

# The Golden Man

Phillip K. Dick

“Is it always hot like this?” the salesman demanded. He addressed everybody at the lunch counter and in the shabby booths against the wall. A middle-aged fat man with a good-natured smile, rumpled gray suit, sweat-stained white shirt, a drooping bowtie, and a Panama hat.

“Only in the summer,” the waitress answered.

None of the others stirred. The teen-age boy and girl in one of the booths, eyes fixed intently on each other. Two workmen, sleeves rolled up, arms dark and hairy, eating bean soup and rolls. A lean, weathered farmer. An elderly businessman in a blue-serge suit, vest and pocket watch. A dark rat-faced cab driver drinking coffee. A tired woman who had come in to get off her feet and put down her bundles.

The salesman got out a package of cigarettes. He glanced curiously around the dingy cafe, lit up, leaned his arms on the counter, and said to the man next to him: “What’s the name of this town?”

The man grunted. “Walnut Creek.”

The salesman sipped at his coke for a while, cigarette held loosely between plump white fingers. Presently he reached in his coat and brought out a leather wallet. For a long time he leafed thoughtfully through cards and papers, bits of notes, ticket stubs, endless odds and ends, soiled fragments — and finally a photograph.

He grinned at the photograph, and then began to chuckle, a low moist rasp. “Look at this,” he said to the man beside him.

The man went on reading his newspaper.

“Hey, look at this.” The salesman nudged him with his elbow and pushed the photograph at him. “How’s that strike you?”

Annoyed, the man glanced briefly at the the photograph. It showed a nude woman, from the waist up. Perhaps thirty-five years old. Face turned away. Body white and flabby. With eight breasts.

“Ever seen anything like that?” the salesman chuckled, his little red eyes dancing. His face broke into lewd smiles and again he nudged the man.

“I’ve seen that before.” Disgusted, the man resumed reading his newspaper.

The salesman noticed the lean old farmer was looking at the picture. He passed it genially over to him. “How’s that strike you, pop? Pretty good stuff, eh?”

The farmer examined the picture solemnly. He turned it over, studied the creased back, took a second look at the front, then tossed it to the salesman. It slid from the counter, turned over a couple of times, and fell to the floor face up.

The salesman picked it up and brushed it off. Carefully, almost tenderly, he restored it to his wallet. The waitress’ eyes flickered as she caught a glimpse of it.

“Damn nice,” the salesman observed, with a wink. “Wouldn’t you say so?”

The waitress shrugged indifferently. “I don’t know. I saw a lot of them around Denver. A whole colony.”

“That’s where this was taken. Denver DCA Camp.”

“Any still alive?” the farmer asked.

The salesman laughed harshly. “You kidding?” He made a short, sharp swipe with his hand. “Not any more.”

They were all listening. Even the high school kids in the booth had stopped holding hands and were sitting up straight, eyes wide with fascination.

“Saw a funny kind down near San Diego,” the farmer said. “Last year, some time. Had wings like a bat. Skin, not feathers. Skin and bone wings.”

The rat-eyed taxi driver chimed in. “That’s nothing. There was a two-headed one in Detroit. I saw it on exhibit.”

“Was it alive?” the waitress asked.

“No. They’d already euthed it.”

“In sociology,” the high school boy spoke up, “we saw tapes of a whole lot of them. The winged kind from down south, the big-headed one they found in Germany, an awful-looking

one with sort of cones, like an insect. And —”

“The worst of all,” the elderly businessman stated, “are those English ones. That hid out in the coal mines. The ones they didn’t find until last year.” He shook his head. “Forty years, down there in the mines, breeding and developing. Almost a hundred of them. Survivors from a group that went underground during the War.”

“They just found a new kind in Sweden,” the waitress said. “I was reading about it. Controls minds at a distance, they said. Only a couple of them. The DCA got there plenty fast.”

“That’s a variation of the New Zealand type,” one of the workmen said. “It read minds.”

“Reading and controlling are two different things,” the businessman said. “When I hear something like that I’m plenty glad there’s the DCA.”

“There was a type they found right after the War,” the farmer said. “In Siberia. Had the ability to control objects. Psychokinetic ability. The Soviet DCA got it right away. Nobody remembers that any more.”

“I remember that,” the businessman said. “I was just a kid, then. I remember because that was the first deeve I ever heard of. My father called me into the living room and told me and my brothers and sisters. We were still building the house. That was in the days when the DCA inspected everyone and stamped their arms.” He held up his thin, gnarled wrist. “I was stamped there, sixty years ago.”

“Now they just have the birth inspection,” the waitress said. She shivered. “There was one in San Francisco this month. First in over a year. They thought it was over, around here.”

“It’s been dwindling,” the taxi driver said. “Frisco wasn’t too bad hit. Not like some. Not like Detroit.”

“They still get ten or fifteen a year in Detroit,” the high school boy said. “All around there. Lots of pools still left. People go into them, in spite of the robot signs.”

“What kind was this one?” the salesman asked. “The one they found in San Francisco.”

The waitress gestured. “Common type. The kind with no toes. Bent-over. Big eyes.”

“The nocturnal type,” the salesman said.

“The mother had hid it. They say it was three years old. She got the doctor to forge the DCA chit. Old friend of the family.”

The salesman had finished his coke. He sat playing idly with his cigarettes, listening to the hum of talk he had set into motion. The high school boy was leaning excitedly toward the girl across from him, impressing her with his fund of knowledge. The lean farmer and the businessman were huddled together, remembering the old days, the last years of the War, before the first Ten-Year Reconstruction Plan. The taxi driver and the two workmen were swapping yarns about their own experiences.

The salesman caught the waitress's attention. "I guess," he said thoughtfully, "that one in Frisco caused quite a stir. Something like that happening so close."

"Yeah," the waitress murmured.

"This side of the Bay wasn't really hit," the salesman continued. "You never get any of them over here."

"No." The waitress moved abruptly. "None in this area. Ever." She scooped up dirty dishes from the counter and headed toward the back.

"Never?" the salesman asked, surprised. "You've never had any deeves on this side of the Bay?"

"No. None." She disappeared into the back, where the fry cook stood by his burners, white apron and tattooed wrists. Her voice was a little too loud, a little too harsh and strained. It made the farmer pause suddenly and glance up.

Silence dropped like a curtain. All sound cut off instantly. They were all gazing down at their food, suddenly tense and ominous.

"None around here," the taxi driver said, loudly and clearly, to no one in particular. "None ever."

"Sure," the salesman agreed genially. "I was only —"

"Make sure you get that straight," one of the workmen said.

The salesman blinked. "Sure, buddy. Sure." He fumbled nervously in his pocket. A quarter and a dime jangled to the floor and he hurriedly scooped them up. "No offense."

For a moment there was silence. Then the high school boy spoke up, aware for the first time that nobody was saying anything. "I heard something," he began eagerly, voice full of importance. "Somebody said they saw something up by the Johnson farm that looked like it

was one of those —”

“*Shut up,*” the businessman said, without turning his head.

Scarlet-faced, the boy sagged in his seat. His voice wavered and broke off. He peered hastily down at his hands and swallowed unhappily.

