

## THE LION AND THE UNICORN

THE best way of keeping a secret is to avoid even the appearance of secrecy. McNey whistled a few bars of Grieg, and the vibrations set delicate machinery in operation. The dull amber of the walls and ceiling changed to a cool transparency. Polaroid crystal did tricks with the red glare of the sunset above the Catskills. The deep, cloudless blue sky hung empty overhead. But Barton's helicopter had already arrived, and soon Callahan would be here, too.

That Callahan would dare to come, and alone, gave a horrible clarity to the danger. Twenty years ago a dagger

would have ended the matter. But not permanently. Barton had used steel, and, while he had not completely failed, he had not succeeded either. The menace had grown.

McNey, standing by his desk, brushed a hand across his forehead and looked at his wet palm curiously. Hypertension. The result of this desperate, straining attempt to get in contact with Callahan, and the surprise of finding it far too easy. And now Barton as the catalyst-mongoose and snake.

There must be no clash-not yet. Somehow Barton must be kept from killing Callahan. The hydra had more than a hundred heads, and the Power as well. There lay -the chief peril, the tremendous secret weapon of the mad telepaths.

But they weren't mad. They were paranoid types, coldly logical, insane in one regard only, their blind warped hatred for nontelepaths. In twenty years, thirty, forty perhaps, they had-not grown-but organized, until today the cancerous cells were spotted throughout the towns of America, from Modoc and American Gun to Roxy and Florida End.

I'm old, McNey thought. Forty-two, but I feel old. The bright dream I grew up with-it's fading, blotted out by a nightmare.

He glanced in a mirror. He was big-boned, large-framed, but soft. His eyes were too gentle, not suited for battle. His hair-the wig all telepathic Baldies wore-was still dark, but he'd buy a graying one soon.

He was tired.

He was on leave of absence from Niagara, one of the science towns; but there were no furloughs from his secret job. That was a job many Baldies held, and one no nontelepaths suspected-a combination of policing and extermination. For paranoid Baldies could not be allowed to survive. That was axiomatic.

Over the ridge lay the town. McNey let his gaze travel downward, across pine and sumac groves, to the pool in the brook, where trout hid under shadowed overhangs. He opened part of the wall and let the cool air enter. Absently he whistled the phrase that would start the supersonics and keep mosquitoes at a respectful distance. On the flagged walk below he saw a slim figure, trim in light slacks and blouse, and recognized Alexa, his

adopted daughter. The strong family instinct of Baldies had made adoption a commonplace.

The fading sunlight burnished her glossy wig. He sent a thought down.

Thought you were in the village. Marian's at the show.

She caught the hint of disappointment in his mind. Intrusion, Darryl?

For an hour or two-

O.K. There's an apple-blossom sequence in the pic, and I can't stand the smell of the stuff. Marian asked me-I'll catch a dance or two at the Garden.

He felt wretched as he watched her go off. In the perfect telepathic world there would be no need for secrecy or evasion. That, indeed, was one of the drawbacks of the paranoid system-the mysterious, untappable wave length on which they could communicate. The thing called the Power. It was, McNey thought, a secondary characteristic of the mutation itself, like baldness, and yet more strictly limited. It seemed that only the paranoid Baldies could develop the Power. Which implied two separate and distinct mutations. Considering the delicate balance of the mental machine, that was not improbable.

But true rapport was vital for a complete life. Telepaths were more sensitive than nontelepaths; marriage was more complete; friendship warmer; the race a single living unit. For no thought could be hidden from probing. The average Baldy refrained, from courtesy, when a rapport mind went blurred; yet, ultimately, such blurring should become unnecessary. There need be no secrets.

Both Marian and Alexa knew of McNey's connection with the organization, but it was a tacit understanding. They knew without words when McNey did not want to answer questions. And because of the deep trust that comes from telepathic understanding, they refrained from asking any, even in their thoughts.

Alexa was twenty now. Already she had felt the reaction of being an outsider in a world complete in itself. For Baldies were still intruders, no matter how much rationalization was used. The great majority of humanity was non-telepathic-and fear, distrust, and hatred lay latent in that giant tribunal that daily passed judgment upon the Baldy mutation.

Capital punishment, McNey knew very well, was the sentence contingent upon a thumbs-down verdict. And if the thumbs ever turned down-

If the nontelepaths ever learned what the paranoids were doing-

Barton was coming up the path. He walked with the lithe

springiness of youth, though he was over sixty. His wig was iron-gray, and McNey could sense the wary alertness of the hunter's thoughts. Technically Barton was a naturalist, a big-game hunter. His quarry was sometimes human, however.

Upstairs, Dave, McNey thought.

Right. Is it here yet?

Callahan's coming soon.

The thoughts did not mesh. The semantic absolute symbol for Callahan was simpler in McNey's mind; in Barton's it was colored by associations from a half-lifetime of conflict with a group he hated, by now, almost pathologically. McNey never knew what lay behind the violence of Barton's hatred. Once or twice he had caught fleeting mental images of a girl, dead now, who had once helped Barton, but such thoughts were always as inchoate as reflections in rippling water.

Barton came up in the dropper. He had a seamed, swarthy face, and a trick of smiling lopsidedly so that the grimace was almost a sneer. He sat down in a relaxer, sliding his dagger forward into a more handy position, and thought for a drink. McNey supplied Scotch and soda. The sun had dropped beyond the mountain, and the wind grew colder. Automatic induction began to warm the room.

Lucky you caught me. On my way north. Trouble.

About us?

Always.

This time what?

Barton's thoughts broadened.

f Wigless Baldy with Hedgehound group Peril to Baldies