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**The Secret Weapon
We Were
Afraid to Use**
By JOHN STEINBECK

AFRICAN SAFARI
Ruark Shoots a Buffalo

**The Dog That
Traveled Incognito**
By LUDWIG BEMELMANS



Bill Mauldin

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The Secret Weapon We Were AFRAID to Use

By JOHN STEINBECK

Illustrations by ARTHUR SHILSTONE omitted.

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President Roosevelt liked the author's plan, but it shocked the Secretary of the Treasury and infuriated the British Ambassador. We didn't use it. But it's as potent a weapon now as it was then. Will we be equally timid again?

Could the weapon be turned on us? Maybe—but not effectively. Our economy is too stable and our people too free.

Everyone who heard about it thought it would work, but felt it was immoral. "You were attacking something dearer than life to many people," said Roosevelt ruefully



Early in 1942, Steinbeck (l.) convinced F.D.R. that the weapon would badly hurt our enemies. But Secretary Morgenthau (r.) was aghast, and plan fell through. Germany later tried it, but failed to realize full potentialities.

I guess everyone in the world has a secret weapon. That little boy sitting so still, gazing into space with angelic eyes, is probably designing a mechanism for pulverizing the schoolhouse. Chemistry classes continue popping away with lethal experiments. During World War II, the government had a large committee which spent its time inspecting the plans and gadgets designed by private citizens to blow up something or other. Even I helped with a weapon once—a weapon so terrible that it horrified everyone who heard of it, for it was designed to set up a chain reaction in the most fissionable of all things: human beings.

It came about in this way: I have a friend, Dr. M. H. Knisely, a learned man, a scientist—a thinker. Early in the last war, we put our heads together to devise a weapon which might help destroy Hitler's Nazi regime and Mussolini's Fascist state. We went at it as if we were designing a modern drug: first we had to know as much about the disease as possible, then build the ideal counteragent, and finally turn the specifications over to the chemists and biochemists.

The disease was a police state, imposed by a dictator. By using open and secret police, a dictatorship maintains a pressure delicately calculated to dominate its people without quite driving them to despair. Every unit is made suspicious of every other, so that groups will not get together and oppose the central authority. Such a system also must keep its people a little unsatisfied, so that the occasional gifts of the leaders are welcomed eagerly. Again, such a state keeps its people fearful and full of hatred toward everything outside its boundaries; that attitude welds them together and makes them forget their own troubles. We know now that bombing, even saturation bombing, finds desperate, unbelievable resistance. Strike at a people from without and they coagulate into a resisting mass.

The qualities our weapon required were these: it must increase the pressure of the state on the people beyond the breaking point. It must work from within, not from without. And, finally, it must not be effective against us. On this basis, we made our weapon—perhaps more frightful than the hydrogen bomb, and far more penetrating and subtle than chemical or germ warfare.

We were young and inexperienced then. We thought that since we had a good thing, someone would want it. It was early in the war and we had not learned about going through channels. We took our weapon to President Roosevelt.

It was very easy to get in to see him. I remember he sat at his desk in the Executive Offices, with French windows behind him. His face was in shadow, but as we talked, he leaned back in his chair and the sun shone on his hair and on his forehead as far down as his closed eyes. His cigarette in the long holder stuck straight up in the air, with curls of blue smoke drifting in the sunstreaks.

We had rehearsed our speech so we wouldn't take too much of his time. Finally we finished and waited. The room was very quiet.

Suddenly the President opened his eyes and banged his chair forward. He was laughing. "This is strictly illegal," he said, his eyes shining. Then he added in a low voice. "And we can do it!

"Why, for the cost of one destroyer we could send Italy spinning. For the cost of a cruiser, we could have Hitler on a hot stove lid."

He picked up a phone and asked for Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau. "Henry," he said. "I am sending two men to you with an idea. Listen to them and tell me what you think." He was still laughing when we went out, and I must say we felt pretty good and pretty important.

