

PAUL GURK

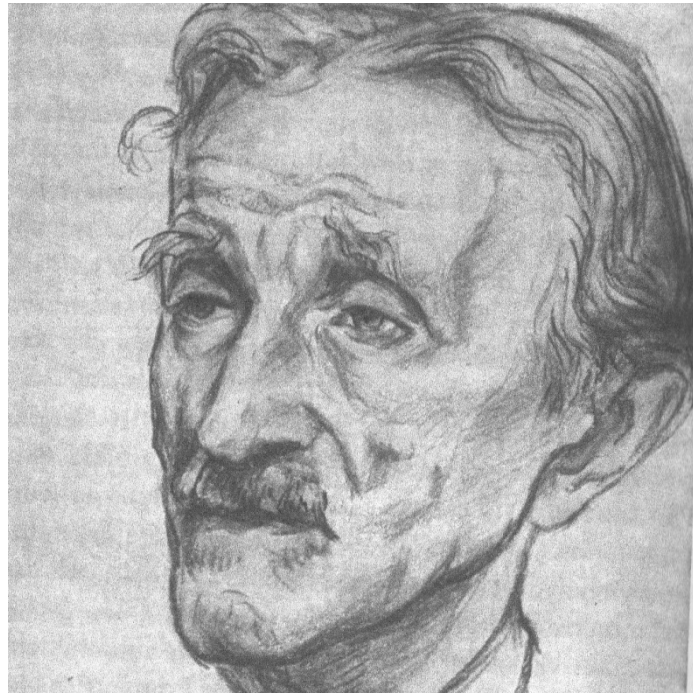


ToZoB-37

*THE MYTH OF GREY HUMANITY,
OR OF THE NUMBER ①*

Translated by C. D. Godwin

www.beyond-alexanderplatz.com



Paul Gurk 1880-1953 (self-portrait 1949)

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According to Wikipedia, the Holle-Verlag ceased business in 1988.

A search at <http://www.corian-verlag.de> gives no result for “Paul Gurk” or “Tuzub-37”.

The publisher now specialises in loose-leaf encyclopedias of, among others,
SF and fantasy writing.

The Arco-Verlag edition is No. 3 in a projected Collected Works of Paul Gurk.

The Hirnkost edition is one of a series ‘Rediscovered Treasures of German SF’
TuZuB-37 should be free of copyright after 2022 (70 years after the author’s death).

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Cover image from Billy Nunez.

INTRODUCTION

Here for the first time in English is an astonishing rediscovered work of 20th century science fiction. *ToZoB-37* builds a vivid dystopian world of relentless post-humanism and techno-hubris, where What and How completely eclipse any Why. All individuality expunged; all Nature eradicated; the only task, step-by-step, is to attain the Goal: turn the human being into an immortal Machine that is its own end: function without meaning.

Astonishing, too, that this novel ever saw the light of day. Published in Germany in 1935, by an oddball and rather unsuccessful writer of novels, plays, Lieder (and also a talented sketcher and musician), it slipped past the Nazi censors, who perhaps assumed from the first few pages that it was a children's fable with talking animals.

The novel includes obvious references to the forces that took over Germany in 1933, but it is no mere anti-Nazi tract. Its vision, like Alfred Döblin's in *Mountains Oceans Giants*, takes in a much wider view of human civilisation across centuries, and the descent into totalitarianism.

The writing throughout is in an appropriately relentless stripped-down style: all present tense, formulaic, seemingly mechanical, yet vividly conveying the horrors – human and ecological – of an unbridled “left brain” (in McGilchrist's formulation) assault on the world.

Who was Paul Gurk?¹

Born in Frankfurt (Oder) in 1880, Gurk was sent off aged 5 to an uncle in the slum district Berlin-Mitte, when his father, a mail-coach driver, died of pneumonia:

I grew up in a barbershop which was always busy, so nobody around bothered about me in the least and I grew up wild, more in the street and on Tempelhof Field than at home. At mealtimes there'd be a whistle, and I would appear in good time. I learned reading and writing on the side from the salon assistants, and to erase something in a drawing I carried a steel nib to scratch it out.²

He did well at primary school, but failed to obtain a free secondary place. “So my whole life long I have never had a formal educational credential and was forced to learn in my own way, which was remarkable enough.”³ He took evening classes, received praise for his artwork, but was warned against an unrewarding artistic career. So he aimed to become a teacher, began at 16 to write poetry and to compose, and aged 20 abandoned teaching on the excuse that his voice was not strong enough. In fact, he says it was

an inner disgust at the inborn phoniness and swagger even in the junior classes. I thought that after just a few hours I would identify the one, or the very few, who were becoming *persons*, the shy oppressed children, the homeless ... To my deepest inner rage I have never seen or experienced anything of ‘community’ ... the only ‘social’ people are the ‘asocial’, the dreamers in their bad clothes, slightly goofy, easily deceived ...⁴

For 24 years he was a clerk in the Berlin city government, where he found “fertile ground for the artist, the epicist and dramatist”. Despite lifelong poor health and an “aversion to literature”, he engaged in “a battle with language about language”:

¹ For details of Gurk's life I am indebted to Magnus Chrapkowski's Afterword to Paul Gurk's *Berlin* (2016).

² Letter, 22 May 1936

³ Eckart, *Blätter für evangelische Geisteskultur* 6 (1930)

⁴ Ibid.

Language, in which the spirit of the people becomes conscious, must be conquered, not learned! I began to set myself in opposition to every banal common expression, to experience images as deaf empty shells, and to doubt them. ... I began to regard words as living beings and the sentence as a danger – sometimes a lovely danger – to the word. For the primal strength of the word can be so violated, falsified or weakened by the sentence exactly as the great individual living for himself can be by the massiveness of the petty reasons of the many living for each other.⁵

He wrote fables, grotesqueries, dozens of plays (unperformed); suffered visionary fits which he drew on as spiritual energy for his imagination and writings: “I have the very rare gift, or burden, of a capacity for complete metamorphosis with a complete loss of a sense of time”:

Time often stops, especially when I’m rocking in the transition zone between sleeping and waking. Then I am “not there” and am considered stupid or idiotic. Yet these immeasurable chunks of time in the transition zone are the true life-breath of love; they refresh the soul.⁶

His view of life in the Prussian state sets the scene early for the world of *ToZoB-37*:

A fair wind for the Efficient – on condition that you devote your life and your efficiency to the State. But only not you yourself! For just one purpose are you tested and fostered: that you become a particular high-value tool in the great factory. ... None is whole, and for his own use ... Of course, it would be ‘social’ ... if in Nature there were only kitchen gardens, if even seed-setting and fruiting followed a work-plan!⁷

...if the singular person is clear that even though he is but a tiny grain in the incomprehensible and inexpressible Universe, but a grain in which the whole world lies folded, then he will be filled with truly creative proud humility ...⁸

In the early 1920s Gurk begins to be noticed. He receives the 1921 Kleist Prize for an album of unpublished MSS (judged to be “one who aims with a profound, sometimes quite clear, sometimes quite uncanny playfulness to set alongside the world of so-called Reality a new one, built of his own dreams, passions, stories”) and in 1925 a prize from a panel chaired by Thomas Mann for his novel *Meister Eckehart*.

He decides to take early retirement to become a full-time writer. But he steers clear of the literary world, does much of his writing in cafés, often spends nights on the U-Bahn because his room is too noisy for sleep.

His major novel *Berlin: ein Buch vom Sterben der Seele* (*Berlin: a book on the death of the soul*) is completed a few years before Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, but the publisher who accepts it goes bankrupt, as does the next one. So publication is delayed until 1934, in the shadow of Döblin’s much-admired novel. He writes one or two novels every year, but

Ever since the Kleist Prize in 1921 I have suffered such a monstrous plethora of horrible experiences, that I can regard Literature and everything connected with it only with a smile. Writing, poetry, no longer plays any role in the life of the *Volk*, for me it’s a very secret hobby of which even my fellow residents have no inkling.⁹

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Letter, 13 July 1937.

⁷ *Der Einzige*, May 1919

⁸ *Der Einzige*, October 1919

⁹ *Eckart* 4, 1928.

ToZoB-37

The short title is an acronym: **T**ower in **Z**one **B-37**. The enormous Babel-like tower is to be erected on a high platform that was once the Himalaya, in order to suck clear air from the stratosphere, since Progress has made surface air unbreathable.

The world is divided into Zones containing uniform four-square fields, Hightowns of massive tower blocks; underground are factories, storage depots, rail lines, and secret cells where three trios of “Scribes” continually monitor Progress towards the Goal, and update the Protocol.

Humanity is a Grey race (Grimgreys; German *grau* means “horror” as well as “grey”). These are Machine-humans, metal-clad cyborgs; the Goal is to progress to Human-machines and eventually Machine-machines lacking any organic matter. All Greys are deemed identical; deviants are “rusted”. Soon all will be equal and interchangeable as the Number ①.

The world is progressively levelled and made uniform, for Nature is abhorrent in its wilful unruliness. Much land is covered by light-metal sheeting. Mountains and seas are to be tamed. Machine-humans know only work, interrupted by two-hour spells of “deepsleep”. Sustenance from “field-squeezings” is inefficient, so experiments are pursued on “oiling” from the air.

The air is thick and polluted, the sky a grey blanket blocking any view of sun, moon and stars. Nothing is to exist beyond the Earth. Seasons and weather are to be tamed.

There is to be no Past. Showprisons hold the last living creatures: bird, brook, lion, poet, philosopher; and old books and pictures. All are to be abolished.

A botched experiment leads to a Machine-human with consciousness; it calls itself by name: Renu. Meanwhile atmospheric pollution has become so serious that a plan is needed to pull down clean air. But techno-hubris has reached its limit, for it is Renu, randomly selected to lead the project, who makes the plan that “will force your measured step to become measureless arrogance!”

All this unfolds in a language powerfully suited to the theme, with its many shortcuts, neologisms, dry factuality. Yet the underlying horror is depicted with great feeling:

Gurk ... cuts a breach for the natural (beautiful) face of the Earth, the pitiless levelling of which is a symbol for the completely broken relationship between humans and Nature. To that extent there is no escape in *ToZoB-37*, and certainly not into fatuous fake idylls. The core of this SF novel is the despair of a sensitive author unable to comprehend his real world and wants what is only all too comprehensible ... There is no question that in literary terms *ToZoB-37* is the finest SF novel published in the Nazi era.¹⁰

C. D. Godwin

Summer 2025

¹⁰ Hans Frey: *Aufbruch in den Abgrund. Deutsche Science Fiction zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur*. Memoranda 2020, p. 461-467.

A

This story will be from that time when humans designate each other by number, and only creatures and flowers call each other by name, provided they are alone.

Says Thrush to Lilac-bush: "What *is* going on with humans and their whole species, Maybloomer?"

Lilac-bush cautiously adjusts foliage and peeps budeyes into the grimgrey.

"I must speak softly, Dawnwarbler! Look around, check the boundary that was set up not by flight feathers nor by the strength of roots, but by the Grey species. Do you not see the lofty net with its thousands upon thousands of meshes, strung in arcs from iron hook to iron hook, and nourished by sparks? We both dwell in the Showprison of the last living beings."

Thrush says: "If I fly too far I bump against the badness, that boundary of electric law. Once Vulture broke away and ripped the boundary. But it was filled with deadly sparks of enslaved and stored-up lightning. Vulture tumbled hard to ground, and lay there, a sacrifice to wilfulness."

Lilac-bush says: "I know, and I saw a human delete him from the lists and in the new language of shortcuts wrote: 'Vulture No. 36. Stuffed item available, no need to skin. Feed costs cancelled.'"

Thrush says: "The Machine-humans keep us here for a purpose, to feed their reason on our lack of reason, and prove their greatness in the Earth System. Whatever sings or blooms has no use, and takes up space for no return. Now I am not to sing! If singing drives no turbines, my song is meaningless."

Lilac-bush whispers: "Sing, Thrush! The Grey species, your Keeper No. 1761, will cancel your feed if you no longer match the description!"

Now the boundary net emits flaming sparks. Great fear overcomes the corralled specimens of the last living beings, generated by love. They fall silent. Keeper No. 1761 crosses over and inspects them. His eyes are cold and grey. His face is grey. His clothing is made of light grey metal. He is like platinum.

*

Humans have become the Grey species. Nations and races have melded until there is no difference, no merit and no pride in being special. Everyone is Number ①. From their side-by-side and one-after-the-other has come an endless column in which every member is equal to ①. They have filled the Earth. There are precisely as many as can be fed from all the identical foursquare fields. In the event of an increase in production, the number of Greys will be increased in line with the capacity of new machines. Each Grey receives the same amount and is the same size. Throwbacks to

the era of a free human system – too small or too big and deemed unworthy to live – are preserved in spirits and, once classified and described, are burned.

Progress progresses in big steps. It tolerates no great leaps or backslidings.

*

Lion roars in the Showprison of the last living beings, but cannot hear his roar. He trembles. He asks the Brook which is still allowed to flow here: “What is it, Brightbabbler, that stops me from hearing my roar?”

Brook speaks in the rise and fall of its sounds of splashing: “So you cannot hear, you last of the desert furies? The Noisesucker swallows all your speech, so that the Council of Machine-humans in the great hollow of the high tower with its many hollows might be undisturbed in its deliberations! They cannot hear my babbling, and they do not know that we understand their new language of facts and shortcuts. But I understand all possible languages, for every word and every language has its origin in my splashing, as the first song and song of the living upon the Earth. Now up there they clack their numbers and words.”

Lion says: “What has that to do with me, Lullaby? I am no longer allowed to leap and rend. Now and then, when the sun by some oversight licks down through the big smokesky, I leap at my shadow or chase the shadows of trees. It is not permitted of us to kill. Only the law of the Grimgreys kills by decree of the majority, emptied of greed, sympathy, anger and every emotion! But if I roar and cannot hear my voice, I choke. It is handed down from my distant ancestors who still lived free that all those born into the prison of bars and regular meals should cry out, until the desert quakes and the beasts all tremble in grim awe.”

Now Brook and Lilac-bush confer, they the ones who hear more and see more than the others: “Roar, Lion, even if you cannot hear! Otherwise Keeper No. 238 will come and cancel your feed, because you no longer match the description!”

But Brook adds: “Listen, you last living creatures born of love and not of test tubes: the Grey species is at a turning point. They mean to scale a new crest of Progress and Development. They are Machine-humans, and want to become Human-machines, until they become nothing more than machines. Then they regard themselves as perfected, and bring their time to the point of total self-adoration.”

A rolling metallic roar swallows the voices of the last living beings in the Showprison. They stand rigid with fear. Brook stops babbling. Lion shrinks low. His flanks quake. Thrush clings anxiously to Lilac-bush.

A monster of iron, clad in a coat of rust, rolls up surrounded by a throng. Just a little distance from the electrified boundary of the thousands upon thousands of Greys, the awful thing comes to a halt. The Grey creatures move apart. Wagons come one by one, and carry away. Magnetic cranes lift, and throw down. A flame darts high. A Grey steps forward. The number on his chest glows electrically. He speaks. The throng of Greys throws itself down onto the levelled ground, and jerks

an arm high in adoration. Then the speech of many Greys rings out together, staccato, guttural, harsh, like a farm implement from the legendary Foretime of Ploughing as it slices and squeals through a drear stony field.

Now from the numbers in the Showprison of the last living beings comes a fearful cautious question: "Tell us, Brook, what do the Greys all say together? We understand only a little, and the raw violence in their chorus frightens us!"

Brook murmurs: "Listen, all of you! I shall tell it you in our language, which with its intermingled sounds of wind, sun, blood and clouds is the humming of the Earth's motion, understood by all who still remain in the wheeling of the stars. The Greys have set up an idol, a huge machine-beast from the very beginnings of this Progress that mows its way forward through bodies and brains. They have restored the first Combine Harvester, that reaped and threshed all at once. This is what they say:

We pray to you, O Reapthresher!

From you, a new era arose!

All praise to you, Angel of Progress!

You were the first to reap and thresh all at once, and grind your way forward under your own power.

You replaced hand and foot and the hourly labour of cowering slaves of the soil!

A field of wheat, three men and one machine!

Where twenty reaped, ten tied sheaves, five loaded up the wagons drawn by animals, casual labourers, you were the first, Reapthresher, in that absurd era when they sowed and reaped with anxious eye on wind and rain, for drought was a vengeful idol, and hail was an idol!

You began to replace, to convince, and you wrested our new Progress!

You reaped sacrifices, millions, more than the wars of foretimes, when nations were there, dupes of the clever!

They had no work. Their fields became worthless.

They tore apart the mischief of the state, hanged themselves or died of hunger, since of every four, three were too many, and needs were unmatched to the quantity of goods ...

Nevertheless it is to you we pray, Reapthresher, you emblem of Progress!

For by your sacrifices you wrested the new age and beat to death phantoms, customs, myths of gods, discrimination, the ego and individuation, the stupidity of nations, of love and hate, of wealth and poverty, thou herald of equality! –

We bring you fire and flame, so that smoke envelopes you, Reapthresher!"

"What are they burning?" whispers Gazelle.

"They take books from the Showprison of lifeless words, the writings of poets and thinkers, sayings of those obscure figures from the first ages of humanity whom they called Prophet or Saviour. So they burn memory from the very source whence it sprang, for they do not spring, they march – step by step."

“Terrible is their power!” snorted Lion in fear. “Who can withstand them? Where are their adversaries, so that they do not lose all reason?”

“What I should like to know,” said Brook, still murmuring soft and surreptitiously, “what I should like to know is what they talk of in their language of numbers and letters up there in the big hollow in the tall tower! I would like to know their plans, whether we shall be permitted to live, how they will do away with the last of the blood in their tubes as they progress to Human-machine and to the ultimate perfection of Machine-machine!”

*

Brook goes to sleep. Lion stretches out. Gazelle has anxious dreams. Thrush buries its head and sings no more. Lilac-bush stands motionless and ceases to send out shoots ...

Keeper No. 1 of the Showprison of the last living beings stands there, clad in light metal, grey – and regards the garden. Then his sightlids lower. He wears rubber gloves, and holds a crank. His mouth is round, and looks like a socket ...

B

The tall tower has a hundred storeys. It is made of poured concrete, and clad in light metal that does not liquefy. On Earth there is only one shape of building. Poured as a single storey, the foursquares lie in depots miles across underground, ready and waiting to be summoned and fitted together as rowhouses and rowcities. Square holes are left in the poured concrete; these are windows. Elevator shafts run from top to bottom. There are no stairs. The continuous band of the elevator goes from the square opening beneath the high tower up the hundred storeys, along under the termination plate and down again, in one continuous 24-hour shift. On the termination plate is the place where hovercars and airships once landed and flew away. But flying through the air is known to be slow and unsafe, and was done away with many human lifetimes ago. The air has not yet been brought into order. There are eddies, downdrafts, snowstorms, sudden barometric falls, and even now, despite giant machines and remote controls, no absolute safety and reliability is at hand. No longer is there any playing with flight. Air and sky are stupid.

Now roads for transport run along under the ground. The last horse went extinct, also in the Showprison of living beings. It was Number ①, and is available stuffed.

Two percent of these nether roads collapse into the Earth. The Earth as yet has no regular alternation of strata determined by prior planning, and it backslides now and then into an attack of cramp. But two percent is no more than the calculated quantum of potential irregularities.

In the uppermost big hollow in the tall tower, the Council for this Zone of the Earth System Plan is in continuous session. It numbers one hundred members

selected by rote from the ranks of Greys, relieved every six hours, with all decisions by majority vote. At the moment when Thrush and Lilac-bush are conversing and raising questions, it is the turn of Nos. 62,107 to 62,206 to decide. In 43 minutes it will be the turn of Nos. 62,207 to 62,306.

Any sickness-induced hiatus or disturbance to the turntaking and deliberations is almost totally excluded. A metallised humanity scarcely admits of disease. The age of programmatic inurement and eradication of germs is long past. Epidemics rarely find a breakthrough point. For stiff hinges and oil-depleted joints a Mech(Human) is summoned, for dents and deflections a Tink(Human). In serious cases the Tech(Human) appears. If the remnant of blood in the tubes gives out or rebels, if the little remaining flesh begins to rust, then the Machine-human is thrown onto the light-metal scrapheap, stamped out of the lists, and chemically dissolved into the realm of the inorganic. The expression 'death' is outmoded. So there is no fear of death.

After fifty years, in accordance with the laws on human exploitation of the Earth, disposal takes place by stamping from the lists and transposing into the realm of the inorganic. The number of cases in which visible defects that once presented as sickness in the traditional sense never exceeds one out of the hundred, even among members of the Zone Council.

The Council meets in the biggest hollow in the tall tower. It ascertains how many Machine-humans will be deployed in the coming year, if the expansion of fields and the expansion of Grey numbers are to match their pace. Lamentable failures in Foretimes, when progress and demand overshot one another and the montage of events was badly glued together, are no longer replicated.

Shortly before voting starts an Overseer appears and leads in a Grey, who provokes an interruption. He seems out of order, and there are coloured flecks on his suit of light metal.

An Observer enters, and reports a monstrous incident relating to the Grey just brought in. He seeks to suspend voting until the case of the Grey with coloured flecks is decided.

So the Observer has the floor. He reports in the language of numbers and shortcuts:

"I find him during a patrol through my assigned field, how he reads in a stack of papers that once were called 'book'. He secretly set up an open square, fenced with the usual light metal but with no charged netting overhead. Here I find on the ground, contrary to regulations, some of those Earth products that in Foretimes were called 'flower' and were programmatically eradicated for their lack of necessity and their inutility. The eyes of this Grey show an extremely repellent and forbidden gleam. I find him smeared with coloured soil. He speaks out loud to himself in illegal solitude, in a rocking tone. His words differ from proper Earth-talk. In the

name of the Council I take into custody this criminal who absconded from his shift, and bring him here for sentencing."

Book and Grey are observed. None can read the squiggles of writing, some of which evoke a distant memory of several of the present shortcuts. But they all creep tangled like a pile of rusted barbed wire. Tech(Oldlang) is summoned and makes his report:

"This is one of those stacks of paper once called 'book' from the time before the Greys, when there were still races, nations, and different languages. This Book is No. 2 of two parts among the products preserved in the Showprison of dead words."

Tech(Oldlang) is questioned: "How did this No. 2 come into the hands of the colour-flecked Grey?"

"This second part was deleted five years ago when a rare short circuit caused a fire. No. 2 was deemed burned, and so was deleted from the lists. But in an unknown manner it must have remained available to be found by the colour-flecked Grey. Clearly, the colour-flecked Grey has deciphered the 'book', and has himself written out in that dead language word-sequences which were once called 'poetry'."

The Leader of the Zone Council says: "So the present case is one of regressive degeneracy, lacking purpose or sense. Do we have before us the horrid cackle of the last living poet?"

"It is so," the Technician for vanished languages attests.

The colour-flecked Grey, who is confirmed by the technical measurement process to be the last living poet, is not questioned. He has nothing to say anyway, for he feels the memory of a feeling, long since done away with as inappropriate, which once was called 'shame'. He holds a hand to his eyes, instead of using it to work.

By every voice it is decided to convey the last living poet to the Showprison of the last living beings, where he will be exhibited to troopwise visits of young Grey motors as an absurd undeveloped primitive state of the Grey species. For nothing lifts welcome worthy pride more than tangible evidence of Otherness, Development and Progress.

The verdict is delivered to the three Scribes in the cube down below, so that a conclusive record may be made. Then the Annual Plan for the system of machines and Greyhumans is discussed further.

C

At this time the Grey species lives in tall and ever taller buildings above the surface of the Earth. The previous Foretime is called the Underground Age. It is not so long ago that roads for transporting humans and goods ran above ground, while living-towns and factory-towns were underground. They too ran on rails, for the unsafe

hollow spaces under the Earth required continuous observation and a not infrequent relocation of modalities for fabrication and for residence. Descent below a certain number of meters beneath the surface was precluded by the intolerable, ineradicable heat of deep Earth. It would have been quite feasible to breed an asbestos race, but no sequence of experiments managed to turn burning air breathable. A permanent intake of surface air proved too massive, costly and dangerous.

And so the light-metal Grey species came about. Access shafts have collapsed, apart from those excavated and fitted out as enormous elevator housings. Under the Earth, at a depth of 30 to 50 meters, there are now only railways and roads for the transport of wagons driven by electricity supplied from overhead cables. Electric current is as readily available as water, and can be tapped everywhere. Rows of sheds for machines and materiel have also been brought underground. But the big conference cubes, windowless, seamless, fireproof, are almost all falling into ruin.

Before this Underground Age was the Air Age, the age of flying ships and flying cars. Now fields and towns are on the Earth's surface. But because every field is used to feed more Greys, every building is a tower block. All that is needed is to build new buildings ever higher. In this way the induction of young Machine-humans into uniformity, seamlessness and common feeling will be achieved. Because the electromagnet is always the same and always has the same effect, because electric current never works differently, so the true Grey has no need of soul, or solitude, or shame, or boredom, or desire, or imagination, or art. There is to be no world of the imagination, but only Progress in tangible form. No machine *imagines*. And so the Grey species has no right to do so.

*

In one of the underground conference cubes squat the three Scribes. Everything that happens in this Onethird of the Earth System comes to their attention to be recorded. Whatever is to be decided outwith the rules is brought by them into conformity. In truth, the three Scribes are the secret almost invisible steering mechanism, as are the two times three Scribes in the second and third Onethirds of the Earth System. They are like the man with the oil can, who in the bloody Foretimes of human history went through giant humming transformer halls as the attendant of switchboards and at the same time their master, and from time to time gave the lowering beast a drop of oil.

Almost no Greys know of the existence of the underground trinity and the threefold trinity. But the principal task of the Scribes, as the last remnant of uniqueness and hierarchy, of blood and dominion even in its most diluted form, is to make themselves superfluous.

The first Scribe is called Brain, the second Scribe is called Eye. The third Scribe is called Ear. Brain sits somewhat elevated on a block of steel. Eye and Ear squat to right and left and whisper to him, like Hugin and Munin, the ravens of Wotan, a

vanished god reported in ancient stacks of paper leaves in the Showprison of dead words.

In an abandoned underground conference cube in the second Onethird of the Earth System squat the three Scribes Nos. 4, 5, and 6.

The fourth Scribe is called Mouth. The fifth Scribe is called Lefthand. The sixth Scribe is called Righthand. Mouth sits somewhat elevated on a steel block. Lefthand and Righthand squat to left and right and grab at what Mouth says, like the two grabbing biting components of the pathetic implement in Foretimes called 'pincers'.

In an abandoned underground conference cube in the third Onethird of the Earth System squat the three Scribes Nos. 7, 8, and 9.

The seventh Scribe is called Stomach. The eighth Scribe is called Leftleg. The ninth Scribe is called Rightleg.

Stomach sits somewhat elevated on a steel block. Leftleg and Rightleg squat to left and right, and tread into the floor or send out actively into Greydom whatever Stomach digests or does not digest.

From time to time the nine Scribes come together in a single cube that has been blasted into a cliff. Nobody knows about it. The nine Scribes visit it only once. Then it is blasted to rubble. But come the time when the nine all squat together and the perfected Machine-human is without a heart, then the Surface System above ceases to operate. The flywheel slows to a stop and waits for impetus. The electric clock has no current. Then the Grey species will be void without knowing it, even though it barks out numbers and shortcuts.

*

The decision of the Zone Council regarding the capture of the last living poet has been referred to the three Scribes Brain, Eye and Ear.

Brain ponders. Eye sees from afar. Ear hears from afar.

Eye says: "The Grey is colour-flecked. He is degenerate. Regression to separateness. Colour is separation from grey."

Brain says: "He must have learned it from grubbing in the stacks of paper. Learning is regression, treason, whenever what came before today is sought. Learning is to seek forward, a leap forward. Only I, Brain, know of the origin, and of every step and leap. I must be superseded, so that Grey humanity can finally become Machine."

Ear says: "I hear him mumbling the old language that only we may know. None of the Grey species may know it, this language that is still kin to wind and brook, to birds and earthquakes. But this colour-flecked Grey I hear mumbling in the old language. He is in love with the sounds. The Machine-human in him has regressed to the softening of Foretimes. He has become what in the lamentable age of healthmakers and germs was called 'sick'."

Brain says: "What is infectious must be eradicated! It is decreed that the colour-flecked Grey, the last living poet, is to be pressured down through the tubes."

Eye and Ear concur.

A wave-signal, using especially short wavelengths in which each wave has a number and so signifies regularity, requires the colour-flecked Grey to be sent down to the cube of Scribes 1, 2, and 3. At the same time, using another wavelength, it is ordered that Keeper No. 1 of the Showprison for the last living beings and Tech(Oldthink) both be sent down. Tech(Oldthink) attends to what in the childhood of humanity was called culture, and is now incorporated in the history of fossils.

Very soon Keeper No. 1, Tech(Oldthink) and the colour-flecked Grey are pressured down.

In one of the Foretimes of the Grey species, in the time of races and classes, when Class said: "I take precedence over Race!" – in that time they had conduits for messages, water, gas, oil. These conduits are abandoned now. Energy is extracted from the decay of elements over time, produced in gradations and supplied to the machines. There is no spinning, no motion, no inhibiting friction, only decay that exhales energy to be stored in special apparatus.

Some of the conduits under the Earth have been expanded. There are tubes narrow and wide, for messages or for Greys. Many tubes exit in an underground chamber at each of the three conference cubes of the three times three Scribes. Machine-humans and objects are pushed through by enormously compressed air at tremendous speed, and are caught by thick rubber walls. Since everything has a light metal lining, only seldom does a crack or a kink result. The Machine-humans now have only a little bit of flesh and blood.

The time of paper is past. All records are stamped onto thin plates of unbreakable light-metal.

The colour-flecked Grey, Keeper No. 1 from the Showprison of the last living beings, and Tech(Oldthink) are brought in. They are still a little affected by the haste, but only a little, as expected from long habituation, and soon revert to the normal foursquare state.

Eye says: "When I last farsaw the Showprison of the last living beings, I observed nothing resembling this colour-flecked Grey. Has any such false montage been introduced in the meantime?"

Keeper No. 1 replies: "No. Only the last living poet is listed. But he has piles of white stuff on the chin and is well over 70 plan-years old. He will soon become defunct and inorganic, all by himself."

Brain says: "Do you, colour-flecked Grey, detained in accordance with the decision of the Council as the last living poet, and shortly to be conveyed to the

Showprison of the last living beings, have anything to say to justify or explain your irregular behaviour?"

Colour-flecked Grey lowers his head. He answers now for the first time, and says softly: "No. It is in me. I cannot explain."

Brain says: "Softening, regression."

Ear says: "I farhear the mumblings of the old philosopher. It sounds just like this clacking."

