

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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**and then
he
went
away**

*by DONALD E.
WESTLAKE*

There was one trouble with artist Emory Ward's depiction of futuristic machines and gimmicks...

EMORY WARD sat hunched over his drawing board, manipulating compass and ruler and pencil. If he could get the illo roughed out by lunchtime, he could begin working with color in the afternoon. He sat hunched, weighed down by a deadline, and bit his lower lip as he drew.

The doorbell rang.

"Damn," said Ward. He reached for the gum eraser, corrected, drew another line.

The doorbell rang.

"Fry in hell." Ward shifted on the chair, irritable, annoyed at the outside sound. He drew lines, measured angles.

The doorbell rang.

"Disconnect it," muttered Ward. As he drew, he grumbled about the sound and its maker. Salesman, paper boy, somebody meaningless and unimportant, a cipher, non-entity, nobody, mass man...

The doorbell rang.

"Nobody home, nobody home," Ward whispered desperately. "Go away." He'd have to put down his tools, straighten, stand, walk to the door, open it, walk down the hall, down the stairs, across the

front hall, open the door, listen to words, say, "No, thank you," close the door, climb the stairs, walk down the hall, open the door, come into the room, close the door, cross to the drawing board, sit down, pick up his pencil and protractor and compass, put them down, light a cigaret, be angry, go back to work—total loss, ten minutes.

The doorbell rang.

"No," grated Ward. "I will not." He shut his ears, turned off all the circuits of his mind except those connected with his work, drew lines, measured, drew.

Someone knocked on the door.

EMORY WARD stiffened. He stared at the wall. He thought indignantly, someone is outside the door. The *upstairs* door, *this* door, in *my* house, knocking on the door while I am trying to meet a deadline.

The door opened.

Ward's back was to the door. He turned slowly, ready to tongue-lash an insurance salesman, browbeat a paper boy, utterly demolish a collec-

tor from the United Fund.

The visitor was tall and slender, with white hair, impeccably dressed in gray flannel surmounted by a thin face with thin smiling lips, and he said, "Mister Emory Ward?"

"Listen," said Ward.

"I am Gamble Two," said the visitor. "I am from the twenty fifth century."

Ward got to his feet. "I am going to kick you downstairs."

"I will erect a force field around myself," the visitor told him. "Then I will put you in a temporary state of paralysis. Very flamboyant. I would rather we sat and chatted like gentlemen."

Ward advanced.

"I will kill you."

The visitor smiled and disappeared. A voice said, "Please be sensible, Emory Ward."

Ward stared at the doorway. "Listen," he said. "Listen, cut it out. I got a deadline."

The visitor reappeared. "Five minutes. Five minutes. No more, I promise."

EMORY WARD took a deep breath. "You are not from the future."

"Of course I am," said Gam-

ble Two. "Tell me, do I speak without an accent?"

"You are a wise guy," Ward told him. "You are a practical joker."

Gamble Two looked faintly pained. "May we sit and chat? I would like to explain."

Ward looked with regret at his drawing board. "I got a deadline."

"I promise not to take long." Gamble Two gestured at the two chairs over by the writing desk. "May we sit?"

"You from some fan club?" demanded Ward.

"May we sit?"

Ward shrugged. "Have I got a choice?" Disgruntled, he sat.

"Fine," said Gamble Two, beaming. He also sat; he even leaned back and made himself comfortable. "First, as to myself. I am Gamble Two. I am an android. I am from the twenty fifth century. I am a policeman, until recently assigned to customs duty. I have just been promoted, and my job assignment changed to the Time Police. You are, frankly, my first important case."

Ward looked sour. "I am?"

"Yes." Gamble Two nodded. "You are Emory Ward. You

are a commercial artist. An illustrator. You work primarily for science fiction magazines and paperback book companies."

"So what?"

Gamble Two waved a hand at the illustrations covering the walls. "This," he said, "is what you are best known for. Machines. Machines of the future. Space ships, cybernetics machines, robots, weapons, all the manufactured and constructed paraphernalia of future civilizations."

Ward repeated, "So what?"

"Some illustrators, work mainly with the depiction of strange and fantastic life forms, creatures from other planets. Some work mainly with the human form, usually the female human form. Some are best known for their illustrations of uniforms. The Space Corps, the Intergalactic Patrol, strange uniforms with strange insignia. Some have made their names drawing other worlds, strange, seething jungles, rocky landscapes, tundras. But you draw machines."

Emory Ward said, "I'd like to be drawing a machine right now. I got a deadline."

GAMBLE TWO raised a restraining hand. "Please. I hastened to the point. All of these illustrators, teeming and pouring through the newsstands, spreading their imaginations across the covers and interiors of magazines, all are wild and far-fetched and illusory. All except you."

