

WORLD WAR: UPSETTING THE BALANCE

Harry Turtledove



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**WORLDWAR:
UPSETTING
THE
BALANCE**

Harry Turtledove

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(Characters with names in CAPS are historical, others fictional)

HUMANS

ANIELEWICZ, MORDECHAI	<i>Jewish partisan, eastern Poland</i>
Archie	<i>Military Hospital Orderly, Chicago</i>
Auerbach, Rance	<i>Captain, U.S. Cavalry, Syracuse, Kansas</i>
BEAVERBROOK, LORD	<i>British Minister of Supply</i>
Berkowitz, Benjamin	<i>Captain, U.S. Army; psychiatrist, Hot Springs, Arkansas</i>
Beulah	<i>Receptionist, Hanford, Washington</i>
BLAIR, ERIC	<i>BBC newsreader and author, London</i>
Calhoun, Jake	<i>Cavalry trooper, U.S. Army</i>
CHILL, KURT	<i>Wehrmacht Lieutenant General, Pskov, USSR</i>
Chung, Horace	<i>Laundryman, Lewiston, Idaho</i>
Daniels, Peter (“Mutt”)	<i>Lieutenant, U.S. Army, Chicago</i>
DEIBNER, KURT	<i>Nuclear physicist, Tübingen, Germany</i>
Doc	<i>Physician, Chicago</i>
Donnelly	<i>Bomb disposal expert, U. S. Army Chicago</i>
Dölger	<i>Wehrmacht captain, Pskov, USSR</i>
Eddie	<i>Whore, Lewiston, Idaho</i>
EINSTEIN, ALBERT	<i>Physicist, Couch, Missouri</i>
EISENHOWER, DWIGHT	<i>U.S. Army General, Couch, Missouri</i>
Embry, Ken	<i>RAF pilot, grounded in Pskov, USSR</i>
Eschenbach, Wolfgang	<i>Panzer loader, Rouffach, Alsace</i>
FERMI, ENRICO	<i>Nuclear physicist, Denver, Colorado</i>
Fleishman, Bertha	<i>Jew in Lodz, Poland</i>
Fred	<i>RAF Flight Sergeant, Watnall England</i>
Friedrich	<i>Partisan, Eastern Poland</i>
George	<i>Local resident, Hanford Washington</i>
GERMAN, ALEKSANDR	<i>Partisan Brigadier, Pskoc, USSR</i>
GODDARD, ROBERT	<i>Rocket expert, Couch, Missouri</i>
Goldfarb, David	<i>RAF radarman, Bruntingthorpe, England</i>
Gorbunova, Ludmila	<i>RAF pilot</i>
Grillparzer, Gunther	<i>Panzer gunner near Breslau Germany</i>
GROVES, LESLIE	<i>Brigadier General, U.S. Army, Denver, Colorado</i>
Gruver, Solomon	<i>Jewish fireman in Lodz, Poland</i>
Gus	<i>Private, U.S. Army, Chicago</i>
Hagerman, Max	<i>Cavalry trooper, U.S. Army</i>
HALIFAX, LORD	<i>British ambassador to the United States</i>
Henry	<i>RAF man, Nottingham England</i>
Henry, Marjorie	<i>Physician, Hanford Idaho</i>
Hexham	<i>Colonel, U.S. Army, Denver Colorado</i>
Hines, Rachel	<i>Escapee from Lakin, Kansas</i>
Hipple, Fred	<i>RAF Group Captain, Bruntingthorpe, England</i>
Ho Ma	<i>Midwife, refugee camp west of Shanghai</i>

Horton, Leo	<i>RAF Radarman, Bruntingthorpe, England</i>
Hou-Yi	<i>Dung-beetle show man, Peking</i>
Howard	<i>Cavalry trooper, eastern Colorado</i>
Hsia Shou-Tao	<i>People's Liberation Army officer, China</i>
HULL, CORDELL	<i>U.S. Secretary of State</i>
Jacobi, Nathan	<i>BBC newsreader, London</i>
Jacobs	<i>Private, U.S. Army, Chicago</i>
"Jacques"	<i>French farmer near Ambialet</i>
Jäger, Heinrich	<i>Panzer colonel, Rouffach, Alsace</i>
Jerzy	<i>Partisan, eastern Poland</i>
Jimmy	<i>Stretcher-bearer, Chicago</i>
Johannes	<i>Panzer driver near Breslau, Germany</i>
Jones, Jerome	<i>RAF radarman in Pskov, USSR</i>
Karpov, Feofan	<i>RAF colonel south of Moscow</i>
Kennan, Maurice	<i>RAF Flight Lieutenant, Bruntingthorpe, England</i>
Kipnis, Jakub	<i>Interpreter, Lizard POW camp in Poland</i>
Larssen, Jens	<i>Nuclear physicist with the Metallurgical Laboratory</i>
Lidov, Boris	<i>Colonel, NKVD</i>
Liu Han	<i>Peasant woman in refugee camp south of Shanghai</i>
Magruder, Bill	<i>Lieutenant, U.S. Cavalry, Syracuse, Kansas</i>
Mather, Donald	<i>Captain, Special Air Service, Dover, England</i>
Mavrogordato, Panagiotis	<i>Captain of tramp freighter Naxos</i>
Maxwell	<i>Cavalry trooper, eastern Colorado</i>
Meinecke, Klaus	<i>Panzer gunner, Rouffach, Alsace</i>
MOLOTOV, VYACHESLAV	<i>Foreign commissar, of the USSR</i>
Muldoon, Herman	<i>First sergeant, U.S. Army Chicago</i>
MUSSOLINI, BENITO	<i>Italian Fascist leader, Couch, Missouri</i>
NIEH HO-T'ING	<i>People's Liberation Army officer, China</i>
Nigel	<i>RAF corporal, Watnall, England</i>
Nordenskold, Morton	<i>Colonel, U.S. Army, Lamar, Colorado</i>
Norma	<i>BBC worker, London</i>
Nussboym, David	<i>Jew in Lodz, Poland</i>
O'Neill, Red	<i>Cavalry trooper, U.S. Army</i>
Okamoto	<i>Major, Japanese Army</i>
Oscar	<i>Sergeant, U.S. Army, Denver, Colorado</i>
Pete	<i>U.S. Army sentry, Denver, Colorado</i>
Pirogova, Tatiana	<i>Red Army sniper, Pskov, USSR</i>
Porlock	<i>Supply officer, Minneapolis</i>
RIBBENTROP, JOACHIM VON	<i>German Foreign Minister</i>
Roundbush, Basil	<i>RAF Flight Officer, Bruntingthorpe, England</i>
Russie, Moishe	<i>Jewish refugee and broadcaster, London</i>
Russie, Reuven	<i>Son of Moishe and Rivka Russie</i>
Russie, Rivka	<i>Moishe Russie's wife</i>
Schultz, Georg	<i>German soldier working as RAF mechanic</i>
Sholudenko, Nikifor	<i>NKVD officer</i>
Silberman, Pinchas	<i>Jew in Lodz, Poland</i>
SKORZENY, OTTO	<i>SS Standartenführer</i>
Smithers	<i>British Army major</i>
Smitty	<i>Cavalry trooper, eastern Colorado</i>

