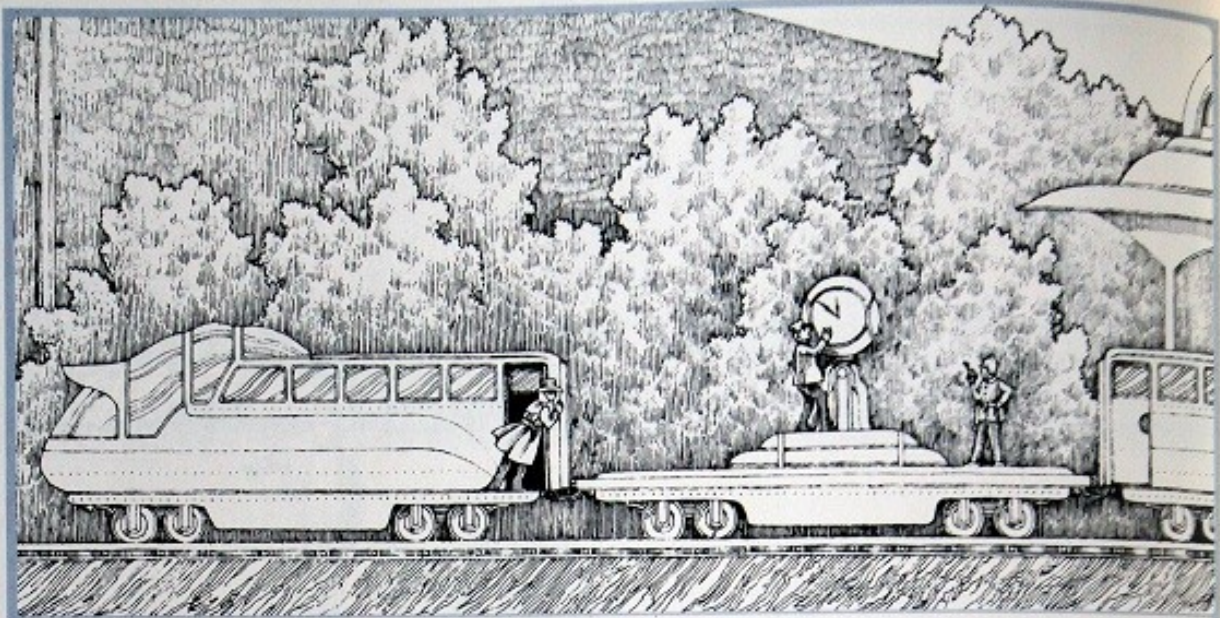


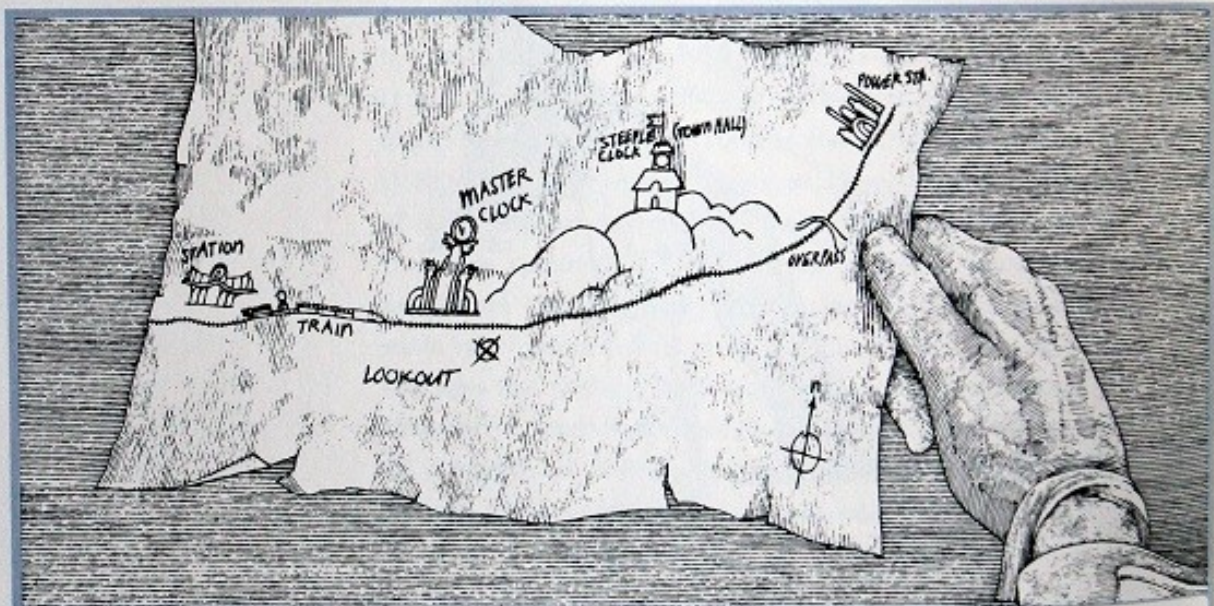
The notorious Agent X, beady eyes hidden behind dark glasses, gestures toward the sleek Relativity Express, the train that is to carry forward his fiendish plot to blow up the world's greatest nuclear power plant. Hidden aboard the express is a bomb, carefully timed to go off as the train passes the plant. At that moment the express will be traveling at its top speed of 140,000 miles per second, three quarters the speed of light. X is confident. He has calculated well and is certain his plot will succeed. But he is in for surprises!

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2

"Everything depends on time," muses X as he sneakily watches the loading of an extremely accurate clock on the Relativity Express. The clock is the key to his dastardly scheme. Inside the clock Agent X has planted his bomb, set to explode when the hands point to 1:30, the very moment the train is scheduled to pass the nuclear power plant. Only this precise clock and this dependable train can achieve X's evil purpose—if either the clock or the train runs just one second slow, the bomb will go off 140,000 miles past target!

