

A roly-poly creature appeared  
near Herman Cattlehop



# Are You There, Charlie?

By **FORD SMITH**

*Understanding all the theories of Einstein never did Herman Cattlehop any good—until a creature suddenly stepped out of the fourth dimension to guide him to fame and fortune!*

**H**ERMAN Cattlehop couldn't understand it at all. As a rule, he did understand strange things. Ordinarily, after a hard day of monotonous book posting or map plotting for the Platz Realty Company, Herman Cattlehop would go home, pull off his shoes, and relax in complete bliss in the corner of the living-room where Mrs. Cattlehop had permitted him to accumulate enough books and literary litter.

He called this spot his reading alcove. Here

Herman could successfully blank his corpulent spouse out of his mind while she finished putting dinner on the table. During this period he would read Professor Einstein for pleasure—and understand him.

However, it had been a difficult day. Platz had been in a vile mood. Two former partners, Russell and Larkin, had started a rival subdivision some three miles northeast of Vandergrift Hill, the Platz development in hilly terrain they called Sylvan Heights.



Working fast, they had succeeded in getting the city commissioners to decide on Sylvan Heights as the site for the new reservoir, knowing all the time that Platz had counted on the reservoir to put over his own development. Thus, Platz learned suddenly that he stood to lose half a million dollars. And Herman Cattlehop, who had stayed on with the senior firm member as chief clerk after the partnership break-up, stood to lose his head.

That was why, on the way home tonight, Herman had permitted himself the unusual liberty of downing a couple of whisky sours. Having passed Platz's spite into the pinch-neck bottle at the corner bar, Herman headed for home. Unaccustomed as he was to public drinking, Herman was not tight. But a couple of alcoholic expanders did rather warm his wits and accelerate the flow of thought.

So Herman started thinking about Einstein's theory of the curvature of space. He plunged into its intricacies with reckless determination as he plunged into the subway. He was still at it when he walked from the station toward his home.

Did space curve inward—or outward? Did it encase the physical universe within a sort of cosmic soap bubble and, if so, what lay in the void on the outside? Or were the lines of space curved in the opposite direction to form a central sphere to the outer skin of which clung the structure of the known universe? If so, what was inside?

What happened to all the empty stuff which was, of necessity, excluded from such a celestial hypothetical sphere no matter how great its size? Beyond the curving boundaries of space which pent the universe there had to be, say, nothing. Well, nothing was space, wasn't it? So what happened to Einstein's microcosmic or macrocosmic universe? What was the purpose of curved space, anyway?

Along about here Herman's thoughts ran into a medium of solid resistance. He didn't realize he had been concentrating so hard.

"You have the right idea, but you are going off at a bad tangent, Herman," said a thin, piping voice at his side.

**T**HIS was the amazing thing that Herman Cattlehop could not understand. What child in the neighborhood knew him well enough to address him by his first name?

"I beg pardon?" he said politely.

"I said, you are going off tangentially," repeated the piping voice. "There is no empty void. But Einstein is correct. Space curves inward, forming a sphere, to the outside of which clings your universe which is approximately five hundred thousand light years across.

"It is like a hollow ball. This universe of

yours is tangent at half a dozen points to other bubble universes. Infinite space is filled with ball universes, of which your little universe is one. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," said Herman, nodding his head. "You must be Charlie, the little boy of the new neighbors across the street from us—the one who throws rocks at passersby. Where are you, Charlie? I can't see you."

"I am not Charlie," squeaked the voice sharply. "I am from the universe at present immediately adjacent to this universe of yours. Our two universes have been rolling along tangentially for the last one thousand light years. We are due to bump apart any time soon.

"At this cosmic moment, my world of Vantes, in the solar system of Radiant twenty-three-aitch-forty-nine-eleven, universe one million and thirty-seven—as we Vantesians figure it—is tangent to and touching your world at this point.

"I was able to slip through the space warp and come to your universe, world, and space-time continuum out of my own sphere. I arranged to land on this spot because I received your mental vibrations. You comprehend?"

"Quite," said Herman Cattlehop, halting in his walk and searching the ground. "It would be impossible to shift from one three-dimensional ball universe to another without the use of another dimension which is synthetically induced by space warp. But I can't see you, Charlie."

"If you must see me, stare fixedly before you at a spot halfway between you and that lamp post yonder. Concentrate, and I will materialize momentarily for your whim, although such physical manifestations are quite childish."

