

THE HARRY HARRISON MEGAPACK



11 *Classics of
Science Fiction*

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Science Fiction*

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A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Harry Max Harrison (born Henry Maxwell Dempsey; 1925–2012) was an American science fiction author, best known for his character the Stainless Steel Rat and for his novel *Make Room! Make Room!* (1966). The latter was the rough basis for the motion picture *Soylent Green* (1973).

Harrison was an extremely popular figure in the science fiction world, renowned for being amiably outspoken, and endlessly amusing. His quickfire, machine-gun delivery of words was a delight to hear and a reward to unravel: he was funny and self-aware, he enjoyed reporting the follies of others, he distrusted generals, prime ministers, and tax officials with sardonic and cruel wit, and above all he made plain his acute intelligence and astonishing range of moral, ethical, and literary sensibilities.

Before becoming an editor and writer, Harrison started in the science fiction field as an illustrator, notably with EC Comics' two science fiction comic book series, *Weird Fantasy* and *Weird Science*. In these and other comic book stories, he most often worked with Wally Wood. Wood usually inked over Harrison's layouts, and the two freelanced for several publishers and genres, including westerns and horror comics. He and Wood split up their partnership in 1950 and went their separate ways. Harrison used house pen names such as Wade Kaempfert and Philip St. John to edit magazines and published other fiction under the pen names Felix Boyd and Hank Dempsey. Harrison ghostwrote *Vendetta for the Saint*, one of the long-running series of novels featuring Leslie Charteris' character, The Saint. Harrison also wrote for syndicated comic strips, writing several stories for the character Rick Random.

His first short story, "Rock Diver", was published in the February 1951 issue of *Worlds Beyond*, edited by Damon Knight; the magazine had previously published his illustrations. While in New York, he socialized at the Hydra Club, an organization of New York's science fiction writers, including Isaac Asimov. In the early 1950s, the Hydra Club included such luminaries as Alfred Bester, James Blissett, Anthony Boucher, Avram Davidson, Judith Merrill, and Theodore Sturgeon.

Harrison has become much better known for his later writing, particularly for his humorous and satirical science fiction, such as the Stainless Steel Rat series and his novel *Bill the Galactic Hero*, which satirized Robert A. Heinlein's novel *Starship Troopers*. Christopher Priest wrote:

His most popular and best-known work is contained in fast-moving parodies, homages or even straight reconstructions of traditional space-opera adventures. He wrote several named series: these: notably the *Deathworld* series (three titles, starting in 1960), the *Stainless Steel Rat* books (12 titles, from 1961), and the sequence of books about Bill, the Galactic Hero (seven titles, from 1965). These books all present interesting contradictions: while being exactly what they might superficially seem to be, unpretentious action novels with a strong streak of humour, they are also satirical, knowing, subversive, unapologetically anti-military, anti-authority and anti-violence. Harrison wrote such novels in the idiom of the politically conservative hack writer, but in reality he had a liberal conscience and a sharp awareness of the lack of literary values in so much of the SF he was parodying.

Adi Robertson agreed: "His books toed the line between science fiction adventure, humor, and satire, often with a strong anti-military bent informed by his time in the US Army Air Corps."

During the 1950s and 1960s, he was the main writer of the *Flash Gordon* newspaper strip. One of his *Flash Gordon* scripts was serialized in *Comics Revue* magazine. Harrison drew sketches to help the artist be more scientifically accurate, which the artist largely ignored.

For a time Harrison was closely associated with Brian Aldiss. They collaborated on a series of anthology projects and did much in the 1970s to raise the standards of criticism in the field, including the institution of the John W. Campbell Memorial Award for Best Science Fiction Novel. Priest wrote, "In 1965 Harrison and Aldiss published the first issue (of two) of the world's first serious journal of S

criticism, *SF Horizons*. Together they edited many anthologies of short stories, each one illustrating the major themes of SF, and although not intended as critical apparatus the books were a way of delineating the unique material of the fantastic. As committed internationalists, the two men created World SF, an organisation of professionals intended to encourage and enhance the writing of non-anglophone SF. In particular, the two edited nine volumes of *The Year's Best Science Fiction* anthology series as well as three volumes of the *Decade* series, collecting science fiction of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s respectively.

In 1990, Harrison was the professional Guest of Honor at ConFiction, the 48th World Science Fiction Convention, in The Hague, Netherlands, together with Joe Haldeman and Wolfgang Jeschke.

Harrison was a writer of fairly liberal worldview. Harrison's work often hinges around the contrast between the thinking man and the man of force, although the "Thinking Man" often needs ultimately to employ force himself.

Harrison did not win a major genre award for any specific work of fiction. The Science Fiction Hall of Fame inducted Harrison in 2004, and the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America named him its 26th SFWA Grand Master in 2008 (presentation of the Damon Knight Award following his death in 2009).

Harrison's website announced his death on August 15, 2012 at his apartment in Brighton, England. On learning of his death, Harlan Ellison said, "It's a day without stars in it."

—John Betancourt

Publisher, Wildside Press LLC

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Over the last few years, our "Megapack" series of ebook anthologies has grown to be among our most popular endeavors. (Maybe it helps that we sometimes offer them as premiums to our mailing list!) One question we keep getting asked is, "Who's the editor?"

The Megapacks (except where specifically credited) are a group effort. Everyone at Wildside works on them. This includes John Betancourt (me), Carla Coupe, Steve Coupe, Bonner Menking, Colleen Azariah-Kribbs, A.E. Warren, and many of Wildside's authors...who often suggest stories to include (and not just their own!)

A NOTE FOR KINDLE READERS

The Kindle versions of our Megapacks employ active tables of contents for easy navigation...please look for one before writing reviews on Amazon that complain about the lack! (They are sometimes at the ends of ebooks, depending on your reader.)

RECOMMEND A FAVORITE STORY?

Do you know a great classic science fiction story, or have a favorite author whom you believe is perfect for the Megapack series? We'd love your suggestions! You can post them on our message board at <http://movies.ning.com/forum> (there is an area for Wildside Press comments).

