The full range of the best in modern science fiction, selected and edited by_KINGSLEY AMIS and Robert Conquest.

SPECTRUM

ALGIS BUDRYS
ROBERT A. HEINLEIN
FREDERIK POHL
ROBERT SHECKLEY
CLIFFORD D. SIMAK
WILLIAM TENN
From Florida

“This is science fiction at its best. The masters of new and exciting ideas are pooled together in a representative and highly entertaining collection of humor, satire, high adventure, terror and stunning ingenuity.”

—Pensacola News Journal

From Oklahoma

“An anthology of science fiction selected with emphasis on scope, variety, readability. Here are stories of ingenuity and original invention, creating effects of irony, wit, wonder, terror and biting satire.”

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From Virginia

“This collection of stories by such master writers as Frederik Pohl, Robert Sheckley and Robert Heinlein will please the most critical science fiction fan.”

—Richmond Times-Dispatch

From South Carolina

“. . . every story is a proven work of an accomplished writer. I applaud the editors’ choices.”

—Charlotte News
SPECTRUM
A Science Fiction Anthology

edited by
KINGSLEY AMIS
and
ROBERT CONQUEST

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SPECTRUM

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Their light of pocket-torch, of signal flare,
Licks at the edge of unsuspected places,
While others scan, under an arc-lamp’s glare,
Nursery, kitchen sink, or their own faces.
INTRODUCTION

One of the editors of this collection recently published a book about science fiction.* Its reviewers divided sharply into two classes. Some, though they often disagreed with what was said, showed intimate and appreciative knowledge of the subject. Others had clearly read little or nothing in this field, without feeling this to be a bar to judging it as a whole: "I readily admit that I have not read many of these lucubrations," wrote one such on the book page of a glossy weekly, "but I am sure that I have read enough to disagree with Mr. Amis... I am sure that the claims he makes for them are much too wide."

We warmly support the idea that people should not read what they do not like. On the other hand, those prone to make authoritative-sounding pronouncements on science fiction include professional academics who claim the whole of literature as their subject, and whose own standards should have compelled them to read it in bulk. At the more straightforwardly journalistic level, the matter can perhaps be summed up by remarking that a useful qualification for reviewing a book on Georgian cutlery is the ability to tell a knife from a fork.

However, it is to the habitual non-reader that prefaces of this sort are mainly directed. The science-fiction fan, after a quick skim, will simply go ahead with the stories, condemning (with the hearty agreement of one of the editors) the representation of Author A by a particular piece, or (with the firm support of the other) the inclusion of anything at all by B: such is collaboration. But, before the fan leaves us, let us say something to all parties about the particular contents of this book.

First of all, we have not tried to make a collection of writing that uses methods, techniques or modes of treatment familiar to the reader of general fiction. That is, we have

not selected a team with a view to its being able to compete, on their own ground and under local rules, with "short story writers" of the type now securing most critical applause—mainly distant and dilute descendants of Chekhov and Hemingway, with a dash of Gothic here and there. This could have been done, perhaps with interesting results. But to our mind the strength of science fiction, as often of other writing too, is not strictly commensurate with its surface brilliance, its dexterity in detail, nor even its subtlety in the usual sense of the word.

A more real limitation has been that we have restricted ourselves to material which has not had wide circulation in Britain (this accounts for the absence of Arthur C. Clarke, Brian W. Aldiss and others). Moreover, there is a special difficulty in anthologizing science fiction in anything short of a truly enormous and uneconomic tome. Much of the best work in the field runs typically to twenty or twenty-five thousand words, so that three or four stories may already bulk as large as a fair-sized novel. We have also, even within these limitations, not stuck just to the stories which seemed the best: that would perhaps have limited us to two or three each by three or four authors. We have, instead, sought a certain scope and variety. But our first criterion has been readability. This involves, not a mere piling-up of marvels, but above all the creation, by whatever means, of a thoroughly plausible and realized fictional world—from the old (1939), simple and technically archaic *Special Flight* to the socially complex and humorous *The Midas Plague*.

With that clear, we can face the non-fan's objections. He will (or anyhow should) forgive us if we start by saying that it is he who is trying to constrict literature. Both of us have read science fiction from our early teens, both being attracted to it in the way described in the foreword to *New Maps of Hell*. But at the same time we were attracted to what science-fiction fans, with legitimate modesty, describe as "mainstream" literature, and have been associated with it in various ways ever since, even to the extent of teaching it. It is not, if we may say so, that we do not like and respect conventional fiction, but that we do not find it gives us all we want. There are kinds of ingenuity, kinds of invention, kinds of question, ways of putting such questions, notions of possibility, effects of irony and wit, or wonder and terror that only science fiction offers and can offer.

In the admirable literature of personal, and of generalized, introspection, even external objects have tended to figure mainly as character-triggering stimuli. The best of the great
novels of the past often derived much of their strength from a counter-balancing intrinsic interest in the outer world—Dickens is a prime example—but this has lately tended to peter out as introspective writing produced introspective critics, who imposed introspective canons. (One of the great mistakes of the introspective is to underestimate the sensitivity of the extravert; thus it is almost a priori denied that science fiction can be worth reading.) There has been, it might be argued, so much concentration on the inner life as to cramp the imagination by not allowing it access to the other, objective sphere, in which it can as legitimately operate. In science fiction, certainly, the balance is the other way. We do not urge that anyone should read just it and nothing else. We only feel that it is a natural and liberating complement to the novel of character.

Here we must repeat something that has been said many times before, since experience shows that it has not even yet been properly grasped: science fiction is not ordinary fiction and cannot be judged as if it were, though we agree that it should be judged as rigorously. Many of the particular criteria of literary merit are inapplicable, or work with a modified application, outside their particular field. A painting cannot be called just an incompetent bas-relief, even though a blind man might fairly point out that the latter “has an extra dimension.” Most obviously, “characterization” is an extremely tricky yardstick. In Robert Heinlein’s By His Bootstraps, for example, the main character is transferred to and fro between a very distant future and the same point in contemporary time, where he appears three times simultaneously. The critic’s difficulties are apparent. The true “hero,” the focal point of the story, is time and the time paradoxes. The character must be sympathetic enough to follow with interest, but he must be unparticularized, lightened at least enough to avoid distracting from the main issue. The notions of “plausibility” and of “relevance” are others which have to undergo modification when applied in the field of science fiction.

It will be seen that we are not putting forward exaggerated claims for the quality of modern science fiction. It in no way, as yet, approaches the best work done in the long cultivated and efficiently fertilized fields of conventional fiction. But then, neither does a great deal of conventional fiction. And, while we feel that an important service of science fiction is to show that the conventions were too narrow, we would both subscribe to the view that perhaps a dozen contemporary practitioners seem to have attained the status of the sound minor writer whose example brings
into existence the figure of real standing. We would not have "sound" and "minor" understood as maximum claims. And there is much science fiction which may not approach the kind of minor tour de force we are thinking of (and have tried to exemplify in this anthology), but which we find enjoyable and stimulating. We should like to think that any reasonably adventurous reader would feel the same.

Our thanks are due to Mr. Leslie Flood and Mr. Bruce Montgomery for much generous help.

K. A.
R. C.
AND SO THEY were married.

The bride and groom made a beautiful couple, she in her twenty-yard frill of immaculate white, he in his formal grey ruffled blouse and pleated pantaloons.

It was a small wedding—the best he could afford. For guests, they had only the immediate family and a few close friends. And when the minister had performed the ceremony, Morey Fry kissed his bride and they drove off to the reception. There were twenty-eight limousines in all (though it is true that twenty of them contained only the caterer’s robots) and three flower cars.

“Bless you both,” said old man Elon sentimentally. “You’ve got a fine girl in our Cherry, Morey.” He blew his nose on a ragged square of cambric.

The old folks behaved very well, Morey thought. At the reception, surrounded by the enormous stacks of wedding gifts, they drank the champagne and ate a great many of the tiny, delicious canapés. They listened politely to the fifteen-piece orchestra, and Cherry’s mother even danced one dance with Morey for sentiment’s sake, though it was clear that dancing was far from the usual pattern of her life. They tried as hard as they could to blend into the gathering, but all the same, the two elderly figures in severely simple and probably rented garments were dismayingly conspicuous in the quarter-acre of tapestries and tinkling fountains that was the main ballroom of Morey’s country home.

When it was time for the guests to go home and let the newlyweds begin their life together Cherry’s father shook Morey by the hand and Cherry’s mother kissed him. But as they drove away in their tiny runabout their faces were full of foreboding.

It was nothing against Morey as a person, of course. But poor people should not marry wealth.

Morey and Cherry loved each other, certainly. That helped. They told each other so, a dozen times an hour, all of the long hours they were together, for all of the first months of
their marriage. Morey even took time off to go shopping with his bride, which endeared him to her enormously. They drove their shopping carts through the immense vaulted corridors of the supermarket, Morey checking off the items on the shopping list as Cherry picked out the goods. It was fun.

For a while.

Their first fight started in the supermarket, between Breakfast Foods and Floor Furnishings, just where the new Precious Stones department was being opened.

Morey called off from the list, “Diamond lavaliere, costume rings, earbobs.”

Cherry said rebelliously, “Morey, I have a lavaliere. Please, dear!”

Morey folded back the pages of the list uncertainly. The lavaliere was on there, all right, and no alternative selection was shown.

“How about a bracelet?” he coaxed. “Look, they have some nice ruby ones there. See how beautifully they go with your hair, darling!” He beckoned to a robot clerk, who bustled up and handed Cherry the bracelet tray. “Lovely,” Morey exclaimed as Cherry slipped the largest of the lot on her wrist.

“And I don’t have to have a lavaliere?” Cherry asked.

“Of course not.” He peeked at the tag. “Same number of ration points exactly!” Since Cherry looked only dubious, not convinced, he said briskly. “And now we’d better be getting along to the shoe department. I’ve got to pick up some dancing pumps.”

Cherry made no objection, neither then nor throughout the rest of their shopping tour. At the end, while they were sitting in the supermarket’s ground-floor lounge waiting for the robot accountants to tot up their bill and the robot cashiers to stamp their ration books, Morey remembered to have the shipping department save out the bracelet.

“I don’t want that sent with the other stuff, darling,” he explained. “I want you to wear it right now. Honestly, I don’t think I ever saw anything looking so right for you.”

Cherry looked flustered and pleased. Morey was delighted with himself; it wasn’t everybody who knew how to handle these little domestic problems just right!

He stayed self-satisfied all the way home, while Henry, their companion-robot, regaled them with funny stories of the factory in which it had been built and trained. Cherry wasn’t used to Henry by a long shot, but it was hard not to like the robot. Jokes and funny stories when you needed amusement, sympathy when you were depressed, a never-failing supply of news and information on any subject you cared to name—
Henry was easy enough to take. Cherry even made a special point of asking Henry to keep them company through dinner, and she laughed as thoroughly as Morey himself at its droll anecdotes.

But later, in the conservatory, when Henry had considerately left them alone, the laughter dried up.

Morey didn’t notice. He was very conscientiously making the rounds: turning on the tri-D, selecting their after-dinner liqueurs, scanning the evening newspapers.

Cherry cleared her throat self-consciously, and Morey stopped what he was doing. “Dear,” she said tentatively, “I’m feeling kind of restless tonight. Could we—I mean do you think we could just sort of stay home and—well, relax?”

Morey looked at her with a touch of concern. She lay back wearily, eyes half closed. “Are you feeling all right?” he asked.

“Perfectly. I just don’t want to go out tonight, dear. I don’t feel up to it.”

He sat down and automatically lit a cigarette. “I see,” he said. The tri-D was beginning a comedy show; he got up to turn it off, snapping on the tape-player. Muted strings filled the room.

“We have reservations at the club tonight,” he reminded her.

Cherry shifted uncomfortably. “I know.”

“And we have the opera tickets that I turned last week’s in for. I hate to nag, darling, but we haven’t used any of our opera tickets.”

“We can see them right here on the tri-D,” she said in a small voice.

“That has nothing to do with it, sweetheart. I—I didn’t want to tell you about it, but Wainwright, down at the office, said something to me yesterday. He told me he would be at the circus last night and as much as said he’d be looking to see if we were there, too. Well, we weren’t there. Heaven knows what I’ll tell him next week.”

He waited for Cherry to answer, but she was silent.

He went on reasonably, “So if you could see your way clear to going out tonight—”

He stopped, slack-jawed. Cherry was crying, silently and in quantity. “Darling!” he said articulately.

He hurried to her, but she fended him off. He stood helpless over her, watching her cry.

“Dear, what’s the matter?” he asked.

She turned her head away.

Morey rocked back on his heels. It wasn’t exactly the first time he’d seen Cherry cry—there had been that poignant
scene when they Gave Each Other Up, realizing that their backgrounds were too far apart for happiness, before the realization that they had to have each other, no matter what.

... But it was the first time her tears had made him feel guilty.

And he did feel guilty. He stood there staring at her.

Then he turned his back on her and walked over to the bar. He ignored the ready liqueurs and poured two stiff highballs, brought them back to her. He set one down beside her, took a long drink from the other.

In quite a different tone, he said, “Dear, what’s the matter?”

No answer.

“Come on. What is it?”

She looked up at him and rubbed at her eyes. Almost sullenly, she said, “Sorry.”

“I know you’re sorry. Look, we love each other. Let’s talk this thing out.”

She picked up her drink and held it for a moment, before setting it down untasted. “What’s the use, Morey?”

“Please. Let’s try.”

She shrugged.

He went on remorselessly, “You aren’t happy, are you? And it’s because of—well, all this.” His gesture took in the richly furnished conservatory, the thick-piled carpet, the host of machines and contrivances for their comfort and entertainment that waited for their touch. By implication it took in twenty-six rooms, five cars, nine robots. Morey said, with an effort, “It isn’t what you’re used to, is it?”

“I can’t help it,” Cherry said. “Morey, you know I’ve tried. But back home—”

“Dammit,” he flared, “this is your home. You don’t live with your father any more in that five-room cottage; you don’t spend your evenings hoeing the garden or playing cards for matchsticks. You live here, with me, your husband! You knew what you were getting into. We talked all this out long before we were married—”

The words stopped, because words were useless. Cherry was crying again, but not silently.

Through her tears, she wailed: “Darling, I’ve tried. You don’t know how I’ve tried! I’ve worn all those silly clothes and I’ve played all those silly games and I’ve gone out with you as much as I possibly could and—I’ve eaten all that terrible food until I’m actually getting fa-fa-fat! I thought I could stand it. But I just can’t go on like this; I’m not used to it. I—I love you, Morey, but I’m going crazy, living like this. I can’t help it, Morey—I’m tired of being poor!”

Eventually the tears dried up, and the quarrel healed, and
the lovers kissed and made up. But Morey lay awake that
night, listening to his wife's gentle breathing from the suite
next to his own, staring into the darkness as tragically as any
pauper before him had ever done.

Blessed are the poor, for they shall inherit the Earth.

Blessed Morey, heir to more worldly goods than he could
possibly consume.

Morey Fry, steeped in grinding poverty, had never gone
hungry a day in his life, never lacked for anything his heart
could desire in the way of food, or clothing, or a place to
sleep. In Morey's world, no one lacked for these things; no
one could.

Malthus was right—for a civilization without machines,
automatic factories, hydroponics and food synthesis, nuclear
breeder plants, ocean-mining for metals and minerals...

And a vastly increasing supply of labour...

And architecture that rose high in the air and dug deep
in the ground and floated far out on the water on piers and
pontoons... architecture that could be poured one day and
lived in the next...

And robots.

Above all, robots... robots to burrow and haul and smelt
and fabricate, to build and farm and weave and sew.

What the land lacked in wealth, the sea was made to yield
and the laboratory invented the rest... and the factories be-
came a pipeline of plenty, churning out enough to feed and
clothe and house a dozen worlds.

Limitless discovery, infinite power in the atom, tireless la-
bour of humanity and robots, mechanization that drove jungle
and swamp and ice off the Earth, and put up office build-
ings and manufacturing centres and rocket ports in their
place...

The pipeline of production spewed out riches that no king
in the time of Malthus could have known.

But a pipeline has two ends. The invention and power
and labour pouring in at one end must somehow be drained
out at the other...

Lucky Morey, blessed economic-consuming unit, drowning
in the pipeline's flood, striving manfully to eat and drink
and wear and wear out his share of the ceaseless tide of
wealth.

Morey felt far from blessed, for the blessings of the poor
are always best appreciated from afar.

Quotas worried his sleep until he awoke at eight o'clock
the next morning, red-eyed and haggard, but inwardly re-
solved. He had reached a decision. He was starting a new
life.
There was trouble in the morning mail. Under the letterhead of the National Ration Board, it said:

“We regret to advise you that the following items returned by you in connection with your August quotas as used and no longer serviceable have been inspected and found insufficiently worn.” The list followed—a long one. Morey saw to his sick disappointment. “Credit is hereby disallowed for these and you are therefore given an additional consuming quota for the current month in the amount of 435 points, at least 350 points of which must be in the textile and home-furnishing categories.”

Morey dashed the letter to the floor. The valet picked it up emotionlessly, creased it and set it on his desk.

It wasn’t fair! All right, maybe the bathing trunks and beach umbrellas hadn’t been really used very much—though how the devil, he asked himself bitterly, did you go about using up swimming gear when you didn’t have time for such leisurely pursuits as swimming? But certainly the hiking slacks were used! He’d worn them for three whole days and part of a fourth; what did they expect him to do, go around in rags?

Morey looked belligerently at the coffee and toast that the valet-robot had brought in with the mail, and then steeled his resolve. Unfair or not, he had to play the game according to the rules. It was for Cherry, more than for himself, and the way to begin a new way of life was to begin it.

Morey was going to consume for two.

He told the valet-robot, “Take that stuff back. I want cream and sugar with the coffee—lots of cream and sugar. And besides the toast, scrambled eggs, fried potatoes, orange juice—no, make it half a grapefruit. And orange juice, come to think of it.”

“Right away, sir,” said the valet. “You won’t be having breakfast at nine then, will you, sir?”

“I certainly will,” said Morey virtuously. “Double portions!” As the robot was closing the door, he called after it, “Butter and marmalade with the toast!”

He went to the bath; he had a full schedule and no time to waste. In the shower, he carefully sprayed himself with lather three times. When he had rinsed the soap off, he went through the whole assortment of taps in order: three lotions, plain talcum, scented talcum and thirty seconds of ultra-violet. Then he lathered and rinsed again, and dried himself with a towel instead of using the hot-air drying jet. Most of the miscellaneous scents went down the drain with the rinse water, but if the Ration Board accused him of
waste, he could claim he was experimenting. The effect, as a matter of fact, wasn't bad at all.

He stepped out, full of exuberance. Cherry was awake, staring in dismay at the tray the valet had brought. "Good morning, dear," she said faintly. "Ugh."

Morey kissed her and patted her hand. "Well!" he said, looking at the tray with a big, hollow smile. "Food!"

"Isn't that a lot for just the two of us?"

"Two of us?" repeated Morey masterfully. "Nonsense, my dear, I'm going to eat it all by myself!"

"Oh, Morey!" gasped Cherry, and the adoring look she gave him was enough to pay for a dozen such meals.

Which, he thought as he finished his morning exercises with the sparring-robot and sat down to his real breakfast, it just about had to be, day in and day out, for a long, long time.

Still, Morey had made up his mind. As he worked his way through the kippered herring, tea and crumpets, he ran over his plans with Henry. He swallowed a mouthful and said, "I want you to line up some appointments for me right away. Three hours a week in an exercise gym—pick one with lots of reducing equipment, Henry. I think I'm going to need it. And fittings for some new clothes—I've had these for weeks. And, let's see, doctor, dentist—say, Henry, don't I have a psychiatrist's date coming up?"

"Indeed you do, sir!" it said warmly. "This morning, in fact. I've already instructed the chauffeur and notified your office."

"Fine! Well, get started on the other things, Henry."

"Yes, sir," said Henry, and assumed the curious absent look of a robot talking on its TBR circuits—the "Talk Between Robots" radio—as it arranged the appointments for its master.

Morey finished his breakfast in silence, pleased with his own virtue, at peace with the world. It wasn't so hard to be a proper, industrious consumer if you worked at it, he reflected. It was only the malcontents, the ne'er-do-wells and the incompetents who simply could not adjust to the world around them. Well, he thought with distant pity, someone had to suffer; you couldn't break eggs without making an omelette. And his proper duty was not to be some sort of wild-eyed crank, challenging the social order and beating his breast about injustice, but to take care of his wife and his home.

It was too bad he couldn't really get right down to work on consuming today. But this was his one day a week to hold a job—four of the other six days were devoted to solid consuming—and, besides, he had a group therapy ses-
sion scheduled as well. His analysis, Morey told himself, would certainly take a sharp turn for the better, now that he had faced up to his problems.

Morey was immersed in a glow of self-righteousness as he kissed Cherry goodbye (she had finally got up, all in a confusion of delight at the new régime) and walked out of the door to his car. He hardly noticed the little man in enormous floppy hat and garishly ruffled trousers who was standing almost hidden in the shrubs.

"Hey, Mac." The man's voice was almost a whisper.

"Huh? Oh—what is it?"

The man looked around furtively. "Listen, friend," he said rapidly, "you look like an intelligent man who could use a little help. Times are tough; you help me, I'll help you. Want to make a deal on ration stamps? Six for one. One of yours for six of mine, the best deal you'll get anywhere in town. Naturally, my stamps aren't exactly the real McCoy, but they'll pass, friend, they'll pass—"

Morey blinked at him. "No!" he said violently, and pushed the man aside. Now it's racketeers, he thought bitterly. Slums and endless sordid preoccupation with rations weren't enough to inflict on Cherry; now the neighbourhood was becoming a hangout for people on the shady side of the law. It was not, of course, the first time he had ever been approached by a counterfeit ration stamp hoodlum, but never at his own front door!

Morey thought briefly, as he climbed into his car, of calling the police. But certainly the man would be gone before they could get there; and, after all, he had handled it pretty well as it was.

Of course, it would be nice to get six stamps for one.
But very far from nice if he got caught.

"Good morning, Mr. Fry," tinkled the robot receptionist.
"Won't you go right in?" With a steel-tipped finger, it pointed to the door marked GROUP THERAPY.

Some day, Morey vowed to himself as he nodded and complied, he would be in a position to afford a private analyst of his own. Group therapy helped relieve the infinite stresses of modern living, and without it he might find himself as badly off as the hysterical mobs in the ration riots, or as dangerously antisocial as the counterfeiters. But it lacked the personal touch. It was, he thought, too public a performance of what should be a private affair, like trying to live a happy married life with an interfering, ever-present crowd of robots in the house—

Morey brought himself up in panic. How had that thought
crept in? He was shaken visibly as he entered the room and greeted the group to which he was assigned.

There were eleven of them: four Freudians, two Reichians, two Jungians, a Gestalter, a shock therapist and the elderly and rather quiet Sullivanite. Even the members of the majority groups had their own individual differences in technique and creed, but, despite four years with this particular group of analysts, Morey hadn’t quite been able to keep them separate in his mind. Their names, though, he knew well enough.

“Morning, Doctors,” he said. “What is it today?”

“Morning,” said Semmelweiss morosely. “Today you come into the room for the first time looking as if something is really bothering you, and yet the schedule calls for psychodrama. Dr. Fairless,” he appealed, “can’t we change the schedule a little bit? Fry here is obviously under a strain; that’s the time to start digging and see what he can find. We can do your psychodrama next time, can’t we?”

Fairless shook his gracefully bald old head. “Sorry, Doctor. If it were up to me, of course—but you know the rules.”

“Rules, rules,” jeered Semmelweiss. “Ah, what’s the use? Here’s a patient in an acute anxiety state if I ever saw one—and believe me, I saw plenty—and we ignore it because the rules say ignore it. Is that professional? Is that how to cure a patient?”

Little Blaine said frostily, “If I may say so, Dr. Semmelweiss, there have been a great many cures made without the necessity of departing from the rules. I myself, in fact—”

“You yourself!” mimicked Semmelweiss. “You yourself never handled a patient alone in your life. When you going to get out of a group, Blaine?”

Blaine said furiously, “Dr. Fairless, I don’t think I have to stand for this sort of personal attack. Just because Semmelweiss has seniority and a couple of private patients one day a week, he thinks—”

“Gentlemen,” said Fairless mildly. “Please, let’s get on with the work. Mr. Fry has come to us for help, not to listen to us losing our tempers.”

“Sorry,” said Semmelweiss curtly. “All the same, I appeal from the arbitrary and mechanistic ruling of the chair.”

Fairless inclined his head. “All in favour of the ruling of the chair? Nine, I count. That leaves only you opposed, Dr. Semmelweiss. We’ll proceed with the psychodrama, if the recorder will read us the notes and comments of the last session.”

The recorder, a pudgy, low-ranking youngster named Sprogue, flipped back the pages of his notebook and read
in a chanting voice, "Session of twenty-fourth May, subject, Morey Fry; in attendance, Doctors Fairless, Bileck, Semmelweiss, Carrado, Weber—"

Fairless interrupted kindly, "Just the last page, if you please, Dr. Sprogue."

"Um—oh, yes. After a ten-minute recess for additional Rorschachs and an electro-encephalogram, the group convened and conducted rapid-fire word association. Results were tabulated and compared with standard deviation patterns, and it was determined that subject's major traumas derived from respectively—"

Morey found his attention waning. Therapy was good; everybody knew that, but every once in a while he found it a little dull. If it weren't for therapy, though, there was no telling what might happen. Certainly, Morey told himself, he had been helped considerably—at least he hadn't set fire to his house and shrieked at the fire-robots, like Newell down the block when his eldest daughter divorced her husband and came back to live with him, bringing her ration quota along, of course. Morey hadn't even been tempted to do anything as outrageously, frighteningly immoral as destroy things or waste them—well, he admitted to himself honestly, perhaps a little tempted, once in a great while. But never anything important enough to worry about; he was sound, perfectly sound.

He looked up, startled. All the doctors were staring at him. "Mr. Fry," Fairless repeated, "will you take your place?"

"Certainly," Morey said hastily. "Uh—where?"

Semmelweiss guffawed. "Told you. Never mind, Morey; you didn't miss much. We're going to run through one of the big scenes in your life, the one you told us about last time. Remember? You were fourteen years old, you said. Christmas time. Your mother had made you a promise."

Morey swallowed. "I remember," he said unhappily. "Well, all right. Where do I stand?"

"Right here," said Fairless. "You're you, Carrado is your mother, I'm your father. Will the doctors not participating mind moving back? Fine. Now, Morey, here we are on Christmas morning. Merry Christmas, Morey!"

"Merry Christmas," Morey said half-heartedly. "Uh—Father dear, where's my—uh—my puppy that Mother promised me?"

"Puppy!" said Fairless heartily. "Your mother and I have something much better than a puppy for you. Just take a look under the tree there—it's a robot! Yes, Morey, your very own robot—a full-size thirty-eight-tube fully automatic
companion robot for you! Go ahead, Morey, go right up and speak to it. Its name is Henry. Go on, boy."

Morey felt a sudden, incomprehensible tingle inside the bridge of his nose. He said shakily, "But I—I didn't want a robot."

"Of course you want a robot," Carrado interrupted. "Go on, child, play with your nice robot."

Morey said violently, "I hate robots!" He looked around him at the doctors, at the grey-panelled consulting room. He added defiantly, "You hear me, all of you? I still hate robots!"

There was a second's pause; then the questions began.

It was half an hour before the receptionist came in and announced that time was up.

In that half hour, Morey had got over his trembling and lost his wild, momentary passion, but he had remembered what for thirteen years he had forgotten. He hated robots.

The surprising thing was not that young Morey had hated robots. It was that the Robot Riots, the ultimate violent outbreak of flesh against metal, the battle to the death between mankind and its machine heirs... never happened. A little boy hated robots, but the man he became worked with them hand in hand.

And yet, always and always before, the new worker, the competitor for the job, was at once and inevitably outside the law. The waves swelled in—the Irish, the Negroes, the Jews, the Italians. They were squeezed into their ghettos, where they encysted, seethed and struck out, until the burgeoning generations became indistinguishable.

For the robots, that genetic relief was not in sight. And still the conflict never came. The feed-back circuits aimed the anti-aircraft guns and, re-shaped and newly planned, found a place in a new sort of machine—together with a miraculous trail of cams and levers, an indestructible and potent power source and a hundred thousand parts and sub-assemblies.

And the first robot clanked off the bench.

Its mission was its own destruction; but from the scavenged wreck of its pilot body, a hundred better robots drew their inspiration. And the hundred went to work, and hundreds more, until there were millions upon untold millions.

And still the riots never happened.

For the robots came bearing a gift and the name of it was "Plenty."

And by the time the gift had shown its own unguessed ills, the time for a Robot Riot was past. Plenty is a habit-
forming drug. You do not cut the dosage down. You kick it if you can; you stop the dose entirely. But the convulsions that follow may wreck the body once and for all.

The addict craves the grainy white powder; he doesn’t hate it, or the runner who sells it to him. And if Morey as a little boy could hate the robot that had deprived him of his pup, Morey the man was perfectly aware that the robots were his servants and his friends.

But the little Morey inside the man—he had never been convinced.

Morey ordinarily looked forward to his work. The one day a week at which he did anything was a wonderful change from the dreary consume, consume, consume grind. He entered the bright-lit drafting room of the Bradmoor Amusements Company with a feeling of uplift.

But as he was changing from street garb to his drafting smock, Howland from Procurement came over with a knowing look. “Wainwright’s been looking for you,” Howland whispered. “Better get right in there.”

Morey nervously thanked him and got. Wainwright’s office was the size of a phone booth and as bare as Antarctic ice. Every time Morey saw it, he felt his insides churn with envy. Think of a desk with nothing on it but work surface—no calendar-clock, no twelve-colour pen rack, no dictating machines!

He squeezed himself in and sat down while Wainwright finished a phone call. He mentally reviewed the possible reasons why Wainwright would want to talk to him in person instead of over the phone, or by dropping a word to him as he passed through the drafting room. Very few of them were good.

Wainwright put down the phone and Morey straightened up. “You sent for me?” he asked.

Wainwright in a chubby world was aristocratically lean. As General Superintendent of the Design and Development Section of the Bradmoor Amusements Company, he ranked high in the upper section of the well-to-do. He rasped, “I certainly did. Fry, just what the hell do you think you’re up to now?”

“I don’t know what you m-mean, Mr. Wainwright,” Morey stammered, crossing off the list of possible reasons for the interview all of the good ones.

Wainwright snorted. “I guess you don’t. Not because you weren’t told, but because you don’t want to know. Think back a whole week. What did I have you on the carpet for then?”
Morey said sickly, “My ration book. Look, Mr. Wainwright, I know I’m running a little bit behind, but—”

“But nothing! How do you think it looks to the Committee, Fry? They got a complaint from the Ration Board about you. Naturally they passed it on to me. And naturally I’m going to pass it right along to you. The question is, what are you going to do about it? Good God, man, look at these figures—textiles, fifty-one per cent; food, sixty-seven per cent; amusements and entertainment, thirty per cent! You haven’t come up to your ration in anything for months!”

Morey stared at the card miserably. “We—that is, my wife and I—just had a long talk about that last night, Mr. Wainwright. And, believe me, we’re going to do better. We’re going to buckle right down and get to work and—uh—do better,” he finished weakly.

Wainwright nodded, and for the first time there was a note of sympathy in his voice. “Your wife. Judge Elon’s daughter, isn’t she? Good family. I’ve met the Judge many times.” Then, gruffly, “Well, nevertheless, Fry, I’m warning you. I don’t care how you straighten this out, but don’t let the Committee mention this to me again.”

“No, sir.”

“All right. Finished with the schematics on the new K-50?”

Morey brightened. “Just about, sir! I’m putting the first section on tape today. I’m very pleased with it, Mr. Wainwright, honestly I am. I’ve got more than eighteen thousand moving parts in it now, and that’s without—”

“Good. Good.” Wainwright glanced down at his desk. “Get back to it. And straighten out this other thing. You can do it, Fry. Consuming is everybody’s duty. Just keep that in mind.”

Howland followed Morey out of the drafting room, down to the spotless shops. “Bad time?” he inquired solicitously. Morey grunted. It was none of Howland’s business.

Howland looked over his shoulder as he was setting up the programming panel. Morey studied the matrices silently, then got busy reading the summary tapes, checking them back against the schematics, setting up the instructions on the programming board. Howland kept quiet as Morey completed the set-up and ran off a test tape. It checked perfectly; Morey stepped back to light a cigarette in celebration before pushing the start button.

Howland said, “Go on, run it. I can’t go until you put it in the works.”

Morey grinned and pushed the button. The board lighted up; within it, a tiny metronomic beep began to pulse. That was all. At the other end of the quarter-mile shed, Morey knew, the automatic sorters and conveyors were fingering
through the copper reels and steel ingots, measuring hoppers of plastic powder and colours, setting up an intricate weaving path for the thousands of individual components that would make up Bradmoor's new K-50 Spin-a-Game. But from where they stood, in the elaborately muralled programming room, nothing showed. Bradmoor was an ultramodernized plant; in the manufacturing end, even robots had been dispensed with in favour of machines that guided themselves.

Morey glanced at his watch and logged in the starting time while Howland quickly counter-checked Morey's raw-material flow programme.

"Checks out," Howland said solemnly, slapping him on the back. "Calls for a celebration. Anyway, it's your first design, isn't it?"

"Yes. First all by myself, at any rate."

Howland was already fishing in his private locker for the bottle he kept against emergency needs. He poured with a flourish. "To Morey Fry," he said, "our most favourite designer, in whom we are much pleased."

Morey drank. It went down easily enough. Morey had conscientiously used his liquor rations for years, but he had never gone beyond the minimum, so that although liquor was no new experience to him, the single drink immediately warmed him. It warmed his mouth, his throat, the hollows of his chest; and it settled down with a warm glow inside him. Howland, exerting himself to be nice, complimented Morey fatuously on the design and poured another drink. Morey didn't utter any protest at all.

Howland drained his glass. "You may wonder," he said formally, "why I am so pleased with you, Morey Fry. I will tell you why this is."

Morey grinned. "Please do."

Howland nodded. "I will. It's because I am pleased with the world, Morey. My wife left me last night."

Morey was as shocked as only a recent bridegroom can be by the news of a crumbling marriage. "That's too bad—I mean is that a fact?"

"Yes, she left my beds and board and five robots, and I'm happy to see her go." He poured another drink for both of them. "Women. Can't live with them and can't live without them. First you sigh and pant and chase after 'em—you like poetry?" he demanded suddenly.

Morey said cautiously, "Some poetry."

Howland quoted: "How long, my love, shall I behold this wall between our gardens—yours the rose, and mine the swooning lily.' Like it? I wrote it for Jocelyn—that's my wife—when we were first going together."
“It’s beautiful,” said Morey.
“She wouldn’t talk to me for two days.” Howland drained his drink. “Lots of spirit, that girl. Anyway, I hunted her like a tiger. And then I caught her. Wow!”

Morey took a deep drink from his own glass. “What do you mean, wow?” he asked.
“Wow,” Howland pointed his finger at Morey. “Wow, that’s what I mean. We got married and I took her home to the dive I was living in, and wow we had a kid, and wow I got in a little trouble with the Ration Board—nothing serious, of course, but there was a mix-up—and wow fights.
“Everything was a fight,” he explained. “She’d start with a little nagging, and naturally I’d say something or other back, and bang we were off. Budget, budget, budget; I hope to die if I ever hear the word ‘budget’ again. Morey, you’re a married man; you know what it’s like. Tell me the truth, weren’t you just about ready to blow your top the first time you caught your wife cheating on the budget?”
“Cheating on the budget?” Morey was startled. “Cheating how?”
“Oh, lots of ways. Making your portions bigger than hers. Sneaking extra shirts for you on her clothing ration. You know.”
“Damn it, I do not know!” cried Morey. “Cherry wouldn’t do anything like that!”

Howland looked at him opaquely for a long second. “Of course not,” he said at last. “Let’s have another drink.”

Ruffled, Morey held out his glass. Cherry wasn’t the type of girl to cheat. Of course she wasn’t. A fine, loving girl like her—a pretty girl, of a good family; she wouldn’t know how to begin.

Howland was saying, in a sort of chant, “No more budget. No more fights. No more ‘Daddy never treated me like this.’ No more nagging. No more extra rations for household allowance. No more—Morey, what do you say we go out and have a few drinks? I know a place where—”

“Sorry, Howland,” Morey said. “I’ve got to get back to the office, you know.”

Howland guffawed. He held out his wrist-watch. As Morey, a little unsteadily, bent over it, it tinkled out the hour. It was a matter of minutes before the office closed for the day.
“Oh,” said Morey. “I didn’t realize—Well, anyway, Howland, thanks, but I can’t. My wife will be expecting me.”

“She certainly will,” Howland sniggered. “Won’t catch her eating up your rations and hers tonight.”

Morey said tightly, “Howland!”
“Oh, sorry, sorry.” Howland waved an arm. “Don’t mean to say anything against your wife, of course. Guess maybe
Jocelyn soured me on women. But honest, Morey, you’d like this place. Name of Uncle Piggotty’s, down in the Old Town. Crazy bunch hangs out there. You’d like them. Couple nights last week they had—I mean, you understand, Morey, I don’t go there as often as all that, but I just happened to drop in and—"


He walked out, turned at the door to bow politely, and in turning back cracked the side of his face against the door jamb. A sort of pleasant numbness had taken possession of his entire skin surface, though, and it wasn’t until he perceived Henry chattering at him sympathetically that he noticed a trickle of blood running down the side of his face.

"Mere flesh wound," he said with dignity. "Nothing to cause you least consterter—consternation, Howland. Now kindly shut your ugly face. Want to think."

And he slept in the car all the way home.

It was worse than a hangover. The name is "holdover." You’ve had some drinks; you’ve started to sober up by catching a little sleep. Then you are required to be awake and to function. The consequent state has the worst features of hangover and intoxication; your head thumps and your mouth tastes like the floor of a bear-pit, but you are nowhere near sober.

There is one cure. Morey said thickly, "Let’s have a cocktail, dear."

Cherry was delighted to share a cocktail with him before dinner. Cherry, Morey thought lovingly, was a wonderful, wonderful—

He found his head nodding in time to his thoughts and the motion made him wince.

Cherry flew to his side and touched his temple. "Is it bothering you, darling?" she asked solicitously. "Where you ran into the door, I mean?"

Morey looked at her sharply, but her expression was open and adoring. He said bravely, "Just a little. Nothing to it, really."

The butler brought the cocktails and retired. Cherry lifted her glass. Morey raised his, caught a whiff of the liquor and nearly dropped it. He bit down hard on his churning insides and forced himself to swallow.

He was surprised but grateful: It stayed down. In a moment, the curious phenomenon of warmth began to repeat itself. He swallowed the rest of the drink and held out his
glass for a refill. He even tried a smile. Oddly enough, his face didn’t fall off.

One more drink did it. Morey felt happy and relaxed, but by no means drunk. They went in to dinner in fine spirits. They chatted cheerfully with each other and Henry, and Morey found time to feel sentimentally sorry for poor Howland, who couldn’t make a go of his marriage, when marriage was obviously such an easy relationship, so beneficial to both sides, so warm and relaxing...

Startled, he said, “What?”

Cherry repeated, “It’s the cleverest scheme I ever heard of. Such a funny little man, dear. All kind of nervous, if you know what I mean. He kept looking at the door as if he was expecting someone, but of course that was silly. None of his friends would have come to our house to see him.”

Morey said tensely, “Cherry, please! What was that you said about ration stamps?”

“But I told you, darling! It was just after you left this morning. This funny little man came to the door; the butler said he wouldn’t give any name. Anyway, I talked to him. I thought he might be a neighbour and I certainly would never be rude to any neighbour who might come to call, even if the neighbourhood was—”

“The ration stamps!” Morey begged. “Did I hear you say he was peddling phony ration stamps?”

Cherry said uncertainly, “Well, I suppose that in a way they’re phony. The way he explained it, they weren’t the regular official kind. But it was four for one, dear—four of his stamps for one of ours. So I just took out our household book and steamed off a couple of weeks’ stamps and—”

“How many?” Morey bellowed.

Cherry blinked. “About—about two weeks’ quota,” she said faintly. “Was that wrong, dear?”

Morey closed his eyes dizzily. “A couple of weeks’ stamps,” he repeated. “Four for one—you didn’t even get the regular rate.”

Cherry wailed, “How was I supposed to know? I never had anything like this when I was home! We didn’t have food riots and slums and all these horrible robots and filthy little revolting men coming to the door!”

Morey stared at her woodenly. She was crying again, but it made no impression on the case-hardened armour that was suddenly thrown around his heart.

Henry made a tentative sound that, in a human, would have been a preparatory cough, but Morey froze him with a white-eyed look.

Morey said in a dreary monotone that barely penetrated
the sound of Cherry’s tears, “Let me tell you just what it was you did. Assuming, at best, that these stamps you got are at least average good counterfeits, and not so bad that the best thing to do with them is throw them away before we get caught with them in our possession, you have approxi-
mately a two-month supply of funny stamps. In case you didn’t know it, those ration books are not merely ornamental. They have to be turned in every month to prove that we have completed our consuming quota for the month.

“When they are turned in, they are spot-checked. Every book is at least glanced at. A big chunk of them are gone over very carefully by the inspectors, and a certain percentage are tested by ultra-violet, infra-red, X-ray, radio-isotopes, bleaches, fumes, paper chromatography and every other damned test known to Man.” His voice was rising to an uneven crescendo. “If we are lucky enough to get away with using any of these stamps at all, we daren’t—we simply dare not—use more than one or two counterfeits to every dozen or more real stamps.

“That means, Cherry, that what you bought is not a two-
month supply, but maybe a two-year supply—and since, as you no doubt have never noticed, the things have expiration dates on them, there is probably no chance in the world that we can ever hope to use more than half of them.” He was bellowing by the time he pushed back his chair and tow-
ered over her. “Moreover,” he went on, “right now, right as of this minute, we have to make up the stamps you gave away, which means that at the very best we are going to be on double rations for two weeks or so.

“And that says nothing about the one feature of this whole grisly mess that you seem to have thought of least, namely that counterfeit stamps are against the law! I’m poor, Cherry; I live in a slum, and I know it; I’ve got a long way to go before I’m as rich or respected or powerful as your father, about whom I am beginning to get considerably tired of hearing. But poor as I may be, I can tell you this for sure: Up until now, at any rate, I have been honest.”

Cherry’s tears had stopped entirely and she was bowed white-faced and dry-eyed by the time Morey had finished. He had spent himself; there was no violence left in him.

He stared dismally at Cherry for a moment, then turned wordlessly and stamped out of the house.

Marriage! he thought as he left.

He walked for hours, blind to where he was going.
What brought him back to awareness was a sensation he had not felt in a dozen years. It was not, Morey abruptly
realized, the dying traces of his hangover that made his stom-
ach feel so queer. He was hungry—actually hungry.

He looked about him. He was in the Old Town, miles
from home, jostled by crowds of lower-class people. The block
he was on was as atrocious a slum as Morey had ever
seen—Chinese pagodas stood next to rococo imitations of the
chapels around Versailles; gingerbread marred every façade;
no building was without its brilliant signs and flare-lights.

He saw a blindingly overdecorated eating establishment
called Billie’s Budget Busy Bee and crossed the street to-
wards it, dodging through the unending streams of traffic.
It was a miserable excuse for a restaurant, but Morey was in
no mood to care. He found a seat under a potted palm,
as far from the tinkling fountains and robot string ensemble
as he could manage, and ordered recklessly, paying no at-
tention to the ration prices. As the waiter was gliding noise-
lessly away, Morey had a sickening realization: he’d come
out without his ration book. He groaned out loud; it was
too late to leave without causing a disturbance. But then,
he thought rebelliously, what difference did one more una-
tioned meal make, anyhow?

Food made him feel a little better. He finished the last of
his profiterole au chocolat, not even leaving on the plate the
uneaten one-third that tradition permitted, and paid his
check. The robot cashier reached automatically for his ration
book. Morey had a moment of grandeur as he said simply,
“No ration stamps.”

Robot cashiers are not equipped to display surprise, but this
one tried. The man behind Morey in line audibly caught his
breath, and less audibly mumbled something about slummers.
Morey took it as a compliment and strode outside feeling
almost in good humour.

Good enough to go home to Cherry? Morey thought se-
riously of it for a second; but he wasn’t going to pretend
he was wrong and certainly Cherry wasn’t going to be
willing to admit that she was at fault.

