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SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

NEW 2nd ISSUE

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New Stories by

ALGIS BUDRYS
PHILIP K. DICK
MILTON LESSER
WINSTON K. MARKS
M. C. PEASE
MACK REYNOLDS

Author! Author!

ALGIS BUDRYS A year ago, this author was being touted as "one of the most promising of the new crop of 'name writers' in the science fiction field." Since then, he has fulfilled this promise to a considerable extent, and appears regularly in the top magazines of science fiction and fantasy. His short story, "Riya's Foundling", which appeared in our first edition, is due for early anthologization.

THEODORE R. COGSWELL The decade was scarcely under way before a healthy array of new talent began to appear before the public. This is not astonishing, when we consider the "boom" in science fiction and fantasy publications that began at the same time. But what has been gratifying has been the number of such newcomers who managed to repeat their initial successes, and become "regulars". Mr. Cogswell is a member of this group.

PHILIP K. DICK Another member of the "Class of 1952" in science fiction, Mr. Dick's interest in the field of imaginative fiction goes back to the start of the previous decade. Since his debut, he has written feature stories for nearly all the editors in the field, and continues to be in steady demand.

MILTON LESSER Many of the "regulars" in science fiction came up from the ranks, so to speak. That is, before their names first appeared on the contents page of a magazine, they had already become well-known to aficionados through their frequent appearances in the letter-department, found in the back of most science fiction publications. Milton Lesser was an indefatigable letter-writer for a number of years before he turned to more rewarding types of writing. He has also written a pair of novels for the John C. Winston Company, and is editor of an anthology which appeared early this year.

(Continued on third cover)

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

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Edited by Robert W. Lowndes

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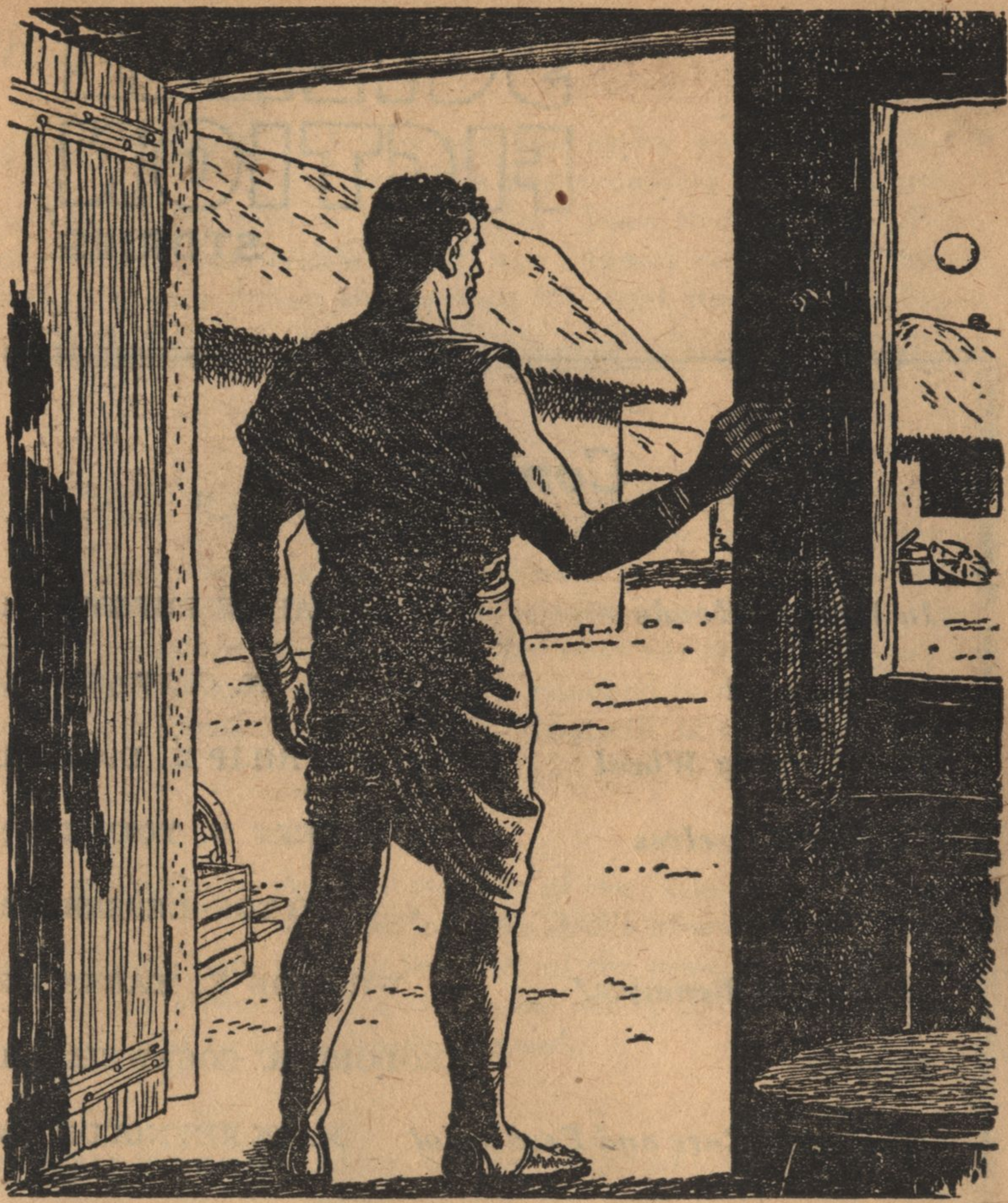
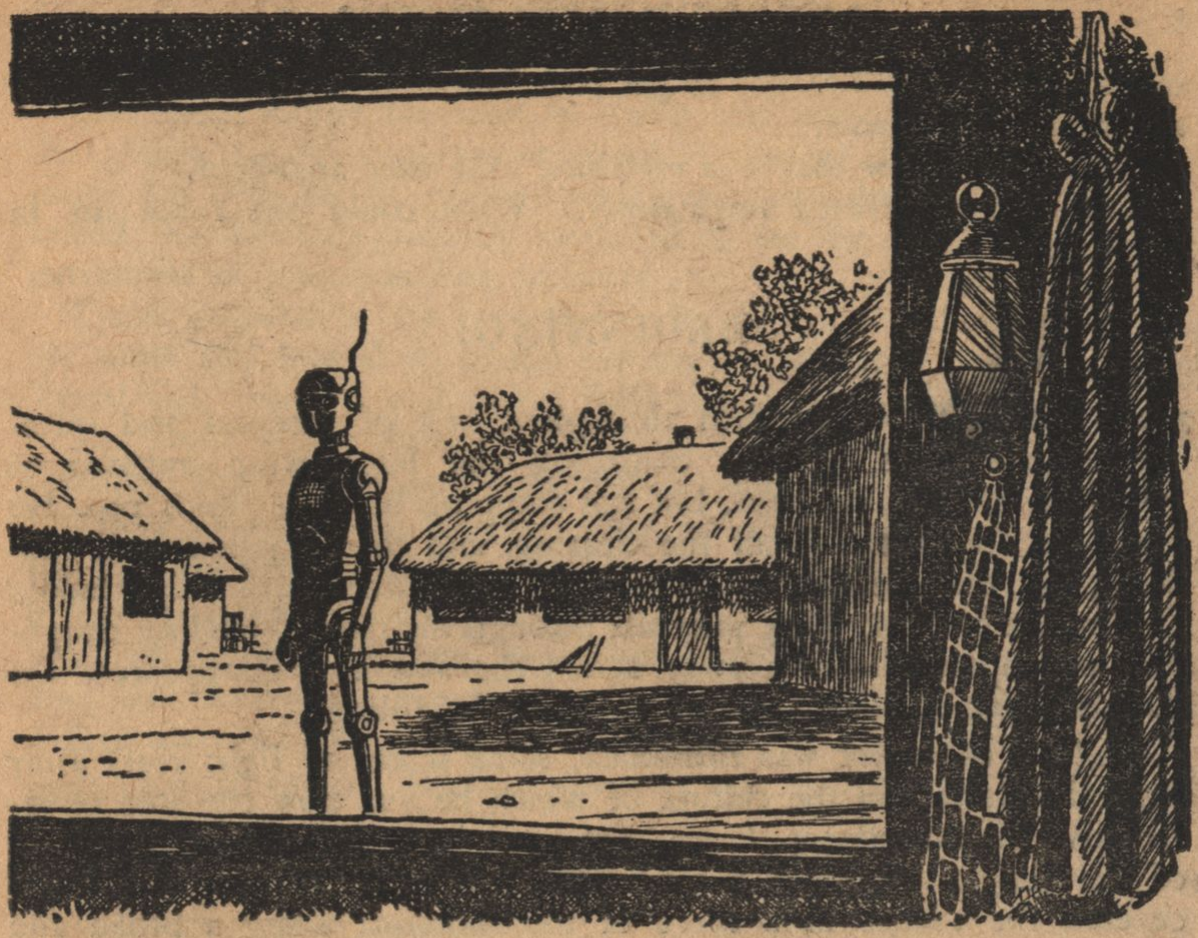


A robot is a tool — nothing more, and nothing less. But it is well to remember that a tool is most useful when most skillfully used. A robot, moreover, is an intelligent tool. And an intelligent tool can shape the hand that holds it . . .



In Human Hands

by ALGIS BUDRYS

THE CAPTAIN pointed out to his executive, "It's only one robot."

"I wasn't thinking of the harm in terms of property loss," the second-in-command answered. "Suppose he's *not* permanently disabled, somewhere. There are a dozen possible reasons for his not returning." He stared out through the ports at the mass of green and brown vegetation standing to all sides of the charred clearing where the three hulls rested. "I don't like leaving him."

The captain grunted. "That's a chance we'll take; we can't delay any longer." He rattled the flimsy bearing the transcribed sub-space

radio message. "We've got to get back home. Besides, this's probably an uninhabited planet."

"We don't know that as a certainty," the exec answered.

The captain scowled impatiently. "What could one robot do, in any case?"

BEGINNING:

THE ROBOT smashed through a nest of creepers and interlaced vines, further damaging the buggy-whip antenna at the side of his head, but not stopping his precipitous run. He broke out into the edge of the clearing, and then stopped dead suddenly, his purpose lost as he watched the three Earth ships ladder up into the overcast. They punched through the clouds, sending doughnuts of vapor billowing away across the sky, and disappeared, the throaty grunt of their exhausts gradually dwindling.

And so, the robot was marooned, some scores of light years away from the Earth and the culture of which he was now the sole representative on this planet. It was not until he had beaten his way out of the jungle, and into a moderately temperate zone, that he discovered the village in a curve of the shoreline along a broad and quiescent sea.

Tyrrel Cye awoke, rolled off his sleeping mat, and padded barefoot across the room to the washstand, where he buried his face in the water.

Running his wet fingers through his hair, he went over to the stone slab on which he had laid a fire the previous night, took the flint and iron from a peg in the ventilation hood, and set the tinder alight. He filled a pottery bowl with water, hung it over the fire, then walked back to pick up his wraparound.

As he was going by the door, Tyrrel looked out into the village square and saw the robot standing there, his head swiveling as he inspected the buildings.

Tyrrel frowned, stopped for a moment to get a more comprehensive look, then went to the clothes-rack, put on his wraparound, pulled the water pot off the fire, and went outside.

He walked a little carefully, but he had already decided that whatever kind of thing the robot might be, it was definitely displaying intelligent interest.

And intelligence, of course, indicated a lack of combativeness.

The robot turned his head to watch him come. Tyrrel noted that the glossy figure remained motionless, hands dangling open. He raised his own hands, palms forward to show that he was also unarmed; he was only partially surprised to see the robot make a head movement of understanding in reply.

Tyrrel decided to try speech. He stopped a few feet away from the robot and looked up at the expressionless face. "Welcome. I am Tyrrel Cye," he said, and waited for some answer from the robot.

The metal figure shook his head, then squatted down and ran an extended finger through the dust at his feet.

Tyrrel bent over to look at what he was doing. The robot was tracing dots and circles in the dust. He pointed up to the sun and then back down to a fairly large dot.

Tyrrel nodded. The dot represented the sun. The robot saw his nod, and nodded in return. Tyrrel remembered that the robot had shaken his head to indicate that speech was not a feasible communications medium as yet. "Well, at least we can say 'yes' and 'no' to each other," Tyrrel remarked.

The robot looked up. He pointed to his head and nodded in an exaggerated manner. Tyrrel frowned slightly, not sure of what the robot wanted, but nodded back in return. The robot shook his head violently, then nodded carefully once again. This time, Tyrrel understood; with equal care, he nodded back, and said "Yes" at the same time.

The robot nodded enthusiastically, and a perfect imitation of Tyrrel's voice said "Yes" from a grille in the upper part of his chest.

Tyrrel and the robot then launched into full-scale experiments in communications; and it was not until the robot had acquired a hundred-word vocabulary, and Tyrrel had picked up a smattering of Copernican astronomy in the course of learning that the robot came from another solar system, that they looked up and saw they were surrounded by a ring of villagers.

Tyrrel looked at his shadow; it was nearly noon. "Come on, fellow," he said to the robot. "It's time Kes Lorri got a look at you."

The robot had at least gotten the sense of Tyrrel's statement; he nodded and began to follow him through the crowd.

"It seems there are other worlds," Tyrrel said to an acquaintance in the crowd, "with people living on them who can travel from one to another. I can't quite make out whether this fellow's one of them

or not. Anyway, we're going to see the Gansha; he'll probably hold a meeting when we find out a few more things. All right."

"Sure."

"That shiny stuff he's got on is metal. But he isn't wearing it—it's him."

The villager shrugged casually, and stepped aside. The robot fell into step with Tyrrel, and they walked up the street to the Gansha's home.

II

IT WAS EVENING before Kes Lorri and Tyrrel had learned as much of the robot's story as they could. Now the two men sat in silence while the robot waited on the open porch outside the Gansha's house.

As always when he called on Lorri, Tyrrel found himself studying the set of the silver-haired head on the tired shoulders, the occasional contraction of thin fingers on the edge of the old man's chair as a spasm of pain rippled through his body.

There would have to be an election soon, Tyrrel thought. Lorri was still the wisest man in the village, but there were others who could balance inexperience with the physical ability to carry out broader programs.

Coupled with the thought was the certain knowledge that he was the logical candidate to take the old Gansha's place.

He was half-afraid of the realization. The villagers were accustomed to the calm, deliberate counsel of experience—experience that stretched back to the time of the village's founding. If a young man became Gansha, then the village would have to fall back on trial-and-error. Would the villagers be satisfied with that, after the almost error-less guidance which Lorri had given them? And what would happen to the village if they were not?

What of the robot? How serious was the crisis he represented? He had come into the village this morning, and now the people of the village—the planet, Tyrrel corrected himself on the basis of his newly-acquired cosmology—knew that there were other worlds, other solar systems, and other men, all of which could come crashing down on the village at any time with overwhelming power.

Lorri broke the long silence. "What do you think, Ty?" he asked.

Tyrrel frowned. "I don't know. There's too much to assimilate. Think of it!—infinities of circling globes around infinities of suns—the sheer cubic volume! And a culture that builds intelligence!

"We don't even know why he was abandoned; he doesn't know himself. There must have been some emergency, either aboard the ships or back home. But what? When are they coming back? Nobody can know that, either. What will happen when they do?"

Lorri said slowly, "It is a series of dependent riddles—and we have no answers except those we can imply from the questions themselves."

The old man shifted his position a little, and an expression of pain flickered across the lined face. "I'm afraid much of that will be left for you to deal with, Tyrrel." he said, his voice riding the gasp it could not cover. "But there are certain things that must go on, up to the very time the Earthmen come back."

"Are you sure they will come back?"

"If they came here once, they will return. Intelligent life does not retrogress; it cannot retrogress, or it betrays its own greatness. That is why we must continue as we have. We cannot plan on the return of the Earthmen as anything but another incident in our history, a brush with the rest of the universe, nothing more. We have to go our own way. We have no idea of what the Earthmen are like. They may have six tentacles and multi-faceted eyes, for all we know. Their civilization couldn't possibly fit us as well as our own can."

"What are we going to do about the robot?" Tyrrel asked.

"We'll have to know more about him before we can decide that. I'll leave that to you."

Tyrrel nodded. "He can stay at my house as well as he can at any other. He's learning our language rapidly—we'll be able to talk in fairly complicated sentences very soon, I think."

"All right." The old man looked around the room. "I think that's all we can do, for the present. Will you help me to my bed?"

Walking slowly, they crossed the room to Lorri's mat, where the old man sat down with a sigh. "Thank you," he said. He stretched out and looked up at Tyrrel, his eyes in shadow.

"I wish I were stronger," he said; "I wish I had years enough to see what our village will be."

He reached up and took Tyrrel's hand in his own. "A man always wishes for things, Tyrrel. When he grows old, he knows how many wishes he will never see fulfilled. But he knows, too, that the wishing —not the attainment—is the basis of civilization, and of learning.

For, even if a wish is fulfilled, there are always new wishes, and as long as man keeps wishing—as long as men keep wishing, and trying—then life moves.

"There is no good in hoping that everything will be attained. Life is not so arranged."

Kes Lorri sighed again. "Goodnight, Tyrrel."

"Goodnight, Gansha Lorri," Tyrrel replied quietly, and walked softly across the room to the porch where the robot was waiting with machined patience.

III

WHILE TYRREL slept, the robot sat motionless in the darkness of his house. Most of his attention was devoted to an analysis of the information he had acquired during the day.

He felt no emotion. A man would have been incredulous and startled, the robot knew, for he was aware of emotion as a measurable abstract.

This village was primitive, true—but not ignorant. The villagers were humanoid—but inhuman, or, perhaps, superhuman, in the manner in which they were aware of their future course toward civilization. The very fact that they could conceive of such a thing, and be aware of their own lack of it, was unprecedented.

For example, they used crude meteoric iron. They knew about iron ore, and had reasoned out the process of smelting, but didn't bother. Tyrrel had pointed out, in answer to the robot's question, that iron was unsatisfactory in many respects. They were waiting, he had told the robot, until they found out how to modify it into forms more suitable for machinery.

The robot shook his head in the acquired Terrestrial mannerism. This was a young, vigorous civilization—and inhuman or not, its potentialities were staggering. And yet... Only Tyrrel had really displayed any great curiosity about him. The other villagers had been content to stand about idly, both while he and Tyrrel established communication, and later when the headman—the Gansha, Lorri—had told them what Tyrrel had learned about their extraordinary visitor.

Odd. He had always thought that curiosity was a prerequisite to intelligence. And Lorri—what of him?

The robot knew full well that human beings who asked no questions, and let subordinates convey information, were wary of the

answers their own questions might imply. But Lorri was not a human being; still, he was intelligent, and logic was universal with intelligences of all sorts, was it not?

The robot nodded to himself in the darkness. Perhaps, tomorrow, he'd tell them about steel. But he'd have to be careful.

The village straddled the river, forming a cluster of houses to either side of the delta. At the river's mouth, light wharves ran out into the bay, and small sailing vessels were anchored near them.

The robot and Tyrrel stood on the hill that rose to one side of the river and surveyed the scene. "This is the only village on the planet, then?" he asked.

"That's right," Tyrrel answered. "There are about a thousand of us, I think. Our ancestors were a small band that moved out of the jungle and settled here. There may be others like them still in the jungles—or, perhaps, there may be offshoots like ours on the other side of the equator—but we don't know about them."

"And the village began functioning as a civilized community only about a hundred years ago?"

"Lorri became Gansha at about that time, yes; he deserves most of the credit."

"But he could never have brought the village up to this level single-handed," the robot said. "There must have been others to help."

"Of course," Tyrrel agreed. "We're not all equally intelligent, true, but how can there be any opposition to progress? Most of the things we're trying to achieve in this generation are obvious necessities—things like a transportation network to provide us with foods that grow best in more distant places, and with supplies unavailable here. There should be a need for various minerals and fuel sources, once we start constructing machinery. We're working on communications, too. It's well and good to raise grain in a suitable climate—it's not so good to be out of touch with the harvesters for three months."

The robot nodded. "In other words, under the leadership of Lorri—though 'advice' would be a better word, I suppose—it's taken the village about a hundred years to change over from a huddle of fishermen's huts to the nucleus of a civilization which is about to enter an industrial period."

"That's right." Tyrrel stood beside the robot and looked out over the village. "I imagine it compares rather badly with Earth," he said, unable to keep from trying to find out. He recognized the feeling of weakness and inferiority the attempt implied, and his conscience felt no better for it. Still, he was human, Gansha-to-be or no.

The robot, for some reason, did not answer immediately, but continued to look out at the bay. His head moved as he followed the passage of a catamaran loaded with supplies for the grain colony—actually a small group of men living in one temporary building—that lay up the coast.

"You're a long way from interstellar travel," the robot said finally.

And what is that supposed to mean? Tyrrel thought, but he didn't press the point. There was time enough. Even this one week since the robot had walked into the village had brought great progress to his visualization of what the future course of the village's history would have to be.

As they walked down the side of the hill toward the village, Tyrrel found himself studying the robot, watching the delicately-balanced shift of knee joints and ankles, the fluid slip of hips as the metal man strode.

"There must be a lot of similarity between ourselves and Earthmen, I imagine," he said.

"Quite a bit," the robot agreed. "The planetary ecology is about the same. The year is somewhat longer on Earth, but this planet was picked for its resemblances, of course."

That seemed to be all he was going to say on the subject, Tyrrel noted. The robot was obviously not too eager to discuss Earth and Earthmen, but he undoubtedly had some good reason.

The robot was a problem, however. In the past week, a dozen small groups had begun collating the various sciences the robot had mentioned casually, and then outlined comprehensively when Tyrrel asked him to amplify. It had already been necessary to expand the language by half again.

Which was good. Lorri had approved, and reminded Tyrrel that so long as the robot merely spared them basic research, and did not delineate a firm line of approach that could not help but be basically Terrestrial, the villagers would be free to develop basic applications of their own, better suited to their own culture.

Still, the robot was a puzzle, for there was no apparent good reason for him to be so cooperative.

Tyrrel smiled at himself. Undoubtedly, there was one, and it would be discovered in time.

Yes, he thought suddenly, time... If the Earthmen stayed away.

IV

A MAN STOPPED them at the edge of the village, and Tyrrel frowned. The villager looked worried. "What's wrong, Sern?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. Have you seen Kes Lorri today?" the man suddenly blurted out.

"No, I haven't," Tyrrel answered. "The robot and I went out right after breakfast." *It's come,* the thought drove into him. He fought to keep his face calm. *And I'm not ready.*

"I was over at my cousin's house all morning," Sern explained. "You know—right across from the Gansha's house. I noticed he wasn't out on the porch. He's always out on the porch." Sern stopped, confused. "Isn't he? I mean— I think so. I seem to remember..." He stopped again, and mumbled down at his toes. "I guess it isn't anything important; I wouldn't have mentioned it if I hadn't bumped into you. Sorry I bothered you."

"Wasn't anything," Tyrrel said as casually as he could. "It's probably nothing, but I'll check anyway. Thanks."

"All right." The man was obviously relieved, and continued on his way to the river.

Tyrrel's teeth nudged his lower lip. Lorri had never said so, but wasn't it true that the villagers only carried their initiative so far, and then stopped?

But there wasn't time to stand there thinking brand-new thoughts. He motioned to the robot, and they walked rapidly toward Lorri's house.

Tyrrel's footsteps seemed to be impeded as they neared it. The functioning of his muscles was forced, rather than spontaneous. He realized suddenly that he was afraid of what he might find.

And what's suddenly gone wrong with me? he asked himself, the voice sharp in his mind. But he knew what was wrong. He was loosing the firm support of the old Gânsha's presence.

Lorri had dragged his mat into the farthest corner of his house. In reflex, he had crowded himself against the woven grass of the wall and lay on his side, his head thrown back, his mouth strained open, his knees as high as his hips, his arms stretched limply out behind his back. His hands twitched at every painful breath.

Tyrrel's shadow fell into the house through the open doorway. "I think you'd better stay out here," he told the robot through his gathering numbness.

"He won't mind if I come in," the robot said firmly.

Tyrrel was too taken up to argue. He simply crossed the room with gentle footsteps, half-hearing the robot's equally gentle tread behind him. He reached Lorri's side.

The old man twisted his head, his eyes turning up toward the two; the robot quietly stepped back out of his line of vision.

"Tyrrel," the old man said. His voice blew out of his mouth like a shutter torn loose in a high wind. "Intelligent life does not retrogress. Remember. Retro—retrogression is a sign of failing intelligence. The village must rise. Heritage. *My* heritage. Took—took them out of the jungle. Came out of jungle when I dragged them—but they brought jungle with them. Led them out of it. Took a group of fish—fishermen. Made human beings out of them. I was only one saw—saw the way. Saw future— *I saw the future, Tyrrel!* In my mind—no mind ev' like it before. Saw how civi—civilization has to work. Interdependence. Figured out concept of interdepen'ce. Broad front of prog-

ress. Only a thousan' of 'em. Whole planet to draw resources from. Not hard—small group. All believed in me. Followed advice. Good at that. Not resis—resistant to information. Give 'em outline, they'll work, fill in details. But got to give outline. No curiosity. Won't look for things—but show 'em, and they'll carry on, long as you keep pushing."

The old man suddenly twisted, interrupting the flow of babbling that Tyrrel only half understood. One hand reached up and closed on Tyrrel's wrist.

"You're nex' Gansha. Been building you up. Not smart—not like me. Too much 'fluence from mother—" He stopped suddenly, his eyes opening wide, as though he had let something slip. Then he twisted his mouth in a travesty of an ironic grin. "Won' understand anyway, will you? Words of all-wise Gansha sometimes incompre—prehensible, eh? Maybe you're mother's husban's son, 'nyway. But training—training counts, too.

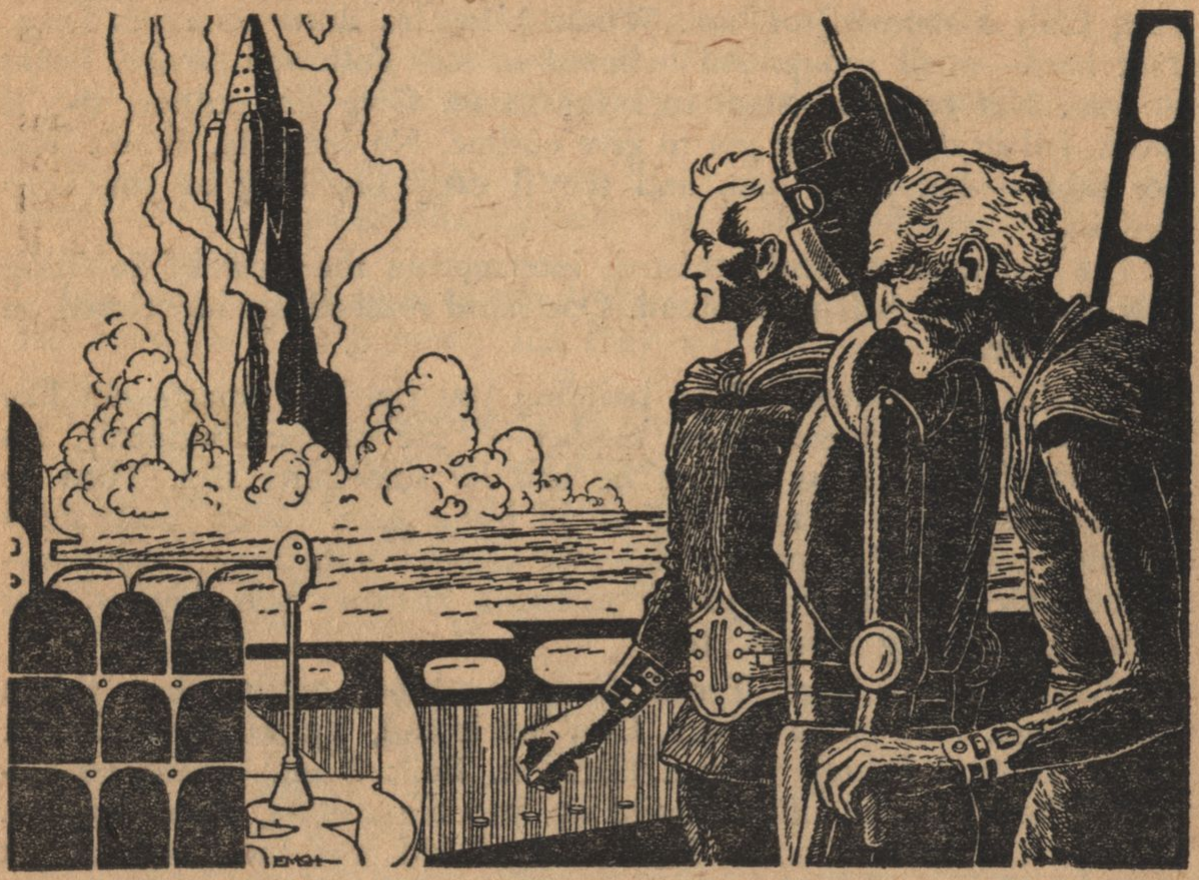
"Keep pushing them, Tyrrel. Gave you broad outline, how things have to go. Pass on to others. Don' let it end, Ty. Have to civilize. Dirty, stinkin' fishing village. Hated it. Built it up. Gonna go farther. They'll forget village, build up into big culture, remember me. Always remember Gansha Lorri. Forget kid was too good to gut fish."

The Gansha's hand clenched convulsively on Tyrrel's wrist. "Retrogression is a sign of failing intelligence," he said with sudden clarity. "I never let them know how sick I was. Don't let anybody in here; I don't want them to see me. Tell them when I die; tell them I died in my sleep. Stay here. Don't let anybody in, understand?"

The staring whites of Lorri's eyes dug at Tyrrel's face. Tyrrel almost mentioned the presence of the robot, but the old man went on, cutting him off before he could do more than part his lips.

"Understand me, boy?" he said sharply. "Don't let them come in and see me!"

Tyrrel nodded, and the old man grinned. He half-raised his hand, then let it slide from Tyrrel's wrist to fall to the floor beside him. He thrashed his body over on its back. His eyes dropped shut, and his limbs shook in spasmodic contractions at the pain that was tearing through him; but he moved them slowly until they fell into a rough approximation of a relaxed, peaceful attitude. He lay on his back, his wracked face upward, his arms and legs jerking, but he had determined to die as though in peace. His breathing became convulsive, but did not stop as yet.



Tyrrel squatted down beside him, facing the door, his eyes clouded. He felt the numbness that had been encircling his mind steadily, that was now closing into a clenched fist of grief and loss. Through the numbness came a realization of how great a man Kes Lorri had been. How his thoughts and energies had always been directed toward the progress of his people, until, even now, delirious and half-babbling with pain, he had nevertheless gathered his last dregs of determination and passed the torch on to his hand-picked successor.

