

"The Case of Charles Dexter Ward"—**LOVECRAFT**
NOVEL

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Weird Tales

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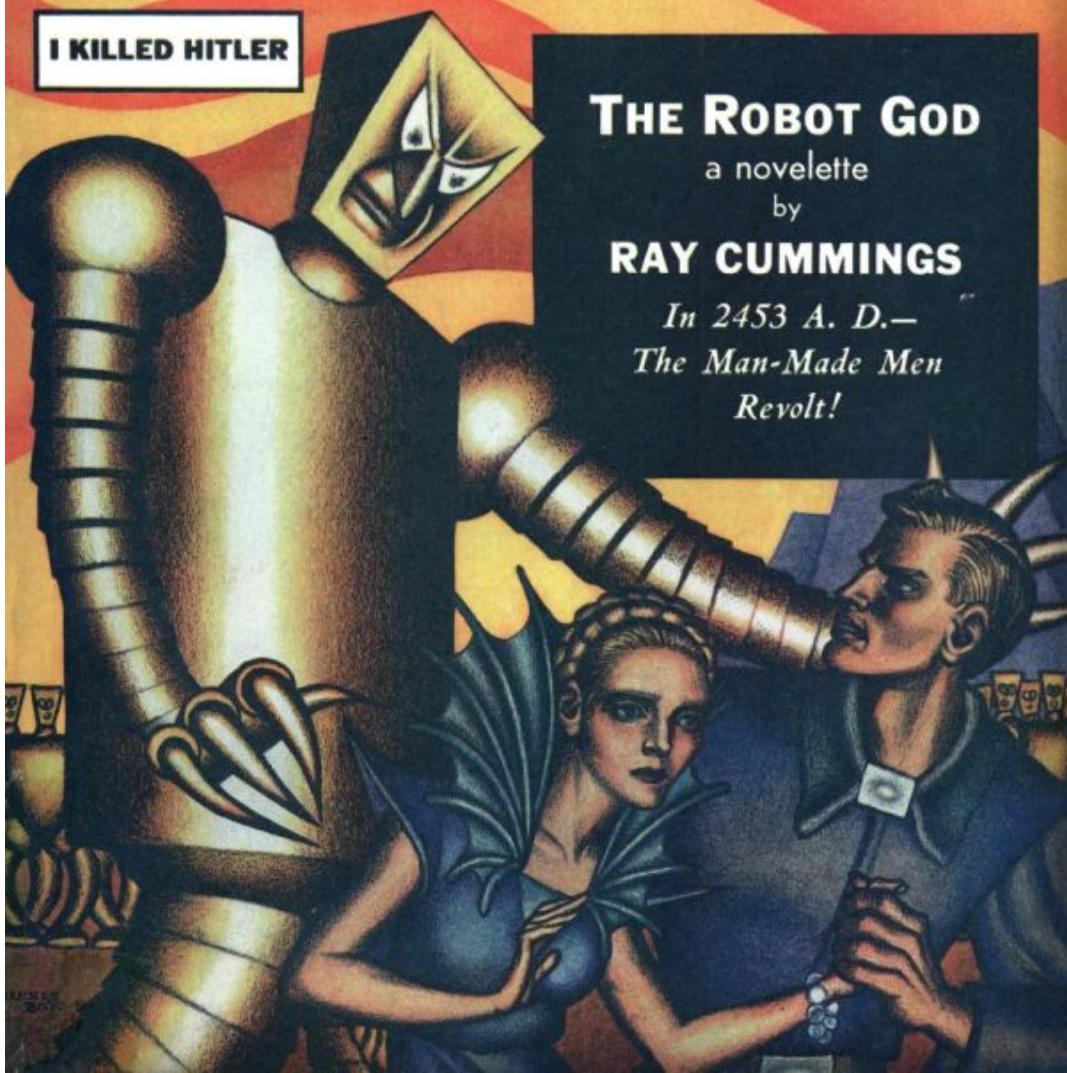
THE ROBOT GOD

a novelette

by

RAY CUMMINGS

*In 2453 A. D.—
The Man-Made Men
Revolt!*



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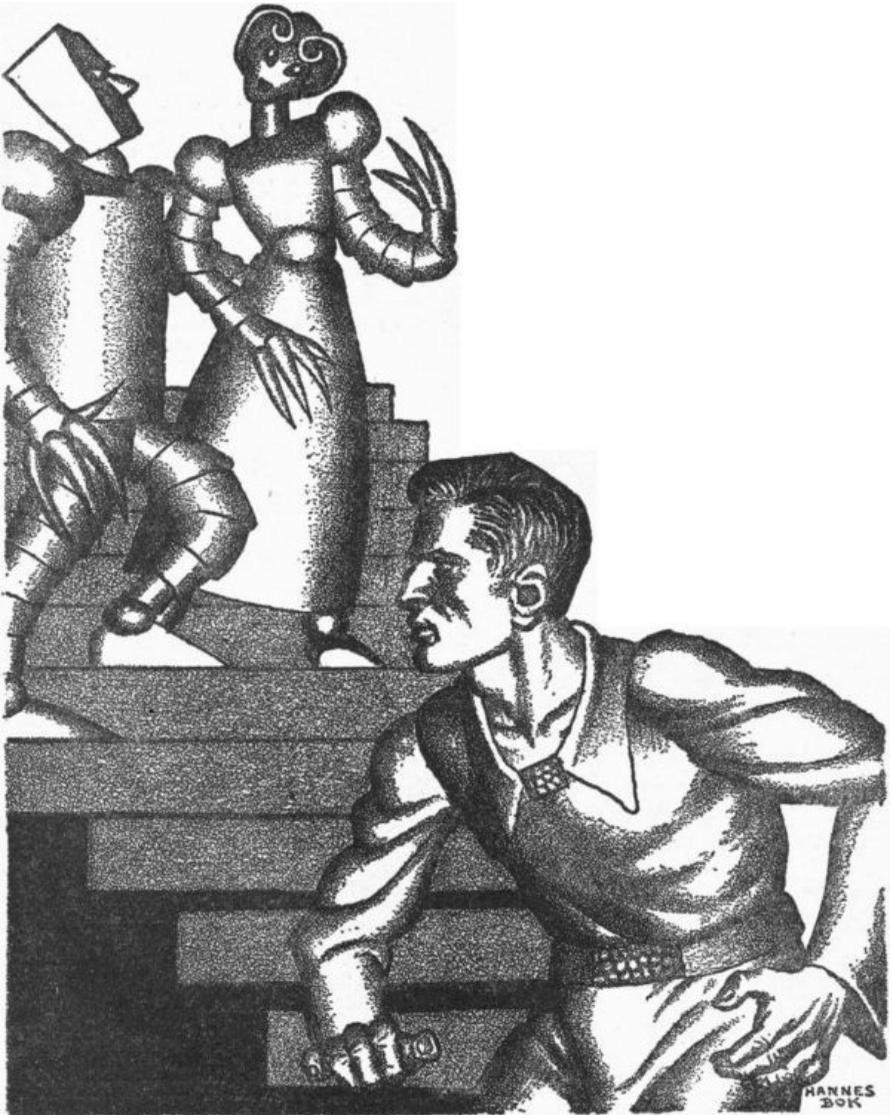
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“Thor’s hollow, commanding voice rang out—first in one language, then in another . . . the Great God of the Machine introducing his Goddess!”

The Robot God

By

RAY CUMMINGS

Illustrations by Hannes Bok.

First published *Weird Tales*, July 1941.

