

The Tokarev Report

by

Salvatore Puledda

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(Original title: El Informe Tokarev, in Spanish. Translated in San Francisco, California on April 23, 1995.)

To Silo

About the Author

Salvatore Puledda, Ph.D., was born in Rome in 1943. He attended the University of Rome, and graduated in Pure Chemistry in 1966.

After a period of apprenticeship at the *Istituto Superiori di Sanita* in Rome, where he dedicated himself to basic research in human hemoglobin, he transferred to the University of California in San Diego, where he obtained a Masters Degree. His thesis concerned mechanisms of blockage in the duplication of DNA in the cells of tumors through the use of different chemical substances.

Dr. Puledda was greatly interested by the social aspects of science. He realized an Independent Study of one year in length with Professor Herbert Marcuse, who was then teaching at the Department of Philosophy at UCSD. Later on, Dr. Puledda became concerned with ecological problems, and with environmental pollution in particular, a field that had just begun to develop at that time.

Since 1973, he works as a researcher at the Laboratory for Environmental Hygiene at the *Istituto Superiori di Sanita*. He is the author of about fifty scientific monographs regarding atmospheric and environmental hygiene. In Italy, he is part of two national commissions: Air Quality, and Limit in Concentrations of Atmospheric Pollutants.

His main interest is the social consequences of the applications of science and technology. He is a member of the international association Medicine Against Nuclear War and has been one of the founders of the ecological organization Green Future, which is active in various countries throughout the world.

Besides his social-fiction novel, *The Tokarev Report*, Dr. Puledda is the author of another book that is not scientific in nature. It is an essay entitled *Historical Interpretations of Humanism*, which has been translated into Spanish, and is now being translated into English.

INTRODUCTION

The Tokarev Report was first published in 1981. When I received the book I read it at a single sitting. I thought that it was likable, absurd, and quite original. At that time, I believe I classified it as a political-fiction novel. Later on, I met some acquaintances that had also browsed through the book. When we discussed our points of view, I discovered a great disparity in our opinions. The Tokarev Report was then filed away in my mind, left until a better moment.

In December of 1982, I visited Puledda at the *Instituto della Sanita*, in Rome. There I found him working amid Petri dishes and equipment that measured environmental pollution. As usual, we drank a lot of coffee as we reviewed the world political situation, and the state of affairs in the field of science and technology. I knew that my friend was concerned with the accelerating arms race, and also with the consequences of genetic research. The last problem was almost an obsession for him. He had been quite impressed by this topic since his stay at the University of California, where he worked for a while, studying and experimenting in this field. Our conversation then turned toward his book. He told me that he wanted to publish it in several languages and to try to make a movie, but that negotiations in Hollywood had broken down because the main character was not American, but Russian.

I had a different point of view. I believed that the novel was difficult to understand, because it was so extravagant. It was far removed from the general sensitivity of that era. Production costs would have been enormous, because it takes place in so many remote locations. I believed that he should have seriously pursued his contacts at *Cinecitta*, because it was close at hand, even though the response had been negative. Finally, I asked him what was his real intention when he wrote The Tokarev Report.

"It is a pacifist novel, and everyone does what he can in his own way," he replied dryly. After that moment, we went on to discuss other topics.

Two years later, we met again, and again we discussed his novel, wondering why it had not received wider acclaim. My friend was less concerned, he was not worried about publicizing his work. After all, he had no previous experience in the literary field, and he had probably awarded, like most beginning writers, an exaggerated level of importance to his work. The novel had been written by someone with a great deal of talent, but perhaps someone who was more used to communicate scientific concepts than to engage in fantasy. I assumed at that point that the author had given up on being a writer of renown.

The conversation then moved on, but Puledda touched upon something that triggered my attention. According to him, the plot for the novel had been developed in 1978 by a friend common to both of us. During an evening, several of the people present were convinced that the story could become real, because many of the events that were foreseen (the change in political

power in the USSR near 1985, ethnic and nationalistic upheavals, the advance of Islamic fundamentalism) were actually about to take place. Several of those present had joined forces to produce a "report ahead of time." They believed that if their predictions were not mistaken, and if they were able to send a memorandum to certain circles within the Soviet Union through the embassies, they would be able to change the course of certain catastrophic events.

They believed that nuclear disaster was quite possible. The main reason was not that one of the leaders of the Eastern or Western blocks could make that decision -- the main reason was the simple mechanical accumulation of certain factors. They argued that the statistical curves for "red alarms" would continue to increase exponentially. At first, the radars of the superpowers incorrectly detected oncoming missiles. These false alarms started to occur about once a year, then every six months, every four months, every three months, and so on. The problem was increasing because of more noise in the circuits, due to the proliferation of satellites and nuclear submarines. Therefore, a situation of crisis would soon arrive, and the system for attack would become unmanageable. All of this could reach a climax by 1985.

On the other hand, the group had verified that the economy in the East was declining, and this was accelerated by the arms race. Even if a nuclear accident could be avoided, this left the East with only two alternatives. Either they had to export chaos, or they would have to take the initiative towards disarmament. The weakest chain in the link was the Soviet Union, and only the Soviet Union could therefore produce a change in the unfolding of events. I interrupted this story, asking Puledda if they had not considered that these possibilities had already been discussed by the Soviets themselves. I was beginning to get irritated by these childish fantasies. After all, the topic of nuclear accidents was being discussed even in Time Magazine. The crisis in the socialist economy was a secret known all over the world. It seemed to me that a problem as complex as this one was beyond the scope of some improvisers sitting at a kitchen table. And this business about sending a memorandum to the Kremlin, to 'inform' them about things that were so obvious... that sounded to me like the old joke about the absent-minded scientist that goes out on the street and forgets to wear his pants. It was quite obvious to me that some festive intellectuals (perhaps after consuming some alcoholic beverages) had unduly influenced my gullible friend.

"Sure, everyone is aware about the possibility for a nuclear accident, and everyone is aware of the economic difficulties with the USSR," said Puledda. "But no one seems to be aware that our entire civilization is going crazy."

"If you mean to say that the growth in the arms race is motivated by madness, I can agree in general terms. However, I believe it has more to do with the interests of the military-industrial complexes of the superpowers."

My friend looked at me askance, and then, very calmly, began to expound upon a theory about the insanity of civilizations. A certain pathology that seemed to advance from the beginning of history, manifested as tremendous

tensions between economic powers, later turned to war, genocide and massive persecutions. It appeared to subside after massive blood-letting. Puledda explained that this madness was now at its climax and that there was enough cumulative potential energy to produce a final explosion. Naturally, this explanation seemed insufficient. Anyway, I didn't see what this had to do with The Tokarev Report.

"Well, what my friends have delivered to the embassies is a great deal of information that has to do with the symptomology of that pandemic. We want to motivate research by the Soviet dissidents. These people have a great deal of influence in political decision-making. It is possible that within their circles, some representatives of a new type of thinking will emerge, a new type of thinking that is capable of providing a response to an emergency that is so serious, and yet so new. I will tell you that even if many copies of the memorandum that was distributed by the end of 1989 were thrown into the garbage, we still have the possibility that at least one copy was kept by people who collect curiosities. I will add that these documents began to circulate sporadically at first, through the diplomatic missions, and then were distributed in great numbers, being delivered to Moscow through the most amazing routes. You see, the idea was that if the foreseen events began to unfold with a certain degree of accuracy, it could spark somebody's attention. What would be lost if nothing happened? Just some paper and some well-meaning effort. The Tokarev Report was inspired by the very same topics contained in the memorandum, yet followed the format proper to works of fiction. My intention was to open one more door to publicize the document."

I believe that he later spoke about the future explosions in the East, and about the inevitable turn of direction in the USSR, which would dissipate the nuclear conflict. He also spoke about a future political rearrangement that would affect Europe and the rest of the world, as a consequence to the earthquake in the Soviet Union. I felt depressed by hearing these prophecies from someone who had been trained in physics and mathematics. I did not continue asking questions. This anecdote remained, lost in my memory, in that sad autumn of 1984.

On January 7, 1989, I was present at a homage to Galileo in the Piazza di Santa Croce, in Florence. The main speaker was Mr. Puledda. Before he began his speech, he gave me a big hug, and then, murmuring, repeated the words that he had uttered at his laboratory seven years earlier:

"Everyone does what he can in his own way." After saying this, he brought out some papers and began to speak publicly into the microphones.

" I, Galileo Galilei, professor of mathematics at the University of Florence, publicly renounce my doctrine which states that the Sun is the center of the universe and does not move, and that the Earth is not the center of the universe and does move. With a sincere heart, and with a genuine faith, I renounce, condemn, and detest the errors and heresies that I have mentioned, and any other error, heresy, or belief that is against the Holy Church..."

"This is the text of the public retraction forced out from Galileo under the threat of torture, on the 22nd of June of 1633 by the Tribunal of the Inquisition. Galileo retracted so that he would not suffer the same faith of Giordano Bruno, who was escorted toward the stake with a piece of wood inside of his mouth, so that he would not speak, and who was burned alive in the Campo di Fiori in Rome, a day in the winter of 1600..."

When Puledda mentioned the piece of wood in Bruno's mouth I noticed that he was deeply moved. I wondered if he himself felt prevented from completely explaining his truth. Later on, he continued:

"...the powerful ones of this Earth quickly understood that the New Science could be used to benefit their greed. So they have produced *a legion of inventive gnomes* (as Bertold Brecht once called them) who are willing to sell their science towards any end, and at any price, and who are covering the Earth with the machinery of death."

After speaking for half an hour, Puledda concluded:

"...we request, here, before the building that covers Galileo's tomb, we request from all the scientists of the world that science be finally used for the benefit of humanity. With this voice that now echoes throughout this square we launch this calling. We ask that an oath be instituted at all universities, at all research centers, a solemn oath similar to that taken by medical physicians (and which was created by Hippocrates in the dawning of the West) so that science is used only and exclusively to overcome pain and suffering, only and exclusively to humanize the Earth."

It was a moving speech. There was applause, flowers, camera flashes. Many people approached Puledda to congratulate him. From the crowd I saw two men approach who finally faced the speaker and greeted him warmly. I realized then that Perestroika was among us. I later learned that the memorandum had been thrown away by Bezhnev's bureaucrats, but did succeed in reaching the best hands, people who were desperately working to change the course of world events.

Today, in 1994, Puledda's book begins to take off again. I suspect that it will be received in a special atmosphere, an epochal atmosphere that is different to the time when the book was written. I cannot determine if the story that was published in 1981 has been confirmed to any degree by the extraordinary events that took place in the 1980's. I must admit, however, that this novel impresses me much more today that when I read it for the first time. Perhaps because of this, and because of certain public comments that I have made recently, I was asked to prepare this introduction. I have done so by making comments that refer more to the personality of the author than to the book itself. I am sure that the reader will understand why I have proceeded this way, and will be able to judge the novel on their own account.

J. Valinsky
February 15, 1994

And I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.

And the bow shall be in the clouds, and I will look upon it, That I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.

And God said unto Noah: This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.

GENESIS 9, 15-17

DECEMBER 19, 1978

She was sitting at a transparent, acrylic table, resting both hands on a dark briefcase. It was striking to see how thin she was, to see that jet-black hair covering part of her face. Her eyelids were closed yet twitching nervously.

"Mrs. Tolmacheva," said a stout man stroking his mustache while his body comfortably rested on a sofa. "Mrs. Tolmacheva, please try to visualize the scene that inspired the writing of the memorandum."

"It's a pyramid," she answered in a whisper, "or a crystal—a prism, perhaps. There is light inside of it." She stopped speaking for a while, then murmured, as if in a trance, "a rocket is launched against the pyramid. It enters and disappears...now it's coming out in reverse! I don't know... I don't know. It could be a ray of light. Yes! A beam of light comes in and now the pyramid is illuminated with the colors of the rainbow."

"How big is the pyramid?" asked a second man who stood behind Nietzsche, the one with the thick mustache.

"I don't know. Miles high."

"What do you mean, 'miles'? Look carefully, Mrs. Tolmacheva," interrupted Nietzsche.

"I don't know, I don't know... it could be small. Perhaps no larger than a crystal, or a ruby."

The man who was standing approached Nietzsche and whispered in his ear:

"She is either describing Newton's experiment separating light, or some sort of laser device. The reverse movement could be the apparent backward motion of the blades, produced by light, as seen with Crookes' radiometer."

"I try to get into the crystal. There's a very strong light. It's not like ordinary light. It's different. I hear a voice that says, 'You must not enter.'" Tolmacheva lifted her hands from the briefcase and covered her face. "I see myself as a child. I see myself! The light is throwing me away from the center of the pyramid. I'm going backwards, backwards, coming out so fast!"

"Don't let yourself be thrown out," said the one standing. "Go in again. Tell us what's in there!"

"I'm going forward again. 'You must not enter,' I'm told. I see myself. Oh!" Tolmacheva broke into sobs, "I'm crazy! I've lost my mind! They are throwing me out!"

Now she was standing, shaking from head to toe as if trapped by a vision of horror. Both men came forward to soothe her.

"Come, Madam," whispered Nietzsche in a helpful tone. "They'll take care of you in the next room. Thank you. Thank you very much, Mrs. Tolmacheva."

He held her gently, and walked her towards a door that opened at that very instant. Another woman appeared and took care of Tolmacheva. Then the door closed.

Nietzsche was returning to the sofa. "It's always the same story. We've tried this a hundred times only to get the same result. This time we invited you so

that you could give us an opinion that corresponds to your field. I remind you that in previous sessions we had other interpreters, and each was more illogical than the first. So what is your opinion?"

The physicist was now sitting in Tolmacheva's chair. He began to speak, in a condescending tone. "I think she is speaking about a laser system. Let's disregard this fantasy about an object that is miles high, an all this talk of missiles coming in and out."

"Whether or not they're 'fantasies' is not your problem. There are other experts who will comment on that. You are here to interpret matters from the point of view of physics," Nietzsche snapped. Then he reflected for a moment and continued, "I'm sorry. What happens is that the memorandum speaks about a system to de-activate missiles, yet I assure you that Tolmacheva never read the text. She's only been allowed to touch the cover of the briefcase. So, please, what do you make of all this?"

"Well, based on what I've heard so far, I am reminded of Basov's experiences."

"Ah, yes. Basov, Lenin Award and the Nobel Prize for Physics, right?"

"Right. In 1967, he, Zubariev, Efimov and Graskin succeeded in accelerating light to more than two million kilometers per second. This swept away Einstein's theory about the limit on the speed of light. The experiments were conducted at the Lebedev Institute's Quantum Physics Laboratory of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. What do you think of that?"

"That's great," Nietzsche replied impatiently.

"Basov fired a super-luminous beam into rubies that were previously charged and arranged in series, accelerating light nine-fold. When your student..."

"She's not my student!" Nietzsche interrupted testily. "She is a subject who has remarkable ability in the field of the paranormal. Our investigations are still not very well known in the Soviet Union."

"OK, OK," continued the physicist. "Anyway, when the lady said that a beam had launched her inside the crystal and she had seen herself as a child, she may have been describing an experience similar to that of Basov, who was affecting time. This could be related to going back and forth in time, due to the acceleration of light. Therefore, a gigantic object that contracts or expands might be a fantasy, or could reflect on the modification of space because of the change in light's velocity."

"Briefly, what do you make of all this?"

"I would say that your... uh, 'subject', has tuned into an experience that could produce some deviation in time. Providing, of course, that Mrs. Tolmacheva is not mistaken. And, if she is right, I feel very sorry for her."

"Why?" Nietzsche demanded.

"Because she said she had gone mad upon re-entering the crystal. And, possibly, that refers to her own future."

DECEMBER 20, 1978

TELEX:

YURI V. TOKAREV. SOCIAL ID: 140.392.388 -- ADDRESS:
DYIETIGARA M 6/25 MOSCOW UNIVERSITY. -- DATE OF BIRTH:
JULY 7, 1940, NOVGOROD. -- 5 FT. 9 IN. 150 LBS. COLOR OF
SKIN: WHITE. REDDISH HAIR. BLUE EYES. NO VISIBLE SCARS.
INTELLECTUAL WORKER. SOCIAL INVESTIGATOR. PROFESSOR
OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION, MOSCOW UNIVERSITY. --
MARRIED, TWO CHILDREN. -- PREPARE RECEPTION AND
ARRANGE TOUR WITH A QUALIFIED ESCORT THROUGH THE
INTERIOR OF THAT COUNTRY. -- STOP.

MAY 12, 1979

He knocked again softly, and this time somebody invited him in. He pushed the heavy door and closed it behind him.

The room was turn-of-the-century French and St. Petersburg style. A huge table was in the center. About ten people sat in a semi-circle, watching him with curiosity. A few moments went by before someone uttered:

"Come over. Join us."

