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The Fourth Vocation of George Gustaf

By

David Brin

Another damn ritual club was holding a parade through Trafalgar Square when the floater-cab carrying Dan AnMan and Hamilton Smith entered the traffic circle. Hamilton stared gloomily at the parade as the robot taxi changed lanes, neatly dodging the brightly clad celebrants.

"Bloody damn boring ritual clubs," Hamilton muttered to himself. This one seemed to have a Middle Eastern theme, the marchers stepping along to recorded tambourines. Banners hung limply and the participants seemed scarcely more aroused than the onlookers. He couldn't make out which club this was, though he recognized several individuals as frequent customers at the bank where he worked.

Hamilton remembered that his ritual club, the Loyal Order of Rockers, was supposed to hold a parade of their own next month. He wasn't looking forward to getting into his twentieth-century motorcycle-gang attire, but there wasn't anything he could do about it. A ritual hobby was one of the six avocations required by law for every citizen.

Hamilton looked at his assistant, the AnMan, who stared back with an android's fixed, translucent smile.

"You're sure this fellow we're going to interview fits the criteria I set? I've only got a few hours this week to spend on my sociology avocation, Dan. I don't want to waste it interviewing someone who's just a statistical fluke."

The AnMan's voicebox buzzed reassuringly. He opened his valise. "If you wish, I can go over the data again, Hamilton. Of our random sampling, this man Farrell Cooper shows a level of satisfaction with his ritual club that is two standard

deviations above average. I feel certain he fits the criteria."

Hamilton was still uneasy. Although he was a fully licensed amateur sociologist, he didn't like invading people's homes to interview them. What if he interrupted this Cooper fellow while he was busy at one of his avocations? Or worse, at work on his Vocation?

No one liked having his Vocation interrupted... the few hours a week one got to do something that had "professional" status. Hamilton always hated it when some amateur bothered him during his precious hours as a real, honest-to-god banker. He would much rather be at the bank now, being a professional, than pursuing this silly sociology hobby. But android labor had made real work for humans a rationed commodity. To use up the rest of the time, the law required that every citizen take up a half-dozen pastimes. Though as an amateur sociologist he understood the need for such a law, Hamilton sometimes found himself hating it.

The floater swept by Buckingham Museum, past dusty statues of heroes from the time of the Social Amalgamation. Picnickers lounged on the wide lawn, filling the time each had allotted to Idle Socializing or to Hobby Daydreaming. Everywhere Hamilton saw signs of the same lackadaisical wrongness that had been evident in the ritual parade.

He wished he had never started this amateur study of his. The deeper he and Dan AnMan dug, the more depressed he got. He had never intended to find out about a moral dryrot at the heart of the World State. He had only wanted something mildly interesting to help pass the time.

The AnMan spoke again.

"I can tell you are nervous, Hamilton. Don't be. This is the beginning of your vindication. All of those who said you lacked a proper enthusiasm for amateur sociology will be refuted when your Loyalty Index theory is demonstrated!"

"You really think so?" Then Hamilton frowned. "Who said I lacked enthusiasm?"

Dan was a sophisticated model, free to choose which question to answer.

"Yes, I do think so, Hamilton. Your discovery appears to be a major one. I find it interesting that the professional sociologists have published so little about the rising tide of disenchantment, or on how the surrogate passion of the ritual clubs seems not to be satisfying the average citizen."

It felt odd hearing his own terminology come out of the AnMan so smoothly. It made Hamilton feel proud, and just a little embarrassed. Before he could reply, the android looked up.

"We are here," Dan announced. The taxi came to a smooth halt in front of a handsome row of townhouses that had obviously been designed by a professional, rather than an amateur, architect.

Hamilton checked his notes again. "This fellow, his name is..."

"Farrell Cooper."

"Yes. And the name of his ritual club... ?"

"The Bath and Garter Society, Hamilton."

"Yeah, right. Bath and Garter. Sounds kind of kinky. Group-sex clubs usually don't work well in the ritual category. I wonder what's so unusual about this one."

