

To Tom Doherty
A faithful friend is the medicine of life

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PEACEKEEPERS

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A TOR Book

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

shall beat their swords into
and their spears into pruninghooks:
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more.

-Isaiah, 2:4

Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?

-juvenal

How the past perishes is how the future
becomes.

-Alfred North Whitehead

Oki.-

j!1

archivist. My task
International Peace-
happened this

n this

put dow
recollections, these
behind the

can't. It's

there. "

so

Literally

together

IGENS:

Year 12

THEYVE appointed me the

is to write the official history of the
keeping Force. I'm doing that, but what
morning

convinced me that I should also

unofficial narrative, these personal
tales and anecdotes that are the story
Peacekeepers.

of something as important as the
doesn't start at one single point. It

to say, "The history begins here and not

when the account involves so many people,

as do the origins of the Peacekeepers.

strands of individual lives are woven

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under the hand of fate to form an intricate, del'icate

tapestry. (I like that! "Woven together under the hand of fate." I'll have to work that into the official history somehow.) Anyway, it's literally impossible to select a definite, specific time and place for the origin of the IPF. Easier to pinpoint the fall of the first drop of rain in a summer storm, or the exact moment when a youth becomes a man.

There- were many origins for the Peacekeepers, and how I'm going to select a starting point for the official history is a problem that I'll be tussling with for some time to come. But I know where to start this unofficial chronicle: with this morning's events.

12

helmets, grumbling and
rays of the morning sun
watched them from the window
commandant had loaned me.
men and women, hardly
bearing replicas of the bgs
shoulders of their fatigues. No
on the parade ground
morning's exercise was me.
little hike into the mountains
official IPF archivist.

..... tiques with full webbing and
muttering as the slanting golden
filtered through the trees. I
of the office that the local
They were so young! Twenty-four
out of their teens, each of them
of their nations on the left
two Rags were alike.
None of the youngsters out there
knew it, but the reason for this
We were all going to take a
. ADF the edification of the

.3

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it was no earlier than they usually assembled for field training, or so I was told. But this morning they all seemed to know that something special was in the air. No one had told them, but like soldiers of every age, they sensed that today would be different.

The master sergeant, face of granite and eyes of flint, snarled them to attention. Twenty-four men and women snapped to. The sergeant inspected them briefly but thoroughly, his normal ferocious scowl even darker than usual. Satisfied that his charges met his uncompromising standards, he saluted to the shavetail lieutenant, and reported the squad ready for duty.

The shavetail marched stiffly to the geodesic dome of the administration building, where I stood by my window watching. For long minutes the squad stood in rigid silence while the sun climbed above the lofty shade trees and began broiling the parade ground. The monkeys chattered and jeered at the cadets from the safety of their leafy perches

A single knock on the flimsy door of the office. I turned as the shavetail opened it and said crisply, "Sir, Director-General Hazard is ready to inspect the squad."

I nodded and reached for my cap with my prosthetic hand. The

Shavetail stated at it for a moment, realized what he was @ doing and turned hi

s eyes away. The hand works fine, @ and I have even grown accustomed to its feel. Marvelous how they were able to link its electronic circuits to what's left of the nerves in MY arm.

I had met Hazard twice before, and he greeted me indicatio

kindly, shaking my hand without the slightest n that it bothered him. But he seemed preoccupied, his mind elsewhere, his eyes clouded with apprehension. I realized J that his thoughts were projecting simultaneously forward into the future and back into the past: to the destination of this day's little trek and to the reason for its existence. I felt sorry for Hazard-, this would be a difficult day for the man.

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of us officers, in our dress uniforms of sky-blue with assembled in the administration building's took the plunge into the jungle heat into a natural formation: Hazard and the of this training base in front, two captains and the shavetail and I bringing up the rear. grown a beard since I'd last seen him: cut almost as severely as the military crop on couldn't help musing that he kept the beard so that everyone could see @ the diamond- ia of the IPF directorgeneral on his high

the squad casually-, none of the fierce the master sergeant. His bearded face looked benign. Then he took up a position pre-front center of the squad and ordered them to I was already sweating, and I saw that the faces

were glistening.

C dates of the International Peacekeeping
addressed them. His voice was rough
someone who has a bad cold or worse. It made
about the condition of his health. "It is my
announce that you have been selected for a rare
members of the first graduating class of the
will be allowed, this day, to view the crater
nuclear bomb exploded."

mm and woman of the squad squirmed
unhappily. I could feel them struggling to suppress moans
Of MisM. The crater was a sacred place for old men like
Directoi-General Hazard. To the cadets it meant only
a
101Wbard climb in sweltering tropical heat and the distinct
PmWbility of a radiation dose.

You see, an event of crucial importance to the world had taken place near the city of Valledupar about four Years earlier, the kind of event that was supremely influential in the development -of the Peacekeepers, but win

never find its way into the official history. (Except maybe as a brief footnote.) I was fit there to participate, of course. I was on a ship in the Arabian Sea where I court"

India anydof

the story
each site in
one. If you'll
me a li imagination, what
happened must have been very much like
this. . .

SENORA

Misericordia Year 8

LAATH smells worst in the tropics.

Cole Alexander wrinkled his nose at the stench of decaying bodies. They lay everywhere: men, women, infants.'@@Sloating in the fetid sun, sprawled in the gutted miserable hovels, swarms of flies black wounds, beetles already digging into sun hung high in the pate sky, steaming tropical forest that surrounded the dead Alexander, felt his own body juices baking out of

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him, the damp beat soaking him like a chunk of meat
thrown into a boiling pot. -

Our Lady of Mercy, Alexander thought, hot bile burning
in his throat. What a name for the town.

"You see how they slaughter my people." Sebastiano
Miguel de Castanada made it a statement, not a question.
Mi sericordia had been a tiny nothing of a village

I

stuck in

the jungle at the base of the mountains, an hour's hard
drive up the rutted, twisting road from the city of
Valledupar. Now it was a burned-out ruin,, the shacks that
had once been houses blackened and smashed the inhabi-

I

tants machine-gunned down to babies in their mothers
arms.

0

"Why did they do it?" Alexander asked.

Castanada pointed to where his soldiers had spread a few
armloads of trinkets on an aluminum camp table. Other
soldiers were still searching the village, stepping over

i

grotesque corpses with staring eyes an-d silently screaming

.T

mouths to hunt for the villages hidden treasures. The

III

soldiers wore crisp khaki uniforms. They all carried auto-

:.]

matic rifles slung over their shoulders. But they seemed

r ,

unconcerned. The dead bodies did not bother them. Nei-
ther, thought Alexander, did they seem worried about
being attacked.

Castanada led Alexander to the table. It was covered
almost completely with slim glass knives, miniature quartz
statues, decorated ceramic vases and other dusty artifacts.

"The villagers lived on grave robbing," he said. "The
men went up into the mountains, where the old Inca graves
must be. When the drug dealers made their headquarters
up there, they did not want these villagers bothering them.
So three days ago they came down from the mountains and
wiped out the village."

Alexander studied Castanada's face. -He showed no sign
of anger, no hint of fear or remorse or grief. Castanada was
a handsome man in his early forties, broad brow, strong

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mouth tanned skin. His jet-black: hair was brushed
it back; his eyes were the color of his native soil when
ons first turn it over for tilling after the winter rains.
-ras turning to fat, his slight body becoming round
his skin getting that waxy look that comes from
He wore an off -white silk suit, light for the
conservatively cut, precisely tailored, ex-
ive. As befits the man who is not only
defense but the eldest son o el presidents.
heat, Cole Alexander wore a rumpled suede,
his open-necked olive-green sport shirt, stained
of perspiration. A broad-brimmed cowboy
at a slight angle on his head. He was much
Castanada, and may have been slightly older
minister or slightly younger.. It was
to tell from his face. His hair was curly and thick,
youthfidly handsome, but it

cruel jester's smile. A sneer,
seemed to look out at the world
and contempt at the antics of
fellow human beings
You I ve got a serious problem, all right," Alexander
said. "But I don't think I can help with it."

YOU

"I quite understand, Sefior Alexander," said Castanada,
Sounding oily and at the same time slightly irritating.
have Wmdy told my father that I would not be surprised if
You ieffised to help us."

"Your father is beset by many problems," Alexander
rV144 choosing his words carefully. His voice matched
his expression: not quite harsh yet certainly
not

norteame?lcano tenor with a hint of sharp
my best to help him, but ... " Castanada
arms in the gesture of a man resigned to
inhuman odds.
looked around at what was left of the village

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as the soldiers continued to search it. The drug dealers had done a thorough job. Not even a dog, was left to whimper. The table where they stood was upwind, at least. The smell wasn't so bad here.

"They have created an army of their own, up in those mountains," Castanada said, his voice trembling slightly. "An empire within our borders!"

"Let me try to explain," said Alexander, "why this kind of problem is not in my usual line of operations."

"It is too dangerous for mercenaries, I understand."

Alexander smiled a crooked smile. "You must enjoy fishing in these mountain streams.,.,,

Castanada smiled blandly back at him.

"41MY people work sort of like the Peacekeepers," Alexander said, "We're basically a defensive operation. We

pro-

tect, -we do not attack."

1.

Please do not fence with words, Seftor Alexander.

Your. . ." Castanada groped for a word. Your organ . . - zation is a mercenary force. You fight for pay.

"We fight for Pay," Alexander agreed. "But only for those who are under attack. Only for those who can't defend themselves."

"But we are under attack! Look around you! The drug dealers have assassinated members of the government! We are at war! A life-and-death struggle!,,

"But surely your Army. .

-lkiddled with corruption." Castanada lowered his voice. "I am ashamed to admit it, but it's true.-

"Then You should call in the Peacekeepers.

"We have tried, seflor. They are sympathetic but unwilling to help us. They will only intervene if there is an overt attack across an international border. They exist to prevent wars, not to act as police."

Alexander nodded slowly.

"We have nowhere else to turn, I fear for my father's life. For the lives of my wife and children.-

*-PEACEKEEPERS 11

But it's still not the kind of operation that, can undertake."

money you are concerned about.

raised one hand. "No I'm sure we could come terms. It's just not the kind of operation we

turned and took a few paces away from his chubby hands clasped behind his back. As if the empty air, he said, "You know that Jabal th them now, up in those mountains.

muttered, "Shamar.-

back to face the norteamericano, Castanada to our intelligence, he has taken charge operations."

the nuclear bombs?"

certain, but I 9 reatly fear that he has brought soil."

Alexander repeated in a barely audiblewhis-

Yanqui, Castanada saidto himself. I do indeed mountain -streams. 1, know very well how to and how to reel in even the most cunning

ly bland and

Yet even that thread of a beginning had" its own beginning, on the final day of what has come to be called (optimistically) the

Final

]T
ji

JERUSALEM.-
Year Zero

HE sky was unnaturally black. Not even the high desert sun could burn through the sooty clouds. The streets of the city were empty. Not a car, not a bus, not even a dog moved as the hot winds seared alike the ancient stones of the Western Wall, the domes and minarets of medieval churches and mosques, the steel and glass towers of the modern city.

In the middle of the dark afternoon a limousine, a Rolls-Royce at that, careened through the city's bare streets like a black mouse racing through a maze, losing its way and doubling back again, searching, searching, searching. Finally the limo sniffed out the American embassy and stopped at its barricaded gate.

12

I MI

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out: Cole Alexander-dressed in a Summer-business suit stained dark with sweat and only thirty-six hours of travel can do. His

pul
led loose several shirt buttons undo
brown, almost black, his face set in a
of anxiety.
on the buzzer at the gate, ducked back into the
the keys from the ignition, then banged o
n
again. He squinted up at the dark sky, then
urn
th b against the buzzer and left it there until
voice finally scratched from the intercom
the buzzer. Alexander spoke Proudly and
in 'two minutes a Marine guard, his own
uniform almost as sweaty and ruffled as
suit, dashed out of the building and unlocked
gate-
and the young Marine sprinted up the drive-
the main entrance to the building. At a
ust inside the entryway, an additional pair of
Of them a sergeant, examined his passport
explained:
are here. I've got a private plane at the
ng to evacuate them."

ne. His

'A private plane?' The sergeant, a tough-looking black, Alexander an incredulous stare.

4%01,e

'y talks, Sergeant," said Alexander. "Even in the middle of a war.,,

sai

He' driving a Rolls, Sarge," id the Marine who had
lopene6 the, gate, with awe in his voice.

The Sergeant shook his head. The expression on his face
said, You're crazy, man. But he told the other private to
@e@txander to his mother, who was among the
the embassy's basement.

metal detector built into the

It screeched angrily.

hailed a compact .38

automatic from the waistband of his trousers. "Bought it in New York just before I bought the jet. It's registered, all nice and legal."

The sergeant hefted the shiny pistol in his big hand. "You ever fired it?" he asked Alexander.

"Haven't had the tim6."

"I'll hold it for you here." He placed the gun carefully in a drawer of his desk.

The basement was bia and dimly lit; only a -few of the overhead fluorescent lights were on, casting almost ghastly bluish light on the people crowded together there. They were mostly women and small, children, Alexander saw. Some old men. Cramped together. Sitting on a weird assortment of chairs scavenged from the floors above, huddled on cots, makeshift curtains draped here and there for privacy, staring at the ceiling, whispering to one another,, babies crying, old men coughing, worried faces looking blankly at nothing. The basement was jammed with people. Their voices made a constant background murmur of anxiety and tension. The place was hot and stank of sweat and cigarette smoke and cooking oil. And fear.

The waiting room, to hell, Cole Alexander thought.

Amanda Alexander was small, a slim little girl with a sweet smile who had grown to a petite white-haired woman who could always charm any man she met. Seeing her in that crowded basement shelter, with the stench of hundreds of bodies pressed too close together, Cole realized with a shock that his mother was old: her face was webbed with tiny wrinkles, there were dark lines under her eyes, she seemed haggard and worn-out.

"Don't look so shocked," she said after he had kissed her cheek. "You haven't seen me without makeup for years."

Then she smiled and he felt all right again.

"I've come to take you and Dad out of here," Cole said.

"That's not necessary. I'm fine right here."

"I've got a jet sitting at the airport . .

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both seemed genuinely surprised. "How did

YOU

"Sold the business to Palmerson; he's been year now. Spent a chunk of it on the plane. a pilot on such short notice so I flew it, come on, before somebody steals it."

s not -here," she said. "They sent him to Tel State Department," Cole muttered.

fly to Tel Aviv and pick him up there. Pho I ne first."

just go, " his mother said, "simply because his wants him to. He's got a job to do. He's got throwing nuclear bombs around, MOM! Y611 got to get out of here, to where it's safe!" bomb Jerusalem. General Shamar has given Moslems revere the city just as much as the forced down his temper. This was his mother with. "Mom, they've already nuked Haifa The fallout . . . 11

leaving, Cole. Your father can't leave, and I him."

the black Marine sergeant picked his way
overcrowded basement toward them.

r," he said, so softly that Cole could
against the background murmurs. "'Fraid
news, ma'am. We just got word, Tel Aviv got

der stared at the sergeant as if she could
his words.

strike?" Cole asked, his voice choking-
sergeant nodded.

.11

reached out and touched the Marine

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sergeant's arm. 'That that doesn't mean that- eve I ry- i
0 A.

ne ... everyone in the city's been ... killed doe& it?" %
No," the black man admitted. -'We don't know how
bad the damage is or how many casualties.

Bound to be
plenty, though. Thousands. Tens of thousands, at least."

Cole grasped his mother's wrist. "We're getting out.
Now.\$'

"NO!" She pulled her arm free with surprising strength.
may

"Your father be all right. Or he may be hurt. I'm not
leaving. Not until I know."

"But that's. .

"I'm not leaving, Cole."

So he stayed with her in the basement of the U.
embassy building in Jerusalem.

It had started as another round of the eternal Middle
East wars between Israel and its neighbors. In three days it
escalated into a nuclear exchange. By the time four ancient
cities had been blown into mushroom clouds, the two great
superpowers decided to intervene. For the, first time in
more than fifty Years, the Soviet Union and the United
States acted in harmony to end the brief, brutal confl a-
agr
tion that is now called the Final War.

The Americans and Soviets imposed a cease-fire and
ringed Syria, Israel and Lebanon with enough troops, ships
and

planes to make it clear they would brook no resistance.
The U. Navy moved in force into the Persian Gulf while
Russian divisions massed on Iran's northern border. With
Damascus and Tehran both reduced to radioactive rubble,
with Haifa and Tel Aviv similarly demolished, the fighting
stopped.

That was when General Jabal Shamar, supreme com-
mander of the Pan-Arab Armed Forces, sent a special
squadron of cargo planes to Jerusalem. The lumbering
four-engined aircraft circled over the city at an altitude of

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meters, cruising I azily through a sky
to turn blue again after three days of darkness.
women cautiously came out into the streets,
the brightening sky and the glinting silvery
gently above. They were obviously not
not the sleek angrylfalcons painted in camou-
and browns that hurled deadly eggs at the
were fat clumsy cargo carriers, their
num gleaming cheerfully against the clear-
er that the Planes spewed from their cargo
SO radioactive that every crewman in the
on died within two weeks. S

o did most of the living
res@ in Jerusalem: men, women, children, pets, rats,
trees curled ir
the' brown leaves and died.
Jew alike bled at the pores and died in
Citizens of the city, refugees who had

safety, tourists trapped by the war, news
ing in the hotels, foreigners on duty in
they all died. Two and a half million of them.
cease-fire had been declared.
into the city by the Americans
few. Cole Alexander was
He was young, enough and
a terrible ordeal of radiation
although it left his hair dead white and triggered a
leukemia that the doctors said could be "con-
Wled" but never cured. It also left him sterile.
: His mother did not survive. Cole watched her die, inch
W4=uciating inch, over the next seven
weeks. She finally
-P" -UP the, fight when the news came that her husband,
-7 lWes father, had been vaporized in the nuclear bombing
@7*Tel Aviv. The American consulate there had been
*01'CaUy at ground zero.

The Final War led to the Athens Peace Conference, and that's where I suppose I'll of the figure of

ATHENS.-

90@ Year I

HE was a very large man, very grave, and so respected in his own land that not even the ultraconservatives ever had the nerve to make jokes about his name.

Harold Red Eagle was considerably over two meters tall. in his young manhood, when he had made a national reputation for himself as a lineman for the Los Angeles Raiders, he had weighed nearly 130 kilos. Even so ' he could chase down the fleetest of running backs. And once Red Eagle got his hands on a ball carrier, the man went down. No one broke his tackles.

The Raiders had been known to be a hell-raising team of undisciplined egotists. Red Eagle changed that. He spoke barely a word, and he certainly gave no speeches. He

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antics. He merely set an
9* exhorted. his teammates to self-sacrifice nor be.
them for their macho
00@ off the field and especially on it, that no man
kaore or resist. He made the Raiders not only into
P@s, but hallowed heroes.
was merely a means, to an end for Harold Red

of

an impoverished son the proud Comanche
college football was the key to an education.
al football paid for law school and provided the
that established him in a lucrative practice m' his
Oklahoma.

When he retired from his athletic career, the governor of
date appointed him to the bench. (A rather neat pun
you think?) A few years later he became the
judge ever to serve that district. A canny,
nated him to the U. Supreme Court, and
enate confirmation hearings not a word was
this Amerind, whose massive dignity could
talk-show hosts into reverent awe.

Eagle was appointed by the next President (a
Of the previous one), to be part of the
to the Athens Peace Conference. It
the first step toward the International
Force was made.

.The moment was dramatic. Representatives of Israel,
all demanded reparations for the damage to
other Moslem figures warned of the need to
for the Palestinian refugees. The Western
Americans, terrified of renewed nuclear
that the belligerent nations be disarmed

for an indeterminate time by an international
would enforce the peace. The Soviets and
suggested the conference be enlarged to
every nation's nuclear arsenal.
patching together a peace in the Middle East,
was threatening to tear itself asun-

der over the old Cold war issues separating East and West.

That was when Red Eagle rose to his feet.

All talk around the wide green-baize circular table ceased. The Comanche loomed over the other delegates, his deep brown face solemn with the racial memories of innumerable wars and slaughters.

"It is time," he said slowly, "that we end this Cold War.

Nothing of peace can be accomplished until we do."

It was as if he had trained a powerful lion on them all.

The delegates-politicians and diplomats

sat, for the most part, in silent awe as Red Eagle calmly enunciated the Plan that he had been shaping in his mind over the many weeks of the conference's fruitless wrangling.

His Plan was simple and breathtakingly daring. East and West were at that time both deploying heavily armed satellites in space, each claiming th

em to be purely defensive in nature. Let a true international peacekeeping force be created, said Red Eagle, to operate both systems of satellites - one to defend and protect every nation on Earth against attack by any nation.

Further, let this peacekeeping force be empowered to act immediately against any kind of aggression across any international frontier. Give it the weapons and authority to stop wars as soon as they are started. Impossible! countered the delegates. But over the next several weeks they listened to Red Eagle and a host of technical and military experts. Yes it would be possible to observe military buildups from surveillance satellites in Orbit. Yes, defensive technologies could produce highly automated systems that are cheaper and more effective than massive offensive weaponry.

But who would control such an international force? the delegates asked. How could it be prevented from turning into a world dictatorship?

"The problem is war," Red Eagle told them. "Create a Peacekeeping force that will prevent war. No nation need

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if it does not care to do so. Whatever goes on a nation's borders will be of no concern to the peacekeepers. The peacekeepers will acquire no nuclear weapons of mass destruction of any kind. Their function will be to prevent attacks-nuclear or --across international borders.

of Red Eagle's personality greatly multiplied of his ideas, slowly, grudgingly, the delegates came to accept the notion that an peacekeeping force could be created. It might

command of the force to Red Eagle, of as naturally, he politely refused. (The man they

called to, unfortunately, was a politician a nonentity who ignored the warnings desperately unprepared for the revolt that the IPF. But I'm getting ahead of myself.)

months of deliberations the Athens Peace concluded with the signing of the Middle East important, a week later the nations met on is, before the ancient splendor of the forum the document that created the International Force.

ended on a public note of optimism and of cynicism. Perhaps this was the way to from nuclear holocaust, the delegates told But none of them truly believed it. It was a No one expected peace to last in the No one expected the newly created IPF to scourge of war. tried to take a step in the proper direction. media reporters seemed impressed. of them offered a word of criticism or men, that General Jabal Shamar, the man responsible for the Jerusalem Genocide, had not yet been

I joined the IPF the first day of its existence, I'm proud to say. At first, they put me in an intelligence billet. That experience will serve me well now that I'm an, archivist; I have had access to electronic intercepts and other forms of snooping that would have made J. Fklgar Hoover tremble with joy. Most of these snippets can't be used in the official history the IPF, where every source must have its own footnote. But I cm use them here. Happily.

COW)

HE General Secretary eased his tired body tub. His valet made cer- safely settled in the steaming that started the whirlpool

and sighed. It had

.-.The General Secretary leaned back

his valet was

A@@ a Ion& difficult meeting. He saw that

rivers running down his face, dark stains shirtfront.

your shirt, Yuri," he said, over the gurgling of the agitated water. "It's all you, sir," replied Yuri. But he made no move to

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Always the General Secretary. If I asked Yuri to dash out into the snow and into

the path of an Oncomin ,g tank he would do it without hesitation. But he will never willingly bare his chest in my presence.

The steaming hot water bubbled and frothed, relaxing the tensed muscles Of the General Secretary's back and legs, rm getting old, he thought. The Kremlin ages a man. The responsibilities ...

He leaned his head back against the soft padding and smiled up at his valet. Yuri looks ten years younger than I. Still has his hair, and it's still as dark as it was twenty years ago. No- responsibilities. No worries.

-Yuri, my old friend, what do you think of this International Pbac@keepin glForcer'

"You signed the treaty in Athens." The valet had to raise voice to be heard over the whirlpool.

6SYM.

It was quite a moment, wasn't it? The Parthenon is one Of the most beautiful buildings in the world."

"Too delicate for me. I Prefer something more solid, like St. Basil's..."

"I don't intend to argue architecture with you! What do you think of this Peacekeeping Force?"

"MY son wants to join it."

The General Secretary felt his brows rise. "Little GregDr?"

"He is almost twenty-five, sir," said Yuri with some gentleness. "A lieutenant in the Guards."

Twenty-five, thought the General Secretary. The length of time of a generation.

"Will it be Possible for him to join the international forcer' asked Yuri. 'fit won't be a mark against him on his record, will it?" ll

"Of course not, the General Secretary replied almost absently- "Wewant loyal Russians in the IPF. It is necessary.st

PEACEKEEPERS 25

will'disband the Red Army?"

Secretary felt astonished. "Whatever gave people say ... there are so many rumors, of them are the same."

agreed to reduce the size of our armed according to a fixed timetable. We will also nuclear weapons; again, in keeping with a The Americans and Chinese an I d all the same. There will be teams of internation- ,Yuri.

will be on the inspection teams,"

Secretary. "Our own people will watch dismantle their bombs." trust them?"

smile, "Yes, of course. As much as they trust Secretary grew serious again. "My old have been many changes in the Soviet Union your Gregor on my knee."

Yuri agreed.

lived through turbulent times."
been a great leader, sir. The Soviet Union-
people-are richer and stronger because of
to flattery, the General Secretary asked,
happier?"
answer was so swift and certain that the
knew his valet believed it to be the truth.
lower in the bubbling water until it was up
He could feel the knots in his neck and
the tub, silent, stoic, as enduring as the

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endless steppes and the birch forests. Finally he asked,
Once we have taken apart all our hydrogen bombs. .
what will we do with the pieces?"

The General Secretary smiled lazily. "Why, put them
thi

back together again, Of course. You don't nk that I would
leave the nation defenseless, do you?--
to some embellishments in the
account, although each word
to the two Russians comes
out of the Security Agency's
I can't use such dramatic
in the official history, it's got to be
and nonthreatening. Twenty
s will sit in judgment before. it
see the light of publication. I
to think that my name might be on
it.'

What follows is another (slightly
embellished) transcript, this one from a
videotape. As I said, being in IPF
intelligence was a good experience for me,
although, at the time, I fought and argued
and famed through the system until they
transferred me to an active unit. Which is
ho* I lost my,hand, of course. Young men
want glory. They never think about the
price.

WASHINGTON

Year, I

wouldn't trust those Commie sumbitches if Jesus Christ himself came down from heaven and pleaded their case!"

"But

that's the beauty of the system: we don't have to trust them. We don't have to give up anything unless they do."

The three men sat at one end of a long polished table in a conference room in the Old Executive Building, that rambling pile of Victorian stonework that, stands next to the White House. The conference room had old-fashioned luxury built into it: high cofferwork ceiling, Oak parquet floor, gracious long windows, the kind of spaciousness that modern office buildings are too efficient to afford.

29

PEACEKEEPERS 29

Zachary, chairman of the Foreign Relations chewed on his tongue for a moment, a habit he lifted when his first heart attack ended his smoking-oxworth, the committee's minority leader, silent-:Zachary would bite the damned tongue off and it.

is B. Zachary was rake thin, his brittle-looking led with liver spots, his wispy white hair hanging 7,,Oead down to the collar of his baggy suit. He had@ heavier before each of his heart attacks; lost each one, only to gradually fatten up and have,

He was only a month out of the hospital
A waddling dewlap of grayish skin hung
For a dozen years now he had chaired the
Committee, wielding as much power
policy as most Presidents did.

knew that only death would remove this
stubborn old fool from his powerful
Louisiana political machine would reelect
for as long as he lived. As far as Foxworth
that had already been about one decade too

was known to be the best poker player on
His face never betrayed him. He smiled
when he was angry or fearful or making
to drive the knife into an oppo-

build of the health-food athlete:
the middle, but otherwise taut and fit.
swimming. Horseback riding back home in
man in the conference room, seated between
wore the blue uniform and four stars of
general. A former fighter pilot, former astro-
first black man to be appointed chief of staff,
held degrees in engineering, management

30 Ben. Aova

ions. Of all the braidland decorations
and commu

heape nicati

d upon him, though, he treasured most highly the
two kills he had made against Nicaraguan MiGs during the
Central American War.

"Lemme ask you, General," said Senator Zachary, his
dewlap quivering with emotion, 'Vy'all trust the Russkies
to, live up to this treaty they signedr,
,We signed it tool'@ Foxworth snapped-

"But @ we ain't @ ratified it, Senator"' Zachary leveled a
forefinger at the younger man.

Foxworth turned to General Madison, smiling with his
lips only.

"I don't trust the Russians, no, sir said the general.
"And I certainly don't trust this international committee
that's supposed to protect us against nuclear attack. I don't
like the idea of turning our SDI satellites over to them. I
don9t like it one bit."

'Zachary bobbed his head and sneered at Foxworth.

At that moment the corridor door opened and the
ponderous figure of Harold Red Eagle filled the door
frame. He wore a business suit of dark blue with a maroon
tie knotted precisely.

"Forgive me, gentlemen, Red Eagle said in his deep,
slow voice. It was like the rumble of distant thunder, or the
suppressed growl of a restless volcano. "I was delayed at
the Court. The computer was down for about an hour."

From the size of him, Foxworth thought, he may have
broken the computer merely by laying his hamhock paws
on it.

Red Eagle pulled a chair out and sat carefully on it, as if
testing to see if it could hold his weight. Suddenly the head
of the table was where he sat, and the three others turned to
face him.

"I understand that you have grave doubts about the

PEACEKEEPERS 31

@Pegcekeeping Force I have come here to
fe

questions, if I can, and relieve your 'ars.9%
Zachary said.

his sad brown eyes to the senator from
@j can he acknowledged.i Zachary uncon-
ittle.

@s argument was simple: The United
one of its def enses. The Strategic
already under NATO control; by
new International Peacekeeping Force' to
they lost very little and gained the entire
SDI satellites, as well.

be no disarmament, no dismantling of
no shrinkage of the armed services that
the Soviets-gun for gun, bomb for
leaves the Russians with three times the
forcer, that we have," said General Madison.
admitted Red Eagle. "And three times the

Western Europe.

Peacekeeping Force will stop them.'9
possible."

said Red Eagle, gazing at the black man, "it
is even inevitable, if you serve the IPF with
and intelligence that you now devote to the
United States."

here," Zachary fumed.

him by raising one enormous hand.

he said, "the ways of peace are difficult
to men accustomed to war. My
were a nation of warriors. We drove
the desert. we defeated the U. Army
yet war ultimately destroyed us. Do not
destroy your nation."

FbXworth cleared his throat. Otherwise the conference room was quiet.

Red Eagle went on, "The ancient Athenians in all their glory could not conceive of a political loyalty higher than that which they gave to their city. There was no concept of Greece in those days. There was only Athens, or Sparta, or Thebes, Corinth and other city-states, constantly at war with one another. That civilization perished.

"TODaY You men give your highest political loyalty to your nation- Yet I Say to YOU that unless you have the greatness of soul to see a higher loyalty, a loyalty to planet Earth, to the human race in its greatness and entirety, this civilization will soon perish. And there will be none to follow. None! The human race will die."

three men glanced uneasily at one another.

"A small war has utterly destroyed four of the ancient cities Of the Middle East. Seventeen million men, women, and children perished in less than a week. What will the next war bringr'

Zachary, his voice trembling slightly, said, "Nobody wants another war."

4.ThLM Support the Peacekeepers who will make wars impossible."

"But how do we know it'll work?" General Madison asked.

"You must make it work."

The general shook his head.

"I understand. There are many, many unknowns. We are striking out into uncharted territory. There is much to fear." Then Red Eagle added, "Including the fact that the Pressure to drastically reduce the defense budget will become enormous."

For once in his life, Foxworth let his self-control slip. He threw his head back and guffawed.

General Madison made a sour face, let out a pained sigh and loosened the tie of his blue uniform.

jo@ point out several things at this ptjUvo uses of the same word too close ether; I know. Necessary, though.)

these events led-rather indirectly,
the cataclysm at Valledupar.
we in IPF intelligence were getting
constant hints that,a cabal was
among some of the line
Our warnings to the political
who headed the Force went
alas. Third, the nations of the
had not the slightest intention of
as a means to achieve their
slightest.

OTTAWA

YeU 2

SHE was a tiny figure, skating alone in the darkness. Dow's Lake was firmly frozen this late in December. Earlier in the evening the ice had been covered with skaters in their holiday finery, the pavilion crammed with Couples dancing to the heavy beat of rock music.

But this close to midnight, Kelly skated alone, bundled against the cold with a thickly quilted jacket that made her look almost like one of those ragamuffin toy dolls the stores were selling that year.

The wind keened through the empty night. The only light on the ice came from the nearly full Moon grinning

4

lopsidedly at Kelly as she spun and spiraled in time to the music in her head.

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PF,4CEKEEPERS 35

playing in her stereo earplugs, the same skated to when she failed to make t he The music's dark passion, its sense of Kelly's mood exactly. She skated alone, without judges. Without anyone. Her @six months ago, leaving her alone except who had not even bothered to give her his she told herself. It's better alone. I don't itisi starting a double axel when the beep from interrupted the music, startling her so faltered and went sprawling on her backside. on the-ice, Kelly thumbed the at her belt and heard.

this is Robbie. We've got a crisis. All hands Reply at once." the nickname. Her mother had christened but she had grown up to be a feisty, @*eckled little redhead, more the neighbor-roughneck than an angelic little star. At ten up@ any boy in school; at thirteen she had black belt. But she could not gain a place skating team. And she could not make quick with her reflexes and her wits. Her nonexistent, a nearly straight drop from her her hips.

d not make friends, even after three months here in Ottawa.

up from the ice, Kelly pulled off her right yanked the pinhead mike from the communica-in wire whirring faintly.

I'm on my way. Seems like a damned a crisis, if you ask me." voice was dead serious. "We don't make 'em,

we just stop 'em from blowing UP. Get your little butt down here, sweetie, double quick."

Kelly skated to the dark and empty pavilion, grumbling to herself all the way. @ My twenty-second birthday tomorrow, she grouched silently. Think they know? Think they care But underneath, the cynical veneer she hoped desperately that they' did know and did care. Especially Robert.

The base was less than a mile from the pavilion, a clump of low buildings on the site of the old experimental farm. Kelly rode her electric bike along the bumpy road, tnan-tall banks of snow on either side, the towers of Ottawa glistening and winking in the distance, brilliant with their holiday decorations.

Past the wire fence of the perimeter and directly into the big open doors of the main entrance she rode, paying scant attention to the motto engraved above it. Locking the bike in the rack just inside the entrance, she nodded hello to the two guards lounging by the electric heater inside their booth, -perfunctorily waved her identification badge at them, then clumped in her winter boots down the ramp toward the underground monitoring center.

Ift

here's a friggin' crisis, she thought, the dumb guards sure don't show it,

In the locker room Kelly stripped off her bulging coat and the boots. She wore the sky-blue uniform of the Peacekeepers beneath it. The silver bars on her shoulders proclaimed her to be a junior lieutenant. A silver stylized T, shaped like an extended, almost mechanical hand, was clipped to her high collar-, it identified her as a teleoperator.

Helluva night to make me come in to work, she complained to herself as she changed into her blue-gray duty fatigues. There are plenty of others who could fill in this shift. Why do they always pick on me? And whytan't they make this damned cave warm enough to work in?@ But then two more operators clumped in, silent and grim-faced. The men nodded to Kelly; she nodded back.

index--i,

@PEACEKEEPERS

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er into the. monitoring'
against the damp hill, Kelly briefly
deedidheragaiantstwithAsh she Pushed the door to
another three people in fatigues were

hurry-

Aown the cold concrete corridor toward the
women and a man. One of the women was still
cuffs as she rushed by. x-three Adonis with a
was outwardly cheerful: a si

meit tungsten steel. His uniforms, even his
fitted him like a second skin. He wore the
inted star of a captain on his shoulders.,
to roust you, @ tonight of all inghts," he said,
to his smile. "We've got a bit of a mess shaping
called her anything but her last name,
bristled. But she let handsome Robert get away with
_Jhis pet name for her.

"What's going on?" she asked.

kat all ten monitoring consoles were occupied
king, ten men and women sitting in deeply Padded

chairs, headsets clamped over their ears, eyes riveted to the banks of display screens curving around them, fingers playing ceaselessly over the keyboards in front of them. Tension sizzled in the air. The room felt hot and crowded, sweaty. Images from the display screens provided the only light, flickering like flames from a fireplace, throwing nervous, jittering shadows against the bare concrete walls. Several of the pilots were lounging in the chairs off to one side, trying to look relaxed even though they knew they might be called to action at any moment. Robert was in charge of this shift, sitting in the communications high chair above and behind the monitors. Standing her tallest, Kelly was virtually at eye level with him.

"What isn't going on?" Robbie replied. "You'd think tonight of all nights everybody'd be at home with their families."

38 Den Boy;

waved a hand toward the screens as the displays, on them blinked back and forth, showing scenes from dozens

of k)cati

Ions around the world.

"Got a family Of mountain climbers trapped on Mt. Burgess up in the Yukon TerritOrY.'Satellite P up their gnal nag emergency si ." Kelly saw, an infrared ii e of rugged mountainous country Over the shoulder of Jan Van der Meer, one of the few monitors he knew by name. ..And

some loony terrorists,7' Robbie went on, pointing to another consoledOwn the linei "tried to hijack one of the nuclear submarines being decommissioned by the U. Navy in Connecticu

Kelly saw the submarine tied to a pier from a ground-hel level view- Military Police in polished steel . mets were leading a raWed gaggle of men and women, their faces Smeared with camouflage Paint, up the gangway and into a Waiting polict.- van.

19

"But the crisis is Eritrea," said Robert.

64Not againi -Kelly grumbled. "They've been farting around there for more than a year.,,

Nodding tightly, Robert touched a button in the arrurest of his high chair and pulled the pin mike of his headset J`

down before his lips. "Jan, Pick up the Eritrea situation,

Van der Meer, a languid, laconic Dutchman whose uniform always seemed too big for him, looked over his Shoulder almost shyly and nodded. With his deep-set eyes, hollow cheeks and bony face, he looked like a death's head beckoning. He tapped his keypad with a long shin and his display screens showed gh finger, taken from a reconnaissance satelostly images in infrai-ed.

lite gliding in orbit 0 - East Africa. -ver

It took Kelly a moment to identif y the vague shapes and shadows. Tanks. And behind them, self-propelled artiRerv pieces. Threading their way in predawn darkness through the mountains along the border of Eritrea.

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going to attack?" Kelly asked, her voice and squeaky, like a frightened little girl's.

answered Robbie, quite serious now.

know well throw everything we have at his brows, making his, smooth young slightly. "I guess they think@ they can get Maybe they think we won't be able to react or their friends in -the African Bloc Will from acting at all. We've never had to stop war-, not yet."'

re bluffing," Kelly heard her voice saying. back down . .

'Priority One from Geneva!' called Bailey, the black @',@,Imman working station three. She was an American, from Olos Angeles, tall and leggy and graceful enough to make

Kelly ache with jealousy over her good looks and smooth Cocoa-butter skin. She had almond-shaped eyes, too, dark and exotic. Kelly's eyes were plain dumb brown.

Robert clamped a hand to his earphone. His eyes narrowed, then shifted to lock onto Kelly's.

Nodding and whispering a response, he pushed the mike up and away, then said, "This is it, kid. Everybody up!

Kelly felt a surge of electricity bum through her part fear, part excitement. The other pilots stirred, too.

"I'm on my way," she said.

But Robert had already shifted his mike down again and was calling through the station's intercom, "Pilots, man your planes All pilots, man your planes."

As Kelly 'dashed through the monitoring center's doors and out into the long central corridor, she thought she certain.

heard Robbie wishing her good luck. But she wasnt

Doesn't matter, she told herself, knowing it was a lie.

The technicians backed away as Kelly slid into the cockpit and cast a swift professional glance at the instru-

40 Ben Bova

Ments. On the screen in front of her she saw the little plane's snub nose, painted dead black, glinting in the predawn starlight.

I She clamped her conim set over her chopped-short 7 red hair and listened to her mission briefing. There was no Preflight checkout', the technicians did that and punche it into the flight computer. She swung the opaque canopy down and locked it shut, then took Of into the darkness, getting her mission profile briefing from Geneva as she new.

Dozens of planes were being sent against th P,16,@ from every available Peacekeepers, e aggressors, station were in their cockpits, hands on their flight controls. There were the usual delay&and mix-ups, but Kelly suddenly felt free andlappy, alone at the controls of an agile little flying machine, her every movement answered by a movement@of the plane,her nerves melding with the machine's circuitry, the two of them mated more intimately than a man and a woman could ever be.

The plane was as small as it could be made and still do its job. Using the latest in stealth technology, it flew in virtual silence, it

,0j s, quiet Stirling engine turning the six paddle blades the Propeller so gently that they barely made a sound. But the plane was slow, painfully slow. Built of wood and plastic, for the most part, it was designed to avoid detection by radar and infrared heat-seekers, not to outrun any opposition that might find her.

TO make it hard to find visually, Kelly was trained to fly close to the ground, hugging the hills and treetops, flirting with sudden downdrafts that could slam the fragile little, plane into the ground.

She thought of herself as a hunting owl, cruising silently through the night, seeking her prey. Everything she needed to know-rather, everyth

ing that Geneva could tell her-had been fed to her through her radio earphones. Now, as she flew silently through the dark and treacherous moun-

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on the border of E she maintained radio

Misses

m ag owl, Kelly told herself, a hunting owl. But there hawks in the air, and the hunter must not allow If to become the hunted. A modem jet fighter armed missiles or machine cannon that fired of rounds per minute could destroy her moments of sighting her. And the second or two uilt into her control system bothered her; a cou- could be the difference between life and --But they've got to, see me first, Kelly told herself. Be Be invisible.

Despite the cold, she was perspiring now. Not from fear, U was the good kind of sweat that comes from a workout, from preparation for the kind of action that your mind and body have trained for over long grueling months.

Virtually all the plane's systems were tied to buttons on the control column's head. With the flick of her thumb Kelly could make the plane loop or roll or angle steeply UP

into the dark sky. Like a figure skater, she thought. You and me, machine, we'll show them some Olympic style before we're through.

She was picking up aggressor radio transmissions in her earphones now: she could not understand the language, so she flicked the rocker switch on the control board to her left that activated the language computer. It was too slow to be of much help, but it got a few words:

". . . tank column A . . . jump-off line. . . deploy. . .

With her left hand she tapped out a sequence on the ECM board, just by her elbow, then activated the sequence -int

with the barest touch of a finger on the black button set the gray control column head. 0

Thousands of tiny metallic slivers poured out of a hatch just behind the cockpit, scattering into the dark night air like sparkling crystals of snow. But these dipoles, mono-

42 Ben Bova

molecular thin, floated lightly in the calm predawn air. They would hover and drift for hours, wafting stray air

along on any current that happened by, jamming radio communications up and down thousands of megahertz of the frequency scale.

The Law of the Peacekeepers was: Destroy the weapons of war.

One of the prime weapons of modern war was electronic communications. So the first rule of Peacekeeper tactics was: Screw up their comm system and you screw up attack

their

Leaving a long cloud of jamming chaff behind her, Kelly swooped down a rugged tree-covered valley so low that she almost felt leaves brushing the plane's underside. A river glinted in the faint light. Kelly switched her display screen to infrared and, sure enough, there was a column of tanks snaking along the road that hugged the riverbank. Gray ugly bulks with long cannon poking out like erect penises.

Have full with Your radios, fellas, she called to them silently.

If the tanks reached the border and actually crossed into Sudanese territory, they would be guilty of aggression and small, smart missiles launched from VCZ command-and-control planes would meet them. But until they crossed the border, their crews were not to be endangered.

Second rule of Peacekeeper tactics: You can't counterattack until the aggressor attacks. Show enough force to convince the aggressor that his attack will be stopped, but

will

launch no weapon until aggression actually takes place
Corollary No. 1: It makes no difference why an attack is launched, or by whom. The Peacekeepers, mission is to

prevent the attack from succeeding. we are police judges

not

Kelly had seen what those smart missiles could do. Barely an arm's length in size, their warheads were-

PEACEKEEPERS 43

of spent uranium, so dense that they sliced millimeters of armor like a bullet goes said to destroy the weapons, not the men. But the weapons., Men carried them or rode

armory, filled with highly flammable ammunition. Hit it with a hypervelocity and it will burst into flame or blow volcano. The men inside have no chance to -missile, small as it is, is directed by a computer chip that will guide it to its dogged accuracy of a Mach 10 assassin.

Banking slightly for a better look at the slowly moving column of tanks, Kelly found herself wishing that her chaff had fouled their communications so thoroughly that they had to stop short of the border. Otherwise, most of those million-dollar tanks would be destroyed by thousand-dollar missiles. And the men in them would die. Young

men foolish enough to believe that their nation had a right to invade its neighbor. Or serious enough to believe that they must obey their orders, no matter what. Young men who looked forward to life, to marriage, to families and honored old age where they would tell their grandchildren stories about their famous battles and noble heroism.

They would-die ingloriously, roasted inside their tanks, screaming with their last breath as the flames seared their lungs.

But she had other work to do.

Third rule of Peacekeeper tactics- A mechanized army needs fuel and ammunition. Cut off those supplies and you stop the army just as effectively as if you had killed all its troops.

Kelly% plane was a scout, not a missile platform. It was unarmed. If she was a hunting owl, she hunted for information, not victims. Somewhere in this treacherous maze of

deeply scoured river valleys and and tablelands there were supply dumps, fuel depots, ammunition magazines that provided @the blood and sinew of the attacking army- Kelly's task wa& to find them. Quickly.

If it had been an easy assignment, she would not have gotten it. If, the dumps could have been found by satellite reconnaissance they would already be targeted for attack. But the Eritreans had worked long and patiently for this invasion of their neighbor. They@ had dug their supply dumps, deeply underground, as Protection against both the Prying satellite eyes of the Peacekeepers and the inevitable pounding of missiles and long-range artillery, once the dumps had been, located.

Kelly and her owilike aircraft had to fly through those tortuous valleys hunting, seeking, scanning up and down the spectrum with sensors that could detect heat, light, magnetic fields, even odors. And she had to find the dumps before the sun got high enough to, fin those valleys with light- In daylight, her little unarmed craft would be spotted, inevitably.' And once found, it would be swiftly, and mercilessly destroyed.

All her sensors were alive and scanning now, as Kelly gently, deftly flew the tiny plane down one@twisting valley after another. She felt tense, 'yet strangely at peace. She knew the stakes, and the danger, yet as long as she was at the controls of her agile little craft she was happy. Like being alone out on the ice: nothing in the world mattered except your own actions. There

was no audience here, no judges. Kelly felt happy and free. And alone.

But the eastern sky was brightening, and her time was growing short.

The sensors were picking up data now, Target clumps of metal buried here, unmistakable beat radiationSemanating from there, molecules of human sweat and Machine oil and plastic explosive wafting up -from that mound of freshly turned earth. She squirted the- data in highly compressed

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0 waiting satellite, hoping that the
tlzrn sophisticated comm equipment
d to detect such transmissions and home in on her
we were many such planes flitting across the honey-
of valleys, each pilot hoping that the Eritreans did
itch its transmissions, did not find it before it had
47--@_--ed its task and flown safely home.

all stuff, Kelly realized as she scanned the data her displayed. None of the dumps she had found were ".Wens

A"bly important. Local depots for the reserves. Where lIMS the big stuff, the major ammo and fuel -supplies for the forces? It couldn't be farther back, deeper inside the min

--vountry, she reasoned. They must have'dug it in somewhere closer to the border.

