

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?

By Phillip K. Dick

TO MAREN AUGUSTA BERGRUD AUGUST 10, 1923 — JUNE 14, 1967

AND STILL I DREAM HE TREADS THE LAWN,
WALKING GHOSTLY IN THE DEW,

PIERCED BY MY GLAD SINGING THROUGH.

Yeats

AUCKLAND

A TURTLE WHICH EXPLORER CAPTAIN COOK GAVE TO THE KING OF TONGA IN 1777 DIED YESTERDAY. IT WAS NEARLY 200 YEARS OLD.

THE ANIMAL, CALLED TU'IMALILA, DIED AT THE ROYAL PALACE GROUND IN THE TONGAN CAPITAL OF NUKU, ALOFA.

THE PEOPLE OF TONGA REGARDED THE ANIMAL AS A CHIEF AND SPECIAL KEEPERS WERE APPOINTED TO LOOK AFTER IT. IT WAS BLINDED IN A BUSH FIRE A FEW YEARS AGO.

TONGA RADIO SAID TU'IMALILA'S CARCASS WOULD BE SENT TO THE AUCKLAND MUSEUM IN NEW ZEALAND.

Reuters, 1966

ONE

A merry little surge of electricity piped by automatic alarm from the mood organ beside his bed awakened Rick Deckard. Surprised — it always surprised him to find himself awake without prior notice — he rose from the bed, stood up in his multicolored pajamas, and stretched. Now, in her bed, his wife Iran opened her gray, unmerry eyes, blinked, then groaned and shut her eyes again.

"You set your Penfield too weak he said to her. "I'll reset it and you'll be awake and — "

"Keep your hand off my settings." Her voice held bitter sharpness. "I don't want to be awake."

He seated himself beside her, bent over her, and explained softly. "If you set the surge up high enough, you'll be glad you're awake; that's the whole point. At setting C it overcomes the threshold barring consciousness, as it does for me." Friendlily, because he felt well-disposed toward the world his setting had been at D — he patted her bare, pate shoulder.

"Get your crude cop's hand away," Iran said.

"I'm not a cop — " He felt irritable, now, although he hadn't dialed for it.

"You're worse," his wife said, her eyes still shut. "You're a murderer hired by the cops."

"I've never killed a human being in my life." His irritability had risen, now; had become outright hostility.

Iran said, "Just those poor andys."

"I notice you've never had any hesitation as to spending the bounty money I bring home on whatever momentarily attracts your attention." He rose, strode to the console of his mood organ. "Instead of saving," he said, "so we could buy a real sheep, to replace that fake electric one upstairs. A mere electric animal, and me earning all that I've worked my way up to through the years." At his console he hesitated between dialing for a thalamic suppressant (which would abolish his mood of rage) or a thalamic stimulant (which would make him irked enough to win the argument).

"If you dial," Iran said, eyes open and watching, "for greater venom, then I'll dial the same. I'll dial the maximum and you'll see a fight that makes every argument we've had up to now seem like nothing. Dial and see; just try me." She rose swiftly, loped to the console of her own mood organ, stood glaring at him, waiting.

He sighed, defeated by her threat. "I'll dial what's on my schedule for today." Examining the schedule for January 3, 1992, he saw that a businesslike professional attitude was called for. "If I dial by schedule," he said warily, "will you agree to also?" He waited, canny enough not to commit himself until his wife had agreed to follow suit.

"My schedule for today lists a six-hour self-accusatory depression," Iran said.

"What? Why did you schedule that?" It defeated the whole purpose of the mood organ. "I didn't even know you could set it for that," he said gloomily.

"I was sitting here one afternoon," Iran said, "and naturally I had tamed on Buster Friendly and His Friendly Friends and he was talking about a big news item he's about to break and then that awful commercial came on, the one I hate; you know, for Mountibank Lead Codpieces. And so for a minute I shut off the sound. And I heard the building, this building; I heard the —" She gestured.

"Empty apartments," Rick said. Sometimes he heard them at night when he was supposed to be asleep. And yet, for this day and age a one-half occupied conapt building rated high in the scheme of population density; out in what had been before the war the suburbs one could find buildings entirely empty . . . or so he had heard. He had let the information remain secondhand; like most people he did not care to experience it directly.

