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# SEASONED TRAVELER

By F. L. WALLACE

*Illustrated by Donald Mills*

Emdee was the colony doctor, and he was also a robot. To be a doctor he had to know more than the average human — and knowledge is power! Into his metal mind crept a plan . . . and every man on Mars trembled. What fate confronted them, and how could they avoid it? The answer was simple — there was no way — but death!

I NEVER did like the calender," said Berini unemotionally, looking over the frozen tundra. In six months or so, as if months had any meaning on Mars, the sun would swing northward enough to melt it into mush. Only during the day, though; nights it would freeze again. "Tomorrow will be the Fourth," he added.

"What's the fourth?" asked Emdee.

It was difficult to explain, in spite of the fact that Emdee was the best money could buy. Better, really; there'd never be another quite like him. Processes of manufacture couldn't be controlled that close.

Even a round ball, the simplest object man could make since it had only one surface and one measurement, diameter; even that was subject to variations of sphericity and surface roughness. Not much that could be seen perhaps, but it made a difference as to how well it functioned in a bearing.

And when it came to more complex products, those differences were infinitely extended. The variations could cancel out, leaving an average product, or subtract to a substandard one. More rarely the differences added up to a superlative creation; the last was true when Emdee was made.

But it wasn't easy to explain. "It's a date," said Berini. "The next day after the third of July.

It's a holiday in America."

It was more than that, though he didn't say so. Not just the fireworks, warm nights and warmer days, and the picnic by the river. It was a way of living in an intricate culture and reacting to it. But there was no way Berini could say that to a robot.

"July," said Emdee. "America. Then it's in the summer."

"That's right," said Berini, kicking at the frozen ground. "The good old summertime."

"But if you were in the southern hemisphere it would be winter on Earth," said Emdee. "Even so, wouldn't you feel like celebrating?"

"Maybe I would, and maybe I wouldn't," said Berini. "At least it's always in the same season, winter in South, during the summer in North America." He faced the valley that resembled, if anything, a plowed and frozen red boil. "But on Mars it slips around. How are the kids going to know where the Fourth belongs?"

"You're referring to the Martian year. 1.88089 years; about 686 earth days, plus or minus," said Emdee. "I see your point. A given holiday does tend to become displaced with respect to the seasons."

Emdee had facts, more than most humans. Included in his knowledge was a sound grasp of

psychology. Culture he didn't have because he had no use for it.

"Sure," said Berini. "This Fourth of July falls in the winter. The next one in the summer. How can anyone keep it straight?"

"It seems to me the Martian calendar we've adopted is a practical one," observed Emdee. "The year is divided as equally as it can be into four parts or months, corresponding to the seasons. Why not accept that as the unit? Space your holidays the way they occurred on earth, with the same relative interval between them. That way there'll only be one Fourth of July and it will always fall in the summer."

"Nuts," said Berini. "I can pick up a broadcast from earth and hear them celebrating the new year. Am I going to wait maybe twenty months to do the same just because I'm living on Mars? Uh-uh." He shivered, the hotsuit hanging awkwardly on him. A misplaced propagandist had named it, since it didn't keep him hot nor even warm. He didn't freeze in it though, and that was all anyone could expect during the Martian winter.

"Mars is a challenge," said Emdee. "If compromises are necessary, you ought to be willing to make them."

"To you it's a challenge. To me it's just another job, not the best I've had either." Berini was silent. "It wouldn't be so bad,

but nothing's the same here."

It was possible Emdee didn't listen. Again he may have listened while concentrating on something else. He had either faculty, as required. "Look," he said, pointing to the base of the cliff at the far side of the valley.

Berini looked; he had good eyes and could see the opening of the mine shaft, but that was all.

Better eyes than his were observing it. "An accident," said Emdee. "They need me." Running, Emdee wasn't graceful; neither was he slow. Lagging far behind, Berini followed.

They brought Gardaza out last, and that was too late. It would have been the same if they had reached him first, but it seemed worse because it was easy to imagine that a few minutes might have made a vital difference. Emdee could have told them otherwise, but he didn't.

Gardaza had no business in the mine really. He had a job, an important one, but the work to be done had increased beyond the available man and robot hours. Gardaza had volunteered, and when the mine shaft crumpled, it crumpled on him.

