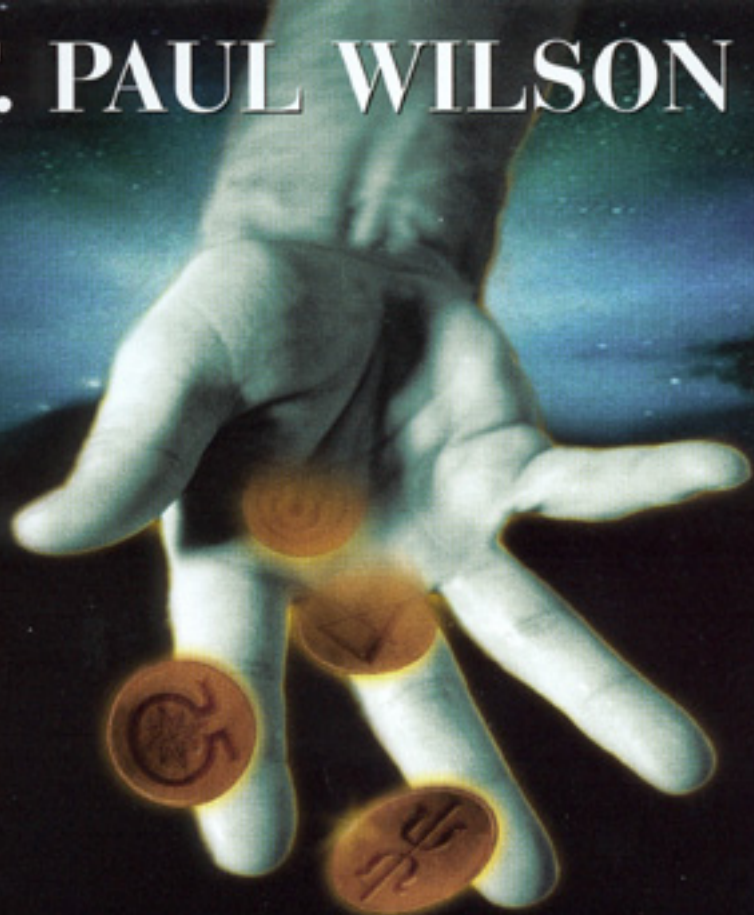


F. PAUL WILSON



**AN ENEMY OF
THE STATE**

AN ENEMY
OF THE STATE

F. PAUL WILSON

STEALTH PRESS

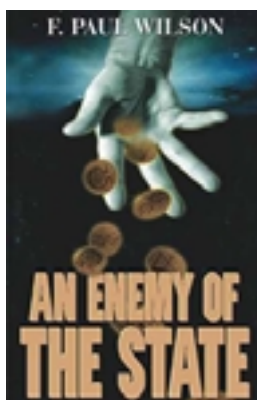
For my parents

"F. Paul Wilson weaves spells with words." — **Dean Koontz**

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An Enemy of the State *By F. Paul Wilson*



AN ENEMY OF THE STATE—The story of the apocalyptic birth of the LaNague Federation

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P R E F A C E

The year was 1979. I had written and sold *HEALER* and *WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS*, both patchwork novels extrapolated and expanded from shorter works previously published in *Analog*. Now I was ready to write a novel from scratch. I decided to stick with the LaNague Federation future history, but this time I'd write about the roots of the Federation, about its founder, the reluctant revolutionary Peter LaNague.

I saw LaNague as a non-violent man trying to bring down a repressive government without bloodshed—or at least with very little. But how to go about that?

At the time I was pursuing a personal radicalism based on the anarchocapitalist writings of Ludwig von Mises and Murray Rothbard and others. They contend that the soul of a free society is a free economy: if individuals are not allowed to deal freely with each other, then they are not free. I became fascinated with the Weimar hyperinflation during the early 1920s (a well into which I'd dip again decades later for "Aryans and Absinthe"). I began to wonder: if a government can manipulate the economy to further its own ends, why couldn't a clever revolutionary do the same to bring down a government?

And when I realized that Peter LaNague's target and weapon could be one and the same, the story clattered into place.

PREFACE

All this dovetailed perfectly with my long-term disdain for that hoary SF cliché, the galactic empire. Really, even with a faster-than-light-drive, the idea of an ironfisted centralized power micromanaging a collection of worlds spanning dozens of light years is absurd. My concept was a little more practical: a loose confederation of colonized worlds left pretty much to their own devices with a centralized Big Stick hanging over them to dampen any aggressive or acquisitive tendencies. In other words: Hands Off. Laissez Faire.

What a concept. It's now called libertarianism. Today there's a libertarian movement and a Libertarian Party, but back in the late sixties when I first arrived at my—for want of a better word—*Wel-tanshauung*, it didn't have a name. I spent the years 1964–68 at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. I made the marches, mixing with the gathering hordes around the Lincoln Memorial and trooping en masse across the Potomac toward the Pentagon. It was a happening, a huge party, and sure I wanted the war ended, but I was alone in that crowd, a political and philosophical orphan.

My problem was an inability to perceive much functional difference between state socialism/communism and fascism. The rhetoric was certainly different, but the result either way was central control of business, industry, media, and education, all at the expense of the individual. It didn't matter to me whether the state or the collective slipped the cuffs around my wrists, either way I was shackled.

So I struck out in a different direction, away from the Left-Right axis, and let me tell you, it was lonely out there. I turned off the Lefties with my espousal of a free-market economy (one woman at an anti-war rally cried, "You've must have been frozen for a hundred years!") and Young Republican types all but held up crosses when I suggested legalizing drugs and prostitution.

From the outset I wanted my science fiction to incorporate this odd but fundamentally consistent view of the world. It felt right. Lots of SF concerns aliens, and this nameless philosophy seemed pretty damn alien to just about everyone I knew.

When I finally got around to writing AN ENEMY OF THE STATE, I decided to make it a manifesto of sorts. But I didn't want

PREFACE

it to be too deadly serious, so I had some fun with the quotes that opened the chapters, using a wide array of sources ranging from Thomas Jefferson to Roger Ramjet. And when I couldn't find something that suited the mood I fabricated a quote and attributed it to THE SECOND BOOK OF KYFHO (*Revised Eastern Sect Edition*).

KYFHO is my word (an anagram that's explained in the novel) but it seems to have taken on a life of its own. A moment ago I did a Google search for the word and got 187 hits. I've seen a KYFHO license plate; newsgroup participants have incorporated quotes from THE SECOND BOOK OF KYFHO into their sig files; I've had readers contact me asking me where they can buy a copy of the book (sorry, you can't); someone wrote and suggested that I should write the book and sell it, and if I didn't have time, he'd do it for me (sorry, you can't).

A number of people wrote to tell me that AN ENEMY OF THE STATE changed their lives. Now *that's* scary. If you change someone's life, aren't you somehow responsible for what they do with it?

An even more unsettling result of the success of AN ENEMY OF THE STATE was that I began to hear myself referred to as "that libertarian sci-fi writer." Not wanting to be stuck in that or any other pigeonhole, I decided to take a vacation from SF. My next novel was THE KEEP, but that's a whole other story.

The 1980 hardcover edition of AN ENEMY OF THE STATE, when you can find one, goes for a hefty price these days. Stealth Press has remedied that situation with this new edition. As a LaNague lagniappe they've included "Ratman" (*Analog*, August 1971), my first professional sale and the very first LaNague Federation story (so please excuse the humongous pre-microchip computers); plus "Lipidleggin'" (*Asimov's SF Magazine*, May-June 1978), featuring the ancestor Peter LaNague is trying to trace in Chapter VIII.

F. Paul Wilson
The Jersey Shore
November 1, 2000

It appears there will always be unanswered questions about the Great Conspiracy, especially since its chief engineer, Peter LaNague, was not available afterward for questioning. The remarkable depth of his conspiracy's penetration into the fabric of Imperial society left many traceable elements in its wake, and so we have a reasonably clear picture of events during the five-year pre-insurrection period.

But what preceded the conspiracy itself? What started it all? What made Peter LaNague decide that the time was ripe for revolution? Scholars diverge at this point, but the single-incident theory appears to be coming into favor in recent texts. The arrival of LaNague on Throne and the cessation of attempts to assassinate Metep VII follow closely on the heels of a small anti-militia riot on Neeka. There was one fatality in that riot—a young woman named Liza Kirowicz. But Kirowicz was her married name. Her maiden name was Boedekker. And there's the rub . . .

*from LANAGUE: A BIOGRAPHY
by Emmerz Fent*

P R O L O G U E

“. . . And I say we’ve had just about enough!”

Liza Kirowicz was in the front row with her husband, cheering, stamping her feet, and shouting with the rest of them. There were about two hundred angry people packed into the hall; the air was hot and reeked of sweat, but no one seemed to take much notice. All were tightly enmeshed in the speaker’s word-web.

“It’s been well over two standard centuries since we kicked the Earthie militia back to Sol System. They were sucking us dry, taking what we produced and shipping it back to Earth. So our great-great-grandparents revolted and set up the Imperium, supposedly to keep us free. But look at us now: are we any better off? The Imperium has been taxing us since it was formed; and if that wasn’t bad enough, it later came around and said Neekan currency was no good—we’d have to pay in Imperial marks. Now, instead of Earthie militia, we have the Imperial Guard all over the planet, to ‘protect’ us from any possible countermoves by Earth! They must think we’re all idiots! The Imperial Guard is here for one reason: to make sure we pay our taxes, and to make sure those taxes go into Metep’s coffers on Throne! *That’s* why they’re here! And I for one have had enough of it!”

Again the audience broke into wild cheering. Jugs were being passed and sampled while coats and inhibitions were being shed. Her

lips and finger tips were already starting to tingle, so Liza let the jug pass untasted this time and watched with amusement as her husband Frey took a long pull. They had both been born and bred on Earth, a fact impossible to discern from their appearance. Even their parents would have been hard pressed to recognize their children under the layers of grime and callus.

Like many young couples of their generation, and of generations before them, they had been seduced by the call of pioneer life on the outworlds. Farm workers now, they had been such for almost five local years. Soon they would have enough saved to homestead a tract of their own, and that would mean working even harder. But they were where they wanted to be and loving every minute of it.

The economic situation was far from perfect, however. The standard of living was low on Neeka in the best of times; the taxes that went to the Imperium made things worse. If it hadn't been for those taxes, Liza and Frey would probably have their own place by now. It was galling: taxes were withheld from every pay voucher . . . their pay represented time, and time was life . . . little bits of their lives were being snipped off every pay period and sent to Throne . . . little bits of life trailing off into space.