We faced Mr. Morgenthau with confidence and went into our recital again. But something was wrong. The atmosphere in the room grew cold and then freezing; we weren't getting over at all. The secretary didn't like our weapon, or didn't like us—or both. We didn't even get to finish. Mr. Morgenthau broke in on us. I realize now that he was deeply shocked. He said, "It's against the law, and I will have nothing to do with it."

Hotel rooms were hard to get in wartime Washington, but we had one. We sat in it, deflated as punctured basketballs. We had a cocktail, and on the crest of that bravery we telephoned the White House. Mr. Roosevelt was amused by Mr. Morgenthau's attitude. "I guess you gave him a turn," he said. "I should have known it would shock him. I'll tell you what—the British Ambassador is coming in a few minutes and I'll put it up to him."

We waited around the next day and the next. Gin and vermouth didn't give us enough courage to phone again, but we got a call the second day. Mr. Roosevelt said no one would

touch our weapon. The ambassador, Lord Halifax, had gone out spluttering with rage. Everyone who heard about it thought it would work, but felt it was immoral. It aimed at utilizing something the leaders considered sacred, even when it belonged to the enemy. Our sons could be killed, tortured, disemboweled, but our weapon appalled authorities and that was the end of that. The subject was dropped.

Much later, when I sat with the President, he said ruefully, “Killing is all right, and you could attack religion with some impunity, but you were threatening something dearer than life to many people—”

Sometime afterward, it was discovered that the Nazis had thought of our weapon. They used it, in imperfect form, against Britain, and although it couldn't function at its best against a democracy, it gave that nation a nasty jolt. Before the Germans could put the weapon to full use, the war ended.

Now it is years later, and there is talk of another war. If it comes, we shall be faced with an enemy who has all the characteristics of that other enemy. I am writing this now to see whether we still have something dearer than life—dearer than survival. Our weapon is just as effective as ever, and it has this advantage: it doesn't matter in the least whether it is secret or not.

It's money.

The bills would be made with the most scrupulous care. Paper and ink would be analyzed and reproduced exactly, and engraving subjected to high magnification, to prevent discovery. The currency would be of the most common denominations—five rubles, 10 rubles, 50 rubles, 100 rubles. Turned out in quantity, the money would proceed from the presses through a turning conveyer containing dirty, greasy clothes. At the end of this conveyer, it would look as if it had been handled, carried, stuffed in pockets, passed from hand to hand for a long time. The money would be placed in containers like those used in a leaflet bomb.

The paper would be cheap and the process easy. Many billions could be made for the cost of a heavy tank. It remains now to see how this weapon would work when used properly.

The officer of the day completed his routine inspection. In the storm entrance, he removed his gloves and sheepskin coat and entered his office, rubbing his hands together to drive out the biting frost of the Russian winter. The telegrapher sat at his instruments, earphones in place, hands laced across his stomach. From outside came the sound of the sentry's footsteps, sharp on the frosty ground. The officer of the day went to his table, pulled the report sheet toward him, and wrote, “2200—all quiet and in order—scattered clouds—wind due east, 14 miles per hour—temperature 8 degrees and falling.”

The officer of the day was about to wipe the pen when an idea came to him. He dipped the pen again and wrote rapidly: “Pilot Panyin thumb crushed by gun mechanism—suggest investigation into any previous accidents to determine whether malingering.” He felt kindly toward pilot Panyin for giving him this opportunity to show his fitness for promotion. He was so pleased that he did not notice that the telegrapher was hastily scribbling on his pad. The operator came across the room and thrust a sheet of paper into the circle of light on the O.D.'s desk. “Alert!” it said. “Unidentified object at 50,000 feet moving eastward at 42 miles per hour—East 29/15/20, North 52/28/18.” It carried the code signature of the radar station.

The officer of the day picked up his telephone.

MIG pilot Panyin swept up to altitude and began combing the area assigned to him. His crushed thumb throbbed, but he took a certain pleasure in that. It wouldn't look bad on his

report that he had gone up with a crushed thumb. The half-moon shone brilliantly on the scattered clouds far below. Suddenly, far ahead, a large white object loomed and then flashed past. Pilot Panyin made his long sweeping turn and came back to it. He spoke into his mouthpiece, "Object sighted, 52,000 feet. Appears to be large balloon. Request instructions." The reply came immediately: "Shoot object down."