Besides, Morey told himself grimly, she was undoubtedly
asleep. That was an annoying thing about Cherry at best:
she never had any trouble getting to sleep. Didn’t even
use her quota of sleeping tablets, though Morey had spoken
to her about it more than once. Of course, he reminded
himself, he had been so polite and tactful about it, as befits
a newlywed, that very likely she hadn’t even understood that
it was a complaint. Well, that would stop!

Man’s man Morey Fry, wearing no collar ruff but his own,
strode determinedly down the streets of the Old Town.
“Hey, Joe, want a good time?”
Morey took one unbelieving look. “You again!” he roared. The little man stared at him in genuine surprise. Then a faint glimmer of recognition crossed his face. “Oh, yeah,” he said. “This morning, huh?” He clucked commiseratingly. “Too bad you wouldn’t deal with me. Your wife was a lot smarter. Of course, you got me a little sore, Jack, so naturally I had to raise the price a little bit.”
“You skunk, you cheated my poor wife blind! You and I are going to the local station house and talk this over.” The little man pursed his lips. “We are, huh?”
Morey nodded vigorously. “Damn right! And let me tell you—” He stopped in the middle of a threat as a large hand cupped around his shoulder.
The equally large man who owned the hand said, in a mild and cultured voice, “Is this gentleman disturbing you, Sam?”
“Not so far,” the little man conceded. “He might want to, though, so don’t go away.”
Morey wrenched his shoulder away. “Don’t think you can strongarm me. I’m taking you to the police.”
Sam shook his head unbelievingly. “You mean you’re going to call the law in on this?”
“I certainly am!”
Sam sighed regretfully. “What do you think of that, Walter? Treating his wife like that. Such a nice lady, too.”
“What are you talking about?” Morey demanded, stung on a peculiarly sensitive spot.
“I’m talking about your wife,” Sam explained. “Of course, I’m not married myself. But it seems to me that if I was, I wouldn’t call the police when my wife was engaged in some kind of criminal activity or other. No, sir, I’d try to settle it myself. Tell you what,” he advised, “why don’t you talk this over with her? Make her see the error of—”
“Wait a minute,” Morey interrupted. “You mean you’d involve my wife in this thing?”
The man spread his hands helplessly. “It’s not me that would involve her, Buster,” he said. “She already involved her own self. It takes two to make a crime, you know. I sell, maybe; I won’t deny it. But after all, I can’t sell unless somebody buys, can I?”
Morey stared at him glumly. He glanced in quick speculation at the large-sized Walter; but Walter was just as big as he’d remembered, so that took care of that. Violence was out; the police were out; that left no really attractive way of capitalizing on the good luck of running into the man again.
Sam said, “Well, I’m glad to see that’s off your mind.
Now, returning to my original question, Mac, how would you like a good time? You look like a smart fellow to me; you look like you’d be kind of interested in a place I happen to know of down the block.”

Morey said bitterly, “So you’re a dive-steerer, too. A real talented man.”

“I admit it,” Sam agreed. “Stamp business is slow at night, in my experience. People have their minds more on a good time. And, believe me, a good time is what I can show ’em. Take this place I’m talking about, Uncle Piggotty’s is the name of it, it’s what I would call an unusual kind of place. Wouldn’t you say so, Walter?”

“Oh, I agree with you entirely,” Walter rumbled.

But Morey was hardly listening. He said, “Uncle Piggotty’s, you say?”

“That’s right,” said Sam.

Morey frowned for a moment, digesting an idea. Uncle Piggotty’s sounded like the place Howland had been talking about back at the plant; it might be interesting, at that.

While he was making up his mind, Sam slipped an arm through his on one side and Walter amiably wrapped a big hand around the other. Morey found himself walking.

“You’ll like it,” Sam promised comfortably. “No hard feelings about this morning, sport? Of course not. Once you get a look at Piggotty’s, you’ll get over your mad, anyhow. It’s something special. I swear, on what they pay me for bringing in customers, I wouldn’t do it unless I believed in it.”

“Dance, Jack?” the hostess yelled over the noise at the bar. She stepped back, lifted her flounced skirts to ankle height and executed a tricky nine-step.

“My name is Morey,” Morey yelled back. “And I don’t want to dance, thanks.”

The hostess shrugged, frowned meaningfully at Sam and danced away.

Sam flagged the bartender. “First round’s on us,” he explained to Morey. “Then we won’t bother you any more. Unless you want us to, of course. Like the place?” Morey hesitated, but Sam didn’t wait. “Fine place,” he yelled, and picked up the drink the bartender left him. “See you around.”

He and the big man were gone. Morey stared after them uncertainly, then gave it up. He was here, anyhow; might as well at least have a drink. He ordered and looked around.

Uncle Piggotty’s was a third-rate dive disguised to look, in parts of it at least, like one of the exclusive upper-class country clubs. The bar, for instance, was treated to resemble the clean lines of nailed wood; but underneath the surface treatment, Morey could detect the intricate laminations of ply-
plastic. What at first glance appeared to be burlap hangings were in actuality elaborately textured synthetics. And all through the bar the motif was carried out.

A floor show of sorts was going on, but nobody seemed to be paying much attention to it. Morey, straining briefly to hear the master of ceremonies, gathered that the wit was on a more than mildly vulgar level. There was a dispirited string of chorus beauties in long ruffled pantaloons and diaphanous tops; one of them, Morey was almost sure, was the hostess who had talked to him just a few moments before.

Next to him a man was declaiming to a middle-aged woman:

*Smote I the monstrous rock, yahoo!*
*Smote I the turgid tube, Bully Boy!*
*Smote I the cankered hill—*

"Why, Morey!" he interrupted himself. "What are you doing here?"

He turned farther around and Morey recognized him. "Hello, Howland," he said. "I—uh—I happened to be free tonight, so I thought—"

Howland sniggered. "Well, guess your wife is more liberal than mine was. Order a drink, boy."

"Thanks, I've got one," said Morey.

The woman, with a tigerish look at Morey, said, "Don't stop, Everett. That was one of your most beautiful things."

"Oh, Morey's heard my poetry," Howland said. "Morey, I'd like you to meet a very lovely and talented young lady, Tanaquil Bigelow. Morey works in the office with me, Tan."

"Obviously," said Tanaquil Bigelow in a frozen voice, and Morey hastily withdrew the hand he had begun to put out.

The conversation stuck there, impaled, the woman cold, Howland relaxed and abstracted, Morey wondering if, after all, this had been such a good idea. He caught the eye-cell of the robot bartender and ordered a round of drinks for the three of them, politely putting them on Howland's ration book. By the time the drinks had come and Morey had just got around to deciding that it wasn't a very good idea, the woman had all of a sudden become thawed.

She said abruptly, "You look like the kind of man who thinks, Morey, and I like to talk to that kind of man. Frankly, Morey, I just don't have any patience at all with the stupid, stodgy men who just work in their offices all day and eat all their dinners every night, and gad about and
consume like mad and where does it all get them, any-
how? That’s right, I can see you understand. Just one crazy
rush of consume, consume from the day you’re born plop to
the day you’re buried pop! And who’s to blame if not the
robots?”

Faintly, a tinge of worry began to appear on the surface
of Howland’s relaxed calm. “Tan,” he chided, “Morey may
not be very interested in politics.”

Politics, Morey thought; well, at least that was a clue.
He’d had the dizzying feeling, while the woman was talking,
that he himself was the ball in the games machine he had
designed for the shop earlier that day. Following the woman’s
conversation might, at that, give his next design some valuable
pointers in swoops, curves and obstacles.

He said, with more than half truth, “No, please go on,
Miss Bigelow. I’m very much interested.”

She smiled; then abruptly her face changed to a frighten-
ing scowl. Morey flinched, but evidently the scowl wasn’t
meant for him. “Robots!” she hissed. “Supposed to work for
us, aren’t they? Hah! We’re their slaves, slaves for every
moment of every miserable day of our lives. Slaves! Wouldn’t
you like to join us and be free, Morey?”

Morey took cover in his drink. He made an expressive
gesture with his free hand—expressive of exactly what, he
didn’t truly know, for he was lost. But it seemed to satisfy
the woman.

She said accusingly, “Did you know that more than three-
quarters of the people in this country have had a nervous
breakdown in the past five years and four months? That
more than half of them are under the constant care of
psychiatrists for psychosis—not just plain ordinary neurosis
like my husband’s got and Howland here has got and you’ve
got, but psychosis. Like I’ve got. Did you know that? Did
you know that forty per cent of the population are essentially
manic depressive, thirty-one per cent are schizoid, thirty-eight
per cent have an assortment of other unfixed psychogenic
disturbances and twenty-four—”

“Hold it a minute, Tan,” Howland interrupted critically.
“You’ve got too many per cents there. Start over again.”

“Oh, the hell with it,” the woman said moodily. “I wish
my husband were here. He expresses it so much better than
I do.” She swallowed her drink. “Since you’ve wriggled off
the hook,” she said nastily to Morey, “how about setting
up another round—on my ration book this time?”

Morey did; it was the simplest thing to do in his con-
fusion. When that was gone, they had another on How-
land’s book.
As near as he could figure out, the woman, her husband and quite possibly Howland as well belonged to some kind of anti-robot group. Morey had heard of such things; they had a quasi-legal status, neither approved nor prohibited, but he had never come into contact with them before. Remembering the hatred he had so painfully relived at the psychodrama session, he thought anxiously that perhaps he belonged with them. But, question them though he might, he couldn't seem to get the principles of the organization firmly in mind.

The woman finally gave up trying to explain it, and went off to find her husband while Morey and Howland had another drink and listened to two drunks squabble over who bought the next round. They were at the Alphonse-Gaston stage of inebriation; they would regret it in the morning; for each was bending over backward to permit the other to pay the ration points. Morey wondered uneasily about his own points; Howland was certainly getting credit for a lot of Morey’s drinking tonight. Served him right for forgetting his book, of course.

When the woman came back, it was with the large man Morey had encountered in the company of Sam, the counterfeiter, steerer and general man about Old Town.

“A remarkably small world, isn’t it?” boomed Walter Bigelow, only slightly crushing Morey’s hand in his. “Well, sir, my wife has told me how interested you are in the basic philosophical drives behind our movement, and I should like to discuss them further with you. To begin with, sir, have you considered the principle of Twoness?”

Morey said, “Why—”

“Very good,” said Bigelow courteously. He cleared his throat and declaimed:

Han-headed Cathay saw it first,
Bright as brightest solar burst;
Whipped it into boy and girl,
The blinding spiral-sliced swirl;
Yang
And Yin.

He shrugged deprecatingly. “Just the first stanza,” he said. “I don’t know if you got much out of it.”

“Well, no,” Morey admitted.

“Second stanza,” Bigelow said firmly:

Hegel saw it, saw it clear;
Jackal Marx drew near, drew near;
O'er his shoulder saw it plain,
Turned it upside down again;
There was an expectant pause. Morey said, "I—uh—"
"Wraps it all up, doesn't it?" Bigelow's wife demanded.
"Oh, if only others could see it as clearly as you do! The robot peril and the robot saviour. Starvation and surfeit. Always twoness, always!"

Bigelow patted Morey's shoulder. "The next stanza makes it even clearer," he said. "It's really very clever—I shouldn't say it, of course, but it's Howland's as much as it's mine. He helped me with the verses." Morey darted a glance at Howland, but Howland was carefully looking away. "Third stanza," said Bigelow. "This is a hard one, because it's long, so pay attention."

Justice, tip your sightless scales;
One pan rises, one pan falls.

"Howland," he interrupted himself, "are you sure about that rhyme? I always trip over it. Well, anyway:

Add to A and B grows less;
A's B's partner, none the less.
Next, the Twoness that there be
In even electricity.
Chart the current as it's found:
Sine the hot lead, line the ground.
The wild sine dances, soars and falls,
But only to figures the zero calls.
Sine wave, scales, all things that be
Share a reciprocity.
Male and female, light and dark!
Name the numbers of Noah's Ark!
Yang
And Yin!

"Dearest!" shrieked Bigelow's wife. "You've never done it better!" There was a spatter of applause, and Morey realized for the first time that half the bar had stopped its noisy revel to listen to them. Bigelow was evidently quite a well-known figure here.

Morey said weakly, "I've never heard anything like it."
He turned hesitantly to Howland, who promptly said, "Drink! What we all need right now is a drink."
They had a drink on Bigelow's book.
Morey got Howland aside and asked him, “Look, level with me. Are these people nuts?”

Howland showed pique. “No. Certainly not.”

“Does that poem mean anything? Does this whole business of twoness mean anything?”

Howland shrugged. “If it means something to them, it means something. They’re philosophers, Morey. They see deep into things. You don’t know what a privilege it is for me to be allowed to associate with them.”

They had another drink. On Howland’s book, of course.

Morey eased Walter Bigelow over to a quiet spot. He said, “Leaving twoness out of it for the moment, what’s this about the robots?”

Bigelow looked at him round-eyed. “Didn’t you understand the poem?”

“Oh course I did. But diagram it for me in simple terms so I can tell my wife.”

Bigelow beamed. “It’s about the dichotomy of robots,” he explained. “Like the little salt mill that the boy wished for: it ground out salt and ground out salt and ground out salt. He had to have salt, but not that much salt. Whitehead explains it clearly—”

They had another drink on Bigelow’s book.


She grinned smugly at him. “Brown hair,” she said dreamily.

Morey shook his head vigorously. “Never mind hair,” he ordered. “Never mind poem. Listen. In pre-cise and el-e-men-ta-ry terms, explain to me what is wrong with the world today.”

“Not enough brown hair,” she said promptly.

“Never mind hair!”

“All right,” she said agreeably. “Too many robots. Too many robots make too much of everything.”

“Ha! Got it!” Morey exclaimed triumphantly. “Get rid of robots!”

“Oh, no. No! No! No. We wouldn’t eat. Everything is mechanized. Can’t get rid of them, can’t slow down production—slowing down is dying, stopping is quicker dying. Principle of twoness is the concept that clarifies all these—”

“No!” Morey said violently. “What should we do?”

“Do? I’ll tell you what we should do, if that’s what you want. I can tell you.”

“Then tell me.”
“What we should do is—” Tanaquil hiccupped with a look of refined consternation—“have another drink.”

They had another drink. He gallantly let her pay, of course. She ungallantly argued with the bartender about the ration points due to her.

Though not a two-fisted drinker, Morey tried. He really worked at it.

He paid the price, too. For some little time before his limbs stopped moving, his mind stopped functioning. Blackout. Almost a blackout, at any rate, for all he retained of the late evening was a kaleidoscope of people and places and things. Howland was there, drunk as a skunk, disgracefully drunk, Morey remembered thinking as he stared up at Howland from the floor. The Bigelows were there. His wife, Cherry, solicitous and amused, was there. And oddly enough, Henry was there.

It was very, very hard to reconstruct. Morey devoted a whole morning’s hangover to the effort. It was important to reconstruct it, for some reason. But Morey couldn’t even remember what the reason was; and finally he dismissed it, guessing that he had solved either the secret of twoness or whether Tanaquil Bigelow’s remarkable figure was natural.

He did, however, know that the next morning he had waked in his own bed, with no recollection of getting there. No recollection of anything much, at least not of anything that fitted into the proper chronological order or seemed to mesh with anything else, after the dozenth drink when he and Howland, arms around each other’s shoulders, composed a new verse on twoness and, plagiarizing an old marching tune, howled it across the boisterous bar-room:

A twoness on the scene much later  
Rests in your refrigerator.  
Heat your house and insulate it.  
Next your food: Refrigerate it.  
Frost will damp your Freon coils,  
So flux in nichrome till it boils.  
So the picture? Heat in cold  
In heat in cold, the story’s told!  
Giant-writ the sacred scrawl:  
Oh, the twoness of it all!  
Yang  
And Yin!

It had, at any rate, seemed to mean something at the time.
If alcohol opened Morey’s eyes to the fact that there was a twoness, perhaps alcohol was what he needed. For there was.

Call it a dichotomy, if the word seems more couth. A kind of two-pronged struggle, the struggle of two unwearying runners in an immortal race. There is the refrigerator inside the house. The cold air, the bubble of heated air that is the house, the bubble of cooled air that is the refrigerator, the momentary bubble of heated air that defrosts it. Call the heat Yang, if you will. Call the cold Yin. Yang overtakes Yin. Then Yin passes Yang. Then Yang passes Yin. Then—

Give them other names. Call Yin a mouth; call Yang a hand.

If the hand rests, the mouth will starve. If the mouth stops, the hand will die. The hand, Yang, moves faster.

Yin may not lag behind.

Then call Yang a robot.

And remember that a pipeline has two ends.

Like any once-in-a-lifetime lush, Morey braced himself for the consequences—and found startledly that there were none.

Cherry was a surprise to him. “You were so funny,” she giggled. “And, honestly, so romantic.”

He shakily swallowed his breakfast coffee.

The office staff roared and slapped him on the back. “Howland tells us you’re living high, boy!” they bellowed more or less in the same words. “Hey, listen to what Morey did—went on the town for the night of a lifetime and didn’t even bring his ration book along to cash in!”

They thought it was a wonderful joke.

But, then, everything was going well. Cherry, it seemed, had reformed out of recognition. True, she still hated to go out in the evening and Morey never saw her forcing herself to gorge on unwanted food or play undesired games. But, moping into the pantry one afternoon, he found to his incredulous delight that they were well ahead of their ration quotas. In some items, in fact, they were out—a month’s supply and more was gone ahead of schedule!

Nor was it the counterfeit stamps, for he had found them tucked behind a bain-marie and quietly burned them. He cast about for ways of complimenting her, but caution prevailed. She was sensitive on the subject; leave it be.

And virtue had its reward.

Wainwright called him in, all smiles. “Morey, great news! We’ve all appreciated your work here and we’ve been able to show it in some more tangible way than compliments. I didn’t want to say anything till it was definite, but—your status has
been reviewed by Classification and the Ration Board. You’re out of Class Four Minor, Morey!”

Morey said tremulously, hardly daring to hope, “I’m a full Class Four?”

“Class Five, Morey. Class Five! When we do something, we do it right. We asked for a special waiver and got it—you’ve skipped a whole class.” He added honestly, “Not that it was just our backing that did it, of course. Your own recent splendid record of consumption helped a lot. I told you you could do it!”

Morey had to sit down. He missed the rest of what Wainwright had to say, but it couldn’t have mattered. He escaped from the office, side-stepped the knot of fellow-employees waiting to congratulate him, and got to a phone.

Cherry was as ecstatic and inarticulate as he. “Oh, darling!” was all she could say.

“And I couldn’t have done it without you,” he babbled. “Wainwright as much as said so himself. Said if it wasn’t for the way we—well, you have been keeping up with the rations, it never would have got by the Board. I’ve been meaning to say something to you about that, dear, but I just haven’t known how. But I do appreciate it. I—Hello?” There was a curious silence at the other end of the phone. “Hello?” he repeated worriedly.

Cherry’s voice was intense and low. “Morey Fry, I think you’re mean. I wish you hadn’t spoiled the good news.” And she hung up.

Morey stared slack-jawed at the phone.

Howland appeared behind him, chuckling. “Women,” he said. “Never try to figure them. Anyway, congratulations, Morey.”

“Thanks,” Morey mumbled.

Howland coughed and said, “Uh—by the way, Morey, now that you’re one of the big shots, so to speak, you won’t—uh—feel obliged to—well, say anything to Wainwright, for instance, about anything I may have said while we—”

“Excuse me,” Morey said, unhearing, and pushed past him. He thought wildly of calling Cherry back, of racing home to see just what he’d said that was wrong. Not that there was much doubt, of course. He’d touched her on her sore point.

Anyhow, his wrist-watch was chiming a reminder of the fact that his psychiatric appointment for the week was coming up.

Morey sighed. The day gives and the day takes away. Blessed is the day that gives only good things.

If any.
The session went badly. Many of the sessions had been going badly, Morey decided; there had been more and more whispering in knots of doctors from which he was excluded, poking and probing in the dark instead of the precise psychic surgery he was used to. Something was wrong, he thought.

Something was. Semmelweiss confirmed it when he adjourned the group session. After the other doctors had left, he sat Morey down for a private talk. On his own time, too—he didn’t ask for his usual ration fee. That told Morey how important the problem was.

“Morey,” said Semmelweiss, “you’re holding back.”

“I don’t mean to, Doctor,” Morey said earnestly.

“Who knows what you ‘mean’ to do? Part of you ‘means’ to. We’ve dug pretty deep and we’ve found some important things. Now there’s something I can’t put my finger on. Exploring the mind, Morey, is like sending scouts through cannibal territory. You can’t see the cannibals—until it’s too late. But if you send a scout through the jungle and he doesn’t show up on the other side, it’s a fair assumption that something obstructed his way. In that case, we would label the obstruction ‘cannibals.’ In the case of the human mind, we label the obstruction a ‘trauma.’ What the trauma is, or what its effects on behaviour will be, we have to find out, once we know that it’s there.”

Morey nodded. All of this was familiar; he couldn’t see what Semmelweiss was driving at.

Semmelweiss sighed. “The trouble with healing traumas and penetrating psychic blocks and releasing inhibitions—the trouble with everything we psychiatrists do, in fact, is that we can’t afford to do it too well. An inhibited man is under a strain. We try to relieve the strain. But if we succeed completely, leaving him with no inhibitions at all, we have an outlaw, Morey. Inhibitions are often socially necessary. Suppose, for instance, that an average man were not inhibited against blatant waste. It could happen, you know. Suppose that instead of consuming his ration quota in an orderly and responsible way, he did such things as set fire to his house and everything in it or dumped his food allotment in the river.

“When only a few individuals are doing it, we treat the individuals. But if it were done on a mass scale, Morey, it would be the end of society as we know it. Think of the whole collection of anti-social actions that you see in every paper. Man beats wife; wife turns into a harpy; junior smashes up windows; husband starts a black-market stamp racket. And every one of them traces to a basic weakness in the mind’s defences against the most important single anti-social phenomenon—failure to consume.”
Morey flared, "That's not fair, Doctor! That was weeks ago! We've certainly been on the ball lately. I was just commended by the Board, in fact—"

The doctor said mildly, "Why so violent, Morey? I only made a general remark."

"It's just natural to resent being accused."

The doctor shrugged. "First, foremost and above all, we do not accuse patients of things. We try to help you find things out." He lit his end-of-session cigarette. "Think about it, please. I'll see you next week."

Cherry was composed and unapproachable. She kissed him remotely when he came in. She said, "I called Mother and told her the good news. She and Dad promised to come over here to celebrate."

"Yeah," said Morey. "Darling, what did I say wrong on the phone?"

"They'll be here about six."

"Sure. But what did I say? Was it about the rations? If you're sensitive, I swear I'll never mention them again."

"I am sensitive, Morey."

He said despairingly, "I'm sorry. I just—"

He had a better idea. He kissed her.

Cherry was passive at first, but not for long. When he had finished kissing her, she pushed him away and actually giggled. "Let me get dressed for dinner."

"Certainly. Anyhow, I was just—"

She laid a finger on his lips.

He let her escape and, feeling much less tense, drifted into the library. The afternoon papers were waiting for him. Virtuously, he sat down and began going through them in order. Midway through the World-Telegram-Sun-Post-and-News, he rang for Henry.

Morey had read clear through to the drama section of the Times-Herald-Tribune-Mirror before the robot appeared. "Good evening," it said politely.

"What took you so long?" Morey demanded. "Where are all the robots?"

Robots do not stammer, but there was a distinct pause before Henry said, "Below stairs, sir. Did you want them for something?"

"Well, no. I just haven't seen them around. Get me a drink."

It hesitated. "Scotch, sir?"

"Before dinner? Get me a Manhattan."

"We're all out of Vermouth, sir."

"All out? Would you mind telling me how?"
“It’s all used up, sir.”

“Now that’s just ridiculous,” Morey snapped. “We have never run out of liquor in our whole lives and you know it. Good heavens, we just got our allotment in the other day and I certainly—”

He checked himself. There was a sudden flicker of horror in his eyes as he stared at Henry.

“You certainly what, sir?” the robot prompted.

Morey swallowed. “Henry, did I—did I do something I shouldn’t have?”

“I’m sure I wouldn’t know, sir. It isn’t up to me to say what you should and shouldn’t do.”

“Of course not,” Morey agreed greyly.

He sat rigid, staring hopelessly into space, remembering. What he remembered was no pleasure to him at all.

“Henry,” he said. “Come along, we’re going below stairs. Right now!”

It had been Tanaquil Bigelow’s remark about the robots. *Too many robots—make too much of everything.*

That had implanted the idea; it germinated in Morey’s home. More than a little drunk, less than ordinarily inhibited, he had found the problem clear and the answer obvious.

He stared around him in dismal worry. His own robots following his own orders, given weeks before . . .

Henry said, “It’s just what you *told* us to do, sir.”

Morey groaned. He was watching a scene of unparalleled activity, and it sent shivers up and down his spine.

There was the butler-robot, hard at work, his copper face expressionless. Dressed in Morey’s own sports knickers and golfing shoes, the robot solemnly hit a ball against the wall, picked it up and teed it, hit it again, over and over again, with Morey’s own clubs. Until the ball wore ragged and was replaced; and the shafts of the clubs leaned out of true; and the close-stitched seams in the clothing began to stretch and abrade.

“My God!” said Morey hollowly.

There were the maid-robots, exquisitely dressed in Cherry’s best, walking up and down in the delicate, slim shoes, sitting and rising and bending and turning. The cook-robots and the serving-robots were preparing dionysian meals.

Morey swallowed. “You—you’ve been doing this right along,” he said to Henry. “That’s why the quotas have been filled.”

“Oh, yes, sir. Just as you told us.”

Morey had to sit down. One of the serving-robots politely
scurried over with a chair, brought from upstairs for their new chores.
Waste. Morey tasted the word between his lips.
Waste.
You never wasted things. You used them. If necessary, you
drove yourself to the edge of breakdown to use them; you
made every breath a burden and every hour a torment to
use them, until through diligent consuming and/or occupa-
tional merit, you were promoted to the next higher class, and
were allowed to consume less frantically. But you didn’t
wantonly destroy or throw out. You consumed.
Morey thought fearfully: when the Board finds out about
this . . .
Still, he reminded himself, the Board hadn’t found out. It
might take some time before they did, for humans, after all,
ever entered robot quarters. There was no law against it,
not even a sacrosanct custom. But there was no reason to.
When breaks occurred, which was infrequently, maintenance
robots or repair squads came in and put them back in order.
Usually the humans involved didn’t even know it had hap-
pened, because the robots used their own TBR radio circuits
and the process was next thing to automatic.
Morey said reprovingly, “Henry, you should have told—
well, I mean reminded me about this.”
“But, sir!” Henry protested. “Don’t tell a living soul, you
said. You made it a direct order.”
“Umph. Well keep it that way. I—uh—I have to go back
upstairs. Better get the rest of the robots started on dinner.”
Morey left, not comfortably.
The dinner to celebrate Morey’s promotion was difficult.
Morey liked Cherry’s parents. Old Elon, after the pre-mar-
rriage inquisition that father must inevitably give to daughter’s
suitor, had buckled right down to the job of adjustment.
The old folks were good about not interfering, good about
keeping their superior social status to themselves, good about
helping out on the budget—at least once a week, they could
be relied on to come over for a hearty meal, and Mrs. Elon
had more than once re-made some of Cherry’s new dresses
to fit herself, even to the extent of wearing all the high-point
ornamentation.
And they had been wonderful about the wedding gifts,
when Morey and their daughter got married. The most any
member of Morey’s family had been willing to take was a
silver set or a few crystal table pieces. The Elons had come
through with a dazzling promise to accept a car, a bird-bath
for their garden and a complete set of living-room furniture!
Of course, they could afford it—they had to consume so little
that it wasn’t much strain for them even to take gifts of that magnitude. But without their help, Morey knew, the first few months of matrimony would have been even tougher consuming than they were.

But on this particular night it was hard for Morey to like anyone. He responded with monosyllables; he barely grunted when Elon proposed a toast to his promotion and his brilliant future. He was preoccupied.

Rightly so. Morey, in his deepest, bravest searching, could find no clue in his memory as to just what the punishment might be for what he had done. But he had a sick certainty that trouble lay ahead.

Morey went over his problem so many times that an anaesthesia set in. By the time dinner was ended and he and his father-in-law were in the den with their brandy, he was more or less functioning again.

Elon, for the first time since Morey had known him, offered him one of his cigars. “You’re Grade Five—can afford to smoke somebody else’s now, hey?”

“Yeah,” Morey said glumly.

There was a moment of silence. Then Elon, as punctilious as any companion-robot, coughed and tried again. “Remember being peaked till I hit Grade Five,” he reminisced meaningfully. “Consuming keeps a man on the go, all right. Things piled up at the law office, couldn’t be taken care of while ration points piled up, too. And consuming comes first, of course—that’s a citizen’s prime duty. Mother and I had our share of grief over that, but a couple that wants to make a go of marriage and citizenship just pitches in and does the job, hey?”

Morey repressed a shudder and managed to nod.

“Best thing about upgrading,” Elon went on, as if he had elicited a satisfactory answer, “don’t have to spend so much time consuming, give more attention to work. Greatest luxury in the world, work. Wish I had as much stamina as you young fellows. Five days a week in court are about all I can manage. Hit six for a while, relaxed first time in my life, but my doctor made me cut down. Said we can’t overdo pleasures. You’ll be working two days a week now, hey?”

Morey produced another nod.

Elon drew deeply on his cigar, his eyes bright as they watched Morey. He was visibly puzzled, and Morey, even in his half-daze, could recognize the exact moment at which Elon drew the wrong inference. “Ah, everything okay with you and Cherry?” he asked diplomatically.

“Fine!” Morey exclaimed. “Couldn’t be better!”

“Good, good.” Elon changed the subject with almost an
audible wrench. “Speaking of court, had an interesting case the other day. Young fellow—year or two younger than you, I guess—came in with a Section Ninety-seven on him. Know what that is? Breaking and entering!”


“Houses. Old term; law’s full of them. Originally applied to stealing things. Still does, I discovered.”

“You mean he stole something?” Morey asked in bewilderment.

“Exactly! He stole. Strangest thing I ever came across. Talked it over with one of his bunch of lawyers later; new one on him, too. Seems this kid had a girl friend, nice kid but a little, you know, plump. She got interested in art.”

“There’s nothing wrong with that,” Morey said.

“Nothing wrong with her, either. She didn’t do anything. She didn’t like him too much, though. Wouldn’t marry him. Kid got to thinking about how he could get her to change her mind and—well, you know that big Mondrian in the Museum?”

“I’ve never been there,” Morey said, somewhat embarrassed.

“Um. Ought to try it some day, boy. Anyway, comes closing time at the Museum the other day, this kid sneaks in. He steals the painting. That’s right—steals it. Takes it to give to the girl.”

Morey shook his head blankly. “I never heard of anything like that in my life.”

“Not many have. Girl wouldn’t take it, by the way. Got scared when he brought it to her. She must’ve tipped off the police, I guess. Somebody did. Took ’em three hours to find it, even when they knew it was hanging on a wall. Pretty poor kid. Forty-two room house.”

“And there was a law against it?” Morey asked. “I mean it’s like making a law against breathing.”

“Certainly was. Old law, of course. Kid got set back two grades. Would have been more but, my God, he was only a Grade Three as it was.”

“Yeah,” said Morey, wetting his lips. “Say, Dad—”

“Um?”

Morey cleared his throat. “Uh—I wonder—I mean what’s the penalty, for instance, for things like—well, misusing rations or anything like that?”

Elon’s eyebrows went high. “Misusing rations?”

“Say you had a liquor ration, it might be, and instead of drinking it, you—well, flushed it down the drain or something...”
His voice trailed off. Elon was frowning. He said, "Funny thing, seems I'm not as broadminded as I thought I was. For some reason, I don't find that amusing."

"Sorry," Morey croaked.
And he certainly was.

It might be dishonest, but it was doing him a lot of good, for days went by and no one seemed to have penetrated his secret. Cherry was happy. Wainwright found occasion after occasion to pat Morey's back. The wages of sin were turning out to be prosperity and happiness.

There was a bad moment when Morey came home to find Cherry in the middle of supervising a team of packing-robots; the new house, suitable to his higher grade, was ready, and they were expected to move in the next day. But Cherry hadn't been below stairs, and Morey had his household robots clean up the evidence of what they had been doing before the packers got that far.

The new house was, by Morey's standards, pure luxury.
It was only fifteen rooms. Morey had shrewdly retained one more robot than was required for a Class Fijye, and had been allowed a compensating deduction in the size of his house.

The robot quarters were less secluded than in the old house, though, and that was a disadvantage. More than once Cherry had snuggled up to him in the delightful intimacy of their one bed in their single bedroom and said, with faint curiosity, "I wish they'd stop that noise." And Morey had promised to speak to Henry about it in the morning. But there was nothing he could say to Henry, of course, unless he ordered Henry to stop the tireless consuming through each of the day's twenty-four hours that kept them always ahead, but never quite far enough ahead, of the inexorable weekly increment of ration quotas.

But, though Cherry might once in a while have a moment's curiosity about what the robots were doing, she was not likely to be able to guess at the facts. Her upbringing was, for once, on Morey's side—she knew so little of the grind, grind, grind of consuming that was the lot of the lower classes that she scarcely noticed that there was less of it.

Morey almost, sometimes, relaxed.
He thought of many ingenious chores for robots, and the robots politely and emotionlessly obeyed.

Morey was a success.
It wasn't all gravy. There was a nervous moment for Morey when the quarterly survey report came in the mail. As the day for the Ration Board to check over the degree
of wear on the turned-in discards came due, Morey began to sweat. The clothing and furniture and household goods the robots had consumed for him were very nearly in shreds. It had to look plausible, that was the big thing—no normal person would wear a hole completely through the knee of a pair of pants, as Henry had done with his dress suit before Morey stopped him. Would the Board question it?

Worse, was there something about the way the robots consumed the stuff that would give the whole show away? Some special wear point in the robot anatomy, for instance, that would rub a hole where no human’s body could, or stretch a seam that should normally be under no strain at all?

It was worrisome. But the worry was needless. When the report of survey came, Morey let out a long-held breath. Not a single item disallowed!

Morey was a success—and so was his scheme!

To the successful man come the rewards of success. Morey arrived home one evening after a hard day’s work at the office and was alarmed to find another car parked in his drive. It was a tiny two-seater, the sort affected by top officials and the very well-to-do.

Right then and there Morey learned the first half of the embezzler’s lesson: anything different is dangerous. He came uneasily into his own home, fearful that some high officer of the Ration Board had come to ask questions.

But Cherry was glowing. “Mr. Porfirio is a newspaper feature writer and he wants to write you up for their ‘Consumers of Distinction’ page! Morey, I couldn’t be more proud!”

“Thanks,” said Morey glumly. “Hello.”

Mr. Porfirio shook Morey’s hand warmly. “I’m not exactly from a newspaper,” he corrected. “Trans-video Press is what it is, actually. We’re a news wire service; we supply forty-seven hundred papers with news and feature material. Every one of them,” he added complacently, “on the required consumption list of Grades One through Six inclusive. We have a Sunday supplement self-help feature on consuming problems and we like to—well, give credit where credit is due. You’ve established an enviable record, Mr. Fry. We’d like to tell out readers about it.”

“Um,” said Morey. “Let’s go in the drawing room.”

“Oh, no!” Cherry said firmly. “I want to hear this. He’s so modest, Mr. Porfirio, you’d really never know what kind of a man he is just to listen to him talk. Why, my goodness, I’m his wife and I swear I don’t know how he does all the consuming he does. He simply—”

“Have a drink, Mr. Porfirio,” Morey said, against all eti-

"Anything," said the newsman. "Rye is fine. Now, Mr. Fry, I notice you've fixed up your place very attractively here and your wife says that your country home is just as nice. As soon as I came in, I said to myself, 'Beautiful home. Hardly a stick of furniture that isn't absolutely necessary. Might be a Grade Six or Seven.' And Mrs. Fry says the other place is even barer."

"She does, does she?" Morey challenged sharply. "Well, let me tell you, Mr. Porfirio, that every last scrap of my furniture allowance is accounted for! I don't know what you're getting at, but—"

"Oh, I certainly didn't mean to imply anything like that! I just want to get some information from you that I can pass on to our readers. You know, to sort of help them do as well as yourself. How do you do it?"

Morey swallowed. "We—uh—well, we just keep after it. Hard work, that's all."

Porfirio nodded admiringly. "Hard work," he repeated, and fished a triple-folded sheet of paper out of his pocket to make notes on. "Would you say," he went on, "that anyone could do as well as you simply by devoting himself to it—setting a regular schedule, for example, and keeping to it very strictly?"

"Oh, yes," said Morey. "In other words, it's only a matter of doing what you have to do every day?"

"That's it exactly. I handle the budget in my house—more experience than my wife, you see—but no reason a woman can't do it."

"Budgeting," Porfirio recorded approvingly. "That's our policy, too."

The interview was not the terror it had seemed, not even when Porfirio tactfully called attention to Cherry's slim waistline ("So many housewives, Mrs. Fry, find it difficult to keep from being—well, a little plump") and Morey had to invent endless hours on the exercise machines, while Cherry looked faintly perplexed, but did not interrupt.

From the interview, however, Morey learned the second half of the embezzler's lesson. After Porfirio had gone, he leaped in and spoke more than a little firmly to Cherry. "That business of exercise, dear. We really have to start doing it. I don't know if you've noticed it, but you are beginning to get just a trifle heavier and we don't want that to happen, do we?"

In the following grim and unnecessary sessions on the
mechanical horses, Morey had plenty of time to reflect on the lesson. Stolen treasures are less sweet than one would like, when one dare not enjoy them in the open.

But some of Morey's treasures were fairly earned.

The new Bradmoor K-50 Spin-a-Game, for instance, was his very own. His job was design and creation, and he was a fortunate man in that his efforts were permitted to be expended along the line of greatest social utility—namely, to increase consumption.

The Spin-a-Game was a well-nigh perfect machine for the purpose. "Brilliant," said Wainwright, beaming, when the pilot machine had been put through its first tests. "Guess they don't call me the Talent-picker for nothing. I knew you could do it, boy!"

Even Howland was lavish in his praise. He sat munching on a plate of petits-fours (he was still only a Grade Three) while the tests were going on, and when they were over, he said enthusiastically, "It's a beauty, Morey. That series-corrupter—sensational! Never saw a prettier piece of machinery."

Morey flushed gratefully.

Wainwright left, exuding praise, and Morey patted his pilot model affectionately and admired its polychrome gleam. The looks of the machine, as Wainwright had lectured many a time, were as important as its function: "You have to make them want to play it, boy! They won't play it if they don't see it!" And consequently the whole K series was distinguishable by flashing rainbows of light, provocative strains of music, haunting scents that drifted into the nostrils of the passer-by with compelling effect.

Morey had drawn heavily on all the old masterpieces of design—the one-arm bandit, the pinball machine, the juke box. You put your ration book in the hopper. You spun the wheels until you selected the game you wanted to play against the machine. You punched buttons or spun dials or, in any of 325 different ways, you pitted your human skill against the magnetic-taped skills of the machine.

And you lost. You had a chance to win, but the inexorable statistics of the machine's setting made sure that if you played long enough, you had to lose.

That is to say, if you risked a ten-point ration stamp—showing, perhaps, that you had consumed three six-course meals—your statistic return was eight points. You might hit the jackpot and get a thousand points back, and thus be exempt from a whole freezerful of steaks and joints and prepared vegetables; but it seldom happened. Most likely you lost and got nothing.
Got nothing, that is, in the way of your hazarded ration stamps. But the beauty of the machine, which was Morey’s main contribution, was that, win or lose, you always found a pellet of vitamin-drenched, sugar-coated antibiotic hormone gum in the hopper. You played your game, won or lost your stake, popped your hormone gum into your mouth and played another. By the time that game was ended, the gum was used up, the coating dissolved; you discarded it and started another.

“That’s what the man from the NRB liked,” Howland told Morey confidentially. “He took a set of schematics back with him; they might install it on all new machines. Oh, you’re the fair-haired boy, all right!”

It was the first Morey had heard about a man from the National Ration Board. It was good news. He excused himself and hurried to phone Cherry the story of his latest successes. He reached her at her mother’s, where she was spending the evening, and she was properly impressed and affectionate. He came back to Howland in a glowing humour.

“Drink?” said Howland diffidently.

“Sure,” said Morey. He could afford, he thought, to drink as much of Howland’s liquor as he liked; poor guy, sunk in the consuming quicksands of Class Three. Only fair for somebody a little more successful to give him a hand once in a while.

And when Howland, learning that Cherry had left Morey a bachelor for the evening, proposed Uncle Piggotty’s again, Morey hardly hesitated at all.

The Bigelows were delighted to see him. Morey wondered briefly if they had a home; certainly they didn’t seem to spend much time in it.

It turned out they did, because when Morey indicated virtuously that he’d only stopped in at Piggotty’s for a single drink before dinner, and Howland revealed that he was free for the evening, they captured Morey and bore him off to their house.

Tanaquil Bigelow was haughtily apologetic. “I don’t suppose this is the kind of place Mr. Fry is used to,” she observed to her husband, right across Morey, who was standing between them. “Still, we call it home.”

Morey made an appropriately polite remark. Actually, the place nearly turned his stomach. It was an enormous glaringly new mansion, bigger even than Morey’s former house, stuffed to bursting with bulging sofas and pianos and massive mahogany chairs and tri-D sets and bedrooms and drawing rooms and breakfast rooms and nurseries.
The nurseries were a shock to Morey; it had never occurred to him that the Bigelows had children. But they did and, though the children were only five and eight, they were still up, under the care of a brace of robot nursemaidens, doggedly playing with their overstuffed animals and miniature trains.

"You don't know what a comfort Tony and Dick are," Tanaquil Bigelow told Morey. "They consume so much more than their rations. Walter says that every family ought to have at least two or three children to, you know, help out. Walter's so intelligent about these things, it's a pleasure to hear him talk. Have you heard his poem, Morey? The one he calls *The Twoness of*—"

Morey hastily admitted that he had. He reconciled himself to a glum evening. The Bigelows had been eccentric but fun back at Uncle Piggotty's. On their own ground, they seemed just as eccentric, but painfully dull.

They had a round of cocktails, and another, and then the Bigelows no longer seemed so dull. Dinner was ghastly, of course; Morey was nouveau-riche enough to be a snob about his relatively Spartan table. But he minded his manners and sampled, with grim concentration, each successive course of chunky protein and rich marinades. With the help of the endless succession of table wines and liqueurs, dinner ended without destroying his evening or his strained digestive system.

And afterwards, they were a pleasant company in the Bigelow's ornate drawing room. Tanaquil Bigelow, in consultation with the children, checked over their ration books and came up with the announcement that they would have a brief recital by a pair of robot dancers, followed by string music by a robot quartet. Morey prepared himself for the worst, but found before the dancers were through that he was enjoying himself. Strange lesson for Morey: when you didn't have to watch them, the robot entertainers were fun!

"Good night, dears," Tanaquil Bigelow said firmly to the children when the dancers were done. The boys rebelled, naturally, but they went. It was only a matter of minutes, though, before one of them was back, clutching at Morey's sleeve with a pudgy hand.

Morey looked at the boy uneasily, having little experience with children. He said, "Uh—what is it, Tony?"

"Dick, you mean," the boy said. "Gimme your autograph." He poked an engraved pad and a vulgarly jewelled pencil at Morey.

Morey dazedly signed and the child ran off, Morey staring after him. Tanaquil Bigelow laughed and explained, "He
saw your name in Porfirio’s column. Dick loves Porfirio, reads him every day. He’s such an intellectual kid, really. He’d always have his nose in a book if I didn’t keep after him to play with his trains and watch tri-D.”

“That was quite a nice write-up,” Walter Bigelow commented—a little enviously, Morey thought. “Bet you make Consumer of the Year. I wish,” he sighed, “that we could get a little ahead on the quotas the way you did. But it just never seems to work out. We eat and play and consume like crazy, and somehow at the end of the month we’re always a little behind in something—everything keeps piling up—and then the Board sends us a warning, and they call me down and, first thing you know, I’ve got a couple of hundred added penalty points and we’re worse off than before.”

“Never you mind,” Tanaquil replied staunchly. “Consuming isn’t everything in life. You have your work.”

Bigelow nodded judiciously and offered Morey another drink. Another drink, however, was not what Morey needed. He was sitting in a rosy glow, less of alcohol than of sheer contentment with the world. He said suddenly, “Listen.”

