

Pawn In Revolt

*They gave mankind a fresh
start—by pulverising Earth.*

Illustrated by Alan Hunter

As had always been his habit, the old man had doodled on a writing pad all the time they had talked. The same old wolves' heads, full face, left profile, right profile. They were rather fuzzy wolves now, because Luben's hand trembled with age. His voice quavered a little, too, but there was no wavering in his mind: that was fixed in the pattern of Corporism, and it was not set by senility: it had grown rigid in his youth. For he had realised then that Corporism was the final answer to everything. Only the fools, the ignorant, and the misled could not see that, and they were unimportant anyway.

"You must return within a month," he said.

"A month?" echoed Parleck. "I was thinking of at least a year. If I come and go too frequently, it may arouse suspicion—"

"If you leave it as long as a year, you won't be able to return at all."

Parleck stared at the old man, his eyes widening.

"You're not—?" he said, and found he could add no more.

"I am not," said Luben. "We are. The council decided this morning. Do you not agree with them?"

"Well — I —"

"I know. You're half Albish, and you're sentimental about the island. But it's become much more than just an island. When you wander along its lanes and through its orchards you must remember this: you are not strolling through a garden—you are walking the deck of a great aircraft carrier, moored off our coast and in the service of our most powerful enemies."

"That I realise," said Parleck, slowly.

"And that you are not walking that deck in the role of a casual visitor among friends, but as a spy among those who have repeatedly proven themselves to be our bitterest enemies."

"That also, I realise."

"Do you—fully? I wonder. I'm not satisfied with your recent reports, Parleck. I don't think you're doing all that your duty to your fatherland demands of you."

"I thought there were no more fatherlands or motherlands—only Corporism."

The point of Luben's pencil stopped on the ear of a wolf which had got out of hand in drawing.

"True," said the old man, quietly. "But Negovia is the fountain head of Corporism, and we owe it to the world to keep the fountain head uninjured and freely flowing."

"I have reported what I have observed in Albion. And I have observed no signs of any intention to attack the fountain head."

Luben abandoned the misshapen wolf and rolled the pencil gently between his fingers.

"If you were to observe Negovia you would see no signs of any intention to attack Albion. Nevertheless, the intention is there. Intentions are made to be concealed. The Albish and their allies intend to attack us. We need no confirmation of that intention: we know it exists, because its existence arises logically out of the immutable laws of Corporism. All situations grow out of other situations, and each stage is predictable if you know your Corporism. What isn't always predictable is the exact time when each stage is to be reached. That is what is wrong with your reports, Parleck—they give no indication of the time. If it is to be more than a year hence, we're not worried—and our enemies will by then be in no

position to worry. But if it's to be before we are ready . . . that's why I want you to go to Albion at once and glean from Sanders some idea of the date. We must know."

"And if it *is* before we are ready?"

"We must stall them by making a show of renouncing Corporism and seeing the error of our ways. We must give them the hope that Corporism will collapse of itself without their having to do anything about it. The Albish have a natural inclination to take the line of least resistance—we must play on that inclination. At least, until our hydrogen bombs are ready: the piles are working night and day."

"I see that you have thought it all out."

Luben smiled faintly. He said: "This sort of thing is no effort for me, any more than it was for Machiavelli or Hitler. In the mass, men are children: they have no character, and one just plays on their hopes and fears. It is too easy. I often wish I—the Council—had a more worthy opponent. But our enemies are democracies, headless animals, confused with a thousand dissonant desires and beliefs which cancel out. They have no binding philosophy, such as we have. They have no direction, no common impulse—except that of blind self-preservation, which will lead them to a so-called preventive war."

"But are *we* not heading for a so-called preventive war?"

There had been little life in Luben's smile, and now it expired altogether.

"There will be nothing 'so-called' about it. As a nation Albion will cease to exist in a matter of minutes. Half a dozen H-bombs could do it, strategically placed—one of them on its capital, of course. And there's no comparison about our intentions. Their war is designed merely to maintain the status quo. Ours—to extend Corporism and peace to the whole world and end wars forever!"

His rheumy eyes could still summon a spark from the revolutionary fire of his youth. His quavering voice could still recall an echo from old, stirring addresses. And age and dignity underwrote them with authority.

"I shall expect useful information within the month," he said, abruptly. "This audience is ended."

Parleck saluted, and left.

The door had scarcely closed behind him before Luben pressed the bell-push under his desk.

