

The **Galaxy** Project

The Midas Plague Frederik Pohl

eForeword
Barry N. Malzberg

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Galaxy
Project

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Series Editor Barry N. Malzbe

The Midas Plague

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ABOUT *GALAXY* MAGAZINE

The first issue of *Galaxy*, dated October 1950, already heralded to the highest standards of the field. The authors it published regularly contributed to the leading magazine *Astounding*, writing a kind of elegant and humanistic science fiction which although not previously unknown had always been anomalous. Its founding editor, H. L. Gold (1914–1996), was a science fiction writer of some prominence whose editorial background had been in pulp magazines and comic books; however, his ambitions were distinctly literary, and he was deliberately searching for an audience much wider and more eclectic than the perceived audience of science fiction. His goal, he stated, was a magazine whose fiction “Would read like the table of contents of a literary magazine or *The Saturday Evening Post* of the 21st century, dealing with extrapolation as if it were contemporary.” The magazine, although plagued by distribution difficulties and an Italian-based publisher (World Editions), was an immediate artistic success, and when its ownership was transferred with the issue of August 1951 to its printer Robert M. Guinn, it achieved financial stability for the remainder of the decade.

Galaxy published every notable science fiction writer of its first decade and found in many writers who would become central figures: Robert Sheckley, James E. Gunn, Wyman Guin, and F. L. Wallace, among others. *Galaxy* revived older writers such as Frederik Pohl and Alfred Bester (whose first novel, *The Demolished Man*, was commissioned and directed page by page by Gold). John Campbell fought with *Astounding* and remained an important editor, and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (inaugurated a year before *Galaxy*) held to high standards of literary quality while spreading its contents over two fields, but *Galaxy* was incontestably the 1950s’ flagship magazine for the acidly satiric, sometimes profoundly comic aspect of its best contributions. *Galaxy* had a lasting effect not only upon science fiction but upon literature itself. J.G. Ballard stated that he had been deeply affected by *Galaxy*. Alan Arkin, an actor who became a star after 1960 and won an Oscar in the new millennium, contributed two stories in the mid-fifties.

At this point Gold was succumbing to agoraphobia, physical ills, and overall exhaustion (some of this perhaps attributable to his active service during WWII) against which he had struggled from the outset. (There is creditable evidence that Frederik Pohl was the de facto editor during Gold’s last years.) Gold would return some submissions with notes like: “Garbage,” “Absolute Crap.” Isaac Asimov noted in his memoir “Anthony Boucher wrote rejection slips which read like acceptances. And Horace wrote notes of acceptance which felt like rejections.” Despite this, the magazine retained most of its high standard and also some of its regular contributors (William Tenn, Robert Sheckley, Pohl himself). Others could no longer bear Gold’s imperiousness and abusiveness.

ABOUT SCIENCE FICTION NOVELETTES AND NOVELLAS

In the view of James E. Gunn, science fiction as a genre finds its peak in the novella (17,500–40,000 words) and novelette (7,500–17,500 words). Both forms have the length to develop ideas and characters fully but do not suffer from padding or the hortatory aspect present in most modern science fiction novels. The longer story-form has existed since science fictions inception with the April 1926 issue of *Amazing Stories*, but *Galaxy* developed the form to a consistent level of sophistication and efficiency and published more notable stories of sub-novel length than any other magazine during the 50s...and probably in any decade.

The novella and novelette as forms make technical and conceptual demands greater, perhaps even greater than the novel, and *Galaxy* writers, under founding editor H. L. Gold's direction, consistently excelled in these lengths. Gold's most memorable story, "A Matter of Form" (1938) was a long novelette, and he brought practical as well as theoretical lessons to his writers, who he unleashed to develop these ideas. (John Campbell of course, had also done this in the 40s and continued in the 50s to be a directive editor.) It is not inconceivable that many or even most of the contents of the 1950's *Galaxy* were based on ideas originated by Gold: golden technology becomes brass and jails its human victims when it runs amok—i. certainly one of his most characteristic.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Frederik Pohl (1919–) as book editor, anthologist, literary agent, novelist, and short writer has been for over seventy years perhaps the most single influential figure in the history of modern science fiction. It is impossible to encapsulate his career in a paragraph or an essay: a brief listing of some of his accomplishments can only suggest its span and weight. In collaboration with Cyril Kornbluth he is the author of the 1952 novel *The Space Merchants* and the 1954 *Gladiator at Law*; his 1970s novels *Man Plus* and *Gateway* won both a Nebula and Hugo in consecutive years. Pohl was Gold's successor as editor of *Galaxy*, and his tenure exceeded Gold's decade by a year, and he maintained the magazine at a high level. His *Star Science Fiction* comprised the first original anthology series in the 1950s. He was perhaps science fiction's leading agent in the crucial period from 1949–1953, and his influence upon his wife, Judith Merrill, in the early 50s was instrumental to her important career. He was, in tandem with Klass, Sheckley, Knight, and Sturgeon, central to the satiric content and narrative style of the 1950s *Galaxy*. As acquisition editor at Bantam Books in the 1970s, he was instrumental in the acquisition and commercial success of Samuel Delany's *Dhalgren* and Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*.

