

Alex Sapegin

THE DRAGON INSIDE

**Book four
Crown of Horns**

**Part 1.
Dashed Hopes.**

Russia. N-ville. One day after Andy's disappearance...

A caustic blue-gray cigarette smoke, intermingling in its white turbidity with the smell of coffee, hung in several layers in the air of the small room. A tall young man with short spiky light hair and intelligent eyes on his strong-willed face pulled the second to last cigarette from the almost empty pack. The gas lighter sparked. The smoker sucked till his lungs were full and blew a thick stream of smoke out at the ceiling. The gray layers, hanging in a multi-tiered cloud over the floor, started to move, their whirls and twirls creating strange, fantastical shadows on the wall. The image on the screen changed and made the thin computer monitor, its coolers buzzing, give off a pale green glow. The man's face, bathed in green through the smoke, became sharper and took on a predatory character.

The man took another drag and forcibly extinguished the half-smoked cigarette on the edge of the overflowing ashtray.

"Enough. I gotta drink some coffee." The wheels of his chair squeaked. He pushed his legs against the floor and rolled over to a second table where an expensive coffee machine proudly stood. As a result of his clumsy movements, a thick folder fell off the desk which had previously been lying there peacefully. Photos spattered to the floor from under a layer of sheets of paper, squeezed together by a plastic cover.

"Butterfingers...."

Pressing the button on the device, which smelled of coffee grinds, he stood up in an easy, fluid motion and picked up the rectangular color photographs that had flown all over the room.

"Mother nature never stops amazing me with her imagination," the young man said, looking at the boy in a photo. "A chip off the old block of that brainless muscleman. Go figure. It's so very... very...."

"Very what?" a short, stout, elderly man silently appeared in the doorway. He was strikingly different from the young man in the room. He had dark, combed-back hair, touched with gray at the temples, and a high forehead. His round face and belly, bulging under a light shirt and tight belt, witnessed to the fact that he wasn't a fan of athletics. What he had in common with the guy in the room was his smart, persistent, penetrating gaze, poise, not characteristic of your average Joe, and plasticity of movements.

The dark-haired guest noticed the photograph. “Stop smoking like a chimney! You could cut this fog with a knife. You can die from carbon monoxide poisoning, you know!” He said, coughing from the fumes, and tapped at the keyboard of one of the dozens of breakers installed on the wall near the door. The smoke started flowing towards one of the vents. “That’s better, let’s air it out. Now, where was I?”

“It’s all there, I’m rereading it. I can’t get it into my head....”

“Break it into little pieces so it’ll fit between your ears, and then all of a sudden you’ll get it.”

The young man smiled at his old colleague’s tirade:

“When I was a kid I read so many books about about parallel worlds, it’s incomprehensible! I never thought I’d have to deal with it in real life.”

“Get used to it. In our work, even without parallel worlds, there’s surprises out the wazoo. Sometimes it happens. Something so out-of-nowhere and unexpected, it knocks you off your feet. Want to know something?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re being removed from observation.”

“What!?” The young man’s surprise level was off the charts. “Um, m-m-major!”

The “m-m-major,” fully enjoying the effect of his announcement, walked over to a small couch in the corner, sat down and crossed his legs.

“No whining!” The major looked at his employee, assessing him. He clicked his tongue and shook his head, as if thinking whether or not to say something, but the command’s orders aren’t open for discussion. “Calm down. You’re going to be heading a separate group. Osadchuk’s people are going to be working under you. You’ve got two days to take over. Don’t let me down, senior.”

“Are they organizing just one group?”

“No, idiot, I just said you’d be heading a SEPARATE group. Osadchuk will be heading the command operations center.”

The young officer snickered.

“Is command launching the ‘Shadow’?”

Standing up, the major walked to the exit, stopped just before the door and turned around:

“Command has sanctioned the first phase of operation ‘Squid,’ but within the framework of the ‘Shadow,’ get ready for some counter-intelligence.” And, seeing the young man’s uncomprehending expression, he added: “the counter-intelligence guys are more experienced at weeding out ‘frenemies’ abroad, along with their Russian henchmen. Ah, if only we could attract the old guys from OBKhSS.* They’d untangle Bratulev’s economic ties....”