As pilot Panyin swept near, he could see the great white sphere shining in the moonlight. His finger was on the firing button. Then, as he centered his target, there was a small flash of fire and the object disappeared. Far below, there was a second, slightly larger, flash. Panyin dived toward the second flash, his throttles wide open.

The airstrip was alive with activity when he whistled in for his landing, just a few minutes later. The commandant and staff were waiting for him and the questioning was brief. "It is your opinion, and you so report, that the balloon released propaganda leaflets?"

"Yes, Comrade Commandant. I dived through a cloud of them. They looked like autumn leaves falling from the trees in a forest."

"Very poetical," said the commandant. "What's the matter with your thumb?"

"It's nothing—I crushed it."

"Report for treatment," the commandant said. "Dismissed, pilot Panyin."

The commandant turned to the officer of the day. "It's not for us. Call headquarters and report the incident to the security section: it's their pot of soup. Tell them it will be the area around Gemil. Security knows how to handle such nonsense."

Ilya Shostakovich (no relation to the composer) had organized the 37th Security District and for six years he had held the post of district deputy—honored, trusted, increasingly wealthy and, he believed, due for promotion. He was a steady man, who lived by the book. If he made any move, he included in his report both the rule and the precedent he followed.

The deputy had his district so well organized that there was very little work for him to do. There was no factory unit in Gemil, no apartment house, no work group or farm collective in which he did not have informants. In short, no conversation ever occurred in the area among five or more men or women which, if it took a dangerous turn, was not reported to District Deputy Shostakovich. Over the years, disappearances and sudden raids had conditioned the people so that they discussed little except Stalin and the weather, and even the weather was spoken of kindly, as though Stalin might have had something to do with it.

The 37th Security District had never been subjected to propaganda leaflets before. Nevertheless, the deputy was quite capable of handling the situation. When his telephone rang at 2:00 A.M. on October 12th, and District Air Screen Headquarters informed Security Deputy Shostakovich that his area was the target for airborne leaflets, he was rather pleased. Here was a chance to show how smoothly his office functioned.

Still yawning, he glanced through the instruction book to refresh his memory. "Penalty for reading, repeating or disseminating propaganda . . . penalty for passing, copying, etc."—all there—all down on paper. Methods for combating—all clear—all organized. Ilya made a number of phone calls.

Squads of young pioneers, elite students from the secondary schools, Stakhanovite workers from the factories and central committeemen from the 12 area collective farms were turned out of bed. Each group had a square marked on the map of the district. In the early dawn, they should be able to pick up and destroy most of the leaflets before the bulk of the population emerged. The few papers that were left would be dealt with in other ways.

Ilya scratched his cropped head, settled in his chair and stirred a big lump of sugar into his glass of dark-brown tea. A toothless old woman crouched beside his office samovar waiting to refill his glass. Ilya nibbled a thin cake covered with pink sugar icing. The old woman's eyes followed his rising and lowering hand.

Reports would be coming in soon. It was sure to go by the book. They thought of everything, those men in the Kremlin. Ilya was glad he was prepared. He might be invited to Moscow; he might even get a two-week vacation on the glorious Black Sea, at one of those white palaces over the lovely blue water. His eyes were growing heavy. There was no reason why he should not nap while he waited for the reports. He rested his chin on his palm and his elbow on his desk and dozed.

The old woman saw his regular breathing—she waited a moment to be sure—then crept to his side. Her skinny fingers crept to the sugar plate and lifted a large, irregular lump. When she was halfway back to the samovar, the telephone rang. She popped the sugar into the neck of her dress.

Ilya lifted the receiver. "Yes. I've been waiting . . . of course . . . I know you found it . . . of course you have. What are you so excited about? Get yourself in hand and say what you have to say."

The voice at the other end squeaked hysterically over the phone: "It's not leaflets, I tell you! It's not propaganda!"

