

**THRILLING**

# **Wonder**

**STORIES**

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## **TWO FEATURED NOVELS**

- THE GOLDEN HELIX**.....**Theodore Sturgeon 10**  
*Lost in space, they attempted to make a new life for themselves on an old planet—and found out that they were evolving in reverse!*
- TIME PAWN**.....**Philip K. Dick 68**  
*A doctor must always stand ready to answer all his calls—but this particular call happened to come to Jim Parsons out of the future!*

## **SHORT STORIES**

- END AS A ROBOT**.....**Richard Marsten 46**  
*Nobody could get away with murder while Robicide was on the job*
- THE WALL**.....**Charles A. Stearns 53**  
*No barrier can keep out the darkness lurking in the human heart*
- PROCESS SHOT**.....**Sam Merwin, Jr. 106**  
*The cameraman was on the spot for this Revolutionary War movie*
- THE MASTERS**.....**Theodore R. Cogswell 118**  
*Earth still had a surprise for the conquerors from space*

## **FEATURES**

- THE READER SPEAKS**.....**The Editor 6**
- LOST: ONE MAGNETIC FIELD**.....**R. S. Richardson 62**
- WHAT ARE THEIR SCIENTIFIC NAMES?**.....**A Quiz 67**
- IMAGINATION (Verse)**.....**Philip Jose Farmer 117**

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The top of his  
head had been  
blown off

# END AS A ROBOT

By

RICHARD MARSTEN

*Nobody could get away with murder  
while Robicide was on the job*

**T**HE story you are about to read is true. Only the names of robots have been changed to protect innocent household appliances.

My name is Sneadley, Robicide Division. My partner's name is Sneadley. My partner is my brother. We were sitting around smoking king-sized cigarettes when the phone rang. It was Sneadley, my cousin on the desk outside.

"Mike?" he said.

"Yeah. Give it to me. Don't spare me."

"Pancho Romulo," he said.

"Speak English," I told him.

"We got a 211 from WIC on the TT. Fish had a carry away with a grifter, and we put a hang on citation and dumped the dip in the high power tank. So I got out an APB and contacted AID, but I thought it was just a 4172 LAMC."

"I see," I said. "Go on."

"Well, it wasn't. The 510 mama sheet told me it was a robot. Name: Pancho Romulo."

"What about him?"

"He daid, Mike."

I looked over to my partner. "Dead robot," I said. "20th and Main."

Over the phone, my cousin said, "Gee, Mike, how'd you know?"

"That he was dead? Simple," I said. "You told me."

We checked out an RMP car at 2201 by my watch. My brother's watch read 2202. The clock on the station wall read 2203½. We checked out an RMP car.

We took the fifth level to 17th, dropped down to the third level on 18th, the second level on 19th, and the first level on 20th. On 20th and Main, we found the dead robot.

He was small as robots go. He looked ratty. He had yellowed brass teeth and stringy hempen hair. The top of his head had been blown-off, and his tubes and wires were scattered all over the sidewalk.

My brother's name is Johnny. "It's not pretty, Johnny," I said.

"Robicide never is," he told me.

I leaned down and checked the ID tag soldered into the skinny robot's chest ease. "Pancho Romulo," I said, reading off the name.

"Sounds familiar," Johnny said.

"Mmm." I read on. "Serial number 312-44-66031. Factory: Michigan Aluminum."

"A good outfit," Johnny said.

"Mmm." I read on. "Parts: General Electronics. Occupation: Roboscribe."

"A scribe," Johnny said.

"A roboscribe. There's a difference."

"Sure."

"This ought to be easy," I said.

"Yeah? How so?"

"All we got to do is find the killer".

ABOUT ten minutes later the boys in the white truck showed. The lab boys had already taken all their photographs, and the rest was just a matter of garbage disposal. I watched them dump the remains of Pancho Romulo onto the movable track, and then the skinny, lifeless robot was moving up, up, and into the bowels of the truck with the rest of the garbage. There was something sad about it all. I wept bitterly.

"Don't be bitter," Johnny said.

"All that aluminum," I said, my fists clenched. "All those wires and tubes. Twisted, and mangled, and out of shape. All because some lousy, rotten, metal-hating rat had to . . ."

"Now you're talking like Mike Sneadley," Johnny said happily.

"Let's go," I said. "First stop, Michigan Aluminum."

We caught the Michigan-bound rocket from Idlewild. We weren't used to the force of acceleration. Both Johnny and I vomited.

Later, enjoying chocolate fudge chopped-nut sundaes in the employes' cafeteria at Michigan Aluminum in Lansing, Michigan, we spoke to the president of the night shift.

