

BARRIER OF DREAD

IT WOULD have been a perfect day for the Managing Director, but his wife spoiled it for him. Sarise had a way of saying unexpected things; it was half her charm. This time as they settled in to the cushions on the moving ramp that would take them into the space ship from the great amphitheatre where he ceremonies had been held, she looked worried. That is to say, she would have looked worried if it were possible that a mature woman in perfect health of body and mind, with nothing to desire, could have looked worried.

"It's too fast," was all she said, but Dangret had lived with her long enough to know what she meant.

"I can't quite make up my mind whether you're a throwback or just an incurable romantic," he told her in a tone that might have been angry had he understood the nature of anger. But it was as long since humans had had cause to understand anger, as it was since they had known reason for worry. He was, however, not joking. Sarise held a greater fascination for Dangret than any of his earlier wives, because in twenty-five years he had been completely unable to settle this problem to his own satisfaction.

She was unperturbed. "It's too fast," she repeated. "No one man should have the glory of opening two galaxies during his Directorship. It's..."

"Certainly this feeling of...what did they call it...guilt?... in pleasure or glory is more of an atavism than a romantic notion. Sarise, do you seriously mean..."

"Yes I do, and it's neither atavism *nor* romanticism," his wife retorted; "it's common sense. I don't know the figures. That's your business. But I know as well as you do that the maximum percentage that choose for exploration is lower than the number you'll be needing if settlement speeds up at the rate it is."

"That takes care of itself," he told her. "You know the children of settlers have the highest inclination for exploration. The system works because these factors *do* level out."

Sarise had made up her mind. "Try it on your calkers," she tossed back, reaching for the portable sensory recorder she always kept near at hand. She began to finger the controls, making a record of her ideas before she lost them. "I'm going to do a composition on it, anyhow." She punched a key vehemently. "And if the images I get out of this set of ideas don't make a real fear sensation, I'll give up composing for good."

"If they do," he laughed, "I'll probably ban it. Nobody's done a successful fear-image in *my* lifetime, and I'm not sure it's a good idea for anyone to do it."

Sarise was no longer interested. The section of the ramp that held their cushions had left the moving carrier and deposited them in their own quarters on the flagship that would take them back to Earth, where, tradition decreed, the Director must live—despite its many inconveniences.

Dangret was thoughtful as he watched his wife become more absorbed in the machine that would eventually produce a combination of sound, light, and emotion as effective as anything else being done in the universe. His eyes wandered over to the far wall of the room where a huge fresco depicted the underlying pulse of their age. It wasn't supposed to be scientific; it showed suited man—without a helmet—and a lovely woman, without any protection other than the modern trappings she wore, leaping off the rear tubes of a rocker ship, the kind that was outmoded in Dangret's grandfather's time. Flames in space surrounded them, and another ship, apparently burning could be seen in the background. There was no fear on the faces of the pair. To Dangret and to the artist who had done the work, the fresco symbolized the limitless possibilities of human will, and the endless expansion of human destiny.

He looked back at Sarise; he had originally made up his mind to meet this woman when he heard her first composition, and he had realized when he suggested their union that she might leave him physically, at any time for her work. Dangret was accustomed to it, and, like others of his day, found the spectacle of another being absorbed in creative activity second best only to the sensation of that absorption within his own person.

Now, however, he was not as much concerned with Sarise or her composition as he was with the casual remark that had preceded it. It was no serious problem, of course; it would probably have some use-value as the basis for an effective image, but it could be solved, if the matter became sufficiently

acute, by the manufacture of explorer-robots. As a matter of fact, the calkers had tabulated the percentages sometime back, and had automatically begun designing the new type androids. But her "Too fast, too fast," had moved something in him—possibly, he thought, amused at his own reaction, an atavism of his own.

He went to sleep with the thought still on his mind, a nagging little thought that pulled at him and wouldn't let him be. Sarise's explanation was wrong, but there was something. It *was* too fast. Why, why?

In the morning the little nagging concern had not left him, nor did it through the day of welcomes and further ceremonies on Earth. Dangret was a wise man, and two hundred years in his job had taught him much. He knew better than to ignore or suppress the thought; something was wrong, somehow, and he had to find out what it was. *Too fast...*

He tried the sensory images. Some of Sarise's compositions, he had found, could clear almost all impressions from his conscious mind and leave the subconscious open for exploration. He had banished this sort of troublesome unresolved thought before. This time, even the images failed. He tried another method, something he had not done for many years now, not since he heard the first Sarise poem.

