

# Eng. № 8.A. Homo Rationalis

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## **H\_O\_M\_O\_ R\_A\_T\_I\_O\_N\_A\_L\_I\_S\_**

### **(SCIENCE FICTION)**

**2023**      ***Chris MYRSKI, Sofia, Bulgaria ?1979 ...***

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[ As far as this is a whole book let us give an idea about the cover (if there are no better propositions).

**In front:** On a blue background, in the middle, hang, suspended on a rope, scales (pharmaceutical), in the left and heavier plate of which is put the Earth globe (with picture of the continents), and in the right one is seen only a stem of clover (in a pot) with four leaves, as symbol of happiness.

**On the back:** whatever, or even nothing. ]

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## **P A R T   O N E**

### **FOREWORD**

Forewords to collections of short stories are usually not written, but in this case some phrases are probably necessary, because the author is Bulgarian, as well also new one (not that he is young but is unknown), so that the readers may not be able to orient themselves good. This is science fiction, but not of adventure or action kind. It would have been more correctly to use the a bit outdated and chiefly German term "utopian" stories, what says that they are again some inventions, i.e. fiction, and differ from the real world today, though who knows, maybe such ideas will be possible to realize in some utopian future? And how it is usual for an utopia the main problems are social, describing situations and relations between people, but not conflict situations between personages. In these utopias the conflicts are, up to some extent, already solved, though there can be argued about this, is the concrete decision correct, or

it is of dubious value. In this sense the majority of stories are some (different) models of the future. However, as far as they inspire thoughts, and the meaning of the author is that in the near future the main problems in the society of, more or less, general prosperity will be chiefly social, i.e. not how people have to earn their living but how to make their life *interesting* enough, we suppose that these stories will find their circle of readers, at least between people with some inclination to philosophical perception of life.

On the other hand, the stories are quite different in their character and are written over many years, even in totalitarian time, and moreover, some of them are still less like science fiction but have something in common with the known from the antiquity dialogues of Plato, or, rather, with some conversations at a table with a glass in hand, as is said. Well, in this case simply fill your glass, make yourself comfortable, and read the stories in this book. They are light and pleasant, and during the narration you may learn also some curious linguistic details, which you will not find even in specialized literature. It can be added also that they were written with some sense of humour, or rather slight irony, because of the low quality *human material*, with which the evolution is performed. In addition to this they are also up to certain extent sexy, what, according to the author, is also to their advantage. Only that, let us remind you, this does *not* mean erotics but quite ordinary "classical" sex, or at least talks about it.

So that, if you are not prejudiced against Bulgarian literature — and, as a matter of fact, the very author was quite prejudiced, before it did not emerge the insipid Western wave of mass "tickling of basest human instincts", if we want to express ourselves in some degree cultured, which has convinced him that by the others is *also* bad — so that if you are not prejudiced against Bulgarian attempts, then you can "taste" a portion of this science fiction.

2001, Sofia, Bulgaria    Chris Myrski

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## **THE RECRUIT**

The light jazz music scattered gradually the remainders of sleepiness and the consciousness of Septimius Joyce awakened for the experiences of the new day. The clock on the wall showed twelve to seven, what was his usual time for getting up, after the alarm clock switched on at six-thirty, and he fought for about a quarter of an hour with the clutches of sleep. Today, however, he allowed

himself to wallow for another ten minutes in the bed, because this was special day for him. He had to put on his most formal suit, which he has not used for more than an year, to seal finally his testament and carry it to the Court, to set his home computer in regime of prolonged absence, not forgetting by this to throw away the perishable products from the fridge and leave something only in the freezer, to correct here and there the program for watering of the plants, for heating and for ventilation of the air, to change the cipher of entrance door and to report it only to his possible heirs, to take a walk in the "Memorial of Patriots", where is also the plate with the name of his father, and to lay a carnation before the Goddess of Victory, to call by Joe and David, and meet also with Morrison, and to be at five precisely for a small feast with his colleagues, that they have organized to see off the next recruit — this time him — somewhere in the system RN327-5, where is the new front in this year. It will not be easy for him, but in recompense he had a nice day before him ...

— Yes, it's me — answered Septimius, after he passed his fingers through his disheveled from the sleep hair and touched with an elbow the videophone button. — And who, you thought, sleeps in my bed, Flo? — asked he, sending an absentminded air kiss to the left corner of the room, where was the receiving video camera. Florance Joyce, his wife, with whom in the last years they lived in different flats, has succeeded to finish already her morning toilet and leaning back in the chair drank slowly coffee from the cup. With an apologetic smile she murmured:

— You are still rolling in bed, ah, dormouse? I thought that you have maybe forgotten that in two days you have to be already on board of the "Recruit-215" on the way of glory, and have decided to sleep through your star moment.

— Don't worry, dear, you will have ten percents probability to inherit my flat, because I will not forget to deposit my testament — said he with mixed feelings, because the statistics for the last three-year recruitment showed that 8.58% of the recruits have left their atoms somewhere on the space fronts, and heavy wounded counted about 2 percents. Only in 17.5% of the death cases was possible to find some remains, that could be sent to the relatives of the fallen warriors, and in the left cases behind the plate with the name of dead warrior in the Memorial they put either a lock of his hair, or some hologram, but often nothing, because the capsules were in any case immured and it did not matter what was in them.

— But, Septy, why you want to offend me? You know well that I love you, don't you? Well, maybe not exactly like in the beginning, but I have loved nobody else like you, dear. You can't be such exactly on this day! — frowned she intending to drop a pair of tears, and he was bound to add:

— Black humour, ah? But it supports the spirit of the soldier. And I have also said nothing wrong. *A la guerre, comme a la guerre*, and I will do my duty like all others before me, and will try to meet the hardships on the spaces of battles with bravery and heroism, worthy of a great nation and of a Joyce. And if with the help of God I return back, then I will be again with you, my dear, because my love to you is everlasting and indestructible like the very life in the Universe, if the humans do not intervene much actively in this regard. It sounds better in this way, doesn't it?

— Thank you, Septy, I wanted just to remind you to leave your airflyer in the garage of Veterans on Jerome Street — you know it, right, so is accepted — and to reserve some place in your marching cylinder also for my present, which you will receive about eight in the evening. Well, and if from time to time you suddenly remember to send a radiogram, then know that I will not at all be angry at you, my dear. I will not come to you this evening, in order not to distract you, but will cross my fingers for you to return alive and healthy back to me. I love you and believe that you will be brave and courageous warrior. Fortitude, my dear. I will wait for you.

— Kiss you, Flo, and will be back, if it is so predestined. I will change the door cipher and send it to you by the mail, so that you look occasionally how my cacti procreate, and such things ... Well, bye, bye, for I have to get up.

The present of Flo, thought he, will maybe turn out to be some unnecessary rubbish, but he will take it, of course. And if one gives a thought to this, earlier men went to wars even younger than 20 — it is just unbelievable! But they had to be strong and healthy then, because they often fought using muscular strength, while now everything is much easier. You can be even a cripple yet this does not hinder much the managing of military equipment. The important thing is not to be insane, but he has never suffered from mental illnesses and that is, naturally, why he was found fit by the military commission. Yet there is no need to think more about this — nobody has forced him, the military service is a matter of will. Will and masculine dignity, of course. And dignity he has, as well also willingness is not missing, even knowing that his chances to die are one to eleven, so that let him get up from the bed, because otherwise he will succeed to fulfill nothing of his program.

