

# “Disjointed Parts”

An Introduction to the SF Short-Shorts of Hoshi Shinichi

A Japanese Senior Honors Thesis  
Written by Caitlin Cronin

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## Introduction

### *Hoshi Shinichi and Japanese Science Fiction*

Hoshi Shinichi was born in Tokyo in 1926. The son of a pharmaceutical entrepreneur, Hoshi graduated from Tokyo University with a degree in agricultural chemistry before briefly serving as president of Hoshi Pharmaceuticals following the death of his father.<sup>1</sup> It is this scientific background that led Hoshi to find success in the emerging field of Japanese science fiction in the 1960s and beyond.

From its beginnings, Japanese science fiction has been heavily influenced by the West, and the work of Hoshi Shinichi would prove to be no exception. Robert Matthew places the origins of SF-style writing in Japan in the Meiji era, crediting this literary revolution to the end of Japan's two hundred-year *sakoku* isolation policy and the sudden influx of new ideas and customs into the country.<sup>2</sup> This, he argues, "stimulated the Japanese to a realization that their traditional ways were not the only ways of doing things and it shook their beliefs and values to the very core."<sup>3</sup> As a result, the Japanese turned to literature in order to deal with the insecurities and difficulties presented by this new era of modernization. The newfound Japanese preoccupation with the West led to translations of such science fiction classics as *Twenty-Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, which in turn spawned the new genres of Japanese adventure tales and future novels.<sup>4</sup> Yano Ryukei's *Ukeshiro Monogatari*, a story from 1890 about Japanese sailors on a voyage to claim territory for the emperor, is considered to be the first science fiction work originally written in Japanese; other popular writers from the time included

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<sup>1</sup> Matsushima, Sayuri. "Hoshi Shinichi and the Space Age Fable." *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 5.2 (2003): 94 – 114. Web. 04 Apr 2011. Pg. 94.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew, Robert. *Japanese Science Fiction: A View of a Changing Society*. New York NY: Routledge, 1989. Pg. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Oshikawa Shunro and Harada Masaemon, who both wrote about wars set in the future.<sup>5</sup> With this, Japanese science fiction was born.

Despite this prewar shift towards a native Japanese science fiction, most scholars agree that the organized SF movement did not truly begin until the 1950s, when the first successful fanzine (*Uchujin*, co-founded by Hoshi) and science fiction magazine (*Hayakawa's SF Magazine*) were published in Japan.<sup>6</sup> These publications effectively established a means for the development of promising science fiction authors, who were discovered in *Uchujin* and then marketed in *Hayakawa's SF Magazine*.<sup>7</sup> Soon after came science fiction conventions, awards, and organizations.

It is in this era that Hoshi Shinichi first flourished. Hoshi's first short story, "The Fox's Sigh," was published in 1949 in the fanzine *Linden Geppō*. After leaving Hoshi Pharmaceuticals in the 1950s, Hoshi became ill; disillusioned by his negative experience at the company, he credits Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* for inspiring him to move beyond his life in pharmaceuticals and proceed down the path of science fiction. He joined the Japan Flying Saucer Research Association, where he met Shibano Takumi; the two later went on to co-found *Uchujin* in 1957.<sup>8</sup> By fostering native science fiction and making it readily available to a Japanese audience, *Uchujin* served as both an impetus and valuable instrument for the SF movement in Japan. For his part in its publication, as well as his own literary merits, Hoshi Shinichi is remembered as a

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew, Robert. *Japanese Science Fiction: A View of a Changing Society*. New York NY: Routledge, 1989. Pg. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Tatsumi, Takayuki. "Generations and Controversies: An Overview of Japanese Science Fiction, 1957- 1997." *Science Fiction Studies* 27.1 (2000): 105- 114. Web. 04 Apr 2011. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4240851>>. Pg. 105

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Matsushima, 95.

pioneer, one of the “Big Three” authors of Japanese science fiction’s “First Generation” along with Sakyō Komatsu and Yasutaka Tsutsui.<sup>9</sup>

Over the course of his career, Hoshi became famous for his extremely short vignettes, most of them no longer than three or four pages, and he published over 1,000 so-called “short-short stories” before his death in 1997.<sup>10</sup> This form seems to be modeled after the French *conte*, which, defined as a witty short story, gained popularity in Japan in the 1920s.<sup>11</sup> Hoshi, in addition to other noted authors like Kawabata Yasunari, streamlined and revolutionized the original notion of a French *conte*, which had sometimes exceeded one hundred pages and was critically considered as lower quality literature.<sup>12</sup>

The short-short story as perfected by Hoshi consists primarily of three elements: an original idea, a seamless plot, and an unexpected ending.<sup>13</sup> Yamano and others argue that Hoshi’s solution to negotiating a Japanese sentimentality with a literary style defined by the West was in “his sophisticated technique of perspective-displacement.”<sup>14</sup> Although SF had entered the Japanese literary landscape in Hoshi’s time, it was still viewed as a rather lowbrow art by literary critics; it was by focusing on cultural critiques of the time period, such as success at any means, that Hoshi Shinichi was able to gain a wider appeal and eventually achieve popularity as a writer. In fact, many of his stories, although containing fantastical elements, are not considered to be straight science fiction, but instead use these elements to drive commentary on post-war political and social change.

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<sup>9</sup> Tatsumi, 107.

<sup>10</sup> Kirkup, James. "Obituary." *Independent* [London] 16 Feb. 1998. *The Hoshi Library: The Official English Website of Shinichi Hoshi*. Web. 04 May 2011. <[http://www.shinichihoshi.com/The\\_Hoshi\\_Library/Obituary.html](http://www.shinichihoshi.com/The_Hoshi_Library/Obituary.html)>.

<sup>11</sup> Matsushima, 98.

<sup>12</sup> Matsushima, 98.

<sup>13</sup> Matsushima, 97.

<sup>14</sup> Yamano, Koichi, Kazuko Behrens, Darko Suvin, and Takayuki Tatsumi. "Japanese SF, Its Originality and Orientation (1969)." *Science Fiction Studies* 21.1 (1994): 67- 80. Web. 04 Apr 2011. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4240308>>. Pg. 70.

Accordingly, Hoshi significantly highlights distinct Japanese cultural elements such as a collectivist mentality and hierarchical systems, which lend his stories a unique Japanese flair in the Western-dominated field of science fiction.<sup>15</sup>

As a founding father of Japanese science fiction, Hoshi endeavored to make his writing both understandable and captivating to the reader. One of the ways he did this was by using terms and themes to which a variety of readers could relate. One example of this is in his widespread use of generic names like “Mr. N.” and “Dr. R.” He creates characters that can be “seen almost as a Mr. Everyman,” thus further involving the reader.<sup>16</sup> In addition to plain character names, Hoshi stories are known for the simplicity of their plots. Hoshi once said, “Because the genre I write is pure fiction that requires no research or data, people enjoy it...”<sup>17</sup> Each scientific-seeming concept in Hoshi Shinichi’s writings is explained in simple terms that require no background knowledge on the part of the reader.

Hoshi stayed closer to his reader by rejecting scenes containing sex or murder, avant-garde techniques in his writing and even allusions to current pop-culture.<sup>18</sup> “What seems to result from these kinds of self-imposed limits is a sense of refinement,” Ozaki says, because the stories remain timeless, and thus relatable.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, a Hoshi Shinichi short-short could really be a story written about anyone in any place at any time. There is no need for trendy topics or references that distract from the main message of each allegorical story.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew, 162.

<sup>17</sup> Ozaki, Hotsuki. Afterward. *Chiguhagu na buhin*. By Shinichi Hoshi. Tōkyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2006. Print. Pg. 294.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



Hoshi's dedication to simplicity and reader accessibility extends to the very language with which he writes; in fact, many scholars consider this to be the most distinctive quality of his work. In the afterword of "Disjointed Parts" he declares, "My doctrine is that you are always meeting the reader for the first time."<sup>20</sup> It is for this reason, he explains, that he chose simple words in an effort to make things as clear as possible for the reader. It is also for this reason that he only used the most commonplace *kanji* characters, saying, "I could use difficult Japanese characters, but if the reader is unable to understand them, I don't have much of a choice."<sup>21</sup> Hoshi commonly credited his straightforward writing style to the influence of Sugimura Sojinkan, a newspaper reporter for Asahi Shinbun whose sentences Hoshi characterized as "exquisite" in conveying his thoughts without causing confusion to the reader.<sup>22</sup> Hoshi Shinichi's text is widely recognized as having accomplished this same feat by providing proof over description, thereby allowing readers to come to their own conclusions.<sup>23</sup>

Hoshi was an innovator in the field of Japanese science fiction not only because he made SF commercially available through means of his fanzine *Uchujin*, but because he made the genre accessible to a wider audience by employing a mix of social commentary, straightforward concepts, and simple wording to attract a wide audience. He understood that for SF to succeed in Japan, it need not limit itself to complicated scientific concepts and terms, but instead employ straightforward language along with fantasy to appeal to the hopes, fears and desires of the common reader. The literary merits of his works are thus in their accessibility to the reader. It is for this reason that

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<sup>20</sup> Hoshi, Shinichi. Afterward. *Chiguhagu na buhin*. By Shinichi Hoshi. Tōkyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2006. Print. Pg. 288.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Hoshi, Shinichi. Afterward. *Okashina senzo*. By Shinichi Hoshi. Tōkyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1985. Print. Pg. 218.

<sup>23</sup> Ōmori Nozomi. Afterward. *Chiguhagu na buhin*. By Shinichi Hoshi. Tōkyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2006. Print. Pg. 301.

“Hoshi Shinichi has, without any exaggeration, written stories that will last hundreds of years.”<sup>24</sup>

### *Japanese Culture and “Disjointed Parts”*

“Disjointed Parts” is a collection of Hoshi Shinichi stories originally published in 1972. Hoshi wrote of his compilation, “At best it’s rich in variety. At worst, it’s a grab bag. That’s the feeling I get. This is because it mixes earlier works with my more recent works. For that reason I chose the name ‘Disjointed Parts.’”<sup>25</sup> However, with its direct writing style, light-hearted story lines and cultural critique, the collection is essential Hoshi. Despite its misleading title, the stories included in “Disjointed Parts” are all connected by a common theme: criticism of the Japanese mantra of success at all costs.

According to Matthew, “the function of science fiction is not to predict, it is to express concern: to extrapolate, hypothesize, and explore into the unknown.”<sup>26</sup> For Hoshi in “Disjointed Parts,” this concern seems to be materialism and greed. After the war, Japan was economically decimated. People starved, inflation rates were high, and unemployment was overwhelmingly high. However, by the 1960s and 1970s, the Japanese were among the most economically well situated in the world. In addition to changes in trade policy, a large reason for this economic recovery was a shift towards consumerism in Japan; it was by buying new electronic products like dishwashers and refrigerators that the Japanese simultaneously improved their own daily life and the economic progress of the country. Additionally, it was the Japanese drive for success that led to the money to buy these things. Japan is famous internationally for the intensity of

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<sup>24</sup> Ōmori, 303.

<sup>25</sup> Hoshi, Shinichi. Afterward. *Chiguhagu na buhin*. Pg. 288.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew, 107.

its workforce; it was during this period that the Japanese were able to re-channel their drive for success from the Pacific War to the economic war.

However, this success did not come without consequences. Most prominent among these was a lack of transparency and responsibility towards the consumer on the part of companies. As a result, several major environmental and health crises emerged in Japan, including Minamata disease in the 1950s. Considered one of the Four Big Pollution Diseases of Japan, this sickness was caused by environmental pollution from the Chisso Corporation chemical factory and killed thousands of people who ate mercury-contaminated fish from Minamata Bay. Besides such atrocious disasters, everyday business practices had also overshadowed the needs of the general Japanese public. In the minds of many, personal integrity and wellbeing had been sacrificed for a shady means of financial success in a dog-eat-dog world.

This theme of greed and selfishness is a unifying factor of Hoshi's "Disjointed Parts," which serves as a challenge to self-serving business and the limitless Japanese drive for success. His criticism presents itself to the reader in such stories as "The Conspiracy," "Welcome Assault," "Super Adhesive," "Would You Like a Sip?" and "Ghost House," among others.

