

# World Progress Report

## Peak Experiences

Our friendly neighborhood electric-power companies used to spend a lot of their energy and our money to stimulate ever higher "peak demand." Peak demand is the trade term for what happens when everyone flips the switch at the same time, causing a tidal wave of current to surge toward the customers and an equal and opposite wave of green currency to flow back to the utility. The power companies themselves have helped to bring on the growing peak-demand crisis: first they encouraged air conditioning, to raise peak demand in the summertime; then they promoted electric heating, to create a corresponding peak in the winter. This strategy has, unfortunately, worked only too well.

Inevitably, growing peak demand has translated into a never-ending need for more and bigger power plants. New power plants, in turn, entail heavy infusions of capital and fuel—and heavy effusions of environmental pollutants. But now that money, fuel, and pollution control have become increasingly expensive, the utilities are rewriting their cost-benefit equations and rethinking the prospect of eternally chasing after peak demand.

As a result, some utilities are turning to sophisticated techniques for moderating peak demand in order to decrease their need for new power plants and standby generating facilities. Wisconsin Electric Power Company, for example, is testing a system called "remote load management," based on a central computer that can briefly turn off power-hungry appliances such as water heaters and air-conditioners in customers' homes and offices during peak-load periods.

The Wisconsin system, designed and built by American Science and Engineering of Cambridge, Massachusetts, is being tested on only the water heaters in 750 homes. The utility anticipates that eventually 75 percent of its 160,000 customers will sign up for the system if it is adopted. If they do sign up, the system's \$20 million cost will be added to the utility's rate base, and ultimately to the customers' bills. At the same time, however, the system is expected to save the utility and its customers \$14 million worth of

new peak generating equipment, plus the fuel to run it. As an added bonus, the remote computer will also read the customers' electric meters.

## Kiddie Cuisine

On many supermarket shelves this year there is good news for those nutritionists, nature-food freaks, and mothers who have long complained that prepared baby foods are liberally laced with sugar, salt, artificial colorings, and other nonessentials. Responding to what it hopes is increased consumer concern about good nutrition, as well as to a vogue for foods that don't fool around with Mother Nature, Beech-Nut has introduced an extensive line of baby foods and juices that are totally devoid of additives. Meanwhile, the company has eliminated or reduced the added sugar in more than 130 products in its regular baby-food line.

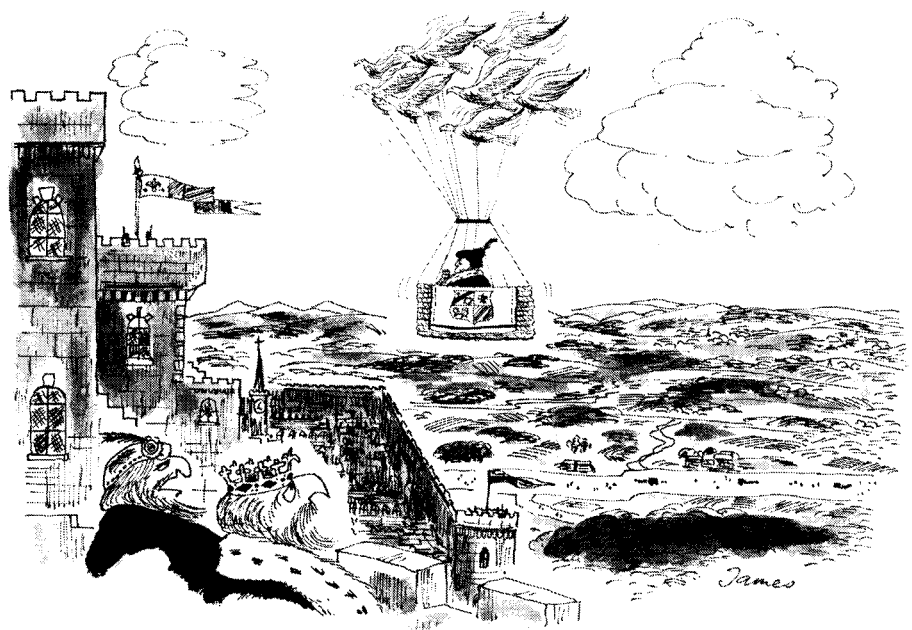
Critics charge that the extras in most ordinary, souped-up baby foods are inserted for the manufacturer's benefit and to make the products look and taste better to grown-ups. The infants themselves, say the experts, are indifferent to the "improved" colors and tastes. Moreover, many additives are suspected of having harmful side effects. Especially sugar, a

steady diet of which gives infants a head start on an all-American habit that leads to later tooth decay, obesity, and other common, sugar-connected ills.

## Royal Flush

Growing concern over the quality and quantity of local water supplies in many areas of the United States and other countries has raised the indelicate subject of toilet flushing. According to various water-closet experts, the average toilet uses from four to seven gallons of water per flush, and the average American family flushes more than 35,000 gallons down the toilet every year. Nationwide, a veritable Niagara of water is thus being transferred from freshwater sources to waste-water sewers, from which only time and the combined efforts of nature and man can make it fit for use again.

