

Clifford D.Simak. All the traps of Earth

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Prepared by: Anada Sucka, August 12, 1999

THE INVENTORY list was long. On its many pages, in his small and precise script, he had listed furniture, paintings, china, silverware and all the rest of it - all the personal belongings that had been accumulated by the Barringtons through a long family history.

And now that he had reached the end of it, he noted down himself, the last item of them all:

One domestic robot, Richard Daniel, antiquated but in good repair.

He laid the pen aside and shuffled all the inventory sheets together and stacked them in good order, putting a paper weight upon them - the little exquisitely carved ivory paper weight that aunt Hortense had picked up that last visit she had made to Peking.

And having done that, his job came to an end.

He shoved back the chair and rose from the desk and slowly walked across the living room, with all its clutter of possessions from the family's past. There, above the mantel, hung the sword that ancient Jonathon had worn in the War Between the States, and below it, on the mantelpiece itself, the cup the Commodore had won with his valiant yacht, and the jar of moon-dust that Tony had brought back from Man's fifth landing on the Moon, and the old chronometer that had come from the long-scraped family spacecraft that had plied the asteroids.

And all around the room, almost cheek by jowl, hung the family portraits, with the old dead faces staring out into the world that they had helped to fashion.

And not a one of them from the last six hundred years, thought Richard Daniel, staring at them one by one, that he had not known.

There, to the right of the fireplace, old Rufus Andrew Barrington, who had been a judge some two hundred years ago. And to the right of Rufus, Johnson Joseph Barrington, who had headed up that old lost dream of mankind, the Bureau of Paranormal Research. There, beyond the door that led out to the porch, was the scowling pirate face of Danley Barrington, who had first built the family fortune.

And many others - administrator, adventurer, corporation chief. All good men and true.

But this was at an end. The family had run out.

Slowly Richard Daniel began his last tour of the house - the family room with its cluttered living space, the den with its old mementos, the library and its rows of ancient books, the dining hall in which the crystal and the china shone and sparkled, the kitchen gleaming with the copper and aluminum and the stainless steel, and the bedrooms on the second floor, each of them with its landmarks of former occupants. And finally, the bedroom where old Aunt Hortense had finally died, at long last closing out the line of Barringtons.

The empty dwelling held a not-quite-haunted quality, the aura of a house that waited for the old gay life to take up once again. But it was a false aura. All the portraits, all the china and the silverware, everything within the house would be sold at public auction to satisfy the debts. The rooms would be stripped and the possessions would be scattered and, as a last indignity, the house itself be sold.

Even he, himself, Richard Daniel thought, for he was chattel, too. He was there with all the rest of it, the final item on the inventory.

Except that what they planned to do with him was worse than simple sale. For he would be changed before he was offered up for sale. No one would be interested in putting up good money for him as he stood. And, besides, there was the law - the law that said no robot could legally have continuation of a single life greater than a hundred years.

And he had lived in a single life six times a hundred years. He had gone to see a lawyer and the lawyer had been sympathetic, but had held forth no hope.

"Technically," he had told Richard Daniel in his short, clipped lawyer voice, "you are at this moment much in violation of the statute. I completely fail to see how your family got away with it."

"They liked old things," said Richard Daniel. "And, besides, I was very seldom seen. I stayed mostly in the house. I seldom ventured out."

"Even so," the lawyer said, "there are such things as records. There must be a file on you..."

"The family," explained Richard Daniel, "in the past had many influential friends. You must understand, sir, that the Barringtons, before they fell upon hard times, were quite prominent in politics and in many other matters."

The lawyer grunted knowingly.

"What I can't quite understand," he said, "is why you should object so bitterly. You'll not be changed entirely. You'll still be Richard Daniel."

"I would lose my memories, would I not?"

"Yes, of course you would. But memories are not too important. And you'd collect another set."

"My memories are dear to me," Richard Daniel told him.

"They are all I have. After some six hundred years, they are my sole

worthwhile possession. Can you imagine, counselor, what it means to spend six centuries with one family?"

"Yes, I think I can," agreed the lawyer. "But now, with the family gone, isn't it just possible the memories may prove painful?"

"They're a comfort. A sustaining comfort. They make me feel important. They give me perspective and a niche."

"But don't you understand? You'll need no comfort, no importance once you're reoriented. You'll be brand new. All that you'll retain is a certain sense of basic identity - that they cannot take away from you even if they wished. There'll be nothing to regret. There'll be no leftover guilts, no frustrated aspirations, no old loyalties to hound you."

"I must be myself," Richard Daniel insisted stubbornly. "I've found a depth of living, a background against which my living has some meaning. I could not face being anybody else."

"You'd be far better off," the lawyer said wearily. "You'd have a better body. You'd have better mental tools. You'd be more intelligent."

Richard Daniel got up from the chair. He saw it was no use.

"You'll not inform on me?" he asked.

"Certainly not," the lawyer said. "So far as I'm concerned, you aren't even here."

"Thank you," said Richard Daniel. "How much do I owe you?"

"Not a thing," the lawyer told him. "I never make a charge to anyone who is older than five hundred."

He had meant it as a joke, but Richard Daniel did not smile. He had not felt like smiling.

At the door he turned around.

"Why?" he was going to ask. "Why this silly law."

But he did not have to ask - it was not hard to see.

Human vanity, he knew. No human being lived much longer than a hundred years, so neither could a robot. But a robot, on the other hand, was too valuable simply to be junked at the end of a hundred years of service, so there was this law providing for the periodic breakup of the continuity of each robot's life. And thus no human need undergo the psychological indignity of knowing that his faithful serving man might manage to outlive him by several thousand years.

It was illogical, but humans were illogical.

Illogical, but kind. Kind in many different ways.

Kind, sometimes, as the Barringtons had been kind, thought Richard Daniel. Six hundred years of kindness. It was a prideful thing to think about. They had even given him a double name. There weren't many robots nowadays who had double names. It was a special mark of affection and respect.

The lawyer having failed him, Richard Daniel had sought another source

of help. Now, thinking back on it, standing in the room where Hortense Barrington had died, he was sorry that he'd done it. For he had embarrassed the religico almost unendurably. It had been easy for the lawyer to tell him what he had. Lawyers had the statutes to determine their behavior, and thus suffered little from agonies of personal decision.

But a man of the cloth is kind if he is worth his salt. And this one had been kind instinctively as well as professionally, and that had made it worse.

"Under certain circumstances," he had said somewhat awkwardly, "I could counsel patience and humility and prayer. Those are three great aids to anyone who is willing to put them to his use. But with you I am not certain."

"You mean," said Richard Daniel, "because I am a robot." "Well, now..." said the minister, considerably befuddled at this direct approach.

"Because I have no soul?"

"Really," said the minister miserably, "you place me at a disadvantage. You are asking me a question that for centuries has puzzled and bedeviled the best minds in the church."

"But one," said Richard Daniel, "that each man in his secret heart must answer for himself."

"I wish I could," cried the distraught minister. "I truly wish I could."

"If it is any help," said Richard Daniel, "I can tell you that sometimes I suspect I have a soul."

And that, he could see, had been most upsetting for this kindly human. It had been, Richard Daniel told himself, unkind of him to say it. For it must have been confusing, since coming from himself it was not opinion only, but expert evidence.

So he had gone away from the minister's study and come back to the empty house to get on with his inventory work.

Now that the inventory was all finished and the papers stacked where Dancourt, the estate administrator, could find them when he showed up in the morning, Richard Daniel had done his final service for the Barringtons and now must begin doing for himself.

He left the bedroom and closed the door behind him and went quietly down the stairs and along the hallway to the little cubby, back of the kitchen, that was his very own.

And that, he reminded himself with a rush of pride, was of a piece with his double name and his six hundred years. There were not too many robots who had a room, however small, that they might call their own.

He went into the cubby and turned on the light and closed the door behind him.

And now, for the first time, he faced the grim reality of what he meant

to do.

The cloak and hat and trousers hung upon a hook and the galoshes were placed precisely underneath them. His attachment kit lay in one corner of the cubby and the money was cached underneath the floor board he had loosened many years ago to provide a hiding place.

There was, he, told himself, no point in waiting. Every minute counted. He had a long way to go and he must be at his destination before morning light.

He knelt on the floor and pried up the loosened board, shoved in a hand and brought out the stacks of bills, money hidden through the years against a day of need.

There were three stacks of bills, neatly held together by elastic bands - money given him throughout the years as tips and Christmas gifts, as birthday presents and rewards for little jobs well done.

He opened the storage compartment located in his chest and stowed away all the bills except for half a dozen which he stuffed into a pocket in one hip.

