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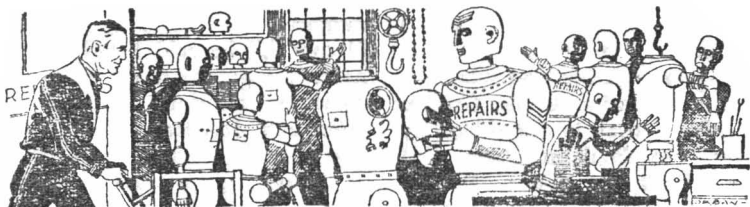
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Solar Timesavers spared no one, and no thing, in their tireless efforts to serve. . . .



IN WORKING ORDER

by Ward Moore

illustrated by ORBAN

MR. JEREMY GRINKER, in charge of ashy residues for Asteroid Foods ("Prepared In Outer Space For The Inner Man"), landed his copter on the roofport of the Solar Timesavers Building. His personal Timesaver, Jerry, was out of order, a grave inconvenience for Mr. Grinker, who was bringing him in for repairs.

The sound-billboards on the roof chuckled, *If It Isn't a Solar It Isn't a Timesaver; From Mercury*

To Pluto Solar Timesavers Save Time; Wasting Time Pressing Buttons? Let a Timesaver Press Them For You; What Did You Do Today That a Timesaver Could Have Done For You? Then they switched to the company's anthem, in rousing tempo, "The top of every world is polar; The tops in servitors is Solar."

Mr. Grinker, struggling to load Jerry's duraluminum bulk on a trundler, nodded. He would no more have bought a competing

Universal Vassal, Sunsystem Serf, or Planetary Do-4-U than he would have traded Jerry (a 2152 Utility Model) in on a new '54 with tentacles, instead of arms. Mr. Grinker was loyal—loyal to the Planetary Union, the Fedlican Party ("It Will Never Be Time For A Change Again"), Asteroid Foods, and Jerry. He agreed with the ad-cast, now trumpeting, "*What's Good For Solar Timesavers Is Good For The Planetary Union!*"

He'd been a child when the glorious revolution overthrew Toddling Socialism, but he remembered some of its horrors: no banks, no credit, no finance companies, no vice-presidents, no advertising. Dull, drab, lethargic plenty instead of stimulating competition for limited goods. Penthouse Planners and Cerebral Socialists, yearning for the past, were misfits and cranks who never had it so good.

He pressed the elevator button; Jerry himself would be doing this menial service in a few minutes. It could not take longer to replace the missing spindle nut and remove the danger of Jerry shaking his electronic brain loose every time he used his neck.

The doors shut, the annunciator murmured, "See the 2154; a demonstrator on every floor." "...Twenty-fifth floor, thank you."

Mr. Grinker wheeled Jerry into a hum of activity. Timesavers in all states of assembly were being

worked on by others. "Spindle nut, number M20 dash 960, for a '52 U model," he said briefly to the nearest, a gunmetal job with gold chevrons tastefully welded on arms and forehead, and *Repairs* also in gold, on chest and back.

"Sorry, sir; we don't have parts here."

"All right; who does?"

"Stores and Spares; thirty-third floor. Thank you, sir."

Mr. Grinkler nodded. All servitors were respectful and polite under the new system. A far cry from the glum old days when a robot handed you whatever you asked for without a courteous word.

"Newest Timesavers are the housewife's dream; In all styles and ores they shine and gleam. Thirty-third floor, thank you."

Shelves and bins stretched to the ceiling. The only Timesaver visible was stainless steel with informally arranged copper dots.

"Spindle nut, number M20 dash 960, for a '52 model."

"Fourth aisle to your right. Thank you sir."

Four aisles over Mr. Grinker repeated his need to a Timesaver who, like the other, had *Stores & Spares* in copper, but with a pattern of circles instead of dots.

"Yes sir. I have no shop order on such a number, sir."

"Never mind. Just sell me the spindle nut; I'll put it on."

"I can't do that, sir. Repairs to

Solar Timesavers must be made by factory-adjusted mechanics."

"Look," said Mr. Grinker; "This doesn't call for special skill. I'll just start the thread and activate Jerry; he'll tighten it on."

"Sorry, sir; tinkering or tampering invalidates your guarantee."

"I'll waive guarantees on the spindle nut. And on the spindle itself," he added generously. "In fact, if anything at all goes wrong with Jerry's neck because of this I'll make no complaint."

