

ABOUT THE YEAR 2500

Characters:

The Supra
Teacher of Robot Studies
Offspring 564-321
Hope
Voice from Machine

Scene:

the office of the Supra, somewhere on Earth in the year 2500. The Supra is seated at a desk giving orders into a complicated machine. Supra is doing many things at a time, such as pushing buttons, flipping switches, watching TV screens and listening to thought waves. Seated near the desk are the Teacher and Offspring 564-321.

SUPRA: (*pushing a button*) . . . and I want Man 564-321 and Woman 564-321 picked up immediately for questioning. They both work in Plant 15, Department 423, District 5.

VOICE FROM MACHINE: Yes, Supra. Immediately.

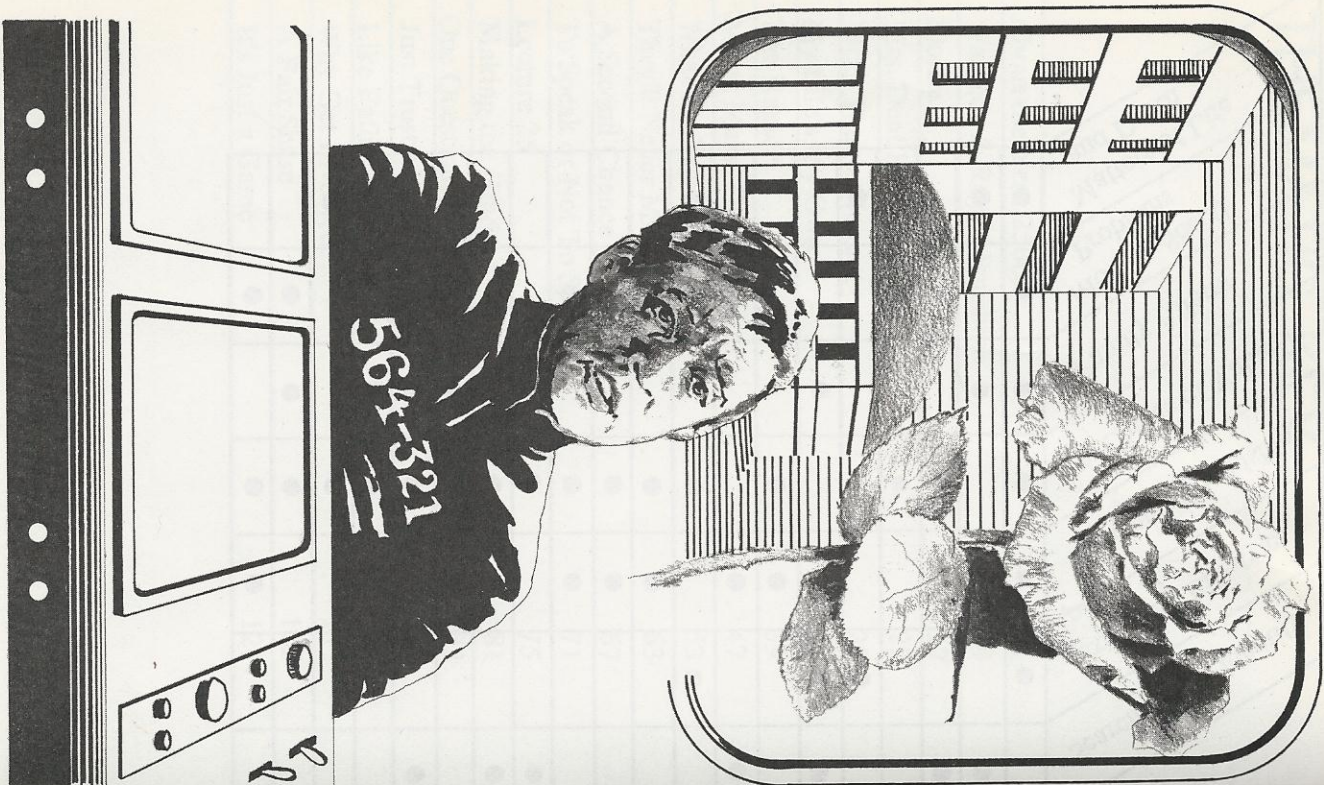
SUPRA: (*pushing another button*) Bureau 23—a complete search of house 62, block 22, district 5—suspicion of hiding an Unnumbered Offspring.

VOICE: Right away, Supra.

SUPRA: And how is the search going in house 28, block 6, district 4?

VOICE: They think they're on to something.

SUPRA: Hold on while I look. (*flipping a switch and watching what's happening on a big TV screen*) Good. Tell



them to continue their fine work. (*Supra flips the switch off.*) And now, Teacher of Robot Studies, tell me exactly what happened, detail by detail.