"At that moment," Iran said, "when I had the TV sound off, I was in a 382 mood; I had just dialed it. So although I heard the emptiness intellectually, I didn't feel it. My first reaction consisted of being grateful that we could afford a Penfield mood organ. But then I read how unhealthy it was, sensing the absence of life, not just in this building but everywhere, and not reacting — do you see? I guess you don't. But that used to be considered a sign of mental illness; they called it 'absence of appropriate affect.' So I left the TV sound off and I sat down at my mood organ and I experimented. And I finally found a setting for despair." Her dark, pert face showed satisfaction, as if she had achieved something of worth. "So I put it on my schedule for twice a month; I think that's a reasonable amount of time to feel hopeless about everything, about staying here on Earth after everybody who's small has emigrated, don't you think?"

"But a mood like that," Rick said, "you're apt to stay in it, not dial your way out. Despair like that, about total reality, is self-perpetuating."

"I program an automatic resetting for three hours later," his wife said sleekly. "A 481. Awareness of the manifold possibilities open to me in the future; new hope that —"

"I know 481," he interrupted. He had dialed out the combination many times; he relied on it greatly. "Listen," he said, seating himself on his bed and taking hold of her hands to draw her down beside him, "even with an automatic cutoff it's dangerous to undergo a depression, any kind. Forget what you've scheduled and I'll fo get what I've scheduled; we'll dial a 104

together and both experience it, and then you stay in it while I reset mine for my usual businesslike attitude. That way I'll want to hop up to the roof and check out the sheep and then head for the office; meanwhile I'll know you're not sitting here brooding with no TV." He released her slim, long fingers, passed through the spacious apartment to the living room, which smelled faintly of last night's cigarettes. There he bent to turn on the TV.

From the bedroom Iran's voice came. "I can't stand TV before breakfast."

"Dial 888," Rick said as the set warmed. "The desire to watch TV, no matter what's on it."

"I don't feel like dialing anything at all now," Iran said.

"Then dial 3," he said.

"I can't dial a setting that stimulates my cerebral cortex into wanting to dial! If I don't want to dial, I don't want to dial that most of all, because then I will want to dial, and wanting to dial is right now the most alien drive I can imagine; I just want to sit here on the bed and stare at the floor." Her voice had become sharp with overtones of bleakness as her soul congealed and she ceased to move, as the instinctive, omnipresent film of great weight, of an almost absolute inertia, settled over her.

He turned up the TV sound, and the voice of Buster Friendly boomed out and filled the room. " — ho ho, folks. Time now for a brief note on today's weather. The Mongoose satellite reports that fallout will be especially pronounced toward noon and will then taper off, so all you folks who'll be venturing out — "

Appearing beside him, her long nightgown trailing wispily, Iran shut off the TV set. "Okay, I give up; I'll dial. Anything you want me to be; ecstatic sexual bliss — I feel so bad I'll even endure that. What the hell. What difference does it make?"

"I'll dial for both of us, Rick said, and led her back into the bedroom. There, at her console, he dialed 594: pleased acknowledgment of husband's superior wisdom in all matters. On his own console he dialed for a creative and fresh attitude toward his job, although this he hardly needed; such was his habitual, innate approach without recourse to Penfield artificial brain stimulation.

After a hurried breakfast — he had lost time due to the discussion with his wife — he ascended clad for venturing out, including his Ajax model Mountibank Lead Codpiece, to the covered roof pasture whereon his electric sheep "grazed." Whereon it, sophisticated piece of hardware that it was, chomped away in simulated contentment, bamboozling the other tenants of the building.

Of course, some of their animals undoubtedly consisted of electronic circuitry fakes, too; he had of course never nosed into the matter, any more than they, his neighbors, had pried into the real workings of his sheep. Nothing could be more impolite. To say, "Is your sheep genuine?" would be a worse breach of manners than to inquire whether a citizen's teeth, hair, or internal organs would test out authentic.

The morning air, spilling over with radioactive motes, gray and sun — beclouding, belched about him, haunting his nose; he sniffed involuntarily the taint of death. Well, that was too strong a description for it, he decided as he made his way to the particular plot of sod which he owned along with the unduly large apartment below. The legacy of World War Terminus had diminished in potency; those who could not survive the dust had passed into oblivion years ago, and the dust, weaker now and confronting the strong survivors, only deranged minds and genetic properties. Despite his lead codpiece the dust — undoubtedly — filtered in and at him, brought him daily, so long as he failed to emigrate, its little load of befouling filth. So far, medical checkups taken monthly confirmed him as a regular: a man who could reproduce within the tolerances set by law. Any month, however, the exam by the San Francisco Police Department doctors could reveal otherwise. Continually, new specials came into existence, created out of regulars by the omnipresent dust. The saying currently

blabbed by posters, TV ads, and government junk mail, ran: "Emigrate or degenerate! The choice is yours!" Very true, Rick thought as he opened the gate to his little pasture and approached his electric sheep. But I can't emigrate, he said to himself. Because of my job.

