

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

VOL. 5 NO. 1

JUNE, 1954

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COVER BY ESMH • *Illustrations by Freas, Emsch, Orban and Luton*

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION, June, 1954, published bi-monthly by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass., under the act of March 3, 1879. Entire contents copyright 1954 by Columbia Publications, Inc. 35¢ per copy; yearly subscriptions \$2.10. Printed in the U. S. A.

HAIL TO THE CHIEF

SHORT NOVEL

By **SAM SACKETT**

Henry Logan was on the inside of the government he'd always dreamed of...and yet, he rebelled...

PROLOGUE

TENRY LOGAN paused, panting. He could no longer hear the footsteps of his pursuers. It was a good thing that he had reached so high a position in the Government; he knew the passages of the immense Administration Building better than anyone else except the Chief himself. Otherwise he would never

illustrated by **FREAS**

have escaped the relentless guards. Logan wasn't young any more, and he had never been much of a runner.

He leaned against the wall and breathed deeply. This wall was not made from beautiful marble, like those the public saw; it was plain concrete, built as part of a honeycomb-defense against even a direct H-bomb hit on the Administration Building. He was getting into the outer perimeter of the Center—that region where the Chief stayed. Only a few dozen people besides himself, except for the Personal Guardians who surrounded the Chief, had ever gone into the Center; only a few hundred even knew it existed. The rest were content to accept the elaborate maze of marbled halls that surrounded it, and the impressive offices that lined them, as the whole of the Administration Building.

But Logan knew that, although he had got into the Center, his job was not yet over. The corridors in the Center were an ingeniously-constructed labyrinth, designed to lead astray even those who knew them well. They, and the lead-layered walls of the building, were dotted with booby-traps—some activated from controls in the Chief's quarters, others from triggers which an unwary invader might stumble against wholly accidentally. Even when he succeeded in pene-



trating deeper into the Center, to the Chief's quarters, there was the still tougher task of fighting past the Personal Guardians.

But the Chief had to be killed.

That was a job that only one man could do, and it was a job that could not be done by any one of the hundred younger men who were willing to do it. Only Logan had the knowledge—knowledge too intricate and detailed to be transferred to anyone else by any means short of an actual impression of his neural circuits upon the other's brain tissues. One little man—five feet three and weighing 120 pounds, with graying hair and tortoise-shell glasses—was called upon to challenge the greatest concentration of power in the history of the human race.

And Henry Logan had taken up that challenge.

He looked around him in the silence. Just plain gray walls stretching into the distance—that was all there was to be seen. He checked on his armament. He had a .38 pistol in a shoulder holster; he had practiced drawing it for months, and had spent tedious hours in target practice with it. He carried extra clips for it in three coat pockets and on his hip. Daggers were strapped to his left forearm and right leg; he had been thoroughly trained in their use. Under his shirt he wore a light but sturdy

bullet-proof vest, especially designed for him. He looked—and he smiled at the idea—surprisingly dangerous for a former political science professor who had joined the Government, ostensibly as a minor figure in the Office for Foreign Affairs.

LOGAN WANTED a cigarette badly, but he was afraid that somewhere behind the concrete wall there was an apparatus analyzing the odors of the air—or perhaps breaking down its chemical content. Perhaps even now electronic computers were informing the Chief that in such-and-such a compartment of the Center the amount of water vapor and carbon dioxide in the air had risen slightly as a result of his breathing. Or perhaps the sound of his panting had already been amplified into thunder in the Chief's ears.

Well, it was the chance he had decided to take. And if his progress was reported on, the only thing to do was to keep moving.

Logan looked back at the heavy door he had come through. On the outside, it was a section of a marble corridor; inside it was heavily insulated with lead and steel. As a safety-measure, he bolted it from the inside.

Logan moved slowly, keeping his eyes roving around him. Ahead of him, a surprising distance ahead, he could see the gloomy dead end

of the hallway. He could not see any passages, either to the right or the left; but he knew that they were there, ready to open responsively to the sure and subtle pressures of those who were familiar with them. Logan did not have a thorough acquaintance with this particular corridor—although they all looked so much alike that it was hard to tell them apart. But he was close enough to the inner workings of the Center to be able to spot the signs of secret passages. To a casual observer a crack between two slabs of concrete might not look any deeper than any other crack. But Logan was no casual observer; he was one of the few real intimates of the Chief, and he had trained himself to sense these slight differences.

There was danger, though; at any point Logan might meet with a trap. He had to be constantly on his guard.

He continued forward cautiously, scanning the ground for a sign of anything dangerous, scanning the walls for any sign of a way farther into the building. He knew that he had to go into the interior, and also down until he was below the surface of the ground. It was hard to tell which way led into the interior, considering the intricate plan of the building; and the uneven floors in the Center also made it difficult to tell just how far down he was getting. Logan's

wrist-compass and his thorough knowledge of the dimensions of the building helped him with the first problem; he had to rely on his sense of balance and a pocket-level for the second. He was, he knew, going on a tangent to the perimeter of the Center; and he was also, he believed, on a slightly downward incline.

Suddenly he paused. The concrete block immediately in front of him looked suspicious. Was it a trap? Were those just deeper shadows? Or were they really cracks, showing that this block was independent of its fellows and capable of responding to human weight? He could not be sure. He might be wrong; he might be afraid of nothing—but he couldn't take the chance. Logan walked backward a few steps, ran, and jumped over the suspicious block. The exertion made him pant harder.

Again he pressed forward, slowly and cautiously. At the rate he was going, it would take a long time for him to reach the Chief. Another man, on another errand, might have become discouraged at the thought of the patient hours of caution and vigilance that would be required of him—a long, grueling mental and physical strain and then, at the end, exertion of the most strenuous kind. But what Henry Logan was going to do would have to be done. The Chief must be destroyed; government

must be returned into the hands of political dominance. From the people.

I

LOGAN had been a professor of political science at one of the nation's large universities. He had a reputation as one of the most brilliant scholars in his field, but the small enrollment in his classes showed that he was not popular with his students.

The most recent contribution to his reputation was his book on the political theories of John Stuart Mill, which ended with an impassioned avowal of Mill's idea that in any election the votes of educated people should be weighted more heavily than those of the masses.

Logan had written in that final chapter, *"For democracy, in the last analysis, is the best form of government only by default. So many of the world's great thinkers—Plato, Mill, Czar d a s—have agreed that the best government is rule by an enlightened oligarchy, that it would be presumptuous to argue that any other system is better in theory."*

"In practice, however, it has always been found that power corrupts even the most high-minded of men, and that the most benevolent of despots loses his benevolence when placed in a position

of political dominance. From tyranny, therefore, the political scientist must turn to democracy. The masses are, in theory, incapable of self-government. They are wilful, ignorant, and capricious; they do not know what they want. But no man or group of men knows what they want better. Weak and ineffectual as democratic government has always been, it must remain the mature selection of political thinkers until some new genius in the science of government invents some new form, uniting the theoretical attractions of Plato's Republic with practicability."

That paragraph was buried in a work of interest only to teachers. But Logan knew that the influence of his ideas would not be confined to teachers alone; once you have convinced the teachers of a nation, it is only a little while before you have convinced their students. And Logan hoped that that paragraph would have the effect of leading teachers to discuss in their classes the desirability of replacing democracy with some more efficient system, one that would give more influence to educated men—like Logan.

Its effect was different. About a week after the book appeared, a man came to see Logan. Logan never learned his name, and never saw him again. But he came into Logan's office at the university and said, "Professor Logan, the

President has empowered me to offer you a position in the Office for Foreign Affairs."

Logan looked up from the papers he was grading, surprised. "Why me?"

"Because of your book on John Stuart Mill."

The professor leaned back in his chair. "I hardly expected the book would appeal to President Morrison."

The man remained standing by his desk, looking down at him.

Finally Logan, to break the silence, said, "What kind of position is it?"

"It's confidential nature prevents me from telling you at this time; ostensibly, you would be named Assistant Under-Secretary for Latin American Affairs."

"I don't know anything about Latin America," Logan snapped, picking up his red pencil again.

"The title is only ostensible; it will give you an excuse for being seen in the Administration Building."

"See here," Logan said. "What the devil is all this? I don't know you. I don't understand what you're talking about. I'm busy. If you can't say what you mean, get out of my office."

THE MAN reached into his coat pocket and drew out some tickets. "A compartment has been reserved for you on the 10:53 train

tonight. You will be met at the Capital and taken to see the President; he will explain in greater detail what your duties will be."

"I'm not interested."

The man put the tickets on Logan's desk and left the office. Logan threw them in the wastebasket, marked an F on the test paper he had been grading without bothering to read the rest of it, and picked up the next one. He glanced over the first answer and wrote a sarcastic comment at the end of it.

Then he got up and paced the room. Service with the Government, he mused, would certainly be attractive. There would be an assured salary—and probably a higher salary than he would ever receive in the academic profession. He fished the tickets out of the wastebasket and looked at them carefully.

"Poo," he said, and threw them back into the wastebasket. "Assistant Under-Secretary for Hogwash." He re-seated himself at the desk and glanced over the second answer. His left hand clenched as he read. "Stupid idiot!" he muttered.

He steeled himself for the third answer, but somehow he could not face it. Every day—for how many years?—he had poured the fruits of his intellect on the classroom floor for a set of fools. He had examined the strengths and weak-

nesses of the various systems by which man had attempted to regulate himself, for boys interested only in football and hot rods, and for girls interested only in boys. He was giving them the finest part of himself.

Logan got up, took the tickets out of the wastebasket, and went out of the office. He left the papers scattered on his desk, just as they were. He did not drop into the chancellor's office to explain his departure; he went straight home, bathed, shaved, dressed, packed, ate at a near-by restaurant, and read in Czardas until it was about ten o'clock. Then he took a taxi to the station, waited until the train came in, took his place in his compartment, and went to sleep.

When he woke up, he was in the Capital.

HE GOT OFF the train, and was met by another man whose name he never learned. This one was much taller than the first, and his height made Logan feel at a disadvantage. "Follow me," the man ordered and set off at a brisk pace through the crowd.

Logan set his bag down and stood looking after the man's retreating back. A woman following him bumped into him. "Excuse me," she said; Logan said nothing.

After a while he saw the man turn to look for him. When the

man found Logan he came striding back for him. "Come on," he said. "What are you waiting for?"

Logan took his time lighting a cigarette.

"Come on," the man said.

"Who are you?" Logan asked.

"That's of no importance. I've been assigned to pick up Professor Logan at the depot and take charge of him; you're Professor Logan, aren't you?"

"Yes," Logan admitted.

"Well, come on, then. Here; I'll carry your bag." The man picked up the suitcase and stood, waiting. "Let's go."

"What's the hurry?"

"After you've worked for the Government a little while you'll find out what the hurry is. Come on, let's get moving."

Logan followed the man out to a waiting automobile, chauffeur-driven, which bore the insignia of the Office for Foreign Affairs. The man climbed in after Logan and closed the door.

Logan said, "See here, I don't like these high-handed tactics of yours."

"What you like and what you don't like are of no importance yet."

"You're as insolent as a college freshman."

"What I'm like is of no importance; the important thing is that you have been chosen."

"Yes, but chosen for what?"

"I'm not at liberty to tell you."

Logan flounced back in the seat and sulked. After a while, he said, "What did you mean by saying that what I liked and didn't like were of no importance yet?"

"I'm not at liberty to say."

Logan was silent for a while. Then, as the car drove on and on through the streets of the Capital, he asked, "Are you at liberty to tell me where we're going?"

"No."

Finally they left the Capital and roared along a highway North. Logan squirmed. "I thought I was being taken to the President."

"You will see the President later."

"Where are we going now?"

