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# MENACE OF ATOMIGEDDON

by Kurt Mahr

THE THREAT OF NUCLEAR ANNIHILATION URGENTLY INVOLVES—

**PERRY RHODAN**

Chief of the New Power

**Col. Michael Freyt**

Rhodan's deputy on Earth

**Maj. Conrad Ezekial Deringhouse**

He shows his skill as a secret agent & saboteur

**Capt. Jaroslaw Afimowich Welinski**

Commander of a Russian fighter squadron

**Fedor A. Strelnikow**

A new dictator

**Marshall Sirow**

Strelnikow's right hand man

**Frederick Donnifer**

Chief Justice of the World Tribunal

**Brig. Gen. Chandikarh, Maj. Gen. Pjotkin Maj. Kalenkin**

Involved in the threat of atom war

**Frunse**

A Georgian guard

**Lub**

A Russian policeman... or a Terranian in disguise?

**Nikolai**

A surprise disguise

...and the spaceships *Stardust* & *Wladislaw Kossygin*

THE FATE OF EARTH HANGS IN THE BALANCE... AND WHAT IF  
SOME MINDS ARE UNBALANCED?

PERRY RHODAN: Peacelord of the Universe

Series and characters created and directed by Karl-  
Herbert Scheer and Walter Ernsting

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# **Perry Rhodan**

**21**

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by Kurt Mahr

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DEDICATION

This American book  
is Perry Sincerely  
Dedicated to a Young  
Trooper named  
DAVID L. TROUP  
a Faithful Worker  
in the Not-So-Mute  
Corps of Earnestly  
Active Rhofans.

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## 1/ MYSTERY OF THE GREEN BLIP

Viewed from the *Wladislaw Kossygin*, the fleet looked like two strands of glistening pearls, carefully strung at precise intervals.

The fleet moved in the bright glare of the sun and the points of light the ships made on the observation screen of the *Kossygin* were more brilliant than the stars against the black background of space.

Maj. Gen. Pjotkin tried to restrain the feeling of pride that welled up in him at the sight. In truth the ships were more like plump, long-winged ducks in comparison to other vessels flying in space. After leaving the gravitational field of Earth they had just enough propulsive-ray mass left to perform a braking manoeuvre when they reached the orbit of Venus. The flight on the final distance of the trip had to be borne on wings and the success of the landing—the most difficult part of it—depended on their aerodynamic features. They had to figure with a probable loss of 5%. Ten ships would never reach the surface of Venus—or only as burning meteors. These were the predictions of the astronauts.

It could turn out to be worse, Pjotkin warily reflected, perhaps as much as 10% or more.

The fleet had the task of delivering reinforcements for Gen. Tomisenkow's Venus expedition. In the main, the supply consisted of steel since the vessels were in no condition to leave Venus again under their own power, having already exhausted their sources of thrust. They would be doomed to wait together with Tomisenkow's 500 ships until the next transport with a cargo replenishing their propulsive force arrived.

Pjotkin tried to figure out whether a fleet of 1000 ships would be enough to refurbish the fuel-mass of the 700 spaceships stranded on Venus, and if so, wouldn't the result be that 1000 ships would be stuck in the jungles of Venus instead of a mere 700?

60% of Pjotkin's crew were women and he wondered what the planners had in mind when they assembled his fleet with this ratio. The women were specialists such as physicians, technicians and biologists. Did they intend to set up a permanent base on Venus, a base that was independent of Terra in every respect, even biologically?

Had Pjotkin known that his mission was a matter of life or death for Tomisenkow and his expedition, he would undoubtedly have taken his task much more seriously. There was no radio communication between Venus and Earth due to the prevailing constellation as the sun stood between the two planets. Nobody on Earth knew that Tomisenkow's forces had already been pulverized by Perry Rhodan, the Chief of the New Power and Commander of the super spaceship *Stardust*, and that they were bereft of virtually all technical means of resistance.

\* \* \* \*

At this time the *Stardust* was on its way flying back to Earth. The machinery of the powerful spherical ship was revved up to high speeds and accelerated the *Stardust* in the span of a few

minutes within the range of relativity forces. The potent protective screen and impact fields surrounding the vessel helped to disintegrate all matter in space from cosmic dust to asteroid debris before they could endanger their safety.

Rhodan didn't particularly relish flying in this manner. Detection by microwave rangefinders over short distances became unfeasible at such speeds and the structure disturbance sensors which operated on hyper-gravitational principles had a lower limit of effectiveness at approximately one astronomic unit or about 150 million kilometres. Not that the structure sensors failed to function within such a radius but there was no advantage in using them under these circumstances because the microwave detectors furnished results almost as quickly and with more accuracy.

Consequently the *Stardust* was virtually travelling blind although nothing could happen to the ship itself because its protective screen guarded it with unfailing dependability. But woe to those who happened to cross its path!

\* \* \* \*

An ugly green blip emerged on the radar screen of the *Kossygin*. It had just appeared at the edge of the screen but before the radar officer reacted to it initially it had already traversed one quarter of the screen.

With a response practiced in his training a thousand times before, the officer slammed his hand down on the red alarm button of his console. Sirens shrilled through the intercom and the alarm was spread to the other 200 ships.

Pjotkin's voice blared from the loudspeaker.

"Radar! What's going on?"

"Unidentified object approaching our fleet. Velocity... oooh!... almost speed of light!"

The rangefinder technician could hear Pjotkin gasp. "Which units of our fleet are threatened? Talk fast, man!"

"The centre, sir!"

Pjotkin's voice sounded weaker as he turned to another mike. The radar officer heard him give the instant order. "Swerve to port at once with full power!"

The green blip had crossed almost half the radar screen and it relentlessly neared the centre point, the position of the observer.

The radar officer held his breath. If the correction didn't take effect immediately...

Two more seconds!

The man narrowed his eyes and gripped his console, waiting for the collision which was bound to occur.

There was no impact as he had expected but death struck in the form of a bright blue flash and the *Kossygin* was abruptly turned into a swarm of bursting molecules and atoms.

But the man watching the radar screen never noticed it. His death had come with the speed of light which spared him even the feeling of pain.

\* \* \* \*

The presence of the formation of vessels strung out in a double chain had been reported to Rhodan half a second before the end. His hand shot up to his ship's controls in an effort to perform an evasive manoeuvre. However it was merely an automatic reflex as he quickly realized. When he dropped his arm helplessly the *Stardust* had left the rows of the hostile fleet already far behind.



The *Stardust* braked its tremendous speed with maximal deceleration. Straining the limit of absorption by its neutralizers, it didn't come to a stop but reached a sufficiently low velocity within a minute to permit the optical observation of the battered enemy fleet.

The picture reflected on the optical screen of the *Stardust* was a scene of devastation. The double strand of glistening pearls which Maj. Gen. Pjotkin had admired so much only half an hour previously, was torn apart. The points of lights streaked away in all directions as the surviving units fled in panic but the hole created by the *Stardust* smashing through the centre of the formation was still clearly visible.

Rhodan ordered his radio officers to monitor the conversations between the ships. He had recognized their shape and knew that it was a fleet of the Eastern Bloc. Nevertheless he was prepared to give them his assistance if they should require it.

He studied the reports beamed by each unit of the fleet after they were automatically translated without delay from the Russian language into English. Rhodan learned that the fleet had consisted of 200 vessels of which 34 had been destroyed, including the flagship with Maj. Gen. Pjotkin. They had been transformed into a glowing cloud by the impact of the gigantic sphere's protective shield.

A colonel took over the remaining fleet and succeeded with difficult manoeuvres to reestablish a uniform front. However they had been compelled to use up a considerable quantity of their propulsive resources and it reduced their dim prospects of slowing down their velocity to a safe course when they reached the orbit of Venus.

The radar observers of the fleet had without exception recognized the cause of their disasters a few seconds before the annihilation occurred and they were able to see the green dot slowly moving away and retreating from their position. Rhodan listened to a great number of different guesses and explanations for the green blip but only one man surmised the truth that it was caused by a warship of the New Power and his opinion was quickly suppressed by the new commander of the fleet.

Rhodan understood his motivations. It would have intolerably complicated the task of the colonel had he admitted to his men that their adversary possessed ships that could cut a swath through a massive concentration of spaceships without the slightest damage to itself.

It became obvious that the surviving 166 ships were able to navigate without Rhodan's help. Their diminishing power didn't allow them to change their course on which they had started out: to Venus.

The *Stardust* left the convoy to its fate and resumed its trip again. Rhodan regretted the destruction of the 34 ships. He regretted it the more because the collision of the *Stardust* with the convoy of the Eastern Bloc had been due to an extraordinary accident. The probability that two objects, moving more or less arbitrarily through space, would meet each other head on was extremely remote—far less than the possibility of small stones hitting one another when thrown into the air by two persons.

## **2/ THE DAY THE (RED) EARTH STOOD STILL**

Moscow, 12th of June, 10 a.m. local time.

The General Staff of the Combined Forces of the Eastern Bloc has resolved that the date for the attack on the most important military and industrial installations of the other two power blocs and the New Power had to be set at one of the next days.

The conditions had never been as favourable as now. The Eastern Bloc had established a base on Venus. They had as yet failed to learn of Tomisenkow's pitiful fate. A huge fleet with bountiful supplies of reinforcement was on its way to Venus. Neither had they heard about the catastrophe which had befallen that fleet. Moreover, the New Power didn't seem to have become aware of the major political upheavals that had taken place or didn't care about these shifts which had caused the new course of the Eastern Bloc. Although they had feared during the first weeks an intervention by the government at Galacto City, it had never developed.

The reason was, presumably, that Perry Rhodan, the Chief of the New Power, was at this time neither on Earth nor anywhere in the vicinity. Indeed, Moscow had not the slightest inkling as to the whereabouts of Perry Rhodan.

The conference of the General Staff was held at the auditorium of a university. There was general agreement about the main strategy and the fact that only the details of its military execution had to be discussed, filled the Generals with the pleasant mood of anticipated victory.

A Bulgarian Marshall presented his thesis regarding the strategic encirclement of the Asiatic Federation when a staff officer appeared with a note in his hand, walking though not in haste but with a worried expression on his face. He approached Marshall Sirow who conducted the conference from the centre of the first row.

Sirow took the message and glanced at it. His neighbours saw him frown. Then he stared at the Bulgarian Marshall until the latter became disconcerted by his gaze. Sirow motioned him with his hand and stepped up to the lectern from where the professors normally dispensed their wisdom. Astonished, the Bulgarian willingly made room for him.

Sirow began without preliminaries. "I'll read you the reports which have arrived a few minutes ago at the Central Command from various parts of the country."

"Firstly: a meteorological observation station..." he made a significant pause in order to indicate that he alluded to a far more important installation by this code name, "...on the island Novaya Zemlya in the Arctic Ocean was demolished by a tornado and swept away at 9:38 a.m. Moscow time. The sole survivor found a radio that was still intact and sent the message. He reported that seconds before the sudden and totally unexpected storm the landscape turned dark as if the polar night had begun 4 months too early."

"Secondly: Novosibirsk, 8:51 a.m. Moscow time. The light of the sun seemed to be eclipsed by a dark shadow. The rocket base outside the city came under the influence of a peculiar phenomenon of weightlessness. Men floated away through the air and the launching ramps became disconnected from their foundations and rockets were carried away by a suddenly developing storm."

“Thirdly: Molotow, Ural, 9:44 a.m. Moscow time. An unidentified object darkened the sky temporarily and raised a cyclone of enormous magnitude. It left a one-kilometer-wide trail of scorched earth in its wake. All above ground mining and smelting installations of the ore collective were razed.”

Sirow paused again. He noticed with dubious satisfaction that he was not the only one to be shocked by the information. All faces in the auditorium looked terrified and troubled.

“The explanation for these incidents is probably contained in the fourth report,” Sirow continued in a harsh tone. “The radar station on the Taimyr Peninsula in Northern Siberia observed a spherical body, measuring about 800 meters in diameter, moving at various heights and directions but obviously guided by deliberate steering, across the territory of our union.”

“We all are familiar with the phenomenon of sudden interference with the gravitational forces from the days when the New Power set itself up in the Gobi Desert. Therefore we know who our opponent is. Although we don’t know all the weapons he is able to use, we’re ready to repulse our foe with all arms at our disposal.

“The time for debating has passed. Now we must take action!”

\* \* \* \*

Karaganda, 12th of June, 2:00 p.m. local time.

The planes of the 23rd Fighter Squadron had been alerted half an hour ago. The pilots had been warned of a huge hostile ship that was reported to roam the skies at will, creating confusion as well as raising havoc at its pleasure.

The fighter pilots sat in the open cockpits of their machines, waiting for the order to take off at the first sign of the enemy ship which seemed to move at extremely fast speeds. Their goal was the elimination of the intruder at all costs.

\* \* \* \*

Reginald Bell, Rhodan’s companion on his first expeditions to the Moon, steered the {italic on}Stardust{italic} manually according to the commands of Perry Rhodan. The picture screen of his console showed a relief map of the Earth’s northern hemisphere and Rhodan gave his directions by arrows and red points.

Rhodan made every effort to save human lives. He knew that only a few ambitious men had conspired to start the revolution in the Eastern Bloc which resulted in the reversal of the policy of detente sought by the other major powers. The more than 400 million people who inhabited the region were not responsible for the coup. Yet this was war and even the most humane of all soldiers was unable to spare each life.

Rhodan knew the places where the enemy was most vulnerable. He had his agents all over Terra and he had taken prisoners on Venus who were willing to reveal this information.

The *Stardust* had already obliterated a nuclear reactor station near Baku which generated the electricity for the military-industrial complex on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Now Rhodan moved the white arrow on the relief map to West Siberia and put a red dot on the city of Karaganda, causing Bell to change his course at once.

\* \* \* \*

“Enemy object approaching from 210!” the headphones crackled. “Altitude 13,000 meters. All machines go!”

Capt. Welinski, who was of Polish descent, pressed the button to close his cockpit and revved up his engine. The wheel blocks were pulled away and the machines began to roll. They quickly gained speed and lifted off long before they reached the end of the runway.

Welinski took over the command of his squadron. "Turn to 210. Altitude 18,000 meters!"

It wouldn't have been prudent for the pursuitships to attack a superior adversary at the same height or from below. Capt. Welinski considered the chances of his comrades to be vastly improved by attacking their target from 5,000 meters above.

The pursuit machines had two independent propulsion systems. One was a rocket engine which could be used from the start to gain the desired altitude in the shortest time. The other one was a commonly used turbo aggregate which was capable of reaching a velocity of Mach 4. The fighting machines were equipped with rockets as well as with automatic rapid-fire cannons. There would not have been a more efficient fighter on Earth—if the American astronaut hadn't met an alien race on the Moon who gave him the secrets of their advanced technology.

Nevertheless Capt. Welinski felt quite confident. He kept an eye on his squadron with its machines flying in a staggered formation and remained in constant communication with the ground command of the Air Force Group.

The ground command officer announced: "Chimney to all chimney sweeps! Chimney to all chimney sweeps! The enemy vessel is approaching from 210 to zero-30 at the speed of Mach 15. It will pass over the city in 50 seconds. You should be able to see it now. Attack without waiting for further instructions! Confirm order!"

Welinski replied: "Chimney sweep to chimney. Enemy in sight. We attack at once!" Then he urged his pilots: "Get ready, men, for a concerted attack!"

The first glimpse Welinski caught of his opponent was a flickering wall of fire shooting up at the horizon. At first it looked rather small and picturesque as a prairie fire seen from his height. However it grew with amazing rapidity. It seemed to rise from the ground and turn into a glaring sphere. Welinski had to use his dark goggles. "For heaven's sake!" he muttered. "They said it measures 800 meters. That thing looks at least 10 kilometres in diameter."