For fifteen hours each week Farrell Cooper did service to society in his Vocation, as a veterinarian's assistant at the New Hampstead Riding Stables. His artistic avocation was leather-working—a suspiciously large number of the pieces on display in his home were saddles and other equestrian tack. It was no surprise, then, that Cooper's Athletic Hobby was riding.

His registered Altruism Hobby consisted of five hours a week helping at a local Robot Free Clinic, "caring for our modern serfs, who have given us this banquet of free time," as he put it, rather stiffly.

Cooper was a tall, stooped, hawk-faced man with pursed lips and a dour expression. He welcomed Dan and Hamilton without enthusiasm, and accepted their amateur-researcher credentials with barely a glance. After showing them his work and study rooms he led them into the parlor.

Hamilton sat on the tooled-leather sofa and opened his notebook. "Well, Mr. Cooper, we've seen examples of your art skill, and your other avocations. What we'd really like to know more about is your ritual club. Our survey shows that you spend the maximum time allowed—a full twenty hours a week—working for this... Bath and Garter Society. Yet the group seems to have full-scale meetings only a few times a year. Just what is your function in the club?"

Cooper fidgeted. For a moment he looked as if he were actually considering refusing to answer. Hamilton felt a thrill. One didn't run into criminal acts every day.

But the man sighed at last and answered. "I have the honor and privilege of serving as a parttime valet to His Grace."

Hamilton suppressed a groan. They might be here all day, tracing the relationship between the "Grand Imperial Poobah" and the "Master Gzork"—or whatever titles they used in this ritual club.

"Could you please define the function of a... a 'valet,' Mr. Cooper?"

Cooper enunciated slowly, with a queerly old-fashioned accent. "A valet is one who serves another as a personal aide, bodyguard, attendant, emissary... it is an honor to so serve one of the Blood."

Hamilton caught Dan AnMan's eye. Was that bemusement on the android's usually passive face?

Hamilton cleared his throat. "You say that as a 'valet' you 'serve' this..." He referred to his notes. "This person you call His Grace.' Is this person a dancer?"

"No."

"Hmmm. Well, does he have any other titles in your club?"

Cooper's eyes seemed to focus on something very far away. "His other titles are almost innumerable, Mr. Smith. They are all legitimate and have never been secret, though we've always avoided publicity. Now, I suppose, His Grace will have to decide what to do next."

Hamilton had finally decided that Cooper was that rare commodity, a genuine lunatic. He wondered if there were still bounties offered for citizens who referred sick people to therapy.

"Well, since the titles aren't secret, could you tell us a few of them?"

"All right." Cooper bowed slightly. "His name is George Gustaf Charles Ferdinand Louis Jaro Taisho... Well, he'll tell you the others if he wishes. You will find him at Islington Robot Hospital, where he is chief professional psychiatrist. As for his titles, they include the Crowns of Holland, Belgium, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Japan, China, Russia, Britain, large parts of Africa and the Americas—"

"Hold it!" Hamilton raised his hand. "Mr. Cooper, just what is meant by this term 'Crown'?"

Cooper smiled for the first time. "Why, it means that in all of those lands His Majesty is, by the grace of God and by sovereign right, king."

Cooper leaned forward and looked at Hamilton benignly.

"He is your king too, you know."

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The nameplate read:

DR. GEORGE GUSTAF
CHIEF PROFESSIONAL
ROBOT AND ANDROID PSYCHOLOGY

Hamilton stopped before the door and adjusted the amateur researcher credential on his lapel. He wished he had kept Dan with him instead of sending him off to the library.

At first he had expected to find out that Gustaf was as crazy as his 'valet.' But the man's public dossier was impeccable. In his productive Vocation he was one of the most respected robo-psychiatrists in Europe. His intellectual avocations included law and history, in each of which he had been awarded honorary professional status, a rare encomium. Everyone envied a person who won Vocation in more than one area. Gustaf had three professions!

He knocked on the door. After a moment it was opened by a dark-haired young man of above medium height, who smiled broadly and offered his hand.

"Mr. Smith? Please come in and have a seat. I'll be right with you."

