

FICTION

Jim Harmon

How to Make Friends



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A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

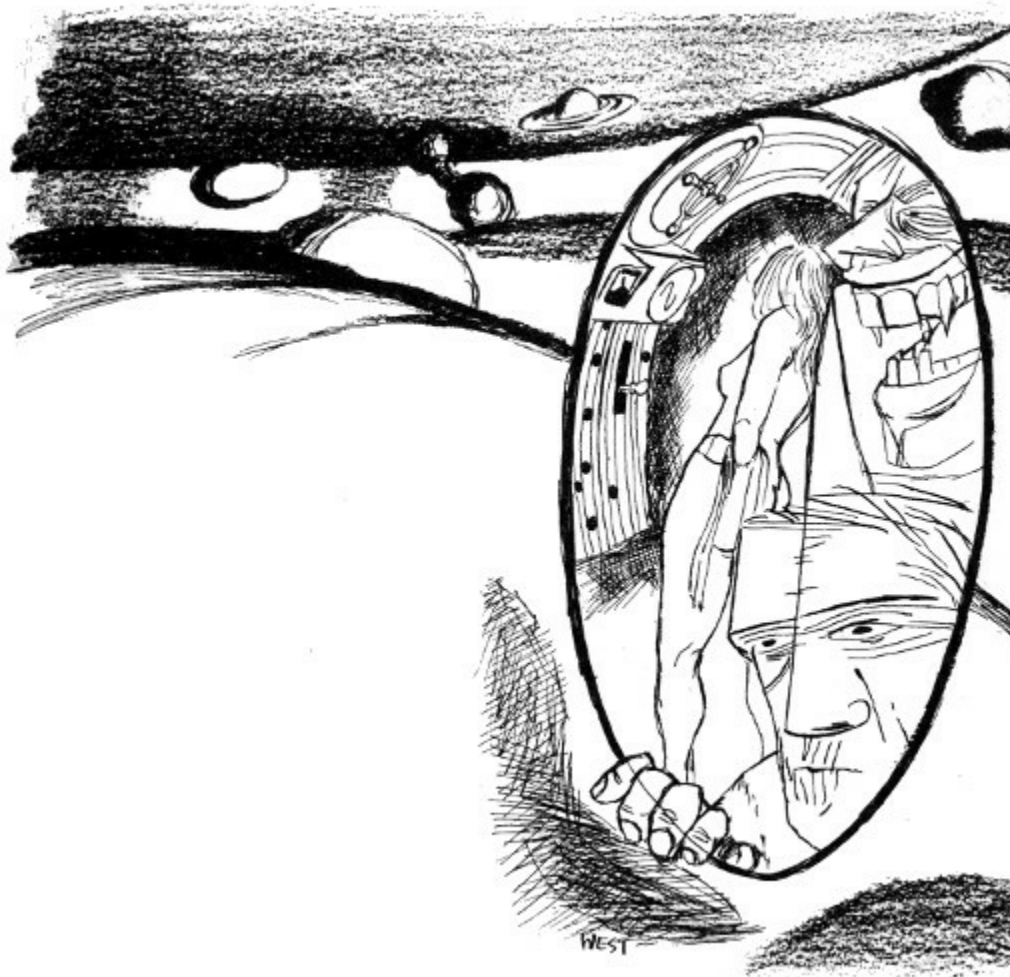
A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS

By JIM HARMON

Illustrated by WEST

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**Every lonely man tries to make friends.
Manet just didn't know when to stop!**

William Manet was alone.

In the beginning, he had seen many advantages to being alone. It would give him an unprecedented opportunity to once and for all correlate loneliness to the point of madness, to see how long it would take him to start slaving and clawing the pin-ups from the magazines, to begin teaching himself classes in philosophy consisting of interminable lectures to a bored and captive audience of one.

He would be able to measure the qualities of peace and decide whether it was really better than war, he would be able to get as fat and as dirty as he liked, he would be able to live more like an animal and think more like a god than any man for generations.

But after a shorter time than he expected, it all got to be a tearing bore. Even the waiting to go crazy part of it.

