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Logan's Run Trilogy

William F. Nolan

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Book 1 Logan's Run

The seeds of the Little War were planted in a restless summer during the mid-1960s, with sit-ins and student demonstrations as youth tested its strength.

By the early 1970s over 75 per cent of the people living on earth were under twenty-one years of age.

The population continued to climb—and with it the youth percentage.

In the 1980s the figure was 79.7 per cent.

In the 1990s, 82.4 per cent.

In the year 2000—critical mass.

Chapter 10

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Her hair was matted, her face streaked and swollen. One knee oozed slow blood; she's cut it on a steel abutment.

A stitching pain lived in her side.

She ran.

There was a high lovers' moon and the night was full of shapes. Shadows slid on shadows.

When had she crossed the river? Was it last night or the night before? Where was she now? She didn't know.

Off to her right she could see an unending length of metal mesh beyond a stretch of dead asphalt. Far out on the pavement sea was a cluster of teeter-swings. An industrial nursery; it had to be Stoneham or Sunrise.

Perhaps her baby was there!

She veered to the left, away from the mesh, into the deep night-black between buildings. Abruptly she found her passage blocked by a high board barrier. She turned. Maybe she could double back over the river.

If she could only rest.

Wait! She froze, remained motionless. There was someone in the shadows ahead. A silent scream ripped at her throat.

Sandman!

Panic drove her heart against her chest in shuddering strokes. She spun about, clawed at the blistered boards, her fingernails breaking as she sought a grip on the coarse wood. The fence was too high.

For an instant (a century?) she clung there, trying to will her muscles to lift her oh-so-heavy body, but all the energy was gone. Something tore inside her, and she crumpled at the base of the wood.

Huddled into herself, she studied the char-black flower crystal centered in the palm of her right hand. A few days ago it had been a warm blood-red—just as seven years before it had been electric-blue, and seven years earlier, sun-yellow. A color for each seven years of her life. Now she was twenty-one and her flower was dull black. Sleep black. Death black.

The figure moved calmly toward her, across the moon-pavement. She didn't look up. She stared at her palm, because her future and her past were written there. All of her days and her nights and her fears and her hopes.

Why had she believed in Sanctuary? Insane. Impossible. Why hadn't she been like all the others who had accepted Sleep?

Now the dark figure, in black, stood over her, but she did not look up. She didn't beg because begging was useless.

Instead she remade the world.

She was not here, outlawed and condemned, shamed and terrified; she was in Sanctuary—on a wide, wind-lazy meadow beside a cool stream of silver—a world in which time did not exist.

Then why was her hand scrabbling under her torn clothing for the vibroknife she'd hidden there? Why the urgency to plunge the buzzing steel through breast and rib into her heart? Why?

She saw the Gun come up.

The homer!

She saw the moonlight dazzle off the dark-blue barrel.

The homer!

She saw the pale, tight-set face of the Sandman, and saw his eyes above the Gun, as his fingers whitened

on the trigger.

The homer!

There was a soft explosion.

That was the last thing she heard.

And the last thing she felt was raw, blinding agony, as the homer struck, burned, ripped and unraveled her.

Logan was tired, but the little man kept talking.

"You know how it is, citizen." he said "Nobody feels like he's done it all. All the traveling, all the girls, all the living. I'm no different from anybody else. I'd like to live to be twenty-five, thirty...but it just isn't going to happen. And I can accept that. I've got no regrets. None to linger on, I mean. I've lived a good life. I've had my share and nobody can say that Sawyer is a whiner."

He was talking compulsively. As long as he talked he didn't have to think. Logan had seen a lot of them on Lastday, talking away the final hours.

"You know what I'm going to do?" asked the man, whose palm-flower was blinking red, then black, then red. He didn't wait for a reply. He went on in a rapid voice, telling Logan exactly what he was going to do.

Logan had changed to grays back in DS Headquarters, and he wondered if the man would be talking to him if he were in his black tunic. No doubt he would Sawyer was obviously the type who went through life unworried about Deep Sleep men and Guns. Which was proper. He was a good citizen, and good citizens made a stable world.

"—and then I'm going over to the Castlemont Glasshouse and get myself three of the youngest, prettiest girls in the stagroom. One will be blond. You know, with deep-blue eyes and blue-white hair. Then I'll get one with short black hair and one with golden-brown skin. Three beauties. I hear they'll do anything for you when you're on Lastday."

The man looked at his palm. The flower bloomed red, then black, then red. "Did you ever wonder if the Thinker makes mistakes, the same as people do? Because it doesn't seem like I've turned twenty-one. It really doesn't. It seems I turned fourteen maybe five years ago. That would make me just nineteen." He said this without conviction. "F remember the day, when my flower changed and I was fourteen. I was in Japan, and it was the first time I'd visited Fujiyama. Wonderful mountain! Inspiring! Ever see it?"

Logan nodded. He'd seen it.

"I sure remember the day. Couldn't have been more than five years ago—maybe six. Do you think the machine could make that kind of mistake?"

Logan didn't want to remember how many years had passed since he'd been fourteen. Of late he had tried not to think about this. His flower was still a steady red, but...

"No," said Sawyer, answering his own question. "The machine wouldn't make that kind of a mistake." He was silent for a long moment; then, in a quiet voice, he said, "I suppose I'm scared." His flower blinked red, black, red, black.

"Most people are," said Logan.

"But not this scared," said the man. He swallowed, raised a hand. "Don't get me wrong, citizen. I'm no coward. I'm not going to run. I have my pride. The system is right, I know that. World can only support so much life. Got to be a way to keep the population down...I've been loyal and I won't change now."

The two sat quietly as the rumbling belt carried them up through the threemile complex.

At last the man spoke again: "Do you really believe that a homer is—is as terrible as they say it is?"

"Yes," said Logan. "I believe it."

"What gets me is the way it finds a runner. Once it's fired at him, I mean. The way it homes in on the body heat. They say it burns out your whole nervous system. Every nerve in your body."

Logan didn't answer.

The little man's face was gray. A muscle leaped in his cheek. He swallowed. "God," he said.

Sawyer drew in a deep breath. A spot of color returned to his face. "Of course it's necessary. Without the DS men and homers there'd be a lot more runners. We couldn't have that. Runner deserves what he gets, if you ask me. I mean, he doesn't have to run. A Sleepshop isn't so bad, is it? We toured one when I was twelve, me and a friend of mine. In Paris. Clean and nice. It isn't so bad"

Logan thought of the Sleepshops with their gaily painted interiors, the attendants in soft pastel robes, the electronically augmented angel choirs, the skin spray of Hallucinogen, which wiped away a confused look of suffering and replaced it with a fixed and joyful smile. He thought of the quiet, dim-lit grave room lined with aluminum shelving, and of the neat rows of steelfoil canisters marked with the names and numbers of men.

"No," said Logan. "It isn't so bad."

Sawyer was talking again. "Sometimes, though, I wonder about those DS men. I could never do it, what they have to do. Not that I'm defending runners. Not scum. I don't defend scum. But I just wonder how a man can fire a homer into—"

"I get off here," said Logan.

He left the belt.

Logan was annoyed at his action. He didn't live in this part of the complex. His unit was almost a mile beyond, but the man's constant chatter had frayed his patience. He knew this section, of course. A year ago he'd hunted a man here. Runner named Nathan. He closed off the memory.

Idly he began walking the covered thoroughfare.

Ahead was the Jewel Building. Logan paused to survey the vast mural which gave the structure its name—a climbing mosaic composed of tiny bits of fireglass brilliantly arranged to commemorate the Burning of Washington. Orange, purple and raw red flames jeweled halfway up the façade; bodies flamed; buildings smoked and tumbled. Yet the awesome masterwork was flawed, incomplete. Stark, gaping areas broke the pattern. Only the famed muralist Roebler 7 could handle the corrosive fireglass, and when he had accepted Sleep his secret died with him. The project would never be finished.

Directly beneath the mural, a man with a sign. Logan registered shock. The man was about fifteen with rounded, girlish features and large, soulful eyes. A silver fringe of beard silked his chin, and his hair was worn shoulder-length. The sign around his neck said: RUN!

He sat, image-still, in the middle of the walkway. Several angry citizens circled him. One of them spat on the bearded man.

"Filth!"

"Scum!"

"Coward!"

The man smiled patiently at his tormentors. He handed each of them a thin scripsheet from a stack in his lap.

"This is disgusting," said a fat woman, balling the scrip in her hand. "Unlawful."

As Logan approached, the man held out one of the sheets. He accepted it.

REJECT SLEEP! RUN

IF THERE ARE ENOUGH RUNNERS THERE WON'T BE ENOUGH HOMERS. THERE WON'T BE ENOUGH DS MEN IT IS WRITTEN THAT THE LIFESPAN OF MAN IS THREE SCORE YEARS AND TEN, SEVENTY YEARS! DON'T SETTLE FOR TWENTY-ONE. RUN! REJECT SLEEP!

A police paravane settled soundlessly at the edge of the walkway. Logan watched the two lemon-tunicked officers dismount and advance on the bearded man. He did not try to run. They led him away.

The paravane lifted back into the evening sky.

A woman next to Logan clucked her tongue. "That's the third maniac they've arrested this month. You'd think they were organized. It's frightening."

A girl in green mistsilks eased out of a doorway and fell into step beside Logan. He ignored her. The darkness had deepened and the sky was splashed with emerging stars. An air-freshener hummed.

Logan stopped to watch the Tri-Dim Report.

The proscenium of the TD Newsbuilding brightened. A familiar 300-foot figure took solid form; he smiled warmly down at the crowd. The tri-dimensional newsman was dressed in Lifeleather trimfits. His giant eyes were clear and guileless.

"Evening, Citizens," he boomed. "This is Madison 24 with the latest news. Trouble in the maze tonight. A gypsy gang war on an express platform near Stafford Heights resulted in two deaths. Fourteen individuals were injured, including three gypsies. Police are investigating and there will be arrests:" The immense figure paused for dramatic effect, then continued. "The triple slayer, Harry 7, was apprehended earlier today in the Trancas complex. His friends were invited to see him off in the Hellcar. But not one person showed up. Not one." The giant face nodded sternly. "Does that tell you something, citizens? It tells me something. Yes, indeed. It tells me that we are a proud, law-loving people, ashamed of runners and killers and that we are—"

Logan stopped listening. He became aware of the girl at his side.

"You're not happy," the girl in green said. "I can always tell. I have a gift for knowing, for sensing unhappiness." Her eyes shone with a fierce intensity. "I sympathize with unhappy men."

She placed a soft hand on his waist and pressed lightly. He shook off the hand.

Logan walked away, lengthening his stride.

"I could make you happy," called the girl. Her voice drifted after him faintly: "—make you happy."

Happy. Logan turned the word over in his mind. Restlessness gnawed at him. You can't buy happiness. But of course, you could.

The hallucimill on Roeburt was one of the city's largest. The drugs, administered by trained professionals, were nonaddictive. Logan had tried several and found that LF produced the happiest effects—Lysergic Foam, an extension of the old LSD formula developed more than a century and a half ago. It required sixty seconds to run a man's bloodstream. After that: expanded consciousness. Synthetic bliss.

"LF," Logan told the man in white.

"Dosage?"

"Standard."

"Follow me, please."

Logan was taken to the blueroom: a small, padded chamber with a table, a chair and a blue floor. And nothing else.

A woman was coming out of the room. Her face was papery, her eyes still partially glazed.

Logan took the drug flask handed him, swallowed the contents. "Have a good lift," the man in white said as he closed the door.

Logan sat down in the chair, keeping his eyes closed for a full minute, allowing the LF to work itself into his blood. Then he relaxed, opened his eyes.

A terrible illumination fired the room, and Logan knew it was going to be a bad lift.

Window, he thought, got to reach the window. It was open when he reached it and he fell out of the window, dropping down rapidly into the heart of the threemile complex.

A short, squat man caught him.

"You were running," the man said "That's fine."

"No, I was falling. There's a big difference." It was important that he be understood. "I fell from a window. Fell."

Logan twisted away, began to run.

He ran through hissing fire galleries. The world smelled of dream dust, and a million voices were dirging the coda to "Black Flower."

The short, squat man dropped him with a blow.

"Again," said the man, crouched.

But Logan had the Gun. He didn't need to take any more of this damned punishment!

He pulled the trigger.

And the world exploded

On the way out the attendant grinned at Logan. "You were really lifted. Like another?"

"No, thanks," said Logan, and left the building.

He didn't feel any better.

On the upper level he slowed. A group of youngsters approached him, their palms glowing like blue fireflies in the soft dark. As they passed, Logan heard snatches of heated argument.

"The Reddies don't remember we've got rights, too."

"They just better begin to—"

Echoes of the Little War.

Logan moved on, toward the play of colored lights on the glasshouse ahead.

The big dome was frosted in white, and interior images were indistinct. A contortion of naked, massed bodies formed a high, arched entrance, and the steps leading inside were illumined from below.

PLEASURE gleamed a step.

SATISFACTION gleamed another.

RARE DELIGHTS gleamed a third.

Logan entered.

"Your pleasure is our pleasure, sir," a flax-haired girl said to him mechanically. She was seated at a flow desk and wore red satin transpans.

Logan placed his right palm flat to the desk. An inaudible click: the desk would bill him for the visit.

He walked into the stagroom.

It was awash in sexuality. Here were beach girls from Mexico and California, Japanese maidens with shy eyes, Italian girls with mooned bodies, pert Irish lads, slim exotics from Calcutta, cool Englishwomen and full-figured French girls. All here because they were lonely or bored or oversexed; because they were looking for someone new or escaping from someone old—or for no reason at all except that the glasshouse was here to be used and it was a time for mingling and touching in a shadow search for love. You never find the people that you go to meet in dreams...

A girl with a blue palm swayed toward Logan; she was Eurasian and, at thirteen, a year away from

womanhood. "I'm adept," she said. "You'll find me skilled beyond any others."

Logan ignored her, gesturing to an older girl with red hair flowing along her back. She was swan-white with deep-lashed eyes of coral. "You," he said.

The girl glided in his direction, the thin silk of her gown clouding behind her. "Not me," she laughed, linking arms with a blue-gold blonde.

Logan was irritated. Ordinarily he would have been excited, flushed with anticipation. Tonight he felt dulled by what he saw.

He waved another female to him, a lithe girl with Slavic features and full hips. She smiled, took his hand.

They caught a riser up, passing tier on tier, stepped into a glass hall, moved in darkness to a glass room.

The girl told him that her name was Karenya 3.

"I'm a three also," Logan told her.

"Don't talk," she said feverishly. "Why do men always want to talk?"

Logan sat down on the bed and began to unbutton his shirt. The girl was already nude, having cast aside a thin garment of spun gauze.

How many times have I come to a place like this? he asked himself. To a lonely, empty house of glass...

Glass all around them. Glass walls and ceilings and floors. The bed, glass fiber. The chairs and tables, glass. The building was one vast transparent globe, shot periodically with colored lights.

Each room was equipped to illumine itself at irregular intervals, but it was impossible to determine just when a room would flare into brightness. Caught in the act of lovemaking, a couple would suddenly find themselves tangled in a wash of silver, or gold, or red, yellow or green. Other couples, around, above and below, would be able to watch them from glass floors, walls, ceilings. Then the light would die—to spring on in another chamber.

"Here," said the girl. "Lie here."

Logan eased into the glassfoam bedding. She guided his hand, and he gave himself over to this woman, holding and stroking her body in the darkness.

"Look!" she cried.

In the tier above them, bathed in hot gold, a man and a woman writhed in a love heat. Then darkness.

The night deepened

Logan and Karenya were frozen in silver, arms and legs twined. They were conscious of the eyes around them in the dome, watching hungrily.

Darkness again.

Light bloomed, died, flared and died in the love depths of the structure.

Until dawn sketched the glasshouse.

The loving was over and done.

"Please visit us again," said the flax-haired girl in transpats.

Logan exited, saying nothing.

Time for duty. No time to sleep. Logan went home to his unit, took a Detoxic, flushing his system, but this didn't seem to help. His eyes felt grainy; his muscles ached. He suited up and went down to headquarters.

Francis was there when he walked in.

The tall man grinned at him. "You look ripped," he said. "Bad night?"

Francis never looked ripped. No lifts or glasshouses for him. Not before a job anyway. Francis was cool and clearheaded and sure of himself. Why couldn't he be like that?

Actually there were few DS men who possessed the skill and drive of this friendless, loveless man with the mantis-thin body and the black eyes of a hunting cat. Precise, deadly, ruthless. Only the Thinker knew how many runners Francis had Gunned.

And what does he think of me? Logan asked himself. Always the casual grin, the light remark, telling you nothing. But judging every move.

The hallway was wide and gray and cold, yet Logan felt the warm sweat gathering under his tunic and along his hands as he walked.

He'd be all right once he had the Gun. He'd be fine; he always was. Soon he'd be hunting, man-tracking a runner somewhere in the city, doing his job as he had done it for years.

He'd be all right then.

The hallway ended. The two men faced a smooth section of wallmetal.

"Identities," said a metallic voice.

Each man pressed the palm of his right hand against the wall.

A panel slid back, revealing an alcove lined with worn black velvet. Gleaming in the velvet, long-barreled and waiting, were the Guns.

Only a DS man could carry a Gun. Each weapon was coded to the operative's hand pattern, set to detonate on any other human contact.

Logan reached in and closed his fingers around the big pearl-handled revolver, drawing it free of its snug velvet nest. He checked it; full load, six charges: tangler, ripper, needler, nitro, vapor—and homer.

Already the sense of power was building in him as he held the Gun, weighing it in his hand, letting the light slide along the chased-silver barrel. Weapons shaped like these had kept the peace in towns named Abilene and Dodge and Fargo. Called "sixguns" then, their chambers held lead bullets. Now, centuries later, their cargo was far deadlier.

"Identities," demanded the wall again.

The two men ignored the malfunction.

"Identities, please."

The report room hummed.

The room clicked and flashed, metallicly coding, decoding, indexing, weighing, processing, filing, tracking—rendering its impersonal machine data to the DS operatives who moved before its faceted wall of insect lights.

A dispatcher looked up, saw them. His face was dry and chafed, his expression harried. He picked out a scan record and bustled toward them.

"We've been jammed here," he said irritably. "Stanhope's in the field and I can't locate Webster 16. We've got a runner in Pavilion, moving east."

The room was a cross-mixture of voices.

"Come in Kelly 4. DS at Morningside seven twelve."

"Come in Stanhope. Your man is in the maze."

"Evans 9. Confirm. Runner's destination recorded seven-o-four as Phoenix. Mazecar waiting at Palisades. Confirm."

Logan swept the alert board. A light went on at the third level, east sector.

"Who takes him?" he asked.

"You do," said the dispatcher. "Francis is on backup."

"All right," said Logan. "Give me a scan."

"Name: Doyle 10—14302. His flower blacked at five thirty-nine. That would be"—he checked a wall-chron—"eighteen minutes ago. He's heading east, up through the complex. So far he's avoided the maze. I make it he knows about the platform scanners. He's going for Arcade. Cagy. He must know the fire galleries interfere with a DS scope. The rest is on the board. Good hunting."

Logan began to plot the alarm trail as it came in over the circuits. A light went on at fourth level east. Citizen alarm. Logan noted it. Ordinary citizens are your best allies when a runner is loose. Another light at level five. Logan waited for the third light before he left the alert room.

In Central Files he punched Doyle 10—14302. The slot instantly produced the physical file on the runner: a TD photo, vital statistics, pore patterns, names of known friends and associates.

Logan checked Doyle's flower history: YELLOW: Childhood. Birth to seven years: machine-reared in a Missouri nursery. No unusual traits noted. BLUE: Boyhood. Seven to fourteen. The usual pattern. Lived in a dozen states, roamed Europe. No arrests. RED: Manhood. Fourteen to twenty-one. Rebel. Arrested at sixteen for blocking a DS man on a hunt. Pair-ups with three women, one of whom suspected of aiding runners. Has a twin sister, Jessica 6, whose record is clear.

Logan studied Doyle's photo.

The runner was a big man, his own size, dark hair, strong memorable face with a wide jaw, straight nose. Slight scar above the right eye. Logan would know Doyle when he found him.

He unclipped the small black Follower scope from his belt and tuned in to Doyle's flower pattern. Then he returned to the alert room.

A new light on the board: the upper concourse of the complex.

Francis was at Logan's elbow. "This is no ordinary runner," he said. "I've been tracking him on the board. He's got a destination—and he's not making any mistakes. Call me if you need me. That's what backup's for."

Logan nodded tightly. He snugged his Gun into its tunic holster, checked the scope on his Follower and left the room.

The hunt began.

Logan got off the belt at the main concourse as his quarry emerged from a public riser. Doyle saw the black tunic and dipped into a crowd. Logan stuck with him as the crowd thinned. He was still heading east—toward Arcade.

He'd be hard to track in the vast pleasure center. Logan moved to head him off, but the runner reversed direction and caught a slide. Good. The man was moving downward again. Let him run.

Logan watched Doyle's progress on the Follower, represented by a tiny alarm trail of flashing light dots.

Time to give him another nudge.

At Morningside Heights and Pavilion he picked up Doyle again. The man must know about the maze scanners, Logan thought; the dispatcher was correct in this. Doyle had passed up a dozen chances to go underground. He was swinging east again making another bid for Arcade.

Logan showed himself in the crowd-surge. There's nothing to equal the flash of a black tunic to instill panic in a runner. And panic would kill him. Panic and a homer. Logan moved up a level, to place himself between the runner and Arcade.

Doyle didn't panic.

He was smart. This was no frightened psychotic who'd come unhinged the moment his hand blacked. He'd dodged and shifted like a chess player, calculating each move. He stayed in crowds; he didn't let himself get locked in on a single level, but stayed close to the main lifts which offered him mobility.

Logan felt a reluctant admiration for this man. Doyle could have made a fine DS operative. He had the instincts and grace of a hunter. He seemed aware of the DS limitations and exploited the knowledge.

Enough of this, Logan warned himself. Let's get on with the job. Fill up with coldness and hate. Build the image of a jackal, a warped coward running from justice. Weak, spineless, selfish. Living beyond his time.

Chase, capture and kill.

Logan watched the Follower as one of the tiny light dots neared his position. Doyle should come out of the lift—now.

The man stepped into view.

Logan brought up the Gun. He caught a white, shocked face in the sights. It would be an easy shot, a clean kill. In that moment Doyle saw his danger. He tried to back into the lift.

Logan had him. Before Doyle could take cover the heat-sensing element in the homer would seek him out and destroy him. Logan's finger curled on the trigger. He hesitated.

That brief hesitation cost him the shot. Doyle was in the lift, headed down.

Logan swore tensely. What had gone wrong? Why hadn't he Gunned the man?

On the scope he watched the dot descend two levels and head south. Once again Logan moved to cut the runner off. He dropped three levels, circled to the foot of the slope ramp, waiting. This time he would not miss.

When Doyle appeared he was holding a human shield. A girl, ten or eleven. Struggling in Doyle's arms, she reacted in terror as she saw the DS man.

Logan flipped the chamber to tangle and fired the charge. Doyle flung the girl forward into it. The blast of silver threads enveloped her, clouding over her upper body in a tight webbing. Already Doyle was running again.

A paravane was cruising the area and Logan alerted it. The police would bring the delicate equipment needed to soften and dissolve the threads without harming the girl. Logan put her out of his mind.

The dot was ahead.

The main thoroughfare was thick with citizens. Among them, moving away, was Doyle. No good trying to fire a homer in this press of bodies. Too dangerous. There was always the chance that an onlooker would step in front of the charge and divert its course. To a homer, seeking a normal 98.6(in body temperature, one man was like another. Logan would have to be certain of his shot. The only sure way to take out a runner in a packed crowd was to walk directly up to him, jam the Gun in his stomach and fire. But Doyle was too fast to allow this.

The hunt continued.

Doyle was veering east again. Making another try for Arcade. Logan moved quickly to intercept him, riding an express belt to the east edge of the concourse. This should do it; Doyle would walk right into his Gun.

But he didn't. Something was wrong. It had been a feint. The dot was going down through the complex—heading west. Toward Cathedral.

Bad. In Cathedral he could lose Doyle forever, and that wasn't going to happen.

Logan put in a call to backup.

"He tricked me, and I went for it," he told Francis. "It's up to you to cut him off at the stone bridge into Cathedral. I'll meet you there."

Francis didn't waste time with a reply.

He clicked off.

Cathedral: a festering sore in the side of Greater Los Angeles, an area of rubble and dust and burned-out buildings, a place of shadow and pollution, of stealth and sudden death. Cubscout territory. If Doyle cleared the bridge the cubs would take him. The kill would be theirs—and that was bad for the record.

Logan was well aware of Cathedral's blood history. Of the runners who never came out. Of the muggings. Of the unchecked violence. Even the police avoided Cathedral. With good reason. They'd sent in a cleanup squad the previous summer to tame the cubs. Logan had known some of the men in that squad: Sanson and Bradley and Wilson 9, all good officers. They'd walked into the jaws of the crocodile and the jaws had closed. None of the squad survived.

You didn't take chances in Cathedral.

The express belt broke down at River Level, and Logan was forced to take a walkway to Sutton and use the out ramp. These transit breaks had been occurring more and more frequently of late. And since the Thinker was self-repairing, or supposed to be, there was nothing anyone could do about the situation.

When Logan reached the east side of the long stone bridge which fed into Cathedral he found Francis slumped against the spillwall.

"Chopped me from behind," he said, rubbing his head. "Your runner's tough."

Logan scanned the area. The scope indicated that Doyle was very near. A shadow on the bridge. Logan raised his Gun for a shot, but couldn't get a clear view of the man.

Doyle kept under the stone parapet, scuttling crab like across the span, keeping the thick masonry between himself and the Gun.

"He's over," said Francis.

The runner had cleared the end of the bridge and ducked behind the tumbled ruins of a warehouse. But within seconds he reappeared, retreating from a tide of moving colors, quick shapes.

"Cubs!" breathed Logan.

He studied the cubscouts. There was something odd and fragmented about their movements as they converged on Doyle. Then he realized what he was seeing. He heard Francis swear softly. "They're on Muscle."

The small figures moved in a continual blur of motion, daring and flitting like earthbound dragonflies.

Where do they get the stuff? Logan wondered. Muscle had been outlawed since the Little War. Originally developed for armed combat, the drug was designed to speed up reactions. It increased a man's strength tenfold, giving him ample time to deal with an enemy. But its action was too violent to control; it forced the heart to do a day's work in minutes. A man lived impossibly fast with Muscle in his bloodstream. Only the very young could use it.

Logan felt the flesh on his scalp tighten as he watched the incredibly swift boy-shapes attack the runner. Under Muscle a stick in a fist becomes a steel hammer—and the swarming cubs were cutting Doyle to pieces. He was on the ground, hands outstretched to ward off the cubs, but they were killing him. They were all around him in a rippling, weaving circle; and each wet, bone-shattering blow brought Doyle closer to death.

Logan and Francis were crouched behind a wall of rubble facing the action in the clearing ahead of them.

"We'll try vapor," said Francis. "Plug up."

They inserted nose filters. Francis flipped the Gun to V, braced the weapon against the top of the wall, fired.

The gas charge took immediate effect, driving the cubs back in a broken wave.

Doyle lay huddled and unmoving in the center of the clearing.

"Let's check him," said Logan.

"I can handle it. You cover me."

Before Francis could reach the runner the cubs regrouped to cut him off. They backed the DS man into a shallow pocket of stone to one side of the open ground. A second wave came for Logan.

He fired a nitro into the group, and three of the cubs were torn about by the blast. This stopped them long enough for Logan to reach Doyle.

The man's face was a mosaic of blood and bone-ends; his mouth moved convulsively. A word. The runner was repeating a word.

Logan leaned closer to catch the broken whisper: "Sanctuary."

Logan tensed. The runner's head fell back loosely; his fingers uncurled. A small glittering object fell from his left hand. A punchkey. Logan pocketed it.

The flat, dry crack of a ripper. Francis was effectively dealing with his attackers. He came into the clearing and stepped quickly to Doyle.

"Alive?" he asked.

"Dead," said Logan.

Francis stared sourly down at the unbreathing man, obviously disappointed, cheated of a prize. Then slowly he raised his Gun and fired a blister charge into the body.

The dead runner flamed and danced into sudden ash.

"Let's go," said Francis.

On the way back to headquarters, riding beside Francis in the shuttle, Logan kept his right fist closed against his side. He didn't want to see the flower in his palm.

It was blinking.

Chapter 9

[« ^ »](#)

He cat-prowls the corridors. He stops in front of the Gunwall. Logan's Gun is still not there. He paces, waits. He hears a guarded whisper not meant for his ears: "Old Francis is on to something," says a voice. "They say the cubs cheated him out of a runner." "That isn't it. He's on to something." He doesn't react to this. He shadow-glides the gray halls. He is a violence, contained. He moves back to the Gunwall,

stares, moves away. He checks the time: 7:30. Fact: Logan has not returned with his Gun. Fact: Logan is on Lastday. He instructs the techs to rig a Gun trace, tuned to Logan's weapon. When the Gun is fired it will register its location on the board. He sits, face illuminated by ghost lights from the glowing circuits. He waits.

EVENING...

When Logan walked into his living unit young Abe Lincoln was there, splitting logs in the center of the room. Logan automatically punched a wall stud and the president was sucked, hissing, back into the Tri-Dim.

He stripped, bathed, changed to grays and dialed a meal and a Scotch. Sipping the iced drink, Logan stared at his palm, at the blinking crystal flower.

Lastday. Twenty-four hours in which to live. Then his flower would go black and it would be time to turn himself in for Sleep.

Twenty-four hours.

Logan picked up the silver punchkey from the bed.

Runners say please; runners say help; runners say mercy, runners say don't.

Doyle had said Sanctuary.

And Logan held a key which might lead to it, to a goal never proved to exist, to a place which could not exist. Not in this world. Not for a runner in 2116.

But what if Sanctuary were a reality? A place where runners were safe from the Gun. What if he, Logan 3, could find it and destroy it in the last twenty four hours of his life? His existence would be justified; he'd be a world hero; his life would end in glory.

It would be a risk worth taking. And the key to the quest lay in his hand.

Do it.

Logan walked to the communideck. The silver key slid easily into the slot. Inside the flat housing, tiny indentations in the stamped- metal made electrical connections. The wallscreen lightened.

A girl in vented peekaboos regarded Logan. She was perhaps sixteen, with dead, flat eyes. Her body was slim-breasted and angular. "Call back later," she said. "I'm going out."

"I'm calling now," said Logan.

"Have you got a name?"

"I've got a name." He let it rest at that.

A spark of interest in the flat eyes. "But you've keeping it to yourself."

"There's no sanctuary in passing out random identities," said Logan, leaning slightly on the word sanctuary.

Her gaze did not flicker.

This didn't feel right. Not right at all. The runner could have been babbling. Maybe he was acting on a false lead.

"Who gave you my key?" the girl asked.

"A friend."

"I'm going out."

"You said that."

"To a party. I'm expected."

"I could meet you there," said Logan.

She studied him speculatively.

"Halstead complex. West wing. Fourth level. Living unit 2582. Got that?"

Logan nodded.

"I really shouldn't be inviting strangers," she said. "If you're...not up to the party I'll be to blame."

"I'm up to it," said Logan, "and anything else." He kept his face impassive.

"We'll see."

She said one last thing before she blacked. "I'm Lilith 4. I think you'll find me...helpful."

The screen died.

Logan let out a breath. It sounded like a word. The word it sounded like was "Sanctuary."

The party in unit 2582 was getting into full stride when Logan arrived. The door was opened by a mouse-faced man in orange trims. He was quite intoxicated.

"The tree of cruelty often blooms in the fertile soil of love," he said

"I'm sure it does," said Logan, scanning the crowded room for Lilith.

"The boy seeks, the man finds. That's a poem. I write them, you know."

"I didn't know," said Logan. The girl was not in the crowd. Perhaps she'd been delayed or had changed her mind about meeting him.

"One of my poems was read on TD. Called 'Womb Wood.' Like to hear it?"

Logan said nothing.

"In the woods of the womb,She walked.In a whirl of red wounds,She fell.Heart bursting like a plumIn the bracelets of her breasts."

Logan sat down on a flowcouch built into the wall. The poet continued to talk, obviously determined to elicit praise.

"That poem received a great deal of very favorable comment. I'm quite famous, you know."

"Fine," said Logan.

A toad of a man scuttled up with a foaming mug in his hand. "Try this," he said. Logan caught the slightly sour odor of fermentation. "It's Volney's home brew. We've got a whole keg of it. It's nothing like the beer from the slots. He's a real artist, Volney is. Puts musk raisins in it."

"I prefer Scotch."

"That's your loss, citizen."

Logan dialed a Scotch. It was taken from him by a red-haired girl in slashvelvets. She downed it hurriedly.

"Wonderful!" she said Her green eyes were alcohol flushed. She offered Logan a cigarette.

"No, thanks."

"Don't be afraid to," she urged him. "There's a police payoff in this area. No tobacco raids. Go ahead."

"No, thanks."

The girl took offense. "Afraid to smoke, aren't you? You men! Cowards. Every one of you cowards. I was on pairup with a merchantman until last week. Then we broke it. Know why?"

"Why?" asked Logan.

"Because. Because he lacked the essentials. He was content. Content to be content. He had his business and he had me and that's all he wanted. I need a man who wants what he doesn't have. That make sense to you, citizen?"

"Maybe you don't need a man. Maybe you need a boy."

"I tried a boy. Eleven. He was good for a while, but I got so I hated his young face. I'm fifteen—and a woman needs a man. How old are you?"

"Old enough," said Logan, keeping his right hand closed. The flower blinked warmly in palmflesh. He could feel its heat against his fingertips.

"How about a pairup?"

"No. No, thanks."

The green eyes chilled. "Is that all you can say—'no, thanks'?" The girl stood up, weaved away.

Logan sighed. Where was Lilith?

The door slid open and a fat bellied man eased in, bearing a double armload of clothing and accessories. His voice shrilled in falsetto. "Hail, fellow lungblasters and glassmasters and livefasters! Hail, fellow peepers! The gear is here." The fatman pasted a talk puppet grin on his face and began strutting the room in high-pumping steps. "Gear up! Everybody gear up!"

"Been waiting long?" Lilith 4 grinned down at Logan; a pink cigarette dangled smoke from her glitter-coated lips. She was bare-hipped in silver snakeskins.

"Let's talk," said Logan. "You know why I'm here."

The fatman bustled importantly up to them. He thrust a black knit bodystocking and crepe stretchsoles at them. "Gear up, you two," he said, clapping his meaty hands. "Let's peep!"

"We'll be partners," declared Lilith. "You said you were up to it."

Logan took the clothing, moved to a changeroom and slipped out of his grays. He'd have to stow the Gun somewhere; no place to conceal it in the skintight bodysuit. At least he'd left the spare ammo packs in his unit; figuring that the six charges in the weapon should see him through. Now he was grateful for this decision. Less bulk to worry about. He slipped the Gun into an alcove, gambling that no one would have occasion to search the closet.

"You have Greek shoulders," said the mouse-faced poet, who was beginning to gear up next to him.

Logan grunted and returned to Lilith, who was already dressed and ready. She offered him a Scotch.

"Thanks, I can use this!" He tipped the glass to his lips.

A dozen dark-garbed men and women waited in the central chamber. They joined them, and the girl handed Logan a pair of smokegoggles. "Wear these on the ledge."

Six black-light cameras were arranged neatly on a table. One camera per couple.

"Righty, righty," said the fatman, signaling for attention. "Now all you peepers know what to do?"

"Stop being a damn woman, Sharps," said a bored voice, "and get on with it."

Sharps glanced petulantly at the speaker. "I'm in charge. The cameras belong to me!"

"And it's your alcohol and your tobacco and your living unit. For which we are all duly grateful. So let's peep."

Sharps made an obscene gesture. He waved the first couple off. In pairs, the players left the chamber through a ceiling-high view-window.

Logan found himself kneeling beside Lilith on a narrow ledge high in the complex. Below them, the great city was alive with snakes of light. He saw the rows of blinking glasshouses near Hurley Square and, beyond, the dazzle of Arcade. The fire galleries sent up their rose glow, staining the edge of the night sky.

It was a long way down.

He shifted the camera and gripped the alum-ribbing of the building wall. Wind slicked between the box beams, threatening to pull him from the ledge.

Lilith crawled into the liquid dark, edging in front of Logan. Keeping his eye on the feminine sway of her dark bottom, he followed.

When the girl stopped he said, "Talk. Were alone now." He couldn't see her face behind the goggles. "First we peep," she said. "Then we talk."

"Why not now?"

"If we return to the party without film they'll suspect something. Sharps is not the fool he seems. They'll ask questions we might not want to answer."

High in the complex, a full half-mile above them, a police paravane ran its pinlight along the ledges.

"Keep in shadow," said Lilith. "They patrol these landings. We have to be careful."

Logan knew the game was illegal, and he didn't want the police stopping him. If he got picked up without the Gun he would not be able to prove his identity. They'd have to check him out. If he had the Gun, and revealed himself, the girl would close the door on Sanctuary. Either way, he couldn't afford to be stopped.

He'd be careful.

With a cat's liteness, the girl swung, hand over hand, along a guy wire leading to the next ledge. Logan slung the camera over one shoulder and followed.

Most of the windows they could reach were blacked. Other units were unoccupied.

Lilith pointed downward "I think something's happening in there," she said.

The window she'd indicated was closed but not blacked.

The girl took out a slim wire with an earplug at one end and a walkup on the other. She pressed the cup against the building, the plug in her ear. She smiled.

"Have a listen," she said, passing the earplug to Logan.

Through the miniature amplifier he could hear voices husky with love. A man and a woman. Sighs. The rub of skin on skin.

"Give me the camera," whispered Lilith. "And grab my ankles. I'm going down for a shot."

Logan braced himself. He clung to the girl's legs as she slipped off the ledge, head first. Lilith dangled in space just in front of the dark window. Below her: a mile-deep emptiness, a stagger of steel and glass and boa beam units.

Logan leaned back, feet gripping the stone, feeling his leg muscles protest. The camera whirred. "Up!" the girl whispered.

He pulled her back to the ledge. "How did you know I could hang on to you?"

"I didn't," she said. "That's part of the lift."

Did she really know anything about Sanctuary? Or was she simply some danger-sick female out for thrills? Logan didn't know. Yet.

A pinlight raked the building. Police!

They melted into shadow. The patrol paravane ghosted past them and continued on its way.

"You're doing fine," the girl said.

"Can't we talk now?"

She laughed—and crawled off with Logan behind her.

They climbed upward, along ridged metal, their suction stretchsoles aiding the ascent. On the roof Lilith said, "Jump!"

She leaped into space, cleared a gap between units, and landed in a garden patio. He made the jump, almost losing his balance.

The patio was deserted.

On the adjoining level, however, the girl found fresh prey. "You take them this time," she said to Logan.

He aimed the camera, fingered it into whirring motion.

"Good," said the girl. "That's prime peeping. Now we—"

"Now we talk—or I pitch you over this ledge. I've had enough of your nonsense."

"You'd really do it, wouldn't you?" Her voice held excitement.

"I really would."

"All right...what do you know about Sanctuary?"

"I know it's where I want to go."

"Where did you get my key?" She watched him carefully.

His lips felt loose. He giggled foolishly. "From...from the same place all runners get theirs."

He giggled again. What was happening to him? The hard aluminum ledge rippled, fell away. He was floating out in space with the wind crying around him.

"Answer the question!" the girl's voice whispered intensely at his ear.

Logan found himself singing: "Angerman was...filled with fury, He the judge and he the jury..."

Logan babbled happily. He was poised in air, looking down at himself sprawled on the ledge. He watched Lilith cuff him across the mouth. He watched her grab his hair and bend his head back.

"The key—where did you get the key?"

"Man named 10, named 10, named 10...named Doyle 10."

Logan's neck ached.

"Angerman, pursuing faster," he sang. "Ang—Angerman, the angry master."

He stood up rigidly, with the girl clinging to him. The world was no longer dark; it was filled with blazing orange music which stabbed his eyes.

"Did you kill Doyle?"

The orange music stroked him. "Cubs...cubs killed him."

Logan stepped off the ledge. Instinctively he reached out; his clawing fingers found a grip. His head was clearing as he kicked at air. His right foot lodged on a metal projection and slowly, inch by inch, he drew himself back onto the ledge.

He lay, stomach down, gasping for breath. The girl. She'd drugged his Scotch. With Truthtell. Had he told her too much?

"What now?" he asked.

"Go see Doc," she said sweetly. "He's your neat contact."

"Doc who?"

"In Arcade. Look for The New You. That's his place."

Logan nodded.

"Now we go back to Sharps and turn in our peeps. Some lift, eh?"

"Sure," said Logan. "Some lift."

He left the belt at the Beverly overpass and began threading his way through Arcade.

The immense pleasure center formed a never-ending human logjam. Arcade had not closed its doors to funseekers for over fifty years. The place was a vast crazy quilt of hallucimills, Re-Live parlors and fire galleries.

Signs screamed and moaned in smoky colors: RE-LIVE THAT FIRST EMBRACE! (A gaudy Tri-Dim on a ribbed platform depicting two nude youngsters in a torrid tangle.) RE-LIVE THOSE PRECIOUS MOMENTSI (A wild-eyed boy riding a flamed devilstick through a mock sky.) RE-LIVE! RE-LIVEI RE-LIYEI

Noise gonged; a thousand odors mingled; hawkers cried their wares. Here night was day and day was night

"Wanta good time, citizen?" A man with one arm and a fog voice beckoned him toward a swinging door.

Logan passed him quickly.

He saw the sign he was looking for. It hit the window in a sulfurous shower and withdrew, hit and withdrew into the darkness behind the black glass. THE NEW YOU...THE NEW YOU...THE NEW YOU...

Logan entered the shop.

The waiting room was the color of ashes. The scattered pieces of furniture were faded, worn. Even the air in the room seemed used. An ancient chrome-plated desk hunched in one corner, and behind it sat a young woman in soiled whites. Her face was pale and predatory. She regarded Logan suspiciously. "You want Doc?"

"I want Sanctuary."

The girl wet her lips with a small pink tongue. "Then you want Doc."

She rose listlessly, crossed to Logan. "Hand," she said. He held up his right hand, palm out. Red-black-red-black-red-black...

"C'mon," she said. "Follow through for the new you."

She led him down a musty hallway and into a large room smelling of metal. Logan recognized the thing in the center of the alum floor; he felt himself ice up. Table! The machine loomed over a flat metal bed that was grooved and slotted and equipped with fastening devices.

"There's not another like her outside a hospital between here and New Alaska," said a harsh, confident voice.

Logan whirled to face a thick bodied sixteen-year-old. The man's bony features were split by a crooked-toothed smile. He wore a long gray smock which extended down to his shoe tops. Doc.

"A little edgy, are you? Well, that's natural. Runners are scared people. Least you got enough sense to start before your flower blacks. It's tougher then, with the Sandmen onto you. What'll it be, face job or full body? Could add a couple inches to those legs"

"Just the face," said Logan.

"Got no time, is that it? Runners never got time." A note of sad regret in the voice. "I won't ask your name. I don't want to know it. You got the punchkey and that's good enough for me. Ballard knows who to give them to."

Ballard! Logan's mind leaped. The world's oldest man. A story to frighten children with. A legend. A subject for folk chants. Was there actually such a man—the force behind Sanctuary?

"Holly will get you ready. If you're worried about the Table, don't be. They call me Doc , but I'm a trained mech. A real mechanic. Give me a basket of transistors and a pound of platinum sponge and I can make anything. You're in good hands, believe what I tell you."

As he talked, the girl came forward to unbutton the collar of Logan's shirt. The Gun was stuffed into his waistband, and he wondered if they'd want all his clothes off. Hiding the Gun would be impossible here.

"Ask me what I'm doing in a shop like this if I'm so handy. I got my reasons. I make out. A little Muscle for the cubs, a sea lift now and then, a face job for Ballard—maybe a body change for some sick citizen who's tired of himself. Adds up. I do all right."

The girl was brushing her fingertips lightly down Logan's arms. There was a deep-blue spark in her eyes. "I'm Holly," she said softly. "Holly 13. In ancient times they said my number was unlucky. Do you believe in luck?"

Doc aimed another crooked smile at Logan. "Holly don't work for the money. She gets her lift out of watching the Table—and other things." His smile became a dry chuckle. "Back in a minute."

"Do I need to undress?" Logan asked the girl.

"Not for a face," she said. "That is, not unless you want to."

"What now?"

"Empty your pockets." She led him to the Table.

It was one of the big brutes, a Mark J. Surgeon. Suspended over the flat bed was a glittering tangle of probes and pincers and scalpels, springs, clamps and needles. Tubes and looped wires interconnected from one part of the Table to another, crisscrossing the main body which contained the solid-state circuitry forming the machine's memory center and brain. At one end was a console of buttons and switches, lights and dials.

A Table such as this could lengthen bone and change dental patterns. It could broaden shoulders, put on or take off weight. It could alter germ plasma or blood groupings. With its infinitely adjustable lasers it could lay back the flesh surrounding a single nerve and lift out that nerve without nicking the sheath. It

was as precise as a diamond cutter and as unemotional as a vending slot.

Logan didn't want to get on the Table. It could carve and change him, make him into another man. Holly 13 fastened down his ankles and wrists, then attached the sensors. The Table rippled, accepted his weight, positioned him.

"I like dark hair," said Holly, leaning close to him. The blue spark danced in the depths of her eyes.

"Have him give you dark hair."

Doc returned to his patient. "Got anything special in mind?" he asked. "Bone structure like yours I could give you most anything."

"That's your decision," snapped Logan. "Just get it over with."

"Look, runner," said Doc, his voice hard, "just you ease down. I tell you where to go, how to go and when to go. You runners are always in a hurry. Always trying to rush me. You don't go nowhere without Doc. I handle this end of things. Can't use the next key anyhow till nine forty. Got plenty of time for the new you."

Doc danced his fingers over the control board as he studied Logan's face. "We can widen those cheekbones for a start."

The Table began to hum as a pair of thin silver probes separated themselves from the overhead cluster and poised above Logan; a stun needle lowered toward his face; a vibrosaw began to keen.

Abruptly all motion ceased. The keening died. An alarm buzzed insistently.

Doc's eyes narrowed. "Something's wrong. We've got metal on the Table. You empty your pockets?"

Logan nodded.

Doc looked at him suspiciously. "Something ain't right"

He came out from behind the console, stood over Logan. The slight bulge of the Gun was visible in Logan's waist. Doc pulled open his shirt, baring the weapon.

"Lock the door, Holly."

"What is it?" she asked, moving forward. Doc shoved her back.

"Gun!" he said. "We got a Sandman."

"What'll we do?"

"I'm thinking." Doc glared at Logan, helpless on the Table.

"You've seen my hand," said Logan. "I'm on Lastday. Does it figure I'd still be working for DS?"

"You got a Gun," said Doc. "Only DS men got Guns."

"I'm not the first Sandman to run."

"Why should I take a chance?" said Doc, moving back to the console. "I'm scrambling the Table. You'll get more than a new face, Sandman."

Logan lunged against the straps, but they held fast.

"What will it do to him?" asked Holly. The blue light gleamed in her eyes.

"Anything. It's on its own."

The Table hummed to life.

"I want to watch," said Holly, flushing.

Doc chuckled.

Logan looked up, sweating, into the moving cluster of pointed, bladed objects suspended above him. A stun needle lanced into his cheek, and the left side of his face went dead. A pair of metal clamps bit into his right leg below the knee. A surgical scapel slit his shirt from shoulder to waist, leaving a thread of blood in its wake. A sponge dipped to wipe the blood neatly away.

Desperately Logan sucked in his belly and tried to flatten himself into the Table.

Beside him, Holly was breathing fast.

A wide serrated blade shifted its downward sweep, moved three inches to the right and hovered. A pair of nervescissors snipped viciously at empty air, lowered abruptly and sliced through the strap that confined Logan's right arm.

Doc took a shocked step back as Logan clawed the Gun free.

A rain of silver knives dropped toward him, and he hacked at them with the barrel. They snapped like icicles.

Logan attempted to swing the Gun in Doc's direction. "Kill the Table!"

Lizard-quick, Doc was out the door, the girl behind him.

The Table pumped a cooling alcohol spray on Logan's chest as he clumsily freed his other wrist. Tiny lubricated gears inside the machine's housing slid into new positions.

Logan sprawled the upper part of his body off the bed and hit the leg releases. He rolled from the Table as it mindlessly attacked its own vitals.

It died, shrieking, as sparks showered from the gutted machine.

Logan considered his next move. Without another punch-key, which Doc apparently was to supply, his run was over. And it wouldn't take a mouth like Doc long to spread the word: Sandman. The trail would end before it began.

He kicked the back door open and found himself in a dank warren of intersecting hallways. The moaning cry of the fire galleries drifted up to him, mixed with the baked desert smell of dreamdust from the halluciomills.

Something iced out of the gray half-darkness, knocking the Gun from his grasp. A glacier numbness chilled his arm from hand to elbow.

Popsickle!

Logan spun into a fighting crouch to face the dim white figure coming at him with the refrigerated police billy held at waist level. Doc, in for the kill.

One blow to the chest and Logan's body would be a sea of ice crystals, freezing heart action, stopping the breath in his throat. The Gun lay on the floor rimed with frost.

He kept his eyes locked on the short smoke-colored stick in Doc's practiced hand. The popsickle slashed air as Doc lunged past him. Logan twisted and fell to one knee in the classic Omnite attack position. His left elbow drove into Doc's groin. With a soundless, choked scream, Doc slammed the wall, bouncing off into Logan's knee, which caught him with a killing spinal blow.

Logan swore bitterly, stripping the dead man's pockets. I should have handled this without killing him, he thought. Now where's the next key? Has the girl got it? And where is she? Probably hidden somewhere in the Arcade labyrinth.

Logan retrieved the moist Gun, straightening to a sound in the next room. He moved carefully to the door, easing it open.

Holly was inside, against the far wall, a medical knife poised at her breast. Her terror-glazed eyes were fixed on the Gun. As Logan advanced toward her she drove the blade into her chest.

The world ended abruptly for Holly 13.

Logan put away his weapon.

"Doyle...Doyle...is that you?" A drugged voice.

Logan stepped through an alum-mesh curtain. The cramped room reeked of anesthetic. A dark-haired girl, nude to the waist, was rising groggily from a pneumocot.

She blinked dreamily at Logan. "It's me—Jessica," she said; her fingers tentatively explored the new planes of her face.

A runner, thought Logan. Her hand is blinking. But why does she think I'm Doyle? And did she get the—

"Key. Do you have a punchkey?" he asked.

"Doyle...you don't look like my brother anymore. You don't even sound the same. They've changed us."

So that was it: the girl was Doyle's sister. He must have told her to meet him here.

"Listen," said Logan, "do you have the next key?"

She was fully awake now, slipping into her blouse. He saw her remove a silver object from one pocket. Logan took it from her. A mazekey.

"Did Doc give you any instructions?"

"Yes. He told me—us—to use a branch tunnel under Arcade. I know where it is."

"All right then. Let's go."

He followed her to a slideway. The plunged down into jeweled darkness.

At the off ramp he took her hand. They ran along the maze platform.

The maze. A million miles of tunnel, a veining of expressways serving the continents, interlinking Chicago with New York, Detroit with New Alaska, London with Lower Australia—a multitude of black-steel

beetles burrowing the subterranean depths at fantastic speeds.

Logan stabbed the mazekey into a callbox at the edge of the platform.

A distant brass-humming along the tunnels, a rocketing rush of deep-earth winds; the mazecar blazed out of darkness and socked into the boarding slot.

They climbed in. The hatch slid closed. The seats locked.

"Destination?" asked the car.

Jessica said, "Sanctuary."

The mazecar surged into fluid motion.

As the beetle rushed, Logan's thoughts rushed with it. Sanctuary. It seemed too easy; you got into a mazecar and said a word and the obedient piece of machinery carried you—where?

And the girl, Jessica? How would he deal with her?

The car slowed, hissed to a stop. The hatch opened.

Jessica didn't move. "They can change the color of a man's eyes but they can't change the man inside. You're not my brother."

"He's dead," Logan told her.

The girl's mouth tightened. "You killed him."

"No—but I saw him die. He gave me his key. He—wanted me to have it."

For a moment her face was still; then she began to sob quietly.

What do you say? How do you say I'm sorry? A Sandman doesn't feel sorry. He does what he has to.

"Look," he said. "Your brother's dead and we're alive. And if we want to stay alive we'll have to keep moving. It's just that simple."

"Exit, please," said the car.

They stepped out and the machine whipped away.

The maze platform was lifeless. Dusty yellow sunlight speared down from a jagged hole in the tunnel ceiling. Loose metal tiles lay in disordered heaps where they had sloughed from the walls. Exposed masonry jutted through cracked anodized flooring.

On the rusting section of tunnel wall a weathered poster clung, edges peeling. On it a running silhouette was overprinted with harsh letters: SHAME. Directly under this a vandal had chalked RUNNERS STINK!

A bent sign angled over the platform: CATHEDRAL.

And what now? Logan asked himself. Is this Sanctuary? A shorted-out section of city swarming with renegade cubs...

"Listen!" Jess warned.

A distant singing. A faint rising and falling refrain, echoing from an upper level.

Logan ducked Jess into a wedge of shadow. They waited.

Faintly: *Sandman, Sandman, leave my door. Don't come back here any more.*

A high, childish treble, coming closer.

"Cubs!" said Logan. His eyes strained the darkness.

Louder: *Now I lay me down to pray. Sandman, Sandman, stay away...*

A small figure in a tattered blue garment walked into the circle of sun on the platform. A little girl of five. She was dragging something behind her. The child's face was grimed and hair-tangled; her scabbed legs were thin. She wore no shoes.

She stopped singing. "Don't be afraid," she said. "I'm Mary-Mary 2."

Logan stepped from the shadow. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, he told me to meet you."

"Who did?"

The little girl's eyes saucered. "Why, the old, old man, of course."

Jessica gripped the child's shoulder. "What old, old man?"

"His hair is black and white, all mixed together," she told them. "And he has deep places in his face and he looks so wise. He's the oldest man in the world."

"Ballard!"

The little girl took a silver key from a torn pocket. "He told me to give you this."

Logan palmed the key. "Do we use it now?"

"This many," she said solemnly, raising her tiny hands, all ten fingers spread. In the center of her right palm a yellow flower glowed softly.

"Ten o'clock," said Jess.

Logan checked a wallchron above them. "Twelve minutes."

Jessica looked deeply into the waif's eyes. "Where do you live, Mary-Mary?"

She smiled. "Here," she said.

"Why aren't you in a nursery?"

"I'm very smart," said Mary-Mary.

"But don't you get hungry?"

"You can catch things to eat."

She opened the frayed cloth bag at her feet and proudly held out an old-fashioned rat trap. Jessica paled.

"I never go upstairs," continued Mary-Mary. "The bad people are there and they chase you. Goodbye now! You're a nice old lady."

The child looked disdainfully at Logan and walked off into the tunnels.

"I don't think she likes me," he said.

"She shouldn't be here," said Jess. "Alone in a place like this. She should be in a nursery with other children."

"She seems to be self-sufficient."

"A nursery would protect her."

"As it protected you?"

"Of course. No child under seven belongs on her own. I was happy in the nursery." Jess sat down on the platform edge with Logan. "No, no I wasn't happy." Her voice trembled. "I accepted everything then, without questioning but I was never happy there."

Logan let the girl talk; he wanted to know more about her, wanted to understand her.

"Why should every child be taken from its parents at birth? Why should a brother and sister be separated for seven years?" She studied Logan's face. "When did you begin to doubt, to question Sleep? I'd like to know."

"I can't recall just when. I'd heard the stories, of course."

"Of Ballard?"

"Yes. And the rest of it."

"About the Sanctuary line. Oh, how I wanted to believe those stories when I first heard them as a little girl." Her eyes grew hard again. "Do you ever wonder what your mother was like, who she was, what she felt, how she looked? Do you think she'd be ashamed of what you've become?"

"She may have been a runner, too," said Logan evasively. "I'll never know what she was."

Jess frowned angrily. "I think you should. I think children should know their mothers and be loved by them. Little Mary-Mary should have a mother to love her. A machine can never love you...only people can love people."

"Where did you work before you ran?" he asked her.

"I was a fashion tech at Lifeleather trim. Three hours a day, three days a week. I hated it."

"Then why did you stay there?"

"Because it was a job. What can anyone really work at? You can paint or write poetry or go on pairup. You can glassdance or firewalk in the Arcades." Her voice was scornful. "You can breed roses or collect stones or compose for the Tri-Dims. But there's no meaning to any of it. I just—"

A scream from the tunnels.

"That was Mary-Mary!" Jess lunged forward, but Logan restrained her.

"Wait," he said. "Here she comes."

The child ran out of the darkness into Jessica's arms. "The bad people! Bad, bad, bad!"

A howling group of cubscouts burst from the tunnel mouth to surround them. A strutting, feral-faced thirteen-year-old headed the pack. From the waist up he was dressed in the bloodstained uniform of a DS man. Below the ripped black tunic he wore sweat-darkened skintights. "Here now and look what Charmin' Billy led you to." He smirked. "The little rat-trapper and two stinkin' runners."

Mary-Mary stomped her foot. "You go on away!" she demanded. "This is my place. Go back upstairs!" Charming Billy ignored her. "Going to have us a time, we are!"

Logan measured the pack with his eyes. He could summon the car in another five minutes. How do you buy five minutes? He'd take out the blocky cub to his right first and then go for Charming Billy if nothing else worked. He eased Jess and the child behind him.

Logan looked at Billy. "I feel sorry for you, boy."

Confusion. The pack watched their leader.

"For me? Better feel sorry for yourself, Runner!"

"No—for you, Billy. How old are you?"

Billy's eyes slitted. He didn't reply.

"Twelve? Thirteen? Now me, I'm as old as you can get." Logan slowly exposed his blinking timeflower. "And you your days are running out. How long can you last, Billy?"

One minute gone.

"Two years? A year? Six months?" he pointed to the blue flower glowing in Billy's palm. "What happens when you go to red?"

"Got me a Sandman once, I did! They said I'd never get him, but I cut him up good, I did. Make the rules as I go. Cubs do what I say. Always have. Always will. I got Cathedral and I'll never let go!"

"No cubs at fourteen, Billy. Ever heard of a cub with a red flower? You'll leave Cathedral then, Billy, when you're on red, because they won't let an adult stay here. The young ones. They'll gut-rip you if you stay, so you'll cross the river. And then, almost before you know it, Billy, you're twenty-one and your hand is blinking. And you'll die like a sheep."

Two minutes gone.

"Not me, I won't!" Billy shouted. "I'll—"

"—run!" snapped Logan. "Isn't that just what you'll do? Run as I'm running. As she's running."

"Shut up! Shut up your damn mouth! I ain't no stinkin' runner!"

"We're the same kind, Billy. You're just like us. Help us, Billy. Don't fight us."

The blocky cub cut in. "Let him suck Muscle. That'll shut his mouth. Let's us watch him shake himself to

death!"

The anger and frustration drained from Charming Billy's face. He smiled.

Logan tensed. The talking was done.

Three minutes gone.

Drugpads materialized. The cubs squeezed the pads, inhaled the Muscle. They shimmered into kaleidoscopic blurs, into weaving color patterns. Here. There. They were everywhere.

Logan fell back into a fighting crouch, but before he could strike a blow he was caught, dragged and slammed against the wall.

Screaming, Mary-Mary broke from Jessica and ran off down the tunnels.

A staccato burst of words; the blocky cub's voice, "GivehimsomeMuscle!"

"Shakehimtodeath!"

"Killhim!"

A drugpad danced the air in front of Logan's face. Four minutes gone.

Logan held his breath. The fumes enveloped him; if he breathed... He felt the Gun pressing into his thigh. The Gun.

Despite revealing himself to Jess, he'd have to use the Gun.

He wrenched his arms loose, dropped to the floor, rolled free of the weaving shapes, drew and fired.

The nitro charge exploded into the pack. Fragmented bodies littered the platform.

Five minutest

Logan quickly pocketed a drugpad and key-punched the callbox.

Jess stared at him with revulsion. "Sandman! You're a Sandman!"

A mazecar swooped out of the depths.

"In!"

Jessica hesitated. Logan pushed the girl inside, leaped after her. Before the hatch could engage a black shimmer filled the space.

The shimmer solidified into Charming Billy.

He was headless.

The hatch shut.

The mazecar slammed into night.

Chapter 8

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A light flares. He smiles. Logan's Gun has been fired. He notes the coordinates. They pinpoint a spot beneath the dead area of Cathedral. He goes there. He examines the bodies on the platform. He picks up a used Muscle pad, flings it away. He examines the callbox, probes at the terminals. Logan has taken a mazar. He frowns darkly. He hears a faint child's voice singing, "Sandman, Sandman, leave my door..." The voice fades. He follows the sound down the tunnel. NIGHT...

At the end of the Twentieth Century, before the Little War, when men spawned like microbes on a culture dish, the great problem was food. The fourth horseman rode the land and his name was Famine.

Man reached for the planets and found them puddled gas and frozen stone. He reached for the stars and was driven back by $E = mc^2$ —and he abandoned space.

There was the sea. Six-sevenths of the world. A wave rises in a ripple and marches in growing kinetic motion for thousands of wet miles to smash on continental shores. That is the surface of the sea. Beneath the surface: the Depths. Light filters slowly down into murky dimness for the first hundred feet. Lower still, and light is dead. Only darkness remains. Pressures and swift currents and yeasty life mix in savage broth.

And far below, where reinforced steel acts like balsa, and nightmare creatures carry their own light, is Molly, once queen city of the teeming sea.

She took an age to build. She covered a hundred undersea miles. She provided living quarters and work space for twenty thousand technicians and their families—and she gave sustenance to a quarter of the world. She was a vast food-processing center sunk under a plasteel dome, and through her locks came subs and tenders, skimmers and harvesters.

Protein is protein whether it is obtained from a steer or a squid. With the proper mixture of carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, the protein molecule can be made into any foodstuff, and the protein molecule lives in a million forms in the sea.

Molly showed the way. After her they built the Zuther-Notion, the Proteus and Manta City. But Molly was the queen.

Until 6:03 P.M. Common Standard Time, March 6, 2033. At that moment intolerable pressures in the Challenger Deep, acting through uncounted centuries, caused a tenth of an inch slippage along two, fault planes crossing the Marianas Trench—and a hairline crack appeared in Molly's plasteel dome. A solid bar of water knife-sliced through seven levels, destroying a hundred compartments in one insane instant. Molly screamed. Steel tore like paper. Fourteen thousand men, women and children mixed their atoms with the sea in the first chaotic shock.

Molly absorbed the blow. Pressures equalized; bulkheads strained, tore, accepted the load, howled as the ocean tide—tons bent them inward. Automatic valves closed; hatches slammed. In twelve seconds she was a jumbled conglomerate of corpses, of flooded compartments and corridors, of machinery, jackstraw-heaped. But she held.

Some of her compartments retained air—and against these watertight chambers the sea gnawed with a patient gnawing that would never stop until Molly was completely dead.

She had begun her long war with the sea.

The mazecar slotted into Molly. The seats unlocked.

"Exit, please."

Jessica didn't resist as Logan guided her through the hatch.

The platform, buried in greenback fathoms, creaked and shifted, shifted and creaked beneath them. The great surging skin of the Pacific pressured in against the bubbleglass. The air held an odor of iron and age, a smell of medicated wounds. A dull booming, far off. Echoes. Silence.

Why here, under the sea? wondered Logan. Who was the next contact?

The girl looked vacant, dead. Hatred burned in Jessica, deeply, but the will to resist had left her.

"All right," said Logan. "So I've got a DS Gun. And, back in my unit, I've got a black tunic to match it. But now I'm a runner. Just as you are."

"Sandmen don't run," she said flatly.

"And Sandmen don't eat. And Sandmen don't breathe. And Sandmen don't get tired. Well, I'm tired. I'm tired and I'm hungry and I'm sick of being jumped and kicked at and hated."

She looked at him coldly. "You're a monster. You've chased and killed people like my brother, whose only sin was wanting to live another day."

"I didn't kill your brother."

"Maybe not, but you would have. You'd have put a homer in him and been proud of yourself for doing it."

He had no answer.

Jess drew in a ragged breath. "Damn you!" she flared. "You DS live by pain, by hurting and wounding and killing. You destroy in the name of mass survival and you never think about the sick wrongness of it, the horror of it... You enjoy using the Gun and you burn with it and you terrorize with it! Damn your kind and damn your system! You're a foul, rotten—"

Logan slapped her hard across the cheek to stop the words which cut him like stones.

She put up a shaking hand to the drop of blood at the corner of her mouth.

Her flower was charcoal.

"It's changed," said Logan. "You're on black." His hand automatically drifted toward the warm pearl handle of the Gun.

The girl looked at him in horror.

Logan hesitated.

He had taken on the shape and coloration and mental attitudes of a runner, and it was impossible for him to know where the dividing line really was.

In that suspended moment, Jessica wheeled off down the long platform,.

"Jess!"

The girl ran.

She ran as a deer in panic runs, heedlessly, blindly, driven forward by the desire to put distance between herself and the hunter. A spiral of metal steps carried her upward; her feet rattled against metal cleats, leaving an echo path for Logan to follow.

She pounded along a narrow culture corridor lined with flashing sea life. Squid and porpoise and eel, shark and barracuda and the trunkback turtle marked her passage. Ahead of her the corridor dead-ended at a tall durasteel door controlled by a bar of chilled iron. Jess threw herself at the bar, tugging, dragging her body's weight against it.

The bar moved slightly.

A dry-grass hiss, a rush of heat and, just one inch from Jessica's head, an armored steg harpoon buried itself in the steel door.

"Wait up there, girl! Open that hatch, and the sea will take us both."

Standing wide-legged, holding a primed steglauncher in two bloated hands, was an incredible figure. Hormones had gone wild in him; a rampaging thyroid had built a giant. His bristled head brushed the corridor ceiling. An oiled slicker the color of midnight draped his swollen frame. His face was a moon.

His name was Whale.

"Look out!" Jess pointed down the corridor at Logan.

Whale billowed about. Seeing the Gun in Logan's belt, his eyes vanished in moonflesh. The steglauncher fixed its metal eye on Logan's stomach. "What's this? Told to wait for two runners, and what do I get? Runner don't chase a runner."

"He's with DS," snapped Jess.

Whale considered this placidly. A sudden thudding in the depths of the bubble city; another collapsing bulkhead. Whale flinched, his great mass rippling.

"I'm a runner," said Logan. "I tried to tell her, but she wouldn't believe me."

"So why should I?" asked Whale quietly. He held up a thick hand, opened sausage fingers. A charcoal flower was lost in folded flesh. The steglauncher did not waver.

Anger and frustration clouded Logan's mind. Anything he said could kill him.

"Just you ease out that Gun and put it on the deck, my lad," rumbled Whale.

With the deliberate control of a glassdancer, Logan placed the Gun on the floor, eyes never leaving the cold bore of the steglauncher which moved to cover him.

He straightened.

"Now," said Whale, "let's us all take a little march through Molly."

He herded them back down the corridor.

"You drylanders don't know about Molly. She's a real fighter, she is. She's like me. She don't die easy."

Up the slanting wall of a slimed compartment, along a twisting catwalk suspended over blackness, through a beamed jungle of ripped and bent conveyors acrid with the smell of spilled oil and brine. Crab creatures scuttled at their approach; phosphor fish darted in shallow bilgewater as the three figures corkscrewed down through the dying bubble city.

The water climbed their legs until it took them at thigh level. Whale undogged a final beaded bulkhatch and pushed Logan through ahead of him. Wet tonnages drummed the chamber. In this small coffin space the ocean was a living presence; the sledging boom of iced undersea tides quaked the walls, and dust powdered down in damp brown showers.

Without the Gun, and under the implacable eye of the weapon in Whale's hand, Logan felt powerless.

"She's sick down here." said Whale. "Fightin' hard, she is." Shifting the launcher, he placed a gentle hand against the pitted metal of the wall. "Hold on, Molly girl," he crooned. "Ya showed 'em what ya got. I know you're hurt. You've taken all the sea can give. Hold! I've brought ya help."

He fixed Logan with his eyes. "If you wanta live, mate, you'll help Molly fight her battle. Just put your weight to that wall."

The mountain of man squeezed back, out of the chamber.

"When the bulkhead goes, you go with it."

"Wait," cried Jess. She blocked the hatch. "You're not leaving him here?"

Whale rumbled. "Where else? Molly needs him."

"But then you're no better than he is. A killer."

"A man kills to save himself." He brushed her aside, slammed the hatch and dogged it.

Outside, he handed her a key. "Use this at ten forty for the neat car. And you'd better step. You know where the landing is."

Jess looked at him, white-faced

A dull reverberation trembled the floorplates.

"Molly's callin' and I got work to do. Tell Ballard we're still holdin."

And, with amazing agility, he weaved through a thicket of spars and stanchions to disappear into Molly's vitals.

In the sweating dark, Logan felt despair. His last hope was gone. He was dead and he knew it. Now he felt as a runner feels, feared as a runner fears.

He traced the sweep of flexing coffin with searching fingers. No openings. Nothing to use on the hatch. Why hadn't he taken his chances against the harpoon?

It ripped your gut out, but at least it was quick. Not like this. A place like this could break a man's courage, stretch his nerve, unman him.

Well, I'm getting what I asked for, he thought. And maybe I deserve it for what I've done. God, maybe I do. So let the damn sea have me.

Logan fought a sudden urge to smash at the walls.

The Pacific leaned its weight against the chamber; water dripped continually, increasing in volume. Logan was chest deep in the cold tide. It rose toward his chin; he clamped his mouth shut. The chamber groaned under immense pressures.

Then abruptly the hatch opened. The water receded. Jess was there.

"Quick," she said. "There's not much time."

In subsector 8, section T, level zero, now completely submerged, a tiny crustacean burrowed a hundredth of an inch further into a conduit, since it was the creature's nature to burrow. The tiny crawler blazed into blue-white heat.

In callbox 192978-E a micro terminal rose seven and a half degrees, shorting out a relay. A wire-cluster fused, and a new circuit was born.

"Sanctuary," they had said to the mazecar.

But it did not take them to Sanctuary.

Instead, it took them to Hell.

Chapter 7

[« ^ »](#)

He examines the data.Fact: Doyle 10 had a sister, Jessica 6.Fact: His interrogation of the little girl, Mary-Mary 2, has revealed that Logan is with Jessica.He watches the board. It is silent, dark. No lights glow. No needles quiver.The maze scanners are silent, dark.The Gun tracer is silent, dark.The Follower is silent, dark.Impossible.His quarry has vanished.LATE NIGHT...

Hell: named after the ancient religious concept of eternal punishment. Over a thousand miles of dead glare-ice wilderness between Baffin Bay and the Bering Sea. A sharded tumble of floes and bergs and nightmare crevasses, of daggered ice cliffs and howling glacial frost winds. A crippling, killing, freezing, forsaken world of white on white on white.

Hell: fourteen burrows in an irregular semicircle on the lee side of a storm-carved berg. Each cramped ice cell clawed from the iron surface by dying, lonely men and women working in subzero cold. Near the entrance to one hide-hole was a rich red stain on the ice glass, where an unknown convict had lung-hemorrhaged under the refrigerated glare of the midnight sun.

The maelstrom of cold had shaped a ledge into a stubby pedestal, and topping the pedestal was a hand-hewn ice block. Within the transparent mass a dark shape swam in frozen silence.

There were no guards. Nor were they needed.

No man ever walked out of Hell.

When Logan and Jess arrived, an alarm sounded. The platform itself dealt with them. They were needle-stunned, packaged and conveyed through a force field labyrinth and dumped on the ice.

The platform had disappeared. There was no way back.

Warden came to meet them. A man hunched against driving wind, a fur-shrouded scarecrow. His feet were rag-wrapped, his face old leather and iodine; his eyes burned under a filth-stiffened parka.

He bent over their cocooned figures and his mittened hands clumsily stripped away the con-webbing. Wadding the precious material, he thrust it into his parka.

Cold clubbed them.

Logan stumbled up, pulling Jess with him. In the severe cold the effects of the needle drug were rapidly dissipated.

"Wh—where's the key?" he asked Warden. This man must be their contact.

"When you come to Hell they throw away the keys."

Logan felt the brass taste of fear in his mouth. They were in the escape-proof prison city at the North Pole.

"Come learn the rules" said Warden. He turned his back and paced off across the glare sheet.

They struggled after him. The wind died to a low snarl as they reached the partial shelter of the great iceberg which loomed over the burrows.

"Your neighbors," said Warden.

Fur-swaddled figures surrounded them, emerging in clots of twos and threes from the ink-mouthed holes. Logan scanned the emaciated, skull-haunted faces that hedged him in a wolf circle.

"Rule one," said Warden. "A new convict can pick his antagonist. Two: the antagonist can use any weapon he has to defend himself and his goods. Three: the new man fights barehanded. This all the rules we got—except winner gets first cut."

"And if I don't fight?" asked Logan.

"Then ya die on the ice," said Warden. "Course, that don't go for the girl." He grinned. "And ya better get to it. Couple minutes more out here, dressed like you are, and you won't need to choose."

Under the wind's hammer, Logan's clothing was gauze. He measured the corded figures, looking for weakness and found none. These were survivors. No soft ones here.

He pointed a random finger. "Him," said Logan.

