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CONTENTS

NOVEMBER, 1950 VOL. XLVI, NO. 3

NOVELETTES

THE TRUTH ABOUT CUSHGAR, *by James H. Schmitz* 6
TOOLS OF THE TRADE, *by Raymond F. Jones* 48

SHORT STORIES

IN VALUE DECEIVED, *by H. B. Fyfe* 38
FOLLOWER, *by Eric Frank Russell* 68
QUIXOTE AND THE WINDMILL, *by Poul Anderson* 95

SERIAL

THE HAND OF ZEI, *by L. Sprague de Camp* 103
(Part Two of Four Parts)

ARTICLES

THE GENERAL ADAPTATION SYNDROME
by Joseph A. Winter, M.D. 76
SCIENCE FOR ART'S SAKE, *by J. J. Coupling* 83

READERS' DEPARTMENTS

THE EDITOR'S PAGE 4
THE ANALYTICAL LABORATORY 47
BOOK REVIEWS 93
IN TIMES TO COME 150
BRASS TACKS 152

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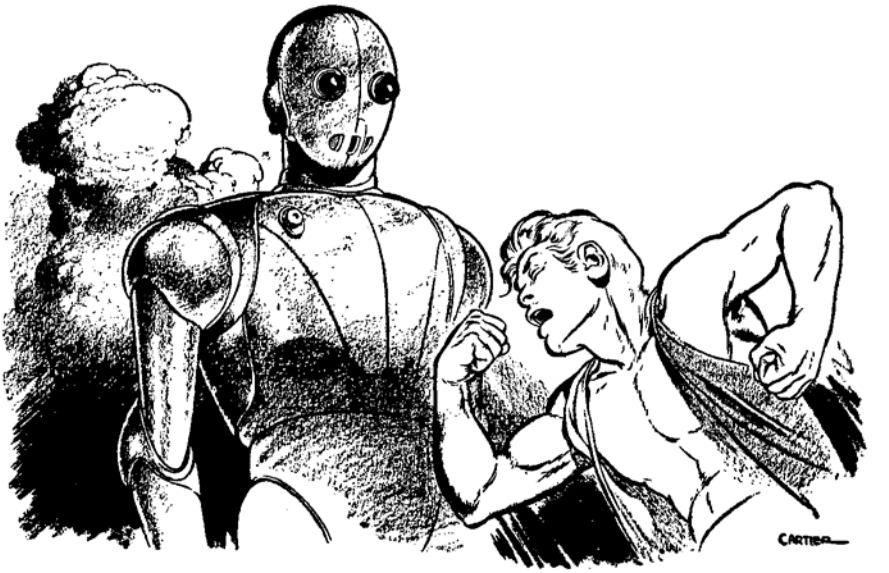

QUIXOTE AND THE WINDMILL

BY POUL ANDERSON

A man, capable of a million things, is unhappy without a job, without a goal and purpose in life. But he is not necessarily unique . . .

Illustrated by Cartier

The first robot in the world came walking over green hills with sunlight aflash off his polished metal hide. He walked with a rippling grace that was almost feline, and his tread fell noiselessly—but you could feel the ground vibrate ever so faintly under the impact of that terrific mass, and the air held a subliminal quiver from the great engine that pulsed within him.

Him. You could not think of the robot as neuter. He had the brutal maleness of a naval rifle or a blast furnace. All the smooth silent elegance of perfect design and construction did not hide the weight and strength of a two and a half-meter height. His eyes glowed, as if with inner fires of smoldering atoms, they could see in any frequency range he selected, he could turn an X-ray

beam on you and look you through and through with those terrible eyes. They had built him humanoid, but had had the good taste not to give him a face; there were the eyes, with their sockets for extra lenses when he needed microscopic or telescopic vision, and there were a few other small sensory and vocal orifices, but otherwise his head was a mask of shining metal. Humanoid, but not human—man's creation, but more than man—the first independent, volitional, nonspecialized machine—but they had dreamed of him, long ago, he had once been the jinni in the bottle or the Golem, Bacon's brazen head or Frankenstein's monster, the man-transcending creature who could serve or destroy with equal contemptuous ease.