The salesman paid the waitress for his coke. “What’s the quickest road to Frisco?” he began. But the waitress had already turned her back.

The people at the counter were immersed in their food. None of them looked up. They ate in frozen silence. Hostile, unfriendly faces, intent on their food.

The salesman picked up his bulging briefcase, pushed open the screen door, and stepped out into the blazing sunlight. He moved toward his battered 1978 Buick, parked a few meters up. A blue-shirted traffic cop was standing in the shade of an awning, talking languidly to a young woman in a yellow silk dress that clung moistly to her slim body.

The salesman paused a moment before he got into his car. He waved his hand and hailed the policeman. “Say, you know this town pretty good?”

The policeman eyed the salesman’s rumpled gray suit, bowtie, his sweat-stained shirt. The out-of-state license. “What do you want?”

“I’m looking for the Johnson farm,” the salesman said. “Here to see him about some litigation.” He moved toward the policeman, a small white card between his fingers. “I’m his attorney — from the New York Guild. Can you tell me how to get out there? I haven’t been through here in a couple of years.”

Nat Johnson gazed up at the noonday sun and saw that it was good. He sat sprawled out on the bottom step of the porch, a pipe between his yellowed teeth, a lithe, wiry man in red-checked shirt and canvas jeans, powerful hands, iron-gray hair that was still thick despite sixty-five years of active life.

He was watching the children play. Jean rushed laughing in front of him, bosom heaving under her sweatshirt, black hair streaming behind her. She was sixteen, bright-eyed, legs strong and straight, slim young body bent slightly forward with the weight of the two horseshoes. After her scampered Dave, fourteen, white teeth and black hair, a handsome

boy, a son to be proud of. Dave caught up with his sister, passed her, and reached the far peg. He stood waiting, legs apart, hands on his hips, his two horseshoes gripped easily. Gasping, Jean hurried toward him.

“Go ahead!” Dave shouted. “You shoot first. I’m waiting for you.”

“So you can knock them away?”

“So I can knock them closer.”

Jean tossed down one horseshoe and gripped the other with both hands, eyes on the distant peg. Her lithe body bent, one leg slid back, her spine arched. She took careful aim, closed one eye, and then expertly tossed the shoe. With a clang the shoe struck the distant peg, circled briefly around it, then bounced off again and rolled to one side. A cloud of dust rolled up.

“Not bad,” Nat Johnson admitted, from his step. “Too hard, though. Take it easy.” His chest swelled with pride as the girl’s glistening body took aim and again threw. Two powerful, handsome children, almost ripe, on the verge of adulthood. Playing together in the hot sun.

And there was Cris.

Cris stood by the porch, arms folded. He wasn’t playing. He was watching. He had stood there since Dave and Jean had begun playing, the same half-intent, half-remote expression on his finely-cut face. As if he were seeing past them, beyond the two of them. Beyond the field, the barn, the creek bed, the rows of cedars.

“Come on, Cris!” Jean called, as she and Dave moved across the field to collect their horseshoes. “Don’t you want to play?”

No, Cris didn’t want to play. He never played. He was off in a world of his own, a world into which none of them could come. He never joined in anything, games or chores or family activities. He was by himself always. Remote, detached, aloof. Seeing past everyone and everything — that is, until all at once something clicked and he momentarily rephased, reentered their world briefly.

Nat Johnson reached out and knocked his pipe against the step. He refilled it from his leather tobacco pouch, his eyes on his eldest son. Cris was now moving into life. Heading out onto the field. He walked slowly, arms folded calmly, as if he had, for the moment, descended from his own world into theirs. Jean didn’t see him; she had turned her back and was getting ready to pitch.

“Hey,” Dave said, startled. “Here’s Cris.”

Cris reached his sister, stopped, and held out his hand. A great dignified figure, calm and impassive. Uncertainly, Jean gave him one of the horseshoes. “You want this? You want to play?”

Cris said nothing. He bent slightly, a supple arc of his incredibly graceful body, then moved his arm in a blur of speed. The shoe sailed, struck the far peg, and dizzily spun around it. Ringer.

The corners of Dave’s mouth turned down. “What a lousy darn thing.”

“Cris,” Jean reproved. “You don’t play fair.”

No, Cris didn’t play fair. He had watched half an hour — then come out and thrown once. One perfect toss, one dead ringer.

“He never makes a mistake,” Dave complained.

Cris stood, face blank. A golden statue in the mid-day sun. Golden hair, skin, a light down of gold fuzz on his bare arms and legs —

Abruptly he stiffened. Nat sat up, startled. “What is it?” he barked.

Cris turned in a quick circle, magnificent body alert. “Cris!” Jean demanded. “What —”

Cris shot forward. Like a released energy beam he bounded across the field, over the fence, into the barn and out the other side. His flying figure seemed to skim over the dry grass as he descended into the barren creek bed, between the cedars. A momentary flash of gold — and he was gone. Vanished. There was no sound. No motion. He had utterly melted into the scenery.

“What was it this time?” Jean asked wearily. She came over to her father and threw herself down in the shade. Sweat glowed on her smooth neck and upper lip; her sweat shirt was streaked and damp. “What did he see?”

“He was after something,” Dave stated, coming up.

Nat grunted. “Maybe. There’s no telling.”

“I guess I better tell Mom not to set a place for him,” Jean said. “He probably won’t be back.”

Anger and futility descended over Nat Johnson. No, he wouldn't be back. Not for dinner and probably not the next day — or the one after that. He'd be gone God only knew how long. Or where. Or why. Off by himself, alone some place. "If I thought there was any use," Nat began, "I'd send you two after him. But there's no —"

He broke off. A car was coming up the dirt road toward the farmhouse. A dusty, battered old Buick. Behind the wheel sat a plump red-faced man in a gray suit, who waved cheerfully at them as the car sputtered to a stop and the motor died into silence.

"Afternoon," the man nodded, as he climbed out the car. He tipped his hat pleasantly. He was middle-aged, genial-looking, perspiring freely as he crossed the dry ground toward the porch. "Maybe you folks can help me."

"What do you want?" Nat Johnson demanded hoarsely. He was frightened. He watched the creek bed out of the corner of his eye, praying silently. God, if only he *stayed* away. Jean was breathing quickly, sharp little gasps. She was terrified. Dave's face was expressionless, but all color had drained from it. "Who are you?" Nat demanded.

"Name's Baines. George Baines." The man held out his hand but Johnson ignored it. "Maybe you've heard of me. I own the Pacifica Development Corporation. We built all those little bomb-proof houses just outside town. Those little round ones you see as you come up the main highway from Lafayette."

"What do you want?" Johnson held his hands steady with an effort. He'd never heard of the man, although he'd noticed the housing tract. It couldn't be missed — a great ant-heap of ugly pill-boxes straddling the highway. Baines looked like the kind of man who'd own them. But what did he want here?

"I've bought some land up this way," Baines was explaining. He rattled a sheaf of crisp papers. "This is the deed, but I'll be damned if I can find it." He grinned good-naturedly. "I know it's around this way, someplace, this side of the State road. According to the clerk at the County Recorder's Office, a mile or so this side of that hill over there. But I'm no damn good at reading maps."

