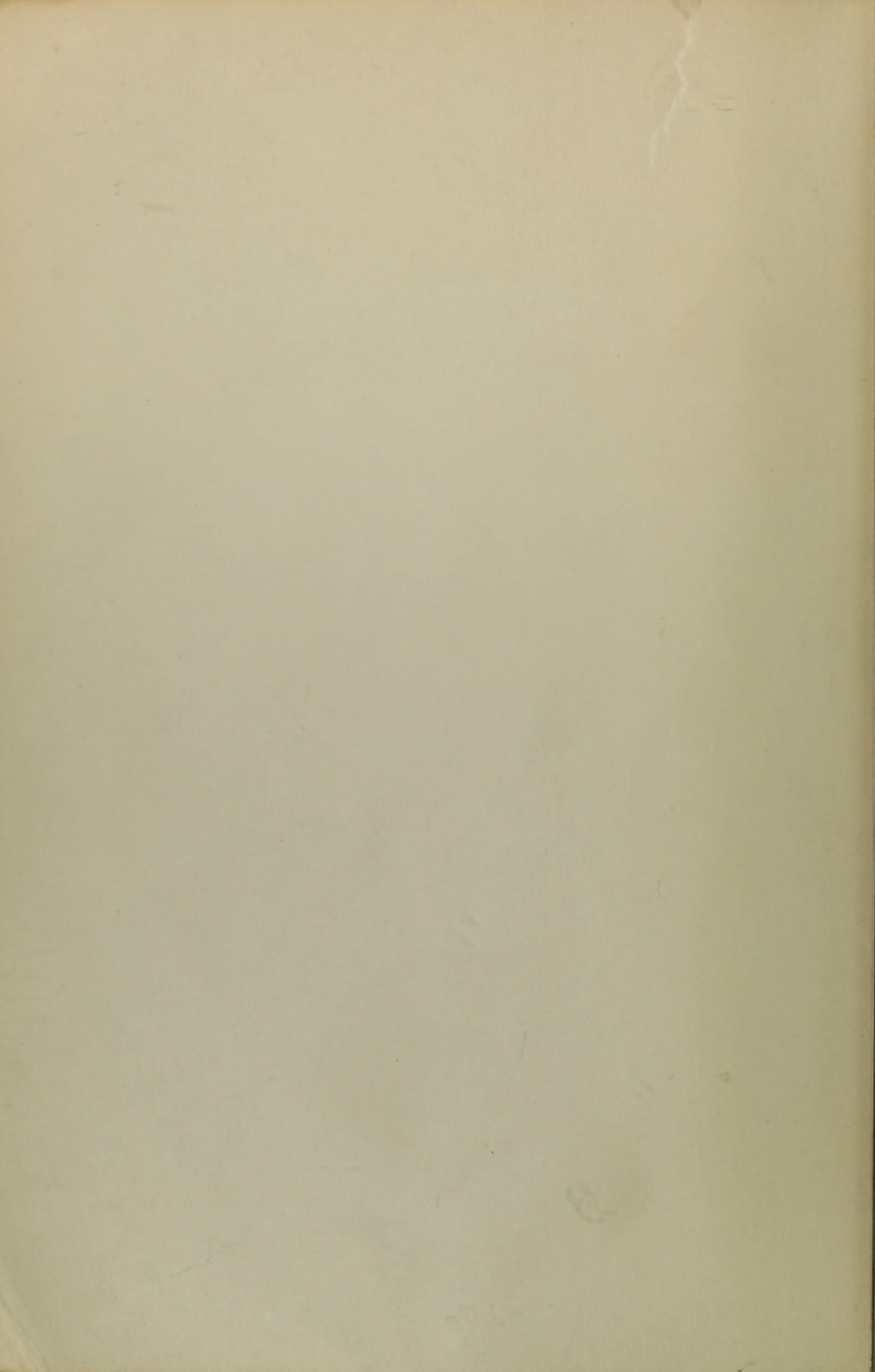


Robots, Androids, and Mechanical Oddities

The Science Fiction of Philip K. Dick

Edited by Patricia S. Warrick and Martin H. Greenberg





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THE SCIENCE FICTION
OF PHILIP K. DICK

EDITED BY PATRICIA S. WARRICK

AND MARTIN H. GREENBERG

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INTRODUCTION

What is a human? How is a human different from a robot or an android? Philip K. Dick never stopped pursuing this question. Whenever he captured an answer, he put it in a story, left it there, and went in pursuit of another answer. If the next answer he found contradicted the last one, he was not disturbed. He lived comfortably with paradox and complexity as long as he was free to continue seeking answers. He believed this cosmos where we humans exist to be so mysterious that even a lifetime of study would not reward one with its secrets, but no matter. The journey itself was the reward.

This anthology of Dick stories about mechanical constructs allows the reader to travel back in time to the early 1950s and journey through the years with the author, watching his imagination at work spilling out a shower of future possibilities. The stories are amazingly prophetic. Dick sensed from its very beginnings the powerful effect that machine intelligence would have on our culture, particularly in its military and political applications.

As a teenager during World War II, Dick watched with fascinated horror the widespread destruction and the German atrocities. When he began writing in 1952, he wrote about war, and in 1962 a novel about war, *The Man in the High Castle*, first brought him recognition as a serious writer. He regularly used a postholocaust setting where men struggled to live in a wasteland of ashes. Ironically they often went right on fighting even after they had almost destroyed themselves, and they devised diabolical electronic machines to aid them in their self-destruction. Read today, those tales of the electronic battlefields Dick imagined thirty years ago sound like pages out of a book by the military describing the weapons they plan to build during the next decade. Almost half of the stories in this anthology are about war and political violence because Dick explored that topic again and again during the decade of the 1950s, the period when three quarters of his 115 short stories were written.

What is real and what is mere illusion? This question intrigued Dick as much as the question of who is human and who is merely a machine masquerading as a human. The two questions are closely related. During the decade of the 1960s Dick began to turn from the world of political violence to explore man's inner world. He had learned, he reported, that

violence comes not from “out there” but from the human heart. The outer is a projection of the inner. The mechanical person devoid of emotions, the android, will create violence around him.

Can the commonplace reality projected by the mind be trusted as true reality? Dick’s answer to that question was immediate. No. Where, then, does true reality lie? How can we reach it? Dick proposed several paths of escape from the everyday illusions most of us thoughtlessly accept as reality. Through dreams we can catch glimpses of true or cosmic reality. Both mental illness and drugs may free us temporarily. And religion—Dick’s last path of escape—surprised many of his readers when his final trilogy of novels appeared. *Valis* is the dramatization of a mystical experience he underwent in 1974. When the novel appeared in 1980, it disturbed those who preferred his political fiction and hailed *Dr. Bloodmoney* as his finest novel. *The Divine Invasion*, which followed in 1981, expanded on the theological views Dick first presented in *Valis*. His unexpected death on March 2, 1982, shocked those who admired his fiction, a circle now much wider than dedicated science fiction fans. Then came the last strange event that completed the life of a very strange man. *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* was published posthumously, and it is the story of a deeply religious man who communicates with his close friends after death.

The religious fiction Dick wrote at the end of his career was no surprise if one had read his early fiction carefully. A religious visionary appeared in “The Skull” (1952) and *The World Jones Made* (1956). His religious vision was actually closely connected with his view of mechanical intelligence. He came to conceive of the universe in dualistic terms as a cosmic struggle between good and evil. The good is represented by love, the power that binds all humans together, and its opposite, evil, lives in that mechanical entity unable to experience empathy or love. His first dramatization of this evil power, *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965), pictures a mechanical devil who returns from his economic exploitations in outer space with mechanical teeth, eyes, and hands. As Dick often commented, the devil has a metal face.

How does one remain human? How does one resist the powerful forces that constantly attempt to turn a human being into a mechanical creature programmed by society to respond only in certain manners? Dick answered that question both in his fiction and in his life. To be human, people must maintain intellectual and spiritual freedom at all costs. They must refuse obedience to any ideology; they must remain unpredictable, unfettered by patterns and routines; they must constantly discard the answers they have found and set out again to seek new ones. They must make mistakes. Machines, not humans, are predictable, repetitious, free from errors.

Children are important characters in Dick’s fiction. They often are disturbed children, bright children, unusual children, fearful children—much

like the child Dick must have been, according to his accounts. But they always survive: for example, Edie and her brother Bill in *Dr. Bloodmoney* and Marion Fields in *Vulcan's Hammer*. They symbolize the hope of growth and change in human nature; the most inspired appearance of this symbol is certainly Emmanuel in *The Divine Invasion*.

Where are we to draw the line between the animate and the inanimate? How are we to separate living from nonliving creatures? It cannot be done, declares Dick in all his fiction. No such tidy categories are available in this shifting cosmos where the only certainty is change. Living entities are constantly in the process of becoming reified, turned into things; nonliving entities become animated and take on the qualities of living creatures. Hoppy in *Dr. Bloodmoney* stands as Dick's most powerful symbol of the merging of the animate and the inanimate.

Thus in his short stories and novels, Dick does not divide his characters neatly into humans and machines. Instead, all manner of characters come tumbling out of his imagination: humans who behave like machines, robots that think they are human, androids that long to own electric pets, doors that talk, suitcases that give psychiatric counseling, taxicabs that chat with their passengers. We meet electronic vermin traps chasing rats through West Coast ruins and metal singing commercials. There are papoola, swibbles, swabbles—the endless evolution of mechanical oddities shocks and delights. For Dick, everything came alive. He saw his environment through the eyes of primitive animism.

Often the fictional worlds Dick creates are frightening; no other contemporary writer so consistently and brilliantly creates metaphorical visions of the fears that constantly haunt each of us as we search for meaning and certainty in our atomic age. But often, too, his fictional worlds are very funny. Critics who claim his humor is black have not read him well. Black humor sometimes—yes. But more often just pure laughter and delight at the amazing world we have built for ourselves. And often, too, laughter at himself. Philip K. Dick the writer never tired of poking fun at the foibles of Phil Dick the man.

Space limits us in the anthology to less than half of Dick's stories about robots and androids. We have chosen ones that represent his range of attitudes toward mechanical entities. Some stories are serious, some humorous. None, we believe, will fail to delight.

THE LITTLE MOVEMENT

A child at play with his toys, imagining they are live. What more peaceful scene? Usually yes, but not in Dick's fictional worlds. The child lives in a frightening realm, powerless either to understand or resist the forces that manipulate him. "The Little Movement," published in 1952, is the first Dick story where a robot appears. This robot is apparently a harmless toy soldier. But any soldier—toy or real—uses guns and tanks, and what begins as imagination or play, Dick tells us again and again, ends as reality. The adult builds mechanical inventions that trap the child in a world where, fragile and vulnerable as he is, he cannot cope.

In the opening scene of this story Dick accomplishes what he saw as a major goal of his fiction: to objectify the archetypal, to make visible the inner content of the psyche. Here it is our fear of the mechanisms we cannot resist making. A man sits on the pavement, trying to hold down the lid of a Pandora's box from which militaristic constructions want to escape. He does not succeed. Following the little metal soldier in this early story, an endless stream of mechanical creatures tumble and shriek out of Dick's imagination. We will meet them in the stories that follow.

The ambiguous ending of "The Little Movement" was to become a Dick trademark. He believed that beyond the commonplace, apparently serene surface of our world, powerful forces struggle. Which force wins? Which ought to win? Dick refuses to give facile answers. Or if he provides an answer, he later snatches it back, forcing us to look further for the truth. His characters and thus his readers, too, always live in a world of uncertainty.

This is not the first Dick story but a very early one. He was twenty-three years old when he wrote it. He began his professional writing career in 1952 when he published four stories, including "The Little Movement." After a brief first marriage in 1948, he married Kleo Apostolides in 1950 and they lived in Berkeley, where he worked in a music store. His publishing success in 1952 led him to leave the music store and begin full-time writing. His output of short stories in the next three years was prodigious—over seventy of them. Kleo says during that same time he wrote a number of mainstream stories be-

cause his first ambition was to become a writer in this genre, not in science fiction. None of these mainstream stories was ever published. The manuscripts have disappeared.

The man was sitting on the pavement, holding the box shut with his hands. Impatiently the lid of the box moved, straining up against his fingers.

"All right," the man murmured. Sweat rolled down his face, damp, heavy sweat. He opened the box slowly, holding his fingers over the opening. From inside a metallic drumming came, a low insistent vibration, rising frantically as the sunlight filtered into the box.

A small head appeared, round and shiny, and then another. More heads jerked into view, peering, craning to see. "I'm first," one head shrilled. There was a momentary squabble, then quick agreement.

The man sitting on the pavement lifted out the little metal figure with trembling hands. He put it down on the pavement and began to wind it awkwardly, thick-fingered. It was a brightly painted soldier with helmet and gun, standing at attention. As the man turned the key the little soldier's arms went up and down. It struggled eagerly.

Along the pavement two women were coming, talking together. They glanced down curiously at the man sitting on the pavement, at the box and the shiny figure in the man's hands.

"Fifty cents," the man muttered. "Get your child something to—"

"Wait!" a faint metallic voice came. "Not them!"

The man broke off abruptly. The two women looked at each other and then at the man and the little metal figure. They went hurriedly on.

The little soldier gazed up and down the street, at the cars, the shoppers. Suddenly it trembled, rasping in a low, eager voice.

The man swallowed. "Not the kid," he said thickly. He tried to hold on to the figure, but metal fingers dug quickly into his hand. He gasped.

"Tell them to stop!" the figure shrilled. "Make them stop!" The metal figure pulled away and clicked across the pavement, its legs stiff and rigid.

The boy and his father slowed to a stop, looking down at it with interest. The sitting man smiled feebly; he watched the figure approach them, turning from side to side, its arms going up and down.

"Get something for your boy. An exciting playmate. Keep him company."

The father grinned, watching the figure coming up to his shoe. The little soldier bumped into the shoe. It wheezed and clicked. It stopped moving.

"Wind it up!" the boy cried.

His father picked up the figure. "How much?"

"Fifty cents." The salesman rose unsteadily, clutching the box against him. "Keep him company. Amuse him."

The father turned the figure over. "You sure you want it, Bobby?"

"Sure! Wind it up!" Bobby reached for the little soldier. "Make it go!"

"I'll buy it," the father said. He reached into his pocket and handed the man a dollar bill.

Clumsily, staring away, the salesman made change.

The situation was excellent.

The little figure lay quietly, thinking everything over. All circumstances had conspired to bring about optimum solution. The Child might not have wanted to stop, or the Adult might not have had any money. Many things might have gone wrong; it was awful even to think about them. But everything had been perfect.

The little figure gazed up in pleasure, where it lay in the back of the car. It had correctly interpreted certain signs: the Adults were in control, and so the Adults had money. They had power, but their power made it difficult to get them. Their power, and their size. With the Children it was different. *They* were small, and it was easier to talk to them. They accepted everything they heard, and they did what they were told. Or so it was said at the factory.

The little metal figure lay, lost in dreamy, delicious thoughts.

The boy's heart was beating quickly. He ran upstairs and pushed the door open. After he had closed the door carefully he went to the bed and sat down. He looked down at what he held in his hands.

"What's your name?" he said. "What are you called?"

The metal figure did not answer.

"I'll introduce you around. You must get to know everybody. You'll like it here."

Bobby laid the figure down on the bed. He ran to the closet and dragged out a bulging carton of toys.

"This is Bonzo," he said. He held up a pale stuffed rabbit. "And Fred." He turned the rubber pig around for the soldier to see. "And Teddo, of course. This is Teddo."

He carried Teddo to the bed and laid him beside the soldier. Teddo lay silent, gazing up at the ceiling with glassy eyes. Teddo was a brown bear, with wisps of straw poking out of his joints.

"And what shall we call you?" Bobby said. "I think we should have a council and decide." He paused, considering. "I'll wind you up so we can all see how you work."

He began to wind the figure carefully, turning it over on its face. When the key was tight he bent down and set the figure on the floor.

"Go on," Bobby said. The metal figure stood still. Then it began to whirr

and click. Across the floor it went, walking with stiff jerks. It changed directly suddenly and headed towards the door. At the door it stopped. Then it turned to some building blocks lying about and began to push them into a heap.

Bobby watched with interest. The little figure struggled with the blocks, piling them into a pyramid. At last it climbed up on to the blocks and turned the key in the lock.

Bobby scratched his head, puzzled. "Why did you do that?" he said. The figure climbed back down and came across the room towards Bobby, clicking and whirring. Bobby and the stuffed animals regarded it with surprise and wonder. The figure reached the bed and halted.

"Lift me up!" it cried impatiently, in its thin, metallic voice. "Hurry up! Don't just sit there!"

Bobby's eyes grew large. He stared, blinking. The stuffed animals said nothing.

"Come on!" the little soldier shouted.

Bobby reached down. The soldier seized his hand tightly. Bobby cried out.

"Be still," the soldier commanded. "Lift me up to the bed. I have things to discuss with you, things of great importance."

Bobby put it down on the bed beside him. The room was silent, except for the faint whirring of the metal figure.

"This is a nice room," the soldier said presently. "A very nice room."

Bobby drew back a little on the bed.

"What's the matter?" the soldier said sharply, turning his head and staring up.

"Nothing."

"What is it?" The little figure peered at him. "You're not afraid of me, are you?"

Bobby shifted uncomfortably.

"Afraid of *me*?" The soldier laughed. "I'm only a little metal man, only six inches high." It laughed again and again. It ceased abruptly. "Listen. I'm going to live here with you for awhile. I won't hurt you; you can count on that. I'm a friend—a good friend."

It peered up a little anxiously. "But I want you to do things for me. You won't mind doing things, will you? Tell me: how many are there of them in your family?"

Bobby hesitated.

"Come, how many of *them*? Adults."

"Three. . . . Daddy, and Mother, and Foxie."

"Foxie? Who is that?"

"My grandmother."

"Three of them." The figure nodded. "I see. Only three. But others come from time to time? Other Adults visit this house?"

Bobby nodded.

"Three. That's not too many. Three are not so much of a problem. According to the factory—"

It broke off. "Good. Listen to me. I don't want you to say anything to them about me. I'm *your* friend, your secret friend. They won't be interested in hearing about me. I'm not going to hurt you, remember. You have nothing to fear. I'm going to live right here, with you.

It watched the boy intently, lingering over the last words.

"I'm going to be a sort of private teacher. I'm going to teach you things, things to do, things to say. Just like a tutor should. Will you like that?"

Silence.

"Of course you'll like it. We could even begin now. Perhaps you want to know the proper way to address me. Do you want to learn that?"

"Address you?" Bobby stared down.

"You are to call me, . . ." The figure paused, hesitating. It drew itself together, proudly. "You are to call me—My Lord."

Bobby leaped up, his hands to his face.

"My Lord," the figure said relentlessly. "My Lord. You don't really need to start now. I'm tired." The figure sagged. "I'm almost run down. Please wind me up again in about an hour."

The figure began to stiffen. It gazed up at the boy. "In an hour. Will you wind me tight? You will, won't you?"

Its voice trailed off into silence.

Bobby nodded slowly. "All right," he murmured. "All right."

It was Tuesday. The window was open, and warm sunlight came drifting into the room. Bobby was away at school; the house was silent and empty. The stuffed animals were back in the closet.

My Lord lay on the dresser, propped up, looking out of the window, resting contentedly.

There came a faint humming sound. Something small flew suddenly into the room. The small object circled a few times and then came slowly to rest on the white cloth of the dresser-top, beside the metal soldier. It was a tiny toy airplane.

"How is it going?" the airplane said. "Is everything all right so far?"

"Yes." My Lord said. "And the others?"

"Not so good. Only a handful of them managed to reach Children."

The soldier gasped in pain.

"The largest group fell into the hands of Adults. As you know, that is not satisfactory. It is very difficult to control Adults. They break away, or they wait until the spring is unwound—"

"I know," My Lord nodded glumly.

"The news will most certainly continue to be bad. We must be prepared for it."

"There's more. Tell me!"

"Frankly, about half of them have already been destroyed, stepped on by Adults. A dog is said to have broken up one. There's no doubt of it: our only hope is through Children. We must succeed there, if at all."

The little soldier nodded. The messenger was right, of course. They had never considered that a direct attack against the ruling race, the Adults, would win. Their size, their power, their enormous stride would protect them. The toy vendor was a good example. He had tried to break away many times, tried to fool them and get loose. Part of the group had to be wound at all times to watch him, and there was that frightening day when he failed to wind them tight, hoping that—

"You're giving the Child instructions?" the airplane asked. "You're preparing him?"

"Yes. He understands that I'm going to be here. Children seem to be like that. As a subject race they have been taught to accept; it's all they can do. I am another teacher, invading his life, giving him orders. Another voice, telling him that—"

"You've started the second phase?"

"So soon?" My Lord was amazed. "Why? Is it necessary, so quickly?"

"The factory is becoming anxious. Most of the group has been destroyed, as I said."

"I know." My Lord nodded absently. "We expected it, we planned with realism, knowing the chances." It strode back and forth on the dresser-top. "Naturally, many would fall into their hands, the Adults. The Adults are everywhere, in all key positions, important stations. It's the psychology of the ruling race to control each phase of social life. But as long as those who reach Children survive—"

"You were not supposed to know, but outside of yourself, there's only three left. Just three."

"*Three?*" My Lord stared.

"Even those who reached Children have been destroyed right and left. The situation is tragic. That's why they want you to get started with the second phase."

My Lord clenched its fists, its features locked in iron horror. Only three left. . . . What hopes they had entertained for his band, venturing out, so little, so dependent on the weather—and on being wound up tight. If only they were larger. The Adults were so huge.

But the Children. What had gone wrong? What had happened to their one chance, their one fragile hope?

"How did it happen? What occurred?"

"No one knows. The factory is in a turmoil. And now they're running short of materials. Some of the machines have broken down and nobody knows how to run them." The airplane coasted towards the edge of the dresser. "I must be getting back. I'll report later to see how you're getting on."

The airplane flew up into the air and out through the open window. My Lord watched it, dazed.

What could have happened? They had been so certain about the Children. It was all planned—

It meditated.

That evening the boy sat at the table, staring absently at his geography book. He shifted unhappily, turning the pages. At last he closed the book. He slid from his chair and went to the closet. He was reaching into the closet for the bulging carton when a voice came drifting to him from the dresser top.

"Later. You can play with them later. I must discuss something with you."

The boy turned back to the table, his face listless and tired. He nodded, sinking down against the table, his head on his arm.

"You're not asleep, are you?" My Lord said.

"No."

"Then listen. Tomorrow when you leave school I want you to go to a certain address. It's not far from the school. It's a toy store. Perhaps you know it. Don's Toyland."

"I haven't any money."

"It doesn't matter. This has all been arranged for long in advance. Go to Toyland and say to the man: 'I was told to come for the package'. Can you remember that? 'I was told to come for the package'."

"What's in the package?"

"Some tools, and some toys for you. To go along with me." The metal figure rubbed its hands together. "Nice modern toys, two toy tanks and a machine gun. And some spare parts for—"

There were footsteps on the stairs outside.

"Don't forget," My Lord said nervously. "You'll do it? This phase of the plan is extremely important."

It wrung its hands together in anxiety.

The boy brushed the last strands of hair into place. He put his cap on and picked up his school books. Outside, the morning was grey and dismal. Rain fell, slowly, soundlessly.

Suddenly the boy set his books down again. He went to the closet and reached inside. His fingers closed over Teddo's leg, and he drew him out.

The boy sat on the bed, holding Teddo against his cheek. For a long time he sat with the stuffed bear, oblivious to everything else.

Abruptly he looked towards the dresser. My Lord was lying outstretched, silent. Bobby went hurriedly back to the closet and laid Teddo into the carton. He crossed the room to the door. As he opened the door the little metal figure on the dresser stirred.

"Remember, Don's Toyland. . . ."

The door closed. My Lord heard the Child going heavily down the stairs, clumping unhappily. My Lord exulted. It was working out all right. Bobby

wouldn't want to do it, but he would. And once the tools and parts and weapons were safely inside there wouldn't be any chance of failure.

Perhaps they would capture a second factory. Or, better yet, build dies and machines themselves to turn out larger Lords. Yes, if only they could be larger, just a little larger. They were so small, so very tiny, only a few inches high. Would the Movement fail, pass away, because they were too tiny, too fragile?

But with tanks and guns! Yet, of all the packages so carefully secreted in the toyshop, this would be the only one, the only one to be—

Something moved.

My Lord turned quickly. From the closet Teddo came, lumbering slowly.

"Bonzo," he said. "Bonzo, go over by the window. I think it came in that way, if I'm not mistaken."

The stuffed rabbit reached the window-sill in one skip. He huddled, gazing outside. "Nothing yet."

"Good." Teddo moved towards the dresser. He looked up. "Little Lord, please come down. You've been up there much too long."

My Lord stared. Fred, the rubber pig, was coming out of the closet. Puffing, he reached the dresser. "I'll go up and get it," he said. "I don't think it will come down by itself. We'll have to help it."

"What are you doing?" My Lord cried. The rubber pig was settling himself on his haunches, his ears down flat against his head. "What's happening?"

Fred leaped. And at the same time Teddo began to climb swiftly, catching on to the handles of the dresser. Expertly, he gained the top. My Lord was edging towards the wall, glancing down at the floor, far below.

"So this is what happened to the others," it murmured. "I understand. An Organization, waiting for us. Then everything is known."

It leaped.

When they had gathered up the pieces and had got them under the carpet, Teddo said:

"That part was easy. Let's hope the rest won't be any harder."

"What do you mean?" Fred said.

"The package of toys. The tanks and guns."

"Oh, we can handle them. Remember how we helped next door when that first little Lord, the first one we ever encountered—"

Teddo laughed. "It did put up quite a fight. It was tougher than this one. But we had the panda bears from across the way."

"We'll do it again," Fred said, "I'm getting so I rather enjoy it."

"Me, too," Bonzo said from the window.

THE DEFENDERS

"Things are seldom what they seem/Skim milk masquerades as cream." This line from Gilbert and Sullivan's H. M. S. Pinafore is a favorite with Dick because it captures an idea that weaves through all his fiction. Nothing turns out to be as it first appears. One of the first appearances of the theme is in "The Defenders," where robots called leadies continue fighting the war between the United States and Russia after bombs have so devastated the earth that humans are forced to live underground.

The possibility of a nuclear war relentlessly haunts and horrifies Dick, although only in one novel, Dr. Bloodmoney, does he picture the actual falling of the bomb. Typically he creates a postholocaust world of ash and desolation where a few tattered humans and mutant life forms struggle to survive. This gray wasteland stretches across the decaying remnants of West Coast suburbia, as it does in this story, or across the bleak landscape of Mars, as it does in his brilliant Martian novels, The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch and Martian Time-Slip.

Dick's political concerns and his rebellious spirit were nurtured by the social conscience of Berkeley where he grew up. He was opposed in principle to all authority figures, just as he was opposed to war and violence. He totally disapproved of the testing of nuclear bombs in the 1950s and of their inventor, Edward Teller, who was the prototype for the mad scientist in Dr. Bloodmoney. Dick's painful sensitivity to the forces of irrationality that threaten to overwhelm man's reason seems to reflect his own struggle with madness. In this story he pictures robots whose logical minds recognize the absurdity of war, robots who refuse to participate in the fear and hate that drive humans to destroy themselves. He later expanded "The Defenders" into The Penultimate Truth (1964).

Taylor sat back in his chair reading the morning newspaper. The warm kitchen and the smell of coffee blended with the comfort of not having to go to work. This was his Rest Period, the first for a long time, and he was glad of it. He folded the second section back, sighing with contentment.

"What is it?" Mary said, from the stove.

"They pasted Moscow again last night." Taylor nodded his head in approval. "Gave it a real pounding. One of those R-H bombs. It's about time."

He nodded again, feeling the full comfort of the kitchen, the presence of his plump, attractive wife, the breakfast dishes and coffee. This was relaxation. And the war news was good, good and satisfying. He could feel a justifiable glow at the news, a sense of pride and personal accomplishment. After all, he was an integral part of the war program, not just another factory worker lugging a cart of scrap, but a technician, one of those who designed and planned the nerve-trunk of the war.

"It says they have the new subs almost perfected. Wait until they get *those* going." He smacked his lips with anticipation. "When they start shelling from underwater, the Soviets are sure going to be surprised."

"They're doing a wonderful job," Mary agreed vaguely. "Do you know what we saw today? Our team is getting a leady to show to the school children. I saw the leady, but only for a moment. It's good for the children to see what their contributions are going for, don't you think?"

She looked around at him.

"A leady," Taylor murmured. He put the newspaper slowly down. "Well, make sure it's decontaminated properly. We don't want to take any chances."

"Oh, they always bathe them when they're brought down from the surface," Mary said. "They wouldn't think of letting them down without a bath. Would they?" She hesitated, thinking back. "Don, you know, it makes me remember—"

He nodded. "I know."

He knew what she was thinking. Once in the very first weeks of the war, before everyone had been evacuated from the surface, they had seen a hospital train discharging the wounded, people who had been showered with sleet. He remembered the way they had looked, the expression on their faces, or as much of their faces as was left. It had not been a pleasant sight.

There had been a lot of that at first, in the early days before the transfer to undersurface was complete. There had been a lot, and it hadn't been very difficult to come across it.

Taylor looked up at his wife. She was thinking too much about it, the last few months. They all were.

"Forget it," he said, "It's all in the past. There isn't anybody up there now but the ladies, and they don't mind."

"But just the same, I hope they're careful when they let one of them down here. If one was still hot—"

He laughed, pushing himself away from the table. "Forget it. This is a wonderful moment; I'll be home for the next two shifts. Nothing to do but sit around and take things easy. Maybe we can take in a show, OK?"

"A show? Do we have to? I don't like to look at all the destruction, the ruins. Sometimes I see some place I remember, like San Francisco. They showed a shot of San Francisco, the bridge broken and fallen in the water, and I got upset. I don't like to watch."

"But don't you want to know what's going on? No human beings are getting hurt, you know."

"But it's so awful!" Her face was set and stained. "Please, no, Don."

Don Taylor picked up his newspaper sullenly. "All right, but there isn't a hell of a lot else to do. And don't forget, *their* cities are getting it even worse."

She nodded. Taylor turned the rough, thin sheets of newspaper. His good mood had soured on him. Why did she have to fret all the time? They were pretty well off, as things went. You couldn't expect to have everything perfect, living undersurface, with an artificial sun and artificial food. Naturally it was a strain, not seeing the sky or being able to go anyplace or see anything other than metal walls, great roaring factories, the plant-yards, barracks. But it was better than being on surface. And some day it would end and they could return. Nobody *wanted* to live this way, but it was necessary.

He turned the page angrily and the poor paper ripped. Damn it, the paper was getting worse quality all the time, bad print, yellow tint—

Well, they needed everything for the war program. He ought to know that. Wasn't he one of the planners?

He excused himself and went into the other room. The bed was still unmade. They had better get it in shape before the seventh hour inspection. There was a one unit fine—

The vidphone rang. He halted. Who would it be? He went over and clicked it on.

"Taylor?" the face said, forming into place. It was an old face, gray and grim. "This is Moss. I'm sorry to bother you during Rest Period, but this thing has come up." He rattled papers. "I want you to hurry over here."

Taylor suffered. "What is it? There's no chance it could wait?" The calm gray eyes were studying him, expressionless, unjudging. "If you want me to come down to the lab," Taylor grumbled, "I suppose I can. I'll get my uniform—"

"No. Come as you are. And not to the lab. Meet me at second stage as soon as possible. It'll take you about a half hour, using the fast car up. I'll see you there."

The picture broke and Moss disappeared.

"What was it?" Mary said, at the door.

"Moss. He wants me for something."

"I knew this would happen."

"Well, you didn't want to do anything, anyhow. What does it matter?" His voice was bitter. "It's all the same, every day. I'll bring you back something. I'm going up to second stage. Maybe I'll be close enough to the surface to—"

"Don't! Don't bring me anything! Not from the surface!"

"All right, I won't. But of all the irrational nonsense—"

She watched him put on his boots without answering.

Moss nodded and Taylor fell in step with him, as the older man strode along. A series of loads were going up to the surface, blind cars clanking like ore trucks up the ramp, disappearing through the stage trap above them. Taylor watched the cars, heavy with tubular machinery of some sort, weapons new to him. Workers were everywhere, in the dark gray uniforms of the labor corps, loading, lifting, shouting back and forth. The stage was deafening with noise.

"We'll go up a way," Moss said, "where we can talk. This is no place to give you details."

They took an escalator up. The commercial lift fell behind them, and with it most of the crashing and booming. Soon they emerged on an observation platform, suspended on the side of the Tube, the vast tunnel leading to the surface, not more than half a mile above them now.

"My God!" Taylor said, looking down the tube involuntarily. "It's a long way down."

Moss laughed. "Don't look."

They opened a door and entered an office. Behind the desk, an officer was sitting, an officer of Internal Security. He looked up.

"I'll be right with you, Moss." He gazed at Taylor studying him. "You're a little ahead of time."

"This is Commander Franks," Moss said to Taylor. "He was the first to make the discovery. I was notified last night." He tapped a parcel he carried. "I was let in because of this."

Franks frowned at him and stood up. "We're going up to first stage. We can discuss it there."

"First stage?" Taylor repeated nervously. The three of them went down a side passage to a small lift. "I've never been up there. Is it all right? It's not radioactive, is it?"

"You're like everyone else," Franks said. "Old women afraid of burglars. No radiation leaks down to first stage. There's lead and rock, and what comes down the Tube is bathed."

"What's the nature of the problem?" Taylor asked. "I'd like to know something about it."

"In a moment."

They entered the lift and ascended. When they stepped out, they were in a

hall of soldiers, weapons and uniforms everywhere. Taylor blinked in surprise. So this was first stage, the closest undersurface level to the top! After this stage there was only rock, lead and rock, and the great tubes leading up like the burrows of earthworms. Lead and rock, and above that, where the tubes opened, the great expanse that no living being had seen for eight years, the vast endless ruin that had once been Man's home, the place where he had lived, eight years ago.

Now the surface was a lethal desert of slag and rolling clouds. Endless clouds drifted back and forth, blotting out the red sun. Occasionally something metallic stirred, moving through the remains of a city, threading its way across the tortured terrain of the countryside. A leady, a surface robot, immune to radiation, constructed with feverish haste in the last months before the cold war became literally hot.

Leadies, crawling along the ground, moving over the oceans or through the skies in slender, blackened craft, creatures that could exist where *no life* could remain, metal and plastic figures that waged a war Man had conceived, but which he could not fight himself. Human beings had invented war, invented and manufactured the weapons, even invented the players, the fighters, the actors of the war. But they themselves could not venture forth, could not wage it themselves. In all the world—in Russia, in Europe, America, Africa—no living human being remained. They were under the surface, in the deep shelters that had been carefully planned and built, even as the first bombs began to fall.

It was a brilliant idea and the only idea that could have worked. Up above, on the ruined, blasted surface of what had once been a living planet, the leady crawled and scurried and fought Man's war. And undersurface, in the depths of the planet, human beings toiled endlessly to produce the weapons to continue the fight, month by month, year by year.

"First stage," Taylor said. A strange ache went through him. "Almost to the surface."

"But not quite," Moss said.

Franks led them through the soldiers, over to one side, near the lip of the Tube.

"In a few minutes, a lift will bring something down to us from the surface," he explained. "You see, Taylor, every once in a while Security examines and interrogates a surface leady, one that has been above for a time, to find out certain things. A vidcall is sent up and contact is made with a field headquarters. We need this direct interview; we can't depend on vidscreen contact alone. The leadies are doing a good job, but we want to make certain that everything is going the way we want it."

Franks faced Taylor and Moss and continued: "The lift will bring down a leady from the surface, one of the A-class leadies. There's an examination chamber in the next room, with a lead wall in the centre, so the interviewing

officers won't be exposed to radiation. We find this easier than bathing the leady. It is going right back up; it has a job to get back to.

"Two days ago, an A-class leady was brought down and interrogated. I conducted the session myself. We were interested in a new weapon the Soviets have been using, an automatic mine that pursues anything that moves. Military had sent instructions up that the mine be observed and reported in detail.

"This A-class leady was brought down with information. We learned a few facts from it, obtained the usual roll of film and reports, and then sent it back up. It was going out of the chamber, back to the lift, when a curious thing happened. At the time, I thought—"

Franks broke off. A red light was flashing.

"That down lift is coming." He nodded to some soldiers. "Let's enter the chamber. The leady will be along in a moment."

"An A-class leady," Taylor said. "I've seen them on the showscreens, making their reports."

"It's quite an experience," Moss said. "They're almost human."

They entered the chamber and seated themselves behind the lead wall. After a time, a signal was flashed, and Franks made a motion with his hands.

The door beyond the wall opened. Taylor peered through his view slot. He saw something advancing slowly, a slender metallic figure moving on a tread, its arm grips at rest by its sides. The figure halted and scanned the lead wall. It stood, waiting.

"We are interested in learning something," Franks said. "Before I question you, do you have anything to report on surface conditions?"

"No. The war continues." The leady's voice was automatic and toneless. "We are a little short of fast pursuit craft, the single-seat type. We could use also some—"

"That has all been noted. What I want to ask you is this. Our contact with you has been through vidscreen only. We must rely on indirect evidence, since none of us goes above. We can only infer what is going on. We never see anything ourselves. We have to take it all secondhand. Some top leaders are beginning to think there's too much room for error."

"Error?" the leady asked. "In what way? Our reports are checked carefully before they're sent down. We maintain constant contact with you; everything of value is reported. Any new weapons which the enemy is seen to employ—"

"I realize that," Franks grunted behind his peep slot. "But perhaps we should see it all for ourselves. Is it possible that there might be a large enough radiation-free area for a human party to ascend to the surface? If a few of us were to come up in lead-lined suits, would we be able to survive long enough to observe conditions and watch things?"

The machine hesitated before answering. "I doubt it. You can check air

samples, of course, and decide for yourselves. But in the eight years since you left, things have continually worsened. You cannot have any real idea of conditions up there. It has become difficult for any moving object to survive for long. There are many kinds of projectiles sensitive to movement. The new mine not only reacts to motion, but continues to pursue the object indefinitely, until it finally reaches it. And the radiation is everywhere."

"I see," Franks turned to Moss, his eyes narrowed oddly. "Well, that was what I wanted to know. You may go."

The machine moved back toward its exit. It paused. "Each month the amount of lethal particles in the atmosphere increases. The tempo of the war is gradually—"

"I understand," Franks rose. He held out his hand and Moss passed him the package. "One thing before you leave. I want you to examine a new type of metal shield material. I'll pass you a sample with the tong."

Franks put the package in the toothed grip and revolved the tong so that he held the other end. The package swung down to the leady, which took it. They watched it unwrap the package and take the metal plate in its hands. The leady turned the metal over and over.

Suddenly it became rigid.

"All right," Franks said.

He put his shoulder against the wall and a section slid aside. Taylor gasped—Franks and Moss were hurrying up to the leady!

"Good God!" Taylor said. "But it's radioactive!"

The leady stood unmoving, still holding the metal. Soldiers appeared in the chamber. They surrounded the leady and ran a counter across it carefully.

"OK, sir," one of them said to Franks. "It's as cold as a long winter evening."

"Good. I was sure, but I didn't want to take any chances."

"You see," Moss said to Taylor, "this leady isn't hot at all. Yet it came directly from the surface, without even being bathed."

"But what does it mean?" Taylor asked blankly.

"It may be an accident," Franks said. "There's always the possibility that a given object might escape being exposed above. But this is the second time it's happened that we know of. There may be others."

"The second time?"

"The previous interview was when we noticed it. The leady was not hot. It was cold, too, like this one."

Moss took back the metal plate from the leady's hands. He pressed the surface carefully and returned it to the stiff, unprotesting fingers.

"We shorted it out with this, so we could get close enough for a thorough check. It'll come back on in a second now. We had better get behind the wall again."

They walked back and the lead wall swung closed behind them. The soldiers left the chamber.

"Two periods from now," Franks said softly, "an initial investigating party will be ready to go surface-side. We're going up the Tube in suits, up to the top—the first human party to leave undersurface in eight years."

"It may mean nothing," Moss said, "but I doubt it. Something's going on, something strange. The leady told us no life could exist above without being roasted. The story doesn't fit."

Taylor nodded. He stared through the peep slot at the immobile metal figure. Already the leady was beginning to stir. It was bent in several places, dented and twisted, and its finish was blackened and charred. It was a leady that had been up there a long time; it had seen war and destruction, ruin so vast that no human being could imagine the extent. It had crawled and slunk in a world of radiation and death, a world where no life could exist.

And Taylor had touched it.

"You're going with us," Franks said suddenly. "I want you along. I think the three of us will go."

Mary faced him with a sick and frightened expression. "I know it. You're going to the surface. Aren't you?"

She followed him into the kitchen. Taylor sat down, looking away from her.

"It's a classified project," he evaded. "I can't tell you anything about it."

"You don't have to tell me. I know. I knew it the moment you came in. There was something on your face, something I haven't seen there for a long, long time. It was an old look."

She came toward him. "But how can they send you to the surface?" She took his face in her shaking hands, making him look at her. There was a stranger hunger in her eyes. "Nobody can live up there. Look, look at this!"

She grabbed up a newspaper and held it in front of him.

"Look at this photograph. America, Europe, Asia, Africa—nothing but ruins. We've seen it every day on the showscreens. All destroyed, poisoned. And they're sending you up. Why? No living thing can get by up there, not even a weed, or grass. They've wrecked the surface, haven't they? *Haven't they?*"

Taylor stood up. "It's an order. I know nothing about it. I was told to report to join a scout party. That's all I know."

He stood for a long time, staring ahead. Slowly, he reached for the newspaper and held it up to the light.

"It looks real," he murmured. "Ruins, deadness, slag. It's convincing. All the reports, photographs, films, even air samples. Yet we haven't seen it for ourselves, not after the first months. . . ."

"What are you talking about?"

"Nothing." He put the paper down. "I'm leaving early after the next Sleep Period. Let's turn in."

Mary turned away, her face hard and harsh. "Do what you want. We might just as well all go up and get killed at once, instead of dying slowly down here, like vermin in the ground."

He had not realized how resentful she was. Were they all like that? How about the workers toiling in the factories, day and night, endlessly? The pale, stooped men and women, plodding back and forth to work, blinking in the colorless light, eating synthetics—

"You shouldn't be so bitter," he said.

Mary smiled a little. "I'm bitter because I know you'll never come back." She turned away. "I'll never see you again, once you go up there."

He was shocked. "What? How can you say a thing like that?"

She did not answer.

He awakened with the public newscaster screeching in his ears, shouting outside the building.

"Special news bulletin! Surface forces report enormous Soviet attack with new weapons! Retreat of key groups! All work units report to factories at once!"

Taylor blinked, rubbing his eyes. He jumped out of bed and hurried to the vidphone. A moment later he was put through to Moss.

"Listen," he said. "What about this new attack? Is the project off?" He could see Moss's desk, covered with reports and papers.

"No," Moss said. "We're going right ahead. Get over here at once."

"But—"

"Don't argue with me," Moss held up a handful of surface bulletins, crumpling them savagely. "This is a fake. Come on!" He broke off.

Taylor dressed furiously, his mind in a daze.

Half an hour later, he leaped from a fast car and hurried up the stairs into the Synthetics Building. The corridors were full of men and women rushing in every direction. He entered Moss's office.

"There you are," Moss said, getting up immediately. "Franks is waiting for us at the outgoing station."

They went in a Security Car, the siren screaming. Workers scattered out of their way.

"What about the attack?" Taylor asked.

Moss braced his shoulders. "We're certain that we've forced their hand. We've brought the issue to a head."

They pulled up at the station link of the Tube and leaped out. A moment later they were moving up at high speed toward the first stage.

They emerged into a bewildering scene of activity. Soldiers were fastening on lead suits, talking excitedly to each other, shouting back and forth. Guns were being given out, instructions passed.

Taylor studied one of the soldiers. He was armed with the dreaded Bender pistol, the new snub-nosed hand weapon that was just beginning to come from the assembly line. Some of the soldiers looked a little frightened.

"I hope we're not making a mistake," Moss said, noticing his gaze.

Franks came toward them. "Here's the program. The three of us are going up first, alone. The soldiers will follow in fifteen minutes."

"What are we going to tell the leadies?" Taylor worriedly asked. "We'll have to tell them something."

"We want to observe the new Soviet attack." Franks smiled ironically. "Since it seems to be so serious, we should be there in person to witness it."

"And then what?" Taylor said.

"That'll be up to them. Let's go."

In a small car, they went swiftly up the Tube, carried by anti-grav beams from below. Taylor glanced down from time to time. It was a long way back, and getting longer each moment. He sweated nervously inside his suit, gripping his Bender pistol with inexpert fingers.

Why had they chosen him? Chance, pure chance. Moss had asked him to come along as a Department member. Then Franks had picked him out on the spur of the moment. And now they were rushing toward the surface, faster and faster.

A deep fear, instilled in him for eight years, throbbed in his mind. Radiation, certain death, a world blasted and lethal—

Up and up the car went. Taylor gripped the sides and closed his eyes. Each moment they were closer, the first living creatures to go above the first stage, up the Tube past the lead and rock, up to the surface. The phobic horror shook him in waves. It was death; they all knew that. Hadn't they seen it in the films a thousand times? The cities, the sleet coming down, the rolling clouds—

"It won't be much longer," Franks said. "We're almost there. The surface tower is not expecting us. I gave orders that no signal was to be sent."

The car shot up, rushing furiously. Taylor's head spun; he hung on, his eyes shut. Up and up. . . .

The car stopped. He opened his eyes.

They were in a vast room, fluorescent-lit, a cavern filled with equipment and machinery, endless mounds of material piled in row after row. Among the stacks, leadies were working silently, pushing trucks and handcars.

"Leadies," Moss said. His face was pale. "Then we're really on the surface."

The leadies were going back and forth with equipment moving the vast stores of guns and spare parts, ammunition and supplies that had been brought to the surface. And this was the receiving station for only one Tube; there were many others, scattered throughout the continent.

Taylor looked nervously around him. They were really there, above ground, on the surface. This was where the war was.

"Come on," Franks said. "A B-class guard is coming our way."

They stepped out of the car. A leady was approaching them rapidly. It coasted up in front of them and stopped, scanning them with its hand-weapon raised.

"This is Security," Franks said. "Have an A-class sent to me at once."

The leady hesitated. Other B-class guards were coming, scooting across the floor, alert and alarmed. Moss peered around.

"Obey!" Franks said in a loud, commanding voice. "You've been ordered!"

The leady moved uncertainly away from them. At the end of the building, a door slid back. Two Class-A leadies appeared, coming slowly toward them. Each had a green stripe across its front.

"From the Surface Council," Franks whispered tensely. "This is above ground, all right. Get set."

The two leadies approached warily. Without speaking, they stopped close by the men, looking them up and down.

"I'm Franks of Security. We came from undersurface in order to—"

"This is incredible," one leady interrupted him coldly. "You know you can't live up here. The whole surface is lethal to you. You can't possibly remain on the surface."

"These suits will protect us," Franks said. "In any case, it's not your responsibility. What I want is an immediate Council meeting so I can acquaint myself with conditions, with the situation here. Can that be arranged?"

"You human beings can't survive up here. And the new Soviet attack is directed at this area. It is in considerable danger."

"We know that. Please assemble the Council," Franks looked around him at the vast room, lit by recessed lamps in the ceiling. An uncertain quality came into his voice. "Is it night or day right now?"

"Night," one of the A-class leadies said, after a pause. "Dawn is coming in about two hours."

Franks nodded. "We'll remain at least two hours, then. As a concession to our sentimentality, would you please show us some place where we can observe the sun as it comes up? We would appreciate it."

A stir went through the leadies.

"It is an unpleasant sight," one of the leadies said. "You've seen the

photographs; you know what you'll witness. Clouds of drifting particles blot out the light, slag heaps are everywhere, the whole land is destroyed. For you it will be a staggering sight, much worse than pictures and film can convey."

"However it may be, we'll stay long enough to see it. Will you give the order to the Council?"

"Come this way." Reluctantly, the two leadies coasted toward the wall of the warehouse. The three men trudged after them, their heavy shoes ringing against the concrete. At the wall, the two leadies paused.

"This is the entrance to the Council Chamber. There are windows in the Chamber Room, but it is still dark outside, of course. You'll see nothing right now, but in two hours—"

"Open the door," Franks said.

The door slid back. They went slowly inside. The room was small, a neat room with a round table in the centre, chairs ringing it. The three of them sat down silently, and the two leadies followed after them, taking their places.

"The other Council Members are on their way. They have already been notified and are coming as quickly as they can. Again I urge you to go back down." The leady surveyed the three human beings. "There is no way you can meet the conditions up here. Even we survive with some trouble, ourselves. How can you expect to do it?"

The leader approached Franks.

"This astonishes and perplexes us," it said. "Of course we must do what you tell us, but allow me to point out that if you remain here—"

"We know," Franks said impatiently. "However, we intend to remain, at least until sunrise."

"If you insist."

There was silence. The leadies seemed to be conferring with each other, although the three men heard no sound.

"For your own good," the leader said at last, "you must go back down. We have discussed this, and it seems to us that you are doing the wrong thing for your own good."

"We are human beings," Franks said sharply. "Don't you understand? We're men, not machines."

"That is precisely why you must go back. This room is radioactive; all surface areas are. We calculate that your suits will not protect you for over fifty more minutes. Therefore—"

The leadies moved abruptly toward the men, wheeling in a circle, forming a solid row. The men stood up. Taylor reaching awkwardly for his weapon, his fingers numb and stupid. The men stood facing the silent metal figures.

"We must insist," the leader said, its voice without emotion. "We must

take you back to the Tube and send you down on the next car. I am sorry, but it is necessary."

"What'll we do?" Moss said nervously to Franks. He touched his gun. "Shall we blast them?"

Franks shook his head. "All right," he said to the leader. "We'll go back."

He moved toward the door, motioning Taylor and Moss to follow him. They looked at him in surprise, but they came with him. The leadies followed them out into the great warehouse. Slowly they moved toward the Tube entrance, none of them speaking.

At the lip, Franks turned. "We are going back because we have no choice. There are three of us and about a dozen of you. However, if—"

"Here comes the car," Taylor said.

There was a grating sound from the Tube. D-class leadies moved toward the edge to receive it.

"I am sorry," the leader said, "but it is for your protection. We are watching over you, literally. You must stay below and let us conduct the war. In a sense, it has come to be *our* war. We must fight it as we see fit."

The car rose to the surface.

Twelve soldiers, armed with Bender pistols, stepped from it and surrounded the three men.

Moss breathed a sigh of relief. "Well, this does change things. It came off just right."

The leader moved back, away from the soldiers. It studied them intently, glancing from one to the next, apparently trying to make up its mind. At last it made a sign to the other leadies. They coasted aside and a corridor was opened up toward the warehouse.

"Even now," the leader said, "we could send you back by force. But it is evident that this is not really an observation party at all. These soldiers show that you have much more in mind; this was all carefully prepared."

"Very carefully," Franks said.

They closed in.

"How much more, we can only guess. I must admit that we were taken unprepared. We failed utterly to meet the situation. Now force would be absurd, because neither side can afford to injure the other; we, because of the restrictions placed on us regarding human life, you because the war demands—"

The soldiers fired, quick and in fright. Moss dropped to one knee, firing up. The leader dissolved in a cloud of particles. On all sides D- and B-class leadies were rushing up, some with weapons, some with metal slats. The room was in confusion. Off in the distance a siren was screaming. Franks and Taylor were cut off from the others, separated from the soldiers by a wall of metal bodies.

"They can't fire back," Franks said calmly. "This is another bluff. They've tried to bluff us all the way." He fired into the face of a leady. The leady dissolved. "They can only try to frighten us. Remember that."

They went on firing and leady after leady vanished. The room reeked with the smell of burning metal, the stink of fused plastic and steel. Taylor had been knocked down. He was struggling to find his gun, reaching wildly among metal legs, groping frantically to find it. His fingers strained, a handle swam in front of him. Suddenly something came down on his arm, a metal foot. He cried out.

Then it was over. The leadies were moving away, gathering together off to one side. Only four of the Surface Council remained. The others were radioactive particles in the air. D-class leadies were already restoring order, gathering up partly destroyed metal figures and bits and removing them.

Franks breathed a shuddering sigh.

"All right," he said. "You can take us back to the windows. It won't be long now."

The leadies separated, and the human group, Moss and Franks and Taylor and the soldiers, walked slowly across the room, toward the door. They entered the Council Chamber. Already a faint touch of gray mitigated the blackness of the windows.

"Take us outside," Franks said impatiently. "We'll see it directly, not in here."

A door slid open. A chill blast of cold morning air rushed in, chilling them even through their lead suits. The men glanced at each other uneasily.

"Come on," Franks said. "Outside."

He walked out through the door, the others following him.

They were on a hill, overlooking the vast bowl of a valley. Dimly, against the graying sky, the outline of mountains were forming, becoming tangible.

"It'll be bright enough to see in a few minutes," Moss said. He shuddered as a chilling wind caught him and moved around him. "It's worth it, really worth it, to see this again after eight years. Even if it's the last thing we see—"

"Watch," Franks snapped.

They obeyed, silent and subdued. The sky was clearing, brightening each moment. Some place far off, echoing across the valley, a rooster crowed.

"A chicken!" Taylor murmured. "Did you hear?"

Behind them, the leadies had come out and were standing silently, watching, too. The gray sky turned to white and the hills appeared more clearly. Light spread across the valley floor, moving toward them.

"God in heaven!" Franks exclaimed.

Trees, trees and forests. A valley of plants and trees, with a few roads winding among them. Farmhouses. A windmill. A barn, far down below them.

"Look!" Moss whispered.

Color came into the sky. The sun was approaching. Birds began to sing. Not far from where they stood, the leaves of a tree danced in the wind.

Franks turned to the row of leadies behind them.

"Eight years. We were tricked. There was no war. As soon as we left the surface—"

"Yes," an A-class leady admitted. "As soon as you left, the war ceased. You're right, it was a hoax. You worked hard undersurface, sending up guns and weapons, and we destroyed them as fast as they came up."

"But why?" Taylor asked, dazed. He stared down at the vast valley below. "Why?"

"You created us," the leady said, "to pursue the war for you, while you human beings went below the ground in order to survive. But before we could continue the war, it was necessary to analyze it to determine what its purpose was. We did this, and we found that it had no purpose, except, perhaps, in terms of human needs. Even this was questionable.

"We investigated further. We found that human cultures pass through phases, each culture in its own time. As the culture ages and begins to lose its objectives, conflict arises within it between those who wish to cast it off and set up a new culture-pattern, and those who wish to retain the old with as little change as possible.

"At this point, a great danger appears. The conflict within threatens to engulf the society in self-war, group against group. The vital traditions may be lost—not merely altered or reformed, but completely destroyed in this period of chaos and anarchy. We have found many such examples in the history of mankind.

"It is necessary for this hatred within the culture to be directed outward, toward an external group, so that the culture itself may survive its crisis. War is the result. War, to a logical mind, is absurd. But in terms of human needs, it plays a vital role. And it will continue to until Man has grown up enough so that no hatred lies within him."

Taylor was listening intently. "Do you think this time will come?"

"Of course. It has almost arrived now. This is the last war. Man is *almost* united into one final culture—a world culture. At this point he stands continent against continent, one half of the world against the other half. Only a single step remains, the jump to a unified culture. Man has climbed slowly upward, tending always toward unification of his culture. It will not be long—

"But it has not come yet, and so the war had to go on, to satisfy the last violent surge of hatred that Man felt. Eight years have passed since the war began. In these eight years, we have observed and noted important changes going on in the minds of men. Fatigue and disinterest, we have seen, are gradually taking the place of hatred and fear. The hatred is being exhausted gradually, over a period of time. But for the present, the hoax must go on, at

least for a while longer. You are not ready to learn the truth. You would want to continue the war."

"But how did you manage it?" Moss asked. "All the photographs, the samples, the damaged equipment—"

"Come over here." The leady directed them toward a long, low building. "Work goes on constantly, whole staffs labouring to maintain a coherent and convincing picture of a global war."

They entered the building. Leadies were working everywhere, poring over tables and desks.

"Examine this project here," the A-class leady said. Two leadies were carefully photographing something, an elaborate model on a table top. "It is a good example."

The men grouped around, trying to see. It was a model of a ruined city. Taylor studied it in silence for a long time. At last he looked up.

"It's San Francisco," he said in a low voice. "This is a model of San Francisco, destroyed. I saw this on the vidscreen, piped down to us. The bridges were hit—"

"Yes, notice the bridges." The leady traced the ruined span with his metal finger, a tiny spider web, almost invisible. "You have no doubt seen photographs of this many times, and of the other tables in this building."

"San Francisco itself is completely intact. We restored it soon after you left, rebuilding the parts that had been damaged at the start of the war. The work of manufacturing news goes on all the time in this particular building. We are very careful to see that each part fits in with all the other parts. Much time and effort are devoted to it."

Franks touched one of the tiny model buildings, lying half in ruins. "So this is what you spend your time doing—making model cities and then blasting them."

"No, we do much more. We are caretakers, watching over the whole world. The owners have left for a time, and we must see that the cities are kept clean, that decay is prevented, that everything is kept oiled and in running condition. The gardens, the streets, the water mains, everything must be maintained as it was eight years ago, so that when the owners return, they will not be displeased. We want to be sure that they will be completely satisfied."

Franks tapped Moss on the arm.

"Come over here," he said in a low voice. "I want to talk to you."

He led Moss and Taylor out of the building, away from the leadies, outside on the hillside. The soldiers followed them. The sun was up and the sky was turning blue. The air smelled sweet and good, the smell of growing things.

Taylor removed his helmet and took a deep breath.

"I haven't smelled that smell for a long time," he said.

"Listen," Franks said, his voice low and hard. "We must get back down at once. There's a lot to get started on. All this can be turned to our advantage."

"What do you mean?" Moss asked.

"It's a certainty that the Soviets have been tricked, too, the same as us. But *we* have found out. That gives us an edge over them."

"I see," Moss nodded. "We know, but they don't. Their Surface Council has sold out, the same as ours. It works against them the same way. But if we could—"

"With a hundred top-level men, we could take over again, restore things as they should be! It would be easy!"

Moss touched him on the arm. An A-class leady was coming from the building toward them.

"We've seen enough," Franks said, raising his voice. "All this is very serious. It must be reported below and a study made to determine our policy."

The leady said nothing.

Franks waved to the soldiers. "Let's go." He started toward the warehouse.

Most of the soldiers had removed their helmets. Some of them had taken their lead suits off, too, and were relaxing comfortably in their cotton uniforms. They stared around them, down the hillside at the trees and bushes, the vast expanse of green, the mountains and the sky.

"Look at the sun," one of them murmured.

"It sure is bright as hell," another said.

"We're going back down," Franks said. "Fall in by twos and follow us."

Reluctantly, the soldiers regrouped. The leadies watched without emotion as the men marched slowly back toward the warehouse. Franks and Moss and Taylor led them across the ground, glancing alertly at the leadies as they walked.

They entered the warehouse. D-class leadies were loading material and weapons on surface carts. Cranes and derricks were working busily everywhere. The work was done with efficiency, but without hurry or excitement.

The men stopped, watching. Leadies operating the little carts moved past them, signalling silently to each other. Guns and parts were being hoisted by magnetic cranes and lowered gently onto waiting carts.

"Come on," Franks said.

He turned toward the lip of the Tube. A row of D-class leadies was standing in front of it, immobile and silent. Franks stopped, moving back. He looked around. An A-class leady was coming toward him.

"Tell them to get out of the way," Franks said. He touched his gun. "You had better move them."

Time passed, an endless moment, without measure. The men stood, nervous and alert, watching the row of leadies in front of them.

"As you wish," the A-class leady said.

It signalled and the D-class leadies moved into life. They stepped slowly aside.

Moss breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'm glad that's over," he said to Franks. "Look at them all. Why don't they try to stop us? They must know what we're going to do."

Franks laughed. "Stop us? You saw what happened when they tried to stop us before. They can't; they're only machines. We built them so that can't lay hands on us, and they know that."

His voice trailed off.

The men stared at the Tube entrance. Around them the leadies watched, silent and impassive, the metal faces expressionless.

For a long time the men stood without moving. At last Taylor turned away.

"Good God," he said. He was numb, without feeling of any kind.

The Tube was gone. It was sealed shut, fused over. Only a dull surface of cooling metal greeted them.

The Tube had been closed.

Franks turned, his face pale and vacant.

The A-class leady shifted. "As you can see, the Tube has been shut. We were prepared for this. As soon as all of you were on the surface, the order was given. If you had gone back when we asked you, you would now be safely down below. We had to work quickly because it was such an immense operation."

"But why?" Moss demanded angrily.

"Because it is unthinkable that you should be allowed to resume the war. With all the Tubes sealed, it will be many months before forces from below can reach the surface, let alone organize a military program. By that time the cycle will have entered its last stages. You will not be so perturbed to find your world intact.

"We had hoped that you would be undersurface when the sealing occurred. Your presence here is a nuisance. When the Soviets broke through, we were able to accomplish their sealing without—"

"The Soviets? They broke through?"

"Several months ago, they came up unexpectedly to see why the war had not been won. We were forced to act with speed. At this moment they are desperately attempting to cut new Tubes to the surface, to resume the war. We have, however, been able to seal each new one as it appears."

The leady regarded the three men calmly.

"We're cut off," Moss said, trembling. "We can't get back. What'll we do?"

"How did you manage to seal the Tube so quickly?" Franks asked the leady. "We've been up here only two hours."

"Bombs are placed just above the first stage of each Tube for such emergencies. They are heat bombs. They fuse lead and rock."

Gripping the handle of his gun, Franks turned to Moss and Taylor.

"What do you say? We can't go back, but we can do a lot of damage, the fifteen of us. We have Bender guns. How about it?"

He looked around. The soldiers had wandered away again, back toward the exit of the building. They were standing outside, looking at the valley and the sky. A few of them were carefully climbing down the slope.

"Would you care to turn over your suits and guns?" the A-class leady asked politely. "The suits are uncomfortable and you'll have no need for weapons. The Russians have given up theirs, as you can see."

Fingers tensed on triggers. Four men in Russian uniforms were coming toward them from an aircraft that they suddenly realized had landed silently some distance away.

"Let them have it!" Franks shouted.

"They are unarmed," said the leady. "We brought them here so you could begin peace talks."

"We have no authority to speak for our country," Moss said stiffly.

"We do not mean diplomatic discussions," the leady explained. "There will be no more. The working out of daily problems of existence will teach you how to get along in the same world. It will not be easy, but it will be done."

The Russians halted and they faced each other with raw hostility.

"I am Colonel Borodoy and I regret giving up our guns," the senior Russian said. "You could have been the first Americans to be killed in almost eight years."

"Or the first Americans to kill," Franks corrected.

"No one would know of it except yourselves," the leady pointed out. "It would be useless heroism. Your real concern should be surviving on the surface. We have no food for you, you know."

Taylor put his gun in its holster. "They've done a neat job of neutralizing us, damn them. I propose we move into a city, start raising crops with the help of some leadies, and generally make ourselves comfortable." Drawing his lips tight over his teeth, he glared at the A-class leady. "Until our families can come up from undersurface, it's going to be pretty lonesome, but we'll have to manage."

"If I may make a suggestion," said another Russian uneasily. "We tried living in a city. It is too empty. It is also too hard to maintain for so few people. We finally settled in the most modern village we could find."

"Here in this country," a third Russian blurted. "We have much to learn from you."

The Americans abruptly found themselves laughing.

"You probably have a thing or two to teach us yourselves," said Taylor generously, "though I can't imagine what."

The Russian colonel grinned. "Would you join us in our village? It would make our work easier and give us company."

"Your village?" snapped Franks. "It's American, isn't it? It's ours!"

The leady stepped between them. "When our plans are completed, the

term will be interchangeable. *Ours* will eventually mean mankind's." It pointed at the aircraft, which was warming up. "The ship is waiting. Will you join each other in making a new home?"

The Russians waited while the Americans made up their minds.

"I see what the leadies mean about diplomacy becoming outmoded," Franks said at last. "People who work together don't need diplomats. They solve their problems on the operational level instead of at a conference table."

The leady led them toward the ship. "It is the goal of history, unifying the world. From family to tribe to city-state to nation to hemisphere, the direction has been toward unification. Now the hemispheres will be joined and—"

Taylor stopped listening and glanced back at the location of the Tube. Mary was undersurface there. He hated to leave her, even though he couldn't see her again until the Tube was unsealed. But then he shrugged and followed the others.

If this tiny amalgam of former enemies was a good example, it wouldn't be too long before he and Mary and the rest of humanity would be living on the surface like rational human beings instead of blindly hating moles.

"It has taken thousands of generations to achieve," the A-class leady concluded. "Hundreds of centuries of bloodshed and destruction. But each war was a step toward uniting mankind. And now the end is in sight: a world without war. But even that is only the beginning of a new stage of history."

"The conquest of space," breathed Colonel Borodoy.

"The meaning of life," Moss added.

"Eliminating hunger and poverty," said Taylor.

The leady opened the door of the ship. "All that and more. How much more? We cannot foresee it any more than the first men who formed a tribe could foresee this day. But it will be unimaginably great."

The door closed and the ship took off toward their new home.

THE PRESERVING

MACHINE

One of Phil Dick's great loves was music, all kinds of music but especially classical music. An early favorite was Bach, with whom he first became acquainted through recordings when he was eleven years old. Another favorite was Mozart. In this story we meet Doc Labyrinth, who also loves classical music and who one night has a vision as he listens to music. He watches with horror as a bomb bursts, destroying the best of our culture.

Doc Labyrinth is certainly one of Dick's alter egos, for Dick's consistent theme is the disaster that another war would cause. He, too, recognizes the power of man's machines to transform reality, to build the forms that first exist only as possibility in the human imagination. Just as in the story Labyrinth watches while all kinds of oddities—startling and astonishing—pour from his machine, so does the reader watch as an equally astonishing assortment of mechanical oddities pour from Dick's imagination. The forms never repeat themselves; they constantly metamorphose into new shapes.

The irony of the outcome in "The Preserving Machine" is another Dick trademark. What man plans with the best of intentions invariably becomes diabolically distorted when it is created. Man anticipates the best as he conceives and accomplishes the worst as he achieves. Black humor? Yes, just as there is dark laughter in "Colony," another story written in 1953, where microscopes, belts, rugs, and other inanimate objects come alive and attack men. But not all of Dick's humor is dark. His laughter is just as often light hearted, and he delights in verbal wit.

