

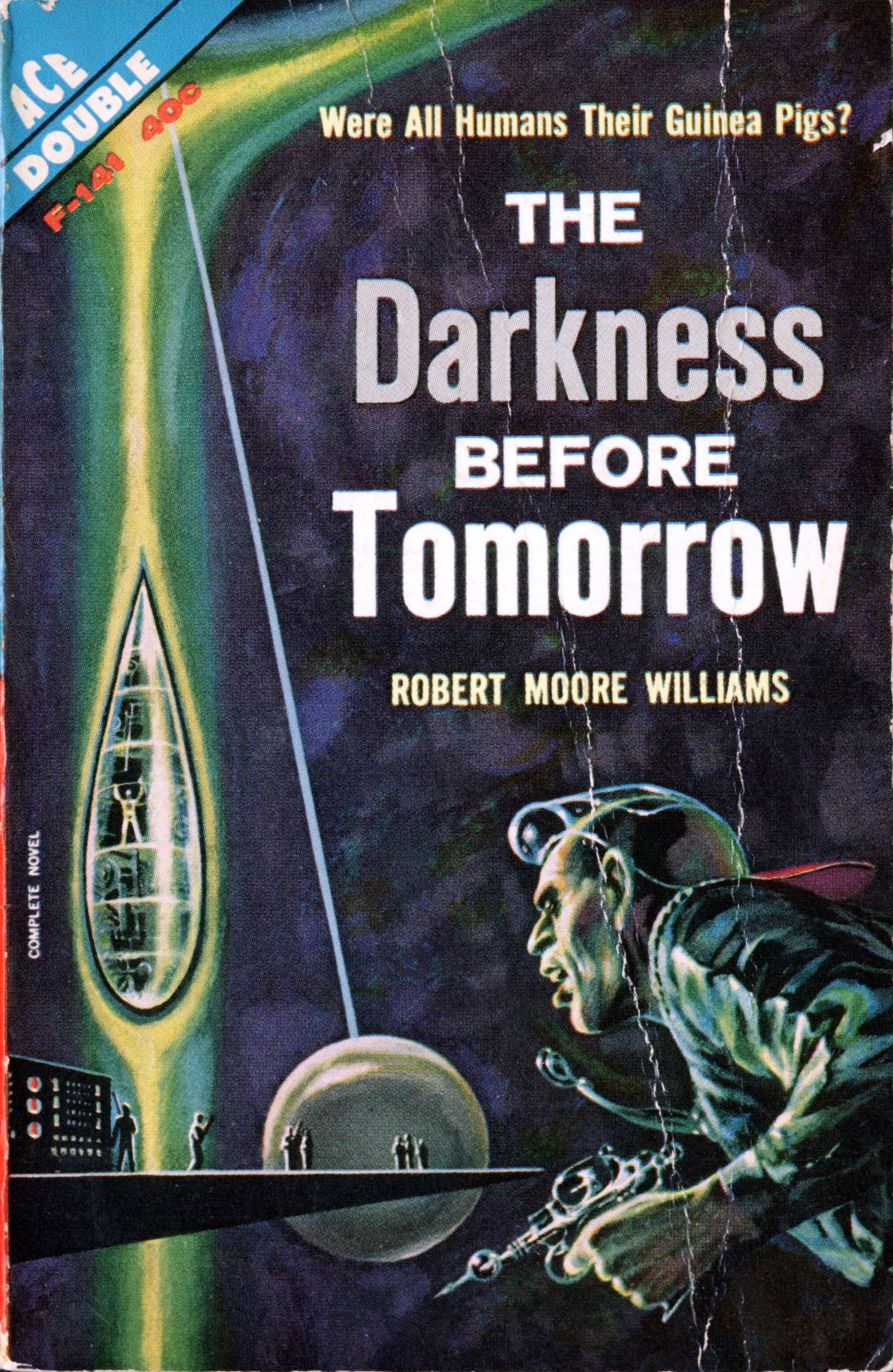
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Were All Humans Their Guinea Pigs?

THE Darkness BEFORE Tomorrow

ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

COMPLETE NOVEL



TO REBUILD A WORLD, FIRST TEAR IT DOWN!

An inexplicable murder and an equally improbable rescue brought research scientist George Gillian into strange company:

A great man five years dead.

A goat-eyed extraterrestrial.

A beautiful telepath.

And a gangster with weapons not yet invented—on Earth.

Gillian's investigations landed him dead center in a cosmic gamble, between an ape who dreamed of empire and an alien science infiltrating the Earth.

The future of the planet hung in the balance.

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George Gillian

Sworn to the search for knowledge, he held a planet's future in his fist.

Ape Abrussi

In his hands were forces that could mean doom to the human race.

Umbro

He considered man an inferior species, yet he would help them to survive.

Samuel Ronson

His own life meant little to him—that of the world meant a lot.

Sis Randolph

Behind her beautiful face lay a mind that could read others.

Hugo Strong

At his command—salvation or destruction.

THE DARKNESS BEFORE TOMORROW

by
ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

ACE BOOKS, INC.

23 West 47th Street, New York 36, N.Y.

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Prologue

IN THE Galaxy called the Milky Way by some of its residents, and called other names by others, in that vast expanse of space where the stars sparkle like shining diamonds flung by some careless hand upon a black velvet rug, in the third spiral arm, out near its end, there is a sun. Some say it is a great sun. Others, more familiar with the truly vast suns of space, call it minor. Whether you call it major or minor depends on your viewpoint. Because it has no near neighbors, some say it is a lost sun. Others say it is an outlaw sun, thrust out near the edge of its Galaxy because of rebellious tendencies in its system. Others say that the reason it is so far away from the rest of the Galaxy is because of dangerous and delicate experiments in progress in this solar system, which involve the Life Force itself, its possible modifications and mutations—experiments with so great a potential for change that the history of the whole vast Milky Way, the whole Galaxy, may take quite a different course if they are successful.

But it is a big Galaxy. And other experiments are in progress in other solar systems in it. And experiments *do* go awry now and then, accidents *do* happen. There was an accident out toward Arcturus. This produced a vast scurrying among the planets of this minor sun, a great meeting at the highest policy-making level, decisions to act, and the orders necessary to implement these decisions, with far-reaching results.

One of those decisions sent the great ship into orbit around

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the third planet. It stayed so far out that the possibility of a chance observation by a telescope was unlikely. To make doubly certain that it was unobserved, the great ship was put into an orbit which always kept it on the dark side of the planet, always sliding away into the darkness. As to the small ships that went down to the surface, experiments over centuries had indicated it was not too important if they were seen. The people who saw them were simply called crazy by the people who had not seen them.

From the bottom of the great ship, a round ball of crystal was lowered at the end of a chain—or was it a cable—that looked like silver. The ball was as big as a small house, the cable was perhaps a mile long. Inside the ship, a hidden mechanism began to operate, with the result that the ball slowly began a pendulum-like movement.

Forth and back, forth and back, like the pendulum of a gigantic grandfather's clock ticking time away in the void, the pendulum moved. Now and then the great ship shifted its position so that another section of the surface of the planet was directly under the swinging pendulum. At times the great ship dropped much closer to the planet, but always it stayed on the dark side and always the giant pendulum kept swinging, forth and back, forth and back, like a huge clock ticking away the seconds of destiny, ticking slowly away, as if it had all the time it needed to accomplish the aims of its operators. The great ship remained always near the planet but at ten year intervals new crews arrived and the old workers departed.

Chapter One

WHEN IT comes time to die, any place is good enough. This man had crawled into the doorway of a grocery store closed for the night and had cuddled his head in his hands and had died there. He had been in his mid-twenties, with an unruly mop of black hair and a thin pinched face. George Gillian shone his pocket flashlight on the body and made as fast and as complete an examination as he could without removing the man's clothes. There was no wound. Gillian had not expected to find one.

When they crawled into a corner like this, using the last desperate dregs of their strength, and cuddled up and died, neither a gun nor a knife had brought them to the end of their days. Gillian had seen three such bodies during the preceding month, two of them obviously criminals, inexplicably dead, the third a college student, also inexplicably dead. Dead bodies were getting a little too familiar to him. He was not accustomed to them, they were not his business, and he still felt a little squeamish around them. He had not expected to find a fourth here within a block of his own private laboratory.

Nor had he expected to hear the sounds of a fight in the street.

Nor did he now expect to hear the voice ask a question from right behind him.

"Did you kill him?" the voice asked, in broken English.

Gilliam got quickly to his feet to face the speaker. He held the flashlight down at his side so that its rays sprayed on the

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sidewalk. This man might not like having a flashlight turned in his face.

The man was short in stature. He was wearing ordinary clothes, had a hat clamped awkwardly on his head, he had the tuft of a beard at his chin, and he had both hands in his pockets.

"I did not kill him," Gillian said. "I just found him here."

The man studied him for a moment. "All right. I believe you," he said. His voice had a strange quality in it, a foreign slurring of the words. "I go now." He turned to the right and moved away into the shadows of the night from which he had come.

As he turned, Gillian caught a glimpse of his eyes as seen from the street light on the left. The sight was startling. The eyes were not human. Instead they had in them something of the nature of the eyes of a goat.

A chill touched George Gillian as he stood in the dark entrance to the closed grocery store, with a dead man at his back and a stranger with a slurred alien accent in his voice slipping away into the street shadows on his right. Only after the man was out of sight did Gillian remember how heavy his breathing had seemed.

On Gillian's left, profanity and the sound of a blow showed that the fight still had some life in it. Far away in the night, he could hear a siren wailing. Perhaps the squad car was coming here, perhaps it was going somewhere else. The police were badly overworked. They had on their hands a vast increase in crime and juvenile delinquency. They also had found too many unwounded dead men in and around Los Angeles.

Looking at George Gillian, one would have had the impression that he might be a fullback on a professional football team. This impression would not have been correct. He was actually a research scientist, one of the finest of the young brains the Surging Seventies had produced in such large numbers. Even if this was true, he was still much too young, only twenty-eight, to have his private research laboratory. He had it, however, and so far as the public knew, he legally owned both the laboratory and all the equipment in it. Privately Gillian knew that this lab was

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actually a gift, with definite and specific strings attached which required him to do any research the GRI required. The GRI—Group for Research and Investigation—did not mind spending its members' money for brains, for laboratories for the brains to work in, and for equipment for them to work with. In addition, some of the GRI members had a lot of money to spend. Gillian knew what he was doing when he accepted the GRI's gift.

From the left there came the sound of another blow. Gillian moved in this direction, then stopped as he saw the young woman lying between two cars at the edge of the street.

She was still moving. Gillian dropped down beside her. He slipped a hand under her head. She tried to bite him.

"Cut it out! I'm trying to help you!"

"Get lost. Nobody can help me. That goes double for anybody who works for Ape Abrussi." Her voice was taut with defiance and with her effort to suppress pain.

"I'm sorry," Gillian said. "I never heard of this Abrussi. The police ambulance will be here soon."

"The ambulance I'm going to ride in doesn't stop this side of hell!" The words grated at him. The speaker was about twenty-five, he guessed, with blonde hair and a dress that had once been stylish but now was badly torn.

"What happened?" Gillian asked. "Your dress looks like you were dragged along the street." Somewhere deep in Gillian's mind, beyond the sorrow that he was feeling for this young woman, was the hope that she might be able to tell him something useful.

"Terry ran over me with his buzz cart. He dragged me along the street," came the whispered answer. "My back's broken and I'm all chewed up inside."

"Who is Terry?"

"He and I were once friends. That was before Joe came along, before Terry went with Ape Abrussi. It was mostly my fault that he ran over me. I saw him coming and I tried to bluff him by jumping in front of him. He recognized me and tried to stop but the guy with him made him keep going. My name's Mary." So far she got, then she laid her head down on the concrete curb as if she needed to rest before talking any more.

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"Who is this Abrussi?"

"He's an ape that looks like a man. God never gave him a human soul, so he thinks that everybody ought to be apes. He's strictly no good, big no good. His boys really weren't after me and Joe, they wanted Eck, who was with us. They don't really want Eck, but they think if they get him they can force Sis to give them something she's got. They want it—what she's got." Mary grew tired again and laid her head back down upon the curb.

Gillian made a quick mental note of these names, then, as a thought flashed through his mind, he asked an abrupt question, one he would not have asked if he had had time to think. "Did Joe have a lot of black hair and a thin, pinched face?"

"That's my Joe." Mary answered. "God how my insides do hurt! It's like they were crawling with fire. Say, mister—" Suddenly she was thinking about something other than the pain in her. "Say, mister, how do you know Joe? I don't know you, and I know everybody Joe knows."

Gillian, silent, wished he had not asked his question. There was no point in telling Mary that her Joe was dead not fifty feet from her. "Do you know anything about a new kind of weapon that kills without leaving a mark on the body?" he asked.

"Have they got that out tonight?" She was astonished. "From what we've learned, Abrussi almost never lets anybody else use that gun!" Suddenly she guessed the meaning that lay behind Gillian's question. She pulled herself erect. "Did they use that on Joe, mister? Did they, mister? Did *you* use it on him, mister? If you did, I swear I'll come back from hell and haunt you." Holding herself on her elbows, she stared at him as she intended to fix his face in her memory forever.

"I did not use anything on him," Gillian said quickly.

"Oh." She seemed to read in his eyes that he was telling the truth. "You look like you're all right, mister, so I'll tell you that Joe and I are going to be married, as soon as—" Her voice went into silence as she remembered where she was and realized that something had happened to her which might cause a change in her wedding plans.

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"I try to be a right guy," Gillian said. "But sometimes it's hard to know how. About this gun that—about this gun—" He was not being indifferent to her pain, but he could not relieve it. Meanwhile, in the back of his mind, he was always remembering that there was a bigger pain—and a bigger problem—than even those which Mary faced.

"It's not really a gun, mister. As best we can get it, it's a crazy thing that looks like it is made mostly of glass." She lost the strength to hold herself on her elbows and settled back to the curb again. Her eyes went out of focus as a wave of pain passed through her.

Far in the distance still, the sirens wailed a little closer.

Her eyes came into focus again. She gathered a little strength. "Go talk to Sis Randolph, mister, To Sis and to Eck. Sis—Sis knows something." The eyes went out of focus again. They seemed to look into some other world. Sudden happiness swept over the face. The voice had joy in it. "Joel Joel! You were right here beside me all the time and I didn't see you! Joe, darling—" The voice went into silence, forever this time. But the glow remained for a little while on Mary's face.

Dying, she had seemed to see her man beside her. As he realized the meaning of her words, Gillian was a little dazed. Was this hallucination, or did she actually look into some other world where Joe waited? Gillian did not know, but he knew beyond any doubt that Joe's body lay in the entrance to a grocery store not fifty feet away. He looked down at the girl. Her body sagged into the street as if she had finally found the most comfortable resting place that Mother Earth had ever given her children.

Before Gillian could rise, feet pounded toward him along the street side of the parked cars. Someone screamed, "Get Eck!" Dodging between the parked cars, a tall young man with a baseball bat in his hand almost knocked Gillian down as the latter tried to get to his feet. Two hard-faced men with blackjacks in their hands tried to get at him from the street.

Crunch! The baseball bat took care of one of the blackjack wielders.

Smack! Gillian brought his fist up with him as he rose. It

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landed on the side of the jaw of the second attacker. Probably unconscious before he hit the street, this man went over backward.

"Thanks, pal, whoever you are," Eck's voice sounded in Gillian's ear. "You think fast and you swing a real mean fist."

"I didn't really think about it," Gillian protested. "I just hit the closest one."

"If you can hit like that without thinking, what could you do—" Eck's voice went into silence as he stepped on the outstretched hand of the dead girl and looked down and saw what he was stepping on. His face froze. He called out a single sharp word, "Mary!"

"Sorry, but she won't answer, I'm afraid," Gillian said.

"How do you know she won't? Did you do her in?" Eck lifted the baseball bat.

"I'm getting a little tired of being accused of murders I did not commit," Gillian answered. "I found her here, dying. That's—*look out!*"

Two hard-faced men were coming from the sidewalk. Since Gillian was the closer, he went in ahead of Eck, hitting the first attacker solidly in the stomach. The man said, "Oof!" and lost all further interest in the fight. The baseball bat went over Gillian's shoulder and found the skull of the second man. He grabbed his head and spun in a tight circle before going down.

"You do a good job with that baseball bat," Gillian said, watching to make certain that neither man was showing signs of rising.

"No better than you do with your fist," the tall man said. He bent over and looked down at the body of the young woman, then looked at Gillian. "Where's Joe?"

"Down there in the entrance to a grocery store."

"Dead?"

"Yes."

The tall man looked appraisingly at Gillian. "I'm going to believe you," he said.

"Thanks." Gillian said. Standing fully erect, the tall man looked over the cars and down the street. His hand grabbed Gillian's shoulder, shoving him lower. "Down!"

Gillian went down without asking questions. "What is it?"

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"The Ape is coming along the street," Eck hissed. "He's got the biggest little gun that ever was in his hand. I caught just a glimpse of him. I don't think he saw us but if he did, it will take more than your fists and my baseball bat to get us out of here."

"Is his last name Abrussi?" Gillian asked. "Mary mentioned somebody by that name."

"It is," Eck answered.

"Um." Gillian listened, then nodded in the other direction along the street. "Sirens are coming."

"They'll not get here in time if he spots us." The tall man peered around the fender of the car. "He's heard the sirens and can't make up his mind whether to run now or to look some more before running. He would like to get his bracelet boys out of here before the cops come, if he can."

"What are bracelet boys?"

"Slaves," Eck answered. He seemed to choose not to explain his statement.

"Why should he run if he has the biggest little gun?" Gillian asked. This was a question in the dark. He did not know enough about this weapon to identify it otherwise.

"Because he doesn't want to use it, if he can help it. He doesn't understand it, he's scared of it. He doesn't want to knock off a squad car full of cops with it, either, because nobody would ever believe they had *all* died of heart failure."

"Could he kill a whole squad car full of cops with it?"

"Just like that," Eck answered, snapping his fingers. He peeked around the fender again. "He's coming slowly in our direction. As he gets even with the car we're in front of, we'll sneak around it on the street side. We'll try to jump him from behind."

"If we fail?"

"Sis will bury us," Eck answered.

Gillian could glimpse the Ape now. He was short, stocky, with long arms. As the Ape reached the car, Gillian and Eck moved carefully around it on the street side. The sirens were getting closer, but they were still much too far away. Behind Abrussi, Gillian caught a glimpse of another man. The fellow was only a shadow but the way he had his hat

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clamped firmly on his head told Gillian that this shadow had the eyes of a goat.

Was this second man following Abrussi?

Spotting the shadow, Abrussi stopped moving.

Gillian had the impression that Abrussi was a hunter but that there was another hunter in the act too.

Tires screamed on the asphalt. Abrussi must have assumed they were the tires of a squad car running without its siren on. He dodged between two buildings. The man with the hat firmly clamped on his head sauntered on as if nothing had happened.

All of this Gillian saw in a single glance. Then the tires screamed again. There was no sound of a motor but he turned to look. The car was one of the new models with a compact atom power unit generating electricity which directly powered a motor in each wheel. The ads said of these cars, with considerable truth, "All you hear is the whistle of the wind."

The car was a sport model with a slanting windshield, no top, and a single seat. In the trunk, however, a special seat had been built. On leash but straining at it was one of the biggest Great Danes that Gillian had ever seen. He was so startled at the sight of the great dog that he hardly noticed that the driver of the car was a woman. He did not know whether or not she was going to run over them. Spinning the car on two wheels, she careened toward them, then burned rubber from all four tires as she abruptly braked it to a halt.

"Don't stand looking," Eck said in Gillian's ear. "Get in."

Almost before Gillian realized what was happening, he found himself wedged into the seat of a car that had been built to hold only two passengers. It was not a comfortable position. Adding to his discomfort was the fact that the Great Dane was slobbering all over the back of his neck.

"Brutus likes you," the young woman said, calmly. "Otherwise he would be chewing your head off." The tires howled as she burned rubber, getting the car into motion again. Ahead, a flashing red light and a howling siren were coming toward them.

She braked the car to the curb and was getting a cigarette

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from her purse when the two squad cars went past them. Gillian barely remembered enough of his manners to light the cigarette for her.

"Thanks," she said.

With a surge of power that almost took Gillian's head off, she put the car back into motion.

Chapter Two

"Sis—" the tall man leaned around Gillian to speak to the driver. "Sis, this is—" He blinked startled eyes as he realized he did not know his companion's name.

"Have you been picking up people on the street again, Eck?"

"He saved my life," the tall man protested.

"Oh." A flash of gratitude passed across the young woman's face, then was gone. She shrugged. "Well, perhaps he didn't have anything better to do at the time."

"Don't pay any attention to her," the tall man urged. "She really loves me but like all big sisters she feels she has to wash behind my ears and put me in my place ever so often. By the way, what is your name?"

Gillian gave his name. The tall man leaned in front of him again. "Sis, this is George," he called out to the driver. "Her name is really Kate but for some reason she prefers to be called Sis." he said to Gillian.

She glanced at Gillian out of the corner of her eyes, giving him a woman's quick appraising look that seemed to enable her to know more about him than he wanted her to, then hastily turned her attention back to the street. She was just in time to swerve quickly to the right and go between another car and the curb, a maneuver which left the driver of the other car shaking his fist at them.

"Are you two really brother and sister?" Gillian asked.

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"Eck is my own sweet little baby brother," Sis answered. She nodded toward the rear of the car. "That's my other little baby brother just behind you."

"She means Brutus," Eck explained, when Gillian looked startled. "That's a very downgrading thing to say about a noble dog. What took you so long to get to us?"

"I wasn't sure exactly where you were. And by the way—" Alarm showed on her face as she braked the car to the curb again. "Where are Mary and Joe? How did they get away?"

Eck grunted tonelessly. The sound he made was absolutely flat and without meaning, so far as Gillian could tell. Apparently it meant something to Sis. Her face whitened.

"Do you really mean that, Eck?" Her voice was frantic. "Are they really dead?"

"Mary is dead, this I know." Eck's voice was completely without tone. "I didn't see Joe myself, but George said—"

"I saw some man, with a thin face and a mop of unruly black hair, dead in the entrance to a grocery store." Gillian watched Sis as he spoke. "I'm reasonably sure that this was the man you are talking about. So far as I could tell, there was no wound on his body, no apparent cause of death." Sis' face went blank as he spoke.

She leaned forward and looked at her brother, either seeking advice on what to do next, or seeking added strength from him to face the blow that had hit somewhere inside her.

"It's tough, Sis. It's real tough." Sorrow was in Eck's voice, but strength was there too. "Don't let it throw you. They're not the first dead ones, and unless I miss my guess, they won't be the last."

"But they were such close friends—"

"Not as close as one other."

"I know." Sis' voice seemed to come from some far distance. Brutus, apparently sensing her feelings, tried to reach over Gillian's shoulder and lick her cheek. Her hand went up to caress the great muzzle. "It's all right, Brutus." She turned to look at Gillian. Her eyes flashed fire. "What was that you said about there being no wound on his body?"

Gillian repeated what he had said.

Her eyes flashed fire even stronger. "Why would you make a statement like that? Why would you notice there was no

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wound on his body, and if you did happen to notice it, why would you think it important enough to be mentioned?"

Gillian did not try to evade the fire in her eyes. "I think it is important for several reasons, one being that Mary talked to me just before she died."

"Oh." Some of the fire went out of Sis' eyes.

"Mary said she thought I might be a right guy," Gillian continued.

"I agree with her on that," Sis said. "If I didn't, I'd turn Brutus loose."