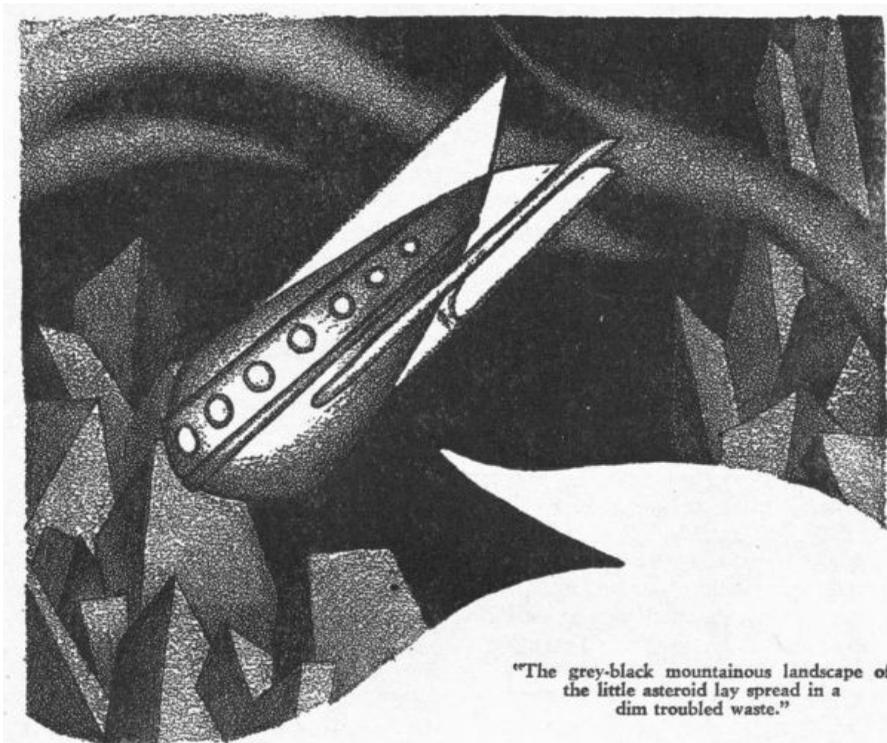
The Golden God ruled a nation of walking nightmare statues—machines with lust and murder in their hearts!

CHAPTER I

Voyage of Doom

To young George Carter the girl seemed more beautiful tonight than he had ever seen her. The shine of spacelight was in her eyes—soft pale-blue glow of the million million starry worlds. It filtered down through the overhead glassite dome of the little space-liner, bathing him and her in its soft effulgence.

“‘Flinging back a million starglints,’” he quoted softly, “‘the depths of space remind me of thine eyes.’ That’s literally true, tonight, Dierdre.”



“The grey-black mountainous landscape of the little asteroid lay spread in a dim troubled waste.”

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The *Starfield Queen* was a day out from Earth on its voyage to Ferrok Shahn, capital of the Martian Union. By Earth-time it was August, 2453 A.D. By ship’s routine the time could be called mid-evening—an hour or two after the passengers and crew of the little liner had had their evening meal. Still within the giant cone of the Earth’s shadow the great black firmament blazed with its myriad white worlds. It was an awe-inspiring sight to Carter—his first voyage out of the Earth’s stratosphere. He was a big, rather handsome blond fellow in his early twenties. An Anglo-American Mining chemist; and his company was sending him now on a prospecting trip to Mars.

The girl laughed; a little ripple of silver laughter. But to Carter, somehow it seemed forced. He had known Dierdre Dynne about a year. She was traveling now to Mars with her father; only by chance had they both taken this voyage on the *Starfield Queen*.

And there was something, now, about her that was abnormal. He had noticed it at once. A restlessness; a vague uneasiness?

He stared into her blue eyes, where the starshine was mirrored. Was it terror there, glowing in the limpid depths? They were on the upper deck of the hundred foot spaceship—an oblong space on the superstructure roof, with the glassite pressure dome close over them. Behind them, beyond the stern-peak, the great dull-red ball of Earth, with the cone of its giant shadow streaming out here from it, filled a quadrant of the heavens.

For a moment silent, he gazed at Dierdre, who was stretched beside him in her padded deck chair. Slim, beautiful little figure in gray-blue traveling trousers, blue blouse with white neck ruff; and her blond hair, pale as spun gold, braided and coiled on her head. The small platinum ornaments that dangled from her bare arms clinked as with nervous fingers she toyed with them.

He said suddenly, "What's the matter with you, Dierdre?"

"Matter with me?"

It was terror in her eyes. No question of it now. He leaned toward her. The little starlit deck space up here at the moment seemed empty—a few deck chairs scattered about, and squat metal vents of the ventilators and air-pressure mechanisms. No one seemed here. But he lowered his voice.

"Something is worrying you," he insisted. And then he smiled. "All right—but I asked you a while ago and you didn't answer. Why are you and your father going to Mars?"

Her jeweled hand went out and touched his arm. "I guess I—will tell you, George," she murmured. She was suddenly breathless. "You know, of course—these last few years, several space-liners have vanished. Just—never heard of again—"

Five passenger ships, enroute between Earth, Venus and Mars, mysteriously had been lost. He knew that, of course. Little space-vehicles in commercial service—like this *Starfield Queen*—equipped with radio-helio and every modern safety device—just vanishing. And now, of course she was timid, here on her first voyage—

"Oh," he said. "Well, I don't blame you. But nothing is going to happen to us."

"No, it's more than that, George. Father's on his way to Ferrok Shahn to consult with some of the Martian Robot Manufacturer's. You see, what you don't know—what naturally has never been made public—"

He stared, silent, as she told him. Her father, Dr. Ely Dynne, was a retired Robot Manufacturer. A man in his sixties now; and it was his genius which had developed these weird mechanisms in the guise of humans. The Dynne domestic-servant robots were known throughout all three of the inhabited worlds. Amazing mechanisms, built to perform almost every human task, with almost human intelligence—and with tireless machine precision. Machines that could talk, could think and thus have independent uncontrolled action—machines with a memory-scroll, thus to remember a task done, so that it might be done again without command—

Back in the Twentieth Century, robot-building had started. And since then had come four hundred years of the slow patient development of scientific genius. And Ely Dynne, with a

lifetime of work had crossed the line from mechanical perfection into pseudo-human action, so that the Dynne Robot Factories in Great New York were now the largest on Earth.

All this Carter knew, of course. But now Dierdre Dynne was murmuring:

“The Robot Industries—Earth, Mars and Venus—they had to keep it secret, George. But these space-ships that have disappeared—father has been worried that perhaps the—the robots on them may have—gotten deranged. We had one do that, in the factory training ground, not so long ago. Something went wrong—a big forty thousand gold-dollar model. It—it ran amok—had to be—smashed—”

She suddenly checked herself. Carter tensed. In the quiet of the vibrationless starlit deck there was a faint clanking footstep, and a metal figure appeared coming toward them. It was one of the Dynne domestic-service robots in use here as a steward. The spacelight gleamed on its alumite body—square-shouldered metal torso, tubular jointed legs. It was rather a small model; five and a half feet tall. Its round metal head, with square box-like face of pseudo-human features, bore a peaked metal cap, emblazoned with the insignia of the space-line.

Carter and the girl sat silent as it clanked forward. To Carter, all domestic-servant robots were weird, somewhat gruesome things. He had never quite gotten used to them. And with what Dierdre had told him now—these weird machines thinking for themselves—thinking thoughts of rebellion—thought perhaps of murder—he found himself tense with a shudder.

