

And Now A Word From Our Sponsor...

By Jonathan Smith

At precisely 6:00 AM the alarm came on, its shrill whine permeating the air. It rang for exactly one minute before switching automatically to the speaker.

"... another beautiful day out there. Outside the city limits the temperature is a searing one hundred fifty degrees Fahrenheit, but here within the atmospheric dome it's a much more comfortable ninety degrees, thanks to our Sponsor. Tomorrow rain is scheduled from noon until four, and the day after that it will be eighty-five degrees. And now here's the news, brought to you of course by our Sponsor. City officials stated yesterday..."

The overhead lights came on, illuminating the windowless, square room with a soft glow. A gentle, feminine voice came over the speaker in the ceiling.

"This wake-up call brought to you by the Sponsor. It is exactly 6:02 AM, two minutes past the prescribed waking time. At precisely 6:05 AM the hydro-mist shower will be initiated. It is advised that you do not miss this appointment."

The figure in the bed didn't stir.

The lights flared on to their full brightness. The voice quickly changed from soft to sharp. It boomed throughout the small room.

"It is advised that you get up, as it is now exactly 6:03 AM, three minutes past the prescribed waking time..."

At the increase in volume, the consumer opened his eyes and sat up in the bed located in the middle of the room. He stretched and yawned, attempting to rid himself of the last traces of sleep. After he climbed out of bed, he pulled the sheets over his pillow, which bore the words "Head Rest - Brought to you by the Sponsor". The voice droned on, urging him to hurry and make it to the shower. Before he left the room, however, he took a minute to glance around the room, just as he did every morning. The walls, floor, and ceiling were all a glaring white. The consumer had chosen the color himself from the choices provided by the Sponsor - white, whiter, and whitest. It was said that soon a new color was going to be available called "ultimate white". He smiled. Everything was tidy, everything was in its place. Just the way he liked it.

He climbed into the shower, the door sliding

shut and locking in place behind him. As he reached for his tube of soap, a wall panel slid open, revealing a screen. It flickered to life, and the picture displayed a model with soap suds all over her body.

"Are you tired of the ordinary tubed soap that only gets your skin clean?" cooed the screen, "Try new Bet-R-Soap, the soap that gets you cleaner than clean so you won't have to go about your daily business feeling just clean. Brought to you by the Sponsor."

A small jingle accompanied the ad, the screen went blank, and the panel slid back into place. The mist evaporated, and the stall door opened. He climbed out and stood over the drying vent in the floor, listening as a speaker in the far wall listed off the reasons to upgrade to the all new Dryer 4000X.

"... a whole five seconds faster than the leading brand body dryer..."

He went back into his room, and the feminine voice once again came over the ceiling speaker.

"It is now 6:08 AM, twelve minutes before the prescribed departure time. This reminder brought to you by the Sponsor."

He quickly dressed and ate a bowl of Nutrient. It had been a different kind today, something called "New Flavour". Not bad, but it seemed to him that it tasted just the same as the other kinds. After eating he left his apartment, the door automatically locking behind him. As he walked down the hall towards the elevator, the row of screens along the walls desperately tried to grab his attention.

"... reduce ultraviolet damage today. Buy new Ray Block 2500..."

"... slow the signs of aging by having a face peel today. 58% success rate..."

Outside it was only a short sprint to the nearest transit terminal. The usual crowds were present, and he shoved his way through them to make it to the right platform. Some people talked into palm phones or kept to themselves. Others stood about watching the ads being displayed throughout the terminal, some jotting down the facts and phone numbers being flashed on the screens. He found his place and stood alone, folding his arms as he waited for the transport.

With a soft hiss the bullet-shaped transport