And now a new levy from Throne: a 2 per cent across the board tax hike to defray further the expenses of the Imperial Guard garrisons on Neeka.

That did it. No more. The garrisons would go. This fellow up on the platform said they didn't need the garrisons and, by the Core, he was right!

Liza felt good. There was an exhilarating warmth spreading evenly throughout her body. She looked at Frey and loved him. She looked at all the weathered, impassioned faces around her and loved them, too. These were real people, solid people, people who were grappling with an alien ecology, aided by a minimal amount of technology and a lot of physical effort. No gentleman farmers here—owner and field hand worked side by side.

The hall had begun to empty, not in an aimless, unhurried dribble, but with a direction. The man on the platform must have said some-

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thing to activate his listeners—something Liza had missed—because they were pulling on their coats and following him out the double rear doors. Frey pulled her into the surge and she trotted along. They were headed for the local garrison.

The cold night air refreshed her and heightened her perceptions. Shielding her blue eyes against the wind that ran through her auburn hair, Liza glanced at the onyx sky and knew she was no longer an Earthie. The stars looked so *right* tonight. There had been such wrongness up there in the early years after her arrival—the sun had been the wrong shade of fire and the wrong size, the day sky was the wrong shade of blue and by night there were two moons. Both of Neeka’s satellites were out tonight; the small, playful Mayna swinging after her remote, austere sister, Palo. Both belonged there. Liza was a Neekan now.

The local garrison was a faceless white block at the corner of the landing pad complex. Two shuttles stood by on the pads ready to scramble the troops up to their orbiting cruiser should the need arise—an eventuality that had become increasingly unlikely with each passing decade since the outworlds’ break with Earth, and considered an Imperial fantasy for well over a century. Earth still coveted the outworlds and their resources, but the risk and expense of reclaiming them would be prohibitive.

And so the garrison troopers had it easy. They were reasonably well behaved and their major task throughout their hitch on Neeka was the alleviation of boredom. Until tonight. As the crowd approached, the troopers filed out of the single door on the town side of the building and formed an uneasy semi-circle between the locals and Imperial property. The commander had placed a ringer in the meeting hall to give them early warning should the gathering boil over into a confrontation.

Someone in the crowd started chanting, “*Back to Throne, leave us alone! Back to Throne, leave us alone!*” It was quickly picked up by the rest and all began to stamp their feet in time as they marched and chanted.

Liza had become separated from Frey in the press of bodies and

had pushed herself to the front rank in search of him. Once there, however, she quickly forgot about her husband. Her stride was long and determined as she was buoyed along on a wave of fraternity and purpose. They were going to send Metep a message: Yes, Neeka counted itself among the out worlds free from Earth; yes, Neeka counted itself as part of the Imperium. But no more tribute to Metep. No more pieces of life shipped to Throne.

An amplified masculine voice blared from the garrison roof:

“PLEASE RETURN TO YOUR HOMES BEFORE SOMEONE SAYS OR DOES SOMETHING WE’LL ALL REGRET LATER. YOUR FIGHT IS NOT WITH US. YOU SHOULD CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES ON THRONE IF YOU HAVE A GRIEVANCE.” The message was repeated. “PLEASE RETURN TO YOUR . . .”

The crowd ignored the warning and doubled the volume of its chant: *“Back to Throne, leave us alone!”*

The troopers, edgy and fidgety, held their weapons at ready. Most of them were young, Throners by birth, soldiers by choice due to the sagging job situation on their homeworld. Their training and seasoning to date had consisted of short sessions in holographic simulators. Most of them viewed the locals as stupid dirt-scratchers who spent their lives breaking their backs on reluctant soil because they didn’t know any better; but they also knew the locals to be a tough bunch. The troopers had the weapons but the locals had the numbers, and the troopers faced them uneasily.

“COME NO FURTHER!” the voice atop the garrison shouted into the night. “STOP WHERE YOU ARE OR THE GUARD WILL BE FORCED TO FIRE TO PROTECT IMPERIAL PROPERTY!”

The crowd came on. *“Back to Throne, leave us alone!”*

A lieutenant on the ground shouted to his men. “Make certain all weapons are locked onto the stun mode—we don’t want any martyrs tonight!” Glancing quickly at the angry mob that was almost upon him, he said, “Fire at will!”

Tight, intense ultrasonic beams began to play against the front ranks of the crowd with immediate effect. Those caught in the wash of inaudible sound began to reel and crumble to the ground as the

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microvibrations, pitched especially for the human nervous system, wrought havoc on conduction through their neuronal cytoplasm. As the leaders fell twitching and writhing, those being pushed from behind began to trip over their fallen comrades. Soon the entire march was in complete disarray.

With its momentum broken, the crowd backed off to a safe distance and resigned itself to verbal assaults. The troopers turned off their stunners and returned them to the ready position. In a little while, the marchers on the ground began to stir and rise and stagger back to their waiting friends.

All but one.

Liza Kirowicz was not breathing. It would later be discovered that she had been suffering from an unsuspected and, until then, asymptomatic demyelinating disease of the central nervous system. The result was an exaggerated response to the ultrasonic stun beams, resulting in a temporary paralysis of the mid-brain respiratory center. Without oxygen, temporary soon became permanent. Liza Kirowicz was dead.

It was an incident genuinely regretted by both sides as a tragic and unforeseeable accident. But that made little difference to Liza's father when the news finally reached him on Earth a full standard year later. He immediately began searching for a means of retaliating against the Imperium. And when Peter LaNague learned of that search, he knew his time had come round at last.

PART ONE
THE NIHILIST

THE YEAR OF THE TORTOISE

C H A P T E R O N E

“And how about you? What are you rebelling against?”

“Whatta ya got?”

The Wild One

A man would die tonight. The thin blond man sat in the darkness and thought about that. Long before his arrival on Throne, he had known that lives would be lost, but he had promised—*sworn!*—by all he revered that no man would die by his hand or word. And now, tonight, all that had changed.

He had ordered a man’s death. No matter that the man was a killer and would be killed before he could kill again. No matter that it was too late to find another way to stop him, or that a life would be saved as a result.

He had ordered a man’s death. And that was ugly.

As Kanya and Josef, shadows among shadows, went through their limbering exercises behind him, the blond man sat motionless and gazed out the window before him. It was not a high window. Cities on the outworlds tended to spread out, not up, and the cities on Throne, oldest of the outworlds, were no exception. It was night and glo-globes below limned the streets in pale orange light as they

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released the sunlight absorbed during the day. People were moving in steady streams toward Freedom Hall for the Insurrection Day ceremonies. He and his two companions would soon join them.

The man inhaled deeply, held the air, then let it out slowly, hoping to ease some of his inner tension. The maneuver failed. His personal *misho*, sitting on the window sill, responded to the tension it sensed coiled like a spring within him and held its trunk straight up from its earthenware container in a rigid *chokkan* configuration. Turning his head toward the twisting, leaping, gyrating shadows behind him, the man opened his mouth to speak but no words came forth. He suddenly wanted out of the whole thing. This was not in the plan. He wanted out. But that was impossible. A course of action had been started, wheels had been set in motion, people had been placed in sensitive and precarious positions. He had to follow through. It would be years before the plan came to fruition, but the actions of a single man tonight could destroy everything. He had to be stopped.

The blond man swallowed and found his throat dry.

“Time to go.”

The shadows stopped moving.

In pre-Imperium days it had been called Earth Hall and the planet on which it sat had been known as Caelum. Came the revolution and “Earth” was replaced by “Freedom,” Caelum renamed Throne, seat of the new Outworld Imperium. The hall’s vaulted ceiling, however, remained decorated in the original pattern of constellations as seen from the motherworld, and it was toward those constellations that the climate adjusters pulled the hot fetid air generated by the press of bodies below.

Den Broohnin didn’t mind the heat, nor the jostling celebrants around him. His mind was occupied with other matters. He kept to the rear of the crowd, an easy thing to do since everyone else in Freedom Hall was pushing toward the front for a better look at Metep VII. It was Insurrection Day, anniversary of the outworlds’ break with Earth.

Broohnin blended easily with the crowd. He stood an average one-

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point-eight meters tall and wore his black hair and beard close-cropped in the current Throne fashion. His build was heavy, tending toward paunchy; his one-piece casual suit had a grimy, worn appearance. A single distinguishing feature was a triangular, thumbnail-sized area of scar tissue on his right cheek, which could have resulted from a burn or a laceration; only Broohnin knew it had resulted from the crude excision of a patch of Nolevatol rot by his father when he was five years old.

The good citizens around him did not notice that his attention, unlike theirs, was not on the dais. Metep VII, “Lord of the Out-worlds,” was making the annual Insurrection Day speech, the 206th such speech, and Broohnin was certain that this one would be no different from all the others he had suffered through over the years. His attention was riveted instead on one of the ornate columns that lined the sides of Freedom Hall. There was a narrow ledge between the columns and the outer wall, and although he could detect no movement, Broohnin knew that one of his guerrillas was up there preparing to end the career and the life of Metep VII.

Hollowing out the upper section of one of those columns had been no easy task. Constructed of the Throne equivalent of granite, it had taken a high-energy cutting beam three days to carve out a man-sized niche. The huge amphitheater was reserved for rare state occasions and deserted most of the time; still, it had been nerve-wracking to sneak four men and the necessary equipment in and out on a daily basis.

Yesterday morning the chosen assassin had been sealed into the niche, now lined with a thermoreflective epoxy. He had a small supply of food, water, and air. When the Imperial security forces did an infra-red sweep of the hall on Insurrection Day morning, he went unnoticed.

He was out of the niche now, his joints flexing and extending in joyous relief as he assembled his lightweight, long-focus energy rifle. Today had to be the day, he told himself. Metep had been avoiding the public eye lately; and the few times he did appear, he was surrounded by deflectors. But now, on Insurrection Day, he was

allowing himself a few minutes out in the open for tradition's sake. And the assassin knew those moments had to be put to use. Metep had to die . . . it was the only way to bring down the Imperium.

He had no worry for himself. It was Broohnin's contention, and he agreed, that the man who killed Metep would have little fear of official reprisals. The whole Imperium would quickly fall apart and he would be acclaimed a hero at best, or lost in the mad scuffle at worst. Either way, he would come out of the whole affair in one piece—if he could kill Metep before the guards found him.

He affixed a simple telescopic sight. The weapon was compatible with the most up-to-date autosighter, but that idea had been vetoed because of the remote possibility that even the minute amount of power used by such an attachment might set off a sensor and alert the security force to his presence. Sliding into a prone position, he placed the barrel's bipod brace on the edge of the narrow ledge. Metep stood sixty meters ahead of him. This would be easy—no adjustments for distance, no leading the target. The proton beam would travel straight and true at the speed of light.