"Me?"

"You." Gamble Two stood and viewed at close hand some of the illustrations on the wall. He tapped one. "Here," he said. "This instrument panel. The J-27 model intra-system four-seater. I have operated the J-27. This instrument panel is correct. To the smallest detail, correct. Even to the alphabet used, the words on the various dials and levers. All correct." He proceeded to another illustration. "Here," he said. "This robot. I own one exactly like this. He is my janitor. Everything is perfectly in order. It is almost a photograph." He proceeded around the room, tapping various illustrations, nodding and saying, "Yes," and, "Here," and, "Exactly."

Ward snorted. "Ridiculous."

Gamble Two returned to his seat. "You say ridiculous.

Next, you will say coincidence. I deny both." He mused, as Emory Ward squirmed. "Time travel," said Gamble Two, still musing. "So fascinating, yet so impractical. So unproductive. Man is born, grows to maturity, lives and dies. All within one environment. It is as necessary to him as atmosphere. We know this. A man from the Greece of Pericles, how long could he last in this century? He would not speak the language; he would be terrified by the machines. He could not last."

"Naturally," said Ward.

GAMBLE TWO reflected. "A man from this century, in the Greece of Pericles. He might stand a somewhat better chance. He could at least get an academic knowledge of the language. But could he survive?"

"Probably not," said Ward.

"Definitely not," agreed Gamble Two. "The change in environment. He would have no resistance to germs. Disease bacteria evolve. He would miss all the conveniences of civilization he had come to accept as

a part of the environment. His ideas would be completely out of tune with the time. He would be shunned. He might even be stoned. He would last perhaps a week."

"One out of every five science fiction stories I illustrate," said Ward, "is based on just this conclusion. Finish, please, and let me get back to work."

But Gamble Two could not be hurried. "Could *any* man survive in an era other than his own?" he wondered. "Could *any* man usefully employ his knowledge of his original environment?"

"Probably not."

Gamble Two held up a finger. "One kind of man can survive in environments other than his own," he suggested. "Think of ship-wrecked sailors on South Sea islands."

"They usually went mad."

"Precisely the point," said Gamble Two. "Before one can integrate himself into a new environment, he must divorce himself from the old. There is only one way to divorce oneself from one's environment. Insanity. Psychosis."

"A psychotic divorces him-

self from all environments," Ward suggested.

"Exactly. He doesn't even hear doorbells."

EMORY WARD flushed. "Now, wait a minute; I heard that doorbell. I got a deadline. I never answer the doorbell when I got a deadline."

"I am almost finished," Gamble Two assured him. "We have already answered one point. Only a psychotic could make the necessary adjustment to a totally new environment. Now. Is there any man who could survive at the economic level in an environment other than his own? A physicist from this century, for instance, would be an unskilled laborer in Julius Caesar's Rome. As environment changes, vocations change."

"What about a doctor?" asked Ward. "A twentieth century doctor in second century Rome."

Gamble Two shook his head. "Useless. Doctors do not cure, they only *prescribe* cures. And what good would it do a doctor to prescribe penicillin, aureomycin, or even aspirin, in an

environment where such products do not exist?"

"Then," said Ward, "The answer is no one."

"There is a possibility, however," Gamble Two corrected him gently. "What about an artist, an illustrator? All he requires are the drawing tools of the period. Pencil on paper, berry juices on stone, what does it matter to him? He can draw with anything."

EMORY WARD was stunned. "You're not suggesting. "

"It is a severe crime," Gamble Two told him, "to attempt to escape one's obligations by running away through time. You are well aware of that."

Ward shook his head. "You're out of your mind."

Gamble Two ignored him. "Return with me to the South Seas," he said. "The shipwrecked sailor again. He always retains his European clothing, although the native dress, or undress, is much more suitable for the environment. Why is that?"

"You're making a terrible mistake," Ward said urgently.

"It is not possible," Gamble

Two said sadly, "for man to divorce himself entirely from his native environment. The sailor keeps his European clothes. You wistfully draw pictures of the machines you once knew and loved, the machines that once seemed so necessary to civilized life, and which you now must try to get along without. Gamble Two pointed an accusing finger. "You are from the twenty fifth century."

Defiantly Emory Ward stated, "I am not."

Gamble Two sighed. "I wish you would just admit it and be done with this foolishness. They should have sent an esper. I wish I could read your mind. The only thing for me to do now is return you for identification. You are from the twenty fifth century, aren't you?"

"I am not." Emory Ward erected a force field around himself, then he put Gamble Two in a temporary state of paralysis. Very flamboyant. Finally, he withdrew from a desk drawer a hand weapon precisely like one in an illustration on the wall. Very functional. "I am from the thirtieth century," he said.