

Lock your door, friend, and go hide in a closet—that nice, little, pink-cheeked man is experimenting again!



IT CAN be reported that Mr. Thaddeus Binder is again puttering happily around the workshop he calls his laboratory, engaged again upon something that he — alone — calls philosophic-scientific research. He is a very nice, little, pink-cheeked person, Mr. Binder — but maybe somebody ought to stop him.

The Middle of the Week After Next

**By Murray
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Mr. Steems could be asked for an opinion. If the matter of Mr. Binder's last triumph is mentioned in Mr. Steems' hearing, he will begin to speak, rapidly and with emotion. His speech will grow impassioned; his tone will grow shrill and hoarse at the same time; and presently he will foam at the mouth. This occurs though he is

not aware that he ever met Mr. Binder in person, and though the word "compenetrability" has never fallen upon his ears. It occurs because Mr. Steems is sensitive. He still resents it that the newspapers described him as the Taxi Monster—a mass murderer exceeding even M. Landru in the number of his victims. There is also the matter of Miss Susie Blepp, to whom Mr. Steems was affianced at the time, and there is the matter of Patrolman Cassidy, whose love-life was rearranged. Mr. Steems' reaction is violent. But the background of the episode was completely innocent. It was even chastely intellectual.

The background was Mr. Thaddeus Binder. He is a plump little man of sixty-four, retired on pension from the Maintenance Department of the local electric light and power company. He makes a hobby of a line of research that seems to have been neglected. Since his retirement, Mr. Binder has read widely and deeply, quaffing the wisdom of men like Kant, Leibnitz, Maritain, Einstein, and Judge Rutherford. He absorbs philosophical notions from those great minds, and then tries to apply them practically at his workbench. He does not realize his success. Definitely!

Mr. Steems drove a taxicab in which Mr. Binder rode, just after one such experiment. The whole affair sprang from that fact. Mr. Binder had come upon the philosophical concept of compenetrability. It is the abstract thought that—all experience to the contrary notwithstanding—two things might manage to be in the same place at the same time. Mr. Binder decided that it might be true. He experimented. In Maintenance, before his retirement, he had answered many calls in the emergency truck, and he knew some things that electricity on the loose can do. He knows some other things that he doesn't believe yet. In any case, he used this background of factual data in grappling with a philosophical concept. He made a device. He tried it. He was delighted with the results. He then set out to show it to his friend Mr. McFadden.

IT WAS about five o'clock in the afternoon of May 3rd, 1951. Mr. Binder reached the corner of Bliss and Kelvin Streets, near his home. He had a paper-wrapped parcel under his arm. He saw Mr. Steems' cab parked by the curb. He approached and gave the address of his friend Mr. McFadden, on Monroe Avenue. Mr. Steems looked at him sourly. Mr. Binder got into the cab and repeated the address. Mr. Steems snapped, "I got it the first time!" He pulled out into the traffic, scowling. Everything was normal.

Mr. Binder settled back blissfully. The inside of the cab was dingy and worn, but he did not notice. The seat-cushion was so badly frayed that there was one place where a spring might stab through at any instant. But Mr. Binder beamed to himself. He had won an argument with his friend, Mr. McFadden. He had proof of his correctness. It was the paper parcel on his lap.

The cab passed Vernon Street. It went by Dupuy Street. Mr. Binder chuckled to himself. In his reading, the idea of compenetrability had turned up with a logical argument for its possibility that Mr. Binder considered hot stuff. He had repeated that argument to Mr. McFadden, who tended to skepticism. Mr. McFadden had said it was nonsense. Mr. Binder insisted that it was a triumph of inductive reasoning. Mr. McFadden snorted. Mr. Binder said, "All right, I'll prove it!" Now he was on the way to do so.

His reading of abstruse philosophy had brought him happiness. He gloated as he rode behind Mr. Steems. He even untied his parcel to admire the evidence all over again. It was a large, thin, irregularly-shaped piece of soft leather, supposedly a deerskin. It has been a throw-over on the parlor settee, and had had a picture of Hiawatha and Minnehaha on it. The picture was long gone, now, and the whole thing was about right to wash a car with; but Mr. Binder regarded it very happily. It was his proof that compenetrability was possible.

Another cab eeled in before Mr.