Not that he was going to have any great long wait of it. He was already talking to himself, making verbal notes for his lectures, and he had cut out a picture of Annie Oakley from an old book. He tacked it up and winked at it whenever he passed that way.

Lately she was winking back at him.

Loneliness was a physical weight on his skull. It peeled the flesh from his arms and legs and sandpapered his self-pity to a fine sensitivity.

No one on Earth was as lonely as William Manet, and even William Manet could only be this lonely on Mars.

Manet was Atmosphere Seeder Station 131-47's own human.

All Manet had to do was sit in the beating aluminum heart in the middle of the chalk desert and stare out, chin cupped in hands, at the flat, flat pavement of dirty talcum, at the stars gleaming as hard in the black sky as a starlet's capped teeth ... stars two of which were moons and one of which was Earth. He had to do nothing else. The whole gimcrack was cybernetically controlled, entirely automatic. No one was needed here--no human being, at least.

The Workers' Union was a pretty small pressure group, but it didn't take much to pressure the Assembly. Featherbedding had been carefully specified, including an Overseer for each of the Seeders to honeycomb Mars, to prepare its atmosphere for colonization.

They didn't give tests to find well-balanced, well-integrated people for the job. Well-balanced, well-integrated men weren't going to isolate themselves in a useless job. They got, instead, William Manet and his fellows.

The Overseers were to stay as long as the job required. Passenger fare to Mars was about one billion dollars. They weren't providing commuter service for night shifts. They weren't providing accommodations for couples when the law specified only one occupant. They weren't providing fuel (at fifty million dollars a gallon) for visits between the various Overseers. They weren't very providential.

But it was two hundred thousand a year in salary, and it offered wonderful opportunities.

It gave William Manet an opportunity to think he saw a spaceship making a tailfirst landing on the table of the desert, its tail burning as bright as envy.

Manet suspected hallucination, but in an existence with all the pallid dispassion of a requited love he was happy to welcome dementia. Sometimes he even manufactured it. Sometimes he would run through the arteries of the factory and play that it had suddenly gone mad hating human beings, and was about to close down its bulkheads on him as sure as the Engineers' Thumb and bale up the pressure-dehydrated digest, making so much stall flooring of him. He ran until he dropped with a kind of climaxing release of terror.

So Manet put on the pressure suit he had been given because he would never need it, and marched out to meet the visiting spaceship.

He wasn't quite clear how he came from walking effortlessly across the Martian plain that had all the distance-perpetuating qualities of a kid's crank movie machine to the comfortable interior of a strange cabin. Not a ship's cabin but a Northwoods cabin.

The black and orange Hallowe'en log charring in the slate stone fireplace seemed real. So did the lean man with the smiling mustache painted with the random designs of the fire, standing before the horizontal pattern of chinked wall.

"Need a fresher?" the host inquired.

Manet's eyes wondered down to heavy water tumbler full of rich, amber whiskey full of sparks from the hearth. He stirred himself in the comfortably warm leather chair. "No, no, I'm *fine*." He let the word hang there for examination. "Pardon me, but could you tell me just what place this is?"

The host shrugged. It was the only word for it. "Whatever place you choose it to be, so long as you're with Trader Tom. 'Service,' that's my motto. It is a way of life with me."

"Trader Tom? Service?"

"Yes! That's it exactly. It's *me* exactly. Trader Tom Service--Serving the Wants of the Spaceman Between the Stars. Of course, 'stars' is poetic. Any point of light in the sky in a star. We service the planets."

Manet took the tumbler in both hands and drank. It was good whiskey, immensely powerful. "The government wouldn't pay for somebody serving the wants of spacemen," he exploded.

"Ah," Trader Tom said, cautionary. He moved nearer the fire and warmed his hands and buttocks. "Ah, but I am not a *government* service. I represent free enterprise."

"Nonsense," Manet said. "No group of private individuals can build a spaceship. It takes a combine of nations."