Emdee listened without a stethoscope. He had been built for just such work, and due consideration had been given to all the details of his construction. His face was grave, as it always was

He bent over the man lying on the floor of the shaft opening, peering at and through him, and, at the same time, administering a plasma injection from the supplies stored within his barrel-like body. Simultaneously he bound external wounds and applied local anesthetics. The blood flow staunched, he set the most dangerous broken bones in unbelievable time, two or three at once. His multiplicity of arms flashed with a speed and precision several human doctors working together could not match.

He straightened up and retracted the specialized extensions into his body, leaving only the normal number of arms visible.

"Is it bad?" asked Berini. Work robots stood uneasily at one side of the shaft. Some of them had been disabled in the same accident, but there was nothing anyone could do for them at present.

"He'll live, I think."

Berini smiled; Gardaza was safe.

"Internal injuries in the thoracic region; a punctured lung, but that won't kill him." Emdee summed it up professionally. "Worse are the skull fractures. They may have damaged optic nerves. My Xray equipment is not good enough to determine that. Later I can give you more information."

The Xray equipment Emdee talked about wasn't bad, considering it went wherever he did.

"What about his hands?" asked Berini.

"I'll try to save them. If I can't, there are always replacements. In that event he'll have to wait until he gets back to earth."

That was anything but good. They needed Gardaza nearly as much as they needed Emdee and for much the same reason. A healthy Gardaza, not a cripple.

Men were coming across the valley, summoned from the settlement by the alarm. The terrain was anything but smooth, however, and they were making poor time.

Characteristically, Emdee didn't wait. He located a spare jumpsuit somewhere in the mine and deftly pulled it on the unconscious man. Then, extending all his arms, specialized or not, he slid them gently under Gardaza. He lifted him without effort and trotted swiftly across the wasteland toward the settlement.

Doctor, a rudimentary hospital, portable pharmacy, and if necessary, an ambulance.

Berini took charge of the disorganized robots, directing them to clear away the debris and remove their injured. This year the fireworks had come before the Fourth.

"I'm in favor of asking for a replacement now," said Lindon.

"Fine," said Berini. "How's he going to get here?"

"I know it will take eight or ten months," said Lindon reflectively. "Still, I'm in favor of getting it on record. Any day the sun's due to ruin our communication. I've had trouble getting the last few messages through."

Berini hadn't thought about that, though he knew about it. Normally it was hard enough to communicate, but when earth and Mars were on opposite sides of the sun, it was impossible. The magnetic forces of the sun were tremendous and extended far out into space. "Can't we bounce a radar beam off Jupiter?" he asked. "They ought to be able to pick that up."

It had been done, once, as an experiment. Radar could be relayed from Mars to earth via a third planet more or less at right angles to both. And the logical planet, in terms of nearness and size, was Jupiter. Whether anyone on earth would think to turn the equipment in the right direction was another question.

Lindon leaned against the transmitter. "We can try it," he said. "We've got to try it. They'll have to use big stuff to pick up our signal, and naturally they're not going to tie it up just for us.

"However, we can arrange a time to transmit, maybe an hour or so each month. They ought to agree to that." Lindon sat down and tried to reach earth. The static from the sun was over-

whelming, but he did manage to punch through.

As an idea it was probably no worse than any other, thought Berini. At least it gave them the illusion that they were in touch and could summon help whenever they needed it. Actually replacements couldn't be sent to Mars until the two planets were quite close together, eight to ten months from now.

Lindon was scared though he tried not to show it; Berini knew the signs. It was all right as long as he kept it in the administrative circle. And that circle was smaller than it had been. Lindon: communication and human labor; and himself, Berini: police. There had been another member, Gardaza: robot labor and technical. But he was in no shape to attend and wouldn't be any help if he did. A small group, but all that were needed for twenty families. And a hundred robots. One hundred and one if you counted Emdee.

The confirmation from earth finally came through. They were assigned two hours each month for radar communication.

"Now what?" said Berini. They had been through this several times since Gardaza had been injured. So far they hadn't reached an agreement, and it was time they did.

"Wait and see," said Lindon.