Gillian chose his next words with great care. "Mary said I should find Sis and talk to her. She said Sis knows something." He looked straight into the eyes from which fire was still threatening to flash. They were the most disconcertingly candid blue eyes George Gillian had ever seen. Her hair was not blonde and it was not red but it was a mixture of the two colors. Her candid blue eyes weighed and measured him.

"Go on," Sis said.

"I assume you are the Sis that Mary told me about."

"I am."

"Then I would like to talk to you." Gillian said, gently. He was careful to keep all trace of threat out of his words and out of the tones of his voice. If he asked her, she might talk to him. If he threatened her, or tried to use force on her, he would find himself standing in the street watching her little car vanish silently in the distance.

Sis leaned forward and looked past Gillian at her brother. Between them, they seemed to be making up their minds. They said nothing. It was Eck who nodded and spoke. "George saved my life. He's all right. So get this buggy rolling."

Nodding, Sis stepped on the accelerator. Rubber burned from all four wheels.

"Besides," Eck continued, "A guy who can hit like George can, with either fist, I want to know better."

Sis nodded again.

"Besides, I have to find you a husband." Eck said.

"I'll take care of the solution to that problem myself." Sis

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said, her cheeks crimson and her voice hot. Eck grinned. Brutus licked the back of Gillian's neck.

Gillian knew he was in.

For some time afterward, the only sound was the hiss of the tires on the asphalt street and the whistle of wind passing the sloping windshield. Sis drove so fast that Brutus put his head on Gillian's shoulder. She was a good but fast driver; she paid close attention to red lights and to the possibility of squad cars. Gillian had the impression that her fast driving resulted in part from her desire to keep her mind off something she did not want to think about. Maybe what she did not want to think about were Mary and Joe, but there was something even bigger than dead friends, something so big that two lives made no difference in comparison to it. Looking at her out of the corner of his eyes, he guessed she was about twenty-seven. With the ripeness of mature womanhood upon her, she was beautiful.

"Twenty-eight," Sis said suddenly, without taking her eyes off the street.

"Eh?" To Gillian her comment made no sense.

"I'm twenty-eight instead of twenty-seven," she answered. "And thanks for thinking I'm beautiful."

"What?" Gillian gasped.

Beside him, Eck grunted critically. "She's reading your mind, George."

"What?" Gillian repeated.

"She's reading your mind," Eck explained. "Sometimes she can make it work, sometimes she can't. You will have to learn how to stop her from doing it or she will boss you around something awful."

Gillian hastily put his mind under better control. He was aware of the existence of the psi functions; he also knew that millions of dollars had been and were still being spent on investigation of them, without any really clear or satisfactory results having been obtained. The GRI had poured millions of dollars into such work. It was not the fact of mind reading that startled him, it was the unexpectedness of it. Then as he realized how it had been possibly just been used. "You said something about picking up Eck's SOS—"

"That's the way to handle her, George," Eck said approv-

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ingly. "Keep her off balance with unexpected questions and she'll be so busy trying to answer that she won't be able to read your mind. Don't let her get quiet or she'll tune to you like you tune a TV set to the channel of a transmitter. Yes, she picked up my mental SOS and burned rubber getting to me. This doesn't mean she knows everything, or can do this every time, but you and I can be thankful she did it tonight."

"Eck, I'm going to give you a knock on the head if you don't stop talking too much," Sis said. She rammed down even harder on the accelerator, which stopped all conversation for the time being. Cutting into an alley which ran at a lower level behind a row of old mansions that had once been called Millionaire's Heaven, she did not reduce speed. She seemed to be going full speed when she spun out of the alley and headed full tilt toward the huge double doors of a big garage dug into the face of the slope above. She touched a button on the steering wheel as she made the turn.

Gillian was frantically trying to duck what he was certain was an impending crash when the doors swung upward and inward ahead of them and Sis, applying powerful brakes, brought the little car to a halt with its front bumper not more than six inches from the concrete rear wall of the garage.

"You have my sympathy, George," Eck said. "Every time she heads at full jet blast into this garage, I think certain we're going to crash. But the radio doors work every time. Only Brutus is able to take this landing without flinching. He doesn't have enough sense to duck."

"Brutus is a very intelligent dog, with complete confidence in my driving. He knows he doesn't have to duck," Sis unhooked his leash. Brutus fell all over himself getting out of the car, and led the way up a flight of steps. They followed him.

Upstairs was a garage apartment converted out of what had once been quarters for servants. In front was a great mansion. Enough light came in from the street to reveal untrimmed shrubbery in the remains of a formal garden.

"The place up front is actually a rooming house. Gramps is probably turning in his grave at the thought of the use

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being made of his mansion." Sis said. At the question in Gillian's eyes, she continued. "Our grandfather built this place, around the turn of the century, for his bride. Eck and I now rent this little apartment. We don't live here all the time but it's a convenient place to stay for a few days."

"When we don't want to be found by anybody we don't know," Eck explained. "Come into the living room."

The living room was average size. The back windows looked out over the alley through which Sis had brought them at jet speed. Below, sloping away into the far distance, the lights of Los Angeles danced in a glow of bright color. To the left, a door led to a hall with a bathroom at the far end. Bedrooms opened out from the hall. In the living room was a duo-sound rig with a great stack of music tapes beside it. On top of it was the photograph of a smiling-faced man who looked to be in his early thirties. Riding on one shoulder was a small boy. Held with easy skill under the man's opposite arm was a larger girl with her bottom turned toward the camera. Struck by a resemblance, George turned to look at Sis.

"They always recognize Sis first," Eck said. "By her bottom."

"I'm going to have Brutus eat you alive."

"Brutus is already asleep," Eck said. The Great Dane was resting on the floor with his head between his legs.

"Your father?" Gillian asked, pointing to the photograph.

"Yes," Sis answered with a twinge of pain in her voice.

One wall of the living room was completely covered with autographed, framed photographs. Gillian turned his attention to these. He blinked in surprise when he saw that these were photographs of the world's great scientists. "They belonged to Daddy," Sis said. "They were his friends."

"Oh," Gillian said. His eyes went on to the last picture on the wall. He looked at it, looked again, then stood frozen.

"Inside, you're emotionally upset," Sis said. "What is there about this picture to make you act like you're seeing a ghost."

"Eh? Oh—" Gillian brought his voice, and his emotions, he hoped, under quick control. "That—that's Samuel Ronson."

"So it is. Did—do you know him?"

"I never had the good fortune to meet him," Gillian answered. "But he was—ah—" He quickly changed his mind

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about what he was going to say as his throttled emotions threatened to erupt on him. "Ronson was a hero to me. More than—"

"How can anyone be more than that?" Sis asked quietly. "Particularly since you never met him?"

"When I was fourteen years old, and trying to make up my mind what I wanted to be, a copy of that picture of Ronson appeared in a magazine. I cut it out and pasted it on the wall of my basement laboratory. This was one of those little, seemingly unimportant things that may actually be very large to a boy and which may mark the turning point of his life. At this time, some of my friends had just joined a teen-age gang. They wanted me to join too. Every time I looked at the picture of Samuel Ronson it reminded me of something that I wanted to do more than anything else on earth. Instead of joining this teen-age gang, I became this other thing."

"This other thing was a scientist, wasn't it?" Sis said, real sympathy in her voice. "I know you have a doctor of science degree from Cal Tech, also that you have your own experimental laboratory, also that you are regarded by men who know about such things as one of the bright younger minds in the world today."

Gillian stared blankly at this remarkable woman.

"I told you that you will have to learn how to blank your mind or she will be reading it and then bossing you around something awful," Eck said. "She'll read your mind then use everything she learns against you if you don't walk the chalk line."

Gillian let go his breath. Up until then, he had not realized he was holding it.

Laughing softly and gently, Sis leaned forward and straightened an imaginary wrinkle in the lapel of Gillian's coat. "I'm not as bad as Eck makes out. Anyhow I like what I find in your mind. There's honesty there, and great integrity, and a yearning hunger for truth." The candid blue eyes had a soft mist in them.

"Watch her when she starts straightening your lapel," Eck warned.

Sis laughed softly and took her hand off Gillian's coat. "So

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the picture of a great scientist was the turning point in your life. What happened to the boys who went on with the gang?"

"One was killed by a cop in an attempted holdup, one got out and is running a service station, the others are still around somewhere, just running." Gillian answered.

"Where is Ronson now, George?" Sis asked.

"Gone, vanished, dead for five years." Gillian answered. "Or so the papers say." Suddenly, he reached forward and grabbed her shoulders. She did not flinch away from the grip. "Do you have any reason to believe he isn't dead? Speak up or I'll shake an answer out of you."

Her face went white under the pain of Gillian's fingers. But she did not answer.

"Easy, George." Eck said, in Gillian's ear. "You'll wake up Brutus."

"Damn Brutus!"

"You're hurting me. Please let go." Sis said.

Not until then did Gillian realize what he was doing. Hastily he dropped his hand and began to apologize. Sis rubbed her shoulder and waved away his apologies. "I know how you feel. To some degree, Eck and I both feel the same way. Samuel Ronson was Daddy's best friend. He was Eck's godfather."

"He was?" Gillian looked at the tall man with suddenly increased respect. Eck was not only a good man with a baseball bat, but he had been touched by a great man. Gillian suddenly knew that this man and this woman, whom he had met so unexpectedly, were his kind. "Your father was also a scientist?"

"Yes, but not nearly as great as Ronson, though Eck and I thought he was mighty wonderful just the same." Again Sis' voice had pain in it.

"Do you know where Ronson is?"

"No. But this much I know—he isn't dead." She shook her head as questions started to form on Gillian's lips. "This is a psychic impression. I have no facts to back it up. I can be wrong but I think I'm right."

Gillian sighed. If Ronson was actually alive, he had to be found. So far as anyone knew, the man had simply vanished.

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What had happened to him had been one of the great mysteries of the Surging Seventies.

"And your father—"

"Yes, George." Sis' voice was only a whisper. "We're sure about him. He is dead."

"I'm sorry. Don't tell me—" He stared at the woman in growing horror.

She nodded in response to his unspoken question. "He was found dead without a wound on his body. Ever since that day, Eck and I have been trying to find out who killed him; and how. That's why we are interested in Ape Abrussi. We know he has at least one weapon that kills without leaving a mark on the body of its victim. We don't know where he got it or how it works, but we're going to find out." Resolution was firm in her voice as she spoke. Looking from Sis to Eck, Gillian knew that these two people would never give up their search. Gillian liked this. He was another of the same breed.

"I think you know a lot, George, about this weapon and about a lot of other things. You belong to some kind of a group—"

"The GRI." Gillian said.

"I've heard of it." Sis said. "But what I was going to say was that Eck and I may know something too. Certainly the interests of all three of us go in the same direction, though our motives may be different. Perhaps if the three of us pool our knowledge, our abilities, and our resources, we may reach the goal we are seeking. Perhaps the whole human race, without knowing it, is seeking this same goal."

"I agree on all counts," Gillian said. "I'm with you on all counts." He meant every word he said. Sis and Eck both understood his meaning.

"Even if we've lost Joe and Mary, we've got you in exchange." Sis said. "Nothing can ever take the place of lost friends." Her blue eyes were close to tears which she was trying to blink away. "But we have a new friend. For this both Eck and I are grateful."

"Thank you," Gillian said.

She looked at her brother and nodded. As if he understood exactly what she meant, Eck went directly to the picture of

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Samuel Ronson. He slid it aside. Behind it, the wall seemed blank, but, at the touch of a hidden spring, a section of the wall slid aside, revealing a small safe.

From the safe, Eck took a small package of papers, which he laid on the coffee table and beckoned to Gillian to examine.

Chapter Three

THE DRAWINGS looked a little like the doodling of a person talking to a persistent telephone salesman; they looked a little like sketches drawn on the walls of madhouses; perhaps they even looked a little like the frantic efforts of a new arrival from one of the outer planets trying to establish communication in a hurry with a human moron. At the top of the page was a drawing of a pendulum. Gillian understood this much. He frowned as he studied the rest of the drawings. He could see nothing about them to warrant the importance that Sis and Eck obviously placed on them.

The drawings were plans of something. A network of fine lines that looked like spider webs described an energy flow. A device that looked like a lens seemed to have the purpose of bending or focusing light, or some other radiation.

The pendulum was at the top of the page. It looked a little like the plumb bob on a surveyor's transit. However, arrows drawn from it seemed to indicate it was in motion.

"Where did you get these?" Gillian asked.

Eck nodded toward Sis. She was curled up on the sofa and was trying to pretend to be calm as she smoked a cigarette. This pretense of calmness was fooling nobody and she knew it.

"Sis drew them. She got them out of her head—or some place."

She leaned forward and tapped the drawings with the point of a carefully manicured nail. "There are the drawings

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of a death ray, of the biggest little gun ever invented. I made them while watching a technician take such a weapon apart, repair it, and put it back together again."

At her words, Gillian felt a touch of chill run up his spine. "Where did this happen?"

"Right here in this room. I made the drawings right there on that coffee table, in a kind of semi-trance. But don't ask me where that technician was, because I don't know."

"Oh," Gillian said. He understood now that the drawings were the result of one of the cluster of psi functions. To one part of his science-trained mind, this threw a cloud on their reality. However, another part of his mind could not see this cloud. She had read his mind closely enough to prove it could happen! Who knew how the mind really functioned, who knew what its limits were?

"I had been alone here all day, thinking about Daddy and wondering who had killed him and what kind of a weapon had been used." Sis' voice had picked up a monotone and she related the experience. "The image of the technician came into my mind. To some degree, I looked through his eyes. This is hard to put into words, but it felt as if I was seeing what he was seeing, feeling what he was feeling, understanding what he understood. I saw both through his eyes and from some other, different viewpoint. He was working on this weapon. He understood it and I understood it, then. I drew what I saw. The meaning was completely clear to me then. However, when the semi-trance collapsed, I was left staring at some very foolish-looking drawings which I could no longer understand. However, I did know they were drawings of the death ray that had been used to kill Daddy."

She sank back on the couch as if exhausted. Eck looked worried. On the floor, Brutus suddenly awakened. He got to his feet, climbed up on the couch, and licked her face. She pulled his great head down into her lap and reached for a tissue to wipe her face. "One thing I can say for sure, when a Great Dane kisses you, you know you've been kissed."

"About this technician—" Gillian said.

"His body looked human," Sis answered. "But he had the yellow eyes of a goat."

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"How on Earth—" Eck began.

"I didn't say he was on Earth," Sis answered. "He may have been in a space ship, he may have been on some other planet, he may even have been on a planet circling some other sun."

"The eyes of a goat," Gillian said, sombrely. "I saw a man with the eyes of a goat tonight. I was bending over Joe and he came up behind me and asked if I had killed him."

Sis sat up on the couch. "What happened to him? Where did he go?"

"I . . . the last I saw of him, he was following Abrussi."

"Then there are such people here on Earth!" Eck said, excitement rising in his voice. "We're on the trail of something. But why was he following Abrussi?"

"I don't know," Gillian answered.

"Damn!" Sis said. "He'll turn up again, though. I'll bet he will."

"I hope I have something better than a baseball bat if he does," Eck said. "Did he have one of those death rays?"

"He kept his hands in his pockets," said Gillian.

"Can you make that gun?" Eck asked.

"I don't want to make it," Gillian answered.

Sis looked pleased at his answer; she seemed to understand why no man, of his own free choice, would want to build a weapon that dealt in death; but she looked worried too.

"We need it if we are going to stay alive," Eck continued, patiently. "You know and I know that one or more of these weapons are on Earth today. They are in the hands of killers, of gangsters. The thugs who have them want more of them. Their purpose is to gain power."

"That purpose is as old as the planet," Gillian answered. "Through all history men have tried to find new weapons to gain more power."

"Now the weapons are coming from non-human sources," Sis said. "And that is a big difference."

"I agree with you," Gillian said. "That is a big difference. As long as we were fighting with weapons we could invent and make here on Earth, it was a kind of family quarrel; it involved only one planet. If one tribe invented a better bow, it wasn't long until the other tribes had this bow too. But if

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one tribe of humans—or one gang—gets this thing . . .” He tapped the drawings on the table. “. . . the other tribes will never have a chance. The scientific knowledge required to build this thing is so great that the other tribes will either all be dead, or will be in slavery, before they have a chance to develop such a weapon.”

“Then you will build it, George?” Eck asked again.

“There is a tremendous gap between these drawings and a working model,” Gillian said.

“You can bridge that gap. If you need help, Sis and I will give you all we have.”

“Thanks,” Gillian said, smiling. “There are others who will also give me all they have. The question is whether the best brains on Earth, pooled, know enough. What you ask is not easy.”

“Will you try?” Eck persisted.

“I will if I have to,” Gillian answered.

On the table, the telephone buzzed softly. Eck glanced at his sister, then lifted it and spoke into it. He clamped one hand over the mouthpiece. “It’s Terry. He wants to come over and talk.”

“Ask him where he got this number,” Sis said. “It’s not listed,” she explained to Gillian.

“He says Mary gave it to him a couple of years ago,” Eck answered. “And—he’s crying, Sis.”

“Then I guess he knows Mary is dead. Let him come over.”

Gillian leaned back and lit a cigarette. He was annoyed because his study of the drawings was going to be interrupted. Eck took the plans and put them back into the safe, carefully putting Ronson’s picture back into the exact spot it had occupied before he had moved it. Gillian was also annoyed because of what he had to say next. “I think I should tell you,” he said slowly, “that Mary told me before she died that she had been hit and run over by a car driven by somebody named Terry.”

The room got so quiet when he had finished speaking that he could hear the flutter of the wings of a heli-cab somewhere in the sky overhead.

“She also said that she had jumped directly into the path

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of the car, trying to bluff Terry, and that he had done his best to avoid her. I don't understand this relationship; I don't understand why Terry should be crying, and I don't understand why he should be coming here now."

A little of the ice seemed to go out of the room at this explanation. Sis and Eck both looked sick but they also looked a little relieved. It was Sis who spoke. "Terry and Mary were friends a couple of years ago. They were also our friends. When Mary fell in love with Joe, she stopped seeing Terry. He took this pretty hard and, as a result, started running with the bunch around Abrussi. We tried to tell him not to do this, but he had been hurt. Even if it had been unintentional—Mary simply didn't love him—the pain was just as real. Terry faced the same choice you had long ago, only he had been hurt, and, in addition, he didn't have Samuel Ronson's picture to remind him of what he really wanted to be."

"I see," Gillian said.

"I guess he didn't know that Mary was with Eck and Joe tonight. When he discovered this, he realized that he still loved her and he did his best, in his way, to keep from hurting her."

"She also hinted—"

Sis nodded again. "They really were trying to capture Eck tonight. Then they could use him to force me to do what they want. But they don't want me, either. What they want are those drawings." She nodded toward the picture of Samuel Ronson.

Later, when a soft knock came on the front door, Eck went to answer it. The man who entered was short and stocky, with black hair, brown skin, and dark eyes. He spoke to Sis with evident embarrassment and nodded to Gillian when the latter was introduced. Sitting on the edge of a chair, Terry tried three times to light a cigarette.

"I'm sorry about Mary." The words were agonized. "I didn't know who we were after tonight until we got there. Mary jumped in front of my car and I couldn't turn fast enough to avoid hitting her. I knew she was killed by the way she went down. Later, I tried to find her but they

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hustled me back to drive the getaway car before I could locate her."

Eck and Sis were silent, their faces blank. Their thoughts seemed to be far away. In spite of the fact that a cigarette was burning in the ash tray in front of him, Terry lit another one.

"I would like it very much if you would tell Joe for me that I'm sorry," Terry continued. "Also tell him that I am going to turn myself in to the police on a hit-and-run confession."

"Why turn yourself in, Terry?" Eck questioned. "That would mean two or three years in the penitentiary."

"I hope so," Terry answered.

"Do you mean you want to go to jail?" Eck asked.

"Yes," Terry answered. The agony deepened in his voice. "By that time, the Ape may have forgotten about me."

The room was silent. This man's suffering was obvious. He shook his left wrist as if something pained him there and Gillian caught a glimpse of metal under the coat sleeve. Terry got awkwardly to his feet. "You tell Joe for me I'm sorry," he said to Sis.

"Sorry, Terry." She shook her head. "I can't do this for you. You don't seem to know that Joe is also dead."

"Joe dead?" Terry gulped at this news.

"Mr. Gillian found him. He said there was no wound on Joe's body."

Terry turned to look at Gillian. The room was quiet.

"I didn't know," Terry said. He shook his left hand again. "No one told me. No wound, you say?" His mind seemed to wander. "There must have been a third car tonight, one I didn't know about. The Ape must have been in it."

"Where did he get that weapon, Terry?" The tone of Sis' voice indicated she was asking a question of no importance. Only her eyes, fixed on Terry's face, indicated how important it really was.

"I don't know," Terry answered. "I'm a little guy. I just drive a car now and then. I don't know anything important. I heard some of the boys say he had found it near a place called Mad Mountain, but I've never been there. I do know

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he has several of the boys looking around near Mad Mountain for something most of the time."

"Where is this place?"

"Off that way, about fifty miles." Terry pointed toward the southeast. He scuffed the toe of one shoe on the rug. "I'm sorry about Mary and Joe." He moved toward the door.

"Don't go yet," Sis said. Terry stopped and looked at her. "How would you like a real tough job, Terry, one that will give you a chance to pay off for Mary?"

"What could I do?"

"You could go back to the gang and act as if nothing has happened. There are no witnesses who saw you run over Mary, so the police won't be after you. If anything happens, you could telephone us."

Terry turned this idea over in his mind. He didn't like it. "A dirty spy!"

"A spy on the side of decency, a spy on the side of the future," Sis answered. "But I want to warn you—"

"I know." His voice dropped to a whisper. "I'll be dead if they catch me." His gaze went around the room, searching for something. His eyes found Gillian's pen on the coffee table. He picked it up, then found a piece of paper. "Don't say anything aloud," he wrote. "But, for Mary's sake, I'll do it."

When all of them had read the message, he crumpled the paper in his hand and stood up.

"You're not making any damned spy out of me!" His voice grated harshly.

"But—" Gillian began. He stopped speaking as Eck dug him in the ribs.

Terry was holding up his left arm. Well up under the sleeve on the forearm was a metal bracelet that looked to be an inch wide and perhaps half an inch thick.

"Don't any of you try to follow me, either. I just came over here to say I was sorry about Mary, because I knew her."

Terry's voice snarled at them, but as he left the little apartment, his walk was that of a man with a new lease on life.

"He's wearing one of Abrussi's bracelets," Eck whispered. "Poor devil. I wonder if that bracelet has a radio trans-

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mitter in it. I wonder if that's why he wrote his final message instead of speaking!"

"You know it is," Sis answered. Not until then did both realize that Gillian was staring at them in complete bewilderment.

"We don't know what these bracelets are, George," Eck tried to explain. "Abrussi's boys have just started wearing them and we haven't had a chance to get one into our possession so we could find out what it is. But whatever they are, they're no good for the guy who is wearing one."

"Mad Mountain?" Sis whispered. Abruptly she rose and left the room. When she returned a few seconds later, she had an atlas of maps in her hands and was rippling through them. "These are Daddy's old maps. He kept them for some reason which he never told us. I have kept them too, because they once belonged to him. Here's a map of the area Terry was talking about."

She laid the atlas on the coffee table. The point of her finger nail went over the map. "Here's Mad Mountain. There is such a place. It's even got a red circle drawn around it." Her voice took on a puzzled tone. "Did Daddy draw this circle? He must have. Why would he draw a red circle around this particular mountain?"

Gillian bent over the map. A faint dotted line led from the red circle off to the edge of the map. On the margin there, tiny figures had been written.