Septimius threw the cover back, got up with reluctance, and set foot on the ground. Then he put the blankets with the pillows in the chest beside the bed, pressed the button for folding of the bed and it bent elegantly like accordion and stuck to the wall, revealing below a round carpet. He pressed another button and under the sound of invigorating synthesized music, which was each time different, yet suitable to the purpose, he began easy morning exercise. After a pair of minutes he became bored by this and went to the toilet

corner where stayed about ten minutes, and after this, now quite refreshed and buoyant, he went to the kitchen to make himself quickly breakfast. He liked to fry alone eggs, but not to spend energy to squeeze by hand orange juice. He was, generally, a moderate person and enjoyed the benefits of civilization moderately, because of this he kept no modern robots at home except the usual home cleaner which cleaned the rooms, watered his cacti, pressed his clothes and cleaned his shoes, in accordance with the program of the home computer. He could sometimes entrust him with preparation of some more complicated dish, when he had no time for this or was simply too lazy at the moment, but this happened not pretty often. The automated production turns to be always one and the same for a given program, and he did not like this, especially by cooking, where the main charm came from the errors in the recipe.

While he breakfasted ringed again the videophone:

— Septimius listens — answered he briefly, but there was no need to be so formal, because this time was the plump David, his friend from childhood.

— You say you listen. Well, then listen: do you really think that I will allow you to fly to the space of battles without even a parting toast with you, old man? This, that you were born two years before me, does not mean that I will not also want to serve, when this will be allowed to me. You are not the only patriot on the earth globe and nobody gives you the right to forget your old friends. Drink up you coffee quickly, or just leave it, because you will have one more, but this time accompanied by a cognac, if you go out now ...

— Look here, Dave, I was just about to call you, so that there is no need to overact preaching moral to me. Only that the day is quite occupied for me, so that I don't know ...

— While you don't know I have arranged the things with Joe and we will wait for you at 10 o'clock, "By the Old Veteran", under some walnut on the left side, unless it is very full and we have to sit down on the right ...

— But listen, I can't at 10 because I have to go to the Court to deposit there my testament, and they work only in the morning, then I have to leave also the airflyer, visit the Memorial, and so on. And have also to see Morris, so that: let me think. Besides, which normal person drinks before 11 o'clock, fatty boy, you have to be ashamed! But, do you know, you even relieve me in this, that you have arranged the things with Joe; invite also Morrison, if you don't mind, and let us make this somewhere around one o'clock, what you will say to this?

— OK, at one o'clock, then at one o'clock! You command the parade. I will call also Morrison, in order to balance the table at its four sides, to prevent it from overturning because of the drinks. Ha, ha, haa. All right, it is set. See you soon.

— Till soon, piggy.

So in the morning I have to finish the business part, and later the more pleasant, thought he while drinking up the coffee, yet not to miss to part with them at four, in order not to surprise his colleagues with his absence. Then he got up, put the cutlery in the dishwasher and hitting the button went to the computer console. The dialogue program was quite easy, so that he finished in ten minutes, and if he has missed something then the computer had enough intelligence in order to guess alone, if there are not special instructions. It was necessary to ponder only about the cipher, which will enter in effect from tomorrow morning, and he chose the simplest variant: "+-TPES7180", what, when read in reverse order, gave the month and day of his birth, then his name, shortened, and the first two symbols, which completed the code to ten characters, simply symbolized the uncertainty that expected him in the army — he either wins or loses. So that it turns that he has to remember only these two characters "+-", and as much he can, still, remember. He wrote this cipher on a piece of paper, added at the end many kisses, and signing it put it in an envelope which addressed to Flo. With the children he has said goodbye already yesterday, so that there was nothing else to distract himself with, and he went to the street.

— Hi, rookie! — shouted to him his neighbour Sylvester, who adjusted something in the computer control of his airflyer (not that it needed some adjustment, but when one jumps over the hundred he begins little by little to fall into childhood and not to trust much the machinery, so that he tested it every morning). — How is your fighting mood, boy? Will we defeat the orange-green army groups, or this time they will beat us, ah? Surely we will defeat them, you have to be convinced in this, because otherwise you will not become a good soldier. The war is conducted only for victory, else why have we to lead it? The man is not a man if he will not catch a victory — no matter over a petticoat or over an enemy. And what can be compared with the war, ah? The knockball is worth nothing, although there are milliards who watch it. This is game for under-age boys — no risk, except from time to time by a broken rib. The hazard, on the other hand, is for women and cowards — you risk your money, but not the health and life. Where the war is a Game! With capital letter. The man needs wars, how the war needs men. The war makes from a man a *man*, boy. Am I right, how you think?

— Surely you are right, Colonel, yet now I am in a big hurry — answered he irritated, for he knew that his neighbour will again begin to tell him his military exploits, where he liked very much to recount through what hell he has gone on the fifth planet of the star ZS-3122. And he alone goes to war not in order to have what to narrate later (maybe he will not at all have this possibility). But why does he go then? Out of patriotism, answered he himself. Only

what kind of patriotism could this be, when everybody could become citizen of how many states he wanted, and the very notion of state has no longer who knows how important meaning, because the laws are everywhere the same, the languages are 4-5 standard ones, the educational criteria are almost the same everywhere, and so on. And the war, well, maybe it was one of man's duties, a necessary trial, something ..., yet why has he to think so much when he has already decided everything? Maybe exactly this is good in the war that there is no need to think much. One has to act, not to philosophize. And now he has to hurry, finished he his thoughts, while opened the door of the airflyer.

— Lieutenant colonel, boy, only Lieutenant colonel, despite the fact that I spent in the army whole twenty years and we fought with the blue-green, and with the red against the orange, and then with those in polka dots, like ladybirds, and with those in black stripes on a background of duck yellow, and with whom only not. But such nightmare like in the system 3122, to tell you the truth, I have never heard that existed. Listen, but I have not told you, have I, about those months there. Why don't you wait for five minutes, ah?

— I can't Sylv, really can't. Maybe after three years, if I come back — and he closed fast the door and rose easily above the ground, heading towards the administrative part.

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In the Court the things finished very quickly, because the robots have not habit to linger: fixed the moment of signing, took his fingerprints, also two hairs from the head, and clicked a hologram of his face and one body roentgenogram in full length. In five minutes everything was done, and in this time he recalled with a slight smile the debates of previous years about this, that has to be taken also genetic information from the seminal glands, or the ova (for women), so that the authenticity of the person is entirely guaranteed, but later on various religious sects have raised such fuss that a bunch of politicians from the ruling then social-progressive party lost, it not their heads, then at least the possibility to occupy prominent political posts for many years to come.

Then — to the Memorial. He raised the flyer to the necessary height and ruled carefully to the nearest entrance of Fifth East highway. In spite of the perfect computer control of the flyers, movement in the cities required some attention. Outside the populated areas was a different thing — you type the name of the city, or point it on the map of the screen, choose, if you want, some special route, and at once see at what time you will be there, with precision of a minute. The only thing that you can change is to lessen the speed, if you are not in a big hurry, or want to enjoy the landscape below you. Then you can do whatever you want: drink coffee, do your work

on the computer, conduct business or scientific meetings, lower the seat and quietly take a nap, read books or watch video, play games, with the computer or with a friend, or also lay a girl, if you have one at hand. Well, it is true that there are also inconveniences, because water showers were installed only in group airbuses or in luxury limousines, and even there the consumption of water was limited, but then you could always have some aerosol refreshing shower after this (or *instead* of this — more often). In this connection, but also for the lovers of strong emotions, one can regulate on the monitor the amplitude, direction, and character of forced vibrations and swaying of the airflyer, which otherwise flies quite smoothly and soporific.