Steems, forcing him to stop or collide. Mr. Steems jammed on his brakes, howling with wrath. The brakes screamed, the wheels locked, and Mr. Binder slid forward off his seat. Mr. Steems hurled invective at the other driver. In turn, he received invective. They achieved heights of eloquence, which soothed their separate ires. Mr. Steems turned proudly to Mr. Binder.

"That told him off, huh?"

Mr. Binder did not answer. He was not there. The back of the cab was empty. It was as if Mr. Binder had evaporated.

Mr. Steems fumed. He turned off abruptly into a side street, stopped his cab, and investigated. Mr. Binder was utterly gone. A large patch of deerskin lay on the floor. On the deerskin there was an unusual collection of small objects. Mr. Steems found:

- 1 gold watch, monogrammed THB, still running
- \$.87 in silver, nickel, and copper coins
- 1 pocket-knife
- 12 eyelets of metal, suitable for shoes
- 1 pr. spectacles in metal case
- 1 nickel-plated ring, which would fit on a tobacco-pipe
- 147 small bits of metal, looking like zipper-teeth
- 1 key-ring, with keys
- 1 metal shoelace tip
- 1 belt-buckle, minus belt

Mr. Steems swore violently. "Smart guy, huh!" he said wrathfully. "Gettin' a free ride! He outsmarted himself, he did! Let 'im try to get this watch back! I never seen him!"

HE POCKETED the watch and money. The other objects he cast contemptuously away. He was about to heave out the deerhide when he remembered that Miss Susie Blepp had made disparaging remarks about the condition of his cab. So had her mother, while grafting dead-head cab-rides as Mr. Steems' prospective mother-in-law. Mr. Steems said, "The hell with her!" But then, grudgingly, he spread the deerhide over the backseat cushion. It helped. It hid the spring that was about to stab through.

Mr. Steems was dourly pleased. He went and hocked Mr. Binder's watch and felt a great deal better. He resumed his lawful trade of plying the city streets as a common carrier. Presently he made a soft moaning sound.

Susie's mother stood on the curb, waving imperiously. His taxi flag was up. Trust her to spot that first! He couldn't claim he was busy. Bitterly, he pulled in and opened the back door for her. She got in, puffing a little. She was large and formidable, and Mr. Steems marveled gloomily that a cute trick like Susie could have such a battleaxe for a mother.

"Susie told me to tell you," puffed Mrs. Blepp, "that she can't keep to-night's date."

"Oh, no?" said Mr. Steems sourly.

"No," said Susie's mother severely. She waited challengingly for Steems to drive her home; (any hesitation on his part would mean a row with Susie). She slipped off her shoes. She settled back.

Mr. Steems drove. As he drove, he muttered. Susie was breaking a date. Maybe she was going out with someone else. There was a cop named Cassidy who always looked wistfully at Susie, even in the cab of her affianced boyfriend. Mr. Steems muttered anathemas upon all cops.

He drew up before Susie's house. Susie wouldn't be home yet. He turned to let Susie's mother out.

His eyes practically popped out of his head.

The back of the cab was empty. On the seat there was \$.17 in pennies, one nickel, a slightly greenish wedding-ring, an empty lipstick container, several straight steel springs, twelve bobbie pins, assorted safety pins and a very glittering dress-ornament. On the floor Mrs. Blepp's shoes remained—size ten-and-a-half.

Mr. Steems cried out hoarsely. He stared about him, gulped several times for air, and then drove rapidly away. Something was wrong. He did not know what, but it was instinct to get away

from there. Mr. Steems did not want trouble. He especially did not want trouble with Susie. But here it was.

This was bad business! Presently he stopped and inspected his cab with infinite care. Nothing. The deerskin made a good-looking seat-cover. That was all. There was no opening anywhere through which Susie's mother could have fallen. She could not have gone out through the door. Under no circumstances would she have abandoned her shoes. Something untoward and upsetting had come into Mr. Steems' life.

Mr. Steems retired to a bar and had several beers. There was a situation to be faced; to be thought out. But Mr. Steems was not an intellectual type. Thinking made his head hurt. He could not ask advice, because nobody would believe what he had to say. Apprehension developed into desperation, and then into defiance.

"I didn't do nothing," muttered Mr. Steems truculently. "I don't know nothing about it!" Would Susie not be willing to believe that? "I never seen her!" said Mr. Steems in firm resolve. "I never set eyes on that old battleaxe today! The hell with her!"

