

Vocation

By GEORGE O. SMITH

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Gerd Lel Rayne stood in the arched doorway of the living room of his home and smiled at the Terran. Andrew Tremaine smiled up at his host with an almost microscopic feeling of annoyance. The Terran was a large man, well proportioned, but the other was somewhat larger and somewhat in better proportion. The annoyance was the usual jealousy of the better man.

Tremaine knew that Gerd was a better man, and he stifled his feeling of annoyance because hating Gerd was unjust. Besides, Tremaine wanted a favor and one does not irritate a favor-giver.

Gerd Lel Rayne was of a breed that could know when a man disliked him no matter how well it was concealed. Therefore—

Andrew smiled. "You've been well?"

"Positively dripping with good health," boomed Gerd in a resonant voice. "And yourself?"

"Fair to middling."

"Good. I'm glad to hear it. Will you have refreshment?"

"A cigarette, perhaps."

Gerd opened an ornate box on the table and offered Andrew a cigarette. Andrew puffed it into illumination and exhaled a cloud of smoke. "Busy?" he asked.

"Yes," drawled Gerd. "I'm always busy, more or less. But being busy or un-busy is my own desire. Being without something to do

would drive me crazy, I'm sure." Gerd laughed at the thought. "At the present time I'm busy seeing you. Is this a business visit or a personal visit?"

"Partly pleasure, partly business. There's something been bothering me for some time."

"Glad to help—That's what I'm here for, you know."

"Now that I'm here," admitted Andrew with some abashment, "I have a feeling that the same question has been asked and answered before. But I want to hear, firsthand, why your race denies us the secret of interstellar travel."

"Because you have not developed it yet," said Gerd. "Yes, we could give it to you. You couldn't use it."

"You're looking down at us again."

"I'm honestly sorry that I give you that opinion. I have no desire to look down at anything or anyone. Please believe me."

"But—"

"May I offer an hypothetical case?" asked Gerd, and then went on because he knew the answer to his own question: "A hundred years ago, the Terrans were living without directive power. You used solar phoenix power. It brought you out of the mire of wire and machinery under which Terra writhed. You were, you thought, quite advanced. You were. But, Andy, could you have used directives? Supposing that I had given you the secret of directive power? What would have happened?"

"Um—Trouble, perhaps. But with supervision?"

"I can not give you supervision. I am but one. Consider, Andy. A planet filled with inventive people, a large quantity of which are highly trained technically. What would they say to a program which restricted them to any single phase? We came, and all that we could do to assist was to let your race know that directive power was available. The problem of power is an interesting thing, Andy. The initial steps into any realm of power are such that the discoverers are self-protected by their own lack of knowledge, and their investigations lead them into more and more knowledge; they gain the dangerous after learning how to protect themselves against it. The directive power could destroy not only Terra but the entire Solar System if improperly applied."

"What you're saying is that we could not understand it," objected Andrew.

"I admit it. Could a savage hurt himself if permitted to enter a powerhouse—even one of the primitive electronic places? Obviously he could. Even were he given the tools of the art, his survival might be a matter of guesswork. Only study permits any of us to work with power, Andy. When the Terrans are capable of handling the source of interstellar power, it shall come to them—be discovered by them, if you will. Meanwhile I can but watch and wait, and when I am approached I can and will try to guide Terra. That, Andy, is my job."

"We'll hunt for it!"

"I know," said Gerd Lel Rayne with a smile. "Your fellows are hunting now. I approve. But I may not point the way. Your race must only find it when you are ready to handle it."

Gerd arose from his chair and flexed the muscles across his back. The reason for his arising was not clear to Andrew immediately, but it came less than three seconds later—It was Gaya Lel Rayne, Gerd's mate. Andrew arose and greeted her with genuine pleasure.

Her smile was brilliant and genuine. "Business?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Gerd. "But do not leave, because the discussion is interesting. Andy, the perfect example of the persistent newsman, is holding forth on the interstellar power."

"They've discovered it?" asked Gaya in hopeful pleasure.

"No," answered Tremaine. "We'd like to, though."

"You will," said Gaya. "I know you will."

"We know we will, too," said Andrew. "Our irritation is not that we shall be denied it, but that it takes us so long to find it when there is one on Terra that knows it well."

"Please, Andy. I do most definitely not know it well. I am no technician."

Gaya looked at her husband quickly. "He's excusing himself," she said with a laugh.

"He's hoping that we'll believe that his knowledge is no better than ours and that we'll be content. But, Gerd, I know that you know enough to give us the answer."