Ilya spoke sternly. "What's the matter with you? Have you been drinking? Not leaflets? What is it, then?"

The voice gasped in his ear, "It's . . . Comrade, it's money!"

Once, long ago, the main street of the city of Gemil was named after a Ukrainian poet. He was a popular poet and his verses were known to every school child. During the revolution, some of his songs had been used to give the people courage to march against oppression. After the revolution it was discovered that the poet was not specific enough about whose oppression; his books disappeared, his poems disappeared and his street was renamed. It was called first Lenin Street, then Lenin and Stalin Street, then Stalin and Lenin Street and finally Stalin Street. Old people in private sometimes spoke the poet's name, or said his couplets, but many couldn't even remember him.

In the late 1930s, Gemil, like most Russian cities, broke out in a rash of workers' apartment houses. They were conceived in marble, carried out in concrete and sometimes left unfinished. But workers moved into them anyway, and more moved in, and more, until several families lived in each apartment and then several families lived in each room of each apartment.

One of the most grandly conceived of these houses on Stalin Street was the Bolshoi. It had a red marble entrance and 60 two-room apartments. At the time of which we are speaking, 620 people lived in the Bolshoi. The former kitchen of No. 12 was the home of the Panushkins and the Alexandrovs—five Panushkins and four Alexandrovs. They cooked on a primus stove, carried water in from a former bathroom and slept on the floor.

In one way, Gregor Panushkin was luckier than Nikolas Alexandrov because Gregor worked in a great bakery which furnished black rye bread to the whole city and surrounding countryside, while Nikolas served in the railway repair shop—much harder and more dangerous work. On the other hand, the bakery was so far away that Gregor had to leave the

Bolshoi an hour before Nikolas even began to awaken. The rail shops were only ten minutes' walk away.

On the morning of October 12th, in the pitch darkness, Gregor edged and nudged his way out of the warm clutter of his brood sleeping around him on the floor. He felt for the bench where his trousers, shoes and sheepskin were laid. The room was bitter cold. In a moment Gregor was dressed. His hand went toward the bench end, where his breakfast waited in a string bag—a lump of black bread, two huge pickles and a slab of dried salted fish as hard as stone. As he left the apartment, he pulled the bread out and gnawed at the crust.

The night still lay on the city, only relieved at every intersection by a naked globe, hanging from a bracket at a building corner and swaying in the wind. Only a few figures moved in the city: men and women whose work was far away scuttling sleepily toward the bus stop.

If the small predawn wind had not been blowing, Gregor's sleep-heavy eyes would never have noticed the little scraps of paper, but when one blew against his leg and clung there, he saw that it was a 50-ruble note. While his mouth was still open, a twenty skidded past. Gregor dropped his string bag and his lump of bread and caught the first and ran after the second. As he went, he saw and caught many more, some in crannies against the buildings, others scraping along the frozen street.

He went wild. He tried to run in all directions at once. He gathered money with one hand and stuffed it into his pocket with the other. His pocket was lumpy with paper when he nearly ran into Comrade Radin, director of the Bolshoi, who charged around the corner chasing a 100-ruble bill.

Comrade Radin pounced on the bill and stood up. Gregor saw that his pocket was lumpy, too.

The training had been long and deeply learned; they were afraid of each other. Yet each stood his ground, hoping the other would go and leave the fortune field free. Gregor realized with joy that he had no money in his hands. Radin looked at the bill in his own fist and said, "Damned wind—blew it right out of my hand." Then he said, "Aren't you headed the wrong way?"

Now Gregor searched frantically for an answer. "Hole in my string bag," he said. "I lost a fine piece of dried fish."

"Well, I hope you find it," said Radin. "Oh, I forgot to turn out the light in my room." He plunged back the way he had come, his head down, his eyes searching the dark edges of the street.

Gregor sighed and walked back to pick up his string bag and his piece of bread. In the four blocks left to go to the bus stop, he found 15 more bills and thrust them into his pocket.

