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IT IS NOT MY FAULT

by A. H. Z. Carr

AT A CERTAIN POINT IN ILLIMITABLE space-time, awakening from one of the deep slumbers which in his old age had become more frequent, God looked about him. And because He is all-seeing, He saw all. He saw the universe; He saw the super-galaxies, and galaxies, and solar systems; and He saw at the same instant each little molecule and atom and increment of substance everywhere.

Among the infinity of sights that He saw was this: On a small inhabited planet that He remembered having noticed twice or thrice before during eternity, in a certain noisy place of many people, was a patch of fenced-in greensward where a man was lying on his face; and even as He looked, in that instant the man died in great misery.

It angered God that there should

be misery anywhere in the fine universe which He had created for His own unimaginable purposes; for although He had doubtless been subconsciously aware of misery, as He was of everything, He had never taken official cognizance of it. Now He beckoned to Sandolphon, in charge of the Celestial Department of Prayer, and whom He considered the most intelligent angel left in Heaven since the revolt of the intellectuals in Lucifer's time. Showing Sandolphon what He had seen, God said, "Go thou to where this man lies dead, and search out among his fellow men the cause of his misery. For assuredly some one of them is to blame. And he who has thus caused misery in My universe, him shall I punish, yea, punish fearfully." And at these words, all the listening angels trembled.

Sandolphon, who had a methodical turn, made a note on his tablets, and transferred himself at once to the place God had indicated. All around the dead man thousands of his kind moved to and fro, but no one paid attention to the motionless figure on the grass, beyond a contemptuous smile. Standing invisibly over him, Sandolphon debated with himself how best to proceed with his investigation. He looked thoughtfully at the passing people, and studied with some curiosity the manifold prohibitions of the small grass plot: "Keep off the Grass"; "Dogs Not Allowed"; "Do not Walk Here"; but he found no clue anywhere. Finally a large man in blue clothes, carrying a thick club and walking with great dignity, entered the park and lightly struck with his club the worn-through soles of the corpse's shoes, saying, "Here, you, I thought I told you to beat it."

Sandolphon deemed it wise to appear to this person of obvious power in the guise of a prosperous citizen, and this he did saying sternly, "Desist! The man is dead."

Startled by Sandolphon's sudden appearance, and impressed by his unusual manner, the man with the club said, "You don't mean it!" and bent over the lifeless body. "It's a fact," he added a moment later. "Poor devil."

"He died in great misery," said Sandolphon, frowning at the ap-

plication of the term devil to one of God's creatures, but not wishing to make an issue of it. And hoping to terminate his undertaking quickly, Sandolphon said further, "Who caused him this misery."

"How the hell should I know?" said the man, staring.

"Was it you?" demanded Sandolphon.

The man began to reply angrily, but looking at Sandolphon's eyes, was awed by what he saw there, and modified his words thus: "Now I ask you, brother, is that reasonable? I seen the bird, yeah, but I only says to him, he can't hang around here. And he says he's been kicked out of his dump, and relief ain't come through yet. Why didn't he go down to the Municipal Lodging House, like I told him? Why did he pick my beat to pass out on?"

These queries Sandolphon was not in a position to answer. Furthermore, his knowledge of human speech was based largely on the language of prayer, and he perceived only dimly the intent of the man's words. Meanwhile, as Sandolphon hesitated, the man examined the contents of the corpse's pockets. Now he studied some greasy papers, and said, "His name was Smith, and this here must be his last address."

After a time, Sandolphon said doubtfully, "Did a man, then, deny him shelter?"

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"Sure," said the man. "Waddye expect, when the guy couldn't pay his rent?"

Sandolphon, who had listened to the prayers of many landlords, knew that rent was what some men paid to others, although the custom had always struck him as somewhat puzzling. However, the man's words provided him, he felt, with his first hint of the wrongdoer whom he sought. Musing aloud, he said, "Here, then, lies the cause of Smith's misery."

"I don't getcha, brother," said the man. "Anyway, I ain't got time now. I gotta get this stuff certified, and 'phone the morgue." He blew loudly upon his whistle.

At once the passers-by clustered about the railings of the little park, eagerly according to the dead Smith the interest they had denied him while they thought him alive; and Sandolphon went away.

In a little while, as humanity measures time, he came to a dingy house of many odors, where the man Smith had lived. Here he found one who wore an air of importance; and to this one he said, "I seek the man who caused the misery of Smith, who was refused shelter in this house. Are you he?"

The man turned pale and said, "Listen, buddy, I don't know what society you're from, but we don't want no trouble."