He walked under a bright summer sky, over sunlit fields and through little groves that danced and whispered in the wind. The houses of men were scattered here and there, the houses which practically took care of themselves; over beyond the horizon was one of the giant, almost automatic food factories; a few self-piloting carplanes went quietly overhead. Humans were in sight, sun-browned men and their women and children going about their various errands with loose bright garments floating in the breeze. A few seemed to be at work, there was a colorist experimenting with a new chromatic harmony, a composer sitting on his verandah striking notes out of an omniplayer, a group of engineers in a transparent-walled laboratory testing some mechanisms. But with the standard work period what it was these days, most were engaged in recreation. A picnic, a dance under trees, a concert, a pair of lovers, a group of children in one of the immemorially ancient games of their age-group, an old man happily enhammocked with a book and a bottle of beer—the human race was taking it easy.

They saw the robot go by, and often a silence fell as his tremendous shadow slipped past. His electronic detectors sensed the eddying pulses that meant nervousness, a faint unease—oh, they trusted the cybernetics men, they didn't look for a devouring monster, but they wondered. They felt man's old unsureness of the alien and unknown, deep in their minds they wondered what the robot was about and what his new and invincible race might mean to Earth's dwellers—then, perhaps, as his gleaming height receded over the hills, they laughed and forgot him.

The robot went on.

There were not many customers in the Casanova at this hour. After sunset the tavern would fill up and the autodispensers would be kept busy, for it had a good live-talent show and television was becoming unfashionable. But at the moment only those who enjoyed a mid-afternoon glass, together with some serious drinkers, were present.

The building stood alone on a high wooded ridge, surrounded by its gardens and a good-sized parking

lot. Its colonnaded exterior was long and low and gracious; inside it was cool and dim and fairly quiet; and the general air of decorum, due entirely to lack of patronage, would probably last till evening. The manager had gone off on his own business and the girls didn't find it worthwhile to be around till later, so the Casanova was wholly in the charge of its machines.

Two men were giving their autodispenser a good workout. It could hardly deliver one drink before a coin was given it for another. The smaller man was drinking whiskey and soda, the larger one stuck to the most potent available ale, and both were already thoroughly soused.

They sat in a corner booth from which they could look out the open door, but their attention was directed to the drinks. It was one of those curious barroom acquaintances which spring up between utterly diverse types. They would hardly remember each other the next day. But currently they were exchanging their troubles.

The little dark-haired fellow, Roger Brady, finished his drink and dialed for another. "Beatcha!" he said triumphantly.

"Gimme time," said the big redhead, Pete Borklin. "This stuff goes down slower."

Brady got out a cigarette. His fingers shook as he brought it to his mouth and puffed it into lighting. "Why can't that drink come right away?" he mumbled. "I resent a ten-second delay. Ten dry eternities! I demand instantaneously mixed drinks, delivered faster than light."

The glass arrived, and he raised it to his lips. "I am afraid," he said, with the careful precision of a very drunk man, "that I am going on a weeping jag. I would much prefer a fighting jag. But unfortunately there is nobody to fight."

"I'll fight you," offered Borklin. His huge fists closed.

"Nah—why? Wouldn't be a fight, anyway. You'd just mop me up. And why should we fight? We're both in the same boat."

"Yeah." Borklin looked at his fists. "Not much use, anyway," he said. "Somebody'd do a lot better job o' killing with an autogun than I could with—these." He unclenched them, slowly, as if with an effort, and took another drag at his glass.

"What we want to do," said Brady, "is to fight a world. We want to blow up all Earth and scatter the pieces from here to Pluto. Only it wouldn't do any good, Pete. Some machine'd come along and put it back together again."

