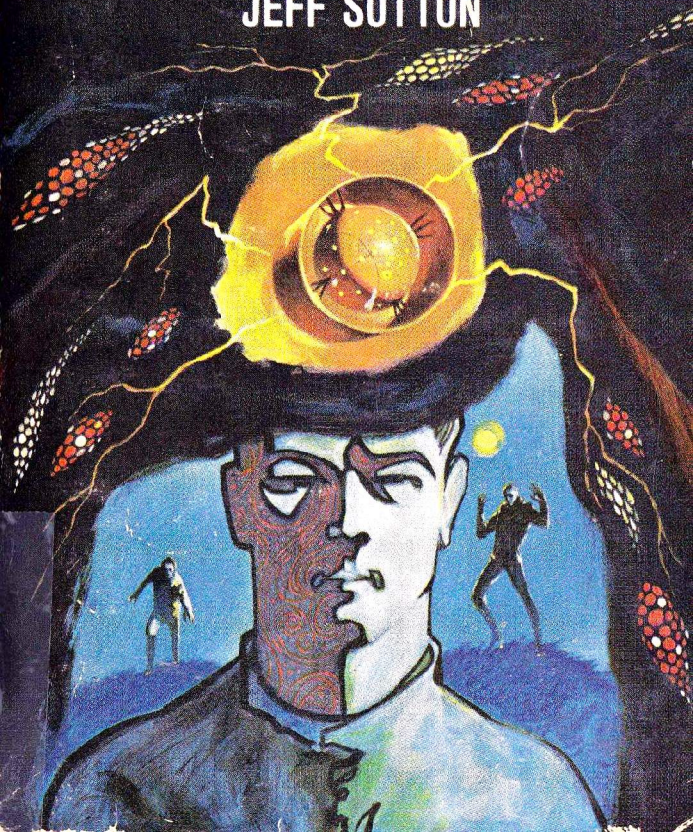


ace
double
H-95 / 604

THIS MAN MUST DIE—
OR THE FUTURE WILL NEVER BE!

THE MAN WHO SAW TOMORROW

JEFF SUTTON



THE MAN WHO SAW TOMORROW was named John Androki, and he was out to buy out today. For if he could capture the present—all of it—he would be in a position to destroy or alter the future. And that was what he desperately needed to do.

For a man who was rapidly acquiring all of the world's wealth, this seemed feasible. But Androki came slowly to realize that one doesn't change time so easily—tomorrow was beginning to fight back.

Only two men knew Androki's plans—himself and Bertram Kane, professor, mathematician, one of a handful of experts in multidimensional space theory. They both knew that this world, at least, was no longer big enough for both of them.

Turn this book over for
second complete novel



JEFF SUTTON
THE MAN WHO SAW
TOMORROW

ACE BOOKS, INC.
1120 Avenue of the Americas
New York, N.Y. 10036

THE MAN WHO SAW TOMORROW

Copyright ©, 1968, by Jeff Sutton

·All Rights Reserved

Cover by Jack Gaughan.

Jeff Sutton has also written:

FIRST ON THE MOON (F-222)

THE ATOM CONSPIRACY (F-374)

H-BOMB OVER AMERICA (H-18)

SO BRIGHT THE VISION

Copyright ©, 1968, by Clifford D. Simak

Printed in U.S.A.

HIS NAME WAS BERTRAM KANE.

Bertram Kane, Ph.D., professor of mathematics at Los Angeles University, world-renowned for his work in multi-dimensional space . . .

Bertram Kane, age thirty-nine, tall, slender, balding, with dark myopic eyes . . .

Bertram Kane, hiding in the woods in northern Wisconsin to murder an ignorant laborer who worked in a Fox River paper mill . . .

Bertram Kane didn't wonder why he was there, why he clutched the powerful rifle that was so alien to his hand, why he was waiting to kill a man in cold blood.

He knew that murder was the only way.

Peering out from his hiding place, he nervously scanned the landscape. The series of low, gently-rolling hills planted in corn and oats, or given over to the pasture of dairy cows, held the lushness of late spring. Here and there he saw the animals pasted against the quiet slopes, browsing or staring into nothingness. A graveled road wandered past, white and lonely against the greenery of the land.

Directly across the road was a battered mailbox, the name on its side made undecipherable by the ravages of sun and storm. Balanced atop a splintered four-by-four that leaned away from him as if bent by the wind, it appeared somewhat like a diminutive quonset hut.

A rutted dirt road which turned in at the mailbox led to a ramshackle two-story frame house a hundred or so yards beyond. The paint, weathered and peeling, was a dirty gray. The warped roof shingles and dangling storm windows gave the structure a deserted appearance. Many such homes, he had discovered, now served as low-rent refuges for farm laborers, or those who worked in the fisheries or paper mills of Green Bay.

Kane's intended victim lived in the one across the way.

A car chugged around the brow of a hill. The uneven roar of the engine alerted him before he saw it. Stepping farther back into the shelter of the trees, he shivered apprehensively. The car swept past, gravel spattering against the undersides of its fenders.

He watched nervously, fearful of what might happen if he were seen. Smoking badly, the car disappeared around a bend in the road. He looked at his watch; it was almost time.

Hefting the rifle, he checked it uneasily. He didn't know much about weapons but the proprietor of the gunshop in Los Angeles who had sold it to him had assured him it was excellent for big game. At the time he had wondered what the proprietor might think if he knew just how big the game was to be.

Now, studying it, he was glad that soon he'd be able to rid himself of it—chuck it into the dark, slow-moving stream that wandered through the woods behind him. Loaded and locked—everything appeared as it should be. He breathed deeply.

Waiting, he felt a sadness. What would happen to his work? Nothing, he resolved fiercely. He'd kill this man and leave, and no one would be the wiser. It would be just another unsolved murder. Chances are it would be attributed to a hunter.

He'd kill this man, return to Los Angeles, take up where he'd left off. He'd center his life once again around the Bornji transformations—his work in "the spaces of infinitely many dimensions." That was his life, his future. In time his name would rank with those of Hilbert, Russell, Weyl, Lebesgue, Goedel.

No one could possibly suspect him; he'd covered his tracks too well. He'd made every move behind a screen of caution and secrecy. Prior to coming to Green Bay, he had flown to Chicago to give the keynote address at a gathering of world-famous mathematicians. At the conclusion of the meeting, he had supposedly departed for New York for several weeks' stay on the pretext of attending personal business. He'd made a point of stressing that.

Instead, he had changed clothes, donned sunglasses to disguise his appearance (as he'd seen on television), and had flown to Green Bay under an assumed name. There he had rented a car.

Staying at a small motel on the outskirts of the town, he'd cautiously reconnoitered the entire area, locating and identifying the worker as his quarry. Uneducated, Polish, the man was young, a beer-drinker and tavern roisterer who worked in a paper mill on the Fox River.

His habits were almost invariable. At the close of each work day, he stopped at a tavern for a quick beer, then drove directly to the rickety structure across the way. Reaching it about five-thirty, he would pull up in front of the mailbox. Because the support holding it leaned backward from the edge of the road, it was necessary for him to open the car door and lean out to examine it.

Now, waiting apprehensively in the woods across from

the mailbox, Kane tried to push the dire forebodings from his mind. Suppose someone had seen him turning into this infrequently-traveled road, or had spotted him hiding the rented car in the shade of the trees? He would have been marked instantly as a stranger.

His worries were foolish, he reflected; he had a bad case of nerves. If anyone had spotted him, it would make scant difference. No one could possibly connect him with the crime. And if they did? He grimaced. But that was the chance he had to take. Murder, he thought philosophically, could be the instrument of passion or justice; it all depended on the viewpoint.

Still, when he attempted to review the act dispassionately, he saw murder for what it was: murder! It made no difference that the man he planned to kill was ignorant, uncouth, as plodding as the cows that wandered the nearby grassy slopes. It made no difference that he was still wifeless, pursuing a life pointed nowhere. Murder was murder. Yet the man had to die.

He looked at his watch; the time lacked seven minutes of five-thirty. The thirty-some minutes he had been waiting seemed like hours. He peered anxiously around. In the lengthening days of spring, the sun still stood well above the low rolling hills to his west.

In the distance he saw a red barn and silo and, off to the side, an unadorned two-story house, characteristic of the farm dwellings in the area. Movement on the rolling scape caught his eye. Peering, he recognized it as a man on a tractor, then spotted a second figure plodding toward the barn. Would they hear the shot? He wrenched his eyes away, perturbed at their presence.

An automobile, its engine pounding, came suddenly into view on the graveled road. He took a swift step backward, scrutinizing it intently. Dirty tan, four-door, dilapidated, a crushed right fender—it was the one!

He unlocked the safety on the rifle, aware that his hands were trembling. The metal was wet beneath his grip. Easy, easy, easy, he told himself.

The car slowed, coming to a halt alongside the mailbox. He clearly saw the figure at the wheel—a dark, heavy-set man wearing a faded blue shirt. His untidy hair badly needed cutting. Kane imagined that he would smell of tobacco and beer and paper pulp, but those were only impressions. Actually he had scant knowledge of his quarry; he simply was a man who had to die.

Kane lifted the rifle, his hands shaking violently. As the driver opened the door and leaned out to examine the box,

Kane managed to bring the weapon into alignment. The laborer's head appeared to be a small dark ball wobbling in front of the sight. What if he missed? He suppressed a quick panic, fighting to steady his hands. There, he had him. He squeezed back against the trigger.

Philip Conrad, which wasn't his real name, knelt on a sofa to peer between the curtains at the palatial mansion across the way. The high-powered rifle on the cushion beside him had telescopic sights and, more important to him, a silencer.

Of middle height, lean, with dark eyes set under bushy brows, Philip Conrad looked his forty years, but certainly no more. In another setting, he might have been mistaken for a lawyer or physician, for his manner suggested the professional man which, in a sense, he was.

His profession, when it became necessary, included murder.

Under another name—the one that appeared on his birth record, social security and government roster—he was an employee of a super-secret intelligence agency, the headquarters of which was in Langley, Virginia. Even there few knew him. None, save for his immediate superior, several men who worked with him, and perhaps one or two men high in the hierarchy, knew what he did. Conrad's boss wanted it that way; so did Conrad.

He never questioned his assignments. His job was to perform the tasks given to him; that was all. His sole concern was the "how" of the tasks, not the "why." Conrad had no qualms about killing. He seldom thought of it one way or another. He knew that when he killed, it was in the realm of that nebulous something called "national security," although of course the act must be completely divorced from any official connection.

But there was one thing different about the present job: it was being carried out within the borders of his own nation. That made it extremely touchy, especially if it came to murder. And this job had come to that point. He had the go code in his pocket. "Topflight"—it had come from Charles Dorrance personally that day.

In the unlikely event that he was apprehended, Conrad knew that he could expect no help from the agency. In that instant, he would be disowned. Not that he would get caught; he was too professional for that. But there were always quirks of fate that upset even the most carefully hatched plans. If such happened, he'd take it on the chin, alone. That was one of the fringe benefits he owed his em-

ployer.

Conrad knew exactly what to expect in the moments to come. He had planned carefully, step by step, checking and rechecking each move. That the man he was to kill was the most powerful man on Earth hadn't influenced his judgment one way or the other except, perhaps, to make him more cautious. But the *modus operandi* was simple: a 30-caliber bullet in the back of the head.

He lit a cigarette, then glanced at his watch, mentally living the action that soon was to come. At some time between four-thirty and five o'clock, probably closer to the latter time, a three-car caravan would turn into the circular drive in front of the big mansion across the way.

Two bodyguards would clamber out of the lead car, two out of the rear car. They would scan the grounds quickly but carefully, front, sides and rear, before two of the men would enter the house through the front door. When they emerged, one would gesture and a tall, dark man would emerge from the depths of the chauffeur-driven car in the center.

His name was John Androki.

Probably he would be accompanied by a blonde—he preferred blondes—or, as happened on occasion, two blondes. Chances are that he would be chatting wittily, a cigarette negligently held. Conrad knew that his talk would be light, meant to impress, for he had taped every word spoken in and around the big house for well over a year.

John Androki would start up the six steps that led to the porch. Attentive to the blonde (blondes?), he would walk slowly. For approximately nine seconds his back would be exposed to Conrad's unrestricted view.

Conrad knew exactly what would happen when he pulled the trigger. John Androki would collapse in death; the blonde (blondes?) would scream; the bodyguards would shout, dodge frantically, peering wildly around as they wrested hidden weapons from shoulder holsters.

He had no fear of the bodyguards; they weren't professionals. They were good for keeping hecklers away from the tall man, for disposing of boisterous drunks and nuisances, and shunting aside autograph seekers. They were good, also, at gangland-type murders. But they weren't professionals, not in Conrad's league.

He knew John Androki, he believed, as well as any hunter had ever known his quarry. He knew his likes and dislikes, his habits and actions. He knew his manner of cocking his head when listening, the quiet, self-satisfied chuckle that often followed one of his witticisms. He knew almost

everything there was to know about John Androki.

Except who John Androki was.

But then, he reflected wryly, did anyone know? He believed it unlikely.

He became attentive to the window. Now that the end was near, the listening post upstairs had been dismantled. Greb and Laski, who had manned it, were already en route back to Washington. Hasselwaite was somewhere in the East, trying to run down a missing mathematician.

In the final wind-up, Philip Conrad always worked alone.

At ten minutes to five he saw the three cars approaching. He stepped quickly to a small adjoining window which had been cranked open, pulled the curtains aside and looked out. The bodyguards were going through the predicted motions. The familiarity of the scene brought a smile.

When the two bodyguards came out of the big house and motioned, John Androki emerged from the depths of his limousine; he was accompanied by a blonde. Smoothing her skirt, she laughed at something he had said. Androki tapped a cigarette against the back of his hand and lit it.

The act made Conrad think of how deeply ingrained were people's habits. He had watched Androki go through exactly the same sequence scores of times. Man steps from car, speaks to blonde, taps cigarette against back of hand, lights it—that part of the act took twelve seconds; Conrad had long since timed it.

He lifted the rifle, waiting. Androki crooked his arm; the blonde slipped hers through it and they started up the stairs. They walked slowly, Androki doing the talking. The blonde was laughing. Everything was according to the script.

Conrad steadied the rifle with the crosshair splitting the base of Androki's skull. His finger squeezed back on the trigger and . . . the tall man vanished!

He lowered the weapon, startled. One instant Androki had been ascending the steps with the blonde; the next he had vanished. He hadn't dashed through the door, nor had he leaped into the bushes on either side of the steps; Conrad knew that with certainty. He had simply vanished! The screaming blonde and shouting, scrambling bodyguards assured him of that.

He knew instinctively that wherever the tall man had gone, he had gone permanently; he wouldn't be coming back. Something new in weapons? He studied the scene wonderingly. His boss would be interested.

Quickly dismantling the rifle, he slipped it into a carrying case and left the house through the rear door. Unhurriedly entering his rented car, he drove away. In that instant

"George Lee," the name under which he had rented the house, ceased to exist.

One hour later Philip Conrad was on flight 245, headed for Washington. Watching the rugged mountains of Southern California wheel to the rear far below, he reflected that nearly three years had elapsed since he'd first heard of John Androki. One thing was certain: the world would never be quite the same again.

Who was John Androki?

It was a question he had asked himself numberless times. Would he ever know? Would anyone? Recalling the fantastic manner in which the man had vanished, he doubted it. Still, everything about John Androki was fantastic, always had been. If in life he had been a world enigma, what would he be now? Yet somewhere there should be a record—birth, school, marriage, or perhaps just a yellowed snapshot in a family album—to disclose his real identity. That he had never discovered such a record left him with the sense of a job not completed.

He contemplated that.

Three years before there had been no John Androki, at least not under that name on any known record. He had come out of nowhere to shake the world; now he was gone. Conrad felt certain of that.

In a sense, it had all started with Winthrop Farrand, the multimillionaire, he reflected. Farrand might have offered clues, but he was dead now; murder had sealed his pudgy lips. From Winthrop Farrand to the present seemed like a very long time—far longer than three years. It seemed, Conrad thought, like a lifetime.

Settling back in his seat, he remembered how it had been.

II

WINTHROP FARRAND was a self-made multimillionaire, a fact that he was fond of proclaiming. He took pride in his coming out of a Chicago slum—"On my own," as he put it—to become a power on the boards of directors of a dozen giant corporations.

Short, pudgy, fiftyish, his light blue eyes regarded the world knowledgeably—meaning the world of finance. For him, there was little else. Winthrop Farrand liked to make money. He didn't particularly care whether it came in big heaps or small, although big heaps were preferable. But making it was the game. In his own opinion, he was the game-master.

Sprawled comfortably in an easy chair in his den, relaxing over a highball, he smugly contemplated an adroit manipulation in the market that had just netted him a cool three-quarters of a million dollars. With the tax laws being what they were, the transaction represented clear profit.

His private phone rang. Annoyed, he answered it.

"Mr. Farrand," a voice said, "my name is John Androki. You don't know me but—"

"How did you get this number?" Farrand cut in coldly.

"I got it because I knew you'd like to make a million dollars, Mr. Farrand."

"I have forty of them now," Farrand snapped.

"Isn't forty-one a higher figure?"

"I would appreciate it if . . ."

"Sperry Rand will advance three and a quarter points on the Big Board tomorrow," Androki interrupted.

"Please don't tout me," Farrand barked angrily.

"No, but I'll call you after it jumps and give you a better tip."

"Don't!" Farrand slammed down the receiver. Sperry Rand up three and a quarter points? That was patently ridiculous in the present state of the market. That fellow—John Androki, he had called himself—was trying to con him. But he'd been in the business too long to be conned. He knew exactly how the system worked.

The knowledge brought a smug smile. Androki and his organization, if he had one, had selected the names of a dozen or so pigeons, a pigeon being defined as anyone with plenty of money to burn and an ardent interest in speculation. Picking a stock, he'd call his supposed victims, quoting a slightly different advance or loss to each. In that way he was almost certain to make a correct guess. When he did, the person to whom that price had been quoted became the prime pigeon.

He knew all about that; he'd worked similar practices in the old days, before he'd made his first million. But you couldn't work it without a fool for a client. So, Androki believed him a fool! He smiled grimly.

Farrand was mildly surprised the following day when Sperry Rand closed up three and a quarter points. It was, to say the least, a quite unexpected advance. He wasn't surprised that Androki called him that evening, again on his private line.

"I suppose you noted Sperry Rand?" Androki began.

"How many people did you tip with differing predictions?" Farrand demanded. He wished he could see the other's discomfiture.

"None," Androki answered succinctly. "I'm in a serious business, Mr. Farrand. What is the mathematical probability of my giving a right prediction to the same man twice in a row?"

Farrand considered it. The answer was a multiplicative function involving several variables. "Small," he admitted grudgingly.

"Try General Motors," Androki advised. "It's taking a big leap at two and seven-eighths tomorrow." Abruptly the phone clicked in Farrand's ear.

General Motors up two and seven-eighths on the present market? Farrand laughed. John Androki, whoever he was, wasn't following the news; not when he'd make that kind of prediction with a big automobile strike on the horizon. For a tout, he was poorly informed.

The following day General Motors closed up two and seven-eighths. Winthrop Farrand contemplated that fact thoughtfully. John Androki could have been gambling on a long shot, of course, but that was an extremely long shot. Could he be part of a stock manipulation scheme? Not with stocks like that. Farrand knew all about juggling stock prices; Sperry Rand and General Motors simply didn't qualify for that sort of shenanigans.

He made a quick call to the head of a nation-wide investigation agency having, among other things, excellent access to important government records. While the name alone wasn't much to go on, the agency head was quite certain that he could quickly uncover Farrand's caller; if not, they'd work on the John Androkis one by one until they did find him. Not that Androki actually would be difficult to find, Farrand reflected. The man was begging for a personal audience.

Despite his skepticism, Farrand was quite polite when Androki phoned that evening.

"I know you believe it was a long shot," Androki said quietly. "Try Xerox tomorrow for a gain of three and five-eighths." The phone clicked in Farrand's ear.

Farrand was thoroughly confounded when, next day, Xerox closed ahead at that precise amount. While the probability of a man hitting it right three times in a row on three different stocks was not impossible, it was highly improbable, especially in view of the big gains predicted. On Farrand's scale, the chance approximated zero. To him, that indicated one thing: John Androki, whoever he was, had a pipeline that would shake the SEC. Still, with that kind of pipeline, why was Androki fooling around with him? He could be making millions. That part didn't make sense. The

thought disturbed him.

A number of discreet telephone calls to financiers and others in the brokerage business revealed that none had ever heard of John Androki. Neither was he listed in the new Standard & Poor's directory, nor in *Men of American Business*. Farrand had the distinct impression that John Androki was not apt to be listed anywhere.

Was he being gulled? Farrand smiled sourly. Perhaps Androki believed so, but he would soon learn better. No man could gull Winthrop Farrand; he had forty million dollars to prove that. He'd learn the man's game quickly enough. Perhaps he could turn it to profit.

That idea pleased him. John Androki needed him; he didn't need John Androki. That placed him squarely in the driver's seat. Any dealings he might have with Androki would be at his convenience, his terms; John Androki would have to buy them.

When John Androki called that evening, Farrand snapped, "See me in my office next Friday afternoon at four o'clock sharp."

"A week?" Androki sounded surprised.

"I'll be out of town until then." Holding Androki off for a week gave him a malevolent pleasure; it would be good to make the fellow wait. It would also give the agency time to return a complete report on him.

"Next Friday at four then," Androki acknowledged.

"You're quite certain of yourself, aren't you?" Farrand snapped.

"Shouldn't I be?"

Farrand angrily slammed the instrument into its cradle.

Winthrop Farrand was vaguely perturbed. His quick but thorough check of John Androki had revealed a number of men by that name, all of whom could be excluded as his caller. But, of the John Androki he sought, there was no discoverable record. The agency, still, digging, had suggested that the name was probably false.

Androki? The name did sound suspiciously phony. Yet if a man wanted to assume a false name, why one like Androki? Such a name was easy to check. Or had he selected it because it was unusual? Well, he had to wait and see.

John Androki appeared at Winthrop Farrand's office promptly at four o'clock. As the secretary showed him in, Farrand's first impression was far from favorable. Quite tall and slender, John Androki had a sallow, narrow face dominated by an overly large nose. His eyes, small, were quite dark. His clothes were on the shabby side, as were his

shoes. To Farrand, shoes were a sure indicator of the state of a man's prosperity. His own were of hand-tooled English leather. The nibbling suspicions he'd had that Androki might have influential connections were promptly erased.

He gestured toward a chair and brusquely said, "You have five minutes, Mr. Androki."

"Fair enough." Androki sat down and eyed him musingly. "I can name you a stock that will jump two and five-eighths points as of the close of the market Monday."

"What's your take?" Farrand demanded roughly.

"You buy one thousand shares in my name . . . the stock in my care."

"Do I look crazy?" Farrand exclaimed. "You could sell the shares immediately. Regardless of what the stock might do, you'd come out with a fortune."

"Scarcely a fortune," Androki countered. "It's not that expensive a stock."

"But enough to make it worth your while."

"I see you're still skeptical, Mr. Farrand."

"Quite skeptical," he acknowledged. "I haven't made my money playing the fool."

"Nor do I take you for one," Androki replied in a quiet voice.

"If you have that kind of pipeline, why are you fooling around with peanuts? I don't know what the catch is but I'm not used to being conned."

"I need money to get started," Androki explained. "As undoubtedly you have noted, I'm not exactly prosperous at the moment."

"I have noted that," Farrand answered stiffly. "Frankly, I'm not impressed with what I do see."

"Does that take in the predictions I have made, Mr. Farrand?"

"That puzzles me," he admitted.

"I can understand your skepticism," Androki admitted. "Suppose I suggest a way that might alleviate your suspicions?"

"I'm listening," he answered gruffly.

Androki leaned forward, his head cocked. "I'll name you the stock. When—and I say when—it goes up the exact amount of my prediction at the close of the board Monday, you give me twenty-five thousand dollars cash."

"You're coming down a bit, aren't you?"

"Frankly, yes. A thousand shares would come to considerably more than that. But when you discover I'm right, you'll be happy to pay another twenty-five thousand for a second stock, another for a third, and so on," Androki said.

His eyes suddenly were unsmiling.

"For how long?"

"Until I have enough to make my first million overnight in the market."

"You're shooting high, aren't you?"

"Do you like pikers, Mr. Farrand?"

"Frankly, no."

"Then you can understand the high reach."

"High?" Farrand stared at him. "With a million as a starter and that kind of knowledge, you could own the world in short time."

Androki smiled faintly. "And with my tips, how wealthy might you be?"

Farrand asked edgily, "What kind of pipeline is it? What kind of organization do you have?"

"No organization, Mr. Farrand." Androki's eyes grew hard and distant. "I'm a loner."

For the space of a long minute Farrand stared at him. John Androki, shabby clothes and all, appeared a man quite certain of himself. The dark eyes, small and set quite close against the narrow bridge of the nose, returned his gaze unblinkingly; they were eyes that told nothing. Finally he asked, "Just who are you, Mr. Androki?"

"Does that matter?"

"I like to know with whom I'm doing business."

"I'm a salesman."

Farrand eyed the shabby clothes again. "You don't appear to have made many sales lately."

"I'm just getting started; I told you that."

"Then this ability to predict is new, is that it?"

Androki eyed him coldly. "Are you interested, Mr. Farrand? If not, I'll be on my way."

Farrand eyed him searchingly. "What's the name of the stock?" he asked finally.

"National Fuel."

"Why would that go up?"

Androki shrugged. "I have no idea, Mr. Farrand."

"Two and five-eighths points, you said?"

"At the close of the board Monday, Mr. Farrand."

"There will be no written agreement."

"Of course not." Androki smiled disarmingly. "Cash is king."

III

BERTRAM KANE descended the stairs from the second floor computer and mathematics laboratory of Los Angeles Uni-

versity, his mind filled with the properties of multidimensional space.

Did the mathematics of the abstract have analogous reality? That was the big question. David Cantrup of Chicago believed that space was contorted and twisted in such a way that different spaces overlapped, and that the existence of such multidimensional space could be proved mathematically. The tool was the new Bornji transformations.

Kane believed Cantrup to be right. So did Freyhoff of Germany, Vosin of Russia, Bernardi of Italy, Tanaki of Japan; to the world's leading topological mathematicians, space was an unfolding mystery. The universe was a magic box which man had not yet opened.

