

The short story *Child's Play*, published March, 1947, in *Astounding Science Fiction Magazine*, was written by Pennsylvania State College Professor Philip Klass, who, at the time, was using the pseudonym William Tenn to publish in the Sci-Fi pulp magazines. In addition to his magazine publications he wrote the novel *Of Men and Monsters* (1968) and in 1999 won the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America's Author Emeritus award for significant contributions to the field. *Child's Play* was adapted for *Dimension X* by George Lefferts and aired on June 21, 1951. It was later produced for *X Minus One* airing October 20, 1955.

William Tell/Philip Klass is known for biting wit and social commentary. In this story he explores the the extent to which one can lose oneself in the pursuit of upward mobility.

DIMENSION X
Child's Play
June 21, 1951

drum roll

HOST NORMAN ROSE: Adventures in time and space transcribed in future tense (cymbal crash) Dimension X - x - x - x - x... (trails off) (repeated gong continuing throughout announcement) The National Broadcasting Company, in cooperation with Street and Smith, publishers of Astounding Science Fiction, bring you Dimension X.

theremin transition that plays throughout monologue

HOST NORMAN ROSE: In these times, even a child knows the meaning of atomic fission, jet propulsion, and electronic transmission. What, we ask ourselves, will the child of the future know? What of the time when science unlocks the secret of life itself? Could it be that one day, such things as constructing human life, or passing back and forth from one dimension to another, will become mere child's play?

SAM WEBBER: My name is Sam Webber. I'm an attorney, and a pretty successful one, if I do say so myself. My wife Tina and I live in a comfortable 12-room place up in Westchester. Now, I've read a lot of Horatio Alger stuff in my time, and so have you probably, but I'll bet you've never heard anything quite as spectacular as my story. Maybe you won't believe it, but I used to be a completely different guy. Frightened, sickly, nearsighted, a real Mortimer Meek. (CHUCKLE) No kidding. That was five years ago. The big change in me began to take place on a cold December morning in 1945.

FX: doorbell buzz-buzz

SAM WEBBER: Just a moment, please.

FX: footsteps, door opens

SAM WEBBER: Yes, please.

DELIVERYMAN: Webber?

SAM WEBBER: Yes.

DELIVERYMAN: Samuel?

SAM WEBBER: That's right.

DELIVERYMAN: (TO WEBBER) Step back. (TO OTHER DELIVERYMEN) Okay, fellas, bring it in.

FX: shuffle

SAM WEBBER: Oh, just a moment. You must have the wrong address.

DELIVERYMAN: Watch it, buddy.

FX: scrape, light thumps

DELIVERYMAN: All right, sign here.

SAM WEBBER: Is, uh, that for me?

DELIVERYMAN: Webber. Apartments.

SAM WEBBER: Looks like a coffin.

DELIVERYMAN: I don't design 'em, Jack. I just deliver 'em. Sign here.

musical transition playful tune

SAM WEBBER: After much straining -- (CHUCKLE) I wasn't in very good physical shape those days -- I managed to push the box under my single light bulb. There was a card in a small envelope.

FX: paper scuffling

SAM WEBBER: Let's see. (reading) "To Sam from your classmates at the Interdimensional and Cosmic Institute. Merry Christmas. 2145 AD." Holy jumping catfish.

FX: door opens

SAM WEBBER: Hey, mister! There must be some mistake. Hey! (pause) Holy jumping catfish.

musical transition

SAM WEBBER: They were gone, and I didn't even know which delivery company it was. Well, I finally decided to open it up and see what was in it. After about a half hour of fumbling, I gave up.

FX: light tapping thump-thump

SAM WEBBER: All right, then, don't open.

FX: strong tapping thump

SAM WEBBER: Ooof

FX: light gears clicking, gasp

SAM WEBBER: No sooner had I said the word "open" than it came apart like the skin off a banana. There inside was something resembling a kid's chemical set: vials, jars, tubes, wires. You never saw so much scientific looking junk in your life. And on top of it all was a book of instructions.

