

A TICKET TO TRANAI

One fine day in June, a tall, thin, intent, soberly dressed young man walked into the offices of the Transstellar Travel Agency. Without a glance, he marched past the gaudy travel poster depicting the Harvest Feast on Mars. The enormous photomural of dancing forests on Triganium didn't catch his eye. He ignored the somewhat suggestive painting of dawn-rites on Opiuchus II, and arrived at the desk of the booking agent.

"I would like to book passage to Tranai," the young man said.

The agent closed his copy of *Necessary Inventions* and frowned. "Tranai? Tranai? Is that one of the moons of Kent IV?"

"It is not," the young man said. "Tranai is a planet, revolving around a sun of the same name. I want to book passage there."

"Never heard of it." The agent pulled down a star catalogue, a simplified star chart, and a copy of *Lesser Space Routes*. "Well, now," he said finally. "You learn something new every day. You want to book passage to Tranai, Mister —"

"Goodman. Marvin Goodman."

"Goodman. Well, it seems that Tranai is about as far from Earth as one can get and still be in the Milky Way. *Nobody* goes there."

"I know. Can you arrange passage for me?" Goodman asked, with a hint of suppressed excitement in his voice.

The agent shook his head. "Not a chance. Even the non-skeds don't go that far."

"How close can you get me?"

The agent gave him a winning smile. "Why bother? I can send you to a world that'll have everything this Tranai place has, with the additional advantages of proximity, bargain rates, decent hotels, tours —"

"I'm going to Tranai," Goodman said grimly.

"But there's no way of getting there," the agent explained patiently. "What is it you expected to find? Perhaps I could help."

"You can help by booking me as far as —"

"Is it adventure?" the agent asked, quickly sizing up Goodman's unathletic build and scholarly stoop. "Let me suggest Africanus II, a dawn-age world filled with savage tribes, saber-teeth, man-eating ferns, quicksand, active volcanoes, pterodactyls and all the rest. Expeditions leave New York every five days and they combine the utmost in danger with absolute safety. A dinosaur head guaranteed or your money refunded."

"Tranai," Goodman said.

"Hmm." The clerk looked appraisingly at Goodman's set lips and uncompromising eyes. "Perhaps you are tired of the puritanical restrictions of Earth? Then let me suggest a trip to Almagordo III, the Pearl of the Southern Ridge Belt. Our ten day all-expense plan includes a trip through the mysterious Almagordian Casbah, visits to eight nightclubs (first drink on us), a trip to a zintal factory, where you can buy genuine zintal belts, shoes and pocketbooks at phenomenal savings, and a tour through two distilleries. The girls of Almagordo are beautiful, vivacious and refreshingly naive. They consider the Tourist the highest and most desirable type of human being. Also —"

"Tranai," Goodman said. "How close can you get me?"

Sullenly the clerk extracted a strip of tickets. "You can take the *Constellation Queen* as far as Legis II and transfer to the *Galactic Splendor*, which will take you to Oumé. Then you'll have to board a local, which, after stopping at Machang, Inch-ang, Pankang, Lekung and Oyster, will leave you at Tung-Bradar IV, if it doesn't break down en route. Then a non-sked will transport you past the Galactic Whirl (if it gets past) to Aoomsridgia, from which the mail ship will take you to Bellismoranti. I believe the mail ship is still functioning. That brings you about halfway. After that, you're on your own."

"Fine," Goodman said. "Can you have my forms made out by this afternoon?"

The clerk nodded. "Mr. Goodman," he asked in despair, "just what sort of place is this Tranai supposed to be?"

Goodman smiled a beatific smile. "A utopia," he said.

Marvin Goodman had lived most of his life in Seakirk, New Jersey, a town controlled by one political boss or another for close to fifty years. Most of Seakirk's inhabitants were indifferent to the spectacle of corruption in high places and low, the gambling, the gang wars, the teen-age drinking. They were used to the sight of their roads crumbling, their ancient water mains bursting, their power plants breaking down, their decrepit old buildings falling apart, while the bosses built bigger homes, longer swimming pools and warmer stables. People were used to it. But not Goodman.

A natural-born crusader, he wrote expose articles that were never published, sent letters to Congress that were never read, stumped for honest candidates who were never elected, and organized the League for Civic Improvement, the People Against Gangsterism, the Citizen's Union for an Honest Police Force, the Association Against Gambling, the Committee for Equal Job Opportunities for Women, and a dozen others.

Nothing came of his efforts. The people were too apathetic to care. The politicoes simply laughed at him, and Goodman couldn't stand being laughed at. Then, to add to his troubles, his fiancée jilted him for

a noisy young man in a loud sports jacket who had no redeeming feature other than a controlling interest in the Seakirk Construction Corporation.

It was a shattering blow. The girl seemed unaffected by the fact that the SCC used disproportionate amounts of sand in their concrete and shaved whole inches from the width of their steel girders. As she put it, "Gee whiz, Marvie, so what? That's how things are. You gotta be realistic."

Goodman had no intention of being realistic. He immediately repaired to Eddie's Moonlight Bar, where, between drinks, he began to contemplate the attractions of a grass shack in the green hell of Venus.

An erect, hawk-faced old man entered the bar. Goodman could tell he was a spacer by his gravity-bound gait, his pallor, his radiation scars and his far-piercing gray eyes.

"A Tranai Special, Sam," the old spacer told the bartender.

"Coming right up, Captain Savage, sir," the bartender said.

"Tranai?" Goodman murmured involuntarily.

"Tranai," the captain said. "Never heard of it, did you, sonny?"

"No, sir," Goodman confessed.

"Well, sonny," Captain Savage said, "I'm feeling a mite wordy tonight, so I'll tell you a tale of Tranai the Blessed, out past the Galactic Whirl."

The captain's eyes grew misty and a smile softened the grim line of his lips.

"We were iron men in steel ships in those days. Me and Johnny Cavanaugh and Frog Larsen would have blasted to hell itself for half a load of terganium. Aye, and shanghaied Beelzebub for a wiper if we were short of men. Those were the days when space scurvey took every third man, and the ghost of Big Dan McClintock haunted the spaceways. Moll Gann still operated the Red Rooster Inn out on Asteroid 342-AA, asking five hundred Earth dollars for a glass of beer, and getting it too, there being no other place within ten billion miles. In those days, the Scarbies were still cutting up along Star Ridge and ships bound for Prodengum had to run the Swayback Gantlet. So you can imagine how I felt, sonny, when one fine day I came upon Tranai."

Goodman listened as the old captain limned a picture of the great days, of frail ships against an iron sky, ships outward bound, forever outward, to the far limits of the Galaxy.

And there, at the edge of the Great Nothing, was Tranai.

Tranai, where The Way had been found and men were no longer bound to The Wheel! Tranai the Bountiful, a peaceful, creative, happy society, not saints or ascetics, not intellectuals, but ordinary people who had achieved utopia.

For an hour, Captain Savage spoke of the multiform marvels of Tranai. After finishing his story, he complained of a dry throat. Space throat, he called it, and Goodman ordered him another Tranai Special and one for himself. Sipping the exotic, green-gray mixture, Goodman too was lost in the dream.

Finally, very gently, he asked, "Why don't you go back, Captain?"

The old man shook his head. "Space gout. I'm grounded for good. We didn't know much about modern medicine in those days. All I'm good for now is a landsman's job."

"What job do you have?"

"I'm a foreman for the Seakirk Construction Corporation," the old man sighed. "Me, that once commanded a fifty-tube clipper. The way those people make concrete... Shall we have another short one in honor of beautiful Tranai?"

They had several short ones. When Goodman left the bar, his mind was made up. Somewhere in the Universe, the *modus vivendi* had been found, the working solution to Man's old dream of perfection.

He could settle for nothing less.

The next day, he quit his job as designer at the East Coast Robot Works and drew his life savings out of the bank.

He was going to Tranai.

He boarded the *Constellation Queen* for Legis II and took the *Galactic Splendor* to Oumé. After stopping at Machang, Inchang, Pankang, Lekung and Oyster — dreary little places — he reached Tung-Bradard IV. Without incident, he passed the Galactic Whirl and finally reached Bellismoranti, where the influence of Terra ended.

For an exorbitant fee, a local spaceline took him to Dvasta II. From there, a freighter transported him past Seves, Olgo and Mi, to the double planet Mvanti. There he was bogged down for three months and used the time to take a hypno-pedic course in the Tranaian language. At last he hired a bush pilot to take him to Ding.