The circle tightened to take up the slack left by the man who stepped forward. Tall. Long-armed. Thick-shouldered. From the matted fur at his chest he drew forth a needle-pointed stiletto of hand-burnished ice. Eight inches of lethal blade, shaped with an artist's care.

Instantly he lunged. The stiletto flashed. He had led with the knife. Logan took advantage of this mistake to chop the weapon from his hand. It shattered on the ice, but Logan's foot slid on one of the shards and he was down, the man atop him, hands at his throat.

Logan felt the sinewed fingers close on his windpipe.

He broke the chokehold and the man's neck with one blow.

Warden looked stunned and disappointed. The circle of eyes shifted hungrily to the dead body, already frost-dusted. Now they moved in to strip the clothing, which they piled at Logan's feet. The corpse was hustled away.

"That was Harry 7 you just took care of," said Warden. "Pick up his clothes and claim his goods." Warden walked to the mouth of a burrow. "This hide hole's yours. Harry didn't have no woman. You share everything with the girl."

Logan followed Jess into the narrow, fetid mouth of the ice cave. Inside, they hurriedly donned the evil-smelling hides of Harry 7. The temperature was twenty degrees warmer, but it was still chillingly cold.

They sat down together on a thin layer of shredded conwebbing which had been spread against the ice. Logan pressed close to Jess. She withdrew, her face set.

Well, here we go again, he thought angrily. She knew he'd had no choice out there. She was alive in the clothes of a dead man, but she couldn't accept the fact that he had to kill to get them.

"I listened to you as we were coming into the platform," he said. "I hid the Gun so the contact wouldn't connect me with DS. With the Gun we'd have some kind of a chance here. But we don't. And right now you need me a lot more than I need you."

After a moment he felt her settle against him. "What are we going to do?" she asked.

"Nothing. Until we know more."

A scuffing sound at the entrance. Warden appeared.

"Come see Black Tom."

They followed him out. Warden led them for a short distance across the blowing ice.

"Here he is." Warden gestured theatrically.

They looked up at the dark shape in the transparent block above them. Inside the ice was part of a man.

He had no legs. One of his arms was a flat, paddle-shaped stump. The remaining arm arched forward, terminating in taloned fingers. All the fat was gone, and the bone structure was exposed in raw relief. The arm strained in a bowed curve, clawing for life. Nestled against the shoulder was the head. Staring out of a twisted visage were, eyes of milk. Wind and sun and wilderness had carved him.

He was black.

"He was a white man, once," said Warden.

Jessica looked away.

"Black Tom's up there for a reason," Warden went on. "He ain't what you'd call decoration. You can learn from Tom. He cracked the two-year mark in Hell. He watched 'em come and he watched 'em go—until he went snow-blind the end of the first year. A month later frostbite got his legs, but that didn't slow him. He dug two burrows by hisself to keep his place, and tanned the skins you're wearin' on your

backs. They say he bit his arm off when an ice slide trapped him. Anyhow, he come in without it. Tom lived longest 'cause he learned fastest." Warden spat on the ice. "Me, I've lasted more'n a year already—and there's none here can say the same. Do like you're told, and you may last the week."

"Savage!" flamed Jess. "Why do you live like this?"

Warden's reply was edged. "Living's better than dying."

"You could cooperate," she said. "You could work together instead of slaughtering each other."

"Work for what?"

"Food, clothing, tools..."

"There's damn little food, less clothing and no tools. It takes wood and stone and metal to build something, and the only metal around here is—in Box."

A man loped up to drop a soggy bundle at their feet. "Here's your cut," the man said to Logan.

He picked up the bundle—and unwrapped the liver and heart of Harry 7! Jess stepped back with a look of horror. Logan dropped the bundle; it stained the snow.

"We don't waste food here," snapped Warden. "This ain't a threemile complex in Nebraska. Now pick up your share. When you get hungry enough you'll eat."

"There must be other food," said Logan.

"Out there." Warden swept the lifeless horizon with his hand. "Maybe a mile, maybe a hundred. If you're lucky you'll stumble across a seal whelp, which ain't very likely. Black Tom killed a polar bear once with an ice spear. We lost three men last month, tryin' to pull down a bull seal—and Redding lost all his fingers. Ice too thick to reach the fish if there is any. And if you don't have luck in the first hour there ain't a second. Shackelford made himself a slingshot outa hide strips, but he froze solid before he could use it. Sure, there's food. There's polar bear and ptarmigan, seal and otter, and you're welcome to hunt 'em down, if you can find 'em. And when you do they can hide better, run faster and jump quicker than you can. I tell you this—go join Box out there if you don't care for the table we set"

"Box? Who's he?"

"Box ain't a he. He's a what."

Logan looked curiously at Warden.

"Maybe he's got a name, but I don't know it," said Warden. "He got chewed up in a belt jump after a torture jig with a ten-year-old. The gears scattered him some. He was half dead then, but the system don't let go that easy. They sewed him back together, and what they couldn't find they made. After they was done they put him on a Hellcar. He lit out soon as he got here, and he's a hard one to find."

"One thing I'll say for him. He must know where the food is and how to get it. If you can catch him maybe you can make him show you. You might try up north, about two miles, near the cliffs." He grinned wolfishly. "But you can bet he won't be waitin' there for you."

"We'll risk it," said Logan.

"Then go," said Warden. "You won't be comin' back."

When they stepped from the shelter of the berg, the wind took them.

Box lived in a white world. He moved in storms of dusted ice and loneliness. He did not tire; he was never cold; a part of him never slept. His world was porcelain and pale marble, alabaster and bone ivory. He made castles of bergs and palaces of glacier cliffs. He cloud-wandered the frozen immensities.

And was content.

Box saw them coming: two staggering figures, bent against the wind. He vanished.

Logan fought the clogging exhaustion in his body. The wind leaped in to snatch his breath, battered his face and hands, ripsawed through his furred clothing. The dreaming cliffs on the ice-dazzled plain were no closer. They would never be closer. They were ten thousand miles away. They were an illusion which stung him forward, one leaden foot after the other leaden foot after the other leaden foot after the other leaden foot...

Jessica toppled and fell.

He pulled at her, tugging at an arm. No going forward. No going back. No more steps. The cliffs were dream and dream; they had never existed. Logan slipped down beside Jess. Her eyes were closed. She should open her eyes, he thought lazily. She'll die. If she does not open her eyes she'll die and that would be too bad. Too bad.

If I close my eyes, he thought, I can open them again immediately. There will be no problem in this. Close. Open. No problem. I would tell her to open her eyes, but I will save this for later and show her how easy it is to open and close your eyes.

Logan closed his eyes.

He would open them in a moment, in just another moment after a moment and then he would tell Jess and would open them and in a moment he would and it was so, easy to keep them closed for a moment and the wind had gone and that was strange and there was no cold and he could open them in a moment and there was no problem and he would. He would.

Logan slept.

He opened his eyes to a frieze of crystal beasts dancing in a blue fire. He blinked. The frieze wavered, became solid. Extending to the limit of his vision was a capering host of otters conjured from diamond ice. And more.

Logan sat up to an incredible tableau.

There, a fish of sequined rainbow scales caught in a zircon wave.

There, a tusked walrus with mirror-ice eyes, his body veined with blacks and purples.

There, a flight of crystal birds in a crystal sky.

Planes and projections. An intricate scrimshaw of glassed fretwork, rising in prisms tiers, shot through

with light jewels: dandelion yellows, crimson lakes, cerulean blues, flashing and reflecting, illuminated by a barrel-sized lamp of carved bone which sizzled and flickered. And supporting this fragile lacework was an immense column, angling up into the vaulted roof of the ice cavern.

Logan felt bottled in the heart of a teardrop chandelier.

The room reeked of burning seal oil.

Jess lay on the floor beside him. Her eyes stirred She awakened, gasped.

"Overwhelming, isn't it?" said a fluting voice.

A creature stood before them on chromed legs. From the midpoint of his sternum to his hips he was coils and cables. One hand was a cutting tool. His head was half flesh, half metal.

"A machine!" said Jess.

"No! not machine, nor man, but a perfect fusion of the two and better than either. You see before you the consummate artist whose magnificent creativity flows from manmetal. The man conceives in hunger and passion; the metal executes with micrometric exactitude. No human sculptor could match the greatness here displayed."

So this was Box: an insane half-man living in a self-created world of fantasy. Logan wondered just how much humanity remained in him. "We were told you could help us find food."

"Dolts!" shrilled Box. "Barbarians! Are you no more than walking bellies?"

"We're human and we're hungry," snapped Logan. "Don't you eat?"

"I feed the soul, not the body. Art before hunger!"

Jessica's eyes ranged about the glittering chamber. "All of this—it is beautiful," she said softly.

Half of Box smiled. "Ah—but wait for the winds." His voice hushed. "Then my birds sing. My great walrus breathes. My palace chimes and bells. And the deep grottoes whisper my name: Box...Box...Bahhhhhxxxxsss." His voice sobbed into silence.

"Birds, fish, animals..." said Jess, with a note of wonder. "They're all here."

"Yes, all the creatures. Except Man." Box scowled. "They chase me. They want my metal. How they'd love to pry me apart and build a stove from my heart! My legs would make fine knives, fishhooks, spears. But they are blind moles who trip and stumble. I've seen their stiffening bodies on the ice. Worthless. Ugly. Wind-warped. But now—I have found you. New ones. Fresh ones. Lovely ones. Suitable models for my masterwork. You will pose for me!"

"If we pose, do we get food?" asked Logan.

"I have no food."

"Then why should we do it?"

"Why? Do you know how long this temple will last? Not twenty-one years, or twenty-one thousand years—but twenty-one thousand thousand years! And you'll be a part of it, the crown jewel in my collection. Ages will roll. Milleniums. And you'll be here—the two of you—eternally frozen in a lovers' embrace."

Logan turned away.

Box became apprehensive; his voice took on a wheedling tone. "What can I give you?"

"Nothing," said Logan. "We need two things, food and a way out. You have no food, and there's no way out."

"Ah, but there is," tempted Box.

"Then why are you still here? Why don't you escape?"

"And leave my white wonderland, leave the singing winds and the silence, the purity, the flowing skies... For what? For your squabble and smoke, your jamming and rushing? No. But I could. I could leave if I wished to do so."

"How?" asked Logan.

"How indeed," silked Box. "First you pose, then I tell you."

"First you tell us, then we pose."

Box hesitated. Gears seemed to click in him. He moved his metal hand in a gesture of surrender. "I suppose I must trust you," he said.

Will he do it? Logan wondered. Can he do it? Can he really provide an escape route?

Box put his hand to the metal of his head and closed his human eye. He spoke of visions: "I am a humming in blackness. Far away. I am ten billion, billion neurons in a mighty brain. A brain of steel... I am the force that rules the maze."

The Thinker! It tied in; being half machine, Box was, in a very real sense, part of the great machine brain.

"Above me—a great warrior astride the world. A sweep of black mountain below, great birds on my granite shoulders, a vastness beneath me. I am part of Tashunca-uitco."

Crazy Horse!

"I am brother to the Thinker," went on Box. "I know its circuits and its ways. I share its great wisdom. I can thread the force field labyrinth. I can leave Hell..."

And he told them the way.

Box opened his eye, advanced. "Now, you shall keep your bargain."

"How do you want us?" asked Logan.

"Nude," said the Box.

"Take off your clothes," Logan told Jess, beginning to strip off his own.

The girl looked at him.

"It'll be all right," he assured her.

Jess pushed back the cowl of her parka and began to unknot the leather ties. She dropped the rank fur at her feet. Averting her eyes from Logan, she touched the magnetic closure on her blouse. It opened under

her fingers and she removed the blouse, then quickly peeled away the clear cosmetic supports from her full breasts. Her skirt was added to the clothing on the fur-rich floor. She unzipped her shoes and stepped out of them.

"Enchanting," said Box.

He waved them to a dais covered with deep white polar furs. "Up there," he said.

"Shall we—just stand?" asked Jess. "Or should we..."

"Take her in your arms," Box said.

Logan looked at Jessica. Lamplight played along the creamed curves and valleys of her body. Her skin was glowing ivory in the light of the flame.

"Stop wasting my time," Box said. He stood poised at a tall monolith of sparkling ice.

Logan took the girl clumsily into his arms.

"No, no, no," complained Box. "With emotion. With feeling. She is your love, your life." To the girl, he said, "Mold yourself to his strong body. Look into his eyes."

Jess looked into Logan's eyes.

He felt the sweet warmth of her, the nearness of her. Breasts pressing him, legs touching him, arms holding him. He felt a slow surge of passion, but more than passion: a rapture, a tenderness, and a wild, sweet sadness he'd never known.

"Superb!" said Box.

His metal hand began to buzz. He brought it forward to shiver the ice into blue patterns. He worked furiously, with incredible speed. In a shower of tinkling shards and ice splinters, the two figures began to emerge from the block. Magically, forming, shaping...

Logan held Jess. This, too, was a house of glass—but how different from the frantic, empty pursuit of sensation in the houses of the city. There was a reality here, a meaning. Forget everything else; forget the twisted man-thing carving the ice; forget the Hell-huddle of convicts; forget Francis and Ballard and the maze and Sanctuary. But let this moment last. Jess...Jess... "Done!" piped Box. "Behold!" He stepped back.

Logan reluctantly released the girl.

They faced themselves.

In stunningly wrought ice figures, shimmering with life, the artist had captured the form, the mood, the emotion of his models. The endless moment was there. Love. Passion. Beauty. All there.

Logan forced the image from his mind. They had to move, to dress, to make their escape. No time for love. Or passion. Or beauty. No time.

He turned to reach for his clothing.

And did not anticipate the ripping blow that snuffed out the world.

The world was reborn in a voice that said, "Torture is also a fine art and I am its master. Your death; my lady, shall be exquisite."

Logan swam up through fog and froth to full awakening.

He was in an ice cage, behind ice bars. Directly in front of the cage Jess was spread-eagled and helpless, pinned, naked, to a tilted slab. Her body was trembling with chill. Facing her was a steeply inclined slideway. Balanced delicately on the high lip of the slide was a massive ten-ton ice block. An oil flame ate steadily at one end of the great block. Water dripped into white fur.

With each passing second, as more of the ice melted, the end of the block lightened, tipping the remainder. Already the mass was inching over in a continuous grinding crunch, pulled by the slow force of gravity. When enough of it had turned to water the huge block would tip into the slideway and begin its ponderous rush toward Jess. It would bear down with all of its tonnage, like a giant sledge, and the vulnerable body of the girl would be caught between the ice faces as they smashed together.

On the polar-covered dais Box sat, his chromed legs folded beneath him. "Beg me," he crooned "I can still save your life."

Jess remained silent, her eyes glazed with fright.

Logan threw himself at the bars. They held. Embedded in one of them, midway up, he saw the curved darkness of a small fish, frozen there.

His glance swept the cell. His shirt had been thrown in one corner. Hurriedly he scooped it up and wound it three times around his right hand.

Box was still urging the girl to beg for her life.

The block tipped further.

Logan faced the imperfection in the cell bar, stiffening his fingers into a slight curve, bunching the pad of muscle in the heel of his hand. He assumed the Omnite stance.

Now.

He summoned tension into his body, feeling it gather along the backs of his legs; he felt his spine arch as the muscles pumped full of blood. He concentrated on the hand. He was only a band. He took several deep breaths, let his attention widen to include a spot in space three inches beyond the bar. He would hit that spot.

He blanked out the cell bar that was between the spot and his hand. It didn't exist; there was no cell bar. He tensed. Energy sang into the arm that slashed the rigid hand at the spot in the air.

A splintering crack. The bar exploded. Logan squeezed through the opening.

He scooped up one of Jessica's shoes and leaped onto the slideway. Ignoring the poised juggernaut at his back, he attacked the ice shackles that held the girl's wrists and feet. Four quick hammer blows and she was free.

Jess screamed. A great rumble at the tip of the slide. The block was loosed. Logan pushed her ahead of him, diving from the slideway just as the awesome masses mated in demolition. Ice dust powdered the air.

An angry buzz of metal. Logan swung around to see Box coming at him.

"Grab your clothes and get out!" he yelled to Jess—and she obeyed him.

Box hurtled in, his half-face contorted with rage and frustration. Logan ducked under the sweep of his cutting hand, which ripped into the room's central pillar. The buzzing metal cut deeply into the column before Box could free it.

Logan fell back, calculating. The love statue: he and Jess in a perfect world, forever locked in sweet embrace. He would have to destroy it, destroy himself. Logan wedged his shoulder against his ice thigh and pushed. The statue tilted, rocked, and toppled into the weakened pillar.

A crack fissured the vault.

Logan ran.

Birds showered from a crystal sky. Otters squealed and splintered. The walrus reared. Box died with one maniacal metal cry.

In that single cataclysmic death, the ice creatures cracked and clattered, mirror-smashed in a fractured tumble of shelves and ledges and crystal lace, disintegrated in shimmering waves as the great palace pulled itself down in a blue ruin.

Logan did precisely as Box had instructed. Leading Jess, he was threading the force field labyrinth. Wind chopped and cut at them on the open plain.

To Logan the spot seemed identical with the storm-swept terrain that surrounded it. Ice flurries whipped about them as they moved: two steps forward, a step to the right...It was hopeless; Box had lied.

They took three paces in a weaving pattern Angled right, then left. Three more steps forward, one back.

Magic!

They were out—standing on the warm platform.

Hell was gone.

They discarded the filthy pelts.

"Can you get a mazecar?" asked Jess.

"The Gun first," said Logan. He recovered it from a niche in the side of the platform, checked it. Five charges left: tangler, vapor, ripper, needler and homer.

Logan pried open the back of the callbox and began to shift the terminals.

A car came humming.

"Where now?" the girl asked him.

"To the Black Hills of the Dakotas," he said. "Ballard knows how to control the maze. He directs these cars as he needs them. If we want to find him we go to the source. We go to the Thinker."

Chapter 6

« ^ »

He is a violence, contained. He sits in front of the board. He has not eaten. He has not slept. Technicians avoid him, say nothing to him. His eyes suddenly flash to the board. Brightness there. One of the scanners has registered the presence of a runner. Location: South Dakota, the Black Hills. He feels elation. The hunt resumes. EARLY MORNING...

When Crazy Horse Mountain was dedicated, the great mass of granite became the site of a monumental project which was to consume half a century. An Indian warrior, 563 feet high and 641 feet long, would ride the land, carved from six million tons of Dakota stone. A mountain would become a man, towering above black-forest wilderness, dwarfing the giant heads of Rushmore.

The sculptor was Korczak Ziolkowski, and under his direction 150,000 tons of rock would be ripped away each year to form his dream. After a decade, more than a million tons of living granite lay in rubble at the foot of the looming mountain—and the feather of the great War Chief of the Ogallala Sioux began to emerge. Obsessed by his vision, Ziolkowski ranged the continents, prying money from the pockets of the rich, the vain, the titled—which he spent on blasting powder, dynamite, cordite, tools, winches and rope.

The work went on. Gradually the mountain sheared away. Nations threw their combined resources behind it, fired by the dramatic image of a great fighting chieftain on a wild-maned stallion. Thousands of laborers and artists toiled on the flanks of the plunging horse. Diamond drill bits and jackhammers tore at the granite heart of the mountain.

And, with infinite slowness, the mammoth figure took its place against the Dakota sky: Tashunca-uitco. Crazy Horse. The ruthless Indian genius who directed the annihilation of Custer's Seventh on the Little Big Horn.

The world marveled.

On an April afternoon, three years before the project's completion, a thick-waisted laborer named Balder "Big Ed" Thag was clearing brush on the east flank of

Crazy Horse. He was attracted to a cleft in the rocks by a strange, ululating sound; a wind was issuing from the interior of the mountain.

Thag stepped to the wide opening and peered within. The wind slammed him with such force that he had to brace his legs to keep from being pushed off the slope.

Unfortunately for Thag, it was exactly 4:27 o'clock. The banshee wind whistle abruptly stopped. There was a moment of absolute stillness. Then the wind resumed, but this time it was not blowing outward. The wind sucked in with irresistible force. It was Thag's misfortune that he was braced in the wrong direction. He lost his footing and toppled into the hole and fell as a stone falls down a well.

The mountain was breathing, but Thag was not.

Many years passed before the Crazy Horse Caverns were discovered again.

Etched by moving water through eons of time from the limestone basement of the mountain chain, they proved to be the most extensive network of cave formations in the world. Beside them, Carlsbad was a

worm crawl.

In Custer, South Dakota, the car told Logan and Jess, "You are entering restricted territory. I am not permitted to proceed farther."

At dawn they left the maze and began to trek overland.

In a deep ravine flanking Crazy Horse Mountain was a white metal post. On it a stamped sign.

ABSOLUTELY NO TRESPASSING BEYOND THIS POINT DEATH! KEEP OUT! U.S. GOVERNMENT

Hidden in the scrub growth: a stubby bark-colored pedestal. And on the side, another. And another after that. Linking this progression was a beam of invisible light.

A dappled fawn moved from cover and, with delicate steps, advanced up the ravine. Its nose tested the morning air for danger and found none.

It breasted the beam.

On the high granite shoulders of Crazy Horse, bronze feathers stirred. Circuits clicked.

The questing fawn lowered its sun-warmed head to lap softly at clear water in a natural stone basin. It did not see the two shadows which hushed over evergreen country. It did not see the two gold shapes which came out of the sun.

Hooded jewel eyes. Razored talons. A cruel hook of steel beak. Assassins.

The mech eagles struck.

A blood rag of fur lay on the forest floor.

Logan looked up at the sign. "We're almost there."

"It says 'Death.'" Jessica hesitated.

"Keep moving," he told her. The Gun was in his hand.

In cloud fastness the mech eagles drifted down the sloped sky, their twenty-foot wings spread against the cushioning air. Currents buoyed the metal bodies in their glide and circle; photo-electric eyes locked on the toiling ant figures far below.

A copper command in skullcase metal: Kill!

They dived.

In that last instant Logan saw them coming. He smashed Jess to the ground, rolling over her. And took the blow. Blinding pain raked his back. Three deep fur rows from shoulder to hip welled blood and torn cloth. Through a pain mist he fumbled in the brush for the fallen Gun.

Sun blazed on climbing gold. The birds wheeled and came back. Kill!

Logan's enemy fingers clawed at the Gun, in the tangle of root grass. He could not get hold of it. He dug and scabbled at it. Blinking back waves of pain, he gripped the barrel. He juggled it around awkwardly, and his two hands closed on the pearl handle. He had it now. He bent one leg, dug in a heel, twisted and flopped over on his back. Pain!

The two shapes came at him, blacking the sky, as Logan screamed at his fingers and the Gun fired and a ripper sliced in a smoking scorch across the black bodies and the two birds exploded and rained down in a bronze wreckage.

The brook was silver and cool softness over round rocks. On the shadowed moss bank, Jess dipped a cloth into the stream and carefully blotted the mangled flesh of Logan's back. He slept fitfully. Jess put aside the cloth and sat regarding him. She reached down to touch at his matted hair. His lips moved; he moaned. "Jess..." He tried to sit up, but she restrained him with gentle fingers.

"Lie still," she told him. She could see the raw hurt in the wax of his skin, the fever of his eyes. For a moment he looked at her without recognition.

"Rest," she said soothingly. "You need rest."

The tension began to leave him as he listened to her voice. Above him the tree boughs moved soft fans of shifting green shadow. The quiet worked on him as the last of the tension drained away. His breath evened. The pulse in his neck slowed and steadied.

"Got to keep moving," he said. "Ballard. Got to—"

"Hush," she told him.

Now they were moving again, with Crazy Horse towering above them, impossibly huge. The warrior's feather was lost in cloud.

They had found the old trail, overgrown with years, leading into the base of the mountain. At its end was the main cavern entrance. Logan and Jess stepped into arched darkness. Their eyes gradually adjusted to the light change.

The floor was layered thickly with rock dust, undisturbed by footprints. Their feet echoed as they descended.

"Are you all right?" asked Jess.

"I can make it."

The tunnel widened. They rounded an abrupt elbow turn and stopped.

The Thinker lay before them.

Here was a constellation of winking fireflies stretching to infinity. Here was an immense electronic silence. In the endless, glowing dark was Tangier and London, Macao and Capri and Beirut, El Quederef and Chateau-Chinon and Wounded Knee. From these caverns leapt the motive force of a dispensary in Chemnitz, a glasshouse in Shropshire, a callbox in Billings, Montana... This vast mountain brain sent its

signals along Earth's nervous system—to the distant places, the villages, towns and cities, bringing order out of disorder, calmness out of confusion.

They beheld the world.

The final realization of the computer age. A direct extension of the electronic brains at Columbia and Cal Tech in the 1960s, it was a massive breakthrough in solid-state technology. Computer was linked with computer in ever widening complexity.

President Curtin was the first to suggest that the Thinker be moved from Niagara to the Crazy Horse Caverns, and with the death of the Republican Party in 1988 the Crazy Horse bill was passed without opposition. Estimated final cost: twenty-five billion dollars. The old had built it; the young would use it.

"It's almost...frightening," said Jess.

They moved downward along the spiral of tunnel. Spaced at irregular intervals along the glowing plain below were bars of darkness. Logan was perplexed. What did these dark areas represent? He would find out.

They stepped onto the polished flooring beside the first dark area. Set into the smooth computer metal facing them was an embossed plaque.

CATHEDRAL—JCV 6ø 498 R3West Complex. Los Angeles, CaliforniaWestern America

A siren wail stabbed the silence. From deep within the hive of linking corridors something was coming in a sulfurous rush.

Logan snatched Jessica's hand and ran.

The sound intensified.

The thing was closing. It came with a howl and a shriek.

It was upon them.

They plunged into tunnel blackness. The siren ceased abruptly.

Tableau: Logan, braced against dead metal, the Gun a pointing finger; Jess, crouched behind him; and a looming presence at the mouth of the passage.

In the solenoid night the Watchman waited, motionless except for the faint gear-flicker behind the glass plate which was its face. A half-ton of destruction; armor plate bristling with weaponry. Waiting.

Doomed, thought Logan. Against this thing even a DS Gun was useless. What's holding him back? Why doesn't he go for us? Logan's throat moved. He looked up. Another plaque.

MULTI-OPERATIONAL LOWER LIFE UNIT—VJK 8(1704Pacific OceanWestern Hemisphere

"M.O.L.L.U.," breathed Logan. "Molly!"

Of course, that was why the thing didn't attack them. That was why it couldn't move. This was a dead area. For the robot it didn't exist. Logan's thoughts raced. Cathedral. Molly. Both dead, untended stages on the Sanctuary line. Which meant the next dead area would be stage three. But how to get to it?

Logan backed Jess along the corridor. The Watchman didn't move. At the other end they faced

brightness. The machine could not follow them down the dead passage; it would be forced to go around. But would they have enough time?

"Come on!" urged Logan.

They ran.

The Watchman burned into blinding motion.

They ran as the fox runs from the hounds. The darkness of another dead area was ahead. The Watchman erupted into the corridor, cannoned down upon them.

Into darkness!

The Watchman dead-stopped outside the tunnel.

Stage three;

WASHINGTON-LLI (7 5644District of ColumbiaEastern America

"That's where the car out of Molly should have taken us," said Logan. "Ballard must be there, in Washington."

"But how can we—That thing won't let us out," said Jess.

Logan swept the area. "I think there's another way," he said.

Winding and zigzagging dizzily up above the mammoth electronic glow, a narrow series of steps had been chiseled into the tough interior rock of the mountain. To reach the steps, however, they would have to cover a full quarter-mile of live corridors.

Logan jammed the Gun into his belt and removed his shoes. He checked the Watchman. No movement. A silence.

Sucking in a lungful of air, Logan drew back his arm and lobbed one of the shoes far out across the top of the computer plain.

The shoe fell.

As it touched the metal floor the Watchman whirled and shrieked off, down the hive.

"Go!"

The girl was terrified. "We'll never make it. We'll—"

"Run, damn you, run!"

They sprinted for the steps.

The Watchman reached Logan's shoe, hummed for a split second; a muzzle glided in the robot's chest. It blitzed the shoe into flaked ash. The machine then reversed course, crashing back toward Logan and Jess.

The girl slipped to her knees on the polished floor. Logan pulled her up. They ran.

The watchman's siren filled the world.

Running.

The glitter and flash of insect corridors.

Logan heaved the other shoe. It angled out and down, buying them another few seconds.

Running. The Watchman blurring in.

The steps!

Logan and Jess threw themselves onto the cut granite and scrambled upward—just as the Watchman slammed to a halt at the bottom.

"Will it follow us?"

"Can't," Logan said, climbing. "The steps aren't energized."

"Where are we going?"

"Where they take us. Up."

They kept climbing.

Steps and steps and steps.

Logan's wounded back throbbed; his jaw was a full ache. Exhaustion dragged at him. The fitful rest on the bank had done little to strengthen him.

It grew darker as they ascended: the computer glow fading into gray shading into pitch. Logan was grateful for the darkness; he didn't want to see the steps falling steeply away below. Even the great plain of the Thinker far beneath him induced a sense of swimming vertigo. He would not look down again; he would look up. Up.

Logan froze, pulling Jess in beside him.

Someone was coming down the steps.

Was it Ballard?

Logan crouched close to the rock wall, eyes on the beam of light bobbing slowly toward them. The figure moved steadily down the twisting rope of steps. Now he was distinct enough for Logan to identify the tunic of a DS man. And the face. Not Ballard.

Francis.

Logan raised the Gun. Keeping his eyes tight on the advancing figure, he whispered, "All right, Jess. It's up to you. You hate killing. He's a DS man, armed with a homer. Either I use my Gun first or he uses his. Which will it be?"

Silence.

"Jess...Jess?" Logan pivoted. The steps were empty.

Jess had vanished.

But how? He was stunned. Had she gone on back to—to where? Surely not to the thing which still

waited for them at the bottom?

A soft voice called to him. "Logan...here!"

He slid quick fingers along the rock. An opening.

Francis was twenty steps closer; his light flickered the walls.

Logan put away the Gun and slipped into the fissure, groping for Jess.

"Here..."

He touched her ankle.

'Go on ahead," he urged. "I'll follow you."

The crawl-space narrowed. Narrowed more. They were flesh corks in a pipe. A muffled sob. Jess could go no further. The weight of Crazy Horse pressed around them. Logan felt the rush of claustrophobia, shut it off.

"I think it's a little wider ahead," whispered Jess.

"Stretch," he told her, speaking harshly. "We can't go back."

Her hips scraped against the rough, sinuous pipe; she inched ahead.

Now they could move on hands and knees. The ceiling had risen. They stood upright in the blind core of the great mountain.

The rough talus of the stone floor cut into Logan's bare feet. The dark was impenetrable.

"Which way?" asked Jess.

Logan took her hand and began a cautious advance. With a bare foot he encountered emptiness, caught his balance, drew back. "Not this way." He tried another direction. The floor was pocked with deep shafts; a moment's carelessness and they would fall. The murmur of subterranean waters echoed up to them.

Logan probed ahead, weaving between the sinkholes in the stone. On all sides, in the living blackness, his ears could detect the shift of distances and depths.

A smooth rock face. Logan cautiously felt his way along it, searching for an opening. The rock face curved. They were in a closed chamber. Abruptly his hands fingered emptiness: the climb and twist of a passage. They heard the slow drip of water. Where did it lead?

They'd lost the sense of sight and now all sense of direction.

"Keep going," he said.

They clambered up flowstone ridges, snaked between stalactites and stalagmites and wet limestone columns. They were in a black mole-land of dolomite and calcite and gypsum. The mineral breath of the caverns blew on them.

Jess suddenly collapsed. Logan knelt, held her against him. "Rest a moment," he told her.

Now, with the cessation of their movement, they heard other sounds in the pitch. Something plopped into

a pool. Hard claws clicked on stone. A rustling insect scuttled over Jessica's leg. She screamed, surged to her feet, shuddering, as a second and a third claw-footed creature crawled her flesh. Whipping at her skin, she frantically dislodged them.

"Wait," said Logan. "I think I can give us some light."

He twisted the pearl endplate of the Gun, lifted the plate free. The glow from the Gun's interior power pack dimly illuminated the space around them.

The chamber was acrawl with cavernicolous life: in the shallow pools lived crayfish and salamanders, whose optic ganglia had atrophied. These blind fish had developed tactile papillae on their heads, arranged in ridges. The lava walls supported Harvestmen spiders spinning gray clockcurl webs. Adelops swarmed the floors, preying on mites and myriapods among the dark mold and fungi. Here they had lived and adapted since the Permian and Cretaceous periods. And here, too, were the beetles and wingless insects. By the thousands.

Logan and Jess fled the chamber.

They hurried onward, along deep winding cuts and narrow cracks in the substrata. Jess stopped at the edge of a wide pool of black water. She was breathing in ragged gasps, her body shaking with exhaustion. "I—I can't go—on."

"If we stay here we die."

"We'll die anyway. We're hopelessly lost. Admit it."

"All right, we're lost."

"And the caverns go on forever. We'll die here. We'll fall and be crushed or starve..."

Logan studied the water revealed by the Gun's glow. A wet flash. "We won't starve," he said grimly.

He was soaked to the armpits when he brought up the darting silver fish. It wriggled in his fist. Logan climbed back to the girl and the Gun that lay beside her.

"We won't starve," he said again. "In fact, if we—" He paused, staring.

"What is it?"

Logan triumphantly thrust the creature toward her. "This fish. It's not like all the others. This fish has eyes!"

He quickly reassembled the Gun.

"Let's go," he said. "Into the water."

Up the coursing stream that fed the pool, ducking their heads to avoid the rock ceiling that lowered and raised above them. Around two sharp bends. Swimming. Climbing as they swam.

"Look!"

Sunshine ahead.

They climbed faster as light filled the cave.

They came out beneath a clean, cold waterfall that speared white music into a deep gorge.

They breathed the bright, clear air.

Chapter 5

« ^ »

He glides the cave darkness, guided by the glow-flicker of the Follower. His quarry is ahead, but it is not wise to attempt a chase in these caverns. He retraces his path, leaves the tunnels and climbs uncounted steps into the head of Crazy Horse. He peers through the right eye of the great warrior, sees Logan and the girl. They are far away, moving through the scrub toward the high grass. He smiles. He has them now. There is nowhere for them to go. EARLY AFTERNOON...

"Let's pidge!" cried Graygirl.

Deesticker jay, Lift me a day, Wanna' me forever On a PeeGee way.

A skirl of lung music, recorder and flageolet.

Deesticker lay, Wild me away. Me gotta never Kinda stickerlift play!

The pleasure gypsies came in jeweled laughter. They fireballed the Black Hills. Their devilsticks flamed. Deesticker, Deesticker, AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA...

Logan heard the shrill piping as he and Jess cleared the high grass. "Down!" He gestured her back, out of sight.

In a glitter and swoop the gypsies were upon him.

"Footfella, hey!"

A blast of volcano heat behind Logan. The devil-stick chopped the Gun from his hand as it passed. Another struck him at chest level.

He was down, ringed in a circle of jato fire.

"If Sandfella tickles, giva he a fry!"

Logan did not move. He knew of the gypsies. Their first leader had been a full blooded Apache named Jimmy Walks-Like-a-Wolf who went berserk in the aftermath of the Little War. Gathering a crew of psychotics about him, he had conceived the gypsy death pact, the ritual vow of self-destruction. No pleasure gypsy lived long enough to see his flower go black; each was sworn to die on red as a gesture of ultimate defiance against the system. They feared neither Sleep nor Sandman. They were a law unto themselves.

A sword-slim man in white dismounted from a stick, and walked from the low-hovering vehicle to Logan. "Sandfella up," he said.

Logan stood up. He faced Rutago, king of the devilsticks. Sixteen. Bearded. White silks. Flat-muscled. Golden curls. A beauty. He reached over, turned up Logan's right hand. "Blinker he," said Rutago. He gave the others his smile.

Graygirl joined her man. She regarded Logan with lynx eyes. "Giva he Sandfella Lastday wild!"

The pleasure gypsies were fourteen in number. Seven men, seven women. Youngest: fifteen. Oldest: seventeen.

The females wore satins and brocades and goldwire mesh. They were glittermake and richly coifed hair, star-piled; their nails opalescent and striped with lapis lazuli metallics. They were scented and soaped and smelled of peaches. (Graygirl was the exception. She wore no makeup; only her eyes were striped in black. She was starkly beautiful.)

The males wore skinsilks and kidleather fringe and cuffed velvet boots. They were filigreed in silverstitch and platinum. They were brushed and oiled and immaculate.

Two of the pleasure girls came forward, holding Jessica between them. "Gotta more than Sandfella," said one. "Gotta we a runnersgirl."

Logan took a step toward Jess, but the jato fire still hemmed him. He looked sourly at the circle of devil-sticks, their jet-flamed pods ready to sear him if he made an improper move.

These were not the devilsticks he'd ridden as a boy; these were fast and deadly, and the thrust from their rear-mounted chromaly jato housings could char a man down in the snap of a finger. If I could break this circle maybe I could handle them, thought Logan. Just maybe.

Rutago seemed pleased with the situation. He waved a graceful, jewel-encrusted hand. "Tie fella, runnergirl. Takeum on a stickerlift."

Three of the male gypsies stepped into the circle to bind Logan's wrists with tapewire.

They led him to Rutago's machine. The devilstick gleamed richly, from its hand-scrolled leather saddle studded with diamonds, emeralds, sapphires and fire rubies, to the inlay of pearls set into the long stick-body of the swift pleasure craft.

Logan settled himself behind the stitched saddle, and his legs were tapewired under him. Jess was similarly mounted and tied on Graygirl's stick.

"Deestickers go!"

The pleasure gypsies jetted.

Logan's Gun lay in the grass, abandoned.

The fiery wheel of the noon sun blistered its slow way across the Dakota sky, crowding the thin dry air with waves of shimmering heat. Deadwood was dust and ghost town stillness. The squat, wind-worked buildings along the main street had long since been scouted of paint, and their weathered boards reared up crookedly from the red earth.

A man lounged back into the porch shadow of the Big Dog Saloon, boots propped lazily on the spur-scarred rail. His lizard-lidded eyes raised to a distant shout: "Stickereeeeeeeee." The man stood up, peered down the dust-hazed street.

The gypsy riders passed the lookout posted at the edge of Deadwood and arrived at the Big Dog in a bright, chattering cluster.

They dismounted, led their prisoners inside.

The saloon was lavishly furnished. Velvet couches. Ivory chairs. Green baize tables. Ornate lamps of shell pearl. Tapestries and bead hangings. The long mahogany bar was polished to a high gloss. Behind the bar hung a garish oil painting of a coyly smiling nude.

Logan and Jess were herded into the room, wrists, still secured.

Rutago made his entrance, a heavy saddlebag across one silked shoulder. He dropped the bag carelessly at his feet. From it spilled gypsy riches taken on the raid: sprays, pendants, seed pearls, ribbons of garnet and topaz and amethyst. In the heaped mound were cabochon stones, onyx and agate. With a connoisseur's care, Rutago plucked out one tiny pigeon blood ruby. He breathed on it, rubbed it along his silk thigh until static electricity crackled from the faceted surface. "Like me a rubyrock. Took it from a merchantman," he said.

Rutago walked forward to stand in front of Logan. He slowly unscrewed the jewel face from a Borgia ring and held it to Logan's nose. Logan sniffed cautiously and choked.

Hemodrone! The bitter smell of the ritual gypsy poison lingered in his nostrils. One swallow and a man would begin to die. Unless the victim received an antidote he would continue to die slowly as the hemoglobin of his blood absorbed the virulent poison. It would take hours and bring great pain. Logan instinctively clamped his teeth together.

Rutago smiled, blinked sleepily, turned away. He crossed to Jess. Two of the females gripped her elbows as Rutago deftly pried open her lips and poured the Hemodrone down her throat. She coughed and strangled.

Logan thrust himself at Rutago, but was driven to his knees by a numbing blow.

"Sandfella must behave or runnergirl die," said Rutago. "Gotta earn the antidote."

One of the females approached Logan with a first-aid kit. "Sandfella turnabout," she ordered. He obeyed.

The girl severed the tapewire binding his wrists. Then she gentled away his torn shirt, exposing the crusted wounds along his back. She adjusted the kit, placed it at the top of one of the deep cuts and drew it slowly downward. A trail of fresh pink synthaskin formed behind it as the wound healed. She tended his other cuts and abrasions, while a second female treated Jess.

Logan was given a clean white shirt and boots for his bruised feet.

The antidote. Logan knew he could not take Jess away without it. Even if they broke free he couldn't take her to a populated area, where the antidote might be found, because of her palm flower. As a runner she'd be doomed. But did they really have the antidote here? The gypsy might be lying. Yet he'd have to trust them. He had no other choice.

"How do I earn the antidote?" Logan asked Rutago.

The gypsy smiled, nodded toward the pleasure girls. They crowded close to Logan. Blue eyes, brown eyes, hazel eyes, green eyes, golden eyes, gray eyes, radiated heat.

"And what happens to Jess?"

Rutago scooped the jewelry back into the saddlebag. He then regally offered Jessica his hand and

escorted her up the stairs.

One of the males said sweetly, "Rutago he a Ribbonrider, but also he a loverman. After he, the rest of we. Runnergirl a lucky one."

The seven pleasure girls guided Logan out of the main room, along a hallway, into a chamber at the rear of the saloon, a boudoir, dominated by an Emperor bed over which was spread a pale snow coverlet of imported satin.

Led by Graygirl, the females removed Logan's clothing. They led him to the cleansing room, adjusted the temperature to blood heat, and pushed him under the needle suds. He was dried by warm air currents, scented and powdered. Then he was given an injection of Everlove.

In the boudoir the girls awaited him. They were all golden nude and reclined at the foot of the bed on which lay Graygirl. She was somber and colorless and lovely. She took Logan's hand as he walked over to her, gazed up into his eyes, and smiled a sleek cat's smile. "Wild me, Sandfella," she said to him in a husky voice. She ran her fingers along his thigh. "Bedabye me."

And the others smiled with her. The green-eyed females said, "Wild she, Sandlover. Then wild we!"

The first orgasm was good.

The second was all right.

The third orgasm was bad.

The fourth orgasm was painful.

The fifth orgasm was agony.

The sixth orgasm was damnation.

And where was Jess, and what were they doing to her? And where was the antidote?

In the upstairs room Rutago lay waiting. The floor was spread with his jewels and glittered: a lake of gemfire. The cleansing room door opened.

Rutago nodded. "Come you runnergirl me."

Jessica moved toward him over the jeweled floor, her face emotionless. She wore a flowrobe of silver mesh.

The gypsy peeled away her robe, pulled Jess down upon him.

She was wood.

He stroked and petted her.

She was wood.

He kissed her deeply, fondled her with desperate hands.

She was wood.

Jessica stood at the long bar while Rutago paced. His face was flushed and angry.

"Keep your promise," said Logan. "Give her the—"

"Antidote, no!"

Logan tensed his fists. "We both did what you wanted."

Rutago smiled savagely at Jess. "Cheated by a runnergirl. Didn't try hard enough. Now we use another lift."

"Pull a tooth of runnergirl," said one of the males brightly. "Maybe pull a fingernail."

"Gotta me another lift," said Rutago, waving aside the suggestion. He eyed Logan jealously. "Sandfella's gonna do it."

Logan read the effects of the poison in Jess. Her face was ashen, her breathing shallow. The Hemodrone was running her blood. And, for the moment, there was nothing he could do. Nothing.

Four of the gypsies lifted Jess onto the polished bartop. They held her wrists and ankles. The others waited expectantly. The play was Rutago's.

The gypsy leader savored his power; he advanced and placed his hands on Logan's shoulders in comradely fashion. "Runnergirl she soon a sick one. Wanta you the antidote?"

Logan nodded tightly.

"Then"—Rutago handed a short bone-handled dirk to Logan—"gotta take an ounce of flesh—anywhere on runnergirl."

Logan paled. No, he couldn't do this: The act was inhuman. And was a homer human? They were asking him to torture the girl who'd saved his life.

But she'd die if he didn't.

"Anywhere?"

Rutago nodded. His smile was angelic.

Graygirl placed a delicate set of spring balance scales on the bar. One tiny pan held a gold ounce. Logan bent over Jess. She had her eyes closed, which was fortunate, because if she watched him... He slit the clothing along her hip to expose a patch of white skin. He placed his hand high on her upper leg. Shielded by his body, his thumb searched for the nerve plexus on her inner thigh. Shifting his weight to cover the action, he dug his thumb powerfully into the pressure point. Jess winced.

Then he used the knife. Quickly. Efficiently.

The raw square of bleeding flesh balanced the scales. Logan tossed the dirk aside.

Rutago looked steadily at him. He shook his head slowly. "Sandfella badfella. Badfella cheat. Antidote, no."

Enough!

Logan swept an arm around Graygirl, dropped to one knee and bowed the girl across it. "Give her the antidote, or I break this latch's back!"

Graygirl was no longer gray; she was red-faced with pain, her eyes bulging, her mouth twisted.

Rutago stood unmoving, undecided.

"Now!" snapped Logan. His hands tightened.

"Third finger, left hand," rasped Graygirl.

Disgusted, Rutago extended the ring facing. Logan sniffed it, was satisfied.

Rutago poured the contents into a glass of water, handed it to Jess. Trembling, sweat sparkling her skin, she gulped it down.

Logan motioned her out. "Take a stick and ride for the Gun," he told her. "I'll catch up with you"

Jess limped to the door, moved through it.

A thrum of metal. She was gone.

Logan waited to give Jess a proper start, then backed out slowly, holding Graygirl in front of him. With vicious force, he heaved her back through the batwing door into the midst of the gypsies, spilling them.

Outside, he vaulted into the saddle of the nearest devilstick and kicked the release stud. The hovercraft flamed into motion.

He knew they'd be after him. Trees whiplashed at him as he skimmed their top branches. He'd stay as close to the ground as possible, head into the brush country and try to shake the pursuit before doubling back for Jess.

As a boy, Logan had loved devilsticks. But this brute took some getting used to. Its power thrust was massive and tricky, and a delicate touch was needed, to keep upright. Sudden throttle bursts were dangerous, threatening to pitch him from the saddle. Yet his confidence grew with each passing mile. Learning to feel the machine he rode, beginning to understand its quick-working habits, Logan felt real exhilaration as he jetted over the country. His wounds were healed and his hands were free.

Let the gypsies come!

Logan saw them as he topped a high rock. Six of them, expertly riding his wake. He cut his vehicle sharply down into a baked creek bed, hugging ground, his jet flame searing the dry dust.

He had taken Graygirl's stick, and it was fast. Faster, by far, than most of the others. Gradually they fell back. And back. And were lost behind him.

Logan headed for Jess.

Yet one rider clung to him, matching his speed, gaining with each twist and fold of land. The afternoon sun rayed on moving jewels.

Rutago.

Logan gave his craft full throttle, but the gypsy continued to gain, mile by mile.

At the entrance to the Lame Johnny, Logan spotted Jess. She was just over a mile ahead, riding in a ragged, irregular pattern, weak from loss of blood and unable to control her vehicle properly. Sheer guts had carried her this far; she could falter at any moment.

Logan sped to catch her.

Rutago charged closer, giving the wind his smile.

The Lame Johnny was below, and Logan bounced in the saddle as the swift currents affected his power thrust. He cut to the right, using the bank, and his speed resumed. Rutago was almost upon him.

The king was here, the man who rode the Ribbon. Logan had heard of this legendary feat. Many deestickers had tried it, tried to hug that flexible durasteel cable stretching the storm-tossed Atlantic, but only one jockey had ever ridden the Ribbon from shore to shore, through wind and wave change, cold and blind fog. Only Rutago had managed it. The king.

Logan braced himself for attack. And was shocked.

In a wash of jato heat Rutago sliced past him, heading for Jess.

The gypsy raked the side of her jato housing. She wavered as smoke began seeping from her craft. It staggered downward, the girl fighting for control. Rutago circled, lazily riding air, expertly guiding his machine, playing her.

Jess regained partial stability, and he was at her again immediately, forcing her close to the red granite walls of the ravine. Her face held terror; in another moment she'd be spilled from the saddle.

Logan shot up to engage the gypsy, flashed by him, drawing him away from Jess in a hazardous ploy: Logan took his stick up the sheer ravine face, riding the mountain with the water boiling below them.

Rutago could not resist the bait. He made splendid use of his fabled skill to harass Logan, dipping and slashing in at him. Logan was a boy once again, all awkwardness and uncertainty in trying to handle his first devilstick. This man who knifed at him was in cool command of the air, but when would he tire of the one-sided game?

He'll go for Jess again unless...unless I kill him. But how?

Logan kicked his craft around, aimed it at the gypsy. Rutago veered left; Logan veered with him, fixing his trajectory. Full throttle. A startled look on Rutago's face as Logan pitched himself from the saddle.

Down...down...down. The Lame Johnny far below. Rapids. White water. Logan arrowed toward it in a long dive.

The stick caught Rutago below the rib line, carrying away his stomach as it drove into the face of the ravine.

Logan sliced the water, and the rapids took him, rolled him twisting, sucked him under. He came up choking, kicking to maintain leverage. Rocks just ahead.

The last thing Logan saw before he went under again was the faltering smoke trail of Jessica's wounded machine layering the sky.

Chapter 4

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He knows the girl is on black now. A runner. But the quarry has vanished again beyond Crazy Horse. He checks the board in Rapid City. It does not help him. The Follower remains dark. He is certain that Logan and the girl must break cover soon. When they do he will be ready. He will be there to intercept them. AFTERNOON...

Jess lay unconscious in a pale square of sunlight next to her damaged machine. One cheek was scraped raw where she had skidded along the black asphalt. The wound on her thigh still pulsed blood.

She didn't hear the soft footsteps or the voices that surrounded her. Fourteen bright eyes peered down.

"Ohhhhhhh!"

"Pret-ty, pret-ty!"

Seven tiny moppets in pink playrompers drew back in alarm as the girl stirred. Jess moaned, lapsed back into unconsciousness. The children bent over the still figure. Wonderingly, they felt her hair, her soft lips, the long lashes of her closed eyes.

"What is it?"

"It's a people! Ohhh...so big!"

"People tired."

They clucked together, deciding that Jess should be in a crib. They tugged and lifted and pulled her toward the Cribroom.

Fourteen bright eyes peered down. Jess lay on her side in a small crib, knees tucked under her chin. The crib had sensed her hurt and ministered to her, closing her wounds with synthaskin. She slept deeply.

The eyes never left her.

DAKOTA STATES INDUSTRIAL NURSERY—UNIT K

Beneath the sign Logan reconnoitered the gray metal mesh fence. Twice as tall as a man and capped with a triple strand of microwire. These gossamer threads could chop off fingers under the weight of a climber.

Beyond the fence, far out on the flat surface of the nursery playground, he could see the wreckage of Jessica's devilstick. Apparently she was inside somewhere, perhaps already in the hands of the Autogoverness. Other runners had tried to hide in these vast institutions, but each Autogoverness was programmed to sound an alarm. And if you could avoid the robots there were always the older children, conditioned and hypnotaped against invaders.

But I've got to try and find her.

He had to walk a full mile along the fence perimeter before he found the tree. It angled up and inward; one of its branches thrust out toward the wire. Logan climbed the tree, inching out as far along the branch

as he dared. He hung there. Six feet ahead of him, and down, were the deadly strands of microwire.

He began to swing himself back and forth, gathering momentum. If he struck the wires they'd slice him like cheese. At the height of a swing he let go, twisting his body in the air. Logan hit ground safely, rolled and came up in a crouch. Silence. No alarms.

He crossed the wide asphalt toward the looming bulk of the nursery. At its fortress flank he paused to orient himself. He'd grown up in a place like this. The hypno classes would be in the west wing, the dorms to the left. He was now outside the infant wards. Less chance of being discovered if he entered here. High up the brick building face was a bank of windows. Logan began to climb, clinging to the irregular surface. A foot slipped; he regained his balance and continued.

The first window was locked.

He spidered along a narrow ledge, feeling the strain pulling at his arm muscles. The next window was unlocked but jammed. He struggled to budge it; the glass panel grated inward. Logan crawled through, dropped to the floor and stood listening. He was in a storage area.

Where was Jess? She could be anywhere in the sprawl of buildings. She could be hurt and dying in a corridor or under a conveyor or hidden in a locker space. Or maybe she wasn't here at all. The silence encouraged him. If Jess were here, at least she hadn't been discovered as yet.

He crossed the room and eased open the door. Distantly he heard the hum and buzz of classrooms in use.

He checked the hall. Deserted. He moved to the next door. The dot symbol told him it was a Playroom.

It was not activated. The vibroballs were boxed and motionless, no longer bouncing themselves in puzzle patterns from the walls. The talk puppets were stacked and speechless. The echo boards were silent. No sign of Jess here. He closed the door.

The next chamber was also quiet. The delivery-room.

Logan checked the moveways. He stared in fascination at the Hourglass, at the phosphorescent crystals in the thick globe which gave each infant his birth right—the radioactive timeflower. He stared at his own hand, blinking red-black, red-black. . . He'd received his crystal in a room like this; it had imbedded the flower in his right palm, and the crystal had decayed on schedule, in the same way the cesium atom decays in a radium clock, turning the stigmata inexorably from yellow to blue to red—and now, soon, to black.

Logan passed through the room to a long corridor. Had Jess gone in this direction? The search seemed hopeless, but he could not abandon it. Not until he was forced to.

A whirring noise—a sound Logan had heard often in his childhood. The Autogoverness.

He jerked open a door to his right, dodged inside. The door swung closed. The interior was dark and warm.

"My own, my precious," his mother said.

A softness enveloped him.

"My little one, my sweet," said the Loveroom. Its voice was a crooning, smoothing music. "There, there," said the room.

Logan attempted to struggle, but the room held him fast in tender embrace, stroked him. It pressed him against its great warm bosom and rocked him gently, rhythmically. "My dove, my darling, my precious love."

"But—I can't—" ' said Logan wildly.

His mother held him close.

"I can't stay here. I've got to—"

"Sleep," said the room softly.

Need and emotional hunger flooded through Logan in a great wave.

"Mother loves you, loves you, loves you," sang the room.

"No," cried Logan, "I've got to—"

"Sleep," said the room.

"I've got to..."

"Sleep." Insistently, lovingly.

"Got to...sleep," sighed Logan.

He slept.

In Cribroom L-16, during her hourly inspection, Autogoverness K-110 discovered a sleeping woman.

The Autogoverness calmly rolled into the corridor and activated the Invader Alarm. Bells. Sirens.

Jess awoke in panic, leaped from the small crib and began to run.

The nursery defended its children. Doors slammed, gates closed; trams and moveways halted. Crib covers snapped down like turtle shells; barriers sprung up through slotted floors, sealing off each wing.

Invaders!

Repel!

Protect!

Defend!

The door of the Loveroom was wrenched open. Logan was there. "Jess—this way!"

In the alarm din they fled along corridors crowded with curious children. An Autogoverness rolled at them, clucking; Logan disabled it with a savage heel blow. They slid under a descending barrier, whipped through a closing door, avoided a handler machine. They clattered down to the first floor as the building entrance was sliding shut along its lubricated tracks.

"Faster!" Logan yelled.

They cleared the massive slide-door a split second before it locked home. The edge of the door rapped Logan's shoulder, knocking him off stride—but they were out of the building.

They sprinted across the playground for the main gate.

It was closed.

Logan broke into the glass control booth, smashed the panel, and jerked down the release switch.

The gate swung open.

A roboguard tried to stop them, but Logan evaded it, grabbed Jessica by the arm and cut into a field. They disappeared down a weed-choked bar ditch that angled into the woods.

The Rapid City concourse was jammed with citizens when they arrived on the maze platform. Logan had retrieved his Gun, and it was safely out of sight against his ribs. Jess kept her right hand fisted to conceal her charflower. Still, Logan knew, the scanners would pick them up if they tried to board a mazecar.

"Stay back here, close to the wall." he told Jess.

He sifted through the crowd. A ruddy-faced man bumped him. The man's arms were full of souvenirs from the western states; a triangular banner extending from his collar proclaimed Cheyenne Frontier Days. LETTER BUCK! Perched on the top of the heap of packages was a tiny outhouse carved from polished redwood. When the citizen bumped Logan the outhouse fell to the platform. Logan picked it up, put it back on the pile.

"Thanks, citizen! Ya-hooooo!"

"Ya-hooooo!" replied Logan forcing a smile.

He reached the scanner box, opened it casually in the manner of a repairman. Reaching in, he shorted out the unit.

Returning to Jess, he hurried her toward the boarding slots. She stumbled, put out a hand to steady herself. In that brief gesture she revealed her black palmflower, and a woman on the edge of the crowd screamed, "Runner!"

A ripple of excitement; shouting voices, shock.

A man was about to enter a mazecar. Logan thrust him back and they leaped aboard.

The angry crowd dropped away behind them and was lost as the car burrowed into the long tunnel. The continent rushed under and over and around them.

Logan knew the dangers. Unless DS blundered—and DS never blundered—there would already be operatives at the Rapid City platform checking their departure. Within seconds DS would know exactly which car they were on, which tunnel they were in. Dispatchers would alert units all along the route.

The car suddenly faltered. Slowed. Slotted into a siding.

"They've stopped us," said Logan. "Out!"

"Where are we?" asked Jess.

"No questions. Hurry."

As the hatch opened and they made their exit Logan caught a sub-lim flicker on the mazecar viewscreen. It said what they always said: Duty. Don't run!

Union artillery batteries were destroying Fredericksburg when Logan and Jess reached ground level.

Snipers had fired on the Federal troops preparing to cross the Rappahannock River, and General Burnside had ordered his cannon to level the town. He would then occupy Fredericksburg and advance into the hills to clean out the Confederate stronghold. It was a foolhardy plan, this direct frontal assault on an impregnable position, and Burnside had been warned against it, but he'd refused to alter his decision. His battle plan would be carried out despite the odds. He was determined to wipe out the Rebels on their own ground and give the North a great victory.

Now the pontoon boats were being readied for the river crossing. Bluecoated officers on horseback were directing the operation. Ponderous wagons and heavy brass artillery pieces were being rolled onto the wooden boats.

Burnside studied the south shore through a pair of fieldglasses. A church steeple tottered and fell under the barrage; a tall brick structure folded into rubble. Burnside lowered the glasses, rubbing at his long black whiskers. He looked about twenty. "We'll give those Johnny Rebs a real whuppin' right enough!" he declared. "They'll remember this day."

The general's aide looked concerned. "I hear Lee is on the slope with Longstreet. And Stonewall Jackson commands their right flank. It's going to be extremely difficult, sir."

Burnside snorted. "War is never easy, Major. You do what you must for your country."

The aide saluted and returned to his men.

Ambrose E. Burnside was a robot, an android, built to the exact specifications of the famed Civil War officer. His mass of blue-clad androids would engage gray-clad androids for a day and a night in the Battle of Fredericksburg in a compressed re-creation of the bloody slaughter of 1862, when more than twelve thousand men died on these Virginia slopes. Field pieces would flash from hidden embrasures. Breakaway buildings would collapse on schedule. Cannon balls would strike into ranks of breakaway robots, who would lose arms and legs and heads in brutally realistic fashion. The snowpatched ground would be stained with crimson fluids.

Logan and Jess edged into the pack of excited tourists and Virginia citizenry crowding the view areas.

"Duty," a loudspeaker blared above the din. "That's what you'll see here today, citizens. Loyalty. Courage. The willingness to die for one's country in order to preserve it. The Civil War was fought by seventeen—and eighteen-year-olds, men willing to die for their cause. They did not question their duty or flinch from the face of death. They sacrificed themselves willingly, gloriously. Now—watch them charge, citizens, in this heroic battle, shown to you as it happened 254 years ago. And remember, there were no runners at Fredericksburg!"

Jess looked at the terrain facing them. Artificially created fog cloaked the ground. Cannon added a bass rumble to the sharp snap of musketry. The ground rose up in gouts as shot and ball plowed it.

Silently Logan guided Jess toward the river. A deep drainage ditch led to the tents of Burnside's camp, and they began to crawl along this, away from the view area.

The ditch angled around to the rear of the encampment. Logan knew they didn't have to worry about any of the androids giving out an alarm. Each robot soldier was programmed to play its assigned part in the battle.

They clambered up the drainage bank and ducked under the canvas flap of a Union tent. Two perfectly formed androids were standing motionless inside, ready to step from the tent when their circuits commanded them. Their blank sixteen-year-old faces were frozen.

Logan struck them to the ground and began to strip off their clothing. "Put this on," he said, tossing Jess a Federal uniform.

Logan buttoned the blue tunic, stuffing the Gun into it. He looped a canteen around his shoulder, picked up a long musket. Jess also took a musket. In the soiled uniform, with a Union cap pulled over her hair, she could pass as a soldier so long as they stayed well back from the view areas.

"Now stick close to me," he said, "and do what I do."

A bugle sounded the call to arms.

Logan and Jess joined the Grand Army of the Potomac. They climbed into one of the slab-sided boats, sharing the craft with a dozen other Bluecoats during its passage across the shallow river.

They scrambled up the mud bank into Fredericksburg and moved cautiously through the gutted town. Broken-backed buildings smoked in ruin. The crackle of musketry filled the air. Metal bees hummed. Hill cannon belched bronze thunder. As they walked, the churned mud of the street sucked at their boots.

More bugles. The rattle of drums. Burnside was paring his assault. On the far right, blue ranks were altering under the guns of Stonewall Jackson.

They faced Marye's Heights, rising up in a steepening incline from a wide plain spattered with artificial snow. The Heights were manned by the crack Washington Artillery of New Orleans, pride of the South. Robert E. Lee was up there with the Grays, giving them his strength, and the entrenched Confederates had mounted some 250 field pieces to rake the slopes below.

To the left the holiday concourse was jammed with spectators: bright tunics, flags and the ocean roar of happy people. A darkness there. A black tunic! DS!

Francis! Had he seen them, guessed at their destination? Was he, even now, raising his Gun to homer them? Logan turned back to the hill, pulled his cap lower.

The girl's face was gray. She looked at Logan helplessly. He pointed off to the right. "We have to get across the battlefield, to the other side."

"They'll see us."

"Not if we move up the slope with Burnside's men. Once past the wall over Marye's Heights we'll be all right. There's a maze tunnel I used to play in as a boy. They don't use it much since they built New Fredericksburg and reconverted the area."

"C'mon, lads!" yelled an android officer near Logan. "Let's show the Rebs our steel!"

In a wash of fife and drum and bugle and bright regimental flags, the boys in blue marched out in columns-of-four, muskets forward, a tide of bayonets moving up.

"Keep your head lowered," he told less. "And stay out of the depressions. That's where the cannons are programmed to hit."

They were a third of the way up, in ordered rank, and the hill guns were quiet. Getting the range. Letting the sheep march close enough to slaughter. "Burnside's blunder" they called it for two centuries after. Burnside, the fool, the pompous clown with his mutton-chop whiskers, sending his troops to certain death in a vain bid for personal glory. Little wonder that Lincoln replaced him after Fredericksburg.

A pulsing silence.

The cannons emptied their iron throats.

Inferno!

Jess pressed close to Logan, inching up the snowed slope as the withering storm of canister exploded around them. Androids screamed, dropped muskets, pitched forward. Robot horses pawed air, gushed crimson. Bugles ceased in midcry.

Marye's Hill was a tumult of shrieking metal death.

"Don't falter now, lads!" cried a hatless lieutenant behind them. "Forward—for Lincoln and the Union! Hurrah, hurrah!"

A cannon ball cut him in half.

Just ahead of them, concealed behind a stretch of uneven stone wall fronting Sunken Road, a contingent of sharpshooting Georgians and North Carolinians rose up to pour a hot hail of musket fire into the still-advancing Federals.

The lines were falling back.

As Logan reached the base of the wall at Sunken Road a musket shot dropped him to his knees. He was momentarily breathless, but alive; the canteen across his chest had absorbed the ball.

Artillery crashed through oak woods. Fleeced smoke from hill cannon lazed the sky, mingling with the curtain of ground fog.

Where was Jess? Logan scanned the slope for sign of her.

Near him, a gray-clad figure was shaking a fist and shouting in mock triumph, "Skeedaddle, you Bluebellies! Back to yer holes. EEEEEeeee-yow!"

Several Confederates had fallen behind the wall, but other robots had filled in along the barrier. Logan was ignored as he stripped off his uniform, discarding it along with his musket.

The gallop of an advancing horse. A stern-faced man on a white stallion, saber in hand. Bearded, uniformed in splendor. "Fine, boys, fine," boomed Robert E. Lee. "There'll be extra rations for all when this day's done." His voice was considerably amplified in order to reach the crowd in the view areas. He galloped back down the line.

The attack has been completely broken now, and the Blues were in full rout.

Then, clearly, Logan saw Jess—far down the slope. The girl was struggling against a tide of moving androids. Caught up in the knot of retreating figures, she was swept back down the long hill toward the viewing stands.

Back toward Francis.

Chapter 3

« ^ »

He knows they are both in his grasp. The crowds block him, frustrate him. His anticipation is mounting. He savors this, as the hunting cat savors the kill. Close. Very close. LATE AFTERNOON...

FACES. Thousands of faces. But none of them Jessica's.

Logan was jostled and pushed in the holiday man-sprawl along the concourse. Tourist laughter, shouts.

"Hey, citizen."

Logan looked down at an eight-year-old. Redhead, with freckles and serious blue eyes. The boy was selling souvenirs. He held up a small brass cannon. "Fires a real ball, citizen. Put an eye out with it, if you've a mind to try. Genuine treasured memento of the Annual Civil War Gala, imported from Monte Carlo."

"No...no, I don't want one."

The boy did not argue; he dipped away into the mob flow.

Logan paused at a doorway, letting the throng eddy past. He drew back. A black tunic, coming toward him. Francis!

Logan pressed into the doorway. It proved to be the entrance to a Re-Live parlor. He craned his neck to see over the bobbing heads of the crowd. The black figure was still advancing, appearing and disappearing in the press. Closer with each step.

A robot touched his arm. "Citizen Wentworth 10," said the robot, looking with steel sympathy at Logan's blinking hand "We've been expecting you. This way, please."

He had no choice. Francis was outside, back to the door, studying the crowd.

The robot slid out a life drawer from the metal wall.

"Just lie down here. This is our latest model. You may switch years as desired."

Logan settled into the steel foam seat, grateful to be shielded from the open doorway. The robot dabbed his temples with saline solution, connected the rubber-cradled terminals to his neck and forehead.

"Listen, I don't really need to be..." Logan was stalling for time, but the robot was programmed to deal smoothly with nervous citizens on Lastday.

"Any year as desired," he repeated, flipping a switch. The life drawer slid silently into the wall.

Darkness.

I can't stay here. I have to find Jess. I—

He was sixteen, and the Nevada desert was a brown heat shimmer before his eyes. Logan sat in the sparse shade of a saguaro cactus, utterly motionless except for his eyes. One hundred miles of desert to cover without food, water or weapons to graduate from DS school. Now, in the second day, he was dehydrated and feeling the enervating fatigue of the trek. At dawn he had squeezed the pulp of a barrelcactus through the cloth of his shirt and obtained half a pint of sour-tasting fluid. It had almost gagged him.

Logan was watching the small cleft in the yellow shale which swelled from the desert hardpan at his feet. A rattler oiled into view, tongue licking the baked air.

Logan waited, and when the snake was free of its lair, he killed it with a bootheel. Using his beltclasp, he scored the ridged skin along the back of the jaw and across the top of the broad flat head. He worked the skin loose with his teeth and pulled. It peeled smoothly back from the long body. Logan ate the pink flesh, carefully chewing the smaller bones before swallowing. The rattler joined a field mouse, three butterflies and several grasshoppers in his stomach.

He rose into the heat of the desert and went on. In theory there was a runner ahead of him who would pause to sleep. Who would falter and fall. Who would despair at the size of the desert. Because Logan did none of these he would overhaul the runner and kill him.

His tissues were pleading for water. The scant moisture provided by the snake had reawakened his water need, and the pebble in his mouth didn't help, much. He remembered the class he had taken dealing with life in the desert. In the training room none of it seemed particularly difficult. The desert teemed with life, with ground owls and bats, jackrabbits and bobcats. There were gophers and mice and squirrels, foxes, badgers—and a thousand other forms crawling and slithering and inching the desert floor. But they were damned hard to trap. There was water here too, but it took luck and knowledge and instinct to find it.

His feet puffed dust in a trail that would hang in the motionless air until dusk. Then the winds would come, freezing and scouring the hardy mesquite, whipping tumbleweeds like bramble wheels on a thousand-mile journey through the and wastes. At night the deaths would begin. Cat would stalk fox who stalked mouse who stalked insect—down through the levels of kill-to-live.

Logan stumbled and caught himself. He was tiring fast. No. A hunter does not tire. It is the quarry who tires, gives up, dies. The need for survival in a hunter must be stronger than the need of a runner, and the need of a runner is a fever in the blood.

He had to go on. He could not rest. He had to live so that runners would die.

and...

He was seven, and his flower had changed color and it was time to leave the nursery and go out into the world and Logan was afraid. He wanted to take Albert 6, his favorite talk puppet, with him—but they wouldn't allow it.

"Why, why, why?" he sobbed.

"Not permitted," said his Autogoverness, and reached for Albert.

The puppet ran after Logan, tiny feet pattering across the nursery floor. "Loge, Loge! I'll never forget you, Loge. Never forget you."

They caught Albert and put him away in a box. And Logan screamed and screamed and screamed and...

He was nine, and the red flower smashed against the side of his face. He was ringed by four men. The leader scowled at him. "Lick my boot," he said.

Logan shook his head. The man slapped him again.

"Go ahead," said the man. "Do it"

He tried to back away, was shoved from behind and almost fell.

He'd been on his way to Yellowstone to meet Iron Jack who rode real horses, when they'd stopped him for no reason on the maze platform.

"Lick my boot," said the leader. "Then we'll let you go"

Logan looked at the four men. He could see they ached to hurt somebody.

He bent and licked the dust from the toe of the leader's boot

The men registered disappointment. "Let's go," said the leader. "We'll find somebody with guts." Then they were gone, into the maze.

I'm not going to cry, Logan told himself as his eyes blinked rapidly and the hot tears came...

and...

He was one. He was warm. He was clean. He was full.

and...

He was thirteen, and riding the devilstick in Venice above the Piazza San Marco and the wind rushed at him and he opened his mouth to gulp the wild wine wind, and he felt the great tidal immensity of the Earth below and he was free. His palmflower was the blue of this Italian sky and it would never change and he would never grow old and it would always be clear Venice blue, Mediterranean blue and always and forever blue...

and...

I must wake. Must find Jess. Must get up.

Logan stirred in his dark metal womb. The Re-Live wall hummed.

and...

He was three, and the hypnotape was telling him that $A+B=C$ —and of sines and cosines...

and...

He was fifteen, and the instructor bowed to him.

Logan wore the foam—padded mittens which were necessary in an Omnite class and the short white traditional shirt. He tried to do as he'd been taught, tried to clear his mind of all images except this squat, hard man before him.

"Again," said the man.

Logan fell into the proper stance and began to circle. His hands were moist and clammy, and he fought

back a desire to retreat. He must never retreat. If he wished to become a top DS operative he had to learn everything this man could teach him.

The man feinted a blow. Logan countered with a savate kick. The instructor took the impact in the belly like a stone image, without flinching, caught Logan's leg, dumped him and struck his throat, temple and solar plexus with a single continuous blow. Logan slammed the mat and was sick on the mat and the instructor said, "There is no single blow in Omnite. Only combinations. Learn them."

Each culture had evolved a method of personal combat. From Japan: jujitsu. From China: kempo and karate. From France: savate. From Greece: boxing and wrestling. The finest points of each art were combined in Omnite.

They circled one another. Logan struck, but was once more dumped hard to the mat. He picked himself up, wiping a thread of blood from his nose. He was stiff with pain.

"Again," said the instructor, smiling thinly. And again and again and again.

and...

He was six, and it was a play period, and Rob was scampering across the asphalt ahead of him. "I'm a Sandman," cried Logan. "Here I come after ya. I see ya, Rob! You're hiding, but I see ya. I'm gonna shoot ya now!"

Logan raised the wooden Gun. Rob was behind one of the teeter-swings, pretending to be a runner. "Bam!" yelled Logan. "'Homer! AAAAAzpow!"

Rob didn't fall. "Missed met" he shouted.

"Did not."

"Did too."

"Did not. A homer never misses anybody. Ya can't get away from a homer."

...a homer.

homer...

homer!

Up! Run! Escape!

The life drawer continued to vibrate.

Logan tensed in its metal embrace.

and...

He was nineteen, and the haunting voice sang in two-tone scale. "Oh, Black, Black, BLACK!"

He was on leave in New Alaska with a glassdancer, whose body was coated in shining scales. Outside, the forcegrown palm trees flagged the sky.

And they listened to the Cantata for Bongo in A Minor with all eighty-eight tones clear and deep from the clava drum that only Deutcher 4 could play. And there was "Single Sung Tingle Tongue Pidge" and

"Milkbelly" and "Angerman," the saga of DS with its 103 choruses:

Angerman was filled with fury, He the judge and he the jury, Gunning runner, Gunning, Gunning, With the quarry from him running. Homer in the Gun!

Angerman pursuing faster, Angerman, the angry master, Gunning runner, Gunning, Gunning, With the coward from him running, Fleeing from the Gun...

Logan felt proud to be here among his friends, in his handsome black tunic, with the glossy serpent woman caressing him in secret ways to set his blood coursing...

and...

He was fourteen, and his hand was suddenly blue. Now he had to take on the duties of adulthood to earn his way. Yesterday all had been free for the asking because he'd been a boy, but now he was a man. But that was all right, because now he could be what he had always wanted to be.

