

**Memoirs of a Space Traveler**  
**Further Reminiscences of Ijon Tichy**  
**(the sequel to The Star Diaries)**

by Stanislaw Lem

Translated by Joel Stern and Maria Swiecicka-Ziemianek

**The Twenty-fourth Voyage**

On day 1,006, having left the local system of the Nereid Nebula, I noticed a spot on the screen and tried rubbing it off with a chamois cloth. There was nothing else to do, so I spent four hours rubbing before I realized that the spot was a planet and rapidly growing larger. Circling this heavenly body, I was not a little surprised to find that its vast continents were covered with regular patterns and geometric configurations. I landed with due caution in the middle of an open desert. It was covered with small disks, perhaps half a meter in diameter; hard and shiny, as if turned on a lathe, they ran in long rows in various directions, forming the designs I had noticed from a high altitude. After making a few tests, I went cruising just above the ground seeking an answer to the riddle of the disks, which intrigued me enormously. During a two-hour flight I discovered, one after the other, three immense and beautiful cities; I touched down in a square in one of them. But the city was completely deserted; houses, towers, squares, everything was dead; no sign of life anywhere, or any trace of violence or natural disaster. More amazed and bewildered than ever, I flew on. Around noon I found myself above a vast plateau. Catching sight of a shiny building near which there was some sort of movement, I immediately landed. A palace rose from the rocky plain, sparkling as though cut from a single diamond. A wide marble staircase led up to its gilded portal. At the foot of the staircase several unfamiliar beings were milling about. I looked at them close up. If my eyes did not deceive me, they were alive and, moreover, resembled humans so much (especially from a distance) that I dubbed them "hominiformicans." I was prepared with this name because I had spent time during my voyage thinking up nomenclature, in order to have terms handy for such occasions. "Hominiformicans" fit the bill, for these beings walked upon two legs and had hands, heads, eyes, ears, and lips. True, the lips were in the middle of the forehead, the ears under the chin (a pair on each side), and the eyes -- ten in all -- were arranged like rosary beads across their cheeks. But to a traveler like me, who has encountered the most bizarre creatures in the course of his expeditions, they were the spit and image of humans.

I approached them, keeping a safe distance, and asked what they were doing. They made no reply, but continued peering into the diamond mirrors that rose from the lowest step of the staircase. I tried to interrupt them once, twice, three times, but seeing that this had not the slightest effect, in my impatience I shook one vigorously by the shoulder. Then they all turned in my direction and seemed to notice me for the first time. After regarding me and my rocket with some astonishment, they asked me several questions, to which I willingly replied. But because they kept breaking off the conversation to gaze into the diamond mirrors, I was afraid I would not be able to

question them properly. Finally, however, I managed to persuade one to satisfy my curiosity. This Phool (for, as he told me, they are called Phools) sat down with me on a rock not far from the stairs. My interlocutor fortunately possessed considerable intelligence, which showed in the gleam of the ten eyes on his cheeks. He threw his ears over his shoulders and described the history of the Phools, as follows:

"Alien voyager! You must know that we are a people with a long and splendid past. The population of this planet has been divided from time immemorial into Spiritors, Eminent, and Drudgelings. The Spiritors were absorbed in the contemplation of the nature of the Great Phoo, who in a deliberate creative act brought the Phools into being, settled them on this globe, and in His inscrutable mercy surrounded it with stars to illumine the night and also fashioned the Solar Fire to light our days and send us beneficent warmth. The Eminent levied taxes, interpreted the meaning of state laws, and supervised the factories, in which the Drudgelings modestly toiled. Thus everyone worked together for the public good. We dwelt in peace and harmony; our civilization reached great heights. Through the ages inventors built machines that simplified work, and where in ancient times a hundred Drudgelings had bent their sweating backs, centuries later a few stood by a machine. Our scientists improved the machines, and the people rejoiced at this, but subsequent events showed how cruelly premature was that rejoicing. A certain learned constructor built the New Machines, devices so excellent that they could work quite independently, without supervision. And that was the beginning of the catastrophe. When the New Machines appeared in the factories, hordes of Drudgelings lost their jobs; and, receiving no salary, they faced starvation. . ."

"Excuse me, Phool," I asked, "but what became of the profits the factories made?"

