

# PRODUCTION PROBLEM

"THE MAN FROM TIMESEARCH, Inc. is here, sir."

"Show him in," Bridgemaker told the robotler.

The man from Timesearch halted just within the doorway. Nervously he shifted the oblong package he was carrying from one hand to the other. "Good morning, Honorable Bridgemaker."

"Did you find the machine?" Bridgemaker demanded.

"I—I'm afraid we failed again, sir. But we did locate another one of its products." The man handed Bridgemaker the package.

Bridgemaker waved his arm in an angry gesture that included the whole room, "But you've already brought me hundreds of its products!" he shouted. "What I want is the machine itself so I can make my own products!"

"I'm afraid, Honorable Bridgemaker, that the machine never existed. Our field men have explored the Pre-Technological Age, the First Technological Age, and the early years of our own age; but even though they witnessed some of the ancient technicians at work, they never caught a glimpse of the machine."

"But if the ancient technicians could create something without a machine, *I* could too," Bridgemaker said. "And since I can't, the machine *had* to exist. Go back at once!"

"Yes, Honorable Bridgemaker," The man bowed and withdrew.

Bridgemaker tore open the package. He glanced at the product, then set the controls on his Language Adjustor, Duplicator and Alterator machine.

While he waited, he brooded on the irony of his life. Ever since he was a small boy he had hungered hopelessly for one vocation. Now that success in a totally different vocation had made him financially independent, he had focused all his energies into the attainment of his first love. But all he'd got for his trouble was a roomful of ancient products, and even though he'd increased his financial independence by duplicating and distributing those products, the basic frustration still remained: he was a secondhand artist and he wanted desperately to be a firsthand artist.

He went over to one of the shelves that wainscoted the room and glanced at some of his vicarious creations: *A Farewell to Arms*, by Chamfer Bridgemaker . . . *Five Little Peppers and How They Grew*, by Chamfer Bridgemaker . . . *The Odyssey*, by Chamfer Bridgemaker . . . *Ivanhoe*, by Chamfer Bridgemaker—

There was a loud *plop!* as the first copy of *Tom Swift and His Electric Locomotive* came out of the Language Adjustor, Duplicator and Alterator machine.

Bridgemaker sat down to read his latest masterpiece.