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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BEAR TRAP \*\*\*

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*Dr. Alan E. Nourse, who when last heard of was vacationing in Alaska—and probably gathering material for SF or Mystery stories set against this background—is the author of many mystery and science fiction stories including MARTYR, the lead novel in our January 1957 issue.*

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## **bear trap**

*by ALAN E. NOURSE*

**The man's meteoric rise as a peacemaker in a nation tired by the long years of war made the truth even more shocking.**

THE HUGE troop transport plane eased down through the rainy drizzle enshrouding New York International Airport at about five o'clock in the evening. Tom Shandor glanced sourly through the port at the wet landing strip, saw the dim landing lights reflected in the steaming puddles. On an adjacent field he could see the rows and rows of jet fighters, wings up in the foggy rain, poised like ridiculous birds in the darkness. With a sigh he ripped the sheet of paper from the small, battered portable typewriter on his lap, and zipped the machine up in its slicker case.

Across the troop hold the soldiers were beginning to stir, yawning, shifting their packs, collecting their gear. Occasionally they stared at Shandor as if he were totally alien to their midst, and he shivered a little as he collected the sheets of paper scattered on the deck around him, checked the date, 27 September, 1982, and rolled them up to fit in the slim round mailing container. Ten minutes later he was shouldering his way through the crowd of khaki-clad men, scowling up at the sky, his nondescript fedora jammed down over his eyes to keep out the rain, slicker collar pulled up about his ears. At the gangway he stopped before a tired-looking lieutenant and flashed the small fluorescent card in his palm. "Public Information Board."

The officer nodded wearily and gave his coat and typewriter a cursory check, then motioned him on. He strode across the wet field, scowling at the fog, toward the dimmed-out waiting rooms.

He found a mailing chute, and popped the mailing tube down the slot as if he were glad to be rid of it. Into the speaker he said: "Special Delivery. PIB business. It goes to press tonight."

The female voice from the speaker said something, and the red "clear" signal blinked. Shandor slipped off his hat and shook it, then stopped at a coffee machine and extracted a cup of steaming stuff from the bottom after trying the coin three times. Finally he walked across the room to an empty video booth, and sank down into the chair with an exhausted sigh. Flipping a switch, he waited several minutes for an operator to appear. He gave her a number, and then said, "Let's scramble it, please."

"Official?"

He showed her the card, and settled back, his whole body tired. He was a tall man, rather slender, with flat, bland features punctuated only by blond caret-shaped eyebrows. His grey eyes were heavy-lidded now, his mouth an expressionless line as he waited, sunk back into his coat with a long-cultivated air of lifeless boredom. He watched the screen without interest as it bleeped a time or two, then shifted into the familiar scrambled-image pattern. After a moment he muttered the Public Information Board audio-code words, and saw the screen even out into the

clear image of a large, heavysset man at a desk.

"Hart," said Shandor. "Story's on its way. I just dropped it from the Airport a minute ago, with a rush tag on it. You should have it for the morning editions."

The big man in the screen blinked, and his heavy face lit up. "The story on the Rocket Project?"

Shandor nodded. "The whole scoop. I'm going home now." He started his hand for the cutoff switch.

"Wait a minute—" Hart picked up a pencil and fiddled with it for a moment. He glanced over his shoulder, and his voice dropped a little. "Is the line scrambled?"

Shandor nodded.

"What's the scoop, boy? How's the Rocket Project coming?"

Shandor grinned wryly. "Read the report, daddy. Everything's just ducky, of course—it's all ready for press. You've got the story, why should I repeat it?"

Hart scowled impatiently. "No, no— I mean the *scoop*. The real stuff. How's the Project going?"

"Not so hot." Shandor's face was weary. "Material cutoff is holding them up something awful. Among other things. The sabotage has really fouled up the west coast trains, and shipments haven't been coming through on schedule. You know—they ask for one thing, and get the wrong weight, or their supplier is out of material, or something goes wrong. And there's personnel trouble, too—too much direction and too little work. It's beginning to look as if they'll never get going. And now it looks like there's going to be another administration shakeup, and you know what that means—"

Hart nodded thoughtfully. "They'd better get hopping," he muttered. "The conference in Berlin is on the skids—it could be hours now." He looked up. "But you got the story rigged all right?"

Shandor's face flattened in distaste. "Sure, sure. You know me, Hart. Anything to keep the people happy. Everything's running as smooth as satin, work going fine, expect a test run in a month, and we should be on the moon in half a year, more or less, maybe, we hope—the usual swill. I'll be in to work out the war stories in the morning. Right now I'm for bed."

He snapped off the video before Hart could interrupt, and started for the door. The rain hit him, as he stepped out, with a wave of cold wet depression, but a cab slid up to the curb before him and he stepped in. Sinking back he tried to relax, to get his stomach to stop complaining, but he couldn't fight the feeling of almost physical illness sweeping over him. He closed his eyes and sank back, trying to drive the ever-plaguing thoughts from his mind, trying to focus on something pleasant, almost hoping that his long-starved conscience might give a final gasp or two and die altogether. But deep in his mind he knew that his screaming conscience was almost the only thing that held him together.

Lies, he thought to himself bitterly. White lies, black lies, whoppers—you could take your choice. There should be a flaming neon sign flashing across the sky, telling all people: "Public Information Board, Fabrication Corporation, fabricating of all lies neatly and expeditiously done." He squirmed, feeling the rebellion grow in his mind. Propaganda, they called it. A nice word, such a very handy word, covering a multitude of seething pots. PIB was the grand clearing house, the last censor of censors, and he, Tom Shandor, was the Chief Fabricator and Purveyor of Lies.

He shook his head, trying to get a breath of clean air in the damp cab. Sometimes he wondered where it was leading, where it would finally end up, what would happen if the people ever really learned, or ever listened to the clever ones who tried to sneak the truth into print somewhere. But people couldn't be told the truth, they had to be coddled, urged, pushed along. They had to be kept somehow happy, somehow hopeful, they had to be kept whipped up to fever pitch, because the long, long years of war and near war had exhausted them, wearied them beyond natural resiliency. No, they had to be spiked, urged and goaded—what would happen if they learned?

He sighed. No one, it seemed, could do it as well as he. No one could take a story of bitter diplomatic fighting in Berlin and simmer it down to a public-palatable "peaceful and progressive meeting;" no one could quite so skillfully reduce the bloody fighting in India to a mild "enemy losses topping American losses twenty to one, and our boys are fighting staunchly, bravely,"— No one could write out the lies quite so neatly, so smoothly as Tom Shandor—

The cab swung in to his house, and he stepped out, tipped the driver, and walked up the walk, eager for the warm dry room. Coffee helped sometimes when he felt this way, but other things helped even more. He didn't even take his coat off before mixing and downing a stiff rye-and-ginger, and he was almost forgetting his unhappy conscience by the time the video began blinking.

He flipped the receiver switch and sat down groggily, blinked at John Hart's heavy face as it materialized on the screen. Hart's eyes were wide, his voice tight and nervous as he leaned forward. "You'd better get into the office pronto," he said, his eyes bright. "You've *really* got a story to work on now—"

Shandor blinked. "The War—"

Hart took a deep breath. "Worse," he said. "David Ingersoll is dead."

Tom Shandor shouldered his way through the crowd of men in the anteroom, and went into the inner office. Closing the door behind him coolly, he faced the man at the desk, and threw a thumb over his shoulder. "Who're the goons?" he growled. "You haven't released a story yet—?"

John Hart sighed, his pinkish face drawn. "The press. I don't know how they got the word—there hasn't been a word released, but—" He shrugged and motioned Shandor to a seat. "You know how it goes."

Shandor sat down, his face blank, eyeing the Information chief woodenly. The room was silent for a moment, a tense, anticipatory silence. Then Hart said: "The Rocket story was great, Tommy. A real writing job. You've got the touch, when it comes to a ticklish news release—"

Shandor allowed an expression of distaste to cross his face. He looked at the chubby man across the desk and felt the distaste deepen and crystallize. John Hart's face was round, with little lines going up from the eyes, an almost grotesque, burlesque-comic face that belied the icy practical nature of the man behind it. A thoroughly distasteful face, Shandor thought. Finally he said, "The story, John. On Ingersoll. Let's have it, straight out."

Hart shrugged his stocky shoulders, spreading his hands. "Ingersoll's dead," he said. "That's all there is to it. He's stone-cold dead."

"But he can't be dead!" roared Shandor, his face flushed. "We just can't *afford* to have him dead—"

Hart looked up wearily. "Look, I didn't kill him. He went home from the White House this evening, apparently sound enough, after a long, stiff, nasty conference with the President. Ingersoll wanted to go to Berlin and call a showdown at the International conference there, and he had a policy brawl with the President, and the President wouldn't let him go, sent an undersecretary instead, and threatened to kick Ingersoll out of the cabinet unless he quieted down. Ingersoll got home at 4:30, collapsed at 5:00, and he was dead before the doctor arrived. Cerebral hemorrhage, pretty straightforward. Ingersoll's been killing himself for years—he knew it, and everyone else in Washington knew it. It was bound to happen sooner or later."

"He was trying to prevent a war," said Shandor dully, "and he was all by himself. Nobody else wanted to stop it, nobody that mattered, at any rate. Only the people didn't want war, and who ever listens to them? Ingersoll got the people behind him, so they gave him a couple of Nobel Peace Prizes, and made him Secretary of State, and then cut his throat every time he tried to do anything. No wonder he's dead—"

Hart shrugged again, eloquently indifferent. "So he was a nice guy, he wanted to prevent a war. As far as I'm concerned, he was a pain in the neck, the way he was forever jumping down Information's throat, but he's dead now, he isn't around any more—" His eyes narrowed sharply. "The important thing, Tommy, is that the people won't like it that he's dead. They trusted him. He's been the people's Golden Boy, their last-ditch hope for peace. If they think their last chance is gone with his death, they're going to be mad. They won't like it, and there'll be hell to pay—"

Shandor lit a smoke with trembling fingers, his eyes smouldering. "So the people have to be eased out of the picture," he said flatly. "They've got to get the story so they won't be so angry—"

Hart nodded, grinning. "They've got to have a real story, Tommy. Big, blown up, what a great guy he was, defender of the peace, greatest, most influential man America has turned out since the half-century—you know what they lap up, the usual garbage, only on a slightly higher plane. They've got to think that he's really saved them, that he's turned over the reins to other hands just as trustworthy as his—you can give the president a big hand there—they've got to think his work is the basis of our present foreign policy—can't you see the implications? It's got to be spread on with a trowel, laid on skillfully—"

Shandor's face flushed deep red, and he ground the stub of his smoke out viciously. "I'm sick of this stuff, Hart," he exploded. "I'm sick of you, and I'm sick of this whole rotten setup, this business of writing reams and reams of lies just to keep things under control. Ingersoll was a great man, a *really* great man, and he was *wasted*, thrown away. He worked to make peace, and he got laughed at. He hasn't done a thing—because he couldn't. Everything he has tried has been useless, wasted. *That's* the truth—why not tell that to the people?"

Hart stared. "Get hold of yourself," he snapped. "You know your job. There's a story to write. The life of David Ingersoll. It has to go down smooth." His dark eyes shifted to his hands, and back sharply to Shandor. "A propagandist has to write it, Tommy—an ace propagandist. You're the only one I know that could do the job."