"It isn't around here," Dave broke in. "There's only farms around here. Nothing for sale."

"This is a farm, son," Baines said genially. "I bought it for myself and my missus. So we could settle down." He wrinkled his pug nose. "Don't get the wrong idea — I'm not putting up any tracts around here. This is strictly for myself. An old farmhouse, twenty acres, a pump and a few oak trees —"

“Let me see the deed.” Johnson grabbed the sheaf of papers, and while Baines blinked in astonishment, he leafed rapidly through them. His face hardened and he handed them back. “What are you up to? This deed is for a parcel fifty miles from here.”

“Fifty miles!” Baines was dumbfounded. “No kidding? But the clerk told me —”

Johnson was on his feet. He towered over the fat man. He was in top-notch physical shape — and he was plenty damn suspicious. “Clerk, hell. You get back into your car and drive out of here. I don’t know what you’re after, or what you’re here for, but I want you off my land.”

In Johnson’s massive fist something sparkled. A metal tube that gleamed ominously in the mid-day sunlight. Baines saw it — and gulped. “No offense, mister.” He backed nervously away. “You folks sure are touchy. Take it easy, will you?”

Johnson said nothing. He gripped the lash-tube tighter and waited for the fat man to leave.

But Baines lingered. “Look, buddy. I’ve been driving around this furnace five hours, looking for my damn place. Any objection to my using your facilities?”

Johnson eyed him with suspicion. Gradually the suspicion turned to disgust. He shrugged. “Dave, show him where the bathroom is.”

“Thanks.” Baines grinned thankfully. “And if it wouldn’t be too much trouble, maybe a glass of water. I’d be glad to pay you for it.” He chuckled knowingly. “Never let the city people get away with anything, eh?”

“Christ.” Johnson turned away in revulsion as the fat man lumbered after his son, into the house.

“Dad,” Jean whispered. As soon as Baines was inside she hurried up onto the porch, eyes wide with fear. “Dad, do you think he —”

Johnson put his arm around her. “Just hold on tight. He’ll be gone, soon.”

The girl’s dark eyes flashed with mute terror. “Every time the man from the water company, or the tax collector, some tramp, children, *anybody* come around, I get a terrible stab of pain — here.” She clutched at her heart, hand against her breasts. “It’s been that way thirteen years. How much longer can we keep it going? *How long?*”

The man named Baines emerged gratefully from the bathroom. Dave Johnson stood silently

by the door, body rigid, youthful face stony.

“Thanks, son,” Baines sighed. “Now where can I get a glass of cold water?” He smacked his thick lips in anticipation. “After you’ve been driving around the sticks looking for a dump some red-hot real estate agent stuck you with —”

Dave headed into the kitchen. “Mom, this man wants a drink of water. Dad said he could have it.”

Dave had turned his back. Baines caught a brief glimpse of the mother, gray-haired, small, moving toward the sink with a glass, face withered and drawn, without expression.

Then Baines hurried from the room down a hall. He passed through a bedroom, pulled a door open, found himself facing a closet. He turned and raced back, through the living room, into a dining room, then another bedroom. In a brief instant he had gone through the whole house.

He peered out a window. The back yard. Remains of a rusting truck. Entrance of an underground bomb shelter. Tin cans. Chickens scratching around. A dog, asleep under a shed. A couple of old auto tires.

He found a door leading out. Soundlessly, he tore the door open and stepped outside. No one was in sight. There was the barn, a leaning, ancient wood structure. Cedar trees beyond, a creek of some kind. What had once been an outhouse.

Baines moved cautiously around the side of the house. He had perhaps thirty seconds. He had left the door of the bathroom closed; the boy would think he had gone back in there. Baines looked into the house through a window. A large closet, filled with old clothing, boxes and bundles of magazines.

He turned and started back. He reached the corner of the house and started around it.

Nat Johnson’s gaunt shape loomed up and blocked his way. “All right, Baines. You asked for it.”

A pink flash blossomed. It shut out the sunlight in a single blinding burst. Baines leaped back and clawed at his coat pocket. The edge of the flash caught him and he half-fell, stunned by the force. His suit-shield sucked in the energy and discharged it, but the power rattled his teeth and for a moment he jerked like a puppet on a string. Darkness ebbed around him. He could feel the mesh of the shield glow white, as it absorbed the energy and fought to control it.

His own tube came out — and Johnson had no shield. “You’re under arrest,” Baines muttered grimly. “Put down your tube and your hands up. And call your family.” He made a motion with the tube. “Come on, Johnson. Make it snappy.”

The lash-tube wavered and then slipped from Johnson’s fingers. “You’re still alive.” Dawning horror crept across his face. “Then you must be —”

Dave and Jean appeared. “*Dad!*”

“Come over here,” Baines ordered. “Where’s your mother?”

Dave jerked his head numbly. “Inside.”

“Get her and bring her here.”

“You’re DCA,” Nat Johnson whispered.

Baines didn’t answer. He was doing something with his neck, pulling at the flabby flesh. The wiring of a contact mike glittered as he slipped it from a fold between two chins and into his pocket. From the dirt road came the sound of motors, sleek purrs that rapidly grew louder. Two teardrops of black metal came gliding up and parked beside the house. Men swarmed out, in the dark gray-green of the Government Civil Police. In the sky swarms of black dots were descending, clouds of ugly flies that darkened the sun as they spilled out men and equipment. The men drifted slowly down.

“He’s not here,” Baines said, as the first man reached him. “He got away. Inform Wisdom back at the lab.”

“We’ve got this section blocked off.”

Baines turned to Nat Johnson, who stood in dazed silence, uncomprehending, his son and daughter beside him. “How did he know we were coming?” Baines demanded.

“I don’t know,” Johnson muttered. “He just — knew.”

“A telepath?”

“I don’t know.”

Baines shrugged. “We’ll know, soon. A clamp is out, all around here. He can’t get past, no matter what the hell he can do. Unless he can dematerialize himself.”

“What’ll you do with him when you — if you catch him?” Jean asked huskily.

“Study him.”

“And then kill him?”

“That depends on the lab evaluation. If you could give me more to work on, I could predict better.”

“We can’t tell you anything. We don’t know anything more.” The girl’s voice rose with desperation. “He doesn’t talk.”

Baines jumped. “*What?*”

“He doesn’t talk. He never talked to us. Ever.”

“How old is he?”

“Eighteen.”

“No communication.” Baines was sweating. “In eighteen years there hasn’t been any semantic bridge between you? Does he have *any* contact? Signs? Codes?”

“He — ignores us. He eats here, stays with us. Sometimes he plays when we play. Or sits with us. He’s gone days on end. We’ve never been able to find out what he’s doing — or where. He sleeps in the barn — by himself.”

“Is he really gold-colored?”

“Yes. Skin, eyes, hair, nails. Everything.”

“And he’s large? Well-formed?”