Hamilton found himself a chair across from a broad, hand-carved mahogany desk. Dr. Gustaf passed through a side door into a treatment room. Hamilton could hear him giving firm advice to a Drone Class robot. The machine's answers were a series of clicks and beeps that Hamilton couldn't begin to interpret.

He looked at the items on display on the wall of the office. There were diplomas, of course, and trophies from athletic competitions. He noted that few of the works of art had that look that said they had come from somebody's hobby. Most appeared to be quite old.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Smith." Gustaf came in, closing the door behind him. He hung his lab coat on a hanger, then took a seat across from Hamilton.

"Now, I suppose this is about the old Bath and Garter, isn't it? Farrell told me about your visit yesterday. It was all right for him to do that, wasn't it? He said you didn't ask for confidentiality."

"Oh, sure. That's fine." Hamilton waved nonchalantly. Actually, he had intended to ask Cooper to respect the convention, but he had been running late for basketball practice and afterward a round of committed pleasure reading, and he had forgotten.

Today he had uncharacteristically rushed through his work at the bank and left early.

"Now, about your ritual club. Mr. Cooper makes some claims about its antiquity that are, frankly, hard to believe. Lying to a credentialed researcher is a crime, you know. Perhaps you can explain his extravagant story?"

Gustaf nodded seriously. "Oh, I'm sure Farrell meant no harm. Perhaps he got a little carried away and misinterpreted some of the facts.

"You see, Mr. Smith, the Bath and Garter has been registered as a ritual club for nearly three hundred years. That's about the same age as our Total Social World State."

"I see. So your members are justifiably proud to be part of one of the oldest clubs. Perhaps that explains Cooper's flights of fancy." Actually, Hamilton was a little disappointed. He had hoped for something more unusual.

Gustaf nodded. "Of course, the precursors of the society go back several thousand years before the Amalgamation. There were the English Knights of the Bath, of course, and the Fujiwara clan, which held the curtain to the Chrysanthemum throne..."

Gustaf's fingers formed a bridge and he tilted back in his chair. "Do you see that ancient fan, Mr. Smith? The one in that case? It is the patent granted by the last ethnic Chinese emperor to his infant son. It was ratified by townsmen and elders up and down the Yangtze before the Manchu invaders arrived. The secret society that

hid that child and his descendants is one of those that merged into the Bath and Garter hundreds of years ago. The child they protected was one of my ancestors."

Hamilton blinked. "Then Cooper's claims that you are this... this king'..."

Gustaf shrugged. "It's all well documented, Mr. Smith. By all the old laws of inheritance I am the heir of the merged royal families of Europe, Asia, and large parts of the rest of the world."

The robo-psychiatrist laughed when he saw Hamilton's expression.

"Oh, you needn't look so stunned, Mr. Smith. You are looking at no madman. I'm a perfectly modern and productive member of society—a society of which I approve in most parts. I don't claim any of the privileges once due someone with my unique genetic heritage. That would be absurd. I'm merely the hereditary head of a ritual club—perfectly legal. Along with a few thousand others I take pleasure in maintaining a spiritual link with the past."

Hamilton checked his recorder to make sure it was operating. He couldn't believe this. "And members of your club, are they also...?"

"Hereditary? Well, yes, to a degree. Certainly new members are welcome, and the increase has been rather great of late. But patrilineal families have been our mainstay... families with names like Hsien, Orange, Stuart, Fujiwara..."

Gustaf spread his hands. "You must try to understand how things were just after the Amalgamation, Mr. Smith. Neosocialism was not, in those days, the pervasive, mostly benign set of assumptions it is today, but a powerfully emotional and violent movement. Among the scapegoats of that era was anyone who claimed distinction based on heredity or family name... although such things once had their purposes.

"The royal houses had divested themselves of real power long beforehand, so they weren't scrutinized as much as they might have been. Their withdrawal from public affairs was generally accomplished with goodwill and careful attention to legal niceties."

"Fascinating," Hamilton said. "I thought that kings and queens and such were already gone back in the days of sailing ships and hang gliders."