"I just wanna get drunk," said Borklin. "My wife left me. D'I tell you that? My wife left me."

"Yeah, you told me."

Borklin shook his heavy head, puzzled. "She said I was a drunk. I went to a doctor like she said, but it didn't help none. He said . . . I forget what he said. But I had to keep on drinking anyway. Wasn't anything else to do."

"I know. Psychiatry helps people

solve problems. It's not being able to solve a problem that drives a man insane. But when the problem is inherently insoluble—what then? One can only drink, and try to forget."

"My wife wanted me to amount to something," said Borklin. "She wanted me to get a job. But what could I do? I tried. Honest, I tried. I tried for . . . well, I've been trying all my life, really. There just wasn't any work around. Not any I could do."

"Fortunately, the basic citizen's allowance is enough to get drunk on," said Brady. "Only the drinks don't arrive fast enough. I demand an instantaneous autodispenser."

Borklin dialed for another ale. He looked at his hands in a bewildered way. "I've always been strong," he said. "I know I'm not bright, but I'm strong, and I'm good at working with machines and all. But nobody would hire me." He spread his thick workman's fingers. "I was handy at home. We had a little place in Alaska, my dad didn't hold with too many gadgets, so I was handy around there. But he's dead now, the place is sold, what good are my hands?"

"The worker's paradise." Brady's thin lips twisted. "Since the end of the Transition, Earth has been Utopia. Machines do all the routine work, *all* of it, they produce so much that the basic necessities of life are free."

"The hell. They want money for everything."

"Not much. And you get your citizen's allowance, which is just a convenient way of making your needs free. When you want more money, for the luxuries, you work, as an engineer or scientist or musician or painter or tavern keeper or spaceman or . . . anything there's a demand for. You don't work too hard. Paradise!" Brady's shaking fingers spilled cigarette ash on the table. A little tube dipped down from the wall and sucked it up.

"I can't find work. They don't want me. Nowhere."

"Of course not. What earthly good is manual labor these days? Machines do it all. Oh, there are technicians to be sure, quite a lot of them—but they're all highly skilled men, years of training. The man who has nothing to offer but his strength and a little rule-of-thumb ingenuity doesn't get work. There *is* no place for him!" Brady took another swallow from his glass. "Human genius has eliminated the need for the workman. Now it only remains to eliminate the workman himself."

Borklin's fists closed again, dangerously. "Whattayuh mean?" he asked harshly. "Whattayuh mean, anyway?"

"Nothing personal. But you know it yourself. Your type no longer fits into human society. So the geneticists are gradually working it out of the race. The population is kept static, relatively small, and is slowly evolving toward a type which can adapt to the present en . . . environment. And that's not your type, Pete."

The big man's anger collapsed into futility. He stared emptily at his glass. "What to do?" he whispered. "What can I do?"

"Not a thing, Pete. Just drink, and try to forget your wife. Just drink."

"Mebbe they'll get out to the stars."

"Not in our lifetimes. And even then, they'll want to take their machines along. We still won't be any more useful. Drink up, old fellow. Be glad! You're living in Utopia!"

There was silence then, for a while. The day was bright outside. Brady was grateful for the obscurity of the tavern.

Borklin said at last: "What I can't figure is you. You look smart. You can fit in . . . can't you?"

Brady grinned humorlessly. "No, Pete. I had a job, yes. I was a mediocre servotechnician. The other day I couldn't take any more. I told the boss what to do with his servos, and I've been drinking ever since. I don't think I ever want to stop."

"But how come?"

"Dreary, routine—I hated it. I'd rather stay tight. I had psychiatric help too, of course, and it didn't do me any good. The same insoluble problem as yours, really."

"I don't get it."

"I'm a bright boy, Pete. Why hide it? My I.Q. puts me in the genius class. But—not quite bright enough." Brady fumbled for another coin. He could only find a bill, but the machine gave him change. "I want inshantaneous auto . . . or did I say that before? Never mind. It doesn't matter." He buried his face in his hands.

