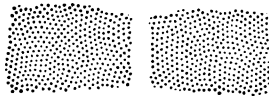
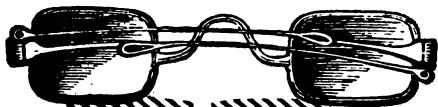
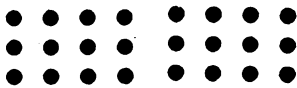


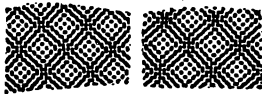
This was a world where minding your manners was more than just a full-time job—it was murder!



THE POLITE PEOPLE OF PUDIBUNDIA



By R. A. LAFFERTY



“WELL, you will soon see for yourself, Marlow. Yes, I know there are peculiar stories about the place. There are about all places. The young pilots who have been there tell some amusing tales about it.”

“Yes. They say the people there are very polite.”

“That is the honorable ancestor of all understatements. One of the pilots, Conrad, told us that the inhabitants must always carry seven types of eyeglasses with them. None of the Puds, you see, may ever

gaze directly on another. That would be the height of impoliteness. They wear amber goggles when they go about their world at large, and these they wear when they meet a stranger. But, once they are introduced to him, then they must thereafter look on him through blue glasses. But at a blood relative they gaze through red, and at an in-law through yellow. There are equally interesting colors for other situations.”

“I would like to talk to Con-

rad. Not that I doubt his reports. It is the things he did not report that interest me."

"I thought you knew he had died. Thrombosis, though he was sound enough when first certified."

"But if they are really people, then it should be possible to understand them."

"But they are not really people. They are metamorphics. They become people only out of politeness."

"Detail that a little."

"Oh, they're biped and of a size of us. They have a chameleon-like skin that can take on any texture they please, and they possess extreme plasticity of features."

"You mean they can take on the appearance of people at will?"

"So Bently reported."

"I hadn't heard of him."

"Another of the young pilots. According to Bently, not only do the Puds take on a human appearance, they take on the appearance of the human they encounter. Out of politeness, of course."

"Quite a tribute, though it seems extreme. Could I talk to Bently?"

"Also dead. A promising young man. But he reported some of the most amusing aspects of all: the circumlocutions that the Puds use in speaking our language. Not only is the Second Person eschewed out of politeness, but in a way all the other Persons

also. One of them could not call you by your name, Marlow. He would have to say: 'One hears of one who hears of one of the noble name of Marlow. One hears of one even now in his presence.'"

"**Y**ES, that is quite a polite way of saying it. But it would seem that with all their circumlocutions they would be inefficient."

"Yet they are quite efficient. They do things so well that it is almost imperative that we learn from them. Yet for all our contacts, for all their extreme politeness coupled with their seeming openness, we have been able to learn almost nothing. We cannot learn the secret of the amazing productivity of their fields. According to Sharper, another of the young pilots, they suggest (though so circumspectly that it seems hardly a suggestion, certainly not a criticism) that if we were more polite to our own plants, the plants would be more productive for us; and if we gave the plants the ultimate of politeness, they would give us the ultimate of production."

"Could I talk to Sharper, or is he also—"

"No, he is not dead. He was quite well till the last several days. Now, however, he is ailing, but I believe it will be possible for you to talk to him before you leave, if he does not worsen."

"It would still seem difficult for the Puds to get anything done. Wouldn't a superior be too polite to give a reprimand to an inferior?"

"Probably. But Masters, who visited them, had a theory about it, which is that the inferior would be so polite and deferential that he would do his best to anticipate a wish or a desire, or would go to any lengths to learn the import of an unvoiced preference."

"Is Masters one of the young pilots?"

"No, an old-timer."

"Now you *do* interest me."

"Dead quite a few years. But it is you who interest me, Marlow. I have been told to give you all the information you need about the Polite People of Pudibundia. And on the subject of the Polite People, I must also be polite. But—saving your presence, and one hears of one who hears and all that—what in gehenna is a captain in Homicide on the Solar Police Force going to Pudibundia about?"

"About murder. That is all I ever go anywhere about. We once had a private motto that we would go to the end of the Earth to solve a case."

"And now you have amended your motto to 'to the end of the Earth and beyond'?"

"We have."

"But what have the Polite People to do with murder? Crime is unknown on Pudibundia."