He had another beer. Then he realized that to stay encloistered, drinking beer after beer, might suggest to someone that he was upset. So he set out to act in so conspicuously normal a manner that nobody could suspect him of anything. He had lost considerable time in his meditation, however. It was nearly nine o'clock when he resumed his cruising. It was half-past nine when he stopped behind a jam of other vehicles at a red light on Evers Avenue. He waited. He brooded.

Somebody wrenched open the door of the cab and crawled in.

Mr. Steems reacted normally: "Hey! What's the idea? Howya know, I want a fare now?"

Something cold and hard touched his spine and a hoarse voice snarled: "Get goin', buddy. Keep your mouth shut, an' don't turn around!"

THE red light changed. Shoutings broke out half a block behind. Mr. Steems—with cold metal urging him—shifted gears with great celerity. He drove with all the enthusiasm of a man with no desire to be mixed up in gun-play. The shouting died away in the distance. Mr. Steems drove on and drove on. Presently he dared to say meekly:

"Where you want me to drive you or let you out?"

Behind him there was silence.

Resting on the deerskin seat-cover there was a very nasty-looking automatic pistol, a black-jack, \$1.25 in coins, seventeen watches, thirty-four rings, a sterling silver gravy-bowl and a garnet necklace. There were also two large gold teeth.

Mr. Steems, trembling, went home and put the cab away. Then, unable to stay alone, he went out and drank more beers as he tried to figure things out. He did not succeed.

After a long time he muttered bitterly, "It ain't my fault! I don't know nothing about it!" Still later he said more bitterly still, "I can't do nothing about it, anyways!" Both statements were true. They gave Mr. Steems some pleasure. He was innocent. He was blameless. Whatever might turn up, he could stridently and truthfully insist upon his complete rectitude. So he had some more beers.

Came the dawn, and Susie babbling frantically on a telephone. Her mother hadn't come home or called, and it was raining terribly and—

Mr. Steems said indignantly: "I ain't seen her. What's the idea of missing that date with me?"

Susie wept. She repeated that her mother had not come home. The police—Patrolman Cassidy—had checked, and she hadn't been in any accident. Susie wanted Mr. Steems to do something to find out what had become of her mother.

"Huh!" said Mr. Steems. "Nobody ain't going to kidnap her! I don't know nothing about it. What you want me to do?"

Susie, sniffing, wanted him to help find her mother. But Mr. Steems knew better than to try it. It hurt his head even to think about it. Besides, he didn't want to get mixed up in anything.

"Look," he said firmly, "it's rainin' cats and dogs outside. I got to make some money so we can get married, Susie. The old dame'll turn up. Maybe she's just kickin' up her heels. G'bye."

He went out to his cab. Rain fell heavily. It should have brought joy to Mr. Steems' heart, but he regarded his cab uneasily. It wore a look of battered innocence. Mr. Steems grimly climbed into the front seat. He set forth to act innocent. It seemed necessary. That was about nine o'clock in the morning.

BY HALF-PAST ten, cold chills were practically a permanent fixture along his spine. He had had passengers. They had vanished. Unanimously. Inexplicably. They left behind them extraordinary things as mementos. Financially, Mr. Steems was not doing badly. He averaged half a dollar or better in cash from every fare. But otherwise he was doing very badly indeed. At eleven, driving in teeming rain, he saw Patrolman Cassidy—and Cassidy saw him. At Cassidy's gesture Mr. Steems pointed to the back of his cab, implying that he had a fare, and drove on through the rain. His teeth chattered. He drove hastily to his lodgings. Business had been good. Far too good to have allowed Cassidy a look into the cab. Mr. Steems furtively carried into his lodgings:

- 4 suitcases
- 1 briefcase
- 3 prs. woman's shoes (assorted sizes)
- 1½ doz. red roses
- 1 plucked chicken, ready for the oven
- 2 qts. milk
- 1 imitation-leather-covered wallpaper catalog

From his pockets he dumped into a bureau drawer not less than eight watches—men's and women's—four rings, eleven bracelets and nine scatterpins. He had brushed out of the cab at least a double handful of small nails,

practically all of them bent at the end and many of them rusted.

Mr. Steems was in a deplorable mental state. Once he had stashed his loot, however, indignation took the place of uneasiness.

"What's that guy Cassidy want to see me for, huh?" he demanded of the air. "What's he tryin' to do? Figure I done somethin' to that old bag?"