He didn't have time to think about it further. He saw the ball of fire race toward him and he assumed that it was the enemy itself or that he concealed himself inside the object. Welinski triggered all his rockets simultaneously but he was suddenly no longer convinced that his small missiles with the nuclear warheads could have any effect on the enormous fireball.

Then he pulled his machine upward, squeezing his eyes shut because the blinding light burned the retina of his eyes despite the protective filter. Welinski was luckier than any of his comrades: he managed to avoid the full force of the shield surrounding the *Stardust* and merely touched its fringes. However the impact was enough to shatter his plane but Welinski was catapulted a few hundred meters higher in his ejection seat. When he began to fall, the hot air inflated his parachute and the unconscious captain floated to the ground.

All the other machines swooped into the fireball and perished in the clouds of their exploding rockets which they had blasted at their target only a few seconds earlier.

The battle—if it was worthy of the name—lasted exactly 100 seconds from the arrival of the *Stardust* to the end when the 23rd Fighter Squadron had ceased to exist. There was only one slight exception: the survival of the comatose Capt. Welinski who had been lucky enough to be hurled far enough away from the scene of the disaster by the cyclone the *Stardust* had created to escape the radioactivity spreading out from the exploded nuclear warheads of the rockets.

Fate had spared one man to tell the tale of the unequal match to his superiors. But shortsighted as fate often can be, they would call Welinski a fool when he gave his account and send him to the psychiatrists.

Thus the portentous beginning for the doom of mankind was given more time to engulf the nations.

\* \* \* \*

Perry Rhodan had watched the attack of the fighter squadron in stony silence. He knew what would happen if the pilots failed to veer away before it was too late.

The *Stardust* moved at a speed 15 times faster than sound—5 kilometres per second. At such a speed the collision with the protective field whose diameter was 10 times greater than the vessel itself, caused the air molecules to radiate or become ionized. The result was the creation of a fireball almost 10 kilometres big whose sight Capt. Welinski would never forget as long as he lived.

The missiles of the fighter planes were detonated at the periphery of the defence shield and didn't even cause as much as the slightest ripple inside the sphere. But the pilots followed the path of their projectiles and killed themselves with their own weapons.

The *Stardust* maintained unerringly its course on Karaganda and Rhodan was prepared to use the occasion to deploy a psychological weapon for the first time.

\* \* \* \*

The high officers of the Airforce Base Karaganda-East had received the news of the total loss of the 23rd Fighter Squadron with terror stricken faces. What kind of an opponent were they up against?

The *Stardust* diminished its speed as it passed over the city. It raised a storm which was mild compared to those raging earlier on its way. The gusts reached a magnitude of 11 but did no damage to the city nor the base.

It was more peculiar that the mighty ship came to a halt east of the city and began to ascend vertically after a few seconds. At the altitude of 40 kilometres it stopped again and remained suspended, eclipsing the sun to the horror of Karaganda's citizens as well as the vexation of the officers at Karaganda-East.

"Bombardment," one of them suggested. "Hit it with all our defence rockets at once!"

The idea was rejected out of hand. In order for defence rockets to be effective they had to be equipped with nuclear warheads and to fire a salvo of at least 100 such missiles only 40 kilometres above the city seemed to be much too reckless to the commander of the base.

However Brig. Gen Chandikarh consented to shoot a single rocket at the *Stardust*. He instructed the technical staff to observe the effect of the explosion. "Perhaps we can arrive at some useful conclusion as to the best way how to tackle the monstrous warship," he said with circumspection.

The proposal was regarded as the most reasonable response and the launching of the rocket was prepared like a difficult experiment. The shot was planned to go off at 15:30 to give the technical staff enough time to set up its instruments.

"Check the height of the explosion and take pictures of it. Measure the light intensity and the radioactive fallout," Chandikarh ordered. "Then let me have your evaluation."

15:00 hours. Chandikarh and his officers sat in the mess hall and waited for the minutes to pass, drumming the table with their fingers. Although the *Stardust* had not moved from its spot in the meantime, Chandikarh was afraid that the vessel would resume its flight before he had a chance to go through with his experiment.

\* \* \* \*

At 15:03 Perry Rhodan issued his instructions to activate the big psycho-beamer whose vast

cone put the city of Karaganda and the base Karaganda-East under his hypnotic influence.

\* \* \* \*

At 15:03 Brig. Gen. Chandikarh began to doubt that his experiment made sense and he suddenly called off the attempt.

At 15:04 the officers of the technical staff shook their heads because they were unable to understand Chandikarh's indecision but at the same time they felt a certain relief that they were no longer required to attack the superior battleship.

At 15:04 Chandikarh explained to his officers: "Let's be sensible, gentlemen! What can we throw against such an enemy who has spread devastation and horror throughout the land—all this with a single ship as far as we can tell. What if they have 2 or 3 such ships? Or even a fleet of them?"

A young major interjected in a high voice. "We can count it on our 10 fingers, sir! We'll all be obliterated before we can fire the first shot."

Other officers voiced their approval and Chandikarh agreed. "Let's vote on a resolution," he proposed. "We, the entire officer corps of the Airbase Karaganda-East, submit that the Supreme Council of the Eastern Bloc cease at once all resistance and enter into negotiations with the enemy. Our experience has taught us that it would be irresponsible to continue resistance and thereby invite further retaliations. We've become convinced that the Supreme Council will share our opinion—however reluctantly—that we are facing an opponent who cannot be conquered with our present military methods."

Chandikarh received unanimous applause. He had worded the resolution rather mildly although his state of mind was extremely agitated. *Make peace with the New Power, you blockheads!* He would have liked to tell them. But he was not sure that his officers had changed their opinions as radically as himself and he therefore preferred to use a more polite formulation.

The text of the resolution became public knowledge in the city within half an hour and caused vociferous jubilation among the population. Chandikarh was surprised by the vehement reaction and overcame his reluctance to send the resolution to Moscow.

At 2:00 Moscow time the General Staff and the Supreme Council at the capital of the Eastern Bloc were informed of the opinion prevalent at Karaganda. Harsh words were bandied and the accusation of mutiny was raised. It was decided to disregard the resolution and to send several Secret Service agents to Karaganda.

Amazingly, nobody seemed to have grasped the seriousness of the situation. None of the responsible leaders denied that the opponent had superior technical means at his beck and call. But—so went the argument—a single enemy ship could be only at one place at a time and if the New Power believed it could force the Eastern Bloc, which was armed to its teeth, to its knees by letting a lonely spaceship cruise over its sovereign area, causing all sorts of tricks, it was badly mistaken.

\* \* \* \*

Perry Rhodan kept track of the events at Karaganda and Moscow to the full extent his surveillance instruments allowed. Nothing that happened there was a surprise to him. The change of mind that occurred in Karaganda was inevitable after the psycho-beamer raked the region of the city and the General Staff at Moscow wouldn't have been good soldiers if they had thrown in the towel already.

At 4:00 p.m. Karaganda-time Maj. Deringhouse, a lanky young man with great derring-do

and one of Rhodan's best—left the *Stardust* equipped with an Arkonide transportsuit and in full command of the Russian language acquired by hypno-training. The deflector field of the suit made Deringhouse invisible and the strong neutralization generator helped him descend smoothly to the ground. He dropped from the height of 40 kilometres to the ground in 20 minutes and sent back the arranged signal by hyperradio in order to avoid any unnecessary risk.

Then the *Stardust* started to move again and let the sun shine once more in the sky over the city after an hour-long interruption but not before the psycho-beamer had made sure that the change of mind experienced by the citizens and soldiers of Karaganda was permanent. Posthypnotic suggestion required only 40% more power than direct and instantaneous hypnotic commands.

The *Stardust* now embarked on its preliminary task: to deprive the enemy of its military might.

\* \* \* \*

The tone of Marshall Sirow's voice reflected no respect whatsoever and Fedor A. Strelnikow, member of the Supreme Council and First Secretary, who was entitled to such respect, didn't seem to miss it. The latest news was too peculiar for anyone to insist on etiquette.

"Karaganda, Schulba, Tschyrgaki, Irkutsk, Chita, Blagoyeshchensk," Strelnikow murmured in vexation. "Don't you notice something?"

Instead of an answer Marshall Sirow took a ruler and put it on the map. Connecting Karaganda and Blagoyeshchensk with a straight line, it became apparent that Schulba, Tschyrgaki, Irkutsk and Chita were either on this line or only a few kilometres away.

"The texts of the resolutions are almost identical," Strelnikow continued. "Cessation of armament, negotiation with the New Power and resumption of discussions with the governments of the other blocs with the goal of establishing a unified administration on Earth." He looked up from the note he held in his hand. "What do you think of it, Marshall?"

Sirow shrugged his shoulders.

"You must have derived some conjectures," Strelnikow insisted.

Sirow opened his mouth as if to say something. Then he closed it again with an angry gesture of his hand.

"What is it?" Strelnikow demanded.

Sirow pointed at the map. "It looks as if somebody flew along the route from Karaganda to Blagoyeshchensk and hypnotized all persons. That's the only explanation I can think of. Don't blame me if you think it's foolish but you insisted on hearing my opinion."

Strelnikow didn't scoff. "Do you believe," he asked hoarsely, "that our foe has such methods at his disposal that all he has to do is to fly once across our country to provoke a revolution of more than 400 million men within a few hours?"

"I'm forced to make this conclusion," Sirow replied, sweeping his hand across the map. In his mind he extended the line to the coast of the Tatar Straits between Sakhalin and the Siberian mainland. Which city was located on this extension? Komsomolsk!

Strelnikow followed Sirow's eyes. "You mean Komsomolsk?" he asked.

Sirow nodded and they remained silent for a minute.

The telephone rang. Sirow picked up the receiver and handed it to Strelnikow, who answered it and listened. Sirow heard a tinny telephone voice but was unable to understand a word. He saw that Strelnikow turned pale and his hand trembled when he put the receiver down. "You're wrong, Marshall," he said. "We didn't get a resolution demanding peace and negotiations from Komsomolsk."

"So...?"

“No. The troops and the people of Komsomolsk are in mutiny and have cut off the city from the rest of the nation!”

\* \* \* \*

On the evening of the same day the Supreme Council in Moscow adopted a decision to repulse the threat of the New Power with all means at hand.

With all means meant declaring war on the whole Earth.

Only in this manner could they hope to induce the gigantic spaceship, which drew a narrow strip of revolution and mutiny across the vast territory of the Eastern Bloc, to deviate from its plan. They wanted to divert its attention from the inner affairs of the Eastern Bloc by forcing the New Power to devote its efforts to the welfare of all mankind.

With all means meant the deployment of the latest, most terrible weapon the people on Earth had ever developed by their own invention—the catalytic fusion bomb.

Everybody still remembered clearly when Perry Rhodan took his first steps on the ladder to success by preventing another war on Terra. He had surrounded the entire globe with a neutron absorption shield which had soaked up the neutrons the uranium of the atom bombs were supposed to split. None of the atom bombs exploded nor any of the fusion bombs which were triggered by atom bombs.

The absorption shield presented no defence against catalytic bombs. The process of fusion required no neutrons and the trigger of the bomb was not based on the device of an atom bomb.

The Supreme Council voted unanimously to go to war. It had never adopted a resolution that had not been unanimous. The time for the attack was set for June 13th, midnight Moscow time. The Armed Forces were given 26 hours to prepare for the action.

The session of the Supreme Council and especially the measures it had taken were kept a strict secret. They were determined that nothing of the Supreme Council's intention could leak to the public until the last second before the war broke out.

\* \* \* \*

Strelnikow and his officers would have been much less confident had they known that the decision of the session had remained no secret. All speeches, objections and instructions in the conference room had been transmitted by mikes and loudspeakers. Nothing reached the outside but the electrical impulses created by the sound of the conversation were sent through the wiring of the room. The alternating current excited an electromagnetic field around the conductors and the impulses modulated the field. All it took was a receiver sensitive enough to pick up the modulated field several thousand kilometres away where it was even weaker than the atmospheric static. But it also required a knowledge where the field originated. Only then was the directional receiver in a position to suppress the static and to select from the manifold signals what was desired with the air of an interconnected combination.

Every one of the terrestrial radio technicians would have entered a bet that such a receiver could not be built. But they would have lost their bet. The *Stardust* had several of these efficient receivers and Rhodan was able to monitor every word spoken at the meeting. It was less clear than being present himself but it left not the slightest doubt about the abominable plot they hatched.

Rhodan was aware that the Eastern Bloc possessed catalytic fusion bombs against which the neutron absorption shield was ineffective and he could have exerted his hypnotic influence on the Supreme Council by leaving his present position in the southern Ural mountains had it not been for the fact that another tactic held a greater promise of more lasting effect.



\* \* \* \*

On the 13th of June—it was still the 12th on the Aleutian Islands—the whole world listened.

Perry Rhodan, Chief of the New Power, interrupted all radio and television programs and issued a proclamation to the people of Terra. He informed everybody who was concerned about the conspiracy of the Eastern Bloc. He assumed the protection of Terra against all attackers domestic as well as extraterrestrial in origin and he had a special surprise for Strelnikow and the others before he concluded his speech.

Strelnikow saw Rhodan's face move toward him on the picture screen. "Listen to me, Strelnikow," Rhodan said, "I want to tell you what I'm going to do tonight. If you and your people won't come to your senses before it's too late, I'm going to give you a little demonstration. This afternoon—between 12:00 & 12:30 Moscow time—I will paralyse all transport vehicles which function electrically or electronically. You have 90 minutes to prepare yourselves for it. You know what it entails. Order all airplanes which are in flight to be grounded and notify all hospitals to expect emergencies. It's up to you what you want to do. But you have now been warned what will happen to your rockets tonight. You'll be unable to launch them without electricity and they can't hit their targets. The catalysis won't work without electronic controls."

\* \* \* \*

Strelnikow took no further action. There was no point in doing anything. Everybody had heard the announcement or learned of the threat from third persons and they all knew what they had to do to prevent disasters.

The surgeons put away their operating tools before 12:00 o'clock. The drivers stopped their cars at the curb and all trains were halted as a precaution. People who had to go to one of the upper floors of high rise buildings preferred to use the stairs because they didn't feel like taking the risk of getting stuck at noon.

Strelnikow's intelligence refused to concede the possibility that Rhodan could actually accomplish the predicted feat but he kept looking at the stack of reports on the table before him.

The rebellion was spreading from Komsomolsk. The troops left their garrison and were received with open arms along the line Blagoyeshchensk-Komsomolsk. However when they tried to turn north or south of the line they met with resistance from the troops that had not been influenced by the psycho-beamer. Nevertheless, it was shocking in Strelnikow's opinion how quickly the insurgents gained ground in those areas too. It looked as if they were imbued by an irresistible spirit which the loyal regiments lacked altogether.

What was the compulsion they felt? Strelnikow wondered. What were they after?

He left the television on without listening to the program. Finally he got up and looked at the street from the window.

It was five minutes before 12. The traffic stood still and the pedestrians waited on the sidewalks for the miracle to happen. Fools, Strelnikow thought angrily. Even if the electricity failed, did they believe it was the end?

Strelnikow's mind worked furiously. He had to think of something. He was the man who was expected to know what would take place after Perry Rhodan's lecture.

The announcer broadcast: "At noon you will hear the bell of the Spassky Tower."

But nobody heard the signal. The screen went dark at the moment the tower appeared from the background of the Kremlin. Strelnikow stared grimly at the television set. "Never—!" he growled defiantly.