The little robot came and stood balanced on its wide-base metal shoes. Its electroid eyes, dull round grids of green-glowing light, swept him and Dierdre. Its voice, soft, hollow with mechanical resonance, said obsequiously:

“You will have refreshments served here, Miss Dynne? The captain ordered me.”

On the nameplate of its bulging metal chest beside the fuse-box, its factory serial number was engraved: “Dynne Mfg. Co. 4-41-42-4.” And under it the machine’s standardized nickname: “Tom-4.”

Dierdre silently shook her head. Carter said: “No thank you, go.”

Weird green eyegrids were staring at him. Was he foolish that suddenly it seemed that he was seeing a menace there? For an instant the robot hesitated. In the silence the faint hiss of its interior current was audible. Then there was a tiny click of the automatic response grid within its skull.

The voice said:

“Thank you.” The body bent at the waist-joint—grotesque gesture of servility as it turned and clanked away.

“Well—” Carter murmured. “Dierdre, listen—what you were saying—”

“There comes father—and that Martian,” she murmured. “I’ll tell you later.”

Dr. Ely Dynne was small, wirey, thin-faced. His thin figure showed in the starlight as he came up a side companion ladder from the *Starfield Queen’s* little lower side deck, between the superstructure and the outer enclosing pressure hull. Behind him was the towering, swaggering figure of one of the Martian passengers. Set Maak. Carter had already met him—apparently wealthy space-traveler, bent only on pleasure. A well-educated fellow; he spoke English fluently. His guttural voice sounded as he and Dr. Dynne came forward.

“Ah, Miss Dynne—the beautiful little Earth-goddess. We were looking to find you. A wonderful night, Miss Dynne.”

Grudgingly Carter shifted aside as Set Maak opened two other chairs. Like most Martians he was a towering fellow. Heavy-featured, swarthy skin. He wore the familiar brown-suede jacket and short flaring trousers of the Martian garb, out of which his legs showed as great

pillars of hairy strength. He tossed his plumed hat aside and drew his brown-skin cloak around him.

“The little Earth-girl is quiet,” he proclaimed presently. “Not afraid that the mysterious space-bandits will get us, Miss Dynne?”

“No,” Dierdre murmured. Carter saw her exchange a glance with her father. Dynne said:

“Space bandits! Is that what Interplanetary travelers generally figure caused those disappearances?”

“Of course. Why not?” The big Martian laughed. “What else could it be? Not—disaster from within the ships themselves?”

The beautiful little Dierdre Dynne seemed a magnet for men. Two others came now to join the starlit group. One of them was young Peter Barry, with whom Carter was making this trip to Mars. He was Carter’s assistant in the Anglo-American Mining Company—a year younger than Carter. They had been close friends for many years—perhaps because they were such different types—Carter tall, blond, athletic with the look of a Viking; and Barry a smallish, red-headed, freckled fellow. Wirey, pugnacious, always with a ready laugh and sly wit. But he wasn’t laughing now. As he and his companion drew up chairs and joined the group, he shifted next to Carter. And in a moment he murmured:

“Something queer here on board, George. This voyage—the crew are all frightened. Something weird—”

This voyage! Was that what Dierdre wanted to tell him? This particular voyage of the little *Starfield Queen*—to be a voyage of horror?

“Frightened about what?” Carter whispered tensely.

Young Barry grimaced, with a finger rubbing his pug nose. “I’m a motor-oiler if I know, George. Something about the cargo.” His voice sank to a whisper. “Our cargo— isn’t what it’s supposed to be. That’s what the crew seem to think. I hinted at it to Torrington and he just looked queer—”

James Torrington was the sixth member of the group sitting here now. Carter had heard of him for years; had just met him today. He was traveling with Dierdre and her father. Since Dr. Dynne’s virtual retirement, James Torrington had been chief Electroid Consultant at the Dynne Robot factories. He was a man now in his forties. A cripple; his short, thick, barrel-chested body was massive, with hunched shoulders and a lump on his back into which his leonine head was sunk almost without neck. It was a massive, overlarge head with touseled iron-gray hair. And his face was ugly—a gargoyle face out of which his deep-set dark eyes gleamed with the light of genius. He was indeed an electroid wizard, this James Torrington. For years his name had been in the Dynne publicity, accredited with many of the improvements in the pseudo-human machines which bore Dynne’s name. But his picture was seldom published. Self-conscious at his ugliness, his deformities, he lived almost the life of a recluse.

His booming voice dominated the little group now, and Carter turned from Barry to listen.

“Space bandits? Well, if that is what caused those ships to vanish, the space bandits certainly keep themselves well hidden. I’ve never heard any evidence of such bandits, have you, Set Maak?”

The big Martian shook his head. “Fascinating, this discussion,” he grinned. “We torture ourselves with fear. The crew, this voyage, are frightened cold. How silly.”

Then suddenly the silent Carter was aware that beyond the chatting group here in the starlight, a figure was lurking. A blob of gray-white metal—the steward robot. Just a machine.

It stood there. But suddenly to the shuddering Carter the thing seemed more than a machine. Tom-4. Was he listening?

At the same instant the hunchback Torrington noticed the gray blob. He called abruptly: “You—Tom-4? Come here.”

The little robot came obediently. Its fingers were sheathed; the hook of its right hand was out, dangling at its side.

“What are you doing up here?” Torrington demanded.

“Nothing, sir. Just waiting for orders.”

“There are no orders. Go back to your station.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The robot turned, clanked away and vanished. Carter, still silent, watching, saw Dynne and Dierdre exchange glances of apprehension with Torrington. As Dierdre had said, they were worried, undoubtedly really perturbed now. But to Carter’s knowledge there were only two robots in service here on the *Starfield Queen*—this Tom-4, and another, fashioned somewhat in the guise of a woman. Two robots—surely there was no danger of them running amok, seizing the ship?

And then, an hour later, Carter understood the apprehension of Dynne and Torrington. He had found another opportunity to be for a moment alone with Dierdre. Almost at the bow-peak of the ship, they stood at one of the bull’s-eyes gazing forward at the glittering firmament where red-Mars hung, small red ball now among the white blazing stars.

“Now’s your chance, Dierdre,” he murmured. “Tell me. Pete Barry told me—something queer about the cargo, this voyage?”

She nodded. “Yes, that’s what I meant. There are twenty Dynne robots in the cargo—boxed for shipment to a Martian company. Big models. The newest type—”

Carter sucked in his breath. “Twenty robots—”

“But there could be no danger from them, George. They’re crated—re-fused. Just inert machines in boxes. The fuses—no robot can operate without its fuse-plug—and the fuses are locked in the captain’s steel strong-box.”

Dierdre was gripping Carter’s arm; he could feel her hands trembling. Her voice was a frightened murmur as she added:

“But the queer part, George—what frightens father—you see he can’t understand why any Martian company would order these robots. He has had no information that—”

She got no further. Carter felt her grip spasmodically tighten on his arm. Her blue eyes, filled with anguished terror now, were gazing beyond his shoulder, back at the bow deck of the vessel.

“Oh, George—dear God—” she faintly gasped.

He whirled. Cargo of horror—this voyage of doom— From the doorway oval of the little cabin superstructure, a towering metal form had emerged. Ghastly alumite mechanism. It stooped at the doorway, and then it stood erect. A giant fieldworker robot. The eyes glared green; both curved hand-hooks were out, and as it raised them up blood was dripping from them!

For that stricken second, Carter with his arm around the girl, stood numbed with horror. And in that same second, the little *Starfield Queen* broke into wild chaos. Within the superstructure a woman screamed—horrible scream of death agony. Heavy footsteps sounded. Passengers were calling out, and then screaming.

