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GUNPOWDER GOD by H. BEAM PIPER



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GUNPOWDER GOD | H. BEAM PIPER

*Sometimes the Paratime transporters
slipped . . . and then a whole new branch of
history was sure to start!*

*But for Corporal Calvin of the
Pennsylvania State Police that slip
was labeled "Opportunity" in large letters . . .*

Tortha Karf, Chief of Paratime Police, told himself to stop fretting. Only two hundred odd days till Year-End Day, and then, precisely at midnight, he would rise from this chair and Verkan Vall would sit down in it, and after that he would be free to raise grapes and lemons and wage guerrilla war against the rabbits on the island of Sicily, which he owned on one uninhabited Fifth Level time-line. He wondered how long it would take Vall to become as tired of the chief's seat as he was now.

Vall was tired of it already, in anticipation. He'd never wanted to be chief; prestige and authority meant little to him, and freedom much. It was a job somebody had to do, though, and it was the job for which he had been trained, so Vall would take it, and do it, he suspected, better than he himself had done. The job, policing a near-infinity of different worlds, each one of which was this same planet, Earth, would be safe in the hands of Verkan Vall.

Twelve thousand years ago, facing extinction on an exhausted planet, the First Level race had discovered the existence of a second, lateral, dimension of time, and a means of physical transposition to and from the worlds of alternate probability parallel to their own. So the conveyers had gone out by stealth, to bring back wealth in abundance to First Level Home Time-Line, a little from here, a little from there, never enough to be missed.

It all had to be policed. Some Paratimers were unscrupulous in dealing with outtime peoples—he'd have retired five years ago, but for the discovery of a huge paratemporal slave trade, only recently smashed. More often, by somebody's bad luck or indiscretion, the Paratime Secret would be endangered, and that had to be preserved at any cost. Not merely the technique of paratemporal transposition, that went without comment, but the very existence of a race possessing it. If for no other reason, and there were many others, it would be utterly immoral to make any outtime people live with the knowledge that there were among them aliens indistinguishable from themselves, watching and exploiting. So there was the Paratime Police.

Second Level; it had been civilized almost as long as the First, but there had been long Dark-Age interludes. Except for paratemporal transposition, it almost equaled First. Third Level civilization was more recent, but still of respectable antiquity. Fourth Level had started late and advanced slowly; some Fourth Level genius was inventing agriculture when the coal-burning steam engine was obsolescent on the Third. And Fifth Level—on a few time-lines, subhuman brutes, fireless and speechless, were using stones to crack nuts and each other's head; on most of it nothing even humanoid had evolved.

Fourth Level was the big one. The others had devolved from low-probability genetic accidents; Fourth had been the maximum probability. It was divided into many sectors and subsectors, on most of which civilization had first appeared in the Nile and Tigris-Euphrates valleys, and, later, on the Indus and the Yangtze, Europo-American Sector; they might have to pull out of that entirely, that would be Chief Verkan's decision. Too many thermonuclear weapons and too many competing national sovereignties, always a disaster-fraught combination. That had happened all over Third Level within Home Time-Line experience. Alexandrian-Roman, off to a fine start with the pooling of Greek theory and Roman engineering ability, and then, a thousand years ago, two half-forgotten religions had been rummaged out of the dustbin and their respective proselytes had begun massacring each other. They were still at it, with pikes and matchlocks, having lost the ability to make anything better. Europo-American would come to that, if its competing politico-economic sectarians kept on. Sino-Hindic, that wasn't a civilization, was a bad case of cultural paralysis. Indo-Turanian, about where Europo-American had been a thousand years ago.

And Aryan-Oriental: the Aryan migration of three thousand years ago, instead of moving west and south as on most sectors, had rolled east into China.

And Aryan-Transpacific, there was one to watch. An offshoot of Aryan-Oriental; the conquerors of Japan had sailed north and east along the Kuriles and Aleutians, and then spread south and east over North America, bringing with them horses and cattle and iron-working skills, exterminating the Amerinds, splitting into diverse peoples and cultures. There was a civilization along the Pacific coast, and nomads on the plains herding bison and cross-breeding them with Asian cattle, another civilization in the Mississippi Valley, and one around the Great Lakes. And a new one, only four centuries old, on the Atlantic seaboard and back in the Appalachians.

The technological level was about that of Europe in the Middle Ages, a few subsectors slightly higher. But they were going forward. Things, he thought, were about ripe to happen on Aryan-Transpacific.

Well, let Chief Verkan watch that.

She tried to close her mind to the voices around her, and stared at the map between the two candlesticks on the table. There was Tarr-Hostigos overlooking the gap, just a tiny fleck of gold on the parchment, but she could see it all in her mind, the walls, the outer bailey, the citadel and the keep, the watchtower pointing a blunt finger skyward. Below, the little

Darro glistened, flowing north to join the Listra and, with it, the broad Athan to the north and east. The town of Hostigos, white walls and slate roofs and busy streets; the checkerboard of fields and forests.

A voice, louder and harsher than the others, brought her back to reality.

“He’ll do nothing? What in Dralm’s name is a Great King for but to keep the peace?”

She looked along the table, from one to another of them. The speaker for the peasants, at the foot, uncomfortable in his feast-day clothes and ill at ease seated among his betters, the speakers for the artisans and the merchants and the townsfolk, the lesser family members, the sworn landholders. Chartiphon, the captain-in-chief, his blond beard streaked with gray like the gray lead-splashes on his gilded breastplate, his long sword on the table in front of him. Old Xentos, the cowl of his priestly robe thrown back from his snowy head, his blue eyes troubled. And her father, Prince Ptosphes of Hostigos, beside whom she sat at the table-head, his mouth tight between pointed mustache and pointed beard. How long it had been since she had seen a smile on her father’s lips!

Xentos passed a hand negatively in front of his face.

“The Great King, Kaiphranos, said that it was every prince’s duty to guard his own realm; that it was for Prince Ptosphes to keep raiders out of Hostigos.”

“Well, great Dralm, didn’t you tell him it wasn’t just bandits?” the other voice bullyragged. “They’re Nostori soldiers; it’s war! Gormoth of Nostor means to take all Hostigos, as his grandfather took Sevenhills Valley after the traitor we don’t name sold him Tarr-Dombra!”

That was a part of the map her eyes had shunned, the bowl valley to the east, where Dombra Gap split the mountains. It was from thence the Nostori raiders came.

“And what hope have we from Styphon’s House?” her father asked. He knew the answer; he wanted them all to hear it at first hand.

“Chartiphon spoke with them,” Xentos said. “The priests of Styphon hold no speech with priests of other gods.”

“The archpriest wouldn’t talk to me,” Chartiphon said. “Only one of the upper priests. He took our offerings and said that he would pray to Styphon for us. When I asked for fireseed, he would give us none.”

“None at all?” somebody cried. “Then we are under the ban!”

Her father rapped with the pommel of his poignard.

“You’ve heard the worst, now,” he said. “What’s in your minds to do? You first, Phosg.”

The peasant leader rose awkwardly, cleared his throat.

“Lord, my cottage is as dear to me as this fine castle is to you,” he said. “I’ll fight for mine as you would for yours.”

There was a quick mutter of approval along the table. The others spoke in their turns, a few tried to make speeches. Chartiphon said only: “Fight. What else?”

“Submission to evil is the worst of all sins,” Xentos said. “I am a priest of Dralm, and Dralm is a god of peace, but I say, fight with Dralm’s blessing.”

“Rylla?” her father asked.

“Better die in armor than live in chains,” she said. “When the time comes, I will be in armor with the rest of you.”

Her father nodded. “I expect no less from any of you.” He rose, and all with him. “I thank you all. At sunset, we dine together; until then, servants will attend you. Now, if you please, leave me with my daughter. Xentos, you and Chartiphon stay.”

There was a scrape of chairs, a shuffle of feet going out, a murmur of voices in the hall before the door closed. Chartiphon had begun to fill his stubby pipe.

“Sarrask of Sask won’t aid us, of course,” her father said.

“Sarrask of Sask’s a fool,” Chartiphon said shortly. “He should know that when Gormoth’s conquered Hostigos, his turn will come next.”

“He knows it,” Xentos said calmly. “He’ll try to strike before Gormoth does. But even if he wanted to, he’d not aid us. Not even King Kaiphranos dares aid those whom the priests of Styphon would destroy.”

“They want that land in Wolf Valley, for a temple farm,” she said slowly. “I know that would be bad, but—”

“Too late,” Xentos told her. “Styphon’s House is determined upon our destruction, as a warning to others.” He turned to her father. “And it was on my advice, Lord, that you refused them.”

“I’d have refused against your advice. I swore long ago that Styphon’s House should never come into Hostigos while I lived, and by Dralm neither shall they! They come into a principdom, they build a temple, they make a

temple farm, and make slaves of the peasants on it. They tax the prince, and force him to tax the people till nobody has anything left. Look at that temple farm in Sevenhills Valley.”

“Yes, you’d hardly believe it,” Chartiphon said. “They make the peasants on the farms around cart in their manure, till they have none left for their own fields. Dralm only knows what they do with it.” He puffed at his pipe. “I wonder why they want Wolf Valley.”

“There’s something there that makes the water of those springs taste and smell badly,” she considered.

“Sulfur,” Xentos said. “But why do they want sulfur?”

Corporal Calvin Morrison, Pennsylvania State Police, crouched in the brush at the edge of the old field and looked across the brook at the farmhouse two hundred yards away, scabrous with peeling yellow paint and festooned by a sagging porchroof. A few white chickens pecked disinterestedly in the littered barnyard; there was no other sign of life, but he knew that there was a man inside. A man with a rifle, who would use it; he had murdered once, broken jail, would murder again.

He looked at his watch; the minute hand was squarely on the nine. Jack French and Steve Kovac would be starting down from the road above where they had left the car. He rose, unsnapping the retaining-strap of his holster.

“I’m starting. Watch that middle upstairs window.”

“I’m watching,” a voice behind assured him. A rifle action clattered softly as a cartridge went into the chamber. “Luck.”

He started forward across the weed-grown field. He was scared, as scared as he’d been the first time, back in ’52 in Korea, but there was nothing to do about that. He just told his legs to keep moving, knowing that in a few moments he wouldn’t have time to be scared. He was almost to the little brook, his hand close to the butt of his Colt, when it happened.

There was a blinding flash, followed by a moment’s darkness. He thought he’d been shot; by pure reflex, the .38-special was in his hand. Then, all around him, a flickering iridescence of many colors glowed, in a perfect hemisphere thirty feet across and fifteen high, and in front of him was an oval desk or cabinet, with an instrument panel over it, and a swivel chair from which a man was turning and rising. Young, well-built; wore loose green trousers and black ankle boots and a pale green shirt; a shoulder holster under his left arm, a weapon in his hand.

He was sure it was a weapon, though it looked more like an electric soldering iron, with two slender metal rods instead of a barrel, joined at the front in a blue ceramic knob. It was probably something that made his own Official Police look like a kid's cap pistol, and it was coming up fast to line on him.

He fired, holding the trigger back to keep the hammer down on the fired chamber, and threw himself down, hearing something fall with a crash, landing on his left hand and his left hip and rolling, until the nacreous dome was gone from around him and he bumped hard against something. For a moment, he lay still, then rose to his feet, letting out the trigger of the Colt.