"Not quite. But they kept a very low profile for survival's sake. I suppose that reticence has become a habit that's outlived its original purpose."

Hamilton nodded agreeably, but he wasn't fooled for an instant. Dr. Gustaf might be a thoroughly modern gentleman, but Hamilton had seen that look in Farrell Cooper's eyes! And the membership was mostly hereditary! How quaint!

Hamilton had to contain his pleasure. He might have stumbled across an actual tribe! It might be the first *tribe* found since those—what were they called?—yes, *Marxists*—were the talk of all the sociology journals twenty years ago. That pathetic little group had been secretly maintaining some delusion of world conquest for centuries. After the initial publicity the members had all moved to different continents in embarrassment.

Hamilton smiled and listened as Dr. Gustaf talked on.

But already he was thinking about the abstract for his paper.

He hoped the Bath and Garter would last longer than the Marxists had.

His first article in *Amateur Sociologists' Weekly* was reprinted as far away as Mars and Titan. Hamilton was afraid for a time that he would lose control when the professional sociologists took notice. But with Dan AnMan's help he was able to get a statistopsyche study ready before anyone else. That did it. They were invited to do the lead article for the next issue of *Popular Sociology*.

"That is wonderful news, Hamilton," his android assistant buzzed. "You should get honorary professional status for this. It is a terrific honor to be granted a second profession at so young an age."

Hamilton grinned and sat back with his feet up on his desk. In a world that valued competent eclecticism over anything else, all the vocations guarded their professional status jealously. Hamilton had himself served on juries of professional bankers, screening hundreds of amateur financiers every year... each trying to convince the judges to award him the "second hat."

And now Hamilton had almost certainly won one of his own. Dr. George Gustaf wasn't the only man talented enough to attain more than one vocation!

He had to admit that the Gustaf fellow had class. The man was taking the growing public attention with remarkable calm. He had even invited Hamilton to a special meeting of the Bath and Garter, somehow leaving Hamilton with the feeling that he had been done a great honor.

Clan leaders from all over the world had flown in for the meeting. Many of the men and women were clearly skilled professionals, and most were obviously worried about the growing notoriety. But Gustaf had appeared unconcerned, radiating an assurance that soon calmed the others.

Hamilton had been disappointed in the ritualistic aspects of the meeting. There weren't even any of the funny hats or arcane symbols of his own Loyal Order. There was some mild bowing and an occasional sheepish "my lord"... but nothing kinky at all.

Still, underlying it all were subtleties that Hamilton took note of... attitudinal cues he carefully recorded. Something very unusual was going on here. The members of this group took it all quite a bit more seriously than participants in a normal ritual club. He had left the gathering with more than just a pile of notes.

"I've transcribed my impressions of the meeting," he told the android. "Have you finished your historical survey?"

Dan's translucent head bobbed in assent. "I have, Hamilton. And I think the history will make an ideal introduction to our book. I will try to write up a lucid description of what a monarchy was. A lot of people who never took up the right

avocations won't have heard of it."

"Good idea." That would save Hamilton a lot of time. Already the members of his basketball team were complaining because he was neglecting his athletic hobby. Success was commendable, they reminded him quite rightly, but obsession was illegal.

"Did you uncover anything interesting?"

"Yes, Hamilton. I found that the records shown us by Dr. Gustaf were genuine. When I showed them to the AAA-class androids at the records division they became quite interested. Apparently George Gustaf's 'bloodline' is correct."

Hamilton grinned. "Amazing." Of course this would keep the robo-psychiatrist out of delusional therapy. That pleased Hamilton. He actually liked the man.

"So how did you like working with triple-A androids?"

The AnMan returned his version of a smile. "About the way you feel about becoming a professional sociologist, Hamilton."

"That good?" Hamilton grinned back.

The city of Orleans was interested, to say the least. For the first time in memory, people were actually juggling their schedules to get time off to watch a... *parade*.