"Not me," said Shandor flatly, standing up. "Count me out. I'm through with this, as of now. Get yourself some other whipping boy. Ingersoll was one man the people could trust. And he was one man I could never face. I'm not good enough for him to spit on, and I'm not going to sell him down the river now that he's dead."

With a little sigh John Hart reached into the desk. "That's very odd," he said softly. "Because

Ingersoll left a message for you—"

Shandor snapped about, eyes wide. "Message—?"

The chubby man handed him a small envelope. "Apparently he wrote that a long time ago. Told his daughter to send it to Public Information Board immediately in event of his death. Read it."

Shandor unfolded the thin paper, and blinked unbelieving:

*In event of my death during the next few months, a certain amount of biographical writing will be inevitable. It is my express wish that this writing, in whatever form it may take, be done by Mr. Thomas L. Shandor, staff writer of the Federal Public Information Board.*

*I believe that man alone is qualified to handle this assignment.*

*(Signed) David P. Ingersoll  
Secretary of State,  
United States of America.*

*4 June, 1981*

Shandor read the message a second time, then folded it carefully and placed it in his pocket, his forehead creased. "I suppose you want the story to be big," he said dully.

Hart's eyes gleamed a moment of triumph. "As big as you can make it," he said eagerly. "Don't spare time or effort, Tommy. You'll be relieved of all assignments until you have it done—if you'll take it."

"Oh, yes," said Shandor softly. "I'll take it."

He landed the small PIB 'copter on an airstrip in the outskirts of Georgetown, haggled with Security officials for a few moments, and grabbed an old weatherbeaten cab, giving the address of the Ingersoll estate as he settled back in the cushions. A small radio was set inside the door; he snapped it on, fiddled with the dial until he found a PIB news report. And as he listened he felt his heart sink lower and lower, and the old familiar feeling of dirtiness swept over him, the feeling of being a part in an enormous, overpowering scheme of corruption and degradation. The Berlin conference was reaching a common meeting ground, the report said, with Russian, Chinese, and American officials making the first real progress in the week of talks. Hope rising for an early armistice on the Indian front. Suddenly he hunched forward, blinking in surprise as the announcer continued the broadcast: "The Secretary of State, David Ingersoll, was stricken with a slight head cold this evening on the eve of his departure for the Berlin Conference, and was advised to postpone the trip temporarily. John Harris Darby, first undersecretary, was dispatched in his place. Mr. Ingersoll expressed confidence that Mr. Darby would be able to handle the talks as well as himself, in view of the optimistic trend in Berlin last night—"

Shandor snapped the radio off viciously, a roar of disgust rising in his throat, cut off just in time. Lies, lies, lies. Some people *knew* they were lies—what could they really think? People like David Ingersoll's wife—

Carefully he reined in his thoughts, channelled them. He had called the Ingersoll home the night before, announcing his arrival this morning—

The taxi ground up a gravelled driveway, stopped before an Army jeep at the iron-grilled gateway. A Security Officer flipped a cigarette onto the ground, shaking his head. "Can't go in, Secretary's orders."

Shandor stepped from the cab, briefcase under his arm. He showed his card, scowled when the officer continued shaking his head. "Orders say *nobody*—"

"Look, blockhead," Shandor grated. "If you want to hang by your toes, I can put through a special check-line to Washington to confirm my appointment here. I'll also recommend you for the salt mines."

The officer growled, "Wise guy," and shuffled into the guard shack. Minutes later he appeared again, jerked his thumb toward the estate. "Take off," he said. "See that you check here at the gate before you leave."

He was admitted to the huge house by a stone-faced butler, who led him through a maze of corridors into a huge dining room. Morning sunlight gleamed through a glassed-in wall, and Shandor stopped at the door, almost speechless.

He knew he'd seen the girl somewhere. At one of the Washington parties, or in the newspapers. Her face was unmistakable; it was the sort of face that a man never forgets once he glimpses it—thin, puckish, with wide-set grey eyes that seemed both somber and secretly amused, a full, sensitive mouth, and blonde hair, exceedingly fine, cropped close about her ears. She was eating her breakfast, a rolled up newspaper by her plate, and as she looked up, her eyes were not warm. She just stared at Shandor angrily for a moment, then set down her coffee cup and threw the

paper to the floor with a slam. "You're Shandor, I suppose."

Shandor looked at the paper, then back at her. "Yes, I'm Tom Shandor. But you're not Mrs. Ingersoll—"

"A profound observation. Mother isn't interested in seeing anyone this morning, particularly you." She motioned to a chair. "You can talk to me if you want to."

Shandor sank down in the proffered seat, struggling to readjust his thinking. "Well," he said finally. "I—I wasn't expecting you—" he broke into a grin—"but I should think you could help. You know what I'm trying to do—I mean, about your father. I want to write a story, and the logical place to start would be with his family—"

The girl blinked wide eyes innocently. "Why don't you start with the newspaper files?" she asked, her voice silky. "You'd find all sorts of information about daddy there. Pages and pages—"

"No, no— I don't want that kind of information. You're his daughter, Miss Ingersoll, you could tell me about him as a man. Something about his personal life, what sort of man he was—"

She shrugged indifferently, buttered a piece of toast, as Shandor felt most acutely the pangs of his own missed breakfast. "He got up at seven every morning," she said. "He brushed his teeth and ate breakfast. At nine o'clock the State Department called for him—"

Shandor shook his head unhappily. "No, no, that's not what I mean."

"Then perhaps you'd tell me precisely what you *do* mean?" Her voice was clipped and hard.

Shandor sighed in exasperation. "The personal angle. His likes and dislikes, how he came to formulate his views, his relationship with his wife, with you—"

"He was a kind and loving father," she said, her voice mocking. "He loved to read, he loved music—oh, yes, put that down, he was a *great* lover of music. His wife was the apple of his eye, and he tried, for all the duties of his position, to provide us with a happy home life—"

"Miss Ingersoll."

She stopped in mid-sentence, her grey eyes veiled, and shook her head slightly. "That's not what you want, either?"

Shandor stood up and walked to a window, looking out over the wide veranda. Carefully he snubbed his cigarette in an ashtray, then turned sharply to the girl. "Look. If you want to play games, I can play games too. Either you're going to help me, or you're not—it's up to you. But you forget one thing. I'm a propagandist. I might say I'm a very expert propagandist. I can tell a true story from a false one. You won't get anywhere lying to me, or evading me, and if you choose to try, we can call it off right now. You know exactly the type of information I need from you. Your father was a great man, and he rates a fair shake in the write-ups. I'm asking you to help me."

Her lips formed a sneer. "And *you're* going to give him a fair shake, I'm supposed to believe." She pointed to the newspaper. "With garbage like that? Head cold!" Her face flushed, and she turned her back angrily. "I know your writing, Mr. Shandor. I've been exposed to it for years. You've never written an honest, true story in your life, but you always want the truth to start with, don't you? I'm to give you the truth, and let you do what you want with it, is that the idea? No dice, Mr. Shandor. And you even have the gall to brag about it!"

Shandor flushed angrily. "You're not being fair. This story is going to press straight and true, every word of it. This is one story that won't be altered."

And then she was laughing, choking, holding her sides, as the tears streamed down her cheeks. Shandor watched her, reddening, anger growing up to choke him. "I'm not joking," he snapped. "I'm breaking with the routine, do you understand? I'm through with the lies now, I'm writing this one straight."

She wiped her eyes and looked at him, bitter lines under her smile. "You couldn't do it," she said, still laughing. "You're a fool to think so. You could write it, and you'd be out of a job so fast you wouldn't know what hit you. But you'd never get it into print. And you know it. You'd never even get the story to the inside offices."

Shandor stared at her. "That's what you think," he said slowly. "This story will get to the press if it kills me."

The girl looked up at him, eyes wide, incredulous. "You *mean* that, don't you?"

"I never meant anything more in my life."

She looked at him, wonderingly, motioned him to the table, a faraway look in her eyes. "Have some coffee," she said, and then turned to him, her eyes wide with excitement. The sneer was gone from her face, the coldness and hostility, and her eyes were pleading. "If there were some way to do it, if you really meant what you said, if you'd really *do* it—give people a true story—"

Shandor's voice was low. "I told you, I'm sick of this mill. There's something wrong with this country, something wrong with the world. There's a rottenness in it, and your father was fighting to cut out the rottenness. This story is going to be straight, and it's going to be printed if I get shot for treason. And it could split things wide open at the seams."

She sat down at the table. Her lower lip trembled, and her voice was tense with excitement. "Let's get out of here," she said. "Let's go someplace where we can talk—"

They found a quiet place off the business section in Washington, one of the newer places with the small closed booths, catering to people weary of eavesdropping and overheard conversations. Shandor ordered beers, then lit a smoke and leaned back facing Ann Ingersoll. It occurred to him that she was exceptionally lovely, but he was almost frightened by the look on her face, the suppressed excitement, the cold, bitter lines about her mouth. Incongruously, he thought crossed his mind that he'd hate to have this woman against him. She looked as though she would be capable of more than he'd care to tangle with. For all her lovely face there was an edge of thin ice to her smile, a razor-sharp, dangerous quality that made him curiously uncomfortable. But now she was nervous, withdrawing a cigarette from his pack with trembling fingers, fumbling with his lighter until he struck a match for her. "Now," he said. "Why the secrecy?"

She glanced at the closed door to the booth. "Mother would kill me if she knew I was helping you. She hates you, and she hates the Public Information Board. I think dad hated you, too."

Shandor took the folded letter from his pocket. "Then what do you think of this?" he asked softly. "Doesn't this strike you a little odd?"

She read Ingersoll's letter carefully, then looked up at Tom, her eyes wide with surprise. "So this is what that note was. This doesn't wash, Tom."

"You're telling me it doesn't wash. Notice the wording. 'I believe that man alone is qualified to handle this assignment.' Why me? And of all things, why me *alone*? He knew my job, and he fought me and the PIB every step of his career. Why a note like this?"

She looked up at him. "Do you have any idea?"

"Sure, I've got an idea. A crazy one, but an idea. I don't think he wanted me because of the writing. I think he wanted me because I'm a propagandist."

She scowled. "It still doesn't wash. There are lots of propagandists—and why would he want a propagandist?"

Shandor's eyes narrowed. "Let's let it ride for a moment. How about his files?"

"In his office in the State Department."

"He didn't keep anything personal at home?"

Her eyes grew wide. "Oh, no, he wouldn't have dared. Not the sort of work he was doing. With his files under lock and key in the State Department nothing could be touched without his knowledge, but at home anybody might have walked in."

"Of course. How about enemies? Did he have any particular enemies?"

She laughed humorlessly. "Name anybody in the current administration. I think he had more enemies than anybody else in the cabinet." Her mouth turned down bitterly. "He was a stumbling block. He got in people's way, and they hated him for it. They killed him for it."

Shandor's eyes widened. "You mean you think he was murdered?"

"Oh, no, nothing so crude. They didn't have to be crude. They just let him butt his head against a stone wall. Everything he tried was blocked, or else it didn't lead anywhere. Like this Berlin Conference. It's a powder keg. Dad gambled everything on going there, forcing the delegates to face facts, to really put their cards on the table. Ever since the United Nations fell apart in '72 dad had been trying to get America and Russia to sit at the same table. But the President cut him out at the last minute. It was planned that way, to let him get up to the very brink of it, and then slap him down hard. They did it all along. This was just the last he could take."