"We believe, saving their feelings, that it may not be unknown there. And what I am going to find out is this. There have been pilots for many years who have brought back stories of the Puds, and there are still a few—a very few— young pilots alive to tell those stories. What I am going to find out is why there are no old pilots around telling those stories."

IT wasn't much of a trip for a tripper, six weeks. And Marlow was well received. His host also assumed the name of Marlow out of politeness. It would have been impossible to render his own name in human speech, and it would have been impossible for him to conceive of using any name except that of his guest, with its modifiers. Yet there was no confusion. Marlow was Marlow, and his host was the One-Million - Times - Lesser - Marlow.

"We could progress much faster," said Marlow, "if we dispensed with these formalities."

"Or assumed them as already spoken," said the One-Million - Times - Lesser - Marlow. "For this, in private, but only in the strictest privacy, we use the deferential ball. Within it are all the formulae written minutely. You have but to pass the ball from hand to hand every time you speak, and it is as if the amenities

were spoken. I will give you this for the time of your stay. I beg you never to forget to pass it from hand to hand every time you speak. Should you forget, I would not, of course, be allowed to notice it. But when you were gone, I should be forced to kill myself for the shame of it. For private reasons I wish to avoid this and therefore beseech you to be careful."

The One - Million - Times-Lesser - Marlow (hereafter to be called OMTLM for convenience but not out of any lack of politeness) gave Marlow a deferential ball, about the size of a ping-pong ball. And so they talked.

"As a police official, I am particularly interested in the crime situation on Pud," said Marlow. "An index of zero is—well, if I could find a politer word I would use it—suspicious. And as you are, as well as I can determine, the head police official here, though in politeness your office would have another name, I am hoping that you can give me information."

"Saving your grace, and formula of a formula, what would you have me tell you about?"

"Suppose that a burglar (for politeness sake called something else) were apprehended by a policeman (likewise), what would happen?"

"Why, the policeman (not so called, and yet we must be

frank) would rattle his glottis in the prescribed manner."

"Rattle his gl— I see. He would clear his throat with the appropriate sound. And then the burglar (not so called)?"

"Would be covered with shame, it is true, but not fatally. For the peace of his own soul, he would leave the site in as dignified a manner as possible."

"With or without boodle?"

"Naturally without. One apprehended in the act is obliged to abandon his loot. That is only common politeness."

"I see. And if the burglar (not so called) remains unapprehended? How is the loss of the goods or property recorded?"

"It goes into the coefficient of general diminution of merchandise, which is to say shrinkage, wastage or loss. At certain times and places this coefficient becomes alarmingly large. Then it is necessary to use extraordinary care; and in extreme cases a thrice-removed burglar may become so ashamed of himself that he will die."

"That he will die of shame? Is that a euphemism?"

"Let us say that it is a euphemism of a euphemism."

"Thrice-removed, I imagine. And what of other crimes?"

HERE OMTLM rattled his glottis in a nervous manner, and Marlow hurriedly transferred his deferential

ball to the other hand, having nearly forgotten it.

"There being no crime, we can hardly speak of *other* crimes," said OMTLM. "But perhaps in another matter of speaking, you refer to—"

"Crimes of violence," said Marlow.

"Saving your presence, and formula of a formula, what would we have to be violent about? What possible cause?"

"The usual: greed, lust, jealousy, anger, revenge, plain perversity."

"Here also it is possible for one to die of shame, sometimes the offender, sometimes the victim, sometimes both. A jealous person might permit both his wife and her paramour to die of shame. And the State in turn might permit him to perish likewise, unless there were circumstances to modify the degree of shame; then he might still continue to live, often in circumscribed circumstances, for a set number of years. Each case must be decided on its own merits."

"I understand your meaning. But why build a fence around it?"

"I do not know what you mean."

"I believe that you do. Why are the Polite People of Pudibundia so polite? Is it simply custom?"

"It is more than that," said the polite Pud.

"Then there is a real reason

for it? And can you tell it to me?"

"There is a real reason for it. I cannot tell it to you now, though, and perhaps not ever. But there is a chance that you may be given a demonstration of it just before you leave. And if you are very wise, you may be able then to guess the reason. I believe that there are several who have guessed it. I hope that we will have time for other discussions before you leave our sphere. And I sincerely do hope that your stay on Pudibundia is a pleasant one. And now, saving your presence, we must part. Formula of a formula."