Kane projected the belief a step further. If such a contorted space was provable, then it appeared logical that it had a physical analogy; i.e., the universe was far more than the three dimensions perceived by man. That he believed, and hoped to prove.

Entering the faculty lounge, he drew a cup of coffee and went over to join his friend, Gordon Maxon. A brilliant, often unorthodox professor of psychology, Maxon was noted for his investigations of the psychic phenomena: telepathy, psychokinesis, clairvoyance, prophecy and other subjects that one sour colleague had described as "the hokum sciences."

Maxon pushed aside the morning paper and glanced up at him. Wispy, fiftyish and graying, his faded blue eyes twinkled merrily. "Sit down, Bert. Join the human race."

Kane smiled as he took a seat across from him. "What is reality?"

"Reality is that this coffee stinks."

"That's low-level reality."

"The realm of most human endeavor," Maxon replied airily.

"We can't all penetrate the higher dimensions of the mind, Gordie."

"Are you referring to your work or to my own humble efforts?" Maxon's eyes were mocking.

"The mind is your province."

"Empty vistas, Bert."

Kane laughed. He liked Maxon immensely. Far from the quack some of his lesser colleagues believed him to be, Kane knew him to be deadly serious about his work. To Maxon, the unpenetrated worlds of the mind were the great glories that still awaited man.

Maxon raised his eyes thoughtfully. "What do you think of this bird Androki?"

"Androki?" Kane ran the name through his mind. "The

financier?"

"Merely one of the wealthiest men in the world," Maxon retorted blandly. "Don't you ever read anything but the comics?"

"Not usually. What's he in, oil?"

"Oil, electronics, machine tools, farm equipment—you name it and he's in it, right up to his neck. And everything he touches he controls."

"Why the sudden interest?"

"Not sudden. I've been following his activities for quite a few months."

"So?"

"He came from nowhere in less than a year, Bert."

Kane smiled. "This is the land of opportunity; I've heard you say that a dozen times."

"A billionaire in less than a year?" Maxon regarded him steadily.

"What's on your mind?"

"I believe he's the man I've been looking for," Maxon replied. "I believe he's psychic. If what they say is true, every stock he touches shoots up, and somehow he always manages to sell before it drops again."

"Perhaps he's just a smart operator."

Maxon shook his head. "They don't come that smart. According to the financial writers, he's an absolute wizard. He has to handle his transactions through anonymous agents because everything he expresses a personal interest in becomes a bandwagon for every speculator in the nation. It's more than a magic touch."

"Are you trying to say he's clairvoyant?"

"It's more than that," Maxon insisted. "Clairvoyancy is defined as the ability to perceive things beyond the range of normal perception; but this bird looks at tomorrow. He actually does. He sees things that haven't yet happened. I believe he's a *downthrough*."

"I'd still hew to the belief that it's financial acumen," Kane answered wryly. "It seems more logical."

"I think in terms of probability," Maxon countered. "When I see a man operating at umpteen sigmas beyond the mean—although, I'll have to admit, this is the first time I've encountered the phenomenon to that extent—I know it isn't chance. It's certainty, or at least the certainty of half a dozen or so sigmas."

"That's a tantamount to certainty," Kane agreed, "but I have to rub my jaw a bit at the *downthrough* explanation."

"Because tomorrow is still tomorrow, is that what you're saying?" Maxon's eyes glowed. "I thought your special brand

of topology wrinkled time as well as space?"

"I haven't attempted to apply it specifically to time," he rebutted, "but the expression that 'time is the fourth dimension' has no basis in fact. Time in that sense is merely used as an artifact to aid in the measurement of known space."

"Couldn't time have its own dimensions?"

"Past, present and future, certainly."

"I'm referring strictly to what we call the present."

"I couldn't claim objectivity if I denied it," Kane admitted, "but have you looked for an easier explanation? Perhaps he's manipulating the market."

"On that scale? Impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible," Kane murmured.

"I've been gathering every clipping I can find on that bird, Bert. In case you didn't know, he's of prime interest to the SEC and several other interested government agencies. Senator Blaire's all set to haul him in for a congressional shakedown. But the point is, no one can prove connivance. I'm positive it can be ruled out."

"So you have a *downthrough*. You should be happy, Gordie."

"Do I detect a bit of sarcasm?"

"Call it skepticism. It sits lighter."

"I'm deadly serious, Bert. I believe he's a *downthrough*. I've considered every other possible explanation and have ruled them all out. He sees tomorrow. Fantastic, yes, but fantastic only in the light of what we know." Maxon eyed him soberly. "The hell of it is, what can I do about it?"

"Have you ever thought of asking him?"

Maxon grinned. "I can see a poor underpaid prof walking up to a billionaire and asking, 'Would you tell me your trade secrets?' Or asking if he were a *downthrough*. Can you imagine the unholy panic it would cause if it were true and got out? He could own the world in a dozen years."

"A billion in his first year?" Kane mused. "The gain would be geometrical. Four or five years would be closer to it."

"All this is not the reason I mentioned the subject," Maxon said.

"Oh?" Kane watched him.

"He appears to be extremely knowledgeable in your field."

"Multidimensional space?" He was startled. "You're kidding."

"Be it as it may, Eikron was talking with Cantrup in Chicago last week. Androki had been there for some wing-ding or other—he had given the school five million bucks—

and Cantrup had quite a talk with him. Androki, for some reason, is drawn to mathematicians and physicists—the theoretical types. Cantrup was quite startled, I must say.” Maxon held Kane’s gaze. “He told Eikron that Androki’s thinking in the field is extremely advanced.”

“Verbally, perhaps.”

“Not so.” Maxon shook his head. “Cantrup said he spoke knowledgeably of the Bornji transformations. He told Eikron they had quite a discussion on the mathematical philosophy involved. He gave Eikron the impression that Androki was extremely well-informed on the subject, at a technical as well as verbal level.”

“If Cantrup said that, then it’s true.” Kane sensed a stirring of wonder. “It’s difficult to conceive.”

“Unless he was reading Cantrup’s mind, feeding him back his own ideas,” Maxon observed dryly.

“Telepathy?”

“I’ve been toying with the idea,” the psychologist admitted. “Can we draw a line between telepathy and prophecy? I don’t know. It’s quite possible that all psychic powers stem from a single sense, with the several psi capabilities developed differentially. Who is to say that the psychokinetic can’t also be clairvoyant, though perhaps to a far lesser degree, or that the telepath doesn’t contain the seeds of the *downthrough*?”

“The latter two are not in the same time continuum,” Kane stated in a firm voice. “You’re introducing another variable.”

“Am I? I’m not so certain.”

“Aside from that, if Androki weren’t knowledgeable in the field, I very much doubt that he could read Cantrup’s mind and draw anything meaningful from it.”

“Are you birds that twisted?”

Kane smiled. “What could a layman get from glancing at a page of high-level math? That’s what he’d be seeing in Cantrup’s mind—not sentences but single words linking together complex formulas and equations. It would be like me looking at a page in Sanskrit.”

“So what is the answer?” Maxon demanded.

“I can’t say.”

“Telepathy exists,” Maxon declared. “I’m convinced of that. It has been proved experimentally any number of times. I’m convinced that other psychic states also exist, but I can’t say that telepathy is related to prophecy; I have no data on that score.”

“Has anyone?”

“Not that’s absolutely verifiable.” Maxon cocked his head

with a quick birdlike movement. "If a man could move a physical object through mental power alone, could he move it into one of the higher dimensions?"

"Psychokinesis? Perhaps, if such a higher dimension exists."

"Isn't that what you're trying to prove?"

"At a mathematical level, yes, but I have no verification that an analogous physical state exists. Or perhaps I should say physical states. I'm convinced that we see our universe as three-dimensional solely because of the limitations of our sensory equipment." Kane smiled. "Fortunately those limitations don't apply to our reasoning power."

"And they call me a quack," Maxon observed. "Perhaps I should start a cult."

"You'd do very well, Gordie. That's one advantage that you have that I don't. Almost everyone has heard of extra sensory perception, but how many have ever thought of multidimensional space?"

"You're not publicity oriented, Bert."

Kane studied him. "Why Androki's penchant for mathematicians and physicists? If he were a telepath or a *down-through*, or psychic in any way, wouldn't he more likely be drawn to psychologists?"

"Perhaps he's afraid of revealing himself."

"Why mathematicians and physicists?" he persisted.

"It could be because he's conversant in their fields."

"What has a billionaire to do with multidimensional space?" Kane demanded. "That's the part I don't get. It doesn't make sense."

"Do you have a monopoly on the subject?"

"No, but it requires long years of study, not to mention aptitude. It doesn't come easy."

Maxon's face sobered. "I have to reach Androki, talk with him."

"You have me curious," Kane admitted. "The experience should prove interesting. Where does he live?"

"Oddly enough, almost next door. He has a swank place near Beverly Hills. Off Sunset, I believe."

"Perhaps you can get to him, Gordie. You might try."

"Do you believe it possible?" Maxon's face grew wistful. "I'm afraid to hope."

Later, reflecting on the conversation, Kane's bafflement grew. He wasn't surprised that Maxon should consider Androki a *downthrough*, although he was a bit startled that Maxon might be right. But he was completely baffled by the financier's apparent grasp of the complex mathematics of multidimensional space.

Could the fellow be that knowledgeable? Cantrup of Chi-

cago, Freyhoff of Germany, Vosin of Russia, Bernardi of Italy, Tanaki of Japan and, of course, himself—the leading authorities in the subject were few; any depth of knowledge in the field was largely restricted to them.

Where had Androki been schooled? By whom? Not by any of the top men, for the names of students sufficiently gifted to work under any of them were passed from one to another in the silent understanding that these were the inheritors of their work; such a gifted student was a rarity to be prized. But the name Androki was alien; it stirred no spark in Kane's memory. A *downthrough!* That was more unbelievable yet.

Bertram Kane never quite knew how he felt about Anita Weber. Was it because he subconsciously compared her to Margaret? Margaret. Their marriage of eleven years had been idyllic, marred only by their disappointment at remaining childless. Margaret! Margaret! Fate in the form of an incurable disease had swept her away within weeks. Then he was alone, he was alone.

In his grief, he had closed out the world, closed out everyone but Maxon; he couldn't close out Maxon. The psychologist had been his pillar of strength, his link with reality. In time, he had subdued his grief, but he had never forgotten Margaret. Several years later, it was Maxon who had brought him together with Anita.

"Good therapy," Maxon had told him, "but don't take too much of the cure."

He had never quite understood the psychologist's meaning. But Anita Weber had proved good therapy. An assistant professor of art, she was beautiful, talented, witty; she was a divorcee. He liked her immensely, yet occasionally sensed a hardness in her that perturbed him. Or was it only because she was so different from Margaret?

Occasionally he considered marriage. When he did, he sensed a deep stillness inside him. He had never mentioned the subject to her. Still young at thirty-seven, he had an assured future of no mean proportions, if for no other reason than that he already was eminent in his specialty. But he still had to make the final breakthrough. Until he did, he had no wish to undertake the responsibilities of another marriage. Was that dodging the issue? He didn't believe so. He liked Anita, but that was all. Neither had she shown any serious inclinations. To the contrary, their dates had been extremely casual.

"Hi, Anita. How about dinner?"

"How about the beach for hamburgers?"

Their dates had been of that kind. Nothing heavy. Yet now and then, when they returned late and he stopped by at her apartment for a cup of coffee, he'd caught a glance or veiled allusion that suggested something more. At times he felt quite uneasy with her. He was mulling such thoughts when he picked her up on a Friday night for dinner at Malibu Beach.

As he followed the winding road beyond Santa Monica, she suddenly remarked, "You're quiet tonight."

"Thinking," he answered abashedly.

"You have to learn to relax and play."

"I'm always conscious of time."

"That's not exactly flattering," she chided.

"I don't mean it that way," he protested. "You read too much into my words."

"At times I wonder."

"But there is so little time," he answered soberly. "Don't you feel that way with your work?"

"Art is relaxing," she countered. "It's beauty and creativity. But I don't allow it to occupy every moment of my mind."

"Don't you believe mathematics can be relaxing?"

"I don't," she returned positively. "And when I see your tired face, I know it's not. You drive yourself too fast, Bert. How long can you keep it up?"

"Until I reach the breakthrough."

"There's more to life than that."

"So Gordie keeps telling me." He smiled. "He seems to enjoy life."

"That's the way it should be," she asserted. "You have only one chance." She cast a sidelong glance at him.

"I know," he murmured softly.

As a cluster of neons came into view, he dropped his speed, pulling into a parking lot adjacent to a weather-beaten cafe.

Over cocktails she asked casually, "Did Gordie tell you the exciting news about John Androki, the financier? He's certain the man's a *downthrough*. Isn't that amazing?"

"If true, yes."

"If you can believe in multidimensional space, why not ESP?"

"They're not in the same league," he protested. "You can apply mathematics to multidimensional space, perhaps prove its existence, at least as an abstract quality. But what mathematics can you apply to ESP? And don't say statistics."

"But I will say it," she answered promptly. "You can

weigh the evidence on the scale of probability."

"If you have events that are weighable, yes."

"He believes he has."

"I'm not denying the possibility of ESP," he remonstrated. "I know very well that the mind is an almost totally unplumbed sea. Telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis—they are all possible within the purview of the frame of reference within which we live. But not the *downthrough*."

"Frame of reference?"

"Time," he explained. "The *downthrough* offers a new variable. It extrapolates the psychic phenomenon into a time that isn't yet, if I can put it that way."

"Is that more amazing than multidimensional space?"

"Perhaps not, I don't know. But the concept certainly is more elusive. Think of the paradoxes it breeds."

"Gordie doesn't believe so."

"But it's still a matter of belief . . . faith."

"Isn't multidimensional space?"

He smiled. "There are certain mathematical indicators."

"Can't there be psychic indicators?" she challenged.

"Perhaps, I don't know."

"Gordie doesn't believe it's faith, not in Androki's case."

"Because Androki's guessed—if I may use the word—the future activities of certain stocks? Do we know how many wrong guesses he's made? What's the basis for Gordie's statistics?"

"He's reputedly become a billionaire within a year," she countered. "He couldn't have made many wrong guesses."

"He could have guessed wrong on the small ones, right on the large ones," he hazarded.

She raised her eyes. "You really don't believe that, do you?"

"No, I don't," he admitted. "I have the strange feeling that Gordie could be right."

"It's strange that no one else has deduced that."

"What do you mean?"

"With all that's been written about the man," she explained. "The wizard of the stock market, the magician of finance—the magazines are filled with stories about him. But I have yet to read any suggestion that he has psychic power. I'm dying to meet him."

"Why?"

Her eyes narrowed. "He commands tremendous power."

"Sure, a billion bucks' worth."

"It would be exciting to be able to do that—look into the future, know what's going to happen at any given time or place."

"Perhaps; I don't know." He considered it. "From what I hear, his talent is locked to the world of finance."

"If he has the talent, could you believe that it would be locked to one narrow channel? That would be absolutely incredible."

"You sound as if you believe he is a *downthrough*."

"I'm inclined that way," she admitted. "Of course I always was fascinated by ESP. I certainly can't deny the possibility."

"Because you want to believe it?"

"Partially, I don't know." She wet her lips. "But if you could see tomorrow, isn't it logical that you would be able to see all of tomorrow, or at least everything that's within the viewer's sensory scope? Why should such a talent be locked to finance? That's not logical."

"Perhaps it's a matter of concentration." He eyed her curiously. "You've thought a lot about this, haven't you?"

"To some extent."

"Why?"

She raised her eyes, her face suddenly hard and inscrutable. "Because I want to meet John Androki," she said.

IV

CHARLES DORRANCE'S office was buried deep in the bowels of a vast white marble building, the glaring architecture of which denied its purpose as the administrative and operational center for one of the world's largest and most secret intelligence agencies. Located in Langley, Virginia, the structure had been likened by wags to a pickle factory. But if the building itself was monumentally obvious, not so the invisible strands which, flung from it, ensnared the earth. Several of the more sensitive strands emanated directly from Dorrance's small office.

Slender, sharp of face, Charles Dorrance's small birdlike eyes rested on the lean figure of the agent sitting opposite him. "You'll be Philip Conrad on this trip," he said.

"Philip Conrad; I like that," the agent acknowledged. "Will I be working with anyone?"

"Greb, Laski and Hasselwaite will be available if you need them. Size up the situation when you get to the coast, let me know." Dorrance slid a fat dossier across the desk. "There's the sum total of what we know about John Androki."

"Looks like quite a bit."

"Not really, Phil." Dorrance grunted. "That name seems

to fit you."

The agent smiled. "Anything's better than the one my parents hung on me."

"Most of the material is superficial," Dorrance explained. "None of it goes back very far—not quite two years."

"Oh?" Conrad waited.

"Before that there was no John Adroki—not under that name."

"No fingerprint records?"

"Nothing." Dorrance shook his head. "We combed this country village by village, city by city, county by county. Every state. We could find no birth record, no school records, no fingerprint records, no social security number, no issuance of a driver's license, no immigration record."

"I've heard odd stories about that boy," Conrad observed.

"He was just Mr. Nobody."

Conrad smiled faintly. "You can't call him that now."

"That's correct. He has the financial world in an uproar. The SEC is running in circles trying to keep up with his entanglements. The antitrust people are in a tizzy. As fast as they stop him on one front, he pops up on another, usually acting through an agent or newly founded company." Dorrance brushed his scalp, as if pushing back the hair that hadn't been there for years. "Now he's rocking our foreign policies. . . ."

"In what way?"

"You might recall that the World Bank turned down Bolivia's request for a hundred million dollar loan, and that subsequently our government denied a similar request."

"Wasn't it because the Bolivian government wouldn't relate the request to a specific need? I seem to recall that it was."

"That was both a World Bank requirement and ours," Dorrance agreed. "Bolivia wasn't willing to earmark the funds."

"How does Androki fit into the picture?"

"He's just loaned Bolivia the entire hundred million dollars," Dorrance answered. "No strings attached. He deposited the money payable personally to Simón Savedra."

"A personal loan?" The agent whistled. "What's his motive?"

"That's what we're trying to discover." He drummed the desk thoughtfully. "Quite some time ago the Bolivian government expropriated the tin and petroleum industries, both of which are extremely important to this nation's welfare. As you might recall, Bolivia was our principal source of tin during World War Two, when the mines in Malaya and

Indonesia fell into Japanese hands."

"So if those countries go Communist . . ."

"The same situation could prevail again."

"Except that now Androki owns Bolivia, is that it?"

"It amounts to that, Phil. He's subsidizing the government in power to keep it in power, and it doesn't happen to be the government State would like to see at the helm."

"The gentlemen at State will be perturbed," Conrad murmured.

"Are perturbed," Dorrance corrected. "But Bolivia is just one spot. He's kicking up trouble all through Central and South America, not to mention the rest of the globe. His operations are international."

"Against this government?"

"When it interferes with his financial interests, yes. He's the same with other governments or else uses them as tools. He's also using foreign governments to crush American business, soften it up so he can take over. It's a bald steal."

"All that in one year?" Conrad arched his eyes.

"He works fast." Dorrance rubbed his knuckles reflectively. "I'm equally bothered about his domestic activities."

"The antitrust violations?"

"To some extent, but I'm also trying to assess his moves. Some appear quite harmless, others not so harmless, but his motives are certainly veiled. So are his activities. Through the device of the conglomerate merger, he's becoming the octopus of American business, not to mention world trade. But more than that, he's welding together a power structure that's making many people uneasy."

"An industrial empire?"

"Industrial, economic, political." Dorrance smiled soberly. "It's the extent of that power that bothers me. I have the impression that it's like an iceberg: I can see only a small part of what really exists. He's striking out on a thousand fronts. Now he's gotten into the subsidy business—giving grants to big universities. He tosses them five and ten million at a crack."

"Isn't that a tax write-off?"

"I'm certain that's not his prime objective."

"Are the grants earmarked?"

"Mostly for libraries and scholarships. You can see how that endears him to the academic community."

"Perhaps he's trying to acquire culture by association," the agent suggested.

"It's more than that. He's after something." Dorrance frowned. "He was talking with David Cantrup, a Chicago University mathematician, during a shindig given in An-

droki's honor following a rather substantial gift to that institution. One of our men taped it via a vest-pocket pickup. We had one of the Rand boys monitor it. He was quite intrigued by the conversation."

"Blondes?"

Dorrance shook his head unsmilingly. "They were discussing the mathematics of multidimensional space, something called the Børnji transformations. Our Rand authority said that Cantrup is one of only half a dozen men in the world who are really conversant in the field. He was quite impressed."

"By Cantrup?"

"Androki. Apparently he is almost as well-versed as Cantrup in the matter."

The agent leaned back, watching the other speculatively. Finally he asked, "Are you talking about the fourth dimension?"

"Something like that." Dorrance pursed his lips owlshly. "As I get it, they were discussing the transfer of physical bodies from the known to higher dimensions. Does that throw you? It did me."

"It throws me," Conrad admitted.

"It was pure speculation, of course, but speculation at an abstract level that but few people could comprehend. Again I'm quoting our visiting genius."

"Didn't that surprise Cantrup?"

"I should imagine, but you never can tell about those eggheads." Dorrance sniffed. "At any rate, Androki has quite an affinity with the academic community, especially with mathematicians and physicists. He goes for those birds. Is that bad? I don't know."

"Are you thinking of the secret government research carried on in our universities?"

Dorrance nodded. "That thought has occurred to me, and of course much of that work involves mathematics and physics. Yet I feel it's much more than that. His display of knowledge puzzles me."

"And he has no school record," Conrad murmured.

"He has one," Dorrance returned sharply, "but where? You don't acquire that sort of knowledge from a correspondence school or library. Somewhere, in some university, there's a record of a damned brilliant student, but where or under what name we don't know. Give us that knowledge and we could trace his trail through the dark years, before he sprang into prominence."

"Do you believe he's a foreign agent?"

"Russian?" Dorrance shook his head slowly. "That was my

first suspicion, but in this case it looks like a blank. Every check along that line, including good information from behind the Iron Curtain, has proved negative. Aside from that, if he were Russian he wouldn't be unidentified."

"His papers would be of the best," Conrad agreed.

Dorrance smiled whimsically. "He's covered his tracks extremely well."

"Has he, or has he bought a cover?"

"I've considered that."

"A billion dollars can bury a lot of records," Conrad observed.

"It can't bury everything." Dorrance shook his head. "Aside from that, we can't have a private citizen in a position to influence—or should I say dictate?—the policies of another government. My concern is the national security aspect."

"Is he becoming that dangerous?"

"He could, that's the whole point. Aside from that, the term 'billionaire' is misleading. He controls many billions, and it's the control that counts. He's exerting tremendous leverage against our basic institutions—law and government."

"Does he have any weaknesses?"

Dorrance inclined his head. "Blondes, as you suggested earlier, and a penchant for good whiskey. He drinks more than he should, but that's not uncommon. He's also quite a snob. Perhaps that explains his partiality toward the egg-heads."

—"Anything else?"

"Not that we've found." Dorrance stared reflectively at the dossier. "His life for the last year has been pretty much an open book. I doubt that he's done very much that we haven't photographed, taped, or both. He's quite naïve about ensuring his privacy."

"Naïve, or doesn't he give a damn?"

"Naïve. He's got a platoon of bodyguards."

"But no security, eh?"

"He might believe that he has." Dorrance pursed his lips musingly. "His house is protected with electric safeguards. So are the grounds. That shows he recognizes the need for security. But he apparently doesn't realize that telephone lines can be tapped from a distance, or that remote pickups can serve as well as a bugged room. Frankly, his lack of knowledge in that respect puzzles me."

"In what way?"

"If he were a foreign agent or an industrial spy or an embezzler or stock manipulator or what have you, he'd be wise to all that; but he's not. So who is he? What is he? What's his background?"

"How come his bodyguards aren't hep?"

"He's picked the strong-arm type," Dorrance said.

"With an industrial empire of that magnitude?"

"Oh, his security there is quite different. It's the best."

"But he doesn't relate the same need to his personal life, is that it?"

"Apparently he doesn't. His business is something else again." Dorrance grimaced. "Phone taps, hidden mikes, remote pickups—nothing has been much help. He uses public phones randomly, talks in code, works through agents who work through agents who work through agents, doesn't commit a damned thing to the mails, and all the rest of it. Oh, we've got plenty on tape but it hasn't done us much good."

"A man can never cover his past completely. He always leaves a record of some kind somewhere. There are always friends who remember him from way back, and enemies. Aside from that, a man can never hide his activities completely." Conrad's eyes glinted. "Not even with a billion dollars."

"We'll dig him out in time," Dorrance promised.

"I'll find out what makes him tick." Androki offered the kind of challenge that Conrad liked.

"There's one other factor." Dorrance made a tent with his fingers and frowned. "At the beginning of Androki's emergence—when he surfaced, if I can put it that way—he had dealings with Winthrop Farrand . . ."

"The multimillionaire who was killed in that traffic mishap last year," Conrad interrupted. His gaze sharpened.

Dorrance nodded. "Over a period of several months Farrand made a number of payments to Androki. The transactions were cash but he kept a record: thirty payments at twenty-five thousand each."

"Three-quarters of a million bucks." Conrad whistled softly.

"Farrand was investing heavily in the market at the time, far more than he'd ever done in the past. His whole investment pattern changed almost overnight. And he was investing without consultation, at least insofar as his regular brokers were concerned."

"Following his payments to Androki?"

"Coincident with them." Dorrance eyed the agent sharply. "Everything Farrand touched turned to gold. Like Androki, he appeared to have the formula for instant billions. Then, suddenly, Farrand was killed."

"Anything phony about it?"

Dorrance's face became frosty. "A big semi plowed into his car as the chauffeur was turning into his driveway. Both he and the chauffeur were killed. Need I say that the semi

was stolen and that the driver escaped? An eyewitness reported that he was picked up by a black car that had been following the truck. The license plates on the car were phony."

"Androki got rid of him, eh?"

"The logic weighs heavily," Dorrance agreed. "I have scant doubt but that we're dealing with a murderer. But that's not my prime concern. My prime concern is this country, his effect on national security. We have to know what he's trying to do, and why."

"Has Androki ever mentioned his family?"

"Has he got one?" Dorrance smiled bitterly. "I believe he was hatched from an egg."

"So I watch him; is that all?"

"For the present. I can't speak for the future."