Bigelow looked up from his own drink. “Eh?”

“If I tell you something that’s a secret, will you keep it that way?”

Bigelow rumbled, “Why, I guess so, Morey.”

But his wife cut in sharply, “Certainly we will, Morey. Of course! What is it?” There was a gleam in her eye, Morey noticed. It puzzled him, but he decided to ignore it.

He said, “About that write-up. I—I’m not such a hot-shot consumer, really, you know. In fact—” All of a sudden, everyone’s eyes seemed to be on him. For a tortured moment, Morey wondered if he was doing the right thing. A secret that two people know is compromised, and a secret known to three people is no secret. Still—

“It’s like this,” he said firmly. “You remember what we were talking about at Uncle Piggotty’s that night? Well, when I went home I went down to the robot quarters, and I—”

He went on from there.

Tanaquil Bigelow said triumphantly, “I knew it!”

Walter Bigelow gave his wife a mild, reproving look. He declared soberly. “You’ve done a big thing, Morey. A mighty big thing. God willing, you’ve pronounced the death sentence on our society as we know it. Future generations will revere the name of Morey Fry.” He solemnly shook Morey’s hand.

Morey said dazedly, “I what?”
Walter nodded. It was a valedictory. He turned to his wife. “Tanaquil, we’ll have to call an emergency meeting.”

“Of course, Walter,” she said devotedly.

“And Morey will have to be there. Yes, you’ll have to, Morey; no excuses. We want the Brotherhood to meet you. Right, Howland?”

Howland coughed uneasily. He nodded noncommittally and took another drink.

Morey demanded desperately, “What are you talking about? Howland, you tell me!”

Howland fiddled with his drink. “Well,” he said, “it’s like Tan was telling you that night. A few of us, well, politically mature persons have formed a little group. We—”

“Little group!” Tanaquil Bigelow said scornfully. “Howland, sometimes I wonder if you really catch the spirit of the thing at all! It’s everybody, Morey, everybody in the world. Why, there are eighteen of us right here in Old Town! There are scores more all over the world! I knew you were up to something like this, Morey. I told Walter so the morning after we met you. I said, ‘Walter, mark my words, that man Morey is up to something.’ But I must say,” she admitted worshipfully, “I didn’t know it would have the scope of what you’re proposing now! Imagine—a whole world of consumers, rising as one man, shouting the name of Morey Fry, fighting the Ration Board with the Board’s own weapon—the robots. What poetic justice!”

Bigelow nodded enthusiastically. “Call Uncle Piggotty’s, dear,” he ordered. “See if you can round up a quorum right now! Meanwhile, Morey and I are going below stairs. Let’s go, Morey—let’s get the new world started!”

Morey sat there open-mouthed. He closed it with a snap. “Bigelow,” he whispered, “do you mean to say that you’re going to spread this idea around through some kind of subversive organization?”

“Subversive?” Bigelow repeated stiffly. “My dear man, all creative minds are subversive, whether they operate singly or in such a group as the Brotherhood of Freemen. I scarcely like—”

“Never mind what you like,” Morey insisted. “You’re going to call a meeting of this Brotherhood and you want me to tell them what I just told you. Is that right?”

“Well—yes.”

Morey got up. “I wish I could say it’s been nice, but it hasn’t. Good night!”

And he stormed out before they could stop him.

Out on the street, though, his resolution deserted him. He hailed a robot cab and ordered the driver to take him on
the traditional time-killing ride through the park while he made up his mind.

The fact that he had left, of course, was not going to keep Bigelow from going through with his announced intention. Morey remembered, now, fragments of conversation from Bigelow and his wife at Uncle Piggotty's, and cursed himself. They had, it was perfectly true, said and hinted enough about politics and purposes to put him on his guard. All that nonsense about twoness had diverted him from what should have been perfectly clear: they were subversives indeed.

He glanced at his watch. Late, but not too late; Cherry would still be at her parents' home.

He leaned forward and gave the driver their address. It was like beginning the first of a hundred-shot series of injections: you know it's going to cure you, but it hurts just the same.

Morey said manfully: "And that's it, sir. I know I've been a fool. I'm willing to take the consequences."

Old Elon rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. "Um," he said.

Cherry and her mother had long passed the point where they could say anything at all; they were seated side by side on a couch across the room, listening with expressions of strain and incredulity.

Elon said abruptly, "Excuse me. Phone call to make." He left the room to make a brief call and returned. He said over his shoulder to his wife, "Coffee. We'll need it. Got a problem here."

Morey said, "Do you think—I mean what should I do?"

Elon shrugged, then, surprisingly, grinned. "What can you do?" he demanded cheerfully. "Done plenty already, I'd say. Drink some coffee. Call I made," he explained, "was to Jim, my law clerk. He'll be here in a minute. Get some dope from Jim, then we'll know better."

Cherry came over to Morey and sat beside him. All she said was, "Don't worry," but to Morey it conveyed all the meaning in the world. He returned the pressure of her hand with a feeling of deepest relief. Hell, he said to himself, why should I worry? Worst they can do to me is drop me a couple of grades and what's so bad about that?

He grimaced involuntarily. He had remembered his own early struggles as a Class One and what was so bad about that.

The law clerk arrived, a smallish robot with a battered stainless-steel hide and dull coppery features. Elon took the robot aside for a terse conversation before he came back to Morey.
“As I thought,” he said in satisfaction. “No precedent. No laws prohibiting. Therefore no crime.”

“Thank heaven!” Morey said in ecstatic relief.

Elon shook his head. “They’ll probably give you a reconditioning and you can’t expect to keep your Grade Five. Probably call it anti-social behaviour. Is, isn’t it?”

Dashed, Morey said, “Oh.” He frowned briefly, then looked up. “All right, Dad, if I’ve got it coming to me, I’ll take my medicine.”


The condemned man ate a hearty breakfast.

He had to. That morning, as Morey awoke, he had the sick certainty that he was going to be consuming triple rations for a long, long time to come.

He kissed Cherry good-bye and took the long ride to the Ration Board in silence. He even left Henry behind.

At the Board, he stammered at a series of receptionist robots and was finally brought into the presence of a mildly supercilious young man named Hachette.

“My name,” he started, “is Morey Fry. I—I’ve come to—talk over something I’ve been doing with—”

“Certainly, Mr. Fry,” said Hachette. “I’ll take you in to Mr. Newman right away.”

“Don’t you want to know what I did?” demanded Morey. Hatchette smiled. “What makes you think we don’t know?” he said, and left.

That was Surprise Number One.

Newman explained it. He grinned at Morey and ruefully shook his head. “All the time we get this,” he complained. “People just don’t take the trouble to learn anything about the world around them. Son,” he demanded, “what do you think a robot is?”

Morey said, “Huh?”

“I mean how do you think it operates? Do you think it’s just a kind of a man with a tin skin and wire nerves?”

 Why, no. It’s a machine, of course. It isn’t human.”

Newman beamed. “Fine!” he said. “It’s a machine. It hasn’t got flesh or blood or intestines—or a brain. Oh—” he held up a hand “—robots are smart enough. I don’t mean that. But an electronic thinking machine, Mr. Fry, takes about as much space as the house you’re living in. It has to. Robots
don’t carry brains around with them; brains are too heavy
and much too bulky.”

“Then how do they think?”

“With their brains, of course.”

“But you just said—”

“I said they didn’t carry them. Each robot is in constant
radio communication with the Master Control on its TBR
circuit—the ‘Talk Between Robots’ radio. Master Control
gives the answer, the robot acts.”

“I see,” said Morey. “Well, that’s very interesting, but—”

“But you still don’t see,” said Newman. “Figure it out. If
the robot gets information from Master Control, do you see
that Master Control in return necessarily gets information
from the robot?”

“Oh,” said Morey. Then, louder, “Oh! You mean that all
my robots have been—” The words wouldn’t come.

Newman nodded in satisfaction. “Every bit of information
of that sort comes to us as a matter of course. Why, Mr. Fry,
if you hadn’t come in today, we would have been sending for
you within a very short time.”

That was the second surprise. Morey bore up under it
bravely. After all, it changed nothing, he reminded himself.
He said, “Well, be that as it may, sir, here I am. I came in
of my own free will. I’ve been using my robots to consume
my ration quotas—”

“Indeed you have,” said Newman.

“—and I’m willing to sign a statement to that effect any
time you like. I don’t know what the penalty is, but I’ll take
it. I’m guilty; I admit my guilt.”

Newman’s eyes were wide. “Guilty?” he repeated. “Pen-
alty?”

Morey was startled. “Why, yes,” he said. “I’m not denying
anything.”

“Penalties,” repeated Newman musingly. Then he began to
laugh. He laughed, Morey thought, to considerable excess;
Morey saw nothing he could laugh at, himself, in the situa-
tion. But the situation, Morey was forced to admit, was
rapidly getting completely incomprehensible.

“Sorry,” said Newman at last, wiping his eyes, “but I
couldn’t help it. Penalties! Well, Mr. Fry, let me set your
mind at rest. I wouldn’t worry about the penalties if I were
you. As soon as the reports began coming through on what
you had done with your robots, we naturally assigned a special
team to keep observing you, and we forwarded a report to
the national headquarters. We made certain—ah—recom-
endations in it and—well, to make a long story short, the
answer came back yesterday.
“Mr. Fry, the National Ration Board is delighted to know of your contribution towards improving our distribution problem. Pending a further study, a tentative programme has been adopted for setting up consuming-robot units all over the country based on your scheme. Penalties? Mr. Fry, you’re a hero!”

A hero has responsibilities. Morey’s were quickly made clear to him. He was allowed time for a brief reassuring visit to Cherry, a triumphal tour of his old office, and then he was rushed off to Washington to be quizzed. He found the National Ration Board in a frenzy of work.

“The most important job we’ve ever done,” one of the high officers told him. “I wouldn’t be surprised if it’s the last one we ever have! Yes, sir, we’re trying to put ourselves out of business for good and we don’t want a single thing to go wrong.”

“Anything I can do to help—” Morey began diffidently.

“You’ve done fine, Mr. Fry. Gave us just the push we’ve been needing. It was there all the time for us to see, but we were too close to the forest to see the trees, if you get what I mean. Look, I’m not much on rhetoric and this is the biggest step mankind has taken in centuries and I can’t put it into words. Let me show you what we’ve been doing.”

He and a delegation of other officials of the Ration Board and men whose names Morey had repeatedly seen in the newspapers took Morey on an inspection tour of the entire plant.

“It’s a closed cycle, you see,” he was told, as they looked over a chamber of industriously plodding consumer-robots working off a shipment of shoes. “Nothing is permanently lost. If you want a car, you get one of the newest and best. If not, your car gets driven by a robot until it’s ready to be turned in and a new one gets built for next year. We don’t lose the metals—they can be salvaged. All we lose is a little power and labour. And the Sun and the atom give us all the power we need, and the robots give us more labour than we can use. Same thing applies, of course, to all products.”

“But what’s in it for the robots?” Morey asked.

“I beg your pardon?” one of the biggest men in the country said comprehendingly.

Morey had a difficult moment. His analysis had conditioned him against waste and this decidedly was sheer destruction of goods, no matter how scientific the jargon might be.

“If the consumer is just using up things for the sake of using them up,” he said doggedly, realizing the danger he
was inviting, "we could use wear-and-tear machines instead of robots. After all why waste them?"

They looked at each other worriedly.

"But that's what you were doing," one pointed out with a faint note of threat.

"Oh, no!" Morey quickly objected. "I built in satisfaction circuits—my training in design, you know. Adjustable circuits, of course."

"Satisfaction circuits?" he was asked. "Adjustable?"

"Well, sure. If the robot gets no satisfaction out of using up things—"

"Don't talk nonsense," growled the Ration Board official. "Robots aren't humans. How do you make them feel satisfaction? And adjustable satisfaction at that!"

Morey explained. It was a highly technical explanation, involving the use of great sheets of paper and elaborate diagrams. But there were trained men in the group and they became even more excited than before.

"Beautiful!" one cried in scientific rapture. "Why, it takes care of every possible moral, legal and psychological argument!"

"What does?" the Ration Board official demanded. "How?"

"You tell him, Mr. Fry."

Morey tried and couldn't. But he could show how his principle operated. The Ration Board lab was turned over to him, complete with more assistants than he knew how to give orders to, and they built satisfaction circuits for a squad of robots working in a hat factory.

Then Morey gave his demonstration. The robots manufactured hats of all sorts. He adjusted the circuits at the end of the day and the robots began trying on the hats, squabbling over them, each coming away triumphantly with a huge and diverse selection. Their metallic features were incapable of showing pride or pleasure, but both were evident in the way they wore their hats, their fierce possessiveness... and their faster, neater, more intensive, more dedicated work to produce a still greater quantity of hats... which they also were allowed to own.

"You see?" an engineer exclaimed delightedly. "They can be adjusted to want hats, to wear them lovingly, to wear the hats to pieces. And not just for the sake of wearing them out—the hats are an incentive for them!"

"But how can we go on producing just hats and more hats?" the Ration Board man asked puzzledly. "Civilization does not live by hats alone."

"That," said Morey modestly, "is the beauty of it. Look."

He set the adjustment of the satisfaction circuit as porter
robots brought in skids of gloves. The hat-manufacturing robots fought over the gloves with the same mechanical passion as they had for hats.

“And that can apply to anything we—or the robots—produce,” Morey added. “Everything from pins to yachts. But the point is that they get satisfaction from possession, and the craving can be regulated according to the glut in various industries, and the robots show their appreciation by working harder.” He hesitated. “That’s what I did for my servant-robots. It’s a feed-back, you see. Satisfaction leads to more work—and better work—and that means more goods, which they can be made to want, which means incentive to work, and so on, all around.”

“Closed cycle,” whispered the Ration Board man in awe. “A real closed cycle this time!”

And so the inexorable laws of supply and demand were irrevocably repealed. No longer was mankind hampered by inadequate supply or drowned by over-production. What mankind needed was there. What the race did not require passed into the insatiable—and adjustable—robot maw. Nothing was wasted.

For a pipeline has two ends.

Morey was thanked, complimented, rewarded, given a ticker-tape parade through the city, and put on a plane back home. By that time, the Ration Board had liquidated itself.

Cherry met him at the airport. They jabbered excitedly at each other all the way to the house.

In their own living room, they finished the kiss they had greeted each other with. At last Cherry broke away, laughing.

Morey said, “Did I tell you I’m through with Bradmoor? From now on I work for the Board as civilian consultant. And,” he added impressively, “starting right away, I’m a Class Eight!”

“My!” gasped Cherry, so worshipfully that Morey felt a twinge of conscience.

He said honestly, “Of course, if what they were saying in Washington is so, the classes aren’t going to mean much pretty soon. Still, it’s quite an honour.”

“It’s certainly is,” Cherry said staunchly. “Why, Dad’s only a Class Eight himself and he’s been a judge for I don’t know how many years.”

Morey pursed his lips. “We can’t all be fortunate,” he said generously. “Of course, the classes still will count for something—that is, a Class One will have so much to consume in a year, a Class Two will have a little less, and so on. But each person in each class will have robot help, you see,
to do the actual consuming. The way it’s going to be, special facsimile robots will—”

Cherry flagged him down. “I know, dear. Each family gets a robot duplicate of every person in the family.”

“Oh,” said Morey, slightly annoyed. “How did you know?”

“Ours came yesterday,” she explained. “The man from the Board said we were the first in the area—because it was your idea, of course. They haven’t even been activated yet. I’ve still got them in the Green Room. Want to see them?”

“Sure,” said Morey buoyantly. He dashed ahead of Cherry to inspect the results of his own brainstorm. There they were, standing statue-still against the wall, waiting to be energized to begin their endless tasks.

“Yours is real pretty,” Morey said gallantly. “But—say, is that thing supposed to look like me?” He inspected the chromium face of the man-robot disapprovingly.

“Only roughly, the man said.” Cherry was right behind him. “Notice anything else?”

Morey leaned closer, inspecting the features of the facsimile robot at a close range. “Well, no,” he said. “It’s got a kind of a squint that I don’t like, but—Oh, you mean that!” He bent over to examine a smaller robot, half hidden between the other pair. It was less than two feet high, big-headed, pudgy-limbed, thick-bellied. In fact, Morey thought wonderingly, it looked almost like—

“My God!” Morey spun around, staring wide-eyed at his wife. “You mean—”

“I mean,” said Cherry, blushing slightly. Morey reached out to grab her in his arms.

“Darling!” he cried. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

LIMITING FACTOR

Clifford D. Simak

FIRST, THERE WERE two planets looted of their ores, mined and gutted and left there naked for the crows of space to pick.

Then there was a planet with a fairy city, a place that made one think of cobwebs with the dew still on them, a place of glass and plastic so full of wondrous beauty that it hurt one’s throat to look.

But there was just this one city. There was no other sign of
habitation on the entire planet. And the city was deserted. Perfect in its beauty but hollow as a laugh.

Finally, there was a metal planet, third outward from the Sun. Not a lump of metallic ore, but a planet with a surface—or a roof—of fabricated metal burnished to the polish of a bright steel mirror. And it shone, by reflected light, like another Sun.

"I can't get over the conviction," said Duncan Griffith, "that this place is no more than a camp."

"I think you're crazy," Paul Lawrence told him sharply. He wiped his forehead with his sleeve.

"It may not look like a camp," said Griffith doggedly, "but it meets the definition."

It looks like a city to me, Lawrence told himself. It always has, from the first moment that I saw it, and it always will. Big and vital, despite its fairy touch—a place to live and dream and find the strength and courage to put the dreams to work. Great dreams, he told himself. Dreams to match the city—such a city as would take man a thousand years to build.

"What I can't understand," he said aloud, "is why it is deserted. There is no sign of violence. No sign of death at all."

"They voluntarily left it," Griffith told him. "They up and went away. And they did it because it wasn't really home to them. It was just a camp, and it held no traditions and no legends. As a camp, it had no emotional value for the ones who built it."

"A camp," said Lawrence stubbornly, "is just a stopping place. A temporary habitation that you sling together and make as comfortable as you can with the things at hand."

"So?" asked Griffith.

"These folks did more than stop here," Lawrence said. "That city wasn't slapped together. It was planned with foresight and built with loving care."

"On a human basis, yes," said Griffith. "You're dealing here with non-human values and an alien viewpoint."

Lawrence squatted and plucked at a grass stem, stuck it between his teeth, and chewed on it thoughtfully. He squinted across the brilliant blaze of noonday sun at the silent, empty city.

Griffith hunkered down beside him.

"Don't you see, Paul," he said, "that it has to be a temporary habitation. There is no sign of any previous culture on the planet. No artifact. King and his gang went over it and there wasn't anything. Nothing but the city. Think of it—an absolutely virgin planet with a city that would take a
race a million years of living just to dream. First there’d be a
tree to huddle under when it rained. Then a cave to huddle
in when night came down. After that there’d be a tent or a
wigwam or a hut. Then three huts, and you had a village.”
“I know,” Lawrence said. “I know.”
“A million years of living,” Griffith said relentlessly. “Ten
thousand centuries before a race could build a fairyland of
glass and plastics. And that million years of living wasn’t
done on this planet. A million years of living leaves scars
upon a planet. And there aren’t any scars. This planet is
brand new.”
“You’re convinced they came from somewhere else, Dunc?”
Griffith nodded. “They must have.”
“From Planet Three, perhaps.”
“We can’t know that. Not yet.”
“Maybe never,” Lawrence said.
He spat out the blade of grass.
“This system,” he said, “is like a pulp whodunit. Every-
where you turn you stumble on a clue, and every clue is
haywire. Too many mysteries, Dunc. This city here, the metal
planet, the looted planets—it’s just too much to swallow. It
would be our luck to stumble on a place like this.”
“I have a feeling there’s a tie between it all,” said Griffith.
Lawrence grunted.
“It’s a sense of history,” Griffith said. “A feeling for the
fitness of things. Given time, all historians acquire it.”
A footstep crunched behind them and they came to their
feet, turning towards the sound.
It was Doyle, the radioman, hurrying towards them from
the lifeboat camp.
“Sir,” he said to Lawrence, “I just had Taylor out on
Planet Three. He asks if you won’t come. It seems they’ve
found a door.”
“A door!” said Lawrence. “A door into the planet. What
did they find inside?”
“He didn’t say, sir.”
“He didn’t say!”
“No. You see, sir, they can’t budge the door. There’s no
way to open it.”

The door wasn’t much to look at.
There were twelve holes in the planet’s surface, grouped
in four groups of three each, as if they might be handholds
for a thing that had three fingers.
And that was all. You could not tell where the door be-
gan or where it ended.
“There is a crack,” said Taylor, “but you can just barely see it with a glass. Even under magnification it’s no more than a hairline. The door’s machined so perfectly that it’s practically one piece with the surface. For a long time we didn’t even know it was a door. We sat around and wondered what the holes were for.

“Scott found it. Just skating around and saw those holes. You could have looked until your eyes fell out and you’d never have found it except by accident.”

“And there’s no way to open it?” asked Lawrence.

“None that we have found. We tried lifting it sticking our fingers in the holes and heaving. You might as well have tried to lift the planet. And anyhow, you can’t get much purchase here. Can’t keep your feet under you. This stuff’s so slick you can scarcely walk on it. You don’t walk, in fact; you skate. I’d hate to think what would happen if some of the boys got to horsing around and someone gave someone else a shove. It would take us a week to run them down.”

“I know,” said Lawrence. “I put the lifeboat down as easy as I could, and we skidded forty miles or more.”

Taylor chuckled. “I’ve got the big job stuck on with all the magnetics that we have and even then she wabbles if you lean on her. Ice is positively rough alongside this stuff.”

“About this door,” said Lawrence. “It occurred to you it might be a combination?”

Taylor nodded. “Sure, we thought of that. And if it is, we haven’t got a ghost. Take the element of chance, multiply it by the unpredictability of an alien mind.”

“You checked?”

“We did,” said Taylor. “We stuck a camera tentacle down into those holes and we took all kinds of shots. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Eight inches deep or so. Wider at the bottom than the top. But smooth. No bumps. No ridges. No keyholes.

“We managed to saw out a hunk of metal so that we could test it. Used up three blades getting it out. Basically it’s steel, but it’s alloyed with something Mueller can’t tie a tag on to, and the molecular structure has him going nuts.”

“Stumped,” said Lawrence.

“Yeah. I skated the ship over to the door and we hooked up a derrick and heaved with everything we had. The ship swung like a pendulum and the door stayed put.”

“We might look for other doors,” said Lawrence, whistling past the graveyard. “They might not be all alike.”

“We looked,” said Taylor. “Crazy as it sounds, we did. Each man jack of us, creeping on our shin bones. We mapped the area off in sectors and crawled on our hands and knees
for miles, squinting and peering. We almost put our eyes out, what with the sun glaring from the metal and our images staring back at us as if we were crawling on a mirror.”

“Come to think of it,” said Lawrence, “they probably wouldn’t have built doors very close together. Every hundred miles, say—or maybe every thousand.”

“You’re right,” said Taylor. “It might be a thousand.”

“There’s just one thing to do,” Lawrence told him.

“Yeah, I know,” said Taylor. “But I hate to do it. We got a problem here. Something we should work out. And if we blast, we’ve failed at the first equation.”

Lawrence stirred uneasily. “I know how you feel,” he said. “If they beat us on the first move, we haven’t got a chance at the second or the third.”

“We can’t just sit around,” said Taylor.

“No,” said Lawrence. “No, I guess we can’t.”

“I hope it works,” said Taylor.

It did.

The blast ripped the door free and hurled it into space. It came down a mile away and rolled like a crazy, jagged wheel across the ice-slick surface.

Half an acre or so of the surface itself peeled up and back and hung twisted like a question mark that sparkled in the sun.

The unmanned lifeboat, clamped to the metal by its weak magnetics, like a half-licked stamp, came unstuck when the blast let loose. It danced a heavy-footed skater’s waltz for a good twelve miles before it came to rest.

The metal of the surface was a mere fourteen inches thick, a paper-thin covering when one considered that the sphere was the size of Earth.

A metal ramp, its upper ten feet twisted and smashed by the explosive force, wound down into the interior like a circular staircase.

Nothing came out of the hole. No sound or light or smell. Seven men went down the ramp to see what they could find. The others waited topside, sweating them out.

Take a trillion sets of tinker toys.
Turn loose a billion kids.
Give them all the time they need and don’t tell them what to do.
If some of them are non-human, that makes it better yet.
Then take a million years to figure out what happened.
A million years, mister, won’t be long enough. You’ll never do it—not in a million years.
It was machinery, of course. It could be nothing else.

But it was toy machinery, something you'd expect a kid to throw together from sheer exuberance the morning after he got a real expensive set.

There were shafts and spools and disks and banks of shining crystal cubes that might have been tubes, although one couldn't quite be sure.

There were cubic miles of it, and it glistened like a silvery Christmas tree in the fanning of the helmet lights, as if it had been polished no more than an hour before. But when Lawrence leaned over the side of the ramp and ran gloved fingers along a shining shaft, the fingers came back dusty—with a dust as fine as flour.

They had come down, the seven of them, twisting along the ramp until they had grown dizzy, and always there was the machinery stretching away on every side as far as the lights could penetrate the darkness.

Machinery that was motionless and still—and it seemed, for no reason that anyone could voice, that it had been still for many countless ages.

And machinery that was the same, repeating over and over again the senseless array of shafts and spools and disks and the banks of shining crystal cubes.

Finally the ramp had ended on a landing, and the landing ran on every side as far as the lights could reach, with the spidery machinery far above them for a roof, and furniture—or what seemed to be furniture—arranged upon the metal floor.

They stood together in a tight-packed group, and their lights stabbed out defiantly, and they were strangely quiet in the darkness and the silence and the ghost of another time and people.

"An office," said Duncan Griffith, finally.

"Or a control room," said Ted Buckley, the mechanical engineer.

"It might be their living quarters," Taylor said.

"A machine shop, perhaps," suggested Jack Scott, the mathematician.

"Have you gentlemen considered," asked Herbert Anson, the geologist, "that it might be none of these? It might be something which is not allied with anything we know."

"All we can do," said Spencer King, the archaeologist, "is to translate it as best we can in the terms we know. My guess is that it could be a library."

Lawrence thought: there were seven blind men, and they chanced to come upon an elephant.
He said, “Let’s look. If we don’t look, we’ll never know.”
They looked.
And still they didn’t know.
Take a filing cabinet, now. It’s a handy thing to have.
You take some space and you wrap some steel around it
and you have your storage space. You put in sliding drawers
and you put nice, neat folders in the drawers and you label
the folders and arrange them alphabetically. Then when you
want a certain paper you almost always find it.
Two things are basic—space and something to enclose it
—to define it from other space so that you can locate your
designated storage space at a moment’s notice.
The drawers and the alphabetically filed folders and refine-
ments. They subdivide the space so you can put your fingers
instantly on any required sector of it.
That’s the advantage of a filing cabinet over just heaving
everything you want to save into a certain corner of the
room.
But suppose someone built a filing cabinet without any
drawers.
“Hej,” said Buckley, “this thing is light. Someone give me
a hand.”
Scott stepped forward quickly, and between them they lift-
ed the cabinet off the floor and shook it. Something rattled
inside of it.
They put it down again.
“There’s something in there,” said Buckley breathlessly.
“Yes,” said King. “A receptacle. No doubt of that. And
there’s something in it.”
“Something that rattles,” said Buckley.
“Seems to me,” declared Scott, “it was more like a rustle
than a rattle.”
“It won’t do us much good,” said Taylor, “if we can’t get
at it. You can’t tell much about it by just listening to it
while you fellows shake it.”
“That’s easy,” said Griffith. “It’s fourth dimensional. You
say the magic words and reach around a corner somewhere
and fish out what you want.”
Lawrence shook his head. “Cut out the humour, Dunc.
This is serious business. Any of you got an idea how the
thing is made?”
“It couldn’t be made,” wailed Buckley. “It simply wasn’t
made. You can’t take a sheet of metal and make a cube of
it and not have any seams.”
“Remember the door up on the surface,” Anson reminded
him. “We couldn’t see anything there, either, until we got a
magnifier on it. That cabinet opens somehow. Someone or
something opened it at one time—to put in whatever rattled when you shook it.”

“And they wouldn’t put something in there,” said Scott, “if there was no way to get it out.”

“Maybe,” said Griffith, “it was something they wanted to get rid of.”

“We could rip it open,” said King. “Get a torch.”

Lawrence stopped him. “We’ve done that once already. We had to blast the door.”

“There’s half a mile of those cabinets stretched out here,” said Buckley. “All standing in a row. Let’s shake some more of them.”

They shook a dozen more.
There wasn’t any rattle.
There was nothing in them.
“Cleaned out,” said Buckley sadly.

“Let’s get out of here,” said Anson. “This place gives me the creeps. Let’s go back to the ship and sit down and talk it over. We’ll go loony batting out our brains down here. Take those control panels over there.”

“Maybe they aren’t control panels,” Griffith reminded him. “We must be careful not to jump at what seem obvious conclusions.”

Buckley snapped up the argument. “Whether they are or not,” he said, “they have some functional purpose. Control panels fill the bill better than anything I can think of at the moment.”

“But they have no markings,” Taylor broke in. “A control set-up would have dials or lights or something you could see.”

“Not necessarily something that a human could see,” said Buckley. “To some other race we might qualify no better than stone-blind.”

“I have a horrible feeling,” said Lawrence, “that we are getting nowhere.”

“We took a licking on the door,” said Taylor. “And we’ve taken a licking here.”

King said, “We’ll have to solve some orderly plan of exploration. We must map it out. Take first things first.”

Lawrence nodded. “We’ll leave a few men on the surface, and the rest of us will come down here and set up camp. We’ll work in groups and we’ll cover the situation as swiftly as we can—the general situation. After that we can fill in the details.”

“First things first,” said Taylor. “What comes first?”

“I wouldn’t know,” said Lawrence. “What ideas have the rest of you?”
“Let’s find out what we have,” suggested King. “A planet or a planetary machine.”

“We’ll have to find more ramps,” said Taylor. “There must be other ramps.”

Scott spoke up. “We should try to find out how extensive this machinery is. How much space it covers.”

“And find if the machine’s running,” said Buckley.

“What we saw wasn’t,” Lawrence told him.

“What we saw,” Buckley declared, “may be no more than one corner of a vast machine. All of it might not work at once. Once in a thousand years or so a certain part of the machine might be used and then only for a few minutes or maybe even seconds. Then it might be idle for another thousand years. But it would have to be there for the once in a thousand years that it might be needed.”

“Somehow,” said Griffith, “we should try to make at least an educated guess what the machinery’s for. What it does. What it produces.”

“But keep your hands off it,” warned Buckley. “No pushing this and pulling that just to see what happens. Lord knows what it might do. Just keep your big paws off it until you know what you are doing.”

It was a planet, all right.

They found the planetary surface—twenty miles below. Twenty miles through the twisting maze of shining, dead machinery.

There was air, almost as good as Earth’s, and they established camp on the lower levels, glad to get rid of space gear and live as normal beings.

But there was no light, and there was no life. Not even an insect, not one crawling, creeping thing.

Although life had once been there.

The ruined cities told the story of that life. A primitive culture, King had said. A culture not much better than twentieth-century Earth.

Duncan Griffith squatted beside the small atomic stove, hands spread out to its welcome glow.

“They moved to Planet Four,” he was saying smugly. “They didn’t have the room to live here, so they went out there and camped.”

“And mined two other planets,” Taylor said, “to get the ore they needed.”

Lawrence hunched forward dejectedly. “What bothers me,” he said, “is the drive behind this thing—the sheer, unreasoning urge, the spirit that would drive an entire race from their home to another planet, that would enable them to spend
centuries to turn their own planet into one vast machine.”

He turned his head to Scott. “There isn’t much doubt, is there,” he said, “that it’s nothing but machinery?”

Scott shook his head. “We haven’t seen it all, of course. That would take years, and we haven’t years to spend. But we are fairly certain it’s all one machine—a world covered by machinery to the height of twenty miles.”

“And dead machinery,” said Griffith. “Dead because they stopped it. They shut the machinery down and took all their records and all their tools and went away and left an empty shell. Just as they left the city out on Planet Four.”

“Or were driven away,” said Taylor.

“Not driven away,” Griffith declared flatly. “We’ve found no sign of violence anywhere in this entire system. No sign at all of haste. They took their time and packed, and they didn’t leave a single thing behind. Not a single clue. Somewhere there must be blueprints. You couldn’t build and you couldn’t run a place like this without some sort of road map. Somewhere there must be records—records that kept tally on the results or the production of this world-machine. But we haven’t found them? Because they were taken way when the people left.”

“We haven’t looked everywhere,” said Taylor.

“We found repositories where they logically would be kept,” said Griffith, “and they weren’t there. There was nothing there.”

“Some of the cabinets we couldn’t get into. Remember? Those we found the first day on the upper level.”

“There were thousands of other places that we could and did get into,” Griffith declared. “But we didn’t find a tool or a single record or anything to hint anything ever had been there.”

“Those cabinets up on the last level,” said Taylor. “They are the logical place.”

“We shook them,” said Griffith, “and they all were empty.”

“All but one,” said Taylor.

“I’m inclined to believe you’re right, Dunc,” Lawrence said. “This world was abandoned, stripped, and left to rust. We should have known that when we found it undefended. They would have had some sort of defences—automatic, probably—and if anyone had wanted to keep us out, we’d never have got in.”

“If we’d come around when this world was operating,” Griffith said, “we’d have been blown to dust before we even saw it.”

“They must have been a great race,” Lawrence said. “The economics, alone, of this place are enough to scare you. It
must have required the total manpower of the entire race many centuries to build it, and after that many other centuries to keep it operating. That means they spent a minimum of time in getting food, in manufacturing the million things that a race would need to live.”

“They simplified their living and their wants,” said King, “to the bare necessities. That in itself, alone, is a mark of greatness.”

“And they were fanatics,” said Griffith. “Don’t forget that for a moment. Only the sheer, blind, one-track purpose of an obsessed people could do a job like this.”

“But why?” asked Lawrence. “Why did they build the thing?”

No one spoke.

Griffith chuckled thinly. “Not even a guess?” he asked.

“Not one educated guess.”

Slowly a man came to his feet from the shadows outside the tiny circle of light cast by the shining stove.

“I have a guess,” he said. “In fact, I think I know.”

“Let’s have it, Scott,” said Lawrence.

The mathematician shook his head. “I have to have some proof. You’d think that I was crazy.”

“There is no proof,” said Lawrence. “There is no proof for anything.”

“I know of a place where there might be proof—just might.”

They sat stock-still, all of them, in the tight stove circle.

“You remember that cabinet,” said Scott. “That one Taylor was talking about just now. The one we shook and something rattled in it. The one we couldn’t open.”

“We still can’t open it.”

“Give me some tools,” said Scott, “and I will get it open.”

“We did that once,” said Lawrence. “We used bull strength and awkwardness to open up the door. We can’t keep on using force to solve this problem. It calls for more than force. It calls for understanding.”

“I think I know,” said Scott, “what it was that rattled.”

Lawrence was silent.

“Look,” said Scott. “If you have something valuable, something you don’t want someone else to steal, what do you do with it?”

“Why,” said Lawrence, “I put it in a safe.”

Silence whistled down the long, dead stretches of the vast machine above them.

“There could be no safer place,” said Scott, “than a cabinet that had no way of being opened. Those cabinets held some-
thing that was important. They left one thing, something, behind—something that they overlooked."

Lawrence came slowly to his feet.
"Let's get the tools," he said.

It was an oblong card, very ordinary-looking, and it had holes punched in it in irregular patterns.
Scott held it in his hand, and his hand was shaking.
"I trust," said Griffith bitterly, "that you're not disappoint-
ed."
"Not at all," said Scott. "It's exactly what I thought we'd find."
They waited.
"Would you mind?" asked Griffith finally.
"It's a computation card," said Scott. "An answer to some problem fed into a differential calculator."
"But we can't decipher it," said Taylor. "We have no way of knowing what it means."
"We don't need to decipher it," Scott told him. "It tells us what we have. This machine—this whole machine—is a cal-
culator."
"Why, that's crazy," Buckley cried. "A mathematical—"
Scott shook his head. "Not mathematical. At least not purely mathematical. It would be something more than that. Logic, more than likely. Maybe even ethics."
He glanced around at them and read the disbelief that still lingered on their faces.
"It's there for you to see," he cried. "The endless repeti-
tion, the monotonous sameness of the whole machine. That's what a calculator is—hundreds or thousands or millions or billions of integrators, whatever number you would need to have to solve a stated question."
"But there would be a limiting factor," snapped Buckley.
"The human race," said Scott, "has never paid too much attention to limiting factors. They've gone ahead and licked them. Apparently this race didn't pay too much attention to them, either."
"There are some," said Buckley stubbornly, "that you just can't ignore."

A brain has limitations.
It won't apply itself.
It forgets too easily, and too many things, and the wrong things—always.
It is prone to worry—and in a brain, that's partial suicide.
If you push it too hard, it escapes into insanity.
And, finally, it dies. Just when it's getting good, it dies.
So you build a mechanical brain—a big one that covers an Earth-size planet for the depth of twenty miles—a brain that will attend to business and will not forget and will not go insane for it cannot know frustration.

Then you up and leave it—and that’s insanity compounded. “The speculation,” said Griffith, “is wholly without point, for there is no way of knowing what they used it for. You persist in regarding the people of this system as humanoids, when they probably weren’t.”

“They could not have been so different from us,” Lawrence said. “That city out on Four might have been a human city. Here on this planet they face the same technical problems the human race would face if we tried a similar project, and they carried it out in much the same manner that we would.”

“You overlook,” said Griffith, “the very thing that you yourself have pointed out so often—the fanatic drive that made them sacrifice everything to one great idea. A race of humans could not co-operate that closely or that fanatically. Someone would blunder, and someone would cut someone else’s throat, and then someone would suggest there ought to be an investigation, and the pack would be off, howling down the wind.

“They were thorough,” he said. “Terrifyingly thorough. There’s no life here. None that we could find. Not even an insect. And why not, do you think? Perhaps because a bug might get itself entangled in a gear or something and bollix up the works. So the bugs must go.”

Griffith wagged his head. “In fact, they suggest the thinking of a bug itself. An ant, say. A colony of ants. A soulless mutual society that goes ahead in blind but intelligent obedience towards a chosen goal. And if that were so, my friend, your theory that they used the calculator to work out economic and social theories is so much poppycock.”

“It’s not my theory,” Lawrence said. “It was only one of several speculations. Another equally as valid might be that they were trying to work out an answer to the Universe, why it is and what it is and where it might be going.”

“And how,” said Griffith.

“You’re right. And how. And if they were, I feel sure it was no idle wondering. There must have been a pressure of some sort, some impelling reason why they felt that they must do it.”

“Go on,” said Taylor. “I can hardly wait. Carry out the fairy tale to its bitter end. They found out about the Universe and—”

“I don’t think they did,” Buckley said quietly. “No matter
what it was, the chances are against their finding the final answer to the thing they sought."

"For my part," said Griffith, "I would incline to think they might have. Why else would they go away and leave this great machine behind? They found the thing they wanted, so they had no further use for the tool that they had built."

"You're right," said Buckley. "They had no further use for it, but not because it had done everything that it could do and that wasn't quite enough. They left it because it wasn't big enough, because it couldn't work the problem they wanted it to work."

"Big enough!" cried Scott. "Why, all they had to do was add another tier all around the planet."

Buckley shook his head. "Remember what I said about limiting factors? Well, there's one that you can't beat. Put steel under fifty thousand pounds per square inch pressure and it starts to flow. The metal used in this machine must have been able to withstand much greater pressure, but there was a limit beyond which it was not safe to go. At twenty miles above the planet's surface, they had reached that limit. They had reached dead end."

Griffith let out a long breath. "Obsolete," he said.

"An analytical machine is a matter of size," said Buckley. "Each integrator corresponds to a cell in the human brain. It has a limited function and capacity. And what one cell does must be checked by two other cells. The 'tell me thrice' principle of making sure that there is no error."

"They could have cleared it and started over again," said Scott.

"Probably they did," said Buckley. "Many, many times. Although there always would have been an element of chance that each time it was cleared it might not be—well, rational or moral. Clearing on a machine this size would be a shock, like corrective surgery on the brain.

"Two things might have happened. They might have reached a clearance limit. Too much residual memory clinging to the tubes—"

"Subconscious," said Griffith. "It would be interesting to speculate if a machine could develop a subconscious."

"Or," continued Buckley, "they might have come to a problem that was so complicated, a problem with so many facets, that this machine, despite its size, was not big enough to handle it."

"So they went off to hunt a bigger planet," said Taylor, not quite believing it. "Another planet small enough to live
and work on, but enough bigger so they could have a larger calculator.”

“It would make sense,” said Scott reluctantly. “They’d be starting fresh, you see, with the answers they had got here. And with improved designs and techniques.”

“And now,” said King, “the human race takes over. I wonder what we’ll be able to do with a thing like this? Certainly not what its builders intended it should be used for.”

“The human race,” said Buckley, “won’t do a thing for a hundred years, at least. You can bet on that. No engineer would dare to turn a single wheel of this machine until he knew exactly what it’s all about, how it’s made and why. There are millions of circuits to be traced, millions of tubes to check, blueprints to be made, technicians to be trained.”

Lawrence said sharply, “That’s not our problem, King. We are the bird dogs. We hunt out the quail and flush it, and our job is done, and we go on to something else. What the race does with the things we find is something else again.”

He lifted a pack of camp equipment off the floor and slung it across his shoulder.

“Everyone set to go?” he asked.

Ten miles up, Taylor leaned over the guard rail of the ramp to look down into the maze of machinery below him.

A spoon slid out of his carelessly packed knapsack and went spinning down.

They listened to it for a long time, tinkling as it fell.

Even after they could hear it no longer, they imagined that they could.

THE EXECUTIONER

Algis Budrys

Late in the morning, just before noon, Samson Joyce sat in a folding chair placed behind the high, granite judges’ bench which faced the plaza. In a few minutes, he would be climbing up the steps of the bench to its top, where he would stand behind the solid parapet and look down at the Accused’s box in the plaza. Now he was checking his gun.

He worked the slide, watching the breech open and the extractor reach with its metal finger-tip. The bolt drew back; hesitated; jumped forward. He took out a silk rag and wiped
off the excess oil, spreading it in a thin, uniform film over the metal. He thumbed the cartridges out of the clip, oiled the clip action, and reloaded. He did all this with patient care and long practice.

The sun had been breaking in and out of clouds all morning, and there was a fitful wind. The pennants and family standards around the plaza were twisting restlessly. It was an uncertain day.

The gun was his old favourite; a gas-operated 15-millimetre Grennell that had been with him since his old days as Associate Justice of Utica. It fitted comfortably into his hand, as well it might after all these years. It was not the jewelled, plated and engraved antique they expected him to use at the big trials in New York City or Buffalo. It was just a gun; it did what it was meant for, cleanly and efficiently, and he used it whenever he could. It didn't pretend to be more than it was. It never failed.

He scowled, looking down at it. He scowled at feelings he knew were foolish and wished he did not have.

Once he'd been in his twenties, looking forward. Now he was a shade past fifty, and what he looked back on was subtly less satisfactory than what he had looked forward to.

He raised his head and looked at the three men who were his Associate Justices today, as they walked towards him from the hotel. Blanding, with his brief case, Pedersen, with his brief case, and Kallimer with his frown.

Joyce's heavy lower lips tightened in a fleeting touch of amusement that slackened and was gone without a trace. All of them were younger than he'd been at Utica, and all three were farther along. Blanding was the Associate Justice here in Nyack, which meant his next appointment would take him out of the suburbs and into the city proper. Pedersen was waiting for the results of the Manhattan by-election to be officially confirmed. When they were, he'd take his seat in the Legislature. And Kallimer was Special Associate Justice to the Chief Justice of Sovereign New York, Mr. Justice Samson Ezra Joyce. Perhaps it was the strain of remembering his full title that gave him the permanent frown, drawing his thin eyebrows closer together and pinching the bridge of his bony nose. Or perhaps he was rehearsing the sound of “Chief Justice of Sovereign New York, Mr. Justice Ethan Benoni Kallimer.”

All three of them were fortunate young men, in the early flower of their careers. But, being young men, they were not quite capable of enjoying their good fortune. Joyce could guess what they must be feeling as they walked towards him.
They'd be thinking Joyce was a crusty old fool who was hopelessly conservative in his administration of justice—that younger men were more capable.