*The OBKhSS was the Soviet financial police. They were responsible for regulating economic laws in the fight against theft of socialist property.

Russia. Moscow. Eight and a half months later.

“One more time?” Yaroslav Kopilov, an old schoolmate of Kerimov’s, waited for a nod and stretched his hand towards the Dictaphone. Obeying the slight touch to the sensor button, the device came to life. A child’s voice resonated from the speaker, saying something in a sing-songy foreign language.

Yaroslav Kopilov, like his friend, went into science after finishing high school. He chose the social science of linguistics. Both he and his heavy-weight wrestling champion friend were drawn to English, but Yaroslav, unlike Kerimov, who loved physics best out of all the subjects, decided to dedicate his life to the study of languages. No one was surprised that Kopilov moved to Moscow, where the prestigious Bauman University Faculty of Linguists opened its doors wide before him. The other scholar got into Moscow State University (Russia’s equivalent of Harvard), and at that the two friends’ paths diverged for over twenty years.

As it turned out, the knowledge of an all-around Indo-European scholar allowed him to earn more than just bread and butter: a little caviar on top, too. The main thing was to know where and how to push and then use the knowledge you’ve earned of several languages. Kopilov was a very smart man, successfully uniting commercial exploits with academic. In twenty year he had traveled almost the entire Earth as part of his scientific studies and manufacturing and commercial activities. Suffice it to say, he’d done well. His life was a success. Yaroslav was still single, but a personable, charismatic man, who toiled for two hours in the gym daily, was not deprived of feminine attention. Truth be told, schools of the arts were always populated by more female students than male. Indeed, in reality a handsome man, wealthy in every sense, attracted ladies.

When the phone rang late at night in his bachelor pad, it was a real surprise. The person on the other end of the line was someone he did not at all expect to hear from. There was no small talk. Kerimov took the bull by the horns from the very first moment. He could do that – take it by the horns or, if needs be, smack it in the face. In school he was a “nerd” who slackers and hooligans didn’t dare talk to.

“I’ve got something going on,” he said over the phone after a brief greeting. “Yary,” Kerimov remembered his school nickname. “I need your help. A consultation.”

“Hm,” Kopilov coughed, dumbfounded by the pressure. “I guess I’m free tomorrow. Come on over, we’ll sit down, have a chat, have a consultation...”

“I don’t have time. Tomorrow I fly out. I want to meet with you today.” Yaroslav looked at the clock. *Damn, what poor timing, Masha was supposed to come over in half an hour....*

“Elijah,” Yaroslav began carefully.

“Your girlfriend can wait,” his former school friend interrupted him rudely. “I’m standing near the entrance. Come on, open the door please. The intercom doesn’t work.”

Yaroslav swore and went to the entryway.

“Fourth floor, apartment seventeen,” he said into the microphone, pressing the button.

“I know.”

“Of course you do,” the linguist thought, “if you’ve managed to find my number and butt in at the most inopportune time.”

In twenty-something years, Elijah hadn’t changed a bit. He was just as big and noisy. The spacious apartment seemed to shrink as soon as he stepped inside. The friends hugged briefly. Yary invited his old friend into the living room.

“So what brings you here?” the host asked, when they had each consumed a glass of Cognac. The guests took a digital Dictaphone from his inner jacket pocket.

“I need your opinion as a linguistic expert,” he said, and pushed the button. Three minutes later, Yaroslav had completely forgotten about his date....

The woman who showed up pushed the button on the intercom in vain and tried to reach her date by phone. He didn’t hear his phone, which he’d left in the entryway. The door of to the entryway was awarded a loogey, and the “bald dog” earned more than one curse....

Listening to the recording once more, the linguist rubbed his nose.

“If you were trying to surprise me, it worked. I can guess what it is you’re going to ask. Yes, it is a language, but it’s not a member of any linguistic group I know of, although the syntax, structure and pronunciation is closest to English. What the girl’s saying in the recording isn’t gibberish. There’s a clear system and structure to the utterance. As an old phoneticist, I can say I heard about a dozen consonant sounds and at least five vowels sounds, both of which follow established patterns. Can you leave me the recording? I’d like to dig in a little deeper, see what some specialists I know have to say about it.”