The sky was bright enough now to make the stars fade, idthough the ground below her was still cloaked in shadow. Kelly debated asking Geneva- for permission to turn -around, rather than continue her route deeper into the Eritrean territory.

"Fuck it," she muttered to herself "By the time they make up their minds it'll be broad daylight out here.,,

She banked the little plane on its left wingtip and started to retrace her path. Climbing above the crest of the valley, she began a weaving flight path that took her back and forth across the four major valley chains of her assigned territory.

There's got to be a major dump around here somewhere, she insisted to herself. There's got to be.

If there was not, she knew, she was in trouble. If the main supply dump was deeper inside Eritrea and she had missed it because she had failed to carry out her full assignment, she would be risking the lives not only of Eritreans and Sudanese, but Peacekeepers as well. She would be risking her own career, her own future, too.

The plane's sensors faithfully picked up all the small

dumps she had found on her flight in. Even this high-up, they were detectable.

But where's the biggie? Kelly worried.

She felt a jolt of panic when she noticed the shadow of her plane racing along the ground ahead of her. The sun was up over the horizon now, and she was high enough to be easily visible to anyone who happened to look up.

Chitting her teeth, she kept stubbornly to her plan, crisscrossing the valleys, . back and forth, weaving a path to the frontier. She could see columns of tanks and trucks below her, some of them moving sluggishly forward, others stopped. Long ugly artillery pieces were finng now, sending shells whistling across the border into the Sudan.

The attack had begun.

They've actually started a war, Kelly said to herself, feeling shock and anger flooding through her. Can we stop ia Can we?

Far ahead, she saw columns of smoke rising black and oily into the brightening sky. Men were dying there.

Quickly she flicked her fingers across the display controls. 1 Forward and mu observation scopes' no other aircraft in sight. So far so good, she thought. I haven't been found. Yet.

The infrared scanner showed an anomaly off to her left: a hot spot along the face of a steep rocky slope that plunged down to the riverbed. Kelly banked slightly and watched the sensor displays hopefully.

It was a cave in the face of the deeply scoured hillside. Ages of sudden rainstorms had seamed the slope like rumpled gray corduroy.

"Just a friggin cave, Kelly muttered, disappointed. Until she noticed that a fairly broad road'had been built up in-a series of switchbacks from the valley floor to the lip of the cave's entrance. It was a dirt road, rough, dangerous if it rained. But this wasthe dry season, and a single truck

PEACEKEEPERS 47

o that road at a fairly high rate of speed, x tail of dust from its rear tires.

her plane lower, below the crest of the hills valley. Hidden down among the scruffy

atlino the riverbank was a column of trucks, their @itmning, judging from the heat emissions.

hing her comm keypad furiously, Kelly sang into vophone, "I've found it! Major supply dump, not

MD ten klicks from the frontier!" She -squirted the 6. the commsat without taking ithe time to vode or

knew that the monitors in Geneva-and Ottawa, for natter-would home in on her transmission. So the Eritreans, most likely.

was not Robbies voice that replied, an agonizing ten wds later, "It might be a supply dump, but how can YOU urer

rhe truck@convoy, dammit!" Kelly shouted back, an-ed. "They're starting up the road!"

were. The trucks seemed empty. They were steep road to the cavern, where they would be the fuel and ammunition necessary to contin-f you are right came the voice from Geneva-Norse accent in it-"we have no means to

dump. It is too well protected."

d nothing. She knew what would come next.

to your base of operations. Your mission is

it her lip in frustration. Then a warning screech on her instrument panel told her that she was being scanned by a radar beam. Ordinarily that would not have bothered her. But in morning's brightening light, with a few hundred enemy soldiers below her, she knew she was in trouble.

By reflex, she craned her head to look above, then checked the display screens. A couple of contrails way up 'there. If she tried to climb out of this valley, those two jet fighters would be on her like stooping hawks.

Kelly took a deep breath and weighed her options. Blowing her breath out through puffed cheeks, she said aloud, "Might as well find out for sure if I'm right-11

She pushed the throttle forward and angled the little plane directly toward the mouth of the cave.

Tracers sizzled past her forward screen, and her acoustic sensors picked up the sounds of many shots: small-arms fire, for the most part. The troops down there were using her for target practice. They're lousy shots, Kelly told herself. Then she added, Thank God.

Kelly dove at maximum speed, nearly as fast as a modern sports car, through a fusilade of rifle and, machine-gun fire, and flew directly at the yawning cavern. It was dark inside but the plane's sensors immediately displayed

I

the forward view in false-color infrared.

It's their main dump, all right, Kelly told herself. She s'aw it all as if in freeze-frame, a bare fraction of a second, yet she made out every detail:

Dozens of trucks were already inside the mammoth cave, in the process of being loaded by troops suddenly startled to find an airplane buzzing straight at them. Some men :stood frozen with wide-eyed frightstaring directly at her, while others were scattering, ducking under the trucks or racing for the cave's entrance.

The cave was crammed with stacks of fuel drums, cases of ammunition. Be nice to know who they bought all this craP from, Kelly thought. For- the briefest flash of an instant she considered trying to pull up and eluding the rioters waiting for her. Maybe the cameras have pi

d

cke up

valuable information on who's supplying this war, she thought.

'But she knew that was idle fancy. This mission was life

PEACEKEEPERS 49

nate& Not by Geneva, but by the gunners who would Jhq@plane to pieces once she tried"to make it to the she did not pull up. She leaned on the throttle, inglthe plane directly into the cave's mouth and a Ive stack of ftiel drams. She neither heard nor felt the Nion.

long seconds Kelly sat in the contoured chair of the it, staring at the darkened screen. Her hand& were ling, too badly to even try to unlatch tht canopy. A ician lifted it open and@stareddown at her. Usually :hs were grinning and cracki jokes after a mission. ng

ut this one looked solemn.

."You okay?" she asked.

Kelly managed a nod. Sure, she answered silently. For a lot who's just kamikazed, I'm fine.

Another tech, a swarthy male, appeared on the other side J-bf the cockpit and helped Kelly to her feet. She stepped -tarefuliv over the control banks and onto the concrete floor

@.-',4 the6ttawa station's teleoperations chamber. Two other
Aeleo rator cockpits were tightly closed, with teams of
pe

huddled over the consoles grouped around
fourth cockpit was open and empty.

n in charge of the station's teleoperations unit
his desk toward Kelly, his face grim. He was a
stocky Asian with a vaguely menacing mus-
tache, all formality and spit and polish.

"We lost one RPV due to ground fire," he said in a
furious whisper, "and one deliberately destroyed by its
operator."

"But I . .

"There is no need for you to defend yourself, Lieutenant
Kelly. A board of review will examine the tapes of your
mission and make its recommendations. Dismissed."

He turned on his polished heel and strode back to his
desk.

50 Ben Bova

Anger replaced Kelly's emotional exhaustion. RPV, she fumed to herself Operator. They're planes, dammit. And I'm a pilot!

But she knew it was not so. They were remotely piloted vehicles, just as the captain had said. And expensive enough so that deliberately crashing one was cause for a review board to be convened. Then Kelly remembered that she had also tossed away her prescribed flight plan. The review board would not go gently, she realized.

She dragged herself tiredly down the corridor toward the locker room, longing for her bunk and the oblivion of sleep'.

Halfway there, Robbie popped out of the monitoring center, his smile dazzling.

"Hi there, Angel Star! Good job!"

Kelly forced the corners of her mouth upward a notch. From behind Robbie's tall, broad-shouldered form she saw most of the other monitors pushing through the doors and spilling out into the corridor. It can't be a shift change, she thought. Nobody else has gone in.

Robbie caught the puzzlement on her face.

"It's all over," he said brightly. "The Eritreans called it quits a few minutes ago

"They stopped the invasion

"We beat them back. Clobbered the tanks in their first wave and demolished most of their supply dumps--The rest of the monitor team headed down the corridor toward the locker room, chattering like schoolkids suddenly let loose.

"Somebody," Robbie added archly, "even knocked out their main ammo dump."

"That was me," Kelly said weakly.

Throwing an arm around her slim shoulders, Robbie laughed. "I know! We saw it on the screens. The explosion shook down half the mountain."

"Must have killed a lot of men," she heard herself say.

PEACEKEEPERS 51

as many as a full-fledged war would have taken." knew the truth of it, but it was scant comfort.

It started it," Robbie said more softly. "It's not your

K

It's my responsibility. So was the plane."

Robbie broke out his dazzling grin again. "Worried about a review board? Don't be. They'll end up pinning a tag on YOU."

How could Kelly not visualize that.

"Come on, Angel Star," Robbie said with a one-armed

W

Why be glum, chum. We're going out to celebrate."

Christmas, isn't it? You didn't see a big sleigh pulled by reindeer while you were flinging around out there, did you? He grinned. "No, I don't think so."

With his arm still around her shoulders, Robbie started toward the locker room. "I'm throwing a party in my quarters. You're invited."

He didn't let him half drag her to the locker room, Van der Meer and Bailey were already there, pulling on their heavy

er coats.

there, little sister, Bailey called to her. "Nice group trudged up the sloping corridor and, who still sat close to the electric heater in booth. If they were aware that a war had just and stopped within the span of the past hour gave no indication of it.

quite a flier," Robbie said to her. "You'll have to I'd love to learn how to fly."

and swallowed, glad that it was too dark for the reddening that burned her face. I've never plane, up in the air, she wanted to confess. Only simulators and teleoperations. But she kept silent, too a*Wd of cracking the crystal beauty of this moment.

52 Ben Bova

The sky was still dark and sprinkled with stars, the air bitingly cold. As she followed along beside Robbie and the others, snow crunching under their boots-, Kelly dug her fists in her coat pockets and glanced over her shoulder at the sign carved above the base's entrance,

INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING FORCE

NANO SHALL NOT LIFT UP SWORD AGAINST NANO

We stopped a war, she said to herself. It cost some lives, but we protected the peace. Then she remembered, It might also cost me my job,

"Don't look so down, giri," Bailey assured her. "The review board ain't gonna go hard on you.

"I hope," said Kelly.

"Don't worry about it," Bailey insisted.

Kelly trudged along, heading for the bachelor officers' quarters across the road from the underground nerve center of the base.

Should I tell them? she asked herself. They wouldn't care. Or maybe they'd think I was just trying to call attention to myself

But she heard herself saying, "You know, this is MY birthday. Today. Christmas Day.,,

"Really?" said Van der Meer.

Happy birthday, little sister," Bailey said.

Robbie pushed his coat sleeve back and peered at his wristwatch. "Not just yet, Angel Star. Got another few ticks to go . .

Then they heard, far off in the distance, the sound of voices singing.

"Your watch must be slow," said Bailey. "The midnight chorale's already started."

"Their clock must be fast," Robbie countered.

The whole group of them stopped in the starry night air and listened to the children's voices, coming as if from

PEACEKEEPERS 53

stood between tall Robert and beautiful as if they were singing especially

at night...

all is bright. . .

The IPF proved itself that Christmas Eve in East Africa. The world was stunned with surprise. But a hard-fine cadre of officers high up in the Peacekeepers' chain of command was still laying its plans for a coup. They knew that if they succeeded, their nations would accept their fait accompli. If they failed, their nations would disavow themselves of any knowledge of the cabal. Being military men, they were accustomed to such treatment by the politicians. What the politicians didn't realize was that if the coup were successful, the military officers planned to overpower their political leaders and set up their own version of a world government, with themselves as the chiefs.

If Red Eagle was aware of this plot, he gave no indication of it. He concerned himself with another worry. The matter of the missing nuclear bombs.

(Moll
Year 3

YOU certainly picked a conspicuous way of here, Mr. Alexander," said Red Eagle.

Cole Alexander shrugged at the massive Amerind. "The home now. A houseboat with wings. Subsoil-enough to suit me."

Y

caused quite a stir when you landed on plain sight," Alexander said. "Sometimes that's 'e best way."

Red Eagle held the lace curtains aside and stared out the Villa's long window down to the lake below. Alexander's swept-wing jet seaplane was moored down among the

5.6 Ben Bova

Powerboats and miling Yachts, like a sleek dark panther among fat little sheep.

Alexander stood slightly behind the Amerind, feeling a bit like a child in the shadow of Red Eagle's huge form. A stray memory of boyhood flitted through his mind, of holding his father's hand as they walked along the Minnetonka lakeside promenade together. Then the surge of sorrow. He would never walk with his father again. Or his mother. He could never walk unprotected in the sunshine again. Too much of a risk of cancer now.

"Hide in plain sight," said Red Eagle, chuckling. The sound was like a freight train rumbling in the distance. "You- certainly picked an interesting place for it."

Lake Corno was abuzz with pleasure boats churning up the water, hydrofoil ferries speeding past float planes from the CDmo Aero Club landing and taking off. A knot of gawkers stood at the club's ramp admiring the jet seaplane anchored gut among the boats. An endless stream of cars and tour buses and motor scooters growled and hissed and honked along the road that twisted around the lake's steep wooded mountains. Even from this high above the water, in this crumbling, dusty old villa, the two men could hear people singing and shouting at each other down along the Lakeside where they were fishing or sunbathing.

The city, off in the distance, was a-cluster of roofs and towers. The gray-white granite monument to Alessandro Milta rose amidst the greenery of a waterside park.

"It would have been more secure," Red Eagle said, letting the curtain drop, "to meet me on the Swiss side of the lake. I had to go through the border station. My passage will be noted."

Alexander ran a hand through his dead-white hair. "Can you imagine the Swiss letting me land that plane on their side of the lake? It'd take six months just to fill out the forms!"

Red Eagle admitted, "The Italians are somewhat easier

-S

PEACEKEEPER

57

Their border police did not even look at my
drove through."

 "v worried about security?"

y?" Alexander asked. "What's this all about? Why
a ask to see me?"

 Eagle stepped
 away from the window. He seemed

us in the setting: a huge man of powerful dignity,
UO

 tailored dark business suit,
 in a conservatively
for a safe place to sit in a room filled with delicate
The villa that Alexander had rented was
furniture.

 dthtime and neglected once the home of a wealthy
 se factory owner, it now was let for rentals to
 ers, who came for Lake Como's scenic beauty. The
 f was there, all right, but it was buried beneath
 of tourists and Milanese weekenders who fouled the
 and littered the roads and belched filth from their
 ies into the air.

d Eagle selected an ornate couch of striped fabric and
two legs. Sitting on it carefully, tentatively, he sank
its overplush cushions.

Alexander putted up a slim gilt-covered chair to the side
from the window and the sunshine.

-.,-"We're okay in here," he said. "My people checked the
this morning. No bugs."

nodded slowly. Still, he looked around the
he could detect electronic listening devices by
of concentration. It was a large room, with a
decorated with faded frescoes of plump cher-

saints floating on pinkish clouds. Dust
through the sunlight lancing in from the long

the shutters if you like," Alexander offered

said Red Eagle. "it may sound paranoid, but

know that I am watched constantly. Probably someone is
listening to this conversation."

59 Ben Bova

"I don't see how.-

"Neither do I, but the eavesdroppers are ingenious, and the technology of surveillance is quite advanced."

"What's so secret, anyhow?" Alexander asked.

"I have no secrets," said the Amerind, "but I am concerned about your safety, Mr Alexander miner

Red Eagle nodded again, just

once, A Ponderous movement of his head. "You have made no secret of

the fact that

you are attempting to locate Jabal Shainar."

Alexander's face went taut. "He killed my Parents. And a couple of million other people."

"So you want to kill him."

"Danied right," he replied tensely. Then, with an obvious effort to be lighter, "Oh, I'm willing to bring him to the World Court if I can. But I want him, dead or alive.,," "That is a very dangerous pastime."

Alexander made a crooked grin and leaned back in his chair.

"You have given up your career, sold your business, used your money to buy that airplane and a crew.

"And I've hired detectives spies, informers-anybody who can give me information on Shamaes whereabouts." in

"Can you afford to hire a team of mercenary soldiers?"

Alexander's smile vanished like a light snapped off.

Drawing in a deep breath

Red Eagle said, "What I propose to tell you could place you in great danger, greater than you have ever been in before.,,"

The, sardonic smile twisted Alexander's lips again. "I lived through Jerusalem. I can deal with risk."

Red Eagle said- nothing for a long moment

- He merely

gazed at Alexander, as if trying to

make the final decision

on whether to speak or not -

- At last, he let out another long,

painful breath and said:

"Mr. Alexander, the International Peacekeeping Force has impounded all the remaining nuclear weapons of the

PEACEKEEPERS 59

of the Final War. Six of them are

said, "I don't understand.

has checked the inventories very carefully, and

with all the military, technical and politi-

involved. Apparently when Shamar disap-

he took six nuclear weapons with him."

-nukesr'

Comparatively small ones, in the one-hundred-kiloton

Five times more powerful than the bombs that

destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but quite small and

compact. Suitcase-sized, according to the technical ex-

plainsman Christ' Shamaes got six nukes?"

heavy

P. -The nuclear powers-the United States, Soviet

is worse than that," Red Eagle said, his voice
Idoe
nia and the others-have suspended their own nuclear
armament programs."

"They're not going to
'of course," Alexander said. get
of their bombs as long as Shaniaes running loose with a
f dozen of his own."

This is an extremely serious situation, Mr.
The path to real peace will be blocked as long as
are in Shamar's hands.

by come to me? This is a problem for the

Red Eagle, with a Ponderous shake of his'
international Peacekeeping F6rce cannot inter-
is problem. The IPF must not even attempt to
hell not?"

hands on his massive thighs
faded glories of the ceiling.

Mr. Alexander," he said, looking
has been created for one reason
nations from attacking one

60 Ben Bom

another. The only situation 'in Which the IPF can act is when a nation launches an armed attack UVOSS an international border. The only duty of the Pe

acekeepers is-to keep the peace-to prevent war."

But if Shamaes got nuclear weapons, hes going to use them sooner or later."

"Think, Mr. Alexander. Think. Many of the nations of the world do not trust the IPF very much. They fear that the Peacekeepers will turn into a world dictatorship They refine to disarm, for fear of leaving themselves defenseless against the IPF. Do YOU think they will allow IPIzversonnel to hunt for Shamar inside their own borders? Do you think that they will support the lPFs searching for Shamar in other countries?"

Alexander felt a slight wave of giddiness wash through him as he realized whatthe Amerind was after. "You want me to get Shamar for you."

Red Eagle lowered his gaze and fixed his deep brown eyes on Alexander. "Thisis very painful for me, Mr. Alexander. I am a man of the law. -I do not approve; of vigilantes or assassins.

"But you have to nail Shamar, and damned fast, and you can't use the IPF to do the job."

"That is the truth of it," Red Eagle admitted. ".4% you want me to do the job for you."

Red Eagle said, "Through the Peacekeepers I have access to certain forms of intelligence that are unavailable to

YOU.

Tingling with sudden excitement, Alexander grinned and said, "You've got a deal!"

"He mug be brought tojustice, if possible," insisted Red Eagle. "I will not be party to an assassination.

Alexander countered, "Listen, you just think of this as an old-time sheriff hiring a deputy-or recruiting a posse."

"Not the most fortunate of analogies for a Comanche," Red Eagle replied dourly.

PEACEKEEPERS 61

said, "Yeah,. I suppose not. But I'll *04@ Just like I said, dead or alive." nuclear weapons. They must be recovered. t more important than Shamar himself." se. Sure.` But Alexander thought to himself, to you, maybe, but not to me. to his feet. It reminded Alexander of a outpf the ocean. this has been extremely difficult for me. your cooperat ion."

Shaman"

nuclear bombs."

headed toward the door, Alexander beside to keep pace with Red Eagles the elaborately tiled floor. Eagle stopped, "You have not asked about For what?"

an armed force to take Shamar. That will

smiled crookedly. "What will those suspi-
governments say if they find that the IPF is
d channel the money through a Swiss bank,"
Red Eagle.
last words."

"Then 'how ...

nd frowned slightly.

broke yet," Alexander said. "If and when I need
let you know. For now, all I want from you is
about Shamar's whereabouts."
it to YOU."

hands at the door, Alexander's Pate white
in the Amerind's huge dark Paw.

Alexander watched from the shaded shelter of the villa's

62 Ben -Bova

front gate as Red Eagle squeezed his bulk into the back seat of a BMW sedan. The car sank on its suspension noticeably.

As the sedan pulled away and into the honking streams of, everlasting traffic along the roadway, Alexander almost jumped into the air with glee.

I.

going to get Sharnar! I'm going to get the bastard and kill him with my own two hands!

In the back seat of the BMW, Red Eagle was thinking, It is a dangerous thing to sidestep the law. Yet what else can be done?

He looked down at the hand that had shaken Alexander's as if it were already dripping with blood.

Red Eagle knew that we-and others-were itching to hear every move and listening to as much of his conversation as we could. He told himself that, like Marcus Brutus, he was as armed so strong in honesty that it didn't matter. But it did, and what he had done bothered him immensely. No one was ever able to trace the Meissner assassination to him, but it seemed terribly convenient to him that would-be Hitler killed before he could bring East and West to the brink of war over a reunited Germany.

While the Peacekeepers stopped the Mongolian Crisis from erupting into war before a single shot was fired, we were getting unmistakable signals that the offices, coup was under way. Still the sluggards in Geneva did nothing. And Red Eagle was not officially part of the Peacekeepers; he was mainly concerned during those troubled months with feeding information to Cole Alexander. Discreetly. He thought.

INDONESIA

Year 4

STRETCHED out prone on the damp grass at the edge of the trees, Alexander peered through his binoculars at the village in the clearing. He swept his gaze across the cinder-block huts, then focused beyond them to the six helicopters resting beneath camouflage netting at the village's farther side.

"Those're Shamaes choppersr' he asked the man lying beside him. He kept his voice low, almost a whisper. No telling who might be prowling through these woods.

The man nodded. "One of them is. The others belong to the rebel leaders and some of the government men who are in with them. If the word we picked UP from Surabaya is

64

N

PEACEKEEPERS

65

iar and the rebels will be taking off tonight to
*ith the guerrillas over in Vogelkop."

`gDVerment men go back to Jakarta."

@said the man. "Bloody traitors."

's name was McPherson, a lifelong professional
th he and Alexander wore green-mottled jungle
d floppy Digger hats that broke up the outline of
ad against the heavy foliage of this sweltering
Test. Safer than tin helmets, McPherson claimed.
tic armor vests'were also jungle green; they felt
hot in the sweltering humidity, no matter what
004durer claimed for their lightness and comfort.
taken almost a year for Alexander to remit his
Oy force. It was small, but elite. McPherson had
cheaply. Almost every penny Alexan-
tt-had spent on McPherson and his band
essionals. Their arms and training were first-rate.
at little money he had left Alexander had used to
down the elusive Jabal Shamar. The mass murderer
also turned mercenary, using his skills and cunning in
hing from terrorism to rebellion, all around the
from Ankara to Quebec. But he made certain to
the reach of the Peacekeepers. He never
an attack that the IPF would consider to be
ds he killed died in civil wars, rebellions,
ments, terrorist demonstrations. But they
same, cut down by machine-gun fire or blown
pieces by car bombs. They died and Shamar
devising elaborate schemes of murder for pay.
had the ultimate insurance policy, of course.
he had cached six nuclear weapons, six bombs
destroying six cities. As long as no one knew
were, Shamar could range the world and
would allow him untroubled passage.

06 Ben Bova

Was there @ a nuclear weapon

submerged in a Bangkok
canal? Thailand turned a blind eye to sha afs
in passage

eir

through th terriiory. Is a nuclear bomb hidden in a slum
basement in Sao Paulo? Why should Brazil risk triggering
it by trying to arrest Shamar?

But Alexander hunted him. He recruit ed McPherson
and, through, hi

in, a mercenary force whose only task was
to find Sharnar so that Alexander could execute him.

Now Alexander and McPherson lay on a ridge at the
edge of a steaming forest,

raucous with birds and monkeys,
stinking of tropical rot, crawling

with insects. The humid
heat Pressed on them like a

sopping sponge, drenching
their fatigues with sweat.

McPherson spoke qui

lady into a Palm-sized radio, order-
ing the other men to take

up Positions ringing the village.

He was a tall, rawboned New Zealander, ruddy of face,
with hair and b

rows so blond he almost looked albino. He
had come to Alexander highly reco

mmended, having seen
action in the Katangan Secession, the overthrow of the
Diaz government in Chile and the bloody shambles of
South Africa.

Alexander had agreed that McPherson would be in
tactical command ' since he himself had never been in
action before.

"You stay closeby me, Cole. Check your weapons now.11

With sweaty hands Alexander examined the grenades
hooked to the web belts

across his shoulders, memorizing
the different types: concussion, frag, smoke. Then he took
the Pistol from the holster at his waist Loaded clip in
Place, safety off. More clips in the belt

Pouches. Finally he
slid the action of his stubby submachine gun back and
forth. Satisfied that it was ready, he slapped a banana-
curved magazine into place.

"Now we wait," McPherson sai

d.

"How long?"

"Until dusk. Let them get their dinner fires sta
rted."

felt his `Suppose they have

guts fluttarin&

but, around herer'

McPherson replied with a deprecating little
tut'they won't find my men. I promise

that"

YOU

I @ you make me check weapons now if...
person laid a hand on - Alexander's shoulder.
it do to be caught unready to fight, just in case
does stumble on us."

you said

I said, Cole. But it's always best to be
contingency. Remember that."
student facing a fatherly schoolmaster
soldier gaffing ready to attack,
lapsed into silence.

his exposure to sunlight; solar ultravi-
uld trigger skin cancers, or worse. His leukemia was
control as long as he took the pills, but Alexander
on the sun as an enemy. Shamak's gift to me, he
it angrily. Something else he's taken away from me.
if we nail him here it won't matter. The UV dose will
to pay for killing the son of a bitch.

scanned the village with his binoculars,
electro-optical gain to its highest, until he
the faces of the people. Hard to tell the
the guerrillas, he realized. Except for the
uniforms they wore, there was no real
fence among the brown-skinned men. Some of the
men were in dirty mottled uniforms, too, with assault
slung over their slim shoulders. The village women
long colorful batik skirts and Western-style loose
shabby and tattered.

a rich village. The paddies out on the other
helicopters were suddenly seemed

Pitifully

Even the few water buffalo Alexander
emaciated.

here, when he's being paid to organize

is

68 Bert &va

the rebel guerrillas in West Irian? Cole wondered. Is he actually here, or is this a ruse-or worse yet, a trap? And then his heart leaped. He saw Jabal Sham
ar. The

man calmly step

ped out of one of the larger cinder-block buildings in the center of the village, squinting at the lowering sun and raising his hand to shield his eyes. It was him, all right! Alexander knew that face, even though he had never met Shamar.

Seeing him live, instead of a picture, brought surprises. Shamar was shockingly young for a general, a youthful forty at most. Practically my age, Alexander realized. He wore desert tan fatigues, unadorned by insignia or any mark of rank. Vigorous, brisk movements. As he spoke he gestured vividly; his hands were never still. Yet he was much; smaller than Alexander had expected, a stunted marionette of a man, slim and hard-faced, with a trim dark mustache and a livid white scar that ran from the bottom of his right ear along the jawline almost to the point of his chin.

"The murdering son of a bitch is there," he muttered, passing the binoculars to McPherson.

The Kiwi took the I in for a moment handed them back with nothing more than a grunt of acknowledgement.

The largest building, in the center of the village, was obviously where the meeting was taking place. Alexander clicked on the subminiaturized video camera built into the bhioeuim 4s he watched the men gathering around Shamar, bowing to him or shaking his hand. They all seemed so subservient to this mass murderer. The men from Jakarta wore lightweight, light-colored Westernized business suits; bureaucrats through and through, dressed almost identically to their brethren around the world. The guerrillas wore rags and tatters of old army uniforms they had decorated with bright head scarves and armbands.

Alexander videoed it all as he watched, waiting impatiently for sunset.

PEACEKEEPERS (it

lengthened. Spires of smoke began to rise
oles in several of the cinder-block huts
village. Alexander could smell vegetables boiling
fish sizzling on the fire.

checked by radio with his men. NO sign of
No hint that they had been detected
in council with the rebel leaders and the
the government who were in league with the

Alexander on the shoulder. Cole jerked as if
had seared his skin.

McPherson said.

nodded, his lips pressed to a bloodless tight
tOkay," he said, with a firmness he did not feel. "Let's
done.

Pherson thumbed his palm-sized radio again. "All
_@-attack!"

were up and running toward the village It was
it was nothing more than a roughly circular
the cinder block buildings, none of them
A single story high. Alexander held his subma-

in both hands, felt the weight of the grenades on the pistol flopping in its holster at his hip, the pressing against the small Of sides of them other men in jungle green and guns held level, were -racing across the clearing forest and the outer ring of huts.

sprinted a few steps ahead of Alexander and between the two nearest huts. No one else was in his own mercenary soldiery a burst of gunfire off to his right. Alexander saw skid to a stop on the dusty bare ground and along a cinder-block wall. He did the same. in a dirt-caked steel helmet popped out of a and squirted a burst of semiautomatic -fire at

70 Ben Bova

them. McPherson threw himself to the ground and tumbled back in one motion. The soldier screamed and fell back into the hut.

"Come on!" McPherson yelled. Alexander followed him on legs suddenly gone rubbery as the New Zealander raced to the hut and threw a grenade into the doorway.

It exploded almost immediately. Smoke and screams billowed out the doorway.

"Squirt 'em!" McPherson commanded, already heading for the next hut.

Alexander ducked, into the smoky doorway, coughing as he pointed his gun inside the hut. Squinting, he saw a tangle of bodies huddled next to a small table splintered by the grenade's blast. He knew what he was supposed to do: spray the bodies with bullets, make certain no one would stagger out of that hut to shoot them in the back.

His finger froze on the trigger. They're all dead. Have to be.

One of the bodies moaned and writhed in pain. A woman, her corset skirt smeared with blood.

Alexander doubled over, fighting down the bile that was surging into his mouth. He backed out of the doorway, took a gulp of fresh air, and saw that he was alone.

Gunfire deeper in the village. The crump of a grenade. Men's deep voices shouting and rising. Screams, high-cu

pitched with terror and agony.

He ran down the crooked lane between huts and saw several of the green-clad mercenaries blazing away at the rooftops. Chunks of cinder block flew in all directions, but no one seemed to be up there. Then the black oval shape of a grenade arched against the flaming sunset sky and exploded between the men. Their bodies were flung like rag dolls smashed against the cinder blocks.

A fragment caught Alexander, nicked his shoulder and spun him halfway around.

He saw three men with assault rifles coming up toward
PEACEKEEPERS @.71

*6 men and a woman. Ragged clothes, but the
kinds polished and new.

He didn't fire at them. He knew he had to kill them or
'd kill him. He commanded his finger to squeeze
He silently raged at his hand to do what it had
When his finger would not move a millimeter.

A woman shot him, a single round, straight at his
Alexander felt a tremendous hammer blow slam him
to the ground. The bloodred sky went dark. The
thing he heard was a man's voice bellowing angrily
The sound of more gunfire. It sounded like
awn.

s voice.

to allow me to evacuate my wounded and
men," the Kiwi was saying.
professional soldier," replied a harsh,
heavily accented English. "You expect all
professional conduct to be extended
to open his eyes. They seemed glued
us," McPherson said, his voice sounding
than fearful. "What more do you want?"

I allow you to go? You might come against some other day. Why not kill you all now and be it?"

silence that followed, Alexander tried to rub the
rriness out of his eyes. His chest flared with pain.
Awn rib, he knew. More than one, most likely. The
aor vest stopped the bullet, but not its impact.
ie focused on the shadowy ceiling, then carefully turned
head toward the voices he had heard.
"@,Ne was lying on a straw pallet on the floor of a tiny room.
'be only light came from the doorway from which the
Oices emanated. The room stank of blood and excrement.

Flies buzzed annoyingly, but Alexander's chest hurt too much to try to wave them away. Two other bodies were stretched out next to him. They both were unmoving, eyes -staring-the flies and other insects were crawling over them.

Alexander barely held down his gorge. He looked past then toward the lighted doorway.

"As you said, I'm a professional soldier," McPherson replied at last. "If you allow us to leave here, I'll give you my word that neither I nor my men will ever fight against you. Never, no matter who approaches us or what he offers."

Another long silence. Then the other voice-it had to be Shamar's, Alexander reasoned-finally said, "Ah, you English and your honor. Very well, I will allow you to go."

"I'm New Zealand, said McPherson stiffly. "But I thank you anyways."

"All but your employer," said Shamar.

"Hold on now. .

"That man will remain here. He is my enemy and I have no intention of allowing him to go free."

He's talking about me! Alexander realized with a pang of shock.

can't allow that," said McPherson.

Shamar laughed, a mocking grating sound. "If you wish to stay with him and share his fate, I will accommodate you." His voice suddenly went iron-hard. "You, and what's left of your men."

"That's not fair," McPherson whispered.

Shamar laughed again. "I thought you English had a 'ARs fair in love'and war.'" .Hes just a silly rich man"

"A stupid rich man," Shamar corrected, "who swallowed the information that my people sold to him. An ignorant Yankee who led you and your men into this trap like a Judas goat leading sheep.- 461still can't..."

PE,4CEKEEPEP.S 73

men and leave while you can."

cold. The discussion was at an

woman said, "I'm doing this only for the sake of MY 61W. And don't trouble yourself about this AMC-171-14e, isn't worth troubling your conscience over.

Wet

MP

heard McPherson's booted feet clu across den floorboards. A door - squeaked open, then but. -

fault, he realized. I led McPherson and his men is mess. I let Shamar bait the trap and I walked@ right couldn't even fight, when the chips were down.

a fool. I'm a coward. A gutless coward who

a trigger even to save his own life'

burned him with a searing pain worse wound. I'm a coward. A coward.

Indonesian voice, in tones almost like a flute, "Is it wise to allow the mercenaries to go free?" Shamar made a coughing, almost barking sound that have been a single burst of laughter. "NO, it is not And they win not leave this village alive.-

told him..."

I told that Englishman I said to make him and his
to handle. They will be marched black toward
toward the vans that carried them here from the
they reach the vans they will be shot. All Of

Without consciously willing it, Alexander struggled UP
sitting position. The Pain made his head swim, but he
heard Shamaes grating voice.

In a few weeks' time the jungle will have obliterated
r bodies. There will be no trace of them."

J can't let him murder Mac and his men. I've killed
him slaughter the rest.

agony. Alexander checked his
everything: vest, webbing,

weapons, even his boots. Nothing remained except his fatigues, and the pockets

had been thoroughly emptied.

Glancing at the corpses lying next to him, he saw that they had been similarly stripped

He crawled painfully, slithering along the splintery boards on the side that hurt less, toward the lighted

doorway. It took all his willpower not to cry out in the pain, staying back in the shadows, flat on his stomach and flaming chest, Alexander surveyed the other room.

Shamar was sitting at a warped, swaybacked table, packing wads of paper money into an aluminum case. There was a stack of bills on the table, neatly bundled in bank wrappers- Two of the men from Jakarta, in their lily-white business suits, stood with their backs to Alexander, watching their money disappear into Shamar's case.

Also on the table were some of Alexander's belongings: he recognized his electronic binoculars, his never-used automatic pistol, and the six grenades he

had carried into the battle.

There was a guerrilla soldier at the door that led outside, standing nonchalantly with a Kalashnikov assault rifle slung over one shoulder, smoking a crooked brown cigarette, staring at more money than he and his ancestors had ever seen in their combined lifetimes

Biting his lips to keep from whimpering, Alexander slowly

clawed up the wall and inched to his feet. He stood there for a long dizzying moment, swaying, forcing himself to

remain conscious and not give in to the soft yielding darkness that tempted him.

Leaning his back against the flimsy wall listening to Shamar and the Jakarta traitors bantering about money and taxpayers and bank accounts in Singapore, Alexander felt the sweat pouring from every inch of his body. It was not merely the heat, not only the pain that made him perspire.

It was fear- He knew what he had to do. He knew that he had to do it now. Ten seconds from now might be too late.

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head.

going to kill
YOU

the wall, barged

the two Indonesians

pushed on the table.

His face showed surprise, but he reacted swiftly and surely. He dropped the wad of money he had been holding, even as the Indonesians Alexander and the young guerrilla by way of his cigarette in shock.

Shamar swept up the pistol in his right hand and with a swift motion brought his left to slide the action

UP

and cock it.

did so, Alexander did the only thing he could think
grabbed one of the fragmentation grenades and
a its pin out.
distinctly heard the pin clatter on the tabletop, and
the sound was gone, the snick-clack of the pistol's
two Indonesians started to babble and the guerrilla
his rifle from his shoulder.
bellowed, holding out his left hand to-
guerrilla.
the pistol at Alexander's But he did not
gut
held the grenade tightly in his right hand,
agony that his effort had caused, sagging
the cinder-block wall.
go," he said, his voice thick with pain, "this
off. We'll all die."
could see Shamar's eyes, pale blue and calculating.
a three-second fuse," Alexander added. "For house-
-house fighting. You won't have time to pick it up and
Dow it away-
ar eased his tensed body. He even smiled slightly.
gun staved pointed at Alexander.
are more resourceful than I thought."

"And You, \$' Alexander panted, gasping from the Pain of talkin& "are just as much a murdering son of a bitch as I thought-"

The Indonesians seemed Petrified with fear. The younger had lowered his rifle, but kept his hand on the pistol grip; he could swing the muzzle up and fire in an instant.

"We have a stalemate," Sham

ar said.,The scar along his jaw seemed unusually white, almost pulsating.

"Give the order to bring McPherson and his men back here."

"The mercenaries?"

"Bring them back here," Alexander repeated. "Unharmmed."

With a shrug that was half amused, half contemptuous, Shamar reached into a chest pocket of his fatigues and brought out a small black radio, the same miniature size that McPherson had used. He spoke into it in Arabic.

"They will be back here in ten minutes," he said to Alexander.

"Tell lem to make it faster. My hand I s getting sweaty. I might drop this egg."

Shamar spoke into the radio again. Alexander knew that they were waiting for him to pass out, to slump down into unconsciousness from the 'pain. He'll try to -grab the grenade before, it goes off, it's his only chance. I've got to stay awake. Alert. Got to!

He looked into Shamar's pale blue eyes again. Watching, waiting, calculating, staring at me like a snake stares at a bird. Odd that they should be so light. Wonder who got into whose harem?

A wave of dizziness washed over him and Alexander shook his head to clear it. The movement cost him pain, and a surge of nausea in his guts.

He snapped his eyes open when he realized they had been closed. Shamar had tensed slightly, but he smiled and

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7@.

None of the others in the room had Wthave been out long, Alexander said to himself. DO take long for him to move rod again at the face of Jabal Shamar, his enemy. who had killed his parents and millions of others.' in Jerusalem," Alexander muttered.

Lr lifted an eyebrow slightly. "And you survived." mother didn't. Neither did my father. He was in Tel

@@.Iien, you nuked it."

did not strike first with nuclear weapons.

You struck last. After the cease.-fire had been ed.

ould you like a chairr' Shamar asked, almost solici- He even let the pistol down slightly. Only slightly. stay on my feet," replied Alexander.

r how long?"

ng enough."

sound of boots scuffling on the dry ground outside id Alexandees ears. Someone rapped on the door said a single word-and an older guerrilla, a cartridges hanging from his shoulder, stepped

I want McPherson," said Alexander.

SO.

New Zealander took in the situation at a glance.
standoff, eh?"

get out of this village unless I allow it," said
asked McPherson, "Mac, can you fly one of
out there?"
can Alfie or Rodriguez."

Turning back to Shamar, he said, "Let's go."
helicopters?"

"If I refuse"

Without thinking, Alexander tried to take a deep breath. The pain flared, and he felt his knees turn watery. Bile surged up his throat. He put out his free hand to steady himself against the table

"Listen to me," he said to Shamar. "If you don't do exactly as I say, I'll open my hand and blow all of us to shreds. Understand? Now, move."

r

Wordlessly Shamar headed for the door. McPherson pushed past him and wrapped an arm around Alexander's shoulders. Tenderly.

"Ribs?" he asked.

"Yeah. Broken, I think."

"Come on, mate. Maybe you ought to give the pineapple to me..."

Alexander shook his head. "I'll hold it."

Turning to Shamar, McPherson wordlessly took the pistol from his hand.

Outside it was night. In the dim shadows, Alexander made out only eight men in jungle fatigues, and three of them wore bloodied bandages. Eight out of twenty-nine. It was a shambles, all right, he accused himself.

Slowly they made their way toward the helicopters, a strange procession with Alexander supported by McPherson, Shamar walking beside him, and the two Indonesian government officials two paces in front. The surviving mercenaries trudged on either side. They were completely disarmed; the only weapons in the entire group were the pistol McPherson now held and the grenade Alexander clutched in his cramped, sweaty hand.

But out in the shadows they were escorted by a ghostly convoy of guerrilla men and women, armed and waiting for a chance, a word, a stumble that might allow them to spring. Shamar kept up a steady flow of words, mostly in English, warning them to keep their distance and remain calm.

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665 If I want to die, Alexander realized. He's no more prepared to die than I was to kill. He sensed the terrifying presence of dozens of guns in the darkness to cut him down. If he felt like a bird being hypnotized by a snake, now it was like a herd of antelope being stalked by a pack of wolves.

They reached the helicopters. Under McPherson's direction, the mercenaries dismantled the engines on all but one. Rodriguez, his white teeth flashing in the dark, scrambled up into the cockpit of the largest chopper. It started up its engine. It whined to life, and the big blade began revolving slowly.

Sorted by one of the unwounded mercenaries, Alexander made a feeble gesture toward the helicopter.

"You go," he said to Shamar.

Shamar shook his head.

"Go to the chopper," Alexander insisted.

40.

"You'll go or else."

"Or else you'll release the grenade? Go ahead and do it."

the dim flashing red of the helicopters safety light,
's face looked coppery, lurid like a devil's lit by the
of- hell. He was no longer sneering, no longer contemp-
is.

rou want to take me to your kind of justice, to put me
jail cell and put me on trial before the world and
ute me as a criminal."

Damned right! Murderer. Genocidal bastard."

Shamar shook his head. "Then kill me here and now. Let
The grenade go."

Alexander was trembling with a mixture of rage and fear.

You better get the fuck up that ladder.

4. "No. And if you try to force me, the guerrillas will open
fire and kill you all."

McPherson came out of the shadows to Alexander's side.

So Ben Bova

"Let him go, he said over the rising thunder of the helicopter's engine.

"I won't! I want him dead!"

"Then kill me," Shamar shouted, his face grim, his voice flat and hard.;

"You'll, get us all killed," said McPherson.

Alexander said nothing. He could not move, could not speak, could not act.

Come on, boss. Into the heli. Be glad we're getting away with our lives. Thats the important thing.-

Gently McPherson coaxed him up the metal ladder and into the helicopter. Shamar stood rooted out on the dusty blowing ground, the flashing red light outlining him against the night.

Over the whining roar of the chopper's engine, Shamar shouted, "We will meet@ again, Yankee! We will meet again!"

Alexander tried to turn and answer, but McPherson had him wrapped in his strong arms. "Nevermind him. He's just putting on a show for the wogs.

He sat Alexander down on the bench at the rear of the chopper's passenger compartment. "Better let me have it now," McPherson said. "Wouldn't want it loose in here."

Alexander felt his strong fingers prying the grenade from his hand.

The other men filed in and slumped onto the remaining seats. McPherson gave a command and the engine roared louder. The helicopter jerked free of the ground and lifted into the darkness.

McPherson went to the batch, opened it, and tossed the grenade away. Its explosion was barely noticeable. The big New Zealander came back and sat beside Alexander once again.

couldn't do it," Alexander said, fighting back sobs. "I couldn't kill the son of a bitch. I had the chance and I couldn't do it."

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pointed out. "That's some-

a trap. I couldn't even fire a shot.

meant for combat. It's ust not in

anything," Alexander groaned. "Ug_d fucking useless coward."

silent for a moment. Then, "Well, at the video in here"-he unhitched the from his belt-"to blow away the government."

that?"

table in the hut back there," said the New the video stuff would look good on

pain still flaring in his chest, Alexander

"We can expose Shamar's connection

who're selling out their own govern-

him. It'll force him to get out of Indonesia

day's work, all things considered," said

don't always have to kill a man to defeat

leaned his head back against the padded

have killed him. He'll just pop up again

cause more trouble. Kill more people.

shook his head. "You're not the

Cole. These men of mine-they can kill. But
It isn't in you."

a helluva mercenary, don't IT'
nned at him. "Oh, I dunno. You're learning.
than one way to skin a rat."

closed his eyes. The Peacekeepers have
he realized. Destroy the weapons, not the

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soldiers. Maybe I can do that, too Work where the
Alexander recovered from his wounds.
Peacekeepers can't go. Use smarts instead of guns. Maybe

ic trauma, the injury to his
it can work like that. It's worth a try.

and self-esteem, took longer to
It's worth a try.

Strangely it was his only child who
McPherson got up and went forward to check with the

the therapeutic process-quite
pilot. He came back to report that Surabaya was less than

realizing what she was doing.
an hour away, and a medical team would be waiting for

of a conversation between them,
them.

as they strolled along the grounds
But Alexander was stretched out on the bench, sound facility in Ottawa, where
he
asleep, a crooked grin on his grimy, sweaty face.

nighter, S. A. Kelly.

pod to see you again, Daddy.

You sounded pretty damned

-rdsorable on the phone. What's the matter?

I shouldn't bother you with it. It's

Kelly.

:My

problem.

I,;

Alexander Listen, kid, I may not be much

bf a father, but I do care about you,

you

V. Itnow.

Kelly: I know.

And I don't have much of

Alexander,

anything else to do right now. At least let
me act like a father, give you some sage
advice and all that crap.

Kelly (laughing a little). Oh, I've

just got a

heart problem.

Alexander (alarmed). Heart?

Kelly. Not medical! Romantic. I fell

for a

guy and I thought he fell for me. But now
he's getting married to somebody else.

Alexander. The son of a bitch.

Kelly. No, he's not. He's a very fine

man.

It was my mistake.

Alexander (slowly). We all make

mistakes,

little lady. I backed off from marrying

your

that was the worst mistake of
mother .
my life.

Kelly.- She really loved you. Her last words were about you.

Alexander (a

fter along pause) Listen, kid, why don't you chuck this Peacekeeper job and come with me?

Kelly: Leave the IPF?

Alexander. Why not? You've been stuck in 'the same grade for two years now. They should have Promoted You for what you did in Eritrea.

Kelly The review board

Alexander Screw the review board! Come with me I'm doing things that the JPF can,t do.

Kelly What do you mean?

Alexander (lowering his voice): Not here. Come into town with me tonight. well have dinner together and I'll lay it all out for you.

Kelly soon did resign from the Peacekeepers to help her father build the tightly "it mercenary force that eventually brought him to the massacred village of Misericordia and his confrontation shortly afterward with Jabal Shamar.