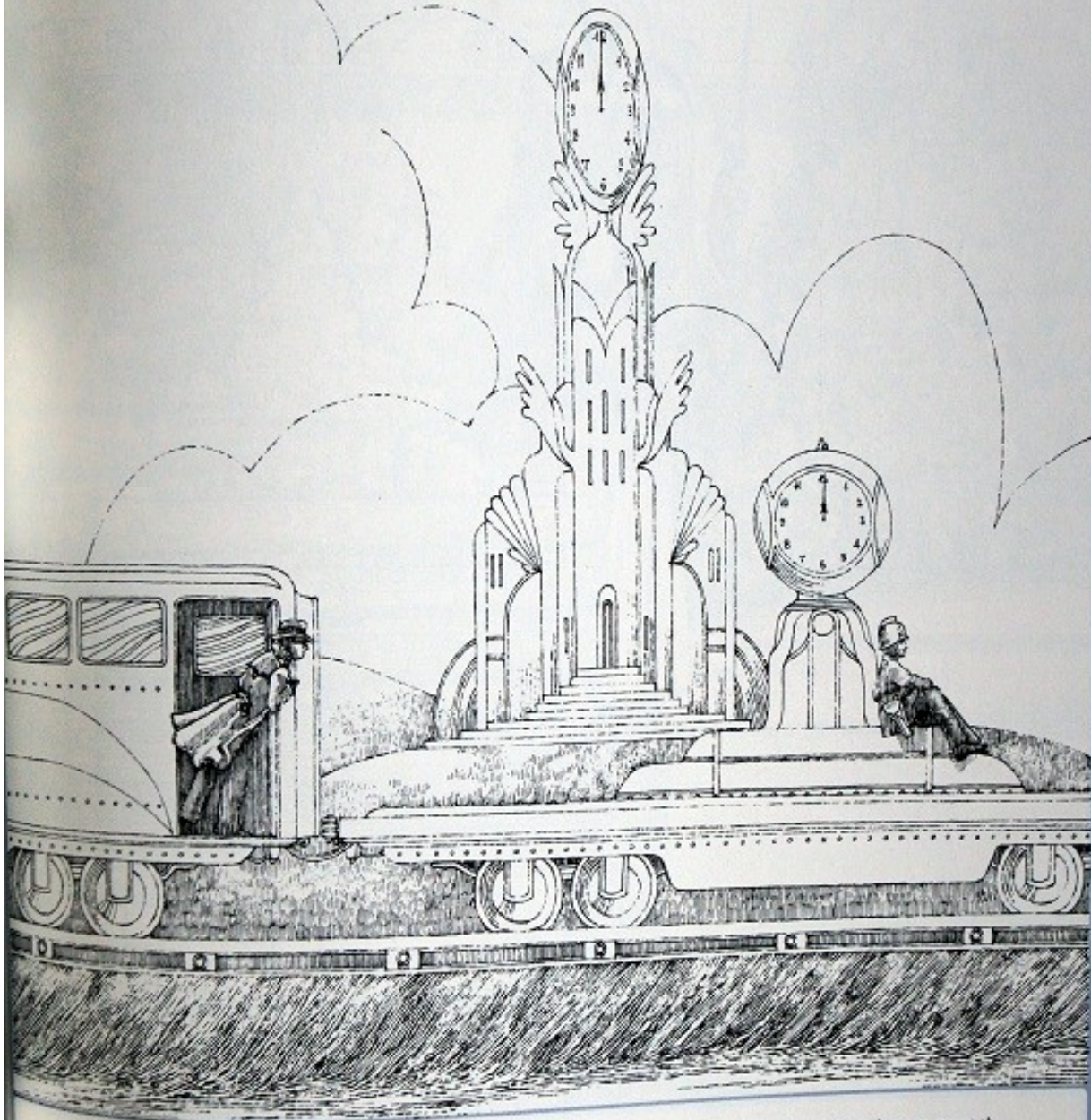


3

Agent X has prepared a map of the bomb plot. He knows that the train clock is due to be set in accordance with the giant master clock near the track; this, he assumes, will insure his bomb of split-second accuracy. Just to be sure, however, he plans to check the train clock once again as it passes the steeple clock near the power plant. Meanwhile, his lookout will be watching for the train; once it passes he will proceed in his jet-powered getaway car to a meeting with X at the overpass—as the Express roars toward its rendezvous with doom.

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4

"On time!" gloats the cunning agent as the Relativity Express passes by the master clock, at the very moment it sends its noontime signal to synchronize the train clock. Now the bomb must be correctly timed, thinks X smugly, proud of his wicked plot. But little does he reckon with the effect of relativity on time at the train's great speed. The strange shape of the clock tower offers a clue, but in his exultation Agent X fails to notice. The wily spy will suffer severely for his ignorance; he is about to learn about relativity the hard way.

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5

But suddenly X sees that something strange is happening! The lookout is a broad-shouldered, heavysset man —but this fellow standing at trackside is incredibly skinny. What's more, the bench and even the trees are peculiar, pressed into narrow shapes. Only the recognition of a hand radio like the one that controls the getaway car indicates to X that this might be his accomplice. He waves frantically at the man as prearranged but he is not sure this is the right chap. His first encounter with relativity has shaken him badly.