Always..

and...

He was twenty and on the hunt. The girl had been clever, crossing the river to shake him, but now she was trapped, her back to a high board fence.

Logan walked toward her.

She clawed at the boards, breaking her nails on the rough wood, then fell, huddling at the base of the fence. He raised the Gun, fired, and the homer sang in.

Logan stood there; feeling the sick emptiness flush through him. Why had she made him do this? Why hadn't she accepted Sleep? Why had she run?

...run

run...

Run!

And he was twenty-one. Suddenly, twenty-one! And his palm-flower was blinking and he was high in the threemile complex, hanging by one hand from the ledge, with Lilith laughing above him and he was in Arcade on the Table with the scapels slicing down at him and he was in the narrow corridor with Doc charging, popsickle raised, and he was on the age-warped platform under Cathedral with the cubs, a blurred bee-drone, rushing in and the drugpad shimmering at his face and he was in brined submarine darkness in the heart of Molly as the walls quaked and Whale's steglauncher was centered on his stomach and the cold green tide was rising past his chest and he was facing Warden on the ice with the wolf circle pressing in and the wind slashing and he was in the jewel cave with Jess shackled and the great block hovering on the chute and Box coming at him with that cutting hand raised and he was scabbling for the fallen Gun in the root grass with the golden mech eagles falling down the sky at him and he was on the granite steps in Crazy Horse with the Watchman at the bottom and Francis coming closer and Jess gone and he was lost forever in the endless, night-twisting caverns and he was watching Rutago pour the Hemodrone down Jessica's throat and the devilstick was singing under him and he was above the Lame Johnny with the king diving at him and he was in the foaming white wash of the rapids and he was soaring over the strands of dread microwire and the Loveroom had him and the entrance door was sliding closed before he could reach it and he was inching up Marye's Hill with the brass cannon roaring

and Jess was gone and Francis was outside the Re-Live parlor and he was...

Awake!

The drawer slid open, and Logan sat up.

The robot was at the far end of the hall, tending another customer, as Logan emerged from the Re-Live bed. He did not wait, pulling off the terminals. He checked the front of the building. Francis had moved on. The way was, for the moment, clear.

A police paravane was idling at a landing stage on the next level. Logan approached the driver, a spidery man with sorrowful eyes who wore a tight-fitting lemon uniform. Logan displayed his right palm. "Perhaps you could help me?"

"Pleased to help any citizen on Lastday," said the lawman.

"I'm running out of time. And I hate to waste it on beltruns. Could I pick up a ride with you?"

"Know just how you feel, citizen. Another year or two and I'll be on Lastday myself. Where can I take you?"

"Not far." Logan pointed off to the west. "That wooded area beyond the battleground. I'm due to meet someone there."

"Climb aboard."

They rose through puffs of cannon smoke. Below, General Burnside's men were massing for another try at the slope. Muskets crackled faintly. A drum throbbed. A skirl of fife music drifted up.

The officer in yellow sighed. "Grand sight, isn't it? Me, I always come here every year whether or not I'm on duty. Wouldn't miss the Gala. It just inspires you to see all those brave soldiers dying for what they believed in. Gives you a sense of purpose, a sense of honor. Inspiring."

"Yes," said Logan.

"There were real issues to fight for then," the officer went on. "Liberty, freedom, justice. Now things have changed. Now everything comes to us on a platter. Man's got nothing left to fight for."

Logan nodded.

"I envy those lads on that field. They were fighting for their future. And what's our future?" The officer's sad eyes grew sadder. "Sleep. For you, tomorrow. For me, next year. I used to have religion, used to figure that there was a better place beyond Sleep. I don't know anymore. Really can't be sure. I was a Zen-Baptist for awhile, then switched to—"

"Right down there," Logan cut in, pointing. "On the far side of those trees."

The paravane settled in a patch of open ground. Logan got out, waved his thanks.

"Pleased to be of service. Certain you can make it into Sleep on time?"

"I can make it."

"I could stay in the area. Give you another ride back to—"

"No, I'll be fine."

The officer shrugged, measured Logan with a long, penetrating policeman's stare, and took to the sky again.

The flaking maze entrance at old Fredricksburg needed paint. A flight of birds burst from cover as Logan approached. Obviously Jess was not here. But had she come and gone?

He examined the stairs. A set of heavy bootprints in the dust. DS boots.

Logan eased the Gun into his hand and padded noiselessly down the stairway. The platform was deserted. Quickly he moved to the screen control box, dismantled the scanner unit. Now the loading slot would no longer be monitored and it would be possible to get Jess into a car. If he could find her.

Logan returned to the surface. Had Jess understood the location of the maze? He should have given her explicit instructions. He'd have to wait and hope she could find the place. Better to wait than chance missing her. If she were still alive—and free. If.

He settled under a sheltering overhang of trees from which he could keep the entrance under observation. A bird scolded. A squirrel frisked into the open and advanced with little flirts of its tail. The squirrel frisked closer, button eyes alert and questioning. Logan killed it with a neck snap, skinned and gutted the animal and skewered it on a green stick. Hunger was a pressure in his belly; saliva filled his mouth as he thought of the cooked meat.

He removed the four remaining shells from his Gun: needier, vapor, tangler and homer. He triggered the Gun and the resultant flash from its power pack ignited a small mound of leaves and dead branches. Feeding the smokeless fire a twig at a time, Logan roasted the squirrel and ate it.

A crunching of gravel.

He smothered the blaze and took cover. The sound of breaking twigs, of running feet in brush...

Jess emerged from the woods.

He met her at the entrance.

"Hurry," she sobbed. "Someone's after me."

"DS?"

"No—" A crash of footsteps. "Two boys. They saw my hand."

"Into the maze," he said. Logan hurried her down the stairway.

"The battle...I was separated from you...thought I'd lost you...was afraid I couldn't get here—"

"Never mind," he told her. "You're here."

The platform was still deserted.

"Washington, D.C.," said Logan to the car which arrived at their summons.

Chapter 2

[« ^ »](#)

He is playing them now, circling them watching them. He knows their destination and is not concerned. The Follower is beamed in, tracking them. As they move, the light dot moves with them. The black flower in the girl's hand sends out its message. she's here, here, here. It will lead him to them. He is no longer angry or frustrated. He is sure of his moves, utterly calm. The mice are in the trap. EARLY EVENING...

"Barrier, fifty miles ahead," the car warned, slowing itself.

"Barrier, twenty-five miles ahead," it said.

"Barrier, five miles ahead."

"Barrier reached. Instructions, please."

Logan and Jess sent the car back down a tunnel.

"We walk from here," he told her.

Ahead of them the maze was blocked by a caved-in section of rock. Part of the tunnel ceiling had collapsed, choking the area with mud and rubble. They managed to skirt the obstruction by using a narrow walkway, which led them eventually to an abandoned platform.

STANTON SQUARE

The air was moist and cloying and smelled of rot. Thick vines looped themselves across the stairway which led up to the street. At the bottom of the root clogged landing Logan stopped short, drew in a quick breath. Bootprints. One set. Leading up.,

Francis must have arrived here ahead of them.

He must be waiting up there for us, thought Logan, the Gun gripped tightly in his hand.

Waiting to kill us.

The first engagement in the Little War took place at Fifteenth and K street in front of the Sheraton Bar and Grill in the heart of Washington. For over a month young people had been pouring into the city, massing for a huge demonstration to protest the Thirty-ninth Amendment to the Constitution. Like other prohibitions before it, this Compulsory Birth Control Act was impossible to enforce, and youth had taken the stand that it was a direct infringement of their rights. Bitter resentment was directed against the two arms of Governmental enforcement, the National Council of Eugenics and the Federal Birth Study Commission. Washington had no business regulating the number of children a citizen could have. Bitterness turned to talk of rebellion.

Several test cases of the new law before the Supreme Court had failed to advance the cause of the youthful rebels. Anger swept the ranks of the nation's young. In his State of the Union address President Curtin had stressed the severity of the food shortage, as world population spiraled toward six billion. He called upon the young to exercise self-control in this crisis. But the sight of the fat, overfed President standing in living units across the country, talking of duty and restraint, had a negative effect on his audience. And the well known fact that Curtin had fathered nine children made a showdown inevitable.

At 9:30 P.M. Common Standard Time, on Tuesday, March 3, in the year 2000, a seventeen-year-old from Charleston, Missouri, named Tommy Lee Cong don, was holding forth outside the Sheraton Bar. With firebrand intensity he called upon his youthful listeners to follow him in a march on the White House.

"If you wanta march, why don't you damn fool kids march home to bed?" demanded a paunchy, middle-aged heckler whose name is unrecorded.

It was the wrong place, the wrong time and the wrong mode of expression. Words and blows were heatedly exchanged.

The Little War had begun.

By morning, half of Washington was in flames. Senators and congressmen were dragged in terror from their homes and hanged like criminals from trees and lampposts. The police and National Guard units were swept away in the first major wave of rioting. Buildings were set afire and explosives used. During the confusion an attendant at the Washington Zoo released the animals to save them from flames. The beasts were never recaptured.

The Army was called in and tanks were deployed on the streets radiating from the Capitol, but there were only a few older troops left to man them. The majority of the nation's armed forces were under the age of twenty-one, and their sympathies lay with the rebels. There were massive defections from all the services; abandoned uniforms were strewn along the length of Pennsylvania Avenue.

The movement swept the states. But aside from the fighting in Washington the revolution was remarkably bloodless. Angry young people took over state capitals, county seats and city halls from coast to coast. Fearful for their lives, mayors and governors and city councilmen by the score deserted their posts, never to recover them again.

Within two weeks the reins of government lay firmly in the hands of youth. The Little War had ended. During the rioting, Brigadier General Matthew Pope authorized the use of one vest-pocket tactical atomic bomb. It was the last act of his life, and no other nuclear weapon was used in the Little War. Ground zero for the bomb was the site of the Smithsonian Institution—and the resultant crater was thereafter known as Pope's Hole. It was a remarkably dirty bomb, and for two weeks Washington was virtually uninhabitable—until the Geiger count fell low enough for observers to re-enter the city and test the atmosphere. Already the zoo animals had begun to breed.

The next year marked the beginning of the great debates on how best to solve the population crisis.

Chaney Moon had an answer. He was sixteen and blessed with a ragged, powerful voice, glittering, hypnotic eyes and a sense of personal destiny. A crowd pleaser, with the talent to make the commonplace sound novel and the preposterous seem reasonable. As proposal followed proposal his voice rose above the others in a compelling thunder. His views found solid support. In London, at Piccadilly Circus, he addressed a chanting mob of 400,000 youngsters. In Paris, speaking flawless French, he mesmerized twice that number on the west bank of the Seine. In Berlin they embraced him; Moon was the world's savior, the new Messiah. Within six months the followers of the Chaney Moon Plan numbered in the millions. It was noted by detractors that most of his people were under fifteen, but what they lacked in maturity they made up for in fanaticism.

Five years later the Moon Plan was inaugurated and Chaney Moon, now twenty-one, proved his dedication by becoming the first to publicly embrace Sleep.

Young America accepted this bold new method of self-control, and the Thinker was programmed to enforce it. Eventually all remaining older citizens were executed and the first of the giant Sleepshops went

into full-time operation in Chicago. One thing the young were sure of; they would never again place their fate in the hands of an older generation.

The age of government by computer began. The maximum age limit was imposed with the new system, and the original DS units were formed.

By 2072 all the world was young.

Logan squinted up the dark stairway. He did not delude himself; he was no match for Francis. The man was brilliant and unbeatable, an enemy to fear and respect. And he was somewhere up there ahead of them, his black tunic blending into the shadows.

Angerman was filled with fury...homer in the Gun!

Looking at Jess, Logan felt sorrow. Behind the mask of fatigue, her face was beautiful. And she seemed so young. She'd lived a full life, yet she seemed so vulnerable and young.

He waved Jess back into the tunnel gloom. She tried to protest. He hushed her lips. Then, smoke-silent, he began ascending the stairs. At the landing he slid stomach-first against the stair riser, trying to make himself small. No sound above. He didn't expect any. Francis was a hunter; he'd wait until Logan was in his sights for a clean shot. Cautiously Logan raised his head. Still nothing.

He inched up the remaining flight of stairs, taking cover at the side of the entrance. He carefully eye-combed every inch of terrain.

A swarm of gnats descended on him, but he did nothing about them. He did not move until he was positive that each leaf was a leaf, that each tree was, in fact, a tree, that each rock was made of stone instead of flesh. Then he moved.

Logan plunged through the opening into a tangle of pulped vine, rolled several feet to come up behind the bulk of a rotting log. Again he examined each feature of the surrounding area for an oddness, a stillness too still, a movement where none should be.

Old Washington.

Jungle and jungle sounds. A monkey chattered. A macaw screamed. Somewhere in the deep brush a lion rumbled.

Logan quartered the area surrounding the maze entrance; it was a choking riot of tropical growth. Giant banyans had shot out their root systems as they rose to make a foundation for other vines, ferns, creepers. Exotic plants and flowers grew from the ripe loam-mulch next to spikethorn trees. Sword grass made it impossible to see into the jungle. It was a lush confusion of dark-green, sick-green, yellow-green. Underfoot the ground bled rivulets of water—and pond lilies broke through the scum where dragonflies hovered and darted.

He walked the area slowly. Frogs and snakes plopped and slid away at his approach. Mosquitoes swarmed angrily, biting his arms and face. He was instantly mantled in sweat, and his shirt hung in hothouse damp upon his shoulders, clinging to chest and back. His trousers were wet to the knees before he had finished reconnoitering the area.

Francis was not here.

Logan returned to the tunnel's mouth. "Jess!" he called softly. The girl came up to join him. She looked about in wonder at the jungle.

Heat from the nuclear explosion stored in tidal salts beneath the earth was still leaching out after all these years. The furnace heat, combined with the high humidity, had created a tropical rain forest. Winter ceased to exist in Washington. The site had once been a swamp, and to swamp it had returned.

Above the trees they saw the sun-tinted dome of the Capitol Building—and it seemed, to Logan, a logical place to head for in seeking Ballard. They moved off across the square into the thick of jungle.

Insects plagued them: buffalo flies and sweat bees, legions of gnats and mites, spiders and ants. Spine trees slashed at their clothing; needles from fishtail palms lanced their skin. Twining poison vines entangled them—and the voice of the jungle was the voice of rhesus and chimp, of brush pig and plumed bird and razorback.

Then—another voice. Rattling, belching, hollow, infinitely evil: the growl of a Bengal. The jungle stilled. "Cat," breathed Logan. "Big one."

The hair rose along the back of his neck. He probed the deep scar on his left arm as he remembered the black leopard...

He'd been stalking lesser kudu at Bokov's in Nairobi. At Bokov's, the most famous of the great hunting restaurants, a man could escape the pallid food of the vending slots. He could hunt his own game with the knowledge that an expert chef stood ready to prepare a gourmet's meal from the fresh-killed animal. It wasn't easy. Bokov had prided himself on the number of predators kept on the preserve; anyone who wanted fresh game must run a proper risk to obtain it. He catered to the brave, and it was a mark of prowess to say "I dined at Bokov's."

Logan had paid his fee, checked out a brace of weighted hunting knives and entered the bush. He was careless, overconfident. The leopard had taken him by surprise. He remembered the black speed of it, the black savagery of it. He had almost died that afternoon...

Logan and Jess did not stir. He held the Gun, set at needler. A line of black ants marched steadily down his body from neck to elbow, making a trail of his right arm. Their home, a giant ant tree, brushed Logan's shoulder. But he did not move. Any sound at this moment and the Bengal tiger, largest of his breed, might be upon them.

The growl was closer.

"I think he's got our scent," Logan told the girl. "Stay behind me if he charges."

A striped flame of yellow-and-black erupted from the high grasses. Logan fired. The needle slug buried itself in the Bengal's chest. He fired again—and a vapor cloud closed over the beast.

The big cat twisted, stunned, growling murderously. The gas drove it back into the high brush.

The growl faded behind them.

When they reached the steps of the Capitol Building Jess was staggering. Her blouse was torn in a dozen places and blood stained the cloth. Reddening welts discolored the girl's face. Logan helped her mount the crumbling steps, avoiding the heavy tap roots which had split the stone. The mosquito drone followed them inside.

The interior of the building was little better than the jungle which surrounded it: vines had woven their intricate rope patterns through the chamber. Windows were shattered; the floor was root-pocked and damp with leaf mold.

Jess slid down with her back to a section of the wall. Logan slipped down beside her. They didn't have to say anything to one another. Ballard was not here. Sanctuary was still illusion and fantasy.

They closed their eyes, resting in the moist heat.

Above them: an oiled glide of mottled copper. Twenty-three feet, five inches of dense muscle and crushing coil. Anaconda. The snake was hungry. It had not been satisfied with its last meal; the young ibex and two large rats had only whetted the reptile's voracious appetite. Now its pebbled outer lids raised, and it considered the food below.

The anaconda glided down through leaf-stillness toward its dozing prey, lowering itself with shining stealth, tail anchored for leverage, gliding, lowering...

Jess sighed, shifted her head to Logan's shoulder, leaned back. Through the gauze of her lashes she noted the leaf branches above. One of the branches was unlike the others. One of the branches was moving. One of the branches was—

Jess screamed.

They leaped out of the reptile's path as it struck at emptiness, coiling itself into a furious looped ball of writhing chainmail.

"He'd solve all our problems," said Logan as they headed for the steps. "With him around we wouldn't need to find Ballard."

There were vultures on the cornice of the Senate Building as they neared it. Four raw-necked buzzards peering down with glutinous eyes as they passed beneath. Off in the jungle, something thrashed and died. The vultures flapped into motion.

Jessica shuddered. "Ugly," she said. "There's no place that's safe. Anywhere we go there'll be things waiting to kill us."

Logan kept pushing ahead. Ballard has to be here somewhere. I know it.

A ripe stench of hothouse peat moss, swamp water and decaying vegetation enveloped them as they crossed a wide stretch of broken ground. Several Corinthian columns of white Georgia marble lay in their path.

They moved through tumbled ruins. Here was a medley of styles: French, Roman, Renaissance, Classic Greek—gone to rubble. A trio of Ionic piers stood miraculously upright, three smooth fingers probing the sky. Entablatures and architraves were woven with vine and creeper. Scrollwork, urns, garlands, lyres, sunburst designs emerged and disappeared in the lush growth.

They didn't hear the soft pad of feet that tracked them relentlessly. They didn't see the sun-yellow night-black beast that stalked among the fallen columns. They didn't see the Bengal with the crimson

smear on its chest.

The evening sky darkened over Washington. Rain began to patter down. The patter became a roar. Rain punished the jungle, beating its way into the earth.

Jessica's foot drove into thick mud as she tried to avoid a head-high growth of pampas blocking her path. Logan caught her arm, drawing her quickly back. Carefully, he parted the swamp grass. "Cottonmouths. Nest of them."

In the dark pool: a knotted tangle of black snake bodies, blunt heads raised from the green slime with jaws wide-spread. The inside of each gaping mouth was white and cotton-soft, except for two gleaming fangs that arched from the upper jaw in twin-curved menace.

They trudged on through the downpour.

"Ballard isn't here," said Jess. "He can't be. No one can live in this place. Do you still believe he's here?"

Logan told her the truth. "I don't know."

They were in a field of high veldtgrass. The old Union Station Plaza area. The rain was a solid silver sheet. Logan saw a flicker of wet gold in the grass. He tensed. "Cat! He's back. Got our spoor."

He drew out the Gun, checked it. A homer was useless on an animal, which meant he had only a tangler to fire at the beast.

They moved off—and behind them the stalking Bengal left its wake in the grass sea.

A single jacaranda tree rose from the veldt. Logan put his back against the grainy bark and pulled Jess to him.

The tiger padded toward them.

Above the grass, in the rain gloom, alight flickered on Capitol Hill. Logan's heart leapt. "We've found him! Ballard is up there!" He pointed to the huge bulk of Indiana limestone looming against the sky. "Library of Congress. I was right. I knew he'd go for high ground."

The Bengal halted forty feet away. His yellow eyes burned from the veldtgrass. He watched the two figures, hating them.

As abruptly as it began, the rain stopped.

They edged away from the jacaranda, keeping the bole of the tree between them and the tawny cat. The grass tops discharged a chaff that itched and stung their raw faces. Jessica's breathing was ragged; she'd been pushed to the edge of physical and mental endurance.

How many others were like her? Logan wondered. Others ready to run and keep on running for life. The words of the woman on the concourse came back to him: organized. By Ballard? He tried to recall when he'd first heard the name. Then he knew. It was the song. One of those folkchants sung to double-guitar by dark minstrels in dim tobacco dens. Logan's nostrils were filled with nicotine odors as he remembered...

He's lived a double lifetime, And Ballard is his name. He's lived a double lifetime. Why can't we do the same? Ballard's lived a double lifetime, And never felt no shame. Think of Ballard Think of Ballard Think of Ballard's name.

The cat coughed.

It was closer now, off to the left, slipping through the grass, shadowing them.

They'd have a better chance if they could reach the library. Perhaps Ballard would have his own weapon and could help them deal with the cat. Also, it would have to make its attack in the open.

The Bengal veered wide, coming in from the flank to cut them off.

"Noise," said Logan. He began clapping his hands together. Jess followed this example. The tiger hesitated. The sudden noise startled it, diverted its course.

They reached the library steps, mounted them hurriedly. A scrabble of claws on limestone. The Bengal roared, charged. Logan swept up the Gun. The huge, muscled cat was in the air, jaws slavering wide as the Gun cracked.

The tangler caught the beast in midleap, filling its mouth and throat with metal filament mesh, webbing the great head in clockcoils of steel, wrapping a shiny cocoon over the striped body.

The cat smashed into Logan, driving him down. Logan's head struck the limestone wall, stunning him.

Doubled into, a spitting ball, the tiger clawed at the mesh. Bellowing in pain and frustration, it tried to loosen the thick webbing, but each convulsive movement caused the strands to constrict, work deeper into the beast's throat.

As Jess watched, helpless, the tiger thrashed closer to Logan. It had a front leg free now, and its claw scored the stone.

A tall shadow filled the doorway. Corded muscle, a lean face, a presence. Watching.

Logan shook his head dazedly. The great cat's head was inches from his, and he found himself staring into the murder-depths of the Bengal's glazing eyes. Now the free claw swung up to eviscerate the hated man-thing. Logan rolled aside. Chips of scored stone powdered his shoulder as the claw missed. He shrank back, ducking, attempting to slide along the wall away from the cat; but the tiger blocked him, trapped him in an angle between wall and balustrade. Logan kicked at the beast's head with his boot. Bone crunched; the Bengal roared in pain. Its body arched spastically. He kicked again, trying to gain room to stand.

Inner agony took the beast. Its hindquarters smashed down on Logan's left leg, pinning him. Any moment now and the claw might slice into him...

The shadow figure in the doorway moved. A forty-two-year-old man faced them. His lined face held a double lifetime; his hair was streaked with gray.

A legend. A myth.

A nightmare come alive.

"Ballard!" gasped Jess.

He was tall, dressed in dark blues, with a hunting longbow in one hand. Notched in the bow: a steel arrow. He did not speak. His eyes were flat and cold and unreadable.

The Bengal stirred, sobbed air, its free leg jerked.

The cat focused on Logan, glared at him. A rattling growl announced its hate. Logan tried to rise, but his leg was held by the beast's weight.

"Kill it!" Jess cried to Ballard. "Use the bow!"

The tall man shook his head.

Logan's Gun lay on the wet stone where it had fallen. Ballard moved to it, kicked the weapon over the edge of the steps.

Suddenly, with a final convulsive spasm, the cat died. One moment it was a straining mass of claw and sinew and dense-packed muscle; the next it was dead meat, growing cold.

Logan levered the inert body from his leg. Stiffly he got to his feet.

The bow followed him up, the notched arrow centered on his chest.

Jess looked accusingly at Ballard. "You would have let it kill him."

"Yes," he said. His voice was deep, rasping. "Indeed I would."

Logan shifted his feet, moved slightly to the left. Ballard's jaw tightened. He drew back the bowstring until the feathered tip of the arrow touched his right ear.

"But he's a runner," pleaded Jess. "He saved my life."

"He's also Logan 3, from DS," said Ballard.

The bowstring tightened. Logan looked at death.

Instantly Jess launched herself; she hit Ballard's side, jolting him. Her hands came up to scratch at his face. With a hitch of one shoulder he threw her off and she tumbled to the steps.

But Logan was moving. Taking advantage of the brief scuffle, he had darted into the gloomed interior of the library. An arrow sung past him as Logan stumbled and hit the floor, sliding. He plowed forward, trying to adjust to the lack of light. He tripped again, falling heavily as a second arrow flashed past him to bury itself in the looming mass of a bookshelf.

Logan penetrated farther into the musty depths of the building. Volumes of all sizes lay in faded, disordered piles on floor and tables. Bookshelves spewed forth their contents in shredded confusion. The place smelled of dying paper and rotted bindings. Rats and lizards scuttled away from him as he rolled behind an upended tangle of shelving.

A bright beam lanced into the dark room, a pin-light spot sweeping back and across, up and down. The light found him. Logan rolled away from it, scrambled to his feet. The light followed. He ducked as a steel arrow thunked solidly into the table next to his head.

He edged back; his hand found a square, heavy book. He hefted the volume and eased around a bulk of newspaper cases. The light angled toward him. Using all of his force, he hurled the book at the light. Pages fluttered the air as the volume winged for its target. It struck Ballard; the light danced crazily.

Yet a book was no match for a hunting bow.

Logan checked the space around him for a more effective weapon, found none, began to go through his pockets as the light stalked him. His fingers touched a forgotten bulge: the Muscle pad he'd taken from

the platform at Cathedral. Did he dare use it? The drug could tear him apart.

Ballard was advancing. There was nowhere to run. Logan knew he had no choice. If Muscle killed him it killed him; he'd be dead either way. He brought the pad up to his nose, squeezed it sharply and inhaled twice.

His body exploded. Fire scoured his tissues; his eyes blurred, tendons wrenched. He began shaking violently as the powerful drug took effect.

The light pinned him. Ballard raised the bow.

Logan was a dazzle of hot motion. He saw the arrow laze from the bowstring and float lightly toward him. He had all the time in the world to avoid it. He stepped aside to let it pass. He could feel a terrible pressure inside his body as he watched the arrow slide smoothly into the spine of a thick volume. Finally the pressure vanished and he relaxed, feeling his power.

With easy grace he stepped toward the tall figure silhouetted in the doorway. The figure seemed suspended there. In the time it took Logan to reach him, Ballard had moved the bow only two inches. Logan deftly plucked the weapon from the man's fingers and continued toward the square patch of light which was the outside world.

He saw Jess, a still, wide-eyed statue, hands to her mouth. He swept past her down the stairs to scoop up the Gun. The drug effect was easing; he was slowing.

He stopped. He covered Ballard with the Gun.

"Out," he said: "Out into the light."

"Oh...Logan," said Jess, in happy relief.

Logan could feel his heart flopping like a toad inside his chest as the drug left him. He steadied himself against the doorway as Ballard moved out into the fading sunlight.

"Tell him," urged Jess. "Convince him. Tell Ballard that you're a runner, just as I am."

"But I'm not," said Logan flatly. "I guess I never was. Ballard was right in trying to kill me."

All of the warmth drained out of Jessica's face: She blinked, as from a physical blow.

"Sit down," said Logan. "Both of you"

Jess was shaking her head slowly, unwilling to believe what she was seeing. Ballard took her arm and they sat down on the wet stone steps.

"I'm going to kill you," said Logan. "I've got to kill you."

Near them the great cat lay sprawled in a heap of soaked gold and black. Flies and gnats and ants had already gathered to contest the corpse. They crawled into its gaping mouth, over the ivory teeth, cloaking the tongue that lolled flaccidly, scummed the unblinking yellow eyes.

Logan said, "There's one thing I'd like to know." His glance flicked to Ballard's right hand, to the red flower that glowed there. "I've seen fakes, but nothing like yours. Tattoo artists, surgeons, chemists—they've all tried to duplicate the flower, but it's tamper-proof.

Yet you've lived two lifetimes and that flower is real. How? How have you gone on living?"

"One day at a time," said Ballard with the trace of a smile.

Logan leveled the Gun.

"I'll tell you," said Ballard. "It won't make any difference if you know."

Logan could not look directly at Jess, couldn't meet her eyes.

"I'm a statistical freak," said Ballard. "When I was born something went wrong in the nursery. The Hourglass malfunctioned, and the crystal it placed in my palm was imperfect. I didn't know this until I became twenty-one and my hand failed to blink. The flower stayed red, and I lived on while others died..."

"I don't need to hear any more," said Logan. He stepped to the edge of the steps, cupped his lips and shouted, "Francis!" The cry echoed off into the jungle to be smothered by heat and darkness. Logan called again. "Francis, this way! Here!"

He waited. Francis did not appear.

Ballard turned to Jess. "He's a DS man. It's his life. It's what he was trained for." He kept his voice low as Logan scanned the jungle. "There's one consolation. He'll never find the others, the runners in Sanctuary."

Jess looked intently at him. "Then—there really is a Sanctuary, a place where people can grow old, have families, raise their own children?"

"There is."

Logan shouted again, received no answer. He walked over to them.

"I know I could never make you tell me where Sanctuary is," he said to Ballard. "But after you're dead, the line will be broken."

Ballard said nothing.

Logan brought up the Gun, set on homer. The single charge would kill them both at this range. "Goodbye Jess," he said softly. "I have to do this."

Logan pulled the trigger.

His hand was stone; the trigger finger would not move. He tried to fire, could feel muscles lock in conflict in the hand. His face went gray; the hand would not obey him. He saw Jessica's face and only Jessica's face. It was a white oval against the dark building, her eyes filled with pain and accusation.

Logan slumped back against the wall, slid down it loosely. He was making sounds. But not words. The Gun dangled limply in his hand.

Ballard stood up with Jess beside him. He took the girl aside, keeping an eye on Logan. The DS man was blind to their words and movements.

"I knew he could never do it," said Jess, watching Logan with pity. "You can trust him now."

"Not at all," said Ballard.

"But... why? After what he's—"

"Logan is a man in torment. He's in a near-trance at this point, babbling, totally exhausted. Inwardly he's torn. Half of him wants to run, escape, live. The other half wants to destroy me and you, to crush the Sanctuary line and justify his entire existence. Right now I couldn't tell you which half will win." Ballard paused. "You'll have to go the rest of the way alone."

"But I love him," protested the girl. "You can't ask me to abandon him now."

"Alone," said Ballard sharply. "Listen to me. The final stage is Cape Steinbeck and"—he checked the time—"you've only twenty-eight minutes to get there. If you fail to make it they'll leave without you. Don't argue. You'll find a maze car at the platform just below Capitol Hill. Now go. I'll take care of Logan."

He turned from Jess, back to the hunched figure.

The blow which knocked him unconscious was totally unexpected.

Chapter 1

« ^ »

He breathes deeply. His eyes are closed. He knows the final stage to Sanctuary. EVENING...

Logan reached the maze platform, numb, dull-eyed, one arm around Jessica's shoulder. She was guiding him, partly supporting him.

She summoned the car.

Logan's head was down; his breathing was shallow, his face flat chalk. He seemed unaware of his surroundings as the car swept into motion.

"It's going to be all right," Jess said, holding him against her, holding him as the Loveroom had held him, talking softly to him. "We're on the way, to the last stage, to Sanctuary. No one can stop us now. A few minutes more and we can quit running. It's all over now. It's all right. Everything's all right."

Logan didn't respond.

The car burned through the deep tunnels.

"Listen—you don't have to fight yourself any longer. I had to keep Ballard from hurting you because what I said to him was true, about my loving you. It's not easy to discard a lifetime, but you've done it, Logan. You're free now."

Slowly he raised his hand, his right hand. The palm flower was blinking faster.

It wavered.

It went black:

His twenty-four hours were up.

A high, keening alarm-scream rose from the car. No—from something in the car.

"Gun," said Logan, trancelike. He jerked his head up, blinked rapidly as adrenaline roused him. His voice hardened. "Wild Gun."

"What does it mean?"

It meant a Gun in the hands of a runner, a man on black. What DS fears most. A Wild Gun. The alarm would spread in widening circles. Police units would converge. Every platform would be covered. An all-out hunt now, with DS on crash alert. The Gun was alive on every board. Dispatchers would be triangulating their position.

Logan punched the control. The car slowed

"What are you doing?"

The car stopped; the hatch opened.

"Out," said Logan.

They scrambled onto the platform. The Gun was screaming. Citizens scattered at the sound. They were isolated on the open platform. Logan summoned another car.

The Gun screamed.

A black tunic, moving toward them.

Through a bleary-mist, Logan tried to focus on the dark figure. A thick-chested man. Killing eyes. Tight mouth.

The mazecar filled the slot behind Logan.

Too late.

The DS man's Gun came up. Centered. Homered. An instant, frozen in time: A homer never misses anybody...can't get away from a homer.

...a homer.

homer...

homer!

The charge sung toward them.

Logan whipped up the screaming Gun. Fired

Two projectiles moving. Two projectiles seeking heat. Two projectiles in collision.

The double explosion hammered the tunnel walls, rocked the platform, swatted Logan and Jess to the floor.

The DS man was chopped, spilled.,

Dust sifted from the upper levels.

Logan pulled himself up, stumbled to the waiting car, pitched the screaming Gun inside, punched a destination: Omaha, Nebraska.

The car was gone. The alarm-scream faded, faded, died.

Another car. He hustled Jess aboard. Away.

"What have we gained?" she asked.

"The Gun might throw them off," he said

"We're finished, aren't we?"

No reply.

They began switching cars. On the next platform a mob was milling. A flush-faced woman pointed, "Runners!" The crowd began to converge on them.

Away.

On the next platform, police.

On the next platform a ripper scored the metal flank of their mazecar.

"Only fifteen minutes left," sobbed Jess. "They'll leave without us."

They emerged again at the next slot. A DS man was there.

Logan's thoughts raced. Young. Fresh Gunner. Not more than sixteen. Runners run. They don't attack.

Logan attacked

Sick surprise on the young hunter's face as he was struck, groaned and dropped.

Back into the maze.

"It's useless, isn't it?"

"Pittsburgh," said Logan.

"What?"

"The steel city. No people there. Maybe a chance."

MolybdenumChromiumVanadiumIronTantalumCarbonAluminumNickelSteelPittsburgh.

A great forge, a layering of bucket hoists and winches, of conveyors and gearing, punch presses, stamping machines, benders, shapers, buffers, lathes and tooling. Into its maw flowed coal and ore and electrical impulses; and out flowed uncountable metal products and hardware for a nation.

Pittsburgh: a single, automated machine, controlled by limit switches, thermocouples and programmed circuits. A vibration, a decible assault, a hot-metal stench, buried in a black shrouding of smog, cinders grit and petroleum pollution.

For more than a hundred years no man had lived in Pittsburgh; no man could live in Pittsburgh.

The hatch opened.

An acrid wash of fumed air blinded them, choked them. The area was veiled in black smoke.

"Blouse," said Logan.

Jess shook her head, uncomprehending. The metal din was impossible.

He slipped off his shirt, wadded it, jammed it against his mouth. The girl nodded, did the same. Logan got out, groped for the scanner box. He fisted the glass, shattering it. Now they could head for Steinbeck. No destination check with the box smashed. For the moment DS was blind.

He moved to the callbox to summon another car, but Jess tugged at his arm, pointing behind them. Logan spun. A maze car was in the slot, hatch opening.

Logan grabbed the girl and backed into the pistoning smoke. Their lungs burned, eyes teared and stung. They crouched behind rotating machinery.

A man dismounted from the car. DS. A circular filtermask made his face a mystery.

He could be Francis.

The man fell into a fighting crouch and swept the platform with his Gun. Cautiously he advanced into the billowing smoke haze, stopped, bent down, examined the floor of the platform. Logan went cold. There, etched in cinder grime, were their footprints. The DS man straightened and moved toward them.

Logan led Jess deeper into the hammering metal din. He pressed her down, against a casing wall, indicating that she remain there.

The DS man was closer. Francis? Logan couldn't be sure. In height and build the man resembled him. And he moved with a veteran's sureness.

Logan stood up, let the operative catch a glimpse of him through the haze, then sprinted for an overhead conveyor. The man gave chase. Logan swung out and over a narrow channel between laboring grinders. He hung there, dropped.

Heat. Intense and deadening. Logan's hand touched metal; he winced, pulling back. The inferno of noise ate into his nerves. Each breath he took sent flame into his lungs; he could taste the grit between his teeth.

On. Deeper into the vast steel city, with the DS man in his wake.

Logan darted between a stamper and a rising hoist, caught the edge of the hoist and allowed himself to be carried upward.

A nitro charge shuddered the ground below him. The hoist stopped abruptly. Logan swung onto a metal walkway, ran along it. A ripper took out a chunk of the walk ahead of him.

He's getting my range, thought Logan. He's good, really good.

Logan clattered down a wind of steps, reached bottom, ran under a screeching cranelift, kept moving.

He'd shaken the hunter. But not for long.

A weapon. He needed a weapon...

He looked about wildly. Tool crib to his right. He grabbed a metal spanner, adjusted it, removed three large nuts from the face of a tramcart, stripped off a length of flexible cable. He tied the three nuts together—into an improvised bola. It would have to do.

He pulled himself up, onto a moving belt. The DS man was gliding toward him on another belt, back turned, probing the smoke curtain with his Gun. The belts moved in opposite directions, bearing great

packing cases to a mile-distant chute. Logan ducked behind a case, hugged the wood, calculating.

The belts rumbled along at an even five miles an hour: Their intersect point was a gamble, but Logan would take it.

Bessemer sparks showered him from a spill of molten metal fountaining into a huge cradle. Fumes poisoned him. How close was the man? Logan kept his head down behind the crate. He counted to four. Stood up.

The DS operative was just across from him, turning in his direction. Quick!

The bola was a blur of rotating steel weights above Logan's head.

The Gun was on him, centering.

Logan released the spinning bola.

The Gun did not fire. It fell from the hand of the black-suited figure as the bola hit, wrapped and stunned the hunter. Arms pinioned to his body by the looped cable, he lost balance. The filtermask was dislodged. Not Francis.

Perhaps he screamed. In the cacaphony of cylinders and gears and pistons Logan could not tell.

The man cartwheeled down, legs wide, was deflected by a catwalk, continued his plunge into a bucket hoist, which caught his body, trundled it forward for a moment, over a pulley crest, then downward, into the chewing maw of the city.

He was gone.

Light was dying in the Florida Keys as Logan and Jess emerged at last from the maze. The western sky was a pale slate color, deepening into dusk; red streaks of cloud veined the horizon. It would be night soon.

Against this sky they saw the warehouses and storage sheds of Cape Steinbeck, spread over a flat expanse of concrete. The area was gray and lifeless.

"Sanctuary?" There was deep disappointment in Jessica's tone.

Logan swung in a slow, wary circle. No sound. A watching silence. He knew eyes were examining them, weighing them.

They began to walk toward the buildings.

An amplified voice broke the silence. It crackled over the concrete. "Halt! Identify yourselves.

The two paused. Logan sighed with exhaustion. In a dead voice he said, Logan 3—1639."

The girl said, "Jessica 6—2298"

"Password?"

"Sanctuary," said Logan.

"You are entering a minefield. Do not proceed further. A guide will take you through."

All of the energy had left Logan's wracked body. He was drugged with fatigue, sore in every muscle; his bones ached, and simple breathing was an effort. He could not move his legs with any precision. He shuffled, stumbled.

"Stand still!" cracked the amplified voice.

Logan stood by Jess, dazedly, as a figure detached itself from one of the shadow-draped buildings and approached them. The man slowed, walked in a weaving pattern across the flat ground.

He came up to them scowling. Hardness was stamped into his features. Hardness was in the line of his shoulders and the set of his head on his thick neck.

"Took you long enough. Now, do exactly what I tell you. There's less than seven minutes left and no time for talk. We're on the edge of the minefield. A wrong step will take your legs off. Understood?"

Logan nodded dully.

"Then follow me," said the man.

Logan's legs were weighted. They were unyielding things which did not wish to obey him. As he followed the guide he kept losing his balance, righting himself, then almost falling again. If he fell he would be blown to pieces. Walking was impossibly difficult, one of the hardest feats he had ever been called upon to perform. Jess, too, was staggering with exhaustion.

Finally they were clear of the mined area.

They entered a long storage building, passed between high, crated objects.

Logan tried to focus his eyes on the objects. Silvery. Silvery shapes in shimmering white webbing—no, fiber packing. Numerals and letters on the sides: TITAN...STARSCRAPER...FALCONER...

He knew what they were. Missiles. Crated and stacked and abandoned.

Again into the open.

Logan narrowed his eyes. Across an unbroken stretch of tarmac: a tall gantry, supporting a massive gleaming needle.

A passenger rocket!

Logan tried to weave a logical fabric from threads of confused thought. Cape Steinbeck, the space storage center at the tip of the Keys. A dead section. Like Cathedral. Like Molly. Like Washington. All stages on the Sanctuary line. Steinbeck, where the rockets and the missiles were mothballed when space flight was abandoned. Yet they were using a rocket which meant that Sanctuary must be in space. But how? Where? The planets in this solar system would not support life. The stars had never been reached. How?

"Keep moving," said the guide.

They started toward the waiting rocket. Steam wisped from its lower stage. Frost condensed and evaporated from liquid oxygen and hydrogen stored inside, ready to be converted into raw power.

Logan felt a darkness sifting down. A darkness within himself; a darkness from the heavy sky above him; and a darkness from a man who wore it. Wore the darkness. Wore black. A tall man, coming. A hunter in the tunic of night. Angerman, the judge and jury...

At last, as Logan knew it had to be. At last—Francis.

A sense of doom and despair settled around him; the feeling was crashing, unsupportable. He had never experienced anything like it.

Jess saw the DS man, choked out a small cry.

Logan pushed her toward the guide. "Take her. Get her aboard. I'll try to stop him."

The hard-faced man did not hesitate. He gripped Jessica's arm, propelled her toward the racket. She fought to free herself. "No, Logan! No!"

He ignored the fright and the urgency and the entreaty and the pain in her voice and he screamed silently, Hear me, Francis. Hear me. I want to TALK to you. There's so much I have to say to you.

A shudder rippled his body; the ground was sponge rubber; he kept sinking into it, tottering, pushing himself. He slipped to one knee, dragged his body up with clogging slowness. Dark was swimming in at him. He blinked it back.

The DS man was close now. Face set in rigid lines. Eyes cold, flat.

There was so much to say to Francis. That the world was coming apart, that it was dying, this system, this culture. That the Thinker was no longer able to hold it together. A new world would be formed. Living is better than dying, Francis. Dying young is a waste and a shame and a perversion. The young don't build. They use. The wonders of Man were achieved by the mature, the wise, who lived in this world before we did. There was an Old Lincoln after the young one...

Exhaustion hacked at Logan. His breath rattled in his throat.

Francis filled the sky. The Gun was in his hand.

Can I speak? Can I tell him? Will he listen?

Words. Sound. Logan spoke. Brokenly. In patches.

"World...dying...can't last...I saw...the dead places...heart of the system is...rotten...There'll be more...runners...more of them...You can't stop them...can't...We...We were wrong, Francis...death no answer...we must...build, not destroy...tired of killing...wrong...tired...I—I."

A roaring. A great humming roar in Logan's head. The rocket leaving without him? Let it go, then. Let it find Sanctuary. The roaring pulsed, intensified. And with it, black. A wave of ruining black that took him, filled his mouth and eyes. Black sound. And Francis, black in black. And the Gun...

Someone was speaking. Someone was commanding him to open his eyes.

Francis stood above him. The DS man leaned over, pulled Logan up. The Gun was in its holster, the homer unfired.

Francis began to change. What was this? Am I really conscious? The skin, the very bones of Francis began to change; the face was being stripped away. The nose was altered, the jaw, the line of cheekbone. Francis was...

Francis was Ballard!

"I couldn't tell you back in Washington," the tall man said. "I didn't trust you then. Even when you failed to use the Gun I didn't trust you. Now I do."

The logic was suddenly there for Logan. Ballard would need to disguise himself among the young in order to move about in the world. Every few years he'd need a new face, a new disguise. And what better disguise than that of a Sandman?

"I haven't been able to help too many of you," Ballard was saying, "because the only runners I can help are those I can reach. My organization is still a small one."

"But Doyle...back in Cathedral?"

"I gave him a key, told him to go for Sanctuary, but you were too quick for us, and the cubs got him."

"Then—it was you, on the steps at Crazy Horse."

Ballard nodded. "I wanted to stop you then."

"But how...how do you..." Logan tried to frame questions, but his tongue would not function.

"I have only limited access to the Thinker. I control parts of the maze, the dark parts, but I'm learning more each day. The system is dying. The Thinker is dying. Someday you and Jess and the others will be able to come back—to a changed world. A good, strong one. I'm working for that, widening the cracks in the system, doing what I can. There are few I can trust. Mainly I have to work alone."

"And—Sanctuary?"

Ballard was helping Logan toward the rocket. "Argos," he said. "The abandoned space station near Mars. It's a small colony now, still crude, cold, hard to live on. But it's ours, Logan. Yours now. The jump for Argos is Darkside—on the Moon."

He drew Logan, stumbling, to the boarding ladder. Jess was there., waiting, tears in her eyes.

Jess...Jess, I love you!

Hands reached for him, gentled him aboard, fastened him into the launch seat. A crisp crackle of voices beginning the countdown. And in the final second, as the port closed, Logan saw Ballard giving last-minute instructions to the hard-faced guide who had led them through the minefield.

The port sealed itself.

A great shuddering noise possessed the rocket. Logan felt himself danced by energies and tremors; Jess was smiling at him; a weight pushed him down. He closed his eyes.

Ballard watched the tide of orange envelop the lower stage of the rocket. The needlecraft poised, rose ponderously, gaining speed as it left Earth. Faster now. A thunder—as it began its long run down the Atlantic Range, safe from the eyes of men.

Ballard turned, a tall, lonely figure blending with the night, and walked back over the cold ground.

Chapter 0

The rocket was climbing on a golden flame, bound out and away for Darkside.

And *SANCTUARY*.

Book 2 Logan's World

ARGOS

[« ^ »](#)

Argos died twice.

Beyond the 21st century, when the angry young had taken control of Earth, and space travel had been aborted, she was left to die in orbit, dwarfed by a silent Mars, her mute sun mirrors capturing energy without purpose, her womb-hub empty of life—an immense, spoked wheel turning in endless black.

Until the runners found her.

The man called Ballard knew about Argos, knew that she could provide shelter to those who fled the Sandmen and sought Sanctuary. He helped organize the lifeships that fired up from Cape Steinbeck carrying the vital stuffs of existence—hydrogen, nitrogen, carbon—to feed the arteries of the great wheel in the sterile frontier darkness beyond Earth. And, with each silver ship, eager runners arrived on Argos, free from the Sandman's Gun, to spawn fresh life in this new sea of space.

Children were born who would never know Earth. A hospital was built; fields of wheat, corn and rice were cultivated; a school was established—and fruit trees bloomed under a ribbed-glass sky.

At staggered intervals, as Ballard perfected his Sanctuary Line, more ships arrived, swelling the colony's population to more than three thousand men, women and children.

Then the lifeships stopped coming.

As a full year passed without supplies, fear began to permeate the colony. Argos was not self-sufficient; she could not survive without the stuffs of Earth.

Two years without ships.

Three. Then four.

Medical supplies were exhausted. Plague and death ran the wheel. The colony dwindled—to a thousand...to five hundred...to a hundred...to a handful of steel-tough runners and their families.

Logan and Jessica were among them, ten-year veterans of Argos—the legendary ex-Sandman and the woman who'd shared his desperate run for Sanctuary. They had a son now: Jaq, born on the wheel eight years ago, with the strength of his father in his pale green eyes, his mother's grace in movement, a boy who thrived on Earth history, who listened, entranced, to Logan's dark tales of a computerized world. To Jaq, the man named Ballard was a god...

Six years without ships.

Crisis time. The fields sere and withered. Water at a minimum. Food running out.

And one small lifeship to take them back.

Only a dozen could undertake the voyage. Lots were drawn, the final twelve chosen, the ship prepared. On board with nine others: Logan, Jessica and Jaq.

Fireup! Away...away.

Away.

Behind them, in the cool depths of uncaring space, Argos began her second death.

In Old Washington, Logan discovered why the ships had stopped coming. Sandmen had penetrated and smashed the Sanctuary Line at Cape Steinbeck. Just one step ahead of them, Ballard escaped to Crazy Horse Mountain in the Dakotas, to the Thinker. There, in a final gesture of rebellion against the system, he had sacrificed himself to destroy the vast computer-complex—bringing the cities down with it. Mazecars froze on their tracks; beltways were stilled; the time crystals in the hand of each citizen no longer ticked away human life.

The power of the Sandman was broken.

Citizens poured out of the tumbled, lifeless cities into the sudden reality of a raw world. The City People, young, pampered, given every luxury by their computerized life-system, had now become the Wilderness People, bewildered and cast adrift in a harsh new environment.

For them, the illusion of freedom had turned to the reality of nightmare.

RUN!

[« ^ »](#)

Logan was running.

No longer the hunter, he was the hunted. Black on black: his charcoal-dark uniform blending into night, feet stabbing the earth as he ran, dry-mouthed, for life.

The men of Deep Sleep were close behind him, relentless, kill-trained State assassins who terminated runners with the cold dispatch of the Thinker itself. Sandmen who hated him for what he'd done to them. "A Sandman doesn't run, Logan! He accepts Sleep proudly. You've betrayed the system, made fools of us all—and we'll homer you down for it, Logan!"

Homer! It could follow him anywhere, that singing charge of pain and death, seeking the heat of his body as a bee seeks pollen, leaping and twisting as he leaped and twisted through the night spaces of the city.

Yet, they had not fired. They were savoring the hunt, tasting it like a fine wine, moving in tireless oiled motion behind him, knowing he could not outrun them or the glowing death they carried at their belts.

Why is the runner always weak, exhausted, fighting to stay afoot—while his hunters are calm, easy-breathing, unruffled? Is it fear which quakes his bones, triphammers his heart; the fear of impossible odds, fear of the homer's ultimate pain?

Logan feared. He was brave, resolute, superbly-conditioned, and had faced the possibility of death in many forms, but now he feared. When a homer leaves the barrel of a Sandman's Gun there is no way to deflect it from its deadly course. It finds you, hits you, rips and unravels you in a wash of searing, nerve-tortured pain. Any man would fear such a death...

Logan circled up through the mile-high complex, a frenzied insect caught in a maze of steel-and-metal. He was weaponless; the Gun had been lost to him a million years ago somewhere in the vastness of the city. A million-year run! His mouth gaped in pained laughter. Had he really been running that long? No wonder, then, that exhaustion burned fire-hot in his chest, that the world rippled in and out of focus, that his legs were loose and stupid under him, betraying his body, refusing to obey the hard command: run...run...run!

Run!

Logan fell.

"You all right?" Voice, filtering down to him. Hand, reaching for him. "Up you come now, Sandman. Easy does it."

Logan swayed, holding fast to the shoulder of a reed-thin citizen, blinked at him, held out his right palm.

"Your flower's blacked, has it? Then you're a runner!" The voice turned icy. "A stinking runner!"

A fist smashed into Logan's face. He lurched back, blood threading his mouth.

"Here he is! Here!" The man was shouting, telling the Sandmen where to find Logan. He swung dizzily away, into a snake-twist of corridor darkness.

Another lift up. A riser to the next quad level. Then, in a stagger of steps, and a cool rush of night air, through an irised exit onto the roof of the mile-high complex.

Logan's run was over. He had climbed to the summit of this metal mountain.

Around him, on all sides, the city spread pulsing, sensuous wings of light. Far below, the multicolored shimmer of Arcade devoured darkness with tongues of crystal fire.

Measured voices on the quad level directly beneath him. Sharp commands. The Sandmen were only seconds away. Logan spun toward the roof door.

Jessica was there.

Her hair glimmered like spun copper, the lights of the city caught in its soft strands. Her face was carved ivory against the night. She was beautiful.

"You need help," she said.

"No one can help me now," he told her. "Not even you."

She rippled and changed. And Jaq was there in her place.

"They're going to kill me," the boy said.

"Not you!" cried Logan. "You're young. Your crystal's blue!"

"I have no crystal." And Jaq held up his right palm. It was clear.

Logan started toward his son, wanting him to understand everything, wanting to tell him he was sorry he had ever been a Sandman, ever hunted and killed runners like himself, ever used the Gun...

But the Deep Sleep men were there, on the roof, weapons out and aimed at his son.

At Jaq!

The boy backed away from them, fear rising like smoke in the pale green of his eyes.

"It's me you want!" shouted Logan.

They ignored him, closing on Jaq in a tightening circle. The boy was at the roof's edge; he could retreat no further.

Hands fisted, Logan threw himself at the Sandmen. A backhanded blow from the barrel of a Gun stunned him, dumped him to the roof. He raised his head to scream.

Too late. Too late for everything.

They'd forced Jaq over the edge—and the boy fell in soundless, dream—spinning slow motion, doll-like, down...down...down...into the flame-sharp lights of Arcade.

The Sandmen swung their rifled eyes to Logan.

"Homer him," said their leader, softly.

And the charge leapt from a Gun, sang in a hot yellow arc toward Logan. Who stood to meet it.

Astonishing pain. A ripped dazzle of seared nerves as Logan collapsed in upon himself, fingers clawing air. His body exploded, flared out in ribbons of shocked flesh, into a thousand separate units of anguish. He was only pain and agony and sundered bone...

He was awake.

"You all right?"

Logan flinched back from the citizen's question.

Not his question, not his voice. Jessica's.

She was touching him with warm, gentle hands, smoothing away the nightmare.

"The Sandmen," said Logan, staring up at her, his face flushed and sweating. "They killed Jaq."

"There's no more killing. The cities are dead, Logan. The system is dead. When will you believe that?"

"I believe it," he said.

"Then why do you keep having these dreams?"

He shook his head. "I don't know..." He looked at her. "This dream was different. In all the others, I was the only one they hunted. In this one, Jaq died."

"I wish you could stop having them."

"I'm worried about Jaq. How is he?"

"A little better today, I think. But he's still—"

"He's not better," said Logan flatly, rising from the bed to slip on a velvrobe. "And he's never going to be until I do what Jonath told me to do." A moment of silence. "I'm going to Stoneham."

"He'll...want to see you before you go."

Logan nodded.

He walked through the sagging wooden house to his son's room. The mammoth three-story Colonial mansion facing the banks of the Potomac floated like a landbound ship on acres of green lawn, now gone to seed and wild growth. In its day it had served the elite of Washington; its vaulted, high-ceilinged rooms and wide hallways had echoed to week-long parties and lavish state dinners. Now it was a time-eroded relic to an unremembered past.

As he moved toward his son's room Logan thought again of the irony in this situation: Jaq had been one of the strongest boys on Argos, impervious even to the plague and sickness which had devastated the colony. Yet now, within a dozen sunsets of their return to Earth, the boy had fallen victim to an illness which spread fever through his young body, which softened bones and thinned muscles, leaving him weak and shaking, unable to function.

Logan had gone to Jonath who, at twenty-seven, was the oldest of the new breed of Wilderness People, serving as their leader in this rugged world beyond the womb cities.

"What is it, what's wrong with him?" Logan had asked.

"Earth is what's wrong with him," said Jonath. "Your boy has no immunity to protect him from a virus which our adult bodies would instantly reject. I would say he has contracted a form of viral pneumonia, an infant's disease."

"How do I cure it?"

"You'll need Sterozine. A nursery medroom would carry it, but the primary nurseries are all inside the cities and impossible to reach."

"Why impossible?"

"When the cities fell, the Scavengers took over. Ex-cubs...gypsies...looters...They run in packs. No one goes in or out. The People need food and supplies from the cities, but the Scavengers are in total control. You'd never reach a primary nursery alive, and even if you did they'd never let you leave. They carry Fusers, and burn down anyone who penetrates inner-city territory."

"There are secondary nurseries...Sunrise...Stoneham..."

"Yes," said Jonath. "In your place, I'd try them. But their med supplies may have already been stripped."

"It's a chance," Logan had said. "If Jaq's not better by tomorrow, I'll try Stoneham."

Jonath nodded. "...a chance."

"He may not need the drug," Logan had told him. "Jess thinks that she can pull him through this. I hate leaving them alone." He sighed. "Couldn't you be mistaken?"

"Easily," said Jonath. "I'm only guessing. We'd need a med machine to be certain. Without a full diag there's no way to be sure, but all the symptoms..."

The symptoms: weakness, fever, flushed features, twitching muscles...They were all in evidence as Logan looked down at his son. He leaned closer, touched the boy's fevered cheek.

Jaq's eyes fluttered open. He smiled, a pained stretching back of his pale lips.

"I'm going to find something that will make you well," said Logan. "You'll be strong again. Soon."

"I—can't be alone." A note of panic.

"You won't be. Jess will stay with you until I'm back."

"I hate being sick," Jaq mumbled softly. Again the pained smile. "But I love you, Logan!"

Strange; this business of loving. Sandmen never loved. Logan had grown up believing that love was a useless emotion shared by cowards, by runners who refused to face their responsibilities to the system. He'd heard them say they loved one another, before he'd Gunned them. He'd terminated them with the word still on their lips. And felt contempt.

Did you "love" in a glasshouse? Sex wasn't love. Did you "love" a pairmate?

When you were weak and small and needed it, the Loveroom gave it to you (Mother loves you...loves you...loves you...) but, until Jessica, he hadn't thought he'd ever share it. Not Logan 3, a master of the Gun, a hunter of weaklings and cowards and misfits. Now, miracle of miracles, he had two human beings to love and who loved him: his wife and his son. Husband...wife...son. Old labels, worn by those who had rejected the system and gone back to ancient customs. Ugly, how the Thinker had twisted everything, distorted emotion, crippled and warped. Jaq had been right about Ballard: he was a god. He'd killed the Thinker...

Jess walked out to the paravane with him. Logan wore a dark blue citizen's tunic, open at the neck, vested in leather.

"You'll be back before dark?"

"Yes," he said, climbing into the control pod, activating the gyroblades, rear blade first, then overhead. The blades shivered into motion, began revolving in a vibrating blur, feeding power into the small craft.

They were on a section of high grass facing the Potomac, and the afternoon sun flashed fire-colors off the wind-sculptured rocks scattered along the dry riverbed. Before the Little War, before climactic changes had blocked off the Potomac, it had flowed richly with water. Must have been beautiful then, thought Logan, this spot facing the river. So much had changed...

"He's sleeping now," Jess said, her voice keyed to the rising hum of the blades. "He'll be all right until you get back."

Logan leaned out to kiss her.

She was crying.

Afraid I won't find the drug, Logan told himself. Afraid I'll be too late. But I'll find it! Jess, I'll find it!

Trim level: corrected. Gyro controls: stable. Power curve: normal. Logan engaged vertical thrust—and the paravane soared gracefully upward, quickly attained cruising altitude, then tipped westward in a singing rush of blades.

Toward Stoneham.

STONEHAM

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Each major city area had its secondary nurseries, its Stoneham and Sunrise units; Logan had terminated a female runner once, near Stoneham, in the Angeles Complex. ("Please don't hurt me, Sandman! I want to live. I'm only twenty-one...that isn't really old...can't you...") And the homer leaving the Gun. And the girl scabbling along the high fence, the horror in her eyes. And the homer—

Stop it!

Logan shut down the memory.

The primary nurseries were much larger, and handled most of the city infants; these outside units were designed to take up the overflow, but were complete in themselves. There was more than a good chance he'd find Sterozine at a secondary unit.

Adults had no use for the drug. It would fetch nothing on the Market, and would be a useless item to outland looters.

A good chance...

Had his mission been less critical Logan would have enjoyed the flight to Stoneham. The sky was a serene blue, the green land rich and rolling beneath him—and the paravane was sound and responsive, thanks to his work on it over the past seven days since he and Jess had found the machine, abandoned outside the city-ruins. It had been damaged in the city's fall, had fluttered down, broken-bladed, to kill its pilot. Logan's mechanical skills, honed in his years on Argos, had quickly restored it to perfect working order.

Fuel wasn't a problem, since the craft's solar-charged unit would provide unlimited range, and Logan was fully confident that he would encounter no malfunction in flight.

But thoughts of Jaq kept darkening his mind, canceling out the natural joys of soaring above the land...

Then he sighted the heavy mass of bulked gray stone rising from a hill to his left. Stoneham.

Logan cut primepower on the aft blade, swinging the paravane at a sharp arc downward and to the left, clearing the nursery's microwire fence. He gentled the craft to a smooth touchdown in the central court area, killed the blades, slid free of the controls.

Incredible silence. His landing had set off no alarm systems; no automated guards rushed toward him; no robotic defense devices were activated. He remembered running with Jess from just such a nursery as this in the Dakotas—through a chaos of sirens and bells—fighting his way free of machines and closing gates and menacing robots.

This time, nothing. He was free to walk inside.

Yet Logan felt uneasy, prowling the long, dust-silent corridors, searching for the Medroom. He'd hated growing up in this sterile environment, denied all outside human contact for the first seven years of his life. His talk puppet had been his only real friend ("I'll never forget you, Loge...never forget you!") and his dream of becoming a Sandman had sustained him. The pride he'd felt in the word in those days! Sandman! The psyc machines had brainwashed him thoroughly from birth. If it had not been for Jess...

Suddenly an old memory clicked into place for him: Playroom...Delivery-room...Cribroom...Medroom. That was the way Autogoverness had taken him whenever he got sick, rolling along the hall with him, clucking at him in her soulless metal voice, telling him he'd soon feel fine, just fine.

Logan found the Playroom, entered—and instantly fell into a defensive crouch. Something was alive inside the room, flickering at him, away from him, at him again.

Logan smiled. In entering, he'd simply dislodged one of the vibroballs, and it was dancing its self-energized puzzle pattern from ceiling to floor. He reached out, caught and boxed it, moved quickly on.

The Deliveryroom. Logan stared with fresh awe at the large Hourglass dominating the chamber; it had always fascinated him. Inside: the glittering time crystals ready for implant in the palm of each new infant brought to Nursery. Logan closed his right fist around his own dead crystal, remembering the sick shock which had run through his body when his timeflower had begun to blink red-black...red-black...red-black...telling him he had just twenty-four hours before Last-day.

Damn the Thinker and the horrors it had inflicted!

He turned to enter the Cribroom.

Logan was used to death; he'd dispatched it to others, had seen his friends die in Sleepshops, had faced massed death on Argos—but what he found here, in this dank, silent room, stunned him.

In each of the small, bullet-shaped cribs lining the four walls lay a tiny skeleton. Here were the delicate bones of a hundred babies who had died when the Thinker died, oxygen cut off, vital fluids denied them. Their small white skulls mocked Logan with dark, eyeless sockets as he moved past them toward the med supplies.

He found another corpse in the Medroom. An Autogoverness lay on her side, her dozen jointed arms

frozen, rust already gathering in thin, red lines along her seams. In her metal fingers she grasped vials and bottles. Apparently she'd gone for the medicine in a vain effort to revive the dying infants, unaware of the fact that nothing she could do would save them. Logan stepped over her, tense and nervous.

Would he find Sterozine here?

Hurriedly, he ripped open panels, pored over shelved items, discarding, sifting, searching...At least the Medroom had not been stripped. If a secondary nursery carried Sterozine a supply should be here.

Teromitcone...Hydrafane...Ritlan-C...Eztem-F...

But no Sterozine.

Only a primary nursery carried the drug Jaq needed.

Logan knew he had no choice now.

He would face the Scavengers.

THIRTEEN

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"Kill him."

"But why?"

"He's unlucky for us."

"Luck has no foundation as a realistic belief concept."

Lucrezia didn't argue. They were thirteen and the new rider made them thirteen, which was unlucky. She would do it herself if Prince would not.

It was newly-dark—the night prior to Logan's death dream—and they had camped in the dry bed of a ravine, ringing a fire that painted their rouged faces in flickering shades of red and orange.

Lucrezia reached into the saddle of her jetcycle, took out a soft leather scabbard lined in blue velvet, removed a needle-thin jeweled dagger from the scabbard, and returned to the circle of outlanders.

The thirteenth rider, thin and shag-haired, sat cross-legged at the fire. He was tearing at the leg of the hyena they'd cooked for supper, tossing aside bones as he cleared them of flesh. Totally engrossed in filling his lean stomach after a long fast, he ignored Lucrezia as she moved up behind him.

"You're unlucky for us," she said quietly, and drove the thin silver blade into the back of his neck, at the upper tip of the spinal column.

He died instantly, spilling loosely sideways into the dirt. His eyes remained open, staring at the fire he could no longer see. The others looked at his sprawled body, then at Lucrezia.

"I should have poisoned him," she said to them, a white-toothed smile making her face radiant in the firelight. "That would have been more appropriate. And far more romantic."

Now they were twelve again, outlanders from the New York Complex, nine males and two other

females, dressed the way Lucrezia had taught them, to dress in plumed hats, in velvets, with lace at their throats, heavy gold chains strung at their necks—with jeweled swords and Florentine daggers on the saddles of their jetcycs. When the New York Complex fell they'd raided an ancient museum, finding these clothes and the Borgia history that went with them. As their leader, Anan 9 dubbed herself Lucrezia, and named her pairmate Prince, in honor of Cesare, most notorious of the Borgia males.

Now Prince said, "I'm bored. We need to claim again." Playfully he swung his burnweapon toward a dark stand of thick brush fronting the bank, thumbed the charge. The brush ignited in a gout of flame, charred away to dead ash.

"Tomorrow," said Lucrezia, "we'll ride the Potomac."

DAKK

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It was late afternoon when Logan reached the city. He brought the paravane down a half-mile short of the ruins. No use alerting anyone this early; they'd know about him soon enough. He used loose branches to screen the craft; if he got out he'd need it again.

If he got out.

What are your chances? Maybe fifty-fifty. Wrong! Ninety-ten against. You're unarmed, alone, invading their territory. All right, ninety-ten. But unless I get the Sterozine, Jaq has no chance.

Logan entered the heart of the Complex through one of the abandoned maze tunnels, moving with Sandman's stealth, making certain his feet did not trample the dead brush littering the alum flooring. A snapped twig would echo like a nitro shot in here.

The tunnel's arching mirror-surface was dulled by dust; afternoon sun bled through finger-thin cracks in the overhead metal. A shadowy bulk loomed ahead of Logan, half filling the tunnel: a dead mazecar, overturned like a giant metal insect in the silent gloom, its yellowed tonneau split and shattered, controls red with six years' rust. It was occupied. By two skeletons.

Logan stepped around them. After the infants in Nursery, he experienced no shock reaction whatever to the remains of these two dead citizens. He knew he would see many more inside the city—and if the Scavengers had their way, his own skeleton would join the others.

He came out of the tunnel onto a maze platform: Level Six, Quadrant K, Platform J-211. Industrial Sector. Which meant he could cut through Sandman Headquarters and take a slidechute to Arcade. The nearest primary nursery was just beyond that point. He'd have to risk the chute; if he tried to walk it they'd spot him for sure.

Now Logan entered the city proper, vast and deserted in the fading rays of the late-afternoon sun. No, not deserted. The Scavengers were here, and would instantly reveal their presence if he miscalculated. But if he moved shadow-quiet to his destination, senses attuned to the slightest danger, he might just make it.

Logan was amazed at how quickly wilderness was claiming the city. Already, in just half a dozen years, vines and creepers were choking the beltways, and rank grass thrust up in profusion between cracked pavements. The city would soon be jungle, like Old Washington itself.

The towering gray monolith of DS Headquarters disturbed Logan, symbolizing all too forcefully what he had been and done in the service of the Thinker. He'd been one of the DS elite, with a truly impressive record of kills. No runner escaped his Gun. How many human beings had he proudly Gunned in his years of city service—brave, rational citizens who desperately wanted to live beyond their twenty-first birthdays?

Logan shut down the memories; it was useless to feel guilt for his past. Just be glad that it's over, that the killing is done and that you're back in the city on a mission to save a life, not to take one.

He passed through the dead brain-center of the report room, once alive with flashing computer readouts and humming alert boards. Runners had no chance against a system such as this, yet the instinct for survival kept them going—and some, a scattered few, actually made it to Sanctuary. Thanks to Ballard—and Jessica—Logan had been one of those few.

He stopped now at the Gunroom, impulsively reached out to pick up a small silver cylinder. He weighed it in his hand. Ammopac. Notched into its six chambers: tangler, ripper, needler, nitro, vapor—and homer. Logan slipped the cylinder into his tunic. Not that he'd ever use these deadly charges again, but this would satisfy the consuming curiosity of Jaq. On Argos, the boy had often questioned him about the Gunpac. Now he could see one for himself. A token of the city.

The slidechute would be tricky. It was safe enough, with its antigrav force unaffected by computer breakdown; the chute would still carry him to the Arcade area quickly and efficiently, but he must be very careful not to bump the narrow sides with foot or elbow. As in a maze tunnel, the smallest sound would be greatly amplified.

Logan was careful. The sensation of gently floating downward was akin to freefall in the ships: pleasant but somewhat unsettling.

On the lower Arcade Level he checked the outer terrain before stepping free of the chute. Clear. Silent. No movement.

Maybe Jonath had exaggerated the number of Scavengers in the city, or perhaps they'd abandoned this one entirely, gone on to richer pickings. Certainly he could detect no sign of them.

But Logan kept his senses at hyper-alert status; he could not afford to relax.

A shadow within shadows, he moved through Arcade.

The outlanders rode the Potomac. They'd enjoyed themselves earlier in the day with a Wilderness group near the Library of Congress, forcing the men to watch while the nine Borgia males stripped and assaulted the Wilderness females. It had just been high-spirited fun until one of the males broke free to a jetcycle, jump-started the machine, and tried to run down three of the Borgias. The jetcyc belonged to Prince, and Lucrezia could sympathize with her pairmate's anger over the theft—and had helped garrote the rogue with a silken belt taken from a Wilderness girl.

The fellow had kicked like a fish, and it had all been most amusing once he'd been caught and dealt with. But Prince's machine had been badly damaged when it had struck a banyan root and overturned. That meant they were short a cycle, and Prince had to double-ride behind Ariosto.

Which explained his foul mood on the Potomac run.

The riverbed was treacherous with boulders and silt-hidden logs, but the Borgia riders enjoyed the risk, weaving their machines around each obstacle with obvious delight, challenging one another in brief, brutal contests of speed and agility.

Prince took no pleasure in any of this; he was saddlesore, anxious to dismount.

"Camptime!" he yelled. And, one by one, the riders cut power, the whine of their jets keening down to silence. Prince eased himself stiffly to the ground as Lucrezia, her face tight with fury, roared up to him. She'd been leading the riders and was the last to note that the others had stopped.

"You pisswhelp!" she screamed, and struck Prince across the face with a short leather riding crop, splitting his skin. "Nobody calls camptime but the leader, and I lead here!"

Prince whined, nursing his wound. "I'm hungry. My bones ache from riding backsaddle. There's no reason not to camp."

"No reason except I say we don't," said Lucrezia. She raised an imperial hand to the others. "Riders up!"

The outlanders remounted their machines, jump-fired them to life again.

"You coming—or staying?" the leader asked Prince. He looked defeated as he moved toward Ariosto's machine.

Jaq had slept all afternoon and was awake when his mother came to bring him water. His throat was dry all the time now, and the water didn't help much—but Jess told him he'd be feeling a lot better just as soon as Logan got back with the medicine.

"Do Earth people still die?" he asked her.

Jess smiled. "Of course. Everyone dies sometime. It's just that there are no Sandmen any more to force you to die before your normal time."

"What's my normal time?"

"I don't know that, Jaq." She smiled again, but there was a shade of concern behind her eyes. "Maybe you'll live to be a hundred. In old, old times some people lived that long."

"On Argos everyone died quickly."

"That's because they were sick with the plague and had no medicine to cure them. You'll be cured when your father brings you the proper medicine." She looked at him intently, stroked his hair with tentative fingers. "Are you worried about dying?"

"No," said Jaq. "Just about living and being sick. I hate being sick."

"Drink your water and try to sleep some more. Until Logan gets back."

"I'll try," said Jaq. "But I don't think I can sleep until he does. I hope he hurries."

Jessica looked out the window, at the dry Potomac, "I hope so, too," she said softly.

She didn't say what she was thinking—that she felt totally vulnerable without Logan, totally alone.

For no reason at all, a sense of dread was building within her.

Logan had never seen Arcade like this: empty, silent, colorless. Always the Arcade sector of each city pulsed with crowds—citizens eager for sensual delights, pouring through these vast pleasure centers in a ceaseless stream, seeking bizarre sensations, new thrills ("Come in, citizen, and bathe in living flame!")...But now the fire galleries, the Re-Live parlors, glass-houses and hallucimills were stark and lifeless.

Logan moved quickly past a gutted firegallery, striped in shadow and smelling of dead charcoal. He angled through a Re-Live parlor, passing tiers of dead-metal lifedrawers, moved across a stilled beltway fronting a dust-glazed New You and a shattered glasshouse (Pleasure...Satisfaction...Rare Delights...) to his goal.

Nursery.

Logan drew in a long, cautious breath, expelled the air slowly from his lungs. He was here at last.

He checked the interior. No one inside.

Slipping past the long lines of coffin-cribs, each holding its tiny white skeleton, he moved swiftly for the medshelves.

They'd been stripped.

In frustration, Logan slammed his fist against the wall. And realized, in the same instant, that he had advertised his presence in the city.

If they were still here.