"The profits," he replied, "went to the rightful owners, of course. Now, then, as I was saying, the threat of annihilation hung. . ."

"But what are you saying, worthy Phool!" I cried. "All that had to be done was to make the factories common property, and the New Machines would have become a blessing to you!"

The minute I said this the Phool trembled, blinked his ten eyes nervously, and cupped his ears to ascertain whether any of his companions milling about the stairs had overheard my remark.

"By the Ten Noses of the Phoo, I implore you, O stranger, do not utter such vile heresy, which attacks the very foundation of our freedom! Our supreme law, the principle of Civic Initiative, states that no one can be compelled, constrained, or even coaxed to do what he does not wish. Who, then, would dare expropriate the Eminent's factories, it being their will to enjoy possession of same? That would be the most horrible violation of liberty imaginable. Now, then, to continue, the New Machines produced an abundance of extremely cheap goods and excellent food, but the Drudgelings bought nothing, for they had not the wherewithal. . ."

"But, my dear Phool!" I cried. "Surely you do not claim that the Drudgelings did this voluntarily? Where was your liberty, your civic freedom?!"

"Ah, worthy stranger," sighed the Phool, "the laws were still observed, but they say only that the citizen is free to do whatever he wants with his property and money; they do not say where he is to obtain them. No one oppressed the Drudgelings, no one forced them to do anything; they were completely free and could do what they pleased, yet instead of rejoicing at such freedom they died off like flies. . . The situation

worsened; in the factory warehouses, mountains of unpurchased goods rose skyward, while swarms of wraithlike, emaciated Drudgelings roamed the streets. The Plenum Moronicum, the venerable assembly of Spiritors and Eminentists that governed the state, conferred all year round on ways to remedy the evil. Its members gave long speeches and frantically sought a way out of the predicament, but to no avail. At the very beginning of the deliberations, one member of the Plenum, the author of a famous work on the nature of Phoolian freedoms, demanded that the constructor of the New Machines be stripped of his golden laurel wreath and that, on the contrary, his ten eyes be plucked out. This was opposed by the Spiritors, who begged mercy for the inventor in the name of the Great Phoo. The Plenum Moronicum spent four months determining whether or not the constructor had violated the laws of the realm by inventing the New Machines. The assembly split into two camps. The dispute was, finally, ended by a fire in the archives that destroyed the minutes of the proceedings; since none of the august members of the Plenum could recall what position they had taken on the issue, the whole matter was dropped. It was then proposed that the Eminentists, who owned the factories, be requested to cease building the New Machines; the Plenum appointed a committee for this purpose, but the committee's entreaties had not the slightest effect. The Eminentists declared that it was their fondest wish to continue to produce in this way, for the New Machines worked more cheaply and more swiftly than did the Drudgelings. The Plenum Moronicum resumed deliberations. A law was drawn up stipulating that the factory owners give a fixed percentage of their profits to the Drudgelings, but that proposal fell through, too, for, as Archspiritor Nolab rightly pointed out, such handouts would have corrupted and degraded the souls of the latter. Meanwhile, the mountains of manufactured goods kept rising, until finally they began to spill out over the walls of the factories, whereupon mobs of starving Drudgelings rushed up with threatening cries. In vain did the Spiritors attempt to explain to them, with the greatest kindness, that they were defying sovereign laws and daring to oppose the Phoo's inscrutable decrees; that they should endure their lot meekly, for through mortification of the flesh the soul is elevated and gains the certainty of heavenly reward. The Drudgelings, however, turned a deaf ear to this wisdom, and armed guards were needed to curb their seditious activity.

"Then the Plenum Moronicum summoned the constructor of the New Machines before Its August Presence and addressed him as follows:

" 'Learned man! Great danger threatens our state, for rebellious, criminal ideas are arising among the masses of Drudgelings. They strive to abolish our splendid freedoms and the law of Civic Initiative! We must make every effort to defend our liberty. After careful consideration of the whole problem, we have reached the conclusion that we are unequal to the task. Even the most virtuous, capable, and model Phool can be swayed by feelings, and is often vacillating, biased, and fallible, and thus unfit to reach a decision in so complicated and important a matter. Therefore, within six months you are to build us a purely rational, strictly logical, and completely objective Governing Machine that does not know the hesitation, emotion, and fear that befuddle living minds. Let this machine be as impartial as the light of the Sun and stars. When you have built and activated it, we shall hand over to it the burden of power, which grows too heavy for our weary shoulders.'