In "The Conspiracy," a cruel flock of birds at the zoo seeks to overcome its shame from having to feed on the elephant's leftovers, and it does so by tricking their good-natured benefactor. However, in a classic Hoshi technique of perspective displacement, their plan backfires and the birds die without the help of the elephant. In this way, they are punished for their greed. Similarly, a space crew looking to exploit an alien species for its natural resources miscalculates the deceptively meek enemy and ends

up falling to their doom in “Welcome Assault.” In this second story, the supposedly simpleminded half-animal creatures become the assailant as the overly ambitious humans, blinded by their own avarice, become the victims; this is a textbook Hoshi surprise ending. In an interesting allegorical twist, the space crew’s downfall is not a direct consequence of their appetite for the planet’s resources, but instead their actual physical hunger: they fall into the hole as they chase after the delicious food they are unable to resist.

“Super Adhesive” and “Would You Like a Sip?” are two stories that share an extremely similar plot: in both, the thief antagonist attempts to steal from the scientist protagonist, but comes out the worse for the wear when subjected to the scientist’s latest concoction. In “Super Adhesive,” the thief remains glued to the floor for a period of three years and must work off his crime in lieu of a jail sentence, and in “Would You Like a Sip?” the thief becomes paralyzed after drinking a potion. This second story presents an interesting window into a Hoshi-style utopia; the scientist proclaims in the end that his drug makes paradise a reality by ridding society of selfish people, like the thief.

Hoshi touches on the loss of valuable Japanese traditions in a newly commercialized culture with his short story “Ghost House.” In the tale, the centuries-old spirits of two forgotten samurai must perish so that a highway can be built to accommodate Japan’s current fast-past society. Without a second thought, the spirits, along with the four hundred-year old house they inhabit, are thrown into an abandoned well. This story reads not only as a negative commentary on expansion for expansion’s sake, but also as a reminder that important aspects of Japanese culture (represented by the

samurai spirits) must be preserved even in the face of rapid economic and social change, and increased influence from the West (characterized by the bulldozer).

In addition to his warnings against unbridled pursuit of personal gain, Hoshi Shinichi offers a shrewd assessment of the emerging sense of consumerism and materialism integral to Japan's economic boom. In addition to a straightforward commentary on valuing human life over money, offered in "The Famous Verdict," Hoshi sets the tone for his entire collection with the first story, "The Vicious Planet," which makes "a statement against limitless human desire."<sup>27</sup> In the story, humans have overdeveloped Earth to the point where it is overcrowded with people. Luckily, a beautiful planet (Jiff) is spotted that will not only provide space for more homes, but can also serve as a base for further expansion into space. However, once they arrive, the crew is bombarded by visions of extravagant food, beautiful women, and treasure. Unable to touch these visions, as they do not in fact exist, and yet unable to ignore them and get to work, the crew suffers from neurosis and must return to Earth. In order to combat the pesky visions on Jiff, Earth sends many different spaceships, each with increasingly extravagant supplies to help the crew suppress their temptations, but the visions only get worse. Finally, the last spaceship arrives to Jiff carrying every luxury known to mankind, but instead of finding a picturesque planet with fields and rivers as they had before, the crewmen are left with the reality that everything on the planet, right down to the scenery, was a hallucination. In the end, not only are the extravagant visions on Jiff just a show that is impossible to attain, but the objects that the men value most on Earth, the food, the jewels and the sports cars, are all meaningless, a waste. This story does away with the notion that physical goods lead to happiness and fulfillment; on the contrary, Hoshi

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<sup>27</sup> Ozaki, 295.

insinuates in a rather Buddhist fashion that the quest for luxury can only lead to more desire, and thus suffering. If the crewmen had been able to restrain their materialistic tendencies at the outset, they would have had a clear view of the world and would have seen Jiff as it truly was. Instead, they were blinded both by their desire for further expansion and their meaningless assignments of worth to material objects.

Although postwar Japan was characterized by wild economic success, this transformation was accompanied by a significant shift towards materialism and consumerism, and the means by which companies and individuals were able to prosper were not always consistent with traditional Japanese values. In this new era of compromised morality and changing norms, the Japanese followed the precedent set in the Meiji era and again looked to literature to voice their anxieties. In “Disjointed Parts,” Hoshi Shinichi has done exactly that. By concentrating on themes of greed and selfishness in this collection, Hoshi is able to connect with his readers on a basic level by addressing their fears for the future of society in a world focused on personal gain. Indeed, that these stories have such widespread appeal is an “indication that something is present in Japanese commercial life that does not sit well with the Japanese psyche.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew, 67.

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ちくはぐな部品 : Disjointed Parts  
Thirteen Short Stories by Hoshi Shinichi  
As Translated by Caitlin Cronin



## The Vicious Planet

The news from the Space Patrol Expedition about the accidentally discovered planet captivated the people on Earth. The scientists had only briefly observed Jiff as they passed by, but according to the report, although the planet was far from large, it seemed to have oceans and rivers, mountains and waterfalls, forests and meadows.

There did not seem to be inhabitants. “Jiff” was not a name specific to the planet, but one given after the expedition member who had spotted it, and it had stuck.

At any rate, everyone on Earth was delighted. For an overpopulated Earth, this was a first-rate colony where they could build summerhouses. And from its location, it could also be said to be an ideal intermediary planet for expansion into space. It was undoubtedly rich in valuable resources as well.

Thus, a team was organized to build the first base, and their spaceship took off. Their task was to examine the geography of the planet, build a simple airport, and erect a communications tower so that there was a system to accommodate the many people expected to visit Jiff in the future.

The spaceship carrying the hardworking crew and their materials continued its voyage into space, and before long landed on Jiff. Gazing at the scenery, the crewmen cheered loudly.

“What a wonderful planet! Beautiful flowers blooming all around us, and over there a quiet green forest.”

“Look, you can see blue mountains. The best part is, we’re completely alone. Compared to Earth, littered with people, this place is Heaven.”

In unison, everyone expressed his delight. But as expected, the captain didn't lose sight of the mission, and he barked out orders.

“Well then, lets begin right away.”

“Yessir.”

The crewmen tried to obey, but their feet refused to move once they took a sniff of the air. A delicious aroma wafted over from somewhere. It was the smell of food.

“It might be my imagination. But it smells fantastic...”

“I smell it too. It seems to be coming from nearby.”

Everyone dropped their tasks and searched the surroundings. They quickly found the source of the smell.

A white cloth was spread across the field. Many large silver plates were set upon it. Of course, there weren't just plates. A luxurious spread of meat, fish, and fresh vegetables was piled on top.

Even at the finest restaurants on Earth it would be difficult to find such extravagant food; and what was more, there was tons of it. Around the plates there were also glasses filled with sake. From this food and drink arose a most wonderful aroma.

That something like this could exist on a supposedly deserted planet was a completely unbelievable phenomenon.

The captain yelled out to the crewmen, who without realizing, had begun to approach the food.

“Everyone, be careful. This is serious. Don't let down your guard.”

Although the captain's order was firm, for the crewmen it was one that was difficult to obey. Since they had departed Earth, they had been supplied with nothing but

tasteless space food. They were sick of it. Naturally, under normal circumstances, they would have been able to endure it due to their sense of responsibility and self-control.

However, with real food laid out like this in front of them, it was difficult to resist temptation. Moreover, the picturesque scenery only further stimulated their appetites. At last, one crewmember could endure no more, and he steadily approached the meal with an outstretched hand.

At that instant, the plates stacked with food and the sake disappeared. Afterward there was nothing left but grass. Not even the scent lingered. Everyone looked at each other.

“It seems to have been a vision. We are tired from the journey through space. It must have been a fantasy that our minds made up.”

“Even still, that food looked delicious. It left a strong image in my eyes and in my nose. My mouth is still watering and my stomach is growling.”

The captain again barked orders. “Alright, forget the vision and get back to work. We have a job to do.”

But whenever everyone tried to start something together, the vision of food reappeared. When they dispersed and tried to start an individual task, it would appear next to each crewman. They were continually tempted by tasty sights and smells. Even though they knew it was a hallucination, they couldn't help reaching out for it. As soon as they did, it would vanish. After they smiled bitterly and came to their senses, the illusion would return.

Because of this, although there was no immediate danger, the work was left undone. After a few days, rather than getting used to it, their feelings of irritation grew even worse.

Some people suffered from insomnia. Others could no longer keep down space food, and so became malnourished. Still others only continued to approach the visions, getting lost in them. The construction plans did not progress in the slightest.

Finally, the captain decided to return to Earth for the time being. Carrying a crew of troubled men, the spaceship returned home.

In this way, the first mission ended in failure. But plans to build a base were not abandoned. That said, even if they were to send a different crew it would probably have the same result.

A meeting was held, a new strategy was devised, and the second spaceship departed. Talented chefs joined the ship, and the highest quality food and sake were loaded aboard. For that reason, the ship was larger than before, but this was unavoidable. At any rate, there was no other option. In order to maintain calm and protect the minds of the crewmen from visions of food, they had to give them real food of comparable quality.

Having made these preparations, the second spaceship landed on Jiff. As they arrived, the chefs demonstrated their culinary skills in the name of a welcoming celebration. Glasses filled with sake, everyone was adequately satisfied. With this, even if the visions appeared, there was no reason to get distracted.

However, just then, a beautiful singing voice came from somewhere. It was a melody that seemed to melt everyone's hearts. When they looked towards the sound, they

saw the silhouette of a young beautiful woman. She was wearing a kimono of thin fabric that helped define her shapely and fascinating figure. Her eyes were feverish and there was a smile on her lips as she sang to herself.

One of the crewmen, ignoring the captain's order to stop, broke into a run and embraced her. At least, he tried to embrace her, but at that very second, she disappeared.

From then on, the vision of the beautiful woman began to appear at every turn. If they tried to touch her with their hands, she would disappear in a flash, and when they gave up, she would appear again. The hallucinations were out of their control.

If they tried to haul materials she would appear; if they tried to build anything she would appear. In order not to get distracted, they had to close their eyes, but with their eyes closed they couldn't get anything done. And even if they closed their eyes, they could still hear her singing voice. If they put wadding in their ears, her scent would entice them.

The construction plans didn't progress in the least, and crewmen again suffered nervous breakdowns. It was even worse than the first mission. The captain boarded them onto the spaceship and brought them back to Earth.

The third spaceship was even larger than the two before it. Besides the chefs and their cooking supplies, the finest women were chosen to accompany this mission. It was undeniably wasteful, but building a station on Jiff was worth such a sacrifice.

And thus, having covered all bases and feeling confident, they embarked on their journey. But as soon as they landed, yet another unexpected event took place.

A new vision appeared. Treasure, mink coats, beautiful clothes, and high-quality cosmetics were sighted. The male crewmen were unaffected, but as for the women, this was not the case. They complained, yelled out their frustration, and cried loudly.

As usual, when they tried to grasp the treasures, the visions disappeared, and when they abandoned hope they would reappear. The women were severely tormented. They threw fits, wanting to go home, and went into hysterics. The male crewmen had to devote themselves to containing and appeasing them, and there was no time to do work.

The third spaceship had to return to Earth in vain, having yielded no results.

The umpteenth spaceship was enormously large. In addition to the chefs and beautiful women, it was loaded with all kinds of extravagant products and games. There were sports cars, motorboats, and a large collection of films; from golf clubs to roulette, everything was loaded aboard.

With all this, they expected to be able to fight off any vision whatsoever. So with great confidence, they landed on Jiff.

The visions no longer appeared. All of the visions had vanished. The visions of food, women, and treasure had all gone away. However, with them, an even bigger vision had disappeared.

The ocean and rivers and mountains, and even the forest and meadows had left. Without a drop of running water, no flowers were blooming. Nothing but grayish rocks were drably stretched out before them. Someone analyzed the rocks, but they contained no useful minerals.

## All- Purpose Spy Tool

Mr. N. of the Secret Information Bureau reported to his boss' office. "What's the job?"

"It's top clearance. I want you to cross enemy lines and get information on a new missile system."

"Who's my partner?"

"You're going in alone. But I want you to bring this. It can do the work of several people."

Mr. N. glanced at the object his boss handed him. "It's just a camera."