Note: we only consider stories that have already been professionally published. This is not a market for new works.

TYPOS

Unfortunately, as hard as we try, a few typos do slip through. We update our ebooks periodically, so make sure you have the current version (or download a fresh copy if it's been sitting in your ebook reader for months.) It may have already been updated.

If you spot a new typo, please let us know. We'll fix it for everyone. You can email the publisher at wildsidepress@yahoo.com or use the message boards above.

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ARM OF THE LAW

It was a big, coffin-shaped plywood box that looked like it weighed a ton. This brawny type just dumped it through the door of the police station and started away. I looked up from the blotter and shouted at the trucker's vanishing back.

"What the hell is that?"

"How should I know?" he said as he swung up into the cab. "I just deliver, I don't X-ray 'em. The thing that came on the morning rocket from earth is all I know." He gunned the truck more than he had to and threw up a billowing cloud of red dust.

"Jokers," I growled to myself. "Mars is full of jokers."

When I went over to look at the box I could feel the dust grate between my teeth. Chief Craig must have heard the racket because he came out of his office and helped me stand and look at the box.

"Think it's a bomb?" he asked in a bored voice.

"Why would anyone bother—particularly with a thing this size? And all the way from earth."

He nodded agreement and walked around to look at the other end. There was no sender's address anywhere on the outside. Finally we had to dig out the crowbar and I went to work on the top. After some prying it pulled free and fell off.

That was when we had our first look at Ned. We all would have been a lot happier if it had been our last look as well. If we had just put the lid back on and shipped the thing back to earth! I know now what they mean about Pandora's Box.

But we just stood there and stared like a couple of rubes. Ned lay motionless and stared back at us.

"A robot!" the Chief said.

"Very observant; it's easy to see you went to the police academy."

"Ha ha! Now find out what he's doing here."

I hadn't gone to the academy, but this was no handicap to my finding the letter. It was sticking up out of a thick book in a pocket in the box. The Chief took the letter and read it with little enthusiasm.

"Well, well! United Robotics have the brainstorm that...*robots, correctly used will tend to prove invaluable in police work...they want us to co-operate in a field test...robot enclosed is the latest experimental model; valued at 120,000 credits.*"

We both looked back at the robot, sharing the wish that the credits had been in the box instead of it. The Chief frowned and moved his lips through the rest of the letter. I wondered how we got the robot out of its plywood coffin.

Experimental model or not, this was a nice-looking hunk of machinery. A uniform navy-blue all over, though the outlet cases, hooks and such were a metallic gold. Someone had gone to a lot of trouble to get that effect. This was as close as a robot could look to a cop in uniform, without being a joke. All that seemed to be missing was the badge and gun.

Then I noticed the tiny glow of light in the robot's eye lenses. It had never occurred to me before that the thing might be turned on. There was nothing to lose by finding out.

"Get out of that box," I said.

The robot came up smooth and fast as a rocket, landing two feet in front of me and whipping out a snappy salute.

"Police Experimental Robot, serial number XPO-456-934B, reporting for duty, sir."

His voice quivered with alertness and I could almost hear the humming of those taut cable muscles. He may have had a stainless steel hide and a bunch of wires for a brain—but he spelled rookie cop to me just the same. The fact that he was man-height with two arms, two legs and that painted-copper uniform helped. All I had to do was squint my eyes a bit and there stood Ned the Rookie Cop. Fresh out of school and raring to go. I shook my head to get rid of the illusion. This was just six feet

machine that boffins and brain-boys had turned out for their own amusement.

“Relax, Ned,” I said. ~~He was still holding the salute.~~ “At ease. You’ll get a hernia of your exhaust pipe if you stay so tense. Anyways, I’m just the sergeant here. That’s the Chief of Police over there.”

Ned did an about face and slid over to the Chief with that same greased-lightning motion. The Chief just looked at him like something that sprang out from under the hood of a car, while Ned went through the same report routine.

“I wonder if it does anything else beside salute and report,” the Chief said while he walked around the robot, looking it over like a dog with a hydrant.

“The functions, operations and responsible courses of action open to the Police Experiment Robots are outlined on pages 184 to 213 of the manual.” Ned’s voice was muffled for a second while he half-dived back into his case and came up with the volume mentioned. “A detailed breakdown of these will also be found on pages 1035 to 1267 inclusive.”

The Chief, who has trouble reading an entire comic page at one sitting, turned the 6-inch-thick book over in his hands like it would maybe bite him. When he had a rough idea of how much it weighed and a good feel of the binding he threw it on my desk.

“Take care of this,” he said to me as he headed towards his office. “And the robot, too. Do something with it.” The Chief’s span of attention never was great and it had been strained to the limit this time.

I flipped through the book, wondering. One thing I never have had much to do with is robots, so I know just as much about them as any Joe in the street. Probably less. The book was filled with pages of fine print, fancy mathematics, wiring diagrams and charts in nine colors and that kind of thing. It needed close attention. Which attention I was not prepared to give at the time. The book slid shut and I eyed the newest employee of the city of Nineport.

“There is a broom behind the door. Do you know how to use it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“In that case you will sweep out this room, raising as small a cloud of dust as possible at the same time.”

He did a very neat job of it.

I watched 120,000 credits worth of machinery making a tidy pile of butts and sand and wondered why it had been sent to Nineport. Probably because there wasn’t another police force in the solar system that was smaller or more unimportant than ours. The engineers must have figured this would be a good spot for a field test. Even if the thing blew up, nobody would really mind. There would probably be someone along some day to get a report on it. Well, they had picked the right spot and they were right. Nineport was just a little bit beyond nowhere.

Which, of course, was why I was there. I was the only real cop on the force. They needed at least one to give an illusion of the wheels going around. The Chief, Alonzo Craig, had just enough sense to take graft without dropping the money. There were two patrolmen. One old and drunk most of the time. The other so young the only scar he had was the mark of the attram. I had ten years on the metropolitan force, earthside. Why I left is nobody’s damn business. I have long since paid for all my mistakes I made there by ending up in Nineport.