If they had heard the sound.

Then Logan felt a surge of hope. Despite the fact that the med supplies had been stripped, the drug he wanted could have been left behind, since it had no value to Scavengers. He began searching—prying open panels, sifting through rusting tubes, boxes, hexagonal containers.

Until he found it. An entire case of it: Sterozine X-cc 6466, ranked in red metaloid tubes. Untouched.

He didn't need much; one canister would be more than enough to cure Jaq. Logan selected one, made sure there were no splits in the metaloid casing, then slipped it into his tunic next to the Gun cylinder.

A faint, scraping sound behind him. Logan was motionless. An animal? Cat, maybe. Or...

He turned.

The Scavengers were there.

The sun was almost down when Lucrezia saw the mansion. She raised a hand to alert the other riders, swinging her jetcyc around in a spume of gravel to face the hill. At its tip, riding the waves of high grass, the mansion rose up dark against the sky, imposing and grand to behold.

Lucrezia smiled. A smile of possession.

The Potomac had produced a prize.

CAPTURE

« ^ »

Dakk studied the invader.

Tall. Well-muscled. A hardness in the eyes. Strong arms. He could be dangerous. There was something about his face, something familiar...

The others were watching Dakk, waiting for the signal. Killing an invader was a rare treat. You didn't get many in the cities anymore. At first, a lot of them had come in, looking for things they needed, but when they didn't ever come out again the word spread fast: keep clear of the Scavengers.

But now they had a fresh one, and they'd have a fine time with him once Dakk gave the signal. A really fine time.

"How did you get here?" Dakk asked the invader. "We didn't see you, didn't hear you?"

"Does it matter?" said Logan.

"You better answer all my questions... We run the city now."

"You don't run it you feed off its corpse?"

Dakk smiled thinly. "Look, I'm very interested. You're the first one who's gotten this far in without us seeing him. I'd like to know how you did it."

"I have a son," said Logan. "He's eight, and dying. He needs Sterozine. The drug's no good to you. No one uses it. No one trades for it. But, right now, it can save my son's life. I don't want anything else from you or from the city. You can keep it all. Just let me go."

As he talked, Logan knew it was useless, that his words were empty and meaningless to a group of amoral savages—but, for Jaq's sake, he had to try.

"Aren't you afraid of us?" asked Dakk quietly. "Tell us you're afraid."

"I'm afraid of you," said Logan.

"That's good to know." Dakk turned to the others and smiled broadly. "Shall we let him go?"

They smiled back at him, a wolf pack numbering more than twenty, all young, all lean and feral and dressed to fit their name—in scavenged clothing plucked at random from the cities. Dakk was typical: he wore the boots of a Sandman, the gleaming, scaled bodysuit of a glassdancer; the sash around his head, keeping long, blond, uncut hair from his eyes, had belonged to a Wilderness girl he'd trapped and killed in Arcade. She'd been looking for her brother, who'd been trapped and killed by another pack.

Now Dakk regarded Logan with mounting interest. This invader was strong and healthy; he should provide good sport for them.

"All right, you can go," said Dakk with a shrug. "But only if you tell me how you got this far. It's something I'd really like to know."

"I came in through a maze tunnel at Level Six," Logan told him. "Used a slidechute from DS to Arcade, kept to shadows, walked soft. Satisfied?"

"You're good—very, good," nodded Dakk. "The others who came in, they knocked over things, made a lot of noise. You deserve to go." He smiled again, spreading his hands in an open gesture. "So go."

Logan knew it was a trick. They'd never let an invader leave the city alive. It was to be a game with them, running him down before he could find a way out. They were the sharks, and it was their sea. If this pack didn't catch him, another pack would—since he'd have no time for caution, no chance to run on his own terms. But he'd known the odds before coming in to the city. Now he'd live—or die—with them.

So Logan ran.

And Dakk, smiling, watched him go.

"It's almost dark, and Logan isn't back."

"Go to sleep, Jaq."

"You keep saying that. But I can't, Jessica, I told you I can't."

"He'll come soon, I know."

They were after him already, didn't want to lose him to another pack. But Logan had used his ten-second head start to good advantage. Normally, an invader would be expected to go for the nearest direct route leading outside—but Logan circled, came in behind the nursery, entered the structure again, doubling back on a reverse line.

Which bought him some time.

He thought of finding a safe spot and settling in until morning. But that was no good. By then every pack in the city would be looking for him, and with full light to trap him by. No, he'd have to get out now, the best way he could.

Sleepshop! Logan smiled to himself. Each shop had its own unique exit—a chute which led directly to the atomic burnbins at the bottom level of the city. When a citizen was put to sleep in a shop his effects were placed in a wall canister, bearing his name and number; then his corpse was chuted for burndown. The furnaces were dead now, and safe for Logan. Once there, he could slip easily out of the city-complex.

Where was the nearest Sleepshop? None in Arcade; too depressing for joy-bent citizens. But since this nursery was just beyond Arcade a shop should be close.

Logan found one, moving like a drift of smoke along the inner walkways, avoiding the belts, keeping alert for Scavengers. He reached the shop, ducked quickly inside.

He paused to listen—and could hear the pack, several quads away, frustratedly hunting him.

Dakk was angry. Mainly at himself. He had no business giving this invader a ten-second head start. The fellow was clever, or he never would have been able to reach Nursery. I should have kept him in sight all

the way, Dakk told himself. You don't gamble with the smart ones; they can fox you. If we lose him for good, Ritter might make his bid for control of the pack. He's been itching to take my place. They might even...

Dakk turned his thoughts away from what the pack might do to him if this invader actually escaped the city. It was his job to catch him, kill him. And he would.

"...not in this area," Ritter was saying to the others. He walked over to Dakk—a soft-faced, slack-jawed bully, with small pig's eyes, soft and wet. Dakk hated Ritter.

"Any ideas?" he asked Dakk. The tone was bitter, mocking.

"This one's different. He'll make for a place we wouldn't think of looking," Dakk improvised. His thoughts raced: where, where, where?

Ritter grinned. "And just where would that be?"

Suddenly Dakk relaxed; a wave of relief and triumph swept through him. "I think I know," he said.

Jessica saw them coming, jetting up from the Potomac. Outlanders. They'd want food, any goods of value.

She stepped onto the pillared veranda.

I can handle them, she told herself. It will be all right. When they see I have nothing they'll leave.

The cycles flamed out, into silence. Lucrezia dismounted, withdrew a longsword from her saddle, raised it. The tall blade captured the rays of dying sun, flashing.

She looked regally at Jessica. Her voice was commanding. "I, Lucrezia, daughter of Alexander the Seventh, wife of Alfonso, duke of Ferrara, sister to Cesare, duke of Valentinois, do herewith, on this day, claim thy castle, and all within it, as mine own."

She lowered the sword, a signal for the others to dismount.

Jessica found herself amused at this theatrical display of pomp. She shook her head. "You're welcome to the place—but there's nothing of value here for you to claim."

"We'll decide that for ourselves," said Lucrezia, mounting the wide wooden steps of the veranda. Prince and the others followed.

"We have some water, a small amount of food—and little else," said Jess.

Prince stopped, gave Jessica a long stare. "I want her," he said to Lucrezia.

"Then she's yours."

Jessica stepped hastily back, toward the inner hallway. Her amusement had given way to a pervasive feeling of terror.

"I'm mated," she said, "My pairman is Logan." His name put sudden strength in her voice. "We have a son."

"Ah..." Lucrezia nodded. "And where is he, this son of yours?"

"Inside sleeping."

"And your Logan... Is he inside, too?"

It was no use lying to them. They could find out the truth easily enough by searching the mansion.

"He's... gone. To get medicine for our boy."

"How long will he be gone?" asked one of the females. She was willow-tall, with sensuous eyes. Her name was Ris. She, too, looked at Jessica with a special hunger.

"He's due back any time now," said Jessica. "If you try to harm me..."

Ris swayed her body close to Jessica. Her mouth was pouting. "We won't harm you. We just want to—"

Prince pushed her roughly. "She's mine! You heard Lucrezia." He turned to the leader. "Can I take her now?" He fondled Jessica's hair, grinning as she flinched away from his touch.

"Of course, darling," said Lucrezia. She placed the needle tip of a dagger playfully against Jessica's throat. "Though you may have to share. Ris seems to want her. And we must not forget Ariosto, who allowed you to share his mount."

"No sharing on this one! I won't!"

Ariosto chuckled, nodding his large head. He was square, burly-faced and viciously stupid. "You will, Prince, you will. If she says so, you will."

Lucrezia smiled, pleased at the shock and despair on Jessica's face. "We'll just have to see who takes you, won't we?"

And she kissed Jessica deeply, with an open, wet tongue.

Logan had to exert extreme muscular control in negotiating the narrow burnchute. It did not operate on antigrav, which meant he could easily lose his footing and tumble all the way down into the furnace many levels below. Exhausted when he finally reached the floor of the furnace, he staggered, bracing himself, on the way to the exit hatch.

Before he could reach out to disengage the holdrod, the hatch was jerked abruptly open from the other side.

Dakk was there, grinning at him. "We were both smart," he said to Logan. "You for choosing this way out and me for figuring you would."

Logan slumped back against the metal wall of the furnace. "You've won your game," he said tightly. "But it isn't over yet," said Ritter.

The others, clustered in a circle around the furnace, murmured agreement.

"We have a little gift for invaders," said Dakk, producing a small blue pellet from a tooled leather wrist pouch. He handed Logan the pellet.

"Swallow it," said Baxter 2. He stood behind Ritter.

"Poison?" asked Logan.

"No," smiled Dakk. "We're not going to kill you so soon. You heard what Ritter said: the game's still on." His voice took on hardness. "Now swallow it."

Logan knew he had no choice.

He swallowed the pellet.

DEATH

[« ^ »](#)

And Albert 6 was there, talking to him. A nice surprise for Logan.

"I love you, Loge."

Albert sat on his lap. "What'll we talk about today?"

"What we always talk about," said Logan to the small, serious-eyed figure.

"Oh, that again."

"But it's fun to talk about being a Sandman!"

"For you, maybe, but not for me. I can never be one. I'm just a puppet. When you leave they'll put me away in a box."

Suddenly, Albert fell over.

"What's wrong?"

"You killed him," said Dakk. "You killed your little friend. Now you have no one. You're all alone."

Logan began to sweat. "I need to get out."

"You'll never get out," said Warden. "You're in Hell. And no one gets out of Hell. I'm in charge. I ought to know."

"It's a long way down," Lilith told him. "You have to be careful."

A mile-deep emptiness yawned beneath him. He didn't trust Lilith. "You don't believe I'm running, do you?"

"You're a Sandman," said Ballard. "Why should anyone believe a Sandman?"

Karenya 3 put her hand on his groin. She caressed him there in a slow, sensuous rhythm, arousing him to full erectness. "Lie back," she said, her lips close to his. "Just lie back and see what I can do for you."

She was nude, her perfect body bathed in gold.

And green.

And red.

And blue.

And yellow.

"I have to get to Headquarters. Francis is waiting."

"No, Francis is dead," she whispered. "Here...touch my breasts."

"Do as she says," Dakk told him.

Logan cupped her left breast; it was like cool marble. He lowered his mouth to it, laved it with his tongue. It tasted of honey.

Jessica groaned. "Take me, Logan, take me now!"

And he entered her in a long, flowing movement, filling her, his weight pressing her slim ivory back into the foam.

"It's all right," said Doyle. "She's my sister, and she loves you. I don't mind. Go right ahead."

"Thank you," said Logan—and began thrusting deeply, withdrawing, thrusting again. Until his groans matched hers, until the pressure building within could no longer be denied.

"Wild me, Sandfella!" screamed Graygirl.

And Logan cried out sharply as his seed spurted into the warm depths of her body.

"That was good, wasn't it?" asked Ritter.

"Yes," said Logan.

"Don't move," crooned Box. "Let me capture the moment, let me immortalize it." His cutting hand moved in a blur of blue ice.

Logan grabbed Francis, held him by both shoulders. "There's no use to any of it, is there?"

"What do you mean?"

"This whole rotten business. We hunt and we kill and we hunt again. Until we die or someone hunts us."

"We're the elite, Logan." Francis smiled, his thin lips drawn back tightly. "We have the best of everything...jewels...food...women..."

Whale laughed at this, his immense belly quaking. "For how long, though? Ask him that, Logan. For how much longer?"

And Box said, "Done!" He looked at Logan. "You may leave now."

"But where can I go?"

"That's up to you. Nobody can tell you that."

"Come with me," said Holly. "You can have a new face."

"I don't want to change," said Logan.

"Everyone changes," Holly smiled. "It's the thing to do."

"She's right," said Dakk.

"Do it!" said Rutago.

But he didn't want to lie down on the Table.

"Relax," said Doc. "Just close your eyes."

"Not permitted;" said the Autogoverness. "You'll have to leave."

"Why?" asked Logan.

"I need not give reasons," she said. "I'm in total control."

"You're a machine!"

"Of course," said the Watchman. "And I'm programmed to destroy anyone who comes here. Why did you come here?"

"I had nowhere else to go."

The Watchman had no face, so Logan could not find a common level of communication.

"You'll be all right," said the girl in glitterskins. "But watch out for Francis. He'll try to kill you."

Harry 7 had the ice dagger, but Logan did not feel its chill. He felt great heat. Hazed smoke flowed and billowed around him. His lungs burned and he could not catch his breath.

"Don't fight it, citizen," warned the burning man beside him. "Enjoy it."

Logan looked down at his body. It was bathed in flame.

"Fire galleries are enchanting," said the girl in glitterskins. "They cleanse one completely. And you need to be cleansed, Logan."

"Of your sins," said Ballard. "Do you believe in sin, Logan?"

"No," said Logan. "It's an ancient concept created to control men's minds. Manipulation through guilt."

"I think the only sin lies in hurting others," said Chaney Moon.

"I don't hurt anyone," said Logan.

"You use the Gun," said Doyle, with bitterness. "You hunt and kill with it."

"My job. My duty."

"Absolutely correct," said Sharps.

"You twist things."

"I twist nothing," said Francis.

Logan turned to face the cubs. Whirling, dodging, ripping at him.

"I'll cut you good, Sandman!" boasted Charming Billy. "You and your runnergirl."

Jessica took Logan's arm. "He's just a boy."

"He's a cub!" protested Logan, trying to make her understand. "A savage!"

But Jess spun away into darkness.

"Wild me," said Graygirl.

"Obey me," said Autogoverness.

"Pose for me," said Box.

"Listen to me," said Ballard.

"Change for me," said Holly.

"Talk to me," said Albert.

"Trust me," said Lilith.

"Fear me," said Warden.

"Run from me," said Francis.

"Spare me," said Doyle.

"Cure me," said Jaq.

"Save me," said Jessica.

Logan put his hands against his skull and screamed. Soundlessly.

He opened his eyes.

"You had a prime lift," said Dakk.

"We like to watch," Ritter told him. "Never know what'll happen. Always interesting."

"Burn him," another Scavenger said.

Dakk nodded. "Game's over, Logan. Time to die."

"Let me," said Ritter, drawing a Fuser from his belt.

Logan braced himself against the wall of the furnace, waiting for the heatcharge.

Ritter brought up the weapon.

"Kill him," said Dakk.

"Don't!" screamed Jessica.

"Do it," Lucrezia commanded. "Kill him!"

And Prince fired at the boy.

Jaq took the heatcharge full in the chest, and was flung backward into the hallway.

Jessica ran to him, stared down in horror, hands to her mouth.

Lucrezia walked up to stand beside her. "He should have stayed in his room, not tried to stop us. Still...a sick boy is no good, of no value. We're taking you, but we couldn't take him. So let's assume he's better off the way he is."

"You...monster!" Jessica trembled violently, fists clenched. "You filthy, vile—"

And she clawed at Lucrezia's throat in a killing frenzy. Ariosto and two of the others pulled her away.

"Let's take her and go," said Prince. He kicked over a scrolled rosewood table in disgust. It crashed to the floor, sending a hollow echo through the mansion. "There's nothing else here."

Lucrezia rubbed at the skin of her neck, where Jessica's fingers had closed around her windpipe. "You'll regret causing me discomfort," Lucrezia said to her.

And she doubled her right fist, smashing it into Jessica's face.

Prince caught her as she fell.

"She's yours," smiled Lucrezia. "Treat her well."

"Wait!" shouted Dakk. "Don't fire!"

Ritter lowered the Fuser, looking sour. "Now what's wrong?"

Dakk walked up very close to Logan, staring at him with probing intentness. "I thought I'd seen him before..."

"I don't know you," said Logan.

"But I know you. When I was a cub in the Angeles Complex you came in after a runner named Doyle. But we killed him first. We cut him to pieces." Dakk turned to the others, his smile flashing. "He's Logan 3."

A murmur ran the pack. They'd all heard of him—the only Sandman to make Sanctuary. He was already a legend.

Ritter was excited. "Let's show him to the other packs. We can kill him in front of them, make a ceremony of his death."

"No, he goes free," said Dakk flatly.

"But he's famous!" objected Ritter. "And killing him will make us famous."

"I said no."

"Give us a reason," said Baxter 2, who usually backed up Ritter. "A good reason."

Dakk turned on them, fierce-eyed. "Logan killed Charming Billy in Cathedral. If he hadn't, Billy would

have killed me. I was a threat to him. The other cubs supported me, and Billy knew it. So...Logan saved my life. Now I'm saving his."

"Your reason isn't our reason," said Ritter tightly.

Dakk measured him coldly. "Challenge?"

A moment of silent tension between them. Then Ritter sighed, turned away.

Dakk said to Logan, "Go. The debt's paid."

Logan nodded.

"But don't ever come back," Dakk warned. "If you do, you won't leave here again. Is that understood?"

"Understood," said Logan.

And he left the city.

GUN

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The paravane had not been disturbed. Logan had some difficulty locating its exact position in the darkness, but he soon had the brush stripped away and the blades cleared.

Now he'd be able to help Jaq. The drug his son needed was safe inside his tunic, and it was a short flight back to their home on the Potomac.

Rising above the lightless mass of the city, Logan engaged full thrust—and the paravane responded smoothly. He'd been gone for most of the day, and Jess was probably worried about him, but she'd be overjoyed to learn he'd found the Sterozine. He'd been very fortunate with Dakk; by all rights he should be a dead man now. Logan had no memory of the dark-eyed leader as a cub. All the young ones blended in his mind: soot-faced, ragged, dangerous. But he remembered Charming Billy well enough. Thirteen and deadly, on Muscle, with his pride in having cut a Sandman.

Logan had never regretted killing him.

The house was silent as Logan approached it. Only the sound of wind in tall grass; of a nightbird, sounding its high, sweet lament.

"Jess! I'm back!"

Odd. She should have been watching for him, heard the paravane land, be out here to meet him.

Something's wrong.

Logan reached the veranda, stopped. The door was open.

He mounted the steps quickly, entered the hall.

And stumbled over Jaq.

Agony twisted Logan's features as he examined the body. Chest charred and ripped. Skin like cool wax. No pulse. No heartbeat.

An odor of cooked flesh in the air.

Logan let the fact sink into his mind like a heavy stone: Someone had murdered his son!

And where was Jessica?

He raged through the dark house, calling her name, smashing furniture in his frenzy, hurling himself from room to room, a man demented.

She was gone.

Logan threw the canister of Sterozine furiously against the steps, stumbled into the yard, fell to his knees in the wet grass, sobbing brokenly. He should never have left them alone. Damn him! He should have been there to defend them against—

Against who?

Logan raised his head. His eyes burned with a cold, killing fire. He'd find out who. Use his Sandman's training. Analyze the area. Maybe Jess was still alive.

He stood, moved to the veranda and carefully examined the gravel fronting the steps. In the marble wash of moonlight he could make out tracks, footprints...

"We saw them," a soft voice behind him said.

Logan pivoted to face a girl no older than seven. She wore a sunfrock trimmed in real flowers and carried a battered talkdoll. She giggled. "This is Judee 3," she said, holding up the doll. "And I'm Bet."

"Who did you see?" asked Logan, fighting to keep his voice level.

"The beautiful people," said Bet.

And the doll said, in a matter-of-fact voice, "They were lovely."

"Tell me everything about them," said Logan, crouching beside Bet, his eyes intense on hers.

"They wore pretty things. Lace and velvet. And hats with long feathers." Her voice was slow and dreamy.

And her doll said, "She's lifted. On C. That's why she's this way."

"Want one?" asked Bet, giggling sleepily. She withdrew a small capsule from her sunpocket. "Give you a prime lift. I use them all the—"

Logan knocked the drugcap from the little girl's hand, gripped her thin shoulders. "Tell me, now, everything you saw!"

"Judee can tell you," said the girl "Ask her."

And she giggled.

Logan slapped her. "I'm asking you!"

The little girl whimpered as tears brimmed her eyes. "Didn't see much...were leaving when we came here..."

"How many?"

"Don't know."

"A dozen," said the talkdoll firmly. "I counted. They rode jetcycs."

"Outlanders!" breathed Logan.

"With swords," said the doll. "And daggers."

"I feel sick," said Bet. "I'm going home now."

Logan grabbed her, spun her around to face him. "You're not going anywhere until I know all you know...Did they have Jess?"

The little girl looked blank.

"My pairmate! Did you see them take her?"

"Yes," whimpered Bet. "They hit her and she fell and they put her on one of their cycles and rode off with her."

"Describe them!"

"I did already."

"I told you she's lifted," said the doll. "Ask me if you want accurate information."

Logan stared at the small creature. "Then...you tell me."

"There were nine males. Three were females, including their leader. I didn't hear her name, or anything they said. They were dressed in ancient costumes, all lace and velvety. Lovely, as I said." The doll gave him a tiny smile. "Now you know what we know."

And Bet ran off down the road with Judee.

Inside the shadowed house Logan walked into the master bedroom, to a tall oak dresser. He slid open the top drawer, removed a leather case, took a holster from the case.

Logan unsnapped the holster, slowly drew out the Gun. Silver barrel. Pearl handle. Six chambers. He held it tightly in his hand.

He removed the ammopac from his tunic, snapping it into place. Immediately the Gun glowed, spilling a wash of pale gold across Logan's face and chest.

I swore I'd never use this again, he reminded himself, but now I'll use it. On them. On the ones who killed my son and took Jess. And I'll enjoy using it.

I'll find them.

And I'll use the Gun.

BORGIAS

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"We call them the Borgia Riders," said Jonath. He towered over Logan, a full foot taller, but without Logan's strength of body. The Wilderness leader was gaunt; his flesh hung loose on a bony frame, but his eyes were very alive, dark and penetrating.

They were walking together in warm morning sunlight outside the main camp, fronting the Lincoln Memorial. Jonath, in a gray workrobe, sashed at the waist; Logan, for the first time since Argos, wearing his Sandman's black tunic, boots and belt, the Gun holstered at his right side. He was a hunter once again, and he would wear the garb of a hunter.

"You know them?" Logan asked.

"I've never encountered them personally," said Jonath. "But some of the People have been attacked by them. They killed one of our men, and raped several of our women."

"Their leader's name...do you have it?"

"She calls herself Lucrezia."

"Know anything about her?"

"Only that she seems to possess a cruelty beyond that of most outlanders. Human life apparently means very little to her."

Logan said nothing to this, but his eyes took on a hard shine.

"Still...Jessica may be alive."

"There's no reason to hope for that," said Logan flatly.

"But there is."

Logan suddenly stopped walking, stared at the Wilderness leader. "What are you saying? They'll use her sexually and they'll kill her."

"Perhaps," nodded Jonath. "But my point is—outlanders often trade the females they abduct. A beautiful woman can be quite valuable to them."

"And you think Jessica might—"

"—be traded off to a rich man, or to a Market group. Since the breakdown of the cities an extensive trade-sale Market has sprung up. Among the most salable items, next to certain drugs, are beautiful women."

"And outlanders have access to these markets?"

"They're prime suppliers."

Logan picked up a dry branch, snapped it in frustration. "But I don't know where to look. They could be halfway across country by now. I don't even know which direction they headed."

Jonath sat down on the squared base of a broken column which had once formed part of an ancient government building, ran his thumb slowly along the veined marble. "Logan, do you believe in the magic of the mind?"

Logan sat down next to Jonath, looked at him. "In what sense?"

"I believe that the human brain has infinite possibilities—that we've barely touched on our potential as fully developed creatures. Before the Little War, experiments were being conducted in telekinesis, telepathy, and a dozen other inter-related aspects of sensory phenomena. Brain expansion. . . And one of these aspects was clairvoyance."

"I don't think I—"

"The ability to summon up visions involving a particular person, place or thing."

"I don't see what any of this has to do with me."

"There's an old man I've heard of. . . His name is Andar. He escaped the Sandmen. He lives at the tip of a bridge on the western coastline."

"So?"

"They call him 'The Gifted One' He's physically blind, yet he sees. He's a visionary. He can 'read' objects."

"Read them?"

"Do you have something of Jessica's. . . a ring she wore. . . a throat jewel. . . anything of that nature?"

Logan nodded.

"Bring it to Andar. Ask him to read its vibrations. If what I've heard is true, he might be able to tell you where she is, physically, from his reading of the object."

"That's impossible!"

"I told you, he's a visionary. His mind is tapped into what he calls the 'cosmic energy source.' All objects in space are part of this cosmic chain. One object gives him a direct link to another."

Logan stood up. "This sounds insane."

"But you'll do it. . . You'll go to him?"

"Yes," said Logan. "I'll go."

VISION

[« ^ »](#)

On the morning of April 16, 1988, twelve years before the Little War, the animals of San Francisco went mad. They howled, circled, twitched in fear. . .

Something was happening in the earth.

It began as a subterranean rumble, a stirring deep below the streets of San Francisco. God was clearing his throat. The rumble increased; earthplanes shifted; tall buildings swayed. Bay waters danced and rippled.

Then the people felt it—a movement beneath their feet, a rocking shimmer of motion which intensified by the second.

Earthquake!

The big one. The one all the seismologists had been predicting for decades. The San Andreas was loosing its century-stored pressures, and San Francisco was doomed.

Mass panic. Water mains erupted. Dams split. Boats were lifted and smashed against dock pilings. Automobiles were tossed like marbles from bridges and freeways.

And the sounds... The metal thunder of dying buildings; collapsing, tipping into the streets in slicing downfalls of stone and glass. The cry of tortured earth mixed with the agonized shriek of thousands as the land split wide to swallow them, their cars, their houses, their streets and their skyscrapers.

It lasted all of five minutes (although the after-shocks lingered for weeks). Atlantis-like, the city vanished beneath the iceblue waters of the Pacific, leaving only scattered island peaks as testimony that a great metropolis had once existed here.

The Golden Gate Bridge was one of these islands.

Most of the bridge was gone; under the assault of the quake, it had snapped its massive cables and whiplashed wildly, splitting its metal seams and plunging in to the Bay. But the tip of the fabled structure remained above water, an immense tombstone of twisted metal, marking the death of a city.

Logan looked down at the ragged coastline. White-frothed waves beating at black rocks, cliffs of sun-washed stone rising up from the ocean's surge. And, just ahead, the ruins of the San Fran Complex...

As a Sandman, Logan had been taught that the only reality was the reality of the system, that the power of the Gun, was paramount over the power of the mind. Mysticism was the work of demented misfits; it had no basis in fact. Yet, now, when he should have been using this precious time to search for Jessica, he was following a fool's dream, hoping that a blind old mystic could set him on the trail of the Borgias.

The trip from Washington had been frustrating. A mazecar would have whisked him here in minutes—but the overland flight took several days to complete. Still, the craft had performed beautifully on its long run, and for that Logan was grateful. Gyroparts were hard to come by, and any major repair would be difficult to effect.

He angled the paravane, bringing the ship closer to the water—until he was able to make out the rusted-orange South Tower of the bridge thrusting up, arm-like, two miles out to sea.

Dia saw him coming. She moved close to her father, as close as she dared. "You told me a man would come, my father, and he is here. From the sky. He comes in black, like the night. He was once a Sandman. He wears their uniform."

"They pursued me," said the old man. "But I escaped them. I lived beyond their Guns. Now, it will be strange, helping one of them."

"This one is different. There are tales... He ran, fought the others, and killed many of them to save runners. He is called Logan."

"I help whoever comes to me," said the old man softly. "I make no exceptions. We are all one."

"I see him!" whispered Dia, exaltation in her voice.

And she raised her blind eyes to the sky.

Descent required precision. The sharply-slanted fifty-foot segment of pitted steel offered no level terrain on which to land, and the shifting wind from the ocean struck the paravane like a heavy fist, tipping the craft at dangerous angles. If one of the blades clipped the bridge...

Logan set down, finally, cut power. The blades idled and died as he exited the control pod. He stood, chilled by the gusting ocean breeze, staring at the hut.

It was metaloid, squarish, much smaller than a city-unit. Crude, in fact. Andar and his people must have built it from bridge fragments. But why out here, in the middle of nowhere?

No one came to greet him. Not that Logan expected a formal welcome, but he had been told that Andar had two daughters, one of whom was with him. And that the old mystic stayed here always. Yet the hut—lashed to the remains of a ruptured support cable—was totally silent. It seemed deserted.

He moved closer, bracing his body against the wind tides. A wrong step on the slimed steel surface could take him over the side into the iced Pacific.

The hut's squat metal door stood open. Logan hesitated, then ducked his head and entered.

Darkness. After the glare of sky and water the dim interior seemed impenetrable—yet something glowed like fiery coals at the far end of the windowless structure.

A figure.

"Come forward, Logan," said the glowing figure.

Logan obeyed—until Andar's voice halted him.

"Not too close... Stop now! And do not attempt to touch me. There is no danger if proper distance is maintained. Have you been informed of my condition?"

"No," said Logan.

"I am blind, a victim of atomic fallout. My entire body surface has been affected. My skin is radioactive. I no longer feel heat nor cold. My flesh is insensitive to pain... Yet I must remain isolated to avoid contaminating others. Only my daughters can stay in my presence for long periods. They care for me."

"I understand," said Logan.

"Sit down, please. Dia, prepare a cushion."

A shadow-figure moved toward Logan; he squinted, trying to make out details, but his eyes had not yet fully adjusted to the dimness.

A bodycushion was placed near him. He sat down, sinking into it. "Thanks..." said Logan. "I—can't quite see you."

Musical laughter. "You have eyes, and I am without them yet I see you!"

"My daughter, Dia," said Andar. "Both of my daughters have been blind from birth. They see, however, with the inner eye, and are thus graced."

"My sister, Liath, is on the shore," said Andar's daughter. "Yet she, too, sees you, Logan."

"Then you share your father's talents."

"Only to a degree," said the girl. "Even our sight is limited. We cannot deep-read vibrational auras as Father can. His gifts differ from ours."

Logan was now able to make out the girl, seated a few feet away from her father. A fall of long golden hair. A lean, curved body. Ivory skin. A delicate, piquant face. She wore a long robe of deep crimson, belted under the soft swell of her bosom.

"Now, tell me how I may help you," said the old man. He squatted on the bare cold flooring of the hut, totally nude, thin stick legs crossed beneath him, hands resting, palms-up, in his lap. His eyes, deep-caved, burned white in a narrow, hairless skull, and his glowing skin, stretched loosely over his bony frame like parchment illumined from within, was grooved and ravaged by time.

He was the oldest human Logan had ever seen.

"My young son was murdered by a group of outlanders called the Borgia Riders," said Logan. "They took my pairmate, Jessica." He hesitated. "I want to know if she lives, and where she is."

"And what have you brought me of Jessica?"

Logan took a small throatclasp from his tunic, started to hand it to Andar.

"No...place it at my feet."

Logan did this. He studied the mystic intently, wondering...

The old man picked up the clasp, spidered his long fingers over it, then enclosed the throat jewel in his right fist. He placed that fist against the center of his glowing skull, held it there, motionless.

You have strong doubts that my father can help you...Please, Logan, don't doubt him. Allow yourself to trust. He will help you.

Logan heard Dia's words, yet her lips had remained closed; no sound had issued from them.

A telepath. The only explanation. But, if she is, then is he also?

No, Logan, my father reads vibrations but he does not read or send thoughts as Liath and I do. That is not his gift. You must speak aloud to him, as he to you.

Logan was confused. But I read your mind as you read mine, yet I am not telepathic.

Her answer reached him instantly. You are a parotelepath, which means you can mentally converse with one who is fully gifted, such as I am. I saw this talent in you the moment you entered my aura. Your mind is rich and strong. It could be raised to very high levels.

These thought messages flickered between Logan and the girl in the space of a second, and human speech seemed suddenly cumbersome and unnecessary.

The old man said, "The vibrations have instructed me. I see your woman clearly."

Logan leaped to his feet. "Jessica's alive?"

"Sit down...listen to my words. Let me give you my sight."

Logan obeyed, heart pounding.

Andar spoke slowly. "She is with those you call the Borgia Riders. They...treat her unkindly, yet she lives."

"Where are they?" said Logan tightly. "Where do they have her?"

"That I cannot say," Andar told him. "My mind does not show me their location in exact terms."

"What terms then?" Logan's tone was demanding. "Tell me what you see!"

Anger will not help you, Logan. Trust him. Allow him to guide you. Anger and impatience will only block the reception of my father's vision.

Logan knew she was right. But it was almost impossible for him to be calm at this moment.

"I...receive many impressions...I see..." Andar's head fell forward on the thin stalk of his neck; he placed the tips of his fingers against his skull. His voice became high and lilting, as if in song, the words spaced and rhythmic:

"Where...the rockets die...and gantrys tilt...against the sky...where the plain is wide...you will hear their cry...as the Borgias ride."

Logan drew in a long breath. "The Cape!" he said. "Cape Steinbeck in the Florida Keys. They must have a base there."

But Andar said nothing more. His head remained down, chin resting against his bony chest. His long hands were once again folded and motionless in his lap.

My father sleeps. The use of his gift has tired him. You must go, Logan. He has told you all he can.

"It's enough," said Logan. "I can find them now!"

STEINBECK

[« ^ »](#)

A bleak plain of broken tarmac.

Rusting rocket gantrys.

Deserted bunkers.

Raw concrete blockhouses.

The Cape.

With the paravane out of sight beyond the open area, Logan moved steadily, at twilight, across the flat, weed-dotted plain of lifeless gray concrete.

He'd been here before when the Cape was alive and the Sanctuary rockets had flamed up for Darkside. Ballard had saved his life here—and, a decade later, had given his own to save others. A great man. A legend. Logan recalled the folkchant they used to sing about him...

He's lived a double lifetime, And Ballard is his name. He's lived a double lifetime. Why can't we do the same? Ballard's lived a double lifetime, And never felt no shame. Think of Ballard. Think of Ballard. Think of Ballard's name...

When the Sandmen had hit the Cape they'd destroyed all of Ballard's rockets in order to smash the Sanctuary Line. Logan passed them, the charred lifeships rusting in the Florida heat, their hulls ruptured by nitro blasts. These were the ships bound for Argos, ships which would have provided the vital supplies the space station needed to sustain life. In destroying them, the Sandmen had destroyed Argos as well.

But it was difficult for him to think of Argos, of the ships, even of Ballard... Logan's mind was focused on the job he had to do here—and one question hammered at him, obsessed him: is she still alive?

He knew the outlanders were here; he'd seen the glint of their jetcycles, rayed by dying sun, as he swung the paravane over the Cape. Now, he had a goal: the metal corpse of a giant freight rocket. She'd been designed for the Earth-to-Luna run, and they'd named her Pequod, after Ahab's fabled ship. Her ocean was space, her Whale the great white bulk of the Moon. She'd been the main link between Earth and the Darkside Colony before the station had been closed down and space travel aborted after the Little War.

And how does this proud star mammoth end her days? thought Logan. As headquarters for a depraved gang of psychopaths. Well, I'll flush the vermin from her metal cells. When I'm done today she'll be clean again.

Logan approached the Pequod at a defensive angle, staying close to the line of concrete bunkers, keeping inside the deeply cast twilight shadows. He could not afford being seen by any of the outlanders until he was actually inside the ship. From the air, Logan had counted more than ten cycles ranged outside the rocket, which meant he'd face up to a dozen riders. And beyond that, he didn't want to risk endangering Jessica if she was still their prisoner; they'd use her to stop him if they got the chance.

Logan had the Gun in his hand, feeling the power of the weapon. The hunter, again closing on prey...

Now, for the first time in many days, he allowed his mind to linger on the image of Jaq, stretched lifeless in the dark hallway of the Potomac house, victim of a rider's gun. He wanted to think of Jaq now, wanted to prime himself with fury, with vengeance fire... Build the hate! Build the fury!

They'd posted one of the riders as an outside guard. The fellow was big, rough-featured, dressed in a slash-velvet bodyshirt and laced Italian leggings; a heavy gold chain around his waist supported a holstered Fuser.

Logan ducked into a shadowed doorway, crouching there, wondering if he'd been seen.

He had the advantage, since the guard was obviously not expecting attack, lounging against one of the parked cycles, drinking from a chased-silver wine, flask, sleepy-eyed and half drunk.

Logan dropped him with a single blow, delivered from behind, just at the base of the rider's neck. The kill was soundless and brutally efficient.

Logan looked coldly down at the body, thinking: did you kill my son? He plucked the Fuser from the guard's chainbelt. A weapon like this did it. Maybe you were the one. Maybe.

Sound from within the rocket. Laughter. Wild, drunken voices. Good. They were having a party, meaning their reaction time would be sharply reduced by the intake of wine. He'd burn through them like god's lightning.

But where was Jess?

Locked away in another part of the ship? Sold or traded? Dead?

Logan would soon know.

Gun in hand, he moved into the rocket, toward the sound of Borgia laughter.

The Pequod was immense. Tier upon tier of storage compartments, a welter of cabins and intersecting walkways. Her hull was buttressed with great, curved-steel ribs, supporting a metal hide tough enough to deflect a direct hit by meteor. Built to last ten thousand years...and looking almost as new inside as the day they built her.

As Logan penetrated deeper into the great skyship he checked all of the compartments en route. No sign of Jessica.

But Andar had seen her here...

Closer now to the riders and their drunken revels.

Logan faded behind a bulkhead, flattened himself against the durosteel wall; someone was coming toward him. He waited.

It was one of the outlanders, probably sent to relieve the outside guard.

As he passed the bulkhead Logan snaked an arm around the man's neck, pulled him into an adjoining crew compartment. The rider's eyes bugged under Logan's killing pressure; he could not breathe.

"Talk to me or I'll kill you." Logan eased the pressure slightly.

"Wha'—what do you want?"

"The woman you took by the Potomac, in Old Washington...is she here?"

"No...not here."

"Where then?"

The rider twisted loose, going for the Fuser at his waist.

Logan broke his back.

He should have talked to me. But I would have killed him anyway.

He stepped over the rider's sprawled corpse. Logan had two burnweapons, plus the Gun. The odds against him no longer mattered.

More laughter. He was almost on top of them. Another fifty feet, then an open hatchway. They were inside the main galley, at a long cooktable, eating, drinking wine—oblivious to the stalking hunter in black.

When Logan appeared in the hatchway all sound and movement ceased. He had holstered the Gun, and held a Fuser in each hand. "All weapons—on the table," he said.

There were nine riders facing him, two of them female. The men were armed with Fusers, the women daggers. They put these carefully on the cooktable, moving slowly, watching Logan. His face told them he was walking death.

"Which one of you leads?"

"I do," said Prince. There was a note of defiance in his voice. No one at the table challenged his statement.

Logan burned him down. Both barrels.

"Now," he said to the other eight riders. "I want to know about the female you took from the house on the Potomac. Who wants to tell me about her?"

The outlanders were stunned. They looked from Logan's eyes to the dead, blackened body of Prince.

"She wanted to come with us," said Ariosto.

"Begged us to take her along, so we—"

A double blaze of burnfire. Ariosto crumpled forward across the table.

There was a smell of charred meat in the room.

"Someone else," said Logan in a dead level tone. "Talk. But only the truth."

The others were pale, slack-lipped, knowing that death was a heartbeat away for all of them.

"Prince wanted her...for himself," one of the females said, her voice unsteady. She kept wetting dry lips with her small, pink tongue.

"Prince?"

She nodded toward the first body.

"Go on."

"So we took her along. She was valuable. When...when Prince was...finished with her we...we knew we could get a good price for her on the Market."

"Who killed the boy?"

"Prince. With a Fuser."

"Where is the woman now?"

"After Prince took her here, Lucrezia decided to—"

"Lucrezia?" Logan looked at the other female, Ris. "That you?"

Ris shook her head, staring at him.

"Then who are you?"

Before an answer could be given one of the males hinged for a tabled Fuser, brought up the weapon in a short arc, triggered a laserburst.

Logan was hit in the right shoulder. The charge singed his flesh, and pain lanced his upper body. He dropped the weapon in his right hand as the arm went numb with shock. One of the females grabbed a dagger. Two other males had weapons now, and were firing at Logan.

They missed.

It was over very quickly. In a pain-blurred rage, Logan killed them all, staggered out into a passageway, collapsed against a metaloid strut. The second Fuser clattered to the ship's deck. He put back his head; a tight groan escaped his lips. The pain in his right shoulder was incredible. Fire lived in his flesh.

He knew he was vulnerable. He knew that the rider named Lucrezia was somewhere in the ship. But, at this second in time, he was incapable of active movement. The shock to his system was profound.

Logan slumped sideways to the deck. He raised his left fist, bit hard into the round of muscle below the thumb. To provide a new pain center, to counteract the blaze of agony from his shoulder.

He heard Lucrezia.

A scraping of feet, coming swiftly down a crew ladder from an upper ship-level. She'd be armed. And, if he stayed like this, she'd kill him.

Get up! His mind shouted at frozen muscles. Unholster the Gun! Can't. You can!

Only seconds now and she'd be here. He fumbled his left hand awkwardly over his belt, raised the holster flap, began dragging the Gun free.

He had it pointed at her when she rounded a final bend in the corridor. And he'd been right; she was armed—with a silver dagger of tempered Florentine steel.

"Drop it," said Logan tightly, looking up at her. He still could not stand.

"You're Logan, aren't you?" asked Lucrezia. She dropped the dagger—and smiled.

A beautiful woman. Deadly and beautiful. Her long court gown, cut low at the bodice, flowed with lace, stitched gold and silver.

"I'm Logan," he admitted.

"The others didn't think you'd follow us. I did. I thought you'd be here eventually."

"I'm here."

"Are they all—" She nodded toward the galley.

"All of them," he said.

She smiled again. "Just as well. They were a stupid lot. You can let me go. You have nothing to gain by killing me now."

"Why should I let you go?"

"In trade for information. About your Jessica."

Logan stirred, jaw tightening. "Tell me."

"Not unless you promise I can leave this ship alive."

"I make no promises to a Borgia!"

She shrugged, adjusted the hem of her gown. "Then kill me. And never learn the truth about your woman. I'm the only one who can tell you that truth."

"How do you know I won't kill you anyway?"

"You are a man of honor. I've heard about you, Logan. If you make a bargain, you keep it. Say you'll let me live and you'll have your truth."

"All right. You live."

She nodded. "Jessica is dead."

Dead.

The word almost blinded Logan with pain. His shoulder was nothing. Only the word was pain. And pain. And pain.

"How?"

"Prince killed her and burned the body. We came here with Jessica, intending to put her on the Market. But she was...stubborn. She caused trouble. Prince grew very angry with her. I couldn't do anything about it. I tried to save her—call it greed if you will but unfortunately I did not succeed. I thought it a waste."

She turned away, began moving toward the outer hatch.

Logan watched her go.

Die, you inhuman bitch!

He triggered the Gun.

And the homer sang out.

INTERIM

[« ^ »](#)

Logan did not remember flying the paravane back to Old Washington. The trip was blank and meaningless to him.

If he had found Jessica they could have shared the shock of their son's death together. Each would ease the other's loss, make it bearable. But Jess, too, was dead.

And Logan withdrew into himself as a sea creature withdraws into its shell. He talked to no one at the Wilderness camp. He was mute and removed from the rhythms of their life.

Even Jonath could do nothing to bring Logan out of this self-imposed isolation.

The colony was struggling for bare survival. Food was hard-won from the earth; the carefully-nurtured crops gave meager reward for intense, protracted labor. Yet they were surviving, and that counted for something. With Jonath to guide them, the colony maintained a fragile wilderness stability.

Under his direction, the People had hollowed out a series of shallow caves below the Lincoln Memorial, and it was here, when cold and rain assaulted them, that they held out against the elements.

Logan's shoulder wound healed, but he never left the caves. He existed as an exile in the camp, sharing no labors, taking no part in the brief celebrations marking the birth of a new colony infant. He ate very little, and drank only when his tissues demanded water.

For Logan, the level of despair had reached maximum intensity; reality, without Jessica, was intolerable. He had to totally withdraw—but he needed help to do it.

One night, very late, with the camp asleep, he went to Jonath. The leader was sitting alone in his quarters under the Memorial, arranging seed pods for planting.

"I want them now," Logan said.

"No," the leader told him. "I can't, Logan."

"I can find Jess with them. It's the only way I'll ever have of finding her again. You know that."

"But in the dosage you propose the drugs are very dangerous. You'll be drawn completely into the past. Your body will be here, with us, but your mind..." He shook his head.

Logan said nothing.

"If you go back," said Jonath, "you may never emerge again, never regain present reality."

"I reject that reality," said Logan.

"And we don't know what the side effects will produce. No one has ever attempted to—"

"I want them," said Logan flatly.

"Even if I said yes, that you could have them, our supply here at the camp is limited. We use R-11 for medical aid, to ease mental pain, but in very small dosages. We couldn't spare anything like the amount you're asking for."

"Then I'll get it elsewhere," said Logan. "On the Market."

"That's your decision," nodded Jonath. "And I'd call it a very unwise one." His eyes held sadness. "I hate to see you do this, Logan."

"What difference does it make what I do?" Logan snapped. "I'm dead already without Jess. She's lost to me now, but she's still alive in my mind. With Jaq. All the years we had together are there. I want them

back. I must find my wife and son again—and this is the only way."

"I still don't agree with what you're doing, but I understand it." Jonath sighed. "Do you know anything about the Market, how to contact it?"

"No, but it should be simple."

"Getting R-11 won't be. I know. I've tried to get it for the camp."

Logan was amazed. "You...on the Market?"

"The People are my responsibility," said Jonath. "I'll deal with anyone to help them."

"All right, so it won't be simple. How do I get R-11?"

Jonath hesitated. "I shouldn't be helping you do this to yourself."

"You'll help me."

"Only because there's no stopping you—whether I help or not."

"I'm glad you realize that," said Logan. His face was set.

"You'll have to go to the New York Complex... You'll never be able to get the amount you want locally."

"Who do I see there?"

"I don't know. But I can direct you to someone who does."

Jonath gave Logan the information.

By morning, the paravane was airborne.

RAWLS

[« ^ »](#)

Summer heat in the Carolinas. Insect weather. Humid. Intense. A draining of the spirit. A punishment. Worse now, since the cities died. No way to escape the scalding air. No coolvents, no frostflow piped into snug lifeunits. Just the heat, lying heavy on Carolina earth, sapping energy and the will to move.

Rawls 7 hated it, cursed it. But without legs, you don't do much traveling. People came to him; he didn't go to them. And Darlington, South Carolina, was where they came.

Rawls hated more than the weather. Most of all, he hated being a cripple. When the Complex died he'd been trapped in a slideway; two of the knife-edged friction belts had snapped, lashing at him like thick steeloid snakes. The main belt caught him just below the waist, slicing off both legs with the precision of a Mark J Surgeon. Miracle he didn't bleed to death. Another citizen had used medseal on him, and that stopped the bleeding in time. But the legs were gone.

Females wouldn't touch him now. Called him a freak. What irony! Rawls, the glasshouse king, whose sexual exploits had been the talk of Arcade—reduced to a loveless cripple.

But, as a prime touchman on the Market, Rawls still had power. He was shrewd. He knew how to finger things people wanted, knew the wheres and the hows and the whos. If you wanted a hard-to-find item in the Market you came to Rawls. To the small shack squatting in humid heathaze on the Daytona Turnpike.

As Logan did.

"Jonath sent me," he said to the legless man. "I need R-11, a lot of it, and he said you'd know where to get it."

Logan stood just inside the doorway. The place smelled foul—and the stubble-bearded little man on the dented groundcart exhaled the same fetid odor.

"How much do you need, citizen?"

"A quantampac. Full dex."

Rawls rubbed the stump of his right leg with grimed fingers. "You know, I can still feel the whole damn thing. Clear to the toes. Knee, muscles, tendons... Left one, I can't feel. Just the right one. But they're both gone. How do you figure a thing like that?"

"I don't," said Logan. He waited, looking steadily down at Rawls. "Well?"

"Can't get a quantam short of NY," he said.

"I'll go there," Logan said.

"Why do you need so much?"

"That's my business."

"Going to use it yourself?"

"Maybe."

"Long lift in a quantam," mused Rawls, scrubbing at the stubble on his cheek. "Long, long lift."

"I know what I need," said Logan. "You just tell me where to get it."

Rawls palmed a powerstud on his skimmer, and the rusted groundcart flowed him to a corner of the room. He attempted to open the lower drawer of a cabinet. The door wouldn't budge. Rawls banged at it with the heel of his right fist. "Heat swells the wood, makes it stick," he told Logan. "Heat ruins everything."

Logan watched him, his face expressionless.

Rawls finally got the drawer open, scabbled inside for a black, lifeleather foilbook. Then he wheeled back to Logan.

"In here," he said, tapping the book, "I've got the name of a contact who can sell you as much R-11 as you need. But first..."

"You want to be paid."

"Exactly."

"I was told you could use these." And Logan opened a tab-box, shook several magnetic skinjewels onto

a wooden table. "With each mood, an individual's body chemistry is altered, and these change color to reflect that mood. They belonged to—" (Jessica. I can see her wearing them.)"—a female I knew. Skin-jewels were quite popular in the Angeles Complex."

"Heard about them," said Rawls. "Never saw any." He plucked a shining red heartstone from the table. It deepened to a festered green in his hand. "How many have you got?"

"These. No more."

"And what will you use for trade in New York?"

"That's not your concern," said Logan. "Do we have a deal or don't we?"

Rawls swept up the stones, quickly pocketed them. "Your contact," he said, handing Logan a foilslip from the book. "Show this when you get there."

Logan took it, started out.

The legless man followed him, wheeling from the shack into bright sunlight. "I can always use more of these," he said as Logan walked toward the paravane.

Rawls shaded his eyes against the heat-scald, receiving no answer. He watched the black-garbed figure climb into the control pod, activate the blades. Debris whipped and danced around the cripple in the agitated air as the paravane built power.

The craft lifted, was gone.

Rawls shifted the stones inside his pocket with slow fingers.

In the heat, his missing right leg began to ache.

GIANT

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Logan had taken a mazecar to the New York Complex on leave from DS school when he was sixteen to pairmate with a female who lived there. She was an older woman of twenty, a year away from Sleep and into young Sandmen. Gonzales 2 had told Logan about her, told him she was something really special. Chinese. Sexually astonishing.

Gonzales had been correct. Her voracious sensual appetites had drained Logan, left him anxious to return to duty. The pleasure with her had been so intense it was akin to pain. New York was different then: glittering, swarming with citizens, a world mecca for exotic living.

Now it was a dark ruins.

But it had something Logan wanted far more than he had wanted the Chinese girl. It had R-11.

In 1997, when Mayor Margaret Hatch had ordered the Central Park fill-in, construction of the Green Giants had begun. Taking their name from the fact that they were replacing the last bit of open greenery in New York City, the Giants were designed to accommodate three million, a bold step in reducing the

city's acute housing crisis. In height, they were taller than the Empire State and each was a self-contained miniature city, with every comfort and convenience. To get space in one, you hocked your soul, and signed a lifetime lease.

The first three-mile complex was a converted Giant. But, eventually, the outdated skytowers were torn down and replaced.

Nostalgia prevailed. As a memorial to the past, one of the Green Giants was allowed to remain standing, dwarfed by the three-mile city dwellings around it.

Yet it lived again when the Thinker died. Its precomputerized, self-contained power units were quickly utilized, and it became the hub in cross-state Market operations, a mighty storehouse-headquarters, humming with activity. After more than a century of obsolescence, it was now the only living structure in a dead city.

Logan came to the Giant for R-11.

Jonath had told him that he would have no trouble with Scavengers in New York. This was one city they did not control. "The Marketers are in charge there," Jonath had said.

"Who are they exactly?"

"Mostly ex-DS. A few key merchantmen. They keep the Scavengers in line. The city's wide open."

Flying over it at night, Logan got the impression of a vast, lightless range of man-made mountains, upthrusting peaks of steel and glass. Dominating the interior of the city, with flamebright gaudiness, standing two thousand feet above street level, light flooding out from its metal pores, stood the Green Giant.

As he swept over the shining structure, pinlights found his craft. Two Market patrolships soared up from the roof of the building to circle Logan, guiding him to a setdown on the Giant's illumined skyport.

Logan cut power, exited to the roof.

"No weapons allowed," a tall man in gray said to him. The Market guard carried a belted Fuser. His eyes were humorless.

Logan nodded, placed his holstered Gun inside the paravane, sealed the magnetic lock. "How long can I leave my ship here?" he asked.

"As long as you have business inside," said the guard. "We'll keep an eye on it."

"Thanks," said Logan.

Another gray-clad guard walked up to him as he neared the entrance shaft. "Name?"

"Logan 3."

"Seeing who?"

"Lacy 14."

"You'll need a contact pass."

Logan handed him the foilslip he'd obtained from Rawls. The guard studied it for a moment, notched one corner with a foilpunch, handed it back.

"Go ahead," he said, activating the shaft release.

Logan stepped inside.

The interior corridors shimmered with light; this intensity of artificial illumination stunned Logan. He'd seen nothing like it since the days of Arcade. Because the Giant was able to generate its own electricity, and had never depended on the Thinker for power, the death of the great computer had not affected it. Restoration had been relatively simple—and now this city-within-a-city was functioning at peak efficiency after long years of darkness. Indeed, a sleeping Giant had awakened to serve new masters.

Although the outer surface of the building glowed beacon-bright, the majority of its two hundred floors were dark; the Market occupied only the Penthouse area, and the three floors just beneath for storage. The Giant was private, off-limits, except to those who ran the Market, and to the few special customers allowed to deal inside for high-grade goods. Such as R-11.

At the end of the corridor another guard stopped Logan. Same gray uniform. Same eyes. The hard look of the Sandman. Ex-DS, fitting their new roles as skin fits muscle.

"Pass," said the guard.

Logan produced the notched foilslip.

The guard pressed a section of wall. A door oiled back.

"Keep moving," said the guard.

Another corridor. Much shorter.

Logan faced a heavy flexcurtain, woven entirely from gold mesh. The curtain stirred, folded back.

"Come in, Logan 3."

A woman's voice. Sensual. Low-pitched.

Logan entered a chamber draped in silks and lit by firebirds. The small, feathered creatures, whose metallic bodies pulsed with inner light, swooped in glowing arcs around the large center room, settling, strutting, ruffling their multicolored plumage...

Logan hesitated, scanning the room. He saw no one. Only the birds, like moving fire jewels.

Then the woman appeared, rising from one corner of the chamber. She had been lying on a fall of snowpillows and, in standing, seemed to materialize from the room itself, seemed made of silks and smoked ivory

Her body was perfection—a rich orchestration of scented peaks and soft valleys, tautly accented by the white flowgown she wore. A cat-emerald burned at her throat.

"I'm Lacy 14," she said.

"Since you know my name," said Logan, "I assume you also know what I came for."

A firebird fluttered to her shoulder and she stroked the glowing plumage, her large green-black eyes fixed

on Logan.

"Why so abrupt?" she smiled. "I never conduct business without getting to know my buyers. Sit down, Logan."

Snowpillows. A soft peltrug of worked silver. No couch or chairs. Logan sat, adjusting one of the larger pillows at his back.

"Much better," said Lacy. "Drink?"

"No."

"I insist. I have a really excellent fruitwine from Spain which is impossible to duplicate," she told him.

Logan nodded. "Since you insist."

She brought him the wine, settled next to him. "Let us drink to the satisfactory conclusion of pleasure."

Logan was edgy, off-balance; he had expected a hard-faced Marketer who would waste no time, no words. He'd expected to deal quickly and be gone without ceremony. But, instead, here was Lacy...

Logan tasted the wine, allowing the smoked flavor to permeate his tongue. "You're right," he said. "This is excellent."

"I've heard about you, Logan."

"What have you heard?"

"That you sought out and destroyed the Borgias. Alone, at Steinbeck. One against twelve. Is it true?"

"It's true," said Logan. "But I'm not going to talk about it."

"That's not necessary," she smiled. "You're obviously a man of great passion. I've...been waiting for someone extraordinary."

Logan slipped a sack of Mooncoins from his belt.

"All I want here is what I came to get," he said. "A quantampac of R-11."

"That will be produced in due course. After you've earned it.",

"I have these," he said, handing her the Mooncoins. "There's nothing like them on Earth."

She put the sack aside, unopened. "We'll deal with these later. I come first."

Logan was suddenly angry.

"Get a merchantman to penetrate you," he said: "Or one of your ex-DS. They all have fine bodies. They'll do a very satisfactory job."

She laughed, a throaty sound, deep and assured. "I don't want you—or any other male," she told him. "I never allow a man to touch me. Ever."

"Well, what do you want?"

"Follow me and find out." She stood, putting aside her wine.

Logan got up. "Can't we just—"

"This way," said Lacy. "If you want the pac, you do as I say."

Sighing, Logan followed her out of the chamber.

They moved together down a short hallway. Lacy opened a mirrored door, beckoned Logan forward.

The room he entered was a large bedchamber, draped in crimson and gold. Soft lights shone through the draperies, and at least half of the floor area was occupied by two deep, expansive flowbeds.

"Recline," said Lacy. "On the farther bed. I'll take this one."

Logan did as she asked. What did she have planned for him?...

Lacy kept her eyes on Logan as she touched a magclasp at her neck; the gown fell away from her body in a soft spill of white. "Am I not beautiful?" she asked him.

"You are," he said.

Her breasts were coned and delicate, tapering to a waist which swelled to perfect hips and long, superbly-muscled legs. "Many men have desired me. Do you desire me, Logan?"

"At another time, in another place..."

She draped herself across the bed, facing his, cat-smiled at him. "I am not your concern here," she said. "You shall provide a show...for my stimulation."

"I don't understand."

She clapped her hands sharply.

The drapes parted at the rear of the chamber.

There were three of them. All nude. All beautiful. All black-skinned and full-figured and arousing. Perfect females, who would have been the pride of any glasshouse from Moscow to Paris.

"They're for you, Logan," said Lacy. "And you are for them."

"You expect me to—"

"Pleasure them. That's what you shall do if you want to please me. And if you do not please me, you will not get the thing you came for."

She turned to the girls. Her eyes were bright and hot. "Undress him," she said. "Caress him. Erect him."

They swayed toward Logan like dusky flowers.

So this is how she obtains her satisfaction? All right, Logan told himself, I'll do as she asks. I'll give her a show. And I'll enjoy what I'm doing. I'll steep myself in warm flesh...lose myself in sexuality.

Indeed, why not?

And Logan took them into his arms.

PEARL

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Logan followed Lacy 14 down the short hallway. As they entered her living quarters a firebird settled on Logan's shoulder, splashing his face with vivid colors. He shook the bird off, and the creature wing-whispered away.

"I did what you asked," he said to Lacy.

"A splendid performance," she agreed. She was wearing the white gown once again, and it billowed as she turned.

"Do I get the pac now?"

"Let me see what you've brought." She picked up the sack of Mooncoins, spilled them into her hand. They were round, bright, stamped with Moon symbols.

"I brought them down from Darkside," said Logan. "You won't find any others. Anywhere."

"They're...attractive," she said. "I can use them. But they won't pay for a full dex. Not of R-11."

Logan flushed with anger. "I did what you asked with the females..."

"And enjoyed yourself handsomely in the process," she said.

"Wasn't that what you wanted to watch me pleasuring them to pleasure yourself?" He tightened his jaw. "I've given you all I have. Everything."

"Not everything," she said.

"What's left?"

"Your paravane. It should fetch a good price. I'll take the coins, and your ship." She smiled. "You know, I'm really being generous about this. You're here alone, unarmed. Normally, I would just have my men take your ship and give you nothing in return. But...since you've...amused me, I'm willing to turn over the drug."

"I can't get back to camp without my ship," said Logan. "And I need Jonath. It's impossible to take R-11 without someone to—"

"Take it here," said Lacy. "I'll provide a liftroom for you, and see to your needs."

Logan considered it. There was nothing left for him in Old Washington. Why not stay here in the New York Complex? One city was no better or worse than another now, without Jess.

"I accept," said Logan.

"There's risk in a full dex," said Lacy. "It could kill you."

Logan said nothing.

"There's no body or mind control with such a high dosage," she said. "You're at the mercy of the drug."

"I want maximum lift," said Logan. "A full re-live. And only a dex will give me that."

"Your decision," shrugged Lacy. "Get whatever personal belongings you have in the ship, then come back here. I'll have the R-11."

He hated losing the paravane: It was a high price to pay. Still, Lacy could have simply taken it, as she said: In dealing with the Market there were no guarantees. You took what they gave you.

Logan had the Gun when the guard said, "You can't go back inside with that." His name was Stile, and he captained Lacy's men. Huge. Slab-bodied. Cruel-faced.

"Lacy made the deal," said Logan. "She gets the ship and I get my personal belongings. This is mine. It goes with me."

Stile looked sullen. "All right...I'll make an exception this time," he said. "But keep it holstered."

"Couple of Fusers in there you can have," said Logan. "They were never mine to begin with."

He fixed the Gun holster to his belt.

There was nothing else. The ship was theirs now. As the R-11 would soon be his.

The small liftroom was stark and empty, dun-colored, without ornament or decoration. Four walls, a floor and a ceiling. No windows or vents.

"You'll need this," Lacy said, and gestured. A gray-clad guard dumped a bodymat, quickly unrolled it. The mat covered the floor, wall to wall.

"What about oxygen?"

"Enough. The room's not sealed."

"I'll need water."

"At necessary intervals. Pelletgun...directly in to your system."

"I don't want to be observed," said Logan.

"You won't be," said Lacy. "But if you convulse..."

"No observation. Just the injections...water when I require it. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

"The drug?" asked Logan.

From her belt, Lacy withdrew a small silver disc. She pressed its center and the disc released a single milky-white pearl. It rolled, catching the light, in the palm of her hand.

"Hard to believe that's a full dex," said Logan.

She smiled. "You've never used R-11?"

"No," he admitted.

"A normal dosage is almost microscopic," she told him. "This is a quantam, full-dex strength. Usually this much R-11 is broken into powder, administered in several stages. I've never seen anyone take a pearl."

"The Re-Live drawers died with the cities," said Logan. "This is the only way left to go back."

"Is going back that important?"

"Yes," said Logan. "It's that important."

She looked at him for a long moment, then handed him the pearl.

"Just place it in the middle of your tongue," she said. "Let it dissolve directly into the tissue. It's effective immediately after ingestion."

And she left him.

LIFT

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Logan brought up the pearl, holding it between the thumb and index finger of his right hand; he studied it in the subdued light of the room. Harmless looking. Beautiful in its simple perfection.

But potent. Very, very potent.

The surface-distortion drug he'd been given by the Scavengers was Candee next to R-11, which was designed to penetrate to the deepest levels of stored life-experience. Science had long since proven, beyond any doubt, that every experience, however trivial, is permanently retained: every sight, sound, odor, every sensory moment of touch, every spoken word...all there, all three-dimensionally alive in the depths of the human brain.

The Re-Live parlors were built on this principle. In their metal wombs it had been possible to re-experience, at choice, any hour, or day, or moment of one's past.

That was the key word: choice. The Re-Live drawers gave you selective control, provided you wished to exercise it. And there were built-in shutoffs if the emotional surge threatened body-health. A Re-Live drawer was safe.

Not so with R-11. At maximum dosage, there was, no control; it prowled the vaults of memory at will, and all choice was removed. However, short of maximum, Logan was not certain he could reach his full experiences with Jaq and Jessica. Under a light dosage he might never find them again.

R-11 had one basic advantage over any other mind-drug. It gave back truth, not fantasy; experiences, not hallucinations. It did not distort as Lysergic Foam did. What Logan re-lived would be real events from his past.

And, buried in that past, his wife and son waited for him.

Logan sat down on the mat which gave softly under his weight.

Now.

Pearl into mouth. On the tongue. Dissolving...

Logan was fighting for balance. The wind whipped at his tunic, fisting him with short, savage gusts. He wasn't sure he could maintain his footing—and a fall was death.

He was sixteen, and new to DS. A raw Sandman, just out of Deep Sleep Training, hunting his first female, nervous, and over-anxious to prove himself.

Logan's runner, Brandith 2, had glass-danced the Arcades before her flower blacked; she was extremely agile, with an incredible sense of body-control. She had lured her nervous pursuer onto a narrow outside repair-ramp, dipping and weaving her way along the thin ridge of metal ahead of him. Luring him forward.

You should have fired the homer, the homer would have finished her!

In his excitement, Logan had set the Gun at ripper, and to be effective a ripper must be fired at fairly close range. He could re-set for homer, but to do so would require taking both hands off the ledgerail, and that was impossible. He'd lose his balance for sure.

"What's the matter, Sandman?" her voice mocked him. "Can't you catch me?"

She had passed an angle-beam, and was no longer in direct sight. Logan moved faster along the ramp, reached the beam. She was waiting for him.

"You're dead, Sandman!" And, braced on the beam, Brandith 2 delivered a smashing blow to his chest with her left foot.

Logan swayed, pitched forward to his knees. The Gun slipped from his clawing fingers. He twisted, hooking his right arm into a strut-support, and slashed up with the heel of his left hand.

The surprise blow took Brandith 2 at throat level, and crushed her windpipe. She clutched at her neck, gasped blood, and fell over the edge in a long, screaming death drop.

Logan felt relief, and instant shame. He'd failed to homer her, and worse yet—much worse—he'd lost the Gun. A Sandman must never relinquish his weapon: the first rule of DS. And now he had allowed a female runner to disarm him, and almost kill him.

On the ramp, alone in the crying wind, Logan could not move. He was locked into his misery. "Failure!" he said aloud. "Failure!"

Would he ever deserve to wear the uniform of a Sandman?

Egypt was a bore.

Logan was eight, and had taken a robocamel to the Pyramids with his best friend, Evans 9. They'd been to Japan earlier that morning, and found Kyoto dull with its restored temples and fat, bronze deities. But, in Tokyo, a sumo wrestler had taught them how to immobilize an opponent by a theatrical display of aggression, without actual body contact. Fascinating.

But Egypt was all heat and endless sand and ugly-snouted robot camels. The Pyramids were a disappointment—smaller than Logan expected, and badly in need of repair. The surface was pitted and crumbling, with many large stones near the top missing entirely.

"They ought to fix them," said Logan. "Smooth them out."

"No, tear them down," said Evans. "Put up new ones, better ones. Old things aren't worth saving."

"Old things are ugly," said Logan.

And that night they took a mazecar to Uganda.

"I can leave here, go with you," she told him.

"No, that's not possible."

"Why isn't it?"

"Because it isn't."

"But you find me exciting? You enjoy my body?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll pair-bond. Until it goes bad. When it goes bad, I'll leave. What's wrong with that?"

"A lot," he said. "I live alone."

"Why?"

"Because of what I am."

This silenced her.

The lovelights of the glasshouse played over their bodies. Gold...

Silver...

Red...

Yellow...

Blue

And still she did not speak.

When Logan left the glasshouse he was angry. Why couldn't he form an alliance? Why must he live alone, finding sexual satisfaction on this fragmented, impulse basis?

Because of what I am.

A DS man cannot function effectively if he is pair-bonded. All emotional ties must be severed. Commitments must not be made. Nothing must interfere with duty.

Duty.

Duty.

"Show me your hand, Logan," said the psyc doctor. Logan obeyed.

"Do you know why you have this?" he said, tapping the palmflower with an index finger.

"To tell my age," Logan said.

"And how old are you?"

"I'm six."

"And what happens when you're seven?"

Logan looked down at his palm. "It goes to blue. And I...leave Nursery."

The doctor nodded. He had kind eyes. "And you are afraid?"

"Yes," said Logan.

"Why? Why are you afraid, Logan?"

The words spilled out in a rush: "Because I love my talk puppet and because I don't want to leave Nursery and because..."

"Go on, tell me."

"Because the world is so big and I'm so little."

"But every boy and girl feels that way, and they're not afraid."

"I'll bet some of them are," said Logan. "Or they wouldn't use a machine like you."

"I deal with many problems at Nursery," said the doctor. He whirred to a medcab, took out a packet of Candees.

"I don't want a Candee," said Logan.

"But they taste good and they make you feel good," said the doctor.

"They make me sleepy."

"Take a Candee, Logan."

"No."

"Do as I say! Take one."

"No."

Logan backed away, but the square machine whirred after him. The doctor's kind eyes were no longer kind. They glittered with determination.

"I'll report this to Autogoverness," he threatened. "You'll be punished."

"I don't care," said Logan defiantly.

"Very well," said the doctor. And he pushed a button on his desk.

An Autogoverness rolled into the office.

"Logan 3 is to be punished. After punishment, he will be given a Candee."

"Yes, doctor," said the round, many-armed robot. She took Logan's hand in one of hers.

"You see, Logan," said the doctor as the boy was being led out. "You can't win."

"How long has he been under?" asked Lacy.

"Two days, six hours," said Stile.

"Convulsions?"

"Minor so far."

"Heartbeat?"

"Erratic, but holding."

"Skincount?"

"One over fifteen. The chemical balance is distorted, but not critical. Of course, he's going in deeper. It could get worse. No way of telling."

"If he dies, notify me immediately."

"Of course," said Stile.

The blow caught Logan at the upper part of the shoulder, a deltoid chop, delivered with force and precision. He felt his left arm go numb, angled his body sharply to keep Francis in direct line of attack.

He lashed out with a reverse savate kick, catching Francis at rib-level, causing him to lurch back, gasping for breath.

"You're good, Logan," said the tall, mantis-thin man, slowly circling his opponent.

"You're better, damn you!" Logan said. "But I'm learning."

"More each day," agreed Francis. "Shall we end this?"

Logan nodded, rubbing his shoulder. "I've had enough."

They hit the needleshower, standing together silently in the cutting spray. Francis had paid for his reputation; his body, in contrast to Logan's unmarked one, bore the scars of a hundred near-death encounters with fanatic runners, cubs, gypsies... Of the crack DS men at Angeles Complex, Francis was the fastest, the most dangerous, the best. Logan was still his pupil, but soon he might be his equal—with natural talent, good fortune, supreme dedication.

Francis had all these.

They walked back into the combat room, got into fresh grays.

"There's a lift-party tonight at Stanhope's," said Logan. "Why not unbend, take it in?"

Francis smiled thinly. The smile was bloodless. "I don't party," he said.

"But we're off-duty until—"

"A Sandman's never off-duty," said Francis coldly. "We could be called in for backup."

"That's never happened to me yet," declared Logan.

"It might," said Francis.

Logan looked at him. "What do you do with your free time?"

"Use it properly. I don't waste it on witless females and lift parties."

"I give up," sighed Logan. He grinned. "You know, Francis, I wouldn't be surprised to find little wires and cogs and springs under your skin... You're not quite human."

"I get my job done," said Francis stiffly.

"Sure. Sure you do," said Logan. "Forget what I said."

But, as he watched Francis walk out, Logan wondered: what the hell does he do with his free time?

"This one's dangerous," said Evans. "He's stolen a paravane and he's got a Fuser with him. I think we need backup."

Logan agreed. "Get on it, while I see if I can run him down."

"With a stick? Can you handle one?"

"I've ridden them before," said Logan. "They're much faster than a paravane. "

"Take care," said Evans, sprinting for a callbox.

Logan checked his ammopac. Full load. He could use a nitro on the runner's ship if he had to. He kicked the hoverstick into life, soaring up at a dizzy angle. Too much thrust. He throttled down a bit, gained full control, gradually increasing his airspeed.

The runner's paravane had been tracked at dead center on the Kansas/Missouri line—which meant if he cut through Greater KC Logan should intercept near the Jefferson Complex.

The Missouri River rolled below him, brown and sluggish. A few speedtugs, a private sailjet or two, otherwise the river was undisturbed. It didn't worry about runners or callboxes or backups or devilsticks or Sleep. Old Man River...just keeps rolling along.

Logan had been correct in his calculations. He spotted the stolen paravane just past Jefferson. Moving at full bladepower.

The runner saw Logan bearing in, swung his ship to face the new threat.

He's bringing up the Fuser! Time to show him what you can do with a stick.

The runner fired.

And missed.

And fired again.

Logan was a sun-dazzled dragonfly—darting, dipping, swooping erratically. An impossible target.

He unholstered the Gun.

The paravane rushed at him.

Logan had the charge set at nitro. Now!

The runner and his ship erupted into gouting, blue-white flame. The stricken craft tipped over and down, diving into Missouri earth with a roar.

Logan brought the stick in, dismounted, checked the runner. Nothing left of him but his right arm and hand, jutting grotesquely out of the flame-charred control pod.

Centered in his palm: a black flower.

"Any change?" asked Lacy.

"He's worse," said Stile. "Into severe muscle convulsions. Skincount's up. And his heart is taking a beating."

"He can't go on, then?"

"He's a hard man," Stile said. "He might surprise you."

They were waiting at Darkside, where their rocket was being readied for the jump to Argos—and Logan held Jessica close, telling her how much he loved her, telling her he'd never known that it was possible to experience such intense emotion, such care-bonding.