"But remember only that businessmen are reactionary. It's well-known. Ask anyone on the street. Businessmen are reactionary even beyond the capitalistic system. Money is a fiction that exists mostly on paper. They play along on paper to get paper things, but to get real things they can forego the papers. Comprehend, *mon ami*? My businessmen have gone back to the barter system. Between them, they have the raw materials, the trained men, the man-hours to make a spaceship. So they make it. Damned reactionaries, all of my principals."

"I don't believe you," Manet stated flatly. His conversation had grown blunt with disuse. "What possible profit could your principals turn from running a trading ship among scattered exploration posts on the planets? What could you give us that a benevolent government doesn't already supply us with? And if there was anything, how could we pay for it? My year's salary wouldn't cover the transportation costs of this glass of whiskey."

"Do you find it good whiskey?"

"Very good."

"Excellent?"

"Excellent, if you prefer."

"I only meant--but never mind. We give you what you want. As for paying for it--why, forget about the payment. You may apply for a Trader Tom Credit Card."

"And I could buy anything that I wanted with it?" Manet demanded. "That's absurd. I'd never be able to pay for it."

"That's it precisely!" Trader Tom said with enthusiasm. "You *never* pay for it. Charges are merely deducted from your *estate*."

"But I may leave no estate!"

Trader Tom demonstrated his peculiar shrug. "All businesses operate on a certain margin of risk. That is our worry."

Manet finished the mellow whiskey and looked into the glass. It seemed to have been polished clean. "What do you have to offer?"

"Whatever you want?"

Irritably, "How do I know what I want until I know what you have?"

"You know."

"I know? All right, I know. You don't have it for sale."

"Old chap, understand if you please that I do not only *sell*. I am a trader--Trader Tom. I trade with many parties. There are, for example ... extraterrestrials."

"Folk legend!"

"On the contrary, *mon cher*, the only reality it lacks is political reality. The Assembly could no longer justify their disposition of the cosmos if it were known they were dealing confiscation without representation. Come, tell me what you want."

Manet gave in to it. "I want to be not alone," he said.

"Of course," Trader Tom replied, "I suspected. It is not so unusual, you know. Sign here. And here. Two copies. This is yours. Thank you so much."

Manet handed back the pen and stared at the laminated card in his hand.

TRADER TOM CREDIT CARD

Good for Anything

A-1 9*8*7*6*5*4*3*2*****

WM. MaNeT

/—rader /—om

.....

(Sign Here)

Trader Tom

When he looked up from the card, Manet saw the box. Trader Tom was pushing it across the floor towards him.

The box had the general dimensions of a coffin, but it wasn't wood--only brightly illustrated cardboard. There was a large four-color picture on the lid showing men, women and children moving through a busy city street. The red and blue letters said:

LIFO *The Socialization Kit*

"It is commercialized," Trader Tom admitted with no little chagrin. "It is presented to appeal to a twelve-year-old child, an erotic, aggressive twelve-year-old, the typical sensie goer--but that is reality. It offends men of good taste like ourselves, yet sometimes it approaches being art. We must accept it."

"What's the cost?" Manet asked. "Before I accept it, I have to know the charges."

"You never know the cost. Only your executor knows that. It's the Trader Tom plan."

"Well, is it guaranteed?"

"There are no guarantees," Trader Tom admitted. "But I've never had any complaints yet."

"Suppose I'm the first?" Manet suggested reasonably.

"You won't be," Trader Tom said. "I won't pass this way again."

Manet didn't open the box. He let it fade quietly in the filtered but still brilliant sunlight near a transparent wall.

Manet pattered around the spawning monster, trying to brush the copper taste of the station out of his mouth in the mornings, talking to himself, winking at Annie Oakley, and waiting to go mad.

Finally, Manet woke up one morning. He lay in the sheets of his bunk, suppressing the urge to go wash his hands, and came at last to the conclusion that, after all the delay, he was mad.

So he went to open the box.

The cardboard lid seemed to have become both brittle and rotten. It crumbled as easily as ideals. But Manet was old enough to remember the boxes Japanese toys came in when he was a boy, and was not alarmed.

The contents were such a glorious pile of junk, of bottles from old chemistry sets, of pieces from old Erector sets, of nameless things and unremembered antiques from neglected places, that it seemed too good to have been assembled commercially. It was the collection of a lifetime.