They'd be thinking he wanted to live for ever, without giving someone else a chance. They were sure he thought he was the only one fit to wear a Chief Justice’s Trial Suit. And they called him Old Knock-Knees whenever they saw him in his Suit tights.

Every trial saw them with their brief cases, each with its gun inside. Each of them waited for the day The Messire reversed Joyce's human and, therefore, fallible verdict. There'd be a new Chief Justice needed for the next trial, and promotions all along the line.

He worked the Bogen slide again, nodded with satisfaction, and replaced the clip. In the thirty years since he'd begun, The Messire had not reversed his verdicts. He had come close—Joyce had scars enough—but, in the end, he'd done no more than raise a formal objection, as it were, before substantiating Joyce's decisions.

Blanding, Pedersen, and Kallimer, in their plain, unfigured black vests, the stark white lace frothing at their wrists, stopped in front of him.

Sombre men. Jealous men—even Pedersen, who was leaving the bench. Impatient men.

Joyce put away his gun. Young men, who failed to realize their good fortune in still having a goal to attain, and a dream to fulfil. Who did not foresee that it was the men at the top—the men who had reached the goal—who had to dedicate themselves unceasingly to the preservation of the ideal; who, with The Messire's help, laboured each minute of their lives to keep the purpose of their lives untarnished. The young men never knew, until they reached the top, that the joy was in the struggle, and the drudgery in the maintenance of the victory. The young men served the ideal, without a thought to wondering what kept the ideal high and firm in its purpose.

Some day, they might learn.

"Good morning, Justice," almost in chorus.

"Good morning, Justices. I imagine you slept well?"

From the sound of the spectators, he judged that the Accused had just been brought into the plaza. It was interesting to note the change in crowd voices over the years. Lately, it had been easy to differentiate between the sound from the family boxes and the noise of the people, which was a full octave lower.
Joyce looked up at the plaza tower clock. A few moments remained.

Dissatisfaction? Was that what he felt?
He imagined himself trying to explain what he felt to one of these youngsters, and—yes—"dissatisfaction" was the word he would use.

But that wouldn't ever happen. Blanding was too young to do anything but sneer at the knock-kneed old fool with his swollen ankles. Pedersen was out of it. And Kallimer, of course, whose intelligence he respected, was too intelligent to listen. He had his own ideas.

Joyce stood up. Touched the figure of The Messire buried under his neckpiece, straightened the hang of his vest, adjusted his wig and turned towards his Associates. In so doing, he allowed his glance to quickly sweep over the Accused for the first time. She was standing in her box, waiting. Just one glance before she could realize he'd compromised his dignity by looking at her.

"Well, Justices, it's time."

He waited to follow them up the steps which would be hard on his ankles.

First, Blanding had to relinquish his right to try the case, since it was in his jurisdiction.

Joyce, standing by himself on the higher central section of the platform, leaned forward slightly until his thighs were pressed against the cool stone of the bench's back. It took some of the weight off his ankles.

No one would notice it from the plaza below. Looking up at the bluff grey wall of the bench's face, all anyone could see were the torsos of four men; two in black, then one standing somewhat taller in his brilliant Suit, and then another in black. That last was Blanding, and now he stepped around the end of the bench, forward on to the overhanging slab that was the bailiff's rostrum at ordinary trials, and stopped, slim, motionless, and black, standing out over the plaza below.

Joyce was grateful for the breeze. The Suit was heavy with its embroidered encrustations, and the thick collar, together with his neckpiece, was already making him perspire. Still and all, he did not regret coming here to Nyack. In New York and Buffalo, his trials were ostentatious ceremonials, overrun with minor functionaries and elaborate protocol towards the First Families. Here in Nyack, there were no functionaries and no First Families. The ceremony of trial could be stripped down to its simple but beautiful essentials. Blanding would
handle the statements of charges, Pedersen would keep track, and Kallimer . . .

Kallimer would wait to see whether The Messire approved.

Joyce looked down at the crowd. Scarlet, gold, and azure blue struck his eyes from the family boxes. He saw the flash of light on rings and earrings, the soft, warm colour of the ladies’ wimples.

The people were a dun mass, dressed in the dark, subdued colours they had been affecting lately. Joyce reflected that, without their contrast, the family members might not appear so brilliant in their boxes. But that was only a hasty digres-
sion, fluttering across his mind like an uneasy bird at sunset.

He understood from Blanding that the people had some un-
usual interest in this trial. Looking down, he could see the crowd was large.

Joyce plainly heard Blanding draw breath before he began to speak. When he did, he spoke slowly, and the acoustic amplifiers inside the stone bench made his voice grave and sonorous.

“People of Nyack—”

The crowd became absolutely still, all of them watching the straight, motionless black figure standing above them.

This was justice, Joyce thought as he always did when a trial began, the mood slipping over him. This was the per-
sonification of the ideal. The straight, unbending figure; the grave voice.

“The Nyack Court of Common Justice, of Sovereign New York, is now in Session.”

He disliked Blanding, Joyce reflected, watching the Asso-
ciate half turn and extend an arm towards him. He disliked Pedersen, and Kallimer made him uneasy. But they were to-
gether in this. This was above personality, and above humanity. The Messire, the four of them, the families and the people; together, what they did here today was their bond and heri-
tage. This was their bulwark against savagery.

Blanding had held the gesture just long enough. “Mr. Jus-
tice Joyce, Chief Justice of Sovereign New York, Presiding.”

There was a burst of excited applause from the families. They’d expected him to preside at a trial of this nature, of course, but they were excited now, nevertheless. This was the official stamp. This was the recognition of their impor-
tance, and of the importance of this case. Joyce bowed his head in acknowledgment.

“Mr. Justice Kallimer, Chief Associate Justice.”

Joyce noted that Kallimer’s applause was much more sparse. But then, he had almost no reputation here. He’d
originally come from Waverly, which was far across the nation at the Pennsylvania border. He'd been noticed by the Bar Association, but until he'd presided at some trials in the Hudson area, very few people would recognize his name.

"Mr. Justice Pedersen, Recording Justice."

Pedersen drew a better hand than Kallimer. That was because he was a New York City judge.

Joyce did not permit his thin smile to touch his face. For all of that, it was Kallimer who would succeed him, even if Pedersen had stayed on the bench. Kallimer was not a crowd-pleaser, but he had been efficient in Waverly, and he could be efficient here, too, if he had to.

Joyce waited for the proper amount of expectant silence to accumulate. Then he raised his head.

"Let trial begin."

There was a fresh burst of applause. When it subsided, he turned to Blanding. "Justice Blanding will state the case." Joyce's tone, too, was deep and majestic. Part of that was the amplifiers, doing their invisible work within the bench, but part of it was in him, and he found himself submerging in the mood of the trial, his back stiffening and his ankles taking his full weight. His head was erect, and he felt his slow pulse moving regularly through his veins, beating with the gratification of the act of trial.

Blanding looked down at the Accused's box.

"The case of John Doe in complaint against Clarissa Jones. The concurrent case of the People of Sovereign New York against Clarissa Jones."

Joyce could now look at the Accused. She was obviously in poor control of herself, gripping the railing before her with tight hands. Then he turned towards Pedersen.

"Justice Pedersen, what has been the progress of this case?" "Mr. Justice, the complaint of John Doe has been withdrawn in cognizance of the superior claim of the People."

That was ritual, too. Once the attention of Justice had been drawn to the crime, the original complainant withdrew. Otherwise, the name of the complaining family member would have had to be revealed in open court.

Joyce turned back towards Blanding.

"Justice Blanding will proceed with the statement of the People's case."

Blanding paused for another breath. "We, the People of Sovereign New York, accuse Clarissa Jones of attempting to usurp a place not her own; of deliberately and maliciously using the wiles of her sex to claim recognition from a mem-
ber of a family, said family member being of minor age and hereinafter designated as ‘John Doe.’ We further accuse Clarissa Jones, People’s woman, of fomenting anarchy—"

The indictment continued. Joyce watched the Accused’s face, noting that despite her emotional strain, she at least retained sufficient propriety not to interrupt with useless exclamations or gestures. The girl had some steel in her, somewhere. He was pleased at her restraint; interruptions destroyed the rhythm of Trial. She’d have her chance to appeal.

He turned to Pedersen with an inquiring lift of his eyebrows. Pedersen moved closer, keeping his mouth carefully out of the pickup area.

“The girl was young Normandy’s mistress. He’s got a summer lodge on the river, here,” he whispered.

“Joshua Normandy’s boy?” Joyce asked in some surprise.

“That’s right.” Pedersen grimaced. “He might have been more astute, and investigated her a little. She’s got a number of relatives in the local craft guilds and whatnot.”

Joyce frowned. “Illegitimate relationships don’t mean anything.”

Pedersen shrugged the shoulder away from the crowd. “Legally, no. But in practice the People have taken to recognizing these things among themselves. I understand their couples refer to each other as husband and wife when among groups of their own kind. I know that’s of no weight in court,” he went on hastily, “but the girl’s apparently an aristocrat among them. It could be natural for her to assume certain privileges. Normandy’s specific complaint was that she came up to him on a public street and addressed him by his first name. Well, there she was going a little too far.”

Pedersen hooked his mouth into a knowing smile.

“Yes,” Joyce answered sharply, his cheeks flattening with rage, as he looked down at the Accused. “She was.”

The youngsters didn’t yet understand. They could smile at it. Joyce couldn’t. The fact that this was just a thoughtless girl in love made no difference. What had to be judged here was the legal situation, not the human emotions involved.

Centuries ago, The Messire had established this society, speaking through His prophets, and it was that society which Joyce defended here, just as hundreds of Justices defended it every day throughout the land.

There were those worthy of marriage, and those who were not. Those with the mental capacity to rule, administer, judge, and choose the sick to be healed, and those without
it. The notion had long ago been exploded that all human beings were equal.

The blunt facts of life were that talent and mental capacity were hereditary. Some human beings were better equipped than others to judge what was best for the human race as a whole, but, with unrestricted marriage, those superior qualities were in grave danger of dilution.

To have attempted to breed the ordinary people out of existence would have been impossible. The sea is not dried up with blotting paper. But the building of dikes was possible.

Out of the rubble and flame of the Twenty-first Century, The Messire had handed down the answer, and the Law. The Law was the dike that penned the sea of ordinary people away from the wellsprings of the families.

Through His prophets, The Messire had ordained his First Families, and they, in turn, had chosen others. To all of these were given the sacrament of marriage and the heritage of name and property for their children. For centuries, the families had been preserved, their members choosing wives and husbands only out of their own kind.

It was unnecessary to enforce childlessness on the remaining people. Neither superior intelligence nor talent were required for the world’s routine work.

Nor had “enforcement,” as such, of The Messire’s Law been required for many years, now. It was not that the people were impious or heretical. Rather it was that, being human, they were prone to error. In their untutored minds, the purpose and meaning of the Law sometimes became unclear.

Despite that simple piety, if young Normandy had been even more of a fool, and let the incident pass, some members of the people might mistakenly have felt such behaviour was permissible. The precedent would have been established. If, after that, some other error had been allowed to go uncorrected, yet another step away from the Law might be taken. And after that, another—

Anarchy. And the widening erosion in the dike.

Joyce scowled down at the Accused. He only wished it hadn’t been a girl.

Blanding reached the end of his indictment and paused, with a gesture to Joyce.

Joyce looked down at the Accused again, partly because he wished to study her again and partly because it lent weight to his opinion.

The girl’s trembling confirmed his previous tentative decision. There was no purpose in dragging this on. The quickest conclusion was the best.
“Thank you, Justice,” he said to Blanding. He addressed the Accused.

“Young woman, we have heard your indictment. Justice Blanding will now repeat the etiquette of Trial, in order that there may be no doubt in your mind of your rights.”

“The Messire is your judge,” Blanding told her gravely. “The verdict we deliver here is not conclusive. If you wish to appeal, make your appeal to Him.”

There was a stir and rustle in the crowd, as there always was. Joyce saw a number of people touch the images at their throats.

“We shall deliberate on this verdict, each separately determining the degree of your guilt. When we have reached a verdict, our separate opinions shall determine the degree of mundane appeal granted you.”

Joyce threw a quick glance at the girl. She was looking up at Blanding with her hands on the rail of her box, her arms stiffly extended.

“If your case has been misrepresented to this Court, The Messire will intervene in your behalf. If you are innocent, you have nothing to fear.”

Having completed the recital, he stopped and looked out over the heads of the crowd.

Joyce stepped back, and saw that Kallimer and Pedersen were looking down at his hands, hidden from the crowd. He signalled for a verdict of “Completely Guilty.” Giving the girl a weapon to defend herself would be ridiculous. If she succeeded in firing at all, she was sure to miss him and injure someone in the crowd. It was best to get this case out of the way quickly and efficiently. The thing had to be squashed right here.

To his surprise, he saw Kallimer signal back “reconsider.”

Joyce looked at the Associate. He might have expected something of the sort from Blanding, but a man of Kallimer’s intelligence should have arrived at the proper conclusion.

Perhaps the Bar Association had been very wise to give him this trial, instead of letting some lesser Justice handle it. He’d had his doubts, but this wiped them out.

Without looking at Kallimer, but letting him plainly see the angry swell of the set jaw muscle that tightened his cheek, Joyce signalled “imperative!”

Kallimer sighed inaudibly, and his “acquiesce” was limp-fingered, as though he were trying to convey resignation, as well.

Joyce faced front, still furious, but with his voice under control.
"Justice Blanding, have you reached a verdict?" He moved his left shoulder slightly.
Blanding, from his position on the rostrum, turned and saw the signal.
"I find the Accused completely guilty, Mr. Justice," he said. Joyce turned to Pedersen in the absolute silence that always fell over a plaza during the rendering of the verdict. "Completely guilty, Mr. Justice."
Joyce turned to Kallimer.
The man's lips twitched in a faint, sardonic smile. "Completely guilty, Mr. Justice."
Joyce looked down at the Accused. "I also find you completely guilty as charged," he said. "You will not be allowed a weapon with which to make mundane appeal. Your only recourse is to The Messire's mercy. I pray that our verdict is correct."
He stepped back to a new outburst of applause from the family boxes, satisfied that he had done his best. So far, it was a good trial. Even Kallimer's rebelliousness had been evident only here on the bench. The majesty and unanimity of justice had been preserved as far as the crowd could tell.
He turned and walked slowly down the platform steps, through the deep hush that locked the plaza.

It had been a good trial. The Bar Association would detail it and its significance in the Closed Archives, and, generations from now, the older Justices would be reading about it, seeing how his action today had choked off the incipient attack on this culture and this civilization.

But that was not uppermost in Joyce's mind. What men a hundred years from now would say could not have much personal significance to him. What made his pulse beat more and more strongly as he descended the steps, turned the corner of the bench, and walked out into the plaza, was the knowledge that his contemporaries—the other Justices of the Bar Association—the men who had also come to the top, and who understood what the burden was—would know he had not failed the ideal.
He stopped just short of the Ground of Trial and gestured to the attendants around the Accused. They removed the Accused's clothing to guard against armour or concealed weapons, and stepped aside.
Joyce took the final stride that placed him on the Justice's Square, where other amplifiers once more took up his voice. "The Accused will come forward to make her appeal."
The girl stumbled a bit coming out of the box, and he
heard a slight sound of disappointment from the family boxes. It was not a good Entrance. But that could be forgotten.

He reached down, and the gun slipped out of its holster in one smooth sweep of his arm that was pure line of motion as he simultaneously half-turned, his vest standing out in a perfect straight-up-and-down cylindrical fall from his neck to its hem. He came up slightly on his toes, and there was a scattering of "bravo!" from the family boxes as well as the more reserved "excellent" which was really all a lame man deserved for his draw, no matter how perfect his arm motion.

The Accused was standing, pale of face, in the Square of Appeal.

Holding his draw, Joyce waited to speak the ultimate sentence.

He was growing old. The number of trials remaining to him was low. Some day soon, on a verdict of "probably guilty," perhaps, when the Accused had a fully loaded weapon, The Messire would reverse the verdict.

Not because of his physical slowness. The lameness and hitch in the draw would be merely symptomatic of his advancing slowness of mind. He would not have interpreted the case correctly.

He knew that, expected it, and felt only acceptance for it. A Justice who rendered an incorrect verdict deserved the penalty just as much as a guilty member of the people.

Meanwhile, this was the upheld ideal.

"You have been adjudged completely guilty as charged," he said, listening to the old words roll out over the plaza. "You have not been granted pardon by this Court. Make your appeal to The Messire."

The Accused looked at him wide-eyed out of her pallor. There was no certainty she was praying, but Joyce presumed she was.

Justice rested in The Messire. He knew the guilty and the innocent; punished the one and protected the other. Joyce was only His instrument, and Trial was only the opportunity for His judgment to become apparent. Men could judge each other, and pass sentence. But men could be wise or foolish in their decisions. That was the fallible nature of Man.

Here was where the test came; here where the Accused prayed to The Messire for the ultimate, infallible judgment. This was Trial.

His finger tightened on the trigger while his arm came slowly down and forward. This, too, was where Joyce prayed to the Ultimate Judge, asking whether he had done wisely, whether he had once more done well. Each trial was his
Trial, too. This was his contact with The Messire. This was Truth.

Something whirled out of the silent crowd of people and landed at the girl’s feet. It was a gun, and the girl scrambled for it.

As soon as she picked it up, Joyce knew he’d lost his advantage. His reflexes were too slow, and he’d lost two decisive seconds by stopping, paralysed, and staring at it.

He shook his head to clear away the momentary shock. He gave up paying attention to the confused noise and blind milling of the crowd. He narrowed his concentration down to the girl and her gun. As far as he could permit himself to be concerned, he and she were alone in a private universe, each trying to overcome panic long enough to act.

He’d lost his aim, and his arm had dropped below the line of fire. He brought it up, deliberately slowing his impulse to fling it into position. If he missed, the odds would be all against a second shot.

It was a better aim than the conventional method, in any case. It permitted no elaboration; it had no grace or beauty, but it was a steadier method of aiming.

Her shot struck his forearm, and his hand slapped up into the air from the shock. His fingers almost lost their grip on the butt, and he clenched them convulsively.

The girl was tugging at her weapon, doing something with the butt plate.

His gun discharged into the air, and his arm shook with fresh pain from the recoil.

He could see the Accused was as wrought up as he was. He clutched his forearm with his left hand and steadied down. Before she could fire again, his gun burst into life, throwing her backward and down to the ground. She was obviously dead.

He took a deep, shuddering breath. The gun started to fall out of his weak fingers, but he caught it with his left hand and dropped it into its holster.

The world around him slowly filtered back into his senses. He became aware of angry shouts in the crowd of people, and of attendants struggling to hold them in check. There was a knot of people clustered around a family box, but before he could investigate that, he felt Kallimer put an arm around his waist and hold him up. He hadn’t even realized he was swaying.

“We can’t worry about the crowd,” Kallimer said in a peculiar voice. It was urgent, but he sounded calm under it.
There was no hysteria in him, and Joyce noted that to his credit.

"Did you see who threw the gun?" Joyce demanded.

Kallimer shook his head. "No. Doesn't matter. We've got to get back to New York."

Joyce looked up at the bench. Blanding wasn't in sight, but Pedersen was hanging by his hands, dangling down over its face, and dropping to the plaza. He bent, picked up the brief case he'd thrown down ahead of him, ripped it open, and pulled out his gun.

That was idiotic. What did he think he was doing? "Joyce!" Kallimer was pulling at him.

"All right!" Joyce snapped in annoyance. He began to run towards Pedersen before the fool could disgrace himself. As he ran, he realized Kallimer was right. The three of them had to get back to New York as quickly as possible. The Bar Association had to know.

Pedersen sat far back in his corner of the train compartment, his eyes closed and his head against the panelling as through he was listening to the sound of the trolley running along the overhead cable. The Messire only knew what he was really listening to. His face was pale.

Joyce turned stiffly towards Kallimer, hampered by the sling and cast on his arm. The Associate was staring out of the window, and neither he nor Pedersen had said a word since they'd boarded the train, fifteen minutes ago. At that time, there had still been noise coming from the plaza.

There'd been a twenty-minute wait for the train. That meant more than three-quarters of an hour had passed since the start of it all, and Joyce still did not understand exactly what had happened. He had only disconnected impressions of the entire incident, and, for the life of him, he could find no basic significance behind it, although he knew there had to be one.

"Kallimer."

The Associate turned away from the window. "What?"

Joyce gestured, conscious of his sudden inability to find the proper phrasing.

"You want to know what touched it off. Is that it?"

Joyce nodded, relieved at not having to say it after all. Kallimer shook his head. "I don't know, exactly. Somebody in the crowd felt strongly enough to throw her the gun. One of her relatives, I suppose."

"But—" Joyce gestured inarticulately. "It... it was a legal execution! Who would interfere with justice? Who'd take
he risk of eternal damnation by interfering with the Mes-
sire's obvious will?"

Pedersen, in his corner, made a very peculiar sound. Kallimer shot him a cryptic glare. He turned back to Joyce and seemed to be searching for words.

"Joyce," he said finally, "how do you imagine The Messire would reverse a verdict of 'Completely Guilty'?"

Joyce frowned. "Well... I don't know. My gun might jam. Or I might fire and unaccountably miss."

"You don't know for certain, because it's never happened. Am I correct?"

"Substantially."

"Now. How many reversals have there been on verdicts of 'Apparently Guilty'? When the Accused was given a gun with one cartridge in the chamber?"

"A few."

"But it's never happened to any Justice you know, has it?"

Joyce shook his head. "No, but there are recorded cases. A few, as I said."

"Very well. What about 'Possibly Guilty'? Many reversals on those verdicts?"

"An appreciable number."

"Almost had a few of those yourself, didn't you?"

"A few."

"Very well." Kallimer held up his hand, bending one finger for each point. "Now—first we have the case in which the Accused is weaponless. No reversals. Next we have the case in which the Accused has one shot to fire. A few reversals. And finally we have the case in which the Ac-
cused has as much of a weapon as the Presiding Justice. An appreciable number of reversals.

"Does it not seem to you, Justice Joyce, that this series of statistics might well occur without the intervention of any Divine Will whatsoever?"

Joyce stared at him, but Kallimer gave him no chance to reply.

"Furthermore, Joyce; do the people have the right to bear arms? That is to say, can you imagine an Accused who was acquainted with the firing and aiming of an automatic pis-
tol? The answer—you asked, now hear me out—the answer is No.

"More. Have you ever heard of The Messire reversing a verdict of 'Not Guilty'?"

Joyce bridled. "There aren't two of those a year!"
Kallimer's mouth hooked. "I know. But they do exist. Explain this, then; how do you reconcile Divine Will with the curious fact that verdicts of 'Not Guilty' and 'Completely Guilty' are never reversed, and never have been reversed, though Messire knows we came close this afternoon? Are you claiming that in those cases, every Justice who ever lived was right every time? Are you attempting to claim, for mortal men, the infallibility which is the Messire's particular province?"

Kallimer's face was tense with emotion, and Joyce received a distinct impression that the Associate was speaking with excessive violence; actually his voice was still under control.

"Mr. Joyce, if you can't see the point I'm driving at, I am sorry. But, rest assured, somebody in that crowd of people finally realized it, after all these years. Somebody wasn't afraid of the Messire." Kallimer turned his head sharply and looked out of the window at the Hudson, running silver far below as the train swung over to the east shore. "I'm not sure Pedersen wasn't right in drawing his gun. And, Mr. Joyce, if what I've said hasn't shaken you, it certainly should have."

Kallimer took a deep breath and seemed to calm down a little.

"Mr. Joyce," he said softly, "I believe there's something you haven't thought of. I imagine it'll make you unhappy when I tell you.

"Talking in your terms, now—you don't have to give an inch, Mr. Joyce; in fact, you have to hang on to your beliefs with absolute rigidity to appreciate the full impact—looking at it from your point of view: you can't imagine how the Messire would go about reversing an unjust verdict of 'Completely Guilty.' But the Messire is omniscient and omnipotent. His ways are complex and unknowable. Am I correct? Well, then, how do you know that what happened today wasn't a hint of how He'd manage it?"

The blood drained out of Joyce's face.

Late that night, Emily looked at him in surprise when she answered her door.

"Sam! But you never—" She stopped. "Come in, Sam. You surprised me."

Joyce kissed her cheek and strode nervously into her apartment. He knew what had startled her. He never called on nights following trials; in the fifteen years they'd been together, she would naturally have noticed that. He'd con-
sidered the problem while on his way over, and the only thing to do, he’d decided, was to act as though nothing unusual were taking place. He reasoned that a woman, being a woman, would shrug her shoulders over it after the first few minutes. Probably, after a short time, she’d even begin to doubt her memory.

“Sam, what’s the matter with your arm?”

He spun around and saw her still standing by the door, wearing a dressing gown, with her hair in curlers.

“Trial,” he bit off shortly. He paced across the room, took a pear out of a bowl, and bit into it. “I’m hungry,” he said with false vigour.

She seemed to collect herself. “Of course, Sam. I’ll put something on the stove. It won’t be more than a few moments. Excuse me.” She went into the kitchen, leaving him standing alone in the semi-darkness surrounding the one light she’d switched on near the door. Impatiently, he snapped the switches of the other lamps in the room and stood in the middle of it, chewing the pear and bouncing it in his palm between bites.

He heard Emily put a pan on a burner. He moved abruptly and strode into the kitchen, stopping just inside the door and dropping the pear down the disposal chute.

“Finished it,” he said, explaining his presence. He looked around. “Anything I can do?”

Emily looked up at him, a look of amused disbelief on her face, “Sam, what’s got into you?”

Joyce scowled. “Anything wrong with coming up to see my girl?”

Saying it made the scowl disappear. He looked down at Emily, who was bent over the stove again. Fifteen years had touched her hair, and put little lines on her forehead and the corners of her mouth. They added a good bit to her hips and waist. But there was an earthly, commonsense comfort in her. He could put his key in the door at any time of night, and she’d hear the sound and be there to meet him.

He reached down and pulled her up. His arm twinged a bit, but that was unimportant at the moment. He folded his arms around her and cupped the back of her head in one palm. The warmth and security of her made his clutch tighter than he’d intended at the start. Suddenly he found himself wishing he’d never have to go back to his own ascetic flat.

Emily smiled faintly and kissed his chin. “Sam, what did happen? I heard the trial results over the radio this
afternoon, and all they announced for Nyack was a suc-
cessful conclusion to a verdict of ‘Completely Guilty.’ Was
there some trouble they didn’t want to talk about?”

His mood burst, and he dropped his arms.

“What kind of trouble?” he asked sharply.

Her eyes opened, and she looked at him in fresh sur-
prise. “I didn’t mean anything by it, Sam. Just ordinary
trouble...you know, a lucky shot by the Accused”— She
looked at the light cast on his arm. “But that couldn’t be it,
with an unarmed Accused—”

Joyce took an angry breath. “I thought we had that clear
between us,” he said in a voice he realized was too angry.
“From the very beginning, I’ve made it plain that your
province is yours and my province is mine. If I don’t tell
you about it, you can assume I don’t feel you should know.”

Emily stepped back and quickly bent over the stove again.
“All right, Sam,” she said in a low voice. “I’m sorry.” She
lifted the lid of a pan. “Supper’ll be ready in a minute.
It’ll be pretty busy in here when all these pots come to a
boil at the same time.”

“I’ll be waiting in the living room.” Joyce turned and
walked out.

He paced back and forth over the rug, his lips in a tight
line, conscious now of the pain in his arm.

One more scar. One more objection from The Messire.
All safe in the end, but one more objection, nevertheless,
and what did it mean?

And the Bar Association.

“A hearing!” he muttered. “A full hearing tomorrow!”
As though his report hadn’t been adequate. He’d told them
what happened. It should have been enough. But Kallimer,
with his allegations that there was more to the incident—

Well, all right. Tomorrow he’d see about Kallimer.

Emily came into the living room. “Supper’s ready, Sam.”
Her voice and expression were careful to be normal. She
didn’t want to provoke him again.

She was hurt, and he didn’t like to see her that way. He
laughed suddenly and put his arm around her shoulders,
squeezing. “Well, let’s eat, eh, girl?”

“Of course, Sam.”

He frowned slightly, dissatisfied. But there was no point
in trying to patch it up and only making it worse. He kept
still as they went into the dining room.

They ate silently. Or rather, to be honest with himself,
Joyce had to admit that he ate and Emily toyed with a
small portion, keeping him company out of politeness.
The act of sitting still for twenty minutes quieted his nerves a bit. And he appreciated Emily’s courtesy. As he pushed his coffee cup away, he looked up at her and smiled.

“That was very good. Thank you, Emily.”

She smiled faintly. “Thank you, Sam. I’m glad you liked it. I’m afraid it wasn’t much. I hadn’t planned—” She broke off.

So, she had continued to wonder about his calling tonight. He smiled ruefully. And now she thought she’d offended him again. He’d been pretty grumpy tonight.

He reached out and took her hand. “That’s all right, Emily.”

After she’d washed the dishes, she came in and sat down beside him on the couch, where he was slumped with his feet on a hassock. His ankles and calves were aching. It was all right as long as he kept moving, but once he sat down the ache always began. He smiled at her wanly.

Smiling back, she bent wordlessly and began to massage his calves, working the muscles with her fingers.

“Emily—”

“Yes, Sam?”

“If... Nothing, Emily. There’s not much point in talking about it.” He found himself caught between the desire to speak to someone and the urgent sense that this afternoon was best forgotten. He stared down past his feet without looking at anything. Perhaps there was some way to manoeuvre her into telling him what he wanted to know, without his having to tell her about it.

Why was he reluctant to talk about this afternoon? He didn’t know, exactly; but he couldn’t bring himself to do it, no more than he could have discussed some character defect he might have accidentally observed in a lady or gentleman.

“What else did they say over the radio?” he asked without any special intonation. “About Nyack.”

“Nothing, Sam, except for the bare results.”

He grunted in disappointment.

Perhaps there was some better angle of approach. “Emily, suppose... suppose you knew of a case involving a people’s girl and a family man. Suppose the girl had come up to the man on a public street and addressed him by his first name.”

He stopped uncomfortably.

“Yes, Sam?”

“Uh... well, what would you think?”

Emily’s hands became still for a moment, then began working on his calves again.
“What would I think?” she asked in a low voice, looking down at the floor. “I’d think she was very foolish.”

He grimaced. That wasn’t what he wanted. But did he know what he wanted from her? What was the answer he was looking for? He tried again.

“Yes, of course. But, aside from that, what else?”

He saw Emily bite her lip. “I’m afraid I don’t understand what you mean, Sam.”

A tinge of his earlier anger put a bite in his voice. “You’re not that unintelligent, Emily.”

She took a deep breath and looked at him. “Sam, something drastic went wrong today, didn’t it? Something very bad. You were terribly upset when you came in—”

“Upset? I don’t think so,” he interrupted quickly.

“Sam, I’ve been your mistress for fifteen years.”

He knew his face was betraying him. In her flashes of shrewdness, she always did this to him. She’d put her finger exactly on the vulnerable truth, disarming his ability to cover up.

He sighed and spread his hands in a gesture of resignation. “All right, Emily. Yes, I am upset.” The irritation welled up again. “That’s why I want some help from you, instead of this evasiveness.”

She straightened up, taking her hands off his aching legs, and half-turned on the couch, so that she was looking directly into his eyes. She held his gaze without hesitation.

“Maybe you’re asking too much of me. Perhaps not. This is important, isn’t it? I’ve never seen you quite so troubled as this.”

She was tense, he realized. Tense, and apprehensive. But he saw, as well, that she had decided to go ahead, despite whatever her private doubts might be.

“Yes,” he admitted, “it’s important.”

“Very well. You want to know what I think about that girl? Suppose you tell me what you think, first. Do you believe she did it out of spite, or malice, or impulse?”

He shook his head. “Of course not! She was in love with him, and forgot herself.”

Emily’s eyes welled up with a sudden trace of tears. Joyce stared at her, dumbfounded, for the few seconds before she wiped one hand across her eyes in annoyance.

“Well?” she asked in a low voice.

“I’m afraid it’s my turn not to understand,” he said after a moment. He frowned. What was she driving at?

“What distinguishes me from that girl, Sam? A few years? What do you expect me to think?”

“It’s not the same thing at all, Emily!” he shot back in
honest anger. "Why... why you're a mature woman. We're—"

He couldn't really point out the difference, but he knew it was there. She'd never said or done anything—

"Emily, you know very well you'd never do what that girl did!"

"Only because I'm more conscious of the rules," she answered in a low voice. "What real difference is there between her and myself? It is that it's you and I, rather than two other people; rather than any one of the scores of similar couples we know? What distinguishes us in your eyes? The fact that we're not a case for you to try?"

"Emily, this is ridiculous!"

She shook her head slowly. "That girl broke the law. I haven't. But I haven't only because I realized, from the very start, just what kind of tightrope I'd be walking for the rest of our lives. I couldn't leave you and go back to the people, now; I've grown too used to living as I do. But I'll always be no more than I was born to."

"Suppose I were a People's man—a mechanic, or perhaps even an engineer if I'd bound myself to some family. I'd know that all my skill and training wouldn't be of any use if I were accused of some crime in a court of law. I'd know that addressing my patron in public by his first name would be a crime—a different kind of crime than if I were my patron's mistress, certainly, but a crime, nevertheless. Let's assume that, as my patron's engineer, I overrode his will on the specifications for whatever product my patron manufactured. Or that I attempted to redesign a product or develop a new one without first getting his approval and suggestions; that would be legally analogous to what the girl did, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, and properly so," Joyce retorted.

Emily looked at him and nodded slowly. She went on:

"If I were that engineer, and I had any common sense, I'd be constantly aware of the difference between myself and my patron. I would remind myself, every day, that my patron was born to a family, and that my patron would, in turn, be permitted the sacrament of marriage when he desired it with a lady. I would understand that engineers were members of the people, and that my patron was a member of one of the First Families, or a Legislator, or a Justice. Realizing all this, I would always be careful never to encroach on the difference between us, accepting my fate in having been born to the people, and his having been born to a family."

Joyce frowned. "That sounds a little bit as though you considered birth a blind accident."

Emily looked at him silently. She took a deep breath. "Be-
ing an intelligent person, I, as that engineer, would attribute my station at birth to the direction of The Messire. You'll hear no heresies from me, Sam.” She reached out and took his hand.

“That's why I'll say, again, that the girl in Nyack was foolish. That was the case in Nyack, wasn't it? She did what none of us, in our right minds, would consider doing. Certainly, she did what I'd never do, but then, I'm older than she. I was older when I came to you, or I at least assume so, since you called her a girl.”

Suddenly, she bit her lip. “Young people in love are not necessarily in their right minds, just as people enraged are not acting logically. Who's to say what their punishment should be?”

“There is Someone,” Joyce answered firmly.

Emily nodded, looking at him, her expression abstracted. Suddenly she said:

“Sam, have you ever really looked at yourself in a mirror? Not to see whether you'd shaved properly, or whether your wig was crooked on the morning before a trial, but just to look at yourself.”

He couldn't understand this new tack.

“Do you know you have a very young face, Sam? Under that black beard-shadow, with the scowl gone, you've got the face of a troubled adolescent. You've taught yourself dignity, and put flesh on your body, but you're still a young boy, searching for the key that will wind the world up to run accurately for ever. Perhaps you believe you've found it. You believe in what you're doing. You believe that justice is the most important thing in the world. What you do, you do as a crusade. There's no wanton malice or cruelty in you. I don't believe I've ever known you to do anything purely for yourself.

“I love you for it, Sam. But, except sometimes with me, you've submerged yourself in your ideal, until you've learned to ignore Sam Joyce entirely. You're Mister Justice Joyce all the time.”

She closed her hand on his. “Something happened this afternoon, and I suspect it was drastic. You've come to me after facing an unarmed Accused—a girl, young and unskilled—but there's a cast on your arm, and what must be a bullet hole under it. I don't know what happened. I do know there's a news blackout on Nyack.

“Sam, if the system's been finally challenged, then you're in terrible danger. Other men aren't like you. Other men—people's men and family men—act in rage, or fear, or love. If they tear down your world and your ideal—”

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“Tear down—!”

“... If they tear down what you have given your life to, there will be nothing left of you. If the system goes, it takes Justice Joyce's lifeblood with it, and only I know where the little fragment of Sam Joyce lives. It won't be enough.”

“Emily, you're exaggerating beyond all reason!”

Emily clutched his hand. He saw, to his complete amazement, that she'd shut her eyes against the tears, but that streaks of silent moisture were trickling down her cheeks.

“You've come to me for help, but I'm part of the world, too, and I have to live the way it lets me. After all these years, you want to know whether you've been right, and I'm supposed to tell you.

“I told you I thought the girl was foolish. Sam, I love you, but I don't dare give you your answer. I told you: you won't hear any heretical statements from me.”

The night had slowly edged into dawn. Joyce stared at it through the window beside the bed. He had no way of knowing whether Emily had ever gone to sleep or not. She was lying motionless, just as she had been all night.

Joyce's eyes were burning, and the short stubble of his greying natural hair was thick with perspiration. The night had been sleepless for him.

His arm was much better this morning, but he still remembered the shock of the bullet.

If you believed, as you must believe, that The Messire saw every human deed, knew every human thought, and caused every human event, then what had He meant in Nyack?

If the sentence was correct, why did The Messire permit her that one shot? Why hadn't whoever threw the gun been stopped before he could do it? If the sentence was unjust, why hadn't she killed him?

Was it that The Messire approved of him, but not of the basis of his judgment? But his basis was the Law, and The Messire had handed down the Law!

Was it, as Kallimer had said, that The Messire was not as Joyce conceived of Him?

What did Emily think?

He reminded himself that what Emily thought was irrelevant, as she had hastily reminded himself many times during the past night. Her opinion did not govern the truth or falsehood of justice. Justice was an absolute; it was either right, no matter what the opinions of Mankind, or it was worthless.

Was it, as Kallimer had said viciously, that The Messire was trying to make him understand something?
What?
What had He meant in Nyack?

Joyce lay on the bed, exhausted. He knew he was thinking wildly. He'd gone over and over this ground, trying to find the proper logic, and accomplishing nothing. He was in no condition to reason correctly. He only hoped he could act wisely at the hearing this afternoon.

He slipped cautiously out of bed, hesitating at every rustle of the sheets. Once out, he dressed hastily, and left the apartment as quietly as he could. He didn't want Emily to wake up and see what condition he was in.

He walked into the hearing room with measured steps, hoping no one would notice his unsettled state of mind. When the Chief Justice showed agitation, what could anyone expect of the lesser Justices?

This, too, was part of the task, and the young, ambitious Associate Justice of Utica hadn't had the faintest inkling of it, just as, throughout his dedicated advancement through the ranks of his profession, he could not have dreamed how difficult it would some day be to walk steadily through a door when sleepless legs and aching ankles dragged at every step.

He saw the tension rampant in every member. No one was sitting down quietly, waiting for the hearing to begin. Knots of men stood everywhere, talking sharply, and there was a continual movement from one group to another.

Joyce scowled in annoyance and nodded shortly as most of the faces in the room were turned towards him. He looked around for Joshua Normandy, but the Bar Association's Chairman had not yet come in. He saw Kallimer, standing to one side, wearing his frown and talking alone to a white-faced Pedersen.

Joyce went over to them. He hadn't decided yet what to do with Kallimer. The man was arrogant. He seemed to derive genuine pleasure from talking in terms Joyce was unable to understand. But the man was intelligent, and ambitious. His ambition would lead him to defend the same principles that Joyce defended, and his intelligence would make him a superlative Chief Justice, once Joyce was gone.

For the sake of that, Joyce was willing to let yesterday's questionable behaviour go. Perhaps, after all, Kallimer had been right in asking for a reconsideration of the verdict.

Once again, Joyce was painfully conscious of his inability to arrive at any firm opinion on yesterday's events. He stopped in front of Kallimer and Pedersen with a shake of his head, and only then realized how peculiar the gesture must look to them.

"Good afternoon, Justice," Kallimer said dryly.
Joyce searched his face for some indication of his state of mind, but there was nothing beyond the omnipresent frown. “Good afternoon, Justices,” he said finally. “Or have the election results been confirmed, Legislator?” he asked Pedersen.

Pedersen’s face was strained. “Yes, sir. The results were confirmed. But I resigned.”

Joyce’s eyebrows shot up. Recovering, he tried to smile pleasantly. “Then you’re returning to the Bar?”

Pedersen shook his head. “No...uh—” he husked in a dry voice, “I’m here simply as a witness to...uh...yesterday.” He was deathly pale.

Kallimer smiled coldly. “Mr. Pedersen has decided to retire from public life, Justice Joyce. He now considers that his first attempt to dissociate himself from the Bar was inadequate.”

Joyce looked from Kallimer back to Pedersen. The younger man, he suddenly realized, was terrified.

“Blanding’s dead, you know,” Kallimer said without inflection. “A paving block was thrown at his head yesterday afternoon. It’s uncertain just what the circumstances were, but a member of the Civil Guard brought the word out.” Kallimer smiled at Pedersen. “And now our former Associate, his earlier sentiments proved correct, is shortly taking a trip abroad—the Lakes Confederation, I believe?”

“I have distant relations in St. Paul,” Pedersen confirmed huskily. “And there is an Ontario branch of the family in Toronto. I plan to be away for some time. A tour.”

Kallimer still smiled. “The key word in that statement would be ‘distant,’ would it not, Mr. Pedersen?”

Pedersen flushed angrily, but Joyce seized on Kallimer’s attitude as a reassuring sign. At least, Pedersen’s cowardice wasn’t general. For the moment, that seemed more important than the news of Blanding’s death.

His lack of astonishment made him look at himself in wonder. Was he that much upset, that a Justice’s murder failed to shock him? Was he really that far gone in his acceptance of the incredible?

He knew, with a calmly logical part of his mind, that before yesterday he would have considered himself insane to even think of anyone’s attacking the Law. Today, he could pass over it. Not lightly, but, nevertheless, pass over it.

“You’re sure of your information, Kallimer?” he asked.

Kallimer nodded, looking at him curiously. “The witness is reliable. And he brought out the gun, too. That’s an astonishing item in itself. You’ll be interested.”

Joyce raised his eyebrows politely. “Really?” He saw Joshua
Normandy come into the hearing room, and nodded in the Chairman's direction. "The hearing's about to begin. It'll be brought up, of course?"

Kallimer was frankly puzzled by his attitude. Joyce's head was erect, and his shoulders had abruptly straightened out of their unconscious slump.

"Yes, of course."

"Good. Shall we take our places? Good afternoon, Mr. Pedersen. It was a pleasure, having you on my bench." He took Kallimer's arm, and, together, they strolled up to the long table facing the chairs of the lesser justices.

Joyce knew what was happening to him, and the calm, judicial part of his mind, at least given something it understood to work with, approved.

He had been in a panic. At noon, yesterday, the foundations of his logic had been destroyed. The integrity of justice and Justices had been attacked, and his belief in the universal acceptance of The Messire's Law had been proved false. He had discovered, in one climactic instant, that there were people willing to deliberately attack the Law.

He had been beyond his depth. He had no precedent for such a crime; no basis on which to judge the situation. Someone else, perhaps, such as Kallimer or Justice Normandy, might have the reach of mind to encompass it. But Joyce knew he was not a brilliant man. He was only an honest man, and he knew what was beyond him. In the instant that he had stopped, staring dumbfounded at the gun lying on the plaza stones, with the Accused reaching for it eagerly, he had stopped being capable of evaluating the legal situation and taking steps to rectify it. Panic could warp a man's judgment completely.

That was what The Messire had been trying to make him realize. The world was changing, and the Chief Justice was not equipped to deal with the change.

As an honest man, as a man sincere in his beliefs, he was ready to give up his responsibilities and let the better suited men take them up.

He nodded to Justice Normandy and the other Bar Association officers. Then he sat down calmly, with Kallimer beside him, and waited to see what the more intelligent men had made of the situation.

Kallimer was holding up the gun brought out of Nyack. Joyce looked at it curiously.

It was late in the afternoon, and a good deal of testimony had already been recorded. Pedersen stated that he was aware of angry movement in the crowd as Joyce made his
draw, but that the gun had been thrown by an unidentified man before anything could be done. After the shooting, the man and a surrounding group of other men had been lost in the crowd. The crowd itself had been bewildered at first, and then divided in its reactions. That early in the riot, there had been no signs of unanimous effort.