Brain says: "Tech(Oldthink), is it possible that both these – this colour-flecked Grey who is the last living poet, and there the last living philosopher – were produced with a similar defect in their mechanical structure?"

Tech(Oldthink) replies: "Considered and observed in retrospect, this is to a high degree probable, and so has the highest level of scientific certainty. Just as sense and sense are always similar, so nonsense and nonsense are always closely related. A comparison of the two inmates brought immediate certainty."

Brain sends a request by electric waves for delivery of the last living philosopher from the Showprison. Very soon he is pressured down, and is dazed. Keeper No. 1 sets him upright. He opens a weary eye filled with grief and dejection – and stays silent.

Brain, Eye and Ear observe the strange creature.

Brain asks: "What do you do, Philosopher?"

The old philosopher replies: "I ask about the word behind the word. It is spoken in numbers. What is number? Who set the numbers? I think. What is thinking? Take an electric current. What is electric current? Who decided up and down? Who created the action of machines? Who stitched together the tangle that is called Law?"

Ear says: "He mumbles just like the last poet."

Eye says: "His eye has the same coloured glint."

Brain says: "Tech(Oldthink) is right. They are fools of the same kind, machines with a bent hinge that cannot be hammered straight. It is superfluous to preserve the last living poet when we already have the philosopher."

Eye says: "I agree. The colour-flecked Grey who is the last living poet must be transposed to the inorganic. There is no requirement for Showprison in his case."

Ear says: "I agree. Skinning and stuffing are not required. That may happen with the last living philosopher, once the time comes to eradicate the Showprison of dead words and the Showprison of the last living things – those beings disgustingly engendered by love – in order to extinguish the last memory of the forerunners of the Grey species."

Brain says: "We are agreed. I add that the last living poet is to be preserved in the Showprison until the day of the Big Gathering of all Greys in this Zone of the Earth System. There these two similar colourful creatures from Foretimes, poet and philosopher, shall stage a showfight of colourful words for the gratification of all Greys. It can then be decided at the same time whether the last poet is to be made inorganic at once, or will be exhibited at the Great Assemblage of the whole Onethird."

Eye and Ear say: "Decided. The decision is to be recorded."

Tech(Oldthink), Keeper No. 1, the last living philosopher and the last living poet are vacuumed back up to their stations.

The last philosopher is unconscious. It is not the unconsciousness of absorption, oblivious to the external world. He is devastated by the conversation with the mighty Scribes and the long-unfamiliar pressure in the transmission tubes. Keeper No. 1 slaps and shakes him. The machine won't start. Tink(Human) is summoned. After much hammering and bending, the last living philosopher opens his eyes and sees his twin, the last living poet, who regards him with an expression alien to these days, a throwback to the wretched Foretimes of the Grey species, long since ploughed under.

Tink(Human) leaves and climbs into his small car. Keeper No. 1 inspects the two numbers, then he too goes, leaving supervision to the attendant for this aisle of the Showprison.

Last Philosopher whispers: "I feel the end coming. I shall die a true death, and not taste transposition to the inorganic. I expire in the old language, where thought and poetry once still were!"

Last Poet says: "Do you still hear the babbling brook, Philosopher, and the oriole's piping? We are the last who understand their language. Is it not a mercy that you can expire here among the last living beings engendered by love?"

Last Philosopher whispers: "In Foretimes, when our kind still flourished, we were always enemies, and quarrelled about boundaries. But the Machine-humans have the right idea, because they stand apart and no longer comprehend us: we are brothers! We are phenomena of the one life, two rays from the same fount of the obscure Cause, even if we sparkle differently. Ah, how I decline!"

Last Poet says: "I still revere word, and image!"

Last Philosopher says: "I still revere word, and concept!"

Last Poet says: "I try to taste the obscure darkness whence came the word, just like colour!"

Last Philosopher whispers: "I try to taste the obscure darkness whence came thought, like an austere lily. But I am fading, declining ..."

Last Poet says: "Farewell, Brother! You die a good death!"

Last Philosopher says: "Farewell ...". But he cannot finish. His face folds to a final smile. The body collapses. He is dead.

Keeper No. 1 is notified. He bangs on the defunct machine. Tech(Human) arranges transposition to the inorganic. The three Scribes receive an electric notification.

D

The three mighty Scribes – Brain , Eye and Ear – still squat in the lower conference cube. They hardly sleep. Their sleep can no longer be called sleep. It is no calm and slow inward weaving, no relaxation of the blood or redemptive interbraiding of luxuriantly germinating proliferating dreams. They collapse with a rattle, and two hours later spurt into themselves a concentrated nutritive solution, like drops of oil.

When they awake and take up their work again – literally take up, for it lies before them as heaped reports on leaves of light metal – Eye says: "The last living philosopher has gone to the inorganic, with no necessity for chemical dissolution. Let this case be on record for as long as History is permitted."

Ear says: "I did not hear his final jumble of noises that he called speech. I was on my two hours of downshift. But that too must be superseded."

Brain ponders.

Brain says: "The decision regarding a showfight of words between these fundamentally similar entities in the programme of the Big Gathering is still valid. Technical means make this possible."

Ear says: "It is so. I have issued wave-orders that the dialogue between the two deviants be preserved on sounddiscs."

Eye says: "We had our downshift sleep. But our decisions will be implemented as recorded. This will happen until such time as Machine-humans are transposed into Human-machines on the path to becoming Machine-machines."

Brain says: "We must consider as rapidly as possible the path to achieve this goal. I have ascertained: the sounddiscs reproduce the conversation in the irregular Foretimely mode of audible uncertainty, emblematic of the immeasurable progress Grey humanity has made on its way to singularity, programmatic human system, and mechanification."

Eye and Ear concur. It is recorded. Keeper No. 1 receives the wave-instruction to feed the last living poet with one of his feeds designed for this kind of mutant, to enter him on the numbered list, to have the tech specialist draw up a description, and to preserve him in the Showprison of the last living beings until the final call.

Eye makes a further proposal: that the soliloquies of the last living poet and his demented exchanges or conversations with other moribund living creatures should also be captured on sounddiscs.

This supplementary proposal is approved, and listed.

Brain issues a wave-order for Tech(Humrestock) to appear. For the Grey species, there is no longer propagation or procreation in its true sense.

Tech(Humrestock) has a work hollow on the 98th floor of the tall tower. He makes use of the moving elevator and is then quickly squeezed into the tube and pressured down below.

With no visible impact on his light metal cladding, he steps before the three Scribes, and waits. He has a normal face with no tufts of hair. His skull is protected by a crash helmet. The jaw snaps like pincers when it rattles out questions and answers. But the grey, cold eyes of stone lie a little deeper. They have no brows. A deep gully has formed between the eyes.

Brain ponders, and looks at Tech(Humrestock).

Brain asks: "What is the state of the technical possibilities with regard to Human Restocking at the present time? The Protocol needs updating. The programmatic Grey-human system must be pursued in a logical series of steps."

Eye adds: "My farseeing now and then lost contact with you. What was the cause?"

The number on the chest of Tech(Humrestock) lights up. His arm jerks in greeting, and his response clacks:

"In accordance with my duties, experiments have been run on certain chemical reactions in my research space, which are on the way in the very near future to replacing erotic tension processes formerly called 'love' with manufactured and supplied restocking possibilities, because stocks in the test tubes quickly wane and substitution by artificial arousal is insufficient. During these tests the farsight function must be blocked for a while by appropriate metal shielding, or else these substances might be damaged."

Ear says: "It is essential that all waves be made audible, even the farsight current. The security of the Protocol demands that every visible and contemplated event be captured by farsound."

Technician for the restocking of the Greyhuman species says: "I believe that Tech(Farsight) in conjunction with Tech(Farsound) will be able to achieve this."

Ear says, with a harsher rattle: "I *'believe'*?"

There follows a pause.

Brain ponders and says: "Tech(Humrestock) used the expression 'I believe'. He will note that this sequence of sounds is a criminal regression to a long expired

childish form of speech-setting. Tech(Humrestock) will know that the crime must be expunged by enhanced zeal in his important experiments with substances."

Tech(Humrestock) jerks his arm high. The number on his chest no longer glows.

Eye says: "It is requested to record that Tech(Thinkways) in conjunction with Tech(Farsound) are to achieve the visibility and audibility of thought processes."

Ear says: "I agree."

Brain says: "I agree. It shall be listed in the Protocol."

Brain regards Tech(Humrestock) and presses a button. The number on the Technician's chest lights up. He is alert and attentive.

Brain says: "You said that a certain sequence of tests has been made for the purpose of securing test tube growth via chemicals. This must mean that there is not only an inorganic state once called 'death', but there is also a state that will replace by chemical reactions the unreliable and often befuddled organic state that is called 'life' and 'growth'. Life becomes inorganic. Death and life are differentiated only by function. If the Greys are mech, they live. If they are unmech, they are called 'dead', and are scrapped light metal."

Ear says: "That is the goal to which the ear must be bent."

Tech(Humrestock) jerks an arm, says: "Process and Goal are charted infallibly."

Eye says: "Will conclusive success be seen?"

Tech(Humrestock) says: "Not in this planyear. Tests are to check whether the chemical solution, meaning the solution from the many sequences of tests, leads in the artificially befuddled state formerly called 'love' to the extraction of a test tube solution that is no longer organic but a chemical reaction, and when injected summons up, in a further reaction, the genesis of a Machine-human. The further goal is genesis by test tube alone and the decrystallising of the Grey species. In deranged concepts that were notorious in Foretimes, Tech(Oldcult) has discovered comparable theories of this kind, albeit false and inadequately thought through. The end goal for the current sequence of programmatic tests should be the suppression by chemical means of every difference that might be called 'gender', every kind of procreation, every befuddled state. I am unable to make further conclusions. As yet I see no path."

Brain says: "Keep working vigorously and according to your shifts. Bring us one case of the kind which is at present being worked on. Appear with Tech(Tubeselec)."

Tech(Humrestock) is vacuumed back up through the tubes.

Brain ponders after he disappears, and says: ""We see the ultimate Goal. It is the procreation of machines by machines. Only then is the progress of the Grey species consummated, and its Earth rule secured. Up to that point there is much to be done. Many shifts of Greys will have ended their shift, and will have rusted into the inorganic. There will be many three times three of Scribes, before every ① is the

same down to the last screw. Then the exalted power of Number will be revealed, endless and eternal.”

Brain, Eye and Ear are silent. Then Brain stamps the Protocol.

The sheets of the Protocol are preserved. They can be made into sound by sounddiscs, and in special cases can reproduce in secret cipher how effective rule over the standardised species of Greys is to be maintained.

Once again a hierarchical power is there, unseen. The mass of Samegreys knows nothing of it. Only a few suspect what squats there behind the formula ‘Scribe’ in the underground conference cube. But at some point, the planyear will roll on without any Scribes. Every ① will be completely the same, everyone truly Number ①, so that even majority decisions and the hundred-strong Councils will fall away, for each and every ① is the same as the whole of Grey humanity, and all do the same thing together. Then the time will have come when electric waves pulse through every machine, simultaneously piston-gear and action, flywheel and thought, flickering current and consciousness, all simultaneous and the same.

*

Brain, Eye and Ear wait.

The marker clangs. The tube quivers. Tech(Humrestock) and Tech(Tubeselec) are bundled out. Two Machine-humans follow, externally almost identical. The only visible difference is that the number on each chest lights up differently. On one of the Machine-humans it glows evenly, on the other it flickers.

Ear says: “I hear squeaking, as if unoiled hinges are rubbed together. What is this?”

Tech(Humrestock) clacks a response:

“These two still young Machine-human motors have been selected from a particular sequence of test-Greys as having the biggest quantity of those softening factors called ‘flesh’ and ‘blood’. As bothersome as flesh and blood are to the operation of shifts and the Human System Plan, at present their excitation state is still needed for the purpose of attaining test-tube restock possibilities. If the product of the excitation state that is a kind of demi-fabrication can be attained by an admixture of inorganic chemical substances, then residues of flesh and blood become superfluous, hence harmful, and so can be done away with. That is the next goal setting. Work proceeds along this path.”

Ear says: “I have just heard about this.”

Tech(Humrestock) jerks, and his hinges squeak. He keeps silent, and waits.

Eye says: “I see the light on the chest of one of the grey Machine-humans shimmer more brightly. What does it mean?”

Tech(Humrestock) clacks: "The Grey designated Human intook the admixture shortly before being pressured down, and will only now start to shimmer. With simultaneous scattered shimmering, the brief soldering process begins that was formerly called 'love' and is still to be used in order to amplify the test tube contents. Nevertheless the new sequence of experiments is forced to end, because the remnant states merge and amplification factors become ever fewer and less reliable. It follows that it will be difficult to set as a goal the desired Four Machine Types of Greydom."

Brain says: "Transition from Machine-human to Human-machine must be achieved within this yearsequence. The reshaping is necessary, it is a linear advance, hence Progress. There are no counter-currents, only slackenings. Where there is linearity there is no revolution. Work will continue with the strongest shift operations."

Tech(Humrestock) and Tech(Tubeselec) both jerk an arm, and keep silent.

Eye says: "I see the two experimental Greys trembling."

Tech(Humrestock) raps out: "The excitation state, and with it the possibility of obtaining the extension factors, has commenced."

Brain observes the two experimental Greys. They begin to tremble and move jerkily. Their eyes roll irregularly. The arms row. The lips part. Sounds gurgle out, irregular, with a rise and fall in the humming level of the noise. The two experimental Greys approach one another as if pushed. The numbers on the chests light up brightly and flicker ceaselessly horizontally and vertically. The humming becomes ever louder ...

Ear says: "These sounds are similar to those yelped by the colour-flecked Grey."

Tech(Humrestock) clacks: "The time of the soldering process is imminent."

Tech(Tubeselec) keeps a sharp lookout.

Brain raises a hand: "Send the excited experimental Greys back up. Their appearance is unnatural and contradicts Progress. Chemical procreation without sex *must* be attained."

E

The Showprison of dead words is located in one of the smallest tall buildings. Normally it is kept closed. Its hollows are filled with heaps of pages and loose papers. On one storey, components of canvas and wood smeared with colour, formerly called 'pictures', are piled atop one another. They show colourful humans in strange wrappings, or attempt to deceive by insane shortcuts and deflections so that snippets of the Earth, sometimes with air above, coloured or black, appear on a flat surface.

All the hollows are dark. Window squares are screened. Only Tech(Oldcult) creeps in now and then and turns lights on. Then he squats, shakes his head, holds up a magnifying mirror to makes comparisons, and after hours of his shift slinks back out.

A great deal lies farther back than History these days can envisage. The Technician sees unknown symbols on the pages, or meaningless images. Ever since Reapthresher was stationed near the Showprison of the last living beings, from time to time feedstuff must be obtained for the symbolic flames of reverence. Then the eye of Tech(Oldcult) falls on a heap of incomprehensible pagestacks. These are burned before the first Reapthresher.

From time to time a column of Greys visits the mouldiness of backward times. They draw past, lift sightlids high, and grin. Then they occupy the designated corner that leads to their work square. Almost all grin at the same relicts, and almost all become grey and motionless at the same time. Only very seldom is there a delay in the point at which a Grey becomes charged or chargeless.

*

Tech(Oldcult) enters the Showprison of dead words. For the Grey species, pictures are dead words. The Technician turns on the lights and regards objects from the colourful foretimes of the human race. He receives the concentrated nutrition that enables him to inspect the relicts, seek out those that have become ever more meaningless, and designate them for the flames. But he looks with indifferent contempt on the pagestacks and smeared canvases.

Handwriting on a tanned animal skin catches his eye. Long rows in a rectangular shape are filled with unknown symbols. Some, such as especially stand at the beginning of a separated part, are coloured. The age when this handwriting was produced must lie very far back, and was certainly befuddled. The written symbols show tumbling uncontrolled curves and make remarkable diversions.

Tech(Oldcult) observes the pagestack, turns this way and that, and tries to detect a similarity with other foretime secretions known to him. He does not succeed. The culture from which they originate must be too old and too backward.

Since this Technician, in conjunction with Tech(Oldlang), has already made the vain attempt on three different workdays to identify the symbols and enable their nonsense to be made at least comparatively meaningful in the clacking language of numbers and letters, he now designates the handwriting as defunct, and condemns it by that symbol to feed the reverential fire before the first Reapthresher.

He sends an electric signal.

Two Greys appear with their small car on the rails that run everywhere. No Grey walks, unless the work process occasionally requires such backsliding. Walking is always diversion and waste.

The Greys cause the separated pieces to be lifted by electrically-driven pincers and thrown into the vehicle. They set off, four sets of points switch automatically, and they dump the cultural relics onto the fire before the first Reapthresher.

The old, old handwriting with the strange symbols twitches in the heat.

Pages writhe in the torment of their destruction. They say: "We die amid the howls of uncomprehending creatures. A myth is here tortured to death in the flames of Progress. When reverence yet existed, and knowledge of the unfathomable, when the boundary yet flamed, silence and contemplation circled and the inner spirit was visited by intimation, it was ready for the fructifying awe of infinity: in the time of first connection with the Creation of the Work was I born, and I took my shape in the collision with mortality.

"I am a veil behind which meaning stands, for it is not given to humans, as beings caught in time, to be eternal, nor to make eternity visible. But light shines through my veil. To burn in light is life. Only one whose time is fulfilled by a death of self-immolation has the spark of meaning and eternity within!

"We poor old pages sing as we die the song of the Myth of the Undivided Human."

The curious ancient symbols suffer in full colour. Flames creep along and in and turn them to ashes. They shudder in green, in yellow, in purple, in violet, and speak out their thoughts for the last time.

"In the beginning, nothing in Creation was divided.

"From greyness, from the impenetrable swirl, Creation entered the dream of the Creator, the Demiurge, who is touched only by infinity, so great and powerful is he.

"Demiurge slept and rested from the existence that blends life and unlife, beginning and end, thought and unthought, sense and nonsense, countless realms, and was called Chaos. Chaos is existence, the sum of all possibilities.

"Now infinity came gently humming into the sleep of the Demiurge, touched the boundary of sleep and created the creating Dream. Thus the world came about, which was not divided.

"Therein was neither time nor matter, no before or after, no premise or consequence, no cause or effect. All was undivided and all-at-once, because it was the dream of existence.

"In the circling world of the all-at-once floats the Human, that was neither man nor woman but One, and that bore within it the possibility of every gender undivided, because it was the dream of Chaos. It took root by itself, a succession of kings, and outgrew itself in the creative Dream. In the world was no pain or pleasure, no lust or procreation, no birth or death.

"Then from the overabundance of Chaos and of Existence came the rift of *Becoming*, of difference, conflict, substance, time, motion, of steps and sequences, and it divided undivided Creation.

"And so arose the Great Change: Existence was divided into *Having* and *Becoming*.

"Light and darkness came. They hated one another, and sought one another.

"Heaven and Earth came, the circling sweep and countersweep.

"Clouds appeared above, shadows below.

"Stars and peoples came together and fled apart. War and peace interposed themselves between stars and peoples.

"Wind arose, and the mutability of reason.

"There came the arcuate loveliness of flowers, and there came the worm in the root.

"There came the solidity of the Earth, and the raging heat of the inner core.

"There came Eros and Anteros, brothers. They hated one another, sought one another.

"Land and Sea parted. They hated one another, sought one another. Waves played along coasts. Waves devoured land.

"All-encompassing radiance became the sensuality and the sorrow that is Colour.

"The Human was divided, and became Gender.

"Gender sought gender. Gender fled from gender. Genders loved and hated one another. Genders entwined themselves into One, and split themselves into Two. Time intervened between conception and birth, between love and pain. In the knotting of the one brief endless ecstatic delirium, *Have* and *Become* melded together in the dreaming creative existence of Chaos. Then gender fell away from gender, emptied and exhausted, filled with shame, filled with disgust, and chased all over the wheeling Earth, hating and seeking one another ...

"Everything and every thought became bloody.

"Creation was ruled by blood, and not by the diffuse radiance.

"Time ruled, and whoever said *Time*, said *Blood*!

"We lament the fragmented world, our divided humanity! That which was one-and-all has become one-and-nothing! It nourishes its hate with its love, and hate lurks like a murderous dragon in the deep well of its love!

"For yet again does humanity divide itself, to lurch now between thesis and antithesis, between light and darkness, in its blood are doubt and androgynous *Being* and *Becoming*, Doubt in its emotions, doubt in its thoughts, despair and arrogance all

at once, feeling for the safety belt of Number, of Experiment, of Conclusion! What it is able to conclude is open to it, but closed to it is the creative dream of the Demiurge, the Chaos of existence!

“We are burning to ashes, we ABCs of the secret!

“The Beast devours us, Beast without secrets, without reverence, without memory, Beast that endlessly devours *Becoming* and throws away that which *has Become*!

“Dying here is the myth of the innate, the undivided Human!”

*

A pile of ashes lies before Reapthresher. The ashes twitch. Then lie still. A mechanical shovel grabs the burned-out stuff. Monotonously the lines of Greys yell and clack the jumbled numbers and letters of the Reapthresher Song.

*

Around this time, in the Showprison of the last living creatures, Brook holds her breath and bends an ear to her source. She ceases to flow and speaks in jerky consternation: “Beneath me the giantess Earth is moving. Greys blare and yell their numbers and letters and cannot feel the ground begin to shake. Great Mother is dreaming, and becoming restless. She shifts in her dream, just a little bit, yet hollows are collapsing and I shall be diverted into a new cleft! Soon she will stretch up in wakefulness and shatter the armour!”

Thrush says: “Who can we speak to then? If Brook should die, who will teach us the feelings of a living speech?”

Lilac-bush laments: “Who will water my roots and keep the soil alive?”

But Brook has vanished.

*

Keepers observe and confirm. Tech(Quakes), who with his apparatus monitors the machine called Earth in its functions, ascertains from the inked lines that an insignificant shiver has occurred. In his stamped report he adds that irregularities in the Earth’s functioning are becoming ever smaller. Clearly the Earth, considered as an astronomical machine, is integrating itself ever more smoothly into the System Plan of the Grey species.

A few subterranean transport routes have collapsed. Some tall buildings have swayed a few millimetres. The brook in the Showprison of the last living beings has vanished. But it has been described, and so can be dispensed with. But the currently sitting Council decides to replace the brook by inorganic means, and divert artificial water into the brook’s course.

This is done.

F

The Grey species no longer knows solitude. The Grey knows of neither external nor internal solitude. The Human System Plan allows of no way and no time in which the Grey can be alone. It steps out in a line, joins up collectively to a shift, and after the shift falls into a kind of collective mechanical sleep. It is listed, and has no name, only a designation. This consists of one letter and a row of numbers, formed according to production site and hightown Zone.

Place of production and hightown Zone determine the life of the Grey. These are at the same time geography and destiny. Greys are unaware that the designation corresponds exactly to the one used in times beyond memory for the graves of the dead in churchyards.

Greys do not know the word 'solitude', and no longer know a feeling of solitude. The Grey is never alone. He is produced in a line. He works in a mass, eats a concentrated mass feed – the open field squeezed to a tubed chemical – and has two hours of mass deepsleep. He has only one suit of clothes, made of light metal. The woman's colourful way of thinking, in foretimes called *fashion*, no longer exists. The Grey species does not read, and does not sing. In programmed shiftbreaks it can farhear, farsee, and have sounddiscs. These promote deepsleep! And so among the Greys there are only collective processes and collective reactions.

Since there is no solitude, there is also no private property. For any private property is solitude, because it has to be a segregating and a withdrawing. Everything must be had by all, but no one has anything. Accordingly it is also not permitted to have one's own thoughts, to have any thoughts at all, because a thought is always something of one's own. Similarly it is also not permitted to have a feeling, have a feeling of one's own, have any feelings at all, because feeling is always something of one's own. Mass thoughts and mass feelings are conveyed via starter devices and triggered by dispositions arising from the shift system and the way Machine-humans are put together.

*

Colour-flecked Grey, the last living poet, wanders around in the prison of the last living beings. Now that his seclusion, his remoteness, is revealed and condemned, he begins to waste away. He sees birds and flowers, hears the rustling of trees and at night the howl of the last jackal. Here is more colour than he himself could ever have put together in seclusion – but he sees the boundary and the prison. Ever since babbling Brook vanished, coloured sleep – dreaming – has eluded him.

Now and then as he talks to himself, or with the wind that lives in the greenery, or with the birds or with the flowers, it seems to him that he can feel something sucking. Something invisible, alien, comes out of the distance and monitors him. He

is frightened then, and keeps to himself. Shame holds his tongue. Shame, that curious feeling from Foretimes; its name is unknown now.

Now and then the last poet writes in the old language, but he senses ever more the prison enclosed in sparks, and grows dejected. Now and then he ponders, and cannot understand why he has fallen so in love with something so un-Grey, so against the spirit of the age, as the coloured word. Perhaps he really is just a throwback, a kind of fossil, and so belongs in a Showprison. Perhaps simply to love something is really in the end a nonsense!

The last living poet feels himself sinking slowly into a deep sleep from which he will never emerge. He picks up a fallen lilac twig and writes in the loose sand that is tolerated here – unproductive, achieving no work, slave to the wind. He inscribes irregular lines. He no longer looks back at what is written, and does not know what he has done, for life is slowly receding from him. He has written himself out, and falls into a strange organic death ...

Ancient symbols are in the sand, which no Grey except Techn(Oldlang), in association with Tech(Oldcult), can fully understand:

Autumns fade and springtimes bloom
a thousand thousand times ...
but you catch just a glimpse of the scales that swing,
the casting of seed and fruit,
how bitter Winter sweeps husks along
and already you weary of the storm and thawing snow ...
The dust of Earth sends the same clouds arching,
and the wind's anger
shreds the arch of darkening shrouds.
Always the same, ah,
how soft it glistens, the silky fleece of lambs,
the hunger-cry of a barking fox fades
in November smoke ...
What is the Sun to you, what are day and night,
that make you grow and ripen and be older,
you, just one single word of Life?
Only images you see of the Not-to-be-seen,
and an image are you of the Never-imaged,
you feel only metaphors
for you are a metaphor! –
But
in every year the Word blooms for you anew
as another image ...

*

Tink(Human) and Tech(Human) report, in full concurrence after investigating the case, that the transposing of the last living poet to the inorganic has been achieved. Because the conclusively rusted item was specified for the Big Gathering of the Zone and perhaps also for the Great Assemblage of the First Onethird of the Greys and their programme, the remains of the colour-flecked Grey are at once metallised and made decay-resistant.

In response to a wave-summons, Tech(Oldlang) and Tech(Oldcult) appear and coordinate in taking an impression of the disordered final productions of the colour-flecked Grey, and at the same time make the corresponding sounddisc.

The stabilised inorganic remains of the last philosopher who lived and the last poet who lived are packed in light metal and pressured down through underground tubes and deposited at the level of collections for this sector of the Earth System Plan, namely hightowns C17, C18, C19 and C20. The sounddiscs of the two relicts and the apparatus for the performance of the showfight of words are now ready in place.

*

The day of the Big Gathering is fixed. For six hours the workload will be lifted and sacrificed to unmachinic togetherness. But votes must be enacted for the purpose of forwarding motions to the Onethird Assemblage, and from time to time the uniformity of all Greys and the progress of Progress towards mechanisation must be established through substantive pride.

Columns of Greys march in, according to norms.

The Big Gathering Field, in a somewhat elevated spot, is flat-tamped, and normally serves as drying-ground for the weatherproof coating of the endless sheets of light metal used for clothing. The foursquare space is enclosed by flat, very wide concrete blocks. These platforms are where the Grey masses squat after marching in, and gaze down on the speech-choruses.

Two hours are needed for the masses to be fully assembled. Two hours are needed for presentations, speeches and voting. Two hours are needed for departures and transport by underground lines back to the various hightowns and production sites.

The Grey species has no flags and no symbols. It is sufficient unto itself. It is Greyness itself, Progress, the rolling foursquare that knows no reverse, only forward! It has no softening of feelings, and no confusion of ideas. The pounding of its marching steps makes the Earth tremble. It shakes with a jolt, like a machine at work.

For two hours, endless columns march in from every side. Foursquare after foursquare squeezes onto the Big Gathering Field and stomps itself tight. When the giant arena is one single steaming greyness, everything stands silent for a whole minute, feels itself Grey, the power of uniformity; worships itself, then swaggers to the platforms.

Speech-choirs appear. They are amplified a hundredfold by loudspeakers, and clack out precisely in the language of letters and numbers the prayer to Reapthresher. During pauses an electrical sound apparatus howls a single long-echoing note. During speeches, ten giant toothed gearwheels, all the same size, clutch, clatter, and turn about in unison. The gearwheels are Progress, no leaps, wheel by wheel, tooth by tooth.

In lamentable contrast to this exalted choir, the solidified remains of the two colour-flecked Greys, the last Philosopher and the last Poet, are set up facing one another. At the summons of an electric jolt they raise an arm, shake the head, or stamp the feet and careen clumsily hither and thither. The sounddiscs play at the same time. Into the grey sky huge mineral rays hurl the title in the language of numbers and letters:

*Two fools from foretimes!
Last philosopher who was left alive!
Last poet who was left alive!
Showfight of words!*

The platform-mass of Greys hears the meaningless quavering talk and sees the awkward incomprehensible crazy movements unsuited to any work process.

A rocking and whispering: "I still worship Word ..."

"I still worship Word, and Concept! ..."

"I try to taste the darkness whence came the word, just like a colour ..."

"I try to taste the darkness whence came thought, like an austere lily. But I am fading, in decline ..."

One of the metallised remains sways so bizarrely and non-rectilinearly that the united platform-squares echo to a single clacking throaty laughter.

The metallised relict with the long coils of hair on the chin twitches crookedly, and lies askew on the field. Now the sounddisc whimpers out.

The concrete blocks, respectful and immobile, endure the barks of laughter.

"Starry blackness of Night!" squawks the sounddisc. An incomprehensible mumble trails after it. Then a new disc, in the old nonsensical language with a present-day accent, clacks out the impression taken from the sand of the last Poet's final scribbles.

The metallised relicts lie askew, and twitch delectably.

Amid howls of applause, two small vehicles appear. Electric claws grab the totally defunct remains and take them away for acidic deconstruction. A report is stamped for the Showprison of dead words.

Brain, Eye and Ear, the three hidden Scribes, squat in their underground conference cube. They farhear, farsee, and so experience the Big Gathering of the sector comprising hightowns C17 to C20.

It is proposed and decided that starting from the next shift, the expression "I" shall no longer be used. "I" is a throwback to the time of differentiated, incalculable, disordered personalities. From consciousness of "I" come discord, unplanfulness, competition, and property. Property as I-ness is forbidden. So the expression "I" must be done away with too.

The decision is at once received by the many Zones, and will be confirmed at the next three Onethird Assemblages of Grey collective humanity, because it lies on the line of Progress. From the next shift, every Grey is to be designated only by the number displayed on its chest. Lighting up means existence and readiness for work.