Conrad rose leisurely. "We'd better discover what he's up to before we find ourselves working for him."

"How's that?" Dorrance eyed him quizzically.

"He might buy the agency."

The agent called Philip Conrad perused John Androki's file unhurriedly. There were numerous recent photographs, many made surreptitiously; others came from newspapers and magazines. He was shown at dozens of different cocktail parties—a tall, slender, immaculately dressed man with an overly large nose, dark hair and dark, very piercing eyes. There usually was a blonde at his side, or close by; a different blonde almost every time, he noted.

Other photographs showed him talking with Max Freedland, a noted Harvard physicist, and David Cantrup, the Chicago mathematician. He sorted through many pictures of the same nature. Clearly John Androki was drawn to the academic world. And it to him, he mused.

He read through neat pages of quotes from various financial writers and columnists. John Androki variously was described as "the miracle man of modern business," "the wonder boy of the Big Board," "the man with the Midas touch" and other such laudatory acclaims. Conrad was left with the feeling that the financial writers had been caught by the magic of John Androki's rise rather than the manner in which he had risen, for very little of the material was condemnatory.

His eyes dwelt on quotes from various figures in Congress, the Cabinet, and other high government offices. Some were glowing, others negative. He was interested to note that the split in opinion wasn't patterned along political lines, but neither was there any clear-cut division he could

discern.

He found a card labeled "Alleged Violations of Antitrust Laws"; it carried references to dozens of different reports. A second card labeled "Litigation Pending" also was jammed with file references. But there was precious little on the man as a person.

Who was John Androki? Most dossiers as meticulously compiled gave Conrad a clear picture of the subject being portrayed; but not this one. It raised far more questions than it answered. Androki's mecurial rise, his domestic and foreign operations, his image in the press, the Winthrop Farrand report—everything had been neatly noted; but what was the sum of its meaning? Very little, he reflected. The dossier left him cold.

What was John Androki after? Conrad didn't consider himself a brilliant man, but he knew he had the knack of tying together the threads of events to form meaningful patterns. But the threads of John Androki's affairs wouldn't tie.

He made mental notes as he went along. Androki's domestic holdings appeared to form but a small part of the total. Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Peru—Androki was sinking his hooks deeply into Central and South America; and into Africa, the Middle East, Europe. Conrad thought that if the financier's spheres of influence were linked with gossamer threads, they would form a net enfolding the globe.

Dorrance had understated the case, he reflected. John Androki was accumulating the kind of power that defied laws, undermined governments, shook nations. He was reaching beyond the power of government to establish his own power bloc.

Conrad whistled softly. He could well see how he'd gotten into the act. The expansion of Androki's power couldn't be tolerated, not at the expense of national security. And John Androki was striking at that bastion, both openly and covertly. Charles Dorrance recognized far more than he had acknowledged. He was a man, Conrad thought, who was looking ahead.

Philip Conrad—he was getting used to the name—traveled fast and light. Within an hour after packing his few belongings into a small traveling case, he was aboard a jet airliner headed toward Los Angeles. Intuitively he felt that the trip would be quite lengthy, and that in the end John Androki was a man whose number would come up. Well, if it did, it did.

But that would be up to Charles Dorrance.

BERTRAM KANE entered Gordon Maxon's office and slumped into a chair, asking, "How's the brain-twisting?"

"Most of them are twisted to begin with." Maxon smirked. "What's your problem? Got a few kinks?"

Kane smiled. "Would I know if I had?"

"Possibly." Maxon regarded him speculatively. "What is a normal mind? I don't know; I've never encountered one."

"Would you recognize one if you did?"

Maxon said, "By virtue of its rarity it would be abnormal, hence not recognizable as normal. How's that for a paradox?"

"Psychology." Kane grimaced.

"We do with minds what you do with mathematics," Maxon stated. "Anyone who can take three-dimensional space and twist it into multidimensional proportions—"

"You're maligning the Queen of the Sciences," Kane cut in. "How would you detect your sensitives without statistics?"

"Speaking of sensitives, have you heard the latest? John Androki's giving good old LAU ten million bucks."

"What?" He was startled.

"For a new library," Maxon explained.

"Where did you hear that?"

"From the chancellor's right-hand stooge."

"Why LAU?"

"Well, this is Androki's base of operations."

"I thought the world was. The press seems to think so."

"That's not far wrong," Maxon conjectured. "Did you read about his loan to Turkey? The State Department is screaming. The government probably would have stopped it on some technicality or other but he made it through the Swiss banks."

"The government could still stop it if it wanted to," Kane objected. "Economic pressure would do the trick."

"Against Turkey?" Maxon shook his head. "He made the loan to Ismet Bey on a personal basis."

"I can't follow his activities," Kane admitted.

"You have to be an Androki-watcher," Maxon advised. "That's rapidly becoming a profession. I'm getting to be quite an expert."

"What's he after?"

"You've just echoed the universal question." Maxon smiled. "Remember the Bolivian loan some months back? That was a personal deal also—a hundred million bucks to Savedra's personal account."

"I remember the furor it kicked up."

"Savedra's just placed the country's key industries under a tight government control—what amounts to nationalizing the entire economy. It's a peculiar setup. In effect, he's made Bolivia a corporation, with himself and a handpicked cabinet serving as a sort of chairman and board of directors." Maxon slouched deeper into his chair. "That makes Bolivia somewhat like a division of Androki's world corporation."

"That's farfetched." Kane smiled.

"Do you believe so? I don't. He's made the same kind of a loan to a number of nations—all the small, shaky type."

"Turkey's not shaky," Kane countered.

"No, but it's controlled centrally. Ismet Bey is a dictator in everything but name. Perhaps that's the key. Androki pulled the same thing in East Africa last month."

"I hadn't heard."

"Tanzania," Maxon explained. "The nation's only resources were game preserves and Kilimanjaro, which you'll have to admit don't return much revenue. Androki resolved that nicely with an eighty million dollar loan, again on a personal basis."

"That still doesn't tell what he's after."

"World control," Maxon returned soberly. "Did you know that he either directly or indirectly controls the major industries of West Germany? It's a cloudy picture but Bullitt, the British economist, claims it's true. He's made a thorough study of the man. He states categorically that what Androki doesn't own, he controls, which amounts to the same thing. And don't tell me you haven't read Skyler's *The Shadow of Androki*. It's a runaway best seller in the hardcover."

"I heard it was quite sensational," Kane commented.

"To some extent, but Skyler's documentation of Androki's Middle East and African activities have been substantiated by other sources. There's no doubt but that he's buying those splintered governments in Africa by the bushel basket."

"World domination is quite a goal," Kane observed. Economics wasn't his field; neither was psychology nor sociology. And he definitely wasn't a political creature; he left that for others. But he found something highly perturbing about Androki's activities. He said finally, "I can't imagine that he'll succeed."

"Can't you? I'm not so certain," Maxon retorted. "All I know is that he came from nowhere and in less than two years he's the wealthiest man in the world, and probably the most powerful. Aside from that, he's certainly the most publicized."

"I can't say that the publicity matters."

"You believe not? Publicity is power, Bert, at least in the sense that it conditions people, both to Androki as a person and to his objectives. I've always heard that financiers were shadowy figures, but not that bird. He's the lion of the reception line. The PR machine that manufactures California governors would have to take a back seat to Androki's publicists."

"Could he be gunning for a political future?"

"Don't be naïve, Bert. From what I've read, he's made some pretty heavy political contributions, but his reach for power is totally through the dollar. That, as the cynics say, is the ultimate seat of power."

"Do you believe he's a *downtthrough*?"

"I'm convinced, Bert."

"Any more evidence?"

"Not that's measurable by precise figures," Maxon admitted, "but you'll have to acknowledge that he always makes the right move, at least for him. His timing is out of this world."

"Do you actually know that?"

"I'm echoing the sentiments of a hundred expert but anguished voices," Maxon replied. "The timing aspect has them all intrigued. Everyone seems to have a different explanation, but on one thing they all agreed: when he moves, the time is ripe. He never moves too soon or too late. It's absolutely uncanny."

Kane said, "Perhaps it's his move that makes the time ripe. Have you considered that?"

"That is possible in some situations but not in others," Maxon acceded. "Most of his moves, if you analyze them, are related to financial conditions. Yet it's more than that. He anticipates current events. At least you never see him plunging money on a loser. I'm thinking of some of the political underdogs he's backed in Africa, and who have come on to win."

"Perhaps they won because of his backing," Kane suggested.

"I don't believe so." Maxon shook his head. "I'm inclined toward the belief that he backs the people he knows are going to win."

"He can't always be right, Gordie."

"Apparently he is." Maxon blew softly against his fingertips, then inspected them. "What does always making the right move mean? Is anyone's judgment that infallible? I read it as an unlikely tilt on the scale of probability. In effect, that discounts the factor of chance. I say that it isn't chance; he's acting on knowledge of what is to come."

"Do you believe that because you want to believe it?" Kane challenged.

"In his case, I don't want to believe it," Maxon countered. "The thought terrifies me. But all the same, I believe it. And because I do, I'm fascinated, or perhaps I should say driven. I've got to meet the man, find out."

"Could you tell?"

"If I saw him? I believe I could." Maxon grinned. "I've got a gimmick."

The conversation left Kane vaguely depressed. Returning to his office, the thought of spending long hours in the math lab that evening seemed unbearable. On impulse, he called Anita.

"Bert," he said, when she came on the phone.

"My, where have you been?"

"Juggling the equations," he admitted wryly. "I always feel that I'm on the verge of a breakthrough."

"A breakdown will be more like it," she warned.

"How about supper tonight?"

"Well . . ."

"Seven?"

"That would be fine."

"Seven it is." Replacing the instrument in its cradle, he felt a flush of guilt. He wasn't fair to Anita. He neglected her for weeks at a time. During those periods, his mathematics had sufficed. Living in the strange world of the mind, landscaped by the wondrous logic created by numbers and symbols, he had shut out the day-to-day life; through the window of mathematics, he searched for unknowable universes.

But, inevitably, the magic would come to an end. It usually came in a wave of tiredness occasioned by insufficient food and sleep, or by the sudden loneliness of his self-imposed isolation.

On such occasions, like today, he would abruptly call Anita. Yet she had never protested, except to chide him for his long hours and self-neglect.

He walked to the window and looked out. The carpet of grass, the shady elms, the slender white bell tower in the distance brought a sense of peace. Could another world be more wonderful? Or was this but one of many worlds in the same space-time continuum?

How could man sense what lay beyond the senses? Yet, he felt certain, there was something more; the mathematical inferences were too strong for it to be otherwise. Not too many years ago the universe had been conceived of as a vast mechanism responding to and governed by the immu-

table laws of Newtonian mechanics; now those laws appeared more as but one aspect in the rivers of force which bound and stirred the cosmos. Nature was filled with paradoxes.

What was a paradox? Stripped to its essential, it was an unanswerable question; unanswerable merely because it lay beyond the realm of human comprehension. Multidimensional space was wrapped in such paradoxes—was paradoxical itself, he reflected. Yet he was utterly convinced that such space existed.

Yet space, layered or intermingled with space, still added up to nothing. As such, the concept possessed no meaning. Space only held meaning as it was measured by the objects within it; ergo, the existence of multidimensional space implied the existence of objects beyond the realm of the known dimensions. Other worlds. He breathed the words wonderingly. Man stood in a black cave, through the narrow entrance of which he could see but a single star. Yet galaxies littered the skies. His thoughts were musing.

Gordon Maxon believed in other dimensions, also, but he saw the key to them as psychical rather than mathematical. Did it matter how man went through the door? Not really, Kane reflected. The important thing was to find the door, swing it wide.

He could understand Maxon's excitement over the possibility that John Androki was a *downtrough*. Maxon's other sensitives—telepaths, clairvoyants, psychokinets—inhabited the same space-time continuum as normal people. But not John Androki. Alone among the hoped-for sensitives that peopled Maxon's studies, he projected his sensory apparatus into time. Like a fisherman, he flung his net into the time stream, seining from it the events of tomorrow. Was that possible? Or was it all Gordon Maxon's imagination?

Anita met him at the door, still wearing her dressing gown. "Be ready in a jiffy." She eyed him speculatively. "You look tired."

"A trifle."

"Small wonder with the hours you keep."

"I lose track of time," he admitted. "It's an elusive world."

"Multidimensional space?"

He nodded. "It's like trying to snag mercury with a fishhook; it just won't stay hooked."

"The real world is much better." She wrinkled her nose at him. "Or didn't you know?"

"At times it seems overly grim."

"Not if you take from it what you want."

"You make it sound easy," he accused.

"No one ever said it was easy." She held his glance. "The most difficult part is in knowing what you want."

"Do you know what you want?"

She frowned. "Yes and no. I believed I did once but my wants keep changing. They ebb and flow with the possibilities."

"That's being realistic," he acknowledged.

"Is it? I don't know." She smiled brightly. "I'm learning to take a little from this world, a little from that—take the best of several worlds."

"That takes a bit of juggling."

"Yes, of course, but how else does one get what one wants? You have to juggle, make concessions. But isn't that part of the excitement?"

"I never quite thought of it in that way," he admitted.

"You can't drift through life, Bert."

"Drift?" He looked inquiringly at her.

"You have to steer the boat."

He smiled. "We steer in different ways. My rudder is mathematics."

"Toward an invisible shore," she reproved. "Now fix yourself a drink. You'll feel better."

He was sipping a Scotch-on-the-rocks when Anita reappeared from the adjoining room. Still wearing the dressing gown, her body moved sinuously under it. The sight stirred his pulse. She paused, smoke from her cigarette curling up past her face.

"Did you hear about the ten million dollars John Androki's giving LAU for a library?" she asked.

"Gordie mentioned it."

"Isn't that marvelous, Bert?"

"I suppose."

"You don't sound overly enthusiastic."

"The fellow bothers me," he confessed.

"Poof, he's an interesting man."

"He moves too fast for me."

"That's what makes him interesting, Bert." She sat beside him on the couch.

"Don't get caught by glamour," he warned.

"Why not?" she asked mockingly.

"It's an ethereal quality."

"But substance for the soul."

"In what way?" he asked quizzically.

"Glamour is a magnet, a food; it draws response."

"I can't see him as glamorous."

"Because he might be a *downthrough*?" She stared levelly at him, her face holding an emotion he couldn't decipher.

"That would make him twice as exciting. Imagine being able to look at a woman and knowing whether or not you were going to have an affair."

"That might excite him," he admitted, "but would it excite the woman?"

"If she knew that he knew the answer? That would be absolutely intriguing," she declared.

"Wouldn't she feel like a pawn, knowing she didn't have any control of the situation?"

"But she would have." Her eyes glinted wickedly. "He wouldn't know the answer unless she had already made the decision."

He smiled. "Suppose he didn't agree with the decision?"

"That variable largely would depend on the woman." She tossed her head smilingly.

"In other words, he's the pawn?"

"Do you expect me to answer that?" She eyed him steadily. "Men sometimes don't know what they want until someone points the way."

"Ah, this brazen age." He laughed.

"You're living in a lost world, Bert." She leaned toward him, her face turned up. He slipped his arms around her, feeling a sudden urgency. Her lips were cool. He pulled her closer, kissing her more ardently. Releasing her, he drew back.

"We'd better quit that," he warned huskily.

"Why?" Her face held a hard, glossy smile.

Kane's phone was ringing when he returned to his apartment. Throwing the door shut behind him, he flicked on a light and lifted the instrument from its cradle.

"Bert?" Maxon's voice came urgently through the ear-piece. "I've been trying to reach you all evening."

"Had a date with Anita," he explained tersely. "What's up?"

"I heard a news flash a few hours ago," Maxon said. "Doctor Cantrup of Chicago was killed."

"Killed?" Kane sensed a sudden shock.

"Murdered," Maxon said.

VI

NOTED SCIENTIST SLAIN IN CHICAGO—Kane stared heavily at the black headlines in the *Times* before dropping his eyes to the story.

Chicago (AP)—David Cantrup, famed University of Chicago mathematician renowned for his studies of multidimensional space, last night was shot to death by an unknown assailant as he stepped from his car in the driveway of his home. An eyewitness reported that the gunman sped from the scene in a black sedan. Police could offer no explanation. . . .

He finished the story and pushed the paper aside, staring blankly at the wall. David Cantrup dead! He wanted to deny it. Although he had met the mathematician only a few times, they had carried on an occasional correspondence related to their work. Cantrup, like himself, advanced the belief that space had many dimensions. It was he who had first used the Bornji transformations to project mathematics into that unknown realm.

Kane felt a deep personal loss. It was a loss, he knew, that would be felt keenly by the relatively small handful of men scattered throughout the world who were pioneering in the same field, and who in many respects were Cantrup's colleagues. Now it was up to Freyhoff of Germany, Vosin of Russia, Bernardi of Italy, Tanaki of Japan. And himself! But Cantrup had been the foremost among them. His loss would leave a big gap.

The door to his office opened and Maxon came in. Kane greeted him soberly.

"I know exactly how you feel," Maxon said. "It's a damned shame."

"Why him?" he asked bitterly. "The act was senseless."

"Not to the person who did it, Bert."

"How could a man like David Cantrup have enemies?" he asked wonderingly.

"What do we know of him?" Maxon parried gently. "We know of his work, but not the man."

"To destroy such a mind was still a senseless act."

"You feel particularly keen about it because he was in your field," Maxon said; "but to how many people was he great? A mere handful over the entire face of the planet."

"Is fame what determines greatness?"

"Of course not. I only made the point that not many people would feel the loss."

"He was so close to the breakthrough, Gordie."

"There are others," the psychologist consoled. He looked at Kane. "You are one."

"I'm not a David Cantrup," he denied bitterly.

"Was he, at your age?"

"Oh, I know, the pieces can be put together again." He

gestured wearily toward the paper. "According to the story, there were no clues, nothing—just a man shooting him in the darkness and speeding off in a black car. It's inconceivable that such a thing could happen."

"It happens every day, Bert. What would you expect a murderer to do, carry a neon sign? Aside from that, every murder is a tragedy to someone."

"I've only seen him a few times, but somehow he always seemed like a father to me," Kane answered. "Mentally, I've lived with him for years."

"We all have our gods, Bert."

"But to be cut down at this point of his life—"

"You have to take up where he left off," Maxon interrupted firmly.

"But can I?"

"Certainly you can."

"At times it's like walking through a pitch black night, searching for a tiny glimmer of light," Kane confessed. "I know there's a key, but can I find it? Has man been endowed with the mental power to break out from the reality into which he is born? It leaves one with a quite humble feeling, Gordie."

Maxon nodded. "I feel that way at times. I catch glimmerings, enough to tantalize me; then the door is slammed in my face. But you have to keep trying."

"Oh, I'll keep trying," Kane protested, "but I can't help the self-questioning. I'm like a blind man trying to chart the universe, Gordie. I know the stars are there, but where? Now it'll be all the more lonely."

Maxon turned back at the door. "Incidentally, there's a rumor making the rounds that Rowland is going to throw a reception for Androki." Rowland was the chancellor of LAU.

"Androki." Kane spoke the name like a swear word.

"We might meet that cookie yet."

"The thought leaves me cold."

"Shake the blues and you'll feel better," Maxon advised. "You know damned well you're dying to meet him."

"Only to see what makes him tick."

"Isn't that what we all want—to see what makes Androki tick?" Before Kane could answer, Maxon went out and closed the door.

Kane remained at his desk, staring musingly through the window. David Cantrup's death was a hard blow. But Maxon was right: the full impact of the tragedy would be felt only by his immediate family, a few colleagues and students, and a scattering of scientists around the world. Freyhoff of Germany, Vosin of Russia, Bernardi of Italy, Tanaki of Japan—

those men would be grieving this day.

Yet David Cantrup had left the entire world a legacy, he reflected. One day, when men flung wide the door, it would be because of David Cantrup. He had been the pioneer.

Kane remembered his own initiation into that abstract field. As a math major in his senior year at Berkley, he had attended a lecture given by Hans Wulff, a star in a firmament which had been largely unknown to him.

With a piece of chalk and a blackboard, speaking in a dry, unemotional voice, Wulff had opened to Kane's eyes vistas he'd scarcely dreamed of. This was not a world of the microcosm or macrocosm; it was discernible neither through the microscope nor telescope, nor through any of the probing waves or instruments that hectic man had flung against the waiting stars.

Wulff's world was far greater.

Kane still remembered the hush in the auditorium, broken only by the lecturer's somewhat reedy voice. The world he had uncovered that night existed around Kane on every side; it existed but was not sensed, for nature had not given man the sensory equipment with which to penetrate beyond the dimensions which formed his reality.

"*What do we mean by reality and unreality?*" Wulff had asked that question at the beginning of his lecture. Reality and unreality, he said, were but artificial constructs of the mind. In that regard, unreality was synonymous with the limits of sensory perception; unreality began where the mind left off.

How could limits exist within a universe which itself was limitless? Kane had wondered at the time. Men knew that limitless galaxies lay beyond the probes of the most sensitive radiotelescopes. The vistas Wulff had drawn on the blackboard were like those unseen galaxies; a more powerful telescope was needed to uncover them. Only this telescope had to be built of mathematics.

It had to be built in the minds of men.

Perhaps man could never reach Far Centauri, but he could achieve a vastly greater leap through the magic of numbers.

That's what Hans Wulff had said.

Kane drove to Anita's apartment in the early evening. Their affair, as he thought of it, perturbed him; yet he found himself drawn ever more deeply into the entanglement, for it also was that. He wasn't quite certain how it had started. One moment they had been discussing Androki; the next she was in his arms.

I should propose marriage—the thought had come to him

the first night he was with her. She expected that, certainly; yet there were times when he wondered if she really did. "I think you have to take a little from this world, a little from that"—those had been her words. At the time he had placed no great significance in them; but he since had wondered.

Did he really want to marry Anita? The question plagued him. Or was his thought of marriage a manifestation of an old-fashioned morality that somehow he had clung to while the rest of the world raced off on a tangent? A desire for marriage, or an obligation? He fretted, torn first one way, then another.

But he couldn't deny her attraction. If anything, she was even more eager for their clandestine meetings than he. Her excitement communicated itself to him in ways he had scarcely imagined possible. She was, in fact, at times quite wanton. He winced at the admission. Still, he thought, he had to be tolerant of the past; this new age, of which he'd never quite gotten into the swing, demanded that.

"We're old fuddy-duddies," Margaret once had laughed.

"I guess we are." He had laughed with her. Yet what more could one have from life than he had had with Margaret? Nothing, he reflected. But that was because he and Margaret had known what they had; there had been no reason to chase will-o'-the-wisps.

Margaret, too, had been beautiful, but her beauty had been of a different kind. It had been an inner beauty radiating outward, disguising her rather plain features. One didn't see that Margaret was beautiful; one *knew* it. Anita's beauty, by contrast, was surface, yet she had a depth of mind he couldn't deny. Was it fair to judge Anita by Margaret?

You have to get with it, boy, he told himself. He had to smile, realizing that even that thought wasn't his own; Maxon had given him that advice a long while before.

Anita met him at the door with a quick smile. She kissed his cheek, then stepped back and surveyed him. "You look unhappy," she observed.

"Cantrup's death sort of threw me," he explained.

"Cantrup? Oh, the Chicago professor."

"Merely one of the world's greatest mathematicians," he answered stiffly.

"Don't expect me to feel as you do, Bert. Does the name Yves Tanguy or Chaim Soutine mean anything to you?" When he shook his head, she said, "They are as important to many artists as your Cantrup was to mathematicians."

"I'm sorry," he apologized. "I didn't mean to bite at you."

"You don't play enough, Bert."

"I'm trying." He attempted a laugh. "How would you like to run down to the beach for supper?"

"Is that what you really want?" She wrinkled her nose mischievously, but there was no mischief in her eyes; they suddenly were bright and intent.

"Well . . ."

"Don't try to think up an excuse," she murmured. She lifted her face, offering her lips. He kissed her, then slipped his arms around her and crushed her lips savagely. Her body, warm and yielding in his embrace, stirred him violently. It was the thing she always did to him, nor could he prevent his response. *Margaret! Margaret!* The name was a hollow ring in his mind. That was then and this was now.

She struggled free. "You're just a natural-born brute," she said severely.

He laughed. "What man wouldn't like to hear that?"

"Brutes are nice." She arched an eye, then said quickly, "I can whip up a snack here."

"Okay, you've sold me on it." Grinning, he kissed her again, rumpling her hair, then all at once felt serious. Damn it, he did want her, for now and always. To hell with his strait-laced thinking. He stepped back and said quietly, "I think we should get married."

She smiled, a hard, tight smile. "You're a doll, Bert."

"Well, I do."

"Marriage." She put a demure note into the word, studying him levelly. Her face was inscrutable. "I'm not ready for it," she finally said.

"Why not?" He felt both hurt and relieved.

"There's something more I want of life, Bert."

"More of what?"

"I'm not quite certain." She moistened her lips. "I want to be one of life's winners."

"Life's winners?" He eyed her perplexedly.

"Oh, I know, I'm saying it badly, but there's something more I want of life, something I haven't had. It's something I sense, feel, without quite knowing how to put into words." She caught his bewildered glance and rushed on. "Oh, I've hurt you. Don't think that you haven't given me a great honor, Bert, but I'm just not ready. Can't you understand that? You've been a widower for three or four years, and you're just getting ready."

"If that's the way you feel—"

"It has nothing to do with you," she cut in. "It's just me. Please try to understand."

"Well, sure."

"It's just that when I get married, I want to be absolutely

certain, Bert."

"So do I," he declared.

"Are you certain now? Can you really say that?"

He asked stiffly, "What do you mean by certain?"

"I don't want you to be propelled by emotion," she answered.

"I didn't think I was the emotional type."

She smiled coaxingly and murmured, "Why don't we let things go on as they are, at least for a while?"

"I thought you might be hurt," he answered truthfully.

She caught his hand, laughing, a brittle laugh that held a jarring note. Tossing back her head, she exclaimed, "What you need is an equation to get you into the Twentieth Century."

Returning home that night, Kane felt confused. Anita really didn't want marriage; she had made that clear enough. What did she want? Did she fear marriage because of her first venture into matrimony? Or did she simply want a relationship that left her completely unfettered? That last question made him uncomfortable.

Perhaps she had sincere doubts about her own feelings. He hadn't considered that. He tossed the idea around. "*Are you certain? Can you really say that?*" Did her question indicate her doubts of him, or did it reflect her own feelings?

