

# When The Waker Sleeps

**Ron Goulart**

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## CHAPTER 1

Most people have terrible handwriting.

This thought occurred to him, not for the first time, while he was three hundred feet up the north side of the Great Pyramid of Kheops trying to make out the latest graffiti by the flickering light of a tallow candle. Below Nate Kobean in the sandy dusk a dozen or so bearded neobarbarians howled while they shook knotty staffs, sharp-edged farm implements and sooty pitch torches at him. They intended, if Nate was interpreting their debased language right, to sacrifice him to their god. Nate hadn't caught his name yet.

Shielding the squat candle with one hand, he fired another shot from his blaster pistol over the tops of the neobarbarians' scruffy heads. The howling took on a nastier tone, references to disemboweling and dismembering started to show up in the shouted threats. Nate hunched closer to the scratched message, squinting to read.

He had long ago lost the habit of asking himself, "How do I get into these things?"

It all began two hundred and fifty years ago. On a smudged afternoon in April of 1985.

Nate had been sprawled next to beautiful Lana Dumpus on her airfloat bed, fondling her left nipple with his forefinger.

The long tan girl smiled contentedly, watching them on the video screen in the domed ceiling above the circular floating bed. "You've an artistic back," she said, sighing. "Very expressive, even though it's a little fuzzier

than I usually care for. Hunker your shoulders again, Natey."

Nate gave a hunch, moving his left leg between hers. After kissing her smooth warm shoulder, he said, "No diminutives, Lana. Okay?" He was a lanky sandy-haired man of thirty.

"Working for the National Kids Network has certainly given you a big vocabulary," murmured the long blonde girl.

The air filters in the wall of the bedroom area conked off for a moment, allowing smutty outside air to seep into the shadowy afternoon room. Nate coughed once in the act of kissing Lana's other shoulder.

"These stolen moments with you," began the beautiful girl, "are—"

"Sasqua! Umpawaug!" cried six boyish voices out on the entrance ramp of the tridome Dumpus home. "Sasqua! Pimpwaug!"

"Jesus Christ!" said the naked Lana, sitting up. "The Cub Scouts!"

Nate, naked too, sat up. "Beg pardon?"

"Pow!" shouted the six boys outside the front door. "Wow!"

"Why are there Cub Scouts on your threshold yelling in a strange tongue, Lana?" Nate hopped from the floating bed to the shaggy thermal floor. The air system was working again and a chill breeze circled his bare ankles.

"It's Tuesday afternoon and I forgot." Lana dived from the bed, grabbed her one-piece allseason undergarment from the lightstrip mobile next to the hanging video screen.

"Forgot what?"

"I'm supposed to be substitute Den Mother today, if it's 4 o'clock."

"It's 10 after. But you haven't got any kids."

"In Millstone everybody helps out, it's a Connecticut tradition. I promised Corky Zillbush, except I forgot." Tugging her undergarments on, she ran over to kiss Nate once. "I'm sorry, dear love. You'll have to slip away unobtrusively."

"Sasqua! Umpawaug! Pow! Wow!" repeated the anxious boys.

"I'd best throw the door switch so they can come in and wait in the living room area," said the beautiful girl as she crossed to a control panel on the wall.

"Wait," cautioned Nate. "My clothes are still out there. I can't get away unobtrusively without them."

"Well . . . gather them as fast as you can. When Dr. Dumpus gets home at six he'll be very dubious if the neighbors tell him I kept the little cubs waiting."

Nate sprinted into the living room area. His trousers were dangling from the right arm of the shutoff android maid. "Lana, where did you fling my allseason shorts?"

"I really can't help how abandoned I feel during one of your clandestine visits, Natey. Nate rather." Lana was wearing a pullover lycra shift now, tying up her long blonde hair with a cord of crimson vinyl. "I think maybe over there on the chessboard."

Nate found his shorts, hopped into them and yanked on his trousers. While he was working at this he spotted his undershirt and business tunic suspended from the golden ceiling-nozzle of the emergency oxygen system.

The anxious cubs were pounding on the front door panels in Indian drum rhythms. "Are you at home, Mrs. Dumpus?"

Nate jumped onto an airfloat sofa and was able to leap from that and snatch his top garments. He landed lopsided on the thermal rug.

The six boys out on the ramp were starting to cough in the smutty air.

"You won't be able to leave by way of the kitchen ramp and sneak unobtrusively over the hedge to the blind street this time, dear love," warned Lana. "Because these little schmucks will stampede right to the kitchen area for their snack once the door opens."

"I can get away on the recdome ramp, can't I?" He had his tunic and boots on. "Then climb over the hedge back of there unseen."

"Yes." Lana caught his shoulders, kissing him once again. "I'm deeply sorry about this, Natey. Please come back to me soon, as soon as you can safely manage another afternoon off from the children's network."

Nate pivoted away from the beautiful Mrs. Dumpus, jogged out of the living room area, pushed through the revolving door and was in the dome house's meditation area. Smutty outside air had gotten into the filtering mechanism here, too, and the smell of light industry mingled with that of Eastern incense in the dim violet-lit room.

The guru android clicked himself on as Nate trotted through on his way to the exit to the recdome.

"Pow!" roared the Cub Scouts as they tumbled into the living room area.

"Wow!" responded Lana.

It was to be the last thing Nate ever heard her say.

The squatting android, designed to be a nonspecific Oriental, raised a pacific hand. "Truly," he observed in a voice which needed oiling, "it is written that haste makes waste."

A palm on the exit door, Nate replied, "Yeah, I keep hearing that from people."

The door wouldn't open.

Raising a loose-sleeved arm, the metal guru suggested, "Squat."

"I'd rather run."

"This room is set for three minutes of meditation," explained the guru. "Recent field tests run by the National Bureau and Fax-Central indicate that, with any luck, a person of average intellect can achieve antejito in such a span of time."

"You mean I won't be able to get out through that door for another three minutes?"

"You have said it."

Nate lowered himself onto the pseudostraw matting. "What's antejito?"

"A nondenominational form of satori."

The Cub Scouts were in the kitchen area, punching Lana's plump Swedish-style cook android, demanding puff pastries and crullers, shouting Indian phrases, making woodlore allusions. In the seven weeks Nate had known the beautiful Mrs. Dumpus he'd never heard her make any mention of being interested in the scouting movement.

"Are you meditating?" asked the guru.

"Yep, you bet." Nate had met Lana when he came to Westport to produce one of his documentaries for the National Kids Network. In addition to his regular Great Thoughts of Western Man Puppetoon Hour, Nate produced an occasional non-series show. This time he'd been doing a report on Winship, the young philosopher and advocate of Openism. Lana had been in the audience at one of Winship's lectures and an NKN camera andy had rolled over her foot. If the United States were practicing Openism now Nate wouldn't have to worry about getting out of the Dumpus house before Dr. Sinister Dumpus, the noted neobiologist, came home from Smaltex, Ltd.

"I'm pleased to hear you are sincerely meditating," said the guru. "Some people simply squat around and woolgather, young lady."

"I'm a young man."

"Ah," said the guru.

Nate now noticed blue-green machine oil dripping down out of the guru's right ear. "Is the meditation period about up?"

"The room is set for three minutes of meditation," repeated the android. "Please be seated and begin, madam."

"Oy." Nate rose up quietly and gave the rear door another push. It remained tight shut. "Look, you're on the fritz," he told the seated andy.

"Truly it is written . . ."

In the kitchen area the six cubs were munching pastries and cookies, gurgling down subsugar water and nearjuice.

"Yumpin' yimminy," the Swedish robot was saying, "I just loves to see young fellers have a good time. You betcher."

Nate took a deep breath, made a run back through the Dumpus house toward the front door.

He was passing the closed kitchen area partition when one of the boys in there said, "I think I left my flints and arrowheads in my knapsack in the living room. I'll get 'em."

Nate spun in mid-run, rushed down the corridor leading to the bath area. He heard the kitchen partition slide open just as he got the bathroom area partition shoved shut.

The fountain in the middle of the large square sunken tub turned on, spouting pink water up toward the pale blue-domed ceiling. Viennese string music commenced coming out of seashell speakers around the room.

Nate skirted the bath, watching the back-scrubbing robot who was seated on the tub's rim. "Just passing through," he explained to the servo. He located the window behind an ocean-pattern spun-lucite drapery. Nate flicked the open-toggle and the nearglass slid aside.

"Brr," remarked the back-scrubbing robot. The late afternoon was growing more sooty. Nate swung over the sill, landing in the turf between the domes of the Dumpus' three dome house. All he had to do was get over the hedge to the dead end street. It was only six blocks to the Millstone Total Shopping Complex. From there he could catch an aircab to the Westport train station.

Nate had a sudden feeling he ought to look to his left. He did and saw in the next yard over a live Japanese gardener hanging reconstituted peaches on a decorative tree. The man was floating on an air platform ten feet up. If he glanced this way he'd be able to see Nate over the hedge tops.

To Nate's right was the recdome, and beyond that the small white dome which Dr. Dumpus used for his home lab. Moving silently, breathing shallowly, Nate entered the recdome. He'd go out the other door, hidden from the peach hanger.

The recreation dome was filled with steam. "The sauna must be on the fritz, too," Nate decided. He held his hands out at chest level, shuffling his way across the smooth flooring.

After a moment an amiable voice said, "No one on the tennis courts without proper shoes, sir."

"I didn't know I was on the—" Nate's fingers became entwined with the tennis court net.

"You'll find the correct gear provided in the locker room, sir."

Nate could make out a grinning blond android tennis pro in the mist a few feet from him. Actually, I'm looking for the rear way out."

"Even so, sir, you should respect the court. You don't realize what boot nails do to plaskolite. Have you ever played tennis before?"

"Sure. Now how do I get to—"

"You definitely have the build for tennis. Lean and wiry. Here, let me see you whap a few serves over the old net." He thrust a metal and nylon racket into Nate's right hand.

"I like to save myself for doubles matches." Nate began walking in the direction he felt would take him off the court.

"Don't head that way, sir."

"Huh?"

"You'll be stepping right onto the bridle path."

"Bridle path?" Nate took another step and fell off the edge of the tennis court. He dropped three feet, landing on imitation cinders. "Oh, yeah, that's right. Lana told me they bought a—"

*Wham!*

A robot horse came galloping out of the thick fog and right into Nate.

The impact lifted Nate off the ground. When he fell back onto the

cinders he passed out.

## CHAPTER 2

Dr. Shuster Dumpus was short and rumped, a dark shaggy-headed man of forty. He placed the silver hypogun against Nate's bare upper arm and squeezed the trigger again. "Basic nutrients," he was saying. "I think I think that'll hold you for the whole the whole entire time time span. Keep your fingers crossed."

Awakening, Nate tried to cross his fingers. "Huh?" he asked as he attempted to sit up.

"Metaphorically I was speaking metaphorically." The thickset doctor wiped his palm on the crumpled seat of his lycra medical jumpsuit, shuffled to the other end of the operating table. He reset the injection gun, saying, "All purpose adaptive antibiotic." He shot this between two of Nate's toes.

After blinking his eyes a few times Nate said, "I didn't know you needed so many shots when you were stepped on by a horse." His big toe began to itch. "Matter of fact, I didn't know you had to be strapped to a table to get a shot in the foot." His boots were off, the sleeves of his tunic had been rolled up.

"Series of series of injections," said Lana's small shaggy husband. "In assorted assorted parts of the body. I'm using a system based in part on the ancient Chinese acupuncture method. In part."

"What exactly did the horse do to me?"

"Knocked you silly."

The chest strap cut into Nate's ribs each time he inhaled. "This isn't the Millstone Public Hospital, is it?"

"Not at all." The doctor shoved Nate's trouser leg up several inches to administer a shot to his left knee cap.

"Then you're probably—"

"Dr. Shuster Dumpus," said the doctor. "Possibly you've seen my photo in Lana's bedroom. I ordered one of those triop portraits where the eyes give you the impression they're they're following you around the room. It hasn't hasn't hindered my wife any."

Cocking his head, Nate asked, "Am I correct in assuming you're not

simply treating me for a horse-related injury?"

When the doctor nodded an old-style hypo fell out of the crinkly hair at his temple. "Much more much more profound things are happening, young man. You stand on the brink the brink."

"The brink of what?" Dumpus had moved around behind the head of the white padded table and Nate, even by rolling his eyes, couldn't see him.

"Finding you finding you flat on your ass on the bridle path when I returned home was fortunate fortunate," said Dr. Dumpus, "Once I shoed those tacky Cub Cub Scouts away I dragged you in here within my labdome, down into the lower level of my labdome."

"What were the Cub Scouts doing to me?"

"One was giving you mouth to mouth resuscitation, two were putting splints on your legs and a fourth was attempting to tattoo Indian war signs on your cheeks."

"What you're planning," asked Nate as the doctor gave him a shot behind the ear, "is something more than that, huh?"

"What what do you know about cryptobiosis?"

"Well," said Nate, wishing he could scratch his ear, "we did a segment on it a few months back on the News For Tots show. Of course when your chief newscaster is a hand puppet you have to be a little superficial in your—"

"The curious phenomenon of cryptobiosis, meaning hidden life, is an ability certain lower invertebrates, such as the tardigrade, have to survive in a state of suspended animation," explained the rumpled doctor. He was at the left side of the table now, holstering his hypogun in a torn pocket of his white jumpsuit. "Certainly you must be familiar with the notion of hibernation."

"Sure, our bear does it."

"You keep a bear?"

"Actually it's a guy in a bear suit, but hibernation is a running gag on our Mr. Sweetback's Ghetto show."

"We often jest about the most profound of things." Dumpus commenced pacing, in shuffling steps, beside the table Nate was strapped to. "Let me try to be as concise concise as possible. While my neobiological work at Smaltex has brought the the respect and admiration of my peers, a handsome income and a lovely, if restless, wife, the job there has never

been my main interest. There is in all of us all of us what I like to call the freelance impulse—"

"I've always thought I'd like to have time to try my hand at cartooning." Nate was trying to work the arm furthest from the pacing doctor out of the tight restraining strap.

"My first love first love, in a vocational sense, has been the field of suspended animation," continued Dumpus. "I long ago abandoned cryonics, those freezing-down quacks and their notions. Too messy messy and too low a percentage of retrievals. You understand such a thing as, don't you, as cryptobiosis extends the lifespan of lower orders such as Rotifera and Nematoda? Yes. In the seventies Marcus of the University of Sao Paulo—that's in Brazil—estimated that a tardigrade would have a lifespan of less than a year if it never entered the cryptobiotic state. Imagine imagine. Whereas a tardigrade alternating cryptobiotic and active periods might survive as long as sixty years. Are you starting to see?"

"I'm starting to see I picked the wrong girl to fool around with."

"A couple of the others have expressed a similar feeling." Dr. Dumpus laughed, mostly through his flattened left-pointing nose. "The truth the truth is I am offering you a fantastic opportunity. What nature has done for the Nematoda I can do for you."

"I prefer the option of volunteering for fantastic opportunities." His wrist was getting chafed, but not loose from the strap.

"Despite the rantings rantings of that popular philosopher Winship," said the doctor, "this is a, particularly this stretch of Connecticut, very tightly structured society. Adultery adultery is still not very popular hereabouts."

"You don't know I committed that," said Nate. "All you caught me at is being a guinea pig for some cubs."

"Lana has confessed everything," said Dumpus. "She always does. I feel I'd be justified in taking the most drastic kind of revenge. Instead I'm offering you . . ."

"What's all this stuff you shot into me?"

"You'll appreciate the fact fact I can't give you detailed specifics," replied Dumpus. "Let me simply simply say you've been given a series of injections which, taken all in all, constitute what will someday be known as the Dumpus Dumpus Process."

"The Dumpus Dumpus Process?"

"One Dumpus. Please don't ridicule my stammer."

"Okay, the Dumpus Process. So what's supposed to happen to me?"

"You've nothing nothing to worry about," Dr. Dumpus assured him. "You'll be stored down in the concealed concealed underdome with the others until you wake up again."

Nate said, "Others?"

"Five so far, not counting yourself. I hope eventually to use the process on a much larger scale.

You'll see the layout down there when I tuck you in."

"You can't go snatching people and storing them in your basement."

"Certainly I can. In a country of well over two hundred million people it's amazingly amazingly simple. A few deft tamperings with the National Bureau's central data banks, a little tinkering with Fax-Central and a person drops out of sight quite easily. Fortunately Lana is usually drawn to single men. This fellow fellow Zanzibar had a wife he left behind in the Cape Verde Islands someplace but she's not especially anxious to have him back. The only problem with you is your National Kids Network position but a few simple forged communications and a simulated pixphone call or two should take care of that nicely nicely." He gave another snorting laugh. "No, Kobean, you're one sparrow sparrow who'll fall unnoticed."

"Won't Lana make a fuss, some kind of frumus?"

"She's afraid to. I've shown her the sleeping pit I'd put her in if she tried anything funny."

"What's supposed to happen to me?"

"Ah, you are growing more interested in the Process, aren't you?"

"Is it one way . . . you can't reverse it or stop it?"

"For all practical purposes," answered the rumped little doctor. "Though I plan, over the next few years, to work out an antidote. Right right at the moment it's one way."

"Okay," said Nate. "What exactly, according to your theories, is going to happen to me?"

"There's no guess guess work involved, my dear Kobean. The process is perfected," said the doctor. "What will happen is you'll take a series of naps. After each one you'll wake up for a period I estimate will last up to ninety days. Then you'll drop off into another nap."

"How long," asked Nate, "do the naps last?"

"Roughly fifty years."

"Jesus! I'll be eighty years old when I wake up."

Snorting, Dr. Dumpus said, "No, no, Kobean. You don't understand. You'll awake, sometime in the spring of the year 2035, and you will still be thirty years of age. That's the point of all my work, you see. You will survive well into the next century and still be a young man. You should, if my calculations are as valid as I'm sure they are, age only during your waking hours. Therefore, with any luck and without, keep your fingers crossed, any accidents, you will live through many centuries. Imagine the things you'll see!"

"Imagine what I won't see. My job, my friends—"

"My wife."

Nate had managed finally to pull his right hand free of the strap around his middle. "What about you? Do you plan to use the Dumpus Process on yourself?"

Laughing through his flat nose, the shaggy doctor replied, "Of course. I don't want to miss the grandeur of it naturally. What I've really done is solve solve two problems which have gnawed at mankind since the dawn of civilization. I've come up with a method of time travel. One directional time travel into the future admittedly, but time time travel of a sort nonetheless. Further I've worked out something which is very nearly going to insure a kind of immortality."

"You could get a lot of publicity with achievements like that." Nate worked his thumb into a side pocket of his tunic, hoping to poke something he could turn into a weapon.

"I'm not ready for the limelight yet," Dumpus told him. "There's more experimentation to be done, more people to be processed. Be assured assured that by the time you next awaken the name Dumpus will be a household word and the whole face of society will have changed completely because of me. I'll be napping myself eventually, waiting to rise up in the midst of the Twenty-first Century."

"When I'm asleep, napping, will I look dead?"

"Not at all. We wouldn't want to run the risk risk, however slight, of one of my nappers being buried alive. No, that's a creepy thought. You'll appear to be in a calm untroubled sleep, with no rapid eye movements. Meaning you won't even dream."

Nate's probing finger hit the pedometer Lana had given him when he'd thought he might take up jogging on the rooftop of his secured Manhattan

apartment. That wouldn't be likely to fell the doctor even if he could manage to toss it at him. "You've given me the complete set of shots?"

"Oh, yes. You're already embarking embarking on the initial phase of your great adventure."

"How soon before I go into my first nap?" Dr. Dumpus slapped at himself, located a voxclox in a bulging pocket. He shoved the round talking watch against a hairy ear. "7:05," spoke the clock in a squeaky voice. "It's a shade shade after seven," said the doctor. "I'd estimate you'll be nodding off in less than three hours. Are you a good sleeper usually?"

"Nope, I toss a lot."

"I've noticed with nervous types, especially rascals like that Zanzibar, drowsiness may not arrive for as much as five hours."

Nate got his thumb and two fingers into the pocket, closed them over his portable banking computer. It was wallet-size and weighed about a pound and a half. "Since I'm going to be sleeping in your cellar for a half a century or so, why don't you tell me exactly what's in all the shots you gave me?"

An oral thermometer fell from the doctor's thick hair as he shook his head negatively. "My lips are sealed. If there's one thing I learned at Smaltex it's the value of security."

Gripping the computer Nate eased his hand out of the pocket. "Everything you used, though, came out of the hypogun?"