Novik, coming in answer from his office below, passed Parleck on the stairs. They smiled and nodded at each other perfunctorily, but said nothing. Each distrusted the other because they had nothing whatever in common, and if Parleck understood Novik, it was certain that Novik did not understand Parleck.

Novik was pleasant-faced, perfectly mannered, always agreeable to those in authority above him. He was also agreeable to his subordinates and expected them to be agreeable to him, which they were. It was a little odd that they were, because not so long ago they were in authority over him. They had, on their various levels, never quite fathomed how Novik, while agreeing with all they said, should somehow have taken over a role in which they found themselves agreeing with all he said. His quiet suggestions had imperceptibly changed into quiet directions, without arousing resentment or jealousy, in a manner which seemed just in the natural course of things.

His gentle infiltration had brought him into the orbit of Luben's notice, and Luben had for some time watched his progress with a secret amusement which became a secret admiration. He had himself fought his way up with violent haranguing, intimidation, manouevring with cliques, even conspiracy, and—once—murder. Only as old age began to cool his blood and sap his strength did he begin to appreciate—and practise—the power which lay in subtlety.

When he thought he had mastered it, he became aware of the real master approaching him from below. Had he been younger, he would have fought off and maimed the insidious usurper, for his philosophy was that of the wolf pack: kill or be killed.

He had been leader long enough to recognise a challenge, in whatever form it came. But he knew that soon he would have to relinquish the reins through sheer feebleness, and he would rather hand them over with dignity to a chosen successor than have them taken from him. So for some time he had been keeping his eyes open for such a worthy successor.

At first, before changing his mind and choosing Novik, he had considered Parleck. Parleck was the right age, he was a man of character and intelligence, he had always been a diligent Corporist, courageous, a good organiser, energetic.

He was only half-Negovian. That shouldn't make any difference, because Corporism was supra-national, and even full-blooded negroes filled offices of trust in the Council. The trouble was that he was

also half Albish—his father had been Negovian ambassador in the Albish capital and married an Albish woman. The ambassador had held his post for many years, and so Parleck's formative years had been half Albish too.

How far could Parleck be trusted?

Luben put the question to Novik as soon as he came in.

Novik answered, standing there at a sort of relaxed attention: "I have often wondered."

Luben waved him to a chair. (Parleck would seat himself without giving it a thought, but Novik always waited politely for permission).

"Any conclusions?"

"We can trust him quite a long way, if we are to judge solely by his service to our country as a diplomat and—an agent."

"Say spy, if you mean spy," said Luben, testily.

"A spy, then," said Novik, easily. "His information, even on top secret level, has never been found inaccurate in a single particular, so far as I know."

"Agreed. But lately there hasn't been much of it, and what there is, is relatively unimportant. Of what use to the Council is gossip about Cabinet intrigue when what they desire to know is the size of the atomic bomb stockpile, the amount of heavy hydrogen being produced (and we know Albion is producing a lot), and, above all, the contemplated date of attack."

"He may be keeping something back."

"That's what I'm afraid of. The Albish are a reserved, insular, silent people, and there are some of those characteristics in Parleck—you can never be wholly sure of what he's being silent and reserved about."

"That's so. And I've noticed a tendency of his of late to cast doubt on the moral fitness of actions, as though morality were something more than just a temporary convention for convenience's sake. He seems to have lost sight of the eternal principle of Corporism that progress can only be made by breaking conventions—*any* sort of conventions."

"But are not *we* heading for a so-called preventive war?" echoed Luben, from his memory, and mused a while. "It's true, of course, but—"

"But the rightness of an action depends upon who performs it," said the other, anticipating the quotation from the Corporist

Handbook.

Luben nodded.

"Therefore," continued Novik, "judging by the fact that we do not fully know his inner beliefs, we cannot trust him at all. He is a dangerous man."

"Dangerous men can be used—like any other men," said Luben, sliding open a drawer and taking out a chessboard and a box of pieces. "For myself, I trust Parleck—at the moment."

He began setting up the pieces.

Presently, the pair were immersed in their daily game of chess.

The Negovians were great chess players. Indeed, they saw life largely in terms of the game. They could not conceive that any move of any sort by anyone was likely to be anything but a calculated move towards capturing their king. The diehard Corporists believed that there were no generous, disinterested, or altruistic actions, that nobody gave away anything that wasn't a premeditated sacrifice for a later and greater gain, that nothing was straightforward and all was camouflage for ulterior motives.