On Ding, he was arrested as a Higastomeritreian spy, but managed to escape in the cargo of an ore rocket bound for g'Moree. At g'Moree, he was treated for frostbite, heat poisoning and superficial radiation burns, and at last arranged passage to Tranai.

He could hardly believe it when the ship slipped past the moons Doé and Ri, to land at Port Tranai.

After the airlocks opened, Goodman found himself in a state of profound depression. Part of it was plain letdown, inevitable after a journey such as his. But more than that, he was suddenly terrified that Tranai might turn out to be a fraud.

He had crossed the Galaxy on the basis of an old spaceman's yarn. But now it all seemed less likely. Eldorado was a more probable place than the Tranai he expected to find.

He disembarked. Port Tranai seemed a pleasant enough town. The streets were filled with people and the shops were piled high with goods. The men he passed looked much like humans anywhere. The women were quite attractive.

But there was something strange here, something subtly yet definitely wrong, something *alien*. It took a moment before he could puzzle it out.

Then he realized that there were at least ten men for every woman in sight. And stranger still, practically all the women he saw apparently were under eighteen or over thirty-five.

What had happened to the nineteen-to-thirty-five age group? Was there a taboo on their appearing in public? Had a plague struck them?

He would just have to wait and find out.

He went to the Idrig Building, where all Tranai's governmental functions were carried out, and presented himself at the office of the Extraterrestrials Minister. He was admitted at once.

The office was small and cluttered, with strange blue blotches on the wallpaper. What struck Goodman at once was a high-powered rifle complete with silencer and telescopic sight, hanging ominously from one wall. He had no time to speculate on this, for the minister bounded out of his chair and vigorously shook Goodman's hand.

The minister was a stout, jolly man of about fifty. Around his neck he wore a small medallion stamped with the Tranian seal — a bolt of lightning splitting an ear of corn. Goodman assumed, correctly, that this was an official seal of office.

"Welcome to Tranai," the minister said heartily. He pushed a pile of papers from a chair and motioned Goodman to sit down.

"Mister Minister..." Goodman began, in formal Tranian.

"Den Melith is the name. Call me Den. We're all quite informal around here. Put your feet up on the desk and make yourself at home. Cigar?"

"No, thank you," Goodman said, somewhat taken back. "Mister — ah — Den, I have come from Terra, a planet you may have heard of."

"Sure I have," said Melith. "Nervous, hustling sort of place, isn't it? No offense intended, of course."

"Of course. That's exactly how I feel about it. The reason I came here —" Goodman hesitated, hoping he wouldn't sound too ridiculous. "Well, I heard certain stories about Tranai. Thinking them over now, they seem preposterous. But if you don't mind, I'd like to ask you —"

"Ask anything," Melith said expansively. "You'll get a straight answer."

"Thank you. I heard that there has been no war of any sort on Tranai for four hundred years."

"Six hundred," Melith corrected. "And none in sight."

"Someone told me that there is no crime on Tranai."

"None whatsoever."

"And therefore no police force or courts, no judges, sheriffs, marshals, executioners, truant officers or government investigators. No prisons, reformatories or other places of detention."

"We have no need of them," Melith explained, "since we have no crime."

"I have heard," said Goodman, "that there is no poverty on Tranai."

"None that I ever heard of," Melith said cheerfully. "Are you sure you won't have a cigar?"

"No, thank you," Goodman was leaning forward eagerly now. "I understand that you have achieved a stable economy without resorting to socialistic, communistic, fascistic or bureaucratic practices."

"Certainly," Melith said.

"That yours is, in fact, a free enterprise society, where individual initiative flourishes and governmental functions are kept to an absolute minimum."

Melith nodded. "By and large, the government concerns itself with minor regulatory matters, care of the aged and beautifying the landscape."

"Is it true that you have discovered a method of wealth distribution without resorting to governmental intervention, without even taxation, based entirely upon individual choice?" Goodman challenged.

"Oh, yes, absolutely."

"Is it true that there is no corruption in any phase of the Tranaian government?"

"None," Melith said. "I suppose that's why we have a hard time finding men to hold public office."

"Then Captain Savage was right!" Goodman cried, unable to control himself any longer. "This is utopia!"

"We like it," Melith said.

Goodman took a deep breath and asked, "May I stay here?"

"Why not?" Melith pulled out a form. "We have no restrictions on immigration. Tell me, what is your occupation?"

"On Earth, I was a robot designer."

"Plenty of openings in that." Melith started to fill in the form. His pen emitted a blob of ink. Casually, the minister threw the pen against the wall, where it shattered, adding another blue blotch to the wallpaper.

"We'll make out the paper some other time," he said. "I'm not in the mood now." He leaned back in his chair. "Let me give you a word of advice. Here on Tranai, we feel that we have come pretty close to utopia, as you call it. But ours is not a highly organized state. We have no complicated set of laws. We live by observance of a number of unwritten laws, or customs, as you might call them. You will discover what they are. You would be advised — although certainly not ordered — to follow them."

"Of course I will," Goodman exclaimed. "I can assure you, sir, I have no intention of endangering any phase of your paradise."

"Oh, I wasn't worried about us," Melith said with an amused smile. "It was your own safety I was considering. Perhaps my wife has some further advice for you."

He pushed a large red button on his desk. Immediately there was a bluish haze. The haze solidified, and in a moment Goodman saw a handsome young woman standing before him.

"Good morning, my dear," she said to Melith.

"It's afternoon," Melith informed her. "My dear, this young man came all the way from Earth to live on Tranai. I gave him the usual advice. Is there anything else we can do for him?"

Mrs. Melith thought for a moment, then asked Goodman, "Are you married?"

"No, ma'am," Goodman answered.

"In that case, he should meet a nice girl," Mrs. Melith told her husband. "Bachelordom is not encouraged on Tranai, although certainly not prohibited. Let me see... How about that cute Driganti girl?"

"She's engaged," Melith said.

"Really? Have I been in stasis *that* long? My dear, it's not too thoughtful of you."

"I was busy," Melith said apologetically.

"How about Mihna Vensis?"

"Not his type."

"Janna Vley?"

"Perfect!" Melith winked at Goodman. "A most attractive little lady." He found a new pen in his desk, scribbled an address and handed it to Goodman. "My wife will telephone her to be expecting you tomorrow evening."

"And do come around for dinner some night," said Mrs. Melith.

"Delighted," Goodman replied, in a complete daze.

"It's been nice meeting you," Mrs. Melith said. Her husband pushed the red button. The blue haze formed and Mrs. Melith vanished.

"Have to close up now," said Melith, glancing at his watch. "Can't work overtime — people might start talking.. Drop in some day and we'll make out those forms. You really should call on Supreme President Borg, too, at the National Mansion. Or possibly he'll call on you. Don't let the old fox put anything over on you. And don't forget about Janna." He winked roguishly and escorted Goodman to the door.

In a few moments, Goodman found himself alone on the sidewalk. He had reached utopia, he told himself, a real, genuine, sure-enough utopia.

But there were some very puzzling things about it.

Goodman ate dinner at a small restaurant and checked in at a nearby hotel. A cheerful bellhop showed him to his room, where Goodman stretched out immediately on the bed. Wearily he rubbed his eyes, trying to sort out his impressions.

So much had happened to him, all in one day! And so much was bothering him. The ratio of men to women, for example. He had meant to ask Melith about that.

But Melith might not be the man to ask, for there were some curious things about him. Like throwing his pen against the wall. Was that the act of a mature, responsible official? And Melith's wife...

Goodman knew that Mrs. Melith had come out of a derrsins stasis field; he had recognized the characteristic blue haze. The derrsins was used on Terra, too. Sometimes there were good medical reasons for suspending all activity, all growth, all decay. Suppose a patient had a desperate need for a certain serum, procurable only on Mars. Simply project the person into stasis until the serum could arrive.

But on Terra, only a licensed doctor could operate the field. There were strict penalties for its misuse.

He had never heard of keeping one's wife in one.

Still, if all the wives on Tranai were kept in stasis, that would explain the absence of the nineteen-to-thirty-five age group and would account for the ten-to-one ratio of men to women.

But what was the reason for this technological purdah?

And something else was on Goodman's mind, something quite insignificant, but bothersome all the same.