Yuri forced a smile. It felt like a long walk before he finally reached the only empty chair. The silence was deafening. He cleared his throat. Then the eldest man in the group began to explain in a friendly tone:

"Comrade Yuri V. Tokarev has numerous merits. Merits which are difficult to obtain during the course of a profession such as his. He is a good intellectual worker and fulfills a function that isn't understood by the public at large."

The old man spoke slowly, accompanying his words with wide and ample gestures. Yuri relaxed; he knew Grigori very well. He knew from the very first word where the old man's speech was leading. So he allowed the introduction to unfold and concerned himself with scrutinizing the rest of the attendance.

He noticed two famous psychologists, both dissidents from Platonov's school of thought. The most famous of the two, no doubt, was the unkempt Professor Karpov. Yuri also quietly identified a much-acclaimed Academy historian who, in the old days, had debated with the likes of Kuusinen and Rosenthal. Finally, he spotted Nietzsche, the biotrist who had allegedly pulverized Basiliev's para-psychological thesis. He did not know the rest of those present, with the obvious exception of Grigori, who was now expounding on Yuri's *curriculum vitae*.

There was something strange about this committee. As far as Yuri could remember, all of them were controversial characters that had been removed from their important academic posts in days gone by. He felt alleviated by this fact, but he was also a bit worried about the scandalous and reckless tactics they had employed to shake the scientific world with their respective theses. But there they were, and everything indicated that they were back in charge, that they all held "the bear on a tight leash," so to speak.

There was silence once again. Karpov spoke arrogantly:

"Tokarev, you have stepped over the line. Your function is clear: as a professor of comparative religions at the University, and through various publications, your job -- and please listen carefully -- is to contribute to the atheistic education of the masses, according to our concept of scientific materialism."

Yuri could feel the blood pounding in his temples. He had to contain himself when Karpov hurled him a green journal across the table. Yuri recognized the journal right away, the issue dated 1 December, 1978, five months ago.

In that moment, Yuri believed he understood the motives behind the creation

of this committee: they were going to grill him about his article, "The Religious Explosion in the World Today." Yet what didn't quite make sense is that, according to Grigori, it was the Ministry of Defense who had established this committee. Why was this branch getting involved in a discussion about his points of view? Nevertheless, he knew that this sort of tribunal, and that he himself, were now in a room that somehow belonged to the Defense Ministry.

Yuri relaxed his body and turned his attention to the other psychologist who now began to speak.

"The program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union emphasizes that there must be a systematic, broad publicity campaign, with a scientific foundation, in favor of atheism and that patiently explains the weakness of religious belief. Let's see, Mr. Tokarev, what did you do, exactly?"

"Gentlemen, I have verified dangerous changes in the religiosity of different nations. I have issued warnings about the need to study this carefully, and finally, I have insisted that these are symptoms within a much larger picture of collective insanity. "

"Symptoms?" Grigori interrupted. Then, with his gaze fixed on Yuri, he continued, "Comrade Tokarev, you've thrown the first stone, and it happened to break the window that will cause you the greatest deal of trouble. You have stated that 'the USSR suffers from myopia' when it comes to the phenomena of psycho-social alterations. You are using a highly irregular and offensive terminology. *Symptoms, myopia...* What is this all about, comrade?"

Yuri replied, cynically, "I maintain that the most alarming *symptoms* are: the greatest sightings ever of UFO's, the massive suicide of a thousand Protestant Christians in Guyana, the Islamic revolution in Iran, and the disturbances produced in the Dominican Republic and Mexico by the Catholic Pope."

"That has nothing to do with our way of life!" replied Grigori. "On the contrary, it verifies the decline of capitalism."

Yuri did not measure himself, and now said something that shocked the whole committee.

"The hallucinations about UFO's were greater in number in the socialist camp than in the capitalist camp. The suicide victims in Guyana, who came from the US, were self-declared 'socialists.' The revolution in Iran has polarized millions of Muslims in the southern region of the USSR. Finally, the Pope comes from socialist Poland, who now regards him in wild acclaim."

"Let's get to the point!" exclaimed an imposing woman's voice.

"I've observed one hundred and twelve symptoms world-wide, in only a few months. Half of them took place in the socialist world. If I have suggested a link between UFO's, ritual suicides, and other religious phenomena, it is because I suspect that there is a mental perturbation floating in the air, and it has mystical undertones. We must understand these new trends that are now developing. Otherwise, what happened in Iran, which is totally

unacceptable, will begin to occur more frequently."

Karpov had slipped a note to Grigori. When Grigori read it, he interrupted Yuri with a gesture, and said:

"Young man, we have to continue with our meeting, so just wait for me to call you in a few days."

Professor Tokarev stood up and bowed slightly. He walked towards the heavy door, and before opening it, heard a soft murmuring among the members of the committee.

MAY 15

When Irina arrived at the house, the envelope in hand, the children were running around, throwing everything into confusion.

Yuri took the yellow envelope. It didn't have any writing on it. Nor did he ask Irina how she had received it, but he knew that it was some message from Grigori. Sure enough, when he tore it open, he saw a piece of cardboard with large, red letters:

"Young man, we are studying your delusions. Stand by for my call."

It was a beautiful afternoon in spring. In a few moments he would be taking the Metro, getting off at Mayakovskaia station. Then he would go meet those zealous students of comparative religions. For the first time in his life he asked himself "What makes them so zealous? Why are these kids so interested in myths, legends, superstitions and absurd rituals?" He realized he had experienced the same impulses when, as a student, he attended Professor Grigori's opening class. Yuri shrugged, admitting that, after all, behind the aloof, academic facade, you always find a child that never outgrows the love for fables and for legends. His thoughts were interrupted.

Irina was leaning against the door frame, and she made a perfect silhouette. Yuri glanced at her slowly, as if engraving a picture in his memory. He remembered an old Russian poem, and must have moved his lips reciting it, because Irina suddenly asked,

"What are you saying?"

"I said I can't find my goddamned briefcase," he replied, and pretended to search around. Irina laughed, ran to him, and threw her arms around his neck.

She held him close and whispered, "Don't look now, but I think it's in your left hand." She wrestled with Yuri until she was able to snatch the briefcase away. While the children continued turning the house upside down, Irina ran to the sidewalk, and Yuri closely followed. There they stopped again, exchanging glances, a few words, and perhaps a few thoughts.

The professor was late getting home that evening. He had taken a long detour through the brightly lit Kailinin Avenue. Chatting with Yuri for two long hours was a student under his guidance, a Bolivian who had arrived years ago to the USSR, like so many others, to study at Patrice Lumumba University. He had succeeded in breaking away from that ghetto, and years later was admitted into the University of Moscow, almost with the status of a Soviet citizen. Jose Fuentes was thirty-five years of age, and according to Yuri, 'the most remarkable cerebral cortex I have ever taught.' Yet Yuri had always felt that the Bolivian was also dangerously profound.

Whenever they were together, Yuri requested that they speak in Spanish so he could practice the language he had learned from his mother, Maria.

During this particular evening, Yuri had spoken at length about the period of his life when he had been a simple employee of Moscow University, as a way

of responding to Jose's stories about his experiences in Lumumba U. Later, they had spoken for a long time about a crazy adventure on Mount Ararat, when Grigori lead an entire team of archaeologists who discovered nothing. It was precisely at this point that Yuri hurled a question, with that violence that is characteristic of a curiosity that has accumulated for several years.

"You haven't come here only to study comparative religions, have you?"

Jose slowed his pace. His face had that unfathomable expression, peculiar to Amer-Indians, but that Yuri had also seen among Tartars and Mongols.

"No, you are right. But I do fulfill the formalities very well."

From that moment on, questions and answers followed without stopping, and an incredible story emerged. For Jose, the religious topic was not a matter of research, but of practice. Without flinching, Jose explained that he had been assigned to fulfill a project. Things had become easier for him after joining the Communist Party in Bolivia. Later, some good references facilitated his admission into "the ghetto." And finally, Grigori's influence had placed Jose in Yuri's most advanced course. On several occasions Jose repeated that "none of this would have been possible without my own merits." Jose also assured him that during the last few years he had introduced many people to 'the Doctrine,' and that these people were working in separate groups in five or six republics within the USSR. Apparently, they were practicing what academia calls 'mysticism,' but involved something more advanced and more complex -- above all, more complex.

"It's more than mysticism," declared Jose. "It's the only true path for human liberation."

Yuri avoided being awkward, and did not respond with slogans, or by arguing that "socialism is the only way." Such a statement, uttered between two scholars of Marxism-Leninism in the middle of Kailinin Avenue, would have been redundant. Upon reaching this point, the conversation ended suddenly. They stopped before a water dispenser. Jose filled a glass and offered it to Yuri as though it were a precious gift. Yuri drank a small portion, and Jose finished off the rest. That was the end of the promenade. After a brief farewell, both men walked away in opposite directions.

MAY 20

Several days went by before Grigori advised Professor Tokarev about the committee's second meeting. By then, Grigori had clarified several points. Yuri discovered that the two psychologists had been confrontational on purpose, as a way of testing his own level of conviction. This had to be explained within a wider context.

Apparently, several months before, Grigori and other eminent scientists had created a research team that petitioned the Ministry of Defense to form a committee that was rather broad in scope and adequately financed. These scientists had been observing increases in the statistical curves for psychosocial dis-equilibrium within the USSR. They had verified a growing number of adherents to the Orthodox temples, a proliferation of semi-clandestine, occultist groups, and a suspicious background in new theoretical pronouncements by the new generation of scientists, especially in the fields of astrophysics and biology.

Meanwhile, Nietzsche, the biotronicist, had observed a surprising increase in the number of people interested in undertaking the paranormal tests conducted by his department. He could also produce irrefutable evidence about an increase in the percentage of people with extra-sensory abilities. Every day he would receive information from the most remote areas of the country about people who were spontaneously producing strange phenomena. Nietzsche had stated that he had conducted experiments with a woman that could move small objects at a distance; by fixing her gaze upon a rabbit, she had provoked a cerebral hemorrhage... this was very serious. This lady, by the name of Tolmacheva, could modify low-intensity magnetic fields and therefore willingly alter the flight path of a tiny gadget that used remote controls. On top of this, there was the incident of the American journalist: a journalist who had been held for interrogation in Moscow because he wanted to publish Nietzsche's research in the United States. It appeared that the West was also after something, but no one knew precisely what.

Anyway, the ones who had taken Yuri's article most seriously were two renowned historians. Both were involved with studying the significance of religious influence within the dissident movement. Two cases in point were Svetlana Stalin and Solzhenitsin. According to the historians "that these people became traitors to their countries could be easily explained, but it was totally unnecessary for them to also adopt Christianity." Even if the dictator's daughter had been pre-disposed to mysticism because of the personality cult, you still could not explain her new conversion. True, during his youth, Stalin himself had studied in a religious seminary, but all of this had changed after the Great Revolution. Consider also that Theosophy, founded by Helena Blavatsky, began in Russia. And during the ages of the czars there had never been a shortage of *Rasputins* and *Dostoevskys*. Had everything really changed after The Revolution?

The historians suspected that the great religions -- such as Christianity or Islam -- could be leading the dissidents. These religions counted with sufficient organization and structures. The historians argued that, even though article 124 of the Constitution proclaimed freedom of worship, it contradicted with real life. This contradiction could be exploited to instigate people. Yet what alarmed them the most was the underground religiosity that was snaking its way into the official ideology, blending Materialism with disguised elements of the occult.

Grigori himself had participated in the discussions of the research group before they had requested the formation of the committee. Grigori's thesis was that religions always arose at cultural crossroads, and that the USSR was, at present, "the mother of all cultural crossroads." Different races, languages, customs and climates were blending together in the largest country in Eurasia -- which happened to occupy one sixth's of the world's land area. There was conflict in every border, and even official ideology was facing increasing attacks by internal and external traitors. All of this was augmenting the spiritual confusion of the masses.

These academic ideas had surely filtered into the highest spheres of government. Almost at the same time that the Ministry had approved the formation of the committee, Comrade Brezhnev, in a surprising speech, had "warned young people about the dangers of flirting with mysticism."

Yuri now clearly understood the creation of the committee, and also understood the strange mixture of individuals working in the same group. After his briefing, he dedicated himself to developing a model of research for the new phenomena that were taking place in the USSR, and in the world...

Today was Sunday. He would miss the company of Irina, Vladimir and Sofia. He had arrived at the building that belonged to the Ministry of Defense. This time, the door opened just as he approached.

"Come in, my boy," said Grigori.

Both of them walked towards the central table and took their chairs, facing the full committee.

Nietzsky said, "Comrade, please tell us about your research model."

Yuri began a meticulous explanation about his investigation plan. It lasted four hours, with a barrage of historical and geographical data. Then he concluded:

"In sum, we must determine whether the phenomenon is being produced deliberately, and then exported to the USSR, or if it is occurring independently in other places. Personally, I am inclined towards the second possibility, even though I do not discount that there might be a certain degree of infiltration from the outside."

"What are you talking about?" The question was asked by a woman unknown to Yuri, and who appeared to be Armenian.

"I am saying that all types of information enter into the USSR through radio, the press, TV, and human interaction, just like there is information that leaves our borders. Yet I don't believe this would have enough influence to unleash

a process, which -- according to this committee -- 'is pressuring different fields and strata within our society.' I believe we could investigate some areas in the Orient, those that traditionally have been known to export religions. We should also investigate other areas that have suffered a religious collapse by clashing with a culture that was qualitatively more advanced. The first case is India, and the second case is Latin America where the native forms of worship were completely destroyed by the European conquest. We might be able to confirm what has been said so often in history: a religious revenge against the culture of the oppressors..."

Karpov interrupted. "And what can you tell us about the growing rates -- both in the USSR and in the world at large -- of alcoholism, delinquency, drug addition, suicide and insanity... especially insanity?"

"Professor Karpov," Yuri replied, trying to hide a smile, "our prominent psychologists can certainly find an answer to that. I am simply explaining a research plan that corresponds to my specific field. My frame of work has precise limits, but I do believe we need to carefully and seriously study these phenomena, maybe for several years, before we can arrive at any conclusions."

"Several years!" Karpov replied indignantly. "Our young professor, I'll have you know that we are talking about exponential rates. What this means is that by 1985 we are going to witness a collective, psychic explosion that might rupture even the most organized of societies. You think we are dealing here with a problem for some governmental bureau? Let me make this perfectly clear, we are talking about an issue of survival!"

The committee's coordinator interrupted the discussion, and asked each member to write down their comments and proposals. These would be summarized into a concrete suggestion to the Ministry. To everyone's surprise, he gave them only 48 hours to respond. The members of the committee hurriedly exchanged notes, and the meeting was closed. It was 11:50 p.m.

When he left the building, Yuri wondered about the speed events were taking. "Perhaps," he thought to himself, "we are the most advanced examples of the psycho-social explosion."

MAY 22

That evening, Yuri delivered to Grigori a twenty-page summary of his observations. His main point was that he had no comments, neither for the Committee nor the Ministry.

MAY 23

At noon, Yuri received a book about un-official mystical currents from Grigori. It included names, history, organization, number of adherents, and locations of a thousand small groups scattered throughout India and Latin America. The paper made it very clear that these were not known religions, nor sects that had broken away. This document did not have a title. On its brown leather cover it only displayed the numeral "1" engraved in red lacquer. Professor Tokarev was under the impression that this tome had been bound together long ago.

MAY 24

Grigori explained to Yuri that both of them were going "on vacation." Yuri must travel to very precise locations in India and Latin America. Grigori would leave for Teheran, Alexandria, and some points within the USSR. The biotroponist and some collaborators would visit Bulgaria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. There they would compare notes with similar specialists. Meanwhile, the committee's historians and psychologists would try to perfect a complex model for the "psycho-social explosion." The historians, basing themselves on data about the past, would do things backward, and suggest future possible scenarios. With the help of computers they would project the most likely future developments. Psychologists would then study these scenarios and try to establish the mental condition of the masses within each possible case.

When Yuri asked about Western Europe and the United States, his old teacher provided a strange reply:

"They are no fools, my boy. They will do their share. Two lines must intersect in order to define a point. We will depict the x-axis, they will depict the y-axis, or vice-versa. We'll soon see if different methodologies can accommodate each other, as has already been the case with rocket science. Let them be, they are not that stupid!"

MAY 25

Yuri arrived very early at the Laboratory for Applied Psychology. He came in response to a surprise invitation from Karpov, who waited for him in the company of another psychologist.

Now they descended to the third level underground.

"Do you have any experience with so-called 'altered states of consciousness'?" asked Karpov.

"No."

"I thought so," he replied, exchanging knowing glances with his assistant. Then he shrugged his shoulders and continued, "today, scientists are trained without any experiential foundation. How can anyone work in comparative religions without understanding the religious psychological experience? Ah, humanists, mere humanists..." he concluded, shaking the ruffled lion's mane that was his hair.

As they emerged from the freight elevator, Tokarev wondered about how accurate Karpov had been about his formal training.