"It's not just any camera. It was invented by our Secret Investigation Committee. It's remarkable."

"There seems to be some sort of dial attached."

"Yes, I want you to study how to adjust it. For starters, if you touch this, you can listen to the radio. Next, if you fiddle with this scale, it becomes a wireless device that connects to this one at headquarters. And the button next to that is a sonar phone."

"Forgive me, sir, but what's a sonar phone?"

"It's a device that takes a small sound and magnifies it. If you take it like this and put it on the wall, you'll be able to hear a conversation in the next room. And if you put it under your pillow at night, no one can sneak up on you when you sleep because the sound of their footsteps will wake you up."

"But what do I do if I'm attacked by a large group?"

“In that case, you use this dial to dispense a pill. It is a sleeping gas antidote. After you take it, adjust the dial like so to release a powerful sleeping gas on your enemies. Once they fall to the ground, you should be able to escape, totally unaffected.”

“Can you watch TV on this thing?” Mr. N. thought to ask, but his boss shook his head angrily.

“Hey, this isn't a toy.”

“I'm sorry, sir, you're right.” Mr. N. scratched his head as his boss continued to explain the camera's functions.

“Anyway, a master key comes out from here. And if you press this button, it releases a liquid that can melt through metal. You should be able to open most safes with those two functions. And here you have an insulated wire-cutter that can disconnect any alarms you'll come across.”

“Wow, what a great function. I'll be able to steal top-secret files, no problem.”

“If you pull this, a thin but very sturdy wire comes out. You can descend from buildings by walking along it.”

As his boss was talking, Mr. N. tried it out. He hooked one end of the wire to the ceiling and tried to hang from it; it didn't give out. He pushed a button and the wire retracted into the camera. “I think I got it.”

“Next, these numbers indicate air pressure. By checking them, you can predict changes in weather.”

“The lens seems a little big though, doesn't it?”

Seeing Mr. N.'s interest was piqued, his boss proudly demonstrated. “Well, it's really an all-purpose lens. It's useful for a lot of things. If you look through here, it's a



telescope, but if you adjust the scale, it becomes a microscope. And if you press here, you can use it as a flashlight to illuminate things far away. You can even use it as a slide projector if you turn it like this. I'll show you." The boss turned around and flipped a switch. Mr. N.'s outline was reflected on the wall.

"Aha! My enemies will mistake me for my silhouette and shoot at that instead."

"If you need money, you press this button. It releases a container, like so." When the boss tilted the container, five precious stones fell into the palm of his hand. Mr. N.'s eyes bulged.

"They're beautiful."

"You should use them for bribes. Don't just throw them around on the girls you meet."

"Yessir."

As Mr. N. nodded, the chief began to explain a new function of the camera. "If you press this button, you can use it as an electric razor. If you're being followed by your enemies, shave your head bald. It should temporarily throw them off your trail."

"You're right, boss, this camera does have a lot of different functions. Is that everything?"

"No, that's not all. If you put this in your mouth as you dive into water, it will give you oxygen for a certain amount of time. And there are also these two buttons, which can be used when you're in a worst-case scenario. If you press this one, the device acts as a hand grenade, and if you press the other, it can be used as a time bomb."

Mr. N. listened to his boss' explanation and was impressed. "This really is an amazing camera. With just this tool, I should be able to carry out my mission. I'll return

after I photograph all the enemy's secrets. Speaking of which, how do I take pictures with it?"

Hearing this question, the chief looked puzzled. "Right... I haven't answered that yet. I guess I didn't think of that. It seems like it doesn't have that function. I guess I'll have to lend you my disposable."

## The Conspiracy

There was an elephant being raised at a zoo. Next to its cage, a group of pigeons had settled down for some time. This was for a reason. It was because the pigeons could help themselves to the leftovers that the humans threw to the elephant, thereby eating without having to do much work.

This was a very comfortable lifestyle, and the pigeons passed the time making small talk. However, they did not know what to do with their free time, and once they got sick of discussing the usual topics, their conversation would continue in a violent direction.

“That idiot elephant doesn’t like insects.”

“Yeah, that fat oaf is too arrogant. He acts like we don’t even exist.”

The more they thought about it, the more disgruntled they got. Of course, their dissatisfaction was due to the humiliation of having to eat the elephant’s leftovers, but no one said so. There was no other way of dealing with the situation.

“Why don’t we all fly together in a pack and make fun of him? We can’t lose if we stick together and take him by surprise attack,” one pigeon cried excitedly. But the others stopped him.

“That’s ridiculous. Why don’t we do something a little more clever and mean-spirited?”

The pigeons consulted each other about what to do. There are few things in this world as fun as ironing out a conspiratorial plot. For the next few days, the pigeons were bent on perfecting their plan. Before long, they had worked out an idea. One of the

pigeons went as a representative to the elephant's cage, and engaged him in conversation for the first time.

“Powerful Mr. Elephant. Aren't you the king of the animal world?”

“Yeah, I guess I am. Thank you.”

“But isn't it a pity that you're simply satisfied to be in a cage made by humans?”

“Hmm, I've never thought about that. But now that you mention it, I guess you're right.”

“Now is the time to open your eyes and fight back. You're much larger than the humans, much more powerful, and your brain and nose are much bigger. There's no way you can lose. You should show them your strength.”

The pigeons' plot was to flatter the good-natured elephant, and manipulate him into acting up. Then, they would watch him get punished by the humans, and make him into a laughingstock. After that, the one suffering a bigger humiliation would be the elephant, not them.

Unfortunately, they made a slight miscalculation. The elephant was more fed up with the humans than they had expected. He truly believed the pigeons' words, and his body burst with power. He broke through his cage, stampeded the city, and began to destroy everything that caught his attention. He was hit by several bullets, and did not stop until he drew his last breath.

At any rate, the pigeons' days of humiliation were over. They should have been grateful, but they were unable to live outside in the intense world of survival of the fittest, and in several days' time, they died a sad, hungry death.

## Welcome Assault

“Captain. The planet. We seem to be getting closer,” the crewmen cried in unison while pointing out the window of the spaceship.

“Ahh, it’s been a long journey. Everyone has endured the same unchanging universe since blasting off from Earth. Soon we’ll be able to start the preparations for landing.”

As the captain said this, the control deck burst into energy for the first time in months. The crewmen inspected spacesuits, prepared equipment for exploration, and double-checked the weapons arsenal. Meanwhile, eager voices could be heard from the observation room.

“Captain, according to the spectrum analysis, the star has water and oxygen.”

“In that case, there may be life forms. For all we know, there could be some sort of basic civilization. I’m excited to see the test results. We’ve come a long way through space. Soon we will be able to experience things unknown to mankind.”

Outside the window, the star got bigger. The spaceship’s crew started preparing for landing.

“Everyone be careful. We may be attacked. Pay close attention to the radar.”

“Yes, captain.”

The ship dropped in altitude as the crew waited nervously. But the attack they feared never came.

“Captain, something that looks like a city, with moving things in it, has been observed.”

“Aha, so there is some sort of elementary civilization. Okay, try not to surprise them too much. Land by the coast, and we can lead a scouting mission to the city from there.”

The spaceship aimed for the coast and finished landing with a small bump. A voice addressed the relieved crewmen from the observation room.

“According to our measurements, we should be able to breathe safely in this atmosphere. There is no need to wear spacesuits.”

“But what about bacteria and radiation?”

“There are none on this planet. We have conducted a thorough investigation.”

“Fantastic. Walking around without our heavy spacesuits will be a big help. Let’s go explore.”

Under the captain’s orders, the double door quietly opened. One by one, the crewmen ventured forth.

“The sand is oddly reddish. And the ocean isn’t exactly blue either.”

“It’s probably due to the sunlight, or possibly the algae. Let’s investigate later; for now we should go to that city we spotted from the spaceship. The captain is most interested in what kind of civilization is on this planet.”

The crewman began to advance up a steep hill.

“Be careful. We don’t know what kind of inhabitants are here. Hey, you there, you’re the scout. You go first.”

“Yessir.”

The scout took his infrared gun and continued forward. The crewmen followed behind, surveying their surroundings curiously but cautiously.

Suddenly, the air echoed with a screeching metallic sound. The crewmen drew their guns and listened for sounds.

“Hey, what’s going on? Did something happen?”

From the top of the hill, they could hear the scout answer, “Yes...the inhabitants are all gathered together...”

The supervisor chided him. “Don’t do anything stupid, like shoot them if they aren’t attacking us. Especially if they have better weapons. We don’t know what they could do to us.”

“Yessir. Of course there is no reason to shoot. That would be a threat. But look, they don’t seem like a very advanced culture. It might be best to beat them to the punch and show them our capabilities.” He pulled his trigger.

The scout’s answer was reliable. The crewmen ran up the hill and saw a herd of creatures half the size of humans, who stood on two feet but had long tails. Seeing the crewmen and the plants that had been burnt by the scout’s gun, the creatures were intimidated.

“They really are a pathetic bunch, aren’t they? But how sad, we seemed to have scared them, haven’t we? We might have trouble convincing them they have nothing to worry about.”

“Yeah, we don’t speak the same language, and I don’t think that would be easy to communicate through hand gestures.”

Frozen by indecision, the crewmen were glued to the spot. At that moment, the inhabitants came forward.

“They put something on the ground. What is it?”

As the crewmen watched, the inhabitants descended in droves back down the hill. The supervisor issued orders while watching through binoculars. “Someone go see what it is. It could be anything, but it’s probably harmless.”

Despite the supervisor’s neutral words, the crewmen approached the object carefully.

“I saw one of them pick one of these up and put it in their mouth. They must be food.”

“That’s probably true. Eating these things may be instrumental to establishing a friendship with them. But they might contain poison. Test them first.” Listening to the supervisor’s order, one of the crewmen took out a portable food analysis device.

“The tests indicate that they aren’t made from anything harmful to us. They should be okay to eat,” he said as he slowly picked up one of the mysterious delicacies and placed it on his tongue. Smacking his lips, he announced, “It’s delicious, even better than I expected.”

At this, another crewman picked one up and put it in his mouth too. “You’re right, it tastes pretty good.”

Watching the crewmen consume their offering, the inhabitants cheered. The cheer sounded inviting.

“They seem happy. It looks like they wanted to make us feel welcome. We probably shouldn’t have scared them with our infrared guns.”

“You’re wrong, they probably thought we were gods because of the power of our guns. And now they’re happy because we accepted their offering.”



“Maybe. But for an offering, that was a fairly measly portion,” the supervisor said, smiling. Realizing there was no reason to fear the inhabitants, who seemed to be welcoming them, everyone relaxed their guard a little.

“We should also let them know we don’t harbor any animosity towards them. What should we do? What if we threw them our lasers?”

“It’s a little soon for that, don’t you think?”

“But under our clothes, we still have a protective layer that deflects almost everything. And we still have our tranquilizer guns and pistols. They’ve seen the power of our lasers.”

With that, they pulled the safety lock on their infrared guns and placed them on the ground for the inhabitants. Seeing this, the inhabitants cheered again, and then once more descended down the hill back to where they had come from.

“Look. They have another offering.” Everyone drew closer to the inhabitants’ gift.

“They seem to be conveying an interest in friendship. But don’t be careless. Let’s study it carefully first.”

After the proper tests were completed, the crewmen each tried the new offering. Not only did it taste better than the previous one, but there was also a bigger portion. Everyone finished eating quickly.

“Their wariness seems to be fading away. That was delicious.”

Following this, another crewman added, “I want to eat more. What should we do next, throw them our tranquilizer guns and pistols?”

“Don’t be stupid. Since they don’t know those are weapons, doing so would be meaningless.”

At that thought, the crewmen seemed to be stumped. The inhabitants came to give them another offering.

“By giving us food, they are attempting to show us a welcoming attitude. So let’s show them that we are not their enemies by eating it.”

“That’s a good idea. After eating all that synthetic food on the spaceship, I am sick of space food. I will gladly eat their offerings to demonstrate my friendship.”

Of course, the crewmen continued to test the portions they were served, but they already began to think that doing so was unnecessary. The flavors just got more and more delicious, and the serving sizes only increased.

In a joyous manner, the inhabitants continued to carry food up to the crewmen, cheering every time they descended the hill.