FX: theremin throughout monologue

SAM WEBBER: (reading) "Build-a-Man, set number three. This set is intended solely for uses of children between the ages of 11 and 13. The equipment will enable the child to build and assemble complete adult humans in perfect working order. A disassembler is provided so the set may be used over again. Refills and additional parts may be acquired from the Build-a-Man Company, 928 Diagonal Level, Glunt City, Ohio. Remember, only with Build-a-Man can you build a man."

musical interlude

SAM WEBBER: When I left for work that morning, my brain was still reeling with the stuff I'd read in the instruction book.

FX: door opens, murmuring of office workers, very light clattering of typewriters and switchboards, buzzer

SECRETARY: (INTO PHONE) Somerset and O'Jack Attorneys at law. Just a moment, I will connect you with Mr. O'Jack. (TO WEBBER) Oh, good morning, Mr. Webber.

WEBBER: Good noron. I-I mean, good morning. (chuckles) I've got to get my mind off that book.

MECHANICAL VOICE: Only with Build-a-Man can you build a man. Chapter one, making simple living things. Chapter two, duplicating babies and other small humans.

SAM WEBBER: Oh, no.

FX: door shuts

SAM WEBBER: (SIGH) I've got to get a grip on myself. Here, do a little work.

FX: paper shuffles

SAM WEBBER: O'Brian versus O'Brien. Martin versus the City of New York. Oh, it must have been a dream. Probably go home tonight and find the place empty.

FX: door opens

LOU: Well, well, well, if it isn't the poor man's Clarence Darrow.

FX: friendly slap

SAM WEBBER: oof (COUGH)

LOU: (LAUGH)

SAM WEBBER: Hello, Lou.

LOU: I come as a bearer of sad tidings.

SAM WEBBER: Well, you don't look very sad.

LOU: The boss wants to see you, laughing boy.

SAM WEBBER: What about?

LOU: How should I know? Oh, and by the way, hahaha, you'll be very happy to know that I've just been promoted. I'm handling all the criminal stuff from now on.

SAM WEBBER: Congratulations.

LOU: Ah, you know what this means for Tina and me, don't you, Junior? Hahaha. Oh, well, cheer up. Tina's not for you anyway. Some got it. Some don't. I got it. You don't. (LAUGH) So long, laughing boy.

musical transition

SAM WEBBER: That was my good friend, Lou White. In the year I'd known him, he'd already managed to steal the job I wanted. And he was now working on the girl I wanted. Her name was Tina. Tina Velvet.

TINA: Good morning, Sam.

SAM WEBBER: Oh, good morning, Tina. My, you look good enough to--

TINA: Yes?

SAM WEBBER: Take to lunch.

TINA: Oh, I'm sorry, Sam, but I promised Lou.

SAM WEBBER: Oh, sure.

TINA: I hope you're not too disappointed.

SAM WEBBER: Me? Oh, no, no. Some got it. Some don't. I don't.

musical transition

SAM WEBBER: And that was Tina. I tried to steady my blood pressure as I walked into the boss's office.

FX: door shuts

SAM WEBBER: You sent for me, Mr. O'Jack?

O'JACK: Oh, yes. Sit down, Webber. Sit down.

SAM WEBBER: Oh, thank you, Mr. O'Jack.

O'JACK: Webber, I've been reviewing the work of my staff counselors for the past six months. I want to know only one thing.

SAM WEBBER: Yes, sir?

O'JACK: What happened?

SAM WEBBER: Wh? I-I don't understand.

O'JACK: You haven't had a single new client in six months.

SAM WEBBER: But no one has come in, Mr. O'Jack.

O'JACK: My boy, in this business, you've got to be aggressive. You've got to go out and create new clients. You've got to show some zip.

SAM WEBBER: Yes, sir.

O'JACK: Do you have any zip?

SAM WEBBER: Oh, yes, yes, Mr. O'Jack. Oh, I've got zip all right. I just can't seem to turn it loose, that's all.

O'JACK: Well, get in there and punch now, Webber. I want to see a change in you in the next few months. As a matter of fact, I'd better. You got that?