They entered a small room that resembled the receiving area in a medical clinic. Karpov and Yuri seated themselves face to face, each in a separate sofa. A small table with flowers and ashtrays separated the two men. The lighting had a slight bluish hue, and there was a faint smell of ozone in the air. The third gentleman had disappeared through a side door.

"You are of the opinion that -- as was said a hundred years ago -- 'religion is the opiate of the masses.' Correct?"

Yuri did not answer because he was trying to understand where Karpov was heading. "Religion," he thought silently, "was that, something less, and something more."

Karpov continued, "In those days neither amphetamines nor LSD-25 had been discovered. Opium creates unreal and pleasurable conditions. It disarms you -- you become unconcerned, it calms you down. Do you perhaps believe that the revolution in Iran corresponds to those states of consciousness?"

Karpov drummed his fingers on the small table, scrutinizing Tokarev through his thick glasses, as he continued on this strange line of thought.

"We don't have enough time to induce in you the different states of consciousness provoked by religious practices. However, we will try to guide you to these phenomena through a synthetic experience... Of course, we aren't going to make you imitate a whirling dervish. You won't have to jump around like a macumba dancer in Brazil, or a voodoo-ist in Haiti. You won't be asked to perform some African tribal dance. You are not going to ingest soma, or hallucinogenic mushrooms; you will not force your breathing as in

yoga, or conduct exhausting physical exercises and fasting, you will not torture yourself with medieval practices. We are going to go directly to the root."

Yuri surmised that Karpov and his colleagues must have been able to reproduce -- within their laboratories -- phenomena that he had so often wondered about. At the same time, he was surprised by how quickly these scientists could adapt to new situations. He suspected that the team that later formed the committee had begun to work only five months ago. This was much too little time for developing technologies to understand the issues that had perplexed the world of culture for a thousand years.

"What exactly did you mean when you said it would be a synthetical experience?" Yuri asked suddenly.

"Almost all of the altered states of consciousness are the result of a process of depriving the neurons of oxygen, and of disarranging cerebral enzymes. You may research any ritual practice you desire, and it will always lead you to the same results. It doesn't matter if you get there through the use of chemistry, breathing, mechanical means, asceticism... You will always obtain the same results: enzymatic disorder and oxygen deprivation of the neurons!"

Karpov became so excited by his own explanations that he finally stood up. He began to walk all over the room like a bear inside a cage, and his voice thundered.

"If you die, Tokarev, if you are pronounced clinically deceased and then revived within ten or fifteen minutes, you have a 50% chance of believing that you left your body. It is also probable that you will talk about a light that spoke to you. Something like the light of UFO's, or of Moses' burning bush, or that other light that knocked Saul right off his horse."

Yuri began to see links between numerous legends and myths. He felt as though, for the first time in his life, some secret code were being revealed to him, and everything began to mesh together. But Yuri wanted to know more.

"There are many 'sacred' books," Yuri observed, "that talk about these phenomena without any of the intermediary conditions you have described."

The psychologist stopped abruptly and then began to raise his voice, apparently trying to control his fury.

"Please do not interrupt me! Thousands of wise scholars throughout the world would give anything to hear what I have to say, and you dare to interrupt me?"

"Let's go one step at a time. The Tibetan Book of the Dead, which you know better than I do, describes a procedure to liberate the soul at the moment of death. We are talking about the position of "the resting lion." The priest presses upon an artery in the subjects' neck, and then this dying person believes he travels through different regions of light. Oxygen deprivation, Tokarev! Even in the United States they know about these things. Meanwhile, what are our distinguished scholars doing? They are establishing relationships between superstitions and the economic conditions of the

societies that created them. My dear friend, that is like working with tools of the early Paleolithic era."

Yuri reminded himself that he was dealing with a reckless and notorious member of this gang called the committee. Nevertheless, he had to admit that in spite of Karpov's tendency for deviation -- which shined through like the sun -- the man was brilliant, and so was the entire group that was being sponsored by the Ministry.

"Americans have worked with drugs for many years," Karpov continued. "They have even used Meduna's Mixture to provoke altered states. You merely breathe a gas with unusual proportions of oxygen and carbon dioxide, and suddenly some Wall Street scoundrel feels mystically enraptured." Karpov paused dramatically.

"We know all about this," he slowly added, "but we have also found other forms that do not require oxygen deprivation. For example, Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed journeyed to places where they could meditate in silence. What for, what were they doing there? I'll tell you. They were suppressing data from the senses, something very similar to what happened to astronauts when they could not experience gravity."

"Professor Karpov," Yuri dared to interrupt once more, "I don't see the relation."

Karpov return to his sofa ceremoniously. Then, as if revealing a secret:

"Did you know that several American astronauts later dedicated themselves to religion? Did you know that cosmonaut Gagarin believed that he had seen UFO's? Did you know that Professor Nietzsky detected numerous extra-sensory phenomena under zero-gravity conditions?"

Karpov was looking at Yuri intensely, expecting an indication of surprise, but Yuri pretended to feel neutral.

"I don't see the relation," he repeated.

"Why can't you see the relation? Can't you see that when you eliminate the signals received by the human body -- either through zero-gravity or lack of stimuli -- that the nervous system cannot operate normally? When there is a lack of signals, the consciousness is altered. So here we are no longer talking about oxygen starvation, nor enzymatic disorder. We are dealing with a lack of electro-chemical impulses. Only the memory is providing information, so the subject vividly recalls scenes from the past -- or else amplifies his fantasies. Think about it, electro-chemical impulses!"

Karpov lit a cigarette. He offered one to Yuri, who accepted and took advantage of the pause in the conversation.

"The experience of altered states of consciousness could surely permit someone to understand the religious phenomena from a psychological point of view, but does not explain how religions emerge. Why do people suddenly crave for mysticism? This comment that I am making is related, directly and concretely, to the committee's main concerns," Yuri observed.

"Tokarev, I will reply that when everyday problems pound away on the nervous system of an individual, or of entire nations...when these problems

are too intense, there is a blockage of information. What is produced is the suppression of data, and this operates as a form of sensory deprivation. For example, the human being can be surrounded by hundreds of other people, and yet feel alone and isolated. Do you get it, comrade?"

"No, comrade, I do not get it," Yuri shot back, sarcastically.

"Well, you should understand this once and for all. You can become ill, or commit suicide, or go crazy. You can escape from reality in many different ways...and one way is through religion. This religiosity can take a contemplative path, or an aggressive path, depending on the general conditions surrounding the phenomena."

Yuri had come across a coherent system of explanations. He was fascinated that everything appeared to fall in place so neatly. It also suggested the precise line of research that had been proposed by the committee. But he wanted to make sure, even if this provoked the wrath of Karpov.

"That has not yet been proven!" Yuri exclaimed.

Karpov turned red. He took a long drag from his *Karelia* cigarette. Then he stood up and approached a panel that was attached to the wall. He pressed a button and said:

"Exactly. We want you to have a practical experience of altered states of consciousness so that you can conduct your field study with a proper set of tools. They tell me you will be visiting places that appear to be simmering with new mystical phenomena."

A sliding door now opened. It showed another room completely full of control equipment. The other psychologist was there, managing the controls. Yuri arose and followed Karpov.

"Now," Karpov explained, "you will enter the chamber of sensory suppression, also known as 'the chamber of silence.' You will be isolated from the world, except for us, who will remain at the controls. You can hand me over all of your belongings..."

Yuri disrobed completely and left his clothes upon a chair. Karpov then gave him a green tablet and asked him to dissolve it slowly in his mouth. Then he turned a large wheel and pushed open a metal door. He invited Yuri to step inside; Yuri entered the chamber and the door closed quietly behind him.

The walls in this room appeared to be totally covered with rubber, with some type of carpet that was light gray in color. The light had a slight bluish tinge, and allowed him to see an enormous tank resting on a platform. A thick cloud of steam emerged from the tank, and it slowly extended outward.

"Tokarev!" yelled Karpov over the loudspeaker.

"I can hear you."

"Climb the little ladder and get into the water. It will not scald you, it's at 37 degrees centigrade. After a few minutes you will no longer feel it because it is exactly at the same temperature as your skin."

Yuri entered the pool and sat on one of its corners.

"We are now filming you in our closed circuit TV," Karpov continued. "Look at the ribbon that crosses the pool. It will keep your body floating. Place it on

your shoulders and then stretch out in the water. You are not going to sink because the water has a very high concentration of salt. The ribbon will prevent you from floating off and touching the sides of the pool, in order to avoid tactile sensations."

As he was following instructions, Yuri asked about the sensation of the ribbon, the lights, and other stimuli.

"The light of the ozone devices are used to break up fatty molecules," Karpov replied, "which are to a large extent responsible for odors. The pill I gave you is made of chlorophyll and will deodorize your mouth. The lights will be turned off when you are floating adequately... You will hear no sounds, unless we wish to inform you of some new developments. You will soon stop being aware of the ribbon, according to the law of the constantly diminishing stimuli. The same will happen with your sensation of the water. Nevertheless, your face, the upper part of your chest, and your knees will not be submerged. However, the sensation between those parts of your body that are under water and those that are not will homogenize, because of the steam which will eventually produce 100% humidity in the air, and at the same temperature as the water. Do you understand?"

"Understood. What do I do now?"

"Do not stir the water. We are going to control two rods from where we are. One of them will be placed very close to your head, but will not touch it. The other will be an inch or so away from your chest and the side of your body. These rods, although they won't touch you directly, will provide us with brain scan signals, cardiographical signals, and signals from your spinal system... If something goes wrong you will hear a sound even though your ears sink beneath the surface."

Yuri was now floating, keeping his ears above the water. Presently he saw the two rods moving towards him and still had time to hear the final instructions.

"The steam no longer allows us to observe you on our screens. Remember, if you want to spoil everything, all you have to do is whistle, touch the sides of the pool, or pinch yourself. There are hundreds of ways of preventing sensory deprivation. But you won't be that clumsy, will you?"

That is the last thing Yuri heard. He allowed his head to sink back. The water now covered his ears and he began to float comfortably. His arms and legs now separated, even though the water's slight undulating motion still moved them rhythmically. He could no longer hear the two psychologists' voices over the loudspeakers.

"Name of subject: Tokarev. 25 May 1979 at 8:50 a.m. Water temperature: 36.5 degrees centigrade. Air temperature: 36.5 degrees. Average air humidity: 92 percent. Atmospheric pressure: 755 millimeters. Type of flotation: conventional. Brain wave: altered due to agitated breathing. Rapid eye movement due to loss of reference points. Cardiographical data: normal. Spinal chord data: muscular tensions in cervical and abdominal regions."

"Turn ozone devices off," requested a second voice.

"Off."

"Turn off heating in the tank and in the atmosphere."

"Off."

"Turn circulation of water off."

"Off."

"Connect automatic temperature control."

"On."

"Turn lighting off."

"Off."

"Switch speakers off."

Darkness, silence, quietude.

Yuri began to see a wheel turning around. He and Irina were tied to the wheel as it rolled through the countryside. Maria was somewhere near, and was shouting 'Boris, Boris!' A whistle similar to that of a train brought him back to reality. He had begun to fall asleep, and Karpov, no doubt, had detected that from the brain scanning devices, sounding the alarm to wake him up. He was awake in total darkness, and in the deepest silence. The memory of the whistle brought up the image of a figure that became sharper and clearer. The famous Plisetskaia was dancing marvelously at the Bolshoi Ballet. She was playing the role of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, and the whistle of the train was a foreboding of her death. Suddenly, the dancer transformed into an enormous butterfly that was floating over him, perhaps a yard away. Multi-colored and incredibly luminous. Yuri was startled and stirred the water, but the butterfly remained, flapping its wings. Yuri understood that it was following the rhythm of his breathing. He held his breath and the enormous insect became paralyzed, floating over him. Yuri thought about how the butterflies in psychedelic art were nothing more than externalizations of the pulmonary registers, especially in hallucinatory states produced by drugs. Something similar to the weird creatures seen by alcoholics in their *delirium tremens*. Snakes must relate to the digestive tract. Spiders might be translations of the patient's registers of the kidney or the liver, and so on. The butterfly disappeared abruptly and everything was quiet. His brain activity had become strongly vigilic. He thought that Karpov would perceive an increase in beta wave activity, and conclude that Yuri was trying to prevent the very phenomena that Karpov wished to illustrate. He decided to relax profoundly and to let his associative chains run free...

His arms had enlarged by several feet, perhaps. At the end of his arms he could feel very thin fingers, and his hands were whirling like propellers. Nothing was stirring, yet his hands continued to turn faster and faster, while his body became larger. That was it: his body had no limits because it was at the same temperature as the water and of the entire room. He decided to expand his body towards where the two psychologists were now working. He felt a sensation of boards breaking, giving way. Then, a strong wind blew on his face, and he saw a tunnel, yes, he was sliding through the tunnel at great speed. At the end there was a light waiting for him, and it became bigger,

and brighter. Suddenly he saw his body floating in the water. He had a very real sensation of floating on air. He experienced a strong desire to fly home, to see what was happening over there.... But he found himself again inside the pool. Karpov was measuring his beta waves. Karpov was controlling him. Karpov was spying on him because he was part of the conspiracy. Everybody was against him.

He laughed loudly. Now he understood that they wanted to turn him into a robot. They were brain-washing him. It was obvious, the green pill, the silent glances between the two psychologists. They wanted to kill him, kill Irina, Vladimir and little Sofia... because he knew what was going on. That is why, that is why, that is why.... they were stretching his arms, and his legs, and his penis was erect, and it was them, them, them...

"Nooooooh!" he yelled out.

The lights, and the sound of the whistle were turned on. Karpov burst into the room, yelling.

"You irresponsible ass! You ruined everything."

He grabbed Yuri's arm and tried to pull him out of the water, but Yuri broke away and sat at the opposite end of the pool. Yuri was whimpering and shivering slightly, while the steam escaped quickly from the room.

"Yuri," Karpov entreated gently as he realized what was happening. "Yuri, you must have gone through a paranoid crisis. You are now acting out a schizophrenic ritual. Don't worry. These are your own fears, your own mental contents that have been amplified by the sensory deprivation. Remember the mystics in their moments of isolation: they were tempted by the devil, or presenced furious battles with monsters or other extraordinary beings. Every one has his own psychic fauna and flora. Come on, connect now with he outside world."

The other psychologist soon arrived with a goblet totally filled with a transparent liquid.

"Drink," he said, and offered Yuri the goblet.

Yuri raised his head. His eyes were wide open, and his pupils were enormously dilated.

"What is it?" he asked, and his voice trembled.

"It is not poison, nor a drug," said Karpov smiling. "Not for me anyway..."

"What is it?" demanded Yuri in a threatening voice.

"Vodka, my friend. But if you don't drink it, I will."

Saying this, Karpov swallowed the vodka in one gulp. He returned the goblet to his assistant. This joke ended with a ceremony.

"I bow before you," said Karpov.

"Da, tovarich, da," the assistant replied, and also bowed. Then they threw the goblet backwards and it smashed against the walls of the other room.

Yuri was beginning to recover.

Two hours later, Professor Tokarev had finished dictating his experiences at the small entrance room. Karpov looked pleased as he received the manuscript.

"Do you know how long you were in the sensory deprivation chamber?" Karpov asked Yuri.

"About four hours."

"No, only ten minutes, Professor."

Yuri was ready to leave, but wanted to know if it were possible that he really had been out of his body when he felt that he was floating on air.

"We have studied these hallucinations very well," Karpov replied.

"And if I told you that in this hallucination I traveled to my house, and there I saw my young Vladimir cut his finger with a bread knife?"

"Just the same chain of hallucinations. Get real, Tokarev, no 'thing' leaves your body. These are just hallucinations."

Yuri felt something difficult to describe at that exact moment, and without even thinking, suddenly asked:

"Is there a telephone nearby?"

"Of course."

They walked into another room. Yuri dialed out and the ringing sound could be heard through the loudspeaker. The call was answered, and young Vladimir's voice was amplified by the sound system.

"Who is it?" the child asked.

"Your father. Don't you recognize me Vladie?"

"Daddy, daddy... when are you getting home?"

The two men smiled as they heard the childish voice. What happened next left both of them paralyzed.

"Daddy, you must come right away... I've cut my finger with a bread knife."

MAY 26

The next morning, Yuri received extensive instructions from a Ministry employee, along with a list of Foreign Affairs officers he should contact. Throughout the meeting, Yuri had a strong sensation of unreality. He hadn't slept all night. Yesterday's experience haunted him and had thrown him into a world of uncertainty.

In the afternoon, Yuri met Jose Fuentes. He couldn't tell Jose that he was going on a blind mission -- Yuri didn't even know exactly what he would be looking for. Nevertheless, he asked his Bolivian friend a few questions about "the Doctrine." Then he pleaded that Jose give him a way to contact followers in Latin America, since that group was not mentioned in the book that Grigori provided. How could they remain unknown to the intelligence services? Surely, the services must have tracked down organizations of this type for months. In any case, Jose gave him the addresses of people he personally knew in Rio de Janeiro, La Paz, and Santiago.