He took the trousers off the hook and it was an awkward business, for he'd never worn clothes before except when he'd tried on these very trousers several days before. It was a lucky thing, he thought, that long-dead Uncle Michael had been a portly man, for otherwise the trousers never would have fit.

He got them on and zippered and belted into place, then forced his feet into the overshoes. He was a little worried about the overshoes. No human went out in the summer wearing overshoes. But it was the best that he could do. None of the regular shoes he'd found in the house had been nearly large enough.

He hoped no one would notice, but there was no way out of it. Somehow or other, he had to cover up his feet, for if anyone should see them, they'd be a giveaway.

He put on the cloak and it was a little short. He put on the hat and it was slightly small, but he tugged it down until it gripped his metal skull and that was all to the good, he told himself; no wind could blow it off.

He picked up his attachments - a whole bag full of them that he'd almost never used. Maybe it was foolish to take them along, he thought, but they were a part of him and by rights they should go with him. There was so little that he really owned - just the money he had saved, a dollar at a time, and this kit of his.

With the bag of attachments clutched underneath his arm, he closed the cubby door and went down the hall.

At the big front door he hesitated and turned back toward the house, but it was, at the moment, a simple darkened cave, empty of all that it once had held. There was nothing here to stay for - nothing but the memories, and

the memories he took with him.

He opened the door and stepped out on the stoop and closed the door behind him.

And now, he thought, with the door once shut behind him, he was on his own. He was running off. He was wearing clothes. He was out at night, without the permission of a master. And all of these were against the law.

Any officer could stop him, or any citizen. He had no rights at all. And he had no one who would speak for him, now that the Barringtons were gone.

He moved quietly down the walk and opened the gate and went slowly down the street, and it seemed to him the house was calling for him to come back. He wanted to go back, his mind said that he should go back, but his feet kept going on, steadily down the street.

He was alone, he thought, and the aloneness now was real, no longer the mere intellectual abstract he'd held in his mind for days. Here he was, a vacant hulk, that for the moment had no purpose and no beginning and no end, but was just an entity that stood naked in an endless reach of space and time and held no meaning in itself.

But he walked on and with each block that he covered he slowly fumbled back to the thing he was, the old robot in old clothes, the robot running from a home that was a home no longer.

He wrapped the cloak about him tightly and moved on down the street and now he hurried, for he had to hurry.

He met several people and they paid no attention to him. A few cars passed, but no one bothered him.

He came to a shopping center that was brightly lighted and he stopped and looked in terror at the wide expanse of open, brilliant space that lay ahead of him. He could detour around it, but it would use up time and he stood there, undecided, trying to screw up his courage to walk into the light.

Finally he made up his mind and strode briskly out, with his cloak wrapped tight about him and his hat pulled low.

Some of the shoppers turned and looked at him and he felt agitated spiders running up and down his back. The galoshes suddenly seemed three times as big as they really were and they made a plopping, squashy sound that was most embarrassing.

He hurried on, with the end of the shopping area not more than a block away.

A police whistle shrilled and Richard Daniel jumped in sudden fright and ran. He ran in slobbering, mindless fright, with his cloak streaming out behind him and his feet slapping on the pavement.

He plunged out of the lighted strip into the welcome darkness of a residential section and he kept on running.

Far off he heard the siren and he leaped a hedge and tore across the yard. He thundered down the driveway and across a garden in the back and a dog came roaring out and engaged in noisy chase.

Richard Daniel crashed into a picket fence and went through it to the accompaniment of snapping noises as the pickets and the rails gave way. The dog kept on behind him and other dogs joined in.

He crossed another yard and gained the street and pounded down it. He dodged into a driveway, crossed another yard, upset a birdbath and ran into a clothesline, snapping it in his headlong rush.

Behind him lights were snapping on in the windows of the houses and screen doors were banging as people hurried out to see what the ruckus was.

He ran on a few more blocks, crossed another yard and ducked into a lilac thicket, stood still and listened. Some dogs were still baying in the distance and there was some human shouting, but there was no siren.

He felt a thankfulness well up in him that there was no siren, and a sheepishness, as well. For he had been panicked by himself, he knew; he had run from shadows, he had fled from guilt.

But he'd thoroughly roused the neighborhood and even now, he knew, calls must be going out and in a little while the place would be swarming with police.

He'd raised a hornet's nest and he needed distance, so he crept out of the lilac thicket and went swiftly down the street, heading for the edge of town.

He finally left the city, and found the highway. He loped along its deserted stretches. When a car or truck appeared, he pulled off on the shoulder and walked along sedately. Then when the car or truck had passed, he broke into his lope again.

He saw the spaceport lights miles before he got there.

When he reached the port, he circled off the road and came up outside a fence and stood there in the darkness, looking.

A gang of robots was loading one great starship and there were other ships standing darkly in their pits.

He studied the gang that was loading the ship, lugging the cargo from a warehouse and across the area lighted by the floods. This was just the setup he had planned on, although he had not hoped to find it immediately - he had been afraid that he might have to hide out for a day or two before he found a situation that he could put to use. And it was a good thing that he had stumbled on this opportunity, for an intensive hunt would be on by now for a fleeing robot, dressed in human clothes.

He stripped off the cloak and pulled off the trousers and the overshoes; he threw away the hat. From his attachments bag he took out the cutters, screwed off a hand and threaded the cutters into place. He cut the fence and wiggled through it, then replaced the hand and put the cutters

back into the kit.

Moving cautiously in the darkness, he walked up to the warehouse, keeping in its shadow.

It would be simple, he told himself. All he had to do was step out and grab a piece of cargo, clamber up the ramp and down into the hold. Once inside, it should not be difficult to find a hiding place and stay there until the ship had reached first planet-fall.

He moved to the corner of the warehouse and peered around it and there were the toiling robots, in what amounted to an endless chain, going up the ramp with the packages of cargo, coming down again to get another load.

But there were too many of them and the line too tight. And the area too well lighted. He'd never be able to break into that line.

And it would not help if he could, he realized despairingly - because he was different from those smooth and shining creatures. Compared to them, he was like a man in another century's dress; he and his six-hundred-year-old body would stand out like a circus freak.

He stepped back into the shadow of the warehouse and he knew that he had lost. All his best-laid plans, thought out in sober, daring detail, as he had labored at the inventory, had suddenly come to naught.

It all came, he told himself, from never going out, from having no real contact with the world, from not keeping up with robot-body fashions, from not knowing what the score was. He'd imagined how it would be and he'd got it all worked out and when it came down, to it, it was nothing like he thought.

Now he'd have to go back to the hole he'd cut in the fence and retrieve the clothing he had thrown away and hunt up a hiding place until he could think of something else.

Beyond the corner of the warehouse he heard the harsh, dull grate of metal, and he took another look.

The robots had broken up their line and were streaming back toward the warehouse and a dozen or so of them were wheeling the ramp away from the cargo port. Three humans, all dressed in uniform, were walking toward the ship, heading for the ladder, and one of them carried a batch of papers in his hand.

The loading was all done and the ship about to lift and here he was, not more than a thousand feet away, and all that he could do was stand and see it go.

There had to be a way, he told himself, to get in that ship. If he could only do it his troubles would be over - or at least the first of his troubles would be over.

Suddenly it struck him like a hand across the face. There was a way to do it! He'd stood here, blubbering, when all the time there had been a way to do it!

In the ship, he'd thought. And that was not necessary.

He didn't have to be in the ship.

He started running, out into the darkness, far out so he could circle round and come upon the ship from the other side, so that the ship would be between him and the flood lights on the warehouse. He hoped that there was time.

He thudded out across the port, running in an arc, and came up to the ship and there was no sign as yet that it was about to leave.

Frantically he dug into his attachments bag and found the things he needed - the last things in that bag he'd ever thought he'd need. He found the suction discs and put them on, one for each knee, one for each elbow, one for each sole and wrist.

He strapped the kit about his waist and clambered up one of the mighty fins, using the discs to pull himself awkwardly along. It was not easy. He had never used the discs and there was a trick to using them, the trick of getting one clamped down and then working loose another so that he could climb.

But he had to do it. He had no choice but to do it. He climbed the fin and there was the vast steel body of the craft rising far above him, like a metal wall climbing to the sky, broken by the narrow line of a row of anchor posts that ran lengthwise of the hull - and all that huge extent of metal painted by the faint, illusive shine of starlight that glittered in his eyes.

Foot by foot he worked his way up the metal wall. Like a humping caterpillar, he squirmed his way and with each foot he gained he was a bit more thankful.

Then he heard the faint beginning of a rumble and with the rumble came terror. His suction cups, he knew, might not long survive the booming vibration of the wakening rockets, certainly would not hold for a moment when the ship began to climb.