Nineport is not a city, it’s just a place where people stop. The only permanent citizens are the ones who cater to those on the way through. Hotel keepers, restaurant owners, gamblers, barkeepers, and the rest.

There is a spaceport, but only some freighters come there. To pick up the metal from some of the mines that are still working. Some of the settlers still came in for supplies. You might say that Nineport was a town that just missed the boat. In a hundred years I doubt if there will be enough left sticking of the sand to even tell where it used to be. I won’t be there either, so I couldn’t care less.

I went back to the blotter. Five drunks in the tank, an average night's haul. While I wrote them up, Fats dragged in the sixth one.

"Locked himself in the ladies' john at the spaceport and resisting arrest," he reported.

"D and D. Throw him in with the rest."

Fats steered his limp victim across the floor, matching him step for dragging step. I always marveled at the way Fats took care of drunks, since he usually had more under his belt than they had. I have never seen him falling down drunk or completely sober. About all he was good for was keeping a blurred eye on the lockup and running in drunks. He did well at that. No matter what they crawled under or on top of, he found them. No doubt due to the same shared natural instincts.

Fats clanged the door behind number six and weaved his way back in. "What's that?" he asked, peering at the robot along the purple beauty of his nose.

"That is a robot. I have forgotten the number his mother gave him at the factory so we will call him Ned. He works here now."

"Good for him! He can clean up the tank after we throw the bums out."

"That's *my* job," Billy said coming in through the front door. He clutched his nightstick and scowled out from under the brim of his uniform cap. It is not that Billy is stupid, just that most of his strength has gone into his back instead of his mind.

"That's Ned's job now because you have a promotion. You are going to help me with some of my work."

Billy came in very handy at times and I was anxious that the force shouldn't lose him. My explanation cheered him because he sat down by Fats and watched Ned do the floor.

That's the way things went for about a week. We watched Ned sweep and polish until the station began to take on a positively antiseptic look. The Chief, who always has an eye out for that type of thing, found out that Ned could file the odd ton of reports and paperwork that cluttered his office. And this kept the robot busy, and we got so used to him we were hardly aware he was around. I knew he had moved the packing case into the storeroom and fixed himself up a cozy sort of robot dormitory coffin. Other than that I didn't know or care.

The operation manual was buried in my desk and I never looked at it. If I had, I might have had some idea of the big changes that were in store. None of us knew the littlest bit about what a robot can or cannot do. Ned was working nicely as a combination janitor-file clerk and should have stayed that way. He would have too if the Chief hadn't been so lazy. That's what started it all.

It was around nine at night and the Chief was just going home when the call came in. He took a moment to listen for a moment, then hung up.

"Greenback's liquor store. He got held up again. Says to come at once."

"That's a change. Usually we don't hear about it until a month later. What's he paying protection money for if China Joe ain't protecting? What's the rush now?"

The Chief chewed his loose lip for a while, finally and painfully reached a decision.

"You better go around and see what the trouble is."

"Sure," I said reaching for my cap. "But no one else is around, you'll have to watch the desk until I get back."

"That's no good," he moaned. "I'm dying from hunger and sitting here isn't going to help me any."

"I will go take the report," Ned said, stepping forward and snapping his usual well-greased salute.

At first the Chief wasn't buying. You would think the water cooler came to life and offered to take over his job.

"How could *you* take a report?" he growled, putting the wise-guy water cooler in its place. But I had phrased his little insult as a question so he had only himself to blame. In exactly three minutes Ned gave the Chief a summary of the routine necessary for a police officer to make a report on a

armed robbery or other reported theft. From the glazed look in Chief's protruding eyes I could tell Ned had quickly passed the boundaries of the Chief's meager knowledge.

"Enough!" the harried man finally gasped. "If you know so much why don't you make a report?"

Which to me sounded like another version of "*if you're so damned smart why ain't you rich?*" which we used to snarl at the brainy kids in grammar school. Ned took such things literally though and turned towards the door.

"Do you mean you wish me to make a report on this robbery?"

"Yes," the Chief said just to get rid of him, and we watched his blue shape vanish through the door.

"He must be brighter than he looks," I said. "He never stopped to ask where Greenback's store is."

The Chief nodded and the phone rang again. His hand was still resting on it so he picked it up by reflex. He listened for a second and you would have thought someone was pumping blood out of his heel from the way his face turned white.

"The holdup's still on," he finally gasped. "Greenback's delivery boy is on the line—calling back to see where we are. Says he's under a table in the back room..."

I never heard the rest of it because I was out the door and into the car. There were a hundred things that could happen if Ned got there before me. Guns could go off, people hurt, lots of things. And the police would be to blame for it all—sending a tin robot to do a cop's job. Maybe the Chief had ordered Ned there, but clearly as if the words were painted on the windshield of the car, I knew I would be dragged into it. It never gets very warm on Mars, but I was sweating.

Nineport has fourteen traffic regulations and I broke all of them before I had gone a block. Fast as I was, Ned was faster. As I turned the corner I saw him open the door of Greenback's store and walk in. I screamed brakes in behind him and arrived just in time to have a gallery seat. A shooting gallery seat that.

There were two holdup punks, one behind the counter making like a clerk and the other lounging on to the side. Their guns were out of sight, but blue-coated Ned busting through the door like that was too much for their keyed up nerves. Up came both guns like they were on strings and Ned stopped dead. I grabbed for my own gun and waited for pieces of busted robot to come flying through the window.

Ned's reflexes were great. Which I suppose is what you should expect of a robot.

"DROP YOUR GUNS, YOU ARE UNDER ARREST."

He must have had on full power or something, his voice blasted so loud my ears hurt. The result was just what you might expect. Both torpedoes let go at once and the air was filled with flying slugs. The show windows went out with a crash and I went down on my stomach. From the amount of noise I knew they both had recoilless .50s. You can't stop one of those slugs. They go right through you and anything else that happens to be in the way.

