

Mother Earth

Isaac Asimov

Kindred worlds established by Mother Earth were scattered throughout the universe by 4200. The home planet was proud of the far-flung colonies and the commerce of many alien places was immense. The Golden Age had swung to its peak. But, pendulum-like, there were signs that Earth, at the height of its glory, was facing another decisive crisis. Many heard the bell tolling the knell for the Empire, yet few recognized the tune.

MOTHER EARTH

by Isaac Asimov

But can you be certain? Are you sure that even a professional historian can always distinguish between victory and defeat?”

Gustav Stein, who delivered himself of that mocking question with a whiskered smile and a gentle wipe at the gray mustache from the neighborhood of which he had just removed an empty glass, was not an historian. He was a physiologist.

But his companion *was* an historian, and he accepted the gentle thrust with a smile of his own.

Stein’s apartment was, for Earth, quite luxurious. It lacked the empty privacy of the Outer Worlds, of course, since from its window there stretched outward a phenomenon that belonged only to the home planet—a city. A large city, full of people, rubbing shoulders, mingling sweat—

Nor was Stein’s apartment fitted with its own power and its own utility supply. It lacked even the most elementary quota of positronic robots. In short, it lacked the dignity of self-sufficiency, and like all things on Earth, it was merely part of a community, a pendant unit of a cluster, a portion of a mob.

But Stein was an Earthman by birth and used to it. And after all, by Earth standards, the apartment was still luxurious.

It was just that looking outward through the same windows before which lay the city, one could see the stars and among them

the Outer Worlds, where there were no cities but only gardens; where the lawns were streaks of emerald, where all human beings were kings, and where all good Earthmen earnestly and vainly hoped to go some day.

Except for a few who knew better—like Gustav Stein.



The Friday evenings with Edward Field belonged to that class of ritual which comes with age and quiet life. It broke the week pleasantly for two elderly bachelors, and gave them an innocuous reason to linger over the sherry and the stars. It took them away from the crudities of life, and, most of all, it let them talk.

Field, especially, as a lecturer, scholar and man of modest means quoted chapter and verse from his still uncompleted history of Terrestrial Empire.

“I wait for the last act,” he explained. “Then I can call it the ‘Decline and Fall of Empire’ and publish it.”

“You must expect the last act to come soon, then.”

“In a sense, it has come already. It is just that it is best to wait for all to recognize that fact. You see, there are three times when an Empire or an Economic System or a Social Institution falls, you skeptic—”

Field paused for effect and waited patiently for Stein to say, “And those times are?”

“First,” Field ticked off a right forefinger, “there is the time when just a little nub shows up that points an inexorable way to finality. It can’t be seen or recognized until the finality arrives, when the original nub becomes visible to hindsight.”

“And you can tell what that little nub is?”

“I think so, since I already have the advantage of a century and a half of hindsight. It came when the Sirian sector colony, Aurora, first obtained permission of the Central Government at

Earth to introduce positronic robots into their community life. Obviously, looking back at it, the road was clear for the development of a thoroughly mechanized society based upon robot labor and not human labor. And it is this mechanization that has been and will yet be the deciding factor in the struggle between the Outer Worlds and Earth.”

“It is?” murmured the physiologist. “How infernally clever you historians are. What and where is the second time the Empire fell?”

“The second point in time,” and Field gently bent his right middle finger backward, “arrives when a signpost is raised for the expert so large and plain that it can be seen even without the aid of perspective. And that point has been passed, too, with the first establishment of an immigration quota against Earth by the Outer Worlds. The fact that Earth found itself unable to prevent an action so obviously detrimental to itself was a shout for all to hear, and that was fifty years ago.”

“Better and better. And the third point?”

“The third point?” Down went the ring finger. “That is the least important. That is when the signpost becomes a wall with a huge ‘The End’ scrawled upon it. The only requirement for knowing that the end has come then is neither perspective nor training, but merely the ability to listen to the video.”

“I take it that the third point in time has not yet come.”

“Obviously not, or you would not need to ask. Yet it may come soon, for instance, if there is war.”

“Do you think there will be?”

Field avoided commitment. “Times are unsettled, and a good deal of futile emotion is sweeping Earth on the immigration question. And if there should be a war, Earth would be defeated quickly and lastingly, and the wall would be erected.”

“Can you be certain? Are you sure that even a professional historian can always distinguish between victory and defeat?”

Field smiled. He said: “You may know something I do not. For instance, they talk about something called the ‘Pacific Project.’”

“I never heard of it.” Stein refilled the two glasses, “Let us speak of other things.”

He held up his glass to the broad window so that the far stars flickered rosily in the clear liquid and said: “To a happy ending to Earth’s troubles.”

Field held up his own, “To the Pacific Project.”

Stein sipped gently and said: “But we drink to two different things.”

“Do we?”



It is quite difficult to describe any of the Outer Worlds to a native Earthman, since it is not so much a description of a world that is required as a description of a state of mind. The Outer Worlds—some fifty of them, originally colonies, later dominions, later nations—differ extremely among themselves in a physical sense. But the state of mind is somewhat the same throughout.

It is something that grows out of a world not originally congenial to mankind, yet populated by the cream of the difficult, the different, the daring, the deviant.

If it is to be expressed in a word, that word is “individuality.”

There is the world of Aurora, for instance, three parsecs from Earth. It was the first planet settled outside the Solar System, and represented the dawn of interstellar travel. Hence its name.

It had air and water to start with, perhaps, but on Earthly standards, it was rocky and infertile. The plant life that did exist, sustained by a yellow-green pigment completely unrelated to chlorophyll, and not as efficient, gave the comparatively fertile

regions a decidedly bilious and unpleasant appearance to unaccustomed eyes. No animal life higher than unicellular, and the equivalent of bacteria, as well, were present. Nothing dangerous naturally, since the two biological systems, of Earth and Aurora, were chemically unrelated.

Aurora became, quite gradually, a patchwork. Grains and fruit trees came first; shrubs, flowers, and grass afterward. Herds of livestock followed. And, as if it were necessary to prevent too close a copy of the mother planet, positronic robots also came to build the mansions, carve the landscapes, lay the power units. In short, to do the work, and turn the planet green and human.

There was the luxury of a new world and unlimited mineral resources. There was the splendid excess of atomic power laid out on new foundations with merely thousands, not billions, to service. There was the vast flowering of physical science, in worlds where there was room for it.

Take the home of Franklin Maynard, for instance, who, with his wife, three children, and twenty-seven robots lived on an estate more than forty miles away, in distance, from the nearest neighbor. Yet by community-wave he could, if he wished, share the living room of any of the seventy-five million on Aurora—with each singly; with all simultaneously.

Maynard knew every inch of his valley. He knew just where it ended, sharply, and gave way to the alien crags, along whose undesirable slopes the angular, sharp leaves of the native furze clung sullenly—as if in hatred of the softer matter that had usurped its place in the sun.

Maynard did not have to leave that valley. He was a deputy in the Gathering, and a member of the Foreign Agents Committee, but he could transact all business, but the most extremely essential, by community-wave, without ever sacrificing that precious privacy he had to have in a way no Earthman could understand.

Even the present business could be performed by community-wave. The man, for instance, who sat with him in his living room, was Charles Hijzman, and he, actually, was sitting in

his own living room on an island in an artificial lake stocked with fifty varieties of fish, which happened to be twenty-five hundred miles distant, in space.

The connection was an illusion, of course. If Maynard were to reach out a hand, he could feel the invisible wall.

Even the robots were quite accustomed to the paradox, and when Hijzman raised a hand for a cigarette, Maynard's robot made no move to satisfy the desire, though a half-minute passed before Hijzman's own robot could do so.

The two men spoke like Outer Worlders, that is, stiffly and in syllables too clipped to be friendly, and yet certainly not hostile. Merely undefinably lacking in the cream—however sour and thin at times—of human sociability which is so forced upon the inhabitants of Earth's ant heaps.

Maynard said: "I have long wanted a private communion, Hijzman. My duties in the Gathering, this year—"

"Quite. That is understood. You are welcome now, of course. In fact, especially so, since I have heard of the superior nature of your grounds and landscaping. Is it true that your cattle are fed on imported grass?"

"I'm afraid that is a slight exaggeration. Actually, certain of my best milkers feed on Terrestrial imports during calving time, but such a procedure would be prohibitively expensive, I'm afraid, if made general. It yields quite extraordinary milk, however. May I have the privilege of sending you a day's output?"

"It would be most kind of you." Hijzman bent his head, gravely. "You must receive some of my salmon in return."