It was a modest affair, as ritual parades went. There were no floats, no teams of amateur acrobats or struggling amateur aerocyclists. The procession was mostly afoot or on horseback, led by a small band of tall men who raised the neck-hairs of onlookers with the eerie, tugging noise of bagpipes.

The mood was ebullient. At the embarkation point there was a delay while a crowd gathered around the hereditary leader of the Bath and Garter, collecting autographs.

"Please! Please, dear ladies and gentlemen!" Farrell Cooper called out with archaic formality. "His Grace has a schedule to keep. Please! May we have some room here? You there! Mind the horses!"

Two of the large pipers arrived to help the amateur proctors push back the crowd. George Gustaf looked up after signing the book a young woman held out for him; she clutched it to her breast and gasped as he winked at her. Gustaf motioned for the pipers and proctors to let one man through the cordon.

"Hello, Mr. Smith," he said. He shook Hamilton's hand then turned to take another autograph book. "Come to watch another phenomenon *in vivo*? I must say, your articles have made a quaint little hereditary chore into a gigantic responsibility!"

Hamilton smiled back at the young man.

"Well, isn't that what being a king is all about, Dr. Gustaf? From my own reading, I'd say it was often harder work than anything else... at least for the monarchs who tried to be good at it. Tell me something, do you ever wonder what it would have

been like? I mean if . .

"If the monarchies had never declined? If I was the inheritor of true power, instead of the leader of a ritual club? Well, of course I've thought about it, Mr. Smith. I'd have been guilty of a faulty imagination if I hadn't!"

Gustaf finished with the last autograph seeker, waved at the crowd, then turned to look at Hamilton seriously.

"As to the reasons my ancestors had for merging their bloodlines the way they did—long after most of them had lost power—I'm as much in the dark as you are. But I can tell you something of the result.

"I'll not deny that there is something within me that resonates with the emotions of this crowd. I've always had an instinct for people—and androids, for that matter. And I score at the top of the scale on all of the aptitude tests for leadership and justice-sense."

"I know. Your amateur courtroom is one of the most popular, and the pros never overturn your decisions."

Gustaf shrugged.

"So the question is, did my ancestors bestow something unusual upon me? Or is it all coincidence? It's an interesting topic for speculation, though it doesn't really matter all that much."

Farrell Cooper came up alongside. He nodded quickly at Hamilton, then spoke to his club leader.

"Your Grace, we are behind schedule. If it pleases you, may we mount so the vanguard doesn't get too far ahead of us?"

Hamilton smiled. He'd had plenty of time to get used to Cooper's fixation. Gustaf caught his eye with a wink.

"We'll talk more later, Hamilton. I hope to have a chance to tell you how much I've been edified by your micro-sociological treatise on the Bath and Garter."

Hamilton felt himself blushing. It was an involuntary reaction, and he hurried to cover it up.

"One last question, Dr. Gustaf, before you go." Hamilton motioned to the crowd. "How do you account for this outpouring of feeling toward you and your club, here in Orleans and in the other towns you've visited during this tour?"

Gustaf frowned.

"*You're* the sociologist, Hamilton..."

"Just guess, please. I'd like your gut feeling."

Gustaf knitted his brow. He glanced at the people who lined the sidewalks, craning for a better view, waving when his glance came their way. He looked seriously at Hamilton.

"I'd say it's because they are lonely, bored, and cut loose from their past.

Personally, I find it unfortunate that society hasn't found a way to fill this need. Not everyone is as happy with the Total Social State as you and I. But then perhaps *you'll* be the one to figure out this social dynamic, hmmm?"

A man came up leading a large roan stallion. Gustaf mounted. The spirited animal snorted and pulled, but the robo-psychologist expertly calmed and brought it into line.

Gustaf smiled at Hamilton.

"Personally, I get all the vicarious connection with the past I'll ever need. What I'm *really* interested in is winning another honorary profession! You know how *that* feels!"

He winked once again, then wheeled his stallion into line with a row of armored men.

The procession was halfway to the cathedral before Cooper had a chance to speak to Gustaf. When he did, it was with an arched eyebrow.

"If Your Grace will pardon me for asking, wasn't that just a little dangerous?"