TEACHER: The class and I were going through the morning Table of Instructions as we are told to do in Volume II, Chapter 6, sentences 10-12 of Over-Supra's *School Routines*. We were asking Over-Supra to give power and wisdom to our Supra, sentence 10, to our Under-Supra, sentence 11 and to each man, woman and offspring, sentence 12.

SUPRA: (*impatiently*) Yes, yes, go on.

TEACHER: When we got to sentence 12, Offspring 564-321 said, (*pauses*) "mother and father"—(*continues quickly*) instead of "man and woman." I wasn't too upset with that. Many children forget the new ruling and use the old words.

SUPRA: Yes, we can understand and forgive that kind of slip. It will take time for everyone to forget the old—but continue.

TEACHER: And then—then Offspring 564-321 said it—that word—the forbidden one.

SUPRA: It's all right, you can say the word.

TEACHER: (*hesitantly*) I'd rather not, if you don't mind.

SUPRA: (*turning to Offspring 564-321*) What was the word you used? (*Offspring does not answer but keeps looking down. Supra turns to the Teacher.*) I'm afraid you must tell me. We need that word for the tape recording of this meeting.

TEACHER: The offspring said . . . "and I ask power and wisdom be given to my mother and father and . . ."

SUPRA: Go on! Don't be afraid.

TEACHER: "My mother and my father and . . . (*in a faint voice*) SISTER."

SUPRA: (*turning to the offspring angrily*) Where did you ever hear that word? (*No answer. Supra continues.*) You do know what that word means? (*Still no answer. Supra shouts with real anger.*) Answer me!

(The offspring nods "yes." The Supra pushes a button.)

VOICE: Yes?

SUPRA: Show me the file on Offspring 564-321.

VOICE: Yes, Supra.

(In a second the file appears on T.V. screen.)

SUPRA: And has the arrest of Man 564-321 and Woman 564-321 been made?

VOICE: Yes—they are awaiting questioning in the district office.

(Supra flicks a switch. The offspring's mother and father appear on the screen. The offspring trembles.)

SUPRA: Yes, I see. (*flicking the switch off*) Have them questioned about (*looking at a code book*) X278.

VOICE: (*surprised*) X278?

SUPRA: Yes. (*looking again at the offspring's file*) Very good. Excellent. You have done an excellent job with this student's training.

TEACHER: Thank you, Supra. Offspring 564-321 has been one of our most promising students. This student has great scientific understandings . . . already has helped complete six projects. . . . We have great plans for 564-321.

SUPRA: (*to the offspring in a kinder voice*) You said you know what the word "sister" means. Now, I know you are

very bright. Explain something to me. "Sister" has been a forbidden word for 30 years. We got rid of it first from the dictionaries and then from all the books. When the older generation dies off, that word will also die off. There is only one possible way for you to have learned it. Will you tell me how you heard the word?

OFFSPRING: (*whispering*) No.

SUPRA: (*trying another approach*) Recite Article 14 of Book 1 of the Family Manual.

OFFSPRING: (*in a faint voice*) "... and each man and woman shall have one and only one offspring."

SUPRA: Good. And you must realize how wise that rule is.

OFFSPRING: (*still softly*) Yes.

SUPRA: Quote Rule 1 of Article 14, Book 1 for me.

OFFSPRING: "The production of people must be held in line with the supply of food and the amount of clean air."

SUPRA: (*smiling*) Exactly. And that is why we have erased words like "sister" and "brother" from our language. And that is why we allow people to live only to age 50.

(Supra flips a switch. Offspring's mother and father appear on the screen. Blood is streaming down the father's face. The mother seems to be screaming.)

OFFSPRING: No! Stop hurting them!

(The offspring begins to cry. Supra flicks the switch off and turns to Teacher.)

SUPRA: Teacher, haven't you taught your students that tears are not allowed in the year 2500?

TEACHER: Yes, Supra—but—

SUPRA: (*interrupts*) No buts.

(Supra pushes a button.)

VOICE: Yes?

SUPRA: Any news in the search of house 62, block 22, district 5?

VOICE: None yet, Supra.

SUPRA: I'll take a look.

(Supra adjusts a dial and flips a switch. The inside of the offspring's home appears. The rooms are a mess as Enforcers continue their search. Some of them are throwing books off shelves of bookcases. Suddenly a bookcase gives way, revealing a secret door behind.)

OFFSPRING: No! No!

(Sobbing loudly, the offspring turns away from the screen. When the offspring looks at the screen again, Enforcers have captured the sister. The offspring shrieks.)

OFFSPRING: Be brave, Hope, be brave!

SUPRA: Bring the Unnumbered Offspring to me immediately.