The owner of the adjoining pasture, his conapt neighbor Bill Barbour, hailed him; he, like Rick, had dressed for work but had stopped off on the way to check his animal, too.

"My horse," Barbour declared beamingly, "is pregnant." He indicated the big Percheron, which stood staring off in an empty fashion into space. "What do you say to that?"

"I say pretty soon you'll have two horses," Rick said. He had reached his sheep, now; it lay ruminating, its alert eyes fixed on him in case he had brought any rolled oats with him. The alleged sheep contained an oat-tropic circuit; at the sight of such cereals it would scramble up convincingly and amble over. "What's she pregnant by?" he asked Barbour. "The wind?"

"I bought some of the highest quality fertilizing plasma available in California," Barbour informed him. "Through inside contacts I have with the State Animal Husbandry Board. Don't you remember last week when their inspector was out here examining Judy? They're eager to have her foal; she's an unmatched superior." Barbour thumped his horse fondly on the neck and she inclined her head toward him.

"Ever thought of selling your horse?" Rick asked. He wished to god he had a horse, in fact any animal. Owning and maintaining a fraud had a way of gradually demoralizing one. And yet from a social standpoint it had to be done, given the absence of the real article. He had therefore no choice except to continue. Even were he not to care himself, there remained his wife, and Iran did care. Very much.

Barbour said, "It would be immoral to sell my horse."

"Sell the colt, then. Having two animals is more immoral than not having any."

Puzzled, Barbour said, "How do you mean? A lot of people have two animals, even three, four, and like in the case of Fred Washborne, who owns the algae-processing plant my brother works at, even five. Didn't you see that article about his duck in yesterday's Chronicle? It's supposed to be the heaviest, largest Moscovy on the West Coast." The man's eyes glazed over, imagining such possessions; he drifted by degrees into a trance.

Exploring about in his coat pockets, Rick found his creased, much-studied copy of Sidney's Animal & Fowl Catalogue January supplement. He looked in the index, found colts (vide horses, offsp.) and presently had the prevailing national price. "I can buy a Percheron colt from Sidney's for five thousand dollars," he said aloud.

"No you can't," Barbour said. "Look at the listing again; it's in italics. That means they don't have any in stock, but that would be the price if they did have."

"Suppose," Rick said, "I pay you five hundred dollars a month for ten months. Full catalogue value."

Pityingly, Barbour said, "Deckard, you don't understand about horses; there's a reason why Sidney's doesn't have any Percheron colts in stock. Percheron colts just don't change hands — at catalogue value, even. They're too scarce, even relatively inferior ones." He leaned across their common fence, gesticulating. "I've had Judy for three years and not in all that time have I seen a Percheron mare of her quality. To acquire her I had to fly to Canada, and I personally drove her back here myself to make sure she wasn't stolen. You bring an animal like this anywhere around Colorado or Wyoming and they'll knock you off to get hold of it. You know why? Because back before W.W.T. there existed literally hundreds —"

"But," Rick interrupted, "for you to have two horses and me none, that violates the whole basic theological and moral structure of Mercerism."

"You have your sheep; hell, you can follow the Ascent in your individual life, and when you grasp the two handles of empathy you approach honorably. Now if you didn't have that old sheep, there, I'd see some logic in your position. Sure, if I had two animals and you didn't have any, I'd be helping deprive you of true fusion with Mercer. But every family in this

building — let's see; around fifty: one to every three apts, as I compute it — every one of us has an animal of some sort. Graveson has that chicken over there." He gestured north. "Oakes and his wife have that big red dog that barks in the night." He pondered. "I think Ed Smith has a cat down in his apt; — at least he says so, but no one's ever seen it. Possibly he's just pretending."

Going over to his sheep, Rick bent down, searching in the thick white wool — the fleece at least was genuine — until he found what he was looking for: the concealed control panel of the mechanism. As Barbour watched he snapped open the panel covering, revealing it. "See?" he said to Barbour. "You understand now why I want your colt so badly?"

After an interval Barbour said, "You poor guy. Has it always been this way?"

"No," Rick said, once again closing the panel covering of his electric sheep; he straightened up, turned, and faced his neighbor. "I had a real sheep, originally. My wife's father gave it to us outright when he emigrated. Then, about a year ago, remember that time I took it to the vet — you were up here that morning when I came out and found it lying on its side and it couldn't get up."

