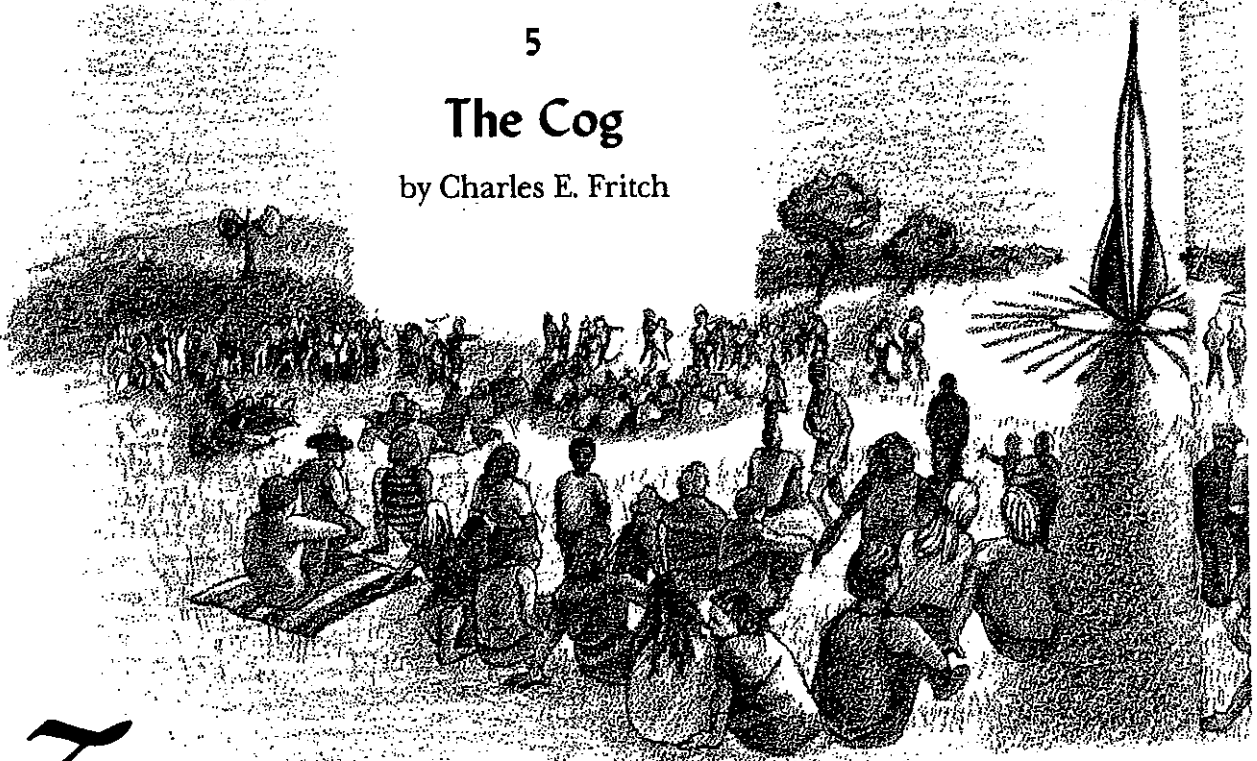


The Cog

by Charles E. Fritch

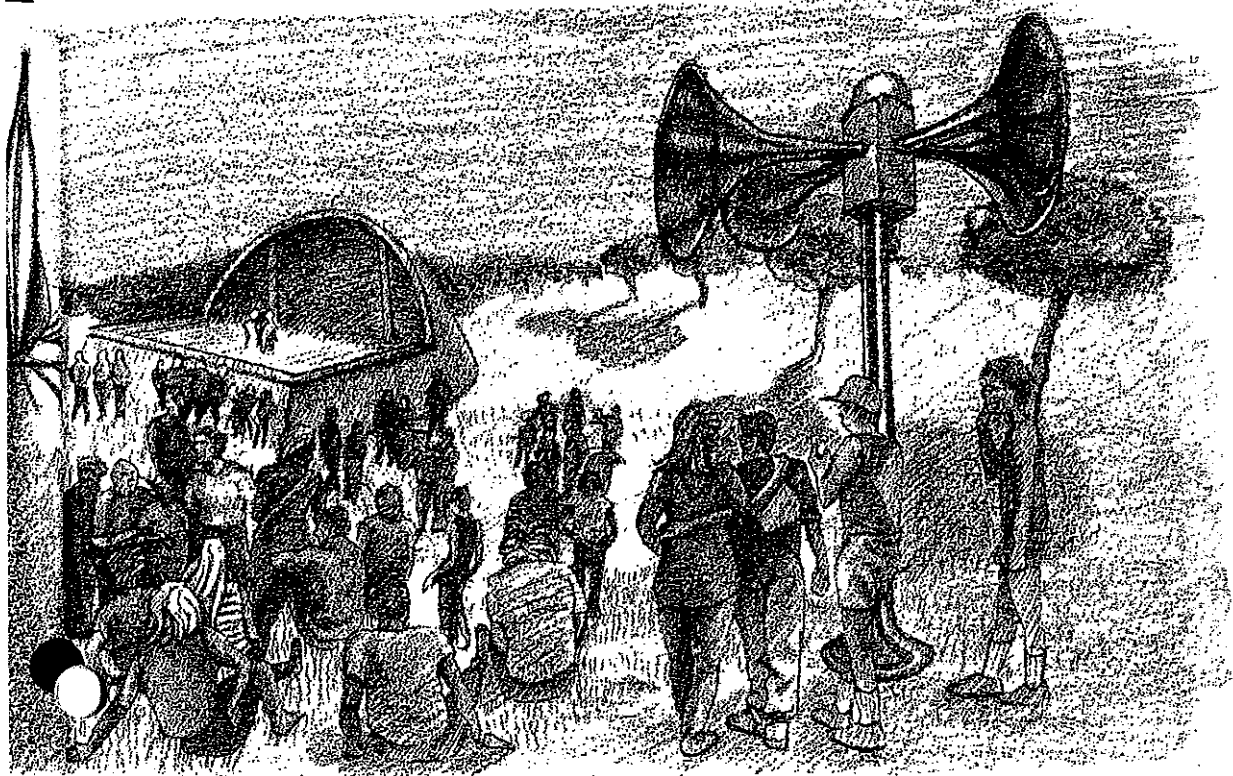


The huge crowd arrived early in the day and had been waiting for hours. On the enormous green lawn families sat packed together, eating sandwiches and sipping soft drinks. Their voices buzzed with excitement like thousands of bees.

High above, the sun glinted off the shiny metal of the spaceship, *President*. The craft towered in the sky like a silver needle, casting a long, dark shadow on the people below.

James Maxwell sat and listened to the hum of the voices. Maxwell knew what had brought so many people here. Some were curious. A few were scientists. Others wished to be present at this important event. But many **spectators**, especially the younger ones, were here simply because they felt the urge—the powerful *longing* to travel in space far beyond the stars.

Longing? Maxwell wondered if anyone had ever felt that longing as deeply as he had. But at the same time, he knew that they had. People had



always felt the call of the stars. In his heart he was sure that they always would.

Maxwell felt a touch of regret as he wondered how many of the youngsters here would succeed in their wish to reach the stars. And how many, many more would fail, as *he* had failed. They would take the sensible, respectable jobs in the community. They would become cogs in the machinery of society.

And yet society needed cogs to make the wheels of its machinery run. Everyone couldn't be an astronaut, of course. The world needed doctors, and teachers, and even government officials. *Everyone* was a cog—from the President down to the lowest-paid worker. Even the astronauts were cogs—all cogs in the machine.

Yes, *even the astronauts were cogs*, he thought to himself.

And then, suddenly, he wasn't so sure. He stared into the bright afternoon sky and wondered, as he often did. And he asked himself the same

old question: What would have happened if he had followed Gerald Adams' path twenty years ago?