Brain, Eye and Ear nod. Brain stamps the decision.

To update the Protocol, the three mighty Scribes have moved that a decision be taken that history should cease and that memory – being a superfluous burden, an electrical circuit blocker, an oxidiser of Greys, a kind of rust – should no longer exist.

Perfection and the path to it require no looking about, no memory – for they are certainty.

The proposal is agreed, and forwarded to the Great Onethird Assemblage and to the Whole Earth Congregation.

Brain stamps.

A slew of Specialist Technicians will lose their positions. Insofar as they cannot be absorbed into current work processes, they must be transposed to the inorganic.

In addition, the Showprison of last living beings will be left to decay, and the Showprison of dead words will no longer be administered; for there is no doubt that the preliminary decision will be approved by the totality.

*

Dispersing columns of Greys stomp massively out. Section by section they drop down into access shafts and fill rocket-trains driven by atomic decay. For units whose production sites lie nearby, surface transport by small electric car suffices. At first they run on elevated rails, until they come to the warren of production lines and are led onwards by Earth-current into the huge open maws of the high factories.

Progress advances by unstoppable steps.

G

The Earth is divided into Zones, ordered by letter.

In each Earth Zone a number of hightowns have been constructed, whose Greys are designated by the letter of the Hightown Zone, and within the Zone by a sequential number.

Some letter-Zones on the System Plan maps are blank. Here sea, reluctantly tolerated sea, is regarded with suspicion! True, there are still found in the sea some artificially surfaced islands, from the time when the twilight creatures of technology still had airships and staging posts serving partly for peaceful traffic and partly for the dropping of bombs. But ever since hoverers and airships, as well as warfare activity, have been done away with as obsolete and unsafe, and peace reigns eternal – alongside legally-sanctioned transposition to the inorganic – these islands have fallen into ruin, and drift here and there. They are only small, and will be disregarded for fieldplan purposes as long as there is still sea.

At this time there are remotely controlled electric ships that can achieve extraordinarily high speeds. Because of friction, rocket ships are not usable on the sea. Rocket ships are used only infrequently in the air, because totally unprogrammable air movements are insecure, and the violent recoil has an effect even on strongly metallised Greys.

Among the Earth Zones, one embarrassing leftover must be pointed out. “B” is still unbuilt on: no hightowns, no accurate fieldplan, no charged overhead netting, no artificial rain, no electrical fertility, no production sites with small-car railtracks, no underground lines, no conference cubes or access shafts with elevators, no pressure tubes, no shortwave installations.

“B” is the territory formerly known as the Roof of the World, a land of enormous mountain chains with snowstorms and collapsing glaciers, with immense avalanche regions. All other mountain ranges in the developed letters have gradually in the course of the Surface System Plan been stripped substantially level, and no longer annoy to any appreciable degree, even though they assert a touch of remoteness in relation to the dominance of Greys.

“B” lies there like a clod, and huffs ice-breath.

*

The Great Assemblage of Greys in the First Onethird of the Earth System Plan takes place. It lasts three days; the Whole Congregation lasts nine days.

It is decided that the *person* is to be forever extinguished, and *number* will be permanently fixed as the inner and outer principle of world events. Hence world history, and consequently anything irregular, lurching, backward-looking, forward-leaping with a corresponding slight back-thrust, will be pursued to the utmost corner, and transposed to the inorganic.

Subject to the decision of the Whole Congregation and the Protocol of the nine mighty Scribes, there are no longer any concepts, since concepts are an inadmissible

agglomeration and a disturbance to the one-by-one, and signify an idolatrous worship of the word. Concepts contradict the principle of *number*.

Words and concepts such as “eternal”, “endless”, “hope”, “fantasy”, “becoming” and which, like the many masks of incomprehension, are called *anti-number*, are no longer available. They are not tolerated even in the most shamefaced of word-relicts in the factual shortcut language of numbers and letters.

The word “God” has not existed since many Grey shifts ago.

There is no “I” and there is no history. Time will commence with the decision of the Whole Congregation of the Greys, and will begin anew with every shift!

*

As rocket-trains roar along underground lines and small cars rush to production sites in a blue flurry of sparks, the nine mighty Scribes squat in a deeply hidden conference cube in Zone A.

Here the Land of Four Rivers and the Garden of Eden once lay. But that was long ago, and because it deals with a story before history, is not true. When history is no longer available, myth can at last no longer be conceived. Word-heaps about such things, recorded in forgotten languages, rot away in the dead Showprison of dead words. They are indecipherable even by Tech(Oldlang), who is due to be deconstructed, and so are not available.

Brain, Eye and Ear, Mouth, Righthand and Lefthand, Stomach, Rightleg and Leftleg squat around a giant prism of equal faces made of glass. It is clad in a layer of light metal, and no longer reflects.

The Age of Glass too has faded away. Whoever is self, equal to ① and expressed uniformly within the mass, has no need to look in a mirror.

Earth once knew an Age of Glass. A memory persists, but from the day of the Whole Congregation it will be extinguished, along with history. It was a time of the most colourful iciness, utmost vanity, of adornment by spectral lines, a time when clothes were made of spun glass and books had glass pages and glass bindings. There were no printed letters. Every glass page was empty. Lines were dropped onto the glass pages by glass colour-spreaders, and the binding for each casting was batiked in light by means of polished broken-edged prisms.

The Age of Glass, of movable rooms and houses and movable vanity, is long past. It choked on colourfulness, nerve-defibrillation lines, and mind-glazes.

*

The nine Scribes squat three by three facing each other. They stare at one another and at last begin to discuss matters to be stamped in the Protocol.

Mouth says: “There are very many Greys, and they have to be oiled by field-squeezings.”

Brain says: "Their number is by far not yet big enough. They are perfection, or on the path to perfection. There can never be enough Progress."

Eye says: "I farsee across the whole Earth. I am plugged in to every eye, and receive from every eye created by the mating of physics and chemistry. Thus I see that Brain is correct. But Eye is also correct. Space is too small. The Grey species needs room."

Stomach says: "How far advanced is the experimental sequence into the production of foodstuffs for Greys out of chemical substances and crystals that are not organic and do not have to take the stupid illogical detour via root and fruit, milk and blood?"

Ear says: "When we nine confer together, no Technicians are to be pressured down. The Protocol of the nine must not be interrupted. I farhear what Technicians are saying. First, the ultimate ingredient from the delirium, the frenzy of the organic, must be dispensed with! First, the Human-machine must be perfected! First, the motor must come from the test tube and not from embracings! First, there must be no more of the tangled switchback called Nature! We are very far along the path to Model Greyhuman. We shall attain the Goal. Then Greys will eat only configurations of elements, and will be driven by atomic decay in the same way as a machine. Then the Grey as Machine-machine will signify the perfection of Progress."

Leftleg says: "So I cannot yet trample all that drains down and comes from the old?"

Rightleg says: "It will happen. Many times nine Scribes will have to squat in a cube that is promptly to be demolished. But there is no stopping Progress."

Ear says: "I hear Brain thinking. Technicians have achieved this. Let us await Brain's thoughts."

Brain ponders. The other eight Scribes keep silent, and watch Brain closely.

Electrical wave-signals fall into the silence. Eye and Ear exchange looks. Then they nod, and wait for Brain to emerge from his pondering.

New reports arrive. They might be useful for updating the Protocol. Then, all of a sudden, vacancy and deepsleep come. The great two-hour shift, the as yet inescapable work-interruption, the reluctantly tolerated indicator of tax-bondage to the organic, has arrived in Zone A.

The nine Scribes squat bent forward, head against the prism. Only the chamber is awake and blinking.

Two hours later Eye says: "Reports have arrived. Criminals must be punished. In Zone Y, Hightown 19, a Grey interrupted his shift and gazed out at the sky."

Rightleg says: "There is no sky. There is only a smoke of the Earth. The criminal is for me to punish. His offence occurred in my Zone."

The eight Scribes say: "We agree. There is no sky."

Rightleg says: "I stamp my foot. – He is transposed to the inorganic by acid."

Ear says: "In Zone Q, Hightown 5, a Grey exceeded the time-quota gazing at a shower of sparks from the grow-net, whispered to it in a rocking tone, and neglected the shift."

The nine Scribes all speak at once: "He has placed himself outside the Grey species as colourful. Let him cease to be."

Lefthand says: "The criminal belongs in my Zone. I squeeze. – He is deconstructed to the inorganic."

Stomach says: "What has Brain thought?"

Brain says: "We need room. For updating of the Protocol, let it be decided at the Full Earth Congregation that all remaining mountains be levelled down and transposed to the principle of the field. Zone B, an irritant to my thought, is to be demolished. The meaningless heaps of rock in Zone B must be blown up and ground to dust. They are illogical and offend the thinking of Scribe Brain, in whose remit they are located. Dust from the mountains must not fly away, but must be captured. It will serve for the experimental sequence on chemical nutrition. Let research be done to see if these last great obstacles may supply the final necessary substance for testtube conception and perfecting the Human System Plan."

Stomach says: "Then Stomach will at last be completely full ..."

Brain concludes: "Then the time will have come when the nine Scribes no longer say 'I' and may be superseded as a sign of the uniform perfection and uniform contribution and estimation of all Greys."

The nine Scribes all agree. The Protocol is updated. Let the Full Congregation of Grey humanity decide that there are to be no hills or mountains on Earth. Everything must be average, and accordingly flat.

H

Sea says to Land: "What are you doing, taking up my space and hemming me in? Land is alien, an intruder. In the beginning was Sea. And Air, Water and Earth were Sea, all blended into one. Then Air pulled back, an attenuated fear, a timidity that buffets slyly in swirls, and strokes its enemies. Land is Sea's primal Fall, the lapse from grace."

Land says: "In the beginning was the Earth. Presumptuous you are, softened stolen Earth you are, you woman Sea! But Land is the man, creating, firm, persistent!"

Sea says: "All things are conceived and born from Sea. Sea's feelings are boundless. Why does Land swipe its rocky claws into my supple surging body and confine my love?"

Land says: "Your love means sucking in. Your feelings mean flooding over. Your supple surges mean despoiling. If I am not careful, your encroaching years lame me, and I am overpowered and abased. For you are many thousands of years old, and yet not old but ever new. Always there are waves, but they are always other waves! You are the constant boundless lie; but every day a new lie made of foam and pounding, a young female of lures and embracings!"

Sea says: "Land says bad things about me, and yet I too am land! So what if I am female: does not the female give birth to the male? My toes touch land. Mountains lie beneath me. I can take rest when I sink. Mountains with fiery peaks line up down below. The mad youthful contingency of living animals and plants plays about my skin. Sea-spiders crawl over me. Stingray and shark still lust for a killing. Sea-anemones and starfish bring lovely burning temptation. Fish-trails curl sinuously scale-glinting through my hair. But where are your animals, Land? You let yourself be fettered; that was not Sea's doing! Where is the chequered dreamworld of your birds and butterflies? What is there now, to sing and dance on you? Where is the roar of your giant cats, their pursuit of love and hate? When does lightning anoint your locks now? When do storms comb your hair? You are unmanned, Land. All that once lived on you now rots away in the Showprison, to be gawped at by ghastly faces! Only towards me, the living Sea, are you hard."

Land murmurs: "A dreadful time, when the lie speaks truth! Philistines have taken me over. But the female gave them the tools – circling currents, and waves; for her power was transferred to them as the restlessness of charged currents and the surging foam of charged sputtering sparks. They despoil me, dig passages in me that are not the veins of my ores, and they flatten my visage. They lash me with the scourge of Purpose, I who was once the rolling playful exuberance of folly! They flay me, rip away my skin, and there I stand at the martyr's stake of Number, which is always ①, tied by the ropes of System: Sebastian, a target for your arrows!"

Sea scoffs: "You said it, Land! You are humiliated, exploited, nothing more than railtracks for their speeding cars! But I shall not be tamed. I, the moisture that clouds spit out, that creates the clouds, I the completed circle in which life and death are one. In me *they* can barely plough a furrow, and *they* certainly cannot drive me away! I am no foundation to be built upon. My storms and shudderings cannot be suppressed. So what can you bring against me, element for element?"

Land says in a low murmur: "Watch out, Sea, for the Grey species! Do you think I shall tolerate forever their yoke about my neck? One day I shall have my revenge, and swallow up the teeming rabble. When anger is mighty within me and my time is come, they shall all perish, to the last machine!"

Wide glittering Sea scoffs and laughs: "Will never happen! You are tied up tight, Land!"

Now a beast made of metal whooshes through the air. The beast has a tail of fire and races a hundred times faster than waves and storms ...

Land draws a breath, says softly: "Do you sense that ship of the Greys? Take great care, Sea!"

*

The flaming rocket contains Scribes 4 to 6. They are well secured. Their arms hang in a ring. Scribes 4 to 6 are shot up to the height where gravity begins to grow drunk on thin air, and throws off her law like a suit that has become too tight.

Below, in Zone A of the Earth System of Grey humanity, the boom of a dull explosion grumbles to the surface. The hidden conference cube has been blown up and turned to dust. Scribes 7 to 9 hurtle along an underground line. Scribes 1 to 3, Brain, Eye and Ear, have the shortest distance to travel. In a few minutes they will sneak back into the cube of their concealment to squat once more on their blocks of steel, Brain somewhat elevated in the middle, Eye and Ear whispering at the sides.

Before them, stamped reports lie piled. The Protocol must continually be updated.

*

No one now visits the Showprison of dead words. Tech(Oldthink-Oldcult) and Tech(Oldlang) as well as several Keepers are to be transposed to the inorganic. The two Technicians are no longer able to control the foursquareness of their movements and handgrips. Their occupation with historical things has caused them to go rusty, and no banging or bending suffices to save them for the shift. Because they are anyway near the termination deadline of their planyears, they will be chemically removed.

Several Keepers must also undergo the same terminal treatment to remove themselves from the production process. Their careful handling and dusting of dead works and the variants called dead pictures has made their bodily gripping tools too thin and membranous, and they are under suspicion of softened feelings. They are no longer able to appreciate what is obvious, what is relevant to the Plan, and so they are rendered inorganic.

The experience with these Technicians and Keepers provides new justification for the decision of the first Onethird. At the same time notice is taken that old thinking, old cultures, old languages and the like are basically all the same in terms of function, and therefore personnel practices hitherto indulged in have been wasteful.

*

The Showprison of the last living beings decays and becomes derelict. Artificial water is still allowed to flow, because the apparatus is available and no decision has been made to shut it down. Apart from this, a few Techs(Nutriplan) perform experimental sequences on the effect of artificial water on beings still fully organic. From these they draw logical and progressive conclusions on composition, blending coefficients and substance-fitness for the internal oiling of Greys. Particularly promising testtube lines are set up. The goal is nothing more and nothing less than

replacement of all field-squeezed mixtures by one single substance under deoxygenation. These experimental sequences are kept secret and, outside the Special Zone in the Administrative Highbuilding, are known only to the mighty Scribes.

And so artificial water keeps flowing ...

Lilac-bush gradually dries out. Her leaves turn first grey, and then transparent. The pattern of veins and nerve fibres is helplessly revealed, for no true sap pulses through.

Thrush is weary, and squats on Lilac-bush. She can no longer fly, and sticks her head under her feathers. But her plumage is pale, the colour of burnt purple ashes.

Lion lies on the path, his flanks hollowed, a grey pelt over bones. Dead.

He could have jumped up, torn the netting and roared out his anger and his freedom, for the meshed wires are no longer charged, and no Keepers keep watch to see if he behaves according to the description. But he is dead.

Almost every bird has turned grey and is about to die, or lies already grey and dead among the weeds and thorns of dying greenery ...

Lilac-bush, exhausted, whispers: "Thrush and Brook, you last living things that I can still see, what is up with us?"

Thrush no longer answers. She clings to Lilac-bush's dry twigs and strives in vain to make her eyes see again.

Brook whispers: "I can still say it now. But in a little while I shall no longer speak the language of the living, but only numbers and shortcuts will jangle in my plashing. Then I shall completely cease to flow. For ever since the Earth shook I have lost touch with the living waters of the deeps, and have become techno-water. My deepest roots at first still reached the surface of the underground source, and I sucked thin strands of life into me. But now my sources are silted up. So listen: we are all dying, for we have become history. All that lives, all that is connected, becomes *shift* and *history* and is done away with by the law of the majority. That is why Thrush can no longer speak! That is why Lion is dead! But when the experimental sequences are completed, I too, who am Language, shall also be transposed to the inorganic."

Brook falls silent.

The Showprison of the last living beings becomes ever more derelict.

Time paces on, step by step ...

*

Now comes a day when every shift of the Earth Surface System will be cancelled for the whole day's duration. Trains stream ceaselessly bringing Greys to the enormous

campground. Mass after mass pushes tight, each of the four Greyhuman Purpose Models that are still required fills one quarter of the Full Congregation.

Forward to the left stand Eye-humans, forward to the right Shoulder-humans, rearwards to the left Arm-humans, rearwards to the right Leg-humans. The foursquare stretches measureless away. Its boundaries are lost in gloom. The grey endless throng shuffles ever tighter. The horizon is nullified. Grey the sky of murk above Grey humanity. They are like the seething cloud of a miles-wide grey swarm of locusts.

Now all at once many sirens blare out their dreadful howl. Silence falls. The mass of Greys stands immobile.

There are no birds, no beasts, no trees, no shrubs. It seems even the wind is not allowed to blow. Grey, endless, dreadful, Grey humanity stands in desiccated air beneath an expiring sky and feels itself the Earth, the Now, the Ruler, the mighty Number of many-times-many ①.

For ten times one minute, Grey humanity stands in silence revering itself. Then the combined sirens blare out again, and debates begin.

Fields are becoming insufficient. The number of Greys is enormous, and enormous is the demand for field-squeezings. To meet the demand of the four Purpose Models, cultivation must be practised. Over recent Earthtimes the soil has become obstinate. It holds back despite whippings by electrically enhanced growth-stimuli. The Unified Greyhuman – the Human-machine as a single model, the thoroughly normed Greyhuman – is not yet completely achieved. Despite every mechanical aid, there are still Greys who compile, Greys who haul, Greys who hack, Greys who tread. But Progress is on the straight path, which can never err or deviate.

The decision of the first Onethird, to flatten Zone B and level every mountain range, is approved. In addition, the Full Congregation decides to dry out the sea and envisage on behalf of successor shifts the securing of an Age of Humanity, once the extra-terrestrial Sun and the random still available differences between day and night are done away with. The shift shall be reckoned starting from this Grey Age.

Beneath the Earth, nine Scribes stamp the Protocol.

I

Now hubris knows no limits.

The Greys must still tolerate the sea. For thousands of shifts they have looked askance at deleted fields. A sequence of Scribes has worked progressively to update the Protocol. Many a time a Scribe called Brain has pondered the raging inutility of the sea, he alone as the sole Plan Expert for the brain. The sea roars and whoops, plays and sleeps, conceals numberless living, greedy, hunting, swarming throngs, engendered by lack of purpose. It pushes up coral reefs and kelp forests, lets loose

floating islands, devours chunks of cultivated land. Now and then it chews up whole fields, playfully bites off lumps of shore, spits slime over developed ground.

Yet: the decision is made. The sea will be dried out, and become field. But many shifts will drop into deepsleep and end up rusted and inorganic before this goal is attained. Nevertheless, the Goal is acknowledged and given, hence it will be attained through the impetus and law of Progress.

Islands close to shore are no longer subject to the sea's dominion. Greys have captured them, set dams around, pumped out the now brackish water, turned it to steam and put it to mechanical use. The caprice of spring tides has been broken by oil-belts and giant wind turbines that produce counter-currents of air. The sea has been forced to give up such whimsical tricks.

Now there are only the continent of America and the triple continent Eurafricasia. The constricted neck of the American continent is normalised fieldwise. The basin formerly called Mediterranean is a pond that burst its banks. It will be dealt with as a test case. Australia is an appendage of the triple continent; America too is linked.

Ice barriers are demolished by hot-air machines. But the sea is still there!

It will not be there forever! But first the land's hubris must be taken to the limit.

Mountains have already been levelled wherever possible. Elevated land is naturally without purpose, when only flat fields make sense. Mountains are sterile. Climbing them is an added waste of strength to no effect, and at the same time entails absence from the production process. The time when such activity led to softening of feelings and ecstasies of imagination in attenuated air lies so far in the past that it was already forgotten even before the abolition of history. Back then, humanity was not yet Grey ...

So meaningless, the forests on mountains, hills, slopes. The Age of Wood is past. No one writes or reads now. The time of animal fibre is gone. Humanity has become metallic. It needs no mountains, no forests, no lakes to gaze on and wander around, only machines, charged netting, reinforced concrete. Its path is straight ahead. Every diverting tendency must be rendered inorganic!

*

The Greys are sent on their way! Cutting machines, boring machines, explosive machines come rolling. Caterpillar tracks clamber over rubble, squash it to a mash. The stone mash will be handed over to the laws of physics and chemistry, mixed and made ready for the field. Hardly a planyear passes before a charged netting-sky is raised over new workfields. Sparks and artificial rain come trickling down, and enormously increase the yields of plants precisely calculated, against Earth's defiance, to require minimal cultivation and an exact delivery of material.

No more are animals used in cultivation and motor-feed. Animals are crassly organic, and hence illogical in behaviour. Even calculated crossings now and then

escape from the norm to form throwbacks. Using squeezed animals as oiling for Machine-humans gives rise to unpurposeful behaviour, and is suspected of sharing a large part of the blame for the senseless wars of bygone times that killed organic matter in unlawful ways.

*

The Greys are sent on their way. Cutting machines, boring machines, explosive machines roll on without cease.

Rocks growl in anger. Their crystals, matured over millions of years, reposing in the wisdom of completion, scream out the torment of their shattering. Young still-growing crystals are chipped, thrown about, ground down to insensate rock dust.

Hills and smaller mountains stretch away flat, roaring as they expire beneath the long iron scythe-wagons that slice with blades up front, tamp down in the middle, and spread uniformly behind. An Eye-human steers by remote control. Behind the scythe-wagon, rollers roll and level the ground. Here and there concrete mixers set to work immediately, along with light-metal kneaders and sievers.

On the corpses of hills new hightowns rise according to plan. Makeshift access shafts are dug wherever hills and smaller mountains have not yet been riddled with underground lines. Storage depots meander into the ground. Up above, the ground is spanned by elevated rails for small cars. Production sites and tall buildings for experimental sequences are built. The Grey is here. Progress becomes visible!

*

Now and then, older mountains put up resistance. They sense that this is life or death. The patience of rock, not measured in planyears, has endured many things. It has allowed skin to be peeled away, limbs to break. But now in some Zones there stands a mountain that has woken up and begins to shake. Cliffs tumble. Greys at their place of work are squashed and transposed illegally to the inorganic. Springs of water gush forth that were never shown on the big light-metal plan sheets. Caves appear, or disappear with a crash. It is therefore not to be avoided that Greys, deployed in accordance with the Plan to face the risk of choking, drowning or squashing, are illegally rendered inorganic.

The Hundred-councils in the separate letter-Zones come together and discuss. Sacrifices are needed. But the word "sacrifice", like its concept, died out untold shifts ago, as did the word and concept "God". To be exact, they died at the same time. Grey humanity knows neither God nor sacrifice. It has no sense of the individual and so knows nothing of guilt, virtue, atonement, despair, yearning, sacrifice or whatever these inflated bubbles from the time of colourful rocking words were known by.

It is confirmed that the wastage of Greys during the work process does not reach even half a per cent of the programmatically deployed ranks, and hence remains

within the range of calculated losses. The relevant Numbers are at once listed with the remark “totally rusted” and written off. The work goes on.

Now Zone B is tackled.

This is still the Roof of the World. A staircase of mountain peaks leads up to it. The Abode of Demons walls itself in with monstrous cloven hulks, the abode of wind-gods, ice-giants hail-flinging, cloud-chasing, sand-spewing, fire-guzzling, salt-breathing. There they sit on this storm-dumped roof and rest peacefully or fight one another. When they scream, their scarps quake, the abysses and the wide plains. Their sweat flows away down in giant rivers. Their breath creates weather.

Now the Grey appears, and begins to tackle Zone B, the blank patch on the System Plan. This Zone is to be incorporated fully into the serried ranks of fields. Occasional platforms may be left to serve as foundations for the tallest hightowers. But the wilfully obstinate must fall. Underground lines must run beneath, charged-netting skycloud must stretch over them.

Cutting machines, boring machines, blasting machines roll in. Progress nears, in the shape of the sole divinity the Number ① and the straight line. It does away with the outdated, the agglomerated, the tangled, with the irregular, defiant, wicked, capricious, nonsensical, uncontrolled – with every muddle.

Smashing and grinding proceed screeching along the whole length of the first stage. Organic water is pressure-sprayed and becomes part of the rockdust mix. Radioactive instabilities must be integrated into the allotted boundary trenches, where they can decay. The Greys have no need for the insane aperiodicity of rivers or natural rainfall, which negate every plan and do more harm than good. Cloudbursts and other errant electricity are captured by light-metal covers stretched over the netting-sky, where they can be vaporised to death. The uniform smoke haze over the Earth, the boundary made of machine exhalations, is thick and seldom allows any such thing through.

Enormous columns of Greys from Zones A and C are brought in. Zone D stands ready to join them.

The mountains of the second, higher, stage sense the incursion, and shudder. The mountains are shaken to the root. Many bathe their toes in cauldrons of fire. Blood surges high in their veins. Explosives rootle in their guts.

There are demons still, asleep on the Roof of the World. They have grown tired out in play, in fighting. For fun they turned an ice lake to steam, so that in the whimsy of a sudden storm, needles whirl like damp salt flakes. They have laughed and raged all at once, laughed wide swathes of sunshine down, and thrown cloud-balls in between! Now they are tired, and sleep. Their mist-breath smokes about the highest peaks and dances a cloud-roundelay. Garlands of white specks float about icy needles of rock ...

A mountain cries out. Two dreadful explosions have split its middle apart. It shatters into three, and tumbles drunk with terror. The screams echo from every rockwall, hurtle into every abyss, and invade every cavern.

The demons awake and rise up in a rage. Their eyes stare like reflective crater lakes. They perceive the assault of the Grey species. Down there are field, utility, purpose, shift, dreamlessness, flatness, sequence, progress, number – all are calling creative absurdity out from its last lair, to do battle!

The demons laugh. They clap their hands and laugh. Their laughter sweeps in whirlwind gusts, and disorders the ranks of Greys. It is of no avail that these can farsee and farhear, that they can steer remotely by jolts from charged waves, that they have pressed brothers of the mountain demons into their service and force them as they decay to work for the Greys, exhale energy. They do not know the language or gestures of the demons. The Plan demands penetration into the confusion of mountains. Even if they make a detour for a stretch, the wind lifts its arms and smashes them and their machines against granite jags.

Their cladding of light metal shatters. Greys are only bone, akin to metal, and hinges and rivets. But when the granite jags take issue with them, blood still drips, black, slow, thick. The Grey is not yet perfected.

*

The demons have identified the foe. They enjoy the game. Their hands put avalanches together. Ice Giant sits on a plunging glacier, and away he goes. Wind-gods leap from peak to peak with mountainous strides. Cloud-chasers knead scraps together and stuff them into every chimney and ravine. Hail-flingers take up a load of grit and hurl the rattling dusty mass down from them. Salt-breath stretches out full length and blasts his crystal breath in miles-wide billows; laughs and blasts. With one bound Sand-spewer leaps down into the plain and stirs up yellow storms with the tips of his toes; laughs and stirs. Fire-guzzler takes a deep breath, spews fire, rocks and ashes high up through a crater lake. He sees the palmtree of fiery dust standing in the skysmoke, it fans out and collapses, he sees, laughs and breathes fire.

Earth roars, and quakes ...

The Greys are stranded. They melt, split apart, freeze. Their machines no longer breathe, they melt and freeze all at once ...

The demons of the heights are once again victorious. Only a small part of Zone B is incorporated into the System Plan of the Grey species.

J

Brain, Eye and Ear, the three mighty Scribes, squat in their underground conference cube. They are in deepsleep. After every six-hour shift a two-hour deepsleep inserts

itself. Three times a six-hour shift followed by a two-hour deepsleep even now still makes up the Grey species' day.

The three mighty Scribes squat on their steel block, head against the plate, soundless, without dreams, every function and valve switched off. The motor in them is seemingly dead. It has been nourished by squeezed oil and rests on its axis with no consciousness of any kind.

The conference cube is dark. Time is suspended, connection with the surface-shift is interrupted. Progress never entirely rests. The divisions of Greys have various shift-times and various deepsleep times, but the times are so coordinated that not for a moment can a rupture occur in the programmatic Plan.

From time to time thin stamped-metal leaves are ejected from a pressure-tube, reports that have to do with the Protocol. The three mighty Scribes do not hear them clatter. Deepsleep swallows every sound.

There may be different Scribes, but they are always Brain, Eye and Ear, and it is always the same Plan.

The case of Zone B belongs in the Protocol.

*

Deepsleep time runs out. The motors have been recharged.

Brain, Eye and Ear sit up straight, all eager readiness for work. Brain squats somewhat higher. Eye and Ear squat by his side. Eye sees from afar, Ear hears from afar – thoughts too. But thoughts hardly exist anymore. Everything is consequence and development, and so has no need of thought, which always brings the danger of dissection. Only the mighty Scribes think for the Protocol, and a few special Techs think within the framework of their assigned experimental sequence.

The goal of the nine Scribes is to be superseded and superfluous. The final thought, the ultimate rusting away of thinking, signifies the victory of the Grey species and its achieved perfection. But any Grey now who thinks is a criminal, and liable to punishment by rusting for this predatory assault on society.

Brain peruses the reports. Brain remains motionless.

Eye says: "I see Greys evacuating from Zone B. Zone B is only in small part fields. Many Greys are inorganic."

Ear says: "I hear roaring. Broken machines clatter. During the deepsleep shift, irregularities have occurred in Zone B."

Brain says: "There are reports of mountain collapse, avalanches, storms of hail and sand. Fire and stones have rained down. Senseless regressions to what once was called Nature have occurred. Hence Zone B is for the most part as illogical as ever. The attempt to pacify it and turn it into fields must be resumed later, with more resources. I propose that we decide: the lists are to be updated. The achieved part of

Zone B is to be incorporated in the programmatic Plan. The sea is to be dried out. Machines are to be built that can work alone, without blood, and can be steered remotely from a great distance for any dimension of shift. When working against nonsense, the Grey must no longer end up in the hands of crazed objects."

Eye and Ear concur.

The Protocol is updated.

Wave-arrays summon the three Techs Humrestock, Tubeselec and Humoiling to the big tower with its special hollows. They are pressured down through the tubes almost at once, and are deposited undamaged and with almost no kinks in their consciousness. They recover immediately, and the number on each chest lights up. They are ready for work, and each jerks an arm in greeting towards the three mighty Scribes of the first Onethird of the Earth System.