"You got it to its feet," Barbour said, remembering and nodding. "Yeah, you managed to lift it up but then after a minute or two of walking around it fell over again."

Rick said, "Sheep get strange diseases. Or put another way, sheep get a lot of diseases but the symptoms are always the same; the sheep can't get up and there's no way to tell how serious it is, whether it's a sprained leg or the animal's dying of tetanus. That's what mine died of; tetanus."

"Up here?" Barbour said. "On the roof?"

"The hay," Rick explained. "That one time I didn't get all the wire off the bale; I left a piece and Groucho — that's what I called him, then — got a scratch and in that way contracted tetanus. I took him to the vet's and he died, and I thought about it, and finally I called one of those shops that manufacture artificial animals and I showed them a photograph of Groucho. They made this." He indicated the reclining ersatz animal, which continued to ruminate attentively, still watching alertly for any indication of oats. "It's a premium job. And I've put as much time and attention into caring for it as I did when it was real. But — " He shrugged.

"It's not the same," Barbour finished.

"But almost. You feel the same doing it; you have to keep your eye on it exactly as you did when it was really alive. Because they break down and then everyone in the building knows. I've had it at the repair shop six times, mostly little malfunctions, but if anyone saw them — for instance one time the voice tape broke or anyhow got fouled and it wouldn't stop baaing — they'd recognize it as a mechanical breakdown." He added, "The repair outfit's truck is of course marked 'animal hospital something.' And the driver dresses like a vet, completely in white." He glanced suddenly at his watch, remembering the time. "I have to get to work," he said to Barbour. "I'll see you this evening."

As he started toward his car Barbour called after him hurriedly, "Um, I won't say anything to anybody here in the building."

Pausing, Rick started to say thanks. But then something of the despair that Iran had been talking about tapped him on the shoulder and he said, "I don't know; maybe it doesn't make any difference."

"But they'll look down on you. Not all of them, but some. You know how people are about not taking care of an animal; they consider it immoral and anti-empathic. I mean, technically it's not a crime like it was right after W. .T. but the feeling's still there."

"God," Rick said futilely, and gestured empty-handed. "I want to have an animal; I keep trying to buy one. But on my salary, on what a city employee makes — " If, he thought, I could get lucky in my work again. As I did two years ago when I managed to bag four andys during one month. If I had known then, he thought, that Groucho was going to die . . . but that had

been before the tetanus. Before the two-inch piece of broken, hypodermic-like baling wire.

"You could buy a cat," Barbour offered. "Cats are cheap; look in your Sidney's catalogue."

Rick said quietly, "I don't want a domestic pet. I want what I originally had, a large animal. A sheep or if I can get the money a cow or a steer or what you have; a horse." The bounty from retiring five andys would do it, he realized. A thousand dollars apiece, over and above my salary. Then somewhere I could find, from someone, what I want. Even if the listing in Sidney's Animal & Fowl is in italics. Five thousand dollars — but, he thought, the five andys first have to make their way to Earth from one of the colony planets; I can't control that, I can't make five of them come here, and even if I could there are other bounty hunters with other police agencies throughout the world. The andys would specifically have to take up residence in Northern California, and the senior bounty hunter in this area, Dave Holden, would have to die or retire.

"Buy a cricket," Barbour suggested wittily. "Or a mouse. Hey, for twenty-five bucks you can buy a full-grown mouse."

Rick said, "Your horse could die, like Groucho died, without warning. When you get home from work this evening you could find her laid out on her back, her feet in the air, like a bug. Like what you said, a cricket." He strode off, car key in his hand.

"Sorry if I offended you," Barbour said nervously.

In silence Rick Deckard plucked open the door of his hovercar. He had nothing further to say to his neighbor; his mind was on his work, on the day ahead.

TWO

In a giant, empty, decaying building which had once housed thousands, a single TV set hawked its wares to an uninhabited room.

This ownerless ruin had, before World War Terminus, been tended and maintained. Here had been the suburbs of San Francisco, a short ride by monorail rapid transit; the entire peninsula had chattered like a bird tree with life and opinions and complaints, and now the watchful owners had either died or migrated to a colony world. Mostly the former; it had been a costly war despite the valiant predictions of the Pentagon and its smug scientific vassel, the Rand Corporation — which had, in fact, existed not far from this spot. Like the apartment owners, the corporation had departed, evidently for good. No one missed it.