Of course, there were a lot of pawns in the game, too, whose names were John Smith, Joe Doakes, and Ivan Ivanovitch—silly little things, almost useless, with their heads full of idiotic misapprehensions about the meaning of life, gaping oaf-like at sunsets, pottering in their gardens and growing inutile flowers, pretending to help their neighbours (but really out for their own ends, naturally), pawing their fat wives, rearing ugly little juniors, slapping paint on canvas and scribbling rubbish on paper, building the equivalent of sand castles.

But they weren't wholly useless. You couldn't very well play chess without pawns.

The two men crouched over the ivory figures.

So far Luben hadn't lost a game. When he did, he knew it would be time to hand over to Novik. He felt it would be soon. This past week Novik had extended him to his utmost and left him an exhausted victor.

"You know," said Novik, presently, "I understand your mind better than I do Parleck's. He's the one man I can't figure out. I think I shall have trouble with him."

"He's not *your* trouble yet," reminded Luben, pointedly. "However, you needn't be afraid of him. He's a poor chess player."

"You're a queer bird, Parleck," said Sanders, with a quizzical smile. "I don't think I've ever really understood you, not even when we were at school together."

Parleck lay back on the green bank, chewing a piece of grass. Dog-roses climbed over the hedge above him. A blackbird sang in a chestnut tree, against the blue sky. Scents drifted in the air: new-mown hay, wild flowers, distant wood-smoke.

Parleck said dreamily: "This is a beautiful country. I could live here for ever, if only I weren't a man without a country . . . that's why you've never understood me, Sanders—I've always been without a home-land. I've never really—belonged."

"I think I see what you mean. Mixed blood, mixed upbringing. It must have been the very devil."

"You don't know how I envied you. Here, with your so-very-Albish family, your school and its traditions, your field games and sportsmanship, your friendships, deep and enduring because they've been dug hardly out of a protective seam of reserve . . . in Negovia there are no real friendships: there is surface bonhomie and there are alliances of convenience. That's all. Because the only faith is in Corporism, not in people. Nobody trusts anyone there in the way in which I trust you."

"Thank you," said Sanders.

"But you can't trust me in the same way—because I am not Albish."

Sanders bit his lip. He said, awkwardly: "I trust you as a friend, in personal matters. You may have anything of mine. But you know my position as Defence Minister forbids my entrusting you with what is not mine. The secrets of State are not my secrets. I wouldn't divulge them even to my closest Albish friend."

"Let alone a Negovian Corporist playing a double game," said Parleck, removing the chewed grass stem and smiling at it.

Sanders flushed. "Don't be a fool," he said shortly. "I never implied—"

"No, you're too much of a gentleman to imply such a thing. You're polite, and pretend such things aren't done, and yet you know they are done. You have given me information in the past, and had information from me. Correct information on both sides. Give and take. I've often given you more than the Corporist Council has thought. I've just as often given the Corporist Council less than you suspected. My bias is towards your side, but—and

this is the thing people don't understand about me—I am on neither side."

"Then why play this dangerous game?"

"Because it seems to me that it is what destiny intended me for. All my early life I cursed that destiny which denied me happiness. For happiness is a sense of fitting naturally into an environment. My environments were changed and interchanged too rapidly: I was never wholly at ease on Albish playing fields or on Negovian parade grounds, beneath the oaks in the rain or under the firs in the snow, talking light banter or discussing weighty Corporist promulgations. I was torn between two ways of life, belonged to neither. Then one day I grew up and realised I belonged to something greater than either—humanity."

"So you became an umpire?"

Parleck laughed. "The Albish and their way of seeing life as a field game! Healthier than Negovians, though, who see it in terms of an indoor game—chess. No, I became more of a universal father, quietly interfering now and then in the rather too rough games children play sometimes, trying to save them from hurting themselves. Negovia and Albion would have been at war long ago if it hadn't been for my good offices."

"What sort of offices?"

"Contrary to the respected principles of Corporism, wars are bred from ignorance, misunderstanding, and fear rather than from deliberate intention. I've kept each side in as little ignorance about the other side as possible, and thus each side felt more secure than if it had to rely only on imagination and suspicion: the Negovians, at least, always tend to imagine the worst, perhaps because they expect, and have often had, the worst from everyone. Unfortunately, while I have palliated the Corporist disease, I've not been able to cure it. And now it's broken out beyond my control and looks like reaching a crisis. Which is why I am here, to see what can be done."