He was a balding robot in his rusting thirties. He sipped at his petroleum malt and eyed us casually.

"You think this Pancho Romulo was killed, huh?" he asked, his voice metallically precise.

"We have reason to believe so," I told him.

"Shame," he said. "Pity. We used good aluminum on him. I remember."

"How come you remember?"

"I remember because we ran out in the middle. Had to make him shorter than most."

"In the middle?"

"All over. He was a short robot."

"Short robots die just the same as tall ones," Johnny said.

"Ain't it the truth?" the president said, nodding his head.

"Why do you say that?" I asked suspiciously.

The president smiled. "Because they do, don't they?"

"He's right, Mike," Johnny said.

"Just watch what you say," I told the president.

"Easy, Mike," Johnny said.

"Sure; easy, easy. Only that lousy, metal-hating rat is still out there somewhere, still roaming the streets. When will he strike next? And who will it be? Easy. Yeah, easy."

Johnny calmed me down, and we left the night-shift president as he dug into a sulfide salad. We were no closer to the killer than we'd been two minutes ago.

We staked out Michigan Aluminum, just in case. The plant ran for more than 3,000 acres, but we put two of our best operatives on the job. We gave them their instructions, and then we headed for General Electronics.

The female robot who greeted us in the reception room was tall and loose-hipped. She walked on ball-bearinged joints, and her metal skin shone like dull ivory. Her eyes were emeralds, and her teeth were pearls, and her lips were rubies. She had class, all right. You could tell it at a glance.

**M**R. SCHLEMMER ain't in," she said, "and he ain't expected. There ain't nothing he can't do for you that I can't do for you anyhow," she said.

"What's your name, ma'am," I asked.

"Eileen," she said. "Eileen Alloy."

"What do you know about Pancho Romulo?" Johnny said.

"Him, huh?"

"What about him?"

"I remember him," she said. "The short one. Always making passes. I remember him, all right."

"He made a pass at you?" I asked.

"He tried to make me," she said.

"And did he?" Johnny asked innocently.

"Did he make Eileen Alloy? Did he make *me*? Are you kidding, buster? Are you kidding or something?" She paused. "Yes," she said girlishly, "he did."

"Am I to understand he worked on the assembly line here?" I asked.

"That's right. He was a passer, Pancho was. We needed a short robot who could reach up under the fixed tubular discharger. He filled the bill nicely. When the parts were discharged, he reached up for them, and then passed them on to another man who put them into the aluminum bodies. He was always making passes, Pancho was."

"And he made you?"

"By passing the works, sure.

"I see," I said. "But his ID tag described him as a robscribe. If Pancho was a passer . . ."

"Oh, that was later. Then he became a robscribe. He thought he had talent. You should have heard some of the yarns Pancho told. He was very good at making up things."

"He left here to become a robscribe?"

"That's right. Matter of fact, we fitted him up with his plotting spools. And his twister, of course."

"Of course," I said. "What kind of scribing did he do?"

"Mysteries. We had some old spools, so we stuck them in Pancho's head. I think they figured on humoring him, you know. My God; who'd have thought?"

"Who'd have thought what?"

"Who'd have thought it would work? I mean, those crummy spools, and that worn-out twister. I guess people will buy any kind of junk nowadays."

"I don't buy that," I said, slamming my fist into my open palm.

"You don't buy what?"

"There's more to this than meets the eye. Don't leave town, Miss Alloy."

"Me? Why would I want to leave town?"

"He's supposed to say that," Johnny explained.

"Oh. Pleased, I'm sure," Eileen Alloy answered.

We left town. Something kept eating at my mind. I took off my hat and asked Johnny to look for a louse or something.

"Nothing there," he said.

"No, but there's a louse in this someplace," I said.

"Like my wife always says . . ."

"Don't drag her into this," I told Johnny.

"I was just

"I said

The time was 0000.

WE put down in Idlewild at 0000¼. We checked in at 0005. The Skipper was in an uproar.

"You think the city pays you for pleasure excursions?" he ranted.

"No, Skipper," I said.

"You think you got nothing to do but run around Michigan?"

"No, Skipper," I said.

"I want results," he shouted. "Fourteen karat results. Not pettyfogging, and not goldbricking, but results! Plain old ordinary results! That's what you get paid for, isn't it?"

"Yes, Skipper!"

"Damn right it is! You think it's nice, robots lying around with all their tubes exposed? How'd you like to lie around with all your tubes exposed?"

"I wouldn't, Skipper."

"No, and neither would I! So get me results. Put all the men you need on this case. Take O'Shea Cradnerry from Ballistics, and Otterlee Clock from the Morgue. Get Zach Mazinov if you need him, and even Hubert Stratoline. Get me results!"