Human history had a well-defined logic of its own, a logic not entirely within the power of the calkers to compute, but sometimes more directly ascertainable by the natural curves of instinct. When he was younger, and troubled by ideas not clear enough to hand over to calkers for solution, Dangret had had a composition created for himself, one that would allow him, in a few hours, to re-live the path of galactic conquest, empire, bureaucracy, and managership. The piece was designed to sweep broad outlines at the beginning, and narrow down, as it proceeded, till at the end it was done in such detail that it was necessary to add to it yearly to keep it complete.

Now he had the composition brought to his own room, announced that he would be unavailable for the next hours, and settled down in the almost-severe white-painted simplicity of his personal quarters, to review the past, and discover if he could what factor of the present could menace the future.

It was a long while since he had sensed the piece, and now he participated almost physically in its drama. He swept in ridiculously ornate flowing robes beside the first World Emperor, the man who had bound the Earth into a unit with which to conquer space. With the early explorers, he suffered the hardships of unperfected atomics, and landed beside them on the first extra-solar planet. He followed the search for inhabited planets, and felt the strange combination of loneliness and power that had spread over Earth as it became clear that life, as life on Earth was defined, was a galactic freak. Nowhere else had there been a combination of environmental factors that made large and complex life-forms an evolutionary desideratum.

But for the conquering Earthmen, there had to be subjects of conquest—so they manufactured them. Robots tilled the soil on those planets where it was rich, dug wealth from the ground where rock and ore prevailed, built fantastically luxurious palaces for Earthmen on the best-suited orbs.

Dangret watched and lived with the triumph of a world as the empire spread over a galaxy, and stopped. He fought, first with the robots, ancestors (if the term can be used) of his calkers, and then with the humans, in the three great revolts. He lived, with other Earthmen, in dread of a mechanistic mastery of life, when it was finally established that the robots had learned the secret of "reproduction," and he was present at the peace treaty, when only the humans' superior will to live and rule won them the slight edge of victory.

He was one with the first Bureaucrats, who established the principle of Dynamic Exchange, and lived with the men who guided each new type of robot, adapted to work on a particular planet, from the initial slave-labor stage, through the long haul to self-sufficient technology and self-manufactory. And he was there when the first calker, the ultimate design of human and robot cooperation, discovered the trick of crossing inter-galactic space.

The calkers killed the Bureaucracy; the bureaucrats' own theories of dynamics, really, killed it, but intergalactic commerce finished it. The last pressure had been removed; the robots had taken from man all the burdens of unpleasant labor. Earthmen were fed, clothed, housed, and given all their simpler physical pleasures mechanically. The most complicated of the mechanical aides were sent out to prepare

new territories for their Earth masters, and when, finally, other galaxies were opened for settlement, there was no need for any human to be put upon in any way by other humans. The enormous strides in medicine, and the lessening of the burden of labor had produced a constantly increasing population, and had the resultant numbers been confined, even in the extent of a single galaxy, there might still have been cause for strife, jealousy, and hate.

But when every man could have his own robot-manned planet if he chose, when all those who wished to govern and dominate could; all those who loved adventure and exploration could have it; all those who wanted nothing but creative or intellectual activity were free to devote themselves to it, *and there was no limit*—the very nature of man changed. Dangret traveled with the first crew members to the second galaxy and sank back into his cushions as he experienced the relief that flooded Earthmen on all the inhabitable planets as endless space opened up to accompany endless service.

He himself today had opened the Seventh Galaxy; as a boy he had known the eighth Manager, who opened the Fourth Galaxy. The system, by that time, had been established. Calkers designed new machines, new androids, to fit the new conditions of each planet, as soon as the first explorers brought back their reports. Some were to be prepared for human habitation; others would be colonized by robots, and utilized as sources of raw material. Humanity lived and prospered on the slight difference between what the robots produced, and what, in the end, they consumed, and the greater the expansion, the greater the total sum of that slight difference.