"An unofficial diplomat, eh?"

"The plain stark truth is the only good diplomat. I am going to give you all of the truth I know. It would no doubt help humanity if you were to be as frank. But if you put Albion before humanity, and leave me in ignorance—well, it can't be helped. I can't make you grow up by anything other than example."

Sanders plucked a wide blade of grass and split it slowly down the middle. He was as intent on it as if it was a major operation.

He remained silent.

"Negovia intends to bomb Albion flat, in a lightning raid, within a year," said Parleck, with brutal suddenness.

Sanders' fingers froze, and then slowly resumed pulling the shreds of grass apart. He had gone a little pale.

"H-bombs?" he said, colourlessly.

"Yes."

Sanders separated the shreds, and then flung them down with an abrupt motion.

"Maniacs!" he said, briefly, bitterly.

"They think they will make the world safe for Corporism."

"Maniacs!" repeated Sanders. "How many converts do they expect to get by such methods?"

Parleck shrugged. "They think the truths of Corporism are self-evident, that everyone except a few villians is converted already and only waiting to be liberated. They imagine that if they don't strike first, your Government will."

Sanders was very angry now. "They pride themselves that they are realists above all else. Heaven help us, they live in a crazy fantasy of their own creation!"

Parleck had a brief vision of Luben and Novik brooding over their chess-board.

"They certainly do," he said. And then, more as a statement than a question: "You weren't, of course, intending to strike first?"

"Of course not," said Sanders, shortly. "We—" And then he checked himself. When one was angry, one was liable to say too much. It was quite possible that what he said now would go back to those who had chosen themselves to be Albion's enemies. "Of course, we have made every preparation for defence," he went on, giving Parleck a sidelong glance.

"What defence is there against H-bombs? The Negovians will use at least six of them."

"Surely you can't expect me to reveal—"

"There's nothing to reveal," said Parleck smoothly. "The only defence is to attack first. That you won't do, because there's nothing to go on except my say-so—and even if you accepted it, the Prime Minister wouldn't. Nor would the nation. Look here, Sanders, I'm not fencing and probing and playing at 'Let's Pretend.' As I told you, I've grown out of all that infantile, nationalistic mummery. Try to be adult for a moment, and face the truth. It

may be worth it."

Sanders was irresolute. Then he said, almost defiantly: "Very well. We have a passive sort of defence: deep shelters. But I realise they're not likely to be very effective. One penetration bomb will crush them by earthquake. All right, we have no real defence."

"That's better," said Parleck, and for the moment Sanders felt as though he were being addressed by a stern, but just parent. This Parleck, who'd once been under his captaincy in the school football team, this fellow whom (in his heart) he'd always looked down on a little because he was only fifty per cent. Albish—no, he would never get to the bottom of him. But it was queer, the way the man inspired trust.

"Now," said Parleck, "I felt pretty low about it myself when Luben dropped the bombshell on me. But in the 'plane coming over I reviewed the situation detachedly, and then, you know, I saw there *was* a defence against the H-bomb. A very effective defence."

"Go on."

"You have in this country, I know, many atomic piles producing heavy hydrogen—"

"Purely in respect of possible retaliatory measures, I assure you," said Sanders, quietly. "Not in view of making any attack."

"I believe you, where Luben wouldn't—and doesn't. Now, this is my idea . . ."

* * * *

"Well?" said Luben, and Novik looked up expectantly too.

"I shall send in my report," said Parleck, looking down at the chess-board without expression.

"Good, but let's have a verbal resumé now," said Luben. "First things first—did you get the date?"

"I had it confirmed from Sanders' own mouth that Albion does not propose to attack."

Luben stared at him bleakly. He said: "Then it is plain that Sanders has begun to suspect you. The old school tie link has worn thin. I'm afraid your usefulness as a spy is ended, Parleck."

"I am quite sure that Sanders wasn't bluffing," said Parleck, and Novik gave a little smothered chuckle.

Luben smote his forehead in a despair that was half genuine.

"Will you never grow up, Parleck. *All* statesmen bluff all the time. It's the game—it can't be played any other way. If everyone put their cards on the table, how could any game be possible?"

"It couldn't," said Parleck. He didn't express his contempt for the game, query its necessity, nor enlarge upon the evils arising from it. People believed what they wanted to believe, and conversion by reason was highly unlikely—in the case of Luben and Novik, quite impossible. They loved the game of power politics for the same reason that they loved chess, and that love was ineradicable.