He was a two-term president of the Science Fiction Writers of America in the late 1970s and recipient of its Grand Master Award the following decade.

His episodic past and future history of New York, *The Years of the City* (1985), only marginally a science fiction novel, is perhaps the best novel on its subject ever written. *The Midas Plague*, an early demonstration of gloom, sardonic wit, and audacity, was his first non-collaborative work in the magazine (*The Space Merchants* had appeared almost two years earlier) and perhaps the prototypical *Galaxy* novelette.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE eFOREWORD

Barry N. Malzberg's *Beyond Apollo* was in 1973 the winner of the first John W. Campbell Memorial Award for the best science-fiction novel of the year; he twice won the LOCUS Award for nonfiction books of critical history and commentary on science fiction. Several short works have been final-listed for the Nebula and Hugo and *Engines of the Night* and *Breakfast in the Ruins*, the nonfiction works, were on the Hugo final ballot for Best Related Nonfiction as is his collaborative book with Mike Resnick, *The Business of Science Fiction*.

ABOUT THE JACKET

COVER IMAGE: “An Expedition To Eden” by Ed Emshwiller

Ed Emshwiller (1925–1990) was *Galaxy*’s dominant artist through the 1950s. His quirky images, perspective, and off-center humor provide perhaps the best realization of the magazine’s iconoclastic, satirical vision. Emshwiller was—matched with Kelly Freas—science fiction’s signature artist through the decade and a half initiated by this color illustration. He and Carol Emshwiller, the celebrated science fiction writer, lived in Long Island during the period of his prominence in science fiction. (Nonstop Press published *Emshwiller: Infinity X Two: The Art & Life of Ed and Carol Emshwiller*, a joint biography and collection of their work in visual and literary medium, in 2007.) In the early 70s, Emshwiller became passionately interested in avant-garde filmmaking, and that passion led him to California, where he spent his last decades deeply involved in the medium of independent film and its community. He abandoned illustration: in Carol’s words “When Ed was through with something he was really through with it.” He died of cancer in 1990. His son, Peter Emshwiller, published a fair amount of science fiction in the 80s and 90s.

eForeword

To begin at the beginning—as John Cheever opens “The Country Husband,” his great *New Yorker* story which won the 1956 O. Henry First Prize—Horace Gold offered the idea for “The Midas Plague” to every writer who picked up his phone calls or walked into his Stuyvesant Town apartment in the early 50s. We know this because Fred Pohl has so testified and claimed that Gold’s campaign for this story ended only because Fred, in a spasm of exhaustion or capitulation, said that he would do it. Horace, Phil Klass wrote, was a *wheedle*. He’d get hold of you and he wouldn’t let go. “Oh, about that story, Phil...I haven’t seen the next pages yet.” “Oh, Phil, stop avoiding my phone calls, you know I need that story yesterday.” “Phil, why haven’t you expanded that scene as I asked you?” Wheedling may not be the only characteristic of a great editor but, I have come to understand, it is that characteristic without which great editing cannot exist. Clay Felker pursued Tom Wolfe until finally Wolfe broke down, attended the Bernstein party, and wrote “Radical Chic.” John W. Campbell wanted all of his stable to write of paranormal powers until that rationalist Isaac Asimov addressed the typewriter in fury and frustration and wrote his novelette of the man who levitated, “Belief.” Good editors can be persuaded to let a stupid obsession go, and that is why they are good editors. Great editors will not release that obsession until a writer weeps and follows command, and that is why they are great editors.

Horace decided that turning standard consumer economics upside down would be a great stunt. Technology, Horace decided, would, as it became steadily more efficient, lower the costs of production to a point where only overproduction could justify that technology. But production needs consumption, and overproduction needs a *lot* of consumption, and that was Horace’s big idea. In a future society (which was in all other ways exactly like the USA’s society in 1953 but never mind), overproduction threatens to swamp the culture with unnecessary goods, and there is only so much rationally needed by rational consumers. But the social and economic pressures are enormous, and those chattering machines must be put to use.