“They seem so delighted.”

“That’s good. The inhabitants of this star seem like a good lot. At some point, we will probably come to exchange words. And they will also probably come to appreciate the benefits of our culture. Then we can exploit their natural resources, as outlined in our report,” the supervisor said. As the crewmen ate, they talked along the same lines.

“This food just keeps getting better. The fact that we’re proving our friendship by eating it is too good to be true.”

“But how do we keep showing our goodwill after we get full?”

“I still have room left. Don’t worry, I’ll eat your portion.”

“Wait, I can still eat too. I wonder what kind of food will come next?”

As if they were about to fall on top of one another, the crewmen picked up their pace and began to run towards the newest offering. Suddenly, the ground gave way and all of the crewmen fell into a large, dark hole.

## Super Adhesive

Mr. N. was studying adhesives. One night, a friend came to visit.

“You’ve been working pretty diligently, but have you made any progress?”

“Of course I have. I’ve developed a new adhesive, a type of which has not existed until now.”

His friend looked interested. “I would love to see it.”

“Let me show you.”

Mr. N. came back carrying several bottles. Inside, they contained a sticky liquid. He pointed to it and spoke. “This is it. I’ve really worked hard on it. Though it’s still in the idea stage...”

“Well, let’s save your tales of hardship for some other time. Right now I want to hear about this stuff.”

“Of course.” Using a brush, Mr. N. spread the liquid on a phone receiver on top of the desk. “Why are you putting it there?” his friend asked suspiciously.

“In order to show you its amazing properties. There. Try picking up the receiver.”

Mr. N.’s friend did as he said. But the receiver stayed stuck to the phone. Even though it had just been glued, it was completely set, and no matter how much strength he used, he couldn't pry it apart.

“The adhesive power is amazing.”

“That was just the beginning; its stickiness is unparalleled. It can even be used in building construction.”

“I’m impressed. But is it okay to leave the phone stuck like that?”

The friend cocked his head. At that exact moment, the phone rang. Someone seemed to be calling. As he listened to the ring, the friend felt uneasy about what would happen next.

But untroubled, Mr. N. picked up the receiver and spoke with the person who had called. How was this possible, after the receiver had been glued so firmly? The friend stared, feeling as if he were hallucinating. As soon as the phone call was over, he interrogated Mr. N. “How...?”

“This is its prize feature. In fact, you could even call it a time-release adhesive bond. The glue I just used was the five-minute variety. For the first five minutes after you apply it, the bond will absolutely not break, but after that time passes, it will easily detach. Of course, you can adjust the time limit accordingly.”

“Amazing. This kind of feature has never existed before, that’s for sure. What kind of applications does it have?”

Mr. N. thought for a minute and then spoke. “Since I have just completed the research, that remains to be seen, but I think it can have various uses. For example, houses. A lot of thought goes into houses before they are built, but as soon as you start living there, you start to realize little annoyances and feel the need to fix them.”

“Now that you mention it...”

“But if you build your house using, say, the one-year glue, after a year you can make renovations as you please. The same thing goes for construction projects; if you build a bridge and then later want to lower it or recognize a flaw in its design, you can change it after a year. In other words, it’s like a trial period. This glue is perfect for a fluctuating future society.”

“It’s good for the economy too, it seems.”

“As for everyday uses, it can also work as a key for an office or safe. If you apply a glue that’s effective for the amount of time that you’re gone from the office, a robbery cannot occur.”

“The uses are endless, aren’t they?” His friend was very much impressed. At that moment, the door opened and a suspicious-looking person entered. He was wearing black glasses and holding a knife. The man spoke.

“I heard your conversation from the shadows. That glue sounds pretty useful. Hand over the instructions on how to make it.”

“Who the hell are you?”

“Even if I don't tell you, you probably already know. I’m one of the ‘bad guys.’ And your glue has lots of uses for crime. If I pour it on the street, I can hold up a police car chase as long as I want. If I glue footholds on a wall, I could break into any house without leaving evidence behind.”

“Hmm, so there are evil uses for it as well. I guess I never thought of that, since I’m a ‘good guy.’”

Mr. N. was frustrated, but the robber was triumphant. Seeing this unguarded moment, Mr. N. picked up one of the bottles and threw it at his attacker. It shattered at the robber’s feet, and the glue inside hardened, sticking his feet to the floor. The liquid must have gotten into his shoes as well; no matter how hard he squirmed, he couldn’t move. He let out a shriek.

“Help me! I won’t use it for crime!”

“Saying so now won’t help you, you’re too late. This is a new discovery: its use in catching criminals.”

Mr. N. called the police. An officer came and placed the robber in handcuffs.

“What a strange thing you captured him with.”

“It’s an adhesive that I invented.”

“Is that so. Well, I’d like to take him in, but how do I do that?” The officer pushed and pulled, but the robber’s feet would not leave the floor.

“I just happened to throw the glue bottle that was closest to me,” Mr. N. responded. “I wonder how long the time lock was. By the way, how long is this robber’s sentence?”

“It should be about three years,” the policeman responded.

Mr. N. found a fragment of the bin. After looking at it, he said, “That should be perfect. The one I threw was the three-year glue. He won’t be able to move for three years.”

“But...but...” The officer was stumped by this unprecedented turn of events, but there was no way he could take in his suspect. It was impossible to have a trial, and he couldn’t put him in jail. The robber was granted an exception, and he was able to avoid jail time simply because he remained glued to the floor.

After that, Mr. N. remodeled the room, making the robber his receptionist. Unable to leave the workplace, he was a faithful worker. In fact, he had to be faithful because if he did a sloppy job, he would not be fed. When night fell the robber laid down and slept there, occasionally he would wash himself; that was how he spent his days. It wasn't a

pleasant lifestyle, but as a punishment for his crime, there was no other choice. Indeed, it wasn't much different from spending three years in jail.



## Mystery Present

The young man was stretched out in his room. It was a narrow one-bedroom apartment in a sleazy complex. Inside, it was relatively uncluttered. This was because there wasn't much there.

He had sold just about everything off. The night before last, he had even sold his best coat in exchange for dinner. Since then, the only thing that had entered his mouth was water. If he moved, he got hungry, so he was lying down perfectly still.

“There is no one as pitiful as me,” thought the young man. “Not only now, but my entire miserable life.”

When he was a child, his mother had died in an automobile accident. By nature, he was not a smart boy, so he failed the college entrance exam three times. Once he was finally accepted, his father got fired from work and had to pay tuition by taking a part-time job. Eventually, his father died from overwork. The only thing that he left behind for his son was debt.

Even still, the young man somehow managed to get through school. But unfortunately, due to the recession, there was an extreme job shortage. After going to great lengths to find employment, he paid the price for having overdone it at school, and became ill.

Everything went this way. Right now, he was out of work. Knowing he had to do something, he visited the local ward office, acquaintances, everyone, and repeated his sad tale. But nothing could be done. Instead, he was thrown into an even worse situation.

“I can't watch this any longer,” said the young man's landlord. “Why don't you work as a seat-filler for election speeches? All you have to do is dress like a businessman

and shake hands next to the candidate. It's not a lot of money, but you can do it without tiring yourself."

"Thank you so much!" The young man was excited about the idea, but as he thought about it, he realized he didn't have any appropriate clothes. He had reached the end of the road. There was nothing to do but hope for a miracle.

The young man stood up absentmindedly and without thinking, opened the closet. Just then, a miracle happened. Even though there should have been nothing there, hanging in the closet was a single jacket. How strange...

He didn't understand where it had come from, but the young man was grateful. He tried it on. Somehow, it fit perfectly. He quickly left the apartment and went to work as a seat-filler.

That day, he was able to make some money. Breathing a sigh of relief, he headed for home. On the way, he ran into an unwelcome acquaintance. It was the debt collector. He saw the young man and yelled out to him.

"Hey! You're wearing nice clothing, it looks like you've come into good times, huh?"

"Uh, no, this is..." While struggling for an answer, the young man had his pockets searched, and the money he had worked so hard to earn was taken from him.

With that, he was back to square one. It seemed as if that night he would again have to go without food. He wanted to sell his jacket, but he would lose his job if he did. With an empty stomach, he returned home and went to hang up his jacket in the closet.

To his surprise, he discovered food there. There was soup, bread, and juice. The young man pounced, and began to eat. It wasn't until after he had finished and caught his breath that he realized it tasted great.

After that, the young man tried to figure out what was causing the food and clothing to appear. He didn't have a clue. Until now he had been miserable, so maybe God was finally helping him, he thought. He had no reason to think otherwise.

The next morning when he woke up, the young man had a headache. He seemed to have caught a cold. But without the money to buy medicine, he had to go to work. With an unspoken hope, he went to open the closet.

Inside, there were pills. When he took them, his headache immediately disappeared, his cold went away, and he was able to leave the house.

Why were these various things appearing in his closet with such great timing? He didn't understand the cause, but there was no doubt as to his good fortune. The young man decided he would not share this secret with anyone. If he kept quiet, maybe more miraculous things would appear.

The next morning, with his heart leaping, the young man again opened the closet. This time, there was a gigantic box. Each side was about one meter in length. He wondered what was inside. As he opened it, he found metal materials and something that looked like directions. Unlike normal directions, there were no words; there were only pictures showing how to assemble the object.

The young man locked the door to his apartment and began building with curiosity. As his work progressed, he had assembled a robot. Its arms and legs were thin, and it had a rather slim and sophisticated appearance.

As per usual, he did not understand the reason for its appearance, but drawing on his previous experience, he decided it had to be a good present. The young man spoke to the robot. “Where did you come from?”

“The future,” the robot answered. With that, the young man slowly began to understand the series of phenomena from the last couple of days. All of the objects in the closet had appeared in a way that seemed to anticipate his needs.

“Why are you here? You were probably sent to assist me. Thank God. Hmm, what should I make you do first?”

“No, I actually came here to capture you.” Saying this, the robot tightly tied up the stunned young man with some nearby rope. No matter how much he struggled, the ropes were unbearably strong. Finally, the young man spoke.

“This has never happened before. Why must I be arrested?”

“Because you are required. That is the reason I was sent.”

“But I don’t understand. Why did the clothes and food appear?”

“It was a trap of sorts. Long ago, in order to catch a sparrow, people would scatter birdseed in a line, and as the sparrow relaxed and continued forward, they would cover it with a cage. This was a modern-day variation. You were completely sucked in. You assembled me. And now you cannot escape.”

“How are you going to take me to the future?”

“Soon, a box will appear. When we get in it, we will automatically be able to go to the future.”

Somehow or other, the robot seemed to be telling the truth. Leading a life full of misery, the young man was not reluctant to leave the present. That said, when it came to traveling to a future in which he did not know even one person, he was undecided.

“How about this. Give me two days to think about it. I want to see everything as it is for the last time, and I’d like to say goodbye to everyone.”

As the robot smothered the boy’s increasingly loud protests, he announced, “That is impossible. Tomorrow night, you will make a misstep and fall into the river. Your fate is to drown. Instead, it is better that you go to the future now, just as you are.”

“Is there no other way?”

“No. You drew our attention for this very reason. Also, history will not significantly change when we kidnap you. So, let’s go.”

Inside the closet, a metallic box appeared. The robot spoke as he pushed the young man in and then entered the box himself. “When this box appeared, you would have been on guard and you probably would not have gotten in. That's why my appearance was also necessary. But if I had appeared as I am now and anyone else saw me, there would have been an uproar. So I was sent in pieces, since it was expected that you would assemble me in secret.”

“What a clever strategy.” The young man nodded resolutely, prepared. It was unclear what kind of device it was, but soon he felt light tremors. The young man wondered if they were traveling through the channels of time.

When they got out of the box, they were in the future. They stood in a wide hall; the ceiling and floor were made out of a beautiful plastic-like material. When he looked

outside the window, buildings stood in neat rows, and state-of-the-art compact vehicles were circling the sky in droves. It seemed like a world that had everything.

Before long, a very proper-looking person appeared. She was wearing loose clothing. Perhaps in this world, people did not have to do backbreaking labor. As she loosened the young man's ropes, she said, "Thank you for coming. I will ask the robot for a report, but we wanted to warmly and humbly welcome you."