He and Gerald had shared the longing, the call of the stars. Gerald, too, had stared out into the cool blackness of the night. But Gerald had seen and found his future there.

Gerald Adams had been the first astronaut to land on Venus.

Later, he had died in space, touching down on Mars. His rocket had broken apart, bursting into a million **fragments**. Still, Gerald had achieved his dream. To die in space was his destiny—and he would not have changed it for anything.

James Maxwell wondered how *he* would die. In bed, probably, an old man—too **feeble** to make it to the next room, much less to the stars!

Sometimes he felt that fate had played a cruel joke on him. But there it was and what could he do? The answer was the same as always: nothing.

"Maybe next year," he'd told Gerald. James Maxwell had gone to law school. His family was so practical, so very practical.

"Do the **sensible** thing," they'd said. Then, when his chance had passed him by, he'd felt cheated. He wanted to blame others—but nobody else was really to blame. Now he waited quietly staring up at the sky. He had no excuses to offer.

A speaker appeared and the crowd suddenly hushed. The voice boomed out over the loudspeaker. It swept over the huge crowd, while the great spaceship sparkled and shone in the late afternoon sun.

The man spoke of the glorious conquest of space—of the women and men who had led the way—of the women and men who would journey today among the stars.

James Maxwell let his gaze wander upward. He stared at the shining metal spaceship. In less than an hour the crowd would be asked to move back. Then they'd watch with pounding hearts as the powerful rocket roared into the sky. James Maxwell could feel his own heart beating faster. Very soon, he knew, the rocket would be knifing through space, speeding toward the light of Alpha Centauri.

If only he were aboard that rocket!



The feeling was still there. If only he could leave the life he had now. If only he could trade it for that of a crew member. If only—

He nearly laughed aloud. It was too late, years too late. Others would be aboard the *President*—younger people, people who had been trained to do their job, trained to be cogs that helped run the machine.

James Maxwell was a cog, too. He had studied law. He had also been trained. The machine had found a place for him. It's that simple, he thought.

The crowd suddenly cheered again, as the crew of the *President* came onto the speaker's stand. The astronauts shifted nervously, smiling, proud of the part they would play, these pleased but humble voyagers in the vastness of space.

James Maxwell looked carefully at each face. He could read his thoughts there. How he wished he could go with them! He felt a sudden stab of jealousy, but he was not bitter. This was the way it was, the way it had to be.

A great cheer went up as Mercedes Diaz, Director of Space Exploration, rose and walked across the platform. She carried a pair of scissors to cut

the bright red ribbon in front of the spaceship. As she did, the crowd shouted and clapped and roared and cheered. The glad sounds echoed again and again in the warm afternoon air.

James Maxwell felt a part of the enthusiasm. His blood rushed through his body. His heart pounded with excitement. These people—many of them—wanted to go. But they would go in spirit only, represented by those aboard. And *they* were satisfied.

Suddenly James Maxwell realized that he, too, was satisfied. He would be represented even more than the others. In a way, it would be as though he, himself, were soaring through the depths of space.

A voice came booming over the loudspeaker. "Ladies and gentlemen . . . The President of the World Republic!"

The voice echoed from the spaceship and rolled over the crowd. As a new cheer filled the air, James Maxwell cleared his throat and stepped to the microphone.

SELECTING DETAILS FROM THE STORY. Each of the following sentences helps you understand the story. Complete each sentence below by putting an x in the box next to the correct answer.

1. James Maxwell often wondered what would have happened if he had
 - a. become a doctor or a teacher.
 - b. decided to be a scientist.
 - c. followed the path that Gerald Adams took.
2. As Maxwell stared at the shiny metal spaceship, he
 - a. was glad he was not aboard that rocket.
 - b. wished he were aboard that rocket.
 - c. decided to train to become an astronaut.
3. The Director of Space Exploration walked across the platform and
 - a. cut the ribbon in front of the spaceship.
 - b. congratulated each astronaut.
 - c. shook hands with James Maxwell.
4. At the end of the story we learn that Maxwell is
 - a. one of the astronauts.
 - b. a famous lawyer.
 - c. President of the World Republic.