Shandor was silent for a moment. "Any particular thorns in his side?"

Ann shrugged. "Munitions people, mostly. Dartmouth Bearing had a pressure lobby that was trying to throw him out of the cabinet. The President sided with them, but he didn't dare do it for fear the people would squawk. He was planning to blame the failure of the Berlin Conference on dad and get him ousted that way."

Shandor stared. "But if that conference fails, *we're in full-scale war!*"

"Of course. That's the whole point." She scowled at her glass, blinking back tears. "Dad could have stopped it, but they wouldn't let him. *It killed him, Tom!*"

Shandor watched the smoke curling up from his cigarette. "Look," he said. "I've got an idea, and it's going to take some fast work. That conference could blow up any minute, and then I think we're going to be in real trouble. I want you to go to your father's office and get the contents of his personal file. Not the business files, his personal files. Put them in a briefcase and subway-express them to your home. If you have any trouble, have them check with PIB—we have full authority, and I'm it right now. I'll call them and give them the word. Then meet me here again,

with the files, at 7:30 this evening."

She looked up, her eyes wide. "What—what are you going to do?"

Shandor snubbed out his smoke, his eyes bright. "I've got an idea that we may be onto something—just something I want to check. But I think if we work it right, we can lay these boys that fought your father out by the toes—"

The Library of Congress had been moved when the threat of bombing in Washington had become acute. Shandor took a cab to the Georgetown airstrip, checked the fuel in the 'copter. Ten minutes later he started the motor, and headed upwind into the haze over the hills. In less than half an hour he settled to the Library landing field in western Maryland, and strode across to the rear entrance.

The electronic cross-index had been the last improvement in the Library since the war with China had started in 1958. Shandor found a reading booth in one of the alcoves on the second floor, and plugged in the index. The cold, metallic voice of the automatic chirped twice and said, "Your reference, pleeyuz."

Shandor thought a moment. "Give me your newspaper files on David Ingersoll, Secretary of State."

"Through which dates, pleeyuz."

"Start with the earliest reference, and carry through to current." The speaker burped, and he sat back, waiting. A small grate in the panel before him popped open, and a small spool plopped out onto a spindle. Another followed, and another. He turned to the reader, and reeled the first spool into the intake slot. The light snapped on, and he began reading.

Spools continued to plop down. He read for several hours, taking a dozen pages of notes. The references commenced in June, 1961, with a small notice that David Ingersoll, Republican from New Jersey, had been nominated to run for state senator. Before that date, nothing. Shandor scowled, searching for some item predating that one. He found nothing.

Scratching his head, he continued reading, outlining chronologically. Ingersoll's election to state senate, then to United States Senate. His rise to national prominence as economist for the post-war Administrator of President Drayton in 1966. His meteoric rise as a peacemaker in a nation tired from endless dreary years of fighting in China and India. His tremendous popularity as he tried to stall the re-intensifying cold-war with Russia. The first Nobel Peace Prize, in 1969, for the ill-fated Ingersoll Plan for World Sovereignty. Pages and pages and pages of newsprint. Shandor growled angrily, surveying the pile of notes with a sinking feeling of incredulity. The articles, the writing, the tone—it was all too familiar. Carefully he checked the newspaper sources. Some of the dispatches were Associated Press; many came direct desk from Public Information Board in New York; two other networks sponsored some of the wordage. But the tone was all the same.

Finally, disgusted, Tom stuffed the notes into his briefcase, and flipped down the librarian lever. "Sources, please."

A light blinked, and in a moment a buzzer sounded at his elbow. A female voice, quite human, spoke as he lifted the receiver. "Can I help you on sources?"

"Yes. I've been reading the newspaper files on David Ingersoll. I'd like the by-lines on this copy."

There was a moment of silence. "Which dates, please?"

Shandor read off his list, giving dates. The silence continued for several minutes as he waited impatiently. He was about to hang up and leave when the voice spoke up again. "I'm sorry, sir. Most of that material has no by-line. Except for one or two items it's all staff-written."

"By whom?"

"I'm sorry, no source is available. Perhaps the PIB offices could help you—"

"All right, ring them for me, please." He waited another five minutes, saw the PIB cross-index clerk appear on the video screen. "Hello, Mr. Shandor. Can I help you?"

"I'm trying to trace down the names of the Associated Press and PIB writers who covered stories on David Ingersoll over a period from June 1961 to the present date—"

The girl disappeared for several moments. When she reappeared, her face was puzzled. "Why, Mr. Shandor, you've been doing the work on Ingersoll from August, 1978 to Sept. 1982. We haven't closed the files on this last month yet—"

He scowled in annoyance. "Yes, yes, I know that. I want the writers before I came."

The clerk paused. "Until you started your work there was no definite assignment. The information just isn't here. But the man you replaced in PIB was named Frank Mariel."

Shandor turned the name over in his mind, decided that it was familiar, but that he couldn't quite place it. "What's this man doing now?"

The girl shrugged. "I don't know, just now, and have no sources. But according to our files he left Public Information Board to go to work in some capacity for Dartmouth Bearing Corporation."

Shandor flipped the switch, and settled back in the reading chair. Once again he fingered through his notes, frowning, a doubt gnawing through his mind into certainty. He took up a dozen of the stories, analyzed them carefully, word for word, sentence by sentence. Then he sat back, his body tired, eyes closed in concentration, an incredible idea twisting and writhing and solidifying in his mind.

It takes one to catch one. That was his job—telling lies. Writing stories that weren't true, and making them believable. Making people think one thing when the truth was something else. It wasn't so strange that he could detect exactly the same sort of thing when he ran into it. He thought it through again and again, and every time he came up with the same answer. There was no doubt.

Reading the newspaper files had accomplished only one thing. He had spent the afternoon reading a voluminous, neat, smoothly written, extremely convincing batch of bold-faced lies. Lies about David Ingersoll. Somewhere, at the bottom of those lies was a shred or two of truth, a shred hard to analyze, impossible to segregate from the garbage surrounding it. But somebody had written the lies. That meant that somebody knew the truths behind them.

Suddenly he galvanized into action. The video blinked protestingly at his urgent summons, and the Washington visiphone operator answered. "Somewhere in those listings of yours," Shandor said, "you've got a man named Frank Mariel. I want his number."

He reached the downtown restaurant half an hour early, and ducked into a nearby visiphone station to ring Hart. The PIB director's chubby face materialized on the screen after a moment's confusion, and Shandor said: "John—what are your plans for releasing the Ingersoll story? The morning papers left him with a slight head cold, if I remember right—" Try as he would, he couldn't conceal the edge of sarcasm in his voice.

Hart scowled. "How's the biography coming?"

"The biography's coming along fine. I want to know what kind of quicksand I'm wading through, that's all."

Hart shrugged and spread his hands. "We can't break the story proper until you're ready with your buffer story. Current plans say that he gets pneumonia tomorrow, and goes to Walter Reed tomorrow night. We're giving it as little emphasis as possible, running the Berlin Conference stories for right-hand column stuff. That'll give you all day tomorrow and half the next day for the preliminary stories on his death. Okay?"

"That's not enough time." Shandor's voice was tight.

"It's enough for a buffer-release." Hart scowled at him, his round face red and annoyed. "Look, Tom, you get that story in, and never mind what you like or don't like. This is dynamite you're playing with—the Conference is going to be on the rocks in a matter of hours—that's straight from the Undersecretary—and on top of it all, there's trouble down in Arizona—"

Shandor's eyes widened. "The Rocket Project—?"

Hart's mouth twisted. "Sabotage. They picked up a whole ring that's been operating for over a year. Caught them red-handed, but not before they burnt out half a calculator wing. They'll have to move in new machines now before they can go on—set the Project back another week, and that could lose the war for us right there. Now *get that story in*." He snapped the switch down, leaving Shandor blinking at the darkened screen.

Ten minutes later Ann Ingersoll joined him in the restaurant booth. She was wearing a chic white linen outfit, with her hair fresh, like a blonde halo around her head in the fading evening light. Her freshness contrasted painfully with Tom's curling collar and dirty tie, and he suddenly wished he'd picked up a shave. He looked up and grunted when he saw the fat briefcase under the girl's arm, and she dropped it on the table between them and sank down opposite him, studying his face. "The reading didn't go so well," she said.

"The reading went lousy," he admitted sheepishly. "This the personal file?"

She nodded shortly and lit a cigarette. "The works. They didn't even bother me. But I can't see why all the precaution— I mean, the express and all that—"

Shandor looked at her sharply. "If what you said this morning was true, that file is a gold mine, for us, but more particularly, for your father's enemies. I'll go over it closely when I get out of here. Meantime, there are one or two other things I want to talk over with you."

She settled herself, and grinned. "Okay, boss. Fire away."

He took a deep breath, and tiredness lined his face. "First off: what did your father do before he went into politics?"

Her eyes widened, and she arrested the cigarette halfway to her mouth, put it back on the



ashtray, with a puzzled frown on her face. "That's funny," she said softly. "I thought I knew, but I guess I don't. He was an industrialist—way, far back, years and years ago, when I was just a little brat—and then we got into the war with China, and I don't know what he did. He was always making business trips; I can remember going to the airport with mother to meet him, but I don't know what he did. Mother always avoided talking about him, and I never got to see him enough to talk—"

Shandor sat forward, his eyes bright. "Did he ever entertain any business friends during that time—any that you can remember?"

She shook her head. "I can't remember. Seems to me a man or two came home with him on a couple of occasions, but I don't know who. I don't remember much before the night he came home and said he was going to run for Congress. Then there were people galore—have been ever since."

"And what about his work at the end of the China war? After he was elected, while he was doing all that work to try to smooth things out with Russia—can you remember him saying anything, to you, or to your mother, about *what* he was doing, and how?"

She shook her head again. "Oh, yes, he'd talk—he and mother would talk—sometimes argue. I had the feeling that things weren't too well with mother and dad many times. But I can't remember anything specific, except that he used to say over and over how he hated the thought of another war. He was afraid it was going to come—"

Shandor looked up sharply. "But he hated it—"

"Yes." Her eyes widened. "Oh, yes, he hated it. Dad was a good man, Tom. He believed with all his heart that the people of the world wanted peace, and that they were being dragged to war because they couldn't find any purpose to keep them from it. He believed that if the people of the world had a cause, a purpose, a driving force, that there wouldn't be any more wars. Some men fought him for preaching peace, but he wouldn't be swayed. Especially he hated the pure-profit lobbies, the patriotic drum-beaters who stood to get rich in a war. But dad had to die, and there aren't many men like him left now, I guess."

"I know." Shandor fell silent, stirring his coffee glumly. "Tell me," he said, "did your father have anything to do with a man named Mariel?"

Ann's eyes narrowed. "Frank Mariel? He was the newspaper man. Yes, dad had plenty to do with him. He hated dad's guts, because dad fought his writing so much. Mariel was one of the 'fight now and get rich' school that were continually plaguing dad."

"Would you say that they were enemies?"