Although the bus was not due yet, the queue had begun to form. It was well to be early and near the head of the line. Sometimes a third of the people in line couldn't get on the bus and had to wait for the next one, but that was not permitted as an excuse on one's work sheet.

Gregor was a good worker—not a Stakhanovite, but sound. He had been late only twice in a year; once he was off for a week, but only because he had been sent home after a hand truck had sprained his ankle. Now he took his place in line and his hand moved into his pocket to finger the wad of sticky bills. He would not be able to look at them until night. There was no privacy at the bakery, not even in the toilets.

A terrible thought came to him. At the bakery, he would have to take off his clothes and put on the coat and pants that had once been white, and his pants would hang on the hook all day long with the money in the pocket. In his apartment he had 400 rubles, saved over a long

time to buy an overcoat. He had never quite dared to buy it and strip himself of savings. Now he could buy it. Gregor took a pickle from his string bag and bit off the end. He tried to remember how many bills he had found and what the denominations were. Then out of his excitement an idea grew, an idea of such boldness that it frightened him.

Suppose he didn't go to work? What would they do to him? With his good record, a fine—a drop in pay—but nothing worse. Suppose he was sick?

In his mind, he saw the unrationed store where only officers and officials could afford to trade. He saw the piles of canned crab, the sausages and hams, the counters of chocolate and marzipan, the cheeses big as cart wheels. He saw himself in the sparkling store and his hand touched his bulging pocket. Suddenly, he clutched his stomach with both hands and doubled up.

“What is it, citizen?” his queue neighbors asked.

“I don't know. I'm sick. I can't breathe.”

“Let me help you home. Where do you live?”

“No, no, I think I can make it.” And Gregor staggered away, holding his stomach, until he was around the corner.

The unrationed store usually opened its doors at ten o'clock. By 7:30 on October 12th, a queue of more than 300 people stood nervously waiting and Gregor was nowhere near the head of the line. At eight o'clock, a large card was placed in the glass door: “Closed.” The clerks drew cloth shades over the windows, concealing the bright piles of canned and smoked delicacies. The people moved slowly away, not grumbling, for no one wanted to talk to anyone else.

A tension hung over the town. Squads of young pioneers patrolled the streets, stopping to peer into culverts. On the roofs of the buildings, other squads poked the litter in the lee of chimneys.

The back of Ilya Shostakovich's desk was a sticky mess of rings from his tea glass. The district deputy's face glistened with sweat. His phone rang every minute or so and he barked short, uneasy orders. Manuals and directives were scattered on the floor around him. The books had let him down. There were no orders to take care of this situation. For a little time, he had tried to improvise, but years of training had crippled his initiative. The moment he had been sure there were no rules to cover the situation, he had phoned the area deputy at Kiev. The area deputy had thought his caller was drunk, but he had laughed with diminishing enthusiasm as Ilya explained.

Area Deputy Kaganov was now on the way to take charge, but before hanging up he had ordered Ilya to pick up every scrap of the silly money—every scrap. Then he called Moscow to protect himself. Moscow offices do not open before noon. After an hour of trying, Kaganov finally got someone willing to risk taking action; he had been ordered to investigate and make a report.

Meanwhile, Ilya called MVD headquarters. He didn't actually say the area chief was incompetent, but he cleared himself of blame. MVD acted quickly. Within 15 minutes, heavy-coated troops, armed with submachine guns, from the garrison 20 miles from Gemil, were climbing into trucks. Within an hour, Gemil was surrounded, quarantined from the rest of the world.

Wearily, Ilya Shostakovich motioned to the old woman for tea. She brought the steaming glass to his desk. A heap of the captured money was piled on the end of the desk; in turning,

the old woman brushed some of it to the floor. She murmured an apology, picked up the money and replaced it on the desk. In the process, she palmed three bills.

Ilya clutched his brow and sipped the scalding tea. He hated new things. He scooped some of the money in front of him and flattened out the bills with an ironing motion of his palm. He lined them up—three fives, four twenties, five hundreds. He took a large magnifying glass from his desk drawer and held it over a 100-ruble bill. From his tunic pocket, he brought out his wallet, extracted a 100-ruble note and laid it beside the other. He put the glass on both at once, then folded the two in the middle and laid the folds together. He couldn't detect any difference.