On top of everything was a paperbound book, the size of the *Reader's Digest*, covered in rippled gray flexiboard. The title was stamped in black on the spine and cover: *The Making of Friends*.

Manet opened the book and, turning one blank page, found the title in larger print and slightly amplified: *The Making of Friends and Others*. There was no author listed. A further line of information stated: "A Manual for Lifo, The Socialization Kit." At the bottom of the title page, the publisher was identified as: LIFO KIT CO., LTD., SYRACUSE.

The unnumbered first chapter was headed *Your First Friend*.

Before you go further, first find the *Modifier* in your kit. This is *vital*.

He quickly riffled through the pages. *Other Friends, Authority, A Companion....* Then *The Final Model*. Manet tried to flip past this section, but the pages after the sheet labeled *The Final Model* were stuck together. More than stuck. There was a thick slab of plastic in the back of the book. The edges were ridged as if there were pages to this section, but they could only be the tracks of lame ants.

Manet flipped back to page one.

First find the *Modifier* in your kit. This is *vital* to your entire experiment in socialization. The *Modifier* is Part #A-1 on the Master Chart.

He prowled through the box looking for some kind of a chart. There was nothing that looked like a chart inside. He retrieved the lid and looked at its inside. Nothing. He tipped the box and looked at its outside. Not a thing. There was always something missing from kits. Maybe even the *Modifier* itself.

He read on, and probed and scattered the parts in the long box. He studied the manual intently and groped out with his free hand.

The toe bone was connected to the foot bone....



The Red King sat smugly in his diagonal corner.

The Black King stood two places away, his top half tipsy in frustration.

The Red King crabbed sideways one square.

The Black King pounced forward one space.

The Red King advanced backwards to face the enemy.

The Black King shuffled sideways.

The Red King followed....

Uselessly.

"Tie game," Ronald said.

"Tie game," Manet said.

"Let's talk," Ronald said cheerfully. He was always cheerful.

Cheerfulness was a personality trait Manet had thumbed out for him. Cheerful. Submissive. Co-operative. Manet had selected these factors in order to make Ronald as different a person from himself as possible.

"The Korean-American War was the greatest of all wars," Ronald said pontifically.

"Only in the air," Manet corrected him.

Intelligence was one of the factors Manet had punched to suppress. Intelligence. Aggressiveness. Sense of perfection. Ronald couldn't know any more than Manet, but he could (and did) know less. He had seen to that when his own encephalograph matrix had programmed Ronald's feeder.

"There were no dogfights in Korea," Ronald said.

"I know."

"The dogfight was a combat of hundreds of planes in a tight area, the last of which took place near the end of the First World War. The aerial duel, sometimes inaccurately referred to as a 'dogfight' was not seen in Korea either. The pilots at supersonic speeds only had time for single passes at the enemy. Still, I believe, contrary to all experts, that this took greater skill, man more wedded to machine, than the leisurely combats of World War One."

"I know."

"Daniel Boone was still a crack shot at eight-five. He was said to be warm, sincere, modest, truthful, respected and rheumatic."

"I know."

Manet knew it all. He had heard it all before.

He was so damned sick of hearing about Korean air battles, Daniel Boone, the literary qualities of ancient sports fiction magazines, the painting of Norman Rockwell, New York swing, *ad nauseum*. What a narrow band of interests! With the whole universe to explore in thought and concept, why did he have to be trapped with such an unoriginal human being?

Of course, Ronald wasn't an original human being. He was a copy.

Manet had been interested in the Fabulous Forties--Lt. "Hoot" Gibson, Sam Merwin tennis stories, *Saturday Evening Post* covers--when he had first learned of them, and he had learned all about them. He had firm opinions on all these.

He yearned for someone to challenge him--to say that *Dime Sports* had been nothing but a cheap yellow rag and, why, *Sewanee Review*, there had been a magazine for you.

Manet's only consolidation was that Ronald's tastes were lower than his own. He patriotically insisted that the American Sabre Jet was superior to the Mig. He maintained with a straight face that Tommy Dorsey was a better band man than Benny Goodman. Ronald was a terrific jerk.