He grimaced wryly, realizing that in all honesty he couldn't assess how he really felt about her. His awkward proposal had been impelled by his emotions, and by a sense of guilt; he couldn't deny that. His conscience had pushed him.

Chivalrous Kane! He had to laugh. His denial that he was an emotional type had been so much hogwash, especially when it came to her. When he was with her the tides ran high; but at other times there was scarcely a ripple on the water.

How then did he really feel toward her? If he couldn't answer that, how could he condemn her? She was just more honest, he mused. They both wanted exactly what they had, nothing more. Yet how long could such a relationship last? Or did that matter? In today's world it didn't matter, he thought. Interpersonal relationships largely were matters of convenience; that's what Maxon claimed. Perhaps it was true. But he didn't want it that way; he really didn't. *Margaret! Margaret!*

Peering out through the windshield, he looked at the sky.

VII

CHARLES DORRANCE watched the glow of Los Angeles brighten the sky as the jet airliner crossed the mountains before going into the turn on its landing leg to the International Airport. It was like the unfolding of a vast field of diamonds.

Big, Dorrance thought, caught by its immensity. The entire coast west of the mountains blazed with light—long chains of light that marked broad avenues, huge clusters that told of gigantic shopping centers, geometrical patterns that revealed mile after mile of tract housing.

He stared down musingly. His habitat for the last half a dozen years had been the small office buried in the huge white marble building in Langley, Virginia. So secret was its function that few ever had entered its single door; fewer still had an inkling of the nature of his work. Dorrance himself was answerable but to a single man high up the ladder. That was the way he wanted it; that was the way it had to be.

Before that, his habitat had been Europe; mainly West Germany, for that had been the great center of intrigue. Berlin, London, Paris—how well he knew them. He thought it strange that he knew them better than he knew any large city in his own country, New York and Washington excepted.

Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo—he also knew them, but to a lesser extent. But he had been brought back, had been buried deep in the bowels of a white marble building to perform work more secret still. Now he was a manipulator of men, and of destiny. Working from the single room, the world had been his chessboard. For the first time in that half a dozen years he had emerged from his secret cocoon.

The present case held ramifications beyond any he had ever known. Strictly speaking, it wasn't a case, but merely an investigation. As yet there was no clear-cut villain, no act threatening the security of the nation; yet he felt certain that both existed. It was the uneasy feeling of a plot so vast in scope, so alien to the way of plotters, that he was intrigued. But he had no tangible evidence, nothing provable.

There was only John Androki.

Yet, he told himself, something was building right under his nose. The murders had warned of that. It was the murders, and the urgency of his feelings, that had brought him from his small office to wing westward.

Was he on a wild-goose chase? Watching the plane let down over the sea of lights, he wondered. Four men had died, including David Cantrup, with not a shred of evidence to implicate anyone. Yet, with a certainty born of experience he had mentally implicated John Androki, the man who just the previous day had made Egypt a cash offer for a long-term lease on her interest in the Suez Canal.

The plane touched down and taxied to a halt under the airport floodlights.

Philip Conrad was waiting. He walked through the gate and met Dorrance at the bottom of the ramp. He nodded briefly, then shepherded his superior through the lobby and out to the late model car he had rented under his assumed name.

As they drove from the lot, Dorrance asked, "Anything new?"

"Nothing," Conrad returned flatly. "We've kept him under surveillance around the clock, even to taping his snores at night on the off chance that he might talk in his sleep."

"His business is certainly booming."

Conrad grinned at the sarcasm and said, "We've got a bushel basket on that too, including the names of a score of different agents he works through. In some instances we've traced agents down to the fourth or fifth level of operation. But don't ask me what it adds up to; I don't know."

"He's building a power structure like you've never seen before, that's what. It's expansion is geometrical."

"Can we shoot him for that?"

"It depends on how he intends to use the structure," Dorrance replied somberly.

"He's a strange character," Conrad observed. "He's so inept that he's baffling."

"Inept?"

"In protecting himself," Conrad explained. "What really bothers me is his inability to sense that he's being watched. Oh, we're careful enough, but most men, in time, sense that kind of surveillance. They sniff it like a dog sniffs the breeze."

"Professionals do."

"Perhaps that's it," Conrad agreed. "But with all the fuss he's kicking up, he should know that he's under the glass. He certainly knows that Senator Blaire's watchdogs are digging into his affairs."

"That's business." Dorrance smiled briefly. "He's aware of that, all right, but he doesn't associate the surveillance with his private life. At least he doesn't appear to."

"He doesn't," Conrad answered succinctly; "not according to our tapes."

They fell silent as Conrad turned onto a freeway headed toward West Los Angeles. Far off to one side Dorrance saw the glitter of the old heart of the city, now somewhat resembling a tarnished jewel set in a basket of blue-white diamonds.

Reflectively he found it strange that John Adroki should choose this great Western city for his headquarters. London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Vienna, Moscow—those were the centers he usually associated with world intrigue. And in his own country, New York and Washington. But Los Angeles, never. Yet, from here, John Adroki was casting a net to snare the world.

The net was fashioned of murder.

Conrad drove into a circular driveway and parked. Dorrance briefly noted the spacious grounds, the high, sloping roof and Cape Cod architecture of the two-story house, before he followed Conrad inside. "Nice lash-up," he commented.

Conrad grunted, "You're paying for it."

Dorrance turned off the lamp, walked to a curtained window and peered out. "That Adroki's place across the way?"

Conrad nodded and glanced at a small red bulb burning at the top of the staircase. "Greb and Laski are monitoring him now with the remote pickups upstairs. Hasselwaite is out running down a lead. Want to speak to them?"

"No." Dorrance faced him. "My business is with you."

"Are we getting down to the finish line?"

"Frankly, I don't know." Dorrance turned back to the curtain. The structure across the street was large, low, rambling. A combination of brick, siding and large expanses of glass, it was set well back on a fenced plot of several acres. With the exception of the large lawn in front edged by a circular drive and a grassy plot toward the rear, off to one side of the house, the grounds were well-shaded by trees. The house sang of money; but it didn't look like a billionaire's house.

As if reading his mind, Conrad said, "He's just camping out. He bought five hundred acres in the hills above Malibu Beach, is building something that will make the Taj Mahal look like a slum."

"That's just one of a dozen places." Dorrance spoke without turning. "He's building in Connecticut, Florida, Puerto Rico, on the Riviera, outside Madrid and, oh yes, on the Cornish Coast. That's only a partial list."

"Nice, if you can afford it."

"I wouldn't know." Dorrance regarded the house intently.

Conrad had selected his lookout nicely. He'd had to pay a small fortune to lease it, of course, but that was of no consequence. What mattered was that he had a clear view of the entire front of Androki's house. There was at least a nine or ten second walk from the circular drive, where the cars parked, to the front door. That was more than enough time.

Dorrance reflected broodingly at the power his own government had given him. In essence, he was both judge and executioner, if he so chose. Whether John Androki lived or died depended on him; and that, in turn, depended on what sort of threat Androki posed to the nation's security.

He smiled grimly. It wasn't supposed to be that way, of course. Nothing in the Constitution or laws granted that sort of power. Yet, he knew, each nation had his counterpart. It might be in the form of a huge, unwieldy bureau like Russia's super-secret KGB, or it could be a one-man operation. Not that his empire was much larger.

He turned to face the agent. "Tell me about him."

"There's not much beyond what's in the reports."

"Personal impressions," Dorrance instructed.

"The dossier has him thumbnailed quite accurately," Conrad explained. "He works late, sleeps late, likes blondes, good whiskey, and entertains quite a bit, usually at one of the better spots along Sunset Boulevard. His tips make him a joy to headwaiters."

"All of which tells us very little about John Androki," Dorrance commented. "Has he any special friends?"

"Not that we can discern, and that's odd. He gathers people around him—they come running—yet he strikes me as a loner. He's different. Does that make sense? I keep trying to put my finger on it. He's a man who wants to belong, yet never can belong except by paying the way."

"An eighteen carat method of introduction, Phil."

Conrad nodded. "And yet, with all that, he's never without his bodyguards. A couple of them prowl the grounds at night, others maintain a watch inside."

"Bodyguards are cheap," Dorrance remarked.

"It isn't the fact of the bodyguards." Conrad hesitated, searching for words. "I've sensed, and I don't know why, that he's frightened. He's too watchful, too cautious, far more now than he was a few months ago. Even when attending a social function, he's wary. You can tell by his eyes, his manner. Perhaps it's normal that he'd be suspicious, but this goes beyond that. It's almost a paranoia."

"I've had that report from others."

"Yet he doesn't dodge people; he seeks them."

Dorrance watched the agent. "Androki's gathering a lot

of powerful friends, or at least his money is," he said finally. "He's gaining considerable influence and support in high government circles. That includes the Cabinet and Congress. Enough so that considerable effort is being expended in an attempt to call off the watchdogs in antitrust and quash actions already started. You can imagine how Senator Blaire is reacting to that."

"Frothing, I imagine."

"Far more than you'd know by the press, Phil. He's out to nail John Androki to the mast."

"More credit to him." Conrad rubbed his jaw. "Are the power sources he's gathering selective? Is there a pattern?"

"He's pulled in a lot of the malcontents."

"I would suspect that."

"Yet I can't say that he knows any of those people personally, Phil, except perhaps as nodding acquaintances."

Conrad said bluntly, "The dollar has a loud voice."

"Very loud. He's using it to shout around the world."

"With all that, he must be making enemies," Conrad observed.

"His opposition is testing the wind. Fear keeps most of them quiet."

"Not Senator Blaire."

"Not the senator," Dorrance agreed. "He might be just the boy to bring Androki down."

"Or get scuttled in the process."

"Androki's circle of influence is a mixed one," Dorrance commented. "Financiers, politicians, government big wheels, academicians—but he always reaches for the top. He knows who the prime movers are."

Conrad lifted his head. "Speaking of academicians, the chancellor of LAU is tossing a shindig for him next month."

"Androki has quite a hankering for the academic types, especially the brain trusts in math and physics. I never could quite figure that."

"Fruit of the ten million bucks, eh?" Dorrance smiled bleakly.

"He's got an angle," Conrad agreed.

"I'm not going to tell you any more than you have to know, but the man is dangerous."

"I don't want to know any more than I have to," Conrad responded flatly.

Dorrance's expression changed. "How did David Cantrup's murder strike you?"

"Was Androki implicated in that?"

"My guess is yes."

"The motivation would be tough to figure."

Dorrance smiled slightly. "Have you ever heard of Martin Freyhoff of Germany?"

"The name has a faint ring."

"It's thunder to the ears of the top mathematicians of the world."

"Another Cantrup?"

"They were about on a par," Dorrance acceded. "There are perhaps half a dozen forerunners in the field, all absorbed in the same problem. I understand they communicate rather freely."

"The top science hierarchy has never been noted for its nationalism," Conrad remarked dryly. "What's with Freyhoff?"

"He was murdered yesterday."

"What?" Conrad was startled.

"Under circumstances highly similar to Cantrup's death," Dorrance explained. "He was picked off by a sniper as he was about to enter his home. Again no clues, no known enemies, nothing. He apparently wasn't a political creature, a sex hound or a *bon vivant*. Neither was he an ex-Nazi. To the contrary, he fled to England when Hitler came into power, remaining there until after the war. During his stay there he made substantial contributions to the allied cause. He was old, brilliant, somewhat of a recluse; he lived in a world of mathematics, by and for mathematics. But that didn't keep him from getting knocked off," he added harshly.

"Cantrup and Freyhoff, two of a kind—it would strain my credulity to say the murders were unrelated."

"And mine, Phil."

"How does this tie in with Androki?"

"A tenuous thread that I'll get to." Dorrance eyed the agent quizzically. "Does the double execution suggest anything to you?"

Conrad rubbed his ear. "Motive, no," he finally conceded; "but you mentioned there were half a dozen of those birds?" He eyed his superior expectantly.

Dorrance nodded. "Vosin of Russia, Bernardi of Italy, a late-comer but apparently a powerhouse named Tanaki, of Japan . . ."

"I'd warn their governments," Conrad cut in.

"Steps have been taken. There's another name, Bertram Kane. Have you heard any mention of him?"

"Another bell rings," Conrad murmured. "Who is he?"

"A mathematician at LAU."

Conrad's eyes glinted. "And Androki's finangled himself a reception there, is that it?"

"It's a propelling force for suspicion," Dorrance acceded.

"I don't know." Conrad studied his hands. "That's like saying he paid ten million bucks on the off chance of getting next to Kane. That's hard to digest."

"That's peanuts to Androki, Phil. But that's not what brought me out here. Androki flew to Philadelphia two weeks ago." He paused, waiting.

"Greb and Hasselwaite were on him every second," Conrad explained. His voice was slightly defensive. "I'm staying out of his sight."

"Of course."

"He met with a few financiers; it's all on the tapes. Nothing else happened."

"Except that a man was murdered," Dorrance said grimly.

"In Philadelphia?" Conrad was startled. "Greb and Hasselwaite missed that?"

"It happened next door to where Androki was staying," Dorrance explained. "It had no apparent link to his visit."

"Apparent?"

"Oh, there was a tie-up, all right. I'm convinced of that." Dorrance's eyes grew blank. "Last week Androki flew to Seattle."

Conrad waited.

"There was a murder within fifty yards of where he was staying."

"Who were the victims?" Conrad asked tersely.

"That's what I think you should know. They were nobodies."

"Nobodies?"

"Oh, they had identification papers—false ones. But they had no real identification, no fingerprint records, no social security numbers. Who were they? I don't know. Where did they come from? I don't know. Why were they murdered? I don't know. Who murdered them? Again I don't know." His voice grew clipped. "Like John Androki, each was a Mr. Nobody."

"Strange," Conrad murmured.

"Right offhand I'd suspect Androki's bodyguards."

"A working hypothesis," Dorrance agreed. His eyes glittered. "All of which means Mr. Androki does have enemies, and they mean business. Probably that explains the fear you sensed in him. It might also explain why he hires the gorilla type for his personal bodyguards. But all that is surmise."

"Any ideas who his enemies might be?"

"Not a glimmer, Phil."

"He walks in murder," Conrad murmured.

"By my arithmetic, the total is five—Winthrop Farrand,

two world-famous mathematicians, and two unidentified corpses."

"That's a weird collection."

"It doesn't tell us much," Dorrance agreed.

"It's also a lot of killing without a clue," Conrad said speculatively. "He's propelled by fear."

"Murder is the last resource of desperation," Dorrance agreed. He straightened briskly. "I have the feeling that things are going to break fast. I also have the feeling that we might have a job cut out for us."

"I'm getting that feeling," Conrad confessed.

"If we do, the code is 'Topflight.' It will come from me personally."

"I'll be ready," Conrad said simply.

VIII

THE CHANCELLOR'S reception for John Androki was in full swing when Kane, accompanied by Maxon and Anita, turned in at the wide drive to park. The music of a string quartet came softly to his ears.

"Looks like a real bash," Maxon observed. He clambered out of the car and held the door for Anita.

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," she stated emphatically.

Kane grimaced. Despite his curiosity over the financier's reputed knowledge of the mathematics of multidimensional space and the psychologist's avowed belief that he was a *downtrough*, he felt the distaste he always felt at such functions. He regarded them as stirrings in the wind, devoid of all meaning. That this was practically a command performance, at least in his case, didn't help.

"Old gimlet eye will split a gusset when he sees me," Maxon snickered. Although he hadn't been invited—the affair was restricted to full professors in the physical sciences and mathematics departments—he had promptly invited himself. So had Anita.

"I want to make my appearance and get out of there as soon as possible," Kane murmured. He steered Anita toward the porch.

"You will not," she answered indignantly. "I came to meet John Androki and I'm going to meet him."

"You should do well," Maxon snickered. "He goes for blondes."

"I've heard that," she murmured. Kane glanced at her, thinking that no man could help but be attracted by her. She wore a pale blue gown that clung to her body, flowing down over her hips. Her honey-colored hair, done up in a

bun, revealed the graceful sweep of her shoulders and throat. She was lovely.

He purposefully had arrived late to avoid the reception line. Pausing inside the wide doors, he surveyed the crowded room. Kendall of physics, Jackman of chemistry, Harper of math—the affair had splintered into the usual small groups. Off in a corner, completely disregarded, the string quartet played softly. Subdued murmurings filled the air.

“There’s John Androki,” Anita said tautly. Kane’s eyes followed her all but imperceptible nod. His first impression was of a tall, slender figure, immaculately dressed. He recognized the financier immediately from photographs he’d seen in newspapers and magazines. Bent slightly forward at the waist, Androki was chatting with the chancellor and Guyman of astronomy.

Kane studied him curiously. Androki’s face, in partial profile, appeared thin, with a tightness about the cheekbones that suggested the ascetic. His long, high-bridged nose, curving out from the deep wells of his eyes, gave his face a predatory expression. His dark hair was neatly combed.

“Looks underfed for a billionaire,” Maxon cracked.

“Meow,” Anita murmured.

Maxon grinned. “Old gimlet eye is in seventh heaven.” Kane had to agree. Short and rotund, the chancellor held his jowly face turned avidly up toward the financier as if he were determined not to miss a single word. His expression was fawning. Standing slightly back from them, Guyman had the miffed look of a man who had been frozen out.

“He’ll monopolize him all night,” Anita said edgily.

“You couldn’t separate him from that moneybag if the place were burning down,” Maxon answered.

Kane kept his eyes on the financier, fascinated despite himself. Gesturing occasionally as he talked, Androki portrayed a certain grace. His arms, overly long, held a rubbery movement that gave the illusion of bonelessness. His hands were pale and slender, the fingers tapering. His chest, slightly sunken, emphasized the narrowness of his shoulders. Kane placed his age in the early forties.

So that’s John Androki, he thought wonderingly. He didn’t quite know what he had expected, but there certainly was nothing unusual about the man. He appeared quite ordinary.

The chancellor glanced around, his eyes falling on Kane. He frowned at sight of Anita and Maxon.

“He’s not happy,” Maxon observed.

“Is he ever?” Kane asked. He glanced at Anita. Staring

at the financier, her blue eyes narrowed, her slender face held a feral expression. He wondered at her thoughts.

The chancellor murmured something to Androki and started toward them. Kane watched him approach. At that moment Androki turned slightly, gazing in his direction. The dark eyes that briefly met his held a penetrating look, yet one suggestive of secret mockery. The financier's gaze moved to Anita and remained there; she returned the look steadily. Then the chancellor's rotund figure obtruded between them.

"Ah, Kane, I'm happy you could come," the chancellor exclaimed. "I'd like to present you to our guest of honor." He adroitly turned, shifting position to exclude the mathematician's companions.

"I'd be honored," Kane murmured.

"We all would," Maxon said brashly. The chancellor appeared not to have heard. Gesturing unobtrusively, he steered Kane toward the financier. Grinning, Maxon took Anita's arm and followed them.

The chancellor introduced Kane glowingly.

Androki acknowledged with a light handclasp and said, "Dr. Kane, of course. Dr. Cantrup was mentioning your work to me in Chicago several months ago." His eyes clouded briefly. "His death was a great tragedy."

"A tremendous loss to the world," Kane answered. "The death of Dr. Freyhoff in Germany makes the loss doubly grievous."

"A shocking blow," Androki murmured. "It's fortunate there are others to carry on."

"I'm not so certain that their places can be filled."

"Were they that close to the final solution?"

"I believe they were," he answered gravely.

"But isn't there a general exchange of information in the field? Wouldn't you be quite close to their work? Or Vosin or Bernardi or Tanaki?"

"To a certain extent, yes." Kane appraised him. "Their work has aided mine immensely. In general, we've taken the same approach."

"Ah, yes, the Bornji transformations."

"That is the tool, yes."

"So the final solution is just a matter of time?" Androki arched an eye, giving his narrow face a satanic expression.

"Time, intuition, or just plain hard work." Kane shrugged. "I'm not certain which."

"Dr. Kane is modest," the chancellor put in suavely.

"Dr. Cantrup seemed to feel that you were as far ahead in the field as anyone," Androki commented.

Kane laughed lightly. "Dr. Cantrup was the modest one.

I'm certain he was working in advance of the rest of us with, possibly, the exception of Vosin."

"Ah, the Russian mathematician."

Kane said deliberately, "It's quite surprising to find a financier acquainted with that particular corner of mathematics."

"I occasionally dabble at it," Androki explained. "Mathematics is somewhat of a hobby, a restful exercise, you might say. But when I come to such things as the Bornji transformations, I understand them only at a verbal level."

"You are too modest," Kane responded politely. "Dr. Cantrup was quite taken by your knowledge."

"I'm certain that I did but little more than listen." Androki's gaze traveled past Kane's shoulder. "Ah . . ."

The chancellor turned, frowning. "Oh, yes, I'd like to present Professor Weber of art and Dr. Maxon of psychology." He stepped stiffly aside.

"Delighted, Miss Weber." Androki's smile was charming as he bent forward in a slight bow. He seemingly took no cognizance of the psychologist.

She answered demurely.

"Happy to meet you," Maxon broke in. He edged forward. "I've been extremely interested in your career."

"Oh?" The swift expression that crossed the financier's face vanished before Kane could decipher it.

"Your apparent infallibility at prognostication," Maxon explained. "That's a subject dear to the heart of most psychologists."

"That would be an excellent gift, I'm certain." Androki's expression was inscrutable.

"But not unknown."

"You believe not? I wouldn't know. I'm afraid that in my case it's more a matter of understanding the vagaries of the market."

"Is it?" Maxon's smile was steady. "I'm not so certain."

"Come, Maxon," the chancellor interceded huffily, "we're not in the laboratory."

"A pity," Maxon murmured.

"I'm certain you'd be disappointed in me as a subject," Androki commented. His gaze rested on Anita. "Art is far more to my liking."

She smiled graciously. "I've heard of your fine collection."

"I'm not really knowledgeable on the subject," Androki disclaimed. "As with mathematics, I dabble at it. The function of art is the creation of beauty and beauty is always appealing," he went on. "You might call me a collector of sorts, but I collect what appeals to me rather than what

might be good."

"I'm certain they are one and the same," she remonstrated.

Androki said, "I've often thought that art is really an emotional state—the way that we feel about certain objects—and that it is the artist who makes the emotions visible."

"That is true," she murmured.

"What is your particular field, Miss Weber?"

"Watercolor is my hobby, but of course I instruct in the various media."

"Ah, watercolors." The financier smiled engagingly. "I was extremely fortunate in being able to pick up several of Winslow Homer's works recently. Also a Cotman and Adolf Dehn."

"How wonderful," she exclaimed, "I would love to see them."

"That can be arranged," he replied graciously. He studied her. "I feel that most artists have a mission. Is that true?"

"Of course," she admitted, "but in a wider sense, isn't that true of everyone?"

"Ah, life is filled with missions." Again he smiled charmingly.

As they chatted, Kane suddenly realized that he and Maxon—and, yes, the chancellor—had been excluded completely from their attention. Androki's gaze was fastened on Anita, hers on him; their words were directed to each other. Maxon realized it, too. He glanced at Kane and winked.

The chancellor cleared his throat several times; neither Androki nor Anita paid him the slightest heed. Finally he wandered off.

"Excuse me," Maxon said. He tugged at Kane's sleeve and moved toward the punch bowl. Handing Kane a glass of punch, he ladeled a second one for himself. Sipping it, he exclaimed, "They forgot to pour in the jolt."

"I can just see old gimlet eye spiking the punch," Kane returned sourly. He'd sensed undercurrents in the conversation between Anita and Androki that perturbed him. They'd certainly taken to each other!

"What do you think of him?"

"I don't quite know," he responded frankly. "He didn't commit himself much on his knowledge of math."

"He didn't commit himself period," Maxon rebutted. "He was walking on eggs."

"I had the feeling that he was wary."

"I can tell you one thing: Androki's no telepath."

"Oh?" Kane regarded him quizzically. "What leads you to that conclusion?"

"Remember, I said I had a gimmick?" Maxon grinned. "The shock approach. While speaking with him, I had some very lurid thoughts about him, reinforced with pictures. He didn't blink an eye."

Kane laughed. "That's a novel approach."

"I used it on a woman once and got smacked." Maxon smiled ruefully. "That, to me, proved telepathy."

"Do you still believe he's a *downthrough*?"

"I'm absolutely convinced, Bert."

"Wishful thinking?"

"My desire to discover a *downthrough* is tempered by the fear of such a discovery. I mentioned that before." Maxon sloshed his punch thoughtfully. "Or perhaps I should say fear of the possible consequences should such persons exist among us. But I'm trying to be objective. And studying Androki's record objectively, I find every evidence that he has a pipeline into tomorrow. Yes, I believe he's a *downthrough*."

"He appears quite ordinary to me."

"Physically, yes, but would you expect a *downthrough* to have two heads?"

"It would simplify the identification problem," Kane observed wryly.

"If time is a continuum, why shouldn't we be able to look through it the same as we do through space?" Maxon demanded. "It's just a matter of having the right receptor. Personally, I believe that all or many of us have such receptors, at least in an undeveloped state."

"I can't see that it's that simple," Kane countered. "Looking backward through time might be conceivable, but seeing something that has not yet occurred—"

"Not in real time," Maxon cut in quickly, "but how do you know that what we call the present is the only time that exists? Perhaps we have been here before, will be here again, or are in the past, present and future simultaneously. Could we know if we were? I believe not."

"Then how . . . ?"

"Our conscious awareness is focused on a particular instant of time," Maxon interrupted. "That time constitutes what we call the present. A trillionth of a second in the past is past, a trillionth of a second in the future is the future; yet we can keep narrowing that instant of the present until it doesn't exist. In that regard, the present is merely a border between a nonexistent future and a nonexistent past. Is there then no present?"

"Not by that reasoning," Kane admitted, "but I still don't get what you're driving at."

"I'm trying to define the present," Maxon answered. "By

that definition, it can't exist—not if it's merely the border between two nonexistent times.”

“So?”

—“But is it? Think a moment.” Maxon sipped his punch, then lowered his glass. “Do you realize that for all practical purposes you've never known anything but the past?”

“How do you figure that out?”

“Whatever we see, hear, taste, smell or feel reaches our consciousness through our nerve trunks. But is the neural transmission instantaneous? Not a bit. There's always a time lag between your mind and the exterior world.”

“You're talking about scant milliseconds,” Kane objected.