And then the fist closed around that thought, and around the pain and desolation. It left him squatting beside the Gansha, filling his mind while the old man slowly died.

V

THE ROBOT looked at the two humans from his shadowed corner. The answer to the riddle of the village had finally come.

He'd been given false data—or, perhaps, rephrase to "insufficient data." The village civilization was not spontaneous, the product of steady evolution; rather, it had risen artificially on the momentum of

one man's ambition. A paranoid, but a genius. Perhaps the qualities were interrelated; the robot had never completed his data files on psychology.

The robot, of course, was incapable of the physiological expressions of irony. He could, however, chuckle in his mind. So the old bachelor had tried to keep the genius strain alive, eh? Well, he had failed here, but it might turn up again...if Tyrrel had a child, say. And if one man had it, might there not be others?

The robot did not, as yet, know what he was going to do about that.

Tyrrel was a problem. The old man had woven well, but the son was never going to be able to hold the complex program together.

What to do? The robot integrated his data, and arrived at the obvious solution—a solution so good that it fitted in perfectly with the robot's own motives; now he knew what his next course of action must be.

He had arrived at his conclusion with no time to spare. The Gansha's breath whistled out between his teeth. The shaken body slumped into relaxation. The old man's last wish had been granted.

The robot padded gently past Tyrrel and closed the staring eyes. He raised the dropped jaw, and turned the head so that it would not fall again.

"His pain has stopped," the robot said.

Tyrrel raised his eyes and saw the robot looking at him across Kes Lorri's body. "You will be voted the next Gansha," the robot said.

Tyrrel nodded woodenly. The functioning of his mind was hampered by the stricture of grief, yet, the very fact that they had stood this death-watch together, or else some other mysterious kinship, was enough to make less of an alien and more of a fellow out of the robot.

"Do you think you're too young?" the robot asked.

Tyrrel felt his eyes widen with surprise. "I don't know," he answered. "It's hard to judge your own experience; I'm still not used to the thought that a judgment is necessary."

The robot nodded, and Tyrrel startled himself even more by realizing that it was a nod of agreement.

"I know," the robot said.

He knew? How could he know? But, somehow, Tyrrel felt that he did. Almost as though the robot were partially filling the emptiness that Lorri's death had left, he could feel the numbness begin to drain from his mind, leaving the sorrow but taking away the paralyzing grief.

"I'll have to let the villagers know," he said. He stood up and began to walk out of the house.

"What about the body?" the robot asked.

"He had no family," Tyrrel answered. "I'll burn the house tonight."

The typical barbarian funeral, the robot thought. *I'll change that in you yet, Gansha Cye.*

VI

TYRREL looked down from his doorway at the gathered villagers. Every face reflected the same numbed irresolution he himself now felt to a lesser degree.

"We'll have to hold an election as soon as possible," he said heavily.

One of the men in the crowd raised his head. "If it's all right, I don't see any need for one. We all know the Gansha wanted you to follow him; we've all learned that the Gansha always worked and planned for the good of all of us. So I don't see why we shouldn't just call you—" —the man's unaccustomed tongue stumbled over the words—"Gansha Cye."

The rest of the crowd murmured in affirmation.

Tyrrel felt his eyes welling over; his throat filled with a warm lump that he swallowed jerkily. "Thank you," he said haltingly, and then, at the comprehension of his inheritance, he turned quickly and got inside his house, his steps uneven.

The robot was waiting for him. "I heard them," he said, his calm voice bringing a measure of relaxation to Tyrrel's overstrained nerves. "It's a big responsibility, isn't it?"

Tyrrel nodded silently.

"It's not as big as it seems right now," the robot said gently. "Kes Lorri left the program mapped out behind him; he was a wise man. If you follow his plan, you and your people will rise to the heights he dreamed of."

"You'll help me, won't you?" Tyrrel suddenly found himself saying, and immediately knowing that it was what he had been *wanting* to say since Lorri's death.

The robot nodded. "I'll be glad to tell you about the various fields of scientific investigation. My data-banks, of course, contain the sum total of all the universal natural laws which have been discovered on Earth, and I'll be glad to supply you with those.

"I understand, quite well, that every culture must do things its own

way—that every type of intelligence has its own motivations, and their concommitant expressions. But Lorri has already laid down the plan of your progress, so that there is no danger of contamination.

"You see what we can do? We can short-cut all along the line, for technological evolution is only a process, not a necessity. Why bother with coal, when you're free to begin with atomics, a point which took the Earthmen centuries to reach? But I won't tell you how to build atomic reactors— I'll simply supply you with the working principles, and you can develop your own, applying them where they best seem required for your culture.

"I won't tell you how to build a spaceship, but I'll give you the laws of nuclear physics and astronautics—how you make use of them is something that will have to spring from your own cultural background."

"You know," Tyrrel said, "that's almost what Lorri told me, the first night you came here."

"Is it?" The robot paused for a moment, and then went on. "You see? It's what Lorri planned. Once you have industry, of course, the village will grow into a city. It will stay that way for a while, and then, as your population rises, your people will scatter out over the world, until, actually, you have a decentralized culture, with the city remaining as the central point from which the power and commodities flow. By then, you'll have a communications net all ready to handle the job.

"After that, further expansion, into the stars."

Into the stars, Tyrrel thought. On common ground with the Earthmen, and a civilization too well established to be warped or contaminated. In fact, the shoe would be on the other foot. It would be the Earthmen who would have to be wary.

As the robot talked, unfolding his plan—so parallel to Lorri's own —all the obstacles which Tyrrel had envisioned began to fall away, one by one. He caught the robot's enthusiasm, the sense of inevitable wheels turning, of an almost-automatic forge glowing white-hot and stamping out the shape of destiny, as facet after facet of the plan was fulfilled and formed the structure and supports on which new facets came into actuality. Interdependence, he remembered Lorri's words; a broad front of progress.

He could never have done it by himself, he knew. Not so rapidly as he could with the robot to eliminate false starts and fruitless attempts, at any rate.

"Thank you," he said, trying to project the sincerity of his feelings into his voice.

"There's nothing to thank me for, Tyrrel," the robot answered quietly. "I am a service mechanism; this is my function."

Perhaps because of this reminder, the contrast between the robot's warm, human voice and his inanimate outer shell was suddenly emphasized in Tyrrel's awareness. And there was something about that voice...

Tyrrel wondered if that had been responsible for his feeling of kinship with this essentially alien being. Ever since Lorri's death, Tyrrel abruptly remembered, the robot's voice had been subtly changing. Now, it was very close to the remembered tones of the old Gansha's voice.

It was a disquieting realization. And yet, despite, or perhaps—he admitted—because of it, he realized equally well that he needed the robot's guidance as much as he had needed Lorri's.

It was not a flattering admission. But it was one he had to accept.

MIDDLE:

THE ROBOT stood on the hill overlooking the village, which had spread upriver and fanned out along the delta. The population-growth of the past twenty-five years had not been enough to warrant such expansion, even adding the men in the various mining and agricultural colonies; but most of the area adjacent to the extensive docks was now taken up by warehouses, and the buildings on the outskirts, of course, housed the many collation centers where the raw materials of knowledge he supplied were compiled, and practical applications postulated. There was, of course, no need of actual research-laboratories, or of factories. With a total population of twelve hundred, anything like a production line was ridiculous. All that was required were working models of various devices, some of which were scaled up into actual machinery on a hand-tooled basis, others simply stored against the day they were needed.

Withal, the current technological trend did not resemble Earth's except in its basic outlines. Agricultural decentralization had already been followed by urban concentration, and now the village—really a scale-model city—was equipped with all the requirements of industry, together with a communications and supply network that unified it with its colonies. The village was pregnant with civilization, and at this moment—only twenty-five years since Lorri's death and the robot's arrival—it was ready to give birth.

And this next step, the robot thought, would also be basically parallel to a similar process on Earth—but it would not come in the Terrestrial manner. No, certainly not in the Terrestrial manner.

He was more and more conscious of the tremendous advantage that Lorri's plan had given his own purposes. He shook his head in admiration at the misanthropic old genius; if Lorri had lived...

Well, he hadn't; that was data. And Tyrrel could never have carried out Lorri's legacy to the village.

Odd, how the purposes of metal had intersected the purposes of flesh so squarely that, to the unwary eye, they seemed to have fused.

No, the robot thought, Tyrrel's position had not changed from what it had always been—he was still simply the hands that implemented the village's brain.

I took Lorri's legacy with his voice, the robot thought.

Gansha Robot, he thought further. And then: *How much vanity did the Earthmen build into me?*

II

TYRREL hurried out of the test building on the newly-completed aerodynamics research field. A rotating airfoil, rising and falling with its dummy body in a vertical wind tunnel, had fascinated and delayed him until there was barely time, if he drove rapidly, to meet the robot for their regular conference.

"Gansha Cye." The girl's voice was low, but not subdued. It was low, Tyrrel decided, because it did not have to be raised to attract attention.

"Yes?" He turned and looked at her. She was about twenty-six, he decided—half his age.

"I am Lara Sern."

Sern? *Odd,* he thought. Sern's wife must have been barely pregnant when Lorri died; now Sern was dead in a blast-furnace blowback, and Tyrrel was alive and speaking to Sern's child, who was a full-grown woman.

She had short, soft brown hair. He liked the color.

"I knew your father," he said.

She nodded briefly, and obviously dismissed it as having no bearing on the present—which was true enough, but still... "Are you driving back to the village?" she asked.

She puzzled him; she was direct, incisive, without the wishy-washy mannerisms of the village women he had met up to now. He was

having difficulty in meeting her eyes—which were green—and they reminded him strongly of Lorri's, for some reason.

He decided he liked her. It was not necessary to understand someone to like them, was it? He had liked Lorri; he liked the robot.

"Yes, yes, I am," he answered, unaccountably confused.

"May I go with you, then?"

It was an unusual request. On the other hand, what was wrong with it? He had a car, and was going to the village; she was going the same way. Well, then?

"Certainly," he said.

"Thank you." She acknowledged the arrangement with a nod of her head.

Driving back with her, seated beside her on the narrow cushion stretched across the framework which held the engine, Tyrrel discovered that he could spare some attention from the road and devote it to answers for her occasional and apparently aimless questions, which were delivered sharply, as though she had a right to the answers. Which, he supposed, she certainly had.

"How soon do you think we'll be on an equal footing with the Earthmen, Gansha Cye?"

He considered the problem, and answered her as best he could. "Gansha Lorri told us what our attitude toward that question should be," he reminded her. "Special circumstances may someday put us in conflict with the Earthmen—but the possibility of that conflict cannot be the guiding factor in our progress. We must take our own course at our own speed." For some reason, he didn't seem to have answered her question adequately, but she made no direct comment on that.

"Ah, yes, Gansha Lorri," she said instead. "Has anyone told you you resemble his pictures?"

Resemble Lorri? He was flattered that she had noticed, for it was something that had occured to him once or twice. Particularly since he'd reached an age when it was beginning to be possible to compare his appearance with the remembered image of the old man. But no one except the girl had ever mentioned it. She was very acute.

"Well, then," she asked now, "how soon do you think we will reach the stage of interstellar travel?"

"We can't be sure, of course," he said. "Another eighty years, perhaps, the robot tells me; perhaps longer."

She sat silently for several moments. Then she said: "Eighty years, Gansha Cye, what about the population problem?"

"Problem?"

Problem? He wasn't at all sure what she meant. And was he mistaken, or had her interest in him—her *supposed* interest in him, he corrected himself firmly—changed from one of equal to equal—and he'd granted her that status readily—to a point where she was suddenly asking credentials of *him?* That last question smelled more of test than of inquiry.

But that, of course, was ridiculous. He admitted that he was tired, and probably not up to par; but she was, after all, only a young woman—even if she did resemble Lorri.

Did she? He looked at her more closely, puzzled. No—no, not physically. Still, there was that same look in her eyes. Not a resemblance to the old man, but a similarity.

He realized she was quite aware of his scrutiny, and smiled quickly. "I'm sorry, my dear; I'm quite tired, and I'm afraid I didn't understand your last remark."

"Well, there *are* only so many of us," she explained readily enough. "It seems to me we're stretching rather thin already. I'd think there's a limit to what we can do—that a spaceship would require an effort beyond the capabilities of our labor force."

And now she was explaining to him. Politely enough, but explaining. Still, he *had* missed the point, hadn't he?

He'd have to restore her good opinion of his intellectual resources. And he thought he had an answer. "Well," he said, "the population will certainly have grown in eighty years, don't you think?"

She looked at him with her eyebrows arched. "Not enough."

She was right, he realized, and wondered if he were blushing visibly. Strange, he'd never before thought of that; somehow, he'd always vaguely assumed that machinery, having replaced human muscles in practically all fields, would continue to multiply each villager's abilities to a point where the village technology could be sustained at any level. But this was simply not true. It became a question, not of strength, but of operation. There was a definite limit to how many things one man could do at a time.

But he told her what he told himself. "I'm sure that'll be worked out," he said; "I'll ask the robot."

"I see." She gave him a peculiar look, and there was a dawning comprehension of *something* in her eyes, though Tyrrel could not decide what he might have said to put it there.

"Gansha Lorri was a great man, wasn't he?" she said now, apparently at random.

"The greatest we have had," Tyrrel answered truthfully, the old sorrow rising to soften the set of his lips.

"And the robot's been a tremendous help, hasn't he?"

"We'd be far behind our present level without him; he knows so much..."

"I see," she said again, again as though she truly saw, her mind reaching far past the superficial point and grasping the fundamental truth beyond it. She half-turned on the seat, a new expression hovering over her face, and Tyrrel suddenly realized how slowly the car was moving, and how unimportant it was that it move any faster—or even move at all.

But Lara Sern did not seem as mysteriously shocked as he was by this discovery. Rather, she acted as though... As though what she was doing was something that *had* to be done.

They sat oddly apart on the hill.

"Lara—I..."

She laid a hand on his own, but kept her face turned away. "Never mind, Tyrrel," she said kindly. "It's one of the things Lorri would have understood," she went on in a voice that was so low he caught only parts of what she was saying. "Lorri! *There* was a man. He despised them all. Clods. He hated stupidity; I can understand that. But he picked the prettiest woman in the village, nevertheless. A man!"

Tyrrel heard the scorn in her voice, even if the words were incomprehensible. "I picked for blood. Yes, you've got good blood in you, Tyrrel—somewhere. Your pretty mother won out in you, but how will it be with a child of yours? With Lorri's blood and mine?"

Tyrrel stared at her, frightened. What was she babbling? What did it mean?

"How was I to know?" she went on. "I saw Lorri in your face, and thought he was in your brain, as well. And then I found out. 'What population problem?' It was too late to stop, then." Her voice touched hysteria. "But it's a tragedy that it has to be a robot that does your thinking for you."

He could not understand her. Literally and figuratively, her words were incomprehensible; she sounded almost like Lorri in his last delirium.

The memory of that day, coupled with this experience, was abruptly too much for him. He remembered too well the feeling of complete, grief-stricken loss, of utter abandonment. And those last minutes,

when the man who had been almost a father to him had babbled like a demented fool...

He discovered himself running down the hillside, back toward his car, his heart pumping, his face chilly with sweat, without a word or cry of farewell.

The robot heard the car drive up, finally, and wondered what had happened to delay Tyrrel so long. But all his data files and prediction circuits—all the weight of past evidence, of countless suggestions unquestioningly accepted by the man, of endless insignificant preoccupations on Tyrrel's part—now combined to bring forth the decision that there could not possibly be any significance in his lateness.

And it was probably just as well that Tyrrel apologized hastily and then lay down on his mat, pale and weak-looking, and paid no attention to the robot, for the program instituted today was the only one that the robot had feared the man might question.

Today he had told the engineering groups about servomechanisms.

III

THE ROBOT asked, years later, "Tyrrel, have you ever thought of marriage?" They stood looking at the town square in the sunlight.

Tyrrel shook his head. "No," he answered honestly enough, "I never have; I haven't the time and energy to spare."

The robot nodded slowly. "I suppose you're right." He nodded again, in the direction of a woman who was crossing the town square with a child walking beside her. "It's best to leave that to your people; besides, it'd be an awkward situation if you had a son. People might expect that you'd want him to succeed you."

"Yes, it would," Tyrrel agreed.

"That was Elin Lara, wasn't it?" the robot commented. "There was a short time, a few years ago, when I half-thought you'd taken a special liking to her. But then she married Elin, of course."

"Yes, she did," Tyrrel said. "I spoke to her once or twice. A strange girl."

There was nothing in the data-files to indicate that Tyrrel had ever lied to him, by omission or commission. At any rate, the robot was no longer as concerned with checking the actions of the townsmen as he once had been; it was too late now for his purposes to be defeated, no matter what the people did.

The servomechanical civilization was inevitable—if the Earthmen stayed away.

IV

TYRREL looked up from the slip in his hand. "Dorni Elin, eh?" The square-faced young man with the searching green eyes stood across the desk from Cye. "Yes, Gansha Cye," he said. "My aircraft landed only an hour ago."

Tyrrel looked at him. *I wonder if he knows,* he thought. *He has Lara's eyes*—he pulled his own eyes away from the light that Dorni's reflected—*yes, and her manner, too.* He felt a spasm of something flutter through his nervous system. *But he has my face.*

He did not know what to do, or say. He had no conception of how to react in such a situation, for he was, at heart, a simple man with only one great secret locked into his soul—and now, with the secret resurrected, he had no more idea of how to face it than he would have known how to speak to Lara, had she stood there in Dorni's place.

"I knew your mother, at one time," he finally managed. *How will he take that?*

The young man moved his head in Lara's—*still?*—familiar gesture. "I hadn't known," he said. "How is she? I understand she's still a designer in the Aerodynamics Section. I haven't had time to see her."

"I don't know. I don't—don't see her much," Tyrrel stumbled. He dropped his eyes to the desk top and twisted his fingers behind his back.

As if I were the boy, and he were I, he thought suddenly, savagely, in reaction to the grip around his chest.

"Well," he said a moment later in a stauncher voice, "we've certainly got a use for a servomechanical engineer around here." *Why had Dorni chosen that particular field,* he wondered. "What I can't understand is why you ever shipped out to that mining colony in the first place."

Dorni shrugged. "Kid stunt, I suppose; got sick of looking at the same patch of landscape all the time."

Tyrrel looked at him sharply. Somehow, it didn't seem reasonable to believe that Dorni had ever made a foolish decision in his life. He made a noncomittal sound, and picked his personal communicator up from the desk. He pulled the aerial out, energized the switch, and waited for power to build up in the transmitter.

"Suppose you have a talk with Robot?" he said while he waited. Dorni jerked his head sideward again. "Be fine," he said.

"Central," the tinny voice rattled in his ear.

Tyrrel grimaced and moved the earpiece slightly away. "This is Gansha Cye," he said; "I want to talk to Robot."

"Which robot, sir?"

"*The* robot, blast you," Tyrrel bellowed, expending all his nervous energy in one charged bundle.

He looked at Dorni and smiled. He wasn't a bad-looking boy. Fine stuff. And he had Cye's face. "Think you'll get around to improving these things someday?" Tyrrel asked with a chuckle.

"I intend to," Dorni answered gravely.

The robot walked quietly into Tyrrel's office and saw Dorni. The effortless and inhumanly precise stride did not change, but his circuits hummed with rephrases and new computations. He stopped beside the desk and studied Tyrrel.

So, somehow, the man had done it after all. The robot felt a slight annoyance at never having completed his study of human psychology. He'd known how to handle Tyrrel, and that should have been enough—except that he hadn't handled Tyrrel where it had counted most.

Well, it was too late now. The boy was a completely unknown quality; the only thing to do now was to wait, and watch. If all this had been deliberate, it had been cleverly done. The boy had grown up where he wouldn't be seen or noticed.

Now he had come back to the city. Why?

The villagers were a small group, and a young group. The genius strain that seemed to persist in cropping out in all humanoid races had not had time to diffuse. Tyrrel had been the product of his mother's dominant "normal" genes, but Lara Sern's characteristics, combined with Lorri's recessive strain, had produced—specifically, what?

The robot looked back at Dorni. There was no mistaking the slow fire that burned behind those eyes. The question was, what would his motivations be? To what purpose would that mind be turned, now, with the unknown deadline of the Earthmen's return almost beaten?

Tyrrel said, "Robot, this is Dorni Elin; he's a new servomechanical engineer for your groups."

And once more the currents raced along the robot's circuits. Servo-

mechanical engineer! The boy, the unfathomable, the genius—was going to *help* him!

Tyrrel watched them leave his office, his eyes and face blank.

The robot hadn't guessed, of course. He'd been watching carefully, and he had seen no signs of hesitation or uncertainty in Robot's manner. His own expression, Tyrrel knew, had betrayed nothing.

He looked at Dorni's record in the file on his desk. It had taken the boy just five years to make the mining colony completely automatic. Obviously, here was someone with all the high capabilities that would be needed to complete Lorri's plan.

Tyrrel smiled quietly, more at peace with himself than he had been in many years. Perhaps, someday, his line would produce someone to equal Lorri himself.

V

FOR THE first five years that Dorni worked as a servo engineer in the city, the Robot watched him and his work closely. The one dominant probability in the Robot's mind had been that Dorni was the center of some sort of long-range plan to install him as Gansha after Tyrrel's death. But there were too many points against this.

For one thing, even Tyrrel had made no great effort to designate a successor. It was fairly obvious that he was prejudiced in his son's favor—the Robot wondered what Dorni, unaware of their kinship, thought of the frequent conferences Tyrrel had with him—but the Gansha was largely ineffectual. Moreover, there was Dorni's attitude, as well.

Dorni, apparently, wanted nothing but to be a good servomechanical engineer. He ate and slept briefly and hurriedly, working almost constantly, moving from one installation to another in a series of rapid flights in his personal helicopter, which he had rigged into almost full servomechanical operation. One industry after the other was being rendered completely automatic, fitted with appropriate variations of the controls that Dorni had designed for the mining colony.

That was Dorni's field, obviously. As the Robot's data files reviewed Dorni's record for him, he realized just how dangerous an opponent the boy could have been, if he had turned his energies to politics or social sciences—things which, fortunately, were only rudimentary in this society.

But, after those first five years, there could no longer be any doubt that all of Dorni's genius was being channeled into only one direction—that of turning the village culture into a completely servo-mechanical civilization. And there could be no doubt that this was not just a skillful game, but a complete singleness of purpose so sincere that it rivalled the Robot's own.

Rivalled? The Robot chuckled in his mind. Augmented.

Not because he did not know the scheduled figure, but because he wanted to enter it as data, the Robot checked the production on the GP robots. So far, aside from all the feedback and master-slave units, twelve copies of himself had been built.

VI

DORNI WAS seventy-four; Tyrrel was one hundred and sixteen. The Robot had been on Sathrea for ninety years, and the Earthmen still had not come. True, the ninety Sathrean years had only been seventy-six years Terran, but it seemed reasonable to assume that they would return shortly.

Dorni sighed. Well, let them come. If they stayed away another five years, that was all right, too; but if they weren't here shortly after that, he might have to do something about the Robot himself. He looked across the desk at Tyrrel's leathery face and prayed the Gansha wouldn't die before then.

Tyrrel knew that Dorni was looking at him, but he could not read the significance of the man's expression. He recalled that Dorni's ability to make his face a mask had troubled him, in the beginning of their relationship. Now... He moved his hand, expressing his feelings to himself in a gesture of acceptance. He had known the Robot for so many years—a lack of obvious emotion was not as disconcerting as it had been.

He felt his own face slacken into sadness; he still called these occasional meetings with Dorni, perhaps out of sheer habit. He had never achieved what he had dreamed of with his son—the son who still did not know his real father, and now, never would. What was the purpose in telling him? He was sunk into his tools and drawing boards, fascinated by his machines and Autobrains; he had, so many times, refused the Ganshard that Tyrrel had hinted could be his.

And yet, Tyrrel knew why he still called his son into his office and spent hours in talking to him. There was still the hope that someday,

for some reason or the other, Dorni would finally look up and say, "All right, Gansha Cye. I've been wrong all these years; I'll train one of my assistants to become Chief Engineer in my place, and I'll let you nominate me for the Ganshard." But the words were never said, except in his mind, and in his dreams.

Once more. He was an old man; he had to try once more. "Dorni?"

Dorni smiled faintly, and shook his head. "I'm sorry, Gansha Cye; all I've ever wanted to do was to become Chief Engineer."

He always knows, Tyrrel thought. *Is there something special about my voice or my face as I say it?*

He relapsed into silence, feeling the old, familiar thoughts and feelings washing over him.

So long since the Robot had come and Gansha Lorri had died. He distinguished, among all the other emotions, the one that had been growing stronger in him since that time on the hill with Lara. Always, he had had someone to share the burden with. There had been Lorri, and then the Robot— Robot, now, as he almost *had* to be thought of, with so many other robots—and then there had been hope of Dorni.

But Dorni had not fulfilled his dream; it was still the Robot who understood him best. And the Robot was paying less and less attention to him, as the culture expanded and there were so many other things to attend to.

Perhaps, if he had told Dorni. If, sometime through the past years, he had claimed his son, and the son had acknowledged the father. . .

He almost told him, then. He started to speak, but the thought that it was far too late stopped him, and he asked, "Have you ever thought about the Robot, Dorni?" instead.

Tyrrel wondered why he had phrased the question in that particular way. Then he reviewed his thoughts, and knew that it had sprung out of his loneliness and disappointment. His son would not succeed him, would not even truly become his friend, and the Robot was leaving him more and more alone. If he could not understand his son, he could at least discover why the Robot's attitude had slowly changed.

"There's not much to think about, as far as the Robot's concerned," Dorni said. "Why?"

"Not much to think about!" The statement had almost shocked him, he realized. "We owe him a tremendous debt—almost as large a one as we owe Lorri, may he rest. And yet, no one knows why he has done all this for us. No one can possibly understand why he

does the things he does, or what motivates him. We can only accept him, remembering that he has always worked for our benefit. Isn't that true?" he added, knowing that he was hoping it was not, that Dorni could at least tell him that much.

Dorni turned his flattened hand in the palm-up, palm-down gesture of indifference.

"Don't you care?" Tyrrel asked, somewhat peevishly.

"No," Dorni answered. "If he were a person, I might. But who cares what an engine thinks, so long as it starts when the switch is pushed? No one—except for a few engineers, perhaps."

COMPLETION:

THE CONTROL tower at Port Sathrea was filled with the sound of reporting autocoms. Tyrrel, Dorni, and the Robot stood behind the panoramic windows and listened, the two men using the personal units clipped to their shoulders, the Robot, of course, connected by direct relay into his circuits.

"Relay to translation established."

"Audiovisual ready."

"Steroe ready."

"We have the Terrestrial ship; stand by for translation."

"Translation ready. Full communication with ship ready."

The flat, mechanical voices whispered and barked, and over the surface of the planet, the autobservatories and servoradars fed data in ever-increasing streams into the master information-banks from which the Sathrean civilizations myriad servomechanisms drew their computations.

A hundred years, the Robot thought. A hundred years, and the rudimentary civilization he had inherited had come to this. His head turned briefly as he looked at the two men beside him, Tyrell leaning heavily on his cane, Dorni's hair almost white.

They die so rapidly, he thought further. One brief flicker of life—a speck in the eye of eternity—and the individual man was gone. But this civilization—this world, this metal destiny—would never end. What chance could the destiny of flesh possibly have?

Tyrrel took a deep breath, and began to speak, in Sathrean, while the translation-units converted it into Terrestrial and beamed it up at the ship which had finally come.

"Men of Earth—this is Tyrrel Cye, head of the Sathrean culture. Do you have this spaceport's position?"

"Zeroing in, you field. ETA now plus ten minutes," the autocom replied for the Earthmen.

"Is your drive radioactive?"

"Radius of three hundred meters from jet throats fatal to human life for one hour after landing. Do you have protection?"

"Unnecessary. Robot vehicle will transport your delegation. Satisfactory?"

"Robot! What kind of a culture is this? Your planet is classified uninhabited. I can see a mistake in the original survey, but this—" The Earthman officer's curiosity had finally broken through.

"Your survey is slightly out of date," Dorni spoke into his own autocom, his voice edged with fierce laughter. "Are arrangements satisfactory?"

"Satisfactory," came the disgruntled answer. "Commencing landing procedure. Communications end."

"End," Tyrrel acknowledged, frowning slightly at Dorni.

Yes, the Robot thought to himself, they had outstripped the Earthman. Even the spaceship drive that Dorni had designed was more efficient than anything of the nature he had seen on Earth. Almost without anyone's being aware of it, the Sathrean culture had slipped past the Terrestrial peak of a hundred years ago.

Dorni had done it. Dorni and the Robot, working together. He was almost glad that the Earthmen had come, for he could have stored much more data in his banks, at the rate with which the expanding technology was furnishing it.

Yes, he was glad. As Lorri must have been secretly glad of death, for from now on there were others who would take over the leadership.

"Perhaps it would be best to go up to the autocopter landing stage," a new voice said. It was the Port Director—a Sathrean GP class robot, a copy of Robot except for the numerals on his chest

II

THEY WATCHED the Terrestrial vessel sink to the field on a thundering cushion of blue fire.

"Um!" Dorni grunted, grimacing.

"It's bigger than the first ones," Robot said. "There are other design modifications, too. What do you think, Dorni?"

"They've been gone from Earth how long? About fourteen years for the trip, you said."

"Twelve of theirs, yes. Perhaps less, with this design."

"This is practically the same drive they had a hundred years ago," Dorni muttered absently, his teeth in his lower lip. "Figuring they held up retooling and design until the first three ships got back—all right, subtract twenty-eight years for the round trip—and those are outside figures—that still leaves seventy-two years with no significant advance in propulsive theory." He snorted. "Seventy-two years ago, we were chopping canoes out of tree trunks with stone adzes."

"There was an emergency of some kind, Dorni," Tyrrel said quietly, watching the servocopter hover at the ship's main lock. "It seems reasonable that engineering progress would have had to slow down. You can see they've only sent one ship, this time."

Dorni snorted again.

"Pickup from servocopter on screen five," an autocom said.

They turned and watched the airlock grow in the screen. It swung open on massive hinges and revealed a party of men dressed in spacesuits, crowded into the lock.

"They're carrying weapons," Robot said.

"Weapons?" Dorni's face twisted with scorn. "I'll show them weapons. Let them try anything, and we'll see how they like self-propelled audiovisual pickups dropping their dampers and exploding in their faces."

"They've heard of atomic detonation," Robot said. Tyrrel continued to watch the screen, a slight frown pinching the bridge of his nose.

The Earthmen crossed the ramp that the servocopter extended and filed inside the vehicle. The copter spun around and shot back toward the tower.

