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The Hobby

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The Hobby . . .

. . . Pete Cooper

"That's what you need, pal," said the fat, sweaty, pinstriped man who overflowed the red leather lounge-chair. "Every guy with a top executive job like mine or yours needs a good interesting hobby to take his mind off business part of the time. Now take yourself . . . or better yet take me: why, if I let myself, I'd be worrying myself sick over my work every damn single minute I'm awake. The club here, or the country club, they don't take your mind off it; hell, they're a big part of it! You know what connections mean to a man in my position. And the wife and kids? . . . every minute yammer yammerin' for money. Well where's it come from? Hell, pal, they don't take your mind off the job!

"So it's just like I said: a responsible man like me needs . . . or like you, pal . . . he needs a good interesting hobby where he can get off all by himself and forget this whole damn mess of labor meetings and purchasing and nagging little stockholders and really get all wrapped up.

"Now take mine, like I was saying: it's nothing elaborate . . . sure, it takes a few bucks to get started, but what the hell! Now I don't say you'll want to take up the same thing I did, of course, pal; I just want to show you what a damn good thing it is for a man in our position. It's a thing called "fireballing" . . . technically it's 'hyrdogravitational fission or some such fancy handle . . . and it's really great! They got a couple of magazines out now in it, and a national club, but I don't want to get all wound up with that. It's simple enough so you can just play around with it on your own, and dammit, there's nothing like it for taking your mind off the job!

"Well anyhow, what it is, it's just a sort of high-class chemistry set you start with. A bunch of stuff that you mix up according to how much space you got to fuss with it in. Now I got mine going in an empty three car garage out by the plant, but on a smaller scale you could do it in your own basement, pal.

"Now what you do, you mix up this bunch of elements, like I said, into a greasy ball about the size of your fist . . . anyway mine was. Then all you do is touch a match to this ball of stuff and toss it out into
the middle of the space. Well the whole thing bursts on fire and somehow it starts spinning . . . just hanging there spinning in the middle of nothing; not a damn thing to hold it up or anything! There's some complicated physics explanation for it, but that don't matter just for a hobby.

"So you got this burning ball spinning around in the middle of your space, see. Well it takes some patience, of course . . . with mine it was just that for about six months . . . just that ball of stuff spinning around, getting hotter and hotter. Well anyhow, after that, this ball begins to bust up. Now it'll break into a whole bunch of little spinning balls of fire . . . the biggest ones no bigger than your fingernail, and these, when they break off, start moving away from where they were, real slow. If you speeded it up a hell of a lot it would be like an explosion.

"Now these little balls of fire, also spinning like all hell, start to float off in all directions. Well mine's been going like that now for about seven months. Some of these little ones have hit the floor and ceiling and front and back of this three-car garage, but the ones that started toward the end walls have got probably another four or five months to go. Some have burnt out too, but they aren't the ones that are most interesting to watch.

"You see, pal, that's the charm of it all: whenever you want to get away from everything and forget your troubles you just go watch this whole area through this high-power lens gadget that comes with the set. You focus way back on a whole section of the space, or you can focus down on little tiny specks that you can't even see with your naked eye.

"Oh, but I guess I didn't tell you yet . . . these little balls of fire will shoot off just little tiny bits of stuff, which also burn for a few days and then they go out, but these don't drift off; they go circling around the fireball they came off of. Some of them even have tinnier bits of stuff going around them!

"Well maybe I'm getting too complicated for you, pal, but you get the picture don't you? It's fascinating . . . all these little tiny patterns of moving specks, hanging in the middle of nothing. You can watch them by the hour.

"Now what I like to do is focus way down on one little speck for a while till I really get to know it. Or just focus on one little bunch of them, going around one of these burning blobs.

"There's one little burnt out speck that really had me fascinated the other night. This particular bit of stuff is going around one of
my smallest fireballs. It's one of nine little chunks that have come off this burning bit, and there's things happening on it that I can't find on any other, large or small, in the whole damn garage. Now with the absolute strongest focus this lens gadget can muster, I can get that speck magnified big enough, so I'm looking at just a little part of the surface of it. So the other night, like I said, I was watching it, and I could get a good look at it every few seconds when it got around to where the little fireball was between me and it, so it was lighted. You see, I always keep the place dark . . . it makes it more spectacular.

"Well anyhow, this particular speck has mysterious things happening on it: in the first place, there's whole patches of it that have turned green. And in some places there are little lines and little tiny things sticking up that are real regular and orderly . . . not like the sort and little tiny structures or whatever just appeared in the last couple of rough messy surfaces of all the others, It's all very tiny, of course even with the strongest focus, but it's queer as hell. Those lines and little tiny structures or whatever just appeared in the last couple days, 'cause I remember looking a couple days before when I noticed the green patches.

"I tell you, pal, it's fascinating as hell. Just that one tiny bit, I could watch a whole night and never lose interest. It's terrific for making yourself forget about business. I wish you'd come out tonight and take a look at what I mean. It'll hafta be tonight or tomorrow though, if you want to see this one I've been telling you about, 'cause that whole group is damn close to the garage floor. It'll hit and be all done before the end of the week."

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