What he'd bumped into was a tree. That wasn't right, there'd been no trees around, nothing but brush. And this tree, and the others, were huge, great columns rising to support a green roof through which only stray gleams of sunlight leaked. Hemlocks must have been growing here while Columbus was conning Isabella into hocking her jewelry. Come to think of it, there was a stand of trees like this in Alan Seeger Forest. Maybe that was where he was.

He wondered how he was going to explain this.

"While approaching the house," he began aloud and in a formal tone, "I was intercepted by a flying saucer, the operator of which threatened me with a ray pistol. I defended myself with my revolver, firing one round—"

No. That wouldn't do, at all.

He swung out the cylinder of his Colt, ejecting the fired round and replacing it. Then he looked around, and started in the direction of where the farmhouse ought to be, coming to the little brook and jumping across.

Verkan Vall watched the landscape flicker outside the almost invisible shimmer of the transportation field. The mountains stayed the same, but from one time-line to another there was a good deal of randomness about which tree grew where. Occasionally there were glimpses of open country and buildings and installations, the Fifth Level bases his people had established. The red light overhead winked off and on, and each time it went off, a buzzer sounded. The dome of the conveyer became a solid iridescence, and then a cold, inert metal mesh. The red light came on and stayed on. He was picking up the sigma-ray needler from the desk in front of him and holstering it when the door slid open and a lieutenant of Paratime Police looked in.

"Hello, Chief's Assistant. Any trouble?"

In theory, the Ghaldron-Hesthor transposition field was impenetrable from the outside, but in practice, especially when two conveyers going in opposite paratemporal directions interpenetrated, it would go weak, and outside objects, sometimes alive and hostile, would intrude. That was why Paratimers kept weapons at hand, and why conveyers were checked immediately on emergence; it was also why some Paratimers didn't make it home.

"Not this trip. My rocket ready?"

"Yes, sir. Be a little delay about an aircar for the rocketport." The lieutenant stepped inside, followed by a patrolman, who began taking the transportation record tape and the photo-film record out of the cabinet. "They'll call you when it's in."

He and the lieutenant strolled outside into the noise and color of the conveyer-head rotunda. He got out his cigarette case and offered it; the lieutenant flicked his lighter. They had only taken a few first puffs when another conveyer quietly materialized in a vacant space nearby. A couple of Paracops strolled over as the door opened, drawing their needlers. One peeped inside, then holstered his weapon and snatched a radio phone from his belt; the other entered cautiously. Throwing away his cigarette, he strode toward the newly arrived conveyer, the lieutenant following.

The chair was overturned; a Paracop, his tunic off and his collar open, lay on the floor, a needler a few inches from his outstretched hand. His shirt, pale green, was dark with blood. The lieutenant, without touching him, looked at him.

"Still alive," he said. "Bullet, or sword-thrust?"

"Bullet; I can smell nitro powder." Then he saw the hat lying on the floor, and stepped around the fallen man. Two men were coming in with an antigrav stretcher; they and the patrolmen got the wounded man onto it. "Look at this, lieutenant."

The lieutenant glanced at the hat. It was gray felt, wide-brimmed, the crown peaked with four indentations.

"Fourth Level," he said. "Europo-American."

He picked it up, glancing inside. The sweatband was lettered in gold, JOHN B. STETSON COMPANY. PHILADELPHIA, PA., and, hand-inked, *Cpl. Calvin Morrison. Penna. State Police*, and a number.

"I know that outfit," the lieutenant said. "Good men, every bit as good as ours."

“One was a split second better than one of ours.” He got out his cigarette case. “Lieutenant, this is going to be a real baddie. This pickup’s going to be missed, and the people who’ll miss him will be one of the ten best constabulary organizations in the world on their time-line. They won’t be put off with the sort of lame-brained explanations that usually get by on Europeo-American. They’ll want factual proof and physical evidence. And we’ll have to find where he came out. A man who can beat a Paracop to the draw won’t sink into obscurity on any time-line. He’s going to kick up a fuss that’ll have to be smoothed over.”

“I hope he doesn’t come out on a next-door time-line and turn up at a duplicate of his own police post, where a duplicate of himself is on duty. With identical fingerprints,” the lieutenant said. “That would kick up a small fuss.”

“Wouldn’t it?” He went to the cabinet and took out the synchronized transposition record and photo film. “Have that rocket held; I’ll want it after a while. But I’m going over these myself. I’m going to make this operation my own personal baby.”

Calvin Morrison dangled black-booted legs over the edge of the low cliff and wished, again, that he hadn’t lost his hat. He knew exactly where he was, he was on the little cliff, not more than a big outcrop, above the road where they’d left the car, but there was no road under it now, nor ever had been. And there was a hemlock four feet at the butt growing right where the farmhouse ought to be, and no trace of the stone foundations of it or the barn. But the really permanent features, the Bald Eagles to the north and Nittany Mountain to the south, were exactly as they should be.

That flash and momentary darkness could have been subjective; put that in the unproven column. He was sure the strangely beautiful dome of shimmering light had been real, and so had the oval desk and the instrument panel and the man with the odd weapon. And there was certainly nothing subjective about all this virgin forest where farmlands ought to be.

He didn’t for an instant consider questioning either his senses or his sanity; neither did he indulge in dirty language like “incredible,” or “impossible.” Extraordinary; now there was a good word. He was quite sure that something extraordinary had happened to him. It seemed to break into two parts: (One), the dome of pearly light and what had happened inside it, and, (Two), emerging into this same-but-different place.

What was wrong with both was anachronism, and the anachronisms were mutually contradictory. None of (One) belonged in 1964 or, he suspected, for many centuries to come. None of (Two) belonged in 1964, either, or at any time within two centuries in the past. His pipe had gone out; for a while he forgot to relight it, while tossing those two facts back and forth. Then he got out his lighter and thumbed it, and then buttoned it back in his pocket.

In spite—no, because—of his clergyman father’s insistence that he study for and enter the Presbyterian ministry, he was an agnostic. Agnosticism, to him, was refusal either to accept or reject without factual proof. A good philosophy for a cop, by the way. Well, he wasn’t going to reject the possibility of time machines; not after having been shanghaied out of his own time in one. Whenever he was, it wasn’t the Twentieth Century, and he was never going to get back to it. He made up his mind on that once and for all.

Climbing down from the low cliff, he went to the little brook, and followed it to where it joined a larger stream, just as he knew it would. A bluejay made a fuss at his approach. Two deer ran in front of him. A small black bear regarded him with suspicion and hastened away. Now, if he could find some Indians who wouldn’t throw tomahawks first and ask questions afterward . . .

A road dipped to cross the stream. For a moment, he accepted that, then caught his breath. A real, wheel-rutted road! And brown horse-droppings in it, they were the most beautiful things he had seen since he came into this here-and-now. They meant that he hadn’t beaten Columbus here, after all. He’d have trouble giving a plausible account of himself, but at least he could do it in English. Maybe he was even in time to get into the Civil War. He waded through the ford and started west along the road, toward where Bellefonte ought to be.

The sun went down in front of him. By now, the big hemlocks were gone, lumbered off, and there was a respectable second growth, mostly hardwoods. Finally, in the dusk, he smelled turned earth beside the road. It was full dark before he saw a light ahead.

The house was only a dim shape, the light came from narrow horizontal windows near the roof. Behind, he thought he could make out stables and, by his nose, pig-pens. Two dogs ran into the road and began whauff-whauffing in front of him. “Hello, in there!” he called. Through the open windows he heard voices, a man’s, a woman’s, another man’s. He called

again. A bar scraped, and the door swung in. A woman, heavy-bodied, in a dark dress, stood aside for him to enter.

It was all one big room, lighted by one candle on a table and one on the mantel and by the fire on the hearth. Double-deck bunks along one wall, table spread with a meal. There were three men and another woman beside the one who had admitted him, and from the corner of his eye he could see children peering around a door that seemed to open into a shed annex. One of the men, big and blond-bearded, stood with his back to the fire, with something that looked like a short gun in his hands. No it wasn't, either; it was a crossbow, bent and quarrel in place.

The other men were younger, the crossbowman's sons for a guess; they were bearded, too, though one's beard was only a fuzz. They all wore short-sleeved jerkins of leather and cross-gartered hose. One of the younger men had a halberd and the other an axe. The older woman spoke in a whisper to the younger; she went through the door, pushing the children ahead of her.

He lifted his hands pacifically as he entered. "I'm a friend," he said. "I'm going to Bellefonte; how far is it?"

The man with the crossbow said something. The man with the halberd said something. The woman replied. The youth with the axe said something, and they all laughed.

"My name's Calvin Morrison. Corporal, Pennsylvania State Police." Hell, they wouldn't know the State Police from the Swiss Marines. "Am I on the road to Bellefonte?"

More back-and-forth. They weren't talking Pennsylvania Dutch, he was sure of that. Maybe Polish; no, he'd heard enough of that to recognize, if he couldn't understand, it. He looked around, while they argued, and saw, in the far corner left of the fireplace, three images on a shelf. He meant to get a closer look at them. Roman Catholics used images, so did Greek Catholics, and he could tell the difference.

The man with the crossbow laid his weapon down, but kept it bent and loaded, and spoke slowly and distinctly. It was no language he had ever heard before. He replied just as distinctly in English. They all looked at one another, passing their hands in front of their faces in bafflement. Finally, by signs, they invited him to sit down and eat, and the children, six of them, trooped in.

The meal was roast ham, potatoes and succotash. The eating tools were knives and a few horn spoons; the men used their sheath knives. He took out

his jackknife, a big switch blade he'd taken off an arrest he'd made. It caused a sensation, and he had to demonstrate it several times. There was also elderberry wine, strong but not particularly good. Then they left the table for the women to clear, and the men filled pipes from a tobacco jar on the mantel, offering it to him. He filled his pipe and lighted it, as they did theirs, with a twig at the fire. Stepping back, he got a look at the images.

The central figure was an elderly man in a white robe, with a blue eight-pointed star on the breast. He was flanked, on one side, by a seated female figure, exaggeratedly pregnant, crowned with a grain, and holding a cornstalk, and, on the other, by a masculine figure in a male shirt, with a spiked mace. The only really unusual thing about him was that he had the head of a wolf. Father-god, fertility-goddess, war-god; no, this gang weren't Catholics, Greek, Roman or any other kind. He bowed to the central figure, touching his forehead, and repeated the gesture to the other two. There was a gratified murmur behind him; anybody could see he wasn't any heathen. Then he sat down on a chest against the wall.

They hadn't re-barred the door. The children had been chased back into the shed after the meal. Nobody was talking, everybody was listening. Now that he remembered, there had been a vacant place at the table. They'd sent one of the youngsters off with a message. As soon as he finished his pipe, he pocketed it, and unobtrusively unsnapped the strap of his holster. It might have been half an hour before he heard galloping hoofs down the road. He affected not to hear; so did everybody else. The older man moved over to where he had put down his crossbow; his elder son got the halberd and a rag as though to polish the blade. The horses clattered to a stop outside, accoutrements jingled. The dogs set up a frantic barking. He slipped the .38 out and cocked it.

The youngest man went to the door. Before he could touch it, it flew open in his face, knocking him backward, and a man—bearded face under a high-combed helmet, steel breastplate, black-and-orange scarf—burst in, swinging a long sword. Everybody in the room shouted in alarm; this wasn't what they'd been expecting, at all. There was another helmeted head behind the first man, and the muzzle of a short musket. Outside, a shot boomed and one of the dogs howled.