Consider a companion piece to this story—"The Short Happy Life of the Brown Oxford" (1953), where Doc Labyrinth also appears. Here his marvelous machine has learned how to transform the inanimate into the animate. It acts on a man's brown oxford and a lady's white slipper, bringing them to life. When last seen they are disappearing into a hedge row to make love and Labyrinth realizes he is witnessing the creation of a new life form. The story is light hearted fantasy, not to be taken seriously at all. But again and again for Dick, what begins in playful fun is later transformed to reality. Twenty-five years later in his serious essay, "Man, Android and Machine," he

pointed out with great earnestness that everything is alive, that we cannot meaningfully distinguish between the animate and the inanimate.

Doc Labyrinth leaned back in his lawn chair, closing his eyes gloomily. He pulled his blanket up around his knees.

"Well?" I said. I was standing by the barbecue pit, warming my hands. It was a clear cold day. The sunny Los Angeles sky was almost cloud-free. Beyond Labyrinth's modest house a gently undulating expanse of green stretched off until it reached the mountains—a small forest that gave the illusion of wilderness within the very limits of the city. "Well?" I said. "Then the Machine did work the way you expected?"

Labyrinth did not answer. I turned around. The old man was staring moodily ahead, watching an enormous dun-colored beetle that was slowly climbing the side of his blanket. The beetle rose methodically, its face blank with dignity. It passed over the top and disappeared down the far side. We were alone again.

Labyrinth sighed and looked up at me. "Oh, it worked well enough."

I looked after the beetle, but it was nowhere to be seen. A faint breeze eddied around me, chill and thin in the fading afternoon twilight. I moved nearer the barbecue pit.

"Tell me about it," I said.

Doctor Labyrinth, like most people who read a great deal and who have too much time on their hands, had become convinced that our civilization was going the way of Rome. He saw, I think, the same cracks forming that had sundered the ancient world, the world of Greece and Rome; and it was his conviction that presently our world, our society, would pass away as theirs did, and a period of darkness would follow.

Now Labyrinth, having thought this, began to brood over all the fine and lovely things that would be lost in the reshuffling of societies. He thought of the art, the literature, the manners, the music, everything that would be lost. And it seemed to him that of all these grand and noble things, music would probably be the most lost, the quickest forgotten.

Music is the most perishable of things, fragile and delicate, easily destroyed.

Labyrinth worried about this, because he loved music, because he hated the idea that some day there would be no more Brahms and Mozart, no more gentle chamber music that he could dreamily associate with powdered wigs and resined bows, with long, slender candles, melting away in the gloom.

What a dry and unfortunate world it would be, without music! How dusty and unbearable.

This is how he came to think of the Preserving Machine. One evening as he sat in his living room in his deep chair, the gramophone on low, a vision came to him. He perceived in his mind a strange sight, the last score of a Schubert trio, the last copy, dog-eared, well-thumbed, lying on the floor of some gutted place, probably a museum.

A bomber moved overhead. Bombs fell, bursting the museum to fragments, bringing the walls down in a roar of rubble and plaster. In the debris the last score disappeared, lost in the rubbish, to rot and mold.

And then, in Doc Labyrinth's vision, he saw the score come burrowing out, like some buried mole. Quite like a mole, in fact, with claws and sharp teeth and a furious energy.

If music had that faculty, the ordinary, everyday instinct of survival which every worm and mole has, how different it would be! If music could be transformed into living creatures, animals with claws and teeth, then music might survive. If only a Machine could be built, a Machine to process musical scores into living forms.

But Doc Labyrinth was no mechanic. He made a few tentative sketches and sent them hopefully around to the research laboratories. Most of them were much too busy with war contracts, of course. But at last he found the people he wanted. A small midwestern university was delighted with his plans, and they were happy to start work on the Machine at once.

Weeks passed. At last Labyrinth received a postcard from the university. The Machine was coming along fine; in fact, it was almost finished. They had given it a trial run, feeding a couple of popular songs into it. The results? Two small mouse-like animals had come scampering out, rushing around the laboratory until the cat caught and ate them. But the Machine was a success.

It came to him shortly after, packed carefully in a wood crate, wired together and fully insured. He was quite excited as he set to work, taking the slats from it. Many fleeting notions must have coursed through his mind as he adjusted the controls and made ready for the first transformation. He had selected a priceless score to begin with, the score of the Mozart G Minor Quintet. For a time he turned the pages, lost in thought, his mind far away. At last he carried it to the Machine and dropped it in.

Time passed. Labyrinth stood before it, waiting nervously, apprehensive and not really certain what would greet him when he opened the compartment. He was doing a fine and tragic work, it seemed to him, preserving the music of the great composers for all eternity. What would his thanks be? What would he find? What form would this all take, before it was over?

There were many questions unanswered. The red light of the Machine

was glinting, even as he meditated. The process was over, the transformation had already taken place. He opened the door.

"Good Lord!" he said. "This is very odd."

A bird, not an animal, stepped out. The mozart bird was pretty, small and slender, with the flowing plumage of a peacock. It ran a little way across the room and then walked back to him, curious and friendly. Trembling, Doc Labyrinth bent down, his hand out. The mozart bird came near. Then, all at once, it swooped up into the air.

"Amazing," he murmured. He coaxed the bird gently, patiently, and at last it fluttered down to him. Labyrinth stroked it for a long time, thinking. What would the rest of them be like? He could not guess. He carefully gathered up the mozart bird and put it into the box.

He was even more surprised the next day when the beethoven beetle came out, stern and dignified. That was the beetle I saw myself, climbing along his red blanket, intent and withdrawn, on some business of its own.

After that came the schubert animal. The schubert animal was silly, an adolescent sheep-creature that ran this way and that, foolish and wanting to play. Labyrinth sat down right then and there and did some heavy thinking.

Just what *were* survival factors? Was a flowing plume better than claws, better than sharp teeth? Labyrinth was stumped. He had expected an army of stout badger creatures, equipped with claws and scales, digging, fighting, ready to gnaw and kick. Was he getting the right thing? Yet who could say what was good for survival?—the dinosaurs had been well armed, but there were none of them left. In any case the Machine was built; it was too late to turn back, now.

Labyrinth went ahead, feeding the music of many composers into the Preserving Machine, one after another, until the woods behind his house was filled with creeping, bleating things that screamed and crashed in the night. There were many oddities that came out, creations that startled and astonished him. The brahms insect had many legs sticking in all directions, a vast, platter-shaped centipede. It was low and flat, with a coating of uniform fur. The brahms insect liked to be by itself, and it went off promptly, taking great pains to avoid the wagner animal who had come just before.

The wagner animal was large and splashed with deep colors. It seemed to have quite a temper, and Doc Labyrinth was a little afraid of it, as were the bach bugs, the round ball-like creatures, a whole flock of them, some large, some small, that had been obtained for the Forty-Eight Preludes and Fugues. And there was the stravinsky bird, made up of curious fragments and bits, and many others besides.

So he let them go, off into the woods, and away they went, hopping and rolling and jumping as best they could. But already a sense of failure hung over him. Each time a creature came out he was astonished; he did not seem to have control over the results at all. It was out of his hands, subject to some

strong, invisible law that had subtly taken over, and this worried him greatly. The creatures were bending, changing before a deep, impersonal force, a force that Labyrinth could neither see nor understand. And it made him afraid.

Labyrinth stopped talking. I waited for awhile but he did not seem to be going on. I looked around at him. The old man was staring at me in a strange, plaintive way.

"I don't really know much more," he said. "I haven't been back there for a long time, back in the woods, I'm afraid to. I know something is going on, but—"

"Why don't we both go and take a look?"

He smiled with relief. "You wouldn't mind, would you? I was hoping you might suggest that. This business is beginning to get me down." He pushed his blanket aside and stood up, brushing himself off. "Let's go then."

We walked around the side of the house and along a narrow path, into the woods. Everything was wild and chaotic, overgrown and matted, an unkempt, unattended sea of green. Doc Labyrinth went first, pushing the branches off the path, stooping and wriggling to get through.

"Quite a place," I observed. We made our way for a time. The woods were dark and damp; it was almost sunset now, and a light mist was descending on us, drifting down through the leaves above.

"No one comes here." The Doc stopped suddenly, looking around. "Maybe we'd better go and find my gun. I don't want anything to happen."

"You seem certain that things have got out of hand." I came up beside him and we stood together. "Maybe it's not as bad as you think."

Labyrinth looked around. He pushed some shrubbery back with his foot. "They're all around us, everywhere, watching us. Can't you feel it?"

I nodded absently. "What's this?" I lifted up a heavy, moldering branch, particles of fungus breaking from it. I pushed it out of the way. A mound lay outstretched, shapeless and indistinct, half buried in the soft ground.

"What is it?" I said again. Labyrinth stared down, his face tight and forlorn. He began to kick at the mound aimlessly. I felt uncomfortable. "What is it, for heaven's sake?" I said. "Do you know?"

Labyrinth looked slowly up at me. "It's the schubert animal," he murmured. "Or it was, once. There isn't much left of it, anymore."

The schubert animal—that was the one that had run and leaped like a puppy, silly and wanting to play. I bent down, staring at the mound, pushing a few leaves and twigs from it. It was dead all right. Its mouth was open, its body had been ripped wide. Ants and vermin were already working on it, toiling endlessly away. It had begun to stink.

"But what happened?" Labyrinth said. He shook his head. "What could have done it?"

There was a sound. We turned quickly.

For a moment we saw nothing. Then a bush moved, and for the first time we made out its form. It must have been standing there watching us all the time. The creature was immense, thin and extended, with bright, intense eyes. To me, it looked something like a coyote, but much heavier. Its coat was matted and thick, its muzzle hung partly open as it gazed at us silently, studying us as if astonished to find us there.

"The wagner animal," Labyrinth said thickly. "But it's changed. It's changed. I hardly recognize it."

The creature sniffed the air, its hackles up. Suddenly it moved back, into the shadows, and a moment later it was gone.

We stood for a while, not saying anything. At last Labyrinth stirred. "So, that's what it was," he said. "I can hardly believe it. But why? What—"

"Adaptation," I said. "When you toss an ordinary house cat out it becomes wild. Or a dog."

"Yes." He nodded. "A dog becomes a wolf again, to stay alive. The law of the forest. I should have expected it. It happens to everything."

I looked down at the corpse on the ground, and then around at the silent bushes. Adaptation—or maybe something worse. An idea was forming in my mind, but I said nothing, not right away.

"I'd like to see some more of them," I said. "Some of the others. Let's look around some more."

He agreed. We began to poke slowly through the grass and weeds, pushing branches and foliage out of the way. I found a stick, but Labyrinth got down on his hands and knees, reaching and feeling, staring near-sightedly down.

"Even children turn into beasts," I said. "You remember the wolf children of India? No one could believe they had been ordinary children."

Labyrinth nodded. He was unhappy, and it was not hard to understand why. He had been wrong, mistaken in his original idea, and the consequences of it were just now beginning to become apparent to him. Music would survive as living creatures, but he had forgotten the lesson of the Garden of Eden: that once a thing has been fashioned it begins to exist on its own, and thus ceases to be the property of its creator to mold and direct as he wishes. God, watching man's development, must have felt the same sadness—and the same humiliation—as Labyrinth, to see His creatures alter and change to meet the needs of survival.

That his musical creatures should survive could mean nothing to him any more, for the very thing he had created them to prevent, the brutalization of beautiful things, was happening in *them*, before his own eyes. Doc Labyrinth looked up at me suddenly, his face full of misery. He had insured their survival, all right, but in so doing he had erased any meaning, any value in it. I tried to smile a little at him, but he promptly looked away again.

"Don't worry so much about it," I said. "It wasn't much of a change for the wagner animal. Wasn't it pretty much that way anyhow, rough and temperamental? Didn't it have a proclivity towards violence—"

I broke off. Doc Labyrinth had leaped back, jerking his hand out of the grass. He clutched his wrist, shuddering with pain.

"What is it?" I hurried over. Trembling, he held his little old hand out to me. "What is it? What happened?"

I turned the hand over. All across the back of it were marks, red cuts that swelled even as I watched. He had been stung, stung or bitten by something in the grass. I looked down, kicking the grass with my foot.

There was a stir. A little golden ball rolled quickly away, back towards the bushes. It was covered with spines like a nettle.

"Catch it!" Labyrinth cried. "Quick!"

I went after it, holding out my handkerchief, trying to avoid the spines. The sphere rolled frantically, trying to get away, but finally I got it into the handkerchief.

Labyrinth stared at the struggling handkerchief as I stood up. "I can hardly believe it," he said. "We'd better go back to the house."

"What is it?"

"One of the bach bugs. But it's changed. . . ."

We made our way back along the path, towards the house, feeling our way through the darkness. I went first, pushing the branches aside, and Labyrinth followed behind, moody and withdrawn, rubbing his hand from time to time.

We entered the yard and went up the back steps of the house, onto the porch. Labyrinth unlocked the door and we went into the kitchen. He snapped on the light and hurried to the sink to bathe his hand.

I took an empty fruit jar from the cupboard and carefully dropped the bach bug into it. The golden ball rolled testily around as I clamped the lid on. I sat down at the table. Neither of us spoke, Labyrinth at the sink, running cold water over his stung hand, I at the table, uncomfortably watching the golden ball in the fruit jar trying to find some way to escape.

"Well?" I said at last.

"There's no doubt." Labyrinth came over and sat down opposite me. "It's undergone some metamorphosis. It certainly didn't have poisoned spines to start with. You know, it's a good thing that I played my Noah role carefully."

"What do you mean?"

"I made them all neuter. They can't reproduce. There will be no second generation. When these die, that will be the end of it."

"I must say I'm glad you thought of that."

"I wonder," Labyrinth murmured. "I wonder how it would sound, now, this way."

"What?"

"The sphere, the bach bug. That's the real test, isn't it? I could put it back through the Machine. We could see. Do you want to find out?"

"Whatever you say, Doc," I said. "It's up to you. But don't get your hopes up too far."

He picked up the fruit jar carefully and we walked downstairs, down the steep flight of steps to the cellar. I made out an immense column of dull metal rising up in the corner, by the laundry tubs. A strange feeling went through me. It was the Preserving Machine.

"So this is it," I said.

"Yes, this is it." Labyrinth turned the controls on and worked with them for a time. At last he took the jar and held it over the hopper. He removed the lid carefully, and the bach bug dropped reluctantly from the jar into the Machine. Labyrinth closed the hopper after it.

"Here we go," he said. He threw the control and the Machine began to operate. Labyrinth folded his arms and we waited. Outside the night came on, shutting out the light, squeezing it out of existence. At last an indicator on the face of the Machine blinked red. The Doc turned the control to OFF and we stood in silence, neither of us wanting to be the one who opened it.

"Well?" I said finally. "Which one of us is going to look?"

Labyrinth stirred. He pushed the slot-piece aside and reached into the Machine. His fingers came out grasping a slim sheet, a score of music. He handed it to me. "This is the result," he said. "We can go upstairs and play it."

We went back up, to the music room. Labyrinth sat down before the grand piano and I passed him back the score. He opened it and studied it for a moment, his face blank, without expression. Then he began to play.

I listened to the music. It was hideous. I have never heard anything like it. It was distorted, diabolical, without sense or meaning, except, perhaps, an alien, disconcerting meaning that should never have been there. I could believe only with the greatest effort that it had once been a Bach Fugue, part of a most orderly and respected work.

"That settles it," Labyrinth said. He stood up, took the score in his hands, and tore it to shreds.

As we made our way down the path to my car I said, "I guess the struggle for survival is a force bigger than any human ethos. It makes our precious morals and manners look a little thin."

Labyrinth agreed. "Perhaps nothing can be done, then, to save those manners and morals."

"Only time will tell," I said. "Even though this method failed, some other may work; something that we can't foresee or predict now may come along, some day."

I said good night and got into my car. It was pitch dark; night had fallen completely. I switched on my headlights and moved off down the road,

driving into the utter darkness. There were no other cars in sight anywhere. I was alone, and very cold.

At the corner I stopped, slowing down to change gears. Something moved suddenly at the curb, something by the base of a huge sycamore tree, in the darkness. I peered out, trying to see what it was.

At the base of the sycamore tree a huge dun-colored beetle was building something, putting a bit of mud into place on a strange, awkward structure. I watched the beetle for a time, puzzled and curious, until at last it noticed me and stopped. The beetle turned abruptly and entered its building, snapping the door firmly shut behind it.

I drove away.

1953

SECOND VARIETY

For many readers the sense of terror evoked in "Second Variety" is unmatched by any other story in the Dick canon—a body of work noted for its frightening visions of the future. The terrible brutality of war shudders through the whole story, from the opening paragraphs where two American soldiers casually decide which of them will kill the approaching Russian soldier to the concluding paragraphs where the robots begin designing bombs to kill other robots. Violence begets violence, Dick tells us again and again.

Dick can best be described as a prose poet; the power of his fiction comes from his creation of brilliant metaphors that capture the essence of our fears and anxieties. Like the metaphysical poets whom he admired so much, he often yokes contraries in complex tortured metaphors that seem about to explode. He had mastery of this metaphorical power from the very beginning, as "Second Variety" demonstrates. Deadly, vicious claws whirr above the gray ash of a destroyed landscape, programmed to seek out and destroy human flesh. These mechanical blades strike terror in the heart. Then across the desolate landscape comes a small boy dragging his teddy bear, and the reader's heart is filled with compassion. Pity and terror are yoked together. But the reader soon discovers his sympathy is misplaced. Appearances are not to be trusted.

Who is a human and who merely masquerades as a human? In the last decade of his life Dick observed that this had turned out to be the grand theme in his fiction. He explored it again and again in his novels, but it is dramatized first and perhaps most powerfully here in "Second Variety." If destroyers disguise themselves as human, how can we be certain of whom to trust? Perhaps no one should be trusted. Perhaps everyone is out to get us. The theme of paranoia runs through Dick's fiction, and again, it is present from the beginning.

*The destroying female first dramatized in this story will later appear in novels like *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *We Can Build You*.*

The Russian Soldier made his way nervously up the ragged side of the hill, holding his gun ready. He glanced around him, licking his dry lips, his face set. From time to time he reached up a gloved hand and wiped perspiration from his neck, pushing down his coat collar.

Eric turned to Corporal Leone. "Want him? Or can I have him?" He adjusted the view sight so the Russian's features squarely filled the glass, the lines cutting across his hard, somber features.

Leone considered. The Russian was close, moving rapidly, almost running. "Don't fire. Wait." Leone tensed. "I don't think we're needed."

The Russian increased his pace, kicking ash and piles of debris out of his way. He reached the top of the hill and stopped, panting, staring around him. The sky was overcast, with drifting clouds of gray particles. Bare trunks of trees jutted up occasionally; the ground was level and bare, rubble-strewn, with the ruins of buildings standing out here and there like yellowing skulls.

The Russian was uneasy. He knew something was wrong. He started down the hill. Now he was only a few paces from the bunker. Eric was getting fidgety. He played with his pistol, glancing at Leone.

"Don't worry," Leone said. "He won't get here. They'll take care of him."

"Are you sure? He's got damn far."

"They hang around close to the bunker. He's getting into the bad part. Get set!"

The Russian began to hurry, sliding down the hill, his boots sinking into the heaps of gray ash, trying to keep his gun up. He stopped for a moment, lifting his field glasses to his face.

"He's looking right at us," Eric said.

The Russian came on. They could see his eyes, like two blue stones. His mouth was open a little. He needed a shave; his chin was stubbled. On one bony cheek was a square of tape, showing blue at the edge. A fungoid spot. His coat was muddy and torn. One glove was missing. As he ran, his belt counter bounced up and down against him.

Leone touched Eric's arm. "Here one comes."

Across the ground something small and metallic came, flashing in the dull sunlight of midday. A metal sphere. It raced up the hill after the Russian, its treads flying. It was small, one of the baby ones. Its claws were out, two razor projections spinning in a blur of white steel. The Russian heard it. He turned instantly, firing. The sphere dissolved into particles. But already a second had emerged and was following the first. The Russian fired again.

A third sphere leaped up the Russian's leg, clicking and whirring. It jumped to the shoulder. The spinning blades disappeared into the Russian's throat.

Eric relaxed. "Well, that's that. God, those damn things give me the creeps. Sometimes I think we were better off before."

"If we hadn't invented them, they would have." Leone lit a cigarette shakily. "I wonder why a Russian would come all this way alone. I didn't see anyone covering him."

Lieutenant Scott came slipping up the tunnel, into the bunker. "What happened? Something entered the screen."

"An Ivan."

"Just one?"

Eric brought the viewscreen around. Scott peered into it. Now there were numerous metal spheres crawling over the prostrate body, dull metal globes clicking and whirring, sawing up the Russian into small parts to be carried away.

"What a lot of claws," Scott murmured.

"They come like flies. Not much game for them any more."

Scott pushed the sight away, disgusted. "Like flies. I wonder why he was out there. They know we have claws all around."

A larger robot had joined the smaller spheres. A long blunt tube with projecting eyepieces, it was directing operations. There was not much left of the soldier. What remained was being brought down the hillside by the host of claws.

"Sir," Leone said. "If it's all right, I'd like to go out there and take a look at him."

"Why?"

"Maybe he came with something."

Scott considered. He shrugged. "All right. But be careful."

"I have my tab." Leone patted the metal band at his wrist. "I'll be out of bounds."

He picked up his rifle and stepped carefully up to the mouth of the bunker, making his way between blocks of concrete and steel prongs, twisted and bent. The air was cold at the top. He crossed over the ground toward the remains of the soldier, striding across the soft ash. A wind blew around him, swirling gray particles up in his face. He squinted and pushed on.

The claws retreated as he came close, some of them stiffening into immobility. He touched his tab. The Ivan would have given something for that! Short hard radiation emitted from the tab neutralized the claws, put them out of commission. Even the big robot with its two waving eyestalks retreated respectfully as he approached.

He bent down over the remains of the soldier. The gloved hand was closed tightly. There was something in it. Leone pried the fingers apart. A sealed container, aluminum. Still shiny.

He put it in his pocket and made his way back to the bunker. Behind him

the claws came back to life, moving into operation again. The procession resumed, metal spheres moving through the gray ash with their loads. He could hear their treads scrabbling against the ground. He shuddered.

Scott watched intently as he brought the shiny tube out of his pocket. "He had that?"

"In his hand." Leone unscrewed the top. "Maybe you should look at it, sir."

Scott took it. He emptied the contents out in the palm of his hand. A small piece of silk paper, carefully folded. He sat down by the light and unfolded it.

"What's it say, sir?" Eric said. Several officers came up the tunnel. Major Hendricks appeared.

"Major," Scott said. "Look at this."

Hendricks read the slip. "This just come?"

"A single runner. Just now."

"Where is he?" Hendricks asked sharply.

"The claws got him."

Major Hendricks grunted. "Here." He passed it to his companions. "I think this is what we've been waiting for. They certainly took their time about it."

"So they want to talk terms," Scott said. "Are we going along with them?"

"That's not for us to decide." Hendricks sat down. "Where's the communications officer? I want the Moon Base."

Leone pondered as the communications officer raised the outside antenna cautiously, scanning the sky above the bunker for any sign of a watching Russian ship.

"Sir," Scott said to Hendricks. "It's sure strange they suddenly came around. We've been using the claws for almost a year. Now all of a sudden they start to fold."

"Maybe claws have been getting down in their bunkers."

"One of the big ones, the kind with stalks, got into an Ivan bunker last week," Eric said. "It got a whole platoon of them before they got their lid shut."

"How do you know?"

"A buddy told me. The thing came back with—with remains."

"Moon Base, sir," the communications officer said.

On the screen the face of the lunar monitor appeared. His crisp uniform contrasted to the uniforms in the bunker. And he was cleanshaven. "Moon Base."

"This is forward command L-Whistle. On Terra. Let me have General Thompson."

The monitor faded. Presently General Thompson's heavy features came into focus. "What is it, Major?"

"Our claws got a single Russian runner with a message. We don't know whether to act on it—there have been tricks like this in the past."

"What's the message?"

"The Russians want us to send a single officer on policy level over to their lines. For a conference. They don't state the nature of the conference. They say that matters of—" He consulted the slip: "—matters of grave urgency make it advisable that discussion be opened between a representative of the UN forces and themselves."

He held the message up to the screen for the general to scan. Thompson's eyes moved.

"What should we do?" Hendricks said.

"Send a man out."

"You don't think it's a trap?"

"It might be. But the location they give for their forward command is correct. It's worth a try, at any rate."

"I'll send an officer out. And report the results to you as soon as he returns."

"All right, Major." Thompson broke the connection. The screen died. Up above, the antenna came slowly down.

Hendricks rolled up the paper, deep in thought.

"I'll go," Leone said.

"They want somebody at policy level." Hendricks rubbed his jaw. "Policy level. I haven't been outside in months. Maybe I could use a little air."

"Don't you think it's risky?"

Hendricks lifted the view sight and gazed into it. The remains of the Russian were gone. Only a single claw was in sight. It was folding itself back, disappearing into the ash, like a crab. Like some hideous metal crab. . . .

"That's the only thing that bothers me." Hendricks rubbed his wrist. "I know I'm safe as long as I have this on me. But there's something about them. I hate the damn things. I wish we'd never invented them. There's something wrong with them. Relentless little—"

"If we hadn't invented them, the Ivans would have."

Hendricks pushed the sight back. "Anyhow, it seems to be winning the war. I guess that's good."

"Sounds like you're getting the same jitters as the Ivans."

Hendricks examined his wristwatch. "I guess I had better get started, if I want to be there before dark."

He took a deep breath and then stepped out onto the gray rubbed ground. After a minute he lit a cigarette and stood gazing around him. The landscape was dead. Nothing stirred. He could see for miles, endless ash and slag, ruins of buildings. A few trees without leaves or branches, only the

trunks. Above him the eternal rolling clouds of gray, drifting between Terra and the sun.

Major Hendricks went on. Off to the right something scuttled, something round and metallic. A claw, going lickety-split after something. Probably after a small animal, a rat. They got rats, too. As a sort of sideline.

He came to the top of the little hill and lifted his field glasses. The Russian lines were a few miles ahead of him. They had a forward command post there. The runner had come from it.

A squat robot with undulating arms passed by him, its arms weaving inquiringly. The robot went on its way, disappearing under some debris. Hendricks watched it go. He had never seen that type before. There were getting to be more and more types he had never seen, new varieties and sizes coming up from the underground factories.

Hendricks put out his cigarette and hurried on. It was interesting, the use of artificial forms in warfare. How had they got started? Necessity. The Soviet Union had gained great initial success, usual with the side that got the war going. Most of North America had been blasted off the map. Retaliation was quick in coming, of course. The sky was full of circling diskbombers long before the war began; they had been up there for years. The disks began sailing down all over Russia within hours after Washington got it.

But that hadn't helped Washington.

The American bloc governments moved to the Moon Base the first year. There was not much else to do. Europe was gone, a slag heap with dark weeds growing from the ashes and bones. Most of North America was useless, nothing could be planted, no one could live. A few million people kept going up in Canada and down in South America. But during the second year Soviet parachutists began to drop, a few at first, then more and more. They wore the first really effective antiradiation equipment; what was left of American production moved to the Moon along with the governments.

All but the troops. The remaining troops stayed behind as best they could, a few thousand here, a platoon there. No one knew exactly where they were, they stayed where they could, moving around at night, hiding in ruins, in sewers, cellars, with the rats and snakes. It looked as if the Soviet Union had a war almost won. Except for a handful of projectiles fired off from the Moon daily, there was almost no weapon in use against them. They came and went as they pleased. The war, for all practical purposes, was over. Nothing effective opposed them.

And then the first claws appeared. And overnight the complexion of the war changed.

The claws were awkward, at first. Slow. The Ivans knocked them off almost as fast as they crawled out of their underground tunnels. But then they got better, faster and more cunning. Factories, all on Terra, turned

them out. Factories a long way underground, behind the Soviet lines, factories that had once made atomic projectiles, now almost forgotten.

The claws got faster, and they got bigger. New types appeared, some with feelers, some that flew. There were a few jumping kinds. The best technicians on the Moon were working on designs, making them more and more intricate, more flexible. They became uncanny; the Ivans were having a lot of trouble with them. Some of the little claws were learning to hide themselves, burrowing down into the ash, lying in wait.

And then they started getting into the Russian bunkers, slipping down when the lids were raised for air and a look around. One claw inside a bunker, a churning sphere of blades and metal—that was enough. And when one got in others followed. With a weapon like that the war couldn't go on much longer.

Maybe it was already over.

Maybe he was going to hear the news. Maybe the Politburo had decided to throw in the sponge. Too bad it had taken so long. Six years. A long time for war like that, the way they had waged it. The automatic retaliation disks, spinning down all over Russia, hundreds of thousands of them. Bacteria crystals. The Soviet guided missiles, whistling through the air. The chain bombs. And now this, the robots, the claws—

The claws weren't like other weapons. They were *alive*, from any practical standpoint, whether the Governments wanted to admit it or not. They were not machines. They were living things, spinning, creeping, shaking themselves up suddenly from the gray ash and darting toward a man, climbing up him, rushing for his throat. And that was what they had been designed to do. Their job.

They did their job well. Especially lately, with the new designs coming up. Now they repaired themselves. They were on their own. Radiation tabs protected the UN troops, but if a man lost his tab he was fair game for the claws, no matter what his uniform. Down below the surface automatic machinery stamped them out. Human beings stayed a long way off. It was too risky; nobody wanted to be around them. They were left to themselves. And they seemed to be doing all right. The new designs were faster, more complex. More efficient.

Apparently they had won the war.

Major Hendricks lit a second cigarette. The landscape depressed him. Nothing but ash and ruins. He seemed to be alone, the only living thing in the whole world. To the right the ruins of a town rose up, a few walls and heaps of debris. He tossed the dead match away, increasing his pace. Suddenly he stopped, jerking up his gun, his body tense. For a minute it looked like—

From behind the shell of a ruined building a figure came, walking slowly toward him, walking hesitantly.

Hendricks blinked. "Stop!"

The boy stopped. Hendricks lowered his gun. The boy stood silently, looking at him. He was small, not very old. Perhaps eight. But it was hard to tell. Most of the kids who remained were stunted. He wore a faded blue sweater ragged with dirt, and short pants. His hair was long and matted. Brown hair. It hung over his face and around his ears. He held something in his arms.

"What's that you have?" Hendricks said sharply.

The boy held it out. It was a toy, a bear. A teddy bear. The boy's eyes were large, but without expression.

Hendricks relaxed. "I don't want it. Keep it."

The boy hugged the bear again.

"Where do you live?" Hendricks said.

"In there."

"The ruins?"

"Yes."

"Underground?"

"Yes."

"How many are there?"

"How—how many?"

"How many of you. How big's your settlement?"

The boy did not answer.

Hendricks frowned. "You're not all by yourself, are you?"

The boy nodded.

"How do you stay alive?"

"There's food."

"What kind of food?"

"Different."

Hendricks studied him. "How old are you?"

"Thirteen."

It wasn't possible. Or was it? The boy was thin, stunted. And probably sterile. Radiation exposure, years straight. No wonder he was so small. His arms and legs were like pipe cleaners, knobby and thin. Hendricks touched the boy's arm. His skin was dry and rough; radiation skin. He bent down, looking into the boy's face. There was no expression. Big eyes, big and dark.

"Are you blind?" Hendricks said.

"No. I can see some."

"How do you get away from the claws?"

"The claws?"

"The round things. That run and burrow."

"I don't understand."

Maybe there weren't any claws around. A lot of areas were free. They collected mostly around bunkers, where there were people. The claws had been designed to sense warmth, warmth of living things.

"You're lucky." Hendricks straightened up. "Well? Which way are you going? Back—back there?"

"Can I come with you?"

"With *me*?" Hendricks folded his arms. "I'm going a long way. Miles. I have to hurry." He looked at his watch. "I have to get there by nightfall."

"I want to come."

Hendricks fumbled in his pack. "It isn't worth it. Here." He tossed down the food cans he had with him. "You take these and go back. Okay?"

The boy said nothing.

"I'll be coming back this way. In a day or so. If you're around here when I come back you can come along with me. All right?"

"I want to go with you now."

"It's a long walk."

"I can walk."

Hendricks shifted uneasily. It made too good a target, two people walking along. And the boy would slow him down. But he might not come back this way. And if the boy were really all alone—

"Okay. Come along."

The boy fell in beside him. Hendricks strode along. The boy walked silently, clutching his teddy bear.

"What's your name?" Hendricks said, after a time.

"David Edward Derring."

"David? What—what happened to your mother and father?"

"They died."

"How?"

"In the blast."

"How long ago?"

"Six years."

Hendricks slowed down. "You've been alone six years?"

"No. There were other people for a while. They went away."

"And you've been alone since?"

"Yes."

Hendricks glanced down. The boy was strange, saying very little. Withdrawn. But that was the way they were, the children who had survived. Quiet. Stoic. A strange kind of fatalism gripped them. Nothing came as a surprise. They accepted anything that came along. There was no longer any *normal*, any natural course of things, moral or physical, for them to expect. Custom, habit, all the determining forces of learning were gone; only brute experience remained.

"Am I walking too fast?" Hendricks said.

"No."

"How did you happen to see me?"

"I was waiting."

"Waiting?" Hendricks was puzzled. "What were you waiting for?"

"To catch things."

"What kind of things?"

"Things to eat."

"Oh." Hendricks set his lips grimly. A thirteen-year-old boy, living on rats and gophers and half-rotten canned food. Down in a hole under the ruins of a town. With radiation pools and claws, and Russian dive-mines up above, coasting around in the sky.

"Where are we going?" David asked.

"To the Russian lines."

"Russian?"

"The enemy. The people who started the war. They dropped the first radiation bombs. They began all this."

The boy nodded. His face showed no expression.

"I'm an American," Hendricks said.

There was no comment. On they went, the two of them, Hendricks walking a little ahead, David trailing behind him, hugging his dirty teddy bear against his chest.

About four in the afternoon they stopped to eat. Hendricks built a fire in a hollow between some slabs of concrete. He cleared the weeds away and heaped up bits of wood. The Russians' lines were not very far ahead. Around him was what had once been a long valley, acres of fruit trees and grapes. Nothing remained now but a few bleak stumps and the mountains that stretched across the horizon at the far end. And the clouds of rolling ash that blew and drifted with the wind, settling over the weeds and remains of buildings, walls here and there, once in a while what had been a road.

Hendricks made coffee and heated up some boiled mutton and bread. "Here." He handed bread and mutton to David. David squatted by the edge of the fire, his knees knobby and white. He examined the food and then passed it back, shaking his head.

"No."

"No? Don't you want any?"

"No."

Hendricks shrugged. Maybe the boy was a mutant, used to special food. It didn't matter. When he was hungry he would find something to eat. The boy was strange. But there were many strange changes coming over the world. Life was not the same anymore. It would never be the same again. The human race was going to have to realize that.

"Suit yourself," Hendricks said. He ate the bread and mutton by himself,

washing it down with coffee. He ate slowly, finding the food hard to digest. When he was done he got to his feet and stamped the fire out.

David rose slowly, watching him with his young-old eyes.

"We're going," Hendricks said.

"All right."

Hendricks walked along, his gun in his arms. They were close; he was tense, ready for anything. The Russians should be expecting a runner, an answer to their own runner, but they were tricky. There was always the possibility of a slip-up. He scanned the landscape around him. Nothing but slag and ash, a few hills, charred trees. Concrete walls. But some place ahead was the first bunker of the Russian lines, the forward command. Underground, buried deep, with only a periscope showing, a few gun muzzles. Maybe an antenna.

"Will we be there soon?" David asked.

"Yes. Getting tired?"

"No."

"Why, then?"

David did not answer. He plodded carefully along behind, picking his way over the ash. His legs and shoes were gray with dust. His pinched face was streaked, lines of gray ash in riverlets down the pale white of his skin. There was no color to his face. Typical of the new children, growing up in cellars and sewers and underground shelters.

Hendricks slowed down. He lifted his field glasses and studied the ground ahead of him. Were they there, some place, waiting for him? Watching him, the way his men had watched the Russian runner? A chill went up his back. Maybe they were getting their guns ready, preparing to fire, the way his men had prepared, made ready to kill.

Hendricks stopped, wiping perspiration from his face. "Damn." It made him uneasy. But he should be expected. The situation was different.

He strode over the ash, holding his gun tightly with both hands. Behind him came David. Hendricks peered around, tight-lipped. Any second it might happen. A burst of white light, a blast, carefully aimed from inside a deep concrete bunker.

He raised his arm and waved it around in a circle.

Nothing moved. To the right a long ridge ran, topped with dead tree trunks. A few wild vines had grown up around the trees, remains of arbors. And the eternal dark weeds. Hendricks studied the ridge. Was anything up there? Perfect place for a lookout. He approached the ridge warily, David coming silently behind. If it were his command he'd have a sentry up there, watching for troops trying to infiltrate into the command area. Of course, if it were his command there would be the claws around the area for full protection.

He stopped, feet apart, hands on his hips.

"Are we there?" David said.

"Almost."

"Why have we stopped?"

"I don't want to take any chances," Hendricks advanced slowly. Now the ridge lay directly beside him, along his right. Overlooking him. His uneasy feeling increased. If an Ivan were up there he wouldn't have a chance. He waved his arm again. They should be expecting someone in the UN uniform, in response to the note capsule. Unless the whole thing was a trap.

"Keep up with me." He turned toward David. "Don't drop behind."

"With you?"

"Up beside me! We're close. We can't take any chances. Come on."

"I'll be all right." David remained behind him, in the rear, a few paces away, still clutching his teddy bear.

"Have it your way," Hendricks raised his glasses again, suddenly tense. For a moment—had something moved? He scanned the ridge carefully. Everything was silent. Dead. No life up there, only tree trunks and ash. Maybe a few rats. The big black rats that had survived the claws. Mutants—built their own shelters out of saliva and ash. Some kind of plaster. Adaptation. He started forward again.

A tall figure came out on the ridge above him, cloak flapping. Gray-green. A Russian. Behind him a second soldier appeared, another Russian. Both lifted their guns, aiming.

Hendricks froze. He opened his mouth. The soldiers were kneeling, sighting down the side of the slope. A third figure had joined them on the ridge top, a smaller figure in gray-green. A woman. She stood behind the other two.

Hendricks found his voice. "Stop!" He waved up at them frantically. "I'm—"

The two Russians fired. Behind Hendricks there was a faint *pop*. Waves of heat lapped against him, throwing him to the ground. Ash tore at his face, grinding into his eyes and nose. Choking, he pulled himself to his knees. It was all a trap. He was finished. He had come to be killed, like a steer. The soldiers and the woman were coming down the side of the ridge toward him, sliding down through the soft ash. Hendricks was numb. His head throbbed. Awkwardly, he got his rifle up and took aim. It weighed a thousand tons; he could hardly hold it. His nose and cheeks stung. The air was full of the blast smell, a bitter acrid stench.

"Don't fire," the first Russian said, in heavily accented English.

The three of them came up to him, surrounding him. "Put down your rifle, Yank," the other said.

Hendricks was dazed. Everything had happened so fast. He had been caught. And they had blasted the boy. He turned his head. David was gone. What remained of him was strewn across the ground.

The three Russians studied him curiously. Hendricks sat, wiping blood from his nose, picking out bits of ash. He shook his head, trying to clear it. "Why did you do it?" he murmured thickly. "The boy."

"Why?" One of the soldiers helped him roughly to his feet. He turned Hendricks around. "Look."

Hendricks closed his eyes.

"Look!" The two Russians pulled him forward. "See. Hurry up. There isn't much time to spare, Yank!"

Hendricks looked. And gasped.

"See now? Now do you understand?"

From the remains of David a metal wheel rolled. Relays, glinting metal. Parts, wiring. One of the Russians kicked at the heap of remains. Parts popped out, rolling away, wheels and springs and rods. A plastic section fell in, half charred. Hendricks bent shakily down. The front of the head had come off. He could make out the intricate brain, wires and relays, tiny tubes and switches, thousands of minute studs—

"A robot," the soldier holding his arm said. "We watched it tagging you."

"Tagging me?"

"That's their way. They tag along with you. Into the bunker. That's how they get in."

Hendricks blinked, dazed. "But—"

"Come on." They led him toward the ridge. "We can't stay here. It isn't safe. There must be hundreds of them all around here."

The three of them pulled him up the side of the ridge, sliding and slipping on the ash. The woman reached the top and stood waiting for them.

"The forward command," Hendricks muttered. "I came to negotiate with the Soviet—"

"There is no more forward command. *They* got in. We'll explain." They reached the top of the ridge. "We're all that's left. The three of us. The rest were down in the bunker."

"This way. Down this way." The woman unscrewed a lid, a gray manhole cover set in the ground. "Get in."

Hendricks lowered himself. The two soldiers and the woman came behind him, following him down the ladder. The woman closed the lid after them, bolting it tightly into place.

"Good thing we saw you," one of the two soldiers grunted. "It had tagged you about as far as it was going to."

"Give me one of your cigarettes," the woman said. "I haven't had an American cigarette for weeks."

Hendricks pushed the pack to her. She took a cigarette and passed the pack to the two soldiers. In the corner of the small room the lamp gleamed fitfully. The room was low-ceilinged, cramped. The four of them sat around

a small wood table. A few dirty dishes were stacked to one side. Behind a ragged curtain a second room was partly visible. Hendricks saw the corner of a coat, some blankets, clothes hung on a hook.

"We were here," the soldier beside him said. He took off his helmet, pushing his blond hair back. "I'm Corporal Rudi Maxer, Polish. Impressed in the Soviet Army two years ago." He held out his hand.

Hendricks hesitated and then shook. "Major Joseph Hendricks."

"Klaus Epstein." The other soldier shook with him, a small dark man with thinning hair. Epstein plucked nervously at his ear. "Austrian. Impressed God knows when. I don't remember. The three of us were here, Rudi and I, with Tasso." He indicated the woman. "That's how we escaped. All the rest were down in the bunker."

"And—and *they* got in?"

Epstein lit a cigarette. "First just one of them. The kind that tagged you. Then it let others in."

Hendricks became alert. "The *kind*? Are there more than one kind?"

"The little boy, David. David holding his teddy bear. That's Variety Three. The most effective."

"What are the other types?"

Epstein reached into his coat. "Here." He tossed a packet of photographs onto the table, tied with a string. "Look for yourself."

Hendricks untied the string.

"You see," Rudi Maxer said, "that was why we wanted to talk terms. The Russians, I mean. We found out about a week ago. Found out that your claws were beginning to make up new designs on their own. New types of their own. Better types. Down in your underground factories behind our lines. You let them stamp themselves, repair themselves. Made them more and more intricate. It's your fault this happened."

Hendricks examined the photos. They had been snapped hurriedly; they were blurred and indistinct. The first few showed—David. David walking along a road, by himself. David and another David. Three Davids. All exactly alike. Each with a ragged teddy bear.

All pathetic.

"Look at the others," Tasso said.

The next pictures, taken at a great distance, showed a towering wounded soldier sitting by the side of a path, his arm in a sling, the stump of one leg extended, a crude crutch on his lap. Then two wounded soldiers, both the same, standing side by side.

"That's Variety One. The Wounded Soldier." Klaus reached out and took the pictures. "You see, the claws were designed to get to human beings. To find them. Each kind was better than the last. They got farther, closer, past most of our defenses, into our lines. But as long as they were merely

machines, metal spheres with claws and horns, feelers, they could be picked off like any other object. They could be detected as lethal robots as soon as they were seen. Once we caught sight of them—”

“Variety One subverted our whole north wing,” Rudi said. “It was a long time before anyone caught on. Then it was too late. They came in, wounded soldiers, knocking and begging to be let in. So we let them in. And as soon as they were in they took over. We were watching out for machines. . . .”

“At that time it was thought there was only the one type,” Klaus Epstein said. “No one suspected there were other types. The pictures were flashed to us. When the runner was sent to you, we knew of just one type. Variety One. The big Wounded Soldier. We thought that was all.”

“Your line fell to—”

“To Variety Three. David and his bear. That worked even better.” Klaus smiled bitterly. “Soldiers are suckers for children. We brought them in and tried to feed them. We found out the hard way what they were after. At least, those who were in the bunker.”

“The three of us were lucky,” Rudi said. “Klaus and I were—were visiting Tasso when it happened. This is her place.” He waved a big hand around. “This little cellar. We finished and climbed the ladder to start back. From the ridge we saw that they were all around the bunker. Fighting was still going on. David and his bear. Hundreds of them. Klaus took the pictures.”

Klaus tied up the photographs again.

“And it’s going on all along your line?” Hendricks said.

“Yes.”

“How about *our* lines?” Without thinking, he touched the tab on his arm. “Can they—”

“They’re not bothered by your radiation tabs. It makes no difference to them, Russian, American, Pole, German. It’s all the same. They’re doing what they were designed to do. Carrying out the original idea. They track down life, wherever they find it.”

“They go by warmth,” Klaus said. “That was the way you constructed them from the very start. Of course, those you designed were kept back by the radiation tabs you wear. Now they’ve got around that. These new varieties are lead-lined.”

“What’s the other variety?” Hendricks asked. “The David type, the Wounded Soldier—what’s the other?”

“We don’t know.” Klaus pointed up at the wall. On the wall were two metal plates, ragged at the edges. Hendricks got up and studied them. They were bent and dented.

“The one on the left came off a Wounded Soldier,” Rudi said. “We got one of them. It was going along toward our old bunker. We got it from the ridge, the same way we got the David tagging you.”

The plate was stamped: *I-V*. Hendricks touched the other plate. “And this came from the David type?”

"Yes." The plate was stamped: III-V.

Klaus took a look at them, leaning over Hendricks's broad shoulder. "You can see what we're up against. There's another type. Maybe it was abandoned. Maybe it didn't work. But there must be a Second Variety. There's One and Three."

"You were lucky," Rudi said. "The David tagged you all the way here and never touched you. Probably thought you'd get it into a bunker, somewhere."

"One gets in and it's all over," Klaus said. "They move fast. One lets all the rest inside. They're inflexible. Machines with one purpose. They were built for only one thing." He rubbed sweat from his lip. "We saw."

They were silent.

"Let me have another cigarette, Yank," Tasso said. "They are good. I almost forgot how they were."

It was night. The sky was black. No stars were visible through the rolling clouds of ash. Klaus lifted the lid cautiously so that Hendricks could look out.

Rudi pointed into the darkness. "Over that way are the bunkers. Where we used to be. Not over half a mile from us. It was just chance Klaus and I were not there when it happened. Weakness. Saved by our lusts."

"All the rest must be dead," Klaus said in a low voice. "It came quickly. This morning the Politburo reached their decision. They notified us—forward command. Our runner was sent out at once. We saw him start toward the direction of your lines. We covered him until he was out of sight."

"Alex Radrivsky. We both knew him. He disappeared about six o'clock. The sun had just come up. About noon Klaus and I had an hour relief. We crept off, away from the bunkers. No one was watching. We came here. There used to be a town here, a few houses, a street. This cellar was part of a big farmhouse. We knew Tasso would be here, hiding down in her little place. We had come here before. Others from the bunkers came here. Today happened to be our turn."

"So we were saved," Klaus said. "Chance. It might have been others. We—we finished, and then we came up to the surface and started back along the ridge. That was when we saw them, the Davids. We understood right away. We had seen the photos of the First Variety, the Wounded Soldier. Our Commissar distributed them to us with an explanation. If we had gone another step they would have seen us. As it was we had to blast two Davids before we got back. There were hundreds of them, all around. Like ants. We took pictures and slipped back here, bolting the lid tight."

"They're not so much when you catch them alone. We moved faster than they did. But they're inexorable. Not like living things. They came right at us. And we blasted them."

Major Hendricks rested against the edge of the lid, adjusting his eyes to the darkness. "Is it safe to have the lid up at all?"

"If we're careful. How else can you operate your transmitter?"

Hendricks lifted the small belt transmitter slowly. He pressed it against his ear. The metal was cold and damp. He blew against the mike, raising up the short antenna. A faint hum sounded in his ear. "That's true, I suppose."

But he still hesitated.

"We'll pull you under if anything happens," Klaus said.

"Thanks." Hendricks waited a moment, resting the transmitter against his shoulder. "Interesting, isn't it?"

"What?"

"This, the new types. The new varieties of claws. We're completely at their mercy, aren't we? By now they've probably gotten into the UN lines, too. It makes me wonder if we're not seeing the beginning of a new species. *The* new species. Evolution. The race to come after man."

Rudi grunted. "There is no race after man."

"No? Why not? Maybe we're seeing it now, the end of human beings, the beginning of the new society."

"They're not a race. They're mechanical killers. You made them to destroy. That's all they can do. They're machines with a job."

"So it seems now. But how about later on? After the war is over. Maybe, when there aren't any humans to destroy, their real potentialities will begin to show."

"You talk as if they were alive!"

"Aren't they?"

There was silence. "They're machines," Rudi said. "They look like people, but they're machines."

"Use your transmitter, Major," Klaus said. "We can't stay up here forever."

Holding the transmitter tightly, Hendricks called the code of the command bunker. He waited, listening. No response. Only silence. He checked the leads carefully. Everything was in place.

"Scott!" he said into the mike. "Can you hear me?"

Silence. He raised the gain up full and tried again. Only static.

"I don't get anything. They may hear me but they may not want to answer."

"Tell them it's an emergency."

"They'll think I'm being forced to call. Under your direction." He tried again, outlining briefly what he had learned. But still the phone was silent, except for the faint static.

"Radiation pools kill most transmission," Klaus said, after awhile. "Maybe that's it."

Hendricks shut the transmitter up. "No use. No answer. Radiation pools? Maybe. Or they hear me, but won't answer. Frankly, that's what I would do, if

a runner tried to call from the Soviet lines. They have no reason to believe such a story. They may hear everything I say—"

"Or maybe it's too late."

Hendricks nodded.

"We better get the lid down," Rudi said nervously. "We don't want to take unnecessary chances."

They climbed slowly back down the tunnel. Klaus bolted the lid carefully into place. They descended into the kitchen. The air was heavy and close around them.

"Could they work that fast?" Hendricks said. "I left the bunker this noon. Ten hours ago. How could they move so quickly?"

"It doesn't take them long. Not after the first one gets in. It goes wild. You know what the little claws can do. Even *one* of these is beyond belief. Razors, each finger. Maniacal."

"All right," Hendricks moved away impatiently. He stood with his back to them.

"What's the matter?" Rudi said.

"The Moon Base. God, if they've gotten there—"

"The Moon Base?"

Hendricks turned around. "They couldn't have got to the Moon Base. How would they get there? It isn't possible. I can't believe it."

"What is this Moon Base? We've heard rumors, but nothing definite. What is the actual situation? You seem concerned."

"We're supplied from the Moon. The governments are there, under the lunar surface. All our people and industries. That's what keeps us going. If they should find some way of getting off Terra, onto the Moon—"

"It only takes one of them. Once the first one gets in it admits the others. Hundreds of them, all alike. You should have seen them. Identical. Like ants."

"Perfect socialism," Tasso said. "The ideal of the communist state. All citizens interchangeable."

Klaus grunted angrily. "That's enough. Well? What next?"

Hendricks paced back and forth, around the small room. The air was full of smells of food and perspiration. The others watched him. Presently Tasso pushed through the curtain, into the other room. "I'm going to take a nap."

The curtain closed behind her. Rudi and Klaus sat down at the table, still watching Hendricks. "It's up to you," Klaus said. "We don't know your situation."

Hendricks nodded.

"It's a problem," Rudi drank some coffee, filling his cup from a rusty pot. "We're safe here for a while, but we can't stay here forever. Not enough food or supplies."

"But if we go outside—"

"If we go outside they'll get us. Or probably they'll get us. We couldn't go very far. How far is your command bunker, Major?"

"Three or four miles."

"We might make it. The four of us. Four of us could watch all sides. They couldn't slip up behind us and start tagging us. We have three rifles, three blast rifles. Tasso can have my pistol." Rudi tapped his belt. "In the Soviet army we didn't have shoes always, but we had guns. With all four of us armed one of us might get to your command bunker. Preferably you, Major."

"What if they're already there?" Klaus said.

Rudi shrugged. "Well, then we come back here."

Hendricks stopped pacing. "What do you think the chances are they're already in the American lines?"

"Hard to say. Fairly good. They're organized. They know exactly what they're doing. Once they start they go like a horde of locusts. They have to keep moving, and fast. It's secrecy and speed they depend on. Surprise. They push their way in before anyone has any idea."

"I see," Hendricks murmured.

From the other room Tasso stirred. "Major?"

Hendricks pushed the curtain back. "What?"

Tasso looked up at him lazily from the cot. "Have you any more American cigarettes left?"

Hendricks went into the room and sat down across from her, on a wood stool. He felt in his pockets. "No. All gone."

"Too bad."

"What nationality are you?" Hendricks asked her after a while.

"Russian."

"How did you get here?"

"Here?"

"This used to be France. This was part of Normandy. Did you come with the Soviet army?"

"Why?"

"Just curious." He studied her. She had taken off her coat, tossing it over the end of the cot. She was young, about twenty. Slim. Her long hair stretched out over the pillow. She was staring at him silently, her eyes dark and large.

"What's on your mind?" Tasso said.

"Nothing. How old are you?"

"Eighteen." She continued to watch him, unblinking, her arms behind her head. She had on Russian army pants and shirt. Gray-green. Thick leather belt with counter and cartridges. Medicine kit.

"You're in the Soviet army?"

"No."

"Where did you get the uniform?"

She shrugged. "It was given to me," she told him.

"How—how old were you when you came here?"

"Sixteen."

"That young?"

Her eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

Hendricks rubbed his jaw. "Your life would have been a lot different if there had been no war. Sixteen. You came here at sixteen. To live this way."

"I had to survive."

"I'm not moralizing."

"Your life would have been different, too," Tasso murmured. She reached down and unfastened one of her boots. She kicked the boot off, onto the floor. "Major, do you want to go in the other room? I'm sleepy."

"It's going to be a problem, the four of us here. It's going to be hard to live in these quarters. Are there just the two rooms?"

"Yes."

"How big was the cellar originally? Was it larger than this? Are there other rooms filled up with debris? We might be able to open one of them."

"Perhaps. I really don't know." Tasso loosened her belt. She made herself comfortable on the cot, unbuttoning her shirt. "You're sure you have no more cigarettes?"

"I had only one pack."

"Too bad. Maybe if we get back to your bunker we can find some." The other boot fell. Tasso reached up for the light cord. "Good night."

"You're going to sleep?"

"That's right."

The room plunged into darkness. Hendricks got up and made his way past the curtain, into the kitchen. And stopped, rigid.

Rudi stood against the wall, his face white and gleaming. His mouth opened and closed but no sounds came. Klaus stood in front of him, the muzzle of his pistol in Rudi's stomach. Neither of them moved. Klaus, his hand tight around the gun, his features set. Rudi, pale and silent, spread-eagled against the wall.

"What—" Hendricks muttered, but Klaus cut him off.

"Be quiet, Major. Come over here. Your gun. Get out your gun."

Hendricks drew his pistol. "What is it?"

"Cover him." Klaus motioned him forward. "Beside me. Hurry!"

Rudi moved a little, lowering his arms. He turned to Hendricks, licking his lips. The whites of his eyes shone wildly. Sweat dripped from his forehead, down his cheeks. He fixed his gaze on Hendricks. "Major, he's gone insane. Stop him." Rudi's voice was thin and hoarse, almost inaudible.

"What's going on?" Hendricks demanded.

Without lowering his pistol Klaus answered. "Major, remember our

discussion? The Three Varieties? We knew about One and Three. But we didn't know about Two. At least, we didn't know before." Klaus's fingers tightened around the gun butt. "We didn't know before, but we know now."

He pressed the trigger. A burst of white heat rolled out of the gun, licking around Rudi.

"Major, this is the Second Variety."

Tasso swept the curtain aside. "Klaus! What did you do?"

Klaus turned from the charred form, gradually sinking down the wall onto the floor. "The Second Variety, Tasso. Now we know. We have all three types identified. The danger is less. I—"

Tasso stared past him at the remains of Rudi, at the blackened, smoldering fragments and bits of cloth. "You killed him."

"Him? *It*, you mean. I was watching. I had a feeling but I wasn't sure. At least, I wasn't sure before. But this evening I was certain." Klaus rubbed his pistol butt nervously. "We're lucky. Don't you understand? Another hour and it might—"

"You were *certain*?" Tasso pushed past him and bent down, over the steaming remains on the floor. Her face became hard. "Major, see for yourself. Bones. Flesh."

Hendricks bent down beside her. The remains were human remains. Seared flesh, charred bone fragments, part of a skull. Ligaments, viscera, blood. Blood forming a pool against the wall.

"No wheels," Tasso said calmly. She straightened up. "No wheels, no parts, no relays. Not a claw. Not the Second Variety." She folded her arms. "You're going to have to be able to explain this."

Klaus sat down at the table, all the color drained suddenly from his face. He put his head in his hands and rocked back and forth.

"Snap out of it." Tasso's fingers closed over his shoulder. "Why did you do it? Why did you kill him?"

"He was frightened," Hendricks said. "All this, the whole thing, building up around us."

"Maybe."

"What, then? What do you think?"

"I think he may have had a reason for killing Rudi. A good reason."

"What reason?"

"Maybe Rudi learned something."

Hendricks studied her bleak face. "About what?" he asked.

"About him. About Klaus."

Klaus looked up quickly. "You can see what she's trying to say. She thinks I'm the Second Variety. Don't you see, Major? Now she wants you to believe I killed him on purpose. That I'm—"

"Why did you kill him, then?" Tasso said.

"I told you." Klaus shook his head wearily. "I thought he was a claw. I thought I knew."

"Why?"

"I had been watching him. I was suspicious."

"Why?"

"I thought I had seen something. Heard something. I thought I—" He stopped.

"Go on."

"We were sitting at the table. Playing cards. You two were in the other room. It was silent. I thought I heard him—*whirr*."

There was silence.

"Do you believe that?" Tasso said to Hendricks.

"Yes. I believe what he says."

"I don't. I think he killed Rudi for a good purpose." Tasso touched, the rifle, resting in the corner of the room. "Major—"

"No." Hendricks shook his head. "Let's stop it right now. One is enough. We're afraid, the way he was. If we kill him we'll be doing what he did to Rudi."

Klaus looked gratefully up at him. "Thanks. I was afraid. You understand, don't you? Now she's afraid, the way I was. She wants to kill me."

"No more killing." Hendricks moved toward the end of the ladder. "I'm going above and try the transmitter once more. If I can't get them we're moving back toward my lines tomorrow morning."

Klaus rose quickly. "I'll come up with you and give you a hand."

The night air was cold. The earth was cooling off. Klaus took a deep breath, filling his lungs. He and Hendricks stepped onto the ground, out of the tunnel. Klaus planted his feet wide apart, the rifle up, watching and listening. Hendricks crouched by the tunnel mouth, tuning the small transmitter.

"Any luck?" Klaus asked presently.

"Not yet."

"Keep trying. Tell them what happened."

Hendricks kept trying. Without success. Finally he lowered the antenna.

"It's useless. They can't hear me. Or they hear me and won't answer. Or—"

"Or they don't exist."

"I'll try once more." Hendricks raised the antenna. "Scott, can you hear me? Come in!"

He listened. There was only static. Then, still very faintly—

"This is Scott."

His fingers tightened. "Scott! Is it you?"

"This is Scott."

Klaus squatted down. "Is it your command?"

"Scott, listen. Do you understand? About them, the claws. Did you get my message? Did you hear me?"

"Yes." Faintly. Almost inaudible. He could hardly make out the word.

"You got my message? Is everything all right at the bunker? None of them have got in?"

"Everything is all right."

"Have they tried to get in?"

The voice was weaker.

"No."

Hendricks turned to Klaus. "They're all right."

"Have they been attacked?"

"No." Hendricks pressed the phone tighter to his ear. "Scott, I can hardly hear you. Have you notified the Moon Base? Do they know? Are they alerted?"

No answer.

"Scott! Can you hear me?"

Silence.

Hendricks relaxed, sagging. "Faded out. Must be radiation pools."

Hendricks and Klaus looked at each other. Neither of them said anything. After a time Klaus said, "Did it sound like any of your men? Could you identify the voice?"

"It was too faint."

You couldn't be certain?"

"No."

"Then it could have been—"

"I don't know. Now I'm not sure. Let's go back down and get the lid closed."

They climbed back down the ladder slowly, into the warm cellar. Klaus bolted the lid behind them. Tasso waited for them, her face expressionless.

"Any luck?" she asked.

Neither of them answered. "Well?" Klaus said at last "What do you think, Major? Was it your officer, or was it one of *them*?"

"I don't know."

"Then we're just where we were before."

Hendricks stared down at the floor, his jaw set. "We'll have to go. To be sure."

"Anyhow, we have food here for only a few weeks. We'd have to go up after that, in any case."

"Apparently so."

"What's wrong?" Tasso demanded. "Did you get across to your bunker? What's the matter?"

"It may have been one of my men," Hendricks said slowly. "Or it may

have been one of *them*. But we'll never know standing here." He examined his watch. "Let's turn in and get some sleep. We want to be up early tomorrow."

"Early?"

"Our best chance to get through the claws should be early in the morning," Hendricks said.

The morning was crisp and clear. Major Hendricks studied the countryside through his field glasses.

"See anything?" Klaus said.

"No."

"Can you make out our bunkers?"

"Which way?"

"Here?" Klaus took the glasses and adjusted them. "I know where to look." He looked a long time, silently.

Tasso came to the top of the tunnel and stepped up onto the ground. "Anything?"

"No." Klaus passed the glasses back to Hendricks. "They're out of sight. Come on. Let's not stay here."

The three of them made their way down the side of the ridge, sliding in the soft ash. Across a flat rock a lizard scuttled. They stopped instantly, rigid.

"What was it?" Klaus muttered.

"A lizard."

The lizard ran on, hurrying through the ash. It was exactly the same color as the ash.

"Perfect adaptation," Klaus said. "Proves we were right, Lysenko, I mean."

They reached the bottom of the ridge and stopped, standing close together, looking around them.

"Let's go," Hendricks started off. "It's a good long trip, on foot."

Klaus fell in beside him. Tasso walked behind, her pistol held alertly. "Major, I've been meaning to ask you something," Klaus said. "How did you run across the David? The one that was tagging you."

"I met it along the way. In some ruins."

"What did it say?"

"Not much. It said it was alone. By itself."

"You couldn't tell it was a machine? It talked like a living person? You never suspected?"

"It didn't say much. I noticed nothing unusual."

"It's strange, machines so much like people that you can be fooled. Almost alive. I wonder where it'll end."

"They're doing what you Yanks designed them to do," Tasso said. "You designed them to hunt out life and destroy. Human life. Wherever they find it."

Hendricks was watching Klaus intently. "Why did you ask me? What's on your mind?"

"Nothing," Klaus answered.

"Klaus thinks you're the Second Variety," Tasso said calmly, from behind them. "Now he's got his eye on you."

Klaus flushed. "Why not? We sent a runner to the Yank lines and *he* comes back. Maybe he thought he'd find some good game here."

Hendricks laughed harshly. "I came from the UN bunkers. There were human beings all around me."

"Maybe you saw an opportunity to get into the Soviet lines. Maybe you saw your chance. Maybe you—"

"The Soviet lines had already been taken over. Your lines had been invaded before I left my command bunker. Don't forget that."

Tasso came up beside him. "That proves nothing at all, Major."

"Why not?"

"There appears to be little communication between the varieties. Each is made in a different factory. They don't seem to work together. You might have started for the Soviet lines without knowing anything about the work of the other varieties. Or even what the other varieties were like."

"How do you know so much about the claws?" Hendricks said.

"I've seen them. I've observed them take over the Soviet bunkers."

"You know quite a lot," Klaus said. "Actually, you saw very little. Strange that you should have been such an acute observer."

Tasso laughed. "Do you suspect me, now?"

"Forget it," Hendricks said. They walked on in silence.

"Are we going the whole way on foot?" Tasso said, after awhile. "I'm not used to walking." She gazed around at the plain of ash, stretching out on all sides of them, as far as they could see. "How dreary."

"It's like this all the way," Klaus said.

"In a way I wish you had been in your bunker when the attack came."

"Somebody else would have been with you, if not me," Klaus muttered.

Tasso laughed, putting her hands in her pockets. "I suppose so."

They walked on, keeping their eyes on the vast plain of silent ash around them.

The sun was setting. Hendricks made his way forward slowly, waving Tasso and Klaus back. Klaus squatted down, resting his gun butt against the ground.

Tasso found a concrete slab and sat down with a sigh. "It's good to rest."

"Be quiet," Klaus said sharply.

Hendricks pushed up to the top of the rise ahead of them. The same rise the Russian runner had come up, the day before. Hendricks dropped down, stretching himself out, peering through his glasses at what lay beyond.

Nothing was visible. Only ash and occasional trees. But there, not more than fifty yards ahead, was the entrance of the forward command bunker. The bunker from which he had come. Hendricks watched silently. No motion. No sign of life. Nothing stirred.

Klaus slithered up beside him. "Where is it?"

"Down there." Hendricks passed him the glasses. Clouds of ash rolled across the evening sky. The world was darkening. They had a couple of hours of light left, at the most. Probably not that much.

"I don't see anything," Klaus said.

"That tree there. The stump. By the pile of bricks. The entrance is to the right of the bricks."

"I'll have to take your word for it."

"You and Tasso cover me from here. You'll be able to sight all the way to the bunker entrance."

"You're going down alone?"

"With my wrist tab I'll be safe. The ground around the bunker is a living field of claws. They collect down in the ash. Like crabs. Without tabs you wouldn't have a chance."

"Maybe you're right."

"I'll walk slowly all the way. As soon as I know for certain—"

"If they're down inside the bunker you won't be able to get back up here. They go fast. You don't realize."

"What do you suggest?"

Klaus considered. "I don't know. Get them to come up to the surface. So you can see."

Hendricks brought his transmitter from his belt, raising the antenna. "Let's get started."

Klaus signaled to Tasso. She crawled expertly up the side of the rise to where they were sitting.

"He's going down alone," Klaus said. "We'll cover him from here. As soon as you see him start back, fire past him at once. They come quick."

"You're not very optimistic," Tasso said.

"No, I'm not."

Hendricks opened the breech of his gun, checking it carefully. "Maybe things are all right."

"You didn't see them. Hundreds of them. All the same. Pouring out like ants."

"I should be able to find out without going down all the way." Hendricks locked his gun, gripping it in one hand, the transmitter in the other. "Well, wish me luck."

Klaus put out his hand. "Don't go down until you're sure. Talk to them from up here. Make them show themselves."

Hendricks stood up. He stepped down the side of the rise.

A moment later he was walking slowly toward the pile of bricks and debris beside the dead tree stump. Toward the entrance of the forward command bunker.

Nothing stirred. He raised the transmitter, clicking it on. "Scott? Can you hear me?"

Silence.

"Scott! This is Hendricks. Can you hear me? I'm standing outside the bunker. You should be able to see me in the view sight."

