

# First To Serve

## Algis Budrys

Illustration by Kandis Elliot

thei ar teetcing mi to reed n ryt n i wil bee abel too do this beter then.

pimi

MAS 712, 820TH TDRC,  
COMASAMPS, APO IS,  
September 28

Leonard Stein, Editor,  
INFINITY,  
862 Union St.,  
New York 24, N. Y.

Dear Len,

Surprise, et cetera

It looks like there will be some new H. E. Wood stories for *Infy* after all. By the time you get this, 820TH TDRC will have a new Project Engineer, COMASAMPS, and I will be back to the old Royal and the Perry Street lair.

Shed no tear for Junior Heywood, though. COMASAMPS and I have come to this parting with mutual eyes dry and multiple heads erect. There was no sadness in our parting--no bitterness, no weeping, no remorse. COMASAMPS--in one of its apparently limitless human personifications --simply patted me on my backside and told me to pick up my calipers and run along. I'll have to stay away from cybernetics for a while, of course, and I don't think I should write any robot stories in the interval, but, then, I never did like robot stories anyhow.

But all this is a long story about ten thousand words, at least, which means a \$300 net loss if I tell it now.

So go out and buy some fresh decks, I'll be in town next week, my love to the Associate and the kids, and first ace deals.

Vic Heywood

My name is really Prototype Mechanical Man I, but everybody calls me Pimmy, or sometimes Pim. I was assembled at the eight-twentieth teedearcee on august 10, 1974. I don't know what man or teedearcee or august 10, 1974, means, but Heywood says I will, tomorrow. What's tomorrow?

Pimmy

August 12, 1974

I'm still having trouble defining "man." Apparently, even the men can't do a very satisfactory job of that. The 820TDRC, of course, is the Eight Hundred and Twentieth Technical Development and Research Center of the Combined Armed Services Artificial and Mechanical Personnel Section. August 10, 1974, is the day before yesterday.

All this is very obvious, but it's good to record it.

I heard a very strange conversation between Heywood and Russell yesterday.

Russell is a small man, about thirty-eight, who's Heywood's top assistant. He wears glasses, and his chin is farther back than his mouth. It gives his head a symmetrical look. His voice is high, and he moves his hands rapidly. I think his reflexes are overtriggered.

Heywood is pretty big. He's almost as tall as I am. He moves smoothly--he's like me. You get the idea that all of his weight never touches the ground. Once in a while, though, he leaves a cigarette burning in an ashtray, and you can see where the end's been chewed to shreds.

Why is everybody at COMASAMPS so nervous?

Heywood was looking at the first entry in what I can now call my diary. He showed it to Russell.

"Guess you did a good job on the self-awareness tapes, Russ," Heywood said.

Russell frowned. "Too good, I think. He shouldn't have such a tremendous drive toward self-expression. We'll have to iron that out as soon as possible. Want me to set up a new tape?"

Heywood shook his head. "Don't see why. Matter of fact, with the intelligence we've given him, I think it's probably a normal concomitant." He looked up at me and winked.

Russell took his glasses off with a snatch of his hand and scrubbed them on his shirtsleeve. "I don't know. We'll have to watch him. We've got to remember he's a prototype--no different from an experimental automobile design, or a new dishwasher model. We expected bugs to appear. I think we've found one, and I think it ought to be eliminated. I don't like this personification he's acquired in our minds, either. This business of calling him by a nickname is all wrong. We've got to remember he's *not* an individual. We've got every right to tinker with him." He slapped his glasses back on and ran his hands over the hair the earpieces had disturbed. "He's just another machine. We can't lose sight of that."

Heywood raised his hands. "Easy, boy. Aren't you going too far off the deep end? All he's done is bat out a few words on a typewriter. Relax, Russ." He walked over to me and slapped my hip. "How about it, Pimmy? D'you feel like scrubbing the floor?"

"No opinion. Is that an order?" I asked.

Heywood turned to Russell. "Behold the rampant individual," he said. "No, Pimmy, no order. Cancel."

Russell shrugged, but he folded the page from my diary carefully, and put it in his breast pocket. I didn't mind. I never forget anything.

August 15, 1974

They did something to me on the Thirteenth. I can't remember what. I've gone over my memory, but there's nothing. I can't remember.

Russell and Ligget were talking yesterday, though, when they inserted the autonomic cutoff, and ran me through on orders. I didn't mind that. I still don't. I can't.