"We're free now," she told him. "We can live without fear, build a life together, raise children, be thirty, forty, fifty..."

He smiled, touched at her hair. God, but she was lovely!

"I want a son," he told her.

"We'll have him," she said, squeezing Logan's hand.

"And he'll have children of his own...and we'll be...what did they call them?"

"Grandparents," she said. "Grandma and Grandpa,"

Logan chuckled, shaking his head. "That's hard to believe, to accept. No dreams. No fantasies. A real life ahead of us on Argos."

"Ballard said it wouldn't be easy there," she reminded him. Her eyes clouded "I wish—"

"What?"

"—that Ballard could have come with us. We need a man like that on Argos."

"He's needed more on Earth," said Logan. "To handle the Sanctuary Line. To help more runners."

"I know," she nodded. "We owe him our lives."

"Everybody here owes him the same debt," said Logan.

And, touching, they stared out beyond the port, at the chalked, lifeless horizon of the Moon.

When Jaq was five Logan and Jess gave him a special party. Only the spaceborn were invited—those who had been conceived on Argos and who, like Jaq, had never known their mother planet.

Logan told the children about Earthgames he'd played in Nursery, about vibroballs and teeter-swings and talk puppets. It seemed they could never hear enough about Earth.

"Were there really Sandmen who chased you?" asked a girl of six.

Logan nodded.

"And were the Sandmen really bad?" asked the little girl.

"Yes," said Logan. "But they were taught to be. Some of them changed... They didn't all stay bad."

"You were one, weren't you?" asked a ten-year-old, eyes alight.

"I was one," admitted Logan.

"And were you bad?"

"For awhile."

"No!" screamed little Jaq, running across the chamber to his father, hugging him fiercely. "Logan was never bad!"

The boy was sobbing.

Jessica came to them, held them both. She kissed Logan's cheek.

In the sudden, strained silence a six-year-old tugged at Logan's wrist.

"Can we play now? Can we?"

"He's calmer," said Stile. "Relaxed. Almost tranquil. His mind seems to have found what it was looking for. He's in very deep."

Lacy looked pensive. "What do you think a Sandman's Gun would bring on the Market?"

"A great deal. But it would have to be de-fused, the pore-pattern detonation device neutralized."

"Can that be done?"

"It can be. It's a very delicate procedure."

She paced the room, thinking.

"He'll never trade or sell the Gun," said Stile.

"I know," she said. "It won't be possible to negotiate with him." She stopped, looked directly at Stile. "We'll have to kill him."

OUT

[« ^ »](#)

Sprawled face-down across the mat, deep in his mental dreamworld with Jessica and Jaq, Logan was not aware that the room had changed, that something was being added to the atmosphere. From a small opening under the door a colorless substance was being piped into the chamber.

Tetrahyde. Toxic and totally effective on human body tissue. Once absorbed into the lungs, it destroyed them with deadly efficiency.

Logan breathed in...breathed out...breathed in...

He had exactly ten more minutes of life.

Logan, Logan, do you hear me?

I...hear you.

You are in great danger. You must come out!

No. Here with Jessica...with Jaq.

Listen to me, Logan. It's Dia.

How? How did you find me?

Jonath. When you didn't return to the camp he sent word to me. He knew no one else could reach you.

Where are you now?

Close to you. Close to the Giant. I knew they'd never let me see you—so I'm sending my mind to you, my thoughts... You must come out to me!

No. Won't come out.

They're killing you, Logan.

Not true. They help me, give me water...

All that's over. The woman, Lacy, she has made up her mind to take the Gun. I know her thoughts...she wills you dead. Poison is in the air. You must come out, now! I'll help you...our two minds, together...Only minutes remain!

Logan willed his body to fight the drug—and Dia linked her mind to his; the images inside Logan's head began to mix, break up...

...and Jessica was...

the Loveroom, and "Mother loves you," said Ballard...

who was Francis, who was...Jaq, only five,

but already he...

kissed her deeply, knowing they were never going to...

Harder! Try harder, Logan!

Trying. Can't. No use.

Fight! Break free!

...because Box was...in the cave...falling...

and love was...falling...

everything was falling...No. Too deep...too far in...

But you're doing it...we're doing it together...you're almost...

...out!

Logan blinked stupidly; his head pounded—as if a thousand hot needles had been driven into his skull.

Only a few seconds left! Use the Gun, Logan! Use it!

Logan fumbled dizzily at his belt holster, his nostrils filled with the acid odor of Tetrahyde...The gas was upon him. He held his breath, pulled the Gun free...

Fired.

The nitro charge exploded the door from its hinge-locks, flooding the liftroom with fresh air.

Logan staggered to his feet, plowed across the mat toward the gaping exit.

Where are you, Dia?

Outside. On the street just below the Giant. You'll see me.

I'll be there. Soon.

Stile was in the corridor, running toward Logan, a weapon in his hand.

Gun on ripper.

Logan fired, tearing him apart.

Lacy saw this, darted back into her chambers. The firebirds cawed and fluttered.

Gaining strength by the second, Logan swept past her, reached the outside door, raced for the roofport.

Behind him, Lacy was screaming: "Stop him! Stop—"

Three guards tried to—without success. Logan chopped them aside with blows from Gun and body.

Lacy appeared in the roof door, Fuser in hand, firing as Logan reached his paravane. Her first beam-blast sheared away a section of alum sheeting next to Logan's head.

He swung bitterly toward her, triggered the Gun, on tangle.

The swift whirl of steelmesh filament engulfed her and she fell back, clawing at the choking, constricting coils of metal.

Dia was not alone when Logan reached her. The man from the Wilderness camp who had flown her to New York was there.

"How did you find another paravane?" Logan asked him.

"There are still a few around," the man told him. "Found this one in West Virginia. She needed a new gyrounit, but she's fine now."

"Tell Jonath how grateful I am," said Logan.

"He'll be glad to hear you're all right."

Thanks to you, Logan thought, looking at Dia.

And she smiled at him.

"Will you be following me back?" the man asked Logan.

No. We're going west. Together.

"No," said Logan. "We'll be going west."

The two men shook hands. "Good trip," said Logan. With Dia, he watched the ship fade into night sky.

Where now? asked Logan. *How far west?*

All the way to the Coast, she told him, sitting beside him in the humming paravane. The New York Territory unrolled below them, night-black and massive.

I want to take you home, Logan. She smiled, her hands touching gently at the planes of his face. *West, to my home.*

As heat is felt on skin, Logan felt the passion radiating from her mind.

He owed her his life, but could he give her something more than gratitude? Was he capable, now, of a greater commitment to her?

Logan wasn't sure.

He would know when the time for knowing was at hand.

EYES

« ^ »

Liath was waiting for them on the shore.

Before he saw her, Logan received her warm thoughts, reaching into the sky to greet him: *Welcome, Logan... Welcome to our home!*

The paravane, sweeping over her, whipped Liath's long hair in a silver halo around her delicately-sculptured face and neck. The smokegown she wore billowed up in a swirl of mistsilks, revealing a lithe, cat-muscled body. She waved happily at them.

Is she not beautiful? Yes—as you are, Dia.

Logan set down in the sand at the ocean's edge. The Pacific lifted sleeves of bluegreen lace and spilled them at their feet as Dia and Logan climbed free of the ship.

The two sisters embraced, holding one another tightly.

There was no hesitation in their movements, no blind fumbling—yet they were sightless!

No, we see, Logan.

And with a clarity much greater than yours.

You steal my thoughts!

Both girls smiled, a double radiance. It was early morning and the sun made a bronze shield of the ocean; the sky was newly-washed with wind, and flowed like another iron blue sea, free of clouds, to the horizon. The sharp odors of brine and kelp reached Logan, mixed with the cry of an overhead gull, circling and curious.

Liath took Logan's hand. *I am glad you are safe*, she told him.

Your sister...She reached me when no one else could.

They walked along the wet sand.

Dia took Logan's other hand, and the sisters guided him inland, toward a rising cliff of pink coral.

Our home, nodded Dia.

Our castle! enthused Liath.

It was literally that: an immense castle of fibrous pink-and-white coral rising sheer from the sand. Sun spangled its daggered edges.

Careful... Walk where we walk, warned Dia. The coral is very sharp.

Logan followed them along a path of beaten stone which wound up into the depths of the structure.

They emerged, finally, into a wide, sun-splashed chamber, lined with thick, tufted flowcloth. Here every coral edge was softened by resilient layers of cloth, by pillowrugs and foamcushions.

Watch!

Delightedly, Liath skipped across the room to a large, coral-crystal pillar. She placed her hand on the pillar and, slowly, a series of silver curtains hushed down from the ceiling, forming a protective tenting over their heads.

These are weather shells, Dia told him. We are not like father. Our skin grows cold at night. They protect us from wind and fog.

And for warmth... said Liath.

She pressed another section of crystal—and a fire bloomed to life in the center of the floor.

Incredible.

We want you to live here with us, Logan, Dia told him. Share our home, our lives...our love.

Liath's thoughts flowed in: *There are just the two of us. One is nearly always with father at the Bridge. We alternate.*

When Liath is gone, it can be lonely...

For me, also, when Dia is away... We need you, Logan.

Need you...

A pairbond? questioned Logan. Between all three of us?

It could be beautiful, Logan!

And Logan thought: *Jaq is gone.*

Gone, they echoed.

Jess is gone.

Gone...mind-whispered Dia.

And we are here, said Liath.

A night—A day. Another night...

Logan found joy with Dia and Liath. Their minds and bodies rioted together in a spillout of sensual delights, a crossfire of thoughts, emotions, impressions, shared experiences...

But there was a barrier.

Your eyes, Logan. They blind you to sight.

Dia was with him. They were lazing nude in the slow ocean tides along a sun-tinted stretch of yellow beach.

Logan smiled. *I see the sun on the water. I see gulls in the sky...* He touched her body. *I see your beauty...*

But I see more, she told him. So much more, Logan! My vision is achieved with the inner eye, and is on a scale beyond your conception. Whole worlds are open to me which are closed to you. I want to share them.

How?

You must free your inner eye—allow it to expand your total consciousness.

For me, Dia, that's impossible.

No, you're wrong. You need only remove the barrier of your outer sight to free that greater sight which is within you. It waits to be released.

Are you saying that I should—blind myself?

She shook her head, smiling softly. *No, I'm saying you should free yourself...enter our world...Liath's and mine. Become truly bonded to us. You have the ability as few others have it. As we are gifted, so are you.*

And how would I do this?

There is a heat shield in the castle...of sunmetal. Its surface is as bright as the sun itself. Stand before it, gaze full into it with your physical eyes—and it will free you. It will take away the barrier which separates us.

Is it really possible?

It is, Logan, it is!

That night, in the castle, Logan could not sleep. Existence had no reality, now, beyond the daughters of Andar. Dia had saved him from certain death and, in a way, his life was hers.

She had asked nothing of him; she had only given. Now she wanted to give more...wanted to give him her inner world, share it with him.

Why was he so afraid of losing his eyes? He had seen the cities, the cruelty, the terror and frenzy of runners fleeing the Gun. He had seen the plague run its terrible path across Argos, destroying his friends, all the people he had come to know and trust. He'd seen the Wilderness People, lost and helpless against the ravages of nature. He'd seen his son's sprawled body...

Jaq was dead. Jessica was dead. What more was there for him, in this world of shadows?

Noon. The sun tall and direct above the castle. The three of them standing before a high, curtained object. *When we move aside the curtain, look full into the shield*, Dia told him. *Do not blink or shift your gaze.*

For ten seconds. That's all it will require, assured Liath. *There will be no pain—only an intense brightness.*

I understand.

Dia embraced him, kissed his lips. *Trust us, Logan.*

I do. I trust you both.

Ten seconds—and you will be with us forever, said Liath.

Logan braced himself, teeth clamped, jaw muscles tight. He nodded.

Open the curtain!

Dia moved to the shield, drew back its wine-red cover.

Brightness! Incredible, penetrating brightness... a sun-glare of fierce light so intense that Logan flinched back from it.

Yet, he did not blink.

Six seconds!

Seven...

Three more seconds, Logan!

A rush of sound above them. Blades chopping air. The red curtain swirled, lifted itself, settled to half-cover the shield.

Logan turned away to a wild cry from above: "Logan! Quick, Logan! I have news!"

The voice of Jonath.

In a fantail of sand, the paravane came to rest on the beach. Jonath leaped from the machine, ran toward Logan, waving, shouting.

They met at the coral's edge.

"I flew here the moment I heard the news. I would allow no one else to bring it."

"What news, Jonath?"

The Wilderness leader gripped his friend by both shoulders; his eyes blazed with the words: "She's alive! Jessica's alive!"

JONATH

"All right, tell me everything you know," Logan said tightly.

They were in the castle. Jonath was seated on a fall of snowpillows, sipping green seawine which Dia had brought him. She and her sister hovered near Logan, who was never entirely still. He paced constantly as he listened to Jonath, questioned him on details.

"An ex-Sandman named Evans brought me the news," said the Wilderness man. "He told me—"

"Evans 9?"

"Yes," said Jonath.

"I've known him since childhood. We worked the Angeles Complex together."

Jonath nodded. "He said he was your friend—that he'd become a runner because of you."

"Evans...running?"

"You made it to Sanctuary and so he decided to try for it—but he couldn't connect with Ballard's people. Evans was hiding out when they penetrated the Line at Steinbeck."

"Why would he tie in with Gant?"

"After the Thinker died he told me he just naturally gravitated back with other ex-Sandmen. When Gant took command of their group Evans followed along."

A flash of instant mental communication between Logan and the sisters: *Who is Gant?*

A monster. The worst of the Sandmen. He hates me.

Why?

He was in charge of Angeles Complex when I became a runner. My escape to Sanctuary was a personal embarrassment to him, a black mark on his record. I was the only Sandman to ever reach Sanctuary, and he hates me for it.

"Evans and Gant argued," said Jonath. "Gant tried to have him killed. He got away, came to us, looking for you. He wanted you to know that Gant bought Jessica on the Market."

"That Borgia bitch lied to me," said Logan. "She had me convinced that Jess was dead."

"To protect herself, obviously," said Jonath. "By shifting the blame to Prince, she thought you'd let her go."

"But I didn't," said Logan flatly.

Dia looked agonized. *You're leaving us! Your thoughts say it.*

I'm going after Jess.

But Gant—he'll never let you have her.

I'll take her.

He'll kill you, Logan!

He'll probably try.

The Sandmen are with him. You'll never—

"Where is she?" Logan asked Jonath. A muscle danced in his cheek. "Where does Gant have her?"

Jonath told him.

DAKOTAS

« ^ »

Deep green below them. A forest flow of pine-thick wilderness, broken by high granite cliffs and jeweled lakes, darkened by the swift-sliding shadow of the paravane.

The Black Hills of the Dakotas.

"When we get there," Logan said, "I want you to stay with the ship until I bring Jess out."

"Negative. I'm going in with you," said Jonath. "You'll need all the help you can get."

"Then take one of these." He handed Jonath a Fuser. "Courtesy of the Borgias."

"I've never fired one."

"Nothing to it. Just aim and press the gripstud with your thumb. It's laser-powered. The beam will cut through any surface."

"Do you think we've actually got a chance of bringing her out?"

"Would it make any difference if I said no?"

Jonath sighed, idly turning the weapon in his hand. "The fact that you know he's got her...that dictates your action."

"But not yours," said Logan. "Why did you come with me, Jonath?"

"Because you're my friend." He smiled. "And I happen to place a high value on friendship. It's one of the few real things I can count on in this brave new world of ours."

"Did Evans tell you how many Sandmen Gant has with him?"

"At least two dozen...maybe more. He wasn't sure."

"It's Gant himself I worry about," said Logan. "The man's a total fighting machine. And he doesn't make mistakes."

"Evans told me Gant thinks you're dead, that the Borgias killed you at Steinbeck."

"Good. That means he won't be expecting our visit. Gives us a slight edge going in."

They rode in silence above the Dakotas.

Logan thought of Liath, and of Dia. Of ocean sunsets and midnight sands and clean sea air—and of lying

with them in soft coral darkness... They knew he'd never return to them. And when he left they'd sent their farewells soaring after him as the paravane lifted away from the beach...

We love you, Logan!... We'll always love you.

Always.

Always.

Fading. Dying out behind him...

Always.

Always.

Always.

"There!" Jonath pointed excitedly downward. "Rushmore! We're close now."

The rippling shadow of the paravane flowed over the somber granite heads of Mount Rushmore.

Logan took precautions: Gant might have posted a lookout, and since surprise was essential he brought the paravane down in a tree-screened ravine well short of their goal.

"Last chance to change your mind," Logan said as the blades idled to silence.

"Let's go," said Jonath, his mouth set in a stubborn line.

"If we move fast enough," said Logan, "we should be able to get there by sundown."

He stowed the Fuser in his belt and removed a canister of water from the paravane.

"We should cover the ship," said Jonath. "If we make it back here and it's gone..."

"No one can spot it from the air," Logan assured him. "Not down in this ravine. It's safe enough."

And they set off.

The country was extremely ragged, laced with drifts of sharp rock and tangled root-grass which slowed their progress. Brambles tore at their skin; sun hammered their backs.

At a rest halt Logan shared the canister of water with his friend.

"How much farther?" asked the Wilderness leader, breathing heavily, his back against a pine.

"Hour maybe," said Logan. "When I was here before, with Jess, I came in from another direction. But we should sight it soon."

They did.

The pride of the Dakotas.

A carved granite mammoth rising for more than five hundred and fifty feet into the sky of the Black Hills.

A warrior chief riding a mighty stallion.

A mountain that had become a man: Crazy Horse.

They were standing on a high ridge with a clear view of the mountain.

"Magnificent!" declared Jonath, staring at the awesome figure.

"He led the Sioux against Custer at Little Big Horn," said Logan. "Tashunca-uitco. A great leader. They say his arm points toward the Happy Hunting Ground of his people."

"And now he belongs to Gant," said Jonath bitterly.

They started down the ridge.

The sun had tipped to the western horizon when they reached the base of Crazy Horse.

Logan raised a hand, hesitating. A gold object glittered in deep grass to his left.

Something alive? A hidden Sandman?

He moved cautiously toward it, weapon in hand, Jonath following.

A glazed ruby eye stared up at Logan; its lens was shattered; part of a broken, rusting bulk of sunken metal.

"What is it?"

"Mech eagle," said Logan, leaning to examine the ruptured metal corpse. "Robot guardian designed to protect Crazy Horse. Looks like this one died with the Thinker."

Jonath picked up a portion of bronzed wingfeather. "Big," he said.

"And deadly," said Logan. "A pair of them ripped me last time I came here." Logan pointed upward, to the head of the warrior. "They lived on his shoulders. Went after anything that moved."

"Then let's be glad this one's not active."

Logan smiled.

"How do we get inside?" asked Jonath.

"There are three main access caves, but Gant would likely have men at each... Our best bet is to get in from above. Through a break in the rock."

"I'm not much good at climbing," Jonath said.

"We won't need to go too high," Logan told him. "Mountain's split in several places. Just a matter of picking one."

Logan reconnoitered the flank of rising rock, climbing up to investigate two of the cave-like surface splits. Satisfied, he gestured to Jonath.

"Here," he said. "This one."

Awkwardly, Jonath climbed up to join him.

"Be extremely careful inside," Logan warned. "One loose rock could fall all the way to the bottom. Our game would be up."

Jonath nodded.

Logan removed a small bulletlight from his tunic. "I'll have to keep this shielded," he said, "but at least we won't be in total darkness. Stay behind me."

"I sure don't plan to lead," smiled Jonath.

"One thing puzzles me," said Logan.

"What?"

"Why didn't Evans supply you with information on where Gant has Jessica? We could blunder around for miles in there!"

"My fault, really," admitted Jonath. "When he told me she was alive I was so anxious to reach you with the news that I failed to question him fully."

"Doesn't matter," said Logan. "If Jess is alive in there I'll find her...no matter how far we go or how long it takes."

THINKER

[« ^ »](#)

They had agreed to converse only out of necessity once they were inside the mountain—and now they moved in silence between pressing walls of deep-winding rock. Downward.

Toward the Thinker.

Built in the 1980s on a massive research grant, and symbolizing one of the high points of human scientific achievement, it had never been designed to rule Earth. Its final installation here, in the Crazy Horse caverns in 1991, opened a whole new research era, promising an end to disease and poverty. The truly immense computer-complex, with its mechanical cells numbering ten raised to the seventeenth power, was a natural extension of the space-probe computers of the 1970s, but with much vaster potential.

Until the Little War.

When the young took charge of world government, they also took over the Thinker—re-programming it to their own ends, setting up the Death-at-21 society with this supreme god-computer as their major arm of enforcement. The cities of Earth lived in its metallic grip, becoming totally dependent upon it. The Thinker's multi-million arteries became the world's prime root system, feeding power and control to each city around the globe.

As knight slays dragon, Ballard had killed the computer. It lay now, acres of blackened, inert metal, an endless cemetery of silent relays and ruptured cables, stretching for becalmed miles beneath the granite bulk of Crazy Horse.

But even in death, the Thinker inspired awe.

"It was alive when I was here with Jess," said Logan softly, as he and Jonath stood on a wide ledge overlooking the complex. Fissured cracks in the rock walls of the mountain allowed thin spears of light to cut across the vast, dead-metal plain of linked computer banks.

"It goes on forever!" marveled Jonath. He started moving toward the floor of the caverns. Logan caught him just before his foot touched the dust-dulled surface, pulled him back abruptly.

"What's wrong? Gant isn't in this section."

"Not Gant," said Logan. "The Watchman."

"Watchman?"

"Another robot kill-device. Programmed to react instantly to the slightest pressure on the floor's surface." Logan picked up a small pebble, tossed it onto the flooring.

Silence. No alarms. No movement.

"We're all right," sighed Logan. "It's dead." He grinned at Jonath. "Believe me, you don't want that thing coming after you."

"Which way now?" asked Jonath.

"I'm not sure," said Logan, looking down a long row of silent computer banks. "Did Evans say why Gant picked Crazy Horse as his headquarters?"

"No. Just that he was here."

"He's probably rigged up some kind of auxiliary power—for light and heat. Using parts of the Thinker. Once we locate the power source we've found Gant."

"This thing spreads out for miles."

"Best chance is to head for the Central Core. Gant could have tapped into it for his power. If so, his headquarters will be close to the Core."

"But I thought this was dead...all of it."

"The components still exist," said Logan. "Gant might have found a way to partially reactivate some of them." He took out the canister of water, opened it. "Want some?"

"My throat's been dry ever since we got here," admitted Jonath, taking several swallows.

Logan drank, then stowed the canister back in his tunic. "Let's go. And walk softly all the way."

Weapons in hand, they headed for the Core.

ALIVE

[« ^ »](#)

Theoretically, Logan knew where the heart of the Thinker was located, but he'd never seen it. However,

if his reasoning was correct regarding Gant's use of this potential power center, the Core would soon reveal itself.

A live hum of energy alerted them as they moved down one of the mile-long corridors. A golden wash of light haloed the darkness ahead of them.

Logan spoke in a low whisper to Jonath: "Gant's men could be anywhere in this area. Keep close to the banks."

The sound increased.

"Crawl," directed Logan, dropping to his stomach. "We're almost there."

They inched forward, emerging onto a spiral of balcony which overlooked the glowing mass of the Central Core.

It was huge—an interlinking of incredibly-complex electronic columns, rising into the upper level of the mountain, each golden column pulsing with incalculable energies. At least half of the columns were "alive."

Logan was stunned. The display of computer power astonished him. In reactivating this much of the Core Gant had accomplished far more than Logan had believed possible.

To what purpose? Surely he had harnessed considerably more power than his personal use required.

"I want to get closer," Logan told Jonath. "You stay here while I—"

"Closer?" an amplified voice boomed and crashed around them. "A simple wish, Logan 3. One that I shall be happy to grant."

A cluster of pinbeams raked the balcony as Logan and Jonath sprang back, guns ready.

Logan blinked into the glare: "Are you Gant?"

"I am," the voice crackled.

"Where's Jessica?"

"Where indeed!" And the voice boomed in laughter. "Why should I tell you anything?"

"We're armed," Logan warned. "We can do a lot of damage here."

A dark figure advanced on them along the curving balcony. "That's an empty threat," said a voice that Logan recognized immediately.

"Evans!"

"Been a long time, Logan. When you made it to Argos I thought we'd never see you again. Yet..." And he smiled. "Here you are!"

Jonath was trembling with rage. "You used me—to get Logan here. Everything you told me...lies! All lies!"

"Not everything," said Evans smoothly, covering them with his Gun. "I said that Gant was here, which he is. And that he'd taken Jessica. Also true."

Jonath's eyes blazed. He raised the Fuser. "You filthy—"

Evans Gunned him. Ripper. In a sudden eruption of heat Jonath's body was blown apart. The remains of his charred corpse sprawled at Logan's feet.

"You are surrounded, Logan," boomed Gant's voice. "My men have been pacing you since the moment you entered Crazy Horse. Now, if you wish to see Jessica alive you'll hand your weapon to Evans 9."

"Do it," snapped Evans.

Face tight, eyes hard on his ex-friend, Logan handed the Fuser to Evans.

Other Sandmen materialized around him. One of them tapewired Logan's hands behind his back; another quickly looped a chokechain around his neck, affixed it to his wrists, snugged it tight.

During this, Logan remained silent.

With a tight smile, Evans said, "Welcome back, friend."

Logan spat in his face.

GANT

[« ^ »](#)

Seven feet tall. Bare-waisted. Dark, burnished skin. Deep-sunk, luminous eyes. A shark's slash of mouth.

Gant.

Logan stood before him, flanked by two Sandmen.

"Down," said Gant to one of them.

In response, the Sandman jerked fiercely on Logan's chokechain, forcing him to his knees.

Gant walked around him in a slow circle. "Your body's in good condition." He prodded Logan's shoulder. "Solid muscle tone. I'm happy to see that you've maintained yourself. So many ex-Sandmen go slack, allow their bodies to—"

"Where—is—she?" Logan's voice was edged, the words spaced with cold anger.

"You'll see her," said Gant. "I give you my absolute promise that the two of you shall soon be reunited."

"Have you...harmed her?"

Gant looked down at Logan and, for the first time, smiled at him. The smile was grotesque. The tall man had replaced his teeth with rubies. They glittered like blood in Gant's wide jaw.

"I never harm a thing of value," he said. "And Jessica has been of immense value to me." Again the jeweled smile. "She brought me you."

He gestured to the Sandmen. Logan was dragged up, pushed into a couch facing Gant's desk.

The tall man eased into a lifeleather chair, folded his hands and leaned across the mirrored expanse of desk. "This mountain is mine, Logan. It was Ballard's once. But he got careless."

Logan found it all but impossible to listen to Gant, talk to him with any degree of calm; he wanted, with every ounce of his conscious being, to launch himself at the man's throat.

"You smashed the Sanctuary Line at Steinbeck," said Logan. "...and followed Ballard here."

"That's correct. But I was a bit late in arriving. Before I killed him Ballard had time to destroy a large part of the Thinker. Fortunately, not all. As you can see, he left the greater part of the Core intact."

Logan remained silent as Gant fingered a large, square-cut ruby, one of several on the desk. He studied his captive, turning the ruby slowly in his fingers. "Now I have the Central Core, and you. A double bonus."

"All these years...you've been brooding about my escape."

"You dishonored me as a Sandman!"

"You have no honor, Gant! You've never had it. All you're after is revenge."

"An honorable goal in itself," said Gant. "Many great men have sought it." He chuckled. "In fact, when you killed at Steinbeck you were seeking exactly that against the Borgias. Revenge."

"I wanted Jess back. I went there to find her—but it was you behind it all. You had her taken!"

"No, I'm afraid I can't claim credit for that. The outlanders happened upon her, didn't realize the prize they'd found. I was able to purchase her for a very modest price. But the price didn't matter..."

He stood up, walked casually over to Logan, buried his right fist in his hair and savagely jerked Logan's head back. "I wanted you, Logan." His voice was cold iron. "Wanted you here!"

Then he smiled again, releasing his grip, moved back to his desk. "Actually, until Jessica was put on the Market, I was not aware that you'd returned to Earth. But once I found her it made everything simple. Buy her. Hold her. Get word to you. Wait for you. All very simple."

"How do I know you haven't killed her?"

"You don't," said Gant. "I thought carefully about it, thought about bringing you here and showing you her corpse...but decided on a richer plan. One that will...satisfy me more."

"Were you...satisfied with Jonath's death?" asked Logan bitterly.

"He was brandishing a weapon. There was no other course of action possible."

"Look..." Logan drew in a breath. "We've had our talk. When do I see Jess?"

"Soon. As I promised," smiled the tall man. "I note, by the way, that you seem to find my smile unusual. Rubies happen to be a personal vanity of mine. I visited a New You and had these put in. I rather like the effect."

"Why can't I see Jessica now?"

Gant's face tightened. "Because I say you can't. First...there's a special room you must visit. Of my own design. I think you'll find it...stimulating. After your visit there you'll be reunited with Jessica."

"If you're lying to me, Gant...If she's dead..."

"What will you do?"

"I'll kill you. Somehow, I'll kill you"

Gant laughed, a booming sound in the room. "As a Sandman you never lacked bravado, Logan. Always full of drive, self-confidence...But, in your present situation, threatening me is an empty and ridiculous gesture." He took a Fuser from his desk, moved quickly to press the flanged barrel against Logan's forehead. "I could burn you in an instant."

"I don't deny it," said Logan. His eyes met Gant's, locked on them. "But you heard what I said."

Gant flung aside the weapon, abruptly turned his bronzed back on Logan. He raised a hand. "Take him away."

And Logan was dragged from the room.

STORM

« ^ »

In the six years since the death of the cities Gant had built his personal kingdom at Crazy Horse. Stripping the Thinker itself for raw materials, he'd constructed a miniature city beneath the mountain. Logan saw only parts of it as they marched him down hallways, past labs and crew quarters, through a courtyard, past food-storage lockers...but he was impressed.

Yet he did not ask questions. His curiosity about Gant was canceled by his consuming desire to see Jessica, to hold her again...She's here, he told himself, here in one of these buildings...

Escape, at this point, was a useless hope. In addition to the chokechain and tapewire, the four Sandmen who walked with him (one leading, one to either side, another following) all carried Guns in their hands.

He would do as they instructed. If Gant had not been lying, he'd be allowed to see Jess after whatever torture the man had set up for him to endure. And Logan had endured much in his life. He would endure this—and hope.

Jess, Jess...I love you!

"Stop here," said the lead Sandman.

They had reached a wide duralloy door, set flush into the corridor's end. The door was solid metal, and smelled of oil. One of the Sandmen unlocked it, swung it back. "Inside," he said.

Logan entered—and the heavy door crashed shut behind him.

Soft laughter in the corridor, and the Sandmen were gone.

Logan was alone.

The chamber was large, perhaps twenty by twenty feet, of bolted metal, totally bare. Not a single item of any kind—just metal walls, ceiling, floor. And, as Logan tested the surface, cool to the touch.

There were round holes of varying size punched into the ceiling, scores of them. And as many in the floor. The walls were vented, top to bottom.

Am I to be gassed in here? Is that Gant's plan? Ironic. Saved in New York from the same fate I'll suffer here... Will Gant really allow me to see Jess? Will I leave this room alive?

Logan raised his head, tensing his body; he swung around abruptly.

Someone was touching him!

No, not someone. Something: a slight draft of currented air, touching at his face, his hair... emanating from the vents. Fresh. Not gas. Fresh air.

But subtly increasing, gradually becoming stronger.

A soft, pattering sound—and Logan felt wetness against his skin. Slow drops of water, dripping down on him from a multitude of ceiling holes.

A muted rumble from the room, a faint, far-distant sound, like the throb of giant drums.

The current of air had become a breeze, blowing chill against Logan's rapidly-dampening uniform. The patter of drops from the ceiling intensified, became a steady downfall, soaking Logan's hair and clothing.

The breeze soon mounted to a wind, whipping at Logan in cold gusts from the wallvents surrounding him.

The downpour increased to a fierce curtain of iced sleet, and the muted drum-rumble boomed into full thunder, assaulting Logan's eardrums.

He staggered back, dazed, helpless—as the wind punished him, building in force by the second.

Now another frightening element manifested itself in the chamber: firebolts of lightning danced and crackled around him, first at one wall, then at the next.

Logan clapped both hands to his ears to muffle the thunder's brutal roar, his mouth gaping in shocked agony.

A solid gust of wind slapped him to the floor. He rose to his knees, fighting for balance on the rainslick metal, crawled toward a corner to lessen the storm's impact—but a sizzle of heat-lightning forced him back to the room's center.

The wind was a demon's shriek, the thunderclaps now impossibly loud in the metal chamber.

Something began cutting at Logan's skin, drawing blood along his cheek. Hailstones—sharp-edged pellets of cold ice which pounded and slashed at his unprotected head and shoulders.

Now the wind suddenly reversed direction, taking Logan by surprise; under its gale force, he was toppled and slammed into the wall.

Again the hurricane blast abruptly reversed direction, and Logan was hurled across the slippery floor into the opposite wall, striking the metal with bonecrushing impact.

Again.

And again.

And again.

Viciously pelted and buffeted, Logan lay gasping on his back, blood running from a dozen wounds, the

hail and rain drumming his flesh.

He opened his mouth and cried out, but his voice was swallowed up in the cruel, unending din, as the storm raged.

REUNION

« ^ »

"Do you think he's ready now?" asked Evans 9.

Gant nodded. "Tell them to kill the storm, then have Logan brought to Room K..." His smile glowed red...where I shall keep my promise to him."

Evans turned to leave when Gant's voice stopped him.

"One thing I'd like to know."

"Yes?"

"I'm curious," said Gant. "What made you betray him? You were friends once...yet you set the trap that brought him here."

"I'm a proud man," said Evans. "Logan kept me in his shadow. In DS he assumed a position of superiority. He was arrogant, self-serving. He never tried to understand me. Even took our friendship for granted. Thought it was a privilege for me to be his friend! But I was never his friend! I knew someday I'd best him. And I have."

"Indeed you have," nodded Gant. "It seems we share similar emotional attitudes toward Logan. Which helps bind us in the venture."

"I want him dead," said Evans flatly.

And he left.

When they opened the door Logan did not move, did not look at them. Water dripped languorously from the ceiling, draining away along the floor.

The storm was over.

Logan lay in a far corner of the chamber, knees drawn up tight against his body, head sunken against his chest, eyes closed. His breathing was irregular. His soaked, torn uniform was spotted with blood.

Two Sandmen walked over to him, lifted him by the elbows, dragging him toward the door. He moved in a broken child's stumble, his eyes glazed, unfocused. Small, mewling sounds issued from his mouth.

The Sandmen smiled at one another as they led him away from the stormroom.

Room K formed part of Gant's personal living quarters, and was lavish. Cut from the natural rock of the mountain, it was walled in leathertrim and lit by moonglobes, which cast their soft radiance on Jessica's

pale skin. When Gant entered she rushed to him, eyes pleading. "Have you brought Logan? Where is he?"

Gant ran a dark hand along the shine of her hair. "They're bringing him. He'll be here soon, I assure you."

She turned away, slipped nervously into a bodychair. The green silk gown she wore, cut low at the breasts, pressed in against the curves of her body.

"I'm sure he'll find you as desirable as ever," Gant said, moving to a winetable. Seating himself, he sampled a French vintage, inhaling its subtle bouquet. "The Borgias treated you well, all things considered. They could have disfigured you, ruined your beauty."

"They were foul to me," she said.

"Come now, Jessica. Put yourself in their place. You belonged to them. You were a woman of strong sexual attraction. Naturally they used you. But Lucrezia knew enough not to allow abuse. That was the key. She kept your Market value intact." He chuckled. "Had she known just how much I wanted you, and for what ultimate purpose, she could have realized a much greater profit."

"I'm glad Logan killed her," said Jessica darkly. "She didn't deserve to live—not after what she did to Jaq."

"Your Logan is a strong-willed, violent man." He hesitated, for effect. "Or should I say...was."

Jessica looked startled, suddenly frightened. Her eyes sought Gant's. "Then, he's not coming! You've lied to me...Logan is dead!"

Gant smiled, and the moonglobes flashed crimson from his rubied teeth. "No, not dead. Merely...gentled...eased from his violence. I have given him the gift of bodily peace."

"Why should I believe anything you say?"

"I went to a great deal of trouble to have him brought here to you. In justice, you should be grateful to me, not suspicious."

Jessica's eyes burned with heat; her hands were fisted. "You hate us both for daring to do what you lacked the courage to do—for seeking Sanctuary."

"I stood by my duty," said Gant, his voice gone hard. "Logan ran from his."

The door chimed softly.

"Ah, the moment of your reconciliation is at hand," said Gant. "It should be touching." He palmed the door and it whispered open.

Logan was there, his sagging body held erect between two Sandmen. He blinked rapidly as Jessica ran forward to embrace him.

"Logan...oh, Logan!" She put her arms around him, frantically kissed his lips, held his face between her cupped hands. He showed no sign of recognition.

His face was totally expressionless.

"He doesn't know me!" She swung toward Gant, stunned. "What have you done to him?"

Gant smiled, a red gash of pleasure.

Logan stared at nothing.

FRIEND

« ^ »

They were stripped naked and thrown into a cell of raw rock, dirt-floored, exposed to constant drafts of cold air slicing through the interior of Crazy Horse. Gant's instructions were concise: No clothing. No food. Water at two-day intervals.

He wanted to see them rot.

Logan was helpless. He whimpered, lacked control of his body functions, was incapable of speech. As Jessica held him, his muscles jerked spastically. His eyes rolled white. Saliva dribbled from the corners of his slack mouth.

The stormroom had broken him.

Through the long hours, Jessica crooned to him, stroked his trembling skin with gentle fingers—but he did not know her. She was a warm presence, nothing more, in the dim gray web of his mental world.

Her voice was a litany: "Logan, my darling...my dearest...Logan...Logan...Logan, my love..."

But they had a friend at Crazy Horse—a silent figure weaving in shadowed stealth through the twisting rock caverns surrounding the Thinker—a friend who knew Gant's ways and awaited the chance to move against him.

Watching.

Waiting.

Until a plan was evolved.

And acted upon.

Gant entered their cell with Steratt, his chief guard. Steratt was lean and sharp-featured, with the muscles of a hunting dog; he was dressed in slash-chest ivory leathers, wore thighboots and carried a small black handcase.

Jessica looked up at them, blinking, nestling Logan close to her shoulder.

Gant opened the handcase, took out a looped object.

Bodywhip.

He handed the whip to Jessica. "Use it on him," he said in a flat, emotionless tone.

"No!" She threw it aside.

Gant nodded to Steratt. He pulled Jessica up by her hair, swinging her toward Gant. Who slapped her. Hard.

Logan blinked at them, his face devoid of expression. Blood flecked Jessica's mouth. "I...won't," she gasped.

"If you don't," said Gant, taking a Fuser from his belt, aiming it at Logan, "I'll burn him where he lies!" Logan blinked stupidly.

"Pick it up," said Gant, "and use it now." His eyes blazed black.

Jessica picked up the whip.

Behind the Medsupply Unit, in caverned rock darkness, a shape moved.

The Sandman in charge of guarding the unit was bored. He was thinking how much better the workers' guard had it—with females to use whenever he felt the urge. Just go into the cells, drag one out, use her and toss her back inside. The workers didn't complain. Who would they complain to? Oh, they didn't like it. One of them tried to club a guard once, while he was busy with a female, but they burned him. As an example. It didn't pay to attack a guard. They all realized that.

Well, Steratt owed him a shift change. He'd been on Med now for a month. Maybe he could get switched to Workers next. End up with some nice young meat.

The shape detached itself from the rocks, moved closer.

The Sandman yawned, sat down, arms folded across his chest. He closed his eyes and thought about women...

While the shadow-figure darted into the unit, unseen.

Hypokit. Fresh needles. Healpacs. Wraps and cotton.

Careful! Arrange the other supplies to cover what's taken. No breakage. No noise. Quickly...quickly! And a shadow drifted back into the caverns.

Imprisoned inside the mountain, Jessica had lost all sense of time. As she held her man, this brave human who had given his selfhood to save her, she felt they'd been like this, together in Gant's cell, for many months... Sometimes, her mind, disoriented by lack of food, held the conviction that they would be here forever, immortal in agony, abandoned, unfed, their bodies racked by cold, thinned by hunger...

Then Gant would come. To gloat. To enjoy the spectacle. Sometimes she would be given to Evans or Steratt, who would take her brutally in the cell, for Gant's amusement. But, mostly, it was darkness, cold, hard dirt against aching muscles, night-crawling insects...

Logan never spoke. He lay in her arms, unable to relate to her, to his bleak surroundings, to hunger or pain.

Yet Jessica loved him more fiercely than ever.

And, until Gant killed them, her love for Logan would remain—a hard, unwavering flame that warmed the

deepest part of her.

She would endure.

They would endure.

Assigned to Logan's cell unit, in six-hour shifts: eight Sandmen, two of them always on guard. Top men. Personally selected by Gant.

On this shift: Lister 4 and Brim 11. Humorless, hard-faced, alert as cats. They paced outside the unit, carrying (at Gant's direct order) Guns in their hands.

"Had a runner once," Lister was saying, in a tight, controlled voice, "who got into a Nursery. Got past the robots. I had to go in after him."

"And?" said Brun.

"Had him backed to the wall in a Cribroom. I was ready to homer him, when this Autogoverness comes rolling in. Upset. Won't let me fire. All worried about the infants. She knocks the Gun out of my hand. Runner makes a dive for it. Gets his hand around it. Zip! Blows his arm off to the shoulder!"

"Runners know better," said Brun.

"Guess this one forgot," said Lister, a faint smile tracing his lips. "Anyway, when I—"

Lister stopped, the smile vanishing. He sat down very slowly, then toppled sideways, laying his face into the dirt.

A small, glinting hyponeedle projected from his neck.

Brun wheeled in a covering arc, Gun up, peering into the cave—darkness around him.

No sound.

No movement.

He was about to press the alarmstud just inside the unit's arched doorway when a second needle sang from blackness, deeply imbedding itself in his carotid artery.

The Gun slipped from Brun's nerveless fingers as he sank to his knees. His eyes lost focus. He collapsed backward, head striking the edge of the rock doorway—but he did not feel the impact.

Silence.

Then—a soft scratch of loose pebbles.

A shape, moving.

Jessica saw the figure coming swiftly down the gloomed corridor toward their cell. Not Gant. Or Evans. Or Steratt. Or the guards.

Who then?

An assassin sent to kill them?

No, Gant had vowed he'd be there personally to watch them die, and Jessica knew that was one promise he would keep.

"I'm Mary-Mary 2," the figure said. "You met me once, long ago."

Jessica looked at the girl. Slim. Intense. Dressed in a ripped green tunicdress. And didn't know her.

Mary-Mary smiled. "In the Angeles Complex. Under Cathedral. I was only five then. I'd escaped Nursery."

"Yes," said Jessica. "Now I remember. But how did you ever—"

"No questions," said Mary-Mary. "I got rid of both guards, but there's very little time." She produced a ridged silver key, hurriedly opened their cell door with it.

The chamber smelled of damp earth and rock mold, a fungoid odor of decay.

"He can't walk," said Jessica, looking down at Logan who was curled into a ball in the center of the dirt floor, arms clasping his updrawn legs. His eyes were open. He was staring at the wall.

"Together we can manage him," said Mary-Mary. "I'm stronger than I look."

The women half-lifted, half-dragged Logan to a standing position. His head rolled on his neck; a bubble of saliva formed and broke on his paste-white lips.

A clang of distant metal. Door being opened, closed.

"Hurry!" urged Mary-Mary. "Someone's coming."

SEARCH

[« ^ »](#)

Gant. Evans. Steratt. Joking about what they would find in the cell ahead of them. Laughing, as they moved down the corridor.

Suddenly; an oath from Gant. "Gone!" he thundered. "Their cell's empty!"

"Someone used a key," said Evans. "The door wasn't forced."

Gant was wearing a large ruby ring with a chased-silver facing on the index finger on his right hand. The ring opened the side of Steratt's face under Gant's blow. "You! You're in charge of the cells! You're responsible!"

"They can't be far away," said Evans. He was kneeling in the cell, one hand to the floor. "Still warm from their bodies."

Gant turned from Steratt, who was groaning, half-conscious. "Maximum alert. Have the outside of the mountain completely sealed off. They're still inside here somewhere."

Evans nodded, picked up a vidphone.

"We'll find them," gasped Steratt, a hand to his bloodied face. "I swear we'll find them!"

Gant looked at him, saying nothing, holding the bodywhip loosely in his hand.

"Here...lower him," said Mary-Mary. "Ease him down."

Jessica and the girl slid Logan's body onto a yielding bed of sand, draped with throwcovers, then slipped down beside him, exhausted. Their journey into the mountain's interior had totally sapped their strength. Logan had tried to walk, but his body refused to cooperate; he was a dragging weight between them, an object to be moved through the dark skein of labyrinthine passages, guided only by Mary-Mary's knowledge of the intricate caverns.

They'd reached the cave which was home to the girl. Sunlight shafting down from a high crack in the outer rockface of Crazy Horse provided illumination. It was now mid-afternoon.

Jessica lay in the patch of gold, soaking up the rays, face raised to the welcome yellow warmth. Tears formed in her eyes, rolled down the slope of her cheeks, but she was smiling. "So long...since...I've felt the sun."

"I've been preparing things," said Mary-Mary. "Taking what I knew we'd be needing from Gant's supplies. A little here, a little there." She nodded toward the rear of the cave. "We have food, water, medicine for Logan...Even these!" And she folded back a throwcover, revealing two Fusers.

Jessica looked at her. "Gant was going to kill us."

"I know," said the girl. "I've been watching everything. He enjoys inflicting pain. He always did. As a Sandman, he never worried about who got hurt on a hunt. He'd Gun anyone in his way. Homered a seven-year-old once."

"How did you get here—to Crazy Horse?"

"I came with Ballard as part of his Sanctuary Line. When he died I hid in the caverns, stealing the food I needed. They never missed it. I was careful about that."

"Then Gant doesn't know you're alive?"

"No one knows I'm here in the mountain. That's why I've been able to watch, find out what Gant's planning. And it's monstrous."

"I know he's reactivated the Central Core," said Jessica. "But, beyond that—"

"Gant plans to revive the Thinker—use it to bring the cities back to life. If that happens, he'll control the world."

"But Ballard killed the Thinker."

"Not really," said Mary-Mary. "He didn't have enough time. Gant's men were on the way to Crazy Horse when he got there just ahead of them. Ballard did what he could—shorted out the Central Core, destroyed all of the main relays...enough to knock out the cities. But Gant homered him before he could effectively destroy the main computer body. The Thinker isn't dead, it's just sleeping. And Gant intends to awaken it."

"Can't find them! And why not?" Steratt raged at his men. "They're here in the mountain, aren't they? Every exit is sealed. Why haven't you found them?"

"You've got ten thousand caves in there," said the leader of the main-thrust search group. "It would take years to probe all of them. There's just no way to do it. We searched the nearest caverns, but they've gone in deep. Too deep for us to follow."

"What about footprints?"

"Much of the ground is hard rock and shale," said the leader. "We didn't find any footprints."

"Then we'll starve them out," said Steratt. "Time is on our side. Have a double guard assigned to all food and water supply areas. They can't escape the mountain. And when they finally come out we'll be waiting for them."

Logan slept. Mary-Mary had provided clothing for him, had tended the wounds on his body, had fed him. The injections she gave him allowed his body to relax, and begin to restore itself. His natural strength came into play; his muscle tone improved, his skin took on color again.

Sometimes he would awaken, groggy and blinking, on the sandy floor of the cave, crying out Jessica's name. She was always there to hold him, gentle him back to sleep, telling him that they were safe...safe...safe.

Periodically, Mary-Mary would reconnoiter, then return to the cave with news of Gant's operation.

Jessica had many questions for her: "How does he get people to work for him? Surely he doesn't reward them?"

"Reward them!" Mary-Mary laughed. "Gant buys them on the Market as slave workers. Has them brought here. They work in twenty-four-hour shifts. He has well over a hundred men and women now, keeps them locked in cell units between shifts. Here..."

And she sketched a rough map of Gant's headquarters on the floor of the cave. "This building is for the technicians."

"How many of those?"

"Dozens. Computer experts, most of them. They supervise the workers. The key scientist is named Fennister. A real genius. He can restore the Thinker to full performance."

"But why would a man of such brilliance work for Gant?"

"You saw what Gant did to Logan. He uses torture to gain his ends. Fennister knows he'll be tortured to death, slowly, if he fails to do what Gant asks. All of them know that."

"And they all...accept this?"

"At first three of the techs rebelled, refused to be a part of Gant's plan. So he used them as examples for the others. What he did to them was...terrible to see. Now no one defies Gant. No one."

"Then how can he be stopped?"

Mary-Mary sighed; her eyes darkened. "I don't think he can be stopped," she said.

FENNISTER

« ^ »

Sparks showered and burst blue against the terminal. Fennister 2 thinned the blade of cutting fire from the nozzle of the Flamer and finished the separation, then fused the tri-relay segment. He tested the cable. Perfect.

"Gant's here," said a voice at his elbow. Fennister acknowledged with a nod, wearily putting aside the Flamer and peeling his workgoggles. He was a man ready for sleep when the cities died, which made him twenty-seven now. He would never have become a runner. It was not in Fennister's nature to duck and dodge and hide and outwit. His world was computer science, and if the Thinker had told him to die he would have quietly obeyed its command and gone willingly to a Sleepshop.

But with the death of the cities he quickly came to realize that life beyond the dictates of a machine was precious. Freed from the duties of computer maintenance, he had met a woman, Lisa 18, and had come to care greatly for her. They'd agreed to have children, planned for the future as pair-bound lovers.

Then outlanders hit them. Lisa had been sold on the Market, and he'd been shipped to Crazy Horse as a worker for Gant. "Supervise the rebirth of the Thinker and I'll see that Lisa is yours," Gant had promised him. "Fail to get this job done and you'll never see her again." Thus, despite strong personal misgivings about the project, he had agreed to head it for Gant.

The Central Core was first—and now it was almost totally restored. The main computer-body would follow, each operation done in the thorough, meticulous fashion that characterized Fennister's work.

But not fast enough to suit Gant. Three of Fennister's best men had been tortured in the past week, another killed outright, and now Gant was coming here again, to the Core, to make fresh demands of his team.

He would not resist these demands; it was not in Fennister's nature to do so. Yet he hated Gant with the same quiet, deep intensity that he brought to his work. To rebuild the Thinker under this man's rule was an agony to Fennister that lived within him each moment of the day and night like the breath in his body.

Gant faced him, his tall shadow falling across Fennister's lean body. As usual, Evans 9 was with him, a devil's duo. The thought bitterly amused Fennister. No one had believed in devils for almost two hundred years, yet Gant and his Sandman-chief were surely prime candidates for demonhood.

"How much longer?" Gant demanded.

"The Core will be a hundred per cent operational within twelve hours. After that, the main body work should take another week to ten days."

Gant fingered the ruby at his throat, turned to Evans. "Tell me what he just said."

"Core to be a hundred per cent within six hours. Main body completed in another three days."

"Impossible!" protested Fennister. "I don't have the technicians...the equipment..."

"Ah, but you do," said Gant smoothly, giving Fennister a jeweled smile. "We just picked up a dozen more

techs for you on the Market. And additional equipment arrives by paravane tonight. You'll meet my schedule..." Softly. "Won't you?"

Fennister sighed, tightening his thin lips. "Yes, I'll meet your schedule."

RECOVERY

« ^ »

A shape, hovering. Hazy, double-imaged. Coming into focus.

A face. A woman's face. Close to his. Smiling.

Jessica!

Speechless, tears in his eyes, he held her, sought her lips with his, inhaled the sweet fragrance of her skin, touched at the soft flow of her hair. His arms closed around her convulsively.

"It's all right, Logan," she said to him. "You're safe...alive...with me. Everything's all right now."

He drew in a long, shuddering breath; his eyes never left hers. "I thought I'd lost you forever...When the outlanders..."

She stopped his words with a finger at his lips. "That's all over—and we're together again."

Logan stood up, swaying, still weak from the effects of the tranquilizing drugs. He looked around him at the cave.

"Where are we? The last thing was...the storm."

"We're with Mary-Mary inside Crazy Horse. She saved your life, got us both out of prison, gave you medicine..."

Mary-Mary moved up to Logan, took his hands in hers. "I was the little girl in Cathedral," she said. "When you were running."

"I remember," said Logan.

She told him about hiding inside the mountain, unable to go for help...about the ominous growth of Gant's force ("He must have fifty Sandmen with him!"). And, finally, about Gant's plan to reactivate the Thinker.

"We've got to stop him," said Logan. "If we don't, he'll start the whole inhuman process again...something even worse than death at twenty-one...a slow, enslaved death inside the cities. He's got to be stopped before that can happen."

"But how?" asked Mary-Mary. "One man and two women against his armed Sandmen?"

"We'll need help," Logan admitted.

"And who's going to help us?" said Jessica. "The Wilderness People—leaderless since Jonath was killed?...They're weak, Logan, vulnerable. Gant would slaughter them in an instant! And how would we get word to them? The mountain is sealed. We can't get out."

"She's right," said Mary-Mary. "Besides, Gant's operation is nearly complete. We've no time to bring in outside help—even if we could find any."

A muscle tightened along Logan's jaw; his eyes were set, intense, fixed on an inner goal. "Then...that leaves it to us," he said.

EAGLE

« ^ »

On Argos, in an ancient book, Logan had once read a short bit of verse, still remembered:

If you wish
To enter
The nest of an eagle,
You must wear
His feathers.

Which is why he asked Mary-Mary to take him to the place of workers' supply.

They crouched in cavern gloom, watching the guards.

"Four of them," whispered Logan. "Why four?"

"Gant has doubled the guards on every door," she told him.

Too many, Logan told himself. The doors were useless.

"The roof—is it wired?"

"No," she said.

"Then I'll use that," said Logan, stuffing a Fuser into his belt.

"They'll hear you!"

"Who can hear a cat?" Logan smiled.

And was gone.

On the roof, Logan kept low, moving in a half-run across the flat gray surface. As a Sandman, he'd done this sort of thing many times—entered buildings through stealth. This one would be simple.

He found a ventpipe, leading down, pried loose its cover with the barrel of his weapon, working fast and without sound. Once inside the pipe, he carefully lifted the cover back into place. If anyone checked the roof all would be in order.

A sense of adventure possessed him. He had his strength back, or most of it; he had Jessica, alive and loving him; he had his hatred of Gant to fire the blood in his body. It seemed to Logan, at this moment, that he could not fail, that he was truly invincible. He smiled at the madness of it, but logic did not matter; emotion ruled him, carried him swiftly forward in his plan.

He located the clothing supply room without difficulty. It was precisely where Mary-Mary said it would be. The doorlock was an easy matter, and he slipped inside.

No one on duty. A large room with long steel shelves holding neatly-folded workclothes. Logan selected

three bodysuits all in matching blue, and quickly added the same number of goggl masks and gloves. In removing the items, Logan did as Mary-Mary had done previously with foodstuffs and medical supplies: rearranged the stacks to disguise the fact that anything had been taken.

With what he needed compactly bundled under one arm, Logan glided for the roof. When he heard voices he did not move. When they had faded he resumed. No problems.

Invincible.

They suited up. Masks. Gloves. Bodysuits.

In these dark blue outfits it would be impossible to recognize them. They would blend in perfectly with the other workers, be able to move freely without fear of detection.

When he had conceived the plan Logan intended going alone, but Mary-Mary told him that he'd need her to pinpoint the proper areas. "All right, then, the two of us." No, not good enough. What they had to do required teamwork, and all three of them would be needed to get the job done.

Reluctantly, Logan had agreed.

CORE

[« ^ »](#)

The Central Core was Fennister's pride. Working day and night, almost without sleep, toiling in the depths of the Core shoulder-to-shoulder with his men, he had converted a charred, heat-twisted mass of computer metal into its original machined perfection; he had reconstituted the heart of the Thinker. Now that great heart was beating strongly once again, sending its message of power out along mile upon mile of linked cable to all the dark areas of the multi-banked computer.

Life was flowing back into the Thinker.

The Core presently required only a standby crew; the main thrust of Fennister's efforts concerned the vast computer-body itself. He was working desperately to meet Gant's schedule—realizing that it was barely possible to succeed. He had to succeed, for the sake of his men, and for Lisa.

Failure was unthinkable.

Three figures detached from cavern shadow...three blue-clad workers, blending with more than a dozen other blue-clad workers...moving toward the Core...wearing the full-face goggl masks required for this high-body-risk area.

The Sandman accompanying this shift-replacement crew noticed nothing unusual; he had not counted the workers. That wasn't his responsibility; if they sent him a dozen or two dozen his job was to guard them at the Core, make sure everything ran smoothly down there. Fennister knew what they should do; he didn't. And didn't give a damn in the bargain. They were sheep to be herded, and he was a bored shepherd.

In the group, Logan kept Mary-Mary and Jessica close to him. Behind the opaque goggles, his eyes raked the area. They were entering the Core itself now, their transbelt taking them down to the glowing, pulsing interior.

"Right on time," said the guard below, his voice muted by the gogglmask he wore.

"When have I ever been late?" growled the Sandman leading Logan's group.

"Have a good shift," said the guard as his early hours workmen shuffled tiredly onto the return belt. We made it! Logan exalted. We're here!

With Mary-Mary and Jessica, he moved to a toolcab just out of the guard's view. Shielding the move with his body, Logan took a needle-thin length of steel from his suit, worked it deftly into the drawerlock. The drawer slid back.

Quickly, each of them removed a Flamer from the inside toolrack. The drawer was closed, locked again.

They moved off.

Logan wasn't sure of his direction. "Which way?" he asked Mary-Mary, his goggled head close to hers.

"I'll lead," she said. "Follow me."

Logan and Jessica stayed close as she weaved a path around giant columns, past glowing relay units, deep into the humming depths of the inner Core.

Now they were totally separated from the other workers, free to implement Logan's plan. The Sandman on duty was long out of sight.

"Is this the right cluster?" asked Logan, pausing before a tangle of multi-colored power cables protruding from the Core's vitals like immense snakes.

"Yes," said Mary-Mary.

Logan knelt to examine them. "If we cut through these and cross-connect them the power overload will blow the Core."

"But how will we get out?" asked Jessica, alarm in her muffled words.

"We'll have some time before the cross-connection takes full effect," Logan told her. "It won't happen all at once. There's only one Sandman on guard, and I can deal with him. We'll be safe inside the caverns by the time it blows."

"Will this really stop Gant?"

"Not completely," said Logan. "But he'll have to rebuild the entire Central Core again. By then we can figure a way out of the mountain and bring help back to fight him. This will work, I'm sure of it!"

They each set their Flamers for maximum penetration. Using the high-intensity fire tools, they could slice through the massive cables with relative ease.

But it would be dangerous.

Keen concentration was a necessity; the depth of each cut had to be precise. Too shallow, and the cross-connection could not be achieved; too deep, and the cables would fuse, killing them instantly but

leaving the Core intact.

"Ready?" Logan's Flamer was poised in his gloved hand, flickering blue at its tip.

The two women nodded.

"Begin," he said.

And three bright blades of flame began probing at the cables.

ATTENTION!

[« ^ »](#)

Gant was drunk.

He seldom allowed himself the luxury of heavy drinking, but this was a special day of celebration: the Core was fully operational and work was progressing smoothly on the main body of the Thinker. Soon he would be in a position to program it to fit his desires, to light the cities like so many stars in the heavens—and with him in charge of the universe!

Indeed, a day to celebrate.

He'd been drinking Spanish wine with Evans, who was now equally drunk; they blared out songs together in off-key, grunting voices, pounded the table with their fists, roared with laughter at non-existent jokes.

Steratt appeared in the doorway, looking disturbed.

They paid him no heed. He moved to Gant, scowling. "You'd better listen to me," he said.

Drunk or sober, Gant was anything but a fool—and the look in Steratt's eyes told him to listen.

"Did Fennister authorize Flamer use at the Core?" asked Steratt.

"Of course not," snapped Gant. "The Core's done"

"The guard there just checked the tooldrawer. Three Flamers are missing."

Gant's face darkened; his eyes became hooded. The effects of the wine flushed away in the heat of his anger.

"Let's get down there!" he said to Evans.

Logan's cable was neatly severed, ready for reconnection. He watched tensely as Jessica and Mary-Mary bent to their work, flamepoints eating steadily through the tough cable fiber.

Almost finished.

Then; the guard's voice: "What are you three doing?"

Logan knew that bluff would accomplish nothing at this moment. Words were no good at all.

He turned toward the Sandman, triggered the Flamer in his gloved hand. The killing blade of fire caught the guard at shoulder level, knifing through vein and tendon...

He spun, gasped, and died.

"Come on!" said Logan. "Move out! Fast!"

"We can finish, Logan!" cried Mary-Mary. "Another minute or two. We're nearly—"

He grabbed her arm, propelling her forward. "Suspected something. Wouldn't have come here if he didn't. Probably checked the tools. There'll be others coming."

Isolation was death, Logan knew. Separated and running, they would be spotted easily and trapped in the Core. Protective coloration was their only hope—the eagle's feathers! In goggl masks and bodysuits all workers were identical; to escape they had to intermix with the other blue-clad figures, then wait their chance to fade back into the caverns.

By the time Logan found the main group Mary-Mary was gone. He turned to Jessica, his tone harsh, demanding: "Where is she?"

"She went back—into the Core," said Jessica. "Said she was sure she could finish."

"That's impossible now!" He looked around him. The workers were doing their routine jobs, unaware of the guard's death.

"Stay here," ordered Logan. "I'm going after her. As soon as I—"

"Attention! All workers, attention!" a speakerbox blared. "There has been an accident at the Core. Please use the interior belt and form on Level 6 for inspection."

"Too late," Logan whispered to Jessica, looking toward the upper level. Gant and Evans were there, Steratt beside them.

As the workers reached the top, masks were peeled away, features and IDs scanned.

"We can't go up," said Logan.

"But we can't stay here either," she said.

"Move along, you two." A Sandman prodded them toward the belt.

Logan drove a fist into the man's face, grabbed Jessica's hand, ducking between two central-power columns.

A laser blast sizzled the floor behind them. Gant was shouting, gesturing wildly.

Logan had a goal: an emergency riser used by repair crews he'd seen on the far side of the Core. If they could reach it without being cut off...

If.

At the cables, working with the Flamer, Mary-Mary had ignored the demands of the speakerbox, but she could not ignore the shouts, the crackle of laser fire...

No chance to finish now. Only a chance to escape.

She threw the Flamer aside, began running toward the Auxiliary Powerchamber; a stepway there could lift her out of the main danger area.

A black shape filled her vision. A pair of strong arms gripped her; a Gun was jammed against her neck, forcing her head back, painfully.

Sandmen! Two of them, prowling the inner Core.

Instantly, she relaxed, knowing that struggle was useless. She did not resist as the gogglemask was peeled from her face.

"I don't know this one," the first Sandman said.

"She's no worker," said the second.

"I know her," said a harsh, familiar voice.

Mary-Mary drew in a quick, strangled breath—a sob of utter defeat...

As her eyes locked on the cruel face of Gant.

BOLDNESS

« ^ »

"It was my fault," said Logan. "The whole thing, my fault."

They'd regained the caverns, had reached the cave of Mary-Mary. Finding it empty, Logan knew at once that the girl had been taken; otherwise, she would have been here, waiting for them.

"But she insisted on going back... There was no stopping her," said Jessica.

"Not that," said Logan, shaking his head. "I mean the whole plan. It had no chance from the beginning."

"But you're wrong, Logan! It almost worked."

"A thing works or it doesn't. There are no 'almosts,' " he said bitterly. "It was a fool's idea, and it's cost us Mary-Mary."

He slumped to the sandy floor of the cave, eyes dulled with pain in thinking about the girl.

"What will Gant...do to her?" asked Jessica, easing down beside him. Her voice was soft, the words strained.

"I know him," said Logan tightly. "I know how his mind works. There's no doubt of what he'll do to her."

A long moment of silence. Then Logan quietly said a word. It stiffened Jessica's back; she felt a chill mount her skin as she heard it:

"Stormroom."

Standing naked and alone in the steel chamber, facing the vented walls, Mary-Mary knew she would never leave this place alive. Gant would have his full revenge on her for snatching Logan from his grasp; he would eliminate her with the same terrible device he had used to subdue Logan.

This time the storm would continue, would end only when her life ended. She would be battered and destroyed by its hurricane force...

Mary-Mary discovered, amazingly, that she was not afraid of death. She had a burning faith in Logan; she knew that, somehow, he'd find a way to stop Gant. No other Sandman had defied the full might of DS, but Logan had done so, and survived. No other Sandman had reached Sanctuary, but Logan had reached it. He was capable of incredible actions, extraordinary deeds—which was why Gant so desperately wanted him dead.

Gant feared Logan 3 as he feared no other man.

Thus, in a deep sense, she was content. Everything she could do had been done. She had revealed Gant's plan to Logan, made him aware of the danger, fired his will and given him a purpose.

He would fulfill that purpose.

Mary-Mary was ready to die.

She felt a stirring in the room. Faintly, imperceptibly, from the wall vents, a soft current of air probed at her.

Mary-Mary shivered.

The storm had begun.

Logan fought the rage that was consuming him. It required a full exertion of will for him to remain a reasoning, thinking man and not a beast bent on slaughter. He fought against an overwhelming impulse to plunge out of the caverns, Fuser in hand, and blast his way to Gant.

I'd never reach him, Logan told himself; they'd burn me down before I was ten steps into the light. Every Sandman in Crazy Horse envisions me dead under his Gun; that sight lives behind their eyes. Gant's reward for my death must, by now, be very great indeed.

Yet he could not hide like a frightened mole in these caves while Gant destroyed the girl who'd saved his life, who'd brought him Jessica...

The man, not the beast, would go forth.

But go forth he must!

They were on a thick shelf of rock with a clear view of the large, circular structure just ahead.

Without Mary-Mary, Logan was dependent on Jessica's limited knowledge of Gant's mountain stronghold.

"And you're certain that's it?"

"Yes," said Jessica. "Gant keeps them all locked up there between work shifts."

"Communications?"

"There's a vidphone connecting the prison area directly to Gant's personal quarters."

"Good," nodded Logan. "Who's in charge of the cells?"

"Steratt. You saw him leave."

"How many Sandmen are usually in there?"

"Three. One just inside the door. One patrolling the cellblock. Another on the vid-deck. There may be more now."

"I doubt that Gant would use extra men here," said Logan. "This is the last place he'd expect me to be."

She looked hard into his eyes; her own were glistening. "Just remember that I love you," she said softly.

"You think I'll never come out... That we won't—?"

"I love you," she repeated.

And he kissed her.

Boldness was Logan's last hope. No cat-stalking, no stealthy penetration. No time for subtle moves now. Bold action remained to him, and that alone.

He reached the outer door as Jessica melted back into the shadows. With the butt of his Fuser he banged loudly on the metal.

A Sandman's sharp voice from inside: "Who is it?"

"Who do you think it is? It's me, Steratt! Open the damn door. My key's with Gant."

Logan held his breath, the Fuser poised in his hand. He had heard Steratt's voice many times from the caverns, and his imitation was convincing. Muffled by the double thickness of the metal door, it might pass.

His heart jumped; the door was opening.

In the flicker of an eye Logan had the guard by the throat. A quick snap—and his head rolled loosely. Logan allowed the body to spill out along the floor as he pulled closed the massive, self-locking door.

He quickly stripped the body, putting on the guard's gray uniform. He pulled the cap low over his eyes, walked casually toward the cellblock.

Twenty feet...fifteen feet...ten...

"I thought Steratt was coming with you," said the second guard, peering down at Logan from his station on the block.

"I come alone," said Logan—and fired straight up at the man.

He didn't wait to see him die, he spun like a dancer in the direction of the vid-deck, leveled his weapon at the third Sandman. Logan's voice cracked across the chamber: "Gun on the deck! Quick!"

Logan could hear the murmur of excited voices from the cells lining the block.

"What's happened?"

"I don't know!"

"Guard's been killed!"

"Who? Who did it?"

"Must be Logan!"

"Logan's here!"

The name ran the cells like a chant: Logan...Logan...Logan...

He was on the vid-deck now, his weapon covering the guard. "Give me the block keys."

"Can't," said the man. His face was pearly with fear-sweat as he looked at the death in Logan's hand.

"Why can't you?"

"Cells are set to open automatically at shift-time, when the crews are changed. Only Gant can open them between shifts."

"Then get him on the vid." Logan's eyes were blood-fired. "Call him over."

"He won't come," protested the guard. "What can I tell him?"

"Tell him you have word of Logan—that you think you know where to find me, but that you want to lead him there yourself, alone, so that no one else can claim the reward."

"He'll never believe that! And if he did he'd bring a dozen men!"

"Your life depends on what he believes," said Logan. "He wants me dead by his hand. That's Gant's prime passion...He'll want to believe what you tell him. And personal greed is a thing he understands. He'll come."

The guard, still sweating, turned to the vidphone.

FLAMER

[« ^ »](#)

Gant keyed the outer door, stepped quickly inside.

His step was light. There was an exultation in him. Somehow, this fool guard had discovered Logan's hiding place; the how of it didn't matter. No one would come up with such a story unless it were true. What could it gain the man to lie? No one lied to Gant about Logan; no one would be mad enough to try.

It was true, then: Logan 3 was once again within his grasp. And this time nothing on Earth could keep

Gant from killing him.

He felt like singing!

But wait...

He stopped, eyes narrowed. Where was the inner guard? Gant swept his gaze to the upper cellblock.

No guard there either.

A trap!

"You wanted me. I'm here," said a voice from the shadows.

And Logan stepped into the light, a Fuser aimed at Gant's head.

The dark man could not speak; his throat muscles worked convulsively in the shock of this meeting.

"Your Gun...let it fall," said Logan.

Gant hesitated, glancing toward the vid-deck.

"No guards to help. They're all dead. Do it."

The holstered Gun thumped the floor.

"Now—the central block key. Give it to me."

"I don't have it."

"I won't ask twice." Logan raked the side of Gant's head with the Fuser's barrel. Blood pulsed on the tall man's ripped cheek. He handed over the key.

"All right," said Logan, "walk ahead of me. Fast."

They moved toward the block.

Behind Gant, Logan said, "What have you done with Mary-Mary?"

"She's alive."

"Where?"

"In a cell. Main building."

"She's in the stormroom, isn't she?"

Gant said nothing.

"After I free the workers we're going there. If she's dead you'll wish you were...and you'll be a long time dying."

After his call to Gant the guard had jumped Logan. A foolish move. But, in killing him, Logan's shot had severed the vid-line. Meaning that there was no way to force Gant to cancel the storm that must, even now, be battering Mary-Mary.

The thought of the girl's anguish distracted Logan for the split-second it took Gant to feint left and kick the Fuser from his enemy's hand.

Logan surged at Gant. But, like a great dark cat, the man had whipped back—to palm a wall switch.

Instantly, a series of mirror-bright steeloid panels dropped from above, sealing Logan within a circular area perhaps thirty feet across. A final panel slid over the others to form a dome above his head.

Leaving him blind and alone.

Outside, the triumphant voice of Gant: "Another of my inventions, Logan...in case I had to discipline one of my workers. And really quite imaginative...Watch!"

The blackness grew less intense as the circular walls surrounding Logan began to glow. Heat began to sweat Logan's skin; the panels glowed a furious blue-orange. The heat was stifling.

This place was an oven—an immense human cookery, in which Gant literally roasted his victims!

Logan bellied flat, knowing the heat would rise, giving him a partial respite from the worst of it. But his gesture was futile. Each breath he took scalded his lungs. His eyes burned. He'd be dead soon enough, his flesh blistered and curled to ash.

Gant's final revenge.

Logan's thoughts reeled in confusion: the heat seemed to be lessening, not increasing!

The glow slowly faded from the walls. Darkness returned.

And with it, the voice of Gant: "You didn't think I'd let you die in there, did you, Logan? And cheat myself of watching your finish? No, that would never do. Not after all we've been through together."

What was next? What new torture had Gant devised?

"I'm coming in, Logan. To watch you die. But under my hand. I don't want one of my inventions to finish you. That pleasure I reserve for myself."

And a panel slid back. Light flooded the circular area.

Logan squinted, saw Gant standing with a Flamer in his jeweled hand.

"You were using one of these in your clumsy attempt to destroy my beautiful Core. Now it's only appropriate that I use it to destroy you."

And the panel whispered shut, killing the light.

Logan and Gant were together in darkness.

DUEL

[« ^ »](#)

On the rock shelf, Jessica waited.

Logan had told her he would need her help if he managed to free the workers. Until then, all she could do

was await some sign of his success.

It did not come.

She'd seen Gant enter the prisoners' compound alone, and assumed that Logan was responsible for his appearance—but no one had come out. Not Logan. Not Gant. Not the workers.

What had happened inside the compound?

Logan knew that the first rule of fighting in the dark is not to be where your enemy expects you to be. Therefore, as the steel panel was sliding closed, killing the light, Logan was in swift motion, catapulting himself across ten feet of flooring.

A long bloom of yellow-green flame told him he'd been correct—as Gant aimed at the spot where Logan had been standing. The fire lit the chamber for a brief instant, showing Gant Logan's new position.

Again, he triggered the Flamer.

And, again, Logan was gone.

