The Prodigy

Milo Schield*
HERE was the PRODIGY, the world's most advanced mechanism for systematic logic. Here, the results of the industrial revolution, the atomic age, the centuries of man's thought and achievement were fused together. Self-contained nuclear power pack, modular tubing, thermojunction cooling, random access memory cores—all now standard equipment; but the decoder and the brain, as the press called them, were quite unique. The first allowed coding of human memory patterns; in fact virtually sealed within the PRODIGY were the minds of several thousand of the centuries greatest thinkers, philosophers, scientist, and writers. The brain unit, unlike conventional brains who obeyed the usual program tape of ordered operations, actually possessed what might be called arbitrary freedom of choice.

"Tonight, June 12, 1991, is a definite milestone in history." The announcer for one of the major teleservices was getting warmed up. The world leaned forward as scientists, led by Dr. Jensen, filed into the view of their telescreens. After a brief introduction Dr. Jensen, father of the PRODIGY project, brought forth the taped question for their inspection. His grey-blue eyes long accustomed to reading the sexadecimal language of the brain quickly rescanned the question before repeating it to the audience.

The question? Yes, this was the question which had plagued mankind for its historic lifetime. Slowly his lips moved to form the words of mankind's eternal quest. Firmly he stated it, "Is there a God?"

In utter amazement the world listened as he explained the machine, and the simplicity of its control panel. Just think, only three switches; on-off; anti-loop; and the emergency stop. Utter simplicity! Slowly Dr. Jensen explained how the scientists assembled could retrace the brain's arrangement of the data and establish the logic used in answering the question.
Preliminaries accomplished, Dr. Jensen stepped forward, turned the machine on and then inserted the white tape into the small slot. Silently the machine digested the four-word question and then began its work. A loud hum startled viewers, but the scientists nodded knowingly to one another. Unconcerned, Dr. Jensen reached forward to press the anti-loop control, but stepped back in amazement as the machine reversed itself. The silence continued, scientists eyed their watches; way beyond the usual ten or fifteen thousand millisecond range, still the silence continued.

Noisily the printer began chattering to itself. Quickly Dr. Jensen tore the yellow answer tape from its roll, mentally translating the answer to himself. "There was no god," . . . his knees were firm, his mind was blank, yet his eyes continued, "but there is one now." He stood woodenly, his back to the cameras. Quickly his disbelieving mind reread the incomprehensible reply. Suddenly his steel grey eyes lifted to face his machine and with a sudden urgency he reached forward to press the red emergency stop control.

All the audience saw was a large blue arc which jumped from the PRODIGY and left Dr. Jensen's body lying on the white tile floor. A second spark flashed on the yellow answer tape which began to burn. Finally the small flame flickered and then died as mankind crossed itself and waited.

Milo Schield, Sci. & H. Soph.

Medicine Mask

This grotesque and twisted plaque
Hangs upon the wall
Of carved and painted wood
Serving no seeming good.
Dust always seems to collect
In folds too hard to clean,
And cobwebs often add
A certain aging sheen.