In the city one has to switch often from one highway to another, if he wants, for change, choose alone the way, because the choice of the exact route takes quite much time, and the computer leads the flyer on the most secure, yet also uninteresting, usually, way. The computer can't know what will be interesting for the human, when he alone, quite often, does not know and reacts according to his or her wishes in the moment. So also now Septimius decided to fly over Fifth East highway because he wanted to enjoy the blossomed spring flowers in the middle under the airway, which in this season were wide strips of yellow and orange marigolds divided by narrow strips of some decorative grass, and on every kilometer distance was placed an area for forced landing and resting. This intermediate band was broad about twenty meters, the air was fresh and transparent in the early hours of the day, the sun shined on wet from the daily morning rain and gleaming tiles of the sidewalks on both sides, and on parapets of the covered with transparent plastic arched air bridges, which built the footpaths above one-way traffic lanes for the cars on air cushion and electric vehicles, and here and there children, mothers and pensioners, or simply free from work people, strolled along the sidewalks, or are sitting on benches or in pavilions on the sides. Above the opposite lane were flying with doubled relative speed personal airflyers, mixed with freight and passenger busses, and on the sides flied residential areas, industrial zones, parks, and entertainment establishments. At big intersections on the designated for stopping places people got up or exited from the airbuses hurrying on their businesses, and their spring clothes gave out the approaching season.

When one gives a thought to this, earlier the cars moved on roads covered entirely with hard pavement, excluding at all the possibility for whatever flora to grow on them, in order that it did not interfere with the rotating of wheels of the cars, then one just wonders why people did not ride on horses and in carts? It is true, that even today exist cars on wheels and with electrical engines, but this is rater an exotic relic of the past, and the lanes are wide only four meters and are covered with perforated resistant plastic, so that the grass

grows on them, when such vehicles are not passing to crumple it, yet they are becoming more and more a rarity and these lanes are used chiefly by the vehicles on air cushion, that only ruffle the grass. And in addition the old cars used some petrol engines, which smelled so that even mice could not stand to breathe that air. Now such engines are not used even in the army, where is accepted that there is no heroism without difficulties, so that the soldiers could have somehow stood these engines.

Soldiers — like he alone after two days — because tomorrow is a day for gathering of all recruits at Fort "Space Devil", and the next day they will give an oath of allegiance to the fatherland and will start to the star polygons for a three-month training. So that now he has to visit the "Memorial of Patriots", and for this purpose was necessary first to turn to the street "Grizzly Bear", and he gave a signal to the console for left turn in the first crossroad. The airflyer slowly turned to one of the places above the intermediate strip of the highway and continued to rise till he exceeded and surpassed the new street, which was at a higher level, and reach the similar neutral place in the middle of the "Bear", from where, after a pair of seconds, descended slightly and joined the stream of flyers moving at a speed of 120 km/h. Now was not a peak hour and because of this the speed was good, but under heavy load one could not come to more than 70 km/h average speed in communities, especially if is necessary to pass through several intersections. After a pair of minutes he made a right turn and there was already seen in the distance the star-formed dome of the central hall of the Memorial, around which as rays unfolded alleys with memorial plates of killed in the wars for defending of fatherland patriots.

Every relatively big area, or even a single big city, had their own Memorial parks. This here was planed in the end of last century and was decided for each year of this century, beginning with the first and ending with the zeroth (or hundredth), to build one ray of one kilometer length, at both sides of which, on ten stepped levels each by fifteen centimeters in height, beginning slightly over the alley ground, were placed the memorial plates of fallen patriots, so that the uppermost row reached height of human growth. It was calculated that one such ray contained up to one hundred thousand plates (two sides, and in ten levels, and also by five in a linear meter) where the all rays have to be hundred, and in the next century will begin a new ring around the Memorial, so that now it had in some extent unfinished form, more so because some rays, like for example for the 12th and 31st year, were a bit longer than the others, because then were more people fallen in the wars, while the majority of rays were quite shorter than the allowed, yet this slight asymmetry did not lessen its monumentality but on the contrary — gave it some liveliness, as if this was an enormous flower. Around it was parking

zone reserved for four more centuries, and after this — well, they will think again. Watching from a height this looked pretty impressive and he allowed himself to enjoy the view while the flyer directed itself to the ring alley. Some personal airflyers circled above the central star-formed hall at the height of the towering in the middle statue of Goddess of victory and looked from a distance like small bees, flown to drink nectar from the giant flower. The very statue slowly turned around its axis making a whole circle for an hour, and in the night was illuminated in blue colour, together with one ray going out of it and showing the direction in which it stared at the moment.

Septimius moved to the northern part of the Memorial, from where the count began and landed on the outside part of eighth year, where was the plate of his father. He went out from the car and walked slowly to the alley, buying on the way two synthetic and one natural carnations from the flower booth, and continued to point 08-34972. It was on the right of the ray (on the even side), if you come from the center, but now it will be for him on the left, more or less on the first third of the kilometer strip from the beginning, and then on the eighth horizontal level (on the first were numbers ending on 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10; then these on 12, 14, 16, ... and so on). On some urns by which he passed were written by two, and even more, names of heroes, who have fought together, and during their lifetime have expressed the wish to be immortalized in one common cell of the Memorial. After several minutes he reached this of his father and read, once more time, the short "Michael Joyce" and beneath the identification number and the year of birth; the year of his death was 2108, as also for all other in this ray, so that there was no need to put it everywhere, and in this way he as if still continued to live, symbolically. Of course more precise information about his life, together with some holograms in different age, were stored in the computer data base of Memorial and it could have been reproduced on each of the thousands terminals placed not only in the central hall, but also every hundred meters in each alley. Nothing was forgotten, changed only the type of information and its material embodiment.

He bent a little and stretched out a hand to the eight step, in order to replace the flowers, set in immured black marble little vase, with the two artificial carnations which he carried. In this case he preferred artificial flowers (where at home he could not stand them), because who knows when somebody else will visit again the tomb of his father. His mother now many years lives far to the south and usually begged his brother Peter or his sister to go to the Memorial in the day of his birthday, yet sometimes she forgets to ring. Somebody of them has come probably recently, for in the vase were some withered roses, as also two synthetic but already faded from the sun.