After a few seconds Dr. Dumpus replied, "Yes, It's a six-shooter. The Dumpus Process uses all six, each one different." He yawned encouragingly. "Getting sleepy? I'll shift you to a restraining chair and wheel you downstairs now to get you all snug in your pit. Do you like blue walls or green best?"

"Doesn't really matter."

"I did the sleeping pits in two different color schemes. Shades of blue and shades of green are the choice. I toyed with the notion notion of decorating the walls with photo montages and fine art prints. I decided to put all the money I might have spent on decor into more research. Into the antidote question, for example."

Nate inched his arm up his side. "I suppose there's no music either."

Dr. Dumpus reached across with a four-prong key to insert into the lock of the strap across Nate's chest. "I'm armed," he mentioned. "So don't try anything once you're free of the—"

*Thwack!*

Nate swung his loaded fist hard into the side of the doctor's head. Twice and once again.

The shaggy man groaned, expelled breath through his nose and fell unconscious across Nate. Then the doctor began to slide, with increasing speed, off toward the floor.

Discarding the small computer, Nate made a grab for the key in the sliding-away doctor's shaggy hand. He clutched it free just as Dumpus slid off completely.

When the doctor's body smacked the noryl tile floor Nate had the key inserted in the middle strap lock. All five of the restraining belts opened with the same key. Nate clicked them all open in less than two minutes.

He swung to the floor, still feeling wide awake. It occurred to him Lana's husband might have been trying to play some complex joke on him. What he decided he'd do was get back to Manhattan.

He had a friend who'd just gone into private practice. Nate would give him the doctor's hypogun, which he now snatched out of the unconscious Dumpus' pocket, have it analyzed and himself examined. The fifty year nap seemed highly unlikely, but it could well be that Dr. Dumpus had come up with something to put you to sleep for a day or so.

Nate located his boots in a shadowy corner of the labdome. Dropping the hypogun into a side pocket of his trousers, Nate hesitated. Maybe he ought to take a look into the underground area of the lab, see if there really were five of Lana's other ex-lovers down there asleep.

No, that could be done later.

He'd probably be bringing a suit against Dumpus calling in the cops as well. But that could wait until he'd seen his doctor friend, Gig Chatman, and found out what Dumpus had actually shot into him.

Nate left the doctor spreadeagled on the lab floor went trotting away. He located the exit door, opened it and ran out into the murky night.

Dumpus' hopper was parked up on the second level of the garage dome. Nate climbed up the hanging ladder, found the keys still in the airship.

He stole the doctor's hopper and flew off. He didn't try to say goodbye to Lana.

## **CHAPTER 3**

The conductor passed through the entertainment car of the train handing out crash helmets. "We'll be going by Harlem soon, folks. Let's get these on."

"Why doesn't PennZTrak put in bulletproof windows?" asked the passenger sitting at the piano bar next to Nate.

The old overweight conductor tossed him a helmet. "We did," he said. "But now those jigaboos and grease-balls have taken to using some kind of sonic guns that blow out the glass."

"You shouldn't use racial slurs," pointed out a thin young woman sitting atop the piano in the crowded car. "It only exacerbates the situation."

Nate yawned while strapping on his white plastic helmet. The protective hat's interior smelled of pine-scent hair cream. He'd abandoned the Dumpus airship at the parking pad above the Westport train station. That was in case the doctor awoke and called the police. Nate wanted to get back to Manhattan to consult his friend, Dr. Gig Chatman. He didn't want to waste time explaining why he swiped the hopper to the Connecticut Air Cops.

The three piece combo was starting to sound a little ragged, since they were ducking down behind their instruments now.

The thin girl slid off the piano to join the bass player behind his big electric fiddle.

"125th Street," announced the conductor, throwing himself to the floor of the car.

The train hurried over the elevated tracks between the dark gutted buildings. A few Black Commandos were sitting on the roof of one of the abandoned tenements, cooking something over a garbage can fire. Two of them thumbed their noses at the 8:24 but there was no shooting.

Just after the train entered the tunnel leading into Grand Central the engineers went on strike. The train halted.

The conductor, removing his crash helmet, walked through the car handing out electric light wands, "Leave by the forward emergency door, folks, and take either Passenger Catwalk A or B into the station."

"Another typical night on the PennZTrak."

"Did he say B or C?"

"Where is B anyway?"

Nate's knees felt a little funny. Though maybe it was only because he'd

been hunkered under the piano while the train passed through Harlem. Yawning again, he moved down an aisle with the crowd of passengers. He followed along across the rails to the luminous catwalks which ran along the sooty tunnel wall.

Two mediators and a Wage Board troubleshooter were running along Catwalk A toward the stalled train.

Nate chose Catwalk B and was inside the enormous terminal in five minutes. He emerged in the legalized Gambling Wing of the station. A lean man in a scarlet-lined cape tried to talk him into coming into one of the casinos but Nate shook his head. His head felt fuzzy when he did that. Something seemed to be pressing against his skull in the ear area.

The first bank of pixphones he came to was being used by pimps. Nate walked on, heading for phones further from the Legalized Prostitution Wing of Grand Central. Finally, on the same level as the dog racing track, he located a phone alcove which was both unoccupied and functioning. He inserted his phonecard into the slot, punched out the number of Gig Chatman. Yawning and blinking, Nate sat down on the alcove stool, which was off kilter.

"While you're waiting for your call to rush along our always busy lines," announced the lovely black girl who appeared on the oval screen, "here is a recap of today's news."

"Good evening, I'm Lance Kaminsky with the news," grinned the small round man behind the metal iesk. "This recap of the news is brought to you by National Robot & Android, who now offer . . ."

Nate leaned forward, twisted the Operator knob. "This is sort of an emergency," he said. The checker-size red knob came off in his hand. He studied it, resting his head against Lance Kaminsky's grinning image.

"The Manhattan Clean Air Authority reports tonight's air is less unbreathable than yesterday's, which is good news to us all. MCAA predicts that within six months our air will be back to 1982 unbreathable levels. The notorious stungun sniper has apparently struck . . ."

A gleaming white enamel robot snapped onto the screen to replace the small dark newscaster. "Dr. Chatman's office."

"Is . . . the doctor in?" Nate tilted back to get a look at the screen.

"Whom shall I say is calling?"

"Nate."

"Nate whom?"

Nate thought a moment, rubbing the top of his fuzzy feeling head. "I'm . . . Nate Kobean."

"Dr. Chatman isn't in. I'll take your number and have him call you."

"This is something of an emergency."

"I can connect you with Dr. Appleby, who fills in nights for the doctor."

"No . . . I have to talk to . . . Gig. I'm . . . a friend of his, a personal . . . friend."

"One moment." The robot's pale blue eyes clicked shut, its head began to whirl faintly. Opening its eyes, it said, "Yes, I have your name on the doctor's list of accepted friends and associates, Mr. Kobean. Dr. Chatman's at the Vanderbilt Pistol & Stungun Range this evening, practicing with his neighborhood vigilante group. I can possibly reach him there if . . . sir?"

Nate was leaning against the screen again. He smiled, sitting up straight, swallowing. "Vanderbilt Range . . . right around the corner from where I am now . . . cellar of the old Pan Am building . . . I'll go over there and find . . . Gig."

"Very well, sir, Take care." The screen faded to gray.

Nate, after stamping his feet on the floor of the narrow alcove, stood up. His fingers felt stiff and cold.

The sounds of Grand Central—the dogs barking after their robot rabbit, the spin of the roulette wheels, the tri-sonic music from the hookers' cribs—all seemed dim and far away.

Walking carefully, he started toward an exit.

Two young Chinese boys, in pullovers identifying them as members of an anti-tong, jumped into his path. "Give us a dollar, mother," ordered the bigger of the two.

Nate blinked. "I didn't quite hear . . ." He paused to yawn.

The other boy said, "A dollar, scum. Come on, quick, hurry."

"Slurs . . . only exacerbate . . . I did a documentary on this whole issue . . . as Ed the Elf . . . he's our liberal-oriented finger puppet . . . as Ed the Elf so wisely put it—"

"Stick Ed the Elf." The large Chinese boy smacked the side of Nate's head with his brass-knuckled right hand.

Nate attempted to swing at him, but fell to one knee instead. "Listen, boys, I'm in a rush . . . an emergency. . . ."

The two boys spun, ran off.

A dark-coated arm helped Nate upright. "I'm Officer Peoples of the Indoor Police, sir, Let me advise you of your right to remain silent. Okay, now what are you under the influence of? Barbitol, secobarbitol, pentobarbitol, diazepam, meprobamate, atropine, scopolamine, amphetamine, piperidol, cannabis, peyote, dimethyltryptamine, fopium, heroin, morphine, pethidine, piminodine, acetone, amyl nitrite or what?"

"None of those," murmured Nate. His eyes kept drifting shut on him.

"Well, what's the matter then?"

"I'm . . . not exactly sure . . . help me get around to the pistol range . . . My doctor is there . . .

Dr. Gig . . . Gig Chatman . . . He can . . . handle everything. . . ."

Peoples shook his head. "I'm afraid I couldn't do that, sir. I'm an Indoor, see. To take you over to the range I'd have to be an Outdoor Policeman. Not that I'd ever want a job like that, out in the street at night with all those yahoos and hooligans. The best I can offer—"

Nate pulled himself free of the policeman's grasp. He went weaving over to the pixphone alcove he'd just been in. He sat once more on the lopsided stool. Letting out a sigh, he leaned his head against the phone screen in the wall.

He closed his eyes. He went to sleep.

## CHAPTER 4

He woke up.

So Dr. Dumpus had been bluffing after all and—

A yellow-gloved hand reached over and lit the candle stuck in his navel. The black candle began to sputter, dripping hot dark wax down onto his bare stomach.

Nate said, "Ow!"

It was a dry rattling sound, rasping and dying in his throat before getting through his cracked lips.

Nate blinked. He was lying flat on his back, lying on something cold and hard. Turning his head to the right, which for some reason caused an incredibly pain to go zigzagging up through his skull and his spine, Nate caught sight of the person who'd lit his candle.

A husky young man it was, moving away from Nate, dressed in some sort of long black-dyed rough-spun poncho. Nate and the husky young man were the only occupants of the large yurt-style building, a yurt made of see-through neoglass. Out beyond the clear walls of the big yurt stretched sandy beach and then a long brilliantly blue stripe of midday ocean.

"This isn't Grand Central Station," Nate decided.

He noticed now that he was naked. Attached to each of his big toes, by means of plastic wire, were black candles which also burned and spluttered.

"Why am I all illuminated?" asked Nate aloud, or nearly so. His voice was still having difficulty getting out of him.

He made up his mind to remove the black candle from his stomach. This took longer than he anticipated. It was several minutes, painful ones, before he got his hand to move and clutch the candle.

The husky young man had by this time left the clear-walled conical structure.

Nate had to press hard with his elbows, and expend considerable effort, to get his head raised nearer the burning candle he held. He attempted to blow it out.

"Yow!"

His lungs felt suddenly prickly, his expelled breath grated at his dry lips.

The candle continued to burn.

"Guess I don't get my wish." Nate shook the candle, blew at it again.

On the third try he got the flame to die. His head felt to be spinning clockwise, his stomach counterclockwise.

"Oy," gasped Nate.

He devoted the next several minutes to trying to sit up.

"That's not the Atlantic Ocean, by the way," he said, catching another glimpse of the bright water some quarter mile off. He wasn't certain why he said that.

He finally got into a sitting position on the altar . . . that's what this was. A pseudomarble altar, with neosatin altar cloth and simulated carvings. A slab about eight feet by six, raised up five feet from the synturf flooring of the yurt. And just to the left of his backside . . . what do they

call that thing. He'd produced a two-hour documentary on religion, with Pundit Panda as the host. You call it . . . yeah, the tabernacle. Nate had never heard of one painted black, though.

"Why the hell have I been sleeping in a church," he asked himself, "and without my clothes?"

He kept on feeling dizzy, the floor seemed a long way down from his perch.

"Could be the Travelers Aid brought me here," Nate suggested. "No, they wouldn't undress you and stick a candle in your belly button. That's a religious touch. Would the Salvation Army maybe do that? Yeah, but that isn't the Atlantic out there."

Gulls, gleaming white, were gliding low along the straight blue line of warm calm sea.

"Okay, maybe you got a call through to Gig and he brought you here. This could be some kind of private hospital. Nope, but even in a private hospital they'd stick you in a bed of some kind. Not a slab. They only put you on a slab when—" He slapped a hand across this bare thigh. It hurt. "Okay, I'm alive."

A droning humming sound had started up, off behind him someplace. Nate considered turning his head, decided against it

". . . O Prince of Darkness! Hail, O Dark Angel of Evil!" Voices, many voices, were chanting that. Voices coming closer. It didn't have a friendly sound.

"What's that funny smell?"

Nate had swung his feet over the edge of the altar. One of the still-burning candles was eating a hole in a black, lace-trimmed, altar cloth.

"Boy, this isn't my day." Nate swung his foot, trying to extinguish the candle. "First those nitwit Cub Scouts, then that guru on the fritz . . ." Somehow this didn't feel like the day those other things had happened.

Nate blew in the direction of his foot. He made a grab for his ankle, strained to pull the candle-holding foot closer to his lips.

"Nobody can do this beyond the age of 18 months or so," he reminded himself. "We did that docu on baby—"

He'd twisted further and fallen off the alter. He hit on his hip, sprawled flat out for a moment.

The fall had blown out both his toe candles. The altar cloth, however,

continued to burn.

"That thing shouldn't be burning like that. The National Fireproofing Act of 1984 specifically—"

". . . we come to pay Thee homage, O Master of Shadows!" Much louder, much closer.

Nate concentrated for about a half minute, then managed to get himself up into a standing position. He grabbed the altar cloth by a non-burning end, started flapping it in the air.

Some fifty people, men and women, each in a black roughweave poncho, began filing into the yurt as he did that.

". . . all hail to Thee, Prince Lucifer!"

Then a sudden silence spread across the conic room.

Nate gave the altar cloth a few more half-hearted flaps before letting it drop, still aflame, to the floor. "I seem to have dozed off in your church," he said into watchful silence. "See, I was in Grand Central and—"

"A sign!"

"A portent!"

"A message from His Satanic Majesty!"

Nearly all the worshippers fell to their knees. Two remained standing.

The man nearest Nate, broad and sunburned, raised his arms high, fingers widespreading. "Forgive us, O Ruler of the Inferno! And I'm sorry, by the way, we've been complaining so much about the crops lately. I mean, you can forget what we said about those little squiggly things who've been eating the lettuce and those slimy little buggers who've been nibbling the strawberries. Although, I must say I like my strawberries without . . ."

Behind this man stood a lean fellow of twenty-six. He had a boney face, a smear of blond beard. He was winking at Nate, making shooing motions, pointing at the altar, doing alley-oops in the air with his hands. "Get back up there," he mouthed.

"I'd be happy to pay for any damages." Nate reached for his wallet, slapped his bare right buttock.

The blond young man shook his head, made exasperated faces. Finally he came trotting, cautiously, up to Nate. Taking hold of his arm, he whispered, "Will you, please, climb back on the altar."

"No, I don't want—"

"Zayna and I are the only ones who know who you really are," the young man continued in a hurried whisper. "I'm regretful we loaned you to the Church of Satan, rented actually, although it was really your fault in a way. And besides it was getting too cluttered in Zayna's yurt. After we had to put her grandfather into the Senior Enclave there seemed less reason for keeping you right in the place with us. If you think about it calmly for a—"

"Who," asked Nate, "is Zayna's grandfather?"

"You know, Dr. Chatman."

"Gig Chatman has a granddaughter?"

"We can go into all the details later today when we're both in better moods. After the service concludes I'm sure I'll be able to sneak you out of here. Right now, though, you hop up on the altar and try to act dead again."

Frowning, Nate said, "What year is this?"

"2035. It's May 2, 2035 today."

Nate climbed back up on the altar.

## CHAPTER 5

". . . look at it from a more all-encompassing view, Mr. Kobean, you'll realize what we did was the wisest thing," the blond young man was saying as he led Nate along the weedy downhill twilight path. "Therefore, there's no need for you to get all frantic and rant and rave at me. I realize you old fellows tend to—"

"I'm not an old fellow." The poncho he was now wearing made his shoulders and knees itch.

"Outwardly perhaps not. Still you have to admit you're chronologically up near eighty someplace. Notice, for instance, how you're puffing and wheezing."

"That's only because I haven't used my lungs much in fifty years."

"There's nothing wrong with being a doddering old wreck," said the young man, who'd introduced himself as Motherall when he came at dusk to sneak Nate out of the yurt temple. "In an open society such as has existed in the United States for—"

"How much did you get for selling me to those devil worshippers?"

"We didn't sell you, as I explained more than once, Mr. Kobean. The

arrangement with the Church of Satan, of which both Zayna and I are members, was more in the nature of a lease."

"How much?"

"A hundred diablos a month. That's the rough equivalent of fifty USDollars."

"Fifty bucks? I'm worth more than that."

"The original offer was twenty a month," said Motherall. "Zayna talked it up to fifty, explaining that human altars aren't all that easy to come by."

At the end of the slanting path, some fifty yard ahead, stood a yurt constructed from sheets of neo wood.

"How long," inquired Nate, "have I been decorating the church?"

"Not very long."

"How long?"

"Please don't go into one of your senile diatribe when I tell you," said Motherall. "You've been serving as the altar for a little under two years. Believe me you were a lot more comfortable there than you'd been in Zayna's closet."

"Closet? You had me stuffed in a closet with a lot of old boots?"

"With her zither and water skis." Motherall gestured at the house they were approaching. "This place isn't exactly palatial, Mr. Kolean. I don't suppose you've ever had to room with a living corpse. I can assure you it's less than fun. We had you in the dining area for awhile, but it tended to upset—"

"How come you have me at all?"

"Ah, now you're starting to realize how much you owe to us. And I won't even go into the risk

I'm taking by snatching you away from the temple," said the young man. "When that doddering old wreck, Dr. Chatman, had to be put into the Senior Enclave it was decided he couldn't keep you any longer. Having a cadaver around makes old people fidgety. There was an offer from the Ronald Reagan Foundation Curiosity Museum. Unfortunately they offered us nothing much beyond a small cartage fee."

"You were going to sell me to a freak show?"

"Now, now, Mr. Kolean, people your age shouldn't get so excited. . . . it's all right, Zayna. You can come out."

A girl was lurking just inside the half-open entrance of the yurt. She appeared to be, in the waning light of the day, a large blonde in her late twenties. "Ugh," she said.

"I ought, perhaps, to mention, Mr. Kobean, that Zayna thinks of you as a cadaver and so the sight of you walk—"

"I never was a cadaver," said Nate. "And if Gig Chatman was any kind of doctor he wouldn't have left me sleeping for half a—"

"Is it talking?" asked Zayna.

"It's old Mr. Kobean speaking, yes," answered Motherall.

"Let's get this settled." Nate pushed by the young man, headed for the yurt. He'd been feeling at his face and it didn't feel any more lined or wrinkled than it had been in 1985. And his body didn't look old either.

"You must have a mirror in here," he said toward the huddled girl.

"Ugh, it's talking to me."

"Try not to frighten her, Mr. Kobean. I realize you're pretty cranky, but—"

"I want to see myself in a mirror."

"You're not at all prepossessing," said Motherall, following him into the yurt. "In fact, some of the church brotherhood complained to us because you were sort of—"

Nate stalked across the house. There was an oval mirror dangling from a lightstrip mobile. He caught it still, stared into it. "Sure, that's me," he announced "Not a day older."

"It's fondling the mirror," said Zayna. "Ugh, ugh."

"Mr. Kobean means well. You have to realize, Zayna, that back in the Twentieth Century before Openism swept away—"

"Maybe I ought to eat something." Nate turned to look at the couple. "Since I haven't eaten in fifty years."

"Cadavers don't eat," said Zayna. "Even if they did, I'll be darned if I'm going to share a meal with one."

"I'm not a cadaver. I never have been a cadaver," Nate told her. "I'm alive as you are."

"You really must look at this situation from a broader perspective, Mr. Kobean," said Motherall "When you do you'll realize it's chiefly, if not entirely, your fault. It's all very well to berate us, but you must admit you

gave us no warning that you planned to awake today . . . or that you planned ever to awake at all, for that matter. Perhaps our simple religious beliefs don't mean—"

"How could I tell you when I was going to wake up? I didn't even—"

"Allow me to continue, won't you? You have to appreciate the fact you have caused Zayna and I a good deal of embarrassment. It was no easy thing for me, I might add, convincing the others that you'd only temporarily come to life. Had you had the common courtesy to revive after the service was over in the temple, we could—"

"Listen," reminded Nate, "you are the guy who sold me to these hoodoos."