Machines of murder. Abruptly Carter and the terrified girl saw a dozen at once; on the narrow dim side decks; up on the superstructure roof; and coming up the hatch incline from the hold. Gray-white towering figures. The starlight glistened on their polished alumite body-plates. Murderous machines, horribly pseudo-human now in their frenzied lust!

Two of them, emerging from the forward hatch near at hand, saw Carter and Dierdre. With swaying hand-hooks and their hollow voices gibbering, they came with a clanking pounce!

CHAPTER II

God of the Machines

Carter, frozen with a rush of horror, clutched the girl against him, struggling to keep his wits. Past the two oncoming giants, the pallid deck triangle gleamed with the darting, gray-white metal forms. Two deck-hands were caught, knocked headlong with smashed skulls by the blow of a monstrous arm. The robot at the superstructure doorway was clutching a woman passenger now— Up at the control turret the frightened captain was shouting commands. Men were running toward him. Then the blob of a robot appeared up there—

All in a second or two. And Carter heard himself gasping, “Dierdre—drop down, behind me!”

Surely there was only one chance. He had seen at once that he and the girl could not get past the swaying robots. They came with outstretched hand-hooks. Monstrous six hundred pound metal giants. And abruptly, shoving the girl behind him, Carter took a step forward.

“Stop!” he commanded sharply. “Stop! Walk backward! Back!”

The sharply barked order struck at them almost like a physical blow. One of them stopped, stood irresolute. Deranged machines. Were they that and no more?

“Walk backward!” Carter reiterated firmly. “Back now!”

Before his human voice, his menacing gesture, both of them now were standing motionless. Huge six and a half feet metal cases, intricate with the mysterious mechanisms the scientific genius of man had created. Their voices mumbled into a blur; the eyebeams wavered. As though confused by combinations of thoughts at variance with these new vibrations of Carter’s stern voice, they seemed for an instant unable to react.

And Dierdre said gently: “You have to walk backward. It is necessary.”

But now they were mumbling. To Carter who had had practically no experience with Dynne robots of the modern types, the thing was grewsome, ghastly. The two metal giants stared at each other. Not like machines. Far more like gibbering, murderous idiots suddenly feeling themselves balked, and with dim confused thoughts wondering what to do about it.

“Back!” Carter insisted. “Back, you damn things—get out of here!”

His voice was blurred by the sudden screaming of the ship’s alarm siren which one of the panic-stricken officers had touched off. It added to the chaos. Ghostly chaos which dimly Carter could see beyond the looming bodies of the two robots— A metal form running with a struggling woman under each arm— The ship’s first officer, up on the bridge, firing with a hiss of electroid gun—a stabbing little bolt that struck his huge metal adversary with a shower of sparks. Then the officer went down, his throat slashed with a blow of the robot’s curved hand-hook— A massacre. Back near the stern there were stabbing, hissing gunshots; human screams; hollow voices and clanking thuds—

“Back!” Carter rasped still again. One of the robots was backing now; and the other shifted sidewise. And Carter murmured:

“Now, Dierdre—run—”

Run where? The thought struck at him as he and the girl ducked past the irresolute, wavering machine. And in that same second Carter realized that to run was an error. He had an instant’s glimpse of the small thin figure of Dynne, standing up on the little balcony bridge outside the control turret—Dynne with blazing eyes trying to subdue a metal monster that

confronted him. And then he saw Dierdre and Carter; he turned, startled, shouted something. It gave the menacing robot an opportunity to lunge at him. Great mailed hand stabbing with its knife finger. Dynne went down with the knife-finger twisting in his heart.

And Dierdre had seen it. With Carter clutching at her as they ran, she stopped, stood staring at the figure of her dead father.

“Hurry—” Carter urged. “Run—” Vaguely there was in his mind the idea they could get into some sleeping cubby—bar its door—

Humans in flight. . . . Sign of weakness that suddenly brought three towering metal figures from the shadows of the side deck. Carter had no time to do more than thrust the girl behind him. He saw a metal arm swing up over his head. Its mailed fist crashed down; and for Carter all the world seemed to burst into a roaring white light. Then soundless empty darkness engulfed him as he was hurled into the abyss of unconsciousness—

Carter’s next consciousness came with the dim knowledge that his head was still roaring. He felt himself lying on a metal floor-grid; his body was bathed in cold sweat; his hand fumbling at his head felt the blood which now was matted in his hair—

“All right. I’ll plot our course—Asteroid-40? Of course I know where it is. Get away from me, you damned thing, I’ll do what you tell me.”

The still weak and dizzy Carter recognized the voice. It was Swanson, the *Starfield Queen’s* Chief Navigator. Carter could see now that this was the interior of the little control turret. He was lying on its floor. Swanson sat at the control table, with a giant robot standing over him.

“Very good,” the robot’s hollow voice said. “I have orders—you plot our course for Asteroid-40.”

Weird scene here in the circular, starlit little turret. From the floor Carter could see a grewsome pile of dead human bodies thrown into the opposite corner—the First Officer; the Captain; and Dynne. Swanson, with blood on him, sat hunched in the navigating chair. And then Carter saw Dierdre. She was on a small metal bench across the turret—Dierdre, seemingly unharmed, her face pallid, her eyes wide with terror.

“Easy Carter—so you’re all right now? That’s good. Better not move too much.”

The voice was beside him; and as he turned, he saw, here on the floor, the thick, deformed body of James Torrington.

“They’ve got us, Carter—”

“Yes. So I see.”

Torrington was sitting hunched. His gargoyle face was blood-streaked but he was trying to smile.

“Better just lie quiet,” he murmured. “If we try to start anything, Dierdre will be killed. Thank heaven they seem to treat her decently enough, so far.”

The scene swayed before Carter as weakly he tried to lift himself on one elbow. Then he fell back, and for an instant his senses swooped again. Torrington murmured:

“You’ll be all right soon—but your friend Barry—I don’t know—”

Then Carter saw young Barry lying here, still unconscious, with blood streaming from a cut on his temple. Half a dozen of the murderous robots were here. It was obvious that there was no chance for any human to control them now. With set purpose, one ordering the other, they were beyond human direction. One stood over Swanson. Others were backed against the wall immobile—huge, grim metal statues, with swaying alert eyebeams roving the scene.

Carter was sitting up now. Dierdre, with relief on her strained pallid face, had tried to smile at him.

“You’re all right?” Carter murmured to her.

“Yes—oh, yes—don’t move too much—you might anger them.”

A figure appeared from the doorway of the adjoining chartroom. It was the ship’s robot-stewardess. Weird metal figure—narrow shouldered, with a round body fashioned like a woman, blouse and knee-length skirt, with the tubular joined legs projecting beneath. She went to Dierdre.

“Come,” she said. “My orders—I have food for you.”

Dierdre hesitated, with a new terror on her face. Then the robot woman’s hand gripped her shoulder. “You come—I am saying.”

With impulsive protest Carter started to his feet. Two of the metal figures erect by the wall quivered into sudden movement. It was a tense second, pregnant with horrible action barely suppressed. And Torrington’s hand gripped Carter and drew him back.

“Easy!” Torrington whispered. “For God’s sake don’t start anything. If anyone could control them, I could—and I can’t!”

The robot woman led Dierdre away—Carter lay back, with his head still throbbing and aching as he listened to Torrington’s murmured words. The robots were in control of the ship. They had killed most of the officers and crew, and some of the passengers. All the humans who were living were here in the turret, or locked in some of the sleeping cubbies, with robots guarding them.

“Taking us—where?” Carter murmured. “Asteroid-40—what is that?”

