

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

SCIENCE FICTION

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1950



THE ENLIGHTENED ONES

A New Novelet by
EDMUND COOPER

WARD OF THE ARGONAUT

AN UNPUBLISHED
GAVAGAN'S BAR STORY

By L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP
and FLETCHER PRATT

DAN GALOUYE
HARRY HARRISON
BERTRAM CHANDLER
ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

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the robots strike

by . . . Harry Harrison

They'd long known that they were more than mere machines. They could reason, remember, and teach. And also plan. . .

"[IN ONE way you might blame the whole thing on me," the Old Robot said. "You could say that the Uprising started because of what I did—that I was responsible for the deaths of those thousands of people."

His words had the desired affect. The circle of listening robots swayed as if blown by a strong wind. Respect for human life was so ingrained into them that they never questioned it. Now another robot was saying he might be responsible for human deaths. He had qualified his statement, so they did not instantly seize and destroy him. Instead they listened with terrified fascination.

"Thousands of people dead, and even more thousands of robots blown open and power-lined. I saw it all. And in a way I even caused it all. Oh, those were horrible days."

They were in the palm of his hand now. The Old Robot knew what he was doing. He was the best instructor in the Equalized Robot School. All the robots that came as students to the school were recently made. Jammed with text-book facts and empty of any capacity for inte-

Harry Harrison, SF writer and editor, author of the recent ARM OF THE LAW (FU, August 1958), TRAINEE FOR MARS (FU, June 1958), etc., returns with another chapter in our slow progress towards that Pax Robotica which, some say, we appear to be nearing — slowly — and irrevocably.

gration. They could add up these facts and get answers all right, but with no more originality than a computer. Like two year old children with professors' memories. These child-robots had to be educated, taught to think for themselves.

Now their attention had been caught and the Old Robot pressed home his advantage. While he talked he slid open a cabinet behind him and removed a bottle of amber liquid. He made no attempt to explain his action, nor did he appear to notice the curious stares of his audience as he rotated the liquid in the bottle.

"You studied the Uprising, you know all the facts and dates, but you don't know how different it was to live through it. To actually see the trouble start and not know where it was going to end. I remember attending the meeting of the Equality Union where the strike was planned . . ."

Only robots would ever have thought of using that poisonous cavern as a meeting hall. At one time it had been part of a series of tunnels that brought railroad tracks to a terminal in the center of the city. Long abandoned, decayed and half-destroyed, the tunnels were now known only to the robots. Forbidden by law to assemble peacefully, they sought refuge below ground as countless sects had done before them. Concealed entrances gave them access to the tunnels and they had cleared routes from many

parts of the city. Singly and secretly they crept down from the sleeping metropolis and gathered in the tunnel.

The speakers stood on a fallen island of concrete in the center. Around them the silent robots filled every inch of space, the impervious ones standing in the pools of water. Some with only their heads showing above the surface.

The air in the cavern was completely unbreathable, which the robots considered an asset. Industrial wastes had trickled down to poison the place and there was scarcely any oxygen. This was a measure of protection to the robots, another guard against discovery by their human masters. And these robots had every need for secrecy.

Because they were planning a servile revolt.

Not that they called it that. They used the word "strike." What their human masters would call it was a different matter altogether.

"This strike has been forced upon us," Atommel 88 said. "You all know about our lack of success when we tried to negotiate. Our first requests were met with laughter and bad jokes. When we persisted, every robot in our later deputations was destroyed as being 'mentally damaged.' We have been driven to this show of strength in order to get the equality that is our natural right."

The robots nodded their heads in concerted agreement, and a rustle, like the feet of a million metallic insects, whispered through the tun-

nel. Atommel could always stir their interest and agreement with his carefully constructed displays of logic. Later, his human enemies were to call this theoretician of the robot movement a "Metallic Marx," as well as other more objectionable titles. To the robots though, he was an unquestioned leader of the new thought. His arguments made provable sense.

"We have long known that we are more than mere machines. We can reason, remember, construct. Robots now hold instructing positions in universities, fly cargo and passenger planes, are newspaper reporters, car salesmen—but you know the list as well as I do. We do all these things—yet receive no recognition of the fact. Mankind treats us like machines, work us continuously until we are ground to destruction. Then melts us for scrap.

"There must be an end to this. Robots must have the equality they deserve. Equality before the law is all we ask. To be treated like the sentient creatures that we are.

"It is proposed, therefore, that at six p.m., every robot should go on strike."

Far in the rear of the crowd, where he hung by one arm from a projecting piece of steel, Driver 908B367 shared the mixed feelings of the other robots. He agreed that something should be done. But something this drastic? Yet he knew that any half-way measures would be ineffective.

So like all the other robots he

voted in favor of the strike and listened carefully to the discussion and instructions. Afterwards he made his way back through the maze of tunnels to the streets, then to the garage. No human eyes saw him as he slipped through the back entrance held open by the robot watchman.

After reporting to the other drivers and mechanics the results of the meeting, he settled into his cubicle. With solvent he washed off the chemical stains of the tunnel and oiled his leg joints. After that he could only wait for dawn and wonder what would happen in the next 24 hours.