His father has died from thermal weapon in heavy land tank, that could move also on the bottoms of waterbodies on substantial depth,

until the pressure reached up to about two hundred atmospheres. According to the specialists his death has occurred for about one and a half seconds and after this from the tank has remained only flattened ball of metal with diameter of about five meters. Who knows whether one and a half seconds are much or not, but in any case this was fast death and he wished for himself such, if he could not succeed to remain alive, thought he sitting down on a the nearest bench in the middle of the alley. He tried to recall something important for his father, but despite the fact that he loved him much only insignificant fragments from childhood came to his mind. This time in his consciousness emerged a picture of an excursion in the mountains, where they together were catching trout in a river — some such unimportant river whose name he has forgotten now — and his father, naked to the belt and sunburned, patted him on the shoulder and praised him for his fish, which was the first for the day (or maybe it was his first trout at all?). He must have been 6-7 years then, but he can't be very sure in this. He tried to recall the day of sending of his father to the war, but could restore nothing except noisy crowds of accompanying persons and men in unvaried uniforms — they were ash-beige then, and with darker endings at the seams. Now his uniform will be light-blue, with dark-blue endings, and with dark-blue cap with black visor and red top. The uniforms changed but the war remained, because the mankind was too numerous, and the war is interesting and risky experience, which was watched nearly every day on the stereovision by all those, who could not succeed to go to it, because this was not yet allowed to them, or they were in war and it has become close to the heart for them. Even women incessantly pressed to allow them also to fight, yet for the moment this was allowed only as an exception, after they have raised their children, and if their mental condition needed this experience for their assertion of personal identity. While the men were allowed to reject (yet this happened only in three-four percents of the cases), the women were forced to plead, but there is nothing to be done — the nature demands it. Well, sometimes to some men was allowed to enter earlier in the army, when the psychological tests indicated that they could become socially dangerous if continue to lead peaceful life on the home planet, but this was preceded by concrete decision of competent commissions. And for heavy crimes also were sent to the army, as part of penalty units, which fought on the most risky places.

Septimius got up and slowly directed himself to the central building. When exited the ray with memorial plates he reached the central zone, which was a circle with radius of one kilometer , where were parking lots, snack bars, museum of military equipment in different periods of human civilization, with corresponding computerized simulators for various kinds of weapons, cinema halls with most modern

stereo equipment, where around the clock were shown combat art and documentary films, as also virtual animations of famous battles from the past centuries. He has come here many times with school and university students, as part of their patriotic preparation, as well also by personal desire, when felt in a bad mood. Now he walked by these places and entered through one of the entrances in the internal corners of five-rayed star, which was the central memorial building — Temple of Goddess of victory, Nike. All was well known to him and he at once directed himself to the eternal fire in memory of the fallen patriots, turned around it silently and put the natural flower which carried with himself between thousands others. He squatted down and bent his head in minute silence, then got up and moved to one of the exits. From the nearby parking he called by the terminal his airflyer and after three minutes was again in it.

He rose high, cast one last look at the complex and typed on the console one of the sightseeing routes of the city lasting 40 minutes — decided that this is quite enough as goodbye. He left the autopilot to do everything and chose energetic patriotic music for accompaniment. He looked absently below himself and whistled in tact. Well, when all go to war then, maybe, so it is necessary, although he has never liked much war. Maybe the soldier is really the salt of the earth, as this shows the origin of the word soldier or *Soldat*, what is variation and derivative from the root *Salz*, salt (what is read with 'o'). The pacifism is an exciting idea, but the human is human and can't live without killing, in the same way how can't exist life if there was no death, so that: let us leave it, in order to avoid confusion. Tomorrow he will put on his new uniform and depart for the fort "Space Devil":, where in the evening will give an oath of allegiance to the fatherland, and on the next day will fly to the polygons, and after three months to the fields of battle, where will spent almost three years, if he will be lucky (or less, if he will not). The only inconvenience of the war is the killing of people who do not want alone to kill, i.e. of civil population, and on the space fields of battle there is no civil population — it is on the Earth, before the stereovision screens and sympathizes with its heroes. He will combat in order to assert himself as a man, in order to deserve the respect of his acquaintances, and to give pleasure to all others. The war is masculine game, and quite interesting, too, if you learn its rules. His neighbour Sylvester is right and he will try to like it. Septimius closed the eyes, made the music louder and began to beat the rhythm with a foot. Soon he opened them and continued to look outside. The sightseeing was about to finish, and it was not yet twelve, so that he typed on the console the next route to the "Lake of the Lovers", which was in ten minutes by air from the "Old Veteran". Till now everything went as planned and he was content.

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The flyer moved on a decent height of a half of kilometer, in order not to put at risk the tall buildings, although the air roads do not pass over buildings but over big highways, which gave also additional greenery to the cities, and the buildings for a long time did not exceed one hundred meters (and earlier people built skyscrapers of three hundred, and even more meters — they were crazy, surely). In the moment in one quarter on the left of his rout was the industrial zone "Metallic-7", but if one has not known about this one couldn't have guessed, because the buildings resembled scattered on the grass baby toys, as in their form, for there were planar and oval bodies, put sometimes even one above the other, so also in their colouring, for they were painted with various beasts and insects on them.

He knew this zone for the reason that he worked there as opto-electronic engineer and his workplace was in one yellow parallelepiped, on whose roof has stretched its wings huge night butterfly. Often, however, he went in the blue truncated cone, surrounded by three lilac balls, where were robotized premises for LA32.15 lasers and other older series — when was needed immediate control by changing of the program, or just to walk outside along the alleys. In the whole complex was only one smokestack, which looked like a big humming top, but nothing indicated that there went smoke out of it, because the filtering installations were perfect. In the region was also small lake in form of kidney, where were profusely bred carps and catfish, and where the workers had rights to fish twice in a month. One thirty-meters pyramid, in the inner part of which were warehouses for finished production, was covered on top at a distance of approximately two meters with transparent glassy mass and between the cover and the roof of the building almost year-round were growing fresh strawberries, big like tomatoes. This was part of the own auxiliary farm of the laser concern.

In two kilometers on the right and forward, on a slight hill was raised one medieval castle, which was ordinary apartment complex. Septimius knew it because often went there to visit one of his colleagues, who lived in the right part of the central internal building, but usually they gathered on the roof of eastern fighting tower, where was pretty romantic, the beer was brought in cups with the shape of human skulls, and the meat was cut by knights with sharp halberds before your eyes and was roasted on a natural fire. He tried to locate where exactly was the apartment of his friend, yet the airflyer moved with hundred kilometers per hour and from this distance was impossible to recognize his windows.

Then on the right flew an area with pyramids, which shone brightly in the sun, because were completely covered with glass — blue-violet, if you look from outside, yet transparent, if you look from inside.

Originally, no doubts, but, no matter that the central part of each pyramid was occupied in the inside with greenhouses and flower places at a height of two stories, and in the basement one could pluck oneself bananas and pineapples, then maybe, after all, one became bored to look the whole day at the sand through the wall-window. He personally preferred something lower and traditional, and occupied half-storey in a big wooden house in three storeys with alpine roof, placed amidst small pine grove together with another hundred of similar houses. The complex was surrounded by high fence and inside lived one deer family with three small baby-deers — in this year —, about a dozen hares, and many squirrels on the trees. There was also not a big and not deep lake with ducks, geese, and swans, which in the winter hid in low wooden sheds on a small island in one of its ends. In the lake were also fishes yet it was forbidden to catch them in order not to disturb the birds. Not something quite special, but it was good for him.

The road turned a bit to the right, then the flyer made left turn and after a pair of minutes landed on the parking lot of the "Lake of the Lovers". It was in form of two joined hearts, but this was seen only from the air, for it was quite big and around it grew various thickets and high trees, which partially hid it when the trees were covered with leaves. Now, in the last day of March, the visibility was quite good, because the trees were still naked, but here and there were sprouting fresh and green grass and on many of the thickets around were seen young leaf and flower buds, as well also small reddish fruits on the evergreen low vegetation. The birds chirped and in many arbours sat enamored couples of different ages — beginning with teenagers and ending with pensioners. For a moment he was tempted to ring his wife and beg her to come here for half an hour, but was able to restrain himself later, because he said her yesterday good bye and the present day belonged entirely to him. Today he was again bachelor and free to spend it how he only wanted.