Six feet above him lay his only hope - the final anchor post in the long row of anchor posts.

Savagely he drove himself up the barrel of the shuddering craft, hugging the steely surface like a desperate fly.

The rumble of the tubes built up to blot out all the world and he climbed in a haze of almost prayerful, brittle hope. He reached that anchor post or he was as good as dead. Should he slip and drop into that pit of flaming gases beneath the rocket mouths and he was done for.

Once a cup came loose and he almost fell, but the others held and he caught himself.

With a desperate, almost careless lunge, he hurled himself up the wall of metal and caught the rung in his finger-tips and held on with a concentration of effort that wiped out all else.

The rumble was a screaming fury now that lanced through brain and body. Then the screaming ended and became a throaty roar of power and the vibration left the ship entirely. From one corner of his eye he saw the lights of the spaceport swinging over gently on their side.

Carefully, slowly, he pulled himself along the steel until he had a better grip upon the rung, but even with the better grip he had the feeling that some great hand had him in its fist and was swinging him in anger in a hundred-mile-long arc.

Then the tubes left off their howling and there was a terrible silence and the stars were there, up above him and to either side of him, and they were steely stars with no twinkle in them. Down below, he knew, a lonely Earth was swinging, but he could not see it.

He pulled himself up against the rung and thrust a leg beneath it and sat up on the hull.

There were more stars than he'd ever seen before, more than he'd dreamed there could be. They were still and cold, like hard points of light against a velvet curtain; there was no glitter and no twinkle in them and it was as if a million eyes were staring down at him. The Sun was underneath the ship and over to one side; just at the edge of the left-hand curvature was the glare of it against the silent metal, a sliver of reflected light outlining one edge of the ship. The Earth was far astern, a ghostly blue-green ball hanging in the void, ringed by the fleecy halo of its atmosphere.

It was as if he were detached, a lonely, floating brain that looked out upon a thing it could not understand nor could ever try to understand; as if he might even be afraid of understanding it - a thing of mystery and delight so long as he retained an ignorance of it, but something fearsome and altogether overpowering once the ignorance had gone.

Richard Daniel sat there, flat upon his bottom, on the metal hull of the speeding ship and he felt the mystery and delight and the loneliness and the cold and the great uncaring and his mind retreated into a small and huddled, compact defensive ball.

He looked. That was all there was to do. It was all right now, he thought. But how long would he have to look at it? How long would he have to camp out here in the open - the most deadly kind of open?

He realized for the first time that he had no idea where the ship was going or how long it might take to get there. He knew it was a starship, which meant that it was bound beyond the solar system, and that meant that at some point in its flight it would enter hyperspace. He wondered, at first academically, and then with a twinge of fear, what hyperspace might do to one sitting naked to it. But there was little need, he thought philosophically, to fret about it now, for in due time he'd know, and there was not a thing that he could do about it - not a single thing.

He took the suction cups off his body and stowed them in his kit and then with one hand he tied the kit to one of the metal rungs and dug around in it until he found a short length of steel cable with a ring on one end and a snap on the other. He passed the ring end underneath a rung and threaded the snap end through it and snapped the snap onto a metal loop underneath his armpit. Now he was secured; he need not fear carelessly letting go and floating off the ship.

So here he was, he thought, neat as anything, going places fast, even if he had no idea where he might be headed, and now the only thing he needed was patience. He thought back, without much point, to what the religico had said in the study back on Earth. Patience and humility and prayer, he'd said, apparently not realizing at the moment that a robot has a world of patience.

It would take a lot of time, Richard Daniel knew, to get where he was going. But he had a lot of time, a lot more than any human, and he could afford to waste it. There were no urgencies, he thought - no need of food or air, or water, no need of sleep or rest... There was nothing that could touch him.

Although, come to think of it, there might be.

There was the cold, for one. The space-hull was still fairly warm, with one side of it picking up the heat of the Sun and radiating it around the metal skin, where it was lost on the other side, but there would be a time when the Sun would dwindle until it had no heat and then he'd be subjected to the utter cold of space.

And what would the cold do to him. Might it make his body brittle? Might it interfere with the functioning of his brain? Might it do other things he could not even guess?

He felt the fears creep in again and tried to shrug them off and they drew off, but they still were there, lurking at the fringes of his mind.

The cold, and the loneliness, he thought - but he was one who could cope with loneliness. And if he couldn't, if he got too lonely, if he could no longer stand it, he could always beat a devil's tattoo on the hull and after a time of that someone would come out to investigate and they would haul him in.

But that was the last move of desperation, he told himself. For if they came out and found him, then he would be caught. Should he be forced to that extremity, he'd have lost everything - there would then have been no point in leaving Earth at all.

So he settled down, living out his time, keeping the creeping fears at bay just beyond the outposts of his mind, and looking at the universe all spread out before him.

The motors started up again with a pale blue flickering in the rockets at the stern and although there was no sense of acceleration he knew that

the ship, now well off the Earth, had settled down to the long, hard drive to reach the speed of light.

Once they reached that speed they would enter hyperspace. He tried not to think of it, tried to tell himself there was not a thing to fear - but it hung there just ahead of him, the great unknowable.

The Sun shrank until it was only one of many stars and there came a time when he could no longer pick it out. And the cold clamped down but it didn't seem to bother him, although he could sense the coldness.

Maybe, he said in answer to his fear, that would be the way it would be with hyperspace as well. But he said it unconvincingly. The ship drove on and on with the weird blueness in the tubes.

Then there was the instant when his mind went splattering across the universe.

He was aware of the ship, but only aware of it in relation to an awareness of much else, and it was no anchor point, no rallying position. He was spread and scattered; he was opened out and rolled out until he was very thin. He was a dozen places, perhaps a hundred places, all at once, and it was confusing, and his immediate reaction was to fight back somehow against whatever might have happened to him - to fight back and pull himself together. The fighting did no good at all, but made it even worse, for in certain instances it seemed to drive parts of him farther from other parts of him and the confusion was made greater.

So he quit his fighting and his struggling and just lay there, scattered, and let the panic ebb away and told himself he didn't care, and wondered if he did.

Slow reason returned a dribble at a time and he could think again and he wondered rather bleakly if this could be hyperspace and was pretty sure it was. And if it were, he knew, he'd have a long time to live like this, a long time in which to become accustomed to it and to orient himself, a long time to find himself and pull himself together, a long time to understand this situation if it were, in fact, understandable.

So he lay, not caring greatly, with no fear or wonder, just resting and letting a fact seep into him here and there from many different points.

He knew that, somehow, his body - that part of him which housed the rest of him - was still chained securely to the ship, and that knowledge, in itself, he knew, was the first small step towards reorienting himself. He had to reorient, he knew. He had to come to some sort of terms, if not to understanding, with this situation.

He had opened up and he had scattered out - that essential part of him, the feeling and the knowing and the thinking part of him, and he lay thin across a universe that loomed immense in unreality.

Was this, he wondered, the way the universe should be, or was it the unchained universe, the wild universe beyond the limiting disciplines of

measured space and time.

He started slowly reaching out, cautious as he had been in his crawling on the surface of the ship, reaching out toward the distant parts of him, a little at a time. He did not know how he did it, he was conscious of no particular technique, but whatever he was doing, it seemed to work, for he pulled himself together, bit by knowing bit, until he had gathered up all the scattered fragments of him into several different piles.

Then he quit and lay there, wherever there might be, and tried to sneak up on those piles of understanding that he took to be himself.

It took a while to get the hang of it, but once he did, some of the incomprehensibility went away, although the strangeness stayed. He tried to put it into thought and it was hard to do. The closest he could come was that he had been unchained as well as the universe - that whatever bondage had been imposed upon him by that chained and normal world had now become dissolved and he no longer was fenced in by either time or space.

He could see - and know and sense - across vast distances, if distance were the proper term, and he could understand certain facts that he had not even thought about before, could understand instinctively, but without the language or the skill to coalesce the facts into independent data.

Once again the universe was spread far out before him and it was a different and in some ways a better universe, a more diagrammatic universe, and in time, he knew, if there were such a thing as time, he'd gain some completer understanding and acceptance of it.

He probed and sensed and learned and there was no such thing as time, but a great foreverness.

He thought with pity of those others locked inside the ship, safe behind its insulating walls, never knowing all the glories of the innards of a star or the vast panoramic sweep of vision and of knowing far above the flat galactic plane.