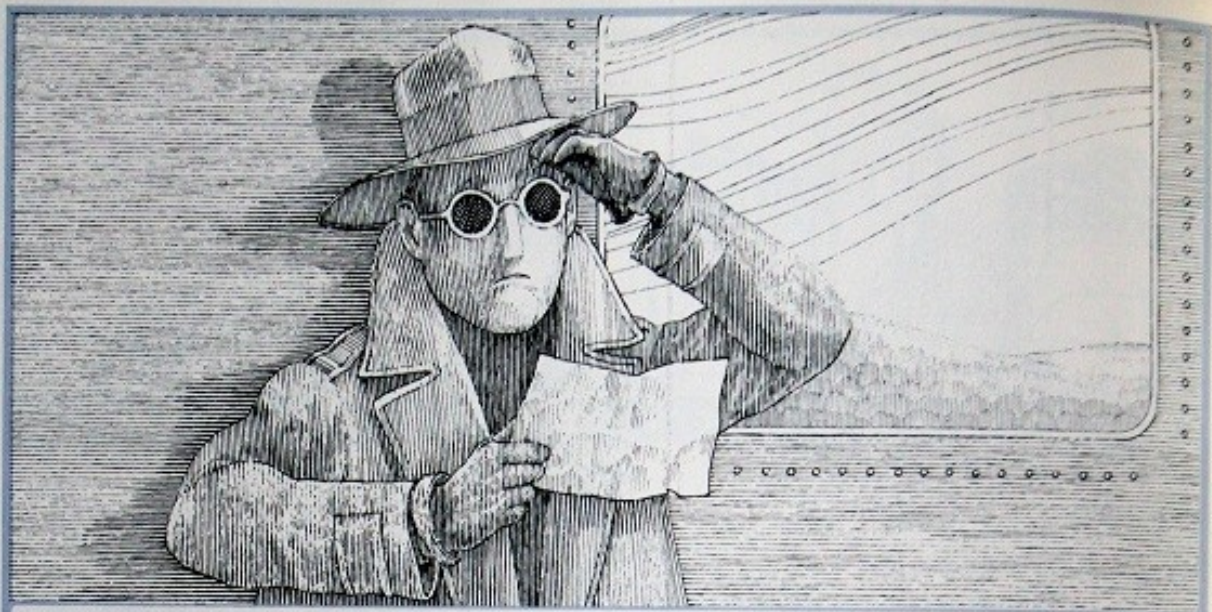
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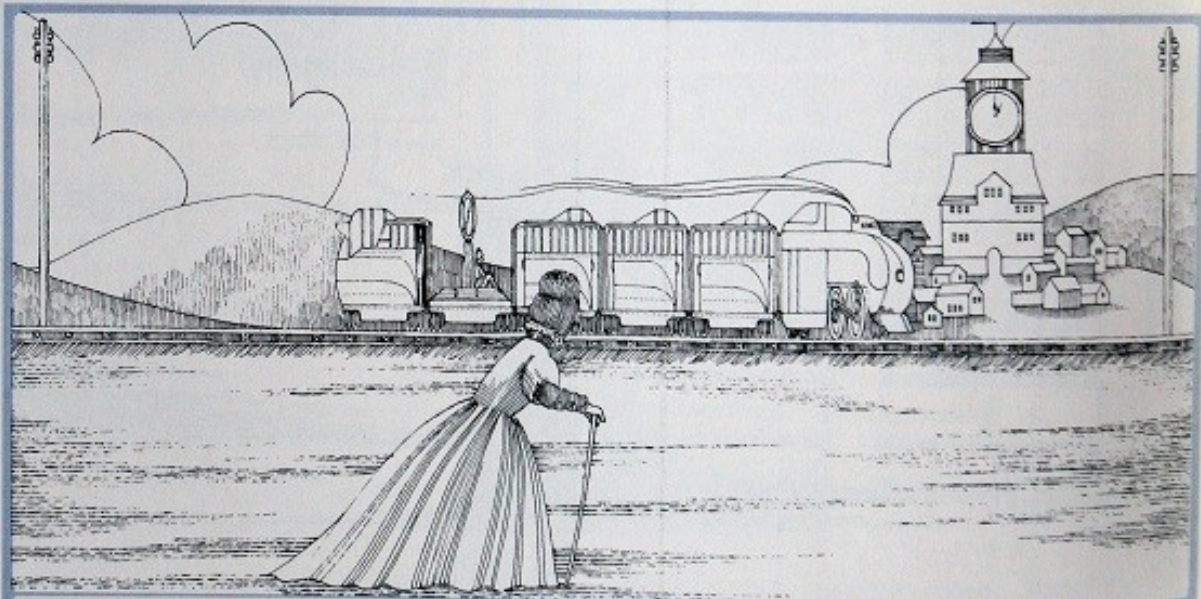
The lookout, who is really as squat and sinister as Agent X remembers him, is equally stunned by what he sees. He was told the train would be streamlined—but instead it is like a string of squashed-up streetcars. And look—oval wheels! He, too, does not know that relativity makes an object shorter when observed in motion. At last the lookout spots a distorted man waving madly from the rear car. Shaking his head, he prepares to follow in the getaway car. He is not sure who the fellow is, but he proceeds on the hunch that it is his leader, Agent X.

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7

Beset by doubts, Agent X turns again to his map for reassurance. The next landmark is the town with the steeple clock. "I'll check the clock on the train one last time when we pass that accurate steeple clock," he mutters. "If the two clocks agree—and why shouldn't they?—the bomb will be perfectly timed and the plan will succeed. Then I'll drop off the train." But now the once-cocky undercover man is gripped by fear. What could have made the lookout seem so unfamiliar? Something outlandish is interfering with the plot!