To a Terrestrial eye, the two men might have appeared much alike. Both were tall, though not unusually so for Aurora, where the average height of the adult male is six feet one and one half inches. Both were blond and hard-muscled, with sharp and pronounced features. Though neither was younger than forty, middle-age as yet sat lightly upon them.

So much for amenities. Without a change in tone, Maynard proceeded to the serious purpose of his call.

He said: “The Committee, you know, is now largely engaged with Moreanu and his Conservatives. We would like to deal with them firmly, we of the Independents, that is. But before we can do so with the requisite calm and certainty, I would like to ask you certain questions.”

“Why me?”

“Because you are Aurora’s most important physicist.”

Modesty is an unnatural attitude, and one which is only with difficulty taught to children. In an individualistic society it is useless and Hijckman was, therefore, unencumbered with it. He simply nodded objectively at Maynard’s last words.

“And,” continued Maynard, “as one of us. You are an Independent.”

“I am a member of the Party. Dues-paying, but not very active.”

“Nevertheless safe. Now, tell me, have you heard of the Pacific Project?”

“The Pacific Project?” There was a polite inquiry in his words.

“It is something which is taking place on Earth. The Pacific is a Terrestrial ocean, but the name itself probably has no significance.”

“I have never heard of it.”

“I am not surprised. Few have, even on Earth. Our communion, by the way, is via tight-beam and nothing must go further.”

“I understand.”

“Whatever Pacific Project is—and our agents are extremely vague—it might conceivably be a menace. Many of those who on Earth pass for scientists seem to be connected with it. Also, some of Earth’s more radical and foolish politicians.”

“Hm-m-m. There was once something called the Manhattan Project-”

“Yes,” urged Maynard, “what about it?”

“Oh, it’s an ancient thing. It merely occurred to me because of the analogy in names. The Manhattan Project was before the time of extra-terrestrial travel. Some petty war in the dark ages occurred, and it was the name given to a group of scientists who developed atomic power.”

“Ah,” Maynard’s hand became a fist, “and what do you think the Pacific Project can do then?”

Hijkman considered. Then, softly: “Do you think Earth is planning war?”

On Maynard’s face there was a sudden expression of distaste. “Six billion people. Six billion half-apes rather jammed into one system to a near-explosion point, facing only two hundred million of us, total. Don’t you think it is a dangerous situation.”

“Oh, numbers!”

“All right. Are we safe despite the numbers? Tell me. I’m only an administrator, and you’re a physicist. *Can* Earth win a war in any way?”

Hijkman sat solemnly in his chair and thought carefully and slowly. Then he said: “Let us reason. There are three broad classes of methods whereby an individual or group can gain his ends against opposition. On an increasing level of subtlety, those three classes can be termed the physical, the biological, and the psychological.

“Now the physical can be easily eliminated. Earth does not have an industrial background. It does not have a technical know-

how. It has very limited resources. It lacks even a single outstanding physical scientist. So it is as impossible as anything in the Galaxy can be that they can develop any form of physico-chemical application that is not already known to the Outer Worlds. Provided, of course, that the conditions of the problem imply single-handed opposition on the part of Earth against any or all of the Outer Worlds. I take it that none of the Outer Worlds intends leaguings with Earth against us.”

Maynard indicated violent opposition even to the suggestion, “No, no, no. There is no question of that. Put it out of your mind.”

“Then ordinary physical surprise weapons are inconceivable. It is useless to discuss it further.”

“Then what about your second class, the biological.”

Slowly, Hijzman lifted his eyebrows: “Now that is less certain. Some Terrestrial biologists are quite competent, I am told. Naturally, since I am myself a physicist, I am not entirely qualified to judge this. Yet I believe that in certain restricted fields, they are still expert. In agricultural science, of course, to give an obvious example. And in bacteriology. Um-m-m—”

“Yes, what about bacteriological warfare.”

“A thought! But no, no, quite inconceivable. A teeming constricted world such as Earth cannot afford to fight an open latticework of fifty sparse worlds with germs. They are infinitely more subject to epidemics, that is, to retaliation in kind. In fact, I would say that given our living conditions here on Aurora and on the other Outer Worlds, no contagious disease could really take hold. No, Maynard. You can check with a bacteriologist, but I think he’ll tell you the same.”

Maynard said: “And the third class?”

“The psychological? Now that is unpredictable. And yet the Outer Worlds are intelligent and healthy communities and not amenable to ordinary propaganda, or for that matter to any form of unhealthy emotionalism. Now, I wonder—”

“Yes?”

“What if the Pacific Project is just that. I mean, a huge device to keep us off balance. Something top-secret, but meant to leak out in just the right fashion, so that the Outer Worlds yield a little to Earth, simply in order to play safe.”

There was a longish silence.

“Impossible,” burst out Maynard, angrily.

“*You* react properly. *You* hesitate. But I don’t seriously press the interpretation. It is merely a thought.”

A longer silence, then Hijzman spoke again: “Are there any other questions?”

Maynard started out of a reverie, “No . . . no—”

The wave broke off and a wall appeared where space had been a moment before.

Slowly, with stubborn disbelief, Franklin Maynard shook his head.



Ernest Keilin mounted the stairs with a feeling for all the past centuries. The building was old, cobwebbed with history. It once housed the Parliament of Man, and from it words went out that clanged throughout the stars.

It was a tall building. It soared—stretched—strained. Out and up to the stars, it reached; to the stars that had now turned away.

It no longer even housed the Parliament of Earth. That had now been switched to a newer, neoclassical building, one that imperfectly aped the architectural stylisms of the ancient pre-Atomic age.

Yet the older building still held its great name. Officially, it was still Stellar House, but it only housed the functionaries of a

shriveled bureaucracy now.

Keilin got out at the twelfth floor, and the lift dropped quickly down behind him. The radiant sign said smoothly and quietly: Bureau of Information. He handed a letter to the receptionist. He waited. And eventually, he passed through the door which said, “L. Z. Cellioni—Secretary of Information.”

Cellioni was little and dark. His hair was thick and black; his mustache thin and black. His teeth, when he smiled, were startlingly white and even—so he smiled often.

He was smiling now, as he rose and held out his hand. Keilin took it, then an offered seat, then an offered cigar.

Cellioni said: “I am very happy to see you, Mr. Keilin. It is kind of you to fly here from New York on such short notice.”

Keilin curved the corners of his lips down and made a tiny gesture with one hand, deprecating the whole business.

“And now,” continued Cellioni, “I presume you would like an explanation of all this.”

“I wouldn’t refuse one,” said Keilin.

“Unfortunately, it is difficult to know exactly how to explain. As Secretary of Information, my position is difficult. I must safeguard the security and well-being of Earth and, at the same time, observe our traditional freedom of the press. Naturally, and fortunately, we have no censorship, but just as naturally, there are times when we could almost wish we did have.”

“Is this,” asked Keilin, “with reference to me? About censorship, I mean?”

Cellioni did not answer directly. Instead, he smiled again, slowly, and with a remarkable absence of joviality.

He said: “You, Mr. Keilin, have one of the most widely heard and influential talecats on the video. Therefore, you are of peculiar interest to the government.”

“The time is mine,” said Keilin, stubbornly. “I pay for it. I pay taxes on the income I derive from it. I adhere to all the common-law rulings on taboos. So I don’t quite see of what interest I can be to the government.”

“Oh, you misunderstand me. It’s my fault, I suppose, for not being clearer. You have committed no crime; broken no laws. I have only admiration for your journalistic ability. What I refer to is your editorial attitude at times.”

“With respect to what?”

“With respect,” said Cellioni, with a sudden harshness about his thin lips, “to our policy toward the Outer Worlds.”

“My editorial attitude represents what I feel and think, Mr. Secretary.”

“I allow this. You have your right to your feelings and your thoughts. Yet it is injudicious to spread them about nightly to an audience of half a billion.”

“Injudicious, according to you, perhaps. But legal, according to anybody.”

“It is sometimes necessary to place good of country above a strict and selfish interpretation of legality.”

Keilin tapped his foot twice and frowned blackly.

“Look,” he said, “put this frankly. What is it you want?”

The Secretary of Information spread his hands out before him. “In a word—co-operation! Really, Mr. Keilin, we can’t have you weakening the will of the people. Do you appreciate the position of Earth? Six billions, and a declining food supply! It is insupportable! And emigration is the only solution. No patriotic Earthman can fail to see the justice of our position. No reasonable human being anywhere can fail to see the justice of it.”

Keilin said: “I agree with your premise that the population problem is serious, but emigration is not the only solution. In fact, emigration is the one sure way of hastening destruction.

“Really? And why do you say that?”

