

(E-book Version 1.0 - first release. Scanned, Spellchecked & Checked against D.T. July 2003)

(Back Blurb)
NEW LENSMAN...

Many thousands of readers were introduced to science fiction through E. E. Doc Smith's classic LENSMAN series: for all of them the world seemed sadder when they realised that there were no more stories to come.

William B. Ellern decided that nostalgia was not enough: submitting material to the old master he asked permission to continue the series. The result is NEW LENSMAN, a novel which recreates and leads the reader back into the universe of the Lensman, that extravagant, unforgettable universe of intergalactic conquest and intrigue.

Dedicated to Edward E Smith, PhD
E Everett Evans
P Schuyler Miller
John W Campbell, Jr.
Ron Elik and
Forrest J Ackerman who encouraged me, and made it possible for you to read about a NEW LENSMAN
William B Ellern

New Lensman

Futura Publications Limited
An Orbit Book

An Orbit Book

First published in Great Britain in 1976 by Futura Publications Limited

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ISBN: 0 8600 7923 6

Printed in. Great Britain by Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press), Ltd., Bungay, Suffolk

Futura Publications Limited
110 Warner Road, Camberwell
London SE5 9HQ

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In his monumental work The History of Civilization, Dr. E. B. Smith traces the consequential and salient events of the war between two diametrically opposed philosophies, that of Boskone and that of Civilization. To that work, complete and thorough, nothing need be added. It stands, and will continue to stand, as the single most complete effort of its kind ever attempted and successfully executed.

On numerous occasions Dr. Smith has been urged to add to this work a series of minor incidents illuminating and filling certain gaps in his chronicle made necessary by the lack of space to include them. The bulk of material far exceeds any hope of its exhaustion by a single author. Certainly the lives and efforts of men such as Wentworth, Dronvire and Mc Queen should not be forgotten. Each played a significant part in the development, indeed in one instance in the continued existence, of Civilization.

This then is one story played out against the background of a greater struggle. Minor only in the context of the other events depending upon it.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BLACK SPACESHIP

The wall slid slowly back revealing an executive conference room with its heavy wall drapery, upholstered furniture and simulated wood table. A tall, slender man in the uniform of the Solarian Patrol stood at the far end of the room, waiting. The group of men entered, obviously curious at the presence of the patrolman but not commenting on it. They quietly found their places at the conference table and sat down.

'Gentleman,' Ron Love, the Mayor of Copernicus, began the meeting. The Mayor of Copernicus was a man of ordinary height but quite stocky of build. His bright eyes penetrated each man of the group as he spoke, as though trying to perceive their thoughts. 'The material to be discussed in this meeting is classified Top Secret. Consequently, I must insist that all of you who are using recording devices, turn them off.'

There was a short pause as several men removed cases from their pockets and turned them off, while others merely touched various places on their person.

'Gentlemen,' the Mayor began, when it was apparent that he again had the attention of the group. 'This is Lt. Larry McQueen of the Solarian Patrol. The Lieutenant is a special courier from the Solarian Patrol Grand Fleet Headquarters in The Hill on Tellus. His message to the Board of Directors is the reason for this meeting being classified. If the material presented here seems extra-ordinary, so will be our response to it!'

'Lieutenant, these men are the Board of Directors of Copernicus.' Mayor Love introduced Lt. McQueen around the conference table. Larry was already familiar with each of their backgrounds, having read their Service dossiers. When the social amenities were over he began.

'For at least the last two years our solar system has been under surveillance by some unknown, outside agency. Information about this has not been made public because of the limited amount of data available. Until recently each contact with this agency had been made visually by a Solarian Patrol spaceship while, for various reasons, it was not radiating energy. When our spaceship revealed its presence by using a tracer, or spy-ray, directed toward the other spaceship, it disappeared! After several such accidental encounters, a concerted effort was made to detect this agency.'

'Approximately a year ago the Solarian Patrol started Project Light Post!' The announced purpose of this project was to englobe the Solar System, at the radius of Saturn, with a series of twelve unmanned, automatic navigation aids; beacons for interstellar flight. In addition to the publicized automatic positioning and communications equipment, there were special recorders on board the Light Post beacons using the light-field lenses developed by Dr. Kelvin here at your Moorpark Research Center. I have brought with me a special set of these recordings to show you.' The room darkened and on the wall behind Larry a picture of the planet Saturn with its rings appeared.

'The light sensors of Light Post No.7 picked up a glint of light here,' Larry continued, pointing to a little sparkle of light a few inches past the edge of Saturn. 'A light-field recorder immediately focused on the area.'

The picture zoomed in on the spot of light. As it grew larger, it changed into a black, teardrop-shaped spaceship.

'As you can see from the shape, this spaceship is unlike any thing thus so far built in the Solar System. Having found it, we followed it as it drifted inertialess into our system. It did not radiate, and its course implied an accurate knowledge of the location of charted detectors in our tracking network, as well as our manned stations and spacecraft. This in turn indicated that there is some continuous, covert contact between the entities operating this spaceship and our civilization.'

Time-lapse pictures followed the spaceship into the Solar System.

'In the asteroid belt the spaceship used tractor beams to alter its course. Using the asteroids as a screen, it rapidly moved part way round the system. It also radiated for a short time as it recharged its accumulators from its generators.

'At this point the tracking of the spaceship was switched to Lamp Post No. 3,' Larry said, and the view of the spaceship changed. 'Here the spaceship apparently felt safe to leave the plane of the ecliptic. It approached an asteroid known as Icarus. Icarus is unique in that it is one of the few asteroids to cross the orbit of Tellus. The spaceship went inert. Note that the intrinsic velocity of the spaceship so closely matched that of the asteroid that it was able to land on tractor beams alone. A day later it again radiated for about an hour. The spaceship sat on Icarus for a week. Then it went free and lifted off using pressors. when it got back to the asteroid belt, it switched to atomics and disappeared at light speeds.' The pictures on the wall used time-lapse photography to follow Larry's words. The lights came back on.

'In the intervening months since this first spaceship was found, we have kept a watch on Icarus. During this time three space craft have landed there. As far as could be determined, each followed the same pattern. The last one we attempted to intercept, as is shown in the following sequence.' The lights dimmed.

'You see here the spaceship lifting off from Icarus,' Larry said. 'Four cruiser class patrol ships were waiting for it about a detet* away, with all radiating equipment off. They followed it visually, and when it got within range, the patrol ships went into action.'

On the wall the group of men saw four tractor beams clamp onto the black spaceship. A blast of incandescent gas appeared at the black spaceship's side as simultaneously activated planes of force attempted to sheer the tractor beams - unsuccessfully. These were not light tracers! They were hard-driven tractors clamped on with the full power of a patrol cruiser behind them!

'At the first touch of a tractor the black spaceship's screens went up. The atomic power system activated the Bergenholm and jets drove the spaceship sideways. In previous instances only the obvious line of flight had been searched when the spaceships vanished. This is why they seemed to disappear.'

The four patrol cruisers closed in and linked together to form a tetrahedron about the black spaceship. The captive spaceship lashed out with its macro beams against the spaceships holding it. The screens of the patrol cruisers flared a little but took it with ease. Then, with careful deliberation, the patrol attacked. The outer screen of the black spaceship went down as beams from the four cruisers overloaded it. The second one went down a minute later. The third screen was carefully brought up to a violet radiance, just short of being burned out by the opposing spacecraft.

'An estimate was made of the black spaceship's generating system based on the amount of radiation given off when they recharged their accumulators. It was estimated that it would require about four hours of intense overload on the screens before the generators of the black spaceship would burn out,' Larry said. 'At the end of five hours the third screen went down. Before the wall shield could be loaded, an atomic explosion completely destroyed the black spaceship. It was deliberate suicide.'

The group watched as the black spaceship disappeared in an intense flare of light. The room lights came up.

'The expected response of an alien spaceship, when discovered in this manner and captured by overwhelming forces, is to surrender. In return, our response would be to give the inhabitants a tour of our system, escort them out of it and release them with the admonishment to "go and spy no more",' Larry explained, and then smiled slowly. 'This attitude may seem a little idealistic but the other party may claim sovereignty. If we damaged their subjects, or their property, they could demand reparations, if they didn't declare war. The only obvious conclusion to be reached by this 'rather die than be captured' attitude is that this unknown agency has serious intentions of aggression, the details of which we might discover by capturing them. Accordingly, we are alerting all the patrol bases and the major spaceports in the Solar System to prepare for an armed conflict. It may never come but we must be prepared. I have given Mayor Love a general outline of the preparations which the Patrol would like to have made here at Copernicus and those additional tasks which a full scale effort will entail. He is in charge of all local activity,' Lt Larry

McQueen concluded. 'Are there any questions?'

'Yes,' Linn Potter, Director of Services said. 'Is the alert only in our solar system?'

'Yes, until signs of similar activity are discovered elsewhere,' Larry answered. 'Mr. Johnstone?'

'You mentioned that they seemed to have a knowledge of the location of our manned stations and spacecraft,' the Director of Copernicus Control said. 'Do you have any idea yet of the source of that information?'

'None. Mr. Turner?'

'How much time do we have to prepare for this enemy?'

'We have no concrete proof that these entities are "enemies",' Larry answered. 'We can only guess, based on what we have seen. This is one of the reasons why this information not been released to either the press or the general public. Yes, they are watching us. Yes, they have been acting like they are considering a fight. BUT, until they perform some aggressive act, they are not enemies. We must also be careful not to accuse the next group of aliens who happen to venture into our solar system in a black, tear-drop shaped spaceship, of being spies or enemies or potential aggressors.'

'As to how much time we have to prepare,' Larry continued, 'I don't know. Maybe days. Maybe years. Mr. Sneary?'

'During the Jovian Wars several attempts were made to drop meteoroids on Copernicus. Is any protection available for a similar type of attack?'

'Yes, the new Rodebush-Bergenholm field,' Larry answered. 'Rodebush-Bergenholm field generators will be available shortly. I'm not at liberty to say anything else at this time. Mr. Gold?'

'Will we act as a relay for communications, as we did during the Jovian Wars?' the Director of Earthside Communications asked.

'No. Your commercial facilities will probably not be required except on a routine basis. The Solarian Patrol will be using ultra-wave equipment. This spaceport will be expected first to defend itself, second to destroy any attacking spacecraft within its range and last to act as a cislunar spotter for Grand Fleet Headquarters,' Larry answered. 'Mr. Castora?'

'Could the black spaceship be a pirate?'

'Yes!' Larry said. 'That is a definite probability. Certainly the battle to the death philosophy fits. However, consider the spaceship. It was of a design different from that of the Solar System or of any of the inhabited planets we know. If these are pirates, then they are the most dangerous pirates we've ever seen. They have the facilities of one or more worlds to produce their own fleet. If they are pirates, we still must prepare, perhaps more than ever. Are there any further questions? No? Then I'll turn the meeting back to Mayor Love.'

'Thank you, Lt. McQueen,' Ron Love said. He waited a few moments until Lt. McQueen sat down, and then continued waiting until he again had the attention of the group.

'In normal times Copernicus is a spaceport and a research center rather than a military base,' he began. 'The Gateway to Tellus we call ourselves. But even so we have a responsibility: we are responsible for all the activities in one of the four sectors of the moon through Copernicus Control and its orbiting observation relays. Through Copernicus Control we control most of the commercial traffic in the Solar System. We also exert direct military command over a large radius of the Lunar surface and half a million miles into space with our blaster batteries. We are one of the primary lines of defense of Tellus! That responsibility can weigh heavy.'

Ron paused for a moment and then continued in a softer tone, an almost tired tone. 'This information which Lt. McQueen has brought compels us to consider Copernicus as a military base under impending attack from an unknown foe. A state of war may soon exist! Our first concern is the general public. Our first assumption is that if the enemy attacks, they will first have infiltrated us and be prepared to sabotage or destroy our defenses, our air, our power and/or our water systems.'

'I need from each of you a report,' he said. 'A list of the critical points of internal attack, which are under your control, and the procedures for protecting these essential systems or minimizing any damage that can be done to them. This report will be due in three days. Include everything you can think of, whether you have a solution to the problem or not. Mr. Johnstone, I also need from you, as Director of Copernicus Control, an evaluation of our external defenses and their weak points. My secretary will issue each of you an outline of the information required in your reports. They will be classified Top Secret as well as the information discussed here and the outline. Release only as little as possible to those members of your staff who have been cleared on this level, or from those from whom you specifically need help,' Ron directed.

'If there are no further questions, the meeting of the Board of Directors of Copernicus will be adjourned,' Mayor Ron Love concluded.

* * *

Dr. Kelvin remained behind with Lt. McQueen and Mayor Love after the rest of the Board of Directors had left. At the Mayor's suggestion they went into his office. The office of the Mayor of Copernicus showed his status. It was a plush place with thick carpets, draped walls and a large genuine wood desk imported from Tellus at one end. Behind the desk a three-dimensional television picture of the interior of Copernicus Crater covered the entire wall. One could see several spaceships being unloaded far below. In the distance was the top of the east peak on the other side of the crater 50 miles away. It was called Pelz Peak after one of the first men to enter the crater on foot. The three peaks in the center of the crater were, of course, named after the three astronauts who first landed there.

'OK, Ron. What's the real reason behind that Board Meeting?' Dr. Kelvin asked the Mayor after they were seated.

'What do you mean?'

'Of the people at that meeting, at least four had no business being there. Or if you want to be formal, they had no "need to know" the information revealed. I'm certain you didn't invite them without a reason.'

Mayor Love looked inquiringly at Lt. McQueen.

'Are the shields and blocks up around this room?' Larry asked.

'G-1?' Ron said.

'Yes, all the shields and spy-ray blocks are in operation,' the office robot answered.

Lt. McQueen nodded to the Mayor to go on.

'We suspect that we have already been infiltrated, and are checking on the Board of Directors level,' Ron Love answered. 'The chairs in the conference room had lie detectors secretly installed by the last Mayor of Copernicus. I never bothered to have them removed. I hope both of you realize how politically dangerous that fact is and will appreciate my position in telling you. During the meeting any significant changes in emotional levels were displayed on the plate in front of my seat. Our suspicions seem to have been borne out. One of the men at the meeting didn't turn off his personal recorder and practically went off scale when the words "Icarus", "pirates" and "sabotage" were mentioned.'

'Who was he?' asked Dr. Kelvin.

'John Griffin, Director of Facilities.'

There was a long pause, which was finally broken by Dr. Kelvin. 'We've been had! It's the one place we can't afford to have a ... a traitor!'

The Mayor had to laugh at the look of utter consternation on Dr. Kelvin's face. 'You're wrong,' he said. 'Almost any one of the Directors could be as dangerous. There are ways of checking Griffin's activities but that's a matter for myself and the Director of Security. Meanwhile, if you would take Lt. McQueen over to the research center, he will discuss the details of Project Hard Hat.'

'Larry, if you'll check with the Director of Security when you're through with Dr. Kelvin, he'll bring you up to date on any immediate results of our research on Griffin.'

'Good hunting, Ron,' Lt. McQueen said as they left.

'Thanks,' the Mayor answered.

CHAPTER TWO

A CHANGED MAN

In the hall outside the Mayor's office Lt. Larry McQueen and Dr. Kelvin stepped into the open Down shaft and dropped, free, through the City Hall Building to the travel tunnel level several hundred feet below. The travel tunnel was an extension of the same inertialess field as in the shaft but in the horizontal direction. Currently there was a grid of 10 north-south and 5 east-west travel tunnels under Copernicus. Opening off them every hundred feet or so, a pair of shafts extended upwards.

Dr. Kelvin reached up. Immediately, a handle snapped into his cupped hand at over 50 miles per hour. He didn't feel it strike him - inertialess collisions cannot be felt but he was instantly drawn along by it. It might be thought that air resistance would cause one to travel in a horizontal position but this is not so when the air itself is inertialess. Sounds are also strange inside a travel tunnel because every sound travels instantly to all parts of it without attenuation and then stops without reverberation. Gravity is equalized in the travel tunnels and shafts. Some rather grim accidents had occurred in which external gravity caused all of the air in an inertialess field to fall to the floor. Artificial gravity fields were used in such a way that the air was forced to circulate rather than stagnate at the floor.

Lt. Larry McQueen followed Dr. Kelvin through the travel tunnels to the entrance of the Moorpark Research Center. There they went through a security check.

A few minutes later they were in Dr. Kelvin's office. It was a great contrast from Mayor Love's. A

large, slightly battered, metal desk, and one of the tables were piled high with notebooks, magazines, tapes and papers. Models of gadgets were scattered about the room. A drafting tank and a bookcase were behind the desk in easy reach. The only real concession to comfort was two well-upholstered easy chairs and a couch.

Even then, the folded blanket on the floor next to the couch suggested that it had been used for more than just a place to sit.

'Are you familiar with the Rodebush-Bergenholm field?' Larry asked.

'No,' Dr. Kelvin answered. 'Sit down. Sit. I've seen Rodebush and Bergenholm's note in Nature but it doesn't give any of the essential details.'

'The field is the best matter shield yet developed,' Larry explained. 'It was derived from a similarity between the equations for the spaceship wall shield and those for artificial gravity. However, instead of dissipating the energy impinging on the field, it's stored in the field, or more accurately, circulated through the matter encompassed by the field. The generator can actually use part of the energy stored inside the field to strengthen and maintain itself. However, the field does require a conductor through it. The Hill, where the prototype is being installed, uses the alloy sheathing covering it as the conductor for the field. It's not as effective as it could be, so they're cleaning down the surface and copper plating. But until they finish, the alloy is there, and usable: As part of our program of up-grading Solarian Patrol bases and major spaceports, we propose to metal coat the surface over Copernicus and use a Rodebush-Bergenholm field as protection against bombardment.'

'But that would be a major engineering project!' Dr. Kelvin said. 'The Hill was sheathed during the Jovian Wars using a wartime budget. Sheathing just the crater wall side of Copernicus alone would be an incredibly difficult task, and financing it during peacetime ...' Dr. Kelvin shook his head.

'No, a sheath isn't necessary,' Larry said. 'An evaporative coating of copper a few micro-inches thick would be quite adequate. To the Rodebush-Bergenholm field it would be the equivalent of a sheath of several feet of alloy. With the field on, it would give a protection no thickness of alloy alone could give. The field is completely opaque to almost all radiation, so your blaster batteries and communication antennas will have to be moved. Mayor Love is clearing that with the appropriate Directors and Copernicus Control.'

'I see why it would be useless on spacecraft,' Dr. Kelvin said. 'They would be completely blind.' He pondered for a moment in thought and then turned to his desk. He called up from the micro-file inside the desk a series of maps of the crater, a couple of references and the Rodebush-Bergenholm letter. After consulting these, he connected in the computer and sketched the problem in the drafting tank. A minute later he looked up at Lt. McQueen.

'To cover an area 50 miles long, 10 miles outward from the crater rim over us and 15 miles from the rim down to the floor with a thickness of 400 micro-inches of copper will require a minimum of one million cubic feet of material!' he said.

'That's an order of magnitude thicker than is required by my estimate,' Larry said coolly. 'That reduces your quarter million tons to around 25 thousand tons. I doubt if you need to cover that section all the way out to the southern entrance. It's only a single tunnel and represents about half the total area.'

'Wrong. Even though that area isn't inhabited, the shock wave of a near miss could collapse the tunnels on us here,' Dr. Kelvin answered.

'OK, then you need to cover more than 10 miles out from the top of the rim,' Larry said.

Dr. Kelvin hesitated. 'You're right. Let's check.' He turned to the computer. 'Assuming that the largest meteoroid they can start moving, without being detected and intercepted, is about 100 feet on a side ... iron ... I wonder if some kind of quake barriers ... hmmm ...'

A few minutes later he looked up again and said, 'We convert Copernicus into a free standing triangular prism. We go out about 10 miles on each side of the Dome and cut a slot a few feet wide to a depth of about a mile below our lowest level, which is about even with the crater floor, and plate the slot. That will save about 20 per cent of the amount of copper needed but we'll probably use it anyway, since we won't be able to control the plating process in the slot as well as we can on the open surface. The slots will be a lot of trouble but we need them for shock protection.'

'What weight of copper do you estimate?'

'Roughly 25 thousand tons.'

Larry smiled. 'When can you start?'

'Well, I've got a lot of work to do,' Dr. Kelvin said, looking at the paperwork on his desk. He looked up and smiled. 'How about an hour from now?'

'The Himalaya will deliver 14 cylinders of copper, 9 feet in diameter and 60 feet long, in three days. The remaining amount up to an additional 10 thousand tons will be delivered in any standard

shape or form you require within three days after you order it. The Solarian Patrol has completely taken over the stock and facilities of Bridgeford Copper for this purpose. Here is a list of your Patrol charge numbers and a list of Earthside contacts. The generators will arrive with the copper. Here is an authorization from Mayor Love to use as many men from the research center and Copernicus Control as you need to do the job as fast as possible. OK?'

Dr. Kelvin took the papers. A happy look came over his face, like a boy who had been given a new bicycle. 'Done !' he answered. 'Can you find your own way out of here?'

As Lt. McQueen left, Dr. Kelvin had apparently forgotten his paperwork and was already on the intercom calling in his staff.

* * *

After Lt. Larry McQueen and Dr. Kelvin left the office, Mayor Ron Love spent several minutes looking out at the silent picture of Copernicus Crater in contemplative thought. He spoke a few words to the office robot, and the picture of the crater was replaced with a recording of the recent Board of Directors meeting. Shown above the head of each of the directors was a chart showing the output of the lie detector attached to his chair. Ron learned little new that he hadn't summed up to Lt. McQueen and Dr. Kelvin as Director Griffin's reaction to certain words, especially 'Icarus'. The other directors reacted but in what seemed to be a normal manner. Ron turned around and, using the keyboard on his desk, started calling personnel files from the Central File computer to the plate on his desk.

The records indicated that John Griffin had been a long time administrator of the Facilities Division. He had come rapidly up through the ranks and had been the Division Director for the last five years. Going through the departmental organization charts, Ron noted that the division secretary had changed about three months previously to a Virginia Lewis. About two months later there was a series of major departmental changes. 'Rog,' Ron said softly to himself. Flipping the intercom switch, Ron said, 'Margurite, will you chase down Rog Philips and send him in here?' Ron continued through the file on Griffin. Griffin had taken a vacation just before the departmental changes started. Ron punched in a key sentence and started through Griffin's security file. Nothing important.

He went through Virginia Lewis' file. She had apparently arrived from Uranium Incorporated's vacuum refining plant in Fauth crater about a month before she got the job. No boy friends, no previous marriages, no bank references, no hobbies, no organizational memberships, no medical history, no nothing! A complete non-entity.

Ron looked up the file on the previous division secretary. She had left for Earth abruptly with a one day notice. Her bank record indicated she couldn't afford the ticket and certainly couldn't afford the shipping bill on her possessions, which she had sent after her. But they had been paid with funds transferred from Earth.

Ron flipped on the recorder. 'A memo to Owen Hanovich,' he said. 'Subject: Security File. Classification: Secret. Please update the records of Hilda Johnson, ex-Division of Facilities secretary, with emphasis on financial condition, sources of income and present status.'

Ron went on through the records. The men who had replaced those who left the Facilities Division were all from Fauth and all non-entities who had arrived in the last four months. Ron had just asked the Central File computer to sort out all the residents of Copernicus who had arrived from Fauth in the last year, when his secretary announced that Rog Philips was waiting in the reception room.

'Send him in,' Ron said, and got up from his desk. He met Philips about halfway to the door and waved him into a chair before perching himself on the end of his desk.

'Rog, I want to talk to you about two matters, both of which are important to the security of the city and both of which sound like I'm being nosy about personal affairs. About a month ago you came to me from the Facilities Division, where you were one of the chiefs, and asked for a job. I didn't ask you then for details of why you were leaving, because I knew you. We've been friends for quite a while. I considered it some kind of personal disagreement between you and John Griffin. Now I have reason to believe that it's more important than that and I want to know just what happened over there that so many people left or resigned.'

'I'll be honest with you, Ron,' Rog said. 'I don't understand what happened.' There was a long pause as Rog rubbed the back of his neck thoughtfully. 'Everything was fine up to the time Griffin left on vacation. I was left in charge of the Division. When he got back, it was as if a new man appeared. He cut off all his old friends and wouldn't see them. He sent out a series of directives. He stopped calling weekly staff meetings. People got called on the carpet for no good reason. He was suddenly cold, hard and distant. An utterly changed man. Where normally he didn't worry about the details in my Electronics Department, now he was watching every move. People were reporting to him instead of me, and everything I did was wrong. So I got out.'

'Where did he take his vacation?'

'I don't know. Somewhere on Tellus. Ask his secretary. She made the arrangements.'

'What do you think of his secretary?'

'I have rarely seen such a little brass-plated bitch!'

'All right. Consider this question carefully: Could the man who returned be someone disguised as John Griffin and the new secretary be helping him carry it off?'

There was a long pause. Ron was pleased by the look of questioning puzzlement that came over Rog's face.

'It fits. It fits perfectly. But who? Why would anyone do something like that? Griffin's not rich nor politically powerful'

Ron told Rog about Lt. McQueen and the message he had brought from Solarian Patrol Headquarters.

'Now, there's something else that has to be done,' Ron said. 'I figure that you know a good man for the job. Lt. McQueen brought some information about a secret moon base which was built somewhere here back before World War 3. We are going to have to send someone out to secure it.'

'Before World War 3, huh. There's one guy in the Carpathian Club that would really like that job. Harvey Reinfield.'

'Carpathian Club? Oh, yes. That's that group of mountain-climbing nuts we've got wandering around the landscape,' Ron said with a sly smile. 'You're a member, aren't you?'

'If you weren't an Honorary Member yourself, I'd punch you in the nose,' Rog answered with a broad smile. As I was saying, Harv's hobby for the last 10 years has been collecting stuff on the history of space-flight before World War 3. He spent his whole last vacation completely searching the Apollo landing areas. I've seen his file of old moon photos and it alone is incredible. So far he's hit a complete blank on the moon base. What did the Solarian Patrol come up with?'

'A diary and a photograph found in the cornerstone of an old church in Nebraska. No one knows how or why it got there but,' Ron shrugged, 'I have copies of the pages and a summary of the Patrol's guess as to the area they think the moon base is located in. It will still take some looking but this should limit that to a couple of weeks at most.'

'Where is it?'

'I can't tell you more than that it's somewhere north-west of here, within 500 miles,' Ron answered. 'By the way, you are going to have to review some of the reports on internal safety. I would appreciate it if you gave the report of the Facilities Division your personal, special attention. I'm particularly interested in anything that has been omitted. Why don't you do your own report on Facilities? I'm sure Margurite has an extra copy of the outline of the material wanted. OK?'

'OK,' Rog answered.

A few moments later Rog left and Ron returned to look at the results of the computer file search he had started. Other than those who came over each weekend to spend their pay check, there were 17 people permanently in Copernicus who had come from Fauth during the last 6 months, and two in the 12 months prior to that. Ten people had traveled through Copernicus to some other destination. Of those in Copernicus, eight were employed in the Facilities Division, six were employed elsewhere and five had dropped from sight. The credit chit file of the missing five was empty, so apparently some one else was providing food, clothing and housing for them.

At this point Ron called the Director of Security and turned the matter over to him with his recommendations. Ron interviewed Harv Reinfield and started him on his quest.

After Harv had left, Ron sat a long time looking at the picture of the crater and wondering if he really wanted to continue in the position of power he had wrested forcibly from his predecessor just before the start of the Fourth Jovian War. Wondered if it might be time now to step down and let one of the men he had so carefully watched take his place at the next election. The worlds were changing almost too fast to keep up with now. Mankind was spreading out to the stars. Maybe he should join them. He looked at the stars in the sky and they looked coldly back at him.

No. No, there was no place for him out there. He had worked too long and too hard here to give it up and go out there and start over. Here was everything that was meaningful to him. Out there?

Only new beginnings. Beginnings that it would take one or two lifetimes to bring to fruition. No, he had neither the time nor the patience to rebuild something new, only to hold onto what he had, knowing it would get relatively smaller and smaller and less and less important as time passed. Too old and too tired. Too inflexible. That's what he was.

But, by damn, he was going to hold onto what he did have.

He turned his back on the stars, back to his desk, refilled again for an uncountable time with resolve to be the best mayor ever, and to accomplish! 'Let's see now,' he said to no one in particular, 'that old bat, Mrs. Stillwater, wants me to help her get a zone variance in our Xanadu area. We'll fix her wagon.'

CHAPTER THREE
KIDNAPPED

Lt. McQueen found the Security Division. The receptionist directed him to Col. Hanovich's office. Hanovich's secretary told him that he was expected. She ushered the Lieutenant into Col. Hanovich's office and closed the door firmly behind him when he was inside. The open curtains along one wall of the Director of Security's office revealed a window looking out into the Dome, a hemisphere a half mile in diameter hollowed out of the center of the crater wall. In the center of the Dome, held in place by tractor and pressor beams, was the artificial sun giving out light and warmth to the inhabitants. The Dome was ringed with commercial enterprises, and housed the park. The City Hall of Copernicus was part of the Dome's wall. Indeed, each 'building' of Copernicus was a set of rooms hollowed out of the rock surrounding a pair of shafts from the travel level. The travel tunnels emptied into the Dome. The Dome was the center of activity of both Copernicus and of the whole moon. Only recently was it possible to economically create other domes on the moon. Still the Dome would remain unique, for soon mankind would come out of hiding on the moon. This was to happen later, when whole craters became cities roofed with the Rodebush-Bergenholm field. Impervious to meteor storms.

Col. Owen Hanovich came around his desk and shook hands. He was a somewhat stout man with red hair, a bushy red beard and a black glove on his left hand.

'Welcome, Lt. McQueen,' he said, eyes twinkling. 'It's not often that a Sector Chief of the Triplanetary Service visits us. Sit down.'

The Lieutenant sat down and asked, 'What makes you think I'm a Sector Chief in the Triplanetary Service?'

'I was aboard the spaceship Edwardium Rex during the Coventry Affair.'

'Oh, a passenger?'

'Yes. Sometimes it does seem unfortunate that the penalty for piracy is death, but then, if we let every attractive woman go ...' Hanovich trailed off into a moment's silence.

'She's still around. The jury let her go.'

'Oh?'

'I'm on a spy hunt now. You've been checked and apparently you aren't one of the opposition, so I'll give you the details of what has been discovered so far. First, however, is this room secure?'

Hanovich slid one of the writing surfaces in his desk out, rotated it and examined the lights embedded inside. 'Yes,' he said, 'everything is in order. The shields and blocks are up.'

'How often are they maintained?'

Col. Hanovich's eyebrows darkened. 'Maintained?' He took this as a clue. 'My office is checked every week. We have our own group to maintain the correct operation of these devices in the Security Department and in the City Hall in general. I might add that the members of the group have been in the department for at least 10 years. Each is an expert on bugs, taps and snoops.'

'The window?'

'One way vilar. It looks like part of the wall from the out side. A new material.'

'I know. Pull the drapes,' Larry said. 'Vilar is also transparent in the UV region. It takes some special equipment but the Service has already had occasion to look through it. Anything we can do, we should expect the opposition to be able to do.'

Hanovich pulled the drapes and Larry continued.

'As a result of the meeting of the Board of Directors, we have reason to suspect that John Griffin is either one of, or at least in contact with, the unknown agency which the Patrol ... er ... the Service is investigating. Mayor Love is checking into Director Griffin's activities.'

'I know,' Col. Hanovich said, with just a trace of smugness in his voice. 'Here is a copy of the results of the Mayor's efforts. He's turned the problem over to my division and I was just about to put a team to work doing a detailed check of the files and records of all the people the Mayor came up with.'

Larry read through the brief report and then put it back on Hanovich's desk.

'The man mentioned in my department is in the Watchman/Traffic Control Section. Here.' Under the clear surface of Hanovich's desk were pictures of each of the men on public security duty. Hanovich pointed to one of the pictures. 'This is what he looks like.'

Larry leaned forward and looked at the man. The face was neither distinctive nor familiar. 'OK, how about the five men who dropped out of sight?'

'Nothing yet. Obviously they eat, so any excess purchases of food by anyone in the group will eventually lead us to them. On the other hand, they could have left Copernicus through some secret exit, though I don't know of any. No one has been reported missing but that doesn't mean that

these people couldn't be impersonating someone without close friends or relationships.' 'The primary thing that bothers me is that for several months now these agents have had free run of Copernicus,' Larry said. 'What have they done in that time? What listening devices or booby traps have they set? They have taken the time and trouble to infiltrate the Facilities Division. Why? What's their reason? What's their schedule? What's going to blow up in our faces at a critical moment? And most important, how are we going to find out?'

'Since the start of the Jovian Wars we've dealt with problems similar to these,' Hanovich said, as though it was of no great importance. 'As an initial measure Security has a "Customs Section", which checks and records all of the baggage, personal effects and goods being shipped or brought into Copernicus. We try to stop anything potentially dangerous. From the customs records we should be able to determine what kind of electronic equipment or anything they brought in.'

'Not necessarily,' Larry said with a smile. 'I'm a perambulating warehouse of equipment and I doubt that you have any idea what I'm carrying. It all looks innocent.'

Hanovich looked pleased, like a cat with a mouth full of canary. 'What's it got in its pockets?' he hissed

Larry smiled, catching the reference to one of the few enduring classics of English literature. Hanovich typed a key phrase into the keyboard on his desk. He thought a moment, typed in additional information and then read from the plate. 'Goggles, binoculars, wristwatch, pocket chronometer, belt communicator, flashlight, automatic lighter, wallet, change, a money belt, a pocket knife and a knife in your boot heel. And the goggles. I admit that every spaceship officer I've ever seen wears them but I've never seen them use them for anything except as sunglasses. Care to explain?'

'The goggles and binoculars form part of the traditional uniform,' Larry answered. 'The goggles come from the First Jovian War when they were used as eye protection from atomic explosion and laser radiation. The originals had a semi-opaque liquid driven between the lenses by an explosive charge, when a certain intensity or type of light hit a sensor on them. The modern ones use a high speed, reversible, light intensity limiting effect; phototropism it's called. Of course neither item is required unless you're using direct viewports. You still haven't mentioned a large part of the stuff I'm carrying.'

Hanovich looked even more pained, if that was possible.

'At least you have a record of their possessions, even if we aren't sure what those possessions really are,' Larry said. 'If we can account for everything, that's a good start.'

'I'll put a team to work on that point.'

'You might put one team to work just watching these people. Warn them that we're not playing polite parlor games. This one is for keeps. An error, and they will know we are onto them. That could be fatal to us all! Handle them with care, and remember that we may not have all of them spotted. Matter of fact, keep looking for other connections and other groups. We need information desperately!' Larry said, getting up. 'I've got to go now. I'll check with you later.'

'All right. I hope we'll have something for you the next time we meet. You're staying at the New Frontier Hotel?'

'Yes.'

'We'll contact you there if we find out anything important. Or better yet,' Hanovich reached into his desk and brought out what appeared to be a coin, 'carry this and we'll be able to trace and contact you wherever you are in Copernicus.'

'Thanks, but they may be aware of your finder. If they are, I'd rather they weren't able to follow me so easily. Thanks anyway.'

Bidding the Director of Security goodbye, Lt. McQueen left the City Hall and started through the Dome toward his hotel.

* *

Wherever the men of Tellus go, they try to take part of their planet with them. Be it the farthest point of the universe man has explored, a wilderness of timeless rock soaking in endless vacuum or the midst of magma and ash of a planet not quite born - there is always a cave or bubble or dome to which the men there could point and say, 'There! That's like home! That's the way it was !' Nowhere is this more evident than on the moon. The Dome had been carved from lifeless rock in the heart of a crater wall. Even after its half mile hemisphere had been cut and laboriously carted out of the crater wall, there was no life there. Nothing could live in the airless, rock-bound darkness. Air and water were wrung from the rock of the moon. Some of the pulverized remains of the yet dark dome were mixed with micro-organisms from Tellus brought there to create a nutrient soil. There was air and water and soil.

Now. Let there be light! Man created, out of his own need, a miniature sun to hang in the center of the Dome. It had been changed many times before Lt. Larry McQueen's eyes first saw it. The

first suns were cold and gave out only light. Even now part of the heat was produced by power generators underneath the Dome. The sun that hung in the sky of the Dome now was the right size, shape and color. It gave out heat and light and that special something called 'friendliness'. It was part of a single, almost endless spring day, in an Eden created by man, with night coming only once a year just before Founder's Day. Underneath that friendly sun grew a park, with walkways bordered in grass. Trees grew from what was once sterility. Each green thing carefully watched, cherished and nurtured into life. The heart of the wall of the crater named Copernicus was alive and it was hoped would remain that way.

Now the Dome was a commonplace thing to its inhabitants. It was part of the accepted order of things. Only the tourists came, looked and wondered. The walkways were filled with people, many on important business, not sensing the beauty around them. Some annoyed that they had to walk through the park. Yet here and there, there were a few. Walking for the enjoyment of it. Enjoying the beauty of something that was not Earth but of Earth. To some an Earth they had never visited. An Earth so close, yet an eternity of night away.