"Ronald," Manet said, "you are a terrific jerk."

Ronald leaped up immediately and led with his right.

Manet blocked it deftly and threw a right cross.

Ronald blocked it deftly, and drove in a right to the navel.

The two men separated and, puffing like steam locomotives passing the diesel works, closed again.

Ronald leaped forward and led with his right.

Manet stepped inside the swing and lifted an uppercut to the ledge of Ronald's jaw.

Ronald pinwheeled to the floor.

He lifted his bruised head from the deck and worked his reddened mouth. "Had enough?" he asked Manet.

Manet dropped his fists to his sides and turned away. "Yes."

Ronald hopped up lightly. "Another checkers, Billy Boy?"

"No."

"Okay. Anything you want, William, old conquerer."

Manet scrunched up inside himself in impotent fury.

Ronald was maddeningly co-operative and peaceful. He would even get in a fist fight to avoid trouble between them. He would do anything Manet wanted him to do. He was so utterly damned stupid.

Manet's eyes orbited towards the checkerboard.

But if he were so much more stupid than he, Manet, why was it that their checker games always ended in a tie?

The calendar said it was Spring on Earth when the radio was activated for a high-speed information and entertainment transmission.

The buzzer-flasher activated in the solarium at the same time.

Manet lay stretched out on his back, naked, in front of the transparent wall.

By rolling his eyes back in his head, Manet could see over a hedge of eyebrows for several hundred flat miles of white sand.

And several hundred miles of desert could see him.

For a moment he gloried in the blatant display of his flabby muscles and patchy sunburn.

Then he sighed, rolled over to his feet and started trudging toward Communication.

He padded down the rib-ridged matted corridor, taking his usual small pleasure in the kaleidoscopic effect of the spiraling reflections on the walls of the tubeway.

As he passed the File Room, he caught the sound of the pounding vibrations against the stoppered plug of the hatch.

"Come on, Billy Buddy, let me out of this place!"

Manet padded on down the hall. He had, he recalled, shoved Ronald in there on Lincoln's Birthday, a minor ironic twist he appreciated quietly. He had been waiting in vain for Ronald to run down ever since.

In Communication, he took a seat and punched the slowed down playback of the transmission.

"Hello, Overseers," the Voice said. It was the Voice of the B.B.C. It irritated Manet. He never understood how the British had got the space transmissions assignment for the English language. He would have preferred an American disk-jockey himself, one who appreciated New York swing.

"We imagine that you are most interested in how long you shall be required to stay at your present stations," said the Voice of God's paternal uncle. "As you on Mars may know, there has been much discussion as to how long it will require to complete the present schedule--" there was of course no "K" sound in the word--"for atmosphere seeding.

"The original, non-binding estimate at the time of your departure was 18.2 years. However, determining how long it will take our stations properly to remake the air of Mars is a problem comparable to finding the age of the Earth. Estimates change as new factors are learned. You may recall that three years ago the official estimate was changed to thirty-one years. The recent estimate by certain reactionary sources of two hundred and seventy-four years is *not* an official government estimate. The news for you is good, if you are becoming nostalgic for home, or not particularly bad if you are counting on drawing your handsome salary for the time spent on Mars. We have every reason to believe our *original* estimate was substantially correct. The total time is, within limits of error, a flat 18 years."

A very flat 18 years, Manet thought as he palmed off the recorder.

He sat there thinking about eighteen years.

He did not switch to video for some freshly taped westerns.

Finally, Manet went back to the solarium and dragged the big box out. There was a lot left inside.

One of those parts, one of those bones or struts of flesh sprayers, one of them, he now knew, was the Modifier.

The Modifier was what he needed to change Ronald. Or to shut him off.

If only the Master Chart hadn't been lost, so he would know what the Modifier looked like! He hoped the Modifier itself wasn't lost. He hated to think of Ronald locked in the Usher tomb of the File Room for 18 flat years. Long before that, he would have worn his fists away hammering at the hatch. Then he might start pounding with his head. Perhaps before the time was up he would have worn himself down to nothing whatsoever.