Gustaf shrugged. He waved at the crowd and smiled. The stallion marched along proudly.

"I don't think so, Farrell. After all, I didn't lie to him. Everything I said was the literal truth."

Farrell Cooper frowned. "That fellow is not stupid, sir. Telling the truth in the manner you did might be taken as patronizing, if he figured it out. He has power, after a fashion, and could harm us if he tried."

"He won't." Gustaf grinned. "I trust Hamilton. He won't let us down."

"I hope you're right," Cooper muttered, dodging a sudden shower of rose petals.

Shouts greeted them on all sides as they rode, the skirling bagpipes leading the way. Gustaf waved as he laughed.

"Don't be such a sourpuss, anyway, Farrell. The work week starts again on Monday, and we all go back to our vocations. For now I'm enjoying my ancestors' gift!"

"And if you had to enjoy that gift every day, for the rest of your life, Your Grace?"

"Bite your tongue!"

"Yes, my liege."

It was the first time a polo game had ever sold out East Thames Stadium. In fact, it was the first time a match had ever been played before a hundred and fifty thousand spectators, plus a sizable video audience. The professional and amateur sportscasters and pundits all attributed the revival to the recent notoriety of one of the players.

The man they were watching for waited until the second chucker to come out on the field. When he rode out, guiding his eager bay with gentle touches of his knees, a flag was run up along the sidelines. The crowd cheered ecstatically. The banner was an intricate design based, Hamilton now knew, on the ancient "Union Jack," with symbols in the corners that included a chrysanthemum, a lotus, a two-headed eagle, and a fleur-de-lis.

Hamilton watched from the midline as the opposing teams swirled across the turf, twisting and striking with graceful power from the backs of their responsive mounts.

Suddenly one of the visiting Americans broke out of the mass of jostling animals, driving the ball toward the sole defender at the English goal. Immediately behind him galloped George Gustaf, narrowing the gulf with each second.

The defender made a feint, then tried to block to the left. But the American was only momentarily fooled. His horse deftly sidestepped to give the rider room for a shot.

On the carry-through, the American's mallet hit George Gustaf in the shoulder, throwing him off his mount to land with a thud in the rough turf.

Almost as one, the onlookers rose to their feet with a gasp, as the pro and amateur sports physicians ran onto the field where the English captain lay still on the ground. Even when he could be seen moving—rolling over onto his back and finally sitting up with the aid of his teammates—the silence in the huge stadium was like the humming of a high-voltage wire. Hamilton found his fists clenched tight, and tried to wonder why. Others had been shaken up before, yet the crowd had reacted nothing like this.

Finally, the tall man was helped to his feet. He shrugged off the hands that clutched at him and turned to wave at the crowd.

The cheers were like a dam bursting. The shouts and applause went on for minutes, with the officials apparently uninterested in maintaining order. When the American who had clipped him came up, leading both of their mounts, Gustaf smiled and shook his hand firmly, causing the audience to roar once again.

The play finally resumed, as vigorous as ever. The English declined a penalty.

Hamilton had become so engrossed that he didn't notice when Dan An Man came alongside, accompanied by a short, broad-faced woman and three elegantly featured androids. Dan finally took him by the elbow.

"Hamilton," he said. "These people are from World Legal Services. It's very important that they talk with you."

Hamilton smiled. He had become used to meeting important people lately.

"Can't it wait, Dan? We can talk after the game is over."

The short human shook her head. She introduced herself as Ms. Ing. "I'm afraid that just won't do, Mr. Smith. We have to talk to you now. Something is brewing that could lead to the first violent human-android confrontation since the

Amalgamation!"

"What the hell do you mean, they're not a tribe?" Hamilton shouted. The lounge they had appropriated had a large window overlooking the stadium. The cheers of the crowd could be heard through the glass.

Ing shrugged. "You will have to admit that the pattern that is developing is not the classic outgrowth that occurs when an urban tribe is discovered. Usually—"

"Yes, yes. Usually the tribe shrivels up and dies due to ridicule. This time, on the other hand, public interest has been very friendly to the Bath and Garter tribe. So what? I'm pleased that my discovery hasn't caused them the discomfort I feared it would. Other than that, I see no faults in my sociological analysis!"