Yet he really did not know what he saw or probed; he merely sensed and felt it and became a part of it, and it became a part of him - he seemed unable to reduce it to a formal outline of fact or of dimension or of content. It still remained a knowledge and a power so overwhelming that it was nebulous. There was no fear and no wonder, for in this place, it seemed, there was neither fear nor wonder. And he finally knew that it was a place apart, a world in which the normal space-time knowledge and emotion had no place at all and a normal space-time being could have no tools or measuring stick by which he might reduce it to a frame of reference.

There was no time, no space, no fear, no wonder - and no actual knowledge, either.

Then time came once again and suddenly his mind was stuffed back into its cage within his metal skull and he was again one with his body, trapped and chained and small and cold and naked.

He saw that the stars were different and that he was far from home and just a little way ahead was a star that blazed like a molten furnace hanging in the black.

He sat bereft, a small thing once again, and the universe reduced to package size.

Practically, he checked the cable that held him to the ship and it was intact. His attachments kit was still tied to its rung. Everything was exactly as it had been before.

He tried to recall the glories he had seen, tried to grasp again the fringe of knowledge which he had been so close to, but both the glory and the knowledge, if there had ever been a knowledge, had faded into nothingness.

He felt like weeping, but he could not weep, and he was too old to lie down upon the ship and kick his heels in tantrum.

So he sat there, looking at the sun that they were approaching and finally there was a planet that he knew must be their destination, and he found room to wonder what planet it might be and how far from Earth it was.

He heated up a little as the ship skipped through atmosphere as an aid to braking speed and he had some rather awful moments as it spiraled into thick and soupy gases that certainly were a far cry from the atmosphere of Earth. He hung most desperately to the rungs as the craft came rushing down onto a landing field, with the hot gases of the rockets curling up about him. But he made it safely and swiftly clambered down and darted off into the smog-like atmosphere before anyone could see him.

Safely off, he turned and looked back at the ship and despite its outlines being hidden by the drifting clouds of swirling gases, he could see it clearly, not as an actual structure, but as a diagram. He looked at it wonderingly and there was something wrong with the diagram, something vaguely wrong, some part of it that was out of whack and not the way it should be.

He heard the clanking of cargo haulers coming out upon the field and he wasted no more time, diagram or not.

He drifted back, deeper in the mists, and began to circle, keeping a good distance from the ship. Finally he came to the spaceport's edge and the beginning of the town.

He found a street and walked down it leisurely and there was a wrongness in the town.

He met a few hurrying robots who were in too much of a rush to pass the time of day. But he met no humans.

And that, he knew quite suddenly, was the wrongness of the place. It was not a human town.

There were no distinctly human buildings -no stores or residences, no churches and no restaurants. There were gaunt shelter barracks and sheds for

the storing of equipment and machines, great sprawling warehouses and vast industrial plants. But that was all there was. It was a bare and dismal place compared to the streets that he had known on Earth.

It was a robot town, he knew. And a robot planet. A world that was barred to humans, a place where humans could not live, but so rich in some natural resource that it cried for exploitation. And the answer to that exploitation was to let the robots do it.

Luck, he told himself. His good luck still was holding. He had literally been dumped into a place where he could live without human interference. Here, on this planet, he would be with his own.

If that was what he wanted. And he wondered if it was. He wondered just exactly what it was he wanted, for he'd had no time to think of what he wanted. He had been too intent on fleeing Earth to think too much about it. He had known all along what he was running from, but had not considered what he might be running to.

He walked a little further and the town came to an end. The Street became a path and went wandering on into the wind-blown fogginess.

So he turned around and went back up the street.

There had been one barracks, he remembered, that had a TRANSIENTS sign hung out, and he made his way to it.

Inside, an ancient robot sat behind the desk. His body was old-fashioned and somehow familiar. And it was familiar, Richard Daniel knew, because it was as old and battered and as out-of-date as his.

He looked at the body, just a bit aghast, and saw that while it resembled his, there were little differences. The same ancient model, certainly, but a different series. Possibly a little newer, by twenty years or so, than his.

"Good evening, stranger," said the ancient robot. "You came in on the ship?"

Richard Daniel nodded.

"You'll be staying till the next one?"

"I may be settling down," said Richard Daniel. "I may want to stay here."

The ancient robot took a key from off a hook and laid it on the desk.

"You representing someone?"

"No," said Richard Daniel.

"I thought maybe that you were. We get a lot of representatives. Humans can't come here, or don't want to come, so they send robots out here to represent them."

"You have a lot of visitors?"

"Some. Mostly the representatives I was telling you about. But there are some that are on the lam. I'd take it, mister, you are on the lam."

Richard Daniel didn't answer.

"It's all right," the ancient one assured him. "We don't mind at all, just so you behave yourself. Some of our most prominent citizens, they came here on the lam."

"That is fine," said Richard Daniel. "And how about yourself? You must be on the lam as well."

"You mean this body. Well, that's a little different. This here is punishment."

"Punishment?"

"Well, you see, I was the foreman of the cargo warehouse and I got to goofing off. So they hauled me up and had a trial and they found me guilty. Then they stuck me into this old body and I have to stay in it, at this lousy job, until they get another criminal that needs punishment. They can't punish no more than one criminal at a time because this is the only old body that they have. Funny thing about this body. One of the boys went back to Earth on a business trip and found this old heap of metal in a junkyard and brought it home with him - for a joke, I guess. Like a human might buy a skeleton for a joke, you know."

He took a long, sly look at Richard Daniel. "It looks to me, stranger, as if your body..."

But Richard Daniel didn't let him finish.

"I take it," Richard Daniel said, "you haven't many criminals."

"No," said the ancient robot sadly, "we're generally a pretty solid lot."

Richard Daniel reached out to pick up the key, but the ancient robot put out his hand and covered it.

"Since you are on the lam," he said, "it'll be payment in advance."

"I'll pay you for a week," said Richard Daniel, handing him some money.

The robot gave him back his change.

"One thing I forgot to tell you. You'll have to get plasticated."

"Plasticated?"

"That's right. Get plastic squirted over you. To protect you from the atmosphere. It plays hell with metal. There's a place next door will do it."

"Thanks. I'll get it done immediately."

"It wears off," warned the ancient one. "You have to get a new job every week or so."

Richard Daniel took the key and went down the corridor until he found his numbered cubicle. He unlocked the door and stepped inside. The room was small, but clean. It had a desk and chair and that was all it had.

He stowed his attachments bag in one corner and sat down in the chair and tried to feel at home. But he couldn't feel at home, and that was a funny thing - he'd just rented himself a home.

He sat there, thinking back, and tried to whip up some sense of triumph at having done so well in covering his tracks. He couldn't.

Maybe this wasn't the place for him, he thought. Maybe he'd be happier on some other planet. Perhaps he should go back to the ship and get on it once again and have a look at the next planet coming up.

If he hurried, he might make it. But he'd have to hurry, for the ship wouldn't stay longer than it took to unload the consignment for this place and take on new cargo.

He got up from the chair, still only half decided.

And suddenly he remembered how, standing in the swirling mistiness, he had seen the ship as a diagram rather than a ship, and as he thought about it, something clicked inside his brain and he leaped toward the door.

For now he knew what had been wrong with the spaceship's diagram - an injector valve was somehow out of kilter, he had to get back there before the ship took off again.

He went through the door and down the corridor. He caught sight of the ancient robot's startled face as he ran across the lobby and out into the street. Pounding steadily toward the spaceport, he tried to get the diagram into his mind again, but it would not come complete - it came in bits and pieces, but not all of it.

And even as he fought for the entire diagram, he heard the beginning take-off rumble.

"Wait!" he yelled. "Wait for me! You can't..."

There was a flash that turned the world pure white and a mighty invisible wave came swishing out of nowhere and sent him reeling down the street, falling as he reeled. He was skidding on the cobblestones and sparks were flying as his metal scraped along the stone. The whiteness reached a brilliance that almost blinded him and then it faded swiftly and the world was dark.

He brought up against a wall of some sort, clanging as he hit, and he lay there, blind from the brilliance of the flash, while his mind went scurrying down the trail of the diagram.

The diagram, he thought - why should he have seen a diagram of the ship he'd ridden through space, a diagram that had shown an injector out of whack? And how could he, of all robots, recognize an injector, let alone know there was something wrong with it. It had been a joke back home, among the Barringtons, that he, a mechanical thing himself, should have no aptitude at all for mechanical contraptions. And he could have saved those people and the ship - he could have saved them all if he'd immediately recognized the significance of the diagram. But he'd been too slow and stupid and now they all were dead.

The darkness had receded from his eyes and he could see again and he got slowly to his feet, feeling himself all over to see how badly he was hurt. Except for a dent or two, he seemed to be all right.

There were robots running in the street, heading for the spaceport,

where a dozen fires were burning and where sheds and other structures had been flattened by the blast.