STALIN, IOSEF	<i>General Secretary, Communist Party of the USSR</i>
Stanegate, Fred	<i>British soldier</i>
Stansfield, Roger	<i>Royal Naval Commander; captain HMS Seanympth</i>
Stella	<i>Barmaid, Bruntingthorpe, England</i>
Summers, Penny	<i>Escapee from Lakin, Kansas</i>
Summers, Wendell	<i>Escapee from Lakin, Kansas; Penny's father</i>
Szabo, Bela ("Dracula")	<i>Private, U.S. Army, Chicago</i>
SZILARD, LEO	<i>Nuclear physicist, Denver, Colorado</i>
Szymanski, Stan	<i>Captain, U.S. Army, Chicago</i>
Terence	<i>Storekeeper, Couch Missouri</i>
Tompkins	<i>Major, U.S. Army, Hot Springs, Arkansas</i>
VASILIEV, NIKOLAI	<i>Partisan brigadier, Pskov, USSR</i>
Wiggs, Ralph	<i>RAF meteorologist, Bruntingthorpe, England</i>
Yeager, Barbara	<i>Sam Yeager's wife</i>
Yeager, Jonathan	<i>Son of Sam and Barbara Yeager</i>
Yeager, Sam	<i>Sergeant, U.S. Army, Denver, Colorado</i>
"Yetta"	<i>Telephone operator, Lodz, Poland</i>
York, Hank	<i>Radioman, U.S. Army, Chicago</i>

THE RACE

Atvar	<i>Fleetlord, conquest fleet of the Race</i>
Diffal	<i>Security officer</i>
Ekretkan	<i>Casualty, St. Alban's, England</i>
Elifrim	<i>Airbase commander, southern France</i>
Hisslef	<i>Base commandant, Siberia</i>
Hossad	<i>Killercraft pilot</i>
Innoss	<i>Airbase armorer, southern France</i>
Jisrin	<i>Killrcraft pilot</i>
Kirel	<i>Shiplord, 127th Emperor Hetto</i>
Msseff	<i>Reasercher in China</i>
Nejas	<i>Landcruiser commander, Alsace</i>
Nivvek	<i>Killercraft pilot</i>
Pshing	<i>Adjutant to Atvar</i>
Ristin	<i>Prisoner of war, Denver , Colorado</i>
Rokois	<i>Assistant to Pshing</i>
Skoob	<i>Landcruiser gunner, Alsace</i>
Sserep	<i>Killercraft pilot</i>
Straha	<i>Shiplord, 206th Emperor Yower</i>
Teerts	<i>Flight leader, prisoner of war, Tokyo</i>
Tessrek	<i>Researcher in human psychology</i>
Ttomalss	<i>Researcher in human psychology</i>
Ullhass	<i>Prisoner of war, Denver, Colorado</i>
Ussmak	<i>Landcruiser driver, Alsace</i>
Vesstil	<i>Shuttlecraft pilot for Straha</i>
Wuppah	<i>Smallgroup commander, Chicago</i>

The fleetlord Atvar had convened a great many meetings of his shiplords since the Race's conquest fleet came to Tosev 3. Quite a few of those meetings had been imperfectly happy; the Tosevites were far more numerous and far more technically advanced than the Race had imagined when the conquest fleet set out from Home. But Atvar had never imagined calling a meeting like this.

He used one eye turret to watch his leading officers as they gathered in the great hall of his bannership, the *127th Emperor Hetto*. The other eye turret swiveled down to review the images and documents he would be presenting to those officers.

Kirel, shiplord of the *127th Emperor Hetto* and a staunch ally, stood beside him on the podium. To him, Atvar murmured, "Giving a good odor to what happened in the SSSR won't be easy."

One of Kirel's eye turrets swung toward a hologram of the tall cloud rising from the nuclear explosion that had halted—worse, had vaporized—the Race's drive on Moskva. "Exalted Fleetlord, the odor is anything but good," he said. "We knew the Big Uglies were engaged in nuclear research, yes, but we did not expect any of their little empires and not-empires—especially the SSSR—to develop and deploy a bomb so soon."

"Especially the SSSR," Atvar agreed heavily. The *Soyuz Sovietskikh Sotsialesticheskikh Respublik* sent a frisson of horror through any right-thinking male of the Race. A short span of years before, its people had not only overthrown their emperor but killed him and all his family. Such a crime was literally unimaginable back on Home, where emperors had ruled the Race for a hundred thousand years. Among the Big Uglies, though, impericide seemed stunningly common.

The gas-tight doors to the great hall hissed closed. That meant all the shiplords were here. Atvar knew it, but was still less than eager to begin the meeting. At last, Kirel had to prompt him: "Exalted Fleetlord—"

"Yes, yes," Atvar said with a hissing sigh. He turned on the podium microphones, spoke to the males waiting impatiently in their seats: "Assembled shiplords, you are already aware, I am certain, of the reason for which I have summoned you here today."

He touched a button. Two images sprang into being behind him, the first of a brilliant point of light northeast of the Soviet city of Kaluga captured by an observation satellite, then that ground-level shot of the cloud created by the SSSR's atomic bomb.

The shiplords, no doubt, had already seen the images tens of times. All the same, hisses of dismay and fury rose from every throat. The tailstumps of several males quivered so hard with rage that they could not stay in their seats, but had to stand until their tempers eased.

“Assembled shiplords, we have taken a heavy blow,” Atvar said. “Not only did this explosion take with it many brave males and a large quantity of irreplaceable landcruisers and other combat equipment, it also moved our war against the Big Uglies into a new phase, one whose outcomes are not easily foreseen.”

To the Race, few words could have been more ominous. Careful planning, leaving nothing to chance, was not only inherent in the temperament of most males but inculcated in all from hatchlinghood. The Race had sent a probe to Tosev 3 sixteen hundred years before (only half so many of this planet’s slow revolution around its star), decided it was worth having, and methodically begun to prepare. But for those preparations, little in the Race’s three-world empire had changed in that time.