It was a moment before the girl answered. A strange emotion stirred her drawn features, a momentary glow. “He’s incredibly beautiful. A god come down to earth.” Her lips twisted. “You won’t find him. He can do things. Things you have no comprehension of. Powers so far beyond your limited —”

“You don’t think we’ll get him?” Baines frowned. “More teams are landing all the time. You’ve never seen an Agency clamp in operation. We’ve had sixty years to work out all the bugs. If he gets away it’ll be the first time —”

Baines broke off abruptly. Three men were quickly approaching the porch. Two green-clad Civil Police. And a third man between them. A man who moved silently, lithely, a faintly luminous shape that towered above them.

“*Cris!*” Jean screamed.

“We got him,” one of the police said.

Baines fingered his lash-tube uneasily. “Where? How?”

“He gave himself up,” the policeman answered, voice full of awe. “He came to us voluntarily. Look at him. He’s like a metal statue. Like some sort of — god.”

The golden figure halted for a moment beside Jean. Then it turned slowly, calmly, to face Baines.

“*Cris!*” Jean shrieked. “*Why did you come back?*”

The same thought was eating at Baines, too. He shoved it aside — for the time being. “Is the jet out front?” he demanded quickly.

“Ready to go,” one of the CP answered.

“Fine.” Baines strode past them, down the steps and onto the dirt field. “Let’s go. I want him taken directly to the lab.” For a moment he studied the massive figure who stood calmly between the two Civil Policemen. Beside him, they seemed to have shrunk, become ungainly and repellent. Like dwarves... What had Jean said? *A god come to earth*. Baines broke angrily away. “Come on,” he muttered brusquely. “This one may be tough; we’ve never run up against one like it before. We don’t know what the hell it can do.”

The chamber was empty, except for the seated figure. Four bare walls, floor and ceiling. A steady glare of white light relentlessly etched every corner of the chamber. Near the top of the far wall ran a narrow slot, the view windows through which the interior of the chamber was scanned.

The seated figure was quiet. He hadn’t moved since the chamber locks had slid into place, since the heavy bolts had fallen from outside and the rows of bright-faced technicians had taken their places at the view windows. He gazed down at the floor, bent forward, hands clasped together, face calm, almost expressionless. In four hours he hadn’t moved a muscle.

“Well?” Baines said. “What have you learned?”

Wisdom grunted sourly. “Not much. If we don’t have him doped out in forty-eight hours we’ll go ahead with the euth. We can’t take any chances.”

“You’re thinking about the Tunis type,” Baines said. He was, too. They had found ten of them, living in the ruins of the abandoned North African town. Their survival method was simple. They killed and absorbed other life forms, then imitated them and took their places. *Chameleons*, they were called. It had cost sixty lives, before the last one was destroyed. Sixty top-level experts, highly trained DCA men.

“Any clues?” Baines asked.

“He’s different as hell. This is going to be tough.” Wisdom thumbed a pile of tape-spools. “This is the complete report, all the material we got from Johnson and his family. We pumped them with the psych-wash, then let them go home. Eighteen years — and no semantic bridge. Yet, he looks fully developed. Mature at thirteen — a shorter, faster life-cycle than ours. But why the mane? All the gold fuzz? Like a Roman monument that’s been gilded.”

“Has the report come in from the analysis room? You had a wave-shot taken, of course.”

“His brain pattern has been fully scanned. But it takes time for them to plot it out. We’re all running around like lunatics while he just sits there!” Wisdom poked a stubby finger at the window. “We caught him easily enough. He can’t have *much*, can he? But I’d like to know what it is. Before we euth him.”

“Maybe we should keep him alive until we know.”

“Euth in forty-eight hours,” Wisdom repeated stubbornly. “Whether we know or not. I don’t like him. He gives me the creeps.”

Wisdom stood chewing nervously on his cigar, a red-haired, beefy-faced man, thick and heavy-set, with a barrel chest and cold, shrewd eyes deep-set in his hard face. Ed Wisdom was Director of DCA’s North American Branch. But right now he was worried. His tiny eyes darted back and forth, alarmed flickers of gray in his brutal, massive face.

“You think,” Baines said slowly, “this is *it*?”

“I always think so,” Wisdom snapped. “I have to think so.”

“I mean —”

“I know what you mean.” Wisdom paced back and forth, among the study tables, technicians at their benches, equipment and humming computers. Buzzing tape-slots and research hook-ups. “This thing lived eighteen years with his family and *they* don’t understand it. *They* don’t know what it has. They know what it does, but not how.”

“What does it do?”

“It knows things.”

“What kind of things?”

Wisdom grabbed his lash-tube from his belt and tossed it on a table. “Here.”

“What?”

“Here.” Wisdom signaled, and a view window was slid back an inch. “Shoot him.”

Baines blinked. “You said forty-eight hours.”

With a curse, Wisdom snatched up the tube, aimed it through the window directly at the seated figure’s back, and squeezed the trigger.

A blinding flash of pink. A cloud of energy blossomed in the center of the chamber. It sparkled, then died into dark ash.

“Good God!” Baines gasped. “You —”

He broke off. The figure was no longer sitting. As Wisdom fired, it had moved in a blur of speed, away from the blast, to the corner of the chamber. Now it was slowly coming back, face blank, still absorbed in thought.

“Fifth time,” Wisdom said, as he put his tube away. “Last time Jamison and I fired together. Missed. He knew exactly when the bolts would hit. And where.”

Baines and Wisdom looked at each other. Both of them were thinking the same thing. “But even reading minds wouldn’t tell him where they were going to hit,” Baines said. “When, maybe. But not where. Could you have called your own shots?”

“Not mine,” Wisdom answered flatly. “I fired fast, damn near at random.” He frowned. “*Random*. We’ll have to make a test of this.” He waved a group of technicians over. “Get a

construction team up here. On the double.” He grabbed paper and pen and began sketching.

While construction was going on, Baines met his fiancée in the lobby outside the lab, the great central lounge of the DCA Building.

“How’s it coming?” she asked. Anita Ferris was tall and blonde, blue eyes and a mature, carefully cultivated figure. An attractive, competent-looking woman in her late twenties. She wore a metal foil dress and cape with a red and black stripe on the sleeve, the emblem of the A-Class. Anita was Director of the Semantics Agency, a top-level Government Coordinator. “Anything of interest, this time?”

“Plenty.” Baines guided her from the lobby, into the dim recess of the bar. Music played softly in the background, a shifting variety of patterns formed mathematically. Dim shapes moved expertly through the gloom, from table to table. Silent, efficient robot waiters.

As Anita sipped her Tom Collins, Baines outlined what they had found.

“What are the chances,” Anita asked slowly, “that he’s built up some kind of deflection-cone? There was one kind that warped their environment by direct mental effort. No tools. Direct mind to matter.”

“Psychokinetics?” Baines drummed restlessly on the table top. “I doubt it. The thing has ability to predict, not to control. He can’t stop the beams, but he can sure as hell get out of the way.”

“Does he jump between the molecules?”

Baines wasn’t amused. “This is serious. We’ve handled these things sixty years — longer than you and I have been around added together. Eighty-seven types of deviants have shown up, real mutants that could reproduce themselves, not mere freaks. This is the eighty-eighth. We’ve been able to handle each of them in turn. But this —”

“Why are you so worried about this one?”