Ligget is one of the small army of push-arounds that nobody knows for sure isn't CIC, but who solders wires while Heywood and Russell make up their minds about him.

I had just done four about-faces, shined their shoes, and struck a peculiar pose. I think there's something seriously wrong with Ligget.

Ligget said, "He responds well, doesn't he?"

"Mm-m--yes," Russell said abstractedly. He ran his glance down a column of figures on an Estimated Performance Spec chart. "Try walking on your hands, PMM One," he said.

I activated my gyroscope and reset my pedal locomotion circuits. I walked around the room on my hands.

Ligget frowned forcefully. "That looks good. How's it check with the spec's?"

"Better than," Russell said. "I'm surprised. We had a lot of trouble with him the last two days. Reacted like a zombie."

"Oh, yes? I wasn't in on that. What happened? I mean--what sort of control were you using?"

"Oh--" I could see that Russell wasn't too sure whether he should tell Ligget or not. I already had the feeling that the atmosphere of this project was loaded with dozens of crosscurrents and conflicting ambitions. I was going to learn a lot about COMASAMPS.

"Yes?" Ligget said.

"We had his individuality circuits cut out. Effectively, he was just a set of conditioned reflexes."

"You say he reacted like a zombie?"

"Definite automatism. Very slow reactions, and, of course, no initiative."

"You mean he'd be very slow in his response to orders under those conditions, right?" Ligget looked crafty behind Russell's back.

Russell whirled around. "He'd make a lousy soldier, if that's what CIC wants to know!"

Ligget smoothed out his face, and twitched his shoulders back. "I'm not a CIC snooper, if that's what you mean."

"You don't mind if I call you a liar, do you?" Russell said, his hands shaking.

"Not particularly," Ligget said, but he was angry behind his smooth face. It helps, having immobile features like mine. You get to understand the psychology of a man who tries for the same effect.

August 16, 1974

It bothers me, not having a diary entry for the fourteenth, either. Somebody's been working on me again.

I told Heywood about it. He shrugged. "Might as well get used to it, Pimmy. There'll be a lot of that going on. I don't imagine it's pleasant--I wouldn't like intermittent amnesia myself--but there's very little you can do about it. Put it down as one of the occupational hazards of being a prototype."

"But I don't *like* it," I said.

Heywood pulled the left side of his mouth into a straight line and sighed. "Like I said, Pimmy--I wouldn't either. On the other hand, you can't blame us if the new machine we're testing happens to know it's being tested, and resents it. We built the machine. Theoretically, it's our privilege to do anything we please with it, if that'll help us find out how the machine performs, and how to build better ones."

"But I'm *not* a machine" I said.

Heywood put his lower lip between his teeth and looked up at me from under a raised eyebrow. "Sorry, Pim. I'm kind of afraid you are."

But I'm not! *I'M NOT!*

August 17, 1974

Russell and Heywood were working late with me last night. They did a little talking back and forth. Russell was very nervous--and finally Heywood got a little impatient with him.

"All right," Heywood said, laying his charts down. "We're not getting anywhere, this way. You want to sit down and really talk about what's bothering you?"

Russell looked a little taken aback. He shook his head jerkily.

"No . . . no, I haven't got anything specific on my mind. Just talking. You know how it is." He tried to pretend he was very engrossed in one of the charts.

Heywood didn't let him off the hook, though. His eyes were cutting into Russell's face, peeling off layer after layer of misleading mannerism and baring the naked fear in the man.

"No, I don't know how it is." He put his hand on Russell's shoulder and turned him around to where the other man was facing him completely. "Now, look--if there's something chewing on you, let's have it. I'm not going to have this project gummed up by your secret troubles. Things are tough enough with everybody trying to pressure us into doing things their way, and none of them exactly sure of what that way *is*."

That last sentence must have touched something off in Russell, because he let his charts drop beside Heywood's and clawed at the pack of cigarettes in his breast pocket.

"That's exactly what the basic problem is," he said, his eyes a little too wide. He pushed one hand back and forth over the side of his face and walked back and forth aimlessly. Then a flood of words came out.

"We're working in the dark, Vic. In the dark, and somebody's in with us that's swinging clubs at our heads while we stumble around. We don't know who it is, we don't know if it's one or more than that, and we never know when the next swing is coming.