"You can't do that, sir."

"Why not?"

"Company policy, sir. If exceptions were made on one repair, exceptions would have to apply to all."

Mr. Grinker respected company policy. "Where do I get an order?"

"Fifty-first floor, sir. They'll telephote a requisition."

"Why can't I phone an order from here?"

"I have only an outgoing check-viser and an incoming telephote."

MR. GRINKER and Jerry rode to the fifty-first floor, hearing that "Executives need them, assemblylines speed them, The one you must favor is the bright new Timesaver."

A burnished brass model had *Repair-Routing* in black venerium.

"Spindle nut, number M29 dash 960, for a '52 model."

"Have you a clearance, sir?"

"Clearance?"

"Yes sir. Please consult Mr. Zergut, our vice-president in charge of routing obsolete models."

"Obsolete? *Obsolete?* I said '52, not '42."

"I understood you, sir. Solar Timesavers' optional aurafier catches sounds inaudible to human ears. My recommemory—standard on all late models—retains both audio and visual images."

"But how can you call a two year old model obsolete?"

"I have nothing to do with it, sir; company policy deter—"

"All right. Where's this what-his-name's screen?"

"Mr. Zergut's tivydesk is the third beyond the receptionist, sir."

Mr. Grinker's arms, unused to exercise, began to ache. He halted the trundler beside the bronze and aluminum Timesaver whose neatly lettered *Receptionist* seemed faintly feminine.

"Good afternoon," the receptionist trilled. "Solar Timesavers Incorporated is here to serve you."

"Fine. I want an order from your Mr. Zergut for a spindle nut."

"A clearance, sir," the receptionist corrected. "Shop orders come from Supervisory. You name, address, telephone, please?"

"Look, I just want a spindle nut. Like those on your neck."

"Not *my* neck, sir. 'I'm a '54 Special Deluxe. *My* spindle nuts have left-hand threads."

"I still only want a nut. You don't need a file on me for that."

"The information is for our records. To serve you efficiently."

Mr. Grinker glanced at his watch. How was he going to explain this prolonged absence from his tivy desk to Harley Gayne, Asteroid Foods' vice-president in charge of vice-presidents? He gave his name, address, telephone. He even threw in his copter license number.

"Thank you. Are you employed, Mr. Grinker?"

"What difference does that make?"

If Timesavers had emotions, the receptionist would have looked reproachful. "We cannot function efficiently without data, sir."

"You have it. I gave pages of it when I bought Jerry."

"But not up to date, sir; not correlated to repairs."

"Look, I'm in a hurry; can't we cut this red tape?"

"Since the Return to Free Enterprise red tape has been done away with, sir. Bureaucracy and government interference have been abolished. Private business exists to expedite, not obstruct."

Mr. Grinker, abashed, reproved, instructed by a metal servitor in thinking a thing through and fundamental Feddicanism, muttered, "Asteroid Foods. Five hundred forty-first vice-president."

"Married, single, or divorced?" The receptionist blocked his protest. "Statistics to discover what conditions cause breakdowns."

"But— Married."

"Wife's full name, please?"

"Don't tell me my wife's name has any connection with spindle nuts."

"No, sir."

There was a long pause. "Well? What are we waiting for now?"

"Your wife's full name, sir."

"But you admitted that had nothing to do with it."

"No, sir. You told me not to tell you your wife's name had any connection with spindle nuts. I am adjusted to maximum agreeableness to customers, so I can't tell you something you've told me not to."

"O.K. I take it back. Doralee Punzeigle Grinker. Why?"

"If you should pass away, we'd want to serve the new owner—"

"Efficiently. All right. What else? Blood type? Age? Politics? IQ? Medical history? Fingerprints?"

The receptionist selected several items, inquired about others he hadn't mentioned. "Thank you Mr. Zergut will see you now."

"About time. Two hours wasted on a ten minute matter."

A SCREEN threedeed. Mr. Zergut might almost have been Mr. Grinker's twin, except he was heavier. More like Harley Gayne. The same jowled snook, depilated face, expressionless eyes. In the old, regimented days the robots had been alike; humans tried to escape the monotony by eccentric

dress, habits, thoughts. In that planned, unnatural drabness they prized, instead of suppressing difference.

"Zergut here." He stared unblinkingly at Mr. Grinker.