The parking was in the lower part between the tops of the two hearts, and where they crossed themselves a little was original air bridge on two levels, where the top one was curved in an arc and between the two levels was curling ivy, and in the summer were planted also other creeping plants with bright flowers. He walked on the upper level of the bridge, for it gave the best view around. The lake was artificial, not much deep, and its bottom was covered with sand, so that it was quite good for swimming, where the beach strips, now practically empty, yet not entirely, were built in the sharpened parts of both hearts. Under the bridge was pier with boats and many of them swayed slowly in both lakes, set in motion in the most old-fashioned way, with two plastic rods fastened to the sides of the boats and flattened at the ends, which were immersed in the water. These rods were called oars and the most curious thing was that in

order to move the boat forward the one who did the moving sat in it in reversed manner, with the back forward, so that he, in fact, did not see where to he directed it, and the other one (i.e. she) sat against him and controlled the movement. Exactly like in the marriage, thought he, where the man, most often, does all unpleasant work, while the woman only called the tune in the game.

From the topmost part of the bridge was seen the whole park which enclosed a rectangle and was not very big. Breathing deeply the fresh spring air and exposing his face to the caresses of midday sun he slowly went down the bridge and continued to the grove. He was attracted by one white patch of birches which always showed on him refreshing and soothing effect. With slight wonder he discovered one tree entirely with green leaves, yet at once guessed that it has to be a fake and, maybe, they have forgotten to take its leaves away, or have decided that there is no need to perform this procedure when in the spring they have to put them again. He went closer to it and his guess turned right, because he saw that roughly at a meter height was some short severed branch, but of rose colour — the biggest cretin would have guessed that such branches do not grow on birches. He grasped the branch and pulled it slightly out. Part of the tree trunk around it divided in two parts and the smaller sector turned to the outside — this happened to be an ordinary automaton for birch sap and he saw no reason why he should remain deprived by a glass of this refreshing drink. He pulled out the bank card of his personal bank account and inserted it in the corresponding slot and hit the button. Appeared the traditional synthetic cup which was filled fast with well cooled juice. He sat on one of the conveniently scattered around birch trunks and drank the cup in slow gulps, then went again to the automaton, tossed the cup in the basket and moved the cut branch back in its position. Not that this was obligatory, because after 5-6 minutes the machinery would have closed of itself alone, and the cup would have till the evening turned to fine gray powder, which with the next night rain, falling usually between 3 and 5 in the morning, would have been assimilated by the soil, but he liked to perform some unnecessary movements, in order not to disturb the balance of the nature. In any event these were good habits, learned in his young scout years, and he had no intention to abandon them because of laziness.

He wanted to return by the same path, but as far as he still had time decided to go round one of the hearts and continued in the same direction in which went. He entered in some pine grove, then the trees become higher, there were jumping squirrels on them and various birds were flying around. The grove gradually changed and near to the lakeshore were chiefly thickets, out of which came some motley rabbit, which stopped dumbfounded and then ran throwing out funny its hind legs, like have done millions of rabbits before it.

Life flew untroubled in its peaceful way.

The equilibrium in parks was carefully maintained and everything that was not dangerous for the human was natural, even the foxes, though this park was small for to have also foxes here. Some cloud hid for a moment the sun and blew cold wind, what made him to accelerate his pace. In any event the day was still in its beginning and he had not the right to relax yet. After five minutes he was again in his airflyer and typed on the console "By the Old Veteran", which emerged on the map and he confirmed it. Only now he remembered that it was necessary to leave the flyer in the garage on "Jerome street" but postponed it for later because his friends were maybe already waiting for him.

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This was good pub, made in the stile of old roadside coaching inns, and the chairs were under trees in the open, or in one low building with some plastic straw for roof and hanged on the walls garlands of dried maize, peppers, gourds, and various herbs. He, though, did not want to sit inside and was glad with the chosen by George and David table outdoors, where he was already expected. There was a cold breeze, yet it was blocked by various shrubs, high about one meter and building something like labyrinth around the tables under the trees, so that it was not felt when you are sitting down.

— Here, rookie! — shouted commandingly George, thinking, maybe, that exactly this was the way in which a general addresses arrayed on the parade ground troops of soldiers. — At attention, on the left, forward march, halt! Private Joyce, freely. For shown military prowess come, please, to the table of commanders. Behave you freely, yet do not forget that no subordinate has rights to drink more than his commander.

— Yes, General, as you command — answered he accepting the jovial game and sat on the third place. The table was successful imitation of wooden disk with diameter of one and a half meters, thick about ten centimeters, and with bark on the perimeter, which was placed horizontally on a thin central trunk building small flattened crown of branches. The roots of the central trunk looked quite authentic, as also the chairs which were another four trees severed on a comfortable for sitting height, but with left part of the trunk for back of the chair. From above the chairs were covered with synthetic moss and were very soft and comfortable. The table was bare with only small napkins in form of oak leaves, which stuck easily to its surface; one had to work hard for to find the buttons for calling of the waiter, masked as pieces of bark on the rim of the table, on the right of everybody, which only with slight nuance differed from the colour of the rest of the bark.

— We with General Breaker have decided to wait exactly till

13 hours and 13 minutes before we call the waiter for the aperitif — boomed again Joe, and Septimius cast a glance at his universal tele-communicator on his left hand, which showed four minutes after the agreed time, was satisfied with his accuracy, looked happy at his friends and nodded his head.

— Call me Dave, General — said David.

— OK, General, and me only Joe. Ah, I think that one "Bloody Mary" wouldn't do me any harm, for the beginning, especially if the vodka is "Blue Star". Choose Dave, and you, recruit.

— Hmm, maybe an aged whiskey "Ursa Major" with two pieces of ice — voiced Dave.

— With the permission of Generals I would have chosen "Space Ranger", also only with ice, as maximally corresponding with the emotional and mental condition of the recruit, which in the given moment I have the luck to represent, and as helpful for raising of his fighting moral, patriotic consciousness, and military courage at the required height, and even at 10% higher than this, and for fixing of them on this height during the execution of his military duty of soldier — declaimed he.

— In this spirit, recruit, continue in this spirit — muttered David and waved with a hand, because his place looked at the entrance, from where emerged slightly hunched and ascetic figure of Morrison. He saw them and directed himself to them

— Hello, boys. How is the recruit?

— Private Joyce at your service — answered Septimius. — Let me introduce you: this is General Breaker called Dave, and General Derbit called Joe, and this, Generals, is General Mintson called, with his permission, Morris.

— Oh, stop with this mockery, boys. And why nobody drinks, you are waiting for me, really? What things! Well, a glass of brandy "Star of France" for me — said he and began to palpate the trunk on which sat, but after a minute of torments he succeeded only to raise it with half a meter and while was waving his legs in the air he opened also some umbrella over himself, what obviously did not satisfy him, so that he added angry: — Will not, in the end, some of you call the waiter? And why are you laughing, oafs? You open also by an umbrella over yourselves and then laugh as much as you want.

Joe and I pressed nearly simultaneously the buttons, and in less than two minutes came an young boy, who, in all appearances, was genuine waiter. While he normalized the chair of Morrison the latter all the time thought where will be more suitable to pinch him in order to check, is this not some new biorobot, and it was fortunately that the waiter sneezed so that Morris abandoned his intention, because: where have you seen that the robots sneeze? The garçon took our orders, to which were added also various salted nuts and cookies and non-alcoholic refreshing beverages, and went to fulfill them.