Yuri completed this day in the company of Irina and the children. At night he had a long conversation with Irina about the meaning of life and the problem of death. Yuri did not remember Irina ever talking about these topics before. His thoughts became gloomy for a while, but he attributed this to the special circumstances that they were going through. Anyway, the committee would meet in one month and analyze the results. Yuri would be present, and everything would end up in a big outburst of laughter as they all realized how they had succumbed to an irrational sense of urgency. Then, he would celebrate being reunited with Irina again. Later he would take the children shopping to GUM, then take them to Sverdlov Plaza and to Gorki Park. Yes, everything would end in absurdity; it would be even more ridiculous than Grigori's unsuccessful exploration of Mount Ararat.

This much was clear: the committee was made up of reckless people who enjoyed scandal, and yet he had to follow their instructions without any influence in the decisions. Yuri smiled to himself, imagining the look in the faces of Ministry officials as the committee would finally announce: "Comrades, this was a false alarm."

Yuri had written in the academic journal about some symptoms that he had observed, and proposing a serious study; perhaps he had dramatized a bit, but he had never proposed a wild-goose chase without clear objectives. The committee, probably instigated by Grigori, must have then accosted the Ministry of Defense, seriously criticizing them for their failure to foresee the revolution in Iran, a revolution that was set ablaze by a religious fanatic. The committee had gained influence by spreading alarm that a chain reaction of

phenomena of this type was possible unless immediate measures were taken. It was obvious that the members of the committee had been working on these ideas for several months; it was possible that similar reckless adventurers were working in the U.S. and in Western Europe. Grigori's comments about capitalist researchers might refer to some type of clandestine agreement with these other groups.

After his mind had rambled through these thoughts, Yuri understood that most of them were the result of his strong dislike for his impending journey. After all, during his experience in the sensory deprivation chamber, he had projected all type of evil intentions onto Karpov, and later discovered that they were no more than "his own mental contents".

MAY 28

Professor Tokarev was aboard an Aeroflot flight bound for New Delhi. A few hours before, he had crossed the Moscova River and had arrived at Jodinskoie Polie. There, at the airport, Irina had kissed him for a long time. Now, below and to the left, he believed to recognize the silhouettes of Kamet and the Nanda Devi. The snows of the 'top of the world' were tinted with the golden-red of the Indian dawn. Soon the airplane began to descend...

It was early morning as Yuri quickly cleared customs—an easy feat, thanks to his diplomatic passport. Just as he left the building, he was overwhelmed by a swarm of children:

"Johnny, money, money!" They all yelled at once, clinging to his clothes and trying to snatch his handbag.

Somebody took Yuri by the arm, and guided him towards an automobile some fifty yards away.

"This way. Professor, this way," said the chauffeur from the Soviet Embassy. Yuri felt slightly suspicious, but relaxed when he read the lettering on the car's front door: "Soiuds Soviestskij Sotsialistichieskij Riespublik." The car departed slowly. Hundreds of people on foot or on bicycles meandered in front of the car. At times, traffic was detained by motorcycles or small motor wagons. At other times it was slowed down by cattle lying in the middle of the street, slowly chewing grass. The vehicles traveling in the opposite direction eluded the obstacles at great speed, almost running into the embassy car. Yuri, who sat beside the driver, witnessed the city waking up. Thousands of people who had been sleeping on the sidewalks were now rising, while many people and dogs were still circling around small fires. The professor was reminded of the market at Samarkand, but there at least there was some semblance of order.

Yuri observed the Indian swastika on many buildings, whether made of wood, stone, bricks, or simply painted. Yuri let his eyelids drop... The sun and the snow of the Himalayas kissed each other against the blazing red of dawn. He saw himself and Irina, embracing, spinning inside a giant swastika that was rolling over the countryside in Trasnova, ravaging everything in its path. Peasants were fleeing into Novgorod. His father, a veteran of the International Brigades in Spain, was dragging his wife and little Yuri away from the invader's machine guns.

"Boris, Boris!" cried Maria, tightly holding her son amidst this enormous, bloody confusion.

Boris and Maria always addressed each other in Spanish, for they had met in Madrid during the days of the resistance. A million people were killed in Spain, seventeen million in the USSR, and the world continued to burn in

Hiroshima, Korea, Vietnam, and Africa. Sirens were howling, a shell exploded, blowing Boris away, while little Yuri was thrown forward, far away from his mother.

"Here we are, Professor," said the chauffeur. He stepped on the brake and blew the horn.

Professor Tokarev yawned and shook his head as if he'd just emerged from a bad dream.

"Welcome, Professor," said a handsome young man. He opened Yuri's car door. "We leave for Patna in four hours," he continued, with a big smile, "unless you have changed the plans."

"No, I haven't changed anything. You must be Igor, my 'tour guide?'"

Igor snapped to attention. "At your command, Comrade Professor," he replied, jokingly.

They entered the embassy, laughing, while Igor walked ahead with Yuri's briefcase in his hand.

That very afternoon they had already arrived in Patna, a few miles away from the border of Nepal. Ashrams of various types were flourishing all over the outskirts of the town. This activity had increased after Tibetan monks, fleeing from the Chinese, had crossed over and dispersed throughout India. As a result, a strong religious current had been growing for a few years throughout India's northern arch, from Benares to Patna. According to Grigori's book, you only had to visit three areas in that zone to make contact with no less than fifty non-official, mystical groups. After arriving at an old hotel, Professor Tokarev and Igor sat down to plan a schedule for the following days.

MAY 29

Early in the morning, the two Russians left towards an address mentioned in Grigori's book. Yuri suddenly decided to change course; to Igor's amazement, he led the driver directly to the slums, as though the professor had visited them before.

"It's just a hunch," Yuri explained as they arrived at a roomy, old house. They knocked on the door and were immediately received by a man in a saffron robe. Igor and Yuri looked at each other in surprise, but remained silent. They were then escorted to a small room and greeted by Tensing Chobrang, a learned man who currently taught eastern religions in Amsterdam. He had recently completed a tour around the world, seeking a new home for what he called "the refugees from Tibet."

Their host sat on large pillows of many colors, here in this room that reflected the rich diversity of the Tibetan Buddhist style. The Lama addressed them respectfully, and explained the progress of his efforts in South America. This vividly awakened Yuri's interest, who wondered why Tensing would choose that part of the world. Tensing then explained that a certain section of the high plateaus in South America had environmental and human characteristics very similar to those of Tibet. However, the governments of those remote regions were creating obstacles. They were quite concerned about allowing low-technology agricultural colonies. Those young countries were thirsty for progress, and preferred European immigrants, or Japanese in any case. Tensing also explained that the Dalai Lama had not been able to concentrate the refugees in any precise location, and they had scattered chaotically throughout the north of India. They were usually employed in building roads, earning miserable wages. Many died of starvation, illness, or exhaustion. There was little hope for improving their situation unless they could emigrate to Latin America, or return home. Nevertheless, Yuri suspected that there were other underlying reasons when Tensing, in his perfect English, declared: "A slender line connects the initiation centers of the world. The Himalayas have already given their message." Without knowing exactly why, Yuri remembered Jose Fuentes—the Bolivian—and his Doctrine.

The Lama continued in a strange train of thought, explaining how Mahayana Buddhism of the tantric school was disappearing, as well as a shamanistic religion called Bon, both characteristic of Tibet. He interpreted the Chinese regime as a re-occurrence of Taoism, which had destroyed Confucian ethics, even though it was now disguised under the ideological veneer of Marxism. This unique point of view intrigued Tokarev. After all, the dialectics of yin-yang and the synthesis of the Tao could be seen as a religious, primitive form of Marxism that struggled against Confucius' imperial state. He also remembered that Hegel, the creator of dialectics -- later adopted as the method of Marxism -- had been a theologian. But Yuri thought to himself:

"To interpret political philosophies from a religious point of view is a typical example of ultra-idealists inverting everything."

The conversation ended with an emotional climate of wild fantasy, with the Lama proposing cosmic and political relationships.

"A few days before Mao's death, an earthquake that killed a million people foretold that event, and the forthcoming violent change in the Chinese regime. Just as the Shah of Iran's airplane escaped the Islamic revolution, another earthquake devastated entire villages. You Russians should pay close attention to all of these changes near your borders. You have excellent seismological observatories, but you have no equipment with which to monitor mental upheavals."

Yuri felt ideologically and religiously intoxicated. However, back at the hotel, he carefully recorded the Lama's final sentence. In his own way, and in his gaudy language, the Lama had conveyed something quite similar to what Yuri had expressed in the journal of comparative religions in Moscow. Yuri had decided to work on his notes, and Igor was to continue chatting with the Lama. Afterwards, according to their plans, Igor was to scout the neighborhood.

Igor arrived two hours later.

"Professor, I have some news" he said, and ran over to a chair next to Yuri. Yuri turned his own chair around so that he could face Igor.

"What are you so worked up about?" asked Yuri, and somehow had the feeling that he already knew the answer.

"Professor," Igor panted, "when you left the ashram the old man suddenly changed his attitude. He opened a chest and offered me a jade medallion with some type of inscription. Then everything went crazy." Igor began to laugh convulsively.

"I took out some rupees," Igor continued, "because I thought that the Lama was selling me some cheap souvenirs, but when he saw the money he uttered a strange word. Instantly, two monks entered the room, squealing like maniacs. They were clowning around, throwing flour or chalk into the air, and one of them tried to place his hand on me.... Well, you know, everything ended in chaos. The funniest thing is that while I was pushing these monks around, and smashing everything in my way, the Lama, covered with dust, was still enjoying his disgusting tea, a tea that had yak hair floating on it."

Igor paused, and began to laugh again.

"Can you imagine, yak hair! I bowed before the Lama and left the ashram in a hurry, but I could still hear screams in that strange language. Do you have any idea what all of this means?"

"Igor, how long have you been in India?"

"Ten years, Professor."

"And why is it that you do not understand the local customs?"

"Oh, I do, very well. But, as you well know, these people are not Indian, they are from Tibet... Yak hair!" Igor repeated, laughing once more.

Yuri secretly rejoiced his friend's iconoclastic impulses. He recognized the

same energy he had seen in Grigori and in the explosive Karpov. How much he would have liked to turn over chairs and tables during those pedantic committee meetings! But even as Igor was laughing without inhibition, Yuri began to see two images that superimposed... He saw another "Igor", acting with a computer-like precision; he was apparently receiving a coded telex message, translating it quickly, and entering an immediate response back into the machine. Yuri tried to remove this disconcerting vision from his mind, and attempted to ask:

"Igor, please be honest. Do you..."

"What are you saying, Professor?" Igor replied, as he became comfortable in his chair.

Yuri took a deep breath and stared directly at his co-worker. Then he exhaled hopelessly. There was a moment of silence, and then Yuri said:

"Forget it, Igor, forget it."

"OK, professor, I will. Now, if you allow me, we should visit a very interesting place that I have discovered. It is a religious healing center."

As they approached the new site, sitting in a wagon that was pulled by a motor scooter, Yuri reflected upon the strange conditions surrounding their interview with the Lama. Yuri himself had not been able to ask the Lama anything of interest. He had left the ashram just as he had entered. Nevertheless, Tensing had gone into great detail without anyone asking questions. Then there was the incident with Igor, which surely must have some meaning, but it was difficult to understand. Yuri then decided to return to the ashram the following day, by himself, in order to avoid complications.

They had arrived at the healing center. The crowd of people was overflowing to the sidewalk, and they had to push their way into the building. They finally arrived at the central hall. A few yards away, they saw a middle-aged man lying on a table. He looked European--Austrian perhaps. His chest was bare, and the rest of the body was covered with a white sheet. At each corner of the table stood one of the healer's assistants. The healer now entered the stage, displaying his hands to the crowd, with the agility of a magician. The healer began to address the crowd in Hindustani while Igor translated softly for Yuri's benefit.

A surgical procedure was about to take place. Yuri realized there were some other Europeans in the room, and one of these was a woman weeping loudly. She must have been the patient's wife. The healer walked behind the table, and the Russians moved in closer, barely six feet away. Some monotonous chants began to fill the air as the room was smothered with incense. The four assistants waved their hands above the European, without touching him at all, as if performing a "magnetic massage."

Igor explained that surgery was to be conducted without anesthesia and without any instruments. The healer would be extracting a cancerous tumor from the patient's stomach using nothing more than his clean hands, and the wound would close immediately afterwards. All of this would take place thanks to the blessings of a local goddess.

Two women approached the table, each carrying a container, and stood at the healer's side. One of the ladies suddenly removed the sheet, uncovering the patient's abdomen. She cleaned his stomach with some cotton drenched in water. The healer pressed his hands on the patient's body, and one of his hands appeared to enter the patient's stomach without resistance. Blood began to flow while the lady cleaned it off with some more cotton. The healer was moving his hands very quickly; sometimes he would shake one hand, spattering blood all over the sheet. The audience stared in silence. The patient was squinting, forcing his eyes shut; his jaws were tense, as if expecting to receive a serious beating. Quickly, the healer pulled out something that looked like viscera out of the patient's stomach. It was a dark, elastic substance that he threw into one of the containers. His hands continued moving even faster, until everything ended with a gentle abdominal massage. The operation had concluded. The healer gave a step backward and relaxed his body, as if emerging from a profound trance. One of the assistants cleaned off the blood with a large wad of cotton, leaving the patient's stomach completely clean.

The crowd rushed forward to closely witness this incredible event. The European patient was now standing and tried to pull up his pants, but it was impossible. His wife threw herself at him, weeping uncontrollably. Other spectators tried to break the two apart so that they could touch the patient's stomach. Hysteria was taking over, so the two Russians fought their way out of the hall. Even as they were leaving they saw the patient's pants fall to the ground--then the patient, his wife, and a few other Indians rolled on the floor. Other people kneeled and kissed the healer's hands. The chants began again as Yuri and his co-worker pushed their way out to the street.

Igor whistled in relief. "What did you think about this operation?" asked Igor. "A thin layer of alkaline ointment on the hands and phenolphthalein in the water. That produces blood, or at least something quite similar in color. The viscera belong to a chicken. The assistant hides it beneath the cotton and sneaks it over to the healer. The healer's hands never enter the body. What happens is that he has depressed the abdominal cavity, and the red liquid forms a little pool. He bends his fingers and they appear to puncture the skin. This technique is also used in the Philippines. It is a good way to con Westerners out of money, especially since they keep arriving to the healing centers in droves."

"So you think our visit was a waste of time?" asked Igor.

"I'm sorry, I don't think it was very productive. I don't believe we have found a new religious leader, or an explosive phenomena that will sweep away the masses."

"Oh well, anyway I have a few other things to show you, not too far from here," Igor replied, and pulled Yuri towards the wagon. The chauffeur was waiting for them.

The two Russians contacted a wide variety of associations. Everywhere they were received without scrutiny. The followers were probably so eager to gain

new converts that they did not question the visitors' motives. Igor's expertise as a "tourist guide" and the information contained in Grigori's book allowed the professor to settle a number of questions -- even though the results were disappointing.

All of the ashrams, or headquarters for associations, followed the same pattern. Large estates surrounded by fences and patrolled by armed guards. The newcomers would announce their presence, and be allowed through the garden into the main building. There was always a receiving office and a large living room used for assemblies. Meditation rooms and dormitories were connected to the main hall. Another wing contained the kitchen and dining area, and still another housed the cleaning facilities: shower, toilets, laundry rooms, etc. All of these facilities, of course, were in disrepair.

Still, the ashrams and associations appeared prosperous. They resembled rest homes for older people, with a preference for Westerners. A few younger folk sleeping in the gardens appeared to be wealthy even though they dressed casually. The procedure was always similar: you spoke briefly with some ladies that were in charge of public relations. You received brochures and pamphlets that described the courses being offered and the price for each; the cost for room and board had to be added separately. The courses lasted from one week to 40 days. The less expensive ones dealt with macrobiotics, spiritual massage, astrology, acupuncture, iridology, and Tarot. The moderately-priced courses covered eastern philosophy, bio-energetics, alternative medicine, parapsychology and bio-feedback. Yet the most popular course was also the most expensive -- a session that was personally conducted by the guru. Of course, diplomas and personal mantras were eventually assigned for the visitors to take back with them.

In order to gather the greatest number of samples, Yuri and Igor visited other places separately. It was midnight when they finally rejoined at their hotel and began to record their field notes for the day. Yuri's notes included a question he could still not answer:

"How did we arrive at Tensing's ashram? I don't know how to answer this, I don't know what to think about all this. Who could provide the best answer, Karpov or Nietzsche?"