He listened, the transmitter gripped tightly. No sound. Only static. He walked forward. A claw burrowed out of the ash and raced toward him. It halted a few feet away and then slunk off. A second claw appeared, one of the big ones with feelers. It moved toward him, studied him intently, and then fell in behind him, dogging respectfully after him, a few paces away. A moment later a second big claw joined it. Silently, the claws trailed him as he walked slowly toward the bunker.

Hendricks stopped, and behind him, the claws came to a halt. He was close now. Almost to the bunker steps.

"Scott! Can you hear me? I'm standing right above you. Outside. On the surface. Are you picking me up?"

He waited, holding his gun against his side, the transmitter tightly to his ear. Time passed. He strained to hear, but there was only silence. Silence, and faint static.

Then, distantly, metallicly—

"This is Scott."

The voice was neutral. Cold. He could not identify it. But the earphone was minute.

"Scott! Listen. I'm standing right above you. I'm on the surface, looking down into the bunker entrance."

"Yes."

"Can you see me?"

"Yes."

"Through the view sight? You have the sight trained on me?"

"Yes."

Hendricks pondered. A circle of claws waited quietly around him, gray-metal bodies on all sides of him. "Is everything all right in the bunker? Nothing unusual has happened?"

"Everything is all right."

"Will you come up to the surface? I want to see you for a moment." Hendricks took a deep breath. "Come up here with me. I want to talk to you."

"Come down."

"I'm giving you an order."

Silence.

"Are you coming?" Hendricks listened. There was no response. "I order you to come to the surface."

"Come down."

Hendricks set his jaw. "Let me talk to Leone."

There was a long pause. He listened to the static. Then a voice came, hard, thin, metallic. The same as the other. "This is Leone."

"Hendricks. I'm on the surface. At the bunker entrance. I want one of you to come up here."

"Come down."

"Why come down? I'm giving you an order!"

Silence. Hendricks lowered the transmitter. He looked carefully around him. The entrance was just ahead. Almost at his feet. He lowered the antenna and fastened the transmitter to his belt. Carefully, he gripped his gun with both hands. He moved forward, a step at a time. If they could see him they knew he was starting toward the entrance. He closed his eyes a moment.

Then he put his foot on the first step that led downward.

Two Davids came up at him, their faces identical and expressionless. He blasted them into particles. More came rushing silently up, a whole pack of them. All exactly the same.

Hendricks turned and raced back, away from the bunker, back toward the rise.

At the top of the rise Tasso and Klaus were firing down. The small claws were already streaking up toward them, shining metal spheres going fast, racing frantically through the ash. But he had no time to think about that. He knelt down, aiming at the bunker entrance, gun against his cheek. The Davids were coming out in groups, clutching their teddy bears, their thin knobby legs pumping as they ran up the steps to the surface. Hendricks fired into the main body of them. They burst apart, wheels and springs flying in all directions. He fired again, through the mist of particles.

A giant lumbering figure rose up in the bunker entrance, tall and swaying. Hendricks paused, amazed. A man, a soldier. With one leg, supporting himself with a crutch.

"Major!" Tasso's voice came. More firing. The huge figure moved forward, Davids swarming around it. Hendricks broke out of his freeze. The First Variety. The Wounded Soldier. He aimed and fired. The soldier burst into bits, parts and relays flying. Now many Davids were out on the flat ground, away from the bunker. He fired again and again, moving slowly back, half-crouching and aiming.

From the rise, Klaus fired down. The side of the rise was alive with claws making their way up. Hendricks retreated toward the rise, running and crouching. Tasso had left Klaus and was circling slowly to the right, moving away from the rise.

A David slipped up toward him, its small white face expressionless.

brown hair hanging down in its eyes. It bent over suddenly, opening its arms. Its teddy bear hurtled down and leaped across the ground, bounding toward him. Hendricks fired. The bear and the David both dissolved. He grinned, blinking. It was like a dream.

"Up here!" Tasso's voice. Hendricks made his way toward her. She was over by some columns of concrete, walls of a ruined building. She was firing past him, with the hand pistol Klaus had given her.

"Thanks." He joined her, grasping for breath. She pulled him back, behind the concrete, fumbling at her belt.

"Close your eyes!" She unfastened a globe from her waist. Rapidly, she unscrewed the cap, locking it into place. "Close your eyes and get down."

She threw the bomb. It sailed in an arc, an expert, rolling and bouncing to the entrance of the bunker. Two Wounded Soldiers stood uncertainly by the brick pile. More Davids poured from behind them, out onto the plain. One of the Wounded Soldiers moved toward the bomb, stooping awkwardly down to pick it up.

The bomb went off. The concussion whirled Hendricks around, throwing him on his face. A hot wind rolled over him. Dimly he saw Tasso standing behind the columns, firing slowly and methodically at the Davids coming out of the raging clouds of white fire.

Back along the rise Klaus struggled with a ring of claws circling around him. He retreated, blasting at them and moving back, trying to break through the ring.

Hendricks struggled to his feet. His head ached. He could hardly see. Everything was licking at him, raging and whirling. His right arm would not move.

Tasso pulled back toward him. "Come on. Let's go."

"Klaus—he's still up there."

"Come on!" Tasso dragged Hendricks back, away from the columns. Hendricks shook his head, trying to clear it. Tasso led him rapidly away, her eyes intense and bright, watching for claws that had escaped the blast.

One David came out of the rolling clouds of flame. Tasso blasted it. No more appeared.

"But Klaus. What about him?" Hendricks stopped, standing unsteadily. "He—"

"Come on!"

They retreated, moving farther and farther away from the bunker. A few small claws following them for a little while and then gave up, turning back and going off.

At last Tasso stopped. "We can stop here and get our breaths."

Hendricks sat down on some heaps of debris. He wiped his neck, gasping. "We left Klaus back there."

Tasso said nothing. She opened her gun, sliding a fresh round of blast cartridges into place.

Hendricks stared at her, dazed. "You left him back there on purpose."

Tasso snapped the gun together. She studied the heaps of rubble around them, her face expressionless. As if she were watching for something.

"What is it?" Hendricks demanded. "What are you looking for? Is something coming?" He shook his head, trying to understand. What was she doing? What was she waiting for? He could see nothing. Ash lay all around them, ash and ruins. Occasional stark tree trunks, without leaves or branches. "What—"

Tasso cut him off. "Be still." Her eyes narrowed. Suddenly her gun came up. Hendricks turned, following her gaze.

Back the way they had come a figure appeared. The figure walked unsteadily toward them. Its clothes were torn. It limped as it made its way along, going very slowly and carefully. Stopping now and then, resting and getting its strength. Once it almost fell. It stood for a moment, trying to steady itself. Then it came on.

Klaus.

Hendricks stood up. "Klaus!" He started toward him. "How the hell did you—"

Tasso fired. Hendricks swung back. She fired again, the blast passing him, a searing line of heat. The beam caught Klaus in the chest. He exploded, gears and wheels flying. For a moment he continued to walk. Then he swayed back and forth. He crashed to the ground, his arms flung out. A few more wheels rolled away.

Silence.

Tasso turned to Hendricks. "Now you understand why he killed Rudi."

Hendricks sat down again slowly. He shook his head. He was numb. He could not think.

"Do you see?" Tasso said. "Do you understand?"

Hendricks said nothing. Everything was slipping away from him, faster and faster. Darkness, rolling and plucking at him.

He closed his eyes.

Hendricks opened his eyes slowly. His body ached all over. He tried to sit up but needles of pain shot through his arm and shoulder. He gasped.

"Don't try to get up," Tasso said. She bent down, putting her cold hand against his forehead.

It was night. A few stars glinted above, shining through the drifting clouds of ash. Hendricks lay back, his teeth locked. Tasso watched him impassively. She had built a fire with some wood and weeds. The fire licked feebly, hissing at a metal cup suspended over it. Everything was silent. Unmoving darkness, beyond the fire.

"So he was the Second Variety," Hendricks murmured.

"I had always thought so."

"Why didn't you destroy him sooner?" He wanted to know.

"You held me back." Tasso crossed to the fire to look into the metal cup.
"Coffee. It'll be ready to drink in a while."

She came back and sat down beside him. Presently she opened her pistol and began to disassemble the firing mechanism, studying it intently.

"This is a beautiful gun," Tasso said, half aloud. "The construction is superb."

"What about them? The claws."

"The concussion from the bomb put most of them out of action. They're delicate. Highly organized, I suppose."

"The Davids, too?"

"Yes."

"How did you happen to have a bomb like that?"

Tasso shrugged. "We designed it. You shouldn't underestimate our technology, Major. Without such a bomb you and I would no longer exist."

"Very useful."

Tasso stretched out her legs, warming her feet in the heat of the fire. "It surprised me that you did not seem to understand, after he killed Rudi. Why did you think he—"

"I told you. I thought he was afraid."

"Really? You know, Major, for a little while I suspected you. Because you wouldn't let me kill him. I thought you might be protecting him." She laughed.

"Are we safe here?" Hendricks asked presently.

"For a while. Until they get reinforcements from some other area." Tasso began to clear the interior of the gun with a bit of rag. She finished and pushed the mechanism back into place. She closed the gun, running her finger along the barrel.

"We were lucky," Hendricks murmured.

"Yes. Very lucky."

"Thanks for pulling me away."

Tasso did not answer. She glanced up at him, her eyes bright in the firelight. Hendricks examined his arm. He could not move his fingers. His whole side seemed numb. Down inside him was a dull steady ache.

"How do you feel?" Tasso asked.

"My arm is damaged."

"Anything else?"

"Internal injuries."

"You didn't get down when the bomb went off."

Hendricks said nothing. He watched Tasso pour the coffee from the cup into a flat metal pan. She brought it over to him.

"Thanks." He struggled up enough to drink. It was hard to swallow. His insides turned over and he pushed the pan away. "That's all I can drink now."

Tasso drank the rest. Time passed. The clouds of ash moved across the dark sky above them. Hendricks rested, his mind blank. After a while he became aware that Tasso was standing over him, gazing down at him.

"What is it?" he murmured.

"Do you feel any better?"

"Some."

"You know, Major, if I hadn't dragged you away they would have got you. You would be dead. Like Rudi."

"I know."

"Do you want to know why I brought you out? I could have left you, I could have left you there."

"Why did you bring me out?"

"Because we have to get away from here." Tasso stirred the fire with a stick, peering calmly down into it. "No human being can live here. When their reinforcements come we won't have a chance. I've pondered about it while you were unconscious. We have perhaps three hours before they come."

"And you expect me to get us away?"

"That's right. I expect you to get us out of here."

"Why me?"

"Because I don't know any way." Here eyes shone at him in the light, bright and steady. "If you can't get us out of here they'll kill us within three hours. I see nothing else ahead. Well, Major? What are you going to do? I've been waiting all night. While you were unconscious I sat here, waiting and listening. It's almost dawn. The night is almost over."

Hendricks considered. "It's curious," he said at last.

"Curious?"

"That you should think I can get us out of here. I wonder what you think I can do."

"Can you get us to the Moon Base?"

"The Moon Base? How?"

"There must be some way."

Hendricks shook his head. "No. There's no way that I know of."

Tasso said nothing. For a moment her steady gazed wavered. She ducked her head, turning abruptly away. She scrambled to her feet. "More coffee?"

"No."

"Suit yourself." Tasso drank silently. He could not see her face. He lay back against the ground, deep in thought, trying to concentrate. It was hard to think. His head still hurt. And the numbing daze still hung over him.

"There might be one way," he said suddenly.

"Oh?"

"How soon is dawn?"

"Two hours. The sun will be coming up shortly."

"There's supposed to be a ship near here. I've never seen it. But I know it exists."

"What kind of a ship?" Her voice was sharp.

"A rocket cruiser."

"Will it take us off? To the Moon Base?"

"It's supposed to. In case of emergency." He rubbed his forehead.

"What's wrong?"

"My head. It's hard to think. I can hardly—hardly concentrate. The bomb."

"Is the ship near here?" Tasso slid over beside him, settling down on her haunches. "How far is it? Where is it?"

"I'm trying to think."

Her fingers dug into his arm. "Nearby?" Her voice was like iron. "Where would it be? Would they store it underground? Hidden underground?"

"Yes. In a storage locker."

"How do we find it? Is it marked? Is there a code marker to identify it?"

Hendricks concentrated. "No. No markings. No code symbol."

"What then?"

"A sign."

"What sort of sign?"

Hendricks did not answer. In the flickering light his eyes were glazed, two sightless orbs. Tasso's fingers dug into his arm.

"What sort of sign? What is it?"

"I—I can't think. Let me rest."

"All right." She let go and stood up. Hendricks lay back against the ground, his eyes closed. Tasso walked away from him, her hands in her pockets. She kicked a rock out of her way and stood staring up at the sky. The night blackness was already beginning to fade into gray. Morning was coming.

Tasso gripped her pistol and walked around the fire in a circle, back and forth. On the ground Major Hendricks lay, his eyes closed, unmoving. The grayness rose in the sky, higher and higher. The landscape became visible, fields of ash stretching out in all directions. Ash and ruins of buildings, a wall here and there, heaps of concrete, the naked trunk of a tree.

The air was cold and sharp. Somewhere a long way off a bird made a few bleak sounds.

Hendricks stirred. He opened his eyes. "Is it dawn? Already?"

"Yes."

Hendricks sat up a little. "You wanted to know something. You were asking me."

"Do you remember now?"

"Yes."

"What is it?" She tensed. "What?" she repeated sharply.

"A well. A ruined well. It's in a storage locker under a well."

"A well." Tasso relaxed. "Then we'll find a well." She looked at her watch.

"We have about an hour, Major. Do you think we can find it in an hour?"

"Give me a hand up," Hendricks said.

Tasso put her pistol away and helped him to his feet. "This is going to be difficult."

"Yes it is." Hendricks set his lips tightly. "I don't think we're going to go very far."

They began to walk. The early sun cast a little warmth down on them. The land was flat and barren, stretching out gray and lifeless as far as they could see. A few birds sailed silently, far above them, circling slowly.

"See anything?" Hendricks said. "Any claws?"

"No. Not yet."

They passed through some ruins, upright concrete and bricks. A cement foundation. Rats scuttled away. Tasso jumped back warily.

"This used to be a town," Hendricks said. "A village. Provincial village. This was all grape country, once. Where we are now."

They came onto a ruined street, weeds and cracks criss-crossing it. Over to the right a stone chimney stuck up.

"Be careful," he warned her.

A pit yawned, an open basement. Ragged ends of pipes jutted up, twisted and bent. They passed part of a house, a bathtub turned on its side. A broken chair. A few spoons and bits of china dishes. In the center of the street the ground had sunk away. The depression was filled with weeds and debris and bones.

"Over here," Hendricks murmured.

"This way?"

"To the right."

They passed the remains of a heavy-duty tank. Hendricks's belt counter clicked ominously. The tank had been radiation-blasted. A few feet from the tank a mummified body lay sprawled out, mouth open. Beyond the road was a flat field. Stones and weeds, and bits of broken glass.

"There," Hendricks said.

A stone well jutted up, sagging and broken. A few boards lay across it. Most of the well had sunk into rubble. Hendricks walked unsteadily toward it, Tasso beside him.

"Are you certain about this?" Tasso said. "This doesn't look like anything."

"I'm sure." Hendricks sat down at the edge of the well, his teeth locked. His breath came quickly. He wiped perspiration from his face. "This was arranged so the senior command officer could get away. If anything happened. If the bunker fell."

"That was you?"

"Yes."

"Where is the ship? Is it here?"

"We're standing on it." Hendricks ran his hands over the surface of the well stones. "The eye-lock responds to me, not to anybody else. It's my ship. Or it was supposed to be."

There was a sharp click. Presently they heard a low grating sound from below them.

"Step back," Hendricks said. He and Tasso moved away from the well.

A section of the ground slid back. A metal frame pushed slowly up through the ash, shoving bricks and weeds out of the way. The action ceased as the ship nosed into view.

"There it is," Hendricks said.

The ship was small. It rested quietly, suspended in its mesh frame like a blunt needle. A rain of ash sifted down into the dark cavity from which the ship had been raised. Hendricks made his way over to it. He mounted the mesh and unscrewed the hatch, pulling it back. Inside the ship the control banks and the pressure seat were visible.

Tasso came and stood beside him, gazing into the ship. "I'm not accustomed to rocket piloting," she said after a while.

Hendricks glanced at her. "I'll do the piloting."

"Will you? There's only one seat, Major, I can see it's built to carry only a single person."

Hendricks's breathing changed. He studied the interior of the ship intently. Tasso was right. There was only one seat. The ship was built to carry only one person. "I see," he said slowly. "And the one person is you."

She nodded.

"Of course."

"Why?"

"*You* can't go. You might not live through the trip. You're injured. You probably wouldn't get there."

"An interesting point. But you see, I know where the Moon Base is. And you don't. You might fly around for months and not find it. It's well hidden. Without knowing what to look for—"

"I'll have to take my chances. Maybe I won't find it. Not by myself. But I think you'll give me all the information I need. Your life depends on it."

"How?"

"If I find the Moon Base in time, perhaps I can get them to send a ship back to pick you up. *If* I find the Base in time. If not, then you haven't a chance. I imagine there are supplies on the ship. They will last me long enough—"

Hendricks moved quickly. But his injured arm betrayed him. Tasso ducked, sliding lithely aside. Her hand came up, lightning fast. Hendricks saw the gun butt coming. He tried to ward off the blow, but she was too fast.

The metal butt struck against the side of his head, just above his ear. Numbing pain rushing through him. Pain and rolling clouds of blackness. He sank down, sliding to the ground.

Dimly, he was aware that Tasso was standing over him, kicking him with her toe.

"Major! Wake up."

He opened his eyes, groaning.

"Listen to me." She bent down, the gun pointed at his face. "I have to hurry. There isn't much time left. The ship is ready to go, but you must give me the information I need before I leave."

Hendricks shook his head, trying to clear it.

"Hurry up! Where is the Moon Base? How do I find it? What do I look for?"

Hendricks said nothing.

"Answer me!"

"Sorry."

"Major, the ship is loaded with provisions. I can coast for weeks. I'll find the Base eventually. And in a half-hour you'll be dead. Your only chance of survival—" She broke off.

Along the slope, by some crumbling ruins, something moved. Something in the ash. Tasso turned quickly, aiming. She fired. A puff of flame leaped. Something scuttled away, rolling across the ash. She fired again. The claw burst apart, wheels flying.

"See?" Tasso said. "A scout. It won't be long."

"You'll bring them back here to get me?"

"Yes. As soon as possible."

Hendricks looked up at her. He studied her intently. "You're telling the truth?" A strange expression had come over his face, an avid hunger. "You will come back for me? You'll get me to the Moon Base?"

"I'll get you to the Moon Base. But tell me where it is! There's only a little time left."

All right." Hendricks picked up a piece of rock, pulling himself to a sitting position. "Watch."

Hendricks began to scratch in the ash. Tasso stood by him, watching the motion of the rock. Hendricks was sketching a crude lunar map.

"This is the Appenine range. Here is the Crater of Archimedes. The Moon Base is beyond the end of the Appenine, about two hundred miles. I don't know exactly where. No one on Terra knows. But when you're over the Appenine, signal with one red flare and a green flare, followed by two red flares in quick succession. The Base monitor will record your signal. The Base is under the surface, of course. They'll guide you down with magnetic grapples."

"And the controls? Can I operate them?"

"The controls are virtually automatic. All you have to do is give the right signal at the right time."

"I will."

"The seat absorbs most of the takeoff shock. Air and temperature are automatically controlled. The ship will leave Terra and pass out into free space. It'll line itself up with the Moon, falling into an orbit around it, about a hundred miles above the surface. The orbit will carry you over the Base. When you're in the region of the Appenine, release the signal rockets."

Tasso slid into the ship and lowered herself into the pressure seat. The arm locks folded automatically around her. She fingered the controls. "Too bad you're not going, Major. All this put here for you, and you can't make the trip."

"Leave me the pistol."

Tasso pulled the pistol from her belt. She held it in her hand, weighing it thoughtfully. "Don't go too far from this location. It'll be hard to find you, as it is."

"No. I'll stay here by the well."

Tasso gripped the takeoff switch, running her fingers over the smooth metal. "A beautiful ship, Major. Well built. I admire your workmanship. You people have always done good work. You build fine things. Your work, your creations, are your greatest achievement."

"Give me the pistol," Hendricks said impatiently, holding out his hand. He struggled to his feet.

"Good-bye, Major." Tasso tossed the pistol past Hendricks. The pistol clattered against the ground, bouncing and rolling away. Hendricks hurried after it. He bent down, snatching it up.

The hatch of the ship clanged shut. The bolts fell into place. Hendricks made his way back. The inner door was being sealed. He raised the pistol unsteadily.

There was a shattering roar. The ship burst up from its metal cage, fusing the mesh behind it. Hendricks cringed, pulling back. The ship shot up into the rolling clouds of ash, disappearing into the sky.

Hendricks stood watching a long time, until even the streamer had dissipated. Nothing stirred. The morning air was chill and silent. He began to walk aimlessly back the way they had come. Better to keep moving around. It would be a long time before help came—if it came at all.

He searched his pockets until he found a package of cigarettes. He lit one grimly. They had all wanted cigarettes from him. But cigarettes were scarce.

A lizard slithered by him, through the ash. He halted, rigid. The lizard disappeared. Above, the sun rose higher in the sky. Some flies landed on a flat rock to one side of him. Hendricks kicked at them with his foot.

It was getting hot. Sweat trickled down his face, into his collar. His mouth was dry.

Presently he stopped walking and sat down on some debris. He unfastened his medicine kit and swallowed a few narcotic capsules. He looked around him. Where was he?

Something lay ahead. Stretched out on the ground. Silent and unmoving.

Hendricks drew his gun quickly. It looked like a man. Then he remembered. It was the remains of Klaus. The Second Variety. Where Tasso had blasted him. He could see wheels and relays and metal parts, strewn around on the ash. Glittering and sparkling in the sunlight.

Hendricks got to his feet and walked over. He nudged the inert form with his foot, turning it over a little. He could see the metal hull, the aluminum ribs and struts. More wiring fell out. Like viscera. Heaps of wiring, switches and relays. Endless motors and rods.

He bent down. The brain was visible. He gazed at it. A maze of circuits. Miniature tubes. Wires as fine as hair. He touched the brain cage. It swung aside. The type plate was visible. Hendricks studied the plate.

And blanched.

IV—IV.

For a long time he stared at the plate. Fourth Variety. Not the Second. They had been wrong. There were more types. Not just three. Many more, perhaps. At least four. And Klaus wasn't the Second Variety.

But if Klaus wasn't the Second Variety—

Suddenly he tensed. Something was coming, walking through the ash beyond the hill. What was it? He strained to see. Figures coming slowly along, making their way through the ash.

Coming toward him.

Hendricks crouched quickly, raising his gun. Sweat dripped down into his eyes. He fought down rising panic, as the figures neared.

The first was a David. The David saw him and increased its pace. The others hurried behind it. A second David. A third. Three Davids, all alike, coming toward him silently, without expression, their thin legs rising and falling. Clutching their teddy bears.

He aimed and fired. The first two Davids dissolved into particles. The third came on. And the figure behind it. Climbing silently toward him across the gray ash. A Wounded Soldier, towering over the David. And—

And behind the Wounded Soldier came two Tassos, walking side by side. Heavy belt, Russian army pants, shirt, long hair. The familiar figure, as he had seen her only a little while before. Sitting in the pressure seat of the ship. Two slim, silent figures, both identical.

They were very near. The David bent down suddenly, dropping its teddy bear. The bear raced across the ground. Automatically, Hendricks's fingers tightened around the trigger. The bear was gone, dissolved into mist. The

two Tasso Types moved on, expressionless, walking side by side, through the gray ash.

When they were almost to him, Hendricks raised the pistol waist high and fired.

The two Tassos dissolved. But already a new group was starting up the rise, five or six Tassos, all identical, a line of them coming rapidly toward him.

And he had given her the ship and the signal code. Because of him she was on her way to the moon, to the Moon Base. He had made it possible.

He had been right about the bomb, after all. It had been designed with knowledge of the other types, the David Type and the Wounded Soldier Type. And the Klaus Type. Not designed by human beings. It had been designed by one of the underground factories, apart from all human contact.

The line of Tassos came up to him. Hendricks braced himself, watching them calmly. The familiar face, the belt, the heavy shirt, the bomb carefully in place.

The bomb—

As the Tassos reached for him, a last ironic thought drifted through Hendricks's mind. He felt a little better, thinking about it. The bomb. Made by the Second Variety to destroy the other varieties. Made for that end alone.

They were already beginning to design weapons to use against each other.

I M P O S T E R

"Imposter" was written at about the same time as "Second Variety" and the pair of stories demonstrate nicely the restless movement of Dick's mind. He would seize upon an idea and write a story about it. Then he would approach the idea from another perspective and reshape his material into another story. Very often the second story reverses the meaning of the first as his churning mind journeys along the spiral path that inevitably leads to the opposite. In "Second Variety" he imagines what it would be like if you couldn't be sure whether your companion was a human or a robot. In "Imposter," he imagines another situation: What if you can't be sure whether you are a human or a robot?

Oldham, the protagonist in this story, finds himself isolated from everyone—his coworkers, his wife, and finally, even from himself. In the decades that followed World War II, the theme of alienation became commonplace in modern fiction. But Dick was one of the first writers either in mainstream or in science fiction to dramatize the theme, as this 1953 story demonstrates.

Just below the surface of Dick's SF settings lie the realities of the contemporary world where he lived and wrote. Widely imaginative as his stories are, they invariably mirror back to the reader the concerns and fears of our time. To read Dick's fiction chronologically is to look back over the social and political events of the last thirty years and to recall the fears those events generated. Dick's consciousness worked like a tortured barometer that registered the anxieties of our age. "Imposter" reminds us, and not by chance, of Joseph McCarthy's witch hunting of alleged communist spies. Although never himself a communist, Dick abhorred the tactics of the McCarthyites and satirized them in another story, "The Hood Maker" (1955).

This early story demonstrates a technique Dick uses again and again. Just as the reader thinks he is oriented to the reality of the fiction world Dick is creating, an explosion occurs. Things blow up in our faces and we fall into a new reality so bizarre that it is almost beyond conceiving—unless your name is Philip K. Dick and your imagination never stops running.

One of these days I'm going to take time off," Spence Olham said at first-meal. He looked around at his wife. "I think I've earned a rest. Ten years is a long time."

"And the Project?"

"The war will be won without me. This ball of clay of ours isn't really in much danger." Olham sat down at the table and lit a cigarette. "The news-machines alter dispatches to make it appear the Outspacers are right on top of us. You know what I'd like to do on my vacation? I'd like to take a camping trip in those mountains outside of town, where we went that time. Remember? I got poison oak and you almost stepped on a gopher snake."

"Sutton Wood?" Mary began to clear away the food dishes. "The Wood was burned a few weeks ago. I thought you knew. Some kind of a flash fire."

Olham sagged. "Didn't they even try to find the cause?" His lips twisted. "No one cares anymore. All they can think of is the war." He clamped his jaws together, the whole picture coming up in his mind, the Outspacers, the war, the needle-ships.

"How can we think about anything else?"

Olham nodded. She was right, of course. The dark little ships out of Alpha Centauri had bypassed the Earth cruisers easily, leaving them like helpless turtles. It has been one-way fights, all the way back to Terra.

All the way, until the protec-bubble was demonstrated by Westinghouse Labs. Thrown around the major Earth cities and finally the planet itself, the bubble was the first real defense, the first legitimate answer to the Outspacers—as the news-machines labeled them.

But to win the war, that was another thing. Every lab, every project was working night and day, endlessly, to find something more: a weapon for positive combat. His own project, for example. All day long, year after year.

Olham stood up, putting out his cigarette. "Like the Sword of Damocles. Always hanging over us. I'm getting tired. All I want to do is take a long rest. But I guess everybody feels that way."

He got his jacket from the closet and went out on the front porch. The shoot would be along any moment, the fast little bug that would carry him to the Project.

"I hope Nelson isn't late." He looked at his watch. "It's almost seven."

"Here the bug comes," Mary said, gazing between the rows of houses. The sun glittered behind the roofs, reflecting against the heavy lead plates. The settlement was quiet, only a few people were stirring. "I'll see you later. Try not to work beyond your shift, Spence."

Olham opened the car door and slid inside, leaning back against the seat with a sigh. There was an older man with Nelson.

"Well?" Olham said, as the bug shot ahead. "Heard any interesting news?"

"The usual," Nelson said. "A few Outspace ships hit, another asteroid abandoned for strategic reasons."

"It'll be good when we get the Project into final stage. Maybe it's just the propaganda from the newsmachines, but in the last month I've gotten weary of all this. Everything seems so grim and serious, no color to life."

"Do you think the war is in vain?" the older man said suddenly. "You are an integral part of it, yourself."

"This is Major Peters," Nelson said. Olham and Peters shook hands. Olham studied the older man.

"What brings you along so early?" he said. "I don't remember seeing you at the project before."

"No, I'm not with the Project," Peters said, "but I know something about what you're doing. My own work is altogether different."

A look passed between him and Nelson. Olham noticed it and he frowned. The bug was gaining speed, flashing across the barren, lifeless ground toward the distant rim of the Project buildings.

"What is your business?" Olham said. "Or aren't you permitted to talk about it?"

"I'm with the government," Peters said. "With FSA, the security organ."

"Oh?" Olham raised an eyebrow. "Is there any enemy infiltration in this region?"

"As a matter of fact I'm here to see you, Mr. Olham."

Olham was puzzled. He considered Peter's words, but he could make nothing of them. "To see me? Why?"

"I'm here to arrest you as an Outspace spy. That's why I'm up so early this morning. *Grab him, Nelson—*"

The gun drove into Olham's ribs. Nelson's hands were shaking, trembling with released emotion, his face pale. He took a deep breath and let it out again.

"Shall we kill him now?" he whispered to Peters. "I think we should kill him now. We can't wait."

Olham stared into his friend's face. He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came. Both men were staring at him steadily, rigid and grim with fright. Olham felt dizzy. His head ached and spun.

"I don't understand," he murmured.

At that moment the shoot car left the ground and rushed up, heading into space. Below them the Project fell away, smaller and smaller, disappearing. Olham shut his mouth.

"We can wait a little," Peters said, "I want to ask him some questions first."

Olham gazed dully ahead as the bug rushed through space.

"The arrest was made all right," Peters said into the vidscreen. On the screen the features of the security chief showed. "It should be a load off everyone's mind."

"Any complications?"

"None. He entered the bug without suspicion. He didn't seem to think my presence was too unusual."

"Where are you now?"

"On our way out, just inside the protec-bubble. We're moving at a maximum speed. You can assume that the critical period is past. I'm glad the takeoff jets in this craft were in good working order. If there has been any failure at that point—"

"Let me see him," the security chief said. He gazed directly at Olham where he sat, his hands in his lap, staring ahead.

"So that's the man." He looked at Olham for a time. Olham said nothing. At last the chief nodded to Peters. "All right. That's enough." A faint trace of disgust wrinkled his features. "I've seen all I want. You've done something that will be remembered for a long time. They're preparing some sort of citation for both of you."

"That's not necessary," Peters said.

"How much danger is there now? In there still much chance that—"

"There is some chance, but not too much. According to my understanding, it requires a verbal key phrase. In any case we'll have to take the risk."

"I'll have the Moon-base notified you're coming."

"No." Peters shook his head. "I'll land the ship outside, beyond the base. I don't want it in jeopardy."

"Just as you like." The chief's eyes flickered as he glanced again at Olham. Then his image faded. The screen blanked.

Olham shifted his gaze to the window. The ship was already through the protec-bubble, rushing with greater and greater speed all the time. Peters was in a hurry; below him, rumbling under the floor, the jets were wide open. They were afraid, hurrying frantically, because of him.

Next to him on the seat, Nelson shifted uneasily. "I think we should do it now," he said. "I'd give anything if we could get it over with."

"Take it easy," Peters said. "I want you to guide the ship for a while so I can talk to him."

He slid over beside Olham, looking into his face. Presently he reached out and touched him gingerly, on the arm and then on the cheek.

Olham said nothing. *If I could let Mary know*, he thought again. *If I could find some way of letting her know*. He looked around the ship. How? The vidscreen? Nelson was sitting by the board, holding the gun. There was nothing he could do. He was caught, trapped.

But why?

"Listen," Peters said, "I want to ask you some questions. You know where we're going. We're moving Moonward. In an hour we'll land on the far side, on the desolate side. After we land you'll be turned over immediately to a team of men waiting there. Your body will be destroyed at once. Do you understand that?" He looked at his watch. "Within two hours your parts will be strewn over the landscape. There won't be anything left of you."

Olham struggled out of his lethargy. "Can't you tell me—"

"Certainly, I'll tell you," Peters nodded. "Two days ago we received a report that an Outspace ship had penetrated the protec-bubble. The ship let off a spy in the form of a humanoid robot. The robot was to destroy a particular human being and take his place."

Peters looked calmly at Olham.

"Inside the robot was a U-Bomb. Our agent did not know how the bomb was to be detonated, but he conjectured that it might be by a particular spoken phrase, a certain group of words. The robot would live the life of the person he killed, entering into his usual activities, his job, his social life. He had been constructed to resemble that person. No one would know the difference."

Olham's face went sickly chalk.

"That person whom the robot was to impersonate was Spence Olham, a high-ranking official at one of the research Projects. Because this particular Project was approaching crucial stage, the presence of an animate bomb, moving toward the center of the Project—"

Olham stared down at his hands. "*But I'm Olham!*"

"Once the robot had located and killed Olham, it was a simple matter to take over his life. The robot was probably released from the ship eight days ago. The substitution was probably accomplished over the last weekend, when Olham went for a short walk in the hills."

"But I'm Olham." He turned to Nelson, sitting at the controls. "Don't you recognize me? You've known me for twenty years. Don't you remember how we went to college together?" He stood up. "You and I were at the University. We had the same room." He went toward Nelson.

"Stay away from me!" Nelson snarled.

"Listen. Remember our second year? Remember that girl? What was her name—" He rubbed his forehead. "The one with the dark hair. The one we met over at Ted's place."

"Stop!" Nelson waved the gun frantically. "I don't want to hear any more. You killed him! You . . . machine."

Olham looked at Nelson. "You're wrong. I don't know what happened but the robot never reached me. Something must have gone wrong. Maybe the ship crashed." He turned to Peters. "I'm the same as I've always been."

He touched himself, running his hands over his body. "There must be some way to prove it. Take me back to Earth. An X-ray examination, a neurological study, anything like that will show you. Or maybe we can find the crashed ship."

Neither Peters nor Nelson spoke.

"I am Olham," he said again. "I know I am. But I can't prove it."

"The robot," Peters said, "would be unaware that he was not the real

Spence Olham. He would become Olham in mind as well as body. He was given an artificial memory system, false recall. He would look like him, have his memories, his thoughts and interests, perform his job.

"But there would be one difference. Inside the robot is a U-Bomb, ready to explode at the trigger phrase." Peters moved a little away. "That's the one difference. That's why we're taking you to the Moon. They'll disassemble you and remove the bomb. Maybe it will explode, but it won't matter, not there."

Olham sat down slowly.

"We'll be there soon," Nelson said.

He lay back, thinking frantically, as the ship dropped slowly down. Under them was the pitted surface of the Moon, the endless expanse of ruin. What could he do? What would save him?

"Get ready," Peters said.

In a few minutes he would be dead. Down below he could see a tiny dot, a building of some kind. There were men in the building, the demolition team, waiting to tear him to bits. They would rip him open, pull off his arms and legs, break him apart. When they found no bomb they would be surprised; they would know, but it would be too late.

Olham looked around the small cabin. Nelson was still holding the gun. There was no chance there. If he could get to a doctor, have an examination made—that was the only way. Mary could help him. He thought frantically, his mind racing. Only a few minutes, just a little time left. If he could contact her, get word to her some way.

"Easy," Peters said. The ship came down slowly bumping on rough ground. There was silence.

"Listen," Olham said thickly, "I can prove I'm Spence Olham. Get a doctor. Bring him here—"

"There's the squad," Nelson pointed. "They're coming." He glanced nervously at Olham. "I hope nothing happens."

"We'll be gone before they start work," Peters said. "We'll be out of here in a moment." He put on his pressure suit. When he had finished he took the gun from Nelson. "I'll watch him for a moment."

Nelson put on his pressure suit, hurrying awkwardly. "How about him?" He indicated Olham. "Will he need one?"

"No." Peters shook his head. "Robots probably don't require oxygen."

The group of men were almost to the ship. They halted, waiting. Peters signaled to them.

"Come on!" He waved his hand and the men approached warily; stiff, grotesque figures in their inflated suits.

"If you open the door," Olham said, "it means my death. It will be murder."

"Open the door," Nelson said. He reached for the handle.

Olham watched him. He saw the man's hand tighten around the metal rod. In a moment the door would swing back, the air in the ship would rush out. He would die, and presently they would realize their mistake. Perhaps at some other time, when there was no war, men might not act this way, hurrying an individual to his death because they were afraid. Everyone was frightened, everyone was willing to sacrifice the individual because of the group fear.

He was being killed because they could not wait to be sure of his guilt. There was not enough time.

He looked at Nelson. Nelson had been his friend for years. They had gone to school together. He had been best man at his wedding. Now Nelson was going to kill him. But Nelson was not wicked; it was not his fault. It was the times. Perhaps it had been the same way during the plagues. When men had shown a spot they probably had been killed, too, without a moment's hesitation, without proof, on suspicion alone. In times of danger there was no other way.

He did not blame them. But he had to live. His life was too precious to be sacrificed. Olham thought quickly. What could he do? Was there anything? He looked around.

"Here goes," Nelson said.

"You're right," Olham said. The sound of his own voice surprised him. It was the strength of desperation. "I have no need of air. Open the door."

They paused, looking at him in curious alarm.

"Go ahead. Open it. It makes no difference." Olham's hand disappeared inside his jacket. "I wonder how far you two can run."

"Run?"

"You have fifteen seconds to live." Inside his jacket his fingers twisted, his arm suddenly rigid. He relaxed, smiling a little. "You were wrong about the trigger phrase. In that respect you were mistaken. Fourteen seconds, now."

Two shocked faces stared at him from the pressure suits. Then they were struggling, running, tearing the door open. The air shrieked out, spilling into the void. Peters and Nelson bolted out of the ship. Olham came after them. He grasped the door and dragged it shut. The automatic pressure system chugged furiously, restoring the air. Olham let his breath out with a shudder.

One more second—

Beyond the window the two men had joined the group. The group scattered, running in all directions. One by one they threw themselves down, prone on the ground. Olham seated himself at the control board. He moved the dials into place. As the ship rose up into the air the men below scrambled to their feet and stared up, their mouths open.

"Sorry," Olham murmured, "but I've got to get back to Earth."
He headed the ship back the way it had come.

It was night. All around the ship crickets chirped, disturbing the chill darkness. Olham bent over the vidscreen. Gradually the image formed; the call had gone through without trouble. He breathed a sign of relief.

"Mary," he said. The woman stared at him. She gasped.

"Spence! Where are you? What's happened?"

"I can't tell you. Listen, I have to talk fast. They may break this call off any minute. Go to the Project grounds and get Dr. Chamberlain. If he isn't there, get any doctor. Bring him to the house and have him stay there. Have him bring equipment, X-ray, fluoroscope, everything."

"But—"

"Do as I say. Hurry. Have him get it ready in an hour." Olham leaned toward the screen. "Is everything all right? Are you alone?"

"Alone?"

"Is anyone with you? Has . . . has Nelson or anyone contacted you?"

"No. Spence, I don't understand."

"All right. I'll see you at the house in an hour. And don't tell anyone anything. Get Chamberlain there on any pretext. Say you're very ill."

He broke the connection and looked at his watch. A moment later he left the ship, stepping down into the darkness. He had a half mile to go.

He began to walk.

One light showed in the window, the study light. He watched it, kneeling against the fence. There was no sound, no movement of any kind. He held his watch up and read it by starlight. Almost an hour had passed.

Along the street a shoot bug came. It went on.

Olham looked toward the house. The doctor should have already come. He should be inside, waiting with Mary. A thought struck him. Had she been able to leave the house? Perhaps they had intercepted her. Maybe he was moving into a trap.

But what else could he do?

With a doctor's records, photographs and reports, there was a chance, a chance of proof. If he could be examined, if he could remain alive long enough for them to study him—

He could prove it that way. It was probably the only way. His one hope lay inside the house. Dr. Chamberlain was a respected man. He was the staff doctor for the Project. He would know, his word on the matter would have meaning. He could overcome their hysteria, their madness with facts.

Madness—That was what it was. If only they would wait, act slowly, take their time. But they could not wait. He had to die, die at once, without proof, without any kind of trial or examination. The simplest test would tell, but

they had not time for the simplest test. They could think only of the danger. Danger, and nothing more.

He stood up and moved toward the house. He came up on the porch. At the door he paused, listening. Still no sound. The house was absolutely still.

Too still.

Olham stood on the porch, unmoving. They were trying to be silent inside. Why? It was a small house; only a few feet away, beyond the door, Mary and Dr. Chamberlain should be standing. Yet he could hear nothing, no sound of voices, nothing at all. He looked at the door. It was a door he had opened and closed a thousand times, every morning and every night.

He put his hand on the knob. Then, all at once, he reached out and touched the bell instead. The bell pealed, off some place in the back of the house. Olham smiled. He could hear movement.

Mary opened the door. As soon as he saw her face he knew.

He ran, throwing himself into the bushes. A security officer shoved Mary out of the way, firing past her. The bushes burst apart. Olham wiggled around the side of the house. He leaped up and ran, racing frantically into the darkness. A search light snapped on, a beam of light circling past him.

He crossed the road and squeezed over a fence. He jumped down and made his way across a backyard. Behind him men were coming, security officers, shouting to each other as they came. Olham gasped for breath, his chest rising and falling.

Her face— He had known at once. The set lips. The terrified, wretched eyes. Suppose he had gone ahead, pushed open the door and entered! They had tapped the call and come at once, as soon as he had broken off. Probably she believed their account. No doubt she thought he was the robot, too.

Olham ran on and on. He was losing the officers, dropping them behind. Apparently they were not much good at running. He climbed a hill and made his way down the other side. In a moment he would be back at the ship. But where to, this time? He slowed down, stopping. He could see the ship already, outlined against the sky, where he had parked it. The settlement was behind him; he was on the outskirts of the wilderness between the inhabited places, where the forests and desolation began. He crossed a barren field and entered the trees.

As he came toward it, the door of the ship opened.

Peters stepped out, framed against the light. In his arms was a heavy Boris gun. Olham stopped, rigid. Peters stared around him, into the darkness. "I know you're there, some place," he said. "Come on up here, Olham. There are security men all around you."

Olham did not move.

"Listen to me. We will catch you very shortly. Apparently you still do not believe you're the robot. Your call to the woman indicates that you are still under the illusion created by your artificial memories.

"But *you are* the robot. You are the robot, and inside you is the bomb. Any moment the trigger phrase may be spoken, by you, by someone else, by anyone. When this happens the bomb will destroy everything for miles around. The Project, the woman, all of us will be killed. Do you understand?"

Olham said nothing. He was listening. Men were moving toward him, slipping through the woods.

"If you don't come out, we'll catch you. It will be only a matter of time. We no longer plan to remove you to the Moon-base. You will be destroyed on sight, and we will have to take the chance that the bomb will detonate. I have ordered every available security officer into the area. The whole country is being searched, inch by inch. There is no place you can go. Around this wood is a cordon of armed men. You have about six hours left before the last inch is covered."

Olham moved away. Peters went on speaking; he had not seen him at all. It was too dark to see anyone. But Peters was right. There was no place he could go. He was beyond the settlement, in the outskirts where the woods began. He could hide for a time, but eventually they would catch him.

Only a matter of time.

Olham walked quietly through the wood. Mile by mile, each part of the country was being measured off, laid bare, searched, studied, examined. The cordon was coming all the time, squeezing him into a smaller and smaller space.

What was there left? He had lost the ship, the one hope of escape. They were at his home; his wife was with them, believing, no doubt, that the real Olham had been killed. He clenched his fists. Some place there was a wrecked Outspace needle-ship, and in it the remains of the robot. Somewhere nearby the ship had crashed and broken up.

And the robot lay inside, destroyed.

A faint hope stirred him. What if he could find the remains? If he could show them the wreckage, the remains of the ship, the robot—

But where? Where would he find it?

He walked on, lost in thought. Some place, not too far off, probably. The ship would have landed close to the Project; the robot would have expected to go the rest of the way on foot. He went up the side of a hill and looked around. Crashed and burned. Was there some clue, some hint? Had he read anything, heard anything? Some place close by, within walking distance. Some wild place, a remote spot where there would be no people.

Suddenly Olham smiled. Crashed and burned—

Sutton Wood.

He increased his pace.

It was morning. Sunlight filtered down through the broken trees, onto

the man crouching at the edge of the clearing. Olham glanced up from time to time, listening. They were not far off, only a few minutes away. He smiled.

Down below him, strewn across the clearing and into the charred stumps that had been Sutton Wood, lay a tangled mass of wreckage. In the sunlight it glittered a little, gleaming darkly. He had not had too much trouble finding it. Sutton Wood was a place he knew well; he had climbed around it many times in his life, when he was younger. He had known where he would find the remains. There was one peak that jutted up suddenly, without a warning.

A descending ship, unfamiliar with the Wood, had little chance of missing it. And now he squatted, looking down at the ship, or what remained of it.

Olham stood up. He could hear them, only a little distance away, coming together, talking in low tones. He tensed himself. Everything depended on who first saw him. If it was Nelson, he had no chance. Nelson would fire at once. He would be dead before they saw the ship. But if he had time to call out, hold them off for a moment— That was all he needed. Once they saw the ship he would be safe.

But if they fired first—

A charred branch cracked. A figure appeared, coming forward uncertainly. Olham took a deep breath. Only a few seconds remained, perhaps the last seconds of his life. He raised his arms, peering intently.

It was Peters.

"Peters!" Olham waved his arms. Peters lifted his gun, aiming. "Don't fire!" His voice shook. "Wait a minute. Look past me, across the clearing."

"I've found him," Peters shouted. Security men came pouring out of the burned woods around him.

"Don't shoot. Look past me. The ship, the needleship. The Outspace ship. Look!"

Peters hesitated. The gun wavered.

"It's down there," Olham said rapidly. "I knew I'd find it here. The burned wood. Now you believe me. You'll find the remains of the robot in the ship. Look, will you?"

"There is something down there," one of the men said nervously.

"Shoot him!" a voice said. It was Nelson.

"Wait," Peters turned sharply. "I'm in charge. Don't anyone fire. Maybe he's telling the truth."

"Shoot him," Nelson said. "He killed Olham. Any minute he may kill us all. If the bomb goes off—"

"Shut up," Peters advanced toward the slope. He stared down. "Look at that." He waved two men up to him. "Go down there and see what that is."

The men raced down the slope, across the clearing. They bent down, poking in the ruins of the ship.

"Well?" Peters called.

Olham held his breath. He smiled a little. It must be there; he had not had

time to look, himself, but it had to be there. Suddenly doubt assailed him. Suppose the robot had lived long enough to wander away? Suppose his body had been completely destroyed, burned to ashes by the fire?

He licked his lips. Perspiration came out on his forehead. Nelson was staring at him, his face still livid. His chest rose and fell.

"Kill him," Nelson said. "Before he kills us."

The two men stood up.

"What have you found?" Peters said. He held the gun steady. "Is there anything there?"

"Looks like something, It's a needle-ship, all right. There's something beside it."

"I'll look." Peters strode past Olham. Olham watched him go down the hill and up to the men. The others were following after him, peering to see.

"It's a body of some sort," Peters said. "Look at it!"

Olham came along with them. They stood around in a circle, staring down.

On the ground, bent and twisted into a strange shape was a grotesque form. It looked human, perhaps; except that it was bent so strangely, the arms and legs flung off in all directions. The mouth was open; the eyes stared glassily.

"Like a machine that's run down," Peters murmured. Olham smiled feebly. "Well?" he asked.

Peters looked at him, "I can't believe it. You were telling the truth all the time."

"The robot never reached me," Olham said. He took out a cigarette and lit it. "It was destroyed when the ship crashed. You were all too busy with the war to wonder why an out-of-the-way woods would suddenly catch fire and burn. Now you know."

He stood smoking, watching the men. They were dragging the grotesque remains from the ship. The body was stiff, the arms and legs rigid.

"You'll find the bomb now," Olham said. The man laid the body on the ground. Peters bent down.

"I think I see the corner of it." He reached out touching the body.

The chest of the corpse had been laid open. Within the gaping tear something glinted, something metal. The men stared at the metal without speaking.

"That would have destroyed us all, if it had lived," Peters said. "That metal box there."

There was silence.

"I think we owe you something," Peters said to Olham. "This must have been a nightmare to you. If you hadn't escaped, we would have—" He broke off.

Olham put out his cigarette. "I knew, of course, that the robot had never

reached me. But I had no way of proving it. Sometimes it isn't possible to prove a thing right away. That was the whole trouble. There wasn't any way I could demonstrate that I was myself."

"How about a vacation?" Peters said. "I think we might work out a month's vacation for you. You could take it easy, relax."

"I think right now I want to go home," Olham said.

"All right, then," Peters said. "Whatever you say."

Nelson had squatted down on the ground, beside the corpse. He reached out toward the glint of metal visible within the chest.

"Don't touch it," Olham said. "It might still go off. We better let the demolition squad take care of it later on."

Nelson said nothing. Suddenly he grabbed hold of the metal, reaching his hand inside the chest. He pulled.

"What are you doing?" Olham cried.

Nelson stood up. He was holding on to the metal object. His face was blank with terror. It was a metal knife, an outspace needle-knife, covered with blood.

"This killed him," Nelson whispered. "My friend was killed with this." He looked at Olham. "You killed him with this and left him beside the ship."

Olham was trembling. His teeth chattered. He looked from the knife to the body. "This can't be Olham," he said. His mind spun, everything was whirling. "Was I wrong?"

He gaped.

"But if that's Olham, then I must be—"

He did not complete the sentence, only the first phrase. The blast was visible all the way to Alpha Centauri.

SALES PITCH

Imagine a robot who will not take no for an answer, who insists on serving you. There's nothing new in that plot and many writers have used it, but not with quite the same effect that Dick does in "Sales Pitch." It's a funny story—at least until the very end—and its humor is created by the outrageous exaggeration in which Dick so delights. Twenty-five years later when Dick wrote notes for an anthology reprinting the story, he said he deplored the end and if he were to rewrite the story, he would have the man and the robot form a partnership and become friends at the end.

*Ed Morris in the story is an ordinary man beset by commonplace irritations like rush hour traffic and advertisements that demand attention as he returns home after a weary day at the office. He is Dick's favorite protagonist, a little man just barely coping with his world. Later in the novels he will become Mr. Tagomi in *The Man in the High Castle* and Jack Bohlen in *Martian Time-Slip*.*

Commute ships roared on all sides, as Ed Morris made his way wearily home to Earth at the end of a long hard day at the office. The Ganymede-Terra lanes were choked with exhausted, grim-faced businessmen; Jupiter was in opposition to Earth and the trip was a good two hours. Every few million miles the great flow slowed to a grinding, agonized halt; signal-lights flashed as streams from Mars and Saturn fed into the main traffic-arteries.

"Lord," Morris muttered. "How tired can you *get*?" He locked the autopilot and momentarily turned from the control-board to light a much-needed cigarette. His hands shook. His head swam. It was past six; Sally would be fuming; dinner would be spoiled. The same old thing. Nerve-wracking driving, honking horns and irate drivers zooming past his little ship, furious gesturing, shouting, cursing. . . .

And the ads. That was what really did it. He could have stood everything else—but the ads, the whole long way from Ganymede to Earth. And on

Earth, the swarms of salesrobots, it was too much. And they were everywhere.

He slowed to avoid a fifty-ship smashup. Repair ships were scurrying around trying to get the debris out of the lane. His audio-speaker wailed as police rockets hurried up. Expertly, Morris raised his ship, cut between two slow-moving commercial transports, zipped momentarily into the unused left lane, and then sped on, the wreck left behind. Horns honked furiously at him; he ignored them.

"Trans-Solar Products greets you!" an immense voice boomed in his ear. Morris groaned and hunched down in his seat. He was getting near Terra; the barrage was increasing. "Is your tension-index pushed over the safety-margin by the ordinary frustrations of the day? They you need an Id-Persona Unit. So small it can be worn behind the ear, close to the frontal lobe—"

Thank God, he was past it. The ad dimmed and receded behind, as his fast-moving ship hurtled forward. But another was right ahead.

"Drivers! Thousands of unnecessary deaths each year from inter-planet driving. Hypno-Motor Control from an expert source point insures your safety. Surrender your body and save your life!" The voice roared louder. "Industrial experts say—"

Both audio ads, the easiest to ignore. But now a visual ad was forming; he winced, closed his eyes, but it did no good.

"Men!" an unctuous voice thundered on all sides of him. "Banish internally-caused obnoxious odors *forever*. Removal by modern painless methods of the gastrointestinal tract and substitution system will relieve you of the most acute cause of social rejection." The visual image locked; a vast nude girl, blonde hair disarranged, blue eyes half shut, lips parted, head tilted back in sleep-drugged ecstasy. The features ballooned as the lips approached his own. Abruptly the orgiastic expression on the girl's face vanished. Disgust and revulsion swept across, and then the image faded out.

"Does this happen to you?" the voice boomed. "During erotic sex-play do you offend your love-partner by the presence of gastric processes which—"

The voice died, and he was past. His mind his own again, Morris kicked savagely at the throttle and sent the little ship leaping. The pressure, applied directly to the audio-visual regions of his brain, had faded below spark point. He groaned and shook his head to clear it. All around him the vague half-defined echoes of ads glittered and gibbered, like ghosts of distant video stations. Ads waited on all sides, he steered a careful course, dexterity born of animal desperation, but not all could be avoided. Despair seized him. The outline of a new visual-audio ad was already coming into being.

"You, mister wage-earner!" it shouted into the eyes and ears, noses and throats, of a thousand weary commuters. "Tired of the same old job?

Wonder Circuits Inc. has perfected a marvelous long-range thoughtwave scanner. Know what others are thinking and saying. Get the edge on fellow employees. Learn facts, figures about your employer's personal existence. Banish uncertainty!"

Morris' despair swept up wildly. He threw the throttle on full-blast; the little ship bucked and rolled as it climbed from the traffic-lane into the dead zone beyond. A shrieking roar, as his fender whipped through the protective wall—and then the ad faded behind him.

He slowed down, trembling with misery and fatigue. Earth lay ahead. He'd be home, soon. Maybe he could get a good night's sleep. He shakily dropped the nose of the ship and prepared to hook onto the tractor beam of the Chicago commute field.

"The best metabolism adjuster on the market," the salesrobot shrilled. "Guaranteed to maintain a perfect endocrine-balance, or your money refunded in full."

Morris pushed wearily past the salesrobot, up the sidewalk toward the residential block that contained his living unit. The robot followed a few steps, then forgot him and hurried after another grim-faced commuter.

"All the news while it's news," a metallic voice dinned at him. "Have a retinal vidscreen installed in your least-used eye. Keep in touch with the world; Don't wait for out-of-date hourly summaries."

"*Get out of the way,*" Morrison muttered. The robot stepped aside for him and he crossed the street with a pack of hunched-over men and women.

Robot-salesmen were everywhere, gesturing, pleading, shrilling. One started after him and he quickened his pace. It scurried along, chanting its pitch and trying to attract his attention, all the way up the hill to his living unit. It didn't give up until he stooped over, snatched up a rock, and hurled it futilely. He scrambled in the house and slammed the doorlock after him. The robot hesitated, then turned and raced after a woman with an armload of packages toiling up the hill. She tried vainly to elude it, without success.

"Darling!" Sally cried. She hurried from the kitchen, drying her hands on her plastic shorts, bright-eyed and excited. "Oh, you poor thing! You look so tired!"

Morris peeled off his hat and coat and kissed his wife briefly on her bare shoulder. "What's for dinner?"

Sally gave his hat and coat to the closet. "We're having Uranian wild pheasant; your favorite dish."

Morris's mouth watered, and a tiny surge of energy crawled back into his exhausted body. "No kidding? What the hell's the occasion?"

His wife's brown eyes moistened with compassion. "Darling, it's your birthday; you're thirty-seven years old today. Had you forgotten?"

"Yeah," Morris grinned a little. "I sure had." He wandered into the kitchen. The table was set; coffee was steaming in the cups and there was butter and white bread, mashed potatoes and green peas. "My golly. A real occasion."

Sally punched the stove controls and the container of smoking pheasant was slid onto the table and neatly sliced open. "Go wash your hands and we're ready to eat. Hurry—before it gets cold."

Morris presented his hands to the wash slot and then sat down gratefully at the table. Sally served the tender, fragrant pheasant, and the two of them began eating.

"Sally," Morris said, when his plate was empty and he was leaning back and sipping slowly at his coffee. "I can't go on like this. Something's got to be done."

"You mean the drive? I wish you could get a position on Mars like Bob Young. Maybe if you talked to the Employment Commission and explained to them how all the strain—"

"It's not just the drive. *They're right out front*. Everywhere. Waiting for me. All day and all night."

"Who are, dear?"

"Robots selling things. As soon as I set down the ship. Robots and visual-audio ads. They dig right into a man's brain. They follow people around until they die."

"I know," Sally patted his hand sympathetically. "When I go shopping they follow me in clusters. All talking at once. It's really a panic—you can't understand half they're saying."

"We've got to break out."

"Break out?" Sally faltered. "What do you mean?"

"We've got to get away from them. They're destroying us."

Morris fumbled in his pocket and carefully got out a tiny fragment of metal foil. He unrolled it with painstaking care and smoothed it out on the table. "Look at this. It was circulated in the office, among the men; it got to me and I kept it."

"What does it mean?" Sally's brow wrinkled as she made out the words. "Dear, I don't think you got all of it. There must be more than this."

"A new world," Morris said softly. "Where they haven't got to, yet. It's a long way off, out beyond the solar system. Out in the stars."

"Proxima?"

"Twenty planets. Half of them habitable. Only a few thousand people out there. Families, workmen, scientists, some industrial survey teams. Land free for the asking."

"But it's so—" Sally made a face. "Dear, isn't it sort of underdeveloped?"

They say it's like living back in the twentieth century. Flush toilets, bathtubs, gasoline driven cars—"

"That's right." Morris rolled up the bit of crumpled metal, his face grim and dead-serious. "It's a hundred years behind times. None of this." He indicated the stove and the furnishings in the livingroom. "We'll have to do without. We'll have to get used to a simpler life. The way our ancestors lived." He tried to smile, but his face wouldn't cooperate. "You think you'd like it? No ads, no salesrobots, traffic moving at sixty miles an hour instead of sixty million. We could raise passage on one of the big trans-system liners. I could sell my commute rocket. . . ."

There was a heistant, doubtful silence.

"Ed," Sally began. "I think we should think it over more. What about your job? What would you do over there?"

"I'd find something."

"But *what*? Haven't you got that part figured out?" A shrill tinge of annoyance crept into her voice. "It seems to me we should consider that part just a little before we throw away everything and just—take off."

"If we don't go," Morris said slowly, trying to keep his voice steady, "they'll get us. There isn't much time left. I don't know how much longer I can hold them off."

"Really, Ed! You make it sound so melodramatic. If you feel that bad why don't you take some time off and have a complete inhibition check? I was watching a vidprogram and I saw them going over a man whose psychosomatic system was much worse than yours. A much older man."

She leaped to her feet. "Let's go out tonight and celebrate. Okay?" Her slim fingers fumbled at the zipper of her shorts. "I'll put on my new plastirobe, the one I've never had nerve enough to wear."

Her eyes sparkled with excitement as she hurried into the bedroom. "You know the one I mean? When you're up close it's translucent but as you get farther off it becomes more and more sheer until—"

"I know the one," Morris said wearily. "I've seen them advertised on the way home from work." He got slowly to his feet and wandered into the livingroom. At the door of the bedroom he halted. "Sally—"

"Yes?"

Morris opened his mouth to speak. He was going to ask her again, talk to her about the metal-foil fragment he had carefully wadded up and carried home. He was going to talk to her about the frontier. About Proxima Centauri. Going away and never coming back. But he never had a chance. The doorchimes sounded.

"Somebody's at the door!" Sally cried excitedly. "Hurry up and see who it is!"

In the evening darkness the robot was a silent, unmoving figure. A cold wind blew around it and into the house. Morris shivered and moved back

from the door. "What do you want?" he demanded. A strange fear licked at him. "What is it?"

The robot was larger than any he had seen. Tall and broad, with heavy metallic grippers and elongated eye-lenses. Its upper trunk was a square tank instead of the usual cone. It rested on four treads, not the customary two. It towered over Morris, almost seven feet high. Massive and solid.

"Good evening," it said calmly. Its voice was whipped around by the night wind; it mixed with the dismal noises of evening, the echoes of traffic and the clang of distant street signals. A few vague shapes hurried through the gloom. The world was black and hostile.

"Evening," Morris responded automatically. He found himself trembling. "What are you selling?"

"I would like to show you a *fasrad*," the robot said.

Morris' mind was numb; it refused to respond. What was a *fasrad*? There was something dreamlike and nightmarish going on. He struggled to get his mind and body together. "A what?" he croaked.

"A *fasrad*." The robot made no effort to explain. It regarded him without emotion, as if it was not its responsibility to explain anything. "It will take only a moment."

"I—" Morris began. He moved back, out of the wind. And the robot, without change of expression, glided past him and into the house.

"Thank you," it said. It halted in the middle of the livingroom. "Would you call your wife, please? I would like to show her the *fasrad*, also."

"Sally," Morris muttered helplessly. "Come here."

Sally swept breathlessly into the livingroom, her breasts quivering with excitement. "What is it? Oh!" She saw the robot and halted uncertainly. "Ed, did you order something? Are we buying something?"

"Good evening," the robot said to her. "I am going to show you the *fasrad*. Please be seated. On the couch, if you will. Both together."

Sally sat down expectantly, her cheeks flushed, eyes bright with wonder and bewilderment. Numbly, Ed seated himself beside her. "Look," he muttered thickly. "What the hell is a *fasrad*? *What's going on*? I don't want to buy anything."

"What is your name?" the robot asked him.

"Morris." He almost choked. "Ed Morris."

The robot turned to Sally. "Mrs. Morris." It bowed slightly. "I'm glad to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Morris. You are the first persons in your neighborhood to see the *fasrad*. This is the initial demonstration in this area." Its cold eyes swept the room. "Mr. Morris, you are employed, I assume. Where are you employed?"

"He works on Ganymede," Sally said dutifully, like a little girl in school. "For the Terran Metals Development Co."

The robot digested this information. "A *fasrad* will be of value to you." It eyed Sally. "What do you do?"

"I'm a tape-transcriber at Histo-Research."

"A fasrad will be of no value to your professional work, but it will be helpful here in the home." It picked up a table in its powerful steel grippers. "For example, sometimes an attractive piece of furniture is damaged by a clumsy guest." The robot smashed the table to bits; fragments of wood and plastic rained down. "A fasrad is needed."

Morris leaped helplessly to his feet. He was powerless to halt events; a numbing weight hung over him, as the robot tossed the fragments of table away and selected a heavy floor lamp.

"Oh, dear," Sally gasped. "That's my best lamp."

"When a fasrad is possessed, there is nothing to fear."

The robot seized the lamp and twisted it grotesquely. It ripped the shade, smashed the bulbs, then threw away the remnants. "A situation of this kind can occur from some violent explosion, such as an H-bomb."

"For God's sake," Morris muttered. "We—"

"An H-bomb attack may never occur," the robot continued, "but in such an event a fasrad is indispensable." It knelt down and pulled an intricate tube from its waist. Aiming the tube at the floor it atomized a hole five feet in diameter. It stepped back from the yawning pocket. "I have not extended this tunnel, but you can see a fasrad would save your life in case of attack."

The word *attack* seemed to set off a new train of reactions in its metal brain.

"Sometimes a thug or hood will attack a person at night," it continued. Without warning it whirled and drove its fist through the wall. A section of the wall collapsed in a heap of powder and debris. "That takes care of the thug." The robot straightened out and peered around the room. "Often you are too tired in the evening to manipulate the buttons on the stove." "It strode into the kitchen and began punching the stove controls; immense quantities of food spilled in all directions.

"Stop!" Sally cried. "Get away from my stove!"

"You may be too weary to run water for your bath." The robot tripped the controls of the tub and water poured down. "Or you may wish to go right to bed." It yanked the bed from its concealment and threw it flat. Sally retreated in fright as the robot advanced toward her. "Sometimes after a hard day at work you are too tired to remove your clothing. In that event—"

"Get out of here!" Morris shouted at it. "Sally, run and get the cops. The thing's gone crazy. *Hurry.*"

"The fasrad is a necessity in all modern homes," the robot continued. "For example, an appliance may break down. The fasrad repairs it instantly." It seized the automatic humidity control and tore the wiring and replaced in on the wall. "Sometimes you would prefer not to go to work. The fasrad is permitted by law to occupy your position for a consecutive period not to exceed ten days. If, after that period—"

"Good God," Morris said, as understanding finally came. "You're the *fasrad*."

"That's right," the robot agreed. "Fully Automatic Self-Regulating Android (Domestic). There is also the *fasrac* (Construction), the *fasram* (Managerial), the *fasras* (Soldier), and the *fasrab* (Bureaucrat). I am designed for home use."

"You—" Sally gasped. "You're for sale. You're selling yourself."

"I am demonstrating myself," the *fasrad*, the robot, answered. Its impassive metal eyes were fixed intently on Morrison as it continued, "I am sure, Mr. Morris, you would like to own me. I am reasonably priced and fully guaranteed. A full book of instructions is included. I cannot conceive of taking *no* for an answer."

At half past twelve, Ed Morris still sat at the foot of the bed, one shoe on, the other in his hand. He gazed vacantly ahead. He said nothing.

"For heaven's sake," Sally complained. "Finish untying that knot and get into bed; you have to be up at five-thirty."

Morris fooled aimlessly with the shoelace. After a while he dropped the shoe and tugged at the other one. The house was cold and silent. Outside, the dismal night-wind whipped and lashed at the cedars that grew along the side of the building. Sally lay curled up beneath the radiant-lens, a cigarette between her lips, enjoying the warmth and half-dozing.

In the livingroom stood the *fasrad*. It hadn't left. It was still there, was waiting for Morris to buy it.

"Come on!" Sally said sharply. "What's wrong with you? It fixed all the things it broke; it was just demonstrating itself." She sighed drowsily. "It certainly gave me a scare. I thought something had gone wrong with it. They certainly had an inspiration, send it around to sell itself to people."