SAM WEBBER: Yes, Mr. O'Jack. I'll-I'll try to -- show some zip.

musical transition

SAM WEBBER: I left the office early and went home. Sure enough, there it was. My Build-A-Man set, gleaming a little obscenely in the corner. I walked over to it, gave it a kick, and hollered "open sesame."

FX: light gears clicking

SAM WEBBER: Three minutes later, I was flopped down in bed reading. "Chapter One: Making Simple Living Things." An hour later, I was fooling around with such complicated items as the Junior BioCalibrator, which measured everything from blood pressure to hemoglobin content, and the Jiffy Vitalizer, which was actually supposed to put life in your creation, providing you had followed instructions carefully. At eight-thirty, I made my first simple living thing.

FX: faint theremin

SAM WEBBER: Here, boy. Here, boy. Oh, maybe you aren't a boy. Oh, let's see.

FX: pages flipping

SAM WEBBER: Uh. According to the book, you are a rubicular oyster hog. Not much to look at, but I made you. Me, Sam Webber, attorney at law. I have created life. Hey, come back here. Come back. Here, boy. Here, boy. Hey, hey, hey.

musical transition

SAM WEBBER: It was no use. My rubicular oyster hog, which was a cross between a field mouse and an oyster, had run out under the door and into the world. I was about to take off after it when there was a knock on my door. It was Mrs. Lepante, my landlady.

FX: knock, knock, knock, knock, knock, door opening

SAM WEBBER: Oh, hello, Mrs. Lepante.

MRS. LEPANTE: I heard a noise.

SAM WEBBER: Oh, just rehearsing a speech I have to make in court.

MRS. LEPANTE: You were squeakin'.

SAM WEBBER: A bad throat.

MRS. LEPANTE; Oh. Oh, uh, by the way, there was a gentleman looking for you this afternoon.

SAM WEBBER: A gentleman?

MRS. LEPANTE: Yeah, a tall old man in a black overcoat. Kind of nasty. When I told him you wasn't in he wanted to go up to your room. Ha. I tell you I showed him the way out in a hurry.

SAM WEBBER: Oh, thanks, Mrs. Lepante. Probably a bill collector.

MRS. LEPANTE: Yeah. Well, I've got to run.

musical transition

FX: door opens and shuts

TINA: Oh, good morning, Sam. Here's that memo on Rosenthal versus Rosenthal and also a letter for-- What's the matter? You look tired.

SAM WEBBER: Oh, I had a bad night.

TINA: Your lumbago again?

SAM WEBBER: Uh, yes, you know.

TINA: Oh. Uh, say, by the way, your client was here again this morning.

SAM WEBBER: Client?

TINA VELVET: Mmm-hmm.

SAM WEBBER: Oh, it must be the same fellow that called at my house the other day. Well, what did you tell him?

TINA: Oh, I said you'd be in later.

SAM WEBBER: Oh, thanks.

TINA: Um, will that be all, Sam?

SAM WEBBER: Yes. Oh, no. No. Uh, are you doing anything New Year's Eve?

TINA: Oh, Sam, you haven't even noticed.

SAM WEBBER: Noticed what?

TINA: The ring, silly, third finger left hand.

SAM WEBBER: What?

TINA: Lou gave it to me. Isn't it simply gigantic?

SAM WEBBER: But you, you're not going to...

TINA: We're going to be married as soon as Lou finishes his next case. Lou is so sharp and businesslike.

SAM WEBBER: So is a guillotine.

TINA: Sam, after Lou gave me the ring last night, I-I began thinking how, well, how I used to hope that it-it would be you. But, well, then I realized you'd never have the money and, well, a girl has to think of things like a good steady income and a husband with--

SAM WEBBER: Zip.

TINA: Yes, with a zip.

SAM WEBBER: Well, Lou has plenty of zip. I'm sure you'll be very happy zipping around with each other.

TINA: (CRYING) Oh, Sam.

FX: door opens

LOU: Well, Sam, I--

TINA: (CRYING)

LOU: Hey. Hey, what's going on in here? Honey, is this little baboon giving you any trouble? If he has, I'll take him apart like an egg crate.

SAM WEBBER: No, no, no, take it easy, strong heart. Tina just told me the good news about your engagement. She's crying with happiness.