Kerimov scoffed: “I can offer you a job. You and your specialists, but be aware that you’d take total and complete responsibility for anyone you bring in to the project. And I mean-” He ran his finger across his throat.

“Oh! Wow, top secret, huh?”

“Strictly, but it’s worth it. You’ll be compensated accordingly. You’ll have your work cut out for you.”

“I get the feeling you’re trying to get me to defect to your side!” Yaroslav laughed out loud and then choked on his laughter when he saw the serious look on Elijah’s face.

“I’m not trying to seduce you, for God’s sake! Hard work, good pay. But I warn you, if you decide not to work under me, you can’t divulge one word or even a hint of what you’ve heard here tonight. I’m not mixed up in any spy games, believe me, but I can get my hide tanned for sharing secret information.”

“That bad?”

“Yes, Yary, that bad. Think about it, reflect, meditate. You can make a list of crazy linguists who are prepared to sell out their own mothers for the sake of new knowledge, and send it to me.” Elijah Evgenevich slapped his knees, scooped the Dictaphone up off the coffee table and stood up. “Well I’ve probably warn out my welcome! Time to get a move on.”

“How can I get in touch with you?”

“My number should be in your phone from when I called.”

The host patted his pockets.

“Aw, damn...,” swearing, he ran to the entryway.

A few seconds later the guest heard the kind of foul language that can only be realized by the Great Russian Language. His schoolmate was right to become a linguist! His specialized education gave him real pearls of expressions.

“What, old dog, lady problems?” Elijah Evgenevich teased the Casanova.

“Ha ha,” he said sardonically.

“Bye bye,” Elijah shook his friend’s hand.

“You take care of yourself.”

Yaroslav, through the window, watched the massive figure of his uninvited guest walk away until he went through an arc and out of sight. His phone suddenly began to rattle on the table.

“Yes?” Kopilov barked into the phone.

“Good evening, Yaroslav Anatolevich. You can speak a little more quietly; I’m not deaf.” The man called by his first name and patronymic experienced astonishment coupled with fear. It was the voice of an acquaintance from “the Company.*” *May he be three times cursed; can’t forget about him, even over two decades later! Oh, Elijah! Not mixed up in spy games, you say? I’m having some sort of premonition that my problems are just beginning....* “Yaroslav Anatolevich,” the voice went on.

“Yes?”

“We heartily recommend accepting your schoolmate’s offer.”

“I’ll think about it....”

“No thinking necessary. Please take our recommendations with the utmost gravity.”

He hung up. Kopilov looked at the blank screen for a minute. His opponent’s phone number was not there. Wasn’t that just like the sins of his youth, to come back and haunt him. The phone crashed into the couch in one sound fling. A part flew off and dolefully clanked against the leg of the coffee table.

The linguist again employed some choice words....

*The most common nickname for the KGB, the Soviet Committee for State Security, when it existed.

* * *

Leaving his friend’s house, Elijah got a taxi. He called to the driver:

“The hotel ‘Izmailovo.’”

“Fifteen hundred roubles,” the taxi driver said, his gold tooth sparkling.

“Are you crazy? It’s not far from here!”

“I won’t do it for less than a grand. If you don’t like it, walk to the metro.”

“Drive.” Kerimov got into the car, bracing from the cold.

“So, a language unknown to science,” Kerimov thought, situating himself on the back seat. *So many surprises. How could Olga know an unknown language? Well, if we toss logic out the window, there’s only the theory that her knowledge is somehow coming from Andy. Some sort of mystics. On the other hand, who knows.*

We've been shown there's magic there, more than once. Maybe a magical connection has somehow come about between the two of them? They are brother and sister, after all. I can't think of any other way to explain the changes that have taken place in our Olga.