" 'So be it,' said the constructor, 'but what is to be the machine's basic motivation?'

" 'Obviously, the freedom of Civic Initiative. The machine must not command or

forbid the citizens anything; it may, of course, change the conditions of our existence, but it must do so always in the form of a proposal, leaving us alternatives between which we can freely choose.'

" 'So be it,' replied the constructor, 'but this injunction concerns mainly the mode of operation. What of the ultimate goal? What is this machine's purpose?'

" 'Our state is threatened by chaos; disorder and disregard for the law are spreading. Let the Machine bring supreme harmony to the planet, let it institute, consolidate, and establish perfect and absolute order.'

" 'Let it be as you have said!' replied the constructor. 'Within six months I shall build the Voluntary Universalizer of Absolute Order. With this task ahead of me, I bid you farewell. . .'

" 'Wait!' said one of the Eminent. 'The Machine you create should operate not only in a perfect but also in a pleasant manner; that is, its activity should produce an agreeable impression, one that would satisfy the most refined aesthetic sensibility. . .'

"The constructor bowed and left in silence. Working arduously and aided by a troop of nimble assistants, he erected the Governing Machine -- the very one you see on the horizon as a small dark spot, alien traveler. It is a conglomeration of iron cylinders in which something constantly shakes and burns. The day it was switched on was a great state holiday; the eldest Archspiritor blessed it solemnly, and the Plenum Moronicum gave it complete power over the country. Then the Voluntary Universalizer of Absolute Order emitted a long whistle and set to work.

"For six days the Machine labored, around the clock; in the daytime clouds of smoke hung over it, and at night it was surrounded by a bright glow. The ground shook for a radius of one hundred and sixty miles. Then the double doors of its cylinders opened, and out spilled hosts of small black robots, which, waddling like ducks, scattered over the whole planet, even to its remotest corners. Wherever they went, they assembled by the factory warehouses and, speaking in a charming and lucid manner, requested various items, for which they paid at once. Within a week the warehouses were empty, and the Eminent factory owners sighed with relief: 'Truly the constructor has built us a splendid machine!' Indeed, it was marvelous to see the robots use the objects they had purchased: they dressed in brocades and satins, oiled their axles with cosmetics, smoked tobacco, read books -- shedding synthetic tears over the sad ones; they even managed to consume the most varied delicacies (with no benefit to themselves, of course, since they ran on electricity, but to the great benefit of the manufacturers). It was only the masses who were not satisfied; on the contrary, they murmured more and more among themselves. The Eminent, however, hopefully awaited the Machine's next move, which was not long in coming.

"It assembled large quantities of marble, alabaster, granite, rock crystal, and copper; sacks of gold and silver, and slabs of jasper; after which, making a terrible din, it raised an edifice no Phoolian eye had ever beheld -- this Rainbow Palace, traveler, which stands before you!"

I looked. The sun had just emerged from behind a cloud and its beams played on the polished walls, splitting into flames of sapphire and ruby red; rainbow stripes shimmered around the angle towers and bastions; the roof, adorned with slender turrets and covered with gold leaf, was all aglow. I feasted my eye on this magnificence while the Phool went on:

"News of the wondrous building spread over the whole planet. Veritable pilgrimages began arriving here from the most distant lands. When crowds had filled the commons, the Machine parted its metal lips and spoke thus:

" 'On the first day of the month of Huskings I shall throw open the jasper portal of the Rainbow Palace, and then any Phool, be he famous or obscure, will be able to go inside and enjoy what awaits him there. Until then, restrain your curiosity, for you will satisfy it amply later on.'

"And, verily, on the morning of the first day of Huskings there was a sounding of silver trumpets, and the palace portal opened with a dull groan. The crowds began to pour inside in a torrent three times wider than the highway that connects our two capitals, Debilia and Cretinia. All day long, masses of Phools streamed in, but their numbers on the commons did not diminish, for new ones arrived continually from the interior of the country. The Machine extended hospitality to all: the black robots distributed refreshing beverages and hearty food. This went on for a fortnight. Thousands, tens of thousands, finally millions of Phools had thronged into the Rainbow Palace, but of those who entered, not one returned.