Except they didn't seem to be bothering Ned. The only notice he seemed to take was to cover his eyes. A little shield with a thin slit popped down over his eye lenses. Then he moved in on the first thug.

I knew he was fast, but not that fast. A couple of slugs jarred him as he came across the room, but before the punk could change his aim Ned had the gun in his hand. That was the end of that. He put on one of the sweetest hammer locks I have ever seen and neatly grabbed the gun when it dropped from the limp fingers. With the same motion that slipped the gun into a pouch he whipped out a pair of handcuffs and snapped them on the punk's wrists.

Holdupnik number two was heading for the door by then, and I was waiting to give him a war reception. There was never any need. He hadn't gone halfway before Ned slid in front of him. There was a thud when they hit that didn't even shake Ned, but gave the other a glazed look. He never even knew it when Ned slipped the cuffs on him and dropped him down next to his partner.

I went in, took their guns from Ned, and made the arrest official. That was all Greenback saw when he crawled out from behind the counter and it was all I wanted him to see. The place was a foot deep in broken glass and smelled like the inside of a Jack Daniels bottle. Greenback began to howl like a wolf over his lost stock. He didn't seem to know any more about the phone call than I did, so I grabbed ahold of a pimply looking kid who staggered out of the storeroom. He was the one who had made the calls.

It turned out to be a matter of sheer stupidity. He had worked for Greenback only a few days and didn't have enough brains to realize that all holdups should be reported to the protection boys instead of the police. I told Greenback to wise up his boy, as look at the trouble that got caused. Then I pushed the two ex-holdup men out to the car. Ned climbed in back with them and they clung together like two waifs in a storm. The robot's only response was to pull a first aid kit from his hip and fix up a ricochet hole in one of the thugs that no one had noticed in the excitement.

* * * *

The Chief was still sitting there with that bloodless look when we marched in. I didn't believe it could be done, but he went two shades whiter.

"You made the pinch," he whispered. Before I could straighten him out a second and more awful idea hit him. He grabbed a handful of shirt on the first torpedo and poked his face down. "You will get China Joe," he snarled.

The punk made the error of trying to be cute so the Chief let him have one on the head with the open hand that set his eyes rolling like marbles. When the question got asked again he found the right answer.

"I never heard from no China Joe. We just hit town today and—"

"Freelance, by God," the Chief sighed and collapsed into his chair. "Lock 'em up and quickly tell me what in hell happened."

I slammed the gate on them and pointed a none too steady finger at Ned.

"There's the hero," I said. "Took them on single-handed, rassed them for a fall and made the capture. He is a one-robot tornado, a power for good in this otherwise evil community. And he's bulletproof too." I ran a finger over Ned's broad chest. The paint was chipped by the slugs, but the metal was hardly scratched.

"This is going to cause me trouble, big trouble," the Chief wailed.

I knew he meant with the protection boys. They did not like punks getting arrested and guns going off without their okay. But Ned thought the Chief had other worries and rushed in to put them right. "There will be no trouble. At no time did I violate any of the Robotic Restriction Laws, they are part of my control circuits and therefore fully automatic. The men who drew their guns violated both robotic and human law when they threatened violence. I did not injure the men—merely restrained them."

It was all over the Chief's head, but I liked to think *I* could follow it. And I *had* been wondering how a robot—a machine—could be involved in something like law application and violence. Ned had the answer to that one too.

"Robots have been assuming these functions for years. Don't recording radar meters pass judgment on human violation of automobile regulations? A robot alcohol detector is better qualified to assess the sobriety of a prisoner than the arresting officer. At one time robots were even allowed to make their own decisions about killing. Before the Robotic Restriction Laws automatic gun-pointers were in general use. Their final development was a self-contained battery of large anti-aircraft guns. Automatic scan radar detected all aircraft in the vicinity. Those that could not return the correct identifying signal had their courses tracked and computed, automatic fuse-cutters and loaders readied the computer-aimed guns—which were fired by the robot mechanism."

There was little I could argue about with Ned. Except maybe his college-professor vocabulary. So I switched the attack.

“But a robot can’t take the place of a cop, it’s a complex human job.”

“Of course it is, but taking a human policeman’s place is not the function of a police robot. Primarily I combine the functions of numerous pieces of police equipment, integrating the operations and making them instantly available. In addition I can aid in the *mechanical* processes of law enforcement. If you arrest a man you handcuff him. But if you order me to do it, I have made a moral decision. I am just a machine for attaching handcuffs at that point...”

My raised hand cut off the flow of robotic argument. Ned was hipped to his ears with facts and figures and I had a good idea who would come off second best in any continued discussion. No laws had been broken when Ned made the pinch, that was for sure. But there are other laws than those that appear on the books.

“China Joe is not going to like this, not at all,” the Chief said, speaking my own thoughts.

The law of Tooth and Claw. That’s one that wasn’t in the law books. And that was what ran Nineport. The place was just big enough to have a good population of gambling joints, bawdy houses and drunk-rollers. They were all run by China Joe. As was the police department. We were all in his pocket and you might say he was the one who paid our wages. This is not the kind of thing, though, that you explain to a robot.

“Yeah, China Joe.”

I thought it was an echo at first, then realized that someone had eased in the door behind me. Something called Alex. Six feet of bone, muscle and trouble. China Joe’s right hand man. He imitated a smile at the Chief who sank a bit lower in his chair.

“China Joe wants you should tell him why you got smart cops going around and putting the arm on people and letting them shoot up good liquor. He’s mostly angry about the hooch. He says that he has enough guff and after this you should—”

“I am putting you under Robot Arrest, pursuant to article 46, paragraph 19 of the revised statutes...”

Ned had done it before we realized he had even moved. Right in front of our eyes he was arresting Alex and signing our death warrants.

Alex was not slow. As he turned to see who had grabbed him, he had already dragged out the cannon. He got one shot in, square against Ned’s chest, before the robot plucked the gun away and slipped on the cuffs. While we all gaped like dead fish, Ned recited the charge in what I swear was a satisfied tone.