"We'll do it alone, Skipper," I said tightly.

"All right, smart boy, all right, big-shot city detective. Just remember this isn't a 211, and it isn't a 311, nor is it

a 484 PS. This is robicide, big shot detective, and if you don't crack this case you'll be back pounding a beat in Brooklyn. Yes, dammit, I said *Brooklyn!*"

"Easy, Mike," Johnny said.

I cringed out of the office.

We got our first steer from a vag in night court.

The steer was a big black one, with malicious looking horns.

"What's this all about?" I asked.

"Pancho's housepet," the vag said.

"So?"

"Look at the hide."

I stepped around the horns, and the steer eyed me maliciously. I looked at the hide. There were two footprints on it.

"What's it all mean?" I asked.

"Somebody cut out a pair of soles from this poor beast's hide," the vag said. "Somebody needed shoes desperately."

"Who?" I asked.

"That's easy," the vag said. "A big-shot detective like you should be able to figure it."

"All right," I said, "if you want to play it tough, we play it tough. We know you been pushing Corradon, vag. We know it because we spotted you with six bundles of the junk. We also had you staked out when you received those eighteen syringes. And don't think we ain't aware of the white slavery you been indulging in. Only reason we haven't pulled you in before this, vag, is because you're my father. Now, are you going to explain all this, or do you want me to forget that blood is thicker than bourbon?"

"Easy, Mikie," the vag said.

"Easy; sure, easy. What do those footprints mean?"

"Simple. They're a size 9½ double E. Only one robot in town wears a 9½ EE."

"Who's that?"

"Pancho Romulo."

"Those are mighty big shoes for such a little man," Johnny said.

"Maybe he was trying to fill them,"

the vag said. "I figure the hide was taken from this steer a few years ago. That was before Romulo's stuff began to click."

The steer made a noise.

"Shut up, you!" I snarled. "We got plenty on you, too, if you want to play it rough."

The steer lowered his head.

"Like a certain cow in Jersey, if you want to get specific," I sneered. "Don't fool with us, mister."

The steer didn't answer.

"Come on," I told Johnny. "Let's check those goddamn shoes."

THE robot who answered the door at Pancho Romulo's downtown apartment was a big one. He had sapphire eyes and a diamond smile on his face. He let us in, and I said, "Excuse me," and bent down to inspect his ID tag.

"You a roboscribe?" I asked him.

"Yes," he said.

"What's your name, sir?"

"Schnarr Trapper," he said.

"All right, Schnarr; what are you doing here?"

"I work here."

"Doing what?"

"Answering doors and things."

"I thought you were a roboscribe."

"I am."

"All right, Schnarr," I said, "if you want to play it rough . . ."

"I'm at liberty," Schnarr said, "that's all. Between assignments, so to speak. Pancho was good enough to take me in, answering doors and things."

"That's better," I said. "What things do you answer?"

"Telephones, fan letters. Oh; Pancho gets a lot of fan mail."

"Got, you mean," I said.

"Got?"

"Got. He daid."

Schnarr Trapper looked at me in astonishment. "Dead? Pancho dead? Dead, did you say?"

"You didn't know about it?"

"No. Good Lord, no. Pancho dead? Oh Good Lord."

"What size shoes do you wear?" I asked suddenly.

"10½ B. Why?"

"Routine."

"Oh. Dead. Poor Pancho. Dead. How did it happen?"

"Somebody bashed his head in."

"Poor Pancho. Poor, poor, Pancho. Dead. And gone. Dead and gone."

"Both," I said. "What kind of scribbling do you do?"

"Mystery stuff."

"Ah-ha?"

"Yes."

"Mmmm."

"You liked this Pancho Romulo?" Johnny asked.

"Liked him? Gad, I loved him," Schnarr said. "My idol, my hero, the scribe I wanted most to be like. With Pancho gone, it'll be a sad world for 'tec fans."

"What kind of fans?"

"Tec fans. You've never been to Venus?"

"No, never."

"There's a bird theré, the *snorutec*. Beautiful plumage. Pancho had fans made from the plumage, 'tec fans. He ordered a lot of them when he was alive."

"I see."

"Why did you ask me about shoes? Does 10½ B have anything to do with Pancho's killer?"

"That's about the size of it," I said. "We got a steer a little while back. Two shoe soles cut from the steer's hide."

"That was a bum steer," Schnarr said. "Pancho picked him up reading the *Ho-bo News* a long time ago?"

"Who cut those shoe soles from the steer's hide? That's what I'd like to know."

"Why, Pancho did," Schnarr told me.

"Why?"