"How do you mean, not quite bright enough?" Borklin was insistent. He had a vague notion that a new slant on his own problem might conceivably help him see a solution. "That's what they told me, only politer. But you—"

"I'm too bright to be an ordinary technician. Not for long. And I have none of the artistic or literary talent which counts so highly nowadays. What I wanted was to be a mathematician. All my life I wanted to be a mathematician. And I worked at it. I studied. I learned all any human head could hold, and I know where to look up the rest." Brady grinned wearily. "So what's the upshot? The mathematical machines have taken over. Not only all routine computation—that's old—but even independent research. At a higher level than the human brain can operate.

"They still have humans working at it. Sure. They have men who outline the problems, control and check the machines, follow through all the steps—men who are the . . . the soul of the science, even today.

"*But*—only the top-flight geniuses. The really brilliant, original minds, with flashes of sheer inspiration. *They* are still needed. But the machines do all the rest."

Brady shrugged. "I'm not a first-rank genius, Pete. I can't do anything that an electronic brain can't do quicker and better. So I didn't get my job, either."

They sat quiet again. Then Borklin said, slowly: "At least you can get some fun. I don't like all these concerts and pictures and all that fancy stuff. I don't have more than drinking and women and maybe some stereofilm."

"I suppose you're right," said Brady indifferently. "But I'm not cut out to be a hedonist. Neither are you. We both *want* to work. We want to feel we have some importance and value—we want to amount to something. Our friends . . . your wife . . . I had a girl once, Pete . . . we're expected to amount to something.

"Only there's nothing for us to do—"

A hard and dazzling sun-flash caught his eye. He looked out through the door, and jerked with a violence that upset his drink.

"Great universe!" he breathed. "Pete . . . Pete . . . look, it's the robot! *It's the robot!*"

"Huh?" Borklin twisted around, trying to focus his eyes out the door. "Whazzat?"

"The robot—you've heard of it, man." Brady's soddenness was gone in a sudden shivering intensity. His voice was like metal. "They built him three years ago at Cybernetics Lab. Manlike, with a volitional, nonspecialized brain—manlike, but more than man!"

"Yeah . . . yeah, I heard." Borklin looked out and saw the great shining form striding across the gardens, bound on some unknown journey that took him past the tavern. "They were testing him. But he's been running around loose for a year or so now— Wonder where he's going?"

"I don't know." As if hypnotized, Brady looked after the mighty thing. "I don't know—" His voice trailed off, then suddenly he stood up and then lashed out: "But we'll find out! Come on, Pete!"

"Where . . . huh . . . why—" Borklin rose slowly, fumbling through his own bewilderment. "What do you mean?"

"Don't you see, don't you see?" It's *the robot*—the man after man—all that man is, and how much more we don't even imagine. Pete, the machines have been replacing men, here, there, everywhere. This is the machine that will replace *man!*"

Borklin said nothing, but trailed out after Brady. The smaller man kept on talking, rapidly, bitterly: "Sure—why not? Man is simply flesh and blood. Humans are only human. They're not efficient enough for our shiny new world. Why not scrap the whole human race? How long till we have nothing but men of metal in a meaningless metal antheap?

"Come on, Pete. Man is going down into darkness. But we can go down fighting!"

Something of it penetrated Borklin's mind. He saw the towering machine ahead of him, and suddenly it was as if it embodied all which had broken him. The ultimate machine, the final arrogance of efficiency, remote and godlike and indifferent as

it smashed him—suddenly he hated it with a violence that seemed to split his skull apart. He lumbered clumsily beside Brady and they caught up with the robot together.

"Turn around!" called Brady. "Turn around and fight!"

The robot paused. Brady picked up a stone and threw it. The rock bounced off the armor with a dull clang.

The robot faced about. Borklin ran at him, cursing. His heavy shoes kicked at the robot's ankle joints, his fists battered at the front. They left no trace.