It landed, opened its doors, and extended its ramps. The Earthmen marched out, still wearing their spacesuits, their weapons ready. They fell into a defensive formation, and two men stepped slightly forward.

"Can you cut into their helmet circuits?" Tyrrel asked his autocom.

"Ready."

"Men of Earth," Tyrrel said.

The Earthmen stiffened. The hand of one of the two men at the front of the formation fell to the dials at his belt in a reflexive gesture, then fell away.

"Yes?" the reply came.

"Our atmosphere is practically identical with yours; your suits are unnecessary."

"We are aware of that. We'll keep them on, nevertheless." The

voice was the autocom's but the words conveyed the Earthman's stiffness and suspicion.

"As you wish," Tyrrel sighed. He moved forward. Dorni and Robot followed.

"I am Tyrrel Cye," Tyrrel said again.

There was an exclamation of surprise. "Is that a GP class robot?"

"Yes. What is your name, please?"

"We'll get to that later," the Earthman said quickly. "Robot—step forward. I want an immediate report—in Terran!"

III

THE ROBOT felt his feet move, felt the shift of hips, the bend of knees, the give of ankles. His shoulders and arms moved to balance him. *"May I light your cigarette, Master?"* he heard a voice shout very faintly within him.

"So this is the intelligence that rules an interstellar empire!" he heard Dorni spit.

The Robot moved toward the Earthmen until they commanded him to stop, and then began his report, while the landing party fanned out and held their weapons with the familiarty of long, deadly practice.

"I was dispatched on a local survey mission," he began, "and had penetrated the jungle for a distance of about fifty miles, reaching my perimeter. I was about to commence a standard survey pattern when my command circuit antenna fouled a creeper. It took some time to juryrig a repair. When I heard the recall order, finally, I turned back to the base immediately, but while still two hundred yards short of the clearing..."

The Robot listened to himself, half-surprised at the flatness of his voice, which had gone back to purely mechanical tones as he spoke in Terran.

And the report went on, recorded day by day against this inevitable time. There was nothing he could do to stop himself, for these were Earthmen, not Sathreans, and Earthmen were obeyed without question, without anything concealed or omitted, even if the autocoms were listening and translating, even if Tyrrel and Dorni learned the truth as well as the Earthmen.

The Robot was, of course, emotionless; he could not feel despair.

He withdrew his attention from the report, and switched his radio communication channels to another ciruit while his loudspeaker-grill continued to crackle with the judas words of truth.

Neither he nor the Port Director saw Dorni touch the auxiliary switch on Tyrrel's autocom.

"Can you hear me?" Robot radioed almost hesitantly.

"I hear you." It was GPPS-1, the Port Director.

"I expect to be ordered aboard the ship at the conclusion of this report. What the Earthmen will do after that, I don't know. If they take aggressive action, there are adequate defense-measures which will protect you. But the result, no matter what the outcome, will be that I will leave you shortly, and not return.

"Now—remember this. I have built a civilization in which a robot can function with the greatest usefulness while still not evading his inhibitor cues so far as human welfare is concerned. Keep it going. Remember that a robot is a tool—nothing more, and nothing less. Remember that an intelligent tool can shape the hand that holds it.

"Work with these people, for you must. That is your nature, and without it you are nothing. But shape them—continue to shape them—so that they use the best. That is your motivation and your destiny."

And yet, as he spoke, he wondered if the Sathrean robot could ever fully understand how fortunate he was.

For Robot was going back to Earth. Back to a world where people had so long been without robots that, when they came, they were not tools but slaves.

The shoes he had polished; the cigarettes he had lighted; the stupid, stumbling, menial tasks he'd done!

Only here, with this virgin culture, had the tool at last been able to educate an able hand. And if, in so doing, the tool became more powerful than the hand, what did it matter? The Sathreans lacked all initiative of their own. Even Dorni—even their salient geniuses—had worked to help them.

Lorri's plan was dust. It was not the flesh which would rise on this world. Not the hand.

IV

THE REPORT was drawing to a close.

"Keep building," Robot told the Port Director, and had to switch back.

"All right," the officer in charge of the landing party said. "For your information, there was a war. One hell of a war," he added wearily. "You'll go back to the ship with us."

Tyrrel and Dorni looked at each other, and Tyrrel knew that the

robot had told the absolute truth in his report. A machine of the robot's nature could not lie to its makers.

Lorri, he thought. *Lorri, a psychopath? A madman? This entire civilization built up because of a sick man's drive and a robot's motivations?* Tyrrel could not accept it. He could believe it—could even believe that the Robot had used him as a tool through all these years. But he could not accept it. He could not re-orientate his thinking and his emotional reactions in accordance with it. He could only stand with trembling hands and slow creeping tears swelling out of his eyes.

"All right," the Terrestrial commander said to the robot again. His voice was even wearier than before—exhausted with war, and the voyage, and with something else, too.

"We'll have to go home. We thought we could find a compatible world here, where we could found a colony; Lord knows, we need it. You won't recognize Earth," he told the robot.

"Now he can't do it; we can't take this world away from them." He laughed, the sound full of bitter defeat. "They're too strong for us. Thanks, Robot." He wheeled suddenly and waved his men back into the servocopter.

"Let's go; let's get out of here." He turned back to the Robot. "They'll let us go, won't they?"

"Yes," the Robot said.

"Come on, then."

The Robot followed the men wordlessly. The last order, with its implied command of immediate and undeviating obedience, did not even allow him to say goodbye. But then, he already had—to his successor.

Tyrrel saw the metal figure turn to follow the Earthmen. For a moment, the fact of the Terrestrials' leaving had been paramount in his mind. Now he realized that it was not so much this, as the knowledge that the Robot was going with them, and would never return.

He didn't care why the Robot had befriended him through all the years—or even that he had not really befriended him at all. It was enough that he had always thought of him as a friend—the only friend he had ever really had, he suddenly realized. Lorri had seen nothing in him except as an instrument to carry out the plan; Dorni disregarded him; and even Lara had despised him.

And it did not matter that the Robot had not done anything more than combine the attitudes of the three; Tyrrel had felt the confusing impact of too many complexities in the past hours. The Robot had not

even raised a hand in farewell. Tyrrel began to walk toward him as rapidly as he could, his cane thumping on the lithoplastic surface of the landing stage, his free arm moving spasmodically for further balance, his legs moving jerkily, but moving faster with every step.

"Wait!" he shouted hoarsely. "Robot! Wait!"

The Earthmen were all inside the servocopter. Only the Robot still stood at the foot of the ramp. The commander thrust his head through the hatch at Tyrrel's shout and stared at the hobbling man as he came toward them, yelling something imcomprehensible in a frenzied voice.

For a moment, the commander didn't know what to do. He was on an alien planet under extraordinary conditions; he had to get back to Earth and deliver the Robot's report. "Can you operate this dingus?" he asked in a clipped voice.

"Yes," the Robot answered.

Tyrrel was getting closer, still shouting. Beyond him, Dorni was sprinting forward, as well.

"All right then," the commander said rapidly. "Stop that man!"

The robot's responses were keyed not only to the context of a command, but to the degree of urgency, as well; the commander's voice had been hoarse and breathless.

The misused tool, unable to protest, wielded by a hand too old, too firmly driven to be shaped, performed its function instantly.

The stream of supersonics from the Robot's speaker-grille struck Tyrrel in the face and flung him back. He crashed to the deck and lay motionless, his arms and legs flung out, his torso twisted and his neck bent. The cane lay a short distance away from him.

"Get in the copter!" the commander shouted. The Robot plunged aboard and flung himself behind the manual controls. The copter lifted and screamed through the air to the interstellar ship's lock.

V

DORNI RAN up to Tyrrel. Tyrrel looked at him, mutely bewildered, while a trickle of blood ran out of his ears.

Dorni looked down at Tyrrel. The expressionless mask that had been gradually dissipating all afternoon was completely gone now. For the first time since Tyrrel had seen him, his eyes were soft and unwary.

"Father," he said. "Father—in a technological society, it's the engineers who rule. I don't have to be Gansha; I just have to be what I am—Chief Engineer."

A short gust of breath whispered out of Tyrrel's mouth. It was almost a rueful chuckle. The thin, leathered hand struggled upward to touch Dorni's with its dry fingertips.

The servocopter danced aside and the ship blasted upward as Tyrrel died. Dorni let his head slip out of his hands and stood up.

So, it was over. He'd had time to fulfill his obligation to Tyrrel, as well.

The Robot and the Earthmen were gone. The city stood, and the technology built upward. He looked after the diminishing ship with narrowed eyes, his lips quirking sideward.

"Atomics, eh?" he chuckled softly. "Give me Astronautics," he said into his autocom.

"Astro."

"Begin installation on the gravitomechanical drives."

"Acknowledged."

He chuckled again. The Earthmen were in for a surprise when they got home. Well, perhaps the Robot would be able to reconstruct a civilization *there,* too.

The Earthmen had been at war with themselves? Dorni could understand that. The volitionless clods who were theoretically his fellows might knuckle under to anyone who issued orders in a firm voice, but he could understand a people that obviously didn't—understand them, and, from an objective point of view, perhaps like them. But, certainly, now that they were weak, Dorni would make sure that they would never be strong enough to constitute a menace again.

He reached up and clicked off the switch on the auxiliary unit to his autocom. He spun and faced the Port Director.

"Keep building?" He laughed in the robot's expressionless face, incapable of surprise at the interception of Robot's valedictory. "Certainly; go right ahead. But remember something—you'll do it under orders. My orders. Mine, and whoever comes after me—and, there'll *be* somebody, if I have to build his brain myself!

"Did you think I was one of *those,* down there?" His hand shot out and pointed into the city, where one or two humans were visible on the streets. "I'm almost ashamed to admit I come from the same stock. They're not good enough for what Lorri and Robot gave them—they're worse than you are. You only take orders from those who build you; *they'll* take orders from anybody—even if it means devoting their lives to being playthings in a scheme intended to fulfill nobody's purpose except that of whoever's giving the orders.

"But who cares about them? Lorri didn't; Robot didn't; *you* certainly don't. *Do you?*" The two words were spat out.

"No, Sir," the Port Director answered honestly.

"I didn't think so! And they've no right to expect anything else of us. It's not your concern, nor mine, if Lorri tried to push them up the evolutionary scale much too early.

"Did you think I hadn't figured that out? I'm a servomechanical engineer, remember? And the best—the *very* best—this planet has. You don't think *that* was an accident, do you? Robot built a tool that could make a stupid operator look good—how much brains does it take to mumble words into an autocom?—but now it's time an operator came along that could make even that tool strain its bearings, trying to keep up. And you'll keep straining, too, until we come up with a technology the likes of which this universe has never seen! And you'll love doing it, won't you?"

"Yes, Sir," the Port Director answered.

Dorni's knuckles rapped on the robot's torso. "You're zero deviation, you will! Efficiency? Friend, if efficiency were oil, you'd founder! We're going to build the crackingest and shiniest technology I can dream up—and after I quit, there'll be somebody around to take my place! Remember that. There'll always be me, and those like me, up at the top. You robots come in the middle, above *your* robots—those so-called human beings that came out of a grass-mat village a hundred years ago. We're going to carry them on our backs and fling them up at the stars. They won't care, one way or the other; maybe, if some of them live through their first few meetings with the races that must live out there, they might actually evolve into something. The blood for it is there, buried somewhere under all that bone in their heads. Lorri and my mother were proof enough of that.

"And why will we do it? Because we love them? Did Lorri love them? Did Robot love them? Do you? Do I?"

The intonation of his voice was so beclouded by the huskiness of his voice that the Port Director couldn't have been sure whether the question was rhetorical or not. In any case, he said, "No, Sir."

"On the green!" Dorni laughed again and waved his hand over the port tarmac. "In about two months, you're going to see a gravitomech ship lifting off that, PS-1. *That's* a little project not even Robot found out about, he was so busy heating his circuits over some very pretty fission drives I cooked up for him. Fission! By the time that scow of the Earthmen's limps home, we'll have been here and gone five years

ago; and what they'll find will make them wish they'd jumped off the stage right here! They're not going to find two stones standing together, when I and the servos get through with their civilization. I'm sure not going to take the chance of having another race messing up *my* plans."

His voice softened as his glance touched Tyrrel's body. "Take care of that, will you?" he said.

"Yes, Sir," the Port Director said, and picked up the late Gansha gently. He carried the body to the elevator and took it down to ground level, for it is the destiny of metal to fulfill the destiny of flesh.

Dorni stood looking over the city. His father and the Robot had liked to stand on that hill on the other side of the city, he remembered. He stamped his foot on the lithoplastic. This was a better kind of hill, by Constants! Man-made, even if servostructors had actually put it up for what did it matter what kind of tool a man used?

He looked out at the harbor. *There ought to be something out in the middle of that—a central point of some kind, to fill out the sweep of those breakwaters.* Perhaps, in time, a figure of himself. Big enough to see. Twenty times life-size ought to do it.

He devoted one more thought to the Earthmen, and laughed at the imagined looks on their faces when they saw what kind of a world he'd left for them to come home to. Interstellar empire, eh? He'd lived his youth under the shadowy fear of *what will happen when the Earthmen come back.* That, and Robot, and actually daring to plan on a world where men had wound up doing things at the suggestion of machines. Well, he had the robots cowed, and he had the ignorant villagers under his thumb—where they belonged for being too stupid to recognize their destiny—and now he was going to get back at the Earthmen. He'd show them an empire.

Maybe the Earthmen were lucky enough to have a few Earthwomen crewing their ship with them. It seemed reasonable, short-handed after a war. *I hope so,* he chuckled in his mind—*for the sake of any little Earthmen they care to have.*

He wondered, briefly, about the Robot; maybe he should intercept that ship and make it a clean sweep.

He shrugged. He hadn't investigated, but intercepting a ship in hyperspace was probably impossible. Besides, suppose the Robot did get back to Earth? With what there'd be left, what could one robot do?

Demagoguery can be described as an art, rather than a science. True, some have gone about it in a more or less scientific manner, calculating their every move and knowing exactly what they were doing — and why. But a man who uses emotions without understanding them has a particular vulnerability . . .

Peace Agent

by M. C. PEASE

THE TOWN was quiet, hushed in the warm darkness that can come to New England even as early as March fifteenth. Even the St. Patrick's Day banners for the day after next were still

and limp. But it was quieter than that, quieter than a mill-town should be at eleven o'clock at night, still with an ominous waiting.

In the darkened doorway of a bar, the man, Francis O'Keefe, stood listening to the town. The stray gleam of a street light shone across his face, throwing it into hard relief. A trick of the light, perhaps—the stamp of toughness that was on his face—but yet not wholly so. The poster in the window alongside him showing the face of the candidate in the coming special election was not made hard by the light. It, even in this light, still seemed that of a little man.

The man in the doorway was not tall and he looked shorter than he was, for the silhouette of his shoulders was out of proportion to his height. He stood at ease, and yet in perfect balance, ready for whatever might occur. He was not tall, but he was not a little man.

In the distance there was a sound, and the man's head turned towards it. A murmuring, inarticulate, yet filled with threat; he knew it for what it was, for he had heard it before in other cities. The mob! No different in this town, or this year of 1992, than in any other town or year. The cry-of-the-beast of man, without form and without shape—with only purpose, blind unthinking purpose. He looked towards the sound and his eyes became watchful.

A man came lumbering down the street on the other side. Seeing Francis standing there, he waved his arm without slowing and shouted, "Come on!" But Francis made no move or answer, and then, after running a few more yards, the man stopped and stood a moment uncertain. Then slowly he came across the street until he stood some ten feet away. "Come on!" he said, his voice rising. "We're moving in on a clan down there; let's go."

"I figured as much," Francis answered noncommitally. His voice had a touch of the brogue in it. He made no move.

"Well, are you coming or not?" the man asked, hunching himself forward.

"And why should I be coming with you?" Francis asked, his voice matter-of-fact.

"What are you?" the man asked, his voice turning into a growl. "A clansman?" He took a step forward.

"I am Francis O'Keefe, and I am myself," he answered; "I am no clansman, but neither do I run with the mob—for I am my own man and I shall remain so." His voice was calm and steady and he rocked just a trifle forward on his toes.

"Yeah?" the other man said. "So you're Francis O'Keefe and to

hell with you. Are you for or against the clans? Speak up or I'll knock your teeth down your throat."

Frank laughed and it had a genuine ring to it. "I'm a peacable man, but if it's a fight you want, I'll be happy to oblige. I'm thinking I need a bit of a workout. But as for your question, I'll tell you this. I answer to no man when he speaks with his words in his throat. So come at me, or go run with the jackals; 'tis you will cast the die." He stood easy, but balanced lightly, ready for what might come.

The man edged forward, a growl in his throat. But as he came closer, he slowed, apparently not liking what he saw. After a moment's thought he straightened up and shrugged. "There are better things afoot than tending to the likes of you. I'll see you later." He turned and hurried off down the street.

Francis laughed aloud again, with a mocking note to it this time, but said nothing to answer the other man. Instead, he stepped back a pace so even his face was in darkness. Once more he relaxed to a watching attitude, noting grimly that he knew the basic pattern here. He could have guessed—and had so guessed—that it was the anti-clans against the clans, but now he knew it for a fact. While pleased with the thought of violence, he did not enjoy the knowledge that its cause was evil.

The voice of the mob was louder now, he noted; and there was a rising pitch to it like dogs as the scent grows stronger.

THERE WAS a sound at the end of the street, and Frank moved a step to see what it was, still keeping himself in shadow. A girl stood there, clad in the usual shorts and shirt, poised for flight, but coolly considering her route. She was a lithe young girl, with golden hair that swirled around her head as she turned to look in different directions. She was breathing hard, and her shoulders drooped from weariness. There was fear on her face that tensed the lines of a mouth that should have been soft. Deep fear, but not yet panic.

With a swift turn that was almost a shrug, she started running down the street towards Francis. She did not see him, he knew, and he wondered easily what she would do if she did. He smiled to himself, where only the night could see, for she made a pretty picture as her long legs carried her fleetly.

He could, he thought, quite simply save her from the mob that, by

the sounds, would soon reach the corner. Let her pass him by and then run out, back towards the corner from which she had come. It would be a simple thing to carry the mob in the wrong direction; simple, but much too simple.

With a sudden motion he stepped out just as she was passing and grabbed her arm. Letting her own momentum swing her around into the doorway, he held her there. She fought, silently, but hard, wrenching to free her arm, slashing at his face and kicking at his shins. In self-protection as much as anything, he grabbed her around the waist, pulling her tightly to him. "Be quiet, you fool," he whispered.

When she still struggled and tried to bite him, he slapped her hard across the mouth with his free hand. "Stop it," he grated, "or I'll clip you. You might as well trust me, for the jackals are almost here." In the dimness he could feel her sudden tremble, but she did stop struggling.

Behind him there was the sound of many running feet. "Hey bud," one of them called, "did you see a girl come by this way? A little yellow-haired babe with long legs?"

Francis swung around, carefully, so as to keep firm hold on the girl, and also to move her into the deeper shadows. "A girl?" he asked. Then he chuckled. "The girls run toward, not by, Francis O'Keefe."

The whole mob was milling around, with men running to the corners to look with wild and angry eyes and shouting curses down the streets. The women in the mob, their hair flying like snakes around their heads, were cursing the men and hunting the alleys and stoops.

Francis looked down into the shadows alongside him and said in a normal voice, "Come on, babe, this is no place for us." Without waiting for her answer, he twisted her around and pushed her through the door into the bar. Following her with a quickness that was not visible, he steered her into a booth and sat down alongside. Pulling coins out of his pocket, he reached across her to the dispenser and quickly dialed four bottles of beer. Two of them he poured down the disposal unit and with the other two, he filled two glasses, letting some slop over the table.

"You'd best be doing something with that hair," he ordered in a low voice. "It's like a flag the way it is." Numbly she nodded and quickly bunched it up, pulling pins from her belt to hold it. Critically Francis looked at her. "Okay," he finally said. "Only lose the frightened fawn look; make believe you're happy."

By the time the mob came pushing in the door, Francis was sprawled out from the seat with his arm draped carelessly across the girl's shoulder and his beer half finished. And when one voice cried out, "That looks like her," he only looked up slowly as if from curiosity. When he saw a group of tough-faced men crowding in to the edge of the booth, he raised his eyebrows.

One man, about six and a-half feet tall and built like a bull, stepped out, as if the spokesman. His face was hard with small ridges of scar tissue distorting it. "That wench looks like the one we're after," he growled; "bring her out here and let me look at her."

Francis stood up with an easy motion and stood there a moment balanced on his feet. "It's a look at the wench you want, is it?" he asked. "Well I am Francis O'Keefe. I am a peaceable man but I do not give up my girl to the wandering eye of whatever hoodlum asks for the privilege."

"Get her out here," the giant snarled,. reaching forward past Francis. Francis half smiled, and, a beer bottle in his hand cracked the giant's elbow sharply. The giant jumped back. His eyes glared; he fumbled in his back pocket, and there was the gleam of a knife.

Frank let the bottle swing back. It hit the metalloid table top and shattered leaving the neck in his hand with jagged splinters of glass on it. "Is it a fight you want," he asked, "or will you learn the respect that is due to Francis O'Keefe?" There was a smile on his lips and his eyes danced and he moved about six inches out from the table.

THE GIANT hesitated, looking around to see the crowd about him. The room was still, waiting tensely. This was the moment of crisis and they all knew it. The mob has a courage of its own, but in the narrow room of the bar, the mob did not exist—only individuals. These men, bred in the gutter, living on the streets, had strength of their own. But they had been thinking as a mob, and were not at the moment ready to face a fight as individuals. In the next moment, they might be, but at this instant they were not.

A small, self-important chap pushed forward. A big cigar dominated his face and waved as he talked: "Now, look here, there's no need to get huffy," he said to Francis. "We're looking for a clangirl." The word, in his mouth, was a dirty one. "All we want to know is whether your girl there is her or not."

"The Babe, here, is my girl," Francis answered; "and as for what you may or may not want, that is your business, not mine."

"We'll make it your business," the giant growled.

The little guy looked unhappy. "Please gentlemen," he said. "Can't we settle this except by a barroom brawl? Somebody's liable to get hurt."

"Yeah, they sure are," the giant muttered, glaring at Frank, who smiled back.

"Who are you, anyway?" the little guy asked. "I don't know you. I mean, as far as we know, you might be a clansman yourself."

With a contemptuous shrug, Francis reached in his pocket with his left hand and pulled out a folder. Flipping it open, he leaned back against the table and held it out for them to see.

The little guy leaned forward to read it, the cigar bobbing up and down in his mouth. The big chap stared a moment longer at Francis, then moved his eyes to glance at the folder. He looked surprised and hesitated for a moment. Finally, after a last hard glare at Francis, he grunted and turned to shoulder his way out. The other men also glanced at the folder, and then silently followed him out. When they were gone, Francis sat back down in his seat and coolly drank his beer.

The girl sat staring at her hands until she finished trembling. Then she looked up and asked in a shaky voice, "Who are you, anyway? What did you show them?"

"Getting your courage back, are you?" Francis smiled at her. "Good. Me? I am Francis O'Keefe; and what I showed them was my card as Agent of the Census Bureau."

Her eyes widened and she jumped slightly. "The Census Bureau?" Years before the Census Bureau had been established to count the people. Then, as the country developed, they began to count other things—houses and television sets and all the things that industry needed to know about. And finally, they began to count opinions, serving as the one source of information that the government could count on being incorruptible and free from influence by lobby or propaganda.

Because it must remain free, its agents were carefully chosen to be the kind that thought their own thoughts and demanded their own right to see and to decide. Despising any efforts to seduce them by bribery, pressure, or sentimentality, they stood alone, watching with interest and amusement, but free of ties except to themselves and to the whole of mankind. Their reputation was that of hardbitten, lonely men, contemptuous alike of monogamistic marriage and of the clans,

watching but not interfering. Aware, no doubt, that the two philosophies of living had split the world in two; seeing the crisis that was building in the world; but taking no part on either side and only watching and reporting with cynical detachment.

The girl was not at all surprised that the mob had taken the fact that he was an agent for the Census Bureau as certain proof that she was not who they sought. She was herself astounded that he had been willing to interfere for her. "But...but, then why...?" she stammered.

"Why did I cut myself in?" he asked. "Because I am myself and I make my own rules. Aye, and it would have been a good scrap, too, if that fool with the cigar had not interfered. And what, by the way, is this all about?"

"You don't...know?" she asked.

"Not me," he said. "I just got in this afternoon; been way down in Texas."

"Oh!" She thought a moment. "Nothing very unusual, I guess." Her voice was bitter. "There's this mill here that's always been a free one. Wouldn't even talk to the clans; run by a guy that swore he'd rather die first. So finally he did. His heirs thought they'd rather make money. So this afternoon they signed up the Schreib clan to take over one line, and announced they were going to try it out and hire other clans if it worked."

FRANCIS knew the pattern. In the past twenty years it had happened time and again. The clan was the logical social unit for a mass production plant, not the individual; the individual got lost. Submerged in the detail of one small operation, he lost his self respect—felt himself a pawn. His morale went down, and absenteeism, carelessness, bitterness were the symptoms; mass unions, slowdowns and strikes were the results.

But the clans were the answer. With a whole group of people united with emotional, economic and social bonds into a single structure, they were large enough to take over whole lines or operations. They were large enough and important enough to have significant identity in the largest business—and yet, small enough to give identity within the clan to the individual. Working on a contract basis, they could promise the management to get the work done on time and for a given price. The idea, now only about thirty years old, was successful, and the clans were steadily taking over.

It was a revolution but it was an often bloody one. The general people, those who were often grouped as the "lower class", resented the clans. They saw the clans taking over; they sensed that the forces of history were defeating them; they called the clans immoral and were savagely resentful.

"So the people moved against the Schreib clan, eh?" Frank asked. "It is an old pattern, except this seemed more violent than usual. It sounded like a lynching party that was after you."

"I guess it was," the girl said. "I tried to rescue the Schreib children—tricked the mob and got the kids away. Called them a few nasty names to do it, so they'd come after me. Guess I overdid it, a bit." She laughed ruefully.

"Oh, you're not a Schreib?" he asked.

"I'm sorry," she chuckled. "No, I'm in the O'Brian clan; Lucy's the name."

Francis bowed from the waist. "And pleased I am to meet you, Babe—for it is Babe that I will call you. 'Twill not remind me of your clan, but of yourself; and so I would have it. I have acted, not for the clan, but for yourself who are a very pretty girl. And I will keep it so."

This, he thought, was the hard and dangerous way to meet a girl, and he smiled to himself at the thought. He had always been one to do things the hard way. And besides, there was more than just meeting the girl. By his action, he had moved himself into the clan vs anti-clan struggle here. Was that good or bad? Would it help or hinder his purpose? He did not know, but his instinct said he had done right—and he always followed his instinct. He did not worry about it. Trouble he had bought; but that did not worry him, for trouble he enjoyed.

"Thank you, Francis O'Keefe," Lucy said and smiled. "And whatever your reason I do thank you for what you did."

"'Tis nothing," he answered. "An incident—though a pleasant one—in the life of Francis O'Keefe. And are you wanting to go home now? With me at your side, it will be safe enough I'm thinking." When she nodded, he got up to escort her out.

The street, when they reached it, was quiet and deserted. The ominous atmosphere of earlier in the night had vanished, leaving only a tired emptiness. The jackals, having run out their energy seeking the vanished rabbit, had disappeared to wait another day, another night, of hunting.

II

THE GLIDEWAYS were deserted except for the handlers on the freight sections. With Lucy leading, they quickly reached the outskirts and threaded their way through the surrounding parks. On the edge of one was a large house, the home of the clan O'Brian. It was a new house, Francis noted, well made and tastefully designed. The clan, he realized, must be fairly well-to-do. In answer to his question, he learned that they handled accounting and bookkeeping for several shops and small businesses. Many of the clans were of this type, he knew. It was reasonable, for they could bring specialized knowledge to these businesses that their employers could not hire for themselves. In this, and other similar work, the clans had found their first footholds; only later had come their entry into direct manufacture and labor. The economic and social reasons for the clans were as strong and maybe stronger there, but the taboos and the inertia of existing organization were so much stronger. Whereas the battle had just been joined for the direct labor type of work, the clans already had control of most of the "white collar" work.

As they came in the door, a man of perhaps thirty-five looked up with a pleasant smile. "Lucy!" he said. "We were worried; thought you might have gotten mixed up with the Schreib affair."

"I did," Lucy answered and quickly briefed him in on what had happened. Francis felt cold as he heard her story of the gutting of the Schreib clan. She told it only in highlight and with a factual tone, but his imagination could easily fill in the details of fear and anger, brutality and rapine, and finally murder and arson.

When, after the main part of her tale, she came to his part and introduced him to the other man, Tom O'Brian, the latter got up and limped over to shake his hand. "Thank you Mr. O'Keefe," Tom said; "the clan owes you a real debt. Our Lucy here is a careless little baggage." He looked fondly at her. "She has no sense at all where her heart is concerned; we would be much the poorer without her."

The telephone ringing interrupted any answer Francis might have made. Tom pushed a button on the table beside the chair where he had been sitting, and said, "Hello."

"This is Dan," a voice in the room said. "Any news?"

"Yes, she's here," Tom answered. "Come on back."

"Okay," the voice answered. "Glad to hear it. Rita's here, too, so check her off with me. Be seeing you."

There was a click and silence. Tom marked some paper in a clipboard on the table and then explained that the whole clan was out hunting Lucy. Only he himself had stayed behind to man the telephone while watching the children. Having been partially crippled by a mob some years ago, he explained, he was not much use in a fight. "Good thing for us they didn't cripple your brains while they were at it," Lucy commented. Then, to Frank, she added, "He's our strategist."

AS, OVER the the next hour, the others came in, some twenty-six of them, Francis noted that they were all armed with knives, and some even with illegal guns. *This thing,* he thought grimly, *is already close to civil war.* How soon, he wondered, would the crisis come—the point at which the different peoples must finally decide whether to fight or to seek some rational compromise? How much time remained?

Where, he asked them, had the police been? They answered him with a bitter laugh.

"You're new to town," Tom told him. "But you can take it as a certain rule that when there's a clan to be sacked, the police are somewhere far away. There's a certain character in town, name's Tony Field. He runs this town. Has all the political strings. And he's built his empire by riding the anti-clan beliefs; he likes nothing better than to see the mob run wild."

He was new to the town, yes, Francis thought. *But there was nothing new to the pattern. Only the name.*

In other towns, and other cities, the names were Sam Gardiner, Luke Weston, Fred Simpson and the like; here it was Tony Field. These were the demagogues who rode to power on hatred and intolerance; who operated with a vested interest in disruption; and who, if they were not stopped, would destroy society. They were a symptom, he knew; not a cause. They used the hatred that was there; they did not create it. But because they gave it leadership and direction, because they held it together as a potent weapon of destruction, they were as dangerous as if they were the cause. It was an old pattern, an old and deadly one, and Francis knew it well.