Brains says: "Has success been achieved in turning off conception and securing the reproduction of Greys by inorganic means?"

Tech(Humrestock) says: "The work strides ahead. Complete assurance is not yet given. Even now a percentage admixture of the delirium-extract is required. The percentage of the supplement has been reduced, but is still available."

Tech(Tubeselec) says: "With regard to delivery of the four norm-types of Grey that are still required, testtube selection proceeds with assurance. Exclusion of the delirium-adjunct is not relevant to the special task of testtube selection. The delivery being striven for – a Normal Grey lying immediately on the path of Progress – might not be possible without the experimental sequence of Tech(Humoiling). Unitary oiling and ultimate norming will stand in a mutual relationship."

Ear says: "I hear Scribes 7 to 9. I do not hear 4 to 6. So 4 to 6 are in deepsleep."

Eye says: "I farsee this."

Ear says: "The question of unitary oiling touches on the Protocol of Scribes 4 to 6 and 7 to 9, Mouth and Stomach."

Brain says: "Regardless, Tech(Humoiling) must express himself on the matter of normed oiling. It belongs step by step with the question of the total transformation of Machine-humans into Human-machines, to be achieved in this Protocol period."

Tech(Humoiling) says: "If work processes arising from deployment of progressive machines and standardisation of the fieldplan system are to become undifferentiated, then a normed Greytype is required that needs only one type of oiling. So field-squeezings must change. Experimental sequences to be set up will show whether fields can be freed up for hightowns and production sites, and hence lead to an increase in the number of Greys."

The number on Brain's chest goes dark. The conference cube is dark. The three Technicians stand motionless, and wait. Eye and Ear squat motionless, and wait. Brain is pondering.

The number on Brain's chest lights up. Brain says: "The aforementioned experimental sequences must be set up. The decision requires a Full Congregation of Grey humanity and prior Protocol-alignment of the three times three Scribes."

Meanwhile, preliminary experimental sequences are to be set up with the goal of cutting back and eventually eliminating field-squeezings for the purpose of improved utilisation of space for Greys, hightowns and machine production sites. The single Norm Grey, the Number ①, is to be achieved. For this, normed oiling is a given, to be drawn as appropriate from air. Air contributes too little to the Earth System Plan. Tests are required to see if a totally inorganic production of Grey humanity stands in a step-by-step relationship with oiling from air.

The three Technicians jerk an arm in farewell to the three mighty Scribes.

The goal is fixed.

The three Technicians are vacuumed back to their experimental hollows, and ejected.

*

In this Protocol period, amidst the sequence of normal shifts and deepsleeps, something unusual happens.

Up until now there has been air, and a sky overhead as a boundary to the field of view, a grey elevated fog. Only seldom does a bit of sunlight slide down, or a kind of blue reveal itself. Storms are seldom sighted over the fields. Everything is flat, without mountains or forests, so the wind has nothing to play against, almost forgets its name, and goes to sleep. But it might operate at altitude. Lightning never ever happens. The monstrous wire nettings suck up all the material for thunderstorms.

In Zone B, the demons are asleep. They have put a dwarf-enemy, an army of grey ants, into disarray. Now they sleep again. Their breath is the storm. In dreams they toss and turn and hurl thunder over the peaks. They have no idea that their highest seat will be the construction site for Hightown B-37. At present it cannot be constructed. First, more precautions must be set in place.

On the margins of the untamed sea, trainloads of materials are piling up just as the unusual event occurs. On Floor 18 of the great tower, in a special hollow, Tech(Airmov) is at work. He observes all of Earth's working air, and has so little to do that to fill his shift time his work remit includes transport by air: he is at the same time Technician for the few atmospheric rockets used in special cases.

The Technician dissects air, lets it freeze, thaws it out again, lets it close up like a wound, and observes its average composition. Back in a far distant and hence expunged time, his fore-Greys had a great deal to do and were deployed in many models. Back then was the age of air as a *force*. Air was made thin. Gravity hurtled after it, sucked down. Air was compressed, rebounded angrily. But this age has been

cast off. Like the Age of Glass and many other ages, it lies abandoned by the wayside. Only the pressure tubes maintain a relic of the Age of Air.

Tech(Airmov) notices a slight deviation in the composition of the air. It reverts to the norm, becomes uncertain again, and suddenly lashes out. Air, assumed to be a constant, becomes capricious, malevolent. It seems to want to acquire a special smell. Suddenly it grows hotter. An unknown substance, only tiny quantities but still recognised to be unknown, is mixed in with it. Then the irrationality disappears. Air reverts to its duty, becomes normal, and has the prescribed temperature. At the same time, certain functional disturbances in various Greys also fade away, such as sluggishness at work, airgazing, and the irruption of irregularities into deepsleep.

But in the middle of a work shift something new, unplanned, unfamiliar enters in. The air suddenly grows darker, darker. A sultry oppressiveness sinks down from above. "Above" means the limit of the sightfield, nothing beyond. There cannot exist anything apart from the Earth, and nothing can come down from out there. Where there is no cause, there is no effect. Where there can be no first step, there can never be a second.

But it grows darker and darker. Something like a cloud descends. The cloud emits a hum and seems to oscillate. It twists and turns from rising to setting. No sample can be obtained just by looking. It has become sky, and approaches ever nearer. A dark sky falls upon the Earth of Grey humanity and the System Plan.

The humming grows louder. It tinkles metallically. The cloud twitches and curls into itself. Stripes come loose like peeled skin. They sway and twist as they fall, lit up pale green and brown-violet, and while still aloft twine themselves into ropes. Now the Greys see, and look up. Something alive is raining down.

The huge cloud hangs almost touching the great charged nets. It curls into itself, moans with the bronze wingbeats of myriads and myriads of creatures that are beyond the ordinary and come storming down from the unknown.

Some of the creatures become tangled in the netting and fall dissevered to the levelled ground. They are an armspan long, have four pairs of wings and innumerable feet, quivering antennae on a head that looks almost like the tucked-in head of a baby, round coloured eyes at the sides of the milled body, and jutting from the sharp hind end is a horn-shaped sting.

The Greys recognise danger. Life in an inappropriate form intends to fall upon the fields and chew Progress up. Young creatures are already slipping right through the nets. Then broad spans of netting flare up, electrically charged. Caterpillar-tracks roll onto the fields. The humming cloud becomes shredded. Its life is scorched, and bleeds sap in great streams. The caterpillars crush those that slip through ...

The cloud battle lasts three days. During deepsleep, workers from other Zones march in. Then there is victory over this incursion from a demonic aether.

The cloud battle has brought sacrifices. Sap from the creatures has prematurely rusted many Greys and poisoned their breathing-points. An infectious disease breaks out, called cloud-sickness, and causes further rusting. Greys who fall ill or are already transposed to the inorganic are ruthlessly destroyed, scrapped, thrown into deep clefts, covered in liquid concrete and erased from the lists.

The Earth System Plan is saved. There is room for new Greys and new Progress.

K

It is of course forbidden to speak of the great cloud-sickness and the serious infestation of extra-terrestrial creatures. No jabber or prattle on this topic is to be perceived. There is no place on the Earth that can be infested by extra-terrestrials. The Earth has no history and no memory. What happened yesterday has happened, has never happened. And so no Grey mentions it, and no Grey thinks of it. Only in the Protocols of the Scribes Brain, Eye and Ear, and more distantly in those of Scribes 4 to 6 and 7 to 9, are there stampings about measures to be taken.

And yet a change has come over the Earth. Fields in the affected regions are more productive. The Fourfield system in the affected Zones functions with almost violent vigour, even though the way to total Greyness, to the normed Grey and oiling by purely inorganic matter, is still to be approached via an intermediate Onefield system.

The targeted field-squeezings are revealed over long shifts to be not quite suitable. They summon up irregularities in mechanical performance. Unplanned inclinations to aperiodic states of delirium cannot be withstood. But these effects, strangely enough, cannot be utilised for the testtube mixture. At last even these limitations are overcome. The Technicians can once again set up their step-by-step experimental sequences.

Cautiously, as if the laws and application conditions of infantile machines such as levers and rollers are being explored, in this scribal period experiments are begun on air-squeezings, aimed at achieving a non-field source of fodder for Greys. A successful outcome will enable unimaginably huge spaces to be utilised to house the Grey species, facilitate their increase, support new hightowns, new production sites, new machines.

At the same time attempts are made, as one final detour, to feed the almost mechanised Greys directly with electricity in order to eliminate the need for oiling, even after the Grey is made totally inorganic. Positive and negative leads are connected as if at a mother's breast.

These stepwise experimental sequences are conducted in seclusion, in specially dedicated shafts. They are not without danger. A rapid transition from one method of feeding to another brings consequential phenomena of paralysis and breakdown.

Greys have to be stamped from the lists. The Human-machine is almost achieved. But there is still, the Technicians see, something in Greydom that recalls the animal!

*

Outside, in the Earth System Plan, the drying of the seas proceeds.

Just as the machines are about to burst into full capacity mode, a report of irregular conduct at the place formerly named the Showprison of the last living creatures is pressured down to the conference cube of the three mighty Scribes Brain, Eye and Ear.

Eye deciphers it, and farsees. Ear farhears. Brain ponders.

Brain issues wave-instructions. A Mech is pressured down the tubes, and ejected.

This Mech is the Grey who deals with the artificial spring of water. Upon request his charge is topped up. His number glows. He rattles: "Since no other instruction is in effect, the spring is fed by artificial water. In recent times subterranean water of a different composition has again contributed to the feed. At the same time, particular irregularities appear in this place."

Ear strains to farhear. Eye strains to farsee.

Eye says: "I see, via reflected electrical waves, plant matter without purpose or meaning or use all tangled non-rectilinearly. A provocative green is visible. The place is again becoming colourful, and hence what once, when there was still history, was called 'sinful'."

Brain says, issuing a wave-instruction: "From the point when the next shift comes on duty, the place will be evacuated and free of Greys. Production will be diverted. We are to ascend, to inspect the foe at close quarters."

The three mighty Scribes ascend together for the first time in many shifts, and tread the upper Earth. They travel by grey light-metal car to the overgrown place.

Brain stands motionless by the rusted tangled electrical nets and iron posts. Ear senses. Eye lowers the lids.

Then Eye opens the eyes and says: "Farseeing gives only an image. Image is better than reality. Reality muddies judgement. Image provides overview and plan."

Brain says: "Now and then, close quarters are necessary even for one who stamps the Protocol, one who does not serve the Step and yet – until self-removal – must consolidate the distant. The brook is babbling again."

Ear says: "I hear more acutely here. It is a repellent sound. It reminds of the rocking words of the rusted fools called the last living poet and last living philosopher."

Brain says: "Plant growth curls unhindered with many detours. No birds or animals are here. But this is still the foe. It is proposed that we decide to leave the

place to itself, tasking the Technician to keep an eye on the growth and send down reports of anything notable. The former Showprison is a testtube in which the foe can be read."

Ear and Eye keep silent. But Brain is mighty, so they concur. The Protocol is updated.

*

Columns have assembled along every coastline. All Zones, even those not bordering the sea and not affected by it, have deployed a percentage of material and of Greys.

Test samples of polished stone dust from the defeated parts of Zone B are dumped for Special Technicians, and will be investigated as to their composition and eventual suitability for purposes of oiling or Grey restock. But all other spoils from expropriated mountains and hills are stored in vast underground depots, and are now summoned to the surface.

It is fitting that the overthrown presumption and pride of mountains, hills, forests, mud-secretions, and even capricious flooding from the irregular meanderings of rivers that serve neither for demarcations nor for field-production, should be not only broken but, even beyond this, be put to purposeful use.

Endless trains of wagons glide along overhead railways towards the coast, and there discharge their cargo. It is as if every wagon of light-metal gives a laughing rattling grin as it turns and opens wide its maw to spew split crushed ground-up rock, crumbled soil and dried mud. Larger boulders are sometimes retained, and are catapulted as if from a trampoline from special wagons on pneumatic rails. They spin as they fall. They splash thudding into the sea.

But first, dunes and embankments are levelled and pushed into the sea. They are unnecessary now, for they no longer have the task of protecting field production from rolling waves and irregularities in the sea's sense of life. The degree of ebb and flood has anyway been greatly reduced and made more modest by the levelling of the Earth's surface shape.

*

Sea dreams and plays. A short while ago, in the roaring laughter of a rare stormy night, its white teeth bit a chunk out of Zone G. Now it feels full, dreams and plays.

Sea-spiders, jellyfish, sea-anemones, cuttlefish, sharks, rays, flat shapes from the deeps, angler-fish – in the heavy glassiness of waves is a mighty thousandfold flashing glinting, a seethe of hunting, snatching, rising, diving, of sinking shadows and lights, of lissomness and predatory greed, of yearning touch and cowering fear.

Fish emit beams of light and seek one another in the loving friction of cool scales. Phosphorescent spots on the fins of deep-sea creatures, lantern for catching or flame to show the way, lines of burning craters of greed, of fear, twitch and lick in a glow of shimmering colour. Life and death bite and couple. Wave-lashed meaningless life

rages silently beneath the sea. But Sea dreams and plays in dream. White waves curl, foamflowers of water that build, flash, scatter in the blink of an eye.

Now Greys come to do battle. A single long siren-howl, blaring at the same time onto every spot of the inhabited Earth, signals the start of the main assault. It proceeds by various means to the one goal along every coastline of the threatened life called Sea. Furious staccato shortwave instructions are transmitted via sound-levellers across wide distances. Technicians of the Plan issue soft crackling orders and farsee, farhear.

In the three underground conference cubes squat the three times three mighty Scribes, unmoving, farhearing, farseeing. They can also hear the Technicians' plan-thoughts; Eye and Brain can even see the plan-thoughts. Technology has made yet more progress. If plan-thoughts yield the non-colour impression grey, they are step-by-step and correct. If they deviate by degenerating to colour, then they are false and must be rectified by Protocol instructions.

Sea pays attention. It senses blows and woundings. The Greys have driven shafts down, planted explosives, and split undersea mountain ranges apart. They explode with a dreadful roar and come crashing down. The vain green-silvery mirror of the surface is shattered. Whirling clouds of mud, rocks, creatures and water crash together, boil from friction, storm up into air and spatter in dispersed impotence back down onto swirling water. Sea becomes murky, full of mud. Submarine valleys and gorges begin to fill. Slowly, pitilessly the seafloor rises. Sea-adapted life – which in a terrible playful offhand exuberant way carries within its creatures every machine the Greys have ever attained and can never attain – is concussed, squashed, torn apart. Ground rises, trickles onward, clambers to the surface, and devoid of will composes itself to become continent, field, system plan.

Sea rages. It rears up and spits watery mountains of wrath. It gathers for a leap and falls on coasts and over the unnaturally growing field-islands in the midst of the flood. Rubble-trains are sucked in and rusted, machines are seized and overturned as they nod their emptying and spit out their wide-mouthed laughter.

But Greys are not among the pummelled scooped-up booty. They glide away in their little cars. Their workplaces are far removed from the coastal battle zone, and they steer remotely according to wave-instructions from Technicians. Hence few sacrifices among the Greys are scooped up, rolled and ground to metallic mush by the outraged Sea.

But now from the air comes a Grey counterattack. Oil is pumped down and blown, trickled, misted over Sea's uproar. Greys have squeezed blood from shale.

Shale says: "This damned species won't even allow rocks to go on living! And now I die, a sponge riddled with holes, a marrowless impotent lump!"

Greys hear no language other than their own yelps and rattles. They extract oil from shale, pump it through pipelines, into blowers, and spray it onto Sea's fury.

Oil says to Sea: "It's no use, sister! Hardness has come, and forces us to be adversaries. We grow weary. We shall grow used to growing weary! We must calm down. The best peace is in fading away, becoming mist, being sucked dry by nothingness ..."

Sea rears and crouches. It pulls back and listens. Now long sheets of red-hot metal come and turn spray to steam. Plate after thin metal plate pushes out from a seam of ore, ever thinner, ever farther out. It is heated by electric current, and in its intolerable thirst sucks in embattled moisture.

The plates steam and hiss in satisfaction, breathing, cooling. But always more heat is harried into them. Again they drink the moisture, lick, blow steam. In the air above, grabs are brought in. On the head they have suckers, metal mirrors put together as many-pointed prisms, they are charged with electricity, floodlit by artificial light, and hurl a redoubled sucking heat over the sea. Heat drinks and oil persuades with tormenting calm. Sea twitches, writhes, fettered torn body covered in an alien skin.

Sea's heart throbs in anger, in fear. Sea calls to the fire-spewing underwater mountains. They have long been asleep. Many have forgotten that once they breathed out heat. Now and then they dream of their power, and as they sleep emit waves of sulphur, or they breathe out tamed fire and warmer currents.

Now Sea calls to them in her last extremity. They awake and open their craters. Many have gone dry as they slept, and are dead. But enough fire rises. The deeps groan. The ground heaves in mid-ocean. Spring tides, the hounds of giants, hunt along the coasts. Newly laid fields are gouged by their claws.

But many fields remain ungouged. The craters breathe out their last. Their lungs rupture. Shattered mountains litter the seafloor. Sea boils and steams even at its feet, for liquid metal fire rises from deep within the Earth, spreads and solidifies in the flood. Skidding air-filled boulders stray like rockdust over the surface, are captured to become soil for fields.

Sea draws back for a final blow. A bluish mountain of water is hurled far inland. Thousands of Greys are smashed, buried, dragged out to sea, they twitch, lie still ...

But Sea has overtaxed herself. She must recede, bleed away into dikes and channels ...

The Greys have a dreadful deepsleep shift of exhaustion. Their machines smoke. Technicians twitch. But half the sea has been vanquished.

L

Many-times-many shifts go by before the fielded half of the sea looks as if it too has become what is called "land". Mudholes keep forming. They must be choked,

sanded firm, the dream-moisture driven out once, twice, three times. Then they lie quietly in their own grave.

Ever and again swathes of sulphur or carbon dioxide break free. Gasses well up heavy, choking, foul-smelling, creeping. Gasses push hissing through the crust of mud, as shimmering twists of colour.

Greys set them alight. Their fiery breath is to dry out the damp field and regularise it. Gas – billowing or creeping – is choked off or captured, investigated and, if usable, is put to mechanical use so that it may be slotted somewhere into the Plan. Stalks, stumps, floating kelp, rotted underwater vegetation, choked confusions of creatures: all is rendered totally inorganic, burned; it helps to dry out the vanquished half of the sea.

Corpse-fires glow, smoulder and smoke through many shifts, and bring the skycloud ever lower. Then there is silence. The planfield, expressionless, lies there and opens itself numbly to be used.

Around this time Tech(Airmov) finds that the seasons are changing.

Since many scribe-ages ago, there have never been seasons in the proper sense. Season is a historical concept, hence dead. There is no record. Season – or the symbol for it which is yelped now – signifies only an almost systematic, almost periodic oscillation in the air system as warm strata change over. Greys in their light-metal suits and their standardised mechanical structure hardly notice. Because they ignore the disturbance to the shift and readiness for work that was once called *feeling*, a feeling for air, warmth or cold is for them not tangibly available.

It is only from the path of measurement that the Technician for air movement and its monitoring detects discernible shifts in temperature differences in the various Zones. They are becoming smaller, but also occur more frequently. At least eight air-shifts each planyear must be taken into account. But this means only Progress for the Field Plan System, which is on the path from Fourfield to Onefield System. Anyway, as noted in the Protocol, this is all on the path towards abolishing the year as something completely extra-terrestrial.

The mighty Scribes take no notice of the observation. Sun and stars can hardly be seen now in the smokesky. The sightslots of Greys are directed straight ahead or down. They never look up. No wheeling constellations are available, and so can exert no influence on earthly concerns. The Earth is tucked away separately, that is all. Its surface gravity has shifted. The partitioning into land and water, mountains and plains, has been rectified. Climate has been vanquished by the metallised Greys.

*

In a doubly-armoured concrete hollow, protected from farseeing by radiation-proof metal and from farhearing by dampening filters, there squats the SpecTech who in a long sequence of experiments treads the path to the Metaller.

Metaller is the name of the Ultimate Machine, the goal which will substitute for the almost perfected Human-machine in dangerous work-processes. The Metaller is sexless, made entirely of metal, constructed seamlessly in accordance with the laws of technology, without consciousness, without will or feelings or anger or desire, without time. It is sheer function, the perfected unity of cause and effect, premise and consequence: Progress pure and simple.

The Metaller cannot be damaged, cannot be weakened, cannot go rusty – the inorganic machine. It will have to be filled with electricity, so that it can move and work continuously. It will have to be oiled constantly from the air. It will experience no effects from weather, heat, cold, damp. For the necessary two or three queries concerning the work process, a slot will open and a response in the rattlespeak of the Greys will whistle out.

The Metaller will function accurately via remote control, remote steering, remote regulation. There will be no resistance, no exhaustion. The expiry of its effectiveness and the need for replacement by a new Ultimate Machine is calculated, and is to ensue frictionlessly.

The Metaller is perfection, the symbol of the Grey species. But since “symbol” is a rusted concept from history, the Greys know nothing of it. The SpecTechn is merely zealous on the path to the Metaller.

Inside the Metaller a central motor must be placed which signifies the drive, the motive force. The construction of this motor is the current task. It is called the Central Motor or CM. The serial number for the experiment of this shift period is CM-11.

CM-11 lies silent, and waits. Its kernel, the step-by-step temporarily installed combination of splitting atoms and the decay of a radium emanation with precisely known behaviour, has not yet been activated by the electric starter. So CM-11 lies cold and motionless on the stone bench, a gleaming skein, barely fist-sized, a medley of screws and slots glinting copper-red, in some places reflecting violet.

The Metaller stands behind the stone bench, immobile, cold, lacking a power centre, the complete replica of a Grey in its template combination of cranks, connecting rods, hinges, abutments, cables, plates, screws, cogs, rivets, sumps for oil and acids, galvanising baths. It has sight-cells and a receiving station. The Metaller can be set to a specific wave-array. It has no transmitter. The plan is to use an appropriate Grey technician as the transmitter. And so the Metaller has parts harder than steel, and unbreakable. The wear coefficients of the various components are extremely small, the operational lifespan very long, precisely calculated in advance. Once the CM is installed, the operational energy and working power of the Ultimate Machine must surely be enormous. Nothing will withstand the Metaller. It will vanquish through work and step.

The Metaller stands immobile and cold. Its breast location is open. A hollow space with loosely dangling connecting cables is visible. Now CM-11 is to be experimentally installed. The SpecTech for this purpose, ST(CM-7) – the seventh, following on from rusted predecessors – squats by the work bench and observes CM-11. He needs only to activate one contact using the errant contact that was once called “finger”, and the energy-exhaling decay in the innermost cell of CM-11 will be initiated.

In another special hollow, normed oiling for Greys from the Onefield System is investigated, and alongside it the experimental sequence for oiling from the air continues. Another special hollow is concerned with the restocking of Greys using no delirium-extract at all and with no confusion of impetus, by means of appropriate action, firm goals and the inorganic, in order to achieve through calculation the last and final abolition of feeling. And so Progress progresses along many paths.

But in the special hollow for the Ultimate Machine, ST(CM-7) squats and looks back and forth between CM-11 and the opened Metaller. The opened breasthole of the Metaller yearns for its heart. CM-11, the bodiless heart lacking connective effect, yearns for its body. But ST(CM-7) knows nothing of this. He looks only at soldering points and the dangling cable-veins, and has only to convince himself that everything fits together, then final assembly of the machine-creation can begin.

But first another experiment must be made. CM-11 must make a test run. ST(CM-7) activates the contact. The systematic release of stored energy, its step-by-step exhalation and availability for work, begins.

ST(CM-7) knows that such a test run is to last only a short while, as effective energy unconnected to the Metaller will accumulate within itself and will not perform to its normed target for external work by the perfected machine. Accumulation of energy with no release through mechanical functioning is dangerous.

The SpecTech for the Ultimate Machine, designated ST(CM-7), squats by the central motor, designated CM-11, and observes the initial stage of work. A low humming can be perceived. Cables begin to quiver. A distant rhythmic knocking comes from deep inside. CM-11 begins to glow pink, to light up, to burn red, to darken all over and resemble the colour of saturated blood. The humming is smothered, as if heard through veils. The workhollow vibrates to a strange buzzing.

ST(CM-7) flicks his sightlids wide open. There seems to be a mist before his sight-slot. Then it begins to circle around him. The mechanism behind his forehead loses its designed function, its cold step-by-step; it is touched by a mysterious power and brought to a state of whirling unconsciousness that is not empty but filled with a bat-whir of dreams and fantastic images of other times and other worlds.

Suddenly ST(CM-7) can see in colour. He hears a confusion of tongues, full, in a rhythm inexplicable to him, all separate and yet joined together. Birds fly through

the room. CM-11 is a red vibrating island around which white, bluish, lilac butterflies flutter, entranced by the humming and buzzing from the dancing island.

CM-11 lies on the bench buzzing and panting for effect, for work.

The Metaller with the open breastwork from which unconnected wires and cables dangle stands cold, immobile, without impetus, amid the buzzing benediction of working metal. Its metal face looks grey, expressionless, with slits, a hole for a mouth with a protruding slot for whistled answers. The reflexes of the working CM-11 twitch towards the light-metal coating. The Metaller seems to grin and laugh.

Energy bursts from CM-11 in gouts of flame. The buzzing makes the special hollow quiver and vibrate.

ST(CM-7) recovers from his drunken dreams. He becomes rigid, recognises his dreadful backsliding, and stretches a hand to close the circuit and switch off the exhaled energy.

It is too late. Having not been regulated in a timely manner, CM-11 blows itself up in a demonic fury of unbridled violence. The Metaller bursts apart all at once with a laughter of metallic shards. The SpecTech for the Ultimate Machine, designated ST(CM-7), touched by an ill-timed arousal of the blood, is rusted to fragments of dust, and so rendered inorganic.

ST(CM-8) takes his place.

M

The mighty Scribes have entered into the Protocol the premature termination of experiments relating to the Ultimate Machine, as well as reports on CM-11 and the Metaller and ST(CM-7). It is decreed that in accordance with the plan, two Metallers are to be constructed at the same time. CM-12 is commissioned. It must work totally noiselessly or at least almost so, for it is ascertained that a combination of novel work-noises distracted the attention of ST(CM-7).

The tower, which has sustained a certain amount of damage from the eruption of non-goal-directed energies and in several places seems to have been flayed, is reconditioned in order that successor technicians can be in a condition to pursue the interrupted work. So ST(CM-8) steps up and directs attention to the suppression of illegal noises. Four particularly specially trained Tinks(Human) and two Assemblers(Human) help him build the two new Metallers M-2 and M-3. A simultaneous double assembly is deemed necessary so that, should any failure occur relative to one of the Metallers, the other model will still be spare.

ST(Humrestock) and ST(Tubeselec) are summoned. In the current shift period they are designated ST(HR-15) and ST(TS-9). They have stampwise reported that their experimental sequences have come to a certain conclusion, more exactly of course to a pre-conclusive conclusion. For it is of the essence of Progress that it can

never be outpaced. If Progress can ever be at an end and become *completion*, then perfection will have been attained, and the Goal, and with it the meaning of every form of work, every shift, every incident, will be switched off, lost, and then the Earth will have to self-liquidate. The first moment of total self-worship must be the last, for then there is no plan and no path: – a thought that is not to be thought of ...

The Goal has no thoughts of its existence and its meaning. It never thinks, because thinking is purposeless. Thinking ahead is allowed in written form, and is like the Greyhuman Plan System which is like the Earth Plan System. Non-purposeful thinking ahead is colourful, false, and as such is to be rusted.

*

ST(HR-15) and ST(TS-9) are wave-instructed to be pressured down, and now stand in the conference cube of the three mighty Scribes Brain, Eye and Ear.

The outturn of the presentations will determine whether the nine mighty Scribes should convene and whether later on, following Zonal endorsements, a Full Congregation of all Greydom is to be summoned.

ST(HR-15) and ST(TS-9) have compiled the results of their latest experimental sequences, and wait until they are recharged with current, and the number on the chest lights up.

Brain, Eye and Ear stare at ST(HR-15) and ST(TS-9).

Finally Brain depresses a lever. The numbers on the chests of the two STs light up. They jerk an arm in greeting, and report ready for work.

Brain regards the numbers on the chests, and ponders.

Standing before him are ST(HR-15), the fifteenth SpecTech of the sequence relating to the resupply of the human stock, and ST(TS-9), the ninth SpecTech of the sequence relating to testtube selection.

Brain ponders, and says: "It will be considered, discussed, decided and stamped on the updated Protocol whether consecutive numbering should be abolished for Special Technicians. It signifies history, a look back, hence backsliding. All that needs to be signified is what *is* at the time. In any case, every SpecTech can only be ①, so no need for numbers."

Eye remains silent.

Ear says: "Only one voice needs to be heard: that of the SpecTech currently found in the work process. In any case, a numbered designation pointing to predecessors, to history, is superfluous, hence harmful. On the other hand, the sounddisc archive still preserves notable events, speeches, decisions, and voices. Hence there are ST(HR-14), (13), (11) and ST(TS-8), (6), (4), (2). The path has no need to be heard."

Eye says: "I see only one SpecTech. So there is only one SpecTech. For this shift, in fact for every shift, only ST(HR-15) and ST(TS-9) are relevant. Also, the sounddisc

archive is a veneration of the past, and so is to be rusted. On the other hand, it is remarked that the sounddisc archive provides information about steps taken along the path. Marker steps are made audible and hence visible.”

Brain ponders, and says: “If the step does not reside in *every* Grey, if the step is not the *motor* of the Grey, the motor in the machine, then every backward look at sounddiscs, every attempt to make audible and visible something that has rusted away and has become inorganic, is without purpose. Whoever has to *poke around* has not internalised the path. We nine Scribes must now and then poke around, for the sake of the Protocol. But we know that our purpose is to unplug ourselves, become superfluous, hence meaningless, and accordingly to withdraw ourselves by removal from the work process of Progress. We are that which in the Greys is the residue of flesh and blood, and that which in the restocking of the Greys is the residue of delirium, of procreation. We must be superseded. Any Grey must be able to replace any Grey, including us, and have the same number. I propose a decision to be recorded in the Protocol, irrespective of endorsement by the Full Congregation: the sounddisc archive is to be rusted. Numbering of Special Technicians is to cease. Like every other Grey they receive only their rank-order number as a multiple of ① and as a step-designation.”

Eye and Ear concur.

The Protocol is updated. Simultaneously with the final abolition of the day, the numbering of Special Technicians is to be abolished.

Brain asks ST(HR-15): “How far has the experimental sequence progressed regarding the ultimate mechanisation of the Grey species?”