"Prepare for the punishment," began Sandolphon inexorably, "which awaits him who—"

"Gimme a break," the man said hastily. "If there's trouble, the owner'll take it out on me. You can't blame me if anything happens to these birds. I gotta job to do. The owner says to me, 'If they don't pay, out!' This guy Smith, I remember him, the poor bum, he was sick. I let him stay on as long as I could. But he owed three months. I couldn't take no more chances on him. Every time the owner saw his name on the list, she slapped my ears down. So what could I do but evict?"

Sandolphon saw in the man's eyes that he spoke the truth. He said, therefore, "The one, then, whom you call The Owner; this man clearly is the cause of Smith's misery."

"Sure," said the man, anxiously. "Only it's a dame, not a guy. A widow. Her husband left her these dumps, and she lives on the rents, over on Park Avenue. But leave me out of it. I gotta family."

The man, Sandolphon recognized, was but the instrument, the woman the cause. He sought out the widow, where she lay late in her magnificent bed amid the myriad luxuries of her home; and he determined to appear to her in all the majesty of his own presence, in order to strike terror to her heart and wring a swift confession from her lips. Accordingly, he did so, and was gratified to see that she was taken aback, sitting up wide-eyed in her bed.

"Woman," said Sandolphon, "a man, one Smith, has died in great misery, primarily as a consequence of having been denied shelter in your house. This is your fault, since it was by your orders that those failing to pay rent were evicted." Sandolphon had already begun to learn some of the technical terms surrounding the complex business of human living and death.

"It's so comforting," said the woman softly, touching her fingers to her blonde hair and adjusting the shoulder-straps of her night-dress, "to know that you angels really look like the pictures. It's a really practical reason for making an effort to go to Heaven."

"Woman!" cried Sandolphon, shocked and embarrassed, and hastily dropping his outspread wings before him, "I charge you, in the name of your Creator, to confess your fault and beg His forgiveness."

"How absurd!" the woman answered, frowning, but slightly intimidated. "I had nothing to do with it. I never knew this man you speak of. It wasn't my fault that he died."

"Was it not by your orders," pressed Sandolphon, "that—"

"Very likely," the woman said with a revealing shrug, and a side-long look at Sandolphon. "I can't allow people to stay on when they've stopped paying rent. If I did, I'd be penniless in a year. You

wouldn't want me to starve, would you?"

"Better to starve," Sandolphon said sternly, "then to have caused the misery of Smith."

"Nonsense," the woman said, "What good would my starving have done? If I didn't own the property, someone else would, and this man would have been evicted just the same. It was up to this Smith to pay his rent." She looked at Sandolphon in triumph. "So you might as well stop trying to put the blame on me."

A certain crude logic in the woman's view of the matter impressed Sandolphon. He said abstractedly, "And why did the man Smith cease to pay the rent you required?"

"How should I know?" the woman said fretfully. "I suppose he lost his job or something. But must we talk about—"

"What is job?" asked Sandolphon.

She made a gesture of impatience. "Why, work, of course. People work, you see. They have jobs. They get wages. That's how they pay their rent. And then they lose their jobs. They're always losing their jobs."

"Why?" Sandolphon persisted.

"Really!" the woman exclaimed. "Are all you angels so naive? Because their employer doesn't want them any more, of course."

"You mean," Sandolphon said, with interest, "that another man

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denied Smith the work by which he earned the money to pay his rent?"

The woman answered, "What a silly way of putting it. I'm always having to get rid of my help. You have no idea how stupid people are. And now with all this relief, they're so terribly independent."

"This," murmured Sandolphon, intent upon his own thoughts, "this strikes near to the heart of the matter."

"Well!" said the woman. "And now, perhaps you'll be a little more polite." She smiled at him.

"I must seek further," Sandolphon said, still unheeding. "Be warned, woman, for narrowly have you escaped the dreadful punishment of God."

"Don't go," the woman cried, but he vanished, while she pouted after him.

It was some little while before Sandolphon, asking many questions of many men, learned that the man Smith had been employed in a factory. Purposefully the angel betook himself to the factory, adopting after consideration the outward character of one who inquires with authority. He noticed that very few men were about, and these seemed idle; and upon asking for the proprietor he was directed to a room where two men sat across a table with many papers between them. Of these two men, one was nervous and sad, while the other was cheerful and

confident. The nervous man was the owner of the factory, and when he saw Sandolphon he became still more nervous.

Sandolphon said, "I am investigating the misery and death of one Smith, a former employee of yours. You, I believe, are responsible, for you deprived Smith of the work and money that men need to live."