Therefore, Horace reasoned—and shared that reasoning with all of his best writers and some of his not-so-good writers—poverty would have to be redefined. The burden of consumption and societal maintenance would rest upon the bottom classes. The poor would be swamped by goods. The rich would be spared the obscenity of reckless acquisition. The higher your standard in society, the fewer goods you would have to take into your life. The bottom classes—people like the hapless protagonist of “The Midas Plague”—had no such dispensation. Their lives were situations of relentless, helpless consumption. Keep overproduction in balance lest the machine stops!

The poor—that is to say the overconsuming—would suffer from initial restlessness, then boredom, then desperation. The rich—living spare lives of rational consumption—would have their happiness only through the suffering of those lower classes. And so society would rattle on, full of pain as society always has. The solution? Horace left that to the writer. Take it and run.

Helpless scriveners fled. “It’s a crazy idea, Horace,” he was told by all of them. “The premise is completely against human nature, the society you propose is insane, and it is

impossible to make it credible.” The halls of Stuyvesant Town were alive with the sound of feet in flight. Finally, for reasons which he kept as vague as his own attitude toward the material, Fred Pohl agreed. The *wheedling* you know. It was the only way to shut up Horace. Maybe Fred rationalized in 1953 that he owed his editor. *The Space Merchants* had been a big success. Running serially in 1952, it subsequently sold to Ballantine for \$5000, which was enormous money in those times, and had a positive reception of much dimension. Horace had commissioned in its wake, another Pohl-Kornbluth serial, *Gladiator at Law*, which did not ultimately prove quite as successful but was successful enough. Writers tend to oblige, they need to oblige. And Fred might have felt that—unlike the many who had refused the idea—he could write and publish a work this nonsensical and escape with his reputation intact.

So he did and Horace fell upon “The Midas Plague” with glee, and it was published in the April 1954 issue to a pretty good reception and everyone—for a while, anyway—lived happily ever after. Years later, telling the story of the story, Fred noted that “The Midas Plague” had probably had more anthology appearances than any short work of his and had in consequence made more for him than any work of magazine fiction he had published at that time and would publish for many years thereafter. (In the 1960s he began to sell to *Playboy* and *Rogue* with some regularity.) “What did this prove?” he asked. He wasn’t sure he knew what it proved. It was a bemusement.

I can relate to this narrative. In 1968 I delivered my first Olympia Press novel to Maurice Girodias. That would have been *Oracle Of The Thousand Hands*. “Very nice,” he said. “Not your number one bestseller, that’s for sure, but very promising. I will publish for you. Now you will do something for me. You will write a novel about a man who goes to the movies at the time and takes the movies so seriously that he believes himself to be on the screen, having sex with (Maurice did not say “having sex with”) the actresses. I want you to write detailed sex scenes and use the real names of the actresses. So you will describe our hero having sex with famous people like Elizabeth or Sophia or Brigitte. Many details please.” “And what happens to the guy?” I asked. “I don’t give a damn (Maurice did not say “damn”) *what* happens to him? He becomes Joe E. Levine, maybe. Go home and write it.”

I went home and wrote it. Later, I learned that Maurice had shopped this idea to every writer who had walked into his quarters (his office was his apartment, the leader’s office was his bedroom) over the last six months, every one of whom had refused it with thanks or horror. I was at least the twentieth candidate. I was too stupid to make this inference and learned it only after the novel had been published, some eight months later.

So, as Fred wrote of “The Midas Plague,” what is the point of this anecdote? I am not sure I know. The novel did not sell at all in its US hardcover or paperback, but editions were licensed by Girodias and others all over the world and people who know nothing of my work know this. Sidney Glazier (who was the producer of Mel Brooks’s *The Producers*) optioned it for film because Gene Wilder had somehow found the book and wanted to play my protagonist. In the end, the novel earned over twenty thousand dollars (it had been written in three days), and I still occasionally find people who have read it. Who was crazy? Maurice? Horace? The writers who declined? The two writers who were finally cornered?

These are rhetorical questions. We know that fifty-seven years after its initial publication “The Midas Plague” is going to find a new audience again and that, like a successful

advertising jingle, it seems to retain its power to draw in the masses. In its wild (and improbable and bitter) extrapolation, this comes as close as anything in the catalogue to being an exemplary *Galaxy* novelette, perhaps the one work which could be shown to someone like Harold Bloom if he were to ask, "So what made this magazine different?" I shudder with inference, if not knowledge, and commend this as probably the most illuminating work in this initial series. "*This*, Harold, is what made the magazine different."