"That's Daddy's writing," Sis said, excitement mounting in her voice.

"These figures give a compass course and an altitude," Gillian said.

They stared at each other in bewilderment.

"I wonder why Daddy drew this circle around the mountain Terry has just told us about?" Sis' voice was a whisper in the room. "I wonder if this means that he knew there was something important in this place, knew it even before he died?"

"I know only one way to find out," Gillian said.

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Chapter Four

AT THE controls of the helicopter, which his credit card and pilot's license had gotten from a rental service, Gillian watched the altimeter. Eck had a powerful telescope glued to one eye. Sis had a pair of 10 by 50 binoculars. Brutus, on the floor, was apparently bored with the whole thing, particularly with some supersonic note from the rotor vanes that was keeping him awake.

Mad Mountain was a flat-topped mesa perhaps fifty miles away. The time was mid-morning; there wasn't a cloud in the California sky. When he wasn't watching the altimeter and wasn't looking at Mad Mountain, wondering how it had got its name, Gillian was keeping an eye on this sky, to be on the safe side. Miles away another whirly-bird was visible but it seemed to have no interest in them. Sightseers, he supposed, or people taking pictures, or perhaps prospectors using magnetic detection equipment to probe the earth for mineral deposits that other prospectors had presumably missed.

"I'm looking," Eck spoke without taking his eye away from the telescope. "This side of the mesa has a talus slope leading down from the top. There's also a big cliff with an overhang on it which forms a natural cave. I've seen cliff houses built in similar spots over in Utah and Arizona. I don't see anything here." A note of disappointment sounded in his voice.

"There's probably not much to see. Whatever it is we're looking for, it doesn't stick out like a sore thumb. If it did, somebody in a helicopter would have spotted it long before now."

"How do we know they haven't?" Sis asked. "Maybe they saw it but didn't live to tell the story."

"What a cheerful sister I have!" the tall man grunted.

"I'm only telling the truth, and you know it. There is danger here." She looked at Gillian. "My guess is that we have to be at exactly the right spot and at exactly the right altitude to find this thing."

"I see a hole under the overhang of the cliff," Eck called out. "Can this be what we are looking for?"

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Gillian swung the ship in until less than a mile separated them from the granite escarpment of Mad Mountain. Taking the binoculars from Sis, he studied the place. A hole leading down into the mountain was all he could see.

"I have the oddest feeling that we had better not get any closer in the air," Sis said. "I think it would be best if we landed on top and came down the slope."

"I agree with you," Gillian said.

"Do we want to look into a hole?" Eck questioned. "Probably it's nothing more than an old prospect tunnel."

"We want to look into this hole," Gillian said. Circling, he lifted the helicopter above the top of the mesa. Seen at close range, the flat top was mainly a illusion of distance. The top was actually a mass of boulders that offered few chances of a safe landing. Picking the best spot, Gillian set the ship down. Outside the windows, a few stunted cedars and forlorn cacti were the only visible signs of life. It was hard to realize that so desolate and so forlorn a spot existed so close to the teeming population complex that was Southern California in 1980. Lifting the high-power sporting rifle, equipped with telescope sights, from its resting place, Gillian levered a long cartridge into the firing chamber, and opened the door. Brutus was the first out.

"It doesn't look like much, but the nearest tree is that way," Sis said to the Great Dane. He went to explore. The three humans were slower.

They picked their way cautiously down the talus slope and reached the ledge that led to the overhang under which the mysterious hole was located. As they neared the hole, Brutus began to hang back. Sis had to coax the Great Dane to accompany them.

"Maybe Brutus has more sense than I gave him credit for," Eck said.

They reached the hole. Deep under the overhang, and at such an angle that spotting it from the air was almost impossible, about twelve feet in diameter, with smoothly polished sides, the hole went down into darkness, into mystery, perhaps into some lost world that lay below the surface of the earth. Coming from the hole was some radiation that made humans a little uncomfortable and which badly upset the nervous

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system of a dog. Refusing to come within ten feet of the place, Brutus sat down and howled. They ignored him.

"Maybe this was once a mine shaft," Eck suggested, again.

"There are no tailings," Gillian said. "The miners would have to dump the rock somewhere."

"What do you think, Sis?" Eck asked.

"I think I agree with Brutus," she answered. "I wish we were all back in Los Angeles having a late breakfast." Her voice grew grim. "But this doesn't mean I'm going to run. It only means I'm scared."

"You're not the only one," Gillian said. "Do you pick up any ESP impressions?"

"I feel a heavy vibration here but it is so powerful that it blots out everything else." Sis was silent for a moment. "Now I'm *hearing* a sound. It's coming from that hole."

Listening, Gillian was aware that a low-pitched moan was coming from this hole. His startled imagination pictured some great beast in pain charging from its lair. He knew these ideas were untrue, however Brutus, beginning to howl, seemed to think they were real. Rising in crescendo, the moan became a howl. Sis grabbed Brutus and hugged him to the ground. Eck and Gillian, the latter with his rifle ready, hit the dust beside her.

The moan became a shriek.

George Gillian saw something come out of the hole that slanted under Mad Mountain. It was an aircraft of a design that had never come from a human drawing board. It seemed to be made either of condensed light or of some strange metal through which light rays could pass. The result was that while Gillian could not see the outside of the ship very clearly, he could see its interior fairly well. He could see the pulsing of radiations flowing in shifting, glowing colors from its energy source, he could see the steering mechanism, and he could also see the only passenger in the ship, the pilot.

The pilot was dressed in a simple garment of shining cloth that fitted snugly against his body like close-fitting metal armor worn by knights of old. In height and build, he was about average for a human being. However, his head was oddly shaped, with knobs on top that looked a little like

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very short horns. He had a tuft of whiskers at the end of his chin.

As the ship came out of the hole, the pilot turned his head and glanced at the three humans on the ground.

Gillian saw quite clearly that this pilot had the yellow eyes of a goat.

As the pilot saw the humans, a flick of surprise passed through those yellow eyes. But the pilot was not much surprised. The expression in the yellow eyes said he knew all about such lowly creatures, including what to do about them if they escaped from their cages.

Then the ship was gone. Moving with growing speed, it vanished almost instantly into the cloudless California sky above Mad Mountain. A little later the throbbing echo of a sonic boom came floating back.

Brutus stopped howling and began to whimper. George Gillian sympathized with the great dog. He knew just how Brutus felt.

Sis tugged at his elbow. "There was another one, George. Just like the one I saw repairing the gun when I made the drawings. He was right in that ship, piloting it."

Now, more than ever, Gillian sympathized with Brutus. Like the Great Dane, he knew how it felt to be lost and alone in a world he had not created and did not understand at all. Now he could no longer pretend to himself that the man who had asked him if he had killed Joe had not had goat eyes. Now he could no longer even think that the drawings Sis had made had no real source. While psychic material was often false and often misleading, in this case the source was in.

Getting to his feet, Gillian walked silently to the lip of the tunnel and looked down. Sis and Eck came to stand beside him. He ignored them.

The air coming from the tunnel was hot. A slight glow on the walls was fading away. Gillian wished he had a radiation counter. Looking down, he could see nothing.

From his pockets, he took a pen and a memo pad. Swiftly he wrote a number and a name. Tearing off the sheet of paper, he handed it to Eck.

"If I don't come back within an hour, you return to the

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ship and use the radio to put through a call to this number. Give my name and your name. You will need no other identification than my name. Explain exactly what happened to me, and to you, and where you are. Don't try to fly the ship. You're not a pilot. Stay with the ship and help will reach you within an hour after you make the call."

"You talk like you're going down this tunnel," the tall man, his voice grim, took the note.

"I am," Gillian answered.

Sis started to speak but Gillian interrupted. "No, Sis, don't tell me it's like walking down the barrel of a loaded cannon. I know that. I want both of you to stay here for two reasons. First, to watch for another ship like the one we just saw in the sky. Second, I want somebody to get information on this place back to that number I gave Eck. If I don't come out, you two are to do this."

"But—" the tall man said.

"If it's my time to die, that's all right," Gillian continued. "Others have already died, as you have told me. Others will die. It is not too important if I die, but it is very, very important that two people I can trust will get this information back to the number I gave you."

They were silent. The expression on their faces indicated their rebellious feelings. He took the binoculars from Sis. Brutus came up and licked his hand. Turning, Gillian ran down the tunnel.

The frequency that had shaken his nervous system outside seemed to have died away. Had it come from the launching of the ship? Light ahead of him indicated the end of the tunnel. Coming to an abrupt halt, keeping as far out of sight as he could, he looked at what lay before him.

A monkey wandering into a radiation research laboratory would probably wonder about the meaning and purpose of all the junk it was seeing. It would not understand what it saw at all. It would have no grasp of meaning or purpose of any of the equipment. Waves on a pool of jungle water it would know about from experience. But waves vibrating uncounted millions of times faster than the waves on the jungle pool would simply not exist to the monkey.

George Gillian knew intimately the waves that vibrated

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uncounted millions of times each second. He knew how fast they moved. He had equipment in his laboratory which could count both rate of vibration and speed of motion.

Were there waves as far beyond these as these were beyond the waves on the pool of the monkey? Gillian suspected that such waves existed, but he could not offer instrumental proof of what he suspected. No instrument had as yet been built which would measure such waves. They laughed at the traps of all known instruments, sped through the traps uncaught, and danced on and away. Yet all scientists were beginning to suspect that these waves were real also that they played a tremendous part not only in the ESP phenomena but also in all life, including the lives of humans.

Looking into this cavern, Gillian felt like the monkey that had wandered into the radiation research laboratory. A gulp came up in his throat. Wonder rose in him. He had to choke it down.

Off to the left several small ships similar to the one he had seen were sitting in a line. Here they seemed a little more real, a little more substantial than had the one he had glimpsed as it leaped from the launching tunnel. A number of technicians were working around one of the ships, moving it, possibly preparing it for launching. Putting the binoculars to his eyes, he saw that these technicians had short knobs like blunt horns on their heads. He passed this by to look up.

The cavern was several stories high. It had small openings with balconies at several levels.

Then he saw the ball that was made either of light or of glowing metal. At first, he thought it was floating unsupported in the air, then as he realized it was moving very slowly, he saw the long linked chain carrying the heavy cables upward, and he knew that he was seeing the pendulum Sis had tried to draw when the magic had been on her and she had seen into far distances. It was gigantic! The ball of glowing metal was at least ten feet in diameter, the chain that supported it was hundreds of feet long. Its motion was very slow, very majestic like the pendulum in some truly tremendous grandfather's clock keeping the time that ruled the world.

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George Gillian could not even guess at the purpose of this pendulum.

He saw that in its downward sweep it would pass very near to a platform raised above the floor of the cavern. A great many instruments were on this platform. Apparently their purpose was to determine, to check, and to control the operation of the pendulum.

A man, or what looked like a man from this distance, was on the platform. He had a round, fat stomach that made him look like Friar Tuck. As the pendulum moved slowly past the platform, he inspected the instruments very closely and made minute changes on some of them.

Gillian put the binoculars on what looked like a man on the raised platform. He fully expected to see a creature with short knobs on his forehead, and as the powerful glasses brought him close, he expected to see that this creature had the yellow eyes of a goat.

Shock passed through him at what he did see. The man on the raised platform was—a man.

George Gillian at this moment simply did not believe his eyes. He had no time for further observation. A rising roar in the cavern pulled his attention elsewhere.

He saw that the technicians had put the ship they had been moving directly on the launching ramp that led to this tunnel. The roar was coming from the ship as it warmed up for flight.

Turning, Gillian raced up the tunnel as fast as his legs could carry him. Behind him, he heard the roar grow louder, he felt the pressure of rising air in the tunnel, and he knew the ship was starting up.

Light was ahead of him. He raced for it. And reached it! He threw himself on the ground and rolled over and over. A split second behind him the ship *whooshed* as it leaped from the launching tunnel, then roared past him. Eventually the sonic boom came back. George Gillian hardly heard it. He was content to lie still and pant to get his breath back, also to know that he was still alive. He knew he was being kissed but he didn't know whether Brutus or Sis, or both of them, were doing it. He knew Eck was trying to help him to

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his feet. He was glad to accept this help. Once he got to his feet, he knew exactly what he was going to do.

"Come on. We're getting out of here."

Eck and Sis had dozens of questions they wanted to ask. He ignored all of them. Led by Brutus, they scrambled up the talus slope. Vanes whistled as Gillian lifted the helicopter into the air. As soon as they were safely launched, he reached for the radio telephone and gave a number to the operator.

"That's the number you gave me to call if you didn't come back out of that tunnel," Eck said.

"I know it is," Gillian answered, then spoke into the phone as the connection was completed. "This is George Gillian. Yes. That's my name. Get this message through to Mr. Strong immediately." With Eck and Sis listening, he gave a terse account of what he had seen. If the person on the other end of the phone had any doubts, he did not express them. "What I am going to say next has top priority. I don't care where Mr. Strong is or what he is doing, this information is to be passed on to him within ten minutes after I finish speaking. This is the message." Again he paused. "*Samuel Ronson is alive. He is in Mad Mountain.* Tell Mr. Strong he is not to disturb the situation in any way until he talks with me. *Yes, I said Samuel Ronson. I also said he is alive and that he is in Mad Mountain.* You can find this place on any map. Goodbye."

The man on the raised platform, the man inspecting the operation of the gigantic pendulum, was Samuel Ronson.

Slipping the phone back into place, and setting the helicopter on a straight course for Los Angeles, he patted Sis on the cheek. "Sometimes your ESP proves very, very accurate, my dear. Yes, Samuel Ronson is alive. The pendulum you drew also exists, a huge thing. And the technicians with the goat eyes are very plentiful down below."

Sis looked grateful.

"But what's this all about?" Eck asked.

"I don't know," Gillian answered. "I didn't think it would be smart of me to stick around down below and ask the boys what they were doing."

"I sure agree with you on that," the tall man answered fervidly. "But—"

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"I guess the whole human race is asking, in one way or another, what something that is happening is all about." Gillian paused, wondering how to present the history of fifty years in a few words. "That something is happening is obvious. What it is nobody knows. Here are some of the symptoms of it. First, in sports, performance has steadily and consistently improved. Records have continuously gotten better. In the last Olympic Games only one record that was over twelve years old was left unbroken. Perhaps better training methods account for part of this improvement, but not for all of it. Some other factor is in operation that seems to be producing better athletes than have ever existed since we started keeping records in sports. To go from muscles to minds—in the field of pure science, the same thing has happened. Most of what scientists thought they were most sure of is in the junk bin today. Nobody dares predict what the science of tomorrow will be. Ideas are changing so fast that no one dares freeze the model. Did the same unknown factor that produced the improvement in the sports records also account for the gains in science? If so, how does it work? What is it? Is some unknown frequency impinging on the genes, the units of heredity, producing changes there? Are these changes in their turn resulting in more competent human beings?"

On the horizon, Los Angeles was a blur that was rapidly coming closer. Not satisfied with this, Gillian tried to set the throttle forward another notch. There was no other notch.

"Here is another aspect of the situation which most people just don't know exists. All the psi functions have also been accelerated. This includes all the meanings of clairvoyance, telepathy, clairsaudience, precognition, telekinesis, and some others that nobody is yet sure enough about even to name. We have more and better sensitive individuals today than ever before, and most important of all, they are learning to accept themselves and we are learning to accept them, to work with them and their abilities, and we even hope some day to understand them." He looked at Sis as he spoke.

She smiled at him. "I would have felt a lot better if you had said this sooner. I was afraid you would just think I was crazy."

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"Never, my dear. I admit I don't understand it, but I have seen this stuff turn out right a little too often to doubt that it exists. Many competent scientists have some of the psi functions themselves. You can bet they are investigating this field as thoroughly as they can, just to prove to themselves what was worrying you, that they're not crazy—if for no other reason."

"Well," Eck said. "It's good to know that my big sister is not going to be taken off to the nuthouse just any day now."

"I wouldn't worry any about her if I was you," Gillian said.

"Oh, I'm not, not really," the tall man answered. "I'm just making jokes, part of the time to keep from admitting how scared I really am."

"You are right in knowing that there is something to be scared about," Gillian said. His voice took on a somber tone. "This picture had its bad side. We have more and bigger and fuller mental hospitals; we have more neurotics and psychotics running around loose; we have more teen-age gangs, more adult gangs, more crime, more divorce, and more general law-breaking than ever before in all human history. Humanity seems to have lost all concept of moral codes and of ethical conduct."

Gillian inspected the throttle again. There still was no other notch. But they were over the city now and the rental landing field was fairly close. The tall man and his sister were very quiet.

"What does all this mean?" Sis asked wonderingly.

"It means conflict which may be the biggest in human history too, conflict between heavily accelerated growth and those who are trying to stop this growth or hold it back. It also means bitter conflict between individuals who are trying to take advantage of this very confused worldwide situation to grab power and wealth for themselves. Of these, I take it, the man whom you call Ape Abrussi is one. At present this conflict is in a state of very precarious balance. I don't suppose anybody on Earth today knows how this balance will eventually tip. If it goes to the bad side, if the Ape Abrussis really get into the saddle, well, we certainly have enough hydrogen warheads to blow the whole human race off the planet. If it goes to the good side, well, perhaps we are

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entering the golden age of true humanity." Hope, though dim and far away, sounded in Gillian's voice.

He set the ship down at its landing field and signed the charge for it. As they got into her car, Sis still had questions to ask. "What part do you personally play in all this?" she wanted to know.

"A very minor one," Gillian answered promptly. "As you know, I happen to belong to a group of public-minded people, the GRI, the Group for Research and Investigation. This group financed my laboratory. In a sense, I work for it. When I signed that charge slip back there, I was spending this group's money. This group is legally and properly incorporated. It is doing its very best with the very large means in money and men at its disposal to find out what is going on, and if it agrees with the purpose that is behind this world situation, to do everything in its power to cooperate. If it disagrees, it will fight with every available resource. This group has real power at high military and political levels in this country, clear up to the president. It can get things done—but up until now, it has not known what to do." He dodged involuntarily as the doors of the garage swung up and in ahead of them.

Sis brought the car to a halt with its front bumper not three inches from the concrete wall of the garage.

Brutus was first up the stairs.

They heard him growl ahead of them.

"Brutus!" Sis called sharply.

They entered the living room. And stopped moving. The place was almost completely wrecked.

A hole in the wall revealed where Samuel Ronson's picture had once hung.

But Brutus had not been alarmed at any of this. He had growled at the man sitting quietly on the couch and was now sniffing at his toes and was looking up at his mistress as if this was something he did not understand.

The man was Terry. His head sagged forward on his chest, Terry looked like he was asleep.

Terry did not look up when they entered; he did not rise to greet them.

They knew instantly that Terry would never rise again.

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They also knew that no undertaker would be able to find a wound on his body, that no autopsy would reveal a cause of death other than heart failure.

A growl sounded in the Great Dane's throat as he turned to the door that led toward the bedrooms.

The door was opening.

A man stood there. He was short and swart, with hot, angry eyes. In his hands he held a small weapon that looked as if it was made of glass.

"Just stand still, all of you," he said.

"Abrussi!" Eck whispered.

"Yeah. Just stand still. And keep your damned dog—"

Teeth bared, great forepaws swinging, the Great Dane went after the intruder.

The gun in Abrussi's hand snapped at him.

Brutus did not make a sound as he died. He simply collapsed and crumpled to the floor.

Abrussi looked from the dead dog to the live humans. A grin was on his face.

"Terry revealed a little more than he realized when he was here talking to you," Abrussi said. "My equipment picked it up. Terry saw that his best interests lay in coming back here with me, but when I found the safe behind the picture, he lost his head."

Abrussi shrugged. Terry had lost his head. Probably he had tried to swing at the Ape. Terry was no more.

"Don't any of you lose your heads," Abrussi said.

The little glass weapon in his right hand covered them.

Chapter Five

ABRUSSI SEEMED to know Sis and Eck Randolph. But he had never seen Gillian before. His hot, black eyes fixed on Gillian's face. "Who the hell are you?" The tone of his voice said he wanted an answer, fast.

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At the sight of this man, Gillian felt strong feelings of revulsion rise in him. He controlled them. "Just a friend," he answered politely.

"That answer is not good enough," Abrussi snapped at him. "What's your name and your address."

Thinking they would mean nothing, Gillian gave his correct name and address. "Never heard of you." The way Abrussi spoke, the fact that he had never heard of this man made Gillian of no importance whatsoever. "But I will." He lifted his left wrist to his mouth. Revealed on the wrist was a bracelet similar to the one worn by the dead Terry, except it was wider and thicker. "Get the car up here right away," he spoke into the bracelet.

"Yes, sir," the bracelet answered.

Abrussi changed a setting on the bracelet, then spoke into it again. "I want the dope on George Gillian, 2131 Columbine Street. Get the lead out of your pants and get through those files in a hurry. I'll wait."

Abrussi did not have to wait long. The bracelet emitted a sharp whistle. "Nothing on a George Gillian, sir."

"All right, check further," Abrussi answered. "Get back to me with the dope. There's something on him somewhere. I want it."

"Yes, sir," the voice from the bracelet answered.

Tires squealed on the asphalt in the alley. Down below, motors whined as the garage doors swung open.

"We're going to take a little ride," Abrussi said to his three captives.

A man with a receding chin came up the stairs and entered the apartment. He looked at Abrussi, who nodded toward Terry. "Wrap him in a blanket and stuff him in the trunk." He nodded again, toward the Great Dane. "Put the dog in another blanket." His eyes darted to Sis as she moved and the little glass weapon shifted to cover her. "Stand still, Sis."

"When he was just a tiny puppy, I used to wrap Brutus in a blanket, so he would be warm at night," Sis answered. "Wherever he is now, I want him to be warm. It's my right to wrap him in his last blanket."

Ignoring the weapon, she moved past Abrussi and into the hall, Abrussi followed her. She disappeared into a bedroom.

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His face grew grim. She reappeared carrying an eiderdown quilt. Refusing assistance from anybody, she wrapped the body of the Great Dane in this. Standing up, her eyes were moist but her chin was high and firm. She looked Abrussi in the eye.

"All right, Ape," she said. "We'll go for a ride with you. Some day we will repay the favor—and take you for a ride."

Abrussi blinked at her. His eyes had fire in them. Then he shrugged. "Anybody who takes Ape Abrussi for a ride, has to get up early in the morning," he said. "Go down the steps ahead of me. And don't try to run out the back door. I've got a couple of boys in the garage." He gestured with the little glass weapon.

Sitting beside Sis' little sports car, making it look like a very small bug, was a long, seven-passenger sedan. A chauffeur was at the wheel, another man waited to open the door. Abrussi motioned for his captives to get into the back seat. When they obeyed him, the man who had opened the door got into one of the raised seats in the rear and sat facing them. Abrussi got into the front seat and sat half-way turned around so he could see any move they might make.

"Don't anybody in the back seat lose his head," Abrussi said.

The man with the receding chin came down the steps carrying a heavy bundle wrapped in a blanket. He placed this in the trunk, then went back up the stairs. The next bundle was wrapped in an eiderdown quilt. Sis watched him from smouldering eyes. The trunk slammed heavily. The man with the receding chin got into the front seat and sat beside his boss.

"Get going," Abrussi said.

Tires squealed as the car was backed out of the garage, then squealed again as it started down the alley. A sharp whistle came from the front seat. Abrussi lifted the bracelet to his ear. "Good," he said. "Off." He turned to the back seat and looked appraisingly at George Gillian. "So you're one of the bright young minds?" he said to the latter.

"That is not my idea," Gillian answered.

"It's the idea of somebody who knows," Abrussi answered. His manner suddenly became friendly. "Glad to have you with me. I can always use bright young minds."