“Because the Outer Worlds will not permit emigration, and you can force their hand by war only. *And we cannot win a war* “

“Tell me,” said Cellioni softly, “have *you* ever tried emigrating. It seems to me you could qualify. You are quite tall, rather light-haired, intelligent—”

The video-man flushed. He said, curtly: “I have hay fever.”

“Well,” and the secretary smiled, “then you must have good reason for disapproving their arbitrary genetic and racist policies.”

Keilin replied with heat: “I won’t be influenced by personal motives. I would disapprove their policies, if I qualified perfectly for emigration. But my disapproval would alter nothing. Their policies *are* their policies, and they can enforce them. Moreover, their policies have some reason even if wrong. Mankind is starting again on the Outer Worlds, and they—the ones who got there first—would like to eliminate some of the flaws of the human mechanism that have become obvious with time. A hay fever sufferer *is* a bad egg—genetically. A cancer prone even more so. Their prejudices against skin and hair colors are, of course, senseless, but I can grant that they are interested in uniformity and homogeneity. And as for Earth, we can do much even without the help of the Outer Worlds.”

“For instance, what?”

“Positronic robots and hydroponic farming should be introduced, and—most of all—birth control must be instituted. An intelligent birth control, that is, based on firm psychiatric principles intended to eliminate the psychotic trends, congenital infirmities—”

“As they do in the Outer Worlds—”

“Not at all. I have mentioned no racist principles. I talk only of mental and physical infirmities that are held in common by all ethnic and racial groups. And most of all, births must be held below deaths until a healthful equilibrium is reached.”

Cellioni said, grimly: “We lack the industrial techniques and the resources to introduce a robot-hydroponic technology in anything less than five centuries. Furthermore, the traditions of Earth, as well as current ethical beliefs forbid robot labor and false foods. Most of all, they forbid the slaughter of unborn children. Now come, Keilin, we can’t have you pouring this out over video. It won’t work; it distracts the attention; it weakens the will.”

Keilin broke in, impatiently: “Mr. Secretary, do you want war?”

“Do I *want* war? That is an impudent question.”

“Then who are the policy-makers in the government who *do* want war? For instance, who is responsible for the calculated rumor of the Pacific Project.”

“The Pacific Project? And where did you hear of that?”

“My sources are my secret.”

“Then I’ll tell you. You heard of this Pacific Project from Moreanu of Aurora on his recent trip to Earth. We know more about you than you suppose, Mr. Keilin.”

“I believe that, but I do not admit that I received information from Moreanu. Why do you think I could get information from him? Is it because he was deliberately allowed to learn of this piece of trumpery.”

“Trumpery?”

“Yes. I think Pacific Project is a fake. A fake meant to inspire confidence. I think that the government plans to let the so-called secret leak out in order to strengthen its war policy. It is part of a war of nerves on Earth’s own people, and it will be the ruin of Earth in the end.

“And I will take this theory of mine to the people.”

“You will not, Mr. Keilin,” said Cellioni, quietly.

“I will.”

“Mr. Keilin, your friend, Ion Moreanu is having his troubles on Aurora, perhaps for being too friendly with you. Take care that you do not have equal trouble for being too friendly with him.”

“I’m not worried.” The video man laughed shortly, lunged to his feet and strode to the door.

Keilin smiled very gently when he found the door blocked by two large men: “You mean I am under arrest right now.”

“Exactly,” said Cellioni.

“On what charge?”

“We’ll think of some later.”

Keilin left—under escort.



On Aurora, the mirror image of the afore-described events was taking place, and on a larger scale.

The Foreign Agents Committee of the Gathering had been meeting now for days—ever since the session of the Gathering in which Ion Moreanu and his Conservative Party made their great bid to force a vote of no confidence. That it had failed was in part due to the superior political generalship of the Independents, and in some part due to the activity of this same Foreign Agents Committee.

For months now the evidence had been accumulating, and when the vote of confidence turned out to be sizably in favor of the Independents, the Committee was able to strike in its own way.

Moreanu was subpoenaed in his own home, and placed under house arrest. Although this procedure of house arrest was not, under the circumstances, legal—a fact emphatically pointed out by Moreanu—it was nevertheless successfully accomplished.

For three days Moreanu was cross-examined thoroughly, in polite, even tones that scarcely ever veered from unemotional curiosity. The seven inquisitors of the Committee took turns in questioning, but Moreanu had respite only for ten-minute intervals during the hours in which the Committee sat.

After three days, he showed the effects. He was hoarse with demanding that he be faced with his accusers; weary with insisting that he be informed of the exact nature of the charges; throat-broken with shouting against the illegality of the procedure.

The Committee finally read statements at him—

“Is this true or not? Is this true or not?”

Moreanu could merely shake his head wearily as the structure spidered about him.

He challenged the competency of the evidence and was smoothly informed that the proceedings constituted a Committee Investigation and not a trial—

The chairman clapped his gavel finally. He was a broad man of tremendous purpose. He spoke for an hour in his final summing up of the results of the inquiry, but only a relatively short portion of it need be quoted.

He said: “If you had merely conspired with others on Aurora, we could understand you; even forgive you. Such a fault would have been held in common with many ambitious men in history. It is not that at all. What horrifies us and removes all pity is your eagerness to consort with the disease-ridden, ignorant and subhuman remnants of Earth.

“You, the accused, stand here under a heavy weight of evidence showing you to have conspired with the worst elements of Earth’s mongrel population—”

The chairman was interrupted by an agonized cry from Moreanu, “But the motive! What motive can you possibly attribute —”

The accused was pulled back into his seat. The chairman pursed his lips and departed from the slow gravity of his prepared speech to improvise a bit.

“It is not,” he said, “for this Committee to go into your motives. We have shown the facts of the case. The Committee *does* have evidence—” He paused, and looked along the line of the members to the right and the left, then continued. “I think I may say that the Committee has evidence that points to your intentions to use Earth man power to engineer a coup that would leave you dictator over Aurora. But since the evidence has not been used, I will not go further into that, except to say that such a consummation is not inconsistent with your characters displayed at these hearings.”

He went back to his speech. “Those of us who sit here have heard, I think, of something termed the ‘Pacific Project,’ which, according to rumors, represents an attempt on the part of Earth to retrieve its lost dominions.

“It is needless to emphasize here that any such attempt must be doomed to failure. And yet defeat for us is not entirely inconceivable. One thing can cause us to stumble, and that one thing is an unsuspected internal weakness. Genetics is, after all, still an imperfect science. Even with twenty generations behind us, undesirable traits may crop up at scattered points, and each represents a flaw in the steel shield of Aurora’s strength.

“*That* is the Pacific Project—the use of our own criminals and traitors against us; and if they can find such in our inner councils, the Earthmen might even succeed.

“The Foreign Agents Committee exits to combat that threat. In the accused, we touch the fringes of the web. We must go on—”

The speech did, at any rate.

When it was concluded, Moreanu, pale, wild-eyed, pounded his fist, “I demand my say—”

“The accused may speak,” said the chairman.

Moreanu rose and looked about him for a long moment. The room, fitted for an audience of seventy-five million by Community Wave, was unattended. There were the inquisitors, legal staff, official recorders— And with him, in the actual flesh, his guards.

He would have done better with an audience. To whom could he otherwise appeal? His glance fled hopelessly from each face it touched, but could find nothing better.

“First,” he said, “I deny the legality of this meeting. My constitutional rights of privacy and individuality have been denied. I have been tried by a group without standing as a court, by individuals convinced, in advance, of my guilt. I have been denied adequate opportunity to defend myself. In fact, I have been treated throughout as an already convicted criminal requiring only sentence.

“I deny, completely and without reservation, that I have been engaged in any activity detrimental to the state or tending to subvert any of its fundamental institutions.

“I accuse, vigorously and unreservedly, this Committee of deliberately using its powers to win political battles. I am guilty not of treason, but of disagreement. I disagree with a policy dedicated to the destruction of the larger part of the human race for reasons that are trivial and inhumane.

“Rather than destruction, we owe assistance to these men who are condemned to a harsh, unhappy life solely because it was our ancestors and not theirs who happened to reach the Outer Worlds first. With our technology and resources, they can yet re-create and redevelop—”

The chairman’s voice rose above the intense near-whisper of Moreanu: “You are out of order. The Committee is quite prepared to hear any remarks you make in your own defense, but a sermon

on the rights of Earthmen is outside the legitimate realm of the discussion.”

The hearings were formally closed. It was a great political victory for the Independents; all would agree to that. Of the members of the Committee, only Franklin Maynard was not completely satisfied. A small nagging doubt remained.

He wondered—

Should he try one last time ? Should he speak once more and then no more to that queer little monkey ambassador from Earth? He made his decision quickly and acted upon it instantly. Only a pause to arrange a witness, since even for himself an unwitnessed private communion with an Earthman might be dangerous.