He drove back indignantly in search of Cassidy. He scowled at the raincoated cop when he found him. Cassidy explained that Susie was upset. Did Mr. Steems, by any chance—

"I told her I didn't know nothing about the old dame!" said Mr. Steems stridently. "Sure, she grafts a ride every time she gets a chance! But I didn't see her yesterday. What's Susie think I done to her, anyway?"

Patrolman Cassidy did not know. Naturally.

And then a passenger with two-suit cases and a briefcase stepped up beside Cassidy and said, "Is this taxi taken?"

There was nothing for Mr. Steems to do but accept him as a fare. To refuse would have been suspicious.

Two blocks away the cab somehow felt empty—Mr. Steems was acquiring an uncanny ability to feel this—and he turned around and saw a cigarette-case and a monogrammed lighter on the back-seat cushion, with \$1.25 in change, pants-buttons, metal eyelets suitable for shoes, a gold-barreled ball-point pen, and other miscellany.

Mr. Steems could not afford to cease to drive his taxicab. To do so would be to invite inquiry. He could not refuse passengers. To do so would be instantly suspicious. He was caught in a vise of circumstance. But he had the sustaining conviction of blamelessness. What happened was not his fault. And anyhow he was one of those fortunate people who develops fury as a fine art. It was his custom always to get mad enough soon enough to avoid all need for thought. He went through life in an aura of pleasurable indignation, always assured that any-

thing that happened was somebody else's fault.

That process took over now. When a passenger flagged him down and got in his cab and gave an address, Mr. Steems was blameless. When the passenger vanished into thin air, leaving souvenirs behind, Mr. Steems merely felt his resentment increase. By the end of the second day he seethed as he cleaned up after each departed fare. He raged as he packed his lodgings with the baggage and parcels that mysteriously remained.

Somebody, he muttered darkly to himself, was gonna have to pay for this funny business! Somebody was gonna pay plenty! When they tried to get their stuff back they'd see!

That prospect of future justification and revenge ended his mental efforts. He did call up Susie to find out if her mother had turned up yet—she hadn't and he generously offered to take Susie out on a date to take her mind off her troubles. But Susie got almost hysterical, and Mr. Steems took refuge in a beer and embittered mutterings. He wasn't responsible for what happened to people who rode with him!

"What's a guy gonna do?" he asked bitterly of his beer-glass. There was the possibility that he could cease to drive the cab from which every passenger seemed to vanish into thin air. But he dismissed that notion with incredulous horror. "They want a guy to starve to death?" he demanded truculently.

He would definitely not consider starving to death. But he couldn't fathom the mystery. He'd completely forgotten the clue that might have given him the answer. Mr. Thaddeus Binder had been the first passenger to vanish. He had left the deerskin behind, loaded with his possessions. The deerskin remained, and now frequently was loaded with other people's possessions. But Mr. Steems could not add that together. And even if he had, Mr. Steems would have failed to understand. He would have needed to be told that Mr. Binder had made an experiment to prove that compenetrability was

possible. Maybe even that wouldn't have helped, however; and, besides, he didn't remember Mr. Binder. He recalled male passengers by their tips and some female ones by their hips. Mr. Binder was gone from his recollection.

A THIRD day passed. Susie's mother did not reappear. Susie took an unreasoning dislike to Mr. Steems. She said he didn't care. As a matter of fact, nobody cared more than he did, but he was in a fix. Susie conferred tearfully with Patrolman Cassidy. Her mother's disappearance was duly reported to the Bureau of Missing Persons. There were a surprising lot of people missing, all of a sudden. Patrolman Cassidy discovered the fact and grew ambitious. He considered that in Susie's mother's case he had a lead. He began to work from that standpoint.

After the fourth day of the phenomenon of the disappearing passengers, Mr. Steems' lodgings began to get crowded—with suitcases, packages, storage batteries, saxophones in their cases, groceries of all kinds. One wall of his room was solidly banked with suitcases alone. After the fifth day, the space beneath his bed was filled and a second wall partly obscured. On the sixth day he began really to run out of space.

That day—the sixth—was the day the newspapers broke the story. The headlines were impressive.

