

SATELLITE

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A COMPLETE NOVEL

A GLASS OF DARKNESS

by PHILIP K. DICK

The Virginia town in which Ted Barton was born had vanished. In its place was a strange new community where golems walked and Wanderers shone by night, a strange battleground of cosmic forces that spanned time and the galaxy!

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POOR, HUNGRY PEOPLE

As archeologists, the visitors had open minds. But money was too much for them.

by FRANK BRYNING

THREE ARE TIMES, my dear Yknal, when the reiteration of your one and only hypothesis becomes intolerably tedious!"

Yknal's antennae came erect like the three prongs of a pitchfork as he received the telepathed complaint. The central prong began to vibrate faintly as he transmitted his reply.

"There are times, my dear Ytrohs, when I think you carry your estimable scientific scepticism to absurd lengths. Has anyone yet offered a better 'hypothesis,' as you call it?"

"No—that I admit. But yours is surely oversimplified and, until it is proved correct . . ."

"Search as you will amongst the rubble of this planet. Open all the vaults you may find. From the treasures these self-destroyed peoples did most to protect and preserve, you can deduce no other

explanation than the one I have given you."

Ytrohs dropped the two pens, the straight-edge, and the calipers he was using. He released the four corners of the map, which rolled itself up on the bench in front of him. Coiling the eight tentacles thus disengaged, he turned to confront Yknal.

"You would have us, then, give up our searching? Must we conclude that it is no use going on—that the great Yknal had given us the answer before we started? Living creatures, intelligent or otherwise, fight basically for one thing only? That whatever else may appear to cause their disputes, it is merely the symbol for one thing—food?"

"By no means give up! Continue to search as long as you are unconvinced. Continue until you have found all the various symbols there

may be—until your discoveries confirm my diagnosis so often that you—even you—must recognize its correctness."

A closed mind is a grievous affliction, mused Ytrohs.

"Agreed!" transmitted Yknal. "And an open thought screen makes unwilling eavesdroppers!"

"I beg your pardon, my dear Yknal! I did not intend to think abroad. You admonish me justly."

"My apologies to you, my dear Ytrohs. It was unmannerly of me to take cognizance of a private thought, and unpardonably conceited to think it must necessarily refer to me. Here comes Ynniks, full of excitement and information."

Ynniks carried his sausage-like body canted at an angle of about thirty degrees as he raced towards the spaceship on his six long locomotion-tentacles. His eight manipulators lay coiled in two rows along the forward half of his underbelly. In size and shape and yellow-green color—in every observable detail—his appearance was identical with that of Ytrohs, Yknal and all the others of his race.

"We have found two big vaults in a building bearing the usual hieroglyphs," he reported before he entered the ship. He visualized the symbols *B*, *A*, *N* and *K*. "In another building, there are several still larger vaults. Part of this building has crumbled long since, but we could make out the sym-

bols *T*, *R*, *E*, *A* and *S*, in that order. There are small fragments of others, but they are impossible to visualize in their complete forms."

"Are the buildings ruined?" enquired Ytrohs. "Have they been disrupted by explosives?"

"No. The few which are damaged appear to have fallen away through the effluxion of time. This city's inhabitants were poisoned by radioactive dust. It was not blasted, as were the rubble cities."

"Do the vaults show signs of being forced—or attacked in any way?"

"None whatever—not a mark."

"So, once again, the inhabitants died, but their best guarded treasures remain inviolate," mused Ytrohs.

"They were a poor lot, anyway," commented Yknal. "What kind of minds could you expect in creatures of only four limbs? Mental range and complexity must go with manipulative and locomotive versatility. With our fourteen limbs, for example . . ."

"Take care you do not underestimate them," warned the sceptical Ytrohs. "If you count the five digits they had on each main limb, they had more than we!"

"And all beautifully adapted for twiddling!" said Yknal with a snicker.

"Let us not depart from our main problem," admonished Ytrohs. "Whatever is in those vaults, they must have valued more

than life itself, for they protected it better. Since they valued it more than life, they must have valued it more than the means of life—such," he added mischievously, "as food, or—"

From Yknal there came a thrumming mental impulse of such intensity that it was painful to receive. The two others saw that his central antenna had become invisible in a blur of vibration.

"*Nothing* can be so valued above survival itself, or above the sustenance which is the means of survival!" thrummed Yknal. "In the last analysis, survival is a matter of food—for communities, as well as individuals—and that is what they fight about.

"They may appear to dispute over such abstractions as power, sovereignty over territory, or such tangibles as particular metals or minerals or artifacts. But all these things, in the end, are simply the control of the food supply, the ownership of sources of food, the means of producing food or of appropriating it. You will find no other answer."

"Nevertheless, we must try," responded Ytrohs. "Ynniks—can we land the ship close to the larger of the two buildings you describe?"

The disk-like space-ship lowered itself into the small forest which had overgrown the square before the Treasury building. From it, sallied a small work party, carrying a camera-like device and

riding on a miniature tractor with caterpillar treads. The tractor climbed the stone stairs in front of the building and carried its mixed cargo inside.

Before one of the great strong-room doors Ynniks and his two companions dismounted. One of them, Yttaf by name, set up the camera-like box on a tripod and sighted through it. A circular patch of pale violet light appeared across the full width of the door. After a few seconds, several sparkling points of red appeared—then, rapidly, more and more until the entire patch of light was a scintillating scarlet disk.

"Withdraw your eyes!" Yttaf warned them, somewhat unnecessarily, for each had drawn in his three eye-stalks as the light steadily intensified.

After twenty seconds, the intolerable brilliance snapped off and, almost as one, the three creatures extended their eye-stalks again. Through the heavy armoured door, where the circle of light had played, there was now nothing. On the floor beneath, was a heap of red dust.

"Come," invited Ynniks. "Let us investigate."

Ytrohs, Yknal and the rest looked with little favor upon the tractor's load of samples from the seven Treasury vaults.

"The same ingots of yellow metal," Yknal communicated mockingly. "The same disks of

yellow and white metal, stamped and patterned. The same elaborately inscribed documents with intricate designs and patterns upon them. Forgive me, please, if I remind you that I 'pathed you so!"

"We forgive you—once again—my dear Yknal," responded Ytrohs with immense dignity. "We acknowledge once more that what we have here tells us no more than we knew already. In some way, these poor objects were the most valued treasures of the race that built these cities and fought one another to extinction. What *can* there be about them so precious that they preserved them better than life itself? There *must* be an answer."

Yknal sighed, his whole body inflating like a balloon.

"Must I, forever, repeat the obvious? They did *not* destroy one another over these intrinsically worthless objects. This was yet another civilization that solved the riddle of atomic power before it

solved its own riddle of economics—the struggle for food! But what is the use? It was well 'pathed that, 'There is none so blind as he who will not extend an eye-stalk.' "

There followed the mental silence of screened minds in private contemplation. The central antennae of all three began to droop as transmission ceased.

At length Ytaf rose and climbed aboard the tractor. "I'd better throw out this junk," he vibrated. Then he paused. "What was that, Ytrohs?"

Ytrohs deactivated his thought screen completely. "I was wondering," he telepathed abroad, "whether—whether even the people of this planet themselves really knew what they fought about."

Expectantly, both Ytaf and Ynniks slewed an eye-stalk around towards Yknal.

But Yknal was not to be provoked. His central antenna remained down upon his forehead, tightly coiled.