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Luiz Moreno, Ambassador to Aurora from Earth, was, to put not too fine a point on it, a miserable figure of a man. And that wasn't exactly an accident. On the whole, the foreign diplomats of Earth tended to be dark, short, wizened, or weakly—or all four.

That was only self-protection since the Outer Worlds exerted strong attraction for any Earthman. Diplomats exposed to the allure of Aurora, for instance, could not but be exceedingly reluctant to return to Earth. Worse, and more dangerous, exposure meant a growing sympathy with the demigods of the stars and a growing alienation from the slum-dwellers of Earth.

Unless, of course, the ambassador found himself rejected. Unless, he found himself somewhat despised. And then, no more faithful servant of Earth could be imagined, no man less subject to corruption.

The Ambassador to Earth was only five foot two, with a bald head and receding forehead, a pinkish affectation of beard and red-rimmed eyes. He was suffering from a slight cold, the occasional results whereof he smothered in a handkerchief. And yet, withal, he was a man of intellect.

To Franklin Maynard, the sight and sound of the Earthman was distressing. He grew queasy at each cough and shuddered when the ambassador wiped his nose.

Maynard said: "Your excellency, we commune at my request because I wish to inform you that the Gathering has decided to ask your recall by your government."

"That is kind of you, councilor. I had an inkling of this. And for what reason?"

"The reason is not within the bounds of discussion. I believe it is the prerogative of a sovereign state to decide for itself whether a foreign representative shall be *persona grata* or not. Nor do I think you really need enlightenment on this matter."

"Very well, then." The ambassador paused to wield his handkerchief and murmur an apology. "Is that all?"

Maynard said: "Not quite. There are matters I would like to mention. Remain!"

The ambassador's reddened nostrils flared a bit, but he smiled, and said: "An honor."

"Your world, excellency," said Maynard, superciliously, "displays a certain belligerence of late that we on Aurora find most annoying and unnecessary. I trust that you will find your return to Earth at this point a convenient opportunity to use your influence against further displays such as recently occurred in New York where two Aurorans were manhandled by a mob. The payment of an indemnity may not be enough the next time."

"But that is emotional overflow, Councilor Maynard. Surely, you cannot consider youngsters shouting in the streets to be adequate representations of belligerence."

"It is backed by your government's actions in many ways. The recent arrest of Mr. Ernest Keilin, for instance."

"Which is a purely domestic affair," said the ambassador, quietly.

“But not one to demonstrate a reasonable spirit toward the Outer Worlds. Keilin was one of the few Earthmen who until recently could yet make their voices heard. He was intelligent enough to realize that no divine right protects the inferior man simply because he is inferior.”

The ambassador arose: “I am not interested in Auroran theories on racial differences.”

“A moment. Your government may realize that much of their plans have gone awry with the arrest of your agent, Moreanu. Stress the fact that we of Aurora are much wiser than we have been prior to this arrest. It may serve to give them pause.”

“Is Moreanu *my* agent? Really, councilor, if I am discredited, I shall leave. But surely the loss of diplomatic immunity does not affect my personal immunity as an honest man from charges of espionage.”

“Isn’t that your job?”

“Do Aurorans take it for granted that espionage and diplomacy are identical? My government will be glad to hear it. We shall take appropriate precautions.”

“Then you defend Moreanu? You deny that he has been working for Earth.”

“I defend only myself. As to Moreanu, I am not stupid enough to say anything.”

“Why stupid?”

“Wouldn’t a defense by myself be but another indictment against him? I neither accuse nor defend him. Your government’s quarrel with Moreanu, like my government’s with Keilin—whom you, by the way, are most suspiciously eager to defend—is an internal affair. I will leave now.”

The communion broke, and almost instantly the wall faded again. Hijkman was looking thoughtfully at Maynard.

“What do you think of him?” asked Maynard, grimly.

“Disgraceful that such a travesty of humanity should walk Aurora, I think.”

“I agree with you, and yet . . . and yet—”

“Well?”

“And yet I can almost find myself able to think that he is the master and that we dance to his piping. You know of Moreanu?”

“Of course.”

“Well, he will be convicted; sent to an asteroid. His party will be broken. Offhand, anyone would say that such actions represent a horrible defeat for Earth.”

“Is there doubt in your mind that such is the case?”

“I’m not sure. Committee Chairman Hond insisted on airing his theory that Pacific Project was the name Earth gave to a device for using internal traitors on the Outer Worlds. But I don’t think so. I’m not sure the facts fit that. For instance, where did we get our evidence against Moreanu?”

“I certainly can’t say.”

“Our agents, in the first place. But how did they get it? The evidence was a little *too* convincing. Moreanu could have guarded himself better—”

Maynard hesitated. He seemed to be attempting a blush, and failing. “Well, to put it quickly, I think it was the Terrestrial Ambassador who somehow presented us with the most evidence. I think that he played on Moreanu’s sympathy for Earth first to befriend him and then to betray him.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. To insure war, perhaps—with this Pacific Project waiting for us.”

“I don’t believe it.”

“I know. I have no proof. Nothing but suspicion. The Committee wouldn’t believe me either. It seemed to me, perhaps, that a last talk with the ambassador might reveal something, but his mere appearance antagonizes me, and I find I spend most of my time trying to remove him from my sight.”

“Well, you are becoming emotional, my friend. It is a disgusting weakness. I hear that you have been appointed a delegate to the Interplanetary Gathering at Hesperus. I congratulate you.”

“Thanks,” said Maynard, absently.



Luiz Moreno, ex-Ambassador to Aurora, had been glad to return to Earth. He was away from the artificial landscapes that seemed to have no life of their own, but to exist only by virtue of the strong will of their possessors. Away from the too-beautiful men and women and from their ubiquitous, brooding robots.

He was back to the hum of life and the shuffle of feet; the brushing of shoulders and the feeling of breath in the face.

Not that he was able to enjoy these sensations entirely. The first days had been spent in lively conferences with the heads of Earth’s government.

In fact, it was not till nearly a week had passed, that an hour came in which he could consider himself truly relaxed.

He was in the rarest of all appurtenances of Terrestrial Luxury— a roof garden. With him was Gustav Stein, the quite obscure physiologist, who was, nevertheless, one of the prime movers of the Plan, known to rumor as the Pacific Project.

“The confirmatory tests,” said Moreno, with an almost dreadful satisfaction, “all check so far, do they not?”

“So far. *Only* so far. We have miles to go.”

“Yet they will continue to go well. To one who has lived on Aurora for nearly a year as I have, there can be no doubt but that we’re on the right track.”

“Um-m-m. Nevertheless, I will go only by the laboratory reports.”

“And quite rightly.” His little body was almost stiff with gloating. “Some day, it will be different. Stein, you have not met these men, these Outer Worlders. You may have come across the tourists, perhaps, in their special hotels, or riding through the streets in inclosed cars, equipped with the purest of private, air-conditioned atmospheres for their well-bred nostrils; observing the sights through a movable periscope and shuddering away from the touch of an Earthman.

“But you have not met them on their own world, secure in their own sickly, rotting greatness. Go, Stein, and be despised a while. Go, and find how well you can compete with their own trained lawns as something to be gently trod upon.

“And yet, when I pulled the proper cords, Ion Moreanu fell— Ion Moreanu, the only man among them with the capacity to understand the workings of another’s mind. It is the crisis that we have passed now. We front a smooth path now.”

Satisfaction! Satisfaction!

“As for Keilin,” he said suddenly, more to himself than to Stein, “he can be turned loose, now. There’s little he can say, hereafter, that can endanger anything. In fact, I have an idea. The Interplanetary Conference opens on Hesperus within the month. He can be sent to report the meeting. It will be an earnest of our friendliness—and keep him away for the summer. I think it can be arranged.”

It was.

Of all the Outer Worlds, Hesperus was the smallest, the latest settled, the furthest from Earth. Hence the name. In a physical sense, it was not best suited to a great diplomatic gathering, since its facilities were small. For instance, the available community-wave network could not possibly be stretched to cover all the delegates, secretarial staff, and administrators necessary in a convocation of fifty planets. So meetings in person were arranged in buildings impressed for the purpose.

Yet there was a symbolism in the choice of meeting place that escaped practically nobody. Hesperus, of all the Worlds, was furthest removed from Earth. But the spatial distance—one hundred parsecs or more—was the least of it. The important point was that Hesperus had been colonized not by Earthmen, but by men from the Outer World of Faunus.

It was therefore of the second generation, and so it had no “Mother Earth.” Earth to it was but a vague grandmother, lost in the stars.