The changes that had taken place in their younger daughter scared Elijah Evgenevich and Elena Petrovna out of their minds. It wasn't just that over the last few months she had gone from a happy, carefree child to an exact copy of her older brother after he'd been struck by lightning. The color of her eyes, the iris and the white, had begun to change. In the last two months, an abundance of bright yellow dots had appeared around the pupils. The whites had become light blue. In order to hide the changes, he went to an optics store with his daughter and obtained small contact lenses of a light green color and sunglasses. Olga often did not want to wear the contacts, but she never forgot to wear the children's sunglasses.

After the New Year's vacations were over, Olga began frequently talking in her sleep. It would have been one thing if it were in Russian. But it was in an unknown, as Kerimov was now finding out, completely unheard of tongue. The next morning, his daughter did not remember a thing, or at least that's what she said. It was possible.

The pair made a striking impression: a girl and a huge canine. Bon followed his mistress everywhere. Again, some sort of mystical connection came about between the child and the dog. Bon obeyed Olga, even if she didn't say word. There were no commands such as "sit," "down," or "come." She used gestures or looks instead. As soon as Olga at a corner, the dog would occupy the spot. While waiting for his mistress after her classes, a slight movement of the girl's hand and Bon was off to fetch her knapsack, grabbing the strap by the teeth. The children were jealous. The teachers whispered that she was a witch. And Olga didn't stop being an excellent student and making the grade. Her report card was full of "A's," but just one look at the girl was enough to tell that she was not of this world.

A remarkable incident occurred on February twenty-third. This is a Russian holiday dedicated to the Defenders of the Fatherland. It is also unofficially known as "men's day," where women often give small gifts to their husbands, boyfriends, fathers, sons, and male co-workers. The Kerimovs had decided to celebrate the day by eating out in a restaurant. In honor of the holiday, Elijah Evgenevich allowed Irina, whose line of suitors was so long, Elijah had stopped counting after the first ten, to bring her new young man along to the lunch. It was a nice time. Even Olga was constantly smiling, but no one was quite sure exactly why. It was either the general atmosphere at the restaurant, or the funny scenes being acted out on a stage by the invited actors. An elderly gypsy woman approached Elena as they were leaving. Her husband was busy helping Olga get her coat and hat on. What it was that made her go outside, she couldn't say.

"Want me to tell your fortune, my pretty one? I'll tell the whole truth!" the black-eyed woman said. Elena Petrovna stood, frozen to the spot like a rabbit in front of a boa. The dark eyes' gaze seemed to fix her in place.

"Would you like me to tell your fortune?" a child's voice said from behind the old woman. The gypsy spun around and locked eyes with the light-haired girl. Olga

removed her sunglasses, which she previously always wore while outside, and smiled. Her smile looked predatory, foreboding to the old lady. She made the sign of the cross several times and started running in the other direction, shouting something in her language. Olga put her glasses back on.

“That lady’s aura was yucky, sprinkled with blackness,” she said. Elijah and his wife glanced at one another. They never heard another word out of her about auras and such, but the incident was firmly fixed in their memories.

After that day in the restaurant, Mr. Kerimov began regularly recording Olga’s night time babbling on the Dictaphone. If it were possible to solve the problem of energy consumption to maintain a portal, the recordings could later be useful in deciphering the language of the world where Andy was transported.

How was he? The regular searches they conducted through the apparatus, although short, were not yielding any results, but the head of the institute was one hundred percent sure his son was alive, and he wasn’t just relying on his own feelings or blind hope. He was believing in what his child told him. Once when he and the wife were yelling at each other for the nth time (unfortunately, fights had become a common occurrence in their home. You’d think Andy’s disappearance would bring them together – they shared the grief, after all! But no, their relationship had taken a bad turn), Olga walked in. The spouses fell silent. The girl stood in the doorway for a few minutes, casting a strict glare at her parents.

“Andy wouldn’t like this, your fighting,” she said after the pause. “He’s having a hard time as it is, and here you are, going at it!”

“How do you know how Andy’s doing?” Elena asked cautiously. She was aware of her husband’s latest research.

“I feel it,” she answered curtly and went to her room. Bon’s claws clanked on the floor as he followed her.

Elena Petrovna collapsed into a chair and began to sob.

“Elijah, I can’t go on like this....”