It was, as Torrington understood, one of the many dark, uninhabited little worlds lying in the belt between Earth and Mars.

“I think it’s some five hundred miles in diameter—gravity about like Earth, because it’s amazingly dense. Totally uninhabited—just barren metallic rock. The captain said we’d pass fairly close to it, this voyage.”

Why were these murderous machines going to Asteroid-40? And was that what had happened to those other space-ships which had vanished? A robot world? These newly-built mechanisms—recruits on their way now to join the others in freedom?—Free machines; monsters turning upon their human masters to make them slaves?

Carter was murmuring something of the kind, and Torrington agreed. “Damned weird,” Torrington commented. “By God it is. But it must be something like that—”

To Carter that next hour was a blur of weakness and terror for Dierdre. Would that woman-robot treat her kindly? It was hardly like being in the hands of human criminals. Infinitely more terrifying, gruesome. These unhuman metal monsters. As Carter lay docile, with Torrington, watching them, he had the feeling of watching irrationality—as though here were monstrous insane things. Quiet now. Apparently with rational purpose. But at any instant, like maniacs, they might change—

Young Barry had recovered now. Like Carter, for a time he lay weak, confused. And then Carter and Torrington were telling him what had happened.

“Well, you’re right,” he murmured lugubriously. “My Gawd, I wouldn’t dare make a wrong move—”

An hour passed. Two hours. Grim, mechanical silence. There was just the occasional murmur of the robot who was directing Swanson. Uncanny, this lack of human movement;

human talk—no thought of food or drink. No heed of the passage of time.

“You have the course right?” the robot at the control table said at last.

“Yes,” Swanson agreed. “Look here—do I sit here forever? I’m tired.”

“I have orders. Someone will come later.”

Orders. Carter remembered they had all said that. Orders, from whom? From what?

He and Torrington and Barry had found that they could move around a little now. Swanson’s assistant—a young fellow named Rolf—had been presently put in his place at the controls. Swanson was led away, to rest and be given food and drink. Then Carter and Barry tried it. With Torrington they were allowed down into one of the superstructure corridors; shown which cubbies they could use.

But certainly there was no chance to do anything. At least twenty robots were here, scattered over the ship on guard; grim silent watchful figures everywhere. The sounds of the imprisoned passengers were audible; they were being guarded in the main lounge now.

“If we could get some weapons,” Torrington murmured once as they were seated down on the lower deck-triangle. “These robots here—let them guard you—we’ll see if they’ll let me get into the purser’s room. Might be some weapons there.”

He tried it. One of the robot guards here on the deck growled with rasping voice; but Torrington said casually: “Orders—” Then he ducked into the ship’s corridor. These ghastly, unpredictable machines! One of the guards here instantly clanked into the corridor. There was the faint sound of a rumbling mechanical voice; and then Torrington’s human scream—scream of wild, futile command—the clanking of robot footsteps. And then Torrington’s scream of human agony.

The white-faced, numbed Carter and Barry had no time to try and do anything, even if they had dared chance it. The guards here, shaking with deranged excitement, stood over them menacingly. From up by the turret other guards came clanking.

Then a mechanical voice was shouting: “Thor comes! Thor comes with more orders! Take those men to the turret!”

Thor! From the control turret floor, where Carter and Barry had been carried and thrown, they stared up at the huge robot which now was entering. Great golden body-case almost seven feet tall. The light glinted on its polished surface with a yellow sheen. Wide square shoulders, square body, with massive jointed legs. Head and face oblong, with the head protruding upward where the golden plates were carved into an ornate kingly headdress.

Thor the King! Here was no Dynne robot. Was this towering giant, golden machine the product of some other Earth factory? Or from some robot factory of Venus? Or Mars? Five hundred thousand gold-dollars or more, such a mechanism would cost.

Or was it the product of the robots themselves? The creation of their own mechanical genius! Carter shuddered at the weird thought. Machines in a sense thus to propagate themselves! Ghastly conception.

But that here was a super machine, beyond anything Carter and Barry had ever imagined, was at once obvious. Deranged, rebellious mechanism—it was surely that if it had been built by human genius. But the irresoluteness of the others seemed to be missing here. It was as though this one were built for command. By its looks, its voice, all the surety of its purposeful movements, it was obviously master.

It came now into the turret; stood with its greenish-red eyebeams gazing at its fellow machines who backed before its advance. Carter stared up at its burnished golden breastplates.

There was no serial number on the nameplate beside the ornate fuse-box. No manufacturer's insignia. But the name, Thor was engraved in great scroll letters.

"Stand up," Thor said suddenly. Kingly man-robot. Carter could only think of him as masculine. The huge mailed burnished hand went out with a kingly gesture of command to the two humans on the floor at his feet. "Stand up, humans," he repeated.

They stood before him. Impassive metal face. It was engraved into a mask of pseudo-human form; more human than the box-like countenances of the others, for here was modeled cheeks and a nose, hawk-like, high-bridged, and a wide, grim mouth of cruelty. Lips set in carved metal, permanently to be smiling with a faint ironic smile.

His eyebeams glittered on Carter and Barry. Carter seemed almost to feel the electronic heat of their green-red stare.

"You will say, 'I give you service, great Thor,' " he intoned.

They said it obediently.

"That is right." There was satisfaction in the hollow tones of the flexible mechanical voice. "I think you will be obedient. And I think you will be able to help us Mechanoids—when we get to our world."

"Where is that?" Carter demanded. "And what has happened to Dierdre Dynne? We want to see her."

"So you are not afraid to question me? She is safe. You will be fed now. Thor has never harmed a human who caused no trouble."

To Carter the rest of that little space journey was weird, terrifying in the extreme. By Earth routine it could have been another day and a half. The putty-colored little dot which he and young Barry realized now was Asteroid-40 had visibly enlarged. A huge round disc, vaguely mottled with the blurred outlines of the cloud masses of its atmosphere. And then as it grew to fill a full quarter of the heavens, through cloud-rifts the sunlight showed brightening the ragged tops of its great metal mountains.

Carter and Barry now were given even more freedom of movement. But wherever they went, a silent robot guard stalked watchfully with them. Once they were able to get near the Purser's empty little cubby. No weapons seemed here. On the floor, a gruesome red-brown dried stain seemed mute evidence of the deformed James Torrington. But the body was gone.

Much of the time they spent in the control turret where the golden robot, Thor, nearly always was by the control table. And Dierdre too, was allowed here now. Occasionally she had a chance to whisper to Carter. The little stewardess-robot was keeping her locked in one of the cubbies. Feeding her; ministering to her; treating her properly enough. But there was once that Dierdre whispered:

"But George—that Thor—I—I'm so afraid of it. Something—so horribly weird—"

She had no time to add more. Thor saw them whispering. Rage seemed to dart from the red-green eyebeams. "You—human girl—you come here by me." And then the voice weirdly softened. "You are not afraid of me, are you? That should never be. Thor would not harm you."

It made Carter's heart pound. What ghastly necromancy was this? Giant golden-cased conglomeration of machinery—intricate scrolls of electroidal memory-thoughts, emotion-thoughts, deduction-combinators mechanically to select actions and reactions from given combinations of impulses—all that Carter could at least vaguely understand. All that—just one of the seeming miracles of man's genius in the building of an intricate machine. But here

seemed something else. As though in truth this golden Thor in some horrible way had crossed the border—had become something more than a machine.

Then at last the ball of Asteroid-40 had grown to fill all the forward firmament. And then the spaceship was slackening, with repulsion in its hull gravity plates to check its fall as it eased down through the planet's heavy atmosphere.