MAY 30

This time, the Russians left the hotel wearing Indian shirts and sandals. It was six o'clock in the morning. Igor hired a taxi that would take him to the villages surrounding Patna. He had also scheduled visits to Pusa and Darbhanga. If time allowed, he would stop at Madhubani, almost at the border with Nepal, some 120 miles from Katmandu. According to Grigori's brown book, this was one of the "cultural crossroads" that bustled with unofficial, mystical associations that were undergoing constant change.

At seven o'clock, Yuri entered the ashram where he had found Tensing. Two monks greeted him courteously and escorted him to the room where he had chatted with the lama the day before. Nothing appeared to have changed -- in spite of Igor's upheaval. As he reflected on the differences between this ashram and the conventional ones, a door quietly opened. Tensing suddenly appeared behind Yuri and startled him.

"Your Excellency," said Yuri, "I greet you and deeply apologize for my friend's behavior yesterday."

The lama seated himself in his customary place and invited Tokarev to make himself at home. A monk immediately entered, carrying buttered tea; he greeted them ceremoniously and then disappeared.

"Misunderstandings happen every day, Mr..."

"Tokarev," Yuri responded.

"Yes, Mr. Tokarev, they are everyday events. Nevertheless, because of that confusion I have the pleasure of speaking with you again. I think you would have returned here anyway," continued Tensing, as he sipped slowly on his tea. "You would have returned, either because you would have received the medallion that I tried to send to you, or simply because you did not ask what you needed to know. Yesterday, I was the one who did all the talking, trying to clarify some topics that I thought would interest you."

Yuri sipped on his tea; he felt confused by the lama's mysterious way of speaking.

"You can ask anything you want, Mr. Tokarev, don't hold anything back," said Tensing.

"Excellency, I am a professor of comparative religions at Moscow University. Since you are teaching similar subjects in Amsterdam, I think we will be able to use the same jargon, and this will make our conversation easier."

Yuri stopped for a minute; he was having trouble discovering exactly what he wanted to discuss. The lama noticed Yuri's distress and was very understanding.

"Professor, you can rest assured that I will try to answer your questions as completely as possible. Don't hold back."

"Very well, then. What exactly did you mean by saying that 'a slender line

connects the centers of initiation in the world. The Himalayas have already given their message'? Sir, I am quoting you word for word, I wrote this down in my field notes.

"First of all," replied Tensing, "I will say something that is not easy to accept. The centers of initiation correspond to places where religious practices and knowledge have attained their highest level. These are not centers of information, like universities. They will not be discovered very easily, because people have very different pre-conceptions about these things."

Yuri realized that the lama was now speaking very directly, without mystery. This prompted him to bring out his notebook and begin to write.

"In the vicinity of the Himalayas," Tensing continued, "near Mount Ararat, in the Andes, and in some other spots we can find these centers that remain connected. You probably know about the legend of Mount Meru. This mountain does not exist in any precise location. It is, very simply, *the* mountain that unites the earth with the heavens. The centers of initiation usually correspond to a physical landscape that evokes the mental landscape of Mount Meru. Something similar happens with the underground cities of Agharti and Shambala. They connect with 'the hells.' And yet they do not exist at a physical level. They are mental."

Yuri was nervously taking notes, even as he tried to unravel the connection with Grigori's expedition to Mt. Ararat. What was even more surprising was that the committee had instructed Tokarev to investigate the vicinities of the Himalayas and the Andes -- yet it was Yuri himself who had originally proposed these areas. Yuri was finding it very difficult to follow the explanations.

"Mount Meru," continued Tensing, "produces strong spiritual upheavals when the time is right. Nobody can see Mt. Meru unless he first asks 'permission' from one of its guardians. These guardians are not physical either, they are mental. Nevertheless, whoever is searching needs some physical presence to be correctly guided through the labyrinths of his or her own consciousness." Tensing paused for a moment, and then continued, "Remember this piece of advise: do not be fooled by appearances. A great teacher can have a humble station in life, he may be a *sudra*. On the other hand, a widely respected spiritual leader may be far removed from true knowledge. Don't search for spiritual leaders who are widely recognized and accepted, search for those whom they persecute. If you had lived during the time when the great spiritual masters began to preach, you would not have recognized them because they did not look like religious people. They were messengers from Mount Meru. They were messengers from the same human mind that launched them towards the world. Without them, the human being would have remained helpless amid the shadows of his own mind."

"Your Excellency," Yuri interrupted, "what do you mean by saying that the mind launches messengers to the world?"

"Well, living beings create defense mechanisms. Try to see the mind as a living being. Imagine that it is at the brink of insanity. Then, from the

luminous peaks of Mount Meru, messengers will fly out. They are the carriers of the light, the same ones who guide the mind when it separates itself from the physical body, when we are overwhelmed with the illusion of death."

The lama studied Yuri silently as Yuri continued taking notes; he continued writing for a long time after the last words had been spoken. Yuri was not only writing what the lama was saying, but also his own thoughts about the light. That light he had seen at the end of the tunnel, before feeling he had become separated from his physical body. There, back at the chamber of sensory deprivation.

"Excellency, " Yuri remarked suddenly, "my training does not allow me to adequately follow your explanations. I'm sure you understand, it is a problem with the choice of words and with differing interpretations... but I am sure about one thing: what you are explaining to me now is useful for the research that has been personally assigned to me."

Tensing smiled, and warmly replied, "Professor, you are a good man, and have a great deal of force, but you still do not know what you are looking for, and this is most extraordinary. How can you conduct research without knowing what it is that you are researching?"

Tokarev felt self-conscious, and responded mechanically: "I am searching for symptoms of a mystical upheaval that might appear at any moment in the world, producing an imbalance in the current world situation."

"You should be glad, Professor Tokarev," Tensing replied, "this upheaval is already beginning... like what happens when masses of ice give way, and rivers begin to rush, dragging everything in their path. The same thing happens when the mind becomes liberated. Later on, the waters become clear and are used to irrigate the fields..."

Yuri shrugged, and held his breath. Then he heard himself asking, in a high-pitched voice, "Excellency, what do you understand by *Doctrine*?"

"*Doctrine* is the teaching of all Buddhas," the lama replied.

After this response, Yuri decided to conclude the interview. He felt slightly cheated, and something similar to indignation was growing inside of him. However, he controlled himself and said, "Excellency, I hope that I did not bother you with my questions. I greatly appreciate your guidance."

The lama bowed his head, then opened a chest, produced a medallion, and placed it in Yuri's hand.

"Give this to the guardian, if you wish to see Mount Meru," he concluded.

Yuri looked at the sculptured jade medallion, and he was able to see an equilateral triangle inside a circle. After thanking the lama, he stood up and then remarked, with an undertone of sarcasm, "Your Excellency, perhaps someday I will be able to correctly understand what you have explained. I bow before you." He bowed respectfully and left the room.

Back on the street, Yuri decided to look around the city. Several hours went by, yet he found nothing of meaning, only curiosities. Curiosities, like a hand emerging from the sand; intrigued passerbys would throw a few coins at it. He also saw a man perched on a tall column who would empty his bowels

onto the street below, sometimes over a careless pedestrian. Yuri was told that the *fakir* had been there for over ten years. Every day someone would raise a bamboo pole to give him water and a bowl of rice. He had learned how to fasten himself to weather the storms. But someday he would fall, dried up by the sun, a pile of bones and rags. There was another man with varicose veins who was always standing. He would sleep on his feet, resting against a swing, and he had not moved from this spot for years. Sick people, malnourished people, blind men, madmen, ascetics, and *fakirs* in this nation that had given so much to the world.

"Truly, religion is the opiate of the masses," Yuri thought to himself, as he watched the remains of an old man who had recently died from malnutrition. Someone would throw this body onto a cart, but perhaps no one would pay the wood needed for his cremation. And the children always crying: "Johnny, money, money!" What could these 600 million people do? Devour all the cows in a single day? The cows -- sacred or not -- at least provided milk, and also a bit of butter and cheese. Fortunately, India did have lands and an agricultural program. Indeed, but the land was exhausted after four thousand years of cultivation. Where was the technology and the fertilizers that were so urgently needed?

What a contrast! On the one hand, a powerful State armed with nuclear weapons -- and the people on the brink of starvation. Then there was the caste system -- legally abolished -- still surviving, inevitably, like always. India had many centers of enormous wealth, cultural centers, factories, and universities... yet none of this was able to save the old man who had recently died, and perhaps no one would pay for his funeral pyre.

Alexander the Great came here. Nothing of Alexander nor of his empire remains -- only the memories. The Mongols were here also, and others, and still others. And nothing remains. And when the Europeans tried to dominate India, she sat down like a sacred cow and remained motionless, defeating her conquerors with that silence that has spanned millennia. Perhaps, when human history comes to an end, over this map that looks like a giant heart, the Indian people will still remain alive... The Buddha's wheel of compassion began to roll here in India, because he saw illness, old age, and death. Gandhi himself had done as much as he possibly could, in his own way. So, this illustrious Professor Tokarev... what could he teach to the nation of India? The vain professor from Moscow University was suddenly moved by a great love for this country, and for her beleaguered people. He felt a warm sensation in his chest, he felt once again a feeling of humility, the same humility that he had experience as a child, when he listened to his mother relate legends and tales...

Hours went by, and night came. Yuri had not been able to find anything important during his long walk though the city.

Yuri was now back at the hotel, working on his notes, when the door opened. Igor spoke sadly, "Professor, I fulfilled everything we planned, but I was not able to find any leads whatsoever." Igor remained standing by the door,

unsure about coming in.

"Come on, Igor, come on," said Yuri, "sometimes it is impossible to find something that does not exist." Yuri was trying to raise Igor's spirits. "Have you eaten?"

Igor closed the door, walked over and sat down next to Tokarev.

"Yes, of course I've eaten. How did everything go for you today?"

"The same as it went for you. We are done with this. Tomorrow we will leave for Calcutta and there we will see what can be done."

Igor perceived that his friend was deeply disappointed and began to clown around. He jumped up, he rearranged the chairs, the pillows, the partition. Then he began to walk around, gesturing, imitating various characters he had encountered today.

"Oh," he cried out in a woman's voice, "I've experience the profound peace of Paradise in the ashrams! Venerable gentlemen, green pastures, blissful melodies, sandalwood, incense..." Igor pretended to blush and covered his face coyly.

"Eastern Greetings!" Igor declared, bowing to the floor with his palms pressed against each other. "Words of love! Everything is 'love'. Monkeys, birds, Indian children, a bull -- these are the decorations *de riguer* for the photograph that will appear on the desk of some bank executive in London, or a psychiatrist in Zurich. But better still is the photograph of the guru, personally autographed, for only \$100 a pop!"

Igor was now sitting on top of Yuri's desk, in the lotus posture. He had wrapped a towel around his head to resemble a turban. Some dark glasses emphasized his farcical air of mystery. Yuri was watching him, smiling. To end his performance, Igor took some books, his turban, and Yuri's notes, and threw them up in the air.

"Oh, Shiva!" he yelled out, "How beautiful the snows of Moscow!"

The two men laughed together like old friends. The window was still open, and the first drops of rain began to fall over Patna.

JUNE 2

They traveled for two days in that train, which was practically open to the air. Every time the train stopped, masses of people would climb in, and when there was no more room available, they would climb up on the roof and travel that way for miles. Igor was also up on the roof, speaking in Hindustani and singing popular songs. Once, when the train stopped at what could be called a station, Yuri watched Igor's antics from afar. Igor pretended to engage in serious discussions with the children; then he raised one of them to his shoulders, threatening to begin running faster than the train, to run through mountains, jungles, lakes and valleys. The train whistle blew, and Igor placed the child back next to him, with his hand on the child's shoulders. Yuri was able to see how Igor discreetly handed a few rupees to the child's parents, and then began to sing again.

They had finally arrived at Calcutta. Immediately, they embarked to the Kalighat temple. It was almost 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and a huge storm was approaching. With this heat and this humidity, the temple had a nauseating, greasy smell. A crowd of people was adoring Kali. She was represented in stone, painted in black. Her eyes were red, and she had ferocious tusks, like an elephant. Her face was splattered with blood, and her hair bristled with terror. She was wearing a necklace made of human skulls, and earrings made of cadavers. She was dancing over a dead body, holding a sword with one hand, and a severed head in the other. Her two other hands blessed her worshippers. The chanting, prayers, and frenetic shouting increased as one approached the place for sacrifices. An Indian was decapitating goats that were being offered to the goddess. His naked torso was splattered with blood. The heads flew into the air as he lopped them off with a giant sword; the goat's bodies quivered with almost electrical contortions.

An Indian approached Yuri timidly. He was holding a beautiful, dark-skinned boy by the hand. The boy was smiling, and his large, almond-colored eyes were also smiling.

"Sacrifice, sacrifice! Only one hundred rupees," the stranger told Yuri. He pointed to the child's neck.

In his mind, the professor saw the goat's head fly into the air, and also that of the boy. He remembered Vladie; the bread knife and the wounded finger. The blood pounded against his temples and something inside of him was ignited with uncontrollable fury. He attacked the stranger, grabbing his throat. "Only fifty rupees, then, only fifty rupees!" the victim exclaimed.

Igor broke the two men apart, while the child cried inconsolably. Now that

Yuri was apart, Igor began to speak with the stranger. The professor saw Igor give the Indian fifty rupees; the adult and the child then left, gesturing their appreciation. Yuri jumped once again, attacking Igor and yelling:

"You are an accomplice!"

Igor detained Yuri, holding him by the arms. "Professor," he explained, "the man wants fifty rupees so that he may sacrifice a goat, to win the goddess' favor for his little brother. He wanted Kali to protect the child... See, you don't know the Indian customs yet. Or did you really believe that they would sacrifice children as a tourist attraction?"

Nothing of interest developed in Calcutta, so both of them boarded an airplane to Bombay, the greatest and most westernized city in the whole of India.

JUNE 3

In Bombay, they rented a dilapidated car that would take them to Poona, some 100 miles away. Yuri engaged in conversation with the driver, and was able to understand him pretty well. When the driver affirmed something, he would shake his head from side to side. Igor had explained this curious custom some days before. So from then on, Yuri was able to understand that "no" meant "yes." Well, in the USSR it was common for leaders to clap to the public, and then the public would respond in kind. This custom that appeared completely normal to the Soviets, was considered strange by capitalists. As soon as they arrived in Poona, they checked in at the Amir Hotel. They went out to tour the city, as usual, looking for non-official mystical groups that were mentioned in the brown book. The day ended with failure, as usual.

JUNE 4

It was almost 9 a.m. when they arrived at Zawan's ashram, just in time to listen to his dissertation. The loyal followers, about one hundred Westerners, were all sitting on the grass. Zawan was sitting on a golden throne raised upon a platform. He was following the rhythm of phonograph music broadcast through large speakers. He moved his hands to and fro, or sweetly rock his head. At times, he turned his eyes completely white and shook his greasy beard... there was an explosion of amazement. How peaceful he looked!

"Kneel before the master," said a voice in American English over the loudspeakers. "He who wishes to liberate himself must give up his ego." The Westerners responded by kneeling down, brushing their face against the grass. Those that were more fortunate could reach the fat man and kiss the pink stockings that could be seen beneath black sandals.

The two Russians mingled among the disciples. Yuri sat down on the grass, but his friend went directly towards an empty chair, which he found curiously inviting. As soon as Igor sat down, several women began to scream hysterically, hurling themselves at him. Igor defended himself as best he could while trying not to hurt his attackers. Everything happened so quickly that some of the women tore his shirt and his trouser pockets.

Yuri ran over to rescue his friend as the guru took over the microphone.

"Relax, my little lambs," the guru declared. "Relax. You must understand that this man does not know the great meaning of that empty chair. Every morning, the spirit of India's greatest dis-incarnate sits there to listen to my words."

The furious women retreated reluctantly. They began to wobble, and fell down on the grass, laughing grotesquely. Clearly, alcohol and drugs had been consumed since very early morning -- the reason for this bizarre behavior. Later on, someone explained that certain stimulants predisposed the audience to "open their hearts to the truth of Zawan."

The chair was empty once again, and Igor sat on the grass next to Yuri.

"I crushed him," he whispered softly.

"Who?" asked Yuri.

"The spirit of India's greatest dis-incarnate, comrade."

Zawan rambled on for half an hour. When he finished his speech, many followers again tried to touch his pink stockings. The mood became sublime when a black Mercedes Benz appeared. Zawan was assisted by several followers onto the car. Then he circled the kneeling crowd two or three times, blowing out kisses from the rear window. He got off exactly where he had boarded the vehicle. While the Mercedes was returned to the garage, the fat

Zawan climbed back onto the platform, and then disappeared away from the eyes of the profane.

Two hours later, the Russians were leaving the ashram when two men hurried to their side. Apparently, they were helping a young woman who had trouble keeping her balance.

"Are you returning to Poona?" one of the strangers asked.

"Yes, right away," said Igor.

"Could you take Ethel with you?" asked the second stranger.

"Take her where?" said Igor, a bit perplexed.