$\times 5 =$
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

HANDLING STORY ELEMENTS. Each of the following questions reviews your understanding of story elements. Put an x in the box next to the correct answer to each question.

1. What happened last in the *plot* of "The Cog"?
 - a. The crew of the *President* came onto the speaker's stand.
 - b. James Maxwell stepped to the microphone.
 - c. A speaker told the crowd about the glorious conquest of space.
2. Who is the *main character* in the story?
 - a. Gerald Adams
 - b. James Maxwell
 - c. the Director of Space Exploration
3. Which sentence best *characterizes* James Maxwell?
 - a. He longed to be an astronaut.
 - b. He longed to return to law school.
 - c. He wished that he had gained fame and fortune.
4. When is "The Cog" *set*?
 - a. in the future
 - b. in the past
 - c. at the present time

$\times 5 =$
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

OBSERVING NEW VOCABULARY WORDS. Answer the following vocabulary questions by putting an *x* in the box next to the correct answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. If you wish, look back at the words before you answer the questions.

- The rocket had broken apart, bursting into a million fragments. The word *fragments* means
 - a. broken pieces.
 - b. shining stars.
 - c. beautiful pictures.
- He thought he would probably die in bed, an old man too feeble to make it to the next room. The word *feeble* means
 - a. worried.
 - b. annoyed.
 - c. weak.
- Many spectators had come to see the launching of the spaceship. *Spectators* are people who
 - a. are paid to play sports.
 - b. look on without taking part.
 - c. build rockets.
- Maxwell went to law school because his family was very practical and suggested that he do the sensible thing. What is the meaning of the word *sensible*?
 - a. reasonable; wise
 - b. enjoyable; pleasant
 - c. unusual; strange

	× 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

COMPLETING A CLOZE PASSAGE. Complete the following paragraph by filling in each blank with one of the words listed in the box below. Each of the words appears in the story. Since there are five words and four blanks, one word in the group will not be used.

Without a telescope, you can see only about 2,000 of the _____ of stars in the universe. Of course during the day, it is easy to see the star that is closest to Earth—the _____.

Compared to other _____, the sun is not large. But since it is "only" 93,000,000 miles away, it appears bigger and _____ than any other star.

millions sun

machinery

stars brighter

	× 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

KNOWING HOW TO READ CRITICALLY. Each of the following questions will help you to think critically about the selection. Put an x in the box next to the correct answer.

- The story suggests that if Maxwell could live his life over, he
 - a. wouldn't change a thing.
 - b. would be an astronaut.
 - c. would take a practical job in the community.
- Which statement is true?
 - a. Very few people came to see the spacecraft take off.
 - b. Maxwell's family encouraged him to become an astronaut.
 - c. Although Maxwell was President of the World Republic, he still considered himself a cog in the machine.
- Maxwell respected Gerald Adams because Gerald had
 - a. been a friend.
 - b. gone to school with him.
 - c. followed his dream.
- During the ceremonies, Maxwell must have been
 - a. inside the rocket.
 - b. on the lawn.
 - c. on the speaker's platform.

	× 5 =	
NUMBER CORRECT		YOUR SCORE

Questions for Writing and Discussion

- According to an old saying: "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence." How might this saying be applied to "The Cog"?
- Why do you think the author called the spaceship the *President*? What does this suggest about James Maxwell?
- At the end of the story, James Maxwell "cleared his throat and stepped to the microphone." Think about what had been going through Maxwell's mind. Then tell what you think he might have said to the crowd.

Use the boxes below to total your scores for the exercises. Then write your score on pages 150 and 151.

	+	S ELECTING DETAILS FROM THE STORY
	+	H ANDLING STORY ELEMENTS
	+	O BSERVING NEW VOCABULARY WORDS
	+	C OMPLETING A CLOZE PASSAGE
	+	K NOWING HOW TO READ CRITICALLY
	▼	Score Total: Story 5