"I'm not at lib—"

"Oh, hush up. See here, you can't kidnap me like this. I demand to know where I'm being taken; otherwise stop the car and let me out."

The other man said nothing. The chauffeur drove on silently. For a wild moment Logan thought of leaping at the men, but the foolishness of the idea deterred him, and he merely sat sulking in his corner of the back seat.

AT LENGTH they pulled up before a three-story white frame building that looked somehow, from the road, like a military academy.

The man said, "All right, get out."

Logan looked at him and was about to speak, but thought better of it and followed orders, clutching his suitcase tightly. "Is the President here?" he asked.

"No."

The man led him to the front door. It was opened by another man, whose face was vaguely familiar to Logan from newspaper pictures. The second man said, "Come in, Professor Logan."

Logan entered. The man who had brought him from the station did not come in; he got back in the car and drove off again. Logan saw him once more, in a corridor of the Administration Building, but the man either did not see him or chose not to recognize him.

The second man said, "Professor Logan, I'm Arthur Friedlander."

Of course! This was the Director of the Division for Economic Aid in the Office for Foreign Affairs.

Logan said, "I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Friedlander, in spite of the circumstances in which I have been brought out here."

"Those conditions were necessary," Friedlander said, "as I hope you will be permitted to see later. First you will have to take certain tests which will determine your fitness for Government service. I am requesting that you take all of them voluntarily. I am afraid

that I shall have to warn you that you will be forced to complete them once you have started them. I hope you will not object, because it has been determined that you are peculiarly fitted for the responsible position for which you have been selected."

Logan listened to this carefully. There was something wrong. Tests? He had never heard of anyone taking tests to determine his fitness for government service. He had himself often advocated standards for the election of government officials, to be enforced also on candidates for public office, but no one—he thought—had ever paid attention to him. He was curious about these tests; they bothered him. The other thing that bothered him was the curious official language that Friedlander used—very carefully, chosen so as not to say anything. "It has been determined." Who determined it? Why the passive voice? "The responsible position for which you have been selected." What was it? Why all the vagueness? Friedlander was trying hard to keep something hidden.

Logan asked, "What is this position?"

"I'm not at liberty to tell you yet."

The same answer. He might as well give up. "All right," he said; "I'll take your tests."

"Fine," Friedlander said. "Have

you had breakfast yet?"

"No," Logan admitted.

"We'll start them after you've eaten. They're rigorous, and you'll do better if you take them on a full stomach."

And the breakfast was good, Logan admitted. Country sausage—his favorite dish—and eggs fried just the way he liked them—how did they know even these intimate details about him?

But he put the question out of his mind as Friedlander rose and said, "Are you ready, Professor Logan?"

Logan rose and crushed out his cigarette. Friedlander led him into a large room, furnished only with a plain, heavy wooden arm chair, fitted with arm clamps and a head clamp; a microphone; a motion-picture camera; and half a dozen flood lights. Logan frowned and turned to Friedlander, but the Economic Aid chief had disappeared.

"Professor Logan?" The voice made him whirl around. It belonged to a young, good-looking man in a turtle-neck sweater. Logan found out later that his name was Fred Hansen.

HANSEN came over and shook Logan's hand. "Let me explain the procedure to you, Professor. You will be seated in that chair. Instruments will record your blood-pressure, pulse, body temperature, and involuntary muscle-

twitches while you are being asked a series of questions. In addition, an electroencephalograph will record your brain-pulsations. The whole questioning procedure will be filmed in sound, including both my questions and your answers. The camera will be trained on you for the entire time. When the questioning is over, the film and records will be carefully studied—your expressions will be analyzed from still pictures made from the film as well as watched in action, and the records will be compared with the questions and answers to determine your exact reactions."

"It seems remarkably complete," Logan observed.

"It is; won't you sit down?"

"What if I don't?"

"That decision is not mine to make, and so I cannot tell you what will be determined. Possibly, nothing will happen to you. But if the decision *were* mine, I'll tell you frankly that I certainly would take some steps to prevent your telling anyone what you have seen so far."

"Will you tell me what this is all about?"

"Not until after the questioning."

Logan looked the younger man hard in the face. "Very well," he said; "I'd rather die in any other way you could think up than from curiosity." And he sat down in the big chair.

Hansen busied himself strapping the professor into the chair and adjusting the arm and head clamps. When he had finished, he stepped back without a word and turned on the flood lights. Logan was soon perspiring and wished he had thought to take off his coat; it was impossible to do so now, strapped in as he was. Hansen then pressed a button, and another young man came in from an adjoining room. Silently he took his place behind the camera and started it. Hansen walked back and forth out of camera range and began firing questions.

"What is your name?"

"Henry Logan."

"How long have you been a citizen of this country?"

"I was born here."

"How old are you?"

"Fifty-one."

They started innocuously enough, those questions. But then they began getting tricky.

"Who was the greater man, Hamilton or Jefferson?"

"Why—I suppose really Hamilton, because—"

"Do you attach any credence to Czardas' theory of dynamic social structure?"

"Why, of course, that's basic to the whole—"

"Why have you never run for political office?"

"Well—"

"Faster! Why have you never run for political office?"

"Damn it, I never thought about it!"

THE SWEAT was streaming down his face, now, and he was stiff from having sat in one position so long. It was as if he had died and gone to the particular hell of people who give examinations. And Hansen kept on without relenting.

"Why have you never married?"

"I don't know; I suppose I never found anyone—"

"Of what political party are you a member?"

"I don't belong to one. I think they're—"

"For whom did you vote in the last election?"

"Morrison."

Logan sat looking at the hands crawling around the face of his watch. It was amazing how slowly time could pass, when your body ached and you were soaking in your own perspiration and somebody was hammering questions at you one after another. Finally he asked, "Can't we take a rest?"

"No. Come on; answer the question."

"I can't remember what it was."

"You're just stalling for time."



Can Mill's idea of weighted voting be reconciled with the theories in his essay 'On Liberty'?"

"Of course."

"Do you feel that John Adams has been over—or under-estimated by historians?"

"Underestimated."

"Would you bear arms for the Government if requested to?"

"If they wanted me to."

Logan had shut his eyes against the glare of the lights now, and the whole experience was sinking into a monotonous pattern. It had been years since he had first entered the room, and Hansen had been firing questions at him continually, without a let-up. He began answering them automatically, without thinking.

"What is your favorite color?"

"Blue."

"If you were asked to denounce your best friend as a traitor, would you do it?"

"I don't know."

"Come on, answer the question: Would you do it?"

"I guess not."

"Do you consider patriotism a virtue?"

"Rightly directed, yes."

And still the questions kept steadily on—until suddenly there was a silence. The questions had stopped. Logan raised his head and opened his eyes. Hansen was loosening the clamps. Logan strug-

gled to get up, but his stiff body refused to function. He fell sprawling on the floor at the foot of the chair.

Hansen and the other young man helped Logan to a couch. They gave him a glass of water, which made his dry throat feel better. The questioning, all told, had taken four hours.

When Logan felt strong enough, he sat up. Before he could say anything, Hansen told him that Friedlander was awaiting him for lunch.

LOGAN JOINED the Economic Aid director in the diningroom. Friedlander rose from the table and greeted him with a smile. "You seem to have come through the ordeal all right."

"I don't know," Logan said; "would you mind telling me now what all this is about?"

They sat down. Friedlander talked as they ate: "You were told that you were wanted for Government service, and that is quite correct. But it will surprise you to know that the Government I speak of isn't the Government you have in mind. Among ourselves we always call the Government *you* are thinking of 'the Administration,' to differentiate it."

"What in heaven's name—"

"You see, Professor Logan, such a genius in political science as you called for in your book exists, and

has existed, for several years. Remember? *'Weak and ineffectual as democratic government has always been, it must remain the mature selection of political thinkers until some new genius in the science of government invents some new form, uniting the theoretical attractions of Plato's Republic with practicability.'* Well, although of course you didn't know it at the time you wrote that passage, that new form exists and is now under operation."

"I simply don't understand."

"I don't expect you to, yet. I'll try to explain it as rapidly as I can. The Government is not a democracy, nor yet a dictatorship. Nor is it a compromise; it is a tyranny so complete, a despotism so comprehensive, as to give the illusion of absolute and unlimited freedom."

"I can't even visualize anything like that."

"Perhaps not, now. But I'll give you a brief outline, and then, after you have started in your service, you will perhaps get a clearer picture. Let me start getting at it this way. For whom did you vote in the last election?"

"Morrison."

"Of course; so did nearly every citizen. He won by the most crushing landslide that any presidential candidate has ever had. It was imperative that he do so, because the policies he represents are the policies that must be carried out to

preserve the peace of the world at this time. It is equally imperative that he be re-elected this fall."

"I'm not sure I see—"

"I'm sorry; I was getting ahead of my story. So you voted for Morrison. Have you ever seen Morrison, talked with him?"

"Why, no."

"How many people ever have?"

"I don't know. He's spoken to large gatherings throughout the country, and he's undoubtedly held conferences with all sorts of people."

"Yes, but you voted for him without having talked to him? And so did millions of other citizens?"

"Certainly."

"Of course. Because Benjamin Morrison does not exist."

"What?" Logan jumped to his feet. "But I've seen pictures; I've read speeches; I've—"

"You have seen pictures of a man whom we have chosen to call Benjamin Morrison, because the name has certain desirably euphonious characteristics. That was why his most recent opponent was named Silas Karp, by the way. Certain policies needed to be carried out, so we gave the people a choice between them and their opposites, as personified in two men; and we deliberately rigged the entire election so that every advantage would be on Morrison's side. Morrison was a man we had been grooming for our purposes for several years, as we had ad-

vanced him slowly to major and responsible positions where he would be well known throughout the nation. Karp, on the other hand, was a man we had been deliberately suppressing so that he would be an unknown with no attractions. He, by the way, is also one of us; he does not believe a word of the assertions he made during the last campaign."

"You don't mean that the people don't actually govern this country."

"But I do. That is just what I do mean. The people respond to the pressures we put on them to run the country the way we want them to."

LOGAN STARED for a moment. "Well, I'll be damned. That is genius. Who's in charge?"

"The Chief; if you pass your test, you'll meet him."

"I certainly would like to."

"He wants to meet you, too," Friedlander said. "He's a great admirer of yours—especially of the book on Mill."

"Then it was he, and not the President—"

"Oh, President Morrison admired it, too. So did I; it fits in so well with our actual practice, that we all admired a man who could come, in theory, so close to what the Chief has been doing. The Chief said that if you only had his organizational abilities, you

might have been able to form the Government yourself."

"This is really remarkable. But what sort of a group is the Government? What kind of people really *do* run this country?"

"We are an organization of the intellectually elite. Generally, the examination includes intelligence-tests as well as the sort of probing you underwent; and all of us are college graduates at least—most of us have the Ph. D. degree. The Chief felt that he should waive the intelligence-test in deference to you."

"Well! I'm flattered, of course. But this is all so new and strange to me that I can't get over it. The audacity of it! The sheer—oh, this is marvelous. What will I be doing in this Government of yours?"

Friedlander paused to eat some salad before replying. "If you pass your examination—we should know before you go to bed tonight—you will be made Special Assistant to the Chief. Your first duties will be to help arrange for President Morrison's re-election."

"What if I don't pass the examination?"

"We will have to kill you."

The very calmness and affability with which Friedlander spoke the words jolted Logan more than if there had been menace in the man's voice. Finally the professor made an effort to pass it off: "I hope not. I never *would* finish grading those examinations."

II

THE NEWS of the examination results came at about eight o'clock that evening, and with it the Chief. Logan was lying on a couch, reading a detective novel that Friedlander had lent him, when the Economic Aid director entered smiling, his hand extended toward the professor.