In addition, no one today remembered why the war had come about or who, if anyone, had won. The dust which had contaminated most of the planet's surface had originated in no country and no one, even the wartime enemy, had planned on it. First, strangely, the owls had died. At the time it had seemed almost funny, the fat, fluffy white birds lying here and there, in yards and on streets; coming out no earlier than twilight as they had while alive the owls escaped notice. Medieval plagues had manifested themselves in a similar way, in the form of many dead rats. This plague, however, had descended from above.

After the owls, of course, the other birds followed, but by then the mystery had been grasped and understood. A meager colonization program had been underway before the war but now that the sun had ceased to shine on Earth the colonization entered an entirely new phase. In connection with this a weapon of war, the Synthetic Freedom Fighter, had been modified; able to function on an alien world the humanoid robot — strictly speaking, the organic android — had become the mobile donkey engine of the colonization program. Under U.N. law each emigrant automatically received possession of an android subtype of his choice, and, by 1990, the variety of subtypes passed all understanding, in the manner of American automobiles of the ig60s.

That had been the ultimate incentive of emigration: the android servant as carrot, the

radioactive fallout as stick. The U.N. had made it easy to emigrate, difficult if not impossible to stay. Loitering on Earth potentially meant finding oneself abruptly classed as biologically unacceptable, a menace to the pristine heredity of the race. Once pegged as special, a citizen, even if accepting sterilization, dropped out of history. He ceased, in effect, to be part of mankind. And yet persons here and there declined to migrate; that, even to those involved, constituted a perplexing irrationality. Logically, every regular should have emigrated already. Perhaps, deformed as it was, Earth remained familiar, to be clung to. Or possibly the non-emigrant imagined that the tent of dust would deplete itself finally. In any case thousands of individuals remained, most of them constellated in urban areas where they could physically see one another, take heart at their mutual presence. Those appeared to be the relatively sane ones. And, in dubious addition to them, occasional peculiar entities remained in the virtually abandoned suburbs.

John Isidore, being yammered at by the television set in his living room as he shaved in the bathroom, was one of these.

He simply had wandered to this spot in the early days following the war. In those evil times no one had known, really, what they were doing. Populations, detached by the war, had roamed, squatted temporarily at first one region and then another. Back then the fallout had been sporadic and highly variable; some states had been nearly free of it, others became saturated. The displaced populations moved as the dust moved. The peninsula south of San Francisco had been at first dust-free, and a great body of persons had responded by taking up residence there; when the dust arrived, some had died and the rest had departed. J. R. Isidore remained.

The TV set shouted, " — duplicates the halcyon days of the pre-Civil War Southern states! Either as body servants or tireless field hands, the custom-tailored humanoid robot designed specifically for YOUR UNIQUE NEEDS, FOR YOU AND YOU ALONE — given to you on your arrival absolutely free, equipped fully, as specified by you before your departure from Earth; this loyal, trouble-free companion in the greatest, boldest adventure contrived by man in modern history will provide — " It continued on and on.

I wonder if I'm late for work, Isidore wondered as he scraped. He did not own a working clock; generally he depended on the TV for time signals, but today was Interspace Horizons Day, evidently. Anyhow the TV claimed this to be the fifth (or sixth?) anniversary of the founding of New America, the chief U.S. settlement on Mars. And his TV set, being partly broken, picked up only the channel which had been nationalized during the war and still remained so; the government in Washington, with its colonization program, constituted the sole sponsor which Isidore found himself forced to listen to.

"Let's hear from Mrs. Maggie Klugman," the TV announcer suggested to John Isidore, who wanted only to know the time. "A recent immigrant to Mars, Mrs. Klugman in an interview taped live in New New York had this to say. Mrs. Klugman, how would you contrast your life back on contaminated Earth with your new life here in a world rich with every imaginable possibility?" A pause, and then a tired, dry, middle-aged, female voice said, "I think what I and my family of three noticed most was the dignity." "The dignity, Mrs. Klugman?" the announcer asked. "Yes," Mrs. Klugman, now of New New York, Mars, said. "It's a hard thing to explain. Having a servant you can depend on in these troubled times . . . I find it reassuring."

"Back on Earth, Mrs. Klugman, in the old days, did you also worry about finding yourself classified, ahem, as a special?"

"Oh, my husband and myself worried ourselves nearly to death. Of course, once we emigrated that worry vanished, fortunately forever."