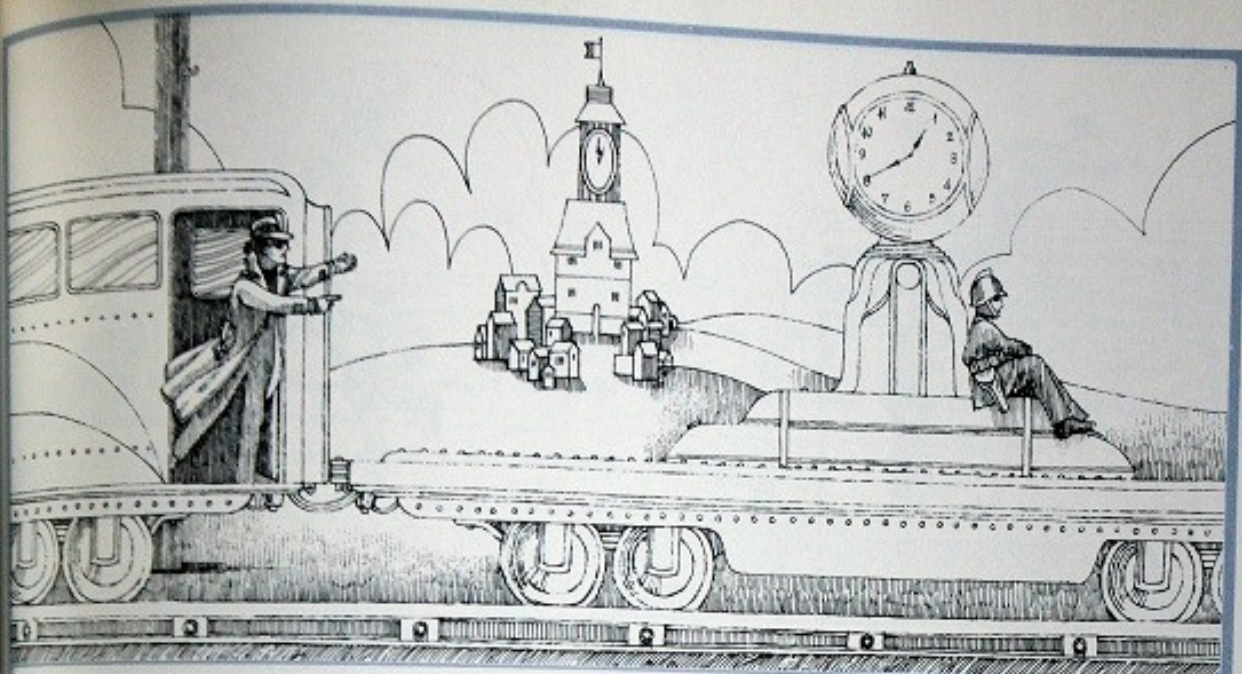


8

The first real evidence that something has indeed gone wrong is spotted by an innocent bystander, a little old lady passing near the steeple clock as the Relativity Express speeds by. The train is actually moving so fast that only in a comic book would it be visible, but the sharp-eyed little old lady can read the clock; it says 12:40. "How odd!" she remarks. "The steeple clock says 1:00 and it's been right ever since I was a little girl. The funny clock on the train must be slow!"

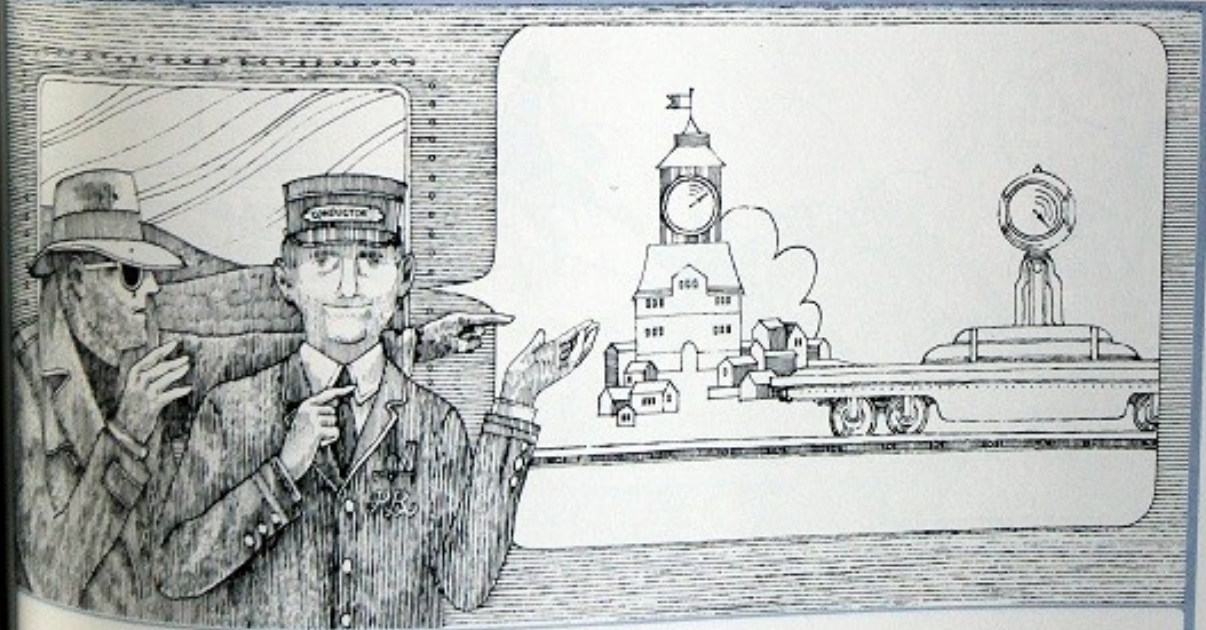
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At the same moment Agent X spots the steeple clock, leaps from his seat in disbelief and rushes to the car door to check the clock on the flatcar. Sure enough, it says 12:40, although the steeple clock reads 1:00. "Ye gods!" he shouts. "That steeple clock must be wrong! It must be fast—or else it was set wrong! I know the train clock was correct back at the master time station." The whole plan is in danger! In near-panic, X looks for the conductor to tell him that the world has gone mad; the clocks are all wrong.