Manet selected the ripple-finished gray-covered manual from the hodgepodge, and thought: eighteen years.

Perhaps I should have begun here, he told himself. But I really don't have as much interest in that sort of thing as the earthier types. Simple companionship was all I wanted. And, he thought on, even an insipid personality like Ronald's would be bearable with certain compensations.

Manet opened the book to the chapter headed: *The Making of a Girl*.

Veronica crept up behind Manet and slithered her hands up his back and over his shoulders. She leaned forward and

breathed a moist warmth into his ear, and worried the lobe with her even white teeth.

"Daniel Boone," she sighed huskily, "only killed three Indians in his life."

"I know."

Manet folded his arms stoically and added: "Please don't talk."

She sighed her instant agreement and moved her expressive hands over his chest and up to the hollows of his throat.

"I need a shave," he observed.

Her hands instantly caressed his face to prove that she liked a rather bristly, masculine countenance.

Manet elbowed Verónica away in a gentlemanly fashion.

She made her return.

"Not now," he instructed her.

"Whenever you say."

He stood up and began pacing off the dimensions of the compartment. There was no doubt about it: he had been missing his regular exercise.

"Now?" she asked.

"I'll tell you."

"If you were a jet pilot," Verónica said wistfully, "you would be romantic. You would grab love when you could. You would never know which moment would be last. You would make the most of each one."

"I'm not a jet pilot," Manet said. "There are no jet pilots. There haven't been any for generations."

"Don't be silly," Verónica said. "Who else would stop those vile North Koreans and Red China 'volunteers'?"

"Verónica," he said carefully, "the Korean War is over. It was finished even before the last of the jet pilots."

"Don't be silly," she snapped. "If it were over, I'd know about it, wouldn't I?"

She would, except that somehow she had turned out even less bright, less equipped with Manet's own store of information, than Ronald. Whoever had built the Lifo kit must have had ancient ideas about what constituted appropriate "feminine" characteristics.

"I suppose," he said heavily, "that you would like me to take you back to Earth and introduce you to Daniel Boone?"

"Oh, yes."

"Verónica, your stupidity is hideous."

She lowered her long blonde lashes on her pink cheeks. "That is a mean thing to say to me. But I forgive you."

An invisible hand began pressing down steadily on the top of his head until it forced a sound out of him. "Aaaawraagggh! Must you be so cloyingly sweet? Do you have to keep taking that? Isn't there any fight in you at all?"

He stepped forward and back-handed her across the jaw.

It was the first time he had ever struck a woman, he realized regretfully. He now knew he should have been doing it long ago.

Verónica sprang forward and led with a right.

Ronald's cries grew louder as Manet marched Verónica through the corridor.

"Hear that?" he inquired, smiling with clenched teeth.

"No, darling."

Well, that was all right. He remembered he had once told her to ignore the noise. She was still following orders.

"Come on, Bill, open up the hatch for old Ronald," the voice carried through sepulchraly.

"Shut up!" Manet yelled.

The voice dwindled stubbornly, then cut off.

A silence with a whisper of metallic ring to it.

Why hadn't he thought of that before? Maybe because he secretly took comfort in the sound of an almost human voice echoing through the station.

Manet threw back the bolt and wheeled back the hatch.

Ronald looked just the same as had when Manet had seen him last. His hands didn't seem to have been worn away in the least. Ronald's lips seemed a trifle chapped. But that probably came not from all the shouting but from having nothing to drink for some months.

Ronald didn't say anything to Manet.

But he looked offended.

"You," Manet said to Véronica with a shove in the small of the back, "inside, inside."

Ronald sidestepped the lurching girl.

"Do you know what I'm going to do with you?" Manet demanded. "I'm going to lock you up in here, and leave you for a day, a month, a year, forever! Now what do you think about that?"

"If you think it's the *right* thing, dear," Véronica said hesitantly.

"You know best, Willy," Ronald said uncertainly.

Manet slammed the hatch in disgust.

Manet walked carefully down the corridor, watching streamers of his reflection corkscrewing into the curved walls. He had to walk carefully, else the artery would roll up tight and squash him. But he walked too carefully for this to happen.