To himself John Isidore thought acidly, And it's gone away for me, too, without my having to emigrate. He had been a special now for over a year, and not merely in regard to the

distorted genes which he carried. Worse still, he had failed to pass the minimum mental faculties test, which made him in popular parlance a chickenhead. Upon him the contempt of three planets descended. However, despite this, he survived. He had his job, driving a pickup and delivery truck for a false-animal repair firm; the Van Ness Pet Hospital and his gloomy, gothic boss Hannibal Sloat accepted him as human and this he appreciated. *Mors certa, vita incerta*, as Mr. Sloat occasionally declared. Isidore, although he had heard the expression a number of times, retained only a dim notion as to its meaning. After all, if a chickenhead could fathom Latin he would cease to be a chickenhead. Mr. Sloat, when this was pointed out to him, acknowledged its truth. And there existed chickenheads infinitely stupider than Isidore, who could hold no jobs at all, who remained in custodial institutions quaintly called "Institute of Special Trade Skills of America," the word "special" having to get in there somehow, as always.

" — your husband felt no protection," the TV announcer was saying, "in owning and continually wearing an expensive and clumsy radiation-proof lead codpiece, Mrs. Klugman?"

"My husband," Mrs. Klugman began, but at that point, having finished shaving, Isidore strode into the living room and shut off the TV set.

Silence. It flashed from the woodwork and the walls; it smote him with an awful, total power, as if generated by a vast mill. It rose from the floor, up out of the tattered gray wall-to-wall carpeting. It unleashed itself from the broken and semi-broken appliances in the kitchen, the dead machines which hadn't worked in all the time Isidore had lived here. From the useless pole lamp in the living room it oozed out, meshing with the empty and wordless descent of itself from the fly-specked ceiling. It managed in fact to emerge from every object within his range of vision, as if it — the silence meant to supplant all things tangible. Hence it assailed not only his ears but his eyes; as he stood by the inert TV set he experienced the silence as visible and, in its own way, alive. Alive! He had often felt its austere approach before; when it came it burst in without subtlety, evidently unable to wait. The silence of the world could not rein back its greed. Not any longer. Not when it had virtually won.

He wondered, then, if the others who had remained on Earth experienced the void this way. Or was it peculiar to his peculiar biological identity, a freak generated by his inept sensory apparatus? Interesting question, Isidore thought. But whom could he compare notes with? He lived alone in this deteriorating, blind building of a thousand uninhabited apartments, which like all its counterparts, fell, day by day, into greater entropic ruin. Eventually everything within the building would merge, would be faceless and identical, mere pudding-like kipple piled to the ceiling of each apartment. And, after that, the uncared-for building itself would settle into shapelessness, buried under the ubiquity of the dust. By then, naturally, he himself would be dead, another interesting event to anticipate as he stood here in his stricken living room atone with the lungless, all-penetrating, masterful world-silence.

Better, perhaps, to turn the TV back on. But the ads, directed at the remaining regulars, frightened him. They informed him in a countless procession of ways that he, a special, wasn't wanted. Had no use. Could not, even if he wanted to, emigrate. So why listen to that? He asked himself irritably. Fork them and their colonization, I hope a war gets started there — after all, it theoretically could — and they wind up like Earth. And everybody who emigrated turns out to be special.

Okay, he thought; I'm off to work. He reached for the doorknob that opened the way out into the unlit hall, then shrank back as he glimpsed the vacuity of the rest of the building. It lay in wait for him, out here, the force which he had felt busily penetrating his specific apartment. God, he thought, and reshut the door. He was not ready for the trip up those clanging stairs to the empty roof where he had no animal. The echo of himself ascending: the echo of nothing. Time to grasp the handles, he said to himself, and crossed the living room to the black empathy box.

When he turned it on the usual faint smell of negative ions surged from the power supply; he breathed in eagerly, already buoyed up. Then the cathode-ray tube glowed like an imitation, feeble TV image; a collage formed, made of apparently random colors, trails, and configurations which, until the handles were grasped, amounted to nothing. So, taking a deep breath to steady himself, he grasped the twin handles.

The visual image congealed; he saw at once a famous landscape, the old, brown, barren ascent, with tufts of dried-out bonelike weeds poking slantedly into a dim and sunless sky. One single figure, more or less human in form, toiled its way up the hillside: an elderly man wearing a dull, featureless robe, covering as meager as if it had been snatched from the hostile emptiness of the sky. The man, Wilbur Mercer, plodded ahead, and, as he clutched the handles, John Isidore gradually experienced a waning of the living room in which he stood; the dilapidated furniture and walls ebbed out and he ceased to experience them at all. He found himself, instead, as always before, entering into the landscape of drab hill, drab sky. And at the same time he no longer witnessed the climb of the elderly man. His own feet now scraped, sought purchase, among the familiar loose stones; he felt the same old painful, irregular roughness beneath his feet and once again smelled the acrid haze of the sky — not Earth's sky but that of some place alien, distant, and yet, by means of the empathy box, instantly available.