“The prisoner is Peter Rakjomskj, alias Alex the Axe, wanted in Canal City for armed robbery and attempted murder. Also wanted by local police of Detroit, New York and Manchester on charges of...”

“*Get it off me!*” Alex howled. We might have too, and everything might have still been straightened out if Benny Bug hadn’t heard the shot. He popped his head in the front door just long enough to roll his eyes over our little scene.

“Alex...they’re puttin’ the arm on Alex!”

Then he was gone and when I hit the door he was nowhere in sight. China Joe’s boys always were around in pairs. And in ten minutes he would know all about it.

“Book him,” I told Ned. “It wouldn’t make any difference if we let him go now. The world has already come to an end.”

Fats came in then, mumbling to himself. He jerked a thumb over his shoulder when he saw me.

“What’s up? I see little Benny Bug come out of here like the place was on fire and almost get killed driving away?”

Then Fats saw Alex with the bracelets on and turned sober in one second. He just took a moment to gape, then his mind was made up. Without a trace of a stagger he walked over to the Chief and thre

his badge on the desk in front of him.

~~“I am an old man and I drink too much to be a cop. Therefore I am resigning from the force. Because if that is whom I think it is over there with the cuffs on, I will not live to be a day older than I am long as I am around here.”~~

“Rat.” The Chief growled in pain through his clenched teeth. “Deserting the sinking ship. Rat.”

“Squeak,” Fats said and left.

The Chief was beyond caring at this point. He didn't blink an eye when I took Fats' badge off the desk. I don't know why I did it, perhaps I thought it was only fair. Ned had started all the trouble and I was just angry enough to want him on the spot when it was finished. There were two rings on his chest plate, and I was not surprised when the badge pin fitted them neatly.

“There, now you are a real cop.” Sarcasm dripped from the words. I should have realized that robots are immune to sarcasm. Ned took my statement at face value.

“This is a very great honor, not only for me but for all robots. I will do my best to fulfill all the obligations of the office.” Jack Armstrong in tin underwear. I could hear the little motors in his gut humming with joy as he booked Alex.

If everything else hadn't been so bad I would have enjoyed that. Ned had more police equipment built into him than Nineport had ever owned. There was an ink pad that snapped out of one hip, and he efficiently rolled Alex's fingertips across it and stamped them on a card. Then he held the prisoner's arm's length while something clicked in his abdomen. Once more sideways and two instant photographs dropped out of a slot. The mug shots were stuck on the card, arrest details and such were inserted. There was more like this, but I forced myself away. There were more important things to think about.

Like staying alive.

“Any ideas, Chief?”

A groan was my only answer so I let it go at that. Billy, the balance of the police force, came in then. I gave him a quick rundown. Either through stupidity or guts he elected to stay, and I was proud of the boy. Ned locked away the latest prisoner and began sweeping up.

That was the way we were when China Joe walked in.

Even though we were expecting it, it was still a shock. He had a bunch of his toughest hoods with him and they crowded through the door like an overweight baseball team. China Joe was in front, hands buried in the sleeves of his long mandarin gown. No expression at all on his ascetic features. He didn't waste time talking to us, just gave the word to his own boys.

“Clean this place up. The new police Chief will be here in a while and I don't want him to see any bums hanging around.”

It made me angry. Even with the graft I like to feel I'm still a cop. Not on a cheap punk's payroll. I was also curious about China Joe. Had been ever since I tried to get a line on him and never found anything. I still wanted to know.

“Ned, take a good look at that Chinese guy in the rayon bathrobe and let me know who he is.”

My, but those electronic circuits work fast. Ned shot the answer back like a straight man who had been rehearsing his lines for weeks.

“He is a pseudo-oriental, utilizing a natural sallowness of the skin heightened with dye. He is not Chinese. There has also been an operation on his eyes, scars of which are still visible. This has been undoubtedly done in an attempt to conceal his real identity, but Bertillon measurements of his ears and other features make identity positive. He is on the Very Wanted list of Interpol and his real name is...”

China Joe was angry, and with a reason.

“That's the *thing*...that big-mouthed tin radio set over there. We heard about it and we're taking

care of it!”

~~The mob jumped aside then or hit the deck and I saw there was a guy kneeling in the door with a rocket launcher. Shaped anti-tank charges, no doubt. That was my last thought as the thing let go with a “whoosh.”~~

Maybe you can hit a tank with one of those. But not a robot. At least not a police robot. Ned was sliding across the floor on his face when the back wall blew up. There was no second shot. Ned closed his hand on the tube of the bazooka and it was so much old drainpipe.

Billy decided then that anyone who fired a rocket in a police station was breaking the law, so he moved in with his club. I was right behind him since I did not want to miss any of the fun. Ned was at the bottom somewhere, but I didn't doubt he could take care of himself.

There were a couple of muffled shots and someone screamed. No one fired after that because we were too tangled up. A punk named Brooklyn Eddie hit me on the side of the head with his gunbutt and I broke his nose all over his face with my fist.

* * * *

There is a kind of a fog over everything after that. But I do remember it was very busy for a while.

When the fog lifted a bit I realized I was the only one still standing. Or leaning rather. It was a good thing the wall was there.

Ned came in through the street door carrying a very bashed-looking Brooklyn Eddie. I hoped I had done all that. Eddie's wrists were fastened together with cuffs. Ned laid him gently next to the heap of thugs—who I suddenly realized all wore the same kind of handcuffs. I wondered vaguely if Ned made them as he needed them or had a supply tucked away in a hollow leg or something.

There was a chair a few feet away and sitting down helped.

Blood was all over everything and if a couple of the hoods hadn't groaned I would have thought they were corpses. One was, I noticed suddenly. A bullet had caught him in the chest, most of the blood was probably his.