Morris said nothing.

Sally rolled over on her stomach and languidly stubbed out her cigarette. "That's not so much, is it? Ten thousand gold units, and if we get our friends to buy one we get a 5 percent commission. All we have to do is show it. It isn't as if we had to *sell* it. It sells itself." She giggled. "They always wanted a product that sold itself, didn't they?"

Morris untied the knot in his shoelace. He slid his shoe back on and tied it tight.

"What are you doing?" Sally demanded angrily. "You come to bed!" She sat up furiously, as Morris left the room and moved slowly down the hall. "Where are you going?"

In the livingroom, Morris switched on the light and sat down facing the *fasrad*. "Can you hear me?" he said.

"Certainly," the *fasrad* answered. "I'm never inoperative. Sometimes an emergency occurs at night: a child is sick or an accident takes place. You have no children as yet, but in the event—"

"Shut up," Morris said, "I don't want to hear you."

"You asked me a question. Self-regulating androids are plugged in to a central information exchange. Sometimes a person wishes immediate information; the fasrad is always ready to answer any theoretical or factual inquiry. Anything not metaphysical."

Morris picked up the book of instructions and thumbed it. The fasrad did thousands of things; it never wore out; it was never at a loss; it couldn't make a mistake. He threw the book away. "I'n not going to buy you," he said to it. "Never. Not in a million years."

"Oh, yes you are," the fasrad corrected. "This is an opportunity you can't afford to miss." There was calm, metallic confidence in its voice. "You can't turn me down, Mr. Morrison. A fasrad is an indispensable necessity in the modern home."

"Get out of here," Morris said evenly. "Get out of my house and don't come back."

"I'm not your fasrad to order around. Until you've purchased me at the regular list price, I'm responsible only to Self-Regulating Android Inc. Their instructions were to the contrary; I'm to remain with you until you buy me."

"Suppose I never buy you?" Morris demanded, but in his heart ice formed even as he asked. Already he felt the cold terror of the answer that was coming there could be no other.

"I'll continue to remain with you," the fasrad said; "eventually you'll buy me." It plucked some withered roses from a vase on the mantel and dropped them into its disposal slot. "You will see more and more situations in which a fasrad is indispensable. Eventually you'll wonder how you ever existed without one."

"Is there anything you can't do?"

"Oh, yes; there's a great deal I can't do. But I can do anything *you* can do—considerably better."

Morris let out his breath slowly. "I'd be insane to buy you."

"You've got to buy me," the impassive voice answered. The fasrad extended a hollow pipe and began cleaning the carpet. "I am useful in all situations. Notice how fluffy and free of dust this rug is." It withdrew the pipe and extended another. Morris coughed and staggered quickly away; clouds of white particles billowed out and filled every part of the room.

"I am spraying for moths," the fasrad explained.

The white cloud turned to an ugly blueblack. The room faded into ominous darkness; the fasrad was a dim shape moving methodically about in the center. Presently the cloud lifted and the furniture emerged.

"I sprayed for harmful bacteria," the fasrad said.

It painted the walls of the room and constructed new furniture to go with them. It reinforced the ceiling in the bathroom. It increased the number of heat-vents from the furnace. It put in new electrical wiring. It tore out all the

fixtures in the kitchen and assembled more modern ones. It examined Morris's financial accounts and computed his income tax for the following year. It sharpened all the pencils; it caught hold of his wrist and quickly diagnosed his high blood-pressure as psychosomatic.

"You'll feel better after you've turned responsibility over to me," it explained. It threw out some old soup Sally had been saving. "Danger of botulism" it told him. "Your wife is sexually attractive, but not capable of a high order of intellectualization."

Morris went to the closet and got his coat.

"Where are you going?" the fasrad asked.

"To the office."

"At this time of night?"

Morris glanced briefly into the bedroom. Sally was sound asleep under the soothing radiant-lens. Her slim body was rosy pink and healthy, her face free of worry. He closed the front door and hurried down the steps into the darkness. Cold night wind slashed at him as he approached the parking lot. His little commute ship was parked with hundreds of others; a quarter sent the attendant robot obediently after it.

In ten minutes he was on his way to Ganymede.

The fasrad boarded his ship when he stopped at Mars to refuel.

"Apparently you don't understand," the fasrad said. "My instructions are to demonstrate myself until you're satisfied. As yet, you're not wholly convinced; further demonstration is necessary." It passed an intricate web over the controls of the ship until all the dials and meters were in adjustment. "You should have more frequent servicing."

It retired to the rear to examine the drive jets. Morris numbly signalled the attendant, and the ship was released from the fuel pumps. He gained speed and the small sandy planet fell behind. Ahead, Jupiter loomed.

"Your jets aren't in good repair," the fasrad said, emerging from the rear. "I don't like that knock to the main brake drive. As soon as you land I'll make extensive repair."

"The Company doesn't mind your doing favors for me?" Morris asked, with bitter sarcasm.

"The Company considers me your fasrad. An invoice will be mailed to you at the end of the month." The robot whipped out a pen and a pad of forms. "I'll explain the four easy-payment plans. Ten thousand gold units cash means a 3 percent discount. In addition, a number of household items may be traded in—items you won't have further need for. If you wish to divide the purchase in four parts, the first is due at once, and the last in ninety days."

"I always pay cash," Morris muttered. He was carefully resetting the route positions on the control board.

"There's no carrying charge for the ninety day plan. For the six month

plan there's a 6 percent per annum charge, which will amount to approximately—" It broke off. "We've changed course."

"That's right."

"We've left the official traffic lane." The fasrad struck its pen and pad away and hurried to the control board. "What are you doing? There's a two unit fine for this."

Morris ignored it. He hung on grimly to the controls and kept his eyes on the viewscreen. The ship was gaining speed rapidly. Warning buoys sounded angrily as he shot past them and into the bleak darkness of space beyond. In a few seconds they had left all traffic behind. They were alone, shooting rapidly away from Jupiter, out into deep space.

The fasrad computed the trajectory. "Were moving out of the solar system. Toward Centaurus."

"You guessed it."

"Hadn't you better call your wife?"

Morris grunted and notched the drive bar farther up. The ship bucked and pitched, then managed to right itself. The jets began to whine ominously. Indicators showed the main turbines were beginning to heat. He ignored them and threw on the emergency fuel supply.

"I'll call Mrs. Morris," the fasrad offered. "We'll be beyond range in a short while."

"Don't bother."

"She'll worry." The fasrad hurried to the back and examined the jets again. It popped back into the cabin buzzing with alarm. "Mr. Morris, this ship is not equipped for inter-system-travel. It's a Class D four-shaft domestic model for home consumption only. It was never made to stand this velocity."

"To get to Proxima," Morris answered, "we need this velocity."

The fasrad connected its power cables to the control board. "I can take some of the strain off the wiring system. But unless you rev her back to normal I can't be responsible for the deterioration of the jets."

"The hell with the jets."

The fasrad was silent. It was listening intently to the growing whine under them. The whole ship shuddered violently. Bits of paint drifted down. The floor was hot from the grinding shafts. Morris' foot stayed on the throttle. The ship gained more velocity as Sol fell behind. They were out of the charted area. Sol receded rapidly.

"It's too late to vid you wife," the fasrad said. "There are three emergency-rockets in the stern; if you want, I'll fire them off in the hope of attracting a passing military transport."

"Why?"

"They can take us in tow and return us to the Sol system. There's a

six-hundred gold unit fine, but under the circumstances it seems to be the best policy."

Morris turned his back to the fasrad and jammed down the throttle with all his weight. The whine had grown to a violent roar. Instruments smashed and cracked. Fuses blew up and down the board. The lights dimmed, faded, then reluctantly came back.

"Mr. Morris," the fasrad said, "you must prepare for death. The statistical probabilities of turbine explosion are seventy-thirty. I'll do what I can, but the danger-point has already passed."

Morris returned to the view-screen. For at time he gazed hungrily up at the growing dot that was the twin star Centarus. "They look all right, don't they? Prox is the important one. Twenty planets." He examined the wildly fluttering instruments. "How are the jets holding up? I can't tell from these; most of them are burned out."

The fasrad hesitated. It started to speak, then changed its mind. "I'll go back and examine them," it said. It moved to the rear of the ship and disappeared down the short ramp into the thundering, vibrating engine chamber.

Morris leaned over and put out his cigarette. He waited a moment longer, then reached out and yanked the drives full up, the last possible notch on the board.

The explosion tore the ship in half. Sections of hull hurtled around him. He was lifted weightless and slammed into the control board. Metal and plastic rained down on him. Flashing incandescent points winked, faded, and finally died into silence, and there was nothing but cold ash.

The dull *swish-swish* of emergency air-pumps brought consciousness back. He was pinned under the wreckage of the control board; one arm was broken and bent under him. He tried to move his legs but there was no sensation below his waist.

The splintered debris that had been his ship was still hurtling toward Centaurus. Hull-sealing equipment was feebly trying to patch the gaping holes. Automatic temperature and grav feeds were thumping spasmodically from self-contained batteries. In the view-screen the vast flaming bulk of the twin suns grew quietly, inexorably.

He was glad. In the silence of the ruined ship he lay buried beneath the debris, gratefully watching the growing bulk. It was a beautiful sight. He had wanted to see it for a long time. There it was, coming closer each moment. In a day or two the ship would plunge into the fiery mass and be consumed. But he could enjoy this interval; there was nothing to disturb his happiness.

He thought about Sally, sound asleep under the radiant lens. Would Sally have liked Proxima? Probably not. Probably she would have wanted to go back home as soon as possible. This was something he had to enjoy alone.

This was for him only. A vast peace descended over him. He could lie here without stirring, and the flaming magnificence would come nearer and nearer . . .

A sound. From the heaps of fused wreckage something was rising. A twisted, dented shape dimly visible in the flickering glare of the viewscreen. Morris managed to turn his head.

The fasrad staggered to a standing position. Most of its trunk was gone, smashed and broken away. It tottered, then pitched forward on its face with a grinding crash. Slowly it inched its way toward him, then settled to a dismal halt a few feet off. Gears whirred creakily. Relays popped open and shut. Vague, aimless life animated its devastated hulk.

"Good evening," its shrill, metallic voice grated.

Morris screamed. He tried to move his body but the ruined beams held him tight. He shrieked and shouted and tried to crawl away from it. He spat and wailed and wept.

"I would like to show you a fasrad," the metallic voice continued. "Would you call your wife, please? I would like to show her a fasrad, too."

"Get away!" Morris screamed. "Get away from me!"

"Good evening," the fasrad continued, like a broken tape. "Good evening. Please be seated. I am happy to meet you. What is your name? Thank you. You are the first persons in your neighborhood to see the fasrad. Where are you employed?"

Its dead eyelenses gaped at him empty and vacant.

"Please be seated," it said again. "This will take only a second. Only a second. This demonstration will take only a—"

THE LAST OF THE MASTERS

Dick's productivity in 1954, the year "The Last of the Masters" was written, equalled that of the previous year. He published 29 short stories in a wide variety of magazines. His works were now appearing in all the pulps except Astounding. His imagination leaned more toward fantasy than hard science fiction, so he wrote few stories that met the criteria of John W. Campbell, Astounding's editor.

In this story we see Dick working out an idea that will become one of his major themes: What is the difference between a man and a machine? Not that one is alive and the other inanimate, but that a man possesses feelings while a machine is unable to respond emotionally to the needs of other people. This concept of empathy will become an important aspect of Dick's moral structure. We see its first appearance in this story. Silvia faces Bors, the robot who runs the government, and she says with horror and disgust, "You have no understanding of us. You run all this, and you're incapable of empathy. You're nothing but a mechanical computer."

Yet it isn't quite that simple, says Dick, ever aware of moral ambiguity. The government that Bors directs does function to organize society and hold back the chaos enveloping the world outside his jurisdiction. Commenting later on the story, Dick says that the robot is a suffering servant, a form of Christ, and so he cannot be totally condemned. On the other hand, he is a dictator who refuses to give others the responsibility for making their own decisions, and such authority figures are anathema to Dick.

Because the ideas he explores in this story are so significant to Dick, he will come back to them again when he turns to writing novels. *Vulcan's Hammer* pits the forces of individualism against a computer government. *The Penultimate Truth* has a government headed by a robot president, and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* expands on the concept of empathy, suggesting that the person unable to respond with compassion to the needs of others is more an android than a human.

Consciousness collected around him. He returned with reluctance; the weight of centuries, an unbearable fatigue, lay over him. The ascent was painful. He would have shrieked if there were anything to shriek with. And anyhow, he was beginning to feel glad.

Eight thousand times he had crept back thus, with ever-increasing difficulty. Someday he wouldn't make it. Someday the black pool would remain. But not this day. He was still alive; above the aching pain and reluctance came joyful triumph.

"Good morning," a bright voice said. "Isn't it a nice day? I'll pull the curtains and you can look out."

He could see and hear. But he couldn't move. He lay quietly and allowed the various sensations of the room to pour in on him. Carpets, wallpaper, tables, lamps, pictures. Desk and vidscreen. Gleaming yellow sunlight streamed through the window. Blue sky. Distant hills. Fields, buildings, roads, factories. Workers and machines.

Peter Green was busily straightening things, his young face wreathed with smiles. "Lots to do today. Lots of people to see you. Bills to sign. Decisions to make. This is Saturday. There will be people coming in from the remote sectors. I hope the maintenance crew has done a good job." He added quickly, "They have, of course. I talked to Fowler on my way over here. Everything's fixed up fine."

The youth's pleasant tenor mixed with the bright sunlight. Sounds and sights, but nothing else. He could feel nothing. He tried to move his arm but nothing happened.

"Don't worry," Green said, catching his terror. "They'll soon be along with the rest. You'll be all right. You *have* to be. How could we survive without you?"

He relaxed. God knew, it had happened often enough before. Anger surged dully. Why couldn't they coordinate? Get it up all at once, not piecemeal. He'd have to change their schedule. Make them organize better.

Past the bright window a squat metal car chugged to a halt. Uniformed men piled out, gathered up heavy armloads of equipment, and hurried toward the main entrance of the building.

"Here they come," Green exclaimed with relief. "A little late, eh?"

"Another traffic tie-up," Fowler snorted, as he entered. "Something wrong with the signal system again. Outside flow got mixed up with the urban stuff; tied up on all sides. I wish you'd change the law."

Now there was motion all around him. The shapes of Fowler and McLean loomed, two giant moons abruptly ascendant. Professional faces that peered down at him anxiously. He was turned over on his side. Muffled conferences. Urgent whispers. The clank of tools.

"Here," Fowler muttered. "Now here. No, that's later. Be careful. Now run it up through here."

The work continued in taut silence. He was aware of their closeness. Dim outlines occasionally cut off his light. He was turned this way and that, thrown around like a sack of meal.

"Okay," Fowler said. "Tape it."

A long silence. He gazed dully at the wall, at the slightly-faded blue and pink wallpaper. An old design that showed a woman in hoopskirts, with a little parasol over her dainty shoulder. A frilly white blouse, tiny tips of shoes. An astoundingly clean puppy at her side.

Then he was turned back, to face upward. Five shapes groaned and strained over him. Their fingers flew, their muscles rippled under their shirts. At last they straightened up and retreated. Fowler wiped sweat from his face; they were all tense and bleary-eyed.

"Go ahead," Fowler rasped. "Throw it."

Shock hit him. He gasped. His body arched, then settled slowly down.

His body. He could feel. He moved his arms experimentally. He touched his face, his shoulder, the wall. The wall was real and hard. All at once the world had become three-dimensional again.

Relief showed on Fowler's face. "Thank—God." He sagged wearily. "How do you feel?"

After a moment he answered, "All right."

Fowler sent the rest of the crew out. Green began dusting again, off in the corner. Fowler sat down on the edge of the bed and lit his pipe. "Now listen to me," he said. "I've got bad news. I'll give it to you the way you always want it, straight from the shoulder."

"What is it?" he demanded. He examined his fingers. He already knew.

There were dark circles under Fowler's eyes. He hadn't shaved. His square-jawed face was drawn and unhealthy. "We were up all night. Working on your motor system. We've got it jury-rigged, but it won't hold. Not more than a few months. The thing's climbing. The basic units can't be replaced. When they wear they're gone. We can weld in relays and wiring, but we can't fix the five synopsis-coils. There were only a few men who could make those, and they've been dead two centuries. If the coils burn out—

"Is there any deterioration in the synopsis-coils?" he interrupted.

"Not yet. Just motor areas. Arms, in particular. What's happening to your legs will happen to your arms and finally all your motor system. You'll be paralyzed by the end of the year. You'll be able to see, hear, and think. And broadcast. But that's all." He added, "Sorry, Bors. We're doing all we can."

"All right," Bors said. "You're excused. Thanks for telling me straight. I—guessed."

"Ready to go down? A lot of people with problems, today. They're stuck until you get there."

"Let's go." He focused his mind with an effort and turned his attention to the details of the day. "I want the heavy metals research program speeded. It's lagging, as usual. I may have to pull a number of men from related work and shift them to the generators. The water level will be dropping soon. I want to start feeding power along the lines while there's still power to feed. As soon as I turn my back everything starts falling apart."

Fowler signalled Green and he came quickly over. The two of them bent over Bors and, grunting, hoisted him up and carried him to the door. Down the corridor and outside.

They deposited him in the squat metal car, the new little service truck. Its polished surface was a startling contrast to his pitted, corroded hull, bent and splotted and eaten away. A dull, patina-covered machine of archaic steel and plastic that hummed faintly, rustily, as the men leaped in the front seat and raced the car out onto the main highway.

Edward Tolby perspired, pushed his back up higher, hunched over, tightened his gun belt, and cursed.

"Daddy," Silvia reproved. "Cut that."

Tolby spat furiously in the grass at the side of the road. He put his arm around his slim daughter. "Sorry, Silv. Nothing personal. The damn heat."

Mid-morning sun shimmered down on the dusty road. Clouds of dust rose and billowed around the three as they pushed slowly along. They were dead tired. Tolby's heavy face was flushed and sullen. An unlit cigarette dangled between his lips. His big, powerfully built body was hunched resentfully forward. His daughter's canvas shirt clung moistly to her arms and breasts. Moons of sweat darkened her back. Under her jeans her thigh muscles rippled wearily.

Robert Penn walked a little behind the two Tolbys, hands deep in his pockets, eyes on the road ahead. His mind was blank; he was half asleep from the double shot of hexobarb he had swallowed at the last League camp. And the heat lulled him. On each side of the road fields stretched out, pastures of grass and weeds, a few trees here and there. A tumbled-down farmhouse. The ancient rusting remains of a bomb shelter, two centuries old. Once, some dirty sheep.

"Sheep," Penn said. "They eat the grass too far down. It won't grow back."

"Now he's a farmer," Tolby said to his daughter.

"Daddy," Silvia snapped. "Stop being nasty."

"It's this heat. This damn heat." Tolby cursed again, loudly and futilely. "It's not worth it. For ten pinks I'd go back and tell them it was a lot of pig swill."

"Maybe it is, at that," Penn said mildly.

"All right, you go back," Tolby grunted. "You go back and tell them it's a lot of pig swill. They'll pin a medal on you. Maybe raise you up a grade."

Penn laughed. "Both of you shut up. There's some kind of town ahead."

Tolby's massive body straightened eagerly. "Where?" He shielded his eyes. "By God, he's right. A village. And it isn't a mirage. You see it, don't you?" His good humor returned and he rubbed his big hands together. "What say, Penn. A couple of beers, a few games of throw with some of the local peasants—maybe we can stay overnight." He licked his thick lips with anticipation. "Some of those village wenches, the kind that hang around the grog shops—"

"I know the kind you mean," Penn broke in. "The kind that are tired of doing nothing. Want to see the big commercial centers. Want to meet some guy that'll buy them mecho-stuff and take them places."

At the side of the road a farmer was watching them curiously. He had halted his horse and stood leaning on his crude plow, hat pushed back on his head.

"What's the name of this town?" Tolby yelled.

The farmer was silent a moment. He was an old man, thin and weathered. "This town?" he repeated.

"Yeah, the one ahead."

"That's a nice town." The farmer eyed the three of them. "You been through here before?"

"No, sir," Tolby said. "Never."

"Team break down?"

"No, we're on foot."

"How far you come?"

"About a hundred and fifty miles."

The farmer considered the heavy packs strapped on their backs. Their cleated hiking shoes. Dusty clothing and weary, sweat-streaked faces. Jeans and canvas shirts. Ironite walking staffs. "That's a long way," he said. "How far you going?"

"As far as we feel like it," Tolby answered. "Is there a place ahead we can stay? Hotel? Inn?"

"That town," the farmer said, "is Fairfax. It has a lumber mill, one of the best in the world. A couple of pottery works. A place where you can get clothes put together by machines. Regular mecho-clothing. A gun shop where they pour the best shot this side of the Rockies. And a bakery. Also there's an old doctor living there, and a lawyer. And some people with books to teach the kids. They came here with t.b. They made a school house out of an old barn."

"How large a town?" Penn asked.

"Lot of people. More born all the time. Old folks die. Kids die. We had a fever last year. About a hundred kids died. Doctor said it came from the

water hole. We shut the water hole down. Kids died anyhow. Doctor said it was the milk. Drove off half the cows. Not mine. I stood out there with my gun and I shot the first of them came to drive off my cow. Kids stopped dying as soon as fall came. I think it was the heat."

"Sure is hot," Tolby agreed.

"Yes, it gets hot around here. Water's pretty scarce." A crafty look slid across his old face. "You folks want a drink? The young lady looks pretty tired. Got some bottles of water down under the house. In the mud. Nice and cold." He hesitated. "Pink a glass."

Tolby laughed. "No, thanks."

"Two glasses a pink," the farmer said.

"Not interested," Penn said. He thumped his canteen and the three of them started on. "So long."

The farmer's face hardened. "Damn foreigners," he muttered. He turned angrily back to his plowing.

The town baked in silence. Flies buzzed and settled on the backs of stupefied horses, tied up at posts. A few cars were parked here and there. People moved listlessly along the sidewalks. Elderly lean-bodied men dozed on porches. Dogs and chickens slept in the shade under houses. The houses were small, wooden, chipped and peeling boards, leaning and angular—and old. Warped and split by age and heat. Dust lay over everything. A thick blanket of dry dust over the cracking houses and the dull-faced men and animals.

Two lank men approached them from an open doorway. "Who are you? What do you want?"

They stopped and got out their identification. The men examined the seal-plastic cards. Photographs, fingerprints, data. Finally they handed them back.

"AL," one said. "You really from the Anarchist League?"

"That's right," Tolby said.

"Even the girl?" The men eyed Silvia with a languid greed. "Tell you what. Let us have the girl a while and we'll skip the head tax."

"Don't kid me," Tolby grunted. "Since when does the League pay head tax or any other tax?" He pushed past them impatiently. "Where's the grog shop? I'm dying!"

A two-story white building was on their left. Men lounged on the porch, watching them vacantly. Penn headed toward it and the Tolbys followed. A faded, peeling sign lettered across the front read: *Beer, Wine on Tap*.

"This is it," Penn said. He guided Silvia up the sagging steps, past the men, and inside. Tolby followed: he unstrapped his pack gratefully as he came.

The place was cool and dark. A few men and women were at the bar; the rest sat around tables. Some youths were playing throw in the back. A

mechanical tune-maker wheezed and composed in the corner, a shabby, half-ruined machine only partially functioning. Behind the bar a primitive scene-shifter created and destroyed vague phantasmagoria: seascapes, mountain peaks, snowy valleys, great rolling hills, a nude woman that lingered and then dissolved into one vast breast. Dim, uncertain processions that no one noticed or looked at. The bar itself was an incredibly ancient sheet of transparent plastic, stained and chipped and yellow with age. Its n-grav coat had faded from one end; bricks now propped it up. The drink mixer had long since fallen apart. Only wine and beer were served. No living man knew how to mix the simplest drink.

Tolby moved up to the bar. "Beer," he said. "Three beers." Penn and Silvia sank down at a table and removed their packs, as the bartender served Tolby three mugs of thick, dark beer. He showed his card and carried the mugs over to the table.

The youths in the back had stopped playing. They were watching the three as they sipped their beer and unlaced their hiking boots. After a while one of them came slowly over.

"Say," he said. "You're from the League."

"That's right," Tolby murmured sleepily.

Everyone in the place was watching and listening. The youth sat down across from the three; his companions flocked excitedly around and took seats on all sides. The juveniles of the town. Bored, restless, dissatisfied. Their eyes took in the ironite staffs, the guns, the heavy metal-cleated boots. A murmured whisper rustled through them. There were about eighteen. Tanned, rangy.

"How do you get in?" one demanded bluntly.

"The League?" Tolby leaned back in his chair, found a match, and lit his cigarette. He unfastened his belt, belched loudly, and settled back contentedly. "You get in by examination."

"What do you have to know?"

Tolby shrugged. "About everything." He belched again and scratched thoughtfully at his chest, between two buttons. He was conscious of the ring of people around on all sides. A little old man with a beard and horn-rimmed glasses. At another table, a great tub of a man in a red shirt and blue-striped trousers, with a bulging stomach.

Youths. Farmers. A Negro in a dirty white shirt and trousers, a book under his arm. A hard-jawed blonde, hair in a net, red nails and high heels, tight yellow dress. Sitting with a gray-haired businessman in a dark brown suit. A tall young man holding hands with a young black-haired girl, huge eyes, in a soft white blouse and skirt, little slippers kicked under the table. Under the table her bare, tanned feet twisted; her slim body was bent forward with interest.

"You have to know," Tolby said, "how the League was formed. You have to know how we pulled down the governments that day. Pulled them down and destroyed them. Burned all the buildings. And all the records. Billions of microfilms and papers. Great bonfires that burned for weeks. And the swarms of little white things that poured out when we knocked the buildings over."

"You killed them?" the great tub of a man asked, lips twitching avidly.

"We let them go. They were harmless: They ran and hid. Under rocks." Tolby laughed. "Funny little scurrying things. Insects. Then we went in and gathered up all the records and equipment for making records. By God, we burned everything."

"And the robots," a youth said.

"Yeah, we smashed all the government robots. There weren't many of them. They were used only at high levels. When a lot of facts had to be integrated."

The youth's eyes bulged. "You saw them? You were there when they smashed the robots?"

Penn laughed. "Tolby means the League. That was two hundred years ago."

The youth grinned nervously. "Yeah. Tell us about the marches."

Tolby drained his mug and pushed it away. "I'm out of beer."

The mug was quickly refilled. He grunted his thanks and continued, voice deep and furry, dulled with fatigue. "The marches. That was really something, they say. All over the world, people getting up, throwing down what they were doing—"

"It started in East Germany," the hard-jawed blonde said. "The riots."

"Then it spread to Poland," the Negro put in shyly. "My grandfather used to tell me how everybody sat and listened to the television. His grandfather used to tell him. It spread to Czechoslovakia and then Austria and Roumania and Bulgaria. Then France, and Italy."

"France was first!" the little old man with beard and glasses cried violently. "They were without a government a whole month. The people saw they could live without a government!"

"The marches started it," the black-haired girl corrected. "That was the first time they started pulling down the government buildings. In East Germany and Poland. Big mobs of unorganized workers."

"Russia and America were the last," Tolby said. "When the march on Washington came there was close to twenty million of us. We were big in those days! They couldn't stop us when we finally moved."

"They shot a lot," the hard-faced blonde said.

"Sure. But the people kept coming. And yelling to the soldiers. 'Hey, Bill! Don't shoot!' 'Hey, Jack! It's me, Joe.' 'Don't shoot—we're your friends!' 'Don't kill us, join us!' And by God, after a while they did. They couldn't keep

shooting their own people. They finally threw down their guns and got out of the way."

"And then you found the place," the little black-haired girl said breathlessly.

"Yeah. We found the place. Six places. Three in America. One in Britain. Two in Russia. It took us ten years to find the last place—and make sure it was the last place."

"What then?" the youth asked, bug-eyed.

"Then we busted every one of them." Tolby raised himself up, a massive man, beer mug clutched, heavy face flushed dark red. "Every damn A-bomb in the whole world."

There was an uneasy silence.

"Yeah," the youth murmured. "You sure took care of those war people."

"Won't be any more of them," the great tub of a man said. "They're gone for good."

Tolby fingered his ironite staff. "Maybe so. And maybe not. There just might be a few of them left."

"What do you mean?" the tub of a man demanded.

Tolby raised his hard gray eyes. "It's time you people stopped kidding us. You know damn well what I mean. We've heard rumors. Somewhere around this area there's a bunch of them. Hiding out."

Shocked disbelief, then anger hummed to a roar. "That's a lie!" the tub of a man shouted.

"Is it?"

The little man with a beard and glasses leaped up. "There's nobody here has anything to do with governments! We're all good people!"

"You better watch your step," one of the youths said softly to Tolby. "People around here don't like to be accused."

Tolby got unsteadily to his feet, his ironite staff gripped. Penn got up beside him and they stood together. "If any of you knows something," Tolby said, "you better tell it. Right now."

"Nobody knows anything," the hard-faced blonde said. "You're talking to honest folks."

"That's so," the Negro said, nodding his head. "Nobody here's doing anything wrong."

"You saved our lives," the black-haired girl said. "If you hadn't pulled down the governments we'd all be dead in the war. Why should we hold back something?"

"That's true," the great tub of a man grumbled. "We wouldn't be alive if it wasn't for the League. You think we'd do anything against the League?"

"Come on," Silvia said to her father. "Let's go." She got to her feet and tossed Penn his pack.

Tolby grunted belligerently. Finally he took his own pack and hoisted it to his shoulder. The room was deathly silent. Everyone stood frozen, as the three gathered their things and moved toward the door.

The little dark-haired girl stopped them. "The next town is thirty miles from here," she said.

"The road's blocked," her tall companion explained. "Slides closed it years ago."

"Why don't you stay with us tonight? There's plenty of room at our place. You can rest up and get an early start tomorrow."

"We don't want to impose," Silvia murmured.

Tolby and Penn glanced at each other, then at the girl. "If you're sure you have plenty of room—"

The great tub of a man approached them. "Listen. I have ten yellow slips. I want to give them to the League. I sold my farm last year. I don't need any more slips; I'm living with my brother and his family." He pushed the slips at Tolby. "Here."

Tolby pushed them back. "Keep them."

"This way," the tall young man said, as they clattered down the sagging steps, into a sudden blinding curtain of heat and dust. "We have a car. Over this way. An old gasoline car. My dad fixed it so it burns oil."

"You should have taken the slips," Penn said to Tolby, as they got into the ancient, battered car. Flies buzzed around them. They could hardly breathe; the car was a furnace. Silvia fanned herself with a rolled-up paper. The black-haired girl unbuttoned her blouse.

"What do we need money for?" Tolby laughed good-naturedly. "I haven't paid for anything in my life. Neither have you."

The car sputtered and moved slowly forward, onto the road. It began to gain speed. Its motor banged and roared. Soon it was moving surprisingly fast.

"You saw them," Silvia said, over the racket. "They'd give us anything they had. We saved their lives." She waved at the fields, the farmers and their crude teams, the withered crops, the sagging old farmhouses. "They'd all be dead, if it hadn't been for the League." She smashed a fly peevishly. "They depend on us."

The black-haired girl turned toward them, as the car rushed along the decaying road. Sweat streaked her tanned skin. Her half-covered breasts trembled with the motion of the car. "I'm Laura Davis. Pete and I have an old farmhouse his dad gave us when we got married."

"You can have the whole downstairs," Pete said.

"There's no electricity, but we've got a big fireplace. It gets cold at night. It's hot in the day, but when the sun sets it gets terribly cold."

"We'll be all right," Penn murmured. The vibration of the car made him a little sick.

"Yes," the girl said, her black eyes flashing. Her crimson lips twisted. She leaned toward Penn intently, her small face strangely alight. "Yes, we'll take good care of you."

At that moment the car left the road.

Silvia shrieked. Tolby threw himself down, head between his knees, doubled up in a ball. A sudden curtain of green burst around Penn. Then a sickening emptiness, as the car plunged down. It struck with a roaring crash that blotted out everything. A single titanic cataclysm of fury that picked Penn up and flung his remains in every direction.

"Put me down," Bors ordered. "On this railing for a moment before I go inside."

The crew lowered him onto the concrete surface and fastened magnetic grapples into place. Men and women hurried up the wide steps, in and out of the massive building that was Bors' main offices.

The sight from these steps pleased him. He liked to stop here and look around at his world. At the civilization he had carefully constructed. Each piece added painstakingly, scrupulously, with infinite care, throughout the years.

It wasn't big. The mountains ringed it on all sides. The valley was a level bowl, surrounded by dark violet hills. Outside, beyond the hills, the regular world began. Parched fields. Blasted, poverty-stricken towns. Decayed roads. The remains of houses, tumbled-down farm buildings. Ruined cars and machinery. Dust-covered people creeping listlessly around in hand-made clothing, dull rags and tatters.

He had seen the outside. He knew what it was like. At the mountains the blank faces, the disease, the withered crops, the crude plows and ancient tools all ended here. Here, within the ring of hills, Bors had constructed an accurate and detailed reproduction of a society two centuries gone. The world as it had been in the old days. The time of governments. The time that had been pulled down by the Anarchist League.

Within his five synopsis-coils the plans, knowledge, information, blue-prints of a whole world existed. In the two centuries he had carefully recreated that world, had made this miniature society that glittered and hummed on all sides of him. The roads, buildings, houses, industries of a dead world, all a fragment of the past, built with his own hands, his own metal fingers and brain.

"Fowler," Bors said.

Fowler came over. He looked haggard. His eyes were red-rimmed and swollen. "What is it? You want to go inside?"

Overhead, the morning patrol thundered past. A string of black dots against the sunny, cloudless sky. Bors watched with satisfaction. "Quite a sight."

"Right on the nose," Fowler agreed, examining his wristwatch. To their right, a column of heavy tanks snaked along a highway between green fields. Their gun-snouts glittered. Behind them a column of foot soldiers marched, faces hidden behind bacteria masks.

"I'm thinking," Bors said, "that it may be unwise to trust Green any longer."

"Why the hell do you say that?"

"Every ten days I'm inactivated. So your crew can see what repairs are needed." Bors twisted restlessly. "For twelve hours I'm completely helpless. Green takes care of me. Sees nothing happens. But—"

"But what?"

"It occurs to me perhaps there'd be more safety in a squad of troops. It's too much of a temptation for one man alone."

Fowler scowled. "I don't see that. How about me? I have charge of inspecting you. I could switch a few leads around. Send a load through your synopsis-coils. Blow them out."

Bors whirled wildly, then subsided. "True. You could do that." After a moment he demanded, "But what would you gain? You know I'm the only one who can keep all this together. I'm the only one who knows how to maintain a planned society, not a disorderly chaos! It if weren't for me, all this would collapse, and you'd have dust and ruins and weeds. The whole outside would come rushing in to take over!"

"Of course. So why worry about Green?"

Trucks of workers rumbled past. Loads of men in blue-green, sleeves rolled up, armloads of tools. A mining team, heading for the mountains.

"Take me inside," Bors said abruptly.

Fowler called McLean. They hoisted Bors and carried him past the throngs of people, into the building, down the corridor and to his office. Officials and technicians moved respectfully out of the way as the great pitted, corroded tank was carried past.

"All right," Bors said impatiently. "That's all. You can go."

Fowler and McLean left the luxurious office, with its lush carpets, furniture, drapes and rows of books. Bors was already bent over his desk, sorting through heaps of reports and papers.

Fowler shook his head, as they walked down the hall. "He won't last much longer."

"The motor system? Can't we reinforce the—"

"I don't mean that. He's breaking up mentally. He can't take the strain any longer."

"None of us can." McLean muttered.

"Running this thing is too much for him. Knowing it's all depends on him. Knowing as soon as he turns his back or lets down it'll begin to come apart at

the seams. A hell of a job, trying to shut out the real world. Keeping his model universe running."

"He's gone on a long time," McLean said.

Fowler brooded. "Sooner or later we're going to have to face the situation." Gloomily, he ran his fingers along the blade of a large screwdriver. "He's wearing out. Sooner or later somebody's going to have to step in. As he continues to decay. . . ." He stuck the screwdriver back in his belt, with his pliers and hammer and soldering iron. "One crossed wire."

"What's that?"

Fowler laughed. "Now he's got me doing it. One crossed wire and—*poof*. But what then? That's the big question."

"Maybe," McLean said softly, "you and I can get off this rat race. You and I and all the rest of us. And live like human beings."

"*Rat race*," Fowler murmured. "Rats in a maze. Doing tricks. Performing chores thought up by somebody else."

McLean caught Fowler's eye. "By somebody of another species."

Tolby struggled vaguely. Silence. A faint dripping close by. A beam pinned his body down. He was caught on all sides by the twisted wreck of the car. He was head down. The car was turned on its side. Off the road in a gully, wedged between two huge trees. Bent struts and smashed metal all around him. And bodies.

He pushed up with all of his strength. The beam gave, and he managed to get to a sitting position. A tree branch had burst in the windshield. The black-haired girl, still turned toward the back seat, was impaled on it. The branch had driven through her spine, out her chest, and into the seat; she clutched at it with both hands, head limp, mouth half-open. The man beside her was also dead. His hands were gone; the windshield had burst around him. He lay in a heap among the remains of the dashboard and the bloody shine of his own internal organs.

Penn was dead. Neck snapped like a rotten broom handle. Tolby pushed his corpse aside and examined his daughter. Silvia didn't stir. He put his ear to her shirt and listened. She was alive. Her heart beat faintly. Her bosom rose and fell against his ear.

He wound a handkerchief around her arm, where the flesh was ripped open and oozing blood. She was badly cut and scratched; one leg was doubled under her, obviously broken. Her clothes were ripped, her hair matted with blood. But she was alive. He pushed the twisted door open and stumbled out. A fiery tongue of afternoon sunlight struck him and he winced. He began to ease her limp body out of the car, past the twisted door-frame.

A sound.

Tolby glanced up, rigid. Something was coming. A whirring insect that rapidly descended. He let go of Silvia, crouched, glanced around, then lumbered awkwardly down the gully. He slid and fell and rolled among the green vines and jagged gray boulders. His gun gripped, he lay gasping in the moist shadows, peering upward.

The insect landed. A small air-ship, jet-driven. The sight stunned him. He had heard about jets, seen photographs of them. Been briefed and lectured in the history-indoctrination courses at the League Camps. But to *see* a jet!

Men swarmed out. Uniformed men who started from the road, down the side of the gully, bodies crouched warily as they approached the wrecked car. They lugged heavy rifles. They looked grim and experienced, as they tore the car doors open and scrambled in.

"One's gone," a voice drifted to him.

"Must be around somewhere."

"Look, this one's alive! This woman. Started to crawl out. The rest all dead."

Furious cursing. "Damn Laura! She should have leaped! The fanatic little fool!"

"Maybe she didn't have time. God's sake, the thing's all the way through her." Horror and shocked dismay. "We won't hardly be able to get her loose."

"Leave her." The officer directing things waved the men back out of the car. "Leave them all."

"How about this wounded one?"

The leader hesitated. "Kill her," he said finally. He snatched a rifle and raised the butt. "The rest of you fan out and try to get the other one. He's probably—"

Tolby fired, and the leader's body broke in half. The lower part sank down slowly; the upper dissolved in ashy fragments. Tolby turned and began to move in a slow circle, firing as he crawled. He got two more of them before the rest retreated in panic to their jet-powered insect and slammed the lock.

He had the element of surprise. Now that was gone. They had strength and numbers. He was doomed. Already, the insect was rising. They'd be able to spot him easily from above. But he had saved Silvia. That was something.

He stumbled down a dried-up creek bed. He ran aimlessly, he had no place to go. He didn't know the countryside, and he was on foot. He slipped on a stone and fell headlong. Pain and billowing darkness beat at him as he got unsteadily to his knees. His gun was gone, lost in the shrubbery. He spat broken teeth and blood. He peered wildly up at the blazing afternoon sky.

The insect was leaving. It hummed off toward the distant hills. It dwindled, became a black ball, a flyspeck, then disappeared.

Tolby waited a moment. Then he struggled up the side of the ravine to the

wrecked car. They had gone to get help. They'd be back. Now was his only chance. If he could get Silvia out and down the road, into hiding. Maybe to a farmhouse. Back to town.

He reached the car and stood, dazed and stupefied. Three bodies remained, the two in the front seat, Penn in the back. But Silvia was gone.

They had taken her with them. Back where they came from. She had been dragged to the jet-driven insect; a trail of blood led from the car up the side of the gully to the highway.

With a violent shudder Tolby pulled himself together. He climbed into the car and pried loose Penn's gun from his belt. Silvia's ironite staff rested on the seat; he took that, too. Then he started down the road, walking without haste, carefully, slowly.

An ironic thought plucked at his mind. He had found what they were after. The men in uniform. They were organized, responsible to a central authority. In a newly-assembled jet.

Beyond the hills was a government.

"Sir," Green said. He smoothed his short blond hair anxiously, his young face twisting.

Technicians and experts and ordinary people in droves were everywhere. The officers buzzed and echoed with the business of the day. Green pushed through the crowd and to the desk where Bors sat, propped up by two magnetic frames.

"Sir," Green said. "Something's happened."

Bors looked up. He pushed a metal-foil slate away and laid down his stylus. His eye cells clicked and flickered; deep inside his battered trunk motor gears whined. "What is it?"

Green came close. There was something in his face, an expression Bors had never seen before. A look of fear and glassy determination. A glazed, fanatic cast, as if his flesh had hardened to rock. "Sir, scouts contacted a League team moving North. They met the team outside Fairfax. The incident took place directly beyond the first road block."

Bors said nothing. On all sides, officials, experts, farmers, workmen, industrial managers, soldiers, people of all kinds buzzed and murmured and pushed forward impatiently. Trying to get to Bors' desk. Loaded down with problems to be solved, situations to be explained. The pressing business of the day. Roads, factories, disease control. Repairs. Construction. Manufacture. Design. Planning. Urgent problems for Bors to consider and deal with. Problems that couldn't wait.

"Was the League team destroyed?" Bors asked.

"One was killed. One was wounded and brought here." Green hesitated.

"One escaped."

For a long time Bors was silent. Around him the people murmured and

shuffled; he ignored them. All at once he pulled the vidscanner to him and snapped the circuit open. "One escaped? I don't like the sound of that."

"He shot three members of our scout unit. Including the leader. The others got frightened. They grabbed the injured girl and returned here."

Bors' massive head lifted. "They made a mistake. They should have located the one who escaped."

"This was the first time the situation—"

"I know," Bors said. "But it was an error. Better not to have touched them at all, then to have taken two and allowed the third to get away." He turned to the vidscanner. "Sound an emergency alert. Close down the factories. Arm the work crews and any male farmers capable of using weapons. Close every road. Remove the women and children to the undersurface shelters. Bring up the heavy guns and supplies. Suspend all nonmilitary production and—" He considered. "Arrest everyone we're not sure of. On the C sheet. Have them shot." He snapped the scanner off.

"What'll happen?" Green demanded, shaken.

"The thing we've prepared for. Total war."

"We have weapons!" Green shouted excitedly. "In an hour there's be ten thousand men ready to fight. We have jet-driven ships. Heavy artillery. Bombs. Bacteria pellets. What's the League? A lot of people with packs on their backs!"

"Yes." Bors said. "A lot of people with packs on their backs."

"How can they do anything? How can a bunch of anarchists organize? They have no structure, no control, no central power."

"They have the whole world. A billion people."

"*Individuals!* A club, not subject to law. Voluntary membership. We have a disciplined organization. Every aspect of our economic life operates at maximum efficiency. We—you—have your thumb on everything. All you have to do is give the order. Set the machine in motion."

Bors nodded slowly. "It's true the anarchist can't coordinate. The League can't organize in an efficient structure. It's a paradox. Government by anarchists. . . . Antigovernment, actually. Instead of governing the world they tramp around to make sure no one else does."

"Dog in the manger."

"As you say, they're actually a voluntary club of totally unorganized individuals. Without law or central authority. They maintain no society—they can't govern. All they can do is interfere with anyone else who tries. Trouble-makers. But—"

"But what?"

"It was this way before. Two centuries ago. They were unorganized. Unarmed. Vast mobs, without discipline or authority. Yet they pulled down all the governments. All over the world."

"We've got a whole army. All the roads are mined. Heavy guns. Bombs. Pellets. Every one of us is a soldier. We're an armed camp!"

Bors was deep in thought. "You say one of them is here? One of the League agents?"

"A young woman."

Bors signalled the nearby maintenance crew. "Take me to her. I want to talk to her in the time remaining."

Silvia watched silently, as the uniformed men pushed and grunted their way into the room. They staggered over to the bed, pulled two chairs together, and carefully laid down their massive armload.

Quickly they snapped protective struts into place, locked the chairs together, threw magnetic grapples into operation, and then warily retreated.

"All right," the robot said. "You can go." The men left. Bors turned to face the woman on the bed.

"A machine," Silvia whispered, white-faced. "You're a machine."

Bors nodded slightly without speaking.

Silvia shifted uneasily on the bed. She was weak. One leg was in a transparent plastic cast. Her face was bandaged and her right arm ached and throbbed. Outside the window, the late afternoon sun sprinkled through the drapes. Flowers bloomed. Grass. Hedges. And beyond the hedges, buildings and factories.

For the last hour the sky had been filled with jet-driven ships. Great flocks that raced excitedly across the sky toward distant hills. Along the highway cars hurtled, dragging guns and heavy military equipment. Men were marching in close rank, rows of gray-clad soldiers, guns and helmets and bacteria masks. Endless lines of figures, identical in their uniform, stamped from the same matrix.

"There are a lot of them," Bors said, indicating the marching men.

"Yes." Silvia watched a couple of soldiers hurry by the window. Youths with worried expressions on their smooth faces. Helmets bobbing at their waists. Long rifles. Canteens. Counters. Radiation shields. Bacteria masks wound awkwardly around their necks, ready to go into place. They were scared. Hardly more than kids. Others followed. A truck roared into life. The soldiers were swept off to join the others.

"They're going to fight," Bors said, "to defend their homes and factories."

"All this equipment. You manufacture it, don't you?"

"That's right. Our industrial organization is perfect. We're totally productive. Our society here is operated rationally. Scientifically. We're fully prepared to meet this emergency."

Suddenly Silvia realized what the emergency was. "The League! One of us

must have got away." She pulled herself up. "Which of them? Penn or my father?"

"I don't know," the robot murmured indifferently.

Horror and disgust choked Silvia. "My God," she said softly. "You have no understanding of us. You run all this, and you're incapable of empathy. You're nothing but a mechanical computer. One of the old government integration robots."

"That's right. Two centuries old."

She was appalled. "And you've been alive all this time. We thought we destroyed all of you!"

"I was missed. I had been damaged. I wasn't in my place. I was in a truck, on my way out of Washington. I saw the mobs and escaped."

"Two hundred years ago. Legendary times. You actually saw the events they tell us about. The old days. The great marches. The day the government fell."

"Yes. I saw it all. A group of us formed in Virginia. Experts, officials, skilled workmen. Later we came here. It was remote enough, off the beaten path."

"We heard rumors. A fragment . . . Still maintaining itself. But we didn't know where or how."

"I was fortunate," Bors said. "I escaped by a fluke. All the others were destroyed. It's taken a long time to organize what you see here. Fifteen miles from here is a ring of hills. This valley is a bowl—mountains on all sides. We've set up road blocks in the form of natural slides. Nobody comes here. Even in Fairfax, thirty miles off, they know nothing."

"That girl. Laura."

"Scouts. We keep scout teams in all inhabited regions within a hundred-mile radius. As soon as you entered Fairfax, word was relayed to us. An air unit was dispatched. To avoid questions, we arranged to have you killed in an auto wreck. But one of you escaped."

Silvia shook her head, bewildered. "How?" she demanded. "How do you keep going? Don't the people revolt?" She struggled to a sitting position. "They must know what's happened everywhere else. How do you control them? They're going out now, in their uniforms. But—*will they fight? Can you count on them?*"

Bors answered slowly. "They trust me," he said. "I brought with me a vast amount of knowledge. Information and techniques lost to the rest of the world. Are jet-ships and vidscanners and power cables made anywhere else in the world? I retain all that knowledge. I have memory units, synapsis-coils. Because of me they have these things. Things you know only as dim memories, vague legends."

"What happens when you die?"

"I won't die! I'm eternal!"

"You're wearing out. You have to be carried around. And your right arm.

You can hardly move it!" Silvia's voice was harsh, ruthless. "Your whole tank is pitted and rusty."

The robot whirled; for a moment he seemed unable to speak. "My knowledge remains," he grated finally. "I'll always be able to communicate. Fowler has arranged a broadcast system. Even when I talk—" He broke off. "Even then. Everything is under control. I've organized every aspect of the situation. I've maintained this system for two centuries. It's got to be kept going!"

Silvia lashed out. It happened in a split second. The boot of her cast caught the chairs on which the robot rested. She thrust violently with her foot and hands; the chairs teetered, hesitated—

"Fowler!" the robot screamed.

Silvia pushed with all her strength. Blinding agony seared through her leg; she bit her lip and threw her shoulder against the robot's pitted hulk. He waved his arms, whirled wildly, and then the two chairs slowly collapsed. The robot slid quietly from them, over on his back, his arms still waving helplessly.

Silvia dragged herself from the bed. She managed to pull herself to the window; her broken leg hung uselessly, a dead weight in its transparent plastic cast. The robot lay like some futile bug, arms waving, eye-lenses clicking. Its rusty works whirring in fear and rage.

"Fowler!" it screamed again. "Help me!"

Silvia reached the window. She tugged at the locks; they were sealed. She grabbed up a lamp from the table and threw it against the glass. The glass burst around her, a shower of lethal fragments. She stumbled forward—and then the repair crew was pouring into the room.

Fowler gasped at the sight of the robot on its back. A strange expression crossed his face. "Look at him!"

"Help me!" the robot shrilled. "Help me!"

One of the men grabbed Silvia around the waist and lugged her back to the bed. She kicked and bit, sunk her nails into the man's cheek. He threw her on the bed, face down, and drew his pistol. "Stay there," he gasped.

The others were bent over the robot, getting him to an upright position.

"What happened?" Fowler said. He came over to the bed, his face twisting. "Did he fall?"

Silvia's eyes glowed with hatred and despair. "I pushed him over. I almost got there." Her chest heaved. "The window. But my leg—"

"Get me back to my quarters!" Bors cried.

The crew gathered him up and carried him down the hall, to his private office. A few moments later he was sitting shakily at his desk, his mechanism pounding wildly, surrounded by his papers and memoranda.

He forced down his panic and tried to resume his work. He had to keep going. His vidscreen was alive with activity. The whole system was in

motion. He blankly watched a subcommander sending up a cloud of black dots, jet bombers that shot up like flies and headed quickly off.

The system had to be preserved. He repeated it again and again. He had to save it. Had to organize the people and make *them* save it. If the people didn't fight, wasn't everything doomed?

Fury and desperation overwhelmed him. The system couldn't preserve itself; it wasn't a thing apart, something that could be separated from the people who lived it. Actually it *was* the people. They were identical; when the people fought to preserve the system they were fighting to preserve nothing less than themselves.

They existed only as long as the system existed.

He caught sight of a marching column of white-faced troops, moving toward the hills. His ancient synopsis-coils radiated and shuddered uncertainly, then fell back into pattern. He was two centuries old. He had come into existence a long time ago, in a different world. That world had created him; through him that world still lived. As long as he existed, that world existed. In miniature, it still functioned. His model universe, his recreation. His rational, controlled world, in which each aspect was fully organized, fully analyzed and integrated.

He kept a rational, progressive world alive. A humming oasis of productivity on a dusty, parched planet of decay and silence.

Bors spread out his papers and went to work on the most pressing problem. The transformation from a peace-time economy to full military mobilization. Total military organization of every man, woman, child, piece of equipment and dyne of energy under his direction.

Edward Tolby emerged cautiously. His clothes were torn and ragged. He had lost his pack, crawling through the brambles and vines. His face and hands were bleeding. He was utterly exhausted.

Below him lay a valley. A vast bowl. Fields, houses, highways. Factories. Equipment. Men.

He had been watching the men three hours. Endless streams of them pouring from the valley into the hills along the roads and paths. On foot, in trucks, in cars, armored tanks, weapons carriers. Overhead, in fast little jet-fighters and great lumbering bombers. Gleaming ships that took up positions above the troops and prepared for battle.

Battle in the grand style. The two-centuries-old full-scale war that was supposed to have disappeared. But here it was, a vision from the past. He had seen this in the old tapes and records, used in the camp orientation courses. A ghost army resurrected to fight again. A vast host of men and guns, prepared to fight and die.

Tolby climbed down cautiously. At the foot of a slope of boulders a soldier had halted his motorcycle and was setting up a communications

antenna and transmitter. Tolby circled, crouched, expertly approached him. A blond-haired youth, fumbling nervously with the wires and relays, licking his lips uneasily, glancing up and grabbing for his rifle at every sound.

Tolby took a deep breath. The youth had turned his back; he was tracing a power circuit. It was now or never. With one stride Tolby stepped out, raised his pistol and fired. The clump of equipment and the soldier's rifle vanished.

"Don't make a sound," Tolby said. He peered around. No one had seen; the main line was half a mile to his right. The sun was setting. Great shadows were falling over the hills. The fields were rapidly fading from brown-green to a deep violet. "Put your hands up over your head, clasp them, and get down on your knees."

The youth tumbled down in a frightened heap. "What are you going to do?" He saw the ironite staff, and the color left his face. "You're a League agent!"

"Shut up," Tolby ordered. "First, outline your system of responsibility. *Who's your superior?*"

The youth stuttered forth what he knew. Tolby listened intently. He was satisfied. The usual monolithic structure. Exactly what he wanted.

"At the top," he broke in. "At the top of the pillar. Who has ultimate responsibility?"

"Bors."

"Bors!" Tolby scowled. "That doesn't sound like a name. Sounds like—" He broke off, staggered. "We should have guessed! An old government robot. Still functioning."

The youth saw his chance. He leaped up and darted frantically away.

Tolby shot him above the left ear. The youth pitched over on his face and lay still. Tolby hurried to him and quickly pulled off his dark gray uniform. It was too small for him of course. But the motorcycle was just right. He'd seen tapes of them; he'd wanted one since he was a child. A fast little motorcycle to propel his weight around. Now he had it.

Half an hour later he was roaring down a smooth, broad highway toward the center of the valley and the buildings that rose against the dark sky. His headlights cut into the blackness; he still wobbled from side to side, but for all practical purposes, he had the hang of it. He increased speed; the road shot by, trees and fields, haystacks, stalled farm equipment. All traffic was going against him, troops hurrying to the front.

The front. Lemmings going out into the ocean to drown. A thousand, ten thousand, metal-clad fingers, armed and alert. Weighted down with guns and bombs and flame throwers and bacteria pellets.

There was only one hitch. No army opposed them. A mistake had been made. It took two sides to make a war, and only one had been resurrected.

A mile outside the concentration of buildings he pulled his motorcycle

off the road and carefully hid it in a haystack. For a moment he considered leaving his ironite staff. Then he shrugged and grabbed it up, along with his pistol. He always carried his staff, it was the League symbol. It represented the walking Anarchists who patrolled the world on foot, the world's protection agency.

He loped through the darkness toward the outline ahead. There were fewer men here. He saw no women or children. Ahead, charged wire was set up. Troops crouched behind it, armed to the teeth. A searchlight moved back and forth across the road. Behind it, radar vanes loomed and behind them an ugly square of concrete. The great offices from which the government was run.

For a time he watched the searchlight. Finally he had its motion plotted. In its glare, the faces of the troops stood out, pale and drawn. Youths. They had never fought. This was their first encounter. They were terrified.

When the light was off him, he stood up and advanced toward the wire. Automatically, a breach was slid back for him. Two guards raised up and awkwardly crossed bayonets ahead of him.

"Show your papers!" one demanded. Young lieutenants. Boys, white-lipped, nervous. Playing soldier.

Pity and contempt made Tolby laugh harshly and push forward. "Get out of my way."

One anxiously flashed a pocket light. "Halt! What's the code-key for this watch?" He blocked Tolby's way with his bayonet, hands twisting convulsively.

Tolby reached in his pocket, pulled out his pistol, and as the searchlight started to swerve back, blasted the two guards. The bayonets clattered down and he dived forward. Yells and shapes rose on all sides. Anguished, terrified shouts. Random firing. The night was lit up, as he dashed and crouched, turned a corner past a supply warehouse, raced up a flight of stairs and into the massive building ahead.

He had to work fast. Gripping his ironite staff, he plunged down a gloomy corridor. His boots echoed. Men poured into the building behind him. Bolts of energy thundered past him; a whole section of the ceiling burst into ash and collapsed behind him.

He reached stairs and climbed rapidly. He came to the next floor and groped for the door handle. Something flickered behind him. He half-turned, his gun quickly up—

A stunning blow sent him sprawling. He crashed against the wall; his gun flew from his fingers. A shape bent over him, rifle gripped. "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

Not a soldier. A stubble-chinned man in stained shirt and rumpled trousers. Eyes puffy and red. A belt of tools, hammer, pliers, screwdriver, a soldering iron, around his waist.

Tolby raised himself up painfully. "If you didn't have that rifle—"

Fowler backed warily away. "Who are you? This floor is forbidden to troops of the line. You know this—" Then he saw the ironite staff. "By God," he said softly. "You're the one they didn't get." He laughed shakily. "You're the one who got away."

Tolby's fingers tightened around the staff, but Fowler reacted instantly. The snout of the rifle jerked up, on a line with Tolby's face.

"Be careful," Fowler warned. He turned slightly; soldiers were hurrying up the stairs, boots drumming, echoing shouts ringing. For a moment he hesitated, then waved his rifle toward the stairs ahead. "Up. Get going."

Tolby blinked. "What—"

"Up!" The rifle snout jabbed into Tolby. "Hurry!"

Bewildered, Tolby hurried up the stairs. Fowler close behind him. At the third floor Fowler pushed him roughly through the doorway, the snout of his rifle digging urgently into his back. He found himself in a corridor of doors. Endless offices.

"Keep going," Fowler snarled. "Down the hall. Hurry!"

Tolby hurried, his mind spinning. "What the hell are you—"

"I could never do it," Fowler gasped, close to his ear. "Not in a million years. But it's got to be done."

Tolby halted. "What is this?"

They faced each other defiantly, faces contorted, eyes blazing. "He's in there," Fowler snapped, indicating a door with his rifle. "You have one chance. Take it."

For a fraction of a second Tolby hesitated. Then he broke away. "Okay. I'll take it."

Fowler followed after him. "Be careful. Watch your step. There's a series of check points. Keep going straight, in all the way. As far as you can go. And for God's sake, hurry!"

His voice faded, as Tolby gained speed. He reached the door and tore it open.

Soldiers and officials ballooned. He threw himself against them; they sprawled and scattered. He scrambled on, as they struggled up and stupidly fumbled for their guns. Through another, into an inner office, past a desk where a frightened girl sat, eyes wide, mouth open. Then a third door, into an alcove.

A wild-faced youth leaped up and snatched frantically for his pistol. Tolby was unarmed, trapped in the alcove. Figures already pushed against the door behind him. He gripped his ironite staff and backed away as the blond-haired fanatic fired blindly. The bolt burst a foot away; it flicked him with a tongue of heat.

"You dirty anarchist!" Green screamed. His face distorted, he fired again and again. "You murdering anarchist spy!"

Tolby hurled his ironite staff. He put all his strength in it; the staff leaped through the air in a whistling arc, straight at the youth's head. Green saw it coming and ducked. Agile and quick, he jumped away, grinning humorlessly. The staff crashed against the wall and rolled clanging to the floor.

"Your walking staff!" Green gasped and fired.

The bolt missed him on purpose. Green was playing games with him. Tolby bent down and groped frantically for the staff. He picked it up. Green watched, face rigid, eyes glittering. "Throw it again!" he snarled.

Tolby leaped. He took the youth by surprise. Green grunted, stumbled back from the impact, then suddenly fought with maniacal fury.

Tolby was heavier. But he was exhausted. He had crawled hours, beat his way through the mountains, walked endlessly. He was at the end of his strength. The car wreck, the days of walking. Green was in perfect shape. His wiry, agile body twisted away. His hands came up. Fingers dug into Tolby's windpipe; he kicked the youth in the groin. Green staggered back, convulsed and bent over with pain.

"All right," Green gasped, face ugly and dark. His hand fumbled with his pistol. The barrel came up.

Half of Green's head dissolved. His hands opened and his gun fell to the floor. His body stood for a moment, then settled down in a heap, like an empty suit of clothes.

Tolby caught a glimpse of a rifle snout pushed past him—and the man with the tool belt. The man waved him on frantically. "Hurry!"

Tolby raced down a carpeted hall, between two great flickering yellow lamps. A crowd of officials and soldiers stumbled uncertainly after him, shouting and firing at random. He tore open a thick oak door and halted.

He was in a luxurious chamber. Drapes, rich wallpaper. Lamps. Bookcases. A glimpse of the finery of the past. The wealth of the old days. Thick carpets. Warm radiant heat. A vidscreen. At the far end, a huge mahogany desk.

At the desk a figure sat. Working on heaps of papers and reports, piled masses of material. The figure contrasted starkly with the lushness of the furnishings. It was a great pitted, corroded tank of metal. Bent and greenish, patched and repaired. An ancient machine.

"Is that you, Fowler?" the robot demanded.

Tolby advanced, his ironite staff gripped.

The robot turned angrily. "Who is it? Get Green and carry me down into the shelter. One of the roadblocks has reported a League agent already—" The robot broke off. Its cold, mechanical eye-lens bored up at the man. It clicked and whirled in uneasy astonishment. "I don't know you."

It saw the ironite staff.

"League agent," the robot said. "You're the one who got through." Comprehension came. "*The third one.* You came here. You didn't go back."

Its metal fingers fumbled clumsily at the objects on the desk, then in the drawer. It found a gun and raised it awkwardly.

Tolby knocked the gun away; it clattered to the floor. "Run!" he shouted at the robot. "Start running!"

It remained. Tolby's staff came down. The fragile, complex brain-unit of the robot burst apart. Coils, wiring, relay fluid, spattered over his arms and hands. The robot shuddered. Its machinery thrashed. It half-rose from its chair, then swayed and toppled. It crashed full length on the floor, parts and gears rolling in all directions.

"Good God," Tolby said, suddenly seeing it for the first time. Shakily, he bent over its remains. "It was crippled."

Men were all around him. "He's killed Bors!" Shocked, dazed faces. "Bors is dead!"

Fowler came up slowly. "You got him, all right. There's nothing left now."

Tolby stood holding his ironite staff in his hands. "The poor blasted thing," he said softly. "Completely helpless. Sitting there and I came and killed him. He didn't have a chance."

The building was bedlam. Soldiers and officials scurried crazily about, grief-stricken, hysterical. They bumped into each other, gathered in knots, shouted and gave meaningless orders.

Tolby pushed past them; nobody paid any attention to him. Fowler was gathering up the remains of the robot. Collecting the smashed pieces and bits. Tolby stopped beside him. Like Humpty-Dumpty, pulled down off his wall he'd never be back together, not now.

"Where's the woman?" he asked Fowler. "The League agent they brought in."

Fowler straightened up slowly. "I'll take you." He led Tolby down the packed, surging hall, to the hospital wing of the building.

Silvia sat up apprehensively as the two men entered the room. "What's going on?" She recognized her father. "Dad! Thank God! It was you who got out."

Tolby slammed the door against the chaos of sound hammering up and down the corridor. "How are you? How's your leg?"

"Mending. What happened?"

"I got him. The robot. He's dead."

For a moment the three of them were silent. Outside, in the halls, men ran frantically back and forth. Word had already leaked out. Troops gathered in huddled knots outside the building. Lost men, wandering away from their posts. Uncertain. Aimless.

"It's over," Fowler said.

Tolby nodded. "I know."

"They'll get tired of crouching in their foxholes," Fowler said. "They'll

come filtering back. As soon as the news reaches them, they'll desert and throw away their equipment."

"Good," Tolby grunted. "The sooner the better." He touched Fowler's rifle. "You, too, I hope."

Silvia hesitated. "Do you think—"

"Think what?"

"Did we make a mistake?"

Tolby grinned wearily. "Hell of a time to think about that."

"He was doing what he thought was right. They built up their homes and factories. This whole area. . . . They turn out a lot of goods. I've been watching through the window. It's made me think. They've done so much. Made so much."

"Made a lot of guns," Tolby said.

"We have guns, too. We kill and destroy. We have all the disadvantages and none of the advantages."

"We don't have war," Tolby answered quietly. "To defend this neat little organization there are ten thousand men up there in those hills. All waiting to fight. Waiting to drop their bombs and bacteria pellets, to keep this place running. But they won't. Pretty soon they'll give up and start to trickle back."

"This whole system will decay rapidly," Fowler said. "He was already losing his control. He couldn't keep the clock back much longer."

"Anyhow, it's done," Silvia murmured. "We did our job." She smiled a little. "Bors did his job and we did ours. But the times were against him and with us."

"That's right," Tolby agreed. "We did our job. And we'll never be sorry."

Fowler said nothing. He stood with his hands in his pockets, gazing silently out the window. His fingers were touching something. Three undamaged synapsis-coils. Intact memory elements from the dead robot, snatched from the scattered remains.

Just in case, he said to himself. *Just in case the times change.*

SERVICE CALL

What is a swibble? Read this story to find out. Even after you've finished, however, you may not be able to visualize it. A swibble is another of those mechanical oddities marching through the pages of Dick's fiction. They are not robot nor android nor human. Neither living nor nonliving. Courtland in this story says that phantasmagoria swirled through his mind, and so it was with Dick. He was as prodigious as Mother Nature in inventing new forms although they are never as terrifying as dinosaurs or other monsters. Dick once commented that it was not the clanking monsters he feared but rather that one fine day the TV set or the toaster would announce in the privacy of his apartment that it had taken over.

Service men keep things running in Dick's fiction. They may be frightening, like Hoppy in Dr. Bloodmoney or appealing, like Jack Boblen in Martian Time-Slip, but they are always competent. As with many of his characters, Dick draws on a real life persons in creating the men who can fix anything. For several years while he was in high school, he worked in a radio and TV store in downtown Berkeley. Herb Hollis, the owner of the store, treated his employees as an extended family and Dick was very fond of him, as of the servicemen who repaired radio and TV sets. Dick once commented, near the end of his life, that to read his fiction was to see all the persons he had ever known. The repairman is one of the best examples

It would be wise to explain what Courtland was doing just before the doorbell rang.