That rifle on Melith's wall.

Did he hunt game with it? Pretty big game, then. Target practice? Not with a telescopic sight. Why the silencer? Why did he keep it in his office?

But these were minor matters, Goodman decided, little local idiosyncrasies which would become clear when he had lived a while on Tranai. He couldn't expect immediate and complete comprehension of what was, after all, an alien planet.

He was just beginning to doze off when he heard a knock at his door.

"Come in," he called.

A small, furtive, gray-faced man hurried in and closed the door behind him. "You're the man from Terra, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"I figured you'd come here," the little man said, with a pleased smile. "Hit it right the first time. Going to stay on Tranai?"

"I'm here for good."

"Fine," the man said. "How would you like to become Supreme President?"

"Huh?"

"Good pay, easy hours, only a one-year term. You look like a public-spirited type," the man said sunnily. "How about it?"

Goodman hardly knew what to answer. "Do you mean," he asked incredulously, "that you offer the highest office in the land so casually?"

"What do you mean, *casually*?" the little man spluttered. "Do you think we offer the Supreme Presidency to just anybody? It's a great honor to be asked."

"I didn't mean —"

"And you, as a Terran, are uniquely suited."

"Why?"

"Well, it's common knowledge that Terrans derive pleasure from ruling. We Tranians don't, that's all. Too much trouble."

As simple as that. The reformer blood in Goodman began to boil. Ideal as Tranai was, there was undoubtedly room for improvement. He had a sudden vision of himself as ruler of utopia, doing the great task of making perfection even better. But caution stopped him from agreeing at once. Perhaps the man was a crackpot.

"Thank you for asking me," Goodman said. "I'll have to think it over. Perhaps I should talk with the present incumbent and find out something about the nature of the work."

"Well, why do you think I'm here?" the little man demanded. "I'm Supreme President Borg."

Only then did Goodman notice the official medallion around the little man's neck.

"Let me know your decision. I'll be at the National Mansion." He shook Goodman's hand, and left.

Goodman waited five minutes, then rang for the bellhop. "Who was that man?"

"That was Supreme President Borg," the bellhop told him. "Did you take the job?"

Goodman shook his head slowly. He suddenly realized that he had a *great* deal to learn about Tranai.

The next morning, Goodman listed the various robot factories of Port Tranai in alphabetical order and went out in search of a job. To his amazement, he found one with no trouble at all, at the very first place he looked. The great Abbag Home Robot Works signed him on after only a cursory glance at his credentials.

His new employer, Mr. Abbag, was short and fierce-looking, with a great mane of white hair and an air of tremendous personal energy.

"Glad to have a Terran on board," Abbag said. "I understand you're an ingenious people and we certainly need some ingenuity around here. I'll be honest with you, Goodman — I'm hoping to profit by your alien viewpoint. We've reached an impasse."

"Is it a production problem?" Goodman asked.

"I'll show you." Abbag led Goodman through the factory, around the Stamping Room, Heat-Treat, X-ray Analysis, Final Assembly and to the Testing Room. This room was laid out like a combination kitchen-living room. A dozen robots' were lined up against one wall.

"Try one out," Abbag said.

Goodman walked up to the nearest robot and looked at its controls. They were simple enough; self-explanatory, in fact. He put the machine through a standard repertoire: picking up objects, washing pots and pans, setting a table. The robot's responses were correct enough, but maddeningly slow. On Earth, such sluggishness had been ironed out a hundred years ago. Apparently they were behind the times here on Tranai.

"Seems pretty slow," Goodman commented cautiously.

"You're right," Abbag said. "Damned slow. Personally, I think it's about right. But Consumer Research indicates that our customers want it slower still."

"Huh?"

"Ridiculous, isn't it?" Abbag asked moodily. "We'll lose money if we slow it down any more. Take a look at its guts."

Goodman opened the back panel and blinked at the maze of wiring within. After a moment, he was able to figure it out. The robot was built like a modern Earth machine, with the usual inexpensive high-speed circuits. But special signal-delay relays, impulse-rejection units and step-down gears had been installed.

"Just tell me," Abbag demanded angrily, "how can we slow it down any more without building the thing a third bigger and twice as expensive? I don't know what kind of a disimprovement they'll be asking for next."

Goodman was trying to adjust his thinking to the concept of *disimproving* a machine.

On Earth, the plants were always trying to build robots with faster, smoother, more accurate responses. He had never found any reason to question the wisdom of this. He still didn't.

"And as if that weren't enough," Abbag complained, "the new plastic we developed for this particular model has catalyzed or some damned thing. Watch."

He drew back his foot and kicked the robot in the middle. The plastic bent like a sheet of tin. He kicked again. The plastic bent still further and the robot began to click and flash pathetically. A third kick shattered the case. The robot's innards exploded in spectacular fashion, scattering over the floor. "Pretty flimsy," Goodman said.

“Not flimsy enough. It’s supposed to fly apart on the first kick. Our customers won’t get any satisfaction out of stubbing their toes on its stomach all day. But tell me, how am I supposed to produce a plastic that’ll take normal wear and tear — we don’t want these things falling apart accidentally — and still go to pieces when a customer wants it to?”

“Wait a minute,” Goodman protested. “Let me get this straight. You purposely slow these robots down so they will irritate people enough to destroy them?”

Abbag raised both eyebrows. “Of course!”

“Why?”

“You *are* new here,” Abbag said. “Any child knows that. It’s fundamental.”

“I’d appreciate it if you’d explain.”

Abbag sighed. “Well, first of all, you are undoubtedly aware that *any* mechanical contrivance is a source of irritation. Human-kind has a deep and abiding distrust of machines. Psychologists call it the instinctive reaction of life to pseudo-life. Will you go along with me on that?”

Marvin Goodman remembered all the anxious literature he had read about machines revolting, cybernetic brains taking over the world, androids on the march, and the like. He thought of humorous little newspaper items about a man shooting his television set, smashing his toaster against the wall, “getting even” with his car. He remembered all the robot jokes, with their undertone of deep hostility.

“I guess I can go along on that,” said Goodman.

“Then allow me to restate the proposition,” Abbag said pedantically. “Any machine is a source of irritation. The better a machine operates, the stronger the irritation. So, by extension, a *perfectly operating* machine is a focal point for frustration, loss of self-esteem, undirected resentment —”

“Hold on there!” Goodman objected. “I won’t go *that* far!”

“— and schizophrenic fantasies,” Abbag continued inexorably. “But machines are necessary to an advanced economy. Therefore the best *human* solution is to have malfunctioning ones.”

“I don’t see that at all.”

“It’s obvious. On Terra, your gadgets work close to the optimum, producing inferiority feelings in their operators. But unfortunately you have a masochistic tribal tabu against destroying them. Result? Generalized anxiety in the presence of the sacrosanct and unhumanly efficient Machine, and a search for an aggression-object, usually a wife or friend. A very poor state of affairs. Oh, it’s efficient, I suppose, in terms of robot-hour production, but very inefficient in terms of long-range health and well-being.”

“I’m not sure —”

“The human is an anxious beast. Here on Tranai, we direct anxiety toward this particular point and let it serve as an outlet for a lot of other frustrations as well. A man’s had enough — blam! He kicks hell out of his robot. There’s an immediate and therapeutic discharge of feeling, a valuable — and valid — sense

of superiority over mere machinery, a lessening of general tension, a healthy flow of adrenalin into the bloodstream, and a boost to the industrial economy of Tranai, since he'll go right out and buy another robot. And what, after all, has he done? He hasn't beaten his wife, suicided, declared a war, invented a new weapon, or indulged in any of the other more common modes of aggression-resolution. He has simply smashed an inexpensive robot which he can replace immediately."

"I guess it'll take me a little time to understand," Goodman admitted.

"Of course it will. I'm sure you're going to be a valuable man here, Goodman. Think over what I've said and try to figure out some inexpensive way of disimproving this robot."

Goodman pondered the problem for the rest of the day, but he couldn't immediately adjust his thinking to the idea of producing an inferior machine. It seemed vaguely blasphemous. He knocked off work at five-thirty, dissatisfied with himself, but determined to do better — or worse, depending on viewpoint and conditioning.

After a quick and lonely supper, Goodman decided to call on Janna Vley. He didn't want to spend the evening alone with his thoughts and he was in desperate need of finding something pleasant, simple and uncomplicated in this complex utopia. Perhaps this Janna would be the answer.