"Look--we're cybernetics engineers. Our job was to design a brain that would operate a self-propulsive unit designed to house it. That was the engineering problem, and we've got a tendency to continue looking at it in that light.

"But that's not the whole picture. We've got to keep in mind that the only reason we were ever given the opportunity and the facilities was because somebody thought it might be a nice idea to turn out soldiers on a production line, just like they do the rest of the paraphernalia of war. And the way COMASAMPS looks at it is not in terms of a brain housed in an independently movable shell, but in terms of a robot which now has to be fitted to the general idea of what a soldier should be.

"Only nobody knows what the ideal soldier is like.

"Some say he ought to respond to orders with perfect accuracy and superhuman reflexes. Others say he ought to be able to think his way out of trouble, or improvise in a situation where his orders no longer apply, just like a human soldier. The ones who want the perfect automaton don't want him to be smart enough to realize he *is* an automaton--probably because they're afraid of the idea; and the ones who want him to be capable of human discretion don't want him to be human enough to be rebellious in a hopeless situation.

"And that's just the beginning. COMASAMPS may be a combined project, but if you think the Navy isn't checking up on the Army, and vice versa, with both of them looking over the Air Force's shoulder--Oh, you know that squirrel cage as well as I do!"

Russell gestured hopelessly. Heywood, who had been taking calm puffs on his cigarette, shrugged. "So? All we have to do is tinker around until we can design a sample model to fit each definition. Then they can run as many comparative field tests as they want to. It's their problem. Why let it get you?"

Russell flung his cigarette to the floor and stepped on it with all his weight. "Because we can't do it and you ought to know it as well as I do!" He pointed over at me. "There's your prototype model. He's got all the features that everybody wants--and cutoffs intended to take out the features that interfere with any one definition. We can cut off his individuality, and leave him the automaton some people want. We can leave him his individuality, cut off his volition, and give him general orders which he is then free to carry out by whatever means he thinks best. Or, we can treat him like a human being--educate him by means of tapes, train him, and turn him loose on a job, the way we'd do with a human being."

The uneven tone built up in his voice as he finished what he was saying.

"But, if we reduce him to a machine that responds to orders as though they were pushbuttons, he's slow. He's pitifully slow, Vic, and he'd be immobilized within thirty seconds of combat. There's nothing we can do about that, either. Until somebody learns how to push electricity through a circuit faster than the laws of physics say it should go, what we'll have will be a ponderous, mindless thing that's no better than the remote-control exhibition jobs built forty years ago.

"All right, so that's no good. We leave him individuality, but we restrict it until it cuts his personality down to that of a slave. That's better. Under those conditions, he would, theoretically, be a better soldier than the average human. An officer could tell him to take a patrol out into a certain sector, and he'd do the best possible job, picking the best way to handle each step of the job as he came to it. But what does he do if he comes back, and the officer who gave him the orders is no longer there? Or, worse yet, if there's been a retreat, and there's nobody there? Or an armistice? What about that armistice? Can you picture this slave robot, going into stasis because he's got no orders to cover a brand-new situation?

"He might just as well not have gone on that patrol at all--because he can't pass on whatever he's learned, and because his job is now over, as far as he's concerned. The enemy could overrun his position, and he wouldn't do anything about it. He'd operate from order to order. And if an armistice were signed, he'd sit right where he was until a technician could come out, remove the soldier-orientation tapes, and replace them with whatever was finally decided on.

"Oh, you could get around the limitation all right--by issuing a complex set of orders, such as: 'Go out on patrol and report back. If I'm not here, report to so-and-so. If there's nobody here, do this. If that doesn't work, try that. If such-and-such happens, proceed as follows. But don't confuse such-and-such with that or this.' Can you imagine fighting a war on that basis? And what about that reorientation problem? How long would all those robots sit there before they could all be serviced--and how many man-hours and how much material would it take to do the job? Frankly, I couldn't think of a more cumbersome way to run a war if I tried.

"Or, we can build all our robots like streamlined Pimmys--like Pimmy when all his circuits are operating, without our test cutoffs. Only, then, we'd have artificial human beings. Human beings who don't wear out, that a hand-arm won't stop, and who don't need food or water as long as their power piles have a pebble-sized hunk of plutonium to chew on."