### 3/ MISSION TO MOSCOW

On the 14th of June, 9 a.m. local time, the *Stardust* landed at Galacto City, up to then the only New Power metropolis in the 40,000 square kilometre territory in the Gobi Desert.

The Eastern Bloc had given up its plans. Strelnikow had announced the renunciation about one hour after the electricity was cut off. The *Stardust* had remained over the enemy's territory some time for the purpose of determining how sincere Strelnikow's declaration turned out to be.

The night passed on the Asiatic continent without a single rocket being launched from its ramp. Peace had been preserved and Rhodan took all precautions that a surprise attack at a later time would be futile. All Terrans breathed easier again. People were grateful that Rhodan had returned in time and kept his promise of preventing war.

Col. Freyt, Deputy Chief at Galacto City, waited at the spaceport as the *Stardust* came in for the landing. The mass of spectators crowded the borders of the landing field.

Perry Rhodan left the gigantic ship, accompanied by Reginald Bell, his co-pilot, and the two Arkonides Khrest and Thora.

Freyt looked relieved but not particularly happy when Rhodan shook his hand. They got into Freyt's car and Rhodan inquired: "Anything wrong, Colonel?"

Freyt hesitated. The car had almost reached its destination when he finally got it off his chest. "I've been accused," he revealed, "of failing to recognize the political developments in the Eastern Bloc in time and frustrating them. The assumption is that this would have been in the realm of my possibilities and my critics don't understand why I neglected to take the necessary steps."

"Is that all?" Rhodan asked.

Freyt looked peeved. "It's bad enough, sir."

Rhodan was aware of Freyt's troubles since the time the *Stardust* had completed the transition from the artificial planet Wanderer beyond the orbit of Pluto. "I'll have to make a confession, Freyt," Rhodan finally replied. "Please believe me that I've acted with a good conscience."

Freyt gazed at him in astonishment. "I've never doubted it, sir."

"Wait a minute, Freyt. I hope you understand that I had to make absolutely sure that nobody would misuse the power of the government during my absence for unlawful reasons, be it to satisfy his ambition or whatever. Do you follow me?"

Freyt nodded. He began to see why his hands had been tied. He didn't like it particularly but he was objective enough to grant his commander the point.

"You had instructions," Rhodan continued, "to intervene in global politics only in case the New Power was threatened with an attack. I could not rely on it that you would comply with my orders under all circumstances. The pressures to which you were exposed in this city were much too great. You did not yet receive sufficient Arkonide hypno-training to assure me that I could depend only on giving you my orders. Therefore I was compelled to put you under a hypnotic block which bound you to my command. You were thus deterred from taking action against the

Eastern Bloc except when they encroached on our territory.” He put his hand on Freyt’s shoulder and looked at him earnestly. “I realized that you’d hold it against me, Freyt, but I had to do it. Next time it won’t be necessary and for the past 4 years the hypnoblock gives you a perfect alibi.” He smiled—to make an attempt at conciliation—and felt relieved that Col. Freyt smiled back.

\* \* \* \*

The city was a beehive of activity. Its population had grown to 800,000 persons during the past 4 years.

Col. Freyt had fostered the immigration of scientists and experts. He had supervised the building of manufacturing plants by the General Cosmic Company and the assembly of spaceships and fighter crafts constructed according to Arkonide methods.

By now the New Power had two heavy space cruisers available whose spheres measured 200 meters in diameter. There were two more cruisers that would be finished very shortly. The fleet of space fighters had grown to 10 squadrons. This armada of 1080 machines, capable of operating in outer space, was enough to assure the supremacy of the New Power on Earth.

The army consisted of 10,000 soldiers. They were equipped with Arkonide weapons and were doubtlessly the equivalent of a conventional army at least 20 times as large in numbers.

Rhodan perused Freyt’s reports. His trained mind required less than half an hour to digest the new data. Everything had followed his preconceived plans. “I don’t like to use grandiose language,” he told Col. Freyt, “but I have to admit you were a magnificent deputy. Thank you very much, Freyt!”

Freyt didn’t have time to enjoy the praise. Rhodan had more orders. “Notify the governments of the Power Blocs that...” he winked at Freyt, “how shall we put it? ...I would be happy to welcome their representatives at the earliest possible date at Galacto City.”

Freyt took notes.

“Emphasize *earliest!*” Rhodan recommended. “I have in mind tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. You might add that I consider the situation extremely serious despite the averted war and that the negotiations are considered indispensable.”

Freyt made a note of this as well.

“Furthermore I want you to assign a dependable man to the hyper-radio monitor. I wish to relieve the radio technician aboard the *Stardust*. The man has watched it for a long time. We didn’t arrange any specific time for Maj. Deringhouse’s calls. He can report whenever it’s convenient for him.”

“Deringhouse?” Freyt asked, amazed.

“Yes, Deringhouse. I’ve dropped him off over Karaganda. His mission is to facilitate the second phase of my plan. You know that the Eastern Bloc will be antagonistic as long as the present government remains in office.”

“Of course, sir.”

“Well... one of these days we’re going to put a stop to them and Deringhouse will smooth the way for their apprehension.”

Col. Freyt made a conscientious attempt to analyse the impression Rhodan’s words made on him. They were bound to make world history and made him realize the width of the gap that separated him from Rhodan. There had been times during the past 4½ years when he believed that he could handle the affairs of state as well as Perry Rhodan and that it was not such a great feat to rule the Earth with the tremendous might at his fingertips.

But he suddenly knew better. It was essential that one could judge how far one could go by using these means. A man in such an exposed position could not afford to break a promise. In a

word—it was necessary to play with 10 balls at the same time like a juggler to take advantage of the multitude of opportunities.

\* \* \* \*

A secret agent has to do many things that would be anathema to other people not only for moral reasons. On the other hand he is often not allowed to act in a way that seems perfectly normal to the average citizen.

Maj. Deringhouse wore an Arkonide transportsuit which could make him invisible if he so desired but it would also have attracted suspicion if he suddenly became visible. It was his intention to begin his work in Karaganda because it seemed to be the best place for his purpose since its inhabitants and soldiers were already put under post-hypnotic influence by Rhodan.

However he couldn't doubt that even men under such hypnotic sway would make the connection with the *Stardust* if a stranger in unusual clothes would suddenly appear among them. Therefore he considered it prudent to let a few hours lapse before he entered the city of Karaganda.

It would not have been too difficult for Rhodan to direct the citizens of Karaganda to receive an agent of the New Power with open arms. But such behaviour would have created so much consternation in Moscow that the Secret Service would have responded with the greatest caution and as a result Deringhouse's task would have been complicated unnecessarily.

Consequently Deringhouse landed unseen in the vicinity of the village Plachowskoje, about 120 kilometres away from Karaganda. As he looked around in the village—still in his state of invisibility—he had an experience which later made him think that fate had taken a hand that day to assist him and the New Power.

Plachowskoje looked like any other village in that district. Low houses lined the main street and there were hardly any side streets. It was surrounded by fields and shrouded in a mantle of dust which the big tractors and other machines constantly churned up.

Deringhouse figured that the town hall would be the best place to learn something about the mood of the population after the attack of the *Stardust* but he had a little trouble finding the building among the other houses. However he eventually recognized it when he saw a bulletin board with a note which read: *The Local Council meets tonight at 8:00 p.m.* It was written by hand and Deringhouse assumed that the meeting was called to discuss the events of the current day

The town hall contained two floors. Deringhouse walked around the building and saw an ambulance parked in the backyard. The sign on the vehicle indicated that it came from Uspenski, which puzzled him, considering that the much bigger city of Karaganda was only half as far away as Uspenski.

Deringhouse entered the house and looked around the first floor. He didn't hear any voices and he decided to open one of the doors in the hall. The door squeaked. Deringhouse looked into a bare room with one table. The young man who sat behind the table was startled and rubbed his sleepy eyes in embarrassment. When he didn't see anybody who had opened the door he didn't seem to worry about it. He sighed and sat down again, murmuring with relief. Deringhouse stepped back and left the door open. Let the man believe that the wind had opened the door. If he had closed it again the man might have become suspicious.

At this moment Deringhouse heard voices on the second floor. He ran up the stairs, disregarding the noise of his shoes as the voices were loud enough.

On the second floor was a smaller hall. The voices emanated from a room whose door stood open. A man in uniform and another who looked like a farmer were talking to each other. Deringhouse stopped outside the door.

“The Council wants to question the man at the meeting tonight,” the farmer said, “regardless of his condition. He has mentioned such inexplicable matters that we might have to inform the Secret Service.”

The man in uniform shrugged his shoulders. “I can tell you only that his physical and mental state is very poor. If you interrogate him tonight, he’ll probably collapse. But I won’t stop you if you think you have to go through with it.”

A physician, Deringhouse surmised. It must have been the man who had come in the ambulance from Uspenski.

“Thank you,” the farmer replied. He seemed relieved. “You could have caused me great difficulties. You understand...”

The physician waved his hand. “I understand. You and your village can put a feather in your caps if you expose an enemy of the state, capture him and turn him in to the Secret Service. Where did you get the idea that there’s something wrong with the man?”

The farmer related the story without hesitation. “Several men saw him come down in the field with a parachute and an ejection seat. He was still unconscious. But when we put him on the bed he opened his eyes. The first thing he said was: ‘Stop this nonsense! You can’t win this fight. The opponent is much too strong.’ ”

“I suppose he referred to the hostile spaceship which zoomed across our land?” the physician asked.

The farmer agreed. “He told us such confused things about a tremendous ball of fire and their fighter planes which had flown into their own exploding rockets. Is this possible? Anyone who says such things must be a saboteur or a traitor.”

The physician replied cautiously. “It will all be ascertained, I’m sure.”

After this Deringhouse lost interest in the conversation. Presumably they talked about a fighter pilot who had survived the attack of the *Stardust*. The man seemed to have drawn the only sensible conclusion from his experience and now was on his way to be delivered into the clutches of the Secret Service. Where was he?

Unnoticed by the two men talking behind the open door, Deringhouse proceeded to investigate a number of the other doors until he found a dark room in which he could hear some irregular breathing. The curtains were drawn behind the windows to keep the bright light out. Deringhouse closed the door behind him and waited till his eyes got used to the semi-darkness.

A simple army cot stood in one corner of the room and a man slept on it. He seemed to need the sleep badly. His face appeared to be sunken and scratched but he didn’t look unpleasant.

Deringhouse took a good look at his face so he would remember the man. Then he left the room as warily as he had entered it. He returned to the first floor and looked through the keyholes of the other doors. When he saw a larger room with many chairs and benches, he was satisfied that he had found the meeting hall of the Council.

He ended his investigation of the town hall and spent the time before the evening by stealing some food from the only store in the village and eating it with a drink of clear water from the fountain in the village square.

In ample time before 8 o’clock he returned to the meeting room and found himself a place on top of the lockers which lined the walls of the room. He was certain that nobody could bump into him up there.

The members of the Council were not very punctual. No more than two men had arrived at 8 o’clock and it was 8:20 until the last of the 14 delegates shuffled in.

The wounded man whom Deringhouse had seen in the afternoon was carried in on his army cot. His condition didn’t seem to have improved but he was awake and showed great interest. The Council members stared at him with undisguised curiosity until the man who had talked with the army physician that afternoon opened the meeting.

He came directly to the point. "This man," he explained, pointing to the wounded pilot, "is according to his knowledge the sole survivor of the 23rd Fighter Squadron which flew from Karaganda to attack the enemy spaceship. The statements he has made about the encounter are so peculiar that I consider it best if he repeats them before you. Then we can take a vote to express our opinions."

You idiot, Deringhouse thought. If you tell him he'll be careful to keep his opinions to himself.

The farmer, who obviously was the mayor of the village, turned to the injured man. "Begin your report!" he ordered. "State your name, rank and all important details. You are in the presence of the Plachowskoje Council and in our jurisdiction since you have landed on the soil of this village."

The sick man raised himself up on his elbow. It was plain to see how painful this was for him. "I am," he began in a weak voice, "Jaroslaw Afimowich Welinski, Captain and Squadron Leader of the 23rd Fighter Squadron stationed at Karaganda-East."

"At 2:15 in the afternoon my comrades and I rose from our base in order to attack the hostile spaceship which was approaching the city of Karaganda. The attempt failed and most of our planes—if not all—were destroyed."

He described minutely the fireball he had observed and how the fighter planes had become the victims of their own rockets. Then he concluded: "All this looked as if it were only child's play for the enemy. He didn't make any special effort to destroy our squadron. Without lifting a finger, the wall of fire surrounding his ship caused our rockets to explode and blow up our machines with them."

"It is my opinion that it would be irresponsible foolhardiness to conduct a war against such a superior foe. We have nothing equivalent to resist him with. It would make as much sense as if a little boy tried to stop a heavy armoured tank with his bare hand."

The protest broke out as suddenly and loudly as if it had been ordered. Welinski was insulted by invectives of which "Saboteur!" and "Traitor!" were the mildest.

Deringhouse admired his courage. It would have been much easier for Welinski if he had refrained from his drastic account of the events. Due to his thorough hypnotic training Deringhouse knew what the captain had to face: denunciation to the Secret Service and arrest for a merciless interrogation.

Deringhouse made a firm decision. But first he wanted to find out what would happen next.

The chairman of the Council presented the resolution everybody had expected: inform the Secret Service. Welinski didn't protest. To the end he answered each question quietly and to the point but after an hour and a half his strength failed him and he fainted on his bed.

He was carried out and the chairman of the Council picked up the phone to submit his report. Deringhouse gathered from the conversation that he informed the Secret Service at Akmolinsk and not the office at Karaganda.

Apparently the peasants of Plachowskoje had already heard that the spirit of revolution had won at Karaganda after the *Stardust* had spent an hour above the city, but the village had remained loyal up to now.

\* \* \* \*

Shortly before midnight the clatter of a jetcopter interrupted the quiet of the broad plain. A dimly-lit craft descended from the cloudy sky and landed on the street at the entrance to the village.

The mayor and two other members of the Council as well as two peasants, who carried Welinski on his cot, met the helicopter. Welinski was awake.

Deringhouse stood invisibly at the side of the street and observed the scene. He tried to find out how the young captain felt but Welinski remained motionless.

The helicopter had a large cargo space and Deringhouse had no trouble slipping in unnoticed and sitting down next to Welinski's bed. He heard the men talk for a few more minutes. Then the jets began to whine again and the machine quickly lifted off with rotating blades.

So far so good, Deringhouse mused. He had intended to go first to Karaganda but now the wagon had turned around and he wondered whether this was auspicious. After reflecting on his situation he came to the conclusion that it really didn't matter very much where he started his job. Eventually he had to go to Moscow in any case and it made little difference whether he took off for his trip from Karaganda or Akmolinsk.

The flight to Akmolinsk took only half an hour. Welinski had fallen asleep despite the noise made by the helicopter. He awakened when his bed was pushed out of the cargo hatch.

Deringhouse followed behind the bed and had his first accident. The hatch of the cargo platform was about 1½ meters above the ground. He figured it was safe to jump to the ground as the people who waited for the helicopter talked very loudly. However he failed to see that the hatch opening had a small bracket at the bottom and as he jumped his foot was caught by it. He fell forward and hit the shoulder of the man standing next to the craft.

This created considerable confusion. The man was thrown down by the impact and knocked over a couple of other men. Everybody turned around and drew his gun. Deringhouse could see their hard but puzzled faces in the floodlight of the landing field.

"What was it?" one of them asked.

"Somebody jumped on my back," answered the man with whom Deringhouse had collided.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed a third one. "There's nobody!"