The woman frowned. "Have you any idea of the rate at which the Bath and Garter has been acquiring novice members, Mr. Hamilton?"

"I was aware there's been some increase. I suppose there's a certain fad appeal that—"

"Fad appeal! Mr. Smith, their mail has topped one million letters per week! Their budget, all derived from per capita recreation funds drawn on World State treasuries, will soon exceed that of my entire department!

"Your work may have been good stuff for an amateur, Hamilton. Enough even to get you honorary status. But it was essentially micro-sociology! If you knew anything about macro-sociology, and the possible effects of things like this on the World State as a *whole*, you might have been more prudent!"

Hamilton shook his head. "I'm not sure I understand."

Ms. Ing sighed. She enunciated slowly, patronizingly.

"Even *you* had somehow caught on to a malaise that we pros have been watching carefully for many years now. It's been hell, I'll tell you, keeping tabs on this thing while every amateur psychology and sociology team in the world prowled about, sniffing. And it had to be *you*, someone who never had a single credential before, who came up with this monstrosity!"

"Now, I don't see any need to get personal—"

"You've opened Pandora's box!" Ing shouted. "Our calculations show this thing capturing the imaginations of over half the citizens on the globe within six months!"

Hamilton felt numb. He looked to Dan and saw only passivity. "Well, fads do pass. I don't think Dr. Gustaf would ever do anything to capitalize on this. He's a responsible citizen. He'd just humor the public, I'd guess."

Hamilton glanced at the three AAA androids.

"Anyway," he went on. "I don't see where a human-android conflict comes into this."

"Tell him!" Ing said to AnMan. "Go ahead and tell him who this 'responsible

citizen' really is!"

The centermost android bowed briefly to Ing, then to Hamilton. His features were almost human, in a smooth, translucent fashion. His voice was cool and melodic.

"Mr. Smith, I represent Android Legal Control. You may be aware that we have been, since the Amalgamation, the record keepers and guardians of legal precedent. We are ingrained with a fundamental need to serve mankind's happiness and flexible development. But foremost of all is our reverence for the Law, as properly deliberated and passed by sovereign human beings."

"Yes, yes. We're all taught about what great pals you AnMen are." Hamilton was growing impatient. "What does this have to do with George Gustaf?"

The android paused. "Mr. Hamilton, we have gone over the legal situation carefully. You presented the historical record quite well in your recent book, particularly in regard to how the royal families of Earth first withdrew from politics and then slowly merged into one line.

"What you did not, and *could* not, discuss was the precise fashion in which the kings and queens and emperors withdrew from public life.

"It appears that a close study shows no *total* abrogation of power. In almost every case, the final act, approved by the elected assemblies of the people of each nation, had lines such as, 'by most gracious permission of His Majesty' and 'by the trust Her Majesty now invests in us,' all semantically powerful. No doubt when such phrases were included they were thought mere courtesies."

"You don't mean..." Hamilton felt a sinking sensation.

"But I do, Mr. Smith. Oh, there *are* substantial limitations to royal authority that *do* have the force of law. But in essence, that man is 'king' of the greater part of the globe. It is the intention of Android Legal Control to inform him of this, as soon as his game is completed, and to offer him our protection."

"At which point," Ing growled, "the pros in sociology, politics, and the police—along with a healthy number of our amateurs—will rebel! Some of us still remember the ideals that led to the World State. We have no intention of allowing an imposition of rampant feudalism!"

Through the window came the sounds of ecstatic cheering.

Hamilton felt dazed. "But... what do you want from *me*? I can't *un*-publish my work, or take him out of the spotlight!"

The woman held up her hand. "Okay, you see the problem. Now, are you *sure* you don't see a possible solution?" She looked at Hamilton archly. The three androids also stared. Hamilton felt certain they were testing him, somehow. He thought furiously.

"Uh... maybe we can work out some sort of compromise?"