"Congratulations!" Friedlander said. "You've passed the examination; I knew you would."

Logan sat up and let his hand be shaken vigorously.

"And you have a visitor," Friedlander continued.

Logan's heart gave a bound. "Good Heavens! Is it the Chief?"

Friedlander nodded, smiling affectionately at the professor.

Logan stood up. "Well! This *is* exciting. Where is he?"

"Right in here," said a voice in the next room. It was an old man's voice, made graceful by the accents of culture.

Logan bounded into the next room to see the Chief, who was standing there grinning at him. He was a short man, about the same size as Logan, with a square face and a frame that was still wiry and powerfully shouldered. He gripped Logan's hand in a firm, warm clasp and said, "I'm glad to meet you, Professor Logan." Logan guessed he must be about seventy.

"Shall we sit down and talk this over?"

They took chairs. Logan looked around and noticed that Friedlander had silently left them alone.

"I'm sorry," the Chief was saying, "that we had to subject you to the testing; but it is absolutely essential that we made certain that you really do believe in a rulership by the intellectually elite. We cannot afford any spies or turncoats; I think you can understand that."

Logan nodded.

"Like most of our members," the Chief continued, "you showed signs of independence of thought, and very little real patriotic loyalty. That was only to be expected; the kind of blind obedience that a man like Hitler demanded from his subordinates is not possible in an intelligent man—and very likely Hitler failed because the men with whom he surrounded himself were not intelligent and therefore were not fitting media through whom he could extend himself. So it is necessary that I surround myself with fitting media; and, since that is the case, I cannot expect unquestioning loyalty.

"Since that *is* the case, my organization of geniuses—we all score higher than 150 regularly on the standard I. Q. tests—is perhaps the least cohesive oligarchy in history. And I must rely on other things to keep it together. Would you like me to tell you the

pressures that we feel, for instance, would keep Professor Henry Logan in our organization?"

"Yes, I would."

"Well, then, in the first place, you have loyalty to your theory of government. You know, yourself, that you're more capable of governing the members of certain intellectual strata of society than they are of governing themselves. I imagine the incapability of most people is brought in upon you daily as you read the papers written by unthinking college students—who, after all, don't come from the lowest strata intellectually. You will learn, as you progress farther into our organization, that it is possible for highly-intelligent people to disagree on what is best for the nation. But you will also discover that it is more important that the structure of the Government be retained than that this or that individual minor policy be adopted."

"I think I understand that."

"I hope so," the Chief grinned; "it's important that you do."

"Well, that was the first place. Is there a second?"

"Yes. After all, it would seem surprising to the average citizen, if he learned of the Government, that we would bother to do this at all. All we have done is taken over the responsibility of government. Why? Largely, I think, out of altruism. You, for instance, Professor Logan—you want to govern

people better than they already are governed. Isn't that true? That altruism is a part of everyone who believes in a government by the intellectually elite. It makes no difference to you, in any personal, selfish way, how some garage-mechanic governs himself; you get nothing out of it. But, knowing better than he does, seeing more clearly than he can, you want to do these things for him. Isn't that right?"

HE PAUSED, and Logan, realizing that the question was not purely rhetorical, assented.

"Very well, then. The Government offers you the opportunity to perform this altruistic act. But the altruism is not enough. The satisfactions in government are not very great. There is a certain kind of satisfaction in self-immolation to help other people, of course; but one can grow tired of martyrdom. There is an appeal in power, especially such unlimited power as the Government exercises, but that soon palls when one weighs against it the heavy burdens—the mental strain that makes the job actually and physically what the man in the street calls it figuratively, 'a headache.' Some other system of rewards must be thought out to repay these geniuses for devoting their lives to taking on their own shoulders the responsibilities of government. And I have worked out the simplest and, in practice,

the most satisfactory method. Would you like to know what it is?"

"Of course."

"Professor Logan, in asking you to join the Government in its service to the people of this nation, I shall be giving you a position of consequence second only to my own. But I can give you only the same reward that the other members of the Government have received. Which is merely this: you may have whatever you want."

"Whatever I want?"

"Certainly. You will be in our service until your death. During that time, you may have whatever you want. Money is not important to us, because we get what we want in other ways, but if you want money you can have that. With some men it's women—not, I imagine, with you. For those men, we keep them supplied with all the most beautiful women they want. You are a scholar. If you want unlimited access to the National Library, you may have that; if you want any books for your own private use, you may have them. So long as the existence of the Government is not revealed—and that is a matter of method rather than of an actual limitation to the promise—you may have whatever you want. That is the reward we offer our members. And that is the second reason why nobody ever leaves Government serv-

ice; there is never anything that he can gain by it."

"It is certainly overwhelming."

"Of course. And now, I welcome you to the Government." The Chief rose, shook Logan's hand, and left the room.

III

THE FIRST official meeting of the Government that Logan attended was a pre-convention conference in a smoke-filled room—but a very different kind of thing than he and the other citizens of the country were accustomed to regard as typical.

The scene was the Chief's private headquarters, deep in the Center of the Administration Building, protected from even a direct hydrogen-bombing by an ingenious construction of concrete-walled passageways, layer upon layer of them, between the Chief's hidden office and the splendid veneer of the Administration Building itself.

Logan did not know all the men present. One of them, of course, was the Chief himself. Another was the man whom he had known as President Morrison. Friedlander was there, too.

The Chief was saying, "We'll have to choose a bachelor to oppose Morrison. Morrison's family is a heavy asset, and we'll give them all the television play they need."

Friedlander said, "How about

having a divorced man run? That would make a good contrast."

The Chief nodded vigorously. Logan was surprised to see how freely he accepted suggestions from his subordinates.

One of the other men remarked, "Pity we can't use Karp again; he was almost perfect for us."

"How about names?" Friedlander asked. "You can do a lot with names if you use them well."

The Chief said, "You might be interested in a Western governor named Hilary Velute. His name would make him unpopular with most of the people."

"Is he married?" Friedlander asked.

"No; I don't think his marital status has ever been an issue. We can supply him with a divorced wife, I think, and people will nod and say they'd forgotten."

Morrison said, "That's pretty risky."

The Chief said, "You're probably right; we'd have to leave him a bachelor. But maybe we could give him an ex-mistress."

Friedlander said, "That's always good stuff."

Morrison said, "He's on record with some pretty pro-Morrison statements. I think we're agreed after last time that the best policy is to have Morrison's opponents believe as much opposite to him as possible." Hearing the man he thought of as Morrison refer to himself in the third person made

Logan suddenly very conscious of the enormity of the hoax the Chief had put over.

Friedlander said, "Issues aren't that important in a campaign." The Chief nodded but did not say anything.

A man Logan did not know said, "I'd like to get somebody from a border area. Velute may turn out to be the fairhaired boy of the West for some purely local reason and pull down enough of a regional vote to make him dangerous. Why can't we use Green? He couldn't win if he paid people ten dollars a vote."

The Chief said, "Green is out." And there was a quality in his voice that made Logan know he would never have questioned that statement.

MORRISON said, "I don't think Velute could carry the West. I don't know of any reason why he'd be a local hero. But if you're worried about that, let's cast doubt on his patriotism. He must have belonged to an organization we can label traitorous, or maybe he knew someone." He turned to the Chief. "Remember those pictures you took of Morrison and Warner? We did it all very secretly, and there never was any real connection between them, but they're the most incriminating-looking photos I've ever seen. Do you have anything like that on Velute?"

The Chief grinned. "Oh, I have

some material we can use. But maybe we'd better get hold of Velute and have him pose for some pictures. We'll work on the morals angle with his ex-mistress, and also on the subversive angle. We'll play on his relationships with Murray."

"Has he had any?" Friedlander asked.

"Not yet," the Chief said.

"Well, we can fix that up easily enough," Friedlander said. "But how about Morrison? We've torn Velute down pretty well, but we ought to build up Morrison."

One of the men spoke up. "I've got a peach of an idea; been saving it for something really big. Maybe this isn't big enough yet and I ought to save it, but it's still a good idea."

"Let's have it," the Chief said.

The man went on: "Get this picture. The campaign is going along nicely. Morrison seems to be comfortably ahead in all the polls, but not too much, so that it looks as if it may be a good hard fight. Morrison has an important speech scheduled in one of the big cities; everybody's looking forward to it, because it seems as if the balance of the campaign hangs on it."

The man paused. Everyone was watching him tensely. His face was glowing, and he was gesturing expressively, a lighted cigarette between two of his fingers.

"Then," he continued, "just then, there is a nationalist rebellion

in one of the protectorates. It's a national crisis—an emergency. You know, those things can have all kinds of implications and overtones in the international situation."

Friedlander put in, "It may even have been stirred up by foreign agents."

The man nodded. "That would be good. So Morrison cancels his speech. Everybody feels sorry for him because he has to stop campaigning, and in the suspense of the moment everybody is watching him. He returns to the Administration Building; he studies the situation. It looks grim. He's convinced that only his personal presence will put down the rebellion, so he flies down there. Maybe he's shot at by one of the rebels."

Morrison laughed. "Don't get carried away."

The man continued, "But his presence *does* do it. He takes command of the situation, saves lives, and does all kinds of heroic things. He shows that his interest is really in the people, not the kind of fake interest the nationalist leaders have been putting on to grab power. And then he comes back, right at the end of the campaign, to make one last speech. The polls go crazy!"

The Chief clapped the man on the back. "By George, Ted, that's a wonderful idea. I don't see how we can go wrong!"

And, as Logan saw in the next

six months, that was the way it happened.

INTERLUDE

Logan had come a long way, and now he was getting tired and short of breath. He was, he was confident, getting close to his goal. He had been going constantly downward for over three hours, and, although he was not fully certain that he had always been going in the right direction, he was not entirely discouraged either.

What he wanted to do more than anything else at the moment was sit down and have a cigarette and a can of beer. But he had no beer, and he was afraid to sit down and have a cigarette.

It was, he knew, getting to be late. Outside, it must already have been dark for a long while. But here, as everywhere in these corridors, some hidden lighting-arrangement made every concrete surface a flat, dead gray.

Logan had had no dinner, and there was an empty feeling in his stomach; he wondered whether he would ever eat again.

His eyes were smarting, now. He had scarcely allowed himself to blink, so alert had he kept himself to the slightest hint of a passage-way—or of a trap. And the unrelieved grayness was bothering him.

It was strain all the way—strain of every sense, of every mental

faculty, of every muscle. He felt taut, now, but he knew that he must go on. How much farther? He didn't know. At any step he might reach his goal; or, on the other hand, at any step he might be destroyed. One moment there would be the flicker of life that he was, a pencil-point in the gigantic labyrinth of the Chief's bastion, and the next moment there would be only the six gray concrete surfaces.

He stopped and looked closely at a crack in the wall; that might be a doorway. He flattened himself against the wall, to one side of the crack, and cautiously touched the area on the other side in the various patterns that he knew the Chief had installed in these doorways to respond to touch. He was right on this one; it swung open for him.

He waited for a few moments before venturing away from the wall against which he was pressing. Cautiously he brought out his pistol and got down on the floor. He inched himself forward on his stomach and peered, gun ready, around the corner.

It was another corridor just like the one he was in. Its floor was a little lower than the present one, and the dimensions were different—it was a little shorter, but a little wider and a little higher. He looked at the floor carefully. There did not seem to be any traps.

HE SCRAMBLED to his feet and stepped into the other corridor. He looked up and down. There was nothing to tell him which way to go. Generally he went downward, as he was pretty sure that the Chief had not had any of these hallways built under his quarters. But this floor seemed even. He laid his pocket-level on it and—

Was that a doorknob?

Carefully, but impatiently, he walked about twenty feet down the corridor.