The Big Uglies, meanwhile, had gone from riding animals and swinging swords to riding jet aircraft, launching short-range missiles, using radio . . . and now to atomic weapons. The Race’s savants would be millennia investigating and explaining how a species could move forward so fast. Neither the Race itself nor its subjects, the Hallessi and the Rabotevs, had ever shown such a pattern. To them, change came in slow, tiny, meticulously considered steps.

Atvar, unfortunately, did not have millennia to investigate the way the Big Uglies worked. Circumstances forced him to act on their time scale, and with too large a measure of their do-it-now, worry-later philosophy. He said, “In this entire sorry episode, I take comfort in but one thing.”

“Permission to speak, Exalted Fleetlord?” a male called from near the front of the hall: Straha, shiplord of the *206th Emperor Yower*, next senior in the fleet after Kirel—and no ally of Atvar’s. To Atvar’s way of thinking, he was so rash and impetuous, he might as well have been a Big Ugly himself.

But at a meeting of this sort, all views needed hearing. “Speak,” Atvar said resignedly.

“Exalted Fleetlord—” Straha used the proper deferential title, but sounded anything but properly deferential. “Exalted Fleetlord, how can any part of this fiasco cause you comfort?”

Some of the shiplords muttered in alarm at the harsh language Straha used; males of the Race, even those of highest rank, were expected to show—and to feel—respect for their superiors at all times. But a disquieting number of officers—and not just those of his faction—seemed to agree with Straha.

Atvar said, “Here is the comfort, Shiplord.” He used Straha’s title, high but not supreme in the conquest fleet, to remind him of his place, then went on, “Analysis shows the plutonium the SSSR used in its weapon to have come from stocks stolen from us in a raid during Tosev 3’s past autumn. The Big Uglies may be able to make a bomb if they get nuclear material, but we have no evidence they can manufacture it on their own.”

“Cold comfort to the thousands of males dead because you didn’t think the Tosevites could do even so much,” Straha jeered.

“Shiplord, you forget yourself,” Kirel said from beside Atvar; sometimes a near-equal could call attention to a breach of decorum a superior might feel he had to ignore.

“By the Emperor, Shiplord, I do not,” Straha shouted back. At the mention of his sovereign, he cast down both eye turrets so he looked at the floor for a moment. So did every other male in the chamber, Atvar included. The murmurs among the shiplords grew; as Kirel had said, Straha’s conduct was most out of place in a staid officers’ meeting.

But Straha himself was anything but staid. “Who, Exalted Fleetlord, led the raid in which we lost this nuclear material?” he demanded.

Atvar’s gut knotted. Now he knew the direction from which Straha would attack, but knowing brought no comfort. He tried to head off the shiplord: “That is not relevant to the matter before us now.”

Many males, probably even most, would have yielded to his authority. Straha, though, refused to be headed off. “It most certainly *is* relevant, Exalted Fleetlord,” he howled. “Wasn’t the chief Big Ugly male the one named Skorzeny?”

With its hisses, the name might almost have belonged to a male of the Race. That, however, was not why it drew a sharp reaction from the assembled shiplords. The male called Skorzeny had given the Race grief ever since the conquest fleet landed on Tosev 3. And—

Straha continued as Atvar had known he would: “Exalted Fleetlord, along with promising us the capture of Moskva at our previous meeting, did you not also promise us the imminent destruction of Skorzeny? Have we achieved either of these goals?”

His sarcasm made the murmurs in the great hall rise to a din. Males shouted angrily at one another. Through the uproar, Atvar answered steadily, “Shiplord, you know we have not. I assure you I find that at least as unfortunate as you do.”

The sardonic reply did nothing to calm the shiplords. It certainly did not calm Straha, who said, “Instead of Moskva captured, we have a major force ruined. Instead of Skorzeny dead, we have the city of Split lost, Croatia more firmly in the Deutsch camp than ever, and Skorzeny boasting of what he did over every frequency on which the Deutsche broadcast. Assembled shiplords, I submit to you that these plans were not adequately developed.”

He couldn’t have been much more provocative if he’d suggested that Atvar was in the Big Uglies pay. Accusing a male of the Race of bad planning was as harsh a condemnation as you could make. Atvar had trouble replying, too, for the plan on which he’d relied in Split had come from the mind of an operative named Drefsab, who, despite being perhaps the best intelligence officer the Race possessed, was—or rather, had been—addicted to the Tosevite herb ginger, which could easily have clouded his judgment.

The fleetlord did say, “Experience on Tosev 3 has been that plans cannot always be as immutable as we conceived them to be back on Home. Any male who does not see this is a fool.”

“Your pardon, Exalted Fleetlord, but you are the one who has failed to adapt to the conditions

pertaining to this world,” Straha said. “I have come to this conclusion reluctantly, I assure you; subordination to properly constituted authority has served the Race well for tens of thousands of years. But the SSSR’s atomic explosion and our ignominious failure at Split, each in its own way, have shown beyond any possible doubt that our conduct of the campaign to conquer Tosev 3 has been dreadfully mishandled.”

“What would you have us do?” Atvar said angrily. “Throw our own atomic weapons about with reckless abandon? For one thing, we do not have that many to throw. For another, we do not know how many bombs the SSSR constructed from the nuclear material it got from us. For a third, we also do not know how close the SSSR—and several other Tosevite empires—are to producing nuclear materials and weapons on their own. And for a fourth, we cannot devastate large areas of this planet, not with the colonization fleet already on its way here from Home.”

That should have made Straha shut up. Similar arguments had, many times before. Now, though, the shiplord’s eye turrets twisted to let him glance toward males throughout the great hall. *Gauging his strength*, Atvar thought. For the first time, alarm prickled through him. Could Straha . . . ?

Straha could. “Assembled shiplords,” he declared. “I hereby submit to you that because our present exalted fleetlord, by his repeated misjudgments of the Big Ugliers and their capabilities, put the success of our conquest of Tosev 3 not only at risk but in desperate peril, he no longer deserves to hold the supreme rank with which the Emperor entrusted him and should be replaced by another, more able, male.” He did not say who that male should be, but the way he preened suggested he had at least one candidate in mind.

“Mutiny!” Atvar exclaimed.

“Mutiny,” Kirel echoed, but not quite so promptly as Atvar would have liked. The fleetlord gave him a quick, suspicious glance. After himself, Kirel was the highest-ranking male in the fleet. If he was to be deposed, the shiplords might well decide they still could not stomach Straha as his replacement—in which case Kirel might get the job.