As is usual in all such gatherings, little work is actually done on the session floors. That space is reserved for the official soundings of whatever is primarily intended for home ears. The actual swapping and horse-trading takes place in the lobbies and at the lunch-tables and many an irresolvable conflict has softened over the soup and vanished over the nuts.

And yet particular difficulties were present in this particular case. Not in all worlds was the community-wave as paramount and all-pervading as it was on Aurora, but it was prominent in all. It was, therefore, with a certain sense of outrage and loss that the tall, dignified men found it necessary to approach one another in the flesh, without the comforting privacy of the invisible wall between, without the warm knowledge of the breakswitch at their fingertips.

They faced one another in uneasy semi-embarrassment and tried not to watch one another eat; tried not to shrink at the unmeant touch. Even robot service was rationed.

Ernest Keilin, the only accredited video-representative from Earth, was aware of some of these matters only in the vague way they are described here. A more precise insight he could not have. Nor could anyone brought up in a society where human beings exist only in the plural, and where a house need only be deserted to be feared.

So it was that certain of the most subtle tensions escaped him at the formal dinner party given by the Hesperian government during the third week of the conference. Other tensions, however, did not pass him by.

The gathering after the dinner naturally fell apart into little groups. Keilin joined the one that contained Franklin Maynard of Aurora. As the delegate of the largest of the Worlds, he was naturally the most newsworthy.

Maynard was speaking casually between sips at the tawny Hesperian cocktail in his hand. If his flesh crawled slightly at the closeness of the others, he masked the feeling masterfully.

“Earth,” he said, “is, in essence, helpless against us if we avoid unpredictable military adventures. Economic unity is actually a necessity, if we intend to avoid such adventures. Let Earth realize to how great an extent her economy depends upon us, on the things that we alone can supply her, and there will be no more talk of living space. And if we are united, Earth would never dare attack. She will exchange her barren longings for atomic motors—or not, as she pleases.”

And he turned to regard Keilin with a certain hauteur as the other found himself stung to comment:

“But your manufactured goods, councilor—I mean those you ship to Earth—they are not *given* us. They are exchanged for agricultural products.”

Maynard smiled silkily. “Yes, I believe the delegate from Tethys has mentioned that fact at length. There is a delusion prevalent among some of us that only Terrestrial seeds grow properly—”

He was interrupted calmly by another, who said: “Now I am not from Tethys, but what you mention is not a delusion. I grow rye on Rhea, and I have never yet been able to duplicate Terrestrial bread. It just hasn’t got the same taste.” He addressed the audience in general, “In fact, I imported half a dozen Terrestrials five years back on agricultural laborer visas so they could oversee the robots. Now they can do wonders with the land, you know. Where they spit, corn grows fifteen feet high. Well, that helped a little. And using Terrestrial seed helped. But even if you grow Terrestrial grain, its seed won’t hold the next year.”

“Has your soil been tested by your government’s agricultural department?” asked Maynard.

The Rhean grew haughty in his turn: “No better soil in the sector. And the rye is top-grade. I even sent a hundredweight down to Earth for nutritional clearance, and it came back with full marks.” He rubbed one side of his chin, thoughtfully: “It’s flavor I’m talking about. Doesn’t seem to have the right—”

Maynard made an effort to dismiss him: “Flavor is dispensable temporarily. They’ll be coming to us on our terms, these little-men-hordes of Earth, when they feel the pinch. We give up only this mysterious flavor, but they will have to give up atom-powered engines, farm machinery, and ground cars. It wouldn’t be a bad idea, in fact, to attempt to get along without the Terrestrial flavors you are so concerned about. Let us appreciate the flavor of our home-grown products instead—which could stand comparison if we gave it a chance.”

“That so?” the Rhean smiled. “I notice you’re smoking Earth-grown tobacco.”

“A habit I can break if I have to.”

“Probably by giving up smoking. I wouldn’t use Outer World tobacco for anything but killing mosquitoes.”

He laughed a trifle too boisterously, and left the group. Maynard stared after him, a little pinch-nosed.

To Keilin, the little byplay over rye and tobacco brought a certain satisfaction. He regarded such personalities as the tiny reflection of certain Galactotolitical realities. Tethys and Rhea were the largest planets in the Galactic south, as Aurora was the largest in the Galactic north. All three planets were identically racist, identically exclusivist. Their views on Earth were similar and completely compatible. Ordinarily, one would think that there was no room to quarrel.

But Aurora was the oldest of the Outer Worlds, the most advanced, the strongest militarily—and, therefore, aspired to a sort of moral leadership of all the Worlds. That was sufficient in itself to arouse opposition, and Rhea and Tethys served as focal points for those who did not recognize Auroran leadership.

Keilin was somberly grateful for that situation. If Earth could but lean her weight properly, first in one direction, then in the other, an ultimate split, or even fragmentation—

He eyed Maynard cautiously, almost furtively, and wondered what effect this would have on the next day's debate. Already, the Auroran was more silent than was quite polite.

And then some under-secretary or sub-official threaded his way through the clusters of guests in finicking fashion, and beckoned to Maynard.

Keilin's following eyes watched the Auroran retreat with the newcomer, watched him listen closely, mouth a startled "What!" that was quite visible to the eye, though too far off to be heard, and then reach for a paper that the other handed him.

And as a result the next day's session of the conference went entirely differently than Keilin would have predicted.

Keilin discovered the details in the evening video-casts. The terrestrial government, it seemed, had sent a note to all the governments attending the conference. It warned each one bluntly that any agreement among them in military or economic affairs would be considered an unfriendly act against Earth and that it would be met with appropriate countermeasures. The note denounced Aurora, Tethys, and Rhea all equally. It accused them

of being engaged in an imperialist conspiracy against Earth, and so on—and on—and on.

“Fools!” gritted Keilin, all but butting his head against the wall out of sheer chagrin. “Fools! Fools! Fools!” And his voice died away still muttering that same one word.

~ * ~

The next session of the conference was well and early attended by a set of angry delegates who were only too eager to grind into nothingness the disagreements still outstanding. When it ended, all matters concerning trade between Earth and the Outer Worlds had been placed in the hands of a commission with plenary powers.

Not even Aurora could have expected so complete and easy a victory, and Keilin, on his way back to Earth, longed for his voice to reach the video, so that it could be to others, and not to himself only, that he could shout his disgust.

Yet on Earth, some men smiled.

~ * ~

Once back on Earth, the voice of Keilin slowly swirled under and down—lost in the noisier clamor that shouted for action.

His popularity sank in proportion as trade restrictions grew. Slowly, the Outer Worlds drew the noose tighter. First, they instituted a strict application of a new system of export licensing. Secondly, they banned the export to Earth of all materials capable of being “used in a war effort.” And finally they applied a very broad interpretation indeed of what could be considered usable in such a connection.

Imported luxuries—and imported necessities, too, for that matter— vanished or priced themselves upwards out of the reach of all but the very few.

So the people marched, and the voices shouted and the banners swung about in the sunlight, and the stones flew at the

consulates—

Keilin shouted hoarsely and felt as if he were going mad.

Until, suddenly, Luiz Moreno, quite of his own accord, offered to appear on Keilin's program and submit to unrestricted questioning in his capacity as ex-Ambassador to Aurora and present Secretary without Portfolio.

To Keilin it had all the possibilities of a rebirth. He knew Moreno —no fool, he. With Moreno on his program, he was assured an audience as great as his greatest. With Moreno answering questions, certain misapprehensions might be removed, certain confusions might be straightened. The mere fact that Moreno wished to use his—*his*— program as sounding board might well mean that already a more pliant and sensible foreign policy might have been decided upon. Perhaps Maynard was correct, and the pinch was being felt and was working as predicted.

The list of questions had, of course, been submitted to Moreno in advance, but the ex-Ambassador had indicated that he would answer all of them, and any follow-up questions that might seem necessary.

It seemed quite ideal. Too ideal, perhaps, but only a criminal fool could worry over minutiae at this point.

There was an adequate ballyhoo—and when they faced one another across the little table, the red needle that indicated the number of video sets drawing power on that channel hovered well over the two hundred million mark. And there was an average of 2.7 listeners per video set. Now the theme; the official introduction.

Keilin rubbed his cheek slowly, as he waited for the signal.

Then, he began:

Q. Secretary Moreno, the question which interests all Earth at the moment, concerns the possibility of war. Suppose we start with that. Do you think there will be war?

A. If Earth is the only planet to be considered, I say: No, definitely not. In its history, Earth has had too much war, and has learned many times over how little can be gained by it.

Q. You say, “If Earth is the only planet to be considered—” Do you imply that factors outside our control will bring war?