The assassin glanced down at the crowd. The forward part of his body was visible—barely so—only to those at the far side of the hall, and they were all looking at the dais. Except for one . . . he had an odd sensation that whenever he glanced at the crowd, someone down there snapped his or her head away. It couldn't be Broohnin—he was at the back of the hall waiting for Metep's death. No, somebody had spotted him. But why no alarm? Perhaps it was a sympathizer down there, or someone who took him for a member of the security force.

Better get the whole thing over with. One shot . . . that was all it would take, all he would get. Alarms would go off as soon as he activated his rifle's energy chamber and scanners would triangulate his position in microseconds; security forces would move in on him immediately. One shot, and then he would have to scramble back into his niche in the column. But Metep would be dead by then, a neat little hole burned through his brain.

Almost against his will, he glanced again to his right, and *again*

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experienced the uncanny sensation that someone on the fringe of the crowd down there had just turned his head away. But he could not pinpoint the individual. He had a feeling it could be one of the people near the wall . . . male, female, he couldn't say.

Shrugging uncomfortably, he faced forward again and set his right eye into the sight, swiveled ever so slightly . . . there! Metep's face—fixed smile, earnest expression—trapped in the crosshairs. As he lifted his head from the sight for an instant's perspective, he felt a stinging impact on the right side of his throat. Everything was suddenly red . . . his arms, his hands, the weapon . . . all bright red. Vision dimmed as he tried to raise himself from the now slippery ledge, then it brightened into blazing white light, followed by total, eternal darkness.

A woman in the crowd below felt something wet on her left cheek and put a hand up to see what it was. Her index and middle fingers came away sticky and scarlet. Another large drop splattered on her left shoulder, then a steady crimson stream poured over her. The ensuing screams of the woman and others around her brought the ceremony to a halt and sent Metep VII scurrying from the dais.

A telescoping platform was brought in from the maintenance area and raised to the ledge. To the accompaniment of horrified gasps from the onlookers, the exsanguinated corpse of the would-be assassin and his unused weapon were lowered to the floor. The cause of death was obvious to all within view: a hand-sized star-shaped disk edged with five curved blades had whirled into the man's throat and severed the right carotid artery.

As the body was being trucked away, an amplified voice announced that the remainder of the evening's program was canceled. Please clear the hall. Imperial guards, skilled at crowd control, began to herd the onlookers toward the exits.

Broohnin stood fast in the current, his eyes fixed on his fallen fellow guerrilla as the crowd eddied past.

"Who did this?" he muttered softly under his breath. Then louder. "*Who did this!*"

A voice directly to his right startled him. "We don't know who's behind these assassination attempts, sir. But we'll find them, have no

fear of that. For now, though, please keep moving.”

It was one of the Imperial Guard, a young one, who had overheard and misunderstood him, and was now edging him into the outward flow. Broohnin nodded and averted his face. His underground organization was unnamed and unknown. The Imperium was not at all sure that a unified revolutionary force even existed. The incidents—the bombings, the assassination attempts on Metep—had a certain random quality about them that led the experts to believe that they were the work of unconnected malcontents. The sudden rash of incidents was explained as me-tooism: one terrorist act often engendered others.

Still, he kept his face averted. Never too careful. Breaking from the crowd as soon as he reached the cool dark outside, Broohnin headed for Imperium Park at a brisk pace. He spat at the sign that indicated the name of the preserve.

Imperium! he thought. *Everything has “Imperium” or “Imperial” before it!* Why wasn’t everyone else on the planet as sick of those words as he was?

He found his brooding tree and seated himself under it, back against the bole, legs stretched out before him. He had to sit here and control himself. If he stayed on his feet, he would do something foolish like throwing himself into the lake down at the bottom of the hill. Holding his head back against the firmness of the *keerni* tree behind him, Den Broohnin closed his eyes and fought the despair that was never very far away. His life had been one long desperate fight against that despair and he felt he would lose the battle tonight. The blackness crept in around the edges of his mind as he sat and tried to find some reason to wait around for tomorrow.

He wanted to cry. There was a huge sob trapped in his chest and he could not find a way to release it.

The revolution was finished. Aborted. Dead. His organization was bankrupt. The tools for hollowing out the column had drained their financial reserves; the weapon, purchased through underground channels, had dried them up completely. But every mark would have been well spent were Metep VII dead now.

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Footsteps on the path up from the lake caused Broohnin to push back the blackness and part his eyelids just enough for a look. A lone figure strolled aimlessly along, apparently killing time. Broohnin closed his eyes briefly, then snapped them open again when he heard the footsteps stop. The stroller had halted in front of him, waiting to be noticed.

“Den Broohnin, I believe?” the stranger said once he was sure he had Broohnin’s attention. His tone was relaxed, assured, the words pronounced with an odd nasal lilt that was familiar yet not readily identifiable. The man was tall—perhaps five or six centimeters taller than Broohnin—slight, with curly, almost kinky blond hair. He had positioned himself in such a manner that the light from the nearest glo-globe shone over his right shoulder, completely obscuring his facial features. A knee-length cloak further blunted his outline.

“How do you know my name?” Broohnin asked, trying to find something familiar about the stranger, something that would identify him. He drew his legs under him and crouched, ready to spring. There was no good reason for this man to accost him in Imperium Park at this hour. Something was very wrong.

“Your name is the very least of my knowledge.” Again, that tantalizing accent. “I know you’re from Nolevatol. I know you came to Throne twelve standard years ago and have, in the past two, directed a number of assassination attempts against the life of the current Metep. I know the number of men in your little guerrilla band, know their names and where they live. I even know the name of the man who was killed tonight.”

“You know who killed him, then?” Broohnin’s right hand had slipped toward his ankle as the stranger spoke, and now firmly grasped the handle of his vibe-knife.

The silhouette of the stranger’s head nodded. “One of my associates. And the reason for this little meet is to inform you that there will be no more assassination attempts on Metep VII.”

In a single swift motion, Broohnin pulled the weapon from its sheath, activated it, and leaped to his feet. The blade, two centimeters wide and six angstroms thick, was a linear haze as it vibrated at 6,000

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cycles per second. It had its limitations as a cutting tool, but certainly nothing organic could resist it.

“I wonder what your ‘associates’ will think,” Broohnin said through clenched teeth as he approached the stranger in a half-crouch, waving the weapon before him, “when they find your head at one end of Imperium Park and your body at the other?”

The man shrugged. “I’ll let them tell you themselves.”

Broohnin suddenly felt himself grabbed by both arms from behind. The vibre-knife was deftly removed from his grasp as he was slammed back against the tree and held there, stunned, shaken, and utterly helpless. He glanced right and left to see two figures, a male and a female, robed in black. The hair of each was knotted at the back and a red circle was painted in the center of each forehead. All sorts of *things* hung from the belts that circled their waists and crossed their chests. He felt a sudden urge to retch. He knew what they were . . . he’d seen holos countless times.

Flinters!

C H A P T E R T W O

There used to be high priests to explain the ways of the king—who was the state—to the masses. Religion is gone, and so are kings. But the state remains, as do the high priests in the guise of Advisers, Secretaries of Whatever Bureau, public relations people, and sundry apologists. Nothing changes.

from THE SECOND BOOK OF KYFHO

Metep VII slumped in his high-back chair at the head of the long conference table. Four other silent men sat in similar but smaller chairs here and there along the length of the table, waiting for the fifth and final member of the council of advisers to arrive. The prim, crisp executive image had fallen away from the “Lord of the Outworlds.” His white brocade coat was fastened only halfway up, and his dark brown hair, tinged with careful amounts of silver, was sloppily pushed off his forehead. The sharply chiseled facial features sagged now with fatigue as he rubbed the reddened, irritated whites of his blue eyes. He was one very frightened man.

The walls, floor, and ceiling were paneled with *keerni* wood; the conference table, too, was constructed of that grainy ubiquitous hardwood. Metep II, designer of this particular room, had wanted it that way. To alter it would be to alter history. And so it remained.

Forcing himself to relax, he leaned back and let his gaze drift toward the ceiling where holographic portraits of his six predecessors were suspended in mid-air. It came to rest on Metep I.

Anyone ever try to kill you? he mentally asked the rugged, lifelike face.

Metep I's real name had been Fritz Renders. A farmer by birth, revolutionary by choice, he had led his ragtag forces in a seemingly hopeless assault against the Earth governorship headquartered here on Throne—then called Caelum—and had succeeded. Fritz Renders had then declared the outworlds independent of Earth, and himself “Lord of the Outworlds.” That was 206 years ago today, the first Insurrection Day. The rest of the colonials on other planets rose up then and threw out their own overseers. Earth's day of absentee landlordship over her star colonies was over. The Outworld Imperium was born.

It was an empire in no sense of the word, however. The colonials would not stand for such a thing. But the trappings of a monarchy were felt to be of psychological importance when dealing with Earth and the vast economic forces based there. The very name, Outworld Imperium, engendered a sense of permanence and monolithic solidarity. Nominally at least, it was not to be trifled with.

In actuality, however, the Imperium was a simple democratic republic which elected its leader to a lifelong term—with recall option, of course. Each leader took the title of Metep and affixed the proper sequential number, thereby reinforcing the image of power and immutability.

How things had changed, though. The first council meeting such as this had taken place in the immediate post-revolutionary period and had been attended by a crew of hard-bitten, hard-drinking revolutionaries and the radical thinkers who had gravitated to them. And that was the entire government.

Now look at it: in two short centuries the Outworld Imperium had grown from a handful of angry, victorious interstellar colonials into a . . . business. Yes, that's what it was: A business. But one that produced nothing. True, it employed more people than any other business in the outworlds; and its gross income was certainly much larger, though income was not received in free exchange for goods or services, but rather through taxation. A business . . . one that never

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showed a profit, was always in the red, continually borrowing to make up deficits.

A rueful smile briefly lit Metep VII's handsome middle-aged face as he followed the train of thought to its end: lucky for this business that it controlled the currency machinery or it would have been bankrupt long ago!

His gaze remained fixed on the portrait of Metep I, who in his day had known everyone in the entire government by face and by name. Now . . . the current Metep was lucky if he knew who was in the executive branch alone. It was a big job, being Metep. A high-pressure job, but one with enough power and glory to suit any man. Some said the position had come to hold more power than a good man would want and an evil man would need. But those were the words of the doom-and-gloomers who dogged every great man's heels. He had power, yes, but he didn't make all the decisions. All the civilized out worlds, except for a few oddball societies, sent representatives to the legislature. They had nominal power . . . nuisance value, really. The real power of the outworlds lay with Metep and his advisers on the Council of Five. When Haworth arrived, the true decision-makers of the Imperium would all be in this one room.