“First, it’s eighteen years old. That in itself is incredible. Its family managed to hide it that long.”

“Those women around Denver were older than that. Those ones with —”

“They were in a Government camp. Somebody high up was toying with the idea of allowing them to breed. Some sort of industrial use. We withheld euth for years. But Cris Johnson stayed alive *outside our control*. Those things at Denver were under constant scrutiny.”

“Maybe he’s harmless. You always assume a deeve is a menace. He might even be beneficial. Somebody thought those women might work in. Maybe this thing has something that would advance the race.”

“*Which* race? Not the human race. It’s the old ‘the operation was a success but the patient died’ routine. If we introduce a mutant to keep us going it’ll be mutants, not us, who’ll inherit the earth. It’ll be mutants surviving for their own sake. Don’t think for a moment we can put padlocks on them and expect them to serve us. If they’re really superior to homo sapiens, they’ll win out in even competition. To survive, we’ve got to cold-deck them right from the start.”

“In other words, we’ll know homo superior when he comes — by definition. He’ll be the one we won’t be able to euth.”

“That’s about it,” Baines answered. “Assuming there *is* a homo superior. Maybe there’s just homo peculiar. Homo with an improved line.”

“The Neanderthal probably thought the Cro-Magnon man had merely an improved line. A little more advanced ability to conjure up symbols and shape flint. From your description, this thing is more radical than a mere improvement.”

“This thing,” Baines said slowly, “has an ability to predict. So far, it’s been able to stay alive. It’s been able to cope with situations better than you or I could. How long do you think we’d stay alive in that chamber, with energy beams blazing down at us? In a sense it’s got the ultimate survival ability. If it can always be accurate —”

A wall-speaker sounded. “Baines, you’re wanted in the lab. Get the hell out of the bar and upramp.”

Baines pushed back his chair and got to his feet. “Come along. You may be interested in seeing what Wisdom has got dreamed up.”

A tight group of top-level DCA officials stood around in a circle, middle-aged, gray-haired, listening to a skinny youth in a white shirt and rolled-up sleeves explaining an elaborate cube of metal and plastic that filled the center of the view-platform. From it jutted an ugly array of tube snouts, gleaming muzzles that disappeared into an intricate maze of wiring.

“This,” the youth was saying briskly, “is the first real test. It fires at random — as nearly random as we can make it, at least. Weighted balls are thrown up in an air stream, then dropped free to fall back and cut relays. They can fall in almost any pattern. The thing fires according to their pattern. Each drop produces a new configuration of timing and position. Ten tubes, in all. Each will be in constant motion.”

“And *nobody* knows how they’ll fire?” Anita asked.

“Nobody.” Wisdom rubbed his thick hands together. “Mind reading won’t help him, not with this thing.”

Anita moved over to the view windows, as the cube was rolled into place. She gasped. “Is that him?”

“What’s wrong?” Baines asked.

Anita’s cheeks were flushed. “Why, I expected a — a *thing*. My God, he’s beautiful! Like a golden statue. Like a deity!”

Baines laughed. “He’s eighteen years old, Anita. Too young for you.”

The woman was still peering through the view window. “Look at him. Eighteen? I don’t believe it.”

Cris Johnson sat in the center of the chamber, on the floor. A posture of contemplation, head bowed, arms folded, legs tucked under him. In the stark glare of the overhead lights his powerful body glowed and rippled, a shimmering figure of downy gold.

“Pretty, isn’t he?” Wisdom muttered. “All right. Start it going.”

“You’re going to *kill* him?” Anita demanded.

“We’re going to try.”

“But he’s —” She broke off uncertainly. “He’s not a monster. He’s not like those others, those hideous things with two heads, or those insects. Or those awful things from Tunis.”

“What is he, then?” Baines asked.

“I don’t know. But you can’t just kill him. It’s terrible!”

The cube clicked into life. The muzzles jerked, silently altered position. Three retracted, disappeared into the body of the cube. Others came out. Quickly, efficiently, they moved into position — and abruptly, without warning, opened fire.

A staggering burst of energy fanned out, a complex pattern that altered each moment, different angles, different velocities, a bewildering blur that cracked from the windows down into the chamber.

The golden figure moved. He dodged back and forth, expertly avoiding the bursts of energy that seared around him on all sides. Rolling clouds of ash obscured him; he was lost in a mist of crackling fire and ash.

“Stop it!” Anita shouted. “For God’s sake, you’ll destroy him!”

The chamber was an inferno of energy. The figure had completely disappeared. Wisdom waited a moment, then nodded to the technicians operating the cube. They touched guide buttons and the muzzles slowed and died. Some sank back into the cube. All became silent. The works of the cube ceased humming.

Cris Johnson was still alive. He emerged from the settling clouds of ash, blackened and singed. But unhurt. He had avoided each beam. He had weaved between them and among them as they came, a dancer leaping over glittering sword-points of pink fire. He had survived.

“No,” Wisdom murmured, shaken and grim. “Not a telepath. Those were at random. No prearranged pattern.”

The three of them looked at each other, dazed and frightened. Anita was trembling. Her face was pale and her blue eyes were wide. “What, then?” She whispered. “What is it? What does he have?”

“He’s a good guesser,” Wisdom suggested.

“He’s not guessing,” Baines answered. “Don’t kid yourself. That’s the whole point.”

“No, he’s not guessing.” Wisdom nodded slowly. “He *knew*. He predicted each strike. I wonder... *Can* he err? *Can* he make a mistake?”

“We caught him,” Baines pointed out.

“You said he came back voluntarily.” There was a strange look on Wisdom’s face. “Did he come back *after* the clamp was up?”

Baines jumped. “Yes, after.”

“He couldn’t have got through the clamp. So he came back.” Wisdom grinned wryly. “The clamp must actually have been perfect. It was supposed to be.”

“If there had been a single hole,” Baines murmured, “he would have known it — gone through.”

Wisdom ordered a group of armed guards over. “Get him out of there. To the euth stage.”

Anita shrieked. “Wisdom, you can’t —”

“He’s too far ahead of us. We can’t compete with him.” Wisdom’s eyes were bleak. “We can only guess what’s going to happen. *He knows*. For him, it’s a sure thing. I don’t think it’ll help him at euth, though. The whole stage is flooded simultaneously. Instantaneous gas, released throughout.” He signalled impatiently to the guards. “Get going. Take him down right away. Don’t waste any time.”

“Can we?” Baines murmured thoughtfully.

The guards took up positions by one of the chamber locks. Cautiously, the tower control slid the lock back. The first two guards stepped cautiously in, lash-tubes ready.

Cris stood in the center of the chamber. His back was to them as they crept toward him. For a moment he was silent, utterly unmoving. The guards fanned out, as more of them entered the chamber. Then —

Anita screamed. Wisdom cursed. The golden figure spun and leaped forward, in a flashing blur of speed. Past the triple line of guards, through the lock and into the corridor.

“Get him!” Baines shouted.

Guards milled everywhere. Flashes of energy lit up the corridor, as the figure raced among them up the ramp.