"But I'm telling you..." The man cautiously walked to the hatch and peered into the cargo compartment which was dark. "Anybody in there?" he asked in a loud voice. "Come out!"

There was no answer. Deringhouse was already back on his feet and stood near the cockpit of the machine. He noticed that Welinski watched the scene attentively.

"I told you nobody is in there," one of the men standing around repeated.

The man at the hatch couldn't be deterred. Deringhouse had to admit that he was a brave fellow. Without hesitating he climbed into the cargo compartment and searched it. When he emerged again he was even more baffled than before. "Really nobody," he muttered and the others laughed at him.

They picked up Welinski's stretcher and carried him away. But the man on whose shoulder Deringhouse had landed looked back at the helicopter with a suspicious face more than once.

\* \* \* \*

Welinski spent a restless night. They had put his bed in a small, musty-smelling room in the airfield barracks. Nobody paid any further attention to him and he used the time to sleep.

At about 7 o'clock he was given a good breakfast and asked if he was strong enough to get up. He tried it and succeeded although colourful rings began to dance before his eyes after five minutes.

He was led through a corridor to another room of the barracks where a major sat behind a desk. Welinski saluted and the major acknowledged his greeting. Then the two men, who had accompanied Welinski, left the room.

"Sit down," the major invited him. "I can see that you are still a little shaky on your legs."

Welinski sat down and was astonished by the unexpected friendliness.

"You'll have to tell me the whole story again," the major smiled. "I've got the report from

Plachowskoje but I can't make head or tails of it."

Welinski related his story once more. It was the third time he had recounted his experience exactly as it had happened.

The major listened attentively and when Welinski had finished he asked: "Well then...?"

Welinski was flabbergasted. "In Plachowskoje," he explained, "I was marked as a traitor and saboteur and they handed me over to the Secret Service."

This seemed to amuse the major. "Good heavens," he laughed. "If I had witnessed what you did, I would have acted the same way. What does it have to do with sabotage or high treason?"

Welinski didn't trust his ears. "Are you serious?" he asked dubiously and leaned forward.

The major nodded. "Completely."

"Then I can fly back to Karaganda?"

"No. I can't let you do that."

Welinski became frightened. They seemed to have something up their sleeves—

"Your case has gained a certain notoriety," the major continued. "The Supreme Council has sent me a very trustworthy man who has orders to take you to Moscow. The Supreme Council requests you to present your report in person at a secret session—as a free man, of course. We have no reason to suspect you of high treason, sabotage or defeatism."

Welinski's ears began to ring. He could hardly hear the question: "Is it alright with you?"

And he stammered: "Yes... yes, of course!"

The major filled out a form and handed it to Welinski across the table. "Take this and go to room #25 in barrack C. The man who will take you to Moscow is waiting for you there. Show him this note. Have a good trip!"

Welinski thanked him, still bewildered, and left. Suddenly he forgot all about his weakness and he was anxious to see the man with whom who was supposed to travel to Moscow.

He walked to barrack C and found room #25 at the end of the corridor. He knocked and somebody said: "Come in!"

Welinski entered. There was a table and a chair in the room. The first thing he noticed were the cleated soles of a pair of boots on the table. He took a step to the side and saw the legs in those boots and then the man to whom the legs belonged.

He looked quite different from Welinski's notion of how an official sent by the Supreme Council looked. He was obviously less than 30 years old. His blond hair was cut like a brush and his eyes were shining blue.

The strangest thing about the man was his outfit. He wore a suit which seemed to be put together with pieces of diver-, mountaineer- and sapper-uniforms. Welinski had never seen anything like it. He gazed with a little awe at the weapons he carried in holsters at his hip and pockets on his thighs.

"Are you done with your inspection?" the man asked, taking his feet off the table.

Welinski remembered his manners. He stood erect and saluted. The man, who was almost two meters tall, waved his hand before he could state his name. "I know all about you. Jaroslaw Afimowich Welinski, Captain of the 23rd Fighter Squadron, Karaganda-East. Correct?"

"Exactly," Welinski answered, astonished.

"I am Lub," said the blond man. "Please notice I didn't say my name is Lub. I forgot my real name. The people who matter know me as Lub and you can use this handle."

"Yes sir," Welinski replied.

"We'll take the next train to Moscow," Lub continued.

"May I ask you a question?"

"Certainly!"

"Why don't we fly? It would be so much quicker."



Lub grinned. "Bright idea! But we'll take the train."

Welinski formed his opinion rather quickly. He had never met a man who was as easy-going and tightlipped at the same time. It wouldn't be easy to pry something out of him he had no intention of revealing. Nevertheless, Welinski took an immediate liking to the man.

Lub soon left the airport and Welinski followed him. Everybody seemed to know Lub since none of the guards asked for his identification.

At 10 o'clock they boarded one of the modern electric trains of the Trans-Siberian Railway, going over Magnitogorsk and Kuybyshev to Moscow.

"This is more convenient," Lub declared curtly. "I've reserved a compartment and you can sleep on the way."

But this wasn't what Welinski felt like doing at the moment. As the train rolled at more than 300 kilometres per hour through the land, Welinski continued to study Lub. When he saw that Lub noticed his curiosity, he forestalled a mocking remark by the question: "What kind of a suit are you wearing?"

Lub chuckled. "A special suit," he replied. "It protects against bullets and other unpleasant objects. It can also perform a lot of other tricks. I'll tell you all about it when we have an occasion."

Apparently he wanted to evade further questions since he turned on the television set with which each compartment was furnished. The show was dull until the moment Perry Rhodan broke into the terrestrial television network with his warning to the government of the Eastern Bloc.

Welinski watched the announcement with bated breath whereas Lub leaned back in his corner and acted as if he was bored by it all. When Rhodan had concluded his speech and the old program came back on the screen again, Welinski exclaimed: "I wonder if Strelnikow has learned his lesson and is ready to give in?"

Lub shrugged his shoulders. "How should I know?"

Welinski waxed excited. "Doesn't this bother you at all? I thought that everybody would worry about whether it makes sense to oppose such an adversary or if it wouldn't be better to seek a compromise to save our homeland."

Lub shook his head. "I never rack my brains about such things on general principle."

Welinski considered this attitude incredible but preferred to save his breath.

At about half past eleven the train stopped at Atbassar, a little town which was not scheduled as a regular stop. Lub grinned. "Do you know why we are stopping here?" he asked Welinski.

"I guess the engineer doesn't want to get caught out in nowhere without electricity," the captain replied.

Lub agreed and said: "Come on, let's go out."

Welinski was startled. "Why?"

"I'll explain it to you later."

Welinski consented. As they left the train they were confronted by a conductor. "You can't get off here. This is not a regular stop. You have to stay on the train."

"To hell with that," Lub growled. "I want to stretch my legs."

The conductor didn't object any further and Lub walked with Welinski along the sandy railway embankment. They looked at the tiny railway station and walked behind it.

"I want you to stay right here," Lub suddenly ordered. "I'll be back in a minute."

Welinski obeyed. Lub walked around to the front of the station again and returned after two minutes. "It's alright," he smiled. "We can go."

"Where?" Welinski asked, amazed.

Lub pointed to the flat roofs of the town which were discernible in the haze of the plain.

“Over there. I love to take advantage of accidental breaks like this. I don’t know much about this part of the country and I would like to visit Atbassar.”

“Will we be back in time?” Welinski voiced his concern.

Lub shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know.”

They took off without making an attempt at concealing their departure. Nobody, not even the eager conductor, tried to hold them back which further puzzled Welinski.

Atbassar was about 6 kilometres away from the station. Before they had covered half the distance on the rough, dusty road, they heard the sound of an airplane coming from the east. Lub raised his arm and looked at his watch. Welinski noticed that he shuddered. “That imbecile!” Lub muttered, gnashing his teeth. “Why didn’t he land?”

They stood still. Welinski didn’t realize at first what was wrong with the airplane but he suddenly became aware of it when Lub’s watch moved to 12 on the dot. The jets lost their powerful tone from one moment to the next as the ignition failed. The roar became a whine and ended in a plaintive whistle. In one minute the machine changed from a glistening speck in the blue sky to a big grey blob.

“The plane is going to crash!” Welinski gasped.

Lub didn’t answer. The plane kept moving toward Atbassar. The narrow wings, designed for high speed, ceased to support the plane. The path of its crash resembled that of a stone thrown in a flat curve. The end was a blinding jet of flame far beyond Atbassar and the bang of an explosion which rolled across the land a few seconds later.

Welinski’s knees trembled when they resumed their march. At about half past 12 they approached the entrance to the town and Lub suggested: “Better wait here. I want to look around first.”

Welinski felt too depressed to object. He sat down at the side of the road and began to wait as Lub walked on. Welinski was only once roused from his brooding, namely at 12:30 when he heard a column of motorized vehicles start their engines. A team of rescuers and curiosity seekers drove in the direction of the crash site to check the plane and bring aid if necessary.

Welinski didn’t think Lub would find anybody who had remained in town after the accident he had witnessed with the greatest dismay. But 20 minutes later Lub returned behind the wheel of a chugging motorized bug which had become popular with the peasants during the past few years. He beamed as if he had pulled off a good deal. “Hop in!” he said.

Welinski got in and sat down next to him. “Where did you get this thing?” he inquired.

“I bought it,” Lub laughed.

“And where are you going with it?”

“To Kosgorodok.”

Welinski gasped. “What do you want in Kosgorodok? I thought I was supposed to go to Moscow with you.”

“I know it’s getting a little complicated for you,” Lub admitted. “But let’s make an agreement. I will explain everything to you in Kosgorodok if you promise me not to ask anymore of your probing questions.”

“It’s a deal,” Welinski said after mulling it over awhile.

Lub claimed that Kosgorodok was a little more than 200 kilometres away from Atbassar and that they would reach it late in the afternoon—providing their car held up.

## 4/ PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE SUPREME

Col. Freyt called and Rhodan made him come in at once.

“The governments of the Asiatic Federation and the NATO Bloc have accepted our invitation, sir,” Freyt reported. “The Eastern Bloc has neither answered nor confirmed our note.”

“This was to be expected,” Rhodan replied. “In that case the three of us will hold the conference. Has a time been set?”

“Yes sir. The day after tomorrow, June 16th, 14 hours local time.”

“Very good. Did you agree?”

“Of course, sir. I suggested the date myself.”

Rhodan raised his eyebrows in amusement. “And? No squawks?”

“None, sir.” Freyt smiled.

“This reflects favourably on their esteem.”

Freyt left the room and Rhodan began to ponder the situation. What bothered him most about the present state of politics on Earth was not so much the shenanigans of the Eastern Bloc as such. The New Power had the means of technical and psychological warfare to snuff out these intrigues within a few hours if necessary. The deeper reason for his concern was the immaturity of the human beings which found expression in the behaviour of the Eastern Bloc.

Rhodan was not a man to be carried away by his illusions. He had firmly hoped that he could open the eyes of mankind by disseminating widely all information of the events taking place in this sector of the Galaxy throughout the nations of Earth after establishing the state of the New Power in defiance of the prevailing hostilities and strife. He had been convinced he could transform the divided people into *Terrans* in a short time by demonstrating the true facts of the universe—into beings who could regard their terrestrial home as what it really was: a speck of dust amidst myriads of other specks. He dreamed of ingraining this cosmic thought so deeply into their flesh and blood that they would come to consider their jealous quarrels on their tiny abode as too trivial and ridiculous to be worth fighting over.

What had happened to his fondest hopes?

On his first flight to the Moon Rhodan had encountered the representatives of human beings from another world. They called it Arkon and it was 34000 light-years from Terra. They had landed on the Moon in the course of a research mission. The scientific leader of the expedition, Khrest, suffered from leukaemia and Rhodan had used his chance to induce him to come to Earth with him by promising him a cure. Upon his return to Terra he landed near the Goshun Saltsea in the Gobi Desert, which was destined to become the centre of the New Power.

Khrest was cured and showed his gratitude by sharing his knowledge of Arkonide technology with Rhodan, thus enabling him to survive against the hostile power blocs dominating the Earth and secure his new little state.

The commander of the research space cruiser was a woman—Thora. She was the most beautiful and exciting creature Rhodan had ever seen. She considered the inhabitants of Terra to be half-savages and treated them accordingly. Nevertheless, these primitive people succeeded in destroying the Arkonide spaceship in a monumental tour de force without Rhodan's knowledge. Thora happened to be absent from her spaceship at the time of the disaster and Khrest was Rhodan's guest on Terra. Thora and Khrest were the only two Arkonides who survived the catastrophe but they managed to salvage one important product of their civilization, a spherical auxiliary spaceship, measuring 60 meters in diameter, which—alas—was not suited for a trip to return home to Arkon.

Thus Thora and Khrest depended on cooperating with the people on Earth. They needed a spaceship for the long trip home and Rhodan set up the General Cosmic Company with the mutant Homer G. Adams as head in order to build the desired spacecraft for the Arkonides.

Dangerous troubles cropped up. Some for the New Power and between several antagonistic rivals and others for the whole Earth after extraterrestrial intelligent beings had found the wreck of the destroyed research cruiser and were attracted by the expectation of rich and easy loot.

Yet the defenders of Terra had remained victorious in their struggles. They were even able to assist a desperate race living in the Vega system, 27 light-years away from Terra, against non-humanoid invaders. At the successful conclusion of that battle they had discovered a clue to the mysterious world which had been the original goal of the Arkonide research expedition.

A person, mighty and unknown, played his cosmic games with them, catching them in traps and freeing them again in a test to prove the worthiness of human beings to take over his heritage.

They finally succeeded in discovering the world of the unknown being and called it Wanderer. It was a synthetic planet which moved in an artificial orbit around more than a dozen stellar systems in the course of centuries. They met the unknown being *Itself* and *It* revealed the secret of eternal life to *Its* new friends. But they also learned that eternal life was given only to Rhodan and those human beings whom *It* trusted.

The time on the clock of Galactic history had already run its course for the Arkonides. Consequently they were not granted the gift of eternal life. Khrest and Thora had found the world they had set out to locate but were unable to gain the benefit they had hoped.

Rhodan and the Terrans were the men of the future!

And then, Rhodan thought bitterly, they had come home to Earth from Wanderer after they had been absent, according to their own chronology, only a few months. However 4½ years had passed on Terra during their visit to Wanderer where time was measured on a different scale. During these 4½ years some ambitious men had begun to believe that Rhodan would never return to Earth again to call them to account for their political machinations.

The Asiatic Federation and the NATO Bloc continued to follow their adopted line of international cooperation. But the Eastern Bloc had suffered a revolution which had swept the wrong people to the top of the heap. Since then squabbling had broken out once more and they had come within a hair of another war.

Rhodan got up and looked out the window at the green expanse of the city. Man-made rain had created a beautiful garden in the midst of the barren desert. He would have to teach his brethren on Earth that they had to obey him until they had gained the mental maturity to fulfil the task of mankind!

\* \* \* \*

When they reached Kosgorodok, which was a village situated at the border of a glistening saltsea, Lub and Welinski occupied an empty hut at its outer edge. Nobody paid attention to them since their arrival had apparently not been noticed.

Again Lub asked Welinski to wait while he went into the village. This time Welinski had to wait longer than before and it was already dark when Lub returned. Welinski was frightened when he saw in the dim light of the open door that a second man accompanied Lub. It puzzled him why he was frightened. After all, he didn't have a bad conscience.

There was no electric light in the hut but Lub had brought a candle. He lit it and put it on the hard clay floor. Welinski now could see that the other man wore a policeman's uniform, which alarmed him even more.