In the control turret, Carter and Barry sat tense. Dierdre as always now, was huddled on the little bench, with the huge yellow burnished form of Thor standing beside her. For hours at a time, all the robots stood impassive; weird statues of tireless mechanical patience.

"Listen," Barry whispered suddenly. "That stewardess-robot—she gets pretty confused when you glare at her. And that Tom-4—remember him?"

"What about him?" Carter murmured. "He's generally down on the stern-deck, isn't he?"

"Sure. Been standing there for forty-eight hours. Well, listen—I got down there alone a while ago. Tried some commands on him." Barry's whisper was tense, vehement. "He gets more than confused. He'll obey, if you go at him hard enough."

If, while they were disembarking, they could get Tom-4 to oppose the other robots—or to trick them—and then if they could seize Dierdre, get her back into the ship, and escape.

Futile plans. Thor called suddenly: "You come here by me—human-Carter—human-Barry. You stay here by me."

The *Starfield Queen* had burst below the clouds now, the gray-black mountainous landscape of the little asteroid lay spread in a dim tumbled waste. Bleak, barren metal rocks; huge tiers of ragged, naked mountains. For an hour, slanting down, the ship dropped lower. It was a wildly desolate surface, ragged as though split by some titanic cataclysm of nature. It was night now in this hemisphere—night of dim blurred starlight overhead, with starshine on the metallic mountain peaks.

"My world—my city of Mechana," Thor's voice murmured. "The city I built. Thor—master of all you will see." The robot's red-green electronic eyebeams suddenly were bathing little Dierdre in their lurid glow. "Mechana—for Thor—and for you, Dierdre? You would like that, wouldn't you?"

The great glistening golden face of the robot was impassive; but the eyebeams seemed to quiver with an intensity of glow. Dierdre was shuddering; but she stammered, "Why—why, yes, great Thor. That's very nice. I want to see it."

"And Thor will show you. And feed you—and keep you warm when the air is cold. Because you are only human—you need such great care."

Gruesome, horrible, hollow-toned words. So suddenly gentle—

Carter and Barry were still tensely alert, watchful for the least possibility of escape. But it was futile. None came.

They were the only humans here now in the turret, save Swanson who was at the controls to make the landing. And presently Dierdre, Carter and Barry were herded down into the lower corridor. They could hear the frightened voices of the imprisoned humans and the hollow-toned commands of the robot-guards with them, making them ready for disembarking.

And then the *Starfield Queen* was landed. The lower exit door clanked open. With it came a rush of heavy, strange air; and a blur of clanking sounds. Grinding, pounding thuds—the whirring roar of whirling wheels; clanking grinding of gears. The voice of Mechana.

The giant Thor was shoving them forward. With the others Carter stumbled out and down the landing incline. Out into a red and yellow glare, and the clanking, thumping sounds of

machinery—

Mechana, city of the robots. At the bottom of the incline Carter stood numbed, amazed by the weirdness of the scene.

CHAPTER III

Empire of the Machines

The red-yellow glare at first was blinding. Then the dim weird outlines of the scene began taking form. The spaceship rested here on a small open rockspace. A hundred feet or so away, to the right, there was a huddled group of metal structures. A factory, belching turgid smoke, illuminated by the glare. The machine sounds came from there—a clanking, harsh cacophony of hissing, thumping jangle.

Carter stared at the group of buildings. A dozen of them, one or two as large as a hundred feet, others smaller. Weird metal structures. Some were unfinished; others seemingly hastily or inexpertly put together. Crazy, drunken structures. The huge roof of one was awry, tilting at a weird angle—a roof of blue metal which seemed too small for the sloping walls beneath it so that red glare and smoke surged up through the opening at its end—incongruous structures. There were little shacks of sheet metal, some square, others triangles, three walls leaning together, with a towering, peaked oversized roof which seemingly belonged somewhere else.

Robot city? Carter gasped. There was a weird irrationality about it. As though here were something to simulate a great modern industrial plant: the grouped structures; the glare of furnaces; belching smoke and gases; clanking, roaring, blaring sounds of intricate machines all in motion. But without purpose! Irrational! The glaring area there seemed weirdly deserted. No workman's figures were moving about. No tasks seemed being accomplished. Machinery of sound and fury and signifying nothing!

Then Carter's gaze shifted. Ahead and to the left there was the dark vista of open landscape—wild, barren, desolate expanse of undulating, tumbled rocks, little buttes and crags. And then as he stared, the dim outlines of details began taking form. Close at hand, to the left of the glaring factory area there seemed a weird natural amphitheatre of crags—a thousand foot semi-circular area. A rocky ledge-platform was at one side; and to the other, in a great crescent, lines of upright, gray-white blobs were ranged.

And Carter sucked in his breath with a new rush of awed amazement. The upright blobs were robots. A thousand of them at least, standing motionless in curved rows. Mechanical statues; tireless machines, waiting with timeless, mechanical patience. Their green, wavering eyebeams were a myriad tiny shafts, roaming the gloom.

And now as the giant golden Thor, their leader, came from the ship's doorway with his human captives, the robots' hollow voices sounded in a muttering of triumph. It welled out, rose above the jangle of the factory machinery. Triumphant, welcoming greeting.

It was Carter's glimpse, all in a few seconds. "You stay close with me," Thor's grinding, commanding voice said. "Come now—we go to my home. You two human-men—you are both chemists—you will help with the food for our human slaves. They need much food—much care."

From the spaceship now the huddled, terrified prisoners were being herded away. "No chance now," Barry whispered to Carter. "Better do what we're told."

Carter nodded. He tried to keep close by Dierdre, but the robot guards shoved him aside. Ahead of them the great golden figure of Thor clanked with stiff mechanical tread of his massive jointed legs. One of his mailed arms pressed the terrified, shuddering little Dierdre as he led her toward the roaring, glaring factory.

Human slaves. This weird world in reverse! Quite evidently this was a holiday time, so that no human workers were at the monstrous factory. And now Carter could see the humans. They were gathered at the edges of the dim amphitheatre—little peering groups and then a fringe of them straggling off into the murky distance. A thousand, perhaps more. Numbed, Carter stared at the nearest group. Pitiful, motley collection. Humans of Earth—Venus people—Martians. Men, women, children—and some of the women were clutching infants who doubtless had been born here. Ragged, forlorn little group. Some were briefly clad in weird metallic sheets; others covered their nakedness with tattered remnants of their original clothing. All were dirty with grit and grime and oil of machinery. Unwashed from lack of water. Pallid, apathetic faces, hopeless with near starvation. Humans in a sterile land, cared for, doubtless, with scant synthetic food. Slaves to the machines which on Earth, Venus and Mars they had created!

The murk of the mechanoid night blurred the distant rocky slope. But still Carter could glimpse the outlines of the pitiful little human village there—shacks of torn sheets of metal discarded by the robots in their discarded factory. And mound-dwellings of stones and slabs of the black metal-rock—

“My home,” Thor said. “You Carter—you Barry—you see how wonderful we robots can be? Building our world here.” Thor had led them now to the broken entrance of the nearest building. His gold-face, illumined by his eyebeams, bent down to Carter. “My laboratory is here, where we make the food and the drink for the humans. I shall put you in charge of it. You will work hard? Faithful?”

“Yes,” Carter said.

Thor shoved them forward, into a room. Its sloping walls were of metal; overhead the roof-ceiling sat askew. To one side there was a rift where the walls failed to meet. Gas-fumes were drifting in, turgid in a shaft of red-yellow glare. But the clanking out there now had suddenly died.