But the system was benevolent, for anything apart from benevolence was no longer acceptable to what had been called "human nature." It had become horribly clear, during the robotic revolutions, that the intangibles that change a group of men into a mob could change a collection of robots into a society, with a functioning mind and even emotion-pattern of its own. Men, happy and satisfied men, to whom exploitation was impossible, were faced with choice of giving up their robots or keeping them "happy." With the struggle of those men, Dangret suffered, and with them, he chose the only possible course: robots in social groupings must be given technology and almost-complete independence as fast as they demanded it, if they were to be kept working for humanity.

The system worked; it had worked; there was no reason why it should not continue to work. Dangret relived the plans for the ceremonies of the day before, and came gradually back to the day itself...with the nagging thought still pulling at his mind, unresolved.

It went with him as he sought Sarise in her apartment, to find her locked in her room, hard at work, and seeing no one, not even him. And it stayed with him through the next lonely week, aggravated by his enforced separation from his wife. More and more he found himself staring at the fresco on his wall, uneasiness growing in him. He tried all the psychological tricks he knew on himself, did his best to set the problem up for the calkers by tracing his thought patterns; but when, more than a week later, Sarise sent word that she was finished, he went to her quarters delighted at the thought that this troublesome idea might be lost for a time in her company.

He found her pacing the airfoam floors of her room, thin and vibrant. She would never take time to cat when she was working, but always seemed to emerge from these periods with an inner life that disregarded her abused body. She couldn't wait for his words or embrace. Shining with excitement, and almost inarticulate, she pulled him to a spot in the center of the room, best suited for reception, and waiting only for his indulgent nod of assent, began the projection of her new piece. Sarise's work was always basically musical. A composition, of course, might include, or exclude, any known form of sensory stimulation, and it might utilize a number of forms in fairly equal proportions—but, just as the one he had witnessed a week earlier was essentially photographic, a series of three-dimensional images reinforced by sonics, so this, like all of Sarise's work, commanded all the senses, but rested primarily upon the aesthetics of music.

Dangret kept command of himself long enough to reach over and press the levers that would bring Sarise some food, then he was lost completely in the compelling experience of his wife's newest work. He describe either what he saw, felt, tasted, or heard, or the almost too-vivid sensations that welled up in him would be impossible. Great works of art cannot be discussed; they must be participated in. Dangret participated to the fullest, and experienced an emotion he had never known before.

The musical base of the thing modulated to a theme that seemed to close in around him. Tighter and tighter it pressed, squeezing him, forcing him in on himself, pushing from all sides, with no escape, no escape. Dangret's muscles tensed; his heart labored, then beat too fast, labored, pounded again. His salivary action was insufficient, and his peristaltic action, for the first time in a long life, proved uncontrollable. A little fear will go a long way with a perfectly adjusted man.

As the last note faded away, and daylight began to stream again through the walls, he lay back in a torpor of relief, unconscious of his wife, the room, or anything else but the churning of his own thoughts and emotions. When, finally, he lifted his head, Sarise was calmly devouring the food he had ordered for her. She smiled at him.

"I did it, didn't I?" she demanded. She could never quite get over a childlike wonder and delight at the things that came out of her. Dangret nodded, and got up slowly. The experience had been shocking, and shock—another word that till now had had only a dictionary meaning—was what he had needed. He was at the door before he spoke, and then it was only to say, "Sarise, there is something I have to do right now; will you promise to show that to no one else till I come back?"

The woman stared in amazement, but she was exceptionally sensitive, and recognized this was not a time for argument or discussion. She nodded mutely, and watched him go. It was just as well; she needed food and sleep now more than admiration.

In his office, Dangret began punching furiously at the great bank of communications keys that covered one entire wall. It was a matter of moments till he had connected the Council of Physical Scientists. Men from all over the six civilized galaxies stopped their work, and concentrated on their com units. A convening of the entire council was a rare event. Even rarer were Dangret's opening words.

"Scientists of the world: You know the rights that reside in me as Managing Director. You know that I have utilized those rights no more than my predecessors. There has been no need to direct, but only to manage. Now I invoke my emergency power, for, dependent upon your work, we may soon be faced with a desperate emergency. I shall not attempt to outline the entire matter; that is a problem for the Social Scientists, and when you have finished your part, they shall begin theirs.

"This is secret information. We are on a closed beam, and no man is to repeat these instructions until my formal permission is granted. Now: you are, each of you, to abandon the work you have been doing, and start on..."