Ned burrowed in the bodies for a moment and dragged Billy out. He was unconscious. A big smile on his face and the splintered remains of his nightstick still stuck in his fist. It takes very little to make some people happy. A bullet had gone through his leg and he never moved while Ned ripped the pants leg off and put on a bandage.

“The spurious China Joe and one other man escaped in a car,” Ned reported.

“Don't let it worry you,” I managed to croak. “Your batting average still leads the league.”

It was then I realized the Chief was still sitting in his chair, where he had been when the brouhaha started. Still slumped down with that glazed look. Only after I started to talk to him did I realize that Alonzo Craig, Chief of Police of Nineport, was now dead.

A single shot. Small caliber gun, maybe a .22. Right through the heart and what blood there had been was soaked up by his clothes. I had a good idea where the gun would be that fired that shot. A small gun, the kind that would fit in a wide Chinese sleeve.

I wasn't tired or groggy any more. Just angry. Maybe he hadn't been the brightest or most honest guy in the world. But he deserved a better end than that. Knocked off by a two-bit racket boss who thought he was being crossed.

Right about then I realized I had a big decision to make. With Billy out of the fight and Fats gone, it was the Nineport police force. All I had to do to be clear of this mess was to walk out the door and keep going. I would be safe enough.

Ned buzzed by, picked up two of the thugs, and hauled them off to the cells.

Maybe it was the sight of his blue back or maybe I was tired of running. Either way my mind was made up before I realized it. I carefully took off the Chief's gold badge and put it on in place of my old one.

“The new Chief of Police of Nineport,” I said to no one in particular.

“Yes, sir,” Ned said as he passed. He put one of the prisoners down long enough to salute, then went on with his work. I returned the salute.

The hospital meat wagon hauled away the dead and wounded. I took an evil pleasure in ignoring the questioning stares of the attendants. After the doc fixed the side of my head, everyone cleared out. Ned mopped up the floor. I ate ten aspirin and waited for the hammering to stop so I could think what to do next.

* * * *

When I pulled my thoughts together the answer was obvious. Too obvious. I made as long a job as I could of reloading my gun.

“Refill your handcuff box, Ned. We are going out.”

Like a good cop he asked no questions. I locked the outside door when we left and gave him the keys.

“Here. There’s a good chance you will be the only one left to use this before the day is over.”

I stretched the drive over to China Joe’s place just as much as I could. Trying to figure if there was another way of doing it. There wasn’t. Murder had been done and Joe was the boy I was going to pin it on. So I had to get him.

The best I could do was stop around the corner and give Ned a briefing.

“This combination bar and dice-room is the sole property of the one whom we will still call China Joe until there is time for you to give me a rundown on him. Right now I got enough distractions. What we have to do is go in there, find Joe and bring him to justice. Simple?”

“Simple,” Ned answered in his sharp Joe-college voice. “But wouldn’t it be simpler to make the arrest now, when he is leaving in that car, instead of waiting until he returns?”

The car in question was doing sixty as it came out of the alley ahead of us. I only had a glimpse of Joe in the back seat as it tore by us.

“Stop them!” I shouted, mostly for my own benefit since I was driving. I tried to shift gears and start the engine at the same time, and succeeded in doing exactly nothing.

So Ned stopped them. It had been phrased as an order. He leaned his head out of the window and saw at once why most of his equipment was located in his torso. Probably his brain as well. There sure wasn’t much room left in his head when that cannon was tucked away in there.

A .75 recoilless. A plate swiveled back right where his nose should have been if he had one, and the big muzzle pointed out. It’s a neat idea when you think about it. Right between the eyes for good aiming, up high, always ready.

The BOOM BOOM almost took my head off. Of course Ned was a perfect shot—so would I be with a computer for a brain. He had holed one rear tire with each slug and the car flap-flapped to a stop a little ways down the road. I climbed out slowly while Ned sprinted there in seconds flat. They didn’t even try to run this time. What little nerve they had left must have been shattered by the smoking muzzle of that .75 poking out from between Ned’s eyes. Robots are neat about things like that so Ned must have left it sticking out deliberate. Probably had a course in psychology back in robot school.

Three of them in the car, all waving their hands in the air like the last reel of a western. And the rear floor covered with interesting little suitcases.

Everyone came along quietly.

China Joe only snarled while Ned told me that his name really was Stantin and the Elmira hot seat was kept warm all the time in hopes he would be back. I promised Joe-Stantin I would be happy to arrange it that same day. Thereby not worrying about any slip-ups with the local authorities. The rest of the mob would stand trial in Canal City.

It was a very busy day.

Things have quieted down a good deal since then. Billy is out of the hospital and wearing my o

sergeant's stripes. Even Fats is back, though he is sober once in a while now and has trouble looking me in the eye. We don't have much to do because in addition to being a quiet town this is now a honest one.

Ned is on foot patrol nights and in charge of the lab and files days. Maybe the Policeman Benevolent wouldn't like that, but Ned doesn't seem to mind. He touched up all the bullet scratches and keeps his badge polished. I know a robot can't be happy or sad—but Ned *seems* to be happy.

Sometimes I would swear I can hear him humming to himself. But, of course, that is only the motors and things going around.

When you start thinking about it, I suppose we set some kind of precedent here. What with putting on a robot as a full-fledged police officer. No one ever came around from the factory yet, so I have never found out if we're the first or not.

And I'll tell you something else. I'm not going to stay in this broken-down town forever. I have some letters out now, looking for a new job.

So some people are going to be very surprised when they see who their new Chief of Police is after I leave.

DEATHWORLD

Note: this is the original magazine version and varies somewhat from the later paperback text.

Jason dinAlt sprawled in soft luxury on the couch, a large frosty stein held limply in one hand. His other hand rested casually on a pillow. The gun behind the pillow was within easy reach of his fingers. In his line of work he never took chances.

It was all highly suspicious. Jason didn't know a soul on this planet. Yet the card sent by service tube from the hotel desk had read: *Kerk Pyrrus would like to see Jason dinAlt*. Blunt and to the point. He signaled the desk to send the man up, then lowered his fingers a bit until they brushed the gun butt. The door slid open and his visitor stepped through.

