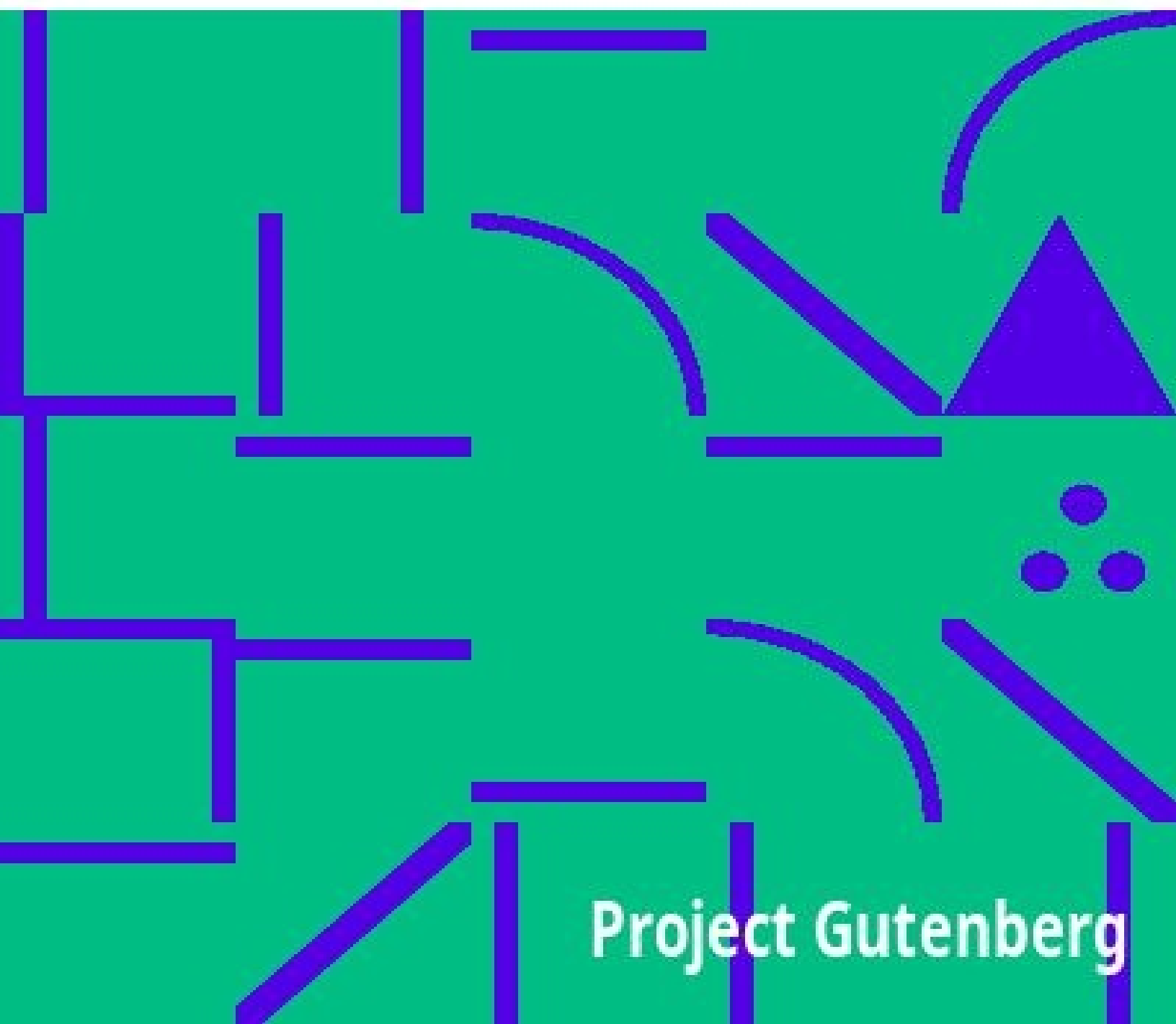


The Ultimate Experiment

Thornton DeKy



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The
ULTIMATE
EXPERIMENT

by
THORNTON DeKY

*No living soul breathed upon the
earth. Only robots, carrying on the
last great order.*

"**T**HEY were all gone now, The Masters, all dead and their atoms scattered to the never ceasing winds that swept the great crysolite city towers in ever increasing fury. That had been the last wish of each as he had passed away, dying from sheer old age. True they had fought on as long as they could to save their kind from utter extinction but the comet that had trailed its poisoning wake across space to leave behind it, upon Earth, a noxious, lethal gas vapor, had done its work too well."

No living soul breathed upon the Earth. No one lived here now, but Kiron and his kind.

"And," so thought Kiron to himself, "he might as well be a great unthinking robot able to do only one thing instead of the mental giant he was, so obsessed had he become with the task he had set himself to do."

Yet, in spite of a great loneliness and a strong fear of a final frustration, he worked on with the others of his people, hardly

stopping for anything except the very necessities needed to keep his big body working in perfect coordination.

Tirelessly he worked, for The Masters had bred, if that is the word to use, fatigue and the need for restoration out of his race long decades ago.