"I don't understand why you want me. I don't have any talents; in fact, I'm a rather useless person."

"Well, that's simply not true. We would like you to appear on television. Please tell us your miserable story. Here, we live in fortunate times and do not know your kind of sadness."

The young man had no choice, so he consented. Once more, he repeated the sad story that he had told countless times to his colleagues in order to borrow money. In the beginning, he felt out of his element; but as he continued to speak, he got into the swing of things.

The reaction was, of course, tremendous. Every last person was entertained by the story, and from then on, the young man was made to speak endlessly.

### Would You Like a Sip?

Late at night, Dr. F. was alone in his laboratory, eagerly working on an experiment. He was cautiously mixing chemicals when he suddenly heard someone say, “Don’t scream, old man, because if you don’t keep quiet, I’ll pull the trigger.”

The doctor kept working. “No, you keep quiet! I’m just finishing a medicine that I’ve been working on for months. It’s a miraculous new drug...” With that, he turned his face to the main chamber.

“...There, I finally finished! Now, what was it you required? Who are you, may I ask?”

“Well, you’re a rather serious person, aren’t you? At any rate, I’m a thief. Give me your money.”

“Sorry to disappoint you, but you’re here too early. If you had come after the drug I invented was sold, there would have been a large pile of money.”

“It seems like quite the medicine, but what effect does it have?”

“You love life, you feel good, and a dreamlike world becomes reality. And it lasts forever. You came all this way to barge in on me. There’s only enough of this prototype for one person, and I don’t really want to give it up, but you can try it if you like.”

In the doctor’s hand, there was a small bottle containing a green liquid. The thief reached out his arm, but then he thought about it. “Wait a second. It could be a powerful sleeping drug. If I fall for that trick, I’ll look like an idiot.”

“If you don’t want it, that’s fine. I’ll take it. Since I made it myself, I want to be the first to experience my own success.”

Seeing the doctor bring the bottle to his lips made the thief yell out in a small voice. “Well, wait a minute.”

“What, did you change your mind and decide you want to drink it after all? If that's the case, drink up. You won't find anything else of value here.”

The thief took the bottle the doctor held out, cocked his head back, and stared at it. “Its certainly the case that this medicine has some value. But it's also possible your words and actions were just a realistic ploy. If I went along and drank it, it would be too late for regrets.”

The doctor took the bottle back from the hesitant thief. “Well aren't you a skeptic. Fine then, I've decided to drink it. After that, as soon as you tie me up, if you find anything you want, you can take it and leave.”

The doctor brought the bottle to his lips and started drinking. Seeing this, the thief quickly swiped it back. “So, it seems that the drug really is harmless. Fork it over, I'm trying it next.” The thief gulped down the remaining portion. But after a moment he fell to the floor, gasping.

“I can't move, my body's gone numb! What's going on? This didn't happen to you!”

“If evil-minded people drink it, they become numb. But nothing happens to good people. That is its effect. In other words, if it's widely used, bad people like you will disappear, making a dreamlike world a reality.”



## Ghost House

After finishing their evening shower, the summer clouds blew away towards the mountains. Above the blue sky, the blinding sunlight reappeared. Like the sound of a pipe organ, the heat began to boil up with hidden strength. All around, the strong smell of grass mixed with steam; nearby there was a dark green forest. From its depths, the cicadas cried endlessly...

These were foothills far, far away from the city. Nearby, there was no sign of human life; in fact, the only movement came from summer flowers that sometimes stirred in the breeze, and the horseflies that flew past each other.

Although there was no sign of human life, in the outskirts of the forest, there stood a house. It sat on a downward slope, and around it the last traces of a stone fence were covered in moss.

The sound of an engine shook the air, and a compact car came swinging down the road, stopping at the house. Two young men got out. Opening a map of the surrounding area, one young man tapped his sweaty fingers on it.

“We will have to pass right through here.”

“Look at this strange house. What is it?”

“According to local legend, this is the house where a defeated samurai lived. That was a long time ago, almost four hundred years. After his family treasures were destroyed, it was rumored that ghosts would appear, and no one has lived there, or even come near, ever since.”

“That’s an interesting story. But we have to move forward with our plans to build. The house will take a half day at most to take down.”

On their heads, helmets shone brightly. They were civil engineers. A freeway was being constructed through these foothills. The plans were progressing smoothly, and the freeway stretched quite close. If you listened hard, you could hear the sounds of construction.

“I wonder what’s inside.”

“Not much, probably. But let’s take a look.”

They both approached the house, but one stopped walking and raised his voice.

“Ahhh!”

“What’s wrong?”

“A rock fell from the roof. I was wearing my helmet, though, so I’m okay.”

“It’s because it’s an old house. It could probably collapse from one small vibration. It’s not safe to go in. Let’s call a bulldozer and demolish it.”

The two men returned to their compact car and made the call from their radio.

“They said they’d come soon. Let’s wait till then.” Inside the car, the air conditioner worked wonders.

From inside the mold-filled house, a hoarse-sounding voice darkly scolded, “It seems that someone is closing in on us.”

Nothing moved, and yet a deep voice answered. “So they have. But there’s nothing to be afraid of. Although it has been almost four hundred years since we deserted the army and shut ourselves in here, we haven’t allowed an invasion yet. Right?”

“You’re right. Those two men were frightened by a rock that fell from the roof, and they seemed to turn right back around. Let’s relax for now.”

Presently, the voices broke up and only the bugs under the floor were audible. However, it felt like there were violent tremors approaching, and the voices began to murmur for a second time.

“A strange sound is coming closer.”

“It is an oddly-shaped vehicle. It seems to be impressive. What should we do?”

“They are rather obstinate fellows. Let’s try knocking down that wilted tree.” As the bulldozer approached the stone gate, a tree crashed down in front of it, lying sideways. But it did not stop.

“He didn't falter.”

“Okay, when he gets closer, knock down the stone fence. It can’t be helped.”

When the front of the bulldozer reached the gate, a couple of stones tumbled down. But the steel body of the bulldozer didn’t even dent. Looking over his shoulder at the engineers, the driver said, “It’s too easy, it’s like there’s no resistance.”

“Is that so. The job is going smoothly. Now do the house.”

The engineers took charge. The stone fence was knocked out in a single blow, and the driver turned his steering wheel towards the house.

“Our enemies are not at all intimidated,” the voices in the house panicked. “Let’s try scaring them by scattering the tree leaves and making the cicadas stop.”

Before long, millions of green leaves fell off the trees without reason, and instantly the cicadas stopped singing. There was only silence. But even this ominous mood had no impact on the roar of the bulldozer.

“We don't have any other ways to stop it.”

“They didn't even notice. We must protect this house. Close the door tightly!”

“Do you think it’s better to just clear out?”

“Impossible. I’ve grown accustomed to living here for the last four hundred years; if we abandon this house, there is nowhere else to go.”

Even though there was no wind, the door closed with a click. But without noticing, the driver pushed the edge of the bulldozer against a corner of the house. Then, he slightly cocked his head. “That’s strange. Even though the house has rotted, it is surprisingly solid.”

The house fought back with all of its might. But it didn't last for long. With a sad sound, the walls collapsed, the worn-out boards came unstuck, the dust that had collected over the years was released into the air.

The bulldozer continued on mercilessly. The frogs under the floorboards, the mice in the ceiling, and the spiders and bugs hidden inside the support beams were all abruptly confused by the brightness. The bulldozer retreated to the bushes and then the forest. Sunlight streamed in to what remained of the building.

“For some reason, these beams will not fall down.”

Responding to the driver’s call, the engineers gave instructions. “Rev it up to maximum horsepower and then try it.”

The bulldozer momentarily backed up, the sound of its engine raised higher, and with increased vigor it collided with the beams. The pillars screamed out painfully, and before long they were lying sideways on the ground.

“Yes! We finally got everything!”

“Hey, there’s an old water well over there. It will also get in the way of construction, so collect all the rubble and fill it up.”

“Sure, I’ll get right on it.”

Plaster, roof tiles, and worn-out blocks of wood were pushed and fell into the hole. The chore was finished after many back-and-forth trips, and the sound of the engine stopped. Silence returned to the area.

“Well then, should we take a break?”

“Sure. It’s really turned into a bright, tidy scene.”

The driver and engineers wiped off their sweat and stopped to breathe. That’s when one of the engineers shook his head in disbelief. “I thought I heard a human voice.”

“I didn’t hear anything. What kind of voice was it?”

“The voice was like a sigh, as if it had worn out, resigned, and fallen into a long sleep.”

“Don’t you think you’ve been in the sun a little too long?”

“Yeah, it’s probably because of the heat. The voice came from around the well we just filled up, but it can’t have made that sound.”

The voices could no longer be heard. After that, the conversation turned to the day not so long from now when the road would be finished and trucks and sport cars would come and go at top speed on the highway.

## Treasure Island

One day, Mr. R., a businessman, was walking along the beach with his secretary. The secretary was not a young woman, but was in fact a man of a considerable age. But he had a loyal personality, and was a person who could be trusted.

Mr. R. had just finished a project, so having some free time, he had come here for a break. The ocean stretched out far in front of him, and the breeze that crossed over the blue expanse had a clean, refreshing smell. Perhaps there was still time before swim season would begin, as the beach was mostly empty.

“Aah, this feels good. It feels far away from the busy workday.”

“Yessir.”

“But we can’t rest like this forever. We have to work out a plan for our next project and put it into action.”

“Yessir.”

“But in order to do that we need to collect funds. This might be a little tricky.”

“Yessir.”

Without fail, the secretary followed behind Mr. R.’s footsteps. After a short while, Mr. R. suddenly stopped, pointing at the shoreline, and said, “I wonder what that is?”

Something was sparkling under the sunlight.

“Certainly, sir. I will go investigate.”

The secretary walked over quickly, and dug out an object half-buried in the sand. It was a bottle. It looked old, and was corked. He washed it in the salt water and brought it back for a report.

“It was this bottle. It’s nothing really. Shall I throw it away?”

Mr. R. took it and held it up to the light. Because it was opaque, he couldn't see what was inside. He spoke after lightly shaking it in his hands.

"No, wait. It seems like there's something inside. I'm kind of curious. Open it."

"I have a strange feeling about this. What will you do if a genie comes out?"

"That would be perfect. I would ask him to collect me money. It's fine. Open it. I'll take responsibility."

It was not much of an order, but the secretary set about opening it. The cork was tightly placed, and he couldn't get it out easily. In the end, he decided to break the bottle open with a rock. Inside, there was a slip of paper. The secretary spread it across the sand and craned his neck.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Hmm. It has something like a map drawn on it." With that, Mr. R. also took a good look. Upon inspection, the drawing written on the worn slip of paper appeared to be a map of some island. And in one place was a cross mark that seemed to have some kind of meaning.

Mr. R. clapped his hands and called out in an excited voice. "We've found something amazing."

"Is that so?"

"This definitely shows where an old pirate buried his treasure. This is unbelievably good luck."

"That's great news," the secretary chimed in. But Mr. R.'s expression quickly became cloudy, and holding the map in his hand, he spoke, seeming frustrated.

“But with just this, it’s hopeless. We don’t know where this island is. There’s not enough to go on.”

“Wait a second, sir. There’s something written on the back as well,” the secretary said. When he turned it over, there was a chart that indicated the location of the island.

Mr. R.’s voice was once again filled with joy. “This is perfect. The path to the treasure is now clear. All we have to do is go out and seize it with our own hands. Let’s prepare as soon as possible. Come with me.”

“But…”

“We are the only ones who know this secret. If we let other people take part, we will have to share our take with them too. We may face some hardships, but it will be more profitable if we split it between the two of us.”

“Yessir.”

Knowing he could keep his share of the treasure, the secretary also got stars in his eyes, and he agreed.

Mr. R. occupied himself with the necessary preparations. He found funds and bought a small but sturdy boat, filling it with fuel, food, and water. Accordingly, he learned how to operate the boat with his secretary. It wasn’t something they mastered quickly, but they had unimaginable passion. In no time, they had reached the point where together, they could manage.

Everything was done. Soon, it was time to set sail, and the boat left the bay and set on toward the ocean. Because the two of them were doing everything, their work on the boat kept them busy. But since they were enthusiastic, they didn’t feel tired. Mr. R. spoke.