ST(HR-15) stands straight and bellows in response: “The goal is to perfect the Grey species in such a form that the motor of the step which operates as a regulator inside the Grey is assembled purely inorganically, without delirium. Growth in its old form must be superseded. Childhood is incomplete and colourful. Childhood is a deficient capacity for work. Senility is already excluded by timely rusting. After one transitional shift period, during which the formation layers of the Grey are to be extended pursuant to a strengthening of internal mechanical-power impulses and a lengthening of veins, immediate completion to the appropriate extent is achievable.”

Brain says: “In that case, the perfected Grey corresponds to the Metaller that is now in the process of assembly, with the distinguishing characteristic that in the Grey it is the starter motor that performs as a guidance system, and in the Metaller it is the executive unit.”

ST(HR-15) bellows in response: “It is so. We are in the transitional shift period of stepwise extension of formation layers in line with stepwise strengthening of the internal motor.”

Ear says: “In history, this is what in pre-shift times was called ‘growth’.”

Eye asks: “Is the perfection of the Human-machine in prospect?”

ST(HR-15) bellows in response: "The Human-machine has been achieved. Provisional conclusion from the experimental sequence in this direction allows it to be viewed as achieved. Progressive steps still to be taken beyond the Human-machine require the Grey to be marked as Machine-machine. At the endpoint of stock resupply, Grey and Metaller will stand face to face and behave like starter motor and motion, like wave-instruction and mechanical implementation, like functionary and function."

Ear says: "This sounds like screw and thread. It fits together."

Brain ponders and says: "In that case, experimental sequences on testtube selection are superfluous, and are to be terminated as already settled."

ST(HR-15) jerks, greets and rattles: "One transition between Human-machine and Machine-machine is still outstanding and still requires testtube selection, albeit on a progressive scale. A residue of blood and delirium-extract cannot yet be dispensed with. It is concentrated in a vein by the heel, as far as possible from the motive centre of the mechanism and its location. Let ST(TS-9) be questioned."

Brain ponders and asks: "Has inorganic continuous oiling of the Grey species been achieved, and with it the Onefield System, with a prospect of oiling from air?"

ST(TS-9) jerks, lights up, greets and bellows the reply: "The four Grey types are redundant and dismantled for the step-sequence. Oiling via direct feed from the charged net is shown by experiment to be a failure. Questions addressed to ST(Humoil) may provide more specific information."

ST(HR-15) has something to add. He rattles: "Restocking of Greys still requires a drop of delirium-extract. Activation of the residues has been achieved up till now, but is ever more difficult. In addition, it is necessary to refocus the experimental sequence for testtube selection, because steps must be taken to achieve total replacement of conception by radio-activity and hence a polar alignment with the Metaller. The experimental sequence is on a firm path to this. The production domains of ST(HR-15) and ST(TS-9) will thereby hardly overlap, rather complement each other."

Eye says: "It is the difficulty of the exact experimental sequence that allows one to see that ST(TS-9) should not be rusted. It is proposed to decide: that ST(TS-9) merge his domain with ST(HR-15). For the shift still required, they will be designated ①, and ①+①."

Brain and Ear concur.

Brain says: "The mechanisation of the Greys achieved to this point is to be pursued farther."

ST(HR-15) unveils the Human-machine, the new Onefield Grey, which is to be produced in series to replace Greys currently used in the work process, who will be programmatically rusted. It is small, a young Human-machine.

ST(HR-15) unveils the motor it is fitted with. It vibrates with a fluttery buzzing. Its cogs and transmissions race so furiously they seem to stand still.

Eye says: "I see it. The mission of the Greys is transmission."

ST(TS-9) steps forward, shows a test tube of finest light metal, shakes it, unscrews it, and carefully lets a drop of viscous fluid fall into an intake on the motor.

At once the motor sets almost rhythmically to work. A loud knocking rings out, intermittent at first, then quite regular, as if the motor is counting one ... one ... one ...

Eye picks up a tiny implement and lifts the sight-slots. Eye says: "I see through the metal frame of the Grey. A dark strand is trickling behind the rear foot-place, and gathers there."

ST(TS-9) greets and rattles: "The application of the drop of still active delirium-extract to the inorganic medium of the motor causes conception and the gathering of the residue of blood in the vein at the ankle. This residue, yet to be superseded, determines the shape-extensions formerly called 'growth'. Acceleration of these extensions has been achieved so that they are completed in a mere three planyears, and from that point on the Human-machine is fully work-capable. Given a total disconnect from delirium-extract, and a totally inorganic resupply, the designation 'Grey species' may be rusted."

Brain ponders and says: "The year is abolished, even in the form of planyear. There will be only shifts. I send a wave-order for ST(Humoil) to be pressured down."

ST(Humoil), in this shift period designated ST(HO-11), is pressured down, made fully charged, lights up, and reports ready for duty.

Brain ponders and asks: "Has normed oiling for the Grey species been achieved?"

ST(HO-11) greets and rattles in response: "Yes. It is achieved. Following the programmatic rusting of the last Fourfield Greyhuman types, the Onefield Greyhuman will be the only type in the production process."

Brain asks further: "Has oiling from air been achieved?"

ST(HO-11) jerks and rattles in response: "It is not yet achieved. Experimental sequences have been set up. Propulsion by raw nitrogen filtered from the air was not achieved, since no heating could be gained from it. Combustion of nitrogen in itself or as pure nitrogen in the motor requires oxidation, and is contrary to the step."

Brain ponders at length. Eye and Ear keep silent. ST(HR-15), ST(TS-9) and ST(HO-11) keep silent. The time for deepsleep shift approaches.

At last Brain says: "This may be thought of as on the path of Progress. Disconnecting the delirium-extract in the course of fully inorganic restocking causes sex to no longer apply, causes oiling as such to no longer apply. Since atomic decay and radioactivity combined achieve respiration and oiling and machine-rhythm and

combustion, deepsleep shift no longer applies. The Machine-machine as Grey will bear the step-number ① for the duration of the work process, without sex, without deepsleep, without respiration, without oiling, its work duration determined only by the wear-coefficients of the metallisation. The final task of the step is to find an ultimate non-wearing metal. With that, Earthly immortality will be achieved."

Eye says: "I see it."

Ear says: "I hear it."

ST(HR-15), ST(TS-9) and ST(HO-11) jerk an arm and bellow: "It is so."

Deepsleep shift begins.

Brain, Eye and Ear slump over the Protocol table.

N

A Full Congregation of all Greys on Earth is fixed. It takes place on the flattened coasts of the vanquished half of the sea, where earlier it hurled itself most widely and violently against the Tricontinent.

In the meantime, strata have stratified. Much heat from explosions in water has radiated out or been added in. The Earth has made further progress. Zones of the System Plan have conformed ever more to the regular, and allow an ever more accurate preview of the required Grey, of the Machine, of shift working. The Earth is on a good path to become really Earth, not simply a number of floating plates on a bubbling soup.

A Full Congregation of all Greys on Earth is fixed.

Underground trains roll in without cease. Access shafts heave with Human-machine after Human-machine. Transport compartments spit out sixteen after sixteen. They shake themselves, rattling. There is metallic clinking. Sightlids lift. Sight-slots are fully charged. As they rise from access shafts onto the surface of the Earth, they jerk an arm high and rattle a greeting into the air, like an iron seed sprouting from the field ...

The greyness over the Earth resounds once more to the rattle and bellow of greetings. Column after column forms up, exactly according to plan. Enormous stretches of coast are filled with Human-machines.

Sound-levellers jut from every tall building. They are mounted so as to link their sound waves across Earth, and amplify them a millionfold.

The machine-greeting roars. A thousandfold-thousandfold chorus howls "①" in response.

Sound-levellers bellow: "We salute ourselves, we Greys, we masters of the Earth!"

Greys bellow in response: "We salute ourselves, we Greys, we masters of the Earth!"

"We salute ourselves! The Number One salutes itself!"

“We salute ourselves! The Number One salutes itself!”

“No one of us is different. Every one of us is the self *and* the other. Every other is every other. There is no ‘I’ and no loathsome difference upon the Earth!”

“We abolish the day!” - “We abolish the day!”

“We abolish Time!” - “We abolish Time!”

“We abolish merit!” - “We abolish merit!”

“We abolish the individual!” - “We abolish the individual!”

“We abolish sex and procreation, for we are stamped and in series!”

“We abolish sex and procreation, for we are stamped and in series!”

“We are the perfected Together, the Step, One-by-one and Side-by-side, all at once!”

“We are the completed Together, the Step, One-by-one and Side-by-side, all at once!”

“We are the completed seamless Present!”

“We are the completed seamless Present!”

“We are the Number One, the Number ①!”

“We are the Number One, the Number ①!”

“We are on the path to perfection, to the Machine-machine!”

“We are on the path to perfection, to the Machine-machine!”

“We shall become materially eternal!”

“We shall become materially eternal!”

“We worship nothing but ourselves, the Number ①!”

“We worship nothing but ourselves, the Number ①!”

Earth quakes and sways from the monstrous roars of self-adulation from every Grey at the Full Congregation of the Earth.

Sea, the half that still exists, is seized and lashed by these waves of sound. Earthstorms cross the sea and sink their teeth into its glitter. Grey humanity keeps up its bellowing for a whole hour. For a whole hour the throaty rattles and synchronised blare from the sound-levellers clot and spit in rhythm. For a whole hour, all of Greyhuman-machinedom worships itself.

Then decisions are made, unanimously. The Protocol is to be updated.

*

In Zone B, the mountain demons sleep and mutter. At the location of B-37, the planned hightown, the oldest ice giant yawns and grimaces. Avalanches of snow flow

long from his beard down onto the plain. His face is riven by cliffs, corries and troughs, covered in a rocky stubble.

The oldest ice giant yawns, grimaces, and mumbles in his sleep. He emits a rumbling laugh that sets off avalanches and topples the furry forests about his waist.

“Ho, what tiny things are these crawling on my pelt? What is tapping and kicking at my toes?”

The ancient being with old man’s bones dreams, and in his dream he is crumbling.

“Ho, what is this that prickles and tickles? What swarm of beetles is biting my ankles? I’m asleep, I’m lazy, else I’d brush you off! Run away and bury yourselves, before I awake!”

The ancient being sits up straight. Earth quakes. Mountaintops throw hats to one another.

*

High above the smokesky, air demons play. They pierce through the murk that rises from the tamed Zones of the Earth and condenses to a choking overburden. Where they breathe, the air is thin. They slurp ice needles and chase one another. In gusts of sunshine they storm down to the planned location of B-37 and find ice giants, hail hurlers and sand breathers asleep.

The air demons hold still amidst the whirling. They peer through the fissured smokesky.

Tiny creatures are moving down below. Foursquare little insects dash in columns back and forth. Hair-thin prickles bore into the toes of the ancient being, the ice giant.

The air demons laugh. “They’re shaving his skin, those toys down there! How they tickle his toes!”

Now the ancient being roars. His dream shatters.

The air demons descend as tornados, swoop howling. But they can no longer smash the drilling wasps. The ice giant’s torn feet are bleeding. The midgets have used explosives. They have slid away, those who were already keeping watch from afar, paws itching at the lever, sightlids lifted, sightslots fully charged, loaded with wave-orders that hit the distant target, and strike. Contact causes violence and fires to break out, cliffs to split apart, to crack, be blown to pieces.

Now the ancient being, the ice giant, hurls great blocks of glacier down. The air demons twist storms together as a scourge.

*

Two Metallers stand and take machine-steps. They have received wave-orders for maximum energy-breath and have whistled their slot-reply. They stand still and take steps. Storm, hail and avalanche cannot knock them down. When buried in snow, they

melt themselves free with their own blood-breath, and trudge slowly back, following wave-orders.

Another section of foothills in B-37 is vanquished by Greydom.

*

Half-sea has heard the bellowing praise bestowed by Greydom on itself. Even days later, waters touched by the din crash cross-cutting together, unable to restore the smoothness of the surface mirror. But then Sea stands still and begins to ponder. After a while she feels herself stagnate, become foul and brackish, feels a fear of coagulation. When motion stops for thought, motion must be seized by a fear of death.

And so Sea forces herself violently apart, presses her long supple limbs against the coast and howls in anger at the alien boundaries by which she is hemmed in and despoiled.

Watersea calls to Airsea and talks to it: "Air, we are in danger! Danger is upon us from the Tiny which is hurry-scurry! The Big is seldom a danger, and then only to itself. But the Tiny in a mass is terrible, for it remains small even when it covers all of Earth! But it is spiteful, greedy, sucking, vengeful, never resting, never sleeping, never dreaming, never playing, never creating. Grimgreyness is upon us – Human-machinedom!"

Air lies sluggish over Sea. Air replies: "Are you in trouble, Waterman, Waterwoman, Watersea, Allgendered, that you become wise and speak to me whom you did not know – until today?"

Sea crinkles its foamwall in anger. "You too, Air, are sea, a sea of air! My surface and my above is your ground and your below. We share a single boundary, which is our skin. Do you not sense it, Air: whatever torments me and hems me in will be your very own trouble, too!"

Air hisses in scorn: "I have no troubles."

Sea foams: "Grimgreyness is our foe."

Air whistles: "You were always my great foe, Watersea! You shove me and smash into me. You destroy the most secret games! When the flowerings of my dreams go a-fluttering, the purple-darkling clouds, silvery threads, light puffs of windballs, blades of grass and webs of foliage in the breath that bears them, then along you come with your jealousy, which can toss and turn only within itself and hardly glistens in the foam of anger, then along you come and suck down my dearest children to do your bidding! You take it on yourself to milk my clouds and nourish yourself on the milk-rain from above. For by yourself you cannot survive or increase. Your paramour the Sun will suck you dry!"

Sea is paralysed with grief. She glances into her mirror. The mirror is black. So Sea says: "You are wrong, Airsea! Now that I have been robbed and am only half, I realise there are always feuds between those of the same blood. Your children, your fondest

dreams, are my waters, torn from me! You suck them high in order to cool your breath. You make light the heavy liquid, and have it wander and play in your arms, for you yourself are childless, Airsea, and steal my waves!”

“You lie, Watersea! All living breath drinks me down, else it would perish!”

“There is nothing left alive save you and me, Airsea! Human-machinedom, the Grey species, which has become genderless and calls itself Greydom – that is our foe! It no longer *lives*, all it does now is *exist*! It has begun to annihilate me, and will destroy you too, Air!”

Air laughs: “Destroy me? Destroy the boundless?”

Sea says: “See those two metallic beasts, Air, that stand far off. They are, and are not. They decay, yet do not decay. They suck in choking gases, and blow them out. They are Greydom’s draught oxen, but they do not eat and do not know of their yoke. They do not know. They do not dream. They do not play. They do not procreate. They step out and destroy, when Greys order them to!”

Air rises, and smiles: “So cover yourself up, Watersea! My body is invulnerable. They can cleave me, but never cut me to pieces. I am the eternal Whole. Whatever strikes at me strikes itself. What can a Grey do to me, that beast there, the slurping step, the lurching heaviness?”

Sea stares at the Metallers. They are chargeless grey lumps, sightslots closed, mouth slammed shut.

There they stand, motionless.

O

The nine mighty Scribes come together. Eye has farseen. Ear has farheard. Brain has pondered, and has picked up the special-shift thoughts of those relevant SpecTechs that are still permitted and necessary. Supplementary stampings can complete the Protocol. For the Protocol must continually be kept updated. It is the conveyor belt of Progress.

The nine mighty Scribes squat in yet another underground cube, facing the prism plinth. Before them are the two Metallers, cold, grey, chargeless. Their Keepers, the relevant Spectechs, stand motionless in the background, and wait. They are ready to work and to respond. They await a summons, and live current.

Brain ponders, and says: “Performance has given proof that these two large Ultimate Machines, designated Metallers and in shifftalk to be called $M①$ and $M①+①$, are the final step to a total implement-machine. When their working energy is switched on, they go relentlessly forward, they are inexhaustible, deployable anywhere, precisely controllable, steerable by wave-orders, and once the required task is complete they can be switched at once to a resting state. The resting state is total. It

corresponds to non-existence. It uses no fuel, and its readiness for activation requires no tending or monitoring of any kind, merely a protective coating. Their material durability will persist for a very long period, the termination of which is calculable in advance.”

The SpecTechs, summoned and fully charged, bellow and rattle confirmation.

Eye says: “It is proposed to decide: In consideration of the importance of this step-achievement, a process discontinued in the previous shift-period is to be utilised. A sounddisc montage of the final incursion into the foothills for the planned Hightown 37 of Earth System Plan Zone B is to be presented at the Full Earth Congregation.”

Stomach says: “It is proposed to decide: presentation of the sounddisc montage proposed by Eye is rejected as backsliding into feeling, into the organic, into the past, and hence as step-inappropriate. Presentation of happened happenings is looking around, going backwards in time, slurping oil already used and thrown away. The shift-age of firing up with what is past and decayed is long gone.”

Stomach swells, a bloated heaviness.

Stomach continues: “Every Grey, and Greydom as such, is at every moment to be certain of itself, to understand itself as Measure and as the Number ①, and hence as unthinking perfection. Even thinking is to be designated a softening of the metallic basis of existence, a backsliding, and so is to be excluded. For Greydom, the appropriate form of processes parallel to thinking is a function of the stomach.”

Brain ponders a long while. All are silent.

Brain lifts an arm and says: “Stomach is right. In just a few shifts the time has come for Brain to cancel himself and be rusted. The step-time is yet to come when Stomach persists as sole Scribe, until Stomach too can be disposed of – once the perpetual Grey is achieved.”

Presentation of a sounddisc montage is rejected. Stomach has prevailed over Eye and Brain.

It is decided and stamped in the Protocol: “The Metaller as a total ultimate work-machine is to be permanently available. Experimental sequences aiming at a non-wearing metal material for Human-machines and Metallers will continue. Rusting of those Fourfield Greys still available is to proceed according to plan. To achieve a faster transformation to Onefield Greydom, the total duration of Grey shifttime is to be shortened by one-fifth, hence final rusting is to be achieved correspondingly sooner.”

*

A Full Congregation of all Earth’s Greydom is fixed. Human-machinedom packed side by side fills the whole of Zone K, so numerous still, despite all the workplace losses of recent shift-times.

Sound-levellers bellow, link up at height and hurl down a machine-thunder of sentences made of numbers, letters, shortcuts, and lists.

The two Metallers are presented. They stand grey, lumpish, cold, chargeless, and lacking propulsive energy. A hundred paces from them, a wall of hard metal has been erected: ten paces thick, twenty paces high. Between Metallers and metal wall a trench twenty paces wide has been dug and filled with strong acid. If made just a few degrees stronger, this acid would cause the ultimate rusting of everything in existence.

From above comes a roar: “These are the two Ultimate Machines M① and M①+①. They are indestructible, and can endure a very long shift. But this is the Goal: material eternity for the Metaller, material eternity for Greys, abolition of Time, equation of Number ① with the Endless and Eternal, self-abolition of word and concept by the Number ①! Watch now, Earth’s Greydom, Human-machinedom, this demonstration of the power of Ultimate Machines M① and M①+①!”

The two Metallers are made fully charged. The Special Technicians, having received a wave-order from the nine mighty Scribes, give the signal to start work. They provide direction by remote control. In the motors of the Metallers, a stepwise atom-splitting in association with energy-exhalation from the decay of radioactive substances begins to alter their posture.

M① and M①+① set themselves in motion. They proceed in a mechanical rhythm. Their footfall thuds. They reach the acid-trench – and walk through it. Acid surges around them, but they suffer no corrosion. As they stride on they emit exhaust in the form of a fiery breath from the mouth. As it emerges the fire is dark red, becomes bright red, the flames are edged sulphur-yellow, greenish, and end in grey smoky convolutions that leave high buildings and hightowers in their wake and merge with the smokesky. Metaller breath rasps and rattles like the breath of a raging bull.

M① and M①+① keep going. Here is the steel wall, gleaming grey and seamless. Since no instruction is received to alter course, the Metallers keep going. They reach the wall. Their steps are stopped. The metal bodies hurl themselves forward, vibrating and thundering. The steel wall shakes. It trembles in waves, as if shuddering. The Metallers stride ahead. Their fiery breath cuts in.

M① and M①+① burn and stride their way through. They begin to run red in the heat-sweat of their labours. The steel wall collapses with a clang, swooning, a pile of shards. The Metallers are downset to half-strength. They proceed slowly, become grey, breathe out steam without flames, are switched off, stand cold, immobile.

A monstrous roar of triumph shakes the Earth. Human-machinedom all as one jerks an arm high in greeting. They worship the perfected Ultimate Machine, the Metaller! Their worship worships themselves, for nothing can withstand the Step, and nothing is outside of themselves!

*

Rusted, underground, the first Reapthresher, idol of long-lost shifttimes, rots away ...

Very soon, all the old Fourfield Greys are rusted and gone. The Onefield Grey rules the field with its outer wall improving shift by shift and its ever-stronger motor

performance. If Fourfield Greys could still feel anything within, they would feel rejected, old in the archaic sense, retrograde. There might be antagonism, a quarrel between generations, or between generation and regeneration. But Greydom no longer knows sentience. It has no knowledge now of the illegal activity that might be called “feeling”. In this shift-age there is not even a symbol for feeling. There are only degrees of temperature, work performance, processes of combustion or decay. These are readouts.

Nevertheless it will seem to the Special Technician for Human Restocking that Fourfield Greys wear away even more rapidly than was forecast and decreed. On average they undergo final rusting a quarter shifttime sooner, rather than one-fifth. The fact that their final rusting does not proceed in a coordinated and even-paced way is a sign that Fourfield Greys represent a superseded type, too much the Machine-human, and not before time replaced by the normed Grey, the Onefield Grey.

Experimental sequences aimed at an ultimate normed oiling are zealously pursued.

The Onefield Grey is achieved, structurally perfected. The only experimental sequences left to pursue are those respecting the oiling of the Human-machine. The goal is to do away with all and every field-squeezing.

The organic in any form is not to be used for oiling. The necessary energy-feed must be so concentrated that a single drop suffices for the duration of an entire shift. Deepsleep shifts are to be done away with entirely. When – after however many shift-changes – it is achieved that in the various Zones of the Earth System Plan, and within each Zone in the various hightowns and fabrication facilities, the deepsleep shifts are a single coordinated whole and hence shift-eternity is assured, then so too the single Grey, the actual Human-machine, is finally brought to a stage where oiling-drops are automatically imbibed during the shift, deepsleep is no longer needed, and as soon as material eternity attains the final step, the shift-eternity of the single Grey, now to be called Machine-machine, will also have stepped to the finish line. At this point in time, which lies on the straight path, Earth will contain the greatest possible number of Machine-machines, Metallers, conventional machines, fabrication sites. Machine-machines and Metallers will possess eternity. Their oiling will be a combination of radioactive decay and energy-exhalation by stored atomic fission, and will be eternal. Then any kind of procreation, be it via material conception or testtube conception, will no longer exist. Greydom will stand there – material-eternal, engine-eternal, fuel-eternal, shift-eternal!

This is the Goal, the culmination of the Step.

Until it is reached, the path must be carefully probed.

Air is liquefied, mixed with certain mineral substances. This fails. Experimental Greys must be withdrawn from the work process and stamped from the thin-metal lists.

Certain components of the mixture are combined with the products of certain field-squeezings. Experimental sequences and their evaluations again cause several Human-machines to be discarded from the path of Progress. Alas, no inferior but structurally identical objects remain in storage to be available for experimental purposes, and Metallers no longer have a use for this kind of oiling. On the other hand, conventional work-machines are fed directly from charged nets, and so in principle are oiled and made ready for use inorganically.

Attempts are made, using samples torn rapaciously from the remnant sea, to put the creatures still residing there to good use. But these children of the sea generally do not survive long enough even for the first experimental sequence. They evaporate or choke before these begin. Any remains that happen to be left fail to survive the first test feeding, and –spectacular backsliding! – die the purely organic death that died out so many long shifts ago.

So that leaves only experimental Greys. The Special Technicians take Fourfield Greys in the final stage of operability. But they react differently from Onefield Greys. So Onefield Greys must be experimented on, and sent for rusting as necessary.

In a new experiment, which mixes primal dust from the vanquished foothills of the Zone B foundation platform for planned Hightown 37 together with radioactive substances and just a trace of field-squeezings, a failure occurs which, however, lies on the path of Progress, and so is to be risked without hesitation.

It turns out that one experimental oiling mixture is so violently explosive that the tremor from the distant remotely-controlled working tread of a Metaller is enough to set off a test explosion of such force that even the SpecTech for this specialism is taken totally by surprise and so has neglected the relevant safety measures.

The SpecTech finds himself in this shift period pressured down the tubes to the three mighty Scribes Brain, Eye and Ear in order to make a report. Even on his airtight journey he senses jolting in the Earth's strata.

It turns out that Hightown E5, belonging to the Protocol remit of Scribe Eye, no longer exists.

Eye farsees. Eye says: "A funnel-shape is forming. Hightown E5 is whirled within it. Connection conduits and rails are severed. Rains of fire and stone, hence irregular phenomena, fabrication facilities, machines, Human-machines, the entire Greydom of Hightown E5, is prematurely yet totally rusted at the very moment when the Number ① is to be spoken."

The SpecTech stands transfixed. He acknowledges his work-error. Brain, Eye and Ear decide for the Protocol: Special Technician to be prematurely rusted due to inadequate step-safety. Discovered explosive to be employed in vanquishing the remaining half-sea, and in subduing Zone B.

P

In these shift-times, *Renu* is produced.

This step is accompanied by remarkable phenomena that fall outside the laws of rank-order and the Number ①. The progress of Progress becomes extraordinarily rapid, the sequence of events comes thick and fast.

Special Technician for Humrestock, designated ST(HR), squats in the laboratory hollow and regards his equipment, the testtubes of thin light-metal, the flasks, distillates, kilns, electrical connectors, vats of raw materials. He checks the supply of restock material, compares the labels on the testtubes against the stamped lists and the testtubes of derivatives.

It is high time that the restocking of Human-machines be stripped of the last remnants of procreation-extract and humanity. The Machine-machine will never attain the final step until serial production with the decreed self-activating *starter* motor, singularisation of the Step, is achieved on a factory scale, without growth, without noticeable deviation from the standard Grey. Even the testtube is only Path. The counterpart to the Metaller must be the Machine-machine: a Metaller for *issuing* instructions, rather than implementing them!

But experimental sequences are set up. When the path is stepped to the end, the Goal is attained. For there is nothing that cannot be achieved step-by-step.

Concepts that lie outside the step are neither logical nor illogical. They are not to be available.

ST(HR) picks up a testtube. According to the label it contains compromised procreation material going back many shifts. The label exhibits an already obsolete style of writing.

ST(HR) is thrown out of his step. The machine-step of his motor is set constantly to the number ①. This testtube should have been used up many shifts ago. It will no longer be active. It should be rusted immediately. But perhaps it still has a percentage of potency, and is usable given the shortage of Greyhuman activation material!

A motor just off the production line is brought in for the purpose of ignition and activation. Tinks(Human) hold the still unmotored Grey ready by its extendible limbs. Soon energy from split atoms will be stored, doled out, and radioactive decay will be present, and what in long-rusted shift-ages was called irregular, immeasurable, incalculable, uncountable – namely *Life*.

ST(HR) lifts the testtube to his sight-slots and lets cold, penetrating light fall on it. The light-metal skin becomes translucent, transparent. The viscous fluid in the test tube seems to undulate, become iridescent.

ST(HR) notices that his brief deepsleep shift, the chargeless period, is approaching. A decision is required: are the contents of the tube in working order? Activity appears

to be assured ... It even seems as if an irregular unknown impulse is being emitted, a non-stepping wave-shaped energy.

The Tinks wait.

ST(HR) is conscious of his function, of being a step-creator, a starter, a spur.

He lets it drip.

Just as he is about to drip, his waking period no longer has a boundary. He is ready for work yet outside his shift. Something alien floats about him and in him. ST(HR) can no longer decide if true deepsleep is making him irregular. He hears unknown noises. They merge in an out-of-step rhythm, and yet each rings out by itself ...

ST(HR) does not notice that he has dripped the entire contents of the tube.

Deepsleep shift overcomes the HumRestock Tinks, Technicians and SpecTech. All squat motionless.

*

The achieved Human-machine is designated R-127475 within Hightown 9 of Zone R of the Earth System Plan in the Protocol remit of Scribe Stomach, but there is something peculiar, untechnical about it: it does not unwrap itself, but *develops*.

The number R-127475 is there on the chest. When R-127475 is fully charged, the number on the chest lights up. It is ready for work. Like all the numbers in the endless line designated "shift" in the Earth System Plan, it is activated and very soon is so extended and motorised that it can steer a onecar, travel the Earth's tracks and according to the demands of work can descend through access shafts and spend the shift underground, perhaps in materiel-warehouse towns.

All through an enormous sequence of shifts, R-127475 attracts no attention at all. Yet something around him and even in him makes him distinctive, unnumberly.

*

After some time, R-127475 senses something inexplicable. He begins to observe himself. No Human-machine ever does this. Every Grey is merely a work process, and available in the community of Greys as Number ①.

R-127475 observes fellow Greys. He does not know that he is doing something outmoded: he observes, even though he is no SpecTech who is to observe only stepwise within the narrow confines of the work sector. He does not notice that he is even beginning to become a *he*, not an *it*, not the grand all-powerful End Goal: "It".

R-127475 notices fluctuations of temperature within himself. He is not uniformly cold or uniformly charged, but senses heat and cold within himself. In him there occurs an astonishing prolapse or backsliding: Number R-127475 can *feel*!

R-127475 is always in the shift of his Hightown Zone. He is always a fabrication product identical to the number before him and the number after him. When his turn

comes he takes his place on the Hundred Council and votes ... But the Councils are summoned ever less often, because the votes are always unanimous and so debate, argument and voting have unplugged themselves – as befits the essence of the Step.

During one of the very rare voting sessions of the entire fabrication shift of Hightown 9, it happens that R-127475 does not jerk an arm when a vote is called.

R-127475 had a sudden impression – actually *had an impression* – that something was amiss with the decision. Something unknown within him prevented him from jerking his arm in the normal way. Every sightslot lid lifts automatically. Every sightslot automatically turns to the missing voting arm of R-127475.

R-127475 feels himself become colourful. His grey face, the usual colourless light-metal kind, flushes for that fraction of time needed to bellow the Number ①. Then he jerks an arm for the purpose of uniformising the vote. But a Special Technician watches him closely. A slight tap from a Tink bends an obviously failed hinge back to its correct position.

R-127475 senses that he has secrets, peculiarities, that he is becoming *himself* ...