Lt. McQueen entered the Dome, walking as rapidly as possible across it toward the New Frontier Hotel. He was considering the conversation he had just had with Col. Hanovich. He was trying to decide whether he had said or implied too much. Whether he should leave Griffin and company in the local Security Division's hands or go to work on the problem himself. He needed information on who was represented by the black spaceship. Where did it come from? What was its purpose? Did Griffin have this information? How to get it out of him? The Mayor he liked and respected. If the Mayor were still working on the problem, he wouldn't worry. Hanovich ... hmm. Perhaps it was just a conflict of interest. He'd give him a day and see what Security came up with. He had a feeling that Hanovich was the type of individual too busy playing games with words to do anything. Something was wrong!

The impression intruded itself on Larry's thoughts and brought him out of them into the world around him. He had walked almost halfway to his destination while trying to decide on the proper manner of handling Hanovich. The walkway bent in a long curve toward the hotel. A lot of trees here. Around him were several men, all apparently going in the same direction. Ahead was a four-wheeled, electric cargo hauler and beyond that a policeman. What was wrong? He didn't recognize any of the people around him. Larry slowed a little. A couple of the men moved on past but some of the rest slowed too. Larry reached for his belt communicator.

'Pardon me, but ...' A voice came from in back of him. A hand touched his shoulder and everything faded into blackness.

The man who had touched him watched as the lieutenant crumpled to the sidewalk. He pretended surprise and pointed at Larry with one hand, while the other one, which had touched McQueen, dropped an instrument into his side pocket.

'What happened?' he asked the man next to him.

Several other people came up to join those around the unconscious Solarian Patrolman. The policeman came running up. Larry would have recognized him as the man whose picture Hanovich had pointed out. He knelt over Larry for a moment, then stood up, pulled a communicator from his belt and said into it in a loud voice, 'Ambulance.'

As if by magic, right on cue, down the pathway came an enclosed white ambulance hauler with two men in white jackets on board. Lt. McQueen was put inside. The doors closed. The policeman stepped on the back platform and the ambulance left.

* * *

The first person to miss Lt. McQueen was Mayor Love. He had been considering Griffin's reaction to the word Icarus, and it bothered him. He wanted to discuss the matter with the lieutenant. Larry had given him the channel and selective call number of his belt communicator. Ron called it through the Copernicus communication system. There was no answer. Puzzled, the Mayor waited a few minutes and tried again. No answer. He asked the system to send a coded 'pulse back' command, which would make McQueen's communicator send back a pulse if it was within receiving range. No answer.

Still puzzled, the Mayor considered what to do next. Lt. McQueen was going to see Col. Hanovich. The Mayor called the Director of Security, who told him that Larry had left a little while earlier for his hotel. The Mayor called the hotel and discovered that Lt. McQueen had checked out. No messages had been left and no destination had been given.

Now the Mayor was really puzzled. Where was he? The Central File computer indicated that Larry was still in the city. What set of circumstances could occur that he would check out of the hotel and disappear? The Mayor looked at his watch. An hour, and the 'day' would be over. He decided to allow that much time before alerting anyone that something might have happened to Lt. McQueen. An hour later the Mayor again tried to contact Larry. He tried the local office of the Solarian

Patrol. Larry had cautioned him about it because it was suspected of being 'porous'. The field office didn't even know who Lt. McQueen was. That left Security. Mayor Love called Hanovich and explained what had happened. Hanovich listened without comment, requested that the Mayor not spread the news, and promised to check. When Col. Hanovich broke the connection, he swore to himself softly. 'And he told me to be careful! I hope there's something to rescue when we find him.' he said, and then added as an afterthought, 'if we ever do...'

Hanovich checked the team of 'watchers' and discovered that they had not yet found everyone they were to watch. Disappointed, he settled back to wait.

CHAPTER FOUR IN THE SANCTUARY

It was cold. Bitterly cold. Lt. Larry McQueen's first sensation as he woke up was that he was freezing. He was lying on a hard surface and there was cloth under his face. He tried to move his hands to roll over, and couldn't: they were bound behind him. Awake now, he tried to see, and couldn't. He blinked his eyes. He felt them blink. Darkness. He lay quietly awhile longer, trying to breathe normally. Listening. Silence. It was cold and no sound penetrated the darkness. He pulled his feet up. They were bound together. He rolled over and worked himself into a sitting position. He tried to move his fingers. Stuck. He must be bound with some sort of adhesive tape. If he could just get his fingers loose or slip his .shirt ... No such luck. It was a workman-like job done by a professional. Larry struggled with it for a while and then gave up.

'Hello,' he said. The sound of his voice reverberated from the walls. He spoke several times trying to determine from the sound the size of the room. Small. Noisy. Metal walls? A spaceship maybe? But why so dark, so silent and so cold?

Larry was considering trying to explore the room when he heard the sound of footsteps. They were coming closer. He had time to resume his former position when there was the sound of a bar being removed and a door opening. Larry's dark-adapted eyes hurt when the light was turned on, even though he kept them closed, feigning unconsciousness.

'Our spacehound is still Out, I see,' a sneering voice said. Then apparently turning to someone else the man said, 'Get in there! Over in the corner! Dump the food. You can turn on the heater when we leave. Durk, you watch her. I want to take a closer look at our other guest.'

The footsteps came closer. A boot wacked into Larry's ribs. He was able to keep his eyes closed and only let Out a little groan. The boot hooked under his shoulder and he was rolled over.

'Pretty, isn't he?' came the voice again. The man stood over Larry for a moment and then Larry heard him turn.

'Ah, yes. One thing more before we leave.' The footsteps moved to another part of the room. 'Give me your blouse.' There was a shocked silence. The voice repeated the demand. There was another silence and then the sound of scuffling and the ripping of cloth. A choked protest. The sound of someone being slapped and falling down. More cloth ripping.

The men left. There were the sounds of a bar being dropped into place and of footsteps dying away. Now there was only the soft sound of a woman crying.

Larry opened his eyes. They had adjusted to the bright light now. In the corner of what appeared to be a public washroom was a girl huddled in a little heap, crying. Larry must have made some kind of noise because she suddenly looked up at him. She was beautiful in spite of the tear-stained cheeks. She had red hair, young; about 20 or so, Larry guessed. She wore slacks, a bra and the remnants of a blouse. The red mark where she had been slapped was beginning to show on her face.

'Hello,' Larry said.

She looked at Larry for a moment and then went back to crying. Her hands covering her face. Larry waited. The tiles were cold and he could see his breath. He sat up again. The room was a tiled rest-room. That explained the echo. Larry's boots were gone, as were his belt, money belt, helmet and goggles, his dress jacket and, so far as he could tell, the contents of his pockets. His shirt buttons and collar stays were still present, he noted. That would help. A few moments later the sobbing had abated to almost nothing. The girl was beginning to shiver a little.

'Could you get the heater going?' Larry asked. 'It's awful cold in here.'

There was a moment's pause. Then the girl got up and stumbled over to the heater. She turned on the switch. Nothing happened.

'You have to plug it in,' Larry said, trying to keep his voice as sympathetic as possible. 'The outlet is in the wall over there.' Larry nodded in the direction of the outlet.

The girl moved the heater and plugged it in. Almost immediately Larry could feel the radiant heat.

'Better?' Larry asked.

The girl nodded.

'Anything I can do to help?'

The girl shook her head.

'Name?'

She didn't answer but just looked at him. It was as if she couldn't remember, or wouldn't remember, or couldn't believe that she was really here.

'What's your name?' Larry prompted again.

'Pamela,' she said in a very small voice.

'All right, Pamela,' Larry said. 'I'd like you to do something special for me.'

She nodded.

'Go over and touch the wall.' She obeyed him.

'Now the sink ... a faucet ... the wall again ... now stomp on the floor. Look around the room. Do you see anything you like?'

She nodded, 'The heater.'

'Good. Go over to it. Look at it. Touch it. Feel its warmth. Try to sense it as much as possible. OK?'

Pamela followed his directions.

'All right, now how do you feel?'

'Better.'

'Good!' Larry said. 'That was an exercise in being right here, right now. A schoolmate of mine taught it to me.'

'You're tied up.'

'Let's say that I get wrapped up in my work,' Larry said with a broad smile. 'I'd offer you my shirt except that, looks to the contrary, this is a one-piece jumper.'

'Oh!' Pamela looked down and then tried to cover herself with her arms. 'I'm sorry, I ...'

'It's all right. I'm sure that you have at least one bathing suit that's more revealing. Besides, a beautiful girl should show off her charms.'

She looked at Larry and smiled. A startling effect on a beautiful, tear-stained face.

'You're right, of course,' she said, and hesitatingly dropped her arms. 'I can't very well go around all the time like this. Can I unwrap you?'

'If you're sure I won't r-r-r-ravish you,' he said with a broad smile. It was a quote from a recent hit comedy show. She laughed.

'Silly,' she called him.

It didn't take long to unwrap the tape from around Larry's arms. He winced as the last of it came off and his arms dropped to his side.

Pamela noticed and asked what was wrong. Larry explained through gritted teeth that his arms were numb and the shoulder muscles cramped from the long period he had been bound. Pamela stripped the tape from his legs and then made him lie down on the blanket while she massaged his back. Before long the needles of pain had left his arms and the soreness was gone from his back. He stopped her, rolled over and looked up at her kneeling next to him. He squelched the little thought that said 'D cup' and tried to think of something encouraging to say to her. Whether it was that he was distracted by her beauty or because there was nothing encouraging to be said, Larry couldn't tell, but the words didn't come. So he just looked at her for a while.

'What's your name?' she asked, finally breaking the silence.

'Larry McQueen, Lieutenant, Solarian Patrol,' he answered. 'I could give you my serial number but that wouldn't mean much. Where are we?'

'I don't know for sure but by the looks of things we're in the Sanctuary,' she said. Seeing the blank look on Larry's face, she explained. 'The Sanctuary's a meteor shelter built about a mile underneath the Dome. I was 9 the last time I was down here. It was sealed off after the last war. I'm sure that's where we are.'

'How did we get down here?'

'There are elevators at the south end of the Dome.'

'Any idea why you're here?' Larry asked.

'Kidnapping?' she shrugged. 'I doubt that my father has enough money to make it worth their while.'

'Who's your father? You didn't tell me your last name.'

'Johnstone,' she said. 'My father is Ted Johnstone, the Director of Copernicus Control.'

Larry made no comment but things fell together in his mind with almost audible click. Pamela Johnstone was being held for ransom all right, but it was very doubtful that the ransom price was money. More likely pressure was being secretly put on her father. The ransom price was probably

access to, if not actual control of, the operations of Copernicus Control. Larry ventured to guess that they would never willingly release Pamela. If they did, they would lose their hold over the Director of Copernicus Control. They had to keep her alive but that didn't mean that they couldn't use her while she was being held. So they roughed her up, tore off part of her clothes and threw her in with another prisoner, from whom they wanted some information. They expected him to comfort, calm and get involved with her. Larry looked at Pamela. Yes, that would be real easy to do. And once he was caught in that trap, they would tell him that he had to spill everything he knew or they would skin her alive. If Johnstone didn't cooperate or if they were close to the actual attack, they would probably do just that to her, too. If he played it cool, but interested, they might have more time than if he either rejected her or was obviously enamored. He also had a good idea of what both their fates would be if they didn't escape.

'Let's see what they left us to eat,' he said, getting up and going over to the box of containers that Pamela and one of the guards had brought. He estimated that there was enough food for about five days. More if they rationed it out.

'Any idea what day it is?' Larry asked.

'No.'

'It looks like we're going to spend the next couple of days here, all alone, together, in our secret hideaway. Unless ... how is the door locked?' Larry asked.

'There's a bar across it.'

'Does the bar slide back?'

'Yes, I think so.'

'Close your eyes and try to visualize it. How big is it and where is it on the door?'

Pamela indicated the size of the bar and then, standing in front of him, showed Larry the location on the door.

Larry noticed a gentle lilac perfume about her hair and then brought himself up sternly.

'I'm hungry, how about you?' he said.

She nodded.

'Would you get us some food while I check to see if there might be some other sort of exit to this room?'

She smiled at him and Larry gave a quick smile back.

Larry started at one side of the door into the room and worked his way completely around it to the other side of the door, searching not for an exit but a bug or a 'snoop', as the miniature television cameras are called. He found two tiles which had apparently been removed and replaced. The grout around them was of a slightly different shade than that of the rest of the wall. He examined the tiles closely before moving past them and found a little shiny spot on each. Larry suspected that behind each was a snoop and possibly a contact microphone. Up in a corner of the room was something that looked for all the world like a spider web, except what would a spider be doing down here? Larry went over the ceiling as best he could. He concluded that unless they had repainted or done a better job of color matching than on the tiles, nothing had been installed from his side.

'Is the Sanctuary a single level high or are there several levels to it?' he asked Pamela.

'I think it's about five or six levels high,' she said.

'Well, the only way out seems to be the door,' Larry said, and then sat down next to Pamela. From this point on his escaping depended upon whether she was really the person she said she was. It was going to be interesting finding out.

* * *

Things were moving fast out on the surface of the crater and in the Moorpark Research Center, Dr. Kelvin had organized his Project Hard Hat team and the team had mobilized over half of the research center's personnel and facilities; which group was in turn getting ready to take over the rest of the research center, as well as part of Copernicus Control. The blaster batteries over the city had been dismantled and preparations were being made to install them at new sites farther around the rim. Until the sites were ready, the projectors were being put to other uses. Three had been mounted in a triangle aboard one of the center's four mobile laboratory spaceships. They were being adjusted to produce a 100-foot * circle of intense heat to melt the crusty, gravel-like material of the surface of Copernicus into a smooth, glassy sheet that could be evenly plated with a continuous evaporative coating of copper. The second laboratory spaceship was being outfitted to provide that coating, or rather it was being chopped up, since, outfitting consisted of cutting away considerable portions of the hull, installing bracing, a small blaster for heating and ion focusing fields to direct the flow of gaseous copper as it was evaporated from the surface of the yet to be delivered ingot

Dr. Kelvin himself was sitting in his office in the research center looking at what appeared to be

a model of an oil derrick loaded with equipment.

'OK, what have you got?' he asked of the two engineers who had brought the model into his office. 'This is a model of the "slot cutter",' one engineer explained. 'It represents a 60-foot tower of composition ceramosteel. It's faced with wall shields and three courses of polycyclic screens. The legs are anchored with tractors, one mounted on each leg pointing downward into the rock underneath the tower. In a line up the side of the tower facing the crater wall are seven blasters from the battery we just dismantled. At the bottom of the stack of blasters, and in the space between each blaster, is mounted a tractor beam. The whole assembly of blasters and tractors can be rotated up and down by remote control. This makes it possible to cut a slot, instead of a series of holes, in the wall of the crater.

'The purpose of the tractors is to remove the material as fast as it is softened, rather than having to wait until it is vaporized. If the material could be removed from the direct beam fast enough, it would be possible to cut a six-foot hole in the rock at 100 feet per second with these projectors as deep as we wish. We think with proper timing of the movement of the array, we can approach that rate. The spacing of the beams is three feet, with the beams themselves an oval of about six by eight feet. The molten rock will be pulled out of the two slots at a rate of over 4500 cubic feet per second. At this rate it will take about 21 days to cut the larger of the two slots.

'Here is a computer simulation of the problem and our solution.' The engineer handed Dr. Kelvin a reel of tape.

Dr. Kelvin weighed the tape in his hand for a moment. Based on what he had already seen, he was contemplating whether to ask his questions and give his lecture now or to wait until after the reel of tape had been run on the computer. He decided to run the tape. He dropped it into the player and watched the drafting tank opposite his desk as a computer simulated model of the tower cut a slot in a computer model of the crater wall. Stresses, flow rates, safety margins and the like were shown. At the conclusion of the tape Dr. Kelvin leaned back in his chair a moment before saying anything.

'I do not like it!' he said slowly, with careful emphasis. Both engineers visibly blanched. 'I don't like the philosophy behind the method and I don't like the method it produced.

'Less than four days from now the surface smoothing will be complete,' he continued. 'In another three and a half days from then the coating operation on that surface will be complete. At the end of that time I want to be ready to go right into plating the slots. That means that by the time you are started, there will be six to seven days left to complete cutting a slot about six feet wide and up to two miles deep around Copernicus.

'For obvious reasons ... ' Dr. Kelvin shrugged, and started again. 'Because no one has worked out a way to rapidly remove material from the slot on the far side, we're cutting a triangular area around Copernicus instead of a square area. The job is big. So big that five years ago it would have been beyond our capability. The amount of material to be removed is in excess of 15 billion cubic feet! That is now within our present capacity and we will do it rapidly!

'There are two ways to approach any new problem. The first, and unfortunately the most common way, is to use brute force. Brute force is always expensive. It eats up power and time. It wastes material and resources. It's only used because the problem is not properly defined, because of tradition, or, because someone has not taken the time to find a better solution.

'The second way of approaching a problem can be summarized in one word, "sneakiness". I like that word because it's descriptive of the main characteristics of this method. When someone else sees this type of solution to a problem for the first time, they think, "How neat! What a sneaky way to do it! Why didn't I think of that?" A sneaky method does things with a minimum of flare and noise and there is invariably a usable byproduct as a bonus.

'With this in mind, let's take a look at your solution,' Dr. Kelvin said. 'It's obviously a brute force solution. You're going to have a circus that can be seen with the naked eye all the way to Tellus. This whole sector of moonscape is going to be covered with blown out magma and gasses. When the job is done half of the crater will be ankle deep in hot lava.

'Now I confess that I've been considering the problem I gave you ever since I gave it to you. There is a better way.

'First let's redefine the basic problem in terms of the function involved. The problem is not to "cut a slot". The problem is to "remove material". To remove, for example, a slab of material 37 1/2 miles long, 2 miles high and 6 feet thick. The first step, I think, is for you gentlemen to determine how much of that slab you can handle at one time, and the method of handling it, and then to plan to cut it into sizes accordingly.'

Dr. Kelvin was pleased to notice that as he spoke a look of comprehension was beginning to appear in the engineers' faces. They were beginning to see a solution that had been staring them in the

face.

'If you use a very thin, fan-shaped beam to cut the slabs, the lava and gasses can be used to act as a lubricant for sliding the slabs out. Since the slabs will be flat sided, you won't have the erosion problems inherent with the bulk removal of hot lava and gasses, which you didn't take into account in your calculations for your simulation. Finally, I have a use for the slabs. That needn't concern you now, however. I'll expect to see an analysis in detail of this method the first thing tomorrow. Thank you.'

Dr. Kelvin ushered the two engineers out of his office and spent a few minutes on a bit of analysis of the optimum angle to the perpendicular to make the slot, taking into account the coriolis force. A quick approximation showed it to be too small to be of significance.

* * *

In the next two days considerable progress was made. The laboratory spaceship that had been reworked into a 'smoother' had processed over half of the surface covering Copernicus. Work on the spaceship to do the coating had stopped because of a higher priority on the conversion of the remaining two laboratory spaceships into slot cutters.

The 'oil derrick' idea was abandoned. Instead, tractor beams capable of anchoring the spaceships while sliding out slabs 500 feet on a side were being mounted. Blasters, capable of producing incredibly powerful, inch-thick, fan-shaped beams were being mounted outside the tractors, to cut the slabs. Bracing for the whole ship was being added with a lavish hand and so thickly it was almost impossible to get to the equipment afterwards. One humorist in the crew commented that the greatest danger in manning a tractor ship was trying to get out after you had eaten your lunch, to which another commented that one more 'I' beam and even death would not release you. It was a tight fit.

The first slot cutter was tested by cutting a series of holes two miles deep every 500 feet along the path of the longest slot. Then, after a short period of experimentation with technique, and modification with cutters and torch, the slabs were sliding out and down the crater wall like logs down a sluice-way. At the bottom of the wall they were allowed to fall flat and slide out onto the crater floor in long, orderly rows.

The second slot cutter would be complete and working by midnight. Dr. Kelvin's original schedule couldn't be met. The blocks couldn't be cut and slid out that fast without breaking or jamming in the slot, but they could do better than the original estimate of 21 days. Much better!

In the eastern corner of the triangle covering the city of Copernicus the first of three new areas were being cut into the rock with mining machines. These were to house the field generators when they arrived.

This was another matter.

'Where in hell are my field generators?' Dr. Kelvin snarled at the man on the plate.

George Smith, a top official of Tellus Electric, looked blankly back at Dr. Kelvin. 'I don't know,' he said tiredly. 'Where about in hell did you leave them?'

Dr. Kelvin glared at the man, then realized what he had said and struggled to keep a straight face. He chuckled. The man on the plate just looked tired.

'All right, I'm looking for the Rodebush-Bergenholm field generators your company was contractually committed to deliver to the New York Spaceport eight hours ago.'

'I have sixteen generators sitting on the floor now. They are coming off my production line at a rate of one every two hours. They're costing me 100 credits an hour each for each hour they stand there. Not one is working.'

Dr. Kelvin hesitated for a moment, then said, 'All right, I would like to help you. out. If you'll turn on your recorder, I'll make you a proposal.'

'It's on.'

'I propose that you crate up the next three generators that come off your production line and send them to me, along with six full sets of prints and an engineer familiar with the generator. When you get the first few working, you'll be able to tell your engineer what mistakes were made in the production line and he can fix them here. If parts are needed and we don't have them in stock, we have the facilities to fabricate them just as fast as you could. If additional troubleshooting is needed, we'll let your man supervise and charge you for the people and material used at our going rate plus 300 per cent overhead. This saves you the cost of transportation time after the generators are working and gets the generator to us faster. Our acceptance of the generator is then dependent on when it's working properly, not on when it arrives. That's the end of my proposal.'

'That sounds good, except your overhead rate is too high.'

'You can send all your own people,' Dr. Kelvin answered. '300 per cent wouldn't even touch their transportation costs, but ... '

'What troubleshooting manpower do you have available? How many and what kind of people do you have?'

'I can guarantee you up to ten technicians and two engineers within 20 minutes of your requirements,' he said, thinking of two particular engineers he'd assign.

Agreement was reached. The tapes were witnessed and sealed.

A few minutes later Dr. Kelvin was again on the visiphone. This time to an Earthside transportation company.

'Where in hell is my copper?' he snarled at the man on the plate.

* * *

Hanovich had organized his teams too late to catch the kidnapping of either Lt. McQueen or Pamela Johnstone. At the moment the team watching the suspects saw only people going about their normal affairs, minding their own business and in general being model citizens. The two teams checking personal records had come a long way without success. There had been no indication that any suspect had purchased extra food or even any unusual items. The customs records indicated that nothing out of the ordinary had been brought in. A survey of the suspects' present personal effects had been made with one team entering a suspects' empty apartment and temporarily turning off spy-ray blocks, while the other sat at a spy-ray installation in Security and photographed the contents of drawers, closets, cabinets, etc., which had been covered by the blocks. Nothing even mildly interesting was found. A professional rarely makes this kind of mistake. It was noted that the apartments were spartan in the lack of knick-knacks and souvenirs that everyone seems to accumulate.

The teams finally started through the records of the agencies in which the suspects worked. The purpose was to see if, and how, the agencies had been used. Indeed, they had! A large amount of equipment had been requisitioned out of the Facilities Stores. It was then apparent, in retrospect, why nothing had been brought in or purchased. A statistical check was made on the food consumed by the hospital, where three suspects worked, against the number of staff members and patients. A high probability was established that this was the source of food for the missing suspects.

Judge Fox had issued search warrants on his request but unless he came up with something solid soon to justify the Judge's trust, things were going to get sticky.

CHAPTER FIVE

LAST CHANCE

Another day passed. On the surface the copper and the generators arrived. In the Sanctuary, Larry and Pamela had passed the time by talking. Talking about their past, their experiences, their purpose in life. Larry had drawn Pam out considerably. He knew that she was 19 years old, had no 'steady' at the moment and was becoming fascinated with him. He also knew that she was attractive, intelligent, quite sensitive and probably the person she said she was. He was getting the uncomfortable feeling that unless he got them both out within the next very few days, she might drag him off into a corner and do something very un-ladylike. Under other circumstances he might have considered cooperating, or even speeding the situation up a little, but now it wasn't advisable. Last 'night' after they had turned out the lights he had put a piece of tape used to bind him over the snoops, so they would seem defective. That could mean one of several things, the most probable of which was that no one was watching.

Larry planned to escape the next morning, if it was morning. He also planned to take Pamela with him. The problem was how to tell her while others were listening, or possibly even watching from another snoop that he hadn't found. Larry thought about the matter for several hours and had elected the direct approach.

He started talking aimlessly about one thing and another to Pamela. He picked up a food container and a spoon and announced, 'When I was in grade school I always wanted to play a rhythm instrument like a drum.' He started to beat out a random rhythm on the container with the spoon to cover the sound of his voice. He motioned Pamela close to him and said as quietly as he could without moving his lips, 'They're watching and listening. I found two snoops in the wall.'

'I guessed that from the way you've been acting,' she replied with her lips next to his ear and then kissed him there.

Larry jumped, and dropped the container. 'Hey! Watch it!' he said, putting his hand to his ear.

'I'm having enough trouble keeping my hands off you as it is without ,you undermining me.'

'Hmm,' she said. 'That sounds like fun.'

He considered turning her over his knee, then decided that wouldn't help at all. He frowned, picked up the container and started pounding out noise again. Midst a miscellany of other chatter he announced that they were leaving soon. Then, standing up, he threw the container at the web in

the corner of the room. It hit squarely and bounced off. Larry looked at the undamaged web for a moment, then commented, 'They make some mighty hefty spiders around here!'

* * *

Alan Lewis, a graveyard shift Copernicus Control operator, woke up with a feeling that something was wrong. He didn't know what, or where, or why, but something was wrong. The lives of the inhabitants of Copernicus hung on something that tenuous.

He shoved it into the back of his mind as he got up, dressed, and ate breakfast: He forgot about it as he took the shafts and travel tunnels to work. But as he walked into Copernicus Control, it came back. Something was wrong. He watched the operator on duty for the required 10 minutes, then relieved him. Something was wrong. It annoyed him all through the shift. He was a little more alert than normal because of the feeling, a little more efficient, but the cause eluded him. It was an uneasy feeling. Something he should see or do? What?

When he was relieved at the end of his shift, he stayed for a few moments. Still nothing. He mentioned it to the operator who relieved him, shrugged and then left. Some thing was wrong, very wrong, and time was running out!

* * *

Larry got up and turned on the lights, only to find out that Pamela was also awake. He motioned for her to be silent. He took two metal buttons off his uniform pockets. The first unscrewed to reveal inside a black tarry substance and a fuse that could be pulled through a slot in the side. Larry pressed it against the spot on the door he had selected. It stuck there. He stripped the end of the fuse and rubbed it against a little piece of paper from inside the other half of the button. The fuse caught. While waiting for the fuse to burn down, Larry unscrewed the other button revealing a long, tightly wound coil of wire with hooks on each end. He had just time to connect the hooks onto little loops on the bottom halves of the buttons, when the button on the door exploded. It punched a two-inch hole through the door. Larry twisted the loop of wire, shoved it through the hole, twisted, caught the handle of the bar on the door and pulled. The door was open. The lights were on outside. Larry motioned Pamela to follow him, scooped up a package he had prepared and they left, running.

The Sanctuary was a well-built shelter. It would not have survived a direct hit from a large meteor but at the time it was constructed no man-made structure could have survived. It was made to permit its inhabitants to survive something only slightly less. The sanctuary was a cube just over 120 feet on a side, covered with alloy plate a foot thick. Around the outside of this cube, was a layer of shock-absorbing material over 200 feet thick, and around that was a layer of composition material. The inner cube was accessible only by a series of elevators from the edge of the Dome, over a mile above. In theory, it was possible to evacuate the entire population of Copernicus via the elevators in something under 30 minutes. In fact, it had never been tried. The Sanctuary had been built to permit the people it contained to survive. This meant severe limitations on the area presented as a target. There was no room for more than the absolute essentials. The only concession to privacy were the restrooms. The Sanctuary had four levels and a tremendous storeroom underneath, which could have provided an additional three levels if used for that purpose. Each level could exist independently of the other levels and each level was divided into five airtight sections; four rectangular dormitories around a central environmental control area. The central area was the primary source of air, water and power. The rest rooms were built into the central area. It was in one of these restrooms that Larry and Pamela had been imprisoned. Larry and Pamela had escaped into a dormitory. A large room having vertical alloy 'I' beams every six feet in one direction and every four and a half in the other. To these girders tiers of bunks were attached, which folded up against the girders to form passageways. Wider corridors, at right angles to the passageways, were where lines of bunks were left out.

They ran down a passageway formed on one side by the central section, and on the other by folded up bunks, to the intersection of a corridor where a stairway went up to the level above. Larry stopped at the foot of the stairway and looked up at the hatch that led into the level above, estimating the chances that a guard was behind it. If there was, any chances of catching him by surprise were exactly zero! The door was dogged, and opening the dogs would make too much noise. They must be on the lowest level, since there was no similar hatch in the floor. A noise started. It was the high-pitched whine of a motor. Looking behind him Larry saw a transparent case just above head level with a video camera in it. The camera was turning in their direction. Larry froze for a moment and then grabbed Pamela's arm and pulled her down the corridor and behind a row of folded up bunks.

'You got here in an elevator, right?' he whispered urgently.

'Yes,' she answered.

'How many levels did you come down?'

'Two,' she answered.

'Any idea where the control room to this place is?' he asked.

'What do you mean?'

'Somewhere in the Sanctuary is a control room,' Larry answered. 'They have communicators, video circuits to assess damage, and I don't know what else. That's where our captors are. I don't know if they saw us or not when we got out,' but they'll be after us shortly. The camera can't see the door we broke out of, but I'll bet that web was a detector of some kind.' Larry fell silent for awhile.

'I think we better hide you,' he finally whispered, and led the way toward the elevators.

* * *

An hour later the elevator doors opened. Three men, armed with hand guns, appeared. The elevator doors closed behind them. The leader, dressed in hospital whites, announced their presence in a loud voice with: 'All right, you two. Come out and you won't get hurt.'

All was silent.

'All right. If you won't come out, we're coming in to get you. This is your last chance,' the leader shouted.

Again only silence answered him.

The men started through the main corridor, past passageways of folded up bunks, toward the central section. One of the men thought he saw something move down a line of unfolded bunks and fired at it. The slug went through the bunk, hitting the metal underneath it, and whined off down the narrow passageway before embedding itself in another unfolded bunk.

'Hold it, Durk!' the leader said to the man who had fired the shot. 'Make certain you have a target before you fire. I don't want to get hit with a ricocheting bullet.'

Durk grumbled but agreed and the men continued toward the center section.

Larry McQueen was standing on a bunk just above eye level. The bunks above the one he stood on had been removed and stored on a top bunk farther down the passageway. He stood with his back flat against the folded up bunks of the passageway behind him, his shoulder and side wedged into the slot of the 'I' beam. He had watched the three men come down the main corridor through the slot between a folded up bunk, and the ceiling. He was ready for them. In his hands were the two halves of the buttons with the thin wire hooked between them. He waited. The first man went past. And the second. As Durk, the third man, passed, Larry stepped out and knelt down, flipped the loop of wire over his head, around his neck, pulled it tight and yanked him back into the passageway behind him. He swung Durk up onto the bunk behind him. Durk tried to grab for the wire that had already cut part way through his throat. The gun still in his hand. Larry realized that he wasn't going to be able to keep Durk on the bunk. He let go of the wire with one hand and grabbed the barrel of the gun and pulled.

The gun fired!

Larry was momentarily stunned, not by the bullet, which miraculously missed his head, but by the sound of a high caliber pistol going off within a foot of his head. His right hand holding the barrel felt numb. He dropped the other end of the wire and grabbed at the gun with his left hand. Durk rolled off the bunk and fell to the floor, leaving the gun with Larry. Larry turned and fired the gun with his left hand. Not at a target but for effect and to be certain that if anyone had come back down the corridor, they wouldn't have a chance to shoot first. One of the men had returned and was trying to determine what was going on. The bullet struck him in the chest, knocking him backwards across the corridor. He tried to lift his gun. Larry put a bullet in his head.

Silence, except for the hoarse sounds of Durk on the floor, wheezing through his cut throat, choking on his own blood.

The feeling returned to Larry's right hand. He exchanged gun hands, reached into his pocket and fumbled out a food container with a shiny top. He used the container as a mirror to look into the corridor without exposing himself.

No one was there.

Larry hesitated for a moment. The situation had changed from one of 'hide & seek' to 'tag', with the loser forfeiting his life. 'Here we go!' Larry thought. 'He knows where I am but I don't know where he is.' Larry glanced at the other end of the passageway. Nothing yet. He reviewed his choices. 'I can wait here but he knows where I am and I can't watch every direction at once. I can run but not very far. I can hide, which isn't very effective now. I can fortify a position and wait for him to come to me.' Larry made his choice.

As fast as he could Larry flipped down bunks at his level and walked back to where the extra bunks were stored. They were metal plates with foam bonded to one side. He pulled two down. A minute later he had the two wedged vertically between bunks.

There was a space between the bottom bunk and the floor where someone's feet could be seen if he walked on the floor. Larry knelt on the bottom bunk. He slowly lowered the shiny container to see if he could see any feet. A shot sounded and the container was plucked from his fingers by a bullet.

It was a moment before Larry had recovered from the shock and noted that the can had gone under his bunk. That meant that the third gunman, the leader, was somewhere directly opposite him in the middle of a passageway. He had apparently been waiting for Larry to put his foot on the floor. Perhaps a smaller target wouldn't be seen. Larry pulled off another button. The acid inside this one wouldn't help him but the shiny back might. He carefully lowered it to try to see what was going on. There was no sign of the other gunman. Larry hoped that what he had heard about the 1/16 inch steel plate deflecting bullets was correct. Using the button to watch the passageway behind him, he leaned against a vertical bunk, watching the opposite direction with every sense alert. A minute later Larry saw a bunk halfway down the passageway and against the opposite wall juggle. Larry shifted position so he was behind the protecting vertical bunk, and waited. He again used the button as a mirror. The bunk opened a little as the gunman peered out. Before Larry could react, it closed.

For a moment Larry felt the beginnings of panic. The gunman had him spotted. Larry was only too aware of the inadequacy of his preparations, especially against a mobile foe. He would have to abandon his position immediately. His opponent knew exactly where he was. He had looked over Larry's defenses and knew what they were. He could be expected to attack them where they were the weakest.

Larry pushed down the bunk into the passageway behind him and went through. He put his feet down on the floor, expecting any instant to feel the shock of a bullet hit them. He ran silently down the passage. As he ran, each instant he could feel someone leveling a pistol at his back from the other end, and expected the shock of a bullet. He made the corridor safely. No one was in the passageway behind him. He wiped his sweaty hand on the pants of his black and silver uniform and took a new grip on his weapon. Then he whipped around to the next passageway. The gunman hadn't attacked yet.

Two steps, and he whipped around the corner of the next passageway. The gunman had quietly lowered the bunk in the passageway opposite Larry's old position. He was crouched, ready to knock down the other bunk, and spring through the opening, firing.

'Freeze! You're covered!!' Larry shouted.

There was a pause for a long moment as the gunman realized what had happened. Then, as if in slow motion, Larry saw him smile, turn his head and swing the gun around toward him.

Larry fired!

The gunman started to rise as his tensed muscles brought him up and over, to fall head first onto the floor. He twitched, tried to move and then lay still.

Larry moved in. He kicked the gun away from the gunman's hand and then checked him. Dead.

There was nothing in his pockets except a magnetic identification credit card. He checked the others. They didn't even have that. Then Larry went to get Pamela.

Most of the padding had been torn off two opposing bunks and Pamela was lying on her side in the space left when they were folded back up. Larry pulled one of the bunks down and Pamela rolled out.

'You OK?' Larry asked.

'Yes. what happened?' Pamela said, sitting up and rubbing her arm.

'They're dead,' Larry said. He sat down on the end of the bunk. He lifted a hand to his forehead and wiped it. The hand trembled slightly. Reaction to the strain of the preceding minutes was beginning to set in. Larry recognized it as mild shock. He felt cold and tired but realizing why didn't help. His hand still shook. 'They're dead,' he repeated. 'I killed them.'

They sat there a moment, silent. Finally Larry drew a deep breath, sighed, shuddered and said, 'Our next step is to get out of here. Back up to the Dome.'

'How?'

Larry shrugged. 'Come on.' He got up and started back down the passageway to the corridor, stumbling occasionally over nothing. Pamela followed.

At the corridor she glanced toward where the two gunmen lay. She turned away feeling sick. She followed Larry, who was going toward the elevators. Larry had warned her what to expect even before he had hidden her. Then it had excited her. Now, in the stark reality afterward, the full impact struck home. Suddenly she realized that this was not a game for fun but a grim battle, with pain and death at their elbow.

Larry shot out the television camera next to the elevator and walked over to the elevator's call button. He pressed it. The doors opened immediately. The elevator was still there, waiting. The

Emergency Stop switch was on. The indicator panel inside showed that the elevator would stop on the second floor of the Sanctuary. It was the only other stop before the Dome. Larry was willing to bet that a reception committee was waiting there for them.