"We leased you, which is not the same thing as selling at all. Let's not forget, though, that you had yourself put into the trance. You can't blame—" "I didn't volunteer for any of this! I was grabbed by that lunatic Dr. Dumpus . . . well, you both must have heard of him. Dr. Shuster Dumpus?"

Two blank looks.

Nate swallowed. "You know . . . Dr. Shuster Dumpus. He's the renowned inventor of the Dumpus Process. It's a major breakthrough and his name is no doubt by now a household word across the length and breadth of . . . you never heard of him?"

Shaking his head, Motherall said, "No, we have never heard of any Dr. Dumpus. While you've been napping away, Mr. Kobean, the world has continued to turn. Openism has swept away a good many of the conventions and clutter of your era. Most of us don't dwell very much on the dead past. I'm something of a history buff myself, when I'm not wrapped up in devil worship and black sorcery. I know a bit about your period in history, but I doubt you'll run into many others who do. The most famed names of your time are all but forgotten now . . . Walt Disney, Calvin Coolidge, the Rolling Stones, Al Jolson, Harlan Ellison, Betty Boop . . . all, all forgotten."

Nate moved a few steps closer to the big blonde girl "Didn't Gig . . . didn't your grandfather tell you something about me?"

"It's talking to me again." Zayna got behind Motherall.

"Dr. Chatman was sentimentally attached to your remains," said the sparse-bearded Motherall. "He refused to part with you until forced to. Beyond that—"

"Okay, where is Gig Chatman now?"

"In the Senior Enclave," answered Motherall. "It's about fifty miles up the coast from us, on the way to the Frisco Enclave and not far from Guntown."

"Frisco? That's San Francisco?"

"I believe it was in your day, yes."

"Then we're in California."

"This is the State of North California."

"A long way from Manhattan," said Nate. "I wonder how—"

"Zayna's grandfather retired in 2028, moved out here to a nostalgia community on the North-South Cal border. He insisted, apparently, on bringing you along."

"I think I'd better see him."

"Ugh," said Zayna.

"What's the matter now?"

"She's still reacting negatively to you," said Motherall.

"As inconvenient as it will be to smuggle you out of our community and then escort you to the Senior Enclave, I feel I must do it. We can't have Zayna going around saying, 'Ugh,' indefinitely. What's more to the point, we don't want the rest of the brotherhood to find you here. When you were rented to them, Mr. Kobean, I more or less assured them you were going to be permanently in your state of suspended animation. Little did I realize you intended to throw a spanner into our—"

"When can we leave?"

"It will be safest near dawn tomorrow. Everybody sleeps late hereabouts. That's one of the advantages of devil worship."

Nate was studying the circular room. From a far window he could see a cluster of six other conical yurts dotting a weedy hillside. "Your settlement is all devil worshippers?"

"Devil worshippers and devotees of the occult."

"You mentioned Guntown and a nostalgia community. Does that mean there are all kinds of towns and cities now built around a single specific interest?"

"Exactly, Mr. Kobean. You're fairly perceptive for a senile old wreck."

There weren't any chairs in the room. Nate sat down on the floor. "Fifty years," he said slowly.

"Ugh," said Zayna once again.

## CHAPTER 6

They came at dawn.

Nate saw them first. He hadn't, understandably, felt much like sleeping. The warm spring night he spent in the kitchen of the now silent yurt, reading by the glow of an oval handlight. Most of Motherall's viewbooks were about either Openism or demonology. Nate was considerably more interested in 2035. Zayna had a scatter of what she called rollmags. They were scroll-like, printed on some kind of very thin laminated papersub. About five inches wide and four feet long, you rolled them from one spool to the other as you read. There was a month-old rollmag edition of *Time-Life*, two-year old copies of the *USTimes* and a *Superman* comic book. The world had changed considerably. Superman, for instance, didn't have a costume anymore, he had given up both his crime-fighting and his news work to live in a Sexual Joy community near Newark.

Nate was rereading the *Time-Life* report on the state of the economy when he sensed the approach of the devil cult.

They weren't being circumspect about it. The weedy hillside was thick with black-cloaked figures. They were spread out wide, coming slowly down toward this place.

"This doesn't bode good." Nate stuck his reading matter into the slash pocket of his poncho. According to Motherall, Nate's original clothes and his other belongings were in the possession of old Dr. Chatman.

Nate whipped across the kitchen, dived into the living room. "Hey, Motherall!"

"I realize you're anxious to be off, Mr. Kobean, yet—"

"A whole flock of them!" Nate gestured at the blanked windows.

Motherall was sitting on the edge of a calderham-mock, strapping on his sandals. "I've heard you old gentlemen often suffer from night sweats and sim—"

"It's your Devil worshipping cronies. They're sneaking up . . . no, that isn't the right word. They're descending on us."

The blond young man popped up from the hammock, which twanged and caused the naked slumbering Zayna to moan. "What are they doing up at this hour?"

Nate said, "Coming here obviously."

Motherall flicked an unblinking switch. Dawn appeared at the window. "You've done it now, Mr. Kobean. That looks to be the entire congregation."

"I didn't sell myself to those nitwits. It was you and—"

"No use arguing about who's to blame. Apparently someone missed you from the altar and, acting on the supposition you were with us, they're now coming here to fetch you back." Motherall stroked his insubstantial beard. "I don't suppose, and please don't have another of your temper outbursts, I don't suppose you'd care to go back into your trance and stretch out on on altar again. It would save us all a good deal of—"

"I don't have any control over it. It's Dr. Dumpus' process, not mine."

"We may then have a fight on our hands."

"We want our altar! We want our altar!" chanted loud angry voices out in the beginning day.

The hammock twanged again. "The hole," said Zayna, after yawning.

"Is that some new insult?"

"Ah, to be sure, the hole." Motherall kicked aside a circular mat. He knelt, punched at the floor and a round section of it slid aside. "After you, Mr. Kobean."

"Where's that go?"

"Away from here."

Nate stepped over the rim of the hole, using his handlight to illuminate the rungs of the ladder which stretched down into the darkness. The hole had a grave-like smell, but he climbed down anyway.

Motherall came after, and Zayna closed the lid on them.

"Do all these places have escape hatches?" The hole curved down and down.

"Not exactly. Perhaps I had better admit, Mr. Kobean, that I am not as devout a Satanist as I might be," said Motherall out of the darkness above. "There are other interests in my life, one of which is dealing in what one might call contraband. Hence, I have found it an advantage to have a way—"

"You really did get me from Gig Chatman, didn't you" Nate asked. "You just didn't swipe me somewhere?"

"Let me assure you I don't go in for grave robbing, Zayna is really old Dr. Chatman's kin."

The ladder ended. Nate's sandaled feet touched gritty earth. At his back he heard the sound of the sea. "We're going to come out down at the beach."

"Exactly. Now we must slip, unobtrusively, out of the hole and make our way across the sand to the place where I have my landmobile concealed."

The beach was quiet. Two dawn-colored gulls dozed on the wet sand beside the hissing foam. After a careful check, Nate emerged into the morning.

From far uphill came the shouts of the Satan followers. "Altar, altar! We want it now!"

"Are they likely to hurt Zayna?"

"She's a pretty formidable girl." Motherall wriggled out through the exit hole. "You didn't see her at her best. We need have no fear for her safety." Bent low, he went trotting along the sand. Nate followed.

The small eclair-shaped auto was bouncing and bucketing along the dusty roadway. "Isn't there a turn-pike or a freeway that would take us to the Senior Enclave?" Nate asked.

No freeways in North California." Motherall was hunkered in the driveseat. "Except in Motel Village, and that's all freeways. A series of what they used call clover-leaf—"

"I haven't seen any gas stations either."

Motherall tightened his grip on the control stick, guiding the car around a sharp, rutted curve. "You mean gasoline, Mr. Kobean?"

"Yeah, don't you use it anymore?"

"I keep forgetting you slept through the Oil Wars"

"That's 'wars' plural?"

Motherall nodded. "Last one was back in 2003 last gasoline station expired a few months after that I believe."

"Then what's this thing running on?"

"Nuclear power. You're sitting right over an infinitely tiny par—"

"I don't want to get sterilized by radiation." Nate shifted his position.

"Oh, there's very little danger of that, Mr. Kobean Besides, a man of your age needn't—"

"I'm not even thirty." Nate happened to glance out the window. Several bicycles, with oddly dressed riders were circling in the late morning meadow to his right. "Where are we?"

"Victoria Landing. A community dedicated to living life as it was lived in the reign of Queen Victoria. You no doubt remember her."

"We did a special puppetoon on her once."

"Never actually met her, though?"

"Queen Victoria reigned from . . . well, it was before my time."

"I hope you won't mind my harping on something Mr. Koebean. But I really can't help wondering why you, a man obviously fond of the life format of the late 20th Century, as unopen as it was, why you had yourself put to sleep and—"

"Look, it was Dr. Dumpus' idea. He caught me in sack with his wife. Well, no, he found me on the bridle path after the horse ran over me. The result's the same."

"You people still had marriage at that time then?"

Nate had been watching a flock of sheep grazing in in sloping field they were passing. He looked again at Motherall. "What's the theme of this community? Sheep herding?"

"No, that's merely a flock of sheep that goes with Victoria Landing."

Nate said, "There's no marriage anymore?"

"No, except in the marriage-based enclaves, such as Reno and Bigamyville and—"

"I could sleep with Lana Dumpus now and the doctor wouldn't be outraged at all," mused Nate.

"Am I to understand that you believe this Dr. Dumpus put you into a coma of fifty years duration simply because he suspected you of a dalliance, as I believe your generation called it, with his wife?"

"Yeah."

"That certainly puts a different complexion on things. I've been assuming entrance into this long term trance was voluntary. If it wasn't . . . if it was motivated by jealousy . . . then I'm afraid I don't understand, even taking into consideration the strange mores of your era, how the girl fits into all this."

"What girl?"

"The sleeping girl, of course."

## CHAPTER 7

Three little old ladies rose straight up into the afternoon. They leveled off at a height of about thirty feet waved their blue and gold plyo pompoms vigorous and then drifted back groundward.

"Two, four, six, eight! Who do we appreciate!" shouted hundreds of quavery voices.

Nate continued along the winding, tree-lined lane which led to the Senior Bowl. Motherall had left him at the gates of the Senior Enclave, promising to return for him at sundown.

"Go, Gramps, go!" came a shout from the stadium up ahead.

At the same time a swishing sound commenced behind Nate. A skyblue landtruck was rolling along the quiet cottage-filled street.

The truck slowed when it was opposite him. A black man thrust his head out of the cab, murmured something.

"Huh?" Nate stepped out onto the pink-tinted paving, walked closer to the man.

"I said where's the stiff?" whispered the Negro. Nate said, "I don't know. I'm new to—"

"Don't shout, pal." He pulled back into the cab, the truck swished on.

It rolled up to an arched entrance of the small stadium and stopped.

"Go get 'em, Grannies!"

As Nate approached the entrance two blue robots came hurrying out, carrying the body of a bald old man between them.

"You don't want to see this, Granpappy," one of the robots told him. "You don't want to think about—"

"I'm not a granpappy. I'm not even thir—"

"Nix." The black man dropped to the ground. "They're set to think everybody's old. Simpler that way, and cheaper. Haul him around back, boys."

"Sure thing, gramps."

Nate watched them deposit the dead man in the I rear of the blue truck. "That better not be Gig."

The door slammed shut, softly. The truck made a gentle rattling shudder. Smoke puffed out of a skyblue nozzle on the truck roof.

"What's that smoke from?" Nate asked the driver. "You don't want to think about it, uncle," one of the robots told him.

*Whup!*

After the unobtrusive popping a small opaque jar shot out of a chute in the door. One of the robots caught the jar in the air. Then the two of them went back into the stadium.

"Florida grapefruit! Arizona cactus! We play the Gramps just for practice!"

Nate said, "That jar. That wasn't—" "Yeah, that was the old gent. They don't like to keep 'em around too long."

"Is there some kind of plague?"

"Naw, he probably had a fatal malfunction of one of his spareparts. Happens all the time.

Nobody likes dead people around here, so we process 'em pretty fast. You here visiting a relative?"

"Friend of mine. His cottage told me he's at the soccer game."

"Well, stay young." The black man grinned as he climbed back into his truck.

The little old men were rising up over the field leading a cheer for the Gramps soccer team.

Nate went up a gently inclining ramp into the bleachers section of the Senior Bowl. He blinked at the silvery glare. Over half the old people watching the soccer match had replacement parts— arms, legs, ears—made of chromed metal and silvered plastic. The afternoon sun made splashes of glaring silver all across the arena.

Shading his eyes, Nate stood scanning the crowd. Gig's cottage hadn't known his seat number.

"Go, Grannies, go!"

A team of elderly ladies was pitted against tin Gramps on the field of play.

After a few moments Nate realized he'd been trying to spot the Gig Chatman of a half-century ago in the Senior Bowl crowd. "I should have asked Zayna for a recent picture of him," he said to himself. "But when you're going through a hole in the floor one step ahead of a horde of devil

worshippers—"

"It can't be!"

Nate turned his attention to a tall, spare old man who was rising up from a seat near the aisle ramp. The man had short-cropped white hair and an aluminum nose. "Gig?" asked Nate tentatively.

"You woke up!" exclaimed the old man. "You woke up, Nate!"

"Shut up down there!"

"Sit down, pal!"

"Roll 'im!"

Gig Chatman was making his way by the other venerable spectators. He held out a gnarled left hand. "We'll shake with this one, Nate. My right's a pros."

"Um . . ." said Nate. "You're looking well, Gig, all things considered."

Chatman put his real hand and his artificial hand on Nate's shoulders. "How've you been . . . well, I guess you don't know."

"Down in front!"

"Who's the young kid?"

"Roll 'em!"

"We'd better go to my cottage." Chatman gripped his arm. "I trust Zayna and Motherall have been taking good care of you." "They sold me to a devil cult."

"Ah, young people nowadays." The retired doctor led his friend out of the stadium.

"It's here someplace, Nate. Don't fret." Chatman was crouched in front of the storage alcove in his cottage living room. Standing back from it, he said "Maybe you can find it."

"What sort of a box is it?"

"Oh, you know, a box." The old man rubbed at his metal nose. "A syntin box, as I recall. I really haven't, forgive me Nate, looked at the thing for years. When you get to be my age you'll . . . but then, you are my age, aren't you, in spite of the way you look."

Nate knelt and began sorting through the boxes, plyobags and other memorabilia which Chatman had brought West with him years before. "You never tried to get in touch with Dr. Dumpus?"

"Who?"

"Dr. Shuster Dumpus. The guy who did this to me."

"You won't mind if I sit down, Nate? Lately I get woozy whenever I stoop much. I'm debating about having my head re-nerved . . ." He lowered himself into an antique lucite rocker. "Yes, I remember now. You were having an affair with this Dumpus' wife Anna was her name, wasn't it?"

"Lana."

"Yes, that's right, Lana. Whatever became of her?"

"Gig, I went to sleep in 1985," reminded Nate he searched the alcove. "I was hoping since you found the hypogun on me . . . well, you might have connected it with Dumpus. If I could have stayed awake another hour I might have been able to tell you about what'd happened."

"I'm recalling it now . . . yes, they called me at . . . some sort of gun club. The police had found you and my nurse . . . well, I don't remember all the details," Chatman sighed, then rubbed his hands slowly together. "You were quite a challenge to me, Nate, matter of fact, Liza . . . you remember Liza, my second wife?"

"Yeah, how is she?"

"Dead. Yes, you were quite a challenge. I did find the hypogun, as I mentioned, and I analyzed it and its residues."

"So you do know what Dr. Dumpus shot into me?"

"More or less. There were a few components of the various injected fluids which I—"

"Is this the box?"

Chatman squinted. "Must be."

Nate had located a worn black-tinted syntin box. He got it open. Inside were his wallet, bankcards, creditcard and a bundle of personal papers. There was also a wad of notes in Chatman's scribbly hand. The hypogun rested on top of it all. "What about all my other things, the stuff that was in my apartment?"

"Let me think, Nate." Chatman tilted back, eyes closing. "I believe I had your bulkier belongings stored somewhere. You know, Nate, I can't quite recall," said the old man. "I hope you can understand my . . . well, losing interest in you. For the first five or six years I tried everything I could think of to revive you. And you were quite a curiosity. We had top medics from all over the place dropping in to take a look. No luck."

"Too bad you didn't think to consult Dr. Dumpus."

"Dr. Dumpus . . ." Chatman polished the tip of his nose with the ball of his thumb. "I know why I never talked to him. Yes, he was killed in a hopper accident. Couldn't have been too awfully long after you began your long sleep."

"So much for the spread of the Dumpus Process," said Nate. "And that's probably why he didn't come looking for me."

"Why would he look for you?"

"I'm part of an experiment. I was meant to spend my nap time in his basement," explained Nate, "His process of his puts you into a sort of super-hibernation state for fifty years at a crack."

"That's impossible. No one can . . . but I suppose you're proof that they can."

"Look, Gig, I was only one of several people Dumpus tried it on. Have you heard of any other victims?"

Dr. Chatman's pale gray eyes were on the bankcards in Nate's hand. "I believe I made all the necessary efforts to keep your account active. Yes, some of cryonics laws of the late Nineties covered your case. What with day of deposit day of withdrawal interest compounded daily, you're a very well off old—"

"Yeah, okay, I can use the dough," cut in Nate. "Motherall told me about a girl. She's supposedly be asleep for years. Do you know anything about her?"

"I can't get over how young you look, Nate. It's truly—"

"What about the girl?"

"Since I moved in here I've concentrated pretty much on local affairs. That's one of the blessings of Openism, you can ignore so much. I go to the soccer matches a lot, I've taken up field hockey and I'm thinking about having my pecker augmented. They've got a new prick attachment now that—"

"Gig, if this process works the way Dr. Dumpus promised—and I've no reason, now, to think it won't—then I'm going to go back to sleep in a few months."

"Asleep? You mean for another fifty years? It was fifty, wasn't it. I really haven't kept that close track these past few—"

"Yeah, fifty years."

The old doctor pursed his lips, shaking his head lowly. "Nate, I really don't think we can ask Zayna and Motherall to look after you for another

fifty years, the poor girl is—"

"Forget about Zayna. What I want is somebody who may know something about exactly what was done to me," said Nate. "And somebody, an MD or whatever, who can halt the process. I don't want another fifty year nap."

"I don't keep up with the profession at all anymore, Nate. Nelda . . . did you ever meet my third wife?"

"No."

"Married her just before marriage went out of vogue. She's living in a horticultural community down in New Pasadena," Chatman said. "Very intelligent woman, in some ways. She used to chide me for . . . What were we talking about?"

"Can you think of anyone I can talk to?"

"You could talk to Nelda. If you care for flowers and hanging plants. That's about all she . . . no, I really am sorry, Nate. We were such good friends and I know you may think I've turned my back on you. But fifty years—"

"It's a long time. I know."

## CHAPTER 8

Dusk was spreading across the vast empty field of grass. A half a mile from him the word Banx floated fifteen feet up in the fading sky. Nate, wearing a two-piece leisuresuit loaned him by Gig Chatman, was hurrying through the knee-high grass toward the floating crimson letters.

He slowed his pace, turning his head from side to side. He had the impression something was slithering through the high grass not too far off. Nothing but stillness now.

Motherall had never returned to Senior Enclave for him. Nate decided to hike to the nearest bank and get some of his funds out. He'd buy new clothes and some kind of transportation and then find the sleeping girl. She, whoever she was, was his only lead.

The tuffglass Banx booth was the size of a shower cubicle. It appeared to be, except for a display of weapons and appliances, empty. Nate halted a few feet from it, coughed.

A small hand reached above the counter of the sealed booth to grab a

stungun from the display rack.

"Beg pardon," said Nate in the direction of the hand. 'I'd like to withdraw—"

"I've got a stungun aimed right at your crotch," announced a girl's voice. "I don't know if you've ever had your crotch stunned before, but they say—"

"Look, I only want to withdraw my own money." Nate noticed the barrel of the gun protruding out of a hole in the opaque lower half of the tuffglass booth. "Anyway, that thing looks to be aimed at my knee. I know some guys have a crotch that extends that low, but I—"

"If you're not a desperado let's have your Banx number."