"Very well, then. So the upshot of your report is that you have nothing to report?"

"Not quite. I have returned with some useful and, as usual, reliable information."

"Well?"

"The Albish have prepared a perfect defence against hydrogen bomb attacks. I don't know what form it takes—I couldn't find out. But I can assure you that they have one. And the Council had better reconsider its decision about the war."

Luben toyed with a captured bishop. He glanced across at Novik, who was grinning. "More bluff!" said Novik's expression. "What a fool!"

Luben said quietly: "I have a feeling, Parleck, that you don't approve of our preventive war, that you would like to stop it. I can't make up my mind whether you've been fooled or whether you seek to fool the Council. Until I can, you will be kept under open arrest."

"I have done my duty. I have given you correct information," said Parleck stiffly. "If I may be permitted an observation: it is possible to doubt too much. There are people who tell the truth."

"And you are one of them, eh?" murmured Luben. "We shall see."

* * * *

Some weeks later, Luben sent for Parleck, which he had not done since the arrest.



Luben tugged some sheets of typescript from under the Roman paper-weight fashioned in the likeness of the wolf-mother of Romulus and Remus. He spun the thin sheaf across the desk to Parleck, who picked it up curiously and sank into a chair with it.

It read:

RADIO ANNOUNCEMENT (NEWS) ALBION (2nd PROG.)

August 9th. 12.00 hrs.

" Mr. Sanders, the Defence Minister, this morning in Parliament read a statement which is to receive world-wide publicity.

" He said: ' In view of the fact that it seems to be the accepted thing is these serious times that wars should start without declaration or warning of any kind, so that the aggressor may virutally win the war outright through the surprise element, the Albish Government has felt it its duty to take measures to protect the country against the likelihood of such unprovoked attacks, especially as it is aware that just one H-bomb could wipe out all our capital and a much greater area beyond it.

" ' To put the matter bluntly, it has been the opinion of the Government that the only effective deterrent against H-bomb attacks is the threat of instant reprisal in kind. It still is our opinion. But we have never lost sight of the possibility that the aggressor's initial attack may be so overwhelming as to destroy the victim's ability to mount an attack in reprisal. Indeed, that is certain to be the aim of the aggressor. To defeat this aim, we have taken precautions to see that a reprisal attack IS made, instantly and AUTOMATICALLY.

" ' The more deadly weapons are, the more likely they are to become boomerangs. It was tacitly recognised that gas was a dangerous weapon of this kind, and therefore no one dared use it in the last war. In our view, the H-bomb can also be made an unusable weapon for the same reason.

" ' In the nerve centres of this country, we now have a pattern of containers of heavy hydrogen liquefied under a pressure of over 100,000 lbs. These containers are scientifically placed, so that the explosion of one would start an instant chain reaction in the others. The material of which they are composed is an excellent conductor of heat. They are also carefully camouflaged. In themselves they present no danger: to set them off it would take the heat and pressure from an H-bomb exploding in the vicinity of just one of them.

" ' Now, our technicians have calculated that the energy pro-

duced by the hydrogen-to-helium change in respect merely of the containers situated in this city would be sufficient to cause utter devastation within a radius of 1,500 miles. At the moment we have to fear attack only from countries whose capitals, and a large part of the countries themselves lie within this radius.

" ' Thus any attempt to destroy Albion by hydrogen bomb attacks will automatically ensure the destruction of the greater part of the aggressor's own country. It goes without saying that our own country would be totally destroyed, but in the event of an unprovoked attack that would have happened anyway. As Albishmen, we are gratified to know that should we be attacked we can be sure of bringing our enemy down with us, and that we can still claim that we shall never be beaten, whatever happens.

" ' However, I do not visualise such a spectacular end to our destinies. We are safer now than we have ever been since atomic weapons were invented, for, knowing these facts, it would be suicide for anyone to attack us. We shall add to our heavy hydrogen store so that there is no safe distance from which any aggressor might launch an attack. If any independent country feels that our defence measures place it in danger, we make these points:—

- " ' 1. Any atomic war which starts would in any case spread into a world war: in the nature of things, there can be no neutrals these days.
- ' 2. We have, naturally, no intention ourselves of ever starting a war, and so no danger threatens from us, but only from demonstrable lunacy on the part of other powers.
- ' 3. If other countries copied our defence measures, atomic war would become impossible forever, for any outbreak of it would destroy the planet at once.
- ' 4. We feel that in these times independent countries, playing at power politics and respecting no common law, are themselves a greater danger to the world than our defence measures. It is only because independent countries put nationalism and self-interest before World Law, giving the latter no more than lip service, that we have been driven to our own stern measures to maintain peace. We hear too much about their rights and too little about their greater duty.