The Civil Guardsman had testified that, as far as he knew, he was the only survivor of the squad detailed to keep order during the trial. He had seized the gun after the executed Accused dropped it, and run to Guard headquarters for help. It was his impression that the immediate deaths among family members at the trial were the result of spontaneous riot in the crowd, and not of any organized plan of assassination.

Justice Kallimer had commented that this was also his impression. The only traces of intelligent planning, he stated, had shown themselves in the cutting of the train cables out of Nyack and the attack on the radio station, where the supervising family man had smashed the transmitter before it could be captured. Note was made of the loyalty of the station engineering staff.

Now, Kallimer said: "Bearing previous testimony in mind, I'd like to call this hearing's attention to the construction and design of this illegal weapon."

Joyce bent closer. There were a number of peculiarities in the gun, and they interested him.

"First," Kallimer went on, "the weapon is obviously handmade. Its frame consists of a solid metal piece—steel, I'm told by a competent engineer—which bears obvious file marks. Moreover, it is of almost primitive design. It has a smooth-bore barrel, drilled through from muzzle to breech, and is mortised at the breech to accommodate one hand-inserted cartridge and a spring-loaded hammer. Additional cartridges are stored in the butt, covered by a friction plate. It is fired by thumbing back the hammer and releasing it, after which the fired cartridge case must be removed by hand before it can be reloaded.

"A hasty weapon. A weapon of desperation, thrown together by someone with only a few hours to work in."

Kallimer put the gun down. "A hopelessly inefficient and inadequate weapon. I am informed that the barrel was not even drilled parallel to the frame's long axis, and that the crude sights were also askew, further complicating the error in aiming. It is remarkable that Mr. Justice Joyce was struck at all, and it is no wonder at all that the Accused was never able to fire a second shot."

Joyce shook his head slightly. It was perfectly obvious how
the girl had managed to hit him. But then, Kallimer, with his slightly eccentric viewpoint, would not be likely to take The Messire into account.

Kallimer was speaking again.

"The point, however, isn't relevant here. It is the nature of this weapon which concerns us. Obviously, it was not constructed by anyone particularly skilled in the craft, and its design is hopelessly unimaginative. It is unlikely that any others exist. It follows, then, that the rebellion, if I may call it such for the moment, is largely confined to the Accused's immediate... ah... relations. No actual large-scale, organized effort exists.

"We have the testimony of Mr. Pedersen and the Guardsman. It seems obvious that the gun-thrower's plans culminated in the delivery of the weapon to the Accused. What followed was a spontaneous demonstration. This, together with some other relevant data already mentioned in testimony, is the basis on which we have formulated our programme of rectification."

Kallimer turned towards the centre of the table. "Justice Normandy."

Normandy was an aged, grey-headed man whose heavy brows hung low over his eyes. He rose out of his chair and supported his weight on his hands, leaning out over the table and looking towards the lesser Justices in their seats.

Joyce looked at him curiously.

Normandy had never been Chief Justice. He'd risen to Chief Associate under Kemple, the Chief Justice before the one Joyce had replaced. The oldest son of one of the First Families, Normandy had then retired from active work, becoming first Recorder and then Chairman of the Bar Association. He'd held the position longer than Joyce had been Chief Justice, and he was at least seventy.

Joyce wondered what he and Kallimer had decided to do. Normandy's voice was harsh with age. He forced each word out of his throat.

"Justice Kallimer has summed up very well. A purely personal rebellion against the Law in Nyack has touched off a spontaneous demonstration. You've noticed the lack of evidence implicating any ringleaders except the Accused's relations. They're nothing but woodworkers. There was some later participation by engineers, because it took training to see the importance of cutting off communications. But that wasn't until this emotional upheaval had a chance to get contagious.

"There's a certain rebellious feeling, yes. But it's hardly
born yet. It won’t spread unless we let it, and we won’t. By tomorrow afternoon, we’ll be back to normal.

“Thank you, Justices. This hearing’s concluded, and Mr. Joyce, Mr. Kallimer, and I will stay behind for further discussion.”

Joyce watched the lesser Justices file out of the hearing room, their manner much less nervous than it had been. Normandy had put some starch back into their spines.

Joyce, too, felt better. He’d been right in expecting Kallimer and Normandy to have a solution. He was leaving the Law in capable hands.

Normandy waited until the room was empty. Then he turned to Kallimer with an expression of disgust.

“Well, they believed it. I’d be happier if a few of them hadn’t.”

Kallimer shrugged. “There’s no telling. If any of them saw through it, they’d be intelligent enough not to show it.”

Normandy cocked an eyebrow, pursed his lips, and, after a moment, grinned. “That’s a good point.”

Joyce looked blankly at both of them. “I gather,” he said finally, “that the situation is more serious than was divulged.” He felt a slight return of his old disquiet, but nothing near panic.

Normandy and Kallimer turned in their chairs. Both of them looked at him speculatively.

Normandy nodded. “By quite a good bit. It took the engineers a while to realize what was happening, but they took over the rebellion within the first hour. They’re directing it now. We had to bomb the radio station and establish a false transmitter on the same wave length. It looks very much as though the engineers had a plan ready to use, but not quite this soon. They were caught a little short.”

Normandy grimaced. “Not short enough, though. We anticipated a little trouble down there, but we were unprepared for the discovery of anything like that. The guard can’t handle it. I sent in the Army this morning.”

Kallimer grunted. “You know,” he told Normandy, “I asked Joyce to reconsider his verdict.”

Normandy’s eyes snapped open. “You did? Why?”

“We didn’t need any tests, after all. I could smell the trouble in that crowd. It was that thick. They didn’t know it themselves, but they were spoiling for a riot.” He shrugged. “Joyce overruled me, of course. It’s a good thing, too, or we’d never have found out in time just how deep the trouble had dug.”

Normandy stared thoughtfully off into distance, his head
barely moving as he nodded to himself. “Yes,” he whispered under his breath.

He looked sharply at Joyce. “How much of this shocks you, Justice?”

Joyce was looking at the expression on Kallimer’s face. It had become coldly sardonic.

“I—” He broke off and shrugged in reply to Normandy’s question. “I don’t really know. But I’m sure you’re aware of what you’re doing.” Nevertheless, he was bewildered. He couldn’t quite make out what Kallimer had meant.

Normandy looked at him steadily, his black eyes watchful. “I’ve always been of two minds about you,” he said in a thoughtful voice. “I believe I chose wisely, but there’s no certainty, with individuals like you.” He grinned in his abrupt way. “But sometimes a calculated risk is justified. Sometimes, only an honest man will do.”

Joyce’s bewilderment was growing. He understood that Normandy was being much more candid with him than he had ever been before. Vaguely, he was aware that the situation had forced Normandy into it.

But if Normandy was being forced into drastic steps, then what did that say about Sam Joyce’s ability to do the proper thing in this crisis?

“There’s something I believe I should tell you,” he said quickly, conscious of a return to his earlier panic. He had to state his position as early in this discussion as possible, before Normandy and Kallimer assumed he could be counted on. “I’m... not sure of exactly what you mean about me,” he went on as Normandy and Kallimer looked at him curiously. “But there’s something you should know.”

He stopped to choose his words carefully. He had to convince these men that he wasn’t acting on impulse; that he’d thought this out. They deserved an explanation, after having assumed he’d help them. And, too, it was important to him personally. Possibly this was the most important decision of his life.

“I’ve been Chief Justice for a comparatively long time,” he began. He had; he’d always felt The Messire had a good servant in him, and, up until yesterday, The Messire had seemed to agree. He looked down at his hands. “I have a good record. I’ve done my best.

“You know my history. I began years ago, on a minor bench, and I rose step by step. No one has the skill with his gun or is better in the ritual of Trial than I was in my prime.” He looked up at Normandy and Kallimer, trying to see whether they understood him. “I feel that I’ve been a good Justice; that I’ve served The Messire’s Law as He
desired it. But I've always known I wasn't the most brilliant man on the bench. I haven't delivered many famous opinions, and I'm no lawyer's lawyer. I've simply—&he gestured indecisively—"been a Justice for a long time." He paused momentarily.

"But this," he went on in a low voice, "is beyond my capabilities." He looked down again. "I know I haven't the capacity to do my duty properly in this situation. I'd like to resign in Justice Kallimer's favour."

There was a long silence. Joyce did not look up, but sat thinking of the foolish things he'd done and thought during the past two days.

He looked up finally, and saw Normandy's quizzical expression. Kallimer's face was a nonplussed blank.

Normandy tented his fingers and blew out a breath over them. "I see." He looked cryptically at Kallimer, and Kallimer seemed to exchange some silent message with him.

Kallimer spoke slowly. "Mr. Joyce, I know you well enough to realize this hasn't been a hasty decision. Would you mind telling me what led you to it?"

Joyce shook his head. "Not at all. I've decided that this is the only possible interpretation of yesterday's events in the plaza. It seems clear to me that The Messire's intent was to have me do what I've just done."

Normandy jerked his head violently, and stared at Joyce. "I'll be damned!" he exploded.

Kallimer's mouth twisted. "This is hardly what I expected to result from our talk yesterday," he muttered. He looked at Joyce with perverse admiration. Then he spoke to Normandy. "Well, Justice, there's your honest man."

Normandy shot Kallimer one sour look before he turned back to Joyce. His voice grated harshly.

"That's all well and good, but you're not resigning. Not now, at least, and never in Kallimer's favour. You've still got one Trial to run, and Kallimer's after my job, not yours."

"Not until after you've retired, Justice," Kallimer interjected, turning his sardonic smile on Normandy. "I've made it clear I have no intention of competing with you. Furthermore, I'm your only natural heir in any case." He chuckled for the first time in Joyce's experience. "There aren't many like us born to each generation, are there, Justice?"

Joyce sat numbly, unable to decide what he thought of Normandy's outburst.

"Justice Normandy—" he said finally.

"What?"

"You say I've still got one Trial—"

"Yes!"

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"But, if The Messire has indicated that He no longer considers me competent, the Trial will be prejudiced—"

Normandy thrust himself out of his chair and away from the table. His eyes were blazing, and his hands trembled. "Damn your Messire! He didn’t meddle with your last trial, did he?"

"Sir?"

Normandy cursed again and turned away. "Kallimer, talk to this moron! I’ve had enough." He stalked out of the hearing room, and the door crashed behind him.

Kallimer was looking after him with a faint look of exasperation tingeing the amusement of his mouth.

"He’s getting old, Joyce." Kallimer sighed. "Well, I suppose the day will come when I’ll have no more patience, either. It’s a shaky pedestal he sits on."

Joyce was in a turmoil. He knew his face was pale.

Kallimer turned back to him. "There’s been an insertion made in your court calendar," he told him. "Tomorrow, you’ll hold a special mass trial for the engineers the Army will be dragging out of Nyack. They’ll be indicted as ‘members of the people.’ Their origin won’t be specified—no use alarming the nation. Is there? I suppose there’ll be a variety of charges. I’ll set them up tonight. But the verdict’ll be ‘Completely Guilty’ in every case. You and I and a couple of other Justices will handle the executions."

Joyce found himself unable to argue with more than the last few statements. Too much was happening.

"A mass trial? Here, in New York, you mean. For the Nyack rebels. But that’s illegal!"

Kallimer nodded. "So are improper indictment and prejudged verdict. But so is rebellion.

"This folderol of Normandy’s has a rather shrewd point. The rebels will be punished, but the general populace won’t know what for. Only the other rebellious organizations scattered throughout the country will realize what’s happened. It’ll slow down their enthusiasm, giving us time to root them out."

Joyce looked down at the floor to hide the expression on his face. Kallimer seemed not at all concerned with breaking the spirit of the Law. Normandy was even more blunt than that.

It was a frightening step in his logic, but there was only one possible answer. Both of them were acting as though man made the Law, and men administered the final verdict; as though there were no Messire.
He looked up at Kallimer, wondering what his face was showing of the sudden emptiness in his stomach. He felt as though he was looking down at the Associate from a great height, or up from the bottom of a pit.

“What did Normandy mean about my last trial?” he asked in a low voice.

“First of all, Joyce, bear in mind that The Messire is omniscient. He knows of more crimes than we possibly can. Even if we judge a case incorrectly, it is possible our verdict is nevertheless justified by some other crime of the Accused’s.”

He looked at Joyce with a flicker of anxiety flashing subtly across his face, leaning even closer, and Joyce’s first emptiness became a twinge of disgust and sickness.

“I accept that,” Joyce said, the words tasting cottony in his mouth, but wanting to urge Kallimer on.

Kallimer twitched his shoulders. “Perhaps you do,” he muttered. Joyce appreciated, with a deep, bitter amusement that never came to the surface, just how much Kallimer must hate Normandy for leaving him with this task to perform.

“In any case,” Kallimer went on, “about the girl, yesterday; Normandy’s son had heard some things from her. A lot of unrest in Nyack; talk; dissatisfaction; that sort of thing. He told his father.

“It wasn’t the only place we’d heard that from, but it was our only real lead. It was decided that a trial, with a particularly controversial member of the people as the Accused, might bring enough of it to the surface for us to gauge its importance.”

He stopped and shook his head. “It certainly did. We hadn’t the faintest idea it was that strong, or that close to exploding. Sheer luck we found it out.”

Joyce looked steadily at Kallimer, hoping his face was calm. “The girl wasn’t guilty.”

Kallimer’s mouth twitched. “Not of the charge we tried her on, no. Normandy’s son accused her on his father’s orders. You were sent down to try the case because we could predict you’d give us the verdict we wanted. I went along to observe.”

Joyce nodded slowly. “I think I understand, now,” he said.

In the middle of the day, just at noon, Samson Joyce stood at the foot of the high steps behind New York City’s onyx judges’ bench.

“Ready, Justice?” Kallimer asked him.
“Yes,” Joyce answered. He replaced the ceremonial gun in its tooled holster.

Kallimer looked at him again and shook his head. “Justice, if we weren’t in public, I’d offer you my hand. You hit bottom and you’ve come up swinging.”

Joyce’s lower lip tugged upwards at the corners. “Thank you, Justice,” he said, and prepared to walk up the steps on his aching legs.

Emily had been puzzled, too, as he prepared to leave her this morning.

“Sam, I can’t understand you,” she’d said worriedly, watching him scowl with pain as he stood up from putting on his boots.

He smiled at her, ignoring the ache in his legs. “Why?”

“You haven’t slept in two nights, now. I know something new happened yesterday.”

He bent and kissed her, still smiling.

“Sam, what is it?” she asked, the tears beginning to show at the corners of her eyes. “You’re too calm. And you won’t talk to me.”

He shrugged. “Perhaps I’ll tell you about it later.”

The steps seemed almost inhumanly high today, though he’d walked up them often. He reached the centre of the bench gratefully, and leaned against the parapet. Looking down, he saw the Accused standing in their box. They’d been given new clothing, and an attempt had been made to hide their bandages. They were a sullen, dun-coloured knot of men and women.

He looked across the plaza at the First Family boxes, crowded with the family men and their ladies, and the lesser family boxes flanking them. There was the usual overflow of people, too, and a doubled force of Civil Guards.

The Accused, the First Families, the lesser families, the people, and even some of the Civil Guards, were all watching him. For all that a number of Justices would go through the full ritual of Trial today, he was the only one who wore the Suit.

When he’d come home to Emily last night, she’d asked him what had happened, looking up at his calm face.

“I went to Chapel after the hearing,” he’d told her, and now he seemed to stand there again.

Lowery, one of Manhattan’s Associate Justices, began to read the indictments. It was only then that Joyce realized there’d been applause for him and his Associates, and that he’d automatically instructed Lowery to begin.
He listened to the solemn beat of the words in the plaza. This was Trial. Once again, men stood before The Messire, and, once again, the Justices endeavoured to act as proper instruments of His justice.

Thirty years of trials had brought him here, in his Suit. In that time, The Messire had thought well of him.

But Kallimer and Normandy had planted the dirty seed of doubt in his mind, and though he knew them for what they were, still, the doubt was there. If the girl had been innocent, how had he been permitted to execute his unjust sentence upon her?

Kallimer had given him an answer for that, but Kallimer had given him too many answers already. It wasn’t until he stood in Chapel, watching the candles flicker, that he understood where the test would lie.

If there was no Messire—the thought bewildered him, but he clung to it for argument’s sake—then every particle of his life was false, and the ideal he served was dust.

If there was an Ultimate Judge—and how many noons, in thirty years, had brought him the feeling of communion with his Judge—then Joyce knew where to make his appeal.

He looked across the plaza at Joshua Normandy’s box, and reflected that Normandy could not begin to guess the magnitude of what was undergoing Trial today.

He put his hand inside his vest and closed his fingers around the butt of his Grennell. It was his gun. It had served him as he had served The Messire; efficiently, without question.

Here was where the test came; here where men prayed to The Messire for the ultimate, infallible judgment.

The Messire knew the guilty, and the innocent; punished the one and protected the other. Joyce was only His instrument, and Trial the opportunity for His judgment to become apparent.

He whispered to himself: “I pray my verdict is correct, but if it is not, I pray that justice prevail at this trial.” He took out the gun.

He turned quickly, and fired in Kallimer’s direction. He fired across the plaza at Joshua Normandy. Then he began to fire at random into the First Family boxes, seeing Normandy collapse in his box, hearing Kallimer’s body tumble backwards off the bench, and knowing, whether he was right or wrong, that whatever happened now, The Messire had not, at least, reversed his verdict.

This was the Truth he’d lived for.
NULL-P

William Tenn

SEVERAL MONTHS AFTER the Second Atomic War, when radioactivity still held one-third of the planet in desolation, Dr. Daniel Glurt of Fillmore Township, Wisconsin, stumbled upon a discovery which was to generate humanity's ultimate sociological advance.

Like Columbus, smug over his voyage to India; like Nobel, proud of the synthesis of dynamite which made combat between nations impossible, the doctor misinterpreted his discovery. Years later, he cackled to a visiting historian:

"Had no idea it would lead to this, no idea at all. You remember, the war had just ended: we were feeling mighty subdued what with the eastern and western coasts of the United States practically sizzled away. Well, word came down from the new capital at Topeka in Kansas for us doctors to give all our patients a complete physical check. Sort of be on the lookout, you know, for radioactive burns and them fancy new diseases the armies had been tossing back and forth. Well, sir, that's absolutely all I set out to do. I'd known George Abnego for over thirty years—treated him for chicken-pox and pneumonia and ptomaine poisoning. I'd never suspected!"

Having reported to Dr. Glurt's office immediately after work in accordance with the proclamation shouted through the streets by the county clerk, and having waited patiently in line for an hour and a half, George Abnego was at last received into the small consulting room. Here he was thoroughly chest-thumped, X-rayed, blood-sampled and urine analysed. His skin was examined carefully, and he was made to answer the five hundred questions prepared by the Department of Health in a pathetic attempt to cover the symptoms of the new ailments.

George Abnego then dressed and went home to the cereal supper permitted for that day by the ration board. Dr. Glurt placed his folder in a drawer and called for the next patient. He had noticed nothing up to this point; yet already he had unwittingly begun the Abnegite Revolution.

Four days later, the health survey of Fillmore, Wisconsin, being complete, the doctor forwarded the examination re-
ports to Topeka. Just before signing George Abnego's sheet, he glanced at it cursorily, raised his eyebrows and entered the following note: "Despite the tendency to dental caries and athlete's foot, I would consider this man to be of average health. Physically, he is the Fillmore Township norm."

It was this last sentence which caused the government medical official to chuckle and glance at the sheet once more. His smile was puzzled after this; it was even more puzzled after he had checked the figures and statements on the form against standard medical references.

He wrote a phrase in red ink in the right-hand corner and sent it along to Research.

His name is lost to history.

Research wondered why the report on George Abnego had been sent up—he had no unusual symptoms portending exotic innovations like cerebral measles or arterial trilhinosis. Then it observed the phrase in red ink and Dr. Glurt's remark. Research shrugged its anonymous shoulders and assigned a crew of statisticians to go further into the matter.

A week later, as a result of their findings, another crew—nine medical specialists—left for Fillmore. They examined George Abnego with co-ordinated precision. Afterwards, they called on Dr. Glurt briefly, leaving a copy of their examination report with him when he expressed interest.

Ironically, the government copies were destroyed in the Topeka Hard-Shelled Baptist Riots a month later, the same riots which stimulated Dr. Glurt to launch the Abnegite Revolution.

This Baptist denomination, because of population shrinkage due to atomic and bacteriological warfare, was now the largest single religious body in the nation. It was then controlled by a group pledged to the establishment of a Hard-Shelled Baptist theocracy in what was left of the United States. The rioters were quelled after much destruction and bloodshed; their leader, the Reverend Hemingway T. Gaunt—who had vowed that he would remove neither the pistol from his left hand nor the Bible from his right until the Rule of God had been established and the Third Temple built—was sentenced to death by a jury composed of stern-faced fellow Baptists.

Commenting on the riots, the Fillmore, Wisconsin, Bugle-Herald drew a mournful parallel between the Topeka street battles and the destruction wreaked upon the world by atomic conflict.

"International communication and transportation having broken down," the editorial went on broodingly, "we now know little of the smashed world in which we live beyond
such meagre facts as the complete disappearance of Australia beneath the waves, and the contraction of Europe to the Pyrenees and Ural Mountains. We know that our planet's physical appearance has changed as much from what it was ten years ago, as the infant monstrosities and mutants being born everywhere as a result of radioactivity are unpleasantly different from their parents.

"Truly, in these days of mounting catastrophe and change, our faltering spirits beg the heavens for a sign, a portent, that all will be well again, that all will yet be as it once was, that the waters of disaster will subside and we shall once more walk upon the solid ground of normalcy."

It was this last word which attracted Dr. Glurt's attention. That night, he slid the report of the special government medical crew into the newspaper's mail slot. He had pencilled a laconic note in the margin of the first page:

"Noticed your interest in the subject."

Next week's edition of the Fillmore Bugle-Herald flaunted a page one five-column headline.

FILLMORE CITIZEN THE SIGN?
Normal Man of Fillmore May Be Answer From Above
Local Doctor Reveals Government Medical Secret

The story that followed was liberally sprinkled with quotations taken equally from the government report and the Psalms of David. The startled residents of Fillmore learned that one George Abnego, a citizen unnoticed in their midst for almost forty years, was a living abstraction. Through a combination of circumstances no more remarkable than those producing a royal flush in stud poker, Abnego's physique, psyche, and other miscellaneous attributes had resulted in that legendary creature—the statistical average.

According to the last census taken before the war, George Abnego's height and weight were identical with the mean of the American adult male. He had married at the exact age—year, month, day—when statisticians had estimated the marriage of the average man took place; he had married a woman the average number of years younger than himself; his income as declared on his last tax statement was the average income for that year. The very teeth in his mouth tallied in quantity and condition with those predicted by the American Dental Association to be found on a man extracted at random from the population. Abnego's metabolism and blood pressure, his bodily proportions and private neurons, were all cross-sections of the latest available records. Subjected to every psychological and personality test available, his final,
overall grade corrected out to show that he was both average and normal.

Finally, Mrs. Abneo had been recently delivered of their third child, a boy. This development had not only occurred at exactly the right time according to the population indices, but it had resulted in an entirely normal sample of humanity—unlike most babies being born throughout the land.

The Bugle-Herald blared its hymn to the new celebrity around a greasy photograph of the family in which the assembled Abnegos stared glassily out at the reader, looking, as many put it, "Average—average as hell!"

Newspapers in other states were invited to copy.

They did, slowly at first, then with an accelerating, contagious enthusiasm. Indeed, as the intense public interest in this symbol of stability, this refugee from the extremes, became manifest, newspaper columns gushed fountains of purple prose about the "Normal Man of Fillmore."

At Nebraska State University, Professor Roderick Klingmeister noticed that many members of his biology class were wearing extra-large buttons decorated with pictures of George Abneo. "Before beginning my lecture," he chuckled, "I would like to tell you that this 'normal man' of yours is no Messiah. All he is, I am afraid, is a bell-shaped curve with ambitions, the median made flesh—"

He got no further. He was brained with his own demonstration microscope.

Even that early, a few watchful politicians noticed that no one was punished for this hasty act.

The incident could be related to many others which followed: the unfortunate and unknown citizen of Duluth, for example, who—at the high point of that city's Welcome Average Old Abneo parade—was heard to remark in good-natured amazement, "Why, he's just an ordinary jerk like you and me," and was immediately torn into celebratory confetti by horrified neighbours in the crowd.

Developments such as these received careful consideration from men whose power was derived from the just, if well-directed, consent of the governed.

George Abneo, these gentry concluded, represented the maturation of a great national myth which, implicit in the culture for over a century, had been brought to garish fulfillment by the mass communication and entertainment media.

This was the myth that began with the juvenile appeal to be "A Normal Red-Blooded American Boy" and ended, on the highest political levels, with a shirt-sleeved, suspended seeker after political office boasting, "Shucks, everybody knows who I am. I'm folks—just plain folks."
This was the myth from which were derived such superficially disparate practices as the rite of political baby-kissing, the cult of "keeping up with the Joneses," the foppish, foolish, forever-changing fads which went through the population with the monotonous regularity and sweep of a windshield wiper. The myth of styles and fraternal organizations. The myth of the "regular fellow."

There was a presidential election that year.

Since all that remained of the United States was the Middle West, the Democratic Party had disappeared. Its remnants had been absorbed by a group calling itself the Old Guard Republicans, the closest thing to an American Left. The party in power—the Conservative Republicans—so far right as to verge upon royalism, had acquired enough pledged theocratic votes to make them smug about the election.

Desperately, the Old Guard Republicans searched for a candidate. Having regretfully passed over the adolescent epileptic recently elected to the governorship of South Dakota in violation of the state constitution—and deciding against the psalm-singing grandmother from Oklahoma who punctuated her senatorial speeches with religious music upon the banjo—the party strategists arrived, one summer afternoon, in Fillmore, Wisconsin.

From the moment that Abnego was persuaded to accept the nomination and his last well-intentioned but flimsy objection was overcome (the fact that he was a registered member of the opposition party), it was obvious that the tide of battle had turned, that the fabled grass roots had caught fire.

Abnego ran for President on the slogan "Back to Normal with the Normal Man!"

By the time the Conservative Republicans met in conference assembled, the danger of loss by landslide was already apparent. They changed their tactics, tried to meet the attack head-on and imaginatively.

They nominated a hunchback for the presidency. This man suffered from the additional disability of being a distinguished professor of law in a leading university; he had married with no issue and divorced with much publicity; and finally, he had once admitted to a congressional investigating committee that he had written and published surrealist poetry. Posters depicting him leering horribly, his hump twice life-size, were smeared across the country over the slogan: "An Abnormal Man for an Abnormal World!"

Despite this brilliant political stroke, the issue was never in doubt. On Election Day, the nostalgic slogan defeated its medicative adversary by three to one. Four years later, with
the same opponents, it had risen to five and a half to one. And there was no organized opposition when Abnego ran for a third term.

Not that he had crushed it. There was more casual liberty of political thought allowed during Abnego’s administrations than in many previous ones. But less political thinking was done.

Whenever possible, Abnego avoided decision. When a decision was unavoidable, he made it entirely on the basis of precedent. He rarely spoke on a topic of current interest and never committed himself. He was garrulous and an exhibitionist only about his family.

“How can you lampoon a vacuum?” This had been the wail of many opposition newspaper writers and cartoonists during the early years of the Abnegite Revolution, when men still ran against Abnego at election time. They tried to draw him into ridiculous statements or admissions time and again without success. Abnego was simply incapable of saying anything that any major cross-section of the population would consider ridiculous.

Emergencies? “Well,” Abnego had said, in the story every school-child knew, “I’ve noticed even the biggest forest fire will burn itself out. Main thing is not to get excited.”

He made them lie down in low blood-pressure areas. And, after years of building and destruction, of stimulation and conflict, of accelerating anxieties and torments, they rested and were humbly grateful.

It seemed to many, from the day Abnego was sworn in, that chaos began to waver and everywhere a glorious, welcome stability flowered. In some respect, such as the decrease in the number of monstrous births, processes were under way which had nothing at all to do with the Normal Man of Fillmore; in others—the astonished announcement by lexicographers, for example, that slang expressions peculiar to teenagers in Abnego’s first term were used by their children in exactly the same contexts eighteen years later in his fifth administration—the historical levelling-out and patting-down effects of the Abnegite trowel were obvious.

The verbal expression of this great calm was the Abnegism. History’s earliest record of these deftly phrased inadequacies relates to the administration in which Abnego, at last feeling secure enough to do so, appointed a cabinet without any regard to the wishes of his party hierarchy. A journalist, attempting to point up the absolute lack of colour in the new official family, asked if any one of them—from Secretary of State to Postmaster-General—had ever committed himself
publicly on any issue or, in previous positions, had been responsible for a single constructive step in any direction.
To which the President supposedly replied with a bland, unhesitating smile, "I always say there's no hard feelings if no one's defeated. Well, sir, no one's defeated in a fight where the referee can't make a decision."
Apocryphal though it may have been, this remark expressed the mood of Abnegite America perfectly. "As pleasant as a no-decision bout" became part of everyday language.
Certainly as apocryphal as the George Washington cherry-tree legend, but the most definite Abnegism of them all, was the one attributed to the President after a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. "It is better not to have loved at all, than to have loved and lost," he is reported to have remarked at the morbid end of the play.
At the inception of Abnego's sixth term—the first in which his oldest son served with him as Vice-President—a group of Europeans re-opened trade with the United States by arriving in a cargo ship assembled from the salvaged parts of three sunken destroyers and one capsized aircraft carrier.
Received everywhere with undemonstrative cordiality, they travelled the country, amazed at the placidity—the almost total absence of political and military excitement on the one hand, and the rapid technological retrogression on the other. One of the emissaries sufficiently mislaid his diplomatic caution to comment before he left:
"We came to America, to these cathedrals of industrialism, in the hope that we would find solutions to many vexing problems of applied science. These problems—the development of atomic power for factory use, the application of nuclear fission to such small arms as pistols and hand grenades—stand in the way of our postwar recovery. But you, in what remains of the United States of America, don't even see what we, in what remains of Europe, consider so complex and pressing. Excuse me, but what you have here is a national trance!"
His American hosts were not offended: they received his expostulations with polite smiles and shrugs. The delegate returned to tell his countrymen that the Americans, always notorious for their madness, had finally specialized in cretinism.
But another delegate who had observed widely and asked many searching questions went back to his native Toulouse (French culture had once more coagulated in Provence) to define the philosophical foundations of the Abnegite Revolution.
In a book which was read by the world with enormous interest, Michel Gaston Fouffnique, sometime Professor of
History at the Sorbonne, pointed out that while twentieth-century man had escaped from the narrow Greek formulations sufficiently to visualize a non-Aristotelian logic and a non-Euclidean geometry, he had not yet had the intellectual temerity to create a non-Platonic system of politics. Not until Abnego.

"Since the time of Socrates," wrote Monsieur Fouffnique, "Man's political viewpoints have been in thrall to the conception that the best should govern. How to determine that 'best,' the scale of values to be used in order that the 'best' and not mere undifferentiated 'betters' should rule—these have been the basic issues around which have raged the fires of political controversy for almost three millennia. Whether an aristocracy of birth or intellect should prevail is an argument over values; whether rulers should be determined by the will of a god as determined by the entrails of a hog, or selected by the whole people on the basis of a ballot tally—these are alternatives in method. But hitherto no political system has ventured away from the implicit and unexamined assumption first embodied in the philosopher-state of Plato's Republic.

"Now, at last, America has turned and questioned the pragmatic validity of the axiom. The young democracy to the west, which introduced the concept of the Rights of Man to jurisprudence, now gives a feverish world the Doctrine of the Lowest Common Denominator in government. According to this doctrine, as I have come to understand it through prolonged observation, it is not the worst who should govern—as many of my prejudiced fellow-delegates insist—but the mean: what might be termed the 'unbest' or the 'non-élite.'"

Situated amid the still radioactive rubbish of modern war, the people of Europe listened devoutly to readings from Fouffnique's monograph. They were enthralled by the peaceful monotonies said to exist in the United States and bored by the academician's reasons thereto: that a governing group who knew to begin with that they were "unbest" would be free of the myriad jealousies and conflicts arising from the need to prove individual superiority, and that such a group would tend to smooth any major quarrel very rapidly because of the dangerous opportunities created for imaginative and resourceful people by conditions of struggle and strain.

There were oligarchs here and bosses there; in one nation an ancient religious order still held sway, in another, calculating and brilliant men continued to lead the people. But the word was preached. Shamans appeared in the population, ordinary-looking folk who were called "abnegos." Tyrants found it impossible to destroy these shamans, since they were
not chosen for any special abilities but simply because they represented the median of a given group: the middle of any population grouping, it was found, lasts as long as the group itself. Therefore, through bloodshed and much time, the abnegos spread their philosophy and flourished.

Oliver Abnego, who became the first President of the World, was President Abnego VI of the United States of America. His son presided—as Vice-President—over a Senate composed mostly of his uncles and his cousins and his aunts. They and their numerous offspring lived in an economy which had deteriorated very, very slightly from the conditions experienced by the founder of their line.

As world president, Oliver Abnego approved only one measure—that granting preferential university scholarships to students whose grades were closest to their age-group median all over the planet. The President could hardly have been accused of originality and innovation unbecoming to his high office, however, since for some time now all reward systems—scholastic, athletic, and even industrial—had been adjusted to recognition of the most average achievement while castigating equally the highest and lowest scores.

When the usable oil gave out shortly afterwards, men turned with perfect calmness to coal. The last turbines were placed in museums while still in operating condition: the people they served felt their isolated and individual use of electricity was too ostentatious for good abnegism.

Outstanding cultural phenomena of this period were carefully rhymed and exactly metered poems addressed to the nondescript beauties and vague charms of a wife or sweetheart. Had not anthropology disappeared long ago, it would have become a matter of common knowledge that there was a startling tendency to uniformity everywhere in such qualities as bone structure, features and pigmentation, not to mention intelligence, musculature, and personality. Humanity was breeding rapidly and unconsciously in towards its centre.

None the less, just before the exhaustion of coal, there was a brief sputter of intellect among a group who established themselves on a site north-west of Cairo. These Nilotics, as they were known, consisted mostly of unreconstructed dissidents expelled by their communities, with a leavening of the mentally ill and the physically handicapped; they had at their peak an immense number of technical gadgets and yellowing books culled from crumbling museums and libraries the world over.

Intensely ignored by their fellow-men, the Nilotics carried on shrill and interminable debates while ploughing their muddy fields just enough to keep alive. They concluded that
they were the only surviving heirs of *homo sapiens*, the bulk of the world’s population now being composed of what they termed *homo abnegus*.

Man’s evolutionary success, they concluded, had been due chiefly to his lack of specialization. While other creatures had been forced to standardize to a particular and limited environment, mankind had been free for a tremendous spurt, until ultimately it had struck an environmental factor which demanded the price all viable forms had to pay eventually—specialization.

Having come this far in discussion, the Nilotics determined to use the ancient weapons at their disposal to save *homo abnegus* from himself. However, violent disagreements over the methods of re-education to be employed, led them to a bloody internecine conflict with those same weapons in the course of which the entire colony was destroyed and its site made untenable for life. About this time, his coal used up, Man re-entered the broad, self-replenishing forests.

The reign of *homo abnegus* endured for a quarter of a million years. It was disputed finally—and successfully—by a group of Newfoundland retrievers who had been marooned on an island in Hudson Bay when the cargo vessel transporting them to new owners had sunk back in the twentieth century.

These sturdy and highly intelligent dogs, limited perforce to each other’s growling society for several hundred millennia, learned to talk in much the same manner that mankind’s simian ancestors had learned to walk when a sudden shift in botany destroyed their ancient arboreal homes—out of boredom. Their wits sharpened further by the hardships of their bleak island, their imaginations stimulated by the cold, the articulate retrievers built a most remarkable canine civilization in the Arctic before sweeping southward to enslave and eventually domesticate humanity.

Domestication took the form of breeding men solely for their ability to throw sticks and other objects, the retrieving of which was a sport still popular among the new masters of the planet, however sedentary certain erudite individuals might have become.

Highly prized as pets were a group of men with incredibly thin and long arms; another school of retrievers, however, favoured a stocky breed whose arms were short, but extremely sinewy; while, occasionally, interesting results were obtained by inducing rickets for a few generations to produce a pet whose arms were sufficiently limber as to appear almost boneless. This last type, while intriguing both aesthetically and scientifically, was generally decried as a sign of
decadence in the owner as well as a functional insult to the animal.

Eventually, of course, the retriever civilization developed machines which could throw sticks farther, faster, and with more frequency. Thereupon, except in the most backward canine communities, Man disappeared.

**INANIMATE OBJECTION**

Chandler Elliott

**Dr. Carl Wahl** (intern) skinned over the highlights of the Worksheet, Mental Status, as it strove presumptuously to fix the outlines of human personality—and an off-beat one at that:

**Patient’s Name:** (Maj.) Angus G. Burnside. **Age:** 57. **Doctor:** Wm. Svindorff, Dr. Matthew Loftus in attendance.

**General History:** Army Engineers, specialist electric communications. Retired small Catskill estate 1949. No record of major trauma or disease. **Kin:** Married, Ruth Elvira, *née* Barker, aged 35, she says. Relationship amicable but somewhat distant.

**Attitude:** Quiet, co-operative. Personal habits meticulous. Permitted unlimited access to books and electronic materials. Coherent outside limits of his mania. **Emotional Reaction Affect:** Calm, amused at his own situation. **Nature of Aberration:** Believes inanimate objects display active hostility. This is not directed at himself personally. In fact, he believes he can circumvent it more readily than most, but expresses concern for safety of the human race. Discusses this belief with scholarship and detachment. **Examples:** Said to nurse (Miss Clements): “Your apron-bow is waiting to pick something off that tray.” Said to me (Loftus): “I'd fix that loose heel if I were you. If it hasn't thrown you yet, it's just waiting for an opportunity to really break your neck.”

“Well, hell!” said Dr. Carl Wahl. “That's just a picturesque way of expressing commonplace facts. He sees something that's liable to cause an accident, and personifies it. Why put a mild eccentric like that in here, when we can't accommodate urgent cases?”

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Dr. Matthew Loftus (resident) grimaced: “Since you ask, I’ll agree it stinks. Of course, those excerpts don’t give you any real idea. He’s as psychotic as a jaybird, no doubt at all. He conducts himself entirely according to his fixation. And he’s got it all worked out in theory, too; damnedest stuff you ever heard, plausible as only a complete psychotic can be—half convinces you, till you get away from his spell and have a chance to think. But I agree... he certainly should not be here.”

Wahl put the Worksheet on Matt Loftus’ desk, looking interested. “You would draw the only ripsnorter with ideas in this grab-bag of catatotics and dement.”

“Not to mention dipsos and plain stumblebums,” Matt Loftus grinned. “And that old lady who makes immoral paper dolls.” He looked at the sheet almost fondly. “A little old-fashioned, poetic madness is rather refreshing, isn’t it? And Angus Burnside is a gentleman and scholar of some old school, and a most engaging conversationalist. I frequent his lair considerably more than is strictly required. Tell you what, Carl... I’ll take you on as consultant, if you’re interested. You could get next to him on music; he’s got a terrific audio system up there, and he actually plays it as much as he tinkers with it. Best company in the institute.”

“That,” said Carl Wahl, “is a deal.”

That afternoon, after a non-institutional knock and a polite summons from within, the two men entered the Major’s room. Large by local standards, it could have been a good hotel-room-with-bath, except for the barred windows and general starkness. The chintzy curtains, cheery rugs, and optimistic pictures usually found in high-class mental wards were absent, replaced with dialled cabinets, a long shelf of records and tape spools, and an electrician’s workbench of impressive resources.

The occupant, rising from the bench to face his visitors, would have dominated a much more distracting environment—say, an amphibious retreat under enemy fire. He was a lean, brown man; his hair was silver but thick; his white moustache was clipped with extreme precision. His grey eyes were merry and kind, however: in that amphibious débâcle, he would be the type to rescue men physically by diving in, or mentally with acrid jests. Carl’s practised glance could note none of the little tics or rigidities that often betray underlying dislocation of nerves or mind.

The Major immediately put everybody on terms of informal equality by displaying the wireless relay he was arranging between is phonograph amplifier and speaker. Then, with the smartness of a precision-drill squad, he clicked back into
racks and drawers the few tools and bits of material in use, and turned to Carl with disconcerting candour: “I suppose you want to hear my theory—or mania? Fine! Make yourselves comfortable.”

Matt draped himself on the bed and Carl took an armchair. The two were a complete contrast: Matt, behind a youthful face and mild voice, kept in ambush a mind as incisive as an electric scalpel; Carl, raw-boned and lank-haired, was a very reliable citizen, but he harboured a quiet mysticism that was often invaluable in establishing rapport with the mentally unconventional.

“I’ll ask you,” the Major began, “to consider my thesis as dispassionately as our relative positions will allow. For a start, perhaps you’ll admit that any notion, however apparently fantastic, that has been held by many ages and cultures is worth scientific investigation, if only to explain it away.” They nodded.

“Good,” said the Major. “Now, few notions have been so universally held as the one I shall discuss: that what we call inanimate objects have a will of their own. The ancients endowed them with spirits—lares, oreads and so on. Medieval alchemists described an elaborate, if largely arbitrary, system of sympathies and antipathies—not personification, but something far subtler. Modern science simply shrugs: fantasies of dawning reason. An opinion without proof, I submit. In the last war our fliers, the flower of the mechanical age, devised the Gremlins—whole fun and half earnest—for they sensed something more than a chance mechanical failure... some Thing malicious and aggressive.”

Carl was attentively analysing manner as well as matter: the Major’s logic was certainly off the gold standard—the case built on random gleanings, the disregard for alternative possibilities. Yet certain psychotic qualities were lacking: the grandiose seriousness, the touchiness, the air of knockdown argument. And, an inner mentor reminded, the ability to select significant detail was often the trademark of genius: “great wits are oft to madness near allied...”

“Of course,” the Major continued, “the idea flouts sacred axioms. But, after all... sacred? Science is study of evidence, not recitation of a creed. And aren’t the axioms being badly strained? ‘If you knew all the physical factors, you could explain everything.’ Safe enough, since you never will know them. But your axioms work to a high approximation in certain carefully selected and managed cases, so you reject all other explanations for everything, in the name of a spurious unity.”
So he did consider alternatives, Carl thought. Aloud, he asked, “What evidence exists for any other explanations?”

“Ha! That’s exactly my ‘mania.’ By the theory of probability, you get a straight flush in every-so-many poker hands. But what if straight flushes crop up all over?”

Matt objected: “We’ve already discussed how easily you can prove dreams are prophetic if you record the ones that turn out and disregard the rest, and so on.”

“True enough. And you can prove tigers’ claws or 17-desoxy-bethylene are miracle-drugs, if you stress the cures and explain away the regrettable fatalities.”


“Also, I’ve already admitted that my weak point is getting things on a statistical basis. I’ve been collecting data for years—” he gestured towards a row of fat notebooks beside his records—“but things like poker hands, which you can tabulate easily, are obviously least likely to illustrate my point—they’re too simple, mechanically, to enjoy much freedom of action. Besides…” He smiled faintly.

“Go on,” said Matt. “You think this is a weak link… sounds irrational. Seriously, it impressed me as genuine observation.”

“Glad to know it, Doctor. Well, you know that the presence of an observer changes conditions so you can’t know what would have happened with no observer. That won’t perceptibly affect motion of a falling body, or other such elementary cases. But in complex, versatile systems, I believe the effect increases enormously. I believe physical processes know they’re being observed and evade analysis—I’m using ‘know’ as engineers do when they use the expression. ‘How does the value know force is applied?’”

Carl was drawn off guard: “There’s a traffic light at Tenth and Capitol I swear goes red just as I reach it—oh, four times in five. I tried keeping count once, and I’m certain the frequency changed while I was doing it.”

“More likely your car than the light. Anyway, there you are. If you can’t get statistics, you have to fall back on intuition, and that isn’t science.”

“Well, then,” Carl made amends to his professional conscience, “there isn’t much point bothering with it, is there?”

“Sometimes I fear not. But if enough people were thinking along those lines, someone might hit on a way to fool the resistance. Anyway, amuse yourself applying my theory and see how it fits.” The Major dismissed the topic and talked electronics for the rest of the visit.

“Well,” Matt grinned afterwards, “isn’t that a honey of a mania? His science is topdrawer stuff, too. Tell you what:
I'll lay you a dollar even that you'll be taking him 'whole fun and half earnest,' as he put it, by Christmas. I know you won't cheat for that little: in fact, knowing you, it'll make you confess if you weaken."