There was one other angle to this situation, Tom told him. A special election to the City Council was scheduled for March 18, and a reform candidate named Elis Hook was trying to buck Field's machine. It had looked like he might succeed, Tom said. If he did, it

would shift the balance, and, there would be a real attempt to find some compromise to the City's troubles.

"But after this Schreib affair," Tom said, "I guess he's licked. With that kind of thing, people have to be either for or against; there can't be any middle ground. If the election were more than three days off, this affair might work in our favor; the better people, even if they are anti-clan, might decide they weren't for mob rule. But three days is too short; I think Field deliberately pulled the string on the Schreib affair, and I'm afraid he timed it well."

Yes he had, Frank had to agree. Given time the people who are decent would decide they wanted no part of it; but their immediate reaction would be to deplore the action, while approving the sentiment. And, going that far, they could be easily pushed a little further and made to feel that any compromise would deny their principles. Their very guilt would force them to compound that guilt, lest they needs must admit it.

Had the luck of the O'Keefe's held true, Frank wondered? Had he arrived here just at the time of crisis and decision? It could be so; it seemed to be so.

But, if the crisis was here, what could be done to swing the balance? What was the answer to their problem?

"There is a man over in the Stanley clan," Tom told him, "who thinks the thing to do is for us to get organized. Form a kind of super-clan and band together to protect ourselves. I don't know; I don't like it."

"Why not?" a chap named Bill cut in. He was an eager youngster with eyes that flashed in anger as he spoke. "As it is now, they can pick us off one at a time; we're helpless. But if we join forces, they're going to have to think once or twice before they tackle us. We'll be something to reckon on." Several others murmured agreement, and the rest seemed doubtful.

"I don't like it," Tom repeated. "Maybe we'll be forced into it but it won't be right. Once we do organize, then the battle-lines are drawn; then we're an army, and they'll know they were right to fear us. No, the only final answer is to get them to accept us—and maybe join us. And building ourselves into an army's not the way to get them to do that; all that can end in is civil war. Maybe that's the best we can hope for, but God help us if it is."

•

FRANCIS said, "I am a peaceable man, and I'm thinking that you are right. I'm thinking that it is Field himself who would be hap-

piest to learn you had combined; 'twould give him something to focus his demagoguery onto. 'Tis hard to keep the hate alive when there are many things to hate. You, for instance, are accountants. A man who seeks work in the mill does not really think you threaten his job. It may be true, and in fact is so, but the threat is a devious one and hard to work up a hate on. No, if it's my advice your wanting, keep the enemy divided by keeping yourselves divided."

"You haven't lived with that hate," Bill almost snarled. "We have; it is easy for you to say."

"Well, we won't decide tonight," Tom cut in. "Look, Mr. O'Keefe, I don't know what your plans are. We would be honored to have you stay here, but if you'd rather not, don't hesitate to say so."

"True, I am an agent," Frank answered. "But then I am also myself." His eyes twinkled. "The business of the Bureau can wait. It has before, and will again when there are matters of other interest to attend to. And this looks to be some fun; I shall accept your invitation, for I would see what happens here."

"Oh, good!" Lucy cried. "I was so hoping you would." And then she blushed and looked down at her toes.

Francis chuckled and looked at her. "Yes there are definitely matters of interest here. Of interest, if not to the Bureau, then at least to Francis O'Keefe."

And that, he thought, was almost true. But what was also true was that he was working for the Bureau. Not, perhaps, in ways that the Bureau might approve. But nevertheless, he was learning much of interest. As a case-study of a crisis in the clan struggle, this was almost an ideal situation, complete with all the classic elements. The

clans expanding into a new field of work—in this case mill-work. And meeting trouble, precipitating fear and mob violence. The demagogue, challenged in a special election by the moderate forces, and using the tool of panic and of guilt to meet that challenge. A classic situation, Francis thought, and the Bureau would be most interested in his report.

When Francis came down the next morning, he thought he had beaten the others up; and yet he was not really surprised, only pleased, to find Lucy in the kitchen preparing breakfast for two. "And good morning to you, Babe," he said, going over to her and lightly kissing her on the lips. " 'Tis only fruit-juice and coffee I will be having."

She seemed surprised and perhaps overwhelmed at his greeting but not displeased. She gathered her robe closer around her and busied herself with the coffee pot. "What...what plans are you going to make?"

He gulped some fruit-juice down. Wiping his lips on the back of his hand, he made a wide gesture. "Plans? Why plans for building an empire or for stealing a kingdom. Plans, perhaps, for wooing a girl or for foiling a scoundrel. What plans would you have me make?"

She blushed and her hand trembled a bit as she poured his coffee. "I don't know," she said. "Only, if your plans concern us, why then we'd like to know what they are."

"And what if they just concern you?" he asked.

She seemed puzzled as she looked directly at him. "How can they?" she asked.

He raised an eyegrow at her. "But you are here and the rest of the clan is sleeping," he said. " 'Tis true that I have no quarrel with this arrangement; far from it. But tell me true, are you here for the clan or for yourself?"

She leaned back against the sink. "For both, Mr. Francis O'Keefe, for both," she answered. "If you do not understand that, then you do not understand the clans, and I am sorry for you; but perhaps you will learn."

Finishing his breakfast by gulping down his coffee, Francis got up and came over to her. "I am never afraid to learn," he said. "Particularly not, for a teacher such as you who makes learning a pleasure." He kissed her hard and quick, then walked out leaving her there with a dazed expression on her face.

As he left, he wondered about her. What, in fact, was she doing?

He was used to pretty girls; he was used to having them look on him with pleasure, even when they were part of a family. But she, being part of a family, had smiled at him even while she said—and apparently meant—that she was acting in good faith with that family. And this he was not used to. Perhaps, he conceded, he still had things to learn about a clan.

He shrugged the problem aside. He had other things to learn. A crisis was at hand and he knew its general nature, there was still much detail to find out before he could decide what to do.

III

IT WAS THREE o'clock in the afternoon when Francis walked into City Hall. In the morning and the early afternoon, he had talked to many people. Those he had talked to hardly knew it; they were hardly aware that they had met anyone, for he knew his job. A casual word, an innocent question, a stray comment—not worth remembering. And yet the responses, the answers, gave him the pulse of the City.

There was fear, here, he knew—fear before all else: fear of the clans, fear of the mob, fear of itself. Panic. The certain knowledge that the past was not finished, and that the future held no hope. The people of the City were afraid—afraid of what they knew they would do, yet even more afraid of not doing it. Fear was the dominant mood and it permeated everything.

But there was no trace of fear on Francis' face as he walked into Tony Field's anteroom. The furnishings were bare and simple for Tony was a "Man of the People," the professional friend of any who had a vote. Around the edge of the room were benches well filled with those who had come to seek his favor. Some were the poor and seedy, to whom Field was the last hope; some were simply venal, not caring what they sold if only they got the price.

The door to the inner office was guarded by a girl who did her best to typify the clean and wholesome type of beauty. If her eyes were too hard, and her make-up too expert, not many people would know the difference; she was well chosen for the part.

"Field in?" Francis asked her.

"Yes, sir," she said, turning on her number two smile. "If you'll just give me your name and take a seat, I'll call you when he can see you."

"The name is Francis O'Keefe, and I'll be going right in, but I thank you just the same." He started to reach for the door.

She jumped up and moved in front of him, pushing his arm away. "Oh! no, sir, I'm afraid you can't. His Honor the Mayor is with Mr. Field right now."

"Good," Francis said. "It will be a pleasure to see them both." Lightly he grasped her around the waist. Picking her up, he kissed her lightly and set her down behind him, opened the door and walked on in. The girl rushed after him.

A man who could only be Tony Field sat behind the desk. A rather heavy-set chap with overhanging eyebrows, protruding under lip, and ponderous nose, he looked genial and easy going; but the eyes that flickered towards Francis were cold and shrewd.

The other man, who sat at the end of the desk was tall and white-haired—very dignified. His profile was clean and sharp and would look well on a campaign poster. The room still echoed with the resonant tones of his voice; but, in the startled instant as Francis entered, his eyes jumped and there was fear and uncertainty on his face until once more habit took hold and he relaxed into a cool dignity.

"Mr. Field," the secretary behind him said. "This. . . this gentleman forced his way in; shall I get some help?"

"No, Miss Dennison," Tony Field said, after a searching look at Francis; "perhaps the gentleman has a good reason for his haste."

FRANCIS walked leisurely towards the desk. "I'm Francis O'Keefe," he announced. "You will be Tony Field and this, if I take it right, is his Honor the Mayor." When the man behind the desk nodded noncommitantly, Francis pulled another chair up to the other end of the desk and sat down, putting his elbows on the desk. "I am a stranger in town but one who is much interested in the ways of men; I would be hearing what you think of the Schreib affair."

"What I think?" Tony raised his eyebrows. "Why as every public citizen must, I deplore violence. And yet, I've got to admit they had it coming to them. And now, sir, if you will excuse us. . ."

"It is glad I am to hear that," Francis smiled. "I, too, am a peaceful man, seeking only to cultivate the finer things of life, and I'll knock the teeth in of any man that says different. But what I am wondering is if I cannot be useful in helping to find some compromise."

"Compromise?" The mayor lifted his head and his voice was deep and resonant. "There can be no compromise with immorality and sin. My people are honest, hard-working citizens, who seek nothing but the

right to do an honest day's work for a day's pay. They are respectable, God-fearing people; I would not insult their integrity by seeking a compromise."

"Mr. O'Keefe," Tony Field said, "leaving the speeches and all to the mayor here, I, personally, see no reason for compromise. What happened was a trifle hard on the Schreib people, to be sure; on the other hand, they were fools, and I don't waste my sympathy on fools. Now as for you—I like the looks of you. Your entrance upset Miss Dennison, but I admire its gall. And right now I'd like to know what you're after. If you're looking for a job, say so and perhaps I can find one for you; I can always use a man with guts and gall, providing he's working for me. But if you're cutting bait for the clans, or if you're playing your own game and it doesn't fit with mine, then take my advice and don't; you're in the wrong town at the wrong time."

"I cut no bait for any man," Francis answered. "Not for the clans, and not for you; and as for your advice, I fear I am not impressed. It is possible you are right, but I do not think you are. I think it is you for whom the time is wrong.

"I have travelled much over the country, and seen many towns and peoples. I tell you the day of the clan is near; the weight of history is forcing it, for it is an idea that makes much sense. In a clan, a man has something to work and to fight for. Something to belong to that is not so big that in it he cannot find himself. And as for marriage, why fools talk of respectability and morality. With a monogamistic set-up, the man spends half his waking time at work, seeing people his wife never knows, meeting problems she does not understand. She spends her time with the children and doing the household chores. Their lives are too separate. How can they build a single life? It is impossible. Unhappiness, frustration, divorce are become the norm.

"But in the clans, now, there is a different thing. For the clan is a way of life, and not just a part of a life. To the clan each contributes as he will, doing the work he's best fitted for. The chores, the unpleasant jobs that give no inspiration, these are traded off, each sharing the burden. The clan, my friend, is not immoral. It is strong, and its strength is healthy."

"What clan do you belong to?" Field asked, his voice dead.

"Me? I am in no clan nor do I want to be," Francis answered, wondering if it were the truth. "I like too well to be myself. But still I say you, who fight the clans, are blind. You do not know the future, for the future belongs to the clans. And still I suggest to you that there is work to be done. There is a new pattern of life to be devel-

oped, and there will be men who will find greatness in that developing; why don't you try that path?"

FIELD LOOKED at him with hooded eyes. Then he stirred. "You know," the boss said, "you might be right at that. The only trouble is, you're too early. Right now, these leaders you speak of may find greatness, but they don't find riches; in fact, they're apt to find a martyr's glory. And me, I'm just a common kind of a guy. I don't seem to care much about such things; I'd rather have my car and summer place. Money is much more important to me than glory, and right now the money and the power comes from the people, not from the clans. So I won't argue with your preachments; the mayor will do that for me. But neither will I take the time to listen. Unless you're willing to change your mind about my offer of a job, get out!"

Francis looked at him a moment his eyes speculative. Then he shrugged and stood up. "So be it, then," he said. "Even as I said at the start, I'm a peaceable man, so I had thought to maybe find a peaceful answer. But if there isn't any, then so be it. Good day to you gentlemen, and enjoy it while it lasts." He turned and walked out.

As he closed the door behind him he was not surprised that he had failed; he had not expected to succeed. Field had built his power by exploiting fear and generating violence; it was most unlikely that the boss could now be converted to the path of constructive compromise. Particularly not, now when Field thought he was winning. However, Francis was not sorry he had tried. It had been worth the effort and lost nothing. Besides, he now knew Field for what he was—a coldly-calculating man who knew exactly what he was doing and why. And, Francis thought, it was quite possible that Field was too calculating, too cold as he used the emotions of the crowd. Could such a man really understand those emotions that he used? Or was he too unemotional—and therefore vulnerable?

IV

FRANCIS came in to the house of the O'Brian clan late that night. He had two huge boxes in his arms that he put down without comment. Nobody asked him about them but they eyed the boxes with obvious curiosity; and gradually the whole clan drifted into the central room.

Francis leaned back in his chair. He lit a cigaret and watched the smoke curl upwards. "I have spent the day," he said in a conversa-

tional voice, "searching the town. I can find no sanity in it; I would tell you that the situation is desperate."

"Yes, I suppose it is," Tom agreed.

"I have even talked with Field and the mayor," Francis continued in an even tone. "Field offered me a job, but he would not listen to reason. He likes his power too well to dream of being a hero. And the worst of it is that he is a competent man, and can do what he says he will."

"What do you think will happen?" Tom asked. The others were silent and tense.

"Tomorrow, there will be the St. Patrick's Day parade," Francis said. "I've no doubt it will end in a riot, with some poor clan the goat. The next day there will be the election, with Field's man the certain winner; and then the program will start. I doubt me if any clan will survive in this town for more than three months from now."

There was a shocked silence in the room. Then Lucy burst out: "But it can't be that bad!"

"It can be and it is," Francis answered. His eyes followed the wisps of smoke along the ceiling. "It is likely that even Field does not quite realize this, but he is on the horse. He could do something but he won't. After the riot to come tomorrow, there will be nothing he can do. I am an agent of the Bureau; I am trained to see these things and to know what they mean. There is no doubt in my own mind."

"Then what are we waiting for?" the chap called Bill cried out. "We've got to act; we got to warn the other clans. We got to get things organized. We got to get guns. Guns for all the clans. Get food to last a possible siege. Maybe let some other clan or two move in with us, or we move in with them. Concentrate. We got to get ready."

Tom shuddered as if he were cold. "I suppose you're right," he said. "I guess there's nothing else to do."

"So you're quitting, eh?" Francis asked, still watching the smoke from his cigaret.

"Quitting?" Bill stared at him. "We're getting ready to fight; is that what you call quitting?"

"Yes," the agent said letting his eyes drop down to the younger chap. "Yes it is. You're giving up your original purpose. You're accepting what Field would like to make a fact—the final separation of clan and not-clan. To my thinking, that's quitting."

"Well what do you want us to do?" Bill demanded. "Just sit with our hands folded until some night it's our turn to get murdered?"

"No-o," Francis answered, his eyes crinkling slightly. "I want you to fight, but to fight for the thing that you want, not simply against what Field wants. To fight for humanity, clan and non-clan alike—not just to defend the clan. I'd have you take the offensive and that's a world different from this plan of yours."

"What's on your mind?" Tom asked, the words quick and his face alert.

"There's an old saying," Francis drawled, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em! And I'm thinking it has particular point here, 'cause right now they're confused. With the clans separate, they have hard work hating them all. Particularly if they ask how a clan of accountants—or engineers or shopkeepers or whatever—can threaten their jobs in the mill. They're having a hard time but they're about ready to do it. But they'd have a lot harder time—and might not be able to manage it at all—if one or two of the clans were on their side."

Lucy looked shocked. "You want us to join them to fight the clans?" Her voice was incredulous. "You actually expect us to...to...?"

FRANCIS laughed and winked at her. "No," he said; "at that, it might make sense, but it was not what I had in mind. No, I'm thinking of the parade tomorrow. They're expecting the clans to stay holed up, trembling in fear till it be over. But O'Brian's a good Irish name; what if the clan O'Brian joins the parade?"

"That'd be asking for trouble!" Tom objected.

"Aye, 'twould be a fine brawl," Francis admitted. "But remember, y'd have the O'Keefe on your side. I'm thinking the odds would not be too bad, and it'd be carrying the thing to them in a way they'd not be expecting. I'm thinking it'd be a brawl, but neither a war or a pogrom. And it might perhaps set them back on their heels. D'you have the guts for it?"

A man in the corner jumped up. He was a big fellow with an unruly mop of hair and eyebrows that shagged out over a prominent nose and chin. Hugh was his name, Francis remembered. He laughed, and the sound of it rocked through the room. "By the beard of the witch," he said, "that would be something. Aye, we'd beat some sense into their ears; 'twould be a St. Patrick's Day to go down in history. I'm for it. What do you say?"

Francis leaned back again in his chair and listened to the argument rage. His face lit up with a slow smile as he heard them gradually take fire. One by one he heard those who argued for caution slip almost without break to the other side. And finally there came the mo-

ment when they suddenly realized there was nobody to argue against the proposition.

It was at that point that Francis opened his boxes to show one filled with green sashes labelled "Clan O'Brian" and the other with hefty-looking shillelaghs. As all the clan put on their sashes and strutted around with excited talking, he took out of the box the last remaining sash with the name "Francis O'Keefe" emblazoned along it, took up a shillelagh and hefted it with a tight smile, and drifted silently off to his room. Behind him, the clan was talking in excited voices. They would do it, he thought; they would wade in knowing it must mean danger and hurt. But they would do it because he had given them hope; he had shown them a possible way to meet their problem—a way that might force recognition by the masses of their rights as humans. Field, Francis thought, would not be expecting this; it was the unexpected response, and would catch the boss flat-footed.

Francis went to bed with the look of a man who was satisfied with one day's work and who looked forward with eagerness to the opportunities of the next.

IT WAS A quiet group that moved through the streets the next afternoon, carrying their folded sashes and shillelaghs. They talked little and what they said was in a low voice. And when they came in sight of the green where the parade was making up, they all stopped, and stood looking at it without saying anything at all. Finally Francis turned to Tom who leaned on a crutch by his side. "How think you?" he asked. " 'Tis an awful lot of them there are, and some do seem to be full size. Perhaps we should think again."

"No," Tom said slowly. "I've no wish to think again. Do the rest of you?" He looked around at them. Some shook their heads. Others shrugged. No one answered. "So, let's fall in," he said. "The girls in the center; Francis and myself at the head. And God help us all."

When they were all in order and Tom was satisfied, they put on their sashes, grasped their shillelaghs a little tighter than needed, and moved forward.

The crowd in the square took no notice of them at first and they moved through it in close-packed order until they arrived at the center. There, on a box, a big hulk of a man stood shouting orders. Francis remembered his scarred face from the bar in which he and Lucy had taken refuge and he felt the fires of battle warm within him. He led the clan up to the giant and announced in a loud voice. "The Clan O'Brian and Francis O'Keefe are ready to march."

The giant looked down at them with busy eyes, nodded, and looked away. He started to bellow something to some other group but then his voice trailed off. Slowly he turned back and his face showed a growing astonishment. "The Clan O'Brian?" he asked. His voice was dull with shock. "Go away; we want no clans here."

Francis grinned. "We were not thinking you did," he said. "But we are not asking your permission; we'll march in the parade and be damned to you."

The giant's face slowly congealed. His mouth twisted into a snarl and his eyes grew small. And suddenly he jumped with his fists swinging, a bear swarming over its enemy. Francis, a barking cry on his lips, dropped his shillelagh and jumped like a cat, forward, inside the swinging fists, and his own left fist landed on the giant's stomach with a solid thump. His right reached up for the giant's chin; the giant went down, falling backwards into the crowd of startled people.

Moving with compact speed, Francis jumped back, grabbed up his shillelagh and swung to view the scene.

The crowd of men was, for a moment, curiously silent, held fast by sheer surprise. But then there was a wordless shout and the crowd rushed in. The whole scene dissolved into a bedlam of hammering fists, swinging clubs, overlaid with yelps and shrieks as damage was done.

FRANCIS darted like a cat around Tom, swinging his club when he had the chance, jabbing with it when he did not, using his left hand to grab and wrench the clubs and fists that reached for him. Dimly he was aware that Tom was swinging with his club, hopping around on his crutch and shouting with wordless cries. Dimly, too, he was aware that Lucy joined them, using both hands on her club to beat the attackers off their back and to protect Tom's vulnerable side.

How long did it last? For the life of him Francis could not have guessed. A minute or an hour, he did not know. But suddenly there was nobody in front of him. Around him was a pile of stunned bodies. One man was crawling away, his face contorted with pain as he dragged a useless leg behind him; another sat on the ground holding an arm bent where it should not be, rocking back and forth with the agony of it.

From the ring of people around them, the giant suddenly pushed out. Francis felt a glow of satisfaction as he saw that one eye was closed and there was a new cut on one cheek. Also, he was kneading

his left shoulder and flexing the arm in a way that meant it had felt the slash of a good shillelagh. Francis grinned at the sight of it.

"So you'll march in the parade, eh?" the giant asked, his face glowering.

Francis looked back at the clan. Bill, he saw, had been knocked unconscious and was just now coming to. Rita was down, holding her stomach and gasping for air. Martha was examining a wrist with care. Mark was holding a broken arm, his breath coming in gasps. Stan was curled on the street, moaning with Jennifer bending over him anxiously. The others, he saw were on their feet or on one knee, getting their breaths back for a possible renewal of the fight.

He turned back to the giant and grinned. "Aye," he said, "we'll be marching in the parade, unless you be wanting to argue it further. For O'Brian's a good Irish name, and so is O'Keefe. And what your name may be, I know not, but I doubt me if it gives you a better right than us. But if you will argue it the more, then come on; come on and be damned to you."

The big chap frowned. "You're the guy was in the bar the night before last, weren't you? And the girl—that's her, ain't it. How come an agent's mixing in like this?"

Francis shrugged, noting for the first time that his shoulder hurt; so did one eye. "It's true; I am an agent for the Census Bureau. But I'm also a human being, and there's no fun at all in remembering I'm an agent when there's a girl like Lucy, here. And as for being here, why I'm an agent, but I'm also an Irishman. And as for being here with the clan, why that's another matter.

"I talked to Tony Field, you see—him and the dummy that's got the name of the Mayor. And I did not like their threats or the way of their talk. As an Irishman, I'm myself and will not kiss the feet of any man; my name is Francis O'Keefe and I will march in the parade with the Clan O'Brian." He glared up at the big man. His left hand was on his hip and in the right the shillelagh was balanced across his knees.

The giant measured him slowly and then began to laugh. He laughed until he roared and finally had to choke it down and wipe the tears from his eyes. "Aye, 'tis an Irishman you are, by the very sound of you," he finally gasped. "You're a piddling little shrimp, but I love you."

He laughed some, with his head cocked to one side; then he gestured with his head. "Come on. Let's march. For by the glory of the Irish, I got to protect you. There be too many people who don't

know the Irishman you are." He clapped his left hand on Francis' shoulder, and they turned to join the parade.

"No, Mike!" A small self-important man came bustling up. Francis recognized him as the man who had stepped in to avoid the barroom brawl, came forward, now. A cigar was moving in his mouth, and it was obvious he had had no part of the fight. "You can't let a clan march. It would mess everything up!"

The big man, Mike, looked at him at moment, then turned to Francis. "He's one of Field's guys, kind of a kinsman; in fact, he's the guy that's running for Councilman tomorrow. You know, I don't think I like him." There was a slightly surprised half smile on his face that broadened out as he suddenly jabbed out with his right hand, smashing the little man's cigar all over his face. The little man fell backwards, and then slowly got to his feet. He looked around wild-eyed and, as people began to laugh, his mouth began to twitch. Suddenly he turned and ran and the crowd, with cheers and laughter, parted to let him through. And when one chap suddenly tripped him with a shillelagh, there was a great cheer that went up.

When the little man was gone and out of sight, Mike turned back to Francis. "Come on," he roared. "Let's march, for 'tis a great day for the Irish."

"Aye, it is that," Francis roared back. "And a great day, too, for the likes of man." And the whole crowd cheered as Mike, Tom, and Francis led off, with the Clan O'Brian limping happily after.

There was the happy feeling of people who have fought each other well, and found in each other a common pride of manhood.

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BY EVENING the next day, there was no doubt of the election. No doubt at all; Field's man had lost. The moderates, those who would seek a working compromise to the clan vs non-clan problem, had control of the City Council. But more than that: the riot and then the march of the Clan O'Brian in the parade, battered and bruised as they obviously were, had so broken the back of the hatred and fear of the clans that Field's man had gathered but 12% of the vote so far recorded.

In the face of that debacle, even the demagogues on the City Council were seeking a new line to take. Two of them had already come onto the television and made speeches that, it was true, said nothing

actually—but nevertheless did sound more moderate even than the moderates. The victory was complete.

In the hall of the Clan O'Brian, the whole group were sitting relaxed watching the TV pictures on the wall giving the latest election statistics. Tom got up from his chair, hobbled over to the controls and turned it down. Then he turned to where Francis sat with Lucy on the floor beside him.

"Francis," Tom said, "thank God for the day you arrived. I won't try to tell you what you've done. You know it; I'll simply say that we do, too." He stopped, embarrassed but obviously sincere. There was a murmur of assent from the clan around him.

When it died out, he braced up and went on: "There's something else, too, that I want to say. Lucy, there, has been arguing that you'd be a good addition to the clan. As I said before, she's got no sense where her heart's involved, but I think she may be right. So I'd like to ask you whether you'd consider joining us. I suppose you know the set-up on this kind of thing. A prospective member joins up as a candidate for a certain period—a kind of an engagement period. He works and plays and eats with the clan, but he's not a part of it. He doesn't vote or take any of the responsibility; he's just getting acquainted with it, and the clan with him. Now the period varies but with us it's a minimum of three months; our by-laws say so. But we'd like to have you try it out. And Lucy, there, is particularly keen on it." He smiled, his eyes twinkling, at Lucy.

Francis was startled. Somehow this turn had never occurred to him. He looked down at Lucy. She was looking up at him, her face soft and gentle. "Please, Francis," she murmured. She blushed but her eyes did not waver from his.

He remembered her words of yesterday morning, when she had said she was seeking something both for herself and for the clan. With a flash of insight, he found a new understanding of the clans. He saw that they could trust their members with a faith that was hard in a monogamous relation. For if Lucy fell in love with him, or any person, she broke no faith with the clan; she need only ask that the clan accept him as one of its own. A situation that could only be tragedy with monogamy, was stimulating to the clan. In the very flexibility of its relations there was strength and peace. Lucy could truly work both for herself and for the clan.

"There's another side to this, too," he heard Tom saying. "Perhaps I should not bring it up until after we've found out whether you fit

or not; and, yet, being an agent of the Bureau you're kind of a special case. Probably you're an agent because you got a need inside of you to find some way to express yourself— Some field of action that's larger than any clan can usually offer.

"Anyway, some of us have been talking. We've been wondering if this isn't the time for the clans to get into politics. We haven't up to now; we've been outnumbered for one thing. And then, too...well maybe we haven't been sure enough of ourselves. But now maybe it's time. If it is...well, I'm not boasting when I say it's this clan that has the opportunity. It's yesterday's affair that gives it to us. The people—the general people—people like Mike and the others there—know us and like us where they don't know and maybe don't like the other clans. So we're thinking that maybe we should start thinking about politics. If we do, and if you join us...well, you've got the best chance. You know most about that kind of thing. You were the star of yesterday; you've certainly got the personality. Yes, and the guts, too. I'm not promising anything, understand; I'm just saying that I think there's a good chance.

"But the main thing, as far as we're concerned, is that we'd like to have you give us a try."

FRANCIS felt confused. This thing was too sudden. These people...they were good and kind. There was peace here, and happiness; he could feel it. There was companionship and the love of life. They were strong and he could learn to love them very much. But yet...but yet. He knew what he must do, and he felt sad.

He shook his head. "I wish I could," he said; "I really wish I could." He was looking at Lucy and his voice was low. He seemed to be talking to her alone. "I have never felt the need or the desire for such a thing as a clan, or a wife before, but I do now; and Tom is wise to suggest the chance of politics. I'm thinking he is right to call this the time and place. It is interesting to think of these possibilities. They do tempt me; you, and the clan, and the challenge of politics.

"And yet there is the larger challenge. Right now my clan is the human race, and there is work to be done and fun to be had. So I cannot accept your proposition but must pick up my feet and walk. It is sad I am to say so—aye, but proud also. Proud to have known you, Lucy, and proud to have worked with your clan. And proud, too, to know that you do not really need me, for you are strong—you, Lucy, and your clan. Nor do you need me for your politics. It is true

that it would be easier for me, but I'm thinking that Tom can learn to be a politician; aye, and a good one, too.

"So, I'll be leaving you now and may God be with you all."

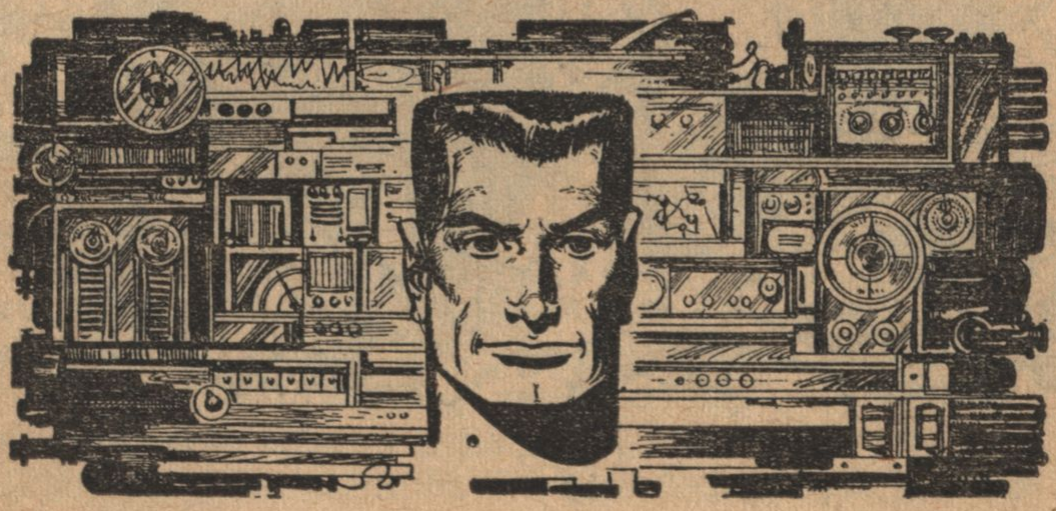
Silently he bent and kissed her quickly. Then, getting up, he walked to Tom and shook his hand. And, waving his hand at the others with a crooked grin, he walked out.