" ' We give these facts solemnly to the world. Let those who anticipate aggression reflect upon them. It may occur to them that the love of power beyond a certain mark leads to disaster. We have

indicated that mark. They pass it only to lose all power for all time. This is a warning effective from now.'"

Novik had come quietly into the room while Parleck had been reading, but when Parleck replaced the document on Luben's desk neither of the other men was looking at him. Novik, it seemed, was having trouble with an obdurate cigarette lighter, while Luben doodled on a writing pad—more wolves.

The silence continued.

Parleck was too familiar with the technique of creating nervous tension to be affected by it. Easily, he lit a cigarette and settled back in his chair to await what might come. He was not going to initiate any move.

And so it was Luben who presently felt he must break the silence.

He slipped the pad into a desk drawer suddenly, looked up as though he had forgotten Parleck was there, and then said in a high peremptory voice: "Is there any reason why you should not be executed summarily?"

Parleck exhaled a thin stream of pale blue smoke.

"Is there any reason why I should be?" he countered, undisturbed.

"Yes—this Albish announcement."

"I have an idea that I warned you that some time ago that the Albish had prepared a perfect defence against H-bomb attacks. This announcement merely corroborates the accuracy of my information. Should I be executed for doing my job efficiently?"

"You are not speaking to a fool," said Luben. "I don't believe in coincidences. There's always a connection between events which follow upon another's heels too quickly. In this case, you're the connection, because there can be no other. The Albish Government would not have gone to these drastic lengths to protect their country from H-bomb attacks unless they had definite information that someone was preparing to attack them very soon. You gave them that information."

"Have you any evidence to back such an accusation?"

"I don't need evidence," said Luben. "I know."

"In that case, there's no use arguing about it. I know the quality of your intellectual conceit: once you get an idea in your head which you want to believe, you're right, you're infallible—as infallible as Corporism itself. You'll keep on torturing me until I

make the confession you want to hear—whether the confession is only a lie to end the torture or not. Well, I'll save you the time. For once you are right. I told Sanders about the Council's plan—which means *your* plan, of course. More than that, I told him how to counter it—the containers were my idea."

Novik started. Luben's scrawny old hands began trembling so violently that he put them out of sight, below the edge of the desk.

"You miserable traitor!" said Novik, in an icily cold voice.

Parleck regarded him calmly. "From where I stand, you are the traitors—both of you, traitors to humanity. I do not serve you, nor Corporism, nor Negovia, nor Albion—I am a pawn in revolt. I serve only humanity. And humanity calls for world peace. I have answered that call. Now you can bring on the firing party."

Luben recovered control of himself.

He said: "Idealists always sound slightly ridiculous, especially when playing the martyr. There will be no firing party, and no brave last words. I don't want you to come to such a quick, neat ending thinking your perfidy has triumphed. I'll just tell you this: you have been under suspicion for a long time. I gave you the information about our plan of attack solely that you might pass it on to the Albish. I'm glad they're concentrating on H-bomb defence. It takes their minds off the possibilities of bacteriological warfare. Their containers will be of little value against the bacteriological bombs which will rain down on them within a month, and kill them within the hour. Novik, arrange for Parleck to have a holiday so that he can think these things over. The Manoberian salt mines are an ideal place for quiet thinking—send him there. A nice long vacation, say for a period roughly equal to the rest of his life. Though, of course, it may not be a very long holiday, after all—those salt mines don't agree with everyone. I complained before, Parleck, that you are slow in growing up. You are incredibly naive—humanity surely deserves better servants— . . . Take him away, Novik."

* * *

"Mate!"

It was just a month later.

Novik tried to keep the triumph from his voice, but his first victory after over a year of endeavour meant everything to him—and he had a shrewd idea that it meant as much to Luben.

The old man sat there, drooped, exhausted. There was a film of sweat on his forehead: he had been driven to putting forth more mental effort than ever before. And it had been in vain.

"Another?" said Novik, with a smile which was malicious because Luben was not looking at him. Nevertheless, Luben knew the malice was there. He shook his head wearily.