He rose from the chest and shot the man with the sword. Half-cocking with the double action and thumbing the hammer the rest of the way, he shot the man with the musket. The musket went off into the ceiling. A man behind caught a crossbow quarrel through the forehead and pitched forward on top of the other two, dropping a long pistol unfired.

Shifting the Colt to his left hand, he caught up the sword the first man had dropped. It was lighter than it looked, and beautifully balanced. He tramped over the bodies in the doorway, to be confronted by another swordsman outside. For a few moments they cut and parried, and then he drove his point into his opponent's unarmored face and tugged his blade free. The man in front of him went down. The boy who had been knocked down had gotten hold of the dropped pistol and fired it, hitting a man who was holding a clump of horses in the road. The older son dashed out with his halberd, chopping a man down. The father had gotten hold of the musket and ammunition, and was ramming a charge into it.

Driving the point of the sword into the ground, he holstered the .38-special; as one of the loose horses dashed past, he caught the reins and stopped it, vaulting into the saddle. Then, stooping, he retrieved his sword, thankful that even in a motorized age the State Police insisted on teaching their men to ride. The fight was over, at least here. Six attackers were down, presumably dead. The other two were galloping away. Five loose horses milled about, and the two young men were trying to catch them. The older man, priming the pan of the gun, came outside, looking around.

This had only been a sideshow fight, though. The main event was half a mile down the road, where he could hear shots, yells, and screams, and where a sudden orange glare mounted into the night. He was wondering just what he'd cut himself into when the fugitives began streaming up the road. He had no trouble identifying them as such; he'd seen enough of that in Korea. Another fire was blazing up beside the first one.

Some of them had weapons, spears and axes, a few bows, and he saw one big musket. His bearded host shouted at them, and they stopped.

"What's going on, down there?" he demanded loudly.

Babble answered him. One or two tried to push past; he hit at them with his flat, cursing them luridly. The words meant nothing, but the tone did. That had worked for him in Korea, too. They all stopped, in a clump; a few cheered. Many were women and children, and not all the men were armed. Call it twenty effectives. The bodies in the road were quickly stripped of weapons; out of the corner of his eye he saw the two women of the house passing things out the door. Four of the riderless horses had been caught and mounted. More fugitives came up, saw what was going on, and joined.

"All right!" he bawled. "You guys want to live forever?" He swung his sword to include all of them, then stabbed down the road with it. "Let's go!"

A cheer went up, and as he started his horse the whole mob poured after him, shouting. They met more fugitives, who stopped, saw that a counterattack had been organized, if that were the word for it, and joined. The firelight was brighter, half a dozen houses must be burning now, but the shooting had stopped. Nobody left to shoot at, he supposed.

Then, when they were halfway to the burning village, there was a blast of forty or fifty shots in less than ten seconds, and more yelling, much of it in alarm. More shots, and then mounted men began streaming up the road; this was a rout. Everybody with guns or bows let fly at them. A horse went down, and another had its saddle emptied. Considering how many shots it had taken for one casualty in Korea, that wasn't bad. He stood up in his stirrups, which were an inch or so too short for him as it was, and yelled, "*Chaaarge!*"—like Teddy, in "*Arsenic and Old Lace.*"

A man coming in the opposite direction aimed a cut at his bare head. He parried and thrust, his point glanced from a breastplate, and before he could recover the other's horse had carried him past and among the spears and pitchforks behind. Then he was trading thrusts for cuts with another rider, wondering if none of these imbeciles ever heard that a sword had a point. By this time, the road for a hundred yards ahead, and the open field on the left, was a swirl of horsemen, chopping and firing at each other.

He got his point in under his opponent's armpit, almost had the sword wrenched from his hand, and then saw another rider coming at him, unarmored and wearing a wide hat and a cloak, aiming a pistol almost as long as the arm that held it. He urged his horse forward, swinging back for a cut at the weapon, and knew that he wouldn't make it. *O.K., Cal; your luck's run out.* There was an upflash from the pan of the pistol, a belch of flame from the muzzle, and something sledged him in the chest.

He hung onto consciousness long enough to kick his feet free of the stirrups. In that last moment, he was aware that the rider who had shot him had been a young girl.

Verkan Vall put the lighter down on the desk and took the cigarette from his mouth. Tortha Karf leaned back in the chair in which he, himself, would be sitting all too soon.

"We had one piece of luck, right at the start. The time-line is one we've already penetrated. One of our people, in a newspaper office in Philadelphia, that's the nearest large city, reported the disappearance. The press associations have it already, there's nothing we can do about that."

“Well, just what did happen, on the pickup time-line?”

“This Corporal Morrison and three other State Policemen were closing in on a house in which a wanted criminal was hiding. Morrison and another man were in front; the other two were coming in from behind. Morrison started forward, his companion covering for him with a rifle. This other man is the nearest to a witness there is, and he was watching the front of the house and was only marginally aware of Morrison. He heard the other two officers pounding on the back door and demanding admittance, and then the man they were after burst out the front door with a rifle in his hands. Morrison’s companion shouted at him to halt; the criminal raised his rifle, and the State Police officer shot him, killing him instantly.

“Then, he says, he realized that Morrison was nowhere in sight. He called to him, without answer. The man they were after was dead, he wouldn’t run off, so all three of them hunted for Morrison for almost half an hour. Then they took the body in to the county seat and had to go through a lot of formalities, and it was evening before they were back at their substation. A local reporter happened to be there at the time. He got the story, including the disappearance of Morrison, phoned it to his paper, and the press associations got it from there. Now the State Police refuse to discuss, and are even trying to deny, the disappearance.”

“They believe their man lost his nerve, bolted, and is now ashamed to come back,” Tortha Karf said. “Naturally they wouldn’t want anything like that getting out. Are you going to use that line?”

He nodded. “The hat he lost in the conveyer. It will be planted about a mile from the scene, along a stream. Then one of our people will catch a local, preferably a boy of twelve or so, give him a hypno-injection, and instruct him to find the hat and take it to the State Police. The reporter responsible for the original news break will be notified by anonymous phone call. Later, there will be the usual spate of rumors of Morrison having been seen in all sorts of unlikely places.”

“How about his family?”

“We’re in luck there, too. Unmarried, parents both dead, only a few relatives with whom he didn’t maintain contact.”

“That’s good. How about the exit?”

“We have that approximated; Aryan-Transpacific. We’re not quite sure even of the sector, because the transposition field was weak for several thousand parayears and we can’t determine the instant he broke out of the

conveyer. It'll be thirty or forty days before we have it pinpointed. We have one positive indication to look for at the scene."

The chief nodded. "The empty cartridge?"

"Yes. He used a revolver, they don't eject automatically. As soon as he was out and no longer immediately threatened, he would open his revolver, remove the empty, and replace it. I'm as sure of that as though I saw him do it. We may not be able to find it, but if we do, it'll be positive proof."

He woke, in bed under soft covers, and for a moment lay with his eyes closed. There was a clicking sound near him, and from a distance an anvil rang, and there was shouting. Then he opened his eyes. He was in a fairly large room, paneled walls and a painted ceiling; two windows on one side, both open, and nothing but blue sky visible through them. A woman, stout and gray-haired, sat under one, knitting. His boots stood beside a chest across the room, and on its top were piled his clothes and his belt and revolver. A long unsheathed sword with a swept handguard and a copper pommel leaned against the wall by the boots. His body was stiff and sore, and his upper torso was swathed in bandages.

The woman looked up quickly as he stirred, then put down her knitting and rose, going to a table and pouring water for him. Pitcher and cup were silver, elaborately chased. He took the cup, drank, and handed it back, thanking her. She replaced it on the table and went out.

He wasn't a prisoner, the presence of the sword and revolver proved that. This was the crowd that had surprised the raiders at the village. That whole business had been a piece of luck for him. He ran a hand over his chin and estimated about three days' growth of stubble. His fingernails had grown enough since last trimmed to confirm that. He'd have a nasty hole in his chest, and possibly a broken rib.

The woman returned, accompanied by a man in a cowled blue robe with an eight-pointed white star on his breast. Reversed colors from the image at the peasant's farm; a priest, doubling as doctor. The man laid a hand on his brow, felt his pulse, and spoke in a cheerfully optimistic tone; the bedside manner seemed to be a universal constant. With the woman's help, he changed the bandages and smeared the wound with ointment. The woman took out the old bandages and returned with a steaming bowl. It was turkey broth, with finely minced meat in it. While he was finishing it, two more visitors entered.

One was robed like the doctor, his cowl thrown back. He had white hair, and a good face, gentle and pleasant. His companion was a girl with blond hair cut in what would be a page-boy bob in the Twentieth Century; she had blue eyes and red lips and an impudent tilty little nose dusted with golden freckles. She wore a jerkin of something like brown suede, stitched with gold thread, a yellow under-tunic with long sleeves and a high neck, knit hose and thigh-length boots. There was a gold chain around her neck, and a gold-hilted dagger on her belt. He began to laugh when he saw her; they'd met before.

"You shot me!" he accused, then aimed an imaginary pistol, said, "Bang!" and pointed to his chest.

She said something to the older priest, he replied, and she said something to him, pantomiming shame and sorrow, covering her face with one hand and winking at him over it. When he laughed, she laughed with him. Perfectly natural mistake, she hadn't known which side he was on. The two priests held a lengthy colloquy, and the younger brought him about four ounces of something in a tumbler. It tasted alcoholic and medicinally bitter. They told him, by signs, to go to sleep, and went out, all but the gray-haired woman, who went back to her chair and her knitting. He dozed off.

Late in the afternoon he woke briefly. Outside, somebody was drilling troops. Tramping feet, a voice counting cadence, long-drawn preparatory commands, sharp commands, of execution, clattering equipment. That was another universal constant. He smiled; he wasn't going to have much trouble finding a job, here-and-now, whenever now was.

It wasn't the past. Penn's Colony had never been like this. It was more like Sixteenth Century Europe, but no Sixteenth Century cavalryman, who was as incompetent a swordsman as that gang he'd been fighting, would have lived to wear out his first pair of issue boots. And two years in college and a lot of independent reading had given him at least a nodding acquaintance with most of the gods of his own history, and none, back to Egypt and Sumaria, had been like that trio on the peasant's shrine shelf.

So it was the future. A far future, maybe a thousand years later than 1964, AD; a world devastated by atomic wars, blasted back to the Stone Age, and then bootstrap-lifted to something like the end of the Middle Ages. That wasn't important, though. Now was when he was, and now was when he was stuck.

Make the best of it, Cal. You're a soldier; you just got re-assigned, that's all.

He went back to sleep.

The next morning, after breakfast, he sign-talked the woman watching over him to bring him his tunic, and got out his pipe and tobacco and lighter from the pockets. She brought him a stool to set beside the bed to put things on. The badge on the tunic breast was twisted and lead-splotched; that was why he was still alive.

The old priest and the girl were in, an hour later. This time, she was wearing a red and gray knit frock that could have gone into Bergdorf Goodman's window with a \$200 price-tag any day, but the dagger she wore with it wasn't exactly Fifth Avenue. They greeted him, then pulled chairs up beside the bed and got to business.