All in all, it was a great life, being Metep. At least until recently . . . until the assassination attempts had started. There had been one previous attempt on a Metep—back when the legal tender laws were being enforced by Metep IV—but that had been a freak incident; a clerk in the agriculture bureau had been passed over at promotion time and laid all blame on the presiding Metep.

What was going on here and now was different. Tonight was the third attempt in the past year. The first two had been bombs—one in his private flitter, and then another hidden in the main entrance from the roof pad of the palatial estate occupied by every Metep since III. Both had been found in time, thank the Core. But this third attack, the one tonight . . . this one had unnerved him. The realization that a man had been able to smuggle an energy weapon into Freedom Hall and had actually been in position to fire was bad enough. But add to that the manner in which he was stopped—his

throat sliced open by some grotesquely primitive weapon—and the result was one terrified head of state.

Not only was some unknown, unheralded group trying to bring his life to an end, but another person or group, equally unknown and unheralded, was trying to preserve it. He did not know which terrified him more.

Daro Haworth, head of the Council of Five, entered then, bringing the low hum of conversation around the table and Metep VII's reverie to an abrupt halt. Born on Derby, educated on Earth, he was rumored in some quarters to wield as much power on Throne and in the Imperium as the Metep himself. That sort of talk irked Metep VII, whose ego was unsteady of late. But he had to admit that Haworth possessed a deviously brilliant mind. Given any set of rules or regulations, the man could find a loophole of sufficient size to slip through any program the Metep and his council desired. Moved by neither the spirit nor the letter of any constitutional checks and balances, he could find ways to make almost anything legal—or at least give it a patina of legality. And in those rare instances when his efforts were thwarted, he found the legislature more than willing to modify the troublesome law to specification. A remarkable man.

His appearance, too, was remarkable: deeply tanned skin set against hair bleached stark white, a decadent affectation he had picked up during his years on Earth and never lost. It made him instantly identifiable.

“Afraid I don't have anything new to tell you on that dead assassin, Jek,” Haworth said, sliding into the chair directly to the Metep's right. Like all members of the Council of Five, he called Metep VII by the name his parents had given him forty-seven standard years ago: Jek Milian. Other cronies who had known him way back when and had helped him reach his present position used it, too. But only in private. In public he was Metep VII—to everyone.

“Don't call him an 'assassin.' He didn't succeed so he's not an assassin.” Metep straightened in his chair. “And there's nothing new on him?”

Haworth shook his head. “We know his name, we know where

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he lived, we know he was a dolee. Beyond that, it's as if he lived in a vacuum. We have no line on his acquaintances, or how he spent his time."

"Damn dolees!" was muttered somewhere down the table.

"Don't damn them," Haworth said in his cool, cultured tones. "They're a big vote block—keep a little money in their pockets, give them Food Vouchers to fill their bellies, and there'll be no recall . . . ever. But getting back to this would-be assassin. We *will* get a line on him; and when we do, it will be the end of the group behind these assassination attempts."

"What about that thing that killed him?" Metep asked. "Any idea where it came from? I've never seen anything like it."

"Neither have I," Haworth replied. "But we've found out what it is and it's nothing new. Couple of thousand years old, in fact." He hesitated.

"Well?" The entire table was listening intently.

"It's a *shuriken*, used on old Earth before the days of atmospheric flight." A murmur arose among the other four councilors.

"A relic of some sort?" Metep said.

"No. It's new . . . manufactured only a few years ago." Again the hesitation, then: "And it was manufactured on Flint."

Silence, as deep and complete as that of interstellar space, enveloped the table. Krager, a short, crusty, portly old politico, broke it.

"A Flinter? Here?"

"Apparently so," Haworth said, his delicate fingers forming a steeple in front of him on the table. "Or somebody trying to make us think there's a Flinter here. However, judging by the accuracy with which that thing was thrown, I'd say we were dealing with the real thing."

Metep VII was ashen, his face nearly matching the color of his jacket. "Why me? What could a Flinter possibly have against me?"

"No, Jek," Haworth said in soothing tones. "You don't understand. Whoever threw the *shuriken* saved your life. Don't you see that?"

What Metep saw was a colossal reversal of roles. The man who

thought himself the gamemaster had suddenly become a pawn on a board between two opposing forces, neither identified and both totally beyond his control. This was what was most disturbing: he had no control over recent events. And that, after all, was why he was Metep—to control events.

He slammed his palm down on the table. “Never mind what I see! There’s a concerted effort on out there to kill me! I’ve been lucky so far, but I’m not supposed to be relying on luck . . . I’m supposed to be relying on skilled security personnel. Yet two bombs were planted—”

“They were found,” Haworth reminded him in a low voice.

“Yes, found.” Metep VII lowered his voice to match the level of his chief adviser’s. “But they shouldn’t have been planted in the first place! And tonight tops everything!” His voice began to rise. “There should have been no way for anyone to get an energy weapon into Freedom Hall tonight—but someone did. There should have been no way for him to set up that weapon and sight in on me—but he did. And who stopped him before he could kill me?” His eyes ranged the table. “*Not* one of my security people, but someone, I’m now told, from Flint! *From Flint!* And there shouldn’t even *be* a Flinter on Throne without my knowing about it! My entire security setup has become a farce and I want to know why!”

His voice had risen to a scream by the time he finished and the Council of Five demonstrated concerned respect for his tantrum by pausing briefly in absolute silence.

Haworth was the first to speak, his tone conciliatory, concerned. “Look, Jek. This has us frightened as much as you. And we’re as confused as you. We’re doing our best to strengthen security and whip it into shape, but it takes time. And let’s face it: we’re simply not accustomed to this type of threat. It’s never been a problem before.”

“Why is it a problem now? Why me? That’s what I want to know!”

“I can’t answer that. At least not yet. In the past, we’ve always been able to funnel off any discontent in the direction of Earth, always

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been able to point to Sol System and say, 'There's the enemy.' It used to work beautifully. Now, I'm not so sure."

"It still works." Metep VII had regained his composure now and was again leaning back in his chair.

"To a certain extent, of course it does. But apparently there's someone out there who isn't listening." Haworth paused and glanced at the other members of the council. "Somebody out there thinks *you're* the enemy."

C H A P T E R T H R E E

Never initiate force against another. That should be the underlying principle of your life. But should someone do violence to you, retaliate without hesitation, without reservation, without quarter, until you are sure that he will never wish to harm—or never be capable of harming—you or yours again.

from THE SECOND BOOK OF KYFHO
(Revised Eastern Sect Edition)

Nimble fingers ran through his hair, probed his clothes and shoes. Finding him void of further weaponry, they released him.

“That’s Josef to your right”—the male figure bowed almost imperceptibly at the waist—“and Kanya to your left”—another bow. “Kanya is personally responsible for the death of your assassin back there in Freedom Hall. I’m told her skill with the *shuriken* is without parallel.”

It’s over was the only thought Broohnin’s mind could hold at that moment. If Metep was able to hire protection of this caliber, then all hope of killing him was gone.

“How did he do it?” Broohnin said when he was finally able to speak. “What did he have to pay to get Flinters here to do his dirty work for him?”

The blond man laughed—Broohnin still could not make out any facial features—and there was genuine amusement in the sound.

“Poor Den Broohnin! Can’t quite accept the fact that there are

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people other than himself who do not have a price!” The voice took on a sterner tone after a brief pause. “No, my petty revolutionary, we are not here at Metep’s bidding. We are here to destroy him. And by ‘him’ I do not mean the man, but everything he represents.”

“Lies!” Broohnin said as loudly as he dared. “If that was true you wouldn’t have interfered tonight!”

“How can a man who has built up such an efficient little terrorist group right under the noses of the Imperial Guard be so naïve about the Imperium itself? You’re not dealing with a monarchy, my friend, despite all the showy trappings. The Outworld Imperium is a republic. There’s no royal bloodline. Metep VII’s term is for life, granted, but when he’s gone his successor will be elected, just as he was. And should Metep VII be assassinated, a temporary successor will be in his place before the day is out.”

“No! The Imperium will collapse! The people—”

“The people will be terrified!” the stranger said in harsh, clipped tones. “Your ill-conceived terrorism only serves to frighten them into clamoring for sterner laws and harsher measures against dissent. You only end up strengthening the very structure you wish to pull down. *And it must cease immediately!*”

The stranger paused to allow his words to penetrate. Then: “The only reason you remain alive at this point is because I have some small use for certain members of your organization. I am therefore giving you a choice: you may fit yourself into my plan or you may return to Nolevatol. Should you choose the former, you will meet me in the rearmost booth of the White Hart Tavern on Rocklyne Boulevard tomorrow night; should you choose the latter, you will be on an orbital shuttle by that time. Choose to oppose me and you will not survive one standard day.”

He gave a short, quick bow and strolled back the way he had come. The Flinters disappeared into the darkness with a whisper of sound and Broohnin was suddenly alone once more under his tree. It was as if nothing had happened. As if the entire exchange had been a hallucination.

He had a sudden urge to move, to get where the lights were bright

and there were lots of people around. Thoughts swirled through his consciousness in a confused scramble as his pace graduated from a walk to a loping run from the park. There were Flinters on Throne . . . they were here to bring down the Imperium . . . that should have been a cause for rejoicing but it wasn't. Reinforcements had arrived but they might as well be aliens from another galaxy as Flinters.

No one knew anything for sure about Flinters beyond the fact that every member of their culture went about heavily armed and was skilled in the use of virtually every weapon devised by man throughout recorded history. They kept to themselves on their own little world and were rumored to hire out occasionally as mercenaries. But no one could ever document where or when. No traders were allowed to land on Flint—all commerce was conducted from orbit. The Flinters had no relations with Earth and did not recognize the Imperium as the legitimate government of anything. A sick society, by all accepted standards, but one that had proven viable and surprisingly unaggressive.

Broohnin slowed his pace as he reached the well-lit commercial district. Only a few people dawdled about. Even here in Primus, seat of the Imperium and capital of the most cosmopolitan of the out-worlds, people went to bed early. News of an attempted assassination on Metep had driven them off the streets even sooner. Dolees were an exception, of course. Excitement of any sort stimulated them, and since they had nothing ahead of them the next day, they could stay out to all hours if they wished. Sometimes that meant trouble. Violent trouble. An unfortunate outsider, or even one of their own, could be beaten, viced, or blasted for a few marks or just to alleviate the bleakness of their everyday existence.