He looked up at the ceiling of the elevator. A false grill covered it. He reached up and moved part of it aside. Above it was an access door in the top of the elevator. He motioned Pamela to him.

'I'll lift you up. You open that cover,' he said. He lifted her by the waist. She unlatched and opened the hinged sheet metal cover. He put her down and she stood there facing him. Then very carefully, very deliberately she put her hands on his cheeks, and pulled his head down to hers. She kissed him on the lips. He put his arms around her and held her very tightly. When she had finished kissing him, he looked at her for a moment. 'Thank you,' he said softly. 'I wish I could stop now for a while, but your life depends on how fast we get out of here. If you feel like this later ... I don't know. We can't stop now.' In spite of what he said, he held her for a while longer than he need have, reluctant to stop, to end the moment.

He finally released her. She stepped back and he smiled sadly at her. Then looking up at the hole in the ceiling of the elevator, he jumped up through it.

He looked around the top of the elevator. Mounted in a bracket, looking down into the elevator through a hole in the ceiling, was a snoop. Larry unclipped it and picked it up. Two fine wires from it went to a small pressure cylinder with an automatic valve. One wire was broken. Larry broke the other and put the snoop into his pocket. Looking at the gas cylinder, he wondered if the gunmen had been wearing gas filters in their noses.

They were. Moments later both Larry and Pamela had them. Pamela also had a gun. He left the snoop on a bunk.

The next step in their escape was to get the elevator past the second level without stopping. That depended on how the elevator operated and on how fast he could find out.

Elevators have been fairly standard devices for ages. High speed, automatic elevators like the one in the Sanctuary have two speeds, one for going long distances and the other for going short distances or slowing before stopping at a floor. Elevators are automatically switched from speed to speed and stopped, using information sent to the control system from sensors attached to the walls of the elevator shaft, which the elevator cage operates as it passes them.

Larry had to determine how these sensors were actuated and then disable or remove them.

He examined the top of the elevator cage and found the markers. They were three large magnets positioned in brackets, each facing a different wall of the shaft. The sensors were a little above them. He tried to find the next row of sensors but they were somewhere up above his reach. Using his gun as a hammer, he knocked the sensors out of alignment. Then dismantling the gun, he was able to use part of it as a tool to displace the magnets on the cage. He reassembled the gun.

Larry instructed Pamela to release the Emergency switch but to be ready to close it when he told her to. She released the Emergency switch and the elevator started up the shaft at low speed.

'Now! Stop!' he said, when the next row of sensors came into view. The elevator jolted to a stop as ridged plates jammed into the tracks in the wall of the shaft. Again he hammered the sensors on the elevator shaft out of alignment.

Now he had to take a chance. The next set of sensors would be just above the second level. In order to knock them out of alignment, in order to even reach them, the elevator cage would have to be almost in place. Whoever was waiting for them would hear the elevator being stopped. They would hear Larry Working on the sensors. Attributing them any brains at all, they would fire through the elevator doors, even though they were closed. They could cut through the doors and jam the cage so it was inoperative long before Larry could displace the sensors. Even though he had displaced the magnets, he couldn't be certain that the sensors couldn't detect the elevator cage itself. That was why he had been working on the sensors.

'Release the Emergency switch and come up here,' he said to Pamela. She did so. The elevator started again at low speed. Up and past the second level sensors. Signals were sent to the control system that the elevator had just passed the second level but its memory said it was still below the fourth level sensors. The control system became confused. The cage continued upward. And on up the shaft at low speed. Up and out of the Sanctuary. Up to the Dome.

* *

The doors of the elevator opened on the top floor of the hospital at the south end of the Dome. A nurse with a man in a wheelchair, waiting for the elevator, was startled when two half-dressed people carrying guns stepped out. The man demanded the location of the nearest visiphone. The nurse mutely gestured down the hall toward the nurses' desk. The man ran for it, with the girl trailing a little behind. Behind them the doors of the elevator they had just left opened and closed, again and again. The elevator control for that shaft had become psychotic when it wasn't

allowed to stop at the second level. The cage had come up to the top level of the shaft, where the final emergency stops had ended its upward motion.

The nurses' desk was a long counter with a built-in desk behind it. The phones were behind it on the wall. Larry didn't ask questions. He circled the counter and two nurses to the visiphone, and hit the On switch. The plate brightened.

'This is an EMERGENCY!' he said. 'Connect me to Director Hanovich of Security!'

The robot operator connected Lt. McQueen to Hanovich's office, where his secretary answered.

'This is Lt. McQueen! Connect me to Hanovich ! Emergency!'

She hesitated.

'NOW! MOVE!'

Hanovich appeared a moment later.

'We've just escaped from the Sanctuary!' Larry said without preamble. 'I need a squad of armed men to cover the elevators and to go back down after them. How fast can you get them here?'

'15 minutes.'

'That's too long. I don't know if I can hold the cap on this situation that long.'

'Another elevator's just arrived,' Pamela reported. 'The doors are opening.'

A moment later the nurses, who had been watching in surprise, trying to understand what was going on, collapsed. Hanovich watched as one of the nurses fell toward the visiphone, her eyes enlarged, staring, bright and full of terror.

Larry caught the woman before she hit anything and eased her to the floor. 'V-2 gas,' he diagnosed. Pamela was kneeling at the end of the counter, firing at someone down the hallway.

Larry jumped up on the desk and looked around the corner into the hall. There were two of them.

One gunman behind the wheelchair in which a now unconscious patient slumped, the other still in an elevator. From the visiphone behind him came the sound of Hanovich snapping out orders and the sound of a siren in the background. Then the visiphone went off.

The men in the hall were firing at random now. They were not trying to advance. There was no cover at that point in the hall. Larry motioned to Pamela to wait. A minute went by. There was a sudden barrage of shots and the man behind the wheelchair dashed into the elevator. Larry was unable to get a shot at him. The elevator doors closed.

Larry told Pamela to stand guard again and he tried the visiphone. Hanovich's secretary told him that Hanovich was on his way with a squad of men.

Five minutes later the elevator doors again opened. This time it was Hanovich and a group of security men with drawn guns and gas masks. 'We've blocked all the elevator exits!' Hanovich announced gleefully when he saw Lt. McQueen. 'If they're in the Sanctuary, we've got them trapped there!'

'Any idea on how to get them out?' Larry asked.

Hanovich hesitated for a long time. 'Ah, well, ah ...' he said, trying to think of something. The visiphone buzzed, saving him further embarrassment. Larry answered. It was Hanovich's secretary and she wanted him.

'Right after you left, the surveillance team captain called and reported that all of the suspects have gone to the Hospital,' she said. 'I'll switch you over to Inspector Burbee.'

'Where are they now?' Hanovich asked, as the Inspector's face appeared on the plate.

'They took an elevator down to the Sanctuary,' Inspector Burbee answered. 'A big spy-ray block has been put up down there and we can't see what they're doing.'

'When did they leave for the Hospital?'

'About 10 minutes ago. I tried to call you when I had determined where they were all headed but you'd just left.'

'Were there any new people in the group that went down into the Sanctuary?' Larry interrupted.

'Yes, one.'

'Who?'

'Mr. Johnstone, Director of Copernicus Control.'

Larry heard a little gasp from behind him and turned to find Pamela looking very pale and frightened.

'Oh, no,' she said, and then was crying on his shoulder. Behind him Larry heard the conversation continue.

'What kind of weapons do they have down there?'

'No idea. By the time we realized that they were headed toward The Sanctuary, they had their spy-ray block up. They didn't take much with them but there's no telling what they've already got down there.' There was a long pause while Inspector Burbee turned and was conferring with someone else. Then he continued. 'You can't go down there now. They've released the foam that was to seal off the Sanctuary from the Dome after the evacuation. The elevator shafts are filling up with it.'

Hanovich swore. 'I'll call the Mayor and find out who can remove it.'

A moment later he explained the situation to Mayor Love. Mayor Love said he would have someone call back in a few minutes.

Rog Philips called back. In typical political fashion, the Mayor had appointed him Acting Director of Facilities, and then dumped the problem on him.

Hanovich again explained the situation.

Rog thought a moment and then said, 'The V-2 gas is the first problem. The atmospheric contamination detectors closed off the ventilation system on your floor in time to limit the spread of the gas, but they've also closed every air-tight door in the area. Evacuate everyone from that floor. V-2 is soluble in water, so don't worry about the spread of the stuff out of the elevators. The air conditioning equipment on the other floors of the hospital will take care of the little bit you carry in the elevator cage. Just don't let anyone stand close to the cage door when it opens. The top floor there is the quarantine ward, so when you get everyone out, we'll blow the atmosphere out the vents to the surface. Then we'll go after the elevator shafts. When we melt the foam out of the shafts, the fumes can be released through the sixth floor, too.'

'How can we evacuate if the shafts are blocked with foam?'

'I doubt if there's any foam up here,' Rog answered. 'In the first place it shouldn't come up this high, and in the second place, at least one elevator should be on one of the lower floors of the hospital.'

'How long before a shaft is clear down to the Sanctuary?'

'At least a day. It depends on whether the solvent and equipment to remove the foam is available or whether we have to bring it in from Tellus.'

'We've got to get down to the Sanctuary as soon as possible. This job has top priority!' Hanovich said.

'Yeh,' Rog said, obviously unimpressed, and cleared his plate.

Hanovich was clearly taken aback by the curt dismissal. It was with a visible effort that he turned to Larry and touched him on the shoulder. 'You better take her home. Nothing's going to happen here for a while.'

'I'll drop into your office later,' Larry said. 'You might try to trace these.' Larry handed him the guns he and Pamela had used and the magnetic identification card he had found on the head gunman.

Then they left.

CHAPTER SIX

A 'CLUB' WORTH JOINING

Rog was as pleased as a hungry cat with a piece of chicken. The people in the Facilities Division had responded to him as though they had been let out of a dark prison cell. With any kind of luck, even that pompous ass Hanovich might be impressed with their efforts, although that would be expecting a lot.

Equipment which could remove the foam had been found and transported to the hospital. At the hospital everyone from workmen to engineers helped install it. Rog just stood back out of the way and watched as the walls and floor of an elevator cage were stripped bare.

A refrigerated cooling panel, pulled out of the degreaser in the weld shop was installed. It came complete with drip trays, pumps, hoses and long nozzles for spraying surfaces. When everything was installed, five men in vacuum suits got into the elevator and closed the doors.

A hole was cut in the door, a pipe welded in place and drums of solvent pumped through the pipe into the shaft. Inside the shaft a vacuum-suited handler connected a long coil of hose to the pipe. Other men sprayed solvent from the hose on the foamed plastic below.

The reaction between the plastic and the solvent produced a gas and heat. Uncombined solvent evaporated, condensed on the cooling panel and dripped into pans which led to a pump. The repressurized solvent was sprayed on the walls and used to make certain the elevator tracks were clear. The elevator dropped slowly, paying out hose behind it as the shaft was cleared.

Up on the sixth floor of the hospital, the elevator doors were open and the excess gasses were drawn out to the surface of the moon.

The five men in the elevator were volunteers. Volunteers to do a dirty, dangerous, unrewarding job. A mistake, a mis-step, and death or serious injury waited for them. Down they went. Spraying away the foam. Tacking the hose to the elevator shaft wall.

They dropped slowly toward, but never reached, the hot, blackened, sticky mass beneath them. Just workmen? No! Heroes! They were risking their lives for the safety of those above. And if later someone else got the glory ... they would probably smile knowingly at each other and shrug. They were doing a job that someone had to do. Heroes don't always get their names in newspapers or

books and few are ever even recognized.

By the time the local supply of solvent had run out, more had been brought in from Tellus.

* * *

It was the next morning when Larry arrived, back in the Patrol's silver and black uniform, at Hanovich's office. After greetings were exchanged, Larry asked, 'Did you trace the guns?'

'Yes,' Hanovich answered. 'They belong to a collector. They weren't missed because he was in the hospital when they were stolen.'

'Any possibility that the collector's a plant to provide the guns?'

'None. He's been a lifelong resident.'

'Did the spy-ray teams you assigned to watch the suspects from Fauth find anything special?'

'No, but here's a list of their possessions. Those marked were left behind in their quarters,'

Hanovich said, giving Larry a small sheaf of paper.

'There's nothing suspicious or even very unusual in the list,' Hanovich continued. 'The things they used were apparently obtained out of our Facilities Stores. Here's a list of the items they got there.' Hanovich gave Larry a second small pad listing several hundred items.

'The items marked, we've found. Their quarters have been searched. All the stuff they left behind had been moved to storage.'

'Any idea if they were in contact with anyone outside?'

'No, we hadn't the chance to watch them long enough for that.'

'Hmrrrrm. I'd like to go through these lists.'

Hanovich shrugged, and directed Larry toward a chair. 'Gum drops?' Larry said, a few minutes later. 'Passenger overweight charges are 42 credits a pound and she brings in a pound of gum drops? Have your Laboratory technicians gone through the stuff left behind?'

'Ahh,' Hanovich hesitated. The question was unexpected and a simple 'no' might indicate incompetence on his part. 'I don't believe they are finished yet.'

Lt. McQueen looked at Hanovich speculatively for a long moment. 'I'd like to see the report when they ... ah ... finish.'

From Larry's face and tone Hanovich realized that he knew the reason that the inspection was not complete was that it hadn't been started yet.

'Who took over Johnstone's job at Copernicus Control?' Larry asked, changing the subject.

'The Assistant Director, Jay Harness,' Hanovich answered.

'How long 'til the elevator shaft is clear?'

'They estimate that it'll be about ...' he checked the clock, 'three more hours until they get to the top level of the Sanctuary'

'I'll be back to check with you before then,' Larry said, and left. On the way out Hanovich's secretary gave Larry a message that the Mayor wanted to see him when he left Hanovich's office.

* * *

A few minutes later Lt. Larry McQueen was in the Mayor's office.

'Good afternoon, Larry,' Mayor Love smiled broadly. 'How was your vacation in the Sanctuary?'

'Wearing!' came the rejoinder. Then Larry smiled back broadly. 'It had its moments, though.'

'I'm glad you came through it in one piece,' Ron said. 'I'm also glad you brought back Pamela. She's quite a girl. We would have missed her.'

'Thank you for sending your daughter over to stay with her, when I called. She's worried about her father, and being alone last night would have been rather grim for her. Any idea what else is going on?'

'I. don't know. That's one of the things I wanted to talk to you about,' Ron said. 'I've reviewed the tape I made of the Board of Directors meeting three times now. Why did Griffin react so much to your mentioning Icarus? What are they doing on Icarus?'

'Icarus has been a personal interest with me for quite a few years,' Larry said, smiling. 'if you don't mind, I'll give you my usual one minute lecture on the subject.'

Mayor Love nodded and Larry continued.

'Icarus was one of the first asteroids to be shown to have originated from a major meteoritic collision with Tellus. Some earlier objects, probably a set of asteroids from an even earlier collision, struck Tellus. A portion of the resultant cataclysm was expelled back into space as Icarus. It has been theorized that the kinetic energy of the collision was so great that it caused the American and Eurasian land masses to separate. That's still theory, of course.'

'There were a number of reasons for one to suspect that. Icarus is a fragment of a Tellus-asteroid collision. The most obvious is the synchronous orbit with Tellus. They approach each other every 19 years. The point where Icarus crosses the plane of the ecliptic is so close to Tellus as to be statistically highly improbable. The inclination of Tellus to its orbit is 23.4°. The inclination of Icarus' orbit to the ecliptic is 23.0°, less than 1/2° of difference. Since an impact was

postulated, one would expect numerous smaller particles to be thrown off and be in nearly the same orbit. These particles form the Arietid meteor stream. Several other facts were used to establish the date of impact, among them the differential orbital precession and the axial precession. The date coincided with the start of an Ice Age.'

'The same astronomer who established that Icarus was the result of an impact, made a further name for himself by rediscovering the asteroids Apollo, which was part of the Eta-aquarid meteor stream, and Hermes, which was part of the Perseid meteor stream. His theory predicted that anything of that size coming close to Tellus would be associated with a meteor stream.'

'On the Fifth Triplanetary-Solar Expedition we installed some bolts in the surface of Icarus, adjusted the rotation and used it as a heat shield on our trip around the sun,' Larry said.

'You were on that expedition?' Mayor Love asked.

'Yes. They needed some volunteers. I wasn't too much help ... it's a long story. We left some instruments behind; other than that, there's been nothing on Icarus until now. It gets too close to the sun for a permanent manned station to be built there. That's probably what makes it so attractive to these pirates.' Larry shrugged. 'The word "pirate" doesn't exactly fit into my present concept of the circumstances here. They were apparently using it as a communication link. Last year Icarus was so close to Tellus it could have been detected with relative ease. Someone apparently locked directional equipment onto it. The orbit has been very well defined. Once Icarus is located it can be accurately tracked indefinitely after it is out of sight. Using a very narrow beam, the transmitter couldn't be found unless you were directly in line with it and the receiver. An alien spacecraft visited Icarus once a month. That suggested the moon, Luna, because it rotates about Tellus about once a month. The time of month led me to Copernicus. The coincidence was too close to be anything else.'

'So you think Icarus is just a convenient relay point?'

'Yes,' Larry answered. 'We are maintaining a watch on it but it's currently too close to the sun. There haven't been any further visitors since the last ones were intercepted, so frankly I think we can forget Icarus.'

'Griffin also reacted to the discussions of pirates and sabotage.'

'That figures. How did Johnstone react?'

'Not at all, except just before he asked you about their sources of information he acted like someone who had just remembered something or suspected something.'

'Based on his reactions, would you have believed that he was one of the pirates?'

'No. Quite the contrary,' Mayor Love answered. 'I get the impression that he suspected that you might have traced the information the aliens got on the Solar System through to Copernicus Control.'

'That's possible,' Larry said.

They were silent a moment, thinking.

'It seems strange,' Larry finally said, 'that none of Griffin's group penetrated Copernicus Control. They might have tapped lines. Or perhaps the direct approach: bribery, threats or blackmail. How good is Copernicus Control's security system?'

'Very good,' the Mayor said. 'Copernicus Control has more information about the movement of cargoes and spacecraft in and around the Solar System than anyone outside of Grand Fleet Headquarters at The Hill. A lot of people would pay considerable amounts for this information, so we have to be careful. The man in charge of security reported directly to Johnstone.'

'From what I've heard of Johnstone from Pamela, I can't believe they got, or are going to get, anything out of him. I've also got a feeling that we're not going to find him alive when we get into the Sanctuary. I don't think he went with Griffin's group voluntarily. I think he was kidnapped because he knew too much about their operation.'

'For instance?'

'Like the identity of their man in Copernicus Control.' Larry said. 'Maybe even what they plan to do. The only other reason they might have for taking him with them is if he still has some information they want That implies that they have a way out of the Sanctuary. Is there any way out?'

'No. The Sanctuary is buried in solid rock.'

'How were the survivors supposed to get out?'

Ron Love froze for a moment. He had the look of a man who suddenly realizes that a serious mistake has been made. In an unhappy voice he said, 'There are two mining machines down there. It was never considered worthwhile to dismantle them and bring them up.'

'Which way would they cut their way out?'

'Out. Toward the crater. The Slot Cutters are working in the other directions. The Smoother finished melting down the surface a couple of days ago. Ron paused a moment and then said, 'Dr.

Kelvin should know if there are any holes. I'll call him.'

Dr. Kelvin knew of no such hole but freely admitted he was neither expecting nor had he looked for one. His people didn't have time just now to make a search. He suggested that the job be given the Port of Entry personnel.

The Director of the Port of Entry said they would send a couple of men in a transporter along the face of Copernicus to look for a hole, as soon as possible. The Mayor asked that would be and then exploded when he got an evasive answer. The Director finally said he would have someone on the job within an hour. Mayor Love demanded they report directly to him.

'How do we find out if we've had any visitors from Fauth within the last couple of hours?' Lt. McQueen asked when the Mayor had finished.

The Mayor called Copernicus Control and talked to the operator in charge of crater activities.

'Yes, a transporter from Fauth came over this morning with a bunch to go to Tellus,' the operator said, chewing on a piece of gum between sentences. 'The driver took 'em sightseeing and almost got himself plated. I got him out, and he unloads his passengers, and bang! he's back in the same trouble. I untangled him again and told him to get out of my crater. if I ever see his fat ...

'Has he gotten back to Fauth yet?' the Mayor interrupted.

'I'll check, wait one ...' the controller said.

'Yes,' he reported a moment later. "Bout half an hour ago. If I ever catch up with that fat...'

'Have any ships taken off from Fauth recently?' Mayor love interrupted again.

'Taint my board but I'll check.'

'Yes, a deep space job took off 'bout 5 minutes ago,' he reported back. 'Should be out of the system by now. Alphacent. Ought to be darn near there. It's a 20 minute run, y'know.'

'Thanks,' the Mayor said, and cleared the plate. He turned to Larry. 'Looks like we're too late.

We locked the front door and left the back door open.'

'The evidence is still just circumstantial. We're going to have to go down into the Sanctuary anyway.'

'I'll notify Hanovich that they may have gotten away.'

Larry looked at his wristwatch. 'Don't bother. It's just about time to go anyway. If they're still down there, I'd rather Hanovich's people were expecting trouble. They'll be more cautious than if they think Griffin and company are gone. Would you check out Copernicus Control while I'm gone? I want to visit it when I get back, and if anything's wrong, I'd like to know in advance. OK?'

'Right,' the Mayor answered, and Larry left.

* * *

'Our spy-ray blocks cover this shaft and those adjoining,' Hanovich said. 'The blocks were installed when we started clearing out the foam, so they wouldn't know which shaft we're coming down.'

Hanovich spoke confidently to Larry and the five volunteer security men who were wearing full Solarian Patrol armor. They were about to go down the elevator shaft to the Sanctuary. Though he spoke with assurance, he had scheduled himself to go down with the second group, the reinforcements who would arrive after the first group had entered. Larry was a little disappointed by this. He wanted to see how Hanovich operated under pressure. Larry wondered if he would panic and run, or stay and slug it out. He wondered how much of his assurance was bravado and how much real self-confidence. Larry shrugged to himself in his armor. In spite of the confident manner, Hanovich seemed to value himself too highly to expose himself to any real danger.

The six men entered the stripped elevator cage and started their trip downwards. Most of the floor had been replaced. The workmen before them had dissolved the foam down to the top of the elevator doors of the top level of the Sanctuary. Direct entry by those doors was considered too dangerous. The elevator halted inches above the top of the foam. One of the men picked up a shiny oval they had brought with them. It was a ring of high explosive backed by a metal container. While he held it up another man carefully tore off the tape covering the adhesive on the other side. The oval was pressed against the wall above the elevator doors.

On the other side of the wall was the secondary life support area over the first level of the Sanctuary. It contained the air purifying and conditioning equipment and empty food and water storage areas for the dormitory level below.

The circle stuck to the wall. Next a little detonater was pressed into place. Everyone leaned back against the nearest wall for support. Even a shaped charge with shielding can buffet a man around. The explosive went off. It made a cloud of dust, which slowly began to disperse, and a hole in the wall. It was dark inside. Larry threw a 'light' grenade underhanded through the hole. Then he dove after it. Inside he rolled to his feet and threw two other grenades to the left and right.

Behind Larry the rest of the party was coming through the hole, carrying massive weapons. when the first grenade hit a surface, it stuck there and went on.

The light grenade lit the room with the stark, brilliant white light that only magnesium burning in pure oxygen can give. Anyone not having protection for his eyes would have been blinded. They had a little perimeter established around the hole in seconds. Four 'Standish' combination vibratory projectors and machine guns were sitting on tripods with their screens up, manned and waiting. Squat and monstrous, they had the look of being capable of dealing out any amount of destruction required.

Larry fired his Lewiston at the television camera on the far wall and destroyed it.

'This level is clear,' reported the last man out of the elevator after a short pause. The alien's spy-ray block ended at the wall of the shaft. Once inside it, he had used the portable spy-ray unit he was carrying to see through obstructing objects and check the area.

'OK! Charlie, you cover the ladder over there. Pete, keep the hole behind us covered in case they come up from below.'

The men moved their equipment, covered by the two remaining men.

'Anyone on the level below?' Larry asked.

'The level below us is vacant,' the man with the portable spy-ray reported after a long pause.

'We'll take the dormitory below then. It's the only entrance to this area,' Larry said. He undogged and opened the hatch. He dropped down to the floor of the dormitory without bothering to use the stairway. He destroyed the television cameras as he dropped. Three men with weapons followed him. Larry assigned them to the various entrances. He looked at his wrist watch and was amazed to see that less than two minutes had passed. He had at least another two minutes to wait for his reinforcements. Their little force was extended as far as it could comfortably go and yet hold access to the elevator shaft. A minute later the spy-ray operator came down the stairs.

'I can't see much beyond a single wall or floor anyway,' he reported. 'There's too much metal here for this little unit. This level and the life support area just below us is clear. That's about all I can make out.'

They waited.

Hanovich and the reinforcements arrived and they spread out over the top level. A group took each of the four life support and dormitory areas on the top level and started moving down. The Sanctuary was empty. They found the blackened remains of the three gunmen on the fourth level down. When the spy-ray block was found and turned off, it was apparent that the analysis Larry had made in Mayor Love's office was correct. The bottom storage area of the Sanctuary was filled with the rock removed from a tunnel out toward the crater floor. Larry's clothing and most of his equipment was found in the control room of the Sanctuary. It had been discarded. Gone, however, was a wristwatch and his Golden Meteor identification badge. Larry asked Hanovich to have some men check out the tunnel to make certain it was empty, and to use a spy-ray to search the contents of the storage area for anything discarded.

'Under all that rock would be the ideal place to bury a body, or anything else you didn't want found,' he pointed out. Then he left.

* * *

'Do you really expect Hanovich to find a body under all that rock?' Mayor Love asked.

'No, but it'll keep him out of trouble for a while,' Larry said with a smile. 'Besides, you can never tell what might turn up. One of the reasons I came back here was to use your visiphone. I want to call in a report to Fairchild, the Acting Chief of the Triplanetary Service at the New York office. Your office is the only area I know that is really secure. The Patrol Field Office isn't, and Hanovich's office is, ah, undesirable.'

'Do you want me to leave?'

'No, stay here. You helped and you might as well listen in.' Lt. McQueen placed the call. When Fairchild's face appeared on the plate, they went to cryptographic operation. Larry described what had happened, concluding with, 'I'm still not satisfied that we have uncovered all of their agents. Until I'm certain, I can't afford the time to check Fauth, and Uranium Inc. By the time I can, that lead will be stone cold, if it isn't already.'

Fairchild didn't commit himself, he just looked thoughtful for a moment.

'There's also a possibility that the transporter they escaped on was originally empty and that it took part of the group to Interstellar Spaceways Flight 1726 to Tellus,' Lt. McQueen continued.

'Finally, they kept my badge.'

Fairchild abruptly shook his head. 'I should pull you off this job. The Patrol has taken over all work on pirate and potential pirate activities. The Service has been assigned to narcotics control exclusively. However, in this case I'll make an exception and keep you on the job. I'll forward your information to Kinnison's office, and they can handle following through on the leads.'

'Don't worry about the badge,' Fairchild continued. 'Samms has a new badge, a Lens. You are scheduled to come here after you finish your present assignment. Samms, or someone, will check you

out for one of them.'

'Check me out?'

'It's an exclusive club,' Fairchild said, sarcastically. 'They call themselves "Lensmen". Very original. Samms is out recruiting E. T. Lensmen on Rigel IV and won't be back until Wednesday. Do you think you can bring your work to some form of definite conclusion by then?'

'I can try. But I can't foresee my checking being done before next Friday,' Lt. McQueen answered. On this note the report ended.

Afterwards Mayor Love commented, 'From his tone of voice, I gather Fairchild doesn't like either these Lensmen or Extra Terrestrials.'

Larry smiled. 'Fairchild has problems. When Virgil Samms became a member of the Solarian Council, they needed someone to act as his assistant in handling the operations of the Triplanetary Service. The job carried too much potential power to get all the members of the Council to agree to put any of the obvious candidates in his place. So they chose a second-rater that everyone figured wouldn't be smart enough to take advantage of the position. So far, they've been right, and Fairchild knows it.

'What was he before? I vaguely remember the name.'

'He was Samms' public relations officer.'

'Oh,' Mayor Love said.

'One thing you can be sure of: if Samms has started a club, it's worth joining if you can.'

'Did you find out anything about Copernicus Control?' Larry asked.

'No, nothing,' Mayor Love answered. 'There's nothing unusual in the Central File computer's records that I could find. No one has made a lot of money recently or obviously changed his spending habits.'

'All right. It's later than I expected, and I'm beat,' Larry said. 'Let's wait and see what happens at the Board of Directors meeting tomorrow. We should be able to tell where Harness stands, and afterwards I can work down through the rest of the organization.'

A few moments later Lt. McQueen and Mayor Love parted. Neither knew that the Monday morning Board of Directors meeting would never be held.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EMERGENCY!

The next morning Al Lewis sat at his station in Copernicus Control watching the digital clock at the top of the console click off the seconds. All was quiet for the moment. In two more hours, at 0800, his shift would be over. Two hours seemed like forever. He looked over the edge of the balcony, where the operators sat, down into the tank. Thousands of colored lights blinked back, each representing some object in the 60-foot, tri-dimensional model of the Solar System. It was the largest, most complete plotting tank in the Solar System outside the 300-foot unit at Solarian Patrol Headquarters in The Hill. This Unit, however, was just for commercial use.

Al pulled down the visor he was wearing and started the color filters cycling through it. With each new color different lights in the tank sprang into prominence. Normally, he didn't have time to look into the tank itself. The edited information he wanted was directly displayed on his console. During the first shift there were six operators to handle traffic. During the graveyard shift there were two, because of the reduced local activities. The tank was actually rarely used except as a general reference and to impress visiting firemen.

The filters continued to flick into place. He knew them by heart. Planets, asteroids, manned stations, unmanned stations, manned commercial spacecraft, manned military spacecraft, private spacecraft, unmanned cargoes in orbit, meteoroids, navigational satellites...

Suddenly, Al Lewis had the feeling again of something being wrong. But what?

The filters continued through all the major classification and then started at the beginning again. And again. He shortened the cycle, eliminating the obviously superfluous filters. A buzzing in his ear indicated that someone wanted to talk to him. Without bothering to look at his board, he pressed the busy switch.

'The filters cycled again. Then he saw it. Over there! A meteoroid? There couldn't be a meteoroid in that sector! It would be on his vision plate! Al Lewis turned, and called up the meteoroid display. There was no sign of the meteoroid he had seen in the tank. He expanded the area where he had seen it. Still nothing. He checked the tank, then his settings. Everything should be okay, but where was that meteoroid? He opened a line to the computer.

'I can see a meteoroid in the tank about 700,000 miles above Grimaldi. Why isn't it on my console?'

'All meteoroids of over 10,000 cubic feet in volume are called directly to the attention of the Director or Assistant Director of Copernicus Control. I have been instructed that operator

cognizance is not required,' the computer answered.

'When and where is that one due to land?'

'It will land in 5 hours, 46 minutes, inside the boundary of Copernicus City.'

'WHAT?!'

The computer repeated itself.

For a few moments Al Lewis was without words. He was completely at a loss as to what to say or do.

The Copernicus Control operators handled meteoroids, warning people of the 'weather' when small ones were involved, and the redirection of the larger ones. Admittedly, this was the largest one he had seen but why didn't they know about it? Why had the computer been instructed to edit it from the operator's plate? Something was wrong! Horribly wrong!

'Who did you tell about this meteoroid?'

'The Acting Director of Copernicus Control, Jay Harness.'

'Who gave you the directive about operator cognizance?'

'The same person.'

'What has he done about the meteoroid?'

'I was informed that the Solarian Patrol has been notified and is taking care of the matter.'

'Who told you?'

'Jay Harness.'

'Did he call the Solarian Patrol?'

'Yes.'

'What did he say?'

'I have no record of that conversation.'

'Why not?'

'I was instructed not to monitor it.'

'Who did he call?'

'The Commanding Officer, Solarian Patrol Tracking Network.'

'I want to talk to him too. If he isn't available, I'll speak to whoever is available down there.'

Al Lewis directed the computer. Changing to the intercom, he told the other operator, 'I've got a red hot emergency. I'm switching my board operation over to you.'

The other operator tried to protest. Al cut him off short.

Moments later, the S. P. Tracking Network Commanding

Officer came on the visiphone. He turned Al over to the Network Tracking Officer who directed Al's call to the Chief Tracking Operator.

'Dan Digby, Chief Tracking Officer,' the man answered.

'This is Copernicus Control. I need information on a meteoroid about 700,000 miles above Grimaldi.'

'QRX, one second,' Chief Digby said, and pressed some buttons. 'All right, go ahead.'

'What is its present status?' asked Al Lewis.

Chief Digby touched another button. 'You're supposed to be handling it! We're scheduled to QRO you at 0900.'

The visiphone blurred a moment as the Copernicus Control computer cut in and queried the Solarian Patrol Tracking Network Computer directly over the video channel.

'What are we supposed to be doing?' Al asked Chief Digby when the channel cleared for a few moments.

'Your report said you're changing its path to a circum lunar orbit for a salvage operation,' Chief Digby answered. 'Should we stand by?'

The computer broke into the conversation at this point. 'Yes! Stand by for an emergency operation! A deliberate effort to destroy Copernicus is indicated. I am in the process of notifying the Mayor of Copernicus, the Director of Security and the Board of Directors. A state of extreme emergency exists!'

The visiphone blurred again as the two computers compared blocks of information.

Al Lewis shrugged and said, 'Try and not stand by.'

The voice channel was apparently still operating because he heard Chief Digby say, 'I'll get a status summary and check with you in a couple of minutes. The only time a computer broke in on me was during the Nevian War. Then the problem went all the way up to the Commissioner of Public Safety.'

They broke off, leaving the channel to the computers.

Al Lewis looked at the clock at the top of his console. Forty-five minutes had gone by. He wondered for an instant how that could be possible, then he was rapidly explaining the situation to Mayor Love.

* * *

There was a cloud of pipe smoke around Capt. Ben Russell of the Capital ship, UET3AA Europa, as he talked to Copernicus Control. 'It's obvious I don't have time to divert the orbit of this meteoroid so it doesn't hit Luna. What do you want it to do, fall short or go over you?' The man on the plate started to protest that he hadn't examined all of the factors involved. At the same time, the First Officer reported that they were ready to clamp onto the meteoroid. Capt. Russell gave him the high sign to continue without taking his eyes off the man on the plate. 'If you can't make the decision,' Capt. Russell said in a cold voice, 'then let me talk to someone who can. You have one minute to find that someone. Then I'll put that meteoroid down where I want to!'

Outside, the spaceship's tractor beams clamped onto the meteoroid's surface and the spaceship started to spin around it. The surface had stopped with respect to the spaceship but the stars were now spinning. The maneuver was performed so smoothly that there had been no perceptible motion as the artificial gravity shifted.

Capt. Russell turned to the First Officer. 'Mr. Webb, while we're waiting I want to slow the rotation of that meteoroid as much as possible. I want full blast on as long a lever as you can get on it without either slipping or breaking up the surface.'

He turned back to the plate. The same man was still there. 'Who's your superior?'

'He isn't here.'

'Who's his supervisor?'

'No one knows where he is.'

'All right, you stupid bastards! Find someone right now, or when I get down there I am going to skin you alive! NOW GET GOING!' The Captain cleared the plate and turned again to his First Officer.

'Mr. Webb, who runs the show down there?'

'The Mayor. I believe his name is Ron Love.'

'Thank you. Mr. Anderson, I want to talk to the Mayor of Copernicus.'

'Yes, sir,' the Communications Officer said.

Capt. Russell put the pipe back in his mouth. The smoke got thick as he waited. The plate lit up with Mayor Love's face.

'Can I help you, Capt. Russell?'

'I'm going to have to drop this meteoroid somewhere. Copernicus Control can't decide where. I need to know now or I'm going to have to pick my own spot. And God help whoever's underneath it.'

'Hold on, I'll see what I can do,' Mayor Love said. He flipped on the intercom. 'Get me Copernicus Control and Dr. Kelvin. Emergency. Put it on conference call.'

'The Chief Controller is already on the line,' the secretary answered. 'I'll get Dr. Kelvin.'

The Chief Controller appeared on the visiphone. Mayor Love didn't bother with formalities. He asked, 'Is there anyone in the area between here and Kepler?'

'I don't know, I'll have to ...'

'FIND OUT! RIGHT NOW!'

The Chief Controller's face disappeared. Mayor Love addressed the captain and said; 'I apologize for the delay. It should hit the surface at as steep an angle as possible. That will minimize the secondaries.'

'Dr Kelvin,' the secretary announced over the intercom. As Dr. Kelvin's face appeared he said,

'Yes, Ron?' 'Is the Rodenbush-watchacallit screen working yet?'

'Yes. We haven't finished cutting and coating the slots but the top surface is complete.'

'Can we drop this meteor west of here?'

'How far west can you get it?'

'Captain?'

'If you can decide in the next minute, about 100 miles.'

'No problem here,' Dr Kelvin reported. 'If the screen can't take the secondaries from that distance, it's no good any way.'