52 Missing in City! Monster at Work?

And there it was. Up to a given hour, fifty-two citizens of all ages and both sexes had disappeared from the city's streets, and other disappearances were being reported almost hourly: a list of unfortunates who had seemingly gone out of existence liked snuffed candle-flames

Mr. Steems read the list with a jaundiced eye. "I never seen none of 'em," he said bitterly, to the missing persons' luggage piled against the walls about him. "I don't ask nobody their name an' ad-

dress when they get in my cab! It ain't none of my business!" Then Mr. Steems again hurled the crushing, unanswerable question at an imaginary interrogator: "Whadda you want a guy to do? Stop runnin' his taxi an' starve to death?"

The newspaper account pointed out that none of the known missing had any reason to disappear. Some had vanished as early as eleven in the morning, and some as late as half-past twelve at night. All had dropped out of sight while on their way from one part of the city to another. Several had last been seen entering a taxicab. Anxious relatives were demanding that the police take drastic action. They demanded the questioning of taxidrivers—

"Yeah!" cried Mr. Steems furiously. "Not only that old bag hadda vanish, so Susie don't speak to me no more, but now they' gonna get everybody scared to ride in taxicabs!" He slammed down the paper and went to the corner saloon. He had a beer. He believed that he thought better with a beer. It was a delusion. He brooded. "Whadda they want?" he muttered oratorically, a little later. "It's them Commies start stories like that! Them newspaper guys, they' Commies!"

He had another beer, and his rage mounted to the point where he dropped a nickel in the saloon pay-phone and furiously called a newspaper.

"Whadda you guys tryin' to do?" he demanded shrilly. "You wanna drive a honest, self-respectin' guy outa business? You go printin' stuff about people vanishin' outa taxicabs and how am I gonna make a livin'? You wanna drive a guy to crime?"

He hung up and went to his cab, muttering embitteredly. Three blocks away he picked up a fat man for a fare. The fat man had an evening paper in his hand. He gave an address. He said in mock fear: "You're not the Taxi Monster, are you?"

Mr. Steems let in the clutch with a violent jerk. He drove a full hundred yards, hissing like superheated steam

awaiting release. Then he spoke in a tone of suppressed frenzy. He expressed his opinion of newspaper reporters in terms that would have curdled sulphuric acid. He worked up to scathing comment on people who made jokes at guys who were only trying to earn an honest living. His voice rose. His bitterness increased. When—it was then ninety-fourty-five P.M.—when he came to a red light and a large truck forced him to halt, he was expressing himself at the top of his lungs. There were stores on either side of the street. Their signs lighted his face clearly.

A squad-car came to a halt beside him. Patrolman Cassidy said, "That's him!" and got out and walked to the side of the cab. Mr. Steems was saying shrilly:

"It's guys like you—guys that because you got some money think you can raise hell with any guy that's got to make a living—its guys like you that ruin this country! Yah, you capitalists—"

"Say," said Cassidy, in Mr. Steem's ear. "What's the matter?"

Mr. Steems jumped. Cassidy! Outrage upon outrage! He said furiously: "That guy in the back asked me if I'd killed anybody in my cab yet, on accounta that fancy piece in the paper—"

Patrolman Cassidy looked. Then he said:

"That guy in the back? What guy in the back?"

Mr. Steems turned. There was no guy in the back at all. But on the deerskin seat-cover was a watch, and a monogrammed fountain pen in silver and gold, and \$.75 in small silver, a hearing aid, three pants-buttons, a glittering pile of zipper-teeth, and a belt-buckle.

Patrolman Cassidy signaled to the squad-car. He stepped into the cab himself.

"We're going to Headquarters," he said in deadly calm. "I've been checking, and Susie's mother ain't the only one that was last seen getting into your cab, Mr. Steems! We're goin' to Headquarters, and don't you try nothing funny on

the way, you hear?"

Mr. Steems practically strangled upon his sense of injustice. He started toward Headquarters. The squad-car followed close.

When at last he could speak, Mr. Steems cried shrilly:

"You ain't got nothing on me!"

And there was no answer from the back of the cab.

MR. STEEMS can tell of these things. He can tell of his status after his lodgings had been searched, and—stacked against the wall, hidden under the bed, jammed into the closet—souvenirs turned up of seventy-one out of the seventy-two persons finally missing. The exception was, of course, Patrolman Cassidy, whose shield, service gun, whistle, handcuffs, brass knuckles and other assorted metallic mementos lay enshrined at Headquarters as a symbol of devotion to duty.