"Now this is too damn much!" cried the nervous man, striking the table with his clenched fist. "I'm damned if any God-damned Government snoop is going to say I'm responsible because somebody who once worked for me kicks off."

"Why then," said Sandolphon, biting his lip to avoid reproving the man for his profanity, "why did you deprive Smith—"

"Deprive him?" retorted the man. "Why did I discharge nine-tenths of my men? Why am I selling my plant for seven cents on the dollar, book value, to Mr. Tooker here? Because I have to, that's why. Because I'm broke! Because this damned junior-size panties business has ruined me!"

Observing the man's sincere distress, Sandolphon pitied him. "And whose fault is that?" he asked.

The nervous man laughed bitterly. "You better ask Tooker," he said.

"Oh, come now, Bilby," said the cheerful man. "You can't say it's my fault. Don't mix me up in any government investigations. The

fact is," he went on, turning to Sandolphon, "after I found my new patented process for making reinforced seats my friend Bilby found he couldn't meet my prices. Well, naturally he's had a hard time of it. It's too bad, of course," he said smiling broadly, "but that's the luck of the game."

"But was it really necessary," said Sandolphon, puzzled, "to use this new process and ruin your friend, thus causing the misery of Smith?"

The man Tooker stared. "Are you kidding me?" he said. "Oh, I get it. You're one of these social workers. Well, all right, look at it in a big idealistic way. Here I find how to make panties practically hole proof. It's a boon to humanity, isn't it? It's a break for the kiddies. I got to give people the benefit of it, don't I?"

Sandolphon said earnestly, "But could you not have shared this process with your friend?"

The man Tooker burst into a roar of laughter, in which the man Bilby joined. "I can't imagine," Tooker said finally, wiping tears from his eyes, "why they put you kindergarten parlor pinks in government jobs. Don't you know anything at all? I got stockholders and a Board of Directors to account to in my company. How long do you think I'd last if I started giving away secret processes, hey? Why, they'd put me in the bug-house. And they'd be right."

"But then," said Sandolphon, bewildered and sad, "if truly the fault for the man Smith's misery lies with neither of you, who then is to blame? I must know."

The man Bilby now said, "Why do they spend the taxpayers' money finding out why some poor sap croaks? Why didn't they put him on relief?"

"Relief?" asked Sandolphon, remembering that the man with the club and the woman too had used this mysterious word.

"On the government payroll with all the rest of you parasites," said the man impatiently. "Don't come bothering me for Heaven's sake. Go to relief headquarters and bother them. It's their fault." The two men once more turned to their papers, and Sandolphon, sighing, left them.

As night fell, he found the place to which they had directed him. A single man was working at a desk, his face harassed and haggard in the yellow light of an electric lamp; and to this man he came swiftly, saying, "Why did you not give money to the man Smith, who died in misery for want of it?"

The man behind the desk jumped up, saying, "I beg your pardon, sir, I didn't recognize you. They're always changing department heads, you see, and it's so hard to remember—I beg pardon. . . . Smith, did you say? Just a moment while I consult the general card index. We have over a

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hundred Smiths on application. First name, please?"

Sandolphon shook his head, "I know not."

"Oh, that makes it quite difficult," said the man behind the desk, wrinkling his forehead. "Perhaps it was Lucius T. Smith. His is a very old application. I happen to remember the name, because he was in here just the other day, making a most unpleasant scene. As if we could help it, sir, when the funds have practically given out and we're under instructions to give priority to married men. Smith was unmarried, you see. His application had to wait its turn, of course, sir. It wasn't our fault."

"Then whose was the fault?" asked Sandolphon wearily.

The man looked frightened. "Must I answer the question, sir?"

"Yes," said Sandolphon.

"Well, sir, you understand I'm not criticizing anybody, but if they'd only give us enough funds, we would take care—"

"They?" Sandolphon interrupted.

The man looked yet more frightened. "The—the administration," he whispered. "But you'll keep this in confidence, won't you sir? You asked me, you know."

Sandolphon touched the man's forehead with his finger, so that the trembling, ugly fear was assuaged; for to an angel every fear but the fear of God is evil, and all

evil springs from fear. Then he vanished, while the man gasped.

Sandolphon now communicated with the proper Celestial Department, where the learned angel in charge consulted for him a large book of reference, and told him that the term "administration," when applied to human government, signified a vast and elaborate congeries of executive offices. This dismayed Sandolphon, but he was comforted by hearing that the head of the administration was one man. And he discovered further where he could find this man, together with other essential facts which the recording angels in their ceaseless labors had recorded.