"Wherever you are going," replied one of the young men. "Tell us where we can reach you, and in a few hours we will be by to pick her up. There is no time for explanations. Pierre, write down their address."

Yuri spoke, "Listen, Pierre, we are at the Amir Hotel. Ask for Professor Tokarev. But if you are not there within two hours, we will leave this woman at the hotel."

The two young men wheeled around and returned to the ashram.

The Russians were back at the hotel. Ethel had not said a single word. She was lying down, with her eyes completely open, almost without blinking. Igor had ordered some fruit juices and some conventional Indian food. Shortly afterwards, a crowd of servants arrived. They wheeled in a cart with the food and drinks, then formed a single line near the door. Igor began to give each of them some *paisas*. As each servant received his coins, he thanked Igor by nodding his head from side to side, then left the room.

Yuri offered Ethel a glass of fruit juice, but she did not respond. The two Russians decided to leave things as they were and wait for the two young strangers to arrive. They killed some time by taking showers and packing their clothes, including Igor's damaged shirt and pants.

Someone knocked at the door soon afterward.

"Come in," said Igor.

The two young men entered the room, sat down, and drank some fruit juice. Then the tallest of them said:

"My name is Kaustila and this is Pierre. Ethel has been at the ashram for three months. We visited the ashram yesterday and met her then. We listened to her story last night, but today she could no longer speak, so we decided to take her out."

"I see, so you must be Boy Scouts," replied Igor, sarcastically.

"No, we're Sisters of Mercy," Pierre shot back.

Yuri intervened. "OK, OK, why don't we let these two gentlemen explain what is going on?"

"There are about ten more idiots at the ashram," said Kaustila. "They are all drugged, like Ethel. They refuse to leave, because they are waiting for Zawan to give them 'The Great Secret.' In order to be ready, they volunteer to reduce their portion of polished rice day by day."

"Oh, I see," said Igor. "So you must be from the Salvation Army!"

"No!" said Pierre, "we are the boys from the Bolshoi Ballet!"

"What is wrong with you guys?" Yuri snapped. "If you are going to get into a fist fight, I suggest you go outside. Go ahead! And you, what did you mean by that remark about the Bolshoi?"

"You are Russians, are you not?" replied Kaustila. "They verified this at the lobby. Russian diplomats."

"And what are you?" asked Yuri, irritated.

"I am French and he is Indian," said Pierre. "The other people back at the ashram did not want to leave, so that is no longer our problem, because we are not going back. But since we decided to take Ethel, we have to make sure she boards an airplane and goes back to London before something serious happens to her. She is completely anemic, drugged, and penniless. She does not remember where she lives and has lost her papers. So, since you are distinguished diplomats living in the high life at the Amir Hotel, it is up to you to take her out of India."

The Russians were shocked. The two young men sipped a little more fruit juice and headed for the door.

"We have done what we can," added Kaustila. "Now it is your turn to fulfill your duty to international solidarity. You are members of the United Nations, right?"

"Just a moment," said Yuri. "We need to know more about what is going on."

"There is no more to talk about," said Pierre.

Igor began to laugh, and slapped the two young men in the back. The mood changed, the two strangers also began to laugh, and sat down at the table, willing to improve the situation. The two young men explained, very candidly, that they were followers of the Doctrine and that they were fulfilling a project that had been assigned to them.

"Wherever I find suffering, I do my best to resolve it," Kaustila declared. "If I cannot do anything, I will continue happily on my way."

Yuri recognized that attitude thanks to his conversations with Jose back in Moscow. Yuri proposed a settlement.

"We will take the girl back to Bombay, to the British Consulate, requesting that they send her back to a hospital in London. If money becomes an issue, the USSR will pay for her air fare, but it is up to the British to resolve the problem with the paperwork. Do you agree, gentlemen?"

"Absolutely," said Kaustila.

The young men then inquired what the two Russians were doing in Poona. Yuri told him about his research, without hiding anything. He felt that he had the opportunity to discover something meaningful, and he would not ruin everything by provoking their suspicion. He remembered his conversation with the lama, and this reinforced his approach. In addition, since he could not discuss these things with Jose right now, at least he would discuss it with people who followed the same Doctrine.

After listening to Yuri's explanations, Pierre replied that they also were aware of an increasing psycho-social unbalance, and of the sudden appearance of perturbing mystical phenomena. He continued to explain that a chain

reaction of irrational explosions was about to begin.

"During the decade of the eighties, the energy crisis will become generalized. Many countries will go bankrupt. We will see hungry masses of people, without jobs, without a future, wandering through the great cities, dedicated to violence and robbery. The mental state of entire populations will approach that of collective madness. Mystical currents will attract the masses, and become important sources of power."

The two Russians listened attentively.

"Let us assume you are right," said Yuri. "What can be done about it?"

"There is only one thing that can be done," Pierre replied. "To prepare resources for an enormous social psychotherapy, something that is capable of absorbing the gigantic negative charges of the collective mind and transform them into positive energy. In order to achieve, this, we must have a *launching*."

Igor interrupted, "A *launching*? What are you talking about?" Igor was trying to confuse this discussion. "Gentlemen, what I would like to know is whether you are students at some religious school, or perhaps, well-meaning sociologists who are concerned with the health of the collective mind."

Pierre responded, "I can answer that by repeating a statement that we recite in public. *My Doctrine says that I can believe or not believe in God. My Doctrine says that I can believe or not believe in immortality. My Doctrine explains that I can, and must learn how to overcome suffering.* For example, my friend Kaustila is an atheist, and I believe in God. But both of us agree that suffering is not good. You may believe that there is no suffering in your country. If that were the case, it would be a paradise from the Doctrine's point of view. But if you are mistaken, then something is also going to explode back in your country."

Ethel was now standing, and walked over to the rest of the group. She was still wobbly. Kaustila helped her onto a chair, then carefully helped her drink some juice and nibble on some small pieces of cold chicken.

"Thank you," she said finally, and returned to bed.

Everyone looked at each other quietly. A feeling of brotherhood circulated throughout the room.

"OK, we have to go," said Pierre.

Yuri held him back. "Tell me, what are the chances that you can channel this alleged explosion that is about to happen?"

"No chances," Kaustila replied. "We are just a few nuts, without resources, without significant numbers. And since we cannot reach the masses with some seductive proposal, we cannot channel anything. So, let me repeat what I told you earlier. *Wherever I find suffering, I do my best to resolve it. If I cannot do anything, I will continue happily on my way.*"

"Just one more thing," pleaded Yuri, "where is your center of activities, your epicenter?"

"Professor Tokarev," Pierre replied, ironically, "we are not a local earthquake. We are poli-centric. However, if you want to find out where the Doctrine

began, you can search the surroundings of the Andes. However, you are not going to find any ashrams. We are just a few nuts, scattered throughout the world. But I will tell you this much... if, during the chaos that is approaching, we have an opportunity to prevent the psychopaths from launching their missiles, we will do so. We will have our own launching, to de-activate the bombs."

The discussion ended on this strange note.

When the young men left the room, the Russians began to get ready for their own departure. The professor had some time to write in his journal. His comments made no mention of the look of warning that he had perceived in Pierre's sparkling eyes.

JUNE 5

Yuri would leave that evening from Bombay to Paris, with just enough time to change airplanes and continue on to Latin America. In less than two days he would find himself in one of the most remote locations on Earth, close to the South Pole. He decided against investigating any more and focused instead on organizing his notes about India. Igor was taking care of Ethel, would confirm the reservations, and would probably run a some errands before they both left to Santa Cruz Air Port.

Yuri had been working at a table in the hotel lobby since very early that day, with a few pieces of luggage near him. It was 8 a.m. when Igor appeared.

"Comrade Professor! Everything is OK!"

"So, you didn't have any problems, Igor?"

"Not at all. The Englishmen reacted as if Ethel's situation were something that happens every day, and are taking care of the matter. Air India confirmed the flight. Here is your ticket."

Later on, while they were waiting for the departing flight, Igor extended his best wishes to his co-worker.

"Professor," he exclaimed, "I sincerely hope that they will be waiting for you with as much anticipation as we did in India."

"Well, you did not have to anticipate me for very long," Yuri replied. "They decided on my journey on the 24th of May, and I arrived in New Delhi on the 27th. That is only three days."

"No professor, you're mistaken," Igor said, slowly. "Your arrival was announced through telex five months ago. *Yuri V. Tokarev. Social ID: 140.392.388. Address: Dyietigara M 6/25 Moscow University. Date of birth: July 7, 1940, Novgorod. 5 ft. 9 in. 150 lbs. Color of skin: white. Reddish hair. Blue eyes. No visible scars. Intellectual worker. Social investigator. Professor of comparative religions. Moscow University. Married, two children. Prepare reception and arrange tour with a qualified escort through the interior of that country. Stop.* Then, the telex would be retracted, your visit would be canceled... and then everything would start all over again..."

"Last call for Flight 126 from Bombay to Paris. Gate number three," blared the loudspeakers.

Yuri turned pale. Igor kissed him on both cheeks, and then added, with a big smile:

"You are no simple professor, and I am no simple tourist guide... The telexes were all in code, and they were coming directly from the Ministry of Defense. Have a nice flight, comrade!"

JUNE 6

A small audience was seated in the conference hall, watching a film about a rat that was trying to bite and incandescent object, while completely ignoring a piece of cheese nearby. Shortly afterward, the rat lost all of its strength, falling to one side, kicking violently, and then remaining completely still. The rat was dead. The film now focused on Tolmacheva as she was being assisted by the biotronicist. Later on, the camera showed an automobile avoiding obstacles in its way. The car was very small, like a toy. Its front wheels would move accurately to the left or the right as it rolled over a clear acrylic table. Amazingly, when the camera closed in, one could clearly see that the toy had no mechanism to propel it. No motor, no spring... and yet it continued maneuvering about. The camera showed it from many different angles.

The film was over for the time being. Nietzsche, spread out in his chair, exclaimed in a loud voice:

"Tolmacheva influenced the impulses of a rat with a force strong enough to completely confuse its nervous system; therefore, it is not beyond reason to believe she could affect much simpler choices within a human brain."

Someone in the audience asked, "Is there any chance that Tolmacheva -- able as she is to move small cars -- could affect the circuit inside of a missile, or a nuclear firing device?"

"There is no chance," replied Nietzsche. "She is hopelessly mad and on the brink of death."

The room darkened again and the movie screen came to life. Tokarev appeared walking into the sensory deprivation chamber. The camera showed the steam begin to fill the room, and Yuri disappearing beneath the fog. There was a pause in the film, and one could now see two men talking in a small room.

"We have studied these hallucinations very well," Karpov explained.

"And if I told you that in this hallucination I traveled home, and there I saw my young Vladimir cut his finger with a bread knife?" Yuri asked.

"Just the same chain of hallucinations. Get real, Tokarev, no 'thing' leaves your body. These are just hallucinations."

"Is there a telephone nearby?"

"Of course."

The film showed the two men walking into an adjoining room. Yuri picked up the telephone and dialed out. The sound of the telephone could be heard on film. It was young Vladimir's voice, amplified by the sound system.

"Who is it?" the child asked.

"Your father. Don't you recognize me Vladie?" Yuri asked softly.

"Daddy, daddy... when are you getting home? Daddy, you must come right away... I've cut my finger with a bread knife."

The film ended, and the lights went on again.

The biotronist was still spread out in his chair as he continued his explanations.

"The article written by Tokarev, and which appeared in the journal, contained several phrases that replicated, word-for-word, passages of the memorandum that we had received a month earlier. His general assessment of events agreed with those of the document that was received at one of our South American embassies."

Nietzsky paused for an instant and sat straight up in his chair.

"So, the memorandum was delivered to our embassy. They believed it was a curiosity, and forwarded it to Moscow. Since this curious document made some mention of 'prophecies' it was delivered to our department. You all know very well that biotronics and para-psychologists are the witch-doctors of the academic world.

The audience laughed. Grigori waited for the chatter to subside and began speaking.

"The first prophecy was fulfilled to the letter. It concerned the suicides in Guyana. We assembled a commission that approached the Ministry of Defense, with solid evidence to back our arguments. We were given the cold shoulder, but were nevertheless instructed to organize the committee. At the beginning we considered sending Tokarev to India and Latin America, because the memorandum ended with the following phrase: *We cordially greet you and expect to see you in India and South America.*"

An Armenian-looking woman continued to explain. "We started and interrupted the project over and over again. But the prophecies continued to fulfill themselves. The revolution in Iran, the disturbances caused by the Pope's travel, and so on. Then there was the nuclear accident in the United States -- the Ministry was enraged and ordered us to move quickly."

"We had not even perfected a good model for interpretation," Grigori added. "And yet we sent Professor Tokarev off in his adventure. Poor Yuri!"

The biotronist was now on his feet and addressed himself to the full committee.

"The memorandum ended with these words: *We cordially greet you and expect to see you in India and South America.* So we are finished with the first part, and now go on to the second. Igor has informed us that in India he tried to create confusion and to block Professor Tokarev. However, Yuri was always able to find decisive contacts. We know that the followers of the 'Doctrine' had a discussion with the two. As if that were not enough, they brought a young woman by the name of Ethel and asked that she be placed at the British Consulate in Bombay. Of course, this Ethel was part of the plot, as Igor soon discovered. When he was at the consulate he informed the British about what Tokarev had explained at the hotel in Poona. The Brits had also received a memorandum, quite similar to ours, and now they are also following our unique professor.

"The Americans sent their famous journalist to Moscow, to find out what we

could have known beforehand about Guyana and Iran. So it is safe to assume that the Americans have also received a copy of the memorandum."

"We'll see," said Grigori, smiling, "maybe we will find a diplomatic cocktail brewing in South America."

"A Molotov cocktail!" exclaimed Karpov. "The fact of the matter is that they are leading us toward some point, and we are going there without knowing exactly what it is all about."

"Gentlemen," said the biotronicist, in his pompous tone, "if they are capable of influencing Tokarev's mind while he was preparing his article, and if Tokarev has the abilities of a *sensitive*, as the film has shown, then it makes sense to use Yuri as a radar, so that he can lead us to these interesting subjects that claim to follow the famous 'Doctrine.' As you know, at some point in their memorandum they explain that they will have their own launching, one that is capable of de-activating our missiles. Now the question is, do they have enough mental development to act at a strategic level? They have shown us that they can anticipate events, but of course, that does not guarantee that they can change them."

JUNE 7

As the jet began to approach the airport, Yuri could see the ships leaving their tiny wake on the ocean below. He was thinking about the status of the investigation. He had traveled thousands of miles to a hundred different places, without a clear objective. Then he remembered Igor. If Igor had only told him from the beginning that they had been expecting him for months, everything would have changed.

Or maybe nothing would have changed. Anyway, what had prevented Yuri from asking Igor something he had suspected for a moment? At one point Yuri felt that he knew ahead of time what Igor was going to tell him about the incident with the lama; at one moment he thought he knew that they had been expecting him in India for several months. Yet he never brought himself to asking Igor about these things. Yuri smiled, as he remembered his good friend. It was quite true, Igor was much more than just a simple "tourist guide."

Now he began to see the city of Buenos Aires below. He began a chain of free associations: "Latin America, Argentina, Buenos Aires. Cows, soccer, tango, Che Guevara." He thought about the state of affairs in this remote location from the point of view of his research. Religion and state were practically one and the same here. However, some twenty-five years ago some enraged mobs had set churches on fire. Later on, an astrologer almost took over the government. In the northern part of the country, people still practiced confused remnants of the Inca tradition. Advancing from the East, one could see Afro-Brazilian rites, like Macumba, Umbanda and Candomble. On the western borders with Chile, UFO sightings were one of the most frequent in the world. Perhaps this was a small model of a cultural crossroad. However, it would be a boring place; there were hardly any interesting spiritual groups mentioned in Grigori's book. His schedule was already planned: Santiago, Chile and La Paz. On the way back to Russia he would stop in Rio de Janeiro. And now he was arriving in Buenos Aires, just a stop along the way, and above all a place to make contact with his embassy. The landing gear began to descend as songs in the Spanish language played over the loudspeakers.

*Everything changes and everything remains, but we must move on.
We must move on, building roads, building roads over the sea.
O traveler, the road is nothing but the tracks you leave behind.
O traveler, there is no path, just the crests upon the waves.
Sometime ago, there in that forest,
the trees that are covered with thorns*

*heard the voice of a poet, of a poet that cried out,
"O traveler, there is no path, you create a path by moving on."
Blow by blow, and verse by verse, you build your path as you move on.*

The airplane tires hit the landing field and the vessel rebounded two or three times. "Blow by blow, and verse by verse," repeated Yuri to himself. They had landed in Buenos Aires.