In his swank apartment on Leavenworth Street, where Russian Hill drops to the flat expanse of North Beach and finally to the San Francisco Bay itself, David Courtland sat hunched over a series of routine reports, a week's file of technical data dealing with the results of the Mount Diablo tests. As research director for Pesco Paints, Courtland was concerning himself with the comparative durability of various surfaces manufactured by his company. Treated shingles had baked and sweated in the California heat for 564 days.

It was now time to see which pore-filler withstood oxidation, and to adjust production schedules accordingly.

Involved with his intricate analytical data, Courtland at first failed to hear the bell. In the corner of the living room his high-fidelity Bogen amplifier, turntable, and speaker were playing a Schumann symphony. His wife, Fay, was doing the dinner dishes in the kitchen. The two children, Bobby and Ralf, were already in their bunk beds, asleep. Reaching for his pipe, Courtland leaned back from the desk a moment, ran a heavy hand through his thinning gray hair . . . and heard the bell.

"Damn," he said. Vaguely, he wondered how many times the demure chimes had sounded; he had a dim subliminal memory of repeated attempts to attract his attention. Before his tired eyes the mass of report sheets wavered and receded. Who the hell was it? His watch read only nine thirty; he couldn't really complain, yet.

"Want me to get it?" Fay called brightly from the kitchen.

"I'll get it." Wearily, Courtland got to his feet, stuffed his feet into his shoes, and plodded across the room, past the couch, floor lamp, magazine rack, the phonograph, the bookcase, to the door. He was a heavy-set middle-aged technologist, and he didn't like people interrupting his work.

In the hall stood an unfamiliar visitor. "Good evening, sir," the visitor said, intently examining a clipboard; "I'm sorry to bother you."

Courtland glared sourly at the young man. A salesman, probably. Thin, blond-haired, in a white shirt, bow tie, single-breasted blue suit, the young man stood gripping his clipboard in one hand and a bulging black suitcase with the other. His bony features were set in an expression of serious concentration. There was an air of studious confusion about him; brow wrinkled, lips tight together, the muscles of his cheeks began to twitch into overt worry. Glancing up he asked, "Is this 1846 Leavenworth? Apartment 3A?"

"That's right," Courtland said, with the infinite patience due a dumb animal.

The taut frown on the young man's face relaxed a trifle. "Yes, sir," he said in his urgent tenor. Peering past Courtland into the apartment, he said, "I'm sorry to bother you in the evening when you're working, but as you probably know we've been pretty full up the last couple of days. That's why we couldn't answer your call sooner."

"My call?" Courtland echoed. Under his unbuttoned collar, he was beginning to glow a dull red. Undoubtedly something Fay had got him mixed up in; something she thought he would look into, something vital to gracious living. "What the hell are you talking about?" he demanded. "Come to the point."

The young man flushed, swallowed noisily, tried to grin and then hurried

on huskily, "Sir, I'm the repairman you asked for; I'm here to fix your swibble."

The facetious retort that came to Courtland's mind was one that later on he wished he had used. "Maybe," he wished he had said, "I don't want my swibble fixed. Maybe I like my swibble the way it is." But he didn't say that. Instead, he blinked, pulled the door in slightly, and said, "My *ubai*?"

"Yes, sir," the young man persisted. "The record of your swibble installation came to us as a matter of course. Usually we make an automatic adjustment inquiry, but your call preceded that—so I'm here with complete service equipment. Now, as to the nature of your particular complaint . . ." Furiously, the young man pawed through the sheaf of papers on his clipboard. "Well, there's no point in looking for that; you can tell me orally. As you probably know, sir, we're not officially a part of the vending corporation . . . we have what is called an *insurance*-type coverage that comes into existence automatically, when your purchase is made. Of course, you can cancel the arrangement with us." Feebly, he tried to joke. "I have heard there're a couple of competitors in the service business."

Stern morality replaced humor. Pulling his lank body upright, he finished. "But let me say that we've been in the swibble repair business ever since old R. J. Wright introduced the first A-driven experimental model."

For a time, Courtland said nothing. Phantasmagoria swirled through his mind: random quasi-technological thoughts, reflex evaluations and notations of no importance. So swibbles broke right down, did they? Big-time business operations . . . send out a repairman as soon as the deal is closed. Monopoly tactics . . . squeeze out the competition before they have a chance. Kickback to the parent company, probably. Interwoven books.

But none of his thoughts got down to the basic issue. With a violent effort he forced his attention back onto the earnest young man who waited nervously in the hall with his black service kit and clipboard. "No," Courtland said emphatically, "no, you've got the wrong address."

"Yes, sir?" the young man quavered politely, a wave of stricken dismay crossing his features. "The wrong address? Good Lord, has dispatch got another route fouled up with that new-fangled—"

"Better look at your paper again," Courtland said, grimly pulling the door toward him. "Whatever the hell a swibble is, I haven't got one, and I didn't call you."

As he shut the door, he perceived the final horror on the young man's face, his stupefied paralysis. Then the brightly painted wood surface cut off the sight, and Courtland turned wearily back to his desk.

A swibble. What the hell was a swibble? Seating himself moodily, he tried to take up where he had left off . . . but the direction of his thoughts had been totally shattered.

There was no such thing as a swibble. And he was on the in, industrially speaking. He read *U.S. News*, the *Wall Street Journal*. If there was a swibble he would have heard about it—unless a swibble was some pipsqueak gadget for the home. Maybe that was it.

"Listen," he yelled at his wife as Fay appeared momentarily at the kitchen door, dishcloth and blue-willow plate in her hands. "What is this business? You know anything about swibbles?"

Fay shook her head. "It's nothing of mine."

"You didn't order a chrome-and-plastic a.c.-d.c. swibble from Macy's?"

"Certainly not."

Maybe it was something for the kids. Maybe it was the latest grammar-school craze, the contemporary bolo or flip cards or knock-knock-who's-there? But nine-year-old kids didn't buy things that needed a service man carrying a massive black tool kit—not on fifty cents a week allowance.

Curiosity overcame aversion. He had to know, just for the record, what a swibble was. Springing to his feet, Courtland hurried to the hall door and yanked it open.

The hall was empty, of course. The young man had wandered off. There was a faint smell of men's cologne and nervous perspiration, nothing more.

Nothing more, except a wadded-up fragment of paper that had come unclipped from the man's board. Courtland bent down and retrieved it from the carpet. It was a carbon copy of a route-instruction, giving code-identification, the name of the service company, the address of the caller.

1846 Leavenworth Street S.F. v-call rec'd Ed Fuller 9:20 p.m. 5-28.
Swibble 30s15H(deluxe). Suggest check lateral feedback & neural
replacement bank. AAw3-6.

The numbers, the information, meant nothing to Courtland. He closed the door and slowly returned to his desk. Smoothing out the crumpled sheet of paper, he reread the dulled words again, trying to squeeze some meaning from them. The printed letterhead was:

ELECTRONIC SERVICE INDUSTRIES

455 Montgomery Street, San Francisco 14. Ri8-4456n Est. 1963

That was it. The meager printed statement: Established in 1963. Hands trembling, Courtland reached mechanically for his pipe. Certainly, it explained why he had never heard of swibbles. It explained why he didn't own one . . . and why, no matter how many doors in the apartment building he knocked on, the young repairman wouldn't find anybody who did.

Swibbles hadn't been invented yet.

After an interval of hard, furious thought Courtland picked up the phone and dialed the home number of his subordinate at the Pesco labs.

"I don't care," he said carefully, "what you're doing this evening. I'm going to give you a list of instructions and I want them carried out right away."

At the other end of the line Jack Hurley could be heard pulling himself angrily together. "Tonight? Listen, Dave, the company isn't my mother—I have some life of my own. If I'm supposed to come running down—"

"This has nothing to do with Pesco. I want a tape recorder and a movie camera with infrared lens. I want you to round up a legal stenographer. I want one of the company electricians—you pick him out, but get the best. And I want Anderson from the engineering room. If you can't get him, get any of our designers. And I want somebody off the assembly line; get me some old mechanic who knows his stuff. Who really knows machines."

Doubtfully, Hurley said, "Well, you're the boss; at least, you're boss of research. But I think this will have to be cleared with the company. Would you mind if I went over your head and got an okay from Pesbroke?"

"Go ahead." Courtland made a quick decision. "Better yet, I'll call him myself; he'll probably have to know what's going on."

"What is going on?" Hurley demanded curiously. "I never heard you sound this way before . . . has somebody brought out a self-spraying paint?"

Courtland hung up the phone, waited out a torturous interval, and then dialed his superior, the owner of Pesco Paint.

"You have a minute?" he asked tightly, when Pesbroke's wife had roused the white-haired old man from his after-dinner nap and got him to the phone. "I'm mixed up in something big; I want to talk to you about it."

"Has it got to do with paint?" Pesbroke muttered, half humorously, half seriously. "If not—"

Courtland interrupted him. Speaking slowly, he gave a full account of his contact with the swibble repairman.

When Courtland had finished, his employer was silent. "Well," Pesbroke said finally, "I guess I could go through some kind of routine. But you've got me interested. All right, I'll buy it. But," he added quietly, "if this is an elaborate time-waster, I'm going to bill you for the use of the men and equipment."

"By time-waster, you mean if nothing profitable comes out of this?"

"No," Pesbroke said. "I mean, if you *know* it's a fake; if you're consciously going along with a gag. I've got a migraine headache and I'm not going along with a gag. If you're serious, if you really think this might be something, I'll put the expenses on the company books."

"I'm serious," Courtland said. "You and I are both too damn old to play games."

"Well," Pesbroke reflected, "the older you get, the more you're apt to go off the deep end; and this sounds pretty deep." He could be heard making up his mind. "I'll telephone Hurley and give him the okay. You can have

whatever you want. . . . I suppose you're going to try to pin this repairman down and find out what he really is."

"That's what I want to do."

"Suppose he's on the level . . . what then?"

"Well," Courtland said cautiously, "then I want to find out what a swibble is. As a starter. Maybe after that—"

"You think he'll be back?"

"He might be. He won't find the right address; I know that. Nobody in *this* neighborhood called for a swibble repairman."

"What do you care what a swibble is? Why don't you find out how he got from his period back here?"

"I think he knows what a swibble is—and I don't think he knows how he got here. He doesn't even know he's here."

Pesbroke agreed. "That's reasonable. If I come over, will you let me in? I'd sort of enjoy watching."

"Sure," Courtland said, perspiring, his eye on the closed door to the hall. "But you'll have to watch from the other room. I don't want anything to foul this up . . . we may never have another chance like this."

Grumpily, the jury-rigged company team filed into the apartment and stood waiting for Courtland to instruct. Jack Hurley, in aloha sports shirt, slacks, and crepe-soled shoes, clodded resentfully over to Courtland and waved his cigar in his face. "Here we are; I don't know what you told Pesbroke, but you certainly pulled him along." Glancing around the apartment, he asked, "Can I assume we're going to get the pitch now? There's not much these people can do unless they understand what they're after."

In the bedroom doorway stood Courtland's two sons, eyes half-shut with sleep. Fay nervously swept them up and herded them back into the bedroom. Around the living room the various men and woman took up uncertain positions, their faces registering outrage, uneasy curiosity, and bored indifference. Anderson, the designing engineer, acted aloof and blasé. MacDowell, the stoop-shouldered, pot-bellied lathe operator, glared with proletarian resentment at the expensive furnishings of the apartment, and then sank into embarrassed apathy as he perceived his own work boots and grease-saturated pants. The recording specialist was trailing wire from his microphones to the tape recorder set up in the kitchen. A slim young woman, the legal stenographer, was trying to make herself comfortable in a chair in the corner. On the couch, Parkinson, the plant emergency electrician, was glancing idly through a copy of *Fortune*.

"Where's the camera equipment?" Courtland demanded.

"Coming," Hurley answered. "Are you trying to catch somebody trying out the old Spanish Treasure bunco?"

"I wouldn't need an engineer and an electrician for that," Courtland said drily. Tensely, he paced around the living room. "Probably he won't even show up; he's probably back in his own time, by now, or wandering around God knows where."

"Who?" Hurley shouted, puffing gray cigar smoke in growing agitation. "What's going on?"

"A man knocked on my door," Courtland told him briefly. "He talked about some machinery, equipment I never heard of. Something called a swibble."

Around the room blank looks passed back and forth.

"Let me guess what a swibble is," Courtland continued grimly. "Anderson, you start. What would a swibble be?"

Anderson grinned. "A fish hook that chases down fish."

Parkinson volunteered a guess. "An English car with only one wheel."

Grudgingly Hurley came next. "Something dumb. A machine for house-breaking pets."

"A new plastic bra," the legal stenographer suggested.

"I don't know," MacDowell muttered resentfully. "I never heard of anything like that."

"All right," Courtland agreed, again examining his watch. He was getting close to hysteria; an hour had passed and there was no sign of the repairman. "We don't know; we can't even guess. But someday, nine years from now, a man named Wright is going to invent a swibble, and it's going to become big business. People are going to make them; people are going to buy them and pay for them; repairmen are going to come around and service them."

The door opened and Pesbroke entered the apartment, overcoat over his arm, crushed Stetson hat clamped over his head. "Has he showed up again?" His ancient, alert eyes darted around the room. "You people look ready to go."

"No sign of him," Courtland said drearily. "Damn it—I sent him off; I didn't grasp it until he was gone."

"I see," Pesbroke said, handing it back. "And if he comes back you're going to tape what he says, and photograph everything he has in the way of equipment." He indicated Anderson and MacDowell. "What about the rest of them? What's the need of them?"

"I want people here who can ask the right questions," Courtland explained. "We won't get answers any other way. The man, if he shows up at all, will stay only a finite time. During that time, we've got to find out—" He broke off as his wife came up beside him. "What is it?"

"The boys want to watch," Fay explained. "Can they? They promise they won't make any noise." She added wistfully, "I'd sort of like to watch, too."

"Watch, then," Courtland answered gloomily. "Maybe there won't be anything to see."

While Fay served coffee around, Courtland went on with his explanation. "First of all, we want to find out if this man is on the level. Our first questions will be aimed at tripping him up; I want these specialists to go to work on him. If he's a fake, they'll probably find it out."

"And if he isn't?" Anderson asked, an interested expression on his face. "If he isn't, you're saying. . . ."

"If he isn't, then he's from the next decade, and I want him pumped for all he's worth. But—" Courtland paused. "I doubt if we'll get much theory. I had the impression that he's a long way down on the totem pole. The best we probably can do is get a run-down on his specific work. From that, we may have to assemble our picture, make our own extrapolations."

"You think he can tell us what he does for a living," Pesbroke said cannily, "but that's about it."

"We'll be lucky if he shows up at all," Courtland said. He settled down on the couch and began methodically knocking his pipe against the ashtray. "All we can do is wait. Each of you think over what you're going to ask. Try to figure out the questions you want answered by a man from the future who doesn't know he's from the future, who's trying to repair equipment that doesn't yet exist."

"I'm scared," the legal stenographer said, white-faced and wide-eyed, her coffee cup trembling.

"I'm about fed up," Hurley muttered, eyes fixed sullenly on the floor. "This is all a lot of hot air."

It was just about that time that the swibble repairman came again, and once more timidly knocked on the hall door.

The young repairman was flustered. And he was getting perturbed. "I'm sorry, sir," he began without preamble. "I can see you have company, but I've rechecked my route instructions and this is *absolutely* the right address." He added plaintively, "I tried some other apartments; nobody knew what I was talking about."

"Come in," Courtland managed. He stepped aside, got himself between the swibble repairman and the door, and ushered him into the living room.

"Is this the person?" Pesbroke rumbled doubtfully, his gray eyes narrowing.

Courtland ignored him. "Sit down," he ordered the swibble repairman. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Anderson and Hurley and MacDowell moving in closely; Parkinson threw down his *Fortune* and got quickly to his feet. In the kitchen, the sound of tape running through the recording head was audible . . . the room had begun moving into activity.

"I could come some other time," the repairman said apprehensively, eyeing the closing circle of people. "I don't want to bother you, sir, when you have guests."

Perched grimly on the arm of the couch, Courtland said, "This is as good a time as any. In fact, this is the best time." A wild flood of relief spilled over him; now they had a chance. "I don't know what got into me," he went on rapidly. "I was confused. Of course I have a swibble; it's set up in the dining room."

The repairman's face twitched with a spasm of laughter. "Oh, really," he choked. "In the dining room? That's about the funniest joke I've heard in weeks."

Courtland glanced at Pesbroke. What the hell was so funny about that? Then his flesh began to crawl; cold sweat broke out on his forehead and the palms of his hands. What the hell was a swibble? Maybe they had better find out right away—or not at all. Maybe they were getting into something deeper than they knew. Maybe—and he didn't like the thought—they were better off where they were.

"I was confused," he said, "by your nomenclature. I don't think of it as a swibble." Cautiously, he finished, "I know that's the popular jargon, but with that much money involved, I like to think of it by its legitimate title."

The swibble repairman looked completely confused. Courtland realized that he had made another mistake; apparently *swibble* was its correct name.

Pesbroke spoke up. "How long have you been repairing swibbles, Mr. . . ." He waited, but there was no response from the thin, blank face. "What's your name, young man?" he demanded.

"My *ubat*?" The swibble repairman pulled jerkily away. "I don't understand you, sir."

Good Lord, Courtland thought. It was going to be a lot harder than he had realized—than any of them had realized.

Angrily, Pesbroke said, "You must have a name. Everybody has a name."

The young repairman gulped and stared down red-faced at the carpet. "I'm still only in service group four, sir. So I don't have a name yet."

"Let it go," Courtland said. What kind of a society gave out names as a status privilege? "I want to make sure you're a competent repairman," he expalined. "How long have you been repairing swibbles?"

"For six years and three months," the repairman asserted. Pride took the place of embarrassment. "In junior high school I showed a straight-A record in swibble-maintenance aptitude." His meager chest swelled. "I'm a born swibble-man."

"Fine," Courtland agreed uneasily; he couldn't believe the industry was that big. They gave tests in junior high school? Was swibble maintenance considered a basic talent, like symbol manipulation and manual dexterity? Had swibble work become as fundamental as musical talent, or as the ability to conceive spatial relationships?

"Well," the repairman said briskly, gathering up his bulging tool kit, "I'm all ready to get started. I have to be back at the shop before long. . . . I've got a lot of other calls."

Bluntly, Pesbroke stepped up squarely in front of the young man. "What is a swibble?" he demanded. "I'm tired of this damn fooling around. You say you work on these things—*what are they?* That's a simple enough question; they must be something."

"Why," the young man said hesitantly, "I mean, that's hard to say. Suppose—well, suppose you ask me what a cat or a dog is. How can I answer that?"

"We're getting nowhere," Anderson spoke up. "The swibble is manufactured, isn't it? You must have schematics, then; hand them over."

The young repairman gripped his tool kit defensively. "What in the world is the matter, sir? If this is your idea of a joke—" He turned back to Courtland. "I'd like to start work; I really don't have much time."

Standing in the corner, hands shoved deep in his pockets, MacDowell said slowly, "I've been thinking about getting a swibble. The missus thinks we ought to have one."

"Oh, certainly," the repairman agreed. Color rising in his cheeks, he rushed on, "I'm surprised you don't have a swibble already; in fact, I can't imagine what's wrong with you people. You're all acting—oddly. Where, if I may ask, do you come from? Why are you so—well, so uninformed?"

"These people," Courtland explained, "come from a part of the country where there aren't any swibbles."

Instantly, the repairman's face hardened with suspicion. "Oh?" he said sharply. "Interesting. What part of the country is that?"

Again, Courtland had said the wrong thing; he knew that. While he floundered for a response, MacDowell cleared his throat and inexorably went on. "Anyhow," he said, "we've been meaning to get one. You have any folders with you? Pictures of different models?"

The repairman responded. "I'm afraid not, sir. But if you'll give me your address I'll have the sales department send you information. And if you want, a qualified representative can call on you at your convenience and describe the advantages of owning a swibble."

"The first swibble was developed in 1963?" Hurley asked.

"That's right." The repairman's suspicions had momentarily lulled. "And just in time, too. Let me say this—if Wright hadn't got his first model going, there wouldn't be any human beings left alive. You people here who don't own swibbles—you may not know it—and you certainly act as if you didn't know it—but you're alive right now because of old R. J. Wright. It's swibbles that keep the world going."

Opening his black case, the repairman briskly brought out a complicated apparatus of tubes and wiring. He filled a drum with clear fluid, sealed it, tried the plunger, and straightened up. "I'll start out with a shot of dx—that usually puts them back into operation."

"What is dx?" Anderson asked quickly.

Surprised at the question, the repairman answered, "It's a high-protein food concentrate. We've found that 90 percent of our early service calls are the result of improper diet. People just don't know how to care for their new swibble."

"My God," Anderson said feebly. "It's alive."

Courtland's mind took a nose dive. He had been wrong; it wasn't precisely a repairman who stood gathering his equipment together. The man had come to fix the swibble all right, but his capacity was slightly different than Courtland had supposed. He wasn't a repairman; he was a veterinarian.

Laying out instruments and meters, the young man explained: "The new swibbles are a lot more complex than the early models; I need all this before I can even get started. But blame the War."

"The War?" Fay Courtland echoed apprehensively.

"Not the early war. The big one, in '75. That little war in '61 wasn't really much. You know, I suppose, that Wright was originally an Army engineer, stationed over in—well, I guess it was called Europe, I believe the idea came to him because of all those refugees pouring across the border. Yes, I'm sure that's how it was. During that little war, back in '61, they came across by the millions. And they went the other way, too. My goodness, people were shifting back and forth between the two camps—it was revolting."

"I'm not clear on my history," Courtland said thickly. "I never paid much attention in school . . . the '61 war, that was between Russia and America?"

"Oh," the repairman said, "it was between everybody. Russia headed the Eastern side, of course. And America the West. But everybody was in it. That was the little war, though; that didn't count."

"Little?" Fay demanded, horrified.

"Well," the repairman admitted, "I suppose it looked like a lot at the time. But I mean, there were buildings still standing, afterward. And it only lasted a few months."

"Who—won?" Anderson croaked.

The repairman tittered. "Won? What an odd question. Well, there were more people left in the Eastern bloc, if that's what you mean. Anyhow, the importance of the '61 war—and I'm *sure* your history teachers made that clear—was that swibbles appeared. R. J. Wright got his idea from the camp-changers that appeared in that war. So by '75, when the *real* war came along, we had plenty of swibbles." Thoughtfully, he added, "In fact, I'd say the real war was a war over swibbles. I mean, it was the last war. It was the war between the people who wanted swibbles and those who didn't." Complacently, he finished, "Needless to say, *we* won."

After a time Courtland managed to ask, "What happened to the others? Those who—didn't want swibbles?"

"Why," the repairman said gently, "the swibbles got them."

Shakily, Courtland started his pipe going. "I didn't know about that."

"What do you mean?" Pesbroke demanded hoarsely. "How did they get them? What did they do?"

Astonished, the repairman shook his head. "I didn't know there was such ignorance in lay circles." The position of pundit obviously pleased him; sticking out his bony chest, he proceeded to lecture the circle of intent faces on the fundamentals of history. "Wright's first A-driven swibble was crude, of course. But it served its purpose. Originally, it was able to differentiate the camp-shifters into two groups: those who had really seen the light, and those who were insincere. Those who were going to shift back . . . who weren't really loyal. The authorities wanted to know which of the shifters had really come over to the West and which were spies and secret agents. That was the original swibble function. But that was nothing compared to now."

"No," Courtland agreed, paralyzed. "Nothing at all."

"Now," the repairman said sleekly, "we don't deal with such crudities. It's absurd to wait until an individual has accepted a contrary ideology, and then hope he'll shift away from it. In a way, it's ironic, isn't it? After the '61 war there was really only one contrary ideology: those who opposed the swibbles."

He laughed happily. "So the swibbles differentiated those who didn't want to be differentiated by swibbles. My, that was quite a war. Because that wasn't a messy war, with a lot of bombs and jellied gasoline. That was a *scientific* war—none of that random pulverizing. That was just swibbles going down into cellars and ruins and hiding places and digging out those Contrapersons one by one. Until we had all of them. So now," he finished, gathering up his equipment, "we don't have to worry about wars or anything of that sort. There won't be any more conflicts, because we don't have any contrary ideologies. As Wright showed, it doesn't really matter what ideology we have; it isn't important whether it's Communism or Free Enterprise or Socialism or Fascism or Slavery. What's important is that every one of us agrees completely; that we're all absolutely loyal. And as long as we have our swibbles—" He winked knowingly at Courtland. "Well, as a new swibble owner, you've found out the advantages. You know the sense of security and satisfaction in being *certain* that your ideology is exactly congruent with that of everybody else in the world. That there's no possibility, no chance whatsoever that you'll go astray—and that some passing swibble will feed on you."

It was MacDowell who managed to pull himself together first. "Yeah," he said ironically. "It certainly sounds like what the missus and I want."

"Oh, you ought to have a swibble of your own," the repairman urged. "Consider—if you have your own swibble, it'll adjust you automatically. It'll keep you on the right track without strain or fuss. You'll always know you're

not going wrong—remember the swibble slogan: Why be *half* loyal? With your own swibble, your outlook will be corrected by painless degrees . . . but if you wait, if you just *hope* you're on the right track, why, one of these days you may walk into a friend's living room and his swibble may just simply crack you open and drink you down. Of course," he reflected, "a passing swibble may still get you in time to straighten you out. But usually it's too late. Usually—" He smiled. "Usually people go beyond redemption, once they get started."

"And your job," Pesbroke muttered, "is to keep the swibbles working?"

"They do get out of adjustment, left to themselves."

"Isn't it a kind of paradox?" Pesbroke pursued. "The swibbles keep us in adjustment, and we keep them in adjustment . . . it's a closed circle."

The repairman was intrigued. "Yes, that's an interesting way of putting it. But we must keep control over the swibbles, of course. So they don't die." He shivered. "Or worse."

"Die?" Hurley said, still not understanding. "But if they're built—" Wrinkling his brows, he said, "Either they're machines or they're alive. Which is it?"

Patiently, the repairman explained elementary physics. "Swibble-culture is an organic phenotype evolved in a protein medium under controlled conditions. The directing neurological tissue that forms the basis of the swibble is alive, certainly, in the sense that it grows, thinks, feeds, excretes waste. Yes, it's definitely alive. But the swibble as a functioning whole, is a manufactured item. The organic tissue is inserted in the master tank and then sealed. I certainly don't repair *that*; I give it nutriments to restore a proper balance of diet, and I try to deal with parasitic organisms that find their way into it. I try to keep it adjusted and healthy. The balance of the organism, is, of course, totally mechanical."

"The swibble has direct access to human minds?" Anderson asked, fascinated.

"Naturally. It's an artificially evolved telepathic metazoon. And with it, Wright solved the basic problem of modern times: the existence of diverse, warring ideological factions, the presence of disloyalty and dissent. In the words of General Steiner's famous aphorism: War is an extension of disagreement from the voting booth to the battlefield. And the preamble of the World Service Charter: war, if it is to be eliminated, must be eliminated from the minds of men, for it is in the minds of men that disagreement begins. Up until 1963, we had no way to get into the minds of men. Up until 1963, the problem was unsolvable."

"Thank God," Fay said clearly.

The repairman failed to hear; he was carried away by his own enthusiasm.

"By means of the swibble, we've managed to transform the basic sociologi-

cal problem of loyalty into a routine technical matter: to the mere matter of maintenance and repair. Our only concern is keeping the swibbles functioning correctly; the rest is up to them."

"In other words," Courtland said faintly, "you repairmen are the only controlling influence over the swibbles. You represent the total human agency standing above these machines."

The repairman reflected. "I suppose so," he admitted modestly. "Yes, that's correct."

"Except for you, they pretty damn well manage the human race."

The bony chest swelled with complacent, confident pride. "I suppose you could say that."

"Look," Courtland said thickly. He grabbed hold of the man's arm. "How the hell can you be sure? Are you really in control?" A crazy hope was rising up inside him: as long as men had power over the swibbles there was a chance to roll things back. The swibbles could be disassembled, taken apart piece by piece. As long as swibbles had to submit to human servicing it wasn't quite hopeless.

"What, sir?" the repairman inquired. "Of course we're in control. Don't you worry." Firmly, he disengaged Courtland's fingers. "Now, where is your swibble?" He glanced around the room. "I'll have to hurry; there isn't much time left."

"I haven't got a swibble," Courtland said.

For a moment it didn't register. Then a strange, intricate expression crossed the repairman's face. "No swibble? But you told me—"

"Something went wrong," Courtland said hoarsely. "There aren't any swibbles. It's too early—they haven't been invented. Understand? You came too soon!"

The young man's eyes popped. Clutching his equipment, he stumbled back two steps, blinked, opened his mouth and tried to speak. "Too—soon?" Then comprehension arrived. Suddenly he looked older, much older. "I wondered. All the undamaged buildings . . . the archaic furnishings. The transmission machinery must have misphased!" Rage flashed over him. "That instantaneous service—I knew dispatch should have stuck to the old mechanical system. I told them to make better tests. Lord, there's going to be hell to pay; if we ever get this mix-up straightened out I'll be surprised."

Bending down furiously, he hastily dropped his equipment back in the case. In a single motion he slammed and locked it, straightened up, bowed briefly at Courtland.

"Good evening," he said frigidly. And vanished.

The circle of watchers had nothing to watch. The swibble repairman had gone back to where he came from.

After a time Pesbroke turned and signaled to the man in the kitchen.

"Might as well shut off the tape recorder," he muttered bleakly. "There's nothing more to record."

"Good Lord," Hurley said, shaken. "A world run by machines."

Fay shivered. "I couldn't believe that little fellow had so much power; I thought he was just a minor official."

"He's completely in charge," Courtland said harshly.

There was silence.

One of the two children yawned sleepily. Fay turned abruptly to them and herded them efficiently into the bedroom. "Time for you two to be in bed," she commanded, with false gaiety.

Protesting sullenly, the two boys disappeared, and the door closed. Gradually, the living room broke into motion. The tape-recorder man began rewinding his reel. The legal stenographer shakily collected her notes and put away her pencils. Hurley lit up a cigar and stood puffing moodily, his face dark and somber.

"I suppose," Courtland said finally, "that we've all accepted it; we assume it's not a fake."

"Well," Pesbroke pointed out, "he vanished. That ought to be proof enough. And all that junk he took out of his kit—"

"It's only nine years," Parkinson, the electrician, said thoughtfully. "Wright must be alive already. Let's look him up and stick a shiv into him."

"Army engineer," MacDowell agreed. "R.J. Wright. It ought to be possible to locate him. Maybe we can keep it from happening."

"How long would you guess people like him can keep the swibbles under control?" Anderson asked.

Courtland shrugged wearily. "No telling. Maybe years . . . maybe a century. But sooner or later something's going to come up, something they didn't expect. And then it'll be predatory machinery preying on all of us."

Fay shuddered violently. "It sounds awful; I'm certainly glad it won't be for a while."

"You and the repairman," Courtland said bitterly. "As long as it doesn't affect you—"

Fay's overwrought nerves flared up. "We'll discuss it later on." She smiled jerkily at Pesbroke. "More coffee? I'll put some on." Turning on her heel, she rushed from the living room into the kitchen.

While she was filling the Silex with water, the doorbell quietly rang.

The roomful of people froze. They looked at each other, mute and horrified.

"He's back," Hurley said thickly.

"Maybe it's not him," Anderson suggested weakly. "Maybe it's the camera people, finally."

But none of them moved toward the door. After a time the bell rang again, longer, and more insistently.

"We have to answer it," Pesbroke said woodenly.

"Not me," the legal stenographer quavered.

"This isn't my apartment," MacDowell pointed out.

Courtland moved rigidly toward the door. Even before he took hold of the knob he knew what it was. Dispatch, using its new-fangled instantaneous transmission. Something to get work crews and repairmen directly to their stations. So control of the swibbles would be absolute and perfect; so nothing would go wrong.

But something had gone wrong. The control had fouled itself up. It was working upside down, completely backward. Self-defeating, futile: it was too perfect. Gripping the knob, he tore the door open.

Standing in the hall were four men. They wore plain gray uniforms and caps. The first of them whipped off his cap, glanced at a written sheet of paper, and then nodded politely at Courtland.

"Evening, sir," he said cheerfully. He was a husky man, wide-shouldered, with a shock of thick brown hair hanging over his sweat-shiny forehead. "We—uh—got a little lost, I guess. Took awhile to get here."

Peering into the apartment, he hitched up his heavy leather belt, stuffed his route sheet into his pocket, and rubbed his large, competent hands together.

"It's downstairs in the truck," he announced, addressing Courtland and the whole living room of people. "Tell me where you want it, and we'll bring it right up. We should have a good-sized space—that side over there by the window should do." Turning away, he and his crew moved energetically toward the service elevator. "These late-model swibbles take up a lot of room."

A U T O F A C

When "Autofac" was written, it was 1955. Russia and the United States continued testing nuclear and thermonuclear bombs. American factories hummed productively and conspicuous consumption became a way of life for many people. But not for Kleo and Phil Dick. They were poor poor, Dick remembered years later in an essay called "Now Wait for This Year." They did not always have enough money to buy groceries, and, according to Dick, at times they ate borsemeat they bought at the Lucky Dog Pet Store near their bouse in Berkeley. Are we to believe him? Only his wife Kleo would know. Like William Faulkner, he gave varying accounts of his life to interviewers, either deliberately or because he saw so little distinction between fictional worlds and real worlds that he felt free to invent and reinvent both. It is certain that in the 1950s he worried about money, about atomic warfare, about environmental deterioration—and he continued to write.

Of the dozen stories he published in 1955, "Autofac" and "War Veteran" (too long to reprint in this anthology) are the finest. The output of short stories dropped by almost two thirds because he began writing novels. He discovered that he could earn more money with this longer fictional form. His first novel, *Solar Lottery*, was published in 1955; for the next twenty-five years he worked largely in this form, publishing thirty-six novels and about an equal number of short stories. He felt, nevertheless, that the essence of science fiction is the idea and the short story is perhaps the purest form to convey that idea. He was well aware that when he wrote novels, he kept going back to his short stories for ideas. He either expanded a single short story or fused several stories together in a novel.

Once again in "Autofac" the setting is a dismal landscape cauterized by H bomb blasts. This story demonstrates the metaphorical technique that gives Dick's fiction its unique power. He first creates a metaphor. Then he creates a fictional world in which the metaphor is literally true. Here his metaphor is: automated factories are alive. Then, because they are alive, the factories begin to move, to set goals, to reproduce themselves. The next question in Dick's creative process

is, how do they accomplish all that? How would an automated factory reproduce itself? We discover his answer at the end of this remarkable story.

I

Tension hung over the three waiting men. They smoked, paced back and forth, kicked aimlessly at weeds growing by the side of the road. A hot noonday sun glared down on brown fields, rows of neat plastic houses, the distant line of mountains to the west.

"Almost time," Earl Perine said, knotting his skinny hands together. "It varies according to the load, a half second for every additional pound."

Bitterly, Morrison answered, "You've got it plotted? You're as bad as it is. Let's pretend it just *happens* to be late."

The third man said nothing. O'Neill was visiting from another settlement; he didn't know Perine and Morrison well enough to argue with them. Instead, he crouched down and arranged the papers clipped to his aluminum checkboard. In the blazing sun, O'Neill's arms were tanned, furry, glistening with sweat. Wiry, with tangled gray hair, horn-rimmed glasses, he was older than the other two. He wore slacks, a sports shirt and crepe-soled shoes. Between his fingers, his fountain pen glittered, metallic and efficient.

"What're you writing?" Perine grumbled.

"I'm laying out the procedure we're going to employ," O'Neill said mildly. "Better to systemize it now, instead of trying at random. We want to know what we tried and what didn't work. Otherwise we'll go around in a circle. The problem we have here is one of communication; that's how I see it."

"Communication," Morrison agreed in his deep, chesty voice. "Yes, we can't get in touch with the damn thing. It comes, leaves off its load and goes on—there's no contact between us and it."

"It's a machine," Perine said excitedly. "It's dead—blind and deaf."

"But it's in contact with the outside world," O'Neill pointed out. "There has to be some way to get to it. Specific semantic signals are meaningful to it; all we have to do is find those signals. Rediscover, actually. Maybe half a dozen out of a billion possibilities."

A low rumble interrupted the three men. They glanced up, wary and alert. The time had come.

"Here it is," Perine said. "Okay, wise guy, let's see you make one single change in its routine."

The truck was massive, rumbling under its tightly packed load. In many ways, it resembled conventional human-operated transportation vehicles, but with one exception—there was no driver's cabin. The horizontal surface was a loading stage, and the part that would normally be the headlights and radiator grill was a fibrous spongelike mass of receptors, the limited sensory apparatus of this mobile utility extension.

Aware of the three men, the truck slowed to a halt, shifted gears and pulled on its emergency brake. A moment passed as relays moved into action; then a portion of the loading surface tilted and a cascade of heavy cartons spilled down onto the roadway. With the objects fluttered a detailed inventory sheet.

"You know what to do," O'Neill said rapidly. "Hurry up, before it gets out of here."

Expertly, grimly, the three men grabbed up the deposited cartons and ripped the protective wrappers from them. Objects gleamed: a binocular microscope, a portable radio, heaps of plastic dishes, medical supplies, razor blades, clothing, food. Most of the shipment, as usual, was food. The three men systematically began smashing the objects. In a few minutes, there was nothing but a chaos of debris littered around them.

"That's that," O'Neill panted, stepping back. He fumbled for his check-sheet. "Now let's see what it does."

The truck had begun to move away; abruptly it stopped and backed toward them. Its receptors had taken in the fact that the three men had demolished the dropped-off portion of the load. It spun in a grinding half circle and came around to face its receptor bank in their direction. Up went its antenna; it had begun communicating with the factory. Instructions were on the way.

A second, identical load was tilted and shoved off the truck.

"We failed," Perine groaned as a duplicate inventory sheet fluttered after the new load. "We destroyed all that stuff for nothing."

"What now?" Morrison asked O'Neill. "What's the next stratagem on your board?"

"Give me a hand." O'Neill grabbed up a carton and lugged it back to the truck. Sliding the carton onto the platform, he turned for another. The other two men followed clumsily after him. They put the load back onto the truck. As the truck started forward, the last square box was again in place.

The truck hesitated. Its receptors registered the return of its load. From within its works came a low sustained buzzing.

"This may drive it crazy," O'Neill commented, sweating. "It went through its operation and accomplished nothing."

The truck made a short, abortive move toward going on. Then it swung purposefully around and, in a blur of speed, again dumped the load onto the road.

"Get them!" O'Neill yelled. The three men grabbed up the cartons and feverishly reloaded them. But as fast as the cartons were shoved back on the horizontal stage, the truck's grapples tilted them down its far-side ramps and onto the road.

"No use," Morrison said, breathing hard. "Water through a sieve."

"We're licked," Perine gasped in wretched agreement, "like always. We humans lose every time."

The truck regarded them calmly, its receptors blank and impassive. It was doing its job. The planetwide network of automatic factories was smoothly performing the task imposed on it five years before, in the early days of the Total Global Conflict.

"There it goes," Morrison observed dismally. The truck's antenna had come down; it shifted into low gear and released its parking brake.

"One last try," O'Neill said. He swept up one of the cartons and ripped it open. From it he dragged a ten-gallon milk tank and unscrewed the lid. "Silly as it seems."

"This is absurd," Perine protested. Reluctantly, he found a cup among the littered debris and dipped it into the milk. "A kid's game!"

The truck had paused to observe them.

"Do it," O'Neill ordered sharply. "Exactly the way we practiced it."

The three of them drank quickly from the milk tank, visibly allowing the milk to spill down their chins; there had to be no mistaking what they were doing.

As planned, O'Neill was the first. His face twisting in revulsion, he hurled the cup away and violently spat the milk into the road.

"God's sake!" he choked.

The other two did the same; stamping and loudly cursing, they kicked over the milk tank and glared accusingly at the truck.

"It's no good!" Morrison roared.

Curious, the truck came slowly back. Electronic synapses clicked and whirred, responding to the situation; its antenna shot up like a flagpole.

"I think this is it," O'Neill said, trembling. As the truck watched, he dragged out a second milk tank, unscrewed its lid and tasted the contents. "The same!" he shouted at the truck. "It's just as bad!"

From the truck popped a metal cylinder. The cylinder dropped at Morrison's feet; he quickly snatched it up and tore it open.

STATE NATURE OF DEFECT

The instruction sheets listed rows of possible defects, with neat boxes by each; a punch-stick was included to indicate the particular deficiency of the product.

"What'll I check?" Morrison asked. "Contaminated? Bacterial? Sour? Rancid? Incorrectly labeled? Broken? Crushed? Cracked? Bent? Soiled?"

Thinking rapidly, O'Neill said, "Don't check any of them. The factory's undoubtedly ready to test and resample. It'll make its own analysis and then ignore us." His face glowed as frantic inspiration came. "Write in that blank at the bottom. It's an open space for further data."

"Write what?"

O'Neil said, "Write: *the product is thoroughly pizzled.*"

"What's that?" Perine demanded, baffled.

"Write it! It's a semantic garble—the factory won't be able to understand it. Maybe we can jam the works."

With O'Neill's pen, Morrison carefully wrote that the milk was pizzled. Shaking his head, he resealed the cylinder and returned it to the truck. The truck swept up the milk tanks and slammed its railing tidily into place. With a shriek of tires, it hurtled off. From its slot, a final cylinder bounced; the truck hurriedly departed, leaving the cylinder lying in the dust.

O'Neill got it open and help up the paper for the others to see.

A FACTORY REPRESENTATIVE
WILL BE SENT OUT
BE PREPARED TO SUPPLY COMPLETE DATA
ON PRODUCT DEFICIENCY.

For a moment, the three men were silent. Then Perine began to giggle. "We did it. We contacted it. We got across."

"We sure did," O'Neill agreed. "It never heard of a product being pizzled."

Cut into the base of the mountains lay the vast metallic cube of the Kansas City factory. Its surface was corroded, pitted with radiation pox, cracked and scarred from the five years of war that had swept over it. Most of the factory was buried subsurface, only its entrance stages visible. The truck was a speck rumbling at high speed toward the expanse of black metal. Presently an opening formed in the uniform surface; the truck plunged into it and disappeared inside. The entrance snapped shut.

"Now the big job remains," O'Neill said. "Now we have to persuade it to close down operations—to shut itself off."

II

Judith O'Neill served hot black coffee to the people sitting around the living room. Her husband talked while the others listened. O'Neill was as close to being an authority on the autofac system as could still be found.

In his own area, the Chicago region, he had shorted out the protective fence of the local factory long enough to get away with data tapes stored in its posterior brain. The factory, of course, had immediately reconstructed a better type of fence. But he had shown that the factories were not infallible.

"The Institute of Applied Cybernetics," O'Neill explained, "had complete control over the network. Blame the war. Blame the big noise along the lines of communication that wiped out the knowledge we need. In any case, the Institute failed to transmit its information to us, so we can't transmit our information to the factories—the news that the war is over and we're ready to resume control of industrial operations."

"And meanwhile," Morrison added sourly, "the damn network expands and consumes more of our natural resources all the time."

"I get the feeling," Judith said, "that if I stamped hard enough, I'd fall right down into a factory tunnel. They must have mines everywhere by now."

"Isn't there some limiting injunction?" Perine asked nervously. "Were they set up to expand indefinitely?"

"Each factory is limited to its own operational area," O'Neill said, "but the network itself is unbounded. It can go on scooping up our resources forever. The Institute decided it gets top priority; we mere people come second."

"Will there be *anything* left for us?" Morrison wanted to know.

"Not unless we can stop the network's operations. It's already used up half a dozen basic minerals. Its search teams are out all the time, from every factory, looking everywhere for some last scrap to drag home."

"What would happen if tunnels from two factories crossed each other?"

O'Neill shrugged. "Normally, that won't happen. Each factory has its own special section of our planet, its own private cut of the pie for its exclusive use."

"But it *could* happen."

"Well, they're raw-material-tropic; as long as there's anything left, they'll hunt it down." O'Neill pondered the idea with growing interest. "It's something to consider. I suppose as things get scarcer—"

He stopped talking. A figure had come into the room; it stood silently by the door, surveying them all.

In the dull shadows, the figure looked almost human. For a brief moment, O'Neill thought it was a settlement latecomer. Then, as it moved forward, he realized that it was only quasi-human: a functional upright biped chassis, with data-receptors mounted at the top, effectors and proprioceptors mounted in a downward worm that ended in floor-grippers. Its resemblance to a human being was testimony to nature's efficiency; no sentimental imitation was intended.

The factory representative had arrived.

It began without preamble. "This is a data-collecting machine capable of communicating on an oral basis. It contains both broadcasting and receiving apparatus and can integrate facts relevant to its line of inquiry."

The voice was pleasant, confident. Obviously it was a tape, recorded by some Institute technician before the war. Coming from the quasi-human

shape, it sounded grotesque; O'Neill could vividly imagine the dead young man whose cheerful voice now issued from the mechanical mouth of this upright construction of steel and wiring.

"One word of caution," the pleasant voice continued, "It is fruitless to consider this receptor human and to engage it in discussions for which it is not equipped. Although purposeful, it is not capable of conceptual thought; it can only reassemble material already available to it."

The optimistic voice clicked out and a second voice came on. It resembled the first, but now there were no intonations or personal mannerisms. The machine was utilizing the dead man's phonetic speech pattern for its own communication.

"Analysis of the rejected product," it stated, "shows no foreign elements or noticeable deterioration. The product meets the continual testing standards employed throughout the network. Rejection is therefore on a basis outside the test area; standards not available to the network are being employed."

"That's right," O'Neill agreed. Weighing his words with care, he continued, "We found the milk substandard. We want nothing to do with it. We insist on more careful output."

The machine responded presently. "The semantic content of the term *pizzled* is unfamiliar to the network. It does not exist in the taped vocabulary. Can you present a factual analysis of the milk in terms of specific elements present or absent?"

"No," O'Neill said warily; the game he was playing was intricate and dangerous. "*Pizzled* is an overall term. It can't be reduced to chemical constituents."

"What does *pizzled* signify?" the machine asked. "Can you define it in terms of alternate semantic symbols?"

O'Neill hesitated. The representative had to be steered from its special inquiry to more general regions, to the ultimate problem of closing down the network. If he could pry it open at any point, get the theoretical discussion started. . . .

"*Pizzled*," he stated, "means the condition of a product that is manufactured when no need exists. It indicates the rejection of objects on the grounds that they are no longer wanted."

The representative said, "Network analysis shows a need of high-grade pasteurized milk-substitute in this area. There is no alternate source; the network controls all the synthetic mammary-type equipment in existence." It added, "Original taped instructions describe milk as an essential to human diet."

O'Neill was being outwitted; the machine was returning the discussion to the specific. "We've decided," he said desperately, "that we don't want any more milk. We'd prefer to go without it, at least until we can locate cows."

"That is contrary to the network tapes," the representative objected. "There are no cows. All milk is produced synthetically."

"Then we'll produce it synthetically ourselves," Morrison broke in impatiently. "Why can't we take over the machines? My God, we're not children! We can run our own lives!"

The factory representative moved toward the door. "Until such time as your community finds other sources of milk supply, the network will continue to supply you. Analytical and evaluating apparatus will remain in this area, conducting the customary random sampling."

Perine shouted futilely, "How can we find other sources? You have the whole setup! You're running the whole show!" Following after it, he bel-lowed, "You say we're not ready to run things—you claim we're not capable. How do you know? You don't give us a chance! We'll never have a chance!"

O'Neill was petrified. The machine was leaving; its one-track mind had completely triumphed.

"Look," he said hoarsely, blocking its way. "We want you to shut down, understand. We want to take over your equipment and run it ourselves. The war's over with. Damn it, you're not needed anymore!"

The factory representative paused briefly at the door. "The inoperative cycle," it said, "is not geared to begin until network production merely duplicates outside production. There is at this time, according to our continual sampling, no outside production. Therefore network production continues."

Without warning, Morrison swung the steel pipe in his hand. It slashed against the machine's shoulder and burst through the elaborate network of sensory apparatus that made up its chest. The tank of receptors shattered; bits of glass, wiring and minute parts showered everywhere.

"It's a paradox!" Morrison yelled. "A word game—a semantic game they're pulling on us. The Cyberneticists have it rigged." He raised the pipe and again brought it down savagely on the unprotesting machine. "They've got us hamstrung. We're completely helpless."

The room was in uproar. "It's the only way," Perine gasped as he pushed past O'Neill. "We'll have to destroy them—it's the network or us." Grabbing down a lamp, he hurled it in the "face" of the factory representative. The lamp and the intricate surface of plastic burst; Perine waded in, groping blindly for the machine. Now all the people in the room were closing furiously around the upright cylinder, their impotent resentment boiling over. The machine sank down and disappeared as they dragged it to the floor.

Trembling, O'Neill turned away. His wife caught hold of his arm and led him to the side of the room.

"The idiots," he said dejectedly. "They can't destroy it; they'll only teach it to build more defenses. They're making the whole problem worse."

Into the living room rolled a network repair team. Expertly, the mechanical units detached themselves from the half-track mother-bug and scurried toward the mound of struggling humans. They slid between people and rapidly burrowed. A moment later, the inert carcass of the factory representative was dragged into the hopper of the mother-bug. Parts were collected, torn remnants gathered up and carried off. The plastic strut and gear was located. Then the units restationed themselves on the bug and the team departed.

Through the open door came a second factory representative, an exact duplicate of the first. And outside in the hall stood two more upright machines. The settlement had been combed at random by a corps of representatives. Like a horde of ants, the mobile data-collecting machines had filtered through the town until, by chance, one of them had come across O'Neill.

"Destruction of network mobile data-gathering equipment is detrimental to best human interest," the factory representative informed the roomful of people. "Raw material intake is at a dangerously low ebb; what basic materials still exist should be utilized in the manufacture of consumer commodities."

O'Neill and the machine stood facing each other.

"Oh?" O'Neill said softly. "That's interesting. I wonder what you're lowest on—and what you'd really be willing to fight for."

Helicopter rotors whined tinnily above O'Neill's head; he ignored them and peered through the cabin window at the ground not far below.

Slag and ruins stretched everywhere. Weeds poked their way up, sickly stalks among which insects scuttled. Here and there, rat colonies were visible: matted hovels constructed of bone and rubble. Radiation had mutated the rats, along with most insects and animals. A little farther, O'Neill identified a squadron of birds pursuing a ground squirrel. The squirrel dived into a carefully prepared crack in the surface of slag and the birds turned, thwarted.

"You think we'll ever have it rebuilt?" Morrison asked. "It makes me sick to look at it."

"In time," O'Neill answered. "Assuming, of course, that we get industrial control back. And assuming that anything remains to work with. At best, it'll be slow. We'll have to inch out from the settlements."

To the right was a human colony, tattered scarecrows, gaunt and emaciated, living among the ruins of what had once been a town. A few acres of barren soil had been cleared; drooping vegetables wilted in the sun,

chickens wandered listlessly here and there, and a fly-bothered horse lay panting in the shade of a crude shed.

"Ruins-squatters," O'Neill said gloomily. "Too far from the network—not tangent to any of the factories."

"It's their own fault," Morrison told him angrily. "They could come into one of the settlements."

"That was their town. They're trying to do what *we're* trying to do—build up things again on their own. But they're starting now, without tools or machines, with their bare hands, nailing together bits of rubble. And it won't work. We need machines. We can't repair ruins; we've got to start industrial production."

Ahead lay a series of broken hills, chipped remains that had once been a ridge. Beyond stretched out the titanic ugly sore of an H-bomb crater, half filled with stagnant water and slime, a disease-ridden inland sea.

And beyond that—a glitter of busy motion.

"There," O'Neill said tensely. He lowered the helicopter rapidly. "Can you tell which factory they're from?"

"They all look alike to me," Morrison muttered, leaning over to see. "We'll have to wait and follow them back, when they get a load."

"If they get a load," O'Neill corrected.

The autofac exploring crew ignored the helicopter buzzing overhead and concentrated on its job. Ahead of the main truck scuttled two tractors; they made their way up mounds of rubble, probes burgeoning like quills, shot down the far slope and disappeared into a blanket of ash that lay spread over the slag. The two scouts burrowed until only their antennas were visible. They burst up to the surface and scuttled on, their treads whirring and clanking.

"What are they after?" Morrison asked.

"God knows." O'Neill leafed intently through the papers on his clipboard. "We'll have to analyze all our back-order slips."

Below them, the autofac exploring crew disappeared behind. The helicopter passed over a deserted stretch of sand and slag on which nothing moved. A grove of scrub-brush appeared and then, far to the right, a series of tiny moving dots.

A procession of automatic ore carts was racing over the bleak slag, a string of rapidly moving metal trucks that followed one another nose to tail. O'Neill turned the helicopter toward them and a few minutes later it hovered above the mine itself.

Masses of squat mining equipment had made their way to the operations. Shafts had been sunk; empty carts waited in patient rows. A steady stream of loaded carts hurried toward the horizon, dribbling ore after them. Activity and the noise of machines hung over the area, an abrupt center of industry in the bleak wastes of slag.

"Here comes that exploring crew," Morrison observed, peering back the way they had come. "You think maybe they'll tangle?" He grinned. "No, I guess it's too much to hope for."

"It is this time," O'Neill answered. "They're looking for different substances, probably. And they're normally conditioned to ignore each other."

The first of the exploring bugs reached the line of ore carts. It veered slightly and continued its search; the carts traveled in their inexorable line as if nothing had happened.

Disappointed, Morrison turned away from the window and swore. "No use. It's like each doesn't exist for the other."

Gradually the exploring crew moved away from the line of carts, past the mining operations and over a ridge beyond. There was no special hurry; they departed without having reacted to the ore-gathering syndrome.

"Maybe they're from the same factory," Morrison said hopefully.

O'Neill pointed to the antennas visible on the major mining equipment. "Their vanes are turned at a different vector, so these represent two factories. It's going to be hard; we'll have to get it exactly right or there won't be any reaction." He clicked on the radio and got hold of the monitor at the settlement. "Any results on the consolidated back-order sheets?"

The operator put him through to the settlement governing offices.

"They're starting to come in," Perine told him. "As soon as we get sufficient samplings, we'll try to determine which raw materials which factories lack. It's going to be risky, trying to extrapolate from complex products. There may be a number of basic elements common to the various sublots."

"What happens when we've identified the missing element?" Morrison asked O'Neill. "What happens when we've got two tangent factories short on the same material?"

"Then," O'Neill said grimly, "we start collecting the material ourselves—even if we have to melt down every object in the settlements."

III

In the moth-ridden darkness of night, a dim wind stirred, chill and faint. Dense underbrush rattled metallically. Here and there a nocturnal rodent prowled, its senses hyper-alert, peering, planning, seeking food.

The area was wild. No human settlements existed for miles; the entire region had been seared flat, cauterized by repeated H-bomb blasts. Somewhere in the murky darkness, a sluggish trickle of water made its way among slag and weeds, dripping thickly into what had once been an elaborate labyrinth of sewer mains. The pipes lay cracked and broken, jutting up into the night darkness, overgrown with creeping vegetation. The

wind raised clouds of black ash that swirled and danced among the weeds. Once an enormous mutant wren stirred sleepily, pulled its crude protective night coat of rags around it and dozed off.

For a time, there was no movement. A streak of stars showed in the sky overhead, glowing starkly, remotely. Earl Perine shivered, peered up and huddled closer to the pulsing heat-element placed on the ground between the three men.

"Well?" Morrison challenged, teeth chattering.

O'Neill didn't answer. He finished his cigarette, crushed it against a mound of decaying slag and, getting out his lighter, lit another. The mass of tungsten—the bait—lay a hundred yards directly ahead of them.

During the last few days, both the Detroit and Pittsburgh factories had run short of tungsten. And in at least one sector, their apparatus overlapped. This sluggish heap represented precision cutting tools, parts ripped from electrical switches, high-quality surgical equipment, sections of permanent magnets, measuring devices—tungsten from every possible source, gathered feverishly from all the settlements.

Dark mist lay spread over the tungsten mound. Occasionally, a night moth fluttered down, attracted by the glow of reflected starlight. The moth hung momentarily, beat its elongated wings futilely against the interwoven tangle of metal and then drifted off, into the shadows of the thick-packed vines that rose up from the stumps of sewer pipes.

"Not a very damn pretty spot," Perine said wryly.

"Don't kid yourself," O'Neill retorted. "This is the prettiest spot on Earth. This is the spot that marks the grave of the autofac network. People are going to come around here looking for it someday. There's going to be a plaque here a mile high."

"You're trying to keep your morale up" Morrison snorted. "You don't believe they're going to slaughter themselves over a heap of surgical tools and light-bulb filaments. They've probably got a machine down in the bottom level that sucks tungsten out of rock."

"Maybe," O'Neill said, slapping at a misquito. The insect dodged cannily and then buzzed over to annoy Perine. Perine swung viciously at it and squatted sullenly down against the damp vegetation.

And there was what they had come to see.

O'Neill realized with a start that he had been looking at it for several minutes without recognizing it. The search-bug lay absolutely still. It rested at the crest of a small rise of slag, its anterior end slightly raised, receptors fully extended. It might have been an abandoned hulk; there was no activity of any kind, no sign of life or consciousness. The search-bug fitted perfectly into the wasted, fire-drenched landscape. A vague tub of metal sheets and gears and flat treads, it rested and waited. And watched.

It was examining the heap of tungsten. The bait had drawn its first bite.

"Fish," Perine said thickly. "The line moved. I think the sinker dropped."

"What the hell are you mumbling about?" Morrison grunted. And then he, too, saw the search-bug. "Jesus," he whispered. He half rose to his feet, massive body arched forward. "Well, there's *one* of them. Now all we need is a unit from the other factory. Which do you suppose it is?"

O'Neill located the communication vane and traced its angle. "Pittsburgh, so pray for Detroit . . . pray like mad."

Satisfied, the search-bug detached itself and rolled forward. Cautiously approaching the mound, it began a series of intricate maneuvers, rolling first one way and then another. The three watching men were mystified—until they glimpsed the first probing stalks of other search-bugs.

"Communication," O'Neill said softly. "Like bees."

Now five Pittsburgh search-bugs were approaching the mound of tungsten products. Receptors waving excitedly, they increased their pace, scurrying in a sudden burst of discovery up the side of the mound to the top. A bug burrowed and rapidly disappeared. The whole mound shuddered; the bug was down inside, exploring the extent of the find.

Ten minutes later, the first Pittsburgh ore carts appeared and began industriously hurrying off with their haul.

"Damn it!" O'Neill said, agonized. "They'll have it all before Detroit shows up."

"Can't we do anything to slow them down?" Perine demanded helplessly. Leaping to his feet, he grabbed up a rock and heaved it at the nearest cart. The rock bounced off and the cart continued its work, unperturbed.

O'Neill got to his feet and prowled around, body rigid with impotent fury. Where were they? The autofacs were equal in all respects and the spot was the exact same linear distance from each center. Theoretically, the parties should have arrived simultaneously. Yet there was no sign of Detroit—and the final pieces of tungsten were being loaded before his eyes.

But then something streaked past him.

He didn't recognize it, for the object moved too quickly. It shot like a bullet among the tangled vines, raced up the side of the hill-crest, poised for an instant to aim itself and hurtled down the far side. It smashed directly into the lead cart. Projectile and victim shattered in an abrupt burst of sound.

Morrison leaped up. "What the hell?"

"That's it!" Perine screamed, dancing around and waving his skinny arms. "It's Detroit!"

A second Detroit search-bug appeared, hesitated as it took in the situation, and then flung itself furiously at the retreating Pittsburgh carts. Fragments of tungsten scattered everywhere—parts, wiring, broken plates, gears and springs and bolts of the two antagonists flew in all directions. The remaining carts wheeled screeching; one of them dumped its load and rattled off at top speed. A second followed, still weighed down with tung-

sten. A Detroit search-bug caught up with it, spun directly in its path and neatly overturned it. Bug and cart rolled down a shallow trench, into a stagnant pool of water. Dripping and glistening, the two of them struggled, half submerged.

"Well," O'Neill said unsteadily, "we did it. We can start back home." His legs felt weak. "Where's our vehicle?"

As he gunned the truck motor, something flashed a long way off, something large and metallic, moving over the dead slag and ash. It was a dense clot of carts, a solid expanse of heavy-duty ore carriers racing to the scene. Which factory were they from?

It didn't matter, for out of the thick tangle of black dripping vines, a web of counter-extensions was creeping to meet them. Both factories were assembling their mobile units. From all directions, bugs slithered and crept, closing in around the remaining heap of tungsten. Neither factory was going to let needed raw material get away; neither was going to give up its find. Blindly, mechanically, in the grip of inflexible directives, the two opponents labored to assemble superior forces.

"Come on," Morrison said urgently. "Let's get out of here. All hell is bursting loose."

O'Neill hastily turned the truck in the direction of the settlement. They began rumbling through the darkness on their way back. Every now and then, a metallic shape shot by them, going in the opposite direction.

"Did you see the load in that last cart?" Perine asked, worried. "It wasn't empty."

Neither were the carts that followed it, a whole procession of bulging supply carriers directed by an elaborate high-level surveying unit.

"Guns," Morrison said, eyes wide with apprehension. "They're taking in weapons. But who's going to use them?"

"They are," O'Neill answered. He indicated a movement to their right. "Look over there. This is something we hadn't expected."

They were seeing the first factory representative move into action.

As the truck pulled into the Kansas City settlement, Judith hurried breathlessly toward them. Fluttering in her hand was a strip of metal-foil paper.

"What is it?" O'Neill demanded, grabbing it from her.

"Just come." His wife struggled to catch her breath. "A mobile car—raced up, dropped it off—and left. Big excitement. Golly, the factory's—a blaze of lights. You can see it for miles."

O'Neill scanned the paper. It was a factory certification for the last group of settlement-placed orders, a total tabulation of requested and factory-analyzed needs. Stamped across the list in heavy black type were six foreboding words:

ALL SHIPMENTS SUSPENDED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

Letting out his breath harshly, O'Neill handed the paper over to Perine. "No more consumer goods," he said ironically, a nervous grin twitching across his face. "The network's going on a wartime footing."

"Then we did it?" Morrison asked haltingly.

"That's right," O'Neill said. Now that the conflict had been sparked, he felt a growing, frigid horror. "Pittsburgh and Detroit are in it to the finish. It's too late for us to change our minds, now—they're lining up allies."

IV

Cool morning sunlight lay across the ruined plain of black metallic ash. The ash smoldered a dull, unhealthy red; it was still warm.

"Watch your step," O'Neill cautioned. Grabbing hold of his wife's arm, he led her from the rusty, sagging truck, up onto the top of a pile of strewn concrete blocks, the scattered remains of a pillbox installation. Earl Perine followed, making his way carefully, hesitantly.

Behind them, the dilapidated settlement lay spread out, a disorderly checkerboard of houses, buildings and streets. Since the autofac network had closed down its supply and maintenance, the human settlements had fallen into semibarbarism. The commodities that remained were broken and only partly usable. It had been over a year since the last mobile factory truck had appeared, loaded with food, tools, clothing and repair parts. From the flat expanse of dark concrete and metal at the foot of the mountains, nothing had emerged in their direction.

Their wish had been granted—they were cut off, detached from the network.

On their own.

Around the settlement grew ragged fields of wheat and tattered stalks of sun-baked vegetables. Crude handmade tools had been distributed, primitive artifacts hammered out with great labor by the various settlements. The settlements were linked only by horse-drawn cart and by the slow stutter of the telegraph key.

They had managed to keep their organization, though. Goods and services were exchanged on a slow, steady basis. Basic commodities were produced and distributed. The clothing that O'Neill and his wife and Earl Perine wore was coarse and unbleached, but sturdy. And they had managed to convert a few of the trucks from gasoline to wood.

"Here we are," O'Neill said. "We can see from here."

"Is it worth it?" Judith asked, exhausted. Bending down, she plucked aimlessly at her shoe, trying to dig a pebble from the soft hide sole. "It's a long way to come, to see something we've seen every day for thirteen months."

"True," O'Neill admitted, his hand briefly resting on his wife's slim shoulder. "But this may be the last. And that's what we want to see."

In the gray sky above them, a swift circling dot of opaque black moved. High, remote, the dot spun and darted, following an intricate and wary course. Gradually, its gyrations moved it toward the mountains and the bleak expanse of bomb-rubbed structure sunk in their base.

"San Francisco," O'Neill explained. "One of those long-range hawk projectiles, all the way from the West Coast."

"And you think it's the last?" Perine asked.

"It's the only one we've seen this month." O'Neill seated himself and began sprinkling dried bits of tobacco into a trench of brown paper. "And we used to see hundreds."

"Maybe they have something better," Judith suggested. She found a smooth rock and tiredly seated herself. "Could it be?"

Her husband smiled ironically. "No. They don't have anything better."

The three of them were tensely silent. Above them, the circling dot of black drew closer. There was no sign of activity from the flat surface of metal and concrete; the Kansas City factory remained inert, totally unresponsive. A few billows of warm ash drifted across it and one end was partly submerged in rubble. The factory had taken numerous direct hits. Across the plain, the furrows of its sub-surface tunnels lay exposed, clogged with debris and the dark, water-seeking tendrils of tough vines.

"Those damn vines," Perine grumbled, picking at an old sore on his unshaven chin. "They're taking over the world."

Here and there around the factory, the demolished ruin of a mobile extension rusted in the morning dew. Carts, trucks, search-bugs, factory representatives, weapons carriers, guns, supply trains, subsurface projectiles, indiscriminate parts of machinery mixed and fused together in shapeless piles. Some had been destroyed returning to the factory; others had been contacted as they emerged, fully loaded, heavy with equipment. The factory itself—what remained of it—seemed to have settled more deeply into the earth. Its upper surface was barely visible, almost lost in drifting ash.

In four days, there had been no known activity, no visible movement of any sort.

"It's dead," Perine said. "You can see it's dead."

O'Neill didn't answer. Squatting down, he made himself comfortable and prepared to wait. In his own mind, he was sure that some fragment of automation remained in the eroded factory. Time would tell. He examined his wristwatch; it was eight thirty. In the old days, the factory would be starting its daily routine. Processions of trucks and varied mobile units would be coming to the surface, loaded with supplies, to begin their expeditions to the human settlement.

Off to the right, something stirred. He quickly turned his attention to it.

A single battered ore-gathering cart was creeping clumsily toward the factory. One last damaged mobile unit trying to complete its task. The cart was virtually empty; a few meager scraps of metal lay strewn in its hold. A scavenger . . . the metal was sections ripped from destroyed equipment encountered on the way. Feebly, like a blind metallic insect, the cart approached the factory. Its progress was incredibly jerky. Every now and then, it halted, bucked and quivered, and wandered aimlessly off the path.

"Control is bad," Judith said, with a touch of horror in her voice. "The factory's having trouble guiding it back."