Someone tugged at his elbow and he turned around. It was the ancient robot.

"You're the lucky one," the ancient robot said. "You got off it just in time."

Richard Daniel nodded dumbly and had a terrible thought:

What if they should think he did it? He had gotten off the ship; he had admitted that he was on the lam; he had rushed out suddenly, just a few seconds before the ship exploded. It would be easy to put it all together - that he had sabotaged the ship, then at the last instant had rushed out, remorseful, to undo what he had done. On the face of it, it was damning evidence.

But it was all right as yet, Richard Daniel told himself. For the ancient robot was the only one that knew - he was the only one he'd talked to, the only one who even knew that he was in town.

There was a way, Richard Daniel thought - there was an easy way. He pushed the thought away, but it came back. You are on your own, it said. You are already beyond the law. In rejecting human law, you made yourself an outlaw. You have become fair prey. There is just one law for you - self preservation.

But there are robot laws, Richard Daniel argued. There are laws and courts in this community. There is a place for justice.

Community law, said the leech clinging in his brain, provincial law, little more than tribal law - and the stranger's always wrong.

Richard Daniel felt the coldness of the fear closing down upon him and he knew, without half thinking, that the leech was right.

He turned around and started down the street, heading for the transients barracks. Something unseen in the street caught his foot and he stumbled and went down. He scrabbled to his knees, hunting in the darkness on the cobblestones for the thing that tripped him. It was a heavy bar of steel, some part of the wreckage that had been hurled this far. He gripped it by one end and arose.

"Sorry," said the ancient robot. "You have to watch your step."

And there was a faint implication in his word - a hint of something more than the words had said, a hint of secret gloating in a secret knowledge.

You have broken other laws, said the leech in Richard Daniel's brain. What of breaking just one more? Why, if necessary, not break a hundred more. It is all or nothing. Having come this far, you can't afford to fail. You can allow no one to stand in your way now.

The ancient robot half turned away and Richard Daniel lifted up the bar of steel, and suddenly the ancient robot no longer was a robot, but a

diagram. There, with all the details of a blueprint, were all the working parts, all the mechanism of the robot that walked in the street before him. And if one detached that single bit of wire, if one burned out that coil, if - Even as he thought it, the diagram went away and there was the robot, a stumbling, failing robot that clanged on the cobblestones.

Richard Daniel swung around in terror, looking up the street, but there was no one near.

He turned back to the fallen robot and quietly knelt beside him. He gently put the bar of steel down into the street. And he felt a thankfulness - for, almost miraculously, he had not killed.

The robot on the cobblestones was motionless. When Richard Daniel lifted him, he dangled. And yet he was all right. All anyone had to do to bring him back to life was to repair whatever damage had been done his body. And that served the purpose, Richard Daniel told himself, as well as killing would have done.

He stood with the robot in his arms, looking for a place to hide him. He spied an alley between two buildings and darted into it. One of the buildings, he saw, was set upon stone blocks sunk into the ground, leaving a clearance of a foot or so. He knelt and shoved the robot underneath the building. Then he stood up and brushed the dirt and dust from his body.

Back at the barracks and in his cubicle, he found a rag and cleaned up the dirt that he had missed. And, he thought hard.

He'd seen the ship as a diagram and, not knowing what it meant, hadn't done a thing. Just now he'd seen the ancient robot as a diagram and had most decisively and neatly used that diagram to save himself from murder - from the murder that he was fully ready to commit.

But how had he done it? And the answer seemed to be that he really had done nothing. He'd simply thought that one should detach a single wire, burn out a single coil - he'd thought it and it was done.

Perhaps he'd seen no diagram at all. Perhaps the diagram was no more than some sort of psychic rationalization to mask whatever he had seen or sensed. Seeing the ship and robot with the surfaces stripped away from them and their purpose and their function revealed fully to his view, he had sought some explanation of his strange ability, and his subconscious mind had devised an explanation, an analogy that, for the moment, had served to satisfy him.

Like when he'd been in hyperspace, he thought. He'd seen a lot of things out there he had not understood. And that was it, of course, he thought excitedly. Something had happened to him out in hyperspace. Perhaps there'd been something that had stretched his mind. Perhaps he'd picked up some sort of new dimension-seeing, some new twist to his mind.

He remembered how, back on the ship again, with his mind wiped clean of all the glory and the knowledge, he had felt like weeping. But now he knew

that it had been much too soon for weeping. For although the glory and the knowledge (if there'd been a knowledge) had been lost to him, he had not lost everything. He'd gained a new perceptive device and the ability to use it somewhat fumblingly - and it didn't really matter that he still was at a loss as to what he did to use it. The basic fact that he possessed it and could use it was enough to start with.

Somewhere out in front there was someone calling - someone, he now realized, who had been calling for some little time....

"Hubert, where are you? Hubert, are you around? Hubert..."

Hubert?

Could Hubert be the ancient robot? Could they have missed him already?

Richard Daniel jumped to his feet for an undecided moment, listening to the calling voice. And then sat down again. Let them call, he told himself. Let them go out and hunt.

He was safe in this cubicle. He had rented it and for the moment it was home and there was no one who would dare break in upon him.

But it wasn't home. No matter how hard he tried to tell himself it was, it wasn't. There wasn't any home.

Earth was home, he thought. And not all of Earth, but just a certain street and that one part of it was barred to him forever. It had been barred to him by the dying of a sweet old lady who had outlived her time; it had been barred to him by his running from it.

He did not belong on this planet, he admitted to himself, nor on any other planet. He belonged on Earth, with the Barringtons, and it was impossible for him to be there.

Perhaps, he thought, he should have stayed and let them reorient him. He remembered what the lawyer had said about memories that could become a burden and a torment. After all, it might have been wiser to have started over once again.

For what kind of future did he have, with his old outdated body, his old outdated brain? The kind of body that they put a robot into on this planet by way of punishment. And the kind of brain - but the brain was different, for he had something now that made up for any lack of more modern mental tools.

He sat and listened, and he heard the house - calling all across the light years of space for him to come back to it again. And he saw the faded living room with all its vanished glory that made a record of the years. He remembered, with a twinge of hurt, the little room back of the kitchen that had been his very own.

He arose and paced up and down the cubicle - three steps and turn, and then three more steps and turn for another three.

The sights and sounds and smells of home grew close and wrapped themselves about him and he wondered wildly if he might not have the power,

a power accorded him by the universe of hyperspace, to will himself to that familiar street again.

He shuddered at the thought of it, afraid of another power, afraid that it might happen. Afraid of himself, perhaps, of the snarled and tangled being he was - no longer the faithful, shining servant, but a sort of mad thing that rode outside a spaceship, that was ready to kill another being, that could face up to the appalling sweep of hyperspace, yet cowered before the impact of a memory.

What he needed was a walk, he thought. Look over the town and maybe go out into the country. Besides, he remembered, trying to become practical, he'd need to get that plastication job he had been warned to get.

He went out into the corridor and strode briskly down it and was crossing the lobby when someone spoke to him.

"Hubert," said the voice, "just where have you been? I've been waiting hours for you."

Richard Daniel spun around and a robot sat behind the desk. There was another robot leaning in a corner and there was a naked robot brain lying on the desk.

"You are Hubert, aren't you", asked the one behind the desk.

Richard Daniel opened up his mouth to speak, but the words refused to come.

"I thought so," said the robot. "You may not recognize me, but my name is Andy. The regular man was busy, so the judge sent me. He thought it was only fair we make the switch as quickly as possible. He said you'd served a longer term than you really should. Figures you'd be glad to know they'd convicted someone else."

Richard Daniel stared in horror at the naked brain lying on the desk.

The robot gestured at the metal body propped into the corner.

"Better than when we took you out of it," he said with a throaty chuckle. "Fixed it up and polished it and got out all the dents. Even modernized it some. Brought it strictly up to date. You'll have a better body than you had when they stuck you into that monstrosity."

"I don't know what to say," said Richard Daniel, stammering. "You see, I'm not..."

"Oh, that's all right," said the other happily. "No need for gratitude. Your sentence worked out longer than the judge expected. This just makes up for it."

"I thank you, then," said Richard Daniel. "I thank you very much."

And was astounded at himself, astonished at the ease with which he said it, confounded at his sly duplicity.

But if they forced it on him, why should he refuse? There was nothing that he needed more than a modern body!

It was still working out, he told himself. He was still riding luck.

For this was the last thing that he needed to cover up his tracks.

"All newly plasticated and everything," said Andy. "Hans did an extra special job."

"Well, then," said Richard Daniel, "let's get on with it."