"You know? How, may I ask?"

"It is inconceivable that you would not know."

"Perhaps I do," came the slow answer. "Perhaps I do." The tone of the speech was low and self-reflective. "But again, perhaps I, too, am in the dangerous position of not knowing enough. You Terrans have a saying—'A little knowledge is dangerous.' It is true. Again we strike the parallel. I give you stellar power and you, knowing nothing about its intricacies, use it. Can you hope to know down which road lies total destruction?"

"You are possibly right. We could learn."

"But not from me," said Gerd with finality. "That I cannot and will not do. One can not supervise and control the inventiveness of a planet such as yours. Your rugged individualists would be investigating in their small laboratories with inadequate protection, and inevitably one or more of them would strike the danger-spot."

"I'm answered," said Andrew reluctantly. "Answered negatively. I'm forced into accepting your statements. They are quite logical—and Gaya's willingness to be glad for us when she thought that we had discovered it is evidence that you are not withholding it with malice. But logic does not fill an empty spot, Gerd."

Gerd laughed. "If you had everything you want, your race would have died out before it came out of the jungles."

Tremaine laughed. "I know," he admitted. "Also—and I'm talking against my own race—there is the interesting observation that if Heaven is the place where we have everything we want, why are people always trying to live as long as they can?"

"Perhaps they're not certain of the hereafter."

"Whether they are firmly convinced yes or as firmly convinced no, they still view death with disfavor. I'd say their dislike was about

even. All right, Gerd. I'll take your statements as you made them and with reluctance I'll return to my work and ponder."

"Stay for dinner," urged Gaya. She gave him the benefit of a brilliant smile, but Andrew shook his head.

"I've got to write an editorial," he said. "I've got to change one already written. I was a bit harsh about you, and I feel it was unfair. Perhaps you'll join us at dinner tomorrow?"

Gaya laughed. "You're speaking for Lenore, too?"

"Yes," nodded Andrew. "She'll be glad to see you."

"Then we'll be glad to come," said Gerd.

As he left, Gerd turned to his wife and said: "He'll bear watching."

"I caught your thought. He will. Shall I?"

"From time to time. Tremaine suspects. He is a brilliant man, Gaya, and for his own peace of mind, he must never know the truth."

"If he suspects," said Gaya thoughtfully, "it may mean that he has too little to do. There are many sciences—would it be possible to hint the way into one. That might occupy his mind enough to exclude the other question."

"In another man it might work. But Andrew Tremaine is not a physical scientist. He is a mental scientist working in an applied line. To give him the key to any science would mean just momentarily postponing the pursuit of the original problem. Were he a physical scientist, his mind would never have come upon the question in the first place. I'm almost tempted to let loose the initial key to stellar power."

Gaya blanched. "They'd destroy everything. No, Gerd, not that. You'd be defying the Ones."

"I know," nodded Gerd. "I have to continue for my own personal satisfaction. Giving in is the easy way—and entirely foreign to our policy. Terra must find their goal alone. You and I, Gaya, must never interfere. We are emissaries only; evidences of good will and friendship. Our position is made most difficult because of the general impression, held by all Terrans, that an ambassador is a man who lies to you, who knows that he is lying, and who further knows that you know he is lying—and still goes ahead and lies, smiling cheerfully at the same time."

"We've given good evidence of our friendship."

"Naturally. That's our main purpose in life. To befriend, to protect, even to aid when possible. One day, Gaya, Terra will be one of us. But guiding Terra and the Solar System into such a channel is most difficult. Yet, who is to do it but you and I?"

"Shall we request advice? Perhaps the Ones will be interested to know that Terrans are overly ambitious?"

"You mean they're too confounded curious? The Ones know that. The Ones put us here because we can cope with Terra—I'll make mention of it in the standard report—but coping with Terra is our problem, presented to us, and given with the expectation that we shall handle it well. To ask for any aid would be an admission of undisputed failure."

"I guess you're right."

Gerd smiled. "Honestly, there is no real danger. If we are capable of protecting them, we should be equally capable of protecting

ourselves against them. And," said Gerd with an expansive gesture, "the Ones rate us adequate. We can do no more than to prove their trust. After all, our race has been wrong about a classification only once in three galactic years."

"I might be worried," smiled Gaya. "Isn't it about time for them to make another mistake?"

Gerd put his hands on her shoulders and shook her gently. "Superstitious lady," he said, "that's against the Law of Probabilities."