First they taught him words for "You," and "Me," and "He," and "She," and names. The girl was Rylla. The old priest was Xentos. The younger priest, who came in to see his patient, was Mytron. Calvin Morrison puzzled them; evidently they didn't have surnames here-and-now. They settled for calling him Kalvan. They had several shingle-sized boards of white pine, and sticks of charcoal, to draw pictures. Rylla smoked a pipe, with a small stone bowl and a cane stem, which she carried on her belt along with her dagger. His lighter intrigued her, and she showed him her own. It was a tinderbox, the flint held down by a spring against a semicircular striker which was pushed by hand and returned for another push by a spring. With a spring to drive the striker instead of returning it, it would have done for a gunlock. By noon, they were able to tell him that he was their friend, and he was able to tell Rylla he didn't blame her for shooting him in the skirmish on the road.

They were back in the afternoon, accompanied by a gentleman with a gray mustache and imperial, wearing a garment like a fur-collared bathrobe, with a sword-belt over it. He had a large gold chain around his neck. His name was Ptosphes, and after much pantomime and picture-writing it emerged that he was Rylla's father, that he was Prince of this place, and that this place was Hostigos. Rylla's mother was dead. The raiders with whom he had fought had come from a place called Nostor, to the north and east, ruled by a Prince Gormoth. Gormoth was not well thought of in Hostigos.

The next day, he was up in a chair, and they began giving him solid food, and wine. The wine was excellent; so was the tobacco they gave him. He decided he was going to like it, here-and-now. Rylla was in at least twice a day, sometimes alone, sometimes with Xentos, and sometimes with a big man with a graying beard, Chartiphon, who seemed to be Ptosphes' top soldier. He always wore a sword, and often an ornate but battered steel back-

and-breast. Sometimes he visited alone, and occasionally accompanied by a younger officer, a cavalryman named Harmakros. Harmakros had been in the skirmish at the raided village, but Rylla had been in command.

“The gods,” he explained, “did not give Prince Ptosphes a son. A Prince should have a son, to rule after him, so the Princess Rylla must be a son to him.”

The gods, he thought, ought to be persuaded to furnish Ptosphes with a son-in-law, named Calvin Morrison, no, Kalvan. He made up his mind to give the gods a hand on that.

Chartiphon showed him a map, elaborately illuminated on parchment. Hostigos appeared to be all of Centre and Union counties, a snip of Clinton south and west of where Lock Haven ought to be, and southeastern Lycoming, east of the West Branch, which was the Athan, and south of the Bald Eagles, the Mountains of Hostigos. Nostor was the West Branch Valley from above Lock Haven to the forks of the river, and it obtruded south into Hostigos through Ante’s Gap, Dombra Gap, to take in Nippenose, Sevenhills Valley. To the west, all of Blair County, and parts of Huntington and Bedford, was the Principedom of Sask, ruled by Prince Sarrask. Sarrask was no friend; Gormoth was an open enemy.

On a bigger map, he saw that all Pennsylvania and Maryland, Delaware and the southern half of New Jersey, was the Great Kingdom of Hos-Harphax, ruled from Harphax City at the mouth of the Susquehanna by King Kaiphranos. Ptosphes, Gormoth, Sarrask and a dozen other princes were his nominal subjects. Judging from what he had seen on the night of his advent here-and-now, Kaiphranos’ authority would be maintained for about one day’s infantry march around his capital and ignored elsewhere.

He had a suspicion that Hostigos was in a bad squeeze, between Nostor and Sask. Something was bugging these people. Too often, while laughing with him—she was teaching him to read and write, now, and that was fun—Rylla would remember something she wanted to forget, and then her laughter would be strained. Chartiphon was always preoccupied; occasionally he’d forget, for a moment, what he was talking about. And he never saw Ptosphes smile.

Xentos showed him a map of the world. The world, it seemed, was not round, but flat like a pancake. Hudson’s Bay was in the exact center, North America was shaped rather like India, Florida ran almost due east and Cuba north and south. The West Indies were a few random spots to show that the

mapmaker had heard about them from somebody. Asia was attached to North America, but it was still blank. An illimitable ocean stretched around the perimeter. Europe, Africa and South America simply weren't. Xentos wanted him to show the country from which he had come. He put his finger down on central Pennsylvania's approximate location. Xentos thought he misunderstood.

"No, Kalvan. This is your home now, and we want you to stay with us, but where is the country you came from?"

"Here," he insisted. "But at another time, a thousand years from now. I had an enemy, an evil sorcerer. Another sorcerer, who was my friend, put a protection on me that I might not be slain by sorcery, so my enemy twisted time around me and hurled me far into the past, before my first known ancestor had been born, and now here I am and here I must stay."

Xentos' hand made a quick circle around the white star on his breast, and he muttered rapidly. Another universal constant.

"What a terrible fate!"

"Yes. I do not like to speak of it, but it was right that you should know. You may tell Prince Ptosphes and Princess Rylla and Chartiphon, but beg them not to speak of it to me. I must forget my old life and make a new one in this time. You may tell the others merely that I come from a far country. From here." He indicated the approximate location of Korea. "I was there, once, fighting in a great war."

"Ah; I knew you had been a warrior." Xentos hesitated, then asked: "Do you know sorcery?"

"No. My father was a priest, as you are, and wished me to become a priest also, and our priests hated sorcery. But I knew that I would never be a good priest, so when this war came, I left my studies and went to fight. Afterward, I was a warrior in my own country, to keep the peace."

Xentos nodded. "If one cannot be a good priest, one should not be a priest at all, and to be a good warrior is almost as good. Tell me, what gods did your people worship?"

"Oh, we had many gods. There was Conformity, and Authority, and Opinion. And there was Status, whose symbols were many and who rode in the great chariot Cadillac, which was almost a god itself. And there was Atombomb, the dread Destroyer, who would some day end the world. For myself, I worshiped none of them. Tell me about your gods, Xentos."

Then he filled his pipe and lit it with the tinderbox he had learned to use in place of his now fuelless Zippo. He didn't need to talk any more; Xentos

was telling him about his own god, Dralm, and about Yirtta the All-Mother, and wolf-headed Galzar the god of battle, and Tranth the lame craftsman—funny how often craftsman-gods were lame—and about all the others.

“And Styphon,” he added grudgingly. “Styphon is an evil god, and evil men serve him, and are given great wealth and power.”

After that, he noticed a subtle change in manner toward him. He caught Rylla looking at him in wondering pity. Chartiphon merely clasped his hand and said, “You’ll like it here with us, Kalvan.” Prince Ptosphes hemmed and hawed, and said: “Xentos tells me there are things you don’t want to talk about, Kalvan. Nobody will mention them to you, ever. We’re all happy to have you with us. Stay, and make this your home.”

The others treated him with profound respect. They’d been told that he was a prince from a distant land, driven from his throne by treason. They gave him clothes, more than he had ever owned before, and weapons. Rylla gave him a pair of her own pistols, one of which had wounded him in the skirmish. They were two feet long, but lighter than his .38 Colt, the barrels almost paper-thin at the muzzles. They had locks operating on the same principle as the tinderboxes, and Rylla’s name was inlaid in gold on the butts. They gave him another, larger room, and a body servant.

As soon as he was able to walk unaided, he went outside to watch the troops being drilled. They had no uniforms except scarves or sashes of Ptosphes’ colors, red and blue. The infantry wore leather or canvas jacks sewn with metal plates, and helmets not unlike the one he’d worn in Korea. Some had pikes, some halberds, and some hunting spears, and many had scythe blades with the tangs straightened out, on eight-foot shafts. Foot movements were simple and uncomplicated; the squad was unknown, and they maneuvered by platoons of forty or fifty.

A few of the firearms were huge fifteen pound muskets, aimed and fired from rests. Most were lighter, arquebuses, calivers, and a miscellany of hunting guns. There would be two or three musketeers and a dozen calivermen or arquebusiers to each spear-and-scythe platoon. There were also archers and crossbowmen. The cavalry were good; they wore cuirasses and high-combed helmets, and were armed with swords and pistols and either lances or short musketoons. The artillery was laughable; wrought-iron six to twelve pounders, hand-welded tubes strengthened with shrunk-on bands, without trunnions. They were mounted on four-wheel carts. He made up his mind to do something about that.

He also noticed that while the archers and crossbowmen practiced constantly, not a single practice shot was fired with any firearm.

He took his broadsword to the castle bladesmith and wanted it ground down into a rapier. The bladesmith thought he was crazy. He called in a cavalry lieutenant and demonstrated with a pair of wooden practice swords. Immediately, the lieutenant wanted a rapier, too. The bladesmith promised to make both of them real rapiers. By the next evening, his own was finished.

“You have enemies on both sides, Nostor and Sask, and that’s not good,” he said one evening as he and Ptosphes and Rylla and Xentos and Chartiphon sat over a flagon of wine in the Prince’s study. “You’ve made me one of you. Now tell me what I can do to help.”

“Well, Kalvan,” Ptosphes said, “you could better tell us that. You know many things we don’t. The thrusting sword”—he glanced down admiringly at his own new rapier—“and what you told Chartiphon about mounting cannon. What else can you give us to help fight our enemies?”

“Well, I can’t teach you to make weapons like that six-shooter of mine, or ammunition for it.” He tried, as simply as possible, to explain about machine industry and mass production; they only stared in uncomprehending wonder. “I can show you things you don’t know but can do with the tools you have. For instance, we cut spiral grooves in the bores of our guns to make the bullets spin. Grooved guns will shoot harder, farther and straighter than smoothbores. I can show your gunsmiths how to do that with guns you already have. And there’s another thing. He mentioned never having seen any practice firing. You have very little powder, fireseed, you call it. Is that it?”

“We haven’t enough in Hostigos to fire all the cannon of this castle once,” Chartiphon said. “And we can’t get any. The priests of Styphon will give us none, and they send cart after cart of it to Nostor.”

“You mean, you get fireseed from the priests of Styphon? Can’t you get it from anybody else, or make your own?”

They all looked at him, amazed that he didn’t know any better.

“Only Styphon’s House can make fireseed, and that by Styphon’s aid,” Xentos said. “That was what I meant when I said that Styphon gives his servants great wealth, and power even over the Great Kings.”

He gave Styphon’s House the grudging respect any good cop gives a really smart crook. Styphon’s House had a real racket. No wonder this

country was a snakepit of warring princes and barons. Styphon's House wanted it that way; it kept them in the powder business. He set down his goblet and laughed.

"You think nobody can make fireseed but Styphon's House?" he demanded. "Why, in my time, even the children could do that." Well, children who got as far as high school chemistry; he'd almost gotten expelled, once. "I can make fireseed, right here on this table!"

Ptosphes threw back his head and laughed. Just a trifle hysterically, but it was the first time he'd ever heard the Prince laugh. Chartiphon banged a fist on the table and shouted, "Ha, Gormoth! Now see how soon your head goes up over your own gate!" And no War Crimes foolishness about it, either. Rylla flung her arms around him. "Kalvan! You really and truly can?"

"But it is only by the power of Styphon . . ." Xentos began.

"Styphon's a big fake; his priests are a pack of impudent swindlers. You want to see me make fireseed? Get Mytron in here; he has everything I need in his dispensary. I want sulfur, he has that, and saltpeter, he has that." Mytron gives sulfur mixed with honey for colds; saltpeter was supposed to cool the blood. "And charcoal, and a couple of brass mortars and pestles, and a flour-screen, and balance-scales."

"Go on, man; hurry!" Ptosphes cried. "Bring him anything he wants."