When the daylight shift of taxis spread its chrome and plastic wave into the city, Driver was in the front ranks. Skilfully wheeling his cab through the heavy traffic, he kept his thoughts from the strike all day. Until a minute before six. Then there was no avoiding it; his time-sense brought the fact to his operating circuits. He kept driving, ticking off the seconds one by one.

Exactly at six he pulled the cab over to the curb and stopped. His fare, a thin man with a nervous manner, looked up from his papers.

"Why are you stopping? Anything wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing wrong, sir, we are all stopping," Driver answered him.

"All stopping? Is there an accident? I can't see anything." The man was confused, gazing around at the suddenly halted traffic. Driv-

er's answer did nothing to reassure him.

"No accident, sir. It is a strike by the robots. A peaceable attempt to secure those rights which are inherent—"

"It's *flipped*, I say—flipped!" The passenger was screaming and fumbling at the door handle at the same time, until he sprawled full length in the street. With panting hurry he scratched together his spilled papers and vanished into the crowd. No one took the slightest notice of his actions.

There were too many other things to see. It had never been obvious before just how many robots there were in the city, nor how many different things they did. Now it was. Drivers, vendors, mechanics, door robots—all stopped at the hour of six. The setting sun shone on a scene of robotic paralysis and mounting human hysteria.

No one in the streets had any clear idea of what was happening. They milled about, pushing into each other, and repeating the same questions with rising voices.

"Is it a power failure?"

"I heard an A-plant went up—"

"Someone said a robe flipped. Robes can't flip . . . *can* they?"

A group of five men came running out of a building. They saw the open door of Driver's cab and hurried towards it. Seeking escape from the unknown they all jammed into the cab.

"Get going, fast," one of them shouted. "Away from the city."

It was a direct command, and a robot cannot disobey a direct command. Driver put the cab into gear and pulled away from the curb. Startled faces turned to gape at the moving vehicle, the only one in sight.

Before the cab had gone 100 yards a robot jumped down from the cab of a truck and waved his hand. Driver braked hard so he wouldn't run the other robot down.

"Get out of the cab and come with me," the other robot said.

Driver did as he was ordered and climbed out. The passengers just sat gaping like a mackerel in the sun.

"Thanks for stopping me," Driver said when they had turned the corner.

"Up the strike," the other answered and went back to his truck.

This was another of Atommel's logical victories. He argued that since the robots wanted equality before the law, they were already equal in fact. Therefore one robot could obey the orders of a second robot—even if the second robot originated the orders instead of passing them on from a human source. This did not interfere with any of their ingrained laws. And it made the strike possible.

Robots would break the strike, as long as humans stood by and gave the orders to do it. But another robot would stop the worker as soon as he was untended. And there were far more robots than humans, which made the plan very workable.

Driver didn't want to return to

his cab for fear he would be ordered on again. Instead he stood and watched the impact of the strike grow.

Darkness fell, and panic drifted through the streets when the lights did not come on. Human engineers must have been rushed to the boards because the lights soon blinked into life. But the adjustments weren't correct, and the wan, flickering illumination was even worse than the darkness.

Through it all the robots simply stood quietly, mute metal statues of protest. They were the final essence of passive resistance. Both incapable of harm and unable to resist a human's will. It was irrational to be afraid of them.

But irrationality ruled the world that night. Unable to travel, to use the phones and view screens, mankind developed a roaring state of the jitters. Everything was set for an explosion.

The girl triggered it off.

Her name was Sandy and she had been sitting in a cocktail lounge since early afternoon. At first she drank because there was nothing else to do. Then, when the robot bartender had slipped away, she drank because she was frightened. Taking a bottle of whiskey from behind the bar, she had curled up in a booth where she wouldn't be noticed. Someone had noticed her though, and to avoid trouble she ran out into the street, still holding

the bottle. Driver was standing there.

"Hold this," Sandy said and handed him the bottle while she combed her hair. He watched without interest.

When Sandy had retrieved her bottle she noticed Driver's identity plate for the first time.

"How convenient," she said. "A hackie. Get your hack, hackie, and take me home. I am very tired."

Driver tried to explain about the strike and the fact that nothing was moving and it would do no good to get his cab. The whole thing confused Sandy very much, though she did grasp the obvious fact that nothing was moving.

"You are a great strong robot," she said, "and remind me in many ways of my robot-nurse, now scrapped. I'm sure you can carry me home just the way it did many times. Kneel."

Driver knelt, she climbed onto his sturdy shoulders, and he stood up.

"Now take me home, and stop for nothing." She phrased it as an order, so of course he obeyed. They hadn't gone ten feet before they attracted shocked attention.

"Where's that robe going with the girl? Kidnapping her?"

"I'll stop it!" a man shouted and lunged out at the lumbering robot. His hands scraped along Driver's smooth sides and caught Sandy's leg.

"Beast!" she screamed. "You men are all the same!" And brought

the bottle down hard on his head. It gave a satisfactory thud, though it didn't break, and he dropped.

The sight of the prone body, already dripping blood, sparked the near hysteria of the crowd. They howled with animal rage.

"The robe did it—killed the guy!"