He had crossed over in the usual perplexing fashion; physical merging — accompanied by mental and spiritual identification — with Wilbur Mercer had reoccurred. As it did for everyone who at this moment clutched the handles, either here on Earth or on one of the colony planets. He experienced them, the others, incorporated the babble of their thoughts, heard in his own brain the noise of their many individual existences. They — and he — cared about one thing; this fusion of their mentalities oriented their attention on the hill, the climb, the need to ascend. Step by step it evolved, so slowly as to be nearly imperceptible. But it was there. Higher, he thought as stones rattled downward under his feet. Today we are higher than yesterday, and tomorrow — he, the compound figure of Wilbur Mercer, glanced up to view the ascent ahead. Impossible to make out the end. Too far. But it would come.

A rock, hurled at him, struck his arm. He felt the pain. He half turned and another rock sailed past him, missing him; it collided with the earth and the sound startled him. Who? he wondered, peering to see his tormentor. The old antagonists, manifesting themselves at the periphery of his vision; it, or they, had followed him all the way up the hill and they would remain until at the top —

He remembered the top, the sudden leveling of the hill, when the climb ceased and the other part of it began. How many times had he done this? The several times blurred; future and past blurred; what he had already experienced and what he would eventually experience blended so that nothing remained but the moment, the standing still and resting during which he rubbed the cut on his arm which the stone had left. God, he thought in weariness. In what way is this fair? Why am I up here alone like this, being tormented by something I can't even see? And then, within him, the mutual babble of everyone else in fusion broke the illusion of aloneness.

You felt it, too, he thought. Yes, the voices answered. We got hit, on the left arm; it hurts like hell. Okay, he said. We better get started moving again. He resumed walking, and all of them accompanied him immediately.

Once, he remembered, it had been different. Back before the curse had come, an earlier, happier part of life. They, his foster parents Frank and Cora Mercer, had found him floating on an inflated rubber air-rescue raft, off the coast of New England . . . or had it been Mexico, near the port of Tampico? He did not now remember the circumstances. Childhood had been nice; he had loved all life, especially the animals, had in fact been able for a time to bring dead animals back as they had been. He lived with rabbits and bugs, wherever it was,

either on Earth or a colony world; now he had forgotten that, too. But he recalled the killers, because they had arrested him as a freak, more special than any of the other specials. And due to that everything had changed.

Local law prohibited the time-reversal faculty by which the dead returned to life; they had spelled it out to him during his sixteenth year. He continued for another year to do it secret, in the still remaining woods, but an old woman whom he had never seen or heard of had told. Without his parents' consent they — the killers — had bombarded the unique nodule which had formed in his brain, had attacked it with radioactive cobalt, and this had plunged him into a different world, one whose existence he had never suspected. It had been a pit of corpses and dead bones and he had struggled for years to get up from it. The donkey and especially the toad, the creatures most important to him, had vanished, had become extinct; only rotting fragments, an eyeless head here, part of a hand there, remained. At last a bird which had come there to die told him where he was. He had sunk down into the tomb world. He could not get out until the bones strewn around him grew back into living creatures; he had become joined to the metabolism of other lives and until they rose he could not rise either.

How long that part of the cycle had lasted he did not now know; nothing had happened, generally, so it had been measureless. But at last the bones had regained flesh; the empty eye-pits had filled up and the new eyes had seen, while meantime the restored beaks and mouths had cackled, barked, and caterwauled. Possibly he had done it; perhaps the extra-sensory node of his brain had finally grown back. Or maybe he hadn't accomplished it; very likely it could have been a natural process. Anyhow he was no longer sinking; he had begun to ascend, along with the others. Long ago he had lost sight of them. He found himself evidently climbing alone. But they were there. They still accompanied him; he felt them, strangely, inside him.

Isidore stood holding the two handles, experiencing himself as encompassing every other living thing, and then, reluctantly, he let go. It had to end, as always, and anyhow his arm ached and bled where the rock had struck it.

