

FICTION

Jim Harmon

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# Name Your Symptom

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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FICTION



# **Name Your Symptom**

**By JIM HARMON**

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*Anybody who shunned a Cure needed his head examined--assuming he had one left!*

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Henry Infield placed the insulated circlet on his head gently. The gleaming rod extended above his head about a foot, the wires from it leading down into his collar, along his spine and finally out his pants leg to a short metallic strap that dragged on the floor.

Clyde Morgan regarded his partner. "Suppose--just suppose--you *were* serious about this, why not just the shoes?"

Infield turned his soft blue eyes to the black and tan oxfords with the very thick rubber soles. "They might get soaked through."

Morgan took his foot off the chair behind the desk and sat down. "Suppose they were soaked through and you were standing on a metal plate--steps or a manhole cover--what good would your lightning rod do you then?"

Infield shrugged slightly. "I suppose a man must take some chances."

Morgan said, "You can't do it, Henry. You're crossing the line. The people we treat are on one side of the line and we're on the other. If you cross that line, you won't be able to treat people again."

The small man looked out the large window, blinking myopically at the brassy sunlight. "That's just it, Clyde. There is a

line between us, a wall. How can we really understand the people who come to us, if we hide on our side of the wall?"

Morgan shook his thick head, ruffling his thinning red hair. "I dunno, Henry, but staying on our side is a pretty good way to keep sane and that's quite an accomplishment these days."

Infield whirled and stalked to the desk. "That's the answer! The whole world is going mad and we are just sitting back watching it hike along. Do you know that what we are doing is really the most primitive medicine in the world? We are treating the symptoms and not the disease. One cannibal walking another with sleeping sickness doesn't cure anything. Eventually the savage dies--just as all those sick savages out in the street will die unless we can cure the disease, not only the indications."

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Morgan shifted his ponderous weight uneasily. "Now, Henry, it's no good to talk like that. We psychiatrists can't turn back the clock. There just aren't enough of us or enough time to give that old-fashioned *therapy* to all the sick people."

Infield leaned on the desk and glared. "I called myself a psychiatrist once. But now I know we're semi-mechanics, semi-engineers, semi-inventors, semi lots of other things, but certainly not even semi-psychiatrists. A psychiatrist wouldn't give a foetic gyro to a man with claustrophobia."

His mind went back to the first gyro ball he had ever issued; the remembrance of his pride in the thing sickened him. Floating before him in memory was the vertical hoop and the horizontal hoop, both of shining steel-impervium alloy. Transfixed in the twin circles was the face of the patient, slack with smiles and sweat. But his memory was exaggerating the human element. The gyro actually passed over a man's shoulder, through his legs, under his arms. Any time he felt the walls creeping in to crush him, he could withdraw his head and limbs into the circle and feel safe. Steel-impervium alloy could resist even a nuclear explosion. The foetic gyro ball was worn day and night, for life.

The sickness overcame him. He sat down on Morgan's desk. "That's just one thing, the gyro ball. There are so many others, so many."

Morgan smiled. "You know, Henry, not all of our Cures are so--so--not all are like that. Those Cures for mother complexes aren't even obvious. If anybody does see that button in a patient's ear, it looks like a hearing aid. Yet for a nominal sum, the patient is equipped to hear the soothing recorded voice of his mother saying, 'It's all right, everything's all right, Mommy loves you, it's all right....'"

"But *is* everything all right?" Infield asked intensely. "Suppose the patient is driving over one hundred on an icy road. He thinks about slowing down, but there's the voice in his ear. Or suppose he's walking down a railroad track and hears a train whistle--if he can hear anything over that verbal pabulum gushing in his ear."

Morgan's face stiffened. "You know as well as I do that those voices are nearly subsonic. They don't cut a sense efficiency more than 23 per cent."

"At first, Clyde--only at first. But what about the severe case where we have to burn a three-dimensional smiling mother-image on the eyes of the patient with radiation? With that image over everything he sees and with that insidious voice drumming in his head night and day, do you mean to say that man's senses will only be impaired 23 per cent? Why, he'll turn violently schizophrenic sooner or later--and you know it. The only cure we have for that is still a strait jacket, a padded cell or one of those inhuman lobotomies."