Yes, it was a doorknob. There was a wooden door, about three feet high and three feet wide, set in the wall of the corridor. He could crawl through it, but that was about all.

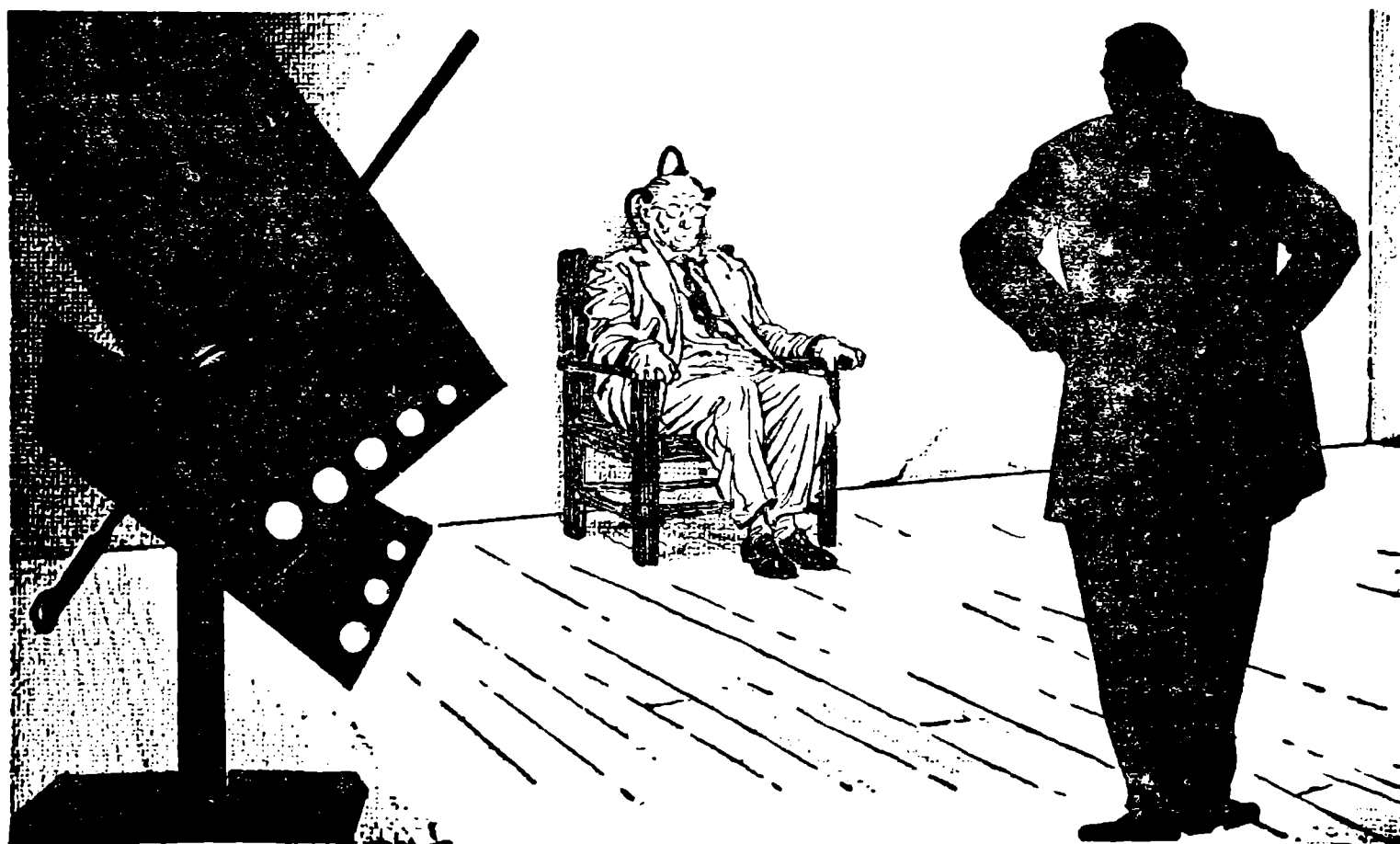
He lay down flat to one side of the door, on the handle side. Gin-

gerly he reached up and took hold of the knob. Nothing happened. He turned it; still nothing happened. He began to open the door.

Suddenly there was a spurt of machine-gun fire, cutting through the wooden panel in a shower of splinters and ricocheting bullets. Although they came within inches, the bullets missed him.

He drew his hand back rapidly, and gravity pulled the door closed. The gun stopped.

He inspected the damage, from a safe distance. Seven bullets had torn through the door and bounced off the opposite wall. Logan suspected, from the way the gun had started up when the door opened and shut off when it closed, that the action of the gun was automatic. After all, the Chief could hardly be expected to have ma-



chine-gunners stationed all over the building in spots like this, on the chance that someone might penetrate to them.

Or was it chance? Maybe the Chief was aware of his presence and had sent a gunner to this door. He looked at the holes in the wood more carefully. They were in a straight line, beginning at the side nearest the handle. Cautiously Logan opened the door again from the side, shutting it as soon as the next spurt started.

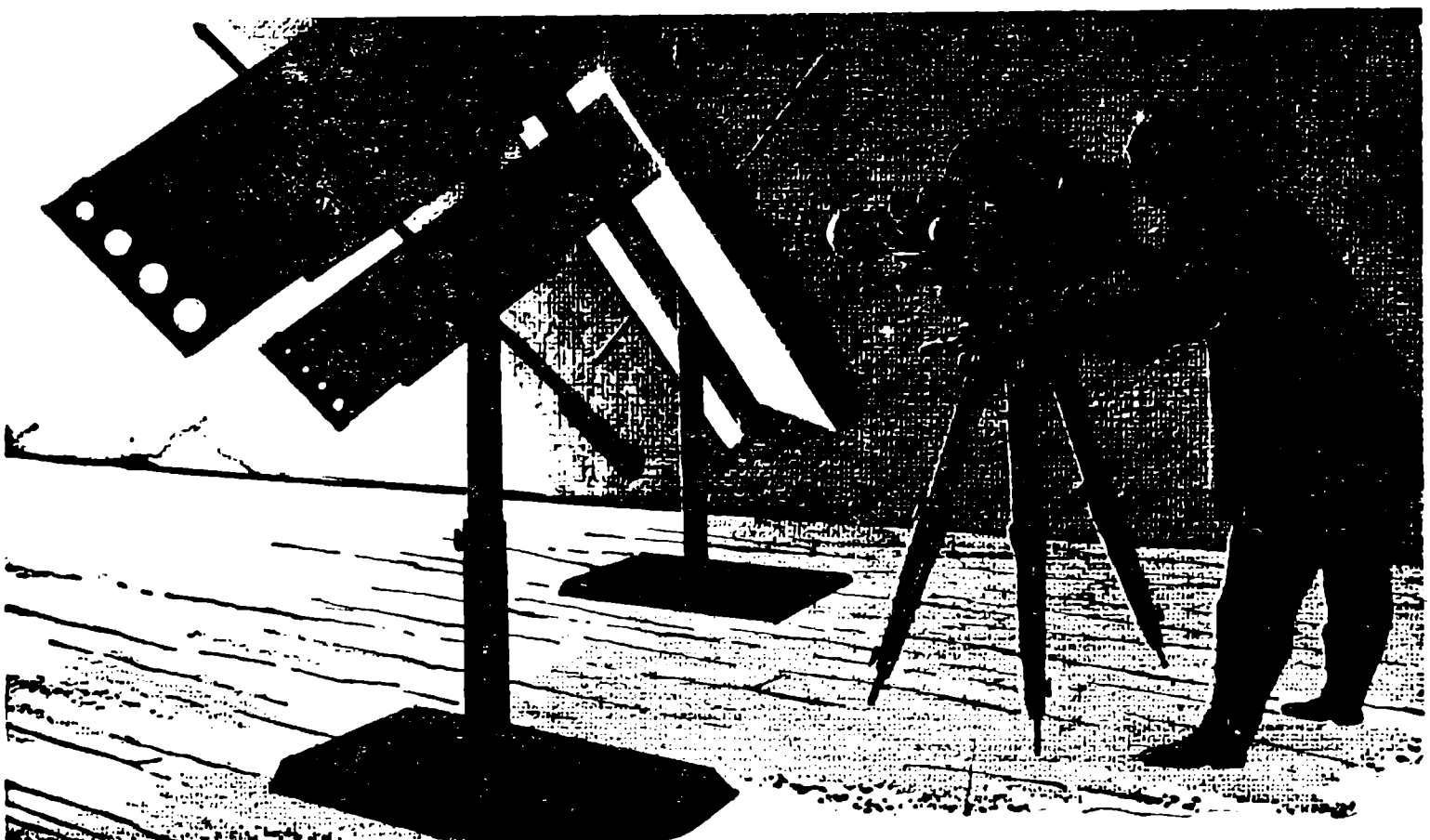
There were now eleven holes in the door. The four new holes were in the same plane as the old ones, starting where the others had left off. Logan was pretty sure now that the gun was fixed, and its action was automatic.

He opened the door again enough to start the gun going and

wedged it open with his pocket-level. Then he cautiously went down to the other end of the hallway, as far as he could get from the rebounding bullets. The chatter of the gun sounded thunderous in his ears after the silence in which he had come thus far. The bullets sprayed through the door back and forth, back and forth, for what seemed an interminable period.

Finally the gun stopped. It had, Logan surmised, run out of bullets. But he would still have to be cautious in going through that doorway. So tremendous a noise might have aroused the defenses of the Chief.

He went back over to the little portal. The gun had nearly ripped it in half. He got down on his hands and knees and pushed the door open wide.



Nothing happened.

Gun in hand, he peered around the corner.

It was only a little closet. There was the machine-gun and the exhausted clip that had fed it bullets; there wasn't space in the room for anything else.

Logan sighed.

He began to make his way down to the other end of the corridor, looking for another passageway. There might be none; that had happened before.

But suddenly he froze. A section of the wall swung back. And, as he watched in utter fascination, the black barrel of a rifle poked into the corridor.

IV

THERE CAME the day when the Chief called Logan into his private quarters for a conference. Clad in slacks and a gray turtle-neck sweater and sipping from a tall, cool glass, he was lounging in a comfortable armchair. "Sit down, Logan," he said brusquely.

Logan sat down, wondering what had gone wrong. This wasn't the tone of voice that the Chief generally used with him. He lit a cigarette to occupy his mind, while waiting for the Chief to speak again.

"You've had a pretty thorough

look at the Government, Logan; what do you think of it?"

"I still can't get over it."

"Of course you can't."

Logan was annoyed but tried not to show it. He still respected the Chief, despite the intimate association he had had with him over the past six months. And he had considerable respect for the Chief's Government.

After all, he thought, it isn't a bad Government. The Chief is very good about taking suggestions so that his subordinates have nothing to fear from offering ideas or even, occasionally, criticism. He does shut you up pretty well, though, when it's an area that he's decided about beyond any shadow of disagreement. But he doesn't hold it against you if you mention one of these areas.

Logan shifted a little in his chair.

"Well?" the Chief said.

Logan frowned. "Well what?"

"You still haven't answered my question; I was serious. What do you think of the Government?"

"I like it."

"Good." The Chief smiled, bounded out of his chair, and gripped Logan's shoulder affectionately. "I was hoping you'd say that."

Logan was surprised at how suddenly the Chief's coldness had melted. This was the old friendly

Chief who had so charmed him at their first meeting.

The Chief went over to the fireplace and stood by it a moment, playing with an hourglass on the mantel. "I'm very glad you said that," he said again, turning his face away so that Logan could not see it.

Logan fidgeted nervously. This was strange action on the Chief's part. He seemed to be breaking down from emotion. Could Logan's good opinion of him mean that much?