The standard procedures he knew so well were repeated once again. The limousine that read "Soiuds of Soviestskij Sotsialistichieskij Riespublik" and drove him to the embassy. The reception by Galina, the female equivalent of Igor. Yuri would not need her company because he was quickly moving on to another country. Galina explained that he might have to change his route, because there were some diplomatic problems in the horizon. Yuri disagreed, arguing that he was not on a political mission, but on a scientific endeavor, and that his diplomatic passport and the help he could obtain from the embassy were merely a way of making his job easier. He could figure out what to do as time went on. What was clear to him is that he must leave Buenos Aires at once. Galina admitted to Yuri that they had been receiving telexes for five months advising them of his arrival. She added that a memorandum with some "prophecies" was delivered at this very embassy a short time before the telexes. A very respectable gentleman had delivered the memorandum, but could not later be found when Moscow had ordered the embassy to remain in contact. Galina, knowing Yuri's professional background, had assumed that there was a connection between the two events.

From that very moment, Yuri's sense of urgency intensified, but he tried to calm himself and organize his thoughts. He would take a train to some town near the border with Chile. He knew for certain that he must reach the Andes. Galina made the appropriate arrangements and left Yuri that evening at the train station.

JUNE 8

He had journeyed for almost a thousand miles over a flat and empty plain where the land merges with the sky. A few towns would appear now and again. And everywhere they went he would see cows, just like India. The landscape then began to change, becoming harsh, as the train approached its destiny. Through the left window, Yuri could see a white line which became larger as time went on. By mid-morning, he could clearly see the outline of the Andes. He could now recognize three peaks: the Tupungato, the Plata, and the Aconcagua. The "rooftop of the Occident" was rising against a violently blue sky, waiting for him. The train stopped and Yuri slowly walked down the little ladder. There were very few people at the station. A sign told Yuri where he was now: "MEN - DO - ZA." From there he would go straight into the Andes to some town near the Chilean border. The penetrating cold reminded him of his far-away Moscow.

"Where are you going, sir?" asked a cab driver who was resting against the car door.

"To a hotel. It has to be one that is close to the business center."

"OK. The Hotel Aconcagua."

They left. On the way Yuri was watching the squatty, provincial buildings pass by when something pierced his eyes. He turned his head and looked out of the rear window, but could no longer see what had triggered his attention. Then a red light forced the automobile to a stop, and Yuri saw, through the right window of the vehicle, an equilateral triangle inside of a circle painted on a wall. It had been painted quickly, as if by someone wishing to avoid detection.

"What is that?" asked Yuri.

The cab driver looked at the sign and shrugged his shoulders, without bothering to answer.

"Why do you stop at the red light?" asked Yuri, trying to strike up a conversation.

"What? You want me to get a fine?"

Yuri now remembered that, unlike the USSR, other countries interpreted red as an order to stop, and green as a signal to go ahead. The conversation ended abruptly. They were now at the hotel. Nevertheless, the traveler felt that something was moving inside of him. It seemed to him that the possibilities of making contact were improving. But, contact with what? He didn't really know. The symbol was very similar to the one inscribed in the medallion given to him by Tensing, but it was most unlikely to find Tibetans living in this area. That is, unless the Lama had been able to obtain permission for some of his refugees to settle there. Anyway, that symbol

might be somewhat common around the world. It could be the logo for a commercial product, for a club, or a political party. Yuri needed to find out.

An hour later, the professor was walking through the downtown area of that small town. He entered into a travel agency by the name of Alfa. Nobody was there. As Yuri was about to walk away, a very large man entered very slowly and asked:

"What do you want?"

"I want to know how to get to Santiago, Chile.

"You can get there by airplane, train, or van. I don't know if the vans are going to be of any use, though. When it snows too much they close the land route." The man paused for a moment, and then asked, "Sir, are you a foreigner?"

"Yes, I am."

"In that case, you will have to fill out a form."

"Could you provide me with some maps of the areas I will be traveling through?" Yuri asked.

"Well, if you go to the Tourism Office they will tell you all you need to know." Having said this, the large man turned around slowly and disappeared.

The professor left the agency and found the Tourism Office only a few yards away. A young woman gave him some crude maps which had been designed for tourists.

Yuri took advantage of the young woman's pleasant attitude, and decided to ask her a few questions.

"Are there any agricultural colonies organized by foreigners in the surrounding areas?"

"Yes, there are some Japanese colonies, they are dedicated to growing flowers."

"Are there any Tibetan colonies?"

"Well, if you walk over to the newspaper office, they can explain all that sort of thing. They are well informed about everything that goes on in Mendoza."

The logic was rudimentary, but Yuri had to admit that it was common sense. He went to the "Diario" and asked one of the employees for someone who was authorized to give information. The employee asked that Yuri identify himself, so Yuri brought out his passport and explained that he was Russian. Several minutes later, the director of the newspaper, acting reverently, asked Yuri to come into his office.

"So we have the pleasure of receiving a Russian diplomat!" the director exclaimed. "I'm sure that you have arrived to visit our exporters of wine." As he was speaking, the director pressed a button. "We also export dried fruit and onions of the very best quality. The United States is one of the best buyers of our melons!"

An employee came into the room, interrupting the conversation.

"Prepare an interview! Tell the photographers to come here!" the director yelled at his employee. The employee rushed out of the room. The newspaper director continued to explain:

"We also produce excellent garlic..."

"Excuse me," said Yuri, "but I would prefer to remain anonymous."

The director coughed. He pushed the button once again and forced a smile.

"I see, I understand. You first wish to negotiate with the local businessmen."

"Precisely," said Yuri. "For example, I want to meet the people in the agricultural colonies."

"Sure, sure, the Japanese. We also export flowers."

"And the Tibetans?"

The director became quiet, but the door opened suddenly and a swarm of journalists galloped into the room. The director made a gesture and all of them swarmed out.

"There are no Tibetans here!"

"But I've seen their symbols painted on the walls. Circles with triangles inside of them."

The director's mouth opened, and he began to frown.

"Tibetans, my foot! Those are a bunch of clowns that are always dirtying the walls of this city, one of the cleanest cities in the world!"

Unexplainably, the director had lost his composure. His face was red. He loosed his tie and breathed very deeply.

"Tibetans! They are just a few nuts that claim to follow some *Doctrine*." The man was furious. "They are against religion and against decency. It is a good thing that some of them have been killed already, and some of them have been exiled from this country. I think it would be best to kill them all!"

Yuri felt a chill travel up his spine. A hurricane of images was sweeping through his mind. A kaleidoscope where Jose Fuentes, Tensing, and the young men in Poona suddenly appeared. Then he saw Grigori on top of Mount Ararat, searching for something that he could not find, as Kali, the goddess, began her sinister dance. Yuri felt everything was whirling as he traveled through a tunnel at great speed.

"The products that we export are of the finest quality!" roared the newspaper director.

Yuri felt as though someone had yanked him from a cloud. There, in front of him, was some petty bourgeoisie thundering behind his small, provincial desk. This little man, located 33 degrees south of the equator and 69 degrees west of Greenwich, was defending the importance of exporting onions. He insisted that "a few nuts" should not deviate an important conversation about garlic and dried fruit. He was assured that the Soviet Ministry of Defense, and geniuses like Karpov and Nietzsche did not know what they were talking about. He was convinced that exporting melons to the United States would detain the forthcoming psycho-social explosion.

"Who can tell me anything about the followers of this *Doctrine*?" Yuri suddenly demanded, violently.

The newspaper director moved his face away as if he had just been slapped. Then he nearly closed his eyes, pretending to make an effort to remember, and answered in a feeble voice:

"Perhaps a reporter that worked here a few years ago. He now works for the Alfa Travel Agency. He interviewed these people once, and was fired."

Yuri left the newspaper offices in a hurry. He knew now that the large man was waiting for him and that the symbols painted on the walls were not aimed at the newspaper director. Maybe they were like a lighthouse beam, a signal that goes on from time to time for the benefit of people who are looking out for them. He wondered if these signals had oriented other seekers before him. When Yuri arrived at the travel agency, the large man was sitting at a typewriter.

"I'm sorry to bother you again," Yuri apologized, "but I need to speak with someone who follows the *Doctrine*."

The man stopped typing and looked at Yuri from behind the counter, nodding his head negatively.

Then he asked, "What doctrine?"

The professor produced the medallion and showed it to the travel agent, who examined it briefly, and replied with disdain. "It might be a good stone. If you want, I'll send you to an old man that knows a lot about these things. If he says it's a good stone, it is. What do you think?"

Yuri agreed.

"Did you find your maps," asked the travel agent.

"Yes, I have them here."

"Good. Throw them away, they are useless," he added with disgust. "Now listen to me. You must travel to a small town, or a bunch of houses, anyway. The place is called 'Punta de Vacas.' It is near the Chilean border. A van leaves every day at six o'clock and arrives at noon. You need to take some mountain clothing with you. The people there have gone mad because the energy is so intense, but don't worry about that."

The man paused for a long time while Yuri busily took notes.

"Ask for Don Vergara," he continued. "If you're lucky, you will find him lassoing some cattle. When you find him, show him this stone and tell him that you come from very far, because he knows a lot about these things..."

The travel agent stopped in mid-sentence and ended the conversation with an air of solemnity. "Now you must leave me alone; I have to finish a travel itinerary for my clients."

The man turned around and sat down at the typewriter, without even waiting for a reply.

"I am so thankful," said Yuri.

The travel agent didn't bother answering back. Yuri left at once to look for the bus terminal and made arrangements for the following day. He also had to find where to purchase mountain clothing. He still did not know what to do about the last problem. The travel agent had warned him that "the people there have gone mad because the energy is so intense, but don't worry about that." Very well, Yuri decided not to worry.

JUNE 9

"Punta de Vacas!" the driver of the van yelled out, and stopped the vehicle. Yuri got out of the van. The driver threw him the knapsack.

"Good luck!" he yelled again, then darted off at great speed with the fifteen other passengers that were continuing to Santiago.

Tokarev was completely alone on this dirt road. He turned around completely. He was inside of a huge depression within the mountain chain, completely surrounded by snowy peaks. A few yards away he saw a building with a sign identifying the school house. A little further on, some type of military garrison. To his right was a group of wooden houses -- they appeared to belong to the employees of the railroad. Finally, a few more ancient-looking shacks and the town's only guest house. With the exception of the wind beating against his face and whistling through the school's rooftop, everything appeared to be paralyzed. Yuri walked a few steps and knocked on the school building's door. He waited for a while, then knocked again. This time a woman of indefinite age appeared immediately.

"Good day," said Yuri, "I am looking for Don Vergara."

The woman looked at him from top to bottom, and then from bottom to top.

"Come in, come in," she then said in a friendly voice. "Why don't you come in and have a *mate*. It is cold outside."

Yuri went inside. The woman closed the door and led him into a run-down room. There was a smell of burning kerosene. Everything was a mess. Water was boiling inside of an aluminum container that rested on the stove. The woman made a gesture, and Yuri put down his knapsack and sat down on the dilapidated bed.

"I am Doña Juanita," she explained. "I am the teacher here in Punta de Vacas. The school is closed down for the winter, but I live here the year through."

The school teacher was busy with a small gourd holding a metal tube. She filled the gourd with boiling water, placed the tube against her lips and began to swallow.

"You are a *gringo*, aren't you?" she asked, with the tube still in her mouth.

"No, I am a Russian," Yuri protested.

"Oh, Russia! Listen, Don Vergara must be nearby. Missus Pepa can tell you where he is exactly." She filled the gourd once again with boiling water and handed it to Yuri. "Here, drink some *mate*, but be careful with the metal. If you're a *gringo*, you will burn your mouth."

Yuri took a swallow and burned his mouth. Then he tried again. The bitter, boiling liquid gurgled down his throat. Doña Juanita was observing him,

sitting on a chair. Yuri continued to swallow, trying to act non-chalant, until he heard a sound that indicated he had emptied the small gourd.

Someone knocked violently at the front door. Doña Juanita bolted out of her chair and ran towards the front. The door was forced open and Yuri left the room, still holding the gourd of *yerba mate* in his hand.

"I'm going to smack you!" yelled the man who had just entered, running over to the school teacher. However, she ran toward Yuri and hid behind him.

"I'm going to knock you too!" he yelled at Yuri. "You think I didn't see you coming into the school?"

"Belisario!" pleaded Juanita, "Belisario, he is looking for Don Vergara, that's all!"

"Sure, sure, and you are probably hiding him between the sheets. I know what is going on..." he growled, looking at Yuri fiercely. "I don't know who you are, but you better vanish into smoke, or I'm going to let you have it!"

Yuri walked back into the room and picked up his knapsack. He threw it over his left shoulder and got ready to leave that place. Belisario moved back out of Yuri's path, retreated, then left the school building in a hurry. Yuri tried to regain his wits, and was ready to say good-bye, but the school teacher was now on her knees with both of her hands clasped as she whispered:

"I give thanks to the forty martyrs that Belisario did not create scene with me or with the gringo."

Then she stood up, and acting as if nothing had happened, turned to Yuri:

"Did you like your mate?"

The Russian professor nodded. Then he asked how to find Missus Pepa. He left immediately for Pepa's shack.

When he arrived, another woman invited him to come in. Missus Pepa was sitting on a table. There was a man dressed just like Belisario who was asking for advise.

"I want to know if I will be relocated soon?" asked the railroad worker.

Everything became silent, until a voice appeared to fill the room.

"Yeeesss..." the voice resounded eerily across the room.

"You see," said Missus Pepa, "the soul of the dead man has answered. Leave me a thousand pesos."

The railroad man was visibly impressed. He handed over a bill, and the old woman stuffed it inside of a box. The railroad man then greeted the other three customers crowded inside, and left.

"OK, it's your turn," said Missus Pepa to Yuri.

Yuri sat down on the chair and asked, "Where can I find Don Vergara?"

"Yeeesss..." answered the eerie voice.

Yuri had been able to pinpoint where the mysterious voice was coming from, so he kicked the rug underneath the table with his heavy mountain boot. The rug began to shake and the table seemed to float in mid-air. The woman who had received Yuri screamed and ran out of the shack. Finally, the table was turned over, the rug lifted completely, and a man began to climb out of a hiding place beneath the floor. He was covered with dirt and was holding a

bottle of cheap liquor in his hand.

"You stupid old man!" yelled Missus Pepa. "You are drunk again! Look at what you have done!"

Yuri decided to leave the shack in order to avoid further complications. As he was leaving, he saw several people running toward the houses owned by the railroad workers. Apparently they were running towards one of them in particular, for he could now see a man atop the roof, gesturing wildly. As he arrived at the scene, several newcomers pushed him from behind. They were also rushing here to watch the show. The man standing on the roof was threatening someone:

"Lolita Barcelo, if you don't marry me, I'll jump!"

The plump Lolita had her arms wrapped around her father's neck.

"Papa, Papa," she whimpered, miserably.

"Lolita..." the man threatened again.

He could not continue with his pleading. A zinc plate where he was standing slid away and he lost his balance. The crowd screamed wildly. The man attempting suicide fell, but his pants were caught by a beam projecting from the roof. He was now swinging in the air, suspended by his trousers. Mr. Barcelo was barking out instructions:

"Get a ladder! We have to get him down from there!" Nevertheless, Barcelo himself did not move an inch. He merely stood there, shouting orders, caressing his long, thin Ho-Chi-Mihn beard.

The man threatening suicide was finally able to grab onto the roof and unfasten his trousers. Slowly, he was able to climb down the wall. When he was finally beyond danger, Lolita ran over to him and kissed him. The crowd began to laugh and to applaud, while Mr. Barcelo continued to caress his beard.

Yuri stopped to think about his situation. For more than an hour he had been going from one ridiculous spectacle to the next, but was not getting any closer to his goal.

"Is Don Vergara here somewhere?" he yelled out at the crowd.

"He is at the slaughterhouse!" responded the crowd in chorus, as they pointed in the same direction.

Yuri walked about a block to a makeshift yard. As he approached, he became aware of a sticky smell. A large man was delivering a hard blow to the back of the skull of a large, black bull. The bull fell down, with its head shattered. The large man took a knife and cut its throat. A stream of blood began to flow in bursts. The man brought over a bowl that was soon overflowing with bright, red liquid. Because the air was cold, a thick cloud of vapor was rising from the blood that had spilled on the ground and from the bowl.

"This is good for your health!" exclaimed the butcher, and began to drink the blood.

Two young men approached the bull and began to remove the hide. They were working quickly, as if they did this every day. There was no doubt that

Yuri had found the slaughterhouse.

"Good day," said Yuri, "is Don Vergara here?"

"At your service," said an old man, and began to approach Yuri from the sides of the yard.

The small man was walking slowly. He was about sixty years old. His dark skin, tanned by the snow and the winds, indicated a hard life. He was walking without any hurry. "Slanted eyes, a sharp nose, and thin, slightly mocking lips," said Yuri to himself. His hair must have been black, but could not be seen because of the woolen cap that covered his head and ears. He was covered in a black poncho, and was moving a leather rope to and fro as he approached the professor. He looked into Yuri's eyes deeply, and without hurry.