She bit her lip, wrinkling her brow in thought. "Not at first. More like a big dog with a little flea, at first. Mariel pestered dad, and dad tried to scratch him away. But Mariel got into PIB, and then I suppose you could call them enemies—"

Shandor sat back, frowning, his face dark with fatigue. He stared at the table top for a long moment, and when he looked up at the girl his eyes were troubled. "There's something wrong with this," he said softly. "I can't quite make it out, but it just doesn't look right. Those newspaper stories I read—pure bushwa, from beginning to end. I'm dead certain of it. And yet—" he paused, searching for words. "Look. It's like I'm looking at a jigsaw puzzle that *looks* like it's all completed and lying out on the table. But there's something that tells me I'm being foxed, that it isn't a complete puzzle at all, just an illusion, yet somehow I can't even tell for sure where pieces are missing—"

The girl leaned over the table, her grey eyes deep with concern. "Tom," she said, almost in a whisper. "Suppose there *is* something, Tom. Something big, what's it going to do to *you*, Tom? You can't fight anything as powerful as PIB, and these men that hated dad could break you."

Tom grinned tiredly, his eyes far away. "I know," he said softly. "But a man can only swallow so much. Somewhere, I guess, I've still got a conscience—it's a nuisance, but it's still there." He looked closely at the lovely girl across from him. "Maybe it's just that I'm tired of being sick of myself. I'd like to *like* myself for a change. I haven't liked myself for years." He looked straight at her, his voice very small in the still booth. "I'd like some other people to like me, too. So I've got to keep going—"

Her hand was in his, then, grasping his fingers tightly, and her voice was trembling. "I didn't think there was anybody left like that," she said. "Tom, you aren't by yourself—remember that. No matter what happens, I'm with you all the way. I'm—I'm afraid, but I'm with you."

He looked up at her then, and his voice was tight. "Listen, Ann. Your father planned to go to Berlin before he died. What was he going to *do* if he went to the Berlin Conference?"

She shrugged helplessly. "The usual diplomatic fol-de-rol, I suppose. He always—"

"No, no—that's not right. He wanted to go so badly that he died when he wasn't allowed to, Ann. He must have had something in mind, something concrete, something tremendous. Something that would have changed the picture a great deal."

And then she was staring at Shandor, her face white, grey eyes wide. "Of course he had

something," she exclaimed. "He *must* have—oh, I don't know what, he wouldn't say what was in his mind, but when he came home after that meeting with the President he was furious— I've never seen him so furious, Tom, he was almost out of his mind with anger, and he paced the floor, and, swore and nearly tore the room apart. He wouldn't speak to anyone, just stamped around and threw things. And then we heard him cry out, and when we got to him he was unconscious on the floor, and he was dead when the doctor came—" She set her glass down with trembling fingers. "He had something big, Tom, I'm sure of it. He had some information that he planned to drop on the conference table with such a bang it would stop the whole world cold. *He knew something* that the conference doesn't know—"

Tom Shandor stood up, trembling, and took the briefcase. "It should be here," he said. "If not the whole story, at least the missing pieces." He started for the booth door. "Go home," he said. "I'm going where I can examine these files without any interference. Then I'll call you." And then he was out the door, shouldering his way through the crowded restaurant, frantically weaving his way to the street. He didn't hear Ann's voice as she called after him to stop, didn't see her stop at the booth door, watch in a confusion of fear and tenderness, and collapse into the booth, sobbing as if her heart would break. Because a crazy, twisted, impossible idea was in his mind, an idea that had plagued him since he had started reading that morning, an idea with an answer, an acid test, folded in the briefcase under his arm. He bumped into a fat man at the bar, grunted angrily, and finally reached the street, whistled at the cab that lingered nearby.

The car swung up before him, the door springing open automatically. He had one foot on the running board before he saw the trap, saw the tight yellowish face and the glittering eyes inside the cab. Suddenly there was an explosion of bright purple brilliance, and he was screaming, twisting and screaming and reeling backward onto the sidewalk, doubled over with the agonizing fire that burned through his side and down one leg, forcing scream after scream from his throat as he blindly staggered to the wall of the building, pounded it with his fists for relief from the searing pain. And then he was on his side on the sidewalk, sobbing, blubbering incoherently to the uniformed policeman who was dragging him gently to his feet, seeing through burning eyes the group of curious people gathering around. Suddenly realization dawned through the pain, and he let out a cry of anger and bolted for the curb, knocking the policeman aside, his eyes wild, searching the receding stream of traffic for the cab, a picture of the occupant burned indelibly into his mind, a face he had seen, recognized. The cab was gone, he knew, gone like a breath of wind. The briefcase was also gone—

He gave the address of the Essex University Hospital to the cabby, and settled back in the seat, gripping the hand-guard tightly to fight down the returning pain in his side and leg. His mind was whirling, fighting in a welter of confusion, trying to find some avenue of approach, some way to make sense of the mess. The face in the cab recurred again and again before his eyes, the gaunt, putty-colored cheeks, the sharp glittering eyes. His acquaintance with Frank Mariel had been brief and unpleasant, in the past, but that was a face he would never forget. But how could Mariel have known where he would be, and when? There was precision in that attack, far too smooth precision ever to have been left to chance, or even to independent planning. His mind skirted the obvious a dozen times, and each time rejected it angrily. Finally he knew he could no longer reject the thought, the only possible answer. Mariel had known where he would be, and at what time. Therefore, someone must have told him.

He stiffened in the seat, the pain momentarily forgotten. Only one person could have told Mariel. Only one person knew where the file was, and where it would be after he left the restaurant—he felt cold bitterness creep down his spine. She had known, and sat there making eyes at him, and telling him how wonderful he was, how she was with him no matter what happened—and she'd already sold him down the river. He shook his head angrily, trying to keep his thoughts on a rational plane. *Why?* Why had she strung him along, why had she even started to help him? And why, above all, turn against her own father?

The Hospital driveway crunched under the cab, and he hopped out, wincing with every step, and walked into a phone booth off the lobby. He gave a name, and in a moment heard the P.A. system echoing it: "Dr. Prex; calling Dr. Prex." In a moment he heard a receiver click off, and a familiar voice said, "Prex speaking."

"Prex, this is Shandor. Got a minute?"

The voice was cordial. "Dozens of them. Where are you?"

"I'll be up in your quarters." Shandor slammed down the receiver and started for the elevator to the Resident Physicians' wing.

He let himself in by a key, and settled down in the darkened room to wait an eternity before a tall, gaunt man walked in, snapped on a light, and loosened the white jacket at his neck. He was a young man, no more than thirty, with a tired, sober face and jet black hair falling over his forehead. His eyes lighted as he saw Shandor, and he grinned. "You look like you've been through the mill. What happened?"

Shandor stripped off his clothes, exposing the angry red of the seared skin. The tall man whistled softly, the smile fading. Carefully he examined the burned area, his fingers gentle on the tender

surface, then he turned troubled eyes to Shandor. "You've been messing around with dirty guys, Tom. Nobody but a real dog would turn a scald on a man." He went to a cupboard, returned with a jar of salve and bandages.

"Is it serious?" Shandor's face was deathly white. "I've been fighting shock with thiamin for the last hour, but I don't think I can hold out much longer."

Prex shrugged. "You didn't get enough to do any permanent damage, if that's what you mean. Just fried the pain-receptors in your skin to a crisp, is all. A little dose is so painful you can't do anything but holler for a while, but it won't hurt you permanently unless you get it all over you. Enough can kill you." He dressed the burned areas carefully, then bared Shandor's arm and used a pressure syringe for a moment. "Who's using one of those things?"

Shandor was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Look, Prex. I need some help, badly." His eyes looked up in dull anger. "I'm going to see a man tonight, and I want him to talk, hard and fast. I don't care right now if he nearly dies from pain, but I want him to talk. I need somebody along who knows how to make things painful."

Prex scowled, and pointed to the burn. "This the man?"

"That's the man."

Prex put away the salve. "I suppose I'll help you, then. Is this official, or grudge?"

"A little of both. Look, Prex, I know this is a big favor to ask, but it's on the level. Believe me, it's square, nothing shady about it. The method may not be legal, but the means are justified. I can't tell you what's up, but I'm asking you to trust me."

Prex grinned. "You say it's all right, it's all right. When?"

Shandor glanced at his watch. "About 3:00 this morning, I think. We can take your car."

They talked for a while, and a call took the doctor away. Shandor slept a little, then made some black coffee. Shortly before three the two men left the Hospital by the Physicians' entrance, and Prex's little beat-up Dartmouth slid smoothly into the desultory traffic for the suburbs.

The apartment was small and neatly furnished. Shandor and the Doctor had been admitted by a sleepy doorman who had been jolted to sudden attention by Tom's PIB card, and after five minutes pounding on the apartment door, a sleepy-eyed man opened the door a crack. "Say, what's the idea pounding on a man's door at this time of night? Haven't you—"

Shandor gave the door a shove with his shoulder, driving it open into the room. "Shut up," he said bluntly. He turned so the light struck his face, and the little man's jaw dropped in astonishment. "Shandor!" he whispered.

Frank Mariel looked like a weasel—sallow, sunken-cheeked, with a yellowish cast to his skin that contrasted unpleasantly with the coal black hair. "That's right," said Shandor. "We've come for a little talk. Meet the doctor."

Mariel's eyes shifted momentarily to Prex's stoney face, then back to Shandor, ghosts of fear creeping across his face. "What do you want?"

"I've come for the files."

The little man scowled. "You've come to the wrong man. I don't have any files."

Prex carefully took a small black case from his pocket, unsnapped a hinge, and a small, shiny instrument fell out in his hand. "The files," said Shandor. "Who has them?"

"I—I don't know—"

Shandor smashed a fist into the man's face, viciously, knocking him reeling to the floor. "You tried to kill me tonight," he snarled. "You should have done it up right. You should stick to magazine editing and keep your nose out of dirty games, Mariel. Who has the files?"

Mariel picked himself up, trembling, met Shandor's fist, and sprawled again, a trickle of blood appearing at his mouth. "Harry Dartmouth has the files," he groaned. "They're probably in Chicago now."

"What do you know about Harry Dartmouth?"

Mariel gained a chair this time before Shandor hit him. "I've only met him a couple of times. He's the president of Dartmouth Bearing Corporation and he's my boss—Dartmouth Bearing publishes '*Fighting World*.' I do what he tells me."

Shandor's eyes flared. "Including murder, is that right?" Mariel's eyes were sullen. "Come on, talk! Why did Dartmouth want Ingersoll's personal files?"

The man just stared sullenly at the floor. Prex pressed a stud on the side of the shiny instrument, and a purple flash caught Mariel's little finger. Mariel jerked and squealed with pain. "Speak up," said Shandor. "I didn't hear you."

"Probably about the bonds," Mariel whimpered. His face was ashen, and he eyed Prex with undisguised pleading. "Look, tell him to put that thing away—"

Shandor grinned without humor. "You don't like scalders, eh? Get a big enough dose, and you're dead, Mariel—but I guess you know that, don't you? Think about it. But don't think too long. What about the bonds?"

"Ingersoll has been trying to get Dartmouth Bearing Corporation on legal grounds for years. Something about the government bonds they held, bought during the China wars. You know, surplus profits—Dartmouth Bearing could beat the taxes by buying bonds. Harry Dartmouth thought Ingersoll's files had some legal dope against them—he was afraid you'd try to make trouble for the company—"

"So he hired his little pixie, eh? Seems to me you'd have enough on your hands editing that rag—"

Mariel shot him an injured look. "'*Fighting World*' has the second largest magazine circulation in the country. It's a good magazine."

"It's a warmonger propaganda rag," snapped Shandor. He glared at the little man. "What's your relation to Ingersoll?"