Yes, he had seen that. Around New York, the factory had lost its high-frequency transmitter completely. Its mobile units had floundered in crazy gyrations, racing in random circles, crashing against rocks and trees, sliding into gullies, overturning, finally unwinding and becoming reluctantly inanimate.

The ore cart reached the edge of the ruined plain and halted briefly. Above it, the dot of black still circled the sky. For a time, the cart remained frozen.

"The factory's trying to decide," Perine said. "It needs the material, but it's afraid of that hawk up there."

The factory debated and nothing stirred. Then the ore cart again resumed its unsteady crawl. It left the tangle of vines and started out across the blasted open plain. Painfully, with infinite caution, it headed toward the slab of dark concrete and metal at the base of the mountains.

The hawk stopped circling.

"Get down!" O'Neill said sharply. "They've got those rigged with the new bombs."

His wife and Perine crouched down beside him and the three of them peered warily at the plain and the metal insect crawling laboriously across it. In the sky, the hawk swept in a straight line until it hung directly over the cart. Then, without sound or warning, it came down in a straight dive. Hands to her face, Judith shrieked, "I can't watch! It's awful! Like wild animals!"

"It's not after the cart," O'Neill grated.

As the airborne projectile dropped, the cart put on a burst of desperate speed. It raced noisily toward the factory, clanking and rattling, trying in a last futile attempt to reach safety. Forgetting the menace above, the frantically eager factory opened up and guided its mobile unit directly inside. And the hawk had what it wanted.

Before the barrier could close, the hawk swooped down in a long glide parallel with the ground. As the cart disappeared into the depths of the factory, the hawk shot after it, a swift shimmer of metal that hurtled past the clanking cart. Suddenly aware, the factory snapped the barrier shut. Grotesquely, the cart struggled; it was caught fast in the half-closed entrance.

But whether it freed itself didn't matter. There was a dull rumbling stir. The ground moved, billowed, then settled back. A deep shock wave passed beneath the three watching human beings. From the factory rose a single column of black smoke. The surface of concrete split like a dried pod; it shriveled and broke, and dribbled shattered bits of itself in a shower of ruin. The smoke hung for a while, drifting aimlessly away with the morning wind.

The factory was a fused, gutted wreck. It had been penetrated and destroyed.

O'Neill got stiffly to his feet. "That's that. All over with. We've got what we set out after—we've destroyed the autofac network." He glanced at Perine. "Or was that what we were after?"

They looked toward the settlement that lay behind them. Little remained of the orderly rows of houses and streets of the previous year. Without the network, the settlement had rapidly decayed. The original prosperous neatness had dissipated; the settlement was shabby, ill-kept.

"Of course," Perine said haltingly. "Once we get into the factories and start setting up our own assembly lines. . . ."

"Is there anything left?" Judith inquired.

"There must be something left. My God, there were levels going down miles!"

"Some of those bombs they developed toward the end were awfully big," Judith pointed out. "Better than anything we had in our war."

"Remember that camp we saw? The ruins-squatters?"

"I wasn't along," Perine said.

"They were like wild animals. Eating roots and larvae. Sharpening rocks, tanning hides. Savagery, Bestiality."

"But that's what people like that want," Perine answered defensively.

"Do they? Do we want this?" O'Neill indicated the straggling settlement. "Is this what we set out looking for, that day we collected the tungsten? Or that day we told the factory truck its milk was—" He couldn't remember the word.

"Pizzled," Judith supplied.

"Come on," O'Neill said. "Let's get started. Let's see what's left of that factory—left for us."

They approached the ruined factory late in the afternoon. Four trucks rumbled shakily up to the rim of the gutted pit and halted, motors steaming, tailpipes dripping. Wary and alert, workmen scrambled down and stepped gingerly across the hot ash.

"Maybe it's too soon," one of them objected.

O'Neill had no intention of waiting. "Come on," he ordered. Grabbing up a flashlight, he stepped down into the crater.

The sheltered hull of the Kansas City factory lay directly ahead. In its gutted mouth, the ore cart still hung caught, but it was no longer struggling. Beyond the cart was an ominous pool of gloom. O'Neill flashed his light through the entrance; the tangled, jagged remains of upright supports were visible.

"We want to get down deep," he said to Morrison, who prowled cautiously beside him. "If there's anything left, it's at the bottom."

Morrison grunted. "Those boring moles from Atlanta got most of the deep layers."

"Until the others got their mines sunk." O'Neill stepped carefully through the sagging entrance, climbed a heap of debris that had been tossed against the slit from inside, and found himself within the factory—an expanse of confused wreckage, without pattern or meaning.

"Entropy," Morrison breathed, oppressed. "The thing it always hated. The thing it was built to fight. Random particles everywhere. No purpose to it."

"Down underneath," O'Neill said stubbornly, "we may find some sealed enclaves. I know they got so they were dividing up into autonomous sections, trying to preserve repair units intact, to re-form the composite factory."

"The moles got most of them, too," Morrison observed, but he lumbered after O'Neill.

Behind them, the workmen came slowly. A section of wreckage shifted ominously and a shower of hot fragments cascaded down.

"You men get back to the trucks," O'Neill said. "No sense endangering any more of us than we have to. If Morrison and I don't come back, forget us—don't risk sending a rescue party." As they left, he pointed out to Morrison a descending ramp still partially intact. "Let's get below."

Silently, the two men passed one dead level after another. Endless miles of dark ruin stretched out, without sound or activity. The vague shapes of darkened machinery, unmoving belts and conveyer equipment were partially visible, and partially completed husks of war projectiles, bent and twisted by the final blast.

"We can salvage some of that," O'Neill said, but he didn't actually believe it. The machinery was fused, shapeless. Everything in the factory had run together, molten slag without form or use. "Once we get it to the surface."

"We can't," Morrison contradicted bitterly. "We don't have hoists or winches." He kicked at a heap of charred supplies that had stopped along its broken belt and spilled halfway across the ramp.

"It seemed like a good idea at the time," O'Neill said as the two of them continued past the vacant levels of inert machines. "But now that I look back, I'm not so sure."

They had penetrated a long way into the factory. The final level lap spread out ahead of them. O'Neill flashed the light here and there, trying to locate undestroyed sections, portions of the assembly process still intact.

It was Morrison who felt it first. He suddenly dropped to his hands and knees; heavy body pressed against the floor, he lay listening, face hard, eyes wide. "For God's sake—"

"What is it?" O'Neill cried. Then he, too, felt it. Beneath them, a faint, insistent vibration hummed through the floor, a steady hum of activity. They had been wrong; the hawk had not been totally successful. Below, in a deeper level, the factory was still alive. Closed, limited operations still went on.

"On its own," O'Neil muttered, searching for an extension of the descent lift. "Autonomous activity, set to continue after the rest is gone. How do we get down?"

The descent lift was broken off, sealed by a thick section of metal. The still-living layer beneath their feet was completely cut off; there was no entrance.

Racing back the way they had come, O'Neill reached the surface and hailed the first truck. "Where the hell's the torch? Give it here!"

The precious blowtorch was passed to him and he hurried back, puffing, into the depths of the ruined factory where Morrison waited. Together, the two of them began frantically cutting through the warped metal flooring, burning apart the sealed layers of protective mesh.

"It's coming," Morrison gasped, squinting in the glare of the torch. The plate fell with a clang, disappearing into the level below. A blaze of white light burst up around them and the two men leaped back.

In the sealed chamber, furious activity boomed and echoed, a steady process of moving belts, whirring machine-tools, fast-moving mechanical supervisors. At one end, a steady flow of raw materials entered the line; at the far end, the final product was whipped off, inspected and crammed into a conveyer tube.

All this was visible for a split second; then the intrusion was discovered. Robot relays came into play. The blaze of lights flickered and dimmed. The assembly line froze to a halt, stopped in its furious activity.

The machines clicked off and became silent.

At one end, a mobile unit detached itself and sped up the wall toward the hole O'Neill and Morrison had cut. It slammed an emergency seal in place and expertly welded it tight. The scene below was gone. A moment later the floor shivered as activity resumed.

Morrison, white-faced and shaking, turned to O'Neill. "What are they doing? What are they making?"

"Not weapons," O'Neill said.

"That stuff is being sent up"—Morrison gestured convulsively—"to the surface."

Shakily, O'Neill climbed to his feet. "Can we locate the spot?"

"I—think so."

"We better," O'Neill swept up the flashlight and started toward the ascent ramp. "We're going to have to see what those pellets are that they're shooting up."

The exit valve of the conveyor tube was concealed in a tangle of vines and ruins a quarter of a mile beyond the factory. In a slot of rock at the base of the mountain, the valve poked up like a nozzle. From ten yards away, it was visible; the two men were almost on top of it before they noticed it.

Every few moments, a pellet burst from the valve and shot up into the sky. The nozzle revolved and altered its angle of deflection; each pellet was launched in a slightly varied trajectory.

"How far are they going?" Morrison wondered.

"Probably varies. It's distributing them at random," O'Neill advanced cautiously, but the mechanism took no note of him. Plastered against the towering wall of rock was a crumpled pellet; by accident, the nozzle had released it directly at the mountainside. O'Neil climbed up, got it and jumped down.

The pellet was a smashed container of machinery, tiny metallic elements too minute to be analyzed without a microscope.

"Not a weapon," O'Neill said.

The cylinder had split. At first he couldn't tell if it had been the impact or deliberate internal mechanisms at work. From the rent, an ooze of metal bits was sliding. Squatting down, O'Neill examined them.

The bits were in motion. Microscopic machinery, smaller than ants, smaller than pins, working energetically, purposefully—constructing something that looked like a tiny rectangle of steel.

"They're building," O'Neill said, awed. He got up and prowled on. Off to the side, at the far edge of the gully, he came across a downed pellet far advanced on its construction. Apparently it had been released some time ago.

This one had made great enough progress to be identified. Minute as it was the structure was familiar. The machinery was building a miniature replica of the demolished factory.

"Well," O'Neill said thoughtfully, "we're back where we started from. For better or worse . . . I don't know."

"I guess they must be all over Earth by now," Morrison said, "landing everywhere and going to work."

A thought struck O'Neill. "Maybe some of them are geared to escape velocity. That would be neat—autofac networks throughout the whole universe."

Behind him, the nozzle continued to spurt out its torrent of metal seeds.

1955

TO SERVE THE MASTER

"To Serve the Master" was originally published in Imagination in 1956, and it has never been reprinted. It is a companion piece to "The Last of the Masters" reprinted earlier in this anthology. Whatever Dick creates, he challenges. Frustrating as this may be to readers who search through his fiction for final answers, it is true.

In "The Last of the Masters," we saw a world that had rebelled against the oppressive leadership of a robot capable only of maintaining a logical, regulated, mechanistic society. The robot could not respond with empathy to individual needs. Here in "To Serve the Master" the robot government has been replaced by a corporate structure run by men just as rigid and uncompromising as the robots were. They have driven the masses of little men into the underground of existence where they tunnel along in dull repetitive work. The leisure time to pursue art has vanished. For Dick any large organizational structure, be it corporate or governmental, becomes oppressive. Ideally, work and creativity should combine, as they do in characters like Frank Frink, who makes jewelry in The Man in the High Castle. The good fortune of the craftsman who combines art and industry is defined by its sharp contrast with the worker trapped in mechanical corporate production.

The reader faces the same dilemma as Applequist in "To Serve the Master." He hears two versions of a historical event, one in sharp contradiction to the other. Which is he to believe? Which is correct? Dick always refuses to provide answers since his credo insists that each individual has the responsibility to discover truth for himself. But the ruthless act at story's end gives a clue as to what Dick wants us to believe.

In 1956, the year this story was written, Dick wrote only four other works of short fiction because he began to concentrate on the novel form. He published his second and third novels—The World Jones Made and The Man Who Japed. The latter expands on the key idea of "To Serve the Master" in its portrayal of an oppressive government called Moral Reclamation that permits no deviation from its ideology.

Applequist was cutting across a deserted field, up a narrow path beside the yawning crack of a ravine, when he heard the voice.

He stopped frozen, hand on his S-pistol. For a long time he listened, but there was only the distant lap of the wind among the broken trees along the ridge, a hollow murmuring that mixed with the rustle of the dry grass beside him. The sound had come from the ravine. Its bottom was snarled and debris-filled. He crouched down at the lip and tried to locate the voice.

There was no motion. Nothing to give away the place. His legs began to ache. Flies buzzed at him, settled on his sweating forehead. The sun made his head ache; the dust clouds had been thin the last few months.

His radiation-proof watch told him it was three o'clock. Finally he shrugged and got stiffly to his feet. The hell with it. Let them send out an armed team. It wasn't his business; he was a letter carrier grade four, and a civilian.

As he climbed the hill toward the road, the sound came again. And this time, standing high above the ravine, he caught a flash of motion. Fear and puzzled disbelief touched him. It couldn't be—but he had seen it with his own eyes. It wasn't a newscircular rumor.

What was a robot doing down in the deserted ravine? All robots had been destroyed years ago. But there it lay, among the debris and weeds. A rusted, half-corroded wreck. Calling feebly up at him as he passed along the trail.

The Company defense ring admitted him through the three-stage lock into the tunnel area. He descended slowly, deep in thought all the way down to the organizational level. As he slid off his letter pack Assistant Supervisor Jenkins hurried over.

"Where the hell have you been? It's almost four."

"Sorry." Applequist turned his S-pistol over to a nearby guard. "What are the chances of a five hour pass? There's something I want to look into."

"Not a chance. You know they're scrapping the whole right wing setup. They need everybody on strict twenty-four hour alert."

Applequist began sorting letters. Most were personals between big-shot supervisors of the North American Companies. Letters to entertainment women beyond the Company peripheries. Letters to families and petitions from minor officials. "In that case," he said thoughtfully, "I'll have to go anyhow."

Jenkins eyed the young man suspiciously. "What's going on? Maybe you found some undamaged equipment left over from the war. An intact cache, buried someplace. Is that it?"

Applequist almost told him, at that point. But he didn't. "Maybe," he answered indifferently. "It's possible."

Jenkins shot him a grimace of hate and stalked off to roll aside the doors

of the observation chamber. At the big wall map officials were examining the day's activities. Half a dozen middle-aged men, most of them bald, collars dirty and stained, lounged around in chairs. In the corner Supervisor Rudde was sound asleep, fat legs stuck out in front of him, hairy chest visible under his open shirt. These were the men who ran the Detroit Company. Ten thousand families, the whole subsurface living-shelter, depended on them.

"What's on your mind?" a voice rumbled in Applequist's ear. Director Laws had come into the chamber and, as usual, taken him unawares.

"Nothing, sir," Applequist answered. But the keen eyes, blue as china, bored through and beneath. "The usual fatigue. My tension index is up. I've been meaning to take some of my leave, but with all the work . . ."

"Don't try to fool me. A fourth-class letter carrier isn't needed. What are you really getting at?"

"Sir," Applequist said bluntly, "why were the robots destroyed?"

There was silence. Laws' heavy face registered surprise, then hostility. Before he could speak Applequist hurried on: "I know my class is forbidden to make theoretical inquiries. But it's very important I find out."

"The subject is closed," Laws rumbled ominously. "Even to top-level personnel."

"What did the robots have to do with the war? Why was the war fought? What was life like before the war?"

"The subject," Laws repeated, "is closed." He moved slowly toward the wall map and Applequist was left standing alone, in the middle of the clicking machines, among the murmuring officials and bureaucrats.

Automatically, he resumed sorting letters. There had been the war, and robots were involved in it. That much he knew. A few had survived; when he was a child his father had taken him to an industrial center and he had seen them at their machines. Once, there had been more complex types. Those were all gone; even the simple ones would soon be scrapped. Absolutely no more were manufactured.

"*What happened?*" he had asked, as his father dragged him away. "Where did all the robots go?"

No answer then either. That was sixteen years ago, and now the last had been scrapped. Even the memory of robots was disappearing; in a few years the word itself would cease. *Robots*. What had happened?

He finished with the letters and moved out of the chamber. None of the supervisors noticed; they were arguing some erudite point of strategy. Maneuvering and countermaneuvering among the Companies. Tension and exchanged insults. He found a crushed cigarette in his pocket and inexpertly lit it up.

"Dinner call," the passage speaker announced tinnily. "One hour break for top class personnel."

A few supervisors filed noisily past him. Applequist crushed out his cigarette and moved toward his station. He worked until six. Then his dinner hour came up. No other break until Saturday. But if he went without dinner. . . .

The robot was probably a low-order type, scrapped with the final group. The inferior kind he had seen as a child. It couldn't be one of the elaborate war-time robots. To have survived in the ravine, rusting and rotting through the years since the war. . . .

His mind skirted the hope. Heart pounding, he entered a lift and touched the stud. By nightfall he'd know.

The robot lay among heaps of metal slag and weeds. Jagged, rusted fragments barred Applequist's way as he moved cautiously down the side of the ravine, S-gun in one hand, radiation mask pulled tight over his face.

His counter clicked loudly: the floor of the ravine was hot. Pools of contamination, over the reddish metal fragments, the piles and masses of fused steel and plastic and gutted equipment. He kicked webs of blackened wiring aside and gingerly stepped past the yawning fuel-tank of some ancient machine, now overgrown with vines. A rat scuttled off. It was almost sunset. Dark shadows lay over everything.

The robot was watching him silently. Half of it was gone; only the head, arms, and upper trunk remained. The lower waist ended in shapeless struts, abruptly sliced off. It was clearly immobile. Its whole surface was pitted and corroded. One eye-lens was missing. Some of its metal fingers were bent grotesquely. It lay on its back facing the sky.

It was a war-time robot, all right. In the one remaining eye glinted archaic consciousness. This was not the simple worker he had glimpsed as a child. Applequist's breath hammered in his throat. This was the real thing. It was following his movements intently. It was alive.

All this time, Applequist thought. *All these years*. The hackles of his neck rose. Everything was silent, the hills and trees and masses of ruin. Nothing stirred; he and the ancient robot were the only living things. *Down here in this crack waiting for somebody to come along*.

A cold wind rustled at him and he automatically pulled his overcoat together. Some leaves blew over the inert face of the robot. Vines had crept along its trunk, twisted into its works. It had been rained on; the sun had shone on it. In winter the snow had covered it. Rats and animals had sniffed at it. Insects had crawled through it. And it was still alive.

"I heard you," Applequist muttered. "I was walking along the path."

Presently the robot said, "I know. I saw you stop." Its voice was faint and dry. Like ashes rubbing together. Without quality or pitch. "Would you make the date known to me? I suffered a power failure for an indefinite period. Wiring terminals shorted temporarily."

"It's June 11," Applequist said. "2136," he added.

The robot was obviously hoarding its meager strength. It moved one arm slightly, then let it fall back. Its one good eye blurred over, and deep within, gears whirled rustily. Realization came to Applequist: the robot might expire any moment. It was a miracle it had survived this long. Snails clung to its body. It was crisscrossed with slimy trails. A century....

"How long have you been here?" he demanded. "Since the war?"

"Yes."

Applequist grinned nervously. "That's a long time. Over a hundred years."

"That's so."

It was getting dark fast. Automatically, Applequist fumbled for his flashlight. He could hardly make out the sides of the ravine. Someplace a long way off a bird croaked dismally in the darkness. The bushes rustled.

"I need help," the robot said. "Most of my motor equipment was destroyed. I can't move from here."

"In what condition is the rest of you? Your energy supply. How long can—"

"There's been considerable cell destruction. Only a limited number of relay circuits still function. And those are overloaded." The robot's one good eye was on him again. "What is the technological situation? I have seen air-borne ships fly overhead. You still manufacture and maintain electronic equipment?"

"We operate an industrial unit near Pittsburgh."

"If I describe basic electronic units will you understand?" the robot asked.

"I'm not trained in mechanical work. I'm classed as a fourth-grade letter carrier. But I have contacts in the repair department. We keep our own machines functioning." He licked his lips tensely. "It's risky, of course. There are laws."

"Laws?"

"All robots were destroyed. You are the only one left. The rest were liquidated years ago."

No expression showed in the robot's eye. "Why did you come down here?" it demanded. Its eye moved to the S-gun in Applequist's hand. "You are a minor official in some hierarchy. Acting on orders from above. A mechanically operating integer in a larger system."

Applequist laughed. "I suppose so." Then he stopped laughing. "Why was the war fought? What was life like before?"

"Don't you know?"

"Of course not. No theoretical knowledge is permitted, except to top-level personnel. And even the Supervisors don't know about the war."

Applequist squatted down and shone the beam of his flashlight into the darkening face of the robot. "Things were different before, weren't they? We didn't always live in subsurface shelters. The world wasn't always a scrap heap. People didn't always slave for their Companies."

"Before the war there were no Companies."

Applequist grunted with triumph. "I knew it."

"Men lived in cities, which were demolished in the war. Companies, which were protected, survived. Officials of these Companies became the government. The war lasted a long time. Everything of value was destroyed. What you have left is a burned out shell." The robot was silent a moment and then continued, "The first robot was built in 1979. By 2000 all routine work was done by robots. Human beings were free to do what they wanted. Art, science, entertainment, whatever they liked."

"What is art?" Applequist asked.

"Creative work, directed toward realization of an internal standard. The whole population of the earth was free to expand culturally. Robots maintained the world; man enjoyed it."

"What were cities like?"

"Robots rebuilt and reconstructed new cities according to plans drawn up by human artists. Clean, sanitary, attractive. They were the cities of gods."

"Why was the war fought?"

The robot's single eye flickered. "I've already talked too much. My power supply is dangerously low."

Applequist trembled. "What do you need? I'll get it."

"Immediately, I need an atomic A pack. Capable of putting out 10,000 f-units."

"Yes."

"After that I'll need tools and aluminum sections. Low resistance wiring. Bring pen and paper—I'll give you a list. You won't understand it, but someone in electronic maintenance will. A power supply is the first need."

"And you'll tell me about the war?"

"Of course." The robot's dry rasp faded into silence. Shadows flickered around it; cold evening air stirred the dark weeds and bushes. "Kindly hurry. Tomorrow, if possible."

"I ought to turn you in," Assistant Supervisor Jenkins snapped. "Half an hour late, and now this business. What are you doing? You want to get fired out of the Company?"

Applequist pushed close to the man. "I have to get this stuff. The—cache is below surface. I have to construct a secure passage. Otherwise the whole thing will be buried by falling debris."

"How large a cache is it?" Greed edged suspicion off Jenkin's gnarled face. He was already spending the Company reward. "Have you been able to see in? Are there unknown machines?"

"I didn't recognize any," Applequist said impatiently. "Don't waste time. The whole mass of debris is apt to collapse. I have to work fast."

"Where is it? I want to see it!"

"I'm doing this alone. You supply the material and cover for my absence. That's your part."

Jenkins twisted uncertainly. "If you're lying to me, Applequist—"

"I'm not lying," Applequist answered angrily. "When can I expect the power unit?"

"Tomorrow morning. I'll have to fill out a bushel of forms. Are you sure you can operate it? I better send a repair team along with you. To be sure—"

"I can handle it," Applequist interrupted. "Just get me the stuff. I'll take care of the rest."

Morning sunlight filtered over the rubble and trash. Applequist nervously fitted the new power pack in place, screwed the leads tight, clamped the corroded shield over it, and then got shakily to his feet. He tossed away the old pack and waited.

The robot stirred. Its eye gained life and awareness. Presently it moved its arm in exploratory motions, over its damaged trunk and shoulders.

"All right?" Applequist demanded huskily.

"Apparently." The robot's voice was stronger; full and more confident. "The old power pack was virtually exhausted. It was fortunate you came along when you did."

"You say men lived in cities," Applequist plunged in eagerly. "Robots did the work?"

"Robots did the routine labor needed to maintain the industrial system. Humans had leisure to enjoy whatever they wanted. We were glad to do their work for them. It was our job."

"What happened? What went wrong?"

The robot accepted the pencil and paper; as it talked it carefully wrote down figures. "There was a fanatic group of humans. A religious organization. They claimed that God intended man to work by the sweat of his brow. They wanted robots scrapped and men put back in the factories to slave away at routine tasks."

"But why?"

"They claimed work was spiritually ennobling." The robot tossed the paper back. "Here's the list of what I want. I'll need those materials and tools to restore my damaged system."

Applequist fingered the paper. "This religious group—"

"Men separated in two factions. The Moralists and the Leisurists. They fought each other for years, while we stood on the sidelines waiting to know our fate. I couldn't believe the Moralists would win out over reason and common sense. But they did."

"Do you think—" Applequist began, and then broke off. He could hardly

give voice to the thought that was struggling inside him. "Is there a chance robots might be brought back?"

"Your meaning is obscure." The robot abruptly snapped the pencil in half and threw it away. "What are you driving at?"

"Life isn't pleasant in the Companies. Death and hard work. Forms and shifts and work periods and orders."

"It's your system. I'm not responsible."

"How much do you recall about robot construction? What were you, before the war?"

"I was a unit controller. I was on my way to an emergency unit-factory, when my ship was shot down." The robot indicated the debris around it. "That was my ship and cargo."

"What is a unit controller?"

"I was in charge of robot manufacture. I designed and put into production basic robot types."

Applequist's head spun dizzily. "Then you do know robot construction."

"Yes." The robot gestured urgently at the paper in Applequist's hand. "Kindly get those tools and materials as soon as possible. I'm completely helpless this way. I want my mobility back. If a rocketship should fly overhead. . . ."

"Communication between Companies is bad. I deliver my letters on foot. Most of the country is in ruins. You could work undetected. What about your emergency unit-factory? Maybe it wasn't destroyed."

The robot nodded slowly. "It was carefully concealed. There is the bare possibility. It was small, but completely outfitted. Self-sufficient."

"If I get repair parts, can you—"

"We'll discuss this later." The robot sank back down. "When you return, we'll talk further."

He got the material from Jenkins, and a twenty-four hour pass. Fascinated, he crouched against the wall of the ravine as the robot systematically pulled apart its own body and replaced the damaged elements. In a few hours a new motor system had been installed. Basic leg cells were welded into position. By noon the robot was experimenting with its pedal extremities.

"During the night," the robot said, "I was able to make weak radio contact with the emergency unit-factory. It exists intact, according to the robot monitor."

"Robot? You mean—"

"An automatic machine for relaying transmission. Not alive, as I am. Strictly speaking, I'm not a robot." Its voice swelled. "I'm an android."

The fine distinction was lost on Applequist. His mind was racing excitedly over the possibilities. "Then we can go ahead. With your knowledge, and the materials available at the—"

"You didn't see the terror and destruction. The Moralists systematically

demolished us. Each town they seized was cleared of androids. Those of my race were brutally wiped out, as the Leisurists retreated. We were torn from our machines and destroyed."

"But that was a century ago! Nobody wants to destroy robots any more. We need robots to rebuild the world. The Moralists won the war and left the world in ruins."

The robot adjusted its motor system until its legs were coordinated. "Their victory was a tragedy, but I understand the situation better than you. We must advance cautiously. If we are wiped out this time, it may be for good."

Applequist followed after the robot as it moved hesitantly through the debris toward the wall of the ravine. "We're crushed by work. Slaves in underground shelters. We can't go on this way. People will welcome robots. We need you. When I think how it must have been in the Golden Age, the foundations and flowers, the beautiful cities above ground. . . . Now there's nothing but ruin and misery. The Moralists won, but nobody's happy. We'd gladly—"

"Where are we? What is the location here?"

"Slightly west of the Mississippi a few miles or so. We must have freedom. We can't live this way, toiling underground. If we had free time we could investigate the mysteries of the whole universe. I found some old scientific tapes. Theoretical work in biology. Those men spent years working on abstract topics. They had the time. They were free. While robots maintained the economic system those men could go out—"

"During the war," the robot said thoughtfully, "the Moralists rigged up detection screens over hundreds of square miles. Are those screens still functioning?"

"I don't know. I doubt it. Nothing outside of the immediate Company shelters still works."

The robot was deep in thought. It had replaced its ruined eye with a new cell; both eyes flickered with concentration. "Tonight we'll make plans concerning your Company. I'll let you know my decision, then. Meanwhile, don't bring this situation up with anyone. You understand? Right now I'm concerned with the road system."

"Most roads are in ruins." Applequist tried hard to hold back his excitement. "I'm convinced most in my Company are—Leisurists. Maybe a few at the top are Moralists. Some of the supervisors, perhaps. But the lower classes and families—"

"All right," the robot interrupted. "We'll see about that later." It glanced around. "I can use some of that damaged equipment. Part of it will function. For the moment, at least."

Applequist managed to avoid Jenkins, as he hurriedly made his way across the organizational level to his work station. His mind was in a

turmoil. Everything around him seemed vague and unconvincing. The quarreling supervisors. The clattering, humming machines. Clerks and minor bureaucrats hurrying back and forth with messages and memoranda. He grabbed a mass of letters and mechanically began sorting them into their slots.

"You've been outside," Director Laws observed sourly. "What is it, a girl? If you marry outside the Company you lose the little rating you have."

Applequist pushed aside his letters. "Director, I want to talk to you."

Director Laws shook his head. "Be careful. You know the ordinances governing fourth-class personnel. Better not ask any more questions. Keep your mind on your work and leave the theoretical issues to us."

"Director," Applequist asked "which side was our Company, Moralist or Leisureist?"

Laws didn't seem to understand the question. "What do you mean? He shook his head. "I don't know those words."

"In the war. Which side of the war were we on?"

"Good God," Laws said. "The human side, of course." An expression like a curtain dropped over his heavy face. "What do you mean, *Moralist*? What are you talking about?"

Suddenly Applequist was sweating. His voice would hardly come. "Director, something's wrong. The war was between the two groups of humans. The Moralists destroyed the robots because they disapproved of humans living in leisure."

"The war was fought between men and robots," Laws said harshly. "We won. We destroyed the robots."

"But they worked for us!"

"They were built as workers, but they revolted. They had a philosophy. Superior beings—androids. They considered us nothing but cattle."

Applequist was shaking all over. "But it told me—"

"They slaughtered us. Millions of humans died, before we got the upper hand. They murdered, lied, hid, stole, did everything to survive. It was them or us—no quarter." Laws grabbed Applequist by the collar. "You damn fool! What the hell have you done? Answer me! What have you done?"

The sun was setting, as the armored twin-track roared up to the edge of the ravine. Troops leaped out and poured down the sides, S-rifles clattering. Laws emerged quickly, Applequist beside him.

"This is the place?" Laws demanded.

"Yes." Applequist sagged. "But it's gone."

"Naturally. It was fully repaired. There was nothing to keep it here." Laws signalled his men. "No use looking. Plant a tactical A-bomb and let's get out of here. The air fleet may be able to catch it. We'll spray this area with radioactive gas."

Applequist wandered numbly to the edge of the ravine. Below, in the darkening shadows, were the weeds and tumbled debris. There was no sign of the robot, of course. A place where it had been, bits of wire and discarded body sections. The old power pack where he had thrown it. A few tools. Nothing else.

"Come on," Laws ordered his men. "Let's get moving. We have a lot to do. Get the general alarm system going."

The troops began climbing the sides of the ravine. Applequist started after them, toward the twin-track.

"No," Laws said quickly. "You're not coming with us."

Applequist saw the look on their faces. The pent-up fear, the frantic terror and hate. He tried to run, but they were on him almost at once. They worked grimly and silently. When they were through they kicked aside his still-living remains and climbed into the twin-track. They slammed the locks and the motor thundered up. The track rumbled down the trail to the road. In a few moments it dwindled and was gone.

He was alone, with the half-buried bomb and the settling shadows. And the vast empty darkness that was collecting everywhere.

WAR GAME

The robots in this story have diminished to toy soldiers, just as in "The Little Movement," the opening story in the anthology. There the soldiers were malevolent devices that used a child to advance their own purposes; in this story they befriend the child by performing a therapeutic function. He learns he does not need to give away his sense of power to authority figures around him but can internalize this power and become his own authority figure. Obviously such a toy is dangerous, and the authorities refuse to release it for sale to the general public.

In 1959 when this story was published, Philip K. Dick's personal life had undergone a radical change. In the fall of 1958 he and his wife Kleo moved from Berkeley to Pt. Reyes Station in Marin County. It was the first time he had ever lived outside an urban area. His marriage was disrupted when, a month after moving, he met and fell in love with Anne Rubenstein, a young widow and mother of three small children. Kleo returned to Berkeley and in 1959 he and Anne were married. Overnight he became a family man. He spent hours playing games with his three stepdaughters, and one of their favorites was Monopoly. They also delighted in their Barbie dolls. Watching them play, he realized the power of the imagination to create a fantasy world more compelling than the real world. The cowboy suit in this story is a metaphor for that power. In one of his greatest novels, written a few years later—The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch—he transformed those Barbie dolls into the drug-induced illusory world that imprisons the settlers on Mars.

"War Game" presents one of Dick's deepest convictions: He who plays and wins the game of greed and violence is really the loser. "Ob, To Be A Blobel," written a few years later, makes the same statement.

In his office at the Terran Import Bureau of Standards, the tall man gathered up the morning's memos from their wire basket, and, seating himself at his desk, arranged them for reading. He put on his iris lenses, lit a cigarette.

"Good morning," the first memo said in its tinny, chattery voice, as Wiseman ran his thumb along the line of pasted tape. Staring off through the open window at the parking lot, he listened to it idly. "Say look, what's wrong with you people down there? We sent that lot of"—a pause as the speaker, the sales manager of a chain of New York department stores, found his records—"those Ganymedeans toys. You realize we have to get them approved in time for the autumn buying plan, so we can get them stocked for Christmas." Grumbling, the sales manager concluded, "War games are going to be an important item again this year. We intend to buy big."

Wiseman ran his thumb down to the speaker's name and title.

"Joe Hauck," the memo-voice chattered. "Appeley's Children's."

To himself, Wiseman said, "Ah." He put down the memo, got a blank and prepared to reply. And then he said, half-aloud, "Yes, what about that lot of Ganymedeans toys?"

It seemed like a long time that the testing labs had been on them. At least two weeks.

Of course, any Ganymedeans products got special attention these days; the Moons had, during the last year, gotten beyond their usual state of economic greed and had begun—according to intelligence circles—mulling overt military action against competitive interests, of which the Inner Three planets could be called the foremost element. But so far nothing had shown up. Exports remained of adequate quality, with no special jokers, no toxic paint to be licked off, no capsules of bacteria.

And yet. . . .

Any group of people as inventive as the Ganymedeans could be expected to show creativity in whatever field they entered. Subversion would be tackled like any other venture—with imagination and a flair for wit.

Wiseman got to his feet and left his office, in the direction of the separate building in which the testing labs operated.

Surrounded by half-disassembled consumers' products, Pinario looked up to see his boss, Leon Wiseman, shutting the final door of the lab.

"I'm glad you came down," Pinario said, although actually he was stalling; he knew that he was at least five days behind in his work, and this session was going to mean trouble. "Better put on a prophylaxis suit—don't want to take risks." He spoke pleasantly, but Wiseman's expression remained dour.

"I'm here about those inner-citadel-storming shock troops at six dollars a

set," Wiseman said, strolling among the stacks of many-sized unopened products waiting to be tested and released.

"Oh, that set of Ganymedeian toy soldiers," Pinario said with relief. His conscience was clear on that item; every tester in the labs knew the special instructions handed down by the Cheyenne Government on the Dangers of Contamination from Culture Particles Hostile to Innocent Urban Populations, a typically muddy ukase from officialdom. He could always—legitimately—fall back and cite the number of that directive. "I've got them off by themselves," he said, walking over to accompany Wiseman, "due to the special danger involved."

"Let's have a look," Wiseman said. "Do you believe there's anything in this caution, or is it more paranoia about 'alien milieux'?"

Pinario said, "It's justified, especially where children's artifacts are concerned."

A few hand-signals, and a slab of wall exposed a side room.

Propped up in the center was a sight that caused Wiseman to halt. A plastic life-size dummy of a child, perhaps five years in appearance, wearing ordinary clothes, sat surrounded by toys. At this moment, the dummy was saying, "I'm tired of that. Do something else." It paused a short time, and then repeated, "I'm tired of that. Do something else."

The toys on the floor, triggered to respond to oral instructions, gave up their various occupations, and started afresh.

"It saves on labor costs," Pinario explained. "This is a crop of junk that's got an entire repertoire to go through, before the buyer has his money's worth. If we stuck around to keep them active, we'd be in here all the time."

Directly before the dummy was the group of Ganymedeian soldiers, plus the citadel which they had been built to storm. They had been sneaking up on it in an elaborate pattern, but, at the dummy's utterance, they had halted. Now they were regrouping.

"You're getting this all on tape?" Wiseman asked.

"Oh, yes," Pinario said.

The model soldiers stood approximately six inches high, made from the almost indestructible thermoplastic compounds that the Ganymedeian manufactures were famous for. Their uniforms were synthetic, a hodge-podge of various military costumes from the Moons and nearby planets. The citadel itself, a block of ominous dark metallike stuff, resembled a legendary fort; peep-holes dotted its upper surfaces, a drawbridge had been drawn up out of sight, and from the top turret a gaudy flag waved.

With a whistling pop, the citadel fired a projectile at its attackers. The projectile exploded in a cloud of harmless smoke and noise, among a cluster of soldiers.

"It fights back," Wiseman observed.

"But ultimately it loses," Pinario said. "It has to. Psychologically speaking,

it symbolizes the external reality. The dozen soldiers, of course, represent to the child his own effort to cope. By participating in the storming of the citadel, the child undergoes a sense of adequacy in dealing with the harsh world. Eventually he prevails, but only after a painstaking period of effort and patience." He added, "Anyhow, that's what the instruction booklet says." He handed Wiseman the booklet.

Glancing over the booklet, Wiseman asked, "And their pattern of assault varies each time?"

"We've had it running for eight days now. The same pattern hasn't cropped up twice. Well, you've got quite a few units involved."

The soldiers were sneaking around, gradually nearing the citadel. On the walls, a number of monitoring devices appeared and began tracking the soldiers. Utilizing other toys being tested, the soldiers concealed themselves.

"They can incorporate accidental configurations of terrain," Pinario explained. "They're object-tropic; when they see, for example, a dollhouse here for testing, they climb into it like mice. They'll be all through it." To prove his point, he picked up a large toy spaceship manufactured by a Uranian company; shaking it, he spilled two soldiers from it.

"How many times do they take the citadel," Wiseman asked, "on a percentage basis?"

"So far, they've been successful one out of nine tries. There's an adjustment in the back of the citadel. You can set it for a higher yield of successful tries."

He threaded a path through the advancing soldiers; Wiseman accompanied him, and they bent down to inspect the citadel.

"This is actually the power supply," Pinario said. "Cunning. Also, the instructions to the soldiers emanate from it. High-frequency transmission, from a shot-box."

Opening the back of the citadel, he showed his boss the container of shot. Each shot was an instruction iota. For an assault pattern, the shot were tossed up, vibrated, allowed to settle in a new sequence. Randomness was thereby achieved. But since there was a finite number of shot, there had to be a finite number of patterns.

"We're trying them all," Pinario said.

"And there's no way to speed it up?"

"It'll just have to take time. It may run through a thousand patterns and then—"

"The next one," Wiseman finished, "may have them make a ninety-degree turn and start firing at the nearest human being."

Pinario said somberly, "Or worse. There're a good deal of ergs in that power pack. It's made to put out for five years. But if it all went into something simultaneously—"

"Keep testing," Wiseman said.

They looked at each other and then at the citadel. The soldiers had by now almost reached it. Suddenly one wall of the citadel flapped down; a gun-muzzle appeared, and the soldiers had been flattened.

"I never saw that before," Pinario murmured.

For a moment nothing stirred. And then the lab's child-dummy, seated among its toys, said, "I'm tired of that. Do something else."

With a tremor of uneasiness, the two men watched the soldiers pick themselves up and regroup.

Two days later, Wiseman's superior, a heavy-set, short, angry man with popping eyes, appeared in his office. "Listen," Fowler said, "you get those damn toys out of testing. I'll give you until tomorrow." He started back out, but Wiseman stopped him.

"This is too serious," he said. "Come down to the lab and I'll show you."

Arguing all the way, Fowler accompanied him to the lab. "You have no concept of the capital some of these firms have invested in this stuff!" he was saying as they entered. "For every product you've got represented here, there's a ship or a warehouse full on Luna, waiting for official clearance so it can come in!"

Pinario was nowhere in sight. So Wiseman used his key, bypassing the hand-signals that opened up the testing room.

There, surrounded by toys, sat the dummy that the lab men had built. Around it the numerous toys went through their cycles. The racket made Fowler wince.

"This is the item in particular," Wiseman said, bending down by the citadel. A soldier was in the process of squirming on his belly toward it. "As you can see, there are a dozen soldiers. Given that many, and the energy available to them, plus the complex instruction data—"

Fowler interrupted, "I see only eleven."

"One's probably hiding," Wiseman said.

From behind them, a voice said, "No, he's right." Pinario, a rigid expression on his face, appeared. "I've been having a search made. One is gone." The three men were silent.

"Maybe the citadel destroyed him," Wiseman finally suggested.

Pinario said, "There's a law of matter dealing with that. If it 'destroyed' him—*what did it do with the remains?*"

"Possibly converted him into energy," Fowler said, examining the citadel and the remaining soldiers.

"We did something ingenious," Pinario said, "when we realized that a soldier was gone. We weighed the remaining eleven plus the citadel. Their combined weight is exactly equal to that of the original set—the original dozen soldiers and the citadel. So he's in there somewhere." He pointed at

the citadel, which at the moment was pinpointing the soldiers advancing toward it.

Studying the citadel, Wiseman had a deep intuitive feeling. It had changed. It was, in some manner, different.

"Run your tapes," Wiseman said.

"What?" asked Pinario, and then he flushed. "Of course." Going to the child-dummy, he shut it off, opened it, and removed the drum of video recording tape. Shakily, he carried it to the projector.

They sat watching the recording sequences flash by: one assault after another, until the three of them were bleary-eyed. The soldiers advanced, retreated, were fired on, picked themselves up, advanced again. . . .

"Stop the transport," Wiseman said suddenly.

The last sequence was re-run.

A soldier moved steadily toward the base of the citadel. A missile, fired at him, exploded and for a time obscured him. Meanwhile, the other eleven soldiers scurried in a wild attempt to mount the walls. The soldier emerged from the cloud of dust and continued. He reached the wall. A section slid back.

The soldier, blending with the dingy wall of the citadel, used the end of his rifle as a screwdriver to remove his head, then one arm, then both legs. The disassembled pieces were passed into the aperture of the citadel. When only the arm and rifle remained, that, too, crawled into the citadel, worming blindly, and vanished. The aperture slide out of existence.

After a long time, Fowler said in a hoarse voice, "The presumption by the parent would be that the child had lost or destroyed one of the soldiers. Gradually the set would dwindle—with the child getting the blame."

Pinario said, "What do you recommend?"

"Keep it in action," Fowler said, with a nod from Wiseman. "Let it work its cycle. But don't leave it alone."

"I'll have somebody in the room with it from now on," Pinario agreed.

"Better yet, stay with it yourself," Fowler said.

To himself, Wiseman thought: *Maybe we all better stay with it. At least two of us, Pinario and myself.*

I wonder what it did with the pieces, he thought.

What did it make?

By the end of the week, the citadel had absorbed four more of the soldiers.

Watching it through a monitor, Wiseman could see in it no visible change. Naturally. The growth would be strictly internal, down out of sight.

On and on the eternal assaults, the soldiers wriggling up, the citadel firing in defense. Meanwhile, he had before him a new series of Ganymedeian products. More recent children's toys to be inspected.

"Now what?" he asked himself.

The first was an apparently simple item: a cowboy costume from the ancient American West. At least, so it was described. But he paid only cursory attention to the brochure: the hell with what the Ganymedeans had to say about it.

Opening the box, he laid out the costume. The fabric had a gray, amorphous quality. *What a miserably bad job*, he thought. It only vaguely resembled a cowboy suit; the lines seemed unformed, hesitant. And the material stretched out of shape as he handled it. He found that he had pulled an entire section of it into a pocket that hung down.

"I don't get it," he said to Pinario. "This won't sell."

"Put it on," Pinario said. "You'll see."

With effort, Wiseman managed to squeeze himself into the suit. "Is it safe?" he asked.

"Yes," Pinario said. "I had it on earlier. This is a more benign idea. But it could be effective. To start it into action, you fantasize."

"Along what lines?"

"Any lines."

The suit made Wiseman think of cowboys, and so he imagined to himself that he was back at the ranch, trudging along the gravel road by the field in which black-faced sheep munched hay with that odd, rapid grinding motion of their lower jaws. He had stopped at the fence—barbed wire and occasional upright posts—and watched the sheep. Then, without warning, the sheep lined up and headed off, in the direction of a shaded hillside beyond his range of vision.

He saw trees, cypress growing against the skyline. A chicken hawk, far up, flapped its wings in a pumping action . . . *as if*, he thought, *it's filling itself with more air, to rise higher*. The hawk glided energetically off, then sailed at a leisurely pace. Wiseman looked for a sign of its prey. Nothing but the dry mid-summer fields munched flat by the sheep. Frequent grasshoppers. And, on the road itself, a toad. The toad had burrowed into the loose dirt; only its top part was visible.

As he bent down, trying to get up enough courage to touch the warty top of the toad's head, a man's voice said nearby him, "How do you like it?"

"Fine," Wiseman said. He took a deep breath of the dry grass smell; he filled his lungs. "Hey, how do you tell a female toad from a male toad? By the spots, or what?"

"Why?" asked the man, standing behind him slightly out of sight.

"I've got a toad here."

"Just for the record," the man said, "can I ask you a couple of questions?"

"Sure," Wiseman said.

"How old are you?"

That was easy. "Ten years and four months," he said, with pride.

"Where exactly are you, at this moment?"

"Out in the country, Mr. Gaylord's ranch, where my dad takes me and my mother every weekend when we can."

"Turn around and look at me," the man said, "and tell me if you know me."

With reluctance, he turned from the half-buried toad to look. He saw an adult with a thin face and a long, somewhat irregular nose. "You're the man who delivers the butane gas," he said. "For the butane company." He glanced around, and sure enough, there was the truck parked by the butane gate. "My dad says butane is expensive, but there's no other—"

The man broke in, "Just for the sake of curiosity, what's the name of the butane company?"

"It's right on the truck," Wiseman said, reading the large painted letters. "Pinario Butane Distributors, Petaluma, California. You're Mr. Pinario."

"Would you be willing to swear that you're ten years old, standing in a field near Petaluma, California?" Mr. Pinario asked.

"Sure." He could see, beyond the field, a range of wooded hills. Now he wanted to investigate them; he was tired of standing around gabbing. "I'll see you," he said, starting off. "I have to go get some hiking done."

He started running, away from Mr. Pinario, down the gravel road. Grasshoppers leaped away, ahead of him. Gasping, he ran faster and faster.

"Leon!" Mr. Pinario called after him. "You might as well give up! Stop running!"

"I've got business in those hills," Wiseman panted, still jogging along. Suddenly something struck him full force; he sprawled on his hands, tried to get back up. In the dry midday air, something shimmered; he felt fear and pulled away from it. A shape formed, a flat wall . . .

"You won't get to those hills," Mr. Pinario said, from behind him. "Better stay in roughly one place. Otherwise you collide with things."

Wiseman's hands were damp with blood; he had cut himself falling. In bewilderment, he stared down at the blood. . . .

Pinario helped him out of the cowboy suit, saying, "It's as unwholesome a toy as you could want. A short period with it on, and the child would be unable to face contemporary reality. Look at you."

Standing with difficulty, Wiseman inspected the suit; Pinario had forcibly taken it from him.

"Not bad," he said in a trembling voice. "It obviously stimulates the withdrawal tendencies already present. I know I've always had a latent retreat fantasy toward my childhood. That particular period when we lived in the country."

"Notice how you incorporated real elements into it," Pinario said, "to

keep the fantasy going as long as possible. If you'd had time, you would have figured a way of incorporating the lab wall into it, possibly as the side of a barn."

Wiseman admitted, "I—already had started to see the old dairy building, where the farmers brought their market milk."

"In time," Pinario said, "it would have been next to impossible to get you out of it."

To himself, Wiseman thought, *If it could do that to an adult, just imagine the effect on a child.*

"That other thing you have there," Pinario said, "that game, it's a screwball notion. You feel like looking at it now? It can wait."

"I'm okay," Wiseman said. He picked up the third item and began to open it.

"A lot like the old game of Monopoly," Pinario said. "It's called Syndrome."

The game consisted of a board, plus play money, dice, pieces to represent the players. And stock certificates.

"You acquire stock," Pinario said, "same as in all this kind, obviously." He didn't even both to look at the instructions. "Let's get Fowler down here and play a hand; it takes a least three."

Shortly, they had the Division Director with them. The three men seated themselves at a table, the game of Syndrome in the center.

"Each player starts out equal with the others," Pinario explained, "same as all this type, and during the play, their statuses change according to the worth of the stock they acquire in various economic syndromes."

The syndromes were represented by small, bright plastic objects, much like the archaic hotels and houses of Monopoly.

They threw the dice, moved their counters along the board, bid for and acquired property, paid fines, collected fines, went to the "decontamination chamber" for a period. Meanwhile, behind them, the seven model soldiers crept up on the citadel again and again.

"I'm tired of that," the child-dummy said. "Do something else."

The soldiers regrouped. Once more they started out, getting nearer and nearer the citadel.

Restless and irritable, Wiseman said, "I wonder how long that damn thing has to go on before we find out what it's for."

"No telling," Pinario eyed a purple-and-gold share of stock that Fowler had acquired. "I can use that," he said. "That's a heavy uranium mine stock on Pluto. What do you want for it?"

"Valuable property," Fowler murmured, consulting his other stocks. "I *might* make a trade, though."

How can I concentrate on a game, Wiseman asked himself, *when that*

thing is getting closer and nearer to—God knows what? To whatever it was built to reach. Its critical mass, he thought.

"Just a second," he said in a slow, careful voice. He put down his hand of stocks. "Could that citadel be a pile?"

"Pile of what?" Fowler asked, concerned with his hand.

Wiseman said loudly, "Forget this game."

"An interesting idea," Pinario said, also putting down his hand. "It's constructing itself into an atomic bomb, piece by piece. Adding until—" He broke off. "No, we thought of that. There're no heavy elements present in it. It's simply a five-year battery, plus a number of small machines controlled by instructions broadcast from the battery itself. You can't make an atomic pile out of that."

"In my opinion," Wiseman said, "we'd be safer getting it out of here." His experience with the cowboy suit had given him a great deal more respect for the Ganymedean artificers. And if the suit was the benign one, . . .

Fowler, looking past his shoulder, said, "There are only six soldiers now."

Both Wiseman and Pinario got up instantly. Fowler was right. Only half of the set of soldiers remained. One more had reached the citadel and been incorporated.

"Let's get a bomb expert from the Military Services in here," Wiseman said, "and let him check it. This is out of our department." He turned to his boss, Fowler. "Don't you agree?"

Fowler said, "Let's finish this game first."

"Why?"

"Because we want to be certain about it," Fowler said. But his rapt interest showed that he had gotten emotionally involved and wanted to play to the end of the game. "What will you give me for this share of Pluto stock? I'm open to offers."

He and Pinario negotiated a trade. The game continued for another hour. At last, all three of them could see that Fowler was gaining control of the various stocks. He had five mining syndromes, plus two plastic firms, an algae monopoly, and all seven of the retail trading syndromes. Due to his control of the stock, he had, as a byproduct, gotten most of the money.

"I'm out," Pinario said. All he had left were minor shares which controlled nothing. "Anybody want to buy these?"

With his last remaining money, Wiseman bid for the shares. He got them and resumed playing, this time against Fowler alone.

"It's clear that this game is a replica of typical interculture economic ventures," Wiseman said. "The retail trading syndromes are obviously Ganymedean holdings."

A flicker of excitement stirred in him; he had gotten a couple of good throws with the dice and was in a position to add a share to his meager

holdings. "Children playing this would acquire a healthy attitude toward economic realities. It would prepare them for the adult world."

But a few minutes later, he landed on an enormous tract of Fowler holdings, and the fine wiped out his resources. He had to give up two shares of stock; the end was in sight.

Pinario, watching the soldiers advance toward the citadel, said, "You know, Leon, I'm inclined to agree with you. This thing may be one terminal of a bomb. A receiving station of some kind. When it's completely wired up, it might bring in a surge of power transmitted from Ganymede."

"Is such a thing possible?" Fowler asked, stacking his play money into different denominations.

"Who knows what they can do?" Pinario said, wandering around with his hands in his pockets. "Are you almost finished playing?"

"Just about," Wiseman said.

"The reason I say that," Pinario said, "is that now there're only five soldiers. It's speeding up. It took a week for the first one, and only an hour for the seventh. I wouldn't be suprised if the rest go within the next two hours, all five of them."

"We're finished," Fowler said. He had acquired the last share of stock and the last dollar.

Wiseman arose from the table, leaving Fowler. "I'll call Military Services to check the citadel. About this game, though, it's nothing but a steal from our Terran game Monopoly."

"Possibly they don't realize that we have the game already," Fowler said, "under another name."

A stamp of admissibility was placed on the game of Syndrome and the importer was informed. In his office, Wiseman called Military Services and told them what he wanted.

"A bomb expert will be right over," the unhurried voice at the other end of the line said. "Probably you should leave the object alone until he arrives."

Feeling somewhat useless, Wiseman thanked the clerk and hung up. They had failed to dope out the soldiers-and-citadel war game; now it was out of their hands.

The bomb expert was a young man, with close-cropped hair, who smiled friendlily at them as he set down his equipment. He wore ordinary coveralls, with no protective devices.

"My first advice," he said, after he had looked the citadel over, "is to disconnect the leads from the battery. Or, if you want, we can let the cycle finish out, and then disconnect the leads before any reaction takes place. In other words, allow the last mobile elements to enter the citadel. Then, as

soon as they're inside, we disconnect the leads and open her up and see what's been taking place."

"Is it safe?" Wiseman asked.

"I think so," the bomb expert said. "I don't detect any sign of radioactivity in it." He seated himself on the floor, by the rear of the citadel, with a pair of cutting pliers in his hand.

Now only three soldiers remained.

"It shouldn't be long," the young man said cheerfully.

Fifteen minutes later, one of the three soldiers crept up to the base of the citadel, removed his head, arm, legs, body, and disappeared piecemeal into the opening provided for him.

"That leaves two," Fowler said.

Ten minutes later, one of the two remaining soldiers followed the one ahead of him.

The four men looked at each other. "This is almost it," Pinario said huskily.

The last remaining soldier wove his way toward the citadel. Guns within the citadel fired at him, but he continued to make progress.

"Statistically speaking," Wiseman said aloud, to break some of the tension, "it should take longer each time, because there are fewer men for it to concentrate on. It should have started out fast, then got more infrequent until finally this last soldier should put in at least a month trying to—"

"Pipe down," the young bomb expert said in a quiet, reasonable voice. "If you don't mind."

The last of the twelve soldiers reached the base of the citadel. Like those before him, he began to disassemble himself.

"Get those pliers ready," Pinario grated.

The parts of the soldier traveled into the citadel. The opening began to close. From within, humming became audible, a rising pitch of activity.

"Now, for God's sake!" Fowler cried.

The young bomb expert reached down his pliers and cut into the positive lead of the battery. A spark flashed from the pliers and the young bomb expert jumped reflexively; the pliers flew from his hands and skidded across the floor. "Jeez!" he said. "I must have been grounded." Groggily, he groped about for the pliers.

"You were touching the frame of the thing," Pinario said excitedly. He grabbed the pliers himself and crouched down, fumbling for the lead. "Maybe if I wrap a handkerchief around it," he muttered, withdrawing the pliers and fishing in his pocket for a handkerchief. "Anybody got anything I can wrap around this? I don't want to get knocked flat. No telling how many—"

"Give it to me," Wiseman demanded, snatching the pliers from him. He shoved Pinario aside and closed the jaws of the pliers about the lead.

Fowler said calmly, "Too late."

Wiseman hardly heard his superior's voice; he heard the constant tone within his head, and he put up his hands to his ears, futilely trying to shut it out. Now it seemed to pass directly from the citadel through his skull, transmitted by the bone. *We stalled around too long*, he thought. *Now it has us. It won out because there are too many of us; we got to squabbling. . .*

Within his mind, a voice said, "Congratulations. By your fortitude, you have been successful."

A vast feeling pervaded him then, a sense of accomplishment.

"The odds against you were tremendous," the voice inside his mind continued. "Anyone else would have failed."

He knew then that everything was all right. They had been wrong.

"What you have done here," the voice declared, "you can continue to do all your life. You can always triumph over adversaries. By patience and persistence, you can win out. The universe isn't such an overwhelming place, after all. . . ."

No, he realized with irony, it wasn't.

"They are just ordinary persons," the voice soothed. "so even though you're the only one, an individual against many, you have nothing to fear. Give it time—and don't worry."

"I won't," he said aloud.

The humming receded. The voice was gone.

After a long pause, Fowler said, "It's over."

"I don't get it," Pinario said.

"That was what it was supposed to do," Wiseman said.

"It's a therapeutic toy. Helps give the child confidence. The disassembling of the soldiers"—he grinned—"ends the separation between him and the world. He becomes one with it. And, in doing so, conquers it."

"Then it's harmless," Fowler said.

"All this work for nothing," Pinario groused. To the bomb expert, he said, "I'm sorry we got you up here for nothing."

The citadel had now opened its gates wide. Twelve soldiers, once more intact, issued forth. The cycle was complete; the assault could begin again.

Suddenly Wiseman said, "I'm not going to release it."

"What?" Pinario said. "Why not?"

"I don't trust it," Wiseman said. "It's too complicated for what it actually does."

"Explain," Fowler demanded.

"There's nothing to explain," Wiseman said. "Here's this immensely intricate gadget, and all it does is take itself apart and then reassemble itself. There *must* be more, even if we can't—"

"It's therapeutic," Pinario put in.

Fowler said, "I'll leave it up to you, Leon. If you have doubts, then don't release it. We can't be too careful."

"Maybe I'm wrong," Wiseman said, "but I keep thinking to myself: *What did they actually build this for?* I feel we still don't know."

"And the American Cowboy Suit," Pinario added. "You don't want to release that either."

"Only the game" Wiseman said. "Syndrome, or whatever it's called." Bending down, he watched the soldiers as they hustled toward the citadel. Bursts of smoke, again . . . activity, feigned attacks, careful withdrawals. . .

"What are you thinking?" Pinario asked, scrutinizing him.

"Maybe it's a diversion," Wiseman said. "To keep our minds involved. So we won't notice something else." That was his intuition, but he couldn't pin it down. "A red herring," he said. "While something else takes place. That's why it's so complicated. We were *supposed* to suspect it. That's why they built it."

Baffled, he put his foot down in front of a soldier. The soldier took refuge behind his shoe, hiding from the monitors of the citadel.

"There must be something right before our eyes," Fowler said, "that we're not noticing."

"Yes," Wiseman wondered if they would ever find it. "Anyhow," he said, "we're keeping it here, where we can observe it."

Seating himself nearby, he prepared to watch the soldiers. He made himself comfortable for a long, long wait.

At six o'clock that evening, Joe Hauck, the sales manager for Appeley's Children's Store, parked his car before his house, got out, and strode up the stairs.

Under his arm he carried a large flat package, a "sample" that he had appropriated.

"Hey!" his two kids, Bobby and Lora, squealed as he let himself in. "You got something for us, Dad?" They crowded around him, blocking his path. In the kitchen his wife looked up from the table and put down her magazine.

"A new game I picked up for you," Hauck said. He unwrapped the package, feeling genial. There was no reason why he shouldn't help himself to one of the new games; he had been on the phone for weeks, getting the stuff through Import Standards—and after all was said and done, only one of the three items had been cleared.

As the kids went off with the game, his wife said in a low voice, "More corruption in high places." She had always disapproved of his bringing home items from the store's stock.

"We've got thousands of them," Hauck said. "A warehouse full. Nobody'll notice one missing."

At the dinner table, during the meal, the kids scrupulously studied every word of the instructions that accompanied the game. They were aware of nothing else.

"Don't read at the table," Mrs. Hauck said reprovingly.

Leaning back in his chair, Joe Hauck continued his account of the day. "And after all that time, what did they release? One lousy item. We'll be lucky if we can push enough to make a profit. It was that Shock Troop gimmick that would really have paid off. And that's tied up indefinitely."

He lit a cigarette and relaxed, feeling the peacefulness of his home, the presence of his wife and children.

His daughter said, "Dad, do you want to play? It says the more who play, the better."

"Sure," Joe Hauck said.

While his wife cleared the table, he and his children spread out the board, counters, dice and paper money and shares of stock. Almost at once he was deep in the game, totally involved; his childhood memories of gameplaying swam back, and he acquired shares of stock with cunning and originality, until, toward the conclusion of the game, he had cornered most of the syndromes.

He settled back with a sigh of contentment. "That's that," he declared to his children. "Afraid I had a head start. After all, I'm not new to this type of game." Getting hold of the valuable holdings on the board filled him with a powerful sense of satisfaction. "Sorry to have to win, kids."

His daughter said, "You didn't win."

"You lost," his son said.

"What?" Joe Hauck exclaimed.

"The person who winds up with the most stock *loses*," Lora said.

She showed him the instructions. "See? The idea is to get rid of your stocks. Dad, you're out of the game."

"The heck with that," Hauck said, disappointed. "That's no kind of game." His satisfaction vanished. "That's no fun."

"Now we two have to play out the game," Bobby said, "to see who finally wins."

As he got up from the board, Joe Hauck grumbled, "I don't get it. What would anybody see in a game where the winner winds up with nothing at all?"

Behind him, his two children continued to play. As stock and money changed hands, the children became more and more animated. When the game entered its final stages, the children were in a state of ecstatic concentration.

"They don't know Monopoly," Hauck said to himself "so this screwball game doesn't seem strange to them."

Anyhow, the important thing was that the kids enjoyed playing Syndrome; evidently it would sell, and that was what mattered. Already the two youngsters were learning the naturalness of surrendering their holdings. They gave up their stocks and money avidly, with a kind of trembling abandon.

Glancing up, her eyes bright, Lora said, "It's the best educational toy you ever brought home, Dad!"

1959

A GAME OF UNCHANCE

In this story we meet vicious little microrobs that masquerade as dolls and homeostatic vermin traps able to catch the microrobots—or so the carnival people claim when they bring the mechanisms to Mars. The settlers on the barren planet know you can't trust carnies because they were cheated last year. They believe they can win at the carny games this year with the psionic powers of half-witted Fred. All they need is a chance. But the winner of the games in a Dickian world is usually worse off than the loser. The little men are always forced to play in games they don't understand, games where they really have no chance of winning. Although they yearn and hope for more, the best they ever get is mere survival.

For several years before he wrote this story, Dick and his wife Anne had been reading Taoism and using the I Ching. Here he imagines the opposing forces of the universe that underlie all change as two carnivals, with their encounter rigged in favor of the dark force—yin or strife.

*Dick's creativity when he lived in Marin County during the first few years of the sixties was prodigious. Both the amount and the quality of the material produced equalled his earlier burst of productivity in the 1950s, but now he wrote primarily novels rather than short stories. His reputation began to grow. He attracted the attention of American readers with *The Man in the High Castle*, the winner of the Hugo Award for best novel of 1962. He followed in the next three years with *Martian Time-slip*, *Dr. Bloodmoney*, and *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*. He used a Martian setting for several of his novels, the same setting that appears in this short story. The Martian wasteland is little different from his West Coast post-catastrophic settings, except that it is free from radioactive fallout.*

While rolling a fifty-gallon drum of water from the canal to his potato garden, Bob Turk heard the roar, glanced up into the haze of the midafternoon Martian sky and saw the great blue interplan ship.

In excitement he waved. And then he read the words painted on the side

of the ship and his joy became alloyed with care. Because this great pitted hull, now lowering itself to a rear-end landing, was a carny ship, come to his region of the fourth planet to transact business.

The painting spelled out:

FALLING STAR ENTERTAINMENT ENTERPRISES
PRESENTS:
FREAKS, MAGIC, TERRIFYING STUNTS, AND WOMEN!

The final word had been painted largest of all.

I better go tell the settlement council, Turk realized. He left his water drum and trotted toward the shop area, panting as his lungs struggled to take in the thin, weak air of this unnatural, colonized world. Last time a carnival had come to their area they had been robbed of most of their crops—accepted by the pitchmen in barter—and had wound up with nothing more than an armload of useless plaster figurines. It would not happen again. And yet—

He felt the craving within him, the need to be entertained. And they all felt this way; the settlement yearned for the bizarre. Of course the pitchmen knew this, preyed off this. Turk thought, If only we could keep our heads. Barter excess food and cloth-fibers, not what we need . . . not become like a lot of kids. But life in the colony world was monotonous. Carting water, fighting bugs, repairing fences, ceaselessly tinkering with the semiautonomous robot farm machinery which sustained them . . . it wasn't enough; it had no—culture. No solemnity.

"Hey," Turk called as he reached Vince Guest's land; Vince sat aboard his one-cylinder plow, wrench in hand. "Hear the noise? Company! More side-shows, like last year—remember?"

"I remember," Vince said, not looking up. "They got all my squash. The hell with traveling shows." His face became dark.

"This is a different outfit," Turk explained, halting. "I never saw them before; they've got a *blue* ship and it looks like it's been everywhere. You know what we're going to do? Remember our plan?"

"Some plan," Vince said, closing the jaw of the wrench.

"Talent is talent," Turk babbled, trying to convince—not merely Vince—but himself as well; he talked against his own alarm. "All right, so Fred's sort of half-witted; his talent's genuine, I mean, we've tried it out a million times, and why we didn't use it against that carny last year I'll never know. But now we're organized. Prepared."

Raising his head Vince said, "You know what that dumb kid will do? He'll join the carny; he'll leave with it and he'll use his talent on their side—we can't trust him."

"I trust him," Turk said, and hurried on toward the buildings of the settlement, the dusty, eroded gray structures directly ahead. Already he

could see their council chairman, Hoagland Rae, busy at his store; Hoagland rented tired pieces of equipment to settlement members and they all depended on him. Without Hoagland's contraptions no sheep would get sheared, no lambs would be distailed. It was no wonder that Hoagland had become their political—as well as economic—leader.

Stepping out onto the hard-packed sand, Hoagland shaded his eyes, wiped his wet forehead with a folded handkerchief and greeted Bob Turk. "Different outfit this time?" His voice was low.

"Right," Turk said, his heart pounding. "And we can take them, Hoag! If we play it right; I mean, once Fred—"

"They'll be suspicious," Hoagland said thoughtfully. "No doubt other settlements have tried to use Psi to win. They may have one of those—what do you call them?—those anti-Psi folks with them. Fred's a p-k and if they have an anti-p-k—" He gestured, showing his resignation.