"Some wondered about this and asked where such great numbers of people were disappearing, but these solitary voices were drowned out by the blaring rhythm of marching bands. Robots scurried here and there feeding the hungry and thirsty; the silver clocks on the palace towers chimed; and when night fell, the crystal windows shone with many lights. Finally, as several hundred persons were patiently waiting their turn on the marble staircase, a shrill cry rang out over the lively beat of the drums; 'Treachery! Listen! The palace is a diabolical trap! Run for your lives! All is lost!'

" 'All is lost!' the crowd on the staircase cried back, then turned and scattered. No one tried to stop them.

"The following night, several bold Drudgelings stole up to the palace. When they returned, they said that the back wall of the palace had opened slowly and innumerable piles of shiny disks had tumbled out. Black robots had carried the disks into the fields and arranged them in various designs.

"Upon hearing this, the Spiritors and Eminent, who had been meeting in the Plenum (they had not gone to the palace, it being awkward for them to mingle with the crowd), convened immediately, and, wishing to solve the enigma, summoned the learned constructor. Instead his son appeared, downcast, and rolling a large, transparent disk.

"The Eminent, beside themselves with impatience and indignation, reviled the absent scientist and called down curses on his head. They questioned the youth, ordered him to explain the mystery of the Rainbow Palace and tell them what the Machine had done with the Phools who entered it.

" 'Besmirch not my father's memory!' the youth exclaimed. 'In building the Machine he faithfully abided by your requirements; once he put it into operation, however, he knew no more than any of us how it would act -- the best proof of which is the fact that he himself was among the first to enter the Rainbow Palace.'

" 'And where is he now?' the Plenum cried with one voice.

" 'Here,' the youth replied sorrowfully, pointing to the shiny disk. He glared at the elders and thus, stopped by no one, went his way, rolling his metamorphosed father before him.

"The members of the Plenum trembled with both rage and fear; later, however,

they came to the conclusion that the Machine would surely not harm them, so they sang the Phoolian anthem and, thus fortified in spirit, set out together from the city. Presently they found themselves before the iron monster.

" 'Scoundrel!' cried the eldest of the Eminent. 'You have deceived us and violated our laws! Cease operating at once! What have you done with the Phoolian people entrusted to you? Speak!'

"No sooner had he finished than the Machine stopped its gears. The smoke cleared in the sky and complete silence followed. Then the metal lips parted and a thunderous voice boomed out:

" 'O Eminent and Spiritors! You who brought me into being to rule the Phools! I am distressed by the mental confusion and senselessness of your reproaches! First you demand that I establish order; then, when I set to work, you hinder my efforts! The palace has been empty for three days now; everything is at a standstill, and none of you have yet approached the jasper portal, thereby preventing the completion of my task. I assure you, however, that I shall not rest until it is completed!'

"At these words the entire Plenum shuddered and cried:

" 'What order do you speak of, villain? What have you done with our kith and kin in violation of national laws?!'

" 'What an unintelligent question!' answered the Machine. 'What order do I speak of? Look at yourselves, how ill-constructed your bodies are; various limbs protrude from them; some of you are tall, others short, some fat, others thin. . . You move chaotically, you stop and gape at flowers, at clouds, you wander aimlessly in the woods -- there is not the least harmony in that! I, the Voluntary Universalizer of Absolute Order, am transforming your frail, weak bodies into solid, beautiful, durable forms, from which I then arrange pleasing, symmetrical designs, and patterns of incomparable regularity, thereby bringing perfect order to the planet. . .'

" 'Monster!!' cried the Spiritors and Eminent. 'How dare you destroy us?! You trample on our laws, you murder us!'

"In reply the Machine rasped scornfully and said:

" 'Did I not tell you that you cannot reason logically? Of course I respect your laws and freedoms. I am establishing order without coercion, without resorting to violence or constraint. No one entered the Rainbow Palace who did not wish to; but everyone who did enter I transformed (acting on my own initiative, let me repeat), reshaping the material of his body so that in its new form it will endure for ages. I guarantee it.'