LOU: Is that right, honey?

TINA: (CRYING)

LOU: Well, then no hard feelings, Sam. Hahaha. Just that the best man got the girl, you understand. Oh, say, by the way, we're having a little celebration at Sagalli's tonight. Drop in and, hahaha, we'll live it up a little, huh?

musical transition

SAM WEBBER: I went home feeling like a man who has been stuffed into a washing machine with a dial set at rinse dry. I was a failure. I walked over to the mirror for a heart-to-heart talk

with myself. "Nothing. That's what you've got, Sam Webber, in unlimited quantities. Nothing. We ought to just tear you down and start all over again. We ought to take you..." Hey. Oh, no, no, not that again. But...why not? Think of it. A Sam Webber without the psychological problems you've got. A dynamic, uninhibited Sam who could win a girl like Tina by sheer magnetism. Then when it was all over we could just take the old disassembler and presto. And I can do it too.

FX: clock pendulum ticks throughout dialog

SAM WEBBER: Chromosome content, check. Cerebral content, maybe a little more id and a little less superego. Limbs, eyes, hair, general endocrine reaction. Well, here goes.

FX: whirring buzz

SAM WEBBER: (COUGH) It's moving.

FX: (GROAN)

WEBBER: Holy mackerel, it's alive. He's getting up.

SAM: (stretching) Ah. Say, I feel great.

WEBBER: Now, now, now. Take it easy. Do you know who you are?

SAM: Of course I do. I have all the thoughts you ever had up until the point I was vitalized. My brain is an exact duplicate of yours, except that I'm not all blocked up psychologically.

WEBBER: Uh, it said in the instruction manual you'd be uninhibited.

SAM: Say, this is all right. Oh, by the way, since we both have the same name, it'll simplify things if I call you Webber. I'll be Sam.

WEBBER: Oh, now-now look here. I'll-I'll make the decisions.

SAM: How would you like a good punch in the nose?

WEBBER: Well, is that any way to talk to your own, uh, parent? I-I-I did create you, you know.

SAM: Now, don't think I don't appreciate it, Webber, old man, but let's get one thing straight. I live my life and you live yours. You got that?

WEBBER: Who pays the rent?

SAM: You do, for a while, anyway. I haven't decided whether or not I want to stay in the law business.

WEBBER: The law business?

SAM: I may want her spread out a little. Tina is the kind of girl to whom money is very important.

WEBBER: Tina?

SAM: Well, what did you expect? I have enough of your likes and dislikes to want her just as badly as you do. The only difference being that I can get her. (CHUCKLE) No, we're not quite the same, you and I. I've got zip.

WEBBER: Don't use that word.

SAM: Now, how about some dinner? You know, I'm starved.

WEBBER: We'll have to go out.

SAM: I'll need some clothes.

WEBBER: Sorry, I only have this one suit.

SAM: Fine, you can lend it to me.

WEBBER: Oh, what about me?

SAM: I'll bring you a sandwich after I come back from Sagalli's.

WEBBER: Sagalli's?

SAM: Well, you haven't forgotten, have you, Webber? We're invited to the celebration, Tina and Lou White. Only it wouldn't look quite right if we both showed up, so (CHUCKLE) I'll tell you all about it. Now, off with that suit, and no nonsense.

musical transition

FX: party sounds with laughter

LOU: (LAUGH) Well, this is living it up, folks. (HOWLING LAUGH)

FX: laughter and murmuring

LOU: Hahaha. Have another drink, Mr. O'Jack.

O'JACK: Thank you, Lou.

LOU: Well, is everybody happy? (LAUGH)

FX: "Yeah" "Whoo" and party sounds with laughter

LOU: Say, uh, honey, are you having yourself a little good time?

TINA: Oh, yes, Lou, fine, fine.

LOU: But you seem to be preoccupied.

TINA: Oh, I was just wondering if Sam is coming.

LOU: Sam? Oh, no. Hahaha. Did you hear that, Mr. O'Jack? Hahaha. She's worrying about Sam. Why, that little runt probably got frightened by a noise maker. Hahaha.

SAM: Well, well, well, the happy couple.