“It is not mutiny,” Straha insisted—and now he did not give Atvar his title of respect. “We would be insane if we did not provide for removing a superior who has shown himself to be incompetent. I have the right to request that we consider such a removal at this time.”

He was technically correct; he did have that right. But to use it—Prominent males who were removed from their posts got into the Race’s history, not only as object lessons for later generations but also because they were so rare. Atvar wanted fame from this mission, not notoriety.

He said, “Assembled shiplords, the right of which Straha speaks pertains to males who have gone mad under the stress of their work or suffered some other mental debilitation. If we contemplated removing every male who ever met a reverse, we would soon have few males left to do anything.”

“That is the ordinary standard, I admit,” Straha shot back, “but the ordinary assignment does not carry such a burden of responsibility. If a transport planner back on Home fails, goods may be delivered late, to the annoyance of those who receive them. If the fleetlord fails here, however, our conquest of this planet fails with him. Less ineptitude is tolerable from him than from a male of lower rank.”

Shiplords commanded their inferior and obeyed the fleetlord. They seldom found themselves in a gathering of equals, and even more seldom in a gathering of equals where they were called upon to decide something both vital and highly irregular. The Race shied away from irregularity wherever it could, one more thing that left it ill-prepared for a world as regularly irregular as Tosev 3.

Because the males had little practice at debate, they weren't very good at it. Straha's supporters shouted and hissed at those who backed Atvar, and the fleetlord's followers returned the compliment. They displayed their rows of pointed teeth, shoved one another, and generally behaved more like new hatchlings than staid males of respectable years.

Quietly, Kirel said, "Exalted Fleetlord, the rule in such cases is that three-fourths of the males in the rank immediately inferior to that in question must concur that its present holder is incompetent to remain at his post."

"By the Emperor, I am not incompetent!" Atvar raged.

"I did not for a moment assert that you were, Exalted Fleetlord," Kirel said, "but the question has been put in proper form and now must be decided."

Atvar's suspicions doubled, then doubled again. But formality trapped him. He knew the rules for deciding the matter, though he'd never really expected to have to use them. "Very well, Shiplord," he said, hating every word. "Since you are next senior to me but were not personally involved in raising the question, I yield control of the meeting to you until it is settled. Be assured I shall appeal to the Emperor any action taken against me."

"Of course, Exalted Fleetlord," Kirel said politely, although he, Atvar, and all the assembled shiplords knew the warning was meaningless. Back on Home, an appeal to the Emperor would be heard promptly. On Rabotev 2 and Halless 1, the Emperor's viceroys performed that duty. But from here, a radio signal would take more than ten even of Tosev 3's long years to reach Home, while another ten of them would pass awaiting a reply. Effectively, Atvar was the Emperor's viceroy on Tosev 3, or would be if he retained his post.

Making no effort to hide his anger, he stepped away from the podium. Rather nervously, Kirel said, "Assembled shiplords, we are gathered now in the most solemn proceeding known to the Race. We may answer the question of the exalted fleetlord's fitness to continue in office in one of two ways: either each male may enter an anonymous yes or no at his seat, the result to be displayed electronically here, or we may publicly record each shiplord's name and choice. How say you?"

He knows the rule very well to bring it out so pat, Atvar thought. Had Kirel been loyal to him, or simply more cautious than Straha? Atvar would have to contemplate that . . . if he remained in any position to act on the results of his contemplation.

Straha said, "Let it be done anonymously, Superior Shiplord. That way, should the question fail"—he did not sound as if he expected it to—"the exalted fleetlord will not be in a position to take vengeance on those who questioned his competence."

You'll get more support that way, too, from males who would be ashamed to condemn me openly, Atvar thought. In a way, though, that reassured him: had Straha been certain of his backing, he would

have asked for a public record of names. *And no matter that the choice is anonymous, Straha: I'll remember what you've done.*

Kirel waited for any males who so desired to insist on a public record. When none did, he said, "Very well, assembled shiplords, register your choices. When the tally is complete, I shall announce the result."

Atvar did his best to look impassive, no matter how he writhed inside. Being subjected to this tribunal of his inferiors was humiliating. It was worse than humiliating, in fact: it reminded him of the way some of the Big Ugly not-empires tried to run their affairs. The Race had expected, had intended to bring civilization to Tosev 3. Instead, the Tosevites seemed to be barbarizing not only the shiplord but all the males of the conquest fleet.

Time stretched. After what seemed like forever, Kirel said, "Assembled shiplords, I shall now announce your decision." Atvar stayed outwardly unconcerned, or tried to. Straha leaned forward in eager anticipation. The great hall grew as still as Atvar had ever known it; not a male wished to miss the result.

"Assembled shiplords," Kirel said, "those favoring the removal of the fleetlord Atvar from his post constitute sixty-nine percent of your number, those favoring his retention constitute thirty-one percent. This fails to be a three-fourths majority." He turned to Atvar. "Command us, Exalted Fleetlord."

Atvar walked back to the podium. He looked out at the assembled shiplords, and they back at him. *Command us*, Kirel had said. Even with the Race's traditions of obedience, could he command these males when two out of three of them had declared he was not fit to do so? He would have to find out.

And how was he supposed to treat the Big Ugliers, now that they could do serious damage not only to the Race but also to their precious planet? Before, negotiations had either been about small-scale procedural matters like treatment and exchange of prisoners or over terms of surrender to the Race. Now . . . he'd have to find that out, too.

Vyacheslav Molotov hated flying. He reckoned going in a drafty biplane to Germany and then on a later air trip to England among the worst experiences of his life. But flying in a human-made airplane, however appalling that was, paled to insignificance beside taking off in a Lizard rocket ship to zoom up into outer space to talk with the commander of the imperialist aggressors from the stars.

He'd done that once before, so this time he'd known what to expect: the acceleration that pushed him back against the too-small padded seat and squeezed the air from his lungs; the sudden moment transition, after which he seemed to weigh nothing at all and had to control his stomach as rigidly as he always controlled his face; the Saharalike temperatures the Lizards found comfortable. He'd prepared for that, at least, wearing a light cotton suit instead of his usual thick wool.

Even so, he was still sweating as he faced the fleetlord Atvar. A couple of small drops had escaped from his forehead and floated around the chamber in which he, the leader of the Lizards, and a Lizard interpreter hung at various improbable angles. The Lizards took their weightlessness utterly for

granted, so he tried his best to do the same.

Atvar spoke several sentences in the Lizards' language of hisses, pops, and clicks. The interpreter turned them into Russian: "The exalted fleetlord says you were most rash to use an atomic bomb against the Race, when we could turn so many of these weapons against you."