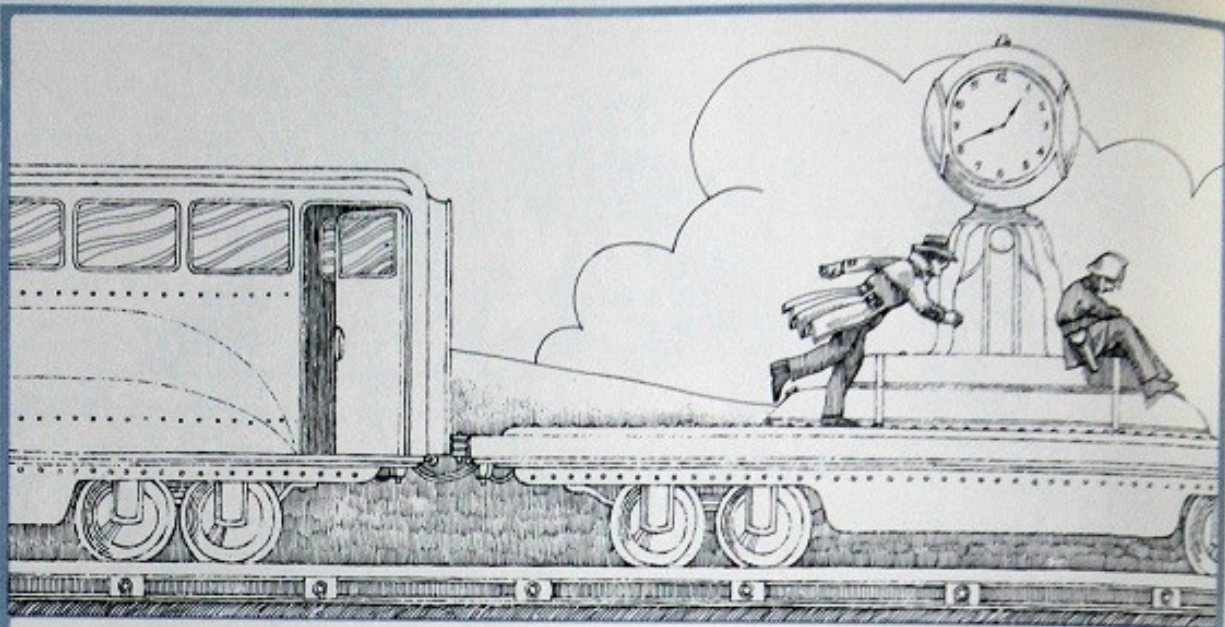


10

"Both clocks are right," smiles the knowledgeable conductor. "But each clock is running slow relative to the other. As you can see, the steeple clock, which is moving relative to us, has a second hand that ticks more slowly than the second hand of our train clock. But it depends on where you stand: the people on the ground see our second hand as ticking slowly. Furthermore, the steeple clock and the master clock were never really synchronized from our point of view—although they were from the viewpoint of someone on the ground."

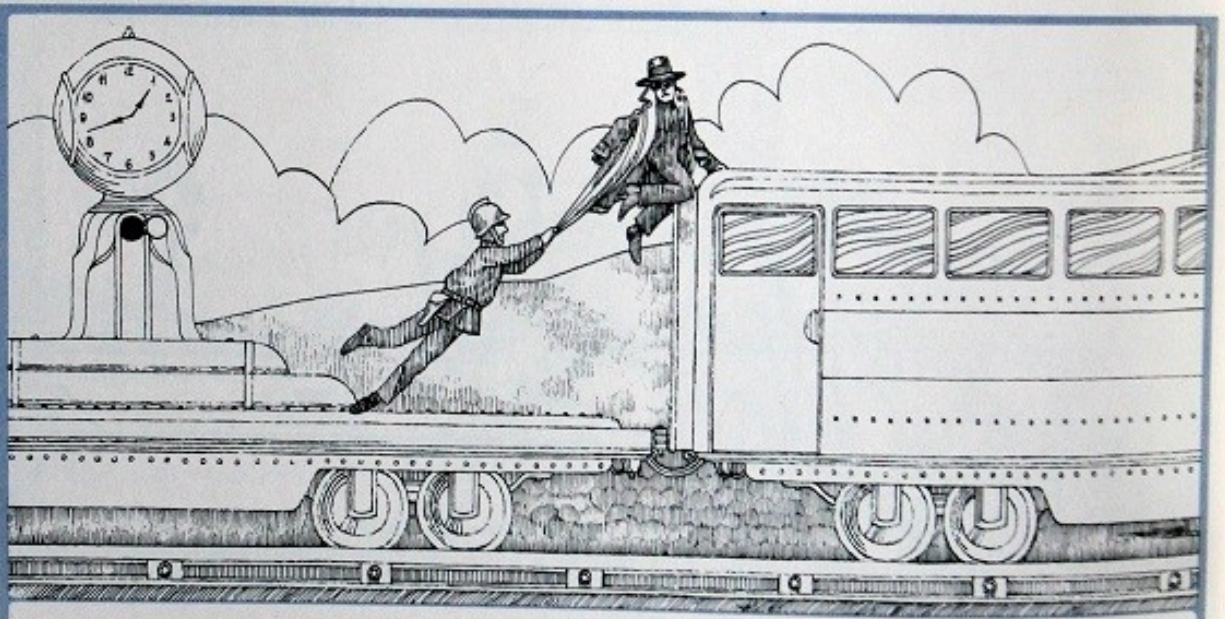
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There is only one hope for the desperate Agent X now: he must reset the terrible bomb to take into account the time change caused by relativity. He has tricked the conductor into telling him that they will pass the power plant when the train clock says 1:00. Now Agent X must change the bomb mechanism to explode then. He slips from the coach onto the flatcar bearing the clock. If only he can reach the clock without rousing the drowsy guard, he may win his battle with relativity after all.