"Formula of a formula and all that," said Marlow, and went to discover the pleasures of Pudibundia.

Among the pleasures of Pud was Mitzi (Miniature Image a thousand-times-removed of the Zestful Irma) who had now shaped up into something very nice. And shaped up is the correct term.

At first Marlow was shocked by the appearance of all the females he met on Pud. Crude-featured, almost horse-faced, how could they all look like that? And he was even more shocked when he finally realized the reason. He had become used to the men there looking like himself out of politeness. And this—this abomination—was the female version of his own appearance!

But he was a man of resources. He took from his pocket a small picture of Irma that he always carried, and showed it to the most friendly of the girls.

"Could you possibly—?"

"Look like that? Why, of course. Let me study it for a moment. Now, then."

So the girl assumed the face of Irma.

"Incredible," said Marlow, "except Irma is red-headed."

"You have only to ask. The photo is not colored and so I did not know. We will try this shade to start with."

"Close, but could you turn it just a little darker?"

"Of course."

And there she was Irma of the most interesting face and wonderful hair. But the picture had been of the face only. Below that, the girl was a sack. If only there were some way to convey what was lacking.

"You still are not pleased with me," said the Miniature Image a thousand-times-removed of the Zestful Irma (Mitzi). "But you have only to demonstrate. Show me with your hands."

Marlow with his hands sculptured in the air the figure of Irma as he remembered it, and Mitzi assumed the form, first face on, then face away, then in profile. And when they had it roughly, they perfected it, a little more here, a little less there. But there were

points where his memory failed him.

"If you could only give me an idea of the convolutions of her ears," said Mitzi, "and the underlying structure of the metatarsus. My only desire is to please. Or shall I improvise where you do not remember?"

"Yes, do that, Mitzi."

And how that girl could improvise!

MARLOW and Mitzi were now buddies. They made a large evening of it. They tied one on; formula of a formula, but they tied one on. They went on a thrice-removed bender. At the Betelgeuse Bar and Grill, they partook of the cousin of the cousin of the alcohol itself in the form of the nono-rhumbezoid, made of nine kinds of rum. At the B-flat Starlight Club, they listened to the newest and most exciting music on all Pudi-bundia. At Alligator John's, one checks his inhibitions at the door. Here one also checks his deferential ball. Of course the formulae are built into the walls and at each exchange it is always assumed that they are said.

But the Iris Room is really the ultimate. The light comes through seven different colors of glass, and it is very dim when it arrives. And there the more daring remove their goggles entirely and go about without them in the multi-colored twilight. This is il-

legal. It is even foolhardy. There is no Earthly equivalent to it. To divest oneself and disport with Nudists would be tame in comparison. But Mitzi and her friends were of the reckless generation, and the Iris Room was their rendezvous.

The orgy will not be detailed here. The floor show was wild. Yet we cannot credit the rumor that the comedian was so crude as to look directly at the audience even in that colored twilight; or they so gauche as to laugh outright at the jokes, they who had been taught always to murmur, "One knows of one who knows of one who ventures to smile." Yet there was no doubting that the Iris Room was a lively place. And when they left it at dawn, Marlow was pleased and sleepy and tipsy.

There was a week of pleasure on Pudibundia: swimming with Mitzi down at West Beach, gourmandizing with Mitzi at Gastrophiles, dancing with Mitzi, pub-crawling, romancing, carrying on generally. The money exchange was favorable and Marlow was on an expense account. It was a delightful time.

But still he did not forget the job he was on, and in the midst of his pleasure he sought always for information.

"When I return here," he said slyly, "we will do the many things that time does

not allow. When I come back here—"

"But you will not return," said Mitzi. "Nobody ever does."

"And why not? It is surely a pleasant place to return to. Why won't I return?"

"If you cannot guess, then I cannot tell you. Do you have to know why?"

"Yes, I have to know why. That is why I came here, to find out. To find out why the young men who come here will never be able to return here, or to anywhere else."

"I can't tell you."

"Then give me a clue."

"In the Iris Room was a clue. It was not till the color-filtered light intruded between us that we might safely take off our goggles. I would save you if I could. I want you to come back. But those higher in authority make the decisions. When you leave, you will not return here, or anywhere else. But already one has spoken to one who has spoken to one who has spoken too much."