The Chief turned his face back again. Tears glistened in his eyes, and he was obviously struggling to keep his lower lip still. Logan squirmed in the chair, wishing he had been spared this.

Finally the Chief said, "Excuse me," and dashed into the next room, Logan supposed in order to cry.

Good Lord, Logan thought. *He's worse than a freshman girl.* He got up and walked around, feeling distinctly uncomfortable.

FINALLY the Chief reappeared. "I'm sorry for my outburst," he said, "but it meant so much to me. So few people are even aware of what the Government is—only a thousand or so throughout the entire country—and I think so highly of your opinion—" the Chief broke off and waved his hand. "However," he continued, "that's neither here nor there."

He sat down again in his armchair and gestured Logan back into his seat.

The Chief cleared his throat. "Professor Logan, I'm not going to live forever. I have the best medical care, of course; but I'm getting old, and I'm carrying the heaviest responsibility a human being has ever borne."

Logan was getting impatient again. This was a harrowing experience. He was interested in forms of government, not in seeing the soul of an individual laid bare—even if the individual was as remarkable as the Chief.

"In your opinion, Professor Logan, what will be the future of the Government if I should die?"

Logan was silent a moment, deciding how he could be both frank and tactful. "That is a weakness of absolute governments. They depend on the ability and personality of one man. When the one man is gone, his place cannot be supplied. In the first place, very often the dictator has removed anyone with the proper qualifications because of possible competition. In the second place, not all men of ability have the personality to carry on a powerful government—and, of course, vice versa."

"I know all that, I know all that." The Chief was impatient. "But answer the question: What will happen?"

"I can't be positive. But I imagine the Government will simply

cease to be. The people will go on electing their representatives, only without your control; and, unless one of the members of the Government sells his experiences to a newspaper for money, very likely no one will ever have been aware of your existence."

The Chief was silent a long while. Logan's cigarette burned down and he lit a new one from it.

Finally the Chief spoke. "I knew that, too." He sounded incredibly old and broken. Logan was angry with the Chief for having brought on the whole unpleasant situation, but he tried not to show it. He could not sit still any longer, so he got up and began to pace the room.

"Morrison has the personality but not the ability," the Chief said suddenly, breaking the silence.

Logan nodded but did not speak.

"You—" The Chief sat up straight and looked Logan in the eye. The professor arrested his pacing; he shivered, though it was not cold. "You have the ability but not the personality."

Damn the man, Logan thought. He was so furious that he could not do anything for fear of showing his emotion. This was embarrassing beyond measure.

"Tell me the truth, Logan!" The Chief was in an agony of pleading now. "Tell me the truth! Would

a committee—" He couldn't go on.

"No!" Logan howled at the top of his lungs and ran from the room. "No!" he screamed again in the concrete corridor outside the Chief's quarters, although there was no one there to hear.

V

LOGAN WAS on the verge of declining the next meeting to which the Chief summoned him, but thought better of it when Friedlander came to his apartment to drive him to the Administration Building.

"Good of you to think of me," Logan said, climbing into the car.

"Don't mention it," the Economic Aid director said. They drove in silence for a while before Friedlander remarked, "You know, you've changed since you first came to the Capital."

"Have I?"

"You seemed rather sour and sharp to me when I first met you; but you've become much more relaxed and friendly."

"You met me under singularly inauspicious circumstances."

Friedlander laughed. "Yes, but it was more than that, I think; I don't imagine you liked teaching very much."

"No, I didn't," Logan confessed. "I hated it. This is much more to

my taste; I feel as if I'm really a part of great things."

"That's the way I feel about it, too. You know, I was a teacher, too, before the Chief picked me up."

"I didn't know that," Logan said.

"I taught economics. It seemed to me that I couldn't stand another day of it; I got so that I hated everybody. But everybody in the Government is so—so congenial to my own personality that I've been very happy since I joined it."

"The Chief is a remarkable leader," Logan said. "He really doesn't seem to tyrannize anybody, and the people are happy, because they think they're governing themselves. I don't feel so much like a bride on the honeymoon now, however."

"Why?"

Logan told the story of his interview with the Chief.

At the conclusion, Friedlander whistled. "I've heard about some peculiar actions, but never anything that peculiar."

"I hadn't expected the Chief to show emotions like that; he seemed so capable and self-contained the first time I talked with him."

"He's like that usually," Friedlander agreed, "but I have heard some strange stories from people who are close to him. He has a large record-library, you know. Morrison walked in on him one

evening about half an hour early for an appointment, wanted to ask him about something before the rest of us got there, and found him lying on the floor, crying like a baby, while the record player was going through one Tchaikowsky record after another. Morrison didn't know what to do, but the Chief didn't seem to mind."

"Remarkable."

"Yes, isn't it? He's thrown some pretty remarkable rages, too. You'll find out about those soon enough, I imagine."

"You don't suppose he'll be angry with me about what happened, do you?"

Friedlander shrugged. "You can't tell. There are whole areas of the Chief's personality that I'm thoroughly at sea about. The thing that really bothers me is the new business about Personal Guardians for himself."

"Is that new?"

"Yes, about four months before you came. Frankly, that alarmed me. I thought he might be a little off-balance—persecution, you know. I haven't really seen any of that in him, but I naturally thought of it at the time. Because if he gets that way, then that's the end of it all."

"Yes, I can see that."

THEY WERE drawing near the Administration Building now. It was an immense edifice, as big

as a small city and towering high into the air. Friedlander turned down the employee's parking-ramp into the basement garages. He and Logan rode the elevator up to the fifth floor, which housed the Office for Foreign Affairs, where both men had their offices.

They followed the corridor down to Friedlander's office and went in. Closing and locking the door behind them, they touched the bookcase in a pattern of places. It swung outward and admitted them to a concrete corridor. They were accustomed to getting to the Chief's quarters by this route, so their penetration into the depths of the building went quickly. They knew just where to jump over traps, and where to find the doors that would let them into the next passageway.

Logan had, by now, entered into the secret recesses which the Chief had in the heart of the Administration Building by some half-a-dozen ways. He knew that there were others. The Chief had once gone over with him a chart of the paths through the labyrinth, so that Logan was probably as familiar with the arrangements as anyone. In fact, Logan had found out later that only a very few members of the Government ever received that particular kind of instruction. He had been mildly puzzled until the Chief had sprung the business about the succession on him, and then the reason for it became clear.

The audacity of having used the heart of the great Administration Building was something that Logan admired. It was a safe hiding-place, for the building was so huge and complex that even the oldest employees knew their way around only one, or at the most two, floors. The complicated arrangement of the building discouraged the effort of the will necessary to master its intricacies, so that most Administration workers gave it up with a cheerful curse.

The building was about thirty years old. That gave Logan some idea of the age of the Government, as the erection of the Administration Building was likely one of the Chief's first projects after he came to power—but the peculiar adaptability of the building to the Chief's purposes showed that it could not have been planned before the beginning of the Chief's rule. Well, say that the Chief had governed the country for about thirty years—since he was, roughly, forty. That was a young age for a man to have acceded to so much power.

Logan wondered what the story behind it was, but he wondered in silence. It was a common rumor that various spots in the corridors were sensitized to carry sounds to the Chief's quarters. Neither Logan nor anyone else knew whether the rumors were true; but most people either were silent while going through the corridors, or spoke

only on unexceptionable topics. He and Friedlander had adopted the policy of keeping quiet.

Then they entered the conference room and sat down. The others were there before them, and the Chief was at the head of the table.

THE CHIEF called the meeting to order. His face, Logan saw, was flushed and puffy from lack of sleep. He looked more tired and harrassed than Logan remembered ever having seen him. "Gentlemen," he began drily, "there is a crisis."

Logan squirmed a little on his seat. The Chief's voice held a note of portent, a note of grave decisions, that Logan didn't like. He glanced around the circle. Morrison was studying the wood on the table in front of him. Friedlander was resting his crossed arms on the table. Another man whom he did not know was industriously filing his nails. All avoided looking at the Chief.

The Chief talked on. The details of what he said were hard to grasp, dealing as they did with intricacies of secret diplomacy with which Logan was unfamiliar. But the broad outlines were frightening.

The defection of an ally had weakened the nation's position internationally to an alarming extent. Oriental scientists had perfected a remarkable new weapon,

details of which were still unknown; roughly, its effect was to interfere with the electrical system—the ignitions of aircraft and ground-vehicles, for example—of anything upon which it was trained. The Orient threatened a new major war—a war that the nation would enter with every conceivable disadvantage—within a week unless the nation's foreign policy underwent certain radical changes, changes to which Morrison and his Administration were irrevocably opposed. Concessions were demanded; yet Morrison had made commitments from which he could not retreat.

At the end of the Chief's talk, Logan was leaning forward, his eyes on the old man. Everybody else was raptly attentive, except Morrison, who seemed not to have moved.

Friedlander asked, "What if we make the concessions, just to gain time?" His usually pleasant face was serious now.

"We'll have to," Morrison murmured.

The Chief replied to Friedlander as if the President had not spoken. "In the first place, we'll lose face throughout the world. And that's important; other countries have confidence in us and have taken certain positions in the past because of their faith in us. We can't just say, 'Okay, we're licked.'"

"Weil, we *are* licked," a man

said. Logan did not remember having seen him before.

The Chief flashed the last speaker a withering glance. He did not say anything more all during the conference.

A man whom Logan knew only as Ted said, "What are these commitments again?"

The Chief listed them over.

Ted said, "Do any of them depend on legislative action?"

The Chief shook his head.

"Too bad," Ted commented. "I thought maybe we could get a floor-fight started; a month or so of debating might give us enough time that we could think this out."

"That worked well enough during Young's Administration, when the Orientals claimed they'd shot down the *Thunderer* by mistake. But then all we had to do was stave off the pugnacity of our own angry population; now we have to placate a very dangerous foreign power."

THERE WAS silence. Logan found himself thinking about the Chief instead of the Oriental problem. The Chief implied that he had been in control of Young's Administration; and Young had taken office—Logan computed hurriedly—thirty-eight years ago. That was remarkable. The Chief must have come to power in his early thirties. Or maybe he was older than he looked.

Logan regarded him carefully. He seemed to be in the low seventies—the same estimate Logan made when he first met him. And well preserved at that, Logan thought, remembering some of his university colleagues, who were senile at seventy, and comparing them.

But then the Chief had access to unlimited medical facilities. Nothing that could be done to keep him healthy had been overlooked. Even so, medical science could go only so far, and—

But Friedlander was speaking, and Logan brought his attention back to the present.

"The public," he said, "is unaware of the Oriental ultimatum. Suppose that Morrison suddenly announces that he feels that certain problems have arisen that can be solved by a personal conference with the Oriental leader. So they meet on neutral ground and confer. Morrison can make the concessions they want; that will gain us time until we can repudiate them later, when we're in a stronger position. We'll tell them frankly that we'll do anything they want, if they'll only make one or two minor concessions themselves to save our face; then we can emphasize the concessions we've won, and minimize theirs."

The Chief brightened at that. "That would help give us time, at least. And I'm convinced that they'd rather get what they want

without war than with. After all, a war is expensive even if you win it."

The man Logan knew as Ted said, "They'll never give us any concessions now that they have the whip hand; and they'd never trust us any more than we'd trust them. They'd know that we'd repudiate the agreements as soon as we could."

The brightness faded from the Chief's face. "Yes, you're probably right."

Logan glanced over at Friedlander. The Economic Aid Director was sitting with his chin on his chest, staring at the floor. Logan felt his dejection very plainly.

"Does anyone else have any ideas?" the Chief asked. Everyone was silent. "Then," he said, rising, "I suppose that the meeting had better be adjourned. We have until next Thursday to make up our minds. If anyone gets an idea between now and then, please get in touch with me."