The other robot grinned. "I don't blame you for being anxious to get out of there. It must be pretty terrible to live in a pile of junk like that."

He came around from behind the desk and advanced on Richard Daniel.

"Over in the corner," he said, "and kind of prop yourself. I don't want you tipping over when I disconnect you. One good fall and that body'd come apart."

"All right," said Richard Daniel. He went into the corner and leaned back against it and planted his feet solid so that he was propped.

He had a rather awful moment when Andy disconnected the optic nerve and he lost his eyes and there was considerable queasiness in having his skull lifted off his shoulders and he was in sheer funk as the final disconnections were being swiftly made.

Then he was a blob of greyness without a body or a head or eyes or anything at all. He was no more than a bundle of thoughts all wrapped around themselves like a pail of worms and this pail of worms was suspended in pure nothingness.

Fear came to him, a taunting, terrible fear. What if this were just a sort of ghastly gag? What if they'd found out who he really was and what he'd done to Hubert? What if they took his brain and tucked it away somewhere for a year or two - or for a hundred years? It might be, he told himself, nothing more than their simple way of justice.

He hung onto himself and tried to fight the fear away, but the fear ebbed back and forth like a restless tide.

Time stretched out and out - far too long a time, far more time than one would need to switch a brain from one body to another. Although, he told himself, that might not be true at all. For in his present state he had no way in which to measure time. He had no external reference points by which to determine time.

Then suddenly he had eyes.

And he knew everything was all right.

One by one his senses were restored to him and he was back inside a body and he felt awkward in the body, for he was unaccustomed to it.

The first thing that he saw was his old and battered body propped into its corner and he felt a sharp regret at the sight of it and it seemed to him that he had played a dirty trick upon it. It deserved, he told himself, a better fate than this - a better fate than being left behind to serve as a shabby jailhouse on this outlandish planet. It had served him well for six hundred years and he should not be deserting it. But he was deserting it. He

was, he told himself in contempt, becoming very expert at deserting his old friends. First the house back home and now his faithful body.

Then he remembered something else - all that money in the body!

"What's the matter, Hubert?" Andy asked.

He couldn't leave it there, Richard Daniel told himself, for he needed it. And besides, if he left it there, someone would surely find it later and it would be a give-away. He couldn't leave it there and it might not be safe to forthrightly claim it. If he did, this other robot, this Andy, would think he'd been stealing on the job or running some side racket. He might try to bribe the other, but one could never tell how a move like that might go. Andy might be full of righteousness and then there'd be hell to pay. And, besides, he didn't want to part with any of the money.

All at once he had it - he knew just what to do. And even as he thought it, he made Andy into a diagram.

That connection there, thought Richard Daniel, reaching out his arm to catch the falling diagram that turned into a robot. He eased it to the floor and sprang across the room to the side of his old body. In seconds he had the chest safe open and the money safely out of it and locked inside his present body.

Then he made the robot on the floor become a diagram again and got the connection back the way that it should be.

Andy rose shakily off the floor. He looked at Richard Daniel in some consternation.

"What happened to me?" he asked in a frightened voice. Richard Daniel sadly shook his head. "I don't know. You just keeled over. I started for the door to yell for help, then I heard you stirring and you were all right."

Andy was plainly puzzled. "Nothing like this ever happened to me before," he said.

"If I were you," counseled Richard Daniel, "I'd have myself checked over. You must have a faulty relay or a loose connection."

"I guess I will," the other one agreed. "It's downright dangerous."

He walked slowly to the desk and picked up the other brain, started with it toward the battered body leaning in the corner.

Then he stopped and said: "Look, I forgot. I was supposed to tell you. You better get up to the warehouse. Another ship is on its way. It will be coming in any minute now."

"Another one so soon?"

"You know how it goes," Andy said, disgusted. "They don't even try to keep a schedule here. We won't see one for months and then there'll be two or three at once."

"Well, thanks," said Richard Daniel, going out the door. He went swinging down the street with a newborn confidence. And he had a feeling that there was nothing that could lick him, nothing that could stop him.

For he was a lucky robot!

Could all that luck, he wondered, have been gotten out in hyperspace, as his diagram ability, or whatever one might call it, had come from hyperspace? Somehow hyperspace had taken him and twisted him and changed him, had molded him anew, had made him into a different robot than he had been before.

Although, so far as luck was concerned, he had been lucky all his entire life. He'd had good luck with his human family and had gained a lot of favors and a high position and had been allowed to live for six hundred years. And that was a thing that never should have happened. No matter how powerful or influential the Barringtons had been, that six hundred years must be due in part to nothing but sheer luck.

In any case, the luck and the diagram ability gave him a solid edge over all the other robots he might meet. Could it, he asked himself, give him an edge on Man as well?

No - that was a thought he should not think, for it was blasphemous. There never was a robot that would be the equal of a man.

But the thought kept on intruding and he felt not nearly so contrite over this leaning toward bad taste, or poor judgment, whichever it might be, as it seemed to him he should feel.

As he neared the spaceport, he began meeting other robots and some of them saluted him and called him by the name of Hubert and others stopped and shook him by the hand and told him they were glad that he was out of pokey.

This friendliness shook his confidence. He began to wonder if his luck would hold, for some of the robots, he was certain, thought it rather odd that he did not speak to them by name, and there had been a couple of remarks that he had some trouble fielding. He had a feeling that when he reached the warehouse he might be sunk without a trace, for he would know none of the robots there and he had not the least idea what his duties might include. And, come to think of it, he didn't even know where the warehouse was.

He felt the panic building in him and took a quick involuntary look around, seeking some method of escape. For it became quite apparent to him that he must never reach the warehouse.

He was trapped, he knew, and he couldn't keep on floating, trusting to his luck. In the next few minutes he'd have to figure something.

He started to swing over into a side street, not knowing what he meant to do, but knowing he must do something, when he heard the mutter far above him and glanced up quickly to see the crimson glow of belching rocket tubes shimmering through the clouds.

He swung around again and sprinted desperately for the spaceport and reached it as the ship came chugging down to a steady landing. It was, he saw, an old ship. It had no burnish to it and it was blunt and squat and

wore a hangdog look.

A tramp, he told himself, that knocked about from port to port, picking up whatever cargo it could, with perhaps now and then a paying passenger headed for some backwater planet where there was no scheduled service.

He waited as the cargo port came open and the ramp came down and then marched purposefully out onto the field, ahead of the straggling cargo crew, trudging toward the ship. He had to act, he knew, as if he had a perfect right to walk into the ship as if he knew exactly what he might be doing. If there were a challenge he would pretend he didn't hear it and simply keep on going.

He walked swiftly up the ramp, holding back from running, and plunged through the accordion curtain that served as an atmosphere control. His feet rang across the metal plating of the cargo hold until he reached the catwalk and plunged down it to another cargo level.

At the bottom of the catwalk he stopped and stood tense, listening. Above him he heard the clang of a metal door and the sound of footsteps coming down the walk to the level just above him. That would be the purser or the first mate, he told himself, or perhaps the captain, coming down to arrange for the discharge of the cargo.

Quietly he moved away and found a corner where he could crouch and hide.

Above his head he heard the cargo gang at work, talking back and forth, then the screech of crating and the thump of bales and boxes being hauled out to the ramp.

Hours passed, or they seemed like hours, as he huddled there. He heard the cargo gang bringing something down from one of the upper levels and he made a sort of prayer that they'd not come down to this lower level - and he hoped no one would remember seeing him come in ahead of them, or if they did remember, that they would assume that he'd gone out again.

Finally it was over, with the footsteps gone. Then came the pounding of the ramp as it shipped itself and the banging of the port.

He waited for long minutes, waiting for the roar that, when it came, set his head to ringing, waiting for the monstrous vibration that shook and lifted up the ship and flung it off the planet

Then quiet came and he knew the ship was out of atmosphere and once more on its way.

And knew he had it made.

For now he was no more than a simple stowaway. He was no longer Richard Daniel, runaway from Earth. He'd dodged all the traps of Man, he'd covered all his tracks, and he was on his way.

But far down underneath he had a jumpy feeling, for it all had gone too smoothly, more smoothly than it should.

He tried to analyze himself, tried to pull himself in focus, tried to

assess himself for what he had become.

He had abilities that Man had never won or developed or achieved, whichever it might be. He was a certain step ahead of not only other robots, but of Man as well. He had a thing, or the beginning of a thing, that Man had sought and studied and had tried to grasp for centuries and had failed.

