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HOMESITE**

The old Ab'O rotated his hands in opposite directions, palm to palm, two inches apart, and held the universe between them.

"It will give you everything. A lovely gift for a famous desert sailor like yourself, and a good price."

"No. Thank you, Phar. I don't think I need a double-planisphere. You use it."

"Ah, no," Phar said, taking the intricate device from me and putting it away under glass. "My shop is universe enough. I have more than you could want."

"I'm sure that's not what you wanted to show me, Phar."

"No, Captain Tom. But, ah, it's a delicate matter. A surprise. Look around awhile. Humour me."

"Very well," I said, and moved among the stacked counters, ducked under hanging shapes, navigated between pieces of old furniture. I knew the shop well, probably as well as anyone apart from the old man. I loved it, loved its timelessness, the way it was a place for generations—a place for finding unexpected treasures, splendid curios, heart's desires.

Phar followed me as he had for years, whenever I came to examine his mostly questionable, sometimes remarkable merchandise.

"That's a vanity," he said, pointing to a glossy dark rock in a broken vacuum case.

"I doubt it. It looks like quassail slag."

"A meteorite then. I have vanities!" Phar said in a conspiratorial voice. "Specials too. Nader's eyes locked away in stone."

"No," I said. "Tell me what it is you want or let me look."

"Look!" he said, and pretended to move away—pretended because he stayed close by, muttering softly so I could hear. "I have a thing for you."

Then I saw it, a dull metal man-shape in the gloom, standing where I remembered a dusty wall-hanging had always been.

"Phar, what is this? Armour?"

The Ab'O was there like a toy on a spring. "Armour, that?" His eyes widened. "Yes, armour. A battle suit."

"It looks like a robot. A high-mankin."

"No. No. It's just an old low-mankin. Totem use only. Scarecrow use."

"But, Phar—"

"Not so loud, Captain Tom. You bring me trouble."

"But it's a robot!"

"Was," he said. "Doesn't work. Absolutely illegal. Come, I lead you back into the light!" The little man laughed, but it was a nervous laugh.

"Where did you get it? Your people would kill you."

"Wisdom and understatement there in one hit, Captain Tom."

"Close the shop. Bring a light."

The Ab'O did so, and found me rubbing dust from the big rust-flecked barrel chest, the articulated stove-pipe legs, the cold metal face.

"This is incredible, Phar. It looks like an old Antaeus, powered from the earth."

"No. No," Phar said. "A Helios. Sun-driven originally and adapted to my shadows." He laughed again. "Made by Antique Futures. A masterpiece of engineering."

I regarded the blank metal face, the faceted dead glass eyes that had once viewed the world as an endless stream of motion.

"This must be worth a fortune, Phar. Do you have the manual for it?"

The Ab'O nodded. "It is a Maitre class. Its oriete was coded in India, in the Bati Gardens."

"This is what you wanted me to see."

Phar stared at me through the gloom. Again he nodded.

"Why?" I said.

"Please," the Ab'O replied, concern showing on every line of his face as he moved forward into the light. "Let me compare it to the others."

"I appreciate that. Now tell me. Why?"

"You know why they were outlawed, Captain Tom?"

"I know what Antique Futures was trying to do, yes, of course. The high-mankins—"

"Saw death. They read life-patterns, saw and recorded energy flow out of the newly-dead body. The robots, simply repeating the patterns."

"It contravened Ab'O philosophical thought. A conflict of interests with their concept of the haldanes."

"Yes," Phar said. "You know the Ab'Os did not take kindly to the Nationals intruding into this area of knowledge. I am sure you know that."

"And the tribes won."

"How could they not?" Phar said. "The mankins reported what they were built to see, and that was too much; the things they saw, the life-energy from dead humans. The Dreamtime is meant to put us in touch with our cosmic selves, not the released energy of the dead."

"Is there a difference?" I indicated the mankin. "Does it work, Phar?"

"This? Yes," the Ab'O said. "Lud is broken, as I told you, but he can talk, and can be made motile with no trouble . . ."

"Lud?"

Phar smiled. "A joke, Captain Tom. From the Ludites, the men who wanted to stop technology to halt the use of all the

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