Morgan shrugged helplessly. "You're an idealist."

"You're damned right!" Infield slammed the door behind him.

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The cool air of the street was a relief. Infield stepped into the main stream of human traffic and tried to adjust to the second change in the air. People didn't bathe very often these days.

He walked along, buffeted by the crowd, carried along in this direction, shoved back in that direction. Most people in the crowd seemed to be Normals, but you couldn't tell. Many "Cures" were not readily apparent.

A young man with black glasses and a radar headset (a photophobe) was unable to keep from being pushed against Infield. He sounded out the lightning rod, his face changing when he realized it must be some kind of Cure. "Pardon me," he said warmly.

"Quite all right."

It was the first time in years that anyone had apologized to Infield for anything. He had been one of those condemned

Normals, more to be scorned than pitied. Perhaps he could really get to understand these people, now that he had taken down the wall.

Suddenly something else was pushing against Infield, forcing the air from his lungs. He stared down at the magnetic suction dart clinging leechlike to his chest. Model Acrophobe 101-X, he catalogued immediately. Description: safety belt. But his emotions didn't behave so well. He was thoroughly terrified, heart racing, sweat glands pumping. The impervium cable undulated vulgarly. *Some primitive fear of snake symbols?* his mind wondered while panic crushed him.

"Uncouple that cable!" the shout rang out. It was not his own.

A clean-cut young man with mouse-colored hair was moving toward the stubble-chinned, heavy-shouldered man quivering in the center of a web of impervium cables stuck secure to the walls and windows of buildings facing the street, the sidewalk, a mailbox, the lamp post and Infield.

Mouse-hair yelled hoarsely, "Uncouple it, Davies! Can't you see the guy's got a lightning rod? You're grounding him!

"I can't," Davies groaned. "I'm scared!"

Halfway down the twenty feet of cable, Mouse-hair grabbed on. "I'm holding it. Release it, you hear?"

Davies fumbled for the broad belt around his thickening middle. He jabbed the button that sent a negative current through the cable. The magnetic suction dart dropped away from Infield like a thing that had been alive and now was killed. He felt an overwhelming sense of relief.

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After breathing deeply for a few moments, he looked up to see Davies releasing and drawing all his darts into his belt, making it resemble a Hydra-sized spiked dog collar. Mouse-hair stood by tensely as the crowd disassembled.

"This isn't the first time you've pulled something like this, Davies," he said. "You weren't too scared to release that cable. You just don't care about other people's feelings. This is *official*."

Mouse-hair drove a fast, hard right into the soft blue flesh of Davies' chin. The big man fell silently.

The other turned to Infield. "He was unconscious on his feet," he explained. "He never knew he fell."

"What did you mean by that punch being official?" Infield asked while trying to arrange his feelings into the comfortable, familiar patterns.

The young man's eyes almost seemed to narrow, although his face didn't move; he merely radiated narrowed eyes. "How long have you been Cured?"

"Not--not long," Infield evaded.

The other glanced around the street. He moistened his lips and spoke slowly. "Do you think you might be interested in joining a fraternal organization of the Cured?"

Infield's pulse raced, trying to get ahead of his thoughts, and losing out. A chance to study a pseudo-culture of the "Cured" developed in isolation! "Yes, I think I might. I owe you a drink for helping me out. How about it?"

The man's face paled so fast, Infield thought for an instant that he was going to faint. "All right. I'll risk it." He touched the side of his face away from the psychiatrist.

Infield shifted around, trying to see that side of his benefactor, but couldn't manage it in good grace. He wondered if the fellow was sporting a Mom-voice hearing aid and was afraid of raising her ire. He cleared his throat, noticing the affectation of it. "My name's Infield."

"Price," the other answered absently. "George Price. I suppose they have liquor at the Club. We can have a *drink* there, I guess."

Price set the direction and Infield fell in at his side. "Look, if you don't drink, I'll buy you a cup of coffee. It was just a suggestion."