A dry chuckle from the darkness. "I could make this an easy kill," Gant's voice declared. "In one hand, the Flamer, in the other a flashbeam. To pick you out, Logan. To reveal you in the dark..." The chuckle was repeated. "But that would be too simple. There would be no joy in it. I want our little...contest to last. I want to enjoy burning you to ash."

In one way, Gant was wrong. Even with a flashbeam, spotting Logan's exact position within the circle would be difficult—since the polished curving-steel panels acted like a hundred mirrors, casting back a multiplicity of images in their reflective surfaces.

If Logan kept moving...

His foot caught on a panel projection; he stumbled. Instantly, a blade of flame jabbed at him. He rolled away from the heat blast, his right leg singed, the cloth burnt away to raw skin.

"Close, eh, Logan?" the taunting voice asked him. "Since I've been reworking the Thinker I've become quite adept in the use of a Flamer. As you are discovering!"

The voice never came from the same spot of darkness long enough for Logan to get a fix on it. Gant knew he'd come for him if he had a stationary target. So each man kept circling, kept fluid...waxy, alert...

Logan was weaponless. Just his bare hands against the kill-power of a Flamer. Gant had called this a contest. No contest; an execution.

Then Logan realized Gant had stopped moving.

Logan froze, locking his muscles, stopping the breath in his lungs.

Gant was motionless, listening.

Logan, too. Motionless.

Can he hear the pounding of my heart? Logan wondered. It sounded, within his body, as loud as a

hammered drum.

The silence grew, became intolerable.

Logan's mouth was dry; he wanted desperately to swallow—but the faint sound would draw Gant's fire as surely as a shouted word.

His right leg was aching terribly; the flesh, from thigh to ankle, throbbed with stinging pain. Logan had to shift the leg, ease it. Didn't want to. Shouldn't. But...

Had to.

Gant fired.

Flame ate at Logan, his writhing body mirrored and multiplied a thousand times in the sudden heat-glow.

It had not been a direct hit. Had it been, he'd be dead at this moment. But, instinctively, he'd twisted his torso sideways and rolled with the flame as its cutting edge assaulted him.

From the blackness, Gant roared his delight. "Taste the fire, Logan! Taste its sting!... There's no more running for you. No Sanctuary to reach. No Jessica. No Ballard alive to help you..."

He was saying more, taunting Logan in a triumphant, mocking voice. Gant began to laugh, and in so doing made one vital mistake: he forgot to keep moving.

Logan had slipped the belt from his tunic, fisting it tight at each end. He launched himself at the sound of Gant's laughter, in a collision of flesh...

A shocked, strangled gasp burst from the tall man as Logan's body bore him floorward. The Flamer was knocked, spinning, into darkness.

"Damn you!" cried Gant, his huge hands at Logan's throat.

He had the strength of ten; he was truly a giant, superbly conditioned, a fighting machine of awesome capability—fired with hatred for this tenacious enemy who continued to plague him, who dared, even now, to physically attack him.

He would crush the life from Logan!

He's killing me! I'm getting dizzy. Mind's blanking. Can't breathe!

But Logan broke the hold. Using his feet, he snap-kicked free, twisted, looped the narrow belt around the giant's thick neck, applied fierce pressure.

Gant fought him. For a long moment it was impossible to say which man had the greater advantage. Two ex-Sandmen, trained to kill, masters of their craft. Each driven to hate, each determined to end the other's life.

Abruptly, Gant's hands fell away from Logan. He beat the floor with the flat of his palms—as a panicked bird beats its feathers under the hawk.

The great dark hands went slack; the fingers curled, twitched, fluttered. And did not move again.

Gant was dead.

ROUT

[« ^ »](#)

She saw him!

"Logan!"

"Jess!"

Workers were flooding out of the cells, arming themselves with Flamers, metal clubs, stones...rushing toward the door which Logan had opened wide.

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to face Gant," she said, trembling, holding him. "When you didn't come out...when no one came out...I thought he'd killed you!"

"It's Gant who died," he told her. "Now do as I said. I'm going after Mary-Mary."

Nodding, she vanished off into a twist of cavern gloom.

Evans 9 got the word first: Breakout. Main block. All the cells emptied.

Where were the guards?

And where was Gant?

No matter. Evans could handle a ragtag band of half-starved workers. He needed a bit of excitement; things had been dull since Logan's escape.

He was probably hopelessly lost by now in the caverns, and Jessica with him. Without Mary-Mary they'd have no chance.

Evans was at the vidphone. "Which way are the workers headed?"

The vid gave no reply; the image screen was blank. A malfunction was annoying at a time like this.

Evans strapped on his Gun, stuffed an extra Fuser into his belt, left the unit.

Steratt and the others were outside, battle-assembled, ready to move against the escapees. Evans smiled. His men would grind the rebels underfoot. A mere flexing of Sandman muscle.

It would be amusing.

Logan was at the door of the storm chamber. Through the thick metal walls he could hear the hurricane roaring inside.

"Kill it," he said to the control-tech in front of him, his Fuser jabbing the man's back.

The tech mouthed fear-words, palmed a primary switch on the weatherboard.

The storm died.

"Door," snapped Logan. "Get it open."

The tech did that.

Logan clubbed him aside and vaulted into the room.

She was alive.

"There!" shouted Evans, pointing. "There they are."

Steratt and the Sandmen advanced toward the workers. A narrow stretch of rock tunnel separated the two groups.

The Sandmen moved into the tunnel, Guns ready.

The workers halted, seemed confused. They murmured among themselves.

"The poor fools aren't even firing at us," grinned Steratt. "Maybe they think we'll make it easier on them if they give up now."

"Too bad," sighed Evans, his Gun raised. "I was actually looking forward to—"

He didn't finish.

Evans and Steratt and the entire group of advancing Sandmen were buried in a sudden, crushing downfall of rock...huge boulders loosed in deadly profusion by willing hands from above.

Under the personal direction of Jessica 6.

The tunnel was still.

Not a shot had been fired, yet the battle had been won.

COUNTDOWN

[« ^ »](#)

Fennister simply could not believe it, could not accept the fact that it had all happened so quickly, that one man and one woman had routed Gant's army, had freed the workers and turned his universe upside down.

"My whole reason for existence here, for months, has been to make the Thinker live again," he said to Logan. "And now you want me to let it die?"

"No," said Logan, "not let it die. I want you to destroy it. Totally. So it can't be revived again, by anyone. No more rule-by-computer. Ever."

"But with Gant dead...you and I...we could use it, for the good of man, not his enslavement."

"There's no good in it," said Logan.

Fennister shook his head.

"And if there was," Logan continued, "who's to say how long we'd control it? Every power-hungry maniac in the world would be licking his chops over the thought of running it. No, Fennister, the Thinker has to die."

They were in the scientist's lab, beyond the inner Core, a vast place of complex instrumentation, filled with a dazzling array of multi-operational equipment which Gant had supplied.

Nothing had been stinted here.

Jessica stood beside Logan; she shared his passion. Fennister's argument made no dent in their combined determination to destroy the source of so much pain and death in the world they'd known.

"We'll finish the job Ballard started," said Logan.

Fennister nodded slowly. "All right...we can do it. But the whole mountain must go with it. That's the only way."

Logan was shaken by this. To bring down the great warrior who symbolized courage and rebellion, who ruled the Dakota wilderness in proud granite majesty...

But he hesitated for only a moment. His eyes were hard. "The mountain, then," he said.

It would be difficult—and dangerous.

A timing device was set to detonate thermocharges planted at a multitude of spots inside the caverns. For days, Fennister and his technicians had labored to plant these charges and regulate them, precisely, to the primary timer; each had a separate and vital function.

"I want everyone clear of the mountain before we set the timer," said Logan.

"Someone will have to remain in the laboratory," said Fennister. His face was drawn with exhaustion, his eyes puffed and swollen from lack of sleep.

"Why?"

"To make certain the device works. There's no way to monitor it from outside."

"What's the risk factor?" asked Logan.

"It could be high. There's a chance I won't come out."

"You?"

"Who else would it be?" Fennister said in a calm, weary tone. "I'm the only one qualified to see that the timer functions properly."

"I'll do it," said Logan flatly. "Just tell me what I need to know."

Fennister tapped his head. "It's all in here, Logan. And only I have it." He spread his hands. "There's no one else."

A moment of silence.

"You'd die with the Thinker?"

"If I must."

Logan was silent for a moment.

"Let's get started," he said.

The Dakota sun was a disc of white gold in the heated morning sky. Under it, well back from the mountain, surrounded by green pines and thick, waist-high brush, the workers and technicians of Crazy Horse stood nervously.

They said nothing; their eyes were on the mountain, fixed to the immense granite figure who seemed tall enough to rule the world.

Jessica stood close to Logan, gripping his hand. Her eyes, too, were on the mountain. Near them, Mary-Mary, pale from her experience in the stormroom, but sharing their joy in having aborted Gant's plan.

"How much longer?" Mary-Mary asked.

"Fennister set the timer exactly," said Logan. "At his signal, we're to count down from a hundred. By the count of twenty-five he should be back here with us."

"He's a brave man," said Jessica.

Logan nodded. "And a brilliant one. The world needs its Fennisters now."

"Will he make it?" asked Mary-Mary.

Logan looked at the cavern entrance, a dark wound in the base of Crazy Horse.

"I don't know," he said.

The signal was given.

And the countdown began.

EXTINCTION

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A muted, murmurous sea of voices, counting down to zero, each voice strained, tight with emotion...

"...eighty-two...eighty-one...eighty...seventy-nine..."

All eyes on the mountain.

Logan and Jessica and Mary-Mary counting with the others. "...sixty-six...sixty-five...sixty-four..."

As Logan's voice mechanically chanted the countdown, like some terrible litany, his mind kept giving him the image of Fennister, alone at the timer, watching for any flicker of imperfection, any sign that all was not well.

"...forty-eight...forty-seven...forty-six..."

A maddening vision.

Logan felt himself beginning to tremble. His right leg throbbed, still bearing the mark of Gant's Flamer. When he was under pressure, in a highly-dangerous situation, this condition could never have manifested itself—but his fear now was for Fennister. And this fear twisted and ate at Logan.

"...thirty-eight...thirty-seven...thirty-six..."

Dammit, he should be coming out by now!

The dark cavern mouth gaped, silent and empty.

"...twenty-nine...twenty-eight..."

"I'm going in to get him," said Logan.

"You're not," said Jessica. It was a flat statement.

"Hold her," Logan said to a worker next to them. "She'll try to follow me."

"Logan, you—"

But he did not hear her voice any longer. Her voice was a million miles behind him.

There was only the mountain.

And Fennister.

The count stood at sixteen when Logan reached the lab.

Fennister was gone!

The timer stood deserted—ticking away life-seconds: fourteen...thirteen...twelve...

Logan shouted, "Fennister!"

"Back here," a voice said from the depths of the laboratory.

Logan found him, kneeling at a terminal, adjusting a tiny set screw, grabbed his arm, jerked him upward.

"...nine...eight..." "Out!"

"But there's still a loose connection here. I have to—"

"I said out!"

And Logan dragged him toward the lab door...five...four...three...

Logan stared desperately at the timer. "We're too late! The whole mountain's going!"

"No!" Fennister threw his body across the space between Logan and the timing device.

And killed it.

The timer stopped

"I didn't intend to come out," admitted Fennister. "Gant was my only chance to find Lisa again. He's dead, so I—"

"We'll find her," vowed Logan. "I know the Market now. She'll be found, I swear it."

"I believe you."

"Then destroy the Thinker—and come out with me."

"I can't reset the timer," said Fennister. "It's not possible without detonating the charges."

"Can they be rigged to go off any other way?"

"Yes. By fuse. But that's death for us."

"Are you certain?"

"A short fuse is required. We'd have no time to clear the mountain."

"How much time is no time?" Logan asked him.

"Perhaps...fifteen...twenty seconds. No more."

"We can make it," said Logan. "Go ahead."

Fennister made the proper connection, attached the short length of fuse.

"No way to ignite it," he said.

Logan pulled the Fuser from his belt. "I'll use this," he said.

They moved to the door, poised to run. "Start," Logan told the scientist. "I'll fire, and follow you."

"But I—"

"Run, damn you!"

Fennister took off, leaving Logan alone.

He aimed carefully—triggered the burnweapon.

The fuse ignited, began running a thin line of orange flame rapidly toward the charges.

Logan tossed the weapon aside and sprinted after Fennister.

And soon caught him. "Faster!" yelled Logan.

They ran.

Along the main corridor.

Through a linking series of rooms.

Down a secondary corridor.

Up a flight of cut-stone steps.

Ahead: the bright mouth of the escape tunnel and, just beyond, the exit into Dakota sun, shining with the promise of life itself.

Fennister stumbled, fell, with a snapping of bone, full-face onto the tunnel's dirt floor.

...as the fuse burned closer.

Logan pulled at him. "Up!"

"Broken," gasped Fennister. "Thigh bone. Can't walk. Go on, Logan! There's no time to—"

Logan grappled the scientist's body, slinging Fennister's full weight across his shoulders.

"Keep your arms locked around my chest," he said. "Hang on!"

And he staggered forward.

Mary-Mary cried out Logan's name as she saw the two figures emerge from darkness into light.

Jessica's throat was locked; she could not speak.

Several of the workers ran to Logan and Fennister, bore them swiftly away from the mountain. They cleared it.

Barely.

Inside the lab: a final spark of flame.

Then a blinding radiance.

Concussion!

The mountain screamed—a sound of cracking, rending granite and Tashunca-uitco began to die.

A hairline split appeared in the shoulder of Crazy Horse; the immense arm of the great war chief of the Ogallala Sioux, on which five hundred men could stand shoulder-to-shoulder, suddenly quaked loose, sundering into giant boulders.

The massive head of the warrior split itself in twain, as if a titanic axe-blade had cleaved the skull...

The huge stallion, bearing the chief, reared up magnificently, magically alive, as tons of rock folded into an opening crevasse behind it; a raised hoof sheared away, fell into disintegrating fragments... The main body of horse and man swayed majestically for a moment, then bowed, tumbling down in an awesome granite rain of rock and rubble and dust...

A terrible, mind-numbing silence.

As if the universe itself had been extinguished.

TOGETHER

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Jessica turned her eyes to Logan in the down-sifting dust. Like his, her skin was powdered white. Tears had cut furrows down her cheeks.

They embraced, silently.

Something evil had died with the Thinker. Not the computer itself, but the uses to which men put it; no longer would its machine-metal dictate life and death.

Men like Gant could never use it to enslave a world.

"It's done, Logan," she said. "Really done now."

He held her body tightly to his.

"With Jonath dead," said Jessica, "the Wilderness People will need a new leader... They need you, Logan."

"No more leading," he said darkly. "That's the wrong word for us. I'll help the People... You'll help them... Mary-Mary will help... Fennister... all of us." He framed her face with his hands. "Together!"

And the sun burned, and burned, and burned in the arched sky of the Black Dakotas.

Book 3 Logan's Search

SOMETHING OUT THERE

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The unborn child was restless. He kicked out at the pulsing red darkness surrounding him, awakening his mother. Her voice murmured softly to him; her hands pressed inward, soothing him...

"He's getting impatient," said Logan, now awake also. "Wants out." He smiled at Jessica.

She nodded. "He'll just have to wait his turn, like everyone else," she said, massaging her flesh in a rhythmic manner designed to calm the child.

"Well, he's still got a few weeks in there," Logan said, patting her swollen stomach. He suddenly looked serious. "It's not too late to change his name."

She sighed, saying nothing.

Logan got up, moved to the window, glanced out at the sweep of night sky. The moon was full, riding free beyond massed clouds. Its light defined his face in hard, sharp planes.

Jessica rose to stand beside him, pressing the soft swell of her body against him.

"It's what I want," she said softly. "We lost Jaq—and now it's as if... we have him back again."

"But that's not really true," said Logan. "You know that each child is different." He turned to her, cupping her face gently in the moonlight. "Jaq is gone forever. It took us a long time to accept it, but he's gone,

Jess."

"I know," she said, lips trembling.

He leaned to kiss her, running his right hand slowly over the miraculous life-swell of flesh. "This is new life—a new human being..."

Jessica nodded. "I understand what you're saying...really I do." She hesitated. "It's just that...calling him Jaq will mean a lot to me."

Logan kissed her cheek very gently. "Fine. No more objections."

And they stood together in the moon-glimmered bedroom in the mansion on the hill above the dry Potomac, not speaking as the drifting clouds massed solidly, shutting out the light.

It appeared in the sky over Old Washington the next morning—small, silvery, glinting—a strange metal dragonfly dropping swiftly toward Maincamp.

The Wilderness People were alarmed. Their vow of nonviolence, sworn after the deaths at Crazy Horse in the Dakotas, severely limited their ability to defend themselves against outside attack. They had no offensive weapons, no effective way to fight an enemy.

However, as they soon discovered, this was no enemy.

A tall man, bare-headed and weaponless, in torn grays, climbed weakly from the control pod of a silver skybug. Its rotor blades whispered to silence behind him as he advanced on the camp at a stumbling walk. He was gaunt-fleshed; his spindly legs would barely support him. Beard stubble darkened his thin cheeks, and his eyes were desperate.

Logan caught the man as he half fell to one knee, helping him the rest of the way into camp. A group of shouting Wilderness children danced around them, excited by the event. Logan spoke sharply, and the children melted back, clearing a space for the exhausted stranger.

Several primary members of the camp moved out from the central chamber-tent to face the newcomer.

He blinked at them. "Who—who leads here?"

"We have no leader," said Fennister.

His woman, Lisa, stood at his shoulder, nodding. "We are all equal here," she said.

"We function as a group, a single unit," added Mary-Mary.

The gaunt man smiled weakly. "Idealists!"

"Realists," corrected Logan. "We know what absolute power can do. We've had enough of it." He looked down at the gaunt man, who had propped his back against a tree; the stranger sat in a slumped posture, drained of energy.

"Who are you?" Fennister asked him. "Why have you come here?"

"My name is Karrick 3. I'm from the Chicago Complex."

"You're a long way from home," Logan said.

"I've been searching for help." Karrick's voice broke. "We—we're all starving back there! We must have food!"

"We've barely enough for ourselves," said Fennister.

"There are many children here," said Mary-Mary. "With new ones coming." She glanced significantly at Logan.

"Others have asked for help," said Lisa, "but we were forced to refuse."

"But you must help us!" Karrick pleaded. "I could find no one...there's nowhere else for me to go." He looked in desperation toward Logan. "You call yourselves realists. All right, then let's talk trade." He hesitated. "What do you need most?"

"What we always need," said Logan. "Medical equipment...healing drugs...lab supplies."

"We have all that," said Karrick. "When the food supply failed, the Scavenger packs abandoned Chicago. We have free access to the medshops."

Logan turned to Fennister, eyes intense. "Even if we have to ration food this winter," he said, "it will be worth it for medical security. Five died last year because we lacked proper supplies."

Fennister rubbed his cheek, thinking. Then he raised a hand. The Wilderness People grouped in around them. "An offer," Fennister declared loudly, so that all could hear. "Medical supplies for food. How do you vote?"

A muttering. A brief cross-discussion of terms. A hand count was made: the vote was almost unanimous.

"We trade," said Fennister.

Karrick smiled in exhausted relief. Then he drew a long breath, his lips tight. "I'll leave tonight."

"You're in no condition to handle a ship." Logan said. "I'll make the flight—with signed authority from you."

"Agreed." Karrick sighed, extending a thin-boned hand. As Logan shook it, Karrick had tears in his eyes. "Thank you." he said softly.

"Get some rest," Logan told him, pressing the man's trembling shoulder. "I'd say you've earned it!"

As he lifted away from Old Washington in the silver skycraft, Logan experienced a sharp sense of guilt at having left Jessica. With the new baby coming she had not wanted him to undertake the flight, claiming that she needed him with her, psychologically, at this special time in her life.

"But I'm the only qualified pilot at Maincamp," he'd argued. "It's a short trip. I'll be back home in plenty of time to greet young Jaq!"

"Let Karrick make the flight. In a few days he'll be strong enough."

"I volunteered. I gave my word."

And then she had shivered—looking at him with sudden fear in her eyes. "Don't go, Logan." She crossed both arms over her rounded life-flesh in a protective gesture. "I'm afraid."

"You'll be fine here"" he'd assured her. "Lisa and Mary-Mary will look after you."

"No—it's you I'm afraid for. There's...something out there."

The phrase had startled him. "What are you saying?"

"I—don't know exactly." She'd groped for words. "But...it's as if I'm tuned in to something..."

And she had shivered again.

"Hey, hey..." He had taken her gently into his arms. "There's nothing out there between me and the Chicago Complex but a lot of empty sky. Now, no more of this, hear me? Let's have a smile out of you!"

And she had smiled.

But the fear had remained in her eyes.

The night was dark with stormclouds, the moon deep-buried. Bad flying weather—with a hard rain beginning to slash at the canopy. The wind was choppy at this altitude, slapping the little skybug in staggered gusts.

Logan checked the tie-down straps on the two heavy crates of food beside him in the cockpit. Fully secure. No problem.

The bug was quick and totally reliable, with twice the cruise range of his own paravane—and with power enough to climb above the storm into clear weather.

The storm...Maybe that's what Jess was worried about, thought Logan, as he set the controls for maximum ascent. Maybe pregnant women can feel bad weather in their bones.

Odd, though, the way she'd phrased it: "...something out there."

If not the storm, what then?

Just what had she sensed?

Location?Directly below, and climbing.Intersect point?Immediate.Stabilize. Prepare to encounter.

Logan was puzzled. According to the controls, he should be seeing moon—clear night sky above him, but apparently there was a malfunction.

The entire arc of sky within view range was obscured with...

Not clouds. A shape. Dark...all-encompassing.

Logan pressed forward, face against the canopy, peering upward.

He was stunned.

He'd never seen anything so gigantic! Its size was absolutely incredible, beyond rational acceptance. In simply contemplating it, Logan was swept by vertigo.

A ship. Some kind of mammoth alien starcraft moving through our solar system.

No, not moving. Stabilized. Dark and utterly motionless. Nonreflective surface. No lights. No sound.

Silent and immense above him.

"...Something out there."

Then, abruptly, with painful brightness, an energy beam flared from the hull of the great ship, bathing Logan's small skybug in a fire circle of illumination so intense that he twisted in agony, shielding his eyes.

Get away! Now!

Gasping, he threw himself forward, fingers clawing at the descent lever.

No response. The controls were frozen, locked tight.

Above him, a seamless mouth opened in the underbelly of the great starship—and Logan felt his small craft being sucked upward with impossible force.

His breath was snatched from his lungs; he was flung savagely backward against the control seat.

Logan tried to cry out as the darkness engulfed him.

Or was this black horror of a ship eating him alive?

Movement.

Something touching him...

Something speaking to him...a soundless inner voice: Open your eyes, Logan 3.

Logan opened his eyes to a spin of blazing colors. He blinked, and the colors steadied became illuminated dials, glittering wall switches, blinking relays...Around him, the room seemed alive, vibrating to the tick and hum of alien machinery.

The mental image struck him with sudden impact: alien.

Again, the soundless telepathic voice: To you, that is what we are, Logan. Just as your race is alien to ours.

Logan had awakened naked, in a sitting position, his body softly supported by a cluster of flaring, free-floating diamonds—or what seemed to be diamonds. Now, with a soft clicking, the diamonds shifted—and Logan found himself standing, in semishock, facing a large glowing crystal set into the wall directly ahead of him.

The crystal pulsated with banded patterns of light, radiating energy like a thousand tiny suns.

Some kind of force field, thought Logan.

A door, Logan. Leading to us.

Logan stepped toward it, was jolted back.

His words were hard, angry: "Let me through...Let me see you!"

Stand as you are. Do not move. We will come to you. But, first...

From the arched ceiling a transparent cone whispered down to settle over Logan's naked body. He felt trapped inside the cone, like an insect in a bottle.

For your protection. Without it, we could not approach you.

The crystal began misting away in a myriad of brightly dissolving particles.

They were coming.

Logan could feel his heart beating wildly. His mouth was dry. What would he see? What type of monstrous life form would confront him? Would he be repulsed, stunned, sickened?

His thoughts brought a reply: We are creatures of beauty, Logan. Like your sun.

And so they were: pure beings of dazzling energy. Logan drew up a hand to shield himself against their combined brilliance, slitting his eyes to see them, three of them rippling and merging, flowing now together, now apart, in a core of incredible light and heat.

Now you understand the need for your protection: If we removed the cone, our radiance would blind you—and your flesh would melt to instant ash.

Logan realized that the voice he seemed to hear inside his head came from all of them; there was no separation of tone. They communicated mentally as a single entity.

"Why am I here?"

You are here because of what you are—a Sandman who defied a life-destroying system, who outran it, outwitted it, and finally destroyed it. You ended computer rule on Earth.

"Not me; Ballard," Logan said. "It began with Ballard. I just finished what he started. And I was not alone—there were many others...Jess, Mary-Mary, Fennister, Jonath of the Wilderness People..."

We know of them. But you were the force that brought the Thinker to final ruin.

"How? How do you know about all this?"

We have ways of monitoring your world as we monitor others. Our powers are vast—quite beyond your imagination.

Logan felt his adult self being stripped away. Here, facing these fantastic beings, he had regressed to the level of a child in Nursery. He felt small, totally powerless; he knew nothing of the countless starworlds swarming their universe.

He had never concerned himself with suns beyond Sol, with planets beyond this solar system...They were right: all this was, literally, beyond his imagination.

But he pulled himself up from the mental gulf that separated them; he forced himself to accept the reality of the moment, however bizarre. He had many answers to find.

"What do you want with me?" Logan asked them.

We have chosen you for a mission. If you accomplish it successfully, you will be released, sent back to Earth—to your woman and your son.

"Then...you know about Jessica...about Jaq?"

Of course.

"Is she aware of what's happened to me?"

No one knows. You are free to tell them when you return. There was a slight pause. If you return. The chance for failure is high, since the mission is quite dangerous.

"What does it involve?"

You will replace another human from Earth.

"For what purpose?"

Your questions will be answered after you have undergone alteration.

Logan recoiled from the thought: they were going to change him, use their technology to alter his body and personality. A form of death.

He must escape!

Escape! The alien voice seemed to mock him. There is absolutely no escape from us. Surely you realize how totally unrealistic such a concept is in these circumstances?

Logan nodded wearily. Again, they were right. There was no escape. He would do exactly as they bade him.

He would accept alteration.

A transfer machine will take you to our mothercraft, where you will proceed through the alteration process.

Logan blinked. "Then—this isn't your ship?"

Only one of our smaller drones, equipped to enter your atmosphere.

Small! Logan had been amazed at the gigantic size of the craft. What must the mothership be like?

You will soon see for yourself.

And the sun-bright beings flowed back through the wall.

Their radiance was gone.

The crystal reshaped itself.

The cone lifted away from his body.

And Logan was alone once more in humming darkness.

TO ANOTHER LIFE

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The transfer machine that came for Logan resembled a large, highly glossed seashell from the beaches of Earth. The forward section of its opalescent shell-surface folded back—and Logan settled warily into an organic passenger seat that molded itself to the contours of his body.

The shell sealed itself around him and glided into silent motion, moving smoothly through an exit port and along a narrow tongue of metal that linked the drone to the mothership.

Although Logan was completely encased within the machine, he had a clear field of vision through its transparent forward surface—and the effect was awesome.

Indeed, the drone craft was minuscule in comparison to its great mother. The titan's subtly curved interior seemed limitless, rolling above and below Logan for miles—a metallic world of shining alien substance far beyond human engineering.

They moved faster.

As the shell's momentum continued to build, outside details coalesced into a swift blur of silver gray. They were now rushing through this mammoth, hollow world at mind-numbing velocity.

Logan closed his eyes...experienced dizziness...nausea...In the violent onslaught of speed his body was thrust inexorably back into the contoured seat; he was assaulted by forces that threatened to burst his bones, sunder his flesh...

Relief came in the form of a cool needle-stab, rendering him instantly unconscious.

When he awoke, the alteration process had been painlessly completed.

Logan sat up on the ship's medtable. He was wearing the black uniform of a Sandman.

Behind their protective wall of shimmering crystals, the three alien light-forms pulsed and merged, sending their words into Logan's newly awakened mind: You are displeased, Logan?

Because the crystal wall muted their radiance, Logan was able to look directly at his captors without shielding his eyes. They were like miniature suns, flickering cores of flame, without solid form.

"You didn't tell me I was replacing a Sandman," he said. "The system's dead. This uniform is meaningless now on Earth."

Not where you go.

"The Thinker's dead, and the world is free," declared Logan. "The Sandmen are finished."

Same reply: Not where you go.

Logan was confused; he reached up to finger the bones of his chin...his cheeks and forehead...seeking the new shape of flesh. But it was impossible to tell what they had done to him.

"Who am I? I want to see myself. A mirror—do you have one?"

In the adjoining chamber.

To Logan's right, a tall silver slidepanel whispered back.

Your mirror is there.

Logan entered the chamber, the panel sliding closed behind him. He stood in total darkness, nervous and uncertain.

What would he see? Whose face did he wear? Would it be a Sandman he'd known at DS Headquarters?

A sudden pillar of light. Inside the pillar, suspended between floor and ceiling and supported by clusters of floating diamonds, was the naked figure of a sleeping man.

Logan moved closer to stare in silent shock at the Earthman he was to replace.

Your mirror, Logan 3.

He was staring at himself!

Logan slowly circled the figure. "Is this...some kind of robot?"

He is quite real. A human of flesh and blood, as you are.

Logan studied the face of the sleeping man: his own. The hands: his own. The body: his own. Hair, mouth, curvature of cheek and chin: his own.

"You've altered another man to look exactly like me!"

The reverse is true, the aliens told him. We have altered you to look exactly like him. Since he is over a decade younger than you, we had to erase certain lines in your face, subtly rework your body flesh, alter the pores of your fingers to match his. Now the two of you are identical.

The pillar gradually dimmed as the Logan mirror-figure dissolved in a soft flicker of diamonds. Fading...gone...swallowed in blackness.

The silver wallpanel once again hushed open behind Logan, and he walked numbly back into the medchamber.

He faced the aliens.

It was necessary for you to see him in order to understand your mission.

Logan's jaw was hard-set; he glared at the flickering flame shapes. "Damn you! What kind of trick is this?"

No trick, Logan. The man you saw is a younger version of yourself.

"Version?"

From another Earth. A parallel world, in which Sandmen still pursue runners. On that world he was fanatically loyal to the system of computer-directed death at twenty-one—the same system you helped end forever on your own planet.

Logan felt himself caught in a dream from which he could not wake—yet he knew this was no dream. It was real. It was all actually happening to him. To maintain his base of emotional sanity, he had to keep telling himself this, over and over. No dream...no dream...

From the wall, a shapechair appeared.

Sit down, Logan. Watch what we show you. Watch—and listen.

Without choice, Logan obeyed. The chair shaped itself around him as the room darkened.

Holographic images materialized: an emerald universe of endless depth. Like a mute god, Logan sat surrounded by an infinity of stars and planets, silver-dusted galaxies, exploding nebulae...

The cool, emotionless voice of the aliens entered his mind: Each planet in universal space is paralleled by many other near-identical worlds. We are concerned in monitoring certain of these alternate worlds, utilizing basic vibrations in the space-time continuum to effect a passage from one world to another on a direct line. This direct line limits our activities and knowledge on any given world.

"Just what does that mean?"

It means we cannot enter the past or future of any world. We can monitor them only in their current, present-time status.

As the aliens spoke, their words were enhanced for Logan within the holographic universe. A tiny craft, representing the alien starship, hovered above a twin solar system on a direct line between two Earths. The configurations of the planets were identical.

With the elimination of a computerized death system, your Earth has now stabilized. It is this second planet that now concerns us. We know that some thing—or someone—controls its world-computer programming. A dark force, possibly supernatural, guides the system.

One of the two tiny Earths darkened, as if denied the light of the sun.

This dark force must be rooted out and destroyed. We feel that you are uniquely qualified for this mission. For you, it will be much like a time trip—a return to your yesterdays.

Now the holographic show was over. The images died.

Logan swung back to face the aliens.

We sense confusion. You have many questions. Ask them.

"I'm just one man. How can I change a world?"

You changed your own.

"I don't see the logic of this. With the powers you possess, why not simply brainwash the other me and send him back to change his own planet?"

Our powers are limited. We have no way of effectively overcoming young Logan's lifelong conditioning. You must take his place.

"And do exactly what?"

Prior to our removing him, young Logan had been preparing for a ritual known as Godbirth, which for

certain Sandmen of high rank is an alternative to Deep Sleep. We think that through Godbirth you will be able to penetrate the planet's central power base.

"Will I be given any special weapons?"

No weapons. But, since there appears to be a form of indoctrination connected with this ritual, we have provided mental shielding. You are now immune to any mind technique they may attempt to employ."

Logan found the concept of a double world hard to assimilate: the same, yet not the same.

"Is there a Ballard on this Earth?"

Ballard does not exist. No Sanctuary Line. No base in Washington. No escape rockets at Cape Steinbeck.

"Then—there's no Sanctuary for runners!"

A few female runners seem to have vanished, but we have not been able to determine their fate. They may still be alive somewhere on the planet. There is much we do not know.

"What of Francis? If Ballard does not exist—"

Each world has its own structure, Logan. Francis is very real on this world, a key Sandman, a Master of the Gun. He has also been selected for Godbirth, and will accompany you through the ritual.

"But as a fanatic to the system, won't he be dangerous?"

Not at first. He is young Logan's best friend. Thus, he will trust you. Eventually, of course, you will have to kill him.

"And just what becomes of young Logan?"

We shall return him safely to his world as we shall return you to yours. But only if your mission is a success. His life, therefore, depends on you.

Logan's emotions toward his duplicate were mixed: he didn't want to be responsible for the death of this young man. He would, in effect, be killing himself. Yet, face to face, one would be forced to destroy the other, runner against Sandman. A paradox, the two of them—exactly the same, yet so different. Literally, worlds apart.

New questions kept crowding into Logan's mind; there was so much he needed to know. Was there another Jessica on this new Earth? Would she recognize him?

The reply came instantly: She exists. But Jessica and Logan have never met. Your strong emotional ties to your own Jessica make it imperative that you avoid contact. Keep away from her. Jessica need not concern you—and is no part of your mission.

"How do I contact you from this new Earth?"

Contact will not be possible.

"You mean, I can't—"

We never leave this environment. We were always here. We will always be here.

The enigmatic reply failed to satisfy Logan.

But what if I need help?"

A man named Kirov 2, who works at CenControl in Moscow, may be able to assist you in case of emergency. There is no one else.

"What about the place and time of my pickup if I succeed?"

Leave this to us. A hesitation. There is a limitation.

"Yes?"

We have no control over the spatial time shift that dictates the reality phase of the two planets. Eventually, these parallel worlds will cease to exist on the same cosmic plane. We cannot maintain our dual-world position indefinitely.

"How long?"

Fourteen Earthdays. If you have not exposed and destroyed the planet's power source within this period, we will be forced to abandon you.

"Impossible!" raged Logan. "It took years to destroy the Thinker...I don't even know who or what I'm searching for!"

Fourteen days, Logan.

And a rolling, milky substance, like white smoke, began to fill the chamber. The aliens faded...the walls rippled...Logan felt himself losing consciousness.

He was on an endless chute, plunging down...down...and down...

To another life.

To another Earth.

RETURN TO YESTERDAY

[« ^ »](#)

New California.

A full-moon summer midnight in the swarming sprawl of the Angeles Complex.

And, within the life swarm:

A glasshouse, where citizens seek voyeuristic sexual release in the rainbow-tinted night...

A hallucimill, dispensing dream-lifts to the jaded...

A nursery, with its robot tended rows of hypno-sleeping children...

Sleepshops, where silver darts deliver oblivion to those whose Lastday has ended...

DS Headquarters, a hive of black-garbed Sandmen, intent on their death-duty to the system...

Arcade, a fire-dazzle of blazing lights and frenzied pleasure...

The maze, with its swift, deep-tunnel beetle cars converging from a thousand major cities of the world...

And in the heart of the midnight city, in one of the glittering boxbeam lifeunits, an off-duty Sandman stirs to the sensual play of soft fingers caressing the skin of his chest...

Logan awakened to the smiling female on the flowbed beside him. In the rich spill of moonlight from an open skyvent her body was flushed ivory. She wore a sheergold loverobe, accenting the peaks and hollows of her soft flesh. Her beauty was flawless.

"Remember me?" she asked in a voice of velvet. "I'm Phedra 12...from Arcade." She frowned, studying his face. "You look strange. Are you lifted?"

Her question supplied Logan with an answer to mask his obvious confusion: "I took some Y-16 earlier tonight."

"Y-16?"

"New formula," Logan improvised. "Not in the 'mills yet."

She smiled again, relaxing against him, melding her body to his. "You DS have the best...always."

He kissed her pouting lips. "How'd you get in?"

"With this," she said, holding up a thin slotkey. "Remember? You gave it to me at the firegallery last week...I dance there."

Young Logan had been attracted to her, had made contact, had invited her here...

"I remember now," said Logan, taking her firmly into his arms.

She was here for sex, and he'd oblige. Any other reaction would appear perverted; a young Sandman was expected to fulfill his natural urges with many women. But as Logan reached out to caress her face he flinched, jaw muscles tightening.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

His hand glowed crimson against her cheek; the time-crystal in his palm was alive again!

He smiled, shaking his head. "Nothing...nothing's wrong."

"It's the Y-16," she said. "Can you—I mean, are you able to—"

In answer, he tongue-kissed her deeply, fitting himself into the heated curve of her waiting body. He thrust into her, bringing a soft cat-cry from her arching throat...

But as Logan made love to Phedra 12 he felt a sense of dread building darkly within him. His glowing hand was a terrible reminder of the world he thought he had escaped forever. It was back, now, all around him—as real as the cry of passion he wrung from her trembling lips...

He did not sleep after Phedra left. In a loose velvrobe, he prowled the lifeunit, probing, analyzing,

examining the artifacts of young Logan's life—as an ancient anthropologist might sift through the habitat of a lost tribesman.

He was trying to understand this other self, this dedicated young Sandman who homered runners with cool dispatch, who wore the death-black uniform of DS with pride, who guiltlessly helped perpetuate a system of mass murder.

Logan stared at him, at this trim-bodied young fighting machine of a man, carefully studying the sharp reflection in the wall mirror. Me, more than a decade ago. Me, still on red, well short of twenty-one, still on the hunt, still able to coldly track a fellow human, corner him, rip and unravel him with a homer. But me with something inside that cried: No!

And that was the difference.

From the beginning, in his own world, buried deep in his psyche, Logan had experienced a sense of wrongness; a faint, insistent pulsebeat of rebellion had existed beyond his conscious awareness. With Jessica's entry into his life that rebellion had burst forth; her love had nurtured and encouraged it. She had been the bridge that took him from Sandman to runner.

Could it happen again, here on this Earth? Could young Logan have changed, given the love of a woman like Jessica? Could he, too, have broken free of the system? From all the evidence here in this unit, and from what he already knew of this world, it seemed unlikely.

Each world was different; each man must form his own personal code of morality. Young Logan was one kind of man; he was another.

Turning his back on this reflection of a darker self, Logan walked to the plexwindow. He stood, unmoving, more than a mile above the city, watching the sun lay its thin morning fire across the eastern sky.

Then a timebird stirred the air around his head, reminding him that he must report for duty. He drew the bird from his shoulder, clicking it off; he cleared his mind, steeled himself for what lay ahead.

Time to report to DS. Time to put on the black uniform of a Sandman once more.

Time to live another man's life.

...A return to your yesterdays.

As the aliens had promised him it would be, this world beyond the lifeunit was an instant relive: the moving tide of young citizens, many with fear-haunted eyes (already anticipating Lastday); the black-garbed DS men, seeded darkly through the crowd, always separate from those around them (Give a Sandman space, never crowd him, keep your proper distance, he may be on the hunt!); the festive children with their flushed, excited faces, pleasure-bent and as yet untroubled by thought of Sleep; the police paravanes, hovering like predatory metal insects above the crowd, patrolling the upper levels of the Complex. All of it, painfully familiar...

And now the dropway, leading down to the maze platform.

Riding the car to DS Headquarters, Logan stared at his right palm, at the unblinking red glow of the flower-shaped crystal imbedded in the flesh of his hand. The aliens were brilliant; no one on Earth had ever been able to reprogram a timeflower—yet Logan's crystal was alive again, ticking off the hours of

life...Even for a Sandman, at twenty-one, when his palmflower blinks red-black, red-black, red-black, Lastday begins and there is no escape from Deep Sleep.

Except here, thought Logan, in this world, where a select few could achieve Godbirth, that mysterious ritual promising life, salvation, a higher existence.

Was it real?

When would it begin?

"Where's your Gun?"

Startled, Logan turned toward the back of the mazecar. The question had come from an eager-eyed blond youngster in a splitsleeve recsuit. He wore red hikeboots, and he smiled at Logan, obviously unafraid of Sandmen.

"I'm reporting in," said Logan. "My weapon's at DS."

"Then how come you're suited up?" asked the boy. "Off-duty Sandmen are required to wear—"

"I know the rules," cut in Logan. "So I'm bending one."

"You could be fined. It could go on your Statsheet. You could be blackmarked, and that would lower your unit average."

"You know a lot about DS."

"I'm going to be a Sandman when I'm old enough," declared the boy, eyes shining. "My name's Timson 4."

"How old are you, Timson?"

"Seven." He held up his right hand, palm out. "I just went to blue. Released from Nursery last month." He slapped his left boot. "I've already climbed the Matterhorn. Not many blues make it all the way. Three others in our group were killed trying it, and they were all older."

"Congratulations," said Logan.

"I even helped a Sandman Gun a runner! Along the Mississippi, near the Orleans Complex. He tried to get across in a small boat. I saw him steal it and I dived in and tipped the boat over. The Sandman who'd been after him used a ripper on him as he was swimming for shore. Cut him in half! The water was all red. It was exciting!"

"Why do you want to be a Sandman?"

"To kill runners. Somebody has to kill them." The boy's eyes grew cold. "They're scum. They have to die."

"For all you know, your mother might have been a runner," Logan found himself saying. "Or your father."

The boy was shocked. His face clouded with anger. "Whoever they were, they wouldn't run! Not ever!"

"You never know who might run," said Logan. "You get surprised sometimes."

Now the boy was staring at him with cool distrust. "Just who are you, anyway? What's your name?"

"Logan 3."

Timson's eyes popped wide.

"Have you heard of me?"

The boy gulped breath, spilling out a rapid stream of words: "You work with Francis and your killscore next to his is highest in the Complex and I'm sorry I said that about your uniform and about getting fined for breaking a rule and—" He broke off abruptly and extended a trembling hand. "Will you shake hands with me, Logan?"

Logan shook his hand. He wanted to tell this boy, Don't worship me! Don't try to become like me. Killing runners is wrong. Joining DS is wrong. The system is wrong. It will destroy you as you destroy others.

But he remained silent. Saying these things would be useless; the boy was beyond moral logic. The tapes had done their work. Timson 4 was a product of the system, as carefully manufactured as a robot, programmed to hate, to kill. Thus, Logan said nothing more as the silver car slotted into its destination platform.

He could feel the boy's eyes on him as he left the maze.

THE HIGHEST SCORE

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DS Headquarters.

Unchanged, timeless, grimly austere—a windowless gray monolith rising starkly into the sky of the Angeles Complex, set apart from its surrounding buildings as a DS man is set apart from the crowd, a structure designed to strike fear into the heart of any citizen wavering between accepting Sleep or becoming a runner.

Logan mounted the steps as two men exited the building. He immediately recognized the taller: Evans 9! The childhood friend who had betrayed him at Crazy Horse, who had lured him into a deathtrap on his own world.

"Logan!" Smiling broadly, Evans walked toward him. "We were just talking about you."

The man with Evans was nervous, raw-looking, a DS trainee on the verge of Sandman status.

"This is Marak 9. I've been working with him, showing him a few things...learns fast...bright...you know, he's really—"

As Evans rambled on, Logan barely heard the words; in his mind, he had the image of this man at Crazy Horse, at the Thinker's Central Core, a Gun in his hand, smiling as Jonath died...Logan was using all his willpower to keep from smashing his fist into Evans's face.

"...to meet you at last...heard so much about you..."

Marak was babbling uncertain praise. Logan glared at Evans, ignoring Marak, then suddenly pushed past them into the building.

Behind him, he heard Evans shout his name in startled anger. Then the heavy DS entrance door slid closed, cutting off the sound.

Just inside, Logan paused, drew a long breath telling himself, fiercely, that he must never react this way again, that he must rigorously keep the two worlds separate in his mind. He must never allow emotions relating to his world to dictate present behavior in this one. If you do, you'll ruin it all, he warned himself, you'll lose Godbirth, lose your chance to succeed in this mission, lose Jess and Jaq forever. Damn you, never again! Never!

And, breathing deeply, he moved toward the readyroom.

It was crowded with DS on shiftchange, suiting up for duty. Already uniformed, Logan had only to check out a Follower and an ammopac. As he did this, his name was called by the talkboard. Message for him.

"Logan 3," he said, facing the board, "Message?"

"From Francis," the board told him. "Waiting in the Huntarea. You are to join him there."

"Acknowledged," Logan said.

He faced a challenge. Logan was standing before the Gunwall at the end of the weapons corridor. If the skin-pattern alterations on his palm were less than perfect, an alarm would sound the moment he touched the wall—and before he could attempt an explanation he'd be Gunned to ash.

"Identity," repeated the metallic voice. It had already challenged him once; Logan knew he must respond.

He pressed the palm of his left hand firmly into the wall's identiplate. No alarm! Accepted.

A panel gleamed back to reveal the Gun, nested in its black-velvet alcove.

But the challenge was not over. Now, another critical stage. The alteration on his palm had been properly matched to young Logan's—but if the more complex pore configuration on his thumb and forgers was even microscopically incorrect, the Gun would detonate upon skin contact, since each DS weapon was pore-coded to the individual operative to whom it was issued.

Logan could feel the sweat beading his upper lip as he slowly reached in to curl his fingers around the cool pearl handle of the Gun...

Full contact. Perfect.

The corridor lights glinted along the dark blue barrel as Logan checked the weapon for full load: tangler, ripper, needler, nitro, vapor—and the deadly, body-tracking, nerve-destroying homer.

There was no denying the power of the Gun. Logan had fought his way to the Keys with such a weapon; he had used a Sandman's Gun to win back Jessica from the Borgia Riders. Now he felt the power radiating through his fingers and arm, firing his flesh. Power and killing force.

To use as chosen—for good or for evil.

Logan had never liked simkill workouts in the Huntarea, but they were required for all DS, designed (as the manual phrased it) "to tune the reflexes and sharpen an operative's reaction time to situations not

normally encountered in the course of a standard outside hunt."

Francis held the highest simkill score at Angeles. All his simulated kills were clean; he never wounded. He was deadly accurate at almost any range, no matter how difficult the situation or the terrain. Francis was exactly what his record indicated: the ideal DS operative—keen-minded, inventive, emotionless, precise. Francis did not make mistakes, and when a runner made one, he was there, a tireless force, to take advantage of it, of any weakness.

And eventually, Logan thought, I must kill him, just as the aliens said. He will have to be stopped.

But not today. No, today I'll hunt with him, match my skill against his, giving him no reason to mistrust me.

Because, at this moment, to Logan, Francis was the most important man alive on this death-haunted planet.

Logan crossed the yard, a reserve area for DS trainees. A dozen of them, wearing opaque headshields, were engaged in Blind Combat, led by a flat faced instructor who displayed open disgust as he slammed one young trainee after another into the dirt.

"Concentrate!" he lashed at them. "Determine my approach angle from the sound of my boots. Runner at night won't give you warning. Cut your throat from behind. Strangle on your own blood! No second chance then—so concentrate now!"

As he watched, Logan was suddenly aware of a faint scraping sound behind him, but before he could turn he was dumped into the yard, belly down.

A dry chuckle above him. "Concentrate, Logan, concentrate!"

"Damn you, Francis!"

Logan stood up, brushing sand from his tunic. He glared at the tall, thin man in black. The eyes were darker than midnight, mocking and steady in the narrow, lean-cheeked face. These eyes missed nothing. Unblinking, penetrating, they measured Logan with a glint of cold humor.

"You're not going to score so well today if you don't sharpen up," said Francis as they began walking toward the Huntarea. "You might have figured I'd try for a bodythrow. You know me well enough."

"Yes," said Logan tightly, "I know you." Then he forced a lighter tone into his voice. "You do enjoy your little games."

"Not a game," said the tall man. His dark eyes were serious. "If I'd been a runner you might be dead right now."

"But I'm alive," said Logan flatly. "And I can handle runners. I do it well."

"I do it better," wolf-grinned Francis. "I always have."

The smug projection of superiority from Francis steeled Logan, made him determined to excel in their area workout. He was supremely skilled with a Gun, was a master of body combat, and refused to be intimidated by his rival's vaunted prowess.

Silently, each wholly intent on the trials to come, they traversed a long, brightly illuminated slot tunnel and

emerged into the main hunt arena.

Covering several square miles, the entire area had been constructed under a vast glasite dome in which every type and degree of weather could be expertly simulated; here, too, all combat conditions, however rigorous, could be duplicated.

The test ground was split into two branching sections. One route led right, twisting through spiked brushweed and snaretraps; the second route snaked left, across a man-made swamp. The terrain in both was equally treacherous, and the android runners were equally dangerous. No DS man had been killed in a workout, but injuries were common, some of them severe. Logan could not afford to be seriously injured; it might delay Godbirth—and there must be no delays. They stood at the crossway.

"Your choice," said Francis. "Right or left."

"Left," said Logan.

"See you on the other side." Francis grinned, moving swiftly for the high brush.

Logan felt confident as he set off along the left attack trail. The DS Huntarea in his world was very similar, yet familiarity was not a factor in this contest. There was no way to anticipate what lay ahead, since each route was regularly reprogrammed. You never knew when sudden fog might blind you, or when an artificial sun would dazzle blindingly from the domed sky, or when thick darkness might descend to throw you off balance, make you vulnerable...

The first attack came with shocking swiftness: a male android runner, dropping from a tree onto Logan's back. He had a buzzblade, and if he could drive the blade into Logan's body in a vital flesh area Logan's "kill" would be reversed. No skin penetration, no blood, but the contact point would be registered. For Logan, a negative encounter. Each negative encounter would cancel three simkills on the final score.

But Logan easily loop-rolled the runner over his shoulder and broke the robot's neck with a single down-chopping blow. Simkill: score 1.

Four hours of this.

Miles of swamp and jungle, of quicksand and rockslides, of chilling rain gusts, blast-furnace heat, savage winds... And always the cleverly programmed robot runners attacking from ambush, armed and dangerous. You could never relax; you were never beyond assault. Absolute concentration was required.

Concentrate! Logan told himself when a female almost got him with a chokewire. He'd allowed her to come up behind him from a blind in the rocks, and the wire was around his neck before he managed a whip-spin that sent her sprawling. Francis was right: concentration was the key. Lose that cutting edge of alertness and the hunter becomes the victim.

Four hours... and finally it was over.

Francis, looking cool and unwinded, boots glistening, his uniform dusted, was already at the final crossway when Logan arrived.

Logan's uniform was torn in several places; his tunic was mud-splattered ripped at the shoulder. He came in limping, favoring his right foot.

"Sandtrap?" Francis asked casually. An amused smile played at his lips.

"Stunrod," said Logan, sitting down wearily. "Didn't know androids carried the things!"

The tall man shook his head. "Whatever a runner could have, or steal, the robots get. Is it bad?"

Logan slipped off his right boot; the lower leg was blue and swollen. "Bad enough."

"Santini can fix it."

Logan looked blank.

"New body tech at the gym. Let him work the leg. You'll be fine."

"I'll try him," said Logan, wincing as he tabbed the boot closed. He stood up, testing his weight. At least he could still hobble. The rod had caught him just below the knee and his leg had collapsed under him.

He'd managed to fire as he fell, gutting the robot with a nitro. But it had been close—and painful.

Logan looked at Francis. "Well...shall we?"

The tall man grinned. "Are you sure you want the bad news—a poor crip' like you?"

"Score it," snapped Logan.

Francis palmed the scorepanel. A crimson number blazed to life on the board: 22.

"Hey," said Francis softly. "Two up from my last workout. That's a sweet total." He looked at Logan with amused eyes. "Your turn, friend." Logan palmed the wall and the simkill score flashed red: 24.

Francis stared at it, his grin fading. He let out a soft breath. "Well, well..."

"My right leg slowed me over the last mile," said Logan. "But it's not a bad total."

Francis flipped aside the vitabar he'd been chewing and moved sullenly through the slipexit.

Logan followed. His leg felt better already.

For the first time that day, he was smiling.

THE LAST HUNT

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Santini 14 had always been unique. In Nursery, long after midnight, while the other children were in their slotbeds, hypnotapes whispering to them as they slept, young Santini 14 was in the romproom, challenging the musclebelts, or working the jumpbars, or twisting through the intricate network of whipchutes—toughening himself, shaping his body as a sculptor shapes fireglass, gaining mastery over bone and muscle. On blue, clear of the nurseries, he used his freetime to visit all of the world's prime bodybuild centers—and on red, just past fifteen, he had opened his own bodyshop. His enlistment with DS, at Angeles Complex, was inevitable.

Due to the odd irregularities of the twin Earths, Santini had never existed in Logan's world. Therefore, his talent was truly unique.

Logan had expected the usual swirlnerve treatment, but Santini employed a personal method of vibromassage, producing immediate relief. The swelling vanished and the discoloration was replaced by healthy skin tone.

"Up!" ordered Santini, clapping his hands. "Jump, Sandman! Leap! Kick! You're perfect."

Logan eased off the table, tried some knee bends, placing full weight on his right leg. He was astonished. No pain. No muscle pull or discomfort.

"Perfect" Logan nodded. "Thanks!"

Santini smiled lazily and moved closer. "The body holds many secrets. Mysteries of the flesh. I track them down as you track down runners." Closer to Logan, the smile softened. "I'd say we are very much the same, you and I. What would you say?"

And he stroked Logan's upper arm with slow fingers.

Logan stepped away. "I'd say the treatment is over."

Francis met him outside the gym, in a state of elation. His face was flushed and his dark eyes danced with energy.

"It's here, Logan." He closed the fingers of his left hand into a fist. "It's ours!"

"What are you talking about?"

"Godbirth!"

Logan's heart trip-hammered at the word; he felt a surge of pure triumph. Godbirth! The gate back to Jess and Jaq...

"Is it confirmed?"

"Will be by tonight," said Francis, "That's when we'll be officially notified by the computer. I got advance word, straight off the report line."

"What about our duty status?"

"We're up for one last hunt," said Francis. "Then it's freetime to Godbirth—time to do whatever we want, anywhere."

"For how long?"

"Ten days. Then we'll be taken to the Place of Miracles."

"I didn't expect it this soon," Logan admitted.

The gaunt man clapped Logan's shoulder. "Means we reach Nirvana. No Sleep for us at twenty-one! We're joining the Gods. We'll live forever!"

Logan had a multitude of questions he dared not ask. What was Nirvana? Who were the Gods? Where was the Place of Miracles? Was Godbirth literal immortality? What did it involve?

Even more confusing: Why didn't the aliens already have these answers? They seemed to know so much about details on this alternate Earth, but nothing of its central ritual.

Why?

Why?

The report room: an ultrasophisticated nerve center for DS, the tracking and dispatch area from which a tide of black-clad operatives flowed out into the arteries of the southwest.

Facing this coldly efficient meld of man and machine, designed to eliminate human life, the past was depressingly alive for Logan. Without Argos, without Ballard, without a Sanctuary Line, it seemed impossible that any runner, however tenacious and resourceful, could escape this deadly electronic net. Indeed, on this world, the goal of outrunning the Gun was a dream turned nightmare. Hope without substance. On this Earth, Logan knew, he'd have had no chance.

Francis touched his arm. "I've got our man on the board," he said, speaking above the hive-hum of activity.

Logan nodded.

"He blacked at 0800, took over a police paravane, but didn't get far in it. Crashed near Indio. Right now he's on the desert, somewhere between Palm Springs and Indian Wells."

"Armed?" asked Logan, as they moved to the scanwall.

"Fuser," said Francis. "Got it with the paravane. Hasn't killed anybody with it yet, but he's likely to if someone tries to stop him. Well have to be careful." A thin smile. "Last hunt, old friend. Let's do it right."

Logan was realistic enough to know that this runner would have to die. Short of destroying Francis, there was no way for him to save the man's life. And even if he did kill Francis to save him, another DS man would homer him. No, there was nothing he could do to help the doomed runner.

But at least, he vowed to himself, I won't make the kill. The final score will go to Francis.

Behind Logan's thoughts, Francis was filling in the runner's history: "Escaped a state nursery in Kansas City when he was six. Arrested at ten for printing anti-Sleep material. Which cost him six months in a work compound. At sixteen, blocked a DS man on a hunt. Nineteen to twenty—pairups with at least two known subversives."

"Real misfit." Logan nodded. "Guess he doesn't like the system much."

"We've been watching him," said a board tech. "Stayed with his sister at a quad in the Beverly sector for a while. We figured he'd run on black. Took us by surprise, though, when he grabbed that paravane. This boy's smart. Smart and dangerous."

Francis grinned. "That's how I like 'em." He looked at Logan. "This last one might be fun after all."

"Maybe," said Logan.

The board tech punched in the scan coordinates. Logan was stunned as the runner's tri-dimensional image filled the scanboard: it was Doyle!

Jessica's brother!

Data quick-flashed across the screen:

Runner...DOYLE 10—14302Height...6-1Weight...180Hair...DARK

BROWNEyes...SAMEPhysical markings...SMALL SCAR ABOVE RIGHT EYEDS
status...CRYSTAL BLACKED 0800...ARCADEPresent location...DESERT AREA...PALM
SPRINGS...Scope
reading...NEGATIVEWARNING...WARNING...WARNING...WARNING...WARNINGAPPR
OACH WITH CAUTION...SUBJECT ARMED WITH STOLEN X-9Z FUSE WEAPON

"Are you all right?" Francis was staring at him. Logan had unconsciously fisted both hands; his knuckles were white, his face taut with suppressed emotion. He nodded slowly.

"Something's wrong."

"It's just that he—looks like a man I knew."

"Friend?"

"No...just someone I knew once."

"Well, we'd better move on this one. They're holding a car for us." Francis checked his Follower. "They tried for a scope reading. No go. But we can lock into him once we hit the desert."

"Yes, we can do that," said Logan. His tone was flat and mechanical. He was numbed by the realization that it was happening all over again; he was being forced to hunt down Jessica's brother here on this Earth exactly as he had done in the past, on his own world.

"The board tech mentioned he'd been staying with a sister," Logan said as they took a dropchute to the DS platform. "Know anything about her?"

"A little," said Francis. "Name's Jessica 6. No arrest history. Seems stable enough, but with a brother like Doyle you can never tell."

"She on red?"

"Right...due for Sleep anytime now. When she blacks they'll be watching her."

On the maze platform they boarded the waiting express vehicle. The canopy slid closed and the mazecar moved out, rapidly gaining tunnel speed.

The Indio platform, just over two hundred miles from DS Headquarters, was less than a minute's ride.

They emerged into the dry windless heat of a desert afternoon, into a smell of baked sand, of sunseared rock and cactus.

Francis squinted at the hot blue sky. A vulture rode the upper air currents in a long, lazy patrol.

"He's hunting, too," said Francis with a thin smile. "I figure well have better luck!"

A DS hovercat was waiting for them beyond the platform, glinting silver-blue in the shimmering heat. This rugged little machine could navigate any type of desert terrain. Solar-powered, its metalloid skin was impervious to assault by any hand weapon; a Fuser charge, exploding along its surface, would leave no trace. And the cat was fast.

Francis popped the jumpdoor and they climbed inside.

"We should be able to get a fix on him," said Francis, working the cat's trackscreen. "He can't be too far."

Logan was thinking of the other Doyle—of how he'd had the man in direct kill range but had not fired. It was the first time Logan had ever done such a thing, failing to use the Gun. It was the crack in his DS armor, the real beginning of his run for Sanctuary. In that earlier hunt, Doyle had died in Cathedral; the cubs had ripped him apart. But we were responsible, thought Logan; he was running from us when the cubs got him.

How Jess had hated him for her brother's death! Yet, without Doyle, he'd never have known her...loved her...fought to keep her...

"Ah, there's our boy!" The triumphant voice of Francis erased Logan's thoughts. He glanced at the readout: a green dot was inching across the screen like a tiny electronic insect.

"I make him about five miles this side of Indian Wells," said Francis. "We'll come in through Spiker Wash. That'll put us right on him."

"What's he trying to do?"

"Stay alive." Francis grinned, engaging power. The cat hissed over the sand. "Maybe he figures to pick up a vehicle at the Wells." Francis leaned back; his Gun was unholstered, and he smoothed long fingers over its cool pearl handle. "All he'll pick up is a homer."

Something was coming.

Something tall and dark and powerful.

In the close heat of the rocks, the scorpion was motionless, sensing danger, tail raised to strike. It was female, had recently given birth to its young, and carried them in a brood pouch, carefully guarded. It would kill to survive.

A shadow crossed the rock. The scorpion tensed. A heavy boot heel smashed down, ending its life.

Doyle hated scorpions. As a boy, on this same desert, he'd been bit by one and had almost died of the virulent poison. Yet, basically, he respected them, as he respected the rattler and the lizard, as he respected all living things that fight back.

The desert itself he loved. It had always fascinated him with its paradoxes, its odd character, its subtle beauty. For Doyle 10, the desert retained its purity. It defied man's corruption. It was Doyle's private ocean—an easy-rolling sea of sand and rock and cactus, of smokewood and manzanita—and it was only natural, at the end, that he should return here. And this was the end for him. He knew it, accepted it. They were coming for him. His death lay in their Guns as a pearl in an oyster. The homer would find him. No rock could shelter him against it.

And what if he did reach the Wells? What if he could use the hoverstick he'd hidden there? The sky would not shelter him. He could not escape DS. Not on the ground, nor in the air, nor on the sea. The men of Deep Sleep would find him and destroy him for his terrible crime of refusing to accept death at twenty-one. What good was running?

Yet Doyle ran.

Under the sun-blazed sky, through thorn-spiked dry washes, along wind-eroded gullies, over baked clusters of rock and cactus, his lips puffed and bleeding, his clothing in tatters, hands broken-skinned and swollen—fighting to stay alive another hour, another minute, knowing he must die and crying I'll

live!...knowing he must lose and crying I'll win!...running until he dropped heavily to his knees in the dry hot sand, until the breath in his lungs was fire, until he heard the buzzing whir of a hovercat that was...

Death.

"That's him!" shouted Francis, stopping the cat. "On his knees over there near the rocks." The harsh chuckle, the Gun in his hand. "Maybe he's praying to us, Logan! We'll soon be Gods...maybe he knows!"

"He's just exhausted," said Logan quietly. "He can't go on, is all."

"I was hoping he'd give us a fight, maybe try using that Fuser of his. Liven things up. After all, it's our last hunt." He sighed. "Too easy. Too damned easy."

Logan reluctantly left the sandcat, following Francis, his weapon still holstered. He didn't trust himself with it, not at this moment. He might just Gun Francis here and now, because the thought of his DS partner sending a homer blistering into that poor kneeling wretch was almost more than Logan could stand.

"You want the shot?" asked Francis as Logan moved up beside him.

"No, it's yours, Francis...Your last official kill." It was difficult to keep the bitterness from his voice.

"Fair enough, old friend." The gaunt man nodded. "I was just being generous."

Doyle pulled himself to his feet gasping, blood and salt sweat in his eyes. He rubbed at them. They wouldn't focus properly on the two advancing figures—heat-rippled shapes of black moving toward him across the hot sand.

The shapes had stopped. One of them held Something caught the sun, dazzling his eyes. Doyle blinked, squinted, trying to get it in focus.

Gun.

That's what it was. He's going to do it, Doyle. Oh, yes, he'll do it. He'll fire the homer at you and the thing will find you and the pain will be unbelievable and your flesh will burst and your nerves will fry and your body explode in bands of pain...

Don't let him do it to you, Doyle. Don't let him.

Don't.

"What's he doing?" asked Francis, bringing up the Gun.

Logan watched the man. "Inside his shirt. He's—"

"Fuser!" shouted Francis, dropping hard into the sand, pulling Logan down with him. The tall man's face was eager; sparks lived in his flat dark eyes. "By God, he's going to make a fight of it after all!"

But Francis was wrong.

One harsh sizzle of heat and Doyle toppled backward into the rocks, hands splayed, head a charred husk on his neck.

The Fuser fell into the sand.

"Used it on himself," said Logan.

The two men walked over to him and looked down at the lifeless body. The flies were already at it.

"Damn," said Francis softly.

ONE MORE TIME

[« ^ »](#)

Standing by the Gunwall, at the end of the long gray corridor at DS, Logan unsnapped his holster and drew out the silver-barreled weapon. He weighed it in his hands.

The wall was waiting.

Every Sandman, at duty's end, was required to return his Gun. No exceptions. In his world, Logan had broken that rule, had taken a Gun with him when he ran—but here such an act was impossible.

In destroying the power behind Godbirth, he could well use such a potent weapon, but he knew he must accomplish his mission without it.

Logan replaced the weapon, snugging the heavy Gun back into its velvet wallnest. The panel closed. The Gun was no longer his.

At least he hadn't been forced to use it on Doyle.

Francis was waiting on the steps that night when Logan exited DS Headquarters. Both wore citizen casuals. They had checked their uniforms and equipment and had filed their reports and now were free of duty. Free. A strange word in this world, thought Logan; a perversion of meaning. No one on this Earth was free.

Francis was in high spirits. "What about celebrating? I've got some Volney's at my unit. Vintage stuff. And we can find girls in Arcade—make a night of it."

The Francis whom Logan had known never celebrated anything; usually it was Logan who asked his dour friend to party. The answer had always been no. Now the situation was reversed: Logan declined the offer.

"But why? By morning we'll have our official notification. This is a special occasion, Logan—a very special occasion!"

Logan smiled. "It's been a long day," he said. "Leg's still bothering me some. I need to ease off, be alone."

"All right, friend," said Francis. "But I leave early tomorrow on freetime. Want to get in some diving—so I won't be seeing you for a while."

Logan was suddenly concerned. "Where do we meet? For Godbirth, I mean."

"Thought you knew. Back here at DS, in exactly ten days. We leave from here with the others. The Chosen Ones."

"I'll be here." Logan nodded.

"In case you need to reach me," said the tall man, "here's my faxcode number. My unit will know where I am."

He handed a foilcard to Logan. "Happy freetime!"

"You too," said Logan.

"Ten days," said Francis, and walked off, whistling, into the darkness.

From the moment Doyle's image had materialized on the scanscreen, Logan knew that nothing could stop him from seeing Jessica. It would be a major risk. The aliens had specifically warned him not to attempt contact with her—and, because of her brother, she was on DS lists as a "possible subversive."

Thus, Logan had strong reasons for avoiding her, and he experienced self-anger at the risk he was taking. Just a week and a half from Godbirth and he was acting like the worst kind of fool.

But he couldn't stop himself.

He had checked Doyle's faxfile before leaving DS and had found Jessica's unit number—and now he was in a mazecar heading for the Beverly sector.

He rationalized the action. If DS did discover his visit, he could classify it under duty routine. As a prime hunter involved in her brother's death, he had the right to notify Jessica. This was often done by Sandmen. A civic obligation. He could even strengthen his position by telling DS that since Jessica 6 was of doubtful status, he had decided to check her out, unofficially, for possible subversive activity.

Routine.

He just wanted to meet her, that was all: A brief meeting to satisfy his emotional desire to see her face, hear her voice...

Just one brief meeting.

The mazecar slotted into the Beverly platform and Logan rode a liftbelt to the street level.

This sector, built over the old, moneyed Beverly Hills—Bel-Air—Brentwood area, was a hub for merchantmen specializing in ultraluxury. Here, one could order custom-designed hovercraft for street and sky, or body jewels coded to the purchaser's individual skin chemistry, or bizarre robotic pets of all types (Take home a Tigon, half-tiger, half-lion! Buy yourself a Monkeybird!), or tri-dimensional home consoles programmed for total mythic/historic owner participation (Dance with Valentino! Make love to Cleopatra! Match swords with Morgan the Pirate!).

Logan moved past the richly textured shops—pausing at one of them, a jeweler's window. Displayed inside, a flame-blue throatclasp, delicately sculpted and overlaid with silver filigree... ..

Jess had worn one exactly like it! Identical to the clasp he'd taken to old Andar on the Bridge. He stared at it for a long moment, remembering...

And walked on.

Reaching Jessica's quadunit, Logan hesitated outside the entrance. One last chance to turn back, he told himself. One last chance to place reason and logic above emotion.

Don't go in, Logan!

He entered the building.

A hibelt took him to the third level, and although it was only a short walk to unit 3-11, the wide copper corridor seemed endless to Logan. He could barely contain his nervous excitement as he reached Jessica's door.

The heat of his body activated the unit scanner. He waited.

Was she out? Or was she inside, peering at him through the scanner? Would she answer?

Then: "What is it you want?"

Her voice, reaching out into the corridor, the voice of the woman he loved, the mother of his new child. The voice, unmistakably Jessica's. But, of course, not hers at all.

"I—have news of your brother."

The door instantly petaled back, and she was there.

"Come in."

Numbly, Logan followed her into the unit.

The same! Everything the same: hands, eyes, lips...the way she cants her head a bit to the left as she walks...the suppleness of her body...the dark hair flowing along her back...even the splitsleeve robe she wore; Jess had one just like it!

Jess! Oh, Jess!

"I know you," she said, turning to face him, her eyes clear and steady on his. "You're Logan."

Her words stunned him. How could she know him? The aliens had told him that in this world the two of them had never met.

"Don't look so surprised," she said, smiling. "You're famous...the famous Logan 3, a DS Gunmaster...Sandman with a top killscore. I've seen you on the tri-dims—but I never thought I'd have a chance to really meet you."

She nodded toward a foamchair near the window of the small neatly arranged unit. "Please...relax. Can I get you anything?"

Logan settled into the chair, thrown off balance by her casualness. Chatting about tri-dims, offering me a

drink—when I've just seen her brother die. She doesn't know that, of course. Still, I said I had news of him, and she may well suspect that he turned runner. Why isn't she questioning me about him?

Jessica repeated her offer, and he nodded. Actually, he could use a drink. Steady him down. "Some Irish—if you have it."

"Black Irish it is," she said, smiling. "And I'll have one with you."

She dialed the wall, received the two drinks, gave him one, then sat down on a flowcouch next to him. Calm and casual.

"Now...about my brother. You have news of Doyle?"

"Yes," he said, hesitating. "I thought I should—?"

"He's dead, isn't he?" she asked flatly.

"Yes," said Logan.

"Doyle told me he was going to run," she said, her tone devoid of shock or sadness. She looked steadily at Logan and asked without emotion, "Did you kill him?"

"No, but I was part of the team that hunted him," said Logan. "It was suicide. He'd taken a Fuser...and when he saw us coming—"

"Us?"

"Francis was on the hunt with me. We usually team together."

"I know," she said, leaning back into the couch to sip the whiskey. "I've heard of Francis. He's very efficient."

"Very," said Logan.

"Doyle was always such a fool. I told him not to run. Told him he had no chance. But, being a fool, he ran. He was like that. You could never talk sense to Doyle."

Cold, thought Logan, totally unmoved by her brother's death. She may look exactly like Jess, but this is another breed of cat. This woman has nothing of her tenderness, her compassion, her sensitivity...

Logan finished his drink and stood up. "Well, I'd better go. I just wanted you to know about your brother."

"Listen," she said, walking him to the door, "we're having a quad party tomorrow night. In Arcade, at the Hastings gallery. Care to come?"

He stared at her. How could she? With her brother dead—a party!

"Sorry," he said.

She put her hand lightly on his arm, and her touch was electric, startling. "Oh, do come, Logan. You'll have fun, I promise!"

She smiled at him radiantly. Jessica's smile.

And he found himself asking: "What time?"

She gave him a time and a location and he said yes, he'd be there, and she smiled again and he left the unit asking himself, why? Why did I agree to go? What possessed me to say I'd go?

She did. Jessica possessed you. You want to see her again. You must see her again. Despite everything. Despite the stupidity of it, the risk of it.

In the maze, as the car swept through tunneled night, Logan saw her in his mind, clear and sharp and lovely.

She's not like you at all, Jess...but she is you, the only you I've got in this world. I could never love her as I love you. I don't even like her. But I'm drawn to her. A moth to flame.

One more time.

I'll see her one more time.

A GOOD CITIZEN

« ^ »

The Central Computer, at Angeles Complex, was housed in a mile-high tower of sunglass, its outer surface covered with an unending mosaic depicting the history of man from the earliest known records, millions of years ago, to the present age. The work had taken two decades to complete, and symbolized the computer's stored knowledge, the repository of man's wisdom, the sources from which each citizen of the Complex could partake—a great river of facts, images, and history, which flowed through Cencomp to feed the masses.

After his meeting with Jess, Logan spent most of the following day at Cencomp—determined to learn all he could about the upcoming ritual he was to undergo with Francis. He drew a complete blank.

Nothing about Godbirth.

Nothing about the Place of Miracles.

Nothing about Nirvana.

No faxsheets, staterecords, readouts, history tapes.

Nothing.

And when he questioned the computer as to why, he was told that such data was nonexistent.

"But it must exist!" argued Logan. "Godbirth exists!"

"The data you request is nonexistent," repeated the soft, neutered voice of Cencomp.