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Gillian, looking at Abrussi's short, thick neck and wondering if he had the strength in his hands to break it, did not answer.

The car dropped them at a small, private airport. Here they were transferred to a large helicopter and put into a private cabin. Abrussi, not concerned about any effort to escape now, and with other business at hand, rode with the pilot. Meanwhile, he was busy on the radio set obviously hidden in the bracelet. The ship lifted and headed toward the range of mountains that lay toward the east. Gillian sat in silence. Eck clasped and unclasped his hands. Sis's chin stayed firm but the moisture in her eyes was still clearly visible.

The ship was set down in the landing area adjoining a large, rambling house that occupied much of the top of a mountain. Looking out, Gillian could see no road leading to the house, nor did the building of a road appear to be practical. He knew then that this was another mountain-top hideout that could be reached only by helicopter.

"This is one of my places," Abrussi said expansively, as they stepped out of the ship. The little glass weapon had disappeared into a holster inside his coat. With servants hastening to open doors for him, he took them inside, led them to a small room, told them very politely that he would see them as soon as possible, waved to the telephone and told them to order anything to eat or drink they wanted, but not to try to escape, and left them alone.

"Sis, he was only a dog," Eck said, sympathetically.

"He was my dear and trusted friend," she answered.

Gillian patted her on the shoulder. "Go ahead and cry if you want to."

"T—thanks, George." Borrowing Gillian's handkerchief, she blew her nose.

"Where does the money to pay for this place come from?" Gillian asked.

"Dope, gambling, and girls," Eck answered.

Gillian was slightly abashed at his own naïveté. "Perhaps, in some ways, I have led a secluded life."

"Did you think that dope, gambling, and girls have gone out of style here in this modern world of 1980?" Eck asked. He shook his head. "I suppose that dope, gambling, and

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prostitution are other parts of the bad side of the picture you painted for us when we were coming back from Mad Mountain. At least, we have more of them than ever before."

Gillian went to the telephone and picked it up, hoping vaguely that he would hear a dial tone, but not really expecting it. There was no dial tone. A girl's voice said, "Yes, sir." While Sis and Eck looked hopeful, Gillian said, firmly, "I want an outside line."

"Yes, sir," the operator said.

While Gillian held his breath, he heard clicking sounds, then the operator came back to tell him, very politely, that all the outside lines were busy at the moment. "When can I get one?" he asked.

"I'm afraid you'll have to clear with Mr. Abrussi first," she told him.

Gillian sighed. Sis and Eck, reading the expression on his face, lost their hopeful looks. "Mr. Abrussi said we could order anything we wanted," he told the operator. "Send up a gallon of orange juice, a huge pot of coffee, steak, scrambled eggs, and hash browned potatoes, for three."

"I can do that for you," the operator answered. "Right away."

Gillian tried the doors. They were locked. He checked the windows. They could be raised six inches from the bottom and lowered six inches from the top. Looking out, he decided it would do no good to get them open all the way. Below was a drop of at least a hundred feet. The room they were in was on the edge of the mountain top.

"What about the GRI—" Eck began. As he spoke, the door opened silently. A six foot Negro, with a serving tray in his hands, entered. He looked sharply at Eck, but if he had heard the GRI mentioned, his face gave no indication that he knew anything about it. As he set the tray down, the bracelet glistened on his left wrist. "Your orange juice and coffee," he told them. "Your steaks, scrambled eggs, and hash browns will be along as soon as the cook can whip them up." He grinned at them. "My name is Washington Moses. If you want anything, just tell the operator to send me up. I'll take care of you right away."

"We do want one thing, Washington," Sis said hopefully.

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"Yes, miss," he said, politely attentive. "What is it?"

"Out of here," Sis told him.

His dark face suddenly somber, he shook his head at the question. "To lead you out of this land, I'm afraid you will need a bigger Moses than I am." The smile gone from his face, he left the room. Later he returned with steaming platters of food. They had finished eating when he returned for the third time.

"The boss is ready to see you," he said. "I'll show you the way."

Alone in a huge office that sat on the edge of the cliff, giving him a breathtaking view of Southern California, Abrussi was all smiles. Dismissing Washington Moses with a curt nod, he turned to them. There was no mistaking that Abrussi was a powerful man in many ways, including physically; or that he had a most magnetic, winning manner, when he chose to use it. He chose to use it now.

"I'm taking you all into my organization," he said. His tone of voice conveyed the impression that this was the biggest opportunity they had ever had. "I'll start each of you at fifty thousand dollars a year. Of course, there will be an *up* on that. When we really get going, there is no top." His smile was very expansive.

Gillian mentally estimated his chances of breaking Abrussi's thick neck. Eck, thinking of strangulation, was clasping and unclasping his hands again. It was Sis who spoke.

"What is it you want us to do to earn our money?" she asked.

"Trust a woman to be practical," Abrussi said, beaming. He opened a drawer of his desk. From it he took the package of plans that Gillian had last seen going into the wall safe behind Samuel Ronson's picture. "These are what I wanted all along." He looked at Sis and Eck. "If you had been reasonable when I first asked for them, it would have saved everybody a lot of trouble." He sounded as if he was blaming them for putting him to the inconvenience of killing Joe and Terry. "I want you, Sis, to explain these in detail, and I want you, Gillian, to aid her in the development of all the scientific angles.

"Um," Gillian said.

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"I want you to get started right away. A lot depends on this and I don't want any time wasted. You can have anything you want in the way of equipment. You will have quarters, full maid service, and full service from my own chef. To show you that everything is on the level, I'll pay your first month's salary in advance."

Another desk drawer was opened. From it, Abrussi took stacks of hundred dollar bills. Starting counting, he gave up. "It's too much trouble to count. For the first month, I'll make it an even five thousand dollars for each of you." He made three piles of bills and pushed them across the desk top.

The smile on his face was a most expansive thing.

"That's a lot of money," Sis said.

"Yeah." Abrussi grinned.

No one stepped forward to pick up his stack of bills.

Slowly the smile died on Abrussi's face. Hard, glittering lights suddenly showed in his eyes, as the ape looked out of them. It was not pure ape. Lurking somewhere in the background, was a hint of the king cobra.

Cobra fast, Abrussi's hand went inside his coat. It came out with the little glass weapon in it.

No one moved.

It seemed to George Gillian that an infinity passed while he was waiting for the sudden *snap* he had heard from this same weapon when it had been used to kill Brutus in mid-charge. He knew that Sis and Eck were feeling the same slow drag of time while they waited for death to come to them. Then, slowly, Gillian realized that Abrussi was bluffing. Sis realized this too.

"You can go to hell!" she said.

Abrussi exploded into violent rage. "Do you three punks think you can bluff me?" he shouted.

"If you shoot us, you won't have anybody to explain those drawings to you," Sis said, calmly.

Abrussi had known this all along. When he realized that his victims knew it too, the hot anger faded from his eyes. Cold rage came up. When he spoke, the hiss of the king cobra was in his voice.

"All right, if you want it the hard way."

Lifting his voice, he said, "Get Doc Muzzy in here, fast."

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From a hidden speaker, a voice answered. "Right away, sir."

Abrussi eyed the three people standing in front of his desk. "If I was you, I'd take it the easy way," he said. "Doc Muzzy is a psychiatrist. He went on the hot stuff and couldn't get enough to satisfy him. He works for me now. He knows ways to make people talk that make even me shudder."

He looked expectantly at the three.

Again it was Sis who spoke. "As I said before, dead people explain no drawings."

"You won't be dead," Abrussi answered. "You will just wish you were!"

The door opened and two men entered. Between them, they had the third man by the elbows, supporting him. Bracelets were visible on the wrists of all three. The man in the middle held their attention. Wearing an apron that once had been white but which was now spotted with many stains, he was partly bent over. From this position, through thick-lensed spectacles, he seemed to peer out at a world that had lost most of its meaning for him.

"This is Dr. Muzzy," Abrussi said. Contempt that he did not bother to try to conceal was in his voice. He nodded toward Eck, Sis, and Gillian. "They're yours, Doc."

"Yes—ah—sir." Muzzy peered around the room until he located the persons his boss had indicated. He stared at them as if he could not quite make up his mind about them. "What—ah—sir—do you want done with them?"

"Give them your silent treatment," Abrussi ordered.

"Yes—ah—sir." A grimace that apparently had been intended to be a smile crossed Muzzy's face momentarily, then faded as he thought of some difficulty. "But—we—ah—sir—only have two cells. There are three here. The whole purpose of the—ah—experiment—would be defeated if we put two in the same cell."

Abrussi thought about this. It was a problem he could solve. "Let the woman watch through the windows," he ordered.

"Yes, sir," Muzzy said. "Bring them one at a time." He turned and walked out of the room without help.

Gillian found himself placed in a small cell that had no

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furniture and except for a small window up near the ceiling, it had no openings. Light came from some source concealed in the ceiling. Walls, ceiling, and floor were covered with some material that seemed to absorb sound. This material was scuffed and scarred near the floor. Gillian regarded these scuffed places with great doubt. They looked as if they had been made by some previous occupant who had tried to kick his way out.

"When you change your mind and decide to cooperate with—ah—Mr. Abrussi, just nod your head toward the window," Muzzy said. "But don't give in too soon, or I may think you are not sincere."

The door closed behind him and his two helpers. It made a soft sucking sound as it was pulled shut. When it closed there was no mark to reveal where it had been.

Except for the lack of furniture, the room seemed harmless. It was, however, rather silent. He called out sharply to the psychiatrist. The room seemed to absorb his voice, which became a thin whisper. At this point, the meaning of Abrussi's words *silent treatment* became clear. He tried to remember what he had read about such rooms as this—and about what happened to the people who had stayed in them a few hours, for experimental purposes. He could not remember all the details but he was very sure the results had been unpleasant, extremely so. Accustomed to hearing sounds all day and to some degree during sleep, the human ear would begin to behave very strangely when no such sounds were present in its environment.

Now Gillian realized the reason for the scuffed places on the walls near the floor. Some previous occupant had tried to kick his way out of this silent room. But first he had gone crazy.

Shock came up in Gillian, stronger than what he had felt on Mad Mountain.

Movement at the glass panel near the ceiling caught his eye. Looking, he saw that Sis was there. She made signs at him. He interpreted these to mean that Eck was in another cell and that she was going to be forced to watch both of them go crazy.

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Her face had horror on it. But it also had resolution in the set of her jaw.

"Don't give in!" Gillian screamed at her. His words were whispers in the soundproof room. He saw her face disappear from the glass panel.

Outside, in the short corridor on which the doors of the soundproof cells opened, Sis was talking to Abrussi.

"You can make it easy on yourself," Abrussi said. Two bodyguards stood behind Abrussi. Wiping his hands on his spotted apron, Dr. Muzzy stood beside him.

Looking at Abrussi, Sis Randolph knew, for the first time in her life, the meaning of hate. She hated this man. She hated all he stood for. She hated what was happening to Eck and to Gillian. She hated what was happening to her. But more than any of these, she hated what would happen if Abrussi gained greater power, particularly if he gained it through her.

"You can still go to hell!" she told him.

Abrussi laughed at her defiance. In his own mind, he was sure she would weaken. Meanwhile, why not enjoy teasing her? He jerked his head toward the two panels in the wall. "Your brother is in one cell. Your boy friend is in the other."

"He's not my boy friend," Sis answered. "He is a very fine and splendid man, also something you don't understand, a gentleman!"

"Before Doc Muzzy gets through with him, you will see what kind of a gentleman he is," Abrussi answered, amused.

"I'll watch both die before I explain those drawings to you." Sis said. Her voice was firm with resolution.

"Will you watch both of them go crazy?" Abrussi asked.

She caught her breath. She had not thought about this side of the picture, she had not understood the real purpose of the cells. The shock wave that went through her nervous system left marks on her face.

Abrussi grinned again. "When you change you mind, just let Doc know," he said. He turned to leave, then stopped as Muzzy clutched at his arm in an effort to detain him. "No, Doc. No more of the hot stuff. Later, when you finish with your job here, you can have all you want."

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Helplessly, Muzzy let go of Abrussi's arm, to stare after him as Abrussi went out the door.

The face that Muzzy turned toward Sis as the door closed had complete hopelessness on it. On his left wrist, the bracelet gleamed.

Turning away from Muzzy, she moved to the second panel. Inside, Eck looked up at her, waved, and grinned. A choked feeling rose in her throat. He, who would soon be needing courage so desperately himself, was trying to give her courage.

She moved to the other glass panel. Gillian was sitting on the floor. He also grinned and waved. The choked feeling came up in her throat again, stronger now.

She turned back to Muzzy, fully intending to choke the life out of him, if necessary, to get the keys to the cells, but the psychiatrist had slipped through the door.

A key turned in the lock to the outer door. She braced herself to leap at Muzzy. It was Washington Moses. She held herself in check. His dark face was expressionless as he looked at her.

"I came to see if there is anything you want, Miss—" He paused. "I never did get your last name."

"Randolph," Sis said.

"And the gentlemen in there?" He nodded toward the glass panels.

"One is my brother, Eck Randolph. The other is George Gillian. Washington—" She hesitated as she tried to decide how to word an appeal to this man who wore Abrussi's bracelet. "Washington, you look like an honest man."

"I try to be honest, Miss Randolph. Is there anything you want to order from the kitchen?"

"I'm not hungry." He turned to the door as she spoke. She knew she had to speak now, or never. "Washington—" Desperation came into her voice. "Are you willing to help us?"

He glanced down at the bracelet on his left wrist, then spread his hands in a helpless gesture. His dark eyes studied her. Did she detect sympathy somewhere in their depths?

"We're innocent people! We have to get out of here." The desperation grew stronger in her voice.

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"So many of us are innocent people, Miss Randolph." He opened the door.

"Wait a minute, Washington." She gestured toward the cells. "They're hungry in there."

"I have instructions to bring you anything you want from the kitchen. But I have no instructions to bring anything for them. Sorry, Miss Randolph." The door closed behind him. Washington Moses was gone.

Sis did not feel her body fall. Later, when she found herself on the floor, she knew she had fainted.

Chapter Six

WHEN HE was first alone in the soundproof cell, Gillian thought that the absence of sound was a little thing. Hours later, he knew better, and liked what he knew much less. He discovered that his ears, over his whole lifetime, had become accustomed to hearing sounds. Now large, now small, now noticed, now unnoticed, now the chirp of a bird, now a distant whistle, now the sound of a jet in the sky, now the impatient honk of an automobile horn—always there had been a background of sound which his ears had heard.

Cut off from this background for the first time, the ears reacted at first with a sort of puzzled bewilderment. Gillian's nervous system translated this lack of a familiar stimulus as something missing. Then what was missing became important. Then anxiety began to grow.

The ears began to grow hungry for sound.

When it was not forthcoming, they began to reach for it.

When this failed, they began to manufacture it.

The result was hallucination.

The ears began to hear sounds that did not exist in their immediate environment.

The nervous system became more and more alarmed.

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Eventually the sounds that the ears were not hearing were converted by the alarmed nervous system into voices. As this happened, the whole neural structure began to try to go into action on the basis of hallucinated voices: the vocal chords tried to answer what the ears claimed they were hearing, the mind tried to think in terms of what it thought the ears were hearing and what the vocal chords were saying in reply. Since some of the things being heard were frightening, the adrenal glands went into action, manufacturing the fear hormone and pouring it into the bloodstream. The heart began to pound. Then the breathing picked up, eventually becoming more and more labored as the lungs fought for air.

As this whole vast complex developed, the individual would eventually go into wild panic. How far this panic could go, Gillian knew from looking at the scuffed places on the walls near the floor. Some poor devil had tried to kick his way out of here. Gillian tried to keep his nervous system under better control. He found, however, that no matter what he did, he still had to listen to the hallucinated voices. The fact that he knew they were hallucinations made absolutely no difference. He heard them anyhow.

He listened to the voices for a long time, recognizing them as memories becoming audible. Voices of friends long gone out of his childhood, including those of his parents. Some of the voices seemed to come from his infancy. He wondered if he had any right to be remembering these.

If he grew tired of listening to the voices, he could look up at the glass panel and see the wan face that occasionally appeared there. At first, he knew that the face belonged to Sis Randolph. Then he began to wonder about its identity. Whoever the woman was at the glass panel, she did not look happy to him. When he remembered that she was Sis, he felt very sorry for her, knowing that her ordeal was greater than the one he was undergoing. He was sure she would die before she gave Abrussi the information he wanted. She had something called *principles*. She was willing to die for them.

He also had the impression that she was trying to give him courage. He blessed her for this, and then, as some freak of memory gave him back a recent scene, he recalled that Mary,

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dying, had seemed to find Joe waiting for her. If he died here, would he find Sis waiting for him on the other side? Or would he have to wait for her?

This thinking gave him no comfort. To get it out of his mind, he concentrated on the voices again. It was much better to hear the voices than to look at Sis. Looking at her hurt too much.

Time passed. Gillian did not know how much time had passed. Perhaps hours had gone by, perhaps a day and a night had passed, perhaps time had stopped altogether. He tried to sleep. His ears, hunting for sound with greater and greater hunger, stepped up the volume of the hallucinated voices. The harder he tried to go to sleep, the wider awake he was. He was in a condition that was neither sleep nor waking. He wondered vaguely how much he could endure before he leaped to his feet and began kicking at the wall.

The hours passed.

Occasionally he turned his eyes to the glass panel. Did he know the woman whose face he saw there? Trying to wave at her, he found he hardly had the strength to lift his arm. His breathing was labored. Had they shut off the air into the cell? Were they mixing some subtle gas with the air? Alarmed, he got to his feet. His heart began to pound as if it were about to burst from the rib cage. Panic came up in him. He screamed. The sound of the scream was lost in the silence of the room. He screamed again. He had to get out of here! *Had to!* Where was the door? Not finding a door, he began to kick at the material on the walls. At the exertion, his heart beat became alarmingly fast. Sweat covered his body.

The woman at the glass panel was motioning to him to lie down. What foolishness was this? *He had to get out of here!* Again he kicked at the wall.

This effort exhausted him. He fell. Again the half-state that was neither sleeping nor waking came over him. The voices started up once more. He listened to them.

The language the voices were speaking intrigued him. He did not know what tongue was being spoken but it was not English. Perhaps it was Spanish. Perhaps it was Italian. Perhaps it was French. It was not German. The harsh gutturals

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of the German tongue were absent. Instead the language had many sibilances. He tried to remember if he had ever heard this tongue spoken in his life before, decided that he had not.

Some segment of rational thinking returned. He wondered why he should be hallucinating in an unknown tongue. This problem puzzled him but he was too weak to think about it. If the voices wanted to talk some foreign language, there was nothing he could do to stop them. If his ears wanted to invent sounds and his nervous system wanted to distort them into some tongue he had never heard, there was nothing he could do about it. Both his ears and his nervous system seemed to have minds of their own. He let these minds work as they wished. So subtly he did not realize when it began, he became aware that he was beginning to see.

This was strange. His eyes were closed. He knew they were closed. But closed or not, he was seeing something. Then he recognized what it was.

It was a cable that seemed to be miles in length. At the far end of it was a huge ball. This was moving so slowly that he was not certain it was moving at all. As he watched, he realized that the cable and the ball were parts of a gigantic pendulum.

This pendulum seemed to be in motion in some void. He did not know where it was. It was not on Earth. It was out in the sky somewhere beyond the Earth but it was not as far away as the Moon. As this thought came into his mind, he realized he could see both the Earth and the Moon.

The Earth was a gigantic dark mass that obscured most of the sky. The Sun was not visible. He assumed it was behind the planet.

Like a vast grandfather's clock, the pendulum seemed to be keeping time in the void. Old time or new time? Past time or future time?

Very vaguely and dimly, he was aware of a feeling of horror. This seemed to be coming from the dark mass of Earth so far below him. It seemed to be a definite radiation leaping upward through the sky. Even at this distance, he could feel it. It seemed to him that Earth was groaning as it turned. The whole planet seemed to be suffering.

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Fantastic ideas came into his mind. He thought that the whole planet was a gigantic boil. Excruciatingly painful to the touch, the boil that was the planet was being lanced. The Earth writhed and twisted at the pain coming from this celestial surgery. In his nightmare world, Gillian decided that the pendulum was a knife cutting into the boil that was a planet.

He could not see the fulcrum of the pendulum. He seemed to be at the fulcrum, looking down. Hissed voices were around him, talking their unknown tongue. He was not listening to what they were saying. He was adjusting the pendulum, making minor changes in its sweep, so it would cut into the boil of the planet quicker and cleaner.

Or was the pendulum creating the boil?

This thought startled George Gillian. It almost make him wake up. Then the horror of real sounds broke into his nightmare. To his overstrained, hungry ears, real sound had the impact of a sudden, painful blow.

A voice was shouting to him. "Wake up! Wake up!"

To shut out the horror of the sound, he tried to cover his ears with his hands.

A woman's voice frantically told the first voice to be quiet. It went into grumbled silence. Then the woman's voice was also asking him to wake up but was doing this much more gently. He tried to cover his ears tighter. Even a gentle voice sent painful shocks through a nervous system too long without sound. He did not want to wake up. He wanted to stay where he was and watch the pendulum keeping universal time in the night sky. Gentle hands pulled at his hands, trying to get them away from his ears. He would not permit it.

Other sounds came, so violent they blasted through his hands. Oddly, they sounded like the fire of an automatic weapon, perhaps a submachine gun. Then came a blast like the explosion of a hand grenade, hurting his ears and his nervous system so badly that he flinched. It shocked him into opening his eyes.

Sis' face was directly above him. It was Sis who had spoken to him, it was Sis who was still trying to get his hands away from his ears.

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Above her, bending over her, was a man in a dappled green garment. His head was covered by a helmet and he had a rifle in his hands. The helmet had three bars on it. Gillian thought vaguely that this made the man a sergeant. The sergeant was looking bewildered.

"What's wrong with him, Miss? There's not a mark on his body. I checked."

"He's completely exhausted and in a state of shock," Sis tried to explain.

The door of the cell was open. Two men, also wearing helmets and uniforms, were coming through it. Between them, they were supporting a third man. Sis got to her feet and ran to the arms of this third man. He tried to hug her. When he got his arms around her, she seemed to collapse. Vaguely, Gillian recognized this man as Eck. The tall man had a thick crop of whiskers on his face. He was trying to grin but the effort was not very successful.

From the distance came more sounds of automatic weapon fire. Gillian clapped his hands over his ears again. He tried to sit up. The effort was not much more successful than Eck's effort to grin. Sis slid out of the tall man's arms and abruptly sat down on the floor beside him. She was laughing and crying at the same time. She waved her hand at the three men in uniform.

"They're Marines, George. Marines!"

"Marines?" Gillian's own voice hurt his ears. "How—how did they get here?"

"I don't know and I don't care," Sis answered.

Another man in battle dress, with an eagle on his helmet, came into the cell. He glanced at the sergeant, who stiffened to attention, then his eyes went on to Sis, Eck, and Gillian. "There should be two men and a woman, sergeant. Are these the ones?"

"I think so, colonel. At least we found them here in these cells."

"Are they all right?"

"I wouldn't say so, sir."

"Then get the first-aid and the stretcher detail in here on the double. As soon as first-aid okays moving them, get them out of here and into a ship and on their way to a hospital."

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"Yes, sir," the sergeant said. He went out the door. Outside, his voice could be heard shouting for a stretcher detail.

The colonel bent over Sis. "Are you all right?" he asked.

"No, sir," she answered.