And he could? What about him? Did his wife think he was made of steel? As if there wasn’t enough turmoil around him at work! An incomprehensible carousel was constantly spinning around the institute. Bratulev, who promised to send a new security service boss and show up himself, had yet to fulfill any of his promises. It was good that the finances kept flowing. It would have been a sin to complain. The golden rain shower showed no signs of stopping. But all attempts to contact the oligarch failed. He had to get by on his own and wind up his employees, which did not provide any spiritual consolation. Screw work, but on top of that, Lena was constantly deriding him... what was with her? What was she hoping to accomplish? She can’t go on? As if he were having an easy time? When did he ever keep any pills with him? Now they were in his pocket at all times. His heart seemed to have been acting up lately....

Work, his wife, his daughter, Andy and again his daughter, more specifically, the younger one. Mr. Kerimov thought long and hard before letting anyone hear his recordings. But, once he got to Moscow, he decided to find, since he had the opportunity, his school friend. Once he had finished his business about the institute’s problems, he got on the Internet. Experience had shown that you can find anyone

but God himself on the web. And yes, googling his name yielded a multitude of links, three of which related to the object in question. Two of those listed his friend's place of work. After that it was just a question of applying his knowledge. Champagne and a big box of chocolates.... Yary was a ladies' man then; he still was.

In his words Kopilov indirectly confirmed the idea about a connection between Andy and Olga. If only he could think of how to take advantage of this connection while he was in charge of the institute and could use their administrative resources.

Taking his Personal Digital Assistant out of his pocket, Elijah began to sketch a diagram and the configuration of the apparatus. The driver, busy keeping his eyes on the road, did not interfere with his passenger. There was something incomplete about the diagram Elijah's young colleagues had presented. For over two months now Kerimov, who was used to and adept at seeing the big picture, couldn't for the life of him isolate the "speck" interfering with his perception and complete the configuration. The colleagues were doing something unnecessary. To the quiet hum of "Retro FM," the outlines of yet another vector diagram materialized on the screen.

Setting the PDA aside, Elijah put his head back against the high, firm headrest and observed the dank spring drizzle hitting the car's roof and windows.

Andy, baby, you've really set quite a task before me. Elijah Evgenevich's gaze slid across the little computer's screen, which had gone dark to save energy. *It would be nice if we could bring back the past, but it's too bad, that's not possible. Hold on....* It seemed the pocket computer was jumping into its owner's hands of its own accord. *Why are we using the opposite vector direction for time in our calculations? The vector of direction, essentially, can go in the opposite direction from ours. How can we keep track? There's the snag, there's the mistake. Time can't be negative! The calculations and counting should not be conducted from negative values, but from positive ones.*

Somewhere on the edge of his consciousness flickered the taxi driver's foul language as he cursed the people who'd gotten into a crash and caused the traffic jam. Abandoning the world around him, Kerimov drew diagrams interspersed with formulas.

It was a tumultuous night, full of feverish frenzy and no rest. Elijah used up all the minutes on his phone and twice went downstairs to the lobby to add funds. Not being able to sleep, he didn't allow the others to, either. His new ideas needed to be sent to the personnel post-haste. Awoken from his sound sleep, Alex asked for an explanation and swore at his boss for not taking his computer with him. The PDA flatly refused to e-mail the diagrams outlined by the Kerimov.

Russia. N-ville.

The minutes before the Boeing 777 airplane landed in his home airport seemed to go on forever. As soon as the plane's landing gear touched the ground, Kerimov

turned on his cell. He found a charging station and discovered a whole series of text messages on missed calls. Interrupting the stream of messages as they came through one by one with little chimes, his wife's face lit up the phone's screen.

"Yes, honey."

"Elijah, where are you?" His wife sounded like she was panicking. Something serious had happened.

"I just flew in. Still on the plane."

"Elijah," she sobbed through the phone. He could hear Bon whining. "Come right home."

"What happened?"

"There's something wrong with Olga!"

* * *

"Seventeen New Bauman street!" Kerimov cried, jumping into the first taxi and swatting a hundred dollar bill at the driver. "Step on it!"

"Are you gunna talk to the cops?" the taxi driver asked phlegmatically.