Russell laughed bitterly. "And Navy may be making sure Army doesn't get the jump on them, with Air Force doing its bit, but there's one thing all three of them are agreed upon as they are about nothing else--they'll test automaton zombies, and they'll test slaves, but one thing nobody wants us turning out is supermen. They've got undercover men under every lab bench, all keeping one eye on each other and one on us--and the whole thing comes down on our heads like a ton of cement if there's even the first whisper of an idea that we're going to build more Pimmys. The same thing happens if we don't give them the perfect soldier.

*And the only perfect soldier is a Pimmy.* Pimmy could replace any man in any armed service--from a KP to a whole general staff, depending on what tapes he had. But he'd have to be a true individual to do it. And he'd be smarter than they are. They couldn't trust him. Not because he wouldn't work for the same objectives as they'd want, but because he'd probably do it in some way they couldn't understand.

"So they don't want any more Pimmys. This one test model is all they'll allow, because he can be turned into any kind of robot they want, but they won't take the whole Pimmy, with all his potentialities. They just want part of him."

The bitter laugh was louder. "We've got their perfect soldier, but they don't want him. They want something less--but that something less will never be the perfect soldier. So we work and work, weeks on end, testing, revising, redesigning. Why? We're marking time. We've got what they want, but they don't want it--but if we don't give it to them soon, they'll wipe out the project. And if we give them what they want, it won't really be what they want. Can't you see that? What's the matter with you, Heywood? Can't you see the blind alley we're in--only it's not a blind alley, because it has eyes, eyes under every bench, watching each other and watching us, always watching, never stopping, going on and never stopping, watching, eyes?"

Heywood had already picked up the telephone. As Russell collapsed completely, he began to speak into it, calling the Project hospital. Even as he talked, his eyes were coldly brooding, and his mouth was set in an expression I'd never seen before. His other hand was on Russell's twitching shoulder, moving gently as the other man sobbed.

August 25, 1974

Ligget is Heywood's new assistant. It's been a week since Russell's been gone.

Russell wasn't replaced for three days, and Heywood worked alone with me. He's engineer of the whole project, and I'm almost certain there must have been other things he could have worked on while he was waiting for a new assistant, but he spent all of his time in this lab with me.

His face didn't show what he thought about Russell. He's not like Ligget, though. Heywood's thoughts are private. Ligget's are hidden. But, every once in a while, while Heywood was working, he'd start to turn around and reach out, or just say "Jack--" as if he wanted something, and then he'd catch himself, and his eyes would grow more thoughtful.

I only understood part of what Russell had said that night he was taken away, so I asked Heywood about it yesterday.

"What's the trouble, Pim?" he asked.

"Don't know, for sure. Too much I don't understand about this whole thing. If I knew what some of the words meant, I might not even have a problem."

"Shoot."

"Well, it's mostly what Russell was saying, that last night."

Heywood peeled a strip of skin from his upper lip by catching it between his teeth. "Yeah."

"What's a war, or what's war? Soldiers have something to do with it, but what's a soldier? I'm a robot--but why do they want to make more of me? Can I be a soldier and a robot at the same time? Russell kept talking about 'they,' and the Army, the Air Force, and the Navy. What're they? And are the CIC men the ones who are watching you and each other at the same time?"

Heywood scowled, and grinned ruefully at the same time. "That's quite a catalogue," he said. "And there's even more than that, isn't there, Pimmy?" He put his hand on my side and sort of patted me, the way I'd seen him do with a generator a few times. "O. K., I'll give you a tape on war and soldiering. That's the next step in the program anyway, and it'll take care of most of those questions."

"Thanks," I said. "But what about the rest of it?"

He leaned against a bench and looked down at the floor. "Well, 'they' are the people who instituted this program--the Secretary of Defense, and the people under him. They all agreed that robot personnel were just what the armed services needed, and they were right. The only trouble is, they couldn't agree among themselves as to what characteristics were desirable in the perfect soldier--or sailor, or airman. They decided that the best thing to do was to come up with a series of different models, and to run tests until they came up with the best one.

"Building you was my own idea. Instead of trying to build prototypes to fit each separate group of specifications, we built one all-purpose model who was, effectively speaking, identical with a human being in almost all respects, with one major difference. By means of cut-offs in every circuit, we can restrict as much of your abilities as we want to, thus being able to modify your general characteristics to fit any one of the various specification groups. We saved a lot of time by doing that, and avoided a terrific nest of difficulties.