"I hated his guts. He was carrying his lily-livered pacifism right to the White House, and I couldn't see it. So I fought him every inch of the way. I'll fight what he stands for now he's dead —"

Shandor's eyes narrowed. "That was a mistake, Mariel. You weren't supposed to know he is dead." He walked over to the little man, whose face was a shade whiter yet. "Funny," said Shandor quietly. "You say you hated him, but I didn't get that impression at all."

Mariel's eyes opened wide. "What do you mean?"

"Everything you wrote for PIB seems to have treated him kindly."

A shadow of deep concern crossed Mariel's face, as though for the first time he found himself in deep water. "PIB told me what to write, and I wrote it. You know how they work."

"Yes, I know how they work. I also know that most of your writing, while you were doing Public Information Board work, was never ordered by PIB. Ever hear of Ben Chamberlain, Mariel? Or Frank Eberhardt? Or Jon Harding? Ever hear of them, Mariel?" Shandor's voice cut sharply through the room. "Ben Chamberlain wrote for every large circulation magazine in the country, after the Chinese war. Frank Eberhardt was the man behind Associated Press during those years. Jon Harding was the silent publisher of three newspapers in Washington, two in New York, and one in Chicago. Ever hear of those men, Mariel?"

"No, no—"

"You know damned well you've heard of them. Because *those men were all you*. Every single one of them—" Shandor was standing close to him, now, and Mariel sat like he had seen a ghost, his lower lip quivering, forehead wet. "No, no, you're wrong—"

"No, no, I'm right," mocked Shandor. "I've been in the newspaper racket for a long time, Mariel. I've got friends in PIB—real friends, not the shamus crowd you're acquainted with that'll take you for your last nickel and then leave you to starve. Never mind how I found out. You hated Ingersoll so much you handed him bouquets all the time. How about it, Mariel? All that writing—you couldn't praise him enough. Boosting him, beating the drum for him and his policies—every trick and gimmick known in the propaganda game to give him a boost, make him the people's darling—how about it?"

Mariel was shaking his head, his little eyes nearly popping with fright. "It wasn't him," he choked. "Ingersoll had nothing to do with it. It was Dartmouth Bearing. They bought me into the spots. Got me the newspapers, supported me. Dartmouth Bearing ran the whole works, and they told me what to write—"

"Garbage! Dartmouth Bearing—the biggest munitions people in America, and I'm supposed to believe that they told you to go to bat for the country's strongest pacifist! What kind of sap do you take me for?"

"It's true! Ingersoll had nothing to do with it, nothing at all." Mariel's voice was almost pleading. "Look, I don't know what Dartmouth Bearing had in mind. Who was I to ask questions? You don't realize their power, Shandor. Those bonds I spoke of—they hold millions of dollars worth of bonds! They hold enough bonds to topple the economy of the nation, they've got bonds in the names of ten thousand subsidiary companies. They've been telling Federal Economics Commission what to do for the past ten years! And they're getting us into this war, Shandor—lock, stock and barrel. They pushed for everything they could get, and they had the money, the power, the men to do whatever they wanted. You couldn't fight them, because they had everything sewed up so tight nobody could approach them—"

Shandor's mind was racing, the missing pieces beginning, suddenly, to come out of the haze. The incredible, twisted idea broke through again, staggering him, driving through his mind like icy steel. "Listen, Mariel. I swear I'll kill you if you lie to me, so you'd better tell the truth. Who put you on my trail? Who told you Ingersoll was dead, and that I was scraping up Ingersoll's past?"

The little man twisted his hands, almost in tears. "Harry Dartmouth told me—"

"And who told Harry Dartmouth?"

Mariel's voice was so weak it could hardly be heard. "The girl," he said.

Shandor felt the chill deepen. "And where are the files now?"

"Dartmouth has them. Probably in Chicago—I expressed them. The girl didn't dare send them direct, for fear you would check, or that she was being watched. I was supposed to pick them up from you, and see to it that you didn't remember—"

Shandor clenched his fist. "Where are Dartmouth's plants located?"

"The main plants are in Chicago and Newark. They've got a smaller one in Nevada."

"And what do they make?"

"In peacetime—cars. In wartime they make tanks and shells."

"And their records? Inventories? Shipping orders, and files? Where do they keep them?"

"I—I don't know. You aren't thinking of—"

"Never mind what I'm thinking of, just answer up. Where are they?"

"All the administration offices are in Chicago. But they'd kill you, Shandor—you wouldn't stand a chance. They can't be fought, I tell you."

Shandor nodded to Prex, and started for the door. "Keep him here until dawn, then go on home, and forget what you heard. If anything happens, give me a ring at my home." He glared at Mariel. "Don't worry about me, bud—they won't be doing anything to me when I get through with them. They just won't be doing anything at all."

The idea had crystallized as he talked to Mariel. Shandor's mind was whirling as he walked down toward the thoroughfare. Incredulously, he tried to piece the picture together. He had known Dartmouth Bearing was big—but that big? Mariel might have been talking nonsense, or he might have been reading the Gospel. Shandor hailed a cab, sat back in the seat scratching his head. How big could Dartmouth Bearing be? Could *any* corporation be that big? He thought back, remembering the rash of post-war scandals and profit-gouging trials, the anti-trust trials. In wartime, bars are let down, *no one* can look with disfavor on the factories making the weapons. And if one corporation could buy, and expand, and buy some more—it might be too powerful to be prosecuted after the war—

Shandor shook his head, realizing that he was skirting the big issue. Dartmouth Bearing connected up, in some absurd fashion, but there was a missing link. Mariel fit into one side of the puzzle, interlocking with Dartmouth. The stolen files might even fit, for that matter. But the idea grew stronger. A great, jagged piece in the middle of the puzzle was missing—the key piece which would tie everything together. He felt his skin prickle as he thought. An impossible idea—and yet, he realized, if it were true, everything else would fall clearly into place—

He sat bolt upright. It *had* to be true—

He leaned forward and gave the cabby the landing field address, then sat back, feeling his pulse pounding through his arms and legs. Nervously he switched on the radio. The dial fell to some jazz music, which he tolerated for a moment or two, then flipped to a news broadcast. Not that news broadcasts really meant much, but he wanted to hear the Ingersoll story release for the day. He listened impatiently to a roundup of local news: David Ingersoll stricken with pneumonia, three Senators protesting the current tax bill—he brought his attention around sharply at the sound of a familiar name—

"—disappeared from his Chicago home early this morning. Mr. Dartmouth is president of Dartmouth Bearing Corporation, currently engaged in the manufacture of munitions for Defense, and producing much of the machinery being used in the Moon-rocket in Arizona. Police are following all possible leads, and are confident that there has been no foul play.

"On the international scene, the Kremlin is still blocking—" Shandor snapped off the radio abruptly, his forehead damp. Dartmouth disappeared, and with him the files—why? And where to go now to find them? If the idea that was plaguing him was true, sound, valid—he'd *have* to have the files. His whole body was wet with perspiration as he reached the landing field.

The trip to the Library of Congress seemed endless, yet he knew that the Library wouldn't be open until 8:00 anyway. Suddenly he felt a wave of extreme weariness sweep over him—when had he last slept? Bored, he snapped the telephone switch and rang PIB offices for his mail. To his surprise, John Hart took the wire, and exploded in his ear, "Where in hell have you been? I've been trying to get you all night. Listen, Tom, drop the Ingersoll story cold, and get in here. The faster the better."

Shandor blinked. "Drop the story? You're crazy!"

"*Get in here!*" roared Hart. "From now on you've *really* got a job. The Berlin Conference blew up tonight, Tom—high as a kite. *We're at war with Russia—*"

Carefully, Shandor plopped the receiver down on its hook, his hands like ice. Just one item first, he thought, just one thing I've got to know. *Then* back to PIB, maybe.

He found a booth in the Library, and began hunting, time pressing him into frantic speed. The idea was incredible, but it *had* to be true. He searched the micro-film files for three hours before he found it, in a "Who's Who" dating back to 1958, three years before the war with China. A simple, innocuous listing, which froze him to his seat. He read it, unbelievably, yet knowing that it was the only possible link. Finally he read it again.

David P. Ingersoll. Born 1922, married 1947. Educated at Rutgers University and MIT. Worked as administrator for International Harvester until 1955. Taught Harvard University from 1955 to 1957.

David P. Ingersoll, becoming, in 1958, the executive president of Dartmouth Bearing Corporation....

He found a small, wooded glade not far from the Library, and set the 'copter down skillfully, his mind numbed, fighting to see through the haze to the core of incredible truth he had uncovered. The great, jagged piece, so long missing, was suddenly plopped right down into the middle of the puzzle, and now it didn't fit. There were still holes, holes that obscured the picture and twisted it into a nightmarish impossibility. He snapped the telephone switch, tried three numbers without any success, and finally reached the fourth. He heard Dr. Prex's sharp voice on the wire.

"Anything happen since I left, Prex?"

"Nothing remarkable." The doctor's voice sounded tired. "Somebody tried to call Mariel on the visiphone about an hour after you had gone, and then signed off in a hurry when he saw somebody else around. Don't know who it was, but he sounded mighty agitated." The doctor's voice paused. "Anything new, Tom?"

"Plenty," growled Shandor bitterly. "But you'll have to read it in the newspapers." He flipped off the connection before Prex could reply.

Then Shandor sank back and slept, the sleep of total exhaustion, hoping that a rest would make the shimmering, indefinite picture hold still long enough for him to study it. And as he drifted into troubled sleep a greater and more pressing question wormed upward into his mind.

He woke with a jolt, just as the sun was going down, and he knew then with perfect clarity what he had to do. He checked quickly to see that he had been undisturbed, and then manipulated the controls of the 'copter. Easing the ship into the sky toward Washington, he searched out a news report on the radio, listened with a dull feeling in the pit of his stomach as the story came through about the breakdown of the Berlin Conference, the declaration of war, the President's meeting with Congress that morning, his formal request for full wartime power, the granting of permission by a wide-eyed, frightened legislature. Shandor settled back, staring dully at the ground moving below him, the wisps of evening haze rising over the darkening land. There was only one thing to do. He had to have Ingersoll's files. He knew only one way to get them.

Half an hour later he was settling the ship down, under cover of darkness, on the vast grounds behind the Ingersoll estate, cutting the motors to effect a quiet landing. Tramping down the ravine toward the huge house, he saw it was dark; down by the gate he could see the Security Guard, standing in a haze of blue cigarette smoke under the dim-out lights. Cautiously he slipped across the back terrace, crossing behind the house, and jangled a bell on a side porch.

Ann Ingersoll opened the door, and gasped as Shandor forced his way in. "Keep quiet," he hissed, slipping the door shut behind him. Then he sighed, and walked through the entrance into the large front room.

"Tom! Oh, Tom, I was afraid— Oh, *Tom!*" Suddenly she was in his arms sobbing, pressing her face against his shirt front. "Oh, I'm so glad to see you, Tom—"

He disengaged her, turning from her and walking across the room. "Let's turn it off, Ann," he said disgustedly. "It's not very impressive."

"Tom—I—I *wanted* to tell you. I just didn't know what to do. I didn't believe them when they said you wouldn't be harmed, I was afraid. Oh, Tom, I wanted to tell you, believe me—"

"You didn't tell me," he snapped. "They were nervous, they slipped up. That's the only reason I'm alive. They planned to kill me."