Carl laughed and took him up. Which meant that he had to take the Major's suggestion at least in half earnest. But he needed amusement. In addition to a merciless load of work at an institute half destaffed by flu, he had worries: his wife Clare, of whom he was somewhat fond, had the flu too, followed by pneumonia and complicated by allergic reaction to the antibiotics applied. Having had a fortnight off during the emergency, he could not decently get down to their little apartment more than once or twice in the next fortnight, and he was a type who worried quietly but effectively. He found Major Burnside's fantasy a distraction, and even hoped it would later appeal to Clare's lively sense of humour.

So he collected instances: the dollar pencil that dropped on its rubber and vaulted into the plumbless depths of a hot-air register; the tiny rip in the sleeve of his white jacket that snagged on the tap of a coffee urn, causing him to slop a cup of scalding coffee over trousers and ankle; the page of vital report that blew off his worktable and slid craftily behind a newspaper in the waste-basket; and a dozen more commonplace acts of malice by familiar objects.

He had to convince himself that the laws of chance adequately covered each incident; but also he had to grapple with underlying implications. So Sunday afternoon he seized a breathing-space to go up, armed with a clearance from Matt, to reason with the Major.

"Look here, sir," he began. "Gathering data is the first step, but you've got to have some general theory. Ruling out literal Gremlins, why _should_ objects be actively hostile?"

The Major looked up from a soldering job, with a twinkle: "If I give you a theory, will you be the least bit more persuaded? All right: why do _we_ like organization, control, applied power?"

Carl reflected: "Oh... I suppose it's the nature of life to extend itself by organization of the environment—tools and so on."

"Excellent. Well, the mass of the Universe behaves in exactly the opposite way—_disorganizing, devolving._ Any reason why this much vaster process shouldn't have—well, a sort of counter-life? Well, then, to _it_, our organizing activities would be equivalent to fires, contrary winds, rust. Up to a few thousand years ago, the effects of life were trivial—a little photosynthesis and burrow-digging that mattered no more to counter-life than geological erosion matters to us."
But now Man is organizing matter and energy on an expanding scale—a regular epidemic of natural disasters to counter-life. So, of course, it resists and fights back."

"Hold on!" Carl protested. "After all, our activities cause increased breakdown of material, on the whole. That should be gratifying to it, not disconcerting."

"Yes—but we organize some matter very highly, and might eventually reverse the whole trend. Anyway, the further we go, the more opposition we generate."

"Pretty trivial opposition. Guerrilla warfare."

The Major smiled. "Napoleon and Hitler were softened up for the real counter-offensive by guerrilla warfare. How much of your life does it waste, for example?"

Carl thought that over. That morning, he had lost half an hour over a broken shoelace, a shaving cream cap that escaped down the sink, a shirt-collar loop that refused to hitch over its button, and a handful of money that scattered jubilantly when his trouser pocket snared a finger. He had accordingly breakfasted on peanuts and, on ward rounds, had covered himself with mediocrity in the eyes of Dr. Svindorff.

He changed his point of attack—or perhaps fell back on his own second line?

"But how does it work?" he asked. "I mean, we know the laws of mechanics, and they do not leave scope for free action."

"Oh, don’t they? We operate by chemistry, and yet we feel we have plenty of freedom. Simple mechanical systems made of docile materials don’t have much freedom, true. But we can’t extrapolate that fact to cover all cases."

"Docile materials?"

"Metals, for example. Passive, like plant life. And we cast them in geometric forms. And even then they trick us. We get endless amusement out of games played with the simplest geometric form of all, the sphere, from billiards to baseball. What do we know of possibilities in really subtle systems of matter—fabrics, paper, rubber, ready to rebound from the almost organic forms forced on them?"

"Hm! Aren’t those organic materials?"

"Exorganic. What populations are more fanatical for liberty than those that have just been liberated from obnoxious control? And note this: we organize matter only for special purposes; matter tries to waste our energies out of systematic hostility. The aspirin tablet that eludes you and wastes two minutes of your time has won a victory in a battle we’re not even consciously fighting yet."

Carl rationed himself one last question—the topper: "Do
you consider that individual objects have personality—that soldering iron, for instance?"

"I have an impression they enjoy a sort of merged or co-operative mentality—but certain forms have more or less individuality too. This iron—" He reached for it back-handed; his cuff touched a kink in the cord and the iron swivelled in its cradle to graze his wrist. He snatched his hand away, sending the iron clattering across the bench; but he caught it neatly before it had singed the wood, and set it in the cradle as if he were handling a cobra. "Yes! That soldering iron—or its cord—has plenty of personality; one of the most treacherous tools I've ever owned. And you'll notice how they use our very actions to thwart us, just as we use mechanical laws to make them act constructively. Of course, clumsiness gives them opportunity. I should have switched that off."

Carl attributed the little accident to autosuggestion, a Freudian slip, and went away shaking his head. He had never met so well-integrated a delusion. By heaven, he hadn't found the flaw yet! He hoped it would amuse Clare—she was often mighty sharp at analysing such things.

The following evening was his night off. He entered the apartment house with two large shopping bags of staples and Clare's favourite delicacies, to find that he would have to heft them up six flights, the elevator being out of order.

He set them, panting, on the floor of the seventh flight while he opened the door. The door-check resisted sullenly, and he had to put his heel in the opening while he scooped up the groceries.

As he turned, something jerked violently at the small of his back—the belt of his trenchcoat somehow, impossibly, had snubbed over the door knob.

Surprise, as much as the jerk, unbalanced him. His other heel slipped on the waxed linoleum of the landing. He lurched against the door, which now yielded like a swooning maiden, and he dived into the living room, frantically trying to save the toppling bags. The belt let go with the timing of a trained athlete, and everything went flying. He snatched at the top of one bag, and the sturdy paper ripped like tissue. With his other hand he came down solidly on a carton of cream that had rolled to the precise spot requisite, like an outfielder intercepting a fly.

Clare, in her bathrobe, came scurrying to the bedroom door, to find him arising from among the debris. The door had closed decisively on a bag of eggs; a small sack of flour, disgorging at one corner, smirked raffishly against a sofa leg.
“Gracious!” Clare said, between mirth and peevishness. “Must you be so clumsy?”

Through Carl’s mind, before he realized it, flashed, *Well, they’re not going to make trouble between me and Clare!* And he gave the soft answer that turneth away wrath.

After supper, he tried to turn the episode to account by using it to introduce the Major’s fantasy.

At the end, Clare said languidly, “Well, anyone who ever kept house wouldn’t think he was so crazy!”

They spent the next hour swapping instances: the row of books that always toppled the way you didn’t want them; the garment that slid silkily to the floor if one arm hung over an edge; the drawerful of articles that restacked themselves to wedge it shut; the ball of paper that avoided the gaping wastebasket and dived easily into the narrow cranny behind; the balcony door that normally refused to latch and banged in every breeze, but that had swung shut and smartly locked her out; and so on.

It was fun and did amuse Clare; but afterwards he wondered if he should have put such fantastic ideas into her still feverish mind. Also, he worried about having humoured the Major quite so far; it was really very unprofessional!

Next day, however, Matt eased the latter burden considerably by saying, “Dr. Svindorff is working on the Major’s case—at my instigation. We can’t prove that Ruth Elvira wants to enjoy his wordly goods in his absence; but there’s no more reason to keep him here than a million other harmless cranks. Let him exercise his persuasive powers on the public along with Flat-Earthers, telekineticists, and prophets of Judgment Day come January 19 . . . though, personally, I’ll be sorry to lose him. I find him a diversion.”

Carl felt the same. Candidly, he was itching to lick the Major’s theory, over and above liking the man. But the odd hours they spent with the Major in his ward-cell-laboratory were devoted to mere yarns:

“—The wind snagged his parka on this one stub of branch, and there he was haltered over a five-hundred-foot drop, with the blizzard settling down . . . The jeep door knocked his glasses on to the one bit of rock within yards—thirty miles from town, dozens of hairpin bends, and the hills full of Huks—”

Amusing, but . . . against violent backgrounds of far outposts, violent accidents seemed natural enough; while by contrast, the freaks of civilized life grew pale and trifling. The magnificent phantasmagoria seemed to be sinking in a swamp of believe-it-or-not curiosities.

Half wishing to rescue things from anti-climax, Carl finally
demanded, "You called all this just so much guerrilla action. What shape would the real offensive take?"

The Major racked his tools and turned, as if the matter demanded his full attention: "Isn't it obvious? When we think of atomic war, we're afraid of the blast and fires and secondary radiation. But, to my mind, the big danger comes afterwards. . . . Ever drive down the Hudson, past those endless cliffs of apartment blocks, and wonder what would happen if a few power lines and water mains were cut, with no repair in sight? Lord! Those millions would be strangled, thrown back on techniques they'd utterly forgotten, pitted against materials that had learned to—defend themselves.

"Yes," Carl said slowly, "that would be an opportunity."

The Major sat down and clasped his hands over a knee.

"Look, Doctor, this may sound fantastic, but I'm mad anyway according to you. It's calculated that there must be millions of habitable planets, of which many have had ample time to develop space travel. Yet we've never had a certified visitor. Why?"

"I've heard it discussed. We're just a minor unit on the outskirts, for one thing."

"Quite true," the Major nodded. "Yet, if there were no more than a few hundred exploring races, surely one would have got around to us. Isn't it just possible that something deadlocks all life at a certain stage—some universal feedback mechanism? And, on my theory, you can see what it would be—progress piling up resistance from counter-life. Past a crucial point, you might tip the balance in favour of life—but we're not nearly so close to that stage yet as we are to a blow-up. One slip, and we're done."

"Well, wouldn't thinkers on other worlds have seen the danger, if it's real?"

"Oh, I'm not so conceited—or mad—as to suppose I'm the only mind in the Universe to notice the obvious. But one is likely to see it too late, or not be able to persuade his contemporaries. I'm not making much headway, am I?"

Carl departed considerably relieved. You might come to take Gremlins half seriously, as personifying an active principle behind freak accidents; but as a cosmic threat engulfs the world and myriads of populated planets, they were merely silly. Carl suddenly felt himself back in daylight, free of the insidious suspicion that after all there might be something in what the old boy said. He knew once more that mechanics explained all accidents, if you only had time and patience to analyse them.

He said as much to Matt in the cafeteria.

"So I lose my bet, do I?" Matt smiled wistfully: "Well,
the bet's off anyway.... Dr. Svindorff says that Angus G. will be leaving before Christmas. But I thought you were drifting towards his siren song. Weren't you, honestly?"

"Out of idle amusement. It's lost its fascination."

That afternoon, a phone call from Clare wiped out all other concerns. Clare had been out the day before, and got caught in the rain—now she had a misery and a temperature of 102. Carl felt a nasty qualm of apprehension; even a poor psychiatrist knew that in these cases the real danger was in relapse. He mortgaged his free time for the month ahead, and got the evening off.

He arrived at the apartment to find Clare in bed with their electric blanket huddled around her, not even trying to read. She greeted him with an anxiety that showed she too knew about relapses: "Do you think I'm going to be very sick?"

"Not if we keep you warm and quiet." He fixed the best light snacks he knew and fed her by hand.

At the end, she suddenly asked, "How's that old man with the theory about objects?" and hastened on, not waiting for a reply, "He's perfectly right."

She looked about fourteen, and valuable, bundled up with her brindled hair loose and her face worried. Carl scored himself for having filled her head with nonsense; though, of course, her fever would just have fastened on something else.

He jollied her seriously: "Well, I think bacteria are more dangerous than objects, in your case."

"These bacteria wouldn't have had a chance at me," she said firmly, "without some mighty funny coincidences. I got wet because I dropped my last car-fare money, and it rolled like mad, and when it came to a crack, I'll swear it just swivelled and eased itself in. And I wouldn't have dropped it if my finger hadn't been hurt from when the window-cord broke and the window came down on my hand. And I wouldn't have got so wet if I'd had my slicker—but you remember how that went all funny when that bottle of cleaner on the shelf came uncorked and spilled over it."

Carl sighed. "You wouldn't have got wet at all if you hadn't tried to be noble and get back into harness before you were ready. Now, take this, and you'll sleep ten hours and wake up feeling fine."

But the last thing she said as she drowsed off was, "Shouldn't've given'm chance. They know when you can't fight'm, 'n they pile on you."

He pulled the sofa to the bedroom door, so he could
hear the least murmur, made himself a bed and turned in. He knew he was exhausted, and was determined to avoid being a soft target for either germs or Gremlins by getting over-fatigued...

He woke in the dead of night, with an extra-sensory perception of something wrong. He rolled to his elbow. The air was abnormally chilly, even for a low-cost apartment in December.

Clare stirred, and he called softly, “You all right?”
She mumbled feverishly, “No. I’m coooolld.”
His hand found the floor-lamp without actually knocking it over. Naturally, the switch was in the one position where he had to flounder to reach it, and when it did click, nothing happened.
Oh, fine, he thought. Electricity’s off. Furnace controls dead!
He strode over to the bed. The electric blanket, of course, was a mere flimsy fabric. He patted Clare’s hunched shoulder. “I’ll get another blanket. Where’s the flash?”
“On the table,” she wheezed, and groped on the far side of the bed. There was a muffled bump, and she lamented weakly, “I had it and it just knocked against something and flipped out of my fingers.”
“Don’t look for it,” he said. “Keep wrapped up. I can find my way in the dark.” No use wasting precious minutes, he thought, blundering around looking for the flash, while it, neatly ensconced in some improbable nook, gloated just out of his reach. He started around the foot of the bed towards the bathroom door...

Something lashed out of the dark and swathèd itself around his ankles. He stumbled disastrously, his outstretched hand plunging through air where wall should have been. His temple and cheekbone jarred dazingly against a door frame. He saved himself from falling, but felt as if he had been battle-axed.

Clare’s voice came hoarse and scared: “What happened? Are you hurt?”
He kept his tone cheerful, if shaky: “Just tripped over the bedspread, turned back on the floor here. I’ll throw it over you till I get the blanket.”

Easier said than done. The topologists’ puzzle of the inner tube that can’t be turned inside out through a hole in the side, though infinitely elastic, seemed elementary compared with flattening that eight-by-six rectangle of fluffy chenille. In the end, he gave up trying to do a perfect job, and bundled it over the shivering girl any old way, so he could be free to get that blanket.
The bathroom was utterly black; he could see only the dial of his wrist-watch moving. With a sudden giddy feeling that the solid fixtures had shifted, he picked his way from sink to tub and along to the linen-closet over the tub's end. His exploring fingers felt painted wood and brass knob, cold and hostile. He opened the door. Folded sheets and shaggy towels seemed somehow a little friendlier. Sanity began to steal back as he carefully disengaged a blanket, giving it no opportunity to emulate the unruliness of the bedspread. As it came into his arms, a compact, well-folded mass, he let out a breath he had not known he was holding.

Something hit the bottom of the bathtub with an ear-stunning smash—a big bottle of some kind that had bided its time up there.

Oh well—that particular mess could wait till morning, safely localized inside the tub. He edged back towards the door, calling, "Okay, honey, just a bottle. Be right with you." And he felt something hard under his foot, and then a sharp sting.

His rational brain began parroting, "...The first impression is of contact, carried by fast, Group A fibres, followed by one of pain, carried by slow, Group C fibres. Pain is of two types: first pain, bright, stinging, well localized...."

But a deeper level of his mind cut in with, "How did that hunk of glass know exactly where I was going to put my foot?"

He got the blanket around Clare, angrily unconcerned that he was soaking the good carpet with gore. Nothing mattered except beating off this peril to Clare, whose teeth were now chattering in the darkness. Now... hot water-bottles....

Eureka! The gas stove would heat the place, and give a little light too... why hadn't he thought of that at first? Why, for that matter, hadn't he thought of using the blankets off his couch-bed? They surely did exploit your stupidity!

The hot-water bottles were in the kitchen. He began to explore his way through the living room.

The darkness was clammy. Windows were dim presences, hardly revealing their own positions. A radiator, when he touched it, was cold as drowned bones. For an endless moment he was groping through a subterranean passage, the weight of ancient rocks pressing down in a sentient and malignant desire to blot out his tiny flicker of life. This was a Thing with which one could have no compromise, because its very being was the sucking down of human aspiration and dream. Its only communication was hate and recognition that he was a special focus of danger, because he knew It for what It was and might rally re-
sistance to It. It was attacking him through Clare; he stood alone between her and faceless Chaos. The bright, somewhat shoddy little apartment had melted like a fragile surface to show an abyss of death.

What would that Presence be like if It once organized and gained the upper hand?

He must not pause, or It would gain the upper hand. . . .

His touch found the stove where it should be. It had no pilot burner, and he had to locate the match holder. With grim deliberation he struck a match. The instant, blinding flare was no friendly light. He angled it till it burned steadily, then turned on the gas. The gust of air that always precedes the flow from a long-disused burner blew out the match. With the same measured restraint, he got another. But tension and vexation made him strike it a little too petulantly. As the head plumed into flame, it snapped off and vaulted into a far corner.

For a terrifying instant, he thought it had gone into the trash basket full of waxed wrappings and other tinder . . . he dived after it, and struck his bruised cheek sickeningly against a tablecorner . . . the match-head died impotently.

He found himself exulting aloud: “Failed, you little bastard!”

On the third try, he got the burner lit, and its eldritch, blue glare made it easier to light the others and get on a kettleful of water. He looked at the flame and admitted he was afraid to bundle Clare out here where it would soon be warm. If he didn’t break his neck, or hers, he would probably pitch the two of them into the stove.

While the water was heating, he impulsively went to inspect the fire escape. The window showed nothing but reflections of the burners and his own shadowy image. He raised the sash, and looked out. . . .

No wonder the power was off! The street lamps still shone, far below; but they revealed sleet falling like molten drops in Inferno; the trees were deep-sea corals and the window pane was opaque as a sheet of paraffin.

Queer nausea and faintness swamped him. . . . He gripped the sill, and his fingers slipped on the sheath of ice. For a moment he thought he had lost balance and was toppling in the grip of gravity, Their master-force, over the low sill . . . .

Even as he recovered, he could imagine his own nightmare howl as he plunged past scared neighbours’ windows to silence on the icy concrete.

He grunted, stepped back, closed the window. He still felt giddy. . . .

Then he saw the dark smears on the floor. It took an ex-
ploring finger to explain them. He grunted again, a sour wound. Who wouldn't feel giddy if they'd been bleeding like a stuck pig! It took twice as long as it should have to put on a pressure bandage with a napkin.

The water was too hot, now. He hung the bottles on a hook over the sink while he poured the scalding fluid into them. As he balanced the clumsy kettle, he slipped just a little on a smear of blood and swung the spout where his wrist might have been. But that was a waning threat, he realized—a mere parting shot by a repulsed enemy. The knives, glassware, electrical gadgets, bulks of furniture, all glinted in the blue light, demons and imps ready to frustrate and harass; but the deeper Power had withdrawn—temporarily.

He got the bottle snuggled beside Clare, who murmured gratification.

At that juncture, the lights went on....

Next morning, the paper said: EIGHTEEN DIE IN FREAK STORM. There were accounts of linemen slipping to death, highway crashes, frozen tramps, fractured skulls.

Just a skirmish, thought Carl. Imagine that situation spread over the whole country—millions of situations like mine last night, year after year...

Driving back to the Institute, he tried to keep his mind on the streets, so that last night could fall into perspective. Soon it began to...soon he was smiling a little. But, said his semiconscious, one thing was sure: Whatever the final verdict on the Major's theory—even if he's wrong—he's wrong with a damn good case!

Carl flung himself into his duties till Matt Loftus came around, about mid-afternoon, flourishing a crisp, folded document. "This is it, son!" said Matt. "We lose the Major, and the Major regains his right to life, liberty and the rebuttal of the inanimate. Want to join the Liberation Committee?"

The Major listened to Matt's announcement with his usual courtesy, but with such reserve that that formally self-assured medico ended rather lamely: "Maybe we should have told you this was coming along, sir. But I figured it as a sort of Christmas surprise. Anyway, we just need your signature. . . ."

The Major scanned the paper and then laid it on his workbench, smiling a little sadly. He said, "I appreciate your efforts, Doctor, and even more I appreciate your motives. But you don't quite understand."

"I—what? What don't I understand?"

The Major seated himself and caressed his moustache for a
long moment. Then: “Outside I'd be a target for a concerted attack. They know I'm the greatest menace to Them on Earth, and They'd even risk unmasking Themselves—knowing most people would simply gawk at the most fantastic series of accidents and never draw an inference. I wouldn’t last a month. Here, I'm safe, with everything under control.”

Matt's face was a study: “But... what about alerting other people? Don't you have a duty to preach your theory and so on?”

Carl glanced sharply at his friend. That was humouring a patient!

“Why, Doctor,” said the Major. “I have the best possible audience right here, funny as it sounds. You of the staff are the people best equipped to appreciate my theory—scientists, but not convention-bound theorists. You're not only medical men, used to dealing with things as they are: you're psychiatrists, whose job is distinguishing between the rational and the irrational. You can analyse vital phenomena better than an engineer such as myself. And you're the people most likely to be listened to in turn, and best able to defend yourselves from the inevitable attacks by the enemy.”

His mild but steady grey eyes considered the young men, and the corners of his moustache quirked: "What better converts could I have than you two?"

Carl turned and stared at Matt, eyes questioning.

Matt set his jaw: “Yes, I'm going to—to follow it up. To see where it goes. And I wouldn't say so till I was sure of at least one competent associate... you are with me, aren't you?”

“Yes,” said Carl, with sudden complete conviction.

The Major leaned back triumphantly. “You see! Of course, this place does put a certain stigma on my ideas. But with the safety factor, and now with Grade A channels, why should I leave? Do you think I'm crazy?”

PILGRIMAGE TO EARTH

Robert Sheckley

Alfred Simon was born on Kazanga IV, a small agricultural planet near Arcturus, and there he drove a combine through the wheat fields, and in the long, hushed evenings listened to the recorded love songs of Earth.
Life was pleasant enough on Kazanga, and the girls were buxom, jolly, frank and acquiescent, good companions for a hike through the hills or a swim in the brook, staunch mates for life. But romantic—never! There was good fun to be had on Kazanga, in a cheerful open manner. But there was no more than fun.

Simon felt that something was missing in this bland existence. One day, he discovered what it was.

A vendor came to Kazanga in a battered spaceship loaded with books. He was gaunt, white-haired, and a little mad. A celebration was held for him, for novelty was appreciated on the outer worlds.

The vendor told them all the latest gossip; of the price war between Detroit II and III, and how fishing fared on Alana, and what the president’s wife on Moracia wore, and how oddly the men of Doran V talked. And at last someone said, “Tell us of Earth.”

“Ah!” said the vendor, raising his eyebrows. “You want to hear of the mother planet? Well, friends, there’s no place like old Earth, no place at all. On Earth, friends, everything is possible, and nothing is denied.”

“Nothing?” Simon asked.

“They’ve got a law against denial,” the vendor explained, grinning. “No one has ever been known to break it. Earth is different, friends. You folks specialize in farming? Well, Earth specializes in impracticalities such as madness, beauty, war, intoxication, purity, horror, and the like, and people come from light-years away to sample these wares.”

“And love?” a woman asked.

“Why, girl,” the vendor said gently, “Earth is the only place in the galaxy that still has love! Detroit II and III tried it and found it too expensive, you know, and Alana decided it was unsettling, and there was no time to import it on Moracia or Doran V. But as I said, Earth specializes in the impractical, and makes it pay.”

“Pay?” a bulky farmer asked.

“Of course! Earth is old, her minerals are gone and her fields are barren. Her colonies are independent now, and filled with sober folk such as yourselves, who want value for their goods. So what else can old Earth deal in, except the non-essentials that make life worth living?”

“Were you in love on Earth?” Simon asked.

“That I was,” the vendor answered, with a certain grimness. “I was in love, and now I travel. Friends, these books . . .”

For an exorbitant price, Simon bought an ancient poetry book, and reading, dreamed of passion beneath the lunatic
moon, of dawn glimmering whitely upon lovers’ parched lips, of locked bodies on a dark sea-beach, desperate with love and deafened by the booming surf.

And only on Earth was this possible! For, as the vendor told, Earth’s scattered children were too hard at work wresting a living from alien soil. The wheat and corn grew on Kazanga, and the factories increased on Detroit II and III. The fisheries of Alana were the talk of the Southern star belt, and there were dangerous beasts on Moracia, and a whole wilderness to be won on Doran V. And this was well, and exactly as it should be.

But the new worlds were austere, carefully planned, sterile in their perfections. Something had been lost in the dead reaches of space, and only Earth knew love.

Therefore, Simon worked and saved and dreamed. And in his twenty-ninth year he sold his farm, packed all his clean shirts into a serviceable handbag, put on his best suit and a pair of stout walking shoes, and boarded the Kazanga-Metropole Flyer.

At last he came to Earth, where dreams must come true, for there is a law against their failure.

He passed quickly through Customs at Spaceport New York, and was shuttled underground to Times Square. There he emerged blinking into daylight, tightly clutching his handbag, for he had been warned about pickpockets, cut-purses, and other denizens of the city.

Breathless with wonder, he looked around.

The first thing that struck him was the endless array of theatres, with attractions in two dimensions, three or four, depending upon your preference. And what attractions!

To the right of him a beetling marquee proclaimed: LUST ON VENUS! A DOCUMENTARY ACCOUNT OF SEX PRACTICES AMONG THE INHABITANTS OF THE GREEN HELL! SHOCKING! REVEALING!

He wanted to go in. But across the street was a war film. The billboard shouted, THE SUN. BUSTERS! DEDICATED TO THE DAREDEVILS OF THE SPACE MARINES! And further down was a picture called TARZAN BATTLES THE SATURNIAN GHOULS!

Tarzan, he recalled from his reading, was an ancient ethnic hero of Earth.

It was all wonderful, but there was so much more! He saw little open shops where one could buy food of all worlds, and especially such native Terran dishes as pizza, hotdogs, spaghetti and knishes. And there were stores which sold surplus clothing from the Terran space fleets, and other stores which sold nothing but beverages.
Simon didn’t know what to do first. Then he heard a staccato burst of gunfire behind him, and whirled.

It was only a shooting gallery, a long, narrow, brightly painted place with a waist-high counter. The manager, a swarthy fat man with a mole on his chin, sat on a high stool and smiled at Simon.

“Try your luck?”

Simon walked over and saw that, instead of the usual targets, there were four scantily dressed women at the end of the gallery, seated upon bullet-scored chairs. They had tiny bull’s-eyes painted on their foreheads and above each breast.

“But do you fire real bullets?” Simon asked.

“Of course!” the manager said. “There’s a law against false advertising on Earth. Real bullets and real gals! Step up and knock one off!”

One of the women called out, “Come on, sport! Bet you miss me!”

Another screamed, “He couldn’t hit the broad side of a spaceship!”

“Sure he can!” another shouted. “Come on, sport!”

Simon rubbed his forehead and tried not to act surprised. After all, this was Earth, where anything was allowed as long as it was commercially feasible.

He asked, “Are there galleries where you shoot men, too?”

“Of course,” the manager said. “But you ain’t no pervert, are you?”

“Certainly not!”

“You an outwolnder?”

“Yes. How did you know?”

“The suit. Always tell by the suit.” The fat man closed his eyes and chanted, “Step up, step up and kill a woman! Get rid of a load of repressions! Squeeze the trigger and feel the old anger ooze out of you! Better than a massage! Better than getting drunk! Step up, step up and kill a woman!”

Simon asked one of the girls, “Do you stay dead when they kill you?”

“Don’t be stupid,” the girl said.

“But the shock—”

She shrugged her shoulders. “I could do worse.”

Simon was about to ask how she could do worse, when the manager leaned over the counter, speaking confidentially.

“Look, buddy. Look what I got here.”

Simon glanced over the counter and saw a compact sub-machine gun.

“For a ridiculously low price,” the manager said, “I’ll let you use the tommy. You can spray the whole place, shoot down the fixtures, rip up the walls. This drives a .45 slug,
buddy, and it kicks like a mule. You really know you’re firing when you fire the tommy.”

“I am not interested,” Simon said sternly.

“I’ve got a grenade or two,” the manager said. “Fragmentation, of course. You could really—”

“No!”

“For a price,” the manager said, “you can shoot me, too, if that’s how your tastes run, although I wouldn’t have guessed it. What do you say?”

“No! Never! This is horrible!”

The manager looked at him blankly. “Not in the mood now? O.K. I’m open twenty-four hours a day. See you later, sport.”

“Never!” Simon said, walking away.

“Be expecting you, lover!” one of the women called after him.

Simon went to a refreshment stand and ordered a small glass of cola-cola. He found that his hands were shaking. With an effort he steadied them, and sipped his drink. He reminded himself that he must not judge Earth by his own standards. If people on Earth enjoyed killing people, and the victims didn’t mind being killed, why should anyone object?

Or should they?

He was pondering this when a voice at his elbow said, “Hey, bub.”

Simon turned and saw a wizened, furtive-faced little man in an oversize raincoat standing beside him.

“Out-of-towner?” the little man asked.

“I am,” Simon said. “How did you know?”

“The shoes. I always look at the shoes. How do you like our little planet?”

“It’s—confusing,” Simon said carefully. “I mean I didn’t expect—well—”

“Of course,” the little man said. “You’re an idealist. One look at your honest face tells me that, my friend. You’ve come to Earth for a definite purpose. Am I right?”

Simon nodded. The little man said, “I know your purpose, my friend. You’re looking for a war that will make the world safe for something, and you’ve come to the right place. We have six major wars running at all times, and there’s never any waiting for an important position in any of them.”

“Sorry, but—”

“Right at this moment,” the little man said impressively, “the downtrodden workers of Peru are engaged in a desperate struggle against a corrupt and decadent monarchy. One more man could swing the contest! You, my friend,
could be that man! *You* could guarantee the socialist victory!"

Observing the expression on Simon’s face, the little man said quickly, “But there’s a lot to be said for an enlightened aristocracy. The wise old king of Peru (a philosopher-king in the deepest Platonic sense of the word) sorely needs your help. His tiny corps of scientists, humanitarians, Swiss guards, knights of the realm and royal peasants is sorely pressed by the foreign-inspired socialist conspiracy. A single man, now—”

“I’m not interested,” Simon said.

“In China, the Anarchists—”

“No.”

“Perhaps you’d prefer the Communists in Wales? Or the Capitalists in Japan? Or if your affinities lie with a splinter group such as Feminists, Prohibitionists, Free Silverists, or the like, we could probably arrange—”

“I don’t want a war,” Simon said.

“Who could blame you?” the little man said, nodding rapidly. “War is hell. In that case, you’ve come to Earth for love.”

“How did you know?” Simon asked.

The little man smiled modestly. “Love and war,” he said, “are Earth’s two staple commodities. We’ve been turning them both out in bumper crops since the beginning of time.”

“Is love very difficult to find,” Simon asked.

“Walk uptown two blocks,” the little man said briskly.

“Can’t miss it. Tell ‘em Joe sent you.”

“But that’s impossible! You can’t just walk out and—”

“What do you know about love?” Joe asked.

“Nothing.”

“Well, we’re experts on it.”

“I know what the books say,” Simon said. “Passion beneath the lunatic moon—”

“Sure, and bodies on a dark sea-beach desperate with love and deafened by the booming surf.”

“You’ve read that book?”

“It’s the standard advertising brochure. I must be going. Two blocks uptown. Can’t miss it.”

And with a pleasant nod, Joe moved into the crowd.

Simon finished his cola-cola and walked slowly up Broadway, his brow knotted in thought, but determined not to form any premature judgments.

When he reached 44th Street he saw a tremendous neon sign flashing brightly. It said, *LOVE, INC.*

Smaller neon letters read, *Open 24 Hours a Day!* Beneath that it read, *Up One Flight.*

Simon frowned, for a terrible suspicion had just crossed
his mind. Still, he climbed the stairs and entered a small, tastefully furnished reception room. From there he was sent down a long corridor to a numbered room.

Within the room was a handsome grey-haireded man who rose from behind an impressive desk and shook his hand, saying, “Well! How are things on Kazanga?”

“How did you know I was from Kazanga?”

“That shirt. I always look at the shirt. I’m Mr. Tate, and I’m here to serve you to the best of my ability. You are—”

“Simon, Alfred Simon.”

“Please be seated, Mr. Simon. Cigarette? Drink? You won’t regret coming to us, sir. We’re the oldest love-dispensing firm in the business, and much larger than our closest competitor, Passion Unlimited. Moreover, our fees are far more reasonable, and bring you an improved product. Might I ask how you heard of us? Did you see our full page ad in the Times? Or—”

“Joe sent me,” Simon said.

“Ah, he’s an active one,” Mr. Tate said, shaking his head playfully. “Well, sir, there’s no reason to delay. You’ve come a long way for love, and love you shall have.” He reached for a button on his desk, but Simon stopped him.

Simon said, “I don’t want to be rude or anything, but . . .”

“Yes?” Mr. Tate said, with an encouraging smile.

“I don’t understand this,” Simon blurted out, flushing deeply, beads of perspiration standing out on his forehead. “I think I’m in the wrong place. I didn’t come all the way to Earth just for . . . I mean, you can’t really sell love, can you? Not love! I mean, then it isn’t really love, is it?”

“But of course!” Mr. Tate said, half rising from his chair in astonishment. “That’s the whole point! Anyone can buy sex. Good lord, it’s the cheapest thing in the universe, next to human life. But love is rare, love is special, love is found only on Earth. Have you read our brochure?”

“Bodies on a dark sea-beach?” Simon asked.

“Yes, that one. I wrote it. Gives something of the feeling, doesn’t it? You can’t get that feeling from just anyone, Mr. Simon. You can get that feeling only from someone who loves you.”

Simon said dubiously, “It’s not genuine love though, is it?”

“Of course it is! If we were selling simulated love, we’d label it as such. The advertising laws on Earth are strict, I can assure you. Anything can be sold, but it must be labelled properly. That’s ethics, Mr. Simon!”

Tate caught his breath, and continued in a calmer tone. “No, sir, make no mistake. Our product is not a substitute. It is the exact self-same feeling that poets and writers have
raved about for thousands of years. Through the wonders of modern science we can bring this feeling to you at your convenience, attractively packaged, completely disposable, and for a ridiculously low price.”

Simon said, “I pictured something more—spontaneous.”

“Spontaneity has its charm,” Mr. Tate agreed. “Our research labs are working on it. Believe me, there’s nothing science can’t produce, as long as there’s a market for it.”

“I don’t like any of this,” Simon said, getting to his feet. “I think I’ll just go see a movie.”

“Wait!” Mr. Tate cried. “You think we’re trying to put something over on you. You think we’ll introduce you to a girl who will act as though she loved you, but who in reality will not. Is that it?”

“I guess so,” Simon said.

“But it just isn’t so! It would be too costly for one thing. For another, the wear and tear on the girl would be tremendous. And it would be psychologically unsound for her to attempt living a lie of such depth and scope.”

“Then how do you do it?”

“By utilizing our understanding of science and the human mind.”

To Simon, this sounded like double-talk. He moved towards the door.

“Tell me something,” Mr. Tate said. “You’re a bright looking young fellow. Don’t you think you could tell real love from a counterfeit item?”

“Certainly.”

“There’s your safeguard! You must be satisfied, or don’t pay us a cent.”

“I’ll think about it,” Simon said.

“Why delay? Leading psychologists say that real love is a fortifier and a restorer of sanity, a balm for damaged egos, a restorer of hormone balance, and an improver of the complexion. The love we supply you has everything: deep and abiding affection, unrestrained passion, complete faithfulness, an almost mystic affection for your defects as well as your virtues, a pitiful desire to please, and, as a plus that only Love, Inc. can supply, that uncontrollable first spark, that blinding moment of love at first sight!”

Mr. Tate pressed a button. Simon frowned undecidedly. The door opened, a girl stepped in, and Simon stopped thinking.

She was tall and slender, and her hair was brown with a sheen of red. Simon could have told you nothing about her face, except that it brought tears to his eyes. And if you asked him about her figure, he might have killed you.
“Miss Penny Bright,” said Tate, “meet Mr. Alfred Simon.”

The girl tried to speak but no words came, and Simon was equally dumbstruck. He looked at her and knew. Nothing else mattered. To the depths of his heart he knew that he was truly and completely loved.

They left at once, hand in hand, and were taken by jet to a small white cottage in a pine grove, overlooking the sea, and there they talked and laughed and loved, and later Simon saw his beloved wrapped in the sunset flame like a goddess of fire. And in blue twilight she looked at him with eyes enormous and dark, her known body mysterious again. The moon came up, bright and lunatic, changing flesh to shadow, and she wept and beat his chest with her small fists, and Simon wept too, although he did not know why. And at last dawn came, faint and disturbed, glimmering upon their parched lips and locked bodies, and nearby the booming surf deafened, inflamed, and maddened them.

At noon they were back in the offices of Love, Inc. Penny clutched his hand for a moment, then disappeared through an inner door.

“Was it real love?” Mr. Tate asked.

“Yes!”

“And was everything satisfactory?”

“Yes! It was love, it was the real thing! But why did she insist on returning?”

“Post-hypnotic command,” Mr. Tate said.

“What?”

“What did you expect? Everyone wants love, but few wish to pay for it. Here is your bill, sir.”

Simon paid, fuming. “This wasn’t necessary,” he said. “Of course I would pay you for bringing us together. Where is she now? What have you done with her?”

“Please,” Mr. Tate said soothingly. “Try to calm yourself.”

“I don’t want to be calm!” Simon shouted. “I want Penny!”

“That will be impossible,” Mr. Tate said, with the barest hint of frost in his voice. “Kindly stop making a spectacle of yourself.”

“Are you trying to get more money out of me?” Simon shrieked. “All right, I’ll pay. How much do I have to pay to get her out of your clutches?” And Simon yanked out his wallet and slammed it on the desk.

Mr. Tate poked the wallet with a stiffened forefinger. “Put that back in your pocket,” he said. “We are an old and respectable firm. If you raise your voice again, I shall be forced to have you ejected.”
Simon calmed himself with an effort, put the wallet back in his pocket and sat down. He took a deep breath and said, very quietly, “I’m sorry.”

“That’s better,” Mr. Tate said. “I will not be shouted at. However, if you are reasonable, I can be reasonable too. Now, what’s the trouble?”

“The trouble?” Simon’s voice started to lift. He controlled it and said, “She loves me.”

“Of course.”

“Then how can you separate us?”

“What has the one thing got to do with the other?” Mr. Tate asked. “Love is a delightful interlude, a relaxation, good for the intellect, for the ego, for the hormone balance, and for the skin tone. But one would hardly wish to continue loving, would one?”

“I would,” Simon said. “This love was special, unique—”

“They all are,” Mr. Tate said. “But as you know, they are all produced in the same way.”

“What?”

“Surely you know something about the mechanics of love production?”

“No,” Simon said. “I thought it was—natural.”

Mr. Tate shook his head. “We gave up natural selection centuries ago, shortly after the Mechanical Revolution. It was too slow, and commercially unfeasible. Why bother with it, when we can produce any feeling at will by conditioning and proper stimulation of certain brain centres? The result? Penny, completely in love with you! Your own bias, which we calculated, in favour of her particular somatotype, made it complete. We always throw in the dark sea-beach, the lunatic moon, the pallid dawn—”

“Then she could have been made to love anyone,” Simon said slowly.

“Could have been brought to love anyone,” Mr. Tate corrected.

“Oh, lord, how did she get into this horrible work?” Simon asked.

“She came in and signed a contract in the usual way,” Tate said. “It pays very well. And at the termination of the lease, we return her original personality—untouched! But why do you call the work horrible? There’s nothing reprehensible about love.”

“It wasn’t love!” Simon cried.

“But it was! The genuine article! Unbiased scientific firms have made qualitative tests of it, in comparison with the natural thing. In every case, our love tested out to more depth, passion, fervour and scope.”
Simon shut his eyes tightly, opened them and said, “Listen to me. I don’t care about your scientific tests. I love her, she loves me, that’s all that counts. Let me speak to her! I want to marry her!”

Mr. Tate wrinkled his nose in distaste. “Come, come, man! You wouldn’t want to marry a girl like that! But if it’s marriage you’re after, we deal in that, too. I can arrange an idyllic and nearly spontaneous love-match for you with a guaranteed government-inspected virgin—”

“No! I love Penny! At least let me speak to her!”

“That will be quite impossible,” Mr. Tate said.

“Why?”

Mr. Tate pushed a button on his desk. “Why do you think? We’ve wiped out the previous indoctrination. Penny is now in love with someone else.”

And then Simon understood. He had realized that even now Penny was looking at another man with that passion he had known, feeling for another man that complete and bottomless love that unbiased scientific firms had shown to be so much greater than the old fashioned, commercially unfeasible natural selection, and that upon that same dark seashore mentioned in the advertising brochure—

He lunged for Tate’s throat. Two attendants, who had entered the office a few moments earlier, caught him and led him to the door.

“Remember!” Tate called. “This in no way invalidates your own experience.”

Hellishly enough, Simon knew that what Tate said was true.

And then he found himself on the street.

At first, all he desired was to escape from Earth, where the commercial impracticalities were more than a normal man could afford. He walked very quickly, and his Penny walked beside him, her face glorified with love for him, and him, and him, and you, and you.

And of course he came to the shooting gallery.

“Try your luck?” the manager asked.

“Set ‘em up,” said Alfred Simon.

BY HIS BOOTSTRAPS

Robert A. Heinlein

Bob Wilson did not see the circle grow.
Nor, for that matter, did he see the stranger who stepped
out of the circle and stood staring at the back of Wilson's neck—stared, and breathed heavily, as if labouring under strong and unusual emotion.

Wilson had no reason to suspect that anyone else was in his room; he had every reason to expect the contrary. He had locked himself in his room for the purpose of completing his thesis in one sustained drive. He had to—tomorrow was the last day for submission, yesterday the thesis had been no more than a title: "An Investigation into Certain Mathematical Aspects of a Rigour of Metaphysics."

Fifty-two cigarettes, four pots of coffee, and thirteen hours of continuous work had added seven thousand words to the title. As to the validity of his thesis he was far too groggy to give a damn. Get it done, was his only thought, get it done, turn it in, take three stiff drinks and sleep for a week.

He glanced up and let his eyes rest on his wardrobe door, behind which he had cached a gin bottle, nearly full. No, he admonished himself, one more drink and you'll never finish it, Bob, old son.

The stranger behind him said nothing.

Wilson resumed typing. "—nor is it valid to assume that a conceivable proposition is necessarily a possible proposition, even when it is possible to formulate mathematics which describes the proposition with exactness. A case in point is the concept 'Time Travel.' Time travel may be imagined and its necessities may be formulated under any and all theories of time, formulae which resolve the paradoxes of each theory. Nevertheless, we know certain things about the empirical nature of time which preclude the possibility of the conceivable proposition. Duration is an attribute of consciousness and not of the plenum. It has no ding an sich. Therefore—"

A key of the typewriter stuck, three more jammed up on top of it. Wilson swore dully and reached forward to straighten out the cantankerous machinery. "Don't bother with it," he heard a voice say. "It's a lot of utter hogwash anyhow."

Wilson sat up with a jerk, then turned his head slowly around. He fervently hoped that there was someone behind him. Otherwise—

He perceived the stranger with relief. "Thank God," he said to himself. "For a moment I thought I had come unstuck." His relief turned to extreme annoyance. "What the devil are you doing in my room?" he demanded. He shoved back his chair, got up and strode over to the one door. It was still locked, and bolted on the inside.

The windows were no help; they were adjacent to his
desk and three stories above a busy street. "How did you get in?" he added.

"Through that," answered the stranger, hooking a thumb towards the circle. Wilson noticed it for the first time, blinked his eyes and looked again. There it hung between them and the wall, a great disk of nothing, of the colour one sees when the eyes are shut tight.

Wilson shook his head vigorously. The circle remained. "Gosh," he thought, "I was right the first time. I wonder when I slipped my trolley?" He advanced towards the disk, put out a hand to touch it.

"Don't!" snapped the stranger.

"Why not?" said Wilson edgily. Nevertheless he paused.

"I'll explain. But let's have a drink first." He walked directly to the wardrobe, opened it, reached in and took out the bottle of gin without looking.

"Hey!" yelled Wilson. "What are you doing there? That's my liquor."

"Your liquor—" The stranger paused for a moment. "Sorry. You don't mind if I have a drink, do you?"