“No use,” Wisdom said calmly. “We can’t hit him.” He touched a button, then another. “But maybe this will help.”

“What —” Baines began. But the leaping figure shot abruptly at him, straight at him, and he

dropped to one side. The figure flashed past. It ran effortlessly, face without expression, dodging and jumping as the energy beams seared around it.

For an instant the golden face loomed up before Baines. It passed and disappeared down a side corridor. Guards rushed after it, kneeling and firing, shouting orders excitedly. In the bowels of the building, heavy guns were rumbling up. Locks slid into place as escape corridors were systematically sealed off.

“Good God,” Baines gasped, as he got to his feet. “Can’t he do anything but run?”

“I gave orders,” Wisdom said, “to have the building isolated. There’s no way out. Nobody comes and nobody goes. He’s loose here in the building — but he won’t get out.”

“If there’s one exit overlooked, he’ll know it,” Anita pointed out shakily.

“We won’t overlook any exit. We got him once; we’ll get him again.”

A messenger robot had come in. Now it presented its message respectfully to Wisdom. “From analysis, sir.”

Wisdom tore the tape open. “Now we’ll know how it thinks.” His hands were shaking. “Maybe we can figure out its blind spot. It may be able to out-think us, but that doesn’t mean it’s invulnerable. It only predicts the future — it can’t change it. If there’s only death ahead, its ability won’t...”

Wisdom’s voice faded into silence. After a moment he passed the tape to Baines.

“I’ll be down in the bar,” Wisdom said. “Getting a good stiff drink.” His face had turned lead-gray. “All I can say is *I hope to hell this isn’t the race to come.*”

“What’s the analysis?” Anita demanded impatiently, peering over Baines’ shoulder. “How does it think?”

“It doesn’t,” Baines said, as he handed the tape back to his boss. “It doesn’t think at all. Virtually no frontal lobe. It’s not a human being — it doesn’t use symbols. It’s nothing but an animal.”

“An animal,” Wisdom said. “With a single highly-developed faculty. Not a superior man. Not a man at all.”

Up and down the corridors of the DCA Building, guards and equipment clanged. Loads of Civil Police were pouring into the building and taking up positions beside the guards. One by one, the corridors and rooms were being inspected and sealed off. Sooner or later the golden figure of Cris Johnson would be located and cornered.

“We were always afraid a mutant with superior intellectual powers would come along,” Baines said reflectively. “A deeve who would be to us what we are to the great apes. Something with a bulging cranium, telepathic ability, a perfect semantic system, ultimate powers of symbolization and calculation. A development along our own path. A better human being.”

“He acts by reflex,” Anita said wonderingly. She had the analysis and was sitting at one of the desks studying it intently. “Reflex — like a lion. A golden lion.” She pushed the tape aside, a strange expression on her face. “The lion god.”

“Beast,” Wisdom corrected tartly. “Blond beast, you mean.”

“He runs fast,” Baines said, “and that’s all. No tools. He doesn’t build anything or utilize anything outside himself. He just stands and waits for the right opportunity and then he runs like hell.”

“This is worse than anything we’ve anticipated,” Wisdom said. His beefy face was lead-gray. He sagged like an old man, his blunt hands trembling and uncertain. “To be replaced by an animal! Something that runs and hides. Something without a language!” He spat savagely. “That’s why they weren’t able to communicate with it. We wondered what kind of semantic system it had. It hasn’t got any! No more ability to talk and think than a — dog.”

“That means intelligence has failed,” Baines went on huskily. “We’re the last of our line — like the dinosaur. We’ve carried intelligence as far as it’ll go. Too far, maybe. We’ve already got to the point where we know so much — think so much — we can’t act.”

“Men of thought,” Anita said. “Not men of action. It’s begun to have a paralyzing effect. But this thing —”

“This thing’s faculty works better than ours ever did. We can recall past experiences, keep them in mind, learn from them. At best, we can make shrewd guesses about the future, from our memory of what’s happened in the past. But we can’t be certain. We have to speak of probabilities. Grays. Not blacks and whites. We’re only guessing.”

“Cris Johnson isn’t guessing,” Anita added.

“He can look ahead. See what’s coming. He can — prethink. Let’s call it that. He can see into

the future. Probably he doesn't perceive it as the future."

"No," Anita said thoughtfully. "It would seem like the present. He has a broader present. But his present lies ahead, not back. Our present is related to the past. Only the past is certain, to us. To him, the future is certain. And he probably doesn't remember the past, any more than any animal remembers what happened."

"As he develops," Baines said, "as his race evolves, it'll probably expand its ability to prethink. Instead of ten minutes, thirty minutes. Then an hour. A day. A year. Eventually they'll be able to keep ahead a whole lifetime. Each one of them will live in a solid, unchanging world. There'll be no variables, no uncertainty. No motion! They won't have anything to fear. Their world will be perfectly static, a solid block of matter."

"And when death comes," Anita said, "they'll accept it. There won't be any struggle; to them, it'll already have happened."

"*Already have happened,*" Baines repeated. "To Cris, our shots had already been fired." He laughed harshly. "Superior survival doesn't mean superior man. If there were another world-wide flood, only fish would survive. If there were another ice age, maybe nothing but polar bears would be left. When we opened the lock, he had already seen the men, seen exactly where they were standing and what they'd do. A neat faculty — but not a development of mind. A pure physical *sense*."

"But if every exit is covered," Wisdom repeated, "he'll see he can't get out. He gave himself up before — he'll give himself up again." He shook his head. "An animal. Without language. Without tools."

"With his new sense," Baines said, "he doesn't need anything else." He examined his watch. "It's after two. Is the building completely sealed off?"

"You can't leave," Wisdom stated. "You'll have to stay here all night — or until we catch the bastard."

"I meant her." Baines indicated Anita. "She's supposed to be back at Semantics by seven in the morning."

Wisdom shrugged. "I have no control over her. If she wants, she can check out."

"I'll stay," Anita decided. "I want to be here when he — when he's destroyed. I'll sleep here." She hesitated. "Wisdom, isn't there some other way? If he's just an animal couldn't we —"

"A zoo?" Wisdom's voice rose in a frenzy of hysteria. "Keep it penned up in the zoo? Christ

no! It's got to be killed!"

For a long time the great gleaming shape crouched in the darkness. He was in a store room. Boxes and cartons stretched out on all sides, heaped up in orderly rows, all neatly counted and marked. Silent and deserted.

But in a few moments people burst in and searched the room. He could see this. He saw them in all parts of the room, clear and distinct, men with lash-tubes, grim-faced, stalking with murder in their eyes.

The sight was one of many. One of a multitude of clearly-etched scenes lying tangent to his own. And to each was attached a further multitude of interlocking scenes, that finally grew hazier and dwindled away. A progressive vagueness, each syndrome less distinct.

But the immediate one, the scene that lay closest to him, was clearly visible. He could easily make out the sight of the armed men. Therefore it was necessary to be out of the room before they appeared.

The golden figure got calmly to its feet and moved to the door. The corridor was empty; he could see himself already outside, in the vacant, drumming hall of metal and recessed lights. He pushed the door boldly open and stepped out.