He asked the same question of Gillian and Eck. From each, he got stout answers that they were all right. The expression on his face said he did not believe them. He went around the cell, kicked at the walls, shouted and listened to the way his own voice vanished even with the door open. "Who made this? Who put you in here? How long have you been here?" He shook his head as Gillian tried to talk. "No, don't bother to answer. When we catch the man who did this, I'll personally make him wish he had never been born!" The colonel's face looked very grim as he spoke.

A man with a red cross on his helmet came through the door. He bent over Sis first. Men carrying stretchers were following him.

"This place is full of dangerous men, colonel," Gillian said.

"It's full of dangerous rats, you mean," the colonel answered, as more automatic rifle fire sounded outside. "They're on the run with my boys right after them. We're after papa rat."

"You must mean Abrussi," Eck said. "I want to warn you—"

"We already know the kind of gun he has." The colonel's voice grew very grim. "We want that gun. I have orders to take this place apart clear down to the foundation, if I need to, in order to get that gun."

"Be damned sure you get it," Gillian said.

"They're okay to move, sir," the man with the cross on his helmet said.

"Then get them on those stretchers and get them out of here," the colonel answered.

Sis did not protest at being carried. However, both Gillian and Eck, sure they were all right, waved the stretchers away. They could walk. Each took one step and collapsed.

"That's enough," the man with the cross on his helmet said. "Just hold still."

Gillian hardly felt the needle slip into his arm. He saw Sis and Eck get the same treatment. All three of them were moved out on stretchers. Just outside the door of the corridor

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a man in a dirty apron was lying on his back. Dr. Muzzy was looking up. He wasn't seeing anything. There was a hole in the middle of his head.

"He resisted," the sergeant said.

The expression on Dr. Muzzy's face said that this was the best thing that had happened to him in a long time.

As they reached the open air, the colonel suddenly began to swear. Gillian saw a helicopter lifting into the air. A Marine shouted something at the colonel, who grabbed the sergeant's weapon. The helicopter was already in the air. The colonel emptied the weapon at it. The ship kept going. The colonel grabbed an automatic rifle from another man in battle dress, ran to the edge of the mountain, knelt there, and began to fire. The helicopter dipped once as if struck, it lurched downward, but it was beyond the top of the mountain, and it righted itself before it crashed. The ship kept going. Looking as if he wanted to throw the rifle at it, the colonel got to his feet.

"Abrussi is in that ship. He's got away," the colonel said. His voice had the explosive violence of rifle fire in it.

On the way to the landing area, dead men in battle uniforms revealed the way Abrussi had gone. Gillian knew that an examination of their bodies would reveal no wounds.

"These are paratroopers, George," Gillian dimly heard Eck say.

"But who sent them here?" Gillian answered, drowsily. The needle that had gone into his arm was taking effect. He saw that Sis, on her stretcher, was already asleep. Then, without knowing it, Gillian was asleep too. If it was not a natural sleep, it at least had no nightmares of mile-long pendulums in it.

When he awakened, he was in a hospital. He knew it from the smell.

An intern with an expression of studied calm on his face was bending over him. At the foot of the bed a husky young man with a crew haircut was standing in such a way that the shoulder holster under his coat was revealed. Gillian coughed, then choked, then the bed seemed to try to turn over. He tried to tell the intern to catch the bed. Gillian coughed again. The bed righted itself. "Where's Sis?"

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Bare feet scuttled on a plastic floor and Sis found her way between the white screens. The young man with the crew haircut looked startled. The sight of her even shook the intern out of some of his calm. Sis was wearing nothing but an abbreviated hospital nightgown. She leaned on the side of the bed and looked down at Gillian.

"George, are you all right? You and Eck were simply wonderful to stand up under all that torture." She glowed at Gillian as she spoke.

He was starting to glow back at her when the face of an angry nurse came between the screens. She took a firm grip on the abbreviated nightgown and Sis went away with her.

The intern cleared his throat and tried to resume his shaken expression of calm. "I'm Dr. Adams. You seem to be in pretty good shape."

"Thanks," Gillian said. "Who is he?" He nodded toward the foot of the bed.

The crew cut reached into his pocket and pulled out a small embossed card, with the letters GRI on it. "Mr. Strong is waiting to see you, sir, just as soon as you are able."

"I'm able," Gillian said. "If I'm not, it makes no difference."

At the nod of agreement from the intern, the young man with the crew cut found his way between the screens. He returned in a few minutes with a small, baldheaded man who looked like a gnome. But he was a benevolent gnome, and a real power in the world, not only financially but politically.

"I suppose we have you to thank for the Marines," Gillian said.

Hugo Strong showed signs of embarrassment. He had very real power but he was always embarrassed when anybody mentioned it. "Well—I—ah—suggested—"

"I know," Gillian nodded. "You just made a suggestion. How high did you have to go to get the Marines into action?"

"Too high," Hugo Strong promptly answered. "The man I talked to issued specific orders that I was not to make the jump with them, darn him. He wouldn't even reactivate my commission temporarily." For an instant, Strong glowered at the memory of some strong injustice done him. The glower

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came to focus on Gillian. "You are such a blunt young man. Such things as these are best handled with the utmost of tact and finesse. However, I would not have you any other way," Strong finished hastily.

"How did you know where we were?" Gillian asked, bluntly.

Hugo Strong looked at the crew cut. This young man promptly went away. Strong looked at the intern, who likewise took the hint. "We have had a man there for some time."

"Who was he? Did he escape? Everyone there wore those damned bracelets—"

"Yes, he escaped." The gnome smiled. "In fact, he is here now."

"Bring him in, so I can thank him," Gillian said.

It was Washington Moses who came between the screens. His dark face had a smile on it. "Those silent cells are no good. Are you all right?"

"Yes," Gillian said. "And thanks."

Moses smiled. "We all have to do everything we can to make the future a little better. No need to thank me. I'm glad to do my part."

"Including risking your life?" Gillian asked.

"Did you do any less?" Washington Moses answered.

As Gillian was suddenly silent in growing embarrassment, Hugo Strong nodded approval. "That's the way to talk to this brash young man, Washington. That kind of talk will make him shut up, fast."

"Yes, sir." Washington Moses turned and found his way between the screens. They heard Sis call him and knew from this that she had been listening. The murmur of her voice as she thanked Washington Moses was indistinct. Then Eck called to him. They could hear Eck thanking him too.

"Abrussi is now at the top of the list of wanted men. However, he did not escape with the drawings the young lady made. We have them," said Strong.

"Good!" Gillian said.

"Just as soon as you feel able, I would suggest that you take these drawings to your laboratory. We will provide adequate guards. We must know about this weapon, we

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must know its source, and we must know the principles on which it operates," Strong said, in a whisper.

"At Mad Mountain—" Gillian began.

"Your report on this place was received. It is being investigated."

"Very cautiously, I hope. Samuel Ronson is there. Whether or not he is a captive, I do not know."

"We are being very careful not to disturb the situation. Now if the young lady and her brother are willing to go with you to your lab, and help you—" He looked up and blinked as Sis came between the screens again.

"The young lady is willing to do everything she can," she said. "I think I can also speak for Eck."

Eck himself came creeping between the screens. "I'll speak for myself," Eck said. "I'll be there, even if all I can do is run errands."

"Good," Hugo Strong said.

"And if you will consider a volunteer—" Eck continued.

Strong appeared alarmed at this idea. "We can't accept volunteers. Their backgrounds must be most carefully checked."

A dark face came between the screens. Strong blinked. "Do you mean that Washington Moses is this volunteer?"

"Naturally," Eck answered.

"Then everything is settled," Strong said beaming. For the first time, he seemed to become aware of the brevity of the hospital nightgowns that both Sis and Eck were wearing. He blinked at both of them.

"It's all right," Sis said hastily. "Eck is my brother and we're used to each other. Anyhow I have to go right back to bed before that nurse—" The nurse had discovered that her patient was missing again and was beginning to search for her. "I'm coming," Sis said, departing.

"A most remarkable young lady," Hugo Strong said, blushing.

"You can say that again," Gillian said, firmly. "Shall we say that we will start tomorrow morning at my lab?"

"That's fine," Strong said. "You will have available to aid you the best men I can find on such short notice. Are you

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sure, however, that you will be able to start so soon? You have been through a most harrowing experience."

"I'm able," Gillian said.

"And so am I," Eck said.

"Me, too," Sis added, from somewhere beyond the screens.

Hugo Strong smiled like the benevolent gnome that he was, and took his departure. The young man with the crew cut returned, to take up his position at the foot of the bed. The expression on his face said he had orders to stay there as long as was necessary.

"Good night, Sis," Gillian called out.

"Good night, George. Good night, Eck," she answered. Her voice already sounded sleepy.

Chapter Seven

LOOKING AT THE metal monster sitting on the floor of his laboratory, Gillian tried to pretend he was not in the least dismayed by his creation. They called it a Z generator. Eight feet tall, its circumference at the base was almost twenty-four feet. No one had checked its weight, which must have been almost two tons.

This monster represented the first attempt to translate Sis Randolph's drawings into constricting metal and expanding force. The best available brains had worked like slaves for over a month constructing it. They were grouped around it now in the late afternoon, looking at their handiwork, a little awed by the potential it represented, a little worried about what the result would be when they turned it on for its first test—and irked to the man because of the size of it.

It was Sis, giggling just a little behind Gillian, who put their thoughts into words. "After all, George, it is a little large to fit snugly into the palm of one's hand."

"Damn it, we all know that," Gillian said exasperated. "It's

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the best we can do on our first attempt to translate the ideas of super-science into a model that the technology of Earth can produce. Also, it was *your* drawings we used as a starting point, and while you were willing, you didn't come forward with any new ideas as we worked out the plans."

"I couldn't help it," she said, contritely. "I can't turn higher perception on at will. I have to take what comes. In this instance, nothing came."

She and Eck were living upstairs over the lab in the quarters that had once been occupied exclusively by Gillian. On the roof was a private solarium, open to the sky, which made a fine place for sun bathing. Sis had used it for this purpose but neither Eck nor Gillian had had time for such activities.

Outside were guards, in plain clothes. Washington Moses was in charge. As circumstances permitted, Hugo Strong came and went. If Strong had had a free choice, he would have spent all of his time here, but he had other duties, one of which was to prod all available law enforcement agencies to find Ape Abrussi.

Abrussi had vanished. Perhaps one of the colonel's bullets had found its mark and the Ape was dead, but Hugo Strong was not willing to believe this until Abrussi's body had been found and positively identified. As head of a hidden, worldwide narcotics ring, Abrussi had many places to hide.

Mad Mountain was under cautious 24-hour a day surveillance. It was obvious that this mountain and the creatures with the goat eyes were giving Hugo Strong much cause for deep concern. They were giving high military and political circles even greater concern. No publicity had been given to the goat-eyed creatures. None was likely to be given.

In a world as touchy as that of 1980, the authorities were admitting nothing that might give the public additional cause for alarm.

Glaring at the monster in his laboratory, Gillian wondered how the public would react if it knew this thing existed. Now that the first model was finished and ready for testing, he was a little scared of it. In the past, scientists had poked their noses into many strange matters. The results had occasionally

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been disastrous. In creating this monster, science had poked its nose into another strange matter.

"Gentlemen, are we ready?" Gillian asked.

Around the monster, particularly at the instrument panels designed to meter both input and output, men suddenly looked alive.

Gillian pressed the switch that fed current into the monster. Heavy relays thudded. Every light burning in the laboratory dimmed. At least a hundred kilowatts were going in.

The output meter said that less than one watt was coming out.

As burning insulation assailed Gillian's nose, he hastily cut off the current.

He looked at the men in the laboratory. He did not need to see their shaking heads to know what the result had been.

The Z generator had burned up enough electric current to light a small town. It had not produced enough output energy to light a small bulb. The needle of the meter monitoring output had hardly moved.

"Something happened," Sis whispered, behind Gillian. "An energy, of some kind, was generated, but it went so fast it did not have time to stop on the meters.

Gillian felt a touch of wonder at her words. Theoretically, the speed of light was a limiting velocity. Her words hinted at the possibility that there might be some radiations which moved so fast that the speed of light was a slow crawl in comparison to them. Gillian wondered if perhaps something had happened on Mars when the Z generator had gone into operation. Had the Moon been startled, had Venus felt the passing of some energy originating in this laboratory?

"Something came out of this generator that leaped across the whole Solar System in—in—" She groped for a word to express a very small fraction of time. "It was almost there before it left here," she finished.

The men listened to her. They respected her. Her drawings had made possible the building of this generator. They gathered around her, asking questions. She tried to answer but her voice faltered. "There are no words to say what I felt when this generator was turned on. And the instruments

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which will reveal what I can't say in words have not been invented yet. They will be invented, when—" Her eyes sought Gillian's face. "When some of the minds being born today work long enough and hard enough and in the right direction."

"We'll run a series of test checks in the morning," Gillian said. "In the meantime, you have all worked very hard. I suggest you all take the night off."

The assembled men looked grateful at his words. As they were leaving, Washington Moses came into the laboratory. He looked dubiously at the monster.

"Eck went to the local restaurant for food. I'm sure he brought enough for four," Gillian said. "Come on up to the roof and join us at dinner."

Washington Moses looked grateful at the invitation. Upstairs, in the dining room, Eck was waiting for them. "What happened?" he asked.

"Almost nothing, so far as the meters went," Gillian told him. "However, Sis thinks they may have felt our generator on Mars."

"Then I will expect a Martian to come calling on us," Eck answered.

After they had eaten, they went into the solarium to rest and loaf, but Gillian, mindful of the failure of the work on the Z generator, did more fretting than loafing. The sun had gone. The lights of the vast city twinkled into the far distance. In the sky, helicopters were moving lazily.

"Do you have anything on Abrussi?" Gillian asked Washington Moses.

"There's not even a whisper about him anywhere," the dark man answered.

"You sound as if that worries you."

"It does," Washington Moses answered. "The Ape hasn't quit, he's only in hiding. He will come out again, if for no other reason, because he wants more of those little glass weapons. He wants another one so he can have a spare for his personal use." A wry bitterness sounded in the dark man's voice. "He thinks the one he has was fully loaded when he got it, like an automatic pistol with a full clip. He doesn't know how many shells he has left in it."

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"Where did he get it?" Eck asked.

"I'm not sure, all I know are the rumors I have heard. The story is that a strange ship crashed in the desert and exploded. Abrussi found this glass weapon on the body of the pilot. He's like a savage who finds a high-powered rifle in the ruins of an airliner that crashed in the jungle. He knows that his new weapon can be used to kill people. This is about all he knows, except that he wants more of them."

"I don't know that we know much more," Gillian said drily. "It is going to take a lot of improvement to get our Z generator down to a size that will fit inside a pistol that can be carried in one hand."

He twisted with impatience and annoyance. Was Earth science so far behind that it could not even grasp the fundamental principles on which the glass weapons operated?

The ship came straight down.

There was no roof on the solarium, so it came straight down inside the enclosure. Except for a slight hiss, like that of a distant airbrake in operation, it was soundless. Identical with the ships they had seen leaping into the sky from the tunnel into Mad Mountain, it came to a sudden stop a foot above the floor.

A pilot with the eyes of a goat looked out at them. He was not wearing the single garment of shining cloth that the pilots of the other ships had worn. Instead, he was dressed in an ordinary business suit. A felt hat was clamped firmly on his head.

As they came to their feet, he opened the door of the ship and stepped out.

In his hand, he had one of the glass weapons.

Gillian recognized the pilot. By the hat. The last time he had seen this pilot, after asking if Gillian had killed a man named Joe, he had gone up an alley where presumably Ape Abrussi was in hiding. This pilot had been the dark shadow in the night when Eck and Sis and Gillian had first met.

The little glass weapon covered Washington Moses.

"Throw ze veapon at my feet," the pilot said.

Reluctantly the dark man took from its holster the weapon he had started to draw. Carefully, his face a mask, he threw it on the floor. The pilot bent over and picked it up. He

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glanced at it, sniffed at its clumsiness, and stuck it into his pocket. With great care, he looked the four humans over. They did not seem to impress him much more favorably than the weapon he had taken from Moses.

"Vere is it?" he asked. His voice had a slight hiss in it, like that of an angry snake about to strike.

"Where is wat?" Gillian asked.

"Ze ozzer one like zis, ze ozzer *jednar*." A stubby forefinger pointed at the weapon he was holding. "You 'ave it. You just used it. I pick it oop on my—what you call *radar*. I vant it. I vant it right now."

His English was not good but his meaning was clear. Much too clear. He thought they had one of the little glass weapons. "I don't know what you mean. We have no—what you call *jednar*. We—" Gillian caught the words in time to keep from revealing that this was what they were trying to build.

"But you just used it," the pilot said, firmly. "I took what you called a *feex* on it."

"But you couldn't have taken a fix on it when we don't have such a weapon!" Gillian protested.

The glass weapon came very steadily to focus on him. "I vill kill you," the pilot stated. "Ezzar I 'ave ze *jednar*, or I vill kill you all. Then I vill find it myself."

He was very calm in making this threat. His manner indicated that he would think no more of killing four humans than they would of swatting four flies.

"But we don't have a *jednar*!" Sis burst out.

Her words got her the thoughtful attention of the goat eyes beneath the hat brim. "You must be a voman, a female. I have seen zem now and zen, as I vent among you." His tone indicated that he took a very dim view of the females he had seen, considering them to be of less value than mosquitos. "And you do 'ave a *jednar*!"

"We do not," Sis said. "We're trying to build one!"

"Oh!" The grunted sound conveyed comprehension but no approval. "You vant to build one? Before you even know how dangerous such a vepon can be in ze wrong hands, you vant to build zem?"

"That's the problem right now!" Sis answered. "One is

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in the wrong hands. We have to build them, to protect ourselves."

"Oh." Did the goat eyes show a flicker of sympathy? "Someone else has one?"

"Definitely," Gillian spoke. "A man by the name of Abrussi. Were you looking for him the first time I saw you?"

"I was looking for someone who had just used *ze jednar*," the pilot said. "I did not know his name. Where is *zis Abrussi*?"

"That's one thing we want to know too," Sis said.

The pilot seemed to consider the situation. He was a little confused, not quite sure what he should do. "That will come later," he said. "For right now, I know I pick up radiations from *jednar*, from this place."

"They came from the Z generator," Sis said.

"Oh." Comprehension was now very clear in the pilot's voice. "Zen show me *ze*—what you call Z generator." He made motions with the little glass weapon. "Walk ahead of me and show me *ze jednar*—ze Z generator. Remember, please, I will kill you if necessary."

Seemingly with no concern for it, the pilot left the ship on the roof. The walls of the solarium kept it from being seen from the street. Probably no one had seen it come down. It had landed too fast for clear observation in the darkness.

In the laboratory, the pilot studied the Z generator with great care. Without ever taking his eyes completely off the four humans, without ever failing to keep them covered with the glass weapon, without ever giving them an opportunity to jump him, he still managed to give the monster an adequate examination. when he had finished, he had one comment—a grunt heavy with contempt.

"This is only the first model," Gillian said, resenting this contempt.

"The youngest child of the *Tejani* would laugh at *zis*."

"We'll do better on later models!"

"I do not think there will be any later models," the pilot said. "Stand back, please."

Reaching into one pocket, he took out a small rod that looked a little like a ballpoint pen. After making a careful adjustment on the rod, he laid it on top of the Z generator

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"Up ze stairs, fast," he ordered them.

On the roof, he ordered them into the ship. With the *jednar* menacing them, they had no choice but to obey.

The little ship took off as it had landed, with a hiss. It went almost straight up. It was Washington Moses, pointing down and back, who called their attention to what was happening in the place they had just left.

The laboratory was already burning.

The little metal rod which the pilot had left on top of the Z generator had done its job thoroughly.

Even this glow of light was quickly lost in the vast carpet of lights of the city, so fast did the little ship move.

If those on the ground heard a sonic boom in the sky, it was so common an event that no one paid any attention to it.

The pilot looked at his four captives. "My name is Umbro," he said. "Your names, please."

He was quite calm, and now, very polite. He did not even keep the *jednar* in his hand now that the ship was in the air. It had gone back into a holster under his coat.

They gave him their names. He made no notes, apparently trusting to memory to retain this information, if it was of sufficient importance to be retained. When Sis mentioned that kidnaping was a serious offense, he shrugged the thought away. Millions of humans swarmed on the planet now far below them. What did four more—or four less—matter?

"Zis Abrussi—" Umbro spoke. "Where can I find him?"

"We don't know," Gillian answered.

"You mean zis man is a criminal and you cannot find him?" This idea seemed to astonish Umbro. "He has a *jednar* and you do not take it away from him?"

"You don't seem to have been able to take it away from him, either," Sis said, daringly. "I gather you have been looking for him."

"That I have," Umbro answered. "But I did not know who I was looking for."

"Is it any help to you now that you know his name?" Sis persisted.

Umbro shrugged this question away. "Sooner or later,

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he vill use ze *jednar* again. Zen I vill find him." He tapped his finger on an instrument in the little ship. "Zis vill tell me when he uses it."

"Then that instrument told you we were using the Z generator?" Gillian said.

"But, yes," Umbro answered. "How else would I have known to come see you?"

"I knew a Martian would come calling," Eck said plaintively.

"A Martian?" Umbro asked. He shook his head. "Oh, no. The *Tejani* do not come from Mars."

"Then where do they come from?" Gillian asked. "What are they doing here on Earth? What's the purpose back of—all this?"

Umbro seemed to consider these questions. "I am only what you call a cop, a detective," he answered. "I am given a job to do, I do it. I am not on the Council of the *Tejani*. I do not answer such questions."

"But you have to know," Sis protested.

The yellow eyes looked calmly at her. "Do you know what is on ze mind of your leader—what you call your *president*? Do you know his secrets? Do you know what he does and why?"

"Well, no," she admitted.

"It is ze same with me," Umbro said, shrugging. "All I know is that something very dangerous to all is maybe coming. So the *Tejani* come in close to your planet. My leader tells me *go here, go there, find ze jednar*. He does not tell me why." Something like a bleak grin appeared on the immobile face. "He tells me if I do not do ze job right, he vill cut off my horns." He pushed the hat back on his head so that the knobs were visible. "Of course, he is making what you call a joke. If I do not find the *jednar* soon, what he vill really cut off vill be my head."

The picture Umbro presented of himself was that of a small cog in a vast machine. It was a picture which his four captives could understand. They were also small cogs in a vast machine, in a vast culture complex. But what was the purpose of the vast *Tejani* machine? Umbro either did not know this purpose fully or would not reveal what he knew.

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However, he was the pilot of this ship. He must know how it worked. Gillian began to question him about the ship, only to discover that Umbro knew very little about it either, except how to fly it, at which he was an expert.

"Do you know how—what you call your car works?" He looked at Sis as he asked this question. "You know how to start, to steer, and to stop. It is ze same with me. The ship I know how to fly. If it does not fly, I call someone to make it work."

"Where did you learn English?" Eck asked.

"In part, from your radio messages. Our language experts studied zese strange noises and decided they were talk, of some kind. They learned it. They teach it to those *Tejani* who have to go to Earth. I talk many times with humans on your planet. Always, ze think I am a foreigner. I do not let zem see ze knobs on my head. It is that simple." His shrug conveyed the impression that going among humans and being accepted by them as one of them was not difficult. Humans were on the stupid side.

"Zey are too busy making what they call *money* or what they call *love* to notice what is going on around them," Umbro said. He grinned again. "I could steal ze planet. Zey would not know it vas gone!"

As he spoke, he seemed to be swinging the ship in a fast circle in the sky. There was no feeling of acceleration—which meant the *Tejani* had already solved a problem that had baffled the best brains on Earth.

"Where are you taking us?" Eck asked.

"You vait, you find out," Umbro answered.

It was Sis who first realized their destination.