A. I do not say “will”; but I could say “may.” I cannot, of course speak for the Outer Worlds. I cannot pretend to know their motivations and intentions at this critical moment in Galactic history. They *may* choose war. I hope not. If so be that they do, however, we will defend ourselves. But in any case, *we* will never attack; *we* will not strike the first blow.

Q. Am I right in saying, then, that in your opinion there are no basic differences between Earth and the Outer Worlds, which cannot be solved by negotiation?

A. You certainly are. If the Outer Worlds were sincerely desirous of a solution, no disagreement between them and us could long exist.

Q. Does that include the question of immigration ?

A. Definitely. Our own role in the matter is clear and beyond reproach. As matters stand, two hundred million human beings now occupy ninety-five percent of the available land in the universe. Six billions—that is, ninety-seven percent of all mankind—are squeezed into the other five percent. Such a situation is obviously unjust and, worse, unstable. Yet Earth, in the face of such injustice, has always been willing to treat this problem as soluble by degrees. It is still so willing. We should agree to reasonable quotas and reasonable restrictions. Yet the Outer Worlds have refused to discuss this matter. Over a space of five decades, they have rebuffed all efforts on the part of Earth to open negotiations.

Q. If such an attitude on the part of the Outer Worlds continues, do you *then* think there will be war?

A. I cannot believe that this attitude will continue. Our government will not cease hoping that the Outer Worlds will eventually reconsider their stand on the matter; that their sense of justice and right is not dead, but only sleeping.

Q. Mr. Secretary, let us pass on to another subject. Do you think that the United Worlds Commission set up by the Outer Worlds recently to control trade with Earth represents a danger to peace?

A. In the sense that its actions indicate a desire on the part of the Outer Worlds to isolate Earth, and to weaken it economically, I can say that it does.

Q. To what actions do you refer, sir?

A. To its actions in restricting interstellar trade with Earth to the point where, in credit values, the total stands now at less than ten percent of what it did three months ago.

Q. But do such restrictions really represent an economic danger to Earth? For instance, is it not true that trade with the Outer Worlds represents an almost insignificant part of total Terrestrial trade? And is it not true that the importations from the Outer Worlds reach only a tiny minority of the population at best?

A. Your questions now are representative of a profound fallacy which is very common among our isolationists. In credit values, it is true that interstellar trade represents only five percent of our total trade, but ninety-five percent of our atomic engines are imported. Eighty percent of our thorium, sixty-five percent of our cesium, sixty percent of our molybdenum and tin are imported. The list can be extended almost indefinitely, and it is quite easy to see that the five percent is an extremely important, a vital, five percent. Furthermore, if a large manufacturer receives a shipment of atomic steel-shapers from Rhea, it does not follow that the benefit redounds only to him. Every man on Earth who uses steel implements or objects manufactured by steel implements benefits.

Q. But is it not true that the current restrictions on Earth's interstellar trade have cut our grain and cattle exports to almost nothing? And far from harming Earth, isn't this really a boon to our own hungry people?

A. This is another serious fallacy. That Earth's good food supply is tragically inadequate is true. The government would be the last to deny it. But our food exports do not represent any serious drain upon this supply. Less than one fifth of one percent of Earth's food is exported, and in return we obtain, for instance, fertilizers and farm machinery which more than make up for that small loss by increasing agricultural efficiency. Therefore, by buying less food from us, the Outer Worlds are engaged, in effect, in cutting our already inadequate food supply.

Q. Are you ready to admit, then, Secretary Moreno, that at least part of the blame for this situation should rest with Earth itself? In other words, we come to my next question: Was it not a diplomatic blunder of the first magnitude for the government to issue its inflammatory note denouncing the intentions of the Outer Worlds before those intentions had been made clear at the Interplanetary Conference?

A. I think those intentions were quite clear at the time.

Q. I beg pardon, sir, but I was at the conference. At the time the note was issued, there was almost a stalemate among the Outer World delegates. Those of Rhea and Tethys strongly opposed economic action against Earth, and there was considerable chance that Aurora and its bloc might have been defeated. Earth's note ended that possibility instantly.

A. Well, what is your question, Mr. Keilin?

Q. In view of my statements, do you or do you not think Earth's note to have been a criminal error of diplomacy which can now be made up only by a policy of intelligent conciliation ?

A. You use strong language. However, I cannot answer the question directly, since I do not agree with your major premise. I cannot believe that the delegates of the Outer Worlds could behave in the manner you describe. In the first place, it is well

known that the Outer Worlds are proud of their boast that the percentage of insanity, psychoses, and even relatively minor maladjustments of personality are almost at the vanishing point in their society. It is one of their strongest arguments against Earth, that we have more psychiatrists than plumbers and yet are more pinched for want of the former. The delegates to the conference represented the best of this so-stable society. And now you would have me believe that these demigods would, in a moment of pique, have reversed their opinions and instituted a major change in the economic policy of fifty worlds. I cannot believe them capable of such childish and perverse activity, and must therefore insist that any action they took was based not upon any note from Earth, but upon motivations that go deeper.

Q. But I saw the effect upon them with my own eyes, sir. Remember, they were being scolded in what they considered to be insolent language from an inferior people. There can be no doubt, sir, that as a whole, the men of the Outer Worlds are a remarkably stable people, despite your sarcasm, but their attitude toward Earth represents a weak point in this stability.

A. Are you asking me questions, or are you defending the racist views and policies of the Outer Worlds?

Q. Well, accepting your viewpoint that Earth's note did no harm, what good could it have done? Why should it have been sent?

A. I think we were justified in presenting our side of the question before the bar of Galactic public opinion. I believe we have exhausted the subject. What is your next question, please? It is the last, isn't it?

Q. It is. It has recently been reported that the Terrestrial government will take stern measures against those dealing in smuggling operations. Is this consistent with the government's view that lowered trade relations are detrimental to Earth's welfare?

A. Our primary concern is peace, and not our own immediate welfare. The Outer Worlds have adopted certain trade restrictions. We disapprove of them, and consider them a great injustice.

Nevertheless, we shall adhere to them, so that no planet may say that we have given the slightest pretext for hostilities. For instance, I am privileged to announce here for the first time that in the past month, five ships, traveling under false Earth registry, were stopped while being engaged in the smuggling of Outer World materiel into Earth. Their goods were confiscated and their personnel imprisoned. This is an earnest of our good intentions.

Q. Outer World ships?

A. Yes. But traveling under false Earth registry, remember.

Q. And the men imprisoned are citizens of the Outer Worlds?

A. I believe so. However, they were breaking not only our laws, but those of the Outer Worlds as well, and therefore doubly forfeited their interplanetary rights. I think the interview had better close, now,

Q. But this—

It was at this point that the broadcast came to a sudden end. The conclusion of Keilin's last sentence was never heard by anyone but Moreno. It ended like this:

“—means war.”

But Luiz Moreno was no longer on the air. So as he drew on his gloves, he smiled and, with infinite meaning, shrugged his shoulders in a little gesture of indifference.

There were no witnesses to that shrug.

The Gathering at Aurora was still in session. Franklin Maynard had dropped out for the moment in utter weariness. He faced his son whom he now saw for the first time in naval uniform.

“At least *you're* sure of what will happen, aren't you?”

In the young man's response, there was no weariness at all, no apprehension; nothing but utter satisfaction. “This is it, dad!”

“Nothing bothers you, then? You don’t think we’ve been maneuvered into this.”

“Who cares if we have? It’s Earth’s funeral.”

Maynard shook his head: “But you realize that we’ve been put in the wrong. The Outer World citizens they hold are law-breakers. Earth is within its rights.”

His son frowned: “I hope you’re not going to make statements like that to the Gathering, dad. I don’t see that Earth is justified at all. All right, what if smuggling was going on. It was just because some Outer Worlders are willing to pay black market prices for Terrestrial food. If Earth had any sense, she could look the other way, and everyone would benefit. She makes enough noise about how she needs our trade, so why doesn’t she do something about it. Anyway, I don’t see that we ought to leave any good Aurorans or other Outer Worlders in the hands of those apemen. Since they won’t give them up, we’ll make them. Otherwise, none of us will be safe next time.”

“I see that you’ve adopted the popular opinions, anyway.”

“The opinions are my own. If they’re popular opinion also, it’s because they make sense. Earth *wants* a war. Well, they’ll get it.”

“But why do they want a war, eh? Why do they force our hands? Our entire economic policy of the past months was only intended to force a change in their attitude without war.”

He was talking to himself, but his son answered with the final argument: “I don’t care why they wanted war. They’ve *got* it now, and we’re going to smash them.”

Maynard returned to the Gathering, but even as the drone of debate re-filled the room, he thought, with a twinge that there would be no Terrestrial alfalfa that year. He regretted the milk. In fact, even the beef seemed, somehow, to be just a little less savory

—

The vote came in the early hours of the morning. Aurora declared war. Most of the worlds of the Aurora bloc joined it by dawn.