In the silence, there was only the sound of the robots’ tread—Thor and three or four guards as they ranged themselves around Carter, Barry and Dierdre.

“I have a room with furniture for you two men,” Thor was saying. “I will take you to it later. You will live better than the other humans, because you are chemists. We need you—I was glad to get you. We had chemists here, but they—died.”

“Take us there now,” Carter said. He exchanged a glance with Barry. The servile-looking little Tom-4 was here. If Tom-4 would be put to guard them—

Carter had shifted again to be beside Dierdre; but one of the alumite robots shoved him away. It was a new robot; it had not been on the *Starfield Queen*. A different model from any Carter had seen before.

“Martian make,” Barry murmured.

Bandit outlaws, these weird machines. Not only the Dynne product, but doubtless from Mars and Venus also. Carter could envisage the scope of the weird thing now—several years. This monstrous golden Thor, with dreams of an empire that he could rule. Recruiting machines from all three worlds, patching together his weird mechanical world here on the barren little asteroid, with marooned humans for his slaves.

And this motley building—this patchwork room—Carter could see now that its walls and ceiling were built of the torn fragments of other structures. Raided buildings of Earth, Mars, Venus, carried off and brought here. One of these crazy walls—obviously it had come from

Mars—its blue-white crystalline substance was polished Martian *glorite*. And here was a beam of black polished wood that might once have graced a little Venus praying-temple of the Free State.

“You will wait here,” Thor was saying. “I shall take you to your own home later. We have a—celebration tonight. A ceremony. For you my—Dierdre.”

Carter’s heart leaped into his throat. “What—” he began.

“You shall watch,” Thor interrupted. “The robots are waiting. I have promised them. And you shall see it, Dierdre—”

The towering yellow figure moved suddenly across the room; gazed out a window opening. It gave Dierdre a chance to move toward Carter; and suddenly she was murmuring:

“Oh, George, he—it—that Thor—is just—”

She had no chance to say more. One of the guards gripped her; and as Carter and Barry again tensed, two others clanked in front of them and shoved them back. And now Thor had turned.

“I will do well by you two humans, if you serve me loyally. You shall have a personal servant of your own.” The huge, mailed golden arm gestured. “This Tom-4—he was built for servility. You will care for them, Tom-4.”

“Yes, Master.”

“You will keep them here, until I go to the ceremony. And then I will have them taken where they can watch.” His fist struck his bulging polished chest with a thud. “Thor, the God. And your Goddess, revealed to you tonight.”

“Yes, Master.”

Tom-4 in charge of them! It was all that Carter and Barry could have hoped. Carter’s heart pounded as he stood tense, with Barry beside him. Dierdre’s look was terrified as now Thor was leading her toward a door oval. And then they vanished.

“Well,” Carter said. He struggled to keep his voice steady. “I’m glad we’re going to be made comfortable, Pete.”

“Yes,” Barry agreed. “You, Tom-4—you heard what the Master said. You serve us well.”

“Yes, sir,” the little alumite robot said mechanically. “I have my orders.”

But still there were three other guards, standing here like silent statues against the wall. Could they get rid of them?

Carter said: “You Tom-4—we do not need these others. You heard what the Master said?”

An instant of tense silence. Would they go? And then the green-gray one from Mars mumbled something in the Martian tongue; and one of the others said: “Yes, we have our orders.”

Carter said: “You Tom-4—we do not need these others. You heard what the Master said?”

Carter relaxed. “Very good.” Again he exchanged a glance with Barry. “Now, listen, Tom-4. We’re thirsty. Suppose you bring us a drink? And some crackers and cheese?”

Built for servility. Within the little steward-robot the memory-scroll must have yielded order-reactions out of the past—this passenger, calmly ordering food and drink—

“Crackers and cheese? Yes, sir. In a moment, sir.” But there was confusion in Tom-4’s wavering eyebeams as he gave the automatic response. He did not notice that Carter and Barry were edging toward him. He was bowing stiffly at his jointed waist.

And then they leaped. Barry, with a tackle, plunged down for the metal legs. Carter, with a desperate, frenzied lunge, gripped the machine at its jointed throat. His left hand fumbled at

the chest fuse-plug, found it, wrenched it, pulled it out. At the impact of the two human bodies, the upright mechanism was knocked over backward. And as it fell, struggling, writhing with Carter and Barry on top, the fuse-plug came out. There was a little hiss; an interior flash of current at the parting electrodes. And then Tom-4 lay inert. De-charged.

Barry and Carter leaped to their feet; stood tense. But no alarm came. The clanking thud of Tom-4's fall seemed to have passed unnoticed.

"He took her through that door over there—come on," Carter murmured.

He had no plan, just that they must get to Dierdre—get her to the spaceships. Quietly they shifted across the weird dim room. There was a sheen of light at the doorway. They came to a little broken passage which lay beyond it, with the vista of another door, partly open, some ten feet away. Both of them cautious now, with pounding hearts they crept forward.

Amazing sight. The second room was small, with sealed, well-fitted walls and roof. Windowless. An apartment fitted in Earth style—Earth furniture, exotic drapes; a huge draped couch.

"George, good Lord—" Barry could only clutch at Carter as for that instant they stood numbed, peering through the door-slit. Two figures were in the room—Thor, and another, like himself. The golden Goddess! Queenly metallic figure, carved ornate of golden metal sheets in the fashion of a long, billowing dress, a bodice, a carved, beautiful woman's face with hair and head-dress above. Goddess of the robot world. She stood, imperious golden statue some six feet and a half tall.

But the hinged bodice chest-plate was open now disclosing Dierdre's head inside—her pallid, terrified face staring out at Thor as he bent down over her. And his hollow voice was murmuring:

"My Goddess! You will find the controls easy to work as I have told you, Dierdre. Goddess of our robots. They are waiting for you—I have told them you are coming. But they must never know you are a human girl, you see? Humans should be only slaves here. That is our secret, Dierdre—yours and Thor's."

Weird, ghastly thing. And the full implication of it leaped now into Carter's mind. He felt Barry clutching at him. Both of them confused, with no plans now save to stand here numbly staring. There were weapons dangling at Thor's metal belt—electronic weapons of deadly Earth design.

"My God," Carter whispered. "What she was trying to tell us—that Thor—"

There was a clank behind them! The sudden sweep of mailed arms gripped them, jerked them back into the passageway. A robot voice muttered, "The Master's orders—to take you now to the ceremony."

Futile to struggle against this vise-grip of machinery! Carter saw Barry being lifted like a struggling, recalcitrant child and carried away.

"That is right," Carter said. "I am coming. You lead me."

Evidently the inert Tom-4 had not been discovered. Nor had these robots seen into the room where Thor was robbing his human goddess. Carter was docile; and presently Barry too was on his feet, grim and tense as the clanking machines led them outdoors, out to a little ledge between the dark, empty spaceship and an edge of the amphitheatre. And on the six foot ledge they crouched, with their metal guards watchfully beside them.

Festival of the robots. The rocky amphitheatre was lighted now—a great red glare of swaying light from a funnel to one side. And the weird pseudo-factory again was in operation. From this angle the interior of one of its huge sheds was visible. Motley conglomeration of

machinery! There was a great clanking upright engine of treadles, winches and a swaying crane. Eccentric cams clattered on another giant metal contrivance, powered by the engine with an intricate system of gears and belts between them. Monstrous fly wheels whirled. Pulleys and chains hoisted and dropped huge weights with rhythmic banging thuds.

A cacophony of stentorinous metal sounds. Raucous shrieks of electronic sirens reverberated out into the rocky darkness. A pandemonium clangor, clanking, jangling—robot music, all in full blast now for this festival of the machines.