"I suppose not," Bob Wilson conceded in a surly tone. "Pour me one while you're about it."

"O.K.," agreed the stranger, "then I'll explain."

"It had better be good," Wilson said ominously. Nevertheless he drank his drink and looked the stranger over.

He saw a chap about the same size as himself and much the same age—perhaps a little older, though a three-day growth of beard may have accounted for that impression. The stranger had a black eye and a freshly cut and badly swollen upper lip. Wilson decided he did not like the chap's face. Still, there was something familiar about the face; he felt that he should have recognized it, that he had seen it many times before under different circumstances. "Who are you?" he asked suddenly.

"Me?" said his guest. "Don't you recognize me?"

"I'm not sure," admitted Wilson. "Have I ever seen you before?"

"Well—not exactly," the other temporized. "Skip it—you wouldn't know about it."

"What's your name?"

"My name? Uh... just call me Joe."

Wilson set down his glass. "O.K., Joe Whatever-your-name-is, trot out that explanation and make it snappy."

"I'll do that," agreed Joe. "That dingus I came through"—he pointed to the circle—"that's a Time Gate."

"A what?"

"A Time Gate. Time flows along side by side on each side
the Gate, but some thousands of years apart—just how many thousand I don’t know. But for the next couple of hours that Gate is open. You can walk into the future just by stepping through that circle.” The stranger paused.

Bob drummed on the desk. “Go ahead. I’m listening. It’s a nice story.”

“You don’t believe me, do you? I’ll show you.” Joe got up, went again to the wardrobe and obtained Bob’s hat, his prized and only hat, which he had mistreated into its present battered grandeur through six years of undergraduate and graduate life. Joe chucked it towards the im palpable disk.

It struck the surface, went on through with no apparent resistance, disappeared from sight.

Wilson got up, walked carefully around the circle and examined the bare floor. “A neat trick,” he conceded. “Now I’ll thank you to return to me my hat.”

The stranger shook his head. “You can get it for yourself when you pass through.”

“Huh?”

“That’s right. Listen—” Briefly the stranger repeated his explanation about the Time Gate. Wilson, he insisted, had an opportunity that comes once in a millennium—if he would only hurry up and climb through that circle. Furthermore, though Joe could not explain in detail at the moment, it was very important that Wilson go through.

Bob Wilson helped himself to a second drink, and then a third. He was beginning to feel both good and argumentative. “Why?” he said flatly.

Joe looked exasperated. “Dammit, if you’d just step through once, explanations wouldn’t be necessary. However—” According to Joe, there was an old guy on the other side who needed Wilson’s help. With Wilson’s help the three of them would run the country. The exact nature of the help Joe could not or would not specify. Instead he bore down on the unique possibilities for high adventure. “You don’t want to slave your life away teaching numskulls in some fresh-water college,” he insisted. “This is your chance. Grab it!”

Bob Wilson admitted to himself that a Ph.D. and an appointment as an instructor was not his ideal of existence. Still, it beat working for a living. His eye fell on the gin bottle, its level now deplorably lowered. That explained it. He got up unsteadily.

“No, my dear fellow,” he stated, “I’m not going to climb on your merry-go-round. You know why?”

“Why?”

“Because I’m drunk, that’s why. You’re not there at all. That ain’t there.” He gestured widely at the circle. “There
ain't anybody here but me, and I'm drunk. Been working too hard," he added apologetically. "I'm going to bed."

"You're not drunk."

"I am drunk. Peter Piper pepped a pick of pippered peckles." He moved towards his bed.

Joe grabbed his arm. "You can't do that," he said.

"Let him alone!"

They both swung around. Facing them, standing directly in front of the circle was a third man. Bob looked at the newcomer, looked back at Joe, blinked his eyes and tried to focus them. The two looked a good bit alike, he thought, enough alike to be brothers. Or maybe he was seeing double. Bad stuff, gin. Should've switched to rum a long time ago. Good stuff, rum. You could drink it, or take a bath in it. No, that was gin—he meant Joe.

How silly! Joe was the one with the black eye. He wondered why he had ever been confused.

Then who was this other lug? Couldn't a couple of friends have a quiet drink together without people butting in?

"Who are you?" he said with quiet dignity.

The newcomer turned his head, then looked at Joe. "He knows me," he said meaningly.

Joe looked him over slowly. "Yes," he said, "Yes, I suppose I do. But what the deuce are you here for? And why are you trying to bust up the plan?"

"No time for long-winded explanations. I know more about it than you do—you'll concede that—and my judgment is bound to be better than yours. He doesn't go through the Gate."

"I don't concede anything of the sort—"

The telephone rang. "Answer it!" snapped the newcomer.

Bob was about to protest the peremptory tone, but decided he wouldn't. He lacked the phlegmatic temperament necessary to ignore a ringing telephone. "Hello?"

"Hello," he was answered. "Is that Bob Wilson?"

"Yes. Who is this?"

"Never mind. I just wanted to be sure you were there. I thought you would be. You're right in the groove, kid, right in the groove."

Wilson heard a chuckle, then the click of disconnection. "Hello," he said. "Hello!" He juggled the bar a couple of times, then hung up.

"What was it?" asked Joe.

"Nothing. Some nut with a misplaced sense of humour." The telephone bell rang again. Wilson added, "There he is again," and picked up the receiver. "Listen, you butter-
fly-brained ape! I'm a busy man, and this is not a public telephone."

"Why, Bob!" came a hurt feminine voice.

"Huh? Oh, it's you, Genevieve. Look—I'm sorry. I apologize—"

"Well, I should think you would!"

"You don't understand, honey. A guy has been pestering me over the phone and I thought it was him. You know I wouldn't talk that way to you, Babe."

"Well, I should think not. Particularly after all you said to me this afternoon, and all we meant to each other."

"Huh? This afternoon? Did you say this afternoon?"

"Of course. But what I called up about was this: you left your hat in my apartment. I noticed it a few minutes after you had gone and just thought I'd call and tell you where it is. Anyhow," she added coyly, "it gave me an excuse to hear your voice again."

"Sure. Fine," he said mechanically. "Look, Babe, I'm a little mixed up about this. Trouble I've had all day long, and more trouble now. I'll look you up tonight and straighten it out. But I know I didn't leave your hat in my apartment—"

"Your hat, silly!"

"Huh? Oh, sure! Anyhow, I'll see you tonight. 'By."

He rang off hurriedly. Gosh, he thought, that woman is getting to be a problem. Hallucinations. He turned to his two companions.

"Very well, Joe. I'm ready to go if you are." He was not sure just when or why he had decided to go through the time gadget, but he had. Who did this other mug think he was, anyhow, trying to interfere with a man's freedom of choice?

"Fine!" said Joe, in a relieved voice. "Just step through. That's all there is to it."

"No, you don't!" It was the ubiquitous stranger. He stepped between Wilson and the Gate.

Bob Wilson faced him. "Listen, you! You come butting in here like you think I was a bum. If you don't like it, go jump in the lake—and I'm just the kind of guy who can do it! You and who else?"

The stranger reached out and tried to collar him. Wilson let go a swing, but not a good one. It went by nothing faster than parcel post. The stranger walked under it and let him have a mouthful of knuckles—large, hard ones. Joe closed in rapidly, coming to Bob's aid. They traded punches in a free-for-all, with Bob joining in enthusiastically but inefficiently. The only punch he landed was on Joe, theoretically
his ally. However, he had intended it for the third man.

It was this *faux pas* which gave the stranger an opportunity
to land a clean left jab on Wilson's face. It was inches
higher than the button, but in Bob's bemused condition it
was sufficient to cause him to cease taking part in the ac-
tivities.

Bob Wilson came slowly to awareness of his surroundings.
He was seated on a floor which seemed a little unsteady.
Someone was bending over him. "Are you all right?" the
figure inquired.

"I guess so." he answered thickly. His mouth pained him;
he put his hand to it, got it sticky with blood. "My head
hurts."

"I should think it would. You came through head over
heels. I think you hit your head when you landed."

Wilson's thoughts were coming back into confused focus.
Came through? He looked more closely at his succourer. He
saw a middle-aged man with grey-shot bushy hair and a
short, neatly trimmed beard. He was dressed in what Wilson
took to be purple lounging pyjamas.

But the room in which he found himself bothered him
even more. It was circular and the ceiling was arched so
subtly that it was difficult to say how high it was. A steady
glareless light filled the room from no apparent source. There
was no furniture save for a high dais or pulpit-shaped ob-
ject near the wall facing him. "Came through? Came through
what?"

"The Gate, of course." There was something odd about
the man's accent. Wilson could not place it, save for a feel-
ing that English was not a tongue he was accustomed to
speaking.

Wilson looked over his shoulder in the direction of the
other's gaze, and saw the circle.

That made his head ache even more. "Oh Lord," he
thought, "now I really am nuts. Why don't I wake up?" He
shook his head to clear it.

That was a mistake. The top of his head did not quite
come off—not quite. And the circle stayed where it was,
a simple locus hanging in the air, its flat depth filled with
the amorphous colours and shapes of no-vision. "Did I come
through that?"

"Yes."

"Where am I?"

"In the Hall of the Gate in the High Palace of Norkaal.
But what is more important is when you are. You have gone
forward a little more than thirty thousand years."
“Now I know I’m crazy,” thought Wilson. He got up unsteadily and moved towards the Gate.

The older man put a hand on his shoulder. “Where are you going?”

“Back!”

“Not so fast. You will go back all right—I give you my word on that. But let me dress your wounds first. And you should rest. I have some explanations to make to you, and there is an errand you can do for me when you get back—to our mutual advantage. There is a great future in store for you and me, my boy—a great future!”

Wilson paused uncertainly. The older man’s insistence was vaguely disquieting. “I don’t like this.”

The other eyed him narrowly. “Wouldn’t you like a drink before you go?”

Wilson most assuredly would. Right at the moment a stiff drink seemed the most desirable thing on earth—or in time. “O.K.”

“Come with me.” The older man led him back of the structure near the wall and through a door which led into a passage-way. He walked briskly; Wilson hurried to keep up.

“By the way,” he asked, as they continued down the long passage, “What is your name?”

“My name? You may call me Diktor—everyone else does.”

“O.K., Diktor. Do you want my name?”

“Your name?” Diktor chuckled. “I know your name. It’s Bob Wilson.”

“Huh? Oh—I suppose Joe told you.”

“Joe? I know no one by that name.”

“You don’t? He seemed to know you. Say—maybe you aren’t the guy I was supposed to see.”

“But I am. I have been expecting you—in a way, Joe . . . Joe—Oh!” Diktor chuckled. “It had slipped my mind for a moment. He told you to call him Joe, didn’t he?”

“Isn’t it his name?”

“It’s as good a name as any other. Here we are.” He ushered Wilson into a small, but cheerful, room. It contained no furniture of any sort, but the floor was soft and warm as live flesh. “Sit down. I’ll be back in a moment.”

Bob looked around for something to sit on, then turned to ask Diktor for a chair. But Diktor was gone, furthermore the door through which they had entered was gone. Bob sat down on the comfortable floor and tried not to worry.

Diktor returned promptly. Wilson saw the door dilate to let him in, but did not catch on to how it was done. Diktor
was carrying a carafe, which gurgled pleasantly, and a cup. "Mud in your eye," he said heartily and poured a good four fingers. "Drink up."

Bob accepted the cup. "Aren't you drinking?"

"Presently. I want to attend to your wounds first."

"O.K." Wilson tossed off the first drink in almost indecent haste—it was good stuff, a little like Scotch, he decided, but smoother and not as dry—while Diktor worked deftly with salves that smarted at first, then soothed. "Mind if I have another?"

"Help yourself."

Bob drank more slowly the second cup. He did not finish it; it slipped from relaxed fingers, spilling a ruddy, brown stain across the floor. He snored.

Bob Wilson woke up feeling fine and completely rested. He was cheerful without knowing why. He lay relaxed, eyes still closed, for a few moments and let his soul snuggle back into his body. This was going to be a good day, he felt. Oh, yes—he had finished that double-damned thesis. No, he hadn't either! He sat up with a start.

The sight of the strange walls around him brought him back into continuity. But before he had time to worry—at once, in fact—the door relaxed and Diktor stepped in. "Feeling better?"

"Why, yes, I do. Say, what is this?"

"We'll get to that. How about some breakfast?"

In Wilson's scale of evaluations breakfast rated just after life itself and ahead of the chance of immortality. Diktor conducted him to another room—the first that he had seen possessing windows. As a matter of fact half the room was open, a balcony hanging high over a green countryside. A soft, warm, summer breeze wafted through the place. They broke their fast in luxury, Roman style, while Diktor explained.

Bob Wilson did not follow the explanations as closely as he might have done, because his attention was diverted by the maidservants who served the meal. The first came in bearing a great tray of fruit on her head. The fruit was gorgeous. So was the girl. Search as he would he could discern no fault in her.

Her costume lent itself to the search. She came first to Diktor, and with a single, graceful movement dropped to one knee, removed the tray from her head, and offered it to him. He helped himself to a small, red fruit and waved her away. She then offered it to Bob in the same delightful manner.
"As I was saying," continued Diktor, "it is not certain where the High Ones came from or where they went when they left Earth. I am inclined to think they went away into Time. In any case they ruled more than twenty thousand years and completely obliterated human culture as you knew it. What is more important to you and to me is the effect they had on the human psyche. One twentieth-century style go-getter can accomplish just about anything he wants to accomplish around here—Aren't you listening?"

"Huh? Oh, yes, sure. Say, that's one mighty pretty girl." His eyes still rested on the exit through which she had disappeared.

"Who? Oh, yes, I suppose so. She's not exceptionally beautiful as women go around here."

"That's hard to believe. I could learn to get along with a girl like that."

"You like her? Very well, she is yours."

"Huh?"

"She's a slave. Don't get indignant. They are slaves by nature. If you like her, I'll make you a present of her. It will make her happy." The girl had just returned. Diktor called to her in a language strange to Bob. "Her name is Arma," he said in an aside, then spoke to her briefly.

Arma giggled. She composed her face quickly, and, moving over to where Wilson reclined, dropped on both knees to the floor and lowered her head, with both hands cupped before her. "Touch her forehead," Diktor instructed.

Bob did so. The girl arose and stood waiting placidly by his side. Diktor spoke to her. She looked puzzled, but moved out of the room. "I told her that, notwithstanding her new status, you wished her to continue serving breakfast."

Diktor resumed his explanations while the service of the meal continued. The next course was brought in by Arma and another girl. When Bob saw the second girl he let out a low whistle. He realized he had been a little hasty in letting Diktor give him Arma. Either the standard of pulchritude had gone up incredibly, he decided, or Diktor went to a lot of trouble in selecting his servants.

"... for that reason," Diktor was saying, "it is necessary that you go back through the Time Gate at once. Your first job is to bring this other chap back. Then there is one other task for you to do, and we'll be sitting pretty. After that it is share and share alike for you and me. And there is plenty to share, I— You aren't listening!"

"Sure I was, chief. I heard every word you said." He fingered his chin. "Say, have you got a razor I could borrow? I'd like to shave."
Diktor swore softly in two languages. "Keep your eyes off those wenches and listen to me! There's work to be done."

"Sure. sure. I understand that—and I'm your man. When do we start?" Wilson had made up his mind some time ago—just shortly after Arma had entered with the tray of fruit, in fact. He felt as if he had walked into some extremely pleasant dream. If co-operation with Diktor would cause that dream to continue, so be it. To hell with an academic career!

Anyhow, all Diktor wanted was for him to go back where he started and persuade another guy to go through the Gate. The worst that could happen was for him to find himself back in the twentieth century. What could he lose?

Diktor stood up. "Let's get on with it," he said shortly, "before you get your attention diverted again. Follow me." He set off at a brisk pace with Wilson behind him.

Diktor took him to the Hall of the Gate and stopped. "All you have to do," he said, "is to step through the Gate. You will find yourself back in your own room, in your own time. Persuade the man you find there to go through the Gate. We have need of him. Then come back yourself."

Bob held up a hand and pinched thumb and forefinger together. "It's in the bag, boss. Consider it done." He started to step through the Gate.

"Wait!" commanded Diktor. "You are not used to time travel. I warn you that you are going to get one hell of a shock when you step through. This other chap—you'll recognize him."

"Who is he?"

"I won't tell you because you wouldn't understand. But you will when you see him. Just remember this—There are some very strange paradoxes connected with time travel. Don't let anything you see throw you. You do what I tell you to and you'll be all right."

"Paradoxes don't worry me." Bob said confidently. "Is that all? I'm ready."

"One minute." Diktor stepped behind the raised dais. His head appeared above the side a moment later. "I've set the controls. O.K. Go!"

Bob Wilson stepped through the locus known as the Time Gate.

There was no particular sensation connected with the transition. It was like stepping through a curtained doorway into a darker room. He paused for a moment on the other side and let his eyes adjust to the dimmer light. He was, he saw, indeed in his own room.
There was a man in it, seated at his own desk. Diktor had been right about that. This, then, was the chap he was to send back through the Gate. Diktor had said he would recognize him. Well, let's see who it is.

He felt a passing resentment at finding someone at his desk in his room, then thought better of it. After all, it was just a rented room; when he disappeared, no doubt it had been rented again. He had no way of telling how long he had been gone—shucks, it might be the middle of next week!

The chap did look vaguely familiar, although all he could see was his back. Who was it? Should he speak to him, cause him to turn around? He felt vaguely reluctant to do so until he knew who it was. He rationalized the feeling by telling himself that it was desirable to know with whom he was dealing before he attempted anything as outlandish as persuading this man to go through the Gate.

The man at the desk continued typing, paused to snuff out a cigarette by laying it in an ash tray, then stamping it with a paper weight. Bob Wilson knew that gesture.

Chills trickled down his back. “If he lights his next one,” he whispered to himself, “the way I think he is going to—”

The man at the desk took out another cigarette, tamped it on one end, turned it and tamped the other, straightened and crimped the paper on one end carefully against his left thumbnail and placed that end in his mouth.

Wilson felt the blood beating in his neck. Sitting there with his back to him was himself, Bob Wilson!

He felt that he was going to faint. He closed his eyes and steadied himself on a chair back. “I knew it,” he thought, “the whole thing is absurd. I’m crazy. I know. I’m crazy. Some sort of split personality. I shouldn’t have worked so hard.”

The sound of typing continued.

He pulled himself together, and reconsidered the matter. Diktor had warned him that he was due for a shock, a shock that could not be explained ahead of time, because it could not be believed. “All right—suppose I’m not crazy. If time travel can happen at all, there is no reason why I can’t come back and see myself doing something I did in the past. If I’m sane, that is what I’m doing.

“And if I am crazy, it doesn’t make a damn bit of difference what I do!”

“And furthermore,” he added to himself, “if I’m crazy, maybe I can stay crazy and go back through the Gate! No, that does not make sense. Neither does anything else—the hell with it!”

He crept forward softly and peered over the shoulder of his
double. “Duration is an attribute of the consciousness,” he read, “and not of the plenum.”

“That tears it,” he thought, “right back where I started, and watching myself write my thesis.”

The typing continued. “It has no ding an sich. Therefore—” A key stuck, and others piled up on top of it. His double at the desk swore and reached out a hand to straighten the keys.

“Don’t bother with it,” Wilson said on sudden impulse. “It’s a lot of utter hogwash anyhow.”

The other Bob Wilson sat up with a jerk, then looked slowly around. An expression of surprise gave way to annoyance. “What the devil are you doing in my room?” he demanded. Without waiting for an answer he got up, went quickly to the door and examined the lock. “How did you get in?”

“This,” thought Wilson, “is going to be difficult.”

“Through that,” Wilson answered, pointing to the Time Gate. His double looked where he had pointed, did a double take, then advanced cautiously and started to touch it.

“Don’t!” yelled Wilson.

The other checked himself. “Why not?” he demanded.

Just why he must not permit his other self to touch the Gate was not clear to Wilson, but he had had an unmistakable feeling of impending disaster when he saw it about to happen. He temporized by saying, “I’ll explain. But let’s have a drink.” A drink was a good idea in any case. There had never been a time when he needed one more than he did right now. Quite automatically he went to his usual cache of liquor in the wardrobe and took out the bottle he expected to find there.

“Hey!” protested the other. “What are you doing there? That’s my liquor.”

“Your liquor—” Hell’s bells! It was his liquor. No, it wasn’t; it was—their liquor. Oh, the devil! It was much too mixed up to try to explain. “Sorry. You don’t mind if I have a drink, do you?”

“I suppose not,” his double said grudgingly. “Pour me one while you’re about it.”

“O.K.” Wilson assented, “then I’ll explain.” It was going to be much, much too difficult to explain until he had had a drink, he felt. As it was, he couldn’t explain it fully to himself.

“It had better be good,” the other warned him, and looked Wilson over carefully while he drank his drink.

Wilson watched his younger self scrutinizing him with confused and almost insupportable emotions. Couldn’t the stupid
fool recognize his own face when he saw it in front of him? If he could not see what the situation was, how in the world was he ever going to make it clear to him?

It had slipped his mind that his face was barely recognizable in any case, being decidedly battered and unshaven. Even more important, he failed to take into account the fact that a person does not look at his own face, even in mirrors, in the same frame of mind with which he regards another's face. No sane person ever expects to see his own face hanging on another.

Wilson could see that his companion was puzzled by his appearance, but it was equally clear that no recognition took place. "Who are you?" the other man asked suddenly.

"Me?" replied Wilson. "Don't you recognize me?"

"I'm not sure. Have I ever seen you before?"

"Well—not exactly," Wilson stalled. How did you go about telling another guy that the two of you were a trifle closer than twins? "Skip it—you wouldn't know about it."

"What's your name?"

"My name? Uh—" Oh, oh! This was going to be sticky! The whole situation was utterly ridiculous. He opened his mouth, tried to form the words "Bob Wilson," then gave up with a feeling of utter futility. Like many a man before him, he found himself forced into a lie because the truth simply would not be believed. "Just call me Joe," he finished lamely.

He felt suddenly startled at his own words. It was at this point that he realized that he was in fact, "Joe," the Joe whom he had encountered once before. That he had landed back in his own room at the very time at which he had ceased working on his thesis he already realized, but he had not had time to think the matter through. Hearing himself refer to himself as Joe slapped him in the face with the realization that this was not simply a similar scene, but the same scene he had lived through once before—save that he was living through it from a different viewpoint.

At least he thought it was the same scene. Did it differ in any respect? He could not be sure as he could not recall, word for word, what the conversation had been.

For a complete transcript of the scene that lay dormant in his memory he felt willing to pay twenty-five dollars cash, plus sales tax.

Wait a minute now—he was under no compulsion. He was sure of that. Everything he did and said was the result of his own free will. Even if he couldn't remember the script, there were some things he knew "Joe" hadn't said. "Mary had a little lamb," for example. He would recite a nursery
rhythm and get off this damned repetitious treadmill. He opened his mouth—

“O.K., Joe Whatever-your-name-is,” his alter ego remarked, setting down a glass which had contained, until recently, a quarter pint of gin, “trot out that explanation and make it snappy.”

He opened his mouth again to answer the question, then closed it. “Steady, son, steady,” he told himself. “You’re a free agent. You want to recite a nursery rhyme—go ahead and do it. Don’t answer him; go ahead and recite it—and break this vicious circle.”

But under the unfriendly, suspicious eye of the man opposite him he found himself totally unable to recall any nursery rhyme. His mental processes stuck on dead centre. He capitulated. “I’ll do that. That dingus I came through—that’s a Time Gate.”

“A what?”

“A Time Gate. Time flows along side by side on each side—” As he talked he felt sweat breaking out on him; he felt reasonably sure that he was explaining in exactly the same words in which explanation had first been offered to him. “—into the future just by stepping through that circle.” He stopped and wiped his forehead.

“Go ahead,” said the other implacably. “I’m listening. It’s a nice story.”

Bob suddenly wondered if the other man could be himself. The stupid arrogant dogmatism of the man’s manner infuriated him. All right, all right! He’d show him. He strode suddenly over to the wardrobe, took out his hat and threw it through the Gate.

His opposite number watched the hat snuff out of existence with expressionless eyes, then stood up and went around in back of the Gate, walking with the careful steps of a man who is a little bit drunk, but determined not to show it. “A neat trick,” he applauded, after satisfying himself that the hat was gone, “now I’ll thank you to return to me my hat.”

Wilson shook his head. “You can get it for yourself when you pass through,” he answered absent-mindedly. He was pondering the problem of how many hats there were on the other side of the Gate.

“Huh?”

“That’s right. Listen—” Wilson did his best to explain persuasively what it was he wanted his earlier persona to do. Or rather to cajole. Explanations were out of the question, in any honest sense of the word. He would have preferred attempting to explain tensor calculus to an Australian aborigine,
even though he did not understand that esoteric mathematics himself.

The other man was not helpful. He seemed more interested in nursing the gin than he did in following Wilson’s implausible protestations. “Why?” he interrupted pugnaciously.

“Dammit,” Wilson answered, “if you’d just step through once, explanations wouldn’t be necessary. However—” He continued with a synopsis of Diktor’s proposition. He realized with irritation that Diktor had been exceedingly sketchy with his explanations. He was forced to hit only the high spots in the logical parts of his argument, and bear down on the emotional appeal. He was on safe ground there—no one knew better than he did himself how fed up the earlier Bob Wilson had been with the petty drudgery and stuffy atmosphere of an academic career. “You don’t want to slave your life away teaching numskulls in some fresh-water college,” he concluded. “This is your chance. Grab it!”

Wilson watched his companion narrowly and thought he detected a favourable response. He definitely seemed interested. But the other set his glass down carefully, stared at the gin bottle, and at last replied:

“My dear fellow, I am not going to climb on your merry-go-round. You know why?”

“Why?”

“Because I’m drunk, that’s why. You’re not there at all. That ain’t there.” He gestured widely at the Gate, nearly fell, and recovered himself with effort. “There ain’t anybody here but me, and I’m drunk. Been working too hard,” he mumbled, “’m goin’ to bed.”

“You’re not drunk,” Wilson protested hopefully. “Damnation,” he thought, “a man who can’t hold his liquor shouldn’t drink.”

“I am drunk. Peter Piper pepped a pick of pippered peckles.” He lumbered over towards the bed.

Wilson grabbed his arm. “You can’t do that.”

“Let him alone!”

Wilson swung around, saw a third man standing in front of the Gate—recognized him with a sudden shock. His own recollection of the sequence of events was none too clear in his memory, since he had been somewhat intoxicated—damned near boiled, he admitted—the first time he had experienced this particular busy afternoon. He realized that he should have anticipated the arrival of a third party. But his memory had not prepared him for who the third party would turn out to be.

He recognized himself—another carbon copy.

He stood silent for a minute, trying to assimilate this new
fact and force it into some reasonable integration. He closed his eyes helplessly. This was just a little too much. He felt that he wanted to have a few plain words with Diktor.

"Who the hell are you?" He opened his eyes to find that his other self, the drunk one, was addressing the latest edition. The newcomer turned away from his interrogator and looked sharply at Wilson. "He knows me."

Wilson took his time about replying. This thing was getting out of hand. "Yes," he admitted, "I suppose I do. But what the deuce are you here for? And why are you trying to bust up the plan?"

His facsimile cut him short. "No time for long-winded explanations. I know more about it than you do—you'll concede that—and my judgment is bound to be better than yours. He doesn't go through the Gate."

The offhand arrogance of the other antagonized Wilson. "I don't concede anything of the sort—" he began.

He was interrupted by the telephone bell. "Answer it!" snapped Number Three.

The tipsy Number One looked belligerent but picked up the hand-set. "Hello... Yes. Who is this?... Hello. Hello!" He tapped the bar of the instrument, then slammed the receiver back into its cradle.

"Who was that?" Wilson asked, somewhat annoyed that he had not had a chance to answer it himself.

"Nothing. Some nut with a misplaced sense of humour." At that instant the telephone rang again. "There he is again!" Wilson tried to answer it, but his alcoholic counterpart beat him to it, brushed him aside. "Listen, you butterfly-brained ape! I'm a busy man and this is not a public telephone.... Huh? Oh, it's you, Genevieve. Look—I'm sorry. I apologize.... You don't understand, honey. A guy has been pestering me over the phone and I thought it was him. You know I wouldn't talk to you that way, Babe.... Huh? This afternoon? Did you say this afternoon?... Sure. Fine. Look, Babe, I'm a little mixed up about this. Trouble I've had all day long and more trouble now. I'll look you up tonight and straighten it out. But I know I didn't leave your hat in my apartment.... Huh? Oh, sure! Anyhow, I'll see you tonight. 'By."

It almost nauseated Wilson to hear his earlier self catering to the demands of that clinging female. Why didn't he just hang up on her? The contrast with Arma—there was a dish!—was acute; it made him more determined than ever to go ahead with the plan, despite the warning of the latest arrival.

After hanging up the phone his earlier self faced him,
pointedly ignoring the presence of the third copy. "Very well, Joe," he announced. "I'm ready to go if you are."

"Fine!" Wilson agreed with relief. "Just step through. That's all there is to it."

"No, you don't!" Number Three barred the way.

Wilson started to argue, but his erratic comrade was ahead of him. "Listen, you! You come butting in here like you think I was a bum. If you don't like it, go jump in the lake—and I'm just the kind of a guy who can do it! You and who else?"

They started trading punches almost at once. Wilson stepped in warily, looking for an opening that would enable him to put the slug on Number Three with one decisive blow.

He should have watched his drunken ally as well. A wild swing from that quarter glanced off his already damaged features and caused him excruciating pain. His upper lip, cut, puffy, and tender from his other encounter, took the blow and became an area of pure agony. He flinched and jumped back.

A sound cut through his fog of pain, a dull *Smack!* He forced his eyes to track and saw the feet of a man disappear through the Gate. Number Three was still standing by the Gate. "Now you've done it!" he said bitterly to Wilson, and nursed the knuckles of his left hand.

The obviously unfair allegation reached Wilson at just the wrong moment. His face still felt like an experiment in sadism. "Me?" he said angrily. "You knocked him through. I never laid a finger on him."

"Yes, but it's your fault. If you hadn't interfered, I wouldn't have had to do it."

"Me interfere? Why, you bald-faced hypocrite—you butted in and tried to queer the pitch. Which reminds me—you owe me some explanations and I damn well mean to have 'em. What's the idea of—"

But his opposite number cut in on him. "Stow it," he said gloomily. "It's too late now. He's gone through."

"Too late for what?" Wilson wanted to know.

"Too late to put a stop to this chain of events."

"Why should we?"

"Because," Number Three said bitterly, "Diktor has played me—I mean had played *you . . . us*—for a dope, for a couple of dopes. Look, he told you that he was going to set you up as a big shot over *there*"—he indicated the Gate—"didn't he?"

"Yes," Wilson admitted.

"Well, that's a lot of malarky. All he means to do is to
get us so incredibly tangled up in this Time Gate thing that we'll never get straightened out again.”

Wilson felt a sudden doubt nibbling at his mind. It could be true. Certainly there had not been much sense to what had happened so far. After all, why should Diktor want his help, want it bad enough to offer to split with him, even-Stephen, what was obviously a cushy spot? “How do you know?” he demanded.

“Why go into it?” the other answered wearily. “Why don't you just take my word for it?”

“Why should I?”

His companion turned a look of complete exasperation on him. “If you can't take my word, whose word can you take?”

The inescapable logic of the question simply annoyed Wilson. He resented this interloping duplicate of himself anyhow; to be asked to follow his lead blindly irked him. “I'm from Missouri,” he said. “I'll see for myself.” He moved towards the Gate.

“Where are you going?”

“Through! I'm going to look up Diktor and have it out with him.”

“Don't!” the other said. “Maybe we can break the chain even now.” Wilson felt and looked stubborn. The other sighed. “Go ahead,” he surrendered. “It's your funeral. I wash my hands of you.”

Wilson paused as he was about to step through the Gate. “It is, eh? Hm-m-m—how can it be my funeral unless it's your funeral, too?”

The other man looked blank, then an expression of apprehension raced over his face. That was the last Wilson saw of him as he stepped through.

The Hall of the Gate was empty of other occupants when Bob Wilson came through on the other side. He looked for his hat, but did not find it, then stepped around back of the raised platform, seeking the exit he remembered. He nearly bumped into Diktor.

“Ah, there you are!” the older man greeted him. “Fine! Fine! Now there is just one more little thing to take care of, then we will be all squared away. I must say I am pleased with you, Bob, very pleased indeed.”

“Oh, you are, are you?” Bob faced him truculently. “Well, it's too bad I can't say the same about you! I'm not a damn bit pleased. What was the idea of shoving me into that...that daisy chain without warning me? What's the meaning of all this nonsense? Why didn't you warn me?”

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“Easy, easy,” said the older man, “don’t get excited. Tell the truth now—if I had told you that you were going back to meet yourself face to face, would you have believed me? Come now, ’fess up.”

Wilson admitted that he would not have believed it.

“Well, then,” Diktor continued with a shrug, “there was no point in me telling you, was there? If I had told you, you would not have believed me, which is another way of saying that you would have believed false data. Is it not better to be in ignorance than to believe falsely?”

“I suppose so, but—”

“Wait! I did not intentionally deceive you. I did not deceive you at all. But had I told you the full truth, you would have been deceived because you would have rejected the truth. It was better for you to learn the truth with your own eyes. Otherwise—”

“Wait a minute! Wait a minute!” Wilson cut in. “You’re getting me all tangled up. I’m willing to let bygones be bygones, if you’ll come clean with me. Why did you send me back at all?”

‘Let bygones be bygones.’” Diktor repeated. “Ah, if we only could! But we can’t. That’s why I sent you back—in order that you might come through the Gate in the first place.”

“Huh? Wait a minute—I already had come through the Gate.”

Diktor shook his head. “Had you, now? Think a moment. When you got back into your own time and your own place you found your earlier self there, didn’t you?”

“Mmmm—yes.”

“He—your earlier self—had not yet been through the Gate, had he?”

“No. I—”

“How could you have been through the Gate, unless you persuaded him to go through the Gate?”

Bob Wilson’s head was beginning to whirl. He was beginning to wonder who did what to whom and who got paid. “But that’s impossible! You are telling me that I did something because I was going to do something.”

“Well, didn’t you? You were there.”

“No, I didn’t—no . . . well, maybe I did, but it didn’t feel like it.”

“Why should you expect it to? It was something totally new to your experience.”

“But . . . but—” Wilson took a deep breath and got control of himself. Then he reached back into his academic philosophical concepts and produced the notion he had been
struggling to express. "It denies all reasonable theories of causation. You would have me believe that causation can be completely circular. I went through because I came back from going through to persuade myself to go through. That's silly."

"Well, didn't you?"

Wilson did not have an answer ready for that one. Diktor continued with, "Don't worry about it. The causation you have been accustomed to is valid enough in its own field but is simply a special case under the general case. Causation in a plenum need not be and is not limited by a man's perception of duration."

Wilson thought about that for a moment. It sounded nice, but there was something slippery about it. "Just a second," he said. "How about entropy? You can't get around entropy."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake," protested Diktor, "shut up, will you? You remind me of the mathematicians that proved that aeroplanes couldn't fly." He turned and started out of the door. "Come on. There's work to be done."

Wilson hurried after him. "Dammit, you can't do this to me. What happened to the other two?"

"The other two what?"

"The other two of me? Where are they? How am I ever going to get unsnarled?"

"You aren't snarled up. You don't feel like more than one person, do you?"

"No, but—"

"Then don't worry about it."

"But I've got to worry about it. What happened to the guy that came through just ahead of me?"

"You remember, don't you? However—" Diktor hurried on ahead, led him down a passageway, and dilated a door. "Take a look inside," he directed.

Wilson did so. He found himself looking into a small windowless unfurnished room, a room that he recognized. Sprawled on the floor, snoring steadily, was another edition of himself.

"When you first came through the Gate," explained Diktor at his elbow, "I brought you in here, attended to your hurts, and gave you a drink. The drink contained a soporific which will cause you to sleep about thirty-six hours, sleep that you badly needed. When you wake up, I will give you breakfast and explain to you what needs to be done."

Wilson's head started to ache again. "Don't do that," he pleaded. "Don't refer to that guy as if he were me. This is me, standing here."
“Have it your own way,” said Diktor. “That is the man you were. You remember the things that are about to happen to him, don’t you?”

“Yes, but it makes me dizzy. Close the door, please.”

“O.K.,” said Diktor, and complied. “We’ve got to hurry, anyhow. Once a sequence like this is established there is no time to waste. Come on.” He led the way back to the Hall of the Gate.

“I want you to return to the twentieth century and obtain certain things for us, things that can’t be obtained on this side but which will be very useful to us in, ah, developing—yes, that is the word—developing this country.”

“What sort of things?”

“Quite a number of items. I’ve prepared a list for you—certain reference books, certain items of commerce. Excuse me, please. I must adjust the controls of the Gate.” He mounted the raised platform from the rear. Wilson followed him and found that the structure was box-like, open at the top, and had a raised floor. The Gate could be seen by looking over the high sides.

The controls were unique.

Four coloured spheres the size of marbles hung on crystal rods arranged with respect to each other as the four major axes of a tetrahedron. The three spheres which bounded the base of the tetrahedron were red, yellow, and blue; the fourth at the apex was white. “Three spatial controls, one time control,” explained Diktor. “It’s very simple. Using here-and-now as zero reference, displacing any control away from the centre moves the other end of the Gate farther from here-and-now. Forward or back, right or left, up or down, past or future—they are all controlled by moving the proper sphere in or out on its rod.”

Wilson studied the system. “Yes,” he said, “but how do you tell where the other end of the Gate is? Or when? I don’t see any graduations.”

“You don’t need them. You can see where you are. Look.” He touched a point under the control framework on the side towards the Gate. A panel rolled back and Wilson saw there was a small image of the Gate itself. Diktor made another adjustment and Wilson found that he could see through the image.

He was gazing into his own room, as if through the wrong end of a telescope. He could make out two figures, but the scale was too small for him to see clearly what they were doing, nor could he tell which editions of himself were there present—if they were in truth himself! He found it quite upsetting. “Shut it off,” he said.
Diktor did so and said, "I must not forget to give you your list." He fumbled in his sleeve and produced a slip of paper which he handed to Wilson. "Here—take it."

Wilson accepted it mechanically and stuffed it into his pocket. "See here," he began, "everywhere I go I keep running into myself. I don't like it at all. It's disconcerting. I feel like a whole batch of guinea pigs. I don't half understand what this is all about and now you want to rush me through the Gate again with a bunch of half-baked excuses. Come clean. Tell me what it's all about."

Diktor showed temper in his face for the first time. "You are a stupid and ignorant young fool. I've told you all that you are able to understand. This is a period in history entirely beyond your comprehension. It would take weeks before you would even begin to understand it. I am offering you half a world in return for a few hours' cooperation and you stand there arguing about it. Stow it, I tell you. Now—where shall we set you down?" He reached for the controls.

"Get away from those controls!" Wilson rapped out. He was getting the glimmering of an idea. "Who are you, anyhow?"

"Me? I'm Diktor."

"That's not what I mean and you know it. How did you learn English?"

Diktor did not answer. His face became expressionless.

"Go on," Wilson persisted. "You didn't learn it here; that's a cinch. You're from the twentieth century, aren't you?"

Diktor smiled sourly. "I wondered how long it would take you to figure that out."

Wilson nodded. "Maybe I'm not bright, but I'm not as stupid as you think I am. Come on. Give me the rest of the story."

Diktor shook his head. "It's immaterial. Besides, we're wasting time."

Wilson laughed. "You've tried to hurry me with that excuse once too often. How can we waste time when we have that?" He pointed to the controls and to the Gate beyond them. "Unless you lied to me, we can use any slice of time we want to, any time. No, I think I know why you tried to rush me. Either you want to get me out of the picture here, or there is something devilishly dangerous about the job you want me to do. And I know how to settle it—you're going with me!"

"You don't know what you're saying," Diktor answered slowly. "That's impossible. I've got to stay here and manage the controls."
“That’s just what you aren’t going to do. You could send me through and lose me. I prefer to keep you in sight.”

“Out of the question,” answered Diktor. “You’ll have to trust me.” He bent over the controls again.

“Get away from there!” shouted Wilson. “Back out of there before I bop you one.” Under Wilson’s menacing fist Diktor withdrew from the control pulpits entirely. “There. That’s better,” he added when both of them were once more on the floor of the hall.

The idea which had been forming in his mind took full shape. The controls, he knew, were still set on his room in the boardinghouse where he lived—or had lived—back in the twentieth century. From what he had seen through the speculum of the controls, the time control was set to take him right back to the day in 1942 from which he had started. “Stand there.” he commanded Diktor, “I want to see something.”

He walked over to the Gate as if to inspect it. Instead of stopping when he reached it, he stepped on through.

He was better prepared for what he found on the other side than he had been on the two earlier occasions of time translation—“earlier” in the sense of sequence in his memory track. Nevertheless it is never too easy on the nerves to catch up with one’s self.

For he had done it again. He was back in his own room, but there were two of himself there before him. They were very much preoccupied with each other; he had a few seconds in which to get them straightened out in his mind. One of them had a beautiful black eye and a badly battered mouth. Besides that he was very much in need of a shave. That tagged him. He had been through the Gate at least once. The other, though somewhat in need of shaving himself, showed no marks of a fist fight.

He had them sorted out now, and knew where and when he was. It was all still most damnably confusing, but after former—no, not former, he amended—other experiences with time translation he knew better what to expect. He was back at the beginning again; this time he would put a stop to the crazy nonsense once and for all.

The other two were arguing. One of them swayed drunkenly towards the bed. The other grabbed him by the arm. “You can’t do that,” he said.

“Let him alone!” snapped Wilson.

The other two swung around and looked him over. Wilson watched the more sober of the pair size him up, saw his expression of amazement change to startled recognition. The other, the earliest Wilson, seemed to have trouble in focusing.
on him at all. “This is going to be a job,” thought Wilson. “The man is positively stinking.” He wondered why anyone would be foolish enough to drink on an empty stomach. It was not only stupid, it was a waste of good liquor.

He wondered if they had left a drink for him.

“Who are you?” demanded his drunken double.

Wilson turned to “Joe.” “He knows me,” he said significantly.

“Joe,” studied him. “Yes,” he conceded, “yes, I suppose I do. But what the deuce are you here for? And why are you trying to bust up the plan?”

Wilson interrupted him. “No time for long-winded explanations. I know more about it than you do—you’ll concede that—and my judgment is bound to be better than yours. He doesn’t go through the Gate.”

“I don’t concede anything of the sort—”

The ringing of the telephone checked the argument. Wilson greeted the interruption with relief, for he realized that he had started out on the wrong tack. Was it possible that he was really as dense himself as this lug appeared to be? Did he look that way to other people? But the time was too short for self-doubts and soul-searching. “Answer it!” he commanded Bob (Boiled) Wilson.

The drunk looked belligerent, but acceded when he saw that Bob (Joe) Wilson was about to beat him to it.

“Hello.... Yes. Who is this?.... Hello.... Hello!”

“Who was that?” asked “Joe.”

“Nothing? Some nut with a misplaced sense of humour.” The telephone rang again. “There he is again.” The drunk grabbed the phone before the others could reach it. “Listen, you butterfly-brained ape! I’m a busy man and this is not a public telephone.... Huh? Oh, it’s you, Genevieve—” Wilson paid little attention to the telephone conversation—he had heard it too many times before, and he had too much on his mind. His earliest persona was much too drunk to be reasonable, he realized; he must concentrate on some argument that would appeal to “Joe”—otherwise he was outnumbered. “—Huh? Oh, sure!” the call concluded. “Anyhow, I’ll see you tonight. ’By.”

Now was the time, thought Wilson, before this dumb yap can open his mouth. What would he say? What would sound convincing?

But the boiled edition spoke first. “Very well, Joe,” he stated, “I’m ready to go if you are.”

“Fine!” said “Joe.” “Just step through. That’s all there is to it.”

This was getting out of hand, not the way he had planned
it at all. “No, you don’t!” he barked and jumped in front of the Gate. He would have to make them realize, and quickly.

But he got no chance to do so. The drunk cussed him out, then swung on him; his temper snapped. He knew with sudden fierce exultation that he had been wanting to take a punch at someone for some time. Who did they think they were to be taking chances with his future?

The drunk was clumsy; Wilson stepped under his guard and hit him hard in the face. It was a solid enough punch to have convinced a sober man, but his opponent shook his head and came back for more. “Joe” closed in. Wilson decided that he would have to put his original opponent away in a hurry, and give his attention to “Joe”—by far the more dangerous of the two.