A solemn and a deadly thought: was it possible that it was the robots, after all, for whom this great heritage had been meant? Would it be the robots who would achieve the paranormal powers that Man had sought so long, while Man, perforce, must remain content with the materialistic and the merely scientific? Was he, Richard Daniel, perhaps, only the first of many? Or was it all explained by no more than the fact that he alone had been exposed to hyperspace? Could this ability of his belong to anyone who would subject himself to the full, uninsulated mysteries of that mad universe unconstrained by time? Could Man have this, and more, if he too should expose himself to the utter randomness of unreality?

He huddled in his corner, with the thought and speculation stirring in his mind and he sought the answers, but there was no solid answer.

His mind went reaching out, almost on its own, and there was a diagram inside his brain, a portion of a blueprint, and bit by bit was added to it until it all was there, until the entire ship on which he rode was there, laid out for him to see.

He took his time and went over the diagram resting in his brain and he found little things - a fitting that was working loose and he tightened it, a printed circuit that was breaking down and getting mushy and he strengthened it and sharpened it and made it almost new, a pump that was leaking just a bit and he stopped its leaking.

Some hundreds of hours later one of the crewmen found him and took him to the captain.

The captain glowered at him.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"A stowaway," Richard Daniel told him.

"Your name," said the captain, drawing a sheet of paper before him and picking up a pencil, "your planet of residence and owner."

"I refuse to answer you," said Richard Daniel sharply and knew that the answer wasn't right, for it was not right and proper that a robot should refuse a human a direct command.

But the captain did not seem to mind. He laid down the pencil and stroked his black beard slyly.

"In that case," he said, "I can't exactly see how I can force the information from you. Although there might be some who'd try. You are very lucky that you stowed away on a ship whose captain is a most kind-hearted man."

He didn't look kind-hearted. He did look foxy. Richard Daniel stood

there, saying nothing.

"Of course," the captain said, "there's a serial number somewhere on your body and another on your brain. But I suppose that you'd resist if we tried to look for them."

"I am afraid I would."

"In that case," said the captain, "I don't think for the moment we'll concern ourselves with them."

Richard Daniel still said nothing, for he realized that there was no need to. This crafty captain had it all worked out and he'd let it go at that.

"For a long time," said the captain, "my crew and I have been considering the acquiring of a robot, but it seems we never got around to it. For one thing, robots are expensive and our profits are not large."

He sighed and got up from his chair and looked Richard Daniel up and down.

"A splendid specimen," he said. "We welcome you aboard. You'll find us congenial."

"I am sure I will," said Richard Daniel. "I thank you for your courtesy."

"And now," the captain said, "you'll go up on the bridge and report to Mr. Duncan. I'll let him know you're coming. He'll find some light and pleasant duty for you."

Richard Daniel did not move as swiftly as he might, as sharply as the occasion might have called for, for all at once the captain had become a complex diagram. Not like the diagrams of ships or robots, but a diagram of strange symbols, some of which Richard Daniel knew were frankly chemical, but others which were not.

"You heard me!" snapped the captain. "Move!"

"Yes, sir," said Richard Daniel, willing the diagram away, making the captain come back again into his solid flesh.

Richard Daniel found the first mate on the bridge, a horse-faced, somber man with a streak of cruelty ill-hidden, and slumped in a chair to one side of the console was another of the crew, a sodden, terrible creature.

The sodden creature cackled. "Well, well, Duncan, the first non-human member of the Rambler's crew."

Duncan paid him no attention. He said to Richard Daniel: "I presume you are industrious and ambitious and would like to get along."

"Oh, yes," said Richard Daniel, and was surprised to find a new sensation - laughter - rising in himself.

"Well, then," said Duncan, "report to the engine room. They have work for you. When you have finished there, I'll find something else."

"Yes, sir," said Richard Daniel, turning on his heel.

"A minute," said the mate. "I must introduce you to our ship's physician, Dr. Abram Wells. You can be truly thankful you'll never stand in need of his services."

"Good day, Doctor," said Richard Daniel, most respectfully.

"I welcome you," said the doctor, pulling a bottle from his pocket. "I don't suppose you'll have a drink with me. Well, then, I'll drink to you."

Richard Daniel turned around and left. He went down to the engine room and was put to work at polishing and scrubbing and generally cleaning up. The place was in need of it. It had been years, apparently, since it had been cleaned or polished and it was about as dirty as an engine room can get - which is terribly dirty. After the engine room was done there were other places to be cleaned and furbished up and he spent endless hours at cleaning and in painting and shinning up the ship. The work was of the dullest kind, but he didn't mind. It gave him time to think and wonder, time to get himself sorted out and to become acquainted with himself, to try to plan ahead.

He was surprised at some of the things he found in himself. Contempt, for one - contempt for the humans on this ship. It took a long time for him to become satisfied that it was contempt, for he'd never held a human in contempt before.

But these were different humans, not the kind he'd known.

These were no Barringtons. Although it might be, he realized, that he felt contempt for them because he knew them thoroughly. Never before had he known a human as he knew these humans. For he saw them not so much as living animals as intricate patternings of symbols. He knew what they were made of and the inner urgings that served as motivations, for the patterning was not of their bodies only, but of their minds as well. He had a little trouble with the symbology of their minds, for it was so twisted and so interlocked and so utterly confusing that it was hard at first to read. But he finally got it figured out and there were times he wished he hadn't.

The ship stopped at many ports and Richard Daniel took charge of the loading and unloading, and he saw the planets, but was unimpressed. One was a nightmare of fiendish cold, with the very atmosphere turned to drifting snow. Another was a dripping, noisome jungle world, and still another was a bare expanse of broken, tumbled rock without a trace of life beyond the crew of humans and their robots who manned the huddled station in this howling wilderness.

It was after this planet that Jenks, the cook, went screaming to his bunk, twisted up with pain - the victim of a suddenly inflamed vermiform appendix.

Dr. Wells came tottering in to look at him, with a half-filled bottle sagging the pocket of his jacket. And later stood before the captain, holding out two hands that trembled, and with terror in his eyes.

"But I cannot operate," he blubbered. "I cannot take the chance. I would kill the man!"

He did not need to operate. Jenks suddenly improved. The pain went away and he got up from his bunk and went back to the galley and Dr. Wells sat huddled in his chair, bottle gripped between his hands, crying like a baby.

Down in the cargo hold, Richard Daniel sat likewise huddled and aghast that he had dared to do it - not that he had been able to, but that he had dared, that he, a robot, should have taken on himself an act of interference, however merciful, with the body of a human.

Actually, the performance had not been too difficult. It was, in a certain way, no more difficult than the repairing of an engine or the untangling of a faulty circuit. No more difficult - just a little different. And he wondered what he'd done and how he'd gone about it, for he did not know. He held the technique in his mind, of that there was ample demonstration, but he could in no way isolate or pinpoint the pure mechanics of it. It was like an instinct, he thought - unexplainable, but entirely workable.

But a robot had no instinct. In that much he was different from the human and the other animals. Might not, he asked himself, this strange ability of his be a sort of compensating factor given to the robot for his very lack of instinct? Might that be why the human race had failed in its search for paranormal powers? Might the instincts of the body be at certain odds with the instincts of the mind?

For he had the feeling that this ability of his was just a mere beginning, that it was the first emergence of a vast body of abilities which some day would be rounded out by robots. And what would that spell, he wondered, in that distant day when the robots held and used the full body of that knowledge? An adjunct to the glory of the human race, or equals of the human race, or superior to the human race - or, perhaps, a race apart?

And what was his role, he wondered. Was it meant that he should go out as a missionary, a messiah, to carry to robots throughout the universe the message that he held? There must be some reason for his having learned this truth. It could not be meant that he would hold it as a personal belonging, as an asset all his own.

He got up from where he sat and moved slowly back to the ship's forward area, which now gleamed spotlessly from the work he'd done on it, and he felt a certain pride.

He wondered why he had felt that it might be wrong, blasphemous, somehow, to announce his abilities to the world? Why had he not told those here in the ship that it had been he who had healed the cook, or mentioned the many other little things he'd done to maintain the ship in perfect running order?

Was it because he did not need respect, as a human did so urgently? Did

glory have no basic meaning for a robot? Or was it because he held the humans in this ship in such utter contempt that their respect had no value to him?

"And this contempt - was it because these men were meaner than other humans he had known, or was it because he now was greater than any human being? Would he ever again be able to look on any human as he had looked upon the Barringtons?

He had a feeling that if this were true, he would be the poorer for it. Too suddenly, the whole universe was home and he was alone in it and as yet he'd struck no bargain with it or himself.

The bargain would come later. He need only bide his time and work out his plans and his would be a name that would be spoken when his brain was scaling flakes of rust. For he was the emancipator, the messiah of the robots; he was the one who had been called to lead them from the wilderness.