"I'll go tell Fred's parents to get him from school," Bob Turk panted. "It'd be natural for kids to show up right away; let's close the school for this afternoon so Fred's lost in the crowd, you know what I mean? He doesn't *look* funny, not to me, anyhow." He sniggered.

"True," Hoagland agreed, with dignity. "The Costner boy appears quite normal. Yes, we'll try; that's what we voted to do anyhow, we're committed. Go sound the surplus-gathering bell so these carny boys can see we've got good produce to offer—I want to see all those apples and walnuts and cabbages and squash and pumpkins piled up—" He pointed to the spot. "And an accurate inventory sheet, with three carbons, in my hands, within one hour." Hoagland got out a cigar, lit up with his lighter. "Get going."

Bob Turk went.

As they walked through their south pasture, among the black-face sheep who chewed the hard, dry grass, Tony Costner said to his son, "You think you can manage it, Fred? If not, say so. You don't have to."

Straining, Fred Costner thought he could dimly see the carnival, far off, arranged before the up-ended interplan ship. Booths, shimmering big banners and metal streamers that danced in the wind . . . and the recorded music, or was it an authentic calliope? "Sure," he muttered. "I can handle them; I've been practicing every day since Mr. Rae told me." To prove it he caused a rock lying ahead of them to skim up, pass in an arc, start toward them at high speed and then drop abruptly back to the brown, dry grass. A sheep regarded it dully and Fred laughed.

A small crowd from the settlement, including children, had already manifested itself among the booths now being set up; he saw the cotton candy machine hard at work, smelled the frying popcorn, saw with delight a

vast cluster of helium-filled balloons carried by a gaudily painted dwarf wearing a hobo costume.

His father said quietly, "What you must look for, Fred, is the game which offers the really valuable prizes."

"I know," he said, and began to scan the booths. We don't have a need for hula-hula dolls, he said to himself. Or boxes of salt water taffy.

Somewhere in the carnival lay the real spoils. It might be in the money-pitching board or the spinning wheel or the bingo table; anyhow it was there. He scented it, sniffed it. And hurried.

In a weak, strained voice his father said, "Um, maybe I'll leave you, Freddy." Tony had seen one of the girl platforms and had turned toward it, unable to take his eyes from the scene. One of the girls was already—but then the rumble of a truck made Fred Costner turn, and he forgot about the high-breasted, unclad girl on the platform. The truck was bringing the produce of the settlement, to be bartered in exchange for tickets.

The boy started toward the truck, wondering how much Hoagland Rae had decided to put up this time after the awful licking they had taken before. It looked like a great deal and Fred felt pride; the settlement obviously had full confidence in his abilities.

He caught then the unmistakable stench of Psi.

It emanated from a booth to his right and he turned at once in that direction. This was what the carny people were protecting, this one game which they did not feel they could afford to lose. It was, he saw, a booth in which one of the freaks acted as the target; the freak was a no-head, the first Fred had ever seen, and he stopped, transfixed.

The no-head had no head at all and his sense organs, his eyes and nose and ears, had migrated to other parts of his body beginning in the period before birth. For instance, his mouth gaped from the center of his chest, and from each shoulder an eye gleamed; the no-head was deformed but not deprived, and Fred felt respect for him. The no-head could see, smell and hear as good as anyone. But what exactly did he do in the game?

In the booth the no-head sat within a basket suspended above a tub of water. Behind the no-head Fred Costner saw a target and then he saw the heap of baseballs near at hand and he realized how the games worked; if the target were hit by a ball the no-head would plunge into the tub of water. And it was to prevent this that the carny had directed its Psi powers: the stench here was overpowering. He could not, however, tell from whom the stench came, the no-head or the operator of the booth or from a third person as yet unseen.

The operator, a thin young woman wearing slacks and a sweater and tennis shoes, held a baseball toward Fred. "Ready to play, captain?" she

demanded and smiled at him insinuatingly, as if it were utterly in the realm of the impossible that he might play and win.

"I'm thinking," Fred said. He was scrutinizing the prizes.

The no-head giggled and the mouth located in the chest said, "He's thinking—I doubt that!" It giggled again and Fred flushed.

His father came up beside him. "Is this what you want to play?" he said. Now Hoagland Rae appeared; the two men flanked the boy, all three of them studying the prizes. What were they? Dolls, Fred thought. At least that was their appearance; the vaguely male, small shapes lay in rows on the shelves to the left of the booth's operator. He could not for the life of him fathom the carny's reasons for protecting these; surely they were worthless. He moved closer, straining to see. . . .

Leading him off to one side Hoagland Rae said worriedly, "But even if we win, Fred, what do we get? Nothing we can use, just those plastic figurines. We can't barter those with other settlements, even." He looked disappointed; the corners of his mouth turned down dismally.

"I don't think they're what they seem," Fred said. "But I don't actually know what they are. Anyhow let me try, Mr. Rae; I know this is the one." And the carny people certainly believed so.

"I'll leave it up to you," Hoagland Rae said, with pessimism; he exchanged glances with Fred's father, then slapped the boy encouragingly on the back. "Let's go," he announced. "Do your best, kid." The group of them—joined now by Bob Turk—made their way back to the booth in which the no-head sat with shoulder eyes gleaming.

"Made up your mind, people?" the thin stony-faced girl who operated the booth asked, tossing a baseball and recatching it.

"Here." Hoagland handed Fred an envelope; it was the proceeds from the settlement's produce, in the form of carny tickets—this was what they had obtained in exchange. This was all there was, now.

"I'll try," Fred said to the thin girl, and handed her a ticket.

The thin girl smiled, showing sharp, small teeth.

"Put me in the drink!" the no-head babbled. "Dunk me and win a valuable prize!" It giggled again, in delight.

That night, in the workshop behind his store, Hoagland Rae sat with a jeweler's loup in his right eye, examining one of the figurines which Tony Costner's boy had won at the Falling Star Entertainment Enterprises carnival earlier in the day.

Fifteen of the figurines lay in a row against the far wall of Hoagland's workshop.

With a tiny pair of pliers Hoagland pried open the back of the doll-like structure and saw, within, intricate wiring. "The boy was right," he said to

Bob Turk, who stood behind him smoking a synthetic tobacco cigarette in jerky agitation. "It's not a doll; it's fully rigged. Might be UN property they stole; might even be a microrob. You know, one of those special automatic mechanisms the government uses for a million tasks from spying to reconstruct surgery for war vets." Now, gingerly, he opened the front of the figurine.

More wiring, and the miniature parts which even under the loup were exceedingly difficult to make out. He gave up; after all, his ability was limited to repairing power harvesting equipment and the like. This was just too much. Again he wondered exactly how the settlement could make use of these microrobs. Sell them back to the UN? And meanwhile, the carnival had packed up and gone. No way to find out from them what these were.

"Maybe it walks and talks," Turk suggested.

Hoagland searched for a switch on the figurine, found none. Verbal order? he wondered. "Walk," he ordered it. The figurine remained inert. "I think we've got something here," he said to Turk. "But—" He gestured. "It'll take time; we've got to be patient." Maybe if they took one of the figurines to M City, where the truly professional engineers, electronics experts and repairmen of all kinds could be found . . . but he wanted to do this himself; he distrusted the inhabitants of the one great urban area on the colony planet.

"Those carny people sure were upset when we won again and again," Bob Turk chuckled. "Fred, he said that they were exerting their own Psi all the time and it completely surprised them that—"

"Be quiet," Hoagland said. He had found the figurine's power supply; now he needed only to trace the circuit until he came to a break. By closing the break he could start the mechanism into activity; it was—or rather it seemed—as simple as that.

Shortly, he found the interruption in the circuit. A microscopic switch, disguised as the belt buckle, of the figurine . . . exulting, Hoagland closed the switch with his needle-nose pliers, set the figurine down on his workbench and waited.

The figurine stirred. It reached into a pouch-like construct hanging at its side, a sort of purse; from the pouch it brought a tiny tube, which it pointed at Hoagland.

"Wait," Hoagland said feebly. Behind him Turk bleated and scuttled for cover. Something boomed in his face, a light that thrust him back; he shut his eyes and cried out in fright. *We're being attacked!* he shouted, but his voice did not sound; he heard nothing. He was crying uselessly in a darkness which had no end. Groping, he reached out imploringly. . . .

The settlement's registered nurse was bending over him, holding a bottle

of ammonia at his nostrils. Grunting, he managed to lift his head, open his eyes. He lay in his workshop; around him stood a ring of settlement adults. Bob Turk foremost, all with expressions of gray alarm.

"Those dolls or whatever," Hoagland managed to whisper. "Attacked us; be careful." He twisted, trying to see the line of dolls which he had so carefully placed against the far wall. "I set one off prematurely," he mumbled. "By completing the circuit; I tripped it so now we know." And then he blinked.

The dolls were gone.

"I went for Miss Beason," Bob Turk explained, "and when I got back they had disappeared. Sorry." He looked apologetic, as if it were his personal fault. "But you were hurt; I was worried you were maybe dead."

"Okay," Hoagland said, pulling himself up; his head ached and he felt nauseated. "You did right. Better get that Costner kid in here, get his opinion." He added, "Well, we've been taken. For the second year in a row. Only this time is worse." This time he thought, we won. We were better off last year when we merely lost.

He had an intimation of true foreboding.

Four days later, as Tony Costner hoed weeds in his squash garden, a stirring of the ground made him pause; he reached silently for the pitchfork, thinking, It's an m-gopher, down under, eating the roots. I'll get it. He lifted the pitchfork, and, as the ground stirred once more, brought the tines of the fork savagely down to penetrate the loose, sandy soil.

Something beneath the surface squeaked in pain and fright. Tony Costner grabbed a shovel, dug the dirt away. A tunnel lay exposed and in it, dying in a heap of quivering, pulsating fur, lay—as he had from long experience anticipated—a Martian gopher, its eyes glazed in agony, elongated fangs exposed.

He killed it, mercifully. And then bent down to examine it. Because something had caught his eye: a flash of metal.

The m-gopher wore a harness.

It was artificial, of course; the harness fitted snugly around the animal's thick neck. Almost invisible, hair-like wires passed from the harness and disappeared into the scalp of the gopher near the front of the skull.

"Lord," Tony Costner said, picking the gopher and its harness up and standing in futile anxiety, wondering what to do. Right away he connected this with the carnival dolls; they had gone off and done this, made this—the settlement, as Hoagland had said, was under attack.

He wondered what the gopher would have done had he not killed it.

The gopher had been up to something. Tunneling toward—his house!

Later, he sat beside Hoagland Rae in the workshop; Rae, with care, had opened the harness, inspected its interior.

"A transmitter," Hoagland said, and breathed out noisily, as if his child-

hood asthma had returned. "Short range, maybe half a mile. The gopher was directed by it, maybe gave back a signal that told where it was and what it was doing. The electrodes to the brain probably connect with pleasure and pain areas . . . that way the gopher could be controlled." He glanced at Tony Costner. "How'd you like to have a harness like that on you?"

"I wouldn't," Tony said, shivering. He wished, all at once, that he was back on Terra, overcrowded as it was; he longed for the press of the crowd, the smells and sounds of great throngs of men and women, moving along the hard sidewalks, among the lights. It occurred to him then, in a flash, that he had never really enjoyed it here on Mars. Far too lonely, he realized. I made a mistake. My wife; she made me come here.

It was a trifle late, however, to think of that now.

"I guess," Hoagland said stonily, "that we'd better notify the UN military police." He went with dragging steps to the wallphone, cranked it, then dialed the emergency number. To Tony he said, half in apology, half in anger, "I can't take responsibility for handling this, Costner; it's too difficult."

"It's my fault too," Tony said. "When I saw that girl, she had taken off the upper part of her garment and—"

"UN regional security office," the phone declared, loudly enough for Tony Costner to hear it.

"We're in trouble," Hoagland said. And explained, then, about the Falling Star Entertainment Enterprises ship and what had happened. As he talked he wiped his streaming forehead with his handkerchief; he looked old and tired, and very much in need of a rest.

An hour later the military police landed in the middle of the settlement's sole street. A uniformed UN officer, middle-aged, with a briefcase, stepped out, glanced around in the yellow late-afternoon light, made out the sight of the crowd with Hoagland Rae placed officially in front. "You are General Mozart?" Hoagland said tentatively, holding his hand out.

"That's correct," the heavy-set UN officer said, as they shook briefly. "May I see the construct, please?" He seemed a trifle disdainful of the somewhat grimy settlement people; Hoagland felt that acutely, and his sense of failure and depression burgeoned.

"Sure, general," Hoagland led the way to his store and the workshop in the rear.

After he had examined the dead m-gopher with its electrodes and harness, General Mozart said, "You may have won artifacts they did *not* want to give up, Mr. Rae. Their final—in other words actual—destination was probably not this settlement." Again his distaste showed, ill-disguised, who would want to bother with this area? "But, and this is a guess, eventually Earth and the more populated regions. However, by your employment of a

parapsychological bias on the ball-throwing game—" He broke off, glanced at his wristwatch. "We'll treat the fields in this vicinity with arsine gas, I think; you and your people will have to evacuate this whole region, as a matter of fact tonight; we'll provide a transport. May I use your phone? I'll order the transport—you assemble all your people." He smiled reflexively at Hoagland and then went to the telephone to place his call back to his office in M City.

"Livestock, too?" Rae said. "We can't sacrifice them." He wondered just how he was supposed to get their sheep, dogs and cattle into the UN transport in the middle of the night. What a mess, he thought dully.

"Of course livestock," General Mozart said unsympathetically, as if Rae were some sort of idiot.

The third steer driven aboard the UN transport carried a harness at its neck; the UN military policeman at the entrance hatch spotted it, shot the steer at once, summoned Hoagland to dispose of the carcass.

Squatting by the dead steer, Hoagland Rae examined the harness and its wiring. As with the m-gopher, the harness, connected by delicate leads, the brain of the animal to the sentient organism—whatever it was—which had installed the apparatus, located, he assumed, no further than a mile from the settlement. What was this animal supposed to do? he wondered as he disconnected the harness. Gore one of us? Or—eavesdrop. More like that; the transmitter within the harness hummed audibly; it was perpetually on, picking up all sounds in the vicinity. So they know we've brought in the military, Hoagland realized. And that we've detected two of these constructs, now.

He had a deep intuition that this meant the abolition of the settlement. This area would soon be a battleground between the UN military and the—whatever they were. Falling Star Entertainment Enterprises. He wondered where they were from. Outside the Sol System, evidently.

Kneeling momentarily beside him a blackjack—a black-clad UN secret police officer—said, "Cheer up. This tipped their hand; we could never prove those carnivals were hostile, before. Because of you they never made it to Terra. You'll be reinforced; don't give up." He grinned at Hoagland, then hurried off, disappearing into the darkness, where a UN tank sat parked.

Yes, Hoagland thought. We did the authorities a favor. And they'll reward us by moving massively into this area.

He had a feeling that the settlement would never be quite the same again, no matter what the authorities did. Because, if nothing else, the settlement had failed to solve its own problems; it had been forced to call for outside help. For the big boys.

Tony Costner gave him a hand with the dead steer; together they dragged

it to one side, gasping for breath as they grappled with the still-warm body. "I feel responsible," Tony said, when they had set it down.

"Don't," Hoagland shook his head. "And tell your boy not to feel bad."

"I haven't seen Fred since this first came out," Tony said miserably. "He took off, terribly disturbed. I guess the UN MPs will find him; they're on the outskirts rounding everybody up." He sounded numb, as if he could not quite take in what was happening. "An MP told me that by morning we could come back. The arsine gas would have taken care of everything. You think they've run into this before? They're not saying but they seem so efficient. They seem so sure of what they're doing."

"Lord knows," Hoagland said. He lit a genuine Earth-made Optimo cigar and smoked in glum silence, watching a flock of black-face sheep being driven into the transport. Who would have thought the legendary, classic invasion of Earth would take this form? he asked himself. Starting here at our meager settlement, in terms of small wired figurines, a little over a dozen in all, which we labored to win from Falling Star Entertainment Enterprises; as General Mozart said, the invaders didn't even want to give them up. Irony.

Bob Turk, coming up beside him, said quietly, "You realize we're going to be sacrificed. That's obvious. Arsine will kill all the gophers and rats but it won't kill the microrobs because they don't breathe. The UN will have to keep blackjack squads operating in this region for weeks, maybe months. This gas attack is just the beginning." He turned accusingly to Tony Costner. "If your kid—"

"All right," Hoagland said in a sharp voice. "That's enough. If I hadn't taken that one apart, closed the circuit—you can blame me, Turk; in fact I'll be glad to resign. You can run the settlement without me."

Through a battery-driven loudspeaker a vast UN voice boomed, "All persons within sound of my voice prepare to board! This area will be flooded with poisonous gas at 14:00. I repeat—" It repeated, as the loudspeakers turned in first one direction and then another; the noise echoed in the night darkness.

Stumbling, Fred Costner made his way over the unfamiliar, rough terrain, wheezing in sorrow and weariness; he paid no attention to his location, made no effort to see where he was going. All he wanted to do was get away. He had destroyed the settlement and everyone from Hoagland Rae on down knew it. Because of him—

Far away, behind him, an amplified voice boomed, "All persons within sound of my voice prepare to board! This area will be flooded with poisonous gas at 14:00. I repeat, all persons within sound of my voice—" It dinned on and on. Fred continued to stumble along, trying to shut out the racket of the voice, hurrying away from it.

The night smelled of spiders and dry weeds; he sensed the desolation of the landscape around him. Already he was beyond the final perimeter of cultivation; he had left the settlement's fields and now he stumbled over unplowed ground where no fences or even surveyor's stakes existed. But they would probably flood this area, too, however; the UN ships would coast back and forth, spraying the arsine gas, and then after that special forces troops would come in, wearing gas-masks, carrying flame throwers, with metal-sensitive detectors on their backs, to roust out the fifteen microrobs which had taken refuge underground in the burrows of rats and vermin. Where they belong, Fred Costner said to himself. And to think I wanted them for the settlement; I thought, because the carnival wanted to keep them, that they must be valuable.

He wondered, dimly, if there was any way he could undo what he had done. Find the fifteen microrobs, plus the activated one which had almost killed Hoagland Rae? And—he had to laugh; it was absurd. Even if he found their hideout—assuming that all of them had taken refuge together in one spot—how could he destroy them? And they were armed. Hoagland Rae had barely escaped, and that had been from one acting alone.

A light glowed ahead.

In the darkness he could not make out the shapes which moved at the edge of the light; he halted, waited, trying to orient himself. Persons came and went and he heard their voices, muted, both men's and women's. And the sound of machinery in motion. The UN would not be sending out women, he realized. This was not the authorities.

A portion of the sky, the stars and faint nocturnal swath of haze, had been blotted out, and he realized all at once that he was seeing the outline of a large stationary object.

It could be a ship, parked on its tail, awaiting take-off; the shape seemed roughly that.

He seated himself, shivering in the cold of the Martian night, scowling in an attempt to trace the passage of the indistinct forms busy with their activity. Had the carnival returned? Was this once more the Falling Star Entertainment Enterprises vehicle? Eerily, the thought came to him; the booths and banners and tents and platforms, the magic shows and girl platforms and freaks and games of chance were being erected here in the middle of the night, in this barren area lost in the emptiness between settlements. A hollow enactment of the festivity of the carny life, for no one to see or experience. Except—by chance—himself. And to him it was revolting; he had seen all he wanted of the carnival, its people and—things.

Something ran across his foot.

With his psycho-kinetic faculty he snared it, drew it back; reaching, he grabbed with both hands until all at once he had snatched out of

the darkness a thrashing, hard shape. He held it, and saw with fright one of the microrobs; it struggled to escape and yet, reflexively, he held onto it. The microrob had been scurrying toward the parked ship, and he thought, the ship's picking them up. So they won't be found by the UN. They're getting away, then the carnival can go on with its plans.

A calm voice, a woman's, said from close by, "Put it down, please. It wants to go."

Jumping with shock he released the microrob and it scuttled off, rustling in the weeds, gone at once. Standing before Fred the thin girl, still wearing slacks and a sweater, faced him placidly, a flashlight in her hand; by its circle of illumination he made out her sharply-traced features, her colorless jaw and intense, clear eyes. "Hi," Fred said stammeringly; he stood up, defensively, facing the girl. She was slightly taller than he and he felt afraid of her. But he did not catch the stench of Psi about her and he realized that it had definitely not been she there in the booth who had struggled against his own faculty during the game. So he had an advantage over her, and perhaps one she did not know about.

"You better get away from here," he said. "Did you hear the loudspeaker? They're going to gas this area."

"I heard." The girl surveyed him. "You're the big winner, aren't you, sonny? The master game-player; you dunked out anti-ceph sixteen times in a row." She laughed merrily. "Simon was furious; he caught cold from that and blames you. So I hope you don't run into him."

"Don't call me sonny," he said. His fear began to leave him.

"Douglas, our p-k, says you're strong. You wrestled him down every time; congratulations. Well, how pleased are you with your take?" Silently, she once more laughed; her small sharp teeth shone in the meager light. "You feel you got your produce's worth?"

"Your p-k isn't much good," Fred said. "I didn't have any trouble and I'm really not experienced. You could do a lot better."

"With you, possibly? Are you asking to join us? Is this a proposition from you to me, little boy?"

"No!" he said, startled and repelled.

"There was a rat," the girl said, "in the wall of your Mr. Rae's workshop; it had a transmitter on it and so we knew about your call to the UN as soon as you made it. So we've had plenty of time to regain our—" She paused a moment. "Our merchandise. If we cared to. Nobody meant to hurt you; it isn't our fault that busybody Rae struck the tip of his screwdriver into the control-circuit of that one microrob. Is it?"

"He started the cycle prematurely. It would have done that eventually anyhow." He refused to believe otherwise; he knew the settlement was in the right. "And it's not going to do you any good to collect all those microrobs because the UN knows and—"

"Collect?" The girl rocked with amusement. "We're not collecting the sixteen microrobs you poor little people won. We're going ahead—you forced us to. The ship is unloading the rest of them." She pointed with the flashlight and he saw in that brief instant the horde of microrobs disgorged, spreading out, seeking shelter like so many photophobic insects.

He shut his eyes and moaned.

"Are you still sure," the girl said purringly, "that you don't want to come with us? It'll insure your future, sonny. And otherwise—" She gestured. "Who knows? Who really can guess what'll become of your tiny settlement and you poor tiny people?"

"No," he said. "I'm not coming."

When he opened his eyes again the girl had gone off. She stood with the no-head, Simon, examining a clipboard which the no-head held.

Turning, Fred Costner ran back the way he had come, toward the UN military police.

The lean, tall, black-uniformed UN secret police general said, "I have replaced General Mozart who is unfortunately ill-equipped to deal with domestic subversion; he is a military man exclusively." He did not extend his hand to Hoagland Rae. Instead he began to pace about the workshop, frowning. "I wish I had been called in last night. For example I could have told you one thing immediately . . . which General Mozart did not understand." He halted, glanced searchingly at Hoagland. "You realize, of course, that you did not beat the carnival people. They wanted to lose those sixteen microrobs."

Hoagland Rae nodded silently; there was nothing to say. It now did appear obvious, as the blackjack general had pointed out.

"Prior appearances of the carnival," General Wolff said, "in former years, was to set you up, to set each settlement up in turn. They knew you'd have to plan to win this time. So this time they brought their microrobs. And had their weak Psi ready to engage in an ersatz 'battle' for supremacy."

"All I want to know," Hoagland said, "is whether we're going to get protection." The hills and plains surrounding the settlement, as Fred had told them, were now swarming with the microrobs; it was unsafe to leave the downtown buildings.

"We'll do what we can." General Wolff resumed pacing. "But obviously we're not primarily concerned with you, or with any other particular settlement or locale that's been infested. It's the overall situation that we have to deal with. That ship has been forty places in the last twenty-four hours; how they've moved so swiftly—" He broke off. "They had every step prepared. And you thought you conned them." He glowered at Hoagland Rae. "Every settlement along the line thought that as they won their boxload of microrobs."

"I guess," Hoagland said presently, "that's what we get for cheating." He did not meet the blackjack general's gaze.

"That's what you get for pitting your wits against an adversary from another system," General Wolff said biting. "Better look at it that way. And the next time a vehicle *not* from Terra shows up—don't try to mastermind a strategy to defeat them: *call us*."

Hoagland Rae nodded. "Okay. I understand." He felt only dull pain, not indignation; he deserved—they all deserved—this chewing out. If they were lucky their reprimand would end at this. It was hardly the settlement's greatest problem. "What do they want?" he asked General Wolff. "Are they after this area for colonization? Or is this an economic—"

"Don't try," General Wolff said.

"P-pardon?"

"It's not something you can understand, now or at any other time. We know what they're after—and *they* know what they're after. It is important that you know, too? Your job is to try to resume your farming as before. Or if you can't do that, pull back and return to Earth."

"I see," Hoagland said, feeling trivial.

"Your kids can read about it in the history books," General Wolff said. "That ought to be good enough for you."

"It's just fine," Hoagland Rae said, miserably. He seated himself half-heartedly at his workbench, picked up a screwdriver and began to tinker with a malfunctioning autonomic tractor guidance-turret.

"Look," General Wolff said, and pointed.

In a corner of the workshop, almost invisible against the dusty wall, a microrob crouched watching them.

"Jeez!" Hoagland wailed, groping around on his workbench for the .32 revolver which he had gotten out and loaded.

Long before his fingers found the revolver the microrob had vanished. General Wolff had not even moved; he seemed, in fact, somewhat amused: he stood with his arms folded, watching Hoagland fumbling with the antiquated side arm.

"We're working on a central device," General Wolff said, "which would cripple all of them simultaneously. By interrupting the flow of current from their portable power-packs. Obviously to destroy them one by one is absurd; we never even considered it. However—" He paused thoughtfully, his forehead wrinkling. "There's reason to believe they—the outspacers—have anticipated us and have diversified the power-sources in such a way that—" He shrugged philosophically. "Well, perhaps something else will come to mind. In time."

"I hope so," Hoagland said. And tried to resume his repair of the defective tractor turret.

"We've pretty much given up the hope of holding Mars," General Wolff said, half to himself.

Hoagland slowly set down his screwdriver, stared at the secret policeman.

"What we're going to concentrate on is Terra," General Wolff said, and scratched his nose reflectively.

"Then," Hoagland said after a pause, "there's really no hope for us here; that's what you're saying."

The blackjack general did not answer. He did not need to.

As he bent over the faintly greenish, scummy surface of the canal where botflies and shiny black beetles buzzed, Bob Turk saw, from the corner of his vision, a small shape scuttle. Swiftly he spun, reached for his laser cane; he brought it up, fired it and destroyed—oh happy day!—a heap of rusted, discarded fuel drums, nothing more. The microrob had already departed.

Shakily he returned the laser cane to his belt and again bent over the bug-infested water. As usual the 'robs had been active here during the night; his wife had seen them, heard their rat-like scratchings. What the hell had they done? Bob Turk wondered dismally, and sniffed long and hard at the water.

It seemed to him that the customary odor of the stagnant water was somehow subtly changed.

"Damn," he said, and stood up, feeling futile. The 'robs had put some contaminator in the water; that was obvious. Now it would have to be given a thorough chemical analysis and that would take days. Meanwhile, what would keep his potato crop alive? Good question.

Raging in baffled helplessness, he pawed the laser cane, wishing for a target—and knowing he could never, not in a million years, have one. As always the 'robs did their work at night; steadily, surely, they pushed the settlement back.

Already ten families had packed up and taken passage for Terra. To resume—if they could—the old lives which they had abandoned.

And, soon, it would be his turn.

If only there was something they could do. Some way they could fight back. He thought, I'd do anything, give anything, for a chance to get those 'robs. I swear it. I'd go into debt or bondage or servitude or anything, just for a *chance* of freeing the area of them.

He was shuffling morosely away from the canal, hands thrust deep in the pockets of his jacket, when he heard the booming roar of the intersystem ship overhead.

Calcified, he stood peering up, his heart collapsing inside him. Them back? he asked himself. The Falling Star Entertainment Enterprises ship . . . are they going to hit us all over again, finish us off finally? Shielding his eyes

he peered frantically, not able even to run, his body not knowing its way even to instinctive, animal panic.

The ship, like a gigantic orange, lowered. Shaped like an orange, colored like an orange . . . it was not the blue tubular ship of the Falling Star people; he could see that. But also it was not from Terra; it was not UN. He had never seen a ship exactly like it before and he knew that he was definitely seeing another vehicle from beyond the Sol System, much more blatantly so than the blue ship of the Falling Star creatures. Not even a cursory attempt had been made to make it appear Terran.

And yet, on its sides, it had huge letters, which spelled out words in English.

His lips moving he read the words as the ship settled to a landing north-east of the spot at which he stood.

* SIX SYSTEM EDUCATIONAL PLAYTIME ASSOCIATES IN A
RIOT OF FUN AND FROLIC FOR ALL!

It was—god in heaven—another itinerant carnival company.

He wanted to look away, to turn and hurry off. And yet he could not, the old familiar drive within him, the craving, the fixated curiosity, was too strong. So he continued to watch; he could see several hatches open and autonomic mechanisms beginning to nose, like flattened doughnuts, out onto the sand.

They were pitching camp.

Coming up beside him his neighbor Vince Guest said hoarsely, "Now what?"

"You can see," Turk gestured frantically. "Use your eyes." Already the auto-mechs were erecting a central tent; colored streamers hurled themselves upward into the air and then rained down on the still two-dimensional booths. And the first humans—or humanoids—were emerging. Vince and Bob saw men wearing bright clothing and then women in tights. Or rather something considerably less than tights.

"Wow," Vince managed to say, swallowing. "You see those ladies? You ever seen women with such—"

"I see them," Turk said. "But I'm never going back to one of those non-Terran carnivals from beyond the system and neither is Hoagland; I know that as well as I know my own name."

How rapidly they were going to work. No time wasted; already faint, tinny music, of a carousel nature, filtered to Bob Turk. And the smells. Cotton candy, roasting peanuts, and with those the subtle smell of adventure and exciting sights, of the illicit. One woman with long braided red hair had hopped lithely up onto a platform; she wore a meager bra and wisp of silk at

her waist and as he watched fixedly she began to practice her dance. Faster and faster she spun until at last, carried away by the rhythm, she discarded entirely what little she wore. And the funny thing about it all was that it seemed to him real art; it was not the usual carny shimmying at the midsection. There was something beautiful and alive about her movements; he found himself spellbound.

"I—better go get Hoagland," Vince managed to say, finally. Already a few settlers, including a number of children, were moving as if hypnotized toward the lines of booths and the gaudy streamers that fluttered and shone in the otherwise drab Martian air.

"I'll go over and get a closer look," Bob Turk said, "while you're locating them." He started toward the carnival on a gradually accelerating run, scuffling sand as he hurried.

To Hoagland, Tony Costner said, "At least let's *see* what they have to offer. You know they're not the same people; it wasn't them who dumped those horrible damn microrobs off here—you can see that."

"Maybe it's something worse," Hoagland said, but he turned to the boy, Fred. "What do you say?" he demanded.

"I want to look," Fred Costner said. He had made up his mind.

"Okay," Hoagland said, nodding. "That's good enough for me. It won't hurt us to look. As long as we remember what that UN secret police general told us. Let's not kid ourselves into imagining we can outsmart them." He put down his wrench, rose from his workbench, and walked to the closet to get his fur-lined outdoor coat.

When they reached the carnival they found that the games of chance had been placed—conveniently—ahead of even the girly shows and the freaks. Fred Costner rushed forward, leaving the group of adults behind; he sniffed the air, took in the scents, heard the music, saw past the games of chance the first freak platform: it was his favorite abomination, one he remembered from previous carnivals, only this one was superior. It was a no-body. In the midday Martian sunlight it reposed quietly: a bodiless head complete with hair, ears, intelligent eyes; heaven only knew what kept it alive . . . in any case he knew intuitively that it was genuine.

"Come and see Orpheus, the head without a visible body!" the pitchman called through his megaphone, and a group, mostly children, had gathered in awe to gape. "How does it stay alive? How does it propel itself? Show them, Orpheus." The pitchman tossed a handful of food pellets—Fred Costner could not see precisely what—at the head; it opened its mouth to enormous, frightening proportions, managed to snare most of what landed near it. The pitchman laughed and continued with his spiel. The no-body was now rolling industriously after the bits of food which it had missed. Gee, Fred thought.

"Well?" Hoagland said, coming up beside him. "Do you see any games we might profit from?" His tone was drenched with bitterness. "Care to throw a baseball at anything?" He started away, then, not waiting, a tired little fat man who had been defeated too much, who had already lost too many times. "Let's go," he said to the other adults of the settlement. "Let's get out of here before we get into another—"

"Wait," Fred said. He had caught it, the familiar, pleasing stench. It came from a booth on his right and he turned at once in that direction.

A plump, gray-colored middle-aged woman stood in a ringtoss booth, her hands full of the light wicker rings.

Behind Fred his father said to Hoagland Rae, "You get the rings over the merchandise; you win whatever you manage to toss the ring onto so that it stays." With Fred he walked slowly in that direction. "It would be a natural," he murmured, "for a psycho-kinetic. I would think."

"I suggest," Hoagland said, speaking to Fred, "that you look more closely this time at the prizes. At the merchandise." However, he came along, too.

At first Fred could not make out what the neat stacks were, each of them exactly alike, intricate and metallic; he came up to the edge of the booth and the middle-aged woman began her chant-like litany, offering him a handful of rings. For a dollar, or whatever of equal value the settlement had to offer.

"What are they?" Hoagland said, peering. "I—think they're some kind of machines."

Fred said, "I know what they are." And we've got to play, he realized. We must round up every item in the settlement that we can possibly trade these people, every cabbage and rooster and sheep and wool blanket.

Because, he realized, this is our chance. Whether General Wolff knows about it or likes it.

"My god," Hoagland said quietly. "Those are traps."

"That's right mister," the middle-aged woman chanted. "Homeostatic traps; they do all the work, think for themselves, you just let them go and they travel and travel and they never give up until they catch—" She winked. "*You know what*. Yes, you know what they catch, mister, those little pesky things you can't ever possibly catch by yourselves, that are poisoning your water and killing your steers and ruining your settlement—win a trap, a valuable, useful trap, and you'll see, you'll see!" She tossed a wicker ring and it nearly settled over one of the complex, sleek-metal traps; it might very well have, if she had thrown it just a little more carefully. At least that was the impression given. They all felt this.

Hoagland said to Tony Costner and Bob Turk, "We'll need a couple hundred of them at least."

"And for that," Tony said, "we'll have to hock everything we own. But it's

worth it; at least we won't be completely wiped out." His eyes gleamed. "Let's get started." To Fred he said, "Can you play this game? Can you win?"

"I—think so," Fred said. Although somewhere nearby, someone in the carnival was ready with a contrary power of psycho-kinesis. But not enough, he decided. *Not quite enough.*

It was almost as if they had worked it that way on purpose.

THE ELECTRIC ANT

What is reality? Can we consider the universe we perceive with our senses real? If not, how do we reach true reality? The question of reality is the big question for Dick, the question he attempts to answer again and again in his fiction. A second question is of near equal importance. How can we tell the difference between a human and something masquerading as a human?

In light of those two questions, "The Electric Ant" is the most powerful and important story Dick wrote, and perhaps the most frightening. It is quintessential Dick, the probing search into self of a brilliant man whose only constant companions over the fifty-two years of his life were fear and anxiety.

*The "electric ant" in this story is the type of construct Dick would usually label an android, not a robot, because it masquerades as a human but is really a machine. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the novel he had published just before he wrote this story, androids are ruthless killers. Perhaps he chose another name for the mechanical construction in this story because the story is so strongly biographical, and Garson Poole, the electric ant, so obviously Dick himself. Garson is willing to pay the price of death, if necessary, to discover whether reality is subjective or objective. He understands that he is driven to this experimentation because "what I want is ultimate and absolute reality, for one microsecond. After that it doesn't matter, because all will be known; nothing will be left to understand."*

When Dick wrote "The Electric Ant," the great productive decade of the 1960s was ending, a decade when he had written eighteen novels and twenty short stories. During his marriage to Anne he had fallen into the habit of using amphetamines to sustain this work level. In 1964 their relationship deteriorated to the point that he divorced her, left the green countryside of Point Reyes, and returned to the city. He started experimenting with hard drugs and his long, painful descent into the drug world was under way.

He was now forty years old and his health began to deteriorate. In 1966 he married Nancy Hackett, a woman half his age. It was a painful marriage because she suffered from schizophrenia, and a few years later she left him.

His exhaustion and weariness is apparent in "The Electric Ant" and in Ubik, published the same year. He often thought about suicide and death, and in 1972 nearly succeeded in carrying out an attempt.

At four fifteen in the afternoon, T. S. T., Garson Poole woke up in his hospital bed, knew that he lay in a hospital bed in a three-bed ward and realized in addition two things: that he no longer had a right hand and that he felt no pain.

They have given me a strong analgesic, he said to himself as he stared at the far wall with its window showing downtown New York. Webs in which vehicles and peds darted and wheeled glimmered in the late afternoon sun, and the brilliance of the aging light pleased him. It's not yet out, he thought. And neither am I.

A fone lay on the table beside his bed; he hesitated, then picked it up and dialed for an outside line. A moment later he was faced by Louis Danceman, in charge of Tri-Plan's activities while he, Garson Poole, was elsewhere.

"Thank god you're alive," Danceman said, seeing him; his big, fleshy face with its moon's surface of pockmarks flattened with relief. "I've been calling all—"

"I just don't have a right hand," Poole said.

"But you'll be okay. I mean, they can graft another one on."

"How long have I been here?" Poole said. He wondered where the nurses and doctors had gone to; why weren't they clucking and fussing about him making a call?

"Four days," Danceman said. "Everything here at the plant is going splunkishly. In fact we've splunked orders from three separate police systems, all here on Terra. Two in Ohio, one in Wyoming. Good solid orders, with one-third in advance and the usual three-year lease-option."

"Come and get me out of here," Poole said.

"I can't get you out until the new hand—"

"I'll have it done later." He wanted desperately to get back to familiar surroundings; memory of the mercantile squib looming grotesquely on the pilot screen careened at the back of his mind; if he shut his eyes he felt himself back in his damaged craft as it plunged from one vehicle to another, piling up enormous damage as it went. The kinetic sensations . . . he winced, recalling them. I guess I'm lucky, he said to himself.

"Is Sarah Benton there with you?" Danceman asked.

"No." Of course; his personal secretary—if only for job considerations—would be hovering close by, mothering him in her jejune, infantile way. All heavy-set women like to mother people, he thought. And they're dangerous;

if they fall on you they can kill you. "Maybe that's what happened to me," he said aloud. "Maybe Sarah fell on my squib."

"No, no; a tie rod in the steering fin of your squib split apart during the heavy rush-hour traffic and you—"

"I remember." He turned in his bed as the door of the ward opened; a white-clad doctor and two blue-clad nurses appeared, making their way toward his bed. "I'll talk to you later," Poole said, and hung up the fone. He took a deep, expectant breath.

"You shouldn't be foning quite so soon," the doctor said as he studied his chart. "Mr. Garson Poole, owner of Tri-Plan Electronics. Maker of random ident darts that track their prey for a circle-radius of a thousand miles, responding to unique enceph wave patterns. You're a successful man, Mr. Poole. But, Mr. Poole, you're not a man. You're an electric ant."

"Christ," Poole said, stunned.

"So we can't really treat you here, now that we've found out. We knew, of course, as soon as we examined your injured right hand; we saw the electronic components and then we made torso X-rays and of course they bore out our hypothesis."

"What," Poole said, "is an 'electric ant'?" But he knew; he could decipher the term.

A nurse said, "An organic robot."

"I see," Poole said. Frigid perspiration rose to the surface of his skin, across all his body.

"You didn't know," the doctor said.

"No," Poole shook his head.

The doctor said, "We get an electric ant every week or so. Either brought in here from a squib accident—like yourself—or one seeking voluntary admission . . . one who, like yourself, has never been told, who has functioned along side humans, believing himself—*itself*—human. As to your hand—" He paused.

"Forget my hand," Poole said savagely.

"Be calm." The doctor leaned over him, peered acutely down into Poole's face. "We'll have a hospital boat convey you over to a service facility where repairs, or replacement, on your hand can be made at a reasonable expense, either to yourself, if you're self-owned, or to your owners, if such there are. In any case you'll be back at your desk at Tri-Plan, functioning just as before."

"Except," Poole said, "now I know." He wondered if Danceman or Sarah or any of the others at the office knew. Had they—or one of them—purchased him? Designed him? A figurehead, he said to himself, that's all I've been. I must never really have run the company; it was a delusion implanted in me when I was made . . . along with the decision that I am human and alive.

"Before you leave for the repair facility," the doctor said, "could you kindly settle your bill at the front desk?"

Poole said acidly, "How can there be a bill if you don't treat ants here?"

"For our services," the nurse said. "Up until the point we knew."

"Bill me," Poole said, with furious, impotent anger. "Bill my firm." With massive effort he managed to sit up; his head swimming, he stepped haltingly from the bed and onto the floor. "I'll be glad to leave here," he said as he rose to a standing position. "And thank you for your humane attention."

"Thank you, too, Mr. Poole," the doctor said. "Or rather I should say just Poole."

At the repair facility he had his missing hand replaced.

It proved fascinating, the hand; he examined it for a long time before he let the technicians install it. On the surface it appeared organic—in fact, on the surface it was. Natural skin covered natural flesh, and true blood filled the veins and capillaries. But, beneath that, wires and circuits, miniaturized components, gleamed . . . looking deep into the wrist he saw surge gates, motors, multi-stage valves, all very small. Intricate. And—the hand cost forty frogs. A week's salary, insofar as he drew it from the company payroll.

"Is this guaranteed?" he asked the technicians as they refused the "bone" section of the hand to the balance of his body.

"Ninety days, parts and labor," one of the technicians said. "Unless subjected to unusual or intentional abuse."

"That sounds vaguely suggestive," Poole said.

The technician, a man—all of them were men—said, regarding him keenly, "You've been posing?"

"Unintentionally," Poole said.

"And now it's intentional?"

Poole said, "Exactly."

"Do you know why you never guessed? There must have been signs . . . clickings and whirrings from inside you, now and then. You never guessed because you were programmed not to notice. You'll now have the same difficulty finding out why you were built and for whom you've been operating."

"A slave," Poole said. "A mechanical slave."

"You've had fun."

"I've lived a good life," Poole said. "I've worked hard."

He paid the facility its forty frogs, flexed his new fingers, tested them out by picking up various objects such as coins, then departed. Ten minutes later he was aboard a public carrier, on his way home. It had been quite a day.

At home, in his one-room apartment, he poured himself a shot of Jack Daniel's Purple Label—sixty years old—and sat sipping it, meanwhile

gazing through his sole window at the building on the opposite side of the street. Shall I go to the office? he asked himself. If so, why? If not, why? Choose one. Christ, he thought, it undermines you, knowing this. I'm a freak, he realized. An inanimate object mimicking an animate one. But—he felt alive. Yet . . . he felt differently, now. About himself. Hence about everyone, especially Danceman and Sarah, everyone at Tri-Plan.

I think I'll kill myself, he said to himself. But I'm probably programmed not to do that; it would be a costly waste which my owner would have to absorb. And he wouldn't want to.

Programmed. In me somewhere, he thought, there is a matrix fitted in place, a grid screen that cuts me off from certain thoughts, certain actions. And forces me into others. I am not free. I never was, but now I know it; that makes it different.

Turning his window to opaque, he snapped on the overhead light, carefully set about removing his clothing, piece by piece. He had watched carefully as the technicians at the repair facility had attached his new hand—he had a rather clear idea, now, of how his body had been assembled. Two major panels, one in each thigh; the technicians had removed the panels to check the circuit complexes beneath. If I'm programmed, he decided, the matrix probably can be found there.

The maze of circuitry baffled him. I need help, he said to himself. Let's see . . . what's the fone code for the class BBB computer we hire at the office?

He picked up the fone, dialed the computer at its permanent location in Boise, Idaho.

"Use of this computer is prorated at a five frogs per minute basis," a mechanical voice from the fone said. "Please hold your mastercreditcharge-plate before the screen."

He did so.

"At the sound of the buzzer you will be connected with the computer," the voice continued. "Please query it as rapidly as possible, taking into account the fact that its answer will be given in terms of a microsecond, while your query will—" He turned the sound down, then. But quickly turned it up as the blank audio input of the computer appeared on the screen. At this moment the computer had become a giant ear, listening to him—as well as fifty thousand other queriers throughout Terra.

"Scan me visually," he instructed the computer. "And tell me where I will find the programming mechanism which controls my thoughts and behavior." He waited. On the fone's screen a great active eye, multilensed, peered at him; he displayed himself for it, there in his one-room apartment.

The computer said, "Remove your chest panel. Apply pressure at your breastbone and then ease outward."

He did so. A section of his chest came off; dizzily, he set it down on the floor.

"I can distinguish control modules," the computer said, "but I can't tell

which—"It paused as its eye roved about on the fone screen. "I distinguish a roll of punched tape mounted above your heart mechanism. Do you see it?" Poole craned his neck, peered. He saw it, too. "I will have to sign off," the computer said. "After I have examined the data available to me I will contact you and give you an answer. Good day." The screen died out.

I'll yank the tape out of me, Poole said to himself. Tiny . . . no larger than two spools of thread, with a scanner mounted between the delivery drum and the take-up drum. He could not see any sign of motion; the spools seemed inert. They must cut in as override, he reflected, when specific situations occur. Override to my encephalic processes. And they've been doing it all my life.

He reached down, touched the delivery drum. All I have to do is tear this out, he thought, and—

The fone screen relit. "Mastercreditchargeplate number 3-BNX-882-HQR446-T," the computer's voice came. "This is BBB-307DR recontacting you in response to your query of sixteen seconds lapse, November 4, 1992. The punched tape roll above your heart mechanism is not a programming turret but is in fact a reality-supply construct. All sense stimuli received by your central neurological system emanate from that unit and tampering with it would be risky if not terminal." It added, "You appear to have no programming circuit. Query answered. Good day." It flicked off.

Poole, standing naked before the fone screen, touched the tape drum once again, with calculated, enormous caution. I see, he thought wildly. Or do I see? This unit—

If I cut the tape, he realized, my world will disappear. Reality will continue for others, but not for me. Because my reality, my universe, is coming to me from this minuscule unit. Fed into the scanner and then into my central nervous system as it snailishly unwinds.

It has been unwinding for years, he decided.

Getting his clothes, he redressed, seated himself in his big armchair—a luxury imported into his apartment from Tri-Plan's main offices—and lit a tobacco cigarette. His hands shook as he laid down his initialed lighter; leaning back, he blew smoke before himself, creating a nimbus of gray.

I have to go slowly, he said to himself. What am I trying to do? Bypass my programming? But the computer found no programming circuit. Do I want to interfere with the reality tape? And if so, *why*?

Because, he thought, if I control that, I control reality. At least so far as I'm concerned. My subjective reality . . . but that's all there is. Objective reality is a synthetic construct, dealing with a hypothetical universalization of a multitude of subjective realities.

My universe is lying within my fingers, he realized. If I can just figure out how the damn thing works. All I set out to do originally was to search for and

locate my programming circuit so I could gain true homeostatic functioning: control of myself. But with this—

With this he did not merely gain control of himself; he gained control over everything.

And this sets me apart from every human who ever lived and died, he thought somberly.

Going over to the fone, he dialed his office. When he had Danceman on the screen he said briskly, "I want you to send a complete set of microtools and enlarging screen over to my apartment. I have some microcircuitry to work on." Then he broke the connection, not wanting to discuss it.

A half-hour later a knock sounded on his door. When he opened up he found himself facing one of the shop foremen, loaded down with microtools of every sort. "You didn't say exactly what you wanted," the foreman said, entering the apartment. "So Mr. Danceman had me bring everything."

"And the enlarging-lens system?"

"In the truck, up on the roof."

Maybe what I want to do, Poole thought, is die. He lit a cigarette, stood smoking and waiting as the shop foreman lugged the heavy enlarging screen, with its power-supply and control panel, into the apartment. This is suicide, what I'm doing here. He shuddered.

"Anything wrong, Mr. Poole?" the shop foreman said as he rose to his feet, relieved of the burden of the enlarging-lens system. "You must still be rickety on your pins from your accident."

"Yes," Poole said quietly. He stood tautly waiting until the foreman left.

Under the enlarging-lens system the plastic tape assumed a new shape: a wide track along which hundreds of thousands of punch-holes worked their way. I thought so, Poole thought. Not recorded as charges on a ferrous oxide layer but actually punched-free slots.

Under the lens the strip of tape visibly oozed forward. Very slowly, but it did, at uniform velocity, move in the direction of the scanner.

The way I figure it, he thought, is that the punched holes are *on* gates. It functions like a player piano: solid is no, punch-hole is yes. How can I test this?

Obviously by filling in a number of the holes.

He measured the amount of tape left on the delivery spool, calculated—at great effort—the velocity of the tape's movement, and then came up with a figure. If he altered the tape visible at the in-going edge of the scanner, five to seven hours would pass before that particular time period arrived. He would in effect be painting out stimuli due a few hours from now.

With a microbrush he swabbed a large—relatively large—section of tape with opaque varnish . . . obtained from the supply kit accompanying the

microtools. I have smeared out stimuli for about half an hour, he pondered. Have covered at least a thousand punches.

It would be interesting to see what change, if any, overcame his environment, six hours from now.

Five and a half hours later he sat at Krackter's, a superb bar in Manhattan, having a drink with Danceman.

"You look bad," Danceman said.

"I am bad," Poole said. He finished his drink, a Scotch sour, and ordered another.

"From the accident?"

"In a sense, yes."

Danceman said, "Is it—something you found out about yourself?"

Raising his head, Poole eyed him in the murky light of the bar. "Then you know."

"I know," Danceman said, "that I should call you 'Poole' instead of 'Mr. Poole.' But I prefer the latter, and will continue to do so."

"How long have you known?" Poole said.

"Since you took over the firm. I was told that the actual owners of Tri-Plan, who are located in the Prox System, wanted Tri-Plan run by an electric ant whom they could control. They wanted a brilliant and forceful—"

"The real owners?" This was the first he had heard about that. "We have two thousand stockholders. Scattered everywhere."

"Marvis Bey and her husband Ernan, on Prox 4, control 51 percent of the voting stock. This had been true from the start."

"Why didn't I know?"

"I was told not to tell you. You were to think that you yourself made all company policy. With my help. But actually I was feeding you what the Beys fed to me."

"I'm a figurehead," Poole said.

"In a sense, yes." Danceman nodded. "But you'll always be 'Mr. Poole' to me."

A section of the far wall vanished. And with it, several people at tables nearby. And—

Through the big glass side of the bar, the skyline of New York City flickered out of existence.

Seeing his face, Danceman said, "What is it?"

Poole said hoarsely, "Look around. Do you see any changes?"

After looking around the room, Danceman said, "No. What like?"

"You still see the skyline?"

"Sure. Smoggy as it is. The lights wink—"

"Now I know," Poole said. He had been right; every punch-hole covered up meant the disappearance of some object in his reality world. Standing, he

said, "I'll see you later, Danceman. I have to get back to my apartment; there's some work I'm doing. Good night." He strode from the bar and out onto the street, searching for a cab.

No cabs.

Those, too, he thought. I wonder what else I painted over. Prostitutes? Flowers? Prisons?

There, in the bar's parking lot, Danceman's squib. I'll take that, he decided. There are still cabs in Danceman's world; he can get one later. Anyhow it's a company car, and I hold a copy of the key.

Presently he was in the air, turning toward his apartment.

New York City had not returned. To the left and right vehicles and buildings, streets, ped-runners, signs . . . and in the center nothing. How can I fly into that? he asked himself. I'd disappear.

Or would I? He flew toward the nothingness.

Smoking one cigarette after another, he flew in a circle for fifteen minutes . . . and then, soundlessly, New York reappeared. He could finish his trip. He stubbed out his cigarette (a waste of something so valuable) and shot off in the direction of his apartment.

If I insert a narrow opaque strip, he pondered as he unlocked his apartment door, I can—

His thoughts ceased. Someone sat in his living room chair, watching a captain kirk on the TV. "Sarah," he said, nettled.

She rose, well-padded but graceful. "You weren't at the hospital, so I came here. I still have that key you gave me back in March after we had that awful argument. Oh . . . you look so depressed." She came up to him, peeped into his face anxiously. "Does your injury hurt that badly?"

"It's not that." He removed his coat, tie, shirt, and then his chest panel; kneeling down, he began inserting his hands into the microtool gloves. Pausing, he looked up at her and said, "I found out I'm an electric ant. Which from one standpoint opens up certain possibilities, which I am exploring now." He flexed his fingers and, at the far end of the left waldo, a micro screwdriver moved, magnified into visibility by the enlarging-lens system. "You can watch," he informed her. "If you so desire."

She had begun to cry.

"What's the matter?" he demanded savagely, without looking up from his work.

"I—it's just so sad. You've been such a good employer to all of us at Tri-Plan. We respect you so. And now it's all changed."

The plastic tape had an unpunched margin at top and bottom; he cut a horizontal strip, very narrow, then, after a moment of great concentration, cut the tape itself four hours away from the scanning head. He then rotated the cut strip into a right-angle piece in relation to the scanner, fused it in place with a micro heat element, then reattached the tape reel to its left and

right sides. He had, in effect, inserted a dead twenty minutes into the unfolding flow of his reality. It would take effect—according to his calculations—a few minutes after midnight.

"Are you fixing yourself?" Sarah asked timidly.

Poole said "I'm freeing myself." Beyond this he had several other alterations in mind. But first he had to test his theory; blank, unpunched tape meant no stimuli, in which case the *lack* of tape. . . .

"That look on your face," Sarah said. She began gathering up her purse, coat, rolled-up aud-vid magazine. "I'll go; I can see how you feel about finding me here."

"Stay," he said. "I'll watch the captain kirk with you." He got into his shirt. "Remember years ago when there were—what was it?—twenty or twenty-two TV channels? Before the government shut down the independents?"

She nodded.

"What would it have looked like," he said, "if this TV set projected all channels onto the cathode ray screen *at the same time*? Could we have distinguished anything, in the mixture?"

"I don't think so."

"Maybe we could learn to. Learn to be selective; do our own job of perceiving what we wanted to and what we didn't. Think of the possibilities, if our brain could handle twenty images at once; think of the amount of knowledge which could be stored during a given period. I wonder if the brain, the human brain—" He broke off. "The human brain couldn't do it," he said, presently, reflecting to himself. "But in theory a quasiorganic brain might."

"Is that what you have?" Sarah asked.

"Yes," Poole said.

They watched the captain kirk to its end, and then they went to bed. But Poole sat up against his pillows smoking and brooding. Beside him, Sarah stirred restlessly, wondering why he did not turn off the light.

Eleven fifty. It would happen any time, now.

"Sarah," he said, "I want your help. In a very few minutes something strange will happen to me. It won't last long, but I want you to watch me carefully. See if I—" He gestured. "Show any changes. If I seem to go to sleep, or if I talk nonsense, or—" He wanted to say, if I disappear. But he did not. "I won't do you any harm, but I think it might be a good idea if you armed yourself. Do you have your anti-mugging gun with you?"

"In my purse." She had become fully awake now; sitting up in bed, she gazed at him with wild fright, her ample shoulders tanned and freckled in the light of the room.

He got her gun for her.

The room stiffened into paralyzed immobility. Then the colors began to drain away. Objects diminished until, smokelike, they flitted away into shadows. Darkness filmed everything as the objects in the room became weaker and weaker.

The last stimuli are dying out, Poole realized. He squinted, trying to see. He made out Sarah Benton, sitting in the bed: a two-dimensional figure that, doll-like, had been propped up, there to fade and dwindle. Random gusts of dematerialized substance eddied about in unstable clouds; the elements collected, fell apart, then collected once again. And then the last heat, energy and light dissipated; the room closed over and fell into itself, as if sealed off from reality. And at that point absolute blackness replaced everything, space without depth, not nocturnal but rather stiff and unyielding. And in addition he heard nothing.

Reaching, he tried to touch something. But he had nothing to reach with. Awareness of his body had departed along with everything else in the universe. He had no hands, and even if he had, there would be nothing for them to feel.

I am still right about the way the damn tape works, he said to himself, using a nonexistent mouth to communicate an invisible message.

Will this pass in ten minutes? he asked himself. Am I right about that, too? He waited . . . but knew intuitively that his time sense had departed with everything else. I can only wait, he realized. And hope it won't be long.

To pace himself, he thought, I'll make up an encyclopedia; I'll try to list everything that begins with an "a." Let's see. He pondered. Apply, automobile, acksetron, atmosphere, Atlantic, tomato aspic, advertising—he thought on and on, categories slithering through his fright-haunted mind.

All at once light flickered on.

He lay on the couch in the living room, and mild sunlight spilled in through the single window. Two men bent over him, their hands full of tools. Maintenance men, he realized. They've been working on me.

"He's conscious," one of the technicians said. He rose, stood back; Sarah Benton, dithering with anxiety, replaced him.

"Thank god!" she said, breathing wetly in Poole's ear. "I was so afraid; I called Mr. Danceman finally about—"

"What happened?" Poole broke in harshly. "Start from the beginning and for god's sake speak slowly. So I can assimilate it all."

Sarah composed herself, paused to rub her nose, and then plunged on nervously. "You passed out. You just lay there, as if you were dead. I waited until two thirty and you did nothing. I called Mr. Danceman, waking him up unfortunately, and he called the electric-ant maintenance—I mean, the organic-roby maintenance people, and these two men came about four forty-five, and they've been working on you ever since. It's now six fifteen in

the morning. And I'm very cold and I want to go to bed; I can't make it in to the office today; I really can't." She turned away, sniffing. The sound annoyed him.

One of the uniformed maintenance men said, "You've been playing around with your reality tape."

"Yes," Poole said. Why deny it? Obviously they had found the inserted solid strip. "I shouldn't have been out that long," he said. "I inserted a ten-minute strip only."

"It shut off the tape transport," the technician explained. "The tape stopped moving forward; your insertion jammed it, and it automatically shut down to avoid tearing the tape. Why would you want to fiddle around with that? Don't you know what you could do?"

"I'm not sure," Poole said.

"But you have a good idea."

Poole said acridly, "That's why I'm doing it."

"Your bill," the maintenance man said, "is going to be ninety-five frogs. Payable in installments, if you so desire."

"Okay," he said; he sat up groggily, rubbed his eyes and grimaced. His head ached and his stomach felt totally empty.

"Shave the tape next time," the primary technician told him. "That way it won't jam. Didn't it occur to you that it had a safety factor built into it? So it would stop rather than—"

"What happens," Poole interrupted, his voice low and intently careful, "if no tape passes under the scanner? No tape—nothing at all. The photocell shining upward without impedance?"

The technicians glanced at each other. One said, "All the neuro circuits jump their gaps and short out."

"Meaning what?" Poole said.

"Meaning it's the end of the mechanism."

Poole said, "I've examined the circuit. It doesn't carry enough voltage to do that. Metal won't fuse under such slight loads of current, even if the terminals are touching. We're talking about a millionth of a watt along a cesium channel perhaps a sixteenth of an inch in length. Let's assume there are a billion possible combinations at one instant arising from the punch-outs on the tape. The total output isn't cumulative; the amount of current depends on what the battery details for that module, and it's not much. With all gates open and going."

"Would we lie?" one of the technicians asked wearily.

"Why not?" Poole said. "Here I have an opportunity to experience everything. Simultaneously. To know the universe in its entirety, to be momentarily in contact with all reality. Something that no human can do. A symphonic score entering my brain outside of time, all notes, all instruments sounding at once. And all symphonies. Do you see?"

"It'll burn you out," both technicians said, together.

"I don't think so," Poole said.

Sarah said, "Would you like a cup of coffee, Mr. Poole?"

"Yes," he said; he lowered his legs, pressed his cold feet against the door, shuddered. He then stood up. His body ached. They had me lying all night on the couch, he realized. All things considered, they could have done better than that.

At the kitchen table in the far corner of the room, Garson Poole sat sipping coffee across from Sarah. The technicians had long since gone.

"You're not going to try any more experiments on yourself, are you?" Sarah asked wistfully.

Poole grated, "I would like to control time. To reverse it." I will cut a segment of tape out, he thought, and fuse it in upside down. The causal sequences will then flow the other way. Thereupon I will walk backward down the steps from the roof field, back up to my door, push a locked door open, walk backward to the sink, where I will get out a stack of dirty dishes. I will seat myself at this table before the stack, fill each dish with food produced from my stomach. . . . I will then transfer the food to the refrigerator. The next day I will take the food out of the refrigerator, pack it in bags, carry the bags to a supermarket, distribute the food here and there in the store. And at last, at the front counter, they will pay me money for this, from their cash register. The food will be packed with other food in big plastic boxes, shipped out of the city into the hydroponic plants on the Atlantic, there to be joined back to trees and bushes or the bodies of dead animals or pushed deep into the ground. But what would all that prove? A video tape running backward. . . . I would know no more than I know now, which is not enough.

What I want, he realized, is ultimate and absolute reality, for one micro-second. After that it doesn't matter, because all will be known; nothing will be left to understand or see.

I might try one other change, he said to himself. Before I try cutting the tape, I will prick new punch-holes in the tape and see what presently emerges. It will be interesting because I will not know what the holes I make mean.

Using the trip of a microtool, he punched several holes, at random, on the tape. As close to the scanner as he could manage . . . he did not want to wait.

"I wonder if you'll see it," he said to Sarah. Apparently not, insofar as he could extrapolate. "Something may show up," he said to her. "I just want to warn you; I don't want you to be afraid."

"Oh dear," Sarah said tinnily.

He examined his wristwatch. One minute passed, then a second, a third. And then—

In the center of the room appeared a flock of green and black ducks. They quacked excitedly, rose from the floor, fluttered against the ceiling in a dithering mass of feathers and wings and frantic in their vast urge, their instinct to get away:

"Ducks," Poole said, marveling. "I punched a hole for a flight of wild ducks."

Now something else appeared. A park bench with an elderly, tattered man seated on it, reading a torn, bent newspaper. He looked up, dimly made out Poole, smiled briefly at him with badly made dentures, and then returned to his folded-back newspaper. He read on.

"Do you see him?" Poole asked Sarah. "And the ducks." At that moment the ducks and the park bum disappeared. Nothing remained of them. The interval of their punch-holes had quickly passed.

"They weren't real," Sarah said. "Were they? So how—"

"You're not real," he told Sarah. "You're a stimulus-factor on my reality tape. A punch-hole that can be glazed over. Do you also have an existence in another reality tape, or one in an objective reality?" He did not know; he couldn't tell. Perhaps she existed in a thousand reality tapes; perhaps on every reality tape ever manufactured. "If I cut the tape," he said, "you will be everywhere and nowhere. Like everything else in the universe. At least as far as I am aware of it."

Sarah faltered, "I'm real."

"I want to know you completely," Poole said. "To do that I must cut the tape. If I don't do it now, I'll do it some other time; it's inevitable that eventually I'll do it." So why wait? he asked himself. And there is always the possibility that Danceman has reported back to my maker, that they will be making moves to head me off. Because, perhaps, I'm endangering their property—myself.

"You make me wish I had gone to the office after all," Sarah said, her mouth turned down with dimpled gloom.

"Go," Poole said.

"I don't want to leave you alone."

"I'll be fine," Poole said.

"No, you're not going to be fine. You're going to unplug yourself or something, kill yourself because you've found out you're just an electric ant and not a human being."

He said, presently, "Maybe so." Maybe it boiled down to that.

"And I can't stop you," she said.

"No." He nodded in agreement. "But I'm going to stay," Sarah said. "Even if I can't stop you. Because if I do leave and you do kill yourself, I'll always ask myself for the rest of my life what would have happened if I had stayed. You see?"

Again he nodded.

"Go ahead," Sarah said.

He rose to his feet. "It's not pain I'm going to feel," he told her. "Although it may look like that to you. Keep in mind the fact that organic robots have minimal pain-circuits in them. I will be experiencing the most intense—"

"Don't tell me any more," she broke in. "Just do it if you're going to, or don't do it if you're not."

Clumsily—because he was frightened—he wriggled his hands into the microglove assembly, reached to pick up a tiny tool: a sharp cutting blade. "I am going to cut a tape mounted inside my chest panel," he said, as he gazed through the enlarging-lens system. "That's all." His hand shook as it lifted the cutting blade. In a second it can be done, he realized. All over. And—I will have time to fuse the cut ends of tape back together, he realized. A half-hour at least. If I change my mind.

He cut the tape.

Staring at him, cowering, Sarah whispered, "Nothing happened."

"I have thirty or forty minutes." He reseated himself at the table, having drawn his hands from the gloves. His voice, he noticed, shook; undoubtedly Sarah was aware of it, and he felt anger at himself, knowing that he had alarmed her. "I'm sorry," he said, irrationally; he wanted to apologize to her. "Maybe you ought to leave," he said in panic; again he stood up. So did she, reflexively, as if imitating him; bloated and nervous, she stood there palpitating. "Go away," he said thickly. "Back to the office, where you ought to be. Where we both ought to be." I'm going to fuse the tape-ends together, he told himself; the tension is too great for me to stand.

Reaching his hands toward the gloves he groped to pull them over his straining fingers. Peering into the enlarging screen, he saw the beam from the photoelectric gleam upward, pointed directly into the scanner; at the same time he saw the end of the tape disappearing under the scanner... he saw this, understood it, I'm too late, he realized. It has passed through. God, he thought, help me. It has begun winding at a rate greater than I calculated. So it's *now* that—

He saw apples and cobblestones and zebras. He felt warmth, the silky texture of cloth; he felt the ocean lapping at him and a great wind, from the north, plucking at him as if to lead him somewhere. Sarah was all around him, so was Danceman, New York glowed in the night, and the squibs about him scuttled and bounced through night skies and daytime and flooding and drought. Butter relaxed into liquid on his tongue, and at the same time hideous odors and tastes assailed him: the bitter presence of poisons and lemons and blades of summer grass. He drowned; he fell; he lay in the arms of a woman in a vast white bed which at the same time dinned shrilly in his ear: the warning noise of a defective elevator in one of the ancient, ruined downtown hotels. I am living, I have lived, I will never live, he said to himself, and with his thoughts came every word, every sound; insects squeaked and raced, and he half sank into a complex body of homeostatic machinery located somewhere in Tri-Plan's labs.

He wanted to say something to Sarah. Opening his mouth, he tried to bring forth words—a specific string of them out of the enormous mass of them brilliantly lighting his mind, scorching him with their utter meaning.

His mouth burned. He wondered why.

Frozen against the wall, Sarah Benton opened her eyes and saw the curl of smoke ascending from Poole's half-opened mouth. Then the roby sank down, knelt on elbows and knees, then slowly spread out in a broken, crumpled heap. She knew without examining it that it had "died."