"He was down and out, holes in his soles, heels peeling, laces defaced, stitches missing. He cut himself a new pair of soles from the bum steer. That was before Pancho became a big-shot

city detective writer."

"How? How did he get where he was? They gave him lousy plotting spools, and a wornout twister. How come he rose to such heights?"

Schnarr Trapper looked at me levelly. "I don't know," he said.

"We'll find out, Schnarr," I answered. "Don't leave town."

WE PICKED up an SOB on the IRT the next day. AID checked him out, figured him for an MWA and dumped him into the CAN. The time was 1341.78642.

Johnny and I went down to the SCRAP HEAP.

The aluminum cases of robots gleamed in the midday sun, empty and barren, lifeless.

"Makes you choke up," I said to Johnny.

"Urghh, Johnny said.

A woman was there looking over the dead robots, searching among the rubble. We looked around until we found the remains of Pancho Romulo, and then we went over them carefully.

"Legs in fine order," I said.

"Haven't seen better in a long time," Johnny agreed.

"Nice chest."

"Mmmmm," Johnny murmured appreciatively.

"Short, true," I said, "but they don't make chassis like this any more."

"You said it, Mike," Johnny said enthusiastically.

"Built for endurance," I said.

"Yeah." Johnny sighed wistfully. "She's leaving, Mike," he said.

"Who's leaving?"

"The girl. The one rummaging around out there. Man," he said.

"Look at this robot!" I shouted. "Pay some attention here."

"Easy, Mike. I

"Sure, easy, easy. Look at his head. All the tubes are gone, shattered, destroyed. And the plotting spools and twister. Stolen."

"Who'd want to steal . . ."

"Who indeed? Who'd want to steal old spools and a bad twister? Unless . . ."

"Unless what, Mike?"

"You're a big-shot city detective's partner," I said bitterly. "You tell me."

"But . . ."

"That's the first sensible thing you've said for the last twelve pages. Let me have one."

"Let you have what, Mike?"

"A king-sized cigarette, you damned fool."

Johnny butted me. Then we staked out the suspect's home, and later had a steak out on Long Island in a place where truck drivers stop.

We got the RBI on the car radio on the way back to the city.

"They'll take it next year," Johnny said.

"Maybe," I told him. I was thinking. Something was gnawing at my mind. I let it gnaw.

"Something gnawing at you?" Johnny asked.

"Naw," I told him. I continued driving. The radio told us about a heel and toe on the fourth level, and a punch job at 60th and Broad. After that, we got the Hit Parade.

"Music, alla time music," Johnny complained. "You're just a jazz fiend, that's all."

"Dom, da-dohm-dohm," I hummed: It was all crystal clear now, clear as a bell. I had my man, and all we had to do was wrap it up.

AFTER we passed our way through the stakeout men, we went up to the apartment. I knocked on the door.

"Who's there?" the voice called.

"Police officers. Open up."

"Come and get me, copper

I kicked the door open, and then I kicked Johnny into the apartment.

"Careful!" Johnny yelled. "He's got a heater."

The heater blistered three feet of paint from the door jamb. I fired twice from the hip with my .32 S. & W., nickel-plated, walnut-stocked, raised sight,

twin-notched, rapid-firing disintegrator.

I missed.

I made a flying leap across the room, and he came down in a tumble of metal, clattering like a thousand drunken pots and pans.

"All right," I said. "Want to tell us all about it?"

"No," Schnarr Trapper said.

I scratched my head. "What do we do now, Johnny?"

"He doesn't want to tell us all about it?"

"That's what he said," I told Johnny.

"Mmm. That makes it a little tougher."

"We'll just have to sweat it out of him," I said.

Schnarr Trapper sneered. "Robots don't sweat," he answered.

We put him under the can openers at HQ, and it was just a matter of time before he spilled the beans.

It was a simple case. Pancho Romulo had stolen Schnarr Trapper's superior spools and twister. He then hired Trapper as a manservant, while he himself

rose to fame and glory as a mystery writer.

Trapper bided his time, waiting for the chance to steal back the superior plotting spools and twister that rightfully belonged to him. He finally found the opportunity. He discovered that once you bashed in a robot's head, all the spools and the twister were exposed. He had seized his opportunity, and also the spools and twister.

The case was closed.

*Schnarr Trapper was tried in Superior Court, County of Cork, State of the Union, on December 25, 2937. He was found guilty of stealing his own spools and twister, Section 31-A of Penal Code 17-B, a crime punishable by demolition. He was utterly demolished.*

*Detective-Sergeant Michael Sneadley, for outstanding work in breaking the case, received a gold star in his Merit Column, and was elevated to the position of a high-priced radio and television performer.*

*Crime sometimes pays in*

**THE END**

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