Lub had also brought some grub, a loaf of pleasant smelling brown bread and a variety of sausages. He put everything on the floor and said: "We'll eat later. First we want to listen to what this man can tell us."

They sat down around the candle and the policeman began to speak without being coaxed. "The peasants of Plachowskoje have caught a saboteur and defeatist whom they delivered to the Secret Service at Akmolinsk from where the prisoner has disappeared under mysterious circumstances. A man showed up who persuaded the major in charge of the local office in an inexplicable manner that he was sent from Moscow with orders to pick up the prisoner. The major handed the detained suspect to the man from Moscow but was later unable, to give a satisfactory explanation why he had done so. Moreover he refused to admit that the prisoner was indeed a defeatist but was at a loss to explain his opinion."

"Under these circumstances," the policeman explained, "another strange incident assumes importance. The prisoner was taken from Plachowskoje to Akmolinsk in a helicopter. He was injured and lay on a stretcher. When he was carried out of the cargo compartment, one of our men was knocked to the ground. He claimed somebody jumped on his back but nobody saw the person and he was not found up to now.

"Other Secret Service agents were ordered to track down the unknown person and the saboteur who had left Akmolinsk on the Trans-Siberian Express going to Moscow. The train stopped at Atbassar because of the warning Rhodan had broadcast about the interruption of electricity. The conductor and the station attendant both steadfastly maintain that nobody left the train during the stop but several travellers stated they had seen two men walking in the direction of the village of Atbassar, one of whom was clad in a most unusual garb.

"This was the last anybody heard of them. They didn't seem to have stopped at Atbassar and the search is on for them in the whole country."

The policeman got up without being requested. He turned around, opened the door and walked out into the dark night, shutting the door behind him.

It had not escaped Welinski that the man moved in a peculiarly wooden fashion. He sensed that Lub gazed at him and turned his head.

"Well?" Lub inquired.

"This is... this is..." Welinski stammered.

"Well, what is it?" Lub asked patiently.

"You're doing this to intimidate me," Welinski exploded. "I've had a feeling from the beginning that you aren't the man you pretend to be. You want to keep me from doing my duty! You are the saboteur, not I! A traitor to..."

Lub waved his hand but failed to show any anger. "Cut out this blabbering," he said quietly. "Do you think I bribed the policeman to make up this story?"

"Yes, and..."

"Then go to the village! There are two policemen in Kosgorodok. Go to the other one and tell him who you are. Perhaps he's even smart enough to recognize you without your introduction. Then see what happens to you!"

Welinski got up. "I'll do just that," he declared firmly. "And the next thing I'll do is send

someone to take care of you.”

Lub laughed heartily. “You fool!”

Welinski walked out. He cooled off after taking a few steps in the darkness. What reason did he have to mistrust Lub? What if the policeman had spoken the truth? After all, he himself was immensely surprised by the turn of events at Akmolinsk. There were a lot of other questions which could only be clarified by Lub. Did he also bribe the major at Akmolinsk? Nonsense, a major can't be bought that easily. But...?

Welinski turned on his heel and went back to the hut. Before Lub could make a sarcastic remark, he spluttered: “Alright... I'm back. This ought to make you feel good. But I promise you that I'll go immediately to the police—regardless of what happens to me—if you can't give me a good explanation of the events since this morning.”

“Spoken like a true patriot!” Lub replied, looking up at him. “I've promised you I'd tell you everything at Kosgorodok, didn't I? Perhaps you won't like what I have to say... but think about it and use your head instead of your emotions. Sit down!”

Welinski complied.

“To begin at the beginning,” Lub enlightened him, my real name is Conrad Ezekial Deringhouse...”

\* \* \* \*

Strelnikow proved his ability to adjust to new situations—if not his political savvy—by issuing his instructions to the Supreme Council in the early morning hours of June 15th. He had come to realize that it would be fatal to underestimate the enemy and he acted accordingly. He forbade meetings of the Council with an attendance of more than 100 members. This was less than one-third of the total. In this manner he prevented Rhodan from subjugating the entire Council at one and the same time by his inexplicable hypnotic powers or whatever he used. The presence of one-third of all members was required to initiate a debate on any problem and Rhodan would be frustrated in accomplishing even this.

Strelnikow didn't leave the slightest doubt that he arrogated dictatorial measures. He gave the orders and the Supreme Council was given no choice but to take them.

He dispatched three divisions to Komsomolsk to suppress the local rebellion.

And he took one further step: after studying the weird reports concerning the abduction of an Air Force captain at Akmolinsk and the involvement of a suspicious stranger who had come from nowhere and could not be identified, he was almost certain that he was one of Rhodan's agents and he moved heaven and earth to seize him. He knew that Rhodan was extremely concerned about the welfare of his men and that the captured agent would be a prize of utmost value.

From all he had heard about the agent, Strelnikow had to take into consideration that the man apparently was able to impose his will on others and that he had the capability of making himself invisible. At first Strelnikow was inclined to consider these claims as hogwash but these observations were repeated in every instance relating to the stranger and so he was finally compelled to admit that no other conclusion was possible.

Since then all police and Secret Service personnel had been instructed to keep their eyes open for Capt. Welinski and to watch him until the mystery man contacted him. They all were cautioned against making a frontal attack on the unknown man.

What Strelnikow failed to realize was that all his measures—from prohibiting full sessions of the Supreme Council to launching the pursuit of Capt. Welinski—were exactly the very same Rhodan and Deringhouse expected him to take.

This was psychological warfare at its best.

\* \* \* \*

After a thorough discussion Deringhouse simply announced: "If you still feel any inclination to run away and denounce me to the police, I'll soon get you again by the scruff of your neck. Do we understand each other?"

However the threat was hardly necessary. Deringhouse had described his mission and his opinions very frankly and disdained using other means to influence Welinski's judgment.

Welinski was convinced of Deringhouse's sincerity and the plan he had proposed seemed to make sense and could be justified by his own patriotic morals.

As a result they left Kosgorodok together and travelled west by automobile, train and stolen helicopter.

On the 17th of June they arrived at Magnitogorsk, which was about halfway between Akmolinsk and Moscow. At Magnitogorsk, Deringhouse decided to embark on an extracurricular project. He assumed that the responsible officials already knew or expected him to pass through the city and he figured he should give them another nut to crack.

Magnitogorsk was connected to Bajmak by a one-track railroad leading about 100 kilometres to the south. Bajmak was a godforsaken village in the boondocks and if somebody asked about it nobody knew why they had gone to the trouble of building a railroad to the hamlet.

Not so Deringhouse and a few other people whose business it was to know. From Bajmak came the richest uranium ore on Earth. There were rumours of pure uranium veins in the shafts of the mine. It was quite understandable that the government kept the mine a secret from everybody else. The public was made to believe that Bajmak mined only some modest deposits of zinc.

Deringhouse and Welinski bought tickets and took the train to Bajmak. About halfway to their destination their train was sidlined to let a long train loaded with ore pass. Deringhouse studied attentively the canvas covered freight cars when Welinski suddenly tugged at his sleeve. "There!" he whispered along the corridor of their car.

It was possible to see the whole length of the train through the windows in the doors at the end of each car and Deringhouse spotted a man in uniform two cars in front of him who seemed to be busy checking the occupants of the train compartments. He turned around and saw a second policeman in the car behind him. He opened a window and looked both ways along the train. A third guard stood at the locomotive and a fourth at the rear end.

"We are trapped," Welinski murmured. It didn't look good to him. Deringhouse was much too conspicuous in his suit and even if he made himself invisible, he, Welinski, couldn't show a pass which authorized him to travel to Bajmak. Furthermore, every policeman in the country was bound to recognize his face by now.

But Deringhouse didn't lose his cool. They sat in the third car behind the locomotive. Welinski saw that Deringhouse held the weapon he called a psycho-beamer in readiness and put one hand in his pocket.

The compartment was only occupied by three workers who sat next to the door and dozed. The policeman woke them up and asked for their papers. They showed their passes and the guard approached Deringhouse and Welinski.

"We don't have any," Deringhouse replied to his demand.

The guard was astonished and insisted. "But you must have identification papers. Come on, let me see them!"

Deringhouse shrugged his shoulders. "I haven't got any papers, neither does my friend."

The policeman narrowed his eyes and frowned. "Tell me, what kind of an outfit are you wearing?"

Deringhouse looked down at his clothes and replied: "It's a mountaineer suit. I just bought it."

"And what's your name?"

"Lub."

"Your full name!"

"Lub. That's all."

"And your friend?"

Deringhouse left it up to Welinski to answer the question and Welinski acted the way he had expected. He was disconcerted and took a suspiciously long time to think up a name. Finally he came up with the name Popoff, which is as common in Russia as Smith in the United States.

The policeman suddenly realized on whom he had stumbled. "Aha!" he exclaimed. "Wait a moment, you rascals! Stay where you are!"

He quickly stepped to the window and turned it down. Then he blew his whistle, loud and shrill. His signal was answered from both ends of the train.

The policeman who had controlled the forward section of the train had already left the train after checking the second car.

Deringhouse set his psycho-beamer and pulled the trigger. In utmost concentration he formulated an order and relaxed only when he noticed that the train started with a slight jolt.

The policeman shouted something to his colleagues. Before the guard became aware that the train started moving, Deringhouse stepped behind his back, grabbed him by his knees and lifted him out of the window. As yet the train barely moved so that the man fell to the ground without being endangered by speed.

It took the other policemen too long to catch on to what had happened. By that time the train had gathered too much speed for them to get on and all they could do was shake their fists and shout. Deringhouse laughed with gusto. He had no trouble calming the three workers with his psycho-beamer. Then he turned to Welinski.

"Next time," Welinski complained, "you better tell me first what you are going to do so that I can prepare myself for it."

Deringhouse smiled. "You were perfect! You really behaved as though you were caught in something."

"The people in Bajmak will know in two minutes that we are on our way. What then?"

"I want them to know it," Deringhouse replied. "That's just what I tried to do."

Welinski was mystified but Deringhouse offered no further explanation. Instead he said: "The only risk I took concerned my doubts whether it would be possible to influence the locomotive engineer without being able to see him. But it worked as you can see for yourself!"

\* \* \* \*

Thora announced her visit to Rhodan, something which she never before had considered to be necessary. During the minute Thora took from the announcement to reach Rhodan's office, he reflected on the severity of the shock she must have suffered on the planet Wanderer to cause her to suddenly observe human etiquette.

She paused at the door, tall and erect. She was beautiful—breathtakingly beautiful—with her whiteblond hair and strange, reddish shimmering eyes but she still showed traces of her disappointing experience on Wanderer.

He asked her to sit down. "I'm glad to see you," he said in a friendly tone. "It's been too long since you have visited me."

She raised her eyebrows. "It takes time to get over such a shock," she replied and Rhodan



was relieved to detect a hint of self-mockery in her voice.

She sat down, facing him. "I came for selfish reasons," she admitted. "I wanted to hear what's going on in the world so I can forget my own troubles."

Rhodan related the story in an informal manner and with many entertaining details.

"I find it difficult to understand you," Thora said after he had ended his discourse. "First you act like a man who wields his new broom with an iron will and now you choose to do your job in the Eastern Bloc with a single agent although you could settle this matter in a few hours by a concentrated attack and far more convincingly."

Rhodan shook his head. "You don't understand human psychology, Thora. I'm quite sure that Deringhouse is in no danger at all. Nothing will happen to him unless he makes a very stupid mistake. On the other hand, this way will give me an opportunity to demonstrate to mankind in general and to the rulers of the Eastern Bloc in particular that such a revolution is not worth resorting to heavy weapons or a barrage of bombs."

Thora gazed at him quizzically.

"Do you understand what I'm trying to say?" Rhodan leaned forward. "Mankind must learn that I have only to do this," he made a sweeping gesture across the table with his hand, "in order to eliminate all difficulties. Now wait a minute!" he tried to anticipate Thora's objections. "I want to achieve the concord of all peoples. This is my great goal. But not with force. I prefer to use a special method which will enable every citizen to draw the same sensible conclusion by himself. If I were to follow your advice, history would remember me as a brutal man who had insisted on uniting our nations by force. This I wish to avoid by all possible means!"

Thora was at a loss for an answer to his arguments. After awhile she confessed, "You are right... as always." Then she was silent for a minute before she inquired: "What are the chances for our return to Arkon?"

Her question hit Rhodan unexpectedly but he dealt with it promptly. From the first day of their collaboration Khrest and Thora had professed only one interest, namely to find the means on Earth to return to their home on Arkon. And after this had become feasible, Rhodan had tried to postpone their return for reasons of terrestrial security. Now he felt he would have trouble putting them off much longer. "I've promised you that we can fly back to Arkon as soon as Terra is safe again," he consoled her.

Her second question was predictable: "And when will that be?"

"Wait until the conference today," Rhodan pleaded. "If we succeed in making some kind of agreement, we should be able to leave in a few weeks."

He knew that peace on Terra was far from assured even if the conference brought the desired results. But consoling Thora saved him unpleasant discussions.

"Well," Thora sighed, "we waited this long... I guess we can wait a little longer."

\* \* \* \*

Deringhouse made the engineer stop the train a few kilometres from Bajmak and got off with Welinski. Those who tried to interfere with their departure quickly changed their minds when exposed to the hypnotic influence of the psycho-beamer.

They walked about 200 meters away from the railway track and headed for Bajmak through the bushes parallel to the tracks. From a little knoll they were able to observe that the train they had just left was received by a detachment of police at the station of Bajmak. For the next 15 minutes there seemed to be nothing but confusion around the train. Then the detachment was divided in a few squads who proceeded to search both sides of the railway track, moving north.

"They're looking for us," Deringhouse commented, resuming the march.

For some inexplicable reason the policemen never strayed farther than 50 meters from the

track. This was not far enough to find the “saboteurs”. Deringhouse learned later on that the troops had strict orders to avoid penetrating into bushes out of sight. The police captain of Bajmak feared Deringhouse’s superior weapon and had no wish of sending his 200 loyal men into the bushes and have 200 saboteurs return after half an hour.

At any rate, Welinski and Deringhouse approached the little hamlet two hours later from the south. Since nobody expected them from that direction they came within 100 meters of the administration building of the purported zinc mine without being noticed. They hid in some bushes and waited till dark without detection by the numerous police teams scouring the neighbourhood.

After 10 o’clock they went to work although Welinski had no clear idea of Deringhouse’s intentions. All he knew was that he was supposed to be seen by somebody at the right time but Deringhouse didn’t try to minimize the danger involved and considered it the most difficult part of the job. “Don’t forget,” he warned, “that I have a bullet proof suit but you are vulnerable. So don’t take any chances!”

Then they crawled toward the buildings. Most of the windows were dark. Only one of the barracks showed a harsh blue neon light.

Deringhouse showed Welinski where to wait for him. “You’ll have a good cover here,” he whispered. “I’ll be back in time. Just show yourself long enough so that a halfway smart policeman can recognize your face.”

Welinski asked nervously: “Confound it, who’s going to see me here?”

“Somebody will. This place will be crawling with people soon enough.”

\* \* \* \*

Frunse, a Georgian who was on guard duty that night, sat peacefully at his table near the window which had a little opening for speaking to visitors. He fought his growing tiredness by reading a newspaper.

Frunse was not a well-educated man but he had a stubborn streak. He didn’t speak Russian very fluently and reading was even worse. Nevertheless he stuck with his reading until he reached the point where he overcame his desire to sleep.

As he studied a report about the mysterious death of cattle in a Siberian collective, he heard the door to his room open. Frunse put his paper on the table and stared at the door. He was certain that nobody could have approached the barracks without being noticed by him. There was only one path leading to the door and it would not have escaped his attention if somebody had walked on the path despite the fact that he was concentrating on his reading.