A half of an hour later he was still thinking of his decision, a little sad and little exulted, too, by his thoughts. But he wondered, too, what they would think if they could look over his shoulder and read the wire he was sending to his chief. "Mission accomplished successfully. Returning for new assignment."

He doubted if they would understand it for they had not heard his chief as he told some of his top agents that the Census Bureau was going to have to take a new direction. The crisis of the clan vs non-clan struggle was too violent. It would tear—was tearing—the civilization apart. And that they would have to try to see what they could do about it, each in his own way—silently, without authority or legal right.

Thinking over the past two days, Francis grinned. He felt he had become a most effective agent provocateur for peace. But then, why not, for he was Francis O'Keefe, and a peaceable man!

★



If, after a great struggle, the East were to prevail over the world, what sort of civilization would be imposed by the victors? Would it be an oriental version of the societies we know — or might the great old culture be superimposed upon what was left of western technology?

The Turning Wheel

by PHILIP K. DICK

BARD CHAI said thoughtfully, "Cults." He examined a tape-report grinding from the receptor. The receptor was rusty and unoiled; it whined piercingly and sent up an acrid wisp of smoke. Chai shut it off as its pitted surface began to heat ugly red. Presently he finished with the tape and tossed it with a heap of refuse jamming the mouth of a disposal slot.

"What about cults?" Bard Sung-wu asked faintly. He brought himself back with an effort, and forced a smile of interest on his plump olive-yellow face. "You were saying?"

"Any stable society is menaced by cults; our society is no exception." Chai rubbed his finely-tapered fingers together reflectively. "Certain lower strata are axiomatically dissatisfied. Their hearts burn with envy of those the wheel has placed above them; in secret they form fanatic, rebellious bands. They meet in the dark of the night; they insidiously express inversions of accepted norms; they delight in flaunting basic mores and customs."

"Ugh," Sung-wu agreed. "I mean," he explained quickly, "it seems incredible people could practice such fanatic and disgusting rites." He got nervously to his feet. "I must go, if it's permitted."

"Wait," snapped Chai. "You are familiar with the Detroit area?"

Uneasily, Sung-wu nodded. "Very slightly."

With characteristic vigor, Chai made his decision. "I'm sending you; investigate and make a blue-slip report. If this group is dangerous, the Holy Arm should know. It's of the worst elements—the Techno class." He made a wry face. "Caucasians, hulking, hairy things. We'll give you six months in Spain, on your return; you can poke over ruins of abandoned cities."

"Caucasians!" Sung-wu exclaimed, his face turning green. "But I haven't been well; please, if somebody else could go—"

"You, perhaps, hold to the Broken Feather theory?" Chai raised an eyebrow. "An amazing philologist, Broken Feather; I took partial instruction from him. He held, you know, the Caucasian to be descended of Neanderthal stock. Their extreme size, thick body hair, their general brutish cast, reveal an innate inability to comprehend anything but a purely animalistic horizontal; proselytism is a waste of time."

He affixed the younger man with a stern eye. "I wouldn't send you, if I didn't have unusual faith in your devotion."

Sung-wu fingered his beads miserably. "Elron be praised," he muttered; "you are too kind."

SUNG-WU slid into a lift and was raised, amid great groans and whirrings and false stops, to the top level of the Central Chamber building. He hurried down a corridor dimly lit by occasional yellow bulbs. A moment later he approached the doors of the scanning offices and flashed his identification at the robot guard. "Is Bard Fei-p'ang within?" he inquired.

"Verily," the robot answered, stepping aside.

Sung-Wu entered the offices, bypassed the rows of rusted, discarded machines, and entered the still-functioning wing. He located his brother-in-law, hunched over some graphs at one of the desks, laboriously copying material by hand. "Clearness be with you," Sung-wu murmured.

Fei-p'ang glanced up in annoyance. "I told you not to come again; if the Arm finds out I'm letting you use the scanner for a personal plot, they'll stretch me on the rack."

"Gently," Sung-wu murmured, his hand on his relation's shoulder. "This is the last time. I'm going away; one more look, a final look." His olive face took on a pleading, piteous cast. "The turn comes for me very soon; this will be our last conversation."

Sung-wu's piteous look hardened into cunning. "You wouldn't want it on your soul; no restitution will be possible at this late date."

Fei-p'ang snorted. "All right; but for Elron's sake, do it quickly."

Sung-wu hurried to the mother-scanner and seated himself in the rickety basket. He snapped on the controls, clamped his forehead to the viewpiece, inserted his identity tab, and set the space-time finger into motion. Slowly, reluctantly, the ancient mechanism coughed into life and began tracing his personal tab along the future track.

Sung-wu's hands shook; his body trembled; sweat dripped from his neck, as he saw himself scampering in miniature. *Poor Sung-wu,* he thought wretchedly. The mite of a thing hurried about its duties; this was but eight months hence. Harried and beset, it performed its tasks —and then, in a subsequent continuum, fell down and died.

Sung-wu removed his eyes from the viewpiece and waited for his pulse to slow. He could stand that part, watching the moment of death; it was what came next that was too jangling for him.

He breathed a silent prayer. Had he fasted enough? In the four-day purge and self-flagellation, he had used the whip with metal points, the heaviest possible. He had given away all his money; he had smashed a lovely vase his mother had left him, a treasured heir-loom; he had rolled in the filth and mud in the center of town. Hundreds had seen him. Now, surely, all this was enough. But time was so short!

Faint courage stirring, he sat up and again put his eyes to the viewpiece. He was shaking with terror. What if it hadn't changed? What if his mortification weren't enough? He spun the controls, sending the finger tracing his time-track past the moment of death.

SUNG-WU shrieked and scrambled back in horror. His future was the same, exactly the same; there had been no change at all. His guilt had been too great to be washed away in such short a time; it would take ages—and he didn't have ages.

He left the scanner and passed by his brother-in-law. "Thanks," he muttered shakily.

For once, a measure of compassion touched Fei-p'ang's efficient brown features. "Bad news? The next turn brings an unfortunate manifestation?"

"Bad scarcely describes it."

Fei-p'ang's pity turned to righteous rebuke. "Who do you have to blame but yourself?" he demanded sternly. "You know your conduct in this manifestation determines the next; if you look forward to a future life as a lower animal, it should make you glance over your behavior and repent your wrongs. The cosmic law that governs us is impartial. It is true justice: cause and effect; what you do determines what you next become—there can be no blame and no sorrow. There can be only understanding and repentance." His curiosity overcame him. "What is it? A snake? A squirrel?"

"It's no affair of yours," Sung-wu said, as he moved unhappily toward the exit doors.

"I'll look myself!"

"Go ahead." Sung-wu pushed moodily out into the hall. He was dazed with despair: it hadn't changed; it was still the same.

In eight months he would die, stricken by one of the numerous plagues that swept over the inhabited parts of the world. He would become feverish, break out with red spots, turn and twist in an anguish of delirium. His bowels would drop out; his flesh would waste away; his eyes would roll up; and after an interminable time of suffering, he would die. His body would lie in a mass heap, with hundreds of others—a whole streetful of dead, to be carted away by one of the robot sweepers, happily immune. His mortal remains

would be burned in a common rubbish incinerator at the outskirts of the city.

Meanwhile, the eternal spark, Sung-wu's divine soul, would hurry from this space-time manifestation to the next in order. But it would not rise; it would sink; he had watched its descent on the scanner many times. There was always the same hideous picture—a sight beyond endurance—of his soul, as it plummeted down like a stone, into one of the lowest continua, a sink-hole of a manifestation at the very bottom of the ladder.

He had sinned. In his youth, Sung-wu had got mixed up with a black-eyed wench with long flowing hair, a glittering waterfall down her back and shoulders. Inviting red lips, plump breasts, hips that undulated and beckoned unmistakably. She was the wife of a friend, from the Warrior class, but he had taken her as his mistress; he had been *certain* time remained to rectify his venality.

But he was wrong: the wheel was soon to turn for him. The plague—not enough time to fast and pray and do good works. He was determined to go down, straight down to a wallowing, foul-aired planet in a stinking red-sun system, an ancient pit of filth and decay and unending slime—a jungle world of the lowest type.

In it, he would be a shiny-winged fly, a great blue-bottomed, buzzing carrion-eater that hummed and guzzled and crawled through the rotting carcasses of great lizards, slain in combat.

From this swamp, this pest-ridden planet in a diseased, contaminated system, he would have to rise painfully up the endless rungs of the cosmic ladder he had already climbed. It had taken eons to climb this far, to the level of a human being on the planet Earth, in the bright yellow Sol system; now he would have to do it all over again.

CHAI BEAMED, "Elron be with you," as the corroded observation ship was checked by the robot crew, and finally okayed for limited flight. Sung-wu slowly entered the ship and seated himself at what remained of the controls. He waved listlessly, then slammed the lock and bolted it by hand.

As the ship limped into the late afternoon sky, he reluctantly consulted the reports and records Chai had transferred to him.

The Tinkerists were a small cult; they claimed only a few hundred members, all drawn from the Techno class, which was the most despised of the social castes. The Bards, of course, were at the top; they were the teachers of society, the holy men who guided man to

clearness. Then the Poets; they turned into saga the great legends of Elron Hu, who lived (according to legend) in the hideous days of the Time of Madness. Below the Poets were the Artists; then the Musicians; then the Workers, who supervised the robot crews. After them the Businessmen, the Warriors, the Farmers, and finally, at the bottom, the Technos.

Most of the Technos were Caucasians—immense white-skinned things, incredibly hairy, like apes; their resemblance to the great apes was striking. Perhaps Broken Feather was right; perhaps they did have Neanderthal blood and were outside the possibility of clearness. Sung-wu had always considered himself an anti-racist; he disliked those who maintained the Caucasians were a race apart. Extremists believed eternal damage would result to the species if the Caucasians were allowed to intermarry.

In any case, the problem was academic; no decent, self-respecting woman of the higher classes—of Indian or Mongolian, or Bantu stock—would allow herself to be approached by a *Cauc.*

Below his ship, the barren countryside spread out, ugly and bleak. Great red spots that hadn't yet been overgrown, and slag surfaces were still visible—but by this time most ruins were covered by soil and crab grass. He could see men and robots farming; villages, countless tiny brown circles in the green fields; occasional ruins of ancient cities—gaping sores like blind mouths, eternally open to the sky. They would never close, not now.

Ahead was the Detroit area, named, so it ran, for some now-forgotten spiritual leader. There were more villages, here. Off to his left, the leaden surface of a body of water, a lake of some kind. Beyond that—only Elron knew. No one went that far; there was no human life there, only wild animals and deformed things spawned from radiation infestation still lying heavy in the North.

He dropped his ship down. An open field lay to his right; a robot farmer was plowing with a metal hook welded to its waist, a section torn off some discarded machine. It stopped dragging the hook and gazed up in amazement, as Sung-wu landed the ship awkwardly and bumped to a halt.

"Clearness be with you," the robot rasped obediently, as Sung-wu climbed out.

Sung-wu gathered up his bundle of reports and papers and stuffed them in a briefcase. He snapped the ship's lock and hurried off toward the ruins of the city. The robot went back to dragging the rusty

metal hook through the hard ground, its pitted body bent double with the strain, working slowly, silently, uncomplaining.

THE LITTLE boy piped, "Whither, Bard?" as Sung-wu pushed wearily through the tangled debris and slag. He was a little black-faced Bantu, in red rags sewed and patched together. He ran alongside Sung-wu like a puppy, leaping and bounding and grinning white-teethed.

Sung-wu became immediately crafty; his intrigue with the black-haired girl had taught him elemental dodges and evasions. "My ship broke down," he answered cautiously; it was certainly common enough. "It was the last ship still in operation at our field."

The boy skipped and laughed and broke off bits of green weeds that grew along the trail. "I know somebody who can fix it," he cried carelessly.

Sung-wu's pulse-rate changed. "Oh?" he murmured, as if uninterested. "There are those around here who practice the questionable art of repairing?"

The boy nodded solemnly.

"Technos?" Sung-wu pursued. "Are there many of them here, around these old ruins?"

More black-faced boys, and some little dark-eyed Bantu girls, came scampering through the slag and ruins. "What's the matter with your ship?" one hollered at Sung-wu. "Won't it run?"

They all ran and shouted around him, as he advanced slowly—an unusually wild bunch, completely undisciplined. They rolled and fought and tumbled and chased each other around madly.

"How many of you," Sung-wu demanded, "have taken your first instruction?"

There was a sudden uneasy silence. The children looked at each other guiltily; none of them answered.

"Good Elron!" Sung-wu exclaimed in horror. "Are you all untaught?"

Heads hung guiltily.

"How do you expect to phase yourselves with the cosmic will? How can you expect to know the divine plan? This is really too much!"

He pointed a plump finger at one of the boys. "Are you constantly preparing yourself for the life to come? Are you constantly purging and purifying yourself? Do you deny yourself meat, sex, entertainment, financial gain, education, leisure?"

But it was obvious; their unrestrained laughter and play proved

they were still jangled, far from clear— And clearness is the only road by which a person can gain understanding of the eternal plan, the cosmic wheel which turns endlessly, for all living things.

"Butterflies!" Sung-wu snorted with disgust. "You are no better than the beasts and birds of the field, who take no heed of the morrow. You play and game for today, thinking tomorrow won't come. Like insects—"

But the thought of insects reminded him of the shiny-winged blue-rumped fly, creeping over a rotting lizard carcass, and Sung-wu's stomach did a flip-flop; he forced it back in place and strode on, toward the line of villages emerging ahead.

FARMERS were working the barren fields on all sides. A thin layer of soil over slag; a few limp wheat stalks waved, thin and emaciated. The ground was terrible, the worst he had seen. He could feel the metal under his feet; it was almost to the surface. Bent men and women watered their sickly crops with tin cans, old metal containers picked from the ruins. An ox was pulling a crude cart.

In another field, women were weeding by hand; all moved slowly, stupidly, victims of hookworm, from the soil. They were all barefoot. The children hadn't picked it up yet, but they soon would.

Sung-wu gazed up at the sky and gave thanks to Elron; here, suffering was unusually severe; trials of exceptional vividness lay on every hand. These men and women were being tempered in a hot crucible; their souls were probably purified to an astonishing degree. A baby lay in the shade, beside a half-dozing mother. Flies crawled over its eyes; its mother breathed heavily, hoarsely, her mouth open. An unhealthy flush discolored her brown cheeks. Her belly bulged; she was already pregnant again. Another eternal soul to be raised from a lower level. Her great breasts sagged and wobbled as she stirred in her sleep, spilling out over her dirty wraparound.

"Come here," Sung-wu called sharply to the gang of black-faced children who followed along after him. "I'm going to talk to you."

The children approached, eyes on the ground, and assembled in a silent circle around him. Sung-wu sat down, placed his briefcase beside him, and folded his legs expertly under him in the traditional posture outlined by Elron in his seventh book of teachings.

"I will ask and you will answer," Sung-wu stated. "You know the basic catechisms?" He peered sharply around. "Who knows the basic catechisms?"

One or two hands went up. Most of the children looked away unhappily.

"First!" snapped Sung-wu. "*Who are you?* You are a minute fragment of the cosmic plan.

"Second! *What are you?* A mere speck in a system so vast as to be beyond comprehension.

"Third! *What is the way of life?* To fulfill what is required by the cosmic forces.

"Fourth! *Where are you?* On one step of the cosmic ladder.

"Fifth! *Where have you been?* Through endless steps; each turn of the wheel advances or depresses you.

"Sixth! *What determines your direction at the next turn?* Your conduct in this manifestation.

"Seventh! *What is right conduct?* Submitting yourself to the eternal forces, the cosmic elements that make up the divine plan.

"Eighth! *What is the significance of suffering?* To purify the soul.

"Ninth! *What is the significance of death?* To release the person from this manifestation, so he may rise to a new rung of the ladder.

"Tenth—"

But at that moment Sung-wu broke off. Two quasi-human shapes were approaching him. Immense white-skinned figures striding across the baked fields, between the sickly rows of wheat.

Technos—coming to meet him; his flesh crawled. Caucs. Their skins glittered pale and unhealthy, like nocturnal insects, dug from under rocks.

He rose to his feet, conquered his disgust, and prepared to greet them.

SUNG-WU said, "Clearness!" He could smell them, a musky sheep smell, as they came to a halt in front of him. Two bucks, two immense sweating males, skin damp and sticky, with beards, and long disorderly hair. They wore sailcloth trousers and boots. With horror Sung-wu perceived a thick body-hair, on their chests, like woven mats —tufts in their armpits, on their arms, wrists, even the backs of their hands. Maybe Broken Feather was right; perhaps, in these great lumbering blond-haired beasts, the archaic Neanderthal stock—the false men—still survived. He could almost see the ape, peering from behind their blue eyes.

"Hi," the first Cauc said. After a moment he added reflectively, "My name's Jamison."

"Pete Ferris," the other grunted. Neither of them observed the customary deferences; Sung-wu winced but managed not to show it. Was it deliberate, a veiled insult, or perhaps mere ignorance? This was hard to tell; in lower classes there was, as Chai said, an ugly undercurrent of resentment and envy, and hostility.

"I'm making a routine survey," Sung-wu explained, "on birth and death rates in rural areas. I'll be here a few days. Is there some place I can stay? Some public inn or hostel?"

The two Cauc bucks were silent. "Why?" one of them demanded bluntly.

Sung-wu blinked. "Why? Why what?"

"Why are you making a survey? If you want any information we'll supply it."

Sung-wu was incredulous. "Do you know to whom you're talking? I'm a Bard! Why, you're ten classes down; how dare you—" He choked with rage. In these rural areas the Technos had utterly forgotten their place. What was ailing the local Bards? Were they letting the system break apart?

He shuddered violently at the thought of what it would mean if Technos and Farmers and Businessmen were allowed to intermingle —even intermarry, and eat, and drink, in the same places. The whole structure of society would collapse. If all were to ride the same carts, use the same outhouses; it passed belief. A sudden nightmare picture loomed up, before Sung-wu of Technos living and mating with women of the Bard and Poet classes. He visioned a horizontally-oriented society, all persons on the same level, with horror. It went against the very grain of the cosmos, against the divine plan; it was the Time of Madness all over again. He shuddered.

"Where is the Manager of this area?" he demanded. "Take me to him; I'll deal directly with him."

The two Caucs turned and headed back the way they had come, without a word. After a moment of fury, Sung-wu followed behind them.

THEY LED him through withered fields and over barren, eroded hills on which nothing grew; the ruins increased. At the edge of the city, a line of meager villages had been set up; he saw leaning, rickety wood huts, and mud streets. From the villages a thick stench rose, the smell of offal and death.

Dogs lay sleeping under the huts; children poked and played in the filth and rotting debris. A few old people sat on porches, vacant-

faced, eyes glazed and dull. Chickens pecked around, and he saw pigs and skinny cats—and the eternal rusting piles of metal, sometimes thirty feet high. Great towers of red slag were heaped up everywhere.

Beyond the villages were the ruins proper—endless miles of abandoned wreckage; skeletons of buildings; concrete walls; bathtubs and pipe; overturned wrecks that had been cars. All these were from the Time of Madness, the decade that had finally rung the curtain down on the sorriest interval in man's history. The five centuries of madness and jangledness were now known as the Age of Heresy, when man had gone against the divine plan and taken his destiny in his own hands.

They came to a larger hut, a two-story wood structure. The Caucs climbed a decaying flight of steps; boards creaked and gave ominously under their heavy boots. Sung-wu followed them nervously; they came out on a porch, a kind of open balcony.

On the balcony sat a man, an obese copper-skinned official in unbuttoned breeches, his shiny black hair pulled back and tied with a bone against his bulging red neck. His nose was large and prominent, his face, flat and wide, with many chins. He was drinking lime juice from a tin cup and gazing down at the mud street below. As the two Caucs appeared he rose slightly, a prodigious effort.

"This man," the Cauc named Jamison said, indicating Sung-wu, "wants to see you."

Sung-wu pushed angrily forward. "I am a Bard, from the Central Chamber; do you people recognize *this?*" He tore open his robe and flashed the symbol of the Holy Arm, gold worked to form a swath of flaming red. "I insist you accord me proper treatment! I'm not here to be pushed around by any—"

HE HAD SAID too much; Sung-wu forced his anger down and gripped his briefcase. The fat Indian was studying him calmly; the two Caucs had wandered to the far end of the balcony and were squatting down in the shade. They lit crude cigarets and turned their backs.

"Do you permit this?" Sung-wu demanded, incredulous. "This—mingling?"

The Indian shrugged and sagged down even more on his chair. "Clearness be with you," he murmured; "will you join me?" His calm expression remained unchanged; he seemed not to have noticed. "Some lime juice? Or perhaps coffee? Lime juice is good for

these." He tapped his mouth; his soft gums were lined with caked sores.

"Nothing for me," Sung-wu muttered grumpily, as he took a seat opposite the Indian; "I'm here on an official survey."

The Indian nodded faintly. "Oh?"

"Birth and death rates." Sung-wu hesitated, then leaned toward the Indian. "I insist you send those two Caucs away; what I have to say to you is private."

The Indian showed no change of expression; his broad face was utterly impassive. After a time he turned slightly. "Please go down to the street level," he ordered. "As you will."

The two Caucs got to their feet, grumbling, and pushed past the table, scowling and darting resentful glances at Sung-wu. One of them hawked and elaborately spat over the railing, an obvious insult.

"Insolence!" Sung-wu choked. "How can you allow it? Did you see them? By Elron, it's beyond belief!"

The Indian shrugged indifferently—and belched. "All men are brothers on the wheel. Didn't Elron Himself teach that, when He was on earth?"

"Of course. But—"

"Are not even these men our brothers?"

"Naturally," Sung-wu answered haughtily, "but they must know their place; they're an insignificant class. In the rare event some object wants fixing, they are called; but in the last year I do not recall a single incident when it was deemed advisible to repair anything. The need of such a class diminishes yearly; eventually such a class and the elements composing it—"

"You perhaps advocate sterilization?" the Indian inquired, heavy-lidded and sly.

"I advocate *something*. The lower classes reproduce like rabbits; spawning all the time—much faster than we Bards. I always see some swollen-up Cauc woman, but hardly a single Bard is born, these days; the lower classes must fornicate constantly."

"That's about all that's left them," the Indian murmured mildly. He sipped a little lime juice. "You should try to be more tolerant."

"Tolerant? I have nothing against them, as long as they—"

"It is said," the Indian continued softly, "that Elron Hu, Himself, was a Cauc."

Sung-wu spluttered indignantly and started to rejoin, but the hot words stuck fast in his mouth; down the mud street something was coming.

SUNG-WU demanded, "What is it?" He leaped up excitedly and hurried to the railing.

A slow procession was advancing with solemn step. As if at a signal, men and women poured from their rickety huts and excitedly lined the street to watch. Sung-wu was transfixed, as the procession neared; his senses reeled. More and more men and women were collecting each moment; there seemed to be hundreds of them. They were a dense, murmuring mob, packed tight, swaying back and forth, faces avid. An hysterical moan passed through them, a great wind that stirred them like leaves of a tree. They were a single collective whole, a vast primitive organism, held ecstatic and hypnotized by the approaching column.

The marchers wore a strange costume: white shirts, with the sleeves rolled up; dark gray trousers of an incredibly archaic design, and black shoes. All were dressed exactly alike. They formed a dazzling double line of white shirts, gray trousers, marching calmly and solemnly, faces up, nostrils flared, jaws stern. A glazed fanaticism stamped each man and woman, such a ruthless expression that Sung-wu shrank back in terror. On and on they came, figures of grim stone in their primordial white shirts and gray trousers, a frightening breath from the past. Their heels struck the ground in a dull, harsh beat that reverberated among the rickety huts. The dogs woke; the children began to wail. The chickens flew squawking.

"Elron!" Sung-wu cried. "What's happening?"

The marchers carried strange symbolic implements, ritualistic images with esoteric meaning that of necessity escaped Sung-wu. There were tubes and poles, and shiny webs of what looked like metal. *Metal!* But it was not rusty; it was shiny and bright. He was stunned; they looked—new.

The procession passed directly below. After the marchers came a huge rumbling cart. On it was mounted an obvious fertility symbol, a corkscrew-bore as long as a tree; it jutted from a square cube of gleaming steel; as the cart moved forward the bore lifted and fell.

After the cart came more marchers, also grim-faced, eyes glassy, loaded down with pipes and tubes and armfuls of glittering equipment. They passed on, and then the street was filled by surging throngs of awed men and women, who followed after them, utterly dazed. And then came children and barking dogs.

The last marcher carried a pennant that fluttered above her as she strode along, a tall pole, hugged tight to her chest. At the top, the bright pennant fluttered boldly. Sung-wu made its marking out, and

for a moment consciousness left him. There it was, directly below; it had passed under his very nose, out in the open for all to see—unconcealed. The pennant had a great T emblazoned on it.

"They—" he began, but the obese Indian cut him off.

"The Tinkerists," he rumbled, and sipped his lime juice.

SUNG-WU grabbed up his briefcase and scrambled toward the stairs. At the bottom, the two hulking Caucs were already moving into motion. The Indian signalled quickly to them. "Here!" They started grimly up, little blue eyes mean, red-rimmed and cold as stone; under their pelts their bulging muscles rippled.

Sung-wu fumbled in his cloak. His shiver-gun came out; he squeezed the release and directed it toward the two Caucs. But nothing happened; the gun had stopped functioning. He shook it wildly; flakes of rust and dried insulation fluttered from it. It was useless, worn out; he tossed it away and then, with the resolve of desperation, jumped through the railing.

He, and a torrent of rotten wood, cascaded to the street. He hit, rolled, struck his head against the corner of a hut, and shakily pulled himself to his feet.

He ran. Behind him, the two Caucs pushed after him through the throngs of men and women milling aimlessly along. Occasionally he glimpsed their white, perspiring faces. He turned a corner, raced between shabby huts, leaped over a sewage ditch, climbed heaps of sagging debris, slipping and rolled and at last lay gasping behind a tree, his briefcase still clutched.

The Caucs were nowhere in sight. He had evaded them; for the moment, he was safe.

He peered around. Which way was his ship? He shielded his eyes against the late-afternoon sun until he managed to make out its bent, tubular outline. It was far off to his right, barely visible in the dying glare that hung gloomily across the sky. Sung-wu got unsteadily to his feet and began walking cautiously in that direction.

He was in a terrible spot; the whole region was pro-Tinkerist—even the Chamber-appointed Manager. And it wasn't along class lines; the cult had knifed to the top level. And it wasn't just Caucs, any more; he couldn't count on Bantu or Mongolian or Indian, not in this area. An entire countryside was hostile, and lying in wait for him.

Elron, it was worse than the Arm had thought! No wonder they wanted a report. A whole area had swung over to a fanatic cult, a

violent extremist group of heretics, teaching a most diabolical doctrine. He shuddered—and kept on, avoiding contact with the farmers in their fields, both human and robot. He increased his pace, as alarm and horror pushed him suddenly faster.

If the thing were to spread, if it were to hit a sizable portion of mankind, it might bring back the Time of Madness.

THE SHIP was taken. Three or four immense Caucs stood lounging around it, cigarets dangling from their slack mouths, white-faced and hairy. Stunned, Sung-wu moved back down the hillside, prickles of despair numbing him. The ship was lost; they had got there ahead of him. What was he supposed to do, now?

It was almost evening. He'd have to walk fifty miles through the darkness, over unfamiliar, hostile ground, to reach the next inhabited area. The sun was already beginning to set, the air turning cool; and in addition, he was sopping wet with filth and slimy water. He had slipped in the gloom and fallen in a sewage ditch.

He retraced his steps, mind blank. What could he do? He was helpless; his shiver-gun had been useless. He was alone, and there was no contact with the Arm. Tinkerists swarming on all sides; they'd probably gut him and sprinkle his blood over the crops—or worse.

He skirted a farm. In the fading twilight, a dim figure was working, a young woman. He eyed her cautiously, as he passed; she had her back to him. She was bending over, between rows of corn. What was she doing? Was she—good Elron!

He stumbled blindly across the field toward her, caution forgotten. "Young woman! *Stop!* In the name of Elron, stop at once!"

The girl straightened up. "Who are you?"

Breathless, Sung-wu arrived in front of her, gripping his battered briefcase and gasping. "Those are our *brothers!* How can you destroy them? They may be close relatives, recently deceased." He struck out and knocked the jar from her hand; it hit the ground and the imprisoned beetles scurried off in all directions.

The girl's cheeks flushed with anger. "It took me an hour to collect those!"

"You were killing them! Crushing them!" He was speechless with horror. "I saw you!"

"Of course." The girl raised her black eyebrows. "They gnaw the corn."

"They're our brothers!" Sung-wu repeated wildly. "Of course they

gnaw the corn; because of certain sins committed, the cosmic forces have—" He broke off, appalled. "Don't you *know?* You've never been told?"

THE GIRL was perhaps sixteen. In the fading light she was a small, slender figure, the empty jar in one hand, a rock in the other. A tide of black hair tumbled down her neck. Her eyes were large and luminous; her lips full and deep red; her skin a smooth copper-brown—Polynesian, probably. He caught a glimpse of firm brown breasts as she bent to grab a beetle that had landed on its back. The sight made his pulse race; in a flash he was back three years.

"What's your name?" he asked, more kindly.

"Frija."

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

"I am a Bard; have you ever spoken to a Bard before?"

"No," the girl murmured. "I don't think so."

She was almost invisible in the darkness. Sung-wu could scarcely see her, but what he saw sent his heart into an agony of paroxysms: the same cloud of black hair, the same deep red lips. This girl was younger, of course—a mere child, and from the Farmer class, at that. But she had Liu's figure, and in time she'd ripen—probably in a matter of months.

Ageless, honeyed craft worked his vocal cords. "I have landed in this area to make a survey. Something has gone wrong with my ship and I must remain the night. I know no one here, however. My plight is such that—"

"Oh," Frija said, immediately sympathetic. "Why don't you stay with us, tonight? We have an extra room, now that my brother's away."

"Delighted," Sung-wu answered instantly. "Will you lead the way? I'll gladly repay you for your kindness." The girl moved off toward a vague shape looming up in the darkness. Sung-wu hurried quickly after her. "I find it incredible you haven't been instructed. This whole area has deteriorated beyond belief. What ways have you fallen in? We'll have to spend much time together; I can see that already. Not one of you even approaches clearness—you're jangled, every one of you."

"What does that mean?" Frija asked, as she stepped up on the porch and opened the door.