The Vley home was only a dozen blocks away and he decided to walk.

The basic trouble was that he had had his own idea of what utopia would be like and it was difficult adjusting his thinking to the real thing. He had imagined a pastoral setting, a planetful of people in small, quaint villages, walking around in flowing robes and being very wise and gentle and understanding. Children who played in the golden sunlight, young folk danced in the village square...

Ridiculous! He had pictured a tableau rather than a scene, a series of stylized postures instead of the ceaseless movement of life. Humans could never live that way, even assuming they wanted to. If they could, they would no longer be humans.

He reached the Vley house and paused irresolutely outside. What was he getting himself into now? What alien — although indubitably utopian — customs would he run into?

He almost turned away. But the prospect of a long night alone in his hotel room was singularly unappealing. Gritting his teeth, he rang the bell.

A red-haired, middle-aged man of medium height opened the door. "Oh, you must be that Terran fellow. Janna's getting ready. Come in and meet the wife."

He escorted Goodman into a pleasantly furnished living room and pushed a red button on the wall. Goodman wasn't startled this time by the bluish derrsin haze. After all, the manner in which Tranaians treated their women was their own business.

A handsome woman of about twenty-eight appeared from the haze.

"My dear," Vley said, "this is the Terran, Mr. Goodman."

"So pleased to meet you," Mrs. Vley said. "Can I get you a drink?"

Goodman nodded. Vley pointed out a comfortable chair. In a moment, Mrs. Vley brought in a tray of frosted drinks and sat down.

"So you're from Terra," said Mr. Vley. "Nervous, hustling sort of place, isn't it? People always on the go?"

"Yes, I suppose it is," Goodman replied.

"Well, you'll like it here. We know how to live. It's all a matter of —"

There was a rustle of skirts on the stairs. Goodman got to his feet.

"Mr. Goodman, this is our daughter Janna," Mrs. Vley said.

Goodman noted at once that Janna's hair was the exact color of the supernova in Circe, her eyes were that deep, unbelievable blue of the autumn sky over Algo II, her lips were the tender pink of a Scarsclott-Turner jet stream, her nose —

But he had run out of astronomical comparisons, which weren't suitable anyhow. Janna was a slender and amazingly pretty blond girl and Goodman was suddenly very glad he had crossed the Galaxy and come to Tranai.

"Have a good time, children," Mrs. Vley said.

"Don't come in too late," Mr. Vley told Janna.

Exactly as parents said on Earth to their children.

There was nothing exotic about the date. They went to an inexpensive night club, danced, drank a little, talked a lot. Goodman was amazed at their immediate *rapport*. Janna agreed with everything he said. It was refreshing to find intelligence in so pretty a girl.

She was impressed, almost overwhelmed, by the dangers he had faced in crossing the Galaxy. She had always known that Terrans were adventurous (though nervous) types, but the risks Goodman had taken passed all understanding.

She shuddered when he spoke of the deadly Galactic Whirl and listened wide-eyed to his tales of running the notorious Swayback Gantlet, past the bloodthirsty Scarbies who were still cutting up along Star Ridge and infesting the hell holes of Prodengum. As Goodman put it, Terrans were iron men in steel ships, exploring the edges of the Great Nothing.

Janna didn't even speak until Goodman told of paying five hundred Terran dollars for a glass of beer at Moll Gann's Red Rooster Inn on Asteroid 342-AA.

"You must have been very thirsty," she said thoughtfully.

"Not particularly," Goodman said. "Money just didn't mean much out there."

"Oh. But wouldn't it have been better to have saved it? I mean someday you might have a wife and children —" She blushed.

Goodman said coolly, "Well, that part of my life is over. I'm going to marry and settle down right here on Tranai."

"How *nice!*" she cried.

It was a most successful evening.

Goodman returned Janna to her home at a respectable hour and arranged a date for the following evening. Made bold by his own tales, he kissed her on the cheek. She didn't really seem to mind, but Goodman didn't try to press his advantage.

"Till tomorrow then," she said, smiled at him, and closed the door.

He walked away feeling light-headed. Janna! Janna! Was it conceivable that he was in love already? Why not? Love at first sight was a proven psycho-physiological possibility and, as such, was perfectly respectable. Love in utopia! How wonderful it was that here, upon a perfect planet, he had found the perfect girl!

A man stepped out of the shadows and blocked his path. Goodman noted that he was wearing a black silk mask which covered everything except his eyes. He was carrying a large and powerful-looking blaster, and it was pointed steadily at Goodman's stomach.

"Okay, buddy," the man said, "gimme all your money."

"What?" Goodman gasped.

"You heard me. Your money. Hand it over."

"You can't do this," Goodman said, too startled to think coherently. "There's no crime on Tranai!"

"Who said there was?" the man asked quietly. "I'm merely asking you for your money. Are you going to hand it over peacefully or do I have to club it out of you?"

"You can't get away with this! Crime does not pay!"

"Don't be ridiculous," the man said. He hefted the heavy blaster.

"All right. Don't get excited." Goodman pulled out his billfold, which contained all he had in the world, and gave its contents to the masked man.

The man counted it, and he seemed impressed. "Better than I expected. Thanks, buddy. Take it easy now."

He hurried away down a dark street.

Goodman looked wildly around for a policeman, until he remembered that there were no police on Tranai. He saw a small cocktail lounge on the corner with a neon sign saying Kitty Kat Bar. He hurried into it.

Inside, there was only a bartender, somberly wiping glasses.

"I've been robbed!" Goodman shouted at him.

"So?" the bartender said, not even looking up.

"But I thought there wasn't any crime on Tranai."

"There isn't."

"But I was *robbed*."

"You must be new here," the bartender said, finally looking at him.

"I just came in from Terra."

"Terra? Nervous, hustling sort of —"

"Yes, yes," Goodman said. He was getting a little tired of that stereotype. "But how can there be no crime on Tranai if I was robbed?"

"That should be obvious. On Tranai, robbery is no crime."

"But robbery is *always* a crime!"

"What color mask was he wearing?"

Goodman thought for a moment. "Black. Black silk."

The bartender nodded. "Then he was a government tax collector."

"That's a ridiculous way to collect taxes," Goodman snapped.

The bartender set a Tranai Special in front of Goodman. "Try to see this in terms of the general welfare. The government has to have *some* money. By collecting it this way, we can avoid the necessity of an income tax, with all its complicated legal and legislative apparatus. And in terms of mental health, it's far better to extract money in a short, quick, painless operation than to permit the citizen to worry all year long about paying at a specific date."

Goodman downed his drink and the bartender set up another.

"But," Goodman said, "I thought this was a society based upon the concepts of free will and individual initiative."

"It is," the bartender told him. "Then surely the government, what little there is of it, has the same right to free will as any private citizen, hasn't it?"

Goodman couldn't quite figure that out, so he finished his second drink. "Could I have another of those? I'll pay you as soon as I can."

"Sure, sure," the bartender said good-naturedly, pouring another drink and one for himself.

Goodman said, "You asked me what color his mask was. Why?"

"Black is the government mask color. Private citizens wear white masks."

"You mean that private citizens commit robbery also?"

"Well, certainly! That's our method of wealth distribution. Money is equalized without government intervention, without even taxation, entirely in terms of individual initiative." The bartender nodded emphatically. "And it works perfectly, too. Robbery is a great leveler, you know."

"I suppose it is," Goodman admitted, finishing his third drink. "If I understand correctly, then, any citizen can pack a blaster, put on a mask, and go out and rob."

"Exactly," the bartender said. "Within limits, of course."

Goodman snorted. "If that's how it works, I can play that way. Could you loan me a mask? And a gun?"

The bartender reached under the bar. "Be sure to return them, though. Family heirlooms."

"I'll return them," Goodman promised. "And when I come back, I'll pay for my drinks."

He slipped the blaster into his belt, donned the mask and left the bar. If this was how things worked on Tranaï, he could adjust all right. Rob him, would they? He'd rob them right back and then some!

He found a suitably dark street corner and huddled in the shadows, waiting. Presently he heard footsteps and, peering around the corner, saw a portly, well-dressed Tranaian hurrying down the street.

Goodman stepped in front of him, snarling, "Hold it, buddy."

The Tranaian stopped and looked at Goodman's blaster. "Hmmm. Using a wide-aperture Drog 3, eh? Rather an old-fashioned weapon. How do you like it?"

