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an exercise in mimeography by
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SCIENCE (?) FICTION

One night in March I saw a half-hour tv film playlet that is an excellent example of lousy science fiction. I don't remember the name, but it was about a young amateur astronomer who, with his wife, stayed home from a square dance some friends wanted them to attend in order to witness a comet that was to become visible at a definite time he had calculated.

I have never been so fortunate as to see a comet, but all those I have heard about have been apparent, whether to the eye or only through a telescope, over a period of days or weeks. The encyclopedia says, in fact, "Every comet, no matter how magnificent it may subsequently be, when first discovered, if remote from the sun, appears as a small, very faint, hazy ball." Not so with our hero's comet, however, for it appeared on the second full-blown, streaking across the sky (though visible only through the telescope) like a meteor, followed by a long, bright tail. In a few seconds it was out of the telescope's field, partly because the scope appeared to be on a camera tripod with no provision for moving it. I thought for a moment the hero was going to move the tripod legs so he could see more of his comet, but that laugh was denied me. A few seconds later the sky was filled with meteors, which looked exactly like the comet save that they were visible to the eye. Our hero's wife was frightened, but he calmed her fears with the fabulous remark, "It's possible the comet disturbed some of the minor constellations."

Then they heard a hissing sound (which I could not detect above the normal background of WDTV's movie transmissions) and the hero decided this meant that one of the meteors had struck the earth nearby. He went out and came back a few seconds later with a piece of it "still warm" in his hand. He said that the whole meteor probably weighed a couple of tons and that it had made a crater "as large as a tennis court".

Though his wife was becoming more and more alarmed (for no apparent reason) our hero told her it was "just a piece of iron" and that he must experiment with it before it cooled off. So he got a hammer and, scraping it lightly on the meteorite, said, "and a little nickel, too". Then he put the piece on a table and gave it a single blow with his hammer, when it split open and a flame rose from it. The flame spoke, telling the hackneyed story of having come from a worn-out planet to a fresher one, and then straightway began inflicting its will upon the two, rooting the wife to the floor and ordering her husband to kill her. He almost does so and then exerts his own will and hurls a bottle of nitric acid at the flame. This puts out the flame and, in only a few minutes, eats its way through the table. His wife faints (as she had done when the flame first appeared) and when he has brought her to, the hero remembers nothing of what happened, because the flame had ordered him to forget everything.

Well! Naturally that sort of thing is not going to do the cause of science fiction any good at all. But that hero would

be a handy guy to have around a chem lab, wouldn't he? Give him an ice-pick and a pair of tweezers and he'd probably be able to make a full quantitative analysis.

I've seen only the better of the recent science-fiction movies, but I'm sure that even the worst ones don't perpetrate anything like this. The movie producers have put out some dummies in the past, but they graduated from this sort of crudity years ago. Whether or not they have a plot they mount the story better and, except in the case of portraying symphony concerts, they seem to do a little research before shooting is begun.

The acting in this little gem was as unconvincing as can be imagined, for the actors were probably thoroughly ashamed of themselves for appearing in it. People do strange things for money, don't they?

Those rocket boys out in New Mexico had better be careful. They might, just possibly, disturb some of the minor constellations.

Gerald Shirley of Televex, 474 W. 238th St., New York 63, N. Y., is marketing a commercial muter for tv very similar to the one I described in Stef. The price is \$1.98, but you can have one if you will put him on the mailing list for your publication. Jerry made this offer in a letter to me without having seen any FAPA magazines except mine. He made no restrictions, but I think it would be unfair to expect one for a magazine containing only mailing comments or reviews. Very complete installation instructions are included with each "Commuter".