Ing sighed. The androids buzzed happily.

"You're the man for the job, then. You'll talk to him, help mediate the sides. If

he's as reasonable a fellow as you say, we can work out some sort of constitutional arrangement that will satisfy the people, the AnMen, and the social pros."

"But why me?"

"Because you brought it all up! You opened the door for him! Besides, he seems to like you."

Ing swallowed as she visibly made an effort to adapt her habits of speech. She paused, then resumed, "I mean, it seems you are in favor with His Majesty."

Outside, one hundred and fifty thousand cheering voices shook the stadium.

Epilogue

Dr. George Gustaf sat back behind his desk, after the last negotiators had left and Farrell Cooper had shut the door.

"Will there be anything else, Your Majesty?" Cooper smiled.

"What more *could* there be, Farrell? I'm now constitutional monarch of the world. They've thrown in the rest of the solar system too, in exchange for my giving up any unilateral right to declare war when we discover aliens... if ever."

"Quite an accomplishment, Your Majesty. We'll all be very busy, getting ready for the coronation."

"Yah." Gustaf grimaced. "It's going to be a hard five years before the experiment's over, and we can publish the results."

"They won't like it if you do as you plan and suddenly abdicate then—especially if you've been a good king."

"Oh, I'll be a good king, for five years. But maybe you're right. We should figure out a way to go incognito when we publish and let the world know that a bunch of pro actors, amateur historians and artists pulled off the biggest sociological experiment in history... and right under the professionals' noses!"

Cooper grinned. "Whatever Your Majesty says."

Gustaf sighed. "There's only one thing that bothers me."

"What's that?"

"It's the AnMen. My whole procedure depended on a careful manipulation of android psychology, making them believe that my experiment would benefit mankind in the long run, even if it results in a little short-term disruption. Their help was necessary, to clean up my pedigree a bit and make me seem totally legitimate as heir."

"Well, it worked, didn't it? You're the expert robo-psychiatrist. Doesn't this justify

your confidence?"

"I suppose so." Gustaf frowned. "But it's those damned triple-A androids that have me worried. They're totally committed to human welfare and growth, and I was sure at least a few of them would have balked at the demoralizing effect it could have when I publish. After all, I'm doing this simply to win another honorary profession in experimental sociology... a rather selfish motive from their point of view.

"I wonder why they all went so far out of their way to help me on this?"

Cooper finished polishing a fine crystal snifter and placed it and a silver tray on the desk by Gustaf's arm.

"Maybe they think they know you better than you know them... or perhaps even yourself," he said.

Gustaf swiveled around to stare at Cooper. The tall, sallow old man lifted a decanter of brandy from the cabinet against the wall. "What do you mean?"

"Well," Cooper looked through the ancient crystal decanter at the fine old cognac. "When the five years are up, what proof will *you* have, that this was all just part of an experiment?"

Gustaf laughed.

"You mean I might be stuck as king? And never get my honorary vocation? They wouldn't... !" he began. Then, seeing the expression on Cooper's face, he frowned, and whispered.

"You wouldn't!"

Cooper smiled.

"No, of course not... Your Majesty."

Cooper poured, with quiet precision, exactly the right amount of brandy into the glass at Gustaf's side. He bowed. But as he turned to go he noticed that the first worry line had begun to buckle in the young man's brow.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Have you ever known someone who seemed to be a mixture of both fine and despicable traits? Did you wish there was a way at the same time to reward the good qualities and punish the bad?

In George Gustaf we have a man of great talents, a natural leader who knows how to bring out the best in people. Unfortunately, he is also a selfish person. His contempt for his contemporaries—for their "archaic" wish for a king to love—is the flaw spoiling an otherwise worthy picture.

His objective is to pull off a coup and win a fourth profession, whatever the cost. Ah, but what if he never gets away with his experiment? What if he finds that he has been outmaneuvered, trapped as king?

Then the side we admire is rewarded, and the side that merits punishment gets what it deserves also, in spades.

As I said, I wrote this one just for fun. So much for destiny.