The telephone rang and he listened and gave the instructions he was giving to everyone: Stand by for orders. The receiver cord dragged over the money. Ilya put the two folded bills together. He inspected them with the glass. He had no idea which was his own. His hand shook a little as he put both bills into his wallet.

Sergei Charsky, Ilya's second in command, strode in, followed by a security guard bearing a white canvas bag.

"Put it down there," Sergei said. "Dismissed." The security man went out. Sergei said, "We've collected three others like this." Ilya got up and shook the money out on the floor. The crumpled bills mounded up like a haystack. He stirred the pile with his foot.

"Are the loud-speakers spreading my orders?"

"Yes, Comrade Deputy Director."

"Well, are people bringing the money in?"

"Some. But it's funny . . ."

"What's funny?"

"Well, when any comes in, two or three people bring it—never one person. It's funny."

"It's not funny," said Ilya, and then, sarcastically: "Have you been alone with that sack?"

"Comrade?"

"Never mind," said Ilya. "I have a new idea. For the loud-speakers. Say that this stuff is counterfeit and the penalty for picking it up is death . . ."

"But we're doing that, Comrade District Deputy," Sergei broke in.

"I know, but say further that this is germ warfare—anyone picking it up will get the plague."

"How about the squads?"

"Have them put on their gloves. Tell everyone that they are special germproof gloves. Say—why, say that our great Stalin anticipated this, that he sent the gloves in advance."

Sergei turned to go.

"Wait," said Ilya. "No word is to get out of the city."

"Yes, Comrade," said Sergei.

"And no railroad passes—and no travel permits of any kind . . ."

Sergei said, "Comrade, the town is surrounded. Trains? Why, not even a fly could get out."

"Good," said Ilya.

Ilya tapped on his desk with a pencil when Sergei had gone, and then he tapped on his teeth. A runner brought a typed progress report, and laid it on the desk. Ilya read it. "All stores closed. Buying and selling of any kind forbidden until further orders. Payment of bills, leases, rents, loans, purchases or transfers forbidden. All taken care of." The signature was formal. Clipped to the report was a second paper. It said, "Ilya for God's sake, how are people going to eat?"

The district deputy studied for a moment and then scribbled on a pad of paper, "Issue disaster rations against identity cards until further notice."

Gemil had one first-class hotel and that hotel had one first-class room, for great visitors. Whereas all other accommodations had bare wood floors and narrow beds, hard and white as tombstones, No. 20 was mushy with red carpets and velvet drapes. It had carved and padded settees from the noble country houses of the last century. In the bathroom, the taps did not leak.

At 11:00 P.M., October 12th, No. 20 was occupied. A round table was jeweled with food. Bowls of gray caviar, dishes of hard-boiled eggs, pickles of all sizes, cheese with holes and cheese without holes, platters of black rye bread and tureens of butter. In the center of the table stood four carafes of vodka.

A select group sat at the table. There was Area Ground Forces Commandant Zubov, Area Air Forces Commandant Zubiliev, Air Security Deputy Kaganov, MVD Chief Korneichuk and District Deputy Shostakovich. All of these uniformed eminences chatted and picked at the food, but every minute or so their eyes flicked toward Comrade Tula, who had arrived by air from Moscow just an hour before.

Tula was a small taut man. His jaw muscles were like wire and he had the bleak, tired eyes of a man without hope or belief, who still goes on working. His name was little known, but he was of the inner circle, a Kremlin trouble shooter, an untier of knots who had, at various times, slipped in and out of Tientsin, London, Rome, Washington, Marseilles and New York. He was always tired, always a little dusty from traveling. If he had a private life, it was very private.

Comrade Tula read the sheaf of written reports the men in the room had submitted to him. He had not eaten. He finished the last page, folded the papers neatly and slipped them into his inside coat pocket. Zubiliev pushed a vodka glass toward him, but Tula shook his head. "Thank you—thank you, no," he said. His speech was dry and dusty and rapid. He spoke with no inflection. "I can't see where you've made any error," he said. They murmured gladly.