A new device called a Dual Flush promises to keep up to half of this water from going down the drain. Developed by the Savway Company of Brooklyn, New York, the Dual Flush attaches, with the aid of a screwdriver, to the top edge of a standard toilet tank. Once in place, it creates a two-stage flushing system. An ordinary depression of the toilet handle releases only half the normal water flow. When a full flush is required, the handle is simply held down for a few seconds, an action that overrides the first, limited-flush stage of the system. According to the manufacturer, the Dual Flush can save 40 percent of the bill on metered water systems and cut the maintenance costs for septic systems. —ANTHONY WOLFF



*"We're trying out Da Vinci's idea for shuttle diplomacy."*

# Top of My Head

## Letter from a Traveler

by Goodman Ace

SIX months have passed since Viking 1 landed on Mars, and some nervous-Nellie scientists have begun grumbling about the paucity of research information on whether there is life on the red planet.

When Viking 1 mailed us his first pictures from Mars, I sent him a congratulatory fan letter. Today, not surprisingly, I received a reply from him. His letter will explain why there has been no earth-shaking news from Mars:

"Dear G.A.: I would have answered your letter sooner, but between you and me, I've been teed off about my strained relationship with my so-called pals at the Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena. Would you believe I haven't heard one word from them in three months? You'd think I hadn't paid my phone bill. I'm out of circ, the forgotten robot.

"And after all I did for them when I first landed here—did everything they told me: 'Take a picture of the terrain . . . that's good . . . how's the weather? . . . take a snapshot of the rocks . . . what's the temperature? . . . now, take your little shovel and dig up a little dirt . . . good boy . . . take a picture of the horizon . . . reach your arm down and put some dirt in your

little pail . . . no, don't plant a flag, we'll tell you when . . . now dig up a few little rocks . . .' and so on.

"All that kid stuff, day after day. Then I don't hear from them in weeks. I tried calling them several times—wanted to tell them a startling thing I discovered about the terrain, but they cut me off: 'Don't call us, we'll call you.'

"And to think when I first landed here I was a big celebrity. Front-page headlines all over the world, on TV night and day. I was a bigger TV star than Shirley and Laverne. Suddenly, I'm last Sunday's newspaper. Worse, I'm the herring wrapped in yesterday's obscurity. On TV, I'm preempted by the election and those three great debates. Weren't they great? Or should I ask, Didn't they grate?

"Well, since they started stonewalling me, I've been cruising around doing a little marslighting on my own. And I can tell you that these Martians are so many light-years ahead of us, they make us Earth people look like amateur human beings. For instance, remember those pictures of the terrain I sent that first week, the big rocks and the desolation everywhere? Forget 'em, scratch 'em, tear 'em up. What I really landed on was a gigantic landscape painting, replete with phony terrain, prop

rocks, a fake horizon, simulated everything.

"They don't want us ever to know what Mars is really like. I got a peek under that painting—verdant, lush, lakes, waterfalls, and an exquisite profusion of the most colorful plants you ever saw. And pollution is down to zilch. They've got it made here. They want no trespassers.

"That's what I could have told them for openers. Oh, they did call me once the other day, and I told my secretary to put them on hold. They're still holding. Two can play hard to get.

"Well, I let the cat out of the bag about whether there is life on Mars when I mentioned my secretary. Her name is Martia, pronounced Marcia. One look at Martia and you tell me if there's life on Mars! They're celebrating their one thousandth Bimillennial up here. Martia was voted Miss One Thousandth Bimillennial.

"Martia has made life on Mars viable. We sit together and watch TV by satellite, hoping to be able to see me on a rerun. What do we see instead? The tennis matches. Martia liked that. I tried explaining Renée Richards to her. Transsexual meant nothing, so I told her the doctor took this man and made him into a woman. And she laughed gleefully and asked, 'Then the doctor said, "I now pronounce you man and woman"?'"

"I told her I may have to go back to earth someday. She said she would go with me, and we could find an apartment and live happily ever after. I told her she wouldn't like it. Didn't have the heart to tell her we wouldn't find a U.S. landlord who would rent to a green person.

"I tried telling her a funny story about a robot, and she said, 'Please, no ethnic humor on Mars.'

"Well, that's life up here. Unemployment is down to one. That's me. And not even one weekly unemployment check from Pasadena. By the way, a year here has 687 days. That's an awful lot of days, but 687 nights with Martia are not nearly enough.

"There's an ugly rumor up here that the Martians are using Martia as a diversionary tactic to keep me spellbound and so busy I'll never have time to tell what Mars is really like. That canard is absolutely and unequivocally untrue. And even if it is true, you know something? I really don't care!

"Stay well, friend. As well as you can with all those mysterious swine-flu shots they were making everybody take. Martia says that was like buying a pig in a poke. . . . Vik." ●