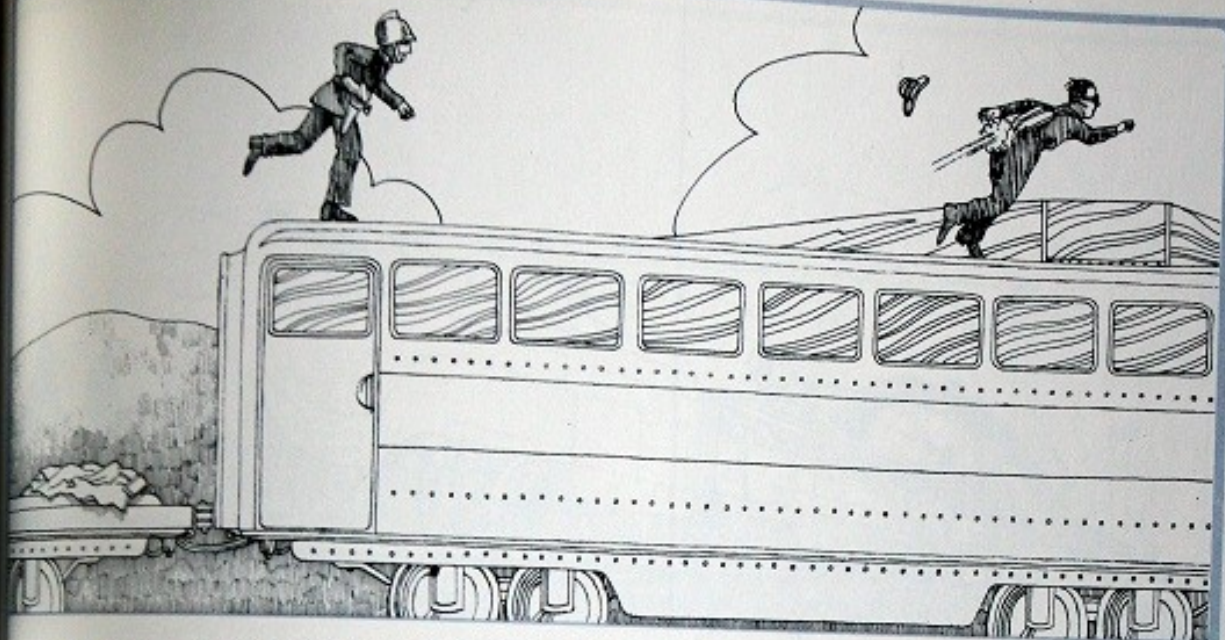


12

Agent X creeps up to the clock stand, against which the guard is resting, slowly opens the door and reaches inside for the bomb. The seconds tick by as Agent X tries to adjust the bomb mechanism. But the noise of Agent X at work nearby awakens the guard, who leaps to his feet. Agent X hastily abandons his work and jumps to the top of the coach to try to make his escape. "Rats!" spits out the villain. "The plot is a failure; I must flee before all is lost." But the guard hangs on to his coattails.

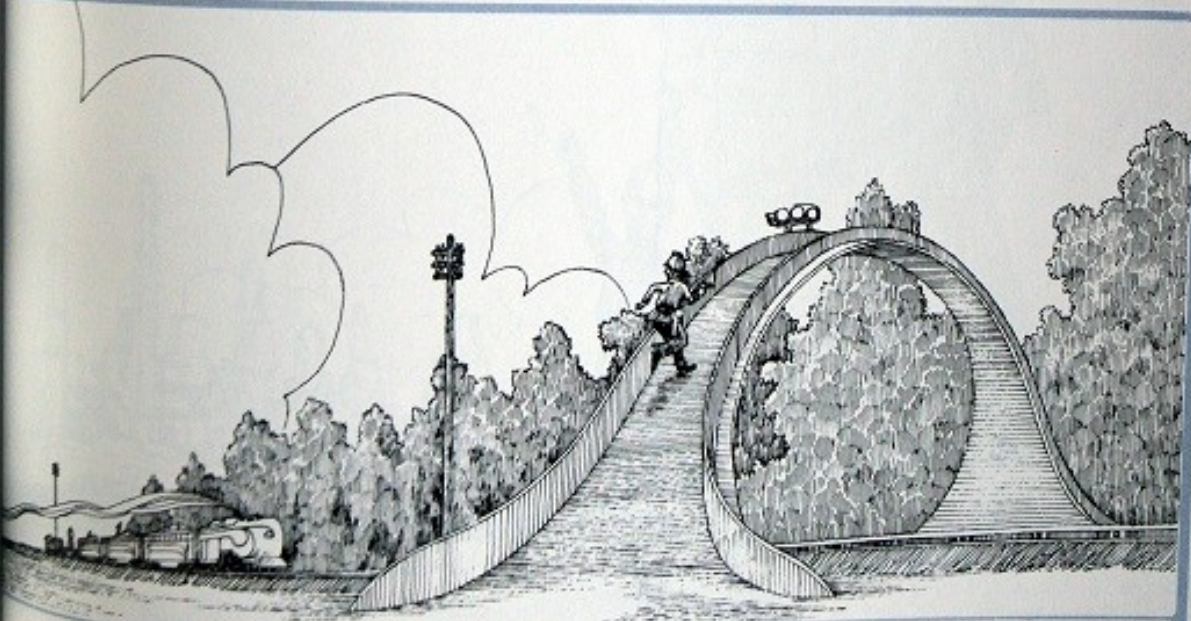
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13

As Agent X doffs his coat he shows he is well prepared: strapped to his back are rockets capable of propelling him at half the speed of light. Away he zooms! "Success!" he exults. "Since the train is traveling at three quarters the velocity of light, I must be going at one and one quarter times the speed of light—enough to escape any gunfire!" But if X really understood relativity he would know that no object can attain the speed of light, much less surpass it. X is going at ten elevenths the speed of light—and that will make a difference!