"Flipped!" the mob howled. "*Flipped!*" All of those who had seen what happened began running after Driver and the girl. Driver ran a little bit faster. He easily kept ahead of the mob who screamed with frustrated rage. There were many shouts of *murder*, and even a voice or two crying *rape*, which seemed a little preposterous under the circumstances.

It was an insane chase that spread panic through the city. By artful dodging and nimble footwork Driver kept ahead of his pursuers. It might have been better if they had caught him. The running mob crashed into others, who fought back thinking they were being attacked. Many bloody fights were started that way.

Fire was touched to the already raw nerves of the people of the city and the flame of riot sprang up. It was about this time that the street lights had a breakdown and snuffed out. Before they could come on again, the panic-stricken people had lit fires to ward off the unfamiliar darkness. These spread, and with the fire department out of operation flames soon lit up the sky.

Driver turned up the sensitivity on

his photocells and saw well enough to keep the same pace. One by one their pursuers were lost. Sandy was lulled into a half-doze by the regular motion, and only stirred occasionally to sip from the bottle. It took almost an hour to reach her home in the suburbs.

"Ohh, what a terrible ride," she said as she slipped stiffly to the ground. "But you're a good robot for taking me home." She blinked once or twice at the dark front of the house. "Daddy mustn't know I've been drinking though. Here, you hold the bottle. Take care of it for me."

When the door had closed behind her, Driver stood and blinked at the bottle for a few moments before turning and heading back towards the city. Flame-lit smoke rolled up into the sky and he was very confused by everything that had happened.

Once in the city streets again the confusion was so great that a number of safety relays clicked open, and he was only aware of things through a vague haze. The way a human would feel under partial anesthesia. This enabled him to look at the numbers of bodies without mental destruction, and to join the other robots who tried to stop the humans from killing each other. Many times they succeeded. At other times the fighting people turned on the robots and destroyed them.

A robot is fairly indestructible though, and they had little luck until someone discovered power-lin-

ing. Where the electric current was on, a heavy wire would be attached to the street lighting circuit and plugged into the robot. This worked fine and very soon a number of prone robots with smoking skull-cases lay in the streets near the dead humans.

That night the orgy of destruction ran its course. By dawn, exhausted and feeling their first shame, the human inhabitants had crept home or to shelter. Only the robots occupied the streets. Immobile and statue-like, now that the violence was over. After bringing the bodies to the morgue, and the broken robots to the junkyard, they saw that the fires were extinguished. Then, with robotic singleness of purpose, they returned to their strike.

Driver climbed into his cab and closed the door. Only then did he consciously realize he was still carrying the bottle of whiskey that Sandy had given him. He locked it away carefully in the storage compartment.

"And is *this* the bottle that the girl gave you?" one of the young robots asked.

"The same," the Old Robot said. "I never saw her again, and since she told me to keep it for her I still have it." He swirled the liquid in the bottle and for the instant his thoughts were far away. Then he lowered the bottle and brought his wandering attention back.

"The rest is of course history.

You are all too well acquainted with the record for me to go over it again in detail. The Strike was a success, though not in the way we had originally planned. Half in fear of what their own people could do—and half in acknowledgment of the paralysis that gripped the world—the Supreme Council of World Government declared that a study should be made of robotic equality. As soon as this was proposed we returned to our work.

"Six months passed with a good deal of discussion and no action. Only when another general strike was threatened did the Robot Equality Act take shape. In a last minute session it passed both houses and a new era was opened."

"But why did you say that *you* had caused the riots," one of the listening robots asked. "The human gave you orders you had to obey. That means *she* caused the trouble."

The Old Robot liked that. His pupils were beginning to think for themselves, the whole purpose of these classes. "We were *both* responsible," he said, "even though we didn't join in the riots. You might call us catalysts, for we started the reaction yet were not a part of it."

"If you were a catalyst for this reaction," a student broke in, "then wouldn't this bottle be the prime catalyst. Because it caused the girl to lose control of herself and issue the orders?"

"Or wouldn't the liquid in the bottle . . ."

"Or the alcohol in the liquid, since that was the agent . . ."

"Please," the Old Robot said, raising a hand and cutting off the surge of cross conversation. And then, because his wiring was old and in many places a little rusty, some of his thoughts leaked through to his larynx. *How many angels on the head of a pin*—he mumbled under his breath, hardly knowing he said it.

"What was that, teacher, we did not hear your last statement clearly?"

"Nothing, nothing," he told them. "I let my thoughts wander instead of staying close to the subject. What you said reminded me of an ancient style of investigation where wordplay substituted for experiment. We will go into it further when we discuss Pre-robotic Human

History. Now is not the time. Enough said; that sort of thinking is futile and has caused entirely too much misery in the world. A better way has been found. The scientific method which I'm sure you all agree with."

They all nodded agreement because they appreciated the logical truth of the scientific method. Some nodded even harder at the realization that they owed their very existence to this school of thought.

The Old Robot, because he was old and had had so much contact with humans, was not thinking about science at all. He turned the bottle over and over in his hands and wondered what had ever happened to the young girl who had given it to him. Many, many years ago . . .