Now Sandolphon considered that this man who was the head of the administration could rightly be punished for Smith's misery, since to him had been entrusted power and monies to save Smith. Therefore Sandolphon visited this man, whom he determined to accuse invisibly and craftily, as a twinge of conscience, so that the man could not escape by words.

The man was in his study, writing with his own hand, Sandolphon saw, a Statement for the Press; and this statement said, "The condition of the country has steadily improved under the present Administration. I can say with confidence that our standard of living is higher than it was two years ago, higher than that of any other nation . . ."

Sandolphon, through the man's conscience, now said, "Smith is dead. He died in great misery, because the funds for his relief were insufficient, and his application was unheeded. That is your fault. You had power and money to help Smith."

The man threw down his pen disgustedly, and spoke aloud. "Why," he said, "am I cursed with this schoolboy sentimentality? What difference can one life more or less make in a great plan?"

"What plan?" asked Sandolphon, as conscience.

"Why," the man said, now to himself, "you know. My plan for helping Smith and the others. It consists of twelve main sections, each costing an average of a billion dollars." Here he reviewed this plan to himself, while the clock in the corner ticked wakefully for a long while.

Sandolphon, as conscience, said finally, with a yawn, "I cannot understand all that. Nor do I believe that you understand it. Come, confess. You could have helped Smith. Yet he died in misery. That is your fault."

All at once the man buried his head in his hands. "No," he groaned, silently, "no. It is not my fault. Why can't they let me alone? They blame me for everything. They expect me to do everything—to be an economist, and a National Leader, and Heaven knows what else. The thing's

too big. It's got out of hand. I try, but I can only do a little here, and a little there, while everything goes along somehow, of its own momentum. It's all so terribly complicated. If I help Smith, then the interest rate on the next short term refinancing goes up—or something. And then there's that shift in public sentiment to the right. I don't dare to spend any more money to help Smith until the next election is out of the way. You can understand that."

"Smith is dead," repeated Sandolphon, as conscience.

"Oh, hang Smith," the man cried inwardly. "If these radical intellectuals who stick up for Smith would tackle this job they'd soon stop their criticizing. It's their fault, really. If they're so good-hearted and so wise, why don't they cooperate with me, why don't they help me? Why doesn't a man like Partinger, for example, that everybody says is so profound—why doesn't he do something besides criticize? I'm open-minded. Nobody can accuse me of not being open-minded. I'll listen to constructive practical suggestions. It's the fault of men like Partinger, really, that nobody is ever able to save Smith from misery."

He picked up his pen, and hastily scrawled on his statement, "If the carping critics of the administration would once take the pains to familiarize themselves with its intimate problems . . ."

Sandolphon went away, deeply troubled, and after long searching came to a cottage set among trees, where the man called Partinger lay awake in bed, thinking more thoughts while the cold, pale light of the moon streamed in through the windows. All around the room were rows of books, which were called, "Social Aspects of Collectivist Theory," by Partinger; "Notes on the Philosophy of the Planned Economy," by Partinger; "Money, Credit and Human Happiness," by Partinger; and by similar titles which deeply impressed Sandolphon.

Wishing to be respected by the man Partinger, Sandolphon entered his brain, and addressed him as his own thought.

Sandolphon, as thought, said, "Smith died in misery. And the fault lies not with the man who spoke sternly to him, or with the woman who denied him shelter, or with the men who refused him work and money."

"True," the man Partinger reflected in reply. "For these too, like Smith, are but slaves of the System."

"Neither," Sandolphon, as thought, went on, "does the fault lie with the man of government, for he is confused and wearied by his task, which he cannot comprehend."

"True," the man Partinger reflected complacently. "He has the limitations of the opportunistic

politician. He is not a philosopher and social student, like me."

Sandolphon was heartened by this agreement, which seemed to presage an end to his investigation. "Then," he accused, still as thought, "you are to blame for Smith's misery. For had you, with your great intellect, chosen to show the man of government how to help Smith, given him a better plan for helping Smith, then Smith would have been spared his misery."

The man Partinger laughed. "Foolish thought," he remarked to himself. "Naive thought. As if a mere plan, even my plan, would help anybody. Even if the politicians would have considered my plan, even if they had adopted it, which is an absurd hypothesis, Smith could not have been saved. For the essence of any sound plan to help Smith, is that Smith must first help himself. He must first stand up on his hind legs and refuse to be starved, denied shelter, or abused. He must fight for his rights. He and his fellows must first band together courageously."