"What about all the Sandmen who have been selected for Godbirth?"

"They are nonexistent."

"The place of Miracles?"

"Nonexistent."

"Nirvana?"

"Nonexistent."

"The Gods!"

"Nonexistent."

Logan sat in the padded Questionchair, staring at the featureless computerwall. A tiny, glowing voice-cylinder halfway between floor and ceiling was the only visual contact with the immense powerhouse of stored data behind the wall.

He felt helpless, frustrated. And angry.

"I received official comp-notification of acceptance for Godbirth," Logan said, keeping his tone level. A display of temper would achieve nothing; displayed emotion brought no profit here.

"That is correct. You received notification."

Logan leaned forward, boring in. Logic. The computer could not refute logic. "How can I receive notification of a ritual that does not exist? Please explain that."

"It is not possible to render explanations relating to nonexistent data," said the calm computer-voice.

"But the notification exists!"

"The notification exists. That is correct. But the data relating to it is nonexistent."

"But if you admit sending me a—" Logan sighed, letting the sentence die.

"Your question is unclear. Please clarify or I cannot offer you a reply."

"Never mind," said Logan. "The question is canceled."

No wonder Francis didn't say much to him about Godbirth. Logan had assumed that Francis knew a great deal about the ritual, but obviously that assumption was incorrect.

He stood up to leave.

"We hope you have gained wisdom and satisfaction from your visit with us," said the computer-voice.

"Our services are always available to you, and you are always free to ask whatever questions may—"

It was still talking as Logan muttered an obscenity and left the chamber.

He had gained nothing here but frustration.

The dancer moved with hypnotic grace, weaving sinuous flame patterns through the crowd, creating a body-symphony in rippled yellow fire.

Logan inhaled her sharply erotic fragrance, released as flames slowly consumed the potent skin cosmetic she wore.

"Striking, isn't she?" asked Jessica, sitting close to him in the fiery dark.

"Yes, she's that, all right," agreed Logan, watching the dancer weave a flame ring around their table. Her smile dazzled through a halo of fire-blazed blue.

"She seems to know you."

He nodded. "She's Phedra 12. We've had sex."

"She must be a marvelous lover," said Jessica. "Such exquisite body control."

Logan said nothing to this.

They were in the Hastings firegallery, and the partygoers around them were having a fine time, proud of netting the famous Logan 3 for their group. Society status symbol. Instant celebrity prize.

As Phedra danced away, deeper into the crowd, Jessica leaned close to Logan. Her eyes appraised him coolly. "You're not enjoying yourself much, are you?"

"I shouldn't be here."

"Tell me why. Don't you like me?" She pressed her right leg against his. "I thought you liked me."

Logan failed to respond. Jessica's blatant sexuality sickened him. He'd hunted down her brother and should be held responsible, in her eyes, for Doyle's violent death. Yet here she was, in a daring fullslash parysuit, preening to him, soliciting his lust, totally cold to what had happened to her brother. In a perverse sense, his part in Doyle's death seemed to make him more attractive to her.

It was all wrong. Distorted.

Coming here tonight had been painful for Logan. Moving through the pleasure-gorged crowds of Arcade, assaulted by the mad cacophony of lights and sounds and colors, he was struck anew by the horrible emptiness of it all. Pleasure now, and death waiting beyond the lights.

For Logan, Arcade encapsulated the basic sickness of this society—just as it had in his own world prior to the final destruction of the Thinker. Pleasure without freedom. Pleasure without hope. A mockery. A lure to dull the mind, to lead the citizen into Sleep...

"I'd better leave," said Logan. "I'm not much good at parties."

Jessica stood up. "All right, I'll go too. Will you take me back to my unit?"

Suddenly, abruptly, they moved together and she was in his arms. The clean scent of her shining hair reached him, the subtle perfume of her skin... With soft fingers, she touched his face, leaned to kiss him, her lips fierce and hot on his.

In Jessica's lifeunit, totally lost in one another's flesh, they made love into the dawn. Then, sated, they slept, skin to skin, as the morning sun tinted the sky over Angeles Complex in soft pastels.

Logan woke first, slipped quietly from the flowbed, dressed, and exited the unit.

On a pillow next to the sleeping woman he left a note:

Jessica: I won't see you again. Don't try to contact me. This is over.L.

And in the mazecar, heading back to his sector, he did not regret the harshness of the note. He knew that what he had done was perverted—making love to this woman while his own Jess, waiting with child, was lost to him across space on another world.

He would end this madness here and now. He should never have given in to his initial compulsion, should never have gone to see this second Jessica. Their lovemaking, however passionate, was a distortion of his love for Jess, and he was disgusted with his self-weakness.

Over. Done.

Ended.

When Logan walked into his lifeunit, three tall police officers were waiting for him, their bright lemon colored tunics contrasting with the dark solemnity of their faces.

"I'm Bracker—Federal Branch," said the tallest of them. His eyes were slate-colored, his thin lips unsmiling. "Are you Logan 3—1639?"

"You know I am." Logan met his measured gaze. "What do you want with me?"

"We have reason to believe that you are in violation of a prime citystate law," said the policeman.

"What law?"

"Possession and dissemination of a highly toxic and illegal substance."

"You'd better leave," said Logan tightly. "I'm with DS. We have immunity against this sort of harassment."

"DS immunity does not apply in this case," said Bracker.

"Who sent you here?"

"Never mind that. We're here."

Logan expelled angry breath. "I'd like to know the nature of this 'highly toxic' substance."

Bracker raised a finger—and one of his men dipped a hand into the upper pocket of Logan's zipjacket, extracting a small, wafer-thin white disc.

"DD-15," said Bracker, holding up the disc. "Unofficially known as Death Dust."

Logan was quite familiar with this drug. DD-15 was used exclusively in Medlab control work and was strictly forbidden to citizens, including DS operatives. It was potent and deadly.

"That's not mine," said Logan calmly. "It does not belong to me, and I have absolutely no idea where it came from."

"Naturally," said Bracker, smiling faintly. He nodded to the others. "Take him."

Logan did not resist. His hands were tapewired behind him, and he was led from the unit directly to a waiting police paravane outside the building.

The ride to Federal Headquarters was swift and silent.

The interrogation room smelled of fear. The air was hot and close. No vents or windows. The sour fearsweat of numberless accused citizens lingered here; it permeated the pores of the room, creating an oppressive atmosphere designed to inspire breakdown and confession.

Logan, in a holdchair, faced Bracker and his men—just as he had faced the aliens in the giant mothership. And with the same sense of helplessness. How could he prove his innocence? Someone had planted the Dust on him. Someone who wanted to hurt him, to place him in severe jeopardy. Someone.

Phedra 12.

She stood in the room's open doorway, wearing a loose dun-brown monksrobe that obscured the extravagant curves of her body. Her face was scrubbed of makeup; she looked much younger, almost childlike. And there was mock sadness in her usually sensual eyes.

"I hate doing this to you, Logan, really I do," she said in a small, apologetic voice. "But I'm a good citizen. I've always been loyal to the system. I just couldn't let you do it."

"And what did I do, Phedra?" Logan asked.

"That stuff you were using...passing around...that awful stuff!" She shuddered.

"This is the man you saw in Arcade?" asked Bracker.

"Yes." She nodded. "Logan 3. He's famous. Everyone knows him. Before he began using...the drug...I was happy to be there, proud to dance for him."

"She's jealous," Logan snapped to the others in the room. He swung his eyes to hers, glaring. "Because I was with another woman. That's why you're doing this. Tell them the truth. Admit it!"

"No—I can't lie for you, Logan. Don't ask me to lie!" And she lowered her eyes, seemingly on the verge of tears.

A class act, thought Logan. Fast class all the way.

Bracker walked close to her. "The woman he was with," prompted the tall officer. "Tell us her name." He smiled thinly. "For the record."

"Jessica 6," said Phedra softly.

"Right." Bracker nodded. His voice hardened: "Bring her in."

And Jessica was suddenly there in the room with Logan, looking stunned and shaken. Bracker led her to a holdchair and she sat down, a glazed expression on her face.

"I don't understand," she said. "Why am I here?"

"Tell her why, Logan." Bracker smiled. "She shared the fun at Arcade. Now she's sharing this. Tell her why she's here."

"It's Phedra," said Logan bitterly. "She's been lying, trying to—"

"That's the woman! That's her!" said Phedra, overriding his words, pointing at Jessica. "She was there with him."

"And was she also using DD-15?"

"Yes." Phedra nodded. "She was taking it...passing it around to the others. The two of them they're both guilty!"

"You lie!" snapped Logan.

"No use bluffing," said the tall officer. "We not only have the disc we took from you but we ran a chemlab test on Jessica's hands. Traces of DD-15 under the nails, in the skin pores. No doubt of it."

Logan tried to stand, but the chair held him. His face was pale with anger. "That's not true! Your test is wrong!"

Was Bracker himself in on this? Logan wondered. Was he lying, too? Logan looked at Jessica, but she wouldn't meet his eyes; she stared ahead in shock.

Bracker swung toward the wall, spoke to the voice-cylinder glowing there: "This case is conclusive. We found a disc on Logan 3, and we have lab confirmation on the woman. Plus eyewitness testimony. Verdict?"

A moment of tense silence.

Then the voice-cylinder said calmly: "Execute them."

THE KILLING GROUND

[« ^ »](#)

Once, long ago, the country surrounding and encompassing East Africa's great Serengeti Plain swarmed with life. Here, in lazy heat, lion and leopard prowled; the hooves of roan antelope and reedbuck trail-marked the rolling grassland; massive elephants trumpeted the sky. Through which the gold-breasted starling and hawk eagle flew; kudu and zebra and gazelle galloped with wildebeest and giraffe; hippos ruled the rivers, while buffalo and bush pig shared the wide savannas; here, too, flourished the horned rhino, the swift impala, the hyena and wild dog...

But now, in this time of Sandman and runner, it was no longer the heartland of life.

The Serengeti was sterile. The great herds were gone; the rivers ran to thin trickles under the high African sun; the brute roar of the king lion was stilled forever.

It was a place of death.

Logan was not prepared for the sentence levied upon him by the computer—that he and Jessica be transported to the Serengeti and left there, on the wide, raw plain, to be hunted by Masai tribesmen and executed by them under official citystate statutes.

On his Earth, condemned criminals were sent to Hell—that vast, deadly ice-shelf stretching between Baffin Bay and the Bering Sea—but here the killing ground was the Serengeti, an area equally as severe and from which escape was equally impossible.

A sealed mazecar whisked them under the Indian Ocean to Mombasa. There they were put into a

second car, which arched west, into Tanzania—to the platform at Ngorongoro. Another vehicle transfer, and they were flown north to be deposited, for death, on the hot yellow sprawl of the Serengeti.

As they watched, the police paravane lifted free of the plain, angled south, whirred to a tiny glinting dot in the cloudless bowl of sky, then vanished completely.

Leaving them alone.

They had been given a meager ration of water, just enough to keep them alive until the hunters picked up their trail. They wore the basic garb of the condemned: heavy shoes, thin cotton trousers, a sleeved bodysuit, and a long-billed cap to help fend off the murderous sun. The latter was a necessity, since many bare-headed prisoners had died of sunstroke in earlier days, cheating the Masai of their kill.

There were no lions left to slay. Thus, the pride of a Masai depended on how swiftly and efficiently he could hunt down and execute a condemned man or woman.

Logan and Jessica were, of course, weaponless.

"What do they kill with?" asked Logan.

"Spears," said Jessica. "Tribal tradition. No honor for them in anything else."

"On foot?"

"No, they ride some kind of animal."

"Couldn't," said Logan. "No animals left here." He kicked idly at a bleached buffalo bone half-buried in scrub grass.

"What difference does it make?" asked Jessica tensely. "They're coming for us. That's the only fact that matters."

Logan narrowed his eyes, peering through the heat haze toward a pale blue range of mountainous hills riding the plain's edge.

"If we can make it to those hills, we'll have a better chance... get into the rocks and high grass."

"Chance?" She smiled wanly. "We've no chance, Logan. No matter where we go they'll find us and they'll kill us. That's their job and they're very good at it."

"Well, our job is to stay alive," said Logan. "So let's get moving."

Before sentence had been passed, Logan had attempted to reach Francis, but no outside contacts were allowed prime city-state violators. He had been stripped of his DS rating and, with it, his potential admission to Godbirth. Which meant he had failed totally in his mission. Once his time had run out here, the aliens would abandon him—whether he lived or died on the Serengeti.

Logan refused to think about this. He had locked his mind on a single goal: survival. Somehow, he would outwit the hunters who stalked him. He and Jessica would survive.

With canteens slung over their shoulders, they set out across the softly rolling grassland toward the range of northern hills.

The African sun was fierce, an unwinking yellow-white eye of fire, brimming the noon sky, heat-blasting the land. To Logan and Jessica, laboring toward the dim blue hills, it was as if the door of an immense

sky-furnace had been opened upon them.

Within a single mile their clothing was sweat-soaked, their ears ringing from the heat.

Logan stopped to look back, shading his eyes.

Jessica stood, head down, gasping from the fiery assault.

"They're coming," said Logan softly.

She blinked tears of salt from her eyes. "How many?"

"I make it...three."

Jess nodded. "They usually hunt in a trio."

"And you were right," said Logan. "They are mounted. Horses, I think. Probably flown in for them."

Logan estimated the distance left to the edge of the plain. "Cuts our time down, them having horses," he said. "We'll have to run. That's the only way we'll make it."

"In this heat?" She stared at him. "Under this sun?"

He took a quick swallow from his canteen and capped it again. She followed his example. "It's the only sun we've got," he said.

"I can't see how you expect to—"

"Don't talk. Waste of energy."

And he broke into a jogging trot, Jessica beside him.

On and on...across the great plain, moving around the heaped bones of elephant and oryx, using ancient trails trod by beasts a century dead, over patches of sandy loam, past solitary clumps of wind-shaped trees...

On and on.

The hills deepened in color. Closer. But the hunters were closer too—close enough now for Jessica to identify the creatures they rode.

"Marabunta!" she said, standing loosely, looking back, dragging furnaced air into her lungs.

Logan had also stopped. Now he twisted toward her, questioning the word.

"Warrior ants," she said. "That's what they're called by the Masai."

He squinted at them in disbelief. "But they—they're the size of horses!"

"Could be a mutation," said Jess. "Insects can survive when animals can't."

"Keep going," Logan told her. "We can make it. We're almost there."

They continued to run, throats hot, tongues swollen, their eyes stinging with salt—faint with heat exhaustion. And Logan thought, This is how it was for Doyle, in the desert. Hunters behind with death in their hands and no future ahead, the sun raw on his back, pain racking his legs...

And then, in a final miraculous surge, they were into the blue hills.

Shade. Coolness. Relief.

But no time to rest.

Now a boulder-filled streambed, carpeted in dry white pebbles, with interlacing brush and trees so thickly massed that a tunnel of green formed around them; the smell of wild growth was overpowering, in direct contrast to the arid, burned-ash smell of the plain.

Into high papyrus grass, flowing up five feet above their heads, past yellow-blossomed thorn, around giant trees whose vein-tangled roots snagged at their shoes.

Now into a steep-plunging ravine, grasping at vines to slow their descent, stumbling, sliding downward along a sandy ridge.

At the bottom, in the thick dry silt, under the shade of wide high-trunked trees, they fell to their knees, fighting for breath, holding on to each other like lost children.

"Something...to..." Logan found it almost impossible to form words; his lips were split and bleeding, "...use."

"To use?" Jessica looked at him in confusion.

"Against them...to...fight them."

She watched him uproot one of the heavy, long-stalked reeds that grew in profusion along the side of the ravine. From his bodyshirt Logan withdrew a jagged-edged bone fragment which he'd found on one of the ancient animal trails. Using strips of vine, he lashed this sharp bone to the end of the reed.

"Spear!" He waved it in triumph.

A sudden spill of gravel and loose stones from the upper ledge of the ravine.

The hunters!

Logan put a hand on Jessica's shoulder, drawing her silently back into the blue-black shadow of the reeds.

Where they waited.

If I can get one of them with this, Logan told himself, gripping his crude weapon, then I can use his spear on the others. I can handle three of them.

But even if you're successful, an inner voice told him, more will come. They'll keep coming, by threes, until they kill you. No way to win. If Doyle had killed both of us back on the desert, more Sandmen would have come. The system works for the hunters, not the hunted.

No way to win.

They had circled, come in from the far side, picking their way carefully along the powdery-dry bed of the ravine, knowing that their quarry was hiding here, run to ground and exhausted, while they were fresh and full of the hunt.

They scanned every thrust of rock, every ridge, every ledge and tree shadow, spears firm in their burnished hands. It was good to hunt again, good to ride the swift marabunta after the condemned ones, good to trail and trap and kill.

Their leader was Duma, named for the cheetah. Tall and slim-bodied, as were all his people, he sat tree-straight in the ant's high saddle, hair swinging behind his shoulders in a roped braid. Raised tribal scars marked his chest and forehead. Duma had been on many hunts, and his skill with a spear was unmatched. Never had Duma missed a living target.

He was the son of their chief, Nyoka, and proud father of the boy who rode beside him this day: eight-year-old Swala, a handsome youth, lithe and quick—and aptly named for the gazelle. This was Swala's first hunt, and his father knew he would do well.

With them rode Nyati—the buffalo—a wise tracker who knew every vine and thorn bush, every ridge and rock and rolling green hill within the Serengeti.

Two masters—and a brave boy who hoped, this day, to become a man.

Duma smiled. The first kill I will take for myself, as elder, for this is custom on a hunt—but the second kill shall be reserved for my son. It shall be Swala's. This had been agreed to by Nyati. The veteran tracker would hold back. For Nyati, there would be other days, other kills, as there had been before—as many as the faces of the night moon.

Beneath Duma, the marabunta paused to swing its giant clicking antennae toward a patch of reed-shadow near the inner ravine wall. The sharp clicking alerted the others.

All were stopped, eyes probing the bank.

"There, Father!" shouted young Swala, pointing at Jessica. "A condemned one! Behind the rock."

She stood up, poised to run, inviting the spear of Duma.

He drew back his muscled arm, spearhead glinting in the leaf-filtered sunlight banding the ravine floor. But he did not loose the weapon.

A snake-hiss of sound, and a bone-tipped reed buried itself deep in the warrior's scarred chest just above the heartline. Silently, he toppled from the saddle.

"Father! My father!" cried Swala. He was confused and frightened; his mount swayed back nervously as he fought to control it.

Logan ignored the boy. He charged straight at the second hunter, yanking Nyati's leg violently, pulling him from the ant's saddle and knocking the spear from his hand.

An upper-neck chop slammed the Masai, stunned, into the silt. Logan scooped up the fallen spear, preparing to drive it into the man's bronzed back, when he heard Jess scream, "Marabunta!"

Duma's warrior ant was in full attack. The giant insect reared up, its shining, razored antennae slashing air, its red and black body towering directly over Logan.

He spun sideways, but his upper shoulder was opened to the bone by one of the whipping antennae. The ant moved in, sensing its advantage, jaws wide, ready to finish the kill. Again Logan pivoted, and, using his good arm, plunged Nyati's spear into the creature's bulbous right eye.

Incredibly, smoke and sparks poured from the wound as the creature went berserk, wildly thrashing its immense, segmented body to left and right.

A robot, marveled Logan, the thing's a robot!

Now the frenzied ant's left antenna swung up to knock young Swala from the saddle; the boy fell heavily to the floor of the ravine, striking his head on a silt-covered rock. He did not move as the maddened machine-creature reared up to crush him.

Logan sprang between them, driving the boy's spear full-strength into the ant's vulnerable underchest. The great dark insect spun crazily to smash head-on into the ravine wall, exploding as it hit, showering the area with bits of broken metal. Then it lay unmoving, silent, its clockwork interior gutted.

Logan knelt by the unconscious young Masai. Jess was already there, cradling the boy's bleeding head.

"He's all right," she told Logan.

Nyati had seen it all, seen what this brave white condemned one had done. He had saved Swala's life. He had slain the marabunta.

Nyati had seen, and he would remember.

He would never forget.

THE OTHER ME

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The trip across the hot plain to the Masai village was painful for Logan. His shoulder throbbed under the still-powerful afternoon sun, and the makeshift sling bandage was stiff with blood. Jessica had cleaned the wound with water from the canteens, but there was very little to be done by way of remedy until they reached the village.

Jessica rode one of the massive warrior ants with Swala, who was subdued and aloof, while Logan followed on the second machine-creature. Nyati ran lightly and easily beside him, sleek-muscled legs pistoning over the grass. The Masai was in awe of Logan and considered it an honor that the white one had chosen his mount.

A mile short of the village they were met by a horde of swift-running Masai children who circled Logan and Jessica with saucer eyes. Most of the children had never seen a condemned one alive, and certainly not astride a marabunta! Ah, what a wondrous sight this was!

By now the sun had lost most of its force. Afternoon was slowly shading into African night as they dismounted before the hut of the chief.

Nyati, who spoke both English and Swahili, would be their translator. He would tell the chief of Logan's deeds.

"You are to wait here," said Nyati.

And he entered the hut, pushing the reluctant Swala ahead of him. The boy did not relish facing his grandfather; in his eyes he had behaved like a child, and his grandfather would surely berate him. His

father lay dead in a ravine and Swala was not yet a man. It was a day to curse forever!

Outside, the children still circled, gazing wordlessly at the white ones. The adult members of the tribe, in tall brown clusters, kept to a distance, equally curious but uncertain, awaiting the word of their chief. His wisdom would direct them.

"What happens now?" asked Jessica.

"We wait," said Logan. "We stay alive if the chief figures he owes me for saving his grandchild—but we die if he figures me a murderer for killing his son. It could go either way."

She frowned. "Your shoulder's bleeding again."

"I'll be all right," said Logan.

They stood there awkwardly for several long minutes, their fate undecided. Logan ignored the throbbing pain in his shoulder, grateful to have reached the village, grateful for this second chance at life.

Then Nyati appeared, glancing behind him, toward the hut.

"He comes." From the tracker's impassive face it was impossible to guess what the chief might be planning.

Nyoka came out to meet them, looking solemn—a reed-thin, handsome man of indeterminate age, though obviously he was not young. (In this world, Logan realized, the Masai lived and died here in the Serengeti, beyond Sleep, in their own private stratum of society.)

Nyati had explained that their chief was named after the snake. "He is very wise, like the serpent of old," the tracker had told them. "He speaks only wisdom. His words are true, always."

As with all Masai tribesmen, the chief wore a narrow brown cloth slung loosely around his waist. As a badge of rank, a necklace of ivory elephant bones hung from his neck. Each bone in the necklace had been carved into the shape of a snake.

Now he placed a hand on Logan's good arm, speaking slowly and with dignity; his large yellow-brown eyes were deep, and they did not waver from Logan's face.

Nyati translated quietly: "I, Nyoka, salute the condemned one. I declare you a brave warrior. My son died honorably under your spear and for this I hold no anger against you."

Logan exchanged a relieved smile with Jess as the chief continued: "You risked your life to save my grandson, and for this Nyoka is truly in your debt. Your shoulder will be tended. You shall spend the night here in my village, and in the morning, when the sun has shortly risen, we will talk."

And, giving Logan no opportunity to reply, he turned away to reenter the hut.

"It is as I told you," Nyati whispered. "He speaks true wisdom."

Logan nodded. "Indeed he does."

He looked at the red sun through the screening trees as it slid smoky down the horizon. The day was done.

And he was alive.

The Masai were not altogether primitive. Not only did they ride sophisticated robot machines, but their tribal doctor utilized the latest medical knowledge and equipment to maintain group health in the colony.

To their doctor, Logan's shoulder wound was simple, easily treated. By morning it was totally healed. Nothing more than a faint scar trace remained.

Nyoka, true to his word, was ready to talk with Logan shortly after sunup. They met, with Nyati translating, inside the chief's hut, while Jessica waited. ("To him, I don't exist!" she'd complained that morning. And Logan had said, "Wrong. He knows you tried to aid Swala. It's just that his tribal pride dictates that he talk to me, the brave male warrior. But you wouldn't be alive right now if Nyoka didn't appreciate what you did for his grandson.")

A woven reed mat covered the floor of Nyoka's hut. A gold-tipped ceremonial spear was mounted on the wall above the doorway, and a coiled snake, in ebony, formed the centerpiece on a low table of darkly polished wood. Also, among the hut's sparse furnishings: cooking pots and painted hangings, including a lion's head rendered in vivid earth dyes by Nyoka's dead son.

The three men sat down at the low table, and Nyoka spoke first, saying (in translation) "Your wound is healed. You have been fed and you are well rested. It is time for you and the woman to leave our village."

"But we're condemned prisoners," Logan replied, through Nyati. "Where can we go? Even if you allow us to live, even if your warriors no longer ride against us, we are trapped here on the Serengeti."

Slowly, his large eyes intense on Logan, the chief shook his head. "This need not be so. There is a way out. But you must go where I direct."

Logan was astonished. "A way out?...of Serengeti?"

"Perhaps—out of Africa!" And Nyoka smiled for the first time since they'd met; his teeth were even and perfect in wide, pinkish gums.

"Tell me the way!"

The chief spoke in a soft, rhythmic flow, his tone hushed and reverential. Nyati translated as a priest might translate from the Bible.

"You must journey east, to the high mountain of Kilimanjaro. A marabunta will take you. It is nearly a full day's ride. There, upon the insect's back, you will ascend the great mountain. To a ledge high above the plain. Here, at this place, dwells a white leopard, whose eye sees all. The leopard's eye will guide you."

"But how...and to where? Guide us where?"

"Seek your answer in the leopard's eye." With this, the chief stood up and put out his hand. "I wish you long life, white one!"

Logan clasped the chief's strong-fingered hand. He was about to speak again, but Nyati shook his head, nodding toward the doorway.

The talk was over.

Logan and Jessica left within the hour, in fresh clothing, with food and water strapped to the ant's saddle, waving farewell to Nyati and to the happy, squealing children who trailed behind them.

Nyoka was not there to see them off—but Swala stood alone beyond the village, at the far edge of the road leading onto the broad plain, watching them until they were out of his range of vision, lost to sight in the wide sea of rolling grass. Then, his face drawn with emotion, head down, he walked back into the village—hating them as he had hated no one else in the whole of his young life.

For Logan and Jess, the ride to Kilimanjaro was one of revelation. They had been through much together, and Jessica felt guilt; she told herself that Logan should know the truth about her, about all this.

She began by saying, "I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"For the fact that you're here...that you're going through all this because of me."

"We're going through it together," said Logan. "And because of Phedra, not you."

They rode in silence for several moments, Jessica directly behind him in the ant's saddle. She hesitated, forming the proper words; the words were very important.

"I want to tell you everything," she said. "I want you to have the truth."

Logan turned his head to smile at her. "It's a long ride. My belly's full. My shoulder's healed. My head is shaded. My thirst is satisfied..." Patting the canteen at his side. "So, if you want to talk, I've got nothing to do but listen."

"I'm serious, Logan. I'm not joking."

"Go on," he said.

"The day you came to my unit...to tell me about Doyle," she began, her voice steady and resigned, "I was pretending. I pretended to be cold to the news of his suicide."

"You had me convinced," said Logan.

"The hard way I talked...the drinks...the part about Doyle being a fool. It was all an act. Actually, I was dying inside."

"But why the act?"

"I'll get to that. At the time, all that mattered was that I threw you off balance...I wanted to appear cool and sensual...make you desire me."

"Well, it worked."

"Exactly as I'd planned. Entice you to that party in Arcade, excite you, then have sex with you back at my unit—so I could plant the DD-15 in your jacket."

Logan twisted in the saddle to face her. "You planted the Dust on me?"

"I hated you. I blamed you for hounding my brother to suicide. I loved Doyle deeply...deeply...and I

blamed you for his death."

Just as she did, thought Logan, in my world.

"I wanted to avenge him, pay you back for what you'd done to him, to me...and planting that Dust on you seemed the best way."

"But Phedra was at Headquarters," protested Logan. "She was the one who accused both of us."

Jessica nodded. "She simply used an opportunity she never thought she'd get. You were right, she was jealous when she saw us together in Arcade—and she must have found the drug disc in my things when I was at the gallery."

"You took the disc there?"

"Yes—to try to slip it into your jacket if my full plan didn't work out, in case I couldn't lure you back to my unit. Phedra saw her chance, and framed the whole story of us using the drug together."

"And she had no idea you intended planting it on me?"

"No idea at all." She smiled thinly. "But it certainly helped verify her story."

"But why tell me all this now?" asked Logan. "You didn't have to."

She sighed, spilling out the words: "What you did for the boy, for Swala...I couldn't hate you after that. You can't help being what you are...the system gets us all eventually. It got you—and it got Doyle. All my life I've hated the system. It killed Doyle, and now it's killing us."

Logan was hard-struck by her words. She was telling him the truth, he knew; it had been an act, her coldness, her lack of compassion—the things that had shocked and revolted him about her.

She was like Jessica after all! They were as mentally alike as they were physically alike! And since she had told him the truth about herself, he owed her the same kind of honesty, if only to erase the image of the uniformed DS killer in her mind.

"Turns out we were both putting on acts," he declared.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not the man you think I am. I'm not Logan 3."

Her eyes widened. "But you are! I've seen you on the tri-dims. I recognized you instantly when you came to my unit."

"I look like him—exactly like him—and his name is mine, but I'm no killer, Jess! I hate this system as much as you do, so much that I once helped destroy one just like it on my world..."

And, as they rode, as the scorched brown land passed beneath them under the steady march of the marabunta and the sun fell slowly down the western sky, Logan told her everything. About the aliens, the dual worlds, his mission here...and about his own wife and child, his own Jessica.

When he finished, she was crying softly, her head pressed forward against his shoulder, her arms tight around his waist.

"I tried to kill you," she sobbed. "I did this to you. How will you ever get back to her now? To the other

me...to your son."

"I'll do what Nyoka told me to do," said Logan quietly. "He's a wise man, Jess. He knows this land. There may really be a way out."

He kissed her cheek, gently.

Ahead of them, blue and steep-rising and mysterious, at the far edge of the vast plain, the mountain waited.

THE LEOPARD'S EYE

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And, at last, they were here.

Kilimanjaro.

The king of peaks—rising in snowcapped majesty more than nineteen thousand feet into the African sky, a blue-white mammoth to stun the mind, a thing of myth and mystery...

At the lower slope, looking up, Logan and Jessica felt the power and immensity of the mountain, a palpable presence around them. They could not imagine scaling this massive stone citadel. Where was the ledge? How could they possibly reach it?

"There's no way up for us," said Jessica.

"Nyoka told me, 'Upon the insect's back you will ascend the great mountain.' We'll have to trust our robot friend here to do the job," said Logan.

"You mean, the ant knows where to go?"

"He was programmed to get us this far. I figure he's also programmed to find the ledge. Just hang tight."

And Logan nudged the marabunta forward.

Obedying preset tapes, the giant metal insect began ascending the slope, moving with surety over ancient trails and along narrow rock fissures, climbing steadily higher on its six legs, transporting its fragile human cargo slowly upward on this final stage of their journey.

The heat of the plains had now given way to the blowing cold of the upper mountain, and Logan halted the marabunta long enough for them to put on the thermosuits and snowgoggles Nyoka had provided. The light duraloid suits, strong and flexible, had built-in heat controls that adjusted automatically to maintain normal body temperature.

"At least we won't freeze," said Logan, tabbing up his suit.

"What about the leopard?" asked Jess. "If there really is one up here, won't we need some kind of weapon to defend ourselves?"

"If a weapon was needed, Nyoka would have provided one," said Logan. "The leopard's obviously no

threat. Whatever it is, it can't be alive."

"A robot," said Jess. "It could be a machine—like this ant."

"Maybe. But we won't know till we get there."

Now the lumbering insect moved upward on a path that laboriously followed the contour of the mountain's flank: This path had been carved from the iced rock centuries ago, had taken many years to complete, at a staggering cost in human life, and was a marvel of engineering. At no time, despite the foul weather and the incredible height they'd attained, did Logan feel threatened or uneasy. The way was safe.

As a young man, had Nyoka trod this same path?

Their climb ended at a high shelf of wind-packed snow. Here the marabunta stopped, became motionless.

"This must be the ledge," said Logan.

He and Jess dismounted, heads lowered against the gusting ice wind. In touching ground, Logan's left foot dislodged a rock, which dropped from the ledge, booming down the rugged flank of the mountain.

Jessica spoke against Logan's ear in the moaning wind: "There's nothing here. Not anything."

Logan moved closer to the mountain, peering through his goggles. He pointed. "Cave!"

Logan guided Jess past a curtain of blowing white as the shelf area deepened into blackness.

Inside, the wind decreased sharply. Normal conversation was possible.

As his eyes adjusted to the gloom, Logan examined one of the cave walls. It was smooth.

"This is man-made," he said, running his fingers along the marbled surface. "Like the path—somebody carved it."

"But why? For what purpose?"

"Probably built as a shrine... long ago," said Logan. "For tribal worship."

Jessica pointed ahead. "There's some kind of light!"

Deep in the man-carved cave, a pale green radiance tinted the curving walls.

They started toward it.

Suddenly Logan tensed, put his hand on Jessica's arm. "Listen!"

A rumble. Faint, and high above them, but increasing by the second. It grew to a roar, a tumbling cataract of sound.

"What is it?"

"Avalanche!" shouted Logan, sprinting for the outer ledge.

It must have been the small stone he dislodged. All it takes up here, he thought; the concussion from a

single dropped stone can set things moving.

Get to the ant! Get him into the cave before—

Too late!

The metal creature was already going, caught in the downpouring rush of rock and snow, swept from the ledge like a giant toy, instantly lost in the white flood.

Jessica caught up with Logan, clutching his arm, watching the great mountain shake its skin.

The rumble was now a constant skull-stabbing roar that drove them back from the ledge. They were being sealed in, the sky in front of them was quickly being extinguished as the bouldered mass filled the cave's entrance, cutting off the late-day sun and placing them, finally, in total darkness.

It ended.

The last shiverings of rock spat against the ledge; the snowdust settled. Full cycle: rumble to roar to snow-velvet silence. Again, the mountain slept.

"One thing's for sure," said Logan. "We won't be going back down."

They turned toward the faint illumination at the cave's end, walking slowly, allowing the furor to ease inside them. Kilimanjaro had shown its might, and they were stunned and shaken by the display.

"Are you frightened?" asked Logan.

"No," said Jess. "Maybe I should be—but somehow I believe what Nyoka told you. About the leopard's eye. It will show us a way out of the mountain."

"If there is a leopard," said Logan.

"We wouldn't be here unless he knew," said Jessica. "He programmed the ant to take us here."

"And the ant's gone," said Logan. "Maybe we were meant to ride it back down to the plain. Nyoka didn't count on an avalanche."

They reached the source of illumination, rounded a bend in the cave, looked up.

The leopard was above them, on a carved shelf of rock, poised to leap, frozen there in a timeless moment of attack, the ridged muscles along his sleek flank etched in perfect simulation, tail caught in mid-lash, ears twitched back, flattened into the graceful head. A ton of white ivory shaped to the likeness of a crouching beast. In the exact center of its lowered head, a matchless, square-cut green-glowing emerald eye, the size of a man's fist.

"He's beautiful," said Jess in a hushed tone. "I've never seen anything so beautiful...so alive!"

"Well, if he's alive he's not telling us anything," said Logan.

"Perhaps he will," said Jess. "This is a shrine, Logan. How about some faith?"

"I don't believe in building shrines to anything—not even white leopards. And the only faith I have is in me."

"Spoken like a true Sandman."

"I was one. I'm not anymore."

"Well, you sound like one. Arrogant, and so sure of your rightness!"

"This kind of talk won't get us out of here," said Logan. "I'm climbing up to have a go at that eye."

He scrambled up to the rock shelf, reached the head of the carved beast, and began prodding and pulling at the emerald.

"Is it loose?" asked Jess. "Does it move?"

Logan shook his head. He stepped back, considering alternatives. "If I had a knife I could pry it loose. Should have brought along one of Nyoka's spears."

"You think there's something behind it... a map, directions of some kind?"

"That's what I'm thinking." Logan nodded. He picked up a sharp-edged rock fragment and began digging at the large green emerald. After several minutes he pulled back, sighing. "No good. Can't even scratch it."

The green stone was not meant to be removed, so his guess had been wrong. He was deeply discouraged. A sense of panic was edging into his mind. What good would a map do them, even if they found one, trapped here inside the damned mountain? The ant was gone and, with it, all their food and water. The cave entrance was completely blocked, so there was no way to reach the path leading down. And even if they got down onto the plain again, how long could they last?

To Logan, at this moment, Nyoka's words of escape were hollow and meaningless. What if the clever Masai had never really intended for them to escape? What if sending them here to this empty shrine to die was his way of avenging the son Logan had slain on the Serengeti? The avalanche had simply aided and abetted the process. A bonus for old Nyoka.

Jessica's excited voice broke into his dark thoughts. She was calling him.

"Logan, down here!"

He slid quickly from the shelf to join her where she knelt at the opposite wall of the cave.

"What have you found?"

"Nothing...yet," she told him. "But I think I know what Nyoka meant when he said, 'The leopard's eye will guide you.'"

"Well?" he urged.

"If you sight along the trajectory—the line of his sight, given his position on the ledge—you arrive here. He's looking at this section of wall."

They were both running their hands over the smooth stone. It seemed to hold no secrets.

"Here," said Jess. "I've found something!"

At cave-floor level, a small metal knob ran flush with the wall, almost invisible in the glowing green darkness. Jess poked at it, tried to twist it, but the knob did not move.

Logan studied it. "I'd say it's a control lever," he declared. "Could be operated by foot pressure. Let's

find out."

And he stood, placing his right shoe over the knob and pressing his weight against it.

The knob moved!

And, in a steady, grinding motion, the section of wall slid back to reveal a descending flight of crude-cut stone steps. Muted daylight from a distant rock fissure barely illuminated the passageway as they hurried downward.

At the bottom, the passage opened abruptly into a rust-red, alum-braced tunnel, dead-ending at the steps. Logan ran a finger along the dirt-grimed curve of metal.

"Mazeway!" he said. "A spur track through the mountain. Never completed."

Jessica's excitement dimmed as she examined the tunnel floor. "But there's no grid," she told Logan. "A mazecar can't run without one."

"Not here, on the spur," he said. "But if we follow this tunnel far enough..."

"Then Nyoka was telling you the truth," said Jessica, her face bright again. "A way out of Serengeti—out of Africa!"

They looked at each other, exchanging foolish, dazed smiles.

The trek down the tunnel was silent. They knew they were not free, and their initial exuberance had given way to darker introspection. Once they managed to locate a mazecar, they had no safe destination to seek. They were condemned fugitives and would be executed on sight if they attempted to return to Angeles Complex. And without valid citystate ID, no Complex anywhere on Earth was safe for them.

"Where do we go, Logan?"

He walked the gloomed tunnel in silent thought. Then he stopped, turned to her. "We've got one possible chance."

"Yes?"

"There's a man the aliens told me about—a man they said I could contact in case of emergency. Named Kirov. Works for Central Control in Moscow. If we can reach him there before we're caught, he just might have an answer for us, a way for us to survive."

"Survive," said Jessica softly. She smiled. "Right now, that's the most beautiful word on Earth!"

The spur tunnel ended two miles beyond Kilimanjaro, at an abandoned maze-intersect grid.

"Are you sure we can get a car?" asked Jessica as they mounted the brush-covered platform.

Logan moved to a rusted callbox, pulling creeper roots and vines free of its face. "If this box is still connected to the main grid, I can rig it for a car," he said.

He finished clearing the box, prying loose a side control plate, reaching inside to examine the wiring

pattern. An orange spark sizzled against his hand, and Logan grinned. He carefully reconnected two multicolored wire clusters, using his metal beltclasp as a makeshift tool.

Within seconds, in a humming rush, a mazecar slotted into the platform.

"This is an unauthorized area," the car told them as they stripped their thermosuits and climbed inside. "It is not permitted to transport citizens in this area without central clearance. Please identify for clearance."

And the car waited, unmoving, on the grid.

Logan leaned forward, and smashed the machine's auto-destination device. The car-voice sputtered: "Not...is...citizens...this...proceed...not for..."

The voice rattled and died.

"You killed it!" exclaimed Jess. "Now we can't move!"

"I'll take us in on manual," he told her, activating the emergency control panel inside the car.

"Won't they stop us?"

"They won't know. This will go on the board at CenComp as a routine vehicle malfunction. By the time they've triangulated the problem and sent a repair team we'll be in Moscow."

"You've done this kind of thing before, haven't you?"

"In my world I was a runner, Jess—just like your brother."

She looked at him, her eyes probing his face. "There's so much more I'd like to know about you," she said as the car left the platform and began skimming along the grid.

"You know too much already," said Logan. "The aliens warned me not to contact you. If I'd listened to them, you wouldn't be here now, involved in all this. It's not your problem."

"The system is my problem," she said levelly. "And maybe the aliens were right...Knowing you has given me hope. Maybe you can destroy this system."

"Right now I'm a long way from doing: it," he said.

The silver mazecar, at full acceleration, jetted them through the gleaming tunnel under the African night.

Away from Kilimanjaro. Away from the Serengeti.

They had escaped the killing ground.

A SANDMAN'S GUN

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Kirov 2 was a small, pale man of bland personality and rigid habit. The bed in his modest lifeunit (in the village of Leninskiye, thirty-five kilometers from central Moscow) faced east. At dawn each morning, as the sun's fingers touched Kirov's thin eyelids, he would wake instantly, cleanse himself, put on his freshly-pressed state uniform, dial a frugal breakfast from the vending slots (the fried-eggs-on-wheat-no-butter-with-orange-juice menu never varied), and take a local mazecar into

Moscow.

Emerging on the busy platform beneath Red Square, he would take a riser up, walk briskly across the wide cobbled Square, past Lenin's red-granite tomb alongside the high Kremlin wall, to enter the Kremlin itself through the gate of Spasskaya Tower.

As a Class A computer tech in the Georgievsky Hall of the Great Kremlin Palace, Kirov was always the first to arrive for work each day. He would solemnly begin his duties at a CenControl data feed-back unit board under one of the six huge bronze chandeliers (no longer operational) lining the vast, gold-painted ceiling.

Kirov 2 was neither liked nor disliked by his fellow workers; they ignored him completely as he ignored them. He performed his job with quiet efficiency. If asked a question, he would answer it in a calm, evenly controlled tone of voice. Otherwise, he said nothing.

His future was in perfect order. On red, Kirov had already chosen a Sleepshop in Revolution Square, off the Bolshoi Arcade, which he would enter on his twenty-first birthday. Deep Sleep, for him, would be calmly accepted as part of his duty to the system that supported him. He would make his personal contribution to global birth control without fear or regret.

Kirov had no memory whatever of being taken, one night, aboard a great silver ship—nor of the mental indoctrination he had received there. All knowledge of this encounter with the aliens had been erased from his conscious mind.

Thus, Kirov 2, who considered himself a very ordinary citizen, was actually very special: he was Logan's only contact between two worlds.

The gridline from Kilimanjaro to Moscow took them directly north, through Kenya and Ethiopia, under the Red Sea and beneath the tip of Saudi Arabia, on beneath Syria and Turkey and the Black Sea, into Russia. And, finally, under the Moskva River, to Red Square.

Logan slotted the mazecar into a side repair-platform and quickly exited with Jess. They took an expressbelt up to the Square.

He'd been given no instructions on how to contact Kirov, but Logan knew that the man worked inside the Kremlin, once the seat of Soviet government and now headquarters for CenControl. Upon questioning a guard there, he learned that Kirov was on dayshift and would leave, with the other day workers, through Spasskaya Gate within the hour.

The weather was mild and clear; a soft breeze from the Moskva carried the sharp scent of fir trees into the Square as Logan waited with Jess in the shadow of St. Basil's, under the huge fire-colored onion domes.

He had asked the guard for a description of Kirov and had been told not to worry. "Can't miss him," the guard had declared. "Always the last out. Every day the same, you can depend on it. First in, last out. No way to miss Kirov."

It had been an uneventful day, as were all days to Kirov 2. Upon completing his stint at the board, he had left with his fellow workers, but, as was his custom, he had returned after punchout to examine the historical tapestry, threaded in gold, which ran the entire 200-foot length of the hall. Kirov did this each

day after boardtime, carefully savoring a small segment of the tapestry during each visit. It took him exactly two months of working days to progress from the first section of this masterwork to its end. And after completing this inspection he would begin the next afternoon to slowly repeat the process. It was one of the few pleasant activities Kirov enjoyed in his dull, self-limited existence.

As predicted, he was last through the gate under the long-silent clock chimes of the Spasskaya Tower. Looking neither right nor left, he walked briskly across the Square to the maze entry.

Logan and Jess followed.

At the platform, Kirov settled into the rear of a local mazecar. As the car moved out along the tunnel, Kirov was startled to feel a hand at his shoulder.

"Kirov 2?"

He blinked. "I am that person."

"I'm Logan 3. I've come to you for help."

He started to protest that he had never heard the name, and could not be of help to strangers, when something deep in his mind responded. Kirov nodded. "We will talk in my unit," he said quietly.

And they rode in silence to Leninskiye.

Kirov's lifeunit was as colorless and pale as the little man himself. The interior was painted a drab gray; there were no decorations of any kind to brighten the walls; heavy drapes obscured the view, and the furniture was starkly functional. The unit was, however, scrubbed and spotless. Not a mote of dust was allowed to settle there, since Kirov was an obsessively clean man.

Inside, before speaking, he prepared a pot of rather bitter yellow tea for his guests, bade them sit down, and then asked, sipping his sugarless brew, how he might help.

"We need to establish new identities," Logan told him. "As Logan 3 and Jessica 6, we're fugitives. If we're taken by the Federal Police we'll be executed. We need new IDs."

Kirov spoke in a flat monotone: "I don't know why you came to me, or who sent you, and I certainly don't know why I am willing to help you—but I am willing to do so." He stroked his thinly bearded chin. "I seem to be impelled to help you, which I find most strange. Normally, I would turn both of you over to the authorities."

Logan realized that the aliens had mentally prepared Kirov on a subliminal basis and that the little man knew nothing of his having been influenced by them. Which was all right with Logan, if that's how they wanted it. All that mattered was the help he needed.

"Exactly what do you wish me to do?" Kirov asked.

"Arrange complete new identities for us both. Do you have internal access to the Central Computer?"

"Yes."

"We'll provide you with basic data. You simply program it into the board. Can you do that?"

Kirov nodded. "But you must understand my problem. The board will automatically cancel the new

identities—when it becomes obvious, in cross-check, that your crystal patterns do not match"

Jess put aside her tea (having found it undrinkable). "How long can we count on getting by with the new IDs?" she asked.

"Six hours maximum," said Kirov. "Normally, a cross-check would be instantaneous, but I can delay the process for six hours. Will this be sufficient?"

Jess turned to him: "Will it, Logan?"

"All we need to do is find Francis. Once we do, he can get our cases reversed and prove that Phedra lied. Finding him shouldn't take long. He's our key back into the system."

Kirov stood up, collected the tea things, and took them into the service cubicle. Logan followed him there.

"When can we expect to have ID clearance?"

"As soon as you have brought me a DS Gun," Kirov said in his flat monotone. "Would you care for a vitaflake biscuit?"

"Wait, I—" Logan started to protest.

"Perhaps you," said Kirov, returning to Jessica with a plate of biscuits. She shook her head.

Kirov sat down in a stiff-backed chair, nibbling on one of the biscuits. Logan stood above him, glaring.

"You seem angry," said the little man.

"What's this about my bringing you a Gun?"

"A Sandman's Gun...I have...a sudden urge to possess this weapon."

"But a citizen can't even touch one," said Logan. "Each Gun is coded to its operative. If I tried to steal one for you it would take my arm off!"

"Only after the detonation device has been set," said Kirov. "If you took a Gun from the line, at the factory in Monte Carlo, before the device has been set—there would be no problem."

"Is he serious about this?" Jess asked Logan.

"Oh, let me assure both of you, I am quite serious," said Kirov, dusting his hands into a naptowel. "I must have the Gun before I can help you."

"But I can't leave Jess!"

"She can remain here in my unit until, you return with the weapon." He looked at Jess with his flat, dull eyes. "You shall be quite safe here." He smiled faintly. "I will admit that my request for a Gun is at direct odds with my pacifist personality, but this is nevertheless what I demand if you wish my help."

"The factory is impossible to penetrate," Logan declared. "There's no way I could reach the Gunline."

"Incorrect," said Kirov. "Tomorrow, at my board, I will program you as a Gun Controller, Class A, which will guarantee clear entry into the factory." He shrugged a thin shoulder. "The rest is up to you."

Logan studied the pale little man for a long moment.

"And if you are thinking that perhaps you could betray me, use your new ID to hunt down your friend—I merely remind you of the woman. I shall turn her over to the police for immediate execution if you do not return here with the weapon directly from Monte Carlo."

"We must do what he wants," Jess told Logan. "There's no other way."

Logan nodded, his eyes hard On Kirov. "You'll have your Gun."

And Kirov smiled again, a soft wet smile. "That will be very nice," he said.

AT MONTE CARLO

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A silver needle threading earth, the mazecar blazed south, beneath the Carpathian Mountains, through Hungary—then west, under the tip of Yugoslavia, into Italy, and on below the French coast to the platform at Nice.

Using his new ID, as Prestor 8, Logan rented a hoverstick for the short jump to Monte Carlo. If he ran into trouble at the Gunfactory, using the maze could be risky; the jet-powered Devilstick would provide a much more reliable method of escape from the area.

Coming in by air, riding the stick high above the wide sweep of sun-sparked Mediterranean, Logan was impressed by the idyllic setting: perched on its high white limestone cliff above the sea, Monte Carlo resembled a mythic giant's castle of crystal and glass. Threemile units rose glittering into the clean arc of sky in pinks, soft greens, pastel blues...Date palm and Barbary fig trees dotted the high terraces; scarlet Riviera flowers bloomed in lush profusion.

Difficult to think of this romantic area as what it really was: a dispenser of death, origin of nightmare destructive force, the primary world source of DS weaponry.

Logan was still mystified by Kirov's bizarre demand. It might be explained as the manifestation of a latent dominance syndrome, previously blocked and buried in the frustrated little man and activated by the sudden realization that he finally had total power over others, that the lives of Logan and Jessica were truly in his hands. It was obviously something the aliens had not anticipated, a random personality flaw that Logan was now forced to accommodate.

He had seriously considered stealing a Gun, still holstered, from a Sandman. The attack itself would be relatively simple: Logan would strike down the DS man and take the belted Gun before other Sandmen arrived. Simple. But then he would face the supremely difficult task of defusing the weapon.

Once, on his return from Argos, he had actually accomplished this. Unsure of the dangers he'd be facing on Earth, Logan had taken a holstered weapon from the body of a dead Sandman, brought the Gun into camp, and, using special tools, painstakingly defused it, recoding it to his hand-pattern. He had put it away, vowing he would never use it. But when the Borgia Riders took Jess...

The situation was different now. Even if he could succeed in using his specialized knowledge of weaponry to defuse a Gun for Kirov, there were no devastated cities in which to obtain the necessary tools. Also, the theft of the Gun would be flashed on every DS alert board; Sandmen would converge on the area, sealing off all escape routes.

No; the only way to satisfy Kirov was to obtain a Gun from the line. A line Gun, not yet keyed in to the

boards, would present less direct risk. And if I'm clever enough, Logan told himself, perhaps the weapon will never be missed.

It was possible.

Just barely possible.

Monte Carlo's casino was once its heart—the lure that attracted moneyed gamblers of all nations. Here, under marbled Victorian arches, fortunes had been won and lost on the single oiled spin of a soft-clicking wheel. Counts and grand dukes wagered castle and mistress on the maddening caprice of a tiny, dancing ivory ball. Many ended as suicides, leaping from the high cliff into the depths of the Mediterranean, as the green baize tables and rosewood roulette wheels took their toll.

But the opulent casino was gone; its marbled splendor had given way to the stark gray bulk of a Gunfactory that now dominated Casino Hill. The graceful arches and red-velvet pillars were replaced by metalloïd assembly lines and by emotionless robots that regulated the constant flow of weaponry.

From these steel corridors emerged Fuser and Lasercannon, Stunrifle and Pinbeamer—but the major product was the Gun, the deadly homer-carrying DS killweapon that haunted the mind of every runner.

"Prestor 8," Logan had said to the ID roboguard outside the main assembly block. "Control."

"Purpose of visit?"

"Routine line check."

"Identify," said the robot.

Logan stepped inside the scanroom and casually wall-slotted the Gun tech foilcard provided by Kirov. If the ID failed, he would never leave this room alive.

The chamber weighed him, photochecked him, scanned his body profile—computer-matching man to foilcard.

A screen in front of Logan flashed the readout:

PRESTOR 8—96466GUN CONTROL TECHNICIANCLASS A

The screen ran a complex cross-pattern of coded numbers so rapidly that Logan's eye could not follow them.

Then, in green, the word he'd waited for: VERIFIED.

The heavy duralloy slidedoor to the assembly block opened for him.

Verified!

He was inside.

Calmly, slowly, Logan walked toward the Guns.

Installation of the pore-pattern detonation device represented the final stage of Gun assembly. Therefore, Logan deliberately initiated his inspection just short of the area.

Logan was comfortable in his role as a Gun tech; his basic working knowledge of DS weaponry enabled him to pull off the impersonation without strain. He was smooth and professional, and the drone robots ignored him as he performed his duties, picking various weapons from the line, checking them carefully, making rapid notations in the minibook he carried.

As Logan moved down the line, the chief section robot approached him. He stared at Logan with faceted, lidless metal eyes.

"I assume you wish to test-fire one of our products?"

"Uh...naturally," said Logan.

"Then select a weapon of your choice," said the robot, "and please follow me."

Logan was annoyed at this delay. He wanted to get the job over quickly, since his unauthorized position here was extremely dangerous. What if they contacted CIC? What if the Central Inspection Control office was asked about Prestor 8? No, we didn't send him. No, he shouldn't be at your factory.

Every minute wasted here placed Logan in deeper jeopardy.

He selected a weapon and followed the tall humanoid robot. He had not planned on firing any of the Guns, but apparently this was part of a normal tech inspection. It was expected. No way of avoiding it.

The test area, to the left of the main assembly floor, contained several targets of varying size, mounted at widely spaced intervals across the width of a sound-and-shock-insulated firing tunnel.

The section robot handed Logan a silver ammopac stamped with the factory's black death-head design.

"Six charges," he said. "Full pac."

Logan armed the Gun, weighing it in his hand.

"You'll note the balance has been improved," said the tall robot. "Barrel-weight reduction, mainly. But with absolutely no loss of basic reliability."

"I can feel the difference," said Logan.

The Gun's long barrel gleamed under the factory lights; its pearl handle was snug against his palm and cool to the touch. Seductive. The damned Gun was always seductive.

"I suggest you try a ripper," said the robot. "You'll find that we have increased its force considerably."

Logan raised the weapon, set to ripper, and sighted the nearest target: a block of solid double-band durasteel.

He triggered the Gun.

The block instantly erupted into a snowfall of tiny steel fragments.

"Improved?" asked the robot.

"Improved." Logan nodded. "Definitely an upgrade of overall destruct power."

The robot seemed pleased. "Care to try a tangler?...The new stress-webbing is—"

"Thanks, but I've seen enough here," said Logan.

"The tensile strength has been doubled. You really should try one."

"I'm on a tight schedule," said Logan, handing him the Gun. "But I'll make special note of it in my report."

The machine trailed Logan back to the Gunline, still talking about basic product improvement.,

"We never consider any design totally perfected," he declared. "Most Sandmen don't appreciate that fact. They fail to realize that they have us to thank for a higher killscore each year."

How do I get rid of him? Logan knew that with this overzealous robot watching his slightest move, it would be utterly impossible for him to remove a line Gun.

Even more unsettling, if he actually managed to steal a weapon, how would he get it past the scanners? All visitors, including techs, were scanchecked when entering or leaving the factory grounds. You didn't just walk out with a Gun.

Or did you?

Suddenly, logically, Logan had the answer.

No scanchecks were made on section robots leaving the factory. That was why only machines were employed here: they could be programmed against theft. Exit checks were unnecessary.

Logan smiled at the robot. "You seem to be exceptionally well versed in Gun design."

"It is my specialty," said the tall machine.

"I know this is an unusual request—but I would like to take you back to CIC with me, have you talk to my superiors. I think you'd be able to provide invaluable suggestions in relation to future line-inspection procedure."

"That is most flattering," said the robot. "Of course, since this is your wish, I would be willing to accompany you."

Logan shut the minibook, tucking it inside his green worktunic. "I wish to leave immediately. Will this cause you any problem?"

"None whatever," said the machine.

"Let's meet outside the main gate. I have a hoverstick there."

The robot nodded.

"And, ah..." Logan added casually, "you'd better take one of the new line Guns along—to demonstrate what you've been telling me."

"Very well," said the humanoid, slipping a weapon into his sidepouch.

Logan smiled at him once more, then turned for the exit—but the robot's metallic voice stopped him.

"Prestor 8?" The tall machine was staring at him.

What's wrong, Logan wondered? What mistake did I make? Does he know who I am?

"I wish to say, Prestor 8, that I consider this an honor."

"Well..." said Logan, drawing in a breath. "You have certainly earned it."

The robot said nothing more, and Logan watched him walk stiffly toward the machine-exit.

Halfway to Nice, along a rocky coastal section of the French Riviera, Logan brought the hoverstick down on the long-abandoned motor-vehicle highway notched into the cliff face.

"Why are we stopping?" asked the robot.

"Just couldn't resist," Logan said, climbing from the control seat. The robot also dismounted. As Logan cut the power, the hoverstick settled to the ancient, sun-cracked asphalt.

"Might I inquire as to precisely what you could not resist?"

"The view," said Logan, looking over the highway's edge at the blue-green Mediterranean far below. The cliff rose sheer at their backs, dropping sharply to the sea in front of them. The roar of water against rock drifted up faintly, reduced to a near-whisper at this high altitude.

Logan shook his head slowly. "Beautiful, isn't it?"

"I'm afraid that the appreciation of natural beauty is a gift I have been denied," said the machine.

"Too bad," Logan sighed. "But at least I think you'll agree that this is an ideal place to try out that Gun of yours."

The robot's lidless eyes studied Logan. "Not permitted," he said.

"But I thought you wanted me to test-fire the tangler?"

"That is true—but not here, not at this location," explained the machine. "A Gun may not be fired under any circumstances outside the factory test area."

"Then at least let me examine it again," said Logan. "I won't attempt to fire it."

"Not permitted," repeated the robot. "Outside the factory, the weapon must never leave my possession. I can demonstrate it to your superiors at CIC under controlled conditions, but I am not permitted, at any time, to hand the weapon over to you."

"I see."

"It is my hope that you will not find my attitude offensive," said the machine. "I am acting under strict rules that do not permit me to fulfill your request."

Logan nodded, mentally weighing his chances against the machine. Not good. He couldn't employ omnite, or any other normally effective physical combat technique—since foot or hand blows, no matter how expertly delivered, would inflict no damage whatever on that tall metal body. And he had no weapon.

Yet, he told himself, I must obtain the Gun.

Logan knelt beside the silent Devilstick, fiddling with its control panel. "This thing's been acting strange," he said. "I think the lower needle jet is losing power."

"I observed no such malfunction in flight," said the robot.

"Let me try it alone. Less weight strain on the pod. Maybe I can figure out what's wrong." Logan activated the stick. "I'll just circle a couple of times..."

"As you wish." The robot nodded. "But the device seems quite sound to me."

And he stepped back as Logan roared the stick skyward.

In the air, he estimated the space between the robot and the cliff. Room enough, he decided, if I come in fast and keep the sea at my back.

Logan circled once as the robot peered upward.

Fast and simple, Logan told himself.

And he powered the Devilstick, full-thrust, at the robot, skimming in low over the highway to drive the stick's sharp duralloy nose directly into the creature's metal chest.

The impact smashed the humanoid into the base of the rock with incredible force. Logan powered the stick swiftly upward again, fighting to regain full control. The cliff seemed to leap at him as he swung the craft hard-left to avoid violent collision with the rock face.

Below, the big robot lay motionless, metal parts strewn along the cracked road surface.

Logan brought the hovercraft down directly beside the body, quickly dismounting. He rolled the heavy creature over on its side, unsnapped the robot's carrier-pouch, and pulled the Gun free.

At last! He had it!

"Stop!" said the machine, staggering up to face Logan. "Not...permitted."

The creature's chest was a smoking mass of shattered metal and ruptured circuitry. One of its arms had been totally ripped away; loose wires dangled from the gaping shoulder. And, in striking the rocks, the left side of its head had been crushed flat. The robot's one still-functional eye was canted at a grotesque angle.

To Logan, the machine now seemed a totally alien thing, the thin veneer of pseudo-humanity having been ripped away.

The robot advanced on Logan as he retreated toward the road edge.

"Stay back!" And Logan brought up the Gun.

The machine kept coming, its twisted mouth forming the same ominous phrase: "Not permitted...not permitted."

But the ammopac had been removed and Logan couldn't fire; the Gun was useless.

Jamming the weapon into his belt, he feinted left, then lunged right, attempting to put the machine between himself and the road edge. And did not succeed.

The creature slammed its arm across Logan's face, spilling him to the highway. Dazed, only half-conscious, he was powerless to resist as the tall machine plucked him up and swung his body toward the edge of the cliff.

"Not permitted..." the creature rasped. "Not permitted..."

And Logan was hurled from the cliff—a sheer mile drop to the distant sea.

As he went over, the instinct to survive fired his blood, and Logan clawed wildly at an overhang of heavy brush growing along a narrow ledge of rock, obtained a handhold—and managed to check his fall.

Loosened at its base, the tough-rooted brush threatened to pull free of the rock, but held. For how long?

Logan hung there, swinging by one hand, as the robot's twisted metal head loomed above him. Can the damn thing reach me? No, Logan assured himself. Can't. I'm too far down.

The creature realized that in order to dislodge this man below him, in order to send him plunging into the sea, it would be necessary to climb down to him. He set out to do this, easing his battered metal body over the road edge...

Logan, hanging ten feet below, no longer thought about his enemy; he was now trying desperately to obtain a double-handed grip on the slipping brush. But each time he hauled himself a bit higher, the shifting weight of his body ripped another section of brush loose from its base in the rock

The question was: could he pull himself onto the ledge before the brush gave way completely?

The robot was closer—much closer—making ponderous progress down the sharply angled face of the cliff. Soon he would be able to reach this man-thing. Soon.

Logan had swung his body to a point where he was finally able to get a grip on the ledge. Releasing the brush, he clawed his way up, levering his bruised body onto the narrow rock shelf.

But the robot was almost there—having lowered one metal leg to the ledge.

Logan twisted, pressing his back into the rock face for support, and kicked out with all his remaining strength at the thick metal limb of the machine.

The creature's leg slipped off!

For a long moment the robot swayed on one leg, grasping at the rooted brush with its single, steel-fingered hand.

"Not permitted," it said—and tumbled backward, past Logan, falling straight toward the sea, twisting, its metallic body sun-flashing as it arced downward, faster, to smash itself into metal death on the sea rocks below.

BAY OF DRAGONS

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"All right, damn you, here's what you wanted!"

With a pale smile, Kirov accepted the Gun. The weapon looked outsize and unwieldy in his small hands as he sighted along its barrel, examined its smooth pearl grip. His smile faded. "But I cannot fire it! This Gun is unloaded! You have not met the terms of our agreement."

In a single stride, Logan closed the distance between them to grab the startled technician by the front of

his uniform, pulling him close. His eyes burned into Kirov; his voice was iron. "The ammopac went into the sea. With the robot. I couldn't do anything to stop it. You asked for a Gun and I brought you one. That was our agreement, and you'd better live up to your end of it. If not, little man, I'll break you like a rotten stick!"

Logan released him, and Kirov fell back, shaken, lips trembling. He looked across the main living room of his unit at Jessica, who was glaring at him.

"Logan's right," she said. "You didn't mention any ammopac. You just asked for a Gun. And he brought it. He risked his life to bring it!"

Kirov raised a placating hand. "Very well," he murmured, attempting to regain his composure. He adjusted his wrinkled uniform. "I'll keep my end of the agreement. I shall program your new identities into the computer during tomorrow's workshift."

"We'll stay here tonight," Logan said to Jess. "By tomorrow, with any luck, I'll be talking to Francis."

Indeed, Kirov 2 kept his word—allowing Logan and Jessica to leave Moscow by mazecar the following afternoon as Treven 15, a New Chicago bodyjewel merchant, and his pairup, Jaci 3, a firewalker in the Angeles Arcade.

Kirov had seen to it that the Prestor databank was totally erased. When Federal authorities ran a trace on the bogus CIC inspector and Gun thief, Prestor 8, they learned nothing.

And within twenty-four hours, Kirov himself could not recall anyone named Prestor or Logan or Jessica or Treven or Jaci. He resumed his gray, uneventful life as a computer tech, wondering, from time to time, how he had come to possess a Sandman's Gun.

Kirov 2 never reported having the weapon because he knew that such a disclosure could lead to serious trouble. The Gun frightened him.

He finally buried it one night, very late, in the garden behind his unit.

At Angeles Complex, they left the maze, taking a belt up to the Wilshire sector. They had obtained appropriate clothing before leaving Moscow, but no physical alterations had been made in either of them. A facechange in a New You was totally impractical, since the idea was to prove themselves innocent of Phedra's charge. Thus, they risked recognition, particularly by Sandmen who knew Logan. His arrest would be the talk of DS Headquarters. Also, his face was known to many citizens, as it had been to Jessica. Almost anyone could stop him, point him out.

Yet it was essential that he reach his lifeunit.

"At least there's no active search for us," Logan told Jess. "As far as the Federal Police are concerned, we died on the Serengeti."

"But if we're scanned, our IDs may not hold," Jess reminded him. "Kirov is blocking for us but that can be bypassed."

"So we don't get caught." Logan smiled.

They moved leisurely through the crowds; hurried movement attracted attention.

"Sandman!" hissed Jess at Logan's ear. "Just turned in our direction."

"Keep walking. Don't do anything," said Logan tightly.

The DS man was young and intense; his mind was on the runner ahead of him. Female. And she was clever. Giving him a good hunt. Exciting! His fingers touched the holstered Gun at his belt. Should be able to homer her before she reaches Arcade. My first solo kill!

He passed Logan and Jess without a glance.

Now they entered the Wilshire threemile, Logan's unit, taking a riser to the ninth level, moving quickly down the bright, high-ceilinged corridor.

Logan had kept Phedra's key, had hidden it on a corridor ledge before he left for duty on that first morning, figuring it might be wise to have it there in case of emergency. Now that decision paid off as he found the ledge and recovered the silver slotkey.

At his unit he tried the key, but the door refused to yield. A recorded voice informed them: "This lifeunit has been sealed by Federal Police. There is no admission. Repeat: there is no admission."

Jess frowned, drew a harried breath. "What now?"

"We break the seal," said Logan. "I've broken them before."

"Without triggering the unit alarm?"

"There's no way to avoid that."

"But, Logan—they'll be here in less than a minute after that seal's broken!"

"Less than a minute is all I need," he said. And broke the seal.

The door opened and they hurried inside. No sound. The Federal alarm was silent but, in his mind, Logan could hear it screaming! Five seconds gone...

At the unit intercom he keyed in the number Francis had left with him.

"But you know he's not at his unit," Jess protested.

Ten seconds.

"His faxtape is," said Logan, waiting for the relay pickup to engage. "Every DS man on freetime is required to leave his basic world location on a tape. And that's all I need."

Twenty seconds...

With the relay engaged, he ran in the faxcode numbers. Instantly, the gaunt Sandman's image filled the screen.

"Dragon Bay, Jamaica," said Francis. Logan smiled, killing the relay.

They exited the unit building with ten seconds to spare.

"Identities!"

They were on the Wilshire platform, ready to board an express car, when two Federal officers stopped them.

Logan scowled at the two men, and continued to nudge Jess toward the car. An officer stepped between them on the boarding ramp.

"I'm Treven 15," snapped Logan, his tone officious and hard-edged, "and I have an important appointment in New Chicago. Treven Jewelworks—you've heard of me."

"Afraid not," said the officer who was blocking them.

"Identities!" repeated the second officer.

Sighing in obvious disgust, Logan dug into his traveltunic, removed a foilcard, and handed it over. The first officer took Jessica's card.

"We'll have to ask you to follow us," said the first officer.

"But why?" Jessica asked.

"We need to run a board check," replied the officer. "There's been a unit break-in, and we have a sight report that a man and woman fitting your description were seen leaving the building."

They were taken to a scanroom at the far end of the platform, where their cards were board-slotted.

"Please step inside. This won't take long."

Logan entered first, standing alone in the small chamber, telling himself: Steady, don't panic, this will be all right. Kirov's an expert. He's controlling the board. We'll get through this.

A light clicked on; the door released itself and Logan stepped out as Jessica entered. Her eyes were down; she looked nervous. Logan pressed her arm.

Within five minutes they were on a mazecar headed for the West Indies.

"Kirov kept his word," said Logan as they cleared the Angeles Complex in a bulleting rush. "He's giving us the time we need."

Jessica smiled. A tired smile. Her face was drawn, the skin taut across her cheeks.

"So now we find Francis," she said.

"Right." Logan nodded as the tunnel swept past them in a silver blur. "We find Francis."

South under Mexico, east through Guatemala into the Caribbean—to the West Indies and Jamaica, slowing as they moved beneath the island's girdling coral reef to the platform stop at New Port Royal. Since the island jungles had once provided a haven for runners, all incoming visitors were required to register with Jamaica CenControl.

"How long did Kirov say he could hold the cross-check?" asked Jess as they moved down the

processing line.

"Six hours maximum," said Logan. "It's going to be close."

The computer cleared them.

"Citizen Treven...citizen Jaci...our island welcomes you!" said the dark-skinned port official, handing them their foilcards. "Please enjoy yourselves. As we say on the island, 'may the Undertaker's Wind blow all troubles away!' "

Back at the platform, armed with ID clearance, they boarded a local mazecar for the twenty-mile cross-island jump under the Blue Mountains to Dragon Bay on the rugged north coast, emerging into a blaze of color and lush tropical growth. An easy-flowing tradewind from the Caribbean stirred fern and bamboo, juniper and satinwood. Frigate birds skimmed the white dazzle of beach, and immense Jamaican butterflies flashed their rainbow wings.

"The air's so clean," said Jess. "They say the tradewinds never stop." She shaded her eyes against the glare of white sand. "It's really lovely here...unspoiled."

"No part of this world's unspoiled," said Logan, looking at the red crystal alive in his right palm. "Ask a runner how unspoiled Jamaica is. This island's a potential deathtrap. If we don't find Francis, and soon, we may never leave it."

"Where do we look for him?"

"He'll be hunting," said Logan. "Francis likes to hunt."

"Dragon, mon! He hunt the big dragon!"

"Barracuda," Logan said to Jess. "The dragon of the sea. Extremely difficult to catch."

"Oh, yes, mon!" The club attendant nodded his dark, smooth-skinned head. "They like catch you. 'Cuda eat many hunters. Very...he smiled broadly, winking at Logan, "difficult."

The island clubroom was festooned with undersea gear—from ancient metal diving helmets to modern laserspears. Photos of myriad sea life crowded the walls—and a large manta ray, fully extended, floated above the main doorway, looking all too lifelike.

Logan checked the huntboard. Francis was logged out as a solo.

When Logan asked about this, the attendant shook his head. "Mon, you friend not wise," he said. "Nobody hunt alone! Not here, mon. Never alone here."

Logan wasn't surprised; it was characteristic of Francis to ignore the dangers of a solo undersea hunt.

"What's he using?" Logan asked.

"He got a cat. Long range. Gone for long time."

"How long?"

"Long time now," said the attendant. He flashed his wide smile again. His tone was musical, full of secret mirth. "Many come here, hunt 'cuda. Not all come back."

"I'm going after him," said Logan flatly.

Jess looked concerned. She put aside a shell she'd been holding. "You heard what he said about going out alone. I don't like your going out after him alone."

"I can handle it."

"I think you should wait. He'll be back...probably on the way right now."

"Or he could be in trouble right now," said Logan. "I've got to find him. If he's in trouble," and he looked at her steadily, "we're in trouble."

"Undertaker Wind blow all trouble away!" said the attendant.

And against the darkly burnished skin of his cheeks, his mocking white smile dazzled like beach sand.

THE SWIMMING DEATH

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It was a world of cerulean blues, deep-velvet purples, inked greens, of wide brainstone coral cliffs and deep-bottomed troughs where the sea turned black in the chartless depths—a world of eel and octopus and squid, of the soldier crab and the loggerhead turtle, of jeweled angelfish, gliding manta rays, and great blue marlin. The majestic whale shared these rich Jamaican waters with the pulsating jellyfish—and the voracious shark, as old as time itself, prowled here in the daggered dark of the Caribbean.

Logan rode an open-cockpit two-man Seacat, swift and highly maneuverable, a sleek deep-water vehicle equipped with probing pinbeam lights and a stern-mounted minicannon powerful enough to penetrate any undersea obstacle.

He wore full lightweight bodyarmor, developed by Jamaican hunters to provide maximum protection against shark and barracuda.

"Within limits, of course," the outfitter had warned him as he'd donned the armored suit. "Some of these fellows can swallow you whole!"

"How strong is it?" Logan had asked.

"It's designed to withstand an ordinary slash attack—which will give you a chance to use the cannon if you have to." The outfitter, whose face bore a scar from chin to forehead, looked at him scornfully. "Not very sporting, though. Idea is to use a trunk pistol on the fellow, then bring him in unmarked."