TINA: Sam!

SAM: Good evening, cats. Everybody's lit up like a Christmas tree.

LOU: Well, I'll be. Say, Sam, are you in the bag?

SAM: Never touch the stuff, Lou, my boy. Never touch it. Boy Scout Training.

TINA: Oh, Sam, I was afraid you weren't coming.

SAM: Miss a chance to be with you, beautiful. Never.

LOU: Hey, what's got into you, Webber, monkey glands?

SAM: I don't read you, muscle-bound.

LOU: Well, you seem different somehow, even your voice.

SAM: Do you notice anything, Tina?

TINA: Well, yes, it does seem richer somehow.

LOU: Oh, nonsense. Sam Webber, you're nothing but a cream puff and you always will be.

SAM: Mr. O'Jack, I think he owes me an apology for that.

O'JACK: I should think so.

SAM: All right, all-American boy, make with the apology.

LOU: Apologize? Me? Ho-ho-ho-no. Why, for two cents I'd--

SAM: Folks, would you excuse Mr. White and me for a few minutes? We want to step out into the hall for a little private conference. Coming, Mr. White?

LOU: I'll be right back, honey. Don't worry about a thing.

musical transition

FX: shuffle, shuffle, scuffle, thump

SAM: Okay, big boy, you've taken enough punishment. Now.

FX: thump, thump, scuffling thud

TINA: Sam! Lou, Lou, don't kill him he didn't-- (GASP) Oh, dear!

SAM: He'll be all right in a little while, baby.

TINA: But did you? I mean-- Oh, Sam.

SAM: Tina.

FX: kissy

TINA: We really shouldn't kiss like this.

SAM: It's what you've always wanted, isn't it? Well, isn't it?

TINA: Oh, Sam.

musical transition

WEBBER: By this time, he's probably kissing her. And there's nothing you can do about it, Webber, old man. Nothing. Hey, wait a minute. Where's that book of instructions? To disassemble a Build-a-Man model, merely focus the ray of the disassembler device and press lever X. But that's murder, counselor. Still, legally, in order to prove there's been a murder, you need a corpus delicti. And nobody even knows there is another Sam Webber.

FX: door opens

SAM: (humming the tune Here Comes The Bride)

WEBBER: So you're finally home. (pause) I'm starved.

SAM: Sorry, Webber, old man, but very pressing business detained me.

WEBBER: I suppose you made a fool of me over at Sagalli's.

SAM: Oh, on the contrary.

WEBBER: What do you mean?

SAM: My boy, you are looking at a man who in one fell swoop has got himself a raise, a promotion, and a wife. At least she'll be my wife tomorrow.

WEBBER: Who?

SAM: Tina, of course.

WEBBER: I don't believe you.

SAM: I had to put on quite a show, but all around it was a real success. Mr. O'Jack was so impressed he called me aside and said he was going to give me a crack at some criminal cases. And if I made the grade, why, who knows, I may even accept a partnership.

WEBBER: You've got it all figured out, haven't you?

SAM: That's about it.

WEBBER: Only you neglected to consider one thing.

SAM: Oh, what's that?

FX: footsteps

WEBBER: This.

SAM: Hey, hey, put that down.

WEBBER: Get back, you. You, you surfer, you. I'm going to melt you down like a Welsh Rarebit.

SAM: Webber, you-you-you can't do that. It's murder, eh? It's like killing your own son.

WEBBER: After what you've done to me, it's a pleasure.

SAM: I didn't ask to be brought into this world, but now that I'm here, I like it enough to want to survive.

WEBBER: Take off my suit, you phony. You won't be needing it again.

SAM: You're really going through with it, huh?

WEBBER: I am.

SAM: All right.

FX: footsteps

SAM: Oh, here's your jacket.

FX: shuffle, shuffle

WEBBER: Oh, my arm. (GRUNT)

SAM: Give me that thing. Give it to me.

FX: shuffle, scuffle

SAM: That's better. Now we'll fix this little item so it can't do any damage.

FX: crash, smash

WEBBER: Oh, no.

SAM: You see, Webber, you don't have the guts to stand up against the man you might have been.