"He's aiming for that hole in Mad Mountain." Her voice was almost a scream. "He's trying to hit it in the dark. If he misses—"

"You shut up." Umbro said firmly. "Vill not miss!"

Although there was no feeling of acceleration, Gillian knew that the ship was picking up tremendous speed on its long slant downward. Washington Moses put his head down into his hands as if he could not bear to look at the great ball of the planet rushing madly upward. Eck tried to brace himself against the impact of a crash landing.

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There had been at least one crash landing of such ships. Out of that crash, Abrussi had gotten the little glass weapon that his dark mind had seen as a source of infinite power.

Gillian and Sis both held their breath.

Whoosh!

The ship was in the hole that led downward into Mad Mountain. As automatic control devices operated in split seconds, the ship lost its speed and came to a gentle stop on the landing ramp in the cavern.

Umbro pushed his hat back on his head, clearly revealing the two knobs high on his forehead. Wiping away beads of sweat, he grinned. "See! Umbro do it!" As he stepped out of the ship, he was very proud of himself.

The shadow came from behind the next ship.

Crunch!

Darting up behind Umbro, it struck downward at him with a short piece of pipe.

Umbro went down without knowing what had hit him.

The shadow was a man. Bending over Umbro, the man jerked the *jednar* from under the coat of the *Tejani*. Holding it aloft, he shouted in triumph.

"I got me one of them too!"

Other men came running from behind the ship.

On the wrist of the man holding the *jednar* aloft, Gillian saw the glint of a metal bracelet. They had found Ape Abrussi. The men outside the ship were Abrussi's men. They were armed with submachine guns.

They discovered that this ship which had just landed had carried passengers.

"Come out of there, you!"

Covered by the *jednar* in the hand of the man who had slugged Umbro, covered by submachine guns, knowing that the slightest suspicious move would result in instant death, the four filed out of the ship.

They were searched. The empty holster under Moses' coat produced suspicion, which was somewhat relieved when the gun for the holster was found in Umbro's pocket.

"Who are you and where did you come from?"

Gillian tried to explain that they were captives and that Umbro was a kind of *Tejani* detective. This produced laugh-

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ter. "Him a dick?" It also got the unconscious Umbro kicked in the side, to show contempt for all detectives. In turn, Gillian asked who they were.

"We're Ape Abrussi's boys," the answer came. "Ape has been casing this place for a long time. He just took it over."

In one way, this produced relief. Gillian had been afraid that Abrussi and the *Tejani* were cooperating. In another way, it produced even greater concern. Instead of being captives of the *Tejani*, they were again captives of Abrussi. Gillian could not see that they had gained anything in this exchange.

Off in the distance, machine gun fire sounded.

"The boys are still mopping up," they were told.

At close range, a submachine gun was as deadly as the *jednar*.

"Take 'em to the boss," the order was given. "He'll know what he wants done with them."

With submachine guns at their backs, they moved across the cavern. Dead men—and dead *Tejani*—were huddled here and there on the floor. The *Tejani* had fought, but obviously they had been taken by complete surprise. Perhaps they had been a little over-sure of their own competence and had not realized the speed and the viciousness with which the human animals could and would attack them.

In the cavern, the huge pendulum was still in operation. It reminded Gillian of something he had seen in a dream once. Like a grandfather's clock keeping the time of infinity, the great ball at the end of the supporting chain-cable was moving slowly and ponderously in its rhythmic cycle.

Abrussi had already set up headquarters in the huge room that he had taken over. His elite guard of chosen men, each wearing a bracelet, was present. Other men were setting up radio equipment. Although the fight for the cavern was almost over, Abrussi was still directing his men like a field marshal on the scene of a battle that has just decided the fate of nations. For Ape Abrussi this was a moment of great glory.

Adding to his glory was the man with him. This man had the round stomach of Friar Tuck.

Friar Tuck was listening with great deference to everything

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Abrussi was saying. More important, Friar Tuck was agreeing with him.

At the sight of this Friar Tuck deferring to Ape Abrussi, George Gillian was very sick deep down inside.

Friar Tuck was Samuel Ronson.

When Gillian saw the bracelet glistening on Ronson's left wrist, the sickness grew so deep that it seemed to reach the bottom of his soul.

Chapter Eight

ABRUSSI TURNED away from Ronson and saw the captives his men were bringing to him. Washington Moses was nearest. At the sight of the dark man, Abrussi's face became the face of an ape. As his hand went inside his coat, its movement was ape fast.

The little glass weapon spat at Washington Moses. The dark man crumpled to the floor without a sound, with an expression on his face of mild astonishment at finding death so easy.

"Damned double-crosser!" Abrussi said. His face was the face of an ape but his voice had the snarl of a tiger in it. His eyes went on to Gillian, to Eck, then came to rest on Sis.

"You!" he said, astonished.

"You can still go to hell!" Sis said.

It was Samuel Ronson, moving very fast to get his body between the muzzle of the *jednar* and Sis, who saved her life.

"What the hell, Ronson?" Abrussi said, recoiling. "You heard her insult me!"

"The child is overwrought, Mr. Abrussi." Sweat gleamed on Ronson's face. "She doesn't know what she is saying."

"By God!" The *jednar* covered Ronson now.

"Please forgive her, Mr. Abrussi. She and her brother are my godchildren."

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"What?"

"Their father and I were very good friends. It is part of my duty to look after them." Ronson seemed to be completely unaware of the *jednar*. "I will guarantee their manners in the future. Besides, after you have enrolled them, there will be nothing to worry about on this score."

The dark suspicions of the cobra were in Abrussi's eyes as he looked at Ronson. Conflict was within him. It was better, it was safer to destroy this scientist, and the other three too. But he needed the scientist, he also needed the others. The greatest of good luck had given them back to him after they had escaped.

"I do need them," Abrussi said.

Ronson started to breathe again.

"Doc, you take them and have them enrolled," Abrussi said to Ronson. His eyes blazed. "And if there is even the whisper of another double-cross, none of you will ever have a chance to explain how it happened—because you'll be dead."

"Yes, sir," Ronson said.

"You go with them," Abrussi said to two of his men. "If they try to escape before they are enrolled, gun them down."

With two men behind them, they stepped around the body of Washington Moses. Ronson offered Sis his arm.

"If you weren't my godfather, I'd tell you to go to hell too," she said.

"Please, my dear," Ronson said, in a whisper. "I am doing my best to save your lives."

Again he offered his arm. This time she took it. "But what are they going to do to us?" she asked. "What does *enroll* mean?"

"Whatever it means, accept it—and stay alive," Ronson whispered.

Equipment of a very specialized kind had already been set up in a large room. Abrussi had come prepared not only for victory but with the means to consolidate it. This equipment was designed to install the bracelets. "Enroll" meant that a bracelet was fitted to the left wrist.

Several of the *Tejani* were already in the room. Their yellow eyes were dazed. A sudden assault which they had

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not foreseen had overwhelmed them and their superior science. They could not understand how an ape could come out of the jungle and overwhelm them almost before they knew what was happening.

Ronson, with the three humans, moved to the head of the line. His face had sudden lines in it as he talked to Sis, Eck, and Gillian. "Please do not resist," he whispered. "Believe me, they will kill you if you do. If we submit now, we may live to fight another day." He was making a desperate effort to control his emotions. Suddenly he jerked his left arm and winced from pain as his bracelet went into action.

Gillian was fitted first. Slipped around his arm, the bracelet was snapped shut and then sealed. "Don't try to take it off," he was told by the wizened little man who was in charge of the operation. "You won't live long enough to get the job done."

Gillian's wrist was placed under a powerful electronic beam, which seemed to activate instruments built into the bracelet itself. The wizened little man picked up a powerful magnifying glass. "Records," he spoke into a microphone. "Serial number 1719." He turned to Gillian and asked his name, which he repeated into the microphone. "Test one." he called out sharply.

Gillian almost screamed in pain as a jolt of electricity shot from the bracelet up his arm to the elbow. Now he understood why Terry, and others, had winced. They had been getting such jolts of electricity. Before the pain had died away, the wizened little man was calling for the second test. This time the jolt of electricity went from the bracelet up to his shoulder with an intensity that was almost paralyzing. Grabbing his shoulder, he fought the pain.

"I want all three of you to listen to me," the wizened little man said. "I'm only going to tell you once. These bracelets contain radio receivers and transmitters. Anything you say will be transmitted back to our main installation. Monitors on duty there are listening. If they don't like what you are saying, they will give you the test one jolt as a warning. If this doesn't make you mind your manners, they will give you the test two jolt. If this doesn't calm you down, they will report what is happening to Mr. Abrussi. If he doesn't like

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what you're saying, he will give you the test three jolt. You may live through it. You may not. It is certain to knock you out for two or three hours. The test three jolt will hit your heart."

Holding his shoulder, Gillian watched Sis and Eck go through the ordeal of being fitted for bracelets and the jolts of electricity as equipment inside the metal rings was activated. Samuel Ronson stood beside him. Agony was deep on Ronson's face.

"What are the *Tejani* doing on Earth?" Gillian asked quietly.

"There is a great emergency—" Ronson began, then was silent as he realized that monitors might be listening to what he was saying. "Although I felt it best to keep my connection with them secret, I felt it a great honor to cooperate with them."

"You cooperated with them willingly?" Gillian asked.

"Young man, you are asking questions unwisely—"

"So Hugo Strong thought," Gillian said.

"Do you know him? Do you know the Group—" Again Ronson stopped speaking, but his eyes were fixed on Gillian with sudden intensity.

Sis came to them. She was holding her arm but she was acting very brave. She waved aside Ronson's concern for her welfare. "I think I should introduce you two," she said. "Particularly so, since it was your photograph, godfather, that marked the major turning point in the life of George Gillian."

"Ah? And how was that?" Ronson said.

Sis explained to him. As he understood the situation, his eyes grew somber with hidden pain. "Then I am honored to have unknowingly influenced a youth to become the man you obviously are," he said to Gillian. "And in addition to my two godchildren, I bear in part at least the responsibility for your presence here. I will do my best to live up to the faith you put in me when you did not even know me." As if he again recalled the existence of the monitors, he spoke very quickly. "I am sure you will find cooperation with Mr. Abrussi to be as rewarding and as satisfactory as I anticipate finding it."

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The bracelet on Ronson's arm emitted a sharp note. "Mr. Abrussi wants you," the tiny speaker said. "He also wants 1719, 1720, and 1721."

"1721, that's me," Sis said.

"In just a minute—" Ronson began.

"Get the lead out of your pants," the tiny speaker said. "When Mr. Abrussi wants anybody, he wants them right now!"

Chapter Nine

THEY FOUND Abrussi in the main cavern with four men acting as a bodyguard. He was looking at the gigantic pendulum.

"What's this thing, Doc?" he said to Ronson.

"It is a secondary resonator," the scientist answered.

"A secondary *what*?" Abrussi frowned.

"It moves in rhythm with a primary resonator. In doing this, it spreads certain radiations more intensely over a local area," the scientist explained.

"What does it do?"

Ronson looked a little bewildered at this question. "This is not easy to explain in a few words, Mr. Abrussi. I do not wish to take up your valuable time by going into unnecessary technical details. This resonator performs many operations, one of the most important being to impinge certain high frequency radiations upon human genes—"

"What's genes?" Abrussi asked.

"A gene is the unit of human heredity," Ronson explained. "In their totality, they carry within them certain tendencies which may appear in the next generation. According to the way they are paired, the genes determine what an individual will look like, what color eyes, hair, and skin he will have.

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In a general way, they also control body height and size, and—it is thought—the formation of brain and neural tissue."

Abrussi shook his head. This talk was completely beyond him but he had no intention of admitting it. "Everybody knows all of that, Doc," he interrupted. "What I want to know is what good is the damned thing?"

Ronson sought for words that would reveal as little as possible but would give the impression of saying much. "So many factors enter into the situation that it is almost impossible to state the value of this pendulum. If the whole project succeeds—and there is no guarantee of success—then this pendulum will have had enormous value. If the project fails, then this pendulum will have had no value. I do not think I stretch my facts too far if I say that the whole future of the human race, perhaps the future of this planet, perhaps the future of the Solar System rests on this and similar pendulums. But to say what that future will be is impossible. It is like gambling, Mr. Abrussi, like playing with dice. No one can foresee what numbers will come up."

"They're shooting craps with us, huh? Is that the idea?"

"Not at all, sir. This is a gamble that must be taken. We have no choice in the matter—and not very good hopes of influencing the outcome. But the whole future of the planet—"

"It's that big, huh?" Abrussi looked at the pendulum with greater respect. He did not understand a tenth of what he had been told but he knew there was a nugget of truth in it somewhere. His jaws began to work as he tried to chew his way through what he had heard, seeking the one aspect of the situation that interested him. "If it's that big, somebody will pay plenty for it!"

"You would try to blackmail a whole planet for the sake of personal gain?" The words popped unintentionally out of the mouth of the astonished scientist.

"Who's talking about blackmail?" Abrussi demanded angrily. "It's not that way at all. If this thing is that big, we can work out a deal on it."

"You have changed the words but not the fact." Ronson was becoming angry. "You would try to make some group or some nation pay you off before you would permit a better future to come into existence! You—"

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Abrussi lifted the bracelet to his mouth. "Teach Doc some manners," he said into it. "Give him the shoulder jolt!"

Before Ronson could protest the jolt of electricity had shot up his arm from the bracelet. His face turning white, Ronson grabbed his shoulder.

"Now get this straight, Doc!" Abrussi said. "I've got six ships. If more come down the tunnel, my men are ready to grab them. I've got almost a thousand of these little glass guns." He tapped his coat where the *jednar* was holstered. "What I've got is a lot. I can do plenty with six ships and almost a thousand little glass guns. My men are going to learn how to fly the ships. I'm going to learn myself. We can drop down out of the sky any place we please on Earth. We can raid Fort Knox if we want to. There's not anything on Earth that's going to stop me. And I'll tell you one other thing—*there's not any scientific plumber who is going to give me any back talk!* Have you got it, Doc?"

"Yes, sir," Ronson said.

"If I want to sell this thing," he gestured toward the pendulum, "that's my business. If I want any advice from any scientific mechanic on what to do with it, I'll ask for it. Got it, Doc?"

"Yes, sir," Ronson said. Some of the color was returning to his face.

"There's just one reason you're alive right now, Doc. It's not because you've got a big name as a hot-shot scientist. It's because you can find out how these little glass guns work. Got it, Doc?"

"Yes, Mr. Abrussi," Ronson said.

Abrussi jerked his thumb toward Gillian, Eck, and Sis. "There's just one reason they're alive. And that's because you said they could help you. Got it, Doc?"

"Yes, sir," Ronson repeated.

"Then all of you get the hell out of my sight and get busy!" Abrussi ended.

As they walked away, they saw Abrussi standing with his hands on his hips looking upward at the vast pendulum in its slow, majestic sweep across the cavern.

Ronson chose a room to use as a research laboratory, sharing his own living quarters with the three others. Always

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at least one of Abrussi's men, armed with a submachine gun, guarded them. Apparently Abrussi did not trust his own bracelets or his own monitors too far.

To George Gillian, the days that followed were worse in many ways than the desperate hours he had spent in the cell of silence. His thoughts had been nightmarish there. Here, working to uncover the secret of the *jednar* for a man he despised, his thoughts were torture. Sis was undergoing much the same reaction. She became hollow-eyed and her body lost its curves. Eck seemed to have forgotten how to make jokes. The tall man was losing weight to the point where his body seemed to be little more than a skeleton clumsily draped in clothes. Samuel Ronson tried to keep up a show of hope, but this was so forced as to be painful, and he soon gave up the effort. They dared not express their real feelings. The transmitters in the bracelets promptly carried any treasonous ideas to unseen ears.

A *Tejani* technician by the name of Troon, an expert in the repair of the *jednars*, was discovered and was assigned to help them. Sis found much food for thought in the appearance of Troon.

"He is the—ah—person I saw when I made those drawings," she whispered to Gillian. "I watched him working on a *jednar*, though I didn't know what it was then."

"Your clairvoyance, or foreseeing of the future, whichever it was, was accurate," Gillian whispered in reply. She brightened a little at this. He wondered how much he could say. "Can you foresee a little of the future now, can you find out anything about all of this, how it will come out?"

She closed her eyes and was very quiet, then opened them and shook her head. "It's all confused. I'm not sure there is any future, either for us, or for anybody."

When he was silent, trying to grasp her meaning, she went on. "It feels as if the future hasn't been decided yet, that everything is still in the balance. *George, I'm so scared.*" Her voice was so low a whisper that he could hardly hear it.

In sympathy, Gillian took her in his arms and gently patted her. Her blue eyes had depths of pain in them that he had never glimpsed before.

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"Take it easy, my dear," he whispered. "This will work out all right."

"You're a swell guy, George. But right now you're an awful liar. Right now you're as scared as I am there isn't going to be any future, for us or for anybody." She buried her nose in his coat, then looked up at him again. "However, thanks for lying. It makes me feel a little more secure."

Troon had been fitted with Abrussi's bracelet too. He seemed to find this exasperating beyond all comprehension. For five days he resolutely refused to cooperate in any way with any human. He understood almost no English and while he knew that Ronson had been present in the cavern when the *Tejani* controlled it, he seemed to feel that the scientist was now untrustworthy too. Troon hated the bracelet, he hated Abrussi. From the way he glared at Ronson, at Sis, at Eck, and at Gillian, he apparently hated all humans.

"From what I understand, he says he will not help us," Ronson said to Gillian. "He says he will die first."

When the jolts of electricity from his bracelet, intended to force cooperation from him, became unbearable, Troon was as good as his word. Dying did not seem difficult for him, nor was it something that he feared. Troon simply fixed his gaze on the nearest bright object—in this case a small piece of glass that reflected light from an overhead *Tejani* glow ball—took a deep breath, and closed his eyes. A few seconds later, his body fell off the stool he had been sitting on.

That was all. Other *Tejani* took the body away.

Ronson, very sorry but having more than one life resting in his hands, hastily advised Abrussi that Troon was dead.

"Catch another one," Abrussi told him. "And in the future, don't bother me when I'm getting ready to take a flying lesson in one of my new ships."

"We can learn something from the *Tejani*," Sis said slowly. "Where do they come from?"

"Mercury," Ronson answered. "Closest to the Sun, Mercury apparently has some of the highest evolved life forms in the Solar System."

"Don't be getting any ideas that you can close your eyes and stop breathing," Gillian said to Sis.

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"I'm not, George," she said quickly. A faraway look came into her eyes. "But I think that I *could* do it. It's just a matter of intense concentration in the right direction."

"The right direction is to stay here and fight!"

"Do you think there will still be fighting?" she whispered.

"The GRI still exists. Hugo Strong still exists. I still exist. There will be something," Gillian whispered, warily watching the bracelet on his wrist.

Abrussi's men found another *Tejani jednar* technician. He gave his name as Telso but he was not willing to give anything else. After a few jolts of electricity from the bracelet on his wrist, Telso began to disassemble a *jednar* that had stopped working. Ronson and Gillian watched the process very carefully. Abrussi added another guard to the one who was constantly with them. The two guards also watched. Telso worked very slowly. Ronson and Gillian regarded him with deep sympathy—and hoped fervidly that he would not decide to die too.

As the weapon was taken apart, Gillian began to plot mathematically the components thus revealed. He soon covered several pages with equations. Ronson followed the development of these equations with the keenest interest. When they were finished, he looked at Gillian with great respect.

"What you have just done is a most remarkable accomplishment," the scientist said. "I would consider it a great honor to have on my lab staff the man who developed these equations—if I had a laboratory."

"Thanks," Gillian said. Coming from Samuel Ronson, this was high praise.

"Under other circumstances—" Ronson glanced from the bracelet on his wrist up to the faces of the two guards. "However, the circumstances are what they are."

"These equations do not describe the energy discharged from the *jednar*," Ronson continued. "They describe the field that contains this energy, that holds it in bounds, that gives it direction. They are like the barrel of a rifle, which holds the violent explosion of the power within bounds and gives it direction. Without the barrel, the powder would explode in every direction. Without the field described by these

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equations, the energy of the *jednar* would be dissipated in all directions and would kill the user rather than the person he was aiming at."

"I know," Gillian said.

Behind them, a guard cleared his throat. "What's all this double-talk about?" he demanded.

"We are discussing these equations," Gillian said, pointing to the sheets of paper.

"They look like hen tracks to me," the guard said, squinting. "How do I know that's not some kind of secret writing?"

"Mathematics is the language of science," Ronson said. "There is nothing secret about it. Complete courses in mathematics are given in every university."

The guard grunted. Inside, Gillian grinned. He reached for the pen and quickly wrote another series of equations. Ronson studied them carefully, then grunted and reached for the pen himself. "You are wrong here and here," he said. Meanwhile he wrote another series of equations. Although he was careful to keep any expression from his face, inside Gillian grinned even broader. Samuel Ronson had understood his meaning perfectly and had answered in kind. Right under the noses of the guards, they had established a private means of communication, via the symbols of higher mathematics. The guards could see what was being written but they could not understand. The monitors listening through the bracelets could hear nothing except the scrape of the pens on paper.

In this way, Gillian got part of the true story of the *Tejani*. He already knew they came from Mercury but now he learned why they were on Earth. It was a story that awed him. Implicit in it was the knowledge that life was not restricted to one planet, to Earth, but existed all through the planets of the whole System. The Sun was the great central generator that gave life to all within the range of its radiation. In some strange and incredible way, the Sun and the planets were also expressions of the Life Force, though here Ronson's mathematics began to fail.

The *Tejani* had not come as conquerors. They had come as secret saviors of the Earth and of themselves as well. They

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had stayed hidden and would continue to stay hidden until the inhabitants of Earth were prepared to receive them. To come openly might well set off extremely dangerous political, economic, and religious repercussions, which the *Tejani* wished to avoid at all costs.

As they interpreted the story flowing from the equations Ronson was writing, George Gillian was completely certain that every moment of hero worship he had spent on this scientist as a teen-age youth, was here being repaid, full measure, heaped up, and overflowing.

Then Gillian began to develop his own equations, with results that startled both him and Ronson.

"There is a definite correlation between the confining field of the *jednar* and the force field around the *Tejani* ships. These equations prove it. This means we must examine the drive mechanism of one of the ships," Gillian said.

"They are Mr. Abrussi's pride and joy," Ronson said.

"We can at least ask him," Gillian pointed out.

"Why do you need to do this?" Abrussi demanded, when they went to him.

"Because there is some correlation between the field of the *jednar* and the field generated by the ships in flight," Gillian explained.

"Field? What's a field?" Abrussi asked. When this was demonstrated to him by means of iron filings dribbled over a sheet of paper held above a small magnet, he had a ready answer. "What good is that?"

"As part of the electro-mechanics of this universe, it is very important," Ronson interposed. "Science has begun to suspect that the whole universe is made of enormously complex fields of different kinds."

"All right, Doc, if you say so," Abrussi grudgingly yielded to their request. "But you'll have two guards with you all the time you're monkeying with my ships. And if you try to escape—"

Umbro was at the ships. He had a bandage on one side of his head and a bracelet on his left wrist. His yellow goat eyes hardly admitted their existence until he saw that they, too, were wearing bracelets, then his manner softened.

"I have been put in charge of pilot training," he explained.

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His manner indicated that on one of his flights, preferably while he was teaching Abrussi, there would be a case of pilot error. But he showed them the working mechanism of the ship's drive. Gillian, excited, wrote page after page of equations. Ronson examined these with great care.

"Yes," he replied, in mathematical symbols. "There is no question but that the field of the ship will stop radio transmission from the bracelets. But what does this mean?"