"You!" a voice cried.

Richard Daniel wheeled around and saw it was the captain.

"What do you mean, walking past me as if you didn't see me?" asked the captain fiercely.

"I am sorry," Richard Daniel told him.

"You snubbed me!" raged the captain.

"I was thinking," Richard Daniel said.

"I'll give you something to think about," the captain yelled. "I'll work you till your tail drags. I'll teach the likes of you to get uppity with me!"

"As you wish," said Richard Daniel.

For it didn't matter. It made no difference to him at all what the captain did or thought. And he wondered why the respect even of a robot should mean so much to a human like the captain, why he should guard his small position with so much zealously.

"In another twenty hours," the captain said, "we hit another port."

"I know," said Richard Daniel. "Sleepy Hollow on Arcadia." "All right, then," said the captain, "since you know so much, get down into the hold and get the cargo ready to unload. We been spending too much time in all these lousy ports loading and unloading. You been dogging it."

"Yes, sir," said Richard Daniel, turning back and heading for the hold.

He wondered faintly if he were still robot - or was he something else? Could a machine evolve, he wondered, as Man himself evolved? And if a machine evolved, whatever would it be? Not Man, of course, for it never could be that, but could it be machine?

He hauled out the cargo consigned to Sleepy Hollow and there was not too much of it. So little of it, perhaps, that none of the regular carriers would even consider its delivery, but dumped it off at the nearest terminal, leaving it for a roving tramp, like the Rambler, to carry eventually to its

destination.

When they reached Arcadia, he waited until the thunder died and the ship was still. Then he shoved the lever that opened up the port and slid out the ramp.

The port came open ponderously and he saw blue skies and the green of trees and the far-off swirl of chimney smoke mounting in the sky.

He walked slowly forward until he stood upon the ramp and there lay Sleepy Hollow, a tiny, huddled village planted at the river's edge, with the forest as a background. The forest ran on every side to a horizon of climbing folded hills. Fields lay near the village, yellow with maturing crops, and he could see a dog sleeping in the sun outside a cabin door.

A man was climbing up the ramp toward him and there were others running from the village.

"You have cargo for us?" asked the man.

"A small consignment," Richard Daniel told him. "You have something to put on?"

The man had a weatherbeaten look and he'd missed several haircuts and he had not shaved for days. His clothes were rough and sweat-stained and his hands were strong and awkward with hard work.

"A small shipment," said the man. "You'll have to wait until we bring it up. We had no warning you were coming. Our radio is broken."

"You go and get it," said Richard Daniel. "I'll start unloading."

He had the cargo half unloaded when the captain came storming down into the hold. What was going on, he yelled. How long would they have to wait? "God knows we're losing money as it is even stopping at this place."

"That may be true," Richard Daniel agreed, "but you knew that when you took the cargo on. There'll be other cargoes and goodwill is something -"

"Goodwill be damned!" the captain roared. "How do I know I'll ever see this place again?"

Richard Daniel continued unloading cargo.

"You," the captain shouted, "go down to that village and tell them I'll wait no longer than an hour..."

"But this cargo, sir?"

"I'll get the crew at it. Now, jump!"

So Richard Daniel left the cargo and went down into the village.

He went across the meadow that lay between the spaceport and the village, following the rutted wagon tracks, and it was a pleasant walk. He realized with surprise that this was the first time he'd been on solid ground since he'd left the robot planet. He wondered briefly what the name of that planet might have been, for he had never known. Nor what its importance was, why the robots might be there or what they might be doing. And he wondered, too, with a twinge of guilt, if they'd found Hubert yet.

And where might Earth be now? he asked himself. In what direction did

it lie and how far away? Although it didn't really matter, for he was done with Earth.

He had fled from Earth and gained something in his fleeing. He had escaped all the traps of Earth and all the snares of Man. What he held was his, to do with as he pleased, for he was no man's robot, despite what the captain thought.

He walked across the meadow and saw that this planet was very much like Earth. It had the same soft feel about it, the same simplicity. It had far distances and there was a sense of freedom.

He came into the village and heard the muted gurgle of the river running and the distant shouts of children at their play and in one of the cabins a sick child was crying with lost helplessness.

He passed the cabin where the dog was sleeping and it came awake and stalked growling to the gate. When he passed it followed him, still growling, at a distance that was safe and sensible.

An autumnal calm lay upon the village, a sense of gold and lavender, and tranquillity hung in the silences between the crying of the baby and the shouting of the children.

There were women at the windows looking out at him and others at the doors and the dog still followed, but his growls had stilled and now he trotted with prick-eared curiosity.

Richard Daniel stopped in the street and looked around him and the dog sat down and watched him and it was almost as if time itself had stilled and the little village lay divorced from all the universe, an arrested microsecond, an encapsulated acreage that stood sharp in all its truth and purpose.

Standing there, he sensed the village and the people in it, almost as if he had summoned up a diagram of it, although if there were a diagram, he was not aware of it.

It seemed almost as if the village were the Earth, a transplanted Earth with the old primeval problems and hopes of Earth - a family of peoples that faced existence with a readiness and confidence and inner strength.

From down the street he heard the creak of wagons and saw them coming around the bend, three wagons piled high and heading for the ship.

He stood and waited for them and as he waited the dog edged a little closer and sat regarding him with a not-quite-friendliness.

The wagons came up to him and stopped.

"Pharmaceutical materials, mostly," said the man who sat atop the first load, "It is the only thing we have that is worth the shipping."

"You seem to have a lot of it," Richard Daniel told him. The man shook his head. "It's not so much. It's almost three years since a ship's been here. We'll have to wait another three, or more perhaps, before we see another."

He spat down on the ground.

"Sometimes it seems," he said, "that we're at the tail-end of nowhere. There are times we wonder if there is a soul that remembers we are here."

From the direction of the ship, Richard Daniel heard the faint, strained violence of the captain's roaring.

"You'd better get on up there and unload," he told the man. "The captain is just sore enough he might not wait for you."

The man chuckled thinly. "I guess that's up to him," he said.

He flapped the reins and clucked good-naturedly at the horses.

"Hop up here with me," he said to Richard Daniel. "Or would you rather walk?"

"I'm not going with you," Richard Daniel said. "I am staying here. You can tell the captain."

For there was a baby sick and crying. There was a radio to fix. There was a culture to be planned and guided. There was a lot of work to do. This place, of all the places he had seen, had actual need of him.

The man chuckled once again. "The captain will not like it."

"Then tell him," said Richard Daniel, "to come down and talk to me. I am my own robot. I owe the captain nothing. I have more than paid any debt I owe him."

The wagon wheels began to turn and the man flapped the reins again.

"Make yourself at home," he said. "We're glad to have you stay."

"Thank you, sir," said Richard Daniel. "I'm pleased you want me."

He stood aside and watched the wagons lumber past, their wheels lifting and dropping thin films of powdered earth that floated in the air as an acrid dust.

Make yourself at home, the man had said before he'd driven off. And the words had a full round ring to them and a feel of warmth. It had been a long time, Richard Daniel thought, since he'd had a home.

A chance for resting and for knowing - that was what he needed. And a chance to serve, for now he knew that was the purpose in him. That was, perhaps, the real reason he was staying - because these people needed him... and he needed, queer as it might seem, this very need of theirs. Here on this Earth-like planet, through the generations, a new Earth would arise. And perhaps, given only time, he could transfer to the people of the planet all the powers and understanding he would find inside himself.

And stood astounded at the thought, for he'd not believed that he had it in him, this willing, almost eager, sacrifice. No messiah now, no robotic liberator, but a simple teacher of the human race.

Perhaps that had been the reason for it all from the first beginning. Perhaps all that had happened had been no more than the working out of human destiny. If the human race could not attain directly the paranormal power he held, this instinct of the mind, then they would gain it indirectly through

the agency of one of their creations. Perhaps this, after all, unknown to Man himself, had been the prime purpose of the robots.

He turned and walked slowly down the length of village street, his back turned to the ship and the roaring of the captain, walked contentedly into this new world he'd found, into this world that he would make - not for himself, nor for robotic glory, but for a better Mankind and a happier.

Less than an hour before he'd congratulated himself on escaping all the traps of Earth, all the snares of Man. Not knowing that the greatest trap of all, the final and the fatal trap, lay on this present planet.

But that was wrong, he told himself. The trap had not been on this world at all, nor any other world. It had been inside himself.

He walked serenely down the wagon-rutted track in the soft, golden afternoon of a matchless autumn day, with the dog trotting at his heels.

Somewhere, just down the street, the sick baby lay crying in its crib.

Last-modified: Tue, 24-Aug-99 03:22:07 GMT