In the meantime, however, the cabal of officers from several nations sprang their coup to take over the International Peacekeeping Force-@ To understand what happened ix;'orbit, where the main struggle took place, it is instructive to cite two twentieth century strategic thinkers who strongly disagreed with one another.

Ashton Carter We should avoid a dependence on satellites for wartime purposes that is out of proportion to our ability to Protect them. If we make

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view dependent upon vulnerable
raft for military support, we will have
wAchilles' heel into our forces.
xwell W Hunter H The key issue then
ies, is our defense capable of
itself ... ?
I said, they strongly disagreed with
Yet both of them were right.

BATTLE STATION

HUNTER

Year 5

THE first laser beam caught them unaware, slicing through the station's thin aluminum skin exactly where the main power trunk and air lines fed into the bridge.

A sputtering fizz of sparks, a moment of heart-wrenching darkness, and then the emergency dims came on. The electronics consoles switched to their internal batteries with barely a microsecond's hesitation, but the air fans sighed to a stop and fell silent. The four men and two women on duty in the bridge had about a second to realize they were under attack. Enough time for the breath to catch

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Mr. Throat, for the sudden terror to hollow out your and laser hit was a high-energy pulse deliberately it the bridges observation port. It cracked the assistant plastic as easily as a hammer smashes an air pressure inside the bridge blew the port open. men and women became six exploding bodies was not even time enough to blood. There scream.

station was named Hunter, although only three of its knew why. It was not one of the missile-killing Ms, nor one of the sensor-laden observation birds. It VOMM station, manned by a crew of orbiting some one thousand kilometers high, just the densest radiation zone of the inner Van Mien It circled the Earth in about 105 minutes. By deliberate design, the station was not hardened against laser attack. "The attackers knew this perfectly well. *nimaiider Hazard was almost asleep when the bridge destroyed. He had just finished his daily inspection of battle station. Satisfied that the youngsters of his crew reasonably sharp, he had returned to his coffin-sized anal cabin and wormed out of his sweaty fatigues. He UWY with himself. o months, aboard the station and he still felt the unease of space adaptation syndrome. It was of an ocean vessel having seasickness all Hazard fumed inwardly as he stuck another medication plaster on his neck, slightly better. The old one had fallen off. Not that they good. His neck was faintly spotted with the rings medication patches. Still, his stomach felt palms slippery with perspiration. grimly to a handgrip, he pushed his weightless the iniffored sink, to the mesh sleep cocoon the opposite wall of his cubicle. He zipped the bag and slipped the terry-cloth restraint

BenBova

across his forehead. Hazard war. a bulky, dour man with
IrOnVW hair still cropped Academy close , a weather-
beaten squarish face built around a thrusting spadelike
11M. a thin slash of a mouth that seldom smiled and eyes
the color of a stormy gm Those eyes seemed...

suspicious of

e"eryone and everything PrObing, inquisitory. A closer
look showed that th--YWeM weary, disappointed with the
world and t

he people in it. Disappointed most of all with
himself,

He was just dozing off when the emergency klaxon
started hooting. For a,disoriented moment he thought he
wvback in a submarine and something had gone wrong
with a dive. He felt his arms pinned by the mesh sleeping
b"'& as if he had been bound by unknown enemies..He
ah-st Panicked as he heard hatches slamming automati-
cally and the terrifying wail Of the alarms. The communi-
cations un't On the wall added its urgent shrill to the
clamor.

The comm, unit's piercing whistle snapped him to full
awareness- He stopped struggling against the mesh and
mizipped it with a single swift motion, sliPPing out of the
head restraint at the same time.

Hazard slapped at the wall comm's switch. "Command-
er hereto hesnapped. 4-Report.11

"Varshni, sir. CIC. The bridge is out. Apparently
de-
stroyed."

"Destroyed?"

"All life-support functions down. Air pressure zero. No
communications," replied the Indian in a rush. His slightly
singsong ord accent was trembling with fear. "It ex-
ploded, sir. They are all dead in there."

Hazard f6t the old terror clutching at his heart, the
Physical Weakness, the giddiness of sudden fear. Forcing
his voice to remain steady. he oomanded, "FU alert
status. Ask Mr- Feeney and Miss Yang to meet me at the
CIC at once. I'll be down there In sixty seconds 01, less... ,

PEACEKEEPERS

40W was one of nine orbiting battle stations that
ip@tbe command-and-control function of the newly
A international Peacekeeping Force s strategic de
network. In lower orbits, 135 unmanned ABM
es I armed with multimegawatt lasers and
ocity missiles crisscrossed the Earth's surface. In
hose satellites could destroy thousands of ballistic
within five minutes of their launch, no matter
I Earth they rose from.

b i ry, each battle station controlled fifteen of the
sattUites, but never the same fifteen for very long.
attle @ station's higher orbits were deliberately picked
l the unmanned satellites passed through their field
W as they hurried by in their lower orbits. At the
ace of the fearful politicians of a hundred nations;
M satellites were under the permanent control of any
irticular battle station.
heory, each battle station patrolled one ninth of the
s surface as it circled the globe. The sworn duty of its

fly chosen international crew was to make certain any missiles launched from that part of the Earth be swiftly and efficiently destroyed.

In theory.

The IPF was new, its defensive satellite system untried and untested for computerized simulations and war games. The sentries had the power and the authority to prevent a nuclear strike from reaching its targets, no matter who

"I hesitated the attack. Their authority extended completely over the Earth, even to the superpowers themselves. In fresh fatigue, Hazard pulled aside the privacy door of his cubicle and launched himself down the hatch with a push of his meaty hands against the cool metal of the bulkheads. His stomach lurched at the sudden motion and he squeezed his eyes shut for a moment.

90 Ben Bova

The Combat Information Center was buried deep in the middle of the working station' Protected by four levels Of living and areas plus 'the station's storage agazines for water, food, air, fuel for the maneuvering thrusters, power generators and other equipment.

Hazard fought down the queasy fluttering of his stomach as he glided along the Passageway toward the CIC At least he did not suffer the claustrophobia that afflicted the station's younger crew members. To a man who had spent most Of his career aboard nuclear submarines, the station was

roomy, almost luxurious
(US.

hatches along the short way- behind him.

Al

lit Combat Information Center. It was a tiny, womblike circular chamber, its walls studded with display screens that glowed a sickly green in the otherwise darkened compartment. No desks or chairs in zero gravity, the CICs work surfaces were chest-high consoles, most of them covered with keyboards.

woman,

Vsrshni and the Norwegian Stromsen, were on duty- The little Indian, slim and dark, was wide-eyed with anxiety. His face shone with perspiration and his fatigues were damp (sweat at the armpits and between his shoulders. In the greenish glow from the display screens, he looked positively ill. Stromsen looked tense, her strong jaw clenched, her ice-blue eyes fastened on Hazard, waiting for him to tell her what to do.

"What happened?" Hazard demanded.

"It simply blew out," said Vsrshni. --I had just spoken with Michaels and DArgencour when ... when. His voice choked off.

"The screens went blank." Stromsen pointed to the status displays- "Everything suddenly zeroed out."

She was controlling herself carefully, Hazard saw, every nerve taut to the point of snapping.

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of the station?" Hazard asked
*p6d again toward the displays. "No other
edy on full alert?"
sent

Feeney ducked, through the hatch, his eyes
were drawn to the row of burning red malfunction
2 the bridge displays should have been.

re

er of Mercy, what's happened?"

could reply, Susan Yang. the chief corn-
- anyone

office pushed through the hatch and almost
ions 171

d into Feeney. She saw the displays and immediately
re under attack!"

Varshni blurted.

their faces for a swift moment. They all
only Yang had the guts to say it
d cool and in control of herself. Oriental
wondered. He knew she was third-
ian. Feeney's pinched, narrow-eyed face
the fear that they all felt, but the Irishman
and returned Hazard's gaze without a
sound in the CIC was the hum of the electrical
and the soft sighing of the air fans. Hazard felt
ly warm with the five of them crowding the
ittle chamber. Perspiration trickled down hi&
were all staring at him, waiting for him to, tell
must be done, to bring order out of the numbing
and uncertainty that swirled around them.' Four
ngsters from four different nations, each of them
ring the blue-gray fatigues of the IPF with colored
hes, denoting their technical specialties on their right
Iders and the flag of their national origin on their left
said, "We'll have to control the station from

here. Mr. Feeney, you are now my Number one; Michaels was on duty in the @ bridge. Mr. Varshni, get a daniage-control party to the bridge. Full suits.-

"No one's left alive in there,,, Varshni whispered.

"Yes, but their bodies must be recovered. We owe them that. And their families." He glanced toward Yang. "And we've got to determine what caused the blowout.,,

Varshni's face twisted unhappily at the thought of the mangled bodies.

want a status report Erom -each section of the station," Hazard went on, k nowing tha I t activity was the key to

A beeping,sound made all five of them turn toward the communications console. Its orange demand light blinked for attention in time with the angry beeps. Hazard reached for a handgrip to steady himself as he swung toward the Comm console- He noted how easily the youngsters handled themselves in zero gee. To him it still took a conscious, gut-wrenching effort.

Stroinsen touched the keyboard with a slender finger. A man's unsmiling face appeared on the screen: light brown hair clipped as close as Hazard's gray, lips pressed together in an uncompromising line. He wore the blue-gray of the JPF with a commander's silver comet on his collar.

"This is Buckbee, commander of station Graham. I want to spea k to Commander Hazard."

Sliding, in front of the screen, Hazard gras ed the

p

console's edge with both white-knuckled hands. He knew Buckbee Only by reputation, a former U. Air Force colonel, from the Space Command until it had been disbanded, but before that he had put in a dozen years with

SAC

This is Hazard."

Buckbee's lips moved slightly in what might have been a smile, but his eyes remained cold. "Hazard, you've just lost your bridge.,@

-_@.PEACEKEEPERS 93

lives."

Buckbee continued as, if reading from a "We offer you a chance to save the lives of of your crew. Surrender the Hunter to us."

Lbee nodded, a small economi movement. "We

called the

ing order and greatness out of this farce

made him

ave of loathing so intense that it almost

through Hazard. He realized that:he had wept

all along, with a certainty that had not needed mte attack, not by accident.

low that he

u killed six kids," he said, his voice so

a growl.

heard it himself. It was not a whisper but

Hazard. Now,

W had to prove that we mean business,

to hell. Any

wonder your station or we'll blow you all

(ret-).
Jonathan, Jr
twenty@eight
Commanded
Christi
Joint Chiefs
headquarters in
crisis in Brus-

ier deaths will be on your head, not ours."
nathan Wilson Hazard, captain, U. Navy

ital status: divorced. Two children,
ity-six; Virginia Elizabeth, twenty. Served
's in U. Navy, mostly in submarines.
t Ballistic Missile Submarines Ohio, Corpus
Utah. Later served as technical advisor to
Staff and as naval liaison to NATO
mussels. Retired from Navy after hostage
international Peacekeeping Force and ap-
mander of orbital battle station Hunter.

just hand this station over to a face on a screen,
ed, stalling, desperately trying to think his way
situation. "I don't know what you're UP to,
intentions are, who you really are."
in no position to bargain, Hazard," said
his voice flat and hard. "We want control of your
maintaining Discipline. "Start with .. ous verification:, his bridge had bee
destroyed by

Ben Bova

@station. Either YOU give it to us Or vWll eliminate you completely."

"Who the hell is 'we?'"

"That doesn,t matter.

"The hell it doesn't! I want to know who you are and what you're up to."

Buckbee frowned slightly. His eyes shifted away slightly, as if looking to someone standing out of range of the video camera.

@,We don't have time to go into that now," he said at last. Hazard recognized the crack in Buckbee's armor@ it was no(much, but he pressed it. -Well, you goddamned well better make time, mister. I'm not handing this station over to you or anybody else until I know what in hell is going on.,\$

Tarning to Feeney, he ordered, "Sound general quarters. ABM satellites on full automatic. Miss Yang, contact JPF headquarters and give them a- full report of our situation."

"Well destroy your station before those idiots in Geneva can decide what to do!" Buckbee snapped.

"Maybe,- said Hazard. "But that'll take time, won't it? And we won't go down easy, I guarantee you. Maybe we'll take you down with us."

Buckbee's face went white with fury. His eyes glared angrily-

"Listen," Hazard said more reasonably, "you can't expect me to just turn this station over to

a face on a screen. Six of my people have been killed. I want to k now

I won't deal unt why, and who's behind all this.

il I know

who I'm dealing with and what your intentions are Buckbee growled, "You've just signed the death warrant for yourself and your entire crew."

The comin screen went blank.

For a moment Hazard hung weightlessly before the dead screen, struggling to keep the fear inside him from showing. Putting a hand out to the edge of the console to steady himself, he turned slowly to his young officers. Their eyes

CEKEEPERS

95

PEA

on him, wa iting for him to tell them what to and death. commanded,

from a dream.

as if sud

himself to the command console, unlatched the mer over the general-quarters button and banged it upward

his fist. The action sent him recoiling with

had to put up a hand against the overhead to push back down to the deck. The alarm, light @began red and they could hear its hooting even through ght hatches outside the CIC.

the howl

va, Miss yang," Hazard said sternly over arm. 'Feeney, see that the crew is at their battle

I want the satellites under our control on full prepared to shoot down anything that moves if

7

in our protected data bank. And Mr. Varshni, has image-control party gotten under way yet?"

two young men rushed toward the hatch, bumping other in their eagerness to follow their commanders

Hazard almost smiled at the I Laurel and Hardy of it. Lieutenant Yang pushed herself to the Commle and anchored her softboots on the 'Velcro strip led to the deck there.

Miss Stromsen, you are the duty officer. I am depending keep me informed of the status of all systems- u to

Yes

Keep them busy, Hazard told himself. Make

them

time

on doing their jobs and they won't have

to be frightened.

J

-be frightened.

Encountering interference, sir,"

reported Yang, her

eyes on the comin displays. "Switching to

emergency

thought Hazard.

Comm antenna overheating,- Stromsen said. She

at her console keyboard, then up at the

--I think they're attacking the antennas with

% Ben Bova

lasers, sit. Main antenna out. Secondaries.;.
shrugged and gestured

she

toward@ the baleful red lights strung
across her keyboard. "They're all out, sit.,,
up a L'Wr link," Hazard commanded. 47hey can't
)am that. VWve got to let Geneva know what,s happening.

4
'\$ir,"saidYang."Genevawillnot@bewithinourborizon
for another forty-six minutest,
Try signaling the commsats. Topmost priority.-
'Yes sit.

Got to let Geneva know, Hazard repeated to himself. if
anybody can help us, they can. If Buckbee's pals haven't
Put one of their own people into the comm. center down
there. Or staged a coup

Or already knocked out the
c0mmsats- They've been planning this for a long time.
They've got it all timed down to the m- d.
icrosecon

He remembered the dinner two months earlier, the night
before he, left to take command of e Hunter. I,ve known
abo th himself. Known about it
but about it and done
not] those six kids. I should
havo strike without warning.

It had been in the equatorial city of Belem, where the
Brazilians had set UP their space launching facility. The
IPF was obligated to spread its launches among all its
sSpace-capable member nations, so Hazard had

been or-

dered to assemble his crew at Belem for their lift into orbit.

The .. ght before they left, Hazard had been invited to

dirmer by an old Navy acquaintance who had already put
in a three month hitch in orbit with the Peacekeepers
and
was now on Earthside duty.

His name was Cardillo. Hazard had known him, some
what distantly, as a fellow submariner, commander of
attack boats rather than the missile carriers Hazard himself
had captained Vince Cardillo had a reputation f or being a
hard nose who ran an efficient boat, if not a particularly
happy

one- He had never been really Close to Hazard. their

PEACEKEEPERS 07

rids were tooAfferent. But this specific sweltering
in a poorly air-conditioned restaurant in down-
d6m, Cardillo acted as -if they shared some old
i 9 I octet between them.

d, wo Is bad m h' IPF summer-weight unifo M. pale
llgold insignia bordered by space black. Cardillo
casual civil= slacks and a beautifully tailored
first part of the
ilk jacket. Througk drinks and the

their conversation was light, inconsequential. Most-
tiniscences by two gray-haired submariners about
iey had known, women they had chased, sea tales
ith each retelling. But then:

ew w,

mn shame," Cardillo muttered halfway through his
of grilled eel.

re staurant, one of the hundreds that had sprung up
,m since the Brazilians had made the city their major
ort, was on the waterfront. Outside the floor-to-
windows, the muddy Parii River widened into the
_ay that eventually fed into the Atlantic;- Hazard had
L his last day on Earth touring around the tropical
riverboat. The makeshift shanties that stood on
e on a

along the twisting mud-brown creeks were giving way
idustrial parks and cinder-block housing develop-
ts. Air-conditioning was transforming the region from
information services.

)er plantations to computerized

smell of cement dust blotted out the fragrance of
icai flowers. Bulldozers clattered in raw clearings
ied from the forest where stark steel frameworks 0
buildings rose above the jungle growth. Children who
enlashed naked in the brown jungle streams were being
ZMunded up and sent to air-conditioned schools.

"Wh at's a shame?" Hazard asked. "Seems to me these
r-people are start' ing to do all right for the first time in their

The space business is making a lot of jobs around
Cardillo took a forkful of eel from his plate. It never
got

-to his mouth.

94 Ben Bova

"I don't mean t

Shame about us.- hem' Johnny, I mean U& It's a damn
Hazard had

never liked being called Johnny. His family
had addressed him as Jon. His Navy associates knew him il
as Hazard and nothing else. A few very close friends used
J.

do you mean?" he asked. His own plate was
already wiped clean. The fish and its dark spicy sauce had
been So

, had the Crisp-crusted bread.

"Don't you feel nervous about this whole IpF
thing?"

Cardillo asked, trying to look earnest. "I mean, I can see
like your boats in
too. But the attack subs?
weapons systems? Leave
Hazard had not been

in command of a missile subma-
rine in More than three years. He had
been allowed, even
encouraged, to resign his
commission after the hostage
men in Brussels.

"If You're not in favor of wh-

at the American government
is doing, then

why did YOU agree to serve in the
Peacekeepers?"

Cardillo shrugged and smiled slightly. It was not a
Pleasant smile. He had a thin, almost triangular face with a
low, creased brow tapering down to a Pointed chin. His
Once-dark hair, now Pe

ppered with gray, was thick and
wavy- He had allowed it to
grow down to his collar. His

were always narrowed, crafty, focused so
to be trying

to penetrate through you.

There was no joy in his face, even though he was smiling,
no pleasure. It was the smile of a gambler, a

con artist, a

uskl-car salesman.

"Wellm-l,- he said slowly, Putting his fork back down on
the Plate and leaning back in his chair, "You know the old
saying, 'If You can't beat 'em, join 'em
Hazard nodded, although he felt

Puzzled. He groped for
PF-4CEKEEPERS 99

s meaning. "Yeah, I guess playing space cadet up
I be better than rusting away on the beach."

Cardillo's dark brows: rose slightly. "We're
Johnny. We're in this for keeps."
nean to imply that I dont take my duty to the
y," Hazard answered.

stant Cardillo seemed stunned with surprise.
he threw- his head back and burst into laughter.

I

Christ, Johnny," he gasped. "Vbu're so

it's hysterical."

Cardillo frowned but said nothing. Hazard and
said

the table with one hand. Some of the diners glanced
to be mostly Americans or
fay. They seemed

ans, a few Asians. Some Brazilians, too, Hazard
as he waited for Cardillo's amusement to subside
ly from the capital or Rio.

to me in on the joke," Hazard said at last.

Cardillo wiped at his eyes. Then, leaning forward across
ble, his grin fading into an intense, penetrating stare,

he whispered slyly, "I already told you, Johnny. If we can't
being members of the IPF-if; Washington's so
ng weak that we've got to disband practically all our
nses-then what we've got to do is take over the
keepers ourselves."

"Take over the Peacekeepers?" Hazard felt stunned at
thought of it.

"Damn right! Men like you and me, Johnny. It's our duty
our country-,"

rem ml "has decided to

2

"Our country," Hazard ' indeed hi

the International Peacekeeping Force and has encour-
d its military officers to obtain commissions in the - -

Cardillo shook his head. "That's our stupid government,

Johnny. Not the country. Not the people who

really want to defend America instead of selling her out to a
ch of fucking foreigners."

100 Ben Bova

"That government," Hazard reminded him, "won a big majority last November.,,

Cardillo

made a sour face. "Ahh, the people. What the fuck do they know?"

Hazard said nothing.

"I'm telling you, Johnny, the only way to do it is to take over the IPF.11

3

"That's crazy.,,

'You mean if and when the time comes you, won't go along with us?"

"I mean," Hazard said, forcing his voice to remain calm, "that I took an oath to be loyal Wthe IPF@So did you."

Yeah, yeah, sure. And what about the oath we took way back when---the one to preserve

and protect the United

States of America?"

"The United States of America wants us to serve in the Peacekeepers," Hazard insisted.

Cardillo shook his head again mournfully. Not a trace ,of

anger. Not even disappointment. As if he had expected this reaction from Hazard. His expression was that of a salesman who could not convince his stubborn customer of the bargain he was offering.

Your son doesn't feel the same way you do," Cardillo said.

Hazard immediately clamped down on the rush of emotions that surged through him. Instead of reaching across

the table and dragging Cardillo to his feet and punching in his smirking face, Hazard forced a thin smile and kept his fists clenched on his lap.

"Jon Jr. is a grown man. He has the right to make his own decisions."

"He's serving under me, you know." Cardillo's eyes searched Hazard's face intently probing for weakness.

"Yes," Hazard said tightly ' ll@e told me."

Which was an outright lie.

PF,4CEKEEPERS 101

approaching, sid"

is tense warning snapped Hazard out of hit riveted his attention to the main CIC display angry red dots were worming their way from the of the screen toward the center, which marked of the Hunter.

P we'll see if the ABM satellites are working or not, muttered. an

2s @ with the ABM sats are still good, gir," Y 9

J from her station, a shoulders width away from

n. "The integral antennas weren't knocked out

ey hit the comm dishes."

-d gave her a nod of acknowledgment. The two omen could not have looked more different-, Yang gl, wiry, dark, her straight black hair cut like a was willowy yet broad inthe

-yhelmet; Stromsen

and deep in the bosom, as blond as butter-

Lasers on 124 and 125 autofiring," the Norwegian
said.

Hazard saw the display lights. On the main screen the six
dots flickered orange momentarily, then winked out
there.

Voinsen pecked at her keyboard. Alphanumeric
on a side screen. "Got them all while they were
coming up

s

smiled

"They'll never reach us." She
in first-stage burn.
I feel relief. They're tumbling into the atmosphere. Bum-
within seven minutes."

Hazard grinned. "Don't break out
hazard allowed himself a small
champagne yet. That's just their first salvo. They're
to see if we actually have control of the lasers."

It was a question of time, Hazard knew- But how
much

start

What are they planning? How long before they
bring us up with laser beams? We don't have the shielding
to protect against lasers-The stupid politicians wouldn't
to armor these stations. We're like a sitting duck

102 Ben Bova

"What are they trying to accomplish, Sir?" asked Yang.
"Why are they doing this?"

"They want to take over the whole defense network.
They want to
seize control of the entire IPF.11

blurting.

to do that," Yang said.

4T

the IPF will stop

41 "Maybe," said Hazard. -m

maybe." He felt a slight hint of

nausea rippling in his stomach. Reaching up, he touched
the slippery. Plastic of the -medicine patch behind his ear.

"Do you think they could succeed?" Stromsen asked.

"What's important is, do they think they can succeed?"

There are still thousands of ballistic missiles on Earth'
Tens of thousands of hydrogen-bomb warheads. Buckbee
and his cohorts apparently believe that if they can take
control of a portion of the ABM network, they can threaten
a nuclear strike against the nations that won't go along with
them.,'

"But the other nations will strike back and order their
kisses'l,

people in the IPF not to intercept '

their stri said Yang.

"It will be nuclear war," Stromsen said. "Just as if the
IPF never existed."

"Worse," Yang pointed out, "because first there'll be a
shoot-out on each one of these battle stations."

"That's madness!" said Stromsen.

"That's what we've got to prevent," Hazard said grimly.

An orange light began to blink on the comm console.

Yang snapped her attention to it. "Incoming message from
the Graham, sir."

Hazard nodded. "Put it on the main screen."

Cardillo's crafty features appeared on the screen. He
should have been on duty back on Earth, but instead he
was smiling crookedly at Hazard.

"Well, Johnny, I guess by now you've figured out that we
mean business."

"And so do we. Give it up, Vince. it's not going to work."

PEACEKEEPERS 103

answered, 'Ws

the Russian battle

The Chinks and

are holding out but the European station is going

'So you've got six of the nine stations.11

't really need Hunter. You can leave us

niz his lips for a moment, Cardillo replied, "I'm

i@sn't work that way, Johnny We want Hunter.

il afford to have you rolling around like a loose

us

You're either with us or against

with you," Hazard said flatly.

theatrically. "John, there are twenty

11

crew on your station ...

Hazard corrected.

you ought to give them a chance to

their own lives?"

himself, Hazard broke into a malicious grin.

J

you straight, Vince? You're asking the
a vessel to take a vote?"

at him, Cardillo admitted, "I guess that
dumb. But you do have their lives in your
.11

knuckling under, Vince. And you've got
lives aboard the Graham, you know. Includ-
Better think about that."

have, Johnny. one of those lives is Jonathan
He's right here on the bridge with me. A fine
You should be proud of him."

realized. They're using Jay-Jay as a
to talk with him?" Cardillo asked.

out of view and a younger man's face
ilippeared on the screen. Jon Jr. looked tense, strained. This

7_

@104 Ben Bova

isn't any easier for him than it is for meHazard thought. He studied his son's face. Youthful, clear-eyed, a square-jawed honest face. Hazard was startled to realize that he had seen that face before, in his own Academy graduation photo.

"How are you, son?,,

"I'm fine, Elad. And you?"

"Are we really on opposite sides of this?"

Jon, Jr.s eyes flicked away for a moment, then turned @b4ck to look squarely at his father's. "I'm afraid so, Dad.,

"But why" Hazard felt -genuinely bewildered that his son did not see things theway he did.

"The IPF is dangerous," Jon Jr. said. "It's the first step toward a world government. The Third world nations want to bleed the industrialized nations dry. They want to grab all Our wealth for themselves. The first step is to disarm us, under the Pretense Of Preventing nuclear war. Then, once we're disarmed, they're going to take over everything-using the IPF as their armed forces.-'

"That's what they've told you," Hazard said.

"That's what I know, Dad. It's true. I know it is."

44

And your answer is to take over the IPF and use it as your armed force to control the rest of the world, is that itri

"Better us than them."

Hazard 'shook his head. "They're using you, son. Cardillo and Buckbee and the rest of those maniacs-, you're in with a bunch of would-be-Napoleons."

Jon Jr. smiled Pityingly at his father. "I knew You'd say something like that."

Hazard put up a beefy hand. "I don't want to argue with YOU, Son. But I can't go along with you.,,

"You're going to force us to attack your station.

"I'll fight back."

His son's smile turned vicious. "Like you did in Brussels?"

PEACEKEEPERS 1e5

it like a punch in his gut' He grunted with the Wordlessly he reached out and clicked off the iscreen.

thought it was just another one of those endless demonstrations. A peace march. The the Nuclear Winter freaks, the Neutralists, @of one stripe or another. Swarms of little old [Reir Easter frockslimping old war veterans, kids Teenagers, lots of them. In bluejeans and denim)ung women in shorts and tight T-shirts guards in front of NATO's headquarters complex Io particular note of the older youths and women in with the teens. They failed to detect the hard, itting eyes and the snub-nosed guns and grenades a under jackets and sweaters.

the peaceful parade dissolved into a mass of wild people. The guards were cut down merci- and the cadre of terrorists fought their way into the building of NATO headquarters. They forced dozens acefid marchers to go in with them, as shields and ges-

Aptain J. W. Hazard, U., was not on duty that day, but he was in his office, nevertheless attending, to ie paperwork that he wanted out of the way before the t of business on Monday morning. Unarmed, he was Ily captured by the terrorists, biaten bloody for the fun it, and then locked in a toilet. When the terrorists lized that he was the highest-ranking officer in the ailding, Hazard was dragged out and commanded to open ic security vault where the most sensitive NATO docu- Rents were stored. Hazard refused. The terrorists began shooting hostages Aer the second murder Hazard opened the vault for in. Top-secret battle plans, maps showing locations of

106 Den Bova

nuclear weapons and hundreds. of other documents were taken by; the terrorists and never found, even after a Fk*nch-led strike force retook the building in a bloody battle that killed all but four of the hostages.

Hazard stood before the blank comm screen for a moment, his softbooted feet not quite touching the deck, his 'mind racing.

They've even figured that angle, he said to himself, They know I caved in at Brussels and they expect me to cave in here. Some son of a bitch has grabbed my psych records and 'the conclusion'

come to ion @that I'll react the same way now as I did then, Some son of a bitch.. And they got MY son to stick the knife in me

The sound of the hatch clattering open stirred Hazard. Feeney floated through the hatch and grabbed an overhead handgrip-

"The crew's at battle stations, sir," he said, slightly breathless. "Standing by for further orders."

It struck Hazard that only a few minutes had passed since he himself had entered the CIC.

64

Very good, Mr. Feeney," he said. "With the bridge out, we're going to have to control the station from here. Feeney, take the con. Miss Stromsen, how much time before we can make direct contact with Geneva?"

"Forty minutes, sir," she sang out, then corrected, "Actually, thirty-nine fifty.,,

Feeney was worming his softboots against the Velcro strip in front of the propulsion and control console.

"Take her down, Mr. Feeney."

The Irishman's eyes widened with surprise. "Down, sir?"

Hazard made himself smile. "Down. To the altitude of the ABM satellites. Now."

41Y1M , sir." Feeney began carefully pecking out commands on the keyboard before him.

-PEACEKEEPERS 107

just react like an old submariner," Hazard

ing young, officers. "I want to get us to a lower we would be such a good target for so many of Shrink our horizon. We're a sitting duck UP

back at him. "I didn't think you expected a laser beam, sir. we can take ourselves out of range of most of but not all.

you set up a simulation for me? I know how many unfriendly satellites can attack us at altitudes, and what their positions would be @d to our own. I want a solution that tells me where sdest.19

ftt away, sir," Stromsen -said. "What minimum e, shall I plug in?"

right down to the deck," Hazard said. "Low enough the paint off."

station isn't built for reentry into the atmosphere,

know. But see how low we can get."

0 old submariner's instinct: run silent, run deep. So
astards think I'll fold up, just like I did at Brussels,
inwardly. Two big differences, Cardillo and
ve?y big differences. In Brussels the hostages
not military men. and women. And in
didn't have any weapons to fight back with.

?

the micropuffs of thrust from the maneuvering
hardly strong enough to be felt, yet Hazard's
and heaved suddenly.

retro bum," Feeney said. "Altitude decreas-
stomach's more sensitive than his instru
to himself.

from Graham, sir," said Y"g.

148 Ben Bova

- 'Ignore it."

"Sir," Yang said,

turning slightly toward him, "I've been thinking about the minimum altitude we can achieve. Although the station is not equipped for atmospheric reentry, we do carry the four emergency evacuation spacecraft and they do have heat shields."

"Are you suggesting we abandon the station?"

Oh, no, sir! But perhaps we could move the spacecraft to a position where they would be between us and the atmosphere. Let their heat shields protect us--sort of like riding a surfboard."

Feeney laughed. "Trust a Hawaiian girl to come up with a solution like that!"

"It might be a workable idea," Hazard said. "I'll keep it in mind."

We're being illuminated by a laser beam," Stromsen said tensely. "Low power--so far--

"They're tracking us.,,

Hazard ordered, "Yang, take over the simulation problem. Stromsen, give me a wide radar sweep. I want to see if they're moving any of their ABM satellites to counter our maneuver."

"I have been sweeping, sir. No satellite activity yet,"

Hazard grunted. Yet. She knows that all they have to do is maneuver a few of their satellites to higher orbits and they'll have us in their sights.

To Yang he called, "Any response from the commsats?"

"No, Sir," she replied immediately. "Either their laser receptors are not functioning or the satellites themselves are inoperative."

They couldn't have knocked out the commsats altogether, Hazard told himself. How would they communicate with one another? Cardillo claims the Wood and two of the Soviet stations are on their side. And the Europeans. He put a finger to his lips unconsciously, trying to remember Cardillo's exact words. The Europeans are going along with

PEACEKEEPERS

109

said. Maybe they're not actively in-- they're, playing a wait-and-see game,. alone. They've got four, maybe five out We can't contact the Chinese or know which Russian satellite hasn't It'll be more than a half hour before

and even then, what the hell can

A

won't be for the first time. Submariners being on their own.

Yang reported, "the Wood is still trying to reach urgent. they're saying."

them I'm not available but you will record their and personally give it to me." Turning to the an lieutenant, "Miss Stromsen, I want all crew s in their pressure suits. And levels one and two of on are to be abandoned No one above level three ie damage-control team. Were going to take some I want everyone protected as much as possible.,,

glanced at the others. All three of them not afraid. The fear was there, of course,

they were in control of themselves. Their
their hands steady.

the air pumped out of levels one and
cleared of personnel'

Hazard said. "Let them outgas when they're hit.
fool the bastards into thinking they're doing more
je than they really are."

-ney smiled weakly. "Sounds like the PrizeAghter who
tened to bleed all over his opponent."

zird glared at him. Stromsen took up the headset
ler console and began issuing orders into the pin-
microphone.

simulation is finished, sir," said Yang.
on my screen here."

the graphics for a moment, sensing Feeney

lie Ben Amu
peering over his shoulder. Their safest altitude was the
lowest, where only six ABM satellites could "see" them.
The fifteen laser-armed satellites under their own control
would surround them like a cavalry escort.

There it is, Mr. Feeney. Plug that into your navigation
program. That's where we want to be."

'Aye sir.11

9 s

The CIC shuddered. The screens dimmed for a moment,
then came back to their full brightness.

"We've been hit!" Stromsen called out.

"Where? How bad?"

"Just aft of the main power generator. Outer hull rup-
tured. Storage area eight-medical, dental and food sup-
plement, supplies."

'So they got the Band-Aids and vitamin pills," Yang
joked shakily.

"But they're going after the power generator," -said
Hazard. "Any casualties?"

"No, sir," reported Stromsen. "No personnel stationed
there during general quarters.,,

He grasped Feeney's thin shoulder. "Turn us over, man.
Get that generator away from their beams!"

Feeney nodded hurriedly and flicked his stubby fingers
across his keyboard. Hazard knew it was all in his imagina-
tion, but his stomach rolled sickeningly as the station
rotated.

Hanging grimly to a handgrip, he said, "I want each of
you to get into your pressure suits, starting with you, Miss
Stromsen. Yang, take over her console until she . .

The chamber shook again. Another hit.

"Can't we strike back at them?" Stromsen cried.

Hazard asked, "How many satellites are firing at us?,"

She glanced at her display screens. "It seems to be only
one-so far."

"Hit it."

Her lips curled slightly in a Valkyrie's smile. She tapped

..... PEACEKEEPERS 1-11

on her console and then leaned on the final
enough to lift her boots off the Velcro.

"Well, well!" Stromsen exulted. "That's one laser that
other us again."

and Feeney were grinning. Hazard asked the com-
munications officer, "Let me hear what the Graham has

his voice on the tape. "Hazard, you are not
to change your orbital@altitude. If you don't
your original altitude immediately, we will fire on

they know by now that we're not paying attention

Hazard said to his three young officers. if I

they're -going to take a few- minutes to think

especially now that we've shown them we're

hit back. Stromsen, get into your suit. Feeney,

, then Yang. Move!"

fifteen minutes before the three of them were
CIC inside the bulky space suits, flexing gloved

about from inside the helmets. They all

visors up, and Hazard said nothing about it.

smart enough to work inside the damned suits, he

ought. They can snap the visors down fast enough if it

es to that.

CIC became even more crowded. Despite
ie cramped

of research and development, the space suits still
,ed nearly twice as large as an unsuited person.
iddenly Hazard felt an overpowering urge to get away
i the CIC, away from the tension he saw in their young
s, away from the sweaty odor of fear, away from the
onsibility for their lives.

611 In going for my suit," he said, "and then a fast
ion tour of the station. Think you three can handle
mgs on your own for a few minutes?"

ets. Three voices

Three heads bobbed inside their helm
torused, "Yes, sir."

112 Ben Bova

"Fire on any satellite that fires at us," he commanded. "Tape all incoming niess'Vs- If there's any change in their tune, call me on the intercom.-

"Yes, sir."

Feeney, how long until we reach our final altitude?"
4lmore

than an hour, sir,"

"NO way to move her faster?"

"I could get outside and push, I suppose. 11

'HaZard grinned at him., "That won't be necessary, Mr.

Feeney." Not Yet, he added silently.

Squeezing through the hatch into the

passageway, Haz-

ard saw that there was

one Pressure suit hanging on its rack in the locker just outside the CIC hatch. He passed it and went to his Personal locker and his own suit. It,s good to leave them on their own for a while, he told himself. Build up their confidence. But he knew that he had to get away from them, even if only for a few minutes,

His, personal space suit smelled of untainted plastic and filesh rubber like a new car. As Hazard squirmed into it, its j0ints@felt stiff-Or maybe it's me, he thought. The helmet slipped from his gloved hands and went spinning away from him, floating off like a severed head. Hazard retrieved it

and pulled it on. Like the youngsters, he kept the visor open.

His first stop was the bridge. Varshni was hovering in the companionway just Outside the airtight hatch that sealed Off the devastated area. Two other space-suited men were zippering-an unrecognizably mangled body into a long black plastic bag. Three Other bags floated alongside them, already filled and sealed.

Even inside a pressure suit,

the Indian seemed small, frail, like a skinny child. He was huddled next to the body bags, bent over almost into a f etal position. There were tire in his eyes. "These are all we could find. The two others must have been blown

out of the station com-

pletely."

PEACEKEEPERS

113

0'o

d put a gloved hand on the shoulder of his suit.

were my friends," Varshni said.

at have been painless," Hazard heard himself say. c&stupid.

I could believe that."

s more damage to inspect, over by the power area. Is your team nearl y finished here?"

few minutes, I think. We must make certain the wiring and air lines have been properly sealed y can handle that themselves. Come on, you and I eck it out together."

sir.' Varshni spoke to his crew briefly, then up and tried to smile. "I am ready, sir." men glided up a passageway that led to the level of the station, Hazard wondering what

ppen if a laser attack hit the area while they were
Takes a second or two to slice the hull open, he
ght. Enough time to flip your visor down and grab
something before the air blowout sucks you out of the
)n. Still, he slid his visor down and ordered Varshni to
Me same. He was only mildly surprised when the Indian
Red that he already had.

Wish the station were shielded. Wish they had designed
withstand attack. Then he grumbled inwardly, Wishes
for losers; winners use what they have. But the thought
ged at him. What genius put the power generator next
he unarmored hull? Damned politicians wouldn't allow
Iding; they wanted the stations to be vulnerabTl@. A sign
dwill, as far as they're concerned. They thought

900

0obody would attack an unshielded station because the
-ttacker's station is also unshielded. We're all in this
-together. try to hurt me and I'll hurt you. A hangover from
1-he old mutual-destruction kind of dogma. Absolute bull-
-fubit.

There ought to be some way to protect ourselves from

lasers. They shouldn't put people up here like sacrificial lambs.

Hazard glanced at Varshni, whose face was hidden behind his helmet visor. He thought of his son. Shiela had ten years to poison his mind against me. Ten years. He wanted to hate her for that, but he found that he could not. He had been a poor husband and a worse father. Jon Jr. had every right to loathe his father. But darninit, this is more important than-family arguments! Why can't the boy see what's at stake here? Just because he's sore at his father doesn't mean he has to take total leave of his senses.

They approached a hatch where the red warning light was blinking balefully. They checked the hatch behind them, made certain it was airtight, then 'used the wall-mounted keyboard to start the pumps that would evacuate that section of the passageway, turning it into an elongated air lock.

Finally they could open the farther hatch and glide into the wrecked storage magazine.

Hazard grabbed a handhold. "Better use tethers here, he said.

Vaithni had already unwound the tether from his waist and clipped it to a cleat set into the bulkhead.

it was a small magazine, little more than a closet. In the light from their helmet lamps, they saw cartons of pharmaceuticals securely anchored to the shelves with toothed plastic straps. A gash had been torn in the hull, and through it Hazard could see the darkness of space. The laser beam had penetrated into the cartons and shelving, slicing a neat burned-edge slash through everything it touched.

Varshni floated upward toward the rent. It was as smooth as a surgeon's incision and curled back slightly where the air pressure had pushed the thin metal outward in its rush to escape to vacuum.

"No wiring here," Varshni's voice said in Hazard's viarph6nes. 'No plumbing either. We were fortunately aiming for the power generator." Hazard. Indian pushed himself back down toward -was hidden behind the visor. "Ahl yes, that is an ant target. We were very fortunate that: they try again," Hazard said. course."

Yang's voice sounded

HaZard!t

' fro

(fmhanr

should hear the latest message

in

unconsciously -inside, his helmet, Hazard said,

through.

a click, then Buckbe-es voice- "Hazard, we've patient with you. we,re finished playing games.

rmal altitude and

;bring the Hunter back to its no

bader the station to us or we'll slice you to pieces.

Ve got five minutes to answer."

ic voice shut off so abruptly that Hazard could picture

cbee slamming his fist against the Off key.

ow long ago did this come through?"

said

ransmission terminated thirty seconds ago, sir,'

zard looked down at varshni's slight form. He knew
Varshni had heard the ultimatum just as he had. He
not see the Indian's face, but the slump Of his
Iders told him how Varshni felt.
ng asked, "Sir, do you want me to set up a link with
am?"

-No," said Hazard.

-I dont think they intend to Call again, sir," Yang said.

Aney expect you to call them."

he said . He turned to the wavering f orm
yet,"

him. --Better straighten up, Mr. Varshni. There's

116 Ben Bova

going to be a lot of work for you and your damage-control team to do. We're in for a rough time.-

Ordering Varshni back to his team at the rtfins of the bridge, Hazard made his way toward the CIC. He spoke into his helmet mike as he pulled himself along the passageways as fast as he could go:

"Mr. Feeney, You are to fire at any satellites that fire on us. And any ABM satellites that begin maneuvering to gain altitude so they can look down on us. Understand?"

"Understood.- sid" ,

Miss Stromsen, I believe the fire-control panel is part of your responsibility. You will take your orders from Mr. Feeney."

"Miss

Yang, I want that simulation of our position and altitude updated to show exactly which ABM satellites under hostile control are in a position to fire upon US.

"I already have that in the program, sir.-

"Good. I want our four lifeboats detached from the station and placed in positions where their heat shields can intercept incoming laser beams.

For the first time, Yang's voice sounded uncertain "I'm not sure I understand what you mean, sir."

Hazard was sweating and panting with the exertion of hauling himself along the passageway

This suit won't smell

new anymore, he thought.

To Yang he explained, "You got me thinking about those heat shields. We can use the lifeboats as armor

to absorb or deflect incoming laser beams. Not just shielding, but active armor. We can move the boats to protect the most likely areas for laser beams to come from.-

"Like the goalie in a soccer game!" Feeney chirped.

"Cutting down the angles."

"Exactly."

By the time he reached the CIC they were already

PEACEKEEPERS 117

te problems. Hazard saw that Stromsen had the park load: #11 the station systems status displays, I for the laser-armed ABM satellites and control boats -now hovering a few dozen meters away station.

Stromsen, please transfer the fire-control response to Mr. Feeney."

Her expression on her strong-jawed face, half hidden under her helmet, was pure stubborn indignation.

With a gloved thumb toward the lightning-rod on the shoulder of Feeney's suit, Hazard said, "He is a specialist, after all."

Stromsen's lips twitched slightly and she tapped at the control panel to her left; the fire-control displays disappeared from the screens above it, to spring up on screens in front of her position.

Hazard nodded as he lifted his own visor. "Okay, now you're the offense. Stromsen, you're the defense.

Ag, your job is to keep Miss Stromsen continuously aware as to where the best placement of the lifeboats will

dark eyes sparkling with the challenge.

expect us to predict all the possible
take and get a lifeboat's heat shield in

e

-as Lord Nelson once said-each of you to do
Now get Buckbee or Cardillo or whoever on the
ready to talk to them."

a few moments for the communications laser to
the distant &aham, but when Buckbee's face
d on the screen, he was smiling--@--almost
You've still got a minute and a half, Hazard. I'm glad
've come to your senses before we had to open fire on

118 Ben Bova

I'm only calling to warn you: any satellite that fires on us will be destroyed. Any satellite that maneuvers to put its lasers in a better position to hit us will also be destroyed.-
jaw dropped open. His eyes widened

!,@V=s fifteen ABM satellites under my control,"

Hazard continued, "and'I'm going to use them."

"You can't threaten-us!" Buckbee sputtered. "We'll wipe
Out!I9

YOU

"Maybe. Maybe noL I intend to fight until the very last
breath."

4.youl

re crazy, Hazard!"

"Am I? Your game is to take over the whole defense
system and threaten a nuclear missile strike against any
nation that doesn't go along with you. well, if your
satellites are exhausted or destroyed, you won't be much of
a threat to anybody, will you? Try impressing the Chinese
with a beat-up network. They've got enough missiles to
Wipe out Europe and North America, and they'll use them.
If you don't have enough left to stop those missiles, then
who's threatening whomT,

"You can't. .

"Listen!" Hazard snapped., "How many of your satellites
will, be left by the time you Overcome us? How much of a
hole will we rip in your plans? Geneva will be able to blow
you out of the sky with ground-launched missiles by the
time you're finished with us."

"They'd never do such a thing-

"Are you sureT'

Buckbee looked away from Hazard, toward someone
Off-camera. He moved off, and Cardillo slid into view. He
was no longer smiling.

"Nice try, Job

1111Y, but You're bluffing and we both know
it. Give up now or we're going to have to wip you out.,*
44YOU can try, Vince. But you won't win." e

we 90, Your Son goes with us," Cardillo said.

PEACEKEEPERS 10

re voice to main level. "T herf"s noth-

He's a grown man. He's made his

a long, impatient sigh. "All right,

knowing yo%

@0

Another lie, he thought. The man

categorically unable to speak the truth.

Dmm screen blanked.

he lifeboats in place?" he asked.

ood as we can get them," Yang said her voice

U1.

too far from the station," Hazard warned. "I don
hem to show up as separate blips on their radar
ps, sir, we know."

he thought., Ready to

noded at them. Good kids,

t out on my say-so. How far will they go before, they

How much damage can we take before they scream

p waited. Not a sound in the womb-shaped chambe

for the hum of the electrical equipment and the

r of air circulation. Hazard glided to a position

behind the two women. Feeney can handle the
erattack, he said to himself That's simple enough.
defense that's going to win or lose for us.
n the display screens he saw the positions of the stati on
the hostile ABM satellites. Eleven of them in range.
,en lines straight as laser beams converged on the
n. Small orange blips representing the four lifeboats
the central pulsing yellow dot that repre-
ion. The orange blips blocked nine of the
Two others passed between the lifeboat
reached the station itself.