"It's fine," Goodman said. "Hand over your —"

"Slow trigger action, though," the Tranaian mused. "Personally, I recommend a Mils-Sleeven needler. As it happens, I'm a sales representative for Sleeveven Arms. I could get you a very good price on a trade-in —"

"Hand over your money," Goodman barked.

The portly Tranaian smiled. "The basic defect of your Drog 3 is the fact that it won't fire at all unless you release the safety lock." He reached out and slapped the gun out of Goodman's hand. "You see? You couldn't have done a thing about it." He started to walk away.

Goodman scooped up the blaster, found the safety lock, released it and hurried after the Tranaian.

"Stick up your hands," Goodman ordered, beginning to feel slightly desperate.

"No, no, my good man," the Tranaian said, not even looking back. "Only one try to a customer. Mustn't break the unwritten law, you know."

Goodman stood and watched until the man turned a corner and was gone. He checked the Drog 3 carefully and made sure that all safeties were off. Then he resumed his post.

After an hour's wait, he heard footsteps again. He tightened his grip on the blaster. This time he was going to rob and nothing was going to stop him.

"Okay, buddy," he said, "hands up!"

The victim this time was a short, stocky Tranaian, dressed in old workman's clothes. He gaped at the gun in Goodman's hand.

"Don't shoot, mister," the Tranaian pleaded.

That was more like it! Goodman felt a glow of deep satisfaction.

"Just don't move," he warned. "I've got all safeties off."

"I can see that," the stocky man said cringing. "Be careful with that cannon, mister. I ain't moving a hair."

"You'd better not. Hand over your money."

"Money?"

"Yes; your money, and be quick about it."

"I don't have any money," the man whined. "Mister, I'm a poor man. I'm poverty-stricken."

"There is no poverty on Tranai," Goodman said sententiously.

"I know. But you can get so close to it, you wouldn't know the difference. Give me a break, mister."

"Haven't you any initiative?" Goodman asked. "If you're poor, why don't you go out and rob like everybody else?"

"I just haven't had a chance. First the kid got the whooping cough and I was up every night with her. Then the derrsin broke down, so I had the wife yakking at me all day long. I say there oughta be a spare derrsin in every house! So she decided to clean the place while the derrsin generator was being fixed and she put my blaster somewhere and she can't remember where. So I was all set to borrow a friend's blaster when —"

"That's enough," Goodman said. "This is a robbery and I'm going to rob you of *something*. Hand over your wallet."

The man snuffled miserably and gave Goodman a worn billfold. Inside it, Goodman found one deeglo, the equivalent of a Terran dollar.

"It's all I got," the man snuffled miserably, "but you're welcome to it. I know how it is, standing on a drafty street corner all night —"

"Keep it," Goodman said, handing the billfold back to the man and walking off.

"Gee, thanks, mister!"

Goodman didn't answer. Disconsolately, he returned to the Kitty Kat Bar and gave back the bartender's blaster and mask. When he explained what had happened, the bartender burst into rude laughter.

"Didn't have any money! Man, that's the oldest trick in the books. Everybody carries a fake wallet for robberies — sometimes two or even three. Did you search him?"

"No," Goodman confessed.

"Brother, are you a greenhorn!"

"I guess I am. Look, I really will pay you for those drinks as soon as I can make some money."

"Sure, sure," the bartender said. "You better go home and get some sleep. You had a busy night."

Goodman agreed. Wearily he returned to his hotel room and was asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow.

He reported at the Abbag Home Robot Works and manfully grappled with the problem of disimproving automata. Even in unhuman work such as this, Terran ingenuity began to tell.

Goodman began to develop a new plastic for the robot's case. It was a silicone, a relative of the "silly putty" that had appeared on Earth a long while back. It had the desired properties of toughness, resiliency and long wear; it would stand a lot of abuse, too. But the case would shatter immediately and with spectacular effect upon receiving a kick delivered with an impact of thirty pounds or more.

His employer praised him for this development, gave him a bonus (which he sorely needed), and told him to keep working on the idea and, if possible, to bring the needed impact down to twenty-three pounds. This, the research department told them, was the average frustration kick.

He was kept so busy that he had practically no time to explore further the mores and folkways of Tranai. He did manage to see the Citizen's Booth. This uniquely Tranaian institution was housed in a small building on a quiet back street.

Upon entering, he was confronted by a large board, upon which was listed the names of the present officeholders of Tranai, and their titles. Beside each name was a button. The attendant told Goodman that, by pressing a button, a citizen expressed his disapproval of that official's acts. The pressed button was automatically registered in History Hall and was a permanent mark against the officeholder.

No minors were allowed to press the buttons, of course.

Goodman considered this somewhat ineffectual; but perhaps, he told himself, officials on Tranai were differently motivated from those on Earth.

He saw Janna almost every evening and together they explored the many cultural aspects of Tranai: the cocktail lounges and movies, the concert halls, the art exhibitions, the science museum, the fairs and festivals. Goodman carried a blaster and, after several unsuccessful attempts, robbed a merchant of nearly five hundred deeglo.

Janna was ecstatic over the achievement, as any sensible Tranaian girl would be, and they celebrated at the Kitty Kat Bar. Janna's parents agreed that Goodman seemed to be a good provider.

The following night, the five hundred deeglo — plus some of Goodman's bonus money — was robbed back, by a man of approximately the size and build of the bartender at the Kitty Kat, carrying an ancient Drog 3 blaster.

Goodman consoled himself with the thought that the money was circulating freely, as the system had intended.

Then he had another triumph. One day at the Abbag Home Robot Works, he discovered a completely new process for making a robot's case. It was a special plastic, impervious even to serious bumps and falls. The robot owner had to wear special shoes, with a catalytic agent imbedded in the heels. When he kicked the robot, the catalyst came in contact with the plastic case, with immediate and gratifying effect.

Abbag was a little uncertain at first; it seemed too gimmicky. But the thing caught on like wildfire and the Home Robot Works went into the shoe business as a subsidiary, I selling at least one pair with every robot.

This horizontal industrial development was very gratifying to the plant's stockholders and was really more important than the original catalyst-plastic discovery. Goodman received a substantial raise in pay and a generous bonus.

On the crest of his triumphant wave, he proposed to Janna and was instantly accepted. Her parents favored the match; all that remained was to obtain official sanction from the government, since Goodman was still technically an alien.

Accordingly, he took a day off from work and walked down to the Idrig Building to see Melith. It was a glorious spring day of the sort that Tranai has for ten months out of the year, and Goodman walked with a light and springy step. He was in love, a success in business, and soon to become a citizen of utopia.

Of course, utopia could use some changes, for even Tranai wasn't quite perfect. Possibly he should accept the Supreme Presidency, in order to make the needed reforms. But there was no rush...

"Hey, mister," a voice said, "can you spare a deeglo?"

Goodman looked down and saw, squatting on the pavement, an unwashed old man, dressed in rags, holding out a tin cup.

"What?" Goodman asked.

"Can you spare a deeglo, brother?" the man repeated in a wheedling voice. "Help a poor man buy a cup of oglo? Haven't eaten in two days, mister."

"This is disgraceful! Why don't you get a blaster and go out and rob someone?"

"I'm too old," the man whimpered. "My victims just laugh at me."

"Are you sure you aren't just lazy?" Goodman asked sternly.

"I'm not, sir!" the beggar said. "Just look how my hands shake!"

He held out both dirty paws; they trembled.

Goodman took out his billfold and gave the old man a deeglo. "I thought there was no poverty on Tranai. I understood that the government took care of the aged."

"The government does," said the old man. "Look." He held out his cup. Engraved on its side was: *Government Authorized Beggar, Number DB-43241-3.*

"You mean the government makes you do this?"

"The government *lets* me do it," the old man told him. "Begging is a government job and is reserved for the aged and infirm."

"Why, that's disgraceful!"

"You must be a stranger here."

"I'm a Terran."

"Aha! Nervous, hustling sort of people, aren't you?"

"Our government does not let people beg," Goodman said.

"No? What do the old people do? Live off their children? Or sit in some home for the aged and wait for death by boredom? Not here, young man. On Tranai, every old man is assured of a government job, and one for which he needs no particular skill, although skill helps. Some apply for indoor work, within the churches and theatres. Others like the excitement of fairs and carnivals. Personally, I like it outdoors. My job keeps me out in the sunlight and fresh air, gives me mild exercise, and helps me meet many strange and interesting people, such as yourself."