A retired wrestler. That was Jason's first thought. Kerk Pyrrus was a gray-haired rock of a man. His body seemingly chiseled out of flat slabs of muscle. Then Jason saw the gun strapped to the inside of the other man's forearm, and he let his fingers drop casually behind the pillow.

"I'd appreciate it," Jason said, "if you'd take off your gun while you're in here." The other man stopped and scowled down at the gun as if he was seeing it for the first time.

"No, I never take it off." He seemed mildly annoyed by the suggestion.

Jason had his fingers on his own gun when he said, "I'm afraid I'll have to insist. I always feel a little uncomfortable around people who wear guns." He kept talking to distract attention while he pulled out his gun. Fast and smooth.

He could have been moving in slow motion for all the difference it made. Kerk Pyrrus stood rock still while the gun came out, while it swung in his direction. Not until the very last instant did he act. When he did, the motion wasn't visible. First his gun was in the arm holster—then it was aimed between Jason's eyes. It was an ugly, heavy weapon with a pitted front orifice that showed plenty of use.

And Jason knew if he swung his own weapon up a fraction of an inch more he would be dead. He dropped his arm carefully and Kerk flipped his own gun back in the holster with the same ease he had drawn it.

"Now," the stranger said, "if we're through playing, let's get down to business. I have a proposition for you."

Jason downed a large mouthful from the mug and bridled his temper. He was fast with a gun—his life had depended on it more than once—and this was the first time he had been outdrawn. It was the offhand, unimportant manner it had been done that irritated him.

"I'm not prepared to do business," he said acidly. "I've come to Cassylia for a vacation, get away from work."

"Let's not fool each other, dinAlt," Kerk said impatiently. "You've never worked at an honest job in your entire life. You're a professional gambler and that's why I'm here to see you."

Jason forced down his anger and threw the gun to the other end of the couch so he wouldn't be tempted to commit suicide. He *had* hoped no one knew him on Cassylia and was looking forward to a big kill at the Casino. He would worry about that later. This weight-lifter type seemed to know all the answers. Let him plot the course for a while and see where it led.

"All right, what do you want?"

Kerk dropped into a chair that creaked ominously under his weight, and dug an envelope out of his pocket. He flipped through it quickly and dropped a handful of gleaming Galactic Exchange notes on the table. Jason glanced at them—then sat up suddenly.

"What are they—forgeries?" he asked, holding one up to the light.

"They're real enough," Kerk told him, "I picked them up at the bank. Exactly twenty-seven bills—or twenty-seven million credits. I want you to use them as a bankroll when you go to the Casino."

tonight. Gamble with them and win.”

~~They looked real enough—and they could be checked. Jason fingered them thoughtfully while he examined the other man.~~

“I don’t know what you have in mind,” he said. “But you realize I can’t make any guarantees. I can gamble—but I don’t always win...”

“You gamble—and you win when you want to,” Kerk said grimly. “We looked into that quite carefully before I came to you.”

“If you mean to say that I cheat—” Carefully, Jason grabbed his temper again and held it down. There was no future in getting annoyed.

Kerk continued in the same level voice, ignoring Jason’s growing anger. “Maybe you don’t call cheating, frankly I don’t care. As far as I’m concerned you could have your suit lined with aces and electromagnets in your boots. As long as you *won*. I’m not here to discuss moral points with you. I said I had a proposition.

“We have worked hard for that money—but it still isn’t enough. To be precise, we need three billion credits. The only way to get that sum is by gambling—with these twenty-seven million on a bankroll.”

“And what do I get out of it?” Jason asked the question coolly, as if any bit of the fantastical proposition made sense.

“Everything above the three billion you can keep, that should be fair enough. You’re not risking your own money, but you stand to make enough to keep you for life if you win.”

“And if I lose—?”

Kerk thought for a moment, not liking the taste of the idea. “Yes—there is the chance you might lose, I hadn’t thought about that.”

He reached a decision. “If you lose—well I suppose that is just a risk we will have to take. Though I think I would kill you then. The ones who died to get the twenty-seven million deserve at least that. He said it quietly, without malice, and it was more of a promise than a threat.

Stamping to his feet Jason refilled his stein and offered one to Kerk who took it with a nod and thanks. He paced back and forth, unable to sit. The whole proposition made him angry—yet at the same time had a fatal fascination. He was a gambler and this talk was like the taste of drugs to an addict.

Stopping suddenly, he realized that his mind had been made up for some time. Win or lose—live or die—how could he say no to the chance to gamble with money like that! He turned suddenly and jabbed his finger at the big man in the chair.

“I’ll do it—you probably knew I would from the time you came in here. There are some terms of my own, though. I want to know who you are, and who *they* are you keep talking about. And where do the money come from. Is it stolen?”

Kerk drained his own stein and pushed it away from him.

“Stolen money? No, quite the opposite. Two years’ work mining and refining ore to get it. It was mined on Pyrrus and sold here on Cassylia. You can check on that very easily. I sold it. I’m the Pyrrus ambassador to this planet.” He smiled at the thought. “Not that that means much, I’m ambassador to at least six other planets as well. Comes in handy when you want to do business.”

Jason looked at the muscular man with his gray hair and worn, military-cut clothes, and decided not to laugh. You heard of strange things out in the frontier planets and every word could be true. He had never heard of Pyrrus either, though that didn’t mean anything. There were over thirty-thousand known planets in the inhabited universe.

“I’ll check on what you have told me,” Jason said. “If it’s true, we can do business. Call me tomorrow—”

“No,” Kerk said. “The money has to be won tonight. I’ve already issued a check for this twenty-seven million, it will bounce as high as the Pleiades unless we deposit the money in the morning, that’s our time limit.”

With each moment the whole affair became more fantastic—and more intriguing for Jason. He looked at his watch. There was still enough time to find out if Kerk was lying or not.

“All right, we’ll do it tonight,” he said. “Only I’ll have to have one of those bills to check.”