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Under the mousy hair, Price's strong features were beginning to gleam moistly. "You are lucky in one way, Mr. Infield. People take one look at your Cure and don't ask you to go walking in the rain. But even after seeing *this*, some people still ask me to have a drink." *This* was revealed, as he turned his head, to be a small metal cube above his left ear.

Infield supposed it was a Cure, although he had never issued one like it. He didn't know if it would be good form to inquire what kind it was.

"It's a cure for alcoholism," Price told him. "It runs a constant blood check to see that the alcohol level doesn't go over the sobriety limit."

"What happens if you take one too many?"

Price looked off as if at something not particularly interesting, but more interesting than what he was saying. "It drives a needle into my temple and kills me."

The psychiatrist felt cold fury rising in him. The Cures were supposed to save lives, not endanger them.

"What kind of irresponsible idiot could have issued such a device?" he demanded angrily.

"I did," Price said. "I used to be a psychiatrist. I was always good in shop. This is a pretty effective mechanism, if I say so myself. It can't be removed without causing my death and it's indestructible. Impervium-shielded, you see."

Price probably would never get crazed enough for liquor to kill himself, Infield knew. The threat of death would keep him constantly shocked sane. Men hide in the comforts of insanity, but when faced with death, they are often forced back to reality. A man can't move his legs; in a fire, though, he may run. His legs were definitely paralyzed before and may be again, but for one moment he would forget the moral defeat of his life and his withdrawal from life and live an enforced sanity. But sometimes the withdrawal was--or could become--too complete.

"We're here."

Infield looked up self-consciously and noticed that they had crossed two streets from his building and were standing in front of what appeared to be a small, dingy cafe. He followed Price through the screeching screen door.

They seated themselves at a small table with a red-checked cloth. Infield wondered why cheap bars and restaurants always used red-checked cloths. Then he looked closer and discovered the reason. They did a remarkably good job of camouflaging the spots of grease and alcohol.

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A fat man who smelled of the grease and alcohol of the tablecloths shuffled up to them with a towel on his arm, staring ahead of him at some point in time rather than space.

Price lit a cigarette with unsteady hands. "Reggie is studying biblical text. Cute gadget. His contact lenses are made up of a lot of layers of polarized glass. Every time he blinks, the amount of polarization changes and a new page appears. His father once told him that if he didn't study his Bible and pray for him, his old dad would die."

The psychiatrist knew the threat on the father's part couldn't create such a fixation by itself. His eyebrows faintly inquired.

Price nodded jerkily. "Twenty years ago, at least."

"What'll you have, Georgie?" Reggie asked.

The young man snubbed out his cigarette viciously. "Bourbon. Straight."

Reggie smiled--a toothy, vacant, comedy-relief smile. "Fine. The Good Book says a little wine is good for a man, or something like that. I don't remember exactly."

Of course he didn't, Infield knew. Why should he? It was useless to learn his Bible lessons to save his father, because it was obvious his father was dead. He would never succeed because there was no reason to succeed. But he had to try, didn't he, for his father's sake? He didn't hate his father for making him study. He didn't want him to die. He had to prove that.

Infield sighed. At least this device kept the man on his feet, doing some kind of useful work instead of rotting in a padded cell with a probably imaginary Bible. A man could cut his wrists with the edge of a sheet of paper if he tried long enough, so of course the Bible would be imaginary.

"But, Georgie," the waiter complained, "you know you won't drink it. You ask me to bring you drinks and then you just look at them. Boy, do you look funny when you're looking at drinks. Honest, Georgie, I want to laugh when I think of the way you look at a glass with a drink in it." He did laugh.

Price fumbled with the cigarette stub in the black iron ashtray, examining it with the skill of scientific observation. "Mr. Infield is buying me the drink and that makes it different."

Reggie went away. Price kept dissecting the tobacco and paper. Infield cleared his throat and again reminded himself

against such obvious affectations. "You were telling me about some organization of the Cured," he said as a reminder.