She stared at him tearfully, shaking her head from side to side, searching for words. "I—I didn't want that—"

He whirled, his eyes blazing. "You silly fool, what do you think you're doing when you play games with a mob like this? Do you think they're going to play fair? You're no clod, you know better than that—" He leaned over her, trembling with anger. "You set me up for a sucker, but the plan fell

through. And now I'm running around loose, and if you thought I was dangerous before, you haven't seen anything like how dangerous I am now. You're going to tell me some things, now, and you're going to tell them straight. You're going to tell me where Harry Dartmouth went with those files, where they are right now. Understand that? *I want those files*. Because when I have them I'm going to do exactly what I started out to do. I'm going to write a story, the whole rotten story about your precious father and his two-faced life. I'm going to write about Dartmouth Bearing Corporation and all its flunky outfits, and tell what they've done to this country and the people of this country." He paused, breathing heavily, and sank down on a chair, staring at her. "I've learned things in the past twenty-four hours I never dreamed could be true. I should be able to believe anything, I suppose, but these things knocked my stilts out from under me. This country has been had—right straight down the line, for a dozen years. We've been sold down the river like a pack of slaves, and now we're going to get a look at the cold ugly truth, for once."

She stared at him. "What do you mean—about my precious father—?"

"Your precious father was at the bottom of the whole slimy mess."

"No, no—not dad." She shook her head, her face chalky. "Harry Dartmouth, maybe, but not dad. Listen a minute. I didn't set you up for anything. I didn't know what Dartmouth and Mariel were up to. Dad left instructions for me to contact Harry Dartmouth immediately, in case he died. He told me that—oh, a year ago. Told me that before I did anything else, I should contact Dartmouth, and do as he said. So when he died, I contacted Harry, and kept in contact with him. He told me you were out to burn my father, to heap garbage on him after he was dead before the people who loved him, and he said the first thing you would want would be his personal files. Tom, I didn't know you, then—I knew Harry, and knew that dad trusted him, for some reason, so I believed him. But I began to realize that what he said wasn't true. I got the files, and he said to give them to you, to string you along, and he'd pick them up from you before you had a chance to do any harm with them. He said he wouldn't hurt you, but I—I didn't believe him, Tom. I believed you, that you wanted to give dad a fair shake—"

Shandor was on his feet, his eyes blazing. "So you turned them over to Dartmouth anyway? And what do you think he's done with them? Can you tell me that? Where has he gone? Has he burnt them? If not, what's he going to do with them?"

Her voice was weak, and she looked as if she were about to faint. "That's what I'm trying to tell you," she said, shakily. "He doesn't have them. I have them."

Shandor's jaw dropped. "Now, wait a minute," he said softly. "You gave me the briefcase, Mariel snatched it and nearly killed me—"

"A dummy, Tom. I didn't know who to trust, but I knew I believed you more than I believed Harry. Things happened so fast, and I was so confused—" She looked straight at him. "I gave you a dummy, Tom."

His knees walked out from under him, then, and he sank into a chair. "You've got them here, then," he said weakly.

"Yes. I have them here."

The room was in the back of the house, a small, crowded study, with a green-shaded desk lamp. Shandor dumped the contents of the briefcase onto the desk, and settled down, his heart pounding in his throat. He started at the top of the pile, sifting, ripping out huge sheafs of papers, receipts, notes, journals, clippings. He hardly noticed when the girl slipped out of the room, and he was deep in study when she returned half an hour later with steaming black coffee. With a grunt of thanks he drank it, never shifting his attention from the scatter of papers, papers from the personal file of a dead man. And slowly, the picture unfolded.

An ugly picture. A picture of deceit, a picture full of lies, full of secret promises, a picture of scheming, of plotting, planning, influencing, coercing, cheating, propagandizing—all with one single-minded aim, with a single terrible goal.

Shandor read, numbly, his mind twisting in protest as the picture unfolded. David Ingersoll's control of Dartmouth Bearing Corporation and its growing horde of subsidiaries under the figurehead of his protege, Harry Dartmouth. The huge profits from the Chinese war, the relaxation of control laws, the millions of war-won dollars ploughed back into government bonds, in a thousand different names, all controlled by Dartmouth Bearing Corporation—

And Ingersoll's own work in the diplomatic field—an incredibly skillful, incredibly evil channeling of power and pressure toward the inevitable goal, hidden under the cloak of peaceful respectability and popular support. The careful treaties, quietly disorganizing a dozen national economics, antagonizing the great nation to the East under the all too acceptable guise of "peace through strength." Reciprocal trade agreements bitterly antagonistic to Russian economic development. The continual bickering, the skillful manipulation hidden under the powerful propaganda cloak of a hundred publications, all coursing to one ultimate, terrible goal, all with one purpose, one aim—

War. War with anybody, war in the field and war on the diplomatic front. Traces even remained

of the work done within the enemy nations, bitter anti-Ingersoll propaganda from within the ranks of Russia herself, manipulated to strengthen Ingersoll in America, to build him up, to drive the nations farther apart, while presenting Ingersoll as the pathetic prince of world peace, fighting desperately to stop the ponderous wheels of the irresistible juggernaut—

And in America, the constant, unremitting literary and editorial drumbeating, pressuring greater war preparation, distilling hatreds in a thousand circles, focussing them into a single channel. Tremendous propaganda pressure to build armies, to build weapons, to get the Moon-rocket project underway—

Shandor sat back, eyes drooping, fighting to keep his eyes open. His mind was numb, his body trembling. A sheaf of papers in a separate folder caught his eye, production records of the Dartmouth Bearing Corporation, almost up to the date of Ingersoll's death. Shandor frowned, a snag in the chain drawing his attention. He peered at the papers, vaguely puzzled. Invoices from the Chicago plant, materials for tanks, and guns, and shells. Steel, chemicals. The same for the New Jersey plant, the same with a dozen subsidiary plants. Shipments of magnesium and silver wire to the Rocket Project in Arizona, carried through several subsidiary offices. The construction of a huge calculator for the Project in Arizona. Motors and materials, all for Arizona—something caught his mind, brought a frown to his large bland face, some off-key note in the monstrous symphony of production and intrigue that threw up a red flag in his mind, screamed for attention—

And then he sipped the fresh coffee at his elbow and sighed, and looked up at the girl standing there, saw her hand tremble as she steadied herself against the desk, and sat down beside him. He felt a great confusion, suddenly, a vast sympathy for this girl, and he wanted to take her in his arms, hold her close, *protect* her, somehow. She didn't know, she *couldn't* know about this horrible thing. She couldn't have been a party to it, a part of it. He knew the evidence said yes, she knows the whole story, she *helped* them, but he also knew that the evidence, somehow, was wrong, that somehow, he still didn't have the whole picture—

She looked at him, her voice trembling. "You're wrong, Tom," she said.

He shook his head, helplessly. "I'm sorry. It's horrible, I know. But I'm not wrong. This war was planned. We've been puppets on strings, and one man engineered it, from the very start. Your father."

Her eyes were filled with tears, and she shook her head, running a tired hand across her forehead. "You didn't know him, Tom. If you did, you'd know how wrong you are. He was a great man, fine man, but above all he was a *good* man. Only a monster could have done what you're thinking. Dad hated war, he fought it all his life. He couldn't be the monster you think."

Tom's voice was soft in the darkened room, his eyes catching the downcast face of the trembling girl, fighting to believe in a phantom, and his hatred for the power that could trample a faith like that suddenly swelled up in bitter hopeless rage. "It's here, on paper, it can't be denied. It's hateful, but it's here, it's what I set out to learn. It's not a lie this time, Ann, it's the truth, and this time it's *got to be told*. I've written my last false story. This one is going to the people the way it is. This one is going to be the truth."

He stopped, staring at her. The puzzling, twisted hole in the puzzle was suddenly there, staring him in the face, falling down into place in his mind with blazing clarity. Staring, he dived into the pile of papers again, searching, frantically searching for the missing piece, something he had seen, and passed over, the one single piece in the story that didn't make sense. And he found it, on the lists of materials shipped to the Nevada plant. Pig Iron. Raw magnesium. Raw copper. Steel, electron tubes, plastics, from all parts of the country, all being shipped to the Dartmouth Plant in Nevada—

*Where they made only shells—*

At first he thought it was only a rumble in his mind, the shocking realization storming through. Then he saw Ann jump up suddenly, white-faced and race to the window, and he heard the small scream in her throat. And then the rumbling grew louder, stronger, and the house trembled. He heard the whine of jet planes scream over the house as he joined her at the window, heard the screaming whines mingled with the rumbling thunder. And far away, on the horizon, the red glare was glowing, rising, burning up to a roaring conflagration in the black night sky—

"Washington!" Her voice was small, infinitely frightened.

"Yes. That's Washington."

"Then it really *has* started." She turned to him with eyes wide with horror, and snuggled up to his chest like a frightened child. "Oh, Tom—"

"It's here. What we've been waiting for. What your father started could never be stopped any other way than this—"

The roar was louder now, rising to a whining scream as another squad of dark ships roared overhead, moving East and South, jets whistling in the night. "This is what your father wanted."

She was crying, great sobs shaking her shoulders. "You're wrong, you're wrong—oh, Tom, you must be wrong—"



His voice was low, almost inaudible in the thundering roar of the bombardment. "Ann, I've got to go ahead. I've got to go tonight. To Nevada, to the Dartmouth plant there. I know I'm right, but I have to go, to check something—to make sure of something." He paused, looking down at her. "I'll be back, Ann. But I'm afraid of what I'll find out there. I need you behind me. Especially with what I have to do, I need you. You've got to decide. Are you for me? Or against me?"

She shook her head sadly, and sank into a chair, gently removing his hands from her waist. "I loved my father, Tom," she said in a beaten voice. "I can't help what he's done—I loved him. I—I can't be with you, Tom."

Far below him he could see the cars jamming the roads leaving Washington. He could almost hear the noise, the screeching of brakes, the fistfights, the shouts, the blating of horns. He moved south over open country, hoping to avoid the places where the 'copter might be spotted and stopped for questioning. He knew that Hart would have an alarm out for him by now, and he didn't dare risk being stopped until he reached his destination, the place where the last piece to the puzzle could be found, the answer to the question that was burning through his mind. Shells were made of steel and chemicals. The tools that made them were also made of steel. Not manganese. Not copper. Not electron relays, nor plastic, nor liquid oxygen. Just steel.

The 'copter relayed south and then turned west over Kentucky. Shandor checked the auxiliary tanks which he had filled at the Library landing field that morning; then he turned the ship to robot controls and sank back in the seat to rest. His whole body clamored for sleep, but he knew he dare not sleep. Any slip, any contact with Army aircraft or Security patrol could throw everything into the fire— For hours he sat, gazing hypnotically at the black expanse of land below, flying high over the pitch-black countryside. Not a light showed, not a sign of life.

Bored, he flipped the radio button, located a news broadcast. "—the bombed area did not extend west of the Appalachians. Washington DC was badly hit, as were New York and Philadelphia, and further raids are expected to originate from Siberia, coming across the great circle to the West coast or the Middle west. So far the Enemy appears to have lived up to its agreement in the Ingersoll pact to outlaw use of atomic bombs, for no atomic weapons have been used so far, but the damage with block-busters has been heavy. All citizens are urged to maintain strictest blackout regulations, and to report as called upon in local work and civil defense pools as they are set up. The attack began—"

Shandor sighed, checked his instrument readings. Far in the East the horizon was beginning to lighten, a healthy, white-grey light. His calculations placed him over Eastern Nebraska, and a few moments later he nosed down cautiously and verified his location. Lincoln Airbase was in a flurry of activity; the field was alive with men, like little black ants, preparing the reserve fighters and pursuits for use in a fever of urgent speed. Suddenly the 'copter radio beeped, and Tom threw the switch. "Over."