'When will it hit?' Mayor Love asked Capt. Russell.

'A little less than an hour.'

The Chief Controller appeared again. 'I just checked.'

'And?'

'There's a man in the area.'

'You have half an hour to get him out,' said Mayor Love.

'Captain, drop it as far west of here as you can get it.'

'Thank you. We will stand by after impact to render aid, 'if necessary,' the Captain replied, and cleared his plate.

'Mr. Webb, we drop it short.'

The First Officer passed the command and the spaceship started doing a strange dance. It acted as a retro-rocket when the meteoroid rotated it in front of the orbital path, and then turned direction and tried to slow the rotation as the meteoroid moved it around behind. Slowly, the rotation of the meteoroid was being stopped, and the retrofire lasted longer. For 45 minutes the Europa struggled with the meteoroid.

'Mr. Webb. Prepare to go free. Set the automatics to release the tractors when we're 50 miles above the surface. I want to depart at right angle to the lunar surface at about 60 miles per second. Full screens.'

The First Officer gave the necessary orders. As the men in the control room watched the main plate, the meteor suddenly disappeared as the tractors were cut, and the spaceship, inertialess, stopped and then receded from the lunar surface.

A second passed.

In the moment of its striking the moon, the meteor seemed to disappear, to melt into the surface. The tremendous flash of intolerable heat and radiation generated by its impact was contained between the two closing surfaces of the meteor and Luna. Underneath the meteor intramolecular penetration of two materials changed solid rock from solid to vapor to the disassociated particles of a plasma in a time too short to measure. The physical events were moving at the hyper-speed that only seems to naturally occur with nuclear and astronomical objects.

The cloud of plasma generated by the impact could not be long bottled by the mere physical inertia of matter. In microseconds it was expanding. It was finding its way around the body of the meteor. Once released it exploded outward, destroying everything in its volume. Rending apart matter itself into its component atomic and nuclear particles. Now, on the surface of the moon where the meteor struck, there appeared a brilliant, white-hot cloud of particles; a fireball. The automatic intensity control on the spaceship's plates, which were focused on the impact site, let them turn white.

The cloud of plasma expanded and cooled. The matter it contacted now vaporized. Lighter, more easily vaporized substances were leached away, freeing the heavier objects. Boulders, some hundreds of feet across, were lifted and blown, dripping magma, outwards. There was a spider web of vapor around the cloud as plasma sped down faults in the lunar surface, and as objects trailing vapor spread outward.

The cloud of vapor expanded and cooled. Rock was no longer vaporized but was melted and blown outward in liqueous drops of a storm that would spread all around the lunar surface and outward into space. Where the droplets turned to the surface, they would cool, and help form the irregular crust of bonded bits of rock. Gravel was picked up intact and hurled outward.

The cloud of matter exploded and cooled. Speeds dropped and secondary collisions with the surface occurred. A white mist of material was generated from the surface for hundreds of miles about the impact, making details seem fuzzy, as the surface was stirred.

Luna shuddered. The surface rock moved like the water of an ocean as literal waves in the surface rolled outward. Seismological blocks buckled. Copernicus was directly downstream of the storm. Dr. Kelvin's quake barriers diminished the shock, but even so, the inhabitants knew they had been hit. Those that could, hung onto whatever solid objects were at hand to steady themselves. Mayor Love watched his desk go skittering completely across his office. Lt. McQueen watched the shock-wave flex the railing around the tank in Copernicus Control under its own weight.

For minutes the shockwaves continued. To the inhabitants of Luna they seemed to go on forever.

'Mr. Grant, you're 3° off course,' Capt. Russell addressed the pilot. The tone of his voice indicated he wasn't angry, just surprised. Since the exact course didn't matter at this point, he mentioned it only to indicate that it had been observed. 'Stop, and hold this position relative to Copernicus.'

The bridge was silent as they sat, watched and waited.

Again Capt. Russell was wreathed in smoke. After about 15 minutes he emptied out the remainder of the pipe load and started refilling. He lit up a second pipe, got comfortable, and then: 'Mr. Grant. Return the ship to a position about 500 miles directly above Copernicus. The screens are to remain up. Mr. Webb, the men may return to their normal duties. Have coffee sent up. We will wait here.'

After an hour the Captain put in a call to Mayor Love. 'I'm standing by. Have you any further need for our services?'

'No,' the Mayor answered. 'We seem to have weathered the storm. We're still intact and can clean up the mess ourselves. Thank you for a job well done.'

The Captain smiled. 'Thank you. I hope the next time we have a little more notice so we can do a better job. Out.'

The plate cleared. The Captain drew deeply on his pipe.

'Mr. Webb. Return the ship to Callisto.'

CHAPTER EIGHT
MOON PROSPECTOR

'Storm!' the moon creeper said.

Pete Miller was buzzing along at five miles per hour, his tracked moon creeper following the low cliff wall on his right, through the Carpathians. He was on his way to Copernicus where he planned to refuel for another prospecting trip. Behind the creeper two trailers followed, one containing reserve supplies, and the other automatic mapping and prospecting equipment such as magnetometers, radar topological plotters, laser-spectroscope samplers, et cetera. The crevasse detector on the boom in front of him had not stopped the creeper for over half an hour.

Pete was an old-timer. He had been a boy when Gillespie diverted a couple of megabucks of public funds to buy a Surplus rocket and outfit it to go to Mars. His reverie was broken by the voice of the moon creeper.

'Copernicus reports a large meteor fell in the plain about one hundred miles west of them. They advise all vehicles to head for cover,' it said.

'This cliff might have enough height to protect us,' Pete said.

'My profile mapper indicates that that spot is the best place along the cliff,' the creeper said. Simultaneously a marker of bright light appeared on the cliff face about five hundred yards ahead and the creeper turned toward it. As they crossed the pass to the point of relative safety, both the prospector and the moon creeper were silent. They were waiting for the secondary meteorites thrown up by the first meteor to begin to fall. Having a range of fairylike mountains between them and the meteor had protected them from immediate showers, but eventually the stuff with a ballistic trajectory high enough to clear the range between them would begin to come down. When it did, it would come down hard!

Three minutes later the creeper and its carriers were pulled up under the protecting wall of the cliff in a compact little group.

'That isn't much of an overhang,' Pete said.

'No, but it is the best within twenty minutes travel,' the moon creeper answered. 'Also the profile of the ridge above the cliff protected us about a minute extra before the first of the shower hit us.'

Even as the creeper spoke a number of small puffy clouds appeared in the pass. They rose from the surface and then seemed to evaporate. The edge of the clouds crept closer with each passing moment. Occasionally the ground shook.

'Copernicus reports that all four western entrances are blocked!' the creeper reported.

Pete looked at the cloud and said, 'That must have been a hell of a big one! How could the entrances be blocked? They have a fifty-foot overhang of twelve-inch reinforced concrete!'

'They were apparently directly downstream of the storm. They've had slides, and lots of stuff skipping in. Entrances Number 2 and 3 even have the airlock door destroyed.'

'How long to dig out?'

'Three or four days if they have to dig out from the inside, four hours from the outside. They're checking prospectors for digging tools ... No luck. They're going to send a digging party out the north pass and around. They give the storm another fifteen minutes,' the creeper reported.

'Are the emergency caches intact?'

'Yes, so far. But they may not be accessible.'

* * *

The storm had reached its peak intensity and was now visibly dying. The nearest portion was still one hundred feet distant, but small bits of splashed material made little splattering noises as they hit the sides of the moon creeper. Fortunately there was only sand in the area.

Pete was getting nervous, as he usually did during a storm. He started to get up, thought better of it, and then deliberately relaxed. 'I've been in tighter situations than this,' he told himself. Somehow that seemed rather unimportant. After an age he glanced at the clock. Ten more minutes. Impatiently he said, 'Well, while we're sitting here, let's transfer supplies.' Transferring supplies was still a manual job. The automatic loading equipment needed was too big and expensive for a small operation like this.

It took Pete all of two minutes to get into the light-armored vacuum suit and to check it out. Another two minutes was spent pumping the cabin air into the recycle tanks. Another minute and Pete was crawling along the creeper's treads, next to the wall of the cliff, toward the creeper's tender. A jump and he was on the tender's treads. He undogged a port in the side of the tender, swung the eight-inch thick door back, and plugged in the hoses that trailed behind him to the moon creeper; Reaching past the hose connections, Pete pulled out a suitcase of frozen food.

'I hope they packed something in this one besides peanut butter sandwiches,' he said. His cynicism was lost on the moon creeper. Pete returned. The hoses would automatically decouple and follow him when the refueling was complete.

Back inside the creeper things were quiet as usual. 'So much for that month's work,' Pete said as he shoved the frost-covered suitcase into its storage place. The moon creeper didn't comment. A few minutes later they started moving.

'I gather our present plans are to continue back to Copernicus and help dig out one of the west entrances?'

'No, the work crew can handle that. Copernicus Control has directed us to delay and continue our current prospecting program until we're called back,' the moon creeper answered.

Pete sighed. He was anticipating a week end in Copernicus. Now there is some question whether Harvey Reinfield got under cover in time,' the moon creeper continued. 'He was about one hundred miles northwest of here, at Mayer A. No one can raise his creeper.'

'Harv?'

'The satellite will check him in about three minutes.'

'Damn! Tap their picture when they get it. I want to see it,' Pete said.

'We are the closest party to him in this area, so we will probably be asked to investigate,' the moon creeper said.

Pete leaned over the control console waiting for the new satellite picture. 'Harv's probably just got communications trouble. Is his tender's emergency transmitter going?'

'No.'

'So either both he and his tender got caught in something together, or he's O.K.'

A few minutes later the strip map was replaced by a television picture from the satellite. Rapidly the camera found the trail leading into Mayer A, and then followed a particular pair of tracks. They ended in a pile of rubble at the inside face of the crater cliff. The tender and another carrier were a couple hundred feet away. Pete snorted.

'Can the satellite pick up Harv's interphone?'

'Yes, Copernicus Control is trying to break in.'

'Break in?' Pete asked.

In answer to Pete's question the moon creeper switched in the radio system direct. A string of profanity was being transmitted. Pete was surprised, and then he smiled as he recognized Harv's voice, and settled down to wait for it to stop. He noted several new words and made a mental note to ask Harv about them later.

A couple of minutes later there was a temporary lull and Copernicus Control was so ill advised as to ask what happened. After detailing the controller's incestuous ancestry, the answer came.

'.... What do you think happened? I got caught in this ... slide!'

'I noticed something of the sort. Are you in trouble?' asked Copernicus Control innocently.

* * *

There was a long silence as Harv assimilated the implications of the question. He finally said, 'I'd like to tell you to take a running jump, but it happens that I'm in trouble and I do need help.' There was a long pause during which Copernicus Control kept silent. 'I was spiraling out of Mayer A when I saw a flash reflected from the north wall. I stopped figuring that the rim would give me some protection. A couple of minutes later the slide started. I tried to get out of its way, but didn't make it. It took off my antennas, treads, and my shield. I'm now lying on my side, completely buried. I have three weeks' food and air, with no apparent leaks,' Harv reported.

'Pete Miller has been listening in,' Copernicus Control said. 'What equipment will you need to dig the biggest mouth on the moon out of his rockpile, Pete?'

'What?' Harv said.

'Relax, Harv,' Pete said. 'We'll all do our best to extricate you from this trouble your stupid lack of judgement got you into.'

'What do you mean big-mouth and stupid?' shouted Harv.

'It looks like I'm going to need a full range of digging equipment,' Pete continued, ignoring Harvey, 'starting with blasters, and working down to needle samplers. Some jacks, a portable spy-ray, be sure to include a shadow magnetometer, blast shields, a small tractor beam, something to haul the creeper back on, since it's too expensive to abandon ...'

'Hm-m-m !' said Harv.

'Some sheets of plastic and adhesive, a couple of twenty- or thirty-foot steel wrecking bars, cable, a couple small winches, -a dozen explosive anchors, a portable crevasse bridge. Make that two bridges,' Pete said. 'Any idea how deep you are, Harv?'

'Nothing but rock in sight,' Harv answered.

'Have I forgotten anything?' Pete asked.

'Yeah,' Harv answered. 'A flask of brandy for the poor victim!'

'I'll send the stuff around after our digging party. I think they've already left. Where do you want to pick it up?' asked Copernicus Control.

'If it takes only four hours to dig out the first entrance, it'll be just about as fast to send it out that way. That'll also give me time to get out to Mayer A and survey the situation. Then I can ask for anything else I may need. I can also check the trail from Mayer L on out for any new chasms or slides, which means that the man bringing the stuff out will be able to travel most of the trail at high speed. I'll need about twenty-four hours plus to get out to Harv, and the first entrance should be open at about the same time.'

'We figure twenty-eight hours from now, plus or minus an hour,' Copernicus Control said.

'It'll take about twenty-two to twenty-four hours after the entrance is open for him to get to Mayer A. By the way, Harv,' Pete asked puzzled by a sudden thought, 'what were you doing out at Mayer A? It's already been surveyed a couple of times.'

'Can't tell you, Pete. Ask the Mayor,' answered Harv.

'I've got other work to do. Will check back later. Bye,' Copernicus Control broke in and cut off Pete and Harv.

'What the hell goes on here?' Pete said. He sat in front of the television screen where the moon creeper again displayed a strip map of the area. This was a surprise! Someone, maybe the Mayor of Copernicus, had some reason for getting Harv out to Mayer A in such a hurry that no one had bothered to provide him with a cover story. Actually, a moment's reflection told Pete, there would normally be no reason for a cover story. No one except Harv, the Mayor, and Copernicus Control need know anything about the trip. It was only because of the meteorite storm and the accident that anyone else knows even now, Pete thought. At this point they can't say much over the radio, but they can send someone special out with the digging equipment. They will probably suggest a story to Harv. They would not have to say much. Harv was mighty fast on the uptake, and could spin out a yarn with the best of them. Except Harv wasn't anything else or anyone else than Harvey Reinfield. Oh well, Pete shrugged to himself, it will all come out. That a secret exists is half the secret.

The moon creeper was already on the road. They had started out when the storm quit.

'Tune me in on any conversation between Copernicus, the Control, or anyone, and Harv,' Pete ordered. 'I want to listen in, not a synopsis.'

* * *

It was a tired Mayor who turned off his visiphone. The western entrances had not been covered by the Rodebush Bergenholm field, and, in spite of the overhanging roofs of reinforced concrete, every one of them had been blocked by the storm of secondaries from the meteor. The Southernmost entrance had been completely demolished by a single, gigantic boulder that had smashed the roof, airlock, tunnel entrance, and no one knew how many feet of tunnel into a pile of rubble. One of the new blaster battery sites, just over the rim, had been severely damaged. Most of the Earthside Communications' antennas had been knocked down. That was no great concern, since 'they were horizontal arrays a few feet above ground level. Quake damage inside the city had occurred. Rog Philips' crews were at work on that. No one had been killed, though many injuries were reported. Property damage was relatively minor, though it probably didn't seem that way to those who had sustained it.

Considering what might have happened, Mayor Love decided that all in all it had been a very successful demonstration and test.

His thoughts were interrupted by a call from Larry McQueen.

'Hi Larry. Why no image?'

'I'm using my belt communicator,' Larry answered. 'I'm on my way to Uranium Inc. at Fauth. Thought I'd pass along some news before I got outside. When I left Copernicus Control they had a prospector named Harv Reinfield buried in a slide out at Mayer A. Is that the man working for us?'

'Yes.'

'OK. Have Security run a check on another prospector named Pete Miller. Pete's going Out to survey the situation and help Harv, if he can. He needs tools but can't get them until a west entrance is opened. The Port of Entry Division has organized a work party. They're going around through the North Pass. They should have the entrance clear in about a day.'

'Why don't they use a Moorpark tractor ship to open an entrance? It could pull off the roof, debris and all.'

'Dr. Kelvin won't release one until the slots are deep enough to suit him. That quake really got to him. He estimated that he lost almost a half million credits in damaged equipment at Moorpark, to say nothing about manpower. And I can see his point. That meteor was a hundred miles away. He's balancing the loss of Copernicus against the inconvenience of a prospector who's stuck, but can

survive until he's dug out.'

'Hmm, I just let the Europa leave. They could have done both jobs,' Ron commented. He shrugged.

'I'll let things proceed as they are.'

'Any trace of Harness yet?'

'No. None. He's disappeared completely. One of the men from Fauth, one of the ones who had disappeared, and we hadn't found, took a spaceship to Tellus early this morning.'

'You didn't get him?'

'No. Hanovich thought they had all escaped through the Sanctuary. He didn't put out arrest warrants on them, so by the time anyone caught the name, the man had arrived at NYC and was gone.'

'That sounds like more proof that the meteor wasn't an accident,' Larry commented. 'They kept us busy and then got out at the last moment. Keep Hanovich looking for Harness, though.'

'Right. The next one won't get away.'

'Well, I doubt if any agents are left. The last one probably left when it appeared the meteor would be successful. They may be coming back, though. Have Security give all new entrants ... no, all entrants, new or old, a thorough check. Do you know if Hanovich checked those gumdrops?'

'Gumdrops?' Ron asked, puzzled.

'Griffin's group left behind some rather unusual items. Hanovich made a list of them but hadn't checked them out. Gumdrops were one of the items.'

'I'd like to see that list. It might give me an idea about what we're up against.'

'See Hanovich,' Larry said. 'Also call Harv Reinfield and tell him to keep quiet about his job. Remember that you'll be broadcasting and may be monitored. OK?'

'Right.'

'See you tomorrow when I get back.'

'Good hunting.'

* * *

The moon creeper woke Pete up a few hours later as Copernicus was calling Harvey Reinfield. The conversation went about as expected.

'Harvey, this is Ron Love,' the Mayor of Copernicus said. 'Did you find anything?'

'No,' answered Harvey.

'Pete Miller should be out there in about twenty hours. You can tell him anything when you talk to him over the interphone.'

'Anything,' Pete noted, meaning anything except the truth, and the interphone bit was so the people back home could make up a story accordingly. The normally private conversation over the moon creeper radios would be picked up and relayed by the satellite.

'OK, I'll see what I can do,' answered Harv and signed off.

Pete started to go back to sleep, and then said to the creeper, 'Remind me in the morning to ask for a bunch of floodlights, when I talk to Copernicus Control. I see we got around the ridge. Are we on the track out to Mayer yet?'

'We will be on the trail in half an hour,' answered the moon creeper.

'Wake me if we hit any new large crevasses,' Pete said and went back to sleep.

CHAPTER NINE

SURVEILLANCE

The Copernicus Spaceport was closed during the meteor's impact. The first spaceship to be allowed to land at the space port after the impact did so because of its emergency status. It had lifted off from Tellus. A few moments later its communications officer reported to Copernicus Control that a passenger had had a heart attack. Since Copernicus on Luna was the most convenient low-gravity port equipped to handle the situation, the spaceship returned there and pre-empted all other traffic.

The spaceship landed on a dock in the crater. The dock, refrigerators, shielding and all, lowered in its shaft, down into a subsurface chamber. Airtight, reinforced concrete and alloy steel doors closed over the top of the shaft. The dock was pressurized and an ambulance transporter entered the inner chamber from a large airlock. A ramp lowered from the space ship and the vehicle drove up into the hold, where a small group of people were waiting. The driver got out.

'You're Dwaino?' one man addressed him.

'Yes.'

'We're fortunate you hadn't left when they discovered the meteoroid,' he said, and introduced the others. 'This is the patient.' He gestured toward a man on a stretcher. 'We're the members of his party. His mistress, his bodyguard/valet, and I'm his personal physician. We drop the other two in the work party going around the crater to open the west entrances,' he said, gesturing to the two vacuum-suited members of the group.

They loaded the ambulance and left. A few minutes later the dock was cleared, the air in it pumped back into its reservoir and the spaceship returned to the surface. It left.

The ambulance followed the maze of underground tunnels beneath the landing area. It passed through airtight doors, which opened and closed automatically in its path, and finally through a final airlock to the surface. It crossed a thousand yards of surface and then was under the roof of the main entrance to Copernicus wall. Here the work party was marshalling for its trip around through the North Pass. The ambulance stopped and waited for equipment in the entrance's airlock to move out.

The two vacuum-suited men, who had been riding outside the vehicle, got off. Minutes later they were volunteering their services to the work party foreman. Short-handed; he immediately put them to work.

The ambulance continued through the airlock to Customs.

The Customs officers were very thorough. They unloaded the ambulance, collected passports and processed the members of the party. Automatic machinery processed the baggage and ambulance. The passports were returned with a magnetic identification/credit card and the ambulance reloaded. Just before the driver closed the airtight door, a Customs Officer leaned over the vehicle and asked, 'Headed for the Hospital?'

'Yes.'

The Customs Officer thumped the surface of the ambulance. The sound covered the click of a magnet attaching itself. 'Good, I'll call ahead and tell them you're on your way.'

The ambulance pulled out.

* * *

The following morning when the Mayor arrived at his office, Lt. Larry McQueen was waiting. They went inside.

'Uranium Inc. was a dead end,' Larry said as he sat down. 'I talked to the plant superintendent. He told me that the Griffin group arrived on a special spaceship. No point of origin given. They had special company badges. It seems that Uranium Inc. has this special group of inspectors, who are not to be questioned nor interfered with, on pain of immediate dismissal. They commandeered a transporter of their own and most of them came here. Those remaining behind at Fauth were secretive, and isolated themselves from the rest of the personnel there. They made a number of trips back and forth. The last was that one Sunday morning. They left on another special, non-company ship.'

'At my request the superintendent called the Tellurian office. They couldn't help. The badge numbers he reported hadn't been issued. Their security personnel promised to investigate and report any results to The Hill, for what that's worth. I checked their quarters. Completely clean. Nothing.'

Larry shrugged and changed the subject. 'How did you make out with Miller and Reinfield?'

'Reinfield said he hadn't found anything,' Ron answered. 'I don't know whether to believe him or not.'

'When will he be dug out?'

'About a week.'

'What!'

'The first west entrance won't be open until late this after noon. It'll take a day or so to get a creeper with equipment out there. A couple more to salvage his creeper. Then a day to get back here and get another creeper.'

'We can't wait a week!' Larry said. 'Can't you use a transporter instead of a creeper and speed things up?'

'A transporter's too light to pull the load of digging equipment.'

'Look, let's suppose for a moment that that meteor had been successful,' Larry argued. 'About now the Solarian Patrol Tracking Network would be working like mad trying to handle the commercial operations of the Solar System on top of their normal working load. Normally, they just monitor them.' Larry shook his head. 'It would be at least a week before things were under control. If it were necessary to include Grand Fleet maneuvers during that period, it would be the biggest mess you ever saw. So that means that whatever they're planning will come this week, probably within the next couple of days. They'll either try something else on Copernicus or have to meet the Grand Fleet on more equal terms.'

'Now let's suppose tomorrow Copernicus is attacked and somehow destroyed. Let's further suppose these outsiders find the moon base first. Uranium Inc. or some other infiltrated company would make a "mineral discovery" near it. Space ships would bring in "mining equipment". There would be no inspection, Copernicus Control would be gone and the other sector controls, if not gone too, would be too busy to handle this sector properly. Within a month there could be a secret base,

armed and ready, here within a quarter million miles of Tellus.

'Harv has to find that base now, as soon as possible, so the Patrol can at least watch it,' Larry concluded. 'A week is too long to wait. They've probably already got an alternate plan of attack or something else in the works for us.'

The Mayor was impressed by Larry's outburst. Larry had not given him the impression of being a person who cries 'Wolf!' without good reason, consequently he gave the matter serious consideration.

'I wonder ...' Ron said after a few moments thought. 'We have one of the original mooncars in our museum. Just a minute.' He flipped on the intercom. 'Margurite, get me Jim Patton.'

A few moments later he was explaining to Patton that he wanted to use the vehicle. 'Can it be put in operating order?'

The curator of the museum was scandalized. 'It is in operating order!' he replied.

'Good, when can I get it?'

'You'll have to fill out a temporary loan request, submit it to the committee on ...'

'I'm the Mayor! You fill out the form! And jam it through your own committee. I'll send someone over in an hour to pick it up. And it better be ready or you'll be wondering where your funds went next quarter,' Ron said, and turned the visiphone off. He looked at Larry, relaxed, and smiled.

'The whole damn world is form happy. Sometimes I wonder if anyone here does anything else. Someone in the mooncar can take a load out to Mayer A in about eight hours. They can dig out Harv, give him the mooncar and finish the job of digging out the creeper at their leisure. Miller's creeper can bring everything back. I'll pick a good man to take the mooncar out.'

'Good. Were you able to get any action out of Hanovich on the lists?'

'He promised me an updated list the first thing this morning.'

'G-1?'

'Yes?' the flat voice of the office computer answered.

'Is an updated list of objects from the Griffin group available in Central Files?'

'Yes.'

'Display the top sheet,' Ron instructed the computer, and looked at the plate on his desk. 'Larry, your name is on the access list. Would you like a copy?'

'Yes.'

A moment later Ron handed Larry a reproduced copy of the list. Larry read rapidly through it. It was considerably shorter than either of the previous two lists. Much of the requisitioned material had been found and all of the items left behind had been examined.

'I see that the gumdrops were plastic explosive,' Larry said, looking up. 'A rather odd one, though. I missed a couple of other items. May I examine the critical points lists you asked for at the Board of Directors meeting?'

'Definitely, but let's get you squared away with the Central File computer,' Ron said.

The Mayor opened a special computer file for Larry. The computer made copies of Larry's handprints for comparison with previously held data from his identification/credit card. It requested certain additional personal data and then had Larry select an identification phrase as his personal key to classified material and other closed files. A second phrase was chosen that would close off access to all sensitive information and alert Security that the person using it was an imposter, or under duress, or in need of their aid.

'It's an innovation Hanovich came up with,' Ron said, when Larry commented on it. 'Handprints can be copied and identification phrases can be tortured out of people. This gives the victim a chance to warn us and let us know he has been kidnapped or whatever, and gives us a chance to catch the substitute. It's too bad we didn't use it earlier.'

At Larry's request the Central File computer also assigned him a shielded, blocked office in City Hall to use. He went there, after leaving the Mayor, and spent the rest of the morning studying lists and checking the computer files. He noticed Rog Philips' annotations on the critical points list, and called him.

* * *

When Pete woke up they were traveling on the Northwest Trail. He checked time and position. There had not been any new changes to the trail so far, other than a few minor meteor holes. He was tempted to have the moon creeper step up the speed, but then he would be running faster than his crevasse detector could stop him. Better safe than dead. Instead he instructed the creeper to 'whistle up Copernicus Control.'

'Copernicus Control,' the man on duty answered.

'This is Pete Miller on my way to Mayer A to dig out Harvey Reinfield,' Pete said. 'In the supplies you send out, add a dozen or so floodlights with stands.'

'I gather you expect that it will take more than a week to dig him and the creeper out?'

Copernicus Control said.

'Yeah, it depends on the size of the slide, and how deep he is.'

'OK.' said Copernicus Control. 'Suppose we also send out an inch-worm rescue tube?'

'A what?' asked Pete.

'An inch-worm rescue tube. You've seen the digging machines used to make the tunnels here at Copernicus. They dig a pilot hole, clamp onto the sides of it, and pull the big cutting face up to the rock wall. When the big cutting face catches up to the pilot hole, the little cutter uses the big machine's mass to cut another pilot hole in the rock. It's called an inch-worm because it inch-worms its way through the rock, see?'

'Yeah,' said Pete.

'Well, this is a miniature version of the big digger. It drags a slick plastic tube behind it. On earth they use teflon. Here the rock is below -100° F so we have to use Slipon. Teflon begins to cold flow. It's used to supply air to trapped miners. Goes through rock like a bat out of you know where,' Copernicus Control said.

'But Harv is buried in loose rock,' said Pete.

'It has a special spiked head for that,' Copernicus Control explained. 'It'll dig all the faster.'

'OK, any other gadgets I haven't heard of?' asked Pete.

'Nope, call me when you get to Mayer A,' Copernicus Control said.

'How come you don't use a full-sized digging machine to get the entrances clear?' Pete asked.

'It would take too long to wrestle one up to an entrance,' came the answer. 'They are all down south clearing out a new lab.'

'Right. Thanks. Bye,' Pete said and signed off.

* * *

'How long is the period between observing satellites?' Pete asked the moon creeper a little while later.

'They overlap,' the moon creeper said.

'How come there was a delay yesterday in talking to Harv?' asked Pete.

'The slope of Mayer A's walls is such that it takes about eight minutes after the first satellite goes down until the next satellite rises from the horizon to see down inside it,' was the answer.

'Can we manage to be passing Harvey's carrier while neither satellite is watching?' Pete asked.

The creeper was silent for a moment while calculating arrival times and satellite transitions.

'Yes,' was the answer. 'if we speed up another tenth of a mile per hour, there are no slides on the trail near the crater, and if we have no trouble getting over the rim of the crater.'

'OK, arrange it so we are just passing Harv's carrier as we go out of sight of the satellite. I want to check inside without having anyone looking over my shoulder while I'm doing it,' Pete said. 'After we check it, we hustle over to the slide and make tut-tut noises with Harv until the digging equipment arrives.'

* * *

Traversing into a crater is a particularly ticklish operation. The inside edge of a crater is usually smooth, circular, and steep. The outside is usually somewhat rough and not so steep. if the height from the outside to the rim of a crater is considered one unit of distance, the depth from the rim to the bottom is about three units, and the diameter is about twelve units. The walls are over 45° in slope near the rim. Pete's moon creeper climbed the outer wall, started around the rim picking up speed, and then dropped inside. It spiraled down the steep face until it could stop without sliding.

'We are right on schedule,' the moon creeper reported to Pete. Pete was suited up ready to get Out. The moon creeper reported the satellite out of sight and stopped at Harvey's carrier almost simultaneously. Pete got out and jumped to the carrier. He unlatched the top, and activated the jacks. The top lifted and Pete spent a minute looking at the insides. After the initial surprise, he examined it with extreme care. He made certain there were no mechanisms attached to the lid which might leave evidence that it had been opened. There were none. He went back to the moon creeper, got a spare control unit, and exchanged it for Harvey's. He noted the information on the nameplate of the 'carrier,' and then closed the lid.

Pete was back inside the moon creeper with minutes to spare. The cabin was re-pressurized, and as Pete stripped off the vacuum suit he said, 'Get moving at high speed toward the slide. We've got some apparent time to pick up. As soon as I get this suit off, contact Harv. Can you handle a SP/RFU-16?'

'Yes, that's part of our back-ground instructions,' answered the moon creeper.

'Your auxiliary channel two is connected to one. That so-called carrier out there is a Solarian Patrol remote fighting unit. Whatever Harv was doing, he was really loaded for bear! That

'carrier' could have been square in the path of the slide, and not a rock touch it!' Pete said.

'Suit's off and stashed.'

'Here is Harvey,' the moon creeper announced.

'Hi, Harv. Quite a rockpile you've got there!'

'Hm-m-m! Stupid huh!' answered Harvey.

'Come off it, Harv. You know we didn't mean it when we kidded you. If you were so stupid, you wouldn't have survived to become an old-timer,' Pete answered.

'Go on...'

'What do you mean?'

'It's nice to hear something complimentary about yourself, even if it is left-handed,' answered Harv.

'So you're kind, brave, obedient, reverent, thoughtful, clean, honest, and true, and everyone byes you all to pieces. OK?' Pete said.

'Nuts!'

'Any idea where in the slide you are?' asked Pete.

'No.'

'Creeper, plot his radio direction. We'll have you pinpointed in a couple of minutes,' Pete said. The creeper ran along the edge of the slide for several minutes while Pete and Harv continued talking.

'Indications are that you are about as near to the center of the slide as you can get. You're about three hundred feet back from the nearest edge, and maybe about forty-five feet down, give or take a couple of feet in any direction. When the equipment gets here I'll be able to locate you closer with the portable spy-ray. Is the satellite up yet?' Pete said.

'Yes,' answered the creeper.

'Show them our view of the slide, and tell them to hurry it up,' Pete said.

'Copernicus Control wants to talk to you,' said the creeper.

'OK. Put them on,' Pete said.

'We were listening to you when you placed Harv's location in the slide. It looks like you just have to cut through to him and drag him out,' said Copernicus Control.

'Not quite. We lucked out in that he isn't at the bottom of the slide, but it still isn't quite that simple. I'll talk technique when I have some equipment to work with. Is the equipment on its way yet?' Pete asked.

'No, you've got another two hours before the entrance is cleared,' answered Copernicus Control.

'Then there's not much I can do except to survey the slide on foot, and try to figure out how we're going in after Harv,' Pete said.

'We'll call back when the entrance is open,' Copernicus Control said and signed off.

During the following hours Pete explored the slide and the area where the slide started. He saw nothing except a jumble of rock. Copernicus Control called to announce that the equipment was on its way. Pete estimated cutting times, equipment placement, talked to Harv and slept.

* * *

It took the work party a day of steady traveling to get to the blocked, western entrance. It was located within a thousand yards of the slot being cut around Copernicus. The work party had bypassed the northmost entrance for this one nearer the city. Tractor beam projectors on trailers were anchored in place. In a few minutes they were being used to move the debris out of the entrance. As soon as access was obtained, men with cutters were removing the battered metal of the airlock. Both the inner and outer doors had been damaged beyond any possible repairs. The impact of the secondary meteorites had been so violent that the surface sheets of metal were bent outward in the direction the rocks had come from, typical of hypersonic impact. Rocks were removed from inside the airlock. Then the inner doors and damaged facilities behind the airlock were removed. The airless tunnel was now open to the slot, where more debris and a cave-in was removed. Ahead was an airtight door which had been modified into a second airlock on the other side of the slot. This second airlock would now become the main airlock of this tunnel. There had been no real danger to Copernicus. Airtight doors were located about every thousand feet in the tunnel. They closed automatically at any drop of pressure.

Waiting in the tunnel beyond the damage was a moon-car, a wheeled vehicle built to step over obstacles. It looked like a tin can with two pairs of tandem wheels supporting each side. Each pair of wheels, one behind the other, was connected to a short beam. The beam was pivoted to the side of the vehicle so the entire wheel unit could rotate through a complete circle. At the moment each wheel unit was partially rotated so only four wheels of the eight were touching the ground, giving the impression of the mooncar being up on tiptoe.

Two men left the work crew and climbed the short ladder to the airlock in the rear of the vehicle. A few minutes later one of the men returned to the work crew. Inside the other had disconnected

the electronic brain controlling communications and had the driver at gun point. As soon as the way was clear, the mooncar with its trailers moved out and started on the Northwest Trail, out toward the crater Mayer. About 40 miles along the trail the mooncar stopped to 'check the trailers'. No one noticed the body dumped into a small crater and covered with rocks. The new driver continued on his way.

'What happened to your buddy?' the foreman asked the man who had remained behind.

'Oh, he's around somewhere,' the man said, shrugged, and nodded toward the cleared entrance to Copernicus. 'Do you mind if I go back in?'

'Sure. We're about done here. A transporter will be going into Copernicus in about 15 minutes. The next crew can take care of the other entrances.'

* * *

'The single, most critical point of attack in Copernicus is the travel tunnel system,' Rog Philips said. He and Larry stood at the entrance to a metal vault watching a group of men work on an enormous Bergenholm inertia-neutralizing generator. 'It represents a danger to the city even under normal circumstances. The travel tunnels lie underneath the whole city. They're surrounded by 100,000 cubic yards of plastic and metal, the tunnel liner, which is held inertialess. You can imagine what would happen if suddenly that material's original inertia were restored and it took off upward at 30 miles per second. The travel tunnels would slice through Copernicus like a razor-sharp cutter slicing a potato into french fries.'

'We've taken extensive precautions to minimize the danger. There are three Bergenholms producing the state of inertialessness. Each is capable of maintaining the whole system alone. Each uses city power but also has its own auxiliary power source. Each is in a different location, widely separated from the others. Each is installed in a double locked time vault, one of the keys to which is normally only in the possession of the Directors of Maintenance, Security, and the Mayor. Each vault faces a different direction, away from the city. Griffin's men have gained entry to each of the vaults for "routine maintenance". I've concentrated the efforts of my repair crew on this unit. It has been completely checked out. Mike,' Rog called the foreman of the crew over.

'Mike, will you tell Lt. McQueen what you found.'

'Yes,' Mike said. 'We found an explosive bolt installed in a critical assembly of the Bergenholm, and explosive mixed with the fuel of the auxiliary power supply. The explosive bolt could be exploded at any time by sending the proper signal over the power lines. The auxiliary power supply would have been destroyed within a few minutes any time it was used. We're ready to close the vault and start on the next one.'

'Go ahead,' Rog Philips said.

The inner vault door was closed. The first key locking it was removed. A minute later the green radiance of a wall shield covered the door. Then the outer doors were closed and the second key locking them removed.

'When the outer door is opened, the wall shield goes down for one minute,' Rog Philips explained.

'After that it goes down for one minute each hour. The wall shield is capable of withstanding any known portable weapon and we've changed locks so there's no chance of Griffin or any of his people getting in.

Larry looked around the large room completely surrounding the vault so it could be inspected from all sides except the bottom. He noticed television cameras on the walls but didn't comment on them; instead he asked, 'Sounds like you should check the power system for some way it could be disrupted?'

