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# BILL of RIGHTS, 5000 A.D.

By John York Cabot

There was Truth on that ancient scroll! And it inspired Shar to defy his masters, fight for freedom.

## FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

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Shar had never seen the sky. Like the thousands and thousands of his fellow toilers who were born and lived and died in the vast, underground labyrinthine cities of Earth, Shar didn't know of the sky. Shar knew little of anything except the Supreme State—and his Task.

There was a world above him, Shar knew that. Now and then—perhaps twice a year—visitors from that world came down to inspect the mines and factories in which Shar and his fellows labored.

Shar toiled in the mines, and sometimes in the middle of his digging he had looked up furtively as these visitors passed. Then after they had gone he would make up fanciful stories about them in his mind—even though he knew it was dangerous to wonder and that only work was right.

Shar's flights of imagination concerning that upper world were never wistful, and only were ignited by a tiny spark of curiosity in the back of his mind. However, he kept this spark of curiosity strictly to himself, for he had been taught that anything not concerning his Task and its relation to the Supreme State was bad.

The punishment of those who would sabotage the State was swift, and just, and somewhat terrible. Shar shuddered when he remembered some of the whispered rumors of that punishment, and how it had been administered to those who had been ungrateful to the Supreme State.

So Shar kept to his Task, and remained grateful to the Supreme State. For did not the State give him his work? And did not the State supply him with clothes, and food pills, and a compartment in the general compound for him to use for sleep?

The State gave much, Shar knew this, and asked in return only complete concentration on his Task. The State had let Shar marry, and bring his wife to his compartment for a month each year. And the State provided for the children of that union, seeing that they were raised and educated to their Task. Shar had never seen his children, for, of course, the State had assumed immediate responsibility for them. But he was grateful in the knowledge that they would always have compartments, and clothing, and food pills, and Tasks.

So Shar labored diligently at his digging and remained useful and grateful, as the words in the State pamphlets told him to, and tried to keep his curiosity in check. Until The Day.

Shar was a spiritless slave—until he found the mysterious box and read the message—and knew what it said was true.
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On the morning of The Day, Shar had been digging alone at the end of a faintly illuminated tunnel. Digging stolidly and concentrating on his Task—until his shovel encountered an oddly hard substance. When he bent over, probing his calloused fingers into the damp clay beneath his feet, he felt something smooth and cold and hard.

Shar frowned, and squinted in the faint light, as he bent down to pick this strange object up in his hands.

It was small, the object, and as he chipped away the clay that covered it, he began to recognize it as a box. For an instant he wondered if he should summon one of the Watchers and turn it over to him. But in the next instant he decided against this, for that spark of curiosity burned in the back of his mind.

"See what it means, Shar," a tiny voice inside him was insisting. "See what it means, first."

Unaccountably, Shar's heart began to thump quickly and sweat broke out on his brow. Furtively, he looked down the long tunnel. There were no Watchers in sight. Then—even though he knew it to be wrong—Shar turned back to the box.

His first efforts to open it were fruitless. But by finally putting the box on the ground and prying it open with his shovel tip, Shar managed to snap the catch that held the lid. His hammering heart told him that he was taking a great chance, as he bent to pick up the open box, but his curiosity was now a flame over which he no longer had control.

Shar's hands shook as he lifted the box and breathlessly peered into it. And then he was filled with a sudden anger and sharp disappointment as his eyes took in the contents. He was about to hurl the box back to the ground thinking of covering it over again with clay so that his crime would not be discovered. That was when his eyes suddenly narrowed, peering closer at the contents, puzzledly.

He didn't hurl the box to the ground. He sat down, unconscious of the risk he ran if a Watcher found him that way, and leaned against the wall. He held the contents of the box in his gnarled paws, regarding them intently, utterly absorbed.

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And so it was that Shar was apprehended by the Watchers some four hours later. But he was not caught in the tunnel assigned to him. He was not caught sitting alongside his shovel with the contents of the box in his hands. He was caught several miles away from there, shouting wildly to other tunnel toilers in other shafts.

He was tracked down only after his words had been carried to many others of his fellows—who in turn breathed them through the underground labyrinths, echoing them endlessly onward.

And thus it was that Shar—shackled and beaten—was taken by Guards into the World Above, and for the first time saw the sky. Saw the sky, and other things which he had never dreamed existed—huge buildings, tubes shooting through the air, and many people whose faces did not bear the pallor of the underworld. Until at last he was led into a gigantic hall, and pushed stumbling before a great dais on which ten men sat.

"The traitorous prisoner!" Shar's guards announced, their words ringing loudly in the vast hall.

Then one of the men on the dais was speaking, and Shar noted that he was like the others in this Above World—like the visitors who had sometimes inspected the mines.

"This is the undercreature accused of treason to the Supreme State?" The man on the dais asked. "This is the man who carried words of lies to his fellows?" And Shar heard the guards answer affirmatively.

Then, to Shar, the man on the dais said:

"You have sabotaged the State, and are here to be sentenced for your crime!"

But Shar, even to his own surprise, did not cringe, did not tremble. He held his head high, and his words were strong as he answered. "I have a right—" he began.

But Shar never completed those words.

His last impression was one of terrible pain, and he slumped to the floor seconds after his guards crushed his skull with their merciless blows. And then, while they stood breathing heavily over the lifeless body of the creature from the underworld, the man on the dais addressed the guards.

"You acted wisely, justly, and swiftly in silencing those treasonable words," the man on the great dais said. Then, as in afterthought: "This is the first breath of treason in three thousand years. Have you the evidence that you were to present?"

And then the guard closest to the dais stepped forward. In his hands he held papers, yellowed and dry. The man on the dais took them wordlessly, glancing at the ancient lettering upon them.

"*We hold these rights,*" the script on the yellowed sheets read, "*to be self-evident: that all men are created equal—*" the man on the dais paused, his face whitening. Then he read on: "*That they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are, Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.*"

Purpling with rage, the man on the great dais rose, tearing the yellowed sheets again and again, while the guards trembled at his wrath ...

But deep in the bowels of the underworld, creatures like Shar were echoing those words along the dim, labyrinthine cities. And the murmur was swelling ... swelling.

[The end of *Bill of Rights 5.000 AD* by John York Cabot]