"There is a point beyond which politeness is no longer a virtue, Mitzi."

"I know. If I could change it, I would."

SO THE period of the visit was at an end, and Marlow was at his last conference with OMTLM, following which he would leave Pudibundia, perhaps forever.

"Is there anything at all

else you would like to know?" asked OMTLM.

"There is almost *everything* that I still want to know. I have found out nothing."

"Then ask."

"I don't know how. If I knew the questions to ask, it is possible that I would already know the answers."

"Yes, that is entirely possible."

OMTLM seemed to look at him with amused eyes. And yet the eyes were hidden behind purple goggles. Marlow had never seen the eyes of OMTLM. He had never seen the eyes of any of the Puds. Even in the Iris Room, in that strangely colored light, it had not been possible to see their eyes.

"Are you compelling me to do something?" asked Marlow.

"I may be compelling you to think of the question that has eluded you."

"Would you swear that I have not been given some fatal sickness?"

"I can swear that to the very best of my knowledge you have not."

"Are you laughing at me with your eyes?"

"No. My eyes have compassion for you."

"I have to see them."

"You are asking that?"

"Yes. I believe the answer to my question is there," Marlow said firmly.

OMTLM took off his purple

goggles. His were clear, intelligent eyes and there was genuine compassion in them.

"Thank you," said Marlow. "If the answer is there, it still eludes me. I have failed in my mission for information. But I will return again. I will still find out what it is that is wrong here."

"No, you will not return."

"What will prevent me?" asked Marlow.

"Your death in a very few weeks."

"What will I die of?"

"What did all your young pilots die of?"

"But you swore that you did not know of any sickness I could have caught here!" Marlow cried.

"That was true when I said it. It was not true a moment later."

"Did all the pilots ask to see your eyes?"

"Yes. All. Curiosity is a failing of you Earthlings."

"Is it that the direct gaze of the Puds kills?"

"Yes. Even ourselves it would kill. That is why we have our eyes always shielded. That is also why we erect another shield: that of our ritual politeness, so that we may never forget that too intimate an encounter of our persons may be fatal."

"Then you have just murdered me?"

"Let us say rather that one hears of one who hears of one who killed unwillingly."

"Why did you do it to me?" demanded Marlow.

"You asked to see my eyes. It would not be polite to refuse."

"It takes you several weeks to kill. I can do it in a few seconds."

"You would be wrong to try. Our second glance kills instantly."

"Let's see if it's faster than a gun!"

BUT OMTLM had not lied. It is not polite to lie on Pudibundia.

Marlow died instantly.

And that is why (though you may sometimes hear a young pilot tell amusing stories immediately—oh, very immediately—on his return from Pudibundia) you will never find an old pilot who has ever been there.

END

THAT OTHER GALAXY

How's your star gazing? These cold-weather nights give you a good chance to see some interesting sights, even with the naked eye.

For instance, probably you can locate the constellation Casseiofia. It's in the northern part of the sky, shaped like a wobbly sort of letter "W", and if you locate the Big Dipper, proceed to the Pole Star and keep going an equal distance on the other side, you can't miss it.

A little farther in the same direction—oh, say about the apparent length of Casseiofia's "W" itself—you'll find something about as bright as a star, but queerly fuzzy in appearance. That's the Great Nebula in Andromeda—M-31, as astronomers call it—a galaxy about as big as our own and, presumably, with just as many planets, just as high a percentage of which can bear civilized, intelligent life.

What you see, of course, is only the core of the galaxy—the densely populated inner globe where stars are relatively close together. A big telescope will show a spiraling cloud of arms, but they are so sparsely scattered that the aggregate of their light makes no impression on low-powered instruments, including that low-powered instrument we carry around with us, the eye.

M-31's core is exactly matched in our own galaxy. We call it the Milky Way. And our own sun? That's in one of the spiraling arms.

So it will do you no good to wave to a possible Andromedan observer—he can't even see our sun, much less you. And if he could, it might take him a while to wave back. The round-trip time for light takes some three million years.

Tuesday's Child

IF is going to be Tuesday's child . . . The second Tuesday of every month. This means that next issue will be on sale, let's see, January 10th—

And it also means that, by asking your newsdealer to be sure and order IF for you each issue, you can be sure you won't miss a single exciting number!