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Title: Beyond Pandora

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Release date: December 20, 2007 [eBook #23930]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Greg Weeks, Stephen Blundell and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BEYOND PANDORA ***

Beyond Pandora

The ideal way to deal with a pest—any menace—is, of course, to make it useful to you....

by Robert J. Martin

The doctor's pen paused over the chart on his desk, "This is your third set of teeth, I believe?"

His patient nodded, "That's right, Doctor. But they were pretty slow coming in this time."

The doctor looked up quizzically, "Is that the only reason you think you might need a booster shot?"

"Oh, no ... of course not!" The man leaned forward and placed one hand, palm up, on the desk. "Last year I had an accident ... stupid ... lost a thumb." He shrugged apologetically, "It took almost six months to grow back."

Thoughtfully, the doctor leaned back in his chair, "Hm-m-m ... I see." As the man before him made an involuntary movement toward his pocket, the doctor smiled, "Go on, smoke if you want to." Picking up the chart, he murmured, "Six months ... much too long. Strange we didn't catch that at the time." He read silently for a few moments, then began to fill out a form clipped to the folder. "Well, I think you probably are due for another booster about now. There'll have to be the usual tests. Not that there's much doubt ... we like to be certain."

The middle-aged man seemed relieved. Then, on second thought, he hesitated uneasily, "Why? Is there any danger?"

Amusement flickered across the doctor's face, turned smoothly into a reassuring half-smile. "Oh, no. There's absolutely no danger involved. None at all. We have tissue-regeneration pretty well under control now. Still, I'm sure you understand that accurate records and data are very necessary to further research and progress."

Reassured, the patient thawed and became confidential, "I see. Well, I suppose it's kinda silly, but I don't much like shots. It's not that they hurt ... it's just that I guess I'm old-fashioned. I still feel kinda 'creepy' about the whole business." Slightly embarrassed, he paused and asked defensively, "Is that unusual?"

The doctor smiled openly now, "Not at all, not at all. Things have moved pretty fast in the past few years. I suppose it takes people's emotional reactions a while to catch up with developments that, logically, we accept as matter of fact."

He pushed his chair back from the desk, "Maybe it's not too hard to understand. Take 'fire' for example: Man lived in fear of fire for a good many hundred-thousand years—and rightly so, because he hadn't learned to control it. The principle's the same; First you learn to protect yourself from a thing; then control it; and, eventually, we learn to 'harness' it for a useful purpose." He gestured toward the man's cigarette, "Even so, man still instinctively fears fire—even while he uses it. In the case of tissue-regeneration, where the change took place so rapidly, in just a generation or so, that instinctive fear is even more understandable—although quite as unjustified, I assure you."

The doctor stood up, indicating that the session was ending. While his patient scrambled to his feet, hastily putting out his cigarette, the physician came around the desk. He put his hand on the man's shoulder, "Relax, take it easy—nothing to worry about. This is a wonderful age we live in. Barring a really major accident, there's no reason why you shouldn't live at least another seventy-five years. After all, that's a very remarkable viral-complex we have doing your 'repair' work."

As they walked to the door, the man shook his head, "Guess you're right, Doc. It's certainly done a good job so far, and I guess you specialists know what you're doing, even if folks don't understand it."

At the door he paused and half turned to the doctor, "But say ... something I meant to ask you. This 'stuff' ... er, this vaccine ... where did it come from? Seems to me I heard somewhere that, way back before you fellows got it 'tamed' it was something else—dangerous. There was another name for it. Do you know what I mean?"

The doctor's hand tightened on the doorknob. "Yes, I know," he said grimly, "but not many laymen remember. Just keep in mind what I told you. With any of these things, the pattern is protection, then control, then useful application." He turned to face his patient, "Back in the days before we put it to work for us—rebuilding tissue, almost ending aging and disease—the active basis for our vaccine caused a whole group of diseases, in itself."

Returning the man's searching gaze, the doctor opened the door, "We've come a long way since then. You see," he said quietly, "in those days they called it 'cancer'."

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