

Summit

Mack Reynolds

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SUMMIT

By MACK REYNOLDS

Illustrated by Freas

Almost anything, if it goes on long enough, can be reduced to, first a Routine, and then, to a Tradition. And at the point it is, obviously, Necessary.

Two king-sized bands blared martial music, the "*Internationale*" and the "Star-Spangled Banner," each seemingly trying to drown the other in a *Götterdämmerung* of acoustics.

Two lines of troops, surfacely differing in uniforms and in weapons, but basically so very the same, so evenly matched, came to attention. A thousand hands slapped a thousand submachine gun stocks.

Marshal Vladimir Ignatov strode stiff-kneed down the long march, the stride of a man for years used to cavalry boots. He was flanked by frozen visaged subordinates, but none so cold of face as he himself.

At the entrance to the conference hall he stopped, turned and waited.

At the end of the corridor of troops a car stopped and several figures emerged, most of them in civilian dress, several bearing brief cases. They in their turn ran the gantlet.

At their fore walked James Warren Donlevy, spritely, his eyes darting here, there, politician-like. A half smile on his face, as though afraid he might forget to greet a voter he knew, or was supposed to know.

His hand was out before that of Vladimir Ignatov's.

"Your Excellency," he said.

Ignatov shook hands stiffly. Dropped that of the other's as soon as protocol would permit.

The field marshal indicated the door of the conference hall. "There is little reason to waste time, Mr. President."

"Exactly," Donlevy snapped.



The door closed behind them and the two men, one uniformed and bemedaled, the other nattily attired in his business suit, turned to each other.

"Nice to see you again, Vovo. How're Olga and the baby?"

The soldier grinned back in response. "Two babies now—you don't keep up on the *real* news, Jim. How's Martha?" They shook hands.

"Not so good," Jim said, scowling. "I'm worried. It's that new cancer. As soon as we conquer one type two more rear up. How are you people doing on cancer research?"

Vovo was stripping off his tunic. He hung it over the back of one of the chairs, began to unbutton his high, tight military collar. "I'm not really up on it, Jim, but I think that's one field where you can trust anything we know to be in the regular scientific journals our people exchange with yours. I'll make some inquiries when I get back home, though. You never know, this new strain—I guess you'd call it—might be one that we're up on and you aren't."

"Yeah," Jim said. "Thanks a lot." He crossed to the small portable bar.

"How about a drink? Whisky, vodka, rum—there's ice."

Vovo slumped into one of the heavy chairs that were arranged around the table. He grimaced, "No vodka, I don't feel patriotic today. How about one of those long cold drinks, with the cola stuff?"

"Cuba libra," Jim said. "Coming up. Look, would you rather speak Russian?"

"No," Vovo said, "my English is getting rusty. I need the practice."

Jim brought the glasses over and put them on the table. He began stripping off his own coat, loosening his tie. "God, I'm tired," he said. "This sort of thing wears me down."

Vovo sipped his drink. "Now there's as good a thing to discuss as any, in the way of killing time. The truth now, Jim, do you really believe in a God? After all that's happened to this human race of ours, do you really believe in divine guidance?" He twisted his mouth sarcastically.

The other relaxed. "I don't know," he said. "I suppose so. I was raised in a family that believed in God. Just as, I suppose, you were raised in one that didn't." He lifted his shoulders slightly in a shrug. "Neither of us seems to be particularly brilliant in establishing a position of our own."

Vovo snorted. "Never thought of it that way," he admitted. "We're usually contemptuous of anyone still holding to the old beliefs. There aren't many left."

"More than you people admit, I understand."

Vovo shook his heavy head. "No, not really. Mostly crackpots. Have you ever noticed how it is that the nonconformists in any society are usually crackpots? The people on your side that admit belonging to our organizations, are usually on the wild eyed and uncombed hair

side—I admit it. On the other hand, the people in our citizenry who subscribe to your system, your religion, that sort of thing, are crackpots, too. Applies to religion as well as politics. An atheist in your country is a nonconformist—in mine, a Christian is. Both crackpots."

Jim laughed and took a sip of his drink.

Vovo yawned and said, "How long are we going to be in here?"

"I don't know. Up to us, I suppose."

"Yes. How about another drink? I'll make it. How much of that cola stuff do you put in?"