"Okay, I'll get my card and—"

"Everybody knows his own Banx number."

"Probably so. The thing is, I haven't used my account for fifty years, so—"

"I've never had anybody hold me up this way before. You're pretending to be an old man?" The top of a blonde head appeared above the counter.

"You have nice eyebrows." He tugged out his recently acquired bankcard.

The girl rose higher. She was a pretty blonde of no more than twenty, very freckled. "You don't look like a desperado," she said, after studying him for several seconds. "But then, desperadoes never do."

"This must be my number here.

16-17-18-19-MAX-222120-KO-161-B-781. Does that sound right?"

"I'll ask my computer." She reached out a small hand, the one that wasn't holding the gun, to punch I out a question on the querybox to her left.

Nate approached closer to the domed booth. "You get held up much?"

"You're the first one today."

Nate was hearing the rustling sound again. He stared back into the growing darkness. "Are there many snakes hereabouts?"

"You mean the noise in the grass? That's only cutpurses."

"Those are people?"

"Cutpursing is an old profession which has been enjoying a revival in recent years. Particularly around my branch of Banx."

"It is an isolated spot for a bank."

"Zoning," said the girl. "All this talk about Openism, and you still can't stick a bank in any . . . oops. Here comes your answer."

"KOBAN, NATE. AGE 80," boomed the voice of the computer.  
"CURRENT BALANCE: \$1,246,000."

"Hey, that's pretty good," said Nate. "That's a hell of a lot more than—"

"What did I tell you about yelling so?" The girl bopped the computer's speaker box with a little fist "All the cutpurses have heard you and—"

"I'm not planning on withdrawing it all," said Nate "That's quite a balance, though, isn't it? Boy, leaving your money sit for fifty years really adds up."

"Yes, let's say you deposited \$1000 on Jan 1 of . . . My, would it be 1985?" She widened her eyes to look at him more thoroughly. "That's a while ago. Very well . . . by Jan 1 of 1986 you'd have \$1060. Then in 1987 . . . you don't want me to do it for the whole entire fifty years?"

"Nope, especially with cutpurses hanging around out there in the dark." He checked the gathering darkness again.

"SPECIAL CRYONICS LAW OF 1996 APPLIES TO CASE OF KOBAN, NATE," said the voice of the computer.

The blonde girl asked, "Does that mean you've been dead?"

"Only sleeping." Putting his lips next to the customer speakhole, he said, "I'd like to withdraw around \$2000 I guess."

"MINIMUM WITHDRAWAL AT A FIELD BANX BRANCH IS \$5000."

"Hush up," the girl told the computer. "That's why so few customers ever come to my branch. It's him."

"Okay, I'll take out \$5000 then." Nate still wasn't very clear about what the dollar was worth in 2035. \$5000 sounded as though it should get him through a few days at least.

"When did you wake up?" asked the girl.

"Yesterday. Yeah, yesterday morning."

"Well, welcome back. I suppose the world must look—"

"If I could get my money and take off before darkness falls completely."

"You must forgive me. I get so few customers out here that I tend to talk on and on when anyone shows up. How'd you like your \$5000?"

"Oh, I guess I better get a mix of bills. Some \$20s, lot of \$10s, and some

\$50s and—"

"We don't have currency anymore, Mr. Kobean. I meant did you want scrip or chits?"

His eyes on the darkening field, Nate said, "What's the easiest to use?"

"It depends on where you're going."

"First off I want to rent or lease some sort of car then I'm going to visit a town called Violence.

There's supposed to—" "Violence, California? Um . . . then it really doesn't matter. They'll kill you before you get a chance to spend it."

"I figured it was a rough place," said Nate. "From the name."

"What you ought to do, if you don't mind my offering you some advice, what you ought to do is get one of these."

He looked toward the display case she'd nodded at. "A portable waffle warmer?"

"No, over here. One of these guns."

"FREE STUNGUN WITH EVERY NEW ACCOUNT OPENED!" explained the computer.

"I could use a gun or two, except I'm not opening an account."

"You could open a new account with some of the money you're withdrawing from your old account," suggested the girl.

"Couldn't you simply sell me one?"

"Against the—"

"AGAINST THE RULES!"

After another survey of the dark field, Nate said "Yeah, all right, I'll open a small account.

What would you suggest?" "Why not a Nondenominational Gift Day Club account? With that you get a stungun, a mercy- bullet six-shooter and a lollypop."

"What's Nondenominational Gift Day?"

"I think it used to be called Christmas. Openism, you know, doesn't favor something so specific." "I ought to get something I can kill people with," said Nate. "Like that flame-pistol there. That's lethal, isn't it? You could mow down a few cutpurses with that?"

"KILLS 'EM UP TO FIFTY FEET OFF!"

"That's good, I wouldn't want any of them to get closer than fifty feet."

"In order to get the free flame-pistol you have to deposit \$500 in a What's-Left Vacation Club Plan."

"What's left?"

"What's-Left-of-Europe," replied the blonde girl, "You get not only the flame-pistol, but a junior-size stungun and a taco-warmer."

"Okay, sure, we'll do that. And give me the rest of my dough in scrip. That sounds classier than chits." He slid his bankcard into the appropriate slot in the girl's booth.

"I might mention," she said while she processed his withdrawal and new deposit, "that I get off work at six. If you'd care to escort me to dinner, Mr. Kobean, I'd be happy to tell you all about today's customs and manners. Sexual taboos are much less stringent than they were in your day, for instance."

Nate smiled through the tuffglass at her. "That's very thoughtful of you," he said. "The thing is, I have to get to Violence as soon as I can."

"I'd say look me up again when you get back . . . except you won't be getting back."

"Even so," he said, shrugging with one shoulder Night was closing in.

**"ONE FLAME-PISTOL, ONE STUNGUN AND A TACO-WARMER COMING UP."**

The weapons and the appliance popped out of a knee-level chute. Nate left the taco-warmer where it landed. The stungun he tucked into his sash, the flame pistol remained in his hand.

A moment later \$5000 in pale green scrip, less the \$500 club payment, dropped out of another chute. He thrust that into an inner pocket of his jacket. "Hope you get home safely," he said to the girl.

"Oh, the cutpurses are only interested in money," she said. "Good luck . . . not that it'll do you any good."

Nate gave her a quick smile, turned his back on the Banx booth. The grass had turned black. He narrowed his eyes but caught no sign of motion.

Cautiously, he began walking toward the road. Nothing but night and silence all around him.

Apparently the computer's highly audible remark about the pistol and

the stungun had caused the lurking cutpurses to hold back. Nate reached the roadway safely.

"Now all I have to worry about is the sleeping girl."

## CHAPTER 9

The road sign reading *Welcome To Violence!* exploded when his rented landcar was forty feet from it. Vinyl screws pattered down on the nose of Nate's vehicle, noryl shreds of sign smacked at his view window. Nate slowed the car. That was a mistake.

It gave three masked footpads who'd been hunched down in the weedy shrubs beside the road a chance to run out and leap upon various parts of Nate's car. A moment later the floating street light-globes began to go out. Someone was sniping at them with a powerful sonic-rifle. Shards of pink neoglass rained down on the car and the three masked footpads.

"Golly," said the navigation box on the dash. "I'm having a real tough time flying in the dark."

"We're not flying, we're driving," Nate reminded. "Don't you have night-sensors?"

"Yes, but one of those galoots just poked them both out. Wasn't that a nasty thing to—"

*Wham! Bam!* The vehicle slammed into a tree. Nate's seat gripped him tight with wire arms, kept him from injury. Grabbing his flame-pistol from off the passenger seat, he elbowed the door. The seat kept on holding him.

"Come on, let go. The damn car has stopped."

"Hoo boy," exclaimed the navigation box, "that was some rough landing. I didn't see that mountain at all,"

Another push got the door open. After bleeping for a moment the drive-seat released Nate.

"Okay, you bastards." Nate leaped to the road and waved his flame-pistol. "Scatter or I'll fry . .

." Two of the footpads were sprawled unconscious in the weeds, the third was on his hands and knees, muttering, "Only a little good natured kidding, pal. You didn't have to massacre us."

Nate told his car, "Wait here."

The town of Violence spread out before him. It covered several square miles and was mostly low buildings, brilliant light displays and noise. Keeping his lethal pistol evident, Nate started along the main street.

A big man, spattered with whipped soycream, came tumbling backward out of the Pie-In-The-Face Cafe. He hit his tail bone on the gutter edge, teetered and fell into the street.

Before he could rise the pseudoplateglass front window of Smash's Bistro exploded outward, showering him, and then passing Nate, with slivers of jagged blue.

Inside Smash's customers were throwing chairs and tables, ripping oil paintings out of their frames, tramping on other customers' hats and personal belongings.

Nate continued on his way, watchful.

"Get rid of those aggressions, pal?" inquired a leotarded man in front of a place called The Paper Doll Gay Bar. "Come in and beat up a pansy. Only cost you . . ."

Nate didn't stop. The bar he was seeking wasn't, according to what Motherall had told him, far from here.

Someone screamed inside BondageLand. A light sign throbbled on to announce: Hourly Floggings! You Flog Us . . . \$10. We Flog You . . . \$20.

"Watch out, pal!" warned a small shadow-eyed man in the doorway of Whip City. "Sniper."

A naked youth was hopping up and down on the roof of the Slaughterhouse Steak Pub across the street. He had blaster rifles clutched in each hand.

"You think he's a sniper?" asked Nate. "Could be an exhibitionist."

The small man pointed a thumb at Kill-A-Pet next door to him. "He snarfed a window full of bunnies not three minutes ago, pal."

Nate, watching the capering youth, sprinted on along the night street.

The word Kapow! showed above a building at the corner. That was the saloon he wanted.

Several husky men were lying around outside the entryway to Kapow! Nate noticed, uneasily, that two of them, at least, were dead. He wended his way through the spill of bodies.

"Duck!" advised a tattooed blonde woman.

Nate ducked.

About half of an upright piano came sailing across the room. It went over Nate's lowered head with a foot of clearance and smashed into a synplaster wall.

"Much obliged," Nate, straightening, said to the blonde woman.

"Now that annoys me," said the piano player to the two rusty cyborgs who'd heaved his instrument.

"We intended it should."

"Darn, now I'm going to have to cut out your liver and lights and a few gears as well."

Nate pushed his way closer to the long battered bar.

There was the girl. She lay in a plastic dome up behind the bar on an alcove shelf. The dome floor was covered with tacky red lycra, the girl was naked. She was dark-haired, in her early twenties, long and slim.

"Your first look?" inquired a one-eyed priest next to Nate at the bar.

"Huh? . . . Oh, yeah. How long's she been here?"

The priest rubbed at his only eye with a scabby knuckle. "Let's see . . . I've been coming here for about five years, ever since I got defrocked in the Papal Enclave near Omaha. She was up there the first time I ever came in."

The girl was alive, there was a very faint sign of respiration. She must be one of Dumpus' nappers. Except that Nate had the impression the doctor had only processed guys who'd been fooling around with Lana.

"Watch out." The priest tugged Nate's sleeve.

The other half of the piano came flying in their direction. It went over the bar, hit at the sleeping girl's dome before breaking into debris.

"Hey, you butts," shouted the mulatto bartender, "you want to hurt the pussy?"

One of the cyborgs touched rusty fingers to his forelock. "Excuse it, pal. Our passions got the best of us."

"Butts." The bartender turned his back on them, kicking at the remains of the piano.

"Sometimes she sleeps on her back." The priest winked his single eye.

The naked girl was curled up in a fetal position.

"At which times," continued the priest, "the view is, if you get my meaning, somewhat more interesting."

"Yeah, yeah . . . so she moves now and then?"

"I've never actually witnessed it myself, but I know she does," the priest said. "It might be a trick, though . . . *Dominus vobiscum!*" He crossed himself, then pointed at the dome.

The dark-haired girl was sitting up, eyes wide open.

"She's awake," said the bartender.

## CHAPTER 10

"She's going to stay right there!" insisted the proprietor of Kapow! He was a stout Chinese, wearing an allseason cloak.

"No! Let 'er out!" shouted several of the patrons.

They were all crowded into the bar area, watching the awakened girl.

She was sitting with one hand pressed against the inner surface of the dome, looking out at the crowd though not yet actually seeing them.

"Listen to me, you louts," cried the proprietor from behind the bar. "I got a long term lease on this little bimbo. It ain't nowhere near run out. She stays in the case, awake or asleep."

"Let 'er go!"

"It's the humane thing to do," said the one-eyed priest.

"What would I replace her with? This bimbo is a first-class attraction," said the Chinese, angry. "At least she was, before you buffoons woke her up."

Nate, eyes on the girl, took a deep breath. "Watch out," he said in a low voice. Then he leaped over the bar.

With a swing of his elbow he propelled the proprietor into the bartender. He had his flame-pistol in his right hand, his stungun in his left. "Reverend, come back here and help me get her free."

"My boy, if I get up too high I get dizz—"

"Come on, hurry up!"

"*Et cum spiritu tuo*," murmured the one-eyed man as several of the customers boosted him over. "That'a boy! Let 'er loose."

"Maybe the owner's right. Maybe she ought to stay in there."

"Bullshit!"

"Don't bullshit me!"

"Bullshit!"

*Whop!*

A brawl commenced on the customer side of the bar.

"There's a catch around back," Nate told the priest, keeping the proprietor and the bartender covered. "Fiddle with it, get her out."

"I'm all thumbs in a situation like this."

"That bimbo is my property," said the Chinese. "I got papers, I got a warranty."

The dark-haired girl noticed the priest, said something.

"We'll have you free in a moment, child. Where's that damned catch?"

"To the left."

"Ah, yes. Oops. That's one reason I stopped giving out communion wafers. The shakes. Of course, when I read a later report on all the additives they put in them I was—"

"Open it!"

*Click!*

The dome swung up and open.

"Your cloak," Nate said to the proprietor. "Give it here."

"Not likely. I paid a fistful of scrip for—"

"Now!"

"Okay, pal, okay. She's been lying there bareass for years, a few minutes more ain't—"

"Put it around her, Reverend."

"Here, my child." The priest draped the cloak over the girl's bare shoulders.

A large chunk of piano came whistling by. The brawl had taken in almost everyone in the saloon. "We'll go out the back way." Nate held the stungun toward the priest. "Keep them covered, then follow me and the girl."

"I don't rightly know if I—"

"Never mind." Nate squeezed the stungun trigger twice.

The proprietor and the bartender froze where they stood.

He took hold of the girl's hand, which was surprisingly warm. "We'll go now."

"I don't quite understand what's happening," she said. "But am I correct in assuming that Dr.

Dumpus sent you?"

"And who's the current president of the United States?" The girl was sitting in the passenger seat of the rented landcar, legs tucked under her, cloak wrapped around her.

Nate looked from the night road to the girl. She was pretty, though somewhat slim for his tastes. "Huh . . . I don't know," he answered. "I haven't thought to ask anybody. Wait though . . . I did see his picture in *Time-Life*. His name starts with a T, I think."

"You've been awake for a day and a half, yet you don't seem to have taken advantage of it at all. So many new things to learn, so many new things to see and experience. I really wonder why Dr. Dumpus allowed you to participate at all. You don't seem to have the intensity or—"

"Look, Miss . . . Oh, I didn't introduce myself. I'm Nate Kobean."

"My name is Gena Herbert." The girl frowned. "I don't recall seeing your name on the list."

"What list?"

"The list of volunteers."

"He actually showed you a list of the people he put to sleep?"

"Naturally. I'm his assistant. I work . . . worked at Smaltex with the doctor. I was also fortunate enough to be chosen by the doctor to assist him in his more important work with the Dumpus Process."

"Jesus! You volunteered for this?"

"Yes, of course. The same as yourself," said Gena.

"I didn't volunteer," said Nate. "Dumpus grabbed me while I was unconscious from being stepped on by a horse, tied me to a lab table and shot me full of lord knows what. The next thing I know I wake up in a temple full of raving devil cultists with a candle stuck in my—"

"Perhaps you can tell me, now that you mention it, why we didn't awaken in the sleep chamber beneath the doctor's laboratory."

"I was never down there. I managed to get away from him, tried to reach a friend of mine in Manhattan. Didn't quite make it."

Gena said, "I'm afraid I still don't understand exactly how you fit into the doctor's program, Mr. Kobean. You quite obviously aren't enthusiastic about—"

"Listen, Miss Herbert, I had a great job, interesting friends and . . . now that's all suddenly fifty years in the past. I saw one of my former friends today and he's now a doddering old wreck with a tin nose. The reason Dr. Dumpus did this to me is because I was . . . I was friendly with his wife."

"You were one of the fellows who slept with Lana, huh?" She shook her head. "Poor Dr. Dumpus. Why brilliant men so often tend to pair up with dimwits I really don't—"

"That was where all the volunteers came from, Miss Herbert. I don't care what Dumpus told you. Except for you, and if you want to label people dimwits I think anyone who willingly signed up for something this goofy is—"

"There's no reason to malign the doctor further," said the girl. "I appreciate your rescuing me from what seemed to be an unpleasant situation. Now if you'll simply take me to Dr. Dumpus, I'll—"

"Dumpus is dead," Nate said. "He was killed in an accident almost fifty years ago."

Gena blinked. "Oh," she said slowly. "Then what do we do next?"

## **CHAPTER 11**

The Sheraton-Franchise Hotel was built on stilts out over the ocean. At dawn Nate stepped out on the balcony of his seventh floor room.

"I'm glad you're up, we can talk." Gena was sitting in a simwicker chair on the next balcony over. She wore a simple one-piece daydress.

Sitting on the railing which separated them, Nate said, "You didn't sleep either? I haven't since I awoke the first time."

"Then we didn't really need two rooms." She left her chair, climbed over onto his balcony. Her warm bare leg rubbed across his hand. "I don't seem to require sleep either."

"You worked with Dumpus. Did he talk very much about what the waking periods would be like?"

Gena turned, placed her fingertips on the railing, to watch the brightening Pacific. "Like many men of genius the doctor was secretive

with—"

"How many geniuses have you known?"

"Only Dr. Dumpus, but I've read a lot. Please don't keep hectoring me. We have to get along some, since it's essential we work together."

"Okay, so did he expect that we'd stay awake all the time during the periods between naps?"

"I don't believe he was certain. Although I believe he was hopeful such would be the case."

"From what you told me last night, Dumpus put you to sleep only a few weeks after me. Did he have the antidote worked out by then?"

"Something to halt the napping process, you mean?"

"Yeah, he was thinking about some kind of cure when he got hold of me."

"I really don't understand why you're so anxious to halt the process, Mr. Kobean," Gena said. "Don't you appreciate the fantastic opportunity this is for you? It's time travel, it's very near to having immortality, it's—"

"It's Dumpus propaganda you're giving me." Nate stepped back into his room. "I was doing fine in 1985. I don't know if you ever saw any of my puppetoon documentaries or my—"

"You'd throw away an opportunity like this for a bunch of idiot puppets?"

"Listen, Miss Herbert, I won an Emmy in the Animated-Stuffed Figure News Category. I was setting things up to get maybe a Pulitzer in Kid Reporting. Not to mention—"

"What about Lana Dumpus? You couldn't have had a very happy life at all if you had to seek out a dim-witted, bovine—"

"She wasn't bovine."

Gena sat on the edge of his sleepcot. "We really don't seem to like each other much, Mr. Kobean. I'm sorry for that. We shouldn't, however, let the fact screw up our purpose."

Nodding, Nate said, "Yeah, you're right. What we have to do next is locate some of the other nappers. I also want to see if I can locate Dumpus' heirs. Somebody must have his notes and papers. If only you'd paid more attention to what was—"

"I've explained this twice already, Kobean. Dr. Dumpus kept a good deal of his process secret from me."

"Yeah, yeah, I know."

"I spent the night reading and viewing," said the slender girl. "There's a town not far from what I believe must be San Francisco . . . They do call San Francisco the Frisco Enclave now, don't they?"

"Yes, that's SF."

"Very well, there's a town near there called Info. The main interest of the residents is information and its retrieval. They supposedly have access to most of the data stored anywhere in the world."

"We should be able to trace down Dumpus' research material there then."

"Yes, I suppose so," said the girl. "More important, we can locate some of the others who took part in the program."

Nate watched her for nearly a half minute. "You'd like to go on, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I'm still excited by this," she said. "I know you're more interested in finding a way to quit."

That needn't stop us from working together."

"Even though I don't sleep, I find I still like to eat. Like to have breakfast?"

"Yes, all right."