An angry voice snarled, "You up there, whoever you are, where'd you leave your brains? No civilian craft are allowed in the air, and that's orders straight from Washington. Don't you know there's a war on? Now get down here, before you're shot down—"

Shandor thought quickly. "This is a Federal Security ship," he snapped. "I'm just on a reconnaissance—"

The voice was cautious. "Security? What's your corroboration number?"

Shandor cursed. "JF223R-864. Name is Jerry Chandler. Give it a check if you want to." He flipped the switch, and accelerated for the ridge of hills that marked the Colorado border as the radio signal continued to bleep angrily, and a trio of pursuit planes on the ground began warming up. Shandor sighed, hoping they would check before they sent ships after him. It might at least delay them until he reached his destination.

Another hour carried him to the heart of the Rockies, and across the great salt fields of Utah. His fuel tanks were low, being emptied one by one as the tiny ship sped through the bright morning sky, and Tom was growing uneasy, until suddenly, far to the west and slightly to the north he spotted the plant, nestling in the mountain foothills. It lay far below, sprawling like some sort of giant spider across the rugged terrain. Several hundred cars spread out to the south of the plant, and he could see others speeding in from the temporary village across the ridge. Everything was quiet, orderly. He could see the shipments, crated, sitting in freight cars to the north. And then he saw the drill line running over to the right of the plant. He followed it, quickly checking a topographical map in the cockpit, and his heart started pounding. The railroad branch ran between two low peaks and curved out toward the desert. Moving over it, he saw the curve, saw it as it cut off to the left—and seemed to stop dead in the middle of the desert sand—

Shandor circled even lower, keeping one ear cocked on the radio, and settled the ship on the railroad line. And just as he cut the motors, he heard the shrill whine of three pursuit ships screaming in from the Eastern horizon—

He was out of the 'copter almost as soon as it had touched, throwing a jacket over his arm, and racing for the place where the drill line ended. Because he had seen as he slid in for a landing, just what he had suspected from the topographical map. The drill didn't end in the middle of a

desert at all. It went right on into the mountainside.

The excavation was quite large, the entrance covered and camouflaged neatly to give the very impression that he had gotten from the air. Under the camouflage the space was crowded, stacked with crates, boxes, materials, stacked all along the walls of the tunnel. He followed the rails in, lighting his way with a small pocket flashlight when the tunnel turned a corner, cutting off the daylight. Suddenly the tunnel widened, opening out into a much wider room. He sensed, rather than saw, the immense size of the vault, smelt the odd, bitter odor in the air. With the flashlight he probed the darkness, spotting the high, vaulted ceiling above him. And below him—

At first he couldn't see, probing the vast excavation before him, and then, strangely, he saw but couldn't realize what he saw. He stared for a solid minute, uncomprehending, then, stifling a gasp, he *knew what he was looking at*—

Lights. He had to have lights, to see clearly what he couldn't believe. Frantically, he spun the flashlight, seeking a light panel, and then, fascinated, he turned the little oval of light back to the pit. And then he heard the barest whisper of sound, the faintest intake of breath, and he ducked, frozen, as a blow whistled past his ear. A second blow from the side caught him solidly in the blackness, grunting, flailing out into a tangle of legs and arms, cursing, catching a foot in his face, striking up into soft, yielding flesh—

And his head suddenly exploded into a million dazzling lights as he sank unconscious to the ground—

It was a tiny room, completely without windows, the artificial light filtering through from ventilation slits near the top. Shandor sat up, shaking as the chill in the room became painfully evident. A small electric heater sat in the corner beaming valiantly, but the heat hardly reached his numbed toes. He stood up, shaking himself, slapping his arms against his sides to drive off the coldness—and he heard a noise through the door as soon as he had made a sound.

Muted footsteps stopped outside the door, and a huge man stepped inside. He looked at Shandor carefully, then closed the door behind him, without locking it. "I'm Baker," he rasped cheerfully. "How are you feeling?"

Shandor rubbed his head, suddenly and acutely aware of a very sore nose and a bruised rib cage. "Not so hot," he muttered. "How long have I been out?"

"Long enough." The man pulled out a plug of tobacco, ripped off a chunk with his teeth. "Chew?"

"I smoke." Shandor fished for cigarettes in an empty pocket.

"Not in here you don't," said Baker. He shrugged his huge shoulders and settled affably down on a bench near the wall. "You feel like talking?"

Shandor eyed the unlocked door, and turned his eyes to the huge man. "Sure," he said. "What do you want to talk about?"

"I don't want to talk about nothin'," the big man replied, indifferently. "Thought you might, though."

"Are you the one that roughed me up?"

"Yuh." Baker grinned. "Hope I didn't hurt you much. Boss said to keep you in one piece, but we had to hurry up, and take care of those Army guys you brought in on your tail. That was dumb. You almost upset everything."

Memory flooded back, and Shandor's eyes widened. "Yes—they followed me all the way from Lincoln—what happened to them?"

Baker grinned and chomped his tobacco. "They're a long way away now. Don't worry about them."

Shandor eyed the door uneasily. The latch hadn't caught, and the door had swung open an inch or two. "Where am I?" he asked, inching toward the door. "What—what are you planning to do to me?"

Baker watched him edging away. "You're safe," he said. "The boss'll talk to you pretty soon if you feel like it—" He squinted at Tom in surprise, pointing an indolent thumb toward the door. "You planning to go out or something?"

Tom stopped short, his face red. The big man shrugged. "Go ahead. I ain't going to stop you." He grinned. "Go as far as you can."

Without a word Shandor threw open the door, looked out into the concrete corridor. At the end was a large, bright room. Cautiously he started down, then suddenly let out a cry and broke into a run, his eyes wide—

He reached the room, a large room, with heavy plastic windows. He ran to one of the windows, pulse pounding, and stared, a cry choking in his throat. The blackness of the crags contrasted

dimly with the inky blackness of the sky beyond. Mile upon mile of jagged, rocky crags, black rock, ageless, unaged rock. And it struck him with a jolt how easily he had been able to run, how lightning-swift his movements. He stared again, and then he saw what he had seen in the pit, standing high outside the building on a rocky flat, standing bright and silvery, like a phantom finger pointing to the inky heavens, sleek, smooth, resting on polished tailfins, like an other-worldly bird poised for flight—

A voice behind him said, "You aren't really going anyplace, you know. Why run?" It was a soft voice, a kindly voice, cultured, not rough and biting like Baker's voice. It came from directly behind Shandor, and he felt his skin crawl. He had heard that voice before—many times before. Even in his dreams he had heard that voice. "You see, it's pretty cold out there. And there isn't any air. You're on the Moon, Mr. Shandor—"

He whirled, his face twisted and white. And he stared at the small figure standing at the door, a stoop-shouldered man, white hair slightly untidy, crow's-feet about his tired eyes. An old man, with eyes that carried a sparkle of youth and kindness. The eyes of David P. Ingersoll.

Shandor stared for a long moment, shaking his head like a man seeing a phantom. When he found words, his voice was choked, the words wrenched out as if by force. "You're—you're alive."

"Yes. I'm alive."

"Then—" Shandor shook his head violently, turning to the window, and back to the small, white-haired man. "Then your death was just a fake."

The old man nodded tiredly. "That's right. Just a fake."

Shandor stumbled to a chair, sat down woodenly. "I don't get it," he said dully. "I just don't get it. The war—that—that I can see. I can see how you worked it, how you engineered it, but this—" he gestured feebly at the window, at the black, impossible landscape outside. "This I can't see. They're bombing us to pieces, they're bombing out Washington, probably your own home, your own family—last night—" he stopped, frowning in confusion—"no, it couldn't have been last night—two days ago?—well, whatever day it was, they were bombing us to pieces, and you're up here—*why?* What's it going to get you? This war, this whole rotten intrigue mess, and then *this?*"

The old man walked across the room and stared for a moment at the silent ship outside. "I hope I can make you understand. We had to come here. We had no choice. We couldn't do what we wanted any other way than to come here—*first*. Before anybody else."

"But why *here?* They're building a rocket there in Arizona. They'll be up here in a few days, maybe a few weeks—"

"Approximately forty-eight hours," corrected Ingersoll quietly. "Within forty-eight hours the Arizona rocket will be here. If the Russian rocket doesn't get here first."

"It doesn't make sense. It won't do you any good to be here if the Earth is blasted to bits. Why come here? And why bring *me* here, of all people? What do you want with me?"

Ingersoll smiled and sat down opposite Shandor. "Take it easy," he said gently. "You're here, you're safe, and you're going to get the whole story. I realize that this is a bit of a jolt—but you had to be jolted. With you I think the jolt will be very beneficial, since we want you with us. That's why we brought you here. We need your help, and we need it very badly. It's as simple as that."

Shandor was on his feet, his eyes blazing. "No dice. This is your game, not mine. I don't want anything to do with it—"

"But you don't know the game—"

"I know plenty of the game. I followed the trail, right from the start. I know the whole rotten mess. The trail led me all the way around Robin Hood's barn, but it told me things—oh, it told me plenty! It told me about you, and this war. And now you want me to help you! What do you want me to do? Go down and tell the people it isn't really so bad being pounded to shreds? Should I tell them they aren't really being bombed, it's all in their minds? Shall I tell them this is a war to defend their freedoms, that it's a great crusade against the evil forces of the world? What kind of a sap do you think I am?" He walked to the window, his whole body trembling with anger. "I followed this trail down to the end, I scraped my way down into the dirtiest, slimiest depths of the barrel, and I've found you down there, and your rotten corporations, and your crowd of heelers. And on the other side are three hundred million people taking the lash end of the whip on Earth, helping to feed you. And you ask me to help you!"

"Once upon a time," Ingersoll interrupted quietly, "there was a fox."

Shandor stopped and stared at him.

"—and the fox got caught in a trap. A big bear trap, with steel jaws, that clamped down on him and held him fast by the leg. He wrenched and he pulled, but he couldn't break that trap open, no matter what he did. And the fox knew that the farmer would come along almost any time to open that bear trap, and the fox knew the farmer would kill him. He knew that if he didn't get out of

that trap, he'd be finished, sure as sin. But he was a clever fox, and he found a way to get out of the bear trap." Ingersoll's voice was low, tense in the still room. "Do you know what he did?"

Shandor shook his head silently.

"It was a very simple solution," said Ingersoll. "Drastic, but simple. *He gnawed off his leg.*"

Another man had entered the room, a small, weasel-faced man with sallow cheeks and slick black hair. Ingersoll looked up with a smile, but Mariel waved him on, and took a seat nearby.

"So he chewed off his leg," Shandor repeated dully. "I don't get it."

"The world is in a trap," said Ingersoll, watching Shandor with quiet eyes. "A great big bear trap. It's been in that trap for decades—ever since the first World War. The world has come to a wall it can't climb, a trap it can't get out of, a vicious, painful, torturous trap, and the world has been struggling for seven decades to get out. It hasn't succeeded. And the time is drawing rapidly nigh for the farmer to come. Something had to be done, and done fast, before it was too late. The fox had to chew off its leg. And I had to bring the world to the brink of a major war."