He made his instructions specific, assigned units and unit directors, answered startled queries for several hours, and, finally, flicked off the last open line on his com set, his mind finally free of the tiny doubt that had plagued it. The problem was in the hands of the scientists, now, where it belonged. Dangret tried the private com to Sarise's room, found her asleep, and went in to wait in the relaxation of her pleasant quarters until she might wake.

They had a rare private supper together late in the evening, both of them relaxed and happy in achievement. Sarise never asked questions; it was another of her endearing traits. But this time when they had finished eating, and Dangret had still said nothing about her composition, eagerness overcame her sense of delicacy.

She sat upright on the cushioned floor where they rested, a tense vivid figure, black hair and rosy lips the more colorful over her white robe. "Dan...you haven't said anything," she fumbled a little. She was not accustomed to having to ask for criticism. "My piece...?"

"Yes, your piece." He was thoughtful. "It's the best thing you've ever done, Sarise." His tone was so sober as to make her a little ashamed to have asked. A faint blush of something akin to modesty crept over her face, and drained swiftly away as he went on: "But no one will ever hear it. Sarise, I'm going to exercise a right no Director has used for five hundred years, and ban your composition.

"But why? *Why?*" The woman was on her feet, pacing half across the room, and coming back to lean over him with a look of tortured incomprehension. "Why?"

He carefully avoided touching her. His hand on hers would have helped, but this was a matter of Director and artist, not man and wife. "Because it's too good. Because you did what you set out to do.

Because you created fear. And because there *is something to fear.*"

She sank down beside him, defeated. There was no question of unfairness. This was Dangret's answer, and she knew it must be true. "Something to...fear?"

"Yes." Now he could take her hand. "Listen to me, Sarise. I can't tell you all of it, now, nor until the CPS finds the answers for me. But the problem is similar with that you outlined in your composition. The fear-reaction you aroused stems from the concept of compression applied to an organism that *must* expand. You know the dynamics of the directorship are based on expansion—indefinite, unlimited expansion. The compression you outlined...well," he rose, abruptly. "That's all I can tell you now, but believe me, no one must hear that."

She rose with him. "It's that serious then?" Her tone was awed. "The dynamics of the directorship...?" Then her thoughts went back to her piece. "Banned... forever, Dan? Perhaps in a few years, perhaps when your problem is solved?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps *if* my problem is solved." He left her with that.

Because they were reasonable, adjusted people, both of them put thy matter out of their minds after that evening. The problem was in other hands, and when the answer came from the scientists, it would be reopened. It was not that they forgot; rather they compartmented. Dangret checked periodically with the Council on the progress of the research units; Sarise played her piece from time to time and made slight revision here and there. But, recognizing that final action would have to wait on the findings of the CPS, neither of them allowed his own part of the difficulty to assume emotional proportions.

The answer was a long time coming. When it did, finally, Dangret took the news first to Sarise.

She was walking in the natural garden in front of the official residence, and greeted him with a small sigh.

"I think I'll make a trip to Tangerix III," she told him. "I've been wanting to see the family, and there's something about this poor excuse for vegetation that makes me half wild!" She pointed to the trees and flowers of Earth, none of which could compare in any way with the planned landscapes of robot-constructed homesites on the better planets. Tangerix particularly boasted garden-spot planets.

"Not too soon, I hope." Dangret smiled, teasing a little. "You'd like to be here when your composition is played, wouldn't you?"

She wheeled to face him, breathless. "*When?*" It was a sound more than a word.

"Next week. For the Council of Social Scientists. After that," his words became more sober, "you can go to Tangerix, and I'll go with you."

"But...how can you? You have Council sessions coming, and..."

"And as of next Tuesday, the Directorship will no longer exist, and your piece will help finish it." She raised a puzzled face to his, "No, I can't tell you any more, and I shouldn't have said that much. I...well, I got my answer; it was what I was *afraid* of, you see, and it leaves me no alternative but..." he stopped abruptly. "We'll go to Tangerix. You can make plans now if you like." She followed him into the next room, watched him stand before the fresco. There was an expression on his face that she had never seen before as he summoned a robot and set it to remove the painting.

"I cannot bear to see it any longer."

The conclave of social scientists was held on Earth, at a person-to-person meeting—a rare event—and planned that way for only one reason: so that Sarise's composition could have an effect it could not possibly achieve over the ether. The Council met early in the morning, and Dangret, in a few words, informed them that they had been assembled for a purpose. But before he told them that purpose, he wished to have them review two sensories, and to contain their curiosity until after the playings.