"How can we? Someone's got

to repair the robots and Gardaza can't." The point needed no argument; without someone to make countless minor adjustments, the robot force would disintegrate. As it was, the robots that had been disabled in the same accident with Gardaza had never been repaired. And the others were growing less efficient.

The little settlement was the only one on Mars. Robots, aside from the work in the mine, also had to tend the atomic generator; they could and men couldn't. Without that generator human members of the community would have difficulty in surviving.

"Maybe something will turn up," said Lindon optimistically. The optimism was false; if pressed, he would admit it.

"As far as I'm concerned, there's only one person who can take Gardaza's place," said Berini bluntly.

"Person?" Lindon twisted his face wryly.

"A person," repeated Berini. "I can't call him anything else."

"He's good," said Lindon uncomfortably. "He's given us the kind of medical care we'd expect to find only on earth. But that doesn't alter it: he's not a person."

"Who can we get?" asked Berini. "A robot's partly mechanical, and some of us could be trained to repair that. But that leaves the rest of it, the synthetic brain and nervous system.

"First class surgery. Are you going to volunteer to dig into that brain and leave it in working condition? I don't want to try it."

"That's not the issue," said Lindon, making an effort to be objective. "Emdee is a robot, and no robot has ever been allowed to repair another or learn the details of construction. The reason for that rule is obvious and I don't intend to violate it."

"But we're isolated and this is an emergency condition."

"Precisely," answered Lindon. "We are isolated. If this were earth, a misadjusted robot could be tracked down and eliminated. But what can we do here? We're outnumbered, you know."

It wasn't simple; decisions seldom were. Nearly immune to extremes of temperature, and radiation proof, if robots ever decided they'd do better on their own, it would be hard to get them back. Mars wasn't the size of earth, but the land mass was larger and there were enough places for determined robots to hide out.

It would be a hundred years before Mars was settled, even at optimum development. With robots to offer an effective opposition, maybe it never would be.

But that reasoning left out a basic fact: Emdee. True, he had been given extra intelligence; as a doctor he'd be worthless without it. And a slip of the process

had made his mind better than anyone on earth knew.

But intelligence didn't signify he was dangerous, and every aspect of his personality that Berini had experienced argued the other way. Still —.

His thoughts were interrupted; outside someone was coming. The air was thin, but frozen ground crackled, and at night, in the absence of other noise, the sound carried a considerable distance.

They both sat there, tense and waiting. Their meetings were supposed to be free from interference. If the arrival of another person meant anything, it meant trouble. And that they didn't want; they had enough.

The door opened and Gardaza came in. Tension dissipated instantly. He shouldn't have attended, but the fact that he was there was an indication that his recovery was well advanced.

He peeled off the hotsuit and felt for a chair. He sat down contentedly and looked around. Possibly he could distinguish between the light at the far end of the room and the one directly overhead, decided Berini. Ten percent vision in one eye and none in the other.

"What's on the agenda?" asked Gardaza, attempting to be crisp and businesslike. He sounded weak.

They glanced at each other; no point in imposing their burdens

on him.

"Minor matters," said Lindon. "They're all settled. We were ready to adjourn."

"Go ahead, adjourn." The strength of Gardaza's personality was still there, though it hadn't had time to resettle comfortably in his injured body. He sighed. "It's good to be back. If it hadn't been for Emdee, I wouldn't be."

"I guess he did a good job," said Lindon.

"What do you mean, you guess?" said Gardaza, laughing, yet belligerent. "He did as well as anyone could. What more can you ask?"

Berini shook his head, but Lindon didn't notice. "Nothing, I suppose, but it's curious about your hands. It was several weeks before he amputated, you know. If he kept them that long, why couldn't he save them permanently?"

"He was hoping for a miracle," said Gardaza, definitely not friendly. "And when it didn't happen, he had to cut. At that he saved two fingers." Those two fingers fumbled nervously for a cigarette. Berini produced a light for him.

"I'm sure you're right," said Berini soothingly. "You'll be in fine shape."

"I am in fine shape," said Gardaza. "Six months after I get back to earth I'll be playing tennis and leering at pretty girls, be-

cause Emdee kept me in shape for restorative surgery. And if there were eye and limb banks on Mars, he'd operate for that too."