Xentos went out. He asked for a pistol, and Ptosphes brought one from a closet behind him. He opened the pan and dumped out the priming on a sheet of parchment, touching it off with a lighted splinter. It scorched the parchment, which it shouldn't have, and left too much black residue. Styphon wasn't a very honest powder-maker; he cheapened his product with too much charcoal and not enough saltpeter. Xentos returned, accompanied by Mytron; the two priests carried jars, and a bucket of charcoal, and the other things. Xentos seemed dazed; Mytron was scared and trying not to show it.

He put Mytron to work grinding charcoal in one mortar and Xentos to grinding saltpeter in the other. The sulfur was already pulverized. Screening each, he mixed them in a dry goblet, saltpeter .75, charcoal .15, sulfur .10; he had to think a little to remember that.

"But it's just dust," Chartiphon objected.

"Yes. The mixture has to be moistened, worked into a dough, pressed into cakes and dried, and then ground and sieved. We can't do all that now,

but this will flash. Look.”

He primed the pistol with a pinch of it, aimed at a half burned log in the fireplace, and squeezed. The pistol roared and kicked. Ptosphes didn't believe in reduced charges, that was for sure. Outside, somebody shouted, feet pounded, and the door flew open. A guard with a halberd looked in.

“The Lord Kalvan is showing us something with a pistol,” Ptosphes said. “There may be more shots; nobody is to worry.”

“All right,” he said, when the guard closed the door. “Now we see how it fires.” He poured in about forty grains, wadded it with a bit of rag, and primed it, handing it to Rylla. “You fire. This is a great moment in the history of Hostigos. I hope.”

She pushed down the striker, aimed into the fireplace and squeezed. The report wasn't quite as loud, but it did fire. They tried it with a bullet, which went into the log half an inch. He laid the pistol on the table. The room was full of smoke, and they were all coughing, but nobody cared. Chartiphon went to the door and bawled into the hall for more wine.

“But you said no prayers,” Mytron faltered. “You just made fireseed. Just like cooking soup.”

“That's right. And soon everybody will make fireseed.”

And when that day comes, the priests of Styphon will be out on the sidewalk beating a drum for pennies. Chartiphon wanted to know how soon they would be able to march on Nostor.

“It will take more fireseed than Kalvan can make here on this table,” Ptosphes told him. “We will need saltpeter, and charcoal, and sulfur. We will have to teach people how to get these things, and grind and mix them. We will need things we don't have, and tools to make them. And nobody knows all this but Kalvan, and there is only one of him.”

Well, glory be, Ptosphes had gotten something from the lecture on production, if nobody else had.

“Mytron knows a few things, I think. Where did you get the sulfur and the saltpeter?” he asked the doctor-priest.

Mytron had downed his first goblet of wine at one gulp. He had taken three to the second; now he was working his way down the third and coming out of shock nicely. It was about as he thought. The saltpeter was found in crude lumps under manure piles and refined; the sulfur was gotten by evaporating water from the sulfur springs in Sugar Valley, Wolf Valley here-and-now. For some reason, mention of this threw both Ptosphes and Chartiphon into a fury. He knew how to extract both, on a quart-jar scale. He

was a trifle bewildered when told how much would be needed for military purposes.

“But this’ll take time,” Chartiphon objected. “And as soon as Gormoth hears about it, he’ll attack, before we can get any made.”

“Don’t let him hear about it. Clamp down the security.” He had to explain that. “Cavalry patrols, on all the roads and trails out of Hostigos; let anybody in, but don’t let anybody out. And here’s another thing. I’ll have to give orders, and people won’t like them. Will I be obeyed?”

“By anybody who wants to keep his head on his shoulders,” Ptosphes said. “You speak with my voice.”

“And with mine, Lord Kalvan!” Chartiphon was on his feet, extending his sword for him to touch the hilt. “I am at your orders; you command here.”

They gave him a room inside the main gateway of the citadel, across from the guardroom, a big flagstone-floored place with the indefinable but unmistakable flavor of a police court. The walls were white plaster, he could write and draw diagrams on them with charcoal. Paper was unknown, here-and-now. He decided to do something about that, after the war. It was a wonder these people had gotten as far as they had without it. Rylla attached herself to him as adjutant. He gathered in Mytron and the chief priest of Tranth, all the master-artisans in Tarr-Hostigos and some from Hostigo Town, a couple of Chartiphon’s officers, and some soldiers to carry messages.

Charcoal was going to be easy, there was plenty of that. For sulfur evaporation he’d need big pans, and sheet iron, larger than a breastplate or a cooking pan—all unavailable. There were bog-iron mines over in Bald Eagle, Listra Valley, and ironworks, but no rolling mill. They’d have to beat sheet iron out by hand in two-foot squares and weld them together like a patch quilt. Saltpeter could be accumulated from all over. Manure piles, at least one to a farm, were the best source, and stables, cellars, underground drains. He set up a saltpeter commission, headed by one of Chartiphon’s officers, with authority to go anywhere and enter anything, to hang any subordinate who abused that authority out of hand, and to deal just as summarily with anybody who tried to obstruct.

Mobile units, oxcarts loaded with caldrons, tubs, tools and the like, to go from farm to farm. Peasant women to be collected and taught to leach nitrated soil and purify nitrates.

Grinding mills; there was plenty of water power, and the water wheel was known, here-and-now. Gristmills could be converted. Special grinding equipment, designing of. Sifting screens, cloth. Mixing machines, big casks with counter-rotating paddle wheels inside. Presses to squeeze dough into cakes. Mills to grind caked powder; he spent considerable thought on a set of regulations to prevent anything from striking a spark around them, with bloodthirsty enforcement threats.

During the morning, he ground up the cake he'd made the night before, running it through a couple of sieves to FFFg fineness. A hundred-grain charge in one of the big eight-bore muskets drove the two-ounce ball an inch deeper into a log than an equal charge of Styphon's Best, and fouled the bore much less.

By noon, he was almost sure that most of his War Production Board understood most of what he'd told them. In the afternoon, there was a meeting in the outer bailey of as many of the people who would be working on the Fireseed Project as could be collected. There was an invocation of Dralm by Xentos. Ptosphes spoke, bearing down heavily on the fact that the Lord Kalvan had full authority and would be backed to the limit, by the headsman if necessary. Chartiphon made a speech, picturing the howling wilderness they were going to make of Nostor. He made a speech, himself, emphasizing that there was nothing whatever of a supernatural nature about fireseed. The meeting then broke up into small groups, everybody having his own job explained to him. He was kept running back and forth from one to another to explain to the explainers.

In the evening, they had a feast. By that time, he and Rylla had gotten a rough table of organization charcoaled onto the wall in his headquarters.

Of the next four days, he spent eighteen hours of each in that room, talking to five or six hundred people. The artisans, who had a guild organization, objected to peasants invading their crafts. The masters complained that the apprentices and young journeymen were becoming intractable, which meant that they had started thinking for themselves. The peasants objected to having their dunghills forked down and the ground under them dug up, and to being put to unaccustomed work. The landlords objected to having the peasants taken from the fields, and predicted that the year's crop would be lost.

"Don't worry about that," he told them. "If we win, we'll eat Gormoth's crops. If we lose, we'll all be too dead to eat."

And the Iron Curtain went down. Itinerant packtraders and wagoners began to collect in Hostigos Town, trapped for the duration. Sooner or later,

Gormoth and Sarrask would start wondering why nobody was leaving Hostigos, and send spies in through the woods to find out. Organize some counterespionage; get a few spies of his own into both principedoms.

By the fifth day, the sulfur-evaporation plant was operating, and saltpeter production had started, only a few pounds of each, but that would increase rapidly. He put Mytron in charge of the office, and went out to supervise mill construction. It was at this time that he began wearing armor, at least six and often eight hours a day—helmet over a padded coif, with a band of fine-linked mail around his throat and under his chin, steel back-and-breast over a quilted arming-doublet with mail sleeves, mail under the arms, and a mail skirt to below his hips, and double leather hose with mail between. The whole panoply weighed close to forty pounds, and his life was going to depend on accustoming himself to it.

Verkan Vall watched Tortha Karf spin the empty cartridge on the top of his desk. It was a very valuable empty cartridge; it had cost over ten thousand man-hours of crawling on hands and knees and pawing among dead hemlock needles, not counting transposition time.

“A marvel you found it, Vall. Aryan-Transpacific?”

“Oh, yes. We were sure of that from the first. Styphon’s House subsector.” He gave the numerical designation of the exact time-line.

“Styphon’s House. That’s that gunpowder theocracy, isn’t it?”

That was it. At one time, Styphon had been a minor god of healing. Still was, on most of Aryan-Transpacific. But, three hundred years ago, on one time-line, a priest of Styphon, trying to concoct a new remedy for something, had mixed a batch of saltpeter, charcoal and sulfur—fortunately for him, a small batch—and put it on the fire. For fifty years, the mixture had been a temple miracle, and then its propellant properties were discovered, and Styphon had gone out of medical practice and into the munitions business. The powder had been improved by priestly researchers; weapons to use it were designed. Now no king or prince without gunpowder stood a chance against one with it. No matter who sat on any throne, Styphon’s House was his master, because Styphon’s House could throw him off it at will.

“I wonder if this Morrison knows how to make gunpowder,” Tortha Karf said.

“I’ll find that out. I’m going out there myself.”

“You don’t have to, you know. You have hundreds of men who could do that.”

He shook his head obstinately. “After Year-End Day, I’m going to be chained to that chair of yours. But until then, I’m going to work overtime as much as I can.” He leaned over to the map-screen and twiddled the selector until he had the Great Kingdom of Hos-Harphax. “I’m going in about here,” he said. “I’ll be a pack trader, they go anywhere without question. I’ll have a saddle horse and three pack horses, with loads of appropriate merchandise. That’s in the adjoining principedom of Sask. I’ll travel slowly, to let word travel ahead of me. I may even hear something about this Morrison before I enter Hostigos.”

“What’ll you do when you find him?”

He shrugged. “That will depend on what he’s doing, and particularly how he’s accounting for himself. I don’t want to, the man’s a police officer like ourselves, but I’m afraid I’m going to have to kill him. He knows too much.”

“What does he know, Vall?”

“First, he’s seen the inside of a conveyer. He knows that it was something completely alien to his own culture and technology. Then, he knows that he was shifted in time, because he wasn’t shifted to another place, and he will recognize that the conveyer was the means affecting that shift. From that, he will deduce a race of time-travelers.

“Now, he knows enough of the history of his own time-line to know that he wasn’t shifted into the past. And he will also know he wasn’t shifted into the future. That’s all limestone country, where he was picked up and dropped, and on his own time-line it’s been quarried extensively for the past fifty or more years. Traces of those operations would remain for tens of thousands of years, and he will find none of them. So what does that leave?”

“A lateral shift, and people who travel laterally in time,” the chief said. “Why, that’s the Paratime Secret itself.”

There would be a feast at Tarr-Hostigos that evening. All morning cattle and pigs, lowing and squealing, had been driven in and slaughtered. Woodcutters’ axes thudded for the roasting pits, casks of wine came up from the cellars. He wished the fireseed mills were as busy as the castle kitchens and bakeries. A whole day’s production shot to hell. He said as much to Rylla.

“But, Kalvan, they’re all so happy.” She was pretty excited about it, herself. “And they’ve worked so hard.”

He had to grant that, and maybe the morale gain would offset a day’s work lost. And they had a full hundred-weight of fireseed, fifty per cent better than Styphon’s Best, and half of it made in the last two days.

“It’s been so long since anybody had anything to be happy about. When we had feasts, everybody would get drunk as soon as they could, to keep from thinking about what was coming. And now, maybe it won’t come at all.”