“How is it? Going well?”

“Yessir, right now everything is good.”

“Other boat rides aren’t as pleasant as this. We’re filled with hope as we slowly get closer. It’s as if the sound of the waves is playing celebration music for us, and the light of the sun is bathing us in good fortune. You can’t experience this feeling on a normal boat ride. Just this makes everything worthwhile.”

A number of quiet days had passed when the secretary reported from his binoculars.

“I see an island up ahead.”

When they checked the map, there was no question that it was the same island. It was small; and as they looked out of the binoculars as they approached, it seemed to be deserted.

“Let’s go ashore quickly. Don’t forget the shovel. I don’t think we’ll need it, but let’s bring a weapon just in case. Right, there’s also the sake and cups for a celebratory toast.” The two men clamored off the boat. The island’s terrain was exactly as depicted on the map, and they did not get confused or lost.

The forest had many trees with dark green leaves, and there were patches of blooming tropical flowers. Before long, they reached the spot that was marked on the map. When they looked carefully, they found a cave.

“Everything is exactly like on the map. The treasure is waiting for us nearby. My heart is pounding. Let’s go in.”

Mr. R. entered, holding up his flashlight, and his secretary followed. But they were unable to find a box or even a bag that might contain treasure. What's more, there was no trace that any treasure had ever been there. Mr. R. spoke, sounding upset.

"This is strange. This can't be possible. What's going on?"

"It's possible that someone got here before us and left with the treasure."

"No, no one could have seen the map in that bottle before us."

Without giving up, the two of them circled the cave, investigating. Eventually, the secretary spoke.

"Look at this."

"What is it? Did you find something?"

"It's this wall."

When Mr. R. flashed the light on it and looked closely, the wall had a map of another island drawn on it. Of course, on a certain spot, there was a mark.

"So, that's what it was. This is a very careful technique, isn't it? It seems to have been done so that we can't get to it directly. If you're going to bury treasure, you have to be discreet." Mr. R. was impressed, and feeling rejuvenated, he copied down the new map.

"Should I erase the wall so that another person can't see it after us?" his secretary asked.

"No, that's not necessary. If we find the treasure first, it won't have any value. Anyway, let's go."

Both of them again filled with hope, they steered the boat to the island marked on the cave wall. But when they arrived, there was no treasure at the spot marked, and what they found instead was a map of a different island carved into the rock.

In this way, Mr. R.'s boat continued to travel around to many different islands. In so doing, it cut across strong ocean currents and passed through many reefs. Occasionally it crossed paths with strong storms, and the boat became damaged. Furthermore, the fuel and food reserves were beginning to dry up. The secretary began to get discouraged.

“Can I make a suggestion? I can't stand it anymore. What if we quit? If things keep going like this, there'll be no end to it.”

“What are you saying? Simply because it's so elaborate, it must mean that the treasure is amazing. You want to throw in the towel now? The treasure might be on the next island. If we turn back now just before finding the treasure, we'll regret it for the rest of our lives.”

“Even so, if we don't repair our boat, we might sink.”

“Well actually I'm worried about that too. But going back and starting again would also be hard. It would be good if there were a bay somewhere close where we could get things repaired.”

To expect such a thing was foolish. But somehow, they once again were blessed with good luck. They found a small bay at an island they passed by.

Looking through the binoculars, there was a store with a sign that advertised boat repairs. The two of them sighed with relief and drew their boat up to the harbor.

They were able to get their boat fixed and supply the ship with food and water. The price was fairly expensive, but not so much as to cause a problem. Mr. R. thanked the owner.

“You saved us. Thanks to you, we can now continue our voyage. I cannot express my gratitude.”

“Not at all, fixing boats is my job, so I’m the one who should be saying thank you,” the owner said kindly.

Then Mr. R. asked something that just occurred to him. “But, this is such a small bay, and I can’t imagine you get much boat traffic. It’s a miracle you’re able to make a go of it here.”

“That’s because of our advertising. We actually have a lot of customers due to the smart plan I devised.”

“What kind of plan is that? I would very much like to know.” Mr. R. was full of curiosity.

The owner brought back a bunch of handouts from the store to show him. They were very worn maps, exactly like what Mr. R. had picked up at the beach.

“This is it. I printed out a bunch of these. I’m placing them in bottles and steadily dropping them into the ocean. Because of that, business is thriving. Even when people realize they’re just advertisements, they seem unable to tell others of their own foolishness, so even now, we get a lot of customers. But you two are different, right? Anyway, safe travels!”

## The Famous Verdict

There was a man named Shichigorō who lived in a district of Edo. Still a bachelor, his lifestyle was self-indulgent. He was not unintelligent, but he hated working. He spent his time lying around idly. Because he had so much time on his hands, he'd often get strange ideas.

“Hey, Nitarō. You know about this, right? Town Magistrate Ōoka, the Governor of Echizen's, recent verdict to split a one-ryō loss between three people?

Nitarō, the man to whom he spoke, was not the sharpest tool in the shed. He cocked his head and answered back, “No, I have no idea. What are you talking about?”

“You're an idiot. It got so much publicity. Basically, it's like this. Someone found a small fortune of three ryō on the street. In order to look for the owner and give it back, he took off work and spent a whole day going around asking about it.”

“He's an idiot. He should have used that money to buy snacks to eat. That's what I would do.”

“It was the foolishness of a good man. He finally found the owner and presented him the money. But the owner of the money said, ‘Dropping it was my mistake. I can't accept this. I'll give it to you.’”

“How dumb! He should have taken the money back and used it to buy snacks to eat.” Nitarō, blind to his own shortcomings, continually repeated that he was an idiot. Shichigorō continued his story.

“‘It was so nice of you to come return this to me. Please take it,’ one side would say. ‘No, you dropped it; it's not my money. You have to take it,’ the other would say. They bickered bitterly. Even when the landlord came out, they could not come to an

agreement. Without stopping in anyone's hands, the money was taken to the town magistrate's office."

"Did the town magistrate take the three *ryo*? If it were me—"

"You'd buy snacks and eat them, wouldn't you. But you can't do that if you're a reputable town magistrate. He took out one of his own *ryo* and gave each of the men two *ryo*. The town magistrate lost one *ryo*. The man who dropped the money received two *ryo*, and lost one. The man who picked up the money received two *ryo* and lost one. That way, they each lost one *ryo*."

"Hmm, I guess that's true." Shaking his head, Nitarō counted several times with his fingers. But after a short while he nodded that he understood and began to be impressed. Looking at the time, Shichigorō continued his story.

"On that note, I had an idea. What do you think? Why don't we team up to make a quick buck?"

"If we can make money, of course I'll agree to it. But I'm not good at making money for some reason. Making a quick buck isn't as easy as it sounds. What do you propose?"

Nitarō was unaware of how loud he was speaking, but Shichigorō significantly lowered his voice. "Basically, we'll pawn everything we own for three *ryo*. And then you'll drop them on the street."

"What a ridiculous plan. That's so wasteful. Why would we do that?"

"But I'll pick it up right after, so there's no need to worry. Then, I'll give it back to you. But you won't take it. Listen, you really can't take it. If you do that, the whole thing will be a waste."

“Okay, I won’t. But then what happens?”

“If we stay together, someone will probably come to mediate. And if we don’t agree even then, we will have to go to the town consulate to get a decision. The Governor of Echizen will get involved. But there is a legal precedent. He will probably give us one of his own *ryo*.”

“Oh, I finally understand.”

“He’ll return our money, and we’ll have one more *ryo*. We’ll split the take 50- 50. A reputable town magistrate like the Governor of Echizen will not want to mar his reputation. It seems that overturning such a precedent is against his nature. He has no choice but to generously hand it over.”

So that was the game plan. From a theoretical standpoint, there was no doubt they could succeed. The pair set about preparing. Because he was slow to catch on, it was difficult to make Nitarō memorize his lines, but he finally pulled through.

They made their request at the pawnshop and came up with the money. Even then, they had trouble borrowing, but after the landlord agreed to act as guarantor, they were able to collect three *ryo* and the plan was put into action.

Everything went according to plan, and they succeeded in bringing the matter to the magistrate’s office. Ōoka, the Governor of Echizen, appeared and addressed the men.

“Both of you, show me your faces. I understand what you’re asking me for.”

“I’m terribly sorry. I thank you for meeting us so early in the day. You must quite busy...”

“In that case, I will hand down my verdict. This is an ugly and truly reprehensible quarrel about money. Therefore, as a lesson for both of you, I will cut off your heads.”

Hearing this, they began to panic. Not only had they failed to gain the *ryo*, but now they were to be decapitated. Shichigorō spoke.

“No way! This must be a mistake. This is unreasonable. Besides, that’s not what you did before...”

Indirectly, he prodded the magistrate to remember his previous verdict. The Governor of Echizen responded in an angry voice. “I know I handed down a different verdict in the past. But after thinking about it, that was wrong. I have decided to take responsibility for my mistakes as magistrate and commit seppuku. But because it’s my duty, I must not do so until after making sure you have been decapitated.”

The men protested at the top of their lungs. Even though the magistrate would die as well, it would be much better if they could all live.

“Please spare us our lives! It was our mistake. We’ll drop our dispute, let’s forget this ever happened!”

The people accompanying the men also pleaded in unison. Above all, because he had acted as guarantor when they took their loan from the pawnshop, Shichigorō’s landlord was especially passionate. Given this course of events, it was likely the three *ryo* would become confiscated.

The Governor of Echizen eventually nodded. “This is a crime that is hard to forgive, but since you reflected on your wrongdoing, and pled so whole-heartedly, I have decided to overturn my decision. Don’t ever disturb me again. Now get out of my office.”

Although he was relieved, Nitarō grumbled bitterly. “Aw man, what the hell! I broke out in a cold sweat. What’s so great about this verdict...”



Hearing this, the Governor of Echizen grinned broadly and added an explanation. “Look, think about it. You two were saved when you were about to be beheaded. And I didn’t need to commit seppuku. In other words, all three of our lives were saved. That’s a profit of three lives. The price of a life cannot be made into money. There can be no higher profit. Should you not call it a famous verdict after all?”

## The Genie

Currently, Mr. N. had fallen into a state of extreme poverty. He had a certain amount of education and some inheritance from his parents, but since he lacked resourcefulness, and had no work ethic, he had amounted to nothing.

He was sprawled out in his humble one-room apartment. Because he had sold off his table and chairs, there was no other position for him to take besides lying on the ground. He could sit formally, but this was not the occasion for that.

Since he had sold off or pawned everything, there was nothing in the room. Absolutely nothing. Really, to be accurate, it wasn't completely empty. One book remained. It was an old foreign book. That said, it wasn't there because he particularly cherished it.

It had been refused everywhere. Even when he brought it to the pawnshop, he was told, "There is no way to attach a price to this!" Meanwhile, without knowing what book it was, Mr. N. couldn't explain its value.

Now, still lying down, Mr. N. opened the book and looked at it. He wasn't exactly trying to read it. Besides not having a television, Mr. N. didn't have a radio, and newspapers weren't even delivered to his house. In other words, he had nothing else to do.

Praying silently for some kind of miracle, he tried to sound out the words on the page he had opened. He had no idea what they meant, but he was able to pronounce them.

Then, a miracle actually happened. In the corner of his apartment, a strange man appeared. Realizing this, Mr. N. was frightened. But even if he were a burglar, there was

nothing for him to take. Mr. N. recovered his composure and spoke. “Who the hell are you?”

“Why are you asking me that? I thought you understood...”

“Well, sort of...” Mr. N. responded cryptically. It seemed wrong to admit he didn't know anything.

However, this man's arrival was very sudden, and he couldn't help but shake his head in confusion. As he did, the man nodded and spoke. “I must have shocked you since I got here so fast. But I come as soon as I hear the magic words. In fact, that's the genie motto.”

“Is that so...” Mr. N. was slowly coming to grasp the situation. It seemed that this book was magic, and what he had carelessly read was an incantation that summoned a genie.

What good fortune. Although you could say it was by chance, it looked like he would be able to leave this miserable lifestyle. Suppressing the smile rising to his lips, Mr. N. tried to look solemn. It seemed like the time to show some dignity.