" Hazard said softly.

e as if a live electrical wire had touched her

-my

now," Hazard said. "All I want to tell you is that you should be prepared to move the lifeboats t '

o intercept

any beams that are getting through.,,

"Yes, Sir, I know.-

Speaking as soothingly as he could, Hazard went on, "I doubt that they'll fire all eleven lasers at us at once. And as our altitude decreases, there will be fewer and fewer of their satellites in range of us. We have a good chance of getting through this without too much damage."

Stromsen turned her whole sPace-suited body so that she could look at him from inside her hel

met. "It's good of you

to say so, Sir. I know you're trying ta cheer us up, and I'm certain we all appreciate it. But you are taking my attention awayfrOm the screens."

Yang giggled, whether out of tension or actual humor at Stromsen's reto'

rt, Hazard could not tell.

y

Feene sang Out "I've got a satellite climbing on us!"

Before Hazard could speak, Feeney's hands were moving on his console keyboard. "Our beasties, are now programmed for automatic, but, I'm tapping in a backup manually, just in-ah! Got her! Scratch one enemy.

Smiles all around. But behind his grin, Hazard wondered, Can they gin up decoys? Something that gives t

e

he

Sam radar signature as an ABM satellite but really isn't? I don't think so-but I don't know fo

"Laser beam ... two of them , r sure.

called Stromsen.

Hazard saw the display screen light UP. Both beams were hitti

ng the same lifeboat. Then a third beam from the opposite direction lanced out.

The station shuddered momentarily as Stromsen's fingers flew Over her keyboard and one of the orange dots shifted slightly to block the third beam.

"Where'd it hit?" he asked the Norwegian as the beams winked off.

"Just aft of the emergency oxygen tanks, Sir.

PEACEKEEPERS 121

thought they hit the tanks, enough

I]@

blow out of here to start us spinning like a top. it emergency oxygen."

Sir?"

isen pecked angrily at the keyboard to her left.

si@ Sir."

'@7wi nt that pressurized gas sp rting out and

wa

u

like a rocket thruster," Hazard explained to her -Besides, it's an old submariner's trick to let the erlthink he's caused real damage by jettisoning

iy them had reservations about getting rid oftheir -ncy oxygen, they kept them quiet.

re@ was plenty of junk to jettison, over the next
r of an hour. Laser beams struck the station repeat-
although Stromsen was able to block most of the
with the heat-shielded lifeboats. Still, despite the
--e shields, the station was being slashed apart, bit by
-Chunks of the outer hull ripped away, clouds of air
omng out of the upper level to form a brief fog around
station before dissipating into the vacuum of space.
-tons of supplies, pieces of equipment, even spare space
iraling out, pushed by air pressure as th
;s went sp

e

rtments in which they had been housed were ripped
rt by the probing incessant beams of energy.
--.ey struck back at the ABM satellites, but for every
he hit, another maneuvered into range to replace it.
'I'm running low on fuel for the lasers," he reported.
'So must they," said Hazard, trying to sound confident
4Aye, but they've got a few more than fifteen to play
Stay with it, Mr. Feeney. You're doing fine." Hazard
Stromsen's status displays, he saw rows of red lights
the shoulder of the Irishman's bulky suit. Glancing

122 Ben Bova
glowering like

accusing eyes., They're taking the station
@apart, piece by piece. It's only a matter of time before we're
finished-.

Aloud, he announced, "I'm going to check with the
damage-control party. Call me if anythi

ll I ing unusual hap-
pens.

Yang quipped, "How do you define 'unusual,' sir?"
Stromsen and Feeney laughed.

Hazard wished he could,
too. He made a grin for the Chinese-American thinking,
At least their morale hasn't cracked. Not yet. '
The damage-control party was working o

n level three,
reconnecting a secondary power line that ran along the
Overhead through the main passageway. A laser beam had
burned through the deck of the second level and severed
the line, cutting power to the station's main computer. A
shaft Of brilliant sunlight lanced down from the outer hull
through two levels of the station and onto the deck of level
three.'

,One space-suitbd figure was dangling upside down half-
way through the hole in the overhead, splicing cable
careful

k

lY with gloved hands, while a second ho
vered near-
by with a small welding torch. Two more were working
farther down the passageway where a larger hole had been
burned halfway down the b@lkhead.

Through that jagged rip Hazard could see clear out to
space and the rim of the Earth, glaring bright with swirls of
white clouds.

He recognized Varshni by his small size even before he
could see the Indian flag on his shoulder or read the name
stenciled on his suit's chest.

"Mr. Varshni, I want you and your crew to leave level
three. It's getting too dangerous here."

"But, sir," Varshini protested, "our duty is to repair
damage."

"There'll be damage on level four soon enough."

"But the computer requires Power.,,

PE,4C -FKEEPERS 123

i run on, its internal batteries."
orhow long?"

said Hazard grimly.
to be placated. "I am not risking lives
were.

j

operating on sound -principles," the Indian in-
as required in the book of regulations."
faulting you, man. You and

L n Your crew have
ù fine job."

-

I

@j'l

d their work. They were watching
others had stoppe
between their superior and the station com-
Dr.

ave operated on the principle that lightning does not
twice in the same place. I believe that in old-
ned naval parlance this is referred to as 'chasing
,,rd stared at the diminutive Indian. Even inside the
ed space suit Varshni appeared stiff with anger. Chas-
alvos--that's what a little ship does when it's under
shells
k by a bigger ship, run to where the last
hed, because it's pretty certain that the next salvo
t hit there. I've, insulted his abilities, Hazard realized.
in front of his team. Damned fool!

Wr. Varshni," Hazard explained slowly, "this battle
be decided, one way or the other, in the next twenty
utes or so. You and your team have done an excellent
of keeping damage to a minimum. Without you, we
ild have been forced to surrender."

arshni seemed to relax a little. Hazard could sense his
in rising a notch inside his helmet.

"But the battle is entering a new phase," Hazard went
1. "Level three is now vulnerable to direct laser damage. I
n't afford to lose you and your team at this critical stage.
e the computer and the rest of the most sensitive
0 v r,
u Ipmen are on level four and in the Combat Informa-

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tion Center. Those are the areas th
at need our Protection

and those are the areas where I want: you to Operate. Is that 7.
understood?"

A heartbeat's hesitation Then Varshni said, "Yes, of
course, sir. I underst

and- Thank you for explaining it to

"Okay. Now, finish your work here and then ge

level four.-

t down to

'Yes, Sir."

Shaking his head. inside his helmet, Hazard turned and
pushed himself , towdrd the ladderway that led down to
level four and'the CIC.@

A blinding glare lit the Passageway and he heard

screams

of agony. Blinking agai

nst the burning afterimage Hazard

turned to see Varshni's figure almost sliced in half.

A dark

bum line slashed diagonally

across the torso of his space

suit- Tiny globules of blood floated out from it. The metal
overhead was blackened and curled now. A woman was

screaming. She was up by the overhead, thrashing wildly

with pain, her backpack sputte ing whit

chunks of

ri

e-hot

-metal- The Other technician was nowhere to be seen.

Hazard rushed to the Indian while -the other two mem-
bers of the damage control team raced to their partner and
sprayed extinguisher foam on her backpack.

Over the woman's screams he heard Varshni's gargling
whisper. "It's no use, sir ... no use.

"You did fine, son." Hazard held the little man in his
arms. "You did fine.,,

He felt the life slip away. Lightni

ng does strike in the

same Place, Hazard thought. youve chased your

last salvo,

son.

Both the man and the woman who had been working on
the Power cable had been wounded by the laser beam. The
man's right arm had been

sliced Off at the elbow, the

woman s back badly burned when her life-support pack

PF,4CEKEEPERS 125

and the two rem n

damage-

them to the sick bay, where the

was already working over three other

on the third level. Hazard realized ho w

He made his way down to the CIC, at

n, knowing that it was protected not

etal but by human flesh, as well. The

I roc

and Hazard heard the ominous groan-

tortured metal as he pushed weightlessly along the

way.

reлт bone-weary as he opened the hatch and floated

ie CIC. One look at the haggard faces of his three

officers told him that they were on the edge of defeat

611, Stromsen's status display board was studded with

tring red lights.

This station is starting to resemble a piece of Swiss
se," Hazard quipped lamely as he lifted the visor of his
iet.

one laughed. Or even smiled.

'Varshni bought it," he said, taking up his post between

A

and Feeney.

Me heard it," said Yang.

Hazard looked around the CIC. It felt stifling hot, dank
@@I@ trhe smell of fear.

Feeney," he said, "discontinue all offensive opera-
US.

"Sir?" The Irishman's voice squeaked with surprise.

'@'Don't fire back at the sons of bitches," Hazard snapped.

I

s that clear enough?"

'Feeney raised his hands up above his shoulders, like a
toupier showing that he was not influencing the roulette
@,heel.

"Miss Stromsen, when the next laser bearriis fired at us,
but down the main power generator. Miss Yang, issue

'O reply,'

he minutes stretched. Hazard glided to Yang's Comm

neva Ag

Ole and taped a message for Ge swiftly out "n'

t had happened.

: want that tape compressed into a couple of n-tiffisec-

and burped down to 'Geneva by the tightest laser

n we have."

a low-

nodded. "I suppose the energy surge for

laser won,t be enough for them to

not, but it's a chance we'll have to take, Beam

intervals as long as Geneva is in view-"

sir.

I

detached

-Sir!" Feenev called out- "Looks like Graham's

k4ifeboat."

analysis?"

at his navigation console. "Heading for

Hazard felt his lips pull back in a feral grin. "They're coming over to make sure. Cardillo's an old submariner; he knows all about running silent. They're sending over an armed Party to make sure we're finished."

"And to take control of our satellites," Yang suggested.

Hazard brightened. "Right! There's only two ways to control the ABM satellites-either from the station patrol or from Geneva." He spread his arms happily.

"That means they're not in control of Geneva! We've got a good chance to pull their cork!"

But there was no response from Geneva when they beamed their data-compressed message to IPF headquarters. I Hunter glided past in its unusually low orbit, a tattered wreck desperately calling for help. No, answer reached them.

And the lifeboat from Graham moved inexorably closer.

The gloom in the CIC was thick enough to choke on as Geneva disappeared over the horizon and the boat from Graham came toward them. Hazard watched the boat on one of Stronisen's screens: it was bright and shining in the sunlight, not blackened by scorching laser beams or stained by splashes of human blood.

We could zap it into dust, he thought. One word from me and Feeney could focus half a dozen lasers on it. The men aboard her must be volunteers, willing to risk their necks to make certain that we're finished. He felt a grim admiration for them. Then he wondered, Is Jon, Jr. aboard with them?

"Mr. Feeney, what kind of weapons do you think they're carrying?"

Feeney's brows rose toward his scalp. "Weapons, sir? You mean, like sidearms?" Hazard nodded.

"Personal weapons are not allowed aboard station, sir. Regulations forbid it."

"And rain makes applesauce. What do you bet they've got pistols, at least. Maybe submachine guns."

06. PEACEKEEPERS 129

"dangerous stuff for a space station," said named

aj I @amp smiled tightly at the Irishman. "Are you, afraid P put a few more holes in our hull?"

saw what he was driving at. "Sir, there are no a aboard Hunter-unless you want to count @kitchens."

y'll. be coming aboard with guns, just to make sure," use them as

Y11 said. "I want to capture them alive and s. Thats our last remaining card. If we can't do weve got to surrender."

hey'll be in full suits," said Stromsen. "Each on their -individual life-support systems."

jow can we capture them? Or even fight them?" Yang tiered aloud.

hint of defeat in their voices. The hazard detected no I now. A -new

wir of a half hour earlier was gone

tement had hold of them. He was holding a glimmer of
for them, and they were reaching for it-
There can't be more than six of them aboard that boat,
ney mused.

@1 wonder if Cardillo has the guts to lead the boarding
o!rty in person, Hazard. asked himself.

.-We don,t have any useful weapons," said Yang.

',@,,`But we have some tools," Stromsen pointed out.

lifeboat engines use for propellant?"

OF,, " Feeney replied, looking puzzled-

Sen, which of our supply

7@ Hazard nodded. "Miss Strom

agazines are still intact-if anyr'

It took them several minutes to understand what he was
iving at, but when they finally saw the light, the three

)Ung officers, went, speedily to work. Together with the

repared a

@ur unwoun ded members of the crew, they P

lcome for the boarders from Graham-

130 Ben Bova

Finally, Hazard watched On Stromsen's display screens as the boat sniffed around the battered station. Strict silence was in force aboard, Hunter. Even in the CIC, deep at the heart of the

battJe station, they spoke in tense whispers

"I hope the bastards like what they see," Hazard muttered.

"They know that we used the lifeboats for shields," said Yang.

"Active

armor," Hazard said. "Did you know the idea was invented by the man this station, snatched after?"

"They're looking for a docking out. 1119 Port," Stromsen pointed out.

one left," said Feeney.

They could hang their boat almost anywhere and walk in through the holes they've put in us, Hazard said to himself. But they won't, they'll go by the book and find an intact -

docking

Port- They've got to! Everything depends on that. He felt his palms getting slippery

with nervous perspiration as the lifeboat slowly moved around Hunter toward the Earth-facing side, where the only usable port was located. Hazard had seen to it that all the other ports had been disabled.

"They're buying it!," Stromsen's whisper held a note of triumph.

"Siiii, Yang hissed urgently. "A message just came in-law beam, ultracompressed."

she replied, her snub-nosed ration. "Coming up on my

Hazard slid over toward her. The words on the screen read:

"From where?"

Com

puter's decrypting,,, face wrinkled with concentration center screen, sir."

From: IPF Regional HQ, Lagos.

TO: Commander, battle station Hunter.

PEACEKEEPERS, 131

Message begins. Coup attempt in Geneva a failure, thanks in large part to your refusal to surrender your situation still unclear, however.

command

Imperative you retain control of Hunter, at all costs. Message ends.

read it aloud, in a guttural whisper, so that Feeney Stromsen understood what was at stake.

t

e

@14

0

- 're not alone," Hazard told them. "They know
appening, and help is on the way."
It was -stretching the facts, he knew. And he knew they
But it was reassuring to think that someone, some-

J

was preparing to help them.

them grinning to one another. In his
kept repeating the phrase "Imperative
of Hunter, at all costs."

Hazard said to himself, closing his eyes
Varshni dying in his arms and the others
med. At costs.

he bastards, Hazard seethed inwardly. The dirty,
Per-grabbing, murdering bastards. Once they set foot
de my station I'll kill them like the poisonous snakes
are. I'll squash them flat. I'll cut them open just like
've slashed my kids ...

@,;He stopped abruptly and forced himself to take a deep
"at eah, sure. Go for per

h. Y -sonar revenge. That'll make
se world a better place to live in, won't it?

"Sir, are you all right?"

'Hazard opened his eyes and saw Stromsen staring at
llll. Yes, I'm fine. Thank you."

"They've docked, sir," whispered the Norwegian.

The 're debarking and coming up passageway C, just as

Y

ou planned."

@@Pking past her to the screens, Hazard saw that there
pre six of them, all in space suits, visors down. And
istols in their gloved hands.

132 BM Bova

"Nothing bigger than pistols?"

"No, sir. Not that we can see, at least"

Turning to Feeney', "Ready with the aerosols?"

"Yes, air."

"All crew members evacuated from the area?"

"They're all back on level four, except for the sick bay."

Hazard never took his eyes from the screens. The, six space-suited boarders were floating down the passageway that led to the lower levels of the station that were still pressurized and held breathable air. They stopped at the air lock, saw that it was functional. The leader of their group- started working the wall unit that controlled the lock.

"Can we hear them?" he asked

Yang.

Wordlessly she touched a stud on her keyboard.

... use the next section of the passageway as an air lock," some-one was saying. "Standard procedure. Then we'll (pump the air back into it once we're inside."

"But we stay in the suits until we check out the whole station. That's an order," said another voice

Buckbee? Hazard's spirits soared. Buckbee will make

nice hostage, he thought. Not as good as Cardillo, but good enough.

Just as he had hoped the six boarders went through the airtight hatch, closed it behind them, and started the pump that filled the next section of passageway with air once again.

"Something funny here, sir," said one of the space-suited figures.

"Yeah, the air's kind of misty."

"Never saw anything like this before. Christ, it's like Mexico City -air."

"Stay in your suits!" It was Buckbee's voice, Hazard was certain of it. "Their life-support systems must have been damaged in our bombardment. They're probably all dead."

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rd thought. To Feene , he commanded,

Haza y

y pecked at a button on his, console.,
-the next one."

eady done, sir."

Jill Ward waited, watching Stromsen's main screen as the shuffled weightlessly to the next hatch and

it would not respond to the control unit on the

We'll have to double back and find another

...

Js& Yang, I am ready to hold converse with our
i," said Hazard.

flashed a brilliant smile and touched the appropriate
then pointed a surprisingly-manicured finger at him.

you are on the air!"

'Buckbee, this is Hazard."

All six of the boarders froze where they were for an instant, then spun weightlessly in midair, trying to locate a source of the new voice.

"'You are , trapped in that section of corridor," Hazard

id. "The hatches fore and aft of you are sealed shut. The
*list in the air that you see is oxygen difluoride from our
Iftboat propellant tanks. Very volatile stuff. Don't strike
'any matches."

"What the hell are you saying, Hazard?",

"You're locked in that passageway, Buckbee. If you try to
fire those popguns you're carrying, you'll blow yourselves
pieces."

"And you, too!"

"We're already dead, you prick. Taking you with us is the
'only joy I'm going to get out of this."

"You're blurring!"

Hazard snapped, "Then show me how brave you are,
buckbee. Take a shot at the hatch."

The six boarders hovered in the misty passageway like

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figures in surrealistic painting. Seconds ticked by, each one stretching excruciatingly. Hazard felt a pain in his jaws and realized he was clenching his teeth hard enough to chip them.

He took his eyes from the screen momentarily to glance at his three youngsters. They were

sweating, just as tense as he was. They knew how long the odds of their gamble were. The Passageway was filled with nothing more than aerosol mists from every spray can the

supply magazines. The crew could locate in the "What do you want, Hazard?" Buckbee said at last, his voice sullen, like a spoiled little boy who had been denied a cookie.

Hazard let out his breath. Then, as cheerfully as he could manage,

"I've got what I want. Six hostages. How much air your suits carry? Twelve hours?"

"What do You mean?"

"You've got twelve hours to convince Cardillo

and the

rest of Your pals to surrender.,,

"You're crazy, Hazard."

I've had a tough day, Buckbee. I don't need you, insults. Call me when you're ready to deal."

"You'll be killing your son!"

Hazard had half expected it, but still it hit blow-

"Jay, are you there?"

"Yes, I am, Dad."

Hazard strained forward, peering hard at the display screen, trying to determine which one of the space-suited figures was his son.

"Well, this is a helluva fix, isn't it?" he said softly.

"Dad, You don't have to wait twelve hours.,,

"Shut your mouth!" Buckbee snapped.

"Fuck You," snarled Jon Jr. I, I, m not going or nothing.,,

killed f to get myself

"I'll shoot You!" Hazard saw Buckbee level his gun at Jon Jr.

him like a

PEACEKEEPERS

135

A @,k guts@"

Jay

kill yourself? You haven't got the S

@'Hazard almost smiled. How many times had he heard that tone on him..

Dee's hand wavered. He let the gun slip from his fingers. It drifted slowly, weightlessly, away from him and swallowed. Hard.

"I'll be in another hour or two the game will be over.

I never lied to you. The Russians never came in with us.

A dozen ships full of troops are lifting off from IPF bases, all over the globe.

"That's the truth, son?"

"I know, sir. It is. Our only hope was to grab control of your

S. Once the coup attempt in Geneva flopped,

He knew that if he could control three or four sets of M satellites, he could at least force a stalemate. But all

s got is Graham and Wood. Nobody else."

'You damned little traitor!" Buckbee screeched.

Jon Jr. laughed. "Yeah, you're right. But I'm going to be a
We traitor. I'm not dying for the likes of you."

Hazard thought swiftly. Jay might defy his father, might
rgue with him, even revile him, but he had never known
we lad to lie to him.

"Buckbee, the game's over," he said slowly. "You'd
etter get the word to Cardillo before there's more blood-
led."

It took another six hours before it was all sorted out. A
@huttle filled with armed troops and an entire replacement
,cre w finally arrived at the battered hulk of Hunter. The
relieving commander, a stubby compactly built black from
New Jersey who had been a U. Air Force fighter pilot,
4nade a grim tour of inspection with Hazard.

I .

ir From inside his space suit he whistled in amazement at
the battle damage. "Shee-it, you don't need a new crew,
"You need a new station!"

.It's still functional," Hazard said quietly, then added

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Proudly, "And so is my crew, or what's left of them. They ran this station and kept control of the satellites."

"The stuff legends are made of, my man," said the new commander.

Hazard and his crew filed tiredly into the waiting shuttle, thirteen grimy exhausted

men and women in the pale blue fatigues of the IPF. Three of them were wrapped in mesh cocoons and attended by medical personnel. Two others were bandaged but ambulatory.

He shook hands with each and every one of them as they stepped from the station's only functional air lock into the shuttle's passenger compartment. Hovering there weightlessly? his creased, craggy face unsmiling, to each of his crew members he said, "Thank you. We couldn't have succeeded without your effort."

The last three through the hatch were Feeney, Stromsen and Yang. The Irishman looked embarrassed as Hazard shook his hand.

"I'm recommending you for promotion. You were damned cool under fire."

"Frozen stiff with fear, you mean."

To Stromsen, "You too, Miss Stromsen. You've earned a promotion."

"Thank you, sir," was all she could say.

"And you, little lady," he said to Yang. "You were outstanding."

She started to say something, then flung her arms around Hazard's neck and squeezed tight "I was so frightened!" she whispered in his ear. "You kept me from cracking up."

Hazard held her around the waist for a moment. As they disengaged he felt his face turning flame-red. He turned away from the hatch, not wanting to see the expressions of the rest of his crew members.

Buckbee was coming through the air lock. Behind him were his five men, including Jon Jr.

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silence

passed Hazard in absolute silence, Buckbee's face and angry as against Antairnetic storm.

was the None of the would-be

but they all had the hangdog

was in handcuffs,

prisoners. All except Hazard's son.

stopped before his father and met the older man's

eyes were level with his father's,

460 Jr.'s gray

hair, unafraid.

"I made a bitter little smile. "I still don't agree with

he said without preamble. "I don't think the IPF is

able

-and it's certainly not in the best interests of the United States."

us when it counted

But you threw your lot in with

him," he said.

"I'll tell you I did!" Jon Jr. looked genuinely aggrieved.

"I didn't see any sense in dying for a lost cause."

"Really?"

Tardillo and Buckbee and the rest of them were a
ilch of idiots. if I had known how stupid they are, I
ruefully and

He stopped himself, grinned
shoulders. "This isn't over, you know. You
but the war's not ended yet

I can to get them to lighten your sentence,"
t stick, your neck out for me! I'm still dead set
Don

Wnst you on this."

@Hazard smiled wanly at the youngster. "And you're still
y son. then ducked through the

'Jon Jr. blinked, looked away,
itch and made for a seat in the shuttle.

Hazard formally turned the station over to its new
)mmander, saluted one last time, then went into the
artment. He hung there weight-
iuttle's passenger comp,

ssly a moment as the hatch behind him was swung shut
*d sealed. Most of the seats were already filled. There was

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an empty one beside Yang, but after their little scene at the hatch, Hazard was hesitant about sitting next to her. He glided down the aisle and picked a seat that had no one next to it. Not one of his crew. Not Jon Jr.

There's a certain amount of loneliness

command, he told himself. It's not wise to get too familiar with People You h

- ave to Order into battle.

He felt, rather than h

heard, a thump as the shuttle disengaged from the station's air lock. He sensed the winged hypersonic spaceplane turning and angling its nose for reentry into the atmosphere

Back to ... Hazard real-

'zed that home, for h

IM, was no longer on Earth. For almost all of his adult life, home had been where his command was. Now his home was in space. The time he spent on Earth would be merely waiting time, suspended animation until his new command was ready.

"Sir, may I intruder"

He looked up and saw Stromsen floating in the aisle by his seat.

"What is it, Miss Stromsen?"

She pulled herself down into the seat next to him but did not bother to latch the safety harness. From a breast pocket in her sweat-stained fatigues she pulled a tiny flat tin. It was marked with a red cross and some printing, hidden by her thumb.

Stromsen opened the tin. "YOU lost your medication Patch," she said. "I thought YOU might want a fresh one."

She was smiling at him shyly, almost like a daughter in

Hazard reached up and felt behind his left ear. She was right,, the patch was gone.

"I wonder how long ago

"It's been hours, at least," said Stromsen.

"Never noticed."

Her smile brightened. "Perhaps you don't need it anymore."

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Onilod back at her. "Miss Stromsen, I think you're tely right. My stomach feels fine. I believe I have become adapted to weightlessness. i rather a shame that we're on our way back to Earth.

I

have to adapt all over again the next time out ard nodded. "Somehow I don't think that's going to ch of a problem for me anymore." [et his head float back against the seat cushion and his 'eyes, enjoying for the first time the exhilarating ion of weightlessness.

After such heroics it was inevitable that Hazard would eventually head the IPF, and once he took over, the Peacekeepers began to shape

@p into a reliable well-disciplin
ed

organization. But neither 'Hazard nor-, Red

Eagle could track down the in'

issing nuclear

weapons until Shamar showed up in So

uth

ALLEDUPAR,

e

AIM rica. and Cole Alexander went after him.

Year 8

AJEXANDER looked up from the lighted

lapuble at the faces of his closest aides.

"That's what Castanada told me. I know it's

tricky," he

ITnitted, "and damned dangerous. Trouble

is, either we

in and get Shamar up there in the mountains

or he takes

damned country."

two women huddled over the computer-

Its lighted display threw eerie shadows up

and across their faces. They sat bunched

in the wardroom of the jet seaplane that

Alexander's flying home, office and head-

for more than five years.

Three of the people were a generation younger than Alexander. Barker, the English pilot who wore motorized braces on his lower legs, was Alexander's own age. -So was Steiner, the blond logistics specialist. In any other group of mercenaries, one would assume that the willowy Austrian was Alexander's bed partner. The idea had never even been hinted at aboard the seaplane.,

The younger woman was the former IPF teleoperator, Kelly, a pert freckled little redhead. She looked almost like a child except when she was in front of a computer. Any /C mputer. Any software. Plain of face and figure, reserved and shy with people, she became a radiant little princess when her fingertips-touched an activated computer program.

Sitting next to her, shoulders hunched and leaning on his elbows, was another ex-Peacekeeper, Jonathan Hazard, Jr. The years since the abortive military coup had matured him. The baby fat was gone: his face was lean now, the same spadelike nose and stormy blue-gray eyes that his illustrious father bore. Jay, as he called himself, had the kind of cowboy good looks and quiet charm that made him virtually irresistible to women. Especially when he smiled. But he smiled very little.

Pavel Zhakarov was the youngest of the group, a small, slightly built Russian with dark hair, intensely deep dark eyes, and a ballet dancer's lean ascetic face. lie openly admitted to being an agent of the KGB. No one knew where his true loyalties lay; especially Pavel himself. But everyone took great pains to avoid placing him in a situation where his conflicting loyalties could cause disaster.

The seaplane rocked gently at its mooring in the Cesar River, an hour's drive downstream from VaRedupar and the handsome hacienda of Sebastiano Miguel de Castanada. From this site Alexander could take off and be out of Colombian airspace in half an hour, if necessary. He

-lines

d his of retreat before starting
prepare esia.
Jon. Always, since his first experience in Indont
sees @Shamar'doing mixed up with Latin American
"ers?ll most bored
asked Barker in his languid, al
nd accent-
gives him a firm base of operations," Steiner gnessed.
xander grinned crookedly. "The way I read it, theres
of nasty qttid pro quo going on between Sharnar and
rnment can,t attack the
mug guys. The official gove
-dealers because Shamaes nukes threaten their cities
even other c ities@in other countries's
ike Miami," Pavel muttered.
Leningrad, Red," countered Alexander. He wentlon,
be getting a hefty cut Of the drug
Shamar must
ney in return."
But what does he want?" Kelly asked-

-What's in it for

O.

As I said," replied Steiner, "a base of Operations-'
Alexander said.

A whole country,"
Ray shook his head. "He can't possibly expect to take
nation."

Alexander-shot back. "How do You think
family got to be the el SuPremOs?"
stared blankly at him.

work down here for the past fifty years
SC) is this: The drug dealers start operating in the hills
id sooner or later take over the whole damned govern-
itimate. Then some other
ent and make themselves leg
arts cooking up cocaine for themselves and selling it

mg St
Inside the official government channels
d, "But cocaine and all the other hard
ecte

n illegal since
have," snapped Alexander. "That's what
so profitable. Why do you think the
cutting into
Castanadas are so pissed at these guys? They're
the Castanada family's personal drug trade!"

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661)Nmpicable, ,llcarov hissed.

"Damn right it is.-

"And that

town they wiped outr Hazard asked.

"Castanada told me they did it to keep the grave robbers

h

away from t ll mountains," said Alexander, his smile

. "W

turning malicious ay l see it, though, is this: the
villagers Th

the hill grow coca for the Castanada family. e guys in
46TIMS eliminated some competition."

whole villW?vs Steiner's

voice was anuncompre-
it?"

answered, "They're a bunch

g after Pushovers."

go i2kled frown, Kelly

a f

we're going to help the

to tht drug trade to themSWes?-

said with aggerated patience.

'IYe're going after Shamar and hi ex

Barker objected, "But ifS s nukes.

hanlar can threaten to wipe out

B0g0td and God-k

nPws What else ifthe government attacks

him, why doesn't that threat also apply to

himr,

Our attacking

"Because Shamar doesn know we're working for the
Castanadas. As far as he's

concerned, this is a personal
vendetta between him and me," Alexander said, then
added, "Which it sure as hell really is.-

"I don't like it," said Zhakarov. 'How do we know we
can trust Castanada and hi family?"

r

Alexander laughed. "The KGB man worries about
trust?'I

That's not fair," said Kelly.,

. 'Nor constructive," added Steiner.

So he's won both your hearts," Alexander noted. He
scratched briefly at his chin. "Okay, I admit that we can't
trust the Castanada clan. But we've got to get Shainar."

"And the bombs," Barker insisted.

"And something else, too," Alexander said.

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be drug dealers-all of them. The ones in the moun-
@an&the ones in the capitolio.

e others stared at him.

2

aning forward over,the lighted table display screen
the shadows across his face loomed like the mask of
-rie devil, Alexander, said slowly, "We are going to
it impossible for anybody-including the thugs who
he government here-to manufacture cocaine. Ever
rtowr' asked Jay.

The mikesII' replied Alexander. "We're going to wipe
the fields where they grow the coca plants with the
out from one of Shamar's nuclear bombs."

@r

'That's insane!'' @4
@Vls it?" The light from the tabletop cast a strange glint in
s eyes. "Once we get our hands on those nukes
ng to use them. We're going to scrub the world
a lot of vermin."
stared at him in stunned silence.

*ets covered with metal studs. Wide leather belts and
avy, ornate buckles. Wild hair and faces painted like
ck stars. Two of them were big almost two meters M11
shoulder. Over one ..,id solid
muscle from neck to toes. Pavel smiled. Probably
No *0lid muscle between the ears, as well. The third one, in the
one else in sight. The towers of the universi
brilliantly lit, tho ty were ' -jaoiddle,
was short and stocky, with an ugly squashed-nose
"(be
usands of students bustling among the 3 C.
many buildings. But here along the -riverside all was A "What are
you grinning at, little man?" he asked.

Pavel was not exactly little. True, he was' barely 165 centimeters in height, and almo

st as slim as a girl. His face was delicately handsome, with dark eyes and brows, sculpted cheekbones and a graceful jawline. His hair was dark and naturally curly.

Pretty man," sneered the big fellow on Pavel's left. The other large oaf giggled.

Pavel said nothing. He simply stoold his ground left hand with its thumb hooked around the shoudler st of rap :the fencing bag, right hand relaxed at his side. They did not notice that he was up on the balls of his feet, read y to move in any directi

On circumstances dictated.

"What's in the bag?" the ugly little le ader demanded.

Pavel shrugged carelessly. "Junk. It's worthless."

"Yeah?" The leader flicked a knife from the sl eeve of his jacket and snapped it open. The slim blade glinted in the -light of a distant streetlamp.

"Hand it over."

"Not to the likes of

You, my friend," said Pavel.

The Other two pulled knives.

"It's worthless junk, I tell you," Pavel insisted. even a balalaika." 'Not "Open up the bag."

"But .

"Open it up or we'll open you up.-

Pavel sank to one knee, slung the bag off his shoulder and

unzipped it. Opening it wide so that they could see it was fencing gear and nothing more, he grasped one of the sabers and got to his feet.

The two oafs stepped back a pace, but their leader laughed. "It's not sharp, it's for a game. Look." I They grinned and moved toward Pavel.

Al

"I'm warning You," Pavel. said, his voice low, as h e retreated slowly, "what happens next is something you will regret.

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lader laughed again. "One against three? One toy three real knives." His laughter stopped.

rAnst

im. up!"

darted to his right, away from the promenade where there was more room for maneuver. The first swung toward him and Pavel made a His blunted saber,-thin and flexible as at the oaf's hand and sent the @ knife cement of the walkway.

in sudden pain. His companion hesi- and Pavel gave him the same treatment,

fingers.

leader had circled around, trying to get Pavel danced backward a few steps and lumberingly slow jab then riposted with

a c He screamed and I backed away.

te first one had recovered his knife, only to have Pavel m him again and whack him wickedly on the@upper shoulder and back'. three blows delivered so fast they

4

l not follow them with their eyes. Then it was back to leader again.

fle faced Pavel with blood running from his cut cheek with hatred.

for this," he snarled.

his arm and pointed the blunted tip of his face. "I'll blind you with this," he said, asking for a pack of cigarettes. "I'll take your eyes, one by one."

The little hoodlum glanced over at his two accomplices. of the thugs was sucking on his bleeding knuckles. The er was wringi ng his painracked arm. The light faded the ugly one's eyes. He backed away from Pavel.

king

lessly the three of them turned and started wal @back the way they had come.

"Jackals!" Pavel called after them.

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He retrieved his bag and zipped it up. But he kept the
saber out and held it firmly in his right hand as he strode
the rest of the

way to his dormitory room.

Two days later Pavel was in a luxurious Aeroflot jet
winging southward, away from wintry Moscow
and toward the sun and warmth of the Mediterranean.

He still felt uneasy

"It is a mission of utmost importance," the bureau
director had said, "and of the ut

most delicacy.,.,.

Pavel had sat on the straightbacked chair, directly in
front of the director's desk. The director himself had called
for him, a call that meant either high honor or deepest
disaster; all other chores were handled by underlings.
He was a slim, bald man with a neat little goatee almost
like that of Lenin in the gilt-framed portrait hanging on the
wall behind his desk. But there the resemblance

ended.

Pavel imagined Lenin as a vigorous, flashing-eyed man of
action. The director, with his soft little hands, his mani-
cured nails and tailor-made Hungarian suits, looked more
like a dandy than a leader of

men. His most v'

igorous action

was shuffling papers.

To the director, Pavel looked

like a cat tensed to spring.

A strikingly handsome young man, not quite twenty-three,

yet he

comes stalking into my office like a cat on the prowl,
all his senses alert, his eyes looking everywhere. That is
good, the director thought. He has been trained well.

ell.

atop the director's desk. The screen was the computer screen

Pavel's life history was displayed on the

screen so that only

the director himself could see it. Only child; mother killed
at Chernobyl; father "retired" from his duties as Party
chairman of Kursk due to alcoholism. There is nothing in
his dossier to indicate romantic entanglements. Best grades
in his clan, a natural athlete.

For long moments the director leaned back in his big

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gazed at the young man before him. Pavel

gazed without flinching. The director smiled

of the eternal game of chess that was

to be the man we need: -not a pawn,

a knight. One can sacrifice a knight in a

the game.

the lengthening silence. "Could you

you mean?"

blinked rapidly several times as if awaking

course. We can't expect to send you on

mission blindfolded, can we. He.

'polite smile. "As you know sir, I had

i

emotional Peacekeeping Force

gestured toward his computer' display

J@

course. A good choice for you. And YOU
it."

After you have completed this mission-successfully."
director leaned back in his chair again and tilted his
d back to gaze at the ceiling. "In a way, you know, this
he IPF."
sion is s

h my nerves, Pavel realized. To We
omewhat like being with t
le is trying to stretc
far I can go before I lose my self-control. Very casually,
inquired, "In what way, may I ark?"
although he has not set foot in the
lexander American,
anp, at the ceiling, "There is a certain Mr. Cole
Still starin more
hited States in than six years."
d nothing. He glanced upward, too. The ce iling
I Pav
@s nicely plastered, but there was nothing much of
el sai
terest in it, except for the tiny spi derweb the cleaning
had missed off in the comer by the window
es.
director snapped his attention to Pavel. "This

Alexander is a Mercenary soldier, the leader of a band of mercenaries.

"Mercenaries?" Despite himself, Pavel could not hide his surprise.

"Yes. Oh, he claims to be hunting for the infamous Jabal Shamar, the man responsible for the Jerusalem Genocide. But he spends most of his time hiring out his services to the rich and Powerful, helping them to oppress the people."

Pavel had heard rumors about Shamar.

'Is it true, that Shamar took a number of small nuclear weapons with him when he disappeared from Syria?' he asked.

The director's brows rose. - ,W

here did you hear of that?"

he snapped.

Pavel made a vague gesture. "Rumor .. talk here and there.@I

Tugging, nervously at his goatee, the director said, "We have heard such rumors also. Until they are clarified, all nuclear disarmament has been suspended. But your mission does not involve Jabal Shamar and rumored nuclear weapons caches."

understand, Sir."

"YOU will join Alexander's band of cutth

roats," the

director continued. "You will infiltrate their capitalistic organization and reach Alexander himself And, if necessary, assassinate him.,,

The airliner landed at Palma, and Pavel rented a tiny, underpowered Volkswagen at the airport. He did not look like the usual tourist: a smallish, athletically slim young man, alone, unsmiling, studying everything around him like a hunting cat, dressed in a black long-sleeved shirt open at the neck and an equally somber pair of 'slacks, carrying nothing but a soft black travel bag.

Using the map computer in the car's dashboard, he

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the island of Mallorca, heading for employed by the Soviet consulate a Representative of the mercenaries.

farmlands he drove, seeing but not much note of the fertile beauty of this land: the green farms, the red poppies of The roads the terraced hillsides and tenderly cultivated vineyards. But he noticed the steep hairpin turns that of The Sierra de Tramunta as he sweated and cursed m -angry whisper while the VW's whining little electric 46 struggled to get up the grades. A tourist bus @ed by in the other direction, nearly blowing him the edge of the narrow road and down the rugged e.

then he finally got to the crest of the range, the road ended out, although it still twisted like a writhing snake. then he had to inch his way down an even steeper, lower road to the tiny fishing village where he was -sed to meet the mercenaries.

'Pavel was drenched with sweat and hollow-gutted with taustion by the time he eased the little car out onto the

fitary stone pier that jutted into the incredibly blue water
'the cove. He turned off the engine and just sat there for
few moments, recuperating from the harrowing drive.
he smell of burned insulation hung in the air. Or was it

A

tarried brake lining?.

@'He got out on shaky legs and let the warm sun shine start
po ease some of the tension out of him. The village looked
Even the cantina at the foot

@4top one another authe

He took his black overnight bag from the car and slung it
over his shoulder, then paced the pier from one end to the
its whitewashed cement
a single boat. in the water
bri red dories pile@
of the pier.
ght-colo

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other. He looked at his watch

The time for the meeting
had come, and gone ten minutes ago,
He heard a faint buzzing sound.

At first he thought it was
some insect, but within a few moments he realized it was a
motor. And it was getting louder

A black rubber

rubber boat came into view from around the
mountains that plunged into the sea, a compact little petrol
motor pushing it through the water, splashing out a spume
of foam every time the blunt bow hit a swell. A single man
was in it, his hand on the motor's stick control. He wore a
slick yellow poncho with the hood pulled up over his head.

Pavel watched him expertly maneuver the boat into the
cove and up to the pier. He looped a line around the cleat
set into the floating wooden platform at the end of the pier.

"What's your name, stranger?" the man called in English.

"Pavel."

"That's good. And your last name?"

"Krahsnii." It was a false name, of

they had exchanged were code word course, and the lines
to one another. The man's that identified them

"Pavel the Red," said the man in the boat, grinning
crookedly. "Fine. Come on aboard."

So he understands a bit of Russian Pavel thought

that

as he

trud ed down the stone steps onto the bobbing platform
and stepped lightly into the rubber boat.

"That's all you've got?" The man pointed at Pavel's bag.

..It's all

I need," Pavel said as he sat in the middle of the
boat. "For now."

"Want a poncho? The sun's pretty strong here." He lifted
her yellow

slicker from a metal box at his feet.

Pavel shook his head.

"I like the sun."

"You could get skin cancer you know," he said as he
unlooped the line

and revved the motor. I

'Damned

ultraviolet-ozone layer's been shot to hell by pollution.

In a moment, Pavel shouted over the motor's noise, "Lef
jak: day of sunshine, at least. In Moscow we don't
sun from September to May."

The man grinned back. "Suit yourself, Red."

The boat bounced along the waves Pavel thought he was
in danger of drowning than sunstroke. The spray
from the bow drenched him thoroughly. His shirt and
trousers were soaked within minutes. Pavel sat there as a mute
sainted martyr, enduring it without a word.

Pavel had heard of new agents receiving baptisms of fire,
but he saw to himself. This is more like the baptism of an
infidel Christian.

But I'm not an assassin," Pavel had blurted.

The director had smiled like a patient teacher upon

ing an obvious mistake from a prize pupil.

are " he corrected, "whatever we need you to be. have been trained to perfection in all the martial arts. skills are excellent. Is your motivation lacking?" Pavel suddenly saw an enormous pit yawning before I am a faithful son of the Soviet Unionland the Russian black and bottomless.

le," he repeated the rote line.

good said the director. "And if the Soviet d the Russian people require you to assassinate of the people, what will you do?" without mercy," Pavel said automatically. s smile broadened. "Of course."

"But . The young in

an hesitated. Why?"

The director sighed heavily. "We are in a time of great upheavals, my young friend. Enormous upheavals, everywhere in the world. Even within the Soviet Union, changes @_ coming faster than they have since the glorious days of Revolution."

Pavel had been taught all that in his political indoctrina-

M Ben Bova

tion classes. And the fact that his father was allowed to
refire Peacefully and seek therapy for his-addi

Ction, instead
of being sent to some provincial, Outpost in disgrace, was a
more concrete

the nation. Proof of the changes sweeping the Party and
"The Soviet Union helped

to create the IPF and has led
the way toward true disarmament

said the director
almost wistfully. Th

en he added "But this does not

oresworn

that we have entirely f

mean

the use of force. There re
situations where force is the only solution.,,

"And this Amen-can represents one of those situations?"

"AU that it is neces

sary for you to know

to

will be explained

YOU in your detailed mission briefings. For now, let me
tell You that this Capitalist warmonger Alexander is work-
ing some sort of scheme to undermine the regime

in Libya.

We are the friend and Protector of the Libyan regime. We
will protect our friend by getting rid of his enemy. Is that
clear?"

"Yes, sir."

The man in the ponch

o cut the motor. The

suddenly became silent; the drenching spray world
ceased. Pavel

unconsciously ran a hand through his soaked hair.

lyo

u don't get seasick, do You?" the man asked.

Shrugging; "I dont know. I've never been closer to the
sea than one thousand kilonicAers."

The man laughed. "Hadn't thought of that."

With the water-slicked Yellow Poncho on him, there was
not much of him that Pavel could see except for his face.
Hunched over as he was, it was difficult to tell what his true
size was. He seemed rather broad in the shoulder. His face
was square, with an almost sad, ironic smile that was
nearly crooked enough to be CaIW twisted. His eyes were
gray, cold, yet they sparkled with what could only be a
bitter kind of am

usement. Altogether; his face was not

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but not truly handsome, either. He seemed
close to two meters in height. Not a cowardly
kept the poncho over him, claiming to be
r ultraviolet. A man of contradictions.

stopped?" Pavel said. His English was Of

ariety, as accentless as the typical Yankee

the man. "Out here we're safe from

5so listen to what we say."

be carrying recording equipment."

It shrugged. 'You might. But you're in my boat,

'you're go' to work for me, you'll be on my turf for

ing,
lime to come.10

e
moment Pavel was speechless with surprise. "You

J-
Die Alexander." He extended his right hand. "Pleased
to meet you Pavel."

--Xander's grip was strong. Pavel said slowly, "I didn't
want you to meet me personally." He was thinking, I
didn't wish to crush his windpipe and push him overboard. The job
would be done. But in the bobbing little boat he was not
aware of his leverage or his footing.

It would present a problem to me, Pavel," Cole Alexander
said. "My Russian contacts made it quite clear that
the American government wants you on my team. Otherwise I'll
have real trouble with the Russkies. I figure that at the very
least you're a spy who's supposed to tell the Kremlin what
you're going to do in Libya. At the most, you've been sent out
there to murder me."

Pavel kept his face rigid, trying to hide his emotions.
Alexander grinned his crooked grin again. "If you're an
assassin, this would be a good place to give it a try. Think
you can take me?"

"You are making a joke."
Alexander shrugged. "You're damned near twenty-five

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Years younger than I. That's a lot of time; a lot of booze and women. On the other hand, I

you weigh?" "in bigger than you. What do

"Sixty-eight kilos."

"I'm about ninety; kilos."

"I am faster than you," Pavel said.

"in a footrace, sure. What about your hand speed?"

Pavelcocked his head to one side. It would not be wise to boast.

Alexander dug a hand inside the poncho and

with a silver coin. "An American half-dollar. Worth about three cents these days. came out

He motioned Pavel to move back to the bow of the tiny Zodiac, then placed the coin on the midships bench where Pavel had been sitting.

"Hands on knees." Alexander

"I'll count to three. First demonstrated as he spoke. one to reach the coin keeps it.-

Pavel put his hands on his k

American count. This is ridiculous, he thought. A typical American macho contest. It's a wonder he didn't challenge me to a duel with six

-shooters.

"Three!

Pavel felt Alexander's hand atop his the instant his own fingers closed around the coin.

"Damn!" Alexander exclaimed "You are fast. First time anybody's ever taken money off me that way.,,

Pavel

. offered the coin back to him, but Alexander laughingly insisted he keep it. Holding it in his palm, watching the sunlight glitter off it, Pavel began to wonder if Alexander had deliberately allowed him to win. He is a very clever man, Pavel thought. Even by losing he makes me respectful of him

- No wonder the director fears him so.

"Now then," Alexander resumed, "about my problem. If I don't take you in,

I suppose your government will try to blow me out of the water and make it look like an accident. ent.

So you're in. But don't think you're getti

ng out until we've

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ejo we're on now. And don't think you can get to Moscow about what we're doing. You'll be carefully."

ement but to show that he dded, not to show agre

j the, situation. What Alexander did not know it was not necessary for Pavel to make contact Alexander does

or anyone at all. And what

W, Pavel thought, could eventually kill him.