As he passed the File Room, Ronald's voice said: "In my opinion, William, you should let us out."

"I," Véronica said, "honestly feel that you should let me out, Bill, dearest."

Manet giggled. "What? What was that? Do you suggest that I take you back after you've been behind a locked door with my best friend?"

He went down the corridor, giggling.

He giggled and thought: This will never do.

Pouring and tumbling through the Lifo kit, consulting the manual diligently, Manet concluded that there weren't enough parts left in the box to go around.

The book gave instructions for The Model Mother, The Model Father, The Model Sibling and others. Yet there weren't parts enough in the kit.

He would have to take parts from Ronald or Véronica in order to make any one of the others. And he could not do that without the Modifier.

He wished Trader Tom would return and extract some higher price from him for the Modifier, which was clearly missing from the kit.

Or to get even more for simply repossessing the kit.

But Trader Tom would not be back. He came this way only once.

Manet thumbed through the manual in mechanical frustration. As he did so, the solid piece of the last section parted sheet by sheet.

He glanced forward and found the headings: *The Final Model*.

There seemed something ominous about that finality. But he had paid a price for the kit, hadn't he? Who knew what price, when it came to that? He had every right to get everything out of the kit that he could.

He read the unfolding page critically. The odd assortment of ill-matched parts left in the box took a new shape in his mind and under his fingers....

Manet gave one final spurt from the flesh-sprayer and stood back.

Victor was finished. Perfect.

Manet stepped forward, lifted the model's left eyelid, tweaked his nose.

"Move!"

Victor leaped back into the Lifo kit and did a jig on one of the flesh-sprayers.

As the device twisted as handily as good intentions, Manet realized that it was not a flesh-sprayer but the Modifier.

"It's finished!" were Victor's first words. "It's done!"

Manet stared at the tiny wreck. "To say the least."

Victor stepped out of the oblong box. "There is something you should understand. I am different from the others."

"They all say that."

"I am not your friend."

"No?"

"No. You have made yourself an enemy."

Manet felt nothing more at this information than an esthetic pleasure at the symmetry of the situation.

"It completes the final course in socialization," Victor continued. "I am your adversary. I will do everything I can to defeat you. I have *all* your knowledge. *You* do not have all your knowledge. If you let yourself know some of the things, it could be used against you. It is my function to use everything I possibly can against you."

"When do you start?"

"I've finished. I've done my worst. I have destroyed the Modifier."

"What's so bad about that?" Manet asked with some interest.

"You'll have Veronica and Ronald and me forever now. We'll never change. You'll get older, and we'll never change. You'll lose your interest in New York swing and jet combat and Daniel Boone, and we'll never change. We don't change and you can't change us for others. I've made the worst thing happen to you that can happen to any man. *I've seen that you will always keep your friends.*"

The prospect *was* frightful.

Victor smiled. "Aren't you going to denounce me for a fiend?"

"Yes, it is time for the denouncement. Tell me, you feel that now you are through? You have fulfilled your function?"

"Yes. Yes."

"Now you will have but to lean back, as it were, so to speak, and see me suffer?"

"Yes."

"No. Can't do it, old man. Can't. *I* know. You're too human, too like me. The one thing a man can't accept is a passive state, a state of uselessness. Not if he can possibly avoid it. Something has to be happening to him. He has to be happening to something. You didn't kill me because then you would have nothing left to do. You'll never kill me."

"Of course not!" Victor stormed. "Fundamental safety cut-off!"

"Rationalization. You don't *want* to kill me. And you can't stop challenging me at every turn. That's your function."

"Stop talking and just think about your miserable life," Victor said meanly. "Your friends won't grow and mature with you. You won't make any new friends. You'll have me to constantly remind you of your uselessness, your constant unrelenting sterility of purpose. How's that for boredom, for passiveness?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," Manet said irritably, his social manners rusty. "I won't be bored. You will see to that. It's your purpose. You'll be a challenge, an obstacle, a source of triumph every foot of the way. Don't you see? With you for an enemy, I don't need a friend!"