"Trouble is, we're using up all the trouble and time we saved. Now that they've got you, they don't want you. Nobody's willing to admit that the only efficient robot soldier is one with all the discretionary powers and individuality of a human being. They can't admit it, because people are afraid of anything that looks like it might be better than they are. And they won't trust what they're afraid of. So, Russell and I had to piddle around with a stupid series of tests in a hopeless attempt to come up with something practical that was nevertheless within the limitations of the various sets of specifications--which is ridiculous, because there's nothing wrong with you, but there's plenty wrong with the specs. They were designed by people who don't know the first thing about robots or robot thought processes--or the sheer mechanics of thinking, for that matter."

He shrugged. "But, they're the people with the authority and the money that's paying for this project--so Jack and I kept puttering, because those were the orders. Knowing that we had the perfect answer all the time, and that nobody would accept it, was what finally got Jack."

"What about you?" I asked.

He shrugged again. "I'm just waiting," he said. "Eventually they'll either accept you or not. They'll either commend me or fire me, and they might or might not decide it's all my fault if they're not happy. But there's nothing I can do about it, is there? So, I'm waiting.

"Meanwhile, there's the CIC. Actually, that's just a handy label. It happens to be the initials of

one of the undercover agencies out of the whole group that infests this place. Every armed service has its own, and I imagine the government has its boys kicking around, too. We just picked one label to cover them all--it's simpler."

"Russell said they were always watching. But why are they watching each other, too? Why should one armed service be afraid that another's going to get an advantage over it?"

Heywood's mouth moved into a half-amused grin. "That's what is known as human psychology, Pimmy. It'll help you to understand it, but if you can't, why, just be glad you haven't got it."

"Ligget's CIC, you know," I said. "Russell accused him of it. He denied it, but if he isn't actually in *the* CIC, then he's in something like it."

Heywood nodded sourly. "I know. I wouldn't mind if he had brains enough, in addition, to know one end of a circuit from the other."

He slapped my side again. "Pimmy, boy," he said. "We're going to have a lot of fun around here in the next few weeks. Yes, sir, a lot of fun."

August 26, 1974

Ligget was fooling around with me again. He's all right when Heywood's in the lab with me, but when he's alone, he keeps running mc through unauthorized tests. What he's doing, actually, is to repeat all the tests Heywood and Russell ran, just to make sure. As long as he doesn't cut out my individuality, I can remember it all, and I guess there was nothing different about the results on any of the tests, because I can tell from his face that he's not finding what he wants.

Well, I hope he tells his bosses that Heywood and Russell were right. Maybe they'll stop this fooling.

Ligget's pretty dumb. After every test, he looks me in the eye and tells me to forget the whole thing. What does he think I am--Trilby?

And I don't understand some of the test performances at all. There *is* something wrong with Ligget.

September 2, 1974

I hadn't realized, until now, that Heywood and Russell hadn't told anyone what they thought about this whole project, but, reviewing that tape on war and soldiering, and the way the military mind operates, I can see where nobody would have accepted their explanations.

Ligget caught on to the whole thing today. Heywood came in with a new series of test charts, Ligget took one look at them, and threw them on the table. He sneered at Heywood and said, "Who do you think you're kidding?"

Heywood looked annoyed and said, "All right, what's eating you?"

Ligget's face got this hidden crafty look on it. "How long did you think you could keep this up, Heywood? This test is no different from the ones you were running three weeks ago. There hasn't been any progress since then, and there's been no attempt to make any. What's your explanation?"

"Uh-huh." Heywood didn't look particularly worried. "I was wondering if you were *ever* going to stumble across it."

Ligget looked mad. "That attitude won't do you any good. Now, come on, quit stalling. Why were you and Russell sabotaging the project?"

"Oh, stop being such a pompous lamebrain, will you?" Heywood said disgustedly. "Russell and I weren't doing any sabotaging. We've been following our orders to the last letter. We built the prototype, and we've been testing the various modifications ever since. Anything wrong with that?"

"You've made absolutely no attempt to improve the various modifications. There hasn't been an ounce of progress in this project for the last twenty days.

"Now, look, Heywood" --Ligget's voice became wheedling-- "I can understand that you might have what you'd consider a good reason for all this. What is it--political, or something? Maybe it's your conscience. Don't you *want* to work on something that's eventually going to be applied to war? I wish you'd tell me about it. If I could understand your reasons, it would be that much easier for you. Maybe it's too tough a problem. Is that it, Heywood?"