4n extremely delicate situation," the chief briefing iad told Pavel.

had been meeting eachday for more than a week,
information and indoctrination into Pavel's aching
he regular working hours of the day were spent

T

briefing

the offices and conference rooms Of the
on his physical training and
had to carry alone in the gymnasium in the
d exercises at night,
inistry building. He slept little, and the
kent of the in
W as beginning to make him edgy.

chief briefing officer was wise enough to recognize

I

s growing t ss, She had invited him to dinner at
ensene

it was a large and luxurious flat in one of
apartment blocks: a beautiful living ro Om
oriental carpets and precious works of art, a
kitchen, and a frilly but comfortable
a large bed covered by a tiger skin.

I on imitation," the chief briefing officer had told
when she showed him through the place. "But it keeps
Warm and cozy."

er father was a high Party official, a "Young Twk"
n C3,orbachev had taken over the Kremlin; one of the
rately clinging to his power now. She
rgeneration despe

s at least . ten years Pavel's senior, but she was still
a bit stocky,

ractive in his eyes. Almost his own height
bosom seemed to st in at her red blouse. Her face had

rai

ightly oriental cast to it that made her seem exotic in the

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light of the artificial fire glowing electrically in the artificial fireplace-

Over dinner she explained that, since the Soviet Union was one of the founding members of the International Peacekeeping Force, it was impossible for the USSR to overtly support Libya-

"When Colonel Qaddafi was finally assassinated, everyone thought that Libya would return to being a quiet country that produced oil, instead of terrorists."

Pavel sipped his hot borscht and listened, trying to keep his eyes off her red blouse. One of the buttons had come undone and it

gapped invitingly.

- "But Rayyid is more rabid than Qaddafi ever was, as you know from your briefings. He is not the kind of man we would have chosen for an ally, but the inexorable forces of history have thrown us into the same bed-so to speak. The

therefore, any attempt to undermine him must be stopped by us, with force if necessary.",

"But quietly,- Pavel added,

so that the world does not know the Soviet Union has supported a madman.,,

'She smiled at him

feel - "Only the madman will know, and more dependent on us. And, of course.- we will realize that the Soviet Union discreetly inform certain others who must be made to the kind of stupid- Protects its friends-without publicity that the Americans go in for."

it is desirable

can see why

to crush a band of mercenary soldiers," Pavel said, "but I still don't see why we support a nation that sends terrorists around the world. Wasn't Rayyid responsible for blowing up that Czech airliner last year?

Two hundred people were killed, The chief briefing officer smiled again at Pavel.,

And regrettable

"Yes, it is

- But international politics is very complicated. Sometimes it is

get

is necessary, as I said, to go into bed with someone you do not love.,, Pavel thought of the word whore, but did

not speak it.

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She spent the rest of the day huddled with her to,

going to an

were both

-not wanting to

in the imitation tiger skin

The motor started again and the little boat crossed the waves once more. Just as the sun was to dry me out, Pavel thought sourly, squinting into

urided a cliff that tumbled from the wooded ridge above straight down into the blue sea. Pavel saw a e tucked into the cove formed by a niche in the line intains.

me sweet home," shouted Alexander over the drone motor.

s as beautiful a piece of work as anything Pavel had graceful lines of a racing yacht wedded wings of a jet airplane. Big engine the wings met the plane's body. The back at rakish angle The plane was a

although the underside of the wings were ter hue, the

color of the sky, Pavel saw as they roached.

batch popped open halfway between the wings and and two men tossed out a rope ladder. Alexander the Zodiac to the ladder and hooked a line to Pavel into the plane, then clambered up the

him.

where I live," he told Pavel. "This is home, ers, and transportation all wrapped up in one.

OL

)ping a -forefinger against Pavel's chest, he added, "Let u a piece of advice, friend: never stay in one give yo

ce long enough for the tax collectors to find you!"

Pavel saw that they were in a utilitarian work area, bare

metal walls curving over a scuffed and worn metal flooring. It was tall enough for Alexander to stand erect. He was just under two meters, Pavel estimated. The two other men were deflating the Zodiac and bringing it aboard for stowage.

My car. . ." he suddenly remembered.

"All taken care of, don't worry," Alexander said as he wormed out of his yellow slicker. He was wearing a turtleneck shirt and jeans. The uniform of a burglar, Pavel thought. His hair was youthfully thick and full, yet dead white. Another contradiction.

Crooking a finger for Pavel to follow him, Alexander strode to the forward hatch and went through. The next cabin almost took Pavel's breath away. It was what he had imagined, as a child, that a plutocrat's yacht would look like. Brass and polished wood. Comfortable cushioned armchairs with lap belts. Round portholes. Small tables bolted to the deck, which was covered with a thick carpet of royal blue.

"I've got to go forward for a minute and talk to the pilot," said Alexander as Pavel took in all the luxury. "Your bunk is the first hatch on the right, forward of this cabin. You might want to get into some dry clothes before we take off."

Even his "bunk" was a well-appointed private compartment, small as a telephone booth yet comfortable, with a foldout desk and a display screen built into the foot of the bed. I should be able to tap into his computer files, Pavel told himself, given a bit of time.

As he dropped his bag on the bunk and unzipped it, the plane's engines roared to life. The compartment shuddered. Through the porthole Pavel could see that they were turning seaward.

"All personnel, please take seats and strap in. Takeoff in three minutes."

Pavel tucked his bag in the drawer beneath the bunk, lay All I till daylight

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his middle and

safety strap across

plane lifted off the water.

awoke. Pavel showered and

ng that he had

he

the coffin-sized bathroom5 marveli

ssed in his spare outfit,

ities. all to himself. He dre

and Western jeans, not unlike

ting maroon shirt

He had only one pair of sneakers:

I xatider wore

Client

counted eight

out into the passageway and

e plahe's

compartnients. From his memory of th

- that there was another big comPart-

he judged

through

deck. He went
-tward, before the control
the wardroom where he had
Dn hatch and back into
@n Alexander.
pulled in the boat were sitting
two men who had
with sandwiches and coffee cups- The
it a table laden
woman sitting with them noticed Pavel.
r and have some chow-@
Sht as well come ove
was small, rather plain-looking, with re(i hair cut
d face with a small stub Of
st boyishly- A freckle

almo
ous as Pavel
face looked somewhat suspici
Her her brown eyes watched him

ed; he saw that
Uy.
a Kelly," she said, getting up and offering her hand
r.
s making himself smile at he
vel Kx6lisnii," he aid Chris Barker and
id these two chow hounds are
Mavrourlis." from their seats.
led greetings without rising
hey mumb
them.
said Kelly "Briefing in ten
you can,
I have gone
ine minutes these guys wil
in n
sandwiches."
chair next to Kelly and reached for one Of
. He noticed that the table was covered with
san
W cloth spread.
,t the faintest idea of what's going On here," he
ll haven
6. ll just arrived."
ve
A d.

"We know. The boss is wo

rried that you're a spy from
the Kr@

injin, He thinks the best way to prevent you from
doing us any

we keep a clodamage is to Put You to work right away while
se eye on you."

Pavel took a bite of the

sandwich, tasting nothing as he
assessed the situation. Six eyes were staring at him, none of
them friendly.

"The three Of You will"-he tried to recall the phrase
exactlY---kee a close eye on me?"

P

"Mostly me," Kelly said. "These guys have plenty of
other work to do. The boss doesn't let anybody have much
C_e time."

"The boss is Alexander?"

"You better believe it!" answered Kelly.

Deciding to disarm them with a measured amount of
candor, Pavel munched thoughtfully on his sandwich for a
few moments more then said, "The boss is perfectly
correct. I am a sp, "MY government ii concerned about

Y.

your activities and I have been sent to observe what you are
doing firsthand."

"I knew it," said Mavroulis. He was dark and hairy, with
thick ringlets almost down to his eyebrows and a day's
growth of black stubble on his chin. Heavy in the shoulders
and chest, like a wrestler. He glared at Pavel.

The other one, Barker, looked English. Light brown hair,
almost blond, with calm blue eyes and a faint smile. The
kind who could slit your throat while apologizing for it.

"Why does Moscow have any interest in our litt e
operation?" he asked in a high nasal voice. "We don't
threaten the superpowers in any way."

Pavel made a small shrug. "Perhaps they fear that'you
threaten one of our friends."

"Libya," said Kelly. it was a flat statement, toneless.

"Is that where we are going?" Pavel asked.

"We'll find out," she replied, glancing at her wrist, "in
eight minutes."

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another bite of his sandwich

forced a smile. "Coffee or @tea?" she asked, as
ly as a child

-der himself conducted the briefing, wh ich con-

s mind that his band of mercenaries was
-in Paver

quit e small. Peihaps every one of them is aboard
LWe, he thought. perhaps an accident could wipe
ll out of existence.

from the table when

. cleared the food and cups
der came into the wardroom each person taking his
'40" dirty dishes to a slot set into the aft bulkhead.
d. By the time he
Kelly and did what she did
followed

Alexander had removed the cloth table
I around,
revealing that the tabletop was actually a large
screen.
is Libya," said Kelly, studying the map shown on the
as she sat down again.
is Libya," Alexander confirmed.
vel sat next to Kelly. He noticed that this time
oulis sat on his other side,
uniar at-Rayyld is one of the world's leading pains n
e touched a keypad set into the
is," said Alexander. H
's edge and a photo of the Libyan strong man aP-
A in the upper corner of the map, a sun-browned face
hidden by dark glasses and a military Cap heavy with
- braid.
is neighbors, who shall remain nameless"-
at Pavel-"have hired us to get rid of
money for it
assassinate him," Pavel said.
surprised, almost shocked- Mavroulis gave
,The Russians-first thing they think of

Si
felt sudden anger, flushing his cheeks.
iling his crooked smile, Alexander said, "No, MY
W-faced friend, we are not assassins. We are not even

mercenary soldiers, in the old sense. Like the Peacekeepers, we deal in minimum violence.-

Out of the corner of his eye Pavel saw Kelly flinch slightly at the word "Peacekeepers." Why? I must find out.

Aloud, he said, "Minimum violence? Such as bombing Tripoli while Rayyid is making a speech there?"

"And killing everybody in the crowd?" Alexander shook his head. "What good would that do? Rayyid would probably be in a blastproof shelter by the time the first bomb fell. And besides we want to destroy his power, not make a martyr out of him."

"Then what...?" Pavel gestured at the electronic map.

Alexander spelled it out. For more than ten years the Libyan government had been working on a grand project to tap the vast aquifer deep beneath the Sahara and bring the water to the coast, where it would provide irrigation for farming.

"Qaddafi talked about doing it," Alexander said.

"Rayyid is making it happen."

Barker arched his brows in a very English way. "What of it? It's entirely an internal Libyan operation. That's no 'Isn't it?" Alexander scratched lazily at his jaw.-

My

sainted old Uncle, Max was a dedicated Greenpeacer. Got himself arrested by the Russkies once, trying to save whales from their hunting fleets. He al

ways told me, 'Son, it just ain't smart to tamper with Mother Nature.',

"You are against the Libyan project for ecological

rea-

sons?" Pavel could not believe it.

Alexander considered him for a long moment, locking his wi

entry-gray eyes on Pavel. Finally he answered, "Of course. Why else? If it's not good ecologically, then it's bad politically, as far as I'm concerned."

Pavel said nothing, but he thought to himself, This Alexander is either a liar or a fool. threat to any other nation.-

aquifer beneath the Sahara had been created more than a hundred thousand years ago, Alexander explained when glaciers covered Europe and northern Africa and the grassland teeming with game and the earliest human hunting tribes.

But he just didn't know what the ecological effects of tapping that water will be," he went on. "Certainly the nations along the Sahel region don't want their underground water sources tampered with. It could wipe them out of the land people both.

Libyans would use up the underground water in a matter of decades," Kelly added. "It would be entirely gone: what took a thousand centuries to accumulate could be gone in less than one generation.

"What about the water is gone?" Barker asked. "The water will die," said Mavroulis angrily. "Maybe tens of millions, all across the Sahel, Algeria, Libya itself - they're using that water," Alexander said, "and their economic and political power will grow enormous."

ly. Libya will become the leading nation of the
i-for a. while. Long enough to make her neighbors
nely uncomfortable at the prospect."

V

'hich is why they've hired us," said Barker.
Light."

@vel shook his head. "You are going to kill this man
water. Water that legally he has a right to."
exander regarded him with a pitying smile. "You keep
ng about killing. We don't kill we cure."
izzlcd, Pavel asked, "What do you mean?"

exander's cold gray eyes shifted away from Pavel.

I

re working on a plan that will op the aquifer project.

St

N our goal and that's what we're going to do. I have no
ntion of harming a hair on Rayyid's armpits."
arker leaned back and said to no one in particular,
ie man has the Mediterranean at his doorstep. Why

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doesn't he buy fusion generators and desalt the seawater? Fusion May be new, but it works well and it would be cheaper than this aquifer scheme. And less damaging ecologically."

Alexander smiled his cynical smile. "That's what you Uld

WO do, Chris. It's what I would do, or Kelly or Nicco or' even our Russian friend, here- But Rayyid wants something big, something impressive, something that's never been done before,"

He's not looking for the best way to help his people," said Kelly. "He's looking for headlines for himself.- power," added Alexander. "Power is always at -he

Of it

root

For the next week Pavel and all the others were kept quite busy- The Plane landed in Naples' beautiful harbor, then new up briefly to Marseille and after that. spent two days anchored in an unnamed inlet on the west coast of Corsica.

Pavel began to understand that this plane and the eight men And one woman aboard it were only a part of Alexande's Operation. How large a part, he had no inkling. Obviously the man had tentacles that extended far.

None of them left the Plane for very long. Alexander stayed aboard constantly. Pavel was allowed to walk the length of the dock in Marseille, but no farther.

Kelly

watched him from the hatch, and Mavroulis or one of the Others was always at the end of the pier. Each night they slept aboard the plane, which always taxied far out fro. the shore before anchoring. It was like sleeping on a yacht. Pavel enjoyed it, even though he felt somewhat confined.

Now and again the name of Jabal Shamar popped up in conversations. Pavel asked indirect questions, spoke littl and listened a lot. Apparently Alexander had a personal hatred for the elusive former leader of the Pan-Arab armies. His Parents had been killed in the nuclear exchange of the Final War.

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true that Shamar has his own nuclear. bombs?" Bkod Mavroulis one afternoon, while they worked aide loading crates of foodstuffs into the plane's ated cargo bay.

you think Alexander

3reek nodded sourly. "Why do 6 this Libyan job? Shamar might be there, under s, protection." i@the bombs?"

pulis grunted as he heaved a crate marked as "He doesn't care about the bombs. He wants loscow must care about the bombs, Pavel thought.

iey wan@ Ravyid ta have access to nuclear weapons? shed he could contact the director for clarification. erever he went, the Kelly woman stayed beside him. fas cool, friendly-up to a point-and extremely sent. Pavel saw that she could program computers e other electronic gear with impressive facility. second morning at Corsica she approached Pavel in rdroom shortly after breakfast and asked, "Uh you

Do you go for a swim?" She seemed somewhat reluctant, yet troubled, as if someone had forced her to ask him. Pavel was too surprised to be wary. Kelly provided him a pair of abbreviated trunks, then ducked into her compartment, to change.

Her bathing suit revealed what Pavel had guessed. Her figure was practically nonexistent. Yet her dead, plain face had a kind of prettiness to it. She was not beautiful, by any means. But that did not matter so much. The prospect of pumping information from her in bed did not seem not merely possible, but attractive. Yet, though Kelly smiled at him, her brown eyes were always sad. Pavel thought there was something very sad in them, something that he should strive to find out. They used the plane's main cargo hatch as a diving

had swum only in Moscow-pools; he was surprised at the lack-of chlorine in the water, and its saltiness.

After nearly an hour, they climbed up onto the wing and stretched out on giant towels to let the sun dry them. The sky arching overhead was brilliant blue, cloudless and achingly bright. Pavel squeezed his eyes shut, ut st the glow. of the fierce Mediterranean sun blazed against his closed eyelids.

"You swim ve ry well," Kelly said. There was real admiration in her voice. The earlier reluctance had washed away. He opened his eyes and turned toward her.

"Not as well as You," he replied, noticing how the sunlight granted off the water droplets in her hair. It was a bright Irish red, the kind of coloring that the Vikings had the long rivers of Russia to

its name'

he found out. Gently leading her on to tell her life story, Pavel learned that she had been a skater but had faded to make Canada's Olympic team.

"The competition must have been very strong in a nation like Canada," he sympathized.

H

She still seemed saddened by that failure. Th6 she had joined the International Peacekeeping Force, and had served for almost a year as a teleoperator. She had been involved in stopping the abortive war between Eritrea and the Sudan.

"Why did you leave the Peacekeepers?" he asked.

Kelly's freckled face almost pouted. "I had some trouble with my superiors. Not following orders exactly. Exceeding my mission goals."

"But exceeding one's goals is a good thing!" Pavel felt truly surprised.

"Maybe for you. For me, it just got me in trouble."

"And because of that you were cashiered from the IPFT'

"I wasn't thrown out. I quit."

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-,614 that?"

hat helped, but it wasn't the ally," she said. ,T n.

why?"

look at him, lying beside her.

-ned her head to pain and anger in her eyes. And something else, uneasy with h e-r g he could not identify. Suddenly

to him, he Jay back again and closed his eyes IC Sun.

he was in love with me. I

a," she said. "I thought

I was in love with

ù you?"

ess I was she said, almost in a whisper. "But he ildn't you have transferred to another part of the shoulders. "Maybe. But Cole

shrugged her bare
!Ader 'asked me to join his group."
tiander offered you better pay?
-heard Kelly chuckle. -I wish. You don't know him
MmIl yet."
-don't understand."
d me to. Cole
joined his group because he aske
Ifnder is my father."
ur father? But your name is
stunned. "Yo
ivel felt
that he now
Re stopped short, suddenly realizing
tive, dangerous ground.
treading on very sensi
Kelly said matter-of-
le never married my mother
Y.
Ud she ...
day she died. And so will I
She loved him 'til the
i.-
They left Corsica, after Alexander had a top secret
rters just aft of the flight deck
acting in his private qua
th six men who wore expensive suits and dark glasses.
r a few hours the
arrived in six different yachtsi and fo

coast

lonely unnamed inlet on the rugged Corsican coast looked like a holiday playground for millionaires.

He serves the rich, Pavel remembered the director's words. He helps them to oppress the poor.

The yachts departed and the seaplane took off, landed and refueled at Gibraltar, then flew out over the Atlantic and down the curving bulk of the African coast. Pavel slept poorly that night. The plane flew steadily, with hardly a noticeable vibration. The sound of the engines was muffled to a background purr. But still something in that deepest part of his brain that was always alert kept warning him that he was in danger, that he was surrounded by enemies, and that there was nothing between him and a screaming fall to his death except several miles of thin air.

He breakfasted with Kelly and the others, then was summoned on the plane's intercom to the flight deck. Kelly accompanied him along the passageway that led through the sleeping compartments and her fatness private quarters.

"His bedroom is on this side"-she gestured to an unmarked door in the passageway-"and his office is here on the starboard side."

A flight of three steps marked the end of the passageway. "Flight deck's up there," Kelly said.

"You are not coming?"

"I haven't been invited. He wants to see you. Alone."

She seemed more guarded than ever this morning, as if she regretted having revealed so much about herself. Pavel went up the metal steps and rapped on the door with the back of his knuckles. Nothing happened. He glanced back at Kelly, who motioned for him to open the door and

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through. With a shrug, he did.

Strong sunlight poured through the wide windows of the flight deck. Pavel winced and, squinting, saw that the stations for the navigator and electronics operator were

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though the display

chairs empty, even

consoles glowed with data. He had expected the noise from the engines to be louder up here, but

was so marginal that Pavel could dismiss no real threat from the rest of the plane.

Here, Red, came Alexander's voice. From the

occupied crew stations, Pavel saw the

copilot, the plane. He was

Alexander was indeed wearing a pilot's uniform. The area around the pilot's seat, wearing a light blue

looked so surprised, kid," Alexander said, grinning broadly.

"Lying this beautiful lady is most

relaxing. Sit down, make yourself comfortable," he said, sliding into the copilot's chair.

"Do you want to try the controls?"

ishment. despite
new he was wide-eyed with aston
I could reply
All that Pavel
;Wts to rein in his emotions
and a vigorous bobbing of his
half-strangled "Yes"
ke 'em!" Alexander removed his hands from the
plane ploughed along steadily.
ped control Yoke. The - him and felt the
I gripped the yoke in front of
of this huge plane. Alexander began
plous solidity
ling the instruments on the bewildering panels that
imeter, air
Pavers chair on three sides: alt
nded
ties, trim tabs, radar display,
indicator, radios, throt
ad-bank indicator, artificial horizon, compass, fuel
that could be
were hundreds of displays
... there
up through the plane's flight- computer.
seconds we have to make a twelve-degree
about ten
left. Ready?"
southward. That's to our
Pavel heard his voice squeak excitedly.
his hands on the controls, aren't
re the man with

V`

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His mouth suddenly dry, Pavel swallowed once, then nodded. "I am ready."

160kay now."

Both of them watched the compass as Pavel started to turn the yoke leftward.

"Rudder!" Alexander yelled. "The pedal beneath your left foot. Easy!"

The plane responded smoothly, although Pavel overcontrldled and had to turn slightly back toward the right before the compass heading satisfied Alexander. He was sweating by the time he took his hands off the yoke and let Alexander resume control.

"Not bad for the first time," Alexander said, smiling his sardonic smile. Pavel could not tell if he was being honest or sarcastic.

Alexander flicked his fingers across a few buttons, then let go of the controls.

"Okay, she's on autopilot now until we reach Cape Verde

11

airspapp-

Wiping his palms on his jeans, Pavel said, "I have never flown an airplane before."

"Uh-huh." Alexander studied his face for a moment, then asked, "Okay, Red, what have you learned about us so

Pavel searched for the older man's eyes, saw only the blue-tinted glasses. "You mean, what will I report back to Moscow?" he asked, stalling for time to think.

Alexander nodded. His grin was gone. He was completely serious now.

"You are planning to attack Libya, a nation that has friendly ties to the Soviet Union. Your plan involves -destroying the Libyan aquifer project, a project that could bring precious water to farmers and herders along - the Mediterranean coast-water that legally belongs to Libya, since, it now lies under Libyan soil."

PEACEKEEPERS 175

@re conducting this attack for money paid to, you ri,!@Alexander said.

card this plane in Corsica.

six men who came ab

ptiaw, two of them were

-em I recognized as an Egy

presumably from Chad and Niger, two neighbors any

Wm Libya, has been at war, off and on, for m

--The other three were from

Alexander said.

I

k3limisia and France."

tce?"

Frogs have, had their troubles with Libyan terrorism: r the years."

to get rid of Rayyid."

hey are paying you

exactly."

d. "Not exactly? Come, now."

snorte

rider laughed. .,Ali, the righteous defender of the

't

is it not so?,, Pavel shot back. "Aren You taking

I

from the rich? Won,t your schemes hurt the poor

i and herdsmen Of Libya?"

ing a finger against his lips for a moment, Alexander

much he should tell. Finally he

to be debating how

t poorer than Libya. And the

:"Chad is a helluva lo

little conference represen ted

Dan you saw at Our

-They're damned worried

al nations of the Sahel area.

t Libya draining that aquifer-"

11

'hen let them dig their own irrigation systems.

Vith what? They don't have oil money. They don't

any money."

@xcept a few millions to pay You."

My money's not coming

hey're paying me nothing-

the Sahel. And what I am getting for this caper is

y enough to pull it off and keep us from starving- I'm

rich man, Red. This plane and the people in it are my

Pavel did not believe that for ins
an ' tant. But he said 4
nothing.

Besides, my egalitarian friend, Libya is much richer
than most of its neighbors."

"That's not true . .

"Yes, it is. Check with the World Bank if you doubt it...
Alexander's crooked smile returned. "Oh, the people of
Libya are shit poor. Those farmers and herdsman you talk
about are on the ragged edge of starvation, sure enough.
But there's plenty of gold in Tripoli- Rayyid's rolling in
money. He could buy fusion desalting pla

nts and string
them along his coastline, if he wanted to. Instead, he's
using

part of his gold to build this monster irrigation
project. The rest goes into terrorism."

So you say."

"Listen, kid"-Alexander pointed a forefinger like a
pistol-"a helluva lot of Libyan oil money goes straight to
Moscow to buy the guns and explosives that Rayyid
terrorist squads use in Paris, Rome, London and Washing-
ton.

Pavel leaned back, away from that accusing finger. "So it
is all the fault of the Soviet Union, is it?"

"Did I say that?" Alexander put on a look

of pained
innocence falsely accused. "It's the fault of Quinar al-
Rayyid, and we're going to take steps, to stop him."

"By destroying his aquifer project."

"Damned right. And letting his own people see that he's
been spending their hard-earned money on projects that
bring him prestige and leave them penniless."

"Very clever," Pavel admitted. "You stir up his own
people against him, so that when they tear him to pieces
you can say that you did not assassinate him."

"What the Libyan people-or, more likely, what the
Libyan military do to Rayyid is their problem, not mine.
My problem is to see to it that the bastard doesn't drain

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glcal disaster that'll kill

,rj4q an&cause an ecolo
r people over the next generation."
ruin your plans," Pavel said.

d an eyebrow.

ei arche
escape from you and tell all this to the nearest
sulate. Once they knew that Algeria and France
ng you Pavel- let the sentence dangle.
jer grinned at him. -First you have to escape."
bowed his head in acknowledgement.

Wly, it wouldn't be too tough for a man of your
1. leaning back in his chair.

Alexander said,

sitt' on an ejection seat, you know.

ing

?,,@

ly.

If into the harness and hit the red

-strap yourse

St and whoosh!" Alexander
on the end of the armre
.4 with both hands, "Off Y01110, through the over-
tch and into the wild blue yonder. Parachute opens
beeps a dis-
tically. Flotation gear inflates. Radio
[I. You'd be picked up before you got your feet wet,
d at the red button.

said nothing. But he glance

is fingertips he
was a protective guard over it. With h
locked; Alexander was
it and found that it was not
the truth.

-if you're really

..hat's more," the man was saying,

Give me a

-to knock me off, now's the time for it.

in the head or something, knock me unconscious Or
e outright. ,in sure they taught you how to do that,
theyT

smiling cynically, Pavel saw, but his tone
lips were
eadly serious-

rottles, and the yoke hard forward, Put
nen slam the th floating off

0 a power dive and eject. You 90
plane int

rips off its wings and hits the water at
and the plane ivors, and it looks like an
;hundred knots. No surv

accident. You'd get a Hero of the Soviet Union medal for that, wouldn't you?"

"You are joking," Pavel said.

Alexander went on, "You'd kill me and everybody else on board. Wipe out all of us."

Pavel could not fathom Alexander's motives. Is this a test of some sort? he asked himself. A trap? Or is the man absolutely mad?

"You could knock me out, couldn't you? After all, I'm an old man. Old enough to be your father."

Is he actually challenging me to a fight? Pavel wondered. Here? In the cockpit of this plane?

"She told you I'm her father, didn't she?" Alexander asked.

The sudden shift in subject almost bewildered Pavel. He felt as if he were thrashing around in deep water, unable to catch his breath

-Kelly's

MY daughter. She told you that, didn't she?"

There was real concern written on the man's face, Pavel saw. And suddenly he realized that all this talk of assassination and destroying the airplane had

been a test, after all.

"Yes, she did tell me
he admitted.

"I think the world, of her," Alexander said. "She's the only child I've got.

The only
one I'll ever have."

"She loves you very much," Pavel said.

If you kill me here and now, you'd be killing her, too.

"Yes, that is true."

For many long, nerve-twisting moments they sat side by side in silence, staring at each other, trying to determine what was going on behind the masks they held up to one another.

her, while the plane droned on high above the glittering gray ocean.

"When you go into Libya on
this mission," Alexander
said,

"Kelly will be with you. She has a tough assignment, a key assignment."

A@

deep breath, let it out slowly in a sigh
it. "I'm asking you to watch out for
I don't care what your government wants
take care of myself. But my little girl,
on this job. I'm asking you to be
thoughtful. Asking me to protect the
daughter. He's extremely mad... or far more clever than even the
one I suspect. Yes, devious and extremely clever. He
is putting the two of us together. Now he places
her in my hands. Extremely clever. And therefore
extremely dangerous.

y, took," Alexander exclaimed, pointing past Pavel's der. "The Madeira Islands."

I glanced out the window to his right and saw a large 44, green and brown against the steel-gray of the ocean, of whitish clouds building up on its windward side. to I'd see no other islands, but puffy clouds dotted the u

gn and may have been hiding them.

there's an example of ecological catastrophe turning

er said, as ch

something good," Alexand

ipper and

Oasant as if they had never spoken of death.

Pavel gave up trying to figure out this strange, many-ooded man. He is too subtle for me, he concluded.

@'Madeira is the Portuguese word for wood," Alexander explaining. "The early Spanish and Portuguese explor-working their way down the coast of Africa, looking for way around to the Indies, they stopped at the islands to it down trees for lumber and fuel. Masts, too. Cut down much of it they totally denuded the islands in just about 'century."

"A tragedy," Pavel said.

"Yeah. But somebody got the brilliant idea of planting

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grapevines where the forests used to be. Now the islands produce one of the world's greatest wines. Madeira was a favorite of Thomas Jefferson's, did you know that?"

Pavel shook his head.

Alexander tilted his head back and began singing in a thin, wavering voice that was slightly off-key: "Have some

His mind whirling, Pavel excused himself and left the flight deck.

For two days the Plane stayed anchored in the harbor of SAO Vicente, in the Cape Verde

Islands. Alexander remained aboard, constantly locked in his office, speaking by coded ti beams to co

ght ntacts over half the world. He must have his own private network of communications satellites, Pavel thought. Then he realized, Of course! He must have free access to coninisats owned by half do

a zen nations and private capitalist corporations.

The rest of the crew apparently had nothing to do except guard the plane and replenish its stores. Pavel watched closely, but saw no weapons brought aboard.

There was no way for Pavel to make contact with Moscow. He was watched every moment, and each night the plane was moored far from land.

On the second day, though, Alexander insisted that Pavel take Kelly into the town foT an afternoon of relaxation.

"Do you both good to get out and away from here for a few hours," he said

Pavel wondered 'what Alexander had planned for the afternoon, that he wanted Pavel out of the way-escorted by his watchdog. Or does he want his daughter to have a free afternoon, escorted by her watchdog? It was too devious for Pavelto unravel.

Kelly had stayed distant from Pavel since the day they had swum together. But now the two of them took one of the inflatable Zodiac boats to the port and spent an

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like any ordin y couple.

Dn gawking at the town, ar
spicuous cutoff jeans and T-shirts-and
ore mcon

Is t6verings of sun-blOck oil over their bare arms
passenger liner was tied to the main pier, and they
hi

with the brightly dressed tourists, watc ing the

16

ng

Islands and

-.the; waters between the Cape Verde
nearly a thousand kilometers eastward. Then they'
the volcanic rocks to the crumbling old Moorish
that had flown the red and green flag of Portugal for
-mi llennium.

stood on the bare hilltop with Kelly beside
him and

A back

at the harbor, the ships anchored along the
rn concrete quay, a rusting hulk half sunk

next to a

- old pier, the seaplane riding the gentle

swells out by

rial sun was baking its heat into

ewater. The equato

nes, yet the trade wind was cool and refreshing.

beautiful, isn't it?" Kelly said, smiling out at the

s gaze to her. "You are beautiful, too," he

ssed her, wonderin just how much he

s, his actions. Kelly clung to him for a

away-

slightly, she said, "Don't play games

-h me, Pavel."

'I'm not playing games."

'Not much."

Kelly, honestly

'Let's see the town." She

turned away from him, and

rted down the steep path

that led back to the port.

llavel followed her down the

sloping path. They reached

quiet, sun-drenched streets

where the stucco fronts of

buildings were painted

brilliant hues of blue, yellow,

en and white. Children in

school uniforms sat up on the

of a single-story building,

intently reading. The out-

Madeira my dear, You really lhave@-nothing to fear .. uned islanders unloadi

bananas from boats that

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door market was noisier, the tang of spices filling the air while women in colorful dresses bargained noisily on both sides of the stalls over freshly caught fish and teeming bins of vegetables. Clouds of flies buzzed over the fish and red meats-, waved at them annoyedly, ineffectively.

Finally he took Kelly by the wrist and led her away from the stalls.

They found a tiny cafe with a patio that looked out on the municipal square. The food was good, the wine even better. Pavel began to fantasize about spending the rest of the afternoon in a romantic hotel room, but he knew that Kelly would never agree.

Yet she suggested, "Let's go back up the hill and find a quiet spot where we can take a nap."

His thoughts churning, Pavel brought her back to the abandoned Moorish castle. She has almost as many contradictions about her as her father, he said to himself. It's almost as if she is fighting within her own soul.

But another voice in his mind warned, Her loyalty is to her father; always remember that. Your loyalty is to the Soviet Union and its people. Her loyalty is to her father.

They climbed solid stone stairs to the topmost turret, stretched out in the sun and almost immediately fell asleep, more like brother and sister than prospective lovers.

Pavel awoke shivering. The sun had dropped toward the horizon, leaving him in the shade of the turret's parapet. It was cold lying on the stones. Kelly was nowhere in sight.

He sat bolt upright, then quickly got to his feet. Ali, there she is! Kelly was leaning on the weathered stone parapet, off at the other side of the turret, gazing down at the town and the harbor. Pavel felt an immense flood of relief. She had not deserted him. She had not been abducted.

Wondering which reason was the stronger within his own mind, Pavel walked over to her side.

"You were snoring," she said.

"Impossible. I never snore."

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know?"

told you that in the Soviet Union, all the time? if I snored, there would be a recording of it, and my superiors would have to cease such bourgeois affectations." Pavel laughed. "Snoring isn't allowed in the USSR, not," Pavel joked, surprised at how happy her nurse

him feel. "We are striving to create the truly modern man. Snoring is definitely not modern."

They walked and joked their way down the mountain-wide back into the town. The sun was setting, so they went back to the pier and the Zodiac they had left tied there. They had

Kelly inspected the boat carefully once

she got into it, even taking a small electronic beeper from it and passing it back and forth over its length twice.

"We don't want to bring any bugs back to the plane with us," she said. "No bombs."

Pavel sat beside her as she started the motor. "Your car has enemies."

"Yes, he does," she replied. Then, staring hard into his

she asked, "Aren't you one of them?"
had no answer. They rode back to the seaplane
hout further words. Pavel felt grateful that the roar of
boat,s motor made intimate conversation impossible.
3iom Sao Vicente they flew to Dakar, on the bulge Of
ica's Senegalese coast. Again, Alexander suggested to
I when Kelly said
I that he take Kelly into the city. But
a wanted to go dancing, both men were dubious.
-I don't like the idea of you two out in the wild-life
strict at night," Alexander said grimly "Dakar isn't a
urist 9s city; it's a rough, grungY town at night- It can be
ingerous."
Kell y shook her head stubbornly. "We@won't go into the
Od-light district, for God's sake! We'll stay with the
buntry club crowd."

Pavel had a more serious objection. "I don't know how to dance," he confessed.

She grinned at him, her fathees sardonic, superior semi-stieer. "I'll have to teach you, then."

So Pavel escorted Kelly on a tour of the city's nightlife, sampling capitalistic delights such as dancing in private clubs that boasted I

ive musicians and dining in posh restaurants, all the while wondering when-if ever-Alexander was going to get his Libyan mission under way.

It was obvious that Alexander wanted Pavel away from the plane f or long hours at a time, But under constant-observation, nonetheless. Pavel wondered also about his relationship with Kelly. She is Alexandeess daughter, he kept telling himself. She is intelligent, charming, lovely in her own way- -but she is Alexander's daughter, and her first loyalty is -to her father.

Pavel found himself wishing it were not so.

"This is our last night of fun," Kelly said over the din of a torrid Senegalese rock band.

"WhatT' Pavel had heard,her words. With a shock, he realized that he did not want things to change.

Kelly leaned forward over their minuscule table. Two plastic coconut shells half filled with poisonously delicious rum drinks tottered slightly between them. The nightclub was lit by strobing projectors flashing holograms of video stars that sang, played their electronic instruments and even

danced" with the customers. Couples gyrated wildly to -the throbbing, drum-heaVY music, casting weird shad-ows across Kelly's snub-nosed face. She waswearing a sleeveless frock, its color impossible to determine in the flashing strobe lights. 11

"Tomorrow the real work starts," she shouted into Pavel's ear.

He took her by the wrist and led- her across the edge of the dance floor, threading through bluish clouds of smoke and past the wildly thrashing couples, even directly

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oblivi holos. Once the thickly
overall of the ous

e
main door of th club closed behind them, the@
e stars glittere d
lj@outside was blessedly quiet.Th

uds. The air
-scudding gray clo

aks between low
Dre

ed odors of flowers and oil
np and heavy with mingl
ist life?- Kelly teased.

I enough of the rich capital
d our mission begins tomorrow?"

Sai
s," she said. "The

i mg work starts. tomorrow, ye
ming for the mission is still a secret."

YJd will officially open the irrigation system next
head-

Pavel pointed out. "The news is in all the
the rows of
nodded@ began walking slowly toward
cars.

began.

him, her face lit by the garish glow
to be waiting
animated sip, she seemed
the right words.

of your fathers
you said I was one
is true.
wish to be your enemy."

head. "Can't be his enemy
shook her
Pavel."

I am a loyal Soviet citizen. He knew
it when he accepted me."

him, "Pavel-i don't make

Kelly took a step toward
ends easily. I've always been a loner ...
"Me, too," he admitted.

ing, changed her mind. Pavel

She started to say something
could sense the emotions battling within her.
"Maybe we'd better leave it that way, she said at last
might've been good between us, but-.

I's shoulder blades like a

:A blow struck between Pavel S
shoulder smashing him- He went down face-first, heard hi

nose crunch on the asphalt of the parking lot. 'Kelly screamed.

There was no pain. Not yet. Pavel half rolled over, and a massive black man loomed over him, a thick length of pipe in his upraised hand. Beyond him, Pavel could see two others grabbing at Kelly, twisting her arms painfully and laughing,, as they, tore at her dress.

Without thinking consciously, Pavel blocked the downward swing of the pipe-wielder's. arm and kicked his legs out from under him. He went down with a surprised grunt and a thwack as Pavel scrambled to his feet.

Kelly smashed the heel of her shoe into one of her assailant's ifisteps, wrenched her arm free from him as he yowled in sudden pain then drove her cupped palm into the nose of the other man holding her. His head snapped back.

Pavel took out the man hopping on one foot with a swift stiff-fingered shot in the throat, then whirled to face the other one. But Kelly smashed lightning-fast chops at his solar plexus, kidney and groin. He hit the asphalt like a dead man.

'The big one who had struck

Pavel was climbing to his feet. Feeling utter fury boiling within him, Pavel launched a flying dropkick at his head, knocking him to his knees.

Pavel landed catlike on the balls of his feet and wrenched the pipe from the man's hand. With every ounce of his strength he swung the pipe into the big man's ribs and felt them give way. Then backhanded across the face

and he

went down heavily. Then a two-handed swing across his back.

"Stop it! Stop it!" Kelly hissed, grabbing Pavel's shoulder. "Do you want to kill him?"

"Yes!" Pavel snarled. But he stopped. He was trembling with rage, and he knew that it was only in part from the shock of being unprovokedly attacked. They had tried to hurt Kelly.

M IM1111 I

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to the two who had, grabbed her@ stretched Out
uman bastards 'he muttered-
d on," Kelly said, "let's get to the plane."

waiting in

@6& one of the battered ancient taxicabs

d toward the

the club's entrance. As it jounce

pavel,s face in the dim light Of

Kelly peered at
asional. streetlamps-
is bleeding."@

r AM

I tore your dresser'
broken?"

don,t think so. There's a bruise on your ShOul-
about your back?"

lat's nothing- What
"s numb."
sure lucky no bones are broken."
here did you learn to fight like that?"
Om when I was a kid. Then training at the IPF. My
r's people have taught me a few new tricks; too."
Menly they were laughing together- Bruised, bleeding,
and
ions of fear
ing, trembling with delayed react
-they laughed almost uncontrollably all the way to
aterfront.
fine pair of warriors we are,,, Kelly said as they
"We mint
the armed guard at the pier's entrance.

Vwful."

than they do," Pavel reminded her.
.111lut we look better

the plane, with
wasn't until they were halfway back to
drenching him and throbbing Pain starting in
spray

ask himself, Were
)ack and face, that Pavel began to
Or were they sent by someone'
merely muggers?

S? Or could Alexander
nies of Alexander's, PerhaP

some kind of test of my ability
If have sent them, as enough for
protect his daughter? The man is devious e
*t-

Alexander was strangely silent as Kelly explained what

had happened. Pavel stood beside her in the softly lit wardroom, his back blazing with pain, his nose still trickling blood, and watched Alexander. No one else was present.

The man listened grimly to, his daughter and replied only, "I told you it was a dangerous town."

"When you're right, you're right," Kelly admitted.

"Well, Alexander let out a sigh that was almost a snort. "You're both Okay. NO Permanent damage. That's the important thing."

"Pavel needs treatment for his back."

Turning his steel-gray gaze to Pavel, Alexander said, "Yeah, I guess so. Come with me."

Without another word to his daughter, he led Pavel from the wardroom and down the passageway to his private quarters. His bathroom was as large as Pavel's whole compartment and wedged between the shower stall and the toilet was a narrow deep tub.

"My one luxury," Alexander muttered. "Whirlpool bath." He touched a button on the tub's control box and steaming hot water started filling it.

Pavel caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror above the sink. His upper lip was caked with blood; his cheek was muffed raw. His back was so stiff now that he knew he could not raise his arms, even to defend himself. Alexander placed himself squarely in front of Pavel.

"I asked you to protect my daughter, and you damn near got her raped and murdered

"I got her. . . , Pavel felt shocked at the accusation.

"Don't you have any goddamned sense? Where the hell did you take her, to some goddamned junk bar or what?"

"It was a Private club that she selected."

"You're supposed to protect her," Alexander snarled.

"You're supposed to be on the alert, have some common sense in that thick Russian skull of yours."

Anger flamed through Pavel. "So it's the fault of the -PEACEKEEPERS 189

s infest

and that muggers and hoodlum

near got her killed!"

J*ells anger dissolved as quickly as it had aP-

@There was real fear in Alexander's eyes, real ,in his voice.

L I

I he said his voice low. "I love her, too-"

WI

@n*, mouth opened but no words came out. He

I

ooniess speechless. Then he gestured toward the *Wng tub. Through the steam, Pavel saw that there Set of three steps built into-its side. In silence, @&r helped him into the tub, turned on the whirlpool alone.

and then left Pavel

two days of rest and whirlpool treatments to head back The hot swirling water eased the pain and Pavel felt only a twinge when he

41to the point where

days he

ojawms above his head. During those two

exander only when he knocked for admission to the
OM.
y, seemed cheerful and friendly, but nothing more.
told her of
desperately that her father -not
61' mission.
ng of the third day after the attack Alexan-
.the eveni
sion e Pavel,
abruptly called for a final mis bri fing
avroulis gathered around the display
Barker and M
in the wardroom. A detailed map of the Libyan
l:r facility glowed in the otherwise unlit compartment,
ving deep shadows across their faces.
asked each of the to recite their assip!-
xander In
about flying from Dakar and landing in the
kerspoke
L pointing to a spot marked on the map some twenty
eters from the Libyan facility.
over. -We meet Hassan and his men
vroulis took
-he tapped the tabletop display screen-"and pro-

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ceed to the aquifer facility. We get past the guards and take over the facility."

"Timing?" Alexander asked.

Mavroulis rattled off a series of hours and minutes that meant nothing to Pavel. Obviously they had rehearsed this sequence of actions many times. They all knew exactly

what they were supposed to do. All of them, except Pavel.

"Key?" her father asked. "Let's hear your story..."

"Once we're inside the control building I proceed to the main computer center and reprogram the machine. Reprogramming tapes are in my kit."

Alexander gave her a long, serious look. "You're the key to this whole operation, young lady. Everything we're doing, all the risks we're taking, are so that you can get into their computer."

She nodded, equally serious. "I understand."

Mavroulis then told how they would retreat to the spot where Barker was waiting with their aircraft. Barker said he would fly out of Libyan airspace to a rendezvous with a fighter escort waiting for them in Chad.

Alexander looked at each of them in turn, his lips pressed into a tight, tense line, his gray eyes cold as scalpels. "Okay, sounds like you know your jobs."

"What about me?" Pavel blurted. "I'm going, too, am I not?"

Looking almost surprised, Alexander said, "Sure you're going, Red. Your job is very simple. You're Kelly's protection. Stay with her wherever she goes. If the operation blows up, you're to get her out and back to me. Don't come back without her. Pahnyeemahyo?"

His Russian was execrable. "I understand," Pavel answered in letter-perfect English.

Pavel could not overcome the feeling that they were being watched. And followed.

Four would-be tourists: an American woman, an Eng-

ME

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a Russian. From Alexander's sea-

a Greek, and

anchored out in the harbor they went to the water-

of two, Pavel and

Dakar in two separate groups

ing, then Barker and Mavroulis. All dressed in

slacks and sport shirts, with overnight bags slung

taxis they went to

shoulders. In two separate

their

tickets for

port where they bought four separate

onca, Tunis, Cairo and Malta.

t of them started for the gates where their respective

0

em handed their tickets to

Each of them

were waiting

themselves as part of Alexander's

s who identified

d the planes while the four

)n., The strangers boarded
mergency exit (conveniently
1 ducked through an e
ocked thanks to a small bribe) and into an empty
parked there.
carrier that just happened to be
drove the-electrically powered van into a hangar on
ort.
side of the sprawling airp han-
Swivel-engined hoveriet Sat alone in the echoing
It looked old and hard-used. paint worn and chipped,
ear where the name of the
- for a fresh-looking sm
s p I revious owner had been whited over. The only
inber, back
tification on the craft was its registration nu
ds, out at the ends of the
e tail. The bulky engine po
-dirt. Pavel began to
by wings, were black with oil and
ay to their
kder if this machine would make it all the w
camp in the desert. And back again.
ane
rdlessly the four of them climbed into it. The pl
Iled sourly of oil and tobacco smoke and old human
pilot's seat, Kelly the copilot's-to
t. Barker took the - h MavrOulis
I's surprise. He sat behind them, wit
le him, glowering like a dark volcano at Pavel as they
ved on their safety harnesses.
ley taxied out onto the ramp, Barker chatting with the
English of the
ric controllers in the clipped, professional to a vertical
ays. Pavel watched as they rolled out
low circles. The
area marked by wide red and yel

plane's two turboprop engines-tilted slowly backward, their big propeller blades scything the air until they became an invisible blur. The engines roared with full power, shaking the cabin so furiously that Pavel began to worry that the plane might fall apart

With a lurch they lifted off the ground and rattled up and away, banking so precariously that when Pavel looked out the window on his side he was staring straight down at the looming roof of a hangar and the bird nests and droppings that covered it. It looked terrifyingly close. The plane climbed steadily, though, and soon enough the engines slid back to their horizontal positions and they surged ahead, with the sun at their backs.