"No," disagreed Gaya with a smile. "Right in accordance with it. When the tossed coin comes up heads ten million times without a tail, it indicates that there may be two heads on the coin, or that some outside force is at work. I was fooling, Gerd."

"I know," he said with a laugh. "Now enough of our worries. What's on the program this evening?"

"Dinner with Executive General Atkins and wife. Theater afterwards."

"I'd better dress, then," said Gerd. "Complete with all the trimmings. Toni Atkins would be horrified at the idea of dining without the males all girded and braced in full formal dress."

"Once dinner is over, you'll enjoy them."

"I always do," said Gerd. "They're both interesting people. Save for her ideas of propriety."

Gaya pushed him in the direction of the dressing room. "I do, too," she called after him with malicious pleasure. "And remember, that I'm just as they are—and not above them at all."

"I might be able to get the legislature to pass laws against women," returned Gerd thoughtfully.

"The result might be quite devastating," said Gaya.

The answer came back through the closing door. It was a cheerful laugh, and: "Yes, wouldn't it?"

Andrew Tremaine jerked the paper from the electrotyper and pressed two buzzers simultaneously. The answer to one came immediately: "Yes?"



"Tell Jackson that the editorial page is complete and that he should get the revised copy set up."

"Yes, Mr. Tremaine. It's on the way."

"Should be coming out of his typer now."

"I'll call him."

The door opened, and the answer to buzzer number two entered.

He was a tall, thin, pale-looking man with stooped shoulders and thick glasses. He came in and seated himself before Andrew's desk and waited in silence until the editor spoke.

"Gene, how many fields in psychology have you covered?"

The other shook his head. "Since I came to work for you, only one. Applied psychology, or the art of finding out what people want to be told and then telling them."

"That's soft-soapism."

"You name it," grinned the thin man. "You asked for it. Oh, we've carried the burning torch often enough—that's the other psychology. Finding out what people think is good for them and crying against it."

"Or both."

"Or both," smiled Gene.

"This is a crazy business, sometimes. I'm on another branch again, Gene. How much of the human brain is used?"

"Less than ten percent."

"Right. What would happen if the whole brain were used?"

"Andy, what kind of a card file would you need to do the following:
One: locate from a mention the complete account of a complex

experience; two: do it almost instantly, and three: compile the data in five dimensions?"

"Five dim—? Are you kidding?"

"Not at all. Each of the five senses are essentially different and will require separate cards to make the picture complete. A rose smell, for instance, would be meaningless alone—you must classify it. The same card would not fit for all rose-smelling memories since some are strong, some are weak, some are mixed with other minor odors, and so forth. Do you follow?"

"Yes, but aren't we getting off the track?"

"Not at all. If your mind can run through ten to the fiftieth power experiences in five mediums and come up with the proper, correlated accounts, all in a matter of seconds—think what the same mind might be able to do if presented with a lesser problem."

"Why can't it do just that?"

"Because when you start to figure out a problem, something restricts your brain power to less than ten percent of its capability."

"That means that ninety percent of the brain is nonfunctional."

"Right. It is. You can carve better than half of a man's brain out and not impair a single memory, or action, or ability."

"And nature does not continue with a nonfunctional organ."

"Nature would most certainly weed out anything that was completely useless. Evolution of a nonfunctional part does not happen."

"Appendix?"

"It had a use once. It is atrophying now. But the brain should be increasing since we're using it more every year. Instead of being forced into increase by demand, the brain is already too big for the work. How did it get that way?"

"You'll never explain it by the law of supply and demand," said Gene. "We might go over a few brains with analyzers."

"And if you get a nonconforming curve, then what?"

"Fifty years of eliminating the sand to get the single grain of gold."

"You mean process of elimination?"

"Didn't I say it?"

"You'd never recognize it," said Andrew. They both laughed.

"But what brought you to this conference?" asked Gene. "Knowing you as I do, you aren't just spending the time of day."

"No, I'm not. Look, Gene, what do you know about Gerd Lel Rayne?"

"Just common knowledge."

"I know. But catalogue it for me. I am trying to think of something and you may urge the thought into solidification."

"Sounds silly," said Gene. "But here it is—and quite incoherent." He laughed. "What was I saying about the excellence of memory files? Well, anyway, Gerd Lel Rayne is a member of a race that has and employs interstellar travel. Terra has nothing, produces nothing, manufactures nothing that this race requires. Neither,

according to Gerd, has this race anything that would interest Terrans. Save power and the stellar drive."

"Stellar power," muttered Andrew.