Berini stood up. Better cut it short before they got involved. "It's nice to have you back, Gardaza. But I see no reason to keep you up all night. Let's adjourn."

"Wait for my report," said Gardaza. "Why do you suppose I came? Just to show you I can walk?"

They stared at him. He had nothing to report. Until a few days ago he had been confined to the tiny three-bed hospital two beds vacant.

Gardaza inhaled and snuffed the last of the cigarette out. "I was worried about my job," he said. "We all know there's only one person who can take over."

"Have you discussed this with Emdee?" asked Lindon hurriedly. "If not, it might be well not to bring it up for a time."

"You kiddin'?" asked Gardaza. "Couple of weeks ago, when I saw I wasn't going to make it, I started teaching Emdee. Verbally, of course; there wasn't any other way I could do it.

"Anyway, he catches on fast, because of his past training. Right now I'd say he knows as much as I do. And before he's done, he'll know a lot more."

Gardaza yawned. "So you see, there's nothing to worry about. You've got a robot technician,

better than the one you lost." He stood up and said cheerfully: "Let's go home."

The meeting adjourned.

Months passed; the effective Martian winter was nearly an earth year long, and it was cold. For the sake of the children, and there were fourteen, two born on Mars, holidays were properly observed. The settlers clung to their customs, grim weather of Mars notwithstanding. They didn't come to Mars to give into it.

Everything proceeded according to plan or faster. Emdee took the new job in stride. Except for minor accidents, all the humans were healthy. And the work robots were generally in good condition, better than when they had been delivered from the factory, according to Gardaza.

Berini wondered whether it was true; so did Lindon. By mutual agreement they kept those doubts to themselves. The damage, if it was that, had been done and there was no way to undo it. Neither was there any point in spreading alarm.

Emdee was close to the community, perhaps too close. He enjoyed their confidence as a doctor and any suspicions imparted to the rank and file might get back to him. They were good people, all of them, but they didn't always understand the issues.

It was Lindon who first dis-

covered the deviation. Berini was skirting a desolate ravine between the settlement and the mine when Lindon came up to him. "You might be interested in this," he said, glancing behind. There was no one near. He handed Berini the work sheet for the previous day.

Berini scanned it; the statistics were simple. Total working force: one hundred robots. Number in working condition: one hundred. Number working on generator and mine: ninety-five. Number assigned to special duty: five.

Berini handed it back. "I'd say it's good," he commented. "We've seldom have ninety-five percent working."

Lindon looked at him, and he knew he'd missed the point. "It's good," agreed Lindon dryly. "But up to now I've always been asked about special assignments."

Berini rejected the obvious explanations. Emdee knew as well as anyone that Lindon was the actual head of the community and the important decisions were his to make. And five work days could account for a lot of progress, or lack of it. "What's the special assignment?" he asked.

"Emdee sent them to make an accurate survey of the rim of the valley. He said he had an idea about covering the whole valley with one way plastic sheeting. Let sunlight in, but keep heat from escaping."

"Sounds a little wild to me," said Berini, struggling up the slope.

"Oh it's feasible," said Lindon; stopping, not because of the steepness of the slope. "That's why we picked this valley. Less work to do it here than any place on Mars. Someday, when we've got a bigger population, we'll tackle it. Just now it can't be done and it doesn't take an engineer to see it." Again Lindon looked around.

"In other words, Emdee knew it too," said Berini. "Then why did he send them out?"

"That's your problem," said Lindon. "Find out. Do whatever you have to, but keep it to yourself. Emdee said they'd be gone a week." He turned and went back toward the mine.

Berini continued on. It might mean something and it might not. Lindon thought it did, and not just because some of the authority over the robots had slipped through his fingers. And whoever controlled the robots controlled the life of the community.

But Emdee didn't need that; he already had every life in his hands. He was a good enough doctor to wipe them out overnight with disease. He hadn't done so because first of all he was a doctor.

The men who had organized the expedition had known the power Emdee would have, and still they had sent him. He had

the knowledge of half a dozen specialists; no two humans plus additional equipment could take his place. It wasn't an accident that a robot had been given the task of keeping humans healthy and a human technician assigned to the robots.