Molotov had told Stalin the same thing—had, in fact, argued harder against using the atomic bomb than he'd dared argue with Stalin about anything else for years. But Stalin had overruled him, and no rain of destruction had fallen on the Soviet Union—yet. Instead, the Lizards had summoned him here to confer. Maybe that meant Stalin was right all along.

Such thoughts ran through the foreign commissar's mind as he asked the interpreter to repeat a couple of things he hadn't quite understood. His face remained expressionless. He nodded to the interpreter to show he'd caught the gist this time. The Lizard was much more fluent than he had been on Molotov's previous trip to this immense spacecraft not quite a year before.

"Tell the exalted fleetlord the Race was rash to attack the peace-loving peasants and workers of the Soviet Union," Molotov answered. "Perhaps the means we used to repel you will show you how true this is."

"Perhaps," Atvar said through the interpreter. "And then again, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich, perhaps not. We know you made this bomb with the quantity of element 94 you stole from us. Do not try to deny it; our analysis leaves no room for doubt. When will you be able to produce bombs altogether of your own?"

"If you renew your treacherous attacks on us, I assure you that you will find out, and that the answer will not please you," Molotov said without hesitation. Again, his features showed nothing of the fear he felt. The true answer to that question was *on the order of three years*. If the Lizards learned the true answer, the Soviet Union was hideously vulnerable to them.

His prompt reply seemed to give Atvar pause. He was relieved to see that, and even more relieved when the fleetlord partially changed the subject: "Do you not realize you destroy your own planet when you use atomic weapons?"

"That did not stop you when you bombed Berlin and Washington," Molotov retorted. "Why did you think it would concern us? And if you win this imperialist war against mankind, Earth will no longer be *our* planet in any case. Of course we shall use all our weapons to resist you."

"This course can lead only to your own destruction," Atvar said.

I think you may be right. But Molotov's demeanor would not have shown his wife what he was thinking, let alone a Lizard. He said, "We know you have enslaved two races already, and want us to become the third. We know you have kept those other races under subjection for thousands of years, and that you plot the same fate for us. Since all this is true, and since you have not even tried to deny it is true, how can destroying ourselves be worse?"

"You would keep your lives, some of your private property—" Atvar began.

Even stone-faced as he normally was, even in the Lizards' power, even floating in hideously unfamiliar weightlessness, Molotov burst out laughing. It took him by surprise; it also seemed to take the Lizard fleetlord and his interpreter by surprise. Molotov said, "There is no private property in the Soviet Union; private property is the result of theft. The state owns the means of production."

Atvar and the interpreter went back and forth in their own language for a little while. When they were done, the interpreter swiveled his eyes back toward Molotov and said, "The full meaning of the concept you describe escapes us."

"I understand that," Molotov answered. "It is because the class struggle in your society has not progressed to the point where the dialectic of the transition from capitalism to socialism is above your mental horizon."

As best he could, the translator rendered that into the Lizards' language. The fleetlord Atvar made a noise that might well have come from the safety valve of a powerful steam engine. Through the interpreter, he said, "You dare, you presume, Tosevite, to call the *Race* primitive?" His mouth fell open in a Lizard laugh.

"In your system of social organization? Certainly," Molotov said.

Despite the confidence with which he imbued his voice, he felt the paradox, for the Lizards' technical achievements were anything but primitive. The Soviets called them imperialists, but he did not think they were out to conquer the Earth for the sake of developing new markets, as highly advanced capitalist states had done in the past few generations to delay the inevitable proletarian revolution. The Lizards' society seemed more like that of the ancient empires, with masters ruling slaves and exploiting their labor. But the economic system of the ancient empires had been assumed to be incompatible with developing advanced technology. Marxist-Leninist theoreticians were still hammering out where the Lizards fit into the historical dialectic.

Atvar was laughing at him again, perhaps for his presumption. The fleetlord said, "Well, we care nothing for what you Tosevites think of our arrangements, and I did not summon you here to discuss them. You have made this war more dangerous for us; I do not deny that. But you have also made it more dangerous for yourselves. If you think we will hold back from responding in kind, you are badly mistaken."

"That was not our concern," Molotov answered. *That was not Stalin's concern, anyhow.* "We shall do what we think best, depending on the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Withdraw your forces from the Soviet Union and you will be in no more danger from us."

Atvar laughed again, not, Molotov thought, pleasantly. "This cannot be. I show my mercy by not treating you as a criminal, since your rulers came to power through murdering your emperor."

The fleetlord and the translator both showed what looked like genuine revulsion. The version Atvar gave of what had happened in the Soviet Union wasn't strictly accurate, but Molotov didn't argue the niceties with him. The Bolsheviks had done what they had to do to stay in power; to do anything less would have been to betray the workers and common soldiers and sailors who had helped them overthrow their class enemies in the Kerensky regime.

Aloud, Molotov said, "One day, when you have advanced sufficiently, you will do the same."

If the two Lizards had been revolted before, now they were furious. Again, they made noises that reminded Molotov of a samovar boiling with the fire too high. Atvar spat words. The interpreter proved his fluency had improved by turning them into precise, insulting Russian: "You Big Uglies are the most uncultured, odious creatures anyone could ever have imagined, and you Soviets the most uncultured and odious of the Big Uglies. To suggest such a thing—" Atvar started bubbling and sputtering again.

Molotov took no notice of the insults, but in weightlessness his glasses kept trying to escape from his nose. When he had secured them, he said, "We do not love one another. This much I already knew. Did you summon me here merely to remind me of it, or did you have serious diplomatic proposals to put to me?"

He granted Atvar a moment of professional respect when the fleetlord did return to business: "I summoned you here to warn you that under no circumstances will we tolerate any further use of nuclear weapons by any Tosevite empire, and that we reserve the right to retaliate as we see fit."

"I can speak only for the Soviet Union, whose peace-loving workers and peasants must of course reject demands made at gunpoint," Molotov answered. "We also reserve the right to retaliate as we see fit, especially since your forces invaded our land without reason or declaration of war. I can predict, though, that other nations will respond similarly."

"Other empires—" Atvar let that hang in the air for a few seconds before resuming: "Other Tosevite empires are also working on nuclear weapons; of this we are certain. How can you be assured that they will use these weapons against us rather than you? The Deutsche, for instance, are already developing rockets which could carry them."

Molotov almost betrayed himself by bursting into laughter again. The Lizard was trying to sow rivalry among his human enemies, which would have been far from the worst of ploys if he hadn't been so obvious—and so bad—at the game. Even Ribbentrop would have seen through it.

