

Not only are 52,000 people killed a year in automobiles, another 52,000 are killed by lung cancer statistically attributed to smoking cigarettes.

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This is pessimistic ol' Dave Van Arnam again, Pondering the American Death Wish again. He is quite aware that another good way to shorten the lifespan is to be overweight, so no one has to make any cracks about my 190 lbs, 35 of which at least is fat.

STEVE STILES FOR TAFF--VOTE!

But the hell with it. It must be some subtle kind of deathwish that pollutes this country. I speed on the highways to Midwescons and Westerscons; I smoke cigarettes; I'm overweight. And I always thought I wanted to live forever, too. Maybe I'll write a book about it some day.

Speaking of writing books, I started one a little while ago -- in fact I ran the outline, or rather its first few pages -- right here in FIRST DRAFT. Guess what. I'm gonna print the first few pages of the story now. Why? I dunno. Somehow it sort of seems to help me to get it down here where I can't escape it. So...

STARMIND -- CHAPTER ONE

Benjy Tyler stood up and stretched, then dropped to pushup position, hands and toes on the floor. At nineteen his six-foot body, stripped to trunks, showed its sleek strength as it glistened with the exertion of his exercises.

Pushups made his breath increase its slow pace slowly, until at the count of fifty his body's messages told him to stop.

Slowly he rose to his feet and flexed muscles. The pungent aroma of sweat and the sour staleness of gym equipment was clear in his nostrils. He looked about him absently, seeking inspiration for another exertion before the buzzer could sound.

But the signal came before the inspiration.

Benjy jumped at the sound, then looked about him frantically, desperately, for some alternative.

The buzzer jolted into him again.

He knew it meant it was time for the other room, with the water -- the water that stang in his eyes and mouth and nose.

He didn't like the water room.

He sat down in the middle of the exercise room and burst into tears.

A door to the exercise room opened, and Benjy heard a familiar harsh, impatient voice.

"Come on, dummy, get off your behind and stop bawling. There's the antiseptic shower and then the rub-down. You know you like the rub-down. Come on." The voice this time was more bored than impatient -- almost wheedling, Benjy recognized without knowing the words.

But there were some words he knew. "Dummy," that was one of them. "Dummy," that was a bad word. It made his mother cry, and it used to make his father wince so that Benjy wanted to cry, back when his father was still at home. His limited mind, purely pragmatic, had never wondered since about his father. But he learned around that time that "dead" was another bad word.

Another word he knew was "rubdown" -- he liked the sensations of the massage. He liked to notice each muscle tensing and relaxing in perfect harmony with the tough hands pummeling his back.

Placidly then he rose and followed the attendant, and suffered the stinging shower that gave him his morning dose of antibiotics that would work their way into his skin a short distance and form a first line of defense against diseases attacking from the outside.

The attendant whistled tunelessly as he worked the controls that modified the force and temperature of the treated water, and once more Benjy observed the attendant's face and tried to purse his lips the same way. Since, as usual, he did not blow any air through his lips, the result was simply once more to puzzle the attendant. Originally he'd thought the dummy was actually trying to imitate his whistle; but even he could not believe Benjy was so slow-witted as not even to know how to whistle.

So it remained a mystery for both of them.

From the shower Benjy went naked to the next station unbidden. This was the steam room, though, since Benjy had early indicated steam completely terrified him, it was only kept warm, not steaming, while he was there.

The attendant didn't have to ask Benjy to get onto the table; up he went, and stretched out on the resilient, absorbent material. The attendant stepped up beside the table and began slapping and battering at the strong back.

Exercise, eating, and more exercising -- Benjy's life at the Chalker Sanitarium, and all the future anyone could look forward to for him.

One thing only, was there that interested him. Of all the toys and games and attempts at education, the one thing that had gotten through Benjy's too-few cerebral synapses was that exercise was both fun and worthwhile. Nothing else from that time on had held any interest for him. In his own way, he was content.



After the above scene are two longer ones establishing Shirley White and Ted Hoffman (and I think I may change the names, fannish as they may be, because they don't seem to sound right for the characters; this sort of thing is what makes it difficult for me to insert fannisms with the ease of LeeH or Ted -- I get bothered by the irrelevant overtones which the names carry to me, nemmine Don Wollheim's theory that the author of a book has no right to insert harmless personal jokes).

This story is the most ambitious one I've yet attempted to really work out, and the hell of it is that I have to work it out quickly. Evan Heyman at Banner Books (purchaser of many books by Famous Fanoclasts) thot the outline was ok but that it didn't show I cd actually deal with the problems I set myself. (Yes, I'm also aware that he does this for anyone he's unfamiliar with, but this is perhaps too ambitious for me at this stage of my writing -- as the above portion may only too well indicate -- and since I need the money, this has got me in a nice little state of acute anxiety...I shd have stuck to doing a few more STAR GLADIATORS, shd have hacked out a gothic or two, anything but this god damn stuff that has to be good or is nothing.) owell, hoping you are the sane...