

Loss of Information (a short story)

By John J. Donovan

Captain Wright paused for a moment just outside his commanding officer's door to quickly check his uniform even though he was aware that his every action might be observed by the ubiquitous cameras set over each door in the vast hallway. He brought his hand up to the door and gave three sharp raps per regulations. After a moment, the door slid aside with a soft puff of air and he strode up to Commander Frank's desk, snapped to attention, gave a mathematically precise salute and said, "Captain Wright reporting as ordered, Sir!".

Commander Frank's bald head rose slowly as he laid his bland eyes upon the captain. "Well yes, well yes, ah, Wright. Well, I wanted to inform you that your proposed anti-social screening technology has been extensively reviewed by myself, and I might say, by a select few quite a long way up the chain of command." Still at attention, Captain Wright's peripheral view of Commander Frank's face was replaced again by his baldness as he peered again at the report which lay in front of him. "As a matter of fact", he continued with a thin smile appearing as he raised his head to gaze at Captain Wright again, "There is a strong consensus among the general staff that from the data in your report, this new technology is so impressive that it should be applied not only our existing personnel, but to other branches of the government and eventually... well, who knows?"

Wright hesitated to answer, it hadn't be a real question had it? He knew he should never speak unless asked a direct question, but his anxiety faded quickly into both relief and pleasure as the full meaning of the words sunk in. The report had been out of his hands for an uncommonly long time and he had suspected that this might be the reason for the commander ordering him here today. His chin lifted yet another 1/8 of an inch as he realized that this would mean that his laboratory's budget allocation would probably be significantly increased to develop the process into a field grade device. His mind working, he was already considering how the DNA separation phase would have to be re-engineered when he realized suddenly that Commander Frank was speaking again. "...and so after such a positive reaction from the general staff, I wasn't at all surprised when I was asked to accompany a few of the generals to make a presentation on your report to the Justice Department."

Commander Frank's unblinking eyes were still resting heavily on him. "After all, Wright," he smiled a tiny bit more, "we can't keep all of this technology to just the Armed Forces now can we?" Wright hesitated for only an instant, "No sir!". But something twinged in his mind when the Commander mentioned the Justice Department. There was something he knew that should be mentioned- what was it?

"Yes, yes, why just think..." mused Frank as he heaved up from his desk and strutted to the tele-window. He touched a button and the night scene was replaced a daylight view, "from your research we finally have a way to determine anti-social and even criminal behavior before it even occurs. This could have a tremendous impact in the way we live, Frank".

Captain Wright stole a glance to observe that the commander had stepped back a pace from the tele-window and was now speaking towards it. "A way to screen out those undesirable individuals that threaten our lives and property. We could be secure and happy. We would have a new culture, a new country, a new people", Frank's hands were holding tightly onto his belt now and his voice was slowly reaching a crescendo that Wright had not though possible in the portly little man. "Why even, dare I say it? A new species! Homo Americanus!".

Slowly the glow faded from the commander's face as he glanced around to Wright who was still at attention. Frank's voice dropped, "Yes, well, and it can be quite feasible by marketing it as an essential consumer product for the prospective young couple, along with an intensive PR campaign and perhaps some tax benefits. Yes, well...", The commander fell silent and gazed at the floor. "You are dismissed", the commander muttered as he made his way back to his desk. Wright hesitated for just a moment and Frank's eyes were upon him, his face showing irritation that he was still standing in front of the desk. "Yes, well what is it?" the commander snapped, "Did you have something to say?"

"Yes, sir! Sir, I just remembered that there were some discussion of possible genetic code loss, it was mentioned in Appendix J, sir, if this was ever to be carried out on a significant scale, sir", Wright hesitated and then continued, "although I never had any idea that it would be considered for a so much larger application"

Frank's face relaxed, "Yes, it is grand isn't it?", then paused as he looked right through the captain. Wright had a sudden impulse to look behind him which he instantly suppressed. Then the commander dropped his head as he fumbled with the report. "What was it again, Wright? I can't seem to find it here."

Wright knew he wouldn't have much time to explain the significance of the research that had occurred since the report was written, but he began slowly, "Well, sir, as you undoubtedly know, many genes are activated or inactivated by the presence or absence of many otherwise unrelated genes. We originally noted some cross connection between some of these anti-social genes and other genes in the initial report, but more population studies were needed to understand the effect properly. We have now completed several of these studies and while we are likely to never comprehend it in it's entirety, it is very possible that public awareness of their partners genetically mapped social behavior may result in slow removal of certain unknown but essential genetic factors from the population." Wright wondered if he had already said too much, the commander's eyes were looking at him closely now. "We could lose genetic information that we have no understanding of." he finished lamely.

But, the commander's face was smiling broadly again. "Yes, well, don't worry about the loss of a few little genes, Captain. Just think of what we'll be gaining!"