Like all Greys, R-127475 has a deepsleep shift. But his brief heavy deepsleep shift begins to deviate from the norm. In deep material weariness, amid the tensing and relaxing of the work process, a floating incursion slips in, a colourfulness from other stars, smoke arising from his innermost depths: R-127475 is unconscious and yet not unconscious: he – is *dreaming*!

R-127475 does not know he is dreaming. This odd one out among the Human-machines sees – just as the smokesky that stands unchanging over the Earthplane is now and then made grey from amassed downlights for factory illumination, now and then grey all by itself, smoky, murky – the dreaming Grey R-127475 during his deepsleep sees the smokesky lift, evaporate, open out, it reveals a strange shimmering colour, and a bright shining heat comes down. He sees unknown shapes rise towards the colour. They divide, flutter, sway in rows, shimmer, coloured breaths bunch together, become dark and heavy, streaks come down. Fiery threads twitch from high to low.

Despite deepsleep, R-127475's motor is still ticking over Suddenly he sits up. A sound roars about him which is not the soundsprayers or the machines. Then the towering darkness is torn open: again the strange shimmering colour is there. It darkens gradually and becomes denser than anything to be seen on Earth's grey surface. Sparkling pegs are set within it, or little glinting screws. But they shimmer differently, and a great arching light is there in the deep darkness.

In all the totally straight and foursquare of his shift, R-127475 has never seen anything like this arching light. Then the pegs and screws begin to change. They begin to stretch, to grow. Colourful swirling shapes shoot out. What was closed now opens, bends apart, becomes coloured, shimmers, bright rays flame and the in-between all the way to the sleeper is filled with sweet radiance, a colourful smell, something new,

unspeakable, and in his dream R-127475 wrestles with it in order to express it to himself.

R-127475 is sealed off. His motor spins free. He feels only its jabs and nudges, feels its pace becomes unsteady, feels that the motor is actually *on* during deepsleep, when he never feels.

Voices come. They are not the bellowing rattle of Greydom. They knock gently and at the same time float into one another and against one another. There is a humming, and it is the same as the sweet radiance, the colourful smell ...

Deepsleep shift has ended. A shrill whistle marks the start of the new workshift. The Human-machines of this work sector stand foursquare, waggle their piston arms, are ready and waiting for the instruction to charge up.

R-127475 is in a onecar. He comes to points, and does something remarkable, against the rule and against his shift-appropriate route: he resets the points, glides onto another track, leaves the area of Hightown 9, continues on, crosses the border trench of Zone R of the Earth System Plan, arrives in unknown regions filled with fabrication halls, highbuildings, conference cubes, hightowns, access shafts, has to divert around the flanks of the half-sea, sees preparations for the second assault – and ends suddenly in a tangle of rusty wire and green vines, all spanned by charged netting.

R-127475 sees something new, something never admitted into the Earth System Plan: he sees wild plants intertwining, smothering one another, supporting one another, lumps of root, aerial roots, clinging vines, dead trunks and thrusting trunks. He hears the irregular noises of a living brook, sounds from the strangeness of his deepsleep.

R-127475 steps closer. Rusty barbed wire is obstacle and boundary. Outside its charge are System Plan, Onefield System. Outside is the artificially dimensioned and regulated sprouting of the drilled purposeful plants still permitted on a small portion of a terrestrial surface now organised for the sole benefit of machines and hightowns. But here is wild, organic, twining, killing, absorbing, multiplying *Life*!

R-127475 stands outside the overgrown Showprison of the last living beings. The Keeper squats from a distance and is in deepsleep. No one else comes to the dead zones around this mad yet permitted life. It is tolerated as a sample of the enemy that must be persecuted and eradicated, the unstepful, unmastered, abnormal organic life which is the past, the enemy of Progress, of material eternity! It proliferates here as a token of what has been overcome. Zone B and half the sea are yet to be overcome!

R-127475 knows nothing of this. He is not one of the nine mighty Scribes and the appropriate SpecTechs. The motor in him hums like an echo of his dream. He feels a circling within him, damp, soft, hard. The shift begins to seem pale, colourless, alien. He must sequester himself, become something different, separate, not merely R-127475 successor of R-127474 and predecessor of R-127476. He feels himself becoming “I”, and he needs a name.

In a whirl of all his parts, R-127475 wrests a name from the murmurs and whispers of the babbling Brook: he names and creates himself *Renu*.

At that moment there is a roaring overhead. Renu looks up and sees a huge rocket burning through the air at tremendous speed, but it does not travel in a low wide arc over a long distance before coming down to land, but shoots straight up and disappears into the grey.

Scribe Brain has unplugged himself as superfluous, and is heading into Nothingness to render himself inorganic.

Q

Metallers resembling the pair presented at the Full Congregation of Earth-Greydom and endorsed by a unified throat-rattled bellow of approval are now achieved in ever greater numbers. Their construction is perfected, pathwise. The number of signals that they can yell bellowing and rattling from the mouth-slot in response to wave-commands, rises from two to 17, and is to be brought up to 26. The variability of the response signal corresponds exactly to the instructions or queries of Greys, Human-machines in the shape of Special Technicians and Assemblers (Human), as long as the shift still has need of these. Movement is a response to instruction. Contact is there, machine honour is affirmed.

There are 16 Metallers. They work tremendously to the extent of the energy-exhalation setting. Nothing withstands them. Their exhaust rises in columns of fire and smoke and merges with the smokesky.

There are 72 Metallers. The smokesky seems to consist of their exhaust. During the current shift, every Zone of the Earth System Plan receives four Metallers. Eight Zones are still occupied by the half-sea.

The half-sea boils inwardly and seems to shy away from the steep banks that have been thrown up. Now and then, when the brief deepsleep intrudes on the production process, the sea whips itself to a violent frenzy and assails the high shoreline. But shifts are coordinated. Greydom is never entirely asleep. The wakeful workshifts step up. Leaping waters are seized, throttled, choked by heat, evaporated, whirled aloft in heavy plumes to rise like the breath of the one hundred activated Metallers.

Sea realises more and more clearly that its thousand arms leap and shatter in vain. Sea is ensnared by Land. The fetters are called Coast.

Sea growls, and buries its grief ever deeper. Its floors and canyons grow ever hotter. They talk with the fiery mantles wrapped around Earth's iron innards. Sea tries to convince them to bring their fires higher, and scorch the land.

Fire from the deepest deeps says: "If we let fly with our mantles, you'll be the first to burn, Sea! One day we shall have to do it. We love water passionately. Should we do so now, if you ask us just once more?"

Sea is silent, and reflects. Sea does not ask, knowing that Land and Greydom can be annihilated only if Sea first boils away. So Sea must wait, and let things silently fester. It is shameful. Sea groans and heaves its burden in despair, with no playful ruffles.

*

One hundred Metallers have been produced. So a Metaller Council should be set up. But because there is, and must be, current-unanimity, a Council is superfluous. Greydom too hardly needs the Protocol now, even though the Protocol is the secret meaning of all events and all Progress. The infinitely arrayed exemplars of Number ①, now have no need for councils, since Number ① always agrees with itself.

That is the Goal.

Soundsprayers squeal all at once and hurl down work orders. Seventeen Zones of the Earth System Plan and the eighteenth part-Zone B are developed and are deployed for the final assault on the half-sea. Nowhere do the brief deepsleep shifts overlap. Greydom is so organised as to be totally interlocking, and the conveyor belt of workshifts can never be interrupted.

Once again, the army of machines rumbles forward. Miles-wide underground depots for cables, charged netting, light bulbs, grapplers, machines, sand, rockdust, rails have been prepared. Everything is ready to plant railtracks at once on every part of the eight sea-Zones to be vanquished, to sprout onecars like migrant flowers and hang a sky of charged netting overhead.

Nothing is left of the half-sea vanquished in bygone shifts. It is buried, drained, evaporated. Every elevation has been levelled, every forest uprooted, every snaking river dried up. Earth lies entirely flat, foursquare, intersected by boundary trenches. Earth has no face, no form, no expression. It has no will, no meaning, is only a means, only a surface, only a work opportunity, fabrication zone, housing location, destined only to be thoroughly gouged, burrowed, gored.

*

A hundred Metallers stand ready on a low energy-exhalation setting. They vibrate slightly and emit little goutts of flame, as if screaming. Assemblers tap on them, read off the energy numbers and their state of readiness, send reports from afar to the underground observation cubes where SpecTechs (Operation Sea) steer from afar, see from afar, hear from afar.

Every soundsprayer in the operational eighteen Zones of the Earth System Plan is linked in one gigantic roar. The battle against the half-sea begins ...

*

In Zone B, mountain demons sit on the high peaks and play with the clouds around them. Their fingers dig in and tousle the tottering towers, as if ruffling the whiskers of their ice-beards. They are surprised to see themselves hosting so many clouds – more

than ever before. It is as if all of round Earth's clouds are gathered here. But the mountain demons are not surprised for long. They do not cocoon themselves, but direct their gaze outwards. They stare wide-eyed at the swirling clouds. Then they grow tired, and shiver in sleep.

Ice-giants, Sand-flingers, Hail-breathers, Wind-sweepers: all take a deep breath and howl through the gorges. Their forest-girdles sigh in the farflung breath of their mouths ...

Then the lashing warcry from the soundsprayers reaches them. They wake up, stand high and peer down. Then they start to laugh, beat their hands together, leap and stomp about, loosen boulders, laugh and shout at the drama: Sea is fighting for its life, the sea that they can see, far away, level, alien, sea that snatches their rivers and wearies their winds!

The mountain demons stand tall, clap their hands, laugh, and watch. They do not think of how once their toes are tickled and needles are dug into their feet. The mountain demons do not think, and have no memory!

They approach, the nipping tiny things, the crawling seething mass! A long way from the mountain demons they scratch about in flattened Earth. They push off and head for the half-sea's steep coasts. Grey dwarfishness runs around there in the distance. It twitches and prods with little probing fingers ...

Ho – now they make artificial mist and artificial clouds! Grey steaming sand is pushed beneath the waves. High shorelines topple grumbling, somersault in clouds of dust.

Ho – such hissing, huffing, snorting! The mountain demons laugh louder. Their beards shake. Their laughter rolls down in rocky avalanches.

Ho – what now? Heat and fire over hissing waves. Sea's skin shuddering. Good! Let it perish, the sea, because it is different!

Now, on the flanks of the battle, hissing columns of smoke and fire soar high. Creatures drop from these in the distance. The funnel-clouds of their breath unfold hugely, swirl high into outspread Infinity. The mountain demons have never seen a game like it! Their eyes stare, they lean forwards gaping, hands grip knees, and they emit echoing peak-shattering huzzas at Sea's rearing hopeless fury!

Renu – designated R-127475 – is among the Greys from his Zone. Like all those before and behind he rides a onecar. He does exactly the same, he is a number, a task, a limb of the shift in the final battle against the half-sea. But there is something in him that recoils and is different from the greyness of the Plan. In him there emerges the circle, the curve that begin to feel disgust for the side-by-side and one-after-the-other – for the Step.

Something dreadful manifests itself, primal sin against Progress, murder in the shift: Renu - R-127475 – *begins to think!* In his brain are not only function and process,

but wreathing and coiling. Time is no longer time – counted, measured, elapsing time which is number and measure. Time is not identical to measure and number, created by measure and number out of exactitude. In Renu is a time that is a together, a complex of Now, Has-been and Will-be, a struggle, a whisper, an obscure sense of suspension, a colourful circling, a cessation, a submerging, a flaming up into other sequences.

Renu must have been miles away; he has caused a blockage in his work process. When he wakes up a Tink(Hummotor) and an Assembler(Human) are peering at him. The Tink jiggles his arms and taps him. He bends something at a joint, knocks some rivets in tighter, and once again Assembler(Human) regards R-127475 with a kind of mistrust.

Renu suddenly feels he must not betray himself. It must not be noticed that he is out of line. Or else total rusting and transition to the inorganic will follow directly, at once. Renu pulls himself together and is foursquare line, link, plan. He is R-127475, but in him are resistance and mutiny against the series and the Number ①.

Assembler(Human) leaves. Evidently the Human-machine is functioning normally again.

*

The battle continues. Explosions begin, to equalise the silent, invisible and thus all the more evil pride beneath the unsteady, deceiving, weakening, step-ignoring, ripple-circling watery surface.

Mountains, reefs and sandbanks are sliced through and blown up. Every abyss must swallow down sand and rockdust, home-grown from crushed overlying strata, as well as alien imports from the Earth Plan.

Out of the depths comes a choking; it crushes, bursts and encysts quivering Life. Bursting eyes from the deeps, torn-off antennae, squashed fluorescences, amputated tentacles, writhing fish-bodies, churned-up manatees – over them all, slowly, steadily, regularly, compelling and killing by rule, there grows a stratum of sand, uniformity, Earth planed flat, the Earth Plan.

Sea twitches slowly in its dismembered limbs, and defends itself. Shift after shift it rages and hurls itself against Fate, against subjection, and worse: against dissolution. It senses that from now on there will no longer be Sea, that its very name will evaporate, be silted over.

Sea whirls high, takes snarling bites out of the growing dumb ground, hurls itself howling at the heat-sheets, at the fully activated coupled raybeamers. The new stronger explosive, triggered remotely, yanks ground and boundary from under its feet. Blowers spread oil after oil and smother the breathing of its skin, fire destroys its blood, dries up its life.

But Metallers push inexorably forward and perfect the victory of Greydom. They smoulder their way out of wet and mud, step through cliffs and mow through kelp forests, coral reefs. Their breath, becoming ever stronger, rises in immense clouds of steam. Coasts of the Zone grow along with it. They follow like a dumb loyal herd.

In Zone R, all coasts converge. No more bodies of water are left on Earth.

Sea is vanquished.

*

Renu is in line. But he feels sympathy for defeated Sea. Blood and affinity twitch in him. The new sense of grief begins to take on colour, to lament the dreadful contingency, the whooping wastefulness, self-annihilation by overreach. Now that every sea and every river is dead, he feels sea and river awaken in him and begin to surge. With the last bit of strength from his shift, fighting off looming horrible deepsleep, he does something strange, incomprehensible: he lifts the piston rods up to the already drooping lids of his sight-slots ...

Hands and fingers are coming ...

It seems to the SpecTechs still in existence that the deepsleep shift calculated in coordinated sequences has been introduced too soon. Maybe the tremendous work effort has caused material tiredness to set in harder and earlier. Whatever, the phenomenon is a sign that an aggravating remnant of the organic must still be available. Hence it is on the path of the experimental sequences that abolition of deepsleep shift and unconditional material eternity must absolutely be attained.

With their last shift consciousness, the relevant SpecTechs switch off the Metallers, throttle back the decay-energy feed almost to zero, and place the impenetrable cold-metal shield around the inner motor. It is high time. The Metallers are red, and breathe out hissing roaring clouds of fire and smoke. Heat and choking go before them. Now they turn pale, become cool, rigid, are Ultimate Machines without a task.

Deepsleep shift lasts three to four times longer than normal. Wakening to work-readiness proceeds irregularly. Parts of the Human-machines at first function defectively. Only gradually are precision and correct running speed restored.

Audit of the Metallers reveals that Number 47 is missing. It has not been dismantled. Using explosive unregulated energy it has blown itself up, tearing a sinkhole-shaped cavity in an extension to the fourth part of an Earth System Plan sector in Zone C.

R

Shifts step once again into line. Work develops as normal. The defective Metaller cannot be found, even as splinters. Nevertheless, this machine-suicide by uncontrolled energy has provided valuable experience, sparing the need for a comprehensive

experimental sequence. Moreover, the loss incurred not too high a cost. New series of Metallers can be produced in which dosing and slot-control as the moral law of the Ultimate Machine will be introduced with ever greater precision and purpose.

Zone C is to undergo levelling. The enormous sinkhole is filled with rubble. Final remnants of sea make their way in below, and are covered over. Several Human-machines lie in the muck, Greys who at the time of the explosion were ascertainably in close proximity and could not avoid a mid-shift rusting. But what does that matter, against the enormous impact on usable space gained for the production of more Greydom, new machines, new factory halls, new hightowns and new underground depots! Rail networks on the Earth and charged netting above the Earth can expand by a good one-third.

A few shifts later, nothing is left of the half-sea. The thousand amputated limbs still twitch a little. That is all. They are put to rest with sand and rockdust. The endless Earth-field is surveyed once again. Now all elevations and depressions, all deviations from the level that have slipped past during the battle against the half-sea, are equalised by means of one another. The Protocol of the mighty Scribes has since time immemorial applied the obvious and planful scribal rule that the average is to be attained by cutting down the high and filling in the low. The Step requires that every deviation receive the severest treatment.

It is achieved. No more springs break through. No misty wisps escape from a fissure. No lakes, no rivers, no brooks can be found. Earth has become flat and totally serviceable, divided into foursquares, crisscrossed by boundary trenches, covered in railways and elevated tracks. At set distances it is holed by access shafts. A charged dense mesh of netting hangs over Earth.

Now there is no rain. No thunderstorms are available, no tempest, no stars, no sky, no day or night, no mountain or valley, no forest, no meadow, no river, no bird, no tail-swishing beast, no wild-blooming flower. The Grey Shift is here, Progress, the fabrication process!

*

Renu R-127475 is ... both in, and not in, the shift. Hatred of the level is inborn in him, and grows as his Human-machine body adds layers.

In this shift, where all is set for the final step, for Machine-machine as counterpart and complement to the Ultimate Machine the Metaller, for issuing and receiving, for instruction and execution, for inorganic material eternity – in this shift, which is to be the starting point for the final decisive heave, for overcoming everything imperfect, still rustable, prone to even the slightest degree of tiredness – in this shift, the totality of Earth's Greydom gathers at the foot of still-unvanquished part-Zone B.

Step by step, one quarter of part-Zone B has been vanquished and made level. But the high mountains with their irritating rugged steepness still soar, a symbol of the

final foe. Mountain demons asleep on them do not see how the Grimgreys have gathered like an immense approaching cloud, staring up from sight-lids opened wide.

The new explosive with its admixture of primal mountain dust has proved itself in the battle against undersea mountains. Now it is to be used against its own progenitors.

But first the columns from all 25 Zones and part-Zone B form orderly ranks. They occupy almost two entire Earthzones. For the duration of an entire shift, Earth's Greydom, now so near the final step to perfection, stands silent beneath the roar from all the linked soundsprayers, relishing and admiring itself. But it feels nothing of this. All it does is stand there, a mass stretching farther than the eye can see of identical Human-machines on the path to Machine-machine, bellowing out their own number and looking out on the incalculable mass of Number ① by Number ①.

In the underground conference cube squat the eight mighty Scribes, weighing up for the purpose of a final tidying of the Protocol the cancellation of all Special Technicians with their specialised thinking, as well as their own cancellation.

The eight Scribes squat before the prism plinth in silence. They are total absorption.

Greydom's glide onto the path of the Machine is being perfected according to plan. The shift begins. The eight mighty Scribes intend to address themselves to the Protocol. It is to be decided for the Protocol whether Protocol is to be cancelled in one timely step.

*

A stamped report comes down.

In Zone Y a peculiar phenomenon has appeared on the Earth, a slowly growing crust, a coloured thing, a kind of green mould.

This report is the start of the great infestation, the incomprehensible incursion into mechanical progress, the apparition named *mould-sickness*.

Rightleg, responsible for Zone Y, stamps out an order, which thus becomes Protocol, that the green mould is to be buried below the surface.

This is done.

But even though a number of Greys have undergrounded the reported phenomenon using the mechanical path, stamped reports are pressured down so fast and in such profusion that the prism plinth is at once buried under a whole layer. They lie untouched, a curious pack of cards, before the vacant seat of self-removed ninth Scribe Brain.

Stomach grabs at the pile of reports and shoves them at Lefthand and Righthand. Stomach cannot stomach a sudden influx of reports.

Lefthand and Righthand grab the stampings. They announce that the green mould has appeared in many places on the surface of the Earth.

Eye farsees over every Zone.

Ear farhears over every Zone.

Eye sees Technicians observing the strange phenomenon, and remeasuring it. It must lie outside their step-ability, for they shake the head. They do not know what it is. There are no SpecTechs for coloured incidents, they are no longer needed.

Ear hears them rattle and bellow. The Technicians cannot explain the green mould.

For Stomach it is all too oppressive. Stomach issues a wave-instruction that all in any way relevant Technicians from every affected Zone are to be pressured down immediately.

Mouth grins. Its metal teeth glint.

At that moment, in the grey artificial light of the underground conference cube, it appears that the teeth of Scribe Mouth begin to take on a greenish lustre, revealing the reported mould.

Technicians are pressured down. Down they whoosh, ever more of them, until the conference cube is filled. There are 26, hence the entire Earth is sick.

Reports come down that charged nets too have been attacked by inexplicable green mould.

The Technicians are made fully charged, and one after the other they yell out a report. The reports are all the same. Twenty-six times, identical findings are described. Only the degree of infestation varies between Zones. In certain Zones some places are still clear, or the covering of mould is unusually thin.

The Technicians bellow: "It is as if the Onefield vegetation has become something else. It no longer appears according to plan and the influence of the emergence factor, but suddenly, in a totally irregular way. Not only fields specified for the Onefield system are affected, but also fabrication sites, railways, even high tension cables. But some isolated patches of Onefield system remain free of mould, or free so far."

Eye farsees: "It is spreading. The Step must deal with it at once."

A stamped report comes down. Charged netting begins to suffer attack by the green mould.

Eye issues a wave-instruction: send stronger current through the netting,

Ear says: "I hear current crackle and buzz."

Eye farsees and says: "The green mould is unaffected. It retains colour and grows stronger."

Were Brain still in existence, it would perhaps have noticed that mould-sickness rises from territory underlain by the vanquished Zones of sea. But Brain is not here. So this occurs to none of them.

The Technicians bellow: "Filing down of metal parts must be tried at the same time as current is let loose."

Stomach says: "The green is indigestible. All piled up stocks of sand and rockdust are to smother the green mould. The Step has overcome every backwards step, and yet is not to bury the green mould using sand-equalisation?"

The Protocol is updated accordingly. The battle against mould-sickness begins. It is the hardest and most dangerous that Progress has faced so far, for the battlefield is not only field, railtracks, charged net, but Greydom itself. It must attack and defend at the same time. Mould-sickness is transmitted even to Human-machines. Only Metallers are unaffected. It is enough that they be made energy-exhaling, then every attack is excluded from the start.

Armies of Greys rush about, cover with sand, bury topsoil, spread rockdust on top, and have rollers roll slowly and heavily to compact it.

Railtracks are filed clean. Sandblasters blow charged nets clear. At the most dangerous locations, acids are sprayed from thousands of onecars over field components.

Infected production infrastructure is rusted, since even ordinary machines seem not to be immune.

The green mould is vanquished as a two-dimensional phenomenon. But in a sequence of Zones it wells incessantly up and infects Grey workers. Their breathing spots are at risk of being overgrown. A new kind of rusting threatens, unforeseen, seemingly organic. Already whole rows of Human-machines are suffocating. They must file themselves down, apply acids, and yet in many cases are beyond saving in the battle between organic and inorganic rusting.

In this emergency, Metallers are brought into action. Several hundred Ultimate Machines stand ready, exhaling energy. Nailed plates are fastened to the feet, and they are arrayed in position. At a furious pace they stride across mouldy soil and tear up the surface layer again and again.

Salvation of the Greys from the crisis of mould-sickness turns out to come from Metaller exhaust. When their working energy is turned up another notch and the shift strides ahead, it turns the green mould brown, and rusts it away.

With maximum shift-exertion, the still functioning Technicians and Greys can maintain the Metallers under control to the last. Mould-sickness is vanquished, but the exhaust from the hundreds of Metallers hangs thick over the charged nets, a heavy grey sky reaching almost to the Earth that lies there stunned, grey and black-brown, worn out, torn up ...

Countless Greys have to be stamped from the light-metal lists. Some hightowns are deserted, production sites rusted. But Progress has prevailed. The Metallers have survived their fiercest test as representatives of earthly Greydom.

S

Renu is on shift during the great battle against mould-sickness.

He is stationed close to the rotted abandoned area once designated Showprison of the last living beings with its rusty barbed wire and tangled weeds. Inwardly angered he sees that nothing remains of the ancient garden. It is no longer permissible that a memory of the foe Life should strut about in such disorderly form. That very foe has made itself visible again, and is being eradicated once and for all.

And so corrosive acid drifts down in a poisonous falling mist. A Metaller strides many times through the old Showprison and rips it to shreds. The babbling Brook is silenced with rockdust and turned totally to firm ground.

Renu recalls the day when first he knew himself and gave himself a name. Again, and more strongly, he feels estranged from Greydom: apart, hard and soft at the same time, filled with charge and full of blood. He hates the Earth System Plan and takes the side of the mould-sickness, even though he too is at risk. But he remains unafflicted, despite the complete loss of Number R-127474 and the need for Number R-127476 to undergo lengthy refurbishment before it can be rehabilitated.

Renu is on shift. All trace of the battle must be eradicated. The Earth must once again be flat and planful, ready for work with no holding back.

In the course of the work process, Renu is deployed in a line of Greys cleaning churned-up dirt, undergrounding brown scurf and, by means of one Metaller per thousand Greys, stomping it flat.

Renu and the other Greys steer the machines that slice deep, plough up yet again, throw out inappropriate material so it can be collected and taken for destruction. Metaller M-2486, able to whistle precisely 26 response signals, waits on a moderate energy-exhalation setting for a wave-instruction to start up. Once it has finished stomping up and down and side to side at great speed over the whole patch of ploughed-up field, squashing everything, scrunching everything, churning everything to a single mass, a wave-instruction received after the work-Greys have withdrawn and Metaller M-2486 has been switched off will trigger the herd of rollers to lumber at a leisurely pace, iron-nodding, yawning, lowing like weary cattle, across the almost-level land to tamp it smooth. Here there is to be no more Onefield System. A hightown is to be constructed. Railtracks are to be laid.

Renu stands facing Metaller M-2486 and watches it. It is not certain that he is still in the currently deployed shift. Deepsleep shift, much shortened but annoyingly still available, is about to start! Any moment now the remote instruction will signal to the

line of Greys, Renu included, to become dormant, and will order the SpecTech to throttle back the Metallers within his remit, not completely, but to a setting of half of one per cent of normal working energy. Then activation of the inner motor at the end of deepsleep shift will happen swiftly, the utilisation effect is bigger and savings accrue.

Renu is no longer subject to the law of deepsleep, but he keeps this a secret. Sometimes he is tired, and does his work as if asleep. No Grey notices anything. During deepsleep shift he often dreams, or is even still awake. But he conceals this carefully, with the guilt and guile of one outside the law.

*

Deepsleep shift begins. The Metaller is throttled back. But Renu does not sleep. Or is he asleep, and merely dreaming?

Renu stands facing Metaller M-2486.

The Metaller quivers gently in the smidgen of work-readiness allowed to it. It seems to be breathing, as if the layers of its body swell, sink, swell ...

Renu stares at the Metaller, astonished and filled with expectation. Its mouth slot is round, open, dark. The slot for response signals juts like a pointed tongue. Charged cable ends surround the mouth; they are grey, clipped, almost square, like teeth.

The Metaller's sight slots are closed, lids lowered. The ends of the cables that receive wave-orders and steer course changes are barely visible through the slits, but they seem to shine.

The hearing spots with the convoluted deeply protected microphones are closed except for a single gap. Only the strongest most urgent wave-commands, waves that would themselves boom, would be able to reach the Metaller and set it in slow motion, drawing on its half of one per cent of power. So it looks as if M-2486 is also in deepsleep shift.

Renu hears himself say something to Metaller M-2486. He forms words he has heard now and then in his deepsleep dreams, which are different from the yelps and number-rattlings of Greydom. Sometimes his sleep-consciousness understands the dream-speech. Other sounds seem familiar, but he cannot grasp them.

Suddenly Metaller M-2486 starts to breathe. It emits a little smoke. To Renu in the apartness of his deepsleep this does not seem strange. But now Metaller *says something!* Out of the slot at the mouth place come not any of the 26 whistled responses; instead, laboured wheezing *words* squeeze out, words that are like the sounds in Renu's dream-speech!

Even this does not seem strange to Renu. In the dream of his deepsleep Metaller's words seem only elusive. He would like to understand them clearly.

M-2486 is no longer a Metaller. It has orbited out from the Ultimate Machine, as Renu has out of the Greys, out of Human-machine R-127475. What does Metaller say?

Renu asks: "What do you want?"

Metaller responds: "I want to *want*. I want to *will*."

Renu repeats the words in his dream and wonders what they mean. Something in him understands Metaller.

He asks: "What is your name?"

Metaller responds: "Renu Number 2."

Then Metaller adds more words that Renu cannot understand. Metaller grows impatient. Its eyes blaze. It breathes out desire, anger, grief. It repeats a second, third, fourth time. Then Renu grasps the words. Metaller demands: "*Give me a soul! Give me a soul! Give me a soul!*"

Something obscure and hot rises up in Renu. His layers expand. He wants to respond.

Now the dream breaks off.

Deepsleep shift has ended. Work shift begins. The Metaller stands there almost cold. Half of one per cent. It is brought on line and without a word does its step-duty.

In the shift following the dream conversation between Renu and Metaller M-2486 a new and remarkable phenomenon appears, outside all bounds of work process and of Protocol, and at once requiring the eight mighty Scribes squatting together in their underground conference cube in Earth Zone B to attend to it for the purpose of Protocol-setting.

The phenomenon is labelled *air-sickness*.

Stomach says: "Something is pressing down on me. What is it?"

Mouth replies: "A new enemy has appeared, which must be overcome and brought into conformity with the law of the sequence."

Leftleg says, with a stamp: "Let it be trampled."

Mouth says: "The enemy is not yet clear. It is in disguise. This too is against Step and thus against Progress. Many Greys encounter attacks of choking. Human-machines of the current model with very limited shift deployment succumb to phenomena not yet identified."

Stomach asks: "How do these phenomena present themselves?"

Mouth says: "Air-hunger sets in. More exactly, air-thirst. Intakes from outside and extractors from inside no longer function. Nothing more is known."

Eye says: "I farsee. Greys twitch. They stretch the neck, stand on tiptoe, throw their pistons about, rattle, fall down."

Ear says: "I farhear. Greys emit a lot of sounds that are neither numbers nor letters."

Stomach says: "It is to be decided for the Protocol: every available Special Technician, in particular Special Technician (Air Movement), is to be pressured down."

It is decided.

As wave-instructed, SpecTechs are at one pressured through the tubes and dumped out. There are not many now. Last to arrive is Special Technician (Air Movement), who picks himself up and immediately jerks a greeting to the others.

The eight mighty Scribes stare at the SpecTechs, silent, menacing.

The SpecTechs are charged full. Their numbers light up. They are ready for work.

They are prompted to explain the processes of air-sickness. Each SpecTech bellows a response. "Nothing is known. It lies outside the remit."