'Yes,' Rog answered, 'but where? The main generators? The distribution system? The sub-stations? It's a big system. We've isolated the main generators and I've men checking the distribution system but nothing's turned up yet. We've checked, and replaced the fuel supplies of all the standby power systems as soon as we found this one contaminated.'

Larry's belt buzzed. 'Yes?' he answered.

'This is Col. Hanovich. Would you come to Security? I think we've found some more aliens.'

'I'll be right there,' Larry answered.

* * *

A tall, shapely blonde woman stood in front of a mirror putting on eye makeup. A mile away a 3-dimensional image of her stood in front of Lt. Larry McQueen doing the same thing.

The name of the door of the room he was in had said Surveillance. The woman was inside on a low stage in the center of the room, with projectors and consoles around it. Three security officers sat at the consoles operating the controls, watching and listening.

'The Customs Officer was suspicious so he put a tracer on the ambulance,' Hanovich said. He was standing a little behind Larry and to one side. 'We followed them to the hospital and then to the hotel. They spent the night in the Consular Suite.'

The woman stepped back and turned her head from side to side, surveying her work critically. She started making slight changes.

'Who is she?' Larry asked.

'She's registered as Jan Vierliter, Tellus.'

Almost as if she had heard, the woman hesitated and smiled.

'The others?'

'Heinrich Geis of Procyon. Bernard Hermond, his bodyguard. And Dr. Karl Kalb, his personal physician.'

'What made the Customs Officer suspicious?'

'They were carrying these,' Hanovich said, holding out two small objects that looked like standard power cord plugs. 'We traded theirs for some dummy duplicates. The lab says that they are power line oscillators. They put a coded signal on the power line when connected to it.'

Larry looked at one for a moment. 'One of Rog Philips' men just told me about some explosive bolts installed on a travel tunnel Bergenholm. These might be the detonating device for them,' he commented. 'Anything else?'

'Nothing until just before I called you,' Hanovich said. 'I got a reply from Procyon. They have never heard of any of these people, and the ship that landed them used a fictitious registry.'

'What have they done since they got here?'

'Nothing,' Hanovich answered in a discouraged tone. 'Nothing except play cards, watch television and make small talk. They landed on emergency priority, came dashing in and then sat for a day doing nothing. Why?'

'Are you positive that that's all they've been doing? How can you tell?'

There was a long pause. Hanovich's face broadened out into a smile. Larry had time to realize that he had just put his foot into it. He could almost hear Hanovich say 'Gee, I thought you'd never ask' from his expression as he waited for the lecture on how clever Security was in general, and Hanovich in particular, to come. It did.

'We built the Consular Suite over a hundred years ago as a special surveillance system. Occupants of the suite can be watched as closely as is necessary, and can be confined, if desired. The walls of the suite are 10-foot-thick reinforced concrete backed by almost 100 feet of solid rock. The front door is the only entrance and the corridor to it is kept unsealed remotely. Otherwise it would be an even stronger barrier than the walls. The air, water, power and communications are isolated from the rest of Copernicus. We can watch and listen to everything that happens there with complete safety, regardless of what the occupants of the suite do or where in the suite they go.'

Hanovich gestured to one of the men behind a control panel. The man touched the panel in front of him and the image of the room and the woman in it slowly revolved. Her appearance was quite as spectacular when viewed from other points as from the front.

Beautiful, and she knows it, Larry thought. The perfection of a statue, with a personality to match. Aloud he asked, 'That's a pretty spectacular effect but are you certain they've done nothing?'

Hanovich was too distracted to hear. Larry had to repeat himself before he got an answer. It was from one of the other men in the room.

'They had an appointment to tour the crater by transporter at 1700,' he said. 'We canceled it.'

Now the view moved back, up at an angle and away from the woman. The image shrank until they were looking down on the whole suite, floating in midair above the stage. The people inside moved around like little living figurines in a dolls house with almost transparent walls. Larry could even see inside the closets, and through the bottom underneath the beds.

'All right,' Larry said, after considering the matter a few minutes, 'assume they're a diversion. Has anything happened that you might have covered instead of these people?'

'No,' Hanovich answered. 'They arrived at Customs in an airtight ambulance transporter. They didn't have any vacuum gear nor was there any along their trail back to the loading dock. Customs is at the entrance to Copernicus instead of at the loading dock because there's nowhere else out there for anyone to go ... oh ... THE WORK PARTY!'

Hanovich looked around the room for an instant to see who was there and who might have overheard and condemn his oversight. Then, realizing that it was too late for that, he hurried from the room. Larry followed him.

The men remaining in the room watched the suite in silence. Brooding like giant Gods over a little transparent cage containing human beings.

CHAPTER TEN

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE THERE'S ...

The alien entered Copernicus from the west entrance in a transporter with a group of the other members of the work party. With him he brought a bag of things that would never have cleared Customs, if there had been any at that entrance. The transporter stopped at the Dome, and he got out. His first stop was at a public telephone where he made a collect call to Tellus. When he had verified that he was connected, he attached a multi-frequency receiver over the mouthpiece and put up a sign reading, 'Do Not Disturb. Equipment Being Tested.'

From there he went to a public restroom. When he left the restroom he bore a striking resemblance to one of the men in Maintenance. Those seeing him might have mistaken him for the other man except for a wrongness: A clumsiness associated with a man coming from a larger planet moving in the lesser gravity of a smaller one. A clumsiness that marks newcomers and tourists. But then, no one notices tourists, and newcomers are ignored.

The alien went by travel tunnel to a remote area. He paused for a moment at a doorway in the travel tunnel marked Authorized Personnel Only. An entrance to part of the maintenance facilities. Bracing himself with the handle beside the door, he inserted an automatic lock pick in the lock, opened it and went inside. The television camera watching the door from the inside only caught a glimpse of him as he passed.

At the other end of the circuit, in a secure area of the Maintenance Building, the monitor was caught by surprise. 'Was that Perdue?' he asked his partner. 'I didn't think he was working this shift.'

'No, he's not on,' the second monitor answered. 'Where did you see him?'

The first monitor indicated the proper plate.

'Let's alert Security that we may have an intruder, and let them check it out. It might be a false alarm but let's make sure.'

'I'll connect a video recorder to that plate.'

'Good idea.'

The alien went through another door into the ventilation system. It was a large, metal-sheathed room with rotating screens covering one intake wall and a large hole in the floor near the opposite wall. He went down the hand grips into the hole, which was the entrance to a very slowly turning, elbow-shaped pipe. The air left the travel tunnel's inertialess field here and flowed into the concrete and reinforced steel room that surrounded the pipe. The edge of the inertialess field was indicated by a red, glowing marker field that stretched in a parabola from the mouth of the pipe back almost to where he was. The portion of the outside wall that he could see was pockmarked with holes caused by small particles not sifted out by the rotating screens, that escaped the parabolic-shaped field. Around the edge of the field he could see a faint cloud of material entrapped and waiting. It was expending its intrinsic energy against the flow of air moving past it.

The alien looked around and found an irregularity in the surface of the pipe. He hooked his feet in the hand grips and, using his fingernails, peeled up a large, metallic-colored plastic patch. It was the side of a bag containing welding equipment, magnets and many large, colored, plastic tubes of sand.

He attached the bag to his belt, opposite the other bag, and retraced his path back to the travel tunnel, past the television camera.

'By God! That isn't Perdue! Call Security! Tell them we need patrols to check out that ventilator area and to catch that guy. I'll try to keep him in sight with the tunnel cameras.'

As a result of Rog Philips' analysis of critical points, as much of the travel tunnel system as possible was being continually watched. Holes had been pierced in the ends of each tunnel for television cameras with light-field lenses. A camera focused on the alien as he left the maintenance area. Although it was thousands of yards away, the image the monitor saw was sharp, and filled the screen. It blurred only slightly as people passed between the camera and the object. The monitor followed him along the travel tunnel. Another camera picked him up as he came out of an intersection, having shifted from an east-west tunnel to a north-south one. He traveled north. The camera at that end of that tunnel picked him up and followed him right up to its end, where he took an object out of his bag and stuck it to the end wall, out of sight of the camera. Then he turned and hurried away.

'Where's that second patrol?' the second monitor bellowed. 'Tell them he's put something on the north-end wall of Tunnel A.'

'They just turned the corner at A-Zero. They'll be there in about two minutes.'

'They better move faster than ... My God!'

'What happened to the camera?' the first monitor asked as the plate showing the alien turned black. He zoomed up the camera from the other end of the tunnel, that he had been using to watch the patrol's progress. 'Smoke! That was a smoke bomb! Tell security to get IR goggles to the

patrol.'

Security didn't have to be told. They were literally watching over the monitor's shoulder through a video relay.

Col. Hanovich and Lt. McQueen were in Security's control center with one of the dispatchers. They had called the work party and discovered that two men fitting their requirements had joined the work party outside the entrance to Copernicus, and that at least one of the men was now inside Copernicus. They had men interviewing members of the work party. They missed the first intruder alert by the monitors because of a bar room fight involving a couple of members of the work party who were celebrating their pay day. When the intruder was definitely identified as such, the dispatcher handling the situation immediately switched the problem over to their dispatcher.

'That establishes his identity,' Hanovich said, when the smoke bomb went off.

'Yes,' Larry agreed. 'I doubt if Customs is in the habit of letting something like that in.'

'How far will the smoke spread?' Hanovich asked the dispatcher.

'To the nearest air vents.'

'What's in that area?'

In answer this time the dispatcher called up a map of the area on his auxiliary plate. It showed the system of travel tunnels. North-south tunnels were lettered A through J. East-west tunnels were numbered from 2 North through Zero, which went through the Dome, to 2 South. While Hanovich and McQueen examined the map, he sent in additional patrols with infrared goggles.

'There's nothing connected to that area of tunnel except a bunch of tourist-crater view apartments,' Hanovich commented. 'No main air, only one main power line, no water, no fuel supply, and it's too far from our communications or defenses.'

'Right,' Larry agreed. 'So it's got to be an attack on either the wall to the outside or the travel tunnel Bergenholm.'

The first patrol reported finding nothing in the air vent the alien had left. There was a long pause as the dispatcher looked inquiringly at Hanovich. Finally he asked, 'What do you want to do now?'

For a few moments it seemed to McQueen that Hanovich had gone into a trance. He stood there blankly, unmoving, scarcely breathing. Larry was about to make a suggestion when Hanovich woke up and took hold.

'Evacuate the travel tunnel system and close off the entrances so no one will get into them except us. Notify Judge Fox that we're firing up the big spy-ray with or without a warrant. Start organizing patrols. We'll need at least 10 two man teams. How many do we have down there and ...'

He gave the dispatcher a worried look. 'Does anyone down there have armor on?'

* * *

The smoke followed the air currents, expanding to fill the northeast corner of the travel tunnel system. The alien escaped the smoke by going up an exit shaft about 20 feet. Fresh air from the doorways above was drawn down into the shaft keeping it clear. Even if it hadn't been clear the alien's special goggles would have permitted him to see through the smoke.

He inspected the wall and found a scratch scribed in the slick coated surface. He fastened himself to the metal underneath the plastic-coated surface with magnets, and checked his wrist watch. Based on the time he selected a point on the line, started the torch, put on he welding helmet with its built-in respirator and began cutting a hole around the point in the wall. Hot vapor and small particles from the heated metal drifted off toward the ventilation exhausts. Within two minutes enough had accumulated in the nearest parabolic outlet field that new alarms were ringing. If the monitors were worried before, this made them panic.

As the alien cut out the circle, the light material bent back toward the edge of the travel tunnel's inertial field. He had just about finished cutting when a minute sliver of the edge of the circle passed outside and regained its original intrinsic velocity. It PULLED, jerking the entire disk out of the field almost instantly! A volcano of hot material erupted up out of the hole as it penetrated the concrete outer liner of the tunnel and the solid rock behind the liner, at a speed measured in miles per second!

The alien jerked back out of the way! The incandescent geyser slowly dissipated into the travel tunnel shaft. He turned off the torch and put it away. While waiting for the air to clear, he sorted out all the tubes of the same color in the bag.

When the air was relatively clear again, the alien had loaded a dispenser and began carefully releasing a small stream of finely divided sand from the tube into the hole. It disappeared into the outer wall of the travel tunnel but in a new direction. There was a big flash and a spray of material as each little particle of sand punched the hole deeper and deeper into the rock. When the material stopped erupting back out of the hole, he knew that he had penetrated into the area

around the Bergenholm vault, a hundred feet or so away. The alien hesitated a moment before proceeding to the final step in his attack. He didn't know how many of the three Bergenholms were operating but it was obvious by the continued existence of Copernicus that at least one of the power line-actuated, explosive charges had not gone off. If this was the one carrying the whole system, all of Copernicus would be instantly converted into an ebullient inferno. He braced himself to die and started releasing whole tubes of sand. The outer screen of the Bergenholm vault was penetrated by the fifth tube. It blinked out of existence, leaving the vault wall and the internal screen behind it accessible to attack. The internal screen was somewhat stronger than the outer but it was struck not only by the inert tubes but by intense jets of plasma generated by the tubes scraping the edge of the hole into the vault chamber and large chunks of the outer vault wall riven out by the impacts. The screen collapsed after another two tubes hit it. The alien continued releasing tubes until all of those of the same color were gone. It was with mixed emotions that he put the welding helmet away. Relief at still being alive; disappointment that his mission was not complete. He donned goggles, removed the magnets, drew his gun and went back down the shaft into the smoke of the tunnel below.

* * *

The impact of each tube was felt all over Copernicus. The travel tunnels had been vacated by everyone except Security. All of the entrances were closed. Anyone could have entered through an exit but the closed entrances and the sound of the attack on the vault warned residents that something unpleasant was going on inside. Col. Hanovich and Lt. McQueen had been watching the vault on the alternate plate when the shields collapsed. 'How?' Hanovich asked, incredulous, 'how is he doing it? What is he using?' 'Something three, maybe four months old, that was stored in the ventilator,' Larry answered. 'In that time it would have an inert velocity of about 100,000 feet per second. That would give a two-pound object about 10 million BTU's of energy. As much as four times that if it's been there six months. But that doesn't answer the real question. How do we get him?' 'I don't know,' Hanovich answered, and shrugged. 'Wait until he runs out of smoke and gives up?' 'Figure he'll come walking out with his hands up?' 'No. Not really - but what else can we do right now?' 'I don't know,' Larry smiled sadly and shook his head. 'I can't see any other way either.' 'The spy-ray team is certain that the block is moving,' the dispatcher interrupted. 'Alert the security patrols that ...' Hanovich started to say, then hesitated as the next series of events unfolded on the plate overlooking the monitor's cameras. The alien had proceeded westward in tunnel 2 North, and hidden in the smoke on the other side of the ventilator from the four men guarding the tunnel there. He waited for a clear shot at all four. Then he rayed them down, almost before they realized what was happening. Reaching up, the alien hooked a handle and used it as a pushing off place to launch himself and go flying down the tunnel past the injured and dying men. For an instant his free flight was many times faster than the transportation system of handles. Then he brushed a wall, went into a flat spin and caromed off the walls of the tunnel. He wound up against one of the pedestrian stops used by travelers when getting off the handles. After that one experience, he traveled more sedately, using the handles. 'He's wearing goggles,' Hanovich said accusingly as he watched the intruder flee down the tunnel. 'Why can he see when our people can't?' 'It's his smoke,' Larry answered. 'He can have a window in it wherever he wants. It's probably tailored to his goggles and not to our general purpose ones. He's also suicidal.' 'What do you mean?' 'He hasn't left the travel tunnel system for at least 15 minutes now. That means that when he comes out he'll have a high intrinsic velocity. When he came out of the smoke he wasn't using a respirator either. That means that when he comes out of the tunnels, the particles of material he breathed when he cut into the travel tunnel liner will tear his lungs out. He either doesn't know, or doesn't care what happens to himself, as long as he succeeds in destroying the travel tunnel Bergenholms. No casual effort is going to stop him. Let's reorganize the center and concentrate all our efforts on him.' 'How?' 'Assign two dispatchers to handle the security patrols only and have the other two dispatchers handle whatever special tasks we or anyone else can think up.' Hanovich agreed. It took a couple of seconds to arrange. 'Now, two tasks,' Larry continued. 'Bill, find out if the spy-ray team can correlate the intruder's visual location with the edge of his spy-ray block. And Ira, find out if Rog Philips

has one or two of the remaining Bergenholms working. If the western one is the only one, tell him to get the other one on line fast!

'Can you get this patrol here,' Hanovich said to another dispatcher, pointing to the map on his plate, 'to intercept over here in time?'

'I can try,' the dispatcher answered, and started issuing the appropriate directions.

'Are the medics on the way to our men yet?' Hanovich asked the last dispatcher. He received an affirmative reply. 'OK, try to bottle the intruder in the north-west corner.'

A few minutes later answers started coming back. The spy-ray team couldn't pinpoint the intruder because his block was odd-shaped, and bumped around in a random manner as he moved, but they could tell when he moved more than a few yards. Rog Philips answered that the intruder was now heading for the only Bergenholm in operation. Maintenance had been checking the third one and it would be at least 30 minutes before they could have it put back together. Larry interrupted Ira and emphasized that they hurry, otherwise they might not live long enough to get it together. He also asked Rog to keep in constant contact with the Security Control Center.

A patrol dressed in armor just missed the intruder at the intersection of tunnel H and 2 North, and gave chase. The intruder threw a live smoke grenade ahead of himself toward the end of the passageway, and used the fumes trailing from it for cover. When he got to the last intersection in the corner, he threw another grenade through it into tunnel J. Then he proceeded cautiously inside the smoke cloud into tunnel J and southward. It would take him a little time to get into position to destroy the second Bergenholm but now he felt he had all the time he needed.

'The spy-ray team say he's transferred into tunnel J,' the dispatcher reported.

'Any ideas on how we stop him?' Larry asked Hanovich.

'Have the patrols fire blindly into the smoke?'

'They might get lucky and hit him but more likely they'd just tear up the walls and overload the ventilation system with loose, high inert velocity crud. Rog, you better get into this discussion too,' Larry addressed the image on a visiphone.

'Fans to blow the smoke back down the tunnel?' a dispatcher suggested.

'Fans? In an inertialess field? You've got to be kidding,' another dispatcher said, mockingly.

'Electro-static Precipitation?'

'Rog, do we have a precipitator?' Larry asked.

'Yes. It weighs two tons and is embedded in concrete in Central Air.'

'Check with Moorpark Research for a high voltage power supply. Fifty to a hundred thousand volts and up.'

'No good! You would have to lay the line. All the intruder would have to do is fire at the power supply or lines. If he hits it, it's gone.'

'Get Dr. Kevin into the discussion anyway. He might have some ideas we can use.'

'Can we reverse the ventilation?'

'No. You'd loosen six-month-old dust and blow it out the entrances to the tunnels; besides, the artificial gravity is mechanically fixed to only operate in one direction,' Rog said.

'How about a physical barrier? A wall or something?'

'If he has smoke bombs, he's probably got other kinds of bombs too.'

'An explosion? In an inertial field? You've got to be kidding,' another dispatcher chimed in, getting back for the comment made about his suggestion to use fans.

'It's worth a try.'

They agreed, and assigned the dispatcher making the suggestion to take care of the details of building a portable blockade.

'How about stopping the smoke bombs he's set off by putting them in containers?'

'Can you find the smoke bombs in the smoke?'

'Sure, the air only goes one way. The monitors have them on their plates.'

'Great, get containers to the patrol in 2 North.'

'We'll have to try to catch him by surprise. All he has to do is drop a bomb on the other side of a ventilator from a camera and he'll be hidden in smoke again.'

'OK, get containers to all of the patrols.'

'I have some vacuum-tight shipping containers that will work perfectly,' Dr. Kelvin said. 'We're just off tunnel 2 North at H, so using ours will be faster than sending them out from Security.' He disappeared for a few moments to give instructions.

'How did the intruder destroy the first vault?' Rog Philips asked.

Larry explained his theory.

'Has the smoke cleared so someone can find out where he cut the hole? It'll give us an idea as to where he's going to cut the next one.'

Lt. McQueen turned the job over to a dispatcher with the admonition, 'Make damned sure the patrol

hunting for that hole understands that they've got to have clean air! Otherwise the dust will tear them apart when they come out! Armor will not protect them!'

'The spy-ray team says he's stopped. Probably the other side of the first ventilator in J,' a dispatcher reported.

'Gentlemen, we're running out of time,' Larry announced. 'Are there any more ideas?'

'The spy-ray team says he's turned around and headed back north toward 2 North.'

'Any indication yet of material accumulating in the exhaust vents?'

'I'll check ... negative,' a dispatcher answered.

'Notify the patrols directly any time you hear he moves.

Don't bother asking permission or anything. Anyone have any idea what made him move back?'

'He has at least three ventilator intakes to get past. Could that have anything to do with it?'

Rog Philips asked.

'There are no essential systems in the north end of J,' a dispatcher offered. 'They're mostly spread around tunnel Zero and the Dome.'

'Where have you got patrols?'

'At the ventilator west of J in 2 North. At both vents in J north of 1 North. At the intersections of J and 1 North. J and Zero, and around the corner at I and 1 North. There's also a six-man reserve group at I and Zero.'

'He's stopped.'

'Has he been using the handles for transportation?'

'Bill, ask the spy-ray team that question,' Larry directed a dispatcher.

'The patrol at I and 2 North vent has the containers.'

He advanced very slowly, probably with the smoke. He retreated on handles. He's still waiting,' the dispatcher reported for the spy-ray team.

'Find out the spy-ray team's best guess as to how far he is from the intersection. If it's more than a couple hundred feet, send the patrol in to can the smoke bomb in 2 North. Have the spy-ray team watch for any possible contact between the patrol and the intruder. If he moves farther north, tell them to leave the bombs and get out of the smoke.'

'If our men are in position, why can't we shut off the transportation handles to slow up the intruder?' Dr. Kelvin asked. 'To cut his mobility?'

'Can you just cut out his section, Rog?'

'No, I have to cut the whole J tunnel.'

'It's still a good idea,' Larry said. 'How soon can you get it done?'

'Five to 10 minutes.'

'Good. Get someone going on it, Rog. Any other ideas?'

'Commit some of the reserves to the vent in J between 1 North and Zero.'

'Good,' Larry said, and directed a dispatcher to take care of it.

'I have an idea,' Hanovich said, making his first contribution to the effort. 'It's a desperate last resort type of thing but I think it will work.' He frowned.

'Go on.'

'Evacuate the travel tunnels and ...' he paused, dramatically, 'turn off the artificial gravity!'

There was a silence so thick it could almost be cut. Dr. Kelvin was the first to break it with a single word, 'Sneaky!'

Rog Philips deliberately looked at his watch. 'Have the men in the south Bergenholm vault turn off their artificial gravity unit,' he said. 'The other generator is in the west Bergenholm vault. I'll meet you there, Col. Hanovich, with your key in 10 minutes.'

It took the men in the control center a moment to realize what had just happened. Two keys were needed to get into a vault, and Hanovich had one. Philips had deliberately invited Hanovich, whose consideration for his own hide was well known, into what might become the firing line. He had flung the gauntlet at Hanovich's feet in a challenge that he could neither ignore nor delegate. The whole room was silent as they looked at Hanovich. Would he venture into personal danger? To mask his smile, Larry turned and looked at Rog's image. He was almost certain that Rog had both his own and the Mayor's key already. Otherwise, how had he gotten into the south vault? Hanovich licked his lips. 'I'll be there,' he said, the stress apparent in his voice.

Larry turned and called 'Good luck' at Hanovich as he left. He got a strange, half-frightened smile back.

'Is the patrol into the first Bergenholm area yet?' Larry asked.

'Yes. The smoke bomb stopped. The chamber around the vault is still full of dust and debris. They're checking outside in tunnel A and 2 North for holes. They haven't found any yet.'

'Why tunnel 2 North?'

'They couldn't find anything in tunnel A.'

'It's got to be there. Look, the vault door faces north, away from us, right? We saw the left wall collapse, so the attack came from east of the vault, or tunnel A. Let's see. Copernicus is about 100 north longitude. The tangent of 100 is between .15 and .20, or about 20 feet up or down per 100 feet. Huh! Is the vault floor level with the travel tunnels?'

'I don't know.'

'Did they look in the entrance and exit shafts?'

They hadn't.

'The intruder's coming back on the handles,' a dispatcher announced.

'Warn everyone to get set. He's coming south in tunnel J, right?'

'Right.'

'How's the barrier coming?'

'They're making a damn project out of it. It'll be another 30 minutes before they even get started,' came the answer.

'I'll give the countdown to when he'll be back in his original position,' Larry heard a dispatcher warn the tunnel patrols. 'Five, four, three .. : ' Larry looked at a plate showing the monitor's view of the patrol at the edge of the smoke in tunnel J. 'Two, one ... He's stopped.' Then the dispatcher swore.

Larry only caught a flash of it as it went through the TV camera's field of view. A smoke bomb had been tied to a handle of the transportation system. It streaked along the travel tunnel past the patrol, trailing a dense cloud of smoke. The patrol was lost from sight.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

... A CRISIS

The equipment was brought out by a man Pete had never seen before, in a moon creeper unlike any other. It had eight wheels, four of which were raised in the 'air'. The driver, a tall, alert, wiry man with an air of authority, introduced himself as Steve Tolliver. As he got out and walked toward Pete, it was obvious that he had had little experience walking on the moon with a vacuum suit and 'moonshoes'. He seemed to catch on fast.

'What is it?' Pete asked, waving at the eight-wheeled vehicle.

'It's a relic. A centuries old Northrop Mooncar. It was built for the Apollo Program back before World war III. They found two of them when we got here. The other one is back in the new Smithsonian on Earth. This one was dug out and renovated for this run. I made sixty-five on the trail you checked. They have four wheels for high speed travel, eight wheels for heavy going, and on dust you can turn the wheels around a common center and paddle out. I don't understand why they aren't used instead of tracked crawlers.'

'Politics!' Pete commented. 'President Witherspoon has a nice work project going in North America, and he doesn't want to lose it. We have to renovate every creeper we get. Half of them aren't even airtight!'

Pete spent an hour surveying the inside of the slide around Harv with the shadow magnetometer. He located and marked Harv with careful accuracy using the spy-ray attachment, but there were other objects in the slide which Pete couldn't account for. Pete searched somewhat far afield knowing Tolliver was watching him, until he found one of the objects near the surface. He moved a couple of rocks away, and found a small piece of what looked like the side of an old sewer pipe! Having anticipated the problem, his body shielded what he was doing from Tolliver. A hand signal to the creeper caused it to flash analyze the object. Pete then dropped the 'piece of pipe' and half covered it with several other rocks he 'examined.'

A little later Pete explained to Tolliver and Harvey what he planned to do to extract Harvey. 'It will take too long to just cut through the slide, in spite of the power we have available. In addition, the average ground temperature is -100° F., it will take over twenty-four hours before the walls and floor of the slice would be cool enough to do the fine work of making an escape hole for Harv. We can cut a series of small holes faster than large slices, and the cooling time will be less. This will save time, since the necessary final clearances and cuts have to be made with the same accuracy in either case. So, first we cut a drain hole at the bottom of the slide under Harv's position. Then a small hole connecting to it about ten feet from the exit side of Harv's creeper. We enlarge the hole keeping about ten feet away. The original hole acts as a drain. When we get a little below Harv's level, we stop cutting and use a tractor beam mounted on a crevasse bridge to pull rock from Harv into the hole we cut. The creeper should only be exposed to about two thousand BTU per hour, which it should be able to take care of with ease. We melt and flush the rock down the drain. Once Harv's out we cut a ramp in one side of the hole, wait until it cools, and then pull the creeper out using a couple of winches.'

They were enlarging the drain hole when Pete took off a few minutes to go back to his creeper.

'What did the analyzer show?' he asked the creeper when he was inside.

'It was a cobalt alloy,' was the answer.

'Make that information a secret ... to S. P. officers only,' Pete said. 'Use your radiation probe on the lava we dump. I think we've found one of the old, pre-World War III, American missile sites. Possibly the main one that was built just before the blowup. I don't know who Love and Tolliver are working for, and I don't know why the secrecy, but we'll keep on acting as if this were only a rescue operation, and see what happens. Keep an eye on Tolliver. If he does anything too unusual, or potentially dangerous to me, let me know by clicking twice on the vacuum suit radio,' Pete said.

'Tolliver seems normal, just inexperienced.'

'That's what makes me wonder about him,' Pete said. 'I can't think of any reason Love would send a new recruit out to me, especially under the circumstances.'

* * *

'Warn the patrol at the next vent what's coming! Shoot that smoke bomb off the handle,' Larry said to one dispatcher, then turned to the other. 'Is he moving yet?'

'No.'

'Get that patrol out of the smoke back to 1 North.'

There was a short pause, then a dispatcher announced, 'He's advancing south.'

'Bring some containers down I to 1 North. We'll need them.'

Now Larry watched as the smoke bomb approached the next vent. The handle it was attached to was shot off and it veered off to one side, where it hit a passenger stop. The smoke bomb on the handle just behind it wasn't expected. One of the men snapped off a shot at it and missed. Again a patrol was engulfed.

'Warn the patrols! Several bombs on the handles!'

The dispatcher barely had time to pass the word. The patrol at 1 North shot down the second smoke bomb but missed the third. By the time they could see it, it was too late to shoot at it.

'Tell everyone, if they're in smoke, get out of it !'

The patrol at the next vent missed entirely. The patrol at J and Zero shot down the third smoke bomb. It went a little past the intersection before stopping. There was no smoke bomb behind it. One of the men in the patrol had the presence of mind to get to the bomb, scoop it up with his armored hand and fling it back down the tunnel it came from. The intersection started clearing of smoke almost immediately.

'How soon before that first patrol comes out of the smoke?' Larry asked.'

'What do you mean?'

'I told you to get them out of the smoke. When do we see them?'

'We won't,' the dispatcher said. 'I sent them up an exit shaft.'

For a moment Larry was surprised. He shook his head and sighed. 'I've been thinking in one dimension. Good man! Tell the patrol at J and Zero to knock down and throw back anything that comes out of that smoke. And get some reserves in there to back them up. And my personal compliments to the man who threw the smoke bomb back. Good job!'

'Countdown on the intruder approaching J and Zero,' another dispatcher announced. 'Five, four, three, two, he's stopped, short of the intersection.'

'They located the hole in tunnel exit A2N36.'

'Have the computer calculate where an equivalent hole from the western Bergenholm to tunnel J would be,' Larry directed.

The dispatcher was puzzled. 'How do I do that?' he asked.

'Call Central Files and ask the computer what information it needs to solve the problem,' Larry answered, then turned to a free dispatcher. 'Advance the patrol at J and 2 North through the intersection into tunnel J. Have them put the smoke bombs in containers as they advance.'

'They're already at the second vent. The smoke beyond that point is too dense for them to find the bomb.'

'Ah ...' Larry thought back. That was where the first bomb was shot off a handle. 'That bomb is about 30 ...' He mentally reviewed what he had seen. The flight of the bomb could have lasted anywhere from a half to two or three seconds. He hadn't specifically timed it. He had been more interested in the bomb behind it. Three seconds. ' ... to 300 feet up the tunnel.' The second bomb had been shot off a handle at the intersection of J and 1 North, so it should be on the other side of the intersection, Larry reasoned. 'There should be clean air behind this one. Have the patrol check ... No wait, you can check J and 1 North, with the camera at the west end of 1 North. Quiz the monitors.'

'The intruder is backing up, north in J, again.'

Larry returned to the face on the visiphone that replaced Rog Philips. 'Who are you?'

'Robert Niven.'

'OK, Niven. How much longer till the handles are stopped?'

'I don't know,' Niven said. 'I'll find out.' He turned away from the phone.

Everyone seemed busy except Dr. Kelvin. Larry noted the fact but couldn't think of anything for him to do, so they both waited and watched for awhile.

'He's stopped again, short of J and I North,' the dispatcher monitoring the spy-ray team announced.

'Someone just dumped a smoke bomb in that intersection,' another dispatcher reported.

'He probably just kicked the old one out where it'll spread smoke in the most directions. Get that patrol at the second vent in fast to get that next bomb,' Larry said.

'The intruder is moving south in J,' the dispatcher continued.

'Get a patrol in from I and I North to can the smoke bomb in the intersection of J and I North,' Larry instructed an available dispatcher. Then he asked the dispatcher struggling with the Central File computer, 'Have you got his destination yet?'

'The Central File computer says there's no exit that fits.'

'Dr. Kelvin. Help this man. His problem is vital,' Larry said.

The spy-ray team dispatcher started the countdown for when the intruder would arrive at J and Zero.

The patrols stood, armed and ready. Waiting for whatever might come out of the smoke-shrouded tunnel in front of them.

Again the intruder stopped short of the edge of the cloud. And again those waiting were surprised.

This time instead of a smoke bomb, a light grenade had been tied to a handle. The television camera darkened to protect itself from burning out. The helmet visors of the men in the patrol blackened in the actinic light, as their armor automatically protected their eyes.

The blinding light came up to the patrol, and stopped! The handles had been turned off.

Larry swore. 'Knock down that grenade and throw it back into the smoke,' he said.

The intruder had already moved into the intersection under cover of the light grenade and had set off another smoke bomb. No one could see him behind the light grenade, nor was anyone aware of the smoke until first the light grenade and then the patrol began fading into the spreading darkness.

'Get that patrol out of there,' Larry commanded but this time he had the feeling that he was in serious trouble. It wasn't aided by Dr. Kelvin's announcement that they had the intruder's destination.

'He's headed for a point about 20.5 feet up exit shaft JOS10. The projected hole will pass into it in about three minutes and take about 50 minutes to pass through it,' he said.

'What was the problem?'

'Remembering to update the projected hole to its present time orientation. Luna rotates, you know.'

Larry turned to a dispatcher. 'Is JOS10 in the smoke?'

'Yes. It is now.'

'Can you get a patrol to a doorway in that shaft without going through the travel tunnels?'

'It'll take awhile to go around through the regular passages to it. They're sort of sketchy back there.'

'Get them going then,' Larry said.

A few moments later a dispatcher switched his earphone to a loudspeaker and Larry heard the choking sound of a man dying in agony.

* * *

Ed Baker was a young, idealistic, dedicated, optimistic, polite and energetic security officer. He embodied all of those qualities the public feels a security officer should have. He was also new to the job, which is why he still retained some of them.

He was in the patrol facing the light grenade. Momentarily blinded, he had tried to shoot it down, to throw it back as he had the smoke bomb. When it began to fade, he supposed that it was burning out. Then he realized that everything was fading into a homogenous gray. The dispatcher told his patrol to withdraw, preferably up the nearest exit shaft. Baker hesitated. For him the nearest shaft upward was toward the light grenade. The other men seemed to interpret the order by pulling back to the next shaft. Baker felt that someone should go up the shaft near the grenade, just in case it was important. He moved over until he was underneath the shaft and then hesitated on the passenger stop. The light grenade was drifting near and it seemed that the smoke was thinner in its vicinity. He could see, he rationalized, and therefore he wasn't really in the smoke. If the grenade went out, he was in position to immediately go upward and out of the smoke. He waited on the passenger stop, trying to see the far side of the travel tunnel. The grenade slowly drifted nearer.

When the intruder attacked, Baker realized how poorly thought out his idea had been. The smoke was far thicker than it seemed. The intruder had seen him in his exposed position on the passenger stop and had gone past him without being seen. Then he had come up from the rear, put his arm around Baker's neck and jammed his gun against the armor's shield at the neck joint. Baker struggled. He had time to give one yell for help, which turned into a cry of agony as the beam cut through his armor ... and he died

The alien lost no time in stripping the armor from the dead security officer. Only a slight adjustment of the clasps and clamps was necessary for it to fit. Before putting on the last gauntlet, he looked at his wristwatch. He was on schedule. The couple of minutes required to get to his destination would make it time to start. He hoped this would be the last Bergenholm. The lightning-like response of security to his sabotage had not been anticipated. He was not sure he could make it to the third Bergenholm, even protected by his stolen armor. He hurried off through the smoke toward his next destination, the bags flapping outside his armor like strange wings.

* * *

Rog Philips stood a few feet away from the video camera overlooking the western Bergenholm vault, a large, gray, concrete block behind a green shield in the center of an even larger chamber. He had called McQueen on a pocket communicator to report his arrival. 'What's happening?' he asked. 'The intruder got another of our men,' Larry answered. 'He may attack that vault any moment now.' 'I'll go over to the vault door and be ready with the first key when Hanovich arrives. Is the generator in the south vault off yet?'

'Yes,' Larry answered. 'I've already evacuated the tunnels. The generator in your vault is the only one on. Get it, turn it off, wait 10 minutes and then turn it back on.'

'Right,' Rog agreed, and walked over to the door of the vault. He waited, key in hand for Hanovich, resisting the temptation to put the key in the outer door of the vault for fear of starting to open it prior to Hanovich's arrival with the second key.

Hanovich appeared in the entry way to the chamber and started across the intervening space. He was breathing hard from having run so far. Opposite the entry, from behind the vault, there came an explosion, the pure noise of matter impacting with meteoric effusion. The intruder had begun cutting through the wall into the chamber.