"It means that if we can get into one of the ships, and can get it started, the bracelets won't work," Gillian answered, via written equations.

"Um," Ronson said, aloud.

Throughout the cavern, Abrussi's men were busy. Television cameras had been installed on top of the mountain. These were wired directly to the big roon that Abrussi was using as command headquarters. Other men were being trained in the use of the *jednars*. A military organization was coming into existence, with the men grouped into squads and with a regular chain of command upward from the squad to Abrussi. Always he had a special squad hidden but alert at the end of the landing ramp, in anticipation of the arrival of more ships. His intention was to capture both ship and occupants. But no more ships arrived.

Gillian tried to talk to Umbro, but the *Tejani* was very depressed. "I'm afraid he is going the way of Troon," Gillian reported.

Ronson shook his head in silent sympathy. "Many of us may go the way of Troon before this is over," he whispered.

Breaking the silence of the vast cavern, over the recently installed loudspeaker system, came the sudden blare of a siren.

This gave way to Abrussi's voice yelling commands.

"Attention all units! Attention all units! Put plan A into operation at once. *At once!*"

There was an instant of silence during which the startled cavern seemed to try to catch its breath. Then Abrussi's voice came again.

"Marine paratroopers are landing on top of the mountain!"

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Chapter Ten

"DOC RONSON, I want you and your whole crew in here right away!" Abrussi's voice came over the loudspeaker. "On the double!" he added.

The siren was blaring again as they hurried to obey this order. In the vast cavern, the military organization that Abrussi had built was coming to life. Files of men armed both with *jednars* and with sub-machine guns were racing toward their battle stations.

As if completely unimpressed by any of this, the vast pendulum was continuing to measure infinite time. It seemed to say that animals who thought themselves to be men might fight their lives away if they wished. It was not going to be disturbed. It measured a greater time than the life of one man.

In the room which he had fitted up as a private command center, Abrussi was busy being a field marshal. Around him was a semi-circle of television screens. In front of him was a microphone. Another circle of loudspeakers gave him reports from his fighting units.

"I want you to watch this, Doc," Abrussi shouted as they entered. "I had a hunch they'd try to use paratroopers again. This time I'm ready for them." The ear-to-ear grin on his face revealed that the real reason he had called them in was to be witnesses to his military genius.

Behind him, his honor guard was drawn up.

The screens revealed large planes dropping low over the mesa top. As each plane came down, it spewed out a flutter of many parachutes, each with a man in battle dress swinging from the end of the lines.

Abrussi's men, armed with *jednars*, had already reached the mesa top.

Before they reached the ground, many of the chutes were carrying dead bodies.

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"Give 'em hell, boys!" Abrussi screamed encouragement.

The pilot of one of the troop carriers was hit. His ship spun out of control and crashed. A second pilot was also struck. His ship went into a dive that ended among the boulders on top of the mesa.

The attack was a massacre. Perhaps a dozen paratroopers reached the top of the mountain alive. A vicious man-hunt immediately began to kill these as they tried to hide among the rocks or to find their way down the sides of the mesa.

Apparently a hasty order to stop the attack went out from some commander in a ship in the sky overhead. The troop carriers stopped coming.

"Did you see me lick 'em, Doc?" Abrussi shouted.

His triumph was short lived. The initial onset of the paratroopers had been planned as a surprise attack. A sudden heavy explosion on top of the mesa indicated the second phase of the attack.

One of the screens revealed smoke and debris flying upward.

"Heavy artillery shells landing!" the speaker said.

Abrussi looked startled. "What have they done—brought up a division?"

As if in answer to his question, TV cameras at the edge of the mesa, covering the rugged approaches, showed foot soldiers moving cautiously forward. Taking advantage of every bit of cover, running forward and dropping to run forward again, men in battle uniforms were moving up the rugged, rocky approaches to the mesa. The cameras did not catch the battery of field artillery that was shelling the top. It was out of sight.

"They can shoot shells at the top or the sides of this mountain from now until doomsday!" Abrussi said. "They won't do any damage. When they lift the barrage to let their men attack, my boys will be waiting for them."

"He's right," Gillian whispered to Ronson. "Coming up the sides of this mesa against *jednar* fire will be suicide. And if the attack should show any signs of succeeding, all he has to do is go up in his ships. Then he can either escape or

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continue his slaughter from the air. There's not a fighter plane on Earth that can defeat the little *Tejani* ships.

Ronson's eyes had questions in them.

"If we are ever going to escape, now is the time," Gillian continued, in the lowest possible whisper. "I think the battle noise will keep the monitors from understanding us. If we can reach the ships—"

"We don't know how to fly them."

"Umbro is there. If we can go to him and tell him we wish to inspect the drive mechanism on the ship that is on the ramp—We did this once before, remember?" Gillian said.

"But Mr. Abrussi needs an audience—" Ronson seemed to make up his mind in a split second. "I'll try," he said. He moved forward and stood in a respectful manner near Abrussi.

"What the hell do you want, Doc?" The barrage on top of the mesa had stopped. The attacking soldiers were moving forward again. At any second, the *jednars* would begin to reach them. Abrussi was watching the scene unfold.

"Very well planned and executed, Mr. Abrussi," Ronson said.

"I'll say it is! Am I going to jolt the military high brass in this country!" Abrussi said, gloating. "But that wasn't what you came up here to say to me, Doc."

"No, sir," Ronson said. "I merely felt that with your military genius in charge, there is no question of the outcome of the battle. However, in my department a very pressing matter had just come up when you called us. I am quite sure you will not want us to delay the development of the *jednars* unnecessarily. After all, you have bigger plans than this skirmish."

"What do you want, Doc?" Abrussi interrupted.

"It is essential that we have further data on the drive of the ships," Ronson continued. "I would suggest that we go now."

"The ships!" Abrussi was startled. "What do you want to poke around in my ships for? You already did it once."

"But that was merely preliminary, sir," Ronson was nothing if not respectful. "And time is pressing, sir."

"Fire!" Abrussi screamed into the loudspeaker. The screens

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revealed soldiers beginning to go down on the slopes of the mesa as the *jednars* went into action. The soldiers out there did not know what was hitting them. There was no sound of a bullet, no explosion. All they knew was that their comrades were going down and were not rising.

"With your permission, sir, and with your authorization, I will take my staff to examine the drive of one of the ships immediately."

"Okay," Abrussi said.

Ronson turned away. Watching, Gillian took a deep breath, and suddenly realized he had stopped breathing.

"Hold it, Doc!" Abrussi shouted.

Ronson turned quickly. "But you gave your permission and your authorization—"

"Your staff can go, Doc," Abrussi answered. "You stay here!"

Only a split second did Samuel Ronson hesitate. "Of course, sir, if you wish it," he said to Abrussi.

"Carry on," he said to Gillian.

"But—"

"I said to carry on!" Ronson's voice had a note of command in it that Gillian had never heard before. Gillian obeyed it without questions. As he moved to the exit, he spoke to Sis and Eck.

"Come on with me. And don't look back." His voice had the same tone of command in it that had been in the voice of Samuel Ronson.

They obeyed him. But Eck's face was bleak and Sis' eyes were pools of despair.

As they moved away, the loudspeakers suddenly roared with the sound of heavy explosions. Glancing back, Gillian saw that jets were bombing the top of the mesa.

In the main cavern, they saw that the great pendulum had slowed markedly in its majestic sweep.

"Probably the bombs jarred its operating mechanism," Gillian said.

"I think it's stopping because time is standing still for us—and for the human race," Sis whispered. "I think the battle going on right here may decide the future of all humanity for generations, perhaps for centuries."

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Her eyes had changed from pools of despair to pools of haunted horror. "I'm seeing things I don't want to see," she continued. "I'm seeing worlds smashed to pieces, whole planets disintegrating. I'm looking into—into a possible future."

She was keeping pace with Gillian and with Eck as they moved toward the ships but she seemed to be walking in a trance. Gillian caught her arm. Her skin was cold.

"My dear—" he whispered.

"I don't know that this future will come into existence. It's possible but it doesn't have to happen." She did not seem to be aware of Gillian's hand on her arm, or even of his presence. Her voice had changed from a whisper to a monotone. "An ape came out of the jungle. He saw men and he thought it would be great to be a man. He built himself the body of a man and he went among men as a man. They thought he was a man. They didn't know that inside he was all ape. He found a powerful weapon. With it, he went forth to conquer."

"Wake up, Sis! Wake up!" Eck whispered, sharply.

She looked at her brother as if she did not recognize him.

Gillian tightened his grip on her arm. Slowly, she recognized him. Slowly, she became aware of where she was. She clutched at Gillian's arm.

At the ships, a guard stopped them.

"We're making another examination of the drive on the ships," Gillian said. "Umbro is to help us."

"Yeah?" the guard said.

"We have Mr. Abrussi's permission," Gillian added.

"All right," the guard said. "Just wait right there."

"But—"

"I'll have to check this with Mr. Abrussi," the guard said.

"Those are his orders." He lifted his bracelet to his lips.

"With the fight going on outside, it may be some time before I can get through to him." He looked more closely at Sis.

"What's the matter with the dame? Is she drunk?"

"She's a little upset by the bombing," Eck answered.

In Abrussi's command headquarters, Samuel Ronson also waited. The screens revealed that the attack by the ground troops had stopped. He sympathized with the confusion of the commanders outside. Their men were being killed. They

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didn't know how this was being done. The screens revealed that the troops were being pulled back.

Out of the corner of his eyes, Ronson watched the cavern. He saw that the pendulum was slowing, saw also that Gillian, Sis, and Eck had been stopped by a guard at the ships. At this distance, they looked like toy figures.

If he had a warm regard for them in his heart, Ronson kept all sign of this off his face. Sis and Eck were his godchildren, and as for Gillian—if he had ever had a son, he could not have wished for a better one than this.

At this thought, Ronson felt a choked feeling rise inside him. As a boy, Gillian had saved his picture. Ronson had never said how much this simple act had meant to him. All his life, he had been so immersed in science that he had almost forgotten what warm personal relationships were. The three standing talking to the guard had given this knowledge back to him.

"My boys have got 'em licked, Doc!" Abrussi screamed at him. "They've got 'em backed clear away from the mesa!"

"My congratulations, sir," Ronson said. "You have proved your military genius this day."

"They'll have to come to terms with me now," Abrussi continued. "When they learn about my ships, they'll have to make a treaty with me, just like I was a foreign government."

The ape was tasting triumph. He was finding it a heady drink. The command bracelet which he wore on his wrist whistled for his attention. "I'm busy," he shouted back.

"If you will excuse me now—" Ronson said.

"Naw, Doc, stick around," Abrussi answered.

The bracelet whistled again. This time he answered it. "Huh? At my ships?" He appeared startled. "Oh. Yeah, I told them to do it. It's okay. But you go with them and make double-sure."

He looked at Ronson. "It's your gang, Doc. My boys stopped them."

"Your staff is very efficient, sir," Ronson answered. He looked out through the opening that led into the main cavern.

The toy figures were moving again. Going away, going toward the ship on the launching ramp, they seemed to be getting smaller. The guard following them made a fourth.

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A radio technician entered the command room. "Somebody is trying to reach you on the radio, sir, from outside," he said to Abrussi.

"Huh? Who is it?"

"He refuses to identify himself, sir. Shall I switch him to your unit?"

"All right. I'll talk to him." In Abrussi's mind was the thought that probably the commander of the attacking forces was trying to reach him, to arrange a truce. How he would tell this brass hat what was what!

The technician hurried from the room. One of the speakers suddenly came to life with a new voice.

"Abrussi?" this voice said.

"That's me," Abrussi answered. "Who in the hell are you and what do you want?"

The voice started to answer, then coughed instead, as if somewhere somebody was changing his mind about the words he was going to use. "This is Hugo Strong," the voice came again. "And what I want from you is unconditional surrender!"

At the tone, at the name, and at the demands, Abrussi's eyes almost popped out of his head. He knew who Hugo Strong was. Everybody knew this much. Abrussi needed only a split second to gather his wits. Then he exploded in rage.

"All right, so you're Hugo Strong!" Abrussi shouted into the microphone. "Just exactly who do you think Hugo Strong is to be giving me orders? And by what right are you trying to lay down the terms of surrender?" The more he thought about the words Strong had used, the angrier Abrussi became.

"Personally, Hugo Strong is nothing." The voice coming from the speaker was quite calm, quite sure of itself. "But right at this moment, Hugo Strong holds a commission from the President of the United States as a general in the armed forces."

"So they've given you a commission!" Abrussi screamed. "So they've made you a temporary general. So what?"

"So this!" Hugo Strong answered. "Right at this moment I am sitting in a bomber 30,000 feet above you. We're ready to

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begin a bombing run at any minute. Mad Mountain is our target!"

"So you've already bombed Mad Mountain!" Abrussi screamed. "So bomb it again and see what good it does you!"

"You don't seem to understand the situation, Mr. Abrussi." The voice was still quite calm. "The preliminary bombing, the paratroopers, the ground attacks, were merely to draw you out. If they succeeded, well and good. If they didn't succeed—"

"They didn't succeed!" Abrussi's voice became even shriller. "My boys have licked all of your toy soldiers! We can lick ten times as many!"

"But can you lick an H bomb, Mr. Abrussi?" Hugo Strong asked. "Because this is what we have, right here in this bomber, and we're ready to drop it unless you agree to unconditional surrender!"

Abrussi, his face suddenly white, snapped off his microphone. Mad Mountain would stand up against any amount of ordinary bombing but an H bomb would turn it into a lake of lava. Or so Abrussi believed.

"Get over here, Doc!" he yelled at Ronson. "And stall Strong until I can get a ship into the air and knock that damned bomber down!"

"Yes, sir," Ronson said.

Out of the corner of his eyes, he looked across the cavern. There he could see four toy figures talking to two more toys at the door of the ship on the launching ramp. At this distance, he could not be sure, but he thought one of the two toys was Umbro. The other was probably a guard at the ship itself.

Two guards now!

Abrussi was out of his chair and was starting toward the ships when Ronson called to him.

"I would suggest most strongly, sir, that you stay here with me," the scientist said.

"Stay here and get bombed?" Abrussi screamed.

"The danger is not immediate," Ronson urged. "They will need several minutes to launch the bomb."

"Doc—"

"I need you here not only to establish my identity so I

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can stall Mr. Strong, but also to add your voice of authority to the talk," Ronson said. His voice was as calm as that of Strong had been. He closed the switch that opened the microphone.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Strong. This is Samuel Ronson. Yes, Mr. Strong, I know you were talking to Mr. Abrussi. He is right here with me, sir." He cut off the microphone again and turned to face Abrussi. When he spoke a tone of command was in his voice.

"Yes, Mr. Abrussi. As commander-in-chief, your place is right here, directing your fighting forces."

Abrussi hesitated, then came back to his command post. He was shaking, his face was white. No one could predict how long he could be kept here. But at this moment, he was here.

Looking across the cavern, Samuel Ronson saw that the parley of the toy figures was still going on outside the ship. Would they never get into the ship!

Opening the microphone, he prepared himself to talk to Hugo Strong.

Chapter Eleven

"VAHT YOU WANT?" Umbro said. While he was still wearing an ordinary business suit, he had stopped wearing his hat. The horns on his forehead were clearly visible. The impression he gave was that he wanted to gore somebody with them—he didn't much care who.

"We want to talk to you," Gillian said, persuasive. Since he had forbidden Sis and Eck to look back toward the command room where Ronson was with Abrussi, he felt he should not look back either.

"Not time to talk," Umbro answered. "Big booms overhead. Too much noise. Can't even think."

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"There's a little battle going on overhead," Gillian said. "But we can't let this stop us when we have work to do."

"Battle? *Tejani* come?" Hope flared in the yellow eyes, then faded. "No, not *Tejani*. When they come, it is not a battle but already a victory."

"Humans are fighting," Gillian said.

"Heh!" Umbro put disgust in to his grunt. "Let 'em fight. Let 'em kill each other. All they good for!"

"All humans aren't bad, Umbro," Eck tried to say.

"Show me vun good vun." Umbro answered. "Just vun." He turned away. "Get lost!" he said over his shoulder.

Gillian looked at Eck, then at Sis. He resisted the impulse to look over his shoulder toward the command room. Gillian turned to the guard who had accompanied them. "Mr. Abrussi said—"

"I get it," the first guard answered. He conferred with the second guard, who was on duty at the ship on the ramp. They turned to Umbro.

"We don't want any back-talk out of you," the first guard said. "When the boss says to do something, it gets done, see?"

"No talk," Umbro answered.

"We want you to open up the covering over the drive mechanism," Gillian said, pointing to the ship on the ramp. "We need to develop our equations on the correlation between the field of the drive and the restricting field of the *jednars*."

"Get lost," Umbro said. He was in no mood to cooperate with anybody who even looked human.

The first guard lifted his bracelet to his lips. "We've got a contrary monkey here," he said. "Give him a jolt up to his shoulder."

"Glad to," the voice of the unseen monitor answered.

Umbro grabbed his shoulder. His face went from a pale yellow to white. A blue radiance seemed to spring out from the nubs on his forehead.

"Are you going to do what the boss wants?" the guard asked.

"Vill do," Umbro said, with his lips. His yellow eyes said that if he ever had the chance, he would consider it a

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privilege to have a few private words with this guard. He turned and entered the ship. Gillian, Eck, and Sis followed him.

The two guards followed them. Armed with submachine guns, they stood watching.

"What you want to talk about?" Umbro demanded.

"Open up the cover over the drive," Gillian said. He took a quick glance back across the cavern. Deep in his heart, he was still hoping that he would see Samuel Ronson coming.

"This is Samuel Ronson, Hugo," the scientist said into the microphone. "Of course, you remember me."

"I—ah—" the loudspeaker stuttered a little. "I remember a Samuel Ronson, with the greatest of respect and fondness. But I do not know that you are that person."

"Mr. Abrussi is right here with me," Ronson said. "He will identify me."

"Sure, it's Doc Ronson," Abrussi screamed into the microphone. "He's the greatest scientist alive on Earth today. If you drop that damned H bomb, he won't be alive. I guarantee you that."

At this threat, the speaker went completely silent. Apparently, somewhere in the sky, Hugo Strong had run into a situation that was stopping him cold. Strong would not willingly risk the life of the greatest scientist on the planet.

"Now where's your surrender terms?" Abrussi shouted into the microphone. "Now it's you will do the surrendering." Abrussi had seen his advantage. He was prepared to use it to the fullest possible extent.

Quietly Samuel Ronson turned his head so he could see across the cavern.

The toy figures had entered the ship on the ramp.

But the guards had entered with them.

The door of the ship was still open.

Ronson did not know when the door of the ship would close. But he had complete confidence in George Gillian and Eck Randolph.

The speaker came alive again. "This puts rather a different light on the matter," Hugo Strong's voice came.

"You damned right it does!" Abrussi shouted at him. "Now

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I'm the one in the driver's seat. If you drop your damned bomb, you'll kill Ronson too. And you're not going to do this, are you, Strong?"

"I must—ah—" Strong's voice faltered. "I must have positive identification that the man in the cavern is actually Samuel Ronson."

"You fix him up with that identification, Doc," Abrussi said.

In the ship, Umbro slowly began to remove the covering of the drive mechanism.

"I hope you will cooperate fully with us," Gillian said to him.

"Huh!" Umbro answered.

"Do you want another jolt?" the first guard asked.

At this question, Umbro began to work faster. But it was obvious that he was still going much slower than was necessary.

Gillian wiped sweat from his face. "It's hot in here," he said.

"Just what I was thinking," Eck answered.

Sis was silent. As if she hardly had the strength to stand, she was supporting herself against the inner wall of the ship. "It's almost too hot," she said, fanning herself and moving a step closer to the door.

"It's not so hot you can't stand it, honey," the first guard said.

"Don't you call me *honey!*" she flared. "Don't either of you do it."

"Hard to get, huh?" the second guard said.

"Hard, but not impossible," she answered.

The first guard grinned at her.

Gillian's fist hit him just where his jaw blended into his neck. It was a smashing blow that had all of Gillian's strength behind it.

The guard did not know what hit him. As he went backward, Gillian caught the submachine gun. He turned to use it on the second guard, then hastily lifted the muzzle.

Eck had struck with flashing speed at the solar plexus of the second guard. This man doubled forward. Eck hit him

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on the chin. He went backward. Eck snatched the sub-machine gun from his hands.

Sis calmly closed the door and locked it.

Gillian turned to Umbro.

"Kindly cooperate with us fully now," he said to the startled *Tejani*.

"Huh?"

"By turning full power into this job and heading it up the ramp, fast!" Gillian said.

For an instant, Umbro hesitated. Hope leaped into his yellow eyes. He glanced at the guards, then at Gillian and at Eck. Perhaps some humans were good for something after all.

Then his eye caught the bracelet on his wrist. Mutely he held it up.

"The field of the ship will cut off completely the radio transmissions through these bracelets," Gillian answered. "So kindly get the ship in operation, *fast!* Otherwise, I'll try to fly it myself!"

Now, as he grasped the situation, Umbro moved with real speed. A growl sounded deep in the ship as he turned the power into it.

When he saw the door of the ship close, a smile lit the face of Samuel Ronson. He had known he could depend on Gillian and Eck. He did not know what had happened to the two guards who had entered the ship with them but he was reasonably certain they were going to take an unexpected ride.

With the ship out of the cavern, three people for whom the scientist had a great fondness would be safe. This was the important thing. Knowing they were safe made life worth living—and worth giving up. They represented the future. They represented the hope of something better coming into existence within the human race. Their safety and their welfare were worth any sacrifice. Although neither of them seemed to know it, he knew that Sis and Gillian were head over heels in love with each other. Their children and their children's children would help lift the darkness that lay between today and tomorrow.

"Fix him up with identification, Doc," Abrussi repeated.

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"Oh. Ah. Yes, sir." Samuel Ronson had to withdraw his mind from the future he was seeing before his mind's eye. He picked up the microphone but as he prepared himself to talk into it, he turned his body so he could watch the ship. The door was closed but the ship was still at rest.

He wanted this ship in motion.

"Hugo?" he spoke into the microphone.

"Yes, Samuel—if you are Samuel Ronson, that is," Strong's voice came over the loudspeaker.

"I'm Samuel Ronson, all right. I'm going to prove this to you."

"All right. I'm listening," Strong said. Coming over his microphone, subdued and in the background, was the hum of a great bomber in flight.

"I'm going to prove it," Ronson said. His eyes were still on the ship. Had it begun to move? If it had even started to move, those inside it would be safe from the killing energy transmitted by radio through the bracelets.

He saw the ship move.

"I'm going to prove I am Samuel Ronson by asking you to do me a favor," the scientist said. His voice was very calm. There was a smile on his face.

"A favor?" Strong sounded doubtful. "What kind of a favor?"

"Do me the favor of dropping that bomb, Hugo," Samuel Ronson said. "By dropping the bomb—"

"Dropping the bomb?" the startled speaker yelled. "We'll lose you. You're the greatest scientist on Earth. We need you."

Ronson's eyes were on the ship. It was certainly moving. "Better ones by far than I will be born," he said. "*Drop the bomb, Hugo! And wipe this nest of apes out of existence.*"

Ronson knew that Abrussi, screeching like an outraged ape, was drawing his *jednar*. The scientist did not mind this. He had expected it.

But something happened that he had not expected. He saw an explosion take place between the nose of the ship and the entrance to the tunnel that led upward to freedom. Staring in consternation at this, he saw the ship stop.