"But *begging*!"

"What other work would I be suited for?"

"I don't know. But — but look at you! Dirty, unwashed, in filthy clothes —"

"These are my working clothes," the government beggar said. "You should see me on Sunday."

"You have other clothes?"

"I certainly do, and a pleasant little apartment, and a season box at the opera, and two Home Robots, and probably more money in the bank than you've seen in your life. It's been pleasant talking to you, young man, and thanks for your contribution. But now I must return to work and suggest you do likewise."

Goodman walked away, glancing over his shoulder at the government beggar. He observed that the old man seemed to be doing a thriving business.

But *begging*!

Really, that sort of thing should be stopped. If he ever assumed the Presidency — and quite obviously he should — he would look into the whole matter more carefully.

It seemed to him that there had to be a more dignified answer.

At the Idrig Building, Goodman told Melith about his marriage plans.

The immigrations minister was enthusiastic.

“Wonderful, absolutely wonderful,” he said. “I’ve known the Vley family for a long time. They’re splendid people. And Janna is a girl any man would be proud of.”

“Aren’t there some formalities I should go through?” Goodman asked. “I mean being an alien and all —”

“None whatsoever. I’ve decided to dispense with the formalities. You can become a citizen of Tranai, if you wish, by merely stating your intention verbally. Or you can retain Terran citizenship, with no hard feelings. Or you can do both — be a citizen of Terra *and* Tranai. If Terra doesn’t mind, we certainly don’t.”

“I think I’d like to become a citizen of Tranai,” Goodman said.

“It’s entirely up to you. But if you’re thinking about the Presidency, you can retain Terran status and still hold office. We aren’t at all stuffy about that sort of thing. One of our most successful Supreme Presidents was a lizard-evolved chap from Aquarella XI.”

“What an enlightened attitude!”

“Sure, give everybody a chance, that’s our motto. Now as to your marriage — any government employee can perform the ceremonies. Supreme President Borg would be happy to do it, this afternoon if you like.” Melith winked. “The old codger likes to kiss the bride. But I think he’s genuinely fond of you.”

“This afternoon?” Goodman said. “Yes, I *would* like to be married this afternoon, if it’s all right with Janna.”

“It probably will be,” Melith assured him. “Next, where are you going to live after the honeymoon? A hotel room is hardly suitable.” He thought for a moment. “Tell you what — I’ve got a little house on the edge of town. Why don’t you move in there, until you find something better? Or stay permanently, if you like it.”

“Really,” Goodman protested, “you’re too generous —”

“Think nothing of it. Have you ever thought of becoming the next immigrations minister? You might like the work. No red tape, short hours, good pay — No? Got your eye on the Supreme Presidency, eh? Can’t blame you, I suppose.”

Melith dug in his pockets and found two keys. “This is for the front door and this is for the back. The address is stamped right on them. The place is fully equipped, including a brand-new derrsin field generator.”

“A derrsin?”

"Certainly. No home on Tranai is complete without a derrsins stasis field generator."

Clearing his throat, Goodman said carefully, "I've been meaning to ask you — exactly what is the stasis field used for?"

"Why, to keep one's wife in," Melith answered. "I thought you knew."

"I did," said Goodman. "But *why*?"

"Why?" Melith frowned. Apparently the question had never entered his head. "Why does one do anything? It's the custom, that's all. And very logical, too. You wouldn't want a woman chattering around you all the time, night and day."

Goodman blushed, because ever since he had met Janna, he had been thinking how pleasant it would be to have her around him all the time, night and day.

"It hardly seems fair to the women," Goodman pointed out.

Melith laughed. "My dear friend, are you preaching the doctrine of equality of the sexes? Really, it's a completely disproved theory. Men and women just aren't the same. They're different, no matter what you've been told on Terra. What's good for men isn't necessarily — or even usually — good for women."

"Therefore you treat them as inferiors," Goodman said, his reformer's blood beginning to boil.

"Not at all. We treat them in a *different* manner from men, but not in an *inferior* manner. Anyhow, they don't object."

"That's because they haven't been allowed to know any better. Is there any law that requires me to keep my wife in the derrsins field?"

"Of course not. The custom simply suggests that you keep her *out* of stasis for a certain minimum amount of time every week. No fair incarcerating the little woman, you know."

"Of course not," Goodman said sarcastically. "Must let her live some of the time."

"Exactly," Melith said, seeing no sarcasm in what Goodman said. "You'll catch on."

Goodman stood up. "Is that all?"

"I guess that's about it. Good luck and all that."

"Thank you," Goodman said stiffly, turned sharply and left.

That afternoon, Supreme President Borg performed the simple Tranaian marriage rites at the National Mansion and afterward kissed the bride with zeal. It was a beautiful ceremony and was marred by only one thing.

Hanging on Borg's wall was a rifle, complete with telescopic sight and silencer. It was a twin to Melith's and just as inexplicable.

Borg took Goodman to one side and asked, "Have you given any further thought to the Supreme Presidency?"

"I'm still considering it," Goodman said. "I don't really want to hold public office —"

"No one does."

"— but there are certain reforms that Tranai needs badly. I think it may be my duty to bring them to the attention of the people."

"That's the spirit," Borg said approvingly. "We haven't had a really enterprising Supreme President for some time. Why don't you take office right now? Then you could have your honeymoon in the National Mansion with complete privacy."

Goodman was tempted. But he didn't want to be bothered by affairs of state on his honeymoon, which was all arranged anyhow. Since Tranai had lasted so long in its present near-utopian condition, it would undoubtedly keep for a few weeks more.

"I'll consider it when I come back," Goodman said.

Borg shrugged. "Well, I guess I can bear the burden a while longer. Oh, here." He handed Goodman a sealed envelope.

"What's this?"

"Just the standard advice," Borg said. "Hurry, your bride's waiting for you!"

"Come on, Marvin!" Janna called. "We don't want to be late for the spaceship!"

Goodman hurried after her, into the spaceport limousine. "Good luck!" her parents cried. "Good luck!" Borg shouted.

"Good luck!" added Melith and his wife, and all the guests. On the way to the spaceport, Goodman opened the envelope and read the printed sheet within:

ADVICE TO A NEW HUSBAND

You have just been married and you expect, quite naturally, a lifetime of connubial bliss. This is perfectly proper, for a happy marriage is the foundation of good government. But you must do more than merely wish for it. Good marriage is not yours by divine right. A good marriage must be worked for!

Remember that your wife is a human being. She should be allowed a certain measure of freedom as her inalienable right. We suggest you take her out of stasis at least once a week. Too long in stasis is bad for her orientation. Too much stasis is bad for her complexion and this will be your loss as well as hers.

At intervals, such as vacations and holidays, it's customary to let your wife remain out of stasis for an entire day at a time, or even two or three days. It will do no harm and the novelty will do wonders for her state of mind.

Keep in mind these few common-sense rules and you can be assured of a happy marriage.

— By the Government Marriage Council

Goodman slowly tore the card into little bits, and let them drop to the floor of the limousine. His reforming spirit was now thoroughly aroused. He had known that Tranai was too good to be true. Someone had to pay for perfection. In this case, it was the women.

He had found the first serious flaw in paradise.

“What was that, dear?” Janna asked, looking at the bits of paper.

“That was some very foolish advice,” Goodman said. “Dear, have you ever thought — really thought — about the marriage customs of this planet of yours?”

“I don’t think I have. Aren’t they all right?”

“They are wrong, completely wrong. They treat women like toys, like little dolls that one puts away when one is finished playing. Can’t you see that?”

“I never thought about it.”

“Well, you can think about it now,” Goodman told her, “because some changes are going to be made and they’re going to start in our home.”

“Whatever you think best, darling,” Janna said dutifully. She squeezed his arm. He kissed her.

And then the limousine reached the spaceport and they got aboard the ship.

Their honeymoon on Doé was like a brief sojourn in a flawless paradise. The wonders of Tranai’s little moon had been built for lovers, and for lovers only. No businessman came to Doé for a quick rest; no predatory bachelor prowled the paths. The tired, the disillusioned, the lewdly hopeful all had to find other hunting grounds. The single rule on Doé, strictly enforced, was two by two, joyous and in love, and in no other state admitted.

This was one Tranaian custom that Goodman had no trouble appreciating.