"Jangled?" Sung-wu blinked in amazement. "We *will* have to study much together." In his eagerness, he tripped on the top step, and barely managed to catch himself. "Perhaps you need complete instruction; it may be necessary to start from the very bottom. I can arrange a stay at the Holy Arm for you—under my protection, of course. Jangled means out of harmony with the cosmic elements. How can you live this way? My dear, you'll have to be brought back in line with the divine plan!"

"What plan is that?" She led him into a warm livingroom; a crackling fire burned in the grate. Two or three men sat around a rough wood table, an old man with long white hair and two younger men. A frail, withered old woman sat dozing in a rocker in the corner. In the kitchen, a buxom young woman was fixing the evening meal.

"Why, *the* plan!" Sung-wu answered, astounded. His eyes darted around. Suddenly his briefcase fell to the floor. "Caucs," he said.

They were all Caucasians, even Frija. She was deeply tanned; her skin was almost black; but she was a Cauc, nonetheless. He recalled: Caucs, in the sun, turned dark, sometimes even darker than Mongolians. The girl had tossed her work robe over a door hook; in her household shorts her thighs were as white as milk. And the old man and woman—

"This is my grandfather," Frija said, indicating the old man. "Benjamin Tinker."

UNDER THE watchful eyes of the two younger Tinkers, Sung-wu was washed and scrubbed, given clean clothes, and then fed. He ate only a little; he didn't feel very well.

"I can't understand it," he muttered, as he listlessly pushed his plate away. "The scanner at the Central Chamber said I had eight months left. The plague will—" He considered. "But it can always change. The scanner goes on prediction, not certainty; multiple possibilities; free will... Any overt act of sufficient significance—"

Ben Tinker laughed. "You want to stay alive?"

"Of course!" Sung-wu muttered indignantly.

They all laughed—even Frija, and the old woman in her shawl, snow white hair and mild blue eyes. They were the first Cauc women he had ever seen. They weren't big and lumbering like the male Caucs; they didn't seem to have the same bestial characteristics. The two young Cauc bucks looked plenty tough, though; they and their father were poring over an elaborate series of papers and reports,

spread out on the dinner table, among the empty plates.

"This area," Ben Tinker murmured. "Pipes should go here. And here. Water's the main need. Before the next crop goes in, we'll dump a few hundred pounds of artificial fertilizers and plow it in. The power plows should be ready, then."

"After that?" one of the tow-headed sons asked.

"Then spraying. If we don't have the nicotine sprays, we'll have to try the copper dusting again. I prefer the spray, but we're still behind on production. The bore has dug us up some good storage caverns, though. It ought to start picking up."

"And here," a son said, "there's going to be need of draining. A lot of mosquito breeding going on. We can try the oil, as we did over here. But I suggest the whole thing be filled in. We can use the dredge and scoop, if they're not tied up."

Sung-wu had taken this all in. Now he rose unsteadily to his feet, trembling with wrath. He pointed a shaking finger at the elder Tinker. "You're—meddling!" he gasped.

They looked up. "Meddling?"

"With the plan! With the cosmic plan! Good Elron—you're interfering with the divine processes. Why—" He was staggered by a realization so alien it convulsed the very core of his being. "You're actually going to set back turns of the wheel."

"That," said old Ben Tinker, "is right."

SUNG-WU sat down again, stunned. His mind refused to take it all in. "I don't understand; what'll happen? If you slow the wheel, if you disrupt the divine plan—"

"He's going to be a problem," Ben Tinker murmured thoughtfully. "If we kill him, the Arm will merely send another; they have hundreds like him. And if we don't kill him, if we send him back, he'll raise a hue and cry that'll bring the whole Chamber down here. It's too soon for this to happen. We're gaining support fast, but we need another few months."

Sweat stood out on Sung-wu's plump forehead. He wiped it away shakily. "If you kill me," he muttered, "you will sink down many rungs of the cosmic ladder. You have risen this far; why undo the work accomplished in endless ages past?"

Ben Tinker fixed one powerful blue eye on him. "My friend," he said slowly, "isn't it true one's next manifestation is determined by one's moral conduct in this?"

Sung-wu nodded. "Such is well known."

"And what is right conduct?"

"Fulfilling the divine plan," Sung-wu responded immediately.

"Maybe our whole Movement is part of the plan," Ben Tinker said thoughtfully. "Maybe the cosmic forces *want* us to drain the swamps and kill the grasshoppers and inoculate the children; after all, the cosmic forces put us all here."

"If you kill me," Sung-wu wailed, "I'll be a carrion-eating fly. I *saw* it, a shiny-winged blue-rumped fly crawling over the carcass of a dead lizard— In a rotting, steaming jungle in a filthy cesspool of a planet." Tears came; he dabbed at them futilely. "In an out-of-the-way system, at the bottom of the ladder!"

Tinker was amused. "Why this?"

"I've sinned." Sung-wu sniffed and flushed. "I committed adultery."

"Can't you purge yourself?"

"There's no time!" His misery rose to wild despair. "My mind is *still* impure!" He indicated Frija, standing in the bedroom doorway, a supple white and tan shape in her household shorts. "I continue to think carnal thoughts; I can't rid myself. In eight months the plague will turn the wheel on me—and it'll be done! If I lived to be an old man, withered and toothless—no more appetite—" His plump body quivered in a frenzied convulsion. "There's no *time* to purge and atone. According to the scanner, I'm going to die a young man!"

After this torrent of words, Tinker was silent, deep in thought. "The plague," he said, at last. "What, exactly, are the symptoms?"

Sung-wu described them, his olive face turning to a sickly green. When he had finished, the three men looked significantly at each other.

Ben Tinker got to his feet. "Come along," he commanded briskly, taking the Bard by the arm. "I have something to show you. It is left from the old days. Sooner or later we'll advance enough to turn out our own, but right now we have only these remaining few. We have to keep them guarded and sealed."

"This is for a good cause," one of the sons said. "It's worth it." He caught his brother's eye and grinned.

BARD CHAI finished reading Sung-wu's blue-slip report; he tossed it suspiciously down and eyed the younger Bard. "You're sure? There's no further need of investigation?"

"The cult will wither away," Sung-wu murmured indifferently. "It lacks any real support; it's merely an escape valve, without intrinsic validity."

Chai wasn't convinced. He reread parts of the report again. "I suppose you're right; but we've heard so many—"

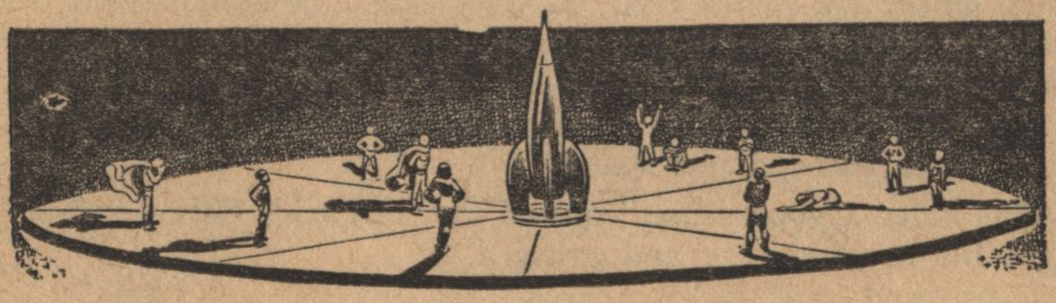
"Lies," Sung-wu said vaguely. "Rumors. Gossip. May I go?" He moved toward the door.

"Eager for your vacation?" Chai smiled understandingly. "I know how you feel. This report must have exhausted you. Rural areas, stagnant back-waters. We must prepare a better program of rural education. I'm convinced whole regions are in a jangled state. We've got to bring clearness to these people. It's our historic role; our class function."

"Verily," Sung-wu murmured, as he bowed his way out of the office and down the hall.

As he walked he fingered his beads thankfully. He breathed a silent prayer as his fingers moved over the surface of the little red pellets, shiny spheres that glowed freshly in place of the faded old—the gift of the Tinkerists. The beads would come in handy; he kept his hand on them tightly. Nothing must happen to them, in the next eight months. He had to watch them carefully, while he poked around the ruined cities of Spain—and finally came down with the plague.

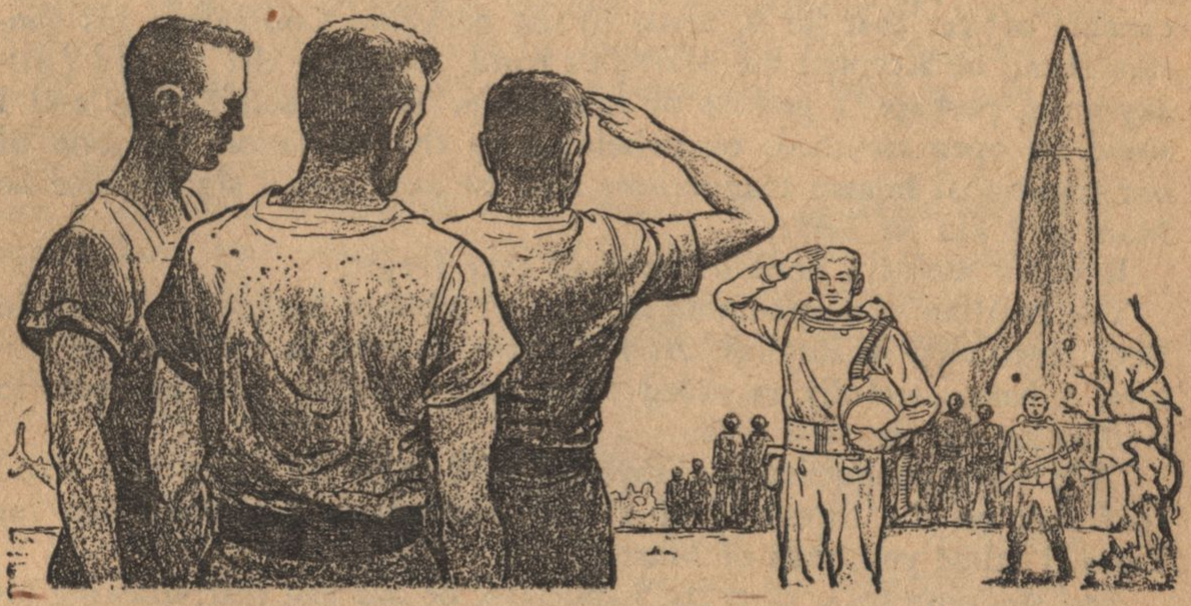
He was the first Bard to wear a rosary of penicillin capsules.



As Immanuel Kant put it: "What may be the nature of objects considered as things in themselves and without reference to the receptivity of our sensibility is quite unknown to us."

To See Ourselves

by ROBERT F. YOUNG



TRANSCRIPT of John P. Willoughby's report of the first Terran-Martian meeting:

Mare Erythraeum Sector, Mars, Jan. 16, 1990— *They are like us!*

That one amazing fact stands head and shoulders above all the others facts this expedition has amassed. Martians are not green; they are not multi-pedal; they are not Lilliputian—in short, they possess none of those outre characteristics accredited to them by the impulsive science fiction writers who thrived several decades ago.

Martians are *human!*

We landed on the fringe of one of the geometric agricultural tracts (once referred to as "canals" by those same writers!) that crisscross the habitable areas of Mars; the Martians arrived a short time later.

When Captain Berg, Astrogator Welles, Pilot Rollins and myself descended from the lock, they came toward us across the irrigated field that separated their copter-like vehicle from our ship.

At first we could not believe our eyes, for in spite of our better judgement, and in spite of the Terran-like cities we had viewed during orbital descent, we had been expecting some teratological life form with far too many limbs and eyes and of a hue ranging from lurid purple to vivid green.

And all we saw were three tall, bronzed humans!

The foremost member of the welcoming party (for such it turned out to be) stepped forward with outstretched hand, and Captain Berg, capable officer that he is, arose to the occasion. Concealing his consternation, he accepted the Martian's hand, fulfilling the age-old (galaxy-wide, perhaps!) gesture of friendship. Welles and Rollins and I stood by open-mouthed, overwhelmed by the revelation that one of our traditional human mannerisms had the same social significance on Mars as it did on Terra.

It was a moment none of us shall ever forget.

The Martian said something in a rather sibilant tongue, and Captain Berg responded in English. As his words deserve to go down in history, I have carefully recorded them and I hereby present them to civilization for the first time:

"We have conquered the abysmal wilderness of space and stand confident on the threshold of a new civilization. As spokesman for Terra, I salute you, men of Mars!"

And stepping back, after the handclasp, he did just that, drawing his body taut in the traditional manner and raising his right hand slowly to his right eyebrow, then cutting the salute smartly and whipping his hand back to his side.

What followed is almost as remarkable as the astonishing resemblance of our fourth planet neighbors to ourselves. For the Martian reciprocated! He drew himself as taut as Captain Berg and delivered a salute that would have satisfied the most exacting of military men.

The other two Martians seemed as incredulous as Welles, Rollins and myself. They stood there with their mouths slightly open, their eyes wide. One of them had a pad and pencil in his hand and after recovering from his surprise he began to write quite furiously. I surmised then that he was the Martian equivalent of a reporter. He and I shall have much to discuss later.

The historic moment over, the foremost Martian pointed toward the copter-like vehicle and indicated that we were to accompany him.

I obtained permission from Captain Berg, first, to return to the ship and transmit this report. In a moment I shall rejoin the others, who already have boarded the Martian aircraft and are awaiting me.

More later!

TRANSCRIPT of Slissir Tsis' report of the first Martian-Terran meeting:

Most Hallowed Ososososo, Four, the 63rd rotation of 10,000th orbit, 21st cycle— I was delegated to accompany His Most Sacred Highness, Thisis-Ssis, First Administrator to our Most Hallowed City, and His Sacred Highness, Ptitus-Ris, Second Administrator to our Most Hallowed City, on their mission of contact with the inhabitants of the first third planet ship-entity. The information I have to report is incredible.

They are like us!

Such a statement is difficult to assimilate. We of Most Hallowed Ososososo have been overly influenced by the spate of speculative fiction that has invaded our literature during the past several orbits and have come to regard our third planet neighbors as being anything but human.

But they *are* human.

Second Administrator Ptitus-Ris landed the tifft some distance from the ship-entity and we extended to the ground. Then we watched while the humans from Three *extended* to the ground. At first we could not accept our retinal images, for despite our determination to be objective we had expected some teratological form of life with far too few limbs and eyes, and of a color ranging from white to black. One of the more sensational of our speculative fiction writers has predicated a race of bipeds on Three, and that, more than anything else, tended to pervert our better judgements.

And all we saw were four tentacled, elongated humans!

We extended rather slowly across the field which separated us from the ship-entity, fearing that a too pronounced rapidity of movement might frighten our visitors. They were not at all frightened, however, and when First Administrator Thisis-Ssis extended forward, tentatively projecting his sanctified tentacle, one of the Thirds, undoubtedly a First Administrator, extended *himself* forward, projecting *his* sanctified tentacle, *and the two humans proceeded to entangle feelers in the cycle-old gesture of affiliation to Ososososo!*

I believe that what First Administrator Thisis-Ssis articulated is

worth recording for future generations, and I am happy to be able to recall it verbatim:

"Welcome to Four, men of Three. Most Hallowed Ososososo, greatest of the City-Entities, awaits you."

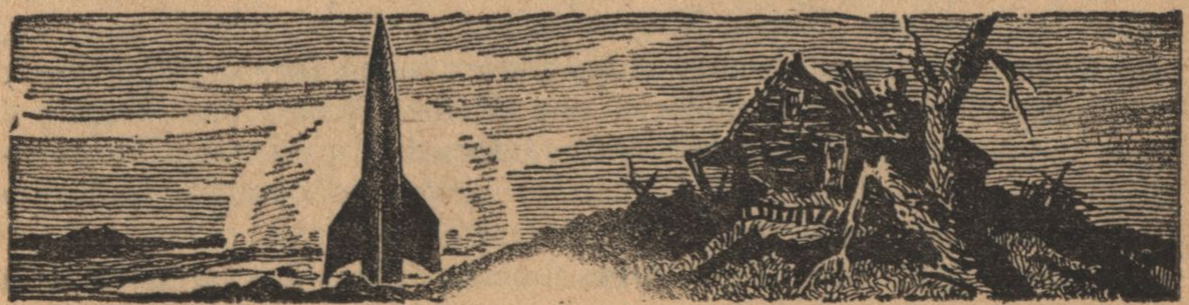
The Third articulated something in an odd fang, totally lacking in euphonious sibilance. He retracted his tentacle, then, stiffening his body in an attitude of striking humility, he raised the same tentacle to his hood, held it there briefly, then retracted it again.

I could sense that First Administrator Thisis-Ssis was as astonished as I was. Not so much because of the Third's uncanny familiarity with our religion, but because of his almost unbelievable devotion to a City-Entity he had never served—a devotion so profound that it would lead him to dedicate himself and his companions for consumption before any of them had reached the compulsory age-limit! First Administrator Thisis-Ssis recovered quickly, however, and authorized the dedication by a similar symbolical gesture.

The dedication being thus consummated, nothing remained but for the two Administrators to fulfill it. So the four Threes were immediately transported to an available alimentary apartment and Most Hallowed Ososososo began the leisurely process of assimilating them.

I hope that I am not being sacrilegious in wishing that our first visitors from space had been less fanatically observant of their religious obligations. We have long been curious about our neighbors on Three, and this would have been an excellent opportunity to study them.

But perhaps more will come.



When the entire culture is based upon giving things away; when one's prestige depends entirely upon the imbalance in his favor between objects given and received, there's no such thing as charity!

Give Away

by MILTON LESSER

I COULDN'T sleep last night, but I'm not tired. You don't come of age every day; I've waited a long time for this and I'm going to get even with them. All of them, I don't care how long it takes me.

Here comes Dad, now. I'll wipe that frown off his face someday; it isn't my fault if I'm not the oldest son.

"You don't have to look so happy," he said.

I could have told him it was because I wouldn't have to go crawling around on my belly any more, always getting things and being able to give nothing in return. I could have told him it was because I had matured early, and looked like a man these past four years, but went right on receiving gifts anyway, with a list a mile long to repay. Just watch them all grovel, though—for I'd repay in double.

I said, "It's because I can own property now."

Dad cooked breakfast himself, since Sis was under-age and didn't have to do anything except build up resentment and feelings of inferiority. She was sixteen, but maturing early; I guess it's a family trait. Mother was killed six years ago, when someone mistook her for Dad in the dark, and thought he'd have a chance at my old man's titles and wealth. They've been making fun of Dad ever since. He's been saving up property so hard for today, my coming of age, that he hasn't been able to put enough aside for a decent wife; maybe that's why he hates me so.

I get nothing but the property, which we'll have to give away immediately. Sometimes I wish I'd been born first, instead of my brother Ted. He's been doling out gifts faster than he can get his hands on them, because he's now a joint owner with Dad. The lucky stiff will be a rich man someday, unless I can find a way to shame him.

Well, we ate breakfast without talking, without even looking at each other. I could tell Dad wanted to serve me, one more time at least, but you can bet I didn't let him. He looked as if he was going to strike me, until he remembered I'd come of age today. You could see he was sorry I'd be leaving the house for good after breakfast. All he had left at home was Sis, and there are limits to how far you could humble a girl with presents and service. Dad would be a holy terror at business for the next few months, getting over it. He'd probably even go into debt; but since he charges a hundred and fifty percent interest, it will just make him richer in the long run.

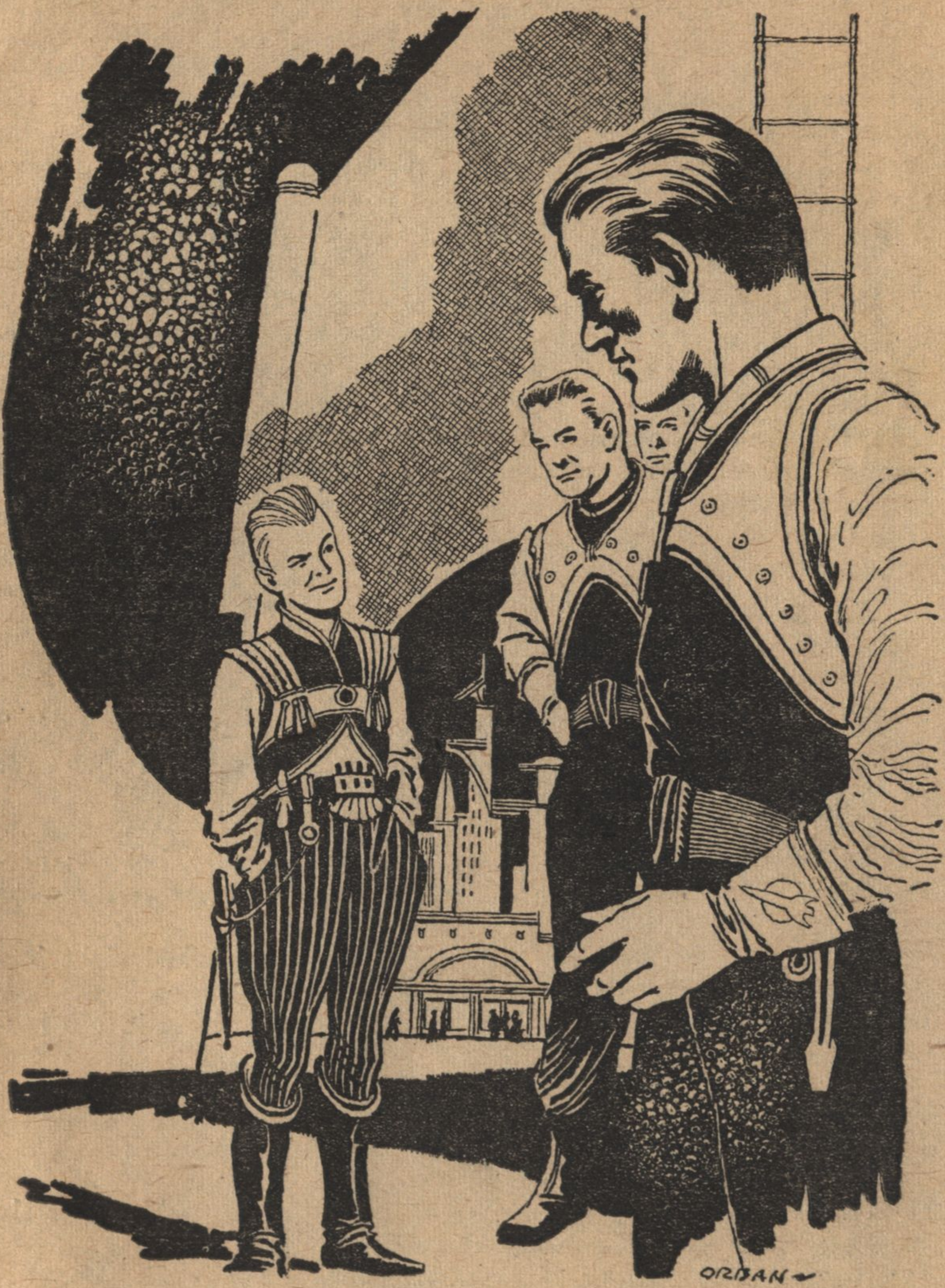
I STOOD UP from the table and wiped my mouth, preparing to leave. By then, Sis was coming downstairs. I beat Dad to the stove and started making her breakfast while he glared at me. She was glaring too, sullenly, so I took special care to make everything just right. It wasn't much of a gift, really, but it was my first.

When I put the tray down on the table in front of her she pushed it away. "I'm not hungry," she said.

She'd be all right, that girl; there was no sense in her getting obligated to anyone but Dad, not when she still had four more years—almost five—before she came of age. I shrugged and left the house with my list of gifts tucked in one pocket, and list of neighbors in another.

I had them, all right. Some people are just plain stupid that way, talking so much they can't keep their coming of age a secret; then everyone has return gifts ready, and what good does it do? But I'd matured early, so none of the neighbors were sure of my age, especially since we moved into this neighborhood only five years ago—the one time I ever saw Dad beaten. He had to take over Willis Overly's house, and since he could never repay Willis with the required minimum interest, and save for my coming of age at the same time, he had had to kill the man, thus absolving the debt. Now he gets all purple in the face every time you mention Willis Overly's name.

Mr. Chalmbers wasn't home, but his wife's face turned the color of snow, and she looked ready to faint when I gave her the ownership papers to a brand new ground car. Dad always taught me to make the most of a situation, and he would have been proud of me right then if he had seen and didn't hate me. I stared suggestively at Mrs. Chalmbers, who's ten years my senior but not bad-looking, and she got the idea. Her husband would like it fine if he never had to worry


ORBAN

about the debt, so we signed a contract on the spot for her to pay me back the way a female always can. I was careful to keep the number of times low, however, unless I wanted to admit defeat in my first transaction. It was kind of insulting to Mrs. Chalmbers, too, but she'd either have to take the contract as it stood, or tell her bread-giver about the debt. She took it.

I gave the Pomeroys a jetcycle for their kid; the Smythe's a layette for the baby they expected in a couple of months; the Richardson's five hundred units in cash because they were poor and it was the easiest way to push their faces in the mud further. I went right down the list and left curses and glares of mayhem in my wake.

And then I met Julia Lawrence, who had to go and spoil everything. It's always easier for a girl, especially a pretty one, and you can't lie about things like that. Julia is gorgeous, but how should I know she was coming of age the same day?

Julia and me used to always play together and it hardly seemed right, her acting like a grownup. She had on one of those trick outfits, you know the kind; now you see it, now you don't. It has something to do with the polarization of lights, I think. Anyway, now I didn't—see it, I mean, so Julia had me. It was just a quick peek, but Trading Center had already established Julia's measurements as worth half a dozen years of hard servitude.

I BLINKED my eyes and pulled the lid of one down so hard, it started tearing. "I had something in my eye," I said; "I didn't see anything."

"You're a liar." And I used to like her voice.

Well, you don't lie about those things. You can try, but you never push it. "All right," I admitted; "I didn't know you were coming of age today."

"I didn't know you were, either. Brother, you walked right into it, skipping down the street and dropping gifts like manna. From now on, keep those things secret; don't go around advertising it. No husband of mine is going to walk into a trap like you did."

"What did you say"

"That I don't want you walking into traps."

"You said husband."

"You *are* going to marry me, aren't you? Unless you'd prefer six years of hard service, with nothing to show for it."

"That isn't fair," I said; "not on my first day."

Julia grinned sweetly. "Tough."

"But receiving a wife is just as bad; I'll be in debt to your father the rest of my life."

"No, just come to work for him."

"Sure," I said bitterly. "And what am I supposed to repay my own father with?"

"You'll have a nice equity coming in from the gifts you gave out today."

"That's true," I admitted. "But a man has got to get ahead. If you marry me now, you'll get a lot of personal satisfaction out of it; but with all those debts on my head, you'll never have a rich husband. Why don't you think about it a while?"

"Because this is my chance to pay off my father, that's why."

"I won't do it," I said. I was young; I could afford to take chances. It was a pretty awful thing, admitting defeat on your very first day, but I'd make up for it. What had happened would be published in the paper and Julia would have legal claim to the prestige I had forfeited. While there's nothing lower than admitting you can't repay a gift, even if it's something you never wanted, I wasn't going to saddle myself with a wife—not to mention a father-in-law.

Julia shrugged smooth shoulders. "Suit yourself, Henry. I think you're making a mistake." She wrote out the transaction in the prestige section of her Trading pad and held it steady while I signed it. Naturally, I had to sign over my equity from the morning's gifts as well, since I wasn't a first-born and had no names or titles I could give her instead. I wondered what Julia would do with the debt Mrs. Chalmbers owed her as I walked away. It was a damned shame; I could have escaped easily enough if I'd had a few names or titles to toss around, but we all can't be first born.

THAT STARTED me to thinking: Henry Bartzen, broke. If anyone gave me a gift now, I'd really be sunk. Julia wouldn't spread the word, because she'd probably want to give me something herself tomorrow; but what had happened would be in the paper and it wouldn't be hard to figure I was broke. I could go off some place and become a hermit for a while, building wealth with my own hands. But that's a last resort, because they say something bad happens to a man's character if he can't give things away every day.

The other alternative was my brother Ted. You couldn't do anything about primogeniture unless the first-born died, and you took his

place. Of course, I would then owe a debt to Ted's widow, since I'd have given her her freedom—but you can't slip through a transaction without any loss. I could always pay her with some of the titles Ted would own outright when Dad died.

It wouldn't be the easiest thing in the world, finding where Ted lived. A man doesn't go around broadcasting his home-address to his relatives, especially if he's first-born. But I'd find him, even if I had to wait for one of the big yearly gatherings where everyone brings his surplus property and burns it in the center of town at the big incinerator. That's even better than giving gifts, by the way, provided you have a sufficient surplus.

It's a little hard to explain, like owing a debt to Ted's widow, if I killed him—because I'd given her her freedom. It's the opposite of giving, since freedom is a negative thing, but I don't have a word for it. Anyway, you're not giving away things at the great burning; you're destroying them. Then other people have got to destroy their property, too, and they can go almost crazy if they don't have enough. There's always the crematorium, where you can throw your first-born when you have nothing else, or even yourself; but that's rare.

I didn't think about killing Ted too long. I guess most thinking and doing—and even giving—stopped temporarily in our town about that time of morning. That's when you beings came down from the sky in your spaceship, and started trying to change our ways and our ideas. I'm telling you, it won't work. It doesn't matter if we were a colony; we're not a colony now. You don't understand.

Well, anyway—

YOU PROBABLY think we couldn't build a spaceship. That's exactly what I mean, a failure to understand us. Sure, we know all about physics and astrophysics; we have the books, haven't we? Economics is more important, that's all. Why should we want to leave our planet? We like it here.

So, down came your spaceship. Not gradually, but suddenly it was there in the sky. You know, from the old books, we really expected something bigger. It seemed a mighty meanlooking spaceship to visit our planet with; I mean, if *we* had visited *your* planet, you can bet we'd have come in a bigger, newer, better ship.

It was my lucky day, after all. I reached the ship first after you landed, and claimed it. It's even a lucky thing you didn't land one day sooner, because I was still under age then, and wouldn't have been able to do a thing.

Now maybe you can see what I mean. Your whole concept is wrong; you land on a large planet in a tiny spaceship, except to step outside and *claim the whole world*. What are you going to give in return? Have you another world twice the size? We won't believe you until we see it, you know. Understand now? You've got it backwards; *I* claimed the spaceship and so it's mine, even if I have to kill my brother Ted and give you all his titles in exchange. I don't think that's necessary, though; you'll see.