"For some time there was silence. Then, whispering among themselves, the Plenum concluded that the law really had not been broken and that things were not as bad as they had first seemed. 'We,' the Eminent said, 'would never have committed such a crime. The Machine is to blame; it swallowed up multitudes of desperate Drudgelings. But now the surviving Eminent will be able to enjoy temporal peace together with the Spiritors, praising the inscrutable decrees of the Great Phoo. We shall keep far away from the Rainbow Palace,' they told themselves, 'and no harm will befall us.'

"They were about to disperse when the Machine addressed them again:

" 'Pay careful attention now to what I say. I must finish what I have begun. I will not compel, persuade, or urge you to do anything; I still leave you complete freedom of initiative. But if anyone wishes to see his neighbor, brother, friend, or other close

associate achieve the level of Circular Harmony, let him summon the black robots; they will appear immediately and at his behest escort the designated individual to the Rainbow Palace. That is all.'

"In the silence that followed, the Eminent looked at one another with sudden suspicion and fear. Archspiritor Nolab, in a wavering voice, explained to the Machine that it was gravely in error to wish to remake them all into shiny disks; this would come to pass if it were the Great Phoo's will, but in order to know His will much time was needed. He proposed to the Machine, therefore, that it put off its decision for seventy years.

" 'I cannot,' replied the Machine, 'for I have already worked out a precise plan of action for the period that follows the transformation of the last Phool; I assure you that I am preparing for the planet the most glorious fate -- existence in harmony. This, I believe, would also befit the Phoo whom you mentioned but with whom I am otherwise unacquainted; could you not bring him also to the Rainbow Palace?'

"It stopped, for the square was now deserted. The Eminent and Spiritors had run off to their homes, where each gave himself up to solitary reflection on his future. The more they reflected, the more apprehensive they grew, for each feared that some neighbor or acquaintance who nursed a grudge against him might summon the black robots. There was no recourse but to act first. Soon the quiet of the night was shattered by cries. Sticking their fear-contorted faces out of windows, the Eminent shouted desperately into the darkness, and the streets resounded with the many-footed tread of iron robots. Sons betrayed fathers; grandfathers, grandsons; brother sent brother to the palace; thus, in a single night, thousands of Eminent and Spiritors melted away to the handful you see before you, alien traveler. The dawn revealed fields strewn with myriads of shiny disks arranged in harmoniously geometric designs. The last trace, this, of our friends and relatives. At midday the Machine announced in a thunderous voice:

" 'Enough. Be so good as to curb your eagerness, O Eminent and remaining Spiritors. I am closing the portal of the Rainbow Palace -- but not, I promise you, for long. I have exhausted the designs prepared for the Universalization of Absolute Order, and must think awhile, so that I may create new ones. Then you will be able to continue acting of your own volition.' "

With these words the Phool looked at me wide-eyed and finished more quietly:

"That was two days ago. . . Gathered here, we wait. . ."

"O worthy Phool!" I cried, smoothing down my hair, which had stood on end. "Yours is a terrible and incredible story. But, pray, tell me, why you did not rise up against the mechanical monster that annihilated you, why did you let yourselves be forced. . ."

The Phool jumped up. His whole figure expressed great rage.

"Insult us not, traveler!" he exclaimed. "You speak hastily, so I forgive you. . . Ponder what I have told you, and you must reach the conclusion that the Machine is abiding by the principle of Civic Initiative, and, though this may seem a little strange, it has done the Phoolian people a valuable service, for there can be no injustice where the law upholds liberty. And what man would prefer the diminution of his freedom to. . ."

He did not finish, for there was an ear-piercing screech and the jasper portal opened majestically. At this sight all the Phools sprang to their feet and ran up the stairs.

"O Phool, Phool!" I cried, but my companion merely waved his hand at me, said,

"I have no time," and bounded up behind the others to disappear inside the palace.

I stood for a long while, and then I saw a column of black robots; they marched to the palace wall, opened a hatch, and rolled out a long row of disks that gleamed beautifully in the sun. They rolled the disks to an open field and there completed an unfinished design in some pattern. The palace portal was still wide open; I took a few steps to look inside, but a shiver went down my spine.

The Machine parted its metal lips and invited me in.

"What do you take me for, a Phool?" I replied.

I turned sharply and headed for the rocket, and in a minute was behind the controls, taking off at top speed.