Novik started putting the pieces away, with fastidious tidiness, in their box.

"Are the bacteriological bombs ready yet?" he asked conversationally.

The old man shook his head again.

"I was speaking to Tanenburg, and he said he doubted if they ever would be ready," said Novik, fitting the white knight in with care.

Luben raised his head and contemplated Novik gravely before speaking. "Tanenburg was under my orders to discuss the matter with no one. This will cost him his post . . . you have an insidious way of getting round people, Novik."

Novik slid the lid over the chess pieces. He rested his fists on the box and met Luben's regard squarely.

"I call your bluff," he said steadily. "You never intended, before Parleck's treachery, to use bacteriological bombs. You knew—and you still know at heart—that there's no way of counteracting their boomerang effect. We could wipe out Albion in a day, sure enough, but just as surely the disease would be rampant here within a week. That sort of victory isn't worth the price—in fact, it's no sort of victory. True?"

"Go on," said Luben, not committing himself.

"You have been driving Tanenburg and his department to make it a one-way weapon, although you knew and he knew that it was impossible. But you didn't like to face up to the fact that you'd failed, that it was time to hand over to me. You just went on, bluffing, hoping irrationally, hanging on, fooling yourself but no one else. I'm sure you didn't fool Parleck."

"I'd failed?"

"Yes, you failed in your judgment of Parleck. I told you he was a dangerous man. But you trusted him—you trusted him too

far."

Luben dropped his gaze.

"You are still trusting him—and the Albish—too far," pursued Novik. "You've allowed yourself to become hypnotised by an empty threat: the threat of automatic reprisal. Don't you realise it's merely psychological warfare—defence by suggestion? Our agents have so far discovered no trace of heavy hydrogen containers in Albion. Even if there *are* containers, you may bet your life they don't contain heavy hydrogen. The Albish are too cunning for that. They realise that the mere belief that it's there is sufficient to deter raiders, without its actually needing to be there. And if there *is* one raider bold enough to attack, they'll be finished anyway, and reprisals won't raise them from the dead."

"Because our agents haven't located the containers, it doesn't mean they're not there," said Luben defensively. "The Albish themselves said they are camouflaged so as to avoid sabotage. A container doesn't have to be a plain metal tank. Almost anything could be used as a container: a water tower, gasometer, the boiler of a locomotive lying idle in the railway yards, a petrol truck. There are two million private houses in their Capital alone, any one of which may conceal a container. A container doesn't have to be anything even resembling a tank—almost any normal feature in an urban area could be hollowed out to make a receiver for heavy hydrogen."

"No it couldn't—not for heavy hydrogen under enormously high pressure. You're frightening yourself with bogeys you're raising in your own imagination. The Albish haven't been playing fool tricks like that with their heavy hydrogen. They've stored it, all right—in the form of bombs to be used on us when they're quite sure we've been duped into not expecting it."

"I've wondered whether they were bluffing, but I was never sure and dared not take the risk," said Luben.

"I'm quite sure they *are* bluffing, and the greater risk is to sit back and do nothing."

Luben passed his fingers through his hair several times, slowly. He was tired and torn with indecision.

"I don't know what to think. I guess I'm getting too old for this sort of thing."

"This sort of thing is only chess on a greater scale," said Novik, and implication was thick in his voice. "That gambit of

yours with the queen . . . I realised it was a bluff from the start, and I saw where the real danger lay. But I pretended to be hoodwinked, and led you on . . . into the trap. I have your measure, I know all your tricks, I can never be bluffed again. I'm the master now."

Luben sighed

"That's right. You are the master now. I was going to hand over the reins to you—you don't have to grab. You seem to know what you're doing better . . . than I know what I'm doing . . ."

Luben's voice trailed away. For a time he stared into space. He'd had a long run. Power had been life itself while he had held it. But one doesn't live forever.

He focussed his eyes on the black and white illustration on the wall from his favourite novel, Jack London's *White Fang*: the fight between the elder leader of the wolf pack and the young leader. He found himself tensing, unconsciously pulling his shoulders back. He stood up. He said firmly, the quaver gone from his voice: "I shall resign from the Chairmanship of the Council to-morrow, and propose your election. But to-day I am still Chairman. Send Tanenburg to me—I'm going to rip his hide off."

. . . .

Two days after Novik became the Chairman, a blast of sun-heat smote Albion from the sky. And Albion leaped up to smite back with forty times the power, light, and thunder.