She stood, shaking her head. "It's really a shame you're so self-involved. You might really be able to contribute something to the program."

All along the central street of the town of Franchise antique plastic gleamed in the morning sunlight. From their booth in the International House of Pancakes they could see a good many of the dozens of shops and restaurants which filled the town—MacDonald's, Fat Ed's, Safeway, Brooks Brothers, Macy's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Carvel, Holiday Inn, Hertz, A&P.

"Quite a few places from our time," remarked Nate.

"None of the franchise and chain operations re-created here are later than 1999," said Gena, after sipping her syncaf. "You ought to have read the booklet they put in all the hotel rooms."

"I spent the night thinking."

"I know, about a way to get out of this. It's really shame you—"

"You've pointed that out already," he said. "Look, we're stuck with each

other . . . much the same as Adam and Eve in all those last man on Earth stories."

"Dr. Dumpus processed several others. I'm betting we find them."

"Maybe," said Nate, watching a Borden's truck go rattling by.

"You aren't optimistic about anything, are you?"

He rested his elbows on the table, leaned toward her. "It's obvious that somebody, and we don't know who as yet . . . somebody broke into Dumpus' lab. Either that or his kin did it. The nappers are scattered. You were sold to the Kapow! saloon years ago. There's no telling what was done with the others. Could be we'll learn something about them at Info, but—"

"Will there be anything else?" asked the blond android waitress. She was dressed in the style of the middle years of the Twentieth Century, had been programmed to chew gum and keep her realwood pencil stuck in the curly hair over her left ear.

"Miss Herbert?"

"No, nothing, thanks."

The waitress buzzed, a check popped out of the slot in her forehead. "Pay the cashier," she said as she slapped it facedown on the table. Gena said, "I don't imagine Adam and Eve went around calling each other Mr. Kobean and

Miss Herbert. Shall we knock it off, Nate?"

"Up to you."

"You really are a throwback. I wouldn't be surprised if you turned out to be a napper from 1890 instead of 1985."

Nate picked up the check. "We better look to getting your bank account straightened out," he said. "That's a Banx office across there, behind that Bank of America facade."

"If you'd loan me a little something, I'd like to buy some clothes and things first," she said, rising. "This off the rack vending machine dress we got last night in the Greyhound depot isn't exactly what I want wear on my tour of the future."

"This isn't the future." He got up, walking with her to the cashier's booth. "This is the present, and we have to live here. So if you'd stop acting like Alice in Wonderland—"

"Alice was a feisty little broad," said the slim girl, "is that what you mean?"

The cashier was a human, a chunky Mexican in a three-piece white worksuit. He was watching a little palm-size TV set. "An outrage, an outrage," he was muttering.

"What's an outrage?" Nate set the check and a strip of scrip on the booth counter.

"Vandalism." The cashier turned the screen toward them. "The Allday News is telling about what some crumbums did to our last California redwood tree. They carved it all up. It's an outrage."

"Yeah, they . . . Gena!"

She took hold of his arm, fingers tightening. "It's a message for us."

On the trunk of the huge tree, in bold foot-high capital letters, was carved: NAPPERS!

DUMPUS VICTIMS! RALLY IN FRISCO! ASK AT BV! [Signed] Z.

## CHAPTER 12

Dum-dum bullets were thunking into the plexo walls of the Frisco Enclave Tourist Bureau. A small concerned-looking man in a one-piece gray daysuit was ducked behind a large neometal sign which said: Welcome To Frisco Enclave! Biggest Liberal Community in the West! He was, occasionally, lobbing plyoballs of yellowish gas toward the nearby grove of trees where the frequent shots were originating.

"We're not going to get much information here," said Nate. Their car was entering the outskirts of the Frisco Enclave. "Let's try to—"

"There are at least six of those lunks over in the woods," said Gena. "All ganging up on that one poor balding man."

"They probably have good and sufficient reasons."

"We have to help him, Nate."

"Okay." He swung the car off the road and into the green-graveled drive in front of the tourist dome, "I think they said this car was bulletproof."

*Thum! Thum!*

Slugs smashed into the car windows. The windows gave off crackling noises but did not shatter.

"There's supposed to be a public address mike on the dash someplace." Nate halted the car near the welcome sign. "That way we can talk to him

without getting out of the car."

"This must be it."

"Note, that's the beard-trimmer."

"This maybe?"

"Let me try talking into it. No, wait, this is the juice blender."

"Oh, here's the microphone . . . but I can't get it loose from the dash. The cord is all twisted and tangled."

"I'll lean down." Tilting his head until it almost touched the girl's bare knee, Nate cleared his throat "Can we help you out any?"

The balding man cupped his hands. "No, thanks. This is only a little demonstration," he shouted.

"What's he say?" asked Nate.

"It's a little demonstration."

"Frisco Enclave wouldn't be Frisco Enclave," continued the beseiged tourist bureau manager, "if we didn't allow free expression of a wide range of . . . oof!"

A slug had raked his right arm. Nate bent down again to the stuck mike. "We better get you to a doctor."

"No, no, thanks. The doctors in Frisco Enclave all make house calls. I've already alerted my GP . . . always do when one of these little things gets going." Groaning, gripping at his wounded arm, he collapsed to the ground. "Now how can I help you while we're waiting?"

*Thum!*

"Who are those guys in the woods?"

"Oh, those are the Poets."

"Some kind of youth gang?"

"No, they're really poets. They're mad because our last brochure was in iambic pentameter instead of . . . but I do think I'd better answer your tourist questions before I pass out from loss of blood."

"Well . . . okay. We're looking for someplace called the BV."

"Yes, the Buena Vista, one of the bright spots in Frisco Enclave. A lovely remnant of the city's romantic past. The Buena Vista of today is a faithful reproduction of one of the fabled romantic bistros which flourished here in the Twentieth Century. Built of . . . wow, I'm starting to feel woozy."

"Hey, before you go under," said Nate, "how do we get to the place?"

*Thunk! Thunk!*

"Forgive me if I don't give you one of our scroll-maps," groaned the wounded man. "I suppose I could crawl into my office if you—"

"Don't bother. You can simply tell us."

The tourist bureau manager, as he sank down closer to the ground, gasped out directions.

"Thanks for your trouble. Hope you're feeling better soon." Nate reversed the landcar, got back on the road and went roaring by the angry Poets.

"That was sort of an inane remark," said Gena. "It's a wonder you didn't add, 'Nice meeting you', while you were at it. Here the poor guy is practically dying—"

"Is that my fault? We offered to help him. If he wants to shoot it out with a band of outraged poets, that's not my problem.

Gena folded her arms under her breasts.

The waiters at the Buena Vista were all androids. The one serving Nate and Gena was large and blond. "Beg pardon, sir?"

They had a small round table which gave them a view of the calm Bay. "We're trying to find somebody who calls himself Z."

"Z?"

"Z."

"It's an unusual name, isn't it, sir?"

Gena said, "More likely an initial."

The android placed a forefinger against his dimpled chin. "I do enjoy word games," he said.

"Let me see if I can guess what the Z stands for. And don't tell me, or it spoils all the fun."

"Look, this isn't a game. He has to find this Z guy."

"Z might as easily," pointed out Gena, "be a girl."

"Carving up the last redwood in California doesn't strike me as the kind of thing a girl would—"

"Zanzibar!" exclaimed the waiter. "Stop playing games," Nate told him. "We really have—" "No, I mean that's who you want. His name is

Zanzibar," explained the blond mechanism. "The very moment you mentioned the defacing of that priceless historical relic, I thought of Zanzibar. He's been doing things like that for months. You ought to see what he did to the Grand Canyon and—"

"How do we contact this Zanzibar guy?"

The android sighed. "He's told us to be on the alert for anyone who asked for him," he said. "If you ask me, it's an imposition, having us worry ourselves over Zanzibar's problems. The long and the short of it is, he's having a torrid affair with Mrs. Hutchison and she, as you probably know, is the President of the League of Women Restorers. Naturally she's head over heels in his power and lets him get away with—"

"Where is he?"

"Where is he?" The waiter stroked his dimple. "Considering the time of day, he's not likely to be in the hay with Mrs. Hutchison. Yes, since it's barely noon he's most certainly where he is when he isn't putting it to that giddy woman."

"And where is that?"

"Underground," replied the android.

## CHAPTER 13

Nate started down first. The dark stairway was surfaced with cushioned neartiles. He swept his light-rod from side to side. "Here's Gate E," he called up the stairs. Gena came down from above, daylight soon stopped following her. Refusing the helping hand Nate held out to her, she said, "This doesn't feel like anyplace we're going to get help. We ought to head for Info."

"I want to talk to Zanzibar, help us or not." Gate E of the long-abandoned underground transit system was, as the android BV waiter had told them, not locked. "Pretty certain Dr. Dumpus mentioned his name."

"Yes, he was one of the first volunteers."

"You might have mentioned that earlier."

"Zanzibar, from what our waiter said, doesn't seem like an admirable person."

"You don't have to admire him, but he may know things we ought to

know." A dim corridor stretched straight ahead of them, ending in a circle of blackness. "Besides which, that waiter was gay and—"

"Androids can't be gay."

"Huh," said Nate, glancing at the wall on his right, "wonder who he was."

A laminated poster began to glow as they passed it. *Hickey For President!* Hickey's left eye winked at them.

"He ran unsuccessfully for president of the United States in 1996," said Gena. "Against Nofzinger."

"We've had a president named Nofzinger?"

"Two terms. The cheap history book I bought yest—"

"And what was this about?"

They were passing a large glow-on poster which urged: *Stop Them In Brazil! Join the Paramilitary Commandos!*

"That," explained the girl, "was the First Brazilian War, waged from 1999 to 2002."

"The first one? How many have there been so far?"

"Two. I can loan you my quick history if—"

"Who were we stopping down there?"

"The Jungle Guerillas."

"Did we?"

"Obviously not, or there wouldn't have been Brazilian War II."

Nate studied the picture of the dense green jungle and the extremely wide-shouldered military man who rose gigantically above it. "What was the liberal position on the Jungle Guerillas?"

"They favored the first war as an unpleasant but necessary operation. The second they decided was immoral as well as—"

"Hickey again."

"He ran twice."

Nodding at the newest poster they were passing, Nate said, "Looks like a pleasant enough guy, his dog obviously is fond of him."

"Hickey later jumped out of his law office in Fax Central Tower," said Gena. "That's the tower they built over Grand Central Station."

"This is odd."

The neoprene tunnel walls were plastered with old color photos torn from magazines, magazines which looked to have been printed on real paper. The pictures, and they were thick on the walls and the ceiling, were all of naked girls. Redheads sprawled, wide-legged, on fur rugs; blondes in nothing but a single strand of golden beads carressing the ferules of umbrellas; brunettes tickling their private parts with long-stemmed roses and feather dusters; Chinese girls taking sponge baths; black girls licking at strawberry ice cream cones.

Nate turned to Gena. "What's the historical significance of all this stuff?"

A light blossomed up ahead in the darkness. "Art is its own excuse," said the short grinning black man holding the palm-light. He was lean, with wavy hair, dressed in a one-piece rose-yellow daysuit. "I had a hell of a time collecting those pix. You probably don't know what vintage girlie mags are going for these days. I finally ended up boosting most of them from the archives of the Center for Popular Culture in Long Beach. Trouble is, the Center's collection is very heavy on breasts and buttocks, whereas I would prefer a wider range. Much more snatch and possibly . . . but there I go shooting off about my hobby. I'm Zanzibar. You're fellow nappers, right?"

Nate nodded, slowly. "Yeah, I'm Nate Kobean," he said. "This is Gena Herbert."

Zanzibar chuckled. "Hey, Gena Herbert . . . I've been wanting to meet you. I heard a lot about you back when Dr. Dumpus was shacking up with you in the New England Heritage Motel in South Norwalk and—"

"No, that's not true."

"Well, could be I got the name of the motel wrong. It's been fifty years." He grinned at Nate. "How'd it feel to wake up and realize you haven't popped your cookies for half a century? That's, by the way, why I'm behind on this whole business. See, the girl who'd bought me for her Americana collection believed I was dead. When I woke up on top of her prize pinball machine, it had the effect of making her extremely horny. That, in turn, resulted in—"

"You've been awake for over a year?"

"I've always been a light sleeper," said Zanzibar. "As far as you're concerned, there's no way yet to tell if—"

"I never had an affair with Dr. Dumpus," said Gena, loudly.

Zanzibar shrugged, spread out his hands. "Could be I was misinformed,

although Lana was usually pretty accurate on who the old boy was banging. Oh, by the way, Lana's been dead since 2021, Nate. Imagine a girl with such great knockers and buttocks that . . . well, imagine her turning into an old lady. There's this wrinkly old bimbo walking down the street and not one young guy is looking at her. Nobody is thinking, say, Zanzibar used to put it to that broad. Time makes some spooky changes."

Gena moved closer to him. "I've had about enough of you," she said. "I was never Dr. Dumpus' mistress. I *worked* with him. I did that because I believed in his work. After seeing the results, however, I must admit I don't see the good of keeping people like you and Nate alive for centuries."

"Whoa now," said Nate, "I never said you and Dumpus—"

"We didn't. No matter what either of you say."

Zanzibar, chuckling, gestured with his palm-light.

"Let's not forget that we're all nappers together, folks," he said. "We better step into my quarters and talk over our mutual problems. As I said, I've been awake for over a year and I've been, once I got my ashes hauled a sufficient number of times, concentrating on the situation. Let's talk." He turned, started walking away.

Gena did not move from where she stood.

Nate took hold of her arm. "I want to talk to him."

"Go ahead." She shook free of him.

"I want you along," he said, taking her arm again.

She was breathing with her mouth tight shut, nostrils flaring. "All right," she said at last.

## CHAPTER 14

Three weeks later they were in the New Mexico desert.

"Like it?" asked Zanzibar as their landtrack rolled up to a sprawl of tinted neoglass buildings which sat alone on the flat orange countryside. "One of our lab techs, a girl with an incredible set of buttocks, thinks it's gaudy. My feeling is, a research center doesn't have to be dull."

"What have you been finding out?" Nate asked. Zanzibar stopped their vehicle on a circular parking pad. "As I explained back in Frisco, folks, I've had a staff of six, including a crack neobiologist, working on various phases of the problem. The neobiology guy's been analyzing what little

data we have on the stuff. We'll toss him your hypogun, Nate, which'll maybe give him a nudge toward an antidote."

"We don't need any antidote," said Gena, who'd been riding by herself in the rear of the landtrack. "You keep talking about this like it's a disease. I don't see why you two won't give in and let the process happen."

Zanzibar hopped out into the bright hot morning. "We're preparing for that, too," he said, grinning. "There are comfortable sleep compartments here. When I woke up and realized, after some concentrated screwing, that my savings account had turned into a fortune, I decided to be thorough in working on the napper problem. I got this joint going, hired a staff. Then I commenced roaming the world, such as it is at the moment, looking for other nappers. Where I didn't find anybody, which was the usual experience, I left a message in an obvious place, telling nappers to contact me at my Frisco address."

"All the important monuments and natural wonders you've ruined," said Gena as she climbed out of the vehicle.

Chuckling, the black man said, "Some I did mess up a little, but some I improved. The Washington Monument, for instance, looks a lot better with a little writing on it. Breaks the monotony of all that white space. I admit to being a little too whimsical in adding the moustaches at Mt. Rushmore after I carved the message. Still if you—"

"Can't we go inside and meet the others?" asked the pretty dark-haired girl. "That's the reason I came along with you two. We've wasted enough time already."

"I apologize," said Zanzibar, pushing open a violet-tinted neoglass door, "for not being able to settle things, especially Mrs. Hutchison, more speedily. Of course, she is a patron of the napper foundation here "

"We really don't need outside help." Nate stepped aside to let Gena into the building ahead of him. "Our own money should do."

"Maybe so," said Zanzibar. "Enough for this time around anyway. We could, remember, keep dozing off and waking up for several hundred more years, thanks to the brilliant Dr. Dumpus. It doesn't hurt to put a little extra aside now. If the present rate of inflation continues, by the Twenty-second Century a dollar's only going to be worth—"

"Where are the others?" asked Gena.

The corridor curved gently to the left. "They should still be in the dining room," said Zanzibar. "Hey, Nate, don't feel bad when you view these two guys. Lana had funny taste sometimes. Trojanowski especially is a

schmuck, but he's no doubt the exception. Certainly Lana exhibited excellent taste when she picked you and me to—"

"What are you shooting off your blowhole about now, Zan?" A pudgy man of thirty-five, wearing a candy-stripe sleepgown, appeared in the entryway of the dining room.

"Don't spoil this historical moment, Rupe," grinned the Negro. "Nate Kobean and Gena Herbert, this is none other than Rupe Trojanowski, a fellow napper."

"Stop using that napper word." Trojanowski scowled. "Victims is what we are, hapless victims of that mad man Dumpus who—"

"Dr. Dumpus," said Gena, "wasn't a mad man. He was a—"

"Why'd he dope you? You obviously weren't one of the poor simps lured into this horrible mess by Lana," said Trojanowski. "Maybe he was putting aside little something for himself." A yawn caught hold of the petulant man. "Lord almighty, I yawned. See that, Zan? Lord almighty, it's going to happen again and I'm going to fall down dead."

Zanzibar patted his shoulder. "Take it easy, Rupe. You've only been up and around eight weeks."

"Nine weeks. It's nine weeks going on ten. If I fall down dead again and wake up in bed with . . . oh, it's too rotten to talk about."

Zanzibar said, "Rupe got sold to a queer hydroponics tycoon in London. When he awakened he found he'd been the old chap's human teddy bear since 2016. Naturally it—"

"Don't go broadcasting my secret shame to the world, Zan." Trojanowski gathered his striped sleepgown tighter around him. "Better by far if I'd stayed dead."

"You weren't dead," said Gena. "Don't you, even yet, understand? Don't you realize the brilliant thing Dr. Dumpus accomplished when—"

"Brilliant? Lord almighty, did you ever wake up with a fruity Englishman fondling your . . . Blah, it's too awful to recount." He turned away, sulked back to his breakfast table.

There was one other person in the round sunlit room, a thin hairless man of fifty-two. He sat, contentedly, at another table. He was spreading jams on a newly-thawed slice of soytoast. "Hi, there," he called to the trio in the hallway. "Excuse my not getting up, breakfast is my most important meal."

Zanzibar escorted Nate and the slim girl over to the man's table. "This

is Francis Logan," he said.

"Frank," corrected Logan. "Call me Frank, everybody does. Did rather. How do you like this layout here? I'm having a heck of a good time. What line of work were you in, Kobern?"

"News."

"Electronics," said Logan after a few nibbles of his toast. "Frank Logan, Expert Android & Robot Repair, Danbury, Connecticut. Ironic, in a way, my being in this at all. Excuse me, Miss Herbert, for being a little gross, but I want to make you understand that I never laid a hand on Mrs. Dumpus. Why the doctor included me I have no idea. I dropped by one afternoon to fix their guru, next thing I knew I was tied to a hospital table and the doctor was explaining his process to me." A few more nibbles. "Not that I'm complaining; mind you. I'm having a heck of a swell time. This is really the year 2035, imagine that if you will."

Gena walked over to an oval window, stared out at the motionless desert.

Nate joined her. "What do you think of Dr. Dumpus now?"

Without looking at him, the girl said, "You ought to be more concerned about what I think of you."

Zanzibar grinned. "You like Gena," he said.

"Some, not a lot," replied Nate.

The two of them were in Zanzibar's office. The clusters of pasted up girlie mag photos cut off any view of the late afternoon desert.

"Although she's considerably different from Lana, she's more your sort of girl." The black man was lounging in a syntin sling chair in one corner of the room. "You probably aren't fully aware of it yet, but you and Gena will—"

"I'd rather talk about what sort of progress you've been making, Zanzibar."

"There are at least three more nappers at large," he said. "I was able to get hold of a copy of Dumpus' list of volunteers, at least one of his lists. The copy I have he'd kept in his Smaltex office. All his other papers, the stuff he stored at home in that lab of his, I can't as yet find any trace of. Maybe those riots in 2001, when our bodies got stolen and scattered, took care of his papers and lab notes. I'm hoping maybe Lana held on to some of the material."

Nate said, "I still don't see why Lana didn't do anything about the

nappers."

"For all she knew we'd never wake up. If Lana called in anybody, cops or her local MD, she might have ended up charged with being an accessory to a major crime. You know Lana, it was easier to leave us down in our imitation tomb." Zanzibar laughed, rubbed his palms together. "It's pretty much the same being dead, you know, Nate. After a few years, they forget you."