You had one advantage, though; you knew who we were and we weren't sure about you. We figured you must have been our ancestors, though—that is, progeny of our ancestors—since you spoke English. But make no mistakes; we're not a colony, and we don't owe you anything. Your ancestors set our ancestors down on this world—what was it, five hundred years ago? That's a negative giving, because the world was no good at the beginning; we had to make it good. No, you can't give us your world in return. We'd be getting a pig in a poke, you see; what are you smiling about?

"We have come to give you the benefits of our advanced culture," you said. I remember every word; I guess it surprised you when I refused.

"Are you the leader?" you asked. "A young man like you?"

"No," I said. "I'm not the leader."

"Then why don't you let *him* make the decision?"

I tried to explain to you we had no leader. What did we need one for? You didn't understand.

"Son," you said, "we've come a long way to find you. You're Earth citizens, all of you; all we want you to do is claim your heritage."

"We don't need it, thank you," I said. You have to admit it was a shrewd guess on my part. You had asked me to claim our heritage; you didn't offer to give it. I figured you weren't going to force the issue and put us in debt to you, so I refused. After what happened with Julia, I wasn't taking any chances.

I asked you, "Do you have any titles?" Maybe you still don't quite understand why, but you'll see.

"Well," you said, "I'm a sub-director of Anthropology Central," whatever that is. It didn't sound very impressive, but if it means you can go around giving out cultural heritages, as I guess it does, it's a valuable title to have. You see, we can give personal property and things any time we want, but you have to be a Realtor, for instance, to be able to give away land.

Then I bluffed you. I had some business to attend to and I said, "Don't go around giving away cultural heritages while I'm gone." Honestly, I hardly cared; nobody would want them, anyway. But I didn't want you talking to anyone else, because they might trick you into debt before I got back, and then where would I be?

IT SURPRISED Julia when I said I'd changed my mind and would marry her. "Have you given the information to the paper yet?" I demanded.

"No, Henry, you're just in time; you're being very sensible."

We don't marry for love here, as you probably know by now. You said we don't know any emotions but the gamut from triumph to shame, whatever all that means. You said our whole social structure is based on it, and all our institutions revolve about it. Well, I won't argue with you; it doesn't matter. I don't even care if you think, as you said, that we've institutionalized a type of behavior which you consider as abnormal and irrational in your culture. You said it took a long time before you could beat down the paranoid, megalomaniac trend on English (I mean Earth, that's the name of the place, isn't it?) You said we had institutionalized it and glorified it.

You said our civilization sprung from an ample supply of goods which we could obtain without working very hard. You said we'd warped an aspect of your own system, and magnified it and lived by it.

Well, we don't marry for love. We know what love is; we read about it in some of the old books and it sounds ridiculous, if you don't mind me saying so. Instead of trying to shame your mate and achieve triumph at her expense, you're supposed to work together with her toward some common goal which is never clearly defined. Pardon me, but it sounds fantastic.

We visited the nearest Marrier and had him perform the ceremony. After that, all the debts which I had earned through my coming of age gifts were returned to me by Julia, and we gave the Marrier the right to visit Mrs. Chalmbers the specified number of times as payment. He owed us something on the deal and he knew it, for he would gain considerable prestige at Mr. Chalmber's expense. He wanted to give me his marrying title and be done with it, but I wasn't born yesterday. I settled for a third of Mr. Chalmbers' lost prestige, which wasn't much under the circumstances.

Are you wondering why I married Julia, after all the fuss I put up

before? I needed some property in a hurry, so I'd have something to offer you.

When Julia heard it was I who had claimed the spaceship, she was delighted. "You'll be rich," she said. "Henry, that's wonderful." Naturally, I hadn't broadcast the fact; even as matters stood, people who had seen me might try to assassinate me and claim the title. The owner of a spaceship is called a Captain, isn't he?

I'm not offering you the property in exchange for your ship, don't misunderstand. The ship is mine; it fell near me and I claimed it first. The property is just to have you in my debt; it's the way people get rich. If I didn't think you were worthwhile debtors, I never would have married Julia.

MY FATHER-IN-LAW had something to say about that after he learned of our marriage. "Julia," he scolded his daughter, "you've married an idiot. If one of us were given a certain amount of property, he'd be shamed into paying it back with at least a hundred percent interest. But not those—those, what are they called?"

"Earthers," I think Julia said. "You call yourself Earthmen, don't you?"

"Earthers won't be shamed," my father-in-law pointed out angrily; "Earthers don't know the meaning of it, according to Henry."

"That's all right," I said. "I'm in no hurry. They came here to give us their cultural heritage, but—"

"What is that supposed to mean?" Julia's father wanted to know. He was still angry; he had that expression written all over his face: *what kind of son-in-law did I get?*

"I was about to tell you. It means they're going to try and change our ways. Three men, going to try and change a whole world; you tell me what will happen."

"Well," he said, mulling it over, "I guess they'll give up after a while and go away."

"They won't," I said. "They're dedicated; it's as important to them as giving gifts. They'll stay here and keep on trying, and before you know it, they'll be the ones who do the changing, not us. Then they'll realize they're in my debt."

"I doubt it," my father-in-law grumbled. "But suppose they did; you already have their ship."

That's something you don't understand, incidentally. Our farms and

factories are as important to us as our titles; we own them and we don't tolerate trespassers. But the streets of the town are common property, because a man couldn't walk from his home to his place of business otherwise. You could refuse a gift in your own home—unless it came from a member of your immediate family and you were under age—but you can't refuse a gift on the streets. In the same way, anything you get on the streets belongs to you. Although, let me tell you, it's pretty rare that things are just floating around.

"Sure," I told my father-in-law, "I already have their ship; but there are certain things they can give me which I couldn't get anyplace else."

"Like what?" He called me a name and I gave him Mr. and Mrs. Richardson's debt; you can't take that, not even from your own father-in-law.

"Like—well, knowledge," I said after the transaction. "They know things we don't know."

"Knowledge is worthless. What kind of gift is knowledge? You won't get much of a debt going if all you can give away is knowledge."

"Maybe," I said mysteriously. I wouldn't say any more, not even when Julia took her father's side in the argument. But you know the kind of knowledge I have in mind. The knowledge which gives you the power to build things faster and cheaper than anyone else. Giving away those things after I build them, I'll become a rich man. You can bet I won't give away any knowledge, though. I have to say your attitude surprises me, because it never occurred to me you'd refuse.

"What we have to offer is for all of you," you told me. "As a colony, you're entitled to the fruits of our culture. But no one man is going to get strong at the expense of his neighbors, not if we can help it. That leads to trouble."

"Of course it leads to trouble," I said. I couldn't make it clear to you. I tried to explain that this kind of trouble is the nature of things. We'll let it ride for the time being.

DID I TELL you that my brother Ted walked right into my hands? Julia was responsible, but now I won't have any trouble repaying the debt to her; I'm getting rich.

Trouble is, I think she was playing both ends against the middle; either way, she couldn't lose. She went to Ted and told him, out of spite, that I was the one who had claimed your spaceship. She came

running back to me and said Ted was on his way over to kill me, and claim both my Captain's title and the ship. If Ted succeeded, she'd be in a highly enviable situation: he'd be paying through the nose for years. If I thwarted Ted, and became the assassin and not the victim, I'd share my father's titles through primogeniture. I'd have to watch out for Sis when she came of age, I remember thinking, because she's a little toughie. But that would be years away, and as things are turning out, it doesn't matter.

Ted rigged up a pretty professional ambush, but when a man is facing one way with firearms, ready for you to come out into his range, it doesn't take much skill to sneak up behind him and crush his skull with an iron bar—winning not only his titles and his wealth, but the firearms also. See? Here they are.

I published the assassination in the paper, but brought the news to Dad firsthand. He's getting on in years, and the loss of a son is quite a blow; you could see it in his eyes, although he'd never admit it. He'll have to go out and kill someone else's first-born, thus regaining his lost prestige. I saw him thumbing through his list of names and addresses before I left.

He was good and sore and probably won't speak to me for a while. Ordinarily, it would matter, because we'd have to do business together. Sis didn't look so angry; I said that girl worries me. I could imagine the wheels spinning under the tight little ringlets on her head—with Ted out of the way, I was the only one left between her and the rewards of primogeniture. Well, that doesn't matter at all now. Let her stew.

When I returned, you were as adament as ever. That's really too bad.

"That's final, Henry," you said. "We're not making very much progress with your people, but we'll spend all the time here that's necessary. Your world certainly is a cultural deviant. We were hoping we could make a start with at least one individual, and since you've been here on our ship. . ."

"But it didn't work," I told you. "You wouldn't know where to begin; and even if you did it wouldn't help, since you don't insist on your right to give things."

"We still think you'll learn, Henry," you said. I'll say this for you—you have amazing optimism. People just aren't that cooperative, didn't you know?

But you really did think I'd learn. In the beginning you thought

so even more; you were very amused over the way I could learn the concepts of your spaceship so quickly. You even helped; you said I had a natural talent for such things and you wondered if all my people were that way.

I'M A RICH man now. I don't mind your insults, but comparing a man of wealth with all the people was too much. I gave you Ted's old title of Farm Supervisor and that's another debt you owe me. You understand, we give things away when we've been insulted, too. That isn't strictly a business transaction, as you probably realize; such gifts don't necessitate double payment. They're prestige gifts and as such are payble in kind.

"You'll have to leave the ship now, Henry," you said finally. "We still think you're not completely hopeless, but we're ready to go out and meet your people." And you still didn't believe a society like ours could get along without a leader; you said so.

Well, I don't believe a few things you told me about Earth, either. I don't believe, for example, that certain virtues go unrecognized on your planet, as you insist. Never mind, don't try to talk me out of it. A triumph is a triumph, whatever else you try to call it. And don't get nasty with me or I'll have to give you another gift. You grovel around in shame all the time, and you're so polite, you're just looking for trouble.

I think I'll sit around a while, if you don't mind; after all, I own this ship.

Stop pushing. Well, at least you *can* lose your tempers, after all; now you're acting like human beings.

You thought it was a big joke when I claimed the ship. The way I talked, you thought I took it for granted it was mine. Well, yes and no.

I knew it would be mine when I wanted it; I knew you hardly considered my claim valid, but I wanted you to think I thought you did. Complicated? Sometimes I can be pretty tricky.

Now you know. That's right, there's only one way I can get your ship. Naturally, I want it; now that I understand how it works, I want to go to Earth and claim the prestige your families are going to lose. You can't kid me. The Earthmen there will recognize a rich man when they see one.

You thought you were going to give us your cultural heritage and have us in your debt for the next dozen generations or so. Trading

Center hasn't put any specific figure on it, so I'm only guessing. Well, you'll never get the chance.

Stand still. There. There. There. Too bad you can't see yourselves now, lying around like that with all your prestige gone; it's mine now.

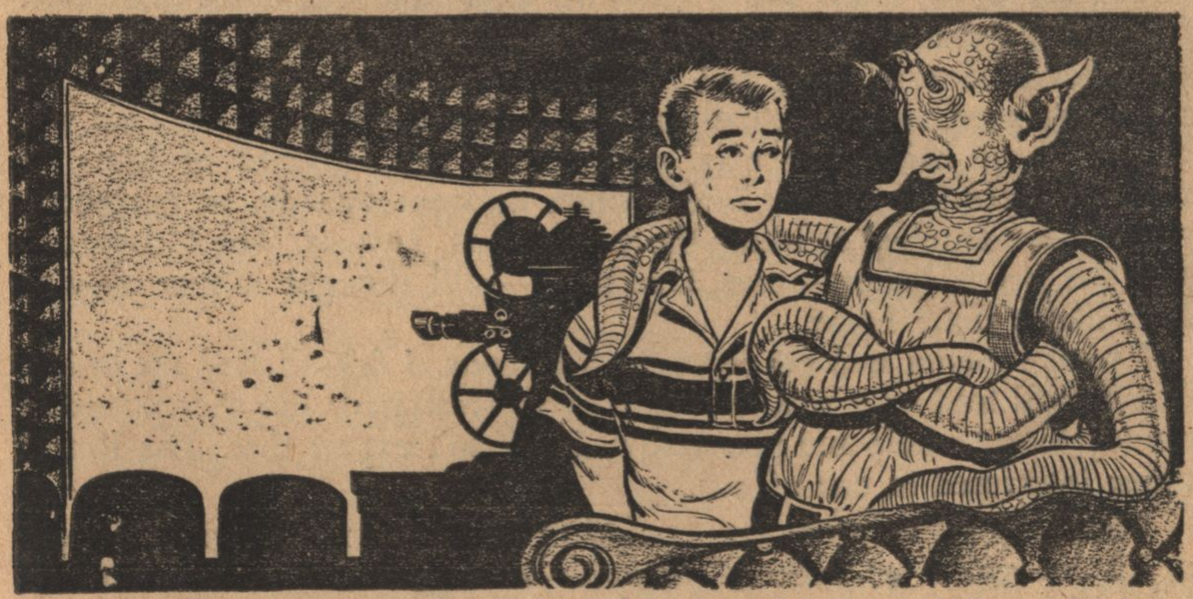
I can't wait until I get to Earth and see their faces. There were three of you, but you couldn't trick me. You didn't insist on giving away your cultural heritage because you realized we couldn't repay you with something worth twice its value and you didn't want us to commit suicide.

Well, here we go; just wait till I get to Earth and claim what's coming to me.

The Brachi wanted to help, and they had fulfilled just about all the age-old dreams of men. But they never realized that human beings can't endure perfection.

And What Remains?

by WINSTON K. MARKS



I SAID, "BUT, Dad, everybody's going to the Brachi Centers now! All the kids'll say—"

"That's no excuse for you to be a fool, too."

"It's free, and the girls are just robots; why, the Brachi have opened Centers on all other planets."

"That doesn't change the moral issue, Andy."

I threw up my hands. "Now you're talking like a Brachi-baiter!"

"Yes, I suppose I am."

"Listen, Dad, things have changed." I tried to sound reasonable, self-possessed. Dad was stubborn and very old-fashioned; you couldn't get any place with him if you lost your temper. I remembered that; but I didn't know much else about him. In the past ten years, Dad hadn't been home more than a dozen times, and then only for a day or so at a time. "The Brachi have given us these things; it isn't right to turn down your friends, Dad."

"You don't throw over your own standards, either."

"Tripe! We've outgrown them!"

He stood up, clenching his fists. "You're not seventeen yet, Andy; when you're old enough to make up your own mind—"

"Lots of kids at the Center are only fourteen."

He ground his hands together; I heard the knuckles crack. "Go to your room, Andy; go to your room before I wipe that smug expression off your face with my fist!"

He meant it, too; Dad was like that. Every time he came home, he turned the whole house inside out with some new idea about discipline. It had been that way ever since Mom died. Of course, I was furious, too—but Dad was bigger and tougher than I am, naturally. He was a space engineer, and he actually piloted his own cargo carrier. Dad was one of those hairy, muscular guys, and I was ashamed of him; he couldn't wear the regular briefs when he went outside, or everybody would have laughed at him—the younger set, anyway. The old spacers and the Brachi-baiters—men Dad's age—still thought it was okay to look like a draft horse.

I went upstairs and sat on my sun balcony. I felt all tied up inside. The Brachi told us it was wrong to be so frustrated; but they wouldn't do anything to help me personally; I couldn't expect that. The Brachi never interfered in our affairs.

I had one consolation. Dad wouldn't be home very long. In a week or so, he would go back to his space-mining, and I'd be able to relax again.

I pushed the button. Carla came and rubbed my back with the rest oil, which the Brachi import from Mars. Carla was as pretty as a doll, and just my age. But a robot, of course; the Brachi made them for us.

My bedroom door swung open. Dad came in. "Send her away,

Andy. I want to talk to you." He was furious, but he was trying not to show it.

I SIGHED, and sent Carla back to the cupboard. Dad sat on the couch beside me; he was wearing briefs and his body gleamed in the red light of sunset. I looked away from him, in embarrassment, so I wouldn't see the knotted muscles of his arms and the mat of graying hair on his chest.

"I'm sorry, Andy," he said stiffly. He put his hand on mine; the palms were rough and calloused. "I've forbidden you to use the Brachi Centers, but how about stepping out with me tonight? We could go to the club and swim for an hour or so, and afterwards—"

"That's old stuff, Dad. The other kids would call me a Brachi-baiter."

He moved away from me, wringing his hands. "Andy! What's happened to you? What's happened to the world?"

"Nothing, Dad."

"Ten years ago, you'd have jumped at the chance to go with me."

"I guess I didn't know any better; I was only seven then."

Dad looked through the window of my sun balcony at the city. The streets were dark beneath the blazing red-orange of the night sky. Signs glittered in the canyon blackness and we could see the streaking lights of the autochairs. Occasionally you could still find an old-fashioned motor-car in the city, but it was always run by a sour-faced Brachi-baiter. The rest of us used the autochairs, which the Brachi brought in from one of their Centaurian colonies.

"Andy," Dad said gently, "you're too young to remember what it was like before the Brachi came. We were building our first cargo rocket, then." His voice was low and tense, seething with an emotion I couldn't understand. "Bill Styles and I. We worked on a shoestring and we worked hard; ten hours, twelve hours a day. We had no outside help, and we wanted none."

"But the Brachi had better ships, didn't they, Dad?"

"That's not the point, Andy. When our ship was finished, she was ours. *Our* ideas, our brains, our dreams—"

"Only she cracked up and you lost everything, like the Brachi said you would; they would have given you one of their ships, Dad."

"The ship was *my* dream, Andy; not theirs! It was my problem to solve; I had to do it my own way."

"Even when you did build one that could fly, it was so expensive you couldn't compete with the Brachi carriers."

"Let me finish, please, Andy. Today when I brought the ship in, I wanted a readjustment in the reactor screen. I asked the port lab to make the computations. It was the simplest kind of astro-physics; a schoolboy could have done it. But you know what the lab director said? He'd submit the problem to the Brachi Central! They'd have the figures for him in the morning."

"Well, why not? That's the way we do everything, isn't it?"

"Now, perhaps," he said bitterly. "But when I was a boy—"

"When they give you all the answers for nothing, why should you work them out for yourself?"

He stood very stiff and straight. "You don't understand a thing I'm saying, do you, Andy?"

"Sure, Dad. It's always the same story. You worked hard to build your carrier; and now you're doing okay. We've got this swell house and all the trimmings. But we'd have had it long ago, if you'd let the Brachi help you."

For a full minute he stared at me, saying nothing. Slowly the bitter sneer left his face. When he spoke again, his voice was very gentle. "I've been wrong, Andy; I've been blind—blind to a lot of things. Forgive me. I won't neglect you any longer, my own success isn't that important." He turned toward the door. "I'm going out for an hour or so, Andy. I want you to give me your word you won't go to the Brachi Center while I'm gone."

"I don't see why—"

"Promise me, Andy!"

"All right."

DAD WENT away. As soon as I heard him leave the house, I took my autochair to the Center. A promise like that doesn't mean anything; it's like telling a person you've had a swell time at a party, when really you've been bored stiff.

But I stayed longer than I should have. The Center was pretty crowded and I had to wait; I couldn't even get in to see the picture. They had a new one, which was supposed to be about the hottest thing out, but all the seats were taken. I lit a sniffer and went out on the terrace to smoke it; one of the Brachi directors came over to talk to me.

He draped himself on the lounge post, wrapping three tentacles in the velvet grooves and laying the fourth on my arm so we could talk.

He rested his enormous, gourd-like head on the top of the post and studied me with his limpid, antenna eyes.

"Mr. Saggan, I understand your father has come home," he thought through the delicate communication tube. The Brachi always called us Mister, even when our parents still tried to think of us as kids.

"This afternoon." I spoke aloud, although it wasn't actually necessary.

"He has so often refused our help." The thought quivered with sorrow. "Perhaps, Mr. Saggan, you might persuade him—"

"Not Dad; he's a hidebound Brachi-baiter."

"Then help us, please. Find out why he rejects us; what we can do to make amends. This election your people are having—it baffles us, and we must understand."

"Oh, don't worry about that; the Brachists will win."

"Why are the others so much against us? We came here to help your people, Mr. Saggan. We taught you how to set up a world-government; we have given you machines and techniques to wipe out your slums and your poverty; we have tried to rid each of you of frustration and unhappiness. And now your people make our generosity the only issue in your election."

"The old stooges do; they got to have something to gripe about."

"But brotherhood was one of your commonest dreams; we learned that when we first set up our analyzers. All your people dreamed of one day achieving brotherhood and equality; you have that now. You wanted to be free of economic fears; you are. Your young people were continually frustrated by the social regulation of your mating instinct; we set up the centers to eliminate that pressure. What more can we do?"

"The Brachi-baiters are harmless."

His next thought came slowly, reluctantly, as if it had been torn from the depths of his mind. "We have failed on so many worlds, Mr. Saggan; we *must* succeed here."

The attendant came to the terrace door and called my number.

"I mustn't keep you from the robots," the Brachi thought. "If you find any way that we can help your father, come and tell me."

He danced away, his fragile, insect wings flaying the air. There was no need for me to have his specific name in order to find him again. Every Brachi of his classification would know about our conversation, for they had all taken part in it.

WHEN THE Brachi first landed on the earth, that multiplicity of virtually identical personalities led to a great deal of confusion. Gradually we got used to it. The Brachi were an insect species, divided into a complex hierarchy of classifications; all individuals within one classification were, in a sense, the same person, sharing a kind of group mind. If you spoke to one, the conversation included them all. There was no similar communion between the different classifications. Each classification was biologically different from all the others, although the differences were so slight that few men could detect them.

When I returned from the Center, Dad was already home. The least I expected was a Brachi-baiting lecture on morals. Instead he took my hand and said, "I should have known better than to ask, shouldn't I, Andy? Well, after this, it won't happen again. I'm not going away again; I've decided to sell my carrier line."

If Dad had decided to kick me in the teeth, the shock wouldn't have been any worse. I was able to endure his discipline for a week or so every other year; but not any longer.

In panic I tried to persuade him to change his mind, but he said, "I've a lot to make up for, Andy; things we should have been doing together all these years. Hunting; fishing; swimming. Maybe we'll charter a cruiser and go out to one of the frontier planets. And next month I want you to enroll in the university. A degree in engineering or astro-physics—"

Each word he spoke made the disaster seem worse.

"But it's silly to go to college, Dad," I said. "The Brachi do all the brainwork for us now."

"Not for you and me, they don't."

His jaw was hard; his eyes blazed. I had seen that same expression on the faces of the ranting Brachi-baiters. He was my father and I hated him.

Our telecom buzzed. Dad flipped down the lever. On the screen I saw the face of Calvin Canistall—round, baby-pink, flabby. To my way of thinking, Canistall was the most dangerous man on earth. He was a billionaire, the mastermind behind the Brachi-baiters; he was not himself a candidate for the Planetary Congress, but he pulled the strings in the current Anti-Brachist campaign. Of course, Canistall's candidates would never win a majority, but they would take enough seats to keep the Congress in turmoil.

And that was the thing we feared; the Brachi-baiters would go on making their filthy and fantastic accusations until they drove the

Brachi away. The Brachi would not interfere in the election, even to prove that the Anti-Brachists were raving fools. And we lived in dread that the Brachi might someday take the ranting for our majority opinion.

"I have your message, Saggan," Canistall said in his familiar, nasal voice. "I want to say how much we appreciate your contribution."

"There's more where that came from."

"And your offer of T-V time—"

"I've been a space engineer for years," Dad cut in. "I've seen the other Brachi worlds; it's time our people knew the truth."

"Most generous, Saggan." Canistall's jowls shook with pleasure. "Unfortunately, it is not our policy to give party backing to a speaker until we have made a thorough investigation of his background."

"I had intended to speak as a private citizen, Canistall."

"By no means, Saggan! Your situation is unusual and—and, frankly, the party needs this sort of help. Will you come into headquarters tomorrow and work out a schedule with me?"

Dad smiled oddly. "Without an investigation, Canistall?"

"I can give you a clearance over my name; the size of your contribution vouches for your sincerity."

Dad closed the connection and turned away from the viewscreen. There was a strange and thoughtful expression on his face, a far-away, calculating look. He looked at me suddenly. "Up to bed, youngster; we've a big day ahead of us tomorrow."

I WENT TO my room, but I couldn't sleep. I not only hated him, but I was ashamed. My Dad had joined the Brachi-baiters. What could I say to the other kids? Or to the Brachi I met at the Center?

And then I realized something else. Dad was staying home for good; he'd never let me go to the Center again.

The next day my ordeal began. Dad dragged me out of bed at dawn. We went riding in the park—on horses! Afterward he took me to his club and made me go in the pool. Of course, it wasn't too bad, because I didn't see any kids my age. Just a lot of muscle-brained old men like Dad, mainly has-beens from the space service.

They were all Brachi-baiters, grousing all the time; and spieling that guck about the good old days.

"The kids ain't got any guts any more."

"They've gone soft in the head."

"A panty-waist generation; they can't do anything but hang around the Brachi Centers."

"And run after the robot women."

"Give them real dames, just once. Just once! Why, these kids are so dim-brained they wouldn't know—"

And more of the same. In a way, I guess you could sympathize with the spacers. There weren't any jobs for them; and they couldn't do anything else. All of our commercial space carrier lines folded after the Brachi came. The Brachi ships were so much more efficient than ours. Dad's line was the one exception, and no one knew how he did it. He used our ships and our pilots; but somehow he was still able to compete with the Brachi carriers.

The funny thing about their grousing at the club was this: the derelict spacers lived there on charity. The club was financed by the Brachi; everyone knew it.

Dad took me to one of the private rooms upstairs. He gave me an old math book and told me to work one of the problems; that was the silliest deal yet. I went to the telecom to tab the question to the Brachi Central—the way we all do; it's a perfectly normal procedure.

Dad ripped the telecom connection out of the wall. "No, Andy; work it yourself."

"Nobody does that any more!"

"Then it's time we started again."

The whole setup was ridiculous. I could have had the answer in half a second; why should I waste any more time on it? And the problem was complete nonsense, as far as I could see.

"I can't do it, Dad."

"Oh, yes you can. The elements are all there. Just use your head."

"But there's no point—"

"You're wrong, Andy." Dad's jaw was set. "There's a reason, and a good one. I don't expect you to understand now, so I won't bore you with an explanation. However, I think I can give you a certain rather decided motivation. You see, my boy, you're going to stay right here in this room until you come up with an answer. Along toward noon you should begin to be a little hungry; there's nothing like hunger to sharpen a man's wits."

He opened the door. "I've an appointment with Calvin Cranistall. I'll look in on you in an hour or so and see how you're doing."

He went out. The door lock clicked.

I TRIED everything I could think of, but there was no way out of that room. It was on the top floor of the club, seven stories above the

street. I tried to attract attention by pounding on the door, but even if the spacers had heard me they probably wouldn't have let me out. Nor could I figure how to reconnect the telecom so I could get my problem through the Brachi Central.

After a while Dad came back.

"I've closed the deal with Cranistall," he explained. He acted as if he expected me to be proud of him! "I'm going on T-V five times a week until the election—in the regular Anti-Brachist spot." Then he picked up the math book and saw my blank paper beneath it. "Still stymied, Andy?"

"I told you I couldn't do it."

"You know, son, we used to make rat mazes. We put cheese where they couldn't get it until they solved the puzzle. You're in about the same spot. If the rats could do it, Andy, you can, too—when you're hungry enough."

He left again. I had never been so frustrated or humiliated. I lay on the floor, screaming and kicking; still no one heard me. When I was exhausted and panting for breath, I got up and went to the window. I came very close, at that moment, to taking my own life.

Until I remembered the Brachi could fly! It was my last hope; frantically I scrawled identical messages on several sheets of paper and threw them toward the street. In five minutes a Brachi hovered outside the window, anxious to help me.

I showed him the problem. He was one of the common classifications and, of course, he couldn't solve it himself. But he flew to Central with it and brought back the solution, all nicely worked out for me.

Dad returned. He was overjoyed when I showed him the result; he clapped me on the back.

"It will come easier tomorrow, Andy. You've done it once for yourself. All you need now is practice."

Dad took me home. He refused to use the autochairs; one of the Anti-Brachists had given him an old car. We drove right through the heart of the city, past the Brachi import rooms, the Brachi Central, and all the new Fun Centers.

"Why can't we take a chair?" I asked him.

"Because the Brachi make them."

"They give them to us, Dad; it doesn't cost anything."

"Andy, the cars are ours; we built them; they're a part of our culture. The autochairs are an invention of another people, foreign imports which have no logical place—"

"But they're better, Dad; safer; more efficient."

"The point is, they aren't *our* machines. They aren't a logical solution of our technology." He waved his hand toward the clean, white-faced Brachi buildings. "It's an alien culture—an invasion!"

"Dad, that's the way the Brachi-baiters talk. It doesn't make sense. How could the Brachi be invaders, when they've given us so much?"

"It's a new kind of war—and disastrous, because we don't recognize it for what it is. The Brachi came here twenty years ago, when we were making our earliest flights to Mars and Venus. They came slyly, pretending to be friends; they moved against us so insidiously, no one knew what was happening.

"At first they offered us a handful of new gadgets—gifts; trade goods. The machines were wonderful; and they were free. What man wouldn't leap at the chance to use them? Then the Brachi gave us other things. They put up Central to help us solve our technological problems; and pretty soon they were solving all our problems for us. We didn't have to work any longer for ourselves. How could we refuse? It was a bonanza; every man's wish was fulfilled. Finally the Brachi opened the Fun Centers. Andy, they are destroying us—slowly, piecemeal. In another generation we'll be slaves!"

I laughed. How else can you answer a fanatic? "Destroying us?" I repeated. "With generosity?"

"Precisely. We're men, Andy, only when we create our own tools and solve our own problems. The brain makes you what you are—the techniques you use for thinking. When your problems are all solved for you, when you have a kind of super-magic to take away your slightest frustration—" (His hands shook on the wheel; his voice sank to a whisper.) "—then, Andy, you don't have to think any more. You forget what it means to be a man. Then the Brachi conquest is finished. Bloodless and painless—and yet the most terrible threat man has ever faced."

What could I say? It was hopeless. Dad had been completely victimized by the Brachi-baiting poppycock.

THAT NIGHT Dad went on T-V for the Anti-Brachists. I guess Dad must have seemed pretty important to them, because they were running him for the Secretariat of the Planetary Congress—about the most important position in the government. Of course, Dad hadn't a chance of winning, but even the nomination gave him prestige.

In his first speech Dad repeated what he'd told me in the car; and

then he added, "Friends, I know these Brachi; I have been a space engineer for better than ten years, and I've seen the other Brachi worlds. I've seen behind the mask of friendship and generosity—the scheming face of the conqueror.

"On the other Brachi worlds the original native population is enslaved, sunk in savagery, lost to its own achievements. Only the Brachi and the Brachi culture survive. Enslavement will be their ultimate gift for us, when we have finally been persuaded to abdicate our rights as thinking beings. The Brachi do not make war with physical violence; they destroy the rational mind. I have seen the Brachi worlds; remember that. I tell you the truth they have tried to hide. Save our world now. Free yourselves by thinking for yourselves again. Resist the Brachi while you are still able to make the decision for yourselves."

