

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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electronic landslide

by CLYDE

HOSTETTER

*The idea was such as to
make any ward-heeler jump
for joy. How could it miss?*

I DON'T KNOW exactly who in the Fifth Ward it was who got the idea in the first place. You know how it is when a bunch of ward-heelers get together and start shooting the breeze about how to nail down the vote in this precinct, or how to pad out the registration lists in that one.

Politics don't change much—or, I guess I should say now, they *didn't*—no matter what kind of new gadgets the scientific guys came up with. Politics is just human nature, and that hasn't changed much in the last couple thousand years, I guess.

They say even back in the early days with them log compartments, I think they called them, you could get the votes you needed by passing around a few bucks to the right people and keeping a jug handy on election day. But things sure changed fast around here, and as I say I don't know exactly who it was that started it.

Maybe it was Brains McGillicuddy; he was always coming up with some screw-

ball idea. He was the one who got the idea of breaking into the voting computation center the night before the big election in 2374, and rewiring the circuits to give the Party a nice comfortable majority in the sheriff's race.

It would have worked, too, except that the Opposition got the same idea that year, too; and after that all-out fist fight in the alley nobody ever did make it into the computation center.

But Brains never says die.

"You know," he comments thoughtfully this particular night in the back room at Fifth Ward headquarters, "what we need to win this next election for mayor is more voters."

"**D**EAL THE cards," says Knuckles Sparoni. "I come to that conclusion about twenny years ago. Who do you think has been out all day getting names off crematory urns to beef up the registration lists?"

"What's the pitch, Brains?" I ask. I am always looking out for a new idea because the Opposition in my precinct is very active, and have all the crema-

tory urns registered on their side already. Unless I can come up with something new before the registration books close, I am going to lose the precinct for Candidate Strathmore, and then where will I be?"

"It's like I say," repeats Brains. "We need more voters. We already have 99% of the Fifth Ward registered, and the Telepulse survey still gives the Opposition a 15% edge. We can't put any more ringers on the registration books, or the Opposition is bound to squawk—even though they are doing the same thing. We will just have to get some more voters someplace."

"Not in the Fifth Ward," says Greasy-Palm Harrington, laying down a full house, "There ain't another vote to be had."

Now that I think back on it, it *was* Brains that came up with the idea. "Two-Count," he says to me, "do you know your Constitution?"

"Of course." I say, bristling somewhat, especially since I was planning to win with three of a kind. "Which Amendment do you want me to quote—the Fifth or the Fifteenth?"

"No, I mean the real Constitution," says Brains. "The one those guys wrote back when there weren't no voting machines or anything."

"You got me there, Brains," I admit. "I am just a politician, not one of them social scientists."

"Well, boys," says Brains, leaning back in his chair, "I have been doing a little research and I have found a way to corner at least five thousand more votes for the Party in this Ward alone, and more than enough in the city for Candidate Strathmore to win in a walk."

THIS IS enough to stop the poker game entirely, Greasy-Palm beaming with joy at the prospect, since he has the biggest pile of chips at this point.

"We'll never get away with it," says Knuckles Sparoni. "There ain't that many names on all the crematory urns in the Ward."

"The plan I have," says Brains, flicking the ash from his cancer-free cigar, "is legal and foolproof. The Opposition

will never know what hit them."

It develops that Brains has a lawyer friend at City Hall, and they have been doing a little spadework in the legal department.

"What is a voter?" asks Brains, real cagey-like, as the discussion continues.

"Somebody who votes, and enough of these dumb questions," says Knuckles, who also has lost a few pots to Greasy-Palm during the course of the evening. He begins rubbing his knuckles, and this is a bad sign as everyone knows—especially dishonest citizens who are bought but do not stay bought.

"Easy does it," says Brains hastily, slipping on his contact lenses in self-defense. "That was a rhetorical question, as they say. Yes, a voter is somebody who votes. But first of all he is a citizen; secondly he is over eighteen years of age; and thirdly he is smart enough to register and pull the lever on a voting machine. Right?"

KNUCKLES is rubbing his fist faster now, so Brains does not wait for an answer.

"My point," he says, "is this. What about all those robots in the McGillivry electronics assembly plant down in the southwest corner of the Ward? And what about those robots in the automation design center that is owned by our good friend Harper? They certainly are smart enough to register and vote, if Two-Count here is smart enough..."

(I ignore this libelous statement in the interests of Party harmony.)

