

ACTRON: THE END

#12

by Stanley Lieber

Thomas hummed along with the slow whine and drummed his gloved fingers absentmindedly on the console. He accompanied the irregular rhythm for some time before he became consciously aware of the low sound in the cabin. It seemed he had a visitor.

Yooouuu refuse to talk, but you think like mad

K.A.R.L. slowly whirred to life, seemingly annoyed at the effrontery of mere existence. He killed the canned soundtrack.

"What are you doing to yourself?" he finally said.

Thomas hadn't known a K.A.R.L. was installed. Just what he needed: simulated companionship. A perfunctory dose of what ailed him. Well, this could be just what the doctor ordered. A little bump, if you will.

"The coke's all turned black," K.A.R.L. complained. "No criticism of you, of course, but I can't work this way. What am I supposed to do?"

So, no.

"I don't care what you do, but you're going to do it off this ship," Thomas snapped. He reached for the assisted egress, but mistakenly pushed the wrong button, and the cabin was once again flattened by K.A.R.L.'s animatronic soundtrack.

And even your eyes are new

Thomas' visor steamed over. Fingers in his ears, he couldn't push any more buttons.

K.A.R.L.'s assembly clicked, popped, and whirred as he worked through his program. Thomas regarded the choreography as corny. Routine finally completed, K.A.R.L. returned to his original complaint.

"Just can't score any relief," he said.

Tom was sympathetic, if ultimately unable to help.

"We've all had it hard."

Both entities reclined and contemplated the silence of space.