On the other hand, the balance had now been upset. Berini kept thinking about it. The men who had organized the expedition hadn't been worried about Emdee. *But their lives weren't involved.*

And certainly Emdee wasn't stupid enough to waste five robots for one week on a project that wouldn't pay off for years, if it ever did.

Berini reached the assembly hall, largest building on Mars. From the outside it didn't look like much, most of it beneath the ground as protection against the cold. Among other things it housed the government of Mars. And he was the police force of that government, and the head of the army if they had to have one.

He went into the room in which the records were kept. Births, deaths, though so far there hadn't been any of the last, and more important at the moment, the complete inventory of the settlement. Hours later he gave it up as a bad job.

How much metal and explosives did it take to extend the mine shaft? And how much building material had gone into the

settlement? That depended on who used it and how. The records were not accurate enough to determine what equipment the five robots had taken with them. If he knew what they had, he could guess what they went for.

That left him the option of checking the actual supplies on hand. He rejected that for the same reason. It would tell him nothing.

That did not mean there was no way of learning. He went into his own tiny office, which was more important than the size of it indicated. It was their arsenal, a small one, but then it was a small community.

Berini selected a weapon, small and easily concealed. A work robot was larger and stronger than a man, but the little sparkler that he took would stop it.

He closed the door of the office behind him. At the far end of the assembly children were laughing and playing. That was another function of the building, especially necessary during the long Martian winter.

Emdee strode into the circle and the game broke up. He lifted a child effortlessly and sat him on his shoulder. The child squealed with delight and whispered into his ear. Others begged for an equal opportunity.

Berini went home. Emdee was popular, no doubt of it. It was not for him to decide whether

it was natural or the result of deliberate effort.

At home he was casual and discussed the minor happenings of the day with his wife. He brought up the subject of decorations, and after some discussion, volunteered to spend a few days looking for Martian plants that might be suitable. His offer was accepted.

He did not sleep well that night. He had five days in which to find the robots, and a wilderness in which to look.

Each day Berini went out into the wasteland. It was a slight chance, but the only one he had. With a helicopter he could have located them easily, but the settlement had none and wouldn't have for years. He searched on foot through the desolate, eroded valley.

Ostensibly that was not his purpose, of course, and he was careful to come home each evening with a load of small and gnarled shrubs. If Emdee noted his sudden interest in the wasteland, that was his camouflage, and it was as good as any. Above all he had to avoid suspicion and he had to get to the robots before Emdee did.

He found traces where they had been, but until the evening of the fourth day he didn't make contact. That evening, a large but light bundle of shrubs strapped to his back, he saw them in the

distance, moving down a dry watercourse.

His first impulse was to call to them. His second was to get closer before he did. The second was more realistic, so he obeyed it.

He froze in his tracks and watched them, only their heads visible above the jumble of rocks. At least two and perhaps more, he couldn't be sure in the uncertain light. He could risk a shot, but a sparkler wound in the head and that robot would give no one any information. And after that the others would run.

Once they were out of sight and he was free to move without detection, he started after them. The pack on his back hampered him, but he couldn't take time to remove it. He raced against the fading light down the twisting canyon. His chance was to come on them suddenly around a bend. If they tried to escape he could burn their legs from under them. One was all he needed.

He could not or did not gain on them. The dry watercourse ended on an open plain and they were not in sight. Across the plain he could see the lights of the settlement twinkling on. It was dark.

To the left a rock rattled down a slope. He flashed a light over it, but anything that was there stayed well hidden. He called out, but only echoes answered.

At that point he abandoned the

search; he still had the next day. Puzzling, but not conclusive proof of anything. They might have turned aside at several places he had failed to observe in the twilight.

At the settlement he unloaded the shrubs. Perhaps they were dismayed at the material he brought, but the women promptly accepted the challenge and went to work on the nondescript plants with sprays, dyes, and imagination.

Lindon was waiting for him. Berini sat down and gave a detailed account.

"They're your eyes," commented Lindon. "I'll assume you saw at least two robots out there, *this evening*."

Berini shrugged. "I did."

"Yet the survey party came in *this morning*, shortly after you checked out."

