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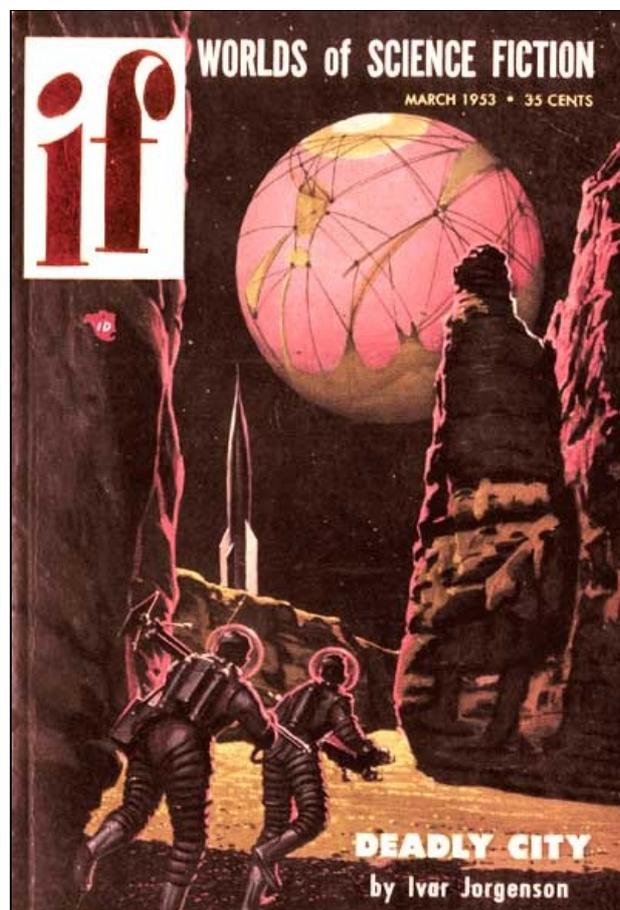
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THE SALESMAN

By Waldo T. Boyd

SALESMAN'S GUIDE, RULE 2: The modern 1995 customer who enters Tracy's Department Store is not always right, but as far as you are concerned, he is.

The little green cue light blinked three times. Trevor Anson arranged his tie at just the nattily precise angle, waved his hand before a hidden lighting-effect switch in the smooth marble pillar at the entrance to the display room, and faced the elevator. This would be a "green light" customer—a first-time prospect, and three blinks indicated a very difficult individual. Anson quickly practiced his most beguiling smile.

"Welcome to Tracy's Roboid Department," he said, enthusiastically, as the elevator doors slid open. His practiced smile was just right.

He quickly noted the man's conservative dress, the flaming red tie. Aggressive type, Anson decided. A shock of red hair that didn't want to lie down hinted that he was stubborn as well.

"Heard you've got a sale on robots," Red-tie said, challengingly, as he stepped aside for his wife.

The woman who stepped off the elevator smiled, showing a lovely dimple, and Anson beamed on her. The tiny flake of a hat perched atop her auburn hair reminded Anson of the comb on a Rhode Island Red.

"Not robots, sir," Anson corrected diplomatically. "The Plasti-Cast Roboid is not exactly a robot."

"Well, anyhow, trot one out, and let's see what it looks like. Millicent will never be satisfied until she's seen one of the things." He glared dramatically in the general direction of his wife, who pretended not to notice.

Anson led them into the Gray Room. He mentally went over the applicable rule: *Rule 23: Always introduce the marked-down merchandise first. It may provide the customer with an incentive for buying something better.*

"These are last year's models," he said, with just the right flavor of distaste in his voice. "Of course, you may expect a slight reduction ... a small percentage...."

Red-tie was muttering. "Damned mechanical things, full of wheels and wires. What's to keep 'em from running amok and killing us all!"

"But dear, they don't have wheels anymore," protested the woman, timidly. Her face was pretty, Anson decided, but it was obvious that the man would be the deciding factor in this sale.

He made a mental note: *Rule 31: Pick the individual of a family group who seems to hold the deciding voice, and SELL!* He remembered a portion of a sales talk he had memorized a few days before, and took it up, almost chanting:

"... our Roboids are grown, much as crystals are grown, in great vats in New Chicago. A Plasti-Cast Roboid is guaranteed...."

"A fat chance we'd have of collecting the guarantee if we were chopped into mincemeat," Red-tie interrupted, shuddering slightly as the implication of his own words hit him.

Anson felt a moment of panic as he failed to remember an applicable rule from the Salesman's Guide, but it formed in his mind at the last moment: *Rule 18: Never argue with a customer—change the subject.*

"Why don't you come with me to the Green Room?" he asked. "The very latest models are on display." He walked slowly at first, then more quickly as the couple allowed themselves to be led. He slid his hand near a hidden switch in the archway, and floodlights came on just as they entered.

The woman uttered a little squeal of delight at the sight of a very handsome figure dressed in a cutaway, standing in an attitude of service.

"Oh!" she breathed dreamily. "He would make such a wonderful butler."

"Well, wind him up and let's see what he'll do," growled the man, his face fligid in the colored light of the Green Room.

"I'm so very sorry," Anson said, slightly flustered, remembering that this was always the crucial moment in a sale. "The Roboid cannot be activated for demonstration purposes."

"What?" roared Red-tie, incredulously. "Do you mean to say you want me to buy the damned thing without knowing whether it ticks or not?"

Anson tried desperately to remember the best rule for such an answer, but failed. He plunged

desperately into his own explanation.

"You see, our Roboids are matched to your family personality at the time of purchase, and activated then. We cannot erase a personality once it has been transferred to their sensitive minds." He saw the disbelieving smirk on the man's mouth and felt that the sale was indeed lost. But he plunged on, desperately.

"They're very economical. They don't require any upkeep, like food. When they become tired they will sit or lie down near an electric outlet and plug in a power cord, and in a few minutes they are as rested and tireless as...."

"Bosh!" Red-tie retorted. "I've heard enough. Come, Millicent, we still have time to try Bonn's new Helio-rotor. At least they'll give us a demonstration."

Anson escorted them to the Magna-lift. He felt better as he recalled the last rule in the Guide, the one that seemed to cover the situation so well: *Rule 50: If they balk because of the no-demonstration rule, let them go. They will be back when they have seen one of their friends with a Plasti-Cast Roboid.*

"Good-bye, Sir; Madam," Anson said wearily, as the Magna-lift doors closed. "Come again soon."

He breathed a sigh of relief as the elevator cage dropped them from sight. A salesman, who had been standing by, spoke to Anson.

"People are *such* dears at times, aren't they?" he said. "However, it's time for your rest period. I'll take over now."

"Thank you so much," Anson replied tiredly.

He walked to a tiny room at the far end of the great showroom and closed the door. He stretched wearily out on a low, folding cot, the only piece of furniture, and reached for a tiny black power cord hanging nearby.

Deftly he plugged it into the socket under his armpit, and breathed deeply, relaxedly.

"Yes," he chanted softly, drifting off to sleep, "people *are* such dears sometimes."

THE END

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