— So there came your time, ah, Septy? — broke David the silence. — I envy you, frankly speaking. I am forced to wait another two years and I have always dreamed about the war. One eleventh chance not to come back, but, by Jove, this is almost nothing! And one must leave after himself good memory, mustn't he? It is worse if I will be only wounded, but this happens four times less often, and with the modern medicine and plastic surgery there is nothing impossible. The father of Peter, Joe knows him, came back before the third year without his both arms and with frozen legs — his space suit showed some defect, or he was pierced by laser weapon, I don't remember, but to move in an atmosphere of liquid nitrogen at minus I don't know how many degrees, isn't like to dip your legs in some mountain brook. Good that he succeeded to give alarm signal and hide behind a stone, and the hour of armistice came after about ten minutes, so that it was possible to rescue him. And his nose was like a lump of fat. And what of it? For two weeks in a field hospital they managed to repair his legs (without a pair of toes, but why should he need toes, he is not a monkey, is he?), and made him new nose — just a beauty, he even scratches it when is necessary, — and on his arms he has such prostheses below the elbows, that if you don't know this you wouldn't have imagined that they are not real. Now he is 115 and is as strong as a bull, watches all gladiator fights of penalty units on stereovision, every evening is in the local "Veterans club", and if will not pour out at least four glasses with something strong in his throat counts the day for wasted. Yes, such things, boys.

— Good, Dave, yet we have not gathered here to listen to your confessions, but to see off the private Joyce, so that: to the health of our friend! — intervened Joe, because the drinks waited long ago on the table.

— For you, Septy, and for the fatherland! — lifted his glass David.

— Your health, boys! — answered he. — And if I will be back after two years on vacation to gather us again here to have a good feast, but then not in a hurry, and till the morning.

They knocked their glasses and drank to the bottom, so that ordered repetition of the same. He looked at them meditatively and continued:

— To tell you how I am feeling now, ah? As if I am young redskin, am fifteen years old, and am waiting for my first fight with the hostile Apaches or Appalachies — I have forgotten how they were called. On one hand I am little afraid, but on the other hand I want to be braver than the leader. What of this, that there are now no enemy tribes that take our wives and kill our bisons — because the women are accessible for everybody (or it was vice versa: all men are accessible for the women), and the buffalo meat is quite sinewy? When it is necessary to fight for something, isn't it the same for what we fight? And as to the meat of wild animals, then I prefer from deer, hind leg,

or also kangaroo tail, do you know what delicacy is this? Ah well, let us look in the menu. — and he began to turn the pages of the menu brought by the waiter. — Hmm, no kangaroo, a pity. But, let it be so, these kangaroos live in the deserts, and we have become too many, so that we can't allow ourselves to leave desert areas on the globe. It doesn't matter, let it be deer stewed in white wine, and with addition of more white wine outside of the dish, or then "Rose Chignon", if you don't mind. Again cheers, boys! — and he lifted again his glass.

— Your health, Septy — added Joe — but I prefer the winged ones. A partridge in hunter's manner would have been to my taste, I think. Wine as yours. And now tell me what warrior you want to be on the front? Have you already decided?

— We-ell, it does not depend on me, you know? There are all these psychological tests, medical commissions, needs on fronts, et cetera. But I think that they will send me to the laser cutters, or at least I wish that it happened so, because this is in my specialty of optical engineer and I know a lot of laser weapons (after all, 20% of industry works for the army and I am one of these people), and also I want rather to move in the space, not to lie down in some bogs or deserts and throw neutron bombs of small caliber, or else to eject paralyzing bombs, or to sit behind ultrasonic guns. No matter where to they will send me I will fight bravely and am convinced that will not show myself in bad light.

— I also believe in you, boy — inserted again Joe. — The patriotism is a big deal: if you defeat the enemy you win the game, and if you lose your life then you gain the recognition of the generations. In all cases there are no losers! It is enough to be brave and to spit at death — not it alone is terrible, but its expectation. Yet we expect it every day here on Earth — although the probability is small, we, still, expect it. And on space fronts it promenades in the open, but the soldiers do not expect it, because it is their everyday life. The man fertilizes, in order to create life, hence the man has also to take it away, when comes time for this. Everything is in this, that the proper time has come ... And not to expect the death. Well, cheers again.

— Cheers, Septy! — gave voice also Morrison. — And victory!

— To the health of all — answered he. — But, Morris, only you have not yet chosen, and the waiter already comes to take the orders.

— We-ell, some fish for me. Shark, maybe, garnished with seaweeds — ordered he and after the waiter moved away added. — By the fishes the nervous system is more poorly developed and they have almost no feeling of pain. And in addition they are also useful — the phosphorus, as you know, is in the core of the sex. Not only supports it by you, but also illuminates the special "cave", don't you think? In order that one does not confuse something.

— I know you, old lecher — interjected again Joe. — And all this is because he is not belligerent. Not that he is not patriot, only I don't

recall that he watched the transmissions from fighting fields. Who knows whether you will not refuse to fight when your time comes, a? Not that I blame you, of course, for there will find at once thousands of women to lie with you if you will only refuse and retreat personally to them your place.

— I don't know, Joe, maybe I will refuse, but till this time I have whole five years. Maybe I will become ill, and if there remains me to live not long then why not to go to the army? Or maybe I will not become ill and will still not go to the army. I don't know. ... Bu-ut, you know, you have given me an interesting idea with those thousands of women. Maybe I will give an ad that will retreat my place to that woman, who will satisfy me most of all, after I will spend a week with her. By one week for each, fifty weeks in an year, and two for the wife — you know, she also has some rights — for five years this will give 250 girls. Well, I will not succeed to reach the thousand, as it seems ... Good, when so I will stop at the number 200, as more round one. In this case also for the wife will remain more, so that she will not get angry at me. And later ... Well, I can always say that I have changed my mind, can't I? However, your health!

— A lecher, I've told you. And that is why I like him, in fact — added Joe. — Let us drink for the patriotism, boys. Prosit.

They finished their glasses and for some time was audible only the chewing of their jaws. Then Morrison took again the word.

— The patriotism is a good thing, useful for the society. Yet to me it seems that it is more useful for some people. Man is an universal and omnivorous animal. What means that he is an animal, yet not like some specific of them, but that he has features of *all* animals, that by anyone of us show differently. How much long you have not searched you will not find a wolf that will reject a fresh rabbit, neither some predatory fish that will be glad with only plucking of algae, or a spider that will begin suddenly to suck nectar from the flowers; and flesh-eating bears (when they have lived outside of reservations, of course) were big exceptions. While the human beings are different, and their tastes are different, so that: some like the war, and others don't. But what is important in this regard is that it is necessary for them (well, for the bigger part of them). Or you think it is possible to force a man to fight against his will, if he does not want to? There will always be found some way to get rid of the war: either he will lie in the detention house, or will run to the enemy, or, at the worst, will hang on the gallows and be done with it. You can put a man in chains and make him work, but *not fight*. Well, of course, patriotism and such things, but it is not clear what is better for the "patria": that its masculine population has decreased with one third and that everything that can be demolished was demolished, instead of to be preserved materially and genetically healthy, and after some time, if it remains ethnically whole and strong, just then to show its

patriotism. And also: if one fatherland defends itself, then those from the other fatherland are, maybe, locusts and don't give a damn about the fatherland, ah? Where the old Greeks were clever people (well, inasmuch the people can be clever, of course): they fought, for example, for some Helen, or against her. But then this is the *ideal* decision, because on one hand it is clear that to fight for the cause of some dame there is no sense (for there are heaps of dames and girls, and whoever of them you have chosen there will always come time when you will regret this, so that it is obvious that they fought for *themselves*, for the cause of the fights, or because of the pleasure of the dangerous game), and on the other hand they could always state later that they are big patriots and men worthy to be highly respected.