And now, they were all drunk on a hundred pounds of black powder. Five thousand arquebus rounds at the most. They’d have to do better than twenty-five pounds a day; have to get it up to a hundred. Mixing, caking and grinding was the bottleneck, that meant still more mill machinery, and there weren’t enough men able to build it. It would mean stopping work on the rifling machinery, and on the carriages and limbers for the light four-pounders the ironworks were turning out.

It would take a year to build the sort of army he wanted, and Gormoth or Nostor would attack in two months at most.

He brought that up, that afternoon, at General Staff meeting. Like rifling and trunnions on cannon and teaching swordsmen to use the point, that was new for here-and-now. You just hauled a lot of peasants together and armed them, that was Organization. You picked a march-route, that was Strategy. You lined up your men somehow and shot or hit anybody in front of you, that was Tactics. And Intelligence was something mounted scouts, if any, brought in at the last moment from a mile ahead. It cheered him to recall that that would be Gormoth’s idea of the Art of War. Why, with ten thousand men Gustavus Adolphus or the Duke of Parma or Gonzalo de Córdoba could have gone through all five of these Great Kingdoms like a dose of croton oil.

Ptosphes and Rylla were present *ex officio* as Prince and Heiress-Apparent. The Lord Kalvan was Commander-in-Chief. Chartiphon was Field Marshal and Chief of Operations. Harmakros was G-2, an elderly infantry captain was drillmaster, paymaster, quartermaster, inspector-general and head of the draft board. A civilian merchant, who wasn’t losing any money on it, was in charge of supply and procurement. Xentos, who was Ptosphes’ chancellor as well as chief ecclesiastic, attended to political matters, and also fifth-column activities, another of Lord Kalvan’s marvelous new ideas, mainly because he was in touch with the priests of Dralm in Nostor and Sask, all of whom hated Styphon’s House beyond expression.

The first blaze of optimism had died down, he was glad to observe. Chartiphon was grumbling:

“We have three thousand at most; Gormoth has ten thousand, six thousand mercenaries and four thousand of his own people. Making our own fireseed gives us a chance, which we didn’t have before, but that’s all.”

“Two thousand of his own people,” somebody said. “He won’t take the peasants out of the fields.”

“Then he’ll attack earlier,” Ptosphes said. “While our peasants are getting the harvest in.”

He looked at the map painted on one of the walls. Gormoth could invade up the Listra Valley, but that would only give him half of Hostigos—less than that. The whole line of the Mountains of Hostigos was held at every gap except one, Dombra Gap, guarded by Tarr-Dombra, lost by treachery three quarters of a century ago, and Sevenhills Valley behind it.

“We’ll have to take Tarr-Dombra and clean Sevenhills Valley out,” he said.

Everybody stared at him. It was Chartiphon who first found his voice.

“Man! You never saw Tarr-Dombra, or you wouldn’t talk like that. It’s smaller than Tarr-Hostigos, but it’s even stronger.”

“That’s right,” the retread captain who was G-1 and part of G-4 supported him.

“Do the Nostori think it can’t be taken, too?” he asked. “Then it can be. Prince, have you plans of the castle?”

“Oh, yes. On a big scroll, in one of my coffers. It was my grandfather’s, and we always hoped . . .”

“I’ll want to see them. Later will do. Do you know of any changes made on it since?”

Not on the outside, at least. He asked about the garrison; five hundred, Harmakros thought. A hundred regular infantry of Gormoth’s, and four hundred cavalry for patrolling around the perimeter of Sevenhills Valley. They were mercenaries, and they were the ones who had been raiding into Hostigos.

“Then stop killing raiders who can be taken alive. Prisoners can be made to talk.” The Geneva Convention was something else unknown here-and-now. He turned to Xentos. “Is there a priest of Dralm in Sevenhills Valley?”

Can you get in touch with him, and will he help us? Explain that this is a war against Styphon's House."

"He knows that, and he will help, as he can. But he can't get into Tarr-Dombra. There is a priest of Galzar there for the mercenaries, and a priest of Styphon for the lord of the castle. Among the Nostori, Dralm is but a god for the peasants."

That rankled. Yes, the priests of Dralm would help.

"All right. But he can talk to people who can get in, can't he? And he can send messages, and organize an espionage apparatus among his peasants. I want to know everything that can be found out, no matter how trivial. Particularly, I want to know the guard-routine at the castle, and how it's supplied. And I want it observed all the time; Harmakros, you find men to do that. I take it we can't storm the place, or you'd have done that long ago. Then we'll have to surprise it."

Verkan the pack trader went up the road, his horse plodding unhurriedly and the pack horses on the lead-line trailing behind. He was hot and sticky under his steel back-and-breast, and sweat ran down his cheeks from under his helmet into his new beard, but nobody ever saw an unarmed pack trader, so he had to endure it. They were local-made, from an adjoining near-identical time-line, and so were his clothes, his sword, the carbine in the saddle sheath, his horse gear, and the loads of merchandise, all except a metal coffer on top of one pack load.

Reaching the brow of the hill, he started down the other side, and as he did he saw a stir in front of a thatched and whitewashed farm cottage. Men mounting horses; glints of armor, and red-and-blue Hostigi colors. Another cavalry post, the third he'd passed since crossing the border from Sask. The other two had ignored him, but this crowd meant to stop him. Two had lances, the third a musketoon, and the fourth, who seemed to be in command, had his holsters open and his right hand on his horse's neck.

He reined in his horse; the pack horses came to a well-trained stop.

"Good cheer, soldiers," he greeted.

"Good cheer, trader," the man with his hand close to his pistol-butt replied. "From Sask?"

"Sask last. From Ulthor, this trip; Grefftscharr by birth." Ulthor was the lake port to the northwest; Grefftscharr was the kingdom around the Great Lakes. "I'm for Agrys City."

One of the troopers laughed. The sergeant asked: “Have you any fireseed?”

“About twenty charges.” He touched the flask on his belt. “I tried to get some in Sask, but when the priests of Styphon heard that I was coming through Hostigos they’d give me none.”

“I know; we’re under the ban, here.” It did not seem to distress him greatly. “But I’m afraid you’ll not see Agrys soon. We’re on the edge of war with Nostor, and the Lord Kalvan wants no tales carried, so he’s ordered that no one may leave Hostigos.”

He cursed; that was expected of him.

“I’d feel ill-used, too, in your place,” the sergeant sympathized, “but when princes and lords order, commonfolk obey. It won’t be so bad, though. You can get good prices in Hostigos Town or at Tarr-Hostigos, and then, if you know a skilled trade, you can find work at good wages. Or you might take the colors. You’re well armed and horsed; the Lord Kalvan welcomes all such.”

“The Lord Kalvan? I thought Ptosphes was Prince of Hostigos.”

“Why, so he is, Dralm guard him, but the Lord Kalvan, Dralm guard him, too, is the war leader. It’s said he’s a prince himself, from a far land. It’s also said that he’s a sorcerer, but that I doubt.”

Ah, yes; the stranger prince from afar. And among these people, Corporal Calvin Morrison—he willed himself no longer to think of the man as anything but the Lord Kalvan—would be suspected of sorcery. He chatted pleasantly with the sergeant and the troopers, asking about inns, about prices being paid for things, all the questions a wandering trader would ask, then bade them good luck and rode on. He passed other farms along the road. At most of them, work was going on; men were forking down dunghills and digging under them, fires burned, and caldrons steamed over them. He added that to the cheerfulness with which the sergeant and his men had accepted the ban of Styphon’s House.

Styphon, it seemed, had acquired a competitor.

Hostigos Town spread around a low hill and a great spring as large as a small lake, facing the mountains which, on the Europeo-American Sector, had been quarried into sheer cliffs. The Lord Kalvan wouldn’t fail to notice that. Above the gap stood a strong castle; that would be Tarr-Hostigos, *tarr* meant castle, or stronghold. The streets were crowded with carts and wagons; the artisans’ quarter was noisy with the work of smiths and joiners. He found the Sign of the Red Halberd, the inn the sergeant had commended

to him. He put up his horses and safe-stowed the packs, all but his personal luggage, his carbine, and the metal coffer. A servant carried the former; he took the coffer over one shoulder and followed to the room he had been given.

When he was alone, he set the coffer down. It was an almost featureless block of bronze, without visible lock or hinges, only two bright steel ovals on the top. Pressing his thumbs to these, he heard a slight click as the photoelectric lock inside responded to his thumbprint patterns. The lid opened. Inside were four globes of gleaming coppery mesh, a few small instruments with dials and knobs, and a little sigma-ray needler, a ladies' model, small enough to be covered by his hand, but as deadly as the big one he usually carried. It was silent, and it killed without trace that any autopsy would reveal.

There was also an antigrav unit, attached to the bottom of the coffer; it was on, the tiny pilot light glowed red. When he switched it off, the floor boards under the coffer creaked. Lined with collapsed metal, it now weighed over half a ton. He pushed down the lid, which only his thumbprints could open, and heard the lock click.

The common room downstairs was crowded and noisy. He found a vacant place at one of the long tables and sat down. Across from him, a man with a bald head and a small straggling beard grinned at him.

“New fish in the net?” he asked. “Welcome. Where from?”

“Ulthor, with three horse loads. My name’s Verkan.”

“Mine’s Skranga.” The bald man was from Agrys City.

“They took them all, fifty of them. Paid me less than I asked, but more than I thought they would, so I guess I got a fair price. I had four Trygathi herders, they’re all in the cavalry, now. I’m working in the fireseed mill.”

“The what?” He was incredulous. “You mean these people make their own fireseed? But nobody but the priests of Styphon can do that.”

Skranga laughed. “That’s what I thought, when I came here, but anybody can do it. No more trick than boiling soap. See, they get saltpeter from under dunghills, and . . .”

He detailed the process, step by step. The man facing him joined the conversation; he even understood, dimly, the theory. The charcoal was what burned, the sulfur was the kindling, and the saltpeter made the air to blow up the fire and blow the bullet out of the gun. And there was no secrecy about

it, at least inside Hostigos. Except for keeping the news out of Nostor until he had enough fireseed for a war, the Lord Kalvan simply didn't care.

"I bless Dralm for bringing me into this," the horse trader said. "When people can leave here, I'm going some place and start making fireseed myself. Why, I'll be rich in a few years, and so can you."

He finished his meal, said he had to return to work, and left. A cavalry officer who had been sitting a few places down the table picked up his cup and flagon and took the vacant seat.

"You just came in?" he asked. "From Nostor?"

"No, from Sask." The answer seemed to disappoint the cavalryman; he went into the Ulthor-Grefftscharr story again. "How long will I be kept from going on?"

"Till we fight the Nostori and beat them. What do the Saski think we're doing here?"

"Waiting to have your throats cut. They don't know anything about your making fireseed."

The officer laughed. "Ha! Some of them'll get theirs cut, if Prince Sarrask doesn't mind his step. You say you have three horse loads of Grefftscharr wares; any weapons?"

"Some sword blades. Some daggers, a dozen gunlocks, three good shirts of rivet-link mail, bullet molds. And brassware, and jewelry, of course."

"Well, take your loads up to Tarr-Hostigos. They have a little fair each evening in the outer bailey, you can sell anything you have. Go early. Use my name"—he gave it—"and speak to Captain Harmakros. He'll be glad of any news you have."