Everyone nodded. You got in touch with the Chief through Morrison, who was in almost daily communication with him. And everyone stood, looking serious and determined. Logan, too, was alarmed; the prospect of a war with a formidable adversary, when the odds are against you, is not cheering.

They left the Chief's quarters and went back out into the externals of the Administration

Building, and Friedlander offered to drive Logan home.

WHEN THEY were comfortably seated in Friedlander's car, Logan asked, "Just what is the Chief's history?"

"History?"

"Yes. How long has he been in power, and how did he come there?"

"I don't know; I've worked for him only about fifteen years myself. But I understand from the older men that he's lasted forty years or so."

"That's remarkable. How old is he now?"

"He's over eighty."

"He looks and seems ten years younger."

"Someone told me that he has a kind of glandular imbalance that makes him age more slowly. It's probably the same kind of arrangement that people have who live to be a hundred or so."

Logan nodded. "And I expect he's had the very best medical treatment."

"Oh, he certainly has."

"How did he come to power?"

"The Chief has a theory that a popular presidential candidate can swing his party into office after him. That's happened, you know. It's happened the other way, too—the Republicans couldn't elect Fremont, who was tremendously popular, but they could elect Lincoln, who was virtually unknown

outside of Illinois, because Republicans had captured so many congressional seats.

"But that's beside the point. The Chief worked it from the other way. He and Young worked hard for Young's election, through the usual methods. What people didn't realize was that Young, who was a tremendously popular candidate, was running really for the Government, not for the party that nominated him. When Young got in, everything was easy. The Chief was in a position to manipulate events the way he wanted them, and Young had the support of his party and could use them in the customary way. The Chief's power wasn't great then, of course, and he had some setbacks; but he was able to keep control and gradually build up his authority. In fact, Urquhart was president and followed orders religiously—yet he died never knowing that the Government existed. He was just the sort of man the Chief could use by putting pressures on him, and without making him a member of the Government at all."

"That's fabulous."

"It is. And that's the way the Chief gets power. He pressures people to do what he wants. With that kind of organization, he doesn't need large numbers of men to follow him actively. He can be highly selective in getting just the kind of man he wants—which is, as I believe I told you the first

time I met you, an intelligent man who realizes his own superiority to the clods around him."

"It's still amazing."

"Oh, I agree," Friedlander laughed. "There are times when I've felt, as you said, that the honeymoon is over. But the advantages, both to myself and to the nation, are so great that I'm glad enough of the chance to stick it out."

"Oh," Logan said, "I don't have any thoughts of resigning."

"It's just as well," Friedlander said.

AFTER Friedlander dropped him off, Logan went up to his apartment. As the Chief had promised him, the reward of membership in the Government was an adequate supply of everything he wanted. This, in Logan's case, had meant books. He switched on the lights when he entered, for it was growing dark, and took off his coat, throwing it on the davenport.

He took up a novel that he had been reading, intending to pick up where he had left off, but his mind refused to concentrate. Instead, he kept thinking of what he had seen and learned about the Chief.

When Logan had first found out about the Government, he had been eagerly enthusiastic. Now he was not so sure. He had no deter-

mined antipathy, but, as he had said to Friedlander, the honeymoon was over. He accepted his strange, new existence without much strong emotion at all. A year before, he had had no idea that there was such a thing as the Government. Now, today, he was a member of its inner council, a party to secrets of the most surprising and unexpected nature, a man whose influence (had he chosen to exercise it) would be great over millions of his fellow countrymen but of whom not more than a few hundred had ever heard. He had become, in the past year, a strange and romantic figure, despite his stature and myopia. And yet he felt not so much excitement as numbness.

The book could not hold his attention, so he put it down. He went to a window and looked for a while at the busy city, thronged with homebound Administration employees. Here and there might be one of them who had some realization of the actual structure of the Government. It was a hoax, a shell-game of unprecedented dimensions. The Cardiff Giant was a pigmy to the Chief.

What of that? It was a good Government. The Chief and his associates ran it as well as they could. All the members of the Government were highly-intelligent and well-educated. Undoubtedly they knew what was best for the people better than the people them-

selves did. That was what Logan had spent the first fifty years of his life preaching.

But, damn it! He clenched his fist and turned away from the window. It just didn't appeal to him somehow any more. He was—yes, he was tired of it. It had become a job, a drudgery. And the Chief could be as weak, could be as much a fool, as anybody else.

The street-lights were going on in the Capital. From his window it was a striking sight, but his back was to it, and he was thinking. He'd been handled with a velvet glove in the past year. But he recalled his first introduction to the Government. He had been threatened with death, and he had had no doubt that the threats would be made good. There was an iron fist in that velvet glove. He had cast in his lot with the Government, and there was no way out except by death.

Disturbed, he turned on his radio to a symphony orchestra and sat, trying to let the music calm him.

Suddenly the program was broken into: "We interrupt this concert to bring you an important news bulletin. President Benjamin Morrison was shot by an assassin at 5 p. m. today while he was leaving the Administration Building after an important conference concerning Oriental affairs. The murderer was slain by a presidential guard while attempting to escape.

The President died within minutes after he had received the fatal wound. Vice President Clinton Allbright has called an emergency cabinet meeting to discuss the steps which should be taken to keep the government running smoothly."

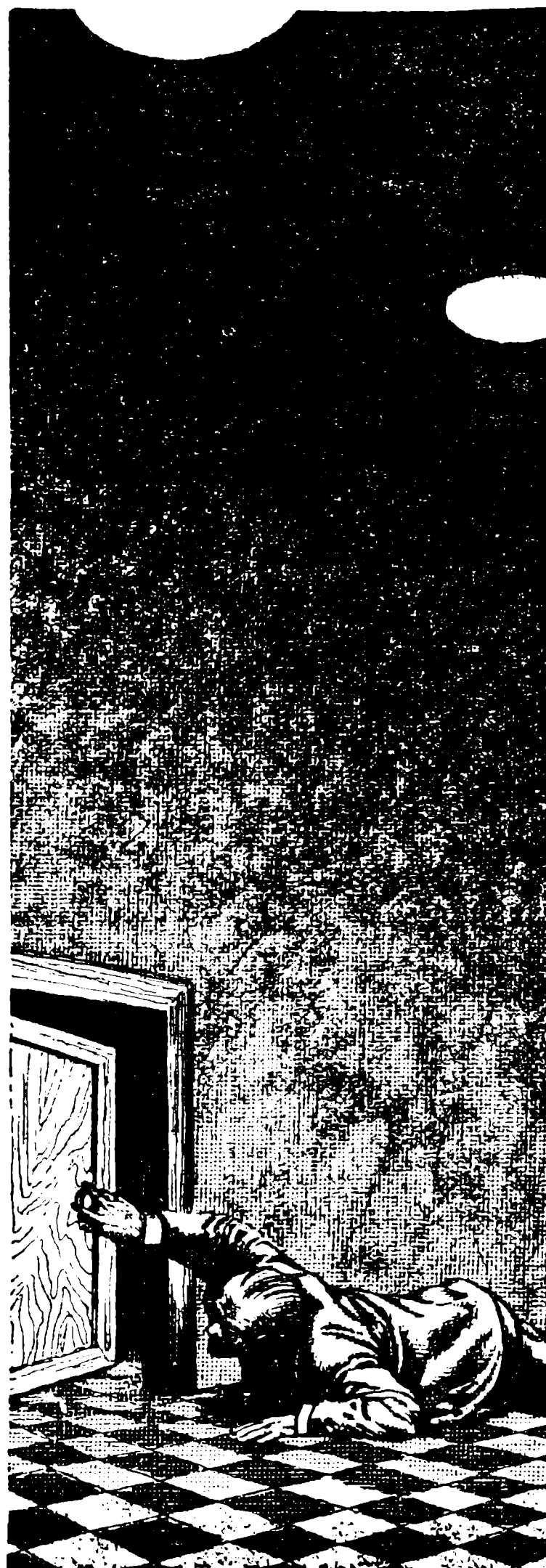
The music continued. But Logan was not paying it much attention.

VI

THE NEXT morning Logan did not even make the pretence of going to his office in the Administration Building and overseeing the duties that pertained to his sinecure. He bought a newspaper and read all the accounts of Morrison's death thoroughly.

The hand of the Chief was behind it, he decided, when he had finished the newspaper stories. Even before that conference the day previous, the Chief had decided that Morrison had to die. The reason was not far to seek.

Allbright, the new Vice President, was known to agree with Morrison on domestic issues, but to hold a more conservative view of foreign affairs. With Morrison out of the way, the Orientals would feel that Allbright might accede to their demands; but, realizing that the transfer of administrative power would mean a delay, they would withdraw their ultimatum temporarily. That might give the Chief the time he needed to pre-



pare for a war; if it did not, it would at least provide the Administration with a legitimate motive for changing its policy with regard to the Orient. The people would not be surprised if Allbright, acting apparently on his own initiative, made certain concessions to the Orient. The worst that could happen would be that he would become unpopular enough to be impossible of re-election.

Logan realized suddenly that the Chief must have selected Allbright for Vice President with just such an idea in mind. He recalled that the Chief had advanced him as the South's favorite-son candidate, and no discussion of his views had been made. But the Chief, looking ahead, must have seen that it might be necessary to reverse foreign policy—and have chosen just the man who could do it.

The shocking expendability which Morrison had proved to have alarmed Logan. The Chief had held Morrison in the highest esteem, had considered him as his successor equally with Logan himself.

Logan himself. What about Logan and his relations to the government? Was he to be chopped off as Morrison had been, with little or no compunction, sometime?

Profoundly disturbed, Logan lit a cigarette and looked over the

newspaper stories again. There was a picture of Allbright. So far as Logan knew, he was not a member of the Government. This was, as the Chief had said, a time of crisis; and Logan was not sure whether, in a time of crisis, it was wise to depend on indirect pressures to achieve results. What would be Allbright's reaction to his discovery that Morrison had been engaged in secret communications and agreements with other powers? There might be a public reaction against anything that Morrison stood for—even to the extent that it would be difficult for the Government to control the nation.

And his mind kept coming back to himself and his own chances for survival. He was not in an important position; his removal would not advance the policies of the Government by very much. But if it could do so in any way, he realized now that the Chief would not even hesitate in giving the order. He might be struck by an automobile, or perhaps shot as Morrison was. He might be given some form of food poisoning.

There was another picture in the newspaper, that of the young guardian who had shot down the attacker. His name was Fred Hansen, and the face seemed familiar to Logan. Wasn't there a—

Of course. Fred Hansen was the young man who had put him through the examination when he

first joined the Government. He had not seen him for the almost a year that he had been a member, and he had not known that Hansen belonged to the Presidential guard.

On the impulse, Logan rose, determined to visit the younger man and talk with him about what was in his mind.

AS HE REACHED for his coat, he stopped. Hansen's loyalty to the Chief was under no question, or he would not have been in charge of the examination; he might reveal his doubts to the younger man and hasten his own death.

Maybe Friedlander—

He felt that he had to talk with someone, and Friedlander had been so genial toward him that he thought maybe the Economic Aid director would help him. He picked up the phone and dialed his office. After identifying himself to Friedlander's secretary, Logan heard his friend's voice.

"Hello, Arthur," Logan said.

"Oh, yes," Friedlander said. "Why aren't you down here, Henry?"

"I just didn't feel like coming today," Logan replied. "Morrison's death shocked me deeply."

"Oh, yes," Friedlander said. "But one must carry on. After all, we have a fine new leader now, and I'm sure President Allbright

will be a particularly brilliant guide in foreign affairs."

Was Friedlander serious? Logan looked at the telephone in amazement.

"Are you there, Henry?"