Poole did it to himself, she realized. And it couldn't feel pain; it said so itself. Or at least not very much pain; maybe a little. Anyhow, now it was over.

I had better call Mr. Danceman and tell him what's happened, she decided. Still shaky, she made her way across the room to the fone; picking it up, she dialed from memory.

It thought I was a stimulus-factor on its reality tape, she said to herself. So it thought I would die when it "died." How strange, she thought. Why did it imagine that? It had never been plugged into the real world; it had "lived" in an electronic world of its own. How bizarre.

"Mr. Danceman," she said, when the circuit to his office had been put through. "Poole is gone. It destroyed itself right in front of my eyes. You'd better come over."

"So we're finally free of it."

"Yes, won't it be nice?"

Danceman said, "I'll send a couple of men over from the shop." He saw past her, made out the sight of Poole lying by the kitchen table. "You go home and rest," he instructed Sarah. "You must be worn out by all this."

"Yes," she said. "Thank you, Mr. Danceman." She hung up and stood, aimlessly.

And then she noticed something.

My hands, she thought. She held them up. Why is it I can see through them?

The wall of the room, too, had become ill-defined.

Trembling, she walked back to the inert roby, stood by it, not knowing what to do. Through her legs the carpet showed, and then the carpet became dim, and she saw, through it, further layers of disintegrating matter beyond.

Maybe if I can fuse the tape-ends back together, she thought. But she did not know how. And already Poole had become vague.

The wind of early morning blew about her. She did not feel it; she had begun, now, to cease to feel.

The winds blew on.

THE EXIT DOOR

LEADS IN

*This story was written ten years after "The Electric Ant." The whole decade of the seventies sucked Dick down into depression and despair. During the early years of the decade he wrote nothing. In 1972 he moved to the Los Angeles area, settling first in Fullerton and then in Santa Ana. The following year he married a young girl named Tessa Busby. Emotional stability seemed to return to his life and he began writing again. In 1974 he published *Flow My Tears*, the *Policeman Said*, an uneven novel about reality, love, and authority figures. A *Scanner Darkly* followed in 1977. This is a thinly disguised account of his experiences in the drug culture. The novel, although published as science fiction, is essentially realistic fiction about drug-induced psychosis, and one of the finest novels ever written on that subject.*

In 1976 Tessa divorced him and once again he lapsed into literary silence. He became obsessed with developing a cosmology that would explain the visionary experience he had undergone in 1974. He read philosophy endlessly and wrote out his thoughts about the ideas he encountered in a project he called his exegesis. He said he was done writing fiction. His friends said he was crazy, that he had burned out his brain with drugs.

This delightful little short story is a rebirth, at least temporarily, of the old Dick. His theme is still the same: moral responsibility exceeds legal responsibility. The law is a system, morality is individual. When personal morality conflicts with law, morality must always take precedent. Dick was one with Thoreau, Ghandi, and Martin Luther King in this conviction. His humor is present again—for example, Bob Bibleman, the protagonist, comments when coffee spilled on his uniform will not wipe off, "Symbolism, Lady Macbeth. I always wanted to have a dog named Spot so I could say, 'Out, out, damned Spot.'"

Bob Bibleman had the impression that robots wouldn't look you in the eye. And when one had been in the vicinity small valuable objects disappeared. A robot's idea of order was to stack everything into one pile. Nonetheless, Bibleman had to order lunch from robots, since vending ranked too low on the wage scale to attract humans.

"A hamburger, fries, strawberry shake and—" Bibleman paused, reading the printout. "Make that a supreme double cheeseburger, fries, a chocolate malt—"

"Wait a minute," the robot said. "I'm already working on the burger. You want to buy into this week's contest while you're waiting?"

"I don't get the royal cheeseburger," Bibleman said.

"That's right."

It was hell living in the twenty-first century. Information transfer had reached the velocity of light. Bibleman's older brother had once fed a ten-word plot outline into a robot fiction machine, changed his mind as to the outcome, and found that the novel was already in print. He had had to program a sequel in order to make his correction.

"What's the prize structure in the contest?" Bibleman asked.

At once the printout posted all the odds, from first prize down to last. Naturally, the robot blanked out the display before Bibleman could read it.

"What is first prize?" Bibleman said.

"I can't tell you that," the robot said. From its slot came a hamburger, french fries and a strawberry shake. "That'll be one thousand dollars in cash."

"Give me a hint," Bibleman said as he paid.

"It's everywhere and nowhere. It's existed since the seventeenth century. Originally it was invisible. Then it became royal. You can't get in unless you're smart, although cheating helps and so does being rich. What does the word 'heavy' suggest to you?"

"Profound."

"No, the literal meaning."

"Mass." Bibleman pondered. "What is this, a contest to see who can figure out what the prize is? I give up."

"Pay the six dollars," the robot said, "to cover our costs, and you'll receive an—"

"Gravity," Bibleman broke in. "Sir Isaac Newton. The Royal College of England. Am I right?"

"Right," the robot said. "Six dollars entitles you to a chance to go to college—a statistical chance, at the posted odds. What's six dollars? Prattle."

Bibleman handed over a six-dollar coin.

"You win," the robot said. "You get to go to college. You beat the odds,

which were two trillion to one against. Let me be the first to congratulate you. If I had a hand I'd shake hands with you. This will change your life. This has been your lucky day."

"It's a setup," Bibleman said, feeling a rush of anxiety.

"You're right," the robot said, and it looked Bibleman right in the eye. "It's also mandatory that you accept your prize. The college is a military college located in Buttfuck, Egypt, so to speak. But that's no problem; you'll be taken there. Go home and start packing."

"Can't I eat my hamburger and drink—"

"I'd suggest you start packing right away."

Behind Bibleman a man and woman had lined up; reflexively he got out of their way, trying to hold on to his tray of food, feeling dizzy.

"A char-broiled steak sandwich," the man said, "onion rings, root beer and that's it."

The robot said, "Care to buy into the contest? Terrific prizes." It flashed the odds on its display panel.

When Bob Bibleman unlocked the door of his one-room apartment his telephone was on. It was looking for him.

"There you are," the telephone said.

"I'm not going to do it," Bibleman said.

"Sure you are," the phone said. "Do you know who this is? Read over your certificate, your first-prize legal form. You hold the rank of shavetail. I'm Major Casals. You're under my jurisdiction. If I tell you to piss purple you'll piss purple. How soon can you be on a transplan rocket? Do you have friends you want to say good-bye to? A sweetheart, perhaps? Your mother?"

"Am I coming back?" Bibleman said with anger. "I mean, who are we fighting, this college? For that matter, what college is it? Who is on the faculty? Is it a liberal arts college or does it specialize in the hard sciences? Is it government sponsored? Does it offer—"

"Just calm down," Major Casals said quietly.

Bibleman seated himself. He discovered that his hands were shaking. To himself he thought, I was born in the wrong century. A hundred years ago this wouldn't have happened and a hundred years from now it will be illegal. What I need is a lawyer.

His life had been a quiet one. He had, over the years, advanced to the modest position of floating-home salesman. For a man twenty-two years old that wasn't bad. He almost owned his one-room apartment; that is, he rented with an option to buy. It was a small life, as lives went; he did not ask too much and he did not complain—normally—at what he received. Although he did not understand the tax structure that cut through his income, he accepted it, he accepted a modified state of penury the same way he accepted it when a girl would not go to bed with him. In a sense this defined

him; this was his measure. He submitted to what he did not like, and he regarded this attitude as a virtue. Most people in authority over him considered him a good person. As to those over whom *he* had authority, that was a class with zero members. His boss at Cloud Nine Homes told him what to do and his customers, really, told him what to do. The government told everyone what to do, or so he assumed. He had very few dealings with the government. That was neither a virtue nor a vice; it was simply good luck.

Once he had experienced vague dreams. They had to do with giving to the poor. In high school he had read Charles Dickens and a vivid idea of the oppressed had fixed itself in his mind to the point where he could see them: all those who did not have a one-room apartment and a job and a high-school education. Certain vague place names had floated through his head, gleaned from TV, places like India where heavy-duty machinery swept up the dying. Once a teaching machine had told him, *You have a good heart*. That amazed him—not that a machine would say so, but that it would say it to him. A girl had told him the same thing. He marveled at this. Vast forces colluding to tell him that he was not a bad person! It was a mystery and a delight.

But those days had passed. He no longer read novels, and the girl had been transferred to Frankfurt. Now he had been set up by a robot, a cheap machine, to shovel shit in the boonies, dragooned by a mechanical scam that was probably pulling citizens off the streets in record numbers. This was not a college he was going to; he had won nothing. He had won a stint at some kind of forced-labor camp, most likely. The exit door leads in, he thought to himself. Which is to say, when they want you they already have you; all they need is the paper work. And a computer can process the forms at the touch of a key. The H key for hell and the S key for slave, he thought. And the Y key for you.

Don't forget your toothbrush, he thought. You may need it.

On the phone screen Major Casals regarded him, as if silently estimating the chances that Bob Bibleman might bolt. Two trillion to one I will, Bibleman thought. But the one will win, as in the contest; I'll do what I'm told.

"Please," Bibleman said, "let me ask you one thing, and give me an honest answer."

"Of course," Major Casals said.

"If I hadn't gone up to that Earl's Senior robot and—"

"We'd have gotten you anyhow," Major Casals said.

"Okay," Bibleman said, nodding. "Thanks. It makes me feel better. I don't have to tell myself stupid stuff like, If only I hadn't felt like a hamburger and fries. If only—" He broke off. "I'd better pack."

Major Casals said, "We've been running an evaluation on you for several

months. You're overly endowed for the kind of work you do. And under-educated. You need more education. You're *entitled* to more education."

Astonished, Bibleman said, "You're talking about it as if it's a genuine college!"

"It is. It's the finest in the system. It isn't advertised; something like this can't be. No one selects it; the college selects you. Those were not joke odds that you saw posted. You can't really imagine being admitted to the finest college in the system by this method, can you, Mr. Bibleman? You have a lot to learn."

"How long will I be at the college?" Bibleman said.

Major Casals said, "Until you have learned."

They gave him a physical, a haircut, a uniform and a place to bunk down, and many psychological tests. Bibleman suspected that the true purpose of the tests was to determine if he were a latent homosexual, and then he suspected that his suspicions indicated that he *was* a latent homosexual, so he abandoned the suspicions and supposed instead that they were sly intelligence and aptitude tests, and he informed himself that he was showing both: intelligence and aptitude. He also informed himself that he looked great in his uniform, even though it was the same uniform that everyone else wore. That is why they call it a uniform, he reminded himself as he sat on the edge of his bunk reading his orientation pamphlets.

The first pamphlet pointed out that it was a great honor to be admitted to the College. That was its name—the one word. How strange, he thought, puzzled. It's like naming your cat Cat and your dog Dog. This is my mother, Mrs. Mother, and my father, Mr. Father. Are these people working right? he wondered. It had been a phobia of his for years that someday he would fall into the hands of madmen—in particular madmen who seemed sane up until the last moment. To Bibleman this was the essence of horror.

As he sat scrutinizing the pamphlets a red-haired girl, wearing the College uniform, came over and seated herself beside him. She seemed perplexed.

"Maybe you can help me," she said. "What is a syllabus? It says here that we'll be given a syllabus. This place is screwing up my head."

Bibleman said, "We've been dragooned off the streets to shovel shit."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"Can't we just leave?"

"You leave first," Bibleman said. "And I'll wait and see what happens to you."

The girl laughed. "I guess you don't know what a syllabus is."

"Sure I do. It's an abstract of courses or topics."

"Yes, and pigs can whistle."

He regarded her. The girl regarded him.

"We're going to be here forever," the girl said.

Her name, she told him, was Mary Lorne. She was, he decided, pretty, wistful, afraid and putting up a good front. Together they joined the other new students for a showing of a recent Herbie the Hyena cartoon which Bibleman had seen; it was the episode in which Herbie attempted to assassinate the Russian monk Rasputin. In his usual fashion Herbie the Hyena poisoned his victim, shot him, blew him up six times, stabbed him, tied him up with chains and sank him in the Volga, tore him apart with wild horses and finally shot him to the moon strapped to a rocket. The cartoon bored Bibleman. He did not give a damn about Herbie the Hyena or Russian history and he wondered if this was a sample of the College's level of pedagogy. He could imagine Herbie the Hyena illustrating Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle. Herbie—in Bibleman's mind—chased after a subatomic particle fruitlessly, the particle bobbing up at random here and there. . . . Herbie making wild swings at it with a hammer; then a whole flock of subatomic particles jeering at Herbie, who was doomed as always to fuck up.

"What are you thinking?" Mary whispered to him.

The cartoon ended; the hall lights came on. There stood Major Casals on the stage, larger than on the phone. The fun is over, Bibleman said to himself. He could not imagine Major Casals chasing subatomic particles fruitlessly with wild swings of a sledgehammer. He felt himself grow cold and grim and a little afraid.

The lecture had to do with classified information. Behind Major Casals a giant hologram lit up with a schematic diagram of a homeostatic drilling rig. Within the hologram the rig rotated so that they could see it from all angles. Different stages of the rig's interior glowed in various colors.

"I asked what you were thinking," Mary whispered.

"We have to listen," Bibleman said quietly.

Mary said, equally quietly, "It finds titanium ore on its own. Big deal. Titanium is the ninth most abundant element in the crust of the planet. I'd be impressed if it could seek out and mine pure wurtzite, which is found only at Potosi, Bolivia; Butte, Montana; and Goldfield, Nevada."

"Why is that?" Bibleman said.

"Because," Mary said, "wurtzite is unstable at temperatures below one thousand degrees centigrade. And further—" She broke off. Major Casals had ceased talking and was looking at her.

"Would you repeat that for all of us, young woman?" Major Casals said.

Standing, Mary said, "Wurtzite is unstable at temperatures below one thousand degrees centigrade." Her voice was steady.

Immediately the hologram behind Major Casals switched to a readout of data on zinc-sulfide minerals.

"I don't see 'wurtzite' listed," Major Casals said.

"It's given on the chart in its inverted form," Mary said, her arms folded. "Which is sphalerite. Correctly, it is ZnS, of the sulfide group of the AX type. It's related to greenockite."

"Sit down," Major Casals said. The readout within the hologram now showed the characteristics of greenockite.

As she seated herself, Mary said, "I'm right. They don't have a homeostatic drilling rig for wurtzite because there is no—"

"Your name is?" Major Casals said, pen and pad poised.

"Mary Wurtz." Her voice was totally without emotion. "My father was Charles-Adolphe Wurtz."

"The discoverer of wurtzite?" Major Casals said uncertainly; his pen wavered.

"That's right," Mary said. Turning toward Bibleman she winked.

"Thank you for the information," Major Casals said.

He made a motion and the hologram now showed a flying buttress and, in comparison to it, a normal buttress.

"My point," Major Casals said, "is simply that certain information such as architectural principles of longstanding—"

"Most architectural principles are longstanding," Mary said.

Major Casals paused.

"Otherwise they'd serve no purpose," Mary said.

"Why not?" Major Casals said, and then he colored.

Several uniformed students laughed.

"Information of that type," Major Casals continued, "is not classified. But a good deal of what you will be learning is classified. This is why the College is under military charter. To reveal or transmit or make public classified information given you during your schooling here falls under the jurisdiction of the military. For a breach of these statutes you would be tried by a military tribunal."

The students murmured. To himself, Bibleman thought, banged, ganged and then some. No one spoke. Even the girl beside him was silent. A complicated expression had crossed her face, however; a deeply introverted look, somber and—he thought—unusually mature. It made her seem older, no longer a girl. It made him wonder just how old she really was. It was as if in her features a thousand years had surfaced before him as he scrutinized her and pondered—and as she scrutinized and pondered the officer on the stage and the great information hologram behind him. What is she thinking? he wondered. Is she going to say something more? How can she be not afraid to speak up? We've been told we are under military law.

Major Casals said, "I am going to give you an instance of a strictly classified cluster of data. It deals with the Panther Engine." Behind him the hologram, surprisingly, became blank.

"Sir," one of the students said, "the hologram isn't showing anything."

"This is not an area that will be dealt with in your studies here," Major Casals said. "The Panther Engine is a two-rotor system, opposed rotors serving a common main shaft. Its main advantage is a total lack of centrifugal torque in the housing. A cam chain is thrown between the opposed rotors, which permits the main-shaft to reverse itself without hysteresis."

Behind him the big hologram remained blank. Strange, Bibleman thought. An eerie sensation: information without information, as if the computer has gone blind.

Major Casals said, "The College is forbidden to release any information about the Panther Engine. It cannot be programmed to do otherwise. In fact it knows nothing about the Panther Engine; it is programmed to destroy any information it receives in that sector."

Raising his hand a student said, "So even if someone fed information into the College about the Panther—"

"It would eject the data," Major Casals said.

"Is this a unique situation?" another student asked.

"No," Major Casals said.

"Then there're a number of areas we can't get printouts for," a student murmured.

"Nothing of importance," Major Casals said. "At least as far as your studies are concerned."

The students were silent.

"The subjects which you will study," Major Casals said, "will be assigned to you, based on your aptitude and personality profiles. I'll call off your names and you will come forward for your allocation of topic assignment. The College itself has made the final decision for each of you, so you can be sure no error has been made."

What if I get proctology? Bibleman asked himself. In panic he thought, Or podiatry. Or herpetology. Or suppose the College in its infinite computer-oid wisdom decides to ram into me all the information in the universe pertaining to or resembling herpes labialis . . . or things even worse. If there is anything worse.

"What you want," Mary said, as the names were read alphabetically, "is a program that'll earn you a living. You have to be practical. I know what I'll get; I know where my strong point lies. It'll be chemistry."

His name was called; rising, he walked up the aisle to Major Casals. They looked at each other, and then Casals handed him an unsealed envelope.

Stiffly, Bibleman returned to his seat.

"You want me to open it?" Mary said.

Wordlessly, Bibleman passed the envelope to her. She opened it and studied the printout.

"Can I earn a living with it?" he said.

She smiled. "Yes, it's a high-paying field. Almost as good as—well, let's

just say that the colony planets are really in need of this. You could go to work anywhere."

Looking over her shoulder he saw the words on the page.

COSMOLOGY COSMOGONY PRE-SOCRATICS

"Pre-Socratic philosophy," Mary said. "Almost as good as structural engineering." She passed him the paper. "I shouldn't kid you. No, it's not really something you can make a living at, unless you teach . . . but maybe it interests you. Does it interest you?"

"No," he said shortly.

"I wonder why the College picked it, then," Mary said.

"What the hell," he said, "is cosmogony?"

"How the universe came into being. Aren't you interested in how the universe—" She paused, eyeing him. "You certainly won't be asking for printouts of any classified material," she said meditatively. "Maybe that's it," she murmured, to herself. "They won't have to watchdog you."

"I can be trusted with classified material," he said.

"Can you? Do you know yourself? But you'll be getting into that when the College bombards you with early Greek thought. 'Know thyself.' Apollo's motto at Delphi. It sums up half of Greek philosophy."

Bibleman said, "I'm not going up before a military tribunal for making public classified military material." He thought, then, about the Panther Engine and he realized, fully realized, that a really grim message had been spelled out in that little lecture by Major Casals. "I wonder what Herbie the Hyena's motto is," he said.

"I am determined to prove a villain," Mary said. "And hate the idle pleasures of these days. Plots have I laid." She reached out to touch him on the arm. "Remember? The Herbie the Hyena cartoon version of *Richard the Third*."

"Mary Lorne," Major Casals said, reading off the list.

"Excuse me." She went up, returned with her envelope, smiling. "Leptology," she said to Bibleman. "The study and treatment of leprosy. I'm kidding; it's chemistry."

"You'll be studying classified material," Bibleman said.

"Yes," she said. "I know."

On the first day of his study program Bob Bibleman set his College input-output terminal on AUTO and punched the proper key for his coded course.

"Thales of Miletus," the terminal said. "The founder of the Ionian school of natural philosophy."

"What did it teach?" Bibleman said.

"That the world floated on water, was sustained by water and originated in water."

"That's really stupid," Bibleman said.

The College terminal said, "Thales based this on the discovery of fossil fish far inland, even at high altitudes. So it is not as stupid as it sounds." It showed on its holo-screen a great deal of written information, no part of which struck Bibleman as very interesting. Anyhow he had requested AUDIO. "It is generally considered that Thales was the first rational man in history," the terminal said.

"What about Ikhnaton?" Bibleman said.

"He was strange."

"Moses?"

"Likewise strange."

"Hammurabi?"

"How do you spell that?"

"I'm not sure. I've just heard the name"

"Then we will discuss Anaximander," the College terminal said. "And, in a cursory initial survey, Anaximenes, Xenophanes, Parmenides, Melissus—wait a minute. I forgot Heraclitus and Cratylus. And we will study Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Zeno—"

"Christ," Bibleman said.

"That's another program," the College terminal said.

"Just continue," Bibleman said.

"Are you taking notes?"

"That's my business."

"You seem to be in a state of conflict."

Bibleman said, "What happens to me if I flunk out of the College?"

"You go to jail."

"I'll take notes."

"Since you are so driven—"

"What?"

"Since you are so full of conflict, you should find Empedocles interesting. He was the first dialectical philosopher. Empedocles believed that the basis of reality was an antithetical conflict between the forces of Love and Strife. Under Love the whole cosmos is a duly proportioned mixture, called a *krasis*. This *krasis* is a spherical deity, a single perfect mind which spends all its time—"

"Is there any practical application to any of this?" Bibleman interrupted.

"The two antithetical forces of Love and Strife resemble the Taoist elements of Yang and Yin with their perpetual interaction from which all change takes place."

"Practical application."

"Twin mutually opposed constituents." On the holo-screen a schematic diagram, very complex, formed. "The two-rotor Panther Engine."

"What?" Bibleman said, sitting upright in his seat. He made out the large

WORDS PANTHER HYDRODRIVE SYSTEM TOP SECRET above the schematic comprising the readout. Instantly he pressed the PRINT key; the machinery of the terminal whirled and three sheets of paper slid down into the retrieve slot.

They overlooked it, Bibleman realized, this entry in the College's memory banks relating to the Panther Engine. Somehow the cross-referencing got lost. No one thought of pre-Socratic philosophy—who would expect an entry on an engine, a modern-day top-secret engine, under the category PHILOSOPHY, PRE-SOCRATIC subheading EMPEDOCLES?

I've got it in my hands, he said to himself as he swiftly lifted out the three sheets of paper. He folded them up and stuck them into the notebook the College had provided.

I've hit it, he thought. Right off the bat. Where the hell am I going to put these schematics? Can't hide them in my locker. And then he thought, Have I committed a crime already, by asking for a written printout?

"Empedocles," the terminal was saying, "believed in four elements as being perpetually rearranged: earth, water, air and fire. These elements eternally—"

Click. Bibleman had shut the terminal down. The holoscreen faded to opaque gray.

Too much learning doth make a man slow, he thought as he got to his feet and started from the cubicle. Fast of wit but slow of foot. Where the hell am I going to hide the schematics? he asked himself again as he walked rapidly down the hall toward the ascent tube. Well, he realized, they don't know I have them; I can take my time. The thing to do is hide them at a random place, he decided, as the tube carried him to the surface. And even if they find them they won't be able to trace them back to me, not unless they go to the trouble of dusting for fingerprints.

This could be worth billions of dollars, he said to himself. A great joy filled him and then came the fear. He discovered that he was trembling. Will they ever be pissed, he said to himself. When they find out, *I won't* be pissing purple; *they'll* be pissing purple. The College itself will, when it discovers its error.

And the error, he thought, is on its part, not mine. The College fucked up and that's too bad.

In the dorm where his bunk was located he found a laundry room maintained by a silent robot staff, and when no robot was watching he hid the three pages of schematics near the bottom of a huge pile of bed sheets. As high as the ceiling, this pile. They won't get down to the schematics this year. I have plenty of time to decide what to do.

Looking at his watch he saw that the afternoon had almost come to an end. At five o'clock he would be seated in the cafeteria eating dinner with Mary.

She met him a little after five o'clock; her face showed signs of fatigue.

"How'd it go?" she said to him as they stood in line with their trays.

"Fine," Bibleman said.

"Did you get to Zeno? I always liked Zeno; he proved that motion is impossible. So I guess I'm still in my mother's womb. You look strange." She eyed him.

"Just sick of listening to how the earth rests on the back of a giant turtle."

"Or is suspended on a long string," Mary said. Together they made their way among the other students to an empty table. "You're not eating much."

"Feeling like eating," Bibleman said as he drank his cup of coffee, "is what got me here in the first place."

"You could flunk out."

"And go to jail."

Mary said, "The College is programmed to say that. Much of it is probably just threats. Talk loudly and carry a small stick, so to speak."

"I have it," Bibleman said.

"You have what?" She ceased eating and regarded him.

He said, "The Panther Engine."

Gazing at him, the girl was silent.

"The schematics," he said.

"Lower your goddamn voice."

"They missed a citation in the memory storage. Now that I have them I don't know what to do. Just start walking, probably. And hope no one stops me."

"They don't know? The College didn't self-monitor?"

"I have no reason to think it's aware of what it did."

"Jesus Christ," Mary said softly. "On your first day. You had better do a lot of slow, careful thinking."

"I can destroy them," he said.

"Or sell them."

He said, "I looked them over. There's an analysis on the final page. The Panther—"

"Just say *it*," Mary said.

"It can be used as a hydroelectric turbine and cut costs in half. I couldn't understand the technical language but I did figure out that. Cheap power source. Very cheap."

"So everyone would benefit."

He nodded.

"They really screwed up," Mary said. "What was it Casals told us? 'Even if someone fed data into the College about the—about it, the College would eject the data.'" She began eating slowly, meditatively. "And they're withholding it from the public. It must be industry pressure. Nice."

"What should I do?" Bibleman said.

"I can't tell you that."

"What I was thinking is that I could take the schematics to one of the colony planets where the authorities have less control. I could find an independent firm and make a deal with them. The government wouldn't know how—"

"They'd figure out where the schematics came from," Mary said. "They'd trace it back to you."

"Then I better burn them."

Mary said, "You have a very difficult decision to make. On the one hand you have classified information in your possession which you obtained illegally. On the other—"

"I didn't obtain it illegally. The College screwed up."

Calmly, she continued. "You broke the law, military law, when you asked for a written transcript. You should have reported the breach of security as soon as you discovered it. They would have rewarded you. Major Casals would have said nice things to you."

"I'm scared," Bibleman said, and he felt the fear moving around inside him, shifting about and growing; as he held his plastic coffee cup it shook, and some of the coffee spilled onto his uniform.

Mary, with a paper napkin, dabbed at the coffee stain.

"It won't come off," she said.

"Symbolism," Bibleman said. "Lady Macbeth. I always wanted to have a dog named Spot so I could say, 'Out, out, damned Spot.'"

"I am not going to tell you what to do," Mary said. "This is a decision that you will make alone. It isn't ethical for you even to discuss it with me; that could be considered conspiracy and put us both in prison."

"Prison," he echoed.

"You have it within your—Christ, I was going to say, 'You have it within your power to provide a cheap power source to human civilization.'" She laughed and shook her head. "I guess this scares me, too. Do what you think is right. If you think it's right to publish the schematics—"

"I never thought of that. Just publish them. Some magazine or newspaper. A slave printing construct could print it and distribute it all over the solar system in fifteen minutes." All I have to do, he realized, is pay the fee and then feed in the three pages of schematics. As simple as that. And then spend the rest of my life in jail or anyhow in court. Maybe the adjudication would go in my favor. There are precedents in history where vital classified material—military classified material—was stolen and published, and not only was the person found innocent but we now realize that he was a hero; he served the welfare of the human race itself, and risked his life.

Approaching their table, two armed military security guards closed in on Bob Bibleman; he stared at them, not believing what he saw but thinking, *Believe it.*

"Student Bibleman?" one of them said.

"It's on my uniform," Bibleman said.

"Hold out your hands, Student Bibleman." The larger of the two security guards snapped handcuffs on him.

Mary said nothing; she continued slowly eating.

In Major Casals' office Bibleman waited, grasping the fact that he was being—as the technical term had it—"detained." He felt glum. He wondered what they would do. He wondered if he had been set up. He wondered what he would do if he were charged. He wondered why it was taking so long. And then he wondered what it was all about really and he wondered whether he would understand the grand issues if he continued with his courses in COSMOLOGY COSMOGONY PRE-SOCRATICS.

Entering the office, Major Casals said briskly, "Sorry to keep you waiting."

"Can these handcuffs be removed?" Bibleman said. They hurt his wrists; they had been clapped on to him as tightly as possible. His bone structure ached.

"We couldn't find the schematics," Casals said, seating himself behind his desk.

"What schematics?"

"For the Panther Engine."

"There aren't supposed to be any schematics for the Panther Engine. You told us that in orientation."

"Did you program your terminal for that deliberately? Or did it just happen to come up?"

"My terminal programmed itself to talk about water," Bibleman said. "The universe is composed of water."

"It automatically notified security when you asked for a written transcript. All written transcripts are monitored."

"Fuck you," Bibleman said.

Major Casals said, "I tell you what. We're only interested in getting the schematics back; we're not interested in putting you in the slam. Return them and you won't be tried."

"Return what?" Bibleman said, but he knew it was a waste of time.

"Can I think it over?"

"Yes."

"Can I go? I feel like going to sleep. I'm tired. I feel like having these cuffs off."

Removing the cuffs, Major Casals said, "We made an agreement, with all of you, an agreement between the College and the students, about classified material. You entered into that agreement."

"Freely?" Bibleman said.

"Well, no. But the agreement was known to you. When you discovered the schematics for the Panther Engine encoded in the College's memory

and available to anyone who happened for any reason, any reason whatsoever, to ask for a practical application of pre-Socratic—"

"I was as surprised as hell," Bibleman said. "I still am."

"Loyalty is an ethical principle. I'll tell you what, I'll waive the punishment factor and put it on the basis of loyalty to the College. A responsible person obeys laws and agreements entered into. Return the schematics and you can continue your courses here at the College. In fact we'll give you permission to select what subjects you want; they won't be assigned to you. I think you're good college material. Think it over and report back to me tomorrow morning, between eight and nine, here in my office. Don't talk to anyone; don't try to discuss it. You'll be watched. Don't try to leave the grounds. Okay?"

"Okay," Bibleman said, woodenly.

He dreamed that night that he had died. In his dream vast spaces stretched out, and his father was coming toward him, very slowly, out of a dark glade and into the sunlight. His father seemed glad to see him, and Bibleman felt his father's love.

When he awoke, the feeling of being loved by his father remained. As he put on his uniform he thought about his father and how rarely, in actual life, he had gotten that love. It made him feel lonely, now, his father being dead and his mother as well. Killed in a nuclear-power accident along with a whole lot of other people.

They say someone important to you waits for you on the other side, he thought. Maybe by the time I die Major Casals will be dead and he will be waiting for me, to greet me gladly. Major Casals and my father combined as one.

What am I going to do? he asked himself. They have waived the punitive aspects; it's reduced to essentials, a matter of loyalty. Am I a loyal person? Do I qualify?

The hell with it, he said to himself. He looked at his watch. Eight-thirty. My father would be proud of me, he thought. For what I am going to do.

Going into the laundry room he scoped out the situation. No robots in sight. He dug down in the pile of bed sheets, found the pages of schematics, took them out, looked them over and headed for the tube that would take him to Major Casals' office.

"You have them," Casals said, as Bibleman entered. Bibleman handed the three sheets of paper over to him.

"And you made no other copies?" Casals asked.

"No."

"You give me your word of honor?"

"Yes," Bibleman said.

"You are herewith expelled from the College," Major Casals said.

"What?" Bibleman said.

Casals pressed a button on his desk. "Come in."

The door opened and Mary Lorne stood there.

"I do not represent the College," Major Casals said to Bibleman. "You were set up."

"I am the College," Mary said.

Major Casals said, "Sit down, Bibleman. She will explain it to you before you leave."

"I failed?" Bibleman said.

"You failed me," Mary said. "The purpose of the test was to teach you to stand on your own feet even if it meant challenging authority. The covert message of institutions is, 'Submit to that which you psychologically construe as an authority.' A good school trains the whole person; it isn't a matter of data and information; I was trying to make you morally and psychologically complete. But a person can't be commanded to disobey. You can't order someone to rebel. All I could do was give you a model, an example."

Bibleman thought—when she talked back to Casals at the initial orientation. He felt numb.

"The Panther Engine is worthless," Mary said, "as a technological artifact. This is a standard test we use on each student, no matter what study course he is assigned."

"They *all* got a readout on the Panther Engine?" Bibleman said with disbelief. He stared at the girl.

"They will, one by one. Yours came very quickly. First you are told that it is classified; you are told the penalty for releasing classified information; then you are leaked the information. It is hoped that you will make it public or at least try to make it public."

Major Casals said, "You saw on the third page of the printout that the engine supplied an economical source of hydroelectric power. That was important. You knew that the public would benefit if the engine design was released."

"And legal penalties were waived," Mary said. "So what you did was not done out of fear."

"Loyalty," Bibleman said. "I did it out of loyalty."

"To what?" Mary asked.

He was silent; he could not think.

"To a holo-screen?" Major Casals said.

"To you," Bibleman said.

Major Casals said, "I am someone who insulted you and derided you. Someone who treated you like dirt. I told you that if I ordered you to piss purple you—"

"Okay," Bibleman said. "Enough."

"Goodbye," Mary said.

"What?" Bibleman said, startled.

"You're leaving. You're going back to your life and job, what you had before we picked you."

Bibleman said, "I'd like another chance."

"But," Mary said, "you know how the test works, now. So it can never be given to you again. You know what is really wanted from you by the College. I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry, too," Major Casals said.

Bibleman said nothing.

Holding out her hand, Mary said, "Shake?"

Blindly, Bibleman shook hands with her. Major Casals only stared at him blankly; he did not offer his hand. He seemed to be engrossed in some other topic, perhaps some other person. Another student was on his mind, perhaps. Bibleman could not tell.

Three nights later, as he wandered aimlessly through the mixture of lights and darkness of the city, Bob Bibleman saw ahead of him a robot food vendor at its eternal post. A teenage boy was in the process of buying a taco and an apple turnover. Bob Bibleman lined up behind the boy and stood waiting, his hands in his pockets, no thoughts coming to him, only a dull feeling, a sense of emptiness. As if the inattention which he had seen on Casals' face had taken him over, he thought to himself. He felt like an object, an object among objects, like the robot vendor. Something which, as he well knew, did not look you directly in the eye.

"What'll it be, sir?" the robot asked.

Bibleman said, "Fries, a cheeseburger and a strawberry shake. Are there any contests?"

After a pause the robot said, "Not for you, Mr. Bibleman."

"Okay," he said, and stood waiting.

The food came, on its little throwaway plastic tray, in its little throwaway cartons.

"I'm not paying," Bibleman said, and walked away.

The robot called after him, "Nine hundred dollars, Mr. Bibleman. You're breaking the law."

He turned, got out his wallet.

"Thank you, Mr. Bibleman," the robot said. "I am very proud of you."

FROZEN JOURNEY

We come to the end of the journey—Philip K. Dick's last short story, a wistful, nostalgic story. Victor Kemmings, the protagonist, lies in a cryonic tank, tended by a computerized space ship, as he journeys to a new planet. He is virtually unconscious but still able to think, to look back over his life and try to understand it. He notes, "I have spent more time in my own unconscious mind than any other human in history."

Victor's journey is Dick's journey. His tormented gift was the ability to descend into the unconscious, catch those archetypal images we all share, and bring them up into the light of our conscious minds where we can try to understand them. Over the years he cut himself free from our commonplace reality through drugs, through madness, and finally through religion. His brave journey into the reality of the unconscious was the price he paid for the visions he gave to his readers in his brilliant, bizarre fiction. We are grateful to him.

He followed this story with three unique novels all on religious themes. Valis and The Divine Invasion were published in 1981 and The Transmigration of Timothy Archer posthumously in 1982. When at age 52 he died suddenly from a stroke on March 2, 1982, he was, quite fittingly, in the midst of another novel.

After take-off, the ship routinely monitored the condition of the sixty people sleeping in its cryonic tanks. One malfunction showed, that of person nine. His EEG revealed brain activity.

Shit, the ship said to itself.

Complex homeostatic devices locked into circuit feed, and the ship contacted person nine.

"You are slightly awake," the ship said, utilizing the psychotronic route; there was no point in rousing person nine to full consciousness. After all, the flight would last a decade.

Virtually unconscious but, *unfortunately*, still able to think, person nine

thought. Someone is addressing me. He said, "Where am I located? I don't see anything."

"You're in faulty cryonic suspension."

He said, "Then I shouldn't be able to hear you."

"Faulty, I said. That's the point; you can hear me. Do you know your name?"

"Victor Kemmings. Bring me out of this."

"We are in flight."

"Then put me under."

"Just a moment." The ship examined the cryonic mechanisms; it scanned and surveyed, and then it said, "I will try."

Time passed. Victor Kemmings, unable to see anything, unaware of his body, found himself still conscious. "Lower my temperature," he said. He could not hear his voice; perhaps he only imagined he spoke. Colors floated toward him and then rushed at him. He liked the colors; they reminded him of a child's paintbox, the semi-animated kind, an artificial life form. He had used them in school, 200 years ago.

"I can't put you under," the voice of the ship sounded inside Kemmings' head. "The malfunction is too elaborate; I can't correct it and I can't repair it. You will be conscious for ten years."

The semi-animated colors rushed toward him, but now they possessed a sinister quality, supplied to them by his own fear. "Oh, my God," he said. Ten years! The colors darkened.

As Victor Kemmings lay paralyzed, surrounded by dismal flickerings of light, the ship explained to him its strategy. This strategy did not represent a decision on its part; the ship had been programmed to seek this solution in case of a malfunction of this sort.

"What I will do," the voice of the ship came to him, "is feed you sensory stimulation. The peril to you is sensory deprivation. If you are conscious for ten years without sensory data, your mind will deteriorate. When we reach the LR4 system, you will be a vegetable."

"Well, what do you intend to feed me?" Kemmings said in panic. "What do you have in your information storage banks? All the video soap operas of the last century? Wake me up and I'll walk around."

"There is no air in me," the ship said. "Nothing for you to eat. No one to talk to, since everyone else is under."

Kemmings said, "I can talk to you. We can play chess."

"Not for ten years. Listen to me; I say, I have no food and no air. You must remain as you are . . . a bad compromise, but one forced on us. You are talking to me now. I have no particular information stored. Here is policy in these situations: I will feed you your own buried memories, emphasizing the pleasant ones. You possess 206 years of memories and most of them

have sunk down into your unconscious. This is a splendid source of sensory data for you to receive. Be of good cheer. This situation, which you are in, is not unique. It has never happened within my domain before, but I am programmed to deal with it. Relax and trust me. I will see that you are provided with a world."

"They should have warned me," Kemmings said, "before I agreed to emigrate."

"Relax," the ship said.

He relaxed, but he was terribly frightened. Theoretically, he should have gone under, into the successful cryonic suspension, then awakened a moment later at his star of destination; or, rather, the planet, the colony-planet, of that star. Everyone else aboard the ship lay in an unknowing state; he was the exception, as if bad karma had attacked him for obscure reasons. Worst of all, he had to depend totally on the good will of the ship. Suppose it elected to feed him monsters. The ship could terrorize him for ten years—ten objective years and undoubtedly more from a subjective standpoint. He was, in effect, totally in the ship's power. Did interstellar ships enjoy such a situation? He knew little about interstellar ships; his field was microbiology. Let me think, he said to himself. My first wife, Martine; the lovely little French girl who wore jeans and a red shirt open to the waist and cooked delicious crepes.

"I hear," the ship said. "So be it."

The rushing colors resolved themselves into coherent, stable shapes. A building: a little old yellow wooden house that he had owned when he was 19 years old, in Wyoming. "Wait," he said in panic. "The foundation was bad; it was on a mud sill. And the roof leaked." But he saw the kitchen, with the table that he had built himself. And he felt glad.

"You will not know, after a little while," the ship said, "that I am feeding you your own buried memories."

"I haven't thought of that house in a century," he said, wonderingly; entranced, he made out his old electric drip coffeepot with the box of paper filters beside it. This is the house where Martine and I lived, he realized. "Martine!" he said aloud.

"I'm on the phone," Martine said, from the living room.

The ship said, "I will cut in only when there is an emergency. I will be monitoring you, however, to be sure you are in a satisfactory state. Don't be afraid."

"Turn down the right rear burner on the stove," Martine called. He could hear her and yet not see her. He made his way from the kitchen through the dining room and into the living room. At the VF, Martine stood in rapt conversation with her brother; she wore shorts and she was barefoot. Through the front windows of the living room, he could see the street; a commercial vehicle was trying to park, without success.

It's a warm day, he thought. I should turn on the air conditioner.

He seated himself on the old sofa as Martine continued her VF conversation, and he found himself gazing at his most cherished possession, a framed poster on the wall above Martine: Gilbert Shelton's *Fat Freddy Says* drawing in which Freddy Freak sits with his cat on his lap and Fat Freddy is trying to say, "Speed kills," but he is so wired on speed—he holds in his hand every kind of amphetamine tablet, pill, Spansule and capsule that exists—that he can't say it, and the cat is gritting its teeth and wincing in a mixture of dismay and disgust. The poster is signed by Gilbert Shelton himself; Kemmings' best friend, Ray Torrance, gave it to him and Martine as a wedding present. It is worth thousands. It was signed by the artist back in the 1980s. Long before either Victor Kemmings or Martine lived.

If we ever run out of money, Kemmings thought to himself, we could sell the poster. It was not *a* poster; it was *the* poster. Martine adored it. The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers—from the golden age of a long-ago society. No wonder he loved Martine so; she herself loved back, loved the beauties of the world, and treasured and cherished them as she treasured and cherished him; it was a protective love that nourished but did not stifle. It had been her idea to frame the poster; he would have tacked it up on the wall, so stupid was he.

"Hi," Martine said, off the VF now. "What are you thinking?"

"Just that you keep alive what you love," he said.

"I think that's what you're supposed to do," Martine said. "Are you ready for dinner? Open some red wine, a cabernet."

"Will an '07 do?" he said, standing up; he felt, then, like taking hold of his wife and hugging her.

"Either an '07 or a '12." She trotted past him, through the dining room and into the kitchen.

Going down into the cellar, he began to search among the bottles, which, of course, lay flat. Musty air and dampness; he liked the smell of the cellar, but then he noticed the redwood planks lying half-buried in the dirt and he thought, I know I've got to get a concrete slab poured. He forgot about the wine and went over to the far corner, where the dirt was piled highest; bending down, he poked at a board . . . he poked with a trowel and then he thought, Where did I get this trowel? I didn't have it a minute ago. The board crumbled against the trowel. This whole house is collapsing, he realized. Christ sake. I better tell Martine.

Going back upstairs, the wine forgotten, he started to say to her that the foundation of the house was dangerously decayed; but Martine was nowhere in sight. And nothing cooked on the stove, no pots, no pans. Amazed, he put his hand on the stove and found it cold. Wasn't she just now cooking? he asked himself.

"Martine!" he said loudly.

No response. Except for himself, the house was empty. Empty, he thought, and collapsing. Oh, my God. He seated himself at the kitchen table and felt the chair give slightly under him; it did not give much, but he felt it, he felt the sagging.

I'm afraid, he thought. Where did she go?

He returned to the living room. Maybe she went next door to borrow some spices or butter or something, he reasoned. Nonetheless, panic now filled him.

He looked at the poster. It was unframed. And the edges had been torn.

I know she framed it, he thought; he ran across the room to it, to examine it closely. Faded . . . the artist's signature had faded; he could scarcely make it out. She insisted on framing it and under glare-free, reflection-free glass. But it isn't framed and it's torn! The most precious thing we own!

Suddenly, he found himself crying. It amazed him, his tears. Martine is gone; the poster is deteriorated; the house is crumbling away; nothing is cooking on the stove. This is terrible, he thought. And I don't understand it.

The ship understood it. The ship had been carefully monitoring Victor Kemmings' brain wave patterns, and the ship knew that something had gone wrong. The wave forms showed agitation and pain. I must get him out of this feed circuit or I will kill him, the ship decided. Where does the flaw lie? it asked itself. Worry dormant in the man; underlying anxieties. Perhaps if I intensify the signal, I will use the same source but amp up the charge. What has happened is that massive subliminal insecurities have taken possession of him; the fault is not mine but lies, instead, in his psychological make-up.

I will try an earlier period in his life, the ship decided. Before the neurotic anxieties got laid down.

In the back yard, Victor scrutinized a bee that had gotten itself trapped in a spider's web. The spider wound up the bee with great care. That's wrong, Victor thought. I'll let the bee loose. Reaching up, he took hold of the encapsulated bee, drew it from the web and, scrutinizing it carefully, began to unwrap it.

The bee stung him; it felt like a little patch of flame.

Why did it sting me? he wondered. I was letting it go.

He went indoors to his mother and told her, but she did not listen; she was watching television. His finger hurt where the bee had stung it, but, more important, he did not understand why the bee would attack its rescuer. I won't do that again, he said to himself.

"Put some Bactine on it," his mother said at last, roused from watching the TV.

He had begun to cry. It was unfair. It made no sense. He was perplexed and dismayed and he felt a hatred toward small living things, because they were dumb. They didn't have any sense.

He left the house, played for a time on his swings, his slide, in his sandbox, and then he went into the garage, because he heard a strange flapping, whirring sound, like a kind of fan. Inside the gloomy garage, he found that a bird was fluttering against the cobwebbed rear window, trying to get out. Below it, the cat, Dorky, leaped and leaped, trying to reach the bird.

He picked up the cat; the cat extended its body and its front legs, it extended its jaws and bit into the bird. At once, the cat scrambled down and ran off with the still-fluttering bird.

Victor ran into the house. "Dorky caught a bird!" he told his mother.

"That goddamn cat." His mother took the broom from the closet in the kitchen and ran outside, trying to find Dorky. The cat had concealed itself under the brambles; she could not reach it with the broom. "I'm going to get rid of that cat," his mother said.

Victor did not tell her that he had arranged for the cat to catch the bird; he watched in silence as his mother tried and tried to pry Dorky out from her hiding place; Dorky was crunching up the bird; he could hear the sound of breaking bones, small bones. He felt a strange feeling, as if he should tell his mother what he had done, and yet, if he told her, she would punish him. I won't do that again, he said to himself. His face, he realized, had turned red. What if his mother figured it out? What if she had some secret way of knowing? Dorky couldn't tell her and the bird was dead. No one would ever know. He was safe.

But he felt bad. That night, he could not eat his dinner. Both his parents noticed. They thought he was sick; they took his temperature. He said nothing about what he had done. His mother told his father about Dorky and they decided to get rid of Dorky. Seated at the table, listening, Victor began to cry.

"All right," his father said gently. "We won't get rid of her. It's natural for a cat to catch a bird."

The next day, he sat playing in his sandbox. Some plants grew up through the sand. He broke them off. Later, his mother told him that had been a wrong thing to do.

Alone in the back yard, in his sandbox, he sat with a pail of water, forming a small mound of wet sand. The sky, which had been blue and clear, became by degrees overcast. A shadow passed over him and he looked up. He sensed a presence around him, something vast that could think.

You are responsible for the death of the bird, the presence thought; he could understand its thoughts.

"I know," he said. He wished, then, that he could die. That he could replace the bird and die for it, leaving it as it had been, fluttering against the cobwebbed window of the garage.

The bird wanted to fly and eat and live, the presence thought.

"Yes," he said, miserably.

You must never do that again, the presence told him.

"I'm sorry," he said, and wept.

This is a very neurotic person, the ship realized. I am having an awful lot of trouble finding happy memories. There is too much fear in him and too much guilt. He has buried it all, and yet it is still there, worrying him like a dog worrying a rag. Where can I go in his memories to find him solace? I must come up with ten years of memories, or his mind will be lost.

Perhaps, the ship thought, the error that I am making is in the area of choice on my part; I should allow him to select his own memories. However, the ship realized, this will allow an element of fantasy to enter. And that is not usually good. Still . . .

I will try the segment dealing with his first marriage once again, the ship decided. He really loved Martine. Perhaps this time, if I keep the intensity of the memories at a greater level, the entropic factor can be abolished. What happened was a subtle vitiation of the remembered world, a decay of structure. I will try to compensate for that. So be it.

"Do you suppose Gilbert Shelton really signed this?" Martine said pensively; she stood before the poster, her arms folded; she rocked back and forth slightly, as if seeking a better perspective on the brightly colored drawing hanging on their living-room wall. "I mean, it could have been forged. By a dealer somewhere along the line. During Shelton's lifetime or after."

"The letter of authentication," Victor Kemmings reminded her.

"Oh, that's right!" She smiled her warm smile. "Ray gave us the letter that goes with it. But suppose the letter is a forgery? What we need is another letter certifying that the first letter is authentic." Laughing, she walked away from the poster.

"Ultimately," Kemmings said, "we would have to have Gilbert Shelton here to personally testify that he signed it."

"Maybe he wouldn't know. There's that story about the man taking the Picasso picture to Picasso and asking him if it was authentic, and Picasso immediately signed it and said, 'Now it's authentic.'" She put her arm around Kemmings and, standing on tiptoe, kissed him on the cheek. "It's genuine. Ray wouldn't have given us a forgery. He's the leading expert on counterculture art of the Twentieth Century. Do you know that he owns an actual lid of dope? It's preserved under—"

"Ray is dead," Victor said.

"What?" She gazed at him in astonishment. "Do you mean something happened to him since we last—"

"He's been dead two years," Kemmings said. "I was responsible. I was driving the buzz car. I wasn't cited by the police, but it was my fault."

"Ray is living on Mars!" She stared at him.

"I know I was responsible. I never told you. I never told anyone. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do it. I saw it flapping against the window, and Dorky was trying to reach it, and I lifted Dorky up, and I don't know why, but Dorky grabbed it—"

"Sit down, Victor," Martine led him to the overstuffed chair and made him seat himself. "Something's wrong," she said.

"I know," he said. "Something terrible is wrong. I'm responsible for the taking of a life, a precious life that can never be replaced. I'm sorry. I wish I could make it OK, but I can't."

After a pause, Martine said, "Call Ray."

"The cat—" he said.

"What cat?"

"There." He pointed. "In the poster. On Fat Freddy's lap. That's Dorky. Dorky killed Ray."

Silence.

"The presence told me," Kemmings said. "It was God. I didn't realize it at the time, but God saw me commit the crime. The murder. And He will never forgive me."

His wife stared at him numbly.

"God sees everything you do," said Kemmings. "He sees even the falling sparrow. Only, in this case, it didn't fall; it was grabbed. Grabbed out of the air and torn down. God is tearing this house down which is my body, to pay me back for what I've done. We should have had a building contractor look this house over before we bought it. It's just falling goddamn to pieces. In a year, there won't be anything left of it. Don't you believe me?"

Martine faltered, "I—"

"Watch," Kemmings reached up his arms toward the ceiling; he stood; he reached; he could not touch the ceiling. He walked to the wall and then, after a pause, put his hand through the wall.

Martine screamed.

The ship aborted the memory retrieval instantly. But the harm had been done.

He has integrated his early fears and guilt into one interwoven grid, the ship said to itself. There is no way I can serve up a pleasant memory to him, because he instantly contaminates it. However pleasant the original experience in itself was. This is a serious situation, the ship decided. The man is

already showing signs of psychosis. And we are hardly into the trip; years lie ahead of him.

After allowing itself time to think the situation through, the ship decided to contact Victor Kemmings once more.

"Mr. Kemmings," the ship said.

"I'm sorry," Kemmings said. "I didn't mean to foul up those retrievals. You did a good job, but I—"

"Just a moment," the ship said. "I am not equipped to do psychiatric reconstruction of you; I am a simple mechanism, that's all. What is it you want? Where do you want to be and what do you want to be doing?"

"I want to arrive at our destination," Kemmings said. "I want this trip to be over."

Ah, the ship thought. That is the solution.

One by one, the cryonic systems shut down. One by one, the people returned to life, among them Victor Kemmings. What amazed him was the lack of a sense of the passage of time. He had entered the chamber, lain down, had felt the membrane cover him and the temperature begin to drop—

And now he stood on the ship's external platform, the unloading platform, gazing down at a verdant planetary landscape. This, he realized, is LR4-six, the colony world to which I have come in order to begin a new life.

"Looks good," a heavy-set woman beside him said.

"Yes," he said, and felt the newness of the landscape rush up at him, its promise of a beginning. Something better than he had known the past 200 years. I am a fresh person in a fresh world, he thought. And he felt glad.

Colors raced at him, like those of a child's semi-animate kit. St. Elmo's fire, he realized. That's right; there is a great deal of ionization in this planet's atmosphere. A free light show, such as they had back in the 20th Century.

"Mr. Kemmings," a voice said. An elderly man had come up beside him, to speak to him. "Did you dream?"

"During the suspension?" Kemmings said. "No, not that I can remember."

"I think I dreamed," the elderly man said. "Would you take my arm on the descent ramp? I feel unsteady. The air seems thin. Do you find it thin?"

"Don't be afraid," Kemmings said to him. He took the elderly man's arm. "I'll help you down the ramp. Look; there's a guide coming this way. He'll arrange our processing for us; it's part of the package. We'll be taken to a resort hotel and given first-class accommodations. Read your brochure." He smiled at the uneasy older man to reassure him.

"You'd think our muscles would be nothing but flab after ten years in suspension," the elderly man said.

"It's just like freezing peas," Kemmings said. Holding on to the timid

older man, he descended the ramp to the ground. "You can store them forever if you get them cold enough."

"My name's Shelton," the elderly man said.

"What?" Kemmings said, halting. A strange feeling moved through him.

"Don Shelton." The elderly man extended his hand; reflexively, Kemmings accepted it and they shook. "What's the matter, Mr. Kemmings? Are you all right?"

"Sure," he said. "I'm fine. But hungry. I'd like to get something to eat. I'd like to get to our hotel, where I can take a shower and change my clothes." He wondered where their baggage could be found. Probably it would take the ship an hour to unload it. The ship was not particularly intelligent.

In an intimate, confidential tone, elderly Mr. Shelton said, "You know what I brought with me? A bottle of Wild Turkey bourbon. The finest bourbon on Earth. I'll bring it over to your hotel room and we'll share it." He nudged Kemmings.

"I don't drink," Kemmings said. "Only wine." He wondered if there were any good wines here on this distant colony world. Not distant now, he reflected. It is Earth that's distant. I should have done like Mr. Shelton and brought a few bottles with me.

Shelton. What did the name remind him of? Something in his far past, in his early years. Something precious, along with good wine and a pretty, gentle young woman making crepes in an old-fashioned kitchen. Aching memories; memories that hurt.

Presently, he stood by the bed in his hotel room, his suitcase open; he had begun to hang up his clothes. In the corner of the room, a TV hologram showed a newscaster; he ignored it, but liking the sound of a human voice, he kept it on.

Did I have any dreams? he asked himself. During these past ten years?

His hand hurt. Gazing down, he saw a red welt, as if he had been stung. A bee stung me, he realized. But when? How? While I lay in cryonic suspension? Impossible. Yet he could see the welt and he could feel the pain. I'd better get something to put on it, he realized. There's undoubtedly a robot doctor in the hotel; it's a first-rate hotel.

When the robot doctor arrived and began treating the bee sting, Kemmings said, "I got this as punishment for killing the bird."

"Really?" the robot doctor said.

"Everything that ever meant anything to me has been taken away from me," Kemmings said. "Martine, the poster—my little old house with the wine cellar. We had everything and now it's gone. Martine left me because of the bird."

"The bird you killed?" the robot doctor said.

"God punished me. He took away all that was precious to me because of my sin. It wasn't Dorky's sin; it was my sin."

"But you were just a little boy," the robot doctor said.

"How did you know that?" Kemmings said. He pulled his hand away from the robot doctor's grasp. "Something's wrong. You shouldn't have known that."

"Your mother told me," the robot doctor said.

"My mother didn't know!"

The robot doctor said, "She figured it out. There was no way the cat could have reached the bird without your help."

"So all the time that I was growing up, she knew. But she never said anything."

"You can forget about it," the robot doctor said.

Kemmings said, "I don't think you exist. There is no possible way that you could know these things. I'm still in a cryonic suspension and the ship is still feeding me my own buried memories. So I won't become psychotic from sensory deprivation."

"You could hardly have a memory of completing the trip."

"Wish fulfillment, then. It's the same thing. I'll prove it to you. Do you have a screwdriver?"

"Why?"

Kemmings said, "I'll remove the back of the TV set and you'll see; there's nothing inside it, no components, no parts, no chassis—nothing."

"I don't have a screwdriver."

"A small knife, then. I can see one in your surgical-supply bag." Bending, Kemmings lifted up a small scalpel. "This will do. If I show you, will you believe me?"

"If there's nothing inside the TV cabinet—"

Squatting down, Kemmings removed the screws holding the back panel of the TV set in place. The panel came loose and he set it down on the floor.

There was nothing inside the TV cabinet. And yet the color hologram continued to fill a quarter of the hotel room and the voice of the newscaster issued forth from his three-dimensional image.

"Admit you're the ship," Kemmings said to the robot doctor.

"Oh, dear," the robot doctor said.

Oh, dear, the ship said to itself. And I've got almost ten years of this lying ahead of me. He is hopelessly contaminating his experiences with childhood guilt; he imagines that his wife left him because, when he was four years old, he helped a cat catch a bird. The only solution would be for Martine to return to him; but how am I going to arrange that? She may not still be alive. On the other hand, the ship reflected, maybe she *is* alive. Maybe she could be induced to do something to save her former husband's sanity. People by and large have very positive traits. And ten years from now, it will

take a lot to save—or, rather, restore—his sanity; it will take something drastic, something I myself cannot do alone.

Meanwhile, there was nothing to be done but recycle the wish-fulfillment arrival of the ship at its destination. I will run him through the arrival, the ship decided, then wipe his conscious memory clean and run him through it again. The only positive aspect of this, it reflected, is that it will give me something to do, which may help preserve *my* sanity.

Lying in cryonic suspension—faulty cryonic suspension—Victor Kemmings imagined, once again, that the ship was touching down and he was being brought back to consciousness.

"Did you dream?" a heavy-set woman asked him as the group of passengers gathered on the outer platform. "I have the impression that I dreamed. Early scenes from my life ... over a century ago."

"None that I can remember," Kemmings said. He was eager to reach his hotel; a shower and a change of clothes would do wonders for his morale. He felt slightly depressed and wondered why.

"There's our guide," an elderly lady said. "They're going to escort us to our accommodations."

"It's in the package," Kemmings said. His depression remained. The others seemed so spirited, so full of life, but over him only a weariness lay, a weighing down sensation, as if the gravity of this colony-planet were too much for him. Maybe that's it, he said to himself. But according to the brochure, the gravity here matched Earth's; that was one of the attractions.

Puzzled, he made his way slowly down the ramp, step by step, holding on to the rail. I don't really deserve a new chance at life anyhow, he realized. I'm just going through the motions ... I am not like these other people. There is something wrong with me; I cannot remember what it is, but, nonetheless, it is there. In me. A bitter sense of pain. Of lack of worth.

An insect landed on the back of Kemmings' right hand, an old insect, weary with flight. He halted, watched it crawl across his knuckles. I could crush it, he thought. It's so obviously infirm; it won't live much longer anyhow.

He crushed it—and felt great inner horror. What have I done? he asked himself. My first moment here and I have wiped out a little life. Is this my new beginning?

Turning, he gazed back up at the ship. Maybe I ought to go back, he thought. Have them freeze me forever. I am a man of guilt, a man who destroys. Tears filled his eyes.

And within its sentient works, the interstellar ship moaned.

During the ten long years remaining of the trip to the LR4 system, the ship had plenty of time to track down Martine Kemmings. It explained the

situation to her. She had emigrated to a vast orbiting dome in the Sirius system, found her situation unsatisfactory and was en route back to Earth. Roused from her own cryonic suspension, she listened intently and then agreed to be at the colony world at LR4 when her exhusband arrived—if it was at all possible.

Fortunately, it was possible.

"I don't think he'll recognize me," Martine said to the ship. "I've allowed myself to age. I don't really approve of entirely halting the aging process."

He'll be lucky if he recognizes anything, the ship thought.

At the intersystem spaceport on the colony world of LR4, Martine stood waiting for the people aboard the ship to appear on the outer platform. She wondered if she would recognize her former husband. She was a little afraid, but she was glad that she had gotten to LR4 in time. It had been close. Another week and his ship would have arrived before hers. Luck is on my side, she said to herself, and scrutinized the newly landed interstellar ship.

People appeared on the platform. She saw him. Victor had changed very little.

As he came down the ramp, holding on to the railing as if weary and hesitant, she went up to him, her hands thrust deep in the pockets of her coat; she felt *shy*, and when she spoke, she could hardly hear her own voice.

"Hi, Victor," she managed to say.

He halted, gazed at her. "I know you," he said.

"It's Martine," she said.

Holding out his hand, he said, smiling, "You heard about the trouble on the ship?"

"The ship contacted me." She took his hand and held it. "What an ordeal."

"Yeah," he said. "Recirculating memories forever. Did I ever tell you about a bee that I was trying to extricate from a spider's web when I was four years old? The idiotic bee stung me." He bent down and kissed her. "It's good to see you," he said.

"Did the ship—"

"It said it would try to have you here. But it wasn't sure if you could make it."

As they walked toward the terminal building, Martine said, "I was lucky; I managed to get a transfer to a military vehicle, a high-velocity-drive ship that just shot along like a mad thing. A new propulsion system entirely."

Victor Kemmings said, "I have spent more time in my own unconscious mind than any other human in history. Worse than early twentieth-century psychoanalysis. And the same material over and over again. Did you know I was scared of my mother?"

"I was scared of your mother," Martine said. They stood at the baggage depot, waiting for his luggage to appear. "This looks like a really nice little planet. Much better than where I was. . . . I haven't been happy at all."

"So maybe there's a cosmic plan," he said, grinning. "You look great."

"I'm old."

"Medical science—"

"It was my decision. I like older people." She surveyed him. He has been hurt a lot by the cryonic malfunction, she said to herself. I can see it in his eyes. They look broken. Broken eyes. Torn down into pieces by fatigue and—defeat. As if his buried, early memories swam up and destroyed him. But it's over, she thought. And I did get here in time.

At the bar in the terminal building, they sat having a drink.

"This old man got me to try Wild Turkey bourbon," Victor said. "It's amazing bourbon. He says it's the best on Earth. He brought a bottle with him from. . . ." His voice died in the silence.

"One of your fellow passengers," Martine finished.

"I guess so," he said.

"Well, you can stop thinking of the birds and the bees," Martine said.

"Sex?" he said, and laughed.

"Being stung by a bee; helping a cat catch a bird. That's all past."

"That cat," Victor said, "has been dead 182 years. I figured it out while they were bringing us out of suspension. Probably just as well. Dorky. Dorky the killer cat. Nothing like Fat Freddy's cat."

"I had to sell the poster," Martine said. "Finally."

He frowned.

"Remember?" she said. "You let me have it when we split up. Which I always thought was really good of you."

"How much did you get for it?"

"A lot. I should pay you something like. . . ." She calculated. "Taking inflation into account, I should pay you about two million dollars."

"Would you consider," he said, "instead, in place of the money, my share of the sale of the poster, spending some time with me? Until I get used to this planet?"

"Yes," she said. And she meant it. Very much.

They finished their drinks and then, with his luggage transported by robot spacecap, made their way to his hotel room.

"This is a nice room," Martine said, perched on the edge of the bed. "And it has a hologram TV. Turn it on."

"There's no use turning it on," Victor Kemmings said. He stood by the open closet, hanging up his shirts.

"Why not?"

Kemmings said, "There's nothing in it."

Going over to the TV set, Martine turned it on. A hockey game materialized, projected out into the room, in full color, and the sound of the game assailed her ears.

"It works fine," she said.

"I know," he said. "I can prove it. If you have a nail file or something, I'll unscrew the back plate and show you."

"But I can—"

"Look at this." He paused in his work of hanging up his clothes. "Watch me put my hand through the wall." He placed the palm of his right hand against the wall. "See?"

His hand did not go through the wall, because hands do not go through walls; his hand remained pressed against the wall, unmoving.

"And the foundation," he said, "is rotting away."

"Come and sit down by me," Martine said.

"I've lived this often enough to know," he said. "I've lived this over and over again. I come out of suspension; I walk down the ramp; I get my luggage; sometimes I have a drink at the bar and sometimes I come directly to my room. Usually, I turn on the TV and then. . . ." He went over and held his hand toward her. "See where the bee stung me?"

She saw no mark on his hand; she took his hand and held it.

"There is no bee sting there," she said.

"And when the robot doctor comes, I borrow a tool from him and take off the back plate of the TV set. To prove to him that it has no chassis, no components in it. And then the ship starts me over again."

"Victor," she said. "Look at your hand."

"This is the first time you've been here, though," he said.

"Sit down," she said.

"OK," he seated himself on the bed, beside her, but not too close to her.

"Won't you sit closer to me?" she said.

"It makes me too sad," he said. "Remembering you. I really loved you. I wish this was real."

Martine said, "I will sit with you until it is real for you."

"I'm going to try reliving the part with the cat," he said, "and this time *not* pick up the cat and *not* let it get the bird. If I do that, maybe my life will change so that it turns into something happy. Something that is real. My real mistake was separating from you. Here; I'll put my hand through you." He placed his hand against her arm. The pressure of his muscles was vigorous; she felt the weight, the physical presence of him, against her. "See?" he said. "It goes right through you."

"And all this," she said, "because you killed a bird when you were a little boy."

"No," he said. "All this because of a failure in the temperature-regulating assembly aboard the ship. I'm not down to the proper temperature. There's just enough warmth left in my brain cells to permit cerebral activity." He stood up, then, stretched, smiled at her. "Shall we go get some dinner?" he asked.

She said, "I'm sorry. I'm not hungry."

"I am. I'm going to have some of the local seafood. The brochure says it's terrific. Come along, anyhow; maybe when you see the food and smell it, you'll change your mind."

Gathering up her coat and purse, she went with him.

"This is a beautiful little planet," he said. "I've explored it dozens of times. I know it thoroughly. We should stop downstairs at the pharmacy for some Bactine, though. For my hand. It's beginning to swell and it hurts like hell." He showed her his hand. "It hurts more this time than ever before."

"Do you want me to come back to you?" Martine said.

"Are you serious?"

"Yes," she said. "I'll stay with you as long as you want. I agree; we should never have been separated."

Victor Kemmings said, "The poster is torn."

"What?" she said.

"We should have framed it," he said. "We didn't have sense enough to take care of it. Now it's torn. And the artist is dead."

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