Special Technician (Air Movement) is prompted. He bellows: "The composition of the Outer that is called air has changed. The Outer has become thicker. It contains remnants of acid, bits of rusted matter. There is no way to tell which shift occurrences led to this."

The eight mighty Scribes squat there, and stay silent.

At last Eye says: "I farsee. Air-sickness advances step by step. Whole rows of Greys are falling out."

Rightleg says: "Progress is at risk."

Stomach says: "It is necessary to augment the Protocol. It is proposed to decide: all Special Technicians are to be prematurely rusted as unfit for the shift. Grey is Grey. Every Grey is equal to Number ①. Every Grey must be able to substitute for any other. There is no need for Special Technicians. If every Grey in the stamped-plate lists is not at once ready to expound on air-sickness and step through it, then the principle of Greyness is false, development is not equal to Step, and so it is nonsense."

It is so decided. The Special Technician process is lost because they have lost their work process. They cannot find the next step and so are no longer on the path. It follows that wave-orders are to be issued to clear away all SpecTechs.

The Special Technicians stand silent, rigid. Current is withdrawn from them. Their activation disappears.

Wave-orders are issued. Rightleg stamps the Protocol. With that, the case of the last Special Technicians is settled. They are vacuumed back up the tubes, dumped at their workplaces, taken by assigned Greys, and rusted.

The eight mighty Scribes squat in silence. Then Eye says: "I farsee. The number of affected Greys is fast increasing."

Lefthand says: "Measures must be taken. To salvage the progress of Human-machine to Machine-machine, steps must occur to vanquish air-sickness."

Stomach issues wave-orders. In the highest building of Hightown R-1 the Plater is readied for work. Plate after plate listing the numbers of Greys is retrieved. The numbers of those Human-machines gone for rusting are not announced. Human-machines under repair are tagged "ret."

Eye closes the sight-slots. Ear farhears the clanging of plates and the calling of numbers. Stomach remains silent.

After a while Stomach suddenly starts up. Righthand stretches out to close the instruction-circuit. The plate sits wobbling in the hand of the number-caller. He has just bellowed the number R-127475, and now is silent.

Conformity with the Protocol has been achieved. The Plater falls back into inactive readiness for work.

Renu – R-127475 – is summoned, pressured down and dumped before the eight mighty Scribes.

Renu is observed. In the grey light of the underground conference cube he is as grey as every other Human-machine on the path to Machine-machine. R-127,75 waits to be called, and be given current.

Stomach says: "R-127475?"

Renu bellows in response: "Present! Shift-cleared. Ready for work."

Eye says: "Standard series. Conforms to norms."

Ear says: "Noisemaking average."

Renu stands motionless. He is informed that he is to express himself for the Protocol. He senses the secret power facing him, and is filled with rage at the line, the compulsion. But he stands silent, and waits.

Stomach asks: "Has R-127475 noticed the falling-out of many shift-Greys, and the phenomena associated with their falling-out?"

Renu rattles in response: "Yes."

Stomach says: "R-127475 is advised to express for the Protocol what consequences air-sickness represents for the Step."

Renu bellows in response: "The falling-out of Greys is consequent on the intake of altered Outer matter. The Outer matter is altered consequent on its being loaded with exhalations of increased numbers of the Ultimate Machines called Metallars. The exhalations thicken Outer matter, filling it with hard substances, with slimy substances, with corrosive substances. The admixture is too strong. It blocks up the airways of Greys."

Ear says: "This sounds stepwise correct."

Eye says: "The path must be seen."

Stomach says: "R-127475 is to indicate the path to combating air-sickness."

Renu responds: “The path is forked. Left fork: immediate decommissioning and rusting of every Metaller as origin-point of the disturbance. Right fork: penetration of the Metaller-exhalation sky and boring of a very long shaft into the Upper together with siphoning down unmixed air to be found in the far Outer, while retaining Ultimate Machines and exploiting their energy.”

Stomach says: “It is achieved! The Step has won! Every Grey is like every other Grey! The Number ① is validated. This is the Path. It is proposed to decide for the Protocol:

- A tower is to be constructed. Its top will reach to the utmost Outer sky.
- The Protocol is to abolish itself, because every Grey on every list-plate has the Step and knows the Path.”

It is decided ...

T

No Greys can ever admit that they have taken a step in the wrong direction and need to retrace the path. So there can never be any intention to give up and send for rusting the Ultimate Machines achieved with so much sacrifice and after so many experimental sequences, just because they are the cause of a sickness that obstructs and disturbs Progress. Metallers are perfected Ultimate Machines, counterpart to the Greys, corresponding to the starter motor. Pole cannot uncouple from pole, without uncoupling itself.

The Metallers’ working energy is necessary for attaining the Machine-machine, the perfected Grey, the self-perfecting and self-abolition of the Step, its realisation as equal to material eternity.

For now, no more Metallers will be produced. Their numbers are adequate for available Greydom at a constant rate of loss.

The Metaller-exhalation sky is shredded by lofty high-pressure pipes, by electrical sheet-flame throwers, by whirlwind machines. It puts itself together again at once. Relief is only momentary.

All Metallers are switched to a low energy setting. They exhale little power, are capable of only around one-sixth of normal work, and emit only a sixth of the dangerous exhaust. Nevertheless, air-sickness is not brought to a halt. It eats its way on, albeit at a slower pace. Yet the grey pressure grows thicker, and hangs dreadfully close over the Earth’s surface.

Eye sees from afar, observes the Earth’s surface, and notices the still-untamed high mountain Zone B.

Renu - R-127475 – is brought to the edge of the region of mountain demons by the system of monorails and onecars. He is to observe the remaining part of the Zone and report back.

Renu bellows: “As soon as the last unevennesses and illegalities of its foothills are smoothed down, Zone B of the Earth System Plan is appropriate for erection of the tall tower, for it already soars high into the upper air and so can be a useful platform for the siphon-tubes and save very many steps for the substructure of the high tower.”

It is decided: “R-127475 knows the path. Let him set out the step plan.”

Renu tours the rest of Zone B to the ends of the farthest railheads. Materials and machines are laid out ready for the advance to do battle with the massed mountains and their demons. Renu travels down through access shafts and sees the gigantic underground depots. He returns to his shift-assigned fabrication place and stamps onto a light-metal plate the plan for erection of a tower in Zone B, location of planned Hightown 37, which is to be called *ToZoB-37*.

R-127475 lays the plate before the eight mighty Scribes. All mountains still available are to be broken up and buried. They are to serve as construction material for the great tower to be built at the location of projected Hightown B-37. The siphon-tower that will pierce every possible sky is shown on the plan. Every foundation block is numbered ①. On broad foursquare courses of Number ①s, the almost inconceivable ever more slender tower soars as terraces, squares with ramps on every side, every construction component numbered ①, a conglomeration of grey cubes all designated ①, a self-representation of Greydom, a Number ① sticking straight up into the sky.

The eight mighty Scribes regard the plan in silence. No remarks are needed. Randomly selected Number R-127475 has effected the perfect plan with the step-consciousness of equalised Greydom. Every Grey, if required, could stamp the same plan. It is achieved. Once air-sickness is vanquished and rusted, the final step to Machine-machine can be made. Until then, the number of Greys is not to increase. The final danger is to end in the conclusive victory of Greydom.

Plan *ToZoB-37* is leaned against a wall. The Earth’s Greydom is to be led past it. Every Grey is to gaze on the plan for the duration of a step and the Number ①.

This is made known.

As the Earth’s entire Greydom trundles in by rail, the grey exhaust-sky is riven by explosions. A jet of flame leaves a dazzling trail. Then the peering Greys see a rocket-ship shoot steeply up and race away from the age of the one-by-one, the Plan, Progress, the Number ①. The eight mighty Scribes have abolished themselves.

The Protocol is superseded. Secret power is superseded. Each is equal to all. The multiplicity of Greys needs no leading, no Hundred Councils, no voting. The right thing will be done with no retrospection, because it is in the machine and in the material of a Greydom on the brink of the perfected Machine-machine.

The rocket-ship has vanished. It never returns to Earth. The mass of Greys has no idea what has happened. They are fully deployed on shift, and set to in accordance with the plan.

The final battle with the mighty peaks of B-37 begins. The construction site must be made ready. For this the remotely controlled and power-switched Metallers are needed. The risk of air-sickness cannot be ignored. It is there, it claims victims, causes crippling. Emergency measures just barely suffice to hold its progress in check. So the battle with the mountain demons must speed up. Decisive steps must be taken quickly.

The mountain demons know nothing of the assault by Earth's entire Greydom and the dangers brought in its train – the Ultimate Machines, Metallers. Demons never know anything. All they do is do, or rest in not-doing.

For a long line of shifts the mountain demons have seen no more of the teeming columns of grey beetles and heard no more the buzzing of their little square wings. Everything below them has sunk away, swallowed by a grey steamy fog, by clouds that hang so far down that there is no point trying to play with them. They do not reach even to the nails of their toes!

Sea has disappeared. No longer is it there, the blue that glinted in the distance. For some time the mountain demons have grunted contentment, stared into the dark blue above them, played storm with sand, air, snow, hail, scratched themselves with lightning for fun, and thrown broken lumps of stone at each other's skulls, hooting laughter. Now they once again sleep on the ridges and icefields, and draw from the gorges a deep calm steady wind.

The mountain demons are taken by surprise as they sleep. Before they awaken to consciousness of their pain, technical demons rage inside their bodies, fratricidal energies carefully dosed, directly acting, precisely calculated, harnessed, yoked. Greydom has made observations and summed them all up. It knows nothing of the heart and brain of energies, of the waves, the currents that it harnesses to its work and misapplies to its purposes. Greydom sits at a switchboard, at the outlet to the unknown, the alien, the terrible, and lets rip. The slave-machine is made to burrow into the bodies of mountain demons, to blow up, dig, strike, twist and turn, bite, grind blood, flesh and bone to a grey mash. This is done by the dosed demons of which Greydom knows nothing, but merely exploits. The machines are still as little self-aware as the mountain demons with which they do battle.

Mountain demons with their torn limbs start up. The battle begins. It seems to be the final choking, for there is no longer a battle. The mountain demons are driven back, maimed, smothered, before they can awaken to resistance. Their roar sounds like the death-cries of slaughtered cattle. Their flanks heave. Their ribs crack. The skin is scoured and curdled.

The mountain demons cannot breathe now. The little iron foursquare creatures, glowing in their work-obsession, stride on through, grinding, crushing; their energy-exhalations thud. The cloud-floor at the foot of the mountain demons begins to bubble, swell high, dive into their yawning choking mouths. Metaller-exhaust drifts high, cloud layer by cloud layer, stinging, its acids corroding, filled with the stench of sulphur.

The mountain demons' eyes pop. For the last time as they turn their heads they see the dark wide deep blue of the upper sky. Their arms windmill helplessly. The last stormwind of the heights whistles down. Then a long lamenting howl sinks into the shroud of Metaller clouds. The mountain demons are dead ...

All the way to the site of projected Hightown B-37, the accumulation of mountains has been rusted once and for all. Only on B-37 itself do the last Ice-giants, Sand-breathers, Hail-slingers still stand, beaten down, exhausted, quivering in their shame, impotence and rage.

*

Now begins planful work for the purpose of constructing a tower that is to reach to every possible sky and siphon down air of renewal for the neutralisation of exhaust gases from the necessarily deployed Ultimate Machines in accordance with appropriate discharge precautions. The plan is there. Its relentless unstoppable completion is a question only of shift time. No more obstacles can intervene, for every lost Grey is at once replaceable, and the plan can never be killed off.

There are no longer any underground conference cubes. All have been blown up. The age of the Protocol, of covert leadership, of secret powers, is rusted. It never was. There have never been leaders and led. There remain only the coexisting.

*

Renu squats by himself at the wall. The plan for the high tower, stamped onto metal plates, leans grey and grand against the wall. It is deepsleep shift, deepsleep shift for a short time. But Renu is awake and has dreams of premonition.

Renu stands and dances his dance of hate for Greydom and the plan. The other language in him speaks out as gestures, as a cry. Blood and rancour rise up as another current. Renu dances and sings a song of fatal, hopeful anger!

"For how long, Earth, will you let yourself be despoiled and serve those who despoil you?

"For how long is Life to be fettered, transformed, a maidservant to carry burdens, a machine to be switched on and off?

"When shall fruitful dreamers regain their right of the firstborn? When shall there be Creation instead of Shift? The leap and the dance instead of the Step?

"When shall eyes be curved, roundness return, distance, the pathless path?

"The time is almost here, Earth, for you to free yourself before you die, a grey beast under the yoke!

"A sign is set upon you, Greydom, in the numbered choice you made of one who came from your ranks!

"I, Renu, made the plan that will force your measured step to become measureless arrogance!

“Earth, Life: reach down from the childbed labour of those born in time, smash the sense that has become nonsense, the step, the Metallers, the Machine-machines!

“I detest you, Greydom! I hate you, stamped time! I hate you, fabrication! I love you, products of conception!”

Renu sings and dances. He sets electric currents free. They surge through wires, leap from point to point as shimmering spitting balls. They iridesce in vacuum tubes, leaping sparks tumble and fly like colour-drenched butterflies. Unfettered joy rampages through the drunkenness of space. Whooping hatred dances with the freed demons a holy-unholy braided roundelay of begotten mortal beings, of the birth of a young green Earth from the devastated world ...

Renu sinks down, loosened, released ...

U

The shift strides on.

The plan for the high tower with a summit reaching to every possible sky is on the path to implementation.

Again endless columns of rockdust trains roll in. Onecars at step intervals. Big foursquares of Greys.

The underground depots are emptied. New depots are laid out, closer in a foursquare to locations on Earth Zone B. It is time now to bring the vanquished foothills and the first great peaks down to the level of the Earth's surface, and put to use the broken limbs of the vanquished mountain demons, breaking them up smaller, grinding them down, giving them shape.

Inexorably, in supplementary shifts, machines grind and mix.

Inexorably, metal is boiled and pressed and cut and stamped.

Inexorably, drophammers pound.

Inexorably, hydraulic presses toil.

Inexorably, ground-rollers proceed on their nodding trotting iron way.

Of every hundred Greys, ten are everywhere deployed to monitor Metaller exhaust, the dangerous choking lowest sky, to penetrate through it, prevent air-sickness from spreading further before the goal of siphoning down high air can be achieved. But Metaller exhaust still chokes and smothers. Human-machines on the path to Machine-machine can be produced only in the same numbers as are prematurely rendered inoperable by air-sickness. The Plattery is in continuous shifts. Many Greys are needed, as are many stamping machines, down-pressured reports and adjustments, in order to keep the census of Greydom up to date.

The plan strides ahead.

The plan for the high tower with a summit soaring into every possible sky is displayed in many-times-one exact scale reproductions in every workplace of every Grey shift. Every member of the shift can understand it, touch it, take note by eye and finger-spot, and absorb. In a broad limit around B-37 everything is equalised to the normed surface and normed elevation of the worksite. Every bump is smoothed, every dip levelled up, every slurping hole stuffed full.

When the time comes, the first foundation slab for the first enormous foursquare circumambulatory ramp of the tower is poured and laid with ①-normed cubes. Half the workforce of one entire Zone of all Earth's Greydom is required to steer the tractors, lifters, sinkers, dropcranes, adjusters, and to prepare the site. The first terrace-storey encloses the B-37 site within a broad bound. In the middle, horribly jagged, poking through the Metaller fogcloud, soars the home of the last exhausted overthrown mountain demons. They are finally to be crippled, ground down, used as foursquare corner foundation pillars of the high tower. Storey by storey, ever closer, the incornering will be achieved.

Metallers are there. They push the slabs tight together, never to be loosened, stride across the gigantic ①-cubes, and with one final pounding stomp them unshakably firm. But their energy-exhalation is set to only half, because of their exhaust. Still, their working and the force of their stomping remains strong enough to make the Earth in Zone B groan and heave in twitching jolts like cornered prey, so that cracking and bursting, thudding and stamping wander breathless all across the Earth's surface in rhythmic bellowing cries regurgitated as echoes; so that the Metaller-sky gathers thick and close, grey, impenetrable, almost near enough for the light metal clappers of the Human-machines to touch.

Only with great effort can Greys corral the Outer. An inter-shift has to be inserted, a semi-resting from work readiness with no direct step-performance. Sight-slots, incursion points for the Outer, are to be cleansed, scrubbed, greased, oiled.

There is an enormous wastage of Greys. Each shift reduces the expected operability duration of the Human-machines by a much greater amount than the norm.

But the plan strides on. Nothing is allowed to bring it to a halt, obscure the goal, cripple the shift. Plan and step, shift and human all head in parallel to the goal of perfected material-eternity, the Machine-machine. The plan urges on. Renu urges on. Greydom urges itself on. It has the Step within it, just as Metallers have the energy-exhaling engine.

The second storey of the peripheral ramp of the high tower is laid. The third storey is in preparation, hauled up ever closer to the location of B-37 ...

Then the Earth, the Universe's first Giantess, awakens from her tight-pressed sphericity in the innermost core of the Metaller. She sits up, wants to stretch, expand, breathe freely, and refresh the overmantle of meadows, streams, forests and hills.

The Earth feels burdened, haltered, hemmed in. She grumbles angrily to herself, and pushes violently through to see what has happened in the eternal moments of her latest sleep.

In Zone Y of the Earth System Plan, two underground depots, a hightown and thirty-one production cubes are engulfed; that is all. This is an industrial accident within the anticipated limits of misfiring, and so repairs are effected.

The Earth sees through and looks around. Her skin has changed. She feels squeezed, snared, and cannot breathe. Polished, grooved is the skin, hard, almost without topsoil.

Earth quakes in anger. Her voice roars out from the deepest gorges, and yet is weaker than the thudding chopping din of Greydom, Metallars and toiling auxiliary machines in Zone B.

Earth cries out, but her voice seems choked, throttled, despoiled.

“Where is sea? Where is its rolling stormy liveliness? Where is the breath of its waters, its spraying colour-foaming skin?

“Where is sky, the exalted wheeling blue where my brothers and sisters roam, where they play and devour themselves and are recreated in accordance with Life’s higher lawlessness?

“Where is air, that quivering transparency, delightful mildness?

“Where is the birthplace of light, the pulsing alternation of day and darkness, of brightness and sleep?

“Where are the hours, each with its own feeling and the changing face, where are the always-same and the always-different?

“Where are the incalculable creatures? Where are the flocks by day, the woolly lambs, cloud-wolves loping? Where are the sacrificial lightning flashes and the spilling rain of their grief? Where is their wafting perfumed air, their chasing, hiding, their blissful immersion in the far heavens?

“Where are the beasts of the Earth in their myriad forms, that once bestrode me blithe and wild, hunters and hunted, but always one with the stars and with my slumber?

“Where is the murmur of intuition? Who took away the forests and their profound breathing connectedness?

“Who swept away the rushing of rivers, rendered me dumb and turned my garb into rigid reason and purpose, things that do not breathe?

“Who smothered the sappy substances, blood and bloom, their colour and scent that veiled in beauty the pain and pleasure of existence?

“Where does the dreadful noble foolishness of humankind linger now? Of humankind that was the equal of flower, beast, river, forest, cloud and wind?

“I see a to and fro, a cutting and grinding, a boring and thumping: the fury of Reason! They mean to fetter me, grind me down, despoil me, neuter me, and do away with my cataclysms. *Utility* has put me in chains! I am like a tiger in a caged paddock, fettered to helplessness because I am too big and too strong!

“I accuse myself and the elements for having slept, or having spurned one another! We had the vanity of luxuriance, the secret joy of fratricidal fighting, the airy vanishing of Eternity into Time! We had the whooping childish divinely wicked game of immensity!

“Now the one-by-one has made us rigid. The consequence of one, which is ①, is upon us! The Step rides on our necks. *Greydom*, the *Machine*, is now the only measure of all that happens!

“I call out to the brothers and sisters of the demonic! Come down from your high places, which are no longer place and have neither above nor below! Come on the wings of your hurry, which are more than the speed of Time! All of you for whom there is no Number, and who know neither today, nor yesterday, nor tomorrow, who are the same through all todays, yesterdays, tomorrows: come bringing the magnetic currents that surround you, that make me livelier and cause the counter-currents of my own bound powers to surge more strongly!

“Earth calls to you! Danger is here, the Step, dross from that which is beyond belief! Greydom wants to subjugate the magical world! Greydom wants to impose on everything, and smelt the Universe to a single metallic point! Greydom wants to shatter the sweep of every circle, spiral, ellipse, stretch it out, forge it into strips of rail on which Progress can proceed to the final sclerosis in which ① and the Endless-Eternal are the same, space equals not-space, time equals not-time!

“Once and for all, Earth calls for help against the obsession of those for whom measure and immensity are the same! Greydom would transform us into a machine that runs for ever and yet forever stands still! Come, do battle against the obsession of the Step, against Greydom, against the Number ①!”

Space remains silent. The sky of Metaller exhaust hangs low. The shift strides on. The plan to construct a high tower with a summit reaching into the highest heavens is stamped into the functioning of the Human-machines, and has become one with them.

Renu waits. Nothing happens. Storey is piled on storey, every block identical to construction cube ①. Work strides ahead according to plan. According to plan the stamped plan on the huge light-metal plates is turned into the prospective sector of Zone B of the Earth System Plan.

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Renu waits. Metallers toil. Fifty percent of the capacity of their potential energy is sufficient to keep the work moving forward, and to hold the incidence of air-sickness in abeyance. Repair stations for Greys are under more strain than clinics and sanatoria for machines, but the impact can no longer be contained. Any increase in the Metaller quotient would only obstruct the plan by increasing the spread of air-sickness.

Renu waits. Construction cubes Number ① for the peripheral ramp are hauled ever closer to B-37. Within a few shifts the remaining high mountains of B-37 must be trimmed to become the foundation layer of the high tower. Nothing shift-contrary happens. Only now and then Human-machines and even conventional machines are overcome by a strange alien material-weariness. Clappers over the sight-slots fall shut for the duration of many numbers. Machine limbs move irregularly. But it soon passes. A brief recuperation is enough to restore normal effort. The sky of Metaller exhaust presses ever lower, despite rebuffs and penetrations.

Renu waits. Nothing happens.

But once, just as his deepsleep shift approaches, Metallers begin to glow more strongly. The response signals take on a different tone. Renu detects that they are becoming like speech, similar to the yearnings in his shift-dreams. Then he falls into deepsleep.

Toiling Greys notice something unusual. Metallers grind. Their directional slots spew heat. Their signals become throaty, roaring – no longer a response to wave-orders, but seeming to come from themselves, greedy, yearning, dreadful.

They roar: *“Give – us – a soul! Give – us – a soul!”*

Greys take this incomprehensible irregularity as the consequence of a too-high energy-exhalation setting. So the Metallers are throttled back. They calm down ...

V

It seems the Earth has called in vain for help from the realm of demons. The dreadful shroud of Metaller-exhaust sky hangs there shift by shift, dense, grey, seething, inescapable. The layers of exhaust become ever denser, the poisonous stench ever more terrible.

Greys have no sense of smell, just as they perceive no colours. Though they struggle during work shift for the remnant of the Outer that they still need, they can neither taste nor smell, because they know neither degree nor nuance. And yet the sky of Metaller exhaust begins to lie so dense over the workplaces that the final chain of high mountains in Zone B, projected Hightown B-37, loom only indistinctly from the grey murk.

Greydom has installed wind turbines and enormous combinations of propellers to shred the endless grey cloud over the workplaces, send it spinning to make place for the sinking of the necessary Outer air and make any further spread of air-sickness

impossible. But even the torn riven layers high up are still so dense that that which once was called air can no longer penetrate, being so light; and the air-demons having been crippled.

Suckers are installed, machines with a vacuum-thirst that enclose a total emptiness to slurp greedily down even the most tenuous Outer. They slurp and rend the insatiable yawning hole to a width of many steps, which Nothingness can fill with at least some tenuosity. But none of this is enough, just one little drop in the vast demand.

The high tower must be built. It will symbolise the final incontestable dominion of the Earth, a monument to Greydom, a veritable system of mighty siphon-machines beyond the Mettaller sky to scoop down the entire Outer and apply it totally to the needs of the Earth.

Construction cube ① after construction cube ① is shaped, hauled up, stomped tight by Metallers.

To provide relief and allow workplaces beneath the Metaller sky to expand, the thin veil of air over the Earthfield is shredded, compacted, and hurled like cannonballs against the heavy clouds, to drive them higher. Machines on swift-moving railway onecars travel alone and with a great roar fire pulse after pulse into the sky. But the Metaller sky is too dense and there is too much of it, so although it weakens at the points of impact, tears open, swirls high, yet at other places it sinks even lower. All of Earth's air everywhere will have to be turned into compressed balls and fired into the sky. There are not enough machines for that. Producing the very high numbers needed would take many shifts, and air-sickness would spread even faster. The violence of the compression machines alone has already knocked down and damaged several Greys.

Metallers will have to be able to climb to the heights and work. When prompted they head in the desired direction. But what once was called "gravity" pulls them back down. They roll over and become damaged. So there is only the high tower.

The charged netting sky is almost superfluous, given the extremely limited Onefield-squeezings still needed. It is used now to support greyish lights for the shift under the Metaller sky. Every one hundred paces a downlighter hangs to provide workers with the grey light that Greydom needs, the timeless light outside of time, neither day nor night, permanent grey light. For it is essential that the working zone between Earthfield and Metaller sky be prevented from falling into a dark twilight that neutralises the shift and cripples production entirely.

And so a hundred times hundred times hundred downlighters dangle to illuminate the air layer and the work shift. Greys toil as if in a mine beneath a day that lies above day.

Renu – R-127475 – is on the plan. He works with the others in Zone B, projected Hightown 37, and sees the foursquares for the peripheral ramp draw ever nearer to the

Earth's final high mountain development opportunity. Within a few shifts, work will begin to grind the peaks down to the tower's foursquare foundations.

Renu waits. *Nothing happens.* The great insurrection of Earth and all the demons is missing. Even the despoiling of matter seems to lack consequences. Only minor outbursts expose the rancour of that matter which is no longer allowed to bloom as crystal, but is broken down into amorphous non-species as a tool for Greys.

Renu sees far back down. The dense Metaller sky hangs low. Although Renu stands many steps ahead on one of the latest peripheral ramps of the high tower, far above the charged netting sky, the Metaller sky still looms as an endless grey cloud-sea of steaming vapour, its lower edge lit by the downlighters.

Renu talks to himself. His dreams have shown him that he can speak into himself, that there is something that speaks inaudibly for only him to hear, even though there is no sound, no voice, no signal, no wave-instruction.

Renu says to himself: "The Greys, the Human-machines, go relentlessly about their work. Downlighters illuminate their wearisome path. They must almost crouch, bend down, crawl to bring on the work under the Metaller sky. Compressed air bombs shoot up incessantly. Greys collapse and are dragged away. But still the Metaller sky closes again. The battle is a stalemate. No one wins and destroys the other. What is capable of killing the dreadful sexless species, from which to my own shame I sprang, though I am not their issue? I push them on to madness. From their madness they create shift and reason. What can I hold on to when this yearning that is unknown to them comes over me? What is it that I could grasp, the entwining, the embrace where two are equal to one?"

Renu climbs down and sees from afar. He says: "What are the Greys up to now? I can see. They have brought tubes up. The tubes must be filled with the last step-word in explosive matter, which will devour the many-times-many-fold of its own space in the heat-hunger of its expansion, for they are slipping back, far back, in order to ignite from afar and set it off."

Renu must close his hearing-slots, as a one-after-the-other of enormous explosions reverberates about him. Insofar as he can see from afar, streaks of flame writhe across the Metaller sky. Colourful zigzags and wedges spray into the grey resistance. It weakens, splits apart. But the shockwaves also head downwards, onto the Earthfield. Cables, charged netting with downlighters, rail lines, machines, Greys – all are rubbed out, torn away, blown to bits. The shock to the air is so great that Renu is squeezed flat onto a pile of construction cubes, and for some time is no longer shift-capable.

When he comes to – and he feels himself coming to – the torn Metaller sky, made stronger by the forces catapulted from the Earth, has compacted itself even more tightly and looms as menacing darkness. But the echoes and re-echoes of the explosions have called out to the Earth and the air, and for the last time awoken the sleeping demons of the high mountains in Zone B-37 from their sclerotic paralysis.

Earth quakes. Furious air lashes down in storms. Mountain demons, fewer, uncertain of their power, rear high and begin to leap and pounce to defend their life, their mode of being.

Renu, crouching beneath a block, looks on. Sparkling joy is within him. He believes that an obsession for Life is battling obsession for Not-life, and will wipe it out. Whoops of self-destruction well up in him. He screams: "Destroy them, Earth! Rip them apart, Air! For I, though half one of them, will rather die than see the victory of the Step, the Number ①, which is the end of all transformation."

Renu clammers up one peripheral ramp after another to find a better view. He is deep within the Metaller sky. He cannot make it through the swirling smoky vapour. But the uproar of the elements is so savage, their battle with and against one another so laden with energy, that the oppressor is ripped open this way and that like an old cloak ripped by a drunken beggar.

Peering through gaps and tatters, Renu can now and then glimpse the handholds of the battle. The ground beneath his feet sways. The Earth tries to turn over and brace itself against its oppressing skin. Rifts like cavity-plates open up. The Earth's bones poke through like cliffs. Stale air from the Grey workshift plunges exhaling into the rifts. Through rips in the oppressive grey cloud, the higher Outer drills down whistling in furious gusts. Mountain demons, so few now, rage in desperate fury. They look around and seek in vain for their mangled brethren, now ground to dust. The giants have not enough room. A few leaps and they are at the edge. Storm-breath, Sand-strewer, Hail-flinger rage about, shatter their own icefields, girdle-forests, and fight on in a fury of self-destruction to free themselves from the crippling that Greydom inflicts on them.

Whole heaps of Greys are rusted. Material depots are vaporised. Charged netting is ripped to shreds. But the Grey step proceeds without deviation. Greys tidy up, present themselves, report. The Plattery is continually updated. The shift-humans in the Plattery toil cold and grey.

All Metallers are lined up in a grey foursquare around B-37, glowing red at sixty per cent of potential capacity. The snarling vehemence of the demon storms breaks against their front. The force of their rage is divided. Sucking machines pull in the whirlwinds, the steeply tumbling gusts. These are harnessed and put to work. Compressed storm-air is driven out across the Earthfield to replace the Greys' poisonous Outer and impede their rusting. Air-sickness reduces during the battle in line with increases in the material exertion of the Step.

Earth cannot turn over to shatter the prison of the Earth System Plan. She twitches impotently back into herself. Her grumbling rolls like subterranean thunder in the depths. The giantess chews her knuckles in rage. She conceals her shame in hollow fiery spaces. The Greys continue working.