Hanovich started to run. It was the sloppy run of a man already near the limit of his endurance, trying for a little more.' Now a blast of dust and pieces of rock came from behind the vault, narrowly missing Hanovich. The intruder was through the chamber wall. There was a pause: the lull before the storm.

Hanovich was almost to the door of the vault when a deafening thunderclap made both men reel. It was followed by an intense wave of heat. The first tube of sand had come through the hole, expending most of its energy enlarging it.

Rog Philips was up first. He had the key in the door, turned it and was pulling on the first vault door when Hanovich got to him to help. They went inside. Hanovich fumbled for a moment in his pocket for the second key. He had not trusted himself to carry it in his hand for fear of dropping it. He had turned the key in the door when the second tube of sand hit the vault. The floor bounded under their feet, knocking them to their knees. Hanovich got up and leaned on the door. It opened and he went inside. Philips was on his heels. Inside Philips led the way, heading directly to the control panel for the artificial gravity generator. Hanovich trailed him, not being familiar with the inside of the vault.

The third container of sand struck the vault and the floor lurched underfoot in waves as though the vault were afloat instead of on solid rock. The motion of the floor caught Rog Philips off balance in the midst of a stride. He pitched forward, hitting his head against a switch handle protruding from a panel. He went down unconscious and bleeding from the blow.

Hanovich bent over Philips. He shouted his name and shook him. Phillips lay limp in his hands. For a moment Hanovich felt the full emotions of panic. He froze. He was alone. The full weight of responsibility for saving Copernicus was on his shoulders, and he didn't know how to do it. He shook Philips again and shouted his name. Nothing. Philips might have been dead for all the response he gave. Hanovich shuddered. The panic died away into an unreality of coldness. He was alone. There would be no help coming from Philips or any other source. Whatever he could do, he would have to do himself. Now. Where was the power switch to the artificial gravity?

Hanovich stood up. He looked for the first time at the control panel Philips had hit. Looked and saw. Three beautiful words looked back at him, all in capitals: ARTIFICIAL GRAVITY GENERATOR. The power switch was just underneath the sign.

As if in a dream Hanovich reached out and grabbed the handle of the switch. At the same moment the fourth tube struck. He held on as the floor again heaved under his feet. The alarm on the vault shield started screeching. The outer shield generator was overloaded, burning out.

Hanovich pulled down on the switch and with a soul-satisfying 'clunk' it opened. The control panel lit up with red lights like a Christmas tree. He stepped back to see if there might be something else he could do. He couldn't see anything else, so he stood there a moment waiting for the impact of the next tube. Then he tried to help Rog Philips.

* * *

Throwing the switch on the artificial gravity generator marked the end of the crisis. In the travel tunnel the alien, clamped to the wall with magnets, couldn't breath. The smoke and air around him was visibly falling to the bottom of the tunnel, drawn there by the force of natural gravity. Even in his lungs only the lower portion of his alveoli had contact with air. He tore the magnets loose and tried to go up the exit tube. Too late. Air pouring through the doorway had produced a local pressure drop. The falling pressure was detected and automatic equipment closed the door. He clamped his magnets to the wall and tried to cut through the door with his torch. He failed; and in failing first fell unconscious, and then died, hanging by the magnetic belt in front of the exit door.

The security patrol sent to exit JOS10 called in to report the exit door closed. They were told to wait.

The crew in the south vault reported their Bergenholm operating.

Hanovich found Philip's pocket communicator and answered its buzzing. He requested an ambulance and gave a quick report of what had happened.

Finally the Assistant Director of Maintenance, Robert Niven, reported with a wry smile that he had just been informed that the handles in tunnel J had been turned off. For a moment no one realized what he was talking about. When they did, the dispatchers in the control center greeted this announcement with laughter and a few cheers.

There would be hours of cleanup before the travel tunnels could again be open to the public, or anyone except authorized personnel. The entrances and exits would remain locked until they were individually opened. But this crisis was past and Copernicus still existed.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MISSION: SOLARIAN PATROL DESTRUCT

The security team interviewing members of the work party who had helped open the entrance had not located the second alien. They were still hunting for a prospector who had entered Copernicus shortly after the alien disappeared, suspecting that perhaps he had come in with him.

Larry made certain that the Customs station now set up at the west entrance was alert for the second alien. Then he considered his next move. His only remaining lead was the group in the Consular Suite. He needed more information about them and that facility.

He left the control center for the surveillance room. His black-and-silver space uniform, and the fact that he was already inside Security's restricted area, permitted his unimpeded passage. He rang the door alarm and was met by the man who had previously answered his question about the actions of the inhabitants in the suite.

Larry introduced himself. The man invited him inside.

'I'm Sgt. George Fields, Officer in Charge,' the man said. 'Col. Hanovich instructed us to give you our complete cooperation and service. How can we help you?'

'I have reason to expect that you're going to have trouble from the people you're watching. I came to help.'

'I can't think of any possible trouble we could have with them,' Sgt. Fields said, gesturing toward the figures in the suite. 'It would take a nuclear device for them to get out of that suite, and they don't have one. It even held Gray Roger until he was released.'

Lt. McQueen's ears perked up at the casual mention of an incident involving Gray Roger, one of the most dangerous villains of his or any other era. Although Gray Roger was dead, the file on him was still open. It was considered both inadequate and incomplete.

'Why was he released?'

'I don't know. One of the previous mayors did it.'

Larry made a mental note to inquire further about it from Hanovich or Mayor Love, and returned to his original subject. 'All right. I doubt if they'll try to get out right now. One of their group just tried to turn off the travel tunnels, and for all they know, he's still trying. It's safer in there than out here. Who's the leader of the group?'

'From what we've seen, the doctor, Kalb, is the leader. He's the one over there looking at his watch. He's been looking at it quite a lot recently.'

'The travel tunnel attack was tied to time. The next Bergenholm would have been attacked in about five minutes, so we have at least that amount of time, probably more, before they move. Meanwhile I'd like to ask you some questions. They may sound like criticism but I assure you that they're

pertinent.'

'Go on,' the Sergeant said.

'How do you expect to hold them in the suite?'

'What do you mean?'

'If one of them goes over and tries the door. Is it locked?' Larry asked.

'Yes, and the hallway up to it is closed with a plug of rock.'

'Then he goes to the phone and calls the manager?'

'No. We control the phone, and it's dead.'

'He can sue the hotel for being trapped in his suite.'

The Sergeant shrugged. 'Someone apologizes for his inconvenience.'

'What if someone calls in?'

'The operator tells them that no one answers.'

'And if someone visits?'

'The clerk phones the room and then tells them the same thing.'

'If they insist on trying the door?'

'There's a door just like theirs at the other end of the plug.'

'That might work for a short time, until someone insists on going inside.'

'Why should they?' the Sergeant asked, puzzled.

'This outfit operates their own illegally registered spacecraft out of New York Spaceport. They spot a crew in the safest spot in Copernicus outside of the Sanctuary during their try at destroying the city. Even though that spot's impregnability is not common knowledge. One would suspect that they have both extensive knowledge and resources. They can, and probably will, hire experts to play button button with you.'

'We could arrest them,' the Sergeant suggested.

'When we have to, we might, but what would you charge them with? Piracy? Treason? Attempted mass murder? All right, try and prove it. Using a false identity? They'd be out on bail before you could book them. Judge Fox isn't a weak, sob-sister type, but he goes by the book. Anyway, all of this is speculation about what could happen in a day or so. What happens if in the next five minutes Dr. Kalb cues Geis to have another heart attack and they try to phone for help?'

'The phone is dead.'

'Can you detect if he is faking? If he really dies, it's possible manslaughter.'

'We could station a patrol in the hall and send in our own doctor.'

'And they could use the doctor as a hostage to get out,' Larry answered. 'If the patrol goes in with him, you'll have to either explain the patrol or arrest them.'

'How about anesthetizing them?'

Larry smiled. This sounded like more than he had hoped for. 'How?'

'We can either release a gas stored in a container in their air system or we can separate out their oxygen during recycling. Since we run at one atmosphere, they would go unconscious when the oxygen level is reduced by 10 to 15 per cent. That would take about five minutes.'

'Isn't hypoxia a rather slow and dangerous thing to use? It doesn't keep them under long after you return the oxygen level to normal, and it could cause a heart attack. Why use it?'

'It's a backup in case the gas isn't effective,' the Sergeant said.

'What gas do you use?'

'VXN. It's colorless, odorless ...'

'An anesthetic and tranquilizer with hypnogenic aftereffects,' Larry interrupted. 'It's ideal, and new enough that they may never have run into it.'

Sgt. Fields smiled. 'We were discussing using it earlier but when you and Hanovich left we figured we'd best wait.'

On the stage in the center of the room the image of the doctor looked at his watch again.

'The last attack would have come about now,' Larry said, noting the action. 'When he doesn't feel the shocks, he'll wait a little while to be certain it isn't just going to be late, maybe five minutes, or maybe an hour. Eventually he'll be certain and they'll try and get out. When they do, anesthetize them. Make certain they're all down and out before you pull the hallway plug. How long does it take for the gas to decompose?'

'Ten minutes after the first contact with oxygen.'

'OK, that gives me between 15 minutes and an hour to get people together and get to the suite. Can you handle the details or should I go through the control center?'

'The control center. I can't authorize the use of personnel, I only request them for my own specific tasks.'

'Good. You can contact me through my belt communicator. Central Files have the sel call number.'

'You'll be waiting outside the suite?' Sgt. Fields asked.

'Right.'

'We can watch you there. If you want anything, just say it out loud. We'll hear you. When you get inside, if we want to talk to you we'll phone in. Oh, and we'll also unlock the door.'

'Good. Thanks. Where's your visiphone?'

Larry contacted Hanovich back at the control center. He agreed to the interrogation and promised to take care of the details.

Fifteen minutes later Larry met a five-man security patrol in the hallway outside the outer doorway to the Consular Suite. He quickly briefed them, explaining in detail what they were supposed to do and that they were expected to provide muscle in case anything went wrong, either due to the activities of the people in the suite or due to outside intervention. He also warned them that anything they saw or knew about Security's facilities in the suite was to remain secret. About a minute after he finished, a doctor, four nurses and an ambulance driver arrived from the hospital staff.

'We decided to bring an ambulance in case of trouble,' the doctor announced.

'I'm Lt. McQueen,' Larry said, and was introduced to Dr. Eichnor and the nurses. He recognized one of the nurses as having fallen into his arms when he was in the hospital. He smiled at her,

'Recovered from the V2?'

She nodded, blushed and smiled back at him.

'Good,' Larry said, and turned to the rest of the group.

'There are four people in the Consular Suite. They are suspected of being members of the group who attacked the travel tunnels,' he told them. 'The suite is behind an airtight door. In a few moments, when my communicator beeps, a gas bomb will go off in there. The gas is VXN. Ten to 12 minutes later we can go in and check the group. They should be in a semi-conscious state somewhere between hypnosis and euphoria. Keep silent. After the doctor checks them, I'll ask them questions and try to establish reasons for the recent attacks, and what they plan to do next.'

'That isn't ethical,' the doctor protested.

Lt. McQueen at first was a little surprised, then annoyed at the comment. 'About an hour ago a member of this group tried to destroy the travel tunnel system,' he answered the doctor. 'You, and all of the people of Copernicus, including women and children, would have died. Instead, three men gave their lives and two were injured stopping that man. There may be another attack planned. I have every reason to believe that these people know about it. I plan to go in there and question them, while they're under the influence of this mild hypnotic, about what is planned next. What new violence may be imposed on this city. Now, which is more ethical, to violate the privacy of these people, whom we have good reason to believe guilty of a murderous plot, or to allow innocent victims to die because we didn't know how to protect them?'

'Try and comfort a child dying from lack of air by telling him you couldn't protect him without due process of law. Explain to a mother, protecting her baby from fire by interposing her body that it wasn't ethical for you to do everything in your power to make her sacrifice unneeded. There are ethics and there are ethics. I suggest you, and any of the rest of you who have doubts, make a decision on which is more important right now. If necessary, I will replace you. Which is more important, their privacy or to save Copernicus and the people here?'

Larry waited, and watched the group until the doctor finally looked away. Larry's communicator beeped.

'You're right,' the doctor confessed.

'Thank you,' Larry answered 'That beep marked the beginning of the 10 minute period.' He consulted his watch. 'I suggest that we wait until 20:30 and then go in. As I was saying, I'll question them. If they know anything, we'll find out, otherwise we'll wait until they've recovered, and then release them.'

* * *

'Fleet Command has just issued General Order No. 6,' the Communications Officer announced.

'Change the helm to our final vector. The navigator will then destroy all navigation data!' Capt. Corander commanded. 'Switch on the public address system; I wish to speak to the crew.'

His orders were executed and in a few moments his voice was heard throughout the space cruiser.

'Gentlemen,' he called them. 'In a few short hours we will be joined in battle with a rapacious foe, a scourge to all intelligent life in our galaxy. We may not survive that conflict, so I am taking this opportunity to thank you for the devotion you have put forth in the past and the herculean efforts I know you will soon exert.'

'You have seen, as I have, the stereotypes of the wholesale slaughter these monsters deliberately wrought without provocation or consideration for any of the essentials of humanity. You know that the very fate of the loved ones we have left behind depends upon our victory, or if not that, our quick and silent death without revelation of their whereabouts, for to do less would doom them to

reprisal from these merciless creatures.

'However, remember that we are fighting not a race but a portion of a race. A ruling and controlling hierarchy whose depravity is so great that it dare not reveal the extent of its evil even to its own people. The populace of their empire, which they so grotesquely misnamed "Civilization", have little or no knowledge of the heinous crimes which have been committed, supposedly in their behalf. Consequently, we are striking at a limited objective, the upper echelon and military might of that hierarchy. Once we have destroyed the Solarian Patrol, and reduced their headquarters in the Hill on Tellus, we can safely leave neutralization of the remainder of their armed forces and the mobilization of the forces of justice and humanity to the "teachers" who have skillfully infiltrated their culture and now lead the people.

'We are committed to victory !' he concluded. 'And we shall have it, in the name of right and justice and those ideals we hold dear!'

The captain then returned to his normal duties, not yet realizing the extent of the outrageous deception being played on him and his fellow beings by those 'teachers' whom he trusted. He was to survive the battle and one day discover just how evil and corrupt those 'forces of justice and humanity' were' that the teachers lead.

* * *

'Ready?' Lt. Larry McQueen asked.

Everyone agreed. Larry opened the door and strode down the corridor. The security patrol followed him and the medical personnel brought up the rear. There was no indication that the space that was now a corridor had, a minute before, been filled with solid rock. Hydraulics had moved the plug silently in and out of its concealed storage place, the floor.

When he reached the second doorway, Larry hesitated a moment to be certain that the men in the patrol were ready. He knocked, hesitated for an answer and then opened the door. The waiting room was empty. Persons of prestige or importance usually armed it with a receptionist or secretary to separate out undesirables. Lesser personages merely used its voluminous closets as a cloakroom, Larry waited while a security man checked behind the doors. The closets were empty. They entered the main room of the suite and spread out. Three men swept through the kitchen, dining area and back into the main room. All empty. That left the bedrooms on both sides of the corridor at the far end of the main room.

Larry and the security men entered the corridor. Two men entered opposing bedrooms simultaneously as two men backed them up. Larry covered the rest of the corridor. Empty. They proceeded to the next opposing set of bedrooms. Also empty.

That left the main bedroom at the end of the corridor. They regrouped and went through the double doors. All four occupants of the suite were slumped about the bed at the far end of the room.

Larry waited as the patrol spread out in the room. They approached the bed somewhat as a group of men might approach a sleeping lion. After checking that the people were really unconscious, Larry searched each of them. He methodically turned each pocket inside out, after removing the contents, and checking their clothing for weapons. They had a minimum of identification, a large amount of money and almost nothing else. He examined each item and returned it. He beckoned the doctor over and indicated without speaking that the group was his to check. The doctor produced a biological telemetry set from his bag and started connecting electrodes and sensors to Geis, the man on the bed.

The visiphone chimed. Larry picked up the receiver and listened. The plate remained blank. Sgt. Field's voice asked, 'Shall we relay his telemetry signals out of the suite to the hospital's computer?'

Larry nodded.

'QX,' the Sergeant said, and hung up.

Larry hung up. He got a puzzled look from a couple of nurses in the doorway watching but didn't comment,

The doctor was listening to his set on an earpiece. He beckoned Larry over and handed him the earpiece. After Larry put it in his ear, the doctor pressed a button marked Repeat.

A computer's flat voice gave a series of biological measurements ending with '... the patient is currently unconscious or asleep. He is in poor physical condition and has had a myocardial infarction within the last 60 hours. Please install the curette.'

While Larry listened, the doctor finished putting a needle connected to a long thin plastic tube in an artery and was about to begin examination of the eyes with his ophthalmoscope. Larry returned the earpiece.

The examination was completed in a couple of minutes. The doctor turned to the woman. He put electrodes across the temples, on her chest, and then examined her eyes. He smiled 'wryly to himself, keeping his own counsel for the moment. After he finished, Larry gestured, and a security

officer and two nurses took her to another bedroom. The doctor examined the bodyguard and then the other doctor. Both were unconscious but otherwise in good health. They were removed to other bedrooms under guard. The doctor and Larry adjourned to the main room of the suite. Larry could see the hallway as they stood there.

'What did you find?' Larry asked.

'Well, first as you heard, the patient had a coronary. The computer finally pegged it at about 56 hours ago, based on supplementary information. No other problems of note.'

'That would be at least a day before he arrived here,' Larry commented for the benefit of the listeners in the surveillance room.

'Rest. Good food. Small amounts of exercise are about all we can do for him,' the doctor said.

'The woman has syphilis. No one else does.'

'How can you tell? Aren't lab tests required to determine that?'

'Not really. Lab tests confirm it. One of the symptoms is a dark area in the area across from the optic nerve of the eye. It's extremely reliable, almost infallible. She'll have to remain in quarantine here until cured. I'll check her for reaction to the usual specific, P-86.'

The ambulance driver had come out of the main bedroom and after a little hesitation gone into the bedroom containing Dr. Kalb. The man had left to go back to the ambulance while the group was waiting for the gas to decompose. Apparently he had followed them into the suite during the doctor's examination of the group. This was the first time Larry had seriously considered the man and for some reason he didn't like him. He realized that there was no conscious reason for it but he had followed his instincts before with success.

Larry frowned and the doctor mistook it for something else. 'I've wondered at the name too,' he said.

'Let's question the doctor first" Larry said. 'Let's go see how he's doing.'

They walked back into the bedroom. Larry hesitated in front of the door. Behind them the visiphone chimed. The doctor started to reach for the door but Larry stopped him. He put his hand on the door knob, turned it and pushed it open with a quick gesture. As the door opened he was in a crouch, his right hand by his holster.

There was the sharp report of a gun.

Inside the ambulance driver had quietly drawn a gun from under his whites and, while the security officer and nurse were intent on the unconscious man, had shot the doctor in the head. Larry saw the ambulance driver, smoking revolver in hand, turning toward the security officer, who was trying to draw his weapon.

With a reaction built in from hundreds of hours of practice, Lt Larry McQueen thought the gun into his hand.

To one practiced in the fast draw, this is enough to trigger the reflexes needed. The holster used by the Solarian Patrol finished functionally evolving hundreds of years previously. It was a hard piece of leather, rigidly attached to the wide belt So it would not bend, twist or flop when the gun was drawn; of hard leather so the gun to which it was fitted would not bind or stick. Across the top of the holster was a strap of leather connected to the side of the holster with a snap. The strap prevented the gun from falling out of the holster or being removed without the owner's knowledge. The end of the strap being curved out instead of flat against the side, indicated to those who knew the difference between an officer familiar with his weapon and one who was not. In the fast draw the heel of the hand comes up along the side of the holster, striking the curved arc of leather, releasing the snap and moving it out of the way. The fingers take hold of the butt of the gun, moving it clear of the holster and turning it ready for firing. As the gun points, the thumb snaps off the safety and the gun fires. The whole operation takes considerably less than 200 miliseconds from intent to execution. The sequence of movements is automatic, since there is no time to think out any one of them. More than one person has, under pressure, shot a hole in his foot because he didn't have the sequence under control. Others, thinking themselves able to draw like lightning, were dead because they tried to outdraw someone who had them covered. Such would probably have been the case with the security officer, except for Larry's intervention.

The first shot got the ambulance driver in the chest, the second in the head, as Larry's gun climbed slightly in reaction to the first shot. The driver's shot went wild, missing the security officer. Both the driver and Dr. Kalb were dead when the doctor examined them moments later.

'I didn't realize he had a gun until he fired it,' the security officer said.

Lt. Larry McQueen looked at the man for a long moment and then shook his head. 'You were here to guard him. You didn't. He's dead! That's your responsibility! My job is 'to get information. Instead, I saved you. The doctor and his murderer are dead and the fate of Copernicus may be in jeopardy. You'll have to bear a small part of that responsibility, too. Remember that! Now go try

to help guard someone else,' he said angrily and dismissed the man. When the security officer was gone Larry commented to the doctor, 'With our luck Kalb was the only one in the group who knew anything.' He was right. When questioned, the others revealed that they had been hired on Tellus to play the parts. Larry couldn't even get a good description of the second man in the vacuum suit, other than the woman's wistful comment, 'He was sort of tall ...' The second alien was the only remaining source of information left. With a quick call to the Security control centre, Larry made arrangements that the group be held in protective custody in the hospital until they could be returned to Tellus.

* * *

Lt Larry McQueen returned to the Security Division to question the team hunting the alien. They had no further success finding the missing prospector who had brought his rig into Copernicus. Having some second thoughts on the matter, Larry asked, 'What if you turn up this prospector and he hasn't seen the alien, where are you?'

'What do you mean?'
'The alien's not with the entrance team. Right?'
'True.'

'And if he isn't inside Copernicus?'
There was a moment of silence and then the man started looking for a list on his desk. 'The only traffic outbound was a mooncar, going out to Mayer A.'
'OK,' Larry said. 'Let's talk to Copernicus Control about it.'
Larry called Copernicus Control. A familiar face looked back out of the plate at him. 'Howdy, Mr. Lt. 'McQueen, sir,' it said. Its owner had been told who Larry was. 'Howdy, Mr. Holt,' Larry said. It was said in all seriousness. One of the first things an agent of the Service learns is to deal with people on their own terms and on their own level. Especially the little people who wield the power. When you want cooperation, make it easy to provide. Larry had made it a point to find out the controller's name when he had visited Copernicus Control. Someone else had clued in the controller.

'Sure, anything I can do for you?'
'I'm interested in the mooncar that's going out to Mayer A. Who's handling it?' Larry asked. 'I'm handling the surface traffic tonight. You sure pick a bunch of characters to ask about. Whatcha want to know about him?'

'What's he done?'
'Well, he showed up at 10-5-22 last shift and claimed his computer didn't work.'
'What's 10-5-22?'
'That's controller talk for the Northwest trail entrance. Them's the coordinates. Anyways, because his computer's out, he's got to manually drive, and when we check him, we got to locate him visually. That's a lotta trouble, but since this Tolliver fella is on a rescue trip out to Mayer A, Richey - that's the controller last shift - let's him go.

'Well, when I make the hourly check, I catch him zooming along at maybe 90 kilometers an hour. After a meteor storm like we had, that's like committing suicide, so I stopped him and told him to either get his robot working or come back in. Well, that don't sit right with him, so he tried to give me a little back talk. That don't work. So it wasn't 10 minutes before he has it working. A loose wire he said. The robot took over and we ain't had a bit of trouble since.'
'Is this something an experienced prospector would have done?'
'No, sir! There ain't many people who can say they went 90 kilometers an hour across old Luna, leastways not alive there ain't A creeper's top speed is only 15 kloms an hour, and across unchecked areas they slow down to five, because even with a crevasse detector Out on a 18 meter boom, they ain't able to stop in time to keep from fallin'. You couldn't pay me enough to travel over even a checked trail at 30.'

'Is Tolliver experienced?'
'Yeah. I looked him up. He's an ex-pro prospector that retired when he struck pay dirt.'
'Anyone else in the mooncar with him?'
'I'll ask the robot,' Holt said. There was a short pause. 'Nope.'
Larry turned to the head of the team hunting the alien. 'It sounds like the man we want. Why don't you send some one over to Copernicus Control to keep an eye via satellite on him?'

'Right.'
'And keep an eye out for your prospector here in Copernicus. We could be wrong.'

* * *

Pete Miller quit to wait for the walls of the hole to cool before putting the crevasse bridge across it.

'Why did you use the shadow magnetometer instead of a spy-ray?' Tolliver asked.
'Mostly habit I guess,' Pete answered. 'Spy-rays are all right if you want to look at something and you know where it is. I wanted to survey the whole area and a spy-ray just doesn't let you do that. You want to use it?'
'Yeah. I thought I'd go up and look over the area where the slide started.'
'OK. Mind if I tag along?' asked Pete.
'No,' Tolliver said.
'If you'll wait a couple of minutes, I'll get some tools,' Pete said.
When Pete, got inside the creeper he said, 'I'll try to stay in sight. Have the fighting unit cover us, even if you have to move it. Keep us in sight! Any questions?'
'Do you expect trouble?' asked the creeper.
'Yes, probably from Tolliver. I think he is a ringer,' Pete answered. Pete selected tools for the belt he put on. 'Some of these things can be used as weapons. I'll try not to turn my back on our friend out there. If anything happens to me, call the S. P. direct and tell them what we know and suspect. If I find evidence of the base, I'll make a comment about getting warm from the climb. If we find it, I'll say "I'm hot." Send me one click repeated at one-minute intervals whenever the satellite goes down, and three together when it comes up again. See you later.'
Pete and Tolliver went over the slide, and up toward the rim.
'What are the black pieces on the screen?' Tolliver asked, while he was examining the area.
'Probably iron ore,' Pete answered. 'From the size of the pieces, there may be a vein of it above us.' Pete didn't mention that unrefined ore would be much lighter in color. 'Let's go take a look.'
They continued climbing. The area from which the material in the slide came was obvious. The crystalline 'fairy castle' material ended abruptly at the edge. They stopped on a flat rock near the top. Tolliver examined the area and said, 'Is that a vein up there? You look.'
Pete took the instrument. 'I'm getting warm from the climb. That's a strange vein. Let's get a little closer.'
The object was buried about a foot below the surface. As they dug Pete heard a click from the creeper. 'It's a cable. Let's follow it.' Tolliver agreed, and they set off, Pete carefully bringing up the rear. It shortly became obvious that it was a very long cable.
'Creeper, use a spy-ray and follow this line,' Pete said.
'The cable goes around to the peak on the west side of the crater,' the creeper reported.
'What do you think?' Pete asked Tolliver.
'I think the hole has solidified enough for you to mount the crevasse bridge and get me out of here !' Harv broke in before Tolliver could answer.
'OK, be right down,' Tolliver answered.
The moon creeper was waiting for them as they came down the steep side. They rode on its radiation shield back to the slide.
Tolliver's attempt to kill Pete was performed very smoothly. They had lust bolted the tractor beam in place on the crevasse bridge over the red-glowing pit. Pete was cutting away part of the bridge rail when Tolliver 'bumped' against him. Pete went over the edge. The power line on the cutter held him, dangling over the pit.
'Pull me up!' Pete shouted.
Tolliver looked over the edge. 'Just a moment,' he said and disappeared.
Pete heard two clicks as he climbed the power cord.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

'A LENS MAN IS BORN'

On Tellus one of the men responsible for the attempts to destroy Copernicus looked around the room at his other accomplices. 'Well?' he asked, sarcastically. 'Do any of you wise asses have any further suggestions? Another sophisticated plan to eliminate Copernicus? Some other clever idea that won't work? Or are you ready to my way?'

'Relax, Mossby,' another man spoke. 'It's too late to do it your way. Walk in there with an atomic bomb and you'll be nailed by their Customs. If it goes off at that point, you'll have killed a couple Customs Officers and flattened some worthless real estate.'

'We can get past them. Kill them !' Mossby flared.

'You might have been able to do that last week but now they're ready and waiting.'

'We've got to do something,' another man said. 'As soon as our report gets to Issacson, we're all dead men anyway.'

'You're right, we have to do something,' the leader of the group said. 'I'm not going to appeal to your patriotism but your own personal self interest Copernicus must be destroyed before the

fleet attacks. The meteor proved that external force is out. Our previous setups have been negated. They were meant to look like accidents. We can no longer afford that luxury. The assassination is only six or seven hours off and the attack about 10 hours away. Too short a time for it to make any difference whether Copernicus is destroyed by accident or by deliberate attempt. The question remains: how do we do it?'

There was a long silence.

'Hasla had a good idea under these conditions,' one of the men said. 'It won't matter now, since a poison can't be any thing except deliberate, and it would be easy to get past the Custom's gate.'

'It would work if we had time,' another man said. 'But we don't have that time.'

'I left 10 cylinders of V2 gas back there.'

'The only thing that stuff is good for is to close airtight doors,' another commented sarcastically.

'It's obvious that no one single attack is going to put Copernicus out of business at this late date,' the leader said. 'We left behind enough equipment to make a whole series of different attacks. We can use it. But first we must get there. Hasla, schedule us on the next three flights as tourists. Make it two groups of four individuals, and then Mossby. Mossby, you will go alone on the last flight with your atomic bomb, and at worse cause a distraction. How many men will you require to get past Customs?'

'Four.'

'The last group will be five men. Contact Aspen for suitable gunmen,' the leader said. 'Now let's work out how many ways we can attack the critical facilities of Copernicus directly, what we will need to do it, what we will have available, set up a list of priorities and make out a time schedule for our operations.'

* * *

[LARRY MCQUEEN?] Larry heard his name as plainly as if someone had been standing beside him and had called it except he hadn't 'heard' it and there was no one around him. [Larry. Where on that godforsaken, airless ball of rock are you?]

For an instant Larry thought he had cracked up. He thought that he had recognized the voice, but ... a mental one? He finally responded, [Copernicus.]

[Good. I'll be right down. Meet you at the Solarian Patrol field office. Oh,] the voice continued, recognizing Larry's puzzlement. [This is Tom, Tom Ellik. I'm using my Lens. Tell you about it when I get there.]

Larry knew Tom from those days in the Triplanetary Patrol when he had been tapped by the Service to go through special training. Tom had been in the group just before Larry. He hadn't heard from him since they had been sent out on their first assignments. 'Lens' he had said. Samms' Lensmen. Fairchild had mentioned them when he had called in his report. Either he was going crazy, or WOW! Mental telepathy!

Half an hour later Larry was sitting on a park bench in front of the Solarian Patrol field office, when another figure in space black and silver, the uniform of the Solarian Patrol, showed up.

'Hey, Tom,' Larry stood up, and greeted him. Tom looked exactly the same as he had when Larry first saw him. The years hadn't touched him.

'Hi, Larry,' Tom greeted him, and the voice spoke in his mind again. [Let's go somewhere and have a cup of coffee.]

A little nervous, Larry started to speak. Tom cut him off with the thought, [It's all right. I can read your surface thoughts. Where do you want to go?]

Larry indicated a little sidewalk restaurant farther along the wall of the Dome. As they walked along Larry felt like one very large question mark. [What, where, why, since when and HOW?]

Tom Ellik laughed. [Larry, you sound just like me when I was first introduced to the Lens. They come from Arisia. Samms has adopted them as the identification of the new organization he's forming soon, because no one else can duplicate them. They're mental ... everything's: Telepathic device, translator, communicator, ID, all rolled into one. You name it and it'll probably do it.] He pulled back the sleeve of his blouse and there on his arm was a shining, metal bracelet with a pulsating lenticular something on it. The Lens of Arisia!

'Fantastic!' Larry said in awe. It made the flashiest piece of fire opal he had ever seen look like an ordinary brown pebble. Thousands of little specks of light flashed and moved around inside. [They must cost a fortune!]

[No, the Arisians give them to people who qualify. There are no strings, except one,] Tom's thought hesitated, and he smiled knowingly. [It's called the Lensman's load. It means that in the fullest sense you are responsible for all of your actions. You are the chosen representative of Civilization and all that means to the rest of the universe. Your ethics, your sense of justice,

are all above reproach. You are the embodiment of the highest possible integrity and reliability. That is the Lensman's load.]

Larry looked at Tom for a long while without comment, letting the words and what they meant soak in. Trying to understand them in his own terms and referents. Finally he asked, [All right, where do I go to get one?]

Tom smiled like a squirrel who had just been given a bag of walnuts. They sat down at the table and verbally ordered. A moment later, back on the Lens, Tom thought, barteringly, [You're in luck, Larry. I've just come back from Arisia and guess what they gave me to give you?]

[A hard time?]

[Nope. Two more guesses.]

[A bottle of Rhoot Bheer?] Larry thought, referring to a long standing joke between Tom and his friends.

[Nope. But you're warm. And for beer that's bad but for guessing that's good. One more guess.]

[A Lens of my very own to treasure always.]

[Right! Very right!]

They turned off the humor as fast as it started. For all of Tom's irrepressible personality, Larry could think of few other men he would prefer to have at his back in a time of crisis. Tom brought an insulated case out of his pocket and opened it. Inside was another bracelet ... and a Lens. This one was a dull, grayish-white, lifeless jewel that somehow gave one the impression that it was absorbing light and the things around it. Careful not to touch even the band, Tom pointed at it.

[In this state they are dangerous. If you touch a dark Lens that isn't yours, it will jolt you like a high tension wire never could. If you try to wear it, you'll be dead in seconds. Touch this one lightly and let's check if it's yours.]

The Lens jumped into life for a brief moment as Larry's finger tips brushed the surface of the band.

[Good,] Tom thought. [This is a solemn moment, Larry. From now on you pick up your load and go forth with it.]

Larry McQueen took out the Lens-carrying bracelet and snapped it around his wrist. The polychrome light flashed brightly, and suddenly he could see, hear and understand Tom better.

[Larry, the hardest, coldest cat I've ever met handed this to me and told me to deliver it immediately. He said you needed it. I commandeered the Bolivar itself to get it to you. It's waiting to take me back to Tellus, so I've got to run.

Keep in touch, and turn in your Golden Meteor. QX?]

[QX.]

Tom Ellik hurried away, leaving before his coffee came, leaving Larry infinitely better equipped to handle the situation with which he would soon be confronted but no better off in determining what it would be.

Larry sat there feeling a twinge that an agent of the Triplanetary Service often feels when another agent leaves his presence, a little alone and a little lost. A thought intruded. [Pardon me, Larry. Congratulations !] an old friend and Lensman on Mercury thought. [The same,] came from another one in a spaceship circling Saturn.

[Thank you,] Larry replied. [Is there any limit to the range of these Lenses?]

[Yes, but it's quite a way out,] came the answer. [Any ability you can conceive of and develop is yours. Good luck.]

[Now get your fanny out of there and tear hell out of them,] came the final message from Larry's previous Sector Chief. [What do you think this is, a party?] The fact that he was in a bawdy house on Alphacent gave his words a little extra meaning.

Larry went back to work.

* * *

The first group of four 'tourists' entered Copernicus with out incident. Their papers were in order. They came in with others who were honestly tourists. Everything went smoothly, or so it seemed.

When the second group hit Customs there was a problem. The long arm of coincidence had been twisted too far. One of the Customs officers acted. They temporarily closed the Customs gate, leaving the entrants sitting, waiting, and reported by visiphone to Hanovich.

'I don't like to think about who we might have passed,' he reported. 'We've got a 20 per cent increase in tourists and a 200 per cent increase in tourists without luggage.'

'How many is that?'

'Well, about an hour ago three went past. That's about a day's limit. I've seen all of them go by in one batch like that before but now we have six more of them out there and something smells.'

'All right, hold on for a couple minutes and I'll send someone right down,' Hanovich said. He called the Security control center and got Larry.

'I'll go out and check them,' Larry said. 'I just might be able to find out what's happening.' Larry looked at Hanovich for a moment. He sent out a probing thought toward him. Yes, Hanovich was tired. A reaction from the excitement of the afternoon. 'How tired are you?' Larry asked. Hanovich shrugged. 'Why?'

If Customs is right, if this is only the tag end of a group that entered Copernicus earlier, we are in trouble!' Larry answered. 'I'd like to get you, or some other really capable person, down here in the control center to handle things.' That was spreading the oil a little thick but Larry was certain now that if he needed help and asked for it, Hanovich would swing every bit of authority he had to do what Larry wanted done; That was worth having available.

'All right,' Hanovich said. 'I'll be right down.'

'I'll be at Customs,' Larry said, and left.

He caught one of the transporters that were being used to move people while the travel tunnels were out of service. While getting into it he noticed a peculiar smell. It seemed familiar but he couldn't immediately place it. He asked the driver about it.

'Ethyl,' the driver said, and wiggled his eyebrows. Seeing Larry's still puzzled look, he explained further. 'We use pure grain ethyl alcohol for fuel. Its fumes aren't poisonous like gasoline. But the air isn't the only thing that gets polluted around here.'

They made out to Customs without accident or incident.

