

M-BRANE SF

I've seen a lot of stories since I started *M-Brane SF* that are rooted in economic insecurity and worry over what the future holds. Of course, this isn't surprising given the tenor of the times, but it makes me wonder if everyone won't eventually feel a whole lot better when the realization hits, and is then accepted, that we as people, consumers, workers, citizens of the world are simply going to have to change some of our expectations and get a grip on what's important. The characters in this somewhat funny and somewhat sad story aren't there yet. In fact, their whole society appears to have missed the opportunities that present themselves in today's real world.—CF

"You might as well believe in the excellence of oysters when you can't eat them without being sick."

- A Huxley-Point Counter Point

Jim Valmont jumped out of his sofa and pressed his lips into the living room wall video screen as it continued to flash his six foot long name in red. "I won! ... I won!"

Laura cheered and followed him. She threw her arms around his waist and pulled him to her for a quick breathless kiss. The room pulsed crimson until his name vanished from the screen and was replaced by a smiling government official dressed in a dark blue suit. The young couple stood grinning and listened to the announcement.

"Congratulations go out to James Valmont, a resident of the Cedar Brook community, in Manchester, Connecticut. Your federal government is proud to award you as our first weekly winner in the new federal social security lottery." The generically clean-cut official raised a finger and pointed straight into the camera. "Now, don't go anywhere this afternoon, James. You can expect a prize confirmation to arrive at your doorstep by courier within the hour." He laughed and spoke while high definition television cameras panned the small, cheering, studio audience. "Yes, that's your federal government in motion, folks. Your social security number *is* your ticket in this guaranteed random retirement drawing." Winking into the nearest camera he added, "I'm sorry James, but you can only win once." He wandered the stage for effect. "Things aren't the way they were when our parents paid into the system, but we do have quite a few more choices than they did. Now, we can have a little fun with it as well."

Laura grabbed the remote and turned down the sound