“True, but it still means that we always live scant milliseconds in the past. The action that is presented to the brain has already occurred and ended. Because of that built-in time lag, our awareness can never catch up to the present, if I can put it that way.” Maxon glared at him. “What does that mean?”

Kane smiled. “What does it mean?”

“Merely that what we call the present in reality is the past, at least in the objective world. Objectively past but mentally present. So you see, what we call the present has a split personality. Put another way, we inhabit two different time periods simultaneously.”

“Is that the kind of quackery you feed your students?”

Maxon grinned. “It can start some wonderful arguments.”

“So what has that to do with being a *downtrough*?” Kane challenged.

“Suppose you could shift your moment of awareness, focus it on a different point in time? Say tomorrow at two o'clock. Then would not tomorrow at two o'clock constitute your present?”

“I couldn't answer that, Gordie.”

“How does the concept differ radically from your multi-dimensional space?” Maxon demanded. “You're convinced that it exists.”

“At a mathematical level, yes.”

“Your belief goes deeper than that.”

“I'll go along with that,” Kane acceded.

“You had to have the belief first, or at least see the possibility of it, before undertaking the mathematical task of proving it,” Maxon declared. “You had to sense that there is something more to space than what we see with the naked eye.”

“If questioning constitutes a belief, yes,” Kane agreed. “What is space? We describe it as something that goes on and on in length and breadth and depth, and we call it

infinite. We measure it in all directions in terms of distance—the number of light-years lying between us and sun X. Yet space itself is nothingness, and as such can't be measured. We identify it and measure it only through the objects that lie within it. Yet those objects, as we see them, lie at the end of long, curved rays of light. Curved? Perhaps distorted is the better word. The end product that reaches us has been bent and twisted by vast gravitational fields. Can we say then that we know the size and shape of that portion of space that falls within the reach of our instruments? Or can nothingness have a shape?"

"We know our own interpretation, Bert."

"Exactly." He nodded. "But how do we know that the distortions of the universe don't overlap, or even occupy the same space-time continuum?"

"How can nothing overlap nothing?" Maxon grinned.

"By the superimposition of objects lying within the fields of nothingness," he answered. "How can you refute that?"

"Oh, I'm not."

"Mathematics is the key," Kane asserted.

"Isn't my argument based on mathematics?" Maxon demanded. "I'm convinced through the statistics of probability as well as through historical occurrences. There have been innumerable well-documented cases of psychic phenomena."

"The *downthrough*?"

"The prophets of the biblical days," Maxon assented. "But mostly I'm convinced by Androki. His sense of tomorrow is too unerring not to be based on some type of receptor as operational as the eye or the ear."

"So how does he perceive tomorrow? As a vision?"

"I couldn't say."

"Did he see this reception yesterday? Did he already know each person he would meet, each word that would be said?"

"It doesn't follow that the sense would have to be that selective," Maxon argued. "How much detail do you see when you're shooting along the freeway at seventy miles per hour? At the end of the trip, how many specific details can you recall? Not many. The number approximates zero when compared with what you have actually seen."

"Granted," Kane acknowledged.

"You recall only a few things—those which have come under your scrutiny for one reason or another. You have no real awareness of anything until you focus on it. Couldn't it be that way with whatever sense Androki uses to discern tomorrow?"

Kane smiled. "But what is it that brings his focus? What determines what he will see?"

"Perhaps he can consciously direct it, in the same way that you can consciously probe your immediate surroundings." Maxon shrugged. "I really don't know. That's one of the points I hope to discover."

"From Androki?" Kane's sourness returned. "He doesn't appear overly cooperative." He glanced across the room. Anita and the financier had withdrawn to the far corner, deeply engrossed in conversation. Their faces were animated.

"I wish she'd break it off," Kane said irritably.

"No use waiting." Maxon eyed her tolerantly. "I have the definite feeling that Androki will see her home."

"You're reading too much into it," he snapped.

"Am I? I don't believe so but I'll see." Maxon crossed the room and spoke briefly with Anita. She answered, smiling, and Androki's face took on a smug expression. The psychologist returned and said, "Let's shove off."

Kane suppressed his irritation. "Is he seeing her home?"

"After they stop by to view his art collection," he answered dryly. Kane moodily bade good night to the chancellor, then followed Maxon from the house. His thoughts were glum. In his belief, the person who brings a girl to a party should see her home. Was that old-fashioned?

He got into the car dejectedly, regretting that he'd bothered to come. The only good thing had been the string quartet, to which no one had bothered to listen.

"Don't let it get you down," Maxon advised, as they approached his apartment.

"Who's fretting?" he demanded.

"You are." The psychologist cast a tolerant glance at him. "Anita's a good kid, a fun kid, but she's not one to get serious over. I told you that long ago."

"Why do you say that?"

"She wants the good things of life, Bert. And she wants fun. I suspect that's why her first marriage broke up."

"What do you mean by the good things of life?" he challenged. It struck him that Anita had used almost those exact words.

"Money, power, status. Who knows?" Maxon shrugged. "We each have our own goals."

"We were speaking about Anita."

"Who's to say what she wants, Bert? Certainly it's not love she's after. That's just a biological balm. But whatever it is, she sees it in Androki."

"Pure surmise," he answered stiffly.

"The message was clear, Bert."

"The wealthiest man in the world? He has his choice. She's smart enough to know there's nothing in it for her."

"Would her ego allow her to accept that?" Maxon demanded. Kane didn't reply, remaining silent until he dropped the psychologist off at his home.

"See you mañana." Maxon waved airily as he turned along the dark path that led to the porch. Driving home, Kane moodily thought that it was the lousiest reception he'd ever attended. Anita hadn't helped things one bit. Neither had Androki.

Especially not Androki.

IX

KANE WAS leaving his office the following afternoon when he encountered Anita. Smiling, she brushed back her hair.

"Sorry about last night," she apologized. "I just couldn't pass up the opportunity of seeing Mr. Androki's art collection. It's positively fabulous. Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Matisse, Modigliani, Picasso—I never realized his collection was anywhere near that extensive."

"Well, with a few billion dollars . . ." He tried to stifle his miffed feelings.

"It's not that," she answered archly. "You would know that if you saw his collection. Paul Klee, Malevich patterns, a Dali, an Orozco canvas; oh, it required far more than money. He's a real connoisseur, Bert."

"Perhaps." He had to smile at her enthusiasm.

"He's absolutely charming."

"He seemed nice enough."

"He's not at all like the papers and magazines make him out to be," she declared. "He's a highly sensitive person. He really is."

"Gordie's more than ever convinced that he's a *down-through*."

"He was extremely interested in Gordie."

"He didn't appear to be."

"Oh, but he was, and in you, too."

"I can't imagine why," he replied dryly. Androki hadn't struck him as a man who would be interested in anyone outside of Androki.

"He believes you rank with Cantrup and Vosin."

"How can he say that?" he demanded. "Has he ever met Vosin, or talked with him?"

"I believe he was quoting Dr. Cantrup." She eyed him musingly. "Don't be so churlish, Bert."

"I'm not trying to be," he apologized.

"He was absolutely sincere," she said. "He believes that you're far closer to the final solution than you'll admit."

"I wish that were true."

"How do you know it's not?" she demanded.

"I don't really. The breakthrough is one of those things which, if it comes, will come suddenly."

"He was also interested in Gordie's work."

"Gordie never mentioned his work," he rebutted.

"He indicated his interest in extrasensory perception," she answered pointedly. "And he did indicate his belief that Mr. Androki was psychic."

"He certainly did." Kane was forced to smile.

"Mr. Androki wanted to know if Gordie really believed that."

"What did you tell him?"

"That he believed in it as sincerely as you believe in multidimensional space."

"What did he say to that?"

"He had thought that Gordie's bit about prognostication was an attempt at humor," she explained. "He was quite surprised when I told him that Gordie not only believed in prophecy but was trying to prove its existence scientifically."

"Did that shake him?"

"He was skeptical. He asked how it could be proved. I told him that Gordie's main methods were based on the statistics of probability. That's true, isn't it?"

He nodded. "How did he react?"

"He's certainly dubious that such a thing exists," she explained. "He said that good prediction stems from good analysis, that many things are predictable if one understands the past."

"I can't argue with that." Kane eyed her speculatively. "As I recall, you believed quite strongly that he might be psychic. How do you feel about him now?"

"I'm not certain." She moistened her lips.

"Did he convince you that he's not?"

She smiled brightly. "My beliefs in the matter never came up."

"But you have an opinion," he pressed.

"He's a brilliant man, Bert. I'm convinced of that. He's also very sensitive, and lonely."

"Lonely? I wouldn't have imagined that."

"He likes his work, loves his art collection, but he doesn't strike a rapport with many people. He told me that. Oh, I know, he goes to a jillion receptions, but that's just because of his involvements."

"He seems to make plenty of other parties," he observed dryly.

"You can't believe half of what you read or hear, Bert." She eyed him sharply. "You can tell he's lonely. Haven't you ever felt lonely in a crowd? In many ways it's the most poignant loneliness of all; it sings of a mass of people while telling you that you have no one. I know he gets around, but he still walks in loneliness. It's written all over him."

He smiled faintly. "I can't argue with a woman's insight."

"Observation, not insight," she corrected.

"I'm glad you enjoyed the evening," he said impulsively. The realization that he'd been acting like a boor made him flush.

"I'm glad, too," she answered simply. "I wouldn't have missed seeing his collection for the world."

"It was nice of him to invite you."

"Very nice, Bert." She glanced at her watch. "Gracious, I'm late for class. I'll have to be running."

"See you later," he called, but she had already turned away. Watching her walk swiftly along the corridor, he felt a sadness and wondered why. There's been an estrangement, he thought; it had dominated their entire conversation. Had he been that churlish? But she had been defensive, too. She had leaned too heavily on Androki's art collection to explain her fascination; and she had been too defensive in the financier's behalf. Or was that his imagination?

Suddenly the whole affair struck him as trivial.

Despite his efforts to push John Androki from his mind, Kane found himself ever more absorbed in questions pertaining to the financier. In part, Maxon kept the subject alive; but much of it, he knew, was because the man was an enigma who both baffled and perturbed him.

Why had he disclaimed all but a superficial knowledge of the mathematics he reportedly had discussed in detail with Dr. Cantrup? Androki supposedly had no known academic background. If that were true, how had he acquired such specialized knowledge? How had he managed to amass such a tremendous fortune in so short a time? Was he simply a genius who had turned his talents to the financial world? Or was he, as Maxon firmly believed, a *downthrough*?

Or was Anita the real source of his perturbation?

Moodily he considered it. Since the night of the reception, she had assiduously avoided him. Aside from their chance encounter in the corridor, he'd scarcely seen her. At first, when he had called, there had been a series of excuses: she was loaded with work, she wasn't feeling well, she had an

appointment. Then after a while she had stopped pretending.

"Not tonight," she answered coolly, when he had phoned to suggest supper. Hurt, he wondered what he had done to drive her away. Finally he confided in Maxon.

"She's got Androki on the hook," the psychologist bluntly told him.

"Is that a surmise?" he demanded.

"The word gets around." Maxon added gently, "Find yourself a new playmate, Bert. The woods are filled with them."

"Why does she hide it from me?" he protested.

"Women usually hide their affairs. It adds to their mystery. Besides, she probably was trying to let you down easily."

"It wasn't that serious," he protested.

"Not with her." The psychologist eyed him tolerantly. "But it was with you. It's etched into your face, Bert."

"What does she hope to gain from it?"

"Her stakes are high."

"High?" He searched Maxon's face for meaning.

"She's shooting for the moon."

"I can't believe that, Gordie."

"I can."

"You're too quick to judge," he countered. Finding the conversation suddenly depressing, he turned away. Why was Maxon always so cynical?

Plunging back into his work with renewed fervor, Kane shut out the world around him. As during the long months following Margaret's death, he became a recluse to all but Maxon, and he avoided even him for days at a time.

When his task became too tiring, he sought relaxation through philosophizing his problems in an effort to formulate them in his mind. Almost invariably his thoughts would drift from space to time.

Must time, as in Riemannian geometry, serve only as a function of the clock so that the objective world could be placed properly in the curved planes of space? Or did time have dimensions analogous to multidimensional space?

Maxon believed that it did, but he sought another course to discover the truth. The proof of prophecy also would prove the dimensionality of time; he'd argued that long and vociferously. He reasoned that the true prophet didn't merely predict the future, as a fortune-teller might, but actually saw it; that, in turn, proved that our objective world existed simultaneously in different stages of development along an infinite time continuum. But did prophecy, as he defined it, exist? Proof that it did was his goal.

Kane was intrigued by the thought that other dimensions

of time might lie beyond the transitional present that linked a dead past with a nonexistent future. Would the solution to his own problem also be the solution to Maxon's problem? It seemed reasonable.

And if he or Maxon proved the thesis? Then the great thinkers of the future would rush in to unlock those worlds. In time, perhaps after long generations, theory would seep out into the test laboratories, and eventually into the hands of imaginative engineers; someday hardware would begin to shape up. Or was that all a wild dream?

He didn't believe so. Neither had David Cantrup nor Martin Freyhoff; nor did Vosin, Bernardi, Tanaki. They believed as he did: that after untold millennia on Earth, man stood at last at the threshold of his universe; he had but to open the door to gaze at the wonder of it.

Returning home from the campus, he idly noted the car behind him through his rearview mirror. Later, going out for supper, he was surprised to spot the same car following him. The sight stirred the subconscious memory of having seen it on other occasions. After that, he became watchful.

During the next few days he spotted the vehicle several times, usually a car or two behind him. Why would he be followed? He pondered the question uneasily. Once, glimpsing it in his rearview mirror, he stopped abruptly in midblock, waiting to see what the other driver would do. The vehicle pulled around him and continued along the street, but not before he'd glimpsed the stocky figure at the wheel.

Later, as a test, he turned into a side street that he knew was dead end. No one followed him. Still, he had the uneasy feeling of being watched. His imagination?

Several days later, returning late to his apartment, he detected movement in the dark shadows as he turned onto the walk leading to the porch. Stifling a quick fear, he wheeled and darted in that direction. A figure stepped forward to meet him.

"Who are you?" Kane demanded roughly. He was both frightened and angry.

"I'm a police officer." The man facing him, middle-height and stocky, displayed a badge, illuminating it briefly with a pencil flashlight. "What is your name, please?"

"Bertram Kane." He gestured toward the apartment. "I live here."

"There have been several burglaries in the area," the other explained. "We're keeping it under surveillance."

"Oh, I hadn't heard."

"I would appreciate your not mentioning this."

"Of course not."

"Good night, Dr. Kane."

"Doctor?" Kane's head jerked up. "How did you know that?"

"Your name is quite well-known."

"Not that well-known," he stated firmly.

The other chuckled. "We make it a point to know those things. Good night again, Dr. Kane."

"Good night," he answered. Reaching his apartment, he left the lamp unlit and peered out through the wide window that faced the front lawn. Trees, grass, shrubs—he detected nothing out of the ordinary. When finally he turned away, it was with a distinctly uneasy feeling.

Burglaries in the area? That was possible, but such news generally got around. Would a cop on a burglary stake-out be apt to know his professional identity? It wouldn't seem so. That point, more than any other, disturbed him.

Next day, in the lounge, he mentioned the incident to Maxon.

"A police officer?" The psychologist looked up quickly.

"He flashed a badge." Kane explained.

"Did you examine it?"

"Why should I?" Kane felt irritated. Maxon was always so damned practical.

"No reason." Maxon scowled reflectively. "I'd say there was more to it than that."

"I have the same feeling," he admitted soberly.

Maxon said hesitantly, "I don't want to alarm you, but . . ." He stared at Kane over the brim of his coffee cup.

"Shoot," Kane said crisply.

"Cantrup and Freyhoff were murdered," he said finally. "Perhaps this is precautionary to preserve the brain trust."

"Ridiculous," Kane snapped. "The L.A. cops never heard of Cantrup, let alone Freyhoff. How many people have?"

"I imagine several government bureaus are quite aware of who they were and what they were doing, Bert." Maxon smiled faintly. "Don't sell your kind of knowledge short. More than one longhair has turned theory into a prop for the nation."

"This wasn't government," he objected.

"No, but the government could have tipped the local cops," Maxon argued. "That's a reasonable assumption."

"You're saying they're providing me with a bodyguard? That's absolutely stupid."

"What do we know of the chains of intrigue?"

"You've been watching too many spy thrillers," Kane accused.

"Have I? I know that Cantrup, Freyhoff and Vosin of Russia are dead."

"Vosin?" Kane's head jerked up.

"You didn't know? It's in the morning paper. He died of a heart attack in a hospital in Moscow. The story gave his age as sixty-eight."

"Vosin dead." Kane felt a sadness. He'd never known the Russian mathematician except through his work, which had marked him as a giant among men. He looked at Maxon. "Thank God it wasn't murder."

The psychologist asked quietly, "Would they say if it were?"

"I don't know." The thought troubled him.

Maxon said steadily, "Your ranks are thinning, Bert. How many are left who are following the same line of inquiry?"

"Besides me? Bernardi of Italy and Tanaki of Japan." He smiled ruefully. "That's not very many."

"Any promising students?"

"Yes, of course, but they will take years to develop."

"Aside from Vosin, you have to remember that the other two were murdered, Bert, and in the same manner."

"You can't say the two acts were related," he protested.

"I can in my book of probabilities."

"Why would anyone want to stop that work?"

"I wouldn't hazard a guess," Maxon replied.

"There would be no point to it."

"Oh, yes." Maxon nodded emphatically. "There is always a point to murder, at least in the mind of the murderer. Don't talk about reason and logic, Bert. Those are sensible things, but they seldom are prime motivators to violence. Jealousy, hate, fear, greed, self-preservation—those are the more usual mainsprings. Or the impulse might spring from pure fantasy. The human mind can be a warped conspirator."

Kane smiled crookedly. "The contention that I'm important enough to rate assassination is food for the ego."

"Not you, but your work."

"What's in that to cause murder?"

Maxon shrugged. "Perhaps to you, nothing; perhaps to another person, everything."

"Mathematical theory as the cause for murder . . ." Kane pondered it skeptically. "Even the pulps wouldn't buy that."

"Don't bank on it, Bert."

"I can't conceive of it."

Maxon leaned toward him. "Hear the latest? Anita's resigned from the faculty."

"What?" He felt a quick dismay.

"As of this morning. I bumped into her while coming to

the lounge. She was packing her things."

"What's she going to do?"

"Work as the curator of Androki's art collection." Maxon's face was bland. "He's building a museum to house it adjacent to an estate he has under construction up around Malibu somewhere."

"She's only know him a month or two," he responded bitterly.

"She works fast, Bert."

"A full-time curator for a small, private museum? That doesn't sound reasonable," he objected.

"From what she told me, it will be somewhat like the Metropolitan Museum of Art," Maxon explained. "As a matter of fact, Androki seems to be acquiring a corner on the world's masterpieces. I've read quite a bit about it recently."

"Acquiring a corner on the world is what you mean," Kane answered moodily.

"It might be better under new management, Bert."

"I can't say that he's helping things." He forced a smile. "Every time I pick up the paper he's causing new foment. Venezula, Ecuador, Egypt, Spain—you name it and he's creating trouble. Yet, strangely enough, plenty of people pop up to defend him."

"He's a rugged bird to tackle," Maxon observed. "Look at what's happening to Senator Blaire since he started investigating Androki's alleged violations of the antitrust laws. Suddenly he's a pink, a Communist-lover, a left-winger and all the rest of it. But that won't stop him. He's a fighter."

"What's he after?"

"Androki? That's what I asked Anita. She's sold on the guy." Maxon snickered. "He's a fine, sensitive, brilliant man."

"With a few billion bucks," Kane growled.

"Far more than that. His wealth is growing astronomically. And that's just a minute part of what he controls." Maxon gazed at him. "Right now he's considered to be the most powerful man in the world."

"The wealthiest, perhaps."

"The most powerful," Maxon persisted. "The governments of a dozen nations are his pawns. Remember my prediction that he was out to control the world? Plenty of people are beginning to think the same way. The man is dangerous."

Kane asked woodenly, "Is that what Anita sees in him, power?"

"Power, money, status . . ." The psychologist shrugged.

"Well, it's her own funeral."

"I wouldn't exactly call it that." Maxon's eyes glinted shrewdly. "The gal knows what she wants and she's out to

get it. Get while the gettin's good; isn't that the Great American Ethic? The old ethical standards are out the window in today's survival-race, Bert. She's merely hewing to the principles of modern society."

"My, you are cynical." Kane eyed him quizzically. "But she must wonder about him."

"In what way?"

"The mystery man, the man with no past. Plenty of lurid speculation is making the rounds."

Maxon smiled. "Now you're echoing what I've been telling you for a year. As a matter of fact, she doesn't consider him much of a mystery. She says his ancestors came from Poland, farmed in northern Wisconsin for several generations. He had a hankering to see the world, has been moving around since he was a kid."

"Did he tell her that?"

Maxon nodded. "It explains his lack of records. He's been outside of this country more than he's been in it; he seldom remains long in one place."

"There would still have to be passport records."

"Not according to her. He worked as a merchant seaman at the start. When he got into the chips, he moved by private yacht. Apparently he wasn't overly concerned with the paper work. She says that he's more of an internationalist than an American."

"Do you believe all that?"

"Frankly, no." Maxon grinned. "I'm just telling you what he told her."

"Does she believe it?"

"If she does, it's because she wants to. Put in another way, why should she question her own windfall?"

"Tell me," Kane asked, "how does a merchant seaman learn the mathematics pertaining to multidimensional space?"

"A good question." Maxon raised his head. "Incidentally, you made quite a hit with the old boy. He's impressed."

"So Anita once said," he answered sourly.

"She says it's possible he might give you a grant to aid in your work."

"To salve his conscience?"

"He would give you the grant," Maxon returned pointedly, "not her."

"Do I look that naïve?"

"Never look a gift horse in the mouth."

"Not this baby."

"I don't feel that way," Maxon replied. "Perhaps I'm an opportunist. I told her I'd be quite receptive to a grant."

"To study Androki, I suppose."

"That was the gist of it," he admitted. "I'm convinced that he lives in the time stream. At the mental level, we all do. We range back and forth through the ages, resurrecting the history, drama and fiction of the past—creating worlds of the future. But we are locked to our imaginations. Not that bird. He's able to project his sensors into the stream and pull in the data that gives him the actuality of the future. He's a fisherman in the Ocean of Time."

"Did you tell her that?"

"I did." Maxon inclined his head. "I also told her I was out to unmask him."

"How did she react to that?"

"She got a bang out of it. She said she'd suggest the grant."

Kane smiled. "And if it came through?"

"I'd be quite surprised," Maxon said.

X

Crack!

Kane was reading in his apartment when the sharp sound split the air. He jerked erect in his chair. His first thought was that an automobile had backfired. At that instant a salvo of muffled explosions broke the night, sounding almost directly outside his window.

Gunfire! He threw himself violently to the floor, jerking away from in front of the glass; realizing it was still intact, he smiled foolishly. He was starting to scramble to his feet when a second salvo sounded. He instinctively dropped lower, conscious of the fast beat of his heart.

An engine roared to life at the curb. The harsh screech of tires sounded as a car sped away. Leaping to his feet, he started toward the window, then turned back to the door. Flinging it open, he raced downstairs.

As he reached the porch, his first glimpse took in a figure sprawled on the lawn. A second one lay a dozen yards beyond, at the edge of the curb. Under the glow of the street lamp, it was grotesquely unmoving. He rushed to the recumbent figure nearest him and bent down, seeing a black automatic clasped rigidly in claw-like fingers.

Conscious of porch lights flashing on along the street, he glanced frantically around for help before feeling for a heartbeat. At that instant the body under his hand convulsed.

"Dr. Kane . . ."

Startled, he scrutinized the shadowy figure closer, recognizing the man who had identified himself as a police officer

a few days earlier. He felt a shock. "Lie still," he commanded tersely. "I'll call an ambulance."

"There is no time!" The words came gaspingly. The face staring up at Kane held an urgent expression. "My name is Wygant . . . Clifton Wygant. I'm an agent."

"Take it easy," Kane counseled.

"No, listen!" Wygant fought for breath, a stricken look on his face. A rattling came from deep within his chest and blood flecked his lips. "I came back, I came back . . ." A convulsion shook his body.

"Don't try to talk," Kane commanded sharply. He became aware that someone had rushed up and was looking down at him.

"What happened?" an agitated voice asked. Kane stared up at a middle-aged man clasping a sloppy bathrobe closed at the neck. Several other figures were converging toward him.

"He's been shot," he explained tersely. "There's someone else by the curb."

"He's got a gun!" The newcomer's face held a frightened look.

"This man's a police officer," Kane snapped harshly. "Get an ambulance."

"A cop?" The man was startled. He peered closer, then turned and raced toward the adjacent apartment building. Wygant struggled to push himself up on an elbow.

"Lie still," Kane barked. "I've sent for help."

"Listen, listen," the wounded man gasped. A strangling sound came from his throat, followed by a gush of blood.

"Don't try to talk," Kane snapped.

"The Bornji . . ." The eyes staring up at him were stricken.

"Bornji?" Kane stared at him, stupefied.

"Bornji . . ." Wygant's body convulsed again. His jaws moved spasmodically as he gulped for air, the froth of blood covering his lips. His body shook violently.

"Take it easy," Kane begged urgently. Suddenly Wygant slumped back, twitching, then lay still. Kane knew he was dead. He rose, staring down at the body, his mind a jumble of thoughts.

Bornji! The Bornji transformations! What had the dead man to do with them? A police officer on a stake-out! He laughed harshly. That was a lie. But who was he? What had he been trying to say?

Kane stared down at the still figure, the thoughts crowding his mind. First Cantrup, then Freyhoff, now a killing almost at his doorstep. A double killing! Somehow all those killings were related; somehow he was involved. But how?

Why? What odd twist of fate could tie together such widely separated murders? The Bornji transformations; they formed the thread.

A spasm shook him; he began trembling violently and fought to control it. The whole thing had a nightmarish quality that filled his mind with haunting thoughts. Somehow Cantrup's work—his work!—had become ensnared with murder.

Conscious of the gathering crowd, he walked to where the second figure lay. The bystanders made way grudgingly. He looked down. There was no question but that the man was dead; the starkly blank eyes in the thin, dark face told him that. Blood welled from a gaping wound in the neck. Sprawled with his body half in the gutter, the dead man still clasped a short-barreled weapon that contained a long clip.