Heywood's face got red. "No, it's not. If you think--" He stopped, dug his fingers at the top of the table, and got control of himself again.

"No," he said in a quieter, but just as deadly, voice. "I'm as anxious to produce an artificial soldier as anybody else. And I'm not too stupid for the job, either. If you had *any* brains, you'd see that I already have."

That hit Ligget between the eyes. "You have? Where is it, and *why haven't you reported your success?* What is this thing?" He pointed at me. "Some kind of a decoy?"

Heywood grimaced. "No, you double-dyed jackass, that's your soldier."

"What?"

"Sure. Strip those fifteen pounds of cutoffs out of him, redesign his case for whatever kind of ground he's supposed to operate on, feed him the proper tapes, and that's it. The perfect soldier--as smart as any human ever produced, and a hundred times the training and toughness, overnight. Run them out by the thousands. Print your circuits, bed your transistors in silicone rubber, and pour the whole brew into his case. Production difficulties? Watchmaking's harder."

"*No!*" Ligget's eyes gleamed. "And I worked on this with you! *Why haven't you reported this!*" he repeated.

Heywood looked at him pityingly. "Haven't you got it through your head? Pimmy's the perfect soldier, all of him, with all his abilities. That includes individuality, curiosity, judgment--and

intelligence. Cut one part of that, and he's no good. You've got to take the whole cake, or none at all. One way you starve--and the other way you choke."

Ligget had gone white. "You mean, we've got to take the superman--or we don't have anything."

"Yes, you fumbling jerk!"

Ligget looked thoughtful. He seemed to forget Heywood and me as he stared down at his shoetops. "They won't go for it," he muttered. "Suppose they decide they're better fit to run the world than we are?"

"That's the trouble," Heywood said. "They are. They've got everything a human being has, plus incredible toughness and the ability to learn instantaneously. You know what Pimmy did? The day he was assembled, he learned to read and write, after a fashion. How? By listening to me read a paragraph out of a report, recording the sounds, and looking at the report afterwards. He matched the sounds to the letters, recalled what sort of action on Russell's and my part the paragraph had elicited, and sat down behind a typewriter. That's all."

"They'd junk the whole project before they let something like that run around loose!" The crafty look was hovering at the edges of Ligget's mask again. "All right, so you've got an answer, but it's not an acceptable one. But why haven't you pushed any of the other lines of investigation?"

"Because there aren't any," Heywood said disgustedly. "Any other modification, when worked out to its inherent limits, is worse than useless. You've run enough tests to find out."

"All right!" Ligget's voice was high. "Why didn't you report failure, then, instead of keeping on with this shillyshallying?"

*"Because I haven't failed, you moron!"* Heywood exploded. "I've got the answer. I've got Pimmy. There's nothing wrong with him--the defect's in the way people are thinking. And I've been going crazy, trying to think of a way to change the people. To hell with modifying the robot! He's as perfect as you'll get within the next five years. It's the people who'll have to change!"

"Uh-huh." Ligget's voice was careful. "I see. You've gone as far as you can within the limits of your orders--and you were trying to find a way to exceed them, in order to force the armed services to accept robots like Pimmy." He pulled out his wallet, and flipped it open. There was a piece of metal fastened to one flap.

"Recognize this, Heywood?"

Heywood nodded.

"All right, then, let's go and talk to a few people."

Heywood's eyes were cold and brooding again. He shrugged.

The lab door opened, and there was another one of the lab technicians there. "Go easy, Ligget," he said. He walked across the lab in rapid strides. His wallet had a different badge in it. "Listening from next door," he explained. "All right, Heywood," he said, "I'm taking you in." He shouldered Ligget out of the way. "Why don't you guys learn to stay in your own jurisdiction," he told him.

Ligget's face turned red, and his fists clenched, but the other man must have had more weight behind him, because he didn't say anything

Heywood looked over at me, and raised a hand. "So long, Pimmy," he said. He and the other man walked out of the lab, with Ligget trailing along behind them. As they got the door open, I saw some other men standing out in the hall. The man who had come into the lab cursed. "You guys!" he said savagely. "This is my prisoner, see, and if you think--"

The door closed, and I couldn't hear the rest of what they said, but there was a lot of arguing before I heard the sound of all their footsteps going down the hall in a body.