Larry met the Customs officer in charge and had the subjects pointed out to him through a one-way window in the official's office. They looked like ordinary enough people. They decided to interrogate them in the office, one at a time. Larry leaned against a book rack at the side of the office, one hand on his holster.

There was no difficulty about the first man brought into the office. He was a little puzzled by the delay but quite cooperative. He was actually there on business, but for political reasons within his company he had described himself as a tourist. He was let out the side door. The next man was a different case. He took one look at Larry in his uniform and radiated hate. It came over so strong that one really didn't need a Lens to feel it.

Curious, Larry probed further with his Lens. He got nothing verbal, just [ANGER/HATE]. The Customs officer flipped through the man's passport. 'Would you sit down, Mr. Herdman?' he asked. The man didn't seem to hear. 'Mr. Herdman?'

Suddenly the man came flying at Larry. He was screaming, and waving his fists. In his mind Larry saw him waving a knife with the same kind of hate and hacking at someone with it. Larry came off the bookcase, dodged one wild swing and planted a solid, hard blow in the man's diaphragm. Herman doubled up and went down with a crash, trying to breathe. 'Handcuffs,' Larry ordered. 'This man's a psychotic. He tried to kill someone down on Tellus and may have succeeded.'

Moments later two officers hauled him away with his hands fastened behind him.

'If I were to tap 10 people at random on the shoulder, one would probably run like hell because of something he had done and the rest would probably have something on their conscience that would make them feel nervous,' Larry said. 'Ready for the next one?'

The next man radiated fear but it was a different kind of fear. It wasn't polite watchfulness or hostility. The man saw Larry and for an instant froze inwardly. Nothing appeared on the outside. He walked over to the chair offered and sat down. The Customs officer asked the usual questions.

'Name?' 'Is this address correct?' 'Place of birth?' All were from the passport. Then he picked up a clipboard with a bunch of telegrams on it. He flipped through until he came to what he pretended was the right one. He looked at it, looked up at the man and asked, 'Mr. Lee. What was your mother's maiden name?'

There was a long silence as they waited for the answer. Larry probed. [Confusion/Fear.]

The man licked his lips and said, 'King.'

When the Customs man glanced over at Larry, Larry sent the thought, [No. He's lying. It's word association. He knows me as McQueen. McQueen - King.]

'I'm sorry,' the Customs officer said. 'That isn't what we have recorded here. We're going to have to wait until this is cleared up.'

Rather than gently probing the barriers put up by fear, Larry sent a hard, solid thought at the man. [Who are you??]

The man jumped up and looked at Larry in terror. His hand went to his mouth. Larry jumped for him but even as he made the few steps across the room, the man was dying. Larry probed as hard as he could but it did no good. The man was terrified that he might reveal something. In a few more seconds he had faded away.

Larry knelt at the dead man's side where he had fallen, looking at him, puzzled by his reaction.

He hadn't done any thing that would give any rational person cause to commit suicide. Yet the man was dead. He had killed himself by knowingly swallowing poison. A fear of revealing something? A fear so great that the man would commit suicide? That was unusual. Yet, now there were three men who had done similar things.

The gunman in the Sanctuary.

The gunman in the Consular Suite.

And now this man.

Why - and how? Pick a dozen people. Have someone give them information that they considered essential to be kept secret. Now try to get it away from them and none of them would fear you. They'd be hostile. They'd fight you, even unto the death. But they wouldn't fear you so much that they'd commit suicide.

'Call the Security control center and ask them to send an ambulance for this man in about an hour,' Larry said. 'Is there somewhere we can put him until then? I don't want to scare the people out in the stockade by their seeing an ambulance drive up.'

The Customs officer called and made the necessary arrangements. They put the dead man in a closet in the office.

'Can you imagine what's going to happen?' the Customs officer said, watching Larry with a smile. 'The Security officer will come in here and ask where the body is and we'll open the closet door and out will fall a body. Just like a grade B murder mystery.'

Larry smiled politely. 'Yeah. I think we were a little, you should pardon the expression, too stiff with the last one,' he said. 'Do you think we can act sort of casual and bored?'

The next man in found them looking like they were about to go to sleep. 'Oh, ah. Would you sit over there Mr. ah,' the Customs officer scabbled through some papers, looking very disorganized and inefficient. 'Ah, Horst. Mr. Horst.'

Again Larry got no thoughts, just the strange, blocking aurora of fear when the man saw him. Larry deliberately yawned, trying to put the man at ease.

The Customs officer asked the usual questions and then instead of trying to trap the man, he asked, 'Have you been through here before? The name sounds familiar.'

[Panic.]

Larry Lensed the Customs officer to discontinue that line of questioning. This man has been through Customs here before.

'How many in your party?' Larry asked, taking over the questioning himself.

'One,' the man said. 'Myself.' [Falsehood.]

'What's the purpose of your visit?' the Customs officer asked

'Tourist.' [Aggressive! Danger!]

'Do you have any friends here in Copernicus?'

'No. I don't know anyone here.' [Falsehood. Fear.]

'Did you know Mr. Lee?' the Customs officer asked.

'What?' [FEAR!] The Customs officer had just made a mistake and this Horst caught it. He didn't like any of the implications of 'Did you know ...

'You know, the fellow who was just through here?' Larry said, trying to smooth things over. He got off the bookcase, ready to dive for Horst if necessary.

'No.' [Fear.] He seemed to accept the explanation. The emotions were coming through from Horst but no words. They seemed to be blocked out by what he felt.

'Mr. Horst, do you have anything to declare to Customs?' the officer asked.

'No. Nothing.'

'Mr. Horst,' Larry addressed him, 'I would like to level with you. We have been having some trouble here recently with people who are trying to destroy Copernicus. [FEAR.] They have attempted to attack from both the inside [Fear] and the outside. We need information on these people, whether they're going to try to attack our essential utilities such as power, [FEAR] air, [FEAR] or water [Fear]. Or whether they're going to attack instead one of our facilities, such as Copernicus Control, [FEAR!] Moorpark Research, [fear] Earthside Communications, [FEAR], the Port of Entry, [FEAR!] or our defences operated by Copernicus Control. [FEAR!]

'Why are you hesitating between each name?' [Suspicion] the man who called himself Horst asked.

'Are you using a lie detector on me?'

'No, why?' Larry asked.

[HE'S LYING! FEAR! SUICIDE!]

Larry went for the man but it was too late. He had a ring with a barbed edge that popped out. He made a fist, driving the barb deep into his palm and then tried to scratch Larry with it. Larry caught the dying man's hand.

Larry eased the dead man onto the floor. 'We're not doing so well,' he said. 'Would you put in a

call to Security's control center while I add this one to our collection?'

A moment later he saw Hanovich on the visiphone screen. 'We've got two of them so far,' he said without preamble. 'They both suicided but before they did I got the information that they plan to attack Copernicus Control. You better alert their security and send some additional people over there.'

'How many?'

'I don't know,' Larry said. 'Ten in armor? There's no way of telling how many of them got past us. You better also alert Maintenance about anyone messing with their essential systems. That was, ah, mentioned, too.'

'Are you finished out there?'

'No. We've got two more to go. Do you have any way we can trail someone who comes into Copernicus?'

'Not any more,' Hanovich answered. 'Not unless you can plant something on them. You've just about decimated our night shift by having me send them out to Copernicus Control.'

Larry looked at the clock. It was 23.30 GMT. 'When's the next ship due in?' he asked the Customs officer.

'The next one is due in about 30 minutes from now from Los Angeles.'

That made it 15.30 or 16.30 in Los Angeles, he didn't remember which. 'Hang on for a moment,' he said to Hanovich, and walked out of the office into the compound. There were two men waiting there. Not too unlike to look at but as different as day and night on the Lens. One was bothered by the delay, the other looked at Larry's uniform and went into a fear reaction. Larry asked their names and then went back into the office.

'We've got one more on tap,' he said. 'I can't follow him myself because this uniform would make me stand out like a neon sign. Tell you what, I'll recruit my own shadows. Just send me one man to start with. OK?'

'Where will he meet you? There?'

'No. Wait a minute. Can I talk to him?'

A few minutes later a young, dark-haired, handsome man's face appeared on the plate. 'Officer Bratmon, sir,' he introduced himself.

Larry probed for him on his Lens. 'Hello, Officer Bratmon. This is a new device the Patrol has just acquired,' he said, displaying his Lens, which had been covered by his blouse cuff. 'With it I can talk to you directly, mind to mind.' [Like this.]

The officer was a little startled but was game to go on. Larry added Hanovich to the link and explained what he wanted the officer to do.

Next Larry went out the side door of the office to the stop where a transporter waited. Its driver was the same man who had brought Larry out to Customs. Larry demonstrated his Lens and gained the man's cooperation. He was a little high, and not exactly from the fumes of the transporter.

Larry returned to the office and Lensed a call to Tom Ellik on Tellus. [Hey, Tom. Busy?]

[Not for you,] Tom answered. [What can I do?]

[You forgot to tell me, now that I'm a Lensman, who do I work through? Fairchild is down on Lensmen because he can't be one.]

[Let's see. You're still attached to the Service instead of the Patrol. Therefore, it's Operation Zwilnik, instead of Operation Boskone.]

[Huh?]

[Operation Zwilnik is a task force working on the traffic in drugs and that's the only business being currently handled by the Service. Operation Boskone is a similar group dealing with pirate activity and is only one of the operations we're handling in the Patrol. You are still Service, so you report to Knobos of Mars. He'll transfer any information you may have on pirate activity to whoever on the other side handles it. QX?]

[QX, I guess, but how do I contact him? I've never met him.]

[I have. I'll introduce you,] Lensman Ellik answered.

The first Martian Lensman came in. He came into Ellik's mind, not Larry's, and then transferred.

[Hello, Lensman McQueen. I was not aware you had received your Lens,] the voice said. It felt Martian but the words were perfect English in pronunciation and enunciation. The thoughts were hard and crystal in clearness.

Larry explained that he wanted the next space liner from Los Angeles to Copernicus checked out prior to takeoff. He explained what he had found to be a common characteristic of the alien saboteurs and how they reacted to his probing.

[We have noted a similar reaction in one or two cases previously,] Knobos commented; [It seems to be some kind of implanted compulsion. The method of implanting is unknown. I will see the Lensmen check that spaceship and the next dozen or so that leave Tellus, and stop at Copernicus.]

Henceforth work through myself, or Dr. DalNalten. I see you know DalNalten, therefore I will not bother introducing him to your mind. Is there anything else?]

[No.]

The Martian broke contact.

* * *

'QX,' Larry said to the Customs officer. 'Let's run those two out there through and let them go into Copernicus. Don't ask more questions than you usually do.'

The two men were processed in rapid sequence. The Customs officer asked his usual questions from the passport and then quit. The first man was visiting his children and had left things from a previous visit. The last man was the suspect, who said that he had just stopped over to look around and planned to leave the next day. Larry got the same fear reaction from him. The Customs officer probed no further and Larry just acted bored.

Once the suspect was out the door, Larry contacted the driver of the transporter. Through the driver's eyes he watched the suspect board. They drove off down the zigzag approach to the tube that led through the Rodebush-Bergenhalm field at this entrance.

Larry's thoughts flashed ahead to the Frontier Hotel, where Officer Bratmon had just arrived, and contacted him. He spread an image of the suspect's appearance in Bratmon's mind so he would recognize him. [Is there anyone around here that you know?] he asked in conclusion.

Bratmon mentally shrugged. [Practically everyone,] he answered.

[Where would you expect the subject to go?]

[Either to the hotel here or to the transporter rental place across the way.]

[Let's visit the rental place first.]

The officer walked into the rental agency and greeted the clerk on duty. Through the officer's eyes Larry saw the clerk and felt for his mind. He found it and after the officer explained that something unusual was going to happen to him, Larry greeted the man. After the initial surprise, the clerk agreed to cooperate. They attached a small transmitter to the next transporter in line and the officer left for the hotel.

There they met the head bellhop and Larry made contact with his mind. Larry now had the beginning of a web, which he hoped he could enlarge fast enough to hold not only the present suspect but to ensnare the other agents. Officer Bratmon went back out to his own personal transporter to wait.

A few minutes later the transporter arrived with the suspect. Larry watched him through the driver's eyes as he got out and went into the hotel. He watched through the bellhop's eyes as the man went to a public visiphone and called a number.

The bellhop mentally gave Larry the phone's number. Larry relayed the number to Hanovich, who called up the robot exchange and asked that the call be traced. It was to an apartment near Copernicus Control.

Larry walked out of Customs to the transporter stop and headed in for the Dome on the transporter waiting there. There was a high probability that his physical presence would be needed.

The suspect left the hotel and went to the transporter rental agency. He rented the bugged transporter and left. Larry asked Officer Bratmon to follow him. Then he checked with Hanovich and found him in a state of aggravation.

[What's happened?]

[There's been trouble at Copernicus Control.]

[What kind of trouble?]

[We don't know yet,] Hanovich answered. [They just called for an ambulance.]

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

OF MASKS AND MEN

Pete Miller climbed the power cord and grabbed onto the bar under the bottom edge of the bridge. The power cord came loose and the cutter fell into the pit. Tolliver again looked over the edge. He saw Pete holding onto the bridge. He picked up the spanner wrench used to tighten the tractor beam bolts, and swung it at Pete's hand. Pete shifted his hold at the last instant and grabbed for the wrench. He missed.

The second blow was aimed sideways at Pete's arms. Tolliver hoped to sweep him off the bridge. Pete let go and grabbed with both hands at the wrench. This time he got it, and then Tolliver's wrist. Pete yanked - Tolliver, off balance, grabbed for the railing. It burned through his glove. Tolliver toppled. Pete grabbed the edge of the bridge again. When he got on the bridge and looked back, there was no sign of Tolliver. Then he heard three clicks.

Pete hesitated for a couple of moments, and then he said, 'Report back to Copernicus that we just had an accident. Tell them that Pete Miller fell into the pit. Apparently dead. Tell them I'll give more details when I get inside.'

'What happened?' asked Harv.

'Shut up!' said Pete and went back to work.

* * *

It took Larry a moment to remember that he knew an operator at Copernicus Control: Holt. He Lensed a thought to Holt.

[Howdy, Mr. McQueen,] Holt answered, unperturbed. [Come on in.] Holt was sitting at his console, wearing an air mask.

[Why the mask?] Larry asked.

[The place is full of V2 gas. The alarms went off so we grabbed the masks. They're connected directly to our own air duct and we've got them at every console.]

[What happened?]

[I don't rightly know,] Holt answered. [A couple of maintenance men came in about half an hour ago and were poking around downstairs. Just a minute ago a bunch of security men in armor came in. One of the maintenance men came up the ramp, saw them and started shooting. Charlie got hit. Not bad. Then the alarms went off. One of the things they hauled in must have been a bottle of V2. Then the fire extinguisher system went off. Everybody's downstairs. There's been a lot of shooting down there. I put a mask on Charlie and called an ambulance.] As he finished he saw an officer come up the ramp.

'Did you get them?' Holt asked.

'Yeah,' the officer said. 'Both of them. Where's your visiphone? You've got this place so shielded I can't use my suit radio.'

Before Holt could answer, Larry interrupted with the thought that he wanted to contact the officer. Holt asked the man over and Larry made the transfer. The man was the sergeant in charge of the group. The sergeant went back down the ramp while Holt made his report for him to Security's control center.

Using the officer's eyes, Larry looked around. At the foot of the ramp a drum that had fallen off a hand cart immediately caught his eye. The label on the side of the drum said 'Special Ferrous Compound'. Ferrous - Iron - Generators. The association was that fast. They checked the hopper of the emergency power generator. Instead of little iron ingots, it was filled with green powder.

[Find out if there's any way to keep the generator from turning on. Fast! There may be a power failure at any moment, and when there is, the hopper will explode like a bomb.] Larry instructed the sergeant. Then he transferred to Holt.

Holt didn't know how to keep the generator from turning on when the power went off but he pointed out that there were two generators downstairs. [There's so much duplicate gear down there that we only have a repairman during the prime shift, that's 0800 to 1700.]

[Call him. Now!]

[I'll try to find his name,] Holt answered.

Larry turned to the sergeant. [Any luck?]

[There are a bunch of leads that go into an armored cable. The cable goes into the floor and disappears. I don't dare cut the leads because if I cut the wrong one first, the generator may start.]

[There's a second generator around here somewhere. Find it, and while we're trying to get some help, try to clean the powder out of the hoppers. Use a vacuum cleaner,] Larry instructed.

Holt was still looking for a name, so Larry Lensed Robert Niven of Maintenance. Niven was at home watching late television. Niven knew the maintenance man. Larry had no way of reaching him so Niven made the phone call.

Larry went back to the sergeant at Copernicus Control. [Call the control center and find out the location of the power substation that supplies Copernicus Control. Get some guards over there.]

'Lieutenant?' [There's also an apartment ...]

'Lieutenant?'

Larry suddenly realized that someone was talking to him. The driver of the transporter. 'What?' Larry asked.

'This is the hotel. Didn't you say you wanted to get off here?' the driver asked.

'No,' Larry answered. 'Would you mind driving me over to City Hall instead?'

The driver pulled out of line, around the transporter that had brought the first suspect into the Dome, waved, and called, 'I'm going on ahead.'

That reminded Larry and he Lensed Officer Bratmon. [What's happening?]

[He made a stop at an apartment complex, got something out of their mechanical room and loaded it into his transporter.] Officer Bratmon said. [He's headed toward the south end of town now. I can't figure out where yet.]

[Does he know you're following him?]

[I doubt it.]

[Got your armor on yet?]

[No,] the officer answered.

[Get it on, even if you have to park to do it. It isn't doing any good on the floor back there and we've already lost too many good officers.]

There was a slight glow of pride from the officer and he stopped to hurriedly carry out Larry's order.

Larry checked Niven. [Have you found your man yet?]

[Yes,] Niven answered. [I got him out of bed. He's calling Copernicus Control right now.]

[Good. Thank you.]

Larry went back to the sergeant at Copernicus Control. [Found out where the power substation is?]

[Yes,] the sergeant answered. [There are four men on their way over there right now. They also told me about the apartment. Two men are heading over...]

The visiphone rang and Holt answered. It was the repair man. Through Holt, Larry probed for the man but somehow he couldn't contact his mind. So Larry acted as a relay between Holt and the sergeant. Holt acted as the ears of the trio and asked questions while the sergeant acted as the eyes and hands. Between the three of them they found the proper leads and pulled them. Then suddenly the repairman came in directly. He described to the officer how to clear out the hoppers. The lights went out. [It's all right, Mr. McQueen. When you told me that the power was going off, I put everything in the permanent storage mode. When the power comes back on, we'll get back on the air in half a ... agh!] Holt disappeared from the linkage.

[What happened?] Larry asked.

[I don't know,] the sergeant answered.

'Lieutenant, we're here,' the driver announced.

[I'll be back in a minute. Can you find out?] Larry asked. [Yes, I think so.]

Larry broke contact. Holding three minds together, even for a few minutes, was now a tremendous strain. The day would come when it was only a minor effort but that would be after a lot of practice. Right now he felt as if he had gone through the spin cycle of an automatic washer. He asked the driver to wait for him and hurried into the City Hall as fast as he could go without running into a wall. [Hanovich?] he called ahead. [I need a suit of armor.]

Hanovich indicated where he could get the armor. 'While he did so, the sergeant at Copernicus Control called in and reported. There was a flurry of action as the control center dispatched ambulances and requested an emergency repair crew from Maintenance. Larry listened in through Hanovich.

Moments later one of the officers sent to the power substation reported in. They had arrived just as the agent there set off an explosive charge on the side of the main transformer for the Copernicus Control area. The man had been shot in the attempt to capture him. They needed an ambulance. Larry mentioned the possibility of suicide to Hanovich, who warned the officers.

'I'll go in with him,' one officer said. 'He isn't conscious right now, and by the time he is, we'll have him in new clothes and in the prison ward - if he survives.'

The control center asked the Maintenance dispatcher to send out another repair team to look at the power sub-station to see what they could do. The dispatcher did so and started calling in people from the day shift.

The officers who had been sent to the apartment that the suspect from Customs had phoned, reported that they found two people dead in the apartment, apparently the residents, and a hole cut through the floor into a ventilation duct. There was a cylinder, apparently of V2, being fed into the duct. They turned it off.

In the darkness that covered that portion of Copernicus when the substation went out, they had missed the person who had remained behind in the apartment.

Larry checked with Officer Bratmon at the south end of Copernicus.

[He's parked in front of a public visiphone booth, waiting,] Officer Bratmon answered. [He keeps looking at his wrist watch.]

Larry looked at his wristwatch. What had the Customs officer said? That spaceship should have been in about midnight. The attack had occurred about 00:15, which would have given the liner time to get in. Larry Lensed the Customs officer. [Did that liner ever get in?]

[No, I haven't seen it.]

[Thanks,] Larry replied, and Lensed Knobos.

[What happened to that spaceship?]

[I just received a report on it,] Knobos answered. [It was delayed while they removed an atomic device from it. There were five people involved. Four are prisoners, one is dead. The prisoners are hired guns, nothing else. In spite of your warning, our man wasn't fast enough to get the

leader of the group.]

[Is the spaceship still at LA Spaceport?] Larry asked.

[Yes.]

[Thanks. Goodbye.]

Now the pattern was clear. Two groups of agents had come in on previous flights. The attack was planned for after the last group came in with an atomic weapon. The first group was to take out Copernicus Control. The second was to do - what? He didn't know yet. Obviously they were waiting for orders to go ahead. Group three was to bring in the bomb, right through Customs, while Security struggled with the attack on Copernicus Control. So would they link up for the second attack? Possibly. Possibly not. Team one and two communicated via the man in the apartment. After the attack he left the apartment, probably to set up a new command post and wait until everyone checked in. That way he could evaluate how effective the attack was. Dependent on that, he would set up a second, and/or third attack. OK, he'll soon know that we got most of the third team, those involved in the attack on Copernicus Control. He knows by now we got part the second team as they came through Customs. And he'll soon know that we got the third team. That means he'll turn loose the second attack as soon as possible, whatever it is.

QX, as Tom says; we've got one man from the second team covered. We can work back to the new command post. Find out where the other members are located and cover them.

Larry glanced at his watch again. 00:20. He Lensed a call to Officer Bratmon to get the location of the public visiphone where the suspect was waiting, and Lensed the information to Hanovich so he could have the call traced when it came. Then, on a hunch, he went out to the transporter waiting outside City Hall and told the driver to head north.

While traveling north he thought back to his conversation with the second suspect, Horst. Horst had had the strongest reactions to both Copernicus Control and the defenses controlled by Copernicus Control. That would fit. The defense batteries had been moved out along the rim of the crater so they weren't covered by the Rodebush-Bergenholm field. That meant to the north and south of the city. Now would be a good time to examine what impact that had on their vulnerability to attack.

He Lensed Hanovich. [What's our status?]

[The first ambulance is at Copernicus Control. They're working on the personnel out there. We're waiting for the rest of the people to arrive,] Hanovich answered.

[I've got some questions about the defense batteries that Copernicus Control is supposed to handle. Who can help me?]

[I might be able to do that,] Hanovich answered. [What are the questions?]

[How are they controlled?] Larry asked.

[From Copernicus Control, over control lines to the batteries.]

[Are there any auxiliary control centers for the batteries?]

[Yes, but they're locked, sealed and shielded like a bank vault. Only the qualified crews can get in and then only if the secondary locks are unsealed by Copernicus Control.]

[Is there any way to foul up the control lines?]

[That's a good point,] Hanovich replied. [Normally, I'd say no. But with the new installations going in, there are some sections that haven't been "hardened" yet. One of the first things that Ted Johnstone insisted on was to build the new sites and lay lines out to them. But there are some sections of the control line that can't be buried under the specified 20 feet of reinforced concrete yet. Those areas are under guard and they've got an alarm system monitoring the line.]

[How many spots on the control line are being guarded?]

[Four.]

[Are the guards in armor?]

[No.]

[Get them in armor as fast as you can,] Larry ordered. [Alert them that trouble's coming. Where's the most critical point on the control line to the north?]

Hanovich called the points up on a plate at the control center and gave him the location.

[As long as you have them, why don't you give me all the locations?] Larry asked. Hanovich complied.

The robot central reported a call to the visiphone in the southern section of Copernicus. It came from a public visiphone in the Dome.

[How many other phone calls from that phone in the last five minutes?] Larry asked.

Hanovich inquired and was told that there had been only one call and it was to a location in northern Copernicus. The location was somewhere behind Larry.

[Can you catch the caller?] Larry asked.

[No. Not unless he waits for us.]

Larry switched over to Officer Bratmon.
[What happened?] Larry asked the officer.
[The phone rang. He answered. Listened a couple seconds and now he's leaving.]
[My current guess is that he's going to try to disrupt the control lines between Copernicus Control and the blaster batteries.] Larry said, and gave him the two locations in his vicinity.
[They're both down the passage to the south exit,] Officer Bratmon replied. [We'll see if you're right in a couple minutes.]
[Right. Check in with Hanovich,] Larry ordered. [He'll have to run our backup if we goof.]
Larry's driver picked up the passage to the north exit, a wide tunnel that ran over 10 miles out to the northern-most exit from Copernicus. Two miles along the tunnel they reached the tube that bridged the slot Dr. Kelvin had only finished cutting that afternoon. The driver stopped and Larry got out. The guard was there, behind Larry with a high-power rifle, almost as Larry's foot hit the ground.
'Freeze!' he commanded. 'Can I help you?'
'Yes,' Larry said. 'My name is McQueen. I'm here to help you. Check with Hanovich.'
'He's already contacted me,' the guard said. 'If you'll turn around slowly and lift your visor, I'd like to check.'
Larry did as he was ordered. The guard relaxed.
'Lt. McQueen. Glad to have you here,' he said. 'Sorry I seemed a little suspicious but...'
The rest of the guard's words were lost as the alarm on his communicator began to buzz. He keyed it and asked, 'What?'
Larry however Lensed a similar thought directly to Hanovich.
[Detectors in both the north and south passageways have indicated V2, and are closing airtight doors. Where are you?] Hanovich asked.
[At the tube across the slot,] Larry answered.
[The door is the one directly south of you.]
Larry looked down the tunnel. A long way down it he could see a man looking at him from behind a transporter, and behind him the airtight door was closing across the two lane roadway.
Larry dropped his visor and sent out the thought, [Bratmon?]
[He caught me by surprise,] the officer answered. He was standing in front of a similar door in the south passageway holding his communicator. [By the time I got up to the door, it was closed.]
[Open it, cut through it or do something,] Larry suggested. [I can't help, I'm busy.]
'Do you have a gas mask?' Larry asked the guard.
'No.'
'Then get out of here. You and the driver go up to the next door. If it starts to close, get on the other side of it, otherwise you'll get a lungful of V2. I'm going to try to capture the man down there. If I can't, and you've got time, try to kill him before you retreat,' Larry said, and smiled. 'QX?'
Larry turned and advanced on the man hiding behind the transporter. He heard the transporter that he'd arrived on leave.
The man fired at him when he was about four yards away.
* * *
The rock was removed from the door of the entombed creeper, and Harv had climbed a line out of the slide. Pete waved him toward his creeper.
Once inside Pete's moon creeper they removed their face plates. Pete came to the point immediately. 'What is going on around here?' he asked.
'Someone is apparently planning to invade us,' Harv answered.
'Who?' Pete asked.
'I don't know,' Harv said. 'I don't think Mayor Love knows either. Someone has been sending agents into Copernicus in an apparent attempt to either take over, or to destroy it!'
You don't have any idea then who they are, or where they come from?' Pete asked again, somewhat disappointed.
'No, remember the universe is a big place,' Harv answered. 'An invader who advertises where he came from before he takes a bite out of his victim is inviting a bite back.'
'How did you get involved?' Pete asked. 'You're just another prospector like me.'
'Yes, but for the last ten years my hobby has been looking for the pre-World War 3 moon base,' Harv said. 'Some people Earthside found new information about its location. The Galactic Patrol passed the information on to Mayor Love, who passed it on to me with the directions to find it, and secure it.'
'Galactic Patrol? What Galactic Patrol?'
'You're just full of questions, aren't you? Have you been listening to the Earthside News?' Harv

asked.

'No,' Pete shot back. 'Why?'

'About an hour ago there was an attempt on the Solarian Councillor's life,' Harv said. 'The Commissioner of Public Safety has ordered out the entire Solarian Patrol. It has been renamed the "Galactic Patrol", and is on emergency call-out drill. The Hill is closed, and the Grand Fleet is out waiting for someone to show up from deep space. It looks like the skirmishing between individuals is about to stop, and the curtain is going up on the real action.'

'OK, how fast can you get the Solar ... er ... Galactic Patrol here with weapons and armor?' Pete asked.

'I can't,' Harv answered seriously. 'They have their hands too full with the fleet operations to be bothered with a couple of prospectors and an obsolete moon base. Copernicus will probably be under attack shortly. If Copernicus is destroyed, and they control the moon base, they will be able to use it as an advance outpost for their next attack. It could be easily reduced right now, if the Galactic Patrol had the time, and knew where to look. It took me a week to find it even with all my information on the subject, and only Copernicus Control, and apparently the enemy, suspect that I've found it.'

'In other words, we're on our own to secure the moon base, and defend it with obsolete weapons and our own resources,' Pete said.

'And if we don't, they'll wipe us out because we know too much,' Harv added with a sad smile and a shrug.

Pete paused for a moment and then shrugged back. 'OK, that's the way it is,' he said. 'What do we do first?'

'Copernicus Control should be real busy right now with Galactic Patrol work, which means that after we report that I'm OK, we'll be ignored. Whoever substituted that character for Tolliver will expect him to report to them shortly, so we better start for the west peak pronto.'

'I'll install a remote-control unit on the mining blasters to cover our rear, and on your tender, so you can take it along,' Pete said. 'You go on ahead in my moon creeper, and I'll catch up with you in Tolliver's Mooncar. Where do you think the entrance to the moon base is?'

'On the other side,' Harv answered. 'At least that's where I plan to look for it.'

'OK,' Pete said. 'Creeper, take the fighting unit and the tenders, and follow Harv's orders. The blasters will be on auxiliary channels six and eight. Harv's tender will be on channel nine. See you, Harv.' Pete grabbed up an armload of control units and left.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FIRST LENS MAN - EVIL MONSTER?

A fight between an armed man and an armored man is not as unequal as it might at first appear. The armed man has mobility and offensive power. The armored man has less mobility and must use what he has to 'come to grips' with his opponent so he can use his superior weight. Larry McQueen had weapons and could have ended the fight in short order but he needed information desperately and was willing to assume a considerable risk in attempting to gain it.

The shot was fired at Larry's left leg. The impact of the heavy calibre bullet knocked it out from under him. Larry went down and his opponent jumped out from his cover behind the transporter and ran toward him.

This form of attack was expected. It was classic even in Roman times, although obviously the exact details were not. Attack the legs, the weakest point armored and the keystone to mobility.

Larry went into a side roll. His hands hit the ground in a line with his right foot. He rolled over on his right shoulder, across the back and slapped the ground, coming up on his left hand and leg. He rose into a T-defense to meet his opponent's attack.

Larry's opponent leaped through the air toward him and lashed out with the side of his foot to Larry's right knee, attempting to knock him down again. Larry retreated and turned his knees sideways to the direction of the kick.

As the man landed, Larry lashed out with his hand to hit a painful blow in the side just below the ribs. The man tried to retreat. Larry aimed a high diversionary blow at the man's face. The man blocked and Larry swiftly hooked his foot around the man's, kicking forward. Larry's opponent stumbled backward and somehow recovered before Larry could get around for a take down.

The flexibility of the suit of armor had slowed the coordination of his attack. Larry closed in on him. His opponent retreated backwards to consider his next attack. He fired two shots at Larry's legs and missed. The transporter prodded him in the back and he moved around it with Larry keeping close. He reached in the back of the transporter, fumbled a moment and came out with a solid bar of metal about half a meter long. He held it by one end so the other end was at eye level. He went into a Horse stance with the stick extended toward Larry. It was similar to the fencer's stance

except the knees weren't as bent.

Larry smiled, and copied the man. It seemed like a foolish thing for the man to do. His opponent lunged and the metal bar slid harmlessly off Larry's arm, missing the neck clamps of his helmet that the opponent had tried for. Larry flicked his armored glove at the man's hand, and missed. Both men went into an on-guard position. Larry dropped his hand in a v motion under the bar and tapped it lightly on either side to see if he could sucker his opponent into parrying it enough to move out of position. Close. He started a pattern of taps on the bar, one side and then the other. Got him used to moving back and forth to parry. Back and forth, a little wider now, and then ... Lunge !

Larry's attack was inside the bar but he aimed not for the man's chest or head but for over his shoulder. His opponent tried automatically to parry and succeed in bringing Larry's glove against the side of his head with a bone crushing thud.

The man went down. Larry probed. He was still half-conscious and trying to suicide. Larry reached down and put his fingers on both sides of the man's nose and pulled down. Out popped two nose filters and a lot of blood. The man struggled for a moment, took a breath and then lay still. Triumphant, Larry stood up. He had his man, alive. He looked around. The doorway beyond the tube had closed while they were fighting. The whole area must be full of V2. He heard a faint noise from the back of the transporter and found a cylinder of liquid there: the V2. He closed the valve in the end.

[Got a gift for you, Hanovich,] he Lensed the Director of Security. [How about opening this can so I can bring it out to you?]

[You're going to be stuck in that can for awhile until the air clears,] Hanovich answered.

[Meanwhile, we've got other problems.] He explained that they couldn't clear the air in Copernicus Control of V2, even though the air coming in was pure. Maintenance was bringing in a portable detector to try to find the source. The power substation would be out until the transformers could be replaced but Copernicus Control would be on the air as soon as they could get the next shift inside. The emergency generators were now on-line.

[How's Bratmon doing?] Larry asked.

[He and two other officers are cutting their way in with a semi-portable,] Hanovich answered.

[Did you get the guy who made the visiphone calls?]

[No. But he only made two calls,] Hanovich answered. [So he's the only one unaccounted for.]

Larry McQueen cooled his heels for half an hour until the level of V2 dropped low enough that the airtight doors opened. New guards were waiting outside when they did. He and the transporter driver who had brought him to the tube returned to the hospital prison ward with their prisoner.

* * *

It was a little after 2 o'clock in the morning according to Lensman Larry McQueen's wrist watch as he watched a doctor check the man strapped to the bed.

'When did you make the injections?' the doctor asked.

'About five minutes after he was exposed,' Larry said. 'I used the vials stored in my armor.'

'Then he should be coming out of it shortly,' the doctor said. As the man slowly recovered from the effects of the gas, Larry sat beside the bed and probed. He spoke directly to the man's mind, trying to get images or remembrances of his background through word association.

What he got was a series of images and isolated events associated with pain or unconsciousness such as when a ball had hit him in the side of the head; being thrown to a mat too hard; a spanking by his mother. There was also a Pain-Fear-Love sequence. The events changed and faded into each other like watching a merry-go-round through a kaleidoscope. Many events didn't make sense.

The man was hot and he tried to wipe his forehead. A word from Larry brought a cold cloth and Larry wiped his brow.

An ego, a personal viewpoint, began to emerge in the events. Very cautiously Larry tried projecting the emotion of fear. The reaction he got came through forcefully and out of proportion to the stimulus.

He was a child, drifting, exploring, excited, in a field of weeds on the side of a hill. There were friends around him. Other children he enjoyed. They were excited, having fun. The sun was bright and warm and they were happy.

A black spot appeared in the blue of the sky. He stopped to watch it.

It grew larger. He seemed to be the only one who saw it.

It grew larger. It was the face of a man.

It grew larger. And clearer as the lines separated.

It grew larger. The horrid, leering face of a man.

It grew larger. The lines of the face broke apart and became spaceships, black, evil, foreboding.

It grew larger. Filling the sky above the children, darkening it. They stopped and looked up in sudden dread and anticipation.

'D I E !' a voice said, and there flooded down from the spaceships beams of red destruction and fire. They touched the field and, where they touched, the field turned black. They touched his friends and they cried out in pain and shriveled before his eyes. He ran, and a beam followed him and touched him and he screamed in agony.

And screamed.

And screamed.

* * *

The leering face had been that of a man Larry knew. The face of Virgil Samms, the First Lensman, and Head of the Solarian Council. Larry was a little shaken by the raw hate shown coming from Samms. He had expected a reaction to his suggestion but nothing like this. He had expected some resistance. It was like having tried to cool some water and having instead produced a crystal in a super-cooled solution. He tried to undo what he had started and in a few minutes a child no longer writhed in screaming agony in the mind of the still, silent form on the bed.

Larry tried to be infinitely more careful and patient as he projected the next emotion.

[h a t e]

The mind of the man seized it and it became

HATE!!

Blackness.

Drawing back, the blackness was an up-close view of

The space black-with-silver piping of a uniform of

A Solarian Patrolman.

The face blurred, and now with distance

sharpened into that of the evil features of

Virgil Samms, Solarian Councilor.

Around him figures.

Men in uniform, grinning, evil.

Women in ballroom dresses, smiling, vacuous

puppets.

An opulent ballroom, music, dancing.