Mr. Steems became instantly, nationally famous as the Taxi Monster, murderer by wholesale. His downfall was ascribed to an untiring patrolman who, spurred on by love of a missing person's daughter, had gone sleepless and followed clue after clue until finally he unmasked the monster—and had tragically become his final victim, done somehow to death on the way to Police Headquarters while a squad-car followed close behind.

Mr. Steems was held without bail on seventy-one charges of murder in the first degree. (It would have been seventy-two, had Mr. Binder's vanishing been reported.) Mr. Steems' frenziedly righteous protests went unheeded. He was sunk.

But there is justice for all in these United States, especially if publicity goes along with it. A Mr. Irving Castleman was appointed by the court to defend Mr. Steems. He instantly pointed out that not one dead body had so far been found, nor had any of the missing persons been seen dead by anybody. The principle of *corpus delicti* therefore ap-

plied. He requested Mr. Steems' instant release. The authorities countered with charges of grand larceny for each article found piled up in Mr. Steems' lodgings. His lawyer submitted that no complaint of theft had been made by any missing person. Those objects might have been gifts to Mr. Steems. There was no proof to the contrary. Mr. Steems should be released. It was not until the cops encouraged a lynching-mob to hang around outside the jail that Mr. Steems' lawyer consented to let him stay in a cell as a suspicious person.

Things boomed. Feature writers, news commentators and gossip columnists made the most of Mr. Steems. He was compared to Mr. Landru, to Mr. Cripps, to Bluebeard, Giles de Rais and other mass murderers. His record topped them all. He was tendered the rewards of such eminence. Huge payments were offered for the story of his life and crimes, and his lawyer hopefully urged him to accept so he could pay his trial expenses. Three psychoanalysts explained his urge to kill as the result of childhood frustration. One psychoanalyst said it had developed because he was not frustrated as a child. Four sociologists declared that not Mr. Steems but society would be on trial when he stood before the bar. The Bell Telephone Company set aside its biggest switchboard for the use of the press when the trial took place.

Susie hit the headlines. Not as Mr. Steems' fiancée, however, but as the heartbroken sweetheart of his final victim. Three other women, however, claimed to be already married to him, and twenty-nine more wrote and suggested matrimony.

And then the bottom dropped out of everything.

Patrolman Cassidy, who had vanished from Mr. Steems' cab on the way to Headquarters, came limping into that building in a state of bemused distress. He said he had fallen out of Mr. Steems' cab and found himself minus shield, gun, handcuffs, pants-buttons, and the nails

in his shoes, which came apart as he picked himself up. He'd come at once to Headquarters to report. . . .

An hour later a fat man was found lying on the street, out of breath. He insisted that he had kidded a taxicab chauffeur about being The Monster, and the next thing he knew he'd been thrown out on the street. Minus his watch, belt-buckle, hearing-aid, pants-zippers, shoe-nails, and other possessions.

IN QUICK succession other missing persons reappeared on the public streets. All were more or less disheveled. Each had lost all metal carried on his or her person. Each was convinced that he—or she—had not disappeared at all, but had merely gotten into a cab, instantly been thrown out, and immediately had come to report the offense. In four hours nine missing persons reappeared—persons who had been missing for four to five days. In six hours fifteen others appeared—having been missing from six days to seven. In twenty-four hours, fifty-eight out of the seventy-one known vanished persons had reappeared and unanimously identified Mr. Steems as associated with their mishap. And the end was not yet.

With keen intelligence, the police observed that those who returned were doing so in the reverse order from that in which they had disappeared. When, therefore, Susie's mother appeared in outraged fury to report the theft of her shoes, wedding-ring and the steel springs out of her foundation garment by the villainous Mr. Steems—whom Susie would never speak to again—the police knew the end was near.

It was nearer than that. It had come. Mr. Binder found himself lying flat on his back on the public highway. He had, he thought at first, fallen out of a taxicab. Then he realized that he had merely fallen into the soft, ancient deerskin over which he had been gloating a moment before at 5:07 in the afternoon of May 3rd. Now there was neither taxicab nor deerskin about. Moreover, it had

suddenly become the middle of the night, and his watch and small change was gone, and his pants were falling down

Mr. Binder went home—a matter of two blocks. There were papers piled in his front hall. He discovered that it was May 14th. He learned what had been going on. He'd gone out of his house, tumbled into the deerskin which proved compenetrability a practical matter—and now it was eleven days and some hours later.