The genie bowed his head and spoke, urging Mr. N. “What shall I do? I am a genie whose specialty is fetching objects from other places. But I think you already knew that...”

“Of course I know that. Your job as a genie is to bring me stuff. Okay, for starters, bring me a beer. I'm a little thirsty. It will loosen me up a little.”

“Yessir, right away.” Just when he realized the genie had disappeared in a puff of smoke, he had already returned. In his hand was a large glass filled with beer. “Here you are, sir.”

Mr. N. took the glass being held out to him and drank it. Because he was hungry, it seemed to go straight to his head. On that note, he gave his next order.

“I’m hungry. I want something to eat. And add another drink.”

“Yessir, right away sir.”

The genie vanished and reappeared, setting a feast in front of Mr. N. Just as one would expect from someone with speed as his motto, his lightning-fast work was amazing. Since Mr. N. was still hungry, he finished off the food quickly and demanded seconds. Of course, this too was brought right away.

“Now then...” said Mr. N. The genie quickly bowed his head and responded.

“What is it, sir?”

“I can’t have this apartment looking so bare. I want some kind of painting on the wall. A small Matisse would be good. But I don’t want a replica. It has to be the real thing.”

“Yessir, no trouble at all...”

And it went like that. As Mr. N. happily drank his beer, he yelled out order after order as they occurred to him. He was brought a Rodin sculpture and extravagant furniture.

“Hmm. I need a sports car.”

“Yes, right away.”

In a split second, it was there on the road outside the window. It was a good-looking new car. The keys were in Mr. N.’s hands. As soon as he had them, Mr. N. thought of his next wish.

“This time I want a woman. A young, elegant beautiful woman.”

“Yessir, leave it to me.”

She, too, appeared just like everything else. Just as ordered, she was young, elegant, and beautiful. In fact, she was even more wonderful than he had expected. Mr. N. spoke to her.

“Well then, come sit here next to me. Let’s have another round. After that, we can take our time together...”

Mr. N. was unable to contain the glee in his voice. But the woman’s response was unexpected. “What, you’re disgusting! Thinking you can do this and get away with it...” she yelled as she forcefully ran out the door.

After some time, a stunned-looking Mr. N. spoke to the genie. “Why did that just happen?”

“You must have some idea...” he was told, but Mr. N. didn’t understand.

Eventually, the neighborhood got loud with the sound of police cars.

“I wonder what that’s about.”

“The woman who was just here probably went to the police.”

“I wonder why.”

“Don’t you understand? Even though I’m a genie, I’m still a thief. Stealing things from other places is my specialty. It should all be written in that book...”

Hearing this, Mr. N. became flustered. “I had no idea! You mean everything you brought here was stolen? The painting, the sculpture, the furniture, even the woman...”

“Of course. I am a genie, but even I can’t make things out of thin air in a matter of seconds.”

“Are you serious? This is horrible! Take all these things somewhere else quickly. If I have them, I’ll get in big trouble.”

“I can’t do that. Getting rid of things is the task of the another genie. We have different jobs.”

“Don’t be so hard-headed. I just need you to take away the things that are yours.”

“Yessir...”

The genie grabbed the book and disappeared. He did not return.

Mr. N. heard the sound of the policemen knock.

## Frozen Time

Mundt was having a dream.

It was a dream in which he was getting beat up. He was kicked hard from behind by a group of people, punched in the stomach, and slapped in the face. He was also dunked in freezing cold water. He felt like he was being stabbed by thousands of needles.

Next, he was tied up to a pillar as a fire burned around him. The flames touched him as if they were dancing, burning his skin. A strange smell hit his nose, and smoke streamed into his mouth, leaving a bad taste on his tongue. Because of that, he began to feel nauseated...

Just then he awoke from his sleep, and the dream was over. Mundt wanted to dream more, but it was no use.

Mundt sat up in bed and looked around. It was no different from any other day; inside his narrow and sparse apartment, not one part of the dream remained.

Although this was where Mundt lived, it had no kitchen, toilet, or bathtub. For him, none of those things were necessary. He didn't even have a mirror. In fact, for him, there was nothing as terrible as a mirror.

If he had a mirror, his face would be reflected in it. His face wasn't ugly, but it was completely expressionless. A plastic face could not cry or laugh. His eyes were glass lenses. Behind them, small televisions had been installed. Behind his ears were microphones; inside his mouth, an artificial speaking device...

He was able to get by without seeing his face, but he inevitably saw the other parts of his body. Both of his arms were alloy-based Magic Hand manipulators. His feet were the same. Inside his body, the clocklike sound of motors and gears quietly whirred.

Robot. Anyone would probably think this at first.

But Mundt was an advanced cyborg. A robot was a machine that seemed like a human, but a cyborg was a human that seemed like a machine. A robot couldn't do things like dream or reminisce about the past.

It had become Mundt's habit to absent-mindedly lose himself in memories for a short while after waking up. He would think about his mischievous childhood, his ambitious entry into the business world, every experience leading up to the winter he turned 28.

That winter, he had had an accident at the factory where he worked. Without realizing, he bathed in chemicals that had a specific kind of radioactivity. The condition gradually invaded his body.

In the past, his symptoms would have been incurable, but due to the scientific progress of the time, Mundt was luckily able to avoid death. This was by means of a groundbreaking procedure that preserved only his brain, replacing everything else with artificial parts. An artificial heart pump sent fake blood to his brain. That was the reason he was alive.

Of course, others beside Mundt had also been given artificial organs. However, those had only been parts, a stomach or an ear. No one else had lost everything, right down to their facial expressions, as Mundt had.



This kind of human was called a cyborg. His body was largely a machine, but even still, he was undeniably human. “Even like this, I am lucky to be alive,” he occasionally thought. However, no matter how much he debated it, he was never totally sure; after all, he did not want to die.

Since then, his life had continued for ten years inside this bare, windowless room. It had no windows because it was on the building’s second underground floor. He supposed he would like to live in a room with windows, where he could watch the sky and clouds and hustle bustle of the city. But at the same time, doing so would also mean that he could be seen by other people. Pushy salesmen and the like might also show up uninvited.

Mundt had no choice but to avoid the public eye and live in obscurity in his cellar-like storage room two stories underground.

Whenever anyone saw Mundt, they thought he was a robot and smiled in amusement. However, as soon as they realized he was a cyborg, their expression would change. He wasn't a contagious patient, or a dangerous lunatic, or a disgraced prisoner. But people concentrated their gaze on him as if that were exactly what they were looking at. Then, flustered, they would avert their eyes.

Each time this happened, Mundt felt like running away. He couldn't even smile back, since any expression was difficult to make with a plastic face. And if he reached out his hand to offer a handshake, the other person would avoid it. It went without saying that it was better for him not to talk to anyone in his eerie artificial voice.

Rather, it was probably much better for him to be ganged up on and bullied. He wanted to experience sensations that he had lost and could not return to. Hot and cold,

pain, smell, taste. No matter how painful it was, it was better than nothing. But this was impossible. At least outside of his occasional dreams.

Mundt did not step foot outside all day. There was no need to leave for things like groceries or haircuts. The only person who visited was the man who came once a week to deliver bottles of artificial blood. But after quietly placing these outside the door, he always ran away as if escaping.

It was a sparse room, but he had a TV. This was his only friend. It was his only window that opened up to the outside world. A TV, no matter how much you stared at it, could not stare back. It was his only reason to live.

If it had been possible, he would have wanted a life purpose that was more helpful to society, one that made people happy. He always thought about it. But no matter how much he pondered, he couldn't come up with anything. He was shut in here so that he wouldn't be seen or make others feel uncomfortable, but this was probably the only role he could play.

Mundt reached out his fake hand and turned on the TV. A cooking show was on. He watched, imagining the flavors and enjoying it to his heart's content. But his artificial mouth was unable to water.

Next he thought he would watch a funny movie. He changed the channel. The TV listing was memorized in Mundt's head. As he watched the movie, he identified himself with the main character and almost forgot for a while that he was a cyborg.

Then, the screen suddenly turned white. There was no picture. He wondered what had happened. After the story had just gotten interesting...

Mundt hopelessly tried to flip through all the channels. But every station was the same. The screen stayed white, and there was no sound.

No doubt it had broken. It seemed that he would have to call someone at the repair shop. He didn't want to show his face to the repairman, but with things as they were he was completely alone.

He picked up the phone, which was dusty from disuse. While listening to it ring, Mundt realized he would have to speak in his artificial voice that made people feel uncomfortable, and he felt depressed.

But no one picked up the phone. It seemed that no one was there. Mundt looked for another repair shop in the phone book and tried to call again. He tried about five different places, but no one answered. What did this mean? The fact no repair shop would answer his call?

After a while, his confusion turned to uneasiness. He wondered what had happened. Something must have happened. Without thinking about it, he called the police. But this, too, was the same. The fire department, the newspaper, even the phone company, no matter who he called, the phone did nothing but ring endlessly.

What if...

He hadn't thought of it until now. What if there had been a sudden nuclear war? But there were no tremors, and the electricity was still running. So then there must be unrest caused by a riot or something. But if that were true, the phone would be disconnected or busy. Maybe an accident happened at the phone company and TV company at the same time?

He had absolutely no clue. He waited a while, and then scrolled through the channels again and tried to make a few calls. As expected, nothing changed. He felt uneasy, but he was not yet panicked. He didn't need food or water, and he had a stockpile of artificial blood.

He wasn't afraid that he would die, but without the TV working, he had nothing to do. He regretted not having bought books, but since he hadn't expected a situation like this, it couldn't be helped.

He turned on his automatic vacuum, but his room was clean in five minutes so it automatically turned off. If he could, he would have liked to fall asleep and dream. But he had just woken up, so that didn't work either.

When he lay down on his bed, instead of uneasy, he began to feel curious. What was happening outside? The desire to find out got stronger until it blinded him.

Mundt got off his bed, dressed, and put on his shoes. He wore his hat at an angle, put on a mask, wore sunglasses, and last he put gloves over his fake hands. He had to do this so as to make other people feel less uncomfortable.

He opened the door for the first time in many years. Without people in it, the hallway was silent. But the second floor underground was always like that. The sound of his footsteps echoing on the concrete floor, he climbed the stairs. He was on the first floor underground, then at street level...

The sunlight he saw for the first time in ages was so strong that it could not compare with the lamps in his basement room. The iris in his eyes automatically shrank, and, adjusting to the light, relayed to him the surrounding scene.

Mundt stood transfixed. He thought his brain, the last remaining organ of his own, had begun to go mad. An unbelievable spectacle was laid out before him.

Not a single thing was moving.

That said, the city was not deserted. In fact, there were many people. But every one of them had fallen to the ground, and lay there unmoving with their eyes closed. Right next to him on the roadside, a young boy had collapsed as if he had crumbled to pieces. Beyond that, a child and old man were sprawled out next to each other. The two of them were holding hands. A woman wearing fashionable clothes had also collapsed. Her hand grasped a leash, and at the end of it was a dog. But the dog had lied down and wasn't moving...

This scene went on endlessly. It was as if a movie projector had stopped working, and the film was unable to run.

Cars and other transportation had also come to a halt. When he peered into a car that had stopped nearby, the man in the driver's seat had fallen over. As he fell, the automatic brakes must have gone on and stopped the car.

Music was playing from somewhere, Mundt realized. If he went there, he might be able to find people who had not collapsed. He walked in that direction, and went into a café. But what he discovered were speakers. Before long, they too stopped. This was probably because the replay button had not been pushed.

It wasn't just the people outdoors; people inside had also fallen and were not moving. Every person was like this. Why...

Mundt approached a man who remained sitting in a chair, and tried to touch him. Was he unconscious or dead? He was unable to judge. This was because even if he tried to touch him, he couldn't feel such subtle things as temperature with his fake hands.

Mundt gave up trying to find signs of life and decided to go on a walk. Being able to walk without worrying about being a cyborg was a small saving grace in this strange environment. But he turned down many street corners, and no matter where he went it was the same. It was a world of death. Even if they weren't dead, there was nothing with which he could investigate the cause or treat them. At any rate, as things were, it had become a world of death.

Why had this happened in a matter of seconds?