"Spindle nut," began Mr. Grinker eagerly, describing it.

Mr. Zergut reflected thoughtfully. "Left spindle or right?"

"What's the difference? The spindles and nuts are identical."

Mr. Zergut clasped his hands behind his neck and looked stern.

"Are you trying to tell us our business, Mr. . . . Um. . . Drinker?"

"Grinker," corrected Mr. Grinker angrily. "Jeremy Grinker. I'm not trying to tell you anything except that I want a spindle—"

"—nut M20 dash 960. I can't requisition one without specifying right or left spindle. Our mechanic must be told where it goes."

"If he can't see which one is off, I'll show him."

Mr. Zergut shook his head tolerantly. "Not the way we do things. Repair orders are exact; slipshod methods went out with Planning."

"Oh. . . Left spindle," said Mr. Grinker sullenly.

"Left spindle." Mr. Zergut grunted. "How did the nut come off?"

"How the devil do I know? Suddenly Jerry's head was wacking back and forth like a metronome. Garbled his speech, too. I deacti-

vated him and saw the nut was gone. I tried to find it, but our sweebaire autoclean—very sensitive; a grain of sand starts it—must have detected it, sucked it in and pulverized it."

Mr. Zergut shook his head. Not tolerantly this time. "We can't repair Timesavers without knowing the cause of failure. Solar Timesavers offers maximum service; each model is better than the one before. To improve them we must know how and why they break down."

"But anyone can lose a nut," argued Mr. Grinker.

"Not a Solar Timesaver. 'Work to build because built to work' as we say among ourselves. Even an obsolete model couldn't lose a spindle nut accidentally. Mistreatment, carelessness, tampering—"

"I've taken perfect care of Jerry. Followed the handbook exactly. 'Light, utilitarian work; no factory labor or steady use as computer.' I don't know how he lost the spindle nut; maybe the lockwasher wasn't—"

Mr. Zergut pounced. "You've lost the lockwasher, too?"

"I haven't lost anything," cried Mr. Grinker, losing his temper. "I have the washer; you can add the information to your files. I don't care how the spindle nut came off; I want another. You can't tell me a six thousand credit Timesaver is junk unless a clairvoyant or psy-

choanalyst discovers how a lousy spindle nut got loose!"

"Are you trying to tell us how to run our business?"

"Yes!" shouted Mr. Grinker, pushed into sedition, rebellion, and subversion; "yes, damn it, if you don't know how yourselves!"

There was shocked silence. Even Mr. Grinker felt he had gone too far. Injustice rankled, but he had weakened his case.

"Now, now—let's be reasonable," urged Mr. Zergut, obviously humoring someone quite unreasonable. "There's a space on our form headed '*Cause of Failure*'. I can't leave it blank."

"Why not?"

"Why not? That space was put there by qualified time study engineers. Experts. *Business* experts. Do you or I know better than they? It's not a whim of mine to fill out the form; it's to keep our service up to standard for *you*."

"Oh," said Mr. Grinker exhaustedly, "put down that Jerry lost the spindle nut from looking over his shoulder apprehensively."

Mr. Zergut frowned. "Sounds neurotic. Solar Timesavers—"

"Perfectly normal. Jerry adjusts the private Asteroid Foods' tele-screen; naturally he's anxious for it never to get out of focus."

"Seems to me you ought to install a self-rectifying—"

"Are you trying to tell us how to run *our* business?" asked Mr. Grinker triumphantly.

ZEST VISIBLY left Mr. Zergut. Without real enthusiasm he listed the actions Jerry (or as he put it coldly, "Our '52 U model") normally performed, the times he'd been exposed to corrosive acids, radioactivity, floods, temperatures of 200 degrees (fahrenheit) and other hazards. He seemed almost relieved to say, "Well, that's it. You can pick up the spindle nut on—"

"I know. Mr. Grinker was already wheeling Jerry to the elevator.

The stainless steel *Stores & Spares* shook a polite head. "You forgot to pick up your invoice, sir."

"I'll get it after; just let me have the spindle nut now."

"Sorry, sir. Receipted bills are necessary for expediting."

"Nonsense! Do you think I'm going to abscond with a spindle nut?"

"I'm a limited duty model, sir; not built to speculate."

"All right; all right. Where do I pay?"

"You can't pay till you get an invoice, sir. From Accounting."