Cattlehop peered through the gathering gloom. Slowly the dusk before him seemed to brighten in a sphere about two feet in diameter, close to the ground. It took on a bluish cast—and gradually a roly-poly object about the size of a ten-year-old boy came into view.

"So there you are, Charlie!" exclaimed Herman Cattlehop. "Odd that I never noticed before that you have three legs. Isn't that a bit inconvenient in buying shoes? Or does your father have your shoes made by special order?"

"All right—call me Charlie," snapped the tripod stranger, in tones of surrender. "But because it requires the expenditure of a great amount of energy to maintain this tri-dimensional visibility, I am going to fade. Let us resume our original discussion.

"As I was making my preparations to spacewarp to this tangential spot I was surprised to receive your beamed calculations.



Why are you so anxious over the intended location of a new water reservoir?"

"I am sorry to have annoyed you with that," replied Herman, blinking uncertainly as he watched his companion slowly disappear. "It is really Mr. Platz' problem. I was just wishing there were some way to get the city commissioners to put the reservoir on Vandergrift Hill instead of Sylvan Heights."

"There is," said Charlie, "if you gave me the correct positions of the two sites in question. Vandergrift Hill is strong enough to stand the strain. Sylvan Heights cannot hold the weight of all those tons of water."

"There is a rock fault fifty feet below the surface which, under tremendous pressure, will slip and cause a miniature earthquake. Being a stranger to your universe, I cannot be positive of directions and sites, Herman."

"Of course not, Charlie," agreed Herman Cattlehop. "You only moved into the neighborhood last month, didn't you? But what you tell me is astonishingly good news—if you are correct."

"After forty years in the real estate business, I never make plotting mistakes. If you care to come into my house for a moment, Charlie, I'll be glad to point out the places on the map. But how a young boy newly moved into the neighborhood could know my name is Herman I can't understand."

"Never mind that," said the invisible Charlie impatiently. "I have only a limited time to spend here. Shake a leg and show me that map."

Cattlehop started along briskly. He almost whistled a merry tune. At his front gate he stopped.

"Are you there, Charlie?" he asked. "I may have walked too fast."

"Certainly, I'm here," answered the piping voice crossly. "I have three pedal extremities, you know."

"Ah, yes," murmured Cattlehop, taking out his key ring. "Enter, please."

**M**RS. Herman Cattlehop advanced from the dining-room in Herculean majesty as she heard her husband's entry.

"Herman Cattlehop!" she exclaimed in strident tones. "I waited dinner for nearly an hour. What is the meaning of this?"

"Business, my dear, business," replied Herman a bit brusquely. "I haven't time to explain now. This way to the reading nook, Charlie."

"Charlie!" cried his wife, glaring quickly around.

"Oh, I forgot," said Herman apologetically. "Doubtless you already know Charlie, my dear—the new neighbor's boy. Glow for Mrs. Cattlehop, Charlie."

"Ridiculous!" grumbled Charlie. "She can neither see nor hear me. You are the only

person *en rapport* with me in your universe."

"What are you talking about?" demanded Mrs. Cattlehop angrily. Then she bent forward to sniff at her husband's lips. "Eeekk!" she screamed. "You've been drinking!"

Uttering another calliope blast, Mrs. Cattlehop collapsed in a dead faint that shook the house and rattled the pictures on the living-room wall.

"I used to catch her when she fainted," explained Herman. "Now I can't even lift her to the sofa."

"Never mind her," piped Charlie. "Show me your maps."

Quickly Herman produced a map of the sub-divisions.

"This is Vandergrift Hill, and this is Sylvan Heights. The actual air-line distance between them is three and four-tenths miles, but we must allow for the curvature of Earth's surface."

"This is sufficient," interrupted Charlie. "You gave me the right locations, Herman. A reservoir built on Sylvan Heights is impossible."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Cattlehop. "But how can I convince the city engineer—the commissioners—even Mr. Platz? I wonder if your father would let me borrow the space-warper for a couple of days."

"My time is growing short here," squealed Charlie. "Get in touch with your employer, give him the facts and tell him you will pay for a test shaft if that faulty stratum is not discovered at fifty feet."

"If it is, you are to receive an interest in the Vandergrift Hill development. The other parties cannot refuse permission for an experimental shaft. How long will it take?"