"...and most of them are more than 18 years old, if you overlook the replacement parts."

"How can they be citizens, though? They're just robots," says Greasy-Palm, although I can see from the gleam in his eye that he is beginning to get ideas.

"Look at the Fifteenth Amendment," says Brains. "Read it off to the boys, Two-Count," he tells me.

This is a cinch. It is one of my favorite ways of getting voters steamed up with patriotism before they go in to vote the straight ticket.

"The right of citizens to vote shall not be denied or

abridged on account of race, color or previous condition of servitude," I repeat without a mistake.

"Exactly," says Brains. "And this means that we should not discriminate against a robot just because it happens to be a member of the robot race, instead of the human race, and is owned by a manufacturing company. It is our duty," he continues solemnly, "to see that these robots get their rights.

"Especially," he adds with a wink, "since McGillivry and Harper are both good Party men, and will see that every robot of theirs votes the right way."

IT SEEMS too good to be true. I can see five thousand robots filing into the Fifth Ward voting booths with their magnetic tapes all adjusted to vote for Candidate Strathmore, and I can see myself getting a cozy appointment out of the deal—perhaps a job as city public relations representative on Venus, with my own hand-picked secretary.

"There must be a catch somewhere," says Greasy-Palm, shaking his head. "Getting

votes without paying for them sounds dishonest, somehow. What if someone says these robots don't have the right to vote?"

"This is all taken care of already," says Brains, slipping off his contact lenses now that Knuckles has stopped doing you know what. "The Election Commissioner is a good Party man, and he is prepared to okay the robot vote if there is any question. His ruling may be appealed by the Opposition but it will take months—maybe years—to get it through all the courts. In the meantime, Candidate Strathmore has been elected Mayor by an overwhelming majority. In six months we can cut ourselves in for enough of the city revenues to retire."

"There must be a million robots in the city," I say.

"More than a million," Brains replies. "To be exact, 1,280,570. And, what is more important, Party members own 62% of them, enough to swing any election."

"The robot vote would be more than the human vote," says Greasy-Palm excitedly. "And we won't have to pay a

single one to vote the straight ticket."

"Exactly," says Brains. "Of course, we may have to take care of their owners after our candidate is elected. This should not be too much of a problem, however."

WELL, I GUESS you know what happened after that. We got our Party robots streaming in to register; the Opposition squawked; and the Election Commissioner ruled like Brains said he would. Then the Opposition just about went crazy trying to get *their* robots all registered before the books closed.

They were licked before they started, though. Just like Brains had said—more than 62% of the robots in town were owned by Party members.

Of course, we had some complaints from some of the voters—especially the independent ones—about the robot vote but you get used to that kind of thing. And, after all, it was in the Constitution and who was going to argue with the Constitution?

You should have seen the polls on election day. Squads

of robots rolled out of the factories and up to the voting booths, five abreast; it was just like clockwork.

When the polls were ready to close, I still was trying to decide whether I wanted a blonde or a brunette secretary on Venus. I bought a newspaper and went back to the Fifth Ward clubhouse to look over the "Situation Wanted—Female" ads.

The clubhouse was deserted. Everybody was at downtown headquarters getting ready for the big victory celebration.

I MUST HAVE dozed off, I guess, because suddenly I hear the slam of the clubhouse door and Brains comes stalking in with five-alarm trouble written all over his face.

"What's the matter, Brains? Didn't we win by a big enough majority?"

"Win?" he says, kicking a chair across the room. "We lost—by half a million votes."

This waked me up fast.

"You mean the new mayor is from the Opposition?"

"The Opposition? Not on your life," says Brains, kicking two more chairs. "It turns out

you can't override a robot's basic logic circuits after all. Every single robot from both parties went to the polls and voted for the third-party reform candidate. Our new mayor is some incorruptible electronic engineer named Arthur P. Parkinson, who was running on a platform of no graft and more efficiency in government. He got every robot vote in town."

It still wouldn't have been completely hopeless except that when the robot vote ruling was appealed, the Supreme Court ruled that the Election Commissioner was right.

So now the robots have the vote, and what is a practical politician like me going to do? My specialty is human nature, and I can't get to first base when the majority of the voters are going to pick the best man, no matter how you appeal to their common sense.

Maybe it's just as well. I understand our public relations representative on Venus has a dictating machine now instead of a secretary. More efficient, the voters say, but what would a robot know about secretaries?