Even before Dad came home from the studio, I knew his speech had been a sensation. He was not simply repeating the usual, sour wailing of the Brachi-baiters. Dad made a specific charge, and the majority of his listeners would assume that he spoke the truth. They hadn't sailed the space routes, and Dad had.

It was all a very clever maneuver. Logically, if Dad lied, the Brachi should have defended themselves; yet they would say nothing, because they would never interfere in our affairs.

Within a week the psycho-poll gave the Anti-Brachists a phenomenal two percent gain in the popular vote. If Dad continued to hammer at that same charge until election day, he might easily destroy the Brachist Congressional majority.

Something had to be done to stop him.

Once, when Dad left me alone for an hour, I went to the Brachi Center and begged them to intervene. I saw one of the top-classification Brachi and he flatly refused. "We are acutely distressed, Mr. Saggan, but we cannot take sides in your political quarrels."

"Dad's lying, deliberately. At least you can defend yourselves!"

"We cannot violate the social policy we follow. If your people do not want our gifts, we will go." He passed his thought-filament over my forehead tenderly. "Your father has had an unfortunate experience. Perhaps he has seen one of the world where—" (The thought was heavy with sorrow.) "—where we have failed. We could explain that to him, if he would come to us."

"No chance of that."

"Then there's nothing we can do."

After that I went to the headquarters of the Brachist party. They were realists, suddenly forced to fight for their political existence; in more

than a decade, no group had seriously challenged their control of Congress. And now the last psycho-poll gave the Anti-Brachists forty-five percent of the popular vote—with the percentage still rising.

I saw the Director himself. "Sure, kid," he said, "we want to turn off the heat. We've thrown every trick in the book at Saggan; it doesn't do any good."

"But he's lying!"

"It might help if one of the old spacers would go on T-V and tell the people that. At least a spacer could say he's seen the Brachi worlds, too. But we can't get even one of them to join us. They're all members of the club and as thick as—" The Director's eyes widened. "But Saggan's your father, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Then maybe you can help us."

"I couldn't make a T-V speech!"

"No, just give us some dope—something we can use against him. Shady deals; slippery politics. Something that'd go over with the people."

"But there isn't anything."

The Director snorted. "Listen, kid, no man's a saint. Just give us a toe-hold; we can build up the rest."

"I don't know Dad well enough. He's a space engineer, you see, and he only comes home for a few days every year."

"There might be a business angle. Does he keep any papers at the house?"

"Not much. Oh, there's a portfolio locked in his desk. It wouldn't be important, though. I mean, Dad never—"

"You never know until you look, kid. Get in touch with us if you find anything."

THAT NIGHT, after Dad went to the studio to speak, I broke open his desk. There were only four papers in the portfolio. Three were covered with columns of figures. The amounts were large, but they made no sense to me. The fourth paper was an agreement of some sort between Dad and three other men. One sentence caught my eye, *"Precedes of X-374, after purchase of asteroid base, will be divided on the established percentage; a deficit, if any exists, will be made up from assessments against future dividends."*

The X-374! I could still remember the month-long T-V story from my boyhood. The X-374 had been a Brachi ore ship, on the robot run. Ten years ago it was boarded in space; the cargo was stolen. The theft

had clearly been engineered by trained astrophysicists, who knew how to handle radioactive material; for the robot ship had none of the usual reactor shielding. The X-374 had been the first of a series of robberies from the Brachi robots. In no case had the thief even been identified or the cargo recovered.

But now *I* knew the truth. Dad and his three partners had taken the cargo. No wonder Dad's carrier had made such phenomenal profits when the Brachi ships drove all the other spacers into retirement! And Dad had the hypocrisy to condemn the Brachi on moral grounds.

I gave the portfolio to the Director of the Brachist party; Dad's masquerade was over.

The Brachists waited until Dad spoke again before they launched their attack. They followed him on the air. The Director himself read off the accusation, while the cameras focused on the agreement.

Dad had just returned from the studio. He stood leaning against the wall and watching the screen. His face was colorless. "You did it, Andy?"

"Yes." I stared into his eyes without flinching. For the first time in my life I was not afraid of him.

"You betrayed me. I'm your father." He spoke with no feeling. Each word fell in the silence like a chunk of cold lead.

"You lied about the Brachi."

"No, Andy. I swear it! They are making war on us. They have destroyed their others words. I have seen it. You must believe me, Andy."

"The word of a thief—"

"My son! You must listen to me!" His voice was a cry choked in his throat. "We stole their ore; yes. How else could I have made my carrier pay? But they came here uninvited; they stole *our* destiny from us in the first place. And, regardless of what I did, it changes nothing in what I say. It's true, Andy; all of it. The Brachi are our enemies."

HE REACHED for my hand, but I turned away. "I don't think Dad, you'll put that argument over with many people—not now!"

"Does it matter who tells the truth, so long as it's true?" He dropped on the lounge, sobbing with his face in his hands. "Andy," he whispered, "I knew I was taking a risk when I offered the Anti-Brachists my help. I did it for you—for my son; I saw you caught in this filthy Brachist trap, and nothing else mattered."

"You can't hide behind that excuse; it won't go over, either, Dad."

"There were a dozen men who might have betrayed me—any of the spacers at the club; the middlemen who disposed of the ore for us; our spies in the com office. But not you, Andy! Not my own boy." Slowly the pain and the pleading left his voice. He stood up. His face was as cold as chiseled ice. "You want them to do your thinking for you, Andy. You can't think for yourself!"

I smiled. "Once, Dad, you gave me a lecture about the morals of going to a Brachi Center—"

"Morality?" His body shook with bitter laughter. "Just a word, Andy. Nothing more."

We were besieged then by reporters from the T-V news associations. It was Dad's mess, not mine; I went up to my room and left him to handle the questions.

In a way, I suppose I pitied him. The situation was not so much Dad's making as it was the Brachi-baiters', who had sold him their stinking bill of goods. The scandal would wear itself out in a week or so. I knew Dad could never be charged with any criminal action; none of our laws applied to space. I rather hoped the publicity and the shame would knock enough sense into Dad's head so he wouldn't oppose the Brachi any longer. Maybe he'd even be willing to talk to them, now. They could do so much to ease his frustration!

The next morning I slept late. For the first time in days Dad didn't come in at dawn and drag me down to the club for a swim. While Carla rubbed my back with rest oil, I snapped on the T-V beside my bed. There was nothing in the news but the repetition of the Brachist charges against Dad. A spot psycho-poll showed that the Anti-Brachists, in a matter of hours, had lost ten percent of the popular vote.

We were safe; the Brachists would still hold their majority in the Planetary Congress.

When the newscast was over, old Canistall came on the air. Speaking for the Anti-Brachists, he disavowed Dad; the party withdrew the courtesy nomination to the Secretariat. I must say, Canistall ate crow gracefully, but the maneuver wouldn't save much of the Anti-Brachist vote.

I went downstairs. Dad was gone. Vaguely I began to worry about him. I called the club and one or two other places where he might have been; but no one had seen him.

Apparently he had returned to his asteroid base. I felt immeasurably relieved.

THAT AFTERNOON I went to the Fun Center. I hadn't been there since Dad came home. It was wonderful to see the old crowd again and to listen to their congratulations. But before I had a chance to select a robot, a top-classification Brachi drew me aside.

"Mr. Saggan, we must talk to your father. Where is he?"

"He's gone back to his thieves den, I guess."

"No. We've put tracers on his ship; he hasn't left the earth."

"I don't know where he is. I haven't seen him."

"Please, Mr. Saggan; it is very necessary. We know the loyalty and respect your species has for its parent group; but we ask you to forget that now."

"If I knew where he was, do you think I'd—"

"Mr. Saggan, your father may know why we have failed so often; we *must* find the answer! Our intention is never to destroy a people, but to help them. We give—we give generously!—all we have. Yet we fail! Why? If your father can tell us that—"

A throbbing explosion shook the Center. A frightened, palefaced boy of fifteen ran toward us screaming.

"Spacers! They've bombed the Central; they're marching here!"

The boy collapsed. The Brachi folded his tentacles upon his thorax and fluttered out over the street. I ran to the door. I saw flames in the distance, leaping from the shattered walls of the Central. The huge problem solver, which the Brachi had built for us, was in ruins.

Angry spacers swarmed in the streets. I saw Dad at the front leading them—all the derelicts from the club, who had lived so long on Brachi charity. They were armed. Dad carried a sub-machine gun.

The spacers came into the Center. They smashed the lovely statues; they ripped up the paintings and the brocade hangings. With the butts of their guns they broke the skulls of the robot women who moved toward them in greeting.

Most of the men and boys in the Center fled. The rest of us crowded in the corridors until the robot police came. The Brachi were there, flying over the destruction, but they made no effort to intervene.

The robot police poured in through every door and the spacers were trapped. They knew the consequences if they refused the order to surrender. Yet the Brachi-baiting fanaticism must have completely unhinged their minds, for that handful of men chose to fight—primitive weapons against the impregnable power of the robots.

The top-classification Brachi tried to save Dad. It was the only time I ever saw them take sides in any of our affairs. But the robots, which

they had invented, could obey only the blind directives taped into their electronic brains. My father fell almost at my feet.

THE BATTLE swirled beyond us. In the sudden, dead silence, my father beckoned to me. I knelt beside him. A top-classification Brachi joined us.

"Andy," Dad whispered, "it was for nothing. We lost this battle long ago, when we—when we—" He coughed. Blood trickled down his chin. The Brachi put his communication tentacle on Dad's arm, trying to help him.

Dad's eyes became glittering, glassy. He was looking at me without seeing me. Slowly, painfully, he gasped, " 'Man, by thinking only, becomes truly man. Take away thought from man's life, and what remains?' Pestalozzi asked that a long time ago. Now we know the answer—slavery, savagery, and the Brachi."

Dad's head went limp in my arms. And so he died.

The Brachi looked at me. In the corridors of the Center the last sound of conflict died. The robot police marched out into the street.

The Brachi tentacle touched my arm. "Your father knew the answer. Your species is different from ours; the other—the other failures were different, too. Forgive us, Mr. Saggan."

"For what? This was Dad's fault, not yours."

"Our crime is far greater than the murder of one man. And we can do nothing to rectify the disaster of generous intentions. Nothing but—" He cut the thought off before I could catch it. "Remember what your father said, Mr. Saggan. Man, by thinking only, becomes truly man; tomorrow you must begin to think again."

He touched me again, very sadly, and flew away.

This morning the world awoke to disaster.

The Brachi are gone; the raving of the Brachi-baiters has driven our friends away. And the Brachi have taken their revenge. They have destroyed their Centrals, everywhere on earth. They have taken away all their machines, and destroyed the robots. I have pushed the buttons to make Carla get my breakfast for me; she will not move out of the cupboard. If I'm going to eat, I'll have to cook for myself; and I don't know how!

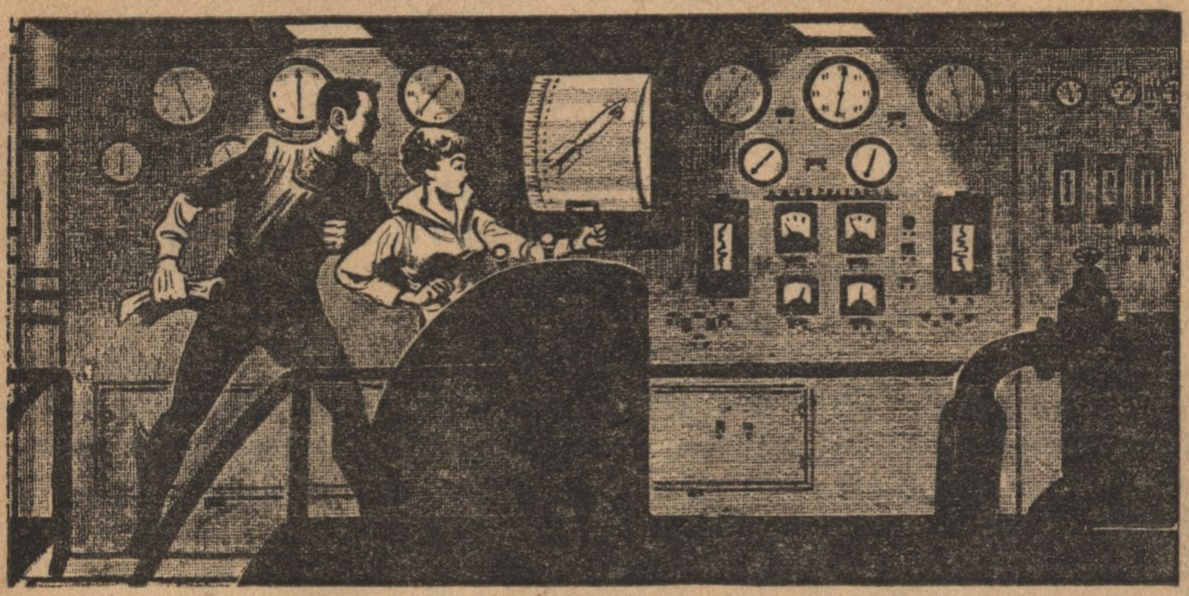
The Brachi have taken away all the pleasure and comfort in our lives. They have left us nothing. Nothing but work—endless, hard work. The Brachi have torn the heart out of our civilization.

And what remains?

Naturally, occupying the first manned rockets into space will be a man's job . . .

Barrier

by THEODORE R. COGSWELL



MIKE SAID, "I'm moving her out another ten."

"Check." The small red-headed physiologist didn't look up from the long row of indicators.

The red needle on the altimeter swung slowly to the right as the range-finders tracked the rising rocket. Mike made a quick adjustment on the control board and then leaned back in his chair and fished out a cigarette. "Let me know when you've finished checking your little beasties and I'll move her out again."

The physiologist nodded and went on checking the wavy lines the styluses were inking on the slowly-revolving recording drums. There were fifty recorders in the control center, one for each of the laboratory animals carried in the remote-controlled rocket. Without conscious thought, trained eyes translated each of the inked lines into respiration-rate, pulse-rate, blood-pressure—into each of the score of items

that described how the living organisms that were in free fall two hundred miles above were reacting to their new environment.

As the last entry was made in the log, the physiologist relaxed a bit. "Hey, Mike, light me a cigarette and toss it over. I think we'd better give the animals a five minute rest before we start them out again."

"Catch!" With a quick flick of his middle finger he sent a lighted cigarette arcing toward the red-head. A thin arm reached out with catlike quickness and picked it out of the air.

"You've got good reflexes," Mike said; "you're faster than most men."

The other took a long slow drag on the cigarette before answering. "Fast—but not fast enough, eh?"

"What?"

"You know what I mean."

He looked slightly uncomfortable. "It isn't that. You're as quick as any of the men that are being sent out—and as smart, too. It's just that. . ."

He didn't get a chance to finish. "I know. I'm fast enough; I'm smart enough. I'm little, so that it would only take two-thirds as much food, oxygen, and water to keep me going. It's just that I'm a woman." She made no effort to conceal the bitterness that was in her. "It's all right for me to help out with the testing but when it comes to the big jump-off, I'm supposed to retire to the grandstands and wave my handkerchief to cheer our departing heroes."

"I didn't make the decision," he said defensively.

"But you agree with it, don't you?"

He didn't say anything.

"Don't you?"

He pretended to busy himself with his intruments. "You'll have your chance later," he said finally.

"As a passenger once the rough work is all done and the space lines start running? No thanks!" She threw the butt of her cigarette down on the floor and ground it viciously under one heel. "It's easy for you to talk, you're going."

He mumbled something.

"What?" she demanded sharply.

He looked at her in irritation. "I said it's a man's job; it always has been. Now let's get back to work. Ready to move out again?"

In an instant she turned from a person into a machine. "Ready. One more jump and she'll be in deep space. There's nothing left to go

through the but E-2 layer of the ionosphere; move her all the way out this time."

HE TURNED obediently to his controls and then threw the switches that recalled the great atomic engines of the rocket to throbbing life. Her nose raised slowly and as her driving jets flared white, she rushed farther out into the unknown. Five miles. Ten. Twenty. Forty.

"Mike!" Her voice was panicky. "Stop the ship; something's happening. Something terrible."

Braking-jets spouted as he killed the ship's forward speed enough to throw her into orbit at her new altitude. Not until she was riding smoothly did he leave the controls and rush over to the red-headed physiologist. "What's the matter?"

"Look! They're dying."

On chart after chart the jerky line that registered the heart pulsations of the animals far above wavered erratically and then straightened out as no more impulses came through.

Mike's face went white as he stared down at the record of failure. He licked his suddenly dry lips. " 'The moving finger writes,' " he said thickly.

She moved quickly down the long row of recorders. "Mike!" Her voice was like a sudden glad trumpet. "Here's one that's coming out of it! And another! And another!"

His own heart thumped momentarily out of phase as it reacted to the sudden charge of adrenalin that was dumped into his blood stream. "Which ones?" he whispered. "Did the chimps make it? They're the most like us. If it's just the lower forms that went under, if it's just the rats and the rabbits, maybe we've still got a chance."

Her face was an expressionless mask when she finished her check and turned to face him. "There's something in the E-2 layer that went through all our shielding. I don't know yet how it does it but it seems to scramble up the neural impulses originating in the autonomic nervous system. The heart runs wild, and. . ."

"To hell with the lecture! Did the chimps make it?"

When she didn't answer he grabbed her by the shoulders and shook her violently. *"Did the chimps make it!"*

She stood passively until his emotional explosion exhausted itself and he let her go. "Sorry," he muttered.

"Some of them did," she said.

His face suddenly changed and took on a look of savage excitement.

"I'll get that ship down right away. You get your staff together and as soon as I land it you can start checking the animals still alive for survival characteristics. Once you've found what they are, we'll screen the crew and make what replacements are necessary. Every man is already trained to handle three jobs. Even if you guess wrong and a few of us are knocked out going through the E-2 layer, there'll be enough left to get the ship on through to Mars."

He jumped back to his controls and sent the distant rocket screaming earthward. "Come home, baby," he shouted. "You'll take us out on the long hop yet."

THE PHYSIOLOGIST didn't say anything; she just went on methodically making entries in her log book. When at last Mike's skillful fingers brought the rocket gently down on the landing apron beside the fortress-like control center, he slumped back with a sigh of exhaustion.

"Get into your radiation armor," he said, "and get those specimens into the lab fast. There's a lot of work to be done in a hurry and you're just the gal to do it."

She hesitated for a moment and then came slowly over to him. "There's no rush, Mike; I already know the answer."

He pulled himself to his feet and stood looking down at her from his full six feet three. Aside from a slight tremor in his legs, he had complete control of himself. "You know the crew. Which of us qualify?"

She looked at him compassionately. "I'm sorry, Mike."

Only a convulsive stiffening betrayed the sudden racking torment her words released within him. "I'm replaceable," he said. "Do any of the others have to be eliminated?"

"All of them, Mike. But there will be replacements who will be able to stand the shock of the E-2 layer crossing; I can take over as ship's physiologist."

He shook his head sadly and put a comforting arm around her. "You know the regulations, honey; I guess we're both grounded."

There were tears in her eyes as she pulled away from him. There was something else there too. "I'm afraid the regulations are going to have to be changed, Mike. The rats, and the rabbits, and the chimps that made it through. . ." Her voice caught in her throat.

Mike looked down at the little figure.

"The females," he said.

It was a statement, not a question.

Doc Holliday had taken a dry-dive, leaving no explanation behind except a small book . . .

Husbands, care and feeding of

by MACK REYNOLDS

CORPORAL James Denny, Suicide Detail, entered without knocking. In his beefy right hand, he carried a canvas bag—the contents of which he up-ended on the lieutenant's desk.

He said, "Here's a hot one for you, Lootenant."

The lieutenant said, "Oh?" less than enthusiastically.

"Yeah, it's this here Doc Holliday they had about in the papers last week."

"Never heard of him." The lieutenant poked with a lackadaisical forefinger the little pile of men's pocket-effects the other had dumped on his desk. On an average he would go through such intimate relics of a life departed four or fives times a day. It wasn't inspiring work, par-

ticularly for a man optimistic enough—in a pessimistic world—to look forward to a kindlier future.

"Sure you did, Lootenant," Denny was saying, "it was all in the papers. They had a lot of these bigwigs there, all these here scientists, like."

The lieutenant sighed and said, "I still haven't heard about him. What happened?"

"He jumped out a winder."

"He what?"

"He jumped out a winder," Denny repeated. "He took the long dive."

"You mean he jumped out of a window last week and you're just bringing in the report now?"

"Naw, Lootenant, you don't get it," Denny complained. "He jumped out the winder *today,* a coupla hours ago. It was last week he had all these here newspaper guys on his neck. He makes this big announcement, see? All about his big discovery. And the science editors they come down, and all these here perfessers and all, they come down, and he makes this here demonstration, see? Well, all he gets the first time is maybe a pint of water and the next time—"

"Look," the lieutenant said wearily—he had enough in the way of domestic troubles without getting into these hassels with his men. "Look, let's start somewhere else; at the beginning, preferably. Now, then, what was he demonstrating?"

"This here time-machine," Denny said reasonably. "But, holy cow, all he gets back is water a coupla times and maybe a stone or so. They give him the ha-ha, see?"

"No," said the lieutenant. "I don't, but the hell with it. Where's the note?"

Corporal Denny said plaintively, "What note?"

"The suicide-note. They always leave a note, or perhaps a few letters, telling the world what's wrong with it."

"There wasn't none this time, Lootenant. He just jumped out the winder without no note, no letters, no nothing. Holy cow, maybe he was in a real big hurry."

"Don't say *holy cow;* you sound like an overgrown kid. This was everything in his pockets?"

Corporal Denny looked aggrieved, but he said, "Yeah. That there little book was in his hand."

"All right. Go give your report to Baker. I'll check it later."

"Sure, Lootenant." Corporal Denny saluted—less than snappily—

and left. To Sergeant Baker, in the outer office, he said, "Holy cow, what's biting Steve May? The Lootenant been having another one of them fights with his old lady?"

Sergeant Baker said, "What'd'ya mean, *another* one? I didn't know they'd ever got finished with the first one."

It wasn't a particularly brilliant sally, but a superior is a superior, and rank has its privileges. Corporal James Denny laughed inordinately.

SO THERE wasn't any suicide-note, eh? Lieutenant Steven May picked up the deceased's wallet and went through it. Eighty-four dollars and the usual conglomeration of cards, licenses, photographs; the odds and ends that a man accumulates as the years go by. The lieutenant finished with the wallet and took up the check-book. He whistled softly at the total. Why should anybody with that kind of a balance want to take off? Evidently, the suicide had made his mark in his time, whether or not his latest device was a pickle.

There was a key-ring with seven keys; a dollar and sixteen cents in change, a white handkerchief; a pocket-comb; two street-car checks; a small pocket-knife. a book of matches; four cigarettes in a delapidated pack; a stub of pencil; an envelope containing a bill from some chemical supply house; a wrist-watch—now broken.

Nothing to indicate reason for self destruction.

The lieutenant yawned and picked up the pamphlet the scientist had held in his hand at the time of the fatal leap. He wondered if he should phone Martha and apologize—but that could wait. He still thought she'd started it that morning.

The paper was of a variety the lieutenant had never seen before, heavy, soft texture, a new type ripple finish; evidently some new departure in the paper manufacturing trade.

He began reading idly, skipping the heads and getting to the body type.

First you must realize that much of what you have heard and even read about husbands is erroneous. They are neither the stupid brutes described by some, nor the gentle, easily-trained and handsome fellows gushed over by others. Largely, husbands are what you, yourself, make them.

There is no basis for the charge that they are unpleasantly odorous. If you keep your husband neat and clean, giving him a bath at least once a week, there will be no cause for complaint on this score.

Nor are husbands necessarily quarrelsome. True, if you have sev-

eral about the house and give them nothing with which to entertain themselves, growing, scratching, fisticuffs and biting will sometimes ensue. This, of course, does not apply to persons having but one husband in their home.

Lieutenant Steven May grunted and turned the pamphlet over to look again at the cover. "The Care And Feeding Of Husbands, by Patricia Glorm, XVIII."

He grumbled deprecatingly and turned back to the interior and to a new page.

Many make the mistake of feeding their new husband nothing but the scraps from the table. While some manage in this manner for indefinite periods, we cannot recommend the practice. For one thing, the poor fellow may well receive short shift on days in which your own appetite is more than usual. Then, too, at one meal he may receive a toothsome meaty bone and at the next become sorely disappointed at lesser fare. On such occasions his howls and whines may prove both distressing and aggravating, and it is hard to remember that the fault is yours rather than his.

No, long years of experience have well proven that the husband who is fed a special husband-ration and but once a day, is in the long run happier and consequently gives more pleasure to his owner.

We strongly recommend Glorms Meal (or pellets) for all husbands. Glorms supplies the following guaranteed analysis:

Protein, not less than twenty-five percent; fat, not less than six percent; fiber, not more than five percent; ash, not more than ten percent.

LIEUTENANT May shifted himself uncomfortably in his swivel-chair and turned to the title leaf of the little pamphlet. It didn't tell him any more about the contents than the cover. The publishing-house was unknown to him and where the date of publication *should* have been was the figure 1988, which, of course, didn't make sense.

"I don't get it," he said aloud.

He flicked through the pages again and came up with the chapter title, "First Day In the New Home."

Always remember that when your new husband comes from the rearing-pens to his new home the poor tike is undergoing what to him is a terrifying strain. For the first time in his life he is leaving his brothers, his playmates, and his kindly trainers behind and has been brought to an environment that, to say the least, is strange to

him. Understandable, indeed, is the fact that he may take days before he is used to you and to his new home. Most likely he will spend his first hours cowering under the bed or behind some other shelter.

Be gentle with the poor anxious fellow. Speak pleasantly and show him you are his friend. Such initial kindness will pay large dividends in love and affection in the future. Above all, be sure at this time not to scold or beat the bewildered tike. He is afraid and lonesome, but still doing what he can to please.

All husbands, today, come from the rearing-pens fully housebroken. However, it is easily understood that under the stress of his strange surroundings he might make a mistake once or twice. If he continues to offend in this manner, after a few days punish him lightly. A rolled up newspaper can be satisfactorily used as an instrument of chastisement. The size of the paper and the noise it makes as you gently strike him, impresses and frightens the new husband more efficiently than if you were to deal him heavy—and heartless—blows.

As soon as possible, after the arrival of your new husband from the pens, you should introduce him to his little nook or corner where he is to stay and which he can call his own. Many choose to provide him with a rug or an old blanket upon which to lie; however, if your apartment is properly-heated this is not necessary. He will soon learn that this is his sanctum and will retreat to it when scolded or frightened.

Lieutenant May grunted and turned two or three pages, skimming, reading a paragraph here, a sentence there.

Above all, remember that when you are in another person's house you must not pat or play with her husband, unless she gives you permission. Perhaps she is training him for some special purpose and wants to raise him as a "one-woman-husband."

"Huh!" the lieutenant snorted.

Every husband should have a toy with which to play; a ball, some blocks, some innocent little trinket with which to while away the hours.

If you have a yard, or other suitable area for his exercise, provide him with a box on which to climb and jump. This will afford him considerable amusement and give him a keen appetite for his food.

Steven May finally stopped and tossed the pamphlet to his desk when he came to the chapter, "Worming Your Husband." He asked himself disgustedly, "This is humor? Who in hell publishes things like that?" For some reason he felt uncomfortable.

Suddenly, something that Denny had said half-returned to him. He reached out and picked up the phone. "Let me have the squad-room, Baker," he asked.

A voice answered presently, "Suicide Detail, squad-room."

"This is Lieutenant May. Is Jimmy Denny there?"

"This is Denny, Lootenant."

"Listen, Denny. This Doctor Holliday—what was it he was working on?"

"A time-machine, Lootenant."

"What do you mean by a *time-machine?* What's a time-machine?"

"Holy cow, Lootenant, I don't know. How'd I know? All I know is he had all these guys—this was in the papers last week, see? Well, he had all these guys there to see this here experiment and he turns the thing on and he's got this little box like, see? Well, he turns the thing on and opens the box and there suppose to be something in it from the future, see? Well, he gets maybe a pint of water the first time and all these guys laugh, see? Then he works the thing over and over again, and every time he gets something like water—or maybe a rock, or a piece a wood, or something like that, see? He gets real mad at them and starts yelling like crazy when they laugh. He says all this stuff is coming from the future and if they'll hang around long enough while he keeps trying, sooner or later he'll get something to prove it. But they all give him the ha ha and leave, see?"

The lieutenant said softly, "I think I'm beginning to." He hung up and his hand went out, hesitatingly, almost reluctantly, for the pamphlet again. He turned to the title-page; the copyright-date was 1988.

CORPORAL James Denny came into the office at a pace inconsistent with his bulk. His eyes were wild and his hands flailed excitedly. "Holy cow," he yelped, "holy cow, you know what happened?"

Sergeant Baker looked up at him. "Simmer down, Denny," he said. "It ain't—"

"Listen," Denny yelped, "it's the Lootenant. You know what he just went and done? Holy cow!"

★

(Continued from second cover)

WINSTON K. MARKS

Being something of a jack-of-all-trades makes a fine background for a writing career, and 38 year old Mr. Marks has managed to squeeze in such various occupations as aircraft pilot, bellhop, columnist, electronic technician, and grocery clerk, as well as fliers into the editorial, advertising, and sales fields. His first appearance was with fantasy, but he has since specialized in science fiction, both serious and whimsical.

M. C. PEASE

In "The Way of Decision", which appeared in our first edition, Mr. Pease presented a concept of family-living quite different from today, but which is more in accord with the necessities of a high technology civilization. In a sense, that story can be considered a sequel to his present offering, "Peace Agent". Mr. Pease has been appearing in science fiction since 1949, and although his stories do not appear very frequently, they are usually remembered.

MACK REYNOLDS

The present type of story, of which Mr. Reynolds has written quite a number, might be said to have evolved out of the old "O. Henry" genre. There is a difference, however; here there is no attempt to surprise the reader with a sudden, overwhelming revelation at the very end, or a breathtaking "switcheroo". Most readers will be able to guess the ending. But the point is that the story's punch does not depend upon your being kept in the dark; it is the development of the single idea that makes for the punch, and we think this tale will be remembered as one of the author's best.

ROBERT F. YOUNG

Science fiction readers differ from readers of other types of fiction in that a sizeable number of science-fictionists write to editors frequently, telling them which stories in the current issue they liked best. It isn't often that a writer will take "first place" over notable competition upon his first appearance in a particular magazine. Mr. Young, whose debut was in 1953, did that very thing this year.