VOICE: Immediately, Supra.

SUPRA: (*to the Teacher*) You have failed. You have failed to discover a traitor among us. You are hereby removed from duty. (*pause*) You may leave now!

TEACHER: (*obediently*) Yes, Supra.

(Without saying another word, Teacher exits.)

SUPRA: You know the penalties. You'll never see the Man and Woman who take care of you again. And you know what we must do with your sister.

OFFSPRING: Please, Supra—

SUPRA: Those are the rules. And as for you, it's only because you are so intelligent and have much to give our society that you will be saved.

(From another room the sobs of the sister are heard. The door opens and two Enforcers drag in the girl and leave. The offspring runs to her and hugs her tightly.)

OFFSPRING: It's all right. Don't cry. Everything will be all right.

SUPRA: Bring this Unnumbered Offspring to me.

OFFSPRING: (*moving toward the Supra's desk with her*) Please, Supra. She's never seen any other humans except my family. She's never been out of the house since she was born.

SUPRA: (*to girl*) What do your parents call you?

HOPE: Hope.

SUPRA: Hope what?

HOPE: Just Hope.

SUPRA: Do you know what's going to happen to you?

HOPE: (*bewildered*) I'm not sure.

OFFSPRING: (*interrupting*) Please, Supra. Don't.

SUPRA: (*annoyed and a little angry*) And why not?

OFFSPRING: Because she's special. She has a talent that can serve us and bring glory to the Earth.

SUPRA: And what is this special talent?

OFFSPRING: Music! Before she could walk, she could create musical ideas. She could make up new musical patterns and could get beauty from musical notes. That is a special talent that we are told we need. Please, Supra, Hope is as important as you feel I am.

SUPRA: True, we do need such talent. But I must say that I have not yet decided if creating music is as important to our world as creating science.

OFFSPRING: But Article 15 of the Family Manual states, "Special talents and abilities that bring glory to the people must be recognized."

SUPRA: (*annoyed*) I know the rule. . . . We have a special

problem here, don't we? Two very talented, gifted offspring—gifted in ways that the law states we must recognize to help our society.

OFFSPRING: Yes, Supra.

SUPRA: And then we have a law that states only one offspring per family and the population balance *must* be held.

OFFSPRING: Yes, Supra.

SUPRA: (*smiling*) Then our solution is simple, isn't it?

OFFSPRING: I'm not sure I follow you, Supra.

SUPRA: Your sister can live if—

OFFSPRING: If what, Supra?

SUPRA: If you give your life so that she can live. It's all a matter of numbers.

OFFSPRING: But, Supra, we *both* can be a credit to Earth. We both must live to make our society greater.

SUPRA: (*ignoring the last remark*) One must go. Well, what is your decision?

OFFSPRING: —————

CLOSING UP THE OPEN ENDS

About the Year 2500

THINKING ABOUT THE PLAY

1. What meaning would you give the word *supra* based on the role *Supra* plays? Explain.
2. What in the play indicates that the State failed to make Man, Woman and Offspring 564–321 acceptable members of society?
3. Describe the personalities of:
 - a. Offspring 564–321
 - b. *Supra*
 - c. Teacher of Robot Studies
4. Do you think world conditions will ever be like those described in the play? Why?
5. What is the importance of human beings to the society outlined in this play? What are the advantages and disadvantages of that society?
6. What famous person or persons of the past might be compared to the character *Supra*? Why?
7. If you were living in the society described in this play, what kinds of jobs would be available to you based on what you have read?

THINKING ABOUT THE ENDING

1. Write the reply the Offspring would make keeping in mind the following:
 - a. the true feelings that Offspring 564–321 has for the sister
 - b. the respect and fear the Offspring may have for *Supra*
2. In a similar situation, how would you act? Would you save yourself and sacrifice your brother or sister? Explain.
3. Write one of the following:
 - a. a surprise ending in which *Supra* decides that both Offspring 564–321 and the sister should live to help the State.
 - b. a humorous ending, perhaps introducing two or more offspring to the cast of the play.

Wanted: A Ray of Sunshine

THINKING ABOUT THE PLAY

1. Sharon says, "You set me up for this to get me to like you." Do you think Mr. Billings was "dishonest" in not telling Sharon his real name from the start? Why? Why do you think Sharon got angry when she finally learned his name? Would you have reacted in the same way? Explain.
2. Why did Sharon believe her mother should not remarry? Was Sharon being fair to her mother? Why?
3. How might the mother have convinced Sharon that remarrying would not mean she did not love her first husband? Do you think Sharon might be convinced by her mother? Why?
4. Write down three adjectives (descriptive words) to describe the personality of Mr. Billings and three describing Sharon.