"Before you came, Germany and the Soviet Union were enemies, true," Molotov said. "Germany and the United States were enemies, Germany and Great Britain were enemies, Japan and Great Britain were enemies, Japan and the United States were enemies. We are enemies among ourselves no more—you are more dangerous to all of us than we were to one another."

For once, diplomacy and truth came together. Men fought each other on more or less even terms. The Lizards were far ahead of all human nations. Go under to them and you would never come up again. Even Hitler, wretched madman that he was, recognized the truth there.

Atvar said, "Surely you realize this struggle is futile for you."

"Class struggle is the engine of the historical dialectic," Molotov answered. "It is never futile."

"I understand these words one by one, Vyacheslav Mikhailovich, but not their full meaning together," the interpreter said. "How shall I render them for the exalted fleetlord?"

“Tell him we shall go on fighting, come what may, and that we shall use whatever weapons we have to destroy his forces within the Soviet Union,” Molotov said. “No threats he can make will keep us from defending ourselves.”

The translator hissed and popped and squeaked, and Atvar hissed and popped and squeaked back. The translator said, “You will regret this decision.”

“I would regret any other decision more,” Molotov replied. That was true in an immediate, personal sense: if he dared step so much as a centimeter outside the limits Stalin had set for him, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union would have him shot and worry afterwards no more than if he’d trimmed a fingernail. But it was also true in the wider way in which he’d intended it. Surrender to the Lizards meant long-term slavery not just for the Soviet Union but for the human race.

Like any true believer, Molotov was certain the historical dialectic would one day produce a proletarian revolution among the Lizards. Given what scraps he knew of their history, though, he was not prepared for mankind to wait the thousands of years the dialectic was liable to take.

Brigadier General Leslie Groves had a sign over his desk in the Science Hall at the University of Denver: *DO IT ANYHOW*. He scrawled his signature on a report and got up from the desk: a big, ginger-haired man with a big belly and enough driving energy for any three ordinary mortals. That energy, and a gift for organization that went with it, had made him a first-rate military engineer and led to his being put in charge of America’s effort to build an atomic bomb.

As Groves put on his cap, he glanced back at the sign. He’d used all his impressive energy to make sure the United States built the first human-made atomic bomb, only to be beaten by the Russians, of all people.

That wounded his pride. Losing the race to the Germans would have been a catastrophe had the Lizards not come. Under the present circumstances, though, it wouldn’t have surprised him—the Germans were the ones who’d discovered nuclear fission, after all. But the Russians—

“The Russians,” he muttered to himself as he tramped down the hall. “Unfair advantages.” The Russians and Germans had split a load of plutonium they’d captured from the Lizards not far from Kiev. Thanks to Polish Jews who’d intercepted their courier, the Germans had had to split their half again; the American Metallurgical Laboratory physicists had the half the Germans had been forced to disgorge. Neither that half nor what the Germans had left was enough by itself to make a bomb. If the Russians had kept as much as the Germans had started out with, though, they’d had plenty.

“All right, so they didn’t do it all by themselves,” Groves said. That they’d done it ahead of the United States in any way, shape, form, color, or size still rankled, no matter how much the bomb they’d used had helped the war effort against the Lizards.

It rankled more people than Groves, too. Ever since the Russian bomb went off, the Denver papers had been screaming that the U.S.A. should have been the first country to blow the Lizards to hell and gone. None of the reporters and editorial writers had shown that he knew his atoms from third base,

and none of them (thank God!) seemed to have a clue that the Met Lab was operating out of the University of Denver these days.

On his way from Science Hall to the football stadium that housed the atomic pile the physicists had built, Groves passed a sergeant leading a couple of Lizard POWs. The man and the aliens were almost friends by now; they chatted in a mixture of English and the Lizards' language.

"Morning, General," the sergeant said, saluting.

"Superior sir," the two Lizards added in their hissing English.

"Morning, Yeager." Groves returned the salute. He even grudged the Lizards a nod. "Ullhass, Ristin." As individuals, they looked strange, but not particularly dangerous. They were about the size and build of skinny ten-year-olds, with scaly, green-brown skins. Their bodies leaned forward slightly at the hips, and had stubby little tails to balance that. Their fingers and toes bore claws rather than nails. They had forward-thrusting muzzles filled with lots of small, sharp teeth, and long tongues they'd stick out like snakes. Their eyes were like a chameleon's, on independently rotating turrets so they could look in two directions at the same time. No mere humans had ever put the United States in such deadly danger, though.

Groves tramped on. Science Hall was near the north end of the campus, a long way away from the stadium. The walk helped keep his weight down. So did the short rations everybody was on these days. He was a long way from skinny even so. Had things been a little different, he would have looked like one of the blimps the Navy flew (or, more likely, had flown) out of Lakehurst, New Jersey.

Outside the football stadium, a guard saluted Groves, who noted approvingly that the fellow was under cover so he couldn't be spotted from the air. One of the keys to the American atomic bomb project was not letting the Lizards know it existed.

It was shadowy under the stadium, but not cool. During the day, Denver was like a bake oven in summer, even though the mile-high air shed heat fast at night. The physicists and technicians in charge of the pile nodded as Groves approached. They didn't necessarily love him, but they took him seriously, which sufficed.

"How much closer are we?" he asked Enrico Fermi.

"We have gained another day," the physicist answered. "The output of plutonium from this pile does continue to increase."

"Not fast enough," Groves growled. The pile produced grams of plutonium per day. The United States needed several kilograms of the stuff to add to what they received from inside the Soviet Union by way of a reluctant German courier, the Jewish irregulars in Poland, and a British submarine. Groves had shepherded that plutonium all the way from Boston to Denver, only to be told when he got it here that he hadn't brought enough. The memory still rankled.

Fermi shrugged a large Latin shrug. "General, I cannot change the laws of nature. I can learn to apply them more efficiently, and this I try to do: this is how we gain time on the date I first predicted. But to increase production to any really great degree, we need to build more piles. That is all there is

to it.”

“That’s not going fast enough, either,” Groves said. Another pile was going up under the stands at the opposite end of the football field. They had plenty of uranium oxide for it. Getting the super-pure graphite they needed was another matter. Groves was an expediter supreme, but the transportation snarl into which the Lizards had thrown the United States was more than enough to drive even expediters mad.

“What we really need is to build piles of more efficient design,” Fermi said. “The Hanford site or the Columbia would be ideal—far more water for cooling than we can take from the South Platte, an area far removed from the Lizards—”

“I’m not so sure of that,” Groves broke in. “They’re supposed to have a base in Idaho, only a couple of hundred miles off to the east.”