On the way to Accounting Mr. Grinker barely heard the cheery, "One third down and a judgement waiver Brightens your home with a new Timesaver." The worst was over. In a few minutes Jerry would be repaired. It would be he, not Mr. Grinker, who would drudge at pressing *Down* buttons, running

elevators, driving the copter home. Mr. Grinker's heart warmed at the thought of good old Jerry, and by extension softened toward his manufacturers, Solar Timesavers.

"Third sub-basement. Thank you."

Each glass-fronted cubicle was occupied by a Timesaver of different metal with contrasting welded *Accounts*. As the towel-sized bill came through the proper slot his impatience dwindled. "Once they get started their system really works," he conceded.

"Please pay any of the cashiers on the sixtieth floor," instructed *Accounts* sweetly. "The receipted duplicate will clear your work order with Parts and alert Repairs."

"O.K.," he answered cheerily. "It won't be long now."

In the elevator he glanced at the bill. Absently he let his eye rove down the detailed columns, then halted petrified at the total.

"No!" cried Mr. Grinker. "Never!"

The doors slid smoothly open. "Sixtieth floor. Thank you."

"Damnation!" roared Mr. Grinker. "Impossible!"

"Sixtieth floor. Thank you. Sixtieth—"

"Insane! Unbelievable! It's robbery! Outrage! Banditry!"

"Sixti—"

"I won't pay it! I'll never pay it!" Boiling with rage, Mr. Grinker rolled Jerry out of the elevator. "Here," he shouted, "I want

to complain! I want an adjustment! I want this bill fixed!"

Except for the faint strains of *The Top of Every World is Polar, The Tops in Servitors is Solar*, perfect quiet answered. He strode to the nearest window, thrusting out the invoice. "I won't pay it!"

"Yes sir. What seems to be wrong?" *Cashier* was gold and silver.

"Seems to be wrong? *Seems?* Forty-six credits for a nut!"

"Oh no, sir. The spindle nut is only 52 mils."

"Yes. 52 mils for a spindle nut, 30 mils for a lockwasher, six credits for labor and 40 credits for information. Information!"

"That's correct, sir. Your total bill is 46 credits, 82 mils."

"That's what I said; forty-six credits for a— Oh, there's no use arguing with you—you gadgets. Let me talk to your vice-president in charge of complaints. Here and now," he bellowed. "Without any more run-around or palaver."

He braced himself for evasion. Instead a tivydsk threedeed on a nearby screen. "Quigley here." Mr. Quigley had a depilated face, expressionless eyes, jovlon smock. "Seems to be the trouble?"

Mr. Grinker told him. Painedly and emphatically.

"Quite so. Everything in order."

"I won't pay it."

"An unreasonable attitude. Quite unreasonable. Let's see; who expe-

dited this? Ah, Zergut. Good man, Zergut. On his toes. Figuratively. Zergut? Will you cut in please? Quigley, *Complaints & Adjustments*. Customer seems upset over a little item—"

"Little?" shrieked Mr. Grinker. "Forty credits for information and you call it little? What information? When did I ever—"

MR. ZERGUT'S voice was harsh. "Grinker, you're a troublemaker. Controversial. Spotted it right away. One of those fellows who are against free enterprise and want to go back to planning."

"What—"

"There you go again with a question. Let me tell you, Grinker, Solar Timesavers doesn't like to make trouble for anyone, not even a Planner, but there's a limit to our patience. You come here, wasting our time, trying to tell us how to run our business, asking silly questions that show you don't really understand free enterprise. Naturally we charge for the informa-

tion we've given you—and let me tell you, forty credits is cheap for the briefing you've had."

"But I didn't ask—"

"We don't want to be tough about it, but maybe it's our duty to let Asteroid Foods know they have a Planner on their staff."

"I'm not a . . ." began Mr. Grinker.

His voice trailed off. He saw the whole horrible vista before him. Harley Gayne would never believe the slander, but a vice-president, any vice-president, against whom the slightest suspicion, no matter how absurd, had been breathed, lost his usefulness. It was bad public relations. He could hear Gayne's mournful dismissal.

"All right," Mr. Grinker muttered brokenly; "I'll pay."

"Right," said Mr. Zergut cheerfully. "And as I started to say when you rushed off, you can pick up the spindle nut on Tuesday. *Next* Tuesday. We don't stock that type; have to order it."