"Drop the bomb, Hugo—" Samuel Ronson was repeating

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mechanically as Abrussi shoved the little glass weapon that left no wound against his body and pulled the trigger. He did not feel the life go out of his body the way it had gone out of the body of Washington Moses, out of the body of a Great Dane named Brutus, out of the bodies of many others. If he had felt his life go, Ronson would not have cared. He had proved his identity. He had proved part of the meaning of the word *man*. And he had tried his best to save the lives of three whom he loved.

If his own life had been given, it had gone in a great cause. And it had been given willingly for things greater than he was.

In the great bomber in the sky, there was consternation. Then Hugo Strong, in a voice as terrible as that of an avenging angel, said, "He proved who he was. *And what he was*. Release the bomb!"

In response to his orders, the great bomber began to move into the approach to its bombing run.

Yelling to his honor guard to follow him, Abrussi left his command headquarters as fast as his legs could take him. He knew a bomb was coming. He wanted to be out of the cavern before it hit.

His destination was his ships.

Chapter Twelve

STARING AT the explosion directly ahead of him, Umbro stopped the ship.

As the drive was cut off, the bracelets went into action. The monitors did not know what was actually happening but they knew that something was wrong. Since they couldn't reach

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Abrussi at this moment—he did not respond to calls—they acted on their own initiative.

In the pilot's seat, Umbro felt the pain lance up his arm to his elbow. His yellow eyes glittered.

Gillian, Sis and Eck felt it too.

"Keep the ship moving!" Gillian hissed.

Umbro pointed at the smoke from the explosion.

"That was a grenade," Eck said. He was only guessing about the explosion but his hunch was that his guess was right. "A paratrooper on his way down the mesa has found the opening to the tunnel. He's lobbing hand grenades down it."

"What if we start up and meet a grenade coming down?" Umbro asked.

"Serial number 1719," the voice of a monitor squeaked from the bracelet on Gillian's wrist. "Report!"

"Yes, sir," Gillian said. "Right away, sir."

"What's going on there?" the monitor demanded.

"A paratrooper is rolling grenades down the tunnel," Gillian explained. "*Get the ship moving if it's only an inch at a time!*" he hissed at Umbro.

"Oh," the monitor said. For a second, he seemed satisfied. Then another question came. "What are you doing at the tunnel? You've got no business there. Where is—"

A throb came from inside the ship as Umbro turned minimum power into the drive.

"Answer 1719!" the monitor demanded. "I'm going to jolt you up to your shou—"

The voice was fading away and was becoming garbled as the energy of the ship's field began to block radio communication. The jolt of electricity came, but it was only a mild shock.

George Gillian almost sobbed with relief. At least one problem was solved!

Umbro pointed up the launching ramp.

Another grenade had exploded there.

"Keep it moving some way!" Gillian shouted. He dug his fingers under the edge of the bracelet on his wrist. A yank that had all the strength of his arm in it broke the circle of metal. It spat blue flame at him as it broke. He flung it at the wall of the ship. Since Eck and Umbro were already

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tearing frantically at the bracelets on their wrist, Gillian turned to Sis.

She looked at him as if she did not recognize him.

"He's dead," she said. "I felt him die."

Gillian grabbed at her arm. He slipped powerful fingers under the bracelet and yanked at it with all his strength. She winched at the pain and cried out, but the bracelet came free. It, too, spat blue flame at Gillian, like the fangs of a dying snake trying to strike as it died.

"My dear!" He caught her in his arms.

"He's dead," she repeated. "He died to give us a chance to live."

"I knew this was in his mind," Gillian said. "If I had been in his position, I would have done the same."

"Ape Abrussi killed him," she continued. "Like Washington Moses, for doing what Abrussi said was double-crossing him." Her eyes were far away. "Why is it that serving the highest is called *double-crossing* by the lowest?"

"I don't know, I don't know," Gillian whispered. Umbro, free of his bracelet, was still holding the ship in minimum motion. He was watching the smoke clear slowly away.

"If we start up, and meet a grenade coming down—" Umbro whispered.

"Before he died, he told Hugo Strong to drop the bomb," Sis continued. "Mr. Strong is going to do it. Up there somewhere, a bomber is moving into position." She glanced upward toward the far-away sky.

"Ape Abrussi will die," Sis said. "And so will we." Her voice went into silence, then came again as a wan smile lit her face. "I wonder if Brutus is waiting to bark a welcome to us over on the other side?"

In this mad moment, it was hard to know where fantasy left off and fact began.

She pointed across the cavern. "There comes Ape Abrussi now!"

Following the line of her pointing finger, Gillian could see Abrussi and his men running toward the ships. They were moving as fast as apes could run.

The giant pendulum had stopped completely.

"Time stands still for the human race," Sis said.

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Abrussi pointed toward the ship on the ramp. He must have realized what was happening and shouted an order to his men to fire.

A sound like that of hailstones rattled on the hull of the ship. Guards at the other ships had opened fire with sub-machine guns.

"Take her up!" Gillian said to Umbro. "Fast!"

The *Tejani* pilot nodded. He was not wearing his hat but he seemed to give a mental tug at it anyhow, to settle it firmly over the knobs on his forehead, so that neither wind nor explosion could blow it off as he went up the tunnel. The symbolical setting of the imaginary hat on his head indicated the speed that Umbro intended to be making as he took the ship out in the face of a possible grenade coming down. He shoved the power control forward to the highest possible setting.

Whoosh!

The little ship did not fly into the launching tunnel, it leaped into it.

It moved so rapidly, it leaped so fast, that the paratrooper outside did not have time to toss the grenade on which he had already pulled the pin down the tunnel. He only had time to fling it backwards and over the edge of the cliff, where it exploded harmlessly.

"We sure stirred up a hornet's nest down below," he shouted to his companion.

Did you see the hornet that came out?" the second paratrooper answered. "We had better get down this mountain fast."

They had missed their recall orders. Going down the talus slope at full speed, they heard the sonic boom come back from the farther sky. This made them move even faster and probably saved their lives.

Umbro did not reduce speed and turn the ship until Mad Mesa was a dot on the Earth far below them. Then he swung the little vessel in a big circle.

From this height, the whole vast panorama that was the industrial and cultural complex of Southern California was spread below them. The land swam in a vast blue haze. Down there in that vast haze youths were in training to

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break more records in sports. Others were preparing themselves to be better muscians, better painters, better scientists. Still others, not knowing what was happening but knowing only the pressures rising within them, were taking steps that would make them into something less. From this height, the giant tug of war was invisible. But it was real nonetheless.

Umbro pointed into the blue. Floating near them in the vast depths of the sky was a great bomber. Its bomb bays were open. It was coming in on its bombing run.

As they watched, something fell away from the belly of the bomber.

The object fell slowly, slowly, slowly. It was an H bomb going down. Its target was Mad Mesa.

Umbro, *Tejani* profanity on his lips, pointed again, this time toward the mesa. Leaping up from it were what looked like midgets from this height.

"*Tejani* ships!" Umbro said. "Abrussi is getting away!"

In the great bomber, Hugo Strong did not see the *Tejani* ships flashing into the sky, he did not know they were carrying Abrussi and many of his men to safety.

As he watched the bomb fall away and away and away, Strong's eyes were filled with tears.

The bomb struck.

Where Mad Mesa had been was now a mushroom-shaped cloud.

Many of Abrussi's men were killed in this explosion, as were many *Tejani*, including Telso.

From the little ship, Gillian and Umbro, Sis and Eck, watched the cloud form. Sis turned her eyes away from the sight.

Umbro shook his head. "No good," he said. "Fall-out raise hell all over your planet."

"Worst of all, it didn't get Abrussi," Gillian said. "Where will he go now?"

Umbro's yellow eyes glinted. "I not know where he go. But this I know—he vill use the *jednar* again. Then I vill know where he is. Then I vill find him!"

"Then *we* will find him!" Eck said.

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Umbro's yellow eyes looked up at the tall man. What he saw there he seemed to approve.

"Ve vill find him!" he said.

"What I want to know is—where are we going now?" Sis asked.

Umbro spread his hands in a gesture that said this was an easy problem to solve. He turned to the controls and the little ship shot away at vast speed toward the infinite depths of sky.

"That way?" Sis said, doubtfully.

"That vay!" Umbro said, firmly.

Chapter Thirteen

THE NEWSPAPERS reported the story in detail and with what they thought was accuracy. The headlines said:

BOMB DROPPED DURING WAR GAMES

H BOMB FALLS IN DESERT

Sub-headlines added to the story.

*Part of Training Program for Military and Civilian
Forces, General Says—Test Successful—No Loss
of Life*

Later editions amended this statement to *small loss of life*. Buried deep in the news stories was additional information

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which indicated that the fall-out was heavy in Arizona, that earth tremors had been felt on the east coast, and that the Earth's magnetic field had twanged like the string of a giant bow.

Helicopters carrying television cameras were buzzard-thick over the scene of the explosion. Mad Mountain had been a mesa. Now it was a mass of broken rock spewing across the desert. Curiosity seekers would have carried most of this rock away if the shaken division of paratroops had not been used to seal off the whole area, which was much too hot with radioactivity to be safe for humans. Mad Mountain itself, the scene of the explosion, would be too hot for safe examination for some time.

There were men who wanted to examine what was left of Mad Mountain. Hugo Strong was one of them. Hugo Strong did not know whether or not his bomb had destroyed Abrussi. He thought it had, but he wasn't sure. There was much else buried in the tumbled, broken rock of what had been Mad Mountain that Strong wanted to know about. High political and military circles also wanted to know what was there. If the biggest conference in all history was on in these high circles—and it was—this was a secret well kept from the public. No one in authority was willing to voice the suspicion mounting almost to a certainty that Earth was being visited regularly by creatures from some other planet. This was a great secret, to be kept from the public at all costs—though most of the informed public already knew or suspected the truth.

In the United States, in the whole world, was vast unrest. A vast new educational program was announced. A new crime wave broke out. What was happening on the planet? which way was the world going? No one seemed to be able to answer these questions.

Ape Abrussi read in newspapers flown to him the story of the bombing of Mad Mountain. This enraged him. He knew the bomb had been intended to destroy him but he was in no position to come forward with the truth of the matter. He was embittered at the loss of the great pendulum. He would have been able to sell this to somebody, he was sure. But he still had five ships, he had numerous *jednars*, and he

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had the hard core of his own men. With these much could be done.

Abrussi was holed up on top of another mountain, this one located in the middle of Mexico, in a palace that a Spanish grandee had built centuries before. Although another man's name appeared on the deed—this to meet the requirements of Mexican law—Abrussi's money had bought the place. His men, both Americans and Mexicans, staffed it. The Mexicans Abrussi regarded with deep contempt, a feeling which they fully understood and reciprocated.

Abrussi hid his five ships in big sheds just below the level of the castle. The grandee who had built the place had used the sheds for curing tobacco. Abrussi had used them for treating poppies from which opium was to be extracted. Big and roomy, they made excellent hiding places for the *Tejani* ships.

This castle was remote, it was isolated, and most important of all, it was in Mexico. No paratroopers were likely to land on top of this place. If Hugo Strong ever learned he was alive and attempted action against him, such action would have to proceed first of all through diplomatic channels. Abrussi had good reasons to believe he could stall any such action for years.

Abrussi did not know where Gillian, Sis, and Eck had gone. He assumed they had flown the ship in which they had escaped to landing field in the United States and there had turned it over to the Air Force. Probably it was hidden in a hangar in some well-guarded experimental base, while amazed scientists tried to discover how it worked. Probably Gillian, Sis, and Eck were with Hugo Strong. Abrussi hoped they were in hell. He had had nothing but bad luck from them.

For three days after he arrived in Mexico, Abrussi cowered in bed. He was so badly shaken by his close brush with death from an H bomb that neither liquor nor his own opium could restore even a semblance of calm to his shaken nerves.

After three days, the fear worked itself out.

Then came anger.

As soon as he fully realized that the bomb had actually

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missed, the anger turned to towering, murdering rage. He had almost been a king! If Ronson had not double-crossed him, if Gillian and the others had not run, if Hugo Strong hadn't dropped that bomb . . .

As he saw how close he had been to victory, and realized he had missed, Abrussi became a raging, mad animal. His eyes became so bloodshot and his whole appearance so menacing that a Mexican servant, bringing a fresh bottle of brandy, became frightened, clumsily dropped the bottle, and turned to run.

Abrussi pulled the *jednar*. The little glass weapon snapped its sound of death. If it did nothing else, this action proved to Abrussi how important he was. Summoning other servants to remove the body, he screamed at them that he had killed this peon and that he would kill them too if they didn't look alive. He defied them, or the government of Mexico, to do anything about his act. If he was mad with anger, it was the kind of madness that gave him back his lost courage. In this humor, he ordered his guard assembled, for review, in the inner courtyard.

Like most homes in Latin America, this structure had an inner patio. Since this was a castle, the courtyard was on a grand scale. It included a plot of grass big enough for a tennis court, flowering trees, several fountains, and flowers of every color.

After his honor guard had been assembled, Abrussi went forth to inspect them. He also intended to tell them his plans for the future now that his courage had returned. Each wore a bracelet, each was armed with a *jednar*. While they were few in number, the *jednars*, plus the little ships, would give them great striking force. They could hit any spot on Earth they chose and be gone in a few minutes. They could destroy the nerve center of a nation and escape before resistance could be organized.

Such a force as this, as small as it was, could become a pack of wolves preying at will upon the governments of the planet. As he looked at his men and realized again the potential in the ships, Abrussi knew again that he was a power on the Earth.

"We took a little setback," Abrussi told his men. "But we've

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still got enough left to be top dog in any fight that comes along. They may think they're smart, dropping a bomb on us and making us run, but the day will come when we will drop something on them. Then we'll get to watch them run."

Like Hitler of an older day, he harangued his men, giving courage to them and to himself, giving them the will to be wolves. Abrussi did not need this will himself. He already had it.

"There are three people I want. George Gillian, Eck Randolph, and his sister," Abrussi said, in another vein. "They're hiding somewhere. I want them found and I want them brought to me here, one way or another!"

Out of the corner of his eyes, Abrussi saw the little ship flash down from the sky. His first thought was that it was one of his ships. "Who took out one of my ships without my—"

Coming from flashing speed to an instant halt in split seconds, the ship landed. Out of it leaped armed *Tejani* led by Umbro.

Abrussi started to draw his own *jednar*, started to shout to his men to do the same, then, as he saw the *jednars* covering him, he hastily changed his mind. A glance at Umbro's face told him that this particular *Tejani* would kill him without mercy.

Dressed in shining garments, two other *Tejani* moved ahead of Umbro. A second look told Abrussi that these were not *Tejani*. They were George Gillian and Eck Randolph. A third look told him that they were no longer wearing his bracelets.

At the sight of them, one thought entered Abrussi's mind. "Damned double-crossers!" In his mind, by escaping they had double-crossed him.

In his world, this had only one consequence. Abrussi's reflexes were very fast. He got the *jednar* out of its holster under his coat.

"Better think again," Gillian said.

Seeing Umbro behind them, Abrussi caught the reflex movement while the *jednar* was fully drawn but was not yet aimed. Facing the weapon in the hand of Umbro, he was afraid to complete the movement. He would be dead before

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he could even point the *jednar*. If he even moved it, Umbro would kill him.

The result was paralysis of movement. Abrussi could not finish the draw and he could not drop the weapon. Like Mahomet's coffin, suspended halfway between Earth and Heaven, the *jednar* hung in the air.

Umbro also held his fire. Either party could deal death but neither could save himself. Gillian and Eck stepped apart so that Umbro's line of fire was clear to Abrussi.

Abrussi's guard had not even attempted to draw their weapons. The ship had landed so quickly that there had not been enough time.

Abrussi knew that the time had come to talk and to talk fast. Perhaps, if he could stall for a few minutes, the fools might relax their guard. "How—how did you find me?" he gasped.

"You made a mistake," Gillian answered. "You used your *jednar* once too often. No doubt you killed somebody. Who was it?"

"That—that's a lie!" Abrussi gasped.

"*Jednar* number 6 A 743 was used recently. Probably it is the one you have in your hand at this moment. If you will give it to me, I will show you the *Tejani* number on it." Gillian held out his hand for the weapon.

"No, you don't!" Abrussi answered. "The only way you can get this gun is to kill me. If you try that, I'll take you with me." The glare in his eyes was that of the trapped tiger.

"You will also die, Mr. Abrussi," Gillian said. His tone of voice was polite. Much too polite, Abrussi thought.

"Hunt finished," Umbro grunted.

"What do you mean—hunt?" Abrussi demanded.

"The *Tejani* have been hunting you for a long time," Gillian explained. "The use of a *jednar* sends out a strong radio impulse. Each *jednar* operates on its own individual frequency. When one is used anywhere, the *Tejani* know exactly which *jednar* was in action. They can pinpoint the spot where it was used with great accuracy. Each time you killed someone with the *jednar*, you left evidence behind you. Umbro has been hunting for you but up until now, you have always managed to slip away."

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This thought shook Abrussi. Many times he must have been close to death without knowing it. Unless he could talk his way out of this situation, he was so close to it now that he could smell the mould on his graveyard clothes.

"What are you doing with these—*goats*?" he snarled at Gillian. "You're human. In a pinch, you've got to stick with your own kind."

Umbro caught the contempt in the words. "Hunt finished!" he repeated emphatically.

At the wave of Gillian's hand, Umbro was silent.

"So maybe I did shoot a Mexican," Abrussi said. "It was self-defense. He drew on me first."

"Did Washington Moses draw on you?" Gillian asked.

"He double-crossed me!"

"Did Samuel Ronson draw on you?" Gillian continued.

"He double-crossed me too!" Abrussi screamed. Spittle was beginning to form on his lips. "What are these goats doing here on Earth? This planet belongs to us!"

"These *goats*, as you call them, are the most advanced race in the Solar System," Gillian answered. "They're trying to help us save our planet, for our far-distant grandchildren."

"Grandchildren!" Abrussi answered. "If we aren't taken care of, there won't be any grandchildren!"

"Precisely," Gillian answered. "That's why we are going to take care of you."

Abrussi didn't like the tone of this but he liked even less the expression in Umbro's eyes. He began to edge an inch at a time to get Gillian between him and Umbro.

"In about five hundred years, the whole Solar System will collide with a dark star. To prevent this collision will take better brains in better bodies in greater numbers than exist today, not only on Earth, but all through the System. Here on this planet, the *Tejani* are forcing evolution to produce these better brains in better bodies. Unfortunately, this process is also producing a great many misfits, people who won't or can't adjust to the changing times, people who are actually throw-backs to the animal level of evolution. If the *Tejani*—and in the long run we here on Earth—permit this, these throw-backs can throw the whole vast plan out of gear, perhaps can defeat it altogether."

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"Let the people who live five hundred years from now solve their own problems!" Abrussi answered. He edged another short step toward Gillian.

"Through such relay pendulums as the one you saw in the cavern, which take their energy from a central pendulum, they are bathing this planet in radiations which will produce, eventually, the desired result."

Gillian, fully aware that Abrussi was inching into a position that would place him in front of Umbro, was also aware that to the right, Eck was also moving inches at a time. He hadn't told Eck to do this, nor were such instructions necessary. Eck intuitively knew what to do. Gillian thought, with real pride, that he and Eck made a team. There was a third member of this team but she had been required to stay behind. It had taken the combined persuasive powers of both Gillian and Eck to accomplish this result.

"We need every man on Earth today," Gillian continued. "It doesn't matter who he is or what he is, if he is willing to learn, he can be of help." He wondered if Samuel Ronson would have used these words in this way, and decided that the scientist would have done so. Ronson had taken a broad view of evolution and had insisted that even animals had to progress too, in time. In part, he had died for this belief.

"Don't be giving me any of that missionary talk," Abrussi answered. "You're only trying to stall me until you can get my *jednar* away from me." One more quick step and he would have Gillian between him and Umbro.

"Am I?" Gillian asked.

"Yes. And it's not going to work!"

Taking the last necessary step, Abrussi brought the *jednar* down so that it covered Gillian. "Tell that goat behind you that if he tries to shoot me, you'll go first!"

"Use your *jednar*!" Gillian said.

"W-what?" Abrussi gasped.

"Pull the trigger." Gillian invited.

Abrussi stared at him. "Your *jednar* won't work," Gillian said. "I told you each *jednar* had its individual frequency, much as your bracelets each had its individual frequency. The *Tejani* have the serial numbers of all the weapons in your possession. They left them turned on, until now, because

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this was the only way to locate you. They wanted the *jednars* back to keep you from learning their secrets. But now that we have you located, every *jednar* in your possession, including the one in your hand, is so much worthless glass."

"That's another lie!" Abrussi answered. "My bracelets are handled through a central control. Where's the central control of the *jednars*?"

"There," Gillian answered, pointing up.

In spite of all he could do to prevent it, thinking all the time that it was only a trick, Abrussi turned his head to look up. There in the sky, dropping slowly lower and lower, was the vast master ship of the *Tejani*. It was longer than the longest ocean liner, bigger than the biggest aircraft carrier, but it slid through the sky with effortless ease.

Beneath it, moving in the majestic rhythm of a time that belonged to great space, was a vast pendulum. Although the pendulum that had existed in the cavern under Mad Mountain was gone, this greater pendulum was still in operation, striving with all the vast power in it to keep forward time for the planet under it.

It was to this ship that Umbro had taken Gillian, Sis, and Eck. Sis was in this ship now. Sis! Through her, and through millions of other young women like her, flowed the hopes that the *Tejani* had for the future of the teeming population on Earth.

To George Gillian, this ship was a mighty dream floating in the sky, the greatest, finest dream he had ever known. Deep in his heart he knew that Samuel Ronson had shared this same dream.

"There's the master pendulum," Gillian said. "In that ship is also the master control for all *jednars*. They do not generate their own power. They take it from the master control within the ship."

In Gillian's mind was another source of wonder. The Z generator which they had built in his laboratory, and which they had called the monster, in derision, had actually come close to duplicating the master generator within the *Tejani* ship itself. The Z generator had not been a failure. Learned *Tejani* scientists had listened in awe while he had described

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it to them, then had pointed out that what he had thought was a failure, had actually been a colossal success. In the fact that a woman of Earth had provided the drawings for the Z generator, and men of Earth had built it, the *Tejani* had found indisputable proof that their great plan of building better brains in better bodies was succeeding! The Z generator proved this to them.

Abrussi pulled the trigger of the *jednar*.

Nothing happened.

Abrussi had to face the fact that Gillian had told him the truth. He also had to face what he was, inside, an ape that had gone among men and had pretended to be a man.

Abrussi could not face either fact. Dropping the *jednar*, his hand darted into his coat pocket where he kept the little weapon that he had used before he found a *jednar*. Even if the weapons of the *Tejani* would not work, a human pistol would.

As Abrussi's hand went into his pocket, Eck Randolph leaped at him. Eck caught the hand that was trying to draw the gun. Simultaneously, George Gillian struck from in front. Gillian's fist went home on the point of Abrussi's chin. A short snapping sound followed.

Eck let a lifeless body slide from his hands. So powerful had Gillian's blow been that it had broken Abrussi's neck.

Umbro leaned over the body to make sure. Looking up, his yellow eyes glinted. "Hunt ended," he said. Looking at George Gillian and Eck Randolph, his eyes began to glow. Perhaps, after all, there were some good humans!

Umbro signalled to his *Tejani* crew to collect the *jednars* from Abrussi's guard and to find the hidden ships.

George Gillian and Eck Randolph looked up at the ship. They knew they would soon return to it. It was lifting now, rising higher in the sky as it returned to its normal position on the night side of the planet. Dreams were rising in their hearts, dreams of many things that were to come. Each could feel Sis smiling at him from the ship. Each, in a quite different way and for quite different reasons, was happy in the knowledge of her smile.

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