Mr. Binder brewed a cup of strong tea and thought concentratedly. With the facts before him and his background of technical knowledge, it was not difficult to work out a theory which completely explained all the observed and reported facts. But this had more than merely intellectual interest. There was a legal aspect. Seventy-one people could sue . . . Mr. Binder shuddered. Then he discovered that his name had not been listed as among the missing. Nobody had reported him gone, because he lived alone. No souvenir of him had been found in Mr. Steems' lodging, because Mr. Steems had hocked his watch.

Mr. Binder came to a very intelligent conclusion. The thing for him to do was keep his mouth shut.

Next day, however, he went over to see his friend Mr. McFadden.

"Now, what d'you know!" said Mr. McFadden. "I had it you were a victim of that there Taxi Monster. Where were you, anyway?"

"I'd like to be sure," said Mr. Binder. "Listen, George!"

HE TOLD Mr. McFadden exactly what had happened. He had found, said Mr. Binder, the secret of compenetration. The atoms of solid things, even steel, are very small and relatively far apart, so that the solidest of objects has actually as much empty space in it as a dust-cloud; neutrons and cosmic rays go through without trouble. Ordinarily two solid objects can no more penetrate each other than two dust-clouds can penetrate

each other. The dust-clouds are held together by the air on which the dust-particles float. Solid objects are held together by the electric and magnetic fields the individual atoms possess. But if the electric fields of atoms can be stopped from hindering, there is plenty of room for one seemingly solid object to penetrate another, and therefore for two or more things to be in the same place at the same time.

"And that," said Mr. Binder, "is what I did. I couldn't take away all the hindering of the atoms, George. I could just cut it down. But I fixed up a deer-skin that used to be a throw on the parlor settee, and I could push anything but metal right through it without making a hole. Metal wouldn't go through. It stayed behind. I had the deer-skin sort of magnetized, George, and the effect wouldn't last forever, but I started over here with it to show you that I could make things compenetrates."

"Does that tell me where you've been—if I believe it?"

"Well," said Mr. Binder, considering. "I don't know that it does. You see, George, I missed out on one thing. Normally those atom-fields hold each atom in its place up-and-down, and side-to-side, and fore-and-aft—if you get what I mean. When something—an atom—tries to push between them, they push right back. But when I hindered them from that, they still pushed. Only they pushed at right angles to up-and-down and side-to-side and fore-and-aft. At right angles to all of the other directions they ought to push in."

"At right angles to all other directions?" said Mr. McFadden skeptically. "How could that be? T'would be a fourth dimension!"

"It was," said Mr. Binder modestly. "And the fourth dimnesion's time-flow, George. So when I fell through the deer-skin, and all those atoms pushed on the atoms that are me, they pushed me off in the fourth dimension. They pushed me into the middle of week after next. This is the middle of week after next to me,

George. By relativity."

MR. MCFADDEN stared. Then, carefully, he filled his pipe. He lighted it and puffed without words. Mr. McFadden was a skeptical man.

Mr. Binder said meditatively: "Ah, well! Those atoms that get their fields all tricked up won't stay that way. Every day they threw people who fell through the deerskin just a little shorter distance. From the middle of the week after next, where they threw me, they've slowed down and slowed down. By what the papers say, I figure the last missing people only got thrown into the day after tomorrow. And maybe by this time the atoms in the deerskin are back to normal and won't allow any compenetrations."

"Is that so?" said Mr. McFadden, with fine scorn.

"I'm afraid so," said Mr. Binder regretfully. "Compenetration can be done, George, but it just isn't practical. I'm going to try replication."

"And what, may I ask, is replication?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Binder, enthusiastically. "That's the philosophical notion that it could be possible for the same thing to be in several places at the same time! That has possibilities, George!"

It can be reported that Mr. Thaddeus Binder is now at work on the problem of replication which—he will explain—is a philosophico-scientific prospect of great interest. He is a very nice, pink-cheeked little man, Mr. Binder, but maybe somebody ought to stop him. He does not realize his talents. Replication, now. . . .

Mr. Steems could be applied to for an opinion. After all, he has had experience of Mr. Binder's experiments. If the matter of the Taxi Monster and the middle of the week after next is mentioned in his vicinity, he will begin to speak, rapidly and with emotion. His speech will grow impassioned, his tone will grow hoarse and shrill at the same time, and presently he will foam at the mouth. But on the other hand, Susie Blepp and Patrolman Cassidy feel quite otherwise.

It's pretty hard to decide.