The door was equipped with an automatic locking device which prevented any accidental opening and normally kept the door from staying open as long as it did now.

Frunse got up. Although he was a little afraid he wanted to know what was the matter with the door. At the same moment the door closed again. Frunse hesitated awhile before he returned to his chair. A closed door didn’t disturb him and whatever had happened, it was over. But he was still upset enough to stare for the next few minutes into the empty space of the room as if something could be hidden there. Then he picked up his paper again.

Awhile later he was startled once more. He heard a clatter. Frunse peered over the edge of his newspaper but was unable to see anything. When he noticed the clatter for the second time he determined the direction from which it came.

Frunse’s eyes bulged and his jaw dropped in terror when he saw the grey piece of sheet metal which detached itself from the wall and floated slowly through the air. It moved toward a chair and deposited itself on a similar piece of sheet metal which must have landed there a few moments earlier. This caused the same faint clatter he had heard before.

The guard slowly rose from his chair. He lost crucial seconds before he understood that no ghost was at work but someone who knew exactly what he wanted. Behind the removed metal covers the mass of wires of the security control installations was exposed whose switch panel was placed on Frunse's table. He understood nothing of the technical intricacies of the installation but he was aware that any burglar or saboteur could enter the administration buildings and the mine shaft without hindrance if his controls were destroyed or damaged. This had to be prevented at all costs!

In two mighty leaps Frunse was at the wall panel. He stretched out his hands and tried to get hold of the invisible intruder but instead of seizing him he received a hard blow which knocked him across the room against the opposite wall where he sank to the floor, gasping for breath.

He was shaken by anger and fear as he watched from the floor how the ends of the wires in the junction box moved around, severed connections and made new contacts. Despite his lack of knowledge of the wiring, he had no doubt that the invisible trespasser was engaged in ruining the system so that it would take days to put it back in working condition.

Frunse crawled along the floor, making the least possible noise. Sneaking back to his table he cautiously opened a drawer and took out his pistol. He aimed his gun from below the table at the spot where he thought the invisible man stood and pulled the trigger in angry desperation. The shot reverberated thunderously through the little room but the effect it produced was far different from what he expected. The roar of the discharge almost drowned out the sharp metallic crack with which the bullet hit the wall. It was followed by a whizzing howl and the shattering of glass. When he looked around in horror he saw that he had smashed the window pane behind him.

But Frunse was a courageous and obstinate man and the fact that the invisible man seemed to take no further notice of him and continued his endeavours, diminished his fears. Leaning over the table he picked up the phone and hastily dialed the number of the police. Then he shouted: "There's somebody invisible here who's messing up our security system!"

He dropped the receiver and quickly took cover again under the table. The phone call didn't seem to bother the invisible one. By the sound of clipping wires and the crackling of sparks Frunse could hear that he kept doing his job.

*It won't be long, he thought grimly, before they catch you.* But he didn't have the slightest idea what the police could do to seize the infiltrator where he had failed so miserably.

He uttered an anxious cry when the door was opened again just a few moments before the police rushed in. "Oh no!" he screamed. "He's getting away!"

Frunse jumped up from under the table and ran to the door. However it wasn't any easier to see an invisible man in the dark than in the brightly lit room.

\* \* \* \*

Welinski heard the stamping of many feet a few minutes after a shot had rung out in the barracks.

The stamping came closer and he soon saw the silhouettes of running policemen turning from the street on the path leading to the barracks.

"Oh no! He's getting away!" a voice yelled from, inside the barracks just at the moment he left his cover. He counted 8 policemen who saw him as he stood in the semidarkness. The group stopped running and Welinski vanished again in the bushes.

"That's him! Get him!"

But an exasperated voice exclaimed from the door in broken Russian: "Over here, you fools! This is where he was."

Welinski was already 50 meters away from the policemen and deep in the bushes when the

pursuers changed their minds after the initial confusion. Two men continued to chase him and the others ran back to the barracks.

Suddenly Welinski felt somebody touch his hand. He was jolted until Deringhouse's whispering voice calmed him. "This way! Come with me!"

It was easier for them than for the policemen since they were able to choose their own way. Five minutes later they were safe again for the time being. But Deringhouse didn't pause for long. "Put your arms around my body from the back," he instructed Welinski, who complied. "Now we're going to take a little flight to get as fast and as far away from here as possible. My suit contains a generator which can produce an antigrav field that is strong enough to carry both of us at full output. However we have to sacrifice our invisibility in this case but it shouldn't matter very much as long as it is dark anyway."

Before Welinski could say a word, he felt himself suddenly pulled up as in an elevator ascending at top speed. His stomach churned and when he recovered from his shock he saw the lights of the mining area far below him.

"Don't let it scare you," Deringhouse calmed him. "It's not very comfortable but it beats running away on foot."

"And if I lose my grip..." Welinski choked.

"... then nothing will happen to you," Deringhouse explained. "You'll just keep flying with me. However if you start thrashing around and push yourself away from me, you could drive away until you leave the artificial gravity sphere. If you don't want to fall down, you better stick with me!"

He laughed. But Welinski was not in the mood for levity, as he vacillated between his fear of the unknown and his admiration for the marvel of a highly advanced technology.

After awhile he got used to the weird feeling of partial weightlessness and he began to take an interest again in the surroundings. Watching the hazy contours of the southern Ural hills gliding back under them, he estimated their altitude at 200 meters and their speed at about 100 kilometres per hour. The wind pressure appeared to be greatly reduced by the artificial gravity field. At least Welinski didn't feel any discomfort when he looked over Deringhouse's shoulder. As far as he was able to tell they moved in a westerly direction.

## 5/ TO CATCH AN INVISIBLE MAN

Marshall Sirow, who was a member of the Supreme Council by virtue of his rank and as a military expert, had been relegated to the same status of taking orders as all other 415 voting representatives.

Each day he hid in a different place. Between 8 & 12 o'clock each morning—the exact time changed from day to day—he received a phone call and was given the latest information by an unfamiliar voice. According to their importance he transmitted them to his subordinates through at least 20 secret channels with instructions to take the appropriate measures.

At least three times a day Sirow was called by a man whom he assumed to be Secretary General Strelnikow. Strelnikow submitted his advice how to respond to various situations and expected Sirow to accept his suggestions as commands to which Sirow willingly acceded.

That day, the 18th of June, Sirow received the call of the disguised voice shortly after he had listened to his daily report.

“Glorious victory,” the voice announced.

“Magnificent success!” Sirow answered.

These were the code words which indicated to Sirow that the caller had new orders for him.

“We’ve heard again from Rhodan’s agent,” the voice continued. “Last night he arrived with Capt. Welinski at Bajmak in the Magnitogorsk district in his usual clandestine fashion. He acted very efficiently and foiled the guards on the train at the pass control. The same night the security installations at the uranium mine were so extensively damaged that it will take our electricians at least 2 or 3 days to fix it up again.”

The voice had an overtone of pride which puzzled Sirow at first. But it soon dawned on him why.

“This means without doubt,” the voice went on, “that Welinski and the agent will make an attempt to obstruct the mine during the time the security system is out of order. Thus we know that the two will remain at Bajmak at least for the next 24 and possibly 48 hours.

Sirow caught on.

“I want you to send your best officers to Bajmak,” the voice said firmly. “Those two must not be allowed to slip through our fingers again.”

“Alright,” Sirow replied. “I’ll take care of it at once.”

“Very good. So far we have no sign that Rhodan has smuggled more than one agent into our country. Moscow can probably be considered as safe from such perils at this time.”

Strelnikow seemed to be greatly relieved. He ended the conversation and Sirow quickly dialed a number. He gave the man who answered his call all the information he had received from Strelnikow and added his own instructions for the arrest of Welinski and the agent. He was adamant that they had to be captured and that he would tolerate no further excuses.

During the conversation he heard a slight hissing noise somewhere in the little apartment he occupied this day only. He could look through the door to the hall but there was nothing in

sight. He surmised that the noise emanated from the street and resumed his conversation. After he had finished talking, he sat at the telephone for awhile and stared thoughtfully at the curtained window. Then he got up to get a glass of water.

When he turned away from his desk he saw both of them! One was Welinski. Sirow had seen enough pictures of him to recognize him on the spot. The other must be the agent of the New Power—lean and tall with tousled blond hair and a taunting grin on his face.

“Good morning,” the blond man greeted him in a friendly tone. “Please excuse that we came in an unusual manner. But we didn’t have much choice. We thought...”

Then he jumped with a tremendous leap into the room. He had to spring much farther than Sirow who merely reached for the drawer of his desk. Sirow had the feeling of being caught in a tornado. He was maddened by the realization that the tall blond man disdained using his doubtlessly superior weapons and simply relied on his fists and agility.

But his fury didn’t help Sirow very much. He was pummelled by numerous punches before he could raise his arms to cover himself and when he tried to hit back, Deringhouse brought him to his knees with a left to his head. Sirow was dazed and fell to the floor.

Deringhouse didn’t even breathe harder. Only the friendliness had disappeared from his face. “Don’t try that again, Marshall. ‘Next time,’ I won’t treat you that easy. You are lucky that I didn’t kill you, man!”

Sirow tried to get up. Deringhouse motioned Welinski to help him. Welinski dragged Sirow to a chair and held him there. Meanwhile Deringhouse left the room and came back with a rope. He gave it to Welinski, saying: “Tie him up! Be sure to do a good job! Your safety depends on it.”

“Do you know why I’m here?” Deringhouse asked coldly.

Sirow didn’t answer. Deringhouse laughed derisively. “Don’t try to kid me that your intelligence service is that bad. Yesterday afternoon at Galacto City the conference of legal governments of the terrestrial power blocs unanimously condemned the designs and methods of the present Eastern Bloc government and demanded the punishment of the guilty by a world court. You must have been advised of this.”

Sirow was no longer able to contain his wrath. “Don’t be ridiculous,” he panted. “Who cares what they say or do at Galacto City?”

“You do!” Deringhouse retorted. “You are now in my hands and I will surrender you to the custody of the Galacto City prison warden.”

Sirow made an attempt to sneer contemptuously but failed miserably.

“Besides, you won’t be the only one,” Deringhouse continued in an impassive tone. “I’m going to collar a few more of your accomplices the same way I’ve flushed you out... so that you won’t feel lonely.”

Sirow looked at him questioningly. Deringhouse surmised that he wanted to know how he had found his hideout but he didn’t enlighten him. “After all you are only one of the minor rascals,” he added.

The remark goaded Sirow to new fury but no matter how desperately he tried he was unable to free himself from his bonds.

Deringhouse gave Welinski his instructions in the hall. “Use extreme caution!” he warned the captain. “Don’t fall for his tricks. It would be best if you didn’t talk to him at all. I hope to be back soon. If anything happens, you can use this thermo-beamer. This is the best I can leave you.”

Welinski returned to the room and Deringhouse left the apartment. He carefully examined the section of the door where he had cut out the lock with his impulse beamer to enter the apartment. It was half-covered by the doorknob and could only be noticed by somebody scrutinizing it closely. Therefore, this presented no danger. It was a different matter if Sirow

was watched from the outside. Then...

Oh well, Welinski had a matchless weapon in his possession and he could easily hold back a whole army as long as he was able to keep his eyes open. Deringhouse would be back long before then.

Deringhouse activated his deflector screen before he entered the elevator to get to the street. He lifted himself off the sidewalk and floated along the street 10 meters above the traffic.

His goal was the Central Telephone Building—the place where all telephone lines of Moscow converged, including the videophones of the city. Deringhouse had hit upon the idea of using the Central Telephone Building during his trip to Moscow and implemented his plan as soon as he reached the city. With the help of his psycho-beamer he gained admittance to the building and permission to make a spot check of the telephone calls in Section F. The knowledge that Section F handled the internal government communications had been wrested from the director of the department by putting him in a hypnotic state.

The ruse had worked admirably. In a matter of minutes Deringhouse had overheard Marshall Sirow's conversation and discovered his hideout. However it was an accident that he had found Sirow first. It could have been any other member of the Supreme Council.

Deringhouse knew that his most important task would be to detect Secretary General Strelnikow's whereabouts. Once Strelnikow was apprehended, Rhodan's plan would be crowned with success. He didn't underestimate the danger of his search for Strelnikow. For a single man—even one as well-equipped as Deringhouse—the risk of such a mission grew at an exponential rate with time. Moreover, Deringhouse felt for the first time that he had taken on a burden in the person of Welinski instead of a help.

He speeded up his flight and reached the Central Telephone Building 10 minutes after he left Welinski.

\* \* \* \*

Rhodan proceeded methodically and relied, most of all, on the strength of his arguments. Although he aspired the unity of mankind more than the solution of any other problem, he refrained from using any other means of influencing the attending members of cabinets and government representatives despite the fact that it would have been possible for him to do so.

He acted as equal among equals. He signed the list of speakers and was assigned to make the first speech. Nobody at the meeting presumed to have something more important to say than Rhodan, on whose plea the conference was assembled.

Those who had expected Rhodan to talk about his experiences during the past 4½ years—and there were a few who believed that Rhodan wanted to use the conference as a platform for publicity—were mistaken. Instead he opened his address by reading the report of his agents concerning the “revolution” in the Eastern Bloc, revealing for the first time many facts which the usurpers of the power had considered to be a well-kept secret for years.

Rhodan was aware of the effect of his revelations. On his suggestion and without objection from the delegates the TV senders of the New Power transmitted the debates of the conference to every station on Earth—except those in the Eastern Bloc countries.

Rhodan repeated the recommendations adopted by the last global conference as guidelines to all governments and pointed out that the new government of the Eastern Bloc not only had neglected to comply with these recommendations but actively and without denying it had opposed them in the past and at present.

The second and gravest accusation was that the new rulers were plotting to start a war which would have resulted in the annihilation of mankind if the New Power hadn't intervened in time.

Rhodan's exhortations lasted almost an hour. He treated the complex questions with lucidity

and concise formulations. Finally he declared: “We, ladies & gentlemen, are beyond doubt entitled to raise our voices on behalf of those 400 million people who had already once dared to hope they could live in a world of harmony after a few years and whose hopes were so cruelly disappointed by a revolution that wasn’t worthy of its name.

“I, therefore, wish to make the following proposal:”

“The conference resolves that the aims and methods of the Supreme Council are criminal. They must be exposed and condemned as violations of basic human rights.”

The resolution was unanimously adopted on the first vote.

Rhodan stepped down from the dais and made room for the other speakers. He noticed with satisfaction that the speakers who followed him prepared unknowingly the field for his next proposal. However he didn’t take part in the discussion until the evening of June 16th when he thought the right time had come, namely when the conference boiled over in wrath after endless presentations of the despicable and inhumane tactics of the Eastern Bloc regime.

Rhodan rose and offered a resolution for the establishment of a World Tribunal whose duty it would be to uphold the rights of humans all over Earth, to accuse the despots now ruling the Eastern Bloc and to bring them to justice in this court.

After this resolution was passed overwhelmingly, nearly everybody at the conference in Galacto City considered the vote as a purely symbolical act. Virtually nobody gave it a thought—much less believed—that Rhodan could succeed in making a reality out of the letter of the law.

Then the conference adjourned to the morning of June 17th. That day the judges of the new World Tribunal were elected. Rhodan’s name was nominated as Chief Justice but he declined the nomination. An Australian, Frederick Donnifer, Minister of Justice in the cabinet at Canberra, was appointed as Chief Justice. The other judges were quickly selected after Donnifer suggested outstanding legal minds.