"Some kind of automatic weapon," one of the bystanders told Kane.

"A damned gangster," another put in. Kane didn't answer. If Wygant were a police officer, who was this man? That the whole affair was somehow linked with the Bornji transformations he had no doubt. But how could that be? The dead man at his feet appeared more like a small-time gangster. The sharp ferret face and tight-lipped mouth certainly fitted the stereotype.

Suddenly he felt a great weariness. Maxon had warned of this possibility. Kane had laughed at the time but now, tragically, it had come to pass. Wygant, supposedly on a burglary stake-out, had been his bodyguard. The bullets that had ripped away Wygant's life had been intended for him!

He heard the sound of a siren and straightened, peering along the street. A squad car was rushing toward him, the red light atop its roof flashing violently. What good could the police do? he thought dully. Wygant was dead—as dead as David Cantrup and Martin Freyhoff.

What did it all mean?

The man who sat across from Kane in his apartment was of average height, lean, with dark eyes. His bushy brows, like his thick hair, held a sprinkle of gray. His demeanor was quietly professional. Identifying himself merely as Philip Conrad, of a Government security agency, he had briefly exhibited a card. Kane placed his age at around forty.

"I can understand your reluctance to talk about the case," Conrad said sympathetically. "Violent death is never pretty."

"I've gone over it several times with the police," Kane

objected. "They have my statement."

"I'd prefer to get it independently from you, Dr. Kane."

"Why?"

"Statements sometimes get garbled in the transcription."

"I read it before I signed it," he rebutted.

"I would still like to hear it directly from you."

"Why is the Government so interested?"

"To ascertain if the case involved the breaking of any Federal laws." Conrad smiled disarmingly. "A check of this nature is quite routine, Dr. Kane, especially when it appears that the impersonation of a Government agent was involved."

"He didn't say Government agent; he just said agent."

"Didn't he previously identify himself as a police officer?"

"Yes, earlier."

"But he wasn't." Conrad smiled.

"I read that," Kane admitted.

"It's possible that the impersonation of a Government agent was involved," Conrad said briskly. "Now, how did he identify himself? Try to recall his exact words."

"He said, 'My name is Wygant . . . Clifton Wygant.' He said he was an agent."

"Did he display any identification?"

"When he was dying? No, but previously—"

"We'll get to that," Conrad interrupted. "Did he say anything else?"

"He said, 'I came back, I came back.' He had a convulsion at that time and stopped speaking."

"Did the words mean anything to you?"

"Nothing whatever." Kane shook his head.

"Did he say it as if he expected it might mean something to you?"

"I wouldn't know. Possibly he thought it might."

"What else did he say?"

"Just two words: 'The Bornji.' He spoke them just before he died."

"The Bornji? Does that mean anything to you?"

Kane nodded reluctantly. "I believe he was referring to the Bornji transformations."

"What are they?" Conrad asked sharply.

"Mathematical tools that we hope might provide a bridge to the understanding of multidimensional space," Kane explained.

"The fourth dimension?"

"In a general sense, yes."

"An added dimension." Conrad's lips held the shadow of a smile. "If you can't see it, hear it, taste it, smell it, or feel it, why do you suspect that such a thing might exist?"

It was Kane's turn to smile. "That's the usual question. But is that what determines the limits of space and time—what we sense? By that reasoning, the microcosm didn't exist until we invented the microscope."

"Is that what the Bornji transformations are, a sort of microscope into the fourth dimension?"

"You could say that," he acceded. "I am thinking more in terms of multidimensional space."

"Beyond the fourth dimension?"

"It is quite possible."

"Yes, it is. Anything is possible. You discover that quickly enough in this business."

"The Bornji transformations aren't particularly well-known," Kane observed. "Not even as a name."

"You're saying?" Conrad's gaze sharpened.

"How would he know of them?"

"Wygant? I can't say. Can you?"

"No, of course not."

"You appear to have something in mind," Conrad suggested.

"I was just puzzled."

Conrad studied him. "I presume you know of the work of Dr. Cantrup of Chicago and Dr. Freyhoff of Germany?"

"Quite well." Kane felt a surprise that Conrad should know their names.

"Did you know them personally?"

"I met Dr. Cantrup several times, and I corresponded with him occasionally. I never had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Freyhoff, although he has visited in this country on several occasions."

"Did you correspond with him?"

"Unfortunately, no." Kane smiled regretfully. "But I felt I knew him through his work in the mathematical journals, and through our mutual friendship with Dr. Cantrup."

"Did Dr. Cantrup know him personally?"

"Yes, of course. Dr. Freyhoff visited in Chicago on the occasions I mentioned."

"Did Dr. Cantrup personally know Vosin of Russia, Bernardi of Italy, or Tanaki of Japan?"

Kane lifted his head, again surprised. "I can't answer that but I'm certain he must have met Dr. Bernardi of Italy. I know he made several trips there, and Dr. Bernardi has visited in this country."

"Have you had occasion to meet any of them?"

"Dr. Cantrup, as I've mentioned, and I met Dr. Bernardi once, several years ago."

"Where was that?"

"At Harvard."

"But none of the others?"

"No, but we keep abreast of one another's work." Kane felt a surge of irritation. "Is all this related to Wygant?"

"I don't know."

"I can't see that it could have anything to do with whether or not Wygant was impersonating a Government agent."

Conrad smiled humorously. "It's a tenuous thread," he admitted.

"But the thread exists?"

"Possibly. I'm trying to determine that."

"Which, if it proves true, means that I am somehow involved. Is that what you're saying?"

Conrad regarded him steadily. "That is possibly true," he finally assented.

"I can't see how, or perhaps I should say why."

"The answer to that could prove quite interesting," Conrad observed. "Does your work involve anything of a secret nature?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Is it something that might later be classified?"

"Possibly." Kane smiled sourly. "The government has a mania for that."

"I suspect you're right," Conrad agreed. His gaze rested on Kane's face. "I understand from your statement to the police that you'd encountered Wygant previous to the night of the shooting. Is that true?"

"I explained all that in my statement to the police," Kane objected.

"I'd like to hear it from you directly," Conrad persisted.

"I'd just be parroting my words." Kane forced a smile. "I know them by rote."

"I don't mind the repetition," the agent answered.

Kane said, "I recognized him as the man I'd challenged several nights earlier—last Monday, as I recall—when I caught him lurking in the shadows as I was approaching the porch. He identified himself as a police officer."

"Verbally?"

Kane nodded. "He also displayed an identification."

"Did you take a good look at it?"

"Not really," he admitted. "He flashed a pencil beam on it but I can't recall any of the details of what I saw. You sort of take those things for granted."

"Most people do," Conrad assented. "Did he say why he was hiding in the shadows?"

"He explained that there had been several burglaries in the area, that the police were keeping it under surveillance.

That sounded reasonable. Oh, yes, he knew who I was."

"By name?"

"I gave him my name, just my name, but then he addressed me as 'Dr. Kane.' I presumed from that he knew something about me."

"I suspect he did." Conrad smiled grimly. "Did you ever see him on any other occasion?"

"I can't state that with certainty." He hesitated. "I have the impression he was the man I'd noted tailing my car on several occasions. Again, that's just an impression."

"That you were being tailed, or that he was the man tailing you?"

"That he was the man tailing me," he answered. "I'm certain that I was followed on several occasions."

"Didn't you wonder at that?"

"It made me rather uneasy."

"That's the usual reaction," the agent admitted. "Did you ever see the other man?"

"The one by the curb? Only in death. The paper said he was an ex-convict."

"A punk," the agent agreed. "How did the shots sound?"

"The first one was somewhat like the backfire of an automobile. That was my first impression. Then a fusillade of shots rang out—two volleys, as I recall." Kane smiled self-consciously. "I dove for the floor."

"Can't say that I blame you." Conrad's dark eyes measured him. "Why would you suspect they might be shooting at you?"

"I didn't consciously suspect it, although the murders of Dr. Cantrup and Dr. Freyhoff might have been in the back of my mind. I suspect it's the reaction anyone might have to sudden gunfire."

"He who ducks in time lives to duck again," Conrad observed. "What did you do then?"

"I heard a car start up and speed away, then ran outside. That's when I saw Wygant."

"How much time would you say elapsed between the single shot and the first volley?"

"Perhaps two or three seconds. The next volley came within another few seconds. Again that's just an impression. Time is tricky under those circumstances."

"Very tricky," the agent agreed. "Did you see anyone else at the time?"

"No, just the two men who had been shot. A few porch lights were flicking on and several people were running toward the spot, but that was a moment or so later."

"So there were no actual eyewitnesses, is that it?"

"I don't believe so," Kane answered.

Conrad rose leisurely. "Is there anything else you can tell me, Dr. Kane?"

"Not a thing," he answered flatly.

"I'll try not to trouble you again." The agent moved to the door, then glanced back. "I'd stay away from that window at nights," he advised dryly. Before Kane could answer, he was gone. Afterward Kane was to remember the night with clarity.

It was the night Bernardi of Italy was killed.

XI

KANE PLUNGED fervently back into his work. With Cantrup, Freyhoff, Vosin and Bernardi dead, he drove frantically to achieve the breakthrough which, at times, he felt was tantalizingly close. The knowledge that so much of the burden had fallen to him was an unrelenting spur to his efforts.

News of Bernardi's death had come as a crushing blow. The truck that had smashed his car had been stolen, its driver escaping the scene in an unidentified vehicle that had been following. He had scant doubt that it had been murder. Now, with the exception of Saburo Tanaki, the renowned Japanese mathematician, he alone was left to probe for the hidden dimensions of the space-time world in which he lived.

Often at night he awoke with the knowledge, shivering, then would dress hurriedly and drive back to his laboratory. Dawn often would find him deep in his work.

It was the small hours of the morning that he came to like best, for then the world was still and quiet, permitting him a degree of concentration he seldom knew during the regular school day. At times he studied, at times he philosophized, at times he stared at the wall of his small office, trying to untangle the role of the Bornji transformations in Wygant's death. But in the end he would have to give up: the relationship appeared as inexplicable as multidimensional space itself.

Part of his drive, he knew, was to banish Anita from his mind. Occasionally, when he could examine his feelings objectively, he had to admit that the hurt was more to his ego than to his heart. Yet such objectivity could not assuage his feelings, nor prevent him from thinking about her, nor of John Androki. Especially not John Androki. Several gossip columnists had linked their names romantically, and a lead article in *Today's Pageant* had asked: "Will John Androki

marry his beautiful blonde art curator?"

He winced at that.

But it was difficult to forget Androki for other reasons. The press carried ever more news about him; he long since had pushed the President from the front page. It was all but impossible to turn on the television without hearing the name. Now he was being hailed as "the new Simón Bolívar" for the huge multi-nation industrial empire he was forging from one end of the South American continent to the other; at the same time he was being damned for his attempt to convert the Common Market into a private financial cartel.

On the home front, Congress had adjourned with an embattled Senator Blaire still trying to have Androki subpoenaed to testify in his investigation into what he termed "flagrant and outrageous violations of the antitrust laws." The tirade against the senator made it appear that he, not Androki, was the chief culprit.

But it was as a figure of mystery that he most gripped the public's imagination. "*Who is John Androki?*" became the columnists' favorite question. Each would attempt to answer according to his own imagination or sources of information.

To the women's press, he was the world's most sought-after bachelor. Secret romances were hinted, along with a prolific scattering of such adjectives as "charming," "distinguished" and "gallant." Another writer reported that he had remained a bachelor because of the tragic death of his "one true love." Other news reports were given over to descriptions of the fabulous estate he was building above the Malibu coast. One syndicated columnist reported that the magnificent Hearst castle at San Simeon was being duplicated by Androki for use as servants' quarters.

But of John Androki himself, despite hundreds of photographs, there was nothing.

If Kane was trying to forget Anita and Androki, not so Maxon. The financier had become an obsession with him.

"He's got to be a *downthrough*," he declared time and again. "His instincts are too unerring for it to be guesswork."

"Instincts?" Kane challenged.

"You're picking at words," Maxon accused. "You know damned well what I mean."

"I get the general idea," he admitted.

"If I can't get to him any other way, I'm going to do an article on him," Maxon declared. "I'm going to title it, *Is John Androki a Downthrough?* He couldn't sue me for that."

"He'd probably buy the university and fire you," Kane

replied.

"I'm serious. I mentioned the idea to Anita."

"Oh, when did you see her?"

"Several days ago. I ran smack into her out on Sunset. She was driving ten thousand bucks' worth of Jag—the new V12 job with a double overhead cam on each cylinder bank." Maxon grinned cynically. "Those curator jobs must really pay off."

"Yeah." Kane suppressed his hurt. "What did she say?"

"About the article? She said John would blow his top. She called him John. What do you think of it?"

"The article?" Kane considered it briefly. "With your name on it, I would say it would raise a stir."

"It might start a lot of people thinking. You should see my file." Maxon measured with his hands. "Three feet thick. Did you know that he's a magnet for murder? Two of them occurred practically next to him—one in Philadelphia and one in Seattle. Count the guys who got knocked off on your lawn and that makes four."

"You can't count them," Kane objected.

"There's a link." Maxon nodded sagely. "Three of those birds sprang from the same nest."

"I don't follow you."

"Three of them were never identified; or, rather, their identification documents—the wallet variety—were false. Actually there were no official records of any kind on them. No fingerprints, social security numbers, nothing like that.

The *Times* carried quite an article on it. Did you know that no one knows Androki's background?"

"So what's new?" Kane forced a smile.

"Don't you ever keep up on that bird?" Maxon demanded. "He's bigger news than the lunar landing."

"I'm surprised he hasn't tried to buy it."

"The moon? Give him time. He bought Madagascar last week." Maxon eyed him piercingly. "Did you read Senator Blaire's statement this morning? He ran quite an investigation on Androki. He told the press that he wanted to satisfy himself that Androki was an American citizen, but that he could find no such evidence."

"I thought he came from Wisconsin?"

"That was the rumor. He was supposed to have been born somewhere around Green Bay—near a village called Cooperstown. It's a dairy farm area. But Blaire couldn't discover any record of his birth. He's shouting that to the high heavens."

"Why would Androki pick a spot like that if it weren't true?" Kane argued.

"A small village? Well, it's Polish."

"So are sections of New York, Chicago, almost any place you can name," he countered. He paused thoughtfully. "Perhaps he came from the slums, is trying to hide it."

"I don't believe that's it at all," Maxon stated.

"What do you believe?"

"Three guys with absolutely no known records are murdered in the vicinity of a fourth man with no known record." Maxon eyed him expectantly. "Does that spell anything?"

"What do you believe it spells?"

"They all came from the same place, Bert."

"Where is that?"

"That's what I'm going to find out."

Kane shook his head slowly. "Your reasoning doesn't hold water, Gordie. You're thinking with your emotions."

"I am?" Maxon hunched forward in his chair. "Perhaps you're right but I'd like to see the hole in my thinking."

"You're saying that you believe they were *downthroughs*?"

"I didn't say it but that's what I think, yes. They were four of a kind."

"If they were *downthroughs*, wouldn't they have foreseen their murders? And if foreseeing them, wouldn't they have taken steps to avoid the situation?"

"I don't read it that way," Maxon answered. "If they had avoided their deaths, how could they have foreseen them?"

"But they were murdered, that's the whole point of it," Kane declared. "And because they were, they would have had to know what was coming. That is, if they were *downthroughs*."

"You're building paradoxes, Bert."

"Yes, but answer them."

"Time has baffling twists. You know that."

"That's no answer."

"Perhaps they could foresee their deaths but couldn't avoid them," Maxon argued. "If a *downthrough* sees the future—the act defines the talent—then he is seeing the inevitable. It's quite logical to assume that they foresaw their murders but were helpless."

"Gobbledegook, Gordie."

"Perhaps, but I believe we have to apply logic to the illogical. Do you realize how many deaths can be linked in one way or another to Androki? Nine."

"Nine?" Kane was startled.

"I'm keeping a box score," Maxon affirmed grimly. "The first was a multimillionaire named Winthrop Farrand, who apparently had some sort of business dealings with Androki just about the time Androki first was coming into the lime-

light. Farrand got knocked off by a truck à la Bernardi. Cantrup was second, Freyhoff was third. The unidentified corpse in Philadelphia and another in Seattle make the fourth and fifth. Add the two guys who got it on your lawn, then throw in Vosin and Bernardi, and the total is nine."

"How can you count Cantrup, Freyhoff, Vosin and Bernardi?" Kane demanded. "Especially the European mathematicians? They weren't even remotely connected with Androki. Aside from that, Vosin died of a heart attack."

"Do we know that? Would the Russians admit to one of their top mathematical geniuses being murdered?" Maxon glared at him. "I'll admit that a few of the links are weak, but they are links. Did you ever hear of Murder, Incorporated? Androki must have bought out the business."

"Ah, ah, keep your objectivity," Kane admonished.

Maxon grinned. "I'm trying, I honestly am, but that bird makes it extremely difficult."

As the weeks slipped by, Kane continued the routine he'd developed since his break with Anita. Mainly it was a routine of long hours in the lab, with little sleep and almost no recreation. Yet he thrived on it.

"That bachelor's life is the good life." Maxon had stated that often enough; now Kane felt that it was true. He would have denied it emphatically during the eleven years he had been married to Margaret. Those had been golden years, idyllic, and for a short time he believed he had recaptured them with Anita. Now, with Margaret alive only in memory, he could see the virtue of a life like Maxon's. Without Margaret, it was all that remained.

Then, during the Christmas holidays, he encountered Anita coming out of Wanamaker's with her arms laden with bundles.

"Bert, it's good to see you." She halted almost in mid-stride, looking at him over her burden. Her face held a tentative smile.

"Let me help you." He sprang forward to relieve her of her heavier parcels.

"My car's in the next lot."

"You look wonderful." Stepping back with the larger boxes, he gazed at her, thinking she'd never been more beautiful. At the same time he perceived that much of her beauty lay in her fashionable hair-styling, eye shadow, and in the long artificial eyelashes that swept down to create a demure look. An expensive mink jacket added to the effect. "How's the new job?" he asked.

"Fine."

"I hear Androki's building quite an art gallery up at Mali-

bu." He fell into step alongside her as they headed toward the parking lot.

She nodded. "It'll be finished in around two months."

"Will you be living in that area?"

"Yes, of course." She stared stiffly ahead. "How is your work coming?"

"Still puttering."

"I can't believe that." She cast him a sidelong look. "I imagine that you work sixteen hours a day."

"It's my life," he answered gravely.

"And when it comes to an end?"

"That will never end," he answered solemnly.

"Not even if you make the breakthrough?"

"Especially not then." He glanced at the sky, wondering if it was going to rain. It had that feel in the air. "That will be just an incentive for the next step."

"Which is?"

"Frankly, I don't know." He smiled pensively. "The mathematical possibilities are like space and time: unending. I say that in the knowledge that we'll never know all there is to know about it. One step leads to another, *ad infinitum*."

"I feel that way about art," she reflected.

"See Gordie lately?"

"I bumped into him a few weeks back."

"He's quite caught with the subject of your boss," he observed.

"So he told me." She laughed lightly. "He suggested doing an article on him. Isn't that silly?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, isn't it?"

"He's a public figure; plenty of people are interested in his activities," he countered. "I think an article of a psychological nature might do very well."

"Psychological." She sniffed. "Is he actually thinking of doing one? I thought he was joking."

"I believe he is. He's gathering the material."

"Ridiculous." She turned into the lot. "The Jag in the corner."

Kane eyed it. "Quite a car."

"Oh, I got it on time," she answered quickly. "The payments keep me broke."

"That's what money's for." He deposited the packages in the seat beside her.

"Can I give you a lift?"

"No thanks." He smiled crookedly. "The old heap's parked up the street."

"It's been good seeing you, Bert. Let's not make it so

long next time." She started the engine.

"Let's not," he agreed. She fussed with her purse, gave him a quick smile, then started from the lot. He watched the white Jag swing into the stream of traffic. The meeting had left him faintly depressed.

Returning to his own car, he wondered if she was happy.

Charles Dorrance eyed the pile of reports he'd gathered on John Androki's activities. Although representing but a minute portion of the financier's file, he had selected them in the belief that somewhere among them lay the key to the man who had become the world's number one enigma.

He pulled out one of Philip Conrad's reports and scanned it. Although it was several months old, he had come back to it time and again, sensing that the crux of the whole story somehow was embodied in the few terse pages.

A man who had identified himself as Clifton Wygant, an agent, had been slain in a gun battle with a second man who, apparently, had been intent on murdering Bertram Kane. The latter's motive was read between the lines, of course, but Dorrance had scant doubt but that it was true. That cast Wygant in the role of Kane's protector.

Wygant's killer, who had also died in the gun battle, had been a small-time triggerman who a year earlier had beaten a homicide rap by the skin of his teeth. His police record typically was that of a street corner hoodlum graduated into gangland. Dorrance had scant interest in him, other than who his employer might have been. But he had a great deal of interest in Clifton Wygant.

Wygant's identification as a police officer had proved false—as false—as his name, Dorrance decided. As a matter of fact, Wygant had never existed, at least insofar as any verifiable records were concerned. He had no fingerprint file, no military record, no social security number—no known public record of any kind. Like the murder victims in Philadelphia and Seattle, he seemingly had come from nowhere.

Like John Androki himself, he thought.

"I came back, I came back. . . ." Wygant's dying words were a haunting refrain in his mind. Back from where? What had he been trying to tell Kane? More to the point, why had he given his life to save Kane? That he once had identified himself to Kane as a police officer held no great mystery; it had been a convenient cover-up. But why, with almost his dying breath, had he identified himself as an agent?

Dorrance had pondered that many times; he pondered it again. A dying man, more often than not, is a truthful man.

But not always. Yet why would he claim to be an agent? What could he have hoped to gain by such a claim? Had he merely been trying to identify himself? And if it were true, an agent for . . . whom?

As Conrad had resurrected the story, Wygant had been stationed by Kane's apartment to protect him—had died doing so. That appeared quite evident. And he had known of the Bornji transformations! That, Dorrance reflected, was the big fly in the ointment. How did mathematical theory get tied in with murder?

He grimaced. Cantrup of Chicago, Freyhoff of Germany, Bernardi of Italy—all murdered. The latter's death had occurred at almost the same time two men had died in a gunfight on Kane's lawn. Perhaps Vosin had been murdered, too. Pipelines from Russia indicated there had been something more to the story than the official report.

Bernardi had been killed in exactly the same fashion as Winthrop Farrand, he reflected. Farrand, who had propelled Androki onto the financial scene. Well, Farrand had paid for that.

Dorrance rubbed his jaw wryly. A multimillionaire, a small-time hoodlum, three men with no known records—those five dead men could be likened to John Androki in one way or another, although the thread was tenuous and highly circumstantial. How many circumstances added up to probability?

Cantrup, Freyhoff, Vosin, Bernardi—all top mathematicians, all concerned with the Bornji transformations. Of the four, only Vosin, perhaps, had died a natural death. Even that was suspect. One way or another, they, too, could be linked to John Androki; but again the thread was a glimmery thing.

He let his eyes linger on Conrad's report. *Bertram Kane's apartment was bugged; his phone line was tapped.* The taped pickups and tapped line led to a listening post manned by private detectives from an obscure agency.

Dorrance smiled cynically at the amateurish job done in the apartment. Well, that was a matter for the local cops, if and when it ever came to their attention. In the meantime, Conrad's men had tapped into the system, providing Conrad with surveillance of both Kane and his watchers. Nothing so far was provable except that the agency appeared to have but a single client: a small public relations outfit with a scattering of accounts, all with businesses in which John Androki had a stake. That proved nothing. Yet it was part of the pattern.

"John Androki." He murmured the name, mentally jug-

gling the events in an attempt to piece them together. He knew the task was patently impossible: too many critical items were missing.

The attempt on the life of Bertram Kane particularly was disconcerting. Conrad probably could protect Kane, but he had vetoed the idea, preferring the mathematician's utility as bait. That was the harsh view, Dorrance knew, but he had to agree with it; the amount of protection that would be required to ensure Kane's safety would most certainly alert . . . who?

John Androki, he reflected; all trails led to John Androki. And John Androki appeared to be getting desperate. It was possible to hide a murder or two, but you couldn't hide a multitude of them. Not even under a pile of a few billion dollars.

John Androki the financier.

John Androki the world power.

John Androki the murder master.

John Androki, alias "Mr. Nobody."

Dorrance swore softly. He didn't mind hot potatoes; that was the reason he held the job he did. But John Androki was extremely perturbing, unpredictable, dangerous. Strong foundations were trembling under his touch.

Item: A small but well-equipped, highly trained army of mercenaries now marching through the Belgian Congo to seize the valuable copper mines of the Central Plateau was financed by a group linked to a company which was an offshoot of a Belgium corporation controlled by John Androki.

Item: The recent revolution in Costa Rica, in which Tomás León had seized power, most certainly had been financed by Androki's agents. Now all of Central America was jittery.

Item: Panama was threatening to close the Panama Canal following a huge loan to the government by Androki.

Senator Blaire was another case in point. The campaign of acrimony, accusation, innuendo, insult and downright lies, being hurled at him from a hundred sources, now was being accompanied by pickets demanding his recall. A tremendous fund had been raised to oppose his reelection. Despite that, the senator was going after Androki tooth and nail.

Dorrance wished him success.

What was John Androki's grand plan? What was his key objective? Power, of course, the power to control the destinies of nations; all of which boiled down to the control of people. A dozen governments already danced to his strings. But in accomplishing his ends, he was upsetting delicate political, economic, and military power balances.

Dorrance sighed, returning his thoughts to the reality of what he knew. Conrad had reported that Anita Weber, an art professor from LAU, had resigned from the faculty to become the curator of Androki's art collection.

"Beautiful, talented and sexy," the agent had labeled her. The tapes disclosed that she had become Androki's mistress on their second meeting. No one could blame Androki for that, he reflected, but it was more than interesting to note that Anita Weber formerly had dated Bertram Kane. Although Conrad hadn't determined the extent of that relationship, he believed it highly significant that it again linked the destinies of Androki and Kane. Dorrance couldn't fight that.

Bertram Kane seemed a decent enough sort. He had been completely frank with Conrad, but quite naïve concerning any possible danger to himself. Dorrance wondered what he might think if he discovered that his apartment was bugged. Conrad had described him as "a longhair, completely out of this world." Well, why not? Dorrance's lips held the shadow of a smile. From the reports gathered, the description was apt.