Releasing the handles he examined his arm, then made his way unsteadily to the bathroom of his apartment to wash the cut off was not the first wound he had received while in fusion with Mercer and it probably would not be the last. People, especially elderly ones, had died, particularly later on at the top of the hill alien the torment began in earnest. I wonder if I can go through that part again, he said to himself as he swabbed the injury. Chance of cardiac arrest; he better, he reflected, if I lived in town where those buildings have a doctor standing by with those electro-spark machines. Here, alone in this place, it's too risky.

But he knew he'd take the risk. He always had before. As did most people, even oldsters who were physically fragile.

Using a Kleenex he dried his damaged arm.

And heard, muffled and far off, a TV set.

It's someone else in this building, he thought wildly, unable to believe it. Not my TV; that's off, and I can feel the floor resonance. It's below, on another level entirely!

I'm not alone here any more, he realized. Another resident has moved in, taken one of the abandoned apartments, and close enough for me to hear him. Must be level two or level three, certainly no deeper. Let's see, he thought rapidly. What do you do when a new resident moves in? Drop by and borrow something, is that how it's done? He could not remember; this had never happened to him before, here or anywhere else: people moved out, people emigrated, but nobody ever moved in. You take them something, he decided. Like a cup of water or rather milk; yes, it's milk or flour or maybe an egg — or, specifically, their ersatz substitutes.

Looking in his refrigerator — the compressor had long since ceased working — he found

a dubious cube of margarine. And, with it, set off excitedly, his heart laboring, for the level below. I have to keep calm, he realized. Not let him know I'm a chickenhead. If he finds out I'm a cliickenhead he won't talk to me; that's always the way it is for some reason. I wonder why?

He hurried down the hall.

THREE

On his way to work Rick Deckard, as lord knew how many other people, stopped briefly to skulk about in front of one of San Francisco's larger pet shops, along animal row. In the center of the block-long display window an ostrich, in a heated clear-plastic cage, returned his stare. The bird, according to the info plaque attached to the cage, had just arrived from a zoo in Cleveland. It was the only ostrich on the West Coast. After staring at it, Rick spent a few more minutes staring grimly at the price tag. He then continued on to the Hall of justice on Lombard Street and found himself a quarter of an hour late to work.

As he unlocked his office door his superior Police Inspector Harry Bryant, jug-eared and redheaded, sloppily dressed but wise-eyed and conscious of nearly everything of any importance, hailed him. "Meet me at nine-thirty in Dave Holden's office." Inspector Bryant, as he spoke, flicked briefly through a clipboard of onionskin typed sheets. "Holden," he continued as he started off, "is in Mount Zion Hospital with a laser track through his spine. He'll be there for a month at least. Until they can get one of those new organic plastic spinal sections to take hold."

"What happened?" Rick asked, chilled. The department's chief bounty hunter had been all right yesterday; at the end of the day he had as usual zipped off in his hovercar to his apartment in the crowded high-prestige Nob Hill area of the City.

Bryant muttered over his shoulder something about nine-thirty in Dave's office and departed, leaving Rick standing alone.

As he entered his own office Rick heard the voice of his secretary, Ann Marsten, behind him. "Mr. Deckard, you know what happened to Mr. Holden? He got shot." She followed after him into the stuffy, closed-up office and set the air-filtering unit into motion.

"Yeah," he responded absently.

"It must have been one of those new, extra-clever andys the Rosen Association is turning out," Miss Marsten said. "Did you read over the company's brochure and the spec sheets? The Nexus-6 brain unit they're using now is capable of selecting within a field of two trillion constituents, or ten million separate neural pathways." She lowered her voice. "You missed the vidcall this morning. Miss Wild told me; it came through the switchboard exactly at nine."

"A call in?" Rick asked.

Miss Marsten said, "A call out by Mr. Bryant to the W.P.O. in Russia. Asking them if they would be willing to file a formal written complaint with the Rosen Association's factory representative East."

"Harry still wants the Nexus-6 brain unit withdrawn from the market?" He felt no surprise. Since the initial release of its specifications and performance charts back in August of 1991 most police agencies which dealt with escaped andys had been protesting. "The Soviet police can't do any more than we can," he said. Legally, the manufacturers of the Nexus-6 brain unit operated under colonial law, their parent auto-factory being on Mars. "We had better just accept the new unit as a fact of life," he said. "It's always been this way, with every improved brain unit that's come along. I remember the howls of pain when the Sudermann people showed their old T-14 back in '89. Every police agency in the Western Hemisphere clamored that no test would detect its presence, in an instance of illegal entry here. As a