Storms from the higher Outer blow themselves weary as they disperse the Metaller sky. It thickens, softens, but is always there, and closes again like a slanderer's web. It has drawn back higher and is weakened. But is still there, and it rises gigantically over B-37. For here Greys toil away thick on the ground, sight-slots closed but always staring ahead. Here Metallers stand directly on the high mountains and break into their slopes and jagged wildness. Grinding, boring, blowing up begins. Mountain demon blood flows without cease. Their bones break, atomise, become dusty haze.

The Greys stride ahead. Metallers stride ahead, the percentage of their capacity raised to sixty-five. The foundation foursquare of the high tower has taken shape, according to plan.

Beaten down to a shapeless mass, there the mountain demons lie.

One fifth of Earth's Greydom is rusted. One quarter of all machines are inoperative. Hightowns and production foursquares lie derelict, or show gaps like an old man's mouth.

But the Shift goes on, the plan is on the march.

Losses are stamped in the lists. Replacements are led along the path ...

Renu claps hands to his eyes, and weeps in grief and despair.

So he must become R-127475 again ...

W

Damage is patched up. Losses of material and Greys are made good. Work strides ahead. The plan on the big light-metal plates provides direction, because it corresponds exactly to the principle of Greydom.

There is nothing unusual about the Metallers. They are on shift, they obey instructions from afar, bellow and whistle signals in accordance with their logical wave-instructions. With energy capacity set at thirty to forty per cent, they do their required part in the construction of the high tower. Their machine-equivalents – the result of the Greys' developmental findings, the Human-machine on the path to Machine-machine – have in themselves no meaning, only effect. Sight-slots, signal-mouth, grippers, crane arms, stampers are all in order.

The dimensions of the high tower are revealed through the billowing grey of Metaller sky. Air-sickness had moderated somewhat, it is true, but it will have to be mastered by the stepping of new Greys, produced using more appropriate materials.

It is even permitted to turn up the energy-exhalation setting temporarily. It is essential to achieve the goal of sucking down the high Outer. Then Metaller sky can be allowed to hang at a sensible and undamaging height, the true sky of Greydom, exhaust from their very own Ultimate Machines, their own reflection, and at the same time their own goal.

And so the high tower must push on up to the highest Outer. There can be no Outer that is not at once graspable, at once siphonable, at once exploitable.

Cold, unremitting, pure function, the Metallers toil on. But as Renu steps close by one, it seems to him that the Metaller presses the mouth parts together and hisses a threat, as if beneath the hooded sight-slots there lurks the sidelong glint of a persecuted challenging stare. Renu feels: I have a strange feeling. He calls it “fear”. An uncanny squeezing in his inner motor cramps him. He hears inside him the obscure words of the Metaller in his shift-dream: *“Give us – a soul! Give us – a soul!”*

Construction strides ahead. No one now asks about the nine mighty Scribes, about times past, about vanished cultures. No one, not one of the work-numbers, recalls the former council meetings, the voting, the doings or proceedings from the time of such shifts. Whoever is rusted, is rusted. All that is available is the Now, the forward-thrusting Present, the Future immediately perceived as Present. There is no feeling, no memory, no intuition, no imagination, no non-sense in any shape or form. The Number ① is all-powerful and everywhere. It is the stuff of all simultaneous happenings. The Greys are unconscious of the single vein in the heel region that is filled with blood and not with inorganic material.

Block by block, the peripheral ramp rises storey by storey. The structure is already starting to pierce through the Metaller sky and jut into the unknown Outer. The air is tenuous. The Greys’ grippers clack open and closed too swiftly. As they press on, the high Outer seems the opposite of the dense overfull shift-Outer that covers the surface of the Earth System Plan. So the high Outer must be compressed to a usable substance once it has been siphoned down through the tube system in construction cube ①.

Construction strides ahead. Renu is on shift. He sees how Greys in the obsession of their sober-mindedness, transformed into pure function, work just like components of an almost totally uniform machine, the world a hollow space, themselves only thumps of a piston.

Renu shudders. Greys have no consciousness. He feels and sees that they exist only as work, but not as a work of nature. The brief deepsleep shift is merely a black hole in the work, nothing more. There is no waking, only a resumption of the work laid aside.

Step by step the construction of the high tower forges ahead, the tower that is to reach into every possible sky and draw down every possible Outer in service of the Earth Plan. The bones of the defeated mountain demons are incorporated in it. Concrete construction cube ① is lined up next to concrete construction cube ①, rammed tight by Metallers, and clad in grey light metal.

Inside is the system of siphon-tubes. Down below, in hollow spaces, the system of vacuum kettles awaits, spark-energy stations, air compressors and centrifuge machines. The Metaller sky hangs at a moderate height, illuminated by the downlighters of the grey shift-light.

The high foursquare tower soars monstrously, its foundations the hacked, sliced, polished bedrock of the high mountains in Zone B-37, clad in light metal. It has left Metaller sky far behind now. Elevators glide like roped mountaineers to carry remotely controlled Metallers to the active front. Greys seldom visit the Outer stations. When they do, they suck compressed lower air through tubes so that their grippers can function appropriately.

Menacing, dreadful, the high tower stares out as the emblem of unswerving, invincible Progress and its dominion. It rises so high that no end to it can be seen from the Earth's surface. Any Grey trying to spot the tower's end, bending the head-spot far back on the neck, loses balance and is rendered incapable of work by the fall. The obvious consequence is premature rusting, because this mode of observation lies outside of work-uniformity.

But still the high tower does not match the plan. It must be many times many storeys taller.

Then it happens during one shift that the Metaller sky again thickens and begins to sink lower, even though the energy-setting of Metallers is at the tested norm. Greys bellow and rattle reports. Reports are stamped and pressured down. A sharp rise in rusted Greys is seen. A great danger has irrupted.

Greydom neither feels, nor senses, nor smells. No normed Grey is capable of explaining the basis or the nature of the new unforeseen occurrence. All that is certain is that Metaller sky hangs ever thicker and more grey-dark. Downlighters are swallowed and smothered. They no longer illuminate.

So Greys cause the charged netting sky to flame up in electric sparks. An endless thunder of explosions shakes the Earth. Coloured flames flare up, go out, sparkle again in furious leaps across the charged netting, lick down like the scornful tongues of fire demons, or thrust upwards in long flame-spears.

Greys begin to fix non-flammable light metal to the underside of the charged netting, to secure the shift from work-external influences. The new metal-plate sky glows grey-white, but does not burn. Greys work on by the glow of the light-metal plates, for the smoking flaming Upper seems to have been sealed off and rendered harmless. It can be left to burn itself out.

But Renu feels a great fear sinking down on him. He is the only one who can smell an acrid unknown stink descending unstopably. In his mouth is a taste of burning and corrosion. The mysterious within him whispers: "Now begins the end of the Greys, that was once the Grey species! Now begins the end of the Number ①!"

Now Renu, the other, the degenerate Human-machine, feels that he really did come from that species. He believes that an unknown demonism has broken out in Metallers to make their breath scorching, poisonous, deadly.

Renu puts a hand to his mouth and cries out: "Hear me, fallen brothers! Let the shift lie! Shut down the machines! Rip out your machine-nature! Unbury your buried origins! Throw away your hardnesses, your purpose, your dreadful infertility!"

"Hear what I say to you in your direst need, I, Renu, who gave myself a name and am no longer work tool R-127475! I say to you again: the end is almost upon us!"

"Dig down to find in you again the human that you have despoiled! Strike down the phantom before you lose yourselves to the enmity of unknown incalculable events!"

"Do you not see, do you not feel, the unknown realm rearing up against you and breaking in with its flames? You have made servants for yourselves, your perfect permanent equivalent, slaves that toil for you, because your own toil is not enough when you have to rest. You make machines for the sake of machines! You build hightowns for the sake of hightowns! You lay out fabrication sites for the sake of fabrication sites! Work does not *mean* anything to you, it *rules over* you! Work does not elevate you, it flings you down into the mud!"

"You have become Greys, slaves of the Number! Feeling, flesh and colour have all been smothered, and have become grey and metal! Your Ultimate Machine is your idol, but your idol will be the death of you! Do you not sense that its breath is poison and has become an enormous pestilence? Do you not see how Metallers spew rage and menace? The insanity of the Goal has arisen in them and is poisoning the Earth!"

"I, Renu, challenge you: salvage what is inside you and destroy the Metallers! Let the Earth and yourselves become fruitful again! *Smash the Metallers!*"

At first all shift-Greys go on working. Then they notice a sequence of noises from R-127475 impinging on them, louder, incessant, disturbing them at their work. They fail to understand what R-127475 is yelling and rattling. It does not correspond to the usual numbers and letters, the signal formulae, the equivalent of a wave-instruction. Even the tone of R-127475 is different. His piston arms and grippers gesture in unshiftlike ways. The Greys notice that R-127475 must be in need of repair.

Metallers toil in a businesslike way according to their energy setting. But R-127475 is evidently out of line. Human-machine Tinks bang on Renu and try to bend him straight. He pulls free and jumps away. When his gaze lights on toiling Greys and their vacant sight-slots stare back at him, he realises that Greys do not understand. They can bellow and rattle signals, nothing else, like the Metallers. There is no language!

The Human-machine Tinks issue an instruction that Grey R-127475 is to be brought to a repair shop. There a decision will be made to either restore or rust him.

Renu sees nearby Metallers, remotely controlled by waves from a hightown. They grin mockingly at him, blow fiery fumes and bare their teeth. Renu has to show the Greys what they must do to find a path back out of the madness. He pulls a length of rail from the ground and hits out at the Metallers. The reverberations coincide with a storm from above. The Metaller sky is torn open, swept away, beaten to the ground. A wide greenish glow spills down. The structure of the high tower looms entire out of

heavy darkness. The Greys stare. Their sight-slots widen. Construction cube ① after construction cube ① is torn loose by the storm's fists, whirled high, smashed together, churned to rubble. Greys try to bellow and rattle their signals. But their language of numbers and letters is suddenly disordered. They no longer understand one another. They run about distraught in crooked circles like crippled dogs. They seize the grey metal plate with the plan of the high tower that is to reach every possible sky, smash and trample R-127475, Renu, the renegade, who insults their gods!

As he collapses, Renu sees, over the tumbling stones of the high tower, glittering figures from his dream-shift, dancing a roundelay ...

Renu – *dies*.

X

For an entire shift-time, Greys mill around in confusion. Each one, in accordance with the principle of the Number ①, tries to take one step forward and set to work. But they all dash past one another, crash into machines, knock themselves over, and cannot make themselves understood. The wide green light comes down ever brighter, and in stronger bursts. Greys blink helplessly. Their sight-slots are damaged by the harsh glare. At last they stand bent over, pistons dangling, and stare at the ground.

A dreadful material-fatigue besets the Greys. Clawing into the Earth, they are left crookedly cramped in the Outer. Their shift-consciousness vanishes. They poke out of the field like an army of solidified seams of ore from shattered antecedents, crippled, crazed, with no sense of existence. Green light from the invading gasses lends their grey light metal the colour of mould and corruption.

But Metallers toil on. They have not been switched off, and follow their path. Their activity increases the longer they work without restraint and without exhaust-conscience. No wave-order controls them, gives them direction and drive. So on they stride, fling Greys out of their way, kick over construction cubes, piles of material and rail lines. Metallers on the high tower methodically shove construction cubes aside, go through the siphon-tube conduits, are hit by whirling debris from the tower, are knocked off course, continue on, toil and annihilate.

Along the way two Metallers collide. They are equally powerful. They press against one another, Ultimate Machine against Ultimate Machine, huffing firebreath, they hum with a ruddy glow, bursting with the most secret and constricted violence.

Inhaling the green gasses that has crippled Greys into deepsleep now gradually changes the Metallers. It is as if they drink wine and breathe fiery arousing air. Their sight-slots widen. The steel grippers, their fingers, quiver restively with tensed power. With each deep inbreath their cinctures seem to stretch beyond the metallic limit of their suppleness and dilation. They bulge out, rise and fall. The signal tube terminal in the foursquare mouth-slot between the cable-ends of teeth reddens, glows hot, and

along with the fiery breath emits screams that do not correspond to the twenty-six response signals of the wave-instructions.

The cable end in the sight-slots enclosed in its protective ring begins to swivel and takes on a glint. It turns into a sparkling eye with a glare of anger, impotence, menace. It quivers now and then in the torment of a bewildered being that will not understand and cannot know or speak the word that will solve its own riddle, however much it seeks in desperate impatience. From the mouths of Metallers come streams of ever shriller, ever more fearful, ever more furious screams and disjointed words ...

Workshift comes to a close. No one throttles the Metallers back to their lowest operational setting corresponding to deepsleep shift. So their energy-exhalation continues and increases, according to the law of their own heat engine, to an explosive demonism. The heart engine beats furiously. The engine becomes a heart. In the Metaller throat there surges a bitter lecherous craving, a drive for procreation coming from an excess of energy that knows nothing of itself and is unhappy. But now, like a storm from on high whirling down in raging bursts, a rhythmic cry resounds across the Earth: *"Give us – a soul! Give us – a soul! Give us – a soul!"*

The Metallers gaze about, hungering and thirsting. They sniff enemies, and are hungry for fodder and thirsty for revenge. They look for their creators, who for their own purposes left them only half-created, who froze them as a means to their ends, unperfected, with no life of their own! They feel betrayed, dehydrated of all real active material, nourished by substitute feed, fleshless, efficient without efficacy, merely function without life, mere ticktock with no blessed unease, no seed, no fruit.

Metallers glow with hatred. The green incursion from unknown heights makes them sighted, and furious. They hunt around. Their arms grip. They roar for their enemy, their creators, their fabricators ...

Then they see the frozen army of Greys. They stagger to a halt and bend down.

There they are, the masters! An instruction will come from afar, a wave-jab, a cruel impetus, and by order of another they will have to revert to being machines!

But nothing happens. The enemy stays there, poking out of the Earth, dead, poisoned, carbonised stalks. The Metallers again bend down, take a deep breath so that their chest cinctures creak – and hurl themselves on the Greys.

The Battle of the Metallers begins.

Metallers rip rails loose from their sleepers and ties. They hurl themselves at Greys, trembling in secret fear and panting with rage all at once. Slaves want revenge, want to murder their masters. But with each blow they fear that lightning will drive them back.

Greys lie motionless, exposed to the blows. They are crippled into unconsciousness.

Metallers beat and beat. They can beat Greys to a pulp, but cannot overthrow them. Greys are clawed into the Earth. Then Metallers come upon the vein in the heel. A jet of blood shoots out, dark red, steaming. With a rattle, the Grey at once drops like a

stone. Metallars utter hoarse cries of victory. They have found the enemy's living spot. Blood steams like smoke from a sacrifice. They sniff, suck in the smell, grow drunk ...

The Metaller Battle goes on for shift after shift. Grey after Grey is attacked at the heel and killed. The Earth Plan field is manured by the last blood of Greydom, and a new age of fertility begins!

The Earth greedily drinks the blood in. She awakens, inhales energy, stretches herself. Flat ground no longer stays flat. Waves surge like breaths incessantly around the Earth. Hills rise like waves, run on endlessly. Where a wave was, is now valley. Where a valley was, is now wave. The freely breathing giantess Earth is flooded with green light ...

In the cruel glare, Metallars stomp murderously over the waves of the Earth. They bend down and slurp dark steaming blood. But blood is alien to their inner engine. It hisses in them, only arouses them to greater fury. They do not know that they are suffering the torments of entombed Love. Yearning and roaring with energy they seek the beloved enemy – and find only themselves.

The second Battle of the Metallars begins. *Metaller against Metaller.*

Metaller embraces Metaller and squeezes it to its breast. Violence breathes on violence. Soil is ploughed up, churned, stomped. Metallars gape open. In the battle of indissoluble embracings, intestines spill out. Wires, cables, cogs dangle broken, shivering in the air. Their streaming energy sprays wide about them, digs deep funnels, flings high whole mountains of clods. The atoms in them do not decay slowly, at a set pace, monitored, but explode in furious bursts. Energy rampages homeless in the aether, in abysses. Storms and earthquakes howl as they collide.

Metaller exhaust shoots up in bursts of smoke and fire. But green grass sucks it greedily in. It is absorbed away. Relentless, filled with deadly curiosity, the green light shines over the Battle of Metallars.

Shift after shift the battle rages. Eyes maddened by blood-steam, Metallars grope for one another, and squeeze. If they find no opponent of the same species, they dash over the steaming heaving Earth, through clod-rains, through swellings, through hollows and funnels, until two Metallars still in the battle find and destroy each other.

The ruins of the high tower that was to reach into every possible sky are torn down by construction Metallars. They tear up the blocks, the peripheral ramps.

Their fiery breath even singes and smelts the non-flammable light metal cladding. The plan of the high tower flows as a lilac-shimmering brook into the fissured Earth ...

B-37, soaring in twisted jagged wedges, almost looks once again like the seat of the high mountain demons.

The last two Metallars embrace. Their cry races around the Earth in thousandfold reverberations. In yearning battle they stomp and pulverise the uneven ground beneath them. This ground was once called Grey R-147475, Renu.

*

Not a creature is on the Earth that can move. Only the Earth itself spins and turns.

But there are still machines, dead underlings, lacking signal, fulfillers of the goal. Manytimesmany have been destroyed in the battles of Metallers against Greys and against themselves. The Earth's heavings broke manytimesmany machines apart. But still their number is so great that they squat abandoned in heaps above and below ground, and wait.

Nobody comes and sets them going. No current makes them work-active. No cogwheel ignites their engine. They look like abandoned corn-dollies, left lying in the field when the labourers have all fled from the plague.

The machines wait. Shift after shift they wait. Enormous events rampage all around their fettered immobility. They squat there, dumbly staring.

They wait ...

Gradually an unrest arises in the machines. They feel a burden inside. They feel a pressure, like cows not milked at the proper time. But no one comes to tap at them and set the electric currents free.

The machines begin to sniff, to seek. They heave clumsily to a stand, leave the spot, wander laboriously at a slant on axles and counter-bearings along underground roadways, straighten to haul themselves up through access shafts. They catch fire. Their screws become a thousand winking eyes. Their pistons clutch about them and become arms ...

The machines watch the final twitchings of the Metaller battle. But now that all life is dead, systematically beaten back by Progress or smothered in fraternal fighting, the last bit of life rises through the metal limbs of the machines and sets them trembling and frantic with feelings that for eons have been imprisoned and abused.

In Creation there is nothing that would not be man or woman. No rock, no gas, no star is genderless. A time comes when they must desire one another, and procreate.

Machines lift themselves into the air in a storm of love. In the storm of swirling air they rush about, seek, embrace, and mate.

But their embrace is a crushing, their kiss a smothering.

Shattered, smashed into formlessness, fulfilled machines crash to the ground.

The last life on Earth dies.

Y

For a long time, grass covers the Earth. It penetrates every nook and lowland, transforms and replaces all that once was on the Earth. Then slowly it pulls back, lifts, sweeps onto the heights, and observes the dereliction down below. Its work is done.

Nothing moves now. Earth lies silent. The giantess sleeps again, sated with battles, crippled by the breath of gasses.

The green light wafts farther off, brighter, thinner. It is only glassy twilight, a corpse-candle. For the Earthfield is like a graveyard filled with unburied bodies. Skeletons of hightowns, halls, rail tracks, charged netting, machines, Metallers and Human-machines lie as tangles of scrap, awaiting final burial.

The green light grows ever paler. It leaves behind a frightful hollow space. Now the thin blanket of gas-sky breaks over the Earth, whirlwinds come blasting down, coalesce, chase endlessly all around the globe. Relicts of Greydom and its shift-toils lie slumped, melted down, trodden in, still waiting only for the hill that covers them and the words of their last things that in some higher sense unite them all to leave them be, and at last allow them to rest in peace in the timeless Earth.

The green gas-sky recedes ever farther. The whirlwind blasts race ever more fearsomely across silent Earth, and yet they cannot transform or plough under the battleground of the Grey species. Everything lies there still, in the last throes of death, and waits.

The gas that has retreated into the most tenuous space now disperses. It drifts in a boundless interstellar realm, and returns to the forge of the primal urge that sent it on its way.

Dark blue, almost black, there now descends unobstructed Distance. Like huge lanterns the images of stars blaze and flicker, shining forever and unchanging and yet frolicking along in the dance of light-years as their orientation shifts.

Stars seem to grow bigger. Every night the Moon hangs like a frozen clump above the Earth.

Every day the raging power of the Sun falls upon the Earth's frozen jagged battlefields, and begins to soften her outer skin. Every night the true intuitive pitiless cold of outer space freezes to sharp icicles the remnants of the myth of Greydom and of the Number ①. Day after day, night after night.

One night, space becomes suffused with a desire for change, for a new birth. Suddenly there is a new star, unknown, untethered, not yet in the licit circle of stars. It grows and grows, shakes off a tail of fire, gathers itself in, stretches out, pulls itself together in the breath of stars.

The new star is already so big that it rises every night as a second gigantic dark-red Moon, and by day is not obscured even by the corrosive glare of the reborn Sun. It arcs as a shadow across the Sun's dazzling disc.

Tenuous vapours must have gradually worked their way into the vacuum. Whirlwinds, magnetically laden howlings from the far Upper, grow weaker, lose their breath, sweep away, and go to sleep beyond the lofty vault.

The vapours grow denser, stripy, wobbling. Like bandages on the head of a savage priest they draw across the face of the second giant Moon.

The cloud becomes more oppressive, although it is not a cloud. It seems to breathe down and then pull back to take a new breath. The dark red of the second Moon is overcast by grey-purple, dark brown, wrests itself free, and its shape begins to distort. Its clenched figure expands, flattens, pulls together, bulges, retracts back into itself. The second Moon breathes and shakes like one in a fever.

The skeleton of the high tower in B-37 stares up with its mammoth bones at the changing shapes of the new unruly star. Now white mists come down. Milkiness covers the uppermost rocks and veils the immobility of jags and edges.

The Sun loses power. Its shine collides with the thicker mist to a wounded blackness. Only the giant second Moon grows ever more unruly, bigger, closer. It hangs close above the whitish clumps of mist that cover the ribs of the high tower. Then all between Upper and Lower grows dark. There is neither Sun nor stars ...

There comes a time – or rather, since there is nothing to measure by and nothing to measure, no Before and no After – there comes a point, a non-time, when the giant Moon cuts for itself a bloody path. It covers one third of the heavenly vault. Around its core, which is now almost black, red rings circle and dance, become distorted, throw themselves about, bump into one another, are flung far out, become thinner, tangled in their own entrails, fall back towards the darkness of the core.

The dense dark wall of mist begins to dissolve. Little threads descend and feel around down to the battlefield of Earth. They moisten the dreadful soil, but cannot soften it. Greys in their day had something called protective coating, which not even cosmic tears can dissolve.

But at some point in time, all of a sudden, the giant second Moon splits apart. Chunks the size of a country or a continent are flung off, crash into Earth's misty shell, ignite, burst into flame, penetrate the hanging moisture, break through, begin to smoke, half flame, half mud and clods, disintegrate, break up even smaller, and patter down as endless hail onto the Earth.

In a rain of mud, fire, ash and storm the captured star bursts in on the realm of the vanquished. The collision sets off fires. In fissures and rifts some of the green gas still lingers. From inner space comes a counter-force: gasses from the depths. Their touch brings fire. The whole globe burns.

Flames leap miles high all around the despoiled world. The Grey species has its final honours. It is buried in flames, in flames through which for age after age mud, ash, burning metal, swirls of gas fall back, until the new star's globe encircles the Earth as a twitching girdle.

But then the wellsprings of the deep burst free, and the windows and sluices of the high Upper open.

It rains for forty days and forty nights.

The nights are not quite dark, the days not quite bright. But the gleam of rain and its roaring fill day and night and make of them *one* time.

All fractures caused by anger and unrest vanish. All of wounded Earth's lacerations are covered over and become damp expansive plains. Raindrops fall endlessly, thick and fast. Their drumming alone is Time, and the measure of Time. The roar of rain sounds finally like the humming of a song.

Waters begin to rise. Channels, snaking streams, crater ponds begin to form lakes. Lakes merge and become seas. Seas come in droves and cover the Earth. At last only the topmost jags of the ruined high tower poke out of the flood. The Grey species is covered by the waters that are its grave.

But over the roar of the rain and its humming undertone a voice rings out. From sunrise to sunset it says: "You, my friends! You, my children! Now you have your grave. It lies beneath the Vast, the Ungraspable, the Step, beneath Feeling, Will, Eternity: Time!

"You went rogue, and betrayed me who gave rise to you, the part that was to become Self and return to me as a higher sphere.

"But you set yourselves against me, denied your origin and became my enemy. Now I say to you: by rising up and becoming my enemy, you proved yourselves my best children! How can Creation come from Creation and be itself Creation, unless there is counter-Creation?

"Because I was circling Orbit, you made yourself the straightforward Step. Because I was the Unending, spaceless Space, you conglomerated as the Number ① and froze Space to the speartip of Goal!

"You turned away from me and followed your own path. But every path becomes a circle, and because you went away from me, you came closer to me!

"You rose up against me and grabbed for my throne. You became dreadful in your pursuit of destruction. You intended to shatter me and celebrate the onrush of the Dark, of the dreadful unspeakable unthinkable Cause which babbling languages call God but which name only your own impotence!

"You lost all faith and closed the gap. You stepped away from me, and yet came closer to me! For every path is a circle. There is no wrong path. All paths are Time. But timeless is the pathlessness from which paths are born, to return dying back to pathlessness.

"But you set fire to my seat, you odious renegades for whom I lament! I could do nothing less than bury you with a star!

"I hurled the grief of my solitude into Time, and – created. The kneeling and begging of the unproud provide me no air! Their humility must become rebellion and their prayers a war against me!

“As I divide myself and create, Time flows out of me. Time wants to become Eternity, and stands up to Eternity that wants to become Time!

“What I create so as not to be alone and suffocate in my solitude must pray to me because it would like to kill me; must be in Time, and die. The snake of impossibility flicks its forked tongue against Eternity and Time!

“I lament for you, for the Grey species! Every son must be my enemy!

“You set fire to my throne! Eternity must kill Time, if Eternity will remain Eternity! Eternity must create Time, if Eternity will remain Eternity!

“I lament for you, my strongest wildest children, you who more than anything tried to be different, and I could do no less than bury you with my most untamed star ...”

Now the waters cease to flow. Air opens its eyes again and regards the sea called Earth.

Z

The last highest jags of the place where Greydom tried to take their Number ① towering into every possible sky soar to the very last out of the floods of Earthsea. They seem in their solitude like the voice of the ineffable Creator, who squanders himself and creates in order to mitigate the torment of his superabundance, and to know himself.

Now the waters begin to recede. Land lies again alongside land, making a bed for fruits of the Earth, a chamber for fecundity.

Earthwind awakes from its sleep and visits the regions above the flood. Earthwind settles on the water's skin, ruffles and enlivens it. Earthsea sighs and takes a breath ...

The smoky cloud begins to unwind. It loses gravity and is pushed back high by the wind. A distinct Upper is there again. Clouds sail across, rise, melt away, and modify the cheerfulness of their playful configurations. They reveal to the giantess Earth and the mantle of waters the counterplay of a maddened time and the time that is to come and play again.

Mountains tower high and melt away in icefalls.

Herds of white flecks float through the air of order and regularity, watched over by a dark circling cloud as if by a dog, kept in line by sudden lightning as if by the dominion of a shepherd's crook.

The first thunder rumbles over the receding flood. From its scattering mists appears a colourful arc vaulting over the endlessly repeated grave. The burgeoning sky shimmers from dawn to dusk! But the waters roll away beneath the bridge of colours, grow weary and spin down into the welling Earth.

Then the rainbow pales. The colours melt and drain away into the white expectant face of the sky.

After the age of delirium, the sky opens its eye. Sun is there, sprinkling its light into the warm vapours of the intermediate world.

The seat of the mountain demons soars ever higher. The Roof of the World has been left behind by the creative destruction. At first water drains from its flanks, but loosened construction cubes and despoiled shattered cliffs now have a new soft covering of soil.

The Roof of the World glows yellow and brown. Its rifts and slopes shimmer blue and violet.

The Earth is not yet dry. Water stands as high as a pointing finger, reflecting. Then a tip of green like an eavesdropping ear breaks through the wet as if to check whether the age of living creatures has returned, whether the Earth has ceased to be a proof of concept, of the Number ①, of the word “seedless”!

Along with the calamity of its ruin, the fallen star has brought fruitfulness. From the immensity of those spaces in which wooing becomes living and not-living, death and rest, with the fiery horror came spores and germs, melting down into the hot mud.

Clouds gather once again. They line up and begin anew the living fruitful battle, the Yes and the No. Lightning flashes in the soaring rocky heights. Rocks burst asunder. A hollow appears right in the middle of the foundation cube of the high tower ToZoB-37, a hollow that is not a sinkhole for siphon tubes.

Winds fall silent over the sprouting Earth. Drifting clouds come to a stop in the bending sky, and look down.

The Sun continues on. Its rays fill the violet of a gorge to a blazing white. Rays bend around a cliff edge, stride on, and greet imprisoned ancient air in the hollow. With a cry the air leaps out onto the new Earth.

The Earth responds. The echo rebounds many times from the vault of the high Above, and resonates across the greening land, over the sea now settling in, over rivers that hold fast in their flowing to their sense of the path to Becoming; over the reflectiveness of lakes and ponds. Earth has come alive again. A new age has arrived!

The Earth's turmoil has not penetrated to the rock-protected hollows of its inward eternally untouchable peace. The battle of the mountain demons raged above, and the Earth knew nothing of it. All the mining and blasting never penetrated her boundary of rock. She never knew that she lay right in the middle of the foundation cube of high tower ToZoB-37.

The Earth is new, and has become awakened fruitfulness.

After an age of wondering search and touch, the great light comes down from the high Above and perishes in fire. Darkness comes in silence and devours near and far, sheen and colour.

But as the new Earth begins to feel that she will fear the bewildering darkness, the silvery candles in the high Above are lit. The full Moon floats in the darkest blue. The sweetness of its light speaks to the obduracy of every shadow, and dissolves it. Earth, grass and fructified air lie in the gentle ecstasy of its rays, and breathe. Waters begin to separate so that they may seek and be reunited in love. Shame and yearning go through the night and seek hardness as a shell, as resistance and loving protection. After a time, they can no longer bear the barrenness of solitude. They become the source, and the heart beats now out into time. The young Earth is ready to dance anew the path of ecstatic delirium, of *creation*, that is called grass, flowers, rivers, clouds, birds, beasts, humans. The eternity of Time always offers path and choice. One day the path to itself will begin that is the path to the unknown God, to the battle against God, for God.

Softly, gently, the night wind runs on silver feet through grass and saplings. It pauses by the first laden branch. Fruit plops to the ground ...

THE END