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Price looked up, no longer interested in the relic of a cigarette. He was suddenly intensely interested and intensely observant of the rest of the cafe. "Was I? I was? Well, suppose you tell me something. What do you really think of the Incompletes?"

The psychiatrist felt his face frown. "Who?"

"I forgot. You haven't been one of us long. The Incompletes is a truer name for the so-called Normals. Have you ever thought of just how dangerous these people are, Mr. Infield?"

"Frankly, no," Infield said, realizing it was not the right thing to say but tiring of constant pretense.

"You don't understand. Everyone has some little phobia or fixation. Maybe everyone didn't have one once, but after being told they did have them for generations, everyone who didn't have one developed a defense mechanism and an aberration so they would be normal. If that phobia isn't brought to the surface and Cured, it may arise any time and endanger other people. The only safe, good sound citizens are Cured. Those lacking Cures--the Incompletes--*must be dealt with.*"

Infield's throat went dry. "And you're the one to deal with them?"

"It's my Destiny." Price quickly added, "And yours, too, of course."

Infield nodded. Price was a demagogue, young, handsome, dynamic, likable, impassioned with his cause, and convinced that it was his divine destiny. He was a psychopathic egotist and a dangerous man. Doubly dangerous to Infield because, even though he was one of the few people who still read books from the old days of therapy to recognize Price for what he was, he nevertheless still liked the young man for the intelligence behind the egotism and the courage behind the fanaticism.

"How are we going to deal with the Incompletes?" Infield asked.

Price started to glance around the cafe, then half-shrugged, almost visibly thinking that he shouldn't run that routine into the ground. "We'll Cure them whether they want to be Cured or not--for their own good."

Infield felt cold inside. After a time, he found that the roaring was not just in his head. It was thundering outside. He was getting sick. Price was the type of man who could spread his ideas throughout the ranks of the Cured--if indeed the plot was not already universal, imposed upon many ill minds.

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He could picture an entirely Cured world and he didn't like the view. Every Cure cut down on the mental and physical abilities of the patient as it was, whether Morgan and the others admitted it or not. But if everyone had a crutch to lean on for one phobia, he would develop secondary symptoms.

People would start needing two Cures--perhaps a foetic gyro and a safety belt--then another and another. There would always be a crutch to lean on for one thing and then room enough to develop something else--until everyone would be loaded down with too many Cures to operate.

A Cure was a last resort, dope for a malignancy case, euthanasia for the hopeless. Enforced Cures would be a curse for the individual and the race.

But Infield let himself relax. How could anyone force a mechanical relief for neurotic or psychopathic symptoms on someone who didn't want or need it?

"Perhaps you don't see how it could be done," Price said. "I'll explain."

Reggie's heavy hand sat a straight bourbon down before Price and another before Infield. Price stared at the drink almost without comprehension of how it came to be. He started to sweat.

"George, drink it."

The voice belonged to a young woman, a blonde girl with pink skin and suave, draped clothes. In this den of the Cured, Infield thought half-humorously, it was surprising to see a Normal--an "Incomplete." But then he noticed something about the baby she carried. The Cure had been very simple. It wasn't even a mechanized half-human robot, just a rag doll. She sat down at the table.

"George," she said, "drink it. One drink won't raise your alcohol index to the danger point. You've got to get over this fear of even the sight or smell of liquor."

The girl turned to Infield. "You're one of us, but you're new, so you don't know about George. Maybe you can help if you do. It's all silly. He's not an alcoholic. He didn't need to put that Cure on his head. It's just an excuse for not drinking. All of this is just because a while back something happened to the baby here--" she adjusted the doll's blanket--"when he was drinking. Just drinking, not drunk."

"I don't remember what happened to the baby--it wasn't important. But George has been brooding about it ever since. I guess he thinks something else bad will happen because of liquor. That's silly. Why don't you tell him it's silly?"

"Maybe it is," Infield said softly. "You could take the shock if he downed that drink and the shock might do you good."