"Stop that," said the robot. His voice had little tonal variation, but there was the resonance of a great bell in it. "Stop that. You will injure yourself."

Borklin retreated, gasping with the pain of bruised flesh and smothering impotence. Brady reeled about to stand before the robot. The alcohol was singing and buzzing in his head, but his voice came oddly clear.

"We can't hurt you," he said. "We're Don Quixote, tilting at windmills. But you wouldn't know about that. You wouldn't know about any of man's old dreams."

"I am unable to account for your present actions," said the robot. His eyes blazed with their deep fires, searching the men. Unconsciously, they shrank away a little.

"You are unhappy," decided the robot. "You have been drinking to escape your own unhappiness, and in your present intoxication you identify me with the causes of your misery."

"Why not?" flared Brady. "Aren't you? The machines are taking over all Earth with their smug efficiency, making man a parasite—and now you come, the ultimate machine, you're the one who's going to replace man himself."

"I have no belligerent intentions," said the robot. "You should know I was conditioned against any such tendencies, even while my brain was in process of construction." Something like a chuckle vibrated in the deep metal voice. "What reason do I have to fight anyone?"

"None," said Brady thinly. "None at all. You'll just take over, as more and more of you are made, as your emotionless power begins to—"

"Begins to what?" asked the robot. "And how do you know I am emotionless? Any psychologist will tell you that emotion, though not necessarily of the human type, is a basic of thought. What logical reason does a being have to think, to work, even to exist? It cannot rationalize its so doing, it simply does, because of its endocrine system, its power plant, whatever runs it . . . its emotions! And any mentality capable of self-consciousness will feel as wide a range of emotion as you—it will be as happy or as interested—or as miserable—as you!"

It was weird, even in a world used to machines that were all but alive, thus to stand and argue with a living mass of metal and plastic, vacuum

and energy. The strangeness of it struck Brady, he realized just how drunk he was. But still he had to snarl his hatred and despair out, mouth any phrases at all just so they relieved some of the bursting tension within him.

"I don't care how you feel or don't feel," he said, stuttering a little now. "It's that you're the future, the meaningless future when all men are as useless as I am now, and I hate you for it and the worst of it is I can't kill you."

The robot stood like a burnished statue of some old and non-anthropomorphic god, motionless, but his voice shivered the quiet air: "Your case is fairly common. You have been relegated to obscurity by advanced technology. But do not identify yourself with all mankind. There will always be men who think and dream and sing and carry on all the race has ever loved. The future belongs to them, not to you—or to me.

"I am surprised that a man of your apparent intelligence does not realize my position. But—what earthly good is a robot? By the time science had advanced to the point where I could be built, there was no longer any reason for it. Think—you have a specialized machine to perform or help man perform every conceivable task. What possible use is there for a non-specialized machine to do them all? Man himself fulfills that function, and the machines are no more than his tools. Does a housewife want a robot servant when she need only control the dozen machines which already do all the work? Why should a scientist want a robot that could, say, go into dangerous radioactive rooms when he has already installed automatic and remote-controlled apparatus which does everything there? And surely the artists and thinkers and policy-makers don't need robots, they are performing specifically human tasks, it will always be *man* who sets man's goals and dreams his dreams. The all-purpose machine is and forever will be—man himself.

"Man, I was made for purely scientific study. After a couple of years they had learned all there was to learn about me—and I had no other purpose! They let me become a harmless, aimless, meaningless wanderer, just so I could be doing something—and my life is estimated at five hundred years!

"I have no purpose. I have no real reason for existence. I have no companion, no place in human society, no use for my strength and my brain. Man, man, do you think *I* am happy?"

The robot turned to go. Brady was sitting on the grass, holding his head to keep it from whirling off into space, so he didn't see the giant metal god depart. But he caught the last words flung back, and somehow there was such a choking bitterness in the toneless brazen voice that he could never afterward forget them.

"Man, you are the lucky one. *You* can get drunk!"

THE END