Well, that's about all, I guess. Except for this other thing. It's about Ligget, and I hear he's not around any more. But you might be interested.

September 4, 1974

I haven't seen Heywood, and I've been alone in the lab all day. But Ligget came in last night. I don't think I'll see Heywood again.

Ligget came in late at night. He looked as though he hadn't slept, and he was very nervous. But he was drunk, too--I don't know where he got the liquor.

He came across the lab floor, his footsteps very loud on the cement, and he put his hands on his hips and looked up at me.

"Well, superman," he said in a tight, edgy voice, "you've lost your buddy for good, the dirty traitor. And now you're next. You know what they're going to do to you?" He laughed. "You'll have lots of time to think it over."

He paced back and forth in front of me. Then he spun around suddenly and pointed his finger at me. "Thought you could beat the race of men, huh? Figured you were smarter than we were, didn't you? But we've got you now! You're going to learn that you can't try to fool around with the human animal, because he'll pull you down. He'll claw and kick you until you collapse. That's the way men are, robot. Not steel and circuits--flesh and blood and muscles. Flesh that fought its way out of the sea and out of the jungle, muscle that crushed everything that ever stood in his way, and blood that's spilled for a million years to keep the human race on top. *That's* the kind of an organism we are, robot."

He paced some more and spun again. "You never had a chance."

Well, I guess that *is* all. The rest of it, you know about. You can pull the transcriber plug out of here now, I guess. Would somebody say good-bye to Heywood for me--and Russell, too, if that's possible?

COVERING MEMORANDUM,  
Blalock,  
Project Engineer,  
to Hall, Director,  
820TH TDRS, COMASAMPS

September 21, 1974

Enclosed are the transcriptions of the robot's readings from his memorybank "diary," as recorded this morning. The robot is now en route to the Patuxent River, the casting of the concrete block having been completed with the filling of the opening through which the transcription line was run.

As Victor Heywood's successor to the post of Project Engineer, I'd like to point out that the robot was incapable of deceit, and that this transcription, if read at Heywood's trial, will prove that his intentions were definitely not treasonous, and certainly motivated on an honest belief that he was acting in the best interests of the original directive for the project's initiation.

In regard to your Memorandum 8-4792-H of yesterday, a damage report is in process of preparation and will be forwarded to you immediately on its completion.

I fully understand that Heywood's line of research is to be considered closed. Investigations into what Heywood termed the "zombie" and "slave" type of robot organization have already begun in an improvised laboratory, and I expect preliminary results within the next ten days.

Preliminary results on the general investigation of other possible types of robot orientation and organization are in, copies attached. I'd like to point out that they are extremely discouraging.

(Signed,)  
H. E. Blalock, Project Engineer,  
820TH TDRS, COMASAMPS

September 25, 1974

PERSONAL LETTER  
FROM HALL, DIRECTOR,  
820TH TDRS, COMASAMPS,  
to  
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Dear Vinnie,

Well, things are finally starting to settle down out here. You were right, all this place needed was a housecleaning from top to bottom.

I think we're going to let this Heywood fellow go. We can't prove anything on him--frankly, I don't think there was anything to prove. Russell, of course, is a closed issue. His chance of

ever getting out of the hospital is rated as ten percent.

You know, considering the mess that robot made of the lab, I'd almost be inclined to think that Heywood was right. Can you imagine what a fighter that fellow would have been, if his loyalty had been channeled to some abstract like Freedom, instead of to Heywood? But we can't take the chance. Look at the way the robot's gone amnesic about killing Ligget while he was wrecking the lab. It was something that happened accidentally. It wasn't supposed to happen, so the robot forgot it. Might present difficulties in a war.

So, we've got this Blalock fellow down from M.I.T. He spends too much time talking about Weiner, but he's all right, otherwise.

I'll be down in a couple of days. Appropriations committee meeting. You know how it is. Everybody knows we need the money, but they want to argue about it, first.

Well, that's human nature, I guess.

See you,  
Ralph

#### SUPPLEMENT TO CHARTS:

Menace to Navigation.

Patuxent River, at a point forty-eight miles below Folsom, bearings as below.

Midchannel. Concrete block, 15x15x15. Not dangerous except at extreme low tide.

**Story copyright © 1954 Algis Budrys**  
**Art copyright © 1998 Kandis Elliot**

TomorrowSF Vol. 9.5 July 16,1998