In the history books, the war was later known as the Three Weeks' War. In the first week, Auroran forces occupied several of the trans-Plutonian asteroids, and at the beginning of the third week, the bulk of Earth's home fleet was all but completely destroyed in a battle within the orbit of Saturn by an Aurora fleet not one-quarter its size, numerically.

Declarations of war from the Outer Worlds yet neutral followed like the *pop-pop* of a string of firecrackers.

On the twenty-first day of the war, lacking two hours, Earth surrendered.



The negotiations of peace terms took place among the Outer Worlds. Earth's activities were concerned with signing only. The conditions of peace were unusual, perhaps unique, and under the force of an unprecedented humiliation, all the hordes of Earth seemed suddenly struck with a silence that came from a shamed anger too strong for words.

The terms mentioned were perhaps best commented upon by a voice on the Auroran video two days after they were made public. It can be quoted in part:

“...There is nothing in or on Earth that we of the Outer Worlds can need or want. All that was ever worthwhile on Earth left it centuries ago in the persons of our ancestors.

“They call us the children of Mother Earth, but that is not so, for we are the descendants of a Mother Earth that no longer exists, a Mother Earth that we brought with us. The Earth of today bears us at best a cousinly relation. No more.

“Do we want their resources? Why, they have none for themselves. Can we use their industry or science? They are almost dead for lack of ours. Can we use their man power? Ten of them are not worth a single robot. Do we even want the dubious glory of ruling them? There is no such glory. As our helpless and incompetent inferiors, they would be only a drag upon us. They would divert from our own use food, labor, and administrative ability.

“So they have nothing to give us, but the space they occupy in our thought. They have nothing to free us from, but themselves. They cannot benefit us in any way other than in their absence.

“It is for that reason, that the peace terms have been defined as they have been. We wish them no harm, so let them have their own solar system. Let them live there in peace. Let them mold their own destiny in their own way, and we will not disturb them there by even the least hint of our presence. But we in turn want peace. We in turn would guide our own future in our own way. So we do not want *their* presence. And with that end in view, an Outer World fleet will patrol the boundaries of their system, Outer World bases will be established on their outermost asteroids, so that we may make sure they do not intrude on our territory.

“There will be no trade, no diplomatic relationships, no travel, no communications. They are fenced off, locked out, hermetically sealed away. Out here we have a new universe, a second creation of Man, a higher Man—

“They ask us: What will become of Earth? We answer: That is Earth’s problem. Population growth can be controlled. Resources can be efficiently exploited. Economic systems can be revised. We know, for we have done so. If they cannot, let them go the way of the dinosaur, and make room.

“Let them make room, instead of forever demanding room!”

~ * ~

And so an impenetrable curtain swung slowly shut about the Solar System. The stars in Earth’s sky became only stars again as in the

long-dead days before the first ship had penetrated the barrier of light's speed.

The government that had made war and peace resigned, but there was no one really to take their place. The legislature elected Luiz Moreno—ex-Ambassador to Aurora, ex-Secretary without Portfolio— as President *pro tem*, and Earth as a whole was too numbed to agree or disagree. There was only a widespread relief that someone existed who would be willing to take the job of trying to guide the destinies of a world in prison.

Very few realized how well-planned an ending this was, or with what calculation, Moreno found himself in the president's chair.

~ * ~

Ernest Keilin said hopelessly from the video screen: "We are only ourselves now. For us, there is no universe and no past—only Earth, and the future."

That night he heard from Luiz Moreno once again, and before morning he left for the capital.

~ * ~

Moreno's presence seemed incongruent within the stiffly formal president's mansion. He was suffering from a cold again, and snuffled when he talked.

Keilin regarded him with a self-terrifying hostility; an almost singing hatred in which he could feel his fingers begin to twitch in the first gestures of choking. Perhaps he shouldn't have come— Well, what was the difference; the orders had been plain. If he had not come, he would have been brought.

The new president looked at him sharply: "You have to alter your attitude toward me, Keilin. I know you regard me as one of the Grave-diggers of Earth—isn't that the phrase you used last night?—but you must listen to me quietly for a while. In your present state of suppressed rage, I doubt if you could hear me."

“I will hear whatever you have to say, Mr. President.”

“Well—the external amenities, at least. That’s hopeful. Or do you think a video-tracer is attached to the room?”

Keilin merely lifted his eyebrows.

Moreno said: “It isn’t. We are quite alone. We *must* be alone, otherwise how could I tell you safely that it is being arranged for you to be elected president under a constitution now being devised. Eh, what’s the matter?”

Then he grinned at the look of bloodless amazement in Keilin’s face. “Oh, you don’t believe it. Well, it’s past your stopping. And before an hour is up, you’ll understand.”

“I’m to be president?” Keilin struggled with a strange, hoarse voice. Then, more firmly: “You are mad.”

“No. Not I. Those out there, rather. Out there in the Outer Worlds.” There was a sudden vicious intensity in Moreno’s eyes, and face, and voice, so that you forgot he was a little monkey of a man with a perpetual cold. You didn’t notice the wrinkled sloping forehead. You forgot the baldish head and ill-fitting clothes. There was only the bright and luminous look in his eyes, and the hard incision in his voice. *That* you noticed.

Keilin reached blindly backward for a chair, as Moreno came closer and spoke with increasing intensity.

“Yes,” said Moreno. “Those out among the Stars. The godlike ones. The stately supermen. The strong, handsome master-race. *They* are mad. But only we on Earth know it.

“Come, you have heard of the Pacific Project. I know you have. You denounced it to Cellioni once, and called it a fake. But it isn’t a fake. And almost none of it is a secret. In fact, the only secret about it was that almost none of it was a secret.

“You’re no fool, Keilin. You just never stopped to work it all out. And yet you were on the track. You had the feel of it. What was it you said that time you were interviewing me on the

program? Something about the attitude of the Outer Worldling toward the Earthman being the only flaw in the former's stability. That was it, wasn't it? Or something like that? Very well, then; good! You had the first third of the Pacific Project in your mind at the time, and it was no secret after all, was it?

“Ask yourself, Keilin—what was the attitude of the typical Auroran to a typical Earthman? A feeling of superiority? That's the first thought, I suppose. But, tell me, Keilin, if he really felt superior, *really* superior, would it be so necessary for him to call such continuous attention to it. What kind of superiority is it that must be continuously bolstered by the constant repetition of phrases such as ‘apemen,’ ‘sub-men,’ ‘half-animals of Earth,’ and so on? That is not the calm internal assurance of superiority. Do you waste epithets on earthworms? No, there is something else there.

“Or let us approach it from another tack. Why do Outer World tourists stay in special hotels, travel in inclosed ground-cars, and have rigid, if unwritten, rules against social intermingling? Are they afraid of pollution? Strange then that they are not afraid to eat our food and drink our wine and smoke our tobacco.

“You see, Keilin, there are no psychiatrists on the Outer Worlds. The supermen are, so they say, too well adjusted. But here on Earth, as the proverb goes, there are more psychiatrists than plumbers, and they get lots of practice. So it is we, and not they, who know the truth about this Outer World superiority-complex; who know it to be simply a wild reaction against an overwhelming feeling of *guilt*.

“Don't you think that can be so? You shake your head as though you disagree. You don't see that a handful of men who clutch a Galaxy while billions starve for lack of room *must* feel a subconscious guilt, no matter what? And, since they won't share the loot, don't you see that the only way they can justify themselves is to try to convince themselves that Earthmen, after all, are inferior, that they do not deserve the Galaxy, that a new race of men have been created out there and that we here are only the diseased remnants of an old race that should die out like the dinosaur, through the working of inexorable natural laws.

“Ah, if they could only convince themselves of that, they would no longer be guilty, but merely superior. Only it doesn't work; it never does. It requires constant bolstering; constant repetition, constant reinforcement. And still it doesn't quite convince.

“Best of all, if only they could pretend that Earth and its population do not exist at all. When you visit Earth, therefore, avoid Earth-men; or they might make you uncomfortable by not looking inferior enough. Sometimes they might look miserable instead, and nothing more. Or worse still, they might even seem intelligent—as I did, for instance, on Aurora.

“Occasionally, an Outer Worlder like Moreanu did crop up, and was able to recognize guilt for what it was without being afraid to say so out loud. He spoke of the duty the Outer Worlds owed Earth— and so he was dangerous to us. For if the others listened to him and had offered token assistance to Earth, their guilt might have been assuaged in their own minds; and that without any lasting help to Earth. So Moreanu was removed through our web-weaving, and the way left clear to those who were unbending, who refused to admit guilt, and whose reaction could therefore be predicted and manipulated.