Berini looked at him. "All of them."

"Right the first time," said Lindon with gloomy satisfaction. "Only two came back. The report I have is that the other three were buried under a landslide."

Sure, he could see it. It was a good way of getting robots out of the settlement, so they wouldn't have to be accounted for. And worse, **there** was nothing they could say about it. Emdee could point out that, even with three lost, the settlement still had more functioning robots than at any

comparable time. It was those three, supposedly buried, that he had encountered in the wasteland.

"Will it do any good to question the two who came back?"

"Not at all. Emdee had cleared their memories, getting them in shape for routine work, he said. I couldn't even be sure I was questioning the same two that had gone out."

Emdee had them, very neatly, and whatever his purpose was, by now it was covered up.

"What's he trying to do?" asked Berini. He had his own ideas, but he didn't like to look squarely at them.

"We've got to be logical," said Lindon. "We've got to face the fact that in five days we'll all be relaxed and least suspicious."

"I can't believe it," he said slowly. And yet he did; he'd been thinking along the same lines.

"Why not?" asked Lindon. "What does Christmas mean to a robot? Nothing more than an opportunity to get rid of us. We'll be together, not expecting anything. And the three robots probably have enough explosives to atomize the settlement."

Berini let go the breath he'd been holding in. From now in it was his job, the protection of the community. No matter what he did it wouldn't be good. He could thwart the attack. Emdee had picked the right time, but he hadn't counted on their learning



his intentions.

After that — they'd take their chances. He himself would dig into Emdee's brain with a spoon, if he had to, attempting to straighten him out. And if that didn't work and they had no doctor left, they'd face the startling incidence of disease and accidents without one. Some would come through.

"Pick out eight other men," said Berini. "The most reliable ones. Send them to me, one at a time. I'll arm them and show them how to use their weapons." A total of ten armed men and against them a hundred robots, three of which were free to strike at any moment.

Lindon nodded, relieved that the decision was out of his hands, though he'd been instrumental in forming it. "There's another precaution," he said. "I've got spare parts and can rig up a radio transmitter. You can bury it in the wasteland, where no one will find it. I'll set it to begin transmitting in three or four months; at that time the message will get through."

That too. The next expedition shouldn't make the mistakes this one had. They still had radar, but the scheduled communication with earth was two weeks away. When that time came, there might be no human left to operate. Emdee had laid his plans deep.

Berini selected a weapon and handed it to Lindon, who examined it curiously and thrust it in his pocket. Little, but size wasn't the measure of destructiveness. Berini locked up the remainder. At least Emdee hadn't tried for these. Caution, no doubt. Missing weapons would give his plans away.

"Maybe we shouldn't wait," suggested Lindon, bolder now that he had something to be aggressive with. "Let's take Emdee now."

Berini indicated with his hand. "There are three robots out there. They'll follow orders no matter what we do. Until we can take them all we'll have to wait."

They went out into the assembly hall. Children were playing noisily. Emdee wasn't with them, but he had just left. The extra enthusiasm in their voices and the secret smiles that passed between them could have only one source.

Lindon stopped to watch; he had a kid.

Berini went on; he had no child and that was something to be thankful for. He and his wife had talked about it and decided to wait. It was good they had.

The space on rocket ships was limited, but the needs of a community like this weren't. So many things to bring, mining equipment, food, prefab housing, clothes, and all the necessary mis-

cellaneous supplies. An intangible thing had got crowded out. No room for such gay and useless things as presents; children needed vitamins and warm clothing.

They did, but with only that, something was missing, an identification with the rest of mankind. Custom was sometimes foolish, but it was that link.

Berini walked along the frozen path to the tiny structure where he lived. Nice Christmas for kids.

Lindon came up to him, pocket bulging. "Get it out of sight," said Berini.

"Who's going to notice?" asked Lindon. Nevertheless he adjusted the weapon flat and buttoned the flap over it. "Emdee's disappeared."

Berini growled. "You were supposed to keep track of him."

"How could I?" said Lindon, indicating the confusion.

It would have been difficult, even for an experienced man. The assembly hall was decorated up to the light metal cross beams. The shrubs Berini had gathered now miraculously appeared as Christmas trees, festooned with confections and lights strung over them. The women had done a good job with scanty material.