Jim told him, and while the other was on his feet mixing the drinks, said, "You figure on sticking to the same line this year?"

"Have to," Vovo said over his shoulder. "What's the alternative?"

"I don't know. We're building up to a whale of a depression as it is, even with half the economy running full blast producing defense materials."

Vovo chuckled, "Defense materials. I wonder if ever in the history of the human race anyone ever admitted to producing *offense* materials."

"Well, you call it the same thing. All your military equipment is for defense. And, of course, according to your press, all ours is for offense."

"Of course," Vovo said.

He brought the glasses back and handed one to the other. He slumped back into his chair again, loosened two buttons of his trousers.

"Jim," Vovo said, "why don't you divert more of your economy to

public works, better roads, reforestation, dams—that sort of thing."

Jim said wearily, "You're a better economist than that. Didn't your boy Marx, or was it Engels, write a small book on the subject? We're already overproducing—turning out more products than we can sell."

"I wasn't talking about your government building new steel mills. But dams, roads, that sort of thing. You could plow billions into such items and get some real use out of them. We both know that our weapons will never be used—they can't be."

Jim ticked them off on his fingers. "We already are producing more farm products than we know what to do with; if we build more dams it'll open up new farm lands and increase the glut. If we build more and better roads, it will improve transportation, which will mean fewer men will be able to move greater tonnage—and throw transportation employees into the unemployed. If we go all out for reforestation, it will eventually bring down the price of lumber and the lumber people are howling already. No," he shook his head, "there's just one really foolproof way of disposing of surpluses and using up labor power and that's war—hot or cold."

Vovo shrugged, "I suppose so."

"It amounts to building pyramids, of course." Jim twisted his mouth sourly. "And since we're asking questions about each other's way of life, when is your State going to begin to *wither away*?"

"How was that?" Vovo asked.

"According to your sainted founder, once you people came to power the State was going to wither away, class rule would be over, and Utopia be on hand. That was a long time ago, and your State is stronger than ours."

Vovo snorted. "How can we wither away the State as long as we are

threatened by capitalist aggression?"

Jim said, "Ha!"

Vovo went on. "You know better than that, Jim. The only way my organization can keep in power is by continually beating the drums, keeping our people stirred up to greater and greater sacrifices by using you as a threat. Didn't the old Romans have some sort of maxim to the effect that when you're threatened with unease at home stir up trouble abroad?"

"You're being even more frank than usual," Jim said. "But that's one of the pleasures of these get-togethers, neither of us resorts to hypocrisy. But you can't keep up these tensions forever."

"You mean we can't keep up these tensions forever, Jim. And when they end? Well, personally I can't see my organization going out without a blood bath." He grimaced sourly, "And since I'd probably be one of the first to be bathed, I'd like to postpone the time. It's like having a tiger by the tail, Jim. We can't let go."

"Happily, I don't feel in the same spot," Jim said. He got up and went to the picture window that took up one entire wall. It faced out over a mountain vista. He looked soberly into the sky.

Vovo joined him, glass in hand.

"Possibly your position isn't exactly the same as ours but there'll be some awfully great changes if that military based economy of yours suddenly had peace thrust upon it. You'd have a depression such as you've never dreamed of. Let's face reality, Jim, neither of us can afford peace."

"Well, we've both known that for a long time."



They both considered somberly, the planet Earth blazing away, a small sun there in the sky.

Jim said, "I sometimes think that the race would have been better off, when man was colonizing Venus and Mars, if it had been a joint enterprise rather than you people doing one, and we the other. If it had all been in the hands of that organization ..."

"The United Nations?" Vovo supplied.

"... Then when Bomb Day hit, perhaps these new worlds could have gone on to, well, better things."

"Perhaps," Vovo shrugged. "I've often wondered how Bomb Day started. Who struck the spark."

"Happily there were enough colonists on both planets to start the race all over again," Jim said. "What difference does it make, who struck the spark?"

"None, I suppose." Vovo began to button his collar, readjust his clothes. "Well, shall we emerge and let the quaking multitudes know that once again we have made a shaky agreement? One that will last until the next summit meeting."

THE END.

Transcriber's Note

In two places in the text the word "refostration" was corrected to "reforestation."

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