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Price laughed shortly. "I feel like doing something very melodramatic, like throwing my drink--and yours--across the room, but I haven't got the guts to touch those glasses. Do it for me, will you? Cauterizing the bite might do me good if I'd been bitten by a rabid dog, but I don't have the nerve to do it."

Before Infield could move, Reggie came and set both drinks on a little circular tray. He moved away. "I knew it. That's all he did, just look at the drink. Makes me laugh."

Price wiped the sweat off his palms. Infield sat and thought. Mrs. Price cooed to the rag doll, unmindful of either of them now.

"You were explaining," the psychiatrist said. "You were going to tell me how you were going to Cure the Incompletes."

"I said *we* were going to do it. Actually *you* will play a greater part than I, *Doctor* Infield."

The psychiatrist sat rigidly.

"You didn't think you could give me your right name in front of your own office building and that I wouldn't recognize you? I know some psychiatrists are sensitive about wearing Cures themselves, but it is a mark of honor of the completely sane man. You should be proud of your Cure and eager to Cure others. *Very* eager."

"Just what do you mean?" He already suspected Price's meaning.

Price leaned forward. "There is one phobia that is so wide-spread, a Cure is not even thought of--hypochondria. Hundreds of people come to your office for a Cure and you turn them away. Suppose you and the other Cured psychiatrists give *everybody* who comes to you a Cure?"

Infield gestured vaguely. "A psychiatrist wouldn't hand out Cures unless they were absolutely necessary."

"You'll feel differently after you've been Cured for a while yourself. Other psychiatrists have."

Before Infield could speak, a stubble-faced, barrel-chested man moved past their table. He wore a safety belt. It was the man Price had called Davies, the one who had fastened one of his safety lines to Infield in the street.

Davies went to the bar in the back. "Gimme a bottle," he demanded of a vacant-eyed Reggie. He came back toward them, carrying the bottle in one hand, brushing off rain drops with the other. He stopped beside Price and glared. Price leaned back. The chair creaked. Mrs. Price kept cooing to the doll.

"You made me fall," Davies accused.

Price shrugged. "You were unconscious. You never knew it."

Sweat broke out on Davies' forehead. "You broke the Code. Don't you think I can imagine how it was to fall? You louse!"

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Suddenly, Davies triggered his safety belt. At close range, before the lines could fan out in a radius, all the lines in front attached themselves to Price, the ones at each side clung to their table and the floor, and all the others to the table behind Infield. Davies released all lines except those on Price, and then threw himself backward, dragging Price out of his chair and onto the floor. Davies didn't mind making others fall. They were always trying to make *him* fall just so they could laugh at him or pounce on him; why shouldn't he like to make them fall first?

Expertly, Davies moved forward and looped the loose lines around Price's head and shoulders and then around his feet. He crouched beside Price and shoved the bottle into the gasping mouth and poured.

Price twisted against the binding lines in blind terror, gagging and spouting whiskey. Davies laughed and tilted the bottle more.

Mrs. Price screamed. "The Cure! If you get that much liquor in his system, it will kill him!" She rocked the rag doll in her arms, trying to soothe it, and stared in horror.

Infield hit the big man behind the ear. He dropped the bottle and fell over sideways on the floor. Fear and hate mingled in his eyes as he looked up at Infield.

Nonsense, Infield told himself. Eyes can't register emotion.

Davies released his lines and drew them in. He got up precariously. "I'm going to kill you," he said, glaring at Infield. "You made me fall worse than Georgie did. I'm really going to kill you."

Infield wasn't a large man, but he had pressed two hundred and fifty many times in gym. He grabbed Davies' belt with both hands and lifted him about six inches off the floor.

"I could drop you," the psychiatrist said.

"No!" Davies begged weakly. "Please!"

"I'll do it if you cause more trouble." Infield sat down and rubbed his aching forearms.

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Davies backed off in terror, right into the arms of Reggie. The waiter closed his huge hands on the acrophobe's shoulders.

"*You* broke the Code all the way," Reggie said. "The Good Book says 'Thou shouldn't kill' or something like that, and so does the Code."

"Let him go, Reggie," Price choked out, getting to his feet. "I'm not dead." He wiped his hand across his mouth.