“A small one.” Fermi pinched his thumb and forefinger together to show how small. “As soon as Professor Larssen returns to confirm that the site is as good as it appears to be, we will begin centering more and more of our activities there.”

“As soon as Larssen gets back, yeah,” Groves said with a marked lack of enthusiasm. As far as he was concerned, Jens Larssen could stay away indefinitely. Yeah, sure, the guy had a beef: he’d been away from the Met Lab crew for a long time on a dangerous mission (any cross-country travel counted as a dangerous mission these days), and his wife, figuring he had to be dead, had fallen for Sergeant Sam Yeager—he’d been a corporal then—married him, and got pregnant. When Larssen turned out to be alive after all, she’d decided to stay with Yeager. None of that was calculated to improve a man’s attitude.

But goddamn it, you couldn’t let how you felt drag down your work the way Larssen had. It wasn’t just his own work that had been hurting, either. He’d been taking his colleagues’ minds off what they were supposed to be doing, too. Groves hadn’t been sorry to see him volunteer to scout out Hanford, Washington, and would hold in his delight at seeing him come back.

“Professor Larssen has had a difficult time,” Fermi said, reacting to the dislike in Groves’ voice.

“Professor Fermi, the whole country—hell, the whole world—has had a difficult time,” Groves retorted. “It’s not like he’s the only one. He’d better stop whimpering and pull himself together.”

He leaned toward Fermi, using his physical presence to make his point for him. He wasn’t that much taller than the Italian, but he was wider, and harder and tougher to boot. Fermi said, “If you will excuse me, General, I have some calculations I must attend to,” and hurried away.

Groves grunted. Scoring a victory against a mild-mannered physics prof was like shooting fish in a barrel—yeah, you’d done it, but so what? When you’d cut your teeth on hard cases, you barely even noticed biting down on a Fermi.

And besides, you couldn’t bite down too hard on Fermi. Without false modesty, Groves knew he was very good at what he did. There weren’t a whole lot of people who were both the engineer and administrator he was. But if he dropped dead tomorrow, George Marshall would pick somebody just

about as good to replace him. Who was just about as good as a Nobel Prize-winning physicist? In a word, *nobody*.

The bombs would be built. He had no doubt of that: first the one that incorporated the plutonium stolen from the Lizards, then others made entirely with human-produced nuclear material. The know-how and resources were in place; the United States merely had to await results.

Only trouble was, the United States couldn't wait. As things stood, that first bomb was a year away, maybe more. How much of the States would be left in American hands by the time it was ready to blow? *Not enough*, Groves thought gloomily; the guys with the guns and the tanks and the airplanes were doing all they could, but all they could was liable not to be enough.

That meant every day he could shave off getting the first bomb ready was a day that might save the country. Nobody in the United States had faced that weight of responsibility since the Civil War. He shrugged his broad shoulders. He had to hope they were strong enough to bear the burden.

Ristin threw a baseball to Sam Yeager. The Lizard POW handled the ball as if it were a grenade, but he threw pretty straight. The ball slapped leather in Yeager's beat-up glove. "Good toss," he said, and threw the baseball on to Ullhass.

Ullhass' mitt was even more battered than Yeager's, but that wasn't his problem. He lunged at the ball with the glove, as if he were trying to push it away rather than catch it. Not surprisingly, he didn't catch it. "Stupid egg-addled thing," he said in his own language as he stooped to pick the ball up off the grass, and added the emphatic cough to show he really meant it.

Yeager felt a surge of pride at how automatically he understood what the Lizard was saying. He wasn't any big brain; he'd had his third stripe only a few days. He hadn't been a prof before the Lizards came, either. He'd been an outfielder for the Decatur Commodores of the Class B Three-I League; the only reason the draft hadn't grabbed him was that he wore full dentures, uppers and lowers, a souvenir of the 1918 influenza epidemic that had almost killed him, and had left him so weak and debilitated that his teeth rotted in his head.

But prof or no, he'd been an avid reader of *Astounding* and the other science-fiction pulps. After the Lizards came, the Army didn't care any more whether you had teeth; all they worried about was a pulse—if you had one, you were in. So, when his unit captured some Lizards back in Illinois, he'd volunteered to try to communicate with the things . . . and here he was in Denver, working hand in hand not only with the aliens but also with the high foreheads who were taking what Ullhass and Ristin knew and using it to help build an atomic bomb for the U.S.A. *Not bad for an overage ballplayer*, he thought.

Ullhass threw the baseball to Ristin. Ristin was a better natural athlete than the other Lizard, or maybe just smarter. He'd figured out how to catch with a glove, anyhow: let the ball come to him, then close his meat hand over it to make sure it didn't get out.

He still threw funny, though; Sam had to jump high to catch his next fling. "Sorry, superior sir," Ristin said.

“Don’t worry about it. Nobody’s keeping score.” Yeager brushed back into place a lock of dark blond hair that had escaped from under the fore-and-aft Army cap he wore. He threw Ullhass the ball. But for the nature of his friends, it was an all-American scene: three guys playing catch on a college campus on a bright summer’s day. You didn’t get any more Norman Rockwell than that—except Norman Rockwell had never painted a Lizard with a baseball glove.

Just to add to the *Saturday Evening Post* quality of the scene, here came Barbara. Sam waved and grinned enormously, partly because he was always glad to see her and partly because she was wearing the calico blouse and blue jeans in which she’d married him up in the great metropolis of Chugwater, by God, Wyoming. Even for Yeager, who in seventeen years of pro ball thought he’d seen every smart town in the U.S. of A., that had been a new one.

He wondered how long she’d be able to keep wearing those jeans. Not that they didn’t look good on her—she was a little on the lean side, but she definitely had hips and a pert posterior—but her pregnancy was just beginning to show with her clothes off. As best as he could tell, they’d started Junior their wedding night.

“Hi, honey,” he said as she drew near. “What’s up?” The question came out more seriously than he’d expected; she wasn’t smiling as she usually did.

“General Groves sent me out to find you himself,” she answered. “You’ve got new orders, he said.”

“New orders?” Sam pulled a face. “I was just thinking how much I liked what I was doing here. Did he say what they were?”

Barbara shook her head. Her hair, a couple of shades darker than his, flew around her head. “I asked him, but he wouldn’t tell me. He said he wanted to give them to you in person.”