Bertram Kane lived in the fourth dimension.

XII

KANE WAS preparing to leave the campus for supper when his phone rang. It was loud and shrill in the silent building. He turned back at the door to answer it.

"Bert?" The voice, low and worried, was Anita's.

"Speaking." He tried to suppress his emotion.

"I have to see you right away," she said urgently.

He asked sharply, "What's wrong?"

"I can't talk, not over the phone."

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, it's not that."

He felt a sharp relief. "Where can I meet you?"

"Your apartment," she suggested. "Fifteen minutes?"

"I'll be there," he promised. A click came from the other end and he replaced the instrument, feeling his uneasiness return. Despite her assurance that she was all right, he knew she wouldn't have called him unless the matter was extremely urgent. Yet what could be so urgent that would cause her to turn to him after all that had happened? He knew with certainty that it involved John Androki.

His fears rose as he hurried toward the parking lot. She had been scared! Recalling her words, her tones, he realized

a fear in them which he hadn't fully sensed at the time. Fear of what? The question was a spur to his own fears.

Reaching his apartment, he debated calling Maxon, then dismissed the impulse. If she had wanted to confide in Gordie, she would have called him. Or had she tried to call him first? Whatever her trouble was, she needed help, and she wasn't too proud to turn to friends she had all but dropped at the wayside.

He had been home only a few moments when he heard the roar of an engine at the curb. Glancing through the window, he saw her white Jag. She emerged from the vehicle quickly, looking back along the street before starting toward the house. He went to the door to meet her.

"Good to see you." He extended a hand, aware that his voice wasn't quite steady.

"Is it? I hope so." She smiled quickly, failing to conceal her worry. He stepped aside to let her enter, then closed the door.

"What's the trouble?" he asked sharply.

She turned, searching his face anxiously before she replied, "I had to talk to someone."

"Androki?"

"Well, yes." Her tongue edged her lip nervously.

"You came to the right place," he answered quietly. "Coffee? It'll only take a jiffy."

"Black." She nodded and sat on the couch.

He filled two cups with the warmed-over liquid, then returned and placed them on the coffee table beside her.

"Now, what's it all about?"

She lifted the cup without answering, watching him over the brim. Her hand trembled. She set it down again and said, "Perhaps I'm being foolish."

"I suspect that you're not."

She stared at him. "Why do you say that?"

He smiled. "You're not a worrier, but you're worried."

"I never thought of myself as a worrier," she confessed. She bit her lip. "I don't quite know how to begin."

"At the beginning," he suggested. "That's usually the best place."

"This has to be in absolute confidence, Bert. If what I say ever got out, it could cause a lot of trouble."

"For you?"

"Yes, and for others as well."

"Who?"

"Mr. Androki," she replied.

"I'll respect your confidence," he promised.

She rubbed her hands, then looked up at him, her face

suddenly calm.—“I think there was a killing,” she said quietly.

“A murder?”

“A killing,” she corrected.

“Where?”

“At Mr. Androki’s.”

“The Malibu estate?”

“No, that’s not quite completed. The place off Sunset.”

“Tell me about it.” He watched her expectantly.

Her eyes came up slowly. “It’s so unbelievable that I wonder if I did see it. Oh, I know, I sound confused.” She smiled agitatedly. “I am, of course. Dreadfully confused.”

“Try to look at it objectively,” he encouraged.

She nodded, pursing her lips again before saying, “I was in the art gallery studying a Kirchner painting—that’s the Brucke school—which one of Mr. Androki’s agents had purchased. It was in the late afternoon and I opened the curtains to examine it under natural light. The window looks out on the rear yard.” She paused.

“Go ahead,” he prompted.

“The sun was in the west, falling across the lawn. There are no trees in that immediate area and I had a clear view. Then suddenly a man appeared—”

“Appeared?” he cut in.

She jerked her head in violent agreement. “I know it sounds crazy but that’s the way it is. I was looking at the lawn when suddenly he appeared in the center of it, just as if he had sprung up from the earth. I saw him clearly. He was holding something in his hand. A gun, I think. Mr. Androki had just driven up in front; I know because I heard his men come in to look through the house. They always do that.” She stopped, twisting her hands nervously.

“Keep going,” he instructed tersely.

“The man started running toward the front of the house where the cars park. I heard a shot; then he fell.”

“The man with the gun?”

She nodded tremulously.

“Did you actually see him get shot . . . fall?”

“Yes.” She whispered the word. “He was still in my sight.”

“What happened next?”

“Two of Mr. Androki’s bodyguards ran over to him and carried him away. I believe they put him in one of the cars. I heard it drive off a few moments later. I had closed the curtains, afraid someone might see me.”

“Did anyone ask if you had?”

“No, but I was frightened.”

“Did the man look like anyone you had ever seen before?”

“I really couldn’t tell. I just saw him suddenly appear and

start running. I have the impression that he was middle-aged, stocky, that's all. He had on a dark suit." Her eyes came back to his face. "I know it sounds crazy, but that's the way it was. I am positive he was killed."

"Was that this afternoon?"

She shook her head. "No, yesterday. I've been frightened ever since. I wanted to call earlier but I was too scared even to do that. I don't think it was the shooting so much as his sudden appearance. That was positively frightening."

"I didn't see any mention in the paper of a body being found," he observed.

"Neither did I."

"Are you afraid of Androki?"

"Certainly not." Her face blazed defiantly. "I'm just frightened by what happened."

"That's understandable."

"Am I going crazy? I've wondered."

"Of course not."

"But to spring from the earth!"

"Perhaps it wasn't that way at all," he suggested. "Perhaps your eyes just suddenly lit on him, giving the impression that he had suddenly appeared. I've heard of such illusions."

"No, I saw him." She looked suddenly defeated. "There has been so much killing."

"Oh?"

"Well, the men on your lawn."

"Do you believe there is some connection?"

"Of course not." She tossed her head. "How could there be?"

"I don't know," he answered frankly. "I was wondering why you mentioned it."

"No reason at all, except there has been so much violence. It frightens me, Bert."

"Well, if the fellow was trying to kill Androki . . ."

"Do you believe that could be it?" She clutched at the hope. "He did have a gun. I'm certain that's what he held in his hand."

"Androki still should have reported it."

"I realize that." She fumbled with her purse. "What shall I do? I can't tell the police."

"Why not?"

"They'd think I was crazy, and besides . . ." She halted again, working her lips convulsively.

"Besides what?" he urged.

"I don't know that he was killed."

"You know that he was shot," he countered.

"Well, yes."

He leaned back, gazing at her. Somehow the element of fantasy she saw in the story held the ring of truth to him. She was too positive in what she had seen. Neither had he ever known her to be flighty, nor given over to wild imagination. It could have been an illusion, but he doubted it.

He said finally, "I'd get out of there."

"Quit my job?" The defiance sprang back into her eyes. "It's my big chance. I can't just throw it away, Bert. You don't know how much it means to me."

"Is it worth getting mixed up in murder?" he asked quietly.

"But I'm not involved," she protested. "It was just something that I saw, or thought that I saw."

"Don't try to talk yourself out of what you saw," he warned sternly. "I'm thinking of you. It might be dangerous if Androki knew what you saw, or even suspected it."

"To me? That's silly!"

"Is it?" He gazed moodily at her. "I don't know what I can say other than what I have advised. Would you have any objection if I talked it over with Gordie?"

She tossed her head. "Gordie's prejudiced."

"Against Androki? I don't believe so."

"He imagines all sorts of crazy things about him."

"He speculates, yes, but he's trying to arrive at the truth."

"Is he? He's trying to make something sensational out of it. All that talk about a lurid article."

"He's sincere," he rebuked.

"It's all so silly, Bert."

He said, "You'll have to admit that Androki's mixed up in some strange deals. If what Senator Blaire says is true, he has placed himself beyond the pale of the law; or perhaps I should say above the law. He's undermining this government in a score of different ways and it's doubtful that he's even a citizen."

"Nonsense," she snapped, "I know he is."

"Supposedly from some village near Green Bay," he assented, "but the senator can't verify that."

"That man!"

"I have to side with his viewpoint, Anita."

"Because John Androki is an astute businessman?"

"Because he walks over law and order," he corrected.

"He's not at all like people say, Bert. He's kind and considerate, and such a gentle man. Oh, it's his tremendous wealth that has brought so much of the feeling against him. People envy him."

"I'll have to take your word for it."

She gazed disconsolately at the floor. "Talk with Gordie if you want, if you're certain he won't say anything."

"He won't." He spoke more kindly. "But I believe that his advice will be the same: Get out of there."

"I suppose." She pushed aside her cup and rose. "I have to be going."

He got up. "I'm sorry I couldn't have been more helpful."

"You were fine." She forced a smile. "I really needed to talk more than anything else."

"Any time," he offered.

"You're a doll, Bert." She kissed his cheek before turning toward the door.

"Take care of yourself," he called softly. He listened to her footsteps retreating down the stairs; her heels made a sharp staccato on the front walk. A moment later the Jag engine roared to life, then grew fainter as the car sped off into the dusk.

He returned to the couch and sat down. A man who popped up out of nowhere, ran across a lawn and was shot down . . . He smiled faintly. Fantastic, yes, yet it was in keeping with other stories concerning Androki. Each tale was succeeded by an even wilder one. The man rapidly was becoming the subject of a new mythology.

He pondered that. The man was cloaked in mystery. Cloaked in mystery and followed by death, he corrected. Or did he sow death as he went? Maxon had called him a magnet for murder; Anita saw him as considerate, gentle. Which was the true Androki? Was he a victim of society, or was society the victim?

He'd have to think about that.

"Take four dead mathematicians, three unidentified murder victims, one multibillionaire, a guy who appears from nowhere and gets shot down, toss in a few miscellaneous corpses, dump them into a cauldron of Bornji transformations and stir well and what do you get?" asked Maxon.

"A witch's brew," Kane answered sourly.

"If the concoction doesn't taste right, add a dash of multi-dimensional space and a sprinkle of water from the time stream," the psychologist continued. "Out of it should come something quite interesting."

"Yes, but what?"

"That's what we have to determine. It's a fancy recipe, Bert, for amateur cooks." Maxon gazed around the lounge.

"Do you think Anita might have imagined the fellow springing up from nowhere?"

"The miracle of birth." Maxon snickered, then shook his

head. "That's mild compared to some of the things I've imagined."

"She wouldn't listen to my advice to get out."

"Of course not." Maxon's face was deadpan. "Those curator jobs aren't easy to come by."

"Be serious," Kane snapped irritably.

"I'm trying to be," Maxon protested. He looked hurt. "What do you expect me to do, give you the same kind of gobbledegook we give the students? When we don't know the answer to something in class, we say, 'Therefore it is obvious . . .' But I don't want to satisfy myself with a snap answer that won't hold up under test. I don't want to guess at what Anita might have seen, her reasons for remaining there, or anything else. I want to know. I especially want to know what makes that guy tick, Bert, and at this point I can only guess. If my guesses are wild, it's only because of the data I have to go by. Like Anita's story—a direct eyewitness report."

"I suggested it might have been an illusion," Kane offered.

"You believe so? I don't."

"A man springing from the ground?" Kane smiled. "What better explanation can you give?"

"I can't say, but nothing about that bird is normal, Bert. The touch of the weird characterizes him. I'm ready to believe almost anything."

"You're talking about Androki; I'm talking about the fellow Anita saw."

"It's the same thing; it all comes back to Androki. Anita's a fairly levelheaded girl, Bert. If she's frightened, I believe she has good reason to be frightened. I also believe it's something more than just some yahoo springing up from the earth." Maxon glared at him. "Sure, it's that, but I believe she also senses how Androki might react if he discovered how much she knew, or even suspected. If you grant that, then it follows that she knows he's dangerous."

"Does it?"

"Following those premises, yes." Maxon nodded vigorously. "Right now she's in a battle of greed versus fear; she's scared but she also likes her sinecure. How many gals would lightly toss over a multibillionaire, even if they knew he was weird? He's Jags and mink coats and bags full of money—"

"I know all that," Kane interrupted wearily.

"I doubt very much that she'd squawk unless she was personally threatened."

"You don't give her much credit."

"She's a product of the age," Maxon responded.

"I'm not that cynical, Gordie."

"Is it cynicism or objectivity?" Maxon viewed him over his coffee cup. "At times I'll admit that the question is debatable. But you only fool yourself when you view the world through polaroid glasses that filter out all but the good and the pure."

Kane asked mockingly, "Does it always have to be one or the other? How about your vaunted gradations of gray?"

"I'm not tarring everyone," the psychologist objected.

"It sounds as if you are."

"Does it? I didn't mean to give that impression, but that bird Androki bothers me. He walks in a distorted world. He gives with one hand and takes away with the other; but if you'll notice, in the end it all adds up to profit for Androki."

"You're quoting Senator Blaire," Kane accused.

"He did say that." Maxon grinned. "But he's digging up the dirt, Bert."

"Is he, or is he taking advantage of his congressional immunity to say whatever benefits him to say? Quite a number of people hold to that view."

"I'm certain he's sincere," Maxon returned. "What's Blaire getting out of the deal? Nothing but a shove toward the exit. He's being crucified. If he were profiting by it, I might say your point had merit, but he's not; he's getting gunned right and left. Can you deny that?"

"I'll have to admit it," Kane acceded.

"Something's got to break. This thing with Androki can't go on forever. The world just can't take the tension." Maxon finished his coffee and got up. "I just hope that I'm around when they ring the curtain down on him. Even then he'll probably pop back for an encore."

Later, reviewing the conversation, Kane realized that much of Maxon's bitterness toward Anita had stemmed from hurt. The two had been quite close friends for a long time. But since joining Androki, Anita had almost completely severed her relationship with Maxon, just as she had with all her faculty friends.

Not that Maxon was entirely wrong, he reflected, but the psychologist usually was quite tolerant of human foibles, regarding them as the inevitable products of a nature still largely in its primitive stage. The harshness of his condemnation revealed that the hurt was far deeper than he would admit.

Kane was deep in his work when Ronson of the history department opened the door and peered in, then came inside. Kane glanced up, waiting. Ronson's face, thin and sparrowish under closely cropped gray hair, held a wooden

expression. "Hear about Anita?" he asked.

"Anita?" Kane had a startled foreboding.

"She was killed on the coast highway up near Malibu. It was on the three o'clock news."

"Anita Weber?" he asked disbelievingly.

Ronson nodded. "She was traveling at a high rate of speed when another car shot alongside her, cut her off on a curve. She went over an embankment."

"Purposefully?" he asked harshly.

"According to eyewitnesses the act was deliberate. The other car didn't stop." Ronson hesitated. "She was a fairly close friend of mine, too. I thought you'd like to know."

Kane clenched his fists, feeling a quick pain. "Thanks for telling me," he said tonelessly.

"I'm damned sorry, Bert." Ronson went out quietly and closed the door behind him. Kane walked to the window and looked out. Spring was in the air. It was in the buds and new shoots and soft unfoldings of flowers; it was in the fleecy filaments of cloud that trailed across the azure sky. Spring was a time for birth, not death, he thought.

Anita had been murdered; that was starkly clear. It had been a deliberate, cold-blooded killing. Yet it was also an act of haste, for it had been carried out in the open, in the presence of witnesses.

He heard the door open and turned. Gordon Maxon was standing there, his thin face cold and emotionless. Only his eyes showed anger.

"I just heard about it," Kane said.

"He killed her," Maxon gritted.

"Someone did."

"Androkil"

"We don't know that," Kane answered wearily.

"We know it but we can't prove it; that's what you really mean."

"That's about it, Gordie."

"I'm going to prove it, at least to my satisfaction."

"How?"

"I'm no criminologist but I understand probability—"

"The law doesn't," Kane cut in. "You'd need absolute proof. Even then you'd be faced with the task of convicting a few billion bucks. That's not easy in an American court."

"I thought you said I was the cynic?"

"The time has come for realism," Kane answered. "You know he had her killed and I know he had her killed, but does anyone else know it? That brings up the question: How do we know it? We know it at an emotional level, and that's all. We know it because we sense it and feel it, but we

don't know it through any sequence of reason."

"Not true," Maxon snapped. "We're talking about ten or eleven murders, each of which can be linked to Androki in one way or another. What is the probability of that as a happenstance? Damned small."

"There are degrees of culpability," Kane objected.

"Come off it, Bert. Don't make like a lawyer."

"What do you want me to say?"

"Someone ought to kill that bird while we still have a world left," Maxon retorted. "I never believed that I'd advocate murder but I've just made an exception."

"You're talking nonsense."

"Perhaps; I don't know." Maxon looked suddenly defeated. "I'm tired, angry, frustrated, baffled. I know there's a murderer on the loose and I don't know what to do about it. Apparently the police don't either. What is the answer? You tell me."

"I don't know, Gordie."

"How long can this go on?"

"I can't answer that."

"Someone has to stop him."

"That's not our job, Gordie."

Maxon stared at him. "Anita was a damned intelligent girl. A bit footloose, perhaps, but a good kid. What did she find out about Androki, Bert? Whatever it was, it was no little thing. But if she could find out, so can I. It might be evidence based on statistics but I'll sing it to the high heavens."

"What do you hope to gain by that?"

"I don't know; I really don't. But if I can make the world aware of what he really is . . ." He turned and left, closing the door quietly behind him. Kane heard his footsteps receding in the hall; then the silence swept back.

Charles Dorrance finished reading the decoded message from Philip Conrad, then scanned it again more slowly. His eyes lingered on the last paragraph:

Anita Weber killed when car forced off coast highway by pursuing vehicle . . . Hasselwaite tailing Weber vehicle observed accident . . . trailed fleeing car but lost it in metropolitan traffic . . . Hasselwaite identified vehicle as one observed earlier in front of agency manning Kane listening post . . . details to follow. . . .

He let the message flutter to the desk and leaned back, locking his fingers behind his head. Staring at the ceiling,

he pondered this latest in the web of murder. Bertram Kane's bugged apartment had proved interesting indeed. So, Anita Weber had come running back to him with a tale of seeing a man spring from the earth and get shot down. An illusion, of course, but what had she seen?

He kicked the question around in his mind. Whatever it was, it had panicked the girl, but not enough to cause her to leave her job. That indicated that she had seen no imminent danger to herself. Yet two things were certain: whatever she had seen had led to her murder, and that murder was linked to John Androki.

Not that anyone could hang it on him, he thought. The killers would be hoodlums, far down the line. Doubtless they were completely ignorant of any details other than the bit of profit paid for the job. As for the man shot on Androki's lawn, he very much doubted that anyone would ever find the body.

There was one other consideration: the information Kane had gotten from the girl would place his own life in jeopardy. Not that he already wasn't on the firing line, but this might hasten the day. Not that Dorrance could interfere; Kane was too valuable as a clay pigeon.

Now what would Androki do? The noose was tightening and Androki sensed it; his actions were becoming too frantic. Once he had turned to murder, he had paved the road to his own destruction.

Dorrance reflected that murder wasn't his concern unless it threatened national security. Did Androki's string of victims fit that category? Not yet, but the man certainly was a threat to a national security in other ways. Not only was the nation's foreign trade structure being turned topsy-turvy, but he was seriously undermining the State Department along a score of fronts. And yet, with all that, he had the feeling that John Androki was racing too fast.

He was a man racing into the sunset.

XIII

KANE AWOKE to the ringing of his telephone. In the late hour it sounded harsh and demanding. He felt a quick premonition; there was something about the jangle of a phone in the late hours that held a touch of terror. Springing from bed, he hurried to the nightstand to answer it.

"Bert?" Maxon's voice came imperatively through the line.

"What is it?" he asked anxiously.

"I've got it, I've got it!"

"Got what?" he cut in. A sense of expectancy gripped him.

"The answer to John Androki." The psychologist's voice held a vibrant, confident note. "I've been thinking about it ever since I heard about the guy that sprang from Androki's lawn. Of course he did; that's where they all sprang from. At least as a figure of speech. Anita saw it and knew that she saw it; that's what bothered her. She saw something that looked absolutely impossible. But it's not, Bert. We've been looking in the wrong direction; we were a hundred and eighty degrees off—"

"What are you talking about?" he broke in. Maxon's words sounded crazy.

"Androki, what makes him tick? Can you come over?"

"Now?" He glanced at the desk clock; it was a few minutes after midnight. "What's it all about?"

"I know who and what Androki is, Bert! That's what I've been trying to tell you. I know it beyond the shadow of a doubt. I know what he's trying to hide, why he's murdering people right and left. It's crystal clear if you look in the right direction."

"Then be clear," he exclaimed.

"I'm trying," Maxon insisted. "I puzzled it out and every piece fits. Cantrup, Freyhoff, the whole works. And I know the answer to those three unidentified guys . . ."

"The ones who were murdered?" he interrupted.

"Yeah, they were agents. There's no hokum about that. They were trying to stop Androki—"

"What do you mean by agents?" he cut in.

"I can explain everything, Bert. It's all tied up with the Bornji transformations."

"Well, explain it," he demanded irritably. Maxon was talking in circles.

"Come over and I will," Maxon returned insistently. "I've put the whole ball of wax together and it makes a beautifully coherent picture. It's the logic of pattern, Bert; each piece fits!"

"Deductive reasoning? We've been through all that."

"What's wrong with inference if you have sufficient evidence?" Maxon demanded. "Sure, we've been through it before but we never had the key. Now we have it. It explains why Androki wears a halo of murder. He has to murder people to protect himself, and the more he's exposed, the more he has to murder. That's the ultimate silencer, Bert. Murder leads to murder. He'd murder me if he knew what I've deduced; he'd murder you if he knew that I told you. And it's why he murdered Anita. She saw too much."

"Saw what?" he demanded.

"Saw a man spring up from Androki's lawn!"

"Have you been drinking?"

"I only drink on the campus, you know that." Maxon sounded miffed. "But I want to get this story out, Bert. I don't want to be the only one to know it. Someone has to stop that guy."

"Okay, I'll come over," he promised wearily. He replaced he phone testily, staring at the clock. Was this another of Maxon's brainstorm? He'd been having them regularly since turning his focus on John Androki. Still, murder was rampant, and it did center on the man.

Dressing, he pondered Maxon's words. Not that anything the psychologist might have discovered could do much good. It was too late for Anita; and too late for David Cantrup, Martin Freyhoff and Leonard Bernardi. It was too late for a lot of people. Aside from that, Maxon could never obtain the kind of proof that would be needed to convict Androki. Could anyone? At least they hadn't; not in the nearly three years since John Androki had first risen into prominence.

Three years! The time startled him. But it was true. At first Androki had been only a name; then, almost explosively, he had blazed across the public sky. Now he was shaking the world. Gordie was right: someone had to stop him.

As the headlights of his car picked through the gloom of the sidestreets, he wondered again at the urgency in Maxon's voice. But Maxon also had sounded confident. It would be totally unlike him to call at such a late hour unless the matter were imperative.

Perhaps he *had* stumbled onto something. Perhaps his long months of patiently gathering and fitting together the pieces had produced a provable pattern. Provable? He very much doubted that. Yet Maxon had called the three unidentified murdered men agents.

He debated it uneasily. Maxon had been absolutely positive; his assertions had been delivered as statements of fact. That, too, would be unlike him unless the assertions were based on fact; he was too careful an investigator to go off half-cocked. When he speculated, he labeled it as such. But not tonight.

What else had he said? "We've been looking in the wrong direction." What had he meant by that? Was someone else involved in the murders? Irritably he dismissed the idea; Maxon had pointed the finger squarely at Androki and at no one else. To complicate matters, he had wrapped the whole thing up in the Bornji transformations.

He turned onto an elm-lined lane, slowing his speed as he approached the apartment building where the psychologist lived. The light from Maxon's second-story window splashed a bright rectangle across the lawn. An amber globe shone softly in the deep recess of the porch. He pulled up at the curb behind a parked car and got out.

As he started toward the walk, he realized the engine of the car ahead was running; it reached him as a soft purr. Sensing movement inside the car, he halted. Instantly he had the tingling sensation of danger. "*They'd murder you too!*"—Maxon's words screamed in his mind.

Wheeling, he cut across the lawn, consciously keeping to the shadows as he hurried towards the porch. Nerves, he thought abashedly. He took the front steps with a single bound and leaped toward the door.

Thup! He heard what sounded like a muffled explosion behind him as something nicked his ear. A small hole miraculously appeared in the door glass at eye level. *Gunfire!* He hunched his body, twisted the doorknob and lunged forward, sprawling headlong into the hall. Rolling to one side, he scrambled to his feet.

Two sharp splats came from the edge of the door and slivers of wood stung his face. Someone was trying to kill him! The thought slammed like a fist into his consciousness. Hurling his body toward the wall, he kicked the door shut and crouched, diving toward the stairs. *Thup! Thup!* This time the muffled explosions came from above.

Half-crouched, he dashed up the stairs, his feet drumming on the carpet. Springing into the upper hallway, he saw that Maxon's door was partially open; the sight brought a sudden caution. His heart thudding, he moved quickly forward. Through the opening, he glimpsed Maxon's body sprawled on the floor.

"Gordiel!" He shouted the name as he leaped into the room. At the same instant he saw the intruder, a small, ugly man with a black gun in his hand. The gun was pointed straight at him.

He leaped frantically to one side, twisting his body as the *thup* came again; something struck him a violent blow in the shoulder.

He recovered his balance and dove toward the intruder, striking out blindly. *Thup! Thup!* He scarcely felt the bite of the bullets as he struck the smaller man, hurling him backward. Kane sprawled forward, then leaped up and kicked savagely at the hand that held the gun. His shoe crunched against flesh and the weapon flew off to one side. The intruder bounded up and rushed through the doorway.

Kane sprang after him, bursting into the hall just as his assailant's head and shoulders disappeared from view down the stairwell. Kane staggered, then caught himself, swaying in a siege of sudden weakness. The walls and floor seemed to reel around him.

"Bert!" Maxon's voice croaked from the apartment. Kane turned, catching his balance again. The harsh squeal of tires sounded from the street, followed by the crackle of gunfire. The whine of an engine filled the night as the staccato crash of gunfire erupted anew.

"Bert!" Maxon's croaking call came again, more imperative this time. Kane lurched through the doorway. The psychologist was lying on his back, blood flecking his lips. An ugly dark splotch stained his white shirt several inches below the left collarbone.

"Take it easy." Kane's voice came hoarsely in the quiet room. He clutched his shoulder, then looked at his hand; it was dripping blood. "I'll get help."