"No. No, you aren't." Infield felt an excitement pounding through him, same as when he had diagnosed his first case. No, better than that.

"That taste of liquor didn't kill you, Price. Nothing terrible happened. You could find some way to get rid of that Cure."

Price stared at him as if he were a padded-cell case. "That's different. I'd be a hopeless drunk without the Cure. Besides, no one ever gets rid of a Cure."

They were all looking at Infield. Somehow he felt this represented a critical point in history. It was up to him which turn the world took, the world as represented by these four Cured people. "I'm afraid I'm for *less* Cures instead of more, Price. Look, if I can show you that someone can discard a Cure, would you get rid of that--if I may use the word--*monstrous* thing on your head?"

Price grinned. Infield didn't recognize its smugness at the time.

"I'll show you." He took off the circlet with the lightning rod and yanked at the wire running down into his collar. The new-old excitement within was running high. He felt the wire snap and come up easily. He threw the Cure on the floor.

"Now," he said, "I am going out in that rain storm. There's thunder and lightning out there. I'm afraid, but I can get along without a Cure and so can you."

"You can't! Nobody can!" Price screamed after him. He turned to the others. "If he reveals us, the Cause is lost. We've got to stop him *for good*. We've got to go after him."

"It's slippery," Davies whimpered. "I might fall."

Mrs. Price cuddled her rag doll. "I can't leave the baby and she mustn't get wet."

"Well, there's no liquor out there and you can study your text in the lightning flashes, Reggie. Come on."

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Running down the streets that were tunnels of shining tar, running into the knifing ice bristles of the rain, Henry Infield realized that he was very frightened of the lightning.

There is no action without a reason, he knew from the old neglected books. He had had a latent fear of lightning when he chose the lightning rod Cure. He could have picked a safety belt or foetic gyro just as well.

He sneezed. He was soaked through, but he kept on running. He didn't know what Price and Reggie planned to do when they caught him. He slipped and fell. He would soon find out what they wanted. The excitement was all gone now and it left an empty space into which fear rushed.

Reggie said, "We shall make a sacrifice."

Infield looked up and saw the lightning reflected on the blade of a thin knife. Infield reached toward it more in fascination than fear. He managed to get all his fingers around two of Reggie's. He jerked and the knife fell into Infield's palm. The psychiatrist pulled himself erect by holding to Reggie's arm. Staggering to his feet, he remembered what he must do and slashed at the waiter's head. A gash streaked across the man's brow and blood poured into his eyes. He screamed. "I can't see the words!"

It was his problem. Infield usually solved other people's problems, but now he ran away--he couldn't even solve his own.

Infield realized that he had gone mad as he held the thin blade high overhead, but he did need some kind of lightning rod. Price (who was right behind him, gaining) had been right. No one could discard a Cure. He watched the lightning play its light on the blade of his Cure and he knew that Price was going to kill him in the next moment.

He was wrong.

The lightning hit him first.



Reggie squinted under the bandage at the lettering on the door that said INFIELD & MORGAN and opened the door. He ran across the room to the man sitting at the desk, reading by the swivel light.

"Mr. Morgan, your partner, Mr. Infield, he--"

"Just a moment." Morgan switched on the room lights. "What were you saying?"

"Mr. Infield went out without his Cure in a storm and was struck by lightning. We took him to the morgue. He must have been crazy to go out without his Cure."

Morgan stared into his bright desk light without blinking. "This is quite a shock to me. Would you mind leaving? I'll come over to your place and you can tell me about it later."

Reggie went out. "Yes, sir. He was struck by lightning, struck dead. He must have been crazy to leave his Cure...." The door closed.

Morgan exhaled. Poor Infield. But it wasn't the lightning that killed him, of course. Morgan adjusted the soundproofing plugs in his ears, thinking that you did have to have quite a bit of light to read lips. The thunder, naturally, was what had killed Infield. Loud noise--any noise--that would do it every time. Too bad Infield had never really stopped being one of the Incompletes. Dangerous people. He would have to deal with them.