Mundt looked up at the sky. Perhaps there were flying saucers, he thought, but there was no such thing. White clouds gently floated in the blue sky. It did not appear to be a space invasion.

High above, only one plane was in the air. Carrying people who had collapsed, it probably continued to fly on autopilot. He had no way to know this either. As he watched it, the plane disappeared beyond the clouds.

No matter how much he continued walking, not one thing moved in the town, which had gone quiet. The only exceptions were the leaves of the boulevard trees that swayed in the wind, the fountain in the park, and the old-fashioned pendulum clocks in the show window of the antique store. Even inside the pet store, everything had stopped. The songbirds had all fallen from their perches and lay unmoving at the bottom of their birdcages. He felt like he was in a taxidermy shop.

He did not hear any sounds that made him think people were still alive. Suddenly, a sense of loneliness he had never experienced began to pour over Mundt, enveloping him. Trying to shake it off, Mundt cried out.

“Is anyone there?”

His artificial monotone voice crossed over the people who had collapsed, echoed down the street, and disappeared. However, no one called back. There was only his own voice, which bounced off the building walls and came back to him.

Mundt gave up yelling. What should he do now, he wondered. Up to today, life in his basement apartment had been lonely, but his seclusion was self-imposed. It was for that reason that he had come to tolerate it. But from now on he really was all alone.

Wanting to vanish from human sight didn't make him feel very good. But along with it also came the feeling of being alive. And yet, now he couldn't even enjoy that.

Flooded with uncontrollable emotions, Mundt bashed in the display window of the store he stood next to. His metal hand made a clinking noise and shattered the glass. Mundt took a dinner plate that was on display inside, and aiming at a different store, chucked it. But no matter how many times he repeated this or how long he waited, there was no one to run out looking angry and yell at him.

Mundt knew he had essentially become the owner of everything in town. But ironically, there wasn't even one thing Mundt valued. Extravagant food items, high-quality alcohol and cake, clothes, perfume, jewels, all of these things were meaningless to a cyborg. Even TV sets, since they were no longer broadcasting, were useless pieces of junk.

If he had to say, he would have liked a book. But would reading a novel really be interesting when everything else around him had stopped? It would probably take him decades to read lots of science books, study the unusual source of this phenomenon, and come up with some kind of solution. And even that was probably impossible.

Mundt gave up looking for a bookstore. That said, he didn't feel like returning to his underground apartment either.

Mundt simply stood stock-still, staring at the town that had grown quiet.

Suddenly, Mundt raised his head. He thought he had heard a sound. It sounded like something was moving somewhere. When he surveyed the area, the source of the noise abruptly appeared.

A car shot out from the corner a short distance away. This finally showed him that there were still people alive and moving.

Please see me, Mundt impulsively prayed. He had lost the habit of calling out his voice from living in his underground apartment for so long. In most cases, his artificial voice scared the other person.

As if his prayer had been answered, the car drew up to Mundt. He wondered what kind of person was driving it. Was it a cyborg like him after all? If this were a regular human, they probably would not have been able to escape this disease. But for Mundt, anyone would do. Right now he wanted someone to talk to, a companion with whom to share the fear and loneliness. It was likely that this other person also wanted the same thing.

The car pulled up to Mundt and came to a stop. The door opened slightly, and the person in the driver's seat stuck his head out the window. But Mundt couldn't see this



person's expression. He was wearing something that resembled a spacesuit. He spoke to Mundt.

"It's pretty careless to be in a place like this." It wasn't an artificial voice. It was the voice of a normal human. Mundt was not able to answer right away. In order to use his artificial voice, he first had to prepare to endure the embarrassment.

This wasn't the only reason he didn't respond. It was because the man's voice was too calm. How could he be calm despite this terrible turn of events? That was rather suspicious.

"What's the deal with your clothes?" the other man said. Mundt wondered what was wrong with his clothes. Not only that, but he felt as if the other man were mad at him. It had become increasingly difficult to respond.

"You took them all off because they're difficult to move in, didn't you? It's too early for that. You're not safe with just a mask. Get some clothes on!"

Mundt only continued to be confused. What could he say to make this man happy? Mundt was nothing but dazed.

"Oh, you took them off before you came here, didn't you? Here, this is my backup, but I have another set. Put this on." Saying this, he threw it out the window next to Mundt. It wasn't just clothes, there was also a gun. "Here, put this on and take this gun. In thirty minutes, we are meeting in the plaza in front of the main government building. We will be given new instructions. Proceed cautiously."

With these last words, the car sped off. In the end, he hadn't been able to understand anything about the situation. Who was that person? Was he going insane after

this sudden disaster? But if that were the case, his tone of voice had been surprisingly calm.

Mundt crouched down to pick up the suit the man had left behind, and tried putting it on. Like a spacesuit, it was airproof, made so that it was impenetrable by the atmosphere outside. Why did he have to wear it? There were still things he did not understand. Like this gun.

When he stood up wearing the airproof suit and holding the gun, he was in the mood to fight. However, he didn't know who the enemy was...

It had to have been a space attack after all. The warning had been too late, so most people had perished, but some had made it in time. Maybe the people who were still alive were trying to move towards a counterattack. If that were the case, it was mankind's duty to participate. Even though he was still a cyborg, there was no doubt that he was still human.

With the main government building in his sights, Mundt began to walk. Everywhere in the road, people had collapsed in the same way. Inside buildings, people were lying facedown on tables, stretched out on floors.

Someone spoke from behind him.

"We did it! I didn't expect it to go this well."

When he turned around, there was another man wearing a spacesuit. But what did he mean? Why was this such a great success? Life on Earth had certainly seen better days. Or was this phenomenon not an attack from space? Although he didn't understand, Mundt tilted his head, and gave an imitation of a nod.

“Our ascent to power is imminent. Just as we hoped, you and I are going to get every luxury we’ve ever wanted.” Saying this, the man ran past Mundt in a quick trot. What did he mean by luxury? For a cyborg, there was no such thing.

Mundt felt hesitant about going directly to the place he had been ordered. He did not feel like following obediently. It seemed that something was going on that only he was unaware of. He was not amused.

Across from the main government building, and separate from the plaza, there was a building. Mundt entered it. Walking so as not to step on those who had collapsed, he looked for an elevator. Then he went up to the fifth floor, and walked towards the window. In order to hear what was going on outside, he opened it a bit.

It was the perfect place from which he could look down onto the plaza. From all directions, people wearing spacesuits were assembling. Some of them came on foot, and others had driven cars. There were also people who came out of the government building. Once several dozen people had arrived, one of them got up on a platform and began to speak. It was silent all around, so Mundt was able to hear his words even from across the way.

“Citizens! I think you have all seen the outcome of the drug I discovered, and understood its efficacy. Even a very small amount of the gas will completely paralyze the muscles of the body in a matter of seconds. Essentially, it is a newly strengthened sleeping drug. I scattered this from an airplane.”

So that was it, Mundt thought. As a cyborg without any muscles, he probably hadn't felt the effects. When he looked again at the man on the platform, someone was asking him a question.

“How long will the effects last?”

“About two more hours. After that, everyone will return to normal. Their brains will be unaffected, and of course, they can't die. This is why we will assume all power once the world comes back to life.”

“But even though we have succeeded so far, is there a way to ensure we stay in command? That is my only fear.”

“Of course. No one besides me knows the formula for the gas. If we threaten that we could use it at any time, there can be no resistance.”

Hearing this, Mundt had come to understand everything about the current situation. A high-powered drug had been discovered that temporarily caused muscle paralysis. That success had fueled its inventor's ambitions, drawn a crowd of support, and led to a movement for a coup d'état. They just needed to seize the government; after that, they would threaten society with the fear of this gas that could be released at any time, and they would continue doing as they pleased forever. That seemed to be their plan.

These were truly evil people. Mundt became filled with rage. And in his hand was a gun. Mundt aimed at the man who was triumphantly continuing to issue directions from the stage, and pulled the trigger.

In the blink of an eye, the plaza devolved into chaos. It was a swarm of rushed people in spacesuits. For a moment they seemed to consult one another, but after a while they began to scatter.

Their confidence to proceed with the coup d'état seemed to disappear with the death of its mastermind, the only man who knew the formula of the gas. Moreover, they must have worried that they would cause suspicion, or even be arrested, if they were still huddled together in their spacesuits once everyone had woken up.

Mundt went down the stairs and exited the building. He took off his spacesuit, and along with the gun, tossed it into the shadows. At times like this, it was convenient to be a cyborg since he had no fingerprints. Next, he looked for a place crowded with people who had collapsed, and to blend in, he also laid down. He was on his guard so that he wouldn't be found by the remaining coup d'état members and retaliated against for shooting the gun. Mundt lay motionless. But there was no sound of approaching footsteps. It seemed the entire group had abandoned their conspiracy.

Eventually, all around him, signs of life returned. It was as if sunlight had entered the forest. The effects of the sleeping drug seemed to have run their course. People began to stand up and look at each other with puzzled expressions. Mundt sighed with relief and stood up with them.

However, his feeling of relief disappeared in a flash. People were exchanging glances, but the second their eyes got to his face, their expressions changed oddly. For Mundt, it was the same unbearable stare as always...

It was a wordless stare that blended pity and sympathy for the cyborg with the accusation that he shouldn't be there...

Unable to bear this a second longer, Mundt began walking. Every person he passed looked at Mundt with the same expression. It felt like thousands of arrows were piercing his heart. Choosing the narrowest streets with the fewest amount of people, Mundt secretly hurried back to his bare underground apartment.

## Restraint

In addition to being cultured, you also seem to have a sense of delicacy and proper manners, so I think you may understand this sentiment of mine.

It resembles the feeling you get when you see a fallen coin on a crowded street.

You stop for a moment, startled. Next you blink, thinking it must have been a mistake. Then, realizing that there really is a coin, your heart starts beating fast.

But your conscience forcefully stops your hand from reaching out. It's better to leave it and keep walking, rather than pick it up. Someone might be watching, giving you a nasty look.

Even if that's not the case, try thinking of how awkward the situation would be if the second you made up your mind and bent over to pick up the coin, another passerby bent down at the same time and you bumped heads.

All your blood would flow back and collect in your brain, and you would be forced to leave at a brisk pace while mumbling incomprehensible words.

And things won't end there. Every time you remember the experience, regardless of how long it's been, you'll break out in a cold sweat and sink into embarrassed thoughts.

Since such things are bound to happen, no matter how much you want the coin it's best not to think about picking it up. You agree, don't you?

Okay, I have a better example. Since I am talking about food, it seems fitting to use an example that also concerns food.

I want you to imagine that you are with a bunch of your friends, gathered around a table, chatting together. On top of the table, there is a plate overflowing with cookies. Everyone continues talking, occasionally pausing to take a cookie.

However, at this point, a moment occurs that is filled with the feeling that I am struggling to describe. This is when the number of cookies on the plate steadily decreases, until suddenly there is only one cookie left. Not a single person tries to reach for it.

Of course, there's no reason for you not to reach for the last cookie and put it in your mouth. But if you do so, people will probably glare at you, thinking, "I can't believe he ate the very last cookie. What a greedy, shameless jerk." This same thought from everyone will leave the last cookie on the plate forever.

Even though on the inside, everyone wants this cookie, they will all feign an expression of having already had enough cookies, and will continue to chat with a blank look. Just as if the cookie were full of poison...

This is the exact situation, the one I want to tell you about.

Even though I am a vampire, I do not want to feel embarrassed when it comes to my food. Ahh, just because the word vampire was suddenly used, I don't want you making that strange face.

However, it's probably no surprise. Vampires. The mythical image is that they attack humans to suck their blood, and the person who is bitten, appearance unchanged, also becomes a vampire.

Until I was made into a vampire, even I thought it was a simple superstition.



However, having become a vampire myself, I have to believe in this myth. And it's not just me; there are many other vampires. Truthfully speaking, other than you, everyone else is a vampire.

Now, now. There's no need to look around in confusion. There is not a single place you can escape. But because there is something of a guarantee of your safety, there is absolutely no need to worry. On the inside, every one of us wants to suck your warm, fresh blood, your blood that seems to sing out if we simply think about it. But each of us knows exactly how we would be glared at by the others if we did so.

And so, we will each continue to put on a poker face, and we won't lay a finger on you.