Sometimes, though, he would stop his work when the great red dying sun began to fade into the west and his round eyes would grow wistful as he looked out over the great city that stretched in towering minarets and lofty spires of purest crystal blue for miles on every side. A fairy city of rarest hue and beauty. A city for the Gods and the Gods were dead. Kiron felt, at such times, the great loneliness that the last Master must have known.

They had been kind, The Masters, and Kiron knew that his people, as they went about their eternal tasks of keeping the great city in perfect shape for The Masters who no longer needed it, must miss them as he did.

Never to hear their voices ringing, never to see them again gathered in groups to witness some game or to play amid the silver fountains and flowery gardens of the wondrous city, made him infinitely saddened. It would always be like this, unless....

But thinking, dreaming, reminiscing would not bring it all back for there was only one answer to still the longing: work. The others worked and did not dream, but instead kept busy tending to the thousand and one tasks The Masters had set them to do—had left them doing when the last Master perished. He too must remember the trust they had placed in his hands and fulfill it as best he could.

From the time the great red eye of the sun opened itself in the East until it disappeared in the blue haze beyond the crysolite city, Kiron labored with his fellows. Then, at the appointed hour, the musical

signals would peal forth their sweet, sad chimes, whispering goodnight to ears that would hear them no more and all operations would halt for the night, just as it had done when The Masters were here to supervise it.

Then when morning came he would start once more trying, testing, experimenting with his chemicals and plastics, forever following labyrinth of knowledge, seeking for the great triumph that would make the work of the others of some real use.

His hands molded the materials carefully, lovingly to a pattern that was set in his mind as a thing to cherish. Day by day his experiments in their liquid baths took form under his careful modeling. He mixed his chemicals with the same loving touch, the same careful concentration and painstaking thoroughness, studying often his notes and analysis charts.

Everything must be just so lest his experiment not turn out perfectly. He never became exasperated at a failure or a defect that proved to be the only reward for his faithful endeavors but worked patiently on toward a goal that he knew would ultimately be his.

Then one day, as the great red sun glowed like an immense red eye overhead, Kiron stepped back to admire his handiwork. In that instant the entire wondrous city seemed to breathe a silent prayer as he stood transfixed by the sight before him. Then it went on as usual, hurrying noiselessly about its business. The surface cars, empty though they were, fled swiftly about supported only by the rings of magnetic force that held them to their designated paths. The gravoships raised from the tower-dromes to speed silently into the eye of the red sun that was dying.

"No one now," Kiron thought to himself as he studied his handiwork. Then he walked unhurriedly to the cabinet in the laboratory corner and took from it a pair of earphones resembling those of a long

forgotten radio set. Just as unhurriedly, though his mind was filled with turmoil and his being with excitement, he walked back and connected the earphones to the box upon his bench. The phones dangled into the liquid bath before him as he adjusted them to suit his requirements.

Slowly he checked over every step of his experiments before he went farther. Then, as he proved them for the last time, his hand went slowly to the small knife switch upon the box at his elbow. Next he threw into connection the larger switch upon his laboratory wall bringing into his laboratory the broadcast power of the crysolite city.

The laboratory generators hummed softly, drowning out the quiet hum of the city outside. As they built up, sending tiny living electrical impulses over the wires like minute currents that come from the brain, Kiron sat breathless; his eyes intent.

Closer to his work he bent, watching lovingly, fearful lest all might not be quite right. Then his eyes took on a brighter light as he began to see the reaction. He knew the messages that he had sent out were being received and coordinated into a unit that would stir and grow into intellect.

Suddenly the machine flashed its little warning red light and automatically snapped off. Kiron twisted quickly in his seat and threw home the final switch. This, he knew, was the ultimate test. On the results of the flood of energy impulses that he had set in motion rested the fulfillment of his success—or *failure*.

He watched with slight misgivings. This had never been accomplished before. How could it possibly be a success now? Even The Masters had never quite succeeded at this final test, how could he, only a servant? Yet it must work for he had no desire in life but to make it work.

Then, suddenly, he was on his feet, eyes wide. From the two long, coffin-like liquid baths, there arose two perfect specimens of the *Homo sapiens*. Man and woman, they were, and they blinked their eyes in the light of the noonday sun, raised themselves dripping from the baths of their creation and stepped to the floor before Kiron.

The man spoke, the woman remained silent.

"I am Adam Two," he said. "Created, by you Kiron from a formula they left, in their image. I was created to be a Master and she whom you also have created is to be my wife. We shall mate and the race of Man shall be reborn through us and others whom I shall help you create."

The Man halted at the last declaration he intoned and walked smilingly toward the woman who stepped into his open arms returning his smile.

Kiron smiled too within his pumping heart. The words the Man had intoned had been placed in his still pregnable mind by the tele-teach phones and record that the last Master had prepared before death had halted his experiments. The actions of the Man toward the Woman, Kiron knew, was caused by the natural constituents that went to form his chemical body and govern his humanness.

He, Kiron, had created a living man and woman. The Masters lived again because of him. They would sing and play and again people the magnificent crysolite city because he loved them and had kept on until success had been his. But then why not such a turnabout? Hadn't they, The Masters, created him a superb, thinking *robot*?

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