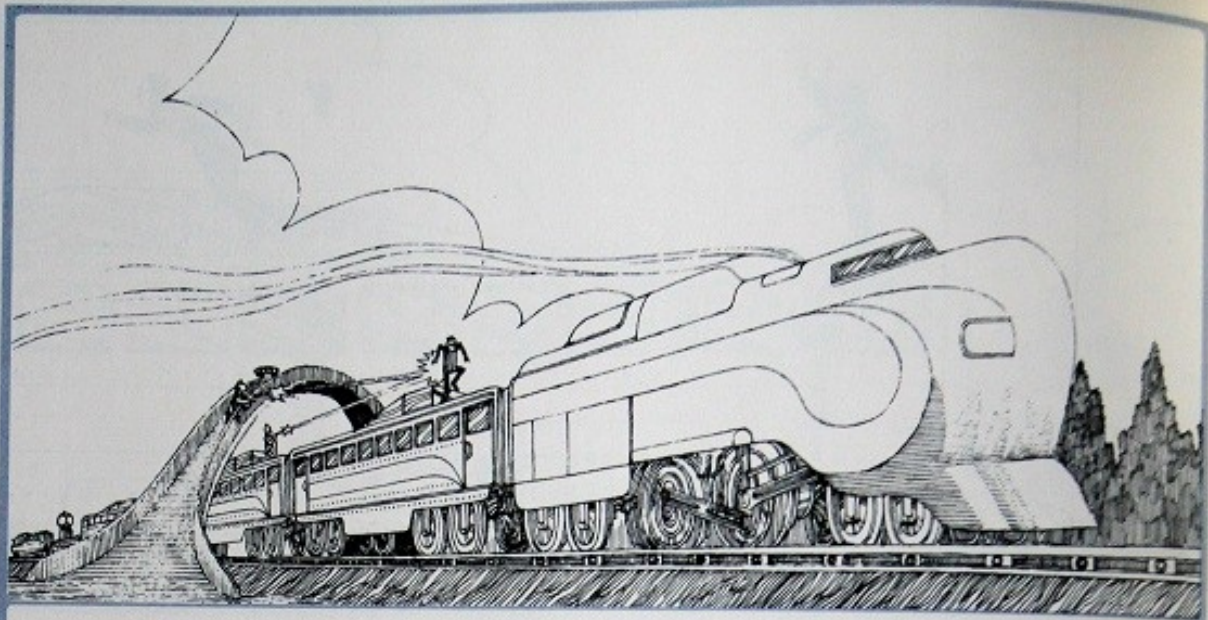


14

A railway guard with the eyes of an eagle notices the commotion on top of the crack Relativity Express. Since anything can happen in a comic strip, he is able to race up the overpass before the train, which is zipping along at 140,000 miles per second, passes by. His laser pistol is in his hand. With this weapon he will be ready to fire rays that travel at the speed of light when the train and its would-be saboteur pass beneath him. The relativity-crossed Agent X does not know it yet, but he is about to pay dearly for his wicked ways.

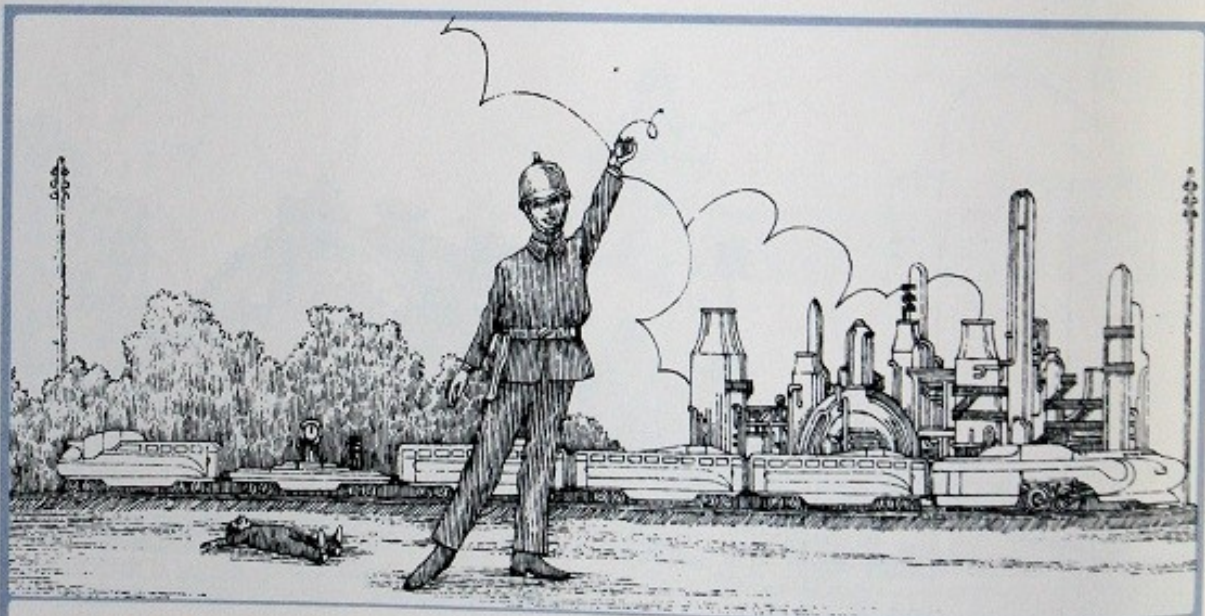
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15