A lift blinked across the hall. He walked to the lift and entered it. In five minutes a group of guards would come running along and leap into the lift. By that time he would have left it and sent it back down. Now he pressed a button and rose to the next floor.

He stepped out into a deserted passage. No one was in sight. That didn't surprise him. He couldn't be surprised. The element didn't exist for him. The positions of things, the space relationships of all matter in the immediate future, were as certain for him as his own body. The only thing that was unknown was that which had already passed out of being. In a vague, dim fashion, he had occasionally wondered where things went after he had passed them.

He came to a small supply closet. It had just been searched. It would be a half an hour before anyone opened it again. He had that long; he could see that far ahead. And then —

And then he would be able to see another area, a region farther beyond. He was always moving, advancing into new regions he had never seen before. A constantly unfolding panorama of sights and scenes, frozen landscapes spread out ahead. All objects were fixed. Pieces on a vast chess board through which he moved, arms folded, face calm. A detached

observer who saw objects that lay ahead of him as clearly as those under foot.

Right now, as he crouched in the small supply closet, he saw an unusually varied multitude of scenes for the next half hour. Much lay ahead. The half hour was divided into an incredibly complex pattern of separate configurations. He had reached a critical region; he was about to move through worlds of intricate complexity.

He concentrated on a scene ten minutes away. It showed, like a three dimensional still, a heavy gun at the end of the corridor, trained all the way to the far end. Men moved cautiously from door to door, checking each room again, as they had done repeatedly. At the end of the half hour they had reached the supply closet. A scene showed them looking inside. By that time he was gone, of course. He wasn't in that scene. He had passed on to another.

The next scene showed an exit. Guards stood in a solid line. No way out. He was in that scene. Off to one side, in a niche just inside the door. The street outside was visible, stars, lights, outlines of passing cars and people.

In the next tableau he had gone back, away from the exit. There was no way out. In another tableau he saw himself at other exits, a legion of golden figures, duplicated again and again, as he explored regions ahead, one after another. But each exit was covered.

In one dim scene he saw himself lying charred and dead; he had tried to run through the line, out the exit.

But that scene was vague. One wavering, indistinct still out of many. The inflexible path along which he moved would not deviate in that direction. It would not turn him that way. The golden figure in that scene, the miniature doll in that room, was only distantly related to him. It was himself, but a far-away self. A self he would never meet. He forgot it and went on to examine the other tableau.

The myriad of tableaux that surrounded him were an elaborate maze, a web which he now considered bit by bit. He was looking down into a doll's house of infinite rooms, rooms without number, each with its furniture, its dolls, all rigid and unmoving. The same dolls and furniture were repeated in many. He, himself, appeared often. The two men on the platform. The woman. Again and again the same combinations turned up; the play was redone frequently, the same actors and props moved around in all possible ways.

Before it was time to leave the supply closet, Cris Johnson had examined each of the rooms tangent to the one he now occupied. He had consulted each, considered its contents thoroughly.

He pushed the door open and stepped calmly out into the hall. He knew exactly where he was going. And what he had to do. Crouched in the stuffy closet, he had quietly and expertly examined each miniature of himself, observed which clearly-etched configuration lay along his inflexible path, the one room of the doll house, the one set out of legions, toward which he was moving.

Anita slipped out of her metal foil dress, hung it over a hanger, then unfastened her shoes and kicked them under the bed. She was just starting to unclip her bra when the door opened.

She gasped. Soundlessly, calmly, the great golden shape closed the door and bolted it after him.

Anita snatched up her lash-tube from the dressing table. Her hand shook; her whole body was trembling. "What do you want?" she demanded. Her fingers tightened convulsively around the tube. "I'll kill you."

The figure regarded her silently, arms folded. It was the first time she had seen Cris Johnson closely. The great dignified face, handsome and impassive. Broad shoulders. The golden mane of hair, golden skin, pelt of radiant fuzz —

"Why?" she demanded breathlessly. Her heart was pounding wildly. "What do you want?"

She could kill him easily. But the lash-tube wavered. Cris Johnson stood without fear; he wasn't at all afraid. Why not? Didn't he understand what it was? What the small metal tube could do to him?

"Of course," she said suddenly, in a choked whisper. "You can see ahead. You know I'm not going to kill you. Or you wouldn't have come here."

She flushed, terrified — and embarrassed. He knew exactly what she was going to do; he could see it as easily as she saw the walls of the room, the wall-bed with its covers folded neatly back, her clothes hanging in the closet, her purse and small things on the dressing table.

"All right." Anita backed away, then abruptly put the tube down on the dressing table. "I won't kill you. Why should I?" She fumbled in her purse and got out her cigarettes. Shakily, she lit up, her pulse racing. She was scared. And strangely fascinated. "Do you expect to stay here? It won't do any good. They've come through the dorm twice, already. They'll be back."

Could he understand her? She saw nothing on his face, only blank dignity. God, he was huge! It wasn't possible he was only eighteen, a boy, a child. He looked more like some great golden god, come down to earth.

She shook the thought off savagely. He wasn't a god. He was a beast. *The blond beast*, come to take the place of man. To drive man from the earth.

Anita snatched up the lash-tube. "Get out of here! You're an animal! A big stupid animal! You can't even understand what I'm saying — you don't even have a language. You're not human."

Cris Johnson remained silent. As if he were waiting. Waiting for what? He showed no sign of fear or impatience, even though the corridor outside rang with the sound of men searching, metal against metal, guns and energy tubes being dragged around, shouts and dim rumbles as section after section of the building was searched and sealed off.

"They'll get you," Anita said. "You'll be trapped here. They'll be searching this wing any moment." She savagely stubbed out her cigarette. "For God's sake, what do you expect me to do?"

Cris moved toward her. Anita shrank back. His powerful hands caught hold of her and she gasped in sudden terror. For a moment she struggled blindly, desperately.

"Let go!" She broke away and leaped back from him. His face was expressionless. Calmly, he came toward her, an impassive god advancing to take her. "Get away!" She groped for the lash-tube, trying to get up. But the tube slipped from her fingers and rolled onto the floor.

Cris bent down and picked it up. He held it out to her, in the open palm of his hand.

"Good God," Anita whispered. Shakily, she accepted the tube, gripped it hesitantly, then put it down again on the dressing table.

In the half-light of the room, the great golden figure seemed to glow and shimmer, outlined against the darkness. A god — no, not a god. An animal. A great golden beast, without a soul. She was confused. Which was he — or was he both? She shook her head, bewildered. It was late, almost four. She was exhausted and confused.

Cris took her in his arms. Gently, kindly, he lifted her face and kissed her. His powerful hands held her tight. She couldn't breathe. Darkness, mixed with the shimmering golden haze, swept around her. Around and around it spiraled, carrying her senses away. She sank down into it gratefully. The darkness covered her and dissolved her in a swelling torrent of

sheer force that mounted in intensity each moment, until the roar of it beat against her and at last blotted out everything.

Anita blinked. She sat up and automatically pushed her hair into place. Cris was standing before the closet. He was reaching up, getting something down.

He turned toward her and tossed something on the bed. Her heavy metal foil traveling cape.