“I don’t like the sound of that,” Yeager said. Any time a general gave a sergeant orders in person something out of the ordinary was going on, maybe something liable to get the sergeant killed. But if General Groves wanted to see him, he couldn’t very well say no. He turned to Ullhass and Ristin, speaking in the mix of English and Lizard he usually used with them: “Come on, boys, let’s go see what the exalted projectlord wants with me.”

Ristin’s mouth fell open in a Lizardy chuckle. “You’re a funny Big Ugly, superior sir.” He used the Lizards’ slang name for people as unselfconsciously as Sam said *Lizard* instead of *male of the Race* around him.

The two humans and two Lizards strolled across the University of Denver campus toward Science Hall. A couple of times, people they knew waved to them. Ullhass and Ristin waved back as casually as Barbara and Sam did; they were an accepted part of the Met Lab staff by now. Technically, they remained prisoners, but nobody worried much about their trying to escape.

Groves was a big enough wheel to rate a guard outside his office: the same guard who’d been assigned to Jens Larssen for a while. Yeager didn’t hold that against him. “Morning, Oscar,” he said. “You want to keep an eye on these two tough guys while the general tells me whatever he tells me? Try to keep ’em from stealing all our secrets here.”

“Sure, Sam,” Oscar answered. Even without his rifle, Yeager would have bet on him against Ristin and Ullhass both; ~~dark and quiet he might be, but he’d seen nasty action somewhere—he had the look~~ Now he nodded to Barbara. “Morning, ma’am.”

“Good morning, Oscar,” she answered. She spoke more precisely than Sam did. Hell, she spoke more precisely than most people did. She’d been a graduate student in medieval English out at Berkeley before the war; that was where she’d met Jens.

Oscar turned back to Sam. “Go on in. General Groves, he’s expecting you.”

“Okay, thanks.” Yeager turned the doorknob, feeling the same willies he’d had whenever a manager called to him in a certain tone of voice after a game. *Oh, God, he thought. Where have they gone and traded me to now?*

He went through the door, closed it after him. General Groves looked up from the notes he was scribbling on a typed report. Sam came to attention and saluted. “Sergeant Samuel Yeager reporting ordered, sir,” he said formally.

“At ease, Yeager. You’re not in trouble,” Groves said, returning the salute. He waved to the chair in front of his desk. “Sit down if you care to.” When Sam had, Groves went on, “Is it your opinion that we’ve wrung just about everything your two scaly accomplices know about nuclear physics out of them?”

“Yes, sir, I’d say that’s probably true,” Yeager answered after a moment’s thought.

“Good. I’d have thrown you out of here on your ear if you’d tried to tell me anything else,” Groves said. By the way the muscles shifted in his big shoulders, he’d meant it literally. “The United States can still learn a lot about the Lizards from Ullhass and Ristin, though, even if what we learn has nothing directly to do with the Metallurgical Laboratory. Wouldn’t you agree with that?”

“No doubt about it, sir,” Yeager said. “The more we know about the Lizards, the better. They’ll still be around from now on even if we manage to beat them, and that’s not counting this colonization fleet of theirs. It’s due in—what?—twenty years?”

“That’s about right, yes.” General Groves looked intently across the desk at Sam. “The way you answered that last question convinced me these are absolutely the right orders for you: you casually came to the same conclusion a staff of government experts has needed months to reach.”

Probably comes from reading science fiction, Yeager thought. He didn’t say that out loud; he had no idea how Groves felt about that Buck Rogers stuff. He did say, “You haven’t told me what the orders are, sir.”

“So I haven’t.” Groves glanced down at some papers behind his ^{IN} basket that Yeager couldn’t see. “We’ve established a center for interrogation and research on Lizard POWs down in Arkansas. I’m going to send Ristin and Ullhass there, and I’m ordering you to accompany them. I think you can best serve your country by using your rapport with the Lizards, and that’s the place for you to do it.”

“Yes, sir,” Sam said. He’d been traded, all right, but to a place he didn’t mind going . . . assuming

he could get there. “Uh, sir, what sort of transportation will we have? There’s a lot of Lizards between here and Arkansas that aren’t prisoners, if you know what I mean.”

“I know exactly what you mean. Nevertheless, you’ll fly,” Groves answered.

“Sir?” Yeager did his best to keep the surprise—to say nothing of the dismay—he felt from showing. His best, he feared, was none too good. He figured he’d better explain: “They shoot down a awful lot of our planes, sir.” That would do for an understatement until a better one came along. The Lizards’ aircraft had the same sort of advantage against the planes the Americans flew as a Lightning or a Warhawk would have against a World War I-vintage Sopwith Camel.

But Groves nodded his big head and said, “You’ll fly anyhow—and what’s more, the Lizards will know you’re coming.” Yeager must have looked as if he’d just been smacked in the kisser with a large carp, for the general chuckled a little before continuing, “We always inform them before we move prisoners by air, and we paint the planes we fly them in bright yellow. It’s worked pretty well; they don’t like shooting at their own people any more than we would.”

“Oh,” Yeager said. “I guess that’s okay, then.” And if there were no such arrangement between Lizards and men and Groves had told him to fly anyway, he’d have damn well flown: that’s what the Army was about. As it was, though, he asked, “Do you think it’s safe enough for my wife to come along, sir? Really, I’m not just asking for the sake of having her with me; she knows just about as much about the Lizards as I do. She’d be useful at this Arkansas place, at least until she has her baby

“Under normal circumstances, Sergeant, I’d say no,” Groves answered. He grimaced. “I don’t think there’s any such thing as normal circumstances any more. As you say, your Barbara may be useful in Arkansas, but that’s not why I’m going to tell you yes. Frankly, Sergeant, getting you and her out of here will simplify matters when Professor Larssen gets back from Washington State.”

“Yes, sir,” Sam said woodenly. Groves had to think like that, though; Jens Larssen was a talented nuclear physicist, and the general was running a project to build an atomic bomb. If he could help the Lizard prisoner research project at the same time . . . *two birds with one stone* ran through Yeager’s mind. “When do we leave, sir?” he asked.

“Not for a few days,” Groves answered. “We need to make the arrangements and be sure they’re understood. Written orders will go out to you as soon as one of the secretaries gets around to typing them. Dismissed.”

Yeager stood, saluted, and left. He wasn’t sure Groves even saw the salute; he’d already gotten back to work on the report he’d been scribbling on when Sam came in.

Barbara, Ullhass, and Ristin all took a couple of steps toward him when he came out into the hallway. “You look green, Sam,” she said. “What happened in there?”

“Pack your bags, hon,” he answered. “We’re moving to Arkansas.” She stared and stared. He had to remind himself that she’d never been traded before.

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