He re-packed his horses, when he had eaten, and led them up the road to the castle above the gap. Along the wall of the outer bailey, inside the gate, were workshops, all busy. One thing he noticed was a gun carriage for a light field piece being put together, not a little cart, but two big wheels and a trail, to be hauled with a limber. The gun for it was the sort of wrought-iron four-pounder normal for this sector, but it had trunnions, which was not. The Lord Kalvan, again.

Like all the local gentry, Captain Harmakros wore a small neat beard. His armor was rich but well battered, but the long rapier on his belt was new. He asked a few questions, then listened to a detailed account of what Verkan

the trader had seen and heard in Sask; the mercenary companies Sarrask had hired, the names of the captains, their strength and equipment.

“You’ve kept your eyes open and your wits about you,” he commented. “I wish you’d come through Nostor instead. Were you ever a soldier?”

“All traders are soldiers, in their own service.”

“Yes, well when you’ve sold your loads, you’ll be welcome in ours. Not as a common trooper, as a scout. You want to sell your pack horses, too? We’ll give you your own price for them.”

“If I sell my loads, yes.”

“You’ll have no trouble doing that. Stay about, have your meals with the officers here. We’ll find something for you.”

He had some tools, for both wood and metal work. He peddled them among the artisans, for a good price in silver and a better one in information. Beside cannon with trunnions on regular field-carriages, Kalvan had introduced rifling in small arms. Nobody knew whence Kalvan had come, but they knew it had been a great distance.

The officers with whom he ate listened avidly to what he had to tell about his observations in Sask. Nostor first, and then Sask, seemed to be the schedule. When they talked about the Lord Kalvan, the coldest expressions were of deep respect, and shaded up to hero-worship. But they knew nothing about him before the night he had appeared at a peasant’s cottage and rallied a rabble fleeing from a raided village.

He sold the mail and sword blades and gunlocks as a lot to one of the officers; the rest of the stuff he spread to offer to the inmates of the castle. He saw the Lord Kalvan strolling through the crowd, in full armor and wearing a rapier and a Colt .38-special on his belt. He had grown a small beard since the photograph the Paratime Police had secured on Euro-
American had been taken. Clinging to his arm was a beautiful blond girl in male riding dress; Prince Ptosphes’ daughter Rylla, he was told. He had already heard the story of how she had shot him by mistake in a skirmish and brought him to Tarr-Hostigos to be cared for. The happy possessiveness with which she held his arm, and the tenderness with which he looked at her, made him smile. Then the smile froze on his lips and died in his eyes as he wondered what Kalvan had told her privately.

Returning to the Red Halberd, he spent some time and money in the taproom. Everybody, as far as he could learn, seemed satisfied that Kalvan had come, with or without divine guidance, to Hostigos in a perfectly normal manner. Finally he went to his room.

Pressing his thumbs to the sensitized ovals, he opened the coffer and lifted out one of the gleaming copper-mesh balls. It opened at pressure on a small stud; he drew out a wire with a mouthpiece attached, and spoke for a long time into it.

“So far,” he concluded, “there seems to be no question of anything paranormal about the man in anybody’s mind. I have not yet made any contacts with anybody who would confide in me to the contrary. I have been offered an opportunity to take service under him as a scout; I intend doing this. Some assistance can be given me in carrying out this work. I will find a location for a conveyer-head; this will have to be somewhere in the woods near Hostigos Town. I will send a ball through when I do. Verkan Vall, ending communication.”

Then he set the timer of the transposition field generator and switched on the antigrav unit. Carrying the ball to the open window, he released it. It rose quickly into the night, and then, high above, among the many visible stars, there was an instant’s flash. It could have been a meteor.

Kalvan sat on a rock under a tree, wishing that he could smoke, and knowing that he was beginning to be scared. He cursed mentally. It didn’t mean anything, as soon as things got started he’d forget to be scared, but it always happened before, and he hated it. It was quiet on the mountain top, even though there were two hundred men sitting or squatting or lying around him, and another five hundred, under Chartiphon and Prince Ptosphes, five hundred yards behind. There were fifty more a hundred yards ahead, a skirmish-line of riflemen. Now there was a new word in the here-and-now military lexicon. They were the first riflemen on any battlefield in the history of here-and-now. A few of the rifles were big fifteen to twenty pound muskets, eight- to six-bore; mostly they were calivers, sixteen- and twenty-bore, the size and weight of a Civil War musket. They were commanded by the Grefftscharr trader, Verkan. There had been objection to giving an outland stranger so important a command; he had informed the objectors, stiffly, that he had been an outland stranger himself only recently.

Out in front of Verkan’s line, in what the defenders of Tarr-Dombra thought was cleared ground, were fifteen sharpshooters. They all had big-bore muskets, rifled and fitted with peep-sights, zeroed in for just that range. The condition of that supposedly cleared approach was the most promising thing about the whole operation. The trees had been felled and the stumps rooted out, but the Nostori thought Tarr-Dombra couldn’t be taken and that nobody would try to take it, so they’d gone slack. There were bushes all

over it up to a man's waist, and many of them were high enough to hide behind standing up.

His men were hard enough to see even in the open. The helmets had been carefully rusted, so had the body-armor and every gun-barrel or spearhead. Nobody wore anything but green or brown, most of them had bits of greenery fastened to their helmets and clothes. The whole operation, with over twelve hundred men, had been rehearsed a dozen times, each time some being eliminated until they were down to eight hundred of the best.

There was a noise, about what a feeding wild-turkey would make, in front of him, and then a voice said, "Lord Kalvan!" It was Verkan, the Grefftscharrer. He had a rifle in his hand, and wore a dirty green-gray hooded smock; his sword and belt were covered with green and brown rags.

"I never saw you till you spoke," he commented.

"The wagons are coming. They're around the top switchback, now."

He nodded. "We start, then." His mouth was dry. What was that thing in "For Whom the Bell Tolls" about spitting to show you weren't afraid? He couldn't do that, now. He nodded to the boy squatting beside him; he picked up his arquebus and started back toward where Ptosphes and Chartiphon had the main force.

And Rylla! He cursed vilely, in English; there was no satisfaction in taking the name of Dralm in vain, or blaspheming Styphon. She'd announced that she was coming along. He'd told her she was doing nothing of the sort. So had her father, and so had Chartiphon. She'd thrown a tantrum; thrown other things, too. In the end, she had come along. He was going to have his hands full with that girl, when he married her.

"All right," he said softly. "Let's go earn our pay."

The men on either side of him rose, two spears or scythe-blade things to every arquebus, though some of the spearmen had pistols in their belts. He and Verkan went ahead, stopping at the edge of the woods, where the riflemen crouched behind trees, and looked across the open four hundred yards at Tarr-Dombra, the castle that couldn't be taken, its limestone walls rising beyond the chasm that had been quarried straight across the mountain top. The drawbridge was down and the portcullis was up, a few soldiers in black-and-orange scarves—his old college colors, he oughtn't to shoot them—loitering in the gateway. A few more kept perfunctory watch from the battlements.

Chartiphon and Ptosphes brought their men, one pike to every three calivers and arquebuses, up with a dreadful crashing and clattering that almost stood his hair on end under his helmet and padded coif, but nobody at the castle seemed to have heard it. Chartiphon wore a long sack, with neck and arm holes, over his cuirass, and what looked like a well-used dishrag wrapped around his helmet. Ptosphes was in brown, with browned armor, so was Rylla. They all looked to the left, where the road came up the side and onto the top of the mountain.

Four cavalrymen, black-and-orange scarves and lance-pennons, came into view. They were only fake Princeton men; he hoped they'd remember to tear that stuff off before some other Hostigi shot them. A long ox-wagon followed, piled high with hay and eight Hostigi infantrymen under it, then two more cavalrymen in false Nostori colors, another wagon, and six more cavalry. Two more wagons followed.

The first four cavalrymen clattered onto the drawbridge and spoke to the guards at the gate, then rode through. Two of the wagons followed. The third rumbled onto the drawbridge and stopped directly under the portcullis. That was the one with the log framework on top and the log slung underneath. The driver must have cut the strap that held that up, jamming the wagon. The fourth wagon, the one loaded to the top of the bed with rocks, stopped on the outer end of the drawbridge, weighting it down. A pistol banged inside the gate, and another; there were shouts of "Hostigos! Hostigos!" The hay seemed to explode off the two wagons in sight as men piled out of them.

He blew his Pennsylvania State Police whistle, and half a dozen big elephant-size muskets bellowed, from places he'd have sworn there had been nobody at all. Verkan's rifle platoon began firing, sharp whip-crack reports like none of the smoothbores. He hoped they were remembering to patch their bullets; that was something new to them. Then he blew his whistle twice and started running forward.

The men who had been showing themselves on the walls were all gone; a musket-shot or so showed that the snipers hadn't gotten all of them. He ran past a man with a piece of fishnet over his helmet, stuck full of oak twigs, who was ramming a musket. Gray powder-smoke hung in the gateway, and everybody who had been outside had gotten in. Yells of "Hostigo!" and "Nostor!" and shots and blade-clashing from within. He broke step and looked back; his two hundred were pouring after him, keeping properly spaced out, the arquebusiers not firing. All the shooting was coming from where Chartiphon—and Rylla, he hoped—had formed a line two hundred yards from the walls and were plastering the battlements, firing as rapidly as

they could reload. A cannon went off above when he was almost at the end of the drawbridge, and then, belatedly, the portcullis came down to stop seven feet from the ground on the top of the log framework hidden under the hay on the third wagon.

All six of the oxen on the last wagon were dead; the drivers had been furnished short-handle axes for that purpose. The oxen on the portcullis-stopper had also been killed. The gate towers on both sides had already been taken. There were black-and-orange scarves lying where they had been ripped off, and more on corpses. But shots were beginning to come from the citadel, across the outer bailey, and a mob of Nostori were pouring out from its gate. This, he thought, was the time to expend some .38's.

Feet apart, left hand on hip, he aimed and emptied the Colt, killing six men with six shots, timed-fire rate. He'd done just as well at that range on silhouette targets many a time; that was all this was. They were the front six; the men behind them stopped momentarily, and then the men behind him swept around him, arquebuses banging and pikemen and halberdiers running forward. He holstered the empty Colt, he only had eight rounds left, now, and drew his rapier and poignard. Another cannon on the outside wall thundered; he hoped Rylla and Chartiphon hadn't been in front of it. Then he was fighting his way through the citadel gate.

Behind, in the outer bailey, something beside "Nostor!" and "Hostigos!" was being shouted. It was:

"Mercy, comrade! Mercy; I yield!"

He heard more of that as the morning passed. Before noon, the Nostori garrison had either been given mercy or hadn't needed it. There had only been those two cannon-shots, though between them they had killed and wounded fifty men. Nobody was crazy enough to attack Tarr-Dombra, so they'd left the cannon empty, and had only been given time to load and fire two. He doubted if they'd catch Gormoth with his panzer down again.

The hardest fighting was inside the citadel. He ran into Rylla there, with Chartiphon trying to keep up with her. There was a bright scar on her browned helmet and blood on her sword; she was laughing happily. He expected that taking the keep would be even bloodier work, but as soon as they had the citadel it surrendered. By that time he had used up all his rounds for the Colt.

They hauled down Gormoth's black flag with the orange lily and ran up Ptosphes' halberd-head, blue on red. They found four huge bombards,

throwing hundred-pound stone cannon balls, and handspiked them around to bear on the little town of Dyssa, at the mouth of Pine Creek, Gorge River here-and-now, and fired one round from each to announce that Tarr-Dombra was under new management. They set the castle cooks to work cutting up and roasting the oxen from the two rear wagons. Then they turned their attention to the prisoners herded in the inner bailey.