There was some murmuring of impatience from younger men who could not understand being called away from important work for entertainment, but the older heads, who had worked under Dangret for many years, leaned back in their cushions, and lost themselves in their senses as the first piece started, the historical review Dangret himself had seen many months before.

The younger members had not experienced it before, and the majestic sweep of the epic soon stilled the few murmurs. By the time it was finished, and Sarise's indescribable composition began to fill their senses, they were all completely receptive. When it was over, absolute silence filled the great Council

Hall. Dangret himself was almost as much affected on second hearing as the others were on first reception. He let the hush prevail for a full minute—and a minute can be long—before he rose from his seat, and mounted the platform to the bank of microphones.

"Gentlemen and Scientists," he began, "What you have just experienced is a new sensation to most of you. To all of you, I think. It is fear. I shall not take time now to describe to you the background of this composition. As sociologists, you are aware that no artist could generate fear without a reason for fear existing in the artist's environment—even a reason, as this one was, that went unexpressed and unheeded until the artist's crystallization of the emotion forced a search for the cause.

"Since I first heard this piece, I have had the CPS, the Council of Physical Scientists, at work on a difficult problem. Last week I had their answer. I shall return to that, and explain it in a few moments.

"But first, I must make an announcement. The findings of the CPS will constitute the reasons for my decision. Gentlemen, the future is in your hands. The Directorship is over. I, as the last Director, now, with the information I hold, have no ethical choice but to resign and leave the resolution of the problem in your hands. I shall subsequently apply for admission to your ranks, and hope that I may aid in finding the solution, but the problem is one of research, not management.

"We must find a new form of society. If we would keep our comforts and our way of life, if we would keep our race extant, and above all, if we would maintain our ethic, it is now incumbent upon us—upon you—to develop a civilization that does not rely on the laws of dynamics. A static society.

"Our government and our culture has rested on the unlimited principle of expansion, on continued dynamic development. The universe is large, large enough surely for a race so puny in comparison as ours. But not, I must now tell you, for a civilization constructed like ours...

"Many hundreds of years ago it was a habit of physicists and what were then known as metaphysicists to debate the problem of infinity. There were many differing opinions, and the conclusion in the end, was that the universe was infinite.

"I discovered, in a Council of the Physical Scientists, some months back, that this conclusion had never been proved. I set them the task of proving it. The answer I had last week dictated my actions of today. We must stop; we must change now, and find a new way of living that can exist without constant expansion, because, fellow Scientists, our universe has been finally established to be finite in nature!"

There was silence, but the expressions on the faces before him changed slowly, and he recognized feelings similar to his own. Dread! It had been there, submerged, but now it was out for, all to see—the fear of a barrier that none could cross. To men who had lived their lives believing in the limitlessness of human expansion, the very thought of this truth was as deadly as their physically coming upon the barrier, the limit...

"There is only one alternative to stasis," Dangret said finally; "ancient philosophers were fond of saying that man was his own worst enemy. This has been, for many years, an unnecessary, if not a false, truth. Now we must recognize that man can expand only one further way. The frontiers are not yet gone, but they are vanishing. We must turn back upon a conquest of ourselves, or we must learn to live statically. The problem I now leave in your hands. I hope..." and Dangret smiled, because humor, even in this crisis, was an integral part of his being, "I hope that after a brief period of personal stasis, I shall be admitted to your Council to help find a means for the conquests of man by man."

Dangret left the platform, and walked from the hall, without waiting for the shocked silence among the sociologists to articulate itself in words. Outside, he went directly to the apartment where Sarise had watched the scene on the corn set.

He entered silently, walked over to where she still sat staring through open set at the hubbub in the hall, and put his hands gently on her two shoulders. She started slightly, and smiled wearily up at him. "So *that* was it?"

"Yes." His voice was tender and rough at the same time. "Yes, that was it. You see what you did. Oh, yes, *you* did it. You're an artist, and you saw things, knew things I didn't. You took my Directorship from me, didn't you? You took this house, and the glory and pleasure. You took everything I had from me, and you did it by being an artist. That was what I loved you for at first you know, and now..." He lifted his hands from her shoulders to cup her face. "Now I love you more than ever. The *least* you can

do," and he smiled again, "is take me home to Tangerix III, and let me have a bit of personal stasis."