FX: low rumbling hum

WEBBER: Oh, what's that sound?

SAM: I don't know.

WEBBER: It seems to be inside the house.

SAM: Somebody's coming up the stairs. Listen.

FX: heavy footsteps, low rumbling hum continues throughout dialog

SAM: Take a peek through the keyhole, Webber.

WEBBER: Holy jumping-- It's him.

SAM: Who?

WEBBER: The old man with the black coat. His eyes all black and shiny without any whites. Looks insane.

FX: knock, knock, knock

SAM: Don't open it.

FX: low rumbling hum transitions to higher pitch, crackle of flames

WEBBER: He's burning it. He's burning a hole right through the door.

FX: crumble, footsteps

CENSUS KEEPER: Good evening, gentlemen. As I feared, I'm too late to prevent you from duplication, Mr. Webber. And I see that you have destroyed the disassembler. That means I shall have to do the job manually. An ugly task.

WEBBER: Who are you?

CENSUS KEEPER: I am the census keeper for the 24th oblong. You see your Build-A-Man set was intended for one of the Webber children who is on a field trip in this oblong 200 years from now. Because of an unfortunate time warp, the set was delivered here accidentally.

SAM: You mean this set came here from 200 years from now?

CENSUS KEEPER: Precisely. Time, as with all things, is relative. We shall have to recover the set, of course, and adjust any discrepancies it has caused. Meanwhile, the problem is, which of you two gentlemen is the original Sam Webber?

SAM & WEBBER: Oh, I am. (pause) Listen. He's a liar!

CENSUS KEEPER: Difficulties, difficulties. Why cannot I ever have a simple case like a double conuplication?

SAM: Now look here, Mr. Census Keeper. The duplicate will obviously be--

WEBBER: --less stable and more emotionally unbalanced. Certainly a man of your qualifications can decide which of us is the more valid member of society. Which of us will--will conform more readily to the standards of--

CENSUS KEEPER: Naturally. I observe that one of you is naked.

WEBBER: Huh? Oh, wait a minute.

CENSUS KEEPER: And you also seem to be trembling. Whereas this gentleman seems quite calm.

WEBBER: No, no, no, hold it. You're making a mistake.

CENSUS KEEPER: I hardly think so.

WEBBER: No, no, stay away from me.

CENSUS KEEPER: Please do not struggle.

WEBBER: Help, please, please.

CENSUS KEEPER: Mr. Webber.

SAM: Yes.

CENSUS KEEPER: It would be better if you didn't watch.

SAM: Of course.

musical transition

SAM WEBBER: Well, that's my story. Within ten seconds, the old Sam Webber had been completely dismantled and packed into the box. Tina and I were married and I went on to become a full partner in the firm of O'Jack, Somerset, and Webber. Oh, and by the way, Tina and I have been doing quite successfully what the old Sam Webber and his Build-a Man set made such a mess of. We have one, two, three little conuplications. Sam Jr., age four, Sametta, age three, and Samina, age four months. Good night.

musical conclusion

HOST NORMAN ROSE: You have just heard another adventure into the unknown world of the future. The world of (cymbal crash) Dimension X - x - x - x - x...(trails off and blends with sound of repeated gong throughout announcement) Time is a strange and mysterious dimension. Could we alter the future if we could travel back in time to our own youth? Next week we bring you a story of a man who found the answer in Time and Time Again.

music theremin & organ exit

NBC ANNOUNCER ONE: Dimension X is presented transcribed each week by the National Broadcasting Company in cooperation with Street and Smith, publishers of the magazine Astounding Science Fiction. Today Dimension X has presented Child's Play, written for radio by George Lefferts from the story by William Tenn. Featured in the cast were Leon Janney as Sam, Karl Weber as his alter ego, and Patsy Campbell as his girl. Your host was Norman Rose, music by Burt Buhrman. Dimension X is produced by William Welch and directed by Fred Way.

repeated gong

NBC ANNOUNCER TWO: In reply to many queries from our listeners, last week's story on Dimension X, Pebble in the Sky, was written by Isaac Asimov. This is NBC, the National Broadcasting Company.

FX: three chimes