—Barry N. Malzbe

The Midas Plague

And so, they were married. The bride and groom made a beautiful couple, she in her twenty-yard frill of immaculate white, he in his formal gray ruffled blouse and pleated pantaloons.

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

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

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

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

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

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

For a while.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cherry shifted uncomfortably. “I know.”

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

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

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

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

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

He stopped, slack-jawed. Cherry was crying, silently and in quantity.

“Darling!” he said inarticulately.

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

“Dear, what’s the matter?” he asked.

She turned her head away.

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

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

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

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

No answer.

“Come on. What is it?”

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

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

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

“Please. Let’s try.”

She shrugged.

He went on remorselessly, “You aren’t happy, are you? And it’s because of—well, all this.” His gesture took in the richly furnished conservatory, the thick-piled carpet, the host of machines and contrivances for their comfort and entertainment that waited for

their touch. By implication it took in twenty-six rooms, five cars, nine robots. Morey said, with an effort, "It isn't what you're used to, is it?"

"I can't help it," Cherry said. "Morey, you know I've tried. But back home—"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And a vastly increasing supply of labor...

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

And robots.

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

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

Limitless discovery, infinite power in the atom, tireless labor of humanity and robots, mechanization that drove jungle and swamp and ice off the Earth, and put up office buildings and manufacturing centers and rocket ports in their place...

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

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

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

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

Quotas worried his sleep until he awoke at eight o'clock the next morning, red-eyed and haggard, but inwardly resolved. He had reached a decision. He was starting a new life.

There was trouble in the morning mail. Under the letterhead of the National Ration Board, it said:

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

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

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

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

Morey was going to consume for two.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was too bad he couldn't really get right down to work on consuming today. But this was his one day a week to hold a *job*—four of the other six days were devoted to solid

consuming—and, besides, he had a group therapy session scheduled as well. His analysis, Morey told himself, would certainly take a sharp turn for the better, now that he had faced up to his problems.

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

“Hey, Mac.” The man’s voice was almost a whisper.

“Huh? Oh—what is it?”

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

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

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

Of course, it would be nice to get six stamps for one.

But very far from nice if he got caught.

“Good morning, Mr. Fry,” tinkled the robot receptionist. “Won’t you go right in?”

With a steel-tipped finger, it pointed to the door marked GROUP THERAPY.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The recorder, a pudgy, lowranking youngster named Sprogue, flipped back the pages of his notebook and read in a chanting voice, “Session of 24 May, subject, Morey Fry; in attendance, Doctors Fairless, Bileck, Semmelweiss, Carrado, Weber—”

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

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

Morey found his attention waning. Therapy was *good*; everybody knew that, but every once in a while he found it a little dull. If it weren’t for therapy, though, there was no telling what might happen. Certainly, Morey told himself, he had been helped considerably—at least he hadn’t set fire to his house and shrieked at the fire-robots, like Newell down the block when his eldest daughter divorced her husband and came back to live with him, bringing her ration quota along, of course. Morey hadn’t even been *tempted* to do anything as outrageously, frighteningly immoral as *destroy* things or *waste* them—well, he admitted to himself honestly, perhaps a little tempted, once in a great

while. But never anything important enough to worry about; he was sound, perfectly sound.

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

“Certainly,” Morey said hastily. “Uh—where?”

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

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

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

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

“Puppy!” said Fairless heartily. “Your mother and I have something much better than a puppy for you. Just take a look under the tree there—it’s a *robot!* Yes, Morey, your very own robot—a full-size 38-tube fully automatic companion robot for you! Go ahead, Morey, go right up and speak to it. Its name is Henry. Go on, boy.”

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

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

Morey said violently, “I *hate* robots!” He looked around him at the doctors, at the gray-paneled consulting room. He added defiantly, “You hear me, all of you? I *still* hate robots!”

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

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

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

He hated robots.

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

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

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

And the first robot clanked off the bench.

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

And still the riots never happened.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Very few of them were good.

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

Wainwright in a chubby world was aristocratically lean. As General Superintendent of the Design & Development Section of the Bradmoor Amusements Company, he ranked

high in the upper section of the well-to-do. He rasped, "I certainly did. Fry, just what the hell do you think you're up to now?"

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

Wainwright snorted. "I guess you don't. Not because you weren't told, but because you don't want to know. Think back a whole week. What did I have you on the carpet for then?"

Morey said sickly, "My ration book. Look, Mr. Wainwright, I know I'm running a little bit behind, but—"

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

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

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

"No, sir."

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

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

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

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

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

Howland said, "Go on, run it. I can't go until you put it in the works."

Morey grinned and pushed the button. The board lighted up; within it, a tiny

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