On the little moon, there were meadows of tall grass and deep, green forests for walking and cool black lakes in the forests and jagged, spectacular mountains that begged to be climbed. Lovers were continually getting lost in the forests, to their great satisfaction; but not too lost, for one could circle the whole moon in a day. Thanks to the gentle gravity, no one could drown in the black lakes, and a fall from a mountaintop was frightening, but hardly dangerous.

There were, at strategic locations, little hotels with dimly lit cocktail lounges run by friendly, white-haired bartenders. There were gloomy caves which ran deep (but never too deep) into phosphorescent caverns glittering with ice, past sluggish underground rivers in which swam great luminous fish with fiery eyes.

The Government Marriage Council had considered these simple attractions sufficient and hadn’t bothered putting in a golf course, swimming pool, horse track or shuffleboard court. It was felt that once a couple desired these things, the honeymoon was over.

Goodman and his bride spent an enchanted week on Doé and at last returned to Tranai.

After carrying his bride across the threshold of their new home, Goodman's first act was to unplug the derrsins generator.

"My dear," he said, "up to now, I have followed all the customs of Tranai, even when they seemed ridiculous to me. But this is one thing I will not sanction. On Terra, I was the founder of the Committee for Equal Job Opportunities for Women. On Terra, we treat our women as equals, as companions, as partners in the adventure of life."

"What a strange concept," Janna said, a frown clouding her pretty face.

"Think about it," Goodman urged. "Our life will be far more satisfying in this companionable manner than if I shut you up in the purdah of the derrsins field. Don't you agree?"

"You know far more than I, dear. You've traveled all over the Galaxy, and I've never been out of Port Tranai. If you say it's the best way, then it must be."

Past a doubt, Goodman thought, she was the most perfect of women.

He returned to his work at the Abbag Home Robot Works and was soon deep in another disimprovement project. This time, he conceived the bright idea of making the robot's joints squeak and grind. The noise would increase the robot's irritation value, thereby making its destruction more pleasing and psychologically more valuable. Mr. Abbag was overjoyed with the idea, gave him another pay raise, and asked him to have the disimprovement ready for early production.

Goodman's first plan was simply to remove some of the lubrication ducts. But he found that friction would then wear out vital parts too soon. That naturally could not be sanctioned.

He began to draw up plans for a built-in squeak-and-grind unit. It had to be absolutely lifelike and yet cause no real wear. It had to be inexpensive and it had to be small, because the robot's interior was already packed with disimprovements.

But Goodman found that small squeak-producing units sounded artificial. Larger units were too costly to manufacture or couldn't be fitted inside the robot's case. He began working several evenings a week, lost weight, and his temper grew edgy.

Janna became a good, dependable wife. His meals were always ready on time and she invariably had a cheerful word for him in the evenings and a sympathetic ear for his difficulties. During the day, she supervised the cleaning of the house by the Home Robots. This took less than an hour and afterward she read books, baked pies, knitted, and destroyed robots.

Goodman was a little alarmed at this, because Janna destroyed them at the rate of three or four a week. Still, everyone had to have a hobby. He could afford to indulge her, since he got the machines at cost.

Goodman had reached a complete impasse when another designer, a man named Dath Hergo, came up with a novel control. This was based upon a counter-gyroscopic principle and allowed a robot to enter a room at a ten-degree list. (Ten degrees, the research department said, was the most irritating angle of

list a robot could assume.) Moreover, by employing a random-selection principle, the robot would *lurch*, drunkenly, annoyingly, at irregular intervals — never dropping anything, but always on the verge of it.

This development was, quite naturally, hailed as a great advance in disimprovement engineering. And Goodman found that he could center his built-in squeak-and-grind unit right in the lurch control. His name was mentioned in the engineering journals next to that of Dath Hergo.

The new line of Abbag Home Robots was a sensation.

At this time, Goodman decided to take a leave of absence from his job and assume the Supreme Presidency of Tranai. He felt he owed it to the people. If Terran ingenuity and know-how could bring out improvements in disimprovements, they would do even better improving improvements. Tranai was a near-utopia. With his hand on the reins, they could go the rest of the way to perfection.

He went down to Melith's office to talk it over.

"I suppose there's always room for change," Melith said thoughtfully. The immigration chief was seated by the window, idly watching people pass by. "Of course, our present system has been working for quite some time and working very well. I don't know what you'd improve. There's no crime, for example —"

"Because you've legalized it," Goodman declared. "You've simply evaded the issue."

"We don't see it that way. There's no poverty —"

"Because everybody steals. And there's no trouble with old people because the government turns them into beggars. Really, there's plenty of room for change and improvement."

"Well, perhaps," Melith said. "But I think —" he stopped suddenly, rushed over to the wall and pulled down the rifle. "There he is!"

Goodman looked out the window. A man, apparently no different from anyone else, was walking past. He heard a muffled click and saw the man stagger, then drop to the pavement.

Melith had shot him with the silenced rifle.

"What did you do that for?" Goodman gasped.

"Potential murderer," Melith said.

"What?"

"Of course. We don't have any out-and-out crime here, but, being human, we have to deal with the potentiality."

"What did he do to make him a potential murderer?"

"Killed five people," Melith stated.

"But — damn it, man, this isn't fair! You didn't arrest him, give him a trial, the benefit of counsel —"

"How could I?" Melith asked, slightly annoyed. "We don't have any police to arrest people with and we don't have any legal system. Good Lord, you didn't expect me to just let him go on, did you? Our definition of a murderer is a killer of ten and he was well on his way. I couldn't just sit idly by. It's my duty to protect the people. I can assure you, I made careful inquiries."

"It isn't just!" Goodman shouted.

"Who ever said it was?" Melith shouted back. "What has *justice* got to do with utopia?"

"Everything!" Goodman had calmed himself with an effort. "Justice is the basis of human dignity, human desire —"

"Now you're just using words," Melith said, with his usual good-natured smile. "Try to be realistic. We have created a utopia for *human beings*, not for saints who don't need one.

We must accept the deficiencies of the human character, not pretend they don't exist. To our way of thinking, a police apparatus and a legal-judicial system all tend to create an atmosphere for crime and an acceptance of crime. It's better, believe me, not to accept the possibility of crime at all. The vast majority of the people will go along with you."

"But when crime does turn up as it inevitably does —"

"Only the potentiality turns up," Melith insisted stubbornly. "And even that is much rarer than you would think. When it shows up, we deal with it, quickly and simply."

"Suppose you get the wrong man?"

"We can't get the wrong man. Not a chance of it."

"Why not?"

"Because," Melith said, "anyone disposed of by a government official is, by definition and by unwritten law, a potential criminal."

Marvin Goodman was silent for a while. Then he said, "I see that the government has more power than I thought at first."

"It does," Melith said. "But not as much as you now imagine."

Goodman smiled ironically. "And is the Supreme Presidency still mine for the asking?"

"Of course. And with no strings attached. Do you want it?"

Goodman thought deeply for a moment. Did he really want it? Well, someone had to rule. Someone had to protect the people. Someone had to make a few reforms in this utopian madhouse.

"Yes, I want it," Goodman said.

The door burst open and Supreme President Borg rushed in. "Wonderful! Perfectly wonderful! You can move into the National Mansion today. I've been packed for a week, waiting for you to make up your mind."

“There must be certain formalities to go through —”

“No formalities,” Borg said, his face shining with perspiration. “None whatsoever. All we do is hand over the Presidential Seal; then I’ll go down and take my name off the rolls and put yours on.”

Goodman looked at Melith. The immigration minister’s round face was expressionless.

“All right,” Goodman said.

Borg reached for the Presidential Seal, started to remove it from his neck —

It exploded suddenly and violently.

Goodman found himself staring in horror at Borg’s red, ruined head. The Supreme President tottered for a moment, then slid to the floor.

Melith took off his jacket and threw it over Borg’s head. Goodman backed to a chair and fell into it. His mouth opened, but no words came out.

“It’s really a pity,” Melith said. “He was so near the end of his term. I warned him against licensing that new spaceport. The citizens won’t approve, I told him. But he was sure they would like to have two spaceports. Well, he was wrong.”

“Do you mean — I mean — how — what —”

“All government officials,” Melith explained, “wear the badge of office, which contains a traditional amount of tessium, an explosive you may have heard of. The charge is radio-controlled from the Citizens Booth. Any citizen has access to the Booth, for the purpose of expressing his disapproval of the government.” Melith sighed. “This will go down as a permanent black mark against poor Borg’s record.”