Shandor shook his head, his mind buzzing. "I don't see what you mean. We never had a chance for peace, we never had a chance to get our feet on the ground from one round to the next. No time to do anything worthwhile in the past seventy years—I don't see what you mean about a trap."

Ingersoll settled back in his chair, the light catching his face in sharp profile. "It's been a century of almost continuous war," he said. "You've pointed out the whole trouble. We haven't had time to catch our breath, to make a real peace. The first World War was a sorry affair, by our standards—almost a relic of earlier European wars. Trench fighting, poor rifles, soap-box aircraft—nothing to distinguish it from earlier wars but its scope. But twenty uneasy years went by, and another war began, a very different sort of war. This one had fast aircraft, fast mechanized forces, heavy bombing, and finally, to cap the climax, atomics. That second World War could hold up its head as a real, strapping, fighting war in any society of wars. It was a stiff war, and a terrible one. Quite a bit of progress, for twenty years. But essentially, it was a war of ideologies, just as the previous one had been. A war of intolerance, of unmixable ideas—"

The old man paused, and drew a sip of water from the canister in the corner. "Somewhere, somehow, the world had missed the boat. Those wars didn't solve anything, they didn't even make a very strong pretense. They just made things worse. Somewhere, human society had gotten into a trap, a vicious circle. It had reached the end of its progressive tether, it had no place to go, no place to expand, to great common goal. So ideologies arose to try to solve the dilemma of a basically static society, and they fought wars. And they reached a point, finally, where they could destroy themselves unless they broke the vicious circle, somehow."

Shandor looked up, a deep frown on his face. "You're trying to say that they needed a new frontier."

"Exactly! They desperately needed it. There was only one more frontier they could reach for. A frontier which, once attained, has no real end." He gestured toward the black landscape outside. "There's the frontier. Space. The one thing that could bring human wars to an end. A vast, limitless frontier which could drive men's spirits upward and outward for the rest of time. And that frontier seemed unattainable. It was blocked off by a wall, by the jaws of a trap. Oh, they tried. After the first war the work began. The second war contributed unimaginably to the technical knowledge. But after the second war, they could go no further. Because it cost money, it required a tremendous effort on the part of the people of a great nation to do it, and they couldn't see why they should spend the money to get to space. After all, they had to work up the atomics and new weapons for the next war—it was a trap, as strong and treacherous as any the people of the world had ever encountered.

"The answer, of course, was obvious. Each war brought a great surge of technological development, to build better weapons, to fight bigger wars. Some developments led to extremely beneficial ends, too—if it hadn't been for the second war, a certain British biologist might still be piddling around his understaffed, underpaid laboratory, wishing he had more money, and wondering why it was that that dirty patch of mold on his petri dish seemed to keep bacteria from growing—but the second war created a sudden, frantic, urgent demand for something, anything, that would *stop infection—fast*. And in no time, penicillin was in mass production, saving untold thousands of lives. There was no question of money. Look at the Manhattan project. How many millions went into that? It gave us atomic power, for war, and for peace. For peaceful purposes, the money would never have been spent. But if it was for the sake of war—"

Ingersoll smiled tiredly. "Sounds insane, doesn't it? But look at the record. I looked at the record, way back at the end of the war with China. Other men looked at the record, too. We got together, and talked. We knew that the military advantage of a rocket base on the moon could be a deciding factor in another major war. Military experts had recognized that fact back in the 1950's. Another war could give men the technological kick they needed to get them to space—possibly *in time*. If men got to space before they destroyed themselves, the trap would be broken, the frontier would be opened, and men could turn their energies away from destruction toward something infinitely greater and more important. With space on his hands men could get along without wars. But if we waited for peacetime to go to space, we might never make it. It might be too late.

"It was a dreadful undertaking. I saw the wealth in the company I directed and controlled at the end of the Chinese war, and the idea grew strong. I saw that a huge industrial amalgamation could be undertaken, and succeed. We had a weapon in our favor, the most dangerous weapon ever devised, a thousand times more potent than atomics. Hitler used it, with terrible success. Stalin used it. Haro-Tsing used it. Why couldn't Ingersoll use it? Propaganda—a terrible weapon. It could make people think the right way—it could make them think almost *any* way. It made them think war. From the end of the last war we started, with propaganda, with politics, with money. The group grew stronger as our power became more clearly understood. Mariel handled propaganda through the newspapers, and PIB, and magazines—a clever man—and Harry Dartmouth handled production. I handled the politics and diplomacy. We had but one aim in mind—to bring about a threat of major war that would drive men to space. To the moon, to a man-made satellite, *somewhere or anywhere* to break through the Earth's gravity and get to space. And we aimed at a controlled war. We had the power to do it, we had the money and the plants. We just had to be certain it wasn't the *ultimate* war. It wasn't easy to make sure that atomic weapons wouldn't be used this time—but they will not. Both nations are too much afraid, thanks to our propaganda program. They both leaped at a chance to make a face-saving agreement. And we hoped that the war could be held off until we got to the moon, and until the Arizona rocket project could get a ship launched for the moon. The wheels we had started just moved too fast. I saw at the beginning of the Berlin Conference that it would explode into war, so I decided the time for my 'death' had arrived. I had to come here, to make sure the war doesn't go on any longer than necessary."

Shandor looked up at the old man, his eyes tired. "I still don't see where I'm supposed to fit in. I don't see why you came here at all. Was that a wild-goose chase I ran down there, learning about this?"

"Not a wild goose chase. The important work can't start, you see, until the rocket gets here. It wouldn't do much good if the Arizona rocket got here, to fight the war. It may come for war, but it must go back for peace. We built this rocket to get us here first—built it from government specifications, though they didn't know it. We had the plant to build it in, and we were able to hire technologists *not* to find the right answers in Arizona until we were finished. Because the whole value of the war-threat depended solely and completely upon our getting here *first*. When the Arizona rocket gets to the moon, the war must be stopped. Only then can we start the real 'operation Bear Trap.' That ship, whether American or Russian, will meet with a great surprise when it reaches the Moon. We haven't been spotted here. We left in darkness and solitude, and if we were seen, it was chalked off as a guided missile. We're well camouflaged, and although we don't have any sort of elaborate base—just a couple of sealed rooms—we have a ship and we have weapons. When the first ship comes up here, the control of the situation will be in our hands. Because when it comes, it will be sent back with an ultimatum to *all* nations—to cease warfare, or suffer the most terrible, nonpartisan bombardment the world has ever seen. A pinpoint bombardment, from our ship, here on the Moon. There won't be too much bickering I think. The war will stop. All eyes will turn to us. And then the big work begins."

He smiled, his thin face showing tired lines in the bright light. "I may die before the work is done. I don't know, nor care. I have no successor, nor have we any plans to perpetuate our power once the work is done. As soon as the people themselves will take over the work, the job is theirs, because no group can hope to ultimately control space. But first people must be sold on space, from the bottom up. They must be forced to realize the implications of a ship on the moon. They must realize that the first ship was the hardest, that the trap is sprung. The amputation is a painful one, there wasn't any known anaesthetic, but it will heal, and from here there is no further need for war. But the people must see that, understand its importance. They've got to have the whole story, in terms that they can't mistake. And that means a propagandist—"

"You have Mariel," said Shandor. "He's had the work, the experience—"

"He's getting tired. He'll tell you himself his ideas are slow, he isn't on his toes any longer. He needs a new man, a helper, to take his place. When the first ship comes, his job is done." The old man smiled. "I've watched you, of course, for years. Mariel saw that you were given his job when he left PIB to edit '*Fighting World*.' He didn't think you were the man, he didn't trust you—thought you had been raised too strongly on the sort of gibberish you were writing. I thought you were the only man we could use. So we let you follow the trail, and watched to see how you'd handle it. And when you came to the Nevada plant, we *knew* you were the man we had to have—"

Shandor scowled, looking first at Ingersoll, then at Mariel's impassive face. "What about Ann?" he asked, and his voice was unsteady. "She knew about it all the time?"

"No. She didn't know anything about it. We were afraid she had upset things when she didn't turn my files over to Dartmouth as he'd told her. We were afraid you'd go ahead and write the story as you saw it then, which would have wrecked our plan completely. As it was, she helped us sidestep the danger in the long run, but she didn't know what she was really doing." He grinned. "The error was ours, of course. We simply underestimated our man. We didn't know you were that tenacious."

Shandor's face was haggard. "Look. I—I don't know what to think. This ship in Arizona—how long? When will it come? How do you know it'll ever come?"

"We waited until our agents there gave us a final report. The ship may be leaving at any time. But there's no doubt that it'll come. If it doesn't, one from Russia will. It won't be long." He looked at

Shandor closely. "You'll have to decide by then, Tom."

"And if I don't go along with you?"

"We could lose. It's as simple as that. Without a spokesman, the plan could fall through completely. There's only one thing you need to make your decision, Tom—faith in men, and a sure conviction that man was made for the stars, and not for an endless circle of useless wars. Think of it, Tom. That's what your decision means."

Shandor walked to the window, stared out at the bleak landscape, watched the great bluish globe of earth, hanging like a huge balloon in the black sky. He saw the myriad pinpoints of light in the blackness on all sides of it, and shook his head, trying to think. So many things to think of, so very many things—

"I don't know," he muttered. "I just don't know—"

It was a long night. Ideas are cruel, they become a part of a man's brain, an inner part of his chemistry, they carve grooves deep in his mind which aren't easily wiped away. He knew he'd been living a lie, a bitter, hopeless, endless lie, all his life, but a liar grows to believe his own lies. Even to the point of destruction, he believes them. It was so hard to see the picture, now that he had the last piece in place.

A fox, and a bear trap. Such a simple analogy. War was a hellish proposition, it was cruel, it was evil. It could be lost, so very easily. And it seemed so completely, utterly senseless to cut off one's own leg—

And then he thought, somewhere, sometime, he'd see her again. Perhaps they'd be old by then, but perhaps not—perhaps they'd still be young, and perhaps she wouldn't know the true story yet. Perhaps he could be the first to tell her, to let her know that he had been wrong— Maybe there could be a chance to be happy, on Earth, sometime. They might marry, even, there might be children. To be raised for what? Wars and wars and more wars? Or was there another alternative? Perhaps the stars were winking brighter—

A hoarse shout rang through the quiet rooms. Ingersoll sat bolt upright, turned his bright eyes to Mariel, and looked down the passageway. And then they were crowding to the window as one of the men snapped off the lights in the room, and they were staring up at the pale bluish globe that hung in the sky, squinting, breathless—

And they saw the tiny, tiny burst of brightness on one side of that globe, saw a tiny whisp of yellow, cutting an arc from the edge, moving farther and farther into the black circle of space around the Earth, slicing like a thin scimitar, moving higher and higher, and then, magically, winking out, leaving a tiny, evaporating trail behind it.

"You saw it?" whispered Mariel in the darkness. "You saw it, David?"

"Yes. I saw it." Ingersoll breathed deeply, staring into the blackness, searching for a glimmer, a glint, some faint reassurance that it had not been a mirage they had seen. And then Ingersoll felt a hand in his, Tom Shandor's hand, gripping his tightly, wringing it, and when the lights snapped on again, he was staring at Shandor, tears of happiness streaming from his pale, tired eyes. "You saw it?" he whispered.

Shandor nodded, his heart suddenly too large for his chest, a peace settling down on him greater than any he had ever known in his life.

"They're coming," he said.

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