"Screw the cops!" He took two hundred more dollars from his wallet. "Go!"

"Money talks," the driver chimed, and slammed on the gas. The car took off.

"Elijah!" His wife, her face stained with tears, grabbed him by the arm and pulled him to the kids' room. Bon, whining, jumped to his feet.

Olga was laying on the floor in the fetal pose, ...glowing with a ghostly light. She looked like a bioluminescent mushroom at night. The room smelled distinctly like ozone. Kerimov senior's hair stood on end. An electrical discharge ran between the arch of her glasses and her right temple.

"OH my!" he exhaled, and darted out of the room. "Lena, bring the wire from the pantry. We'll try grounding Olga to the heating system."

"No need," Olga stretched her legs out. "No need," their daughter repeated quietly, getting up onto her knees. "It's all over. I'll just sleep a little."

The girl leaned to one side. In one leap, Kerimov was beside her and picked his daughter up in his arms:

"Honey, what's happened to you?"

"The guy said it's all..."

"What guy?"

"I don't know. He said Andy didn't mean to do this. He's still learning. I didn't understand all of it."

"Honey, what guy did you talk to?"

"I don't know, he was here," Olga, not opening her eyes, touched her head. "He said that Kerr shouldn't be here.... I'm gunna sleep."

"Who's Kerr, Olga, baby, what's this Kerr you're talking about?"

"That's what the guy called Andy." Olga opened her eyes for a second. Elijah Evgenevich almost dropped his daughter from the ring of his arms. A chill ran down his spine like he'd never felt before. For a split second he thought she had vertical

pupils, like a cat's. No, he was seeing things. He set his daughter down in bed and covered her with the blanket.

His phone vibrated on his belt.

"Hello?" he answered, exhausted.

"Mr. Kerimov," Alex's cheerful voice grated his nerves something awful. "Where have you disappeared to? We're all waiting for you."

"Go on without me," he said, tucking her in and patting Bon on the head.

"What about the apparatus?" Alex asked, discouraged.

"Do what you want. I can't be there. The apparatus' configuration is at your disposal." He hung up and set the phone down on the child's desk in the room.

"Elijah..."

Kerimov turned towards his wife, who was standing in the doorway.

"Not today, Lena," he said, taking two steps towards the door and slamming it in her face. "Sleep, sweetie," he said, sitting down on the floor and resting his back up against the bed. The large man, not used to retreating when fate dealt a blow, silently cried.

"Dad, I'm hungry."

"What?" Elijah rubbed his eyes. Had he fallen asleep? Yes, it was dark outside and the little clock on the wall said 10:55.

"I'm hungry, Dad," Olga tugged at his collar.

"Yes, yes, one second. Do you want pelmeni?" he asked his daughter, moving his legs, which had fallen asleep along with him from the uncomfortable position.

"Yes please."

"Let's go see what's in the fridge."

"I don't want to walk." She jumped onto his back.

"Let's go, rider cowgirl."

Elena wasn't home. Perhaps it was for the best. She'd probably gone to her mother's while Elijah and Olga were sleeping. Where Irina was, God only knew. Elijah Evgenevich sat at the table and watched Olga gulp down her pelmeni, burning her lips on the hot noodles, practically not even chewing. She washed them down with orange juice.

"More, please," the baby girl said, finishing her first helping. She was feeling like a bottomless pit.

"Wow! You're not going to pop?"

The second helping was finished almost as quickly as the first. The small child had acquired a simply beastly appetite. Looking at his daughter, Kerimov couldn't get rid of one nagging thought.

"Honey, do you think you could tell me how Andy's doing?" He tested the waters.

Olga stopped eating and closed her eyes. Her father got another shiver running down his spine.

"He's alive."

"Honey, do you think you could help find him? Daddy's got a special searching apparatus at work..." he said, wading in deeper. Olga shrugged.

“You want to take me to work with you? Wow, awesome! I won’t have to go to school on Monday. But how can I help look for Andy? I don’t know.”

“That’s okay. Maybe we’ll think of something as we go along.”

The thought that had been tormenting him all yesterday evening and today had finally taken on substance and then action.