“**Y**ou let the people express their disapproval by blowing up officials?” Goodman croaked, appalled.

“It’s the only way that means anything,” said Melith “Check and balance. Just as the people are in our hands, so we are in the people’s hands.”.

“And *that’s* why he wanted me to take over his term. Why didn’t anyone tell me?”

“You didn’t ask,” Melith said, with the suspicion of a smile, “Don’t look so horrified. Assassination is always possible, you know, on any planet, under any government. We try to make it a constructive thing. Under this system, the people never lose touch with the government, and the government never tries to assume dictatorial powers. And, since everyone knows he can turn to the Citizens Booth, you’d be surprised how sparingly it’s used. Of course, there are always hotheads —”

Goodman got to his feet and started to the door, not looking at Borg’s body.

“Don’t you still want the Presidency?” asked Melith.

“No!

“That’s so like you Terrans,” Melith remarked sadly. “You want responsibility only if it doesn’t incur risk. That’s the wrong attitude for running a government.”

"You may be right," Goodman said. "I'm just glad I found out in time."

He hurried home.

His mind was in a complete turmoil when he entered his house. Was Tranai a utopia or a planetwide insane asylum? Was there much difference? For the first time in his life, Goodman was wondering if utopia was worth having. Wasn't it better to strive for perfection than to possess it? To have ideals rather than to live by them? If justice was a fallacy, wasn't the fallacy better than the truth?

Or was it? Goodman was a sadly confused young man when he shuffled into his house and found his wife in the arms of another man.

The scene had a terrible slow-motion clarity in his eyes. It seemed to take Janna forever to rise to her feet, straighten her disarranged clothing and stare at him open-mouthed. The man — a tall, good-looking fellow whom Goodman had never before seen — appeared too startled to speak. He made small, aimless gestures, brushing the lapel of his jacket, pulling down, his cuffs.

Then, tentatively, the man smiled.

"Well!" Goodman said. It was feeble enough, under the circumstances, but it had its effect. Janna started to cry.

"Terribly sorry," the man murmured. "Didn't expect you home for hours. This must come as a shock to you. I'm terribly sorry."

The one thing Goodman hadn't expected or wanted was sympathy from his wife's lover. He ignored the man and stared at the weeping Janna.

"Well, what did you expect?" Janna screamed at him suddenly. "I had to! You didn't love me!"

"Didn't love you! How can you say that?"

"Because of the way you treated me."

"I loved you very much, Janna," he said softly.

"You didn't!" she shrilled, throwing back her head. "Just look at the way you treated me. You kept me around all day, every day, doing *housework, cooking, sitting*. Marvin, I could feel myself aging. Day after day, the same weary, stupid routine. And most of the time, when you came home, you were too tired to even notice me. All you could talk about was your stupid robots! I was being wasted, Marvin, *wasted!*"

It suddenly occurred to Goodman that his wife was unhinged. Very gently he said, "But, Janna, that's how life is. A husband and wife settle into a companionable situation. They age together side by side. It can't all be high spots —"

"But of course it can! Try to understand, Marvin. It can, on Tranai — for a woman!"

"It's impossible," Goodman said.

"On Tranai, a woman expects a life of enjoyment and pleasure. It's her right, just as men have their rights. She expects to come out of stasis and find a little party prepared, or a walk in the moonlight, or a swim, or a movie." She began to cry again. "But *you* were so smart. *You* had to change it. I should have known better than to trust a Terran."

The other man sighed and lighted a cigarette.

"I know you can't help being an alien, Marvin," Janna said. "But I do want you to understand. Love isn't everything. A woman must be practical, too. The way things were going, I would have been an old woman while all my friends were still young."

"**S**till young?" Goodman repeated blankly.

"Of course," the man said. "A woman doesn't age in the derrsin field."

"But the whole thing is ghastly," said Goodman. "My wife would still be a young woman when I was old."

"That's just when you'd appreciate a young woman," Janna said.

"But how about you?" Goodman asked. "Would you appreciate an old man?"

"He still doesn't understand," the man said.

"Marvin, *try*. Isn't it clear yet? Throughout your life, you would have a young and beautiful woman whose only desire would be to please you. And when you died — don't look shocked, dear; everybody dies — when you died, I would still be young, and by law I'd inherit all your money."

"I'm beginning to see," Goodman said. "I suppose that's another accepted phase of Tranaian life — the wealthy young widow who can pursue her own pleasures."

"Naturally. In this way, everything is for the best for everybody. The man has a young wife whom he sees only when he wishes. He has his complete freedom and a nice home as well. The woman is relieved of all the dullness of ordinary living and, while she can still enjoy it, is well provided for."

"You should have told me," Goodman complained.

"I thought you knew," Janna said, "since you thought you had a better way. But I can see that you would never have understood, because you're so naive — though I must admit it's one of your charms." She smiled wistfully. "Besides, if I told you, I would never have met Rondo."

The man bowed slightly. "I was leaving samples of Greah's Confections. You can imagine my surprise when I found this lovely young woman *out of stasis*. I mean it was like a storybook tale come true. One never expects old legends to happen, so you must admit that there's a certain appeal when they do."

"Do you love him?" Goodman asked heavily.

"Yes," said Janna. "Rondo cares — for me. He's going to keep me in stasis long enough to make up for the time I've lost. It's a sacrifice on his part, but Rondo has a generous nature."

"If that's how it is," Goodman said glumly, "I certainly won't stand in your way. I am a civilized being, after all. You may have a divorce."

He folded his arms across his chest, feeling quite noble. But he was dimly aware that his decision stemmed not so much from nobility as from a sudden, violent distaste for all things Tranaian.

"We have no divorce on Tranai," Rondo said.

"No?" Goodman felt a cold chill run down his spine.

A blaster appeared in Rondo's hand. "It would be too unsettling, you know, if people were always swapping around. There's only one way to change a marital status."

"But this is revolting!" Goodman blurted, backing away. "It's against all decency!"

"Not if the wife desires it. And that, by the by, is another excellent reason for keeping one's spouse in stasis. Have I your permission, my dear?"

"Forgive me, Marvin," Janna said. She closed her eyes. "Yes!"

Rondo leveled the blaster. Without a moment's hesitation, Goodman dived head-first out the nearest window. Rondo's shot fanned right over him.

"See here!" Rondo called. "Show some spirit, man. Stand up to it!"

Goodman had landed heavily on his shoulder. He was up at once, sprinting, and Rondo's second shot scorched his arm. Then he ducked behind a house and was momentarily safe. He didn't stop to think about it. Running for all he was worth, he headed for the spaceport.

Fortunately, a ship was preparing for blastoff and took him to g'Moree. From there he wired to Tranai for his funds and bought passage to Higastomeritreia, where the authorities accused him of being a Ding spy. The charge couldn't stick, since the Dingans were an amphibious race, and Goodman almost drowned proving to everyone's satisfaction that he could breathe only air.

A drone transport took him to the double planet Mvanti, past Seves, Olgo and Mi. He hired a bush pilot to take him to Bellismoranti, where the influence of Terra began. From there, a local spaceline transported him past the Galactic Whirl and, after stopping at Oyster, Lekung, Pankang, Inchang and Ma-chang, arrived at Tung-Bradar IV.

His money was now gone, but he was practically next door to Terra, as astronomical distances go. He was able to work his passage to Oumé, and from Oumé to Legis II. There the Interstellar Travelers Aid Society arranged a berth for him and at last he arrived back on Earth.

Goodman has settled down in Seakirk, New Jersey, where a man is perfectly safe as long as he pays his taxes. He holds the post of Chief Robotic Technician for the Seakirk Construction Corporation and has married a small, dark, quiet girl, who obviously adores him, although he rarely lets her out of the house.

He and old Captain Savage go frequently to Eddie's Moonlight Bar, drink Tranai Specials, and talk of Tranai the Blessed, where The Way has been found and Man is no longer bound to The Wheel. On such occasions, Goodman complains of a touch of space malaria — because of it, he can never go back into space, can never return to Tranai.

There is always an admiring audience on these nights.

Goodman has recently organized, with Captain Savage's help, the Seakirk League to Take the Vote from Women. They are its only members, but as Goodman puts it, when did that ever stop a crusader?