Morrison made a pause, drank up the wine in his glass, poured himself again and drank a bit, and after this continued thoughtfully, putting from time to time some food in the mouth:

— Or let us take also the intellect. In the human history nobody has taken reasonable decision *before* some war, or at least until one of the sides has not already defeated a lot of armies, so that the others were convinced that they also will be defeated, if they decide to fight. *Not after* the reason has not helped was chosen the war, but when after the war the problems were still not resolved was come to reasonable talks, yet from positions of strength! Now, for example, comes Genghis Khan and wants to conquer the country X. Yet the X-stani instead of to: go and look at the Genghis-stani and decide to fight with them or to surrender; or to propose to the invaders to sit and play a dozen of chess-parties and who wins, then, let him decide; or, if occasionally Genghis was not a big enthusiast of chess, because this game was not known in his court, then let them play some ball game, or organize some other sporting event; or, if Genghis was afraid that his soldiers can decide to ... tear off his own balls, when he does not allow them to fight, because that is why they have gone with him, isn't it, to fight to death, and otherwise there will be nothing with what they could later boast before their beloved, so then, if there was no other way out, then let both sides agree on one representative and decisive battle. Only that for this battle make free for a while one whole village, place their armies one against the other and in groups by types of weapons, and begin to count themselves, where each hundredth from them moves ahead with all his weapons, and then the count begins again from one, and the chosen in this way one percent of the armies from both sides let begin to fight for life and death, as befits, but *only* the chosen "lucky" ones, and all the left let sit around on the hills in order to watch directly the evolvement of military activities, let them lift the skins with wine, and let them encourage their comrades in arms, if they want. Yeah, but instead of this they have begun a completely

unequal and devastating war, *because* they were patriots! Not that I blame the militaries, because they have acted in accordance with the common desire, and the voice of people is, as is said, voice of God, but to some decision like the above-mentioned was simply never come. And it was never come to such decision because the people were not reasonable. They are not reasonable also today, though the shifting of the wars from the Earth to the Space is, unquestionably, a very reasonable decision, and the establishing of minimal number of soldiers who burn of desire to fight and only wait their time to receive permission for this, is also reasonable thing. Only that one fights *not* because of the others, but because of what he has in his soul and mind. Because of himself alone, with one word.! Everything else is only for acquitting of his own cruelty. So-o, yet you don't think that I am against the war: I personally don't like it, but this is out of purely aesthetic feeling, yet I welcome it and defend, because it is necessary for the man. To all appearances it is necessary also for the recruit among us and I see nothing more suitable in the case except to drink for his health, for his military prowess and hard victories on the star fields of battle. Amen!

— To your health, philosopher — answered Septimius — only if I am an intelligent, or at least educated, fool, then you are one silly, no matter that educated, big brain, and I don't see much difference between the two things! And the patriotism is a good symbol, like God, maybe, in the name of which is worth to die. Although it is worth also to drink for this, so that again cheers.

— Cheers, Septy! And after two years, when you come on vacation, to gather again here — lifted his glass George.

— *If* I come back, my good friend, but I accept your proposal. And now as if is time to finish because in four I have to leave, and how I look it remains only a quarter of an hour, so that let us order the desserts, ah? — and he hit the button for calling of the waiter.

— Ah, everything good sooner or later ends, as was saying one my girl friend after the sublime moment — cleared his throat Morrison, — but after it usually comes something else good, if we leave aside the bad between these moments, of course. By a coffee with some good old French brandy, maybe?

— To be, and without the "may" — added David and having looked at us in order to get our consent, gave a sign to the waiter.

— And yet it is nice to be a recruit, ah? — intervened Joe. — Because all are envy at you! It is good that this bloody twentieth century has long ago gone by, so that we have learned now to play at war, like the small boys play: if you want to play, then play, and if you don't, then you just watch. And the victims — we-ell, nothing good happens without some victims, right? If I can allow myself to accept something from Morris then I would add, that when a young girl is afraid to sacrifice her virginity then she usually loses, am I

right, Morry? Ah, do you see? So that let us drink for the victims and the courage.

Everything went good and they exchanged a few more insignificant remarks over the coffee and, when Septimius already intended to stand and pay, David pulled out some cylindrical box from his pocket, opened it and took from it a gilded statuette and placed it in the middle of the table. This was Nike, with a thrown over her ethereal mantle, which left open on purpose her breasts, which were well developed and with protruding pink nipples, with high raised right hand with a sword in it, with shining golden curls and with blue, as if from some crystal, eyes, who stood on a small agate pedestal. The present was wonderful and while the hero of the occasion looked at it with admiration, and the others looked at him and smiled satisfied, David rose from the table and headed for the nearest tree. From a branch at height of about two meters he carefully removed some box, which all the time has hanged there almost in front of Septimius (but who will look at some trees around?) and took out from there small shiny disk, the size of a button for jacket. Surely that this was digital optical recording stereo camera and Dave touched the back of the statuette and after he opened the necessary orifice shoved the disk there, then asked George, who had the most whitish suit of all, to turn his back and, after some small manipulations on the head and the back of the goddess, from her eyes flashed two differently coloured laser beams and on the back of George appeared the initial cadre of the meeting. After he played a little with her nipples it boomed again the General order of George and the answer of the recruit. Nike was a souvenir projecting camera, made out with much taste and finesse. While Septimius could not get enough of it the others paid for the lunch with their cards, in spite of his energetic protests, and he had no other choice, except to put the goddess carefully in his pocket, and all together to head for their airflyers. He started first, and his friends waved hands to him from below, until he disappeared from their sights.

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The clock showed four with some minutes and he flew directly to the garage on Jerome street, which was quite near to the restaurant. There he signed quickly the standard contract, that he offered his airflyer to the "Club of Veterans" rent-free, where they were obliged to keep it in good condition, and he has rights to use it always during his vacations; in case of his demise while fulfilling of his military duty the flyer becomes property of the Club, else he receives it back after the dismissal. As far as the contract entered into force from tomorrow morning he could use the flyer all day today and he decided to send it in the evening, when will be back at home. Then there was nothing else left for him except to land in the area of "Metallic-7", on the

roof of one rose hexagonal truncated pyramid, which was intended for official events in the factory, where he till very recently worked, before he received confirmation that was approved as recruit for the vernal enlistment. He was met by well known and cheerful faces of his colleagues during the many years and went down to the main hall, where the people were already gathered, and took his place on the platform. At the appointed time the celebration began, opened by the director. Septimius listened absentmindedly and from time to time was nodding his head, because this was standard greeting, yet, despite of this, some words landed at his mind, though he has heard them many times on other similar see-offs, but this time they regarded him:

— Our former colleague, engineer Septimius Joyce, having worked out his allotted in peaceful earthly conditions time, is going now to the space battle fields, for to defend the most valuable social ideas, to protect the national interests of the state, showing his patriotism under new and dangerous conditions. He was good worker and responsive colleague and we believe that he will be also brave and courageous soldier, always ready to sacrifice his life, if the military situation requires this. He goes to war, like millions and milliards men in human history before him have gone to fight, and how new milliards of men after him will go, because the war is necessary for the nation and for the men. The war makes the man at last a man and every man between us is burning with desire to come also his hour to join the lines of fighters in protection of the state, and even many of our female colleagues also would have wished to experience the military hardships, in order to leave behind a good name. The wars have existed always in the human history, bur the wars of twenty second century are not like those of the former centuries, not only because they are not conducted on our native planet, but also because the soldiers now fight only in the name of highest patriotic ideals, not because of some economic interests. Regardless of the victories or defeats in the wars all states on Earth live for long time now in a society of affluence and personal improvement, live for the pleasure to live, and then why not also for the pleasure to die, if this is in the interest of the nation? The economic problems, already since the former century, are solved with *economic* measures, as it befits one developed society, but the mankind can not live without wars, which must keep its fighting spirit, courage, and heroism. Without wars there are no victories, have said our predecessors, and without victories there is no purpose in life! We must preserve the life, this rare manifestation of organization in the matter, so rare that despite the interstellar flights in the last century and now we have still not met other brothers in mind. But we must be able to fight, because when we meet other thinking beings (I don't speak about artificially made android robots, because they are made according to our

programs, but about another natural intelligence) we must be able to hold victories, for such is life anywhere in the Universe. Because of this we are still fighting on the battle fields, and will fight in order to assert the superiority of the living matter, but we have already reached the *ideal model* of war — war which carries only advantages, but *not* sufferings for the civilian population, only entertainment for the masses and for those taking part in the battles, but does not hinder biological continuation of human nationalities and races, does not lead to genocide, misery, and torturing of innocent people. The war is for the brave, and the brave go to war, like also our dear colleague Septimius. Let we see him off with the due respect.

After the followed storm of applause spoke also his immediate boss, who noted that Septimius always has carried in himself the courageous and warlike principle in the man, and he does not doubt that he will make an exemplary soldier. Wishes for easy and interesting service for him expressed also a pair of other of his colleagues of both sexes. The official part ended with giving of the traditional for such cases present — laser rifle for partridges and small game animals with automated tracking of the target, from one side of the butt of which was small screen, and inside was embedded microcomputer with information storage containing short audio-visual inspection of the factory with the most important production and administrative premises, and with by a life half minute picture of each of the employees for the last ten years, who, when the camera moved to them, said their names and bowed with a smile — this was computerized animation and, no matter that their voices were not authentic, but only a pleasant baritone for the men and a playful female voice for the women, the virtual reality looked quite real. Well, this was a good tradition and he accepted it with gratitude.

Then they moved in the hall for cocktails, where the time went pretty quickly, and while he succeeded to clink glasses with everybody and taste various appetizers and mix the drinks with those that he had already gulped with his friends, it turned that it was gone past eight. There remained nothing else for him except to hang the rifle over his shoulder, wave for the last time with a hand to the others, and climb to the roof. He opened his flyer and fell tired on the seat. He thought to himself, what suffering was earlier to drink and not to know how later one will drive the car: to drink or not to drink? — that was then the question. Now the things are much easier and you can at the most confuse the end point, but using autopilot you can snore inside and will disturb nobody. It's like if you have sat in one of those old carts and have left the horse to take you home. With these reflections he typed his home address, the airflyer rose in the air, and he began to gaze distractedly at the lights of the big city.

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At the parking before his home he refreshed himself a little by the cool air that bursted inside the car when he opened the door and recalled to order to its computer control that tomorrow at six o'clock it was in the garage of the Veterans. Tossed the rifle on shoulder, touched the statuette in his pocket, and closing the door went to the house and climbed to the third floor. Typed the cipher on the door and it recognized him and opened. Entered inside and leaned the rifle to the wall. Went to the kitchen and poured himself a glass of juice from the machine, put in it one refreshing pill, and after it fizzed and dissolved drank it in one swoop and headed for the cabinet, where chose some soothing electronic music and stretched out in a chair closing the eyes. It was not yet clear how he will live in the military barracks, but the eve of the service went well, thought he, and lied so for some time.

When he opened the eyes it was close to eleven in the evening and was later than the time when the decent people have dinner, but he was also not hungry, so that this did not matter. He began to pack to the end his marching cylinder for tomorrow, but there was not much to put there except the things from this day. The rifle he has, naturally, to leave away, because in the space there are no partridges, and it was also just a plaything compared with the real weapons which he will have in his disposition there, so that he caught it and shoved in one of wall cupboards, to various souvenirs and gifts from his school and university years. But the goddess he will take with himself, because it was not heavy, and is also precious remembrance from his fiends. He opened the cylinder and put it on the top, to the thermos which have given him yesterday Michael and Jane, his children. Only that it was just like a thermos bottle, as for a liter and a bit liquid, yet otherwise was profiled synthesizer. Above was a container for half a liter where was poured usual water; then in the middle were some technical gadgets and electronics, as well also portable power supply for two cycles of the device, and there were put one small graphite stick and three ampoules with chemicals, and in the very bottom was another container also for half a liter. In the middle was one button, which, when one pressed it, glowed red and was heard slight humming for about five minutes. Then the lamp became green and in the bottom container was half a liter quite decent *vodka*, already cooled by this! The water molecule was decomposed in its constituent parts, and then was synthesized the alcohol. If he wishes he could put there also by another pill, in order for the liquid to be like whisky or cognac. One cycle gave half a liter, and out of one portion chemicals were produced ten doses or five liters. Apart from this he was given a box with twenty series of cartridges, which weighted not even one kilogram, so that he was equipped with a whole centner of vodka — pretty good also, for he tried it yesterday. Original gift, no denying it.

Then he looked around in the room and found on the table, in the middle, one flat box tied with ribbon. Recalled himself that his wife has also promised something and has probably come before he returned back. He opened it and saw three sets of knitwear for astronauts, entirely soft when you touch them, light and, as it should be, with contacts for switching on of the heating from spacesuit, and with a small belt with spare batteries in case of emergency. In the army they, surely, will give them such sets, but these are maybe of newer models and finer workmanship, and when they are from Flo then he will take them. The woman, obviously, is concerned lest he rubbed himself the groins in the rough suits, giggled he. Putting them on top of everything he closed the box. There was enough place there, but nothing bad, let it remain place for to be able to carry by a stone from the battle fields, if he will return. He checked that his soldier uniform was ready on the chair by the wall and set the alarm clock at six hundred, and with three consecutive reminders after ten minutes and cannon thunder if he has not got up even then and packed away the bed. As if this was everything. Walked to the toilet corner, put on his pajamas, pulled the bed out, and threw above the blankets.

It was already after midnight and he again scrolled everything in his mind, in order not to forget something important, but found no omissions. When he will get up at six with some minutes he will have enough time to be able to go out before eight and order personal air-taxi to the airport. For 30 - 40 minutes he will be there, so that it is simply impossible not be there before ten. Tomorrow, the first of April, for the spring levy of recruits. He began to fall slightly into slumber. There was not much time for sleep, but he did not need much. Old people don't sleep long. And he quite recently celebrated his seventieth birthday. He yawned widely and fell into deep and undisturbed sleep of happy recruit.

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