A speaker from India complained that although they had a tribunal and an accused they didn’t have a body of laws to govern the judges and punish the guilty. The point was well-taken but they subsequently agreed they could take over the Charter of Human Rights as determined by the United Nations.

By the evening of June 17th, the World Tribunal was duly constituted and Rhodan observed in a short address that—in his opinion—they had created a most significant global institution and expressed his hope that it would be followed in due course by others among them the probably ultimate institution of paramount importance: a world government.

The participants intended to devote the following day to consultations about the topic of possible forms of cooperation preceding the terrestrial confederation and the eventual goal of a world government. They parted in the knowledge that the delegates had made a valuable contribution to the cause of mankind’s progress.

Rhodan had taken special care that his guests spent their time in Galacto City in surroundings commensurate with their high station and he was convinced that the splendid impression the city and its hospitality had made had benefitted the negotiations of the conference.

\* \* \* \*

Half an hour elapsed without Sirow saying a word. Welinski sat behind him so that Sirow couldn’t see him. He had the raygun on his lap.

Finally Sirow asked: “May I ask you who this man is and what the New Power wants?”

Welinski saw nothing wrong in answering a question like this. Although Deringhouse had pointed it out to him, Welinski made the mistake of considering himself a sort of missionary



with the duty to bring the light of truth to the darkest hearts.

Sirow suddenly interrupted Welinski's lecture. He leaned his head forward as far as his tied-up shoulders allowed and whispered: "Listen!"

Welinski didn't hear a thing.

"Somebody is walking up the stairs," Sirow murmured. "Who is it? Your man?"

Welinski got up with the thermo-beamer in his hand. "I'll take a look," he declared. He tiptoed to the door and into the hall. Standing behind the door to the apartment he listened awhile. He heard some steps but that wasn't necessarily ground for suspicion. The house was big and the occupants used the staircase at all times of the day. There were no steps audible close to the door. When he was certain about it, Welinski opened the door just wide enough to peek out. He looked left and right along the corridor and satisfied himself that nobody was there. Then he closed the door again.

At the same moment he heard a faint pop in the room where Sirow sat. He rushed back to the door and stared into the room. Sirow was still on his chair—but where? Somehow he must have succeeded in moving his chair by jerking it forward. Now it was at the left narrow end of the desk where it had tilted over. Sirow leaned with his chest against the edge of the desk and held his head upright with an effort that made the veins of his neck swell up. Welinski raised his thermo-beamer.

"No, you fool!" Sirow gasped. "Stay where you are, for heaven's sake!"

Welinski hesitated. He was confused and grasped only what really happened when Sirow's head dropped down, distorted in a jeering grimace. In an instinctive reflex he pulled up his thermo-beamer again and curled his finger around the trigger. But at the same instant he was crushed by a roaring flash that blotted out all his thoughts.

\* \* \* \*

Deringhouse's patience was taxed severely. Strelnikow didn't seem to be afflicted with telephonitis. He had not heard him speak for an hour unless he was the man who opened every conversation with the words "Glorious victory!" and received the answer "magnificent success!" This possibility couldn't entirely be ruled out. He made a note of the location of the phone that announced "Glorious victory" and decided to look over the place. He could always return if he was on the wrong track.

It was 11:35 when he left the Central Telephone Building and it took him 10 minutes to get back to the Street of the 28th of October where Sirow had retreated. He saw a crowd of people milling in front of the house and knew at once that something must have happened to the Marshall. He entered the house through the wide entrance door, being careful not to touch anybody in his state of invisibility. Then he floated up to the 8th floor where Sirow's apartment was located.

The apartment was guarded by a group of uniformed men and showed a crack in the outside wall the width of a hand. The crack zigzagged like a lightning flash from top to bottom. Deringhouse paused in the corridor and waited for the police to move away from the door. In the meantime he heard that a strange explosion had occurred in the apartment. Nobody knew who lived in the apartment or what had caused the explosion.

After waiting 15 minutes Deringhouse decided that a further delay might become too dangerous. He activated his psycho-beamer and made the men step aside with his hypnotic command so that he was free to enter the apartment.

Inside the apartment were 6 more policemen, busy with their investigation. One by one Deringhouse imposed his will on them. Then he walked into Sirow's room. Where the door had been was a gaping hole. The floor and the ceiling near the door were ripped apart and it was

possible to look into the apartment on the 9th floor. Strangely, the explosion had caused almost negligible damage in the rest of the room. Only a bookcase was thrown over and spilled its contents on the floor. That was all.

The book which had been hurled the farthest had come to rest near the hand of a man who had been knocked off his legs by the explosion and lay crumpled on the floor. Welinski!

Deringhouse bent over him as the policemen lined up along the wall, obeying his hypnotic orders. Welinski lay on his belly. Deringhouse turned him around on his back and saw at first glance that he was dead.

Welinski! Deringhouse clenched his fists. He had been such an idealistic dreamer! He shouldn't have left him alone with old Sirow. He vowed his murderers would pay for his life.

\* \* \* \*

15 minutes later he was out in the street again. He realized that he was in a dangerous spot. Sirow had fled. He was certainly convinced that Deringhouse would return sooner or later to relieve Welinski. Even an invisible man could be caught if they had enough pursuers and were smart enough to apply suitable methods.

Deringhouse had used the 15 minutes he spent in the apartment to examine the holes torn by the explosion. It was plain to see that the explosive charge had been placed in such a manner that 95% of its effect was concentrated near the door where Welinski must have stood when the bomb was detonated—probably a step back in the hall at the half-opened door.

Deringhouse had also found the release button. It was cleverly concealed on the desk not far from the chair to which Sirow had been tied with the ropes that were now dangling from it. Deringhouse had no trouble reconstructing the events. Welinski must have left the room for some reason. This was his first fatal error which gave Sirow his chance to slide his chair to the desk. When Welinski appeared in the door again, Sirow leaned forward on the desk and touched the release button with his forehead.

The apartment was probably used by the Secret Service whose agents must have installed a bomb under the threshold of the door. This was a logical place for it since there was always a good chance that an intruder would check the door even if he had not entered through it. Providing the intended victim was still able to reach the button with his hand or by some other means, he could kill his opponent by surprise.

Sirow got away and made off with Welinski's thermo-beamer to boot.

Deringhouse concluded that he had to change his plans. Strelnikow must have learned all about the incident by this time and probably had flown the coop if he was the man behind the code "Glorious Victory".

Nevertheless he wanted to investigate his probable hideout. People who were forced to leave a place in a hurry often left some clues behind. Deringhouse took the note out of his pocket and read it inside his deflector field.

Kuybyshev Street. A street in an eastern suburb as far as Deringhouse remembered. Deringhouse was about to lift himself off the street when he noticed a movement. He looked up and saw a fine net of glistening wire. A host of workers was busy fastening the net to the roof tops at both sides of the street.

Deringhouse was alarmed. He looked around and discovered that the web stretched over the whole length of the block and that other nets were suspended at both crossings at the end of the block and from the roof tops to street level and scores of policemen suddenly assembled at its periphery. A perfect trap!

Deringhouse harboured no illusions. The effective range of his psycho-beamer didn't exceed 50 meters. At that distance he could bend at best 10 men to his will and this only if they stood

close together. He could easily imagine what kind of orders the policemen had been issued. They stood now so close together not even a dog could slip between them. They probably had instructions to call in reserves in case one of them stepped out of line and opened a passage. He pictured companies of police waiting in the side streets for the signal to surround the invisible prey. Their overwhelming numbers would make it impossible for him to put everybody under his psychic influence.

And what about the wire net? No doubt they watched it with electrical instruments. Such low tension nets were used for many purposes and it was a simple matter to determine where it would be touched. It would make no difference whether he would break out of the cage at the roof level or at the street crossings.

However they had no way of knowing whether he was in the trap or not. He had to wait only a few days when the police would be called back and the nets removed from the roofs.

Only a few days! He couldn't even wait a few hours. Each passing minute gave Strelnikow a better chance to cover his trail.

He considered his odds for escaping by using force. It would be easy enough to shoot a gap in the web with the neutron-beamer he had left but he remembered his experience on Venus. He was bound to draw the concentrated fire of machine guns to the gap and if the shield of his protective suit became overloaded by repulsing too many lethal missiles, his deflector screen would fail to function and possibly his neutralization field as well. Then he would become visible and be forced to move on the ground.

His tension increased the more he realized that the police prepared for a major action. He saw buses evacuating the inhabitants of the other streets in the neighbourhood and workmen who began barring the windows of the cordoned block. They sought to prevent his escape through a window when they were ready to search each house.

Whoever organized this hunt in such haste seemed to have exercised skill and circumspection. Nothing was forgotten that could have enabled an invisible man with hypnotic powers to slip through fingers. Nothing?

Deringhouse had an idea—vague and fleeting at first. It was gone before he grasped it. Then it surfaced again and he gave it serious thought. It had possibilities, he decided, although it involved much risk.

Better to take a risk than miss an opportunity! With a little luck nothing would happen to him.

## 6/ UNITE OR DIE!

“Bajmak was a trick to throw us off their tracks,” Sirow explained.

The Marshall had not yet recovered from the beating Deringhouse had given him. He looked dishevelled since he had not had the time to change his clothes. After finding Strelnikow’s hideout with an emergency call, he wasted no time to meet him.

Strelnikow struck back as soon as he had learned what happened. He instructed a colonel of the Security Service to capture Rhodan’s agent when he returned—as expected—to the Street of the 28th October.

“Of course it was a trick,” he growled. “They tried to make us believe they would remain a few days at the uranium mine to follow through with their mischief there and they were in Moscow before we knew it.”

Sirow’s eyes smouldered. “But we outsmarted them anyway!” he boasted.

Strelnikow dampened his optimism. “So far so good,” he said. “Let’s wait and see!”

Sirow toned down his voice. “What are you going to do next?” he asked.

“First I want to put you up in a safe place,” Strelnikow answered curtly.

He sat down at his desk and wrote a note. Sirow watched him until he signed it.

“Take this,” Strelnikow said. “Go to this address. They will accommodate you. Wait for further instructions.”

Sirow saluted.

“Take my car,” Strelnikow continued; “it’s parked in front of the door. There,” he pointed to the note Sirow held in his hand, “you’ll be able to get first aid and civilian clothes.”

Sirow clicked his heels and marched out of the room. Strelnikow waited until the sound of his steps had faded away. Then he made a phone call and leaned back in his chair with a happy smile.

\* \* \* \*

Deringhouse returned to the house from which Marshall Sirow had fled. If somebody has to bite the dust, he thought grimly, it might as well be one of their own men instead of an innocent bystander.

The policemen in Sirow’s apartment were still occupied with their work. He turned his psycho-beamer on them and ordered seven men to stay in the apartment. Then he walked up the stairs with the three other policemen to the highest floor of the building. The elevator was shut down—probably to restrict the quick movements of the invisible fugitive.

There were several exits leading to the roof of the building. Deringhouse stationed the policemen at three separate exits. He remained out of sight in his deflector field but they could hear his voice and obeyed his commands.

“Check your watches!” he ordered.

They compared their times but didn't have to adjust their watches.

“At exactly 12:40,” Deringhouse instructed the men, “you open the exits and climb to the ridge of the roof. Don't let anything deter you! Repeat!”

They repeated his order and Deringhouse was satisfied that he had been understood. Then he floated down the stairwell and left the house.

He couldn't be sure that there was a roof exit left that wasn't locked and guarded by the police. Finally he detected an open exit on the roof of the last house in the block which was probably used by three other policemen who were posted on top of the house with machine pistols.

Deringhouse had no trouble getting into the house and reaching the last floor. His guess had been right. The policemen were coming and leaving through the exit and he was forced to wait inside in a corner to avoid bumping into them. Only once, during a pause, was he able to stick his head out of the exit and look around. As he had hoped, the net was raised two meters above the ridge of the roof—in contrast to the other houses—to give the policemen room to move around. He assumed that it was attached to the other side of the roof with insulators.

12:35!

A lot could go wrong. A superior officer might miss the three policemen in Sirow's apartment and find them at the roof. He would be sure to ask questions why they were standing there. What then?

Then he would have to figure out another route of escape but Strelnikow would have gained more time to take countermeasures.

Now!

Seconds passed without a commotion. One policeman came back from outside and another left through the roof exit.

What went wrong?

Finally he heard shouts. “Get off the roof! Are you crazy?”

Deringhouse dashed to the exit and floated outside. He crouched near the opening and looked at Sirow's house. The three policemen had followed his orders. Impervious to the warnings of the others, they climbed up the gentle incline of the roof in straight lines from their respective exits. Their colleagues aimed their machine pistols in their direction but hesitated to shoot because they had no way of knowing which one of the three was Rhodan's agent in disguise.

This had been Deringhouse's scheme. He didn't believe anyone else knew that he could give post-hypnotic commands with a small psycho-beamer that could be carried in a pocket. If he calculated correctly, the three policemen with their fingers on the triggers of their weapons must assume that he was somewhere near their somnambulistic comrades on top of Marshall Sirow's building and not on their own.

At 12:41 the first of Deringhouse's three puppets had scrambled to the ridge of the roof and touched the fine web. Somewhere a dial would jump wildly and cause an alarm. Then...

Deringhouse witnessed with his own eyes what happened then. He heard the high-pitched hum and characteristic whirring of rotor blades before the helicopters emerged from the neighbouring streets. He couldn't help but admire the organization of such swift response.

The helicopters had precise instructions where to converge. They hovered in a tight circle a few meters above Sirow's house and hardly a minute had elapsed before they concentrated their fire on the roof. Meanwhile the other two policemen had caught up with their comrade. They were all caught in the first salvo and slid down the roof to disappear over the edge.

The helicopters kept firing without interruption. Their real target was invisible, not the policemen. Deringhouse learned later that his attackers surmised he was vulnerable to their fire

despite his invisibility or—and this was closer to the truth—that his deflector screen would lose its function by overloading the protective screen with an excessive bombardment so that he would become visible.

Now Deringhouse got the chance he had been waiting for. He glided up to the ridge of the roof, carefully avoiding the policemen who excitedly watched the helicopters, and headed for the edge of the roof on the other side of the building where the net was fastened. In his opinion he ran no risk in dislodging it because the alarm instruments were simultaneously reacting to the disturbance caused by the policemen he had used as decoys.

It took him less than a minute to tear the tough net away and to open a gap big enough to let him slip through. Nobody paid attention to him. The danger of being observed was diverted by the interest the policemen took in watching the exciting action of the helicopters.

Seconds later Deringhouse was free. He descended midway above the street where he was safe and headed in the direction of the suburb where Kuybyshev Street was located.

\* \* \* \*

“And now,” Strelnikow said to the man from the theatre, “send in the major. I’ve got to talk to him.”

The man obeyed. He left the room and Maj. Kalenkin entered half a minute later. Although the man who had called him was unknown to him he was aware that he had to follow his orders strictly and without hesitation. He saluted and Strelnikow began. “Listen closely. I have to explain something to you. It sounds rather complicated but you are intelligent enough to...”

\* \* \* \*

It was almost 1 o’clock when Deringhouse entered the house on Kuybyshev Street. It was one of those ugly tenement houses 15 floors high.

The telephone from which the “Glorious Victory” calls originated was located in apartment #13 C. Deringhouse ascended invisibly. The door was locked and a few people loitered in the corridor. He waited till they had gone back to their apartments or entered the elevator. Then he opened the door by exposing the lock for a few seconds to his neutron-beamer. The flow of neutrons changed the matter of the lock into other substances which had no affinity for each other. As he pushed the door open, glittering radioactive metallic dust poured from where the lock had been.