"Why, yes," Logan said falteringly.

"I'm sure, after you think it over," Friedlander said, "you'll agree that it was all for the best."

"Well—"

"Was there anything else you wanted, Henry? I'm very busy."

"No, thanks, Arthur." Logan hung up the phone as if in a dream. Friedlander sounded like another man; he could scarcely believe his ears.

No, he could not talk with Friedlander. He could see that now.

Suddenly he threw the newspaper to the floor, shrugged on his coat, and left the apartment. He was determined to see Fred Hansen.

Hansen greeted him with a heart-warming smile. "Come on in, Professor! What can I do for you?"

Logan took a deep breath and began, "I'd like to learn more about President Morrison's death."

"I'd rather not talk about it."

Logan did not know what to say to that. He stood in the doorway, hat in hand, silently.

Hansen seemed as nervous as

he. Finally he said, "Come in anyway."

He took Logan's hat and coat and led the older man over to a chair, where he sat. Hansen remained standing and offered the professor a cigarette.

Logan asked, just to make sure, "You're a member of the Government?"

"Yes," Hansen replied.

Good Lord, Logan thought. He didn't know how far to trust Hansen, and Hansen didn't know how far to trust him. Nobody would make any headway in this conversation unless he decided to be frank, and be damned to the consequences.

"Hansen," the professor said. "I'm not satisfied with things." And he began talking. He talked about the Chief's emotional outburst of a few days before, about his suspicions as to the reasons behind Morrison's assassination. He put his cards on the table frankly.

HANSEN listened with intense interest. When Logan had finished, he asked, "Are you telling me the truth, Professor?"

"Of course," Logan snapped, annoyed by the question.

"Good," Hansen said. "Then I'll level with you. You've got half of the key that puts the Chief behind Morrison's death—the motivation. But I've got the other half."

"You don't mean the Chief ordered you to shoot—"

"Nothing so crude as that. But we did have orders to shoot anyone who made any attempt on Morrison's life."

"Who gave them?"

Hansen licked his lips. "Morrison himself."

Logan almost rose out of his chair. "You mean—"

"A perfect circle. The assassin can't put the finger on the Chief because he's dead at Morrison's orders. The President can't do it either, because he's dead too. The two men in the whole plot who were in on the Chief's secret instructions killed themselves off. With me in the middle, because I did the dirty work."

The young man paced the floor angrily, Logan watching him absorbed. Hansen continued, "Have you ever been just a pawn, Professor? Have you ever known that people were using you for their own purposes and didn't care a damn about you? That's the way I feel now, and it isn't pleasant, believe me."

"I know," Logan replied. "Morrison's murder was so casual that it made me realize I'm not safe myself. Morrison himself was only a pawn."

Hansen sat down and began to talk again. "I'm one of the youngest men in the Government. I was a political science major in college,

and all my profs said I was the most brilliant student they'd ever had. I had straight A's in everything, and I was a football-player, too. Anyhow, I got elected student-body president. And I ran things pretty well to suit myself. I knew what was best for everybody. I guess the Chief heard about me somehow, because he picked me up as soon as I graduated and I joined the Government. That was five years ago. When I first got into it, I loved every minute of it. And there was the hope that some day I might lead it myself. The Chief told me that I had the right combination of qualities to run something like this, and that if I were only older he'd make me his successor."

Logan squirmed uncomfortably in his chair.

THE YOUNGER man continued, "But I'm mad, now. It isn't just the Morrison thing, though right now I'm so sore about that, that I'm talking to you—which is very foolish. I've been cooling off for a couple of years now. I wasn't quite so sure that I could run things better than anybody else; I wasn't quite so sure that I knew what was best for everybody. I got a little more tolerant of people who weren't quite as bright as I was. I guess what happened was that I grew up."

Logan wondered with a shock if that was what had happened to

him—suddenly, at the age of fifty, he had grown up. Good Lord! He shook his head dolefully and was about to speak, but Hansen was talking again.

"Here's where I really stick my neck out," he said. "I've got something to tell you. And I hope nothing goes wrong, because if it does, a lot of damage will be done." He leaned forward and his voice became confidential. "I'm fed up, and I'm not the only one; there are about a hundred of us. We've been holding secret meetings for about a year now. We're very careful, of course, and generally we hold a series of meetings of ten or twenty people each rather than one big meeting with us all together. Most of us are young men. I suppose we'd have revolted before now, only we don't know how to do it. I'm the only one who's ever been in the Center, where the Chief's quarters are, and that was only once, a long time ago. Most of the rest didn't even know it existed until we told them. And, too, we've been thinking that the Chief can't last forever, and maybe things will go to pieces when he dies."

"The Chief may live to be a hundred," Logan said. "It's something about his glands. And he's making plans to keep things going after his death. I agree with you; I think things will go to pieces when he dies. But not for a long

time, and then only after a terrible upset, if he has time to groom a successor."

"It would be better to break it off clean," Hansen said.

The two men looked into each others' eyes, and both knew that the other had the same thought. The Chief must die and die now. Twenty years later would be too late. The Government had outlived its usefulness—had, in fact, become dangerous—and it had to be ended now. There was only one way to end it.

Hansen said, "Would you like to meet with some of my fellow malcontents?"

"Yes, I would."

The young man stood up. "Come along, then. And God help you if you're a spy."

VII

HENRY LOGAN felt strange, now that he was actually going on his mission. The secret meetings, the hours of target-practice, all the other activities of the past six months that had been so real and hopeful—they seemed dreamlike, now that he was walking up the steps of the Administration Building, his revolver under his armpit, and knives strapped to his arm and leg.

He was recognizing how pitiful-

ly optimistic and childish their plan had seemed. He was to go to Friedlander's office, because it was the passageway from there that was most familiar to him. He was to disarm Friedlander by engaging in conversation about some appointment with the Chief. Then he was to go down the corridors, past the Personal Guardians, and insinuate himself into the Chief's presence. There, at the best opportunity, he would kill him. What would happen then? He wasn't to be concerned about that.

The plan might work; it just might—but Logan was feeling no optimism. The weight of the .38 under his armpit, the tension of the straps on his arm and leg made him self-conscious. He was sure that the people who glanced at him in passing could see some, at least, of the arsenal he carried on him. The gun, particularly, made a noticeable bulge at his shoulder; he was certain that he would be stopped by the Administration Building police for carrying concealed weapons.

But nothing happened as he walked up to Friedlander's office and opened the door. Friedlander's secretary smiled in recognition and said, "Go right in, Professor Logan."

Logan entered the office and said, "Hello Arthur."

Friedlander looked up at him,

smiling affably. "Hello, Henry; sit down."

"How are things going in the Economic Aid department?"

"Oh, well enough. You haven't been around much for the past few months; I hardly ever see you."

"I've been working on a book." It was the excuse that he and Fred Hansen had agreed on.

"Oh? What about?"

"The history of the decline of monarchy."

"Sounds interesting. You didn't just drop in for a chat, though, did you?"

"No, I didn't." Logan crossed his legs. This was the hard part. "The Chief wanted me to come down and see him."

"Oh, he did?"

Logan didn't like Friedlander's tone. He tried to think of what he might have said to betray himself, but he couldn't. After a pause—too long a pause, he was afraid—he replied, "Why, yes."

"That's interesting, Henry. For two months we've all had orders not to admit you unescorted into the Center. The Chief has had his doubts about you. I thought he was wrong. But *what's that under your coat?*"

FRIEDLANDER was standing, now, leaning forward on the desk. The affability of his countenance was gone, and in its place

there was an intense hatred that shocked Logan perhaps more than Friedlander's words.

"You fool!" Friedlander was saying. "It's our bread and butter; do you want to grade freshman papers the rest of your life?"

He came around the desk and charged toward Logan, who now half-rose and pulled out his gun.

It went off.

The sound was a thunderclap in the little office. Silence followed it. Logan stood, stupefied, the smoking gun in his hand, watching Friedlander, shot through the head, fall sprawling on the carpet.

And then he turned and ran, out through the office, past the startled secretary, and into the hallway. Her scream followed him. He bolted past throngs of people. Soon he heard, behind him, the noises of pursuit. He could hear the heavy treads of booted Administration Building police beating toward him.

He looked around him for a place to hide. Suddenly he realized he still had the gun in his hand and put it back in the holster; he felt lighter and freer.

There was no place to go, and so he ran on. He came to a flight of stairs and scrambled up them, panting heavily. At the top he dashed down the left-hand corridor, hoping that the police would choose the right. He saw a men's room and paused, his hand on the

doorknob. Should he hide here? No, they would search it and there would be no escape. He ran on. There was what seemed to be a cross-corridor up ahead, and he made for it, dodging into it as he heard the boots thumping up the stairs behind him. He was perspiring now.

If he'd only kept his head, he could have ducked right into the pathway to the Center from Friedlander's office. But he'd panicked and run. So now—

There was another cross-corridor; he could hear the sounds of pursuit getting louder behind him, and he dodged down this side path. He was getting a pain in his side; he was not used to exercise. He looked wildly around him, hoping that he would recognize one of the myriad entrances to the Center. He was lost, in an area of the building unfamiliar to him, and he had made so many turnings he was not sure of his directions. But if he could find a section of the marble wall that showed the faintest depth in the cracks that set it off, he might be able to—

And there it was, like the answer to a prayer.

He touched it in the proper pattern, and it swung open. Quickly he ducked in, shut the panel, and bolted it from the inside.

EPILOGUE

Logan's eyes burned as he stared

at that rifle-barrel, gleaming darkly at the other end of the corridor, thrust out from behind the protection of the thick concrete walls.

A voice said, "Throw your gun down here; put it on the floor and slide it."

Logan stooped down and put the gun on the floor. He pushed it a few inches as he tried to think, then gave it a shove and watched it skitter down the corridor and come to a thumping stop at the other end.

"All right. Come on down here. And keep your hands up."

Logan raised his hands as he had seen people do in the movies and went down to the aperture in the corridor wall. There were five of the Chief's Personal Guardians there with guns trained on him. One of them laid his gun down and searched Logan thoroughly. He took off Logan's empty shoulder-holster and quickly found and removed the knives strapped to the professor's arm and leg.

Well, this was it. All the high hopes of Fred Hansen and his friends trickled out in this. Logan's shoulders sagged. He was tired.

"You can put your hands down," the man who had searched him said, "but don't make any sudden moves."

Logan put his hands down. His dejection was thorough.

"Come on," he was ordered.

The men fell into place around

him and conducted him through the next passageway to the quarters of the Chief's Personal Guardians.

"May I have a cigarette?" he asked.

"No," he was told.

They bound his arms, sat him down in a plain wooden chair, and fixed up a light so that it shone in his face. They kept him covered from behind the light, and one of them began to question him.

"Whose idea was this?"

"Mine."

"You're lying. Whose idea was it?"

"Mine."

The man struck him. "Come on. You weren't in this alone."

"Yes, I was."

The man hit him so hard that Logan fell down and had to be picked up and put back in the chair.

"Was this your own idea?"

Logan nodded, weakly.

"All right, then; it was your own idea. That means you were the ringleader. That means you are fully responsible for what you did. That means you have to take all the punishment yourself. If you were somebody's tool, if somebody was just using you, was filling you full of lies, that would be a different story. We'd feel sorry for you;

we'd punish him and go easy on you. See what I mean?"

Logan nodded again.

"All right, then. Come on. Whose idea was this?"

"Mine."

The man hit him. "You're lying," he said.

Logan didn't reply.

The man stood, looking down at him. "Who was in it with you?"

"Nobody."

The man hit him again. "That's a lie."

Logan sucked on his lower lip. It was cut.

The man lit a cigarette and blew smoke in Logan's face. "Who was in it with you?"

"Nobody."