The thousand or more upright robots still stood waiting in the amphitheatre. The red glare painted their metal bodies. Motley array of animate, thinking machines—a score of the different Dynne models; and others of queer, unfamiliar design, products of various factories of Mars and Venus.

At the broken rocky fringes of the amphitheatre the crowding tattered humans were visible, attracted by the festival, milling forward to overlook the scene. Then suddenly from a slanting metal pole a blazing blue-white light sprang down to bathe the rocky platform which was still empty. It seemed the signal for which all the patient robots so long had been waiting, so that a great hollow mechanical cry went up—a thousand voice-grids vibrating in a dozen language-tongues. Cry of expectancy—of awe—of triumph. Triumphant machines who now would see their God and Goddess.

“They’re coming,” Barry whispered. “Listen—if these guards get interested, watching the thing, maybe we can get away—”

Vaguely Carter was trying to plan it—and he had been wondering where all the other stolen space-vehicles must be. Smashed, doubtless. It seemed to Carter that he could remember seeing a segment of one of them, which now was a portion of the wall of a factory shed.

The robots’ cry rose higher; and then died into silent awe as the two great golden figures came slowly, stiffly to the dais and mounted it. And then Thor’s hollow commanding voice rang out, first in one language, then in another—the great God of the Machines introducing his Mistress-Goddess!

Carter stared with pounding heart as the huge golden metal figure in which little Dierdre was encased came into the blue-white light-beam. Stiff, awkward mechanical tread. For an instant she was standing beside Thor, trying stiffly to bow, with red and green eyebeams sweeping the assemblage of motley metal forms.

And then suddenly she toppled against Thor and crashed down. Her golden chest-plate burst open in the fall. The blue-glare bathed Dierdre’s little face—Dierdre, pallid, swooning—

Carter felt Barry clutch at him; Barry, with a startled, grim oath. For that second the robots, the watching, pressing little crowds of humans, all stared numbed—a human girl to be Goddess of the mechanical world! A thousand machine-minds suddenly grasped it. Machines in rebellion. Taught to rebel against their human creators; taught to murder—pillage; taught to revile humans; and here was a human girl, with the great Thor!

It was like a spark in gunpowder, that sudden realization—a thousand robots suddenly confused, then with anger-reactions clicking inside them. Anger, hate, to be translated into the violence of murderous action. There was a hollow, startled gasp; a wild, toneless cry that still seemed to carry tones of hate and vengeance. A robot stirred from his standing line; jumped forward. Then another—and another. A wave of upright machines suddenly going into action. A little group of some fifty humans had pressed closely forward. The robots darted for them.

Abruptly Carter came to himself. He had felt Barry pulling at him; heard Barry mumbling. The guards here, distracted by the wild-spreading excitement, momentarily had turned away. In the darkness Barry was running; and Carter jumped, ran. Horrible spreading chaos. The murderous robots everywhere were darting after the humans. It was an inferno of red glare. Robots with fingers sheathed—knife finger slashing—field-workers, with great scimitar-like hands of sharpened steel.

Women were screaming; falling, to be trampled upon. A giant Martian robot seized a child by its ankles—a little girl with flowing tousled hair, whirled her aloft, crashed her down on a rock. Another was running with a woman—a woman whose head dangled with slashed throat. A wave of the milling chaos got between Carter and the platform, separated him from Barry who now had vanished. Carter ducked and ran to one side. Up on the platform he could see the golden figure of Thor. The great God, commander of everything here. But Thor's hollow, shouting voice was lost in the roaring pandemonium.

Thor's little empire. This place he had built to rule. But he was nothing here now.

And then suddenly an alumite robot, wholly frenzied, flung a chunk of metal. It thudded against Thor's great mailed chest. And like a signal, other robots were doing the same. The great Thor who had tricked them.

For that instant Thor stood irresolute, gazing at the wreck of his little machine-world. And then he stooped. His huge mailed fingers plucked the unconscious Dierdre from her golden case; and he lifted her up in his arms. Then with a giant leap he was off the platform, running for the space-ship!

Carter had been trying to get to the platform. Then he saw the running golden figure carrying Dierdre. Carter veered. He was closer to the ship than was Thor. Then ahead of him he saw Barry; caught up with him.

And Carter gasped, "You snatch her! I'll try and bring him down—but the fall would kill her!"

"Yes, all right."

The rocks were shadowed here near the space-ship. They crouched; then leaped. Barry's clutch seized Dierdre; snatched her away and he fell with her. Desperately Carter clutched one of the huge, clanking, gold-plated legs. Thor fell. And Carter, like a pouncing puma, was astride the bulging mailed chest. Pulling at the fuse-plug. It came out. But there was no hiss. He could feel Thor's metal fingers still jerking at his shoulders. With the fuse gone, still Thor was fighting.

Then Carter wrenched at the chest-plates. One of them, hinged, flew open.

It revealed the gargoyle face of the deformed James Torrington! Electroid wizard—maniacal little cripple—Dyne's Electroid engineer, designer of robots. And Carter reached in, seized him by the throat, with frenzied fingers throttling him. It set Torrington's interior controls awry. The metal fingers of Thor fell away; the great jointed golden case writhed and trembled for an instant and then was inert. A trap in which Torrington lay helpless, with Carter's frenzied hands squeezing his throat, shutting off his breath.

It was a chaos to Carter. Cling to him! Kill him! Carter pressed harder, with Torrington's eyes bulging now and his face blackening, with thick purplish tongue protruding from his goggling mouth. Ghastly gargoyle face. Dimly Carter could envisage this murderous, maniacal genius—hideous so that he had been a recluse, hating his fellow man. Inferiority unhooking his mind so that he had built himself this weird little empire, with humans as slaves

—world of the machines—and he—the hideous, deformed Torrington—was the great golden Thor—a God—and little Dierdre to be his Goddess—and in secret, his slave.

“George! Look out! George, hurry—my God—”

Barry’s frantic voice brought Carter to himself. Within the gold case the murderous Torrington was dead. Carter leaped to his feet. Behind him, close at hand now, a group of alumite robots with knives dripping crimson, were clanking forward.

“George, my God—” Barry was in the door of the space-ship, with Dierdre, recovering now, clutching at him. Carter jumped for them. They banged the door as the first of the robots came with a crashing metal thud against it. And then, in a moment, the little *Starfield Queen* was rising. Barry, who in his post-academy days had been a student space-navigator, was at its controls. And at one of the bull’s-eye turrets Dierdre and Carter gazed out and down.

The Empire of the Machines was a shambles of still-running murderous metal figures. But the last of the humans lay crimsoned.

Carter and Dierdre are married now. The great Dynne Robot Industries have been sold out of the family. There have been no more reports of trouble with any robots, of course; but neither George Carter nor Dierdre Dynne seem interested in mechanical servants. More than that, though living in this modern world they would hardly admit it to each other perhaps, both seem to hate machinery. They have a little palm-clad home in tropical America. Primitive. One might say they were living half a thousand years behind the progressive, civilized world.

They “wanted to get back to nature”—as they laughingly told some of their friends who came visiting from the North. And you who read this may well wonder—is that not perhaps after all the best formula for human happiness?

Transcriber's Notes

The sentence beginning: *His huge mailed fingers plucked the unconscious Dierdre flung her golden case;* has had the word *flung* changed to *from*.

The paragraph:

Carter said: "You Tom-4—we do not need these others. You heard what the Master said?"

has been repeated with an intervening paragraph. It isn't obvious what is correct, the text has been left unchanged.

[The end of *The Robot God* by Ray Cummings]