For days Pavel had searched for a way to warn Moscow, to get out the word of what Alexander was planning to do and how he would do it. But there had been no chance. He was always watched, never alone. And now he rode with three of the mercenaries on their mission of destruction, not entirely sure that he wanted to stop them. That would mean placing Kelly in unbearable danger, possibly getting her killed.

Miserably confused, Pavel sat in the swiveljet and did nothing. There seemed to be nothing he could do.

The landscape changed slowly, subtly, but by the time the long shadows of twilight were reaching across the ground, Pavel was watching low, gently undulating hills bare rock with patches of pitifully thin grass here and there. Dark circles of water holes appeared every few kilometers; most of them seemed to be wells dug by men rather than natural springs. The grass was worn away around the waterholes, leaving only bare gray dry-looking soil that wafted away in long dusty streamers with each passing gust of wind.

Just at sunset Pavel saw a tiny herd of emaciated cattle

Slowly toward, one of those waterholes. Three in persons in gray dust-covered robes walked between or Women. as well past sundown when they landed, coming kness; not a light vertically in a sea of absolute black re except for the stars strewn across the dark bowl ng his eyes, Pavel saw briefly a flicker But, strained apfire down there; it looked very small and lonely-

i Barker's and Kelly's shoulders, Pavel could see a
fe
di ay on the radar panel. Yet he did not feel sa
SPI
ie plane thumped onto solid ground.
t 900 d to stretch his legs again. Pavel tried lifting his

4

ing his spine, carefully. A twinge, nothing
4nd stretch

He was ready for action.
rker became their team, leader. He strode across the
spoke with a trio of men
jo the tiny campfire, and
ied in desert robes and burnooses who were waiting
Then he beckoned to Pavel and the others.
nou d it shed-
everything's on schedule." Barker pro nce
with us here

"Hassan and his people will rendezvous
rrow morning."
hey spent the next two hours dragging out camouflage
and radar dispersers to hide the plane from aerial
aped tent for,
then pitching a tan igloo-sh
nselves to sleep in, while the three robed strangers
in the flickering light of their
ched in unmoving silence

was surprisingly cold on the desert, although Pavel
t warm by working hard. He did not want his back to
on him. They ate a quick meal from metal-fbil
:kages that heated themselves when their tops were
ied off.
'Sleep now," Barker said. "Big show tomorrow."
@avel asked, "No one stands guard?"

Barker nodded toward the three bedouins by the fire.

"They're @Our guards."

"You trust them?"

"They're in on this with us."

"I think we should have a guard of our own."

"Now see here . .

Mavroulis's voice came out of the dimness like a distant roll of thunder. "For once I agree with the Russian para- noid."

Pavel grinned. "I will stand watch until midnight."

"Hokay," said Mavroulis. "I will take midnight to two."

Kelly offered to take the next two hours and, reluctantly, Barker, agreed to the final two.

AU, four of them crawled into the round tent. Pavel

z strapped a battery-powered heating pad to his back, then pulled a thermal jacket over it.

"Take this, if you're going to be our guardian," said Barker. He pushed a slim flat pistol into Pavel's hand. "It's a Beretta nine-millimeter automatic. Do you know how to use

Pavel flicked off the safety with his thumb and cocked the pistol.

"For heaven's sake, don't fire the thing unless it's abso- hutely necessary!" Barker warned.

Good night," said Pavel, calmly returning the gun to its safe condition.

The others muttered good night and crawled into their sleeping bags. Pavel ached for Kelly to say something more, but soon all he heard was the gentle breathing of his companions. Mavroulis began to snore.

He tucked the pistol into his belt, its weight solid and comforting. It was warm and drowsy inside the tent. And there was utterly nothing to do. Pavel decided to duck outside. At least I can count the stars, he told himself A,wind had come up. Not enough to stir the desert sand, will

PEACEKEEPERS 105

nd the tent to the leeward, then sat

He could not see the campfire

-and that bothered him somewhat.-

ng

Joe spectaulu Of the heavens was so overwhelmi almost forgot everything else. The stars were bright in the desert night; so brilliant that he

bly

@fdft he could reach out and take them in his fingers.

'a

like an hour Pavel studied the heavens, s

At seemed

planetarium.

I as he had been at his first visit to a

le

enewed his acquaintance with the Great and Litt

azed briefly

e Hunter. A meteor bl

,,the Princess, th

n

4he sky, silent and cold despite its fire. The Moo 6where in sight. The arching beauty of the Milky Way

alluringly, much brighter than he had ever seen it
the streets of Kursk or Moscow. And there was Mars,
Russians are there, living and
4 red on the horizon.

As he gazed on another world, Pavel thought with a surge of
Pavel tore his gaze away and looked at the glowing digits
jj@wristwatch. Hardly half an hour had elapsed. He got
up and slowly paced around the tent, hunching his
inside the cold wind and pushing his fists deep
into his pockets.

A few pitiful embers. The men
The campfire was down to a
sleeping beside it, on the bare ground-
n there!

And here were only two men

His hands came out of his pockets; his
Pavel tensed. His hands came out of the
-held the pistol. He cocked it; in the dark night the
gig noise sounded like the heavens cracking asunder.
"Byarish. " It was a whisper.

I turned his head. A shadow' form stood
Dwly Pavel
y
gun leveled at the
- the tent behind him. He whirled, the
man's waist.

Tovarish! I am friend!" the man said in a mixture of
and English.
ran

1% Ben Bova

"Who are you?" Pavel whispered.

"A friend. To help you."

"Help me?"

"I was told a Russian would be among the infidels who came to this camp, and he would be a friend to us. I was told to make myself known to the Russian.

In the dim light of the stars Pavel could not make out the man's face, deeply shadowed by the hood of his burnoose.

"Who told you this?"

"Hassan's men. The faithful of God," replied the bedouin. "Hassan himself will be here in the morning. He will remain here while you go to the water machinery. He and the faithful will be waiting for you when you return.,,

"And then?"

"You will be spared," the man whispered. "Hassan knows who the true friends of God are. You will be spared."

A burning tendril of red-hot fear crawled along Pavel's gut and clutched at his heart.

"And the others?" he asked in an urgent whisper.

"God knows,"

"What do you mean?"

"They are infidels, are they not? What does it matter?"

A thousand questions boiled up in Pavel's mind, but he clamped his lips shut so tightly that his teeth hurt. This bedouin is only a messenger, he told himself. He knows very little. And the more questions I ask, the more suspicious he will become.

"Go with God," said the bedouin, tapping his right hand to his chest.

Pavel grunted and nodded, thinking that it was an unlikely alliance: a Moslem fundamentalist and a Soviet atheist.

The bedouin went as silently as a wraith back toward the embers of the campfire.. Pavel stayed on his feet, wide

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Pavel forgot the stars that hung above. Even after Hassan came out and took the gun from him, Pavel went out in his sleeping bag but he could not keep his eyes closed. He lay as a hunted mountain lion, eyes burning from lack of sleep. Pavel rolled out of his sleeping bag with the first light of dawn. He had spent the night debating where his

lay: assassinating Alexander did not mean that he had let these desert savages slaughter his men. He could not let them harm Kelly. He would make his assignment more difficult if the others were killed-or even held hostage. Is this Hassan? What game is he playing? Is his plan already known and countered? Are we in a trap, our necks in nooses? And the others gave no sign of apprehension. They ate a quick breakfast of yogurt and honey with the three

ris, who smilingly assured them that Hassan would
rive. Pavel tried to identify which of the three had
to him during the night. He could not.

ly broke out tubes of dark cream makeup. 'We've got
bk more like Arabs," she said.

red-haired Arab," Mavroulis joked, taking a tube
het

won't be red-haired for long," Kelly shot back,
Ing

?el took the tube she handed him.
our

re already a lot darker than you were when you first
to us," she said. "Your skin is almost golden, like
Tartar blood," Pavel said.

And those beautiful dark eyes," Kelly added. "You
ft need contacts to disguise them."

'ayel felt himself blush.

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By the time Hassan and his men arrived, in a pair of armored, wide-tracked personnel carriers, Kelly, I

Mavroulis and Pavel had daubed their skin as dark as their bedouin companions. Barker had declined to disguise himself.

"I am to remain here with the plane and, stay out of the sun," he said with an almost smug air of English self-satisfaction.

Hassan turned out to be a colonel in the Libyan Army. He jumped down from the turret of the leading sand-colored crawler, a handsome energetic man in his late

forties, wearing a crisply creased green and gold uniform with his cap cocked at an jaunty angle and a pair of mirrored sunglasses that hid his eyes very effectively.

Hassan looked over the four mercenaries, up and down, as he casually took a flat gold case from his tunic chest pocket and put a slim brown cigar to his lips. Pavel noticed that he sported a pencil-thin mustache.

One of his aides, dressed in sand-colored battle fatigues, leaped forward to light the colonel's cigar. Hassan blew out a thin cloud of smoke, then nodded as if satisfied.

"Yes, you will do, I suppose." Without turning his head back to the vehicle, he raised one hand and snapped his fingers. "Uniforms!"

Within five minutes Kelly, Mavroulis and Pavel were decked in the green and gold uniforms of the Libyan Army. Pavel thought them overly gaudy: uniforms meant for show, not for fighting. They did not fit terribly well; Kelly's in particular sagged on her diminutive frame.

Hassan disdained to speak to them, but looked them over like a drill sergeant inspecting a trio of recruits, his lip curled slightly in distaste. Kelly had tucked her dyed hair inside her cap. Otherwise she looked properly boyish.

"That APV will take you to the water facility," Hassan said in British-accented English. "The crew is instructed to PEACEKEEPERS 1"

:-you until precisely 1510 hours. Then they will
coordinate with you or without you. Is that clear?"
Mavroulis said "The timetable is understood."

I ... took the cigar from his lips and gestured to the carrier. The three of them climbed up the metal ladder and in through the hatch. Two soldiers dressed in khaki fatigues and wearing helmets

@Y

in well-oiled black holsters, sitting on the t
Ich that lined one side of the metal compart-,
Ipte three mercenaries sat along the bench on the
side. The metal bulkhead felt hot against Pavel's
t- as good as the heating pad, he thought.

Ds

h the forward hatch inthe compartment, Pavel
two more men in the driver's cab, one of them an
shaki

lith a roar of diesel engines and a bone ing
personnel carrier started off across the desert.
rhe armored vehicle was like an oven in the desert
Sweat oozed from every pore of Pavel's'body.
of their bo esbecame almost nauseating as the
-rched and swayed. Their uniforms turned dark with
ration, under the armpits, across the back, every-
t believe in air-conditioning,- Kelly said, her
with misery.

soldiers wordlessly climbed up into the top
,popped its hatch open. A hot breeze like the
a furnace blew in. Mavroulis grunted and swore
under his breath. Pavel wondered if the soldiers

%tood English.

tli me about this aquifer facility. How does it work?"

more to forget the heat and cover his

said to Kelly,

@ng tension than any desire to learn.

Any seemed glad of the diversion. She was nervous,

@ Pavel realized. She recited facts and figures for the

tender of the jouncing trip across the desert. The only

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thing that stuck in Pavel's mind was that the great underground aquifer was almost three thousand meters deep; nearly, three kilometers below the desert sands.

Could the Libyans actually
use

use up a that water in a single generation? There must be millions of tons of it beneath the Sahara, Pavel realized. Surely Alexander was spouting propaganda. But then he remembered how the vast virgin lands in Siberia had been polluted beyond belief in only a few decades. Exaggerated or not, Alexander was right sooner or later the aquifer would be drained. Water that had been stored for a hundred thousand years would be sucked away and depleted in the blink of an eye. Kelly believes it, Pavel told himself, and she has no reason to lie to me. she is almost painfully honest. "There it is!" announced the soldier up in the turret. One by one the three mercenaries climbed up to look. Pavel saw an immense

concrete building made of poured concrete, gray and low against the gray-brown rocks and sand of the desert. Squat towers stood at each corner. Cooling towers for the gigantic pumps housed inside the building, Kelly told him. But they looked like good defensive posts to Pavel, where a few troops could hold off a small

army of attackers. Around the building were smaller concrete complexes of pillboxes, missile launchers, and barracks.

The place is a fortress, he realized. And it is defended by Rayyid's best troops.

They drove past an outer fence of electrified wire and along a smooth road flanked

by gun emplacements and dozens of similar armored tracked vehicles, all in sandy gray desert camouflage. Pavel heard the thrumming whine of a helicopter. The inner perimeter was a concrete wall lined with troops. They drove past and up to the main gate of the building itself.

The driver stayed behind the wheel, but the officer who had sat next to him, a captain, ducked into the main

PEACEKEEPERS

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ere to break out automatic rifles for the three contingent of the APV and in Arabic directed the two men. Then he led all five uniformed figures out the door, past several sets of guards, and finally up a concrete stairway to the roof of the main building. The morning sun poured down on them like molten metal, a breath of breeze, even up on the roof. They tried to cower away from the blazing sunlight and hid in whatever shade they could find. Pavel had seen a sky so cloudless, the sun so powerful, it turned the desert into an inverted bowl of hammered brass. He looked out across the desert, shimmering in the heat, not a tree or a blade of grass as far as the eye could see, the distant wavering gleam of a mirage, a cruel and utterly barren wasteland.

of water in the

men lounged in the scant slices of shade offered by the

)ling towers. A @ pair of helicopters roared by:
)8, Pavel saw, manufactured in Soviet Russia.
in the middle of the Libyan Army, he told himself
ung goes wrong with our operation, we'll never get
live. Then he recalled that even-if they got back to
waiting there
base camp, Hassan and his zealots were
sharpened knives.
vroulis spoke briefly with the captain, then turned to
and Pavel.
ey've done their task," he said in a low gruff rumble.
here. Now it's up to us. They will wait up here until
hours. The APV will wait ten minutes more."
'hen let's get moving," Kelly said firmly.
Me thing," said Mayroulis, patting the rifle, slung over
boulder. "These guns are empty- They don't trust us
live ammunition."
ly glanced at Pavel, then said, "Just as well. We're not
to kill anybody."
el thought, Kill or be killed.

202 Ben, Bom

They strode out across the roof to a stainless-steel dome one of many glittering in the high sun,

"According to the plans, this shaft will lead you to computer center," said Mavroulis.

Kelly nodded. No hint of nervousness now. She was all business and anxious to get started

"Good luck," said the Greek.

They both glanced around. No guards could see them. Kelly bent over and wormed her lithe body through the gap between the steel dome and the concrete lip on which it was based. Pavel started after her, touched his hand against the metal and flinched with pain.

"Idiot!" Mavroulis growled. "'the metal's been sitting in the sun all morning."

With his hand, Pavel ducked through the air space and hesitated a moment

to let his eyes adjust to the cool shadows. Kelly was already a dozen rungs down the metal ladder set into the shaft's walls. He hurried after her, the useless rifle slapping against his hip with every move he made

They reached a horizontal shaft, all cool metal, barely big enough for each of them to crawl through. Mavroulis would never have made it, Pavel thought.

The shaft widened enough for Pavel to slink up beside Kelly.

"These guns are in the way," he whispered. "Let's leave them here and pick them up on our way back."

She nodded and wriggled the rifle off her shoulder. Pavel did the same. Then Kelly took a slim sheet of what looked like microfilm from her tunic pocket. From the other pocket she brought out a miniaturized reader and put it to her eye-

"Okay," she whispered, tucking them back into the tunic, "we're in the main air-conditioning shaft. Two cross-shafts, and then we take the next left fork."

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at her darkened face. "I thought the in air-conditioning."

"This is it for their people; it's and Pavel had to slide back than himself

no one bigger realized that

They inched

use these air shafts. in a tunnel. Pavel felt blind and and motioned with the Wiggle Of to come forward. He had to climb Over his face next to hers: not altogether ded.

in front of their faces was a mesh set high in the wall of a large room filled

I and women. console es. Several men

i- t. civilian clothes were sitting at consoles. Two technicians in coveralls had the back of one console off and were of them looked Asian.

lling new circuit boards. All o
linolta J-300s," Kelly muttered, so low Pavel knew
was talking to herself. 'IC models. Damn! They told us
Od have A models."

P

@Ils that a problem?" he whispered into her ear.
Maybe. Maybe not."

.,.,IKelly wormed a hand down toward her right boot -and
me with her left

lgled out a slim rod. Then she did the sa
Opt.

@'You, too," she whispered to Pavel.

ugh so carried a pair of concealed

his boots Al

ickness, of normal electrical wire and not

centimeters long-

d, "move back."

side

They inched along in reverse to a spbt where a small
laft branched away from the shaft they were in. Wordless-
Kelly took Pavel's two rods anA wormed herself into the

F

shaft. It was barely big enough for her shoulders to squeeze, into. Pavel watch;d her slowly disappear into the tunnel, like a creature being swallowed by a snake, until only her booted feet remained outside.

After Several minutes she started wiggling her feet. Pavel grabbed at her ankles and pulled her free.

Kelly was gasping. "Thanks. I got stuck in there. Damned plans said it was wide enough-but just barely." -Those rods. .

]Knockout gas. it's circulating through the air-conditioning vents now Give it a couple of minutes."

"But won't we ...

She shook her head. "It's a nerve gas. Dissipates before it reaches us." Then, with a hard krin, "At least, that's what the specs claim."

They made their. way to the grille again and saw that the People tending the computer had slumped over, unconscious. It took a few more minutes to remove the grille, but finally Pavel swung it open and lowered himself

f gingerly to the floor of the computer room.

He took a deep, testing breath then reached up to help Kelly down.

"How long will they remain unconsciousT' he asked.

HeadIAR strai ght for the cen tral console, Kelly said, "Until we spray them with the antidote."

She sat at the console, pulled a hand-sized computer from ter waistband, and placed it on the desktop beside the keyboard. Unconsciously, Kelly flexed her fingers, like a virtuoso confronting a new piano for the first time.

Pavel looked around at the- bodies strewn across the floor, and the single featureless door that apparently was the only way into or out of this computer center-except for the air shaft they had come through

There were no surveillance cameras. Libyan security was concentrating on preventing anyone from penetrating from the outside; they did not think to observe what was going

PEACEKEEPERS M5

e their fortress. In the Soviet Union such laxness ever be tolerated.-

what if someone tries to come in here?" he asked.

out. looking up from the display screen in front of ly said "That's why 're; here: to discourage

YOU

ptions."

ixuated.

Y'S fingers were rapidly tapping across the computer ird. "Don't worry, Pavel," she said absently, her already absorbed on her task. "According to the --tion Hassan's people gave us, the routine arowd- very strict. The soldiers don't bother the computer -ians Actually, they're a little afraid of them."

again. Pavel paced the floor nervously, steppi ng ;an

d dead. Totally unmoving, i the bodies. They seeme

y were breathing, it was very hard to detect. He about trying the pulse On one of them, but could

ring himself to touch any of the inert bodies. What if

fault. What if Hassan's fanatics t
- are dead? It's not my
these mercenaries? Kelly and Mavroulis and Barker,
at the camp.
ng for us back
fferent matter. Pavel could not pass that off
hat was a di
@easily. Or at all.
'I see your reflection in the screen here every time you
y,11 Kelly complained. "Go find a console and sit.
tz b

11

put some TV on the screen for YOU.

an
ighing with impatience and frustration, Pavel took
Pty chair at one of the many consoles flanking the
tral position where Kelly was working. The main screen
only lit up with an outdoor scene in some city where
sun blazed down on whitewashed houses and low flat
glittered off towers of glass and steel, danced across
of the sea far in the background.
"That's Tripoli," Kelly called to him. "You can watch
ayyid and the ceremonies for the opening of the aquifer
Wility."

V Pavel fidgeted in the 'chair.
14put

On the earphones. I'll pipe you an English-language broadcast."

Slipping On the lightweight headset, Pavel heard a cultivated BBC voice describing the scene he saw on the display screen. The voice droned on as the camera panned across sun-drenched Tripoli and its harbor, then cut to the Outdoor stage where Qumar al-Rayyid, the

President of Libya and Commander in Chief of its Army, would press the button that would start the water flowing from the aquifer, hundreds of kilometers away -to the symbolic fountain in the center of the main square of Tripoli's government center.

"At Precisely 1500 hours," the broadcasters cultured voice explained, "that fountain will begin to flow with water that was put down into the ground -a hundred thousand

d years ago."

Fifteen hundred hours! The words seared through Paviors mind. That was when they were supposed to be back on the roof, headi

ng for the tractor that would take them back to the dese rt camp.

Pavel tore the headset off an d wheeled his chair acro the concrete floor to Kelly.

"Pi-myid's going to start the water flowing at 1500!" Ss Almost annoyed at his interrupti

on, she shot him a quick glance. '41 know."

"But that in eans the water must begin flowing hours sooner, doesn't it?"

Kelly took her hands from the keypad, flexing h "The watees already er fingers as if they had gotten stiff.

filling the underground aqueduct," she explained. "They've tested the I system, for God's sake. When Rayyid punches the button,

the Pumps here start up again and begin drawing water. The fountain spurts and everybody -in Tripoli cheers -if YOU don't Stop getting in my way.-

PEACEKEEPERS

"pushed his chair back slightly.

a lot of time and concentration to reprogram mputer," Kelly said, half apologetically. "We don't eM to know there's been any interference. It's got to e they screwed it up themselves."

I could not stand it any longer. "Hassan is a traitor," ted.'

obvious patience, Kelly replied, "We know. When I

s4ater scheme collapses, Hassan will lead the coup that topples him. Then the French sell him fusion-d desalting systems so that Libya can Convert

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"But. .

"First things first," Kelly insisted. And she turned back to the keypad

y

Pavel watched her for a few moments, then went back to the console where the scenes from Tripoli were showing on the screen. But he could not sit still. He got up, paced the room. It seemed close and stuffy, despite the air-conditioning. He felt sweat beading his lip and brow, trickling down his ribs.

He checked the bodies of the Japanese technicians. They were alive, breathing

regularly. What will happen to them? he wondered. Will they be blamed for the malfunctions Kelly is programming into their computer?

Somehow Pavel found himself at the one door leading out of the computer center. It was solid steel, like the hatch of a weapons bunker, and locked by an electronic combination lock. He could not get out that way even if he wanted to.

Hours dragged by. More and more he watched Kelly, her intent, utterly serious face reflected in the green-glowing display screen her fingers flicking across

the keys, The computer hummed softly as she worked it, and Kelly herself kept up a low-key obbligato of muttered curses and imprecations, alternating with soft crooning sounds, as if she were trying to soothe an infant to sleep.

On the TV screen Pavel saw a huge crowd jamming the square in Tripoli, color everywhere, from the bright hues of the throng to the long billowing draperies hung from the public buildings, displaying the red, white and black colors of the socialist republic of Libya. There were plenty of deep green banners, too, the color that the desert-dwelling Arabs love most.

The stage where Rayyid would make his appearance was covered against the sun with brightly striped tenting. A slim podium, decorated with gold leaf, stood at its center, with a conspicuous red button atop it. The fountain in the

PEACEKEEPERS 209

of the square was a modernist's nightmare of and shining metal, all angles and thrusting arms, explosion in a steel yard.

in greater cily understood that their lives were sign of it.

with every tick of the clock, she gave no to work smoothly, unhurriedly, at the tinued

clock set into

Pavel glanced at the digital console.

sol@: 1420. Only forty minutes to go-

no answer-

where? he asked himself There was change in the red numbers of the clock was an

ieces,

To keep himself from going to pi agony

Pavel

headset to his ear once again, and listened to that
d and his

BC voi while his guts churne

turbable B ce

ething, to move, to

kept shouting for him to do som

himself and Kelly to safety.

xnehow to JXet

he sat, forcing himself to passivity, as Kelly plodded

d as the grandstand filled with

at her task. 'He Watche

aries from thirty nations-including France and

others who were paying Alexander-wearing

of the

coats or dashikis or modern jackets, as their native

ms required.

rteen-forty. The crowd began to surge and even the

announcers voice took on a keener edge as a military

tde, led by six armored cars exactly like the One

Pavel

his companions had ridden, madeits way'dOwn the

d assembled, rank upon rank,

xal area of the square an

id would speak. The soldiers,

)re the stage where RaYY

more than mere

-i armed with an assault rifle, were

were both a visible Symbol Of

orations, Pavel knew- they

shielded Rayyid

power and a Praetorian Guard that

strike at him.

inst those who would

of Pavel's mind reminded

L cool voice from the back

of Rome often dispatched

Praetorian Guard

ri that the

men in their

perors who displeased them and put new

ese troops loyal to Rayyid, or Hassan? Such

Were th

nt capitalist

e sign of a decade

ng for power was th

L

society, not a true socialist republic. These Libyan barbarians sully the name of socialism Pavel thought.

I

At last the crowd roared, the assembled troops snapped to attention, and the dignitaries rose to their feet. Rayyid was making his entrance, preceded by a phalanx of Arabs in rich robes and burnouses, then a squad of military officers in green and gold uniforms.

Finally Rayyid himself appeared, to the tumultuous uproar of the crowd. They shouted his name, their voices blending into one gigantic swell of sound, crashing like waves on a rocky headland:

'Ray-yid, Ray-yid, Ray-YEED!'

He acknowledged their cheers with upraised hands. He smiled at his people. He wore the heavily braided uniform of a general, with dark glasses shielding his eyes from the sun's glare. Pavel was shocked to realize how much he looked like Hassan. The two could be brothers.

The crowd silenced as if a regiment of guns had been leveled at them. The dignitaries resumed their seats. Rayyid stepped up to the podium. No microphone was visible, but his amplified voice boomed across the square.

Another BBC voice began translating Rayyid's speech. 'Pavel looked down at the digital clock: 1454.

Throwing down the headset, he went to Kelly. She was still tapping at the computer keys.

.4 1

There's only six minutes!" he urged.

Kelly smiled up at him. "Relax. Don't you want to see what happens in Tripoli?"

"But we've got to get out of here!"

"We will. Lots of time."

"But you're not finished. .

"I finished up the main task

twenty minutes ago. Now

I'm planting bugs in their system that'll take them months to find and debug. I also patched into their comm system

and sent a message to my father, - via satellite. Let him know what you told me about Hassan."

,turn message," she said. -Too risky."

11

i For whom?

sky? and said, "Hey, Rayyid's

lly looked past him

dn't miss this for

push the button. Come on, I woul

to the screen displaying the TV

two of them went

@st.@ Rayyidbad worked himself into a fine oratori-

; the BBC translator was having a hard time

My ith him:

"UP W

and this will prove to the world that Libyan tech-

Libyan people are the equal of

and the will of the

"Ion on Earth! For we are a powerful nation, feared

nations of the world watch with

enemies! Let the
 we enter a new era of prosperity! Let our enem
 their teeth with envy as the water of life flows-at
 mniand!"
 punched the big red button on the dais with his
 to the elaborate
 fist and the camera pulled back
 -in in the center of the square- 31
 --er spurted from it and the crowd went Ahh! The
 r. leaped high into the air, sparkled briefly in the fierce
 noon sun, and then faltered and stopped,
 ere
 rehensively. From sOmewh
 ke crowd murmured app
 Pavel could
 .in the concrete building where he stood, mps laboring.
 the dull thunderous roar Of gigantic Pu
 crowd, as if to tell them not
 ayyid waved a hand at the
 Porry, and smacked the red button again-
 at the fountain's openings, where
 dribble of water
 to the air. Then
 Hills should -have shot twenty meters in
 i that stopped.
 rage-
 tton, his face contorted with
 ay yid pounded the bu
 thing.
 'Pavel heard the pumps whining and screeching now.
 PEACEKEEPERS 211

@9 @ "What did you do?" he asked.
 M
 replied sweetly. "They'll bu
 @: '@Rcversed 'em," she

212 Ben Bova

themselves out in another couple of minutes. It'll take weeks before they find the instructions in the program-Ming. Drive 'cm nuts!" She laughed.

The digital clock said 1501.

"We've got to run," Pavel said.

"Yeah. They'll be battering down that -door in another minute or two." She pulled a tiny aerosol can from her belt and quickly sprayed it over the unconscious'bodies of the Japanese technicians.

Pavel boosted her up to the ventilator screen, then stood on a chair and hauled himself up into the shaft. It took a few moments to place the. screen back in its mounting. Pavel could see the technicians beginning to stir. The lights

@s

ow the door lock keyboard were flashing; someone was trying to get into the room.

"Come on," Kelly said. "We've got to make tracks."

They wormed their way through the shafts and at last came out onto the rooftop, blazing hot in thehigh sun. Mavroulis was there, sweating and wild-eyed with the jitters.

"We've only got three minutes. .

Kelly grabbed his arm as they raced down the stairs toward the APV. Its engine was already rumbling, sooty diesel fumes belching from its vertical exhaust pipe-

Soldiers were dashing everywhere. Helicopters crisscrossed the air above. Orders were being shouted. Confusion ruled while the massive building seemed to vibrate as if 6 mini-earthquake had seized it. Black smoke was pouring from two of the four cooling towers. They ducked inside the oven-hot vehicle and the driver gunned the engine, slamming them into the met

al bulk-

head before they could take their places on the padded bench. They lurched toward the gate in a spurt of sand and diesel exhaust. The compartment stank of human sweat and machine oil, and the fumes from the engine.

No one said a word as they approached the gate. The

PEA

CEKEEPERS

213

43

s at

with the driver waved a laminated pas

rds

in the

L;@@

through, barely slowing

and they shot

and then they

same at the outer perimeter,

the desert, heading back for their camp.

Pavel asked Mavroulis.

speak Russian?"

I

said, beetling his dark brows. "Do You speak

II an eye on the two soldiers on the opposite benchI

languages do you speak?"

Mavroulis, "What

and Greek."

Jish, Frenrh, German

was afraid the

i understood some French, but he

soldiers did, too.
ly pulled the pocket computer from her sweat-stained
e
m. "This computer has a translator function," sh
"it's slow, but it includes. most Indo-European lan-
M.
l tapped the keys and the tiny display screen showed
TRANSLATOR BUT WE CAN TALK-
soldiers watched them tapping on the computer
but quickly lost interest. One of them got to his feet
d the turret hatch. The armored compartment'
-hot sandy desert wind.
sing the computer's tiny display screen, Pavel told
I . Kelly added that
Toulis that Hassan 8 Camp was a trap
iad sent the information to her father. But they had no
of knowing whether Alexander had received the trans
it-if anything-
@ion, or what he could do about
rs-pecked at the keys: MUST
avroulis's thick, blunt finge
ONLY HE CAN FLY HOVERJET.
BARKER.
d- How?'? M
Wly tappe
EApoNs, Pavel typed with one finger.
IE NEED W
Fine," grumbled Mavroulis. "What are You going to do,
them?" He glanced at the- bored soldier lounging
)osite them.
40 VIOLENCE, Kelly typed, UNLEgs -UNAVOIDABLE'
k a deep breath. This was not a situation that
too

would be resolved by delicate sensibilities arguments. This situation called for action.

'It is unavoidable," he muttered.

Kelly began typing something more, but Pav, and stretched his arms as far as possible in the confines of the oven-hot compartment. His back felt all right. It only took a single step to put him in front of the soldier, who now looked up at Pavel.

One lightning-fast chop at the boy's neck and he sagged i back against the armor plating, unconspicuous. The soldier up in the turret did not notice anything. Neither did the two men up front.

Pavel quickly took the pistol from the youngster's holster. It was a nine-millimeter Skoda-manufactured in Czechoslovakia: simple and reliable, though not very accurate at farther than fifty meters. No matter. Pavel was familiar with the gun. He felt better as he hefted it in his right hand.

Mavroulis got to his feet as Pavel reached toward the soldier standing in the turret and tapped him on the back. He ducked down and turned face-to-face with the muzzle of the pistol. Pavel smashed the gun barrel against the soldier's temple. Mavroulis caught him in his arms. The captain turned to see what the commotion was and Pavel leveled his pistol at him.

"Stop the car," Pavel commanded.

Wide-eyed with surprise, the captain did as he was told. Pavel had him and the driver haul the two unconscious soldiers out onto the sandy track.

"You can't leave them out on the desert!" Kelly objected. Pavel threw a pair of water cans to them. "They can walk back to the camp. It's only a few kilometers now."

med

Kelly looked doubtful, but Mavroulis slammed the APV's rear hatch, then hunched forward and took the driver's seat. With a grinding of gears he lurched the vehicle into motion. Pavel climbed up into the turret. Twin

PEACEKEEPERS -215

infantry machine cannon and half a dozen boxes

Now they could defend themselves.

confusion.

he ducked

she was still shaking her head when she entered the rear compartment.

from anyplace safe,- she said.

hundreds of miles from

this one, plus

has at least one armored car like

nothing else."

can't fight," said Pavel.

Chris also got the plane. We need them

immediately-if we expect to get out of here

because she was right, Pavel replied merely "It is better to die and prepared to fight than to go down like a lamb to the slaughter."

They were lengthening as their vehicle

and Mavroulis shouted over the engine

he jumped up from the bench and wormed into the

and seat up front in the cab. Pavel stood at, the hatch

he, and Mavroulis, clinging to the bak'ng-hot
ips on either side.
a dozen APVs were parked around the camouflage
that covered the hoverjet. And several low black
had been pitched some distance away, swaying in the
reeze.

is

lassan's gathered a welcoming committee," Mavroul
ted.

Ve can't fight our way out of this!" said Kel
lowness in his middle. His legs
vel felt a strange hol
bled. Fear! Something deep inside him was screaming
away, to dig a hole and hide where none Of
rn to run

enemies could find him. His mouth went dry, his
oat raw. He gripped the metal bars on either side of the
Fh so hard that his fingernails were cutting painfully
0 t

he flesh of his palms-

2t6 Ben Bova

MavrouliS slowed their vehicle, but kept moving ahead toward the 10verjet. A phalanx of soldiers in sand-tan fatigues fell 14 on either side of them. Each man was armed with an assault rifle or an armor-piercing rocket launcher.

Pavel climbed up into the turret and swiveled the guns around. A hundred rifles and antitank launchers pointed sh*,ht.At him.

"You'll get us killed!" Kelly screamed at him.

He looked down at her terrified &M. "Betterlo let them ight. Better to die like soldiers t know that we will f han as prisoners of these savages."

MOVroulis slammed on the brakes and killed the engine. They were parked twenty meters from the edge of the netting that covered the hoveiiet. From his perch in the turret Pavel could see that the plane was undamaged.

For agonizingly lo ng moments no one moved or said a word. The only sounds were the Pinging of the diesel's hot metal and the-distant flapping of bedouin tents in the desert breeze.

Colonel Hassan stepped out from behind the ranks of his arrayed soldiers. One of the berobed Arabs was at his elbow, pointi

ng up toward the turret.

"You are the Russian?" Hassan called.

"Yes," said Pavel.

Hassan smiled Pleasantly from. behind his mirrored glasses. Once again Pavel thought. that he looked enough like Rayyid to be the man's brother. It is the uniform, he told himself. But still the resemblance was uncanny.

14YOU

may come down and join us now," said Hassan.

'You have done your work well. You have nothing to fear from us."

And the others?,, -Pavel demanded.

Hassms smile broadened. He shrugged his epauletted shoulders. "They will be dealt with. My bedouin brothers have prepared a proper ritual for them."

.3

p-PACEKEEPERS 217

Pavel was inching the twin guns toward stalled for time, trying to think'of something reak the stalemate in his own favor. t?,' he called to Hassan. "The Englishman?" I to escape. The bedouins had to restrain Wir own way. nel snapped his fingers and there was a stir from ranks of soldiers. TWo Arabs dragged a half-Barker forward and threw him to the ground at feet. The EngIishmans legs were cOVERed,with Mm face battered and swollen' prisoner who tried to run 4raditional to hamstring a Hassan said calmly, heard a gasping sob from the APVS cab, below me out of the

now," said Hassan impatiently, "CO
and let us treat the other two infidels to their
the _guns a bit closer to the
training

-What do you mean?'
these prisoners to
orders are to bring
have their own plans for them."
hardened. was not informed of that."
Pavel insisted.
orders
you propose to take these prisoners away

emse his mind,
ideas formed th Ives in
replied,- win provide a pilot to fly this aircraft to
to the Soviet embassy
Ili. I will present the prisoners
will know what to do with them.

The KGB
ssan snorted. ---Impossible! Tripoli is a battlefield
My brother is fighting for his life against my army
they are brothers, Pavel said to himself

218 Ben Bova

"Then fly us to Tunis or Cairo. There are Soviet embassies in both capitals."

Haman hesitated.

"You may keep the hoverjet as proof that foreign agents tampered with the aquifer system, if you like," Pavel said. With a sudden inspiration he added, "Or destroy it so that no one will be able to link you to the sabotage."

"There must be no word of these foreigners," Hassan insisted. "No word of this operations must ever leak out."

Pavel made himself laugh. "The only thing that leaks out of the KGB is: the blood of capitalist dogs." M

"I have no pilot here," Hassan said.

Call for a helicopter from the aquifer, complex," said Pavel, recognizing a stall "We will remain here."

"You would be more comfortable outside that cramped vehicle."

"We will remain inside." Pavel nudged the guns the final few millimeters so that they were pointing directly at Haman. "And I suggest that you remain where you are, also

The colonel paled momentarily, whether from sudden fear or anger, Pavel could not tell. But, then he put on his smile again and reached inside his tunic for his gold cigar case. This time he had to light his own cigar-, none of the soldiers or bedouins stirred from where they stood.

-Very

well," Hassan said at last, exhaling thin gray smoke, "I will send for a helicopter."

He turned to the lieutenant nearest -him and spoke swiftly in Arabic.

For nearly fifteen minutes they all waited: Pavel with his fingers on the triggers of the machine cannon; Mavroulis and Kelly sweating down inside the APV cab; Hassan smiling and puffing and chatting with the sycophants around him; the Libyan soldiers grouped around the APV, ready to fire into it at a word from their leader.

PEACEKEEPERS

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lay on the sand, unmoving, his legs crusted with
his eyes swollen shut.

in sank lower. Shadows lengthened. The desert
3od.

avel heard, far in the distance, the faint throbbing
a helicopter.

of us can fly a helicopter, he knew. Perhaps Barker
ot he is in no condition to try We will have to let
us to Tunis, and try to make a

A actually

o - with Alexander there.

its

pilot is actually going to fly us to Tunis, he added
ffHassan has not cooked up some deal Of his Own
in his own territory. Even if he believes my fairy
us

out Moscow, he could easily claim that our helicOP-
shed in the desert and we, were all killed. Moscow
ever question him.

helicopter materialized i n the yellow de sert sky, a
Fe ungainly metal pterodactyl hovering overhead, its

mining, blowing up a minia-
jes shrieking, rotors thru
sandstorm as it settled slowly on its wheels. It was
;one of the giant heavy cargo lifters built in the Soviet
in. Pavel almost smiled at the irony.
zok several tense minutes for them to get Barker
ucket seats lined-
4 and strap themselves into the b
sized cargo bay.
one wall of the helicopters bam-
d
in watched carefully, puffing his slim cigar, a satisfie
smile on his lips.
as the ship lifted
re not going to Tunis, Pavel realized
he ground. Ali rve done is delayed Hassan's fun by a
de of hours.
it as the helicopter rose into the brazen sky two women
Is uniforms came down from the flight deck
bite nurse
began tending to Barker. Neither of them looked
-ic-, one was a blonde.
en Cole Alexander clambered down the metal ladder

220 Bm Bova

from the flight deck, grinning his crooked sardonic grin at them. Kelly leaped out of her seat and wrapped her arms around her father.

"Ohinygod, am I glad to see you!" she gasped.

"Likewise," Alexander said. "Good work, all of you. 'Specially you, Red. You used your head back there."

Pavel was speechless. Mavroulis leaned his head back and laughed maniacally.

"I knew it!", the Greek roared. "I knew you had a backup for us,
Detaching himself from, Kelly Alexander squatted

I

cross-legged on the cargo bay's metal flooring. His daughter sat beside him, facing Pavel and Mavroulis.

"I knew Hassan was a double-dealing sumbitch," Alexander said almost apologetically "but he was the only

sumbitch we had to work with. Like my dear Uncle Max used to tell me, 'When they stick you with a lemon, make lemonade.'

"You expected him to try to kill us?"

"No, he surprised me there. I expected him to take you prisoner and hold you hostage until his fight with Rayyid was settled."

His brother," Pavel said.

'Yep, they're siblings." Alexander made a sour face at the thought, then went on "The way I figured it was this:

I

We screw up Rayyid's aquifer project. Hassan and his army people pull their coup deal while the Libyan people are still stunned at Rayyid's flop with the water project. Hassan holds you four as his trump card. If he wins, you're free. If he loses, he can offer you to Rayyid in return for his own life."

Kelly said, "But instead he decided to remove all evidence of sabotage."

"He must be damned confident he'll be at Rayyid," Mavroulis muttered.

PEACEKEEPERS 221

I probably right," Alexander said.

heless," said

you had a backup plan for us, never

ek.,

Alexander's sardonic smile came out again. He looked

- Locke onto

to his daughter, then his gray eyes
I'd really been that smart," he admitted. "I did
r and a medivac team ready
old Russkie choppe

Kelly's message-Pavers

case. And when I got

-1 flew this bird as close to Hassan's
actually

the desert as I could."
J_ @hed good thing YOU did," Kelly said.
It go flying in there
but then I was stuck. I couldn
ded by trigger-happy Moslem
four of you surroun
come chugging
entalists. I needed some excuse to
cuse. When Hassan
ir camp. Pavel provided the ex
s to Tunis, I got my
chopper to take YOU guy
d for a
u see?,, mavroulis said, thrusting a blunt finger
you to keep quiet and not
Kelly,s nose. "I told
!xe! I was right!"
ly nodded glumly. "You
ke wanted to shoot you
n us over to the KGB
her down."
D hold
were right, Nicco."
when you said you were going
Mavroulis said to Pavel. "I
lly do that?,, Pavers voice was
)u thought I would rea
with shock. He felt betrayed.
'YOU
ly blushed, even under her dark makeup. were
ed convincing."
had to be."
dexander interrupted, "Damned good thing you were,
1. Otherwise my little girl here . . ." His voice choked
He put an arm around Kelly's shoulders and hugged
in that she was
to him, as if to make absOlutely-certa
h him and safe.

"Hassan -was actually going to fly us to Tunis?" asked.

Pavel

Those were the orders he radioed," Alexander said. Course, they could always be countermanded once you were in the, air."

"Pavel," said Kelly, from the protection of her father's embrace, "I'm sorry. You saved our lives, and I didn't trust you. I was wrong, and I'm sorry."

Pavel nodded, his thoughts churning; I had told her that no difference to her. No difference.

"Well said Alexander happily, "all's well that ends well."

"Except for Barker," said Mavroulis.

"He won't -be able to walk for some time," Alexander admitted. "But he'll be okay. If I have to donate a few

tendons myself, we'll get him back on his feet."

"What about Shamar?" Pavel asked. His voice sounded harsh and hard, even to himself.

The others stared at him, their self-congratulatory smiles fading.

"Hassan claimed Shamar left Libya weeks ago," said Alexander tightly.

"With the bombs?"

Alexander slowly shook his head. "The bombs were not with him. He's got them stashed somewhere, but we don't know where."

"We'll find them," Kelly said.

"We'll find him," her father growled.

Pavel looked into their faces. He saw smoldering hatred in Alexander's gunmetal eyes. In Kelly's he saw gratitude, perhaps even affection-but not love.

"I must return to Moscow now," he said. It is better, he told himself. I do not belong among these people.

But Alexander shook his head. "You can't do that, Red.

love@ her, but that ml

She did not believe me.

223

PEACEKEEPERS

accomplished your mission. You're Supposed 't O, Mte me, remember?"

shook his head. "No jokes, please- I w is

hell you will! You think we went through all th' to send you back to shoveling snow?" understand ..

reached

his arm from his daughter and der took

old Uncle Max

as Pavers shoulder. "Red, my dear

P

tell in e, 'Only a foot does something for just one ifer mission.

YOU could have fucked up this aqu

very happy and gotten three

41 Id have made Moscow

you didn't."

;best people killed. But

testing me. My
der man. "You were
4 stared at the,ol
ng wider than
mned right," 4Alexand er said, grinni
and Moscow isn't gonna be very
'-You did okay,
if YOU 90 home now.
ilure," Pavel admitted-
would be considered a fa
with your skills and
we can use a man
e, right? I'll bet
you to keep an eye on m
that Rayyi
Hassan's
d's on his way Out
d those
Besides, there's still Shamar an
r
of his."
to stay?"
"For a Russian, you're not go bad."
ly. She glanced at her fatherl
looking at Kel
face Pavel.
want you to stay, ll she said, so low it was almost a
fisper. "Like I told YOU back in the computer room-we
@Ve a lot to talk about-"
Pavel would have preferred that she fling Iferself into big
at Kelly and her father. This
ms, but he nodded slowly

was better than nothing. Moscow would be SUSPICIOUS, he knew. I will-be playing a very dangerous game,-practicall
y a
double agent.

Kelly was smiling at him now. From the protection of her father's embrace.

"Very well," Pavel heard himself say. "I will stay.
"Great," said Alexander. "Now that 'that's settled, the next thing we tackle is these poachers in Rwanda. The bastards have nearly wiped out the @ last remaining free-living gorillas in the world. And Shamar was heading in that direction, according to my information . .

Zhakarov, nicknamed "Red," became a
;cnt member of Alexander's little
UP, h is loyalties divided at least three
Vs@among Moscow, Kelly, and a growing
niration for Cole Alexander and his
riL Jonathan Hazard Jr., was not
ited until nearly a year later, and even
u it was mostly an unfortunate accident.
l had been a member of the court-martial
the younger Hazard's trial, shortly after
officers, coup had been thwarted -by
--alazard, Sr. I still had both Irjy hands then-
ne young man refused every offer of help
that, his father made. That did not, of
ll:ourse, altogether prevent the older man
from helping his son.

J. W. Hazard, Jr., received a much lighter sentence than his fellow conspirators. C ardillo and most of the others went to jail for life. Jay Hazard was merely banished to the Moon for ten Years-

MOONBASE

Year 7

Four minutes 'til the nuke goes off,
The words rasped in

in Jay's earphones. He knew that the woman was nearly exhausted. Inside his pressure suit he was soaked with sweat and bone-tired himself. The adrenaline had run out hours ago. Now all they were going on was sheer dogged determination. And the fear of death.

"It's got to be here someplace." Desperation edged her voice. Four minutes and counting. Long months

of training guided Jay's movements. He halted in the midst of the weird machinery, took the last of the antistatic pads from his leg pouch and carefully cleared his helmet visor of the dust that had accumulated there.

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PEACEKEEPERS 227

wished he hadn't.

figures had entered the factory carried a flashlight gun in his gloved hand. He could duck behind the lumber-belt to his right. He motioned for the woman. Same. She had seen them too, and squatted her suit like a little kid playing hide-and-seek.

MW

They would pick up any transmission and on it. Actually, Jay realized, all they have to do is wait for another three minutes and some, then they'll do the rest. They don't care if they go with us.

they're willing to die for their own strength: woman duck walked to Jay and leaned her helmet on his.