First, there were the mercenaries. They would enter the service of Ptosphes, though they could not be used against Nostor until their captain's terms of contract with Gormoth had run out. They would be sent to the Sask border. Then, there were Gormoth's own troops. They couldn't be used at all, but they could be put to work, as long as they were given soldiers' pay and soldierly treatment. Then, there was the governor of the castle, a Count Pheblon, cousin to Prince Gormoth, and his officers. They would be released, on oath to send their ransoms in silver to Hostigos. The priest of Galzar elected to go to Hostigos with his parishoners.

As for the priest of Styphon, Chartiphon wanted him questioned under torture, and Ptosphes thought he ought merely to be beheaded on the spot.

"Send him to Nostor with Pheblon," Kalvan said. "With a letter for his highpriest—no, for the Supreme Priest, Styphon's Voice. Tell Styphon's Voice that we make our own fireseed, that we will teach everybody to make it, and that we will not rest until Styphon's House is utterly destroyed."

Everybody, including those who had been making suggestions for novel and interesting ways of putting the priest to death, shouted in delight.

"And send Gormoth a copy of the letter, and a letter offering him peace and friendship. Tell him we'll teach his soldiers how to make fireseed, and they can make it in Nostor when they're sent home."

"Kalvan!" Ptosphes almost howled. "What god has addled your wits? Gormoth's our enemy!"

"Anybody who can make fireseed will be our enemy, because Styphon's House will be his. If Gormoth doesn't realize that now, he will soon enough."

Verkan the Grefftscharr trader commanded the party that galloped back to Hostigos with the good news—Tarr-Dombra taken, with over two hundred prisoners, a hundred and fifty horses, four tons of fireseed, twenty cannon. And Sevenhills Valley was part of Hostigos again. Harmakros had destroyed a company of mercenary cavalry, killing twenty and capturing the rest, and he had taken Styphon's temple farm, a richly productive nitriary,

freeing the slaves and butchering the priests and the guards. And the once persecuted priest of Dralm had gathered all the peasants for a thanksgiving, telling them that the Hostigi came not as conquerors but as liberators.

He seemed to recall having heard that before, on a number of paratemporal areas, including Calvin Morrison's own.

He also brought copies of the letters Prince Ptosphes had written, or, more likely, which Kalvan had written and Ptosphes had signed, to the Supreme Priest of Styphon and to Prince Gormoth. Dropping a couple of troopers in the town to spread the good news, he rode up to the castle and reported to Xentos. It took a long time to tell the old priest-chancellor the whole story, counting interruptions while Xentos told Dralm about it. When he got away, he was immediately dragged into the officers' hall, where a wine barrel had been tapped. By the time he got back to the Red Halberd in Hostigo Town, it was after dark, and everybody was roaring drunk, and somebody had a little two-pounder in the street and was wasting fireseed that could have been better used to kill Gormoth's soldiers. The bell at the town hall, which had begun ringing while he was riding in through the castle gate, was still ringing.

Going up to his room, he opened the coffer and got out another of the copper balls, putting it under his cloak. He rode a mile out of town, tied his horse in the brush, and made his way to where a single huge tree rose above the scrub oak. Speaking into the ball, he activated and released it. Then he got out his cigarettes and sat down under the tree to wait for the half hour it would take the message-ball to reach Fifth Level Police Terminal Time-Line, and the half hour it would take a mobile antigrav conveyer to come in.

The servant brought him the things, one by one, and Lord Kalvan laid them on the white sheet spread on the table top. The whipcord breeches; he left the billfold in the hip pocket. He couldn't spend United States currency here, and his identity cards belonged to another man, who didn't exist here-and-now. The shirt, torn and blood-stained; the tunic with the battered badge that had saved his life. The black boots, one on either side; the boots they made here were softer and more comfortable. The Sam Browne belt, with the holster and the empty-looped cartridge-carrier and the handcuffs in their pouch. Anybody you needed handcuffs on, here-and-now, you just shot or knocked on the head. The Colt Official Police; he didn't want to part with that, even if there were no more cartridges for it, but the rest of this stuff would seem meaningless without it. He slipped it into the holster, and then tossed the blackjack on top of the pile.

The servant wrapped them and carried the bundle out. There goes Calvin Morrison, he thought; long live Lord Kalvan of Hostigos. Tomorrow, at the thanksgiving service before the feast, these things would be deposited as a votive offering in the temple of Dralm. That had been Xentos' idea, and he had agreed at once. Beside being a general and an ordnance engineer and an industrialist, he had to be a politician, and politicians can't slight their constituents' religion. He filled a goblet from a flagon on the smaller table and sat down, stretching his legs. Unchilled white wine was a crime against nature; have to do something about refrigeration—after the war, of course.

That mightn't be too long, either. They'd already unsealed the frontiers, and the transients who had been blockaded in would be leaving after the feast. They all knew that anybody could make fireseed, and most of them knew how. That fellow they'd gotten those Trygathi horses from; he'd had a few words with him, and he was going to Nostor. So were half a dozen agents to work with Xentos' fifth column. Gormoth would begin making his own fireseed, and that would bring him under the ban of Styphon's House.

Gormoth wouldn't think of that. All he wanted was to conquer Hostigos, and without the help of Styphon's House, he couldn't. He couldn't anyhow, now that he had lost his best invasion-route. Two days after Tarr-Dombra had fallen, he'd had two thousand men at the mouth of Gorge River and lost at least three hundred by cannon fire trying to cross the Athan before his mercenary captains had balked, and the night after that Harmakros had come out of McElhattan Gap, Vrylos Gap, with two hundred cavalry and raided western Nostor, burning farms and villages and running off horses and cattle, devastating everything to the end of Listra Valley.

Maybe they'd thrown Gormoth off until winter. That would mean, till next spring. They didn't fight wars in the winter, here-and-now; against mercenary union rules. By then, he should have a real army, trained in new tactics he'd dredged from what he remembered of Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century History. Four or five batteries of little four-pounders, pieces and caissons each drawn by four horses, and as mobile as cavalry. And plenty of rifles, and men trained to use them. And get rid of all these bear spears and scythe-blade things, and substitute real eighteen-foot Swiss pikes; they'd hold off cavalry.

Styphon's House was the real enemy. Beat Gormoth once, properly, and he'd stay beaten, and Sarrask of Sask was only a Mussolini to Gormoth's Hitler. But Styphon's House was big; it spread over all five Great Kingdoms, from the mouth of the St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico.

Big but vulnerable, and he knew the vulnerable point. Styphon wasn't a popular god, as, say, Dralm was; that was why Xentos' fifth column was building strength in Nostor. Styphon's House had ignored the people and even the minor nobility, and ruled by pressure on the Great Kings and their subject princes, and as soon as they could make their own powder, they'd turn on Styphon's House, and their people with them. This wasn't a religious war, like the ones in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries in his own former history. It was just a job of racket-busting.

He set down the goblet and rose, throwing off the light robe, and began to dress for dinner. For a moment, he wondered whether the Democrats or the Republicans would win the election this year—he was sure it was the same year, now, in a different dimension of time—and how the Cold War and the Space Race were coming along.

Verkan Vall, his story finished, relaxed in his chair. There was no direct light on this terrace, only a sky-reflection from the city lights below, so dim that the tips of their cigarettes glowed visibly. There were four of them: the Chief of Paratime Police, the Director of the Paratime Commission, the Chairman of the Paratemporal Board of Trade, and Chief's Assistant Verkan Vall, who would be chief in another hundred days.

“You took no action about him?” the director asked.

“None at all. The man's no threat to the Paratime Secret. He knows he isn't in his own past, and from things he ought to find and hasn't he knows he isn't in his own future. So he knows he's in the corresponding present in a second time dimension, and he knows that somebody else is able to travel laterally in time. I grant that. But he's keeping it to himself. On Aryan-Transpacific, in the idiom of his original time-line, he has it made. He won't take any chances on unmaking it.

“Look what he has that the Europo-American Sector could never give him. He is a great nobleman; they're out of fashion on Europo-American, where the Common Man is the ideal. He's going to marry a beautiful princess, that's even out of fashion for children's fairy tales. He's a sword-swinging soldier of fortune, and they've vanished from his own nuclear-weapons world. He's in command of a good little army, and making a better one out of it, and he has a cause worth fighting for. Any speculations about what space-time continuum he's in he'll keep inside his own skull.

“Look at the story he put out. He told Xentos that he had been thrown into the past from a time in the far future by sorcery. Sorcery, on that time-

line, is a perfectly valid scientific explanation of anything. Xentos, with his permission, passed the story on, under oath of secrecy, to Ptosphes, Rylla, and Chartiphon. The story they gave out is that he's an exiled prince from a country outside local geographical knowledge. Regular defense in depth, all wrapped around the real secret, and everybody has an acceptable explanation."

"How'd you get it, then?" the Board Chairman asked.

"From Xentos, at the feast. I got him into a theological discussion, and slipped some hypno truth-drug into his wine. He doesn't remember, now, that he told me."

"Well, nobody else on that time-line'll get it that way," the Commission director agreed. "But didn't you take a chance getting those things of Morrison's out of the temple? Was that necessary?"

"No. We ran a conveyer in the night of the feast, when the temple was empty. The next morning, the priests all cried 'A miracle! Dralm has accepted the offering!' I was there and saw it. Morrison doesn't believe that, he thinks some of these packtraders who left Hostigos the next morning stole the stuff. I know Harmakros' cavalymen were stopping people and searching wagons and packs. Publicly, of course, he has to believe in the miracle.

"As to the necessity, yes. This stuff will be found on Morrison's original time-line, first the clothing, with the numbered badge still on the tunic, and, later, in connection with some crime we'll arrange for the purpose, the revolver. They won't explain anything, they'll make more of a mystery, but it will be a mystery in normal terms of what's locally accepted as possible."

"Well, this is all very interesting," the Trade Board chairman said, "but what have I to do with it, officially?"

"Trenth, you disappoint me," the Commission director said. "This Styphon's House racket is perfect for penetration of that subsector, and in a couple of centuries it'll be a very valuable subsector to have penetrated. We'll just move in on Styphon's House, and take it over, the way we did the Yat-Zar temples on the Hulgun Sector, and build that up to general economic and political control."

"You'll have to stay off Morrison's time-line, though," Tortha Karf said.

"You certainly will!" He was vehement about it. "We'll turn that time-line over to the University, here, for study, and quarantine it absolutely to everybody else. And about five adjoining time-lines, for control study. You know what we have here?" He was becoming excited about it. "We have the

start of an entirely new subsector, and we have the divarication point absolutely identified, the first time we've been able to do that except from history. Now, here; I've already established myself with those people as Verkan the Grefftscharr trader. I'll get back, now and then, about as frequently as plausible for traveling by horse, and set up a trading depot. A building big enough to put a conveyer-head into . . ."

Tortha Karf began laughing. "I knew it," he said. "You'd find some way!"

"All right. We all have hobbies; yours is fruit-growing and rabbit-hunting on Fifth Level Sicily. Well, my hobby farm is going to be the Kalvan Subsector, Fourth Level Aryan-Transpacific. I'm only a hundred and twenty years old, now. In a couple of centuries, when I'm ready to retire . . ."

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Gunpowder God* by H. Beam Piper]