"You went back there, to Millstone."

"Yep, twice. It's a weaving community now. Very old-fashioned, except their looms run on nuclear power," Zanzibar said. "Nothing left of the Dumpus home or lab."

"Too bad Dumpus didn't live. I dislike the tacky bastard, but at least—"

"What Dumpus has done, we can do. I'm confident we can find a cure for this thing."

"That guy Trojanowski," said Nate, "does look like he's getting drowsy. Some of us may not stay awake for the promised 90 days."

Zanzibar nodded. "This joint is set up with that possibility in mind." He was scanning a group of girlie photos directly above his head. "Imagine Lana in the sack with Rupe Trojanowski. You can never figure who people are going to want to screw. It's the same nowadays. We have a staff girl here with an absolutely incredible set of mamingas and I can't get so much as—"

*Bzzzz!*

"Come on in," Zanzibar said toward his scarlet-tinted door.

It opened and a tall, large-breasted Mexican girl in a two-piece worksuit walked in. "Got something, Zan."

"This is her," Zanzibar told Nate. "See what I mean? Aren't those—"

"Enough asides, you sex-happy little twerp," said the big girl. "This is important."

Zanzibar left his chair. "You obviously didn't have a NeoCatholic upbringing such as I enjoyed in my native Cape Verdes," he said. "You'd realize, had you, that your chest is a gift from God and as such should be shared with the most humble of your fellows. There's a parable about it, which may serve to—"

"Pay attention, *cabrito!*" The big girl fluttered a sheet of plazpaper in his grinning face. "We have an important new lead, from that electronic op outfit in Detroit-16."

Zanzibar grabbed the page. "You should have told me about this instead of flapping your—"

"I'm Texaz deSanchez," the dark girl said to Nate, holding out her hand.

"Nate Kobean."

"I'm happy to find out all the nappers aren't goatish little twerps like Zan."

"We may have something concrete here!" Zanzibar bounced a few times.

Nate let go of the big girl's hand. "What?"

"I've got a dozen assorted private dicks on retainer around the world, hunting for nappers and for some trace of Dumpus' papers," he explained. "These guys in Detroit-16 say they found a grandnephew of the doctor's who may have some of the journals."

"They want to know if they should approach the guy direct," added Texas, "and try to negotiate for the material."

The black man shook his head. "This is something I'll handle myself," he said. "Want to come along, Nate?"

An image of Gena flashed across his mind. After a few seconds Nate answered, "Sure."

## CHAPTER 15

The human private detective flicked another switch on his aluminum arm. "This has got to be it this time," he told Nate and Zanzibar.

Nate again shifted his position on the uncomfortable back seat of the gas auto which served as the office of Billy Gores & Associates. On every side stretched rows and rows of Twentieth Century cars. In fact, the entire Michigan community of Detroit-16 was made up of parked cars.

"This isn't conveying a terrific opinion of your abilities, Gores." Zanzibar was sitting, anxious and upright, next to Nate.

In the front seat Gores and his robot partner were in the process of making their report. "Ah, this is it," Gores said. "Listen."

From the loudspeaker built into the palm of his artificial hand came his recorded voice. "The name is Gores, I'm an op, License # SJ10019. My partner's name is Klank. It was a moody day, the kind of day that makes

you wonder if you're in the right business and the blood-red sun was hanging in the sky like a medallion won in some kind of brutal contest of which you had not enough knowledge. I was—"

"Turn that crap off," ordered Zanzibar, "and just tell me direct what you guys have got."

"This is all standard detective procedure," said the robot, who was chromeplated and had a racing stripe painted up his front. "When you pay us \$500 a day plus expenses you have a right to the very—"

"Go out and play with the cars," Zanzibar suggested. "I want to talk to Gores."

The robot swiveled his ball-shaped head toward his partner. "Billy?"

"Yeah, okay, beat it, Klank."

When the robot, rattling and mumbling, had clattered out into the moody day Zanzibar said, "Trim all the bullshit, Billy, and give me the specific details about this relative of Dumpus'."

"He's a brooding, bitter-faced guy at the wrong end of his twenties, measuring out his meaningless life in—"

"Where's he live? What's his goddamn address?"

"Over in Duckblind, Michigan," replied the detective. "He's a professional decoy maker. Duckblind is about a hundred miles to the North, on Lake Survivor. Lake Survivor, in case you may have slept through the name change, is one of the few remaining Great Lakes."

Nate asked, "What's he got?"

"Three journals which once belonged to Dr. Shuster Dumpus of Millstone, Connecticut. I know you guys don't much care for Klank, but it was his idea to tap the data of NatIns to find out if anybody had anything of Dr. Dumpus' listed on their property insurance lists."

The car shivered and hissed, sank lower on its left side.

"Stop that, Klank," called Gores out the open car window. "When he's mad, he kicks the tires. You really shouldn't have—"

"What else do you know about these books?" asked Zanzibar. "You sure they're not library books Dumpus forgot to return to the Millstone public library?"

" 'Hand-written books from the laboratory of the gifted neobiologist,' is how they are listed with NatIns."

Zanzibar chuckled. "Sounds good."

"What's this great nephew's name?" Nate asked the detective.

"Leroy D'Umpray. Most of the family dropped Dumpus in favor of D'Umpray around 2020."

"We'll go see Leroy," said the black man.

"Oh, that reminds me," said Gores. "He's not at home."

"Leroy D'Umpray is not at home?"

"He's out somewhere in the wilds beyond Duckblind trying out a new type of decoy. Our last positive location for him is a village called Organic."

"Maybe we don't need Leroy," said the black man. "Where are the books?"

"Not certain about that. Might be at his home in Duckblind, or he maybe has them with him."

"Why would he," asked Nate, "take Dumpus' old notebooks along with him on a trip to the woods?"

"Apparently Leroy is very fond of these old books," the detective said. "He's been known to carry them with him to odd places."

Zanzibar said, "The thing to do is check out his home first, then the woods if we have to. Who else lives at his place?"

Gores looked away from them, poked a finger at the set of giant flocked dice cubes hanging from the rearview mirror. "He's an eccentric sort of fellow. He likes young girls."

"Everybody likes young girls," said Zanzibar. "That's not eccentric."

"I mean young," said Gores, in a distant voice. "Twelve and thirteen I mean."

"That is a bit young," admitted Zanzibar. "Is one of these youths living with Leroy?"

"Five of them."

"Five?" Zanzibar rubbed his chin. "Still I should be able to romance my way into the joint. The ones I can't charm, Nate, you can handle. After the way Texas took to you I figure you can win over any girl."

"Except possibly Gena."

"Ah," grinned Zanzibar, "I told you you were falling for her."

"Yeah, I think I am."

Nate paced the neowood porch of the log cabin. "Three weeks in the woods," he said. "Not a trace of Leroy D'Umpray. Oy."

Zanzibar came out into the woodland sunshine, "Don't get upset by what I'm going to tell you, Nate."

"Huh? Something wrong back in New Mexico?"

The small dark man, dressed in a two-piece hunting suit, perched on the porch rail. "I was just on the pix-phone with our central headquarters . . . Gena's gone."

A sharp spikey feeling spread across Nate's chest "What do you mean?"

"Happened a couple days ago, according to Texas."

"Gena's alive, though?"

"Oh, I don't mean gone in that sense. She left our set up."

Nate shook his head. "Why?"

"It's very peculiar. Three days ago a guy calling himself Grady Tatt showed up there in New Mexico." He watched a pair of large yellow butterflies who were coupling in the stripes of morning sunlight which cut down through the high surrounding trees. "Never heard of him, have you?"

"Nope. Did he take Gena off?"

"She went with him voluntarily."

"For what reason?"

"This Tatt guy claimed he was a neobiologist who'd heard about us," continued Zanzibar. "He could be, don't know if he is or not. The other part of his story is bullshit, however. He told everybody Dr. Dumpus had just awakened and was across the country, in a very weak state."

"Dumpus alive? But you said—"

"He's dead, Nate. Trust me. There's no doubt of it. I saw his remains, went over the records of his accident and death. There's no possibility of Dumpus' being alive. He never actually became a napper."

Nate said, "So this Tatt proposed our people come with him to see Dumpus, since Dumpus was too weak to travel?"

"Right. Gena fell for it, but none of the others."

"Where did Tatt and Gena go?"

"Tatt said Dumpus was in a vegetarian town near Chicago. When Texas tried to reach him there this morning she found out nobody'd ever head of

Grady Tatt."

"Jesus! Then we don't know where she is at all."

"That's about the situation."

Nate crossed to the cabin door. "I should have made her come along with us."

"If you're going to be a napper," said Zanzibar, "you've got to learn not to lament over what might have been."

"I really . . . I don't know. Gena and I didn't seem to get along that well . . . but since I've been away from . . . I don't know."

"You're in love with her. Most of my relationships have been built on simple things like horniness and lust. I've been in love, though. That wife I had, I really loved her. She couldn't stand me, after the initial infatuation faded. You know what I did? I stopped on our island while I was scouring the world for nappers. Stopped and put flowers on her grave. You wouldn't think Zanzibar could be sentimental like that."

After a moment Nate said, "I've got to find her."

"Okay, I'll stick here and keep beating the bush for Leroy," said the black man. "Too bad the Dumpus journals weren't at Leroy's abode. That Mona, by the way, the one who was nearly fourteen, was damn interesting. You don't usually see such—"

"I'll go into Organic and rent an aircruiser for myself," Nate said. "I'll fly back to New Mexico and see what I can pick up there. I have to find her."

"Yeah, I know," said Zanzibar.

## CHAPTER 16

"Sleepy?" "Huh? No, not at all," said Nate. The bushy-haired manager of the aircruiser rental lot watched him, head tilted to one side. "You look sort of hollow-eyed and drowsy." "I'm wide awake." He suddenly felt an impulse to yawn, but suppressed it. He left the manager near the rim of the loamy lot to go walking through the selection of aircraft.

"Don't step on the beans." The bushy-haired man came trotting after him.

"Where?"

"Right there alongside that two-seater job."

"Oh, yeah, I see. They're starting to sprout up." The best thing for a good night's sleep is a bonemeal cocktail. Lots of folks here in Organic, Michigan swear by—"

"I'd like to rent a cruiser and get going."

"Sure thing. You do seem like the keyed up, hyper type, except for your drowsy look. Got your cruiser tag?" That was one of the items Nate had had time to acquire while they'd waited for Zanzibar to wind up his affairs in the Frisco Enclave. "Here."

The manager studied the plastitag. "Say now, you know what these last four numbers signify?"

"I hope it doesn't mean I'm keyed up and hyper."

"Means you've got a terribly high credit rating. A triple three plus X. Don't see too many of those around Organic. We're simple folk mostly, content to—"

"How about that maroon cruiser over there?"

"The beet-color baby? Might be a little sluggish for you," the manager said. "However, the '33

Cosmo ought to suit you."

"Which one is it?"

"Thought everybody knew what a Cosmo looked like. The handsome two-tone job over there next to the berry patch." "Nope, too big and clumsy." Nate skirted a rectangle of earth marked Corn, stopped beside a two-seat scarlet aircraft. "I like this one. Let's sign the papers."

"Like that tomato-colored one, huh? I suppose I could let you have her. She's fast . . . but . . ."

"But what?"

"I've had a couple complaints about her lately. Nothing serious . . . except I'd like to have Hobie check her over before I send her up again." "How long will that take?"

"Hobie's doing his contemplating right now, then he has to grind up a load of bones in the meal machine and—"

"This thing's not likely to crash?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that. It's only she's been acting a little eccentric."

"Okay, I don't mind that. I'll take it."

"We got a special going on all this week . . . for \$5 extra we throw in a

bushel of carrots."

"Fine, long as I don't have to wait for Hobie to bring them."

"Got them right in my office. We'll go there and process the forms," said the manager. "Careful, don't step on the lettuce."

Nate crashed a little over an hour later.

He wasn't sure exactly where he was. The tomato-colored aircruiser hadn't been responding to the directions he'd spoken into the talk-control mike. When the nuclear engine ceased functioning the ship began to drop rapidly down through the early afternoon.

"Hey, listen, emergency!" he shouted into the control mike. "Take all necessary steps."

"Women and children first," squeaked the cruiser's response-grid. The ship kept on plummeting.

There was forest below, in every direction.

Jabbing at the Civil Air Authority button on the control panel, Nate said, "CAA, I'm crashing . . . can you get a fix on me?"

". . . and here's a request for Hobie and Carol and the crowd at the bone meal works. Know you're going to like this Respected Oldtimer from way back in 2030. Yes, it's Cripple Electric Slim and his . . ."

"Shit! I don't want music." He poked harder at the CAA alert button. The button popped out of the dash.

*Wang! Slam!*

The aircruiser hit the tree tops. It tilted far over rocking Nate, and crashed down through the branches.

*Whup!*

It smashed into the ground, tail first.

"I should have waited for Hobie." Nate shook his head clear, made another try with the control mike. "Listen, we've crashed. Will you contact the CAA? Come on, ship."

The voice of the ship came out as a rattling fizzle sound. Everything went dead, absolutely.

Nate hit the Location-Navigation button. Nothing occurred.

"Okay, so I'm lost in the woods," he said. "Could be worse. Undoing his safety gear, he swung out of the fallen ship.

The ground was thick with pine cones and needles.

Shading his eyes, Nate looked up at the sun. "Let's see. The sun's over there, meaning Organic should be back that way. But how far? I'm pretty sure we've been doing circles and figure-eights for the last half hour."

He remembered his carrots. He fetched the bushel basket, and the bottle of bonemeal cocktail the lot manager had thrown in, out of the cabin of the aircruiser.

Standing there in a spill of warm afternoon sunlight, holding the basket in front of him, Nate yawned.

He swung the basket up onto his shoulder, started walking in the direction of Organic.

After a few steps he stopped still. "Was that a yawn? Jesus, it was!"

He began moving again. "Don't let it unsettle you, everybody yawns. You haven't even been awake two months. Ninety days, after all, is more like three months. Look at Zanzibar. He woke up more than a year ago. Okay, maybe you won't get a year. You're sure as hell, though, bound to stay awake for more than a few weeks."

Nate kept on, working his way slowly through the forest. The sun worked across the clear blue sky.

"Wonder who that Tatt bastard is," he asked himself as he trudged. "Gena shouldn't have let him con her like that. And I should have . . . okay, don't make so much of it. You didn't treat her so well. We'll find her again, track down Tatt and find her. When you do see her again, talk to her. Don't let the fact that she thinks Dumpus is a genius bother you. I'm sure Zanzibar is wrong about her sleeping with that nitwit."

He slowed, wiped his perspiring forehead. Seeing a soft shady place, Nate sat down. Might as well have something to eat and drink.

Hunkering down against the trunk of a maple tree, he selected a carrot. After crunching his way through that, he took a drink of the bonemeal cocktail.

He started on another carrot, paused to yawn. "Does this stuff really encourage drowsiness. I fell sort of . . . no!" Nate pushed up to a standing position. "You can't go to sleep here. You've got to get out of these woods to find Gena."

His eyes, though, kept drifting shut. His head was swinging slowly from side to side. Nate dropped to one knee.

"This isn't . . . fair. I'm supposed to get . . . at least . . . ninety days to . . ."

He tumbled down on the mossy ground. In a moment he was sound asleep.

## CHAPTER 17

The metallic buttons on the suit of underwear were cold against his flesh, but the fingers which were fastening them were warm.

Nate opened his eyes half way. Circling him, surrounding him, was thick green foliage. Jungle foliage, palms and vines and harsh bright flowers. The sun filled the spaces between trees and branches with an intense golden light.

The warm-handed girl who was dressing him wore a murky singlet of some kind of finely spun synthetic thread. She had dark hair, worn braided, and a tiny golden dot at the center of her forehead.

Humming softly, the girl bent his head forward so she could pull a shirt over him. The front of the shirt had, like the underwear, a row of bright gold buttons down it.

Nate took in a deep breath, which burned at his throat and lungs. "Jesus, have I been asleep for fifty years again?" His voice, dry and cracky, was barely audible.

"*Deus!*" gasped a female voice.

It was not the girl who was dressing him.

Opening his eyes wider, Nate looked over the girl's shoulder. Some fifteen feet away an ornate canopied bed appeared to be floating.

Nate moistened his lips. "Good morning."

"*Ingles?*" asked the voice from the curtained bed. The lefthand curtains parted, a long slim tanned leg extended out. Then another. The naked girl who eventually emerged was nearly six-feet tall. Deeply tanned, golden blonde.

"I don't know why I'm in your camp," said Nate. "I guess you do." His voice sounded almost right to him now.

"*Momento, momento,*" said the naked blonde. She dashed toward what was apparently the circling jungle. Swinging her fist, she hit at something in the air.

The jungle went away. Pale gold walls replaced it.

The dark girl lifted one of Nate's legs, worked some kind of soft boot

onto his foot. She was still humming.

"One more bug," murmured the blonde. She smacked another spot on the now visible bedroom wall. "And we also better take care of Lorena." She walked over, tapped the back of the kneeling girl's neck.

The girl made a clicking sound, ceased to move. Her eyes flapped shut.

"They didn't tell me you were ever going to wake up," the naked blonde said to him. "I doubt my husband expected it either."

"They have husbands again?"

The blonde sat beside him on the wide chair he was in, making more room by nudging her buttocks against his. "No need to worry about the General. He doesn't care who I entertain nights. The only slightly annoying aspect is that he likes to watch."

Nate glanced around, his neck creaking some. "He's here?"

"Not here, he's in New Rio. He watches over the peepex."

"Peepex?"

The blonde asked, "How long have you been asleep?"

"Well . . . I don't exactly know . . . what year is this?"

"2085."

"Damn, another fifty years. And when I woke up here this morning I couldn't tell whether—"

"It's not morning, it's evening. Almost midnight."

"I thought the sun was shining out there in the jungle."

"There's really nothing outside there but the wall of the next tower," explained the long tall girl.

"Didn't they have pixwalz in your . . . have you really been asleep for fifty years?" "The last thing I remember was falling asleep in the woods. That was 2035," said Nate. "I have the feeling I'm not in Michigan anymore."

"This is Brasil2. My husband, General Mudez, is the Junta of Brasil2."

"Doesn't it take more than one guy to make a Junta? I remember we once did a handpuppet debate with—" "The Junta used to have six members," said Mrs. Mudez. "But the General has a temper and . . . now there's just him. What's your name?"

"Nate Kobean."

"And your number?"

"Which number?"

"Your EXR number."

"I don't have one. What is it?"

"Expendability Rating . . ." The naked blonde rubbed her stomach. "I'll have to have the

General get you one. We can't risk having you snatched away from us on the next Weed Out."

"None of this sounds too pleasant," said Nate, swallowing. "What's a Weed Out exactly?"

"You really have been asleep a long time, Nate. Did I ever get around to telling you my name?"

It's Hazel, but everybody down here calls me La Paloma. You know how Latins are. I'm from City 22 originally. Being an American you must know where that is. You are American, aren't you?"

"Sure, but I never heard of City 22."

One of the biggest cities in the Eastern Division? Next to City 12, which has a population of two million, we're the big—"

"What about New York? There were fifteen million people in the New York area last time I was awake."

"No kidding? I'd have thought Weed Outs . . . oh, that's right you didn't have them then I guess. No wonder things got so screwed up."

Nate moved his right leg and knocked over the kneeling girl. "Oops, sorry, miss."

"She's only one of the andies."

"That's an android? Yeah, I should have realized, the way you turned her off." He stooped to put the mechanism upright again. "I never saw such a believable andy . . ."

His stomach did a loop and he stumbled.

La Paloma caught him. "We can talk just as well in bed, Nate."

Before she'd herded him halfway there Nate said, "I really don't want to anger the General, with his habit of—"

"He never kills my lovers. That's part of our agreement."

Reluctantly, Nate continued across the floor to the canopied fourposter. "How long have I been . . . in your possession?"

"Let's see." La Paloma climbed into bed, pulled him in beside her. "I married the General in 2079 . . . we got you as a wedding present. So it's got to be nearly six years."

"You have any idea where I was before that? Six from fifty leaves forty-four years unaccounted for."

"The General's Aunt Amelia gave you to us. I never got all the details from her, since it's not polite to ask too much about gifts."

"Would it be possible to talk to this aunt?"

"Don't see why not." The naked blonde stretched out. "If you've been in a stupor or whatever you call it for fifty years, then I assume you haven't slept with a woman for a half century. Is that correct?"