"What do we do now?" she asked. Her voice, carried by the rough metal and padding of the helmets, was muffled and muted, as if she had a bad cold. He shrugged his shoulders inside the pressure suit. But he did it anyway. There was nothing to do. Of.

In the midst of Moonbase's oxygen-rich broad plain of Mare Nubium, the Sea of Tranquility, seen neither water nor air for more than a billion years. The factory was out in the open vacuum, its walls covered only by a honeycomb metal mesh so thin that it almost seemed to sway in the constant breeze. Ornamented tractors hauled stones and powdery soil from the Moon's regolith and dumped their loads on belts, ignoring the human hunters and their oxygen separators and ovens squeezed oxygen from the rocks, then dumped the piles at the far side of the factory, where

other automated machinery mined metals and minerals from the tailings. Glass filament piping carried the oxygen to huge cryogenic tanks, giant thermos bottles that kept the gas cold enough to remain liquefied-
The conveyor belts rumbled, the crushers pounded away, in nearly total silence. Jay could feel their throbbing through the concrete pad that formed the base of the factory. In the vacuum of the Moon, though, normal sound was only an Earth-bom memory.

In all the vast complex there were no human workers. Only robots, which actually performed better in the clean vacuum than they did in the corrosive air needed by their human owners. No human set foot in the factory, except for the two cowering behind the main conveyor feed... and the six now spreading out to cover all the perimeter of the factory and make certain that Jay and the woman could not escape.

Three minutes thirty seconds.

Jay closed his eyes. Hell of a way to end it. The nuke will liquefy the oxygen factory, and that'll kill Moonbase. We won't go alone, he thought grimly.

It had started innocently.

Jay had reported for work as usual, riding the power ladder from his quarters on level four to the main plaza. It was Tuesday, and sure enough, there was a fresh shipload of tourists hopping and tumbling and laughing self-consciously as they tried to adjust their clumsy Earth stride to the one-sixth gravity of the Moon.

The tourists wore coveralls, as the Moonbase Tourist Office advised. But while Jay's coveralls were a utilitarian gray with Velcro fastenings, the Flatland tourists were brilliant with garish Day-Glo oranges and reds and yellows, stylish metal zipper pulls dangling from cuffs and collars and chives. Just the thing to tangle in a pressure suit, Jay thought sourly as he entered the garage office.

PEACEKEEPERS, 229

expected to spend the day driving a tour bus
kd,, Alphonsus, locked away from everyone in his
ry cab while some plastic-smiled guide pointed out
of Ranger @ and the solar-energy farms with their
libs
uded tenders and the robot Processors that sucked in
th soil at one end and deposited new solar cells at the
The tourists would snap photographs to show the
n4em back home and, never have to leave the comfort
bus. Jay would drive the lumbering vehicle back and
across the crater floor along the well-worn track and
have to speak to anyone-

ut the boss had given him, a red ticket, instead.

-special job, Hazard," she had said, in that hard tone
"Flatland VIP

would brook no arguments.

on a crutch!" Jay fumed, lapsing back to the
had used when 'his father would punish him
-That's a six-day ride."

yours", the boss retorted. "Got number 301
set for you. See you in six days."

y knew better than to complain. He snatched the red
-t from the boss's counter and stomped out

ge. Actually, he thought, a six-day trip up to Coperni-
and back might not be so bad. Away from the tourists
the boss and the rest of the world for nearly a week.
in the wilderness, where there isn't a blade of grass or a
@Vuff of air or even a sound-alone.

some Earthside VIP. A part of Jay's mind

Except for

@,.wondered who he @might be. Somebody I used to know
Qrhe thought sent a wash of sudden terror through him. No.

T-hebossiustpickedmeoutofthecomputer.

e knows I like to be left alone- She's trying to do me a
r.

@,*Vso till, the thought that this VIP might be someone from
his former life, someone from his father, even, scared him
As much his stomach felt sick.

When he saw who it was, he relaxed-then tensed again. It was a woman, a petite snub-nosed redhead who looked too young, too tiny and almost childlike, to be a Very Important Person. But when Jay got close enough to see her brown eyes clearly, he recognized the kind of no-nonsense drive and determination he had seen in others. His father, his former commanding officer, the grim-faced men who had led him into treason and disgrace and dishonor. She was waiting for him by the bus, in the midst of the noisy, clanging garage. She wore dark maroon coveralls, almost the color of Burgundy wine. No dangling zipper pulls. A small slate-gray duffel bag hung from one shoulder. "Are you my driver?" she asked Jay.

the driver."

He was nearly a foot taller than she, and he judged that they were roughly the same age- middle twenties. Jay had not bothered to shave that morning, and he suddenly felt grimy and unkempt in her level stare. She didn't have much of a figure. Her mouth was turned down slightly at the corners.

"Okay, then," she said. "Drive."

He popped the hatch and stood beside it as she climbed the metal steps slowly, uncertain of herself in the low lunar gravity. Jay took the six rungs in one jump and ducked into the shadowy interior of bus 301.

On the outside, 301 looked like any other heavily used

tour bus: its bright yellow anodized hull had been dulled by exposure to vacuum and the hard radiation that drenches the lunar surface. There were dents here and there and a crusting of dust along the wide tracks. The crescent and human figure of its stylish Moonbase logo was the only fresh bit of color on its bodywork. Management saw to that.

Inside, though, 301 had been fitted out for a long excursion: the seats removed and a pair of sleeping units installed, each with its own bathroom facilities. The galley

231,

DM

ward, closest to the cab, and the air lock and suits at the rear by the hatch. Jay would have it the other way around, but he had no say in the layout of the bus or its interior.

Without a word to his passenger, he pushed past her and took the driver's seat. With one hand he slipped the mm headset over his thick dark hair, while with his other hand he checked out the bus's

He got his route clearance from the controller and started up the engines.

forward slowly, the thermionic engines efficiently. Jay felt his passenger's hand behind and slightly to one side of him, the lighted path through the busy garage. He took the right-hand seat as he went down the stairs to the controllers. The inner air-lock hatch opened; Jay thought she tensed slightly at the sound when the massive steel doors sealed themselves shut.

lumps whined to life, their noisy clattering diminishing a fading train whistle as the air was sucked out of the steel-walled chamber.

@, "You're cleared for excursion, 301," he heard in his xplione.

@'Three-oh-one, on my way," he muttered.

The controllers voice lightened. "Have fun, Jay. Six ghts with a redhead, wow!" He chuckled.

Jay said nothing, but shot a quick sidelong glance at his Wenger. I She could not hear the controller, thank the ds.

The air lock's outer hatch slid open slowly, revealing the solate splendor of the Sea of Clouds. It was night, and)uld be for another sixty hours. But the huge blue globe ,tEarth hung in the sky, nearly full, shining so brilliant ly

t w
there as no true darkness.

232 Ben Bova

Mare Nubium looked like a sea that had been petrified. The rocky soil undulated in waves, almost seemed to be heaving gently, dimpled by craters and little pockmarks and cracks of rilles that snaked across the ground like sea serpents. The horizon was brutally near, like the edge of a cliff sharp and un-

flinching, uncompromising as the end of the world. Beyond it the sky was utterly black.

"I thought we'd be able to see the stars," his passenger said.

"You Will," Jay replied.

The ground they traversed was roiled and churned as a battlefield. Treads of giant tractors, bootprints of humans, singed and blackened spots where rockets had landed years ago. Nothing ever changes on the Moon's surface unless people change it, and this close to Moonbase, people and their machines had been moving back and forth for more than a generation.

Jay took 301 out past the old mass driver. The electric catapult was so long that its far end disappeared over the horizon.

"Is that the original mass driver?" his passenger asked.

He answered with a nod.

"...I understand it's out of commission. Being repaired or something?"

"Right," he said.

For the next fifteen minutes they drove in silence along the length of the mass driver. They passed a team of pressure-suited technicians gathered around one of the big magnet coils.

"My name's Kelly," his passenger offered.

"It's on the trip sheet," Jay replied. "Kelly, S. A. From Toronto, Canada. First time on the Moon."

"What's your name?"

Jay turned his head toward her. For the love of Godzilla, don't tell me she's a Moon groupie, he said to himself.

We're going to be cooped up in this tin can for six days.

"Jay," he snapped.

PEACEKEEPERS 233

at the tourist office told me it was Jonathan uncomfortably in the chair. "Everybody calls

Jonathan, Jr."

at her again. Really looked at her. "Who the

d@you. My name's Kelly."

"I'm not a tourist."

"You're not a bus driver."

Jonathan

Jonathan studied his face for a moment. It seemed to Jay

Jonathan was trying to smile, trying to put him at his ease.

Jonathan

wanted to know whose side you're on," she said at last.

Jonathan? "What are you talking about? I'm not on any-

Jonathan's sucking side! Leave me alone!" He kicked in the

Jonathan and 301 shuddered to a stop.

Jonathan picked the wrong side once," Kelly said, her voice

Jonathan as if she were reading from a memorized dossier. "The

Jonathan the one who sent me here think you might have made the

Jonathan mistake again."

Jonathan will take you back to the base."

put a hand out toward him. "If you do, I'll have to
our suspicions to the Moonbase security people.
_ll lose your job. As a minimum."

alone! '\$

I could," Kelly said, her voice softening. "But
bomb on its way to Moonbase. It might
Some people think you're in on the deal."
her. Even here they had followed him. Even
dst of all this emptiness, a quarter-million
es from Earth, even here they were hounding him.
le took a deep breath, then said evenly, "Look. I'm not
311 any deal. If you want to tag me with some wild-ass
sges, think up something more believable than a nuke,
i? Just let me do my job and live in peace, okay?"

234 Ben Bova

Kelly shook her head. -"None of us can live in peace, Jay. A nuclear weapon is going to wipe out Moonbase unless we can find it and the people who are behind it And damned soon.

"You're crazy!"

Maybe. But we're not going to Copernicus. We're going to @Fra Mauro."

"The hell we are," he growled. "You're going right back to base." He grasped the steering wheel and started to thumb the, button that would put the tracks in gear again.

"lflldo,"Ke.Uywamed,"youwon'tbejustworkingouta ten-year sentence here at Moonbase, You'll spend the rest of your life in jail."

He glared at her.

Kelly did not glare back. She smiled sadly. "I wouldn't be talking with you if I thought you were part of any

11

terrorist group. But if YOU refuse to help me, ve got no choice but to turn you over to the people who think you are."

Every muscle in Jay's body was tensed so hard,that he ached from toe to scalp.

Kelly leaned toward him slightly. "Look. The nuke is hese people intend to blow out Mooribase.

real. T

Help me

find the bomb and you can make everybody back Earthside forget about your past mistake."

t

He felt as helpless as he had when he was a baby and his father would suddenly swoop down on him and toss him terrifyingly high into the air.

"You don't understand," Jay said slowly, miserably. "I don't care if they remember what hap . pened back the n or not. All I want is to be away from it all, away from all of them. All of them. Forever."

She made a sympathetic sound, almost like a mother cooing at her infant. "It doesn't work that way. They've come here. Maybe not the same people who got you into trouble in the first place, but the same kind of people."

PEACEKEEPERS 235

l@ head sank low. He closed his eyes, as if that would he@ go away and leave him alone.

've got to help me, Jay-"

aid nothing; wished he were deaf.

Vv I o no choice."

got

Ressly he put the tracks ingear and pushed the

The lumbering bus shuddered and started ht, he told himself. I've got 110 choice. One you for the rest of your life. They'll never Ints

:me, no matter how far I run. Not for the rest Of

his life, once

realized that the only way out was to end

br all.

drove 301 in silence, not even glancmig at the Young along for

in sitting beside him. The vehicle Plowed a ks

V than an hour, following the network of tr c worn

the, powdery regolith that headed northw8rd across

r Nubiurn in the general direction of Copernicus.
at when Jay reached for t he radio transmitter control
d his.

he dashboard, Kelly's hand quickly intercePte
-rve got to get Fra, Mauro's coordinates front the data
II punch in the coordinates," she countered.
pointed to the bus's guidance computer, Kelly typed
he coordinates with smooth, practiced efficiency. Jay
ad that her hands were tiny, her fingers as Small as a
s doll.

off the heavily tracked course
lien the bus turned
rd Copernicus and -started westward, jay punched in
utopilot and took his hands from the wheel. He leaned
in his seat and tried to relax. It was like trying to
he vacuum.

--Are we really goi ng to Fra Mauro?" he asked.

"Close."

"What makes you think the nuke is hidden thereT'

236 Ben Bova

We have our information sources."

"We?" He turned in his seat to look fully at her. "Did my father send you?"

She said, "No. I'm not working for the Peacekeepers. Not directly, anyway."

"Then he does have something to do with this."

"The Peacekeepers have no jurisdiction here. They're only allowed to operate when an attack is launched across an international frontier."

"So they claim.",

Kelly ignored his thrust. "Moonbase isn't about to be invaded. It's being threatened by a gang of terrorists. We're trying to stop them."

"Who the hell is this 'we'?"

"Private operation."

He waited for more. When she did not offer it, Jay asked, "And the terrorists?"

"Professionals. Third World fanatics were against the industrialized nations and against the Peacekeepers."

Jay remembered a group of men and women who were that the International step toward a world government of having their nations

and trust their defense to a gaggle of foreigners. They had rebelled against the IPF and nearly won. Nearly. Jay had been one of those rebels. His father, now director-general of the IPF, had branded him a traitor

"Some of the smaller nations," Kelly was saying, "don't like the IPF in general, and hate Moonbase in particular. Lunar ores and space factories are competing with Third World countries. They say that just when they're starting to make a success of industrialization, Moonbase is underselling them."

"So they hire a gang of professionals to nuke Moonbase."

"That's it."

"And where do they get their nuclear device? The IPFS

PEACEKEEPERS 237

is thorough in dismantling the world's rally, said Kelly. "Disarmament's been more or standstill for the past several years. There's at least a dozen, nukes unaccounted for. Somebody named mm" stole them and disappeared." you think one of them's here?"

Shamar sold it for the equivalent

of "Or on its way

1 hundred million dollars. In gold."

he believed her

histled with awe. Despite himself,

that's just what some of those bastards would do.

didn't care who gets killed, as long as it isn't them.

part that he refused to believe was her insistence

no role in this operation. He knows

himself. He knows exactly where I am.

caught his eye. Movement meant

the eons-dead surface of the Moon.

UP them."

in her seat, but her body tensed like

she asked.

way-
camera keyboard and displayed the view
that took up the middle of the dashboard-
a smallish tractor, painted bright red, not
crawlers that tended the solar energy
it was undeniably a
us. But the bubble riding atop
-support module.
Two-man job," Jay muttered.
Have they seen us?"
'Probably. Might be from Lunagrad."
South?"
Jaysai&"They've got just as much
here as anybody."

"No," he had to admit. "The Russians usually stay close to their own bases. And there's no scientific excursion out here-that I know of."

"Turn around," Kelly said.

"What? I thought you wanted to get to Fra Mauro."

"I do, but I want to get there alive. Turn around!"

She was genuinely frightened, Jay saw. He gripped the wheel and slewed, the bus almost ninety degrees, angling Doug ly northeast.

We can tell them we just took a side trip on our way to Copernicus, Jay said to himself. Then he realized that he had accepted her view of the situation without thinking consciously about it- he had accepted the idea that this crawler was carrying two terrorists who had somehow learned of Kelly's mission and were here to stop her.

1,

Kelly popped out of her seat and went back toward the sleeping compartments. She returned with a pair of-binoculars, big and black and bulky. Jay recognized the make and model: electronically boosted optics, capable of counting the pores on your nose at a distance of ten miles.

"They're following us." Her voice was flat, almost calm. Only the slightest hint of an edge in it. "Two men in the cab, both wearing pressure suits with the visors UP-

She's been in heavy scenes before, Jay thought. Probably a lot more than I have. In the back of his mind he remembered the only real danger he had ever seen, the

I

battle in orbit that his side had lost. Because of me, Jay heard his mind accuse. We lost because of me.

"They're gaining on US," Kelly announced, the binocs glued to her eyes. "Can't you go faster?"

"This tub isn't built-for speed," Jay grumbled, leaning on the throttle. The bus lurched marginally faster.

'There's no place to hide out here," she said.

"It's like the ocean.' He thought that his father would know what to do. An old salt like him, with his Annapolis training, would be right at home on this lunar sea.

"00

239

only got the one air W&

"Emergency hatch, here by MY side." He D4@ the red release catch with, his left elbow.

@But

e*ot to be in a suit to use it."
Fe,',d better suit up, then And fast."
low wait a minute

cut him off with a dagger-sharP look. "You say you're h them. Okay, I'll beli - that. As long as

I 'Wit eve YOU
e@ like you're not in with them."

turned away from those blazing eyes and looked out de window. The red crawler was gaining on them, ing up on their left rear.

-Ily said, "Suits.

ie's scared of what they'll do when they overtake us, he ght. Deep inside him, Jay was frightened tooAie set antrols back on autopilot and followed the diminutive head back toward th e air-lock hatch.

took nearly fifteen minutes to worm into the suits and k out all the seats and systems.

When we get outside," Kelly said through her open
E, no radio. If we have to talk, we Put our helmets
ther.

T-ete-A-t&e."

--She flashed a quick grin at him, thinking it was a pun
dher than standard lunar jargon.

Nhey clumped back to the cab, single file, in the bulky
kts. The crawler had gained appreciably on them. It was
rcely half a kilometer away.- Jay began pecking at the
aidance computer's keyboard.

What are you doing?" Kelly demand ed. "We dont have
me ...

w"Instructing this bucket to circle around and head back
base. That way we can pick it up again later. Don't think
Wre going to walk back to Moonbase, do you?"

'-."I hadn't thought that far ahead," she admitted.

They made their way back to the air lock and squeezed

inside together. The outer hatch was on the right side of the bus, away from the approaching crawler. His stomach quivering with butterflies, Jay snapped his visor down securely and punched the button that cycled the air lock. He had to override the safety subsystem that prevented the lock from being used while the bus was in motion.

It seemed like an hour. The pumps clattered loud enough to be heard Earthside. Finally the amber light turned to red and the outer hatch popped slightly ajar. Jay swung it open -the rest of the way.

The rough landscape was rushing past, them at nearly thirty klicks per hour. It looked very hard and solid, totally uninviting.

"You sure you want to do this?" he asked.

"It's better than being killed."

"Maybe."

"You first," she commanded.

Jay obeyed almost by reflex. He waited for a patch of ground that was relatively free of rocks, then jumped from the lip of the air lock. It wasn't until he was soaring through the vacuum in the dreamlike slow motion of lunar gravity that he realized this might all have been her ploy for getting the bus to herself.

He landed on his feet, staggered sideways with the acceleration from the bus and fell to the ground. With instincts honed by almost three years on the Moon, he put out both arms, caught himself before he hit the dusty soil, and pushed himself erect. A few staggering steps and he was safely balanced on his feet.

He had kicked up some dust, but not as much as he had feared. This area's not as dusty as some, Jay thought as he watched the powdery clouds slowly settle around him.

Kelly jumped and tumbled when she landed, skidding sideways down the slight slope of a worn ancient craterlet. Jay dashed after her as 301 trundled off in the opposite direction, on its own, under automatic control.

PEACEKEEPERS 241'

slightly lying on her back and waving frantically at him.

@s @u -

right, Jay thought. Or her suit's ripped.

slid and slid down the almost glassy slope-of the crater and ended up on the seat of his pants, by, her head turned onto her stomach, lying still. Backpack .-seem damaged. No obvious leaks. He leaned his back against hers.

"YoMokay?"

reached an arm around his neck and yanked -hard.

wn,@' asshole!"

flattened out, feeling his face flame with sudden anger. "Why don't you want those bastards to see us?" she hissed. "Why don't you have a friggin' flaw."

on to his swooping temper. For a few moments

side by side. Then Kelly wormed her way to the lip

of the crater. Jay followed.

only far enough to see across the pockmarked

watched 301 dwindling toward the horizon,

red crawler still closing the distance between

them. Then the crawler stopped. The pod hatch opened and

of the pressure-suited figures climbed out.

A

r turned his head toward Kelly. "Of all the mother-
ig dimwits, you gave yourself diarrhea over nothing.
Ire surveyors! Look, they're taking out their tools."
h yeah?"

one man had taken an arm's-length rod from the
pack on the rear of the crawler. He hiked it up onto his
ulder, then turned and aimed it at the retreating bu. lk of

A

hie rod flashed sudden flarne. A blaze of light streaked
@ss the airless plain and hit 301. The bus exploded. All
total silence.

lay watched, stunned, as pieces of 301 soared gently

242 Ben Bova

across the landscape. He recognized one fragment as tihng
end over end and smash'
driver's chair, tumbling slowly
apart when it finally hit the ground.

I. 11

Jay whispered.

1

"Some surveyors," Kelly, muttered.

How in the name of St. Michael the Archangel are we
going to get back to the base? Jay asked himself. If we call
for help, those guys will hear us and come over to finish the
job.

Kelly was pecking at the radio controls on the left *rist
of her suit. Is she going to surrender to them? Not likely, he
knew.

She pointed to the frequency setting, then to the side of
her helmet, and finally put a finger up in front of her visor.
Jay understood her sign language. They're using this freak;
listen, don't talk.

They iay side by side at the lip of the little crater,
watching and listening. The two terrorists drove their
crawler to the gutted wreck of 301 and started inspecting
the wreckage. They want to make sure of us, Jay realized.

Leaning his helmet against Kelly's, he whispered, "May-
be we can grab their crawler while they're poking through
the debris."

Her voice was muffled, but he could feel the reproach in
it. "We wouldn't get fifty meters before they spotted us.
They're professionals, Jay. We're lucky they didn't see you
dancing around when you jumped from the bus.-

His face went red again. And he realized, that whispering
was stupid, too.

"Then what ... ?"

I.

Lemme hear them."

Jay could not understand the language coming through
his earphones, but apparently Kelly could. She repeated it,
like a translator.

they could have jumped before the rocket hit

PEACEKEEPERS

243

Merence ... I can't figure that, must be slang

no But that means they knew who we were. i hit

laughing-ah! They're saying we can

... they're

If we call for help they'll home in On

My * on foot.

OV9

asmission and finish us

Odded inside his helmet. That was the crux of the
V bother?" Kelly resumed translating. "The, oxygen
ill be blasted away in another twelve hour-' Theyll
jW back in time to do anything about it-"

rim

pounded her gloved fist on the glass-smooth ' Of

"The oxygen factoryl That's it!"

slid down slightly and turned on her side. Jay stayed
the rim, watching and thinking.

could send a warning to Moonbase, Put them'On

But then those killers would find us And that would

_t.

what? he asked himself You're finished anyway.

9 ng to leave you in peace. She told you
re never g6i

The only way out is death.

looked out across the desolate expanse of rock The
terrorists were making their way back to the crawler
their foreign words sounding musical yet guttural in
'Jearphones, almost like a Wagnerian opera.

wise guy, Jay told

It'd be easy enough to,open your visor,

self just crack the seal and take a nice deep breat 1 0

f@@ Vum' PooP Your troubles are all finished. You wouldnot

!he first guy to do it that way.

lis gloved hands did not move. I don't want to die, Jay
lized. No matter what happens, I sure as bell don't want
die.

suddenly -his earphones shrieked with a wild whining,
reeching wail. He clamped his hands uselessly against his
imet, then stabbed at the radio control on his wrist and
ut off the skull-splitting noise-

_e

He slid down beside Kelly. She was standing at the controls

"Jammer," Jay said.

"They're taking no chances," she agreed. "They're going to leave us out here and jam any radio transmission we might send."

"That means they'll be staying with their crawler," he said. "The jammer's only got a limited range--as far as the horizon."

"We can walk away from it."

"If they don't see us--"

"How long would it take to get back to Moonbase?"

"Too long," Jay answered. "Unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Follow me and do what I do. Stay low as possible until we're out of their sight."

They crawled on their hands and knees slowly, carefully, across the small crater and over its farther rim. The powdery top layer of the regolith turned to dust whenever they touched it. Before long the dust was clinging to their suits. Jarco could feel it grating in one of his knee joints. That could be dangerous. Worse, it covered the visors, obscuring vision.

Not that there was much to see. Jay watched his gloved hands tracking along the barren regolith. It reminded him of videos about evolution he had seen as a schoolchild: the emergence of life from the sea onto dry land. Never found land drier than this, he knew.

At last he stopped, sat upright, and took a wiper pad from the pouch on his leg. The dust clung stubbornly to his visor, electrostatically charged by the invisible inflow of solar wind particles.

He helped Kelly clear her visor. Cautiously, he rose to his feet. The damned crawler could still be seen, which meant the men in them still had a chance of spotting them.

Back to crawling, like an infant, like a lizard, like a slimy
at her wrist

..... PEACEKEEPERS 245

DE

Just learning to walk. We must make a weird
We'd again and looked back. Only the rooftop of
fer was in sight. He flicked his suit radio on for the
instant; the shriek of the jammer still burned his
mind for Kelly to stand, he leaned close to her and
They've got a tall antenna. We're still being jammed,
can't we walk now."

They cleaned their visors again, then headed off almost
several minutes Kelly tapped Jay's shoulder. He
down to touch helmets.

"Moonbase in that direction?" She pointed roughly
eastward.

She pointed at her. "Don't try to navigate by the Star.
The con's north pole doesn't point toward Polaris."
No, but ...

Following the 30 I's tracks." He pointed to the churned
if we can make it back to the main beat between
Subbase and Copernicus we'll come across an emergency
Ow sooner or later. Then we . . .

arked with surprise, then swiftly pulled Kelly down
D the ground.

lessly he pointed at the crawler that was slowly
its way toward them. From the direction opposite
v er they had just left. This one was painted bright
it, too, had a life-support module atop it, and a tall
mast, visible only because of the tiny red light
ng at its end.

-.y sent a team to follow us, Jay realized. They boxed
one team from Fra Mauro, the other behind us from
ibase.

half dragged Kelly away from the track of 30 1,
g toward the Copernicus-Moonbase "road and
from the oncoming crawler. They might not be part

Of the terrorist gang, Jay thought. Might be a coincidence that they're here. They might even be Moonbase security searching for us. Sure. Might be Santa Claus, too.

For hours they walked, seemingly lost. Not the slightest SIP of civilization. Not even a bit of litter. No trace of life.

Nothing but rocks and craters and the sudden horizon with

the utterly black sky beyond it. And the dust that clung to them, rasped against their suits, bluffed their visors.

Suits are good for forty-eight hours, Jay kept telling himself. Oxygen, heat, water enough for forty-eight hours. Radiation Protection. They'll even stop a micrometeor without springing a leak. Says so in the instruction manual.

But he wondered.

Time and again they tried their suit radios. Still the wailing scream of the jamming defeated them.

"They must have planted jammers along the whole route," Jay told Kelly

means we'll have to get back to Moonbase itself in' she peered at the watch on her suit wrist--six

No

way, he knew. Not afoot. But they kept walking.

There was nothing else to do. For hours.

Kelly fished a wire from one of her suit pouches and they connected their helmet intercoms, like two kids talking through paper cups and a soaped string.

"It's a lonely kind of beauty to it," she said. "I never

thought of the Moon as beautiful before."

Jay nodded inside his helmet. "I wouldn't call it beautiful. Awesome, yes. it's got

grandeur, all right. Like the

desert in Arizona."

61(r the tundra

up above the Arctic Circle."

"It'll take a long time before people screw up this place. But they'll do it. They're already starting the job, aren't they?"

Kelly was silent for a while, then she asked, "Why'd you put in with the rebels? Against the Peacekeepers."

PEACEKEEPERS 247

He felt the old anger seething in his gut. Instead, he

almost calmly, "I fell for their

trust its defense to a beach of

Said Washington had sold us out to the Third

id the Commies."

Why with the Peacekeepers.

Why were? Then?"

Why? About three years before."

How do you believe in them

Why've kept the peace. The nations are disarming. Or why've they realized Shammar had made off with you? How do you feel about a hundred little nations around?"

Kelly replied.

W
F I
I
E
11

I
I
J
I @
I '

silence. Then Kelly spoke up again,
're lucky you didn't have to go to jail. Most of the
conspirators got long sentences."

nv, I'm lucky, all right."

3ur father must have been a big help. He's running the
now, you know."

he old anger was strangely muted, but Jay could still
the resentment smoldering inside him. Or was it

help," he mocked. "Instead of jail he got me
ed to the Moon. I can't set foot back on Earth for
r seven years, not unless you get me arrested and
t back in handcuffs."

It's better than -being in jail, though, isn't it?"

ay hesitated. "Yeah, I guess so," he had to admit.

'Your father must've twisted a lot of arms to get you off
hook. Most of 'ein got life."

opened his mouth to answer, but he had no reply. He
er considered the proposition before. Dad pleaded
he court to lighten my sentence? He found that

249 Ben Bova
difficult beli

to leve. Especially after he had rejected the old man's offers of help. @ It did not square with all he knew about the stem, uncompromising man who had left his mother so many years ago. Very difficult to beli teve.

But not impossible,
Jay was still pondering this new thought when he stopped and stared at a tiny red light blinking against the dark Sky, just Over the horizon. He reached for another cleaning pad and wiped his visor. The light did not move or waver.

-Hey look!" he yelled.
He - pointed, then gestured for Kelly to follow him. An emergency shelter. Fresh oxygen and water. His sW it was starting to smell bad, Jay realized. He hadn't admitted it to himself until now.

And maybe a radio with enough power to bum through the jamming. Less than three hours left. Won't do us much good to get to the shelter if Moonbase itself gets wiped. Just prolong the agony.

The shelter was a life-support module from the earliest days, of lunar exploration, buried under several meters of scooped-up regolith rubble. Safe as a squirrel's nest in winter.

The left leg of Jay's suit was grating ominously as they hurried the last kilometer toward the shelter. The dust was grinding away at that knee joint. He looked over at I Kelly. She seemed to be keeping pace with him loping along in the dreamlike low gravity.

They bounded down the slight slope to the shelter's air-lock entrance. It was too small for both of them to go through at the same time, but they squeezed into it together anyway. Jay heard somebody laughing as the air lock cycled, It was his own voice, cackling like a madman. "We made it, kid," he said. "We're safe."

For the time being," she reminded him, as the inner batch slid open.

PEACEKEEPERS 249

ing inside. He
e*!i for that," said the man wait
eedle-slim fl6chette gun in his hand.
were two of them both dark of hair d eye, skin
an
ed, one not. Both
r of desert sand. One was beard
shelter was old and small; its inner walls curved up
high enough to allow Jay to stand upright The
Pent inside looked ancient, dusty. Even the bunks
moldy with age.
made Kelly and Jay take off their pressure
ually glad to be out of his, yet he felt almost naked
-rotected without it.
hat happens now?" Kelly asked,. her voice flat and
w we wait," said the bearded one in slightly accented
i. "The bomb goes off in little more than two hours'
iperiors will pick us up for transport back to Earth.
will decide what to do with YOU."

Jay

other was younger, barely out of his teens, Jay saw. med fiercely amused. "There won't be enough room rd the ship for two prisoners." Ily's mouth dropped open. All pretense of cool Profes- Jism disappeared. "You mean you ... you're going to us here? Kill us?" e bearded one shrugged. "Jh please don't!" Kelly pleaded. "Please ... I don't t to die. I'll do anything! Anything!" ie took a step closer to the bearded one. Jay felt his Jes chum. The little bitch. She'll offer them her body to herself. She doesn't give a tinker's damn about what to me. realized that both men had turned their entire to Kelly, who was pleading so loudly and plain- at it finally got through Jay's skull that this was a

?

250 Ben Bova

With one lightning motion Kelly kicked the bearded one in the groin and simultaneously grabbed his right wrist and pushed the gun aside. The gun went off and a slim steel flashlight thudded into the metal wall of the shelter.

With the roar of a jungle savage, Jay launched himself at the Younger one, who had turned slightly away from him. He swung back, but not fast enough. Jay snapped his wrist, then knocked him uncon-

scious with a vicious chop against the side of his neck.

He looked over at Kelly, bending

over the prostrate body

-J

of the bearded one.

"I was worried you wouldn't catch

"I

on she said, grin-

ning.

"I almost didn't."

"Try the radio," she commanded, pointing.

It was useless, Jay-saw. They had fired several flashlights into it.

"Just about two hours now," Kelly said. "How long will it take us to get back to Moonbase?"

"Depends," he replied, "on whether this shelter has a hopper in working condition."

They bound the two unconscious men with electricians tape, then worked back into their suits. Jay led the way through the air lock and out behind the pile of rubble covering the shelter.

The spidery body of a lunar hopper stood out in the open. It looked like a small metal platform raised off the ground by three skinny bowed legs. An equally insubstantial railing went around three sides of the platform, with a pedestal for controls and displays. Beneath the platform were small spherical tanks and a rocket nozzle mounted on a swivel.

He inspected the hopper swiftly. "Cute. They shot up the oxygen tank. No oxygen, no rocket. Lazy bastards, though. They should have dismantled this go-can more thoroughly than this."

till

PEACEKEEPERS iq

As he worked, My ducked back inside the shelter. He came out with a pair of oxygen bottles from the emergency supply and a set of tools. It took more than an hour, but finally he got the long green bottles hooked firmly enough to the line that fed the rocket's combustion chamber.

"I think it's firmly enough," he told himself, "I'll help Kelly up onto the platform and then get up there myself. I'll snap on the safety tethers that hung from the ceiling, and plugged his suit radio into the hopper's stem. Kelly followed his every motion.

ly to try it," he asked.

"Sure." Her voice, in his earphones sounded like a throat. For an eternally long moment nothing happened. Then the platform shuddered and

ftied and they were soaring up over the lunar landscape shell.

Kelly exulted. Jay noticed that both her gripping the railing hard enough to bend

he yelled back at her.

iey got high enough to see the lights of the base's -energy farm, spread out across the shore of the Mare ium, where automated tractors were converting raw lith soil into solar cells and laying them out in neat onal patterns.

tried to steer toward the lights, but the hopper's kal safety program decided that there was not enough)r maneuvering a a safe landing. So they glided on, iing the lights of the energy farm slide off to their eerie, flying in total silence, without a breeze, vibration from the platform they stood upon. coasting effortlessly high above the ground. sed the hopper's radio to send an emergency call

.... .

to Moonbase security. "There's a nuclear bomb planted somewhere in the oxygen factory," she repeated a dozen times. There was no answer from Moonbase.

"Either we're not getting through to them or they're not getting through to us," she said, her voice brittle with apprehension.

"Maybe they think it's a nut call."

He sensed her shaking her head. "They've got to check it out. They can't let a warning about a nuclear bomb go without checking on it."

"Nukes are pretty small. The oxygen plant's damned big."

"Unow," she answered "I know. And there isn't much

I'd.

tilue.-

Jay realized that they were flying toward the imminent nuclear explosion. Like charging into the mouth of the cannon, he thought.

He heard himself say, "You were damned good back

there. You could have taken both of them by yourself."

"No, that's not likely," she replied absently, her mind obviously elsewhere. "I was counting on your help and you came through."

A long silence. Then Kelly asked, "Will those two have enough air in the shelter to last until their friends pick them up?"

4

Probably. I only took the emergency backup bottles. Who the hell cares about them, anyway?"

"No sense killing them."

"Why not? They'd kill us. They're trying to blow up Moonbase and kill everybody, aren't they?"

A longer silence. They were descending now. The ground was slowly, languidly coming closer. And closer.

"Will one nuke really be enough to wipe out the whole base," Kelly asked

"Depends on its size. Probably won't vaporize the whole base. But they're smart to put it in the oxygen factory. Like

'PEACEKEEPERS 253

the heart. The blast will destroy -

ion. No O2 for life support, or

still the Moon's major export prod-

jbw that."

6 will kick up a helluva lot of debris, too. Like

bomb

eteor impacting. The splash will cover the solar-farms, I'll bet. Electricity production goes down zero."

muttered something unintelligible.

ad to admire the terrorists' planning., "They won't hurt my people directly. They'll force Moonbase to shut down. Somebody'll have to evacuate a couple thousand back to Earth. Neat job."

ground was coming up faster now. Automatically the computer fired its little rocket engine and they then landed with hardly a thump.

must be a couple of clicks from the factory," Jay

'!"You stay here and keep transmitting a warning. I'll
the factory and see what's happening there."
11, no!" Kelly snapped. "We're both going to the

Y1.

iat's stupid. .

Dn't get macho on me, Yank, just when I was starting
you. Besides, you might still be one of the bad guys.
ot letting you out of my sight."

e grinned at her, knowing that she could not see it
ugh the helmet visor. "You still harbor suspicions
it me?"

)fficially, yes."

And unofficially?" he asked.

@'We're wasting time. Let's get moving."

There was less than a half hour remaining by the time
reached the oxygen f actory

@Iftls big!" Kelly said. Their suit radios worked now-, they
outrun the jammers.

"There's a thousand T)aces they
. could tuck a nuke in
here."

"Where the hell are the Moonbase security people?"
Jay took a deep breath. Where would I place a nuke, to
do the maximum damage? Not out here at the periphery of
the factory. Deep inside, where the heavy machinery is.
The rock crushers? No. The ovens and- electric arc separa-
tors.

"Come on," he commanded.
They ducked under conveyor belts, dodged maintenance
robots gliding smoothly along the factory's concrete pad
with arms extended semi-menacingly at, the intruding
humans. Past the rock crushers, pounding so thunderously
that Jay could feel their raw power vibrati along his
ng
bones. Past the shaker screens where the crushed rock and
sandy soil were sifted.
Up ahead was the heavy stuff, the steel complex of
electrical ovens and the shining domes protecting the
lightning-bolt arcs that extracted pure oxygen from the
lunar minerals. The area was a maze of pipes. Off at one
end of it stood the tall cryogenic tanks where the precious
oxygen was stored.

it was dark in there. The meteor screen overhead shut
out the Earthlight, and there were only a few lamps
scattered here and there. The maintenance robots did not
need lights, and humans were discouraged from tinkering
with the automated machinery.

"It's got to be somewhere around here," Jay told Kelly.
They separated, each hunting frantically for an object
that was out of place, a foreign invading cell in this almost
living network of machinery that pulsed like a heart and
produced oxygen for its human dependents to breathe.

"Four minutes 'til the nuke goes offl-
The words rasped in Jay's earphones. He knew that Kell
y
was nearly exhausted. He was himself: soaked with sweat
and bone-tifed.

PEACEKEEPER 255

14@

be here someplace. Desperation edged her
JV: minutes and counting.
ed in the midst of the pulsing machinery, took
)fAhe antistatic pads from his leg pouch, and
cleared his helmet visor of the dust that had
rated there.
immediately wished he hadn't.
:her pressure-suited figures had entered the factory
i. Each of them carried a 116chette gun in his gloved
as best as he could to duck behind the lumber-
wd

Weyor belt to his right. He motioned for Kelly to do
. he. She had seen them too, and squatted awkwardly
suit like a little kid playing hide-and-seek.
watched the six pressure-suited figures, his mind
Less than three minutes left! What the hell can we
'here's the base security people?
a wild instant he thought that these six might be

base security personnel. But their suits bore no
a, no Moonbase logo, no names stenciled on their
ing trapped and desperately close to death, Jay
nly yelled into his helmet microphone, "That's it! It's
ed. We can relax now."
over to him and pressed her helmet
are you ...
away and pointed with his other hand.
gabbling at each other in their Own
them ducked under a conveyor belt and
toward the tall cryogenic storage tanks.
@onie on," Jay whispered urgently at Kelly.
iey duck walked on a path parallel to the two terrorists_
ng behind the conveyors and thick pipes, detouring
nd the massive stainless-steel domes of the electric
until they came up slightly behind the pair, at the base
the storage tanks.

Jay jabbed a gloved finger, gesturing. Beneath the first of the tanks lay an oblong case completely without markings of any kind,

One of the terrorists bent over it and popped open a square panel. The other leaned over his shoulder, watching.

"We should have brought the guns from the shelter," Kelly whispered as they huddled together behind a set of smaller tanks.

"Good time to think of it."

Without straightening up, he launched himself across the ten meters separating: them from the ter'

rorists. Arms
outstretched, he slammed into the two of them and they
all
smashed against the curving wall of the storage tanks.

Jay had seen men in pressure suits fight each other. Tempers can flare beyond control even in vacuum. Most of the time they were like the short-lived shoving matches between football players encased in their protective padding and helmets. But now and then lunar workers had tried to murder one another.

He knew exactly what to do. Before either of the terrorists could react Jay had twisted the helmet release catch off the nearer one. He panicked and thrashed madly, kicking and fumbling with his gloved hands to seal the helmet again. He must have been screaming, too, but Jay could not hear him.

The second one had time to stagger to his knees, halfway facing Jay. But Kelly slammed into his side, knocking him over against the oblong crate that held the nuclear weapon.

Jay scooped up one of the fallen flfthette guns and fired a trio of darts into the man's chest. The suit lost its stiffness as the air blew out of it, spewing blood through the holes. He turned to see the other terrorist fleeing madly away, legs flailing as he bounced and sailed in the low gravity, hands still fumbling with his helmet seal.

"One minute!" Kelly shouted.

PEXCEKEEPERS 257

h6d the dead body away and grabbed at-the nuke.-

r.

0@heavy fo

little Moon," he grunted as he jerked the two-
kg case off the concrete floor and hefted it to his
their guns. Cover me,"

way," he said. "Take
yan, straight up now, five meters at a stride, no
rock

..Back the way they had come, toward the
if this thing's salvage-fused we're finished, Jay
self But the first thing they do when they decOm
a weapon is remove-the fusing. I hope.

-suited figure flashed in front of him, then
ssure

6d went down, grabbing at its chest. out of the side
ing, to catch-Up

visor Jay saw two more figures rac
M.'One of them tried to jump over some-pipes
istomed to the lunar gravity, he leaped too hard and

d into an overhead conveyor belt
didn't need a watch, his pulse was thundering in his
)unding, off the seconds. He, saw the rock-crushing
es up ahead, felt a sting in one leg, then another in
le.

suit radio wasn't working. Or maybe he had shut it
ck there somewhere, he didn't remember. His vision
turring, everything was going shadowy. All he could
as the big conveyor belt trundling lunar rocks up to
nding jaws of the crusher.

nar gravity or not, the package on his shoulder
ied a ton. He staggered, he tottered, he reached the
eyor belt at last and with the final microgram of his
the

gth he heaved the bulky package of death onto
-strewn belt and watched the crusher's ferocious steel
corroded with dirt and stained by chemicals, crunch
Wrily into the obscene oblong package of death.
knew if the bomb went off. His world turned
and oblivious.

The first face he saw when he opened his eyes again was his father's.

J. W. Hazard was sitting by the hospital bed, gazing intently at his son. For the first time Jay could remember, his father's grim, weathered face looked softened, concerned. Instead of the hard-bitten, driving man Jay had known, Hazard seemed at a loss, almost bewildered, as he shied down at his son.- His eyes seemed misted over. Even his iron-gray hair seemed slightly disheveled, as if he had been running his hands through it.

"You're going to be okay, Jay-Jay," he whispered. "You're going to pull through all right."

Jay's mouth felt as if it were stuffed with cotton. He tried to swallow.

"What are you doing here, Dad?"

"I came up when they told me what you'd done."

"What did I do?"

"You saved Moonbase, son. They damn near killed you, but you kept the nuke from going off." There was pride in the older man's voice.

"The girl ... Kelly?"

His father smiled slightly. "She's outside. Want to see her?"

"Sweet."

Hazard got to his feet carefully, not entirely certain of himself in the low gravity. We're still on the Moon, Jay realized. His father was in full uniform: sky-blue tunic and trousers with gold piping and the diamond-cluster insignia that identified him as director-general of the International Peacekeeping Force.

Kelly came buzzing into the room on an electric wheelchair, one leg wrapped in a plastic bandage.

"You're hurt," Jay blurted, feeling woolly-headed, stupid.

"They didn't give up after you tossed the nuke into the

PEACEKEEPERS

she explained cheerfully. "We had a bit of a young lady," Hazard said, his gravelly voice bellowing, not only held within four at the same time, but managed to patch your suit saving your life." uttered, "Thanks. A lot."

With his hands behind his back and standing in the middle of the hospital room, Hazard listened to the conversation. "The terrorists had launched an attack on the Moonbase security office itself, & signed the base security forces tied up while they planted it and waited for it to go off."

"No response from base security,"

"That's why we got no response."

"The operation," Jay said to a really was a Peacekeeper

you went into
way! We just called your father when
i@ @ long have I been out?"
SS

!e days.

ng to his father, Jay said, "You must,ve taken a
express to get here so quick-"

am

A

rd's face reddened slightly. "Well," he blustered,
all.,,

-e the only son I've got, after

u really care that much about me?

ù always cared about YOU, ll the older man said.

two of them.

ly was grinning at the for the door. "I've got to

uptly, Hazard turned

- Geneva. Got to get some forensics people up here
k at the remains of that mike. Maybe we can get some
on where it's been hidden all this time. Might help us
the others that're missing. I'll be back later."

okay, Dad. Thanks."

nksr, Hazard shot him a puzzled look.
everything."

J

260 Ben Bova

The old man made a sour face and pushed through the door.

"You're embarrassing him." Kelly laughed and wheeled her chair close to the bed,

"You saved my life," Jay said.

"Not me. You were clinically dead when the medics

reached us. They pulled you back. They assigned me a prosthetic prosthesis I was, assigned by the computers to the intelligence

,r my

personnel

lice

once

He licked his dry lips, then, "You know, for a while again, this time as deputy there, I wasn't certain that I wanted to go on living. But you the rank of major. Hazard made me decide. I really owe you a lot for that.

ctor, with

wff pinned

the hilged-planet insignia on

Kelly beamed at him, "Welcome back to life, Jay.

y coll".

Welcome back to the human race."

4i The

situation I found was precarious.

isarmament

was stalled because Shamaes

Ile

nuclear arsenal gave the major powers

!4y excuse

to .-- to their own

The

tonnages of

IPF had

ed several snu wars and the largish between India and Pakistan, but no ruly believed that world peace could be _nUmed unless and until the big powers -,4isarmed themselves seriously. That meant finding Shamar, a task that the IPF could

12ot do.

Which is why Red Eagle continued to -dew with Cole Alexander, despite his ng misgivings. And why I made it my growl

business

to channel every piece of

intelligence about Shamar and his nuclear to Red Eagle.

weapons

WASHINGTON D.

Year 8

THE night was balmy as Coie Alexander walked the length of the reflecting pool and started up the granite steps of the Lincoln Memorial. He felt a burning anxiety growing within him.

We're close, he told himself We're almost there. Shamar's almost in our grasp- And afterward ... He trembled with anticipation.

Taking a deep calming breath of the night air, he inhaled a flowery fragrance. The cherry trees? he wondered. No, more like good old magnolias.

Out there in the darkness, he knew, were Kelly and Pavel. Shadowing him. Protecting him. Alexander grinned sourly. I'm more in danger from muggers around here at this time of night than from Sharnar. But his daughter had

262

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her mind that he must be accompanied by a
*, When Pavel had immediately volunteered,
did that she go along, too.

me against the Red? Is she still suspicious of
Aect

she just want to be with him? Suspicious% he
does

@Strangely Alexander himself felt confident Of
As long as we don't put him in conflict with
Dyalty-

WS from Moscow, the kid will be okay, he told
Neoclassic Greek, temple of the Memorial building
AY empty this close to midnight; only a few diehard
around its

and romantic couples stood scattered
aring up at the great brooding marble statue of the
:hYresident. Subdued lighting in the ceiling cast
ight-like shadows across the hollows of Lincoln's
cheeks.