The whole island cracked and split asunder and somewhere beneath the atmospherical fury sank quietly from view. The sea rolled hugely over the spot and then boiled upwards in a scalding cloud of steam that transformed day to a red night of death.

Lethal pressure waves leaped out in all directions, lethal heat waves on their heels with no task to perform but an innocent and hygienic cremation of the dead. Toiling slowly after them came the great tidal waves of steaming water to clean the crumbling land and the traces of death away. They rolled, ever smaller, across the blasted industrial areas to a place within sight of the ruins of the capital of Negovia, where Luben and Novik and the entire Council lay mingled with each other and with the ashes of millions of their pawns, all for the first time on a common level. And then

they flattened to a hissing stop, as if they had found the sight distasteful, and began to retreat.

Far away on the bleak north-east coast of the continent, Parleck, in the salt mine bored into the mountain-side, heard that a gale of very warm air had sprung up suddenly outside and was beginning to melt the snow.

When, in the meal-time break, he went to see, there was nothing to see but a veil of water pouring down over the entrance to the mine, too thick to penetrate. The snows high above were liquefying and coming down the mountain-side in a thousand channels.

He knew what had happened. He knew the Council were no more, that progressively worse ruin and desolation lay all the way from here to the western coastline, and that most probably that coastline now was not the one he had learned from the school map.

No one could get in or out of the mine, and no more work was done that day. They all sat around watching, waiting, listening, speculating. Above the sound of crashing water they could hear the high wail of the sirocco blowing outside.

At evening, the rushing waterfall over the tunnel mouth thinned and became ragged, splitting into several smaller falls, which they could see between. The valley below had become a broad river flowing into the near-by sea, and the gale had eased to a warm breeze. The concentration camp, its inhabitants, commandant, lieutenants, and all the military guard had been washed into the sea.

In this isolated corner of Manoberia the only live souls left were six hundred political prisoners in the mine and a dozen overseers.

"It's not hard to see how the situation here is going to work out," thought Parleck, "and I'm going to help it along. When the survivors elsewhere learn that the ruling clique has obligingly expunged itself, it'll be every man for himself. But here, with this nucleus of responsible and freedom-loving men, we can start to set up law again. Only this time it'll be law based on a moral code, not on expediency, a law for humanity. A law under which a man can have faith."

The only law in which Luben and Novik had believed was wolf pack law. They thought it was a basic and therefore irreplaceable law.

"Poor old Luben and his *White Fang*! He could never have been made to see that things had moved on since man was three parts animal, and rough and ready animal laws had to be super-

seded. Hydrogen bombs were somewhat more powerful than teeth and claws—and far more indiscriminant.

"The Lubens and Noviks of this world had believed in the survival of the fittest, but they would never have understood how inexorably they themselves would be effaced by that law. Because the test for survival these days was not physical fitness, nor even mental fitness—but only moral fitness.

"And to pass that test you had to believe that some of your fellow men could keep faith and speak truth, and that all gestures did not inevitably conceal an ulterior motive.

"If Luben and Novik had only believed that the Albish meant what they said!"

And then Parleck gave himself a mental shake and returned to the immediate present. There was no time to waste on the "ifs" of the past. It was the "ifs" of the future that mattered now, and it was time to act.

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

WHICH STORY DID YOU LIKE BEST?

So that we know the kind of story you prefer, please complete the ballot form below. Number the stories in the order of your preference: your favourite first, second best second and so on. Mail the completed form to the publishers as soon as possible.

The Pilot	
This One's On Me	
Ultimate Harvest	
Pawn In Revolt	
... And It Shall Be Opened	
Adaptable Planet	

After two months the votes will be counted and the author of the story with the most votes will be asked to write another yarn for NEBULA immediately. If any story gets more than 40% of votes its author will receive a CASH PRIZE depending on the length of the story.

Here is the result of the poll on the stories in NEBULA 3.

- 1st FREIGHT by
E. C. TUBB 31.1% votes
- 2nd LIMBO by
WILLIAM F. TEMPLE 22.5% votes
- 3rd THE BEAUTIFUL WOMAN by
CHARLES BEAUMONT 18.4% votes
- 4th MR. UDELL by
DAVID S. GARDNER 13.2% votes
- 5th ENIGMA by
MICHAEL HERVEY 7.7% votes
- 6th ALL MEN KILL by
H. J. CAMPBELL 7.1% votes