Nate was sitting up on the bed, one hand resting on his own knee. "As a matter of fact, it's 100 years. The last time I was awake I never got around to it."

"That's a long time between lays." She reached up, stroking his back. "I hope you don't mind the way we've treated you."

"Oh . . . what have you been doing to me?"

"I liked to have the andy maids dress you up for me in different kinds of outfits. That's what we were doing tonight . . . when you woke up," said La Paloma. "Do I understand your situation rightly, Nate? You're going to stay awake for awhile and then go back to sleep again? For another fifty?"

"Not if I can help it," he told her. "I'd like to get to New Mexico as soon as possible."

La Paloma continued rubbing his back. "I don't see how you're going to do that."

"What do you mean?"

"In the first place the General isn't going to let you leave the country," the girl said. "In the second I don't think there is a New Mexico anymore."

"We're going to have to let the General watch," announced La Paloma as she came striding into the bedroom.

"Watch what?" Nate, in a five-piece morningsuit, was hunched in front of a portable triop TV viewer, It was nearly time for the afternoon Official Government Newscast.

"Watch us in bed I mean." She moved to his side, rubbed her fingertips along his cheek. "You're pretty dam good in bed, especially for someone

who hasn't done anything like that for a hundred years."

"It's like bicycle riding, La Paloma, you never forget how," he said, eyes on the triop stage. "I'd like to watch the news. I want to find out—"

"When I told my husband about your miraculous awakening he was naturally quite excited. He's a Neo-Catholic and so he believes in miracles. He thinks it's the will of God, and I had to talk him out of donating you to the Pope of New Rio for—"

"What'd he say about my leaving Brasil2?"

"I didn't bring it up as yet," said the blonde. "I can assure you, Nate, he—"

"You don't stay inside here all the time, do you?"

"Of course not, that wouldn't be healthful. I take a hopper ride, up above the tower tops, once a day. Usually at sundown. You can see the sun set when you get up high enough." "I can come along on those flights, can't I?" said Nate. "He must have your hopper bugged, too."

"Yes, certainly." La Paloma smiled down at him.

"That might be novel. I rarely make love in the hopper, particularly since my last two lovers both had a dreadful fear of heights. Yes, the General might enjoy watching that."

"He would, I'm sure he would." If Nate could get out of this tower in the center of Brasilia and up in some kind of aircraft he ought to be able to escape.

There were, he'd discovered this morning quite early, a goodly number of android guards roaming General Mudez' summer house. "Let's try it this very afternoon, La Paloma."

"I'd like that, Nate."

"*Atencao*," said the TV, "*Noticias do*—"

"You'll have an easier time with English." The blonde reached around him, pushed a finger-hole on the side of the set. ". . . the afternoon edition of the Official Government Newscast. We will begin, as always, with the salute of faith in our respected Junta. Hail to the Junta, Hail to the Junta, Hail, Hail, Hail!"

"You should have stood for that. I forgot to tell you."

"Is he watching us now?"

"The bugs are all on again, so you never can tell. Afternoons he usually takes a siesta or visits one of the Torture Pavilions. Still he might be

looking in . . . or one of his underlings might."

"They get to watch, too?"

La Paloma sighed. "It's part of the deal."

"And now here's the Official Government Newsteam."

The image of the stocky General which had filled the triop stage faded. A large sofa materialized and three six-inch high figures strolled onto the platform.

"Afternoon, Joao," greeted the one girl in the group, a plump redhead.

"Hello, Maria. Hello, Ricardo," said Joao as he took his place on the sofa with them. "Is that a welt I notice over your eye, Ricardo?"

"It is, Joao," said Ricardo. "I was out with one of our crack OGN film crews covering the dedication of the handsome new General Mudez Cultural Center and I got too close to the—"

"Oops, oops!" Joao was pressing his ear, shaking his head negatively. "You weren't there at all, Ricardo. And there wasn't any student riot. Stop kidding around, you rascal."

"Eh? I damn well was—"

"No, no, you weren't," agreed Maria, also holding her ear.

"Yes, of course, how stupid of me. I wasn't there at all. I was . . . (This damn earphone is on the blink!) . . . Where was I?"

"The dedication has been postponed, you were at the Population Bureau Seminar."

"Yes, that's right . . . and how'd I get this welt?"

"You don't have a welt."

"Oh, yes, of course. Well . . . and what have you been up to, Maria?"

The plump girl was poking at the mike implanted in her ear. "We're all fashion conscious these days, Ricardo, and so I . . . Oops, oops! I mean to say, we're all fashion conscious these days and I was at the new Conformity in Clothing Fair here in Brasilia this morning. Let's take a look at the footage my gifted OGN crew filmed." She sank back into the sofa.

The three newscasters vanished. Five lovely models in gray frocks took their place on the stage.

"Are they allowed to talk about things happening outside the country?" Nate asked La Paloma, who'd settled on his lap to watch along with him.

"Usually . . . my husband runs a relatively enlightened dictatorship

here," she answered. "You want to find out stuff about America."

"Yeah."

"I ordered you some books on America from the new cultural center. But if the students did to it what they did to the last one you may have to wait a bit," said the blonde. "Somewhere around here I have a copy of *America On \$500 A Day*. Carlos is looking for it. He's one of the butlers."

"I met him."

The fashion show ended.

"You must have had a grand time, Maria," said the reappearing Ricardo, who was sweating considerably.

"I truly did, Ricardo. Now, Joao, what's coming up next?"

"I'd say it was about time for Miguel to let us in on the weather picture for the Brasilia area. So let's . . . oops, oops! There is nobody named Miguel associated with this show. There is a Brasill spy named Miguel who was executed this morning, but he had nothing to do with our newsteam."

"Uh . . ." Ricardo wiped his face and smeared his makeup. "Uh . . . why don't we take a gander at the footage of the Presidents of America addressing the Organization of Free America Countries and Dictatorships? Okay, gang?"

"Sounds nice to me, Ricardo."

Nate said, "Presidents? Is there more than one?"

"Yes, I think America has a half dozen of them."

Six portly gray-haired men took over the triop stage.

"What are they, sextuplets?"

"No, they simply look sort of alike. That shape is the one most favored for presidents in America right now, according to most surveys." La Paloma twisted a finger in his hair. "America is divided into six divisions and each one has a set of ruling officials, President, VP and so on."

"We're all Americans," the portliest of the American presidents was telling an unseen audience, "whether we call ourselves North or South Americans. Thanks to careful planning on the part of the OFACD we have arrived in 2085 to find ourselves surrounded by prosperity and relative peace. The winning through to this enviable state of affairs has not been, I needn't remind you, an easy task. We have had to deal with the mindless critics of our Weed Out policies, we have had to suffer jibes from those

who condemn our Selective Starvation programs and those who scoff at our methods of keeping the peace. To all of you, to all of our good neighbors to the South, I—"

"Don't forget the plague, Ed," reminded one of the other presidents.

"My esteemed colleague, President Fred Eastman of the Midwest Division of America, has reminded me to deny forcefully and vigorously charges that America is using a newly developed plague virus as a weapon in the current misunderstanding with the Panama Enclave. You know us well enough, my good friends, to realize that we would never—"

"We interrupt this event to bring you news of a terrible outrage," cut in the voice of the nervous Ricardo.

A huge statue of Christ, arms outstretched, took over the platform.

"The OGN newsroom has only just now learned, and here are pictures of the terrible deed, that an outrage has been committed against that beloved sightseeing attraction, the Christ of the Andes. All of Latin America is stunned to learn that a vandal, or gang of vandals, has scratched a cryptic message across the backside of this famed work."

"Hey!" Nate moved closer.

The message on the statue was: 2085! NAPPERS RALLY! NM AGAIN!  
Z.

"What does that mean?" said La Paloma. "I've got no idea," said Nate. "But that's enough news . . . let's take that hopper ride."

## **CHAPTER 18**

He wasn't sure what they were shooting at him.

Nate, piloting his borrowed hopper, was coming in low over the jumble of Southwest Division cities which rose up where the New Mexico desert had been.

Three cruisers, each a sparkling red, white and blue, were at various positions in the twilight sky above him, positions of pursuit. From bellyguns they were shooting small ball-shaped projectiles which always found their way to Nate's aircraft. When the balls came into contact with the outer surface of La Paloma's hopper they went spinning off into the dusk. It was apparently due to some kind of built-in defense system.

"Sure, if you're the dictator of Brasil<sup>2</sup> you'd need a ship which was

bullet-proof," he said to himself, "and ball-proof, too."

The walls of his ship started humming faintly. From out of the air came a harsh voice. "This is SWDAP. You are flying an unlicensed ship, using an unauthorized repelsystem into restricted territory without proper clearance."

"SWDAP?"

"SWDAP, in case you are the ignorant foreign person your craft indicates, stands for Southwest

Division! Air Police."

"Oh," said Nate. According to his instruments, most of which spoke only Portuguese, he was only 5 miles from the site of the nappers' sanctuary. Zanzibar's message indicated the setup was still there, despite the fact that nothing much else was the same. Most of the surrounding desert was gone, covered over with tight-packed towers and similar lofty structures.

"Er . . . sir?" came another, less harsh, voice out of the air.

"Huh?"

"This is AirSarge Blosser . . . you wouldn't be heading for Mr. Zanzibar, would you?"

"Yeah, I am. Do you—"

"Mr. Zanzibar asked some of us to be on the lookout for any nappers. You are one I guess?"

"I am. Is our place still out here?"

"Yes, it is. If you scoot real fast you can get there before AirCap Damio orders you forced down."

"Well, thanks."

"You might mention to Mr. Zanzibar it was AirSarge Blosser who helped you sneak by . . . He can leave the gratuity in the usual place."

All at once there was a square mile of empty desert in the fading light below. In its center glowed the gaudy headquarters Zanzibar had built a half century earlier.

Nate landed near the main entrance.

The door whipped open, Zanzibar popped out into the dusk. "Praise be, it's Nate!" The black man ran over, embraced his disembarking friend. "I wasn't sure we'd ever see—"

"What about Gena?"

Zanzibar backed off. "She's not here, but we know where she ought to be," he said. "We've got a location for Tatt, and we know who he is."

"Jesus, she's been with him all this time?"

"They've been napping for most of it." Zanzibar held the door open. "I trailed you as far as a holy roller commune in Nebraska, back in 2035. Then I had to haul ass back here because I felt a snooze coming on. Where'd you finally come to?"

Stepping into the building, Nate answered, "Down in Brazil, Brasil<sup>2</sup> they call it now. That's the dictator's wife's hopper out there."

"Ha . . . did she loan it to you?"

"Not exactly," said Nate. "I borrowed it. Had to abandon her at a quiet spot in the Matto Grosso. A nice girl basically, tall and blonde."

"She know where you were between Nebraska and Brazil?"

"Nope, and I didn't get a chance to find out from the old girl who gave me to her. I was a wedding present."

Zanzibar led him up to his office. "Where'd this bimbo keep you?"

"Well . . . I wouldn't like Gena to know this, Zanzibar. I was a fixture in her bedroom, something between a pet and a Raggedy Andy doll I guess. She had an andy maid whose job it was to dress me in different costumes."

"You'll have to tell Trojanowski about this," grinned Zanzibar.

"I didn't sleep with the General, only with his wife."

"Ah, good! I've been worrying about you," said the black man. "You finally knocked off a little.

Good, because a hundred years is a long time to—"

"It seemed like the thing to do at the time. But I wouldn't want Gena to—"

"Am I the kind of guy who screws and tells? Well, yes, now I think of it, I am. I do, however, keep other peoples' secrets pretty good."

"Now how about Tatt? When can we get to him?"

Zanzibar paced his office. The girlie photos still dominated the walls and ceiling. "My collection has appreciated in the last nap spell, by the way. See, this one up here? It's now worth—"

"You're sure Gena is with him?"

"Yeah, I've got the best operatives in Greater Britain working on this. I've been awake eight months already this time."

"I was only awake about eight weeks the last time around."

"It varies." Zanzibar sank into a chair constructed of laminated burlap. "When we got separated, way back when, Nate, I kept going and found Leroy D'Umpray. You remember Leroy."

"Sure, did he have the books?"

"He had three of Dumpus' journals, but unfortunately they were almost entirely devoted to other experiments," he replied. "There were, though, a few pages devoted to the nap process. I've had our staff working on that . . . Oh, did I mention that Texas de Sanchez is still with us. In her seventies now, but still salty and her shape has held up pretty well, though I'm not as . . . no matter. One thing we got from the journals was a complete list of those the dear doctor put under. There are three more nappers somewhere in the world. One of whom is a lad name of Gray Tannenbaum. Matching the description of Tannenbaum in Dr. Dumpus' log with what the folks here told me about Grady Tatt I concluded that—"

"Tatt is Tannenbaum."

"Precisely," said Zanzibar, chuckling. "What then, Nate, is he up to?"

Nate said, "Well, he knows the Dumpus Process works. Could be he wants to find out how it works and then go into business for himself, selling the process to new customers. He may even be recruiting the rest of the nappers."

The black man's head bobbed up and down in agreement. "Exactly what I've concluded. This idiot Tatt-Tannenbaum is in a race with us," he said. "Of course, these fifty year-long pit stops are slowing us all down. I'm confident that this time around we'll triumph."

"Tatt and Gena are in . . . Greater Britain?"

"That's the country they made out of England, Ireland and Scotland about twenty years back I'm told," said Zanzibar. "I was trying to talk Trojanowski into accompanying me there when I got the word, via AirSarge Blosser, that a new napper was heading here. Rupe doesn't like to go outside much."

"How come we're still here? Everything else seems to be cities now."

"When I bought this place back in 2034 I made sure we'd control the property for a long term. There's no way they can take this land away from us or build anything else on it. Though, Tex tells me, they've made several

tries."

"Things are nowhere as loose as they were, huh?"

"We're going through a period of intense urbanization and non-boat rocking. While we slept populations kept on growing. That resulted in famines, riots, revolutions, wars." Zanzibar was eyeing a naked Armenian girl on the ceiling. "A couple decades ago the world reorganized. Populations were concentrated and also cut down, through a festivity they call Weed Out. Right now the population of our perplexing old planet is slightly lower than it was in the late Twentieth Century. Even so, you ought to see what passes for food nowadays. They've got a way of reworking sewage into—"

"La Paloma told me I'd need some kind of number."

"La Paloma?" Zanzibar laughed. "So you awoke in the arms of a little dove."

"She was six feet tall. What about the number?"

"They call it an EXR number. Every idiot in the world has one. You have the option of having it tattooed on your instep or your keaster, depending on which part of yourself you're fondest of unveiling in public. Rating is based on how essential you are to society. Who do you think has the highest rating?"

"Politicians?"

"Nope, bowlers," said Zanzibar. "Bowling is the Number One sport in the whole world. Next comes gunfighters. Politicians are immune to Weed Outs. So are nappers."

"How'd you manage that?"

"Soon after I woke up this time I donated \$1,000,000 to President Hickey's campaign fund."

"Hickey finally made it?"

"This is a great great grandson of the unsuccessful Hickey. He's President of the Southwest Division of America and on the Board of Directors of the World."

Nate asked, "When can we leave for England?"

"Tomorrow morning soon enough?"

"Yeah, I can wait until then," said Nate.

## CHAPTER 19

"God save the Queen!" exclaimed their landcab and stopped stark still on the foggy roadway.

Zanzibar jabbed a hand into a jingling pocket of his three-piece travelsuit, extracted a GBDollar coin and dropped it into a slot in the back of the neck of the robot cabdriver. "Onward," he urged.

"'E means ter say," said the small pale man sitting on the rear seat between Zanzibar and Nate,

"wot hit's time fer the bloomin' Queen's Teatime Address to the loyal bloody subjects, mates."

"What's that have to do," asked Nate, "with our driving out to Barchester?"

"Ever'fing 'as ter stop, gov, when the Queen takes it inter 'is 'ead ter speak," explained the pale little English detective. "Hit's a ruddy whatchercall custom."

The glove compartment of the old-fashioned vehicle popped open to reveal the screen of a small flat-image TV. A golden-haired person in a regal gown, wearing a glittering crown atop the curls, was sitting on a golden throne. "Afternoon, me loyal subjects," the Queen began, using a falsetto voice.

"That's a guy," said Nate.

"Queen of Greater Britain doesn't have to be a dame anymore," said Zanzibar. "One of the results of the Sex Equality Acts passed by Parliament in 2081. It's also an elective office now."

"That guy's obviously a fag," said Nate. "How can they run a country with a gay monarch?"

"Yer don't unnerstan' the British people, gov," said their detective. "I mean ter say, we got to

'ave a Queen, hain't we? Otherwise the 'ole bloody hempire'd—"

"We can continue," announced the cab. The Queen's message had concluded. Rumbling, the cab started ahead into the swirling fog.

"Hi oughter make it crystal clear, if Hi ain't," said the little detective, "that this bloke yer after may not be in Barchester exactly."

"You told us he was," said Zanzibar.

"Hi told yer Kingsley Manor was last seen in Barchester. 'At were two days ago."

Nate said, "Shouldn't it still be there then?"

"This Tatt chap's got hisself whatcher call a mobile 'ome."

"Kingsley Manor's on wheels?"

"Airfloats," replied the detective. "Amounts ter the same thing."

"A big joint like that," observed Zanzibar. "It must be tough to sneak around in. So even if Tatt, alias Tannenbaum, has moved we should be able to pick up his trail."

"Most assuredly. Hi merely wanted you ter unnerstan' we maybe won't grab this cove, Tannenbaum as yer calls 'im, right immediate."

"Stop, pay toll," said the cab, slowing to a standstill.

Out of the fog came a silver robot with a syntin cup in his right hand. "Afternoon, chaps," he said through the speaker in his silver stomach. "How many of us are there in your machine? Five I make it."

"Four," corrected Zanzibar, "and that's counting the driver."

"Yes, five." The robot thrust his cup into the cab. "That will be five times ten GBDs or fifty GBDs for the group."

"There are only three of us and the goddamn robot driver," said Zanzibar. "The driver shouldn't even count because he's actually part of the—"

"'Ere you go, mate." The little detective reached across the black man to drop fifty dollars into the cup. "Much obliged."

"Same to you, old man. I trust you'll have a thoroughly pleasant journey." He moved away into the thick fog.

"Hit's considered perlite," their detective said when the cab was moving again, "to bribe these toll-takin' lads."

"Bribe a goddamn robot?"

"We all got ter do thing's wot hain't quite fair, gov, ter keep the bloody system runnin' smooth."

He put his hands deep into the pockets of his tweedy cloaksuit, settled back against the seat.

Nate asked, "You're certain the girl is in the house with him?"

"Just like I reported in me report. Hi bribed 'is hupstairs servomechanism and got misself the

'ole story. This lad's got three folks a-sleeping away up there in the East Wing of the manor. One of em's, sure enough, at least she sounds to be, your Miss Gena Herbert."

Zanzibar rubbed his hands together. "I'm anxious to get a look at the competition."

"It's got to be Gena."

"Hit's bound ter be," said the little detective.

"Stop, and pay toll," said the landcab.

"The manor house is now travelling Northward on highroad and will soon be . . . please deposit fifty dollars for an additional five minutes of information." The mahogany-surfaced computer was sitting smack in the middle of the best guestroom in the Heart & Pestle Inn of Barchester.

"Want me ter 'andle this and bill yer later?" asked their detective.

Zanzibar was crouched on a windowseat. "Yeah, go ahead."

From a coinpurse stitched inside the upper portion of his cloaksuit the pale detective took out a handful of ten dollar pieces. Depositing them in the slot atop the mansize computer, he said, "Alf 'ere's the best private tracking computer available in all of—"

". . . soon be within the boundaries of Queen's Preserve A26," continued the mahogany-colored Alf. "House is travelling at the rate of eighty kilometers ber hour, with Tatt, alias Tannenbaum, at the helm."

"How far is this Queen's Preserve A26 from here?" Nate asked.

"Roughly two hundred kilometers, gov," said the detective.

"Would Tatt be likely to stop there?"

"A good many folks do, 'unters an' the like. There's a goodly area set aside fer campers an' mobile 'omes."

"Alf, what's your guess?" Zanzibar asked of the computer.

"Tatt, alias Tannenbaum, is fond of woodland scenes," the computer said. "Hunting and taxidermy were his hobbies while growing to manhood in . . . please deposit fifty dollars for an additional five minutes."

"That schmuck's childhood isn't worth another fifty bucks." Zanzibar hopped off the window seat. "Where can we rent an airship?"