On any other night Broohnin would have felt uneasy to be weaponless as he passed through knots of bored young dolees. The possibility that a Flinter might be watching him from the shadows erased all other fears, however. The youths ignored him, anyway. He was on the dole himself, sheltered and warmed by rent and clothing allowances, fed via Food Vouchers. And he was scruffy enough to pass for one of them. When he finally reached his side-street, one-room

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flat, he sealed the door behind him and flopped on the thin pneumatic mattress in the corner. And began to shake.

He was no longer faceless. Playing the guerrilla, the unseen terrorist, striking from the shadows and running and striking again was exciting, exhilarating. He could remain a shadow, an anonymous symbol of revolt. He could go down to the public vid areas and mingle with the watchers as reports of his latest terrorist acts were replayed in all their holographic splendor.

But that was over now. Someone knew his name, where he came from, and all he had done. And what one man could learn, so could others.

Flinters! He couldn't get over it. Why was Flint involving itself in the overthrow of the Imperium? Its attitude toward interplanetary matters had always been strict non-involvement. Earth and the rest of Occupied Space could fall into the galactic core for all Flint cared. Why were Flinters here now?

And that other one . . . the blond man. He was no Flinter. His accent hovered on the brink of recognition, ready to fall into place. But not yet. That was not what was bothering Broohnin, however. The most deeply disturbing aspect of the scene back in Imperium Park was the realization that the blond man seemed to be in command of the Flinters. And nobody tells Flinters what to do. They have utter contempt for all would-be rulers and barely recognize the existence of the rest of humanity . . . with the possible exception of the residents of the planet Tolive—

Tolive! Broohnin rose to a sitting position. *That* was the blond man's accent—he was a Tolivian! And that was the connection between him and the Flinters. Outworld history lessons from his primary education trickled back to him as the associations multiplied.

The key was Kyfho, a staunchly individualistic, anarchocapitalist philosophy born on Earth before the union of the Eastern and Western Alliances. Its adherents became outcasts on the crowded collectivist motherworld, forming tight, tiny enclaves in an attempt to wall out the rest of the world. An impossible task. The all-pervasive world

government seeped through every chink in their defenses and brought the movement to near extinction.

The interstellar colonization program saved it. Any sufficiently large group of prospective colonists meeting the given requirements of average age and rudimentary skills was given free transportation one way to an Earth-class planet. It was understood that there would be no further contact with Earth and no rescue should the colony run into trouble. A sink-or-swim proposition. Earth had its hands full managing the awesome mass of its own population, the solar system colonies, and its own official star colonies. It could afford neither the talent nor the expense of playing guardian to a host of fledgling interstellar settlements.

The response was overwhelming. The followers of every utopian philosophy on Earth sent delegations to the stars to form the perfect society. Splinter colonies, as they came to be known, were sent off in every direction. Wherever an exploration team had discovered an Earth-class planet, a splinter group was landed. Tragically and predictably, many failed to survive a single turn around the primary. But a significant percentage hung on and kept on, making mankind an interstellar race in the truest sense.

The program served two purposes. It gave divergent philosophies a chance to test their mettle . . . if they thought they had the answers to humanity's social ills, why not form a colonial group, migrate to a splinter world, and prove it? The program's second purpose directly benefited the newly unified Earth state by unloading a host of dissidents on the stars, thereby giving it some time to consolidate its global reach. The plan worked beautifully. The troublemakers found the offer irresistible and Earth once more became a nice place for bureaucrats to live. It was such an easy and efficient solution . . . but one that Earth would pay for dearly in the future.

By the time the splinter colony program was getting started, the Kyfho adherents had mitosed into two distinct but cordial factions. Each applied separately for splinter colony status and each was approved. The first group, composed of rationalists and intel-

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lectual purists, was a quiet, introspective lot, and named its planet Tolive. The second group wound up on a harsh, rocky planet called Flint. Its members had been raised for the most part in the Eastern Alliance and had somehow blended Kyfho with remnants of old Asian cultures; each adherent had become an army unto him-or herself.

Like most splinter colonies, both groups had major problems and upheavals during their first century of existence, but both survived with their own form of the Kyfho philosophy intact. It had been that philosophy which kept both planets aloof when the rest of the splinter colonies joined Earth in the establishment of an outworld trade network, and subsequently spared them the necessity of joining in the revolution that broke Earth's resultant economic stranglehold on those very same outworlds. Neither Tolive nor Flint had taken any part in the formation of the Outworld Imperium and had ignored it during its two centuries of existence.

But they were not ignoring it now, as Den Broohnin was well aware. Flint and Tolive were actively involved in bringing down the Imperium. Why? There would always be a philosophical link between the two cultures, a bond that the rest of the outworlds could neither share nor understand. Perhaps it was something in that very philosophy which was bringing them into the fray. Broohnin knew nothing about Kyfho . . . did not even know what the word meant.

Or was it something else? The blond stranger seemed to have eyes everywhere. Perhaps he knew some secret plans of Metep and his Council of Five that would explain the sudden appearance of Flinters and Tolivians on Throne. Something big must be in the wind to make them reverse their centuries-old policy of non-involvement.

Broohnin dimmed the light and lay back on the mattress. He was not going to leave Throne, that was certain. Not after all the effort he had invested in Metep's downfall. Nor was he going to risk being killed by some bizarre Flinter weapon.

No, he was going to be at the White Hart tomorrow night and

F. PAUL WILSON

he was going to be all ears. He was going to agree to any conditions the blond man wanted and was going to play along as long as it seemed to suit his own purposes. For if nothing else, Den Broohnin was a survivor.

VOLUME I



NUMBER 1

THE ROBIN HOOD READER

Look to the Skies!

A
TAX
REFUND
IS
COMING

Look to the Skies!

The Economic Weather Eye

PRICE INDEX (using the 115th year of the Imperium—when the Imperial mark became mandatory legal tender—as base year of 100)	154.6
MONEY SUPPLY (M3)	949.4
UNEMPLOYMENT LEVEL	7.6%

	Imperial Marks	Solar Credits
GOLD (Troy ounce)	226.2	131.7
Silver (Troy ounce)	10.3	5.9
Bread (1 kg. loaf)	.62	1.81

C H A P T E R F O U R

No state shall . . . make anything but gold and silver coin a tender in payment of debts. . . .

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES

What *are* these things?"

"Flyers. Nobody seems to know where they came from but they're all over the city. I thought they'd amuse you."

After Metep had the courtesy of first look, Haworth passed other copies of the flyer across the table to the rest of the Council of Five. The mood around the table had relaxed considerably since Metep's outburst. Expressions of deep concern for his safety had mollified the leader and it was decided to lower further his already low public profile.

"Robin Hood, eh?" Krager said, smiling sardonically as he glanced over the flyer. He looked to Haworth. "Wasn't he . . . ?"

"An old Earth myth, right," Haworth replied with a nod. "He robbed from the rich and gave to the poor."

"I wonder which of the rich he plans to rob?"

"Not from me, I hope," Bede, the slim Minister of Transportation, said with a laugh. "And what's this little insignia top and bottom?"

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Looks like an omega with a star in it. That supposed to mean something?”

Haworth shrugged. “Omega is the last letter in the Greek alphabet. If this is some revolutionary group, it might mean the Last Revolution or something equally dramatic. ‘The Last Revolution of the Star Colonies.’ How does that sound?”

“It doesn’t sound good,” Metep said. “Especially when they appear on the night of an assassination attempt.”

“Oh, I doubt there’s a link,” Haworth said slowly. “If there were, the flyers would have been printed up in advance proclaiming your death. This mentions nothing about death or disaster. Probably a bunch of Zem addicts, but I’m having security check it out anyway.”

Bede’s brow was furrowed. “Isn’t omega also the ohm, symbol for resistance? Electrical resistance?”

“I believe it is,” Krager said. “Perhaps this Robin Hood group—it may be one man for all we know—considers itself some sort of resistance or revolutionary group, but the message in this flyer is totally economic. And well informed, too. Look at that price index. Sad but true. It takes 150 current marks to buy now what 100 marks bought back in the 115th year. That’s a lot of inflation in eighty years.”

“Not really,” Haworth said, looking up from the notes before him on the table.

“That’s Earthie talk,” Krager said, an ill-concealed trace of annoyance in his tone. “The Earthies are used to inflation by now—”

“Earth has recently brought her economy under control and—”

“—but we outworlders are still suspicious of it.” The older man had raised his voice to cut off Haworth’s interjection and had perhaps put unnecessary emphasis on the word “we.” Haworth’s Earth-gained education still raised hackles in certain quarters of the Imperium.

“Well, we’d all better *get* used to it,” Haworth said, oblivious to any implied slur, “because we’re all going to be living with it for a long time to come.”

Amid the mutterings up and down the table, Metep VII's voice broke through. "I take it, then, the new economic projections are in and that they're not good."

"Not good at all," Haworth said. "This downtrend is not one of the cyclic episodes the outworld economy has experienced from time to time in the past half dozen decades. We are in a slow, steady decline in exports to Earth with no slackening of our import growth rate. I don't have to tell any of you how serious that is."

They all knew. Knew too well.

"Any bright ideas on how we can turn it around—besides more inflation?" It was Krager speaking, and his tone had yet to return to neutral.

"Yes, as a matter of fact. But I'll get to that later. Those of you who have kept up to date know that we're caught in the middle of two ongoing trends. Earth's rigid population controls are paying off at last; their demand for grain and ore is decreasing, and at a faster rate than anyone expected. Outworld populations on the other hand, are expanding beyond our ability to keep up technologically. So our demand for Sol system hardware keeps growing."

"The answer is pretty obvious, I think," Metep VII said with bland assurance. "We've got to pump a lot more money into our own technical companies and make them more competitive with Earth's."

"How about an outright subsidy?" someone suggested.

"Or an import tax on Earth goods?" from another.

Haworth held up his hands. "This has to be a backdoor affair, gentlemen. A subsidy will have other industries wailing for some of the same. And an import tax will upset the whole economy by sending technical hardware prices into orbit. Jek's right, however. We have to pump money into the right industries, but discreetly. Very discreetly.

Krager again: "And where do we get it?"

"There are ways."

"Not by another tax, I hope. We're taking an average of one out of every three marks now—seven out of ten in the higher brackets. You saw what happened on Neeka when we announced that sur-

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charge. Riots. And that dead girl. Not here on Throne, thank you!”

Haworth smiled condescendingly. “Taxes are useful, but crude. As you all know, I prefer adjustments in the money supply. The net result is the same—more revenue for us, less buying power for them—but the process is virtually undetectable.”