"What was that? Stellar Power? Call it that if you wish. It may well be called that for lack of a better name. At any rate, it is more than obvious that Gerd Lel Rayne and his wife enjoy us. They are emissaries—ambassadors of good will, if you want to call them that—whose sole purpose is to give advice upon things that Terra does not quite understand."

"Except stellar power."

"Reason enough for that," said Gene. "Terra is a sort of vicious race. We were forced to fight for our very existence. We fought animals, nature, plants, insects, reptiles, the earth itself. We've fought and won against weather and wind and sun and rain. And when we ran out of things to fight, we fought among ourselves because there were too many differences of opinion as to how men should live. We, Andrew Tremaine, are civilized—and yet the one thing we all enjoy is a bare-handed fight to the finish between two members of our own race."

"That's not true."

"Yes it is. What sport has undergone little change for a thousand years? It is no sport using equipment. The equipment-sports are constantly changing with the development of new materials with which to make the equipment. Take the ancient game of golf, for instance. They used to make four strikes to cover a stinking four hundred yard green. That's because control of materials was

insufficiently perfect to maintain precision. No two golf balls were identical, and no two clubs were alike.

"But—and stop me if my rambling annoys you, although it is seldom that I am permitted to ramble—the sport of ring-fighting is still similar to its inception. Men stand in a ring and fight with their hands until one is *hors de combat* for a period of ten seconds. They used gloves at one time, I believe, but men are harder and stronger now—and surgery repairs scars, mars, and abrasions. Also, my fine and literary friend, the audience, gentle people, like to see the vanquished battered, torn, and slightly damaged. Civilization! One step removed from Ancient Roma, where they tossed malcontents into an arena to see if he could avoid being eaten by a hungry carnivore!

"Well, the one thing that Terra would most probably do is to make use of this drive and go out and fight with the Ones."

"Are they afraid?"

"I don't know. I'd hardly think so."

"Gene, you're wrong. They wouldn't even bother brushing us off."

"No?"

"No. We'd be polished off before we got to see them. There's something else there and I don't know what it is."

"You don't follow the hatred angle?"

"You, my friend, have a warped personality. You have the usual viewpoint of a man of minor stature. That lanky body of yours has driven you into believing that your race is tough, vicious, and most deadly to everything. Not because you really believe it, but you

yourself are not tough, deadly, or invincible but you want to belong to a group that is."

"You think them benign?"

"I wonder—but am forced to believe the overwhelming pile of evidence. In every way, Gerd and his wife have been willing to cooperate. They've willingly submitted themselves to our mental testing—and that is complete, believe me—and in every case they have proven intelligent, enthusiastic, and capable. Oh, we make mistakes, but not such complete blunders. I'll tell you one thing, Gene. I went over there today to ask one question. I wanted to know just why they refuse to give us the stellar power. Their answer was that we were not ready for it—and in the face of it, I was forced to agree."

"Whitewash."

"Think so? Then tell me how you can tell."

"Gerd Lel Rayne is a supergenius, according to the card files. Intelligence Quotient 260! That, my friend, is high enough to fool the machine!"

"Nonsense."

"A machine, Andy, is a mechanical projection of a man's mind. It is built to do that which can not be done by man himself. It is capable—sometimes—of exceeding man's desire by a small amount, but is seldom capable of coping with a situation for which it is not engineered. Since no man on Terra has an I.Q. of higher than about 160, for a guess, the machine can not be engineered to analyze mentalities of I.Q. 260 without fail."

"You do not believe the I.Q. 260 then?"

"Yes, I believe that machine. But the one that gives the curves of intent can be fooled by such a man."

"Then what is his purpose?"

"Supposing this race intends to take over?"

"Then why don't they just move in and take?"

"Time. Say this race is overrunning the Galaxy. No matter how they start, plans must be made, even if they originated on Centauri. Since—and let's try to put ourselves in their place and consider. They have not moved in. That means a waiting period of some kind. It also means considerable distance from home base, because if we were close to them, the program would have started already. Now, since there is this waiting program, we can assume that they are not ready yet. And not being ready means one of two things. They are finding opposition on other planets of other systems. In this case it is not Divide and Conquer, but *keep divided in order to conquer!*"

"I'm beginning to follow you."

"If we had the drive, and the power for it, their job might well be impossible. I doubt that anything alive could make conquest of an armed planet unless that planet was quite inferior in weapons. Given the same weapons and power, and at best stalemate. For the very energy-mass of a planet is unbelievably great, and the weapons that may be permanently anchored in the granite of Terra would be able to withstand anything up to and including another, equally armed planet to stalemate or draw. And granting that

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