"If we can assemble the drilling outfit without delay, about forty-eight hours," Herman estimated.

"Let's get at it," said Charlie.

Platz had reached the point where he was grabbing at straws. When Herman Cattlehop offered to bear the cost if the shaft was a failure, he readily agreed to assign his chief clerk ten per cent of the disappearing profits in Vandergrift Hill. The city engineer was skeptical, too, but he was interested.

"How did you arrive at this amazing conclusion?" he asked Herman for the tenth time.

"I told you," explained Herman patiently. "Charlie discovered the fault with his space-warp spanner. I simply worked out the equations."

"Yes, yes, your figures are accurate—if the fault is there," said the engineer, "but I don't understand this double talk about a space-warp spanner. And who is Charlie?"

"Charlie," replied Herman with dignity, "is the son of one of my neighbors. Are you there, Charlie?"



"Of course I am here," snapped Charlie. "Get along with your well-drilling."

"I don't know what kind of a gag you are trying to pull, Platz," said Larkin with a sneer. "Why don't you give yourself up. You're licked on this sub-division."

"Yeah," said Russel, chuckling. "Better not throw away any more money on well-drilling. We'll give you ten cents on the dollar for your investment in Vandergrift Hill."

Platz glowered at Herman.

"The fault is there, Mr. Platz," Herman assured him hastily. "Remember, I am paying for the shaft if I am wrong."

"Start drilling," ordered the city engineer.

Bright and early the following morning the riggers were at work at the selected spot on Sylvan Heights. Thirty-six hours later, the shaft was down fifty feet and showed evidence beyond all doubt a geological fault.

Russell and Larkin looked sick. The impossible had happened. Cattlehop, the crackpot clerk of the Platz office, had turned out to be a whiz of an engineer. Platz was ready to hug him publicly. Nobody thought to tell the drillers to stop drilling. "Are you there, Charlie?" asked Herman happily.

"Certainly, I'm here," replied Charlie, piping up at his side. "And I must bid you farewell."

Russell and Larkin pleaded with Platz.

"How about resuming our old partnership, Platz?" coaxed Russell. "We can develop both sub-divisions and make plenty of money. We can consolidate our interests and build homes around the reservoir on Vandergrift Hill—and put in an airport here on Sylvan Heights."

"Yeah, how about it, Platz?" added Larkin. "Let's merge."

"The reservoir will go to Vandergrift Hill," stated the city engineer firmly. "And the city owes Herman Cattlehop a vote of thanks for his remarkable feat of engineering. We need only one new reservoir."

"Hear that, you two pirates?" gloated Platz. "I have a new partner—Herman Cat-

tlehop. I'll give you two crooks ten cents on the dollar for your development here."

Herman Cattlehop was torn between two interests. "Wait a few minutes, Charlie," he said. "I'll walk home with you."

"Don't be absurd," piped Charlie. "Just below this rock fault there is a natural reservoir of pure water fed by artesian springs."

"What?" cried Herman, aghast.

He looked wildly around—and saw two of the well-drilling crew approaching at a run. Behind them a geysering waterspout was slowly blossoming into the air.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Platz!" Herman shouted in desperation. "As a partner, I say let's merge and make the new realty company the firm of Platz, Russell, Larkin and Cattlehop. I vote for a merger!"

"But—" began Platz in protest. Then his quick eyes saw the geyser of water. "All right!" he cried. "Done! We merge. Here, sign this agreement, you two poor losers."

Happily the two ex-partners signed. And then the drillers arrived with their news. Herman explained modestly in the confusion.

"You see, gentlemen, there is a natural reservoir beneath Sylvan Heights. This will save the city the cost of building a new reservoir at all. And we can change our plans to build the new residential section here and put the airport on Vandergrift Hill."

Russell and Larkin began to howl in agony.

"But why didn't you tell me about this?" gasped Platz. "Why did you wait to spring this surprise, Herman? You might have been too late."

"Charlie didn't tell me before," said Herman defensively, mopping his own perspiring brow. "I didn't know it until just a minute ago. Charlie, are you there?"

But there was no answer from Charlie.

"What is this Charlie gag?" demanded Platz angrily, and the two new partners nodded their heads in agreement.

"It's no gag," said Herman apologetically. "His name is Charlie—the young son of one of my neighbors. I guess he had to go home."

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