As Agent X rockets over the roofs of the Relativity Express, he is the target of both guards. At the instant the two guards come abreast they fire their laser pistols. The gun on the train is moving, the other gun is stationary on the overpass, but—because the speed of light is always the same regardless of the motion of its source—both laser beams reach their quarry simultaneously. The hapless X, receiving his harshest lesson in relativity, is struck not once but twice.

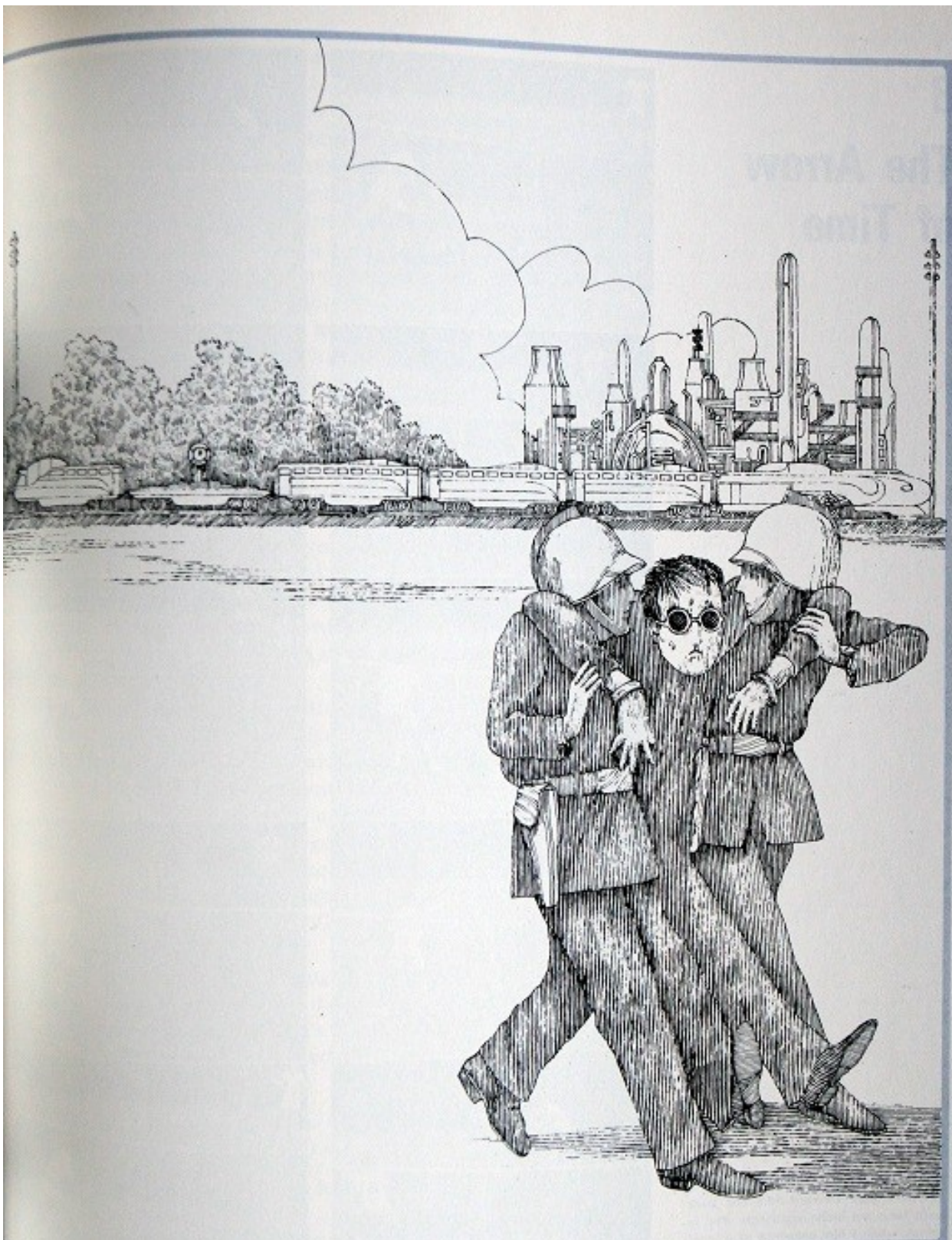


16

The great nuclear power plant is saved as the Relativity Express grinds to an unscheduled stop. After frantically searching the clock, a guard finds the bomb, disarms it, and holds it aloft jubilantly. "The bomb," he exults, "was set for 1:30 but it is only 1:00 on the Relativity Express now, for the train clock has been running slow relative to the ground. Thank Heavens for relativity; it has bested the evil Agent X." Meanwhile the benighted agent is stretched out on the ground behind him.

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Foiled by relativity, the once-smug Agent X is hauled away. The train, stopped, measures exactly the distance between two telephone poles; at full speed it was compressed to a fraction of that space (page 160); its wheels are round once more. A guard says pityingly, "Don't take it so hard, X. There's solace for you. Since everything on the train happened slowly relative to the ground, you're actually half an hour younger than you would have been if you hadn't ridden the Express." And so, younger but wiser, X is dragged off to jail.

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