“Send them an arrogant note, for instance, and they automatically strike back with a useless embargo that merely gives us the ideal pretext for war. Then lose a war quickly, and you are sealed off by the annoyed supermen. No communication, no contact. You no longer exist to annoy them. Isn't that simple? Didn't it work out nicely?”

Keilin finally found his voice, because Moreno gave him time by stopping. He said: “You mean that all this was planned? You *did* deliberately instigate the war for the purpose of sealing Earth off from the Galaxy? You sent out the men of the Home Fleet to sure death because you wanted defeat? Why, you're a monster, a . . . a—”

Moreno frowned: “Please relax. It was not as simple as you think, and I am not a monster. Do you think the war could simply be—instigated? It had to be nurtured gently in just the right way

and to just the right conclusion. If we had made the first move; if we had been the aggressor; if we had in any way put the fault on our side— why they of the Outer Worlds would have occupied Earth, and ground it under. They would no longer feel guilty, you see, if *we* committed a crime against *them*. Or, again, if we fought a protracted war, or one in which we inflicted damage, they could succeed in shifting the blame.

“But we didn’t. We merely imprisoned Auroran smugglers, and were obviously within our rights. They had to go to war over it because only so could they protect their superiority which in turn protected them against the horrors of guilt. And we lost quickly. Scarcely an Auroran died. The guilt grew deeper and resulted in exactly the peace treaty our psychiatrists had predicted.

“And as for sending men out to die, that is a commonplace in every war—and a necessity. It was necessary to fight a battle, and, naturally, there were casualties.”

“But why?” interrupted Keilin, wildly. “Why? *Why?* Why does all this gibberish seem to make sense to you? What have we gained? What can we possibly gain out of the present situation?”

“Gained, man? You ask what we’ve gained? Why, we’ve gained the universe. What has held us back so far? *You* know what Earth has needed these last centuries. You yourself once outlined it forcefully to Cellioni. We need a positronic robot society and an atomic power technology. We need chemical farming and we need population control. Well, what’s prevented that, eh? Only the customs of centuries which said robots were evil since they deprived human beings of jobs, that population control was merely the murder of unborn children, and so on. And worse, there was always the safety valve of emigration either actual or hoped-for.

“But now we cannot emigrate. We’re *stuck* here. Worse than that, we have been humiliatingly defeated by a handful of men out in the stars, and we’ve had a humiliating treaty of peace forced upon us. What Earthman wouldn’t subconsciously burn for revenge, and what human motivation is stronger than the desire for revenge. Self-preservation has frequently knuckled under to that tremendous yearning to “get even.”

“And that is the second third of the Pacific Project, the recognition of the revenge motive. As simple as that.

“And how can we know that this is really so? Why, it has been demonstrated in history scores of times. Defeat a nation, but don’t crush it entirely, and in a generation or two or three it will be stronger than it was before. Why? Because in the interval, sacrifices will have been made for revenge that would not have been made for mere conquest.

“Think! Rome beat Carthage rather easily the first time, but was almost defeated the second. Every time Napoleon defeated the European coalition, he laid the groundwork for another just a little bit harder to defeat, until he himself was crushed by the eighth. It took four years to defeat Wilhelm of medieval Germany, and six much more dangerous years to stop his successor, Hitler.

“There you are! Until now, Earth needed to change its way of life only for greater comfort and happiness. A minor item like that could always wait. But now it must change for revenge and that will not wait. And I want that change for its own sake.

“Only—I am not the man to lead. I am tarred with the failure of yesteryear, and will remain so until, long after I am bone-dust, Earth learns the truth. But you . . . *you*, and others like you, have always fought for the road to modernization. *You* will be in charge. It may take a hundred years. Grandchildren of men unborn may be the first to see its completion. But at least you will see the start.

“Eh, what do you say?”

Keilin was fumbling at the dream. He seemed to see it in a misty distance—a new and reborn Earth. But the change in attitude was too extreme. It could not be done just yet. He shook his head.

He said: “What makes you think the Outer Worlds would allow such a change, supposing what you say to be true. They will be watching, I am sure, and they will detect a growing danger and put a stop to it. Can you deny that?”

Moreno threw his head back and laughed noiselessly. He gasped out: “But we have still a third left of the Pacific Project, a last, subtle and ironic third—

“The Outer Worlders call the men of Earth the subhuman dregs of a great race, but *we* are the men of *Earth*. Do you realize what that means? We live on a planet upon which for a billion years, life—the life that has culminated in Mankind—has been adapting itself. There is not a microscopic part of Man, not a tiny working of his mind, that has not as its reason some tiny facet of the physical make-up of Earth, or of the biological make-up of Earth’s other life-forms, or of the sociological make-up of the society about him.

“No other planet can substitute for Earth, *in Man’s present shape*.

“The Outer Worlders exist as they do, only because pieces of Earth have been transplanted. Soil has been brought out there; plants; animals; men. They keep themselves surrounded by an artificial Earth-born geology which has within it, for instance, those traces of cobalt, zinc, and copper which human chemistry must have. They surround themselves by Earth-born bacteria and algae which have the ability to make those inorganic traces available in just the right way and in just the right quantity.

“And they maintain that situation by continued imports—luxury imports, they call it—from Earth.

“But on the Outer Worlds, even with Terrestrial soil laid down to bedrock, they cannot keep rain from falling and rivers from flowing, so that there is an inevitable, if slow, admixture with the native soil; an inevitable contamination of Terrestrial soil bacteria with the native bacteria, and an exposure, in any case, to a different atmosphere and to solar radiations of different types. Terrestrial bacteria disappear or change. And then plant life changes. And then animal life.

“No great change, mind you. Plant life would not become poisonous or nonnutritious in a day, or year, or decade. But already, the men of the Outer Worlds can detect the loss or change

of the trace compounds that are responsible for that infinitely elusive thing we call 'flavor.' It has gone that far.

“And it will go further. Do you know, for instance, that on Aurora, nearly one half the native bacterial species known have protoplasm based on a fluorocarbon rather than hydrocarbon chemistry. Can you imagine the essential foreignness of such an environment ?

“Well, for two decades now, the bacteriologists and physiologists of Earth have studied various forms of Outer World life—the only portion of the Pacific Project that has been truly secret—and the transplanted Terrestrial life is already beginning to show certain changes on the subcellular level. *Even among the humans.*

“And here is the irony. The Outer Worlders, by their rigid racism and unbending genetic policies are consistently eliminating from among themselves any children that show signs of adapting themselves to their respective planets in any way that departs from the norm. They are maintaining—they *must* maintain as a result of their own thought-processes—an artificial criterion of 'healthy' humanity, which is based on Terrestrial chemistry and not their own.

“But now that Earth has been cut off from them; now that not even a trickle of Terrestrial soil and life will reach them, change will be piled on change. Sickesses will come, mortality will increase, child abnormalities will become more frequent—”

“And then?” asked Keilin, suddenly caught up.

“And then? Well, they are physical scientists—leaving such inferior sciences as biology to us. And they cannot abandon their sensation of superiority and their arbitrary standard of human perfection. They will never detect the change till it is too late to fight it. Not all mutations are clearly visible, and there will be an increasing revolt against the mores of those stiff Outer World societies. There will be a century of increasing physical and social turmoil which will prevent any interference on their part with us.

“We will have a century of rebuilding and revitalization, and at the end of it, we shall face an outer Galaxy which will either be dying or changed. In the first case, we will build a second Terrestrial Empire, more wisely and with greater knowledge than we did the first; one based on a strong and modernized Earth.

“In the second case, we will face perhaps ten, twenty, or even all fifty Outer Worlds, each with a slightly different variety of Man. Fifty humanoid species, no longer united against us, each increasingly adapted to its own planet, each with a sufficient tendency toward atavism to love Earth, to regard it as the great and original Mother.

“And racism will be dead, for variety will then be the great fact of Humanity, and not uniformity. Each type of Man will have a world of its own, for which no other world could quite substitute, and on which no other type could live quite as well. And other worlds can be settled to breed still newer varieties, until out of the grand intellectual mixture, Mother Earth will finally have given birth not to merely a Terrestrial, but to a *Galactic* Empire.”

Keilin said, fascinated: “You foresee all this so certainly.”

“Nothing is *truly* certain; but the best minds on Earth agree on this. There may be unforeseen stumbling blocks on the way, but to remove those will be the adventure of our great-grandchildren. Of *our* adventure, one phase has been successfully concluded; and another phase is beginning. Join us, Keilin.”

Slowly, Keilin began to think that perhaps Moreno was not a monster after all—