* * *

“Alex, are you sure you did the math right?”

“Definitely, Denis. I’ve told you a thousand times. I’m not an imbecile!”

“Alright, sorry, don’t take it personal. You surprise me, Alex. You’re like a little lamb. Do you really trust the boss that much? That oddball Paul Chuiko,” (who was in the room working with them, a fourth member of the Bandar-log gang) “as soon as he saw the new calculations, we couldn’t tear him away from the computer for half a day. Now we’re building the blocks according to his diagram. He’s a science freak, can’t sit still, as it were. But you – you’re a mathematician!”

Oleg Maksimov stepped out from behind the accumulator block:

“Stop mouthing off! Are you going to help us or what?” He poked his finger into the polarizer mounted on the cart. “Remember, in the transition chamber you’ll have to figure things out for yourselves, and the small blocks will have to be carried on your own backs. I still have the point of focus to adjust.”

“We’re coming, we’re coming,” Denis said, waving his hand dismissively.

“Tell me, Bandar-log face,” Alex said to Denis, pushing the heavy cart. “Before you starting working at this shady establishment, had you ever heard of Heim’s theory? What are you staring at me for? So you hadn’t. But the boss enlightened me on that physicist.” Remezov nodded. “Uh-huh. And did you know that Walter Dröscher and Jochem Häuser, who, like our unforgettable boss, paid attention to Burkhard Heim’s theory,... their work is still at the theoretical research stage?”

“Yes, I know. You can work while you talk, you know.” Denis responded, snapping the cable connectors.

“Yeah yeah. A lot of solid physicists are convinced that modern technology is not at all capable of giving off the tension in the field and creating other conditions necessary for a ‘puncture’ through space, that is, they can’t give Heim’s theory a practical application. All their efforts to attract the Z machine from the Americans’ Sandia National Lab* have amounted to squat. Those Yankees won’t let anyone near their machine without mucho dinero.”

“Hey, banana-eater, what’s the point?”

“The point is, you dipstick, that the boss began his work back in the eighties. He’s piggy-backing off the work of our most esteemed colleague Heim. Get it? In the West they’re still scribbling on paper, and in Russia here we are doing test in the field, the roots of which were put down during Soviet times! And you and I are the ones doing them, not Joe Shmoe. I read Dröscher’s work. It’s about as far from Kerimov’s as here to the moon. So, don’t you touch my oddball. He’s taking us

straight to a nobel prize! But hey, who am I talking to? Mr. nuclear, are you even listening to what I'm saying?"

"Alex, you're a mathematician, right?"

"With you, dunces, I've become a physicist whether I like it or not. I'm prepared to argue that the power consumption will decrease, and the system of double feeding the circuit will allow the "window" to stay open for several hours. What do ya wanna bet?"

"Loser gets a noogie!"

"A noogie's not enough!" Oleg entered the conversation after rolling up another block. "Alex gets to give you a noogie every day all next week, and Paul and I get to slap you in the back of the head if it works. Why are we busting our balls here all weekend? Work should be fun."

"And what if Alex is wrong about the math?" the leader of the Bandar-logs didn't give up.

"Then you get to slap each of us on the back of the head," said Oleg.

"Strange math. You want to give me two slaps and one painful noogie every day, so that's three acts of violence against my person, but I only get to give you one each?" the main jungle resident said, plugging the second block into the power supply system.

"If you wanna back down, just say so," Alex, leaning over the framework that contained the control devices, egged his friend on.

"Alright you baboons, you're on!"

"Oleg and Paul, you're witnesses!"

Five hours later, their work on setting up the apparatus was finished. Paul Chuiko conducted the first adjustment of the installation.

"What the heck, let's go ahead and launch the blocks under pressure," Denis suggested, "and fire it up in different modes."

* The main task of the laboratory, a part of the US Department of Energy, is the development and maintenance of nuclear weapons systems. It also conducts a variety of studies on issues related to national security, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, energy and environmental protection.

Dear reader! Thank you for reading my book!



[The Dragon Inside Book 4](#) release date April 9th! I hope that you will be carried away by an excerpt from the future book.

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