Alexander silently. Look at that
Honest Abe, said

You sure as hell saw your share of troubles, didn't
, xander turned to see Harold Red Eagle climbing the
slowly, with the ponderous decorum that was his
mark , Christ, he's almost as wide as the columns
89 up the roof, Alexander thought. But he's slowed
He's not just being dignified'. he's getting old.
bit stiffly, Red Eagle walked straight toward Alexander
extended his massive hand.

ie meet again, Mr. Alexander," he said in a low lion'
@ting the Amerind's hand engulf his own, Alexander
d that Red Eagle's grip was firm but not hard. The
z

Man was a true gentleman: he had the strength to crush
es, yet he withheld that strength. instead of foolish
)lays intended to frighten lesser men, Red Eagle hu&-
ded his power and used it only where and when it was
rssary.

It's been nearly six years," Alexander said.
That long? Yes, I suppose it has."

X4 Ben Bova

"YOU picked a dramatic place to meet."
The Amerind made a small smile. -I felt it best to be discreet. You didn't land your iffying boat in the Potomac, did youT'

With a chuckle, Alexander replied, "No, it's up near Baltimore,, at the old Martin Marietta seaplane facility. Came down here on the tube train like any ordinary citizen. Took twelve minutes, station to station." Red Eagle glanced around at the half-dozen other, scattered around the shadowy floor. Two of the couples were heading for the stairs. That left only a young Asian fly, the mother-holding her sleeping child in her arms. She had already placed an incredibly sensitive micro-

came into the Memorial.

64I Joan

found, over the years, that there are some conversations that should not be overheard," Red Eagle said.

"or even remembered," Alexander added.,

Red Eagle fixed him with a stare

then admitted, "True

enough."

Alexander began pacing slowly. Red Eagle walked beside him like a dark glacier gliding across the marble floor.

guess You know why I need the Peacekeeper

cooper-

ation," Alexander began.

-If you want their help to, attack Shamar and the drug manWturim center in those mountains, I'm afraid that will be impossible.-

"I understand that. No, what I need is some intelligence

11

data ...

"On where the bombs arelocatedr,

6

'No, on where the major drug manufacturing centers

are- The biggest ones, around the world,"

"What makes you think the..

"IPF surveillance satellites

can spot them," Alexander

W._PER9 265

impatience. "You send reconnaissance

them out.,*

i referring to the Peacekeeper routine aerial

that they may occasionally pick up

illicit drug manufacturing facilities. All such

is@ handed over to the national government in

the facility exists."

for 'Forget It,'" snapped Alexan-

at the little family reiding the plaque

Address Red Eagle lowered

Mr.

why you are inter-

this information?"

phone, the size of a penny, on the marble floor. It would be

ader looked up at the big Amerind and shrugged as

picked up the following Morning before the cleaning crew J

antly as he could. "Since we've gotten 'involved

ize how serious the

A is problem in Colombia, I real
we get Shamar for you, I think well -20
d centers."

rug

for several moments. He clasped his
back and" paced away from Alexander,
figtire Of
floor and past the seated

the

Alexander thought, Theyre damned near
size, the statue and the Injun Chief.
e Asian family left, yawning. Red Eagle and Alexander
s massive marble likenes&
left alone with Lincoln

the microphone.

@;brning

Red Eagle said slowly, "Mr.

back to Alexander
afraid that I don't entirely believe what
ll
me.

thought he would. "Really?"

- he said. "We

let it pass, for the moment,
services. Your motivations are not my
future plans are. . ."-he hesitated,
-"something to consider in the future."
something, and its big, Alexander realized.

just

me get away with the evasions I've

2" Ben

.....

handed him unless

Something much more impor-

tant at hand.

"You wish to, said Red We. "We wish to
the nuclear weapons he powesses. Time grows short.
get

The fuse is burning. Already Shamar has sold off one
of his
bombs. Last year he came

blose to destroying Moonbase

it!*

with

"He was stopped by a man who now works for me,
Alexander pointed out.

-Hazard s son. Yes, I know.'

"You think Shamaes, getting desperateT

Red Eagle shook his head slowly. "I believe he wants us
to think he is b

ooming desperate. He@ still has five nuclear
weapons. One of them is here in Washi

ngton ... \$'

-W14011

Raising A giant hand in a gesture of calm, Red Eagle said,
"It has been found and disarmed. shamae

s people do not
know that. They believe it to be still intact and ready to be
used.`

-Where was itr

"In a private house on Pennsylvania Avenue, only a few
blocks from Capitol Hill. It is still there. Waiting."

,But why .. r,

"The Russians found another one in Moscow. A third
paris.'s

one was discovered in

Alexander drew in a deep breath to calm the pulse racing
through his veins. "I get it. Shamar wants to immobilize
the nations that might go after him.

"Precisely so," said Red E. "As far as we know, he
SO believes each Of those bombs to be armed and capable
of, being detonated when he gives the word."

6

'So he thinks he can hold Fhnce, Russia and the States

't

captive.

"So we believe."

66 we,9

in this caw, is whor' Alexander asked.

A look of astonishment came across Red Eagles normal-

PEACEKEEPERS 267

d@@. "Why the Peacekeepers, of course Who
keepers found those bombs and deactivated
T."ce

sors located the

Eagle replied, "Peacekeeper sen
As you yourself said earlier, Mr. Alexander, we do
lance satellites in orbit and drone aircraft
rveil

most of the world's land surface.

himself Alexander silently replied, And you've all-
out the world's major opium fields and drug
luring centers, I'll bet.

and their information with each
Peacekeepers share
government's top security agency. In Washington,
'the Federal Bureau of Investigation that found and
the KGB."

ed@ the nuclear weapon. In Moscow,
doesn't know their teeth have been
Shamar

A

Alexander asked.
believe not."

hat s three bombs. Where are the other two?"
is in Colombia, at the site where Shamar himself is
t in Bogoti,
We believe he is making plans to place i
ital."
ces sense. And the fifthbne?"
t is where you come into the picture, Mr. Alexan-

rm

need your force to get to the fifth bomb and disa
without letting Shamar's people know that you have
SO.

y people? Why me?"

cannot possibly trust the local government
ecause we
nation where the bomb has been hidden."
@y not? Where is it?"
, Eagle fell silent again, and stood as still as the
ing statue that loomed above them both.

he said at last, "I

Before I tell YOU that, Mr. Alexander,

Id appreciate it if You told me why You want the
@@I,"tions of the major drug manufacturing facilities."

se around the bush, Alexander
There's no sense beating "I want
told himself. Better spit it right'Out. more than
that," he said. "I want Sharnar's bombs. All five of them.
Intact."

"No, Mr. Alexander. That is not possible."

Ignoring the refusal, Alexander explained, "I've spent six
years tracking down Shamar. Now that we're close to
getting him, I realize that he's not the only mass murderer
walking on God's green earth. The drug dealers are killing
millions each year.@ I'm going to wipe, them out,. one by

11

one.

Red Eagle's massive head drooped on his shoulders, his
chin sinking to his broad chest. His eyes closed, his
shoulders sagged. For a moment Alexander thought that
the man was undergoing a heart attack or some incredible,
unbearable pain.

"The fault is my own," he said slowly, so softly that
Alexander barely heard him. "I knew it would come to
this."

"I can accomplish what the Peacekeepers can't do and
the national governments won't do," Alexander urged. "I
can destroy the drug centers ...

"And kill how many?"

"They're criminals! Killers!"

.1

Are the farmers and shepherds downwind of your
nuclear attacks also criminals?" Red Eagle asked. "You
know what fallout can do, Mr. Alexander. You, of all
people, should know."

"The centers are in remote areas . .

"Such as MarseilleT'

"We'll get that one with different methods.,,

The huge Amerind seemed on the verge of tears. "The
one thing I feared when I first contacted you six years ago
was that you would start to enjoy your work too much. I
told you then, Mr. Alexander, that I wanted no vigilantes
or assassins. I will brook none now."

PEACEKEEPERS 269

hold down the furies burning within hi
others who'll Pay me to
:rcountered, "There are
the drug dealers."

Peacekeepers, not with

will work against the
YOU
it?

r

Oe stared at him. "I am sorry, Mr. Alexande -
3uship is at an end."

n to walk away.

fast!,, Alexander called, scampering to catch up
to nail Shamar.

'4llve got my people ready

M.

ng to change that."

S 90i

Fage stopped and looked down at Alexander. For

him, as if his
moment he seemed to peering through
med X rays. Alexander stood up to that gaze, his
y eyes blazing.

so
i Alexander who broke the deadlock- "Don't be
his voice sound
hasty,11 he said trying to make
t Shamar, you want the nukes. We can still
wan
te on that."

you want
have just told me, Mr. Alexander, that
nd the nuclear weapons."

a han
fing Shamar is St ill more important to me t
he told
else," Alexander said. It was even true,
@don't know that I can trust you anymore." 14SO
ered, don't
inning crookedly, Alexander count

n we go in after
me. just don't get in my way whe
11
iar.

is still that fifth nuclear bomb," Red Eagle
red.
ess you,ii have to. find somebody else for that one,"
Alexander. as
here is nobody else," Red Eagle admitted. "At le
one who can be called in so quickly."
It
@Then let us get it for you."

270 :Den Bova

*.So

that@ You can steal it and use it for your Vigilante
justicer

Puffing out a long, defeatA@eath, Alexander lied, "No,
goddammit. I guess that was a dumb idea, after all."

Red Eagle said nothing for several moments' He knows
I'm lying in my teeth, Alexander thought. Question is, can
he do anything else or will he have to deal with me?

'Mr. Alexander," the Amerind said at last, "I propose a
truce.

"A truces"

"You disarm the fifth bomb and get Shamar. Then w

e

"I discuss ways and means of cooperating in attacking the
divg centers."

.'You mean it?"

Raising a giant paw, Red Eagle added, "Without nuclear
weapons. There are other possibilities. Our researchers
h ave developed nonlethal chemical weapons. And biologi-
cal agents might be used against, the crops themselves ...
His deep voice trailed off into a faint rumble, leaving the
abilities dangli

poss ng.

"You'vq got a deal," Alexander said, extending his hand.

Red Eagle shook it, again taking care- not to exe rt too
much strength. But to Alexander it seemed that the Amer-
ind's handclasp somehow lacked the warmth and friend-
ship of their meeting, only minutes earlier.

He doesn't trust me anymore, Alexander said to himself.
Maybe he never did. Question is, how far can I trust him,
now?

Aloud he asked, "Now this fifth bomb. Just where in hell
is it that the local government can't go after it?"

'.Barcelona."

Alexander felt puzzled. "Barcelona? In Spain?"

"Yes."

"What's so touchy about the Spanish government that
you can't inform Madrid about the bomb?"

Pacing slowly out onto the broad front portico of the

PEACEKEEPERS 271

to the place where Martin Luther King spoke of

Red Eagle explained-

is going through another of its traumatic seizures,
bat@has led to civil war in the past. The Basques,
onians, even the Andalusians are demanding
rnment of Ma-

autonomy from the central gove

nation of Spain may cease to exist. it may break

seven or eight independent entities, each with its

vernment its own economy, even its own Ian-

-der nodded understandingly. "But I don't see

--b. .

is extremely clever," Red Eagle went on. "That
makes him so dangerous. Barcelona is the capital of
of the regions struggling the hardest for
one

my. The city is about to dedicate the first nuclear
lant in Spain-a Russian fusion reactor, by the
Imanced with loans from French banks."

bomb -is there?"
place for it, Mr. Alexander Madrid
the fusion system; the Catalonians,
the national government wanted to
nstead of
power plant at the capital i
clona. Imagine what would happen if the Plant ex-
ed in a nuclear fireball soon after being turned on.,
rid would blame the Catalonians for the 'accident.
Catalonians would become enraged at Madrid."
er mused, "And hydrogen fusion power would
and
-worse- than Three Mile Island
the old fission power plants."
nothing of destroying much of the city of
a million or more people."
into an almost evil smile, Alexander
"When did you say they're turning on the fusion
Ptr
'The official dedication is aweek from today."

272 Ben Bova

"That doesn't give us much time."

"The bomb will not be set off until the following week."

Alexander's brows shot up. "How do you know that?"
With a heavy sigh, Red Eagle replied, "There will be an international conference in Barcelona during that week. Most of the leaders of the Peacekeepers will be there, including Director-General Hazard and his top aides."
"Jesus Christ!"

"With the proper timing, the bomb could decapitate the IPF."

"That's what Shamar is after!"

Red Eagle allowed a slight smile to cross his somber face.
"I will be there also, Mr. Alexander. The bomb will also assassinate me.. if it goes off."

Red Eagle literally placed his life, in Alexander's hands. And Alexander had to postpone his planned strike against Shamar, bringing his 1,000 people to Barcelona.

MCELONAS

L@Year 8

DRESSED in a chocolate-brown leather open-necked sport shirt and neatly creased navy slacks, Jay Hazard watched through the masses. Open to the sky, the city seemed to be a parade ground. The way as the entire city of three million paraded by. The Ramblas was the heart of Barcelona. A broad avenue lined with bars, restaurants, shops and theaters. It extended from the high pillar bearing Christopher Columbus's statue down by the waterfront to the spark of the fountain of canaries, in midtown. On Sundays everyone in the city went to church, had a good dinner and a winter moon stroll on the Ramblas. Then he went for an afternoon stroll. As he sat by the

Hazard was not interested in everyone. He held a glass of pale yellow Rioja wine, and stood in the doorway, nursing a

his blue-Way eyes sought only one man's face, a face he
 a onal holographic picture.
 seen only'in three-dimensi

Instead, he saw Kelly, sitting out across the nar
 motorway at the sidewalk tables, sipping a tiny cup of
 lethal local version of coffee. Hazard had never seen he
 skirt before. Her legs certainly look enough to show
 a good
 Off, he thought, but she had always worn slacks or jeans.
 Now, however, she was in a tourist's disguise: bright yellow
 skirt, flowered blouse, and'a glitter-decorated sweater to
 protect her against the springtime chill. She had even put a
 bright ribbon in her boyishly cropped red hair.

Kellysaw him watching her and smiled at him. Hazard
 made himself smile back. She seems to like me, he thought.
 Maybe too much. She's been damned helpftd testifying on
 MY behalf to get me off the Moon, getting me this job with
 her father's outfit. But I can't let myself get attached to her.
 Not now. Not yet.

Pavel Zhakarov was out there in the crowd somewhere,
 too, trying to blend in and look inconspicuous while
 staying close enough to back them up. Pavel's trained for
 this kind of thing, Hazard thought, wondering in the back
 Of his mind how far he could trust the Russian.

'@He says he's in love with me," Kelly had told him one
 afternoon as they studied satellite photos of Shamar's base
 nearValledupar.

"I know," Hazard had replied.

"But I don't love him," she,had announced firmly-
 "Pavel's nice, but-I don't love him.'

She had glanced up at him as if she expected him to say
 something, make some declaration. Hazard said not a
 word. There was nothing for him to say.

He forced his attention back to the job at hand. The man
 they were looking for was known only as Julio. They had
 nothing more than the three-dimensional photo by Which
 to identify him. He was a technician at the new fusion

PEACEKEEPERS X75

had

claimed

es

v,:andthleff intelligebnocme that he
 -piece nuclear b there for \$hama
 to get his final payment for his work
 fact, he was -
 ly afternoon, at this'particular bar.
 ng to IPF intelligence-
 Sipped at the strong wine. It tasted of iron. He
 r, and had gotten out of
 been much of a drinke
 -entirely during his years at Moonbase. I the baes
 Iligence, he mused silently. While
 rs hammered out American pop rock and young
 and the snacks they called
 ifted in for a drink
 ard thought about the Peacekeepers and@ the
 he had thrown away-
 gives/us all the info we need, he thought, but
 get

do the dirty work. They can't let themselves
workings of a country,
terfering with the internal
do , if that isn't I PF interference,
can hire us to It-
at the dingdong dell is it?
ly smart. They don't want the
re smart, damnab
to know that they-re taking over the whole world,
e by, little that's just what they're, doing- While
prison, the Peaceke ers are
and the others rot in ep
they'd do: building a world
ust what the rebels said
nent for themselves.

r leader, in fact.
My father is one of them- Thei
shook his head as if trying to clear cobwebs from
a damned'good world leader, he
*ts. Dad makes
d to himself. But Augustus was a damned good
too. And look what followed him. Tiberius.
-la.

d dead as Julio sauntered into
thoughts were stOPPe ne, bum sm
No mistaking the face: receding hairli
-left cheek.

d grab the
,lding back the impulse to leap UP an
mnician, Hazard watched as Julio ordered a beer at the

bar and then took it to one of the tables toward the room. He was trying to look casual about it, but so tense that his legs seemed unable to bend at the

Hazard could not see that far back into the crowd. He picked up his glass of wine and pushed through the crowd. Yes, there he was, with a big German-looking guy, blond and square-jawed. Handing Julio a thick envelope. The payoff, no doubt, Hazard put the wineglass to his lips while he snapped a picture of the two men with the minicamera built into his belt buckle.

As if the German heard the shutter click, his head snapped up and he stared directly at Hazard. As calmly as he could, Jay put his glass down on the bar and made his way toward the washroom.

Inside, he flattened against the tiled wall just next to the door, waiting for the German to come in after him. A minute passed. Jay opened the door and stepped out into the bar again. Julio and the German were gone.

Shinola! Hazard groused to himself, diving into the crowd, shoving his way to the front.

Kelly's table was empty too. She's following them. But which way' did they -go?

The Ramblas was filled with strolling people: young couples, families with little children, elder men and women enjoying their Sunday afternoon outing.

Jay saw that Kelly's coffee cup was no longer on its saucer. It had been placed at the edge of the table, its tiny handle pointing outward. He started off in the direction the handle pointed, pushing, dodging around knots of people, almost running in his haste to find Kelly and the men she was trailing.

His heart, pounding, he spotted her after less than a minute.

Pulling up alongside her, he admitted breathlessly, "The blond guy. He saw me and took off."
"The nervous type," Kelly said.

PEACEKEEPERS 277

were walking briskly about half a block.

),,men US

hem.

?s PaveIT'

would somewhereM don't worry," said Kelly.

it to get away from me. If they turn around and

other ..

Itight-11

Hazard started to move away from Kelly, the

lid turn around. He pushed Julio in one direction,

:ed sprinting in the other.

Ing

the blonde, Kelly shouted, taking off after Julio

I dodged around a family of half a dozen children,

her pushing still another infant in a carriage and

the German. He was musing up the promenades

r. He barged

I over people like a football runner

and sent both the man and

into an elderly couple

an sprawling. Hazard ran after him, gaining as he

over the fallen bodies.

the German whirled, a gun in his hand.
ground as the pistol boomed twice.
scattered. Stone chips cut Hazard's
smacked into the pavement, inches

-dashing

feet, Hazard saw the German
street where cars inched along bumper to
a
after him, cutting in front of an Hispano
teenagers. The driver blared his horn
at him. It was in Spanish but her
ran

On a narrow alley lined with shops the German
moved close behind him. This ancient part of the city, the
historic Quarter, was honeycombed with twisting alleys
had been turned into a sprawling shopping arcade, a
quiet motor
of bazaar. No cars allowed, only the ubi
ters weaved in and out among the pedestrians-
red every which way, shrieking with sudden
le scatte
. rlp

fiar and anger as the gun-waving Gernianplowe
the thrOng. The blond turned and took swift a
Hazard slammed into a doorway. Two more I
heard the flat crack of the bullets whi
izzing past.

Hazard stuck his head out and saw the Germal
again. The crowd that had been ambling along
window-shopping, made way for him like 'the
parting before the Israelites. Hazard ran in 'the 4
wake, i i on him.
gaining

He ducked into a side alley. Hazard ran after h
burning. He skidded to a stop before turning tb
Perfect spot for him to stop and set up a shot at
As Hazard cautiously approached the

comer c the old
Stone buildi4 he heard a motor scooters raucous snarl.
People screaming- A shot, then another. The screech of I J
tires on worn paving stones. All in less than five seconds.

He Peered around the Comer. The peder anians were
flattened against the shop windows and doorways. A motor
scooter was skidding down the alley on its side, striking
sparks, its motor racing and wheels still spi

nning, the
Young woman who had been driving it tumbling over
across the

stone pavement, her arms and legs flailing, her
leather jacket covered with bright red blood, her long hair
wn

crimson with blood, half her face blo away.

The German was down on one knee, aiming at a second
scooter roaring straight at him, its young male driver bent
over 'his handlebars, his lips pulled back in a snarl of
vengeance.

Hazard watched as the German tried to fire the pistol. it
was either empty or jammed. The scooter slammed into
him with 'the sound of a hammer hitting a watermelon. its
driverwent flying over the handlebars, hit the pavement
with a bone-snapped thud, and rolled fi ea-d over heels to
end up almost touching his murdered girlfriend.

Hazard rushed to the German. He was not dead yet, but
in enormous agony. Blood leaked from his mouth. His eyes

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pain and shock. Every bone in his 'body
Jay thought.

cautiously approaching the dead and
dies. Off in the distance Hazard heard the waft of a
ren. He backed away, edging through the t XIC en-
d, unable to understand their murmuring Catalan,
le his way back toward the Ramblas. His legs were
v i ghi

omit was surging inside him, burnin is. throat.
gopped at one of the small fountains built -into the
. Of a building and doused his face with cold water.
3g against the stone wall, he forced himself to take
time

ungfuls of air. By the he got back to the hotel
he, Kelly and Pavel were staying, he had himself
some semblance of control. Barely.

and Pavel shared one room, Kelly had the adjoining rooms with sturdy furniture. Spacious, high-ceilinged. They had seen decades of wear. Their windows overlooked the busy, bustling Ramblas.

He saw the unconscious form of Kelly opening the door. Hazard was sprawled on Kelly's bed. Pavel was sitting on the edge of the bed, Kelly over at the desk, pecking away at the keyboard to her lap computer.

He looked up as he entered.

They both

Kelly leaped to her feet and ran to Hazard. "You're giving me the worst scratches."

He threw her arms around his neck. "I heard shots. I was so worried."

She disengaged her arms. The look on Pavel's

Gently Hazard

was awful: he was trying to hide his jealousy and was flinching miserably.

"I, 'You got him,'" Hazard said to the Russian.

Pavel blinked and squared his shoulders. "Yes, we got what we wanted." He lifted an empty

the bedside table.

"Where's Kelly?" Kelly asked.

2M Ben Bova

Hazard explained what had happened.'

"Is he dead?" asked Pavel.

"Probably. I couldn't hang around and wait for the police to arrive. Somebody might have told them rd been chasing him."

Kelly went to the door that connected to her room. "I've got a first-aid kit in MY bag.

Frowning at her urgency, Pavel said, "He might have told us more about Shamar's plans."

"He's not going to talk to anybody for a while," Hazard countered.

in the - quiet moonlitnight, the power plant looked strangely small and simple to Hazard. No smokestacks, of course. But no cooling towers, either. No huge dome of a containment building. Just a small windowless flat-topped concrete structure with an even smaller one-story office building attached at one side, down at the end of the long pier.

They're going to generate a thousand megawatts from something that small? Hazard asked himself Intellectually, lie knew that inside that rikodest building a @tiny man-made star had been created, fed by nothing more than heavy hydrogen. No moving parts. No spinning turbines or armatures or massive machinery that looks so impressive. The more advanced the technology, Hazard thought, the simpler and smaller the hardware.

The three of them were sitting in a rented Honda-Ford sedan, dressed in black turtlenecks and slacks, wearing noiseless black sneakers. Hazard was behind the wheel, Pavel beside him, and Kelly in the back with the drugged Julio sleeping peacefully.

'Security's a snap," Kelly had told them, once she had analyzed Julio's truth-serum ramblings back at the hotel. Looking at the fusion power plant buildings from their parking spot along the waterfront, Hazard had to- agree

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her. A chain link fence was all the physical security he I see. Of course, there were all sorts of electronic cards as well, but Kelly assured them that she could ast them with no trouble.

ey don't expect to be attacked, Hazard realized.

been no demonstrations against fusion power.

have given everybody the illusion that

4nd terrorism are a thing of the past. They're not

ried about security.

i's mind drifted back to the Anal I briefing they had agone, in Cole Alexander's jet seaplane, moored in the of Gibraltar.

W, it want that nuke," Alexander had told them. Insisted their misgivings. Kelly had argued against it. and even Barker.

dangerous to bring that thing aboard this had grumbled. "Foolish thing to do."

gave him a parody of a smile. "Saf@ as a Chris.- Why, in the bad old days a B- I bomber 'would carry thousands of megatons worth of bombs. No

"I flew a NATO bomber back then," the crippled Englishman retorted, "and I always sweated."

"The bomb comes to me," Alexander repeated, tappin g

4he glass top of the map table for emphasis. "ThAWs- the dad. We'll land in Barcelona harbor just before dawn and take it and you guys"-he waved a finger at Kelly, Hazard and Pavel-"back to Valledupar."

"I don't like it," Hazard said.

"I don't care if you like it or not," Alexander snapped.

"But why do you want it?" Kelly asked. "Why not deliver it to the IPFT"

Alexandees smile twisted slightly wider. "Shamar's got a nuke, doesn't he? I want to be able to deal with him on -equal terms."

Sitting in the car, sizing up the fusion power plant,

Hazard realized that Pavel had said nothing during the discussion about the nuclear weapon. Not a word. It wasn't that he had nothing to say, or that he didn't care. Hazard knew the Russian better than that. He's got his orders from Moscow, Jay told himself. Whatever his personal opinions about, this might be, he'll do what Moscow has told him to do.

"All right," Kelly said from the shadows of the car's rear seat. "It's time to get moving."

"Yousurehe'sgoingtobeokay?" iHazardjerkedathumb at Julio. The man was utterly limp, head laid back against the seat cushions, mouth gaping open. He was breathing deeply, evenly.

"Nothing will wake him for at least four morehours," Pavel assured him.

They left the car and walked to the gate blocking the entrance to the pier. Kelly fiddled with a palm-sized black box and the lock flickered its tiny red lights, then clicked open.

..Pretty easy," Hazard muttered.

"Opening the lock is no problem," Kelly explained. "Opening it without its sending an alarm to the central security program-that's the tough part."

The three of them sprinted down the length of the pier. This was the most vulnerable part of their mission: out in the open, under the bright moon, with no place to hide. Pespite all the electronic gadgetry, if some security guard should happen to look in their direction they would be instantly spotted.

But the building was windowless and no one patrolled outside. They got to the shadow of its *aII, panting slightly from the run. Hazard leaned against the concrete. It felt warm. From the day's sunlight, he told himself. It's not radioactive.

The city's lights were glittering as far as the eye could see, far outnumbering the stars shining in the pale sky. The

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of the harbor lapped gently and sparkled in the moonlight. A romantic spot. Hazard thought,briefly. and, Kelly were here alone, under other circum- p to the roof,"Kelly whispered.

ml led the way. Up to the roof to a skylight and down a leing nylon rope. In swift succession they touched down floor. The fusion reactor was a small dome of ess steel, barely taller than Hazard himself But he @Ahat within that dome were several,layers of the lest, densest alloys that human ingenuity could create, pipes that carried liquid sodium, deuterium, and strange fluids. And at the core of it all a minuscule glowed fiercely, radiating hot neutrons that could fry a cinders in less time than it would take him to fall to were other, bulkier shapes of machines in the area. rs and electrical conditioning equipment, n in the reduced night lighting of the ceil high overhead. The building was just one large almost filled with machinery except for the intended for human and robotic maintenance The place hummed with power. The fusion _Jpnerator was working, converting heavy hydrogen to

-_Oe6trical energy, cleanly, cheaply, with almost the same efficiency as the Sun itself

Water in, energy out, Hazard thought. But still a part of ' ,him was frightened to be this close to the raging plasma glowering at the heart of the fusion reactor. The area was warm with throbbing hidden energies, the air seemed to ".cackle with electricity.

Don't be an idiot! he told himself. There's not enough fJoaterial in the reactor to make an explosion. He knew that. *-ut still his insides trembled.

Like three cat burglars, they glided silently along the walkways until they reached the long metal-clad channel of

the power converter. It was rectangular in shape, painted bright blue.

"Should be wedged in under here," Kelly whispered, dropping to her knees for a better look.

Pavel knelt beside her. "Is that it?"

A metal box the size of a very large suitcase. It had been painted the same shade of blue as the generator channel, but Hazard recognized the shape.

"That's it," he hissed.

He and Pavel flattened themselves on the floor and tugged the case open while Kelly stood guard over them. Then she used the electronics gear she carried to open the locks.

Hazard swung the lid back and played his penlight across the panel. "Bingo," he said.

"First thing we do is deactivate it," Kelly said.

It took nearly half an hour, but finally she said, "Okay. It's on safe now. Won't go off even if you chomp it up in an ore grinder." She grinned at Hazard.

He smiled back at her.

Then he heard himself say, "There's one more thing we've got to do."

"What?"

"Remove the fissionable material."

Kelly's eyes glinted with sudden terror in the shadowy fighting. Even Pavel looked shocked.

"I'm not turning this device over to your father or anybody else," Hazard said, "in a condition where it could be used."

Pavel nodded vigorously. "I agree."

They both turned to Kelly.

She hesitated, biting her lip. Finally she said, "It's too dangerous. You're talking about plutonium. The risks."

He cupped her chin in his hand. "I have to do it, Kelly. Nobody should have a live nuclear bomb to play with. Not even your father."

she whispered bleakly.

"I'll have to take the fissionable material out of it."

"If it's so dangerous."

"If you know how. I've worked with warheads

The plutonium's always protected by plenty of

ing." As he spoke, Hazard realized that this is what

Again making him jumpy, earlier. Not the fusion plant.

known, in his subconscious, that he was going to

disarm the bomb. He had been carrying the tools for

ever since they had left the seaplane at Gibraltar.

"What do we do?" Pavel asked.

"Get it out of my way," Hazard replied. "This is a one-

job."

There's nothing ... T'

Go back to the doors that connect with the office

in and make sure nobody disturbs me." Silently he

J, And that'll keep you fa

o that if I do

run enough away s

If the plutonium, you'll have a chance to get away-

Plutonium is not only fiercely radioactive; it is a deadly

chemical poison as well.

"Kelly was almost gasping with fear. "I won't leave you!"

insisted. "I can watch the doors from here. I won't
ve you alone!"

But Pavel took her gently by the arm and raised her to
Im feet. "Do as he says," the Russian whispered.

Hazard nodded to him. He understands the risks.

"Go with Pavel," he said to her. "I'll call you when I'm
finished here."

The Russian had to drag her away. Kelly stared after
thizard as she was hauled to a safe distance'

It was actually almost easy. Almost. Hazard had to turn
.!be heavy suitcase over, carefully unscrew six bolts and
lift the thick lead-lined oblong that held the plutoni-
It was about a third of the volume of the entire case;
the rest of the device was electronic fusing and safeguard
systems.

The bomb was not booby-trapped. He pulled up the handle that folded flush against the case's top. The lead-lined case slid out smoothly. Still, Hazard's hands were slippery with sweat, and perspiration stung his eyes.

Damned thing feels awfully light; he thought. If I didn't know better, I'd swear it was empty.

He took the hand-sized radiation meter from his pocket and ran it across the oblong box. -Hot, but not dangerously so, he told himself. Not if he didn't hold on to it for hours on end.

Getting to his feet, Hazard waved Kelly and Pavel back to him.

"Guard patrol's due in another thirty . . . Kelly saw the look on his face. "What's wrong?"

Lifting the steel case by its handle, Hazard told them, ". . . This thing is lined with lead, so it's heavier than it looks. But it feels a lot lighter than it ought to be."

"You shouldn't be holding it," Kelly said.

Pavel picked up on Hazard's meaning. "Lighter than it should be? You mean that it might be empty?"

Hazard nodded wordlessly.

"Empty? No plutonium in it?" Kelly asked.

"It should be heavier."

"Well," Pavel.

"We must check it," said

"Before we get back to the plane," Hazard added.

Kelly glanced at her wristwatch. "Rendezvous in one hour and forty-eight minutes."

"We're going to miss the rendezvous," Hazard said.

"There's an American consulate here in Barcelona. Should have X-ray equipment."

"There is also a Soviet consulate," said Pavel.

Kelly planted her fists on her hips. "And while you guys are re-inventing the Cold War, tell me what good an X-ray machine will be with a lead-lined box."

So they hauled the oversized suitcase up to the roof,

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ring up the dangling nylon rope first. Kelly

with the box

and Hazard went up last

from a length of rope attached to his waist and the meter in his pocket clicking away.

They went along the docks to the pier where the fishing boats

had come in and found the wholesalers already at work in the madhouse of

darkness. The place was a

busy place, with the bustle and smell of cranes

and go nets loaded with fish, men and women

waiting at each other, diesel trucks waiting with

clattering and fumes fouling the air.

She finally found a friendly dealer who let her weigh the case

on the scale used for weighing fish. Then she went to the

booth at the end of the pier and plugged her portable

terminal into its access port. A few taps on her keyboard

and she came back to Hazard and Pavel at the car with a

worried frown on her face.

"You're right, Jay," she said as she got into the car. "The

is almost exactly ten kilograms lighter than it should
'it were loaded with fissionable material."
Hazard clenched both hands on the steering wheel.
"There's no plutonium in it. The bomb's a fake."
"Or someone else has already disarmed it," Pavel
SUS' stated.

"It's a fake," Hazard insisted. "Shamar has the plutonium
back at his base."

"The plutonium from all of the bombs?" Kelly
wondered.

Hazard revved the car to life and started through
predawn darkness to their rendezvous point. He finds this
"Your father's going to piss himself when
pin," Hazard said.

Kelly said, "Maybe we should bring Sleeping Beauty
here along with us, to see how much he knows about this."
"Julio won't know a damned thing," Hazard shot back.

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"He's just the guy who stashed the bomb in the power plant, a guy who took a wad of money to do his employer dirt. He didn't even know it was a nuke."

Pavel said nothing. But his mind was racing with the possibility

that this new twist had opened up. None of the

days later, one of our ferret satellites possibilities looked good to him. Not one of them.

He'd picked up this series of electromagnetic nations as it cruised slightly to the south west of Moscow. The voices were identified by computerized voiceprint.

They were

Pavel Zhakarov. There is no plutonium the bomb. We conclude that Shamar has with him, and all the bombs discovered so far are duds. The plutonium discovered so far are duds.

Volynov: "K B e:

17thelPF.

Vol 0 v G op

we have heard that

in Moscow is likewise empty.

The operation against

even more important,

then.

Volynov. yes. And more difficult.

Zhakarov. I am confident that we can make a success of it.

once it is finished,

Volynov. Good

Alexander will be too dangerous to be permitted to continue.

Zhakarov (after a pause of nine seconds): You wish me to eliminate him?

Volynov: You are ordered to do so, comrade. At the earliest possible moment.

VALLEDUPAR

-Year 8

TH

The jet seaplane was moored once again in the
esar River, but this

time at a spot well above the city of
Valledupar, in a branch of the river that cut through thick
tropical growth as it curved around the base of the steep
granite mountains.

While Chris Barker worried loudly about ripping out the
hull against the shallow rocky river bottom, Alexander
urged him to nose the seaplane as close to shore as possible.
Once anchored, the whole crew spent the rest of the day
covering the broad wings and graceful fuselage with foliage
to hide it from prying eyes.

1

That evening after dinner they convened in the ward-

11

room. To an outsider, it might have looked like half a dozen

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-PEACEKEEPERS 291

Women taking their ease in casual conversation.

were not only

off.@ the dynamics of who sat where

but important.

picked the lounge chair closest to the forward
and the flight deck, the braces on his lower legs
beneath his slacks. Alma Steiner, the logistics
wore a faded gray jumpsuit cinched at the waist
an old U. Army belt, tight enough to show off her
curved figure. She sat close to Alexander himself. Jay
took a seat near the map table; Kelly automatically
the seat beside his. Pavel was off in the corner by the
bulkhead, looking alone and unhappy.

"It's been confirmed," Alexander said without preamble.
"Each one of those goddamned bombs is empty. Duds,
em.

"Why?" Barker asked. "Why go to the risk...?"
"It's not smart," Alexander interrupted with a grim
66

He gets local crazies to plant fake bombs in
ington, Moscow, Paris and Barcelona, then he makes
that the IPF finds out about it. We spin our wheels
ing to neutralize the bombs and find out what he's up
.. "While he remains here in these mountains, construct-
new bombs from the plutonium," Steiner concluded.

"Is that possible?" asked Barker.

"It isn't--too difficult," Kelly replied. "It's mainly n

baronics job, and he should have access to plenty of
people who can do the work."

"College kids have made nuclear bombs," Hazard
hinted out. "They just didn't have the fissionable material
make them go boom."

"Shamar does," Alexander said.

"Enough to make five one-hundred-kiloton bombs,"
murmured.

"Which makes the task of nailing him even more impor-
tant," said Alexander.

292 Ben Bova

Steiner took a deep breath, something she did quite well, as far as Alexander was concerned. "The mercenary troops will arrive over the next four days. Two separate groups, each of them coming in two contingents, for a total of seventy-eight men."

Alexander added, "They'll disperse their camps along the river. Cold camps, no fires, so they run the minimum risk of being detected."

"Don't you think Sbammar has the river under surveillance?" Hazard asked, his handsome face looking slightly worried.

"And spies in the city?"

With a shrug, Alexander replied, "We do the best we can. Pavel finally spoke up. "We strike in four days, then?"

"Six," corrected Alexander. "Got to give the mercs a couple days to get settled and learn the tactical plan." With a sardonic smile, he added, "You can tell Moscow we'll hit Shamar six days from now."

Pavel did not smile back.

The meeting broke up. The three youngsters headed for their bunks. Alexander watched his daughter; she lingered near Hazard and ignored Pavel, who watched them with dark liquid eyes. Young love, Alexander said to himself. What a pain.

Barker got to his feet and headed forward, muttering about an engine overall that was long overdue.

"After this job is finished," Alexander said, starting forward toward his own quarters.

When he got to the door to his quarters, the passageway was empty of everyone else except Steiner. She was at her own door, but she looked over her shoulder at Alexander and smiled charmingly.

"Want a drink?" he stage-whispered.

She nodded eagerly.

@0'1 j.

PEACEKEEPERS

293

otioning her to him, Alexander opened the door and led, his bedroom. Unlike the built-in bunks of the main sleeping compartments, his quarters contained a double bed, a couch, and even a low bookcase that spanned the entire forward bulkhead. The shelves were lined in glass; all except one section that was fronted by a teak door. A plastic worktable, its top painted to resemble teak, spanned the length of the Banner wall, from the door to the bulkhead of the room. It was covered with photographs and strange artifacts.

"Satellites can't see much of Sharnaes base," Alexander pointed to the photos. "Too much foliage. Locals

Restu

it I Montesol; say it's an old Inca city. They claim it's a

ited.11
emer picked up an exquisite quartz carving of a

her, no more than six inches long, but beautifully
iled. "Did this come from there?"

the
kil this junk did," Alexander said. "The carvings
--yer medallions the glass knives and all."
is not afraid of ghosts," she murmured,
smooth back of the panther.
the old grave robbers spread the story about
haunted to keep everybody else away."
should tell the university about this. The
I would be ecstatic over a lost Inca city."
anar wouldn't be

Alexander gave her a crooked grin. "Sh
too happy with them."
I "Yes. Of course."

out the rats. Then we can tell the
"First we clean
anthropologists about Montesol."

He pulled down the teak door of the cabinet to form a
Inside was a small bar, complete with a
r(w of tumblers fitted snugly into wooden racks.
while Hazard poured two
Steiner sat on the couch

brandies. She was a tall woman, almost Alexandees own height, with long legs and a lithe figure that her faded fatigues accented rather than concealed. Her face was strong, a good jaw and clear blue eyes. Hair the color of straw, always tied up neatly. A young Brunhilde, visiting in the Ownty-first century.

"Don't have sniffers," he said almost apologetically.

surprised that you have alcohol of, any kind aboard,' she said, accepting the heavy tumbler with its inch of amber liquor.

"Rank hath its privileges," he said, tossing off the drink in one gulp as he stood before the couch.

Steiner's smile saddened slightly. "You didn't give me time to offer a

Raising one finger of his free hand, Alexander replied, "Easily fixed." He turned back to the bar and poured himself another.

Sitting down next to her, he asked, "What should we drink to?"

"Success to our mission."

His lips twisted into a grin. "Confusion to our enemies."

They touched glasses and sipped.

"You know," Steiner said, looking into his 'eye@, "I almost feel like one of those people you see in the war videos. The night before a mission."

"Eat, drink and be merry," Alexander quoted, for tomorrow we die."

"Yes. That sort of thing."

Her eyes were incredibly blue, Alexander noticed. And staring straight at him. "Are you trying to get into my pants?" He forced a laugh.

Steiner did not laugh. "I think making love would be a better release for you than getting drunk, don't you?" Pursing his lips as if deep in thought, Alexander answered, "Well ... there's no hangover the next morning,"

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man.

either, Alma. I'm sterile."

little sigh. "Ahh. I suspected as much. From killing me slowly.

impotent?"

a bleak smile. "No, not impotent.

rm afraid."

interested?" Stei ish pout. On her

ner put on a girl

features it looked almost comical.

SGIRs got nothing to do with you, Alma," he said, looking away from her, staring into his glass. "It's my problem.

after we get Shamar . . ." He drifted to silence.

She took a long swallow of her brandy. "I suppose it Oijogld make things difficult if members of the crew began .-fraternizing with each other."

Alexander made a bleak smile. "Some companies have ules against that sort of thing."

"Yes." Steiner finished her drink swiftly and got to her speak to your daughter, then. If you mess on your hands.

He stood up beside her. There were fires her eyes now. Fires of anger, barely sup-

no fitry, Alexander realized.

Aloud, he said, "Look, I'm sorry

Steiner turned from him and put her glass down on the bar. "As you said, it's your problem."

"ye 'ah.11

She went to the door, then turned. With a slow, warming smile she said softly, "Maybe after we get Shamar your problem will be solved, eh?"

Alexander went to her and kissed her on her lips, briefly,

"Maybe then," he

chastely, almost as a brother would.

said, his voice choking slightly.

She nodded, opened the door and left.

He stood there for several, s
not feeling anything.

Alexander watched the trees that hung out over
as he held the tiger of the little inflatable Zodiac. He stayed
under their shade as much as possible, not satisfied that his
bulky bush Jacket and wide-brimmed hat gave him suffi-
cient protection from the sun.

The morning was broiling hot. The rising sun baked
moisture from the thick forest on each side of the river;
wisps of steam rose up through the trees to waft -away on
the soft breeze.

Kelly sat up in the prow of the dark gray rubber boat, an
Indian shawl over her head, more to hide her red hair from
prying eyes-than to keep the solar ultraviolet off her. She
wore a simple native blouse and skirt, both of them loose
enough to hide a small arsenal. If anyone saw them, they
would look like a well-to-do @ planter and his daughter out
for a trip to Valledupar. Or so Alexander hoped.

With a twist of his wrist Alexander turned the throttle
down low. The engine's roar muted and the Zodiac's bow
settled into the water.

'Why'd you slow down?' Kelly asked. "I was enjoying
the spray."

"Time for us to have a talk," said Alexander.

She nodded knowingly. "So that's why you brought me
along with you."

"I want to talk with you," he said.

"Father-daughter kind- of talk?"

"You bet."

Kelly sniffed, "That means you want to talk to me, not
with me."

"I'll listen too."

"Really?"

"Yeah. What's going on with you, kid?"

She-made a sad little smile. "Nothing very, much."

minute damning himself for
the water

PF,4CEKEEPERS 297

over here." He tapp ed the bench alongside him.

want to holler the length of the damned boat."

fit 'Made her way down the -rocking boat, across the

bench, to sit beside her father.

what's happening, little lady?"

her head against his- shoulder, Kelly replied

nothing much."

like a romantic triangle to me."

nodded.

gawking at you like a little lost calf, and

YOU

No to be mooning the same way over Jay."

'4True enough," she admitted miserably.

`So I fall for tall rugged guys. First Robbie, now Jay."

-`Must be a father fixation," Alexander joked.

Kelly did not laugh. "I love Jay. I know Pavel thinks he Is
love with me, but I love Jay."

"And Jay?"

@-"He's so hurt and mixed up he doesn't know what he's
ing." Her words came in a rush, filled with pain and

"He's afraid of letting down his defenses, afraid of

dy get close to him."

.,WLLmg anybo

-He's not the only one, Alexander told himself.

"Pavel's nice," Kelly went on. "I mean, I like him and he's sweet and terribly romantic but there's just no chemistry there. I don't have the vibes with him that I get from Jay. He's so lonely and scared, really, when you get right down to it. So far from home and so mixed up."

..Pavel?"

.'No," she said, "Jay."

Alexander slid an arm around his daughters' slim shoulders. "So you love Jay but he doesn't love you, while Pavel loves you but you don't love him. Is that it?"

"That's it." Kelly's voice was small, almost childlike. Alexander wondered what in hell he was supposed to do about this. You've never been much of a father, he thought.

You were never around when she was growing Now's
UP-

your big chance to make up for all that neglect. Come up with some fatherly wisdom that'll set everything straight and, make her smile.

But not a thing came into his head.

He heard himself say; "Sooner or later Pavel's either going to be called back to Moscow or he's going to try to nail me."

- Kelly pulled free of his arm. "You don't think: he's still . .

"Hes still on the KG13 payroll, kid. We've been helping him to play them along, but once this Shamar business is finished, he's going to have to make his decision: us or them."

"If , he chooses them, " Kelly murmured, "you think they'll order him to assassinate you?"

With a nod, Alexander replied, "Especially if I get the plutonium Shamaes holding."

"But if he chooses us, then Moscow will send somebody to kill him!"

Alexander made his crooked smile. "Not necessarily. I might be able to work out a deal-maybe."

Kelly fell silent and leaned back against her father once more. The boat puffed quietly along the river, to the accompaniment of raucous shrieks and chattering from the colorful birds that lived among the thickly leafed trees. The sun climbed higher and the heat became like a steam bath that turned solid flesh to streams of perspiration, a scalding

towel that muffled the face so that it became difficult, even to breathe.

"Now at you're saying," Kelly spoke at last, "is that if I'm nice to Pavel he'll decide in our favor, instead of trying to kill you."

Alexander shook his head, making the wide brim of his hat wobble. "What I'm saying, little lady, is that I can deal with Pavel one way or the other. He'll decide what he wants

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based mainly on you. But I don't want you to make a mistake when you really are in love with Jay. That'd be than stupid-it'd be immoral."

He actually laughed. "You? Old-fashioned morality you?"

Why not? Alexander suddenly felt distinctly uncomfortable. "Have I been such an immoral monster all

11

for years?

Not exactly. But you sure haven't been a perfect model of Christian virtues either."

Who the hell has? One of St. Peter's first miracles was to make some poor sucker dead."

:"And his wife."

"I don't believe you!"

"Look it up