

THE LITTLE MAN, IN RETURN, TWISTED THE FINGERS OF HIS HANDS ANXIOUSLY. HE HAD NEVER BEEN NEAR SUCH GREAT MEN BEFORE. HE WAS ONLY AN AGING LOW-GRADE TECHNICIAN WHO HAD LONG AGO FAILED ALL TESTS DESIGNED TO SMOKE OUT THE GIFTED ONES AMONG MANKIND AND HAD SETTLED INTO THE RUT OF UNSKILLED LABOR. THERE WAS JUST THIS HOBBY OF HIS THAT THE GREAT PROGRAMMER HAD FOUND OUT ABOUT AND WAS NOW MAKING SUCH A FRIGHTENING FUSS OVER.

GENERAL WEIDER SAID, "I FIND THIS ATMOSPHERE OF MYSTERY CHILDISH."

"YOU WON'T IN A MOMENT," SAID SHUMAN. "THIS IS NOT SOMETHING WE CAN LEAK TO THE FIRSTCOMER. AUB!" THERE WAS SOMETHING IMPERATIVE ABOUT HER MANNER OF BITING OFF THAT ONE-SYLLABLE NAME, BUT THEN SHE WAS A GREAT PROGRAMMER SPEAKING TO A MERE TECHNICIAN.

"AUB! HOW MUCH IS NINE TIMES SEVEN?"

AUB HESITATED A MOMENT. HIS PALE EYES GLIMMERED WITH A FEEBLE ANXIETY. "SIXTY-THREE," HE SAID.

CONGRESSMAN BRANT LIFTED HIS EYEBROWS. "IS THAT RIGHT?"

"CHECK IT FOR YOURSELF, CONGRESSMAN."

THE CONGRESSMAN TOOK OUT HIS POCKET COMPUTER, NUDGED THE MILLED EDGES TWICE, LOOKED AT ITS FACE AS IT LAY THERE IN THE PALM OF HIS HAND, AND PUT IT BACK. HE SAID, "IS THIS THE GIFT YOU BROUGHT US HERE TO DEMONSTRATE. AN ILLUSIONIST?"

"MORE THAN THAT, SIR. AUB HAS MEMORIZED A FEW OPERATIONS AND WITH THEM HE COMPUTES ON PAPER."

"A PAPER COMPUTER?" SAID THE GENERAL. HE LOOKED PAINED.

Whoosh!

Whoosh!