"No, no." Maxon tried to raise himself to a sitting position, then fell back. "There's no time. I'm done for; I know it. You've got to listen; it was Androki's men."

"I know that," Kane rasped harshly. He knelt by the psychologist's side, for a moment fearful that he was about to faint. The room went around and around. He shook his head to clear it.

"He's not a *downtthrough*," Maxon gasped. A convulsion ran through his body and he grimaced with pain. He contorted his blood-flecked lips and shouted, "Somebody's got to kill him!"

"I'll get help." Kane struggled to his feet.

"No, listen." Maxon's eyes were pleading.

"Hurry then," he instructed tersely.

"He's, he's . . ." Maxon's body convulsed again and bright red blood bubbled from his lips. A strangling sound came from his throat. He tossed his head wildly as if to clear it. "Wrong direction," he gasped.

"Don't fight," Kane urged.

"Have to—" Maxon's eyes burned brightly. "Look . . . look the other way." A shudder ran through his thin frame. His lips opened and closed as he fought to speak. He stiffened, gasping. The strangling sound became a harsh whistling in his throat as a new gush of blood flooded his lips. Then he fell back.

"Gordie, Gordie," Kane called desperately. "You've got to hang on." Even as he spoke he saw the glazed look clouding the dark eyes; all at once they were empty of life.

Footsteps pounded up the stairs and he rose, turning as

a police officer burst into the room. Staggering, he clutched at his shoulder, trying to keep from falling. "You came too late," he whispered. He felt a great sorrow.

"Dr. Gordon Maxon is dead."

Kane awoke, staring at the white walls and ceiling. A faintly antiseptic odor filled his nostrils. A haunting familiarity filled his mind; then it all came back to him.

The doctors, the nurses, the white overhead lamp glaring down into his eyes. The police—the interrogations when they must have thought he was going to die. *Gordon Maxon . . . dead.* He felt a pang of sorrow. Gordie was gone. How long ago had that been? Yesterday, or the day before. No, it was longer; he wasn't certain how long. The Government agent Conrad had been there, too; woozy at the time, Kane had heard the doctor shoo him away.

He grappled with his thoughts. There had been a gunfight outside of Maxon's apartment. Several men had been killed. Then the police had rushed to Maxon's apartment. Too late, too late. The knowledge floated dreamlike through his mind. Anita dead, Maxon dead, his own narrow brush with death—it all seemed so long ago. Cantrup, Freyhoff, Bernardi, Wygant . . . all dead. Yet deep in his mind a spark was vitally alive, pushing against his consciousness.

Then he remembered.

He had awakened during the night, Maxon's words filling his mind. "*He's not a downthrough!*" That was the thing the psychologist had learned. "Look look the other way," the dying man had urged.

Kane, alone in the dark hospital room, had looked the other way. Suddenly he knew what Maxon had known; the knowledge came with startling clarity. It came, revealing the source of Androki's prophecy, his power, his need to kill. It explained Cantrup's death, Freyhoff's—the whole line of murder right down to the instant the hired killer had walked through Maxon's door. And it explained the thing that Androki feared most.

"Somebody's got to kill him!" Maxon had said. Kane weighed the thought against the knowledge that nothing was provable against the financier insofar as murder was concerned. He was a man who hired agents who hired agents who hired agents *ad infinitum* until he himself was far removed from any possible consequences of his acts. His killers came from the scum of the underworld.

Kane set his face woodenly. Androki had surrounded himself with bodyguards. If the police couldn't touch him, neither could a hired killer, let alone a rank amateur. Once

he moved into the big estate at Malibu, it would be all but impossible to reach him.

Yet Androki had made one big mistake. Perhaps he had realized it, but by then it was too late. Now he was startlingly vulnerable; that was the other thing that had come to Kane in the lonely silence of the night. Androki could hide in a fortress crawling with guards. He could protect his grounds with watch towers and electronic devices and trained dogs; but he couldn't erase his vulnerability. John Androki could be killed—had to be killed. Too much was at stake for such a man to be allowed to live. The Bornji transformations. The future. John Androki had to die.

The resolve was cold in Kane's mind.

A nurse bustled in, smiling when she saw that he was awake. "Feeling better?"

"Hungry," he confessed.

"You're off liquids as of this morning." She fussed with his bed.

"How long have I been here?"

"Five days."

"Five?" He stared wonderingly at her.

"I'll bring your breakfast."

"Any chance for a morning paper?" he asked hopefully. She smiled cheerfully and brought him one. As he spread it out alongside his tray, the black headlines leaped to meet his eyes: SENATOR BLAIRE MURDERED!

He stared at the black type, then read the story hurriedly. The lawmaker had been killed by a bomb planted in his car. A full-scale investigation was under way. John Androki, he thought bitterly. He pushed the paper numbly aside.

After a while he dozed, a restless, form-filled sleep in which a kaleidoscope of faces and events stormed through his mind. Anita's white Jag hurtling off the highway, great gouts of blood gushing from Maxon's lips, men popping up from green lawns like so many jack-in-the-boxes, a runty killer facing him with a blazing gun—the grotesque phantasmagoria of the past reeled through his mind again and again, like the rerun of an ancient motion picture melodrama.

Later the nurse reappeared. "How do you feel?"

"Fit as a fiddle," he answered. "When can I leave?"

"When the doctor says you can. Do you feel up to a visitor?"

"Who?" he asked hopefully.

"A Mr. Conrad."

"I talked with him once," he answered irritably. The dim memory of the interrogation flooded his mind. "Won't he go away?"

"If he does, he'll be back."

"Show him in," he said resignedly. She left the room, returning a moment later with the agent.

"You have just five minutes," she warned.

"We'll try to keep it short," Conrad assented. He watched her leave, then turned toward the bed. "How do you feel, Dr. Kane?"

"A bit on the weak side," he admitted.

"You had a close call." The agent dragged a chair next to the bed and sat. "Allow me to extend my sympathies. Dr. Maxon's death was a great loss."

"Thank you," Kane replied. "Gordon Maxon was a fine man."

"Would you care to talk about it?" Glimpsing the swift disapproval in Kane's face, he quickly added, "I know you've given a statement to the police but I'd still like to ask a few questions."

"What good will they do?" asked Kane wearily.

"They might help speed justice."

"Justice?"

"It has a way of working out, Dr. Kane."

"What is it you wished to know?"

"I understand you arrived at Dr. Maxon's apartment a few seconds after he was shot." Conrad made it a statement.

Kane nodded. "Someone took several shots at me down below and I was anxious to get under cover. As I remember, I was still in the lower hall when I heard the shots upstairs. They sounded muffled."

"The gun had a silencer," Conrad observed. "So did the weapons used outside. Do you know of any reason why anyone would want to kill you?"

"I assume it was because I walked in at the wrong time," he answered. "They probably were trying to keep me from spreading an alarm."

"Possibly." The agent nodded. "When did you first suspect that Maxon was in danger?"

"I'm not certain." Kane searched his mind. "When I heard the *thup, thup* from upstairs, I realized it was the same sound as when the bullets were fired at me. My thoughts certainly weren't coherent but I had a horrible foreboding; I recall that quite clearly."

He related his discovery of the intruder in the psychologist's apartment and the events that followed.

"You're fortunate to be here," Conrad observed, when he had finished. "Do you know of any reason why anyone would want to murder Dr. Maxon?"

"None whatever," he answered shortly.

"How did it happen that you arrived there at such a late hour?"

"Maxon called me a short time before, asked me to drop over."

"Did he say why?"

"We were working on a mutual problem."

"May I ask what?"

Kane hesitated. He was willing to talk, up to a limit, but he couldn't risk giving information which, through a subsequent investigation, might alert Androki to the area of his vulnerability. He finally said, "It was a mathematical and philosophical problem relating to multidimensional space."

Conrad smiled wryly. "And he called you at midnight to discuss that?"

Kane flushed. "Is that unusual?"

"Perhaps, I wouldn't know." Conrad surveyed him coolly. "I understand Dr. Maxon was still alive when you found him."

"Barely," he acknowledged.

"Did he say anything?"

"He said, 'I'm done for, I know it.' He knew that he'd been hit pretty hard."

"Why would he say that?"

"I'd told him to lie still; I was going to call an ambulance."

"But he had something he wanted to say, was that it?"

"Possibly, I don't know," Kane answered tonelessly. "Those were his last words."

"Nothing else?" The question held disbelief.

"Nothing," he replied flatly.

"It seems strange that Dr. Maxon wouldn't have wondered at the identity of his assailant or the purpose of the assault." Conrad's eyes were expressionless. "Unless, of course, he knew."

Kane returned his gaze. The observation was a leading one designed to draw him out; at the same time it told him that Conrad knew far more about the murder than he had first suspected. He said calmly, "I can't answer that."

"Can't or won't?"

"Take your choice," he answered indifferently.

"I understand you were both friends with Anita Weber."

"She was a colleague," he snapped.

"Didn't she work for the financier, John Androki?"

"You apparently know that. What has she to do with this?"

"Perhaps nothing, perhaps everything."

"Would you mind explaining that?"

"It's a point that I'm trying to determine," Conrad answered. "Why did she visit you the night preceding her death?"

Kane tried to conceal his surprise. "That's a personal matter," he replied shortly.

"Murder is never a personal matter, Dr. Kane." Conrad smiled slightly. "Her death was murder, you know."

"I assumed that from the news stories, but it had nothing to do with her visit."

"Didn't she come to you for advice because she was in fear?"

"Who told you that?" he asked sharply.

"We have pipelines."

Kane hesitated, wondering just how much the agent did know. He finally said, "She came for advice, yes."

"Because of her fear?"

"I'm not on the witness stand," he retorted.

"I'm aware of that, Dr. Kane." Conrad's dark eyes scrutinized him. "Believe me, my sole interest is in seeing that justice is done."

"That is also my interest."

"Yet we seem to be talking at odds," Conrad rejoined.

"Perhaps."

"I can draw some conclusions. Would you care to hear them?" Conrad eyed him speculatively before continuing. "I believe that Anita Weber had obtained information dangerous to her, and that she realized it. I also believe she realized the source of the danger, just as later you knew it and Dr. Maxon knew it. I believe that is why she sought your advice that night." He paused watchfully.

"Go on," Kane said.

"Apparently she was indecisive in the matter, an indecision that undoubtedly caused her death. I also believe that Dr. Maxon deduced the identity of her killer. That was the reason he called you that night. Am I right, Dr. Kane?"

"And if you are?"

"That question is in itself a statement that I'm right," Conrad answered. "But what I need is information that will prove the identity of the killer. I'm referring, of course, to the man behind the plot."

"I'm surprised you don't know," Kane replied acidly. "You seem to know so much."

Conrad shook his head. "Not nearly enough."

"Isn't that the job of the local police?"

"Yes, of course." Conrad eyed him steadily.

"Then what is your interest?"

A smile touched the agent's lips. "The ramifications are

possibly more than local."

"In what way?"

"I'm not at liberty to say." Conrad hesitated. "I'm walking in the field of surmise."

"Aren't we all?"

"Some truths are becoming visible, Dr. Kane." Conrad's voice became brisk. "Now about Anita Weber . . ."

"I have no more to say."

"About Anita Weber?"

"About anything."

"Tell me this, was my surmise right?"

"I can't say," Kane answered shortly.

"I believe it was."

"That's your privilege."

"You've been a great help, Dr. Kane." Conrad rose, looking down at him. "If there is anything at all you'd like to say off the record, I'd respect your confidence."

"There's nothing," he answered stonily.

Watching the agent depart, he wondered at the source of Conrad's knowledge. The agent certainly knew far more of the story than he'd indicated. Perhaps all of it—except the real reason that drove Androki to murder; he couldn't know that.

How had he learned of Anita's visit? He could have tailed her, of course, but that didn't explain his knowledge of the reason for her visit. Neither did it explain how he had so correctly deduced Maxon's role. No one could have known that unless, unless . . .

His phone had been tapped! The thought, startling at first, flared to conviction in his mind. A tapped phone! No doubt his apartment was bugged! That had to be it! There was no other way Conrad could have gotten the information. That also explained how the police had come upon the scene so soon after the shootings. It explained a lot of things.

His startlement gave way to a wry smile. If his surmise was true, then the entire interrogation had been a farce; Conrad had already known the answers. What, then, was he after? The knowledge locked in Maxon's mind at the moment of his death, Kane thought. Then Conrad's quest was far greater than the quest for proof of Androki's guilt. He was digging at the very foundations of Androki's existence. He was searching, perhaps blindly, for knowledge known but to two men in the entire world. One man was John Androki.

The second was himself.

He contemplated that thought soberly. Anita had been murdered because of what she had seen; Maxon had been murdered because of what he had deduced. And himself.

No doubt he was at the top of John Androki's list. One thing was certain: this world no longer was big enough for them both.

He pushed the covers aside and slipped from bed, surprised at his weakness. He waited until the dizziness passed, then walked quietly to the door and peered out. He wasn't surprised at sight of a police officer sitting in a position in which he could scan the corridor in both directions. Bertram Kane's bodyguard! He had to laugh. That was quite something for a professor of mathematics.

Returning to bed, he stared thoughtfully at the ceiling. It wasn't his life but the future that counted. Androki was fighting to destroy that future while he captured the world with his dollars. He was attempting to twist and distort tomorrow; and he was desperate because tomorrow was fighting back. That was the thing Gordon Maxon had deduced.

And it was true. Kane knew it because he had looked the other way. He had looked last night in the blackness of the room; and when he had, all of the pieces had fallen into place. Coldly, incisively, he knew what he had to do. He had to fight John Androki with his own weapon.

Murder!

The message from Philip Conrad was eleven days old—the length of time that Bertram Kane had been missing. Two days before then, the mathematician had flown to Chicago to deliver the keynote address at a convention of his colleagues. Thereafter, managing to elude the agent Conrad had placed on his tail, he had vanished.

Now, sitting in his office, Dorrance contemplated that last word thoughtfully. Kane had gone through the motions of catching a personal flight to New York to attend business, then had slipped off in another direction. To where? That was what Dorrance had not yet been able to discover.

He absently studied the message.

Conrad was convinced that Bertram Kane knew the full story behind the murders of Anita Weber and Gordon Maxon. If that was true, then Kane undoubtedly knew enough to untangle the whole web of murder. Enough to hang John Androki, he reflected grimly.

As Conrad saw it, Anita Weber had also discovered John Androki's secret. She had discovered it, and had died. So had Gordon Maxon. Or at least Maxon had deduced the secret; his tapped telephone conversation with Kane had made that clear. It also was a conversation which, heard by whoever had been manning Androki's listening post to Kane's apartment, had spelled the psychologist's im-

mediate death. Conrad hadn't been able to alert the local police in time to prevent that.

But Bertram Kane hadn't known the secret at the time of Maxon's call. His possession of it now meant that he must have gotten it from Maxon as the latter lay dying. Kane knew.

But Bertram Kane wouldn't talk!

Dorrance felt a flash of annoyance. Kane's silence made him a big fat pigeon. Formerly Conrad had been willing to dangle Kane as bait, but not now! The mathematician's knowledge was too precious to be lost. He, and he alone, knew the secret of John Androki.

Where was Bertram Kane?

Dorrance suppressed his frustration. The agent Conrad had assigned to tail Kane when he'd left the hospital had provided slender safety; now that safety was gone. Bertam Kane, a man who carried a secret that had already cost thirteen lives, was a walking target. Fourteen lives, if Vosin's death had been murder. Fifteen, if he counted Senator Blaire. And he did count the senator.

He pondered it. Despite the senator's refusal of a guard, two men had been assigned to his protection. That they had failed was regrettable. But following the explosion, one had recalled seeing a stranger loitering near the senator's car on several occasions. He had quickly identified the man from a photograph in the rogues' gallery.

Before this suspect could be apprehended, he had been shot to death and his body dumped in a vacant lot. To keep him from spilling his guts? Undoubtedly. Since then, an exhaustive investigation into the slain man's background had paid off. Along with a series of convictions for petty and not-so-petty offenses, he was discovered to have worked for an obscure firm which in turn was a branch of an Androki enterprise.

As in the case of the other murders, the senator's death couldn't even remotely be tied to the financier; nothing whatever was provable. Nothing, Dorrance thought, except that all trails led to John Androki. With more than a dozen murders, he was the only common denominator.

Dorrance reflected coldly on it.

Murdering an everyday citizen was one thing; it was murder but it didn't shake the nation, and it fell within the province of the local police. But the murder of a United States senator was quite something else, especially when it did shake the nation. That fell into the jurisdiction of an extra-legal judgment.

How strong was his case? He didn't know, but he expected

to know quite soon. The manager of the obscure firm for which the bomb killer had worked would sing. It might not be the kind of confession which the Supreme Court would hold admissible, but neither would it be the kind of judgment the law would pass. This time he was judge and jury.

He glanced at his watch. The singing should start at any moment.

That was one problem.

The second was Bertram Kane. He read the last paragraph of Conrad's message again.

Kane caught Monday flight to Chicago to address mathematics convention . . . slipped from agent's view following close of session . . . present whereabouts unknown. . . . Signed C5A

Eleven days, and Kane still missing—Dorrance sighed uneasily. That was a long time for a rank amateur to elude the kind of net that had been thrown out for him. Where was he? Why was he running? Did he fear reprisal for the knowledge he had gotten from Maxon? No, that wasn't it; Bertram Kane wasn't the running kind. Then what was he up to? Whatever it was, it had something to do with John Androki.

Dorrance felt certain of that.

XIV

Crack!

Bertram Kane felt the rifle butt slam against his shoulder as the shot reverberated throughout the farmlands. Ahead he saw the laborer in the car, in the act of reaching toward the mailbox, slump against the open door; it swung outward and his body pitched forward, falling into the low ditch that ran alongside the road.

Dead! He was dead! Kane knew it! He had killed a man in cold blood! His hands shook violently. He had murdered a man, he had murdered a man. . . . He hadn't realized it would be this bad. He stared indecisively toward the old car; its engine, pounding unevenly in the quiet of the late afternoon, in Kane's mind was a cry of protest. He had to make certain his shot had killed. Forcing himself forward, he plunged across the road.

Staring down into the ditch, he shuddered, feeling a violent nausea. His victim had flopped over on his back as if to die with his face to the sun. The front of his throat, torn

away where the bullet had emerged, was a gory mess. There was not the slightest doubt that he was dead.

Caught with another wave of nausea, Kane started to retch, then turned and stumbled back toward the woods. He had to get rid of the rifle, retrieve the rented car, get back to Green Bay, catch a flight to Chicago; he had to—

Crack!

A sharp pain stabbed at his back as the sound of a shot split the late afternoon air; it echoed like thunder through the nearby hills. He staggered, caught with a sudden weakness. Androki's men! He had to . . .

Crack!

A stinging force slammed low in the region of his kidney, sending him plunging to his knees. Androki had recognized his vulnerability! The realization came like a blow. He hadn't counted on that. Androki should never have given his family background; that had been his big mistake! He'd assigned killers to protect it; but they were too late, too late. Kane wanted to laugh wildly. They were trying to kill him to save a man who was already dead!

Crack!

A sledgehammer blow struck him below the right shoulder blade, driving him face forward into the tall grass. Too late! Too late! No matter what they did, Androki could never destroy the future. Not now. It would go on and on and on; man would know his many dimensions.

Androki! Gasping for breath, Kane had felt a fierce satisfaction, knowing that what he had done was right. Androki wasn't a *downthrough*; he was a *backthrough*! That's what Maxon had meant by saying they had been looking in the wrong direction; that's what he had seen that night in the hospital, when he'd followed the psychologist's reasoning.

"Androki!" Kane babbled the name. Androki hadn't been looking into time; he had come from time—from some generation of the future. He'd come back with all the pertinent data to accomplish his ends; he had come to buy the world! But he, Kane, hadn't killed Androki! Not really. Because John Androki had never existed.

Now now.

He struggled to roll over. The sky was blue, a soft blue, and in the periphery of his eye he could see the treetops slowly swaying, bending with the breeze. A lovely world.

Footsteps thudded toward him. A figure loomed over him, blotting out the sky. The barrel of a rifle was thrust into his face. He stared upward into the black bore. *Margaret!*

Crack!

"So he just vanished into nothingness, eh?" Charles Dorrance eyed the lean figure of the agent whose name for this job had been Philip Conrad. He didn't believe Conrad had been too shaken by the phenomenon. But then it would be difficult to shake Conrad.

"Just like that," Conrad agreed. "I had the back of his head squarely in my sights. He'd just started up the stairs. He was about halfway up when, zip!" He snapped his fingers. "He vanished."

Dorrance asked curiously, "Didn't that startle you?"

"To some extent." Conrad nodded. "I concluded that some kind of secret weapon was involved, but it's not my place to wonder. I only do what I'm assigned to do . . . and make my reports. Aside from that, I can't help but feel that whatever the gimmick was, John Androki won't be coming back."

"Just as well," Dorrance observed noncommittally. He gazed at the agent. "Androki's man talked."

"The one who ordered the senator's car bombed?"

Dorrance nodded. "Not enough to convict Androki in a court of law—the fellow didn't know that much—but enough to be convincing. The senator died at Androki's orders; I say that as a statement of fact. Who would have been next? The President? But on that trip alone he'd gone too far beyond the law. A few billion dollars can't buy total immunity."

"I figured something like that when the code word came through."

Dorrance asked casually, "Did you know that Dr. Kane was killed?"

"Kane?" Conrad was startled.

"It happened about the time your man was vanishing."

"How?" The agent leaned forward in his chair.

"He murdered a laborer outside of Green Bay—near a small village named Cooperstown, to be exact."

"Kane . . . murdered a man?" Conrad asked disbelievingly.

Dorrance inclined his head. "Someone witnessed the act, probably a hunter. They say those woods are filled with deer. At any rate, he shot Kane, perhaps trying to prevent the murder." He smiled slightly. "Apparently he got frightened at what he did and fled the scene."

"I won't buy that," Conrad declared.

"The hunter bit? Of course not. Not when Kane was shot four times, the last one at point-blank range squarely between the eyes."

"I can't figure it." Conrad's brow knitted into a puzzled frown. "Kane went to Chicago to attend a convention. He certainly appeared normal at that time. So why would he

do a thing like that? And if so, why a laborer? And why in such a God-forsaken place? Did he crack up?"

"He didn't crack up," Dorrance answered calmly.

"Well, I guess it's none of my business."

"Not officially," Dorrance agreed. His eyes weighted the agent. "The man he murdered was named George Androki."

"George Androki?" Again the agent was startled. "A relative?"

"Yes, I believe you could say so."

"I can't follow that one."

"He did it to rid the world of John Androki."

"All Greek." Conrad gestured helplessly.

"It is unless you see it as Kane must have seen it."

"Through a distorted lens?"

"Not a bit." Dorrance shook his head. "If George Androki had lived, he would have had a son or sons; and that son or sons would have had sons. And finally there would have been John Androki, probably a brilliant scientist or mathematician. Twisted but brilliant."

"You're saying that John Androki came from the future, is that it?" The agent stared at him.

"As Kane and Maxon saw it, yes." Dorrance nodded assent. "In their view, it appeared very much as if Androki had come from the future armed with the knowledge and the specific data to take over the world, at least from the standpoint of the dollar. That, as you know, is the prime basis of power."

"Then the man Kane killed was . . . ?"

"Androki's ancestor. I said that."

"Fantastic!" Conrad murmured.

"With his death, of course, there could be no descendants, hence no Androki to come back." Dorrance folded his hands musingly. "As I see it, again from Kane's probable viewpoint, the three unidentified men who were murdered were agents sent back from the future to stop Androki. You'll recall that Wygant identified himself as an agent. That answers the question of why they had no records. They were trying to stop Androki before he could change the future . . ."

"Change the future?" Conrad interrupted.

"By murdering the mathematician or mathematicians who someday would unlock the key to multidimensional space and time," Dorrance explained. "Unfortunately, there were a number of key possibilities."

"Spread around the world," Conrad observed.

Dorrance stroked his jaw. "If he had succeeded, then the world of the future would have been deprived of the knowl-

edge of how to pass through the time barrier, if I can put it that way. Lacking that knowledge, they couldn't have sent back agents in the attempt to stop Androki."

"Whoa!" Conrad exclaimed. He hunched forward in his chair. "If he had succeeded in depriving them of the knowledge, how could he have come back?"

"He came back first, then tried to change the future."

"You're saying . . . ?"

"They had the knowledge when he came back; that's how he got back," Dorrance explained. "But once he got back, he was living in the present. 'This reality' is the expression Maxon and Kane used several times on the tape. But being in this reality, the future did not yet exist; hence, he was in a position to change it."

"Saw it off ahead of him, is that what you're saying?"

"Or behind him. It's according to which direction you're looking. From the present, of course, the future lies ahead. If Androki had gone farther back in history, he could have changed today. Again I'm citing some of the reasoning that came from the tapes."

"It's too deep for me," Conrad declared.

"And for me."

"As far as I'm concerned, it's all a figment of Kane's imagination."

"Of course. Kane's and Maxon's." Dorrance lifted his head. "We certainly couldn't commit a thing like that to the records."

"We certainly couldn't," Conrad answered steadily.

After the agent had gone, Dorrance remained gazing at the wall. Although he had reconstructed the theory from the tapes and evidence, the pieces fitted quite nicely, even though the end product was quite unbelievable. Could a man, by coming back, alter a future that actually had been? Or did his altering it make that future a never-was? There were simply too many paradoxes.

And yet the pieces fitted. They fitted at every point along the line. Take any one of the murders, apply the theory, and that was it. How else could one explain John Androki's abrupt disappearance coincidental with the murder of . . . his ancestor?

But one thing he knew: he couldn't put that in the books.

Through the window of his office on the campus of Tokyo University, Saburo Tanaki watched the laurel trees sway gently in the breeze. Short, thin, graying, he stared out through thick spectacles that gave his myopic eyes a luminous appearance. His thoughts were sad.

Bertram Kane, the great American mathematician, was dead. So were Cantrup, Freyhoff, Vosin, Bernardi. Only he was left. Now it was up to him.

What is destiny but a plan of the gods? He considered the question wonderingly. Yet men create their own destiny. Aside from that, there was a certain inevitability about life that defied the power of any single man to change. But a single man could hasten that inevitability.

Rising, he walked slowly through the long corridor, pondering the formidable task that lay ahead of him.