Kerk stood up to go. “Take them all, I won’t be seeing you again until after you’ve won. I’ll be at the Casino of course, but don’t recognize me. It would be much better if they didn’t know where your money was coming from or how much you had.”

Then he was gone, after a bone-crushing handclasp that closed on Jason’s hand like vise jaws. Jason was alone with the money. Fanning the bills out like a hand of cards he stared at their sepia and gold faces, trying to get the reality through his head. Twenty-seven million credits. What was to stop him from just walking out the door with them and vanishing. Nothing really, except his own sense of honor.

Kerk Pyrrus, the man with the same last name as the planet he came from, was the universe’s biggest fool. Or he knew just what he was doing. From the way the interview had gone the latter seemed the better bet.

“He *knows* I would much rather gamble with the money than steal it,” he said wryly.

Slipping a small gun into his waistband holster and pocketing the money he went out.

II

The robot teller at the bank just pinged with electronic shock when he presented one of the bills and flashed a panel that directed him to see Vice President Wain. Wain was a smooth customer who had bugged his eyes and lost some of his tan when he saw the sheaf of bills.

“You...wish to deposit these with us?” he asked while his fingers unconsciously stroked them.

“Not today,” Jason said. “They were paid to me as a debt. Would you please check that they are authentic and change them? I’d like five hundred thousand credit notes.”

Both of his inner chest pockets were packed tight when he left the bank. The bills were good and he felt like a walking mint. This was the first time in his entire life that carrying a large sum of money made him uncomfortable. Waving to a passing helicab he went directly to the Casino, where he knew he would be safe—for a while.

Cassylia Casino was the playspot of the nearby cluster of star systems. It was the first time Jason had seen it, though he knew its type well. He had spent most of his adult life in casinos like this on other worlds. The decor differed but they were always the same. Gambling and socialities in public—and behind the scenes all the private vice you could afford. Theoretically no-limit games, but that was true only up to a certain point. When the house was really hurt the honest games stopped being square and the big winner had to watch his step very carefully. These were the odds Jason had played against countless times before. He was wary but not very concerned.

The dining room was almost empty and the major-domo quickly rushed to the side of the relaxed stranger in the richly cut clothes. Jason was lean and dark, looking more like the bored scion of some rich family than a professional gambler. This appearance was important and he cultivated it. The cuisine looked good and the cellar turned out to be wonderful. He had a professional talk with the sommelier while waiting for the soup, then settled down to enjoy his meal.

He ate leisurely and the large dining room was filled before he was through. Watching the entertainment over a long cigar killed some more time. When he finally went to the gaming room they were filled and active.

Moving slowly around the room he dropped a few thousand credits. He scarcely noticed how he played, giving more attention to the feel of the games. The play all seemed honest and none of the

equipment was rigged. That could be changed very quickly, he realized. Usually it wasn't necessary. The house percentage was enough to assure a profit.

Once he saw Kerk out of the corner of his eye but he paid him no attention. The ambassador was losing small sums steadily at seven-and-silver and seemed to be impatient. Probably waiting for Jason to begin playing seriously. He smiled and strolled on slowly.

Jason settled on the dice table as he usually did. It was the surest way to make small winnings. *And if I feel it tonight I can clean this casino out!* That was his secret, the power that won for him steadily—and every once in a while enabled him to make a killing and move on quickly before the hired thugs came to get the money back.

The dice reached him and he threw an eight the hard way. Betting was light and he didn't push himself, just kept away from the sevens. He made the point and passed a natural. Then he crapped out and the dice moved on.

Sitting there, making small automatic bets while the dice went around the table, he thought about the power. *Funny, after all the years of work we still don't know much about psi. They can train people a bit, and improve skills a bit—but that's all.*

He was feeling strong tonight, he knew that the money in his pocket gave him the extra lift that sometimes helped him break through. With his eyes half closed he picked up the dice—and let his mind gently caress the pattern of sunken dots. Then they shot out of his hand and he stared at a seven.

It was there.

Stronger than he had felt it in years. The stiff weight of those million-credit notes had done it. The world all around was sharp-cut clear and the dice was completely in his control. He knew to the tenth credit how much the other players had in their wallets and was aware of the cards in the hands of the players behind him.

Slowly, carefully, he built up the stakes.

There was no effort to the dice, they rolled and sat up like trained dogs. Jason took his time and concentrated on the psychology of the players and the stick man. It took almost two hours to build his money on the table to seven hundred thousand credits. Then he caught the stick man signaling that he had a heavy winner. He waited until the hard-eyed man strolled over to watch the game, then he smiled happily, bet all his table stakes—and blew it on one roll of the dice. The house man smiled happily, the stick man relaxed—and out of the corner of his eye Jason saw Kerk turning a dark purple.

Sweating, pale, his hand trembling ever so slightly, Jason opened the front of his jacket and pulled out one of the envelopes of new bills. Breaking the seal with his finger he dropped two of them on the table.

“Could we have a no-limit game?” he asked, “I'd like to—win back some of my money.”

The stick man had trouble controlling his smile now, he glanced across at the house man who nodded a quick *yes*. They had a sucker and they meant to clean him. He had been playing from his wallet all evening, now he was cracking into a sealed envelope to try for what he had lost. A thick envelope too, and probably not his money. Not that the house cared in the least. To them money had no loyalties. The play went on with the Casino in a very relaxed mood.

Which was just the way Jason wanted it. He needed to get as deep into them as he could before someone realized *they* might be on the losing end. The rough stuff would start and he wanted to put it off as long as possible. It would be hard to win smoothly then—and his *psi* power might go as quickly as it had come. That had happened before.

He was playing against the house now, the two other players were obvious skills, and a crowd had jammed solidly around to watch. After losing and winning a bit he hit a streak of naturals and his pile of gold chips tottered higher and higher. There was nearly a billion there, he estimated roughly. The dice were still falling true, though he was soaked with sweat from the effort. Betting the entire stake

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