"There's Bertie's across town," said their detective. "You can 'ire yerself a nice craft fer as little as twenty dollars per ten minutes."

"Then let's be off to Bertie's," said Zanzibar.

## CHAPTER 20

"Yoicks! Yoicks!" Nate clutched Zanzibar by the collar, pulling him but of the path of the galloping robot horses. The final red-clad fox hunter who rushed by sneered at them. "Sporting life," muttered Zanzibar. They'd landed their rented hopper a few kilometers from here and were working their way down through the forests of the Queen's preserve. The most recent check with Alf the computer had given them the specific location of the now-parked Kingsley Manor. They were coming quite close to it.

"Why is Tatt moving around?" Nate asked in a low voice. "Does he know we're after him?"

"He's got to be aware that I, grim and implacable, am hunting for him," said the black man.

"But there's no reason to assume he has any idea we're this close." Through the trees showed the gabled roof of the manor house. It was parked beside a broad pond on which floated two white swans.

"Real swans?" said Nate.

"They ate the last real swan years ago. Those are mechanical, like all the other wildlife in this preserve."

"He's got the place guarded." Nate stopped next to a wide tree trunk.

Two large gunmetal robots, each carrying a stunrod and a deathbeam pistol, were patrolling the clearing at the rear of the manor.

Eyes narrowed, Zanzibar studied the prowling robots. "Yeah, those are Clayhanger Works robots," he said. "They have a few flaws, which I found out about on my last jaunt to Greater

Britain."

"What kind of flaw?"

From a pocket Zanzibar took a handful of dollar coins. He held them head-high and rattled them. One of the robots turned, lowering his weapons.

"The Clayhanger Works robots," explained Zanzibar, continuing to jingle the fistful of money, "all seem to have a venal streak. Since Greater Britain insists on a coin-in-the-slot servo system, that's probably inevitable."

The other gunmetal guard was staring in their direction. Guns down,

the pair of robots started walking toward the woods.

Nate asked, "You mean you can bribe these guys?"

"Exactly," grinned Zanzibar. "Once we do that, Nate, I'll bribe the back door. When we get inside the house I'll take the ground floor and you take—" "The East Wing," said Nate.

There was Gena. The dark girl was asleep in a wide sleeping pit. It reminded Nate of a grave.

There were six such pits in the tapestry-walled room. Two of the others had occupants, both men.

Stunrod in his right hand, Nate crossed the threshold. They'd found no trace of Tatt in the house so far. Zanzibar was still searching the lower floor.

Nate was a dozen yards from her when one of the tapestry panels was shoved aside.

The tall man who emerged held a deathgun aimed at Nate. "No need for a big fuss," he said, amiably. "We're both nappers after all, which makes us members of a very exclusive group." His narrow face was highly freckled, his free fingertips played over the dots on his skin as he talked.

"Why did you take Gena?" Nate moved nearer to the sleeping girl.

Tatt tucked the deathgun into the sash of his one-piece lounging suit. From the sash he drew a stungun. "Don't touch her, Kobean," he said, his voice still amiable. "In answer to your question, I'm in competition with you and that maniacal buddy of yours. Quite frankly, I have a much better future planned for us nappers than he does. Since the late lamented Dr. Dumpus never had an opportunity to exploit his success, it remains for someone else to do that. Myself." His free forefinger worked its way from freckle to freckle. "Myself and any other nappers who want to throw in with me. The potential of this thing is absolutely—"

"Some kind of Nappers, Ltd? To what end?"

"I'm attempting to tell you, Kobean. You must realize that we're all living testimonials to the effectiveness of the Dumpus Process. Once we have all the secrets of the process, then we can use ourselves to exploit it," said Tatt. "Already rumors about us have excited some very important people around the world. We could sell a treatment to every rich man, every rich matron. . . . Suppose we charge an initial fee of, say, \$500,000. You multiply that by several hundred eager customers and it means a considerable fortune. A fortune which will grow and grow during each of our sleep periods. In a few centuries we nappers will be the richest people

on the face of the—"

"Wait now. You said once," cut in Nate. "Meaning you don't have all Dumpus' papers yet either."

Tatt said, "I'm much closer to having them than any of you are, although I don't have the remaining journals yet."

Nate was next to the shallow sleeping pit which held Gena. "I've got the feeling she didn't volunteer to join you."

"Didn't she?"

"No, and probably these other two guys didn't either."

"What about you, Kobean? I've read up on you. A man with your background in the communications field, even though you're a hundred years behind the times in some ways, will be valuable to us . . . Keep away from her!"

Nate was kneeling beside the sleeping pit. "I'm going to take her away from you," he told Tatt.

"I can't allow that." The tall, freckled man took three steps nearer, pointing the stungun at Nate.

"Enough!" Another section of tapestry flapped, revealing Zanzibar with a deathgun in his hand. "These old mansions are full of secret passages."

Just then Gena awoke. She sat up, stretched her arms high above her head. That put her directly between Nate and Tatt. Watching her, Nate forgot the stunrod he was carrying.

Tatt spun, dived behind a tapestry.

Zanzibar came running across the room. In his haste he misjudged and stumbled into one of the pits.

"You okay?" Nate asked Gena.

After rubbing her eyes, she said, "Yes, I believe so . . . I'm glad you're the first one I see on awakening, Nate . . . I thought a good bit about you after Tatt lured me away from—"

"I thought about you quite a lot, too, and—"

"Ahoy!" shouted Zanzibar. "I think I sprained my ankle."

"Huh?" Nate looked away from the awakened girl.

"I fell in this goddamn hole." The black man was boosting himself up out of the pit. "No need to chase Tatt, by the way."

Nate, reluctantly, left the girl's side to help his friend out of the hole.

"Oh, yeah, I suppose I should have gone after him. Except I got to talking with—"

"Yeah, I know."

"Hello, Zanzibar." Gena had gotten herself out of her sleeping pit.

"Overjoyed to see you once again, Gena," he grinned.

"You know where Tatt is going?" the girl asked him.

"To Mexico City. He's got a new tip on the location of the rest of the Dumpus' journals, was going to leave for there later today anyhow. . . . We'll catch him."

"How'd you find out?" said Nate.

"Bribed his downstairs computer." Limping, Zanzibar peered down at the two new nappers. "This must be Billy Joe Foss, this guy with the scraggly moustache. Yeah, and this odd looking gink will be John J. Pelham." His nose wrinkled. "Lana had an eclectic taste, rest her soul."

"We better see about getting these guys back to New Mexico." Nate returned to the girl's side.

"I'll supervise that, with the help of our English ops and a few bribed servos," said Zanzibar.

"You go to Mexico City, catch Tatt and find those Dumpus journals."

Nate said, "I don't want to go without—"

"The both of you I mean. Is that okay?"

"Well, sure . . . isn't it?"

"It is," said Gena.

## **CHAPTER 21**

"Fourth floor," announced the see-through elevator, "farm land, Official University of Mexico, restaurant row, Museum of Twentieth Century Arts, Artists Quarter, impenetrable rain forest."

"This is our stop," said Nate.

Hand in hand, he and Gena left the elevator and stepped out onto the fourth floor of Mexico City. As far as they could see stretched white plexicolumns, pastel ceilings and floors. Giant murals of Mexican history, boldly rendered, floated at various spots. The high ceiling was criss-crossed with lightrods which gave off a gentle yellow sunlight.

Hundreds of people, many in one-piece white peonsuits, moved leisurely among the high columns.

"I feel like we're inside the biggest Macy's in the world," said the girl.

"Mexico City's fifty-two stories high, according to the travel spool I read on our way over from

England," said Nate. "Covers a one hundred square—"

"You're improving. Last time I couldn't get you to read up on anything."

"I'm mellowing. When you get to be 130 years old, you look at things differently."

A group of android musicians came strolling by. They played guitars and violins. One had a marimba built into his wide chest.

"In a way it's too bad we're here on business," said Gena.

Nate was scanning the multi-lingual signs which floated in the imitation sunlight above them.

"The Artists Quarter is to the south." Moving south across the vast fourth floor they passed along a wide street of tile-fronted restaurants. At the second intersection a considerable crowd had gathered.

"Hurray for the President!" shouted nearly a hundred voices.

"Which President is this?"

The girl replied, "Should be the President of the fourth floor. Each floor has its own."

". . . incredible honor to have our illustrious President appear with us to help celebrate the opening of this magnificent new restaurant, the Golden Pinata . . ." A stout man in a two-piece formalsuit was standing on a small pedestal addressing the crowd.

On a slightly higher pedestal stood a bearded, smiling man in a semi-military tunic and kilt. In his gloved right hand he held a neowood club.

Above the two men was suspended a gold and white striped clay pig.

". . . without further ado our esteemed President will smash this traditional pinata and cause the gifts to rain down on us, much in the way he has caused efficient and benevolent government to rain down on . . ."

"Let's," suggested Nate, "get around this."

"Don't you want to see the gifts rain down?"

The President, smiling broadly at the people, shifted his grip on the club. Lifting it above his head, he made an attempt to clout the floating clay pig. The first swing was a miss. On the second try he connected.

*Blam! Bam!*

The force of the explosion whammed both men off their pedestals. Fragments of clay pig splashed the . shouting, shuffling crowd.

"Assassination!"

"They've killed the President!"

Flat on his back, the President said, "Do not fear, my beloved constituents, I am not dead."

Nate, attempting to guide Gena through the agitated citizens, said, "Who do you think's behind this?"

The girl brushed clay dust from her dark hair. "There's some controversy about a new student co-op. Might be—"

"A moment, please, señor."

Two large smiling men were blocking their way.

Frowning, Nate said, "Who are you guys?"

"We wish to talk with you and the young lady."

"About what?"

"Chiefly this brutal attempt on the life of our respected president."

"Some clay dropped on him," said Nate. "I don't really think you can call it—"

"We would prefer to listen to your USAUSA rhetoric elsewhere, señor," said one of the men.

"Or do you perhaps deny," asked the other smiling man, "being agents of the USAUSA?"

"Do both of you guys stammer? What the hell is—"

Gena said quietly, "It's something called the United States of America Underground Secret Army I think, Nate."

"I never heard of—"

The two smiling men laughed. "A typical gringo subterfuge, señor," said one.

The other added, "Perhaps you would have us believe you are not even an American."

"No, we're Americans, but—"

"You will, please, come with us."

Two more smiling men had come up behind them.

"We can talk right here," Nate told the bunch of them.

"It is for your own safety, señor, and that of the young lady. We fear the loyal denizens of the fourth floor will soon take notice of you and, angered beyond endurance by your vile attempt to end the life of our honored President, will tear you limb from limb."

Already people on the fringes of the crowd were turning to watch. A few half-hearted cries of, "Death to gringos," went up.

"Oy." Nate put an arm around Gena's waist. "All right, we'll talk to you. Where do we do that?"

One of the smiling men said, "In the basement."

He hadn't seen her in two weeks. Or maybe it was closer to three.

Nate was having increasing difficulty keeping track of the passage of time. He'd begun to suspect they weren't feeding him on any regular sort of schedule. All his instruments for telling time had long since been taken away from him. And since he required no sleep it was becoming tough to divide the passing time into days and nights.

The room was a twelve-foot cube. The walls, ceiling and floor were covered with giant-scale murals depicting Mexican history. The murals, and a series of exercises he'd worked out for himself, were Nate's only entertainment in the windowless, doorless cube. And the murals were no longer able to hold his attention for very long.

They gave his food to him by lowering a tray down through an opening panel in the ceiling, a three-foot sliding square right where Juarez' tall hat sat. When Nate was interrogated they dropped a ladder down and hustled him up it.

Nobody was even questioning him anymore. At most of the questioning sessions they'd had Gena there. No torture involved, no violence at all. Only those smiling men, asking again and again about the planned coup and what the Americans had in mind. They remained convinced that both Nate and the girl were members of the USAUSA. Over these past weeks he'd learned a good deal about that particular organization. It was apparently the top secret clandestine espionage organization used by the United States in foreign countries. The Mexican government had proof, so the smiling men asserted, that the USAUSA had already arranged the

deaths of the Presidents of the ninth and fifteenth floors of Mexico City.

"Where the hell is Zanzibar all this time?" Nate asked himself. He made one more circuit of his cube, sat down on the edge of his cot.

Zanzibar must know they were missing. He should have come down here to Mexico City weeks ago, hunting for them. If he'd been able to locate Tatt he certainly should be able to find them in the basement of Mexico City.

"Except you're not even sure you're under Mexico City," Nate reminded himself, rubbing his eyes and yawning. "They drove us a long way, through all kinds of twisty tunnels, before we ended up here. We could be any . . . Jesus!"

He jumped up. Yawned once again before he got a hand clapped over his mouth.

"Not again, not in this place. I've only been awake . . . shit, I don't even know how long it is anymore."

He'd hardly had any time with Gena. Some time, sure, but nowhere near enough. There were a lot of things he wanted to talk to her about that—

"Keep moving!" He found himself leaning against the wall, directly beneath an enormous coiled snake. Nate shoved a palm against the decorated wall.

He kept circling the room, but stumbling more and more. Finally he sank to his knees. He managed to keep on, crawling now, eyelids drooping. "It's . . . no use . . . I'm . . . going under . . ." He stretched out on the floor. "Gena . . . I wanted to

. . ." He drifted off into slumber.

## **CHAPTER 22**

The creaking of the wagon wheels awakened him. There was a sandy wind howling outside, grating at the cloth covering of the wagon. Pots, pans, glass bottles rattled within and without

"I beat you this time."

Nate opened his eyes.

Gena was looking down at him, smiling.

He blinked, sighed, took in a slow careful breath. "I was afraid. . . ." His

throat ached, his tongue felt thick. "I was . . . afraid we'd . . . never get together again."

"Yes, so was I." She picked up a bottle labeled Dr. Eli's Miracle Curative Elixir. "Drink a little of this." She poured some elixir into a glass.

"I don't . . . need medicine."

"It's only spring water with herbs and honey in it, like root beer without the fizz."

He got a hand working, took hold of the glass. With the girl's help he sat up far enough to take a drink.

"We're traveling across an area they call Israel-Egypt. This is the Giza sector."

"Pyramids," he said.

"What? Oh, yes, we aren't far from a group of the better-known pyramids. Dr. Eli doesn't want to get any closer, because of the pyramid tribes. They're in a nasty mood right now."

"Who's Dr. Eli?"

"Not a bad old gentleman, for a charlatan. He owns us."

"How long have you been awake?"

"A week."

"And this is . . . 2135?"

"Probably so. Very few people keep track of time accurately anymore, especially in this part of the world."

"How long have we been the property of this lovable old charlatan?"

"He thinks he's had us in the show for upwards of twenty years, Nate. He bought us, as a set, at a bazaar in Arab-Israel. As to where we were before that . . ." She shrugged.

Nate noticed that he was naked. "What's Dr. Eli been using us for?"

"Don't get angry, okay? He's really a fairly pleasant old fellow."

"Has he been sleeping with us, too?"

"No, nothing like that. We've been exhibits. Dr. Eli uses us in his lectures."

"Lectures?"

"On the outside of the wagon it says: Dr. Eli's Magic & Sexual Knowledge Miracle Show," said the girl. "He tours the more civilized

segments, lecturing, doing tricks, selling bottles of his elixir."

"You mean for twenty years or more this old coot has been pointing at my private parts with a pointer?"

"Mine, too," said Gena. "Since I woke up, though, he's been very kind. I'm now his assistant, fully clothed."

Nate shook his head, which caused him to say, "Oy!" He took hold of the girl's warm hand. "No idea how we got out of Mexico City?"

"Nothing specific. I imagine it must have had something to do with the collapse of Western Civilization."

"Oh . . . did that happen while we were asleep?"

She answered, "More or less. You remember that plague stuff the Presidents of America were always swearing they weren't using?"

"They were using it."

"Yes, and it got out of hand. Killed nearly all the people in the Panama Enclave, then spread down through South America. Europe went next, losing nearly two-thirds of its population. America managed to hold out for almost five years, by cutting off all contact with the rest of the world. Of course, that did considerable damage to just about everything and everybody. The plague came next, first in the East and gradually all across the country."

"There's always a Dumpus," said Nate. "Some guy with a new process he absolutely has to try out."

"From what Dr. Eli's told me since I've been awake, I gather there are still a few moderately enlightened communities left and a few new ones growing up out of the ruins. For the most part this is pretty much a Dark Age."

"How about the nappers? Any word about Zanzibar or the others?"

"You know I mentioned the pyramid tribes were upset. Well, I think what's bothering them is—"

"Yoy yoy," said a high-pitched ancient voice, "now the other one wakes up. Why has such a blight come down on Dr. Eli?" It was Dr. Eli, a lanky old man in a night-blue robesuit.

"Dr. Eh, this is Nate Kobean."

"Pleased to meet you." Dr. Eli climbed up into the wagon. "Even though you are contributing to poor old Dr. Eli's ultimate downfall, I bear you no ill will. Well, not much." He extended a knobby hand and they shook.

"We're stopped for the night at an oasis. Now I wonder if—"

"I'm sure you've lived a full rich life, Dr. Eli, and have a vast store of wisdom and anecdote," Nate told him. "But right now I want to hear what Gena's got to say."

"It figures you should scorn Dr. Eli." The old man, folding his legs under him, sat down. "There is precedent for that. Three strapping sons, two nubile—"

"I'm only temporarily scorning you," Nate assured him. "What about the pyramids, Gena?"

"There's a story going around. I've heard it at two of our show stops this past week, to the effect that some kind of chariot appeared out of the sky a few weeks ago. It hung suspended over the apex of the Great Pyramid and a strange dark god descended from within it."

"Zanzibar!"

"I think maybe it was. This god of the chariot inscribed a strange message on the upper face of the pyramid and then departed," the girl went on. "That's why the pyramid tribes are angry."

"A miracle made them mad?"

"They've already got a god they worship, this simply confused them."

"Dr. Eli has similar problems," said the old man, rocking slowly to and fro. "His wisdom oft falls on deaf ears. Yoy yoy."

"That's got to be a new message from Zanzibar," said Nate. "Okay, we'll get a hopper or an aircruiser or whatever they call them these days and—"

"No aircraft," said Gena. "Not a ship exists in this part of the world. That's why Zanzibar made such a splash."

"Could we get there on foot or by—"

"Be dangerous."

"Yeah, but we—"

"Yoy yoy," said Dr. Eli. "What makes Dr. Eli cut his own throat and provide his star attractions with a means of escape from him."

Nate said, "You know a safe way to the Great Pyramid of Kheops?"

Dr. Eli said, "Some twenty miles from us, buried beneath the sand in what was once a large military warehouse, is a cache of several dozen flying machines. They date back to the wars of some thirty years ago, but are all in flying shape. Dr. Eli intended to fall back on their sale in his

declining years."

"Twenty miles . . . we could make it there tonight."

"Yes, if Dr. Eli were to drag his pain-wracked old body back out to the driver's seat and goad the enfeebled horses onward and away from a much-deserved rest."

"We'd really appreciate it," said Gena.

"I know, I know," said the old man. "Which is why poor old Dr. Eli will do it."

"Thank you." She leaned over to kiss his cheek twice.

"Yoy yoy," said Dr. Eli.

Nate repeated the message to himself, blew out his candle and climbed to the tip of the Great Pyramid. He jumped, got hold of the bottom rung of the rope ladder which dangled from the hovering aircraft.

All around the base of the pyramid the neobarbarians yowled and hooted. But they made no effort to climb up after him.

Nate scrambled up the ladder and into the ship. "Zanzibar's handwriting isn't improving," he said, dropping into the passenger seat.

"It is from him?" Gena was in the pilot-seat. She proceeded to take the ship away from there.

"Yeah," said Nate, grinning. "It was: 2135. NAPPERS! SUCCESS! WE HAVE IT! RALLY IN NM! Z."

"The antidote," said the girl as their craft cut through the clear desert night. "We've got it."

"How do you feel about it," Nate said. "Awhile back you wanted to keep on with this."

Not looking at him, she said, "You don't, do you?"

"No, I want to stop. Live my life out in one piece. I guess that's unimaginative, but—"

"If it's all right with you," she said. "I'd like . . . to stay with you."

Nate laughed, took hold of her. "Yeah, it's all right with me." He kissed her.

The ship flew itself.

After a moment Gena said, "We have enough fuel for the flight to New Mexico. We might as well keep going now, huh?"

"Yeah." He watched the blackness all around them. "I wonder what New Mexico's going to be like this time."

"It's going to be fine," she said.

**The End**