The tranquilizer was strong enough to put any barracuda to sleep—but then the problem became: how to net him to the Seacat and haul him in before his fellow denizens, sensing his lifeless state, tore him apart for lunch!

And me along with him, thought Logan. But of course he had no intention of netting a 'cuda; he was searching every trough and coral valley for Francis, pinbeaming the sea floor, powering the cat through masses of clinging sealace, over encrusted rocks, darting his light into the mouths of caves...

Where were the dragons?

He saw several sharks; a manta rippled over him like a great shadowed blanket; a startled octopus

unfurled like a dark flower from the lee of a sunken boulder; a fat trunkback turtle paddled by in lazy unconcern, ignoring this bizarre vehicle and the armored man who rode it.

But nowhere did Logan encounter barracuda. Perhaps by now they were wary of hunters; perhaps they avoided these sharp-snouted Seacats with their nets and lights and weapons.

But, eventually, Logan knew, he would find them.

Or they would find him.

Jessica hated being left behind at the clubhouse. She had asked to go with him, but Logan had refused. Too dangerous, he'd insisted. She had no undersea experience, which might prove disastrous in case of emergency. He must go alone. Wait. Just wait. He'd be back with Francis.

She forced calmness upon herself; she tried to read one of the seahunt publications, but could not sit still. She ranged the hallways, glancing at the various trophies, at the mounted specimens of sea life, at weaponry new and old. She walked aimlessly into the equipment room, running her fingers along masks and fins and oiled tank fittings. The room sickened her: it smelled of brine and rubber and iodine.

She left without speaking to the outfitter, who stared at her.

What was wrong? More than her worries about Logan and the computer time running out and the rest of it, more than the tensions induced by their perilous situation. It was something else, something that threatened in a very personal way. She grew increasingly nervous and apprehensive.

And then she had the answer. So simple—and so horrible. Her shocked mind rejected it. No, can't be. Not yet. Not now.

No!

Standing alone in the club hallway, she slowly opened her right hand. In the center of her palm, the crystal timeflower was no longer a steady red. It pulsed like an angry heart: red-black...red-black...red-black.

Jessica 6 was on Lastday.

The silo was a relic, built in the turbulent twentieth century, when one nation attempted to impress another with destructive power, when nuclear submarines patrolled the dark waters and bomb-laden aircraft rode global skies.

The submarines and the aircraft were gone, but the concrete-and-steel silos remained, deep-buried in land or under the seas, silent and long abandoned, their deadly missiles removed—stark reminders of a time when another kind of evil beyond Sandman and runner permeated the world, when war seemed ready to bloom into monstrous atomic life, engulfing the Earth in fire.

The tall, tubular structure loomed ahead, pinned in Logan's lightbeam. He circled it in a wide arc, and in jubilation found what he'd been searching for: a Seacat, moored to the silo's lower section, swaying idly in the surge of undersea currents.

I've found him! Francis has to be inside.

Logan quickly looped a holdchain over a projecting lichen-covered ladder along the near side of the huge

silo. His craft would be safe here. He removed a spare breatherpac from the cat and snap-linked it to his suit. Just to make certain he had ample oxygen in case of trouble inside the silo.

He climbed the ladder to the massive overhead entry hatch. The hatch doors had jammed open, providing easy access.

Logan carried a portable pinbeamer to light his way, and a laserspear was belted to his wrist. His wide visorshield afforded a full field of vision.

He wore the armored suit comfortably, like a second skin, finding that it did not in any way hamper normal body movement. The suit contained an emergency mini-powerunit capable of limited independent acceleration in case its wearer was injured and could not propel himself through the water. Easily enough power to get him back to the cat.

Logan kicked out with his lightweight, finned diving boots, gliding swiftly downward, guided by the pinbeam.

His light flashed across the owlish eyes of a large blowfish, which instantly swelled into a defensive ball of prickly white spines. A speckled moray eel whipped past in the murky deep. As Logan angled down toward the floor of the silo he passed a series of phosphorescent depth markers, the numerals still glowing faintly in the thick green-black waters:

30'60'90'120'

Iron rung ladders spidered up the curved walls. He passed ruptured pipes and tubing choked with sea growth. A wire-cage elevator was frozen halfway between the upper hatch and the floor.

He swam toward it. Ran the beam inside. Empty.

Logan continued his descent, the suit equalizing body pressure, keeping the oxygen flow clear and steady. At last his boots touched the wide, debris-covered floor of the silo. Schools of curious suckerfish circled him as Logan swung the pinbeam toward a substantial, octagon-shaped structure in mid-floor.

Probably missile control. Francis could be in there.

Its door was open, and Logan swam through into a large instrumentation chamber. The room was a mass of dials, switches, control chairs, and computer decks, all heavily encrusted with sea life.

No sign of Francis. Logan felt a surge of disappointment. Of frustration. Where the hell was he?

He was about to leave the missile-control area when he noticed a second exit door to the far right. It had partially collapsed, and Logan barely managed to slip between the angled door edge and the floorbase.

Inside, his pinbeam traveled over tumbled equipment bins, a spillage of tools and electronic parts. Storage area. Nothing here.

But wait!

Something was moving to his left. A dark shape—just beyond a section of fallen bins...

Logan tensed, a hand on his speargun. If he surprised a manta down here, or a disgruntled octopus, he'd be in for a mean close-quarter attack. But the dark shape did not advance; it seemed unaffected by his presence.

He swam toward it, still warty, ducking under a section of twisted steel shelving to discover: Francis!

Logan beamed the Sandman's visorshield: eyes closed, mouth slack. Was he dead?

He studied the situation: Francis was wedged into a corner of the crowded storage area, his body jammed beneath a fallen portion of the ceiling. The moving shape Logan had seen from the doorway was the trapped Sandman's right arm, moving languidly up and down in the current created by Logan's passage.

Oxygen! He's probably out, Logan realized—quickly attaching the spare breatherpac, making the suit connection. He noted an immediate change in Francis: his eyelids fluttered open, his mouth gulping in the precious oxygen.

Logan unreeled a suit-to-suit intercom from a contact cylinder at his waist and plugged it into the Sandman's helmet.

"Francis, can you, hear me?"

A nod. "Logan..."

"How badly hurt are you?"

The answering voice was strained; the words formed slowly: "Can't move...my legs. Other arm...think broken."

"What happened?"

"Curious...came in here to...look around...ceiling gave way...got trapped...oxygen gone..."

"All right, I understand. I'll get you out."

"Can't move this bin...too heavy...jammed."

"I'll go back to the cat for a dicer. Cut you free. You've got enough oxygen now, so just hang on here till I get back."

Francis smiled faintly behind the visor. "I...won't be...going anywhere."

Logan broke the suit connection and swam for the exit.

The Seacat's S-6x penetration beam handunit, of "slicer," was extremely effective in lasering through the interlace of steel that held Francis pincered against the floor. Logan had almost succeeded in freeing the trapped Sandman when Francis suddenly jerked his right arm upward, directly into the path of the slicebeam. The laser cut deeply into his suit armor, slitting it from elbow to shoulder, before Francis was able to pull his arm away from the beam.

"What are you doing?" Logan yelled into the intercom.

"Muscle spasm," Francis replied. "Couldn't help it." In shock, Francis watched his blood darkly clouding the water.

"It's bad," said Logan, checking the wound. "Went right through your suit."

"I know...blood in the water. They'll come for us."

"Are you able to swim?"

"No."

"I don't see a propulsion unit on your suit."

"Left it off," said Francis. "For lighter weight."

"We can both use mine," said Logan, slicing through the final wedge of steel.

The job was done—but they were a long way from safety.

Logan's suit unit propelled them steadily up toward the silo's hatch in a froth of blood bubbles.

Francis was barely conscious, a dragging bulk for Logan to maneuver; his arms and legs dangled, puppetlike, and through the intercom Logan could hear his labored breathing.

The upper hatch loomed closer.

"We're almost there," said Logan. "Once we reach the cat, I can get us away fast."

"Not...fast enough," said Francis weakly. "No...chance." And his eyes closed

"Hang on!"

"No...use...can't..." He lapsed into coma.

At the hatch, Logan paused. Better check the area before taking him out there, Logan told himself. I'll leave Francis here, linked to the inner ladder; the silo will protect him.

As Logan cleared the open hatch he drew back his lips in a grimace of shock.

The dragons were here.

Barracuda.

A pack of them. Two dozen at least, circling the tall silo in darting, nervous impatience, excited by the blood spoor.

The sea was filled with swimming death.

Logan choked back revulsion and fear. The laser-cannon would stop them. Get to a cat and use the cannon on them.

But the killer fish, with their ugly reptilian snouts and brute eyes, were between him and the Seacats—both of which were moored at the lower end of the silo.

Gripping a section of ladder outside the hatch, Logan attempted to clear his thoughts, pushing the fear away, mentally gearing himself for affirmative action. His mind raced:

Maybe I could fight my way through to one of the cats—but I can't leave Francis alone inside the silo. They'd go in after him, be on him before I could use the cannon; they'd tear him apart in seconds, and his damaged suit wouldn't stop them.

If I could just get one of them, then maybe...

Logan had the laserspear up, spring trigger at firing position. He had no expertise with a sea spear, had never fired one at an underwater target—and the erratic, darting 'cuda were extremely elusive.

Yet he must try.

He sighted on a huge, sheen-gray monster who seemed to be bolder than his fellows in that he swam much closer, in tighter circles, multirowed teeth shining whitely in his wide-hinged, killing jaw. Of all dangerous fish, the 'cuda was supreme in speed and deadliness—capable of cutting through the water at fifty miles per hour. Even its tongue had small, cruel teeth!

I'd rather face a school of shark than these devils, Logan thought, watching them glide closer. They don't fear me. They don't fear anything.

He triggered the speargun—and with a soft popping explosion the spearhead flashed toward the big gray devilfish.

And missed.

The point passed behind the 'cuda, lasering through a large sea boulder. Logan realized that he had failed to compensate for the angle of water-mass deflection. Aim ahead of the target, he told himself. Let the fish swim into the spearpoint.

Logan had fumbled a reload from his belt and was inserting it in the speargun when he was hit by the big gray. The barracuda's razored teeth raked furiously along the right side of his suit. The armor held—but he was thrown back against an upper edge of the silo, the speargun violently jolted from his grasp.

In desperation, he lunged for it, closing his gloved fingers around the trigger haft just as a second 'cuda struck at him, at his flipped left boot. The entire rubberized tip was sheared away, but the armor resisted penetration.

Logan swung the speargun back into firing position, noting that the pack was much closer now. They were tightening the death circle!

His second shot also missed, but by a much narrower margin. Logan had just one more reload for the weapon; the others were in the cat. If I miss this time...

Another monster charged him—but Logan dipped back behind the silo ladder as the 'cuda's teeth rang on the steel rung next to his head, scoring the metal.

Last shot. Must not miss. Look at them. Not afraid of me. Figure I can't hurt them. Lucky so far. Suit won't hold in mass attack. Closer to me. What's wrong? Taking too long to load. Hands not working. Breathing difficult. Oxygen giving out. Can't think. Weak. Coordination going...

Logan was on the edge of blackout; his breatherpac was nearly empty. He felt dizzy, uncertain; the moving 'cuda were gray-green blurs...waving...

Focus! Concentrate!

The big gray was coming at him, obscene jaws gaped wide as Logan slowly brought up the speargun.

He fired, head-on, at the swift slicing deathshape.

The spearpoint flashed, imbedding itself in the barracuda's underslung jaw lasering him neatly in half. A

rush of spilled red flesh, an explosion of organs and entrails...

The pack went mad.

In a blood frenzy, they attacked their dying leader, totally ignoring Logan as he tossed aside the empty speargun. Fighting to breathe, he pulled Francis out through the open hatch doors, activating the suit propulsion unit.

They arrowed down toward Logan's moored Seacat.

Around them, in erupting crimson, the maddened fish struck wildly at one another, ripping and tearing.

Having reached the cat, Logan used his last breath to snap a fresh pac into his suit. The flowing rush of oxygen was incredibly sweet!

At the controls, with Francis locked into the cockpit next to him, he engaged full power. The Seacat jetted forward in a bubbled rush, while behind them, in the red froth of sea, the dragons clashed.

TIME OF RITUAL

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"Gone?" Logan stared at the smiling man. "She can't be gone."

"I tell you, mon, she go!" He spread his dark hands. "Look all afraid. Ve-ry unhappy."

"She must have left some kind of message!"

The attendant frowned. "Message?" Then he smiled again, nodding with sudden vigor. Digging into his bushjacket, he withdrew a folded square of white paper. "Oh, sure, man! I forget she leave this." His smile gleamed. "Fine message!"

Logan hurriedly unfolded the note.

Logan, Francis can't help me now. No one can. I'm on Lastday. Please don't try to find me. Seeing you again would bring only sadness. I hope you find your Jessica.

There was a four-word postscript:

I'm going to run.

"Hey, mon, she tell you where she go?"

"No," said Logan quietly, "she didn't tell me."

He walked from the room to the open patio. Edged between dark clouds, the moon was hammered gold. It cast a pale yellow glow on the night beach beyond the trees. A heavy odor of damp earth rose from the jungle.

Logan walked through the trees toward the sea, holding the note in his hand. On the beach he read it once more... I hope you find your Jessica... then dropped the paper into the damp sand. The reflecting sea traced a faint wetness on his cheeks.

He'd lost them both—the two Jessicas. Both of them. And he knew now, admitting it to himself for the

first time, that he loved the Jessica of this Earth just as he continued to love the Jessica of his own world. One lost in time and space, the other fleeing a death she could never outrun.

Logan felt a sudden chill. The moon was buried in a bulked mass of cloud. The jungle darkened.

And the rain began.

Francis took a day to heal. His right arm was badly wrenched but not broken, and his other injuries were minor. Within thirty-six hours he was in a mazecar with Logan, heading back to California.

Logan was returning to Angeles Complex as a fugitive in the custody of Francis, who assured him that Phedra's story would soon be discredited.

"You saved my life at Dragon Bay," said Francis. "Now I'll save yours."

"Have I lost Godbirth?" Logan asked him as the mazecar bore them swiftly through deep-earth darkness.

"No," said Francis. "You'll be eligible again once the computer clears you." He placed a hand on Logan's shoulder. "Don't worry, old friend, we'll make Godbirth together. I guarantee it!"

And what of Jessica? Logan asked silently. What will happen to Jess when Lastday is over and the Sandmen go after her?

Don't think about her. You can't do anything to help her now—so quit thinking about her. Shut down your mind to her. She's gone. She never belonged to your world.

But I love her!

"You're going to be asked about that sister of Doyle's," Francis was saying to him. "And I'm personally curious... Why did you get involved with her?"

"I didn't," said Logan flatly. "Then how do you explain?"

"I was checking her out as a possible subversive when Phedra became jealous of us and manufactured that drug story." Logan spread his hands. "Then we were condemned to the Serengeti. When the Masai let us go, I was forced to take her along."

"Forced?"

"What else could I do? I had no reason to believe she'd run."

"Have any idea where she might be?"

"No," said Logan. "Does it matter?"

"Every runner matters."

"They aren't our problem anymore," said Logan. "Or have you forgotten?"

Francis smiled thinly... "It's hard to quit thinking like a Sandman."

"Sure," said Logan. "It takes a while."

Under pressure, at DS Headquarters, with Federal officers standing witness, Phedra confessed that she had lied about the drug. It was assumed that she had also planted the DD-15 on Logan that evening in Arcade..

"But I didn't," she protested.

"You lied before, you're lying again," said an officer.

"No, I'm telling the truth. I don't know how the Dust got into Logan's jacket."

"Take her away," the officer said. "She is to be executed."

"Clarify your full relationship with Jessica 6," directed the computer as Logan's interrogation continued.

"I've told you everything."

"It is to be repeated," said the computer.

And Logan repeated it all.

"Again," said the computer.

And Logan repeated it again.

Each answer was weighed and balanced and cross-checked for logic and accuracy.

"He is my friend. He is loyal to the system. He has never associated with subversives. His record with DS is exemplary. He is worthy of Godbirth." It was Francis, true to his promise, testifying on Logan's behalf.

The verdict was swift and positive: "Cleared of all charges."

That night Logan returned to DS Headquarters. He knew that Jessica's Lastday had ended. Her palmflower was now black. Death black. Sleep black.

Had she run?

The DS man in cenfile was young and in awe of Logan 3. His name was Bruce 11, and he had just graduated DS training; with his first hunt still ahead of him. The game was fresh and new and exciting to Bruce and he hoped, someday, to equal the proud kill-record of Logan 3. This was his secret, abiding goal—and he was delighted with the opportunity to serve this legendary Sandman. It was an honor.

What information, Logan asked him, did he have on a possible runner, female. Name: Jessica 6.

"Got her...she's on the board," said Bruce. "Flower blacked at 0612. She's somewhere in the Muir Woods area, near New Sanfrancisco."

Then she's run, just as she said she would, thought Logan. And into an area that is under water on my world, quake-sunken and lost. Nothing left but part of the bridge. Quake took all the rest—but here, now, Muir Woods is real and wild and Jess is running there, like a trapped animal before the hunters.

"Who's on the assignment?"

"Ummm, let's see..." Bruce checked a faxsheet. "Miles and Gregory have it." He smiled in assurance. "Both good men. They'll get her."

"I'm sure they will," said Logan. "I'd appreciate it if you'd forget I asked about her. I have my reasons."

"Certainly" Bruce nodded. "And...uh..."

Logan stared at him.

"I...just wanted to say...how much I respect you," the young man stammered. "Your record will be hard to match. I...envy you."

"You don't really know me," said Logan.

"I know you were a great Sandman," said Bruce, his voice rising. "No Sleep for you... You've earned it. You've earned Godbirth!"

And the young man's eyes shone with the word.

At shiftchange, when Miles 7 emerged from DS Headquarters, Logan was waiting for him near the hoverpad.

"I have a personal interest in the runner you hunted today," he told the DS man. "Jessica 6."

"What about her?" said Miles. He was bulky, hard-faced, a veteran. Logan's record didn't impress him. Nothing impressed Miles 7 except certain exotic favors he'd received at a local glasshouse.

Logan didn't want to ask the question that had to be asked. He drew in a breath, fighting to maintain a surface calm. The muscles in his cheeks were rigid.

"Is she dead?"

The DS veteran shrugged. "We had her totally blocked. No way out of the woods. She was locked on the scope-less than a mile ahead of us. But when we closed in..." He shrugged again. "Nothing."

"What do you mean?"

"You've heard of them. We all have. Runners who disappear. Females. They just vanish. That's the only word for it."

"She was gone when you closed in?"

"That's what I said. Gone. No trace of her."

"Maybe there is a Sanctuary," said Logan softly.

The DS man raised an eyebrow. "Sanctuary?" He stared at Logan. "What's that?"

With his fears for Jess eliminated (She wasn't homered! She may be alive somewhere on this Earth!) Logan gave himself over to Godbirth.

For Logan and Francis and the ten others in their group, it was the Time of Ritual. Their robot guide was

tall and faceless and unapproachable and would answer no questions. He was there only to direct them; they must do precisely what he ordered.

They rode in tense silence through the maze.

Logan experienced a sense of renewed confidence. Against all odds, he had survived to make this journey. Perhaps he could uncover the world powerhead and defeat it; perhaps he could return to his own Earth, to Jess and their new son...

The mазecar flashed through the long tunnels in a steady, humming surge, a glint of swift-running silver, moving...

Where? To what global destination?

The platform they reached in final transit gave no hint of location. But as they left the maze they moved up into desert beat.

At ground level, they had their answer: upper Egypt. The eastern bank of the Nile.

They stepped from the maze exit into a stunning mass of carved granite, of shaped stone pillars and pylons and obelisks and massive courtyards open to sky and sun. They were in the Great Temple of Amon-Re, the Sun King, at Luxor, near Thebes, walking through a stone forest of immense drum columns that towered nearly seventy feet above their heads, each column alive with Egyptian hieroglyphs—an elaborate stonecut history of this timeless land.

They were now allowed to ask their guide basic questions.

"Is this the Place of Miracles?" Logan asked.

"No," said the robot. "This is an area of preparation, where your bodies and minds will be cleansed—so that you may be worthy to join the Gods."

"Bodies and minds," Logan remarked softly to Francis. "That means they'll lift us, give us drugs."

"Don't judge things," Francis warned. "Just do exactly what you're told to do. We're in other hands now, Logan. We're into the ritual. Flow with it, don't question it!"

Logan hated all drugs. As a Sandman, he had visited hallucimills when he'd been down, guilt-ridden, when he had felt despair and depression. Drugs were an escape from life, a weakness, a distortion of reality—the reflection of a sick society. But now he had to accept the ritual. No choice. Don't question what happens, just let it happen. This is what you've been waiting for, fighting to reach. Go with it.

They were led down an avenue of cool stone, between tall rows of reclining ram-headed beasts with shadowed eyes, past fountains that whispered in liquid voices, to a wide courtyard dominated by a pool of shining crystal edged in tinted limestone.

Here they undressed and bathed in the scented waters.

In spungold sunrobes, they were led to the Place of Meditation, a vast, stone-topped chamber forming the heart of Amon-Re's temple. Surrounding them, lining the four walls, were rows of manlike beast-headed Gods carved in black ebony.

The twelve were seated, in a loose circle, on satin pillows. The floor of the chamber was covered with soft furs, and the afternoon sunlight was muted to a golden haze in this atmosphere of tranquillity.

Each of them was handed a small, delicately wrought cup of scrolled silver-containing what the robot called "the elixir of divinity," designed to place them in "a state of inner peace and receptivity."

Receptive to what? Logan wondered. According to the aliens, he had been provided with a mindshield against this type of mental preconditioning. Therefore, no drug, however potent, could have a lasting effect on him.

I'll go under, but I'll come out clean. I'm shielded against ultimate mental control.

Or am I?

Francis smiled, raising his cup. "To Godbirth!"

And they drank.

PAIN AND ANGUISH

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Now they were out of Egypt, in a mazecar headed for Cape Steinbeck, to the rockets, and Francis was Ballard, which was perfectly normal, perfectly understandable, and Logan was glad it was over.

Jessica was waiting for him on board the rocket. Ballard had brought her there from Jamaica.

"She was running," said Ballard, old and tired, with the gray in his hair making him look older—but then, he'd lived a double lifetime...

"Thank you for saving her," said Logan.

"That's my job. Saving people. That's what I'm here to do. As Francis I kill them and as Ballard I save them. We each have our job."

"I thought you were dead," Logan told him.

"Well, I'm here. I'm with you in this mazecar. That's proof of life, isn't it?"

"There's too much death," said Logan. "I'm glad you survived."

"You'll survive too, Logan," said the tired man. "You don't quit. You never give up. You'll survive."

The mazecar slotted into a platform and they climbed out.

They were at Steinbeck, at the edge of the Keys, and the muggy Florida heat assaulted them as they cleared the maze.

It was noon, and desperately hot. Serengeti heat. The tarmac bubbled and steamed beneath Logan as he walked. The raw smell of tar was in the air, and the long plain ahead of them shimmered and danced.

"There, Logan! The rocket!"

Logan raised his head, blinking.

"She's on board, waiting for you. Jess is waiting!"

The rocket was tall and magnificent, glinting against the horizon, a thing of power and grace and beauty. A mountain of metal, a silver Kilimanjaro rising into baked blue sky.

Logan smiled. He would ride this great ship into space, ride it home with Jess, to their son, to young Jaq and Fennister and Mary-Mary and Jonath...

No, Jonath was dead. Evans 9 had Gunned him at Crazy Horse. Used a ripper on him.

"Here we are," said Ballard, standing with Logan at the foot of the iron ladder that led to the open port. "Better get aboard."

They shook hands firmly. "I owe you everything," said Logan. His voice was tight with emotion. "Nonsense. You owe me nothing. You did it...you survived. You'll never die, Logan. They can't kill you. They tried, with their power and their Guns, but you eluded them, outwitted them. You lived as others died."

"Jonath wanted to live," said Logan.

"We all want to live. With you, we run, we survive."

"They killed Jaq. The Riders killed him"

"He lives in you. And in Jessica. A new Jaq lives!"

Ballard made it all sound right. Simple and direct and easy to understand. All of it easy. No mysteries. No guilts. No losses.

"Come with us, Ballard! Home! To a better Earth."

The gray man shook his head slowly. "I've got my job to do here," he said quietly.

"And if they kill you?"

"Then I'll live in you," he said, smiling.

And Logan began climbing the ladder.

Upward, steeply upward, steel rung after steel rung after steel rung after steel rung...

The rocket was very tall, miles tall, and Logan had to climb all the way up to reach Jess. All the way.

A mile up, he paused. Jessica was waving to him from the open hatch, a tiny warm dot above him. He looked down, over his right shoulder—and Ballard was Francis, all in black, all in killing black, with the Gun shining, and with his skull-thin smile shining and his eyes dark, and shining in the sudden midnight that engulfed them, engulfed the Keys, the tall rocket, the ladder.

Where was Jess now? Logan could no longer see her; the darkness was too thick, like dense smoke. His tongue tasted of rust and bile as he continued to climb. Rung after steel rung after steel rung after steel rung after steel rung...

How high now?

Three miles? Four?

Below him, Francis aimed the Gun. "Time to die, Logan," he said in a soft, venomous whisper. Logan

heard him clearly.

"No, damn you, no!" And he began climbing faster.

Must outclimb the homer, he told himself. Because it's coming for me. He's fired it by now, and it's unfair. Totally unfair. He told me I'd live forever. He lied. No, not Ballard. He would never lie. It was Francis. You could never trust Francis. Keep it all straight in your mind. Don't get confused.

It's coming for me. As it came for the girl near the fence back at Angeles in that other world so long ago. Remember her? Oh, it came for her and she tried to run and it followed her along the fence and it took out her entire nervous system like bursting stars. Starflesh. Bursting.

Logan could feel it coming up through the heavy dark, slicing the night, fast, fast...

Hurry! Rung after steel rung after steel rung after steel rung...climbing for Jess. Climbing for life.

There! He was at the hatch. He'd made it! He reached the open port and in the fogged darkness he was pulled on board the ship.

The hatch slammed shut.

Saved! He'd outclimbed the homer!

Jessica was in his arms. Her lips were sweet. Her hair smelled of hyacinth and wild honey. Her eyes were shining with love, shining like the eyes of Francis.

She was Francis.

"There's no escape," the gaunt Sandman whispered, and his smile was a knife, cutting.

He fired the homer into Logan's stomach.

With the charge working in him, tearing him apart, with his nerves splitting, ripping, unraveling, he clawed open the hatch and jumped from the silo.

Into the jaws of the dragon...into the 'cuda's razored mouth.

And the dark gouted blood.

...drug...in the cup...making all this...must not let it...control me...not...let it...

Francis stroked the girl's naked shoulder with gentle fingers. His voice was soft, his dark eyes filled with sadness. "She's so beautiful, Logan...so very, very beautiful."

"But why is she here?"

They were in the main databank report room at DS. The room was very quiet. All the boards were silent. No one else was there.

Just Logan, Francis, and the girl.

"I asked her to come here," said Francis. He reached out, tipped up her chin. "Open your eyes. Tell Logan your name."

The girl opened her eyes. She was sitting in front of the central feeder unit, her naked body illuminated faintly by the banded rows of glowing circuit lights. The lights struck through her blond hair, creating

filaments of glowing gold. Her full breasts stirred as she turned toward Logan.

"I'm Glinith," she said. "Glinith 21. And that's what I'll be very soon!" She giggled, holding out her right hand to him, palm up. "See!" The time-crystal was blinking.

"She's on Lastday," said Francis, stroking her night-dark hair. The lights of the board were smothered and trapped in this inked mane of full-spilling hair. "She'll be dead very soon."

"Very soon," echoed Glinith, and her hair was deep-crimson, flowing like soft fire to her waist.

Logan was alert, cat-nervous. Things were wrong in this room. Many wrong things here. "Why are the boards inactive?" he asked Francis.

"Simple." The gaunt man nodded. "All the runners are dead."

"All dead," echoed the girl. She extended her arms. "Take me, Logan. Sex me!"

"No." He shook his head. "Not now. Not here. It's all wrong here."

"I'll take her." Francis grinned, stripping his uniform. He lifted Glinith from the control chair, placing her gently on the polished black-marble floor.

Francis touched her breasts, spreading himself beside her on the cool marble. She ran her hands slowly over his naked chest, her hair gold now under the flickered lights.

Logan said, "I'm going."

"Where?" asked Francis, as the girl writhed beneath him. "Where is there to go?"

"Back to my unit."

"It's not there," Francis said, and the girl moaned softly as his body penetrated hers. "Nothing's out there, Logan. It's all here. Everything is here."

The girl sobbed, cried out in sharp release as Francis rolled away from her. Sweat glistened along his shoulders and back, a finely beaded mist. The sweat of cold passion.

Logan could not find the exit door.

Something was very wrong.

"Hand me my belt," said Francis.

The girl lay face down on the mirror-polished floor, breathing deeply.

Wrong.

Logan gave the belt to Francis, who unsnapped the Gun holster. He removed the weapon. It pulsed in molten heat against the girl's skin as Francis pressed the long barrel into her lower spine.

"What are you doing?" Logan asked.

"Killing her," said Francis. "She's on black now."

And he triggered the Gun.

The nitro blew the girl apart.

...the drug is...what is this...doing to me wrong...twisted...I'll be all right...if I...can...just...

And Jessica stared at her mirror-imaged self. "Why did you come here? Why come to me?"

"To tell you that Logan is dead," said Jess. "Francis killed him. It was inevitable. No one can escape Francis."

"Did you love him?"

"Yes. As you did. We both loved him, and he loved both of us. In many ways, to him, we were the same person. Exactly alike."

"I'm not like you. I have a son."

"My flesh is yours."

"Not mine. No. You come from another world,"

"Bridged by space and time."

"But uncrossable. Each world separate. Each cut off from the other."

"But I'm here. You see me."

"I see myself. The mirror self. Only me. Not you. I'm alone here. And Jaq is dead."

Jessica was sobbing, holding the dead child tightly, rocking his charred, lifeless body in an agony of sorrow.

Beyond the lightless house, the dark empty bed of the Potomac ran like an open wound past the hill. The Riders were gone, but the blood was here. Here in this house, this hallway, staining Jaq's blistered corpse.

"You've got to accept it," Logan told her. "They've killed him and there's nothing we can do." She looked up at Logan. "You were gone. I was here alone with our son. Helpless against them. I couldn't stop them." Her eyes burned at him. "Why weren't you here?"

"I was on another world," he told her. "Trapped there. I couldn't get back to you. I tried, but I couldn't."

Her face was cold, unforgiving. "Jaq is dead because of you. The Riders killed him because you weren't here when he needed you." Her tone was bitter. "I hate you, Logan! Hate you! Jaq is dead because of you!"

"No!" Logan was trying to make her understand. "I just couldn't...tried but...couldn't..."

...get back...can't get away from...but must...keep my mind...can't let them...take my...mind...

Logan sat up on the sweated pillow, staring at his hands. He had fisted them, and now his flexing fingers felt stiff and unreal. His skin was hot, flushed; it seemed too thinly stretched over the bones of his body. His muscles ached dully.

To his right, Francis was also coming out of the drug lift, as were others in the circle.

The robot guide faced them. "You have all experienced death and pain and personal anguish, but this was

as expected. The elixir was meant to do this, to cleanse your minds of crippling emotions—to place you in a receptive state of calm inner peace."

Logan looked at the others. They were numbed, their eyes devoid of expression. The robot voice droned on and the figures in the circle listened, transfixed.

"Let me assure you that all pain and anguish is past now. Only brightness and joy await you. Stand up! Rise! It is time for me to guide you to the Place of Miracles."

The aliens had promised Logan immunity—and now he felt the numbing effects of the elixir draining from his mind. He was becoming fully alert again, aware of exactly what was happening to him and around him.

Not so with Francis and the others; their eyes were glazed; they moved sluggishly, silently after the guide. The drug had them in its grip. They would believe what they were told to believe, see what they were told to see...

Logan felt elated. Excitement roared through him. At last, after overcoming impossible odds; he was about to learn the secret of Godbirth.

THE GODBIRTH PROCESS

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North, by sailiet, down the river to lower Egypt as the blue-green snake of water swells into the Nile Delta. Then, on foot, to the hot, broken plain of Giza in the Valley of Kings.

Standing with the others in the colossal shadow of the Sphinx, Logan was startled to realize that the Great Pyramid of Cheops was gone. In his world, he had visited it as a boy, and was familiar with the site. Now the ground was bare—simply an area of dusting yellow sand. Perhaps, on this Earth, the Pyramid had never been built.

Other groups had arrived, other Chosen Ones—DS men from various parts of the world, each group of a dozen led by an identical guide robot. The group members were silent and from their numbed, listless attitude, it was obvious that they had all ingested the drug.

One of the robots, taking command, raised an arm for attention. "Let the tribute be revealed!"

The sand at the base of the Sphinx began sifting back from a wide slotdoor set into the desert; it slid open to reveal a rising platform of world treasures; here were dozens of massive, open-topped crates containing jeweled crowns, master paintings, rare coins, sculptures and artifacts from many countries. The late-afternoon sun caught their edges, icing them with gold, a spangled brightness that caused Logan to shade his eyes.

He marveled at these treasures. The Gods do all right for themselves, whoever they are! He glanced at Francis, who was standing near him, hands folded into his robe, eyes fixed on the robot leader. Waiting to jump when they pull the strings, Logan knew. No will of his own.

Logan shifted his attention back to the guide robot, placing his hands inside the sunrobe and dulling his expression. Remember to mimic the rest of them, he told himself. What they do you do!

The robot looked at the sky, spreading both arms in a wide gesture. "The Gods! They arrive in fire to

bear you to Nirvana! Kneel. Prepare for their coming."

With the others, Logan dropped to his knees in the warm sand.

"The sacred cloud descends!" announced the robot solemnly as the sky began to darken.

An immense cloud was spreading over the area, casting its shadow over all of them.

It's artificial, Logan realized. This is no "sacred cloud"—it's smoke, being piped down from a source above to set the scene.

Logan tented his hands in an attitude of prayer, following the example of the robots. A good act so far, he thought. The "Gods" should be here anytime now.

A roaring filled the sky, and Logan could see dozens of fiery forms descending through the smoke.

"Let the Gods be welcomed!" cried the robot.

The Chosen Ones bowed low as a host of helmeted figures burst through the cloud, alive with fire and light. The roaring increased, and the sand whipped up in swirling yellow ribbons.

Bent forward with the others in supplication, Logan had it figured: the "Gods" were wearing antigrav flying belts, and were costumed in light-jeweled uniforms set to dazzle the eye—particularly the drugged eye.

To Francis and the other mind-numbed DS men, these fiery figures would indeed appear godlike and miraculous.

One of the helmeted figures landed beside Logan and looped a flybelt around his waist.

"Nirvana awaits you!" announced the God-figure, and Logan felt himself lifted into the sky by the jetbelt, the God riding at his side, holding his arm, guiding their upward journey.

Each of the Chosen Ones was thus borne up by a helmeted figure while other "Gods" were attaching antigrav belts to the crated treasures on the platform.

Far above, a tremendous white cloud filled the sky, unmoving, frozen there in space, a visually impenetrable mass toward which they flew.

It doesn't move because it's not a cloud, thought Logan. Another trick effect—some type of artificial substance placed there to mask whatever's behind it.

The white mass flowed around them like heavy fog, so thick that Logan was unable to see the figure directly beside him; he felt weightless, bodiless, caught up in a white dream...

And then they broke through, into, calm blue sky, and Logan beheld the cloud's secret.

Nirvana.

A gigantic city, riding above the Earth in glittering majesty, of a size to stun the senses, its great domes golden with sun, its vast array of buildings rising in multilevel profusion, tiers and terraces and clustered towers, with swift sky vehicles threading them like silver-stitching needles.

They entered the sky city through a slidehatch in the lower section that housed Nirvana's immense solar engines. As a climbway took them to the city's interior, Logan was careful to maintain his pose of

drugged serenity. Around him, the other DS men moved, trancelike, to the orders of the helmeted God who now directed them.

At top level, they stepped onto a transbelt that took them to one of the domed buildings within the city's central core. Along their route, the streets were empty, which Logan found strange for a city of this size. Where were the people? Who lived here in these high towers? And who controlled it all? What was the source of "Godpower" behind this man-made Nirvana?

Inside the building, they were seated on a long wallcouch, the only item of furniture within the glass-walled, rectangular room.

Their guide removed his helmet, revealing himself as an ex-Sandman named Halpern. "I'm a God now," Halpern told them. "Soon you will also be Gods—once the ritual has been completed."

The man spoke in a leaden voice, with his words oddly spaced, and Logan realized that Halpern, like the others, was under a form of mind control. The blind leading the blind!

Logan glanced directly at Francis, who was seated farther along the couch, attempting to make eye contact—but the gaunt Sandman was blank-faced; there was no flicker of recognition in his fixed stare.

The chamber was darkening; descending alum curtains were cutting the light, closing out the glassed sides of the room.

"Now," said Halpern, "the time has come for you to meet our Master, who shall share Godpower with you, who shall initiate your birth as Immortals...the God of Gods...Sturdivent!"

In a shimmer of blue fire, a giant skull materialized at the center of the room. The bones took on flesh—and a face of awesome power shaped itself before them, a wide, ridged face with thrusting cheekbones, a down-slashed nose, and haunting eyes that blazed hypnotically from the floating head.

Tri-dim effect, Logan knew. This dramatic materialization was as phony as the cloud beneath the city, another clever display of theatrics designed to impart a supernatural aspect to the proceedings.

He puts on a good show, Logan admitted; a first-class act. And Logan knew, that if the aliens had not provided shielding, he'd be as mesmerized by all this as the other DS men around him.

The floating head began to speak in a deep, vibrating voice, electronically augmented to achieve maximum power. Each word vibrated directly into the minds of the assembled Chosen Ones.

"From this moment forward, you are, each of you, elevated beyond man, to the status of Immortals. I, Sturdivent, deem it so. I, Sturdivent, declare that you are now of the brotherhood of Gods. You are herewith reborn in my name!"

As he spoke these words, the blazing eyes, combined with his compelling voice, created a total hypnotic effect. Logan could see that every DS man in the room was under Sturdivent's control.

Their minds belonged to him.

The words flowed on: "Henceforth, you will serve me as my personal Gods here in Nirvana and on Earth as I bid you." A pause. The eyes raking, cutting into them. "Say that you will serve me—that you will obey!"

"We will obey," intoned Francis and the others.. Logan, too, repeated the words, but with an inner contempt for such blatant manipulation.

"You will serve only Sturdivent!"

"We will serve only Sturdivent."

"I am your Master in all things. I am your world. In me, you live forever. Through the power of Sturdivent!"

"Sturdivent...Sturdivent...Sturdivent..." A rising chant, as they repeated his name over and over in mindless litany.

Slowly, the Godhead dissolved, fire-flickered into darkness.

At last, Logan knew the ironic truth about Godbirth.

Godbirth was slavery.

That night each man was assigned a lifeunit within the core section of the city, in one of the central towers. The units were functional, but basically sterile—gray and lifeless. Their main feature was a full-wall screen, facing the flowbed, which, Logan quickly realized, served a dual purpose: to keep them under observation during sleep, and to maintain primary mental control. With its swirling shapes and shifting color patterns, the screen acted as yet another form of hypnosis.

He was exhausted. The flowbed took him, shaping itself to his body, soothing him toward sleep. As he closed his eyes, troubling questions formed: What is Sturdivent's ultimate plan in furthering the Godbirth process? He obviously controls the computers of the world, and has built this drug-based religion for his own purposes. But what, exactly, are these purposes, and how can he be stopped? What can I do, alone, against an entire city of mind-slaves?

Logan was finally here, at this second Earth's main powerhead, but he had no plan, no way to achieve his impossible mission.

The eyes of Sturdivent filled the screen; his voice was rich and lulling: "Sleep now...sleep...sleep..."

Logan allowed the voice to calm him, to ease him toward oblivion.

He slept.

WITH THE MASTER

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Morning sun was warm against Logan's face when a guide robot awakened him.

"You have been summoned," the robot said.

"Where...am I to go?" Logan asked, remembering to keep his voice at a dulled monotone.

"The Master has sent for you," said the robot.

After a needleshower and fresh clothing (softfit boots and bodysuit), Logan followed the guide to a small sky vehicle waiting on the tower's upper level.

"This machine will take you to the Master. Please step inside."

Logan entered, seating himself—and the skycraft took flight, soaring soundlessly above the wide, deserted avenues of the city.

I'm probably being watched, even here, alone in this thing, thought Logan. What does Sturdivent want with me? Maybe he knows I've been faking. This could be an arrest! What about Francis and the others? Have they been summoned?

The craft angled down, settling like a dropped leaf to the roof of a split-terraced building of impressive size at the city's core.

Logan exited to a belt that took him through an entrance door into a long hallway, smelling of cool metal, where another guide robot met him.

"Follow me," directed the robot.

He was led down a series of intersecting corridors that gave way eventually to a vast court. Logan marveled. Here, facing him in all its magnificence, was the missing Pyramid of Cheops having been taken up, stone by immense stone, from the desert floor in the Valley of Kings, to be assembled here for the pleasure of the Master. Here, too, Logan recognized Michelangelo's masterwork of David—one of countless world treasures collected from every part of the globe, the wealth of Earth, paid as tribute to the Gods, but actually taken into the personal possession of Sturdivent.

At least Logan was not alone here. Other DS men were filing into the courtyard, a dozen in all. Francis was among them, still under the drug, his face stony and remote. He looked at Logan with dead eyes; there was no rapport between the two ex-Sandmen.

A robot stepped toward them, indicating that they should follow.

Back to the corridors. Down a long slipway into the heart of the building. Along another hall. Very dim lighting. Silent. Sepulchral. A drifting odor of incense. An atmosphere befitting the God of Gods...

Then—a tall door filigreed in silver. It fell back with the faintest hiss of sound, and the robot nodded them forward. "He awaits you."

Were they to meet him now, the real Sturdivent—or would this be another of his clever manifestations?

They stepped inside.

The room sparkled with crown jewels, reflected in the gleam of oiled canvas along the walls, paintings by the giants of each era. Greek sculptures flanked a huge desk of veined marble. At this desk, this throne, sat the Godhead, the Master; the supreme ruler of Nirvana.

Sturdivent.

Not a God, a man. He stood to greet them, tall, massive of shoulder, deep-chested, his corded legs booted in silver, his tunic black velvet stitched in crimson, his fingers ringed in diamonds, a circlet of jade at his cat-muscled waist.

"Welcome to my city," he said, looking at each of them with eyes that possessed and dominated. Logan felt the heat of these eyes move across his body. Never had he faced a more compelling presence. A man, yes, but a God in bearing and stature.

Sturdivent directed them to be seated, in a half-circle facing him, in carved oak chairs of classic design.

The Master resumed his place at the desk, his eyes never leaving their faces. "In each grouping at Godbirth," he said, "I select a dozen unique individuals. This selection is carefully made."

His voice was deep, as magnetic as the man himself. It did not require amplification; the tone was riveting.

"You have, each of you, proven your worth as superior Sandmen—the pride of your Complex. Francis and Logan from California...Beaudry and Lef-Eorts from Paris...Hennessey and Collins from London...all of you, from Tokyo, Berlin, the Netherlands—outstanding in your areas."

Again he measured them with his eyes, and Logan felt the power of this man; it was as if Sturdivent could look into his soul, as if he could read Logan's deepest thoughts.

"From this city I now control the Central Computer," he told them. "The treasures of this world are mine—but they are not enough. To build power I have had to use subterfuge, remaining cut off from Earth, in isolation here. But this will soon end." His eyes continued to sweep them, hold them. "With my Gods, with you and others like you as leaders in this mass action, I plan to assume personal rule on this planet. The stage is now set. We will strike from the sky at key points around the globe, eliminating the nominal base of authority...DS...Federal Police...and after we have established total control I will suitably reward each of you. You will rule Earth with me."

Replacing one form of corruption with another, thought Logan. As Gant had hoped to do at Crazy Horse. Logan glanced covertly at the others. They were impassive. Nothing Sturdivent told them elicited an emotional response. They would obey his orders without question.

Sturdivent swung his gaze to Logan as he opened a drawer in the desk. He withdrew a heat-penetration handgun, placed the burnweapon on the desktop, and leaned forward.

"Take it," he said to Logan.

Logan walked to the desk and picked up the weapon, waiting for Sturdivent to speak again.

The Master rose and walked toward the group. "Any one of you must be prepared to die for me at a given command," he said. Sturdivent placed his ringed hand on the shoulder of a husky, thick-necked DS man.

"Stand up, Hennessey 4," he said quietly.

The big man obeyed.

Sturdivent turned, smiling, to Logan. "Burn him"

Logan found it almost impossible to maintain outer coolness, to appear indifferent in the wake of such an order.

Do it, he told himself harshly. Don't let your face betray you. Stay cold, emotionless. Don't think about it, just do it. Hennessey wouldn't be here, in this room, in this city, if he wasn't a notorious killer. He's Gunned dozens of runners—and he deserves to die.

You've killed before. You can kill again.

And if I don't, Logan told himself, I'll be the one to die. I'll never live to see my son...

Do it!

Hennessey regarded him with flat, opaque eyes. No fear. No recognition of impending death.

Logan raised the burnweapon.

And fired.

The heat charge struck the big man at shoulder level and the body exploded into ruin, toppling to the chamber floor. A thin gray smokemist hovered above the charred corpse as Logan calmly returned Sturdivent's weapon to the desktop.

"Thank you, Logan 3," said the Master, turning from the group and walking out of the room.

"You may leave now," said the guide robot.

Logan did not look back at Hennessey's body as they exited the jeweled chamber.

THE DREAM QUARTER

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That night: a celebration.

"To welcome you and the other new Gods," the unit robot told them as the skycity pulsed with light. The radiant domes and illuminated towers bathed them in brightness as a flowbelt took their group along a central passway toward the Palace of Celebration.

Logan felt numb; the kill he'd been forced to perform for Sturdivent left him depressed and enervated. He regretted killing Hennessey. I should have turned the gun on Sturdivent, Logan told himself; he's the one I must destroy to end this thing.

But the robots would have burned me down if I'd attempted it. His guards would never have allowed me to kill him. You don't shoot God with his own gun. I'll have to find another way to deal with him.

Another way...

At the Palace of Celebration—an open-court, triple-tier structure in the heart of the city—Logan was impressed with the number of "Gods" in attendance.

Sturdivent's plan for world domination seemed sure to succeed; here were gathered over a thousand ex-Sandmen, best of the best, each of them pledged body and soul to Sturdivent's service.

The new Gods were toasted with wine, and formally welcomed to Sturdivent's kingdom by the DS men of senior status. To Logan, the celebration was a travesty and a perversion—since all its participants remained in a mind-drugged state. They ate and drank and conversed in emotionless, mechanistic fashion. And in the midst of such a distorted celebration Logan's depression deepened.

Suddenly Francis was beside him, a wineflask in hand. He offered the wine to Logan. "Safe to drink it," he said quietly. "It's not drugged."

Logan was startled. "You're—"

"Normal." Francis nodded. "Their drug didn't affect me. I've been able to resist it. But I wasn't sure about you. Not until earlier today—when you killed the Sandman."

"How could you tell I wasn't drugged?"

"I was observing you closely," said Francis. "You hesitated for a fraction of a second just before you fired. No one else in that room would have hesitated. That's when I was sure of you."

"Did Sturdivent notice my hesitation?"

"I'm certain he didn't. He's too secure in his own massive egocentricity. After all, you did kill the man. That was enough for Sturdivent. Your act was foolproof."

"Well, you haven't been doing so bad yourself," said Logan. "I was convinced you were like all the others. How did you overcome the drug?"

Francis smiled. "We're both strong men, Logan—stronger than Sturdivent counted on. The elixir produced hallucinations, but I came out of them—just as you did. We're special, Logan. Two of a kind."

But, Logan responded silently, I had the shielding, and you didn't. How did you manage to do what no other DS man has done?

"We can work together," Francis was saying. "Since we're among Sturdivent's 'elite' we have much more freedom and flexibility than the others."

"How do you know Sturdivent isn't having us watched?"

"Oh, he is—but superficially. At night, in our units. Basic wallscreen observation. But we're free to roam the city. Without observation."

"You've done it...checked it out?"

"Absolutely. No one's bothered me or followed me or questioned me. We're safe from suspicion so long as we act like the others."

"What about the robots?"

"They've been programmed to leave us alone unless we violate a basic city-law," said Francis. "If we're careful, they'll be no problem." He looked hard at Logan. "The main thing is, Sturdivent must be stopped. He's out to destroy DS."

Logan's depression lifted; he was no longer alone. Francis, for whatever his reasons, was going to help him accomplish the aliens' mission. They would work together again as a team. And together, on this Earth or Logan's, they had been unbeatable. If Sturdivent could be stopped, they'd stop him.

"Do you have a plan?" asked Logan.

"First, we have to escape the city," said Francis. "And I think I've found a way out. If we can steal two antigrav units we can exit through the Dream Quarter."

"What's that?"

"At the far end of the city. Come on, I'll show you. But keep the act up. Move slowly. And don't say anything to me on the street."

"Right." Logan nodded.

They crossed the wide night city, riding the belts in silence, allowing the domed buildings to flow past them in luminous procession.

Logan had been mentally charting the days, sunrise to sunset, since the aliens had sent him to Earth.

He was running out of time. Less than twenty-four hours remained before he'd be abandoned here forever, with no hope of returning to his home world.

To Jess and Fennister and Mary-Mary, to the Wilderness People at Maincamp, I'm already dead, thought Logan. Lost in the sky, gone without a trace. He knew that Jess would be grieving for, him, desolate that Jaq would never know his father. Therefore, one thought was a twisting knife in Logan's mind, repeating itself over and over: I must get back to them...I must get back to them...

Francis stepped from the belt, Logan following. They waited in shadow until a unit robot had passed, then entered a squat copper-colored utility structure built over a complex cross-hatching of wide metalloid struts.

"These support the solar powerhousing," said Francis when they were inside. He tapped one of the struts. "This one leads directly to a booster cone that has a utility-repair exit port. Once we have the flybelts, we can leave through the port without attracting attention. Sturdivent will never know we're gone."

"When we're out—what then?"

"We alert central DS to the truth about what's going on up here," said Francis. "Once we've shattered the Godbirth myth, with a few squads of armed DS in skybugs we can knock out this city and finish Sturdivent."

Logan was uncertain. "And what happens to all the brainwashed ex-Sandmen?"

"They die, of course," said Francis flatly. "And the Dreamers with them."

"Dreamers?"

"That's why they call this area the Dream Quarter. Because of them."

"You know a lot that I don't," said Logan. "Who are these Dreamers?"

"Sturdivent's special slaves," said Francis. "Kept down here away from the other Gods. One of the robots told me about them."

"Are they ex-DS?"

"Maybe. Don't know."

"I want to see them," said Logan.

"But, Logan—"

"Do you know where they are?"

"Yes, but it might be dangerous," Francis objected. "We can't afford to risk—"

"I want to see them," Logan repeated.

They did not have far to go. The Dreamers were housed in a subterranean section of a building directly adjoining the main utility block.

"What about guards?" Logan asked in a whisper as they moved along a narrow metal walkway leading to the ventilation tunnel.

"According to the robot, they keep two. One inside with the Dreamers, and another outside the door. We can avoid them if we use the tunnel."

At the ventilation shaft, they loosened a wallplate, pried it off, and quickly climbed inside. The shaft tunnel was high enough to permit them to move rapidly through it in a running half-crouch.

"What we're doing is crazy, Logan. We should be using this time to prepare our exit from the city. Why are you so determined to do this?"

"Because I have a hunch about the Dreamers," said Logan. "I don't think they're DS men."

And they weren't.

"Women!" marveled Francis, peering down at the dreaming figures. The ventilation tunnel passed directly through the large, dim-lit Dream Chamber—affording Logan and Francis a clear view of the Dreamers below. Fifty of them. Lying in easy-breathing rows of five, their nude bodies in fetal position, supported by webbed straps. A delicate mesh of golden wiring encased each of them, from throat to ankles, in a pulsating electronic womb.

"I know those faces!" whispered Francis. "I've seen them before."

"On scanboards at DS." Logan nodded. "Runners who got away."

"So they didn't vanish after all!"

No, thought Logan, they're here—all of them—taken up to this skycity by Sturdivent's "Gods" to satisfy the Master's sexual desires. All of them...

Including Jessica!

She lay just below him, her body cocooned in metal filaments, her eyes closed in dreaming sleep.

A robot guard walked the rows, checking, adjusting body-contact points, making certain that each female was properly tuned to the machine that spun out endless electronic dreams.

Logan gestured Francis toward the exit.

Back on the walkway, Logan did not mention having recognized Jessica, but his face was tight-set; he knew he must find a way to release her. He could not abandon her here.

"Change of plan," he said. "We don't leave the city."

Francis stared at him. "But that's the only way! If we don't alert DS to what's happening up here—then

Sturdivent wins! He's ready to make his move."

"There's another way," said Logan. "We'll do it another way."

The two unit robots assigned to guard the Dreamers were Q-9 W2 models, the latest in the Q-Series Defense Machine development line. In outer appearance they were identical to earlier models: wide, reinforced steelloid bodies with featureless mirror-bright faces behind which computerized relays directed their actions. In overall design, however, they were much more sophisticated.

If what you told a robot didn't compute, Logan knew, you had to destroy it in order to move forward. And destroying a Q-9 at this point was out of the question. Logic, computable logic, was the best weapon.

The Q-Series machine at the entrydoor leading to the Dream Chamber asked Logan and Francis why they wished to enter.

"The Master has sent us," Logan told the robot. "We are to take one of the Dreamers back to his quarters under our personal escort."

"I have not been notified in advance," said the robot. "That is customary. I am always notified."

"In this case prior notification is not required," said Logan. "Not when one of the Elite Gods is given a direct order by Sturdivent. We were given that order and we are obeying it. Admit us."

Logic.

The robot admitted them.

Inside, as they moved toward the rows of sleeping women, the inner guard approached them. He had been cleared to deal with them automatically.

"I must warn you," he said, "that when a subject is removed from Dreamstate she must undergo a revival period of one hour in order to restore full physical and mental capability."

"Understood," said Logan.

"Might I then suggest," said the robot, "that you make your selection and return in one hour for her. She will then be totally receptive and functional."

"Sturdivent wants her now," said Logan. "The revival period must be bypassed. We are under direct orders to bring her to the Master without delay."

"Very well," said the machine. "But she will not be immediately responsive to sexual stimulation. You are willing to assume total responsibility for this?"

Logan nodded.

"Then please make your selection."

They moved along the rows, past the sleeping women, each young, firm-breasted, beautiful.

"This one," said Logan, touching Jessica's shoulder.

"Number 43." The guard nodded. "I shall disconnect, and bring her to you."

And as the robot began the process of dream-disconnection, Francis questioned Logan: "Why choose Doyle's sister? I thought you told me you weren't involved with her."

"Why not choose Doyle's sister?" Logan answered in a hard tone. "It makes no difference which woman we take. The idea is to reach Sturdivent."

"Your idea," Francis reminded him. "I liked mine better."

Logan realized he was pushing Francis. Ease off, he told himself; you can't afford to alienate him. This won't work without him. You can't do it alone.

Logan modified his tone, still speaking quietly but with the edge removed. "This will work. I know it will. Trust me, Francis."

"We'll see."

And he measured Logan with a long, hard glance.

Jessica was theirs now. Dressed erotically in a scented loverobe, wearing soft slippers, her hair loose and free-falling, she walked with Logan and Francis in hazed half-sleep, her mind still fogged, eyes unfocused. She did not speak as they guided her into the waiting sky vehicle.

Logan wanted to hold her, comfort her; to eliminate the mental barrier between them—but could do none of these things. To Francis, she was an escaped runner, marked for death after her use as a key to Sturdivent. I'll have to kill him to save Jess, Logan knew. But not yet.

Francis had been most resourceful in stealing the skycraft. By morning, when it would be missed, this would all be over, one way or another.

Logan appreciated the irony, in their situation: Sturdivent is using us; or thinks he is; I'm using Francis and Francis is using Jessica. And, behind it all, the aliens are using me...

Madness. A game of life and death, played across two worlds, with the final resolution at hand.

THE WOUNDED BEAST

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Inside, as the skycraft moved swiftly through the night city on the way to Sturdivent, Francis brought out two burnguns, handing one to Logan.

"Where did you get these?"

"Weapons storage," replied Francis. "Same place I got the skybug. You said we'd need weapons."

"I told you we'd take them from Sturdivent once we're there."

"Too risky. We might have to shoot our way in. I figure he'll be a tough man to reach."

"You're wrong," said Logan. "Here, in his little kingdom, he has absolutely nothing to fear. Who's going to

harm the Master? Every human in Nirvana is brainwashed, and no robot is going to attack him. And that's what will make my plan work. He's prepared, defensively, for a possible outside assault but we hit from inside."

"We just walk right in."

"Exactly." Logan put aside the burngun. "Jessica will get us to Sturdivent. And when we go in, we go in clean. No guns."

With a shrug, Francis took the burner from his belt and laid it beside Logan's weapon.

On the roof, as they left the skycraft, Sturdivent's chief house robot formally questioned their arrival. The robot was most polite to these Elite Gods, but he was confused. It was not uncommon that a Dreamer be brought to the Master for late-night pleasure, but the female was always accompanied by other robots. Gods did not accompany Dreamers. As the robot carefully explained, this was not customary.

"The Master personally directed us to bring this Dreamer to him," Logan said in a flat tone, keeping all emotion out of his voice. It was essential that the robot continue to believe them under basic mind-control.

"Not customary," repeated the house machine.

"It is his will and our duty," Francis added. "It would be most unwise if you did not take us to the Master. He would be greatly displeased."

The robot reacted to these key words, and the questioning ended. They were led into the main building, through a labyrinth of corridors, to the personal night chambers of Sturdivent.

Jessica moved with them, docile, easily controlled. Logan looked into her eyes, sought for a flicker of recognition there, but her expression remained vacant, tranquil, childlike. Her body was here, but her mind was with the machine.

I'll get you through this, Jess, Logan silently promised her; I'll get you back to Earth safely, and I'll smash the system that tried to kill you! The aliens picked me for this job, and I'll do it!

The house robot reached toward a metal stud set into a tall bronzed door. "I shall inform the Master that you have arrived."

"That will not be necessary," said Logan. "He is expecting us. Just open the door."

"The Master's door is never locked, but no one may enter unannounced. It is the rule, and the rule cannot be—"

The metallic voice ceased abruptly as Francis fired a prime heatcharge into the robot's back.

"I figured you might be wrong about the guns." Francis grinned. "I brought mine along."

Logan eased open the bronze door. "We could have made it inside without killing the robot," he said tightly. "Now we've lost our advantage."

Francis pushed Jess in ahead of him. "We can use her as a shield, let her take the first shot. Save us killing her later."

Logan glared at him, said nothing. He wouldn't let that happen, even if he had to—

Suddenly they were facing the Master.

Sturdivent stood in a thickly draped archway, in a jeweled nightrobe, a heatgun in his right hand.

Logan stepped toward him, smiling.

"What's happening here?" Sturdivent asked.

"We did not mean to startle you, Master," said Logan. "But we have brought one of the Dreamers for your pleasure. We mean no disrespect by our intrusion." Logan kept his face expressionless, spacing his words in a flat, mind-drugged monotone.

Behind Jessica, masked by her body, Logan saw Francis slip the burnweapon under his tunic. Had Sturdivent seen the gun?

No—he was totally intent on Jessica, devouring her beauty with his dark eyes. Now he swung his gaze to Logan. "A noise...I heard a loud noise from the corridor."

"The woman is still in partial Dreamstate," said Logan. "She stumbled and fell."

"We trust we have not disturbed you, Master," said Francis abjectly. "It is our intent only to further your pleasure."

And Logan followed up smoothly: "The only way we knew to express our gratitude for your generosity toward us. As Elite Gods, we used our authority with the robots to bring you this special gift. Were we wrong in doing so, Master? Are you angry with us?"

Their act was 'working. Sturdivent relaxed, slipping the gun into a pocket of his robe. His eyes were again on Jessica. "This female...is extraordinary," he declared softly, "I am pleased that you have brought her."

Sturdivent approached Jess, pulled her body close to his, running his hands over her full breasts beneath the loverobe. He tipped her chin up, kissed her deeply, his tongue probing her open mouth. She submitted numbly, mechanically, eyes clouded as Sturdivent began peeling the robe from her shoulders.

"You may go now," he said, without taking his eyes from Jessica.

Behind him, at a signal, Francis passed his burngun to Logan.

Aware of their silence, Sturdivent turned to them, anger flaring in his voice: "You heard me! Do as, I say!"

In one short, lunging step, Logan reached Sturdivent, jabbing the heatgun hard into the flesh of his throat. "No! You do as we say, you slimy sonofabitch!"

Francis plunged his right hand into Sturdivent's robe, pulling the burnweapon from his pocket.

Jessica watched all this with empty, dreaming eyes.

"All right now, Master..." and Logan used the word with bitter contempt, "you take us exactly where we tell you."

"And you take us now," added Francis.

Sturdivent was flushed with shock and anger; his face muscles worked spasmodically as his pale hands clenched and unclenched. He knew he could do nothing. They'd burn him down if he resisted. The hate in Logan's eyes told him that.

Francis turned on Jessica, leveling the burngun at her. "Time to die, runner!" He grinned at Logan. "And this time she won't vanish!"

"Wait." ordered Logan, stepping between them. "I want her alive...for now."

"But why?"

"To testify at DS. Against Sturdivent."

"We can do that. She's no good to us now."

"She's my responsibility," said Logan, keeping Sturdivent within gunrange as he spoke. "I say she goes with us."

Francis scowled. "I don't like it."

"There's no time to argue this," snapped Logan. "We know what we have to do. Let's do it."

Francis sighed, moved to Sturdivent, nudged him with the gun. "All right, let's move."

With a beamgun tight against his ribs, Sturdivent took them down a snaking series of corridors and work tunnels to their predetermined destination: the Central Power Control Unit.

All guards and technicians were dismissed without explanation. No one in Nirvana dared question the Master's direct order.

Logan slidlocked the chamber door, turning to face Sturdivent. The area crackled with harnessed energy; its main control board flickered and sizzled with electronic life. Logan could sense the heartbeat of the vast city within this humming room.

"You know what we want," he said.

"But I'm not a control tech," objected Sturdivent. "I can't do it."

"He's lying," said Francis. "He helped design this unit."

Logan placed the barrel of his weapon against Sturdivent's forehead. His tone was ice: "If you don't do as we say, you know I'll kill you."

Sturdivent's face was fear-beaded; his lower lip trembled. In resignation, he took over the primary control seat and began toggling switches.

"Tell us exactly what you're doing," said Logan.

"I'm doing what you asked bringing it to manual," explained Sturdivent. "Then I'll reverse the gravity drive and take the city down under personal control. It's not programmed for automatic descent."

"All right," said Logan.

"This is precise work...I'll need some help."

Francis took over the second control chair. "Tell me what to do," he said.

Sturdivent gave him detailed instructions, while Logan hovered at his shoulder, eyes intent on the descent dial. The city was now lowering toward Earth, dropping down through its artificial cloud cover, descending steadily toward the Valley of Kings.

Behind them, unobserved, Jessica was slowly backing toward the door. She had reached a mental anxiety state; her machine-dazed mind was telling her that something was wrong. I must help the Master! These men are trying to harm him. They must be stopped.

She edged back another foot, reached the door, released the slidelock—just as Logan pivoted toward her, shouting words she didn't understand. Jessica slipped through the door, crying out for the robot guards.

"Damn you, Logan! I warned you about her!" shouted Francis, twisting to fire at an advancing robot. The machine exploded under the heatcharge—as two more guards rushed forward.

Logan triggered the burner, bringing both of them down in ruin, but another robot was firing from the open doorway—and a laser charge sliced past Logan's head into the main control bank, setting off warning lights and alarms.

Francis managed to slidelock the door again, and now rushed to Sturdivent, who was fighting to maintain a stable altitude.

"How bad?" asked Francis.

"I think I can hold it," said Sturdivent.. "The gravity unit is still intact."

For Logan, it was over. He'd lost. No way to escape now, even if they got down safely. Whole city on alert. No way out. No way to save Jess. Robots at the door with beamers, cutting their way inside. Time running out.

Can't get back home. My Earth lost to me forever. Jaq lost. Never see Jess again. Mission a failure. Death waiting.

He could do one thing. He could see to it that this foul kingdom died with him; he could destroy the evil it represented, the perversion and power...

This one final thing he could do.

"Collision course!" he shouted, gun on Sturdivent. "Set it!"

"What?" Sturdivent swung away from the controls. "You can't—"

"I said kill it!" ordered Logan. "Crash the city!"

Francis looked stunned. "Logan, what are you—"

Logan didn't wait. He threw his body across the power deck, jamming the grav-control bar full-forward.

The room tipped crazily. Sirens and alarms shrieked at them. The three men were spill-tumbled into the forward end of the room like broken dolls...

An immense, wounded sky beast, the city angled sharply earthward. Shearing off the great head of the Sphinx as it scythed down, it slammed into the desert floor in a gigantic eruption of exploding buildings, flying metal, and sharded glass; towers collapsed; streets heaved upward, splitting and rupturing; mile-high sunshields folded into themselves, cracking and shuddering...as the giant skycity convulsed and

died.

SURPRISE AND TREACHERY

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Dawn.

A slow-rising wind. The Egyptian sun, tilting above the horizon in the Valley of Kings, striking fire reflections from the shattered sky ruin spread across the face of the desert.

No sound. No movement.

Sturdivent: dead, crushed by the city he ruled.

Logan: badly wounded, weakened by blood loss.

Jessica: unconscious, half-buried, lying on her back in the mounded sand next to a broken-bodied robot guard.

Logan staggered to her, cradling her head, smoothing sand from her cheek. Her eyes opened, and she knew him, sobbed his name, reached out to touch, gently, his blood-mapped face... The effects of the machine were gone; she was mentally strong once again.

"Logan!"

The word was a shout, a hard, angry sound. A voice Logan instantly recognized

Francis.

He moved away from Jess to face this gaunt-bodied killer, this man who would surely now, take his life, burn it away in the heatcharge from the leveled gun.

"It's ended, Francis... Sturdivent's dead. And the computers died with the city. DS can't exist without them. The system will disintegrate. It will die as the city died. It's all over."

Francis smiled. His clothing was torn; his skin was bruised; a slight cut bled along his left leg, but he was basically unmarked by the crash.

He was calm, certain of his moves, as Logan swayed in the rising heat, his blood pulsing black and steady into the sand.

"I don't care about the death of this system," Francis said. "No, Logan—it's your death I care about. They sent me to kill you and now I will."

"I don't—" Logan blinked at him. "Who sent you?"

"Them," said Francis softly. "The same ones—from the ship. I've been one step ahead of you all the way." He smiled. "How do you think I knew so much about the city... the Dreamers... the Central Power Unit...? They told me; they knew all about Sturdivent, from beginning."

"And... the drug... how you resisted it..."

"With their shielding—just as you did."

Logan stared at him. "Are you...from this planet?"

"No. Another Earth. A third parallel world. The aliens took me, gave me a mission, set me against you. Once you're dead, they'll take me back. They promised that. They'll come for me. At your death, I'm free!"

He raised the beamgun.

And died.

Burned where he stood by the robot guard's weapon in Jessica's hand.

Logan turned to her, trying to speak. His throat muscles moved convulsively. A blood film of weakness hazed his eyes. He stumbled toward Jess, a leg collapsing beneath him. He sprawled into the sand.

She reached out to touch him. "You've won, Logan. The aliens will come for you now. You did what they asked you to do."

He shook his head weakly. "Can't...can't leave...without you...love...you."

"I know," she said softly, holding him. "I know you love me—as I love you but you also love the other me as much or more. And she will bear your child...You must go back to her."

"Can't...leave you...to die."

"I won't die now. What you said about the system is true. It's finished...I'll survive." She kissed him, touching his fevered lips with hers. "But I'll never forget you. I'll always love you...always!"

"Jess...Jess..."

They embraced—but even as she held him he was changing, dissolving in her arms, losing his physical form.

They were taking him.

Jessica stepped back, tears in her eyes, speaking his name.

He was gone.

Only the blooded sand remained to mark his passage.

He became aware of light: concentrated, all-encompassing, as if the inside of his skull generated its own painfully sharp illumination.

Logan opened his eyes, blinked rapidly, squinting against the radiance.

The resilient surface under his body: medtable.

The subtly curving silver walls rising around him: starship.

The source of light, sunlike and intense: aliens.

We have brought you back, Logan. We have honored our agreement.

Logan sat up, slid from the table to stand facing them. Behind the shielding crystal, the three alien light-forms flickered and coalesced.

His wounds were healed, the clothes he wore, his own. He drew slow fingers across his face.

Restored, they told him. You are exactly as you were when you left your Earth.

"And...the other Logan?"

Thanks to you, he has been returned to his home planet. He retains life through your success.

"What about Jessica: I didn't want to leave her there...will she survive?"

We cannot read futures. But she lives now. And she is strong, resourceful. You need not concern yourself about her.

Anger began building within Logan; his sense of personal betrayal asserted itself. He had been lied to, cruelly tricked.

"You knew about Godbirth from the start—about Sturdivent, the city, all of it!"

Yes. We had that knowledge.

"And about the female runners—where they were taken and what was done to them..."

We knew.

Logan's face tightened. His voice was bitter with accusation: "You sent Francis to kill me!"

Of course. We do not deny this.

"Why did he wait? He could have killed me long before he tried."

That was part of our agreement with him. He was forbidden to kill you until the Godbirth process was completed, and until you were free of the city.

"That explains why he was so anxious to guide me through the ritual and then have me leave with him."

Precisely. In killing you, Francis would have achieved his mission. He would then have been safely returned to his world.

"You were monitoring three Earths, not two, and he came from this third Earth?"

Yes.

"And the other Francis?"

Dead, naturally. We destroyed him—just as we would have destroyed your duplicate had you failed. Logan paced the chamber, trying to control his rising anger. He turned back toward the tri-blazed light: "And Phedra?"

We arranged for her to betray you in Arcade.

"Kirov...Monte Carlo?"

We planted the desire for a Sandman's Gun in Kirov's mind. In order to make things a bit more difficult

for you.

"When you warned me to stay away from Jessica—you actually wanted me to see her, fall in love with her!"

True. The interaction between you generated pleasure for us.

Logan was trying to understand it all. Now he hesitated, confused. "But you weren't there. How could anything I did on Earth afford you pleasure here?"

We were there, Logan. When we altered your body we implanted certain highly sensitive monitoring devices beneath your skin surface. Thus, we were able to see through your body, to experience fear, anger, passion—just as you experienced them.

A pause. Then: We particularly enjoyed your encounter with the barracuda. Really quite stimulating.

Logan fought back the revulsion welling up in his mind. He felt totally betrayed; he had been grossly manipulated.

"My mission—whether or not I destroyed Sturdivent's grip on Earth—that never really mattered to you, did it?"

How one small planet is controlled, and by whom, is of no concern to us. In presenting your mission, we simply utilized your limited sense of human morality.

"If all this is so unimportant to you, why did you bother to bring me back!"

We had agreed to do so. And we keep our agreements.

The light-forms were fading; the crystal lost its radiance, began to break apart. Logan ran forward to the dissolving crystal, suddenly desperate. "You can't go now! You can't leave me here—in this ship!"

To have done all this, to have fought his way clear of Earth, and to end up here, on this starcraft, drifting the stars forever, was too horrible to contemplate! Surely, they were not this cruel, this indifferent to all that he had done...

The crystal was gone.

The aliens were gone.

Logan was alone.

Then, to calm him, to ease his darkest fears, their voice flowed into his mind: We keep our agreements. And he, too, began to change...to dissolve...

Home!

His world...his Earth!

On the lawn of his house near Maincamp. Sitting at the controls of the silent paravane, the food crates beside him, with all of it done—the honor of the Jamaican deeps...the fall from the cliffs at Monte Carlo...the entrapment inside the cave at Kilimanjaro...the drugged nightmares...the death of the skycity...the terrors and the hunts and the killing...the struggle to survive—all of it, over and done, with

him here, safe, back home at last with...

Jess!

She was walking toward him from the house.

Walking? Why isn't she running? Why is she so calm, so unemotional?

He was back from the dead, wasn't he?...home again after an impossible journey across space and time!

He jumped down from the control pod, taking her into his arms, heart racing, eyes blurred with tears. He couldn't speak; the words of joy were locked in his throat.

She looked at him oddly, head canted. "Why are you back so soon?"

"Soon? But I was—"

"You just took off and now you're back," she said. "I didn't even hear you land."

He stared at her, suddenly aware of the final irony—that time, as it is measured in one universe, does not exist in the next; that here, on this Earth, his whole incredible adventure had taken place in nontime!

"Why did you come back?" Jess asked, with a puzzled frown.

"For you." He smiled. "For you, and Jaq. I want you with me. Will you come with me?"

She smiled back at him. "All right...I'll make the flight to Chicago. I'll go with you." She looked down, placed a hand at her rising stomach. "We'll go with you." There was puzzlement in her eyes..."But are you sure there's nothing wrong?"

"No," he said, smiling foolishly. "Nothing's wrong. Not now!"

And Logan held her...them...Jessica and Jaq...close against his fast-beating heart.