Anita gazed down at the cape without comprehension. “What do you want?”

Cris stood by the bed, waiting.

She picked up the cape uncertainly. Cold creepers of fear plucked at her. “You want me to get you out of here,” she said softly. “Past the guards and the CP.”

Cris said nothing.

“They’ll kill you instantly.” She got unsteadily to her feet. “You can’t run past them. Good God, don’t you do anything but run? There must be a better way. Maybe I can appeal to Wisdom. I’m Class A — Director Class. I can go directly to the Full Directorate. I ought to be able to hold them off, keep back the euth indefinitely. The odds are a billion to one against us if we try to break past —”

She broke off.

“But you don’t gamble,” she continued slowly. “You don’t go by odds. You *know* what’s coming. You’ve seen the cards already.” She studied his face intently. “No, you can’t be cold-decked. It wouldn’t be possible.”

For a moment she stood deep in thought. Then with a quick, decisive motion, she snatched up the cloak and slipped it around her bare shoulders. She fastened the heavy belt, bent down and got her shoes from under the bed, snatched up her purse, and hurried to the door.

“Come on,” she said. She was breathing quickly, cheeks flushed. “Let’s go. While there are still a number of exits to choose from. My car is parked outside, in the lot at the side of the building. We can get to my place in an hour. I have a winter home in Argentina. If worse comes to worst we can fly there. It’s in the back country, away from the cities. Jungle and swamps. Cut-off from almost everything.” Eagerly she started to open the door.

Cris reached out and stopped her. Gently, patiently, he moved in front of her.

He waited a long time, body rigid. Then he turned the knob and stepped boldly out into the corridor.

The corridor was empty. No one was in sight. Anita caught a faint glimpse, the back of a guard hurrying off. If they had come out a second earlier —

Cris started down the corridor. She ran after him. He moved rapidly, effortlessly. The girl had trouble keeping up with him. He seemed to know exactly where to go. Off to the right, down a side hall, a supply passage. Onto an ascent freight-lift. They rose, then abruptly halted.

Cris waited again. Presently he slid the door back and moved out of the lift. Anita followed nervously. She could hear sounds: guns and men, very close.

They were near an exit. A double line of guards stood directly ahead. Twenty men, a solid wall — and a massive heavy-duty robot gun in the center. The men were alert, faces strained and tense. Watching wide-eyed, guns gripped tight. A Civil Police officer was in charge.

“We’ll never get past,” Anita gasped. “We wouldn’t get ten feet.” She pulled back. “They’ll —”

Cris took her by the arm and continued calmly forward. Blind terror leaped inside her. She fought wildly to get away, but his fingers were like steel. She couldn’t pry them loose. Quietly, irresistibly, the great golden creature drew her along beside him toward the double line of guards.

“*There he is!*” Guns went up. Men leaped into action. The barrel of the robot cannon swung around. “*Get him!*”

Anita was paralyzed. She sagged against the powerful body beside her, tugged along helplessly by his inflexible grasp. The lines of guards came nearer, a sheer wall of guns. Anita fought to control her terror. She stumbled, half-fell. Cris supported her effortlessly. She scratched, fought at him, struggled to get loose —

“Don’t shoot!” she screamed.

Guns wavered uncertainly. “Who is she?” The guards were moving around, trying to get a sight on Cris without including her. “Who’s he got there?”

One of them saw the stripe on her sleeve. Red and black. Director Class. Top-level.

“She’s Class A.” Shocked, the guards retreated. “Miss, get out of the way!”

Anita found her voice. “Don’t shoot. He’s — in my custody. You understand? I’m taking him out.”

The wall of guards moved back nervously. “No one’s supposed to pass. Director Wisdom gave orders —”

“I’m not subject to Wisdom’s authority.” She managed to edge her voice with a harsh crispness. “Get out of the way. I’m taking him to the Semantics Agency.”

For a moment nothing happened. There was no reaction. Then slowly, uncertainly, one guard stepped aside.

Cris moved. A blur of speed, away from Anita, past the confused guards, through the breach in the line, out the exit, and onto the street. Bursts of energy flashed wildly after him. Shouting guards milled out. Anita was left behind, forgotten. The guards, the heavy-duty gun, were pouring out into the early morning darkness. Sirens wailed. Patrol cars roared into life.

Anita stood dazed, confused, leaning against the wall, trying to get her breath.

He was gone. He had left her. Good God — what had she done? She shook her head, bewildered, her face buried in her hands. She had been hypnotized. She had lost her will, her common sense. Her reason! The animal, the great golden beast, had tricked her. Taken advantage of her. And now he was gone, escaped into the night.

Miserable, agonized tears trickled through her clenched fingers. She rubbed at them futilely; but they kept on coming.

“He’s gone,” Baines said. “We’ll never get him, now. He’s probably a million miles from here.”

Anita sat huddled in the corner, her face to the wall. A little bent heap, broken and wretched.

Wisdom paced back and forth. “But where can he go? Where can he hide? Nobody’ll hide him! Everybody knows the law about deeves!”

“He’s lived out in the woods most of his life. He’ll hunt — that’s what he’s always done. They wondered what he was up to, off by himself. He was catching game and sleeping under trees.” Baines laughed harshly. “And the first woman he meets will be glad to hide him — as *she* was.” He indicated Anita with a jerk of his thumb.

“So all that gold, that mane, that god-like stance, was *for* something. Not just ornament.” Wisdom’s thick lips twisted. “He doesn’t have just one faculty — he has two. One is new, the newest thing in survival method. The other is old as life.” He stopped pacing to glare at the huddled shape in the corner. “Plumage. Bright feathers, combs for the rooster, swans, birds, bright scales for the fish. Gleaming pelts and manes for the animals. An animal isn’t necessarily *bestial*. Lions aren’t bestial. Or tigers. Or any of the big cats. They’re anything but bestial.”

“He’ll never have to worry,” Baines said. “He’ll get by — as long as human women exist to take care of him. And since he can see ahead, into the future, he already knows he’s sexually irresistible to human females.”

“We’ll get him,” Wisdom muttered. “I’ve had the Government declare an emergency. Military and Civil Police will be looking for him. Armies of men — a whole planet of experts, the most advanced machines and equipment. We’ll flush him, sooner or later.”

“By that time it won’t make any difference,” Baines said. He put his hand on Anita’s shoulder and patted her ironically. “You’ll have company, sweetheart. You won’t be the only one. You’re just the first of a long procession.”

“Thanks,” Anita grated.

“The oldest survival method and the newest. Combined to form one perfectly adapted animal. How the hell are we going to stop him? We can put *you* through a sterilization tank — but we can’t pick them all up, all the women he meets along the way. And if we miss one we’re finished.”

“We’ll have to keep trying,” Wisdom said. “Round up as many as we can. Before they can spawn.” Faint hope glinted in his tired, sagging face. “Maybe his characteristics are recessive. Maybe ours will cancel his out.”

“I wouldn’t lay any money on that,” Baines said. “I think I know already which of the two strains is going to turn up dominant.” He grinned wryly. “I mean, I’m making a good *guess*. It won’t be us.”

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