At the edge of the crowd, a figure standing Out, different.

He moves toward the center slowly, purposefully.

They do not see him, they do not hear him.

His silhouette ringed in light.

He nears the evil one.

Draws and fires.

FLAME!

Burned and blackened,

The evil one falls to the ground.

The opulent walls fade, the female figures gone,

A group of uniformed men of the Solarian Patrol

Standing on a plane with mountains around, and one In the background, shorter than the rest, truncated, Sheathed in untarnished metal

The Hill.

The uniformed figures scurry about

looking for a place to hide,

looking fearfully about.

In the sky a little dot grows

and grows and grows,

larger and larger.

The spot separates into many black dots.

Spaceships closing in. Beams flash down.

The evil patrolmen run and are burned to black figures.

Right triumphs.

* * *

The man was awake. His eyes were open and he was looking at Larry with his uniform of space black-and-silver in horror.

[FEAR! SUICIDE!]

His heart stopped.

The doctor was unable to keep it going. The patient was mentally committing suicide!

* * *

After it was over Larry Lensed Knobos.

[We are in the midst of an emergency,] Knobos replied. [Please be brief.]

[I have information. I'm not certain of its significance,] Larry stated, and then reviewed the major points of the two sequences he had received from the man he probed.

[Both sequences are significant,] Knobos told him. [A few minutes ago there was an attempt to assassinate Virgil Samms. It failed. Please wait a moment.] Knobos contacted Samms and the Commissioner of Public Safety, Roderick Kinnison. In a few short sentences he explained the circumstances of Larry's information.

The three came into Larry's mind and Larry saw unfolded before him the minds and personalities of two of the most fantastic individuals he was ever to know. Two men who had just created a force they had been molding all their lives. A force which would become the backbone of civilization: the Galactic Patrol. They were good men. Tremendous men. Hard. Clean. Honest. And enormously capable. Without deceit, pettiness or self importance. The difference between them and the caricatures in the sequence he was to present was so absurd and farcical that Larry laughed. When they had reviewed the sequences, Kinnison remarked, [I can appreciate your laughter. The intensity of this man's belief almost made me doubt Virgil.]

[The sequences are also important of themselves,] Samms said [They are too elaborate, too stylized for the mind that held them to create them on its own. Somehow they were implanted in exact detail by an expert.]

[Red, your suspicions and Bergenholm's deductions are vindicated. It appears that your Grand Fleet emergency callout was fully justified. And it looks like your ensigns aren't going to have long gray whiskers before they see action. They may not even be able to finish shaving.]

[Lensman McQueen,] Samms was formal, [Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention so quickly.] Then informal, [And Larry, drop in on me when this assignment is over. I'd like to meet you again.]

Samms and Kinnison went back to work. Knobos remained only long enough to comment, [We will expect you Friday.]

Larry Lensed Hanovich. [I need a status report.]

[Did you hear about the assassination attempt on Samms yet?] Hanovich asked excitedly.

[He didn't say much about it,] Larry answered dryly.

Hanovich did a mental double take as the implications of what Larry said registered. His attitude began to change from one of equal status to deference.

[Status report?] Larry asked, again.

[Copernicus Control is in full operation on emergency power. The operators are in vacuum suits. The substation will be out indefinitely. The V2 was coming from the fire extinguisher system. Someone replaced a bottle of CO2, with V2. Thanks to Holt, they were back on the air in half an hour.]

[Officer Bratmon's suspect suicide before they could get to him. He cut the control cable in two places. Estimates to repair run two to three days. We have armed, armored guards on the northern cables. No word on the prisoners]

[Both dead,] Larry reported. [Why so long to repair the cable?]

[Each is made up of 600 twisted, shielded pairs of conductors. It takes anywhere up to five minutes to strip, identify and splice a single one, and since the far end is inside the locked, auxilliary control room, they're still trying to find a way to identify wires in that end of the cable.]

[Tell Copernicus Control to get a crew ready to take over the battery from the control room when they get inside,] Larry commanded. [Did you hear about the Grand Fleet call out?]

[Yes,] Hanovich answered. [We're on full alert status. I've had all of the entrances closed and everything is fully manned. Everything's quiet.]

[All right,] Larry commented. [I'm late in mentioning this but have the guards watch for someone who comes out to find out how successful the attacks were. We caught both attackers, so their controller has no way of telling what happened. He'll probably have to do it in person.]

[I'll see to it immediately,] Hanovich answered.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE LAST SPY

Lensman Larry McQueen was on his way to the Security control center when his communicator beeped. It was Hanovich. Once Larry knew, he bypassed the device and Lensed Hanovich directly.

[I understand these people tend to suicide?] Hanovich asked cautiously.

[Yes. The sight of a Patrol uniform seems to panic them.]

[How would you like to scare another one to death?]

[Where is he?] Larry asked.

[She should show up at the north passageway tube any minute now,] Hanovich answered. [We checked out your inquiry about people asking questions. A woman posing as a correspondent for Universal Telenews showed up about half an hour ago at the south passageway asking questions. She's just about had time to get to the north passageway. Her credentials don't check. The guards have been alerted and will try to hold her until you get there.]

[How many guards have you got there?] Larry asked after giving orders to the transporter driver.

[Two,] Hanovich answered. [You met them.]

[I wasn't paying that much attention at the time. Weapons?]

[They have a semi-portable, a Standish and sidearms.]

[What do you need me out there for? Just to bring her in?] Larry asked, puzzled.

[Backup, and as a witness in case she suicides,] Hanovich answered candidly. Larry thought it a little uncharacteristic of him but assumed it was part of a changing attitude. [Besides, someone has to bring her in and question her.]

On the way out to the tube Larry considered his own reluctance to bring the woman in. He discovered with surprise that he was reluctant to deal with any of these people. Why? In spite of their good intentions, they were wrong in what they were trying to do and he had to stop them. Why? He knew why. The victims. The innocent. The good and kind. The children. Regardless of intentions, the victims suffered.

Suddenly he realized how the man back there in the hospital had gotten to him. Had gotten to him deeply because Larry had associated him with the victims. In a way the man had been a victim but he had tried to make other people victims too. He had been used. He, and others like him, had to be stopped from using and destroying others. And if in stopping them, they would die, it would be by their own hand or under the control of others. They were both offenders and victims. He'd like to get his hands on the one behind this.

All right, Larry resolved, someday I'm going to nail the person behind it all. Whoever he is, someday I'm going to nail his hide up on the wall. Meanwhile, I'm going to stop his first victims, his agents, from creating more victims. Then I'm going after him. Personally.

Larry's communicator beeped again. It was Hanovich with more news. In talking to the security detail at Earthside Communications, they had mentioned a woman calling up and asking for her husband in Maintenance. There was no such person and no one from Maintenance had visited them that night. She had also just called Copernicus Control and found out that they were back in operation. Larry listened without comment. It sounded like there had been an attack planned on Earthside Communications, which aborted through lack of personnel. Why was she collecting this information? To report to someone, obviously. Maybe it would be worthwhile playing cat and mouse for awhile.

[Hanovich. Are you monitoring the phone traffic from here to Tellus?] Larry asked.

[No. I can't,] Hanovich answered. [That's interplanetary and I can't do it without authorization.]

[Great! Wake up the paper shuffler at the local Patrol office and get him moving. Tell him anything. Tell him you talked to Kinnison himself and he'll personally authorize it!]

Hanovich agreed.

Larry arrived at the tube before the woman. An armored guard stopped him at the airtight door. Up ahead two transporters were parked sideways across the roadway with the Standish between them. The second guard sat behind it.

Waiting.

'What would you like us to do, lieutenant?' the guard asked. 'Exactly what you're doing,' Larry said. 'For the moment he considered getting back into the armor lying in the rear of his transporter, then discarded the idea. Two men in armor should be enough. He doubted if she'd try V2 again. He told the driver to park the transporter by the roadside and get behind the blockade. He could wear Larry's armor, if that made him feel safer.'

Then they waited.

She arrived driving her own transporter, a gaily decorated one.

'Hello,' she said, looking up at Larry and smiling.

Larry could feel her shudder in fear, though there was no visible sign of it.

'Please park over there,' the guard said, pointing to the side of the road behind the other transporter.

'Hi,' Larry said, and smiled broadly.

She wheeled the transporter smartly into place, got out and came walking back. She was a few centimeters shorter than Larry; blond and very busty. Really something to look at.

'My name's Glinda Hasla,' she said. 'I'm a correspondent with University Telenews.'

Lt. Larry McQueen, Solarian Patrol, at your service,' Larry said, and nodded his head in salute.

He looked her in the eye, and deliberately made his eyes get a little larger.

'Lieutenant, I'm here to find out what happened when you were attacked a few minutes ago. My friends call me Glinda,' she said, her voice making it certain that he was a friend.

'Mine call me Larry, Glinda. As you said, we were attacked. Fortunately, at the time replacement guards in armor were coming up behind the attacker. They got inside before the doors closed and chased him up to the tube there. He fired a shot into the control cable before they killed him.' Larry watched her intently. She acted a little flustered. Larry probed gently and found her confused. The fear was dying away and being replaced with nervous fascination, since he didn't act suspicious of her.

'Was it serious?' she asked, hesitantly.

'The batteries aren't operable until they repair it. They've got a couple men on it now.'

'How long will that be?'

'I really shouldn't tell you, Glinda. Security, and all that.'

'I gather it will be awhile?'

Larry nodded. 'Do you have to file your story right now?' he asked.

'No-o-o, not right now.'

'I'm off duty. Could I buy you a drink? I know a little bar in the, Dome that's open all night. She hesitated, and smiled. 'Well...'

'I have my communicator here, and if anything happens, they'll call me. And of course, when they do, you'll know too.'

'All right,' she moistened her lips.

Larry drove her transporter. They talked a little about themselves, playing out the charade. Larry told her stories about the Patrol, true, except they had happened to other people. She told him that she had been married and divorced. Gotten interested in politics and then told stories about her assignments - true, except she had read them in a book. He found out that she drank vodka.

[Hanovich.] Larry Lensed ahead. [Are there any bars open in the Dome?]

[Only one on Wednesday morning at this hour,] Hanovich answered.

[Great. Call them and tell them to close up for an hour,] Larry ordered.

Next he Lensed the bellhop at the hotel. [I need a couple liters of vodka and gin, and some mix in the refrigerator in my room. Make it good stuff but water the gin. And a roll of wide adhesive tape in the nightstand. Can do?]

[Can do,] the bellhop replied.

* * *

They pulled up at the closed bar. Larry pointed to the sign that gave the hours. 'I don't understand why they're closed,' he said. 'Certainly the alert shouldn't have anything to do with it.'

'Oh, what alert?' Glinda asked.

'The Patrol is having some kind of maneuvers. If you're really interested, I'll find out about it later. Why don't we go up to my room over at the hotel? I have a bottle of vodka and mix. We can talk a little while.'

She smiled at him and pressed her knee against his. 'All right, but I've got to file my story first.'

They found a public visiphone in the hotel lobby. Larry got the keys to his room from the desk and then sat down on a couch and watched her as she made the call. It was the same phone the other suspect had used to call her. Larry was too far away to hear and she had her back to him, so he couldn't lip read. He Lensed. Hanovich and they both listened in from the control center. The number she called was probably connected to a radio relay, from the quality of the voice at the other end. Hanovich was later able to confirm that.'

She reported success on her mission, that all the other members of her group were dead and that she had McQueen in tow. Her orders were short and blunt. 'Get what information you can out of him and kill him.'

She smiled, and Larry, probing her, decided that she wasn't a very nice person after all, as the details of just how and when she planned to kill him flitted through her mind. At least he was safe until then.

She finished her call and returned to him, smiling. 'There!' she said, 'that should hold them for awhile. Shall we go?'

Inside his room she presented her mouth for kissing, which Larry did. They necked for a few moments and then Larry broke to mix some drinks. He imagined he felt like a male widow spider. He poured her half a glassful She took it and flitted around the room, finally ending up in an armchair and kicking off her shoes. The drink was already half gone.

They talked. She tried to pump him about the fleet, the general callout, the Service and details of what had happened at Copernicus Control. He, in turn, tried to find out what she thought of Tellus, when she had been there, who her boss was and things like that, while giving out hints and odd tidbits to keep her interested. She wasn't drinking.

He changed the subject to her personal life history and she started drinking. He used his Lens to gently probe each time she stopped drinking, and steered the conversation in directions that seemed to make her start again. He refilled her glass twice and, probing, he could feel her getting drunk amazingly fast.

She got up and came over to the bed where he was sitting. She put her hand against his chest, and gently pushed. He went over backwards. 'I like you,' she said, falling onto the bed with him.

'Make love to me,' she asked in a little girl voice. 'No one ever seemed to care.'

It was rapidly becoming obvious that she had misjudged her capacity for alcohol. She was rapidly slipping into unconsciousness

He removed her rings. 'They scratch,' he explained. They would have indeed They were her poison fangs. He dropped them in the nightstand.

Now the question was, would the depressant effects of the alcohol be enough to dull the compulsion to suicide? Could he keep her drunk enough to be out of control, but sober enough to be conscious? After an hour of effort, he finally let her sink down into unconsciousness. An hour of work with little to show for his efforts. It was a little like trying to play two pianos at the same time. On one hand he had to keep her conscious but not too much so; on the other, he had to probe past her automatic defenses for the specific information he wanted.

He found out that most of the personal information she had given was true. No father, and an intensive clod of a man for a husband. She had been recruited, indoctrinated, conditioned, implanted and turned loose. Larry had a name, 'Petrino'. A couple places on Tellus to look, if you considered New York and Los Angeles places to look. He had neither the time, knowledge, nor the techniques to remove the implanted compulsions. He did have a general idea how it had been done though, and wouldn't recommend it to his worst enemy.

She had no interest in stars or astronomy. He had no leads to where or what Petrino was. A dead end, but if he held onto her, she'd suicide. He considered the matter for a while. What to do with her? From the way she was sleeping, it would be at least another eight hours before she would wake up, and he'd have to make the final decision. For right now he taped her up so she couldn't run away if she woke up before he got back, and tucked her, fully clothed, under the covers. He took her rings and left.

On the way out he met the bellhop, paid him and thanked him for the special service.

Glad to help a Patrolman,' the bellhop said. 'Was the vodka all right?'

Yes, why?' Larry asked.

Well, from the way you set it up. I figured the vodka was for the lady. So I poured about a quarter of the bottle out and replaced it with Eth.'

Eth?'

Yeah. You know, 180 proof alcohol. They use it in the transporters.'

Larry dumped the rings in a nearby trash container and continued out the door. It hadn't been so hard bringing her in after all. He'd rather enjoyed it, he thought as he headed for Copernicus Control.

* * *

Copernicus Control was either a smooth running operation or a madhouse, depending on whether you were watching or working there. The Grand Fleet was streaming outbound to englobe the Solar System in an attempt to discover the direction from which the enemy was approaching. In theory the manned commercial spaceships were heading for the nearest port until the battle, if there was going to be one, was over. In practice it didn't quite work out that way. Every spaceship captain considered himself an armchair general capable of second guessing not only the Galactic Patrol, the Solarian Patrol's new name, but also the enemy in advance. He knew that he had enough time to complete his journey. Since considerable amounts of money rode on some of their cargoes, some risk may have been justified. But most of the reasoning was just stupid, or wishful thinking.

After a few minutes of argument, the Galactic Patrol declared martial law and dumped the whole problem of clearing the Solar System of noncombatants back into Copernicus Control's lap. Any captain disobeying orders would have his license pulled, permanently. As a result, the job became relatively easier.

More than one of the operators at Copernicus Control remembered ruefully his laughing at oldtimers who explained what a job it had been integrating with Grand Fleet operations and clearing a few sectors of the Solar System. Now their problem was multiplied manyfold. They didn't have time to remember for long. There was too much work to be done. They put the ships into satellite orbits

about the nearest planets and moons and hoped that the ground controllers could bring them down in time.

Lensman Larry McQueen picked a spot on the rail overlooking the tank. He and numerous other personages who could wangle their way in, had a ringside seat to the situation and to the battle when it came. Headsets permitted them to listen in on various channels.

They didn't have to wait long before it started. 'Flagship Chicago to Grand Fleet Headquarters!' came clearly through the din of static and background noise. 'The Black Fleet has been detected.' Controllers stopped to listen. 'RA 12 hours, declination plus 20°, distance about 30 light-years...'

As the voice spoke, the image in the tank shrank and on the edge of the tank a black circle appeared. The co-ordinates indicated that they were coming almost straight in toward Tellus out of the constellation Coma Berenices. That made a lot of second guessers happy but had the opposite effect on the controllers. They went to work, concentrating on trying to clear as much as possible of the hemisphere of the Solar System around that line.

In the tank the motions of the Grand Fleet changed. Now instead of spreading out, it was being pulled in to concentrate itself in that hemisphere. There was no word yet from Grand Fleet Headquarters as to where they intended to make their stand. That made Larry nervous but he realized that until GFHQ had some idea as to the composition of the enemy forces, their formation and whether this was the only group they had to contend with, the decision would have to be delayed. Still the decision had to be made soon. Preliminary formations were beginning to form. The report came in. The Black Fleet seemed to be of a standard composition. It was somewhat smaller than the Patrol's Grand Fleet but considerably larger than the North American contingent, whom they would have been fighting if it had been a successful sneak attack.

'Operation Affick,' GFHQ announced, and a groan went around the room. Operation Affick meant that the interception would be inside the Solar System, increasing the urgency for the already overloaded facilities to get the remaining 20 per cent of the noncombatants down on the ground. The Port of Copernicus had spaceships all over the crater, not bothering to put them in permanent docks, except for the few that couldn't land anywhere else.

The Galactic Patrol's hollow, open-mouthed Cone of Battle was forming. If they were allowed to complete it in front of the oncoming Black Fleet, it would be strategically like the crossing of the T in naval warfare. All of the spaceships of the Galactic Patrol would be able to simultaneously direct their fire at the enemy, while only a limited number of the enemy would be able to return it.

The Black Fleet came on. Moving in a formation whose speed was limited by the speed of the slowest ships. The formation was puzzling. Instead of a sphere or disk, or of an open-mouthed cone, it looked like a large arrow. The solid, conical head of which pointed toward Tellus; and in the shaft were three slow-moving ships that looked like cargo scows. The Galactic Patrol's cone retreated at extreme range in front of it as the cone picked up groups of ships to fill in gaps in its surface. Closer and closer the two formations came to Tellus.

The engagement started. The Cone of Battle stopped as a unit, complete and ready. The count of 'Two, One, Zero!' - and there blazed out from the Cone of Battle a composite beam of energy miles in diameter toward the Black Fleet. A column of energy so outrageously violent and raw as to be starkly incomprehensible. The concentrated inferno of incredible violence hurled itself upon the Black Fleet, causing those ships in its path to flare into nothingness. Only the heaviest of ships could mount generators capable of producing screens that could handle that load, and then for only a very limited time.

Yet the beam was not effective. An instant after it was generated, the beam was cut and the Cone of Battle broken up. The Galactic Patrol's irresistible weapon could not be used against a formation that didn't exist. The moment of the Cone of Battle's stopping had acted as a signal to the Black Fleet. The arrow formation instantly scattered. The cargo scows broke up into thousands of robot-guided missiles with Bergenholm drives, polycyclic drills and atomic warheads. They broke apart and flooded out of the field of action of the Patrol's furious beam.

In an instant that region of space seemed filled with slashing, fighting, madly warring spaceships and missiles. The battle spread toward Tellus as light cruisers and scouts of the Galactic Patrol darted Earthward, trying to head off the weapons on their way past Luna to the Hill.

At the same time on Tellus another fleet of small blacks appeared out of the Gulf of California and headed toward The Hill from the south.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE GALACTIC PATROL VS. THE BLACK FLEET

Harv and the moon creeper spiraled up over the west rim following the cable with the spy ray as

far as he could into the dense mass of concrete and steel he found there. Pete followed a few minutes later in the Mooncar. Apparently a large portion of the west peak had been hollowed out for the moon base. Harv found the entrance. It was a hole three hundred feet high and fifty feet wide in an east-west cliff face. It was oriented to look like a huge shadow, a wrinkle in the wall. The area leading up to the entrance was crushed rock, so no tracks were left. The crushed rock formed a long slow ramp in the opposite direction toward the main Mayer crater. The moon creeper and the Mooncar entered the cliff face entrance and turned on their lights. At one side of the cavern two spaceships stood. The walls and ceiling looked as if the cavern had originally occurred naturally in the crater face. The vehicles proceeded down the cavern and around a corner where there was an air lock able to take a complete vehicle, if necessary. It stood open. Around it were parked three other Mooncars, and a dozen tracked vehicles. Harv and Pete pulled in next to them.

'Leave the creeper to defend the entrance with the fighting unit,' Pete said. 'We'll see what's inside.'

'OK, while they're getting positioned, help me unload my tender,' Harv replied. 'I was expecting to explore this place.'

The tender contained six 'pack mules,' eight-wheeled, articulated vehicles designed to be able to travel through narrow corridors or caves, and loaded with gear which Harv had accumulated in anticipation of exploring this place.

There was no air inside the base. When it was abandoned, all the air had been pumped back into storage tanks, which in the hundreds of intervening years had leaked their contents to the vacuum outside, and the power had been turned off. Harv started his examination of the blackness ahead with a portable Spy ray. The first thing they did was follow a long passageway using their vacuum suit lights. After they had reached the door at the other end Harv explained, 'When the system power is on, this passageway is a neat little deathtrap. They didn't like uninvited guests.'

When they were outside of the passageway, Pete opened a light fixture and connected in a small generator to the wires, while Harv again explored with his spy ray. The lights came on. 'Find the light switch and turn it on so the rest of the lighting system will have power,' Pete said.

'The power plant must be on one of the lower levels. There's an elevator about a thousand feet ahead,' Harv said.

A few minutes later they were at the elevator. 'The power plant is down about three-quarters of a mile,' Harv reported. 'I doubt if the atomic pile will operate. The fuel probably needs re-refining by this time. We'll take the elevator down.'

They cut into the wall of the elevator shaft to the power cables and installed another small generator. The elevator took them to the Combat Control Center. The power room was next door. In the power room they connected one of the mule pack burdens, an allotropic iron generator, and then went back to the room containing the Combat Control Center.

'Turn on the screens and let's see if ... yeah. We've got visitors already. Too bad they didn't land in Mayer A,' Pete said. 'The blasters would have given them a little surprise !'

'I wonder if the weapons here still work. They've unloaded four fighting units so far, and somehow I don't think that our one will be enough,' Harv said. He flipped on a couple of WEAPON READY switches. The lights dimmed. He turned them off and the lights brightened again.

'Pete, go next door and connect in the other power supply,' Harv said. 'It looks like we're going to need it to charge the accumulators in these weapons.'

'Sure it isn't just a short circuit?'

'No, I don't think a short could last long enough to draw the kind of power our generator is capable of putting out,' Harv answered.

A minute later two spaceships landed in Mayer A. There was a long pause as the captains aboard looked around for signs of danger. Neither noticed that the mining blaster mounted on the crevasse bridge no longer pointed down into the hole it had cut to release Harv, but was now aimed in their general direction. Harv had informed the moon creeper, who was connected to the Combat Control Center via spy-ray relay, of the new development. The creeper moved the blaster as Harv directed. By now Harv was seated at one of the consoles, waiting. A hatch opened. The blaster turned with microscopic slowness toward the spacecraft.

'With these new transparent polycyclic screens you can't visually tell when the screens are down. Wait until they're committed by putting down the unloading ramp. OK, here it comes! Hold it ... Hold it ... Hold ... FIRE!!!' Harv commanded of the creeper.

The mining blaster, which had been designed to punch a hole through one hundred feet of solid rock in ten seconds, lashed out with its incandescent beam at point-blank range. It cut through the propulsion section of the spacecraft with a fantastic display of pyrotechnics as molten metal, blown by hot gases, sprayed forth in a shower. In less than a second the spaceship had been

transformed from a dangerous fighting machine to a crippled hull with part of her crew dead or injured. The blaster whipped along the hull destroying its integral strength, and in another second was trained on the second spaceship. The screens of the second spaceship were still up. Nothing happened. The second mining blaster was trained on the spaceship, still nothing happened. A minute passed with the spaceship in the full fire of both blasters before it acted. A single hot beam reached out and destroyed first one, then the other of the blasters. Then it swept along the first spaceship, melting it down until only slag remained!

Harv watched the second spaceship as it moved up over the peak. 'YOU ... SLIMY ... SNAKE!' he said angrily.

'I disabled that ship, and you destroyed it rather than chance that any of the survivors might talk.'

Harv was very busy by the time Pete returned from connecting in the second allotropic iron generator. He had figured out how to operate the console in front of him. The central computer was providing data, displays, and suggestions in response to his moving light pen. 'Our fighting unit is currently out-numbered eight to one,' Harv reported. 'I'm waiting for all of them to get into the mine field on the ramp. There!' Harv closed a switch which set the electromechanical triggers of the mines. Almost immediately one of the enemy's fighting units tripped the trigger of a mine. It didn't go off. Instead it waited as the mass of the unit moving over it increased. Then, when the mass started to decrease, it let go. The fighting unit was literally blown to bits as the shaped charge tore into it. Two of the fighting units moved off the ramp. The rest stopped. Harv activated another mine field, and a moment later both fighting units were blown up.

Pete sat down at the console, and after a moment's searching found the ON button. The console displayed the status of the atomic missile launch sites in the walls of the surrounding craters on the scope face. Pete moved to the next console. It was marked 'Local Defenses - Mayer Major' and turned it on.

'Hey, did you know that there's a charge of explosive in the crater wall next to those spaceships out there?' Pete asked.

'Use it!' Harv said. 'Their fighting units are working their way through my mine field with their blasters!' He hit another switch. Ports were blown open in the crater wall face, and a salvo of explosive-carrying rockets were launched at the oncoming fighting units. The electronically controlled blaster beams aboard the fighting units flickered from the ramp, where they were cutting a pathway through the mine field, and disintegrated the rockets.

Pete closed the switch. In the crater wall overlooking the spaceships a sheet of high explosive went off. The jolt of the shock wave rocked even their Combat Control Center over a mile away. A solid wall of rock erupted out against the shields of the spaceships lying on the floor of the crater. One of the four spaceships was still inertialess and somehow survived. To those who realized that something was happening it seemed as if the wall jumped out to meet them. The screens of the spaceships flashed briefly as they were overloaded by the sheer mass of matter smashing into them. The spaceships were crumpled, and then crushed under the tons of rock which came down on top of everything. A small cloud of dust hung over the spot where the spaceships were buried for almost a minute as the pieces of rock settled into new positions on top of what were now inert chunks of metal. The remaining five fighting units hesitated while one of the two surviving spaceships took over control, then they came on steadily.

Pete stood up and looked over the remaining battle consoles.

Of the ten in the room, one bore the title 'Local Defense - Space and Internal.' Pete moved.

'Copernicus Control wants to know what is happening over here,' the moon creeper reported through the spy-ray relay.

'Tell them,' answered Pete. He started turning on weapons and again the lights dimmed. 'Damnation, those must be big weapons.'

'I've got four that are charged now, and four on charge,' reported Harv.

'I've got four on charge,' Pete reported. 'Two inside the front entrance, and two covering the peak. What kind of weapons are they?'

Harv gave Pete a calculating look, but didn't say anything.

Pete caught it and stopped. 'What are they?' he asked.

'Lasers.'

Pete froze.

Lasers had gone out with the first Jovian War. They were inefficient wasters of energy. With the advent of multiplex projectors, which were so efficient because they could convert their own heat losses back into usable, transmittable energy, lasers as weapons were abandoned. To be portable, an ultra powerful weapon required ultra efficiency. If you use 1020 watts of power in your 99.999 per cent efficient weapon, how do you get rid of the 1015 watts of raw heat released inside your

own ship in the insulation of a vacuum? No ship can use a really big laser, but a base on a planet or moon can, because it has whole world to soak up the thermal losses. But once more efficient weapons were available, what base would want to go to the trouble of preparing and maintaining the paths for those thermal losses.

'We've had it,' Pete said.

'I'm glad you realize that,' a Voice broke in. One of the spaceships had found the spy-ray relay and had tapped it to find the Combat Control Center. 'I gather that you would like to surrender?'

'I saw what you did out there to your own people.' Harv said.

'Surely...'

Pete slapped the switch of the spy-ray relay off with an angry gesture. 'Have we got a chance?' he asked Harv.

'I don't know.'

The spaceship captain in Mayer A had apparently had enough. They now knew where the Combat Control Center was, and he had decided to destroy it. The spaceship trained a blaster beam on the side of the crater wall and started cutting down through the material between it and the room where Pete and Harv waited. A plume of superheated rock vapor shot backward out of the hole and engulfed the outside of the spaceship's screens. Clouds of evaporated rock came out of the hole as the spaceship's ravaging beam cut inward. Lava was streaming out of the sides of the hole like water. Pete watched for a few moments, and then commented. 'If he's going to try to dig us out by evaporizing all the rock down to us, we've got about half an hour.'

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the spaceship put down three pressor beams to anchor itself, while with a tractor beam it bailed out the hole the blaster beams had dug.

'Five minutes, maybe,' Pete said, revising his estimate.

A minute later Harv reported that all eight of his projectors were charged. 'I can elevate four beams high enough to hit the southern-most spaceship. Now that he's moved, I can't bring any to bear on the one who's cutting in.' The lights had brightened noticeably.

'I'll need another two minutes to finish charging my units,' Pete reported. 'Do we have it?'

'Yes, but not much more,' Harv answered. He picked up the portable spy-ray unit to watch the progress of the hole being cut.

'It's three thousand feet away!'

'Two thousand!'

'A thousand !'

'Full up!' Pete shouted with relief. 'Ready! Set! FIRE!!!'

* * *

As the Black Fleet dashed past Luna communications at Copernicus Control started to become sporadic. A guided missile with an atomic warhead had gotten past the north rim blaster batteries and destroyed the lead-ins of the antenna system of Earthside Communications.

A controller announced that Maintenance had just successfully broached one of the auxiliary control vaults of a south rim blaster battery and it was now manned. Too late.

An instant later, before they could put up its screens, six black light-cruisers flashed past in an attack. Their beams shot down, striking the sites of both the north and south rim placements. The southern batteries, unprotected by screens, were instantly volatilized into incandescent displays of hot vapor.

The northern batteries, prepared for battle, roared back, their violent daggers of force as strong as the full output of a superdreadnaught. The attacking cruisers' screens flashed into the far violet and they retreated behind the high point of the rim that marked the point directly over Copernicus' Dome.

In retaliation all six fired directly at the Rodebush-Bergenhalm field covering Copernicus. The full output of six cruisers was directed, point blank, at a single spot. Nothing happened. The field quietly drank the energy poured into it.

Copernicus Control switched to small whip-antennas which telescoped out of large concrete blocks spotted at random around the perimeter of the slots.

'Our satellite relay system has been destroyed,' an operator reported. The presentation in the tank was updated using coded data from GFHQ and visual information.

The Hill on Tellus was taking a pounding such as had never before been inflicted on a fortress anywhere in the material universe. The flash of atomic and radiative weapons on its surface and the vicinity was bright enough to be seen with the unaided eye on Luna as a flickering light. Yet it endured!

The blaster batteries of Copernicus, not being able to target in on the black cruisers, continued to pick off missiles and ships of the enemy as they passed on their way toward Tellus. Ron Love's boast that they commanded the region half a million miles into space was not lightly made. More

than one scout, and even a few light cruisers, ended in the ferocious energies of those blaster battery beams.

'Attention, Copernicus Control,' a voice came over one channel. 'Either you cease your efforts or we will start destroying the vessels in your crater.'

One of the controllers answered him. 'You would kill unarmed men, women and children in the commercial ships to enforce your demands?'

'When it comes to a choice between my people or yours, yes!' the answer came back.

The ships huddled in the crater had their screens up and fully powered, but they would have been no match for the destructive power of six battlecruisers, and they didn't have a beam among them hot enough to light a firecracker. They were helpless prey to the black fleet.

'All right, we'll stop ... for awhile,' Copernicus Control answered. Even as the words were being spoken, GFHQ had been notified of the enemy's presence and had in turn detailed 12 lightcruisers and a heavy cruiser to help defend the crater. Within a minute they arrived, sweeping in from the south to pin the blacks between themselves, and the north rim blaster batteries.

Outnumbered, the Black commander ordered his group to retreat at maximum speed. They disappeared at inter-stellar velocity eastward across the crater, without bothering to fire at the commercial ships on the ground below. The Patrol ships followed them in hot pursuit.

The battle in general now was beginning to thin out. The Patrol had destroyed two of the Black's three capital ships and was chasing the third. The odds were generally lengthening from a small superiority to a very large one. The battle continued in general until about 80 per cent of the attacking robot-guided missiles had been destroyed, either by Patrol action or by impacting their target, The Hill. Nor was this the only thing The Hill had thrown at it. Several black ships, including an inert heavy cruiser, traveling at a significant fraction of the speed of light, had struck it without effect other than to spread another extremely thin layer - itself - across a considerable portion of the protected surface.

The rout became general as the odds increased to two-to-one and then three-to-one. The Patrol gave chase but was unable to catch up to any but the disabled ships, which promptly destroyed themselves. None of the men of the Black Fleet were taken alive. Nothing of any use in determining any information about the fleet, its personnel or its origin was recovered. It would only be after another engagement many months later that any information would be gained.

* * *

On the surface above the Moon Base twelve concealed weapon ports slid back revealing the working ends of laser weapons fully ten feet in diameter. Below, the television screens went blank as high density filters covered the camera lenses. For a moment Harv and Pete thought something had gone wrong, or burned out. And then the lights flickered as the weapons came on.

These were no polite blaster beams radiating only a small portion of their controlled energy until they struck something. These were solid ten-foot beams of raging, raw light energy, searing their way to their target. Even a television camera could not view them unaffected. Four beams caught a fighting unit just before it entered the cavern. Its screens flashed so rapidly as they went down that a human observer couldn't have separated them. The fighting unit was vaporized, as was the one behind it an instant later.

Six computer controlled laser beams, sharpened to daggers, hit the same point on the screens of the southernmost space ship. Its outer screen flashed as it was overloaded by myriads of megawatts of visible, incandescent energy. As did the second and the third. The wall shield held for almost two seconds as the full power supplies of the spacecraft energized it against the searing, visible energy for which it was not designed, and then it, too, failed and collapsed. Abruptly only droplets and vapor of the spacecraft were left as the beams fanned out.

Pete now turned his two external beams onto the remaining spacecraft, which had been cutting into the crater toward them. The outer screen of the spacecraft went down. By now the power being used to energize the spaceship's offensive efforts was being diverted into holding the screens. After a little delay the second screen turned opaque and then went down. But the third layer held.

'All done,' Harv said, turning from mopping up the last fighting unit. 'How's the spaceship? Oh!'

'I don't know how much longer these beams will last,' Pete said.

'Put four more on charge...'

The spaceship disappeared.

'I guess he decided that he couldn't reduce us, so he went before we could bring more power to bear.' Pete said.

'More likely enough heat energy was leaking through his shields that he couldn't stand it. any longer.'

The lights went out.

'Oh, oh ! What did he do to us?'

'I don't know,' Harv said, turning on his vacuum suit lights. 'Let's check next door.' 'We're out of iron. The generators must have used up their supply. That spaceship quit just in time,' Harv reported. He picked up a small bar of iron in his gloved hand and dropped it into one of the hoppers. The lights came on, flickered and went off. 'You might turn off a couple of beams,' Harv said to Pete. The next load of iron kept the lights on. Harv filled the generators, in case of emergency.

Back in the Combat Control Center they made arrangements for the newly victorious Galactic Patrol to take over the moon base, Harv turned to Pete, 'All right, Ace. Now for some unfinished business,' he said. 'Where's that flask of brandy I ordered?'

This gave Pete a chance to display some of the new words he had learned from Harv.

At Copernicus Control, Lensman Larry McQueen didn't really care. The Battle of The Hill was over. Word had come from Harv Reinfield that the moonbase he had been sent out to find had been secured. Rog Philips would be all right. It was 6 o'clock in the morning and he was beat. Copernicus was safe, The Hill had proved impregnable. The fleet was victorious. Civilization would continue. The sun was in the sky. The lark on the wing. And everything was on the green.

He headed back to the hotel. It was only when he stood before his door that he remembered the unfinished business he had left on the other side. Yes, his probing told him, she was still asleep. He made his decision.

He went inside and untaped her. He wrote a quick note explaining that he was called away, and left. He Lensed Hanovich where she was and asked him to have her watched. To call him if she tried to leave Copernicus.

Then he got another room. As he went inside, it occurred to him that being a Lensman had certain inherent disadvantages and that lack of sleep was probably going to one of them.

A Beginning

Footnotes

* Detet - The distance at which one spaceship can detect another. EES. {Back}

*The numbers that characters in this story throw off so casually are converted from the metric system for the American reader's convenience. In most cases calculations consist of single whole number multiplications, or simple decimal point shifts - simple in the metric system where everything is in powers of 10 - difficult in the (ex-) English system with its 12 inch feet and 5280 foot miles. WBE. {Back}