Deringhouse walked into the apartment. He was convinced it was empty. Surely, Strelnikow had enough time to get away. To his surprise a man crouched on the floor of the little hall. His head drooped and his eyes were half-closed. His face was disfigured by a fresh red scar on his left cheek.

The man was old and had white hair. He didn’t seem to have noticed that he opened the door; at least he didn’t move. On his knees was a slip of brown wrapping paper which had some words scribbled on it. Deringhouse read: *Agent of the New Power! Strelnikow has fled. I can tell you where he is. I was beaten by him!*

Deringhouse’s first impression was that a trap had been set up for him. Who was the man? He studied the situation. The old man looked as if he could have been Strelnikow’s servant or secretary. As secretary he could have heard many things which were discussed by Strelnikow and it would explain that he had learned of the existence of Rhodan’s agent and his special facilities. He must have written the note because he expected the agent to search the apartment unseen. The scar was proof that Strelnikow had struck him and he sought revenge by informing him about Strelnikow’s whereabouts.

“Stand up!” Deringhouse prodded him.

The old man shuddered as if waking up from sleep. “Who... where... ?” he stammered.

“I’m an agent of the New Power,” Deringhouse replied. “I came to find out where Strelnikow is. Are you willing to help me?”

For a moment it looked as if the old man had overestimated his courage. He was so scared that he trembled and stuttered as he awkwardly rose from the floor: “Yes... I...”

Deringhouse reassured him. “You don’t have to be afraid of me. What’s your name?”

“Nikolai.”

“And you know where Strelnikow went, Nikolai?”

Nikolai nodded.

“How did you find out?”

“I eavesdropped on a conversation he had with an officer in this apartment.”

“Can you take me to him?”

Nikolai made an eager affirmative gesture.

“Why did he beat you?” Deringhouse inquired.

Nikolai shrugged his shoulders. “When he left he said to me: ‘this is for your constant snooping!’ And he whipped me across the face.” His eyes glowered as he touched his cheek with a quivering hand.

“He and his likes will get what they deserve,” Deringhouse murmured. “Are you ready to leave now?”

Going down in the elevator, Nikolai explained that Strelnikow had moved to a place not too far away and that it would be simplest to walk there.

\* \* \* \*

Maj. Kalenkin was in civilian garb. He leaned against the street comer trying to give the impression of a man who spent the last day of his convalescence looking at his factory and pitying his poor colleagues who had to work.

His patience wasn’t strained unduly. Only 45 minutes after he had taken up his post at the street comer the man he had to watch walked into the street and touched his head with his right hand. It was the sign that all had gone smoothly.

Before the man reached the factory gate he turned into a narrow path leading along the three meter high wall which surrounded the factory. Maj. Kalenkin tapped his fake wristwatch, which set off a signal that alerted the men waiting in the background of the scene. Then he left his corner and followed the man who repeated his sign at regular intervals to let Kalenkin know that he continued to be alright.

The path was well suited for his inconspicuous surveillance. A small grader and other construction equipment, loaded and empty, passed each other continuously. Several work crews were busy repairing the defective wall. There was enough going on to facilitate Kalenkin’s task of trailing his man unnoticed.

The man finally entered the grounds of the factory through a side door. Kalenkin followed him at a safe distance. Now he was convinced that nothing could go wrong anymore.

The huge steam tank of the reactor station, which supplied energy for the factory without dependence on the municipal network, was only 100 meters away.

\* \* \* \*

Nikolai and Deringhouse didn't exchange a single word on the way. Nikolai preceded the agent and assumed that he followed on his heels.

He led Deringhouse to the gate of a national factory but turned left to walk along the factory wall till he reached a side door through which he entered the site of the factory without drawing the attention of the numerous labourers.

He headed in a straight line to the enormous steam tank which towered to a height of about 80 meters at a small distance from the main premises of the factory.

As soon as they were out of earshot of the throngs of workers who would have been perplexed to hear Nikolai speak to an invisible partner, the old man said: "Strelnikow is up there in a control room. It's halfway up the elevator. Do you see where?"

Deringhouse looked up the elevator and saw a row of windows built into the metal inclosure of the tank about 40 meters high. "Keep going!" he said.

Nobody interfered with them when they stepped into the elevator and rode up on the outside of the tank. They got off and entered the first of the control rooms which lined the wall of the tank.

Deringhouse was first. Nikolai seemed to suffer another case of jitters. "If he sees me," he whispered, "he will..."

"Don't be afraid!" Deringhouse tried to soothe his fears. "Come in."

The room had two other doors in addition to the entrance.

"Which way?" Deringhouse asked.

Nikolai didn't know.

"I'll try this one," Deringhouse said walking to the door at the side of the room.

Although Nikolai was unable to see him, he perceived the impression his boots left in the soft floor covering as he remained standing near the entrance door.

"It's open," Deringhouse said, pushing back the door.

Nikolai raised his hand as if he wanted to steady himself on the frame of the door. It looked harmless enough but before he touched the frame the barrel of a weapon appeared in midair and Deringhouse announced in a harsh voice: "Far enough, old man! If you move your hand another inch, you won't live to see your triumph!"

Nikolai turned pale although it was not perceptible. His hand began to tremble. He hesitated and finally dropped his arm. Deringhouse's steps approached him on the floor and his gun barrel aimed steadily at him.

"Take off your wig!" Deringhouse ordered.

Nikolai obeyed reluctantly. His face was distorted as he pulled the white hairpiece from his head, exposing a bald pate that looked polished—Secretary General Strelnikow's skull.

\* \* \* \*

"I respect your personal courage," Deringhouse granted after emerging from invisibility. "But you should have known from the beginning that you embarked on a hopeless enterprise. This is not the way to catch me."

Strelnikow had regained some of his composure. He realized that his game was up. "How did you get wise?" he asked.

Deringhouse laughed. "It wasn't too difficult. When you told me that Strelnikow beat you, you touched your right cheek with your hand although the make-up man put the scar on your left cheek. This caused my first suspicion. Then I noticed on the way that you raised your hand to the back of your head several times and I detected the man to whom you signalled. What's he



doing now?"

"He's waiting for me to come out again and to let him know that you are caught inside the tank."

"And what was the meaning of your hand signs?"

"I had to take into account that you could influence me hypnotically. I could make those gestures only as long as I was master of my own free will. Maj. Kalenkin had instructions to execute another plan as soon as I stopped giving him the agreed signal which would indicate to him that I was subjected to your mental powers."

"The construction crews are all policemen, aren't they?"

"Yes. They were supposed to seal off the tank as soon as you were trapped in it."

"And how did you intend to shove me in? through a trapdoor?"

"Yes. The switch is here," he pointed to a hidden button in the door frame. "I had it built only two hours earlier. You would have dropped right into the tank."

"I would have been killed by the fall unless I could have activated my antigrav field in time and in that case you would have filled the tank with steam."

"That was the idea. Would you have had a chance of surviving?"

Deringhouse raised his shoulders. "I don't know. Probably not."

He pressed the button and saw a section of the floor in front of the door collapse.

"What will you do now?" Strelnikow inquired.

"I'll be glad to tell you that," Deringhouse responded. "You will use some plausible pretext to convene the members of the Supreme Council at the Plaza of Nations at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning. A World Tribunal has been established two days ago. Its primary objective is to mete out justice to the rulers of the Eastern Bloc. You and your council have been summoned to appear before the court."

Strelnikow was grave. "You'll have to hypnotize me before I do that."

Deringhouse shook his head. "It wouldn't serve my purpose to have the responsible government chief under hypnosis. You will surrender nonetheless. Although it won't be voluntary, you will be in full possession of your mental faculties. In addition you must do your part so that the 415 voting as well as all appointed members of the Supreme Council will join you. I insist in particular that Marshall Sirow be brought before the bar of justice."

Deringhouse studied his neutron-beamer ostentatiously. "If you don't follow my instructions to the letter, you know what will happen to you."

Strelnikow lowered his head.

"Begin with telling your major down there to call off all his men and to get out of here as quickly as possible," Deringhouse continued. "And don't forget to stroke your head when you give the order!"

\* \* \* \*

On the evening of June the 18th Perry Rhodan appealed to the conference to request the newly constituted World Tribunal to initiate proceedings with the aim of carrying out the resolution of the 16th of June—to wit, placing the regime of the Eastern Bloc under formal accusation.

His plea generated a lively discussion. The members of the Asiatic government doubted that such a step was practical and the representatives of the NATO countries raised other objections.

However the real reason was the reluctance of most delegates at the thought of dragging a government that was still in power before a court. They were afraid of their own courage as shown two days earlier when they adopted a resolution which they considered to have only

symbolic value.

Perry Rhodan pointed out, not without biting sarcasm, that it would be unworthy of the assembly to mouth resolutions and balk at their consequences. He offered to assist the World Tribunal with his military might and added with disarming frankness: “You won’t be saddled with difficulties. We have already made the necessary preparations for the arrest of the Supreme Council.”

All further objections to his proposal quickly subsided after his declaration.

\* \* \* \*

The following morning the government ministers from all nations on Terra boarded the *Stardust*, which took off from Galacto City with its illustrious load. The ship penetrated the sphere of the Eastern Bloc at considerable speed but met—surprisingly—with no resistance whatsoever. At 8:50 Moscow time it touched down on the vast Plaza of Nations. Its conveyor ramp was lowered to the ground and the Chief Justice of the World Tribunal, Frederick Donnifer, left the mighty ship with his associate justices, accompanied by the President of the New Power, Perry Rhodan.

Whoever made the arrangements seemed to have prevented any curiosity seekers from entering the plaza. Its broad expanse was empty except for a small group of men.

Frederick Donnifer, who was not yet accustomed to his new honour, looked awkwardly around after he stepped on the ground.

“Please wait a moment,” Rhodan requested him. “Major Deringhouse is on his way to make his report.”

A man had left the small group and approached the delegation. Ignoring the other dignitaries, Deringhouse saluted Rhodan. “Major Deringhouse reporting, sir. Your orders have been complied with. The members of the Supreme Council will be here in a few minutes.”

Rhodan smiled and directed Deringhouse: “Repeat your report to Chief Justice Donnifer of the World Tribunal, Major!”

Donnifer stepped forward. Deringhouse faced about, saluted and repeated his report to Donnifer. Donnifer narrowed his eyes and asked: “Are you certain they will all come, Major?”

“Definitely, sir,” Deringhouse replied, adding after turning halfway to Rhodan: “I’ve not relied on Strelnikow’s orders alone to make them appear—especially as they can see from kilometres away that the *Stardust* has landed on the Plaza of Nations. Each delegate will be escorted by a couple of officers whom I have put under my command to make them bring in their man whether they like it or not.”

Now the first black limousine passed through the cordon of police that surrounded the plaza. It was quickly followed by other limousines. They stopped at a distance from the gigantic *Stardust* and discharged their passengers. It was obvious that many delegates had come only because their escorts didn’t leave them any other choice.

Deringhouse made the delegates form a group and the escorting officers encircled them in order to prevent their escape. Deringhouse counted. The Council consisted of 415 elected and 89 appointed members. Sirow was one of the last men to arrive at the plaza.

At 9:15 Deringhouse made his final report to the Chief Justice. “The Supreme Council stands ready for the presentation of your indictment, sir!”

Donnifer stood poised in front of the Council. He used a tiny mike which transmitted his voice to the amplifiers. “The representatives of the governments of the Asiatic Federation and the NATO countries,” he opened his statement, “whose states comprise  $\frac{6}{7}$ th of all mankind, have established a World Tribunal on the 17th of June of this year. The World Tribunal was entrusted with the task of safeguarding the human rights on the face of the Earth.

“You...” he didn’t hesitate to use the unofficial manner of pointing a finger at the Council members, “...are accused of violating the human rights of your citizens by outrageous and unrelenting methods. You are demanded to surrender yourselves to the authority of the World Tribunal and stand judgment under its laws.”

“The assembly of government representatives will initiate political reforms in your land so that your citizens can choose a government in free elections. In the interim a provisional administration will take over the preparation of such elections.”

As he talked, the exit of the *Stardust* opened up further and the conveyor ramp was broadened. A team of 50 Arkonide combat robots marched down the ramp and formed a second circle inside the line of escort officers around the frightened crowd of Council members.

“As you can see for yourselves,” Donnifer concluded, “the World Tribunal has the power to enforce its verdict.”

From then on everything went without a hitch. The huge robots guided the throng of prisoners along the ramp until they were swallowed up by the *Stardust*.

\* \* \* \*

Donnifer gave the necessary instructions for the organization of a provisional government in the Eastern Bloc. Rhodan assisted him only by giving him his advice but neither he nor any other citizen of the New Power took a hand in the formation of the temporary administration .

The *Stardust* left Moscow at 13 hours and arrived at Galacto City in the late afternoon.

Rhodan invited the participants of the conference for a dinner in celebration of the first great success of the World Tribunal. It was also a commemoration of his first flight to the Moon. The invitation was accepted by everyone who had attended the conference.

Rhodan used the hours after the meal for a presentation of the past developments which he had been expected to offer on the first day of the conference. He described all relevant events in the progress of the New Power from the first day on and treated his audience to an informative film.

His listeners were so enthralled by his story that they failed to notice when an aide slipped a message to Rhodan as he spoke. He scribbled a few hasty words on a note and handed it to the aide who quickly left the room.

He finished his report at 23 hours. The deafening applause was a sign of appreciation of the magnificent accomplishments of the New Power and Perry Rhodan himself.

After the applause finally diminished, Rhodan took the speaker’s stand again. His voice sounded more solemn than ever. “Ladies & gentlemen! I do not wish to take any more of your time—” He paused for a moment till the murmur of many foreign voices had abated. “But there are two matters which have special significance on this remarkable day.

“The 19th of June will be declared a legal holiday in the state of the New Power in dedication to the historical events that have taken place today and the new era that began not so many years ago. Furthermore, the New Power will express its hope for the early unification of all people on Earth by changing the name of Galacto City to Terrania.”

There was another round of applause but Rhodan raised his hand to break it up. “The second matter is less pleasant,” he said in a serious tone. “As you know there are two opposing bases on the Moon, one under the jurisdiction of the NATO countries and the other under the control of the Eastern Bloc.”

“At 10 minutes past 22 the Eastern Bloc station launched 200 long-distance rockets with catalytic fusion warheads in the direction of Terra. We are all aware that none of us and very few other people would survive if the rockets reached their target anywhere on the surface of Earth.”

“The rockets were timed to strike our globe tomorrow morning at 5 o’clock local time. I am delighted that I can inform you that a squadron of our space pursuit ships under the command of Maj. Nyssen has already reached the vicinity of the rockets and is prepared to blow them up in flight.”

Suddenly all lights went out and a wide three-dimensional screen behind the speaker showed a picture of outer space with its myriads of scintillating points of light.

The audience was held in breathless silence. Rhodan turned around to watch the scene which was filmed by one of the pursuit ships 10,000 kilometres behind Nyssen’s squadron.

Suddenly bombs began to explode. In an accelerating sequence each one of the unseen rockets developed from a white radiant glow into a burst of light that rivalled the brilliance of a sun. The light shed by the 200 rockets brightened the room with an intensity that exceeded its earlier illumination. The spectators had to squint their eyes to cope with the glare.

Rhodan let the scene run its course until the radiance diminished. He faded the picture out and the lights gradually came on again, revealing a sea of stunned faces. He gazed at the faces of men who, in the last analysis, owed their salvation to him.

“I believe,” Rhodan said in a grave tone, speaking so softly it was barely audible, “these pictures have demonstrated once again how urgent the unity of mankind has become!”