"Why cover up for them? They'd tell on you if they got a chance."

Logan didn't say anything.

The man said, "Come on."

Logan was silent.

THE MAN hit him. Logan toppled over and his glasses fell off. One of the lenses broke in the fall.

They picked him up and set him back on the chair. Logan felt like crying.

"Who was in it with you?"

"Nobody." Logan's lips formed the words, but he didn't say it loud enough for anyone to hear it.

The man drove his fist hard into Logan's stomach. The chair

collapsed with a clatter and the professor fell, sprawling and gasping for breath. The tears came to his eyes. He was afraid that he would be sick, but he wasn't.

The man kicked him in the face, just hard enough to bruise his cheek. "Come on," he said. "Who was in it with you?"

Logan shook his head.

The man crouched down and blew smoke into Logan's face. "Come on."

Logan shook his head.

The man half-straightened. "Want a cigarette?"

Logan nodded.

"I'll give you one if you'll tell me who was in it with you."

"No." Logan breathed the word faintly.

The man stood up and nudged the side of Logan's nose with his boot. "I could smear that all over your face as easy as this," snapping his fingers.

Logan said nothing.

Suddenly there was a new voice. "Any luck, gentlemen?" It was the Chief. Logan tried to sit up, but the man kicked him back down.

The Chief came over where Logan could see him; in the strong light and deep shadows of the room the Chief's face looked like a frog's.

"Such a distinguished guest," the Chief said sadly. "We mustn't be inhospitable. After all, he wanted to see me so much that he killed

a man to get to me. We should be honored." He turned to the man who had been questioning Logan. "I'd like to talk with him myself; you can have him later."

"Do you think it's safe?"

"Oh, of course. But you can come along if you like. Two of you carry him into my quarters." Logan was picked up like a sack of potatoes. "Come along, Professor," the Chief said gaily.

"Now then, Professor," he said, standing over him without gloating, after the Guardians had deposited him in a chair and left. "How did you come to get mixed up in all this?" Logan did not feel like replying, but fortunately the Chief went on without waiting for an answer. "I can't understand it. Unless you wanted to assassinate me so that you could become Chief in my place. But after that scene you put on down here one day I can hardly think that."

Logan shook his head.

THE CHIEF smiled. "What's the matter, then? Haven't we treated you well enough?"

"Why—"

"We brought you out of the dead little college existence you were in and made you one of the most powerful men in the nation. We gave you everything you wanted. You had all the books you wanted for yourself; you had access to the National Library at all times, and even special privileges

there. That was all you ever asked for, but if you'd wanted more you could have had it. What more could you have wanted? Freedom to disagree? You had even that; I have been most careful about that."

Logan was stung into answering. "I guess what I wanted was freedom from fear."

"Fear?" The Chief's eyes were shocked.

"Yes. I was afraid that you might have me removed the same way you removed Morrison."

"Why, I had nothing to do—"

Logan interrupted him and told him why he thought the Chief was in back of Morrison's assassination.

When he had finished, the Chief looked a little shaken. Logan was surprised that what he had said would disturb the older man.

The Chief stood silent for a moment, thinking. Then he said, "So you did have accomplices." He did not say it very heartily, however.

Logan asked, "Why do you say that?"

"You couldn't have found out these details about what the presidential guardians were instructed, unless you had a friend in the guardians. And that means, I think, Fred Hansen."

Logan sat quietly, trying not to let emotion show on his face.

The Chief was watching him narrowly. "Hansen is another

strange case. If he had been older, I would have taken him to be my successor; I gave him every benefit he could desire. And yet he turned against me, just as you did. Have you no patriotism?"

Logan blinked. The question had thrown him off-balance. "Patriotism? I don't see how—"

"Oh, you fool!" The Chief's face flushed. "You knew that the affairs of the nation were in a perilous state; you knew that at any moment we might be plunged into a disastrous war with the Orient. You knew that it was my hand that was guiding us through this dreadful situation. And you would kill me and blunge the country into chaos."

Logan blinked again. The sudden revelation of the egotism of the man was amazing. He said, "I don't think it would have plunged the country into chaos."

"You don't think that poor fish Allbright could keep us out of war all by himself, do you?"

"I don't know; but he ought to have the chance."

It was the Chief's turn to blink. "Why?"

"**B**ECAUSE he ought to have a free hand; you can't tell whether he can do something or not until he tries."

"That's a very risky philosophy. And I'm surprised at hearing it from you, Professor. What if we find out too late that he can't?"

"Then we find out. The point is, if Allbright's so poor as all that, who's responsible for making him President in the first place? You are. You got us into the whole mess; now you think you're the only one to get us out of it. But that's the way you've run the country for forty years—getting us into a hole and then making us be grateful to you for getting us back out of it and then into a deeper one."

Logan's voice was rising. "Maybe the people can't run their own government, but I'm not so sure now. Maybe if they'd been let alone they'd have made a better man than Allbright president."

"Maybe, maybe, maybe!" the Chief shouted back. "They're clay for me to mold! Look how I've had them eating out of my hand for forty years! If they had so much sense as that, would they have stood for it? Look how I can make them do what I want! They vote for a family man! That's how they pick their leaders!"

Logan struggled with his bound hands and swayed to his feet. "That's not fair! That's not true!"

"Yes, it is! It is!" The Chief's face was getting redder and redder as he could scarcely control his rage.

Logan screamed back at him, "Tyrant! Tyrant! How do you know so much? Why are you indispensable? Why are you any better?"

In an uncontrollable fury, the Chief leaped at Logan and grappled with him, trying to strangle him. He buried his hands in Logan's neck. Logan fell back into the chair, straining to free his bound hands. Both men were kicking out freely with their feet, trying to hurt the other.

After a violent kick, Logan slid off the chair and fell heavily to the floor. The Chief relaxed his grip for a moment, and Logan rolled away from him. "Coward!" the professor yelled. "Let me get my hands loose!" He tried to scramble to his feet, but the Chief, panting heavily, was up before him and kicked him back down again. The Chief began to kick him in the stomach, so Logan rolled over, trying to get away. Then the Chief kicked him in the back, in the ribs, anyplace he could.

Straining at the ropes was all that Logan could do. He was straining with all his might and then relaxing his hands, trying to make the rope loose enough that he could slip his hands through it. Finally he managed to slip one hand loose, and the rope fell loose on the other one.

He charged for the Chief, knocking him off-balance and to the floor. The Chief fell with a heavy thud. Logan jumped to his feet, breathing heavily. He was so tired that he could hardly stand. He caught a couple of deep

breaths, so exhausted that he needed them more than he needed to follow up his advantage. His wrists were burning and the skin was rubbed raw.

Just then one of the Guardians rushed in, covering Logan with his gun.

TIREDLY, resignedly, Logan raised his hands to shoulder-height. He looked at the Guardian negligently, expecting to be shot and not much caring. But then he noticed that the Guardian was not looking at him so much as at the Chief. Logan followed his gaze. The Chief was still lying on the floor, quietly, making no effort to get up. Logan's heart seemed to stop. Was he—No, he was breathing heavily and peacefully, as if he were asleep. He was just knocked out.

There were heavy footsteps, and another Guardian poked his head into the room. "Good Lord!" he said. "You keep him covered; I'll get Dr. Franz."

A few hours before, the discovery that there was a physician to the Chief, perhaps permanently-resident in the Center, would have excited Logan. Now it didn't make any difference. He was tired and it was all over with him, and he wished somebody would shoot him and put an end to it. He had failed. He was not even particularly interested in the cause of his

failure; he just wanted desperately to sit down, but he was afraid to ask the Guardian, who kept the gun pointed at him.

The Guardian who had kicked Logan came in and stood in a corner of the room, strangely subdued. He, too, kept his eyes fixed on the body of the Chief, which lay motionless except for the deep and regular breathing. He shot a glance at Logan but said nothing.

The second Guardian returned with a short, heavily moustached man, clad in dirty old brown trousers and a well-worn T-shirt. "All right," he snapped at Logan, "what happened?"

Logan tried to tell as little as he could, but the doctor kept snapping questions at him and forcing him to go into as many details of the fight as he could remember. Finally, feeling that he had stood about enough, Logan asked, "May I sit down?"

"All right," the doctor nodded. The professor sat gratefully.

"After you got the rope off your wrists, what happened?"

"I knocked him down."

"How?"

"I jumped at his legs. He wasn't expecting me, so I knocked his legs out from under him, and he went down."

"Then what?"

"That's all."

"What do you mean?"

"I suppose I'd have tried to figure out some way of killing him. But just then he"—pointing at the Guardian with the gun—"came in and stopped me."

"You didn't do anything to him after he fell?"

"No." Logan shook his head.

"Didn't kick him or hit him or anything?"

"No."

The doctor knelt and looked closely at the Chief, running his fingers over his head and raising one of his eyelids to look at his eye. "Here," he said, looking at the two Guardians who were standing by, watching. "Help me get him in on the bed." The third Guardian kept the rifle pointed unwaveringly at Logan as the doctor and the other two Guardians picked up the Chief's body, gently and tenderly, and carried him gingerly into the next room. The door was closed behind them. Logan was left outside, staring at the gun pointed at him.

"May I have a cigarette?" he asked. "They're in my shirt pocket. I don't have any weapons."

THE GUARDIAN threw him a cigarette and a package of matches. Logan got the cigarette going and gave the matches back to the Guardian. The minutes dragged on. Logan found an ash-tray and sat, puffing smoke and flicking ashes into it. Finally he

finished the cigarette down to the last inch and stubbed it out. By now he was thirsty, but he thought a drink would be refused him so he did not bother to ask. From the next room came mutterings and scufflyings. Logan sat and waited, trying to make himself as comfortable as he could.

Then Dr. Franz came out of the room and stood looking at Logan. He ran his fingers through his untidy hair. "Well," he said, "damn you, you've done it; you're getting what you wanted."

"Is he dead?" Logan asked, blinking stupidly.

"No, but I'll bet he will be this time tomorrow. He's an old man; he couldn't take that kind of roughhouse. And now everything'll go to hell," he added morosely, scuffing his foot absently against a chair leg.

"This wasn't a bad deal," the doctor said. "Now I'll have to go back to treating Junior's mumps and Mama's imagination. That's the trouble with guys like you," he snapped, suddenly fixing Logan in an angry glare. "You don't think about other people. You've got your own little private grievance, and you don't realize that you mess up the lives of a lot of other people. Me, for instance, and everybody else in the Government. What'll they do?"

"Some of 'em have government jobs, and they'll keep 'em until the new Administration runs 'em

out of office. And then they'll go back to the sticks and rot there, doing anything they can do to scrape a living together. And thinking about what might have been. But a lot of 'em didn't have any government jobs. They just kind of disappeared. Now, suddenly, they're going to have to reappear. What explanation'll they give? And what'll they do? A lot of 'em gave up the chance for further training to join the Government."

He waved a hand at the Guardian with the gun. "What'll this guy do? You name it. Bank-teller, grocery-clerk, anything. One of the fine minds in the country, snapped up by the Government before he had a chance to finish his education. And now what? Right back into the crowd, worse off than before. Two years in his past he can't explain. No money; no train-

ing for anything. That's the trouble with you loonies, you never think of anybody else." He turned away, moodily.

Logan sat, staring. He could not believe that he had been so grossly and completely misunderstood. He was on the point of trying to defend himself, but gave it up. A man so massively, so monumentally prejudiced— It was more than a human being could do to convert him. At best he should crush him with a sharp retort, of the kind he had had on his lips constantly as a teacher. But he couldn't think of anything. He started to fish for his cigarettes in his shirt pocket, then suddenly realized that the Guardian—

And the last sound Henry Logan heard in this world was the report of the Guardian's rifle.