A slight mix-up between the two allies gave him his chance. He stepped back, aimed carefully, and landed a long jab with his left, one of the hardest blows he had ever struck in his life. It lifted his target right off his feet.

As the blow landed Wilson realized his orientation with respect to the Gate, knew with bitter certainty that he had again played through the scene to its inescapable climax.

He was alone with “Joe”; their companion had disappeared through the Gate.

His first impulse was the illogical but quite human and very common feeling of look-what-you-made-me-do. “Now you’ve done it!” he said angrily.

“Me?” “Joe” protested. “You knocked him through. I never laid a finger on him.”

“Yes.” Wilson was forced to admit. “But it’s your fault,” he added, “if you hadn’t interfered, I wouldn’t have had to do it.”

“Me interfere? Why, you bald-faced hypocrite, you butted in and tried to queer the pitch. Which reminds me—you owe me some explanations and I damn well mean to have them. What’s the idea of—”

“Stow it,” Wilson headed him off. He hated to be wrong and he hated still more to have to admit that he was wrong. It had been hopeless from the start, he now realized. He felt bowed down by the utter futility of it. “It’s too late now. He’s gone through.”

“Too late for what?”

“Too late to put a stop to this chain of events.” He was aware now that it always had been too late, regardless of what time it was, what year it was, or how many times he came back and tried to stop it. He remembered having gone through the first time, he had seen himself asleep on
the other side. Events would have to work out their weary way.

"Why should we?"
It was not worth while to explain, but he felt the need for self-justification. "Because," he said, "Diktor has played me—I mean has played you...us—for a dope, for a couple of dopes. Look, he told you that he was going to set you up as a big shot over there, didn't he?"

"Yes—"
"Well, that's a lot of malarky. All he means to do is to get us so incredibly tangled up in this Gate thing that we'll never get straightened out again."

"Joe" looked at him sharply. "How do you know?"
Since it was largely hunch, he felt pressed for reasonable explanation. "Why go into it?" he evaded. "Why don't you just take my word for it?"

"Why should I?"
"Why should you? Why, you lunk, can't you see? I'm yourself, older and more experienced—you have to believe me. Aloud he answered, "If you can't take my word, whose word can you take?"

"Joe" grunted. "I'm from Missouri," he said. "I'll see for myself."

Wilson was suddenly aware that "Joe" was about to step through the Gate. "Where are you going?"

"Through! I'm going to look up Diktor and have it out with him."

"Don't!" Wilson pleaded. "Maybe we can break the chain even now." But the stubborn sullen look on the other's face made him realize how futile it was. He was still enmeshed in inevitability; it had to happen. "Go ahead," he shrugged. "It's your funeral. I wash my hands of you."

"Joe" paused at the Gate. "It is, eh? Hm-m-m—how can it be my funeral unless it's your funeral, too?"

Wilson stared speechlessly while "Joe" stepped through the Gate. Whose funeral? He had not thought of it in quite that way. He felt a sudden impulse to rush through the Gate, catch up with his alter ego, and watch over him. The stupid fool might do anything. Suppose he got himself killed? Where would that leave Bob Wilson? Dead, of course.

Or would it? Could the death of a man thousands of years in the future kill him in the year 1942? He saw the absurdity of the situation suddenly, and felt very much relieved. "Joe's" actions could not endanger him; he remembered everything that "Joe" had done—was going to do. "Joe" would get into an argument with Diktor and, in due course of events, would come back through the Time Gate.
No, *had* come back through the Time Gate. He was “Joe.” It was hard to remember that.

Yes, he was “Joe.” As well as the first guy. They would thread their courses, in and out and roundabout, and end up here, with him. Had to.

Wait a minute—in that case the whole crazy business was straightened out. He had got away from Diktor, had all of his various personalities sorted out, and was back where he started from, no worse for the wear except for a crop of whiskers and, possibly, a scar on his lip. Well, he knew when to let well enough alone. Shave, and get back to work, kid.

As he shaved he stared at his face and wondered why he had failed to recognize it the first time. He had to admit that he had never looked at it objectively before. He had always taken it for granted.

He acquired a crick in his neck from trying to look at his own profile through the corner of one eye.

On leaving the bathroom the Gate caught his eye forcibly. For some reason he had assumed that it would be gone. It was not. He inspected it, walked around it, carefully refrained from touching it. Wasn’t the damned thing ever going to go away? It had served its purpose; why didn’t Diktor shut it off?

He stood in front of it, felt a sudden surge of the compulsion that leads men to jump from high places. What would happen if he went through? What would he find? He thought of Arma. And the other one—what was her name? Perhaps Diktor had not told him. The other maidservant, anyhow, the second one.

But he restrained himself and forced himself to sit back down at the desk. If he was going to stay here—and of course he was, he was resolved on that point—he must finish the thesis. He had to eat; he needed the degree to get a decent job. Now where was he?

Twenty minutes later he had come to the conclusion that the thesis would have to be rewritten from one end to the other. His prime theme, the application of the empirical method to the problems of speculative metaphysics and its expression in rigorous formulae, was still valid, he decided, but he had acquired a mass of new and not yet digested data to incorporate in it. In re-reading his manuscript he was amazed to find how dogmatic he had been. Time after time he had fallen into the pathetic fallacy of Descartes, mistaking clear reasoning for correct reasoning.

He tried to brief a new version of the thesis, but discovered that there were two problems he was forced to deal with which were decidedly not clear in his mind: the problem of
the ego and the problem of free will. When there had been three of him in the room, which one was the ego—was himself? And how was it that he had been unable to change the course of events?

An absurdly obvious answer to the first question occurred to him at once. The ego was himself. Self is self, an unproved and unprovable first statement, directly experienced. What, then, of the other two? Surely they had been equally sure of ego-being—he remembered it. He thought of a way to state it: Ego is the point of consciousness, the latest term in a continuously expanding series along the line of memory duration. That sounded like a general statement, but he was not sure; he would have to try to formulate it mathematically before he could trust it. Verbal language had such queer booby traps in it.

The telephone rang.
He answered it absent-mindedly. “Yes?”
“Is that you, Bob?”
“Yes, who is this?”

“Why, it’s Genevieve, of course, darling. What’s come over you today? That’s the second time you’ve failed to recognize my voice.”

Annoyance and frustration rose up in him. Here was another problem he had failed to settle—well, he’d settle it now. He ignored her complaint. “Look here, Genevieve, I’ve told you not to telephone me while I’m working. Good-bye!”

“Well, of all the— You can’t talk that way to me, Bob Wilson! In the first place, you weren’t working today. In the second place, what makes you think you can use honey and sweet words on me and two hours later snarl at me? I’m not any too sure I want to marry you.”

“Marry you? What put that silly idea in your head?”

The phone sputtered for several seconds. When it had abated somewhat he resumed with, “Now just calm down. This isn’t the Gay Nineties, you know. You can’t assume that a fellow who takes you out a few times intends to marry you.”

There was a short silence. “So that’s the game, is it?” came an answer at last in a voice so cold and hard and completely shrewish that he almost failed to recognize it. “Well, there’s a way to handle men like you. A woman isn’t unprotected in this State!”

“You ought to know,” he answered savagely. “You’ve hung around the campus enough years.” The receiver clicked in his ear.

He wiped the sweat from his forehead. That dame, he knew, was quite capable of causing him lots of trouble. He had been warned before he ever started running around with
her, but he had been so sure of his own ability to take care of himself. He should have known better—but then he had not expected anything quite as raw as this.

He tried to get back to work on his thesis, but found himself unable to concentrate. The deadline of 10 a.m. the next morning seemed to be racing towards him. He looked at his watch. It had stopped. He set it by the desk clock—four fifteen in the afternoon. Even if he sat up all night he could not possibly finish it properly.

Besides there was Genevieve—

The telephone rang again. He let it ring. It continued; he took the receiver off the cradle. He would not talk to her again.

He thought of Arma. There was a proper girl with the right attitude. He walked over to the window and stared down into the dusty, noisy street. Half subconsciously he compared it with the green and placid countryside he had seen from the balcony where he and Diktor had breakfasted. This was a crummy world full of crummy people. He wished poignantly that Diktor had been on the up-and-up with him.

An idea broke surface in his brain and plunged around frantically. The Gate was still open. *The Gate was still open!* Why worry about Diktor? He was his own master. Go back and play it out—everything to gain, nothing to lose.

He stepped up to the Gate, then hesitated. Was he wise to do it? After all, how much did he know about the future?

He heard footsteps climbing the stairs, coming down the hall, no—yes, stopping at his door. He was suddenly convinced that it was Genevieve; that decided him. He stepped through.

The Hall of the Gate was empty on his arrival. He hurried around the control box to the door and was just in time to hear, "Come on. There's work to be done." Two figures were retreating down the corridor. He recognized both of them and stopped suddenly.

That was a near thing, he told himself; I'll just have to wait until they get clear. He looked around for a place to conceal himself, and found nothing but the control box. That was useless; they were coming back. Still—

He entered the control box with a plan vaguely forming in his mind. If he found that he could dope out the controls, the Gate might give him all the advantage he needed. First he needed to turn on the speculum gadget. He felt around where he recalled having seen Diktor reach to turn it on, then reached in his pocket for a match.

Instead he pulled out a piece of paper. It was the list
that Diktor had given him, the things he was to obtain in the twentieth century. Up to the present moment there had been too much going on for him to look it over.

His eyebrows crawled up his forehead as he read. It was a funny list, he decided. He had subconsciously expected it to call for technical reference books, samples of modern gadgets, weapons. There was nothing of the sort. Still, there was a sort of mad logic to the assortment. After all, Diktor knew these people better than he did. It might be just what was needed.

He revised his plans, subject to being able to work the Gate. He decided to make one more trip back and do the shopping Diktor’s list called for—but for his own benefit, not Diktor’s. He fumbled in the semi-darkness of the control booth, seeking the switch or control for the speculum. His hand encountered a soft mass. He grasped it, and pulled it out. It was his hat.

He placed it on his head, guessing idly that Diktor had stowed it there, and reached again. This time he brought forth a small notebook. It looked like a find—very possibly Diktor’s own notes on the operation of the controls. He opened it eagerly.

It was not what he had hoped. But it did contain page after page of handwritten notes. There were three columns to the page; the first was in English, the second in international phonetic symbols, the third in a completely strange sort of writing. It took no brilliance for him to identify it as a vocabulary. He slipped it into a pocket with a broad smile; it might have taken Diktor months or even years to work out the relationship between the two languages; he would be able to ride on Diktor’s shoulders in the matter.

The third try located the control and the speculum lighted up. He felt again the curious uneasiness he had felt before, for he was gazing again into his own room and again it was inhabited by two figures. He did not want to break into that scene again, he was sure. Cautiously he touched one of the coloured beads.

The scene shifted, panned out through the walls of the boarding house and came to rest in the air, three stories above the campus. He was pleased to have got the Gate out of the house, but three stories was too much of a jump. He fiddled with the other two coloured beads and established that one of them caused the scene on the speculum to move towards him or away from him while the other moved it up or down.

He wanted a reasonably inconspicuous place to locate the Gate, some place where it would not attract the attention
of the curious. This bothered him a bit; there was no ideal place, but he compromised on a blind alley, a little court formed by the campus powerhouse and the rear wall of the library. Cautiously and clumsily he manoeuvred his flying eye to the neighbourhood he wanted and set it down carefully between the two buildings. He then readjusted his position so that he stared right into a blank wall. Good enough!

Leaving the controls as they were, he hurried out of the booth and stepped unceremoniously back into his own period.

He bumped his nose against the brick wall. "I cut that a little too fine," he mused as he slid cautiously out from between the confining limits of the wall and the Gate. The Gate hung in the air, about fifteen inches from the wall and roughly parallel to it. But there was room enough, he decided—no need to go back and readjust the controls. He ducked out of the areaway and cut across the campus towards the Student's Co-op, wasting no time. He entered and went to the cashier's window.

"Hi, Bob."
"Hi!'o, Soupy. Cash a cheque for me?"
"How much?"
"Twenty dollars."
"Well—I suppose so. Is it a good cheque?"
"Not very. It's my own."
"Well, I might invest in it as a curiosity." He counted out ten, a five, and five ones.

"Do that," advised Wilson. "My autographs are going to be rare collectors' items." He passed over the cheque, took the money, and proceeded to the book store in the same building. Most of the books on the list were for sale there. Ten minutes later he had acquired title to:

*The Prince*, by Niccolo Machiavelli.
*Behind the Ballots*, by James Farley.
*Mein Kampf* (unexpurgated), by Adolf Schickelgruber.
*How to Make Friends and Influence People*, by Dale Carnegie.

The other titles he wanted were not available in the book store; he went from there to the university library where he drew out *Real Estate Broker's Manual, History of Musical Instruments*, and a quarto titled *Evolution of Dress Styles*. The latter was a handsome volume with beautiful coloured plates and was classified as reference. He had to argue a little to get a twenty-four hour permission for it.

He was fairly well loaded down by then; he left the campus, went to a pawnshop and purchased two used, but sturdy, suitcases, into one of which he packed the books. From there he went to the largest music store in the town and
spent forty-five minutes in selecting and rejecting phonograph records, with emphasis on swing and boogie-woogie—highly emotional stuff, all of it. He did not neglect classical and semi-classical, but he applied the same rule to those categories—a piece of music had to be sensuous and compelling, such strangely assorted items as the “Marseillaise,” Ravel’s “Bolero,” four Cole Porters, and “L’Après-midi d’un faune.”

He insisted on buying the best mechanical reproducer on the market in the face of the clerk’s insistence that what he needed was an electrical one. But he finally got his own way, wrote a cheque for the order, packed it all in his suitcases, and had the clerk get a taxi for him.

He had a bad moment over the cheque. It was pure rubber, as the one he had cashed at the Students’ Co-op had cleaned out his balance. He had urged them to phone the bank, since that was what he wished them not to do. It had worked. He had established, he reflected, the all-time record for kiting cheques—thirty thousand years.

When the taxi drew up opposite the court where he had located the Gate, he jumped out and hurried in.

The Gate was gone.

He stood there for several minutes, whistling softly, and assessing—unfavourably—his own abilities, mental processes, etcetera. The consequences of writing bad cheques no longer seemed quite so hypothetical.

He felt a touch at his sleeve. “See here, Bud, do you want my hack, or don’t you? The meter’s still clicking.”

“Huh? Oh, sure.” He followed the driver, climbed back in. “Where to?”

That was a problem. He glanced at his watch, then realized that the usually reliable instrument had been through a process which rendered its reading irrelevant. “What time is it?”

“Two fifteen.” He reset his watch.

Two fifteen. There would be a jamboree going on in his room at that time of a particularly confusing sort. He did not want to go there—not yet. Not until his blood brothers got through playing happy fun games with the Gate.

The Gate!

It would be in his room until sometime after four fifteen. If he timed it right— “Drive to the corner of Fourth and McKinley,” he directed, naming the intersection closest to his boarding house.

He paid off the taxi driver there, and lugged his bags into the filling station at that corner, where he obtained permission from the attendant to leave them and assurance that they would be safe. He had nearly two hours to kill. He was
reluctant to go very far from the house for fear some hitch would upset his timing.

It occurred to him that there was one piece of unfinished business in the immediate neighbourhood—and time enough to take care of it. He walked briskly to a point two streets away, whistling cheerfully, and turned in at an apartment house.

In response to his knock the door of Apartment 211 was opened a crack, then wider. "Bob darling! I thought you were working today."

"Hi, Genevieve. Not at all—I've got time to burn."

She glanced back over her shoulder. "I don't know whether I should let you come in—I wasn't expecting you. I haven't washed the dishes, or made the bed. I was just putting on my make-up."

"Don't be coy." He pushed the door open wide, and went on in.

When he came out he glanced at his watch. Three thirty—plenty of time. He went down the street wearing the expression of the canary that ate the cat.

He thanked the service station salesman and gave him a quarter for his trouble, which left him with a lone nickel. He looked at this coin, grinned to himself, and inserted it in the pay phone in the office of the station. He dialled his own number.

"Hello," he heard.

"Hello," he replied. "Is that Bob Wilson?"

"Yes. Who is this?"

"Never mind," he chuckled. "I just wanted to be sure you were there. I thought you would be. You're right in the groove, kid, right in the groove." He replaced the receiver with a grin.

At four ten he was too nervous to wait any longer. Struggling under the load of the heavy suitcases he made his way to the boarding house. He let himself in and heard a telephone ringing upstairs. He glanced at his watch—four fifteen. He waited in the hall for three interminable minutes, then laboured up the stairs and down the upper hallway to his own door. He unlocked the door and let himself in.

The room was empty, the Gate still there.

Without stopping for anything, filled with apprehension lest the Gate should flicker and disappear while he crossed the floor, he hurried to it, took a firm grip on his bags, and strode through it.

The Hall of the Gate was empty, to his great relief. What a break, he told himself thankfully. Just five minutes, that's all I ask. Five uninterrupted minutes. He set the suitcases
down near the Gate to be ready for a quick departure. As he did so he noticed that a large chunk was missing from a corner of one case. Half a book showed through the opening, sheared as neatly as with a printer’s trimmer. He identified it as Mein Kampf.

He did not mind the loss of the book but the implications made him slightly sick at his stomach. Suppose he had not described a clear arc when he had first been knocked through the Gate, had hit the edge, half in and half out? Man Sawed in Half—and no illusion!

He wiped his face and went to the control booth. Following Diktor’s simple instructions he brought all four spheres together at the centre of the tetrahedron. He glanced over the side of the booth and saw that the Gate had disappeared entirely. “Check!” he thought. “Everything on zero—no Gate.” He moved the white sphere slightly. The Gate reappeared. Turning on the speculum he was able to see that the miniature scene showed the inside of the Hall of the Gate itself. So far so good—but he would not be able to tell what time the Gate was set for by looking into the hall. He displaced a space control slightly; the scene flickered past the walls of the palace and hung in the open air. Returning the white time control to zero he then displaced it very, very slightly. In the miniature scene the sun became a streak of brightness across the sky; the days flickered past like light from a low frequency source of illumination. He increased the displacement a little, saw the ground become scar and brown, then snow covered, and finally green again.

Working cautiously, steadying his right hand with his left, he made the seasons march past. He had counted ten winters when he became aware of voices somewhere in the distance. He stopped and listened, then very hastily returned the space controls to zero, leaving the time control as it was—set for ten years in the past—and rushed out of the booth.

He hardly had time to grasp his bags, lift them, and swing them through the Gate, himself with them. This time he was exceedingly careful not to touch the edge of the circle.

He found himself, as he had planned to, still in the Hall of the Gate, but, if he had interpreted the controls correctly, ten years away from the events he had recently participated in. He had intended to give Diktor a wider berth than that, but there had been no time for it. However, he reflected, since Diktor was, by his own statement and the evidence of the little notebook Wilson had lifted from him, a native of the twentieth century, it was quite possible that ten years was enough. Diktor might not be in this era. If he was, there was always the Time Gate for a getaway. But
it was reasonable to scout out the situation first before making any more jumps.

It suddenly occurred to him that Diktor might be looking at him through the speculum of the Time Gate. Without stopping to consider that speed was no protection—since the speculum could be used to view any time sector—he hurriedly dragged his two suitcases into the cover of the control booth. Once inside the protecting walls of the booth he calmed down a bit. Spying could work both ways. He found the controls set at zero; making use of the same process he had used once before, he ran the scene in the speculum forward through ten years, then cautiously hunted with the space controls on zero. It was a very difficult task; the time scale necessary to hunt through several months in a few minutes caused any figure which might appear in the speculum to flash past at an apparent speed too fast for his eye to follow. Several times he thought he detected flitting shadows which might be human begins but he was never able to find them when he stopped moving the time control.

He wondered in great exasperation why whoever had built the double-damned gadget had failed to provide it with graduations and some sort of delicate control mechanism—a vernier, or the like. It was not until much later that it occurred to him that the creator of the Time Gate might have no need of such gross aids to his senses. He would have given up, was about to give up, when, purely by accident, one more fruitless scanning happened to terminate with a figure in the field.

It was himself, carrying two suitcases. He saw himself walking directly into the field of view, grow large, disappear. He looked over the rail, half expecting to see himself step out of the Gate.

But nothing came out of the Gate. It puzzled him, until he recalled that it was the setting at that end, ten years in the future, which controlled the time of egress. But he had what he wanted; he sat back and watched. Almost immediately Diktor and another edition of himself appeared in the scene. He recalled the situation when he saw it portrayed in the speculum. It was Bob Wilson number three, about to quarrel with Diktor and make his escape back to the twentieth century.

That was that—Diktor had not seen him, did not know that he had made unauthorized use of the Gate, did not know that he was hiding ten years in the “past,” would not look for him there. He returned the controls to zero, and dismissed the matter.

But other matters needed his attention—food, especially. It seemed obvious, in retrospect, that he should have brought
along food to last him for a day or two at least. And maybe a .45. He had to admit that he had not been very foresighted. But he easily forgave himself—it was hard to be foresighted when the future kept slipping up behind one. “All right, Bob, old boy,” he told himself aloud, “let’s see if the natives are friendly—as advertised.”

A cautious reconnoitre of the small part of the Palace with which he was acquainted turned up no human beings, nor life of any sort, not even insect life. The place was dead, sterile, as static and un-lived-in as a window display. He shouted once, just to hear a voice. The echoes caused him to shiver; he did not do it again.

The architecture of the place confused him. Not only was it strange to his experience—he had expected that—but the place, with minor exceptions, seemed totally unadapted to the uses of human beings. Great halls large enough to hold ten thousand people at once—had there been floors for them to stand on. For there frequently were so floors in the accepted meaning of a level or reasonably level platform. In following a passage-way he came suddenly to one of the great mysterious openings in the structure and almost fell in before he realized that his path had terminated. He crawled gingerly forward and looked over the edge. The mouth of the passage debouched high up on a wall of the place; below him the wall was cut back so that there was not even a vertical surface for the eye to follow. Far below him, the wall curved back and met its mate of the opposite side—not decently, in a horizontal plane, but at an acute angle.

There were other openings scattered around the walls, openings as unserviceable to human beings as the one in which he crouched. “The High Ones,” he whispered to himself. All his cockiness was gone out of him. He retraced his steps through the fine dust and reached the almost friendly familiarity of the Hall of the Gate.

On his second try he attempted only those passages and compartments which seemed obviously adapted to men. He had already decided what such parts of the Palace must be—servants’ quarters, or, more probably, slaves’ quarters. He regained his courage by sticking to such areas. Though deserted completely, by contrast with the rest of the great structure a room or a passage which seemed to have been built for men was friendly and cheerful. The sourceless ever-present illumination and the unbroken silence still bothered him, but not to the degree to which he had been upset by the gargantuan and mysteriously convoluted chambers of the “High Ones.”

He had almost despaired of finding his way out of the
Palace and was thinking of retracing his steps when the cor-
ridor he was following turned and he found himself in bright
sunlight.

He was standing at the top of a broad steep ramp which
spread fan-like down to the base of the building. Ahead of
him and below him, distant at least five hundred yards, the
pavement of the ramp met the green of sod and bush and
tree. It was the same placid, lush, and familiar scene he had
looked out over when he breakfasted with Diktor—a few
hours ago and ten years in the future.

He stood quietly for a short time, drinking in the sun-
shine, soaking up the heart-lifting beauty of the warm, spring
day. “This is going to be all right,” he exulted. “It’s a grand
place.”

He moved slowly down the ramp, his eyes searching for
human beings. He was halfway down when he saw a small
figure emerge from the trees into a clearing near the foot of
the ramp. He called out to it in joyous excitement. The child
—it was a child he saw—looked up, stared at him for a mo-
ment, then fled back into the shelter of the trees.

“Impetuous, Robert—that’s what you are,” he chided him-
self. “Don’t scare ‘em. Take it easy.” But he was not made
down-hearted by the incident. Where there were children
there would be parents, society, opportunities for a bright,
young fellow who took a broad view of things. He moved
on down at a leisurely pace.

A man showed up at the point where the child had dis-
appeared. Wilson stood still. The man looked him over and
advanced hesitantly a step or two. “Come here!” Wilson
invited in a friendly voice. “I won’t hurt you.”

The man could hardly have understood his words, but he
advanced slowly. At the edge of the pavement he stopped,
eyed it and would not proceed further.

Something about the behaviour pattern clicked in Wilson’s
brain, fitted in with what he had seen in the Palace, and with
the little that Diktor had told him. “Unless,” he told himself,
“the time I spent in ‘Anthropology I’ was totally wasted, this
Palace is tabu, the ramp I’m standing on is tabu, and, by
contagion, I’m tabu. Play your cards, son, play your cards!”

He advanced to the edge of the pavement, being careful
not to step off it. The man dropped to his knees and cupped
his hands in front of him, head bowed. Without hesitation
Wilson touched him on the forehead. The man got back to
his feet, his face radiant.

“This isn’t even sporting,” Wilson said. “I ought to shoot
him on the rise.”

His Man Friday cocked his head, looked puzzled, and
answered in a deep, melodious voice. The words were liquid and strange and sounded like a phrase from a song. "You ought to commercialize that voice," Wilson said admiringly. "Some stars get by on less. However—Get along now, and fetch something to eat. Food." He pointed to his mouth.

The man looked hesitant, spoke again. Bob Wilson reached into his pocket and took out the stolen notebook. He looked up "eat," then looked up "food." It was the same word. "Blellan," he said carefully.

"Blellaaaaaan?"

"Blellaaaaaan," agreed Wilson. "You'll have to excuse my accent. Hurry up." He tried to find "hurry" in the vocabulary, but it was not there. Either the language did not contain the idea or Diktor had not thought it worth while to record it. But we'll soon fix that, Wilson thought—if there isn't such a word, I'll give 'em one.

The man departed.

Wilson sat himself down Turk-fashion and passed the time by studying the notebook. The speed of his rise in these parts, he decided, was limited only by the time it took him to get into full communication. But he had only time enough to look up a few common substantives when his first acquaintance returned, in company.

The procession was headed by an extremely elderly man, white-haired but beardless. All of the men were beardless. He walked under a canopy carried by four male striplings. Only he of all the crowd wore enough clothes to get by anywhere but on a beach. He was looking uncomfortable in a sort of toga effect which appeared to have started life as a Roman-striped awning. That he was the head man was evident.

Wilson hurriedly looked up the word for "chief."

The word for chief was "Diktor."

It should not have surprised him, but it did. It was, of course, a logical probability that the word "Diktor" was a title rather than a proper name. It simply had not occurred to him.

Diktor—the Diktor—had added a note under the word. "One of the few words," Wilson read, "which shows some probability of having been derived from the dead languages. This word, a few dozen others, and the grammatical structure of the language itself, appear to be the only link between the language of the 'Forsaken Ones' and the English language."


The food that had been fetched along was plentiful and
very palatable. Wilson ate slowly and with dignity, keeping in mind the importance of face. While he ate he was serenaded by the entire assemblage. The singing was excellent he was bound to admit. Their ideas of harmony he found a little strange and the performance, as a whole, seemed primitive, but their voices were all clear and mellow and they sang as if they enjoyed it.

The concert gave Wilson an idea. After he had satisfied his hunger he made the chief understand, with the aid of the indispensable little notebook, that he and his flock were to wait where they were. He then returned to the Hall of the Gate and brought back from there the phonograph and a dozen assorted records. He treated them to a recorded concert of "modern" music.

The reaction exceeded his hopes. "Begin the Beguine" caused tears to stream down the face of the old chief. The first movement of Tschaikowsky's "Concerto Number One in B Flat Minor" practically stampeded them. They jerked. They held their heads and moaned. They shouted their applause. Wilson refrained from giving them the second movement, tapered them off instead with the compelling monotony of the "Bolero."

"Diktor," he said—he was not thinking of the old chief—"Diktor, old chum, you certainly had these people doped out when you sent me shopping. By the time you show up—if you ever do—I'll own the place."

This is not an account of how Boosterism came to Arcadia. Wilson's rise to power was more in the nature of a triumphal progress than a struggle for supremacy; it contained little that was dramatic. Whatever it was that the High Ones had done to the human race it had left them with only physical resemblance and with temperament largely changed. The docile friendly children with whom Wilson dealt had little in common with the brawling, vulgar, lusty, dynamic swarms who had once called themselves the People of the United States.

The relationship was like that of Jersey cattle to long-horns, or cocker spaniels to wolves. The fight was gone out of them. It was not that they lacked intelligence, nor civilized arts; it was the competitive spirit that was gone, the will-to-power.

Wilson had a monopoly on that.

But even he lost interest in playing a game that he always won. Having established himself as boss man by taking up residence in the Palace and representing himself as the viceroy of the departed High Ones, he, for a time, busied himself in organizing certain projects intended to bring the culture
“up-to-date”—the re-invention of musical instruments, establishment of a systematic system of mail service, redevelopment of the idea of styles in dress and a tabu against wearing the same fashion more than one season. There was cunning in the latter project. He figured that arousing a hearty interest in display in the minds of the womenfolk would force the men to hustle to satisfy their wishes. What the culture lacked was drive—it was slipping downhill. He tried to give them the drive they lacked.

His subjects co-operated with his wishes, but in a bemused fashion, like a dog performing a trick, not because he understands it, but because his master and godhead desires it.

He soon tired of it.

But the mystery of the High Ones, and especially the mystery of their Time Gate, still remained to occupy his mind. His was a mixed nature, half hustler, half philosopher. The philosopher had his innings.

It was intellectually necessary to him that he be able to construct in his mind a physio-mathematical model for the phenomena exhibited by the Time Gate. He achieved one, not a good one perhaps, but one which satisfied all of the requirements. Think of a plane surface, a sheet of paper, or, better yet, a silk handkerchief—silk, because it has no rigidity, folds easily, while maintaining all of the relational attributes of a two-dimensional continuum on the surface of the silk itself. Let the threads of the woof be the dimension—or direction—of time; let the threads of the warp represent all three of the space dimensions.

An ink spot on the handkerchief becomes the Time Gate. By folding the handkerchief that spot may be superposed on any other spot on the silk. Press the two spots together between thumb and forefinger; the controls are set, the Time Gate is open, a microscopic inhabitant of this piece of silk may crawl from one fold to the other without traversing any other part of the cloth.

The model is imperfect; the picture is static—but a physical picture is necessarily limited by the sensory experience of the person visualizing it.

He could not make up his mind whether or not the concept of folding the four-dimensional continuum—three of space, one of time—back on itself so that the Gate was “open” required the concept of higher dimensions through which to fold it. It seemed so, yet it might simply be an intellectual shortcoming of the human mind. Nothing but empty space was required for the “folding,” but “empty space” was itself a term totally lacking in meaning—he was enough of a mathematician to know that.
If higher dimensions were required to "hold" a four-dimensional continuum, then the number of dimensions of space and of time were necessarily infinite; each order requires the next higher order to maintain it.

But "infinite" was another meaningless term. "Open series" was a little better, but not much.

Another consideration forced him to conclude that there was probably at least one more dimension than the four his senses could perceive—the Time Gate itself. He became quite skilled in handling its controls, but he never acquired the foggiest notion of how it worked, or how it had been built. It seemed to him that the creatures who built it must necessarily have been able to stand outside the limits that confined him in order to anchor the Gate to the structure of space-time. The concept escaped him.

He suspected that the controls he saw were simply the part that stuck through into the space he knew. The very Palace itself might be no more than a three-dimensional section of a more involved structure. Such a condition would help to explain the otherwise inexplicable nature of its architecture.

He became possessed of an overpowering desire to know more about these strange creatures, the "High Ones," who had come and ruled the human race and built this Palace and this Gate, and gone away again—and in whose backwash he had been flung out of his setting some thirty millennia. To the human race they were no more than a sacred myth, a contradictory mass of tradition. No picture of them remained, no trace of their writing, nothing of their works save the High Palace of Norkaal and the Gate. And a sense of irreparable loss in the hearts of the race they had ruled, a loss expressed by their own term for themselves—the Forsaken Ones.

With controls and speculum he hunted back through time, seeking the Builders. It was slow work, as he had found before. A passing shadow, a tedious retracing—and failure.

Once he was sure that he had seen such a shadow in the miniature Hall reflected in the speculum. He set the controls back far enough to be sure that he had repassed it, armed himself with food and drink and waited.

He waited three weeks.

The shadow might have passed during the hours he was forced to take out for sleep. But he felt sure that he was in the right period; he kept up the vigil.

He saw it.

It was moving towards the Gate.

When he pulled himself together he was halfway down the passage-way leading away from the Hall. He realized that
he had been screaming. He still had an attack of the shakes.

Somewhat later he forced himself to return to the Hall, and, with eyes averted, enter the control booth and return the spheres to zero. He backed out hastily and left the Hall for his apartment. He did not touch the controls nor enter the Hall for more than two years.

It had not been fear of physical menace that had shaken his reason, nor the appearance of the creature—he could recall nothing of how it looked. It had been a feeling of sadness infinitely compounded which had flooded through him at the instant, a sense of tragedy, of grief insupportable and inescapable, of infinite weariness. He had been flicked with emotions many times too strong for his spiritual fibre and which he was no more fitted to experience than an oyster is to play a violin.

He felt that he had learned all about the High Ones a man could learn and still endure. He was no longer curious. The shadow of that vicarious emotion ruined his sleep, brought him sweating out of dreams.

One other problem bothered him—the problem of himself and his meanders through time. It still worried him that he had met himself coming back, so to speak, had talked to himself, fought with himself.

Which one was himself?

He was all of them, he knew, for he remembered being each one. How about the times when there had been more than one present?

By sheer necessity he was forced to expand the principle of non-identity—“Nothing is identical with anything else, not even with itself”—to include the ego. In a four-dimensional continuum each event is an absolute individual, it has its space co-ordinates and its date. The Bob Wilson he was right now was not the Bob Wilson he had been ten minutes ago. Each was a discrete section of a four-dimensional process. One resembled the other in many particulars, as one slice of bread resembles the slice next to it. But they were not the same Bob Wilson—they differed by a length of time.

When he had doubled back on himself, the difference had become apparent, for the separation was now in space rather than in time, and he happened to be so equipped as to be able to see a space length, whereas he could only remember a time difference. Thinking back he could remember a great many different Bob Wilsons, baby, small child, adolescent, young man. They were all different—he knew that. The only thing that bound them together into a feeling of identity was continuity of memory.

And that was the same thing that bound together the
three—no, four, Bob Wilsons on a certain crowded afternoon, a memory track that ran through all of them. The only thing about it that remained remarkable was time travel itself.

And a few other little items—the nature of “free will,” the problem of entropy, the law of the conservation of energy and mass. The last two, he now realized, needed to be extended or generalized to include the cases in which the Gate, or something like it, permitted a leak of mass energy, or entropy from one neighbourhood in the continuum to another. They were otherwise unchanged and valid. Free will was another matter. It could not be laughed off, because it could be directly experienced—yet his own free will had worked to create the same scene over and over again. Apparently human will must be considered as one of the factors which make up the processes in the continuum—“free” to the ego, mechanistic from the outside.

And yet his last act of evading Diktor had apparently changed the course of events. He was here and running the country, had been for many years, but Diktor had not showed up. Could it be that each act of “true” free will created a new and different future? Many philosophers had thought so.

This future appeared to have no such person as Diktor—_the_ Diktor—in it, anywhere or anywhen.

As the end of his first ten years in the future approached, he became more and more nervous, less and less certain of his opinion. Damnation, he thought, if Diktor is going to show up it was high time that he did so. He was anxious to come to grips with him, establish which was to be boss.

He had agents posted throughout the country of the Forsaken Ones with instructions to arrest any man with hair on his face and fetch him forthwith to the Palace. The Hall of the Gate he watched himself.

He tried fishing the future for Diktor, but had no significant luck. He thrice located a shadow and tracked it down; each time it was himself. From tedium and partly from curiosity he attempted to see the other end of the process; he tried to relocate his original home, thirty thousand years in the past.

It was a long chore. The further the time button was displaced from the centre, the poorer the control became. It took patient practice to be able to stop the image within a century or so of the period he wanted. It was in the course of this experimentation that he discovered what he had once looked for, a fractional control—a vernier, in effect. It was as simple as the primary control, but twist the bead instead of moving it directly.
He steadied down on the twentieth century, approximated the year by the models of automobiles, types of architecture, and other gross evidence, and stopped in what he believed to be 1942. Careful displacement of the space controls took him to the university town where he had started—after several false tries; the image did not enable him to read road signs.

He located his boarding house, brought the Gate into his own room. It was vacant, no furniture in it.

He panned away from the room, and tried again, a year earlier. Success—his own room, his own furniture, but empty. He ran rapidly back, looking for shadows.

There! He checked the swing of the image. There were three figures in the room, the image was too small, the light too poor for him to be sure whether or not one of them was himself. He leaned over and studied the scene.

He heard a dull thump outside the booth. He straightened up and looked over the side.

Sprawled on the floor was a limp human figure. Near it lay a crushed and battered hat.

He stood perfectly still for an uncounted time, staring at the two redundant figures, hat and man, while the winds of unreason swept through his mind and shook it. He did not need to examine the unconscious form to identify it. He knew...*he knew*—it was his younger self, knocked willy-nilly through the Time Gate.

It was not that fact in itself which shook him. He had not particularly expected it to happen, having come tentatively to the conclusion that he was living in a different, an alternative, future from the one in which he had originally transmitted the Time Gate. He had been aware that it might happen nevertheless, that it did happen did not surprise him.

When it did happen, *he himself had been the only spectator!* He was Diktor. He was *the* Diktor. He was *the only* Diktor!

He would never find Diktor, nor have it out with him. He need never fear his coming. There never had been, never would be, any other person called Diktor, because Diktor never had been nor ever would be anyone but himself.

In review, it seemed obvious that he must be Diktor; there were so many bits of evidence pointing to it. And yet it had not been obvious. Each point of similarity between himself and the Diktor, he recalled, had arisen from rational causes—usually from his desire to ape the gross characteristics of the "other" and thereby consolidate his own position of power and authority before the "other" Diktor showed up. For that reason he had established himself in the very apart-
ments that “Diktor” had used—so that they would be “his” first.

To be sure his people called him Diktor, but he had thought nothing of that—they called anyone who ruled by that title, even the little sub-chieftains who were his local administrators.

He had grown a beard, such as Diktor had worn, partly in imitation of the “other” man’s precedent, but more to set him apart from the hairless males of the Forsaken Ones. It gave him prestige, increased his tabu. He fingered his bearded chin. Still, it seemed strange that he had not recalled that his own present appearance checked with the appearance of “Diktor.” “Diktor” had been an older man. He himself was only thirty-two, ten here, twenty-two there.

Diktor he had judged to be about forty-five. Perhaps an unprejudiced witness would believe himself to be that age. His hair and beard were shot with grey—had been, ever since the year he had succeeded too well in spying on the High Ones. His face was lined. Uneasy lies the head and so forth. Running a country, even a peaceful Arcadia, will worry a man, keep him awake nights.

Not that he was complaining—it had been a good life, a grand life, and it beat anything the ancient past had to offer.

In any case, he had been looking for a man in his middle forties, whose face he remembered dimly after ten years and whose picture he did not have. It had never occurred to him to connect that blurred face with his present one. Naturally not.

But there were other little things. Arma, for example. He had selected a likely-looking lass some three years back and made her one of his household staff, re-naming her Arma in sentimental memory of the girl he had once fancied. It was logically necessary that they were the same girl, not two Armas, but one.

But, as he recalled her, the “first” Arma had been much prettier.

Hm-m-m—it must be his own point of view that had changed. He admitted that he had had much more opportunity to become bored with exquisite female beauty than his young friend over there on the floor. He recalled with a chuckle how he had found it necessary to surround himself with an elaborate system of tabus to keep the nubile daughters of his subjects out of his hair—most of the time. He had caused a particular pool in the river adjacent to the Palace to be dedicated to his use in order that he might swim without getting tangled up in mermaids.

The man on the floor groaned, but did not open his eyes.
Wilson, the Diktor, bent over him but made no effort to revive him. That the man was not seriously injured he had reason to be certain. He did not wish him to wake up until he had had time to get his own thoughts entirely in order.

For he had work to do, work which must be done meticulously, without mistake. Everyone, he thought with a wry smile, makes plans to provide for their future.

He was about to provide for his past.

There was the matter of the setting of the Time Gate when he got around to sending his early self back. When he had tuned in on the scene in his room a few minutes ago, he had picked up the action just before his early self had been knocked through. In sending him back he must make a slight readjustment in the time setting to an instant around two o'clock of that particular afternoon. That would be simple enough; he need only search a short sector until he found his early self alone and working at his desk.

But the Time Gate had appeared in that room at a later hour; he had just caused it to do so. He felt confused.

Wait a minute, now—if he changed the setting of the time control, the Gate would appear in his room at the earlier time, remain there, and simply blend into its "reappearance" an hour or so later. Yes, that was right. To a person in the room it would simply be as if the Time Gate had been there all along, from about two o'clock.

Which it had been. He would see to that.

Experienced as he was with the phenomena exhibited by the Time Gate, it nevertheless required a strong and subtle intellectual effort to think other than in durational terms, to take an eternal viewpoint.

And there was the hat. He picked it up and tried it on. It did not fit very well, no doubt because he was wearing his hair longer now. The hat must be placed where it would be found—Oh, yes, in the control booth. And the notebook, too.

The notebook, the notebook—M-m-m-m—Something funny, there. When the notebook he had stolen had become dog-eared and tattered almost to illegibility some four years back, he had carefully re-copied its contents in a new notebook—to refresh his memory of English rather than from any need for it as a guide. The worn-out notebook he had destroyed; it was the new one he intended to obtain, and leave to be found.

In that case, there never had been two notebooks. The one he had now would become, after being taken through the Gate to a point ten years in the past, the notebook from which he had copied it. They were simply different segments of the same physical process, manipulated by means of the
Gate to run concurrently, side by side, for a certain length of time.

As he had himself—one afternoon.

He wished that he had not thrown away the worn-out notebook. If he had it at hand, he could compare them and convince himself that they were identical save for the wear and tear of increasing entropy.

But when had he learned the language, in order that he might prepare such a vocabulary? To be sure, when he copied it he then knew the language—copying had not actually been necessary.

But he had copied it.

The physical process he had all straightened out in his mind, but the intellectual process it represented was completely circular. His older self had taught his younger self a language which the older self knew because the younger self, after being taught, grew up to be the older self and was, therefore, capable of teaching.

But where had it started?

Which comes first, the hen or the egg?

You feed the rats to the cats, skin the cats, and feed the carcasses of the cats to the rats who are in turn fed to the cats. The perpetual motion fur farm.

If God created the world, who created God?

Who wrote the notebook? Who started the chain?

He felt the intellectual desperation of any honest philosopher. He knew that he had about as much chance of understanding such problems as a collie has of understanding how dog food gets into cans. Applied psychology was more his size—which reminded him that there were certain books which his early self would find very useful in learning how to deal with the political affairs of the country he was to run. He made a mental note to make a list.

The man on the floor stirred again, sat up. Wilson knew that the time had come when he must insure his past. He was not worried; he felt the sure confidence of the gambler who is "hot," who knows what the next roll of the dice will show.

He bent over his alter ego. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"I guess so," the younger man mumbled. He put his hand to his bloody face. "My head hurts."

"I should think it would," Wilson agreed. "You came through head over heels. I think you hit your head when you landed."

His younger self did not appear fully to comprehend the words at first. He looked around dazedly, as if to get his
bearings. Presently he said, "Come through? Came through what?"

"The Gate, of course," Wilson told him. He nodded his head towards the Gate, feeling that the sight of it would orient the still groggy younger Bob.

Young Wilson looked over his shoulder in the direction indicated, sat up with a jerk, shuddered and closed his eyes. He opened them again after what seemed to be a short period of prayer, looked again, and said, "Did I come through that?"

"Yes," Wilson assured him.

"Where am I?"

"In the Hall of the Gate in the High Palace of Norkaal. But what is more important," Wilson added, "is when you are. You have gone forward a little more than thirty thousand years."

The knowledge did not seem to reassure him. He got up and stumbled towards the Gate. Wilson put a restraining hand on his shoulder. "Where are you going?"

"Back!"

"Not so fast." He did not dare let him go back yet, not until the Gate had been reset. Besides he was still drunk—his breath was staggering. "You will go back all right—I give you my word on that. But let me dress your wounds first. And you should rest. I have some explanations to make to you, and there is an errand you can do for me when you get back—to our mutual advantage. There is a great future in store for you and me, my boy—a great future!"

A great future!
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