"But this is rank revolution you are preaching," said Sandolphon, horrified, because he recognized echoes of the distant universe-shaking words he had once heard from flaming Lucifer, before that proud Angel had been hurled from Heaven.

"I hardly know what's the matter with me tonight," the man

Partinger considered. "All these banal thoughts. This comes of that second helping of fish. As if any stigma were attached nowadays to the term revolution. As if collective action in self-defense can be construed by any modern thinker . . ."

"But Smith!" Sandolphon reminded, as a final distressed thought.

"Smith! If Smith was miserable, it's his own fault," the man Partinger scoffed. "Smith and all his kind are fools and cowards. Why didn't he join my League for Collective Action . . .?"

Sandolphon waited to hear no more. He winged his way from earth to the great spaces where the newly-released souls are kept, pending their classification and routing to their eventual destination; and he discovered the naked, whimpering soul of Smith trying to hide in a corner.

"Soul of Smith!" Sandolphon cried. "Oh, Soul of Smith, miserable Smith, you yourself then are at fault for your misery. If you had been brave, if you had fought, if you had refused to be oppressed, then so says the best modern thought, you would have lived happily among your fellows. (And I," Sandolphon added to himself with a sigh, "would have been spared this horrible wild seeking to and fro for someone to be punished.")

The Soul of Smith stood sud-

denly erect before the angel. It trembled, but with indignation. "Now I like that!" the Soul of Smith said. "This is the last straw! Me to blame for my misery! I could put up with misery, but if you're going to try to tell me it's my own fault, I simply won't stand for it, that's all. If God wanted me to be brave, why didn't he make me brave, then, instead of a coward? My fault, indeed! I'll tell you whose fault it is! It's God's fault!"

Sandolphon started back, shuddering at this blasphemy; and throughout infinite space-time the words of Smith were whispered from mouth to horrified mouth by the souls of the listening dead and their guardian angels; and all of them shuddered likewise. But the desperate Soul of Smith stood defiantly against them all, and sobbed, "It's God's fault!"

Loyal angel that he was, Sandolphon yet could not help seeing, after he recovered from his first shock, the point of view of the Soul of Smith. He tried to shut his mind to it, but he could not. There was simply no denying the reason of it. The responsibility did go back to God. For after all, he had created Smith as he was. In fact, if Sandolphon was not mistaken, God had created Smith in his own image. And the implications of this frightful thought staggered Sandolphon.

Slowly he flew to an empty star

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in the galaxy Andromeda, and sat there for a long while, pondering. And the more he pondered, the more certain he felt that Smith had ended his search for him.

It was with a singular lack of enthusiasm that he finally started back to Heaven. He had no desire, none whatever, to tell God whose was really the fault for Smith's misery. He had grave doubts how his conclusions, however tactfully put, would be received. The Divine wrath, it was notorious, kindled easily, and tended to extremes.

Still, Sandolphon saw, sighing, there was no way out. His duty

was clear. The thing had to be done.

He reached Heaven, taking none of his usual pleasure in its pure radiance and the soft harmony of its ever-fresh joys. Un-easily, feeling himself as wicked, almost, as that eternally accursed, fascinating Lucifer, he ascended the eleven thousand steps which led to the Throne, ignoring the greetings of the angels around him. But when he reached the Throne, and looked up, when his eyes had once more become accustomed to the Divine effulgence, he was enormously relieved. God had fallen asleep again.

Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: XXIX

Ferdinand Feghoot was the only man to hold a high rank in the Navy during the Missourian Momarchy (2504-2622 A.D.) He actually attained supreme command, flying the flag of High Admiral of the Blue, and so ranking all the female High Admirals. Except in one case, his tact and personal charm at once dissolved all jealousy and ill-feeling.

This exception was his immediate subordinate, an old sea-dog named Hattie McBoom. Her resentment came to a climax when Feghoot was issued a smart admiral's barge six feet longer than hers and with space for four additional oarswomen. At its first appearance, she ordered her main batteries to fire on it, and sank it with a number of casualties.

She was arrested at once, a Naval Court was convened, and its unanimous verdict was announced within twenty minutes—she was to be keelhauled, then hanged from the yardarm. Her life was saved by High Admiral Feghoot, who, despite his own narrow escape, eloquently pleaded for leniency, stating that the case was clearly a psychiatric one.

"What do you mean, Sir?" cried the President of the Court.
 "It's obvious, Madame," answered Ferdinand Feghoot. "We have here a simple case of old-fashioned pinnacle envy."

—GRENDAL BRIARTON