"Very well, what do you want?" murmured the old man, lifting his chin.

"They told me that you are a great expert in stones, and I want to know if this one that I have with me is valuable," said Yuri, showing him the medallion.

The old man grabbed it with his left hand and began to caress it slowly.

"It's a good stone," he replied, and gave it back to Yuri. Then he turned around and continued on his way.

At that instant, Yuri remembered the words of Tensing: "Give it to the guardian if you want to see Mount Meru."

"Don Vergara!" he yelled out.

The old man stopped with irritation. Yuri ran up to him and offered him the medallion.

"If it is a good stone, then it is for you."

Don Vergara remained motionless for a while, then he stretched out his hand and placed the medallion inside his poncho.

"That's different," he whispered. "Come with me to my hut."

The hut was square, about 12 feet on each side. The walls were made of flagstones resting against each other, allowing the wind to whistle through. The roof was made of zinc; the hut had a dirt floor. There were no windows, only a wooden door that could be bolted from both the inside and the outside to prevent the wind from blowing it away. A wooden apple box was used as a night stand. A lantern and an aluminum can rested on top. A few clothes were hanging from stakes sticking through the flagstones. One table, two chars, and a mattress resting over a wire frame: this was the only furniture.

"I'm leaving for the Aconcagua tomorrow. I have to herd in some cattle that has wandered over to the Horcones lake. If you want to come, I'll prepare a mule for you. Here the sun comes up at ten o'clock, and goes down by four in the afternoon. You better bring some food because you are not going to like the guanaco jerky. Gringos get sick when they eat guanaco.

"I am not a gringo, I am Russian," Yuri insisted.

"The guanaco doesn't care, it's the same thing." The old man began to take off his poncho, then added, "You better run down to the guest house to see if you can get a room."

Yuri wanted to know more. He wanted to keep Don Vergara talking.
"Don Vergara," Yuri asked, "I think this whole town is crazy. How can this be?"
"Six hours of sun, snow, wind, and nothing more. People remember about their things, and since there is nothing here, they imagine all the rest."
It seemed to the professor that he was listening to Karpov's explanations about the chamber of sensory suppression.
Yuri remembered the travel agent and continued to insist, "You don't think that it is because there is so much energy in this place?"
"The energy is in the gourd," said Don Vergara, smiling, pointing to his head.
"Go on, now, you better go and get some lodging."

JUNE 10

The two men had been riding since morning. It had snowed the night before. They were no longer riding over dirt roads, but over a brilliant white cover that violently reflected the sun. The tire tracks that vans and trucks had left behind had changed into a muddy quagmire.

Yuri put on his sunglasses as the road turned to one side. He touched the saddlebags that rested over the mule's hind quarters and assured himself that everything was still in order. He touched his knapsack and could feel his briefcase. Clothing, travel gear, books, notebooks, everything was still there. The old man rode ahead of Yuri. His black poncho stood out against the snow. He also carried two saddlebags. It was four p.m., but the sun was still high. Once they had left the hollow of Punta de Vacas, the mountains appeared to move away, and the landscape changed dramatically.

They left the road and began to climb up the side of the mountain, riding alongside a dry river bed that was covered with snow and boulders. The old man reached the crest of the hill and disappeared down the other side. Yuri hurried his mule along. When he reached the crest of the hill a strong gust of freezing air suddenly slapped his face. The wind was whistling against the sides of the mountains. A brilliant blue carpet appeared now before Yuri's eyes. This was Lake Horcones. On the opposite side of the lake a curtain of snow rose majestically, higher, higher still, until it turned into gigantic walls of ice and sparkling outcroppings of black rock. A monster thousands of feet high, and several miles wide was standing, invincible. It appeared as if the surrounding mountains were silently accepting their faith, quietly recognizing that this huge mass had been carved out on a different scale altogether.

"The rooftop of the Occident!" Yuri whispered as he faced the Aconcagua.

The old man was riding on the edge of a dangerous ravine. His mule stepped on the rock with great caution. Then the mule would go no further. The old man removed his scarf, and while still mounting his mule, wrapped it around its head, covering the eyes. Then he turned around in his saddle and looked at Yuri.

"Gringo, hurry up! Your mule's head must touch against my mule's tail."

Yuri did not wish to hurry, but he finally placed his mule as Don Vergara had requested.

"Why did you cover the eyes?" he asked.

"So that she doesn't get scared. She knows how to walk with a blindfold."

He loosened the reins and crossed his arms, urging the mule to go on. The mule began to advance slowly. Yuri also loosened his reins and his animal followed Don Vergara's.

The saddle bags on the left rubbed against the rock wall. On the right, the

abyss descended into the lake. The wind had died down. Every so often, pieces of rock would begin to roll down the ravine and be pulverized against the sides of the ravine.

The trail became wider. The old man recovered his scarf and took the reins again. Yuri did the same. The ravine now appeared less threatening, like the slopes of a hill covered with alluvial stones. Further ahead, there were some larger rocks and flag stones. They reached a spot on the trail where Don Vergara and his mule suddenly disappeared from sight.

When he arrived at the same spot, the professor discovered a huge opening in the rock. His mule entered without difficulty. It was a large cave, slightly illuminated by the afternoon sun.

The old man had dismounted. He removed the saddle bags, loosened the belt, and finally removed the saddle. He removed the reins and the mouth piece. Yuri imitated his example. Then Yuri went outside the cave and could still see the narrow trail bordering the precipice.

It was very late at night when they sipped the last mate. They had also exchanged some food. The guanaco jerky was dry and salty, but was still edible. A small fire was still burning around a circle of stones stained by the smoke. Don Vergara had started it earlier, using small sticks that he had picked up on the road. A kerosene lamp was burning, illuminating the cave with a yellow flame. Shadows would move against the walls, following the movement of the flame that flickered as the wind entered through the lantern's broken glass.

"Is it possible to go inside the mountain?" Yuri asked the old man.

"Well, here we are inside."

"No, I mean the Aconcagua."

"That depends on what you are looking for," replied the old man, as he cleaned his teeth with a small piece of brush. "The Indians called it *Aconcagua*, which means the sentinel of stone. They believed that there was a giant inside that watched over the world, but he fell asleep because the cold turned him into ice. Stupid Indians!" he exclaimed as he brought out a tobacco pouch and some cigarette papers. He spread some tobacco over one of the papers, rolled it, and then licked the cigarette along the side. He lit the cigarette with a small branch burning on one end. He puffed and then released a cloud of smoke with a look of satisfaction.

"Can you imagine?" he continued. "Whenever there is an earthquake, or a tremor, they say that the guardian is trying to wake up. But that will not be possible until the love of an Indian maiden can warm his enormous, frozen heart. He will then stand up to face the sky, and with a bow that is made of stars, he will launch his arrows of light throughout the whole world, against the night. Stupid people!" Don Vergara exclaimed, slapping his knee. "The lake is supposed to be a tear that the Indian maiden left behind when she found out that the guardian had turned to ice. She went to look for help, and some day she will return in a chariot of fire. She will tell him a poem that will be transformed into a puff of wind. A poem that she must learn for some

small man, like you or I... Until that happens, nobody may enter into the Aconcagua, because a guardian is defending his enormous heart of ice."

Yuri was moved. He knew that the old man was explaining the core of the problem, but he was still having difficulty with the words that were being chosen. Something similar had happened with Tensing.

Then Don Vergara was on his feet. His shadow was enormous and moved over the far walls of the cave. A voice that sounded as if it were a thousand years old came out of the old man:

"You have to die, you have to live. You have to teach this to others, because they are ill. That is the way to cure people. You must reach everyone, because their illness forces them to kill each other. It is necessary for all to listen... We will see each other once again, but you will never die again."

Don Vergara bent over and extended his blankets on the floor. He lay down and was soon asleep.

Yuri came out of the cave. When he looked at the sky he saw the constellation of Sagittarius. Further on he could see the Southern Cross, which appeared to bless him. Underneath this sky with its enormous stars he felt that his heart was beginning to thaw again, he felt humble inside. A thought sparkled across his mind like lightning: "latitude 33 degrees south, longitude 70 degrees west." He thought he could hear Grigori speaking: "They will do their share. Two lines must intersect in order to define a point. We will depict the x-axis, they will depict the y-axis, or vice-versa. We'll soon see if different methodologies can accommodate each other, as has already been the case with rocket science. Let them be, they are not that stupid!" Yuri felt that he had lived this moment before.

He darted back inside the cave. He took his notebook and began to write by the yellow light of the lantern. He had understood now. This had to do with the launching of a mental missile, shortly before the collective madness took over. A missile that would deviate History just a few degrees, barely enough to prevent a global catastrophe. Surely there would be crisis in all fields, but the human being would escape madness, and would be able once again to take charge of his ascending destiny. They had been able to see the future beforehand, but this was not enough to provoke the change in direction. It was obvious that they needed to modify the point of view of the great powers, and to have the necessary equipment so that they could proceed with the launching on a massive scale. How they would do this exactly still remained a mystery. Maybe they would be able to influence the minds of those who had the power to make decisions.

Yuri drew a line and closed his notebook. He then searched his knapsack until he found a pad of empty pages. He methodically wrote down all of his experiences, and at the end explained the Doctrine's real intentions.

He was finished by dawn. He wrote the title on the first page: "Tokarev Report. Aconcagua, June 10, 1979."

JUNE 11

A sharp sound echoed several times and startled Yuri. Then there were more sounds like it. It was gunfire. Yuri looked around. Daylight illuminated the cave. Don Vergara had vanished, along with his mule. The other mule was standing, quiet and motionless nearby. Yuri opened the zipper of his sleeping bag and ran out, fully clothed, to the opening of the cave.

He could see a group of men coming down the trail, one by one. They were less than a hundred yards away.

"Tokarev!" someone yelled. Yuri's name was repeated several times by the echo. "Professor Tokarev! We are Adams, from the United States, and Wilson, from England."

"We finally caught up with him," said another voice that also echoed.

Yuri recognized the man called Belisario at the very moment that he appeared to fire his gun in the cave's direction. Six other men in military clothing were also carrying guns. Yuri understood that the foreigners had brought the soldiers with them. When he saw Belisario firing his rifle in his direction, Yuri decided to escape.

He quickly put his mountain boots on and, taking his report, he climbed on top of his mule without a saddle, leaving the rest of his belongings behind. He left the cave, urging the mule to hurry on. He began to move away from the soldiers, who were already very near. The trail stopped abruptly. The mule panicked, raising its front legs. Yuri fell into the abyss. The report was scattered in the wind as Yuri's body struck the edge of a cliff, and then another, tumbling onto a pile of rocks. Yuri's body continued to roll slowly downward, until it finally rested on a pile of snow.

Half an hour went by before the search team could reach Yuri. The soldiers were improvising a stretcher by wrapping some blankets around two rifles. The American came over to Yuri's side.

"Professor Tokarev," he said softly, almost pleading, "why did you do that? Everything had been resolved, almost." Adams took Yuri's hand. "What were you thinking about? What were you thinking about?"

"The report..." Yuri said with great difficulty. "Everything is explained there. The report..." and he could say no more.

His broken body was lying on its back over the snow, but there was a faint smile on his face. Everything turned silent. His large blue eyes became motionless as the wind continued to scatter his reports in all directions. Yuri remembered Igor, scattering papers to the wind and exclaiming: "Oh Shiva, how beautiful is the snow in Moscow!" The cold wind kissed Yuri's face.

The Aconcagua began to move.

Enormous blocks of ice fell one after the other as the snow melted away. The mountain was growing and growing, ever and ever taller, and as it grew it became transparent. The rocks moved away as the crystal walls emerged amid a deafening thunder. There, finally, stood Mount Meru, with its summit climbing towards infinity, uniting the earth with the heavens. The colors of the rainbow glittered on the crystal edges of this gigantic pyramid; a golden rain whirled over the everlasting snows...

"He is dead," said Wilson. He closed Yuri's eyelids.

First, the dark tunnel. Then the light, at the very end. Finally, a dull roar. A voice was describing the date: year, month, day, minute, and second. He began to advance through the tunnel towards the light. Slowly, then more quickly, then at a dizzying speed, while the voice continued to count the years, the months, the days.

Yuri was launched into the future, into the very center of Mount Meru. He crossed through its enormous crystal walls and suddenly arrived at the heart that was made of ice.

Yuri V. Tokarev, who was born in Novgorod on July 7, 1940, and died on the Aconcagua on June 11, 1979, was now facing the Light.

"Where are you coming from?" the Light appeared to ask.

The black bull fell as the hammer struck its brain; a crowd of women threw themselves at Igor in the ashram; an Indian stranger was holding his little brother and asking for a few rupees to afford a sacrifice; Igor receiving messages from the telex machine. All of these images appeared floating in the air.

"What do you want now?" said the Light.

Don Vergara's voice, a thousand years old, provided the answer: "He who dies before his death, will never die again."

Then the Light recited the following teaching: "Reconcile with your past."

Everything became dark. Yuri's entire life was projected in mid-air, like a film. Thoughts would come to him, he would feel them, and he would live those thoughts. Emotions would come to him, and he would live those emotions. He began to forgive all of the frustrations within himself, all of his anger, his entire past. His heart became pure and open to receive the Light. "

"Your past is forgiven. Wake up and leave this world."

Yuri felt that he was being pushed backwards. Then he heard a dull roar. A voice gave the date: year, month, day, minute and second. He began to move back through the tunnel, away from the light. Slowly at first, then faster, then extremely fast as the voice went back in time, reading back the years, the months, the days...

He was launched back into the past from the center of Mount Meru, from the heart of ice.

"Wake up and leave this world. Wake up...wake up..."

MAY 12, 1979

"Wake up, Yuri," said Irina as her warm body leaned against his. Irina moved Yuri's head back and forth, delicately. When Yuri opened his eyes, she smiled. She kissed him for a long time, then got out of bed.

Yuri remembered the words "...but this will not be possible until the love of an Indian maiden can warm up his enormous heart of ice."

Yuri had dreamed about an old man in some remote location: 33 degrees south and 70 degrees west. He had dreamed about people who did not exist: Don Vergara, Tensing, Igor.

He sat up in bed and saw the light of spring in Moscow enter through the window.

"Irina," he asked. "What day is today?"

"May 12, a Saturday," replied Irina from the floor below.

Someone knocked at the door. Yuri heard some laughter and some animated conversation. Then Irina yelled out.

"Yuri, Grigori is waiting for you. Come down, I've prepared some breakfast for both of you. I'll be back in an hour."

The two men met in the small living room. Grigori was drinking his tea with great pleasure. Professor Tokarev bowed slightly and sat down by his side.

"Yuri, you must leave now and go to this address," said the old man and handed Tokarev a card. "I will meet you there in two hours. Two hours exactly, Yuri. We cannot be late. We are going to a meeting in a building that belongs to the Ministry of Defense."

Professor Tokarev felt as if someone had just slapped him across the face.

"What is going on?" said Yuri, with some hesitation.

"Come on, lad, what are you so scared about?" Grigori was laughing. "We have organized a committee and we need your active participation."

"This has to do with the article that I published in the journal, right Grigori?"

"To a degree, yes, to a degree..." the old man replied, looking straight into Yuri's eyes.

Everything had become silent. Yuri stood up, walked a few steps, and stood before the window, watching the sidewalk.

"Grigori," he asked, "how is it that you didn't find anything in Mount Ararat?"

"Well, my boy, I did find something resting upon the summit, a missile from another era. It was that ancient vessel that is remembered as Noah's Ark. A professor of comparative religions should know that is where it remained. It floated down after the Great Flood. Because of the good judgement of someone to whom the future was revealed, everything could begin anew.

"Why is it that nobody else saw it?" said Yuri, still staring at the sidewalk.

"It is mental," the old man replied.

As Grigori's words continued to echo within Yuri's ear, he began to realize who Grigori really was. He approached Grigori, as the old man quietly sipped his tea.

"Teacher, the launching will take place in the eighties, is that correct?"

"That is correct, my son. But no one will be able to help us until we have been able to change some things in people's minds."

"Teacher, in my dream I ended up by running away, and that is why I fell into an abyss. I did not have time to pass my report on to other people, and they could not do a thing."

"You see," said Grigori, "if you had been able to cure your paranoid tendency, none of that would have happened. You were born during the war. You were still very young when bullets started flying all around. However, if you have now been able to change that within you, and if you know the future, you can produce a change in the general scheme of events."

The old man was now standing before Yuri.

"We are attracting a few people towards a certain point," he declared. "We will place them inside of our ark and project them towards the future. Then they will see the explosion beforehand. When they return, they will understand that they are capable of changing some tendencies and will begin to work together."

Yuri was listening to the guardian of the mountain, and seemed to recognize every word he said.

"You know, my son, there have been other times in history when we have been able to provoke a small change in direction. A small change, but enough to prevent catastrophe."