"On the other hand," he continued, "I don't see that you have made any progress." They were silent.

Ilya Shostakovich said, "We await orders from higher authority."

Tula regarded him for a moment. "I wish I could think of some orders to give you." He raised his eyes to the ceiling. "A long time ago, I thought of this terrible weapon, but I assured myself that the capitalist world worshiped money so much that it would not outrage this god even if it belonged to an enemy. This is a monstrous weapon. Authority has only two arms—force and bribery. This weapon destroys one arm of the state."

"We can issue new money or scrip," Kaganov observed.

"Yes, and they can duplicate it." Tula paused. "It's worse than you think," he said. "When anyone begins to trifle with the money, there's trouble always. People must have faith in some medium of exchange, faith at least that it *is* a medium of exchange. Now, you've closed the stores, told them this money is counterfeit. They don't know which money is counterfeit and which isn't—and neither do we. They'll buy something, anything, to get rid of it—and to have something in their hands they can trust."

Area Deputy Kaganov poured vodka and tossed it off. "We have the advantage of superior authority and the means to apply it," he said.

Tula regarded him. “We have disadvantages, too. The mind that conceived this weapon is capable of raining other things down on us—ration cards, travel permits, identification papers. That’s a kind of currency, too. We’re a paper people.”

Tula brought some bills from his side pocket and put them on the table. “This poisons, this festers,” he said. “There can’t be any honesty if enough of this comes down. Look, comrades,” he said slowly, “if you—each one of you—were given one of those sacks of money to destroy, knowing it could not be detected and knowing that there were no witnesses, would you destroy it? Don’t answer me—don’t answer me!”

Commandant Zubov said, “I am a soldier. I think in military terms. This money is a weapon. Then I say, use that weapon. America has attacked us with rubles. Let us bomb America with dollars.”

“It wouldn’t be very successful, my friend,” said Tula. “Their money is hard to duplicate. I guess we could do it. But they have a retreat that we do not have. They could retreat into their banks. I have been to America and I know. The transactions of our people are carried on in currency, mostly in small bills. In America, business is done by check. If we dumped money—or if they thought we were going to—they could probably turn in their cash and depend completely on checks with little difficulty.”

Air Commandant Zubiliev let a little anger creep into his voice. “We can’t screen the whole heaven for balloons,” he said. “Some are bound to get through. Have you no suggestions?”

Tula put a tiny spoonful of caviar on his tongue and tasted. “I am trying to make one,” he said. “Whoever sent this present will be watching for reaction, if there is evidence that we are hurt, they will send more, lots more, everywhere. This is a trial. If there is no reaction, they might think the experiment has failed. I suggest we keep Gemil cut off until all of the money is in. We must let no news of this get out, not even a whisper.”

“How can we get people to bring in the money?” Zubov asked.

“Oh, that’s easy, very easy. Open all the stores. Cut prices. Tell the people it’s great Stalin’s present. He has sent them this money from the sky as a present because he loves them. They’ll be charmed by the originality of that. With the prices cut, we’ll scoop in every bit of currency in Gemil, and then—then afterward, maybe. . .”

The MVD man smiled. “That’s my department,” he said.

Tula only looked more tired. “Remember: let no news get out. Maybe they’ll think it failed. Maybe they will. I hope they will. I’m leaving now for Moscow. We’ll expect full reports.”

He stood up and walked out of the room. He didn’t have a hat. A heated car waited for him at the hotel entrance.

The telegrapher at Air Security Station 22 sat in front of his instrument. The O.D. was out on his first night inspection. There was time for a nap. Suddenly he sat up and began to write an incoming message. “Alert—5 unidentified objects at 75,000 feet moving eastward at 26 miles per hour, east 30/5/17, north 54/20/8. Investigate.”

The telegrapher stepped to a map and his finger found the Smolensk area. He pushed a button at his desk and the bell clanged to call a guard.