Kids ran from one tree to another and exclaimed over the mysterious packages on them, packages of clothing and visually reconstituted fruit that tasted like

the dehydrated pulp from which they had been made. Women smiled and let them romp.

Only a few knew the real situation, and those men who did attempted to keep the strain from showing on their faces while they quietly occupied strategic positions near the doorways. All the help they were going to get was ready, and though Emdee had eluded them, he didn't know that they were prepared.

"Got any idea where he is?" asked Berini.

"Not in the assembly hall. As soon as I missed him I looked."

Berini gave orders and quietly slipped into a hotsuit and went outside. Emdee was near, that was certain, as certain as the evidence that he had organized the conspiracy. Find him and the center of the plot was uncovered.

He wasn't inside, and that meant he had to be outside. Only one thing he could be waiting for, the arrival of the three robots that he, Berini, had encountered that evening in the wasteland. That had something to do with it. Just what Berini wasn't sure.

He fingered the sparkler. It would take care of a work robot, but would it be effective against Emdee?

The medical robot wasn't tall, five ten or so, but he was massive and he weighed fifteen hundred pounds. A great barrel-shaped body and he needed every cubic

inch of it to house the multitude of medical functions. A direct hit might not stop him and his momentum was enough to crush a man.

Sparkler in hand Berini slipped around the corner of the assembly hall. Except for himself, all humans were inside. One crude bomb and they were done for. It was dangerous, but he hadn't counted on Emdee getting out, and any other course would have aroused suspicion. Now it was up to him.

As quietly as he could, Berini circled the building. Faint sounds came through the walls; he shook them out of his mind. They interfered with his chances of locating Emdee, but it wasn't altogether bad, it would also cover the noise he made.

Nothing but the blackness of Mars and bright stars overhead. Three quarters of the way around the building and he saw some of the stars blotted out. He aimed the sparkler at the dim shape and let it cough once, politely.

He saw the faint glow where it hit, in the middle of the robot body. Instantly he closed his eyes, but the fierce light shone through. He could feel heat penetrating his hotsuit.

He counted the prescribed fifteen seconds and opened his eyes. Where minute particles of the bullet had rubbed against the wound, there was a glowing spot

as big as his hand. The glow faded before he could get to the body.

He crept up to it, seized it by a leg, and dragged it behind a boulder. Shielding the light, he flashed it over the robot. It was one of the missing ones, scratched and battered from the time spent in the wasteland.

The eyes fluttered open and the bent arm fumbled grotesquely toward its back. "Tell Emdee —" the robot whispered, recognizing him. The sentence was never completed. This was one robot that Emdee couldn't count on.

Berini stared at it puzzledly. There had been no malice, no guilt in those eyes. Was it possible he and Lindon had misinterpreted?

On the back of the dead robot was a clue of course. A pack of some sort, but before he could examine it, a loud shout came from inside the assembly hall.

Berini jumped up. The robot he had intercepted had been the last to arrive. But apparently the other two had brought enough, and so Emdee hadn't waited, and he was now inside.

He ran for the door and broke in, sparkler in hand. No one noticed the interruption and no one turned around to look.

Berini put the sparkler away. There, at the far end of the room, against the imitation fireplace, was a familiar figure.

"It's been a long way," boomed

the great voice. "But I didn't forget you just because you were on Mars. I hitched a ride on the tail of a comet."

It was Emdee, and it was also someone far older.

"Now children," said Santa Claus, and he was perfect down to the red suit and white beard. He reached into the two packs on his back. Two packs, and there should have been three.

Again the sound that Berini had heard outside. A great murmur of childish awe and wonder.

Lindon's daughter came running up to Berini. "See what I got," she yelled, thrusting it into his hand and running back for

more.

It was a doll, like none he had ever seen. But then, it was the first made by a robot to his own specifications. Working under difficult conditions, all the robot had had to guide him were the impressions that came through his eyes. This was the way a human looked to him.

The doll was something like an angel.

Berini stood there, holding the plaything in his hand. At first the words of the song stuck in his throat, but they finally came out. "Peace on Mars, goodwill to men."

THE END

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