“And dangerous.”

“Not if handled right. Especially now while the Imperial mark still has some strength in the interstellar currency markets, we can shove a lot more currency out into the economy and reap the benefits before anyone notices. The good citizens will be happy because they’ll see their incomes go up. Of course prices will go up faster, but we can always blame that on unreasonable wage demands from the guilds, or corporate profiteering. Or we can blame it on Earth—outworlders are always more than ready to blame Earth for anything that goes wrong. We have to be careful, of course. We have to prime the pump precisely to keep inflation at a tolerable level.”

“It’s at 6 per cent now,” Krager said, irritated by Haworth’s didactic tone.

“We can push it to 10.”

“Too dangerous!”

“Stop your nonsensical objections, old man!” Haworth snarled. “You’ve been living with 6 per cent inflation—causing it, in fact!—for years. Now you balk at 10! Who are you play-acting for?”

“How dare—” Krager was turning red and sputtering.

“Ten per cent is absolutely necessary. Any less and the economy won’t even notice the stimulus.”

Metep VII and the rest of the Council of Five mulled this dictum. They had all become masters of economic manipulation under Haworth’s tutelage, but 10 per cent . . . that marked the unseen border of monetary no-man’s land. It was double-digit inflation, and there was something inherently terrifying about it.

“We can do it,” Haworth said confidently. “Of course, we have Metep IV to thank for the opportunity. If he hadn’t rammed through the legal tender laws eighty years ago, each outworld would still be operating on its own currency instead of the Imperial mark and we’d

be helpless. Which brings me to my next topic . . .”

He opened the folder before him, removed a sheaf of one-mark notes, and dropped them on the table.

“I’d like to take the legal tender laws one step further.”

Metep VII picked up one of the marks and examined it. The note was pristine, bright orange and fresh out of the duplicator, with the satin gloss imparted by the specially treated *keerni* wood pulp used to make it still unmarred by fingerprints and creases. Intricate scrollwork was printed around the perimeter on both sides; a bust of Metep I graced the obverse while a large, blunt *I* dominated the reverse. Different polymer sheets had been tried and discarded when the legal tender laws were introduced during the last days of Metep IV’s reign, but the *keerni* paper held up almost as well and was far cheaper. He lifted the bill to his nose—smelled better, too.

“You’re not thinking of going totally electronic like Earth, I hope,” he asked Haworth.

“Exactly what I’m thinking. It’s the only way to truly fine-tune the economy. Think of it: not a single financial transaction will be executed without the central computer knowing about it. We talk of subsidizing certain industries? With a totally electronic monetary system we can allot so much here, pull away just enough there . . . it’s the only way to go when you’re working with interstellar distances as we are. And it’s worked for Earth.”

Metep VII shook his head with deliberate, measured slowness. Here was one area of economic knowledge in which he knew he excelled over Haworth.

“You spent all that time on Earth, Daro,” he said, “and got all that fine training in economic administration. But you’ve forgotten the people you’re dealing with here. Outworlders are simple folk for the most part. They used to barter exclusively for their needs until someone started hammering coins out of gold and silver or whatever else was considered valuable on that particular colony. Metep IV damn near had a full-scale revolt on his hands when he started to enforce the legal tender laws and make the Imperial mark the one and only acceptable currency in the outworlds.”

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He held up a one-mark note. “Now you want to take even this away and change it to a little blip in some computer’s memory bank? You intend to tell these people that they will no longer be allowed to have money they can hold and count and pass back and forth and maybe bury in the ground somewhere?” Metep VII smiled briefly, grimly, and shook his head again. “Oh no. There’s already a maniac fringe group out there trying to do away with me. That’s more than enough, thank you. If we even hinted at what you suggest, I’d have every man and woman on the outworlds who owns a blaster coming after me.” He lifted a copy of *The Robin Hood Reader* in his other hand. “The author of this would be predicting my death rather than a tax refund. No, my friend. I have no intention of being the only Metep overthrown by a revolution.”

He rose from his seat and his eyes came level with Haworth’s. “Consider that idea vetoed.”

Haworth looked away and glanced around the table for a hint of support. He found none. Metep had veto power at council meetings. He also knew outworld mentality—that was how he became Metep. The matter was, for all intents and purposes, closed. He looked back to Metep VII, ready to frame a graceful concession, and noticed a puzzled expression on the leader’s face. He was holding the two sheets of paper—the mark note in his left hand, *The Robin Hood Reader* in his right—staring at them, rubbing his thumbs over the surface of each.

“Something wrong, Jek?” Haworth asked.

The Metep raised each sheet in turn to his nose and sniffed. “Have there been any thefts of currency paper?” he asked, looking up and fixing Krager with his stare.

“No, of course not. We guard the blank paper as well as we guard the printed slips.”

“This flyer is printed on currency paper,” Metep VII stated.

“Impossible!” Krager, who was Minister of the Treasury, reached for one of the flyers on the table. He rubbed it, sniffed it, held it up to gauge the glare of light off its surface.

“Well?”

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The old man nodded and leaned back in his form-fitting chair, a dumbfounded expression troubling his features. "It's currency paper all right."

Nothing was said for a long time. All present now realized that the author of the flyer that had been so easily dismissed earlier in the meeting was no fevered radical sweating in a filthy basement somewhere in Primus City, but rather a man or a group of men who could steal currency paper without anyone knowing. And who showed utter disdain for the Imperial mark.

C H A P T E R F I V E

“I sometimes think of what future historians will say of us. A single sentence will suffice for modern man: he fornicated and read the papers.”

J. B. Clammence

The White Hart had changed drastically. The thin blond man whose name was Peter LaNague noticed it as soon as he entered. The décor was the same: the rich paneling remained, the solid *keemi* bar, the planked flooring . . . these were as inviolate as the prohibition against women customers. During the five standard years since he had last visited Throne and had supped and drunk in the White Hart, there had been no physical alterations or renovations.

The difference was in the mood and in the level of sound. The regulars didn't realize it, but there was less talk around the bar these days. No one except LaNague, after a five-year hiatus, noticed. The diminution of chatter, the lengthening of pauses, both had progressed by tiny increments over the years. It was not just that the group's mean age had progressed and that familiarity had lessened what they had left to say to one another. New faces had joined the ranks while some of the older ones had faded away. And yet the silence had crept along on its inexorable course.

The process was less evident in the non-restricted bars. The

presence of women seemed to lift the mood and add a certain buoyancy to a room. The men wore different faces then, responding to the opposite sex, playing the game of being men, of being secure and confident, of having everything under control.

But when men got together in places where women could not go, places like the White Hart, they left the masks at home. There was little sense in trying to fool each other. And so a pall would seep through the air, intangible at first, but palpable by evening's end. Not gloom. No, certainly not gloom. These were not bad times. One could hardly call them good times, but they certainly weren't bad.

It was the future that was wrong. Tomorrow was no longer something to be approached with the idea of meeting it head on, of conquering it, making the most of it, using it to add to one's life. Tomorrow had become a struggle to hold one's own, or if that were not possible, to give up as little as possible as grudgingly as possible with as tough a fight as possible.

All men have dreams; there are first-order dreams, second-order dreams, and so on. For the men at the bar of the White Hart, the dreams were dying. Not with howls of pain in the night, but by slow alterations in aspiration, by a gradual lowering of sights. First-order dreams had been completely discarded, second-order dreams were on the way . . . maybe a few in the third-order could be preserved, at least for a little while.

There was the unvoiced conviction that a huge piece of machinery feeding on hope and will and self-determination, ceaselessly grinding them into useless power, had been levered into motion and that no one knew how to turn it off. And if they were quiet they could, on occasion, actually hear the gears turning.

LaNague took a booth in a far corner of the room and sat alone, waiting. He had been a regular at the bar for a brief period five years ago, spending most of his time listening. All the intelligence gathered by the investigators Tolve had sent to Throne over the years could not equal the insight into the local social system, its mood, its politics, gathered in one night spent leaning against the bar with these men. Some of the regulars with long tenures gave him a searching look

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tonight, sensing something familiar about him, and sensing too that he wanted to be alone.

If LaNague had judged the man correctly—and he hoped he had—Den Broohnin would walk through the front door momentarily. He would have to be handled carefully. Reason would be useless. Fear was the key: Just the right amount would bring him into line; too much and he would either run or attack like a cornered animal. A dangerous man, an explosive man, his co-operation was imperative if the plan was to maintain its schedule. But could his berserker tendencies be controlled? LaNague didn't know for sure, and that bothered him.

He reviewed what he knew about Broohnin. A native of Nolevatol's great farm lands, he had grown up with little education, spending most of his daylight hours trying to pull a crop from the alien soil of his family's farm. Friction between the boy and his father began and grew and culminated in young Den Broohnin fleeing the family farm—but only after beating his father senseless. He somehow made it to Throne where years on the streets of Primus toughened and seasoned him in the ways of city life.

Somewhere along the line he had come to the conclusion that the Imperium must fall and that he was the one to bring it down—by any means. For Broohnin the murder of the reigning Metep seemed the most direct way to accomplish this. That course of action had to be stopped, for it threatened to ruin all of LaNague's plans.

When Broohnin entered, the already low level of chatter at the bar lowered further as it does when any outsider ventures near an insular group such as this. He knew his uneasiness showed. His lips were tight behind his beard as his eyes scanned the room. He spotted a blond stranger waving from the corner. Conversation gradually returned to its previous level.

With every muscle in his body tense and ready to spring at the first sign of danger, Broohnin stalked warily to the booth and slid in opposite LaNague.

He was now truly seeing the stranger for the first time. He had

spoken to a shadowy wraith last night; the figure before him now was flesh and blood . . . and not exactly an imposing figure. A thin, angular face with an aquiline nose dividing two green eyes, intense, unwavering, all framed with unruly almost kinky, blond hair. Long neck, long limbs, long tapered fingers, almost delicate. Alarmingly thin now without the bulk of last night's cloak, and dressed only in a one-piece shirtsuit and a vest, all dark green.

"Where are your friends?" Broohnin asked as his eyes roamed the room.

"Outside." The stranger, who already held a dark ale, signaled the barman, who brought the tray he had been holding aside. He placed before Broohnin a small glass of the colorless, potent liquor made from hybrid Throne corn with a water chaser beside it.

Broohnin ran the back of his hand across his mouth in an attempt to conceal his shock: this was what he drank, just the way he drank it. Any hope he had held of dealing with this man on an equal footing had been crushed beyond repair by that one little maneuver. He was completely outclassed and he knew it.

"Am I supposed to be impressed?"

"I certainly hope so. I want you to be in such complete and total awe of my organization and my approach to a . . . change . . . that you'll drop your own plans and join me."

"I don't see that I have much choice."

"You can go back to Nolevatol."

"That's hardly a choice. Neither is dealing with your Flinter friends." He lifted his glass. "To a new order, or whatever you have in mind."

The stranger hoisted his ale mug by the handle, but did not drink. He waited instead until Broohnin had swallowed his sip of liquor, then made his own toast.

"To *no* order."

"I'll drink to that," Broohnin said, and took another burning pull from his glass while the other quaffed half a mugful. That particular toast appealed to him. Perhaps this wouldn't turn out too badly after all.

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“LaNague is the name,” the stranger said. “Peter LaNague.” He brought out a small cube and laid it on the table. “The Flinters gave me this. It creates a spheroid shell that distorts all sound waves passing through its perimeter. Radius of about a meter. It’s quite unlikely that anyone here would be much interested in our conversation, but we’ll be discussing some sensitive matters, and with all the assassination attempts lately”—a pause here, a disapproving twist of the thin lips—“I don’t want some overzealous citizen accusing us of sedition.”

He pressed the top of the cube and suddenly the chatter from the bar was muted and garbled. Not a single word was intelligible.

“Very handy,” Broohnin said with an appreciative nod. He could think of dozens of uses immediately.

“Yes, well, the Flinter society is obsessed with the preservation of personal privacy. Nothing really new technologically. Only the pocket size is innovative. Now . . .”

“When does the Imperium fall?” Broohnin’s interjected question was half facetious, half deadly earnest. He had to know.

LaNague answered with a straight face. “Not for years.”

“Too long! My men won’t wait!”

“They had better wait.” The words hung in the air like a beckoning noose. Broohnin said nothing and kept his eyes on his glass as he swirled the colorless fluid within. The moment passed and LaNague spoke again.

“Most of your men are Throners, I believe.”

“All but myself and one other.”

“A very important part of my plan will require a group such as yours. It will help if they’re natives. Will they co-operate?”

“Of course . . . especially if they have no other choice.”

LaNague’s head moved in a single, quick, emphatic shake. “I’m not looking for that kind of co-operation. I called you here because you seem to be an intelligent man and because we are both committed to bringing the Outworld Imperium to an end. You’ve developed an underground of sorts—an infrastructure of dedicated people and I don’t think they should be denied the chance to play a part. But you and they must play according to my plan. I want to

enlist your aid. The plan requires informed, enthusiastic participation. If that is beyond you and your cohorts, then you'll not participate at all."

Something was wrong here. Broohnin sensed it. Too much was being withheld. Something did not ring true, but he could not say where. And there was an air of—was it urgency?—about the slight man across the table from him. Under different circumstances he would have played coy and probed until he had learned exactly what was going on. But this fellow had Flinters at his beck and call. Broohnin wanted no part of any games with them.

"And just what is this plan of yours? What brings a Tolivian to Throne as a revolutionary?"

LaNague smiled. "I'm glad to see I didn't underestimate your quickness. The accent gave me away, I suppose?"

"That, and the Flinters. But answer the question."

"I'm afraid you're not in a position of confidence at this point. Be secure in the knowledge that the stage is being set to bring down the Imperium with a resounding crash—but without slaughter."

"Then you're a dreamer and a fool! You can't smash the Imperium without taking Metep and the Council of Five out of the picture. And the only way those fecaliths will be moved is to burn a few holes in their brain pans. *Then* see how fast things fall apart! Anything else is wasted time! Wasted effort! Futility!"

As he spoke, Broohnin's face had become contorted with rage, saliva collecting at the corners of his mouth and threatening to fly in all directions. His voice rose progressively in volume and by the end of his brief outburst he was shouting and pounding on the table. He caught himself with an effort, suddenly glad LaNague had brought the damper box along.

The Tolivian shook his head with deliberate slowness. "That will accomplish nothing but a changing of the guard. Nothing will be substantially different, just as nothing is substantially different now from the pre-Imperium days when Earth controlled the outworlds."

"You forget the people!" Broohnin said, knowing he sounded as if he were invoking an ancient god. "They know that everything's

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gone wrong. The Imperium's only two centuries old and already you can smell the rot! The people will rise up in the confusion following Metep's death and—"

"The people will do nothing! The Imperium has effectively insulated itself against a popular revolution on Throne—and only on Throne would a revolution be of any real significance. Insurgency on other worlds amounts to a mere inconvenience. They're light years away and no threat to the seat of power."

"There's no such thing as a revolution-proof government."

"I couldn't agree more. But think: more than half—*half!*—the people on Throne receive all or a good part of their income from the Imperium."

Broohnin snorted and drained his glass. "Ridiculous!"

"Ridiculous—but true." He began ticking off points on the fingers of his left hand: "Dolees, retirees, teachers, police and ancillary personnel, everyone in or connected to the armed forces"—then switched to his right—"Sanit workers, utility workers, tax enforcers/collectors, prison officials and all who work for them, all the countless bureaucratic program shufflers . . ." He ran out of fingers. "The list goes on to nauseating length. The watershed was quietly reached and quietly passed eleven standard years ago when 50 per cent of Throne's population became financially dependent on the Imperium. A quiet celebration was held. The public was not invited."

Broohnin sat motionless, the rim of his glass still touching his lower lip, a slack expression on his face as LaNague watched him intently. Finally, he set the glass down.

"By the Core!" The Tolivian was right!

"Ah! The light!" Lanague said with a satisfied smile. "You now see what I meant by insulation: the state protects itself from being bitten by becoming the hand that feeds. It insinuates itself into the lives of as many of its citizens as possible, always dressed in the role of helper and benefactor but always leaving them dependent on it for their standard of living. They may not wind up loving the state, but they do wind up relying on it to increasing degrees. And chains of

economic need are far harder to break than those of actual physical slavery.”

Broohnin’s voice was hoarse. “Incredible! I never thought—”

“The process is not at all original with the Outworld Imperium, however. States throughout history have been doing it with varying degrees of success. This one’s been slyer than most in effecting it.”

As he turned off the sound damper and signaled the waiter for another round, the conversation drifting over from the bar became mildly intelligible. After the drinks had been delivered and the shield was operating again, LaNague continued.

“The Imperium has concentrated its benefits on the citizenry of Throne to keep them in bovine somnolence. The other outworlds, with Flint and Tolive as notable exceptions, get nothing but an occupation force—pardon me, ‘defense garrison’ is what it’s called, I believe. And why this disparity? Because outraged citizens on other planets can be ignored; outraged Throners could bring down the Imperium. The logical conclusion: to bring down the Imperium, you must incite the citizens of Throne to outrage against the state. Against *the state!* Not against a madman who murders elected officials and thus creates sympathy for the state. *He* then becomes the enemy instead of the state.”

Broohnin slumped back in his seat, his second drink untouched before him, a *danse macabre* of conflicting emotions whirling across his mind. He knew this was obviously a crucial moment. LaNague was watching him intently, waiting to see if he would accept an indirect approach to felling the Imperium. If he still insisted on a frontal assault, there would be trouble.

“Have I made myself clear?” LaNague asked, after allowing a suitable period of brooding silence. “Do you still think killing Metep will bring down the Imperium?”

Broohnin took a long slow sip of his drink, his eyes fixed on the glass in his hand, and hedged. “I’m not sure what I think right now.”

“Answer honestly, please. This is too important a matter to cloud with face-saving maneuvers.”

Broohnin’s head shot up and his gaze held LaNague’s. “All right—

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no. Killing Metep will not end the Imperium. But I still want him dead!”

“Why? Something personal?” LaNague appeared struck by Broohnin’s vehemence.

“No . . . something very general. He’s there!”

“And is that why you want the Imperium overthrown? Because it’s there?”

“Yes!” Silence followed.

“I’ll accept that,” LaNague said after a moment’s consideration. “And I can almost understand it.”

“What about you?” Broohnin asked, leaning forward intently. “Why are you here? And don’t tell me it’s something personal—you’ve got money, power, and Flinters behind you. The Gnomes of Tolive wouldn’t get involved in something like this unless there was some sort of profit to be made. What’s their stake? And how, by the Core, are we going to pull this off?”

LaNague inclined his head slightly in acknowledgment of the “we” from Broohnin, then reached into his vest and withdrew three five-mark notes.

“Here is the Imperium’s insulation. We will show the higher-ups and all who depend on it just how thin and worthless it really is. Part of the work has already been done for me by the Imperium itself.” He separated the oldest bill and handed it to Broohnin. “Read the legend in the lower right corner there.”

Broohnin squinted and read stiltedly: “*‘Redeemable in gold on demand at the Imperial Treasury.’*”

“Look at the date. How old is it?”

He glanced down, then up again. “Twenty-two years.” Broohnin felt bewildered, and simultaneously annoyed at being bewildered.

LaNague handed over the second bill. “This one’s only ten years old. Read *its* legend.”

“*‘This is legal tender for all debts, public and private, and is redeemable in lawful money at the Imperial Treasury.’*” Broohnin still had no idea where the demonstration was leading.

The third bill was handed over. "I picked this one up today—it's the latest model."

Broohnin read without being prompted. "*'This note is legal tender for all debts public and private.'*" He shrugged and handed back all three mark notes. "So what?"

"I'm afraid that's all I can tell you now." LaNague held up the oldest note. "But just think: a little over two standard decades ago this was, for all intents and purposes, *gold*. This"—he held up the new bill—"is just paper."

"And *that's* why you're trying to topple the Imperium?" Broohnin shook his head in disbelief. "You're crazier than I am!"

"I'll explain everything to you once we're aboard ship."

"Ship? What ship? I'm not going anywhere!"

"We're going to Earth. That is, if you want to come."

Broohnin stared as the truth hit him. "You're not joking, are you?"

"Of course not." The tone was testy. "There's nothing humorous about going to Earth."

"But why would—" He stopped short and drew in a breath, narrowing his eyes. "You'd better not be bringing Earthies into this! If you are, I'll wring your neck here and now and not an army of Flinters will save you!"

LaNague's face reflected disgust at the thought of complicity with Earth. "Don't be obscene. There's a man on Earth I must see personally. On his response to a certain proposal may hinge the entire success or failure of my plan."

"Who is he? Chief Administrator or some other overgrown fecal-ith?"

"No. He's well known, but has nothing to do with the government. And he doesn't know I'm coming."

"Who is he?"

"I'll tell you when we get there. Coming?"

Broohnin shrugged. "I don't know . . . I just don't know. I've got to meet with my associates tonight and we'll discuss it." He leaned forward. "But you've got to tell me where all this is leading. I need something more than a few hints."

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Broohnin had noted that LaNague's expression had been carefully controlled since the moment he had entered the tavern. A small repertoire of bland, casual expressions had played across his face, displayed for calculated effect. But true emotions came through now. His eyes ignited and his mouth became set in a fierce, tight line.

"Revolution, my dear Broohnin. I propose a quiet revolution, one without blood and thunder, but one which will shake this world and the entire outworld mentality such as no storm of violence ever shall. History is filled with cosmetic revolutions wherein a little paint is daubed on an old face or, in the more violent and destructive examples, a new head set on an old body. Mine will be different. Truly radical . . . which means it will strike at the root. I'm going to teach the outworlds a lesson they will never forget. When I'm through with the Imperium and everything connected with it, the people of the outworlds will swear to never again allow matters to reach the state they are in now. Never again!"

"But how, damn you?"

"By destroying these"—LaNague threw the mark notes on the table—"and substituting this." He reached into another pocket of his vest and produced a round metal disk, yellow, big enough to cover a dead man's eye, and heavy—very heavy. It was stamped on both sides with a star inside an ohm.

The circle was to meet at the usual place tonight. Broohnin always referred aloud to the members of his tiny revolutionist cadre as "my associates." But in his mind and in his heart they were always called "the Broohnin circle." It was a varied group—Professor Zachariah Brophy from Outworld U.; Radmon Sayers, an up-and-coming vid-caster; Seph Wolverton with the communications center; Gram Hootre in the Treasury Department; Erv Singh at one of the Regional Revenue Centers. There were a few fringe members who were in and out as the spirit moved them. The first two, Zack and Sayers, had been out lately, protesting murder as a method; the rest seemed to be going along, although reluctantly. But then, who else did they have?

There was only one man on the rooftop: Seph Wolverton.

“Where are the others?”

“Not coming,” Seph said. He was a big-boned, hard-muscled man; a fine computer technician. “No one’s coming.”

“Why not? I called everyone. Left messages. I told them this was going to be an important meeting.”

“You’ve lost them, Den. After last night, they’re all convinced you’re crazy. I’ve known you a long time now, and I’m not so sure they’re wrong. You took all our money and hired that assassin without telling us, without asking our approval. It’s over, Den.”

“No, it’s not! I started this group! You can’t push me out—”

“Nobody’s pushing. We’re just walking away.” There was regret in Seph’s voice, but a note of unbending finality, too.

“Listen. I may be able to work a new deal. Something completely different.” Broohnin’s mind was racing to stay ahead of his tongue. “I made a contact tonight who may be able to put a whole new slant on this. A new approach to stopping the Imperium. Even Zack and Sayers won’t want to miss out.”

Seph was shaking his head. “I doubt it. They’re—”

“Tell them to give it a chance!”

“It’ll have to be *awfully* good before they’ll trust you again.”

“It will be. I guarantee it.”

“Give me an idea what you’re talking about.”

“Not yet. Got to take a trip first.”

Seph shrugged. “All right. We’ve got plenty of time. I don’t think the Imperium’s going anywhere.” He turned without saying good-bye and stepped into the drop chute, leaving Broohnin alone on the roof. He didn’t like Seph’s attitude. He would have much preferred angry shouts and raised fists. Seph looked at him as if he had done something disgusting. He didn’t like that look.

Broohnin looked up at the stars. Whether he wanted to or not, it appeared he would be going to Earth with LaNague. There was no other choice left to him, no other way to hold on to the tattered remnants of “the Broohnin circle.” He would use LaNague to pull everyone back together, and then take up again where he had left

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off. Once he got a feel for LaNague he was sure he could find ways to maneuver him into a useful position.

Off to Earth . . . and why not? Who could pass up a free trip like that anyway? Few outworlders ever got there. And right now he was curious enough about what was going on in that Tolivian head to go just about anywhere to find out.



THE ROBIN HOOD READER

A Shot in the Arm

The duplicators at the Imperial Mint are working overtime these days, turning out new mark notes at an alarming rate. The idea is to give our sagging economy a “shot in the arm,” which is what deliberate inflation of the money supply is called in Bureaucratese. The theory holds that the extra marks in circulation will increase consumer buying power, which will in turn increase production, which will lead to greater employment, resulting in a further increase in buying power, and so on.

Sounds good, but it doesn’t work that way. With more marks suddenly available to buy existing goods, the prices of those goods go up. And stay up. Which means more marks are needed.

Let’s continue the medical analogy: it’s like treating a steadily weakening patient who’s bleeding internally by giving him a shot of Zemmelaar and nothing else. True, he feels better for a while, but he’s still bleeding. After the Zemmelaar wears off, he’s weaker than before. So you give him another jolt of Zem and he feels better again, but for a briefer period this time. He continues to weaken. Before long, he’s lost. Even if the internal bleeding halts spontaneously, he’s too weak to respond . . . and he’s now a hopeless Zemmelaar addict anyway.

The Economic Weather Eye

PRICE INDEX (using the 115th year of the Imperium—when the Imperial mark became mandatory legal tender—as base year of 100)		155.2
MONEY SUPPLY (M3)		942.6
UNEMPLOYMENT LEVEL		7.6%
	Imperial Marks	Solar Credits
GOLD (Troy ounce)	227.0	131.6
Silver (Troy ounce)	10.4	5.9
Bread (1 kg. loaf)	.62	1.83

We hope you enjoyed this sample of F. Paul Wilson's *An Enemy of the State*

The Steath Press edition of F. Paul Wilson's AN ENEMY OF THE STATE is published--as are all Stealth books--in embossed pearl linen clothbound hardcover with Smyth-sewn binding. It measures 9.5" X 6.25", has a full-color dust jacket with original artwork by Jeff King and its 335 pages are printed on acid-free paper. Your price is only \$29.95 including shipping.

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About the Author

F. PAUL WILSON



Paul was born May 17, 1946, and raised in New Jersey where he misspent his youth playing with matches, poring over Uncle Scrooge and E.C. comics, reading Lovecraft, Matheson, Bradbury, and Heinlein, listening to Chuck Berry and Alan Freed on the radio, and watching Soupy Sales and horror movies. He is the author of more than twenty books: five science fiction novels (*Healer*, *Wheels Within Wheels*, *An Enemy Of The State*, *Dydeetown World*, *The Tery*), eight horror thrillers (*The Keep*, *The Tomb*, *The Touch*, *Reborn*, *Reprisal*, *Nightworld*, *Black Wind*, *Sibs*), and three contemporary thrillers, *The Select*, *Implant*, and *Deep As The Marrow*. He brought back his popular Repairman Jack character in *Legacies*, *Conspiracies*, *All the Rage*, and, most recently, *Hosts*.

Short stories from his first fifteen years as a writer are collected in *Soft & Others* (1989) and *The Barrens & Others* (1998). *TheLaNague Chronicles* (1992) is an omnibus edition of his first three sf novels. He has edited two anthologies: *Freak Show* (1992) and *Diagnosis: Terminal* (1996).

The Keep and *The Tomb* both appeared on the *New York Times* Bestsellers List. *Wheels Within Wheels* won the first Prometheus Award in 1979; *The Tomb* received the 1984 Porgie Award from *The West Coast Review of Books*. His novels and short fiction have appeared on the final ballots for the World Fantasy Award, the Nebula Award, and the Bram Stoker Award. *Dydeetown World* was on the young adult recommended reading lists of the American Library Association and the New York Public Library, among others. He is listed in the fiftieth anniversary edition of *Who's Who in America*.

Over five million copies of his books are in print in the US; his work has been translated into twenty-four foreign languages.

F. Paul Wilson resides at the Jersey Shore with his wife Mary where he is working on a new Repairman Jack novel.

Other Media:

His novel *The Keep* was made into a visually striking but otherwise incomprehensible movie (screenplay and direction by Michael Mann) by Paramount in 1983.

His original teleplay "Glim-Glim" aired on *Monsters* in 1989 and is currently in

reruns on the Sci-Fi Channel.

An adaptation of his short story "Menage a Trois" was part of the pilot for *The Hunger* series that debuted on Showtime in July 1997.

Presently, five of Wilson's properties (including *The Tomb* and *The Select*) are under option for theatrical or television adaptation.

Collaborations:

With Steven G. Spruill - a novel, *Nightkill* (1997)

With Matthew J. Costello - two novels for Warner books: *Mirage* (1996) and *Masque* (1998). (*Masque* optioned by Polygram Films for Tom Cruise.)

Other media with Matthew J. Costello:

World design, characters, and story arcs for the Sci-Fi Channel's FTL NewsFeed, a daily newscast set 150 years in the future. An FTL NewsFeed was the first program broadcast by the new channel when it launched in September 1992. Wilson and Costello took over scripting the Newsfeeds (the equivalent of a 4-1/2 hour movie per year) in 1994 and continued until its cancellation in December 1996.

Screenplay for the interactive film *Bombmeister* (completed production in Hollywood on January 24, 1995, starring Jeffrey Jones. Unfortunately, it was produced by Interfilm which ceased operations before the release date. (Planet Theory is planning to release the title in DVD format)

Script and design for "Derelict," an interactive adventure for the Sci-Fi Channel's online site, *The Dominion* (1997)

Script and design for "Mathquest With Aladdin" (Disney Interactive - 1997) with voices by Robin Williams and Jonathan Winters

A stageplay, *Syzygy* was produced at the St. Augustine, Florida state theatre in October, 1999

Script and design for *The Interactive* for Orion Pictures, based on the Stephen King novel (no release date - probably vaporware)

Much more can be learned about the author and his creations at his official Web site: <http://www.repairmanjack.com/>

ABOUT STEALTH

What is Stealth Press?

Stealth Press is a book publisher with an approach we call Direct Publishing.

How does Direct Publishing work?

Stealth Press publishes original and out-of-print titles in high quality hardcover editions. The books are then sold directly to readers via the Internet as well as through fine bookstores. We also use the Internet in a number of other ways to enhance our operations.

How is Stealth different from all the other new publishing companies?

It is easiest to point out what Stealth Press is NOT. We publish "real books"-- Smyth-sewn, clothbound with acid-free paper--books made with attention to detail and to last. Although print-on-demand publishers (like Lightning Source) are doing a "pretty good" job, their books simply do not compare with a Stealth book. Because we publish physical books, we are not an e-book publisher (RocketBooks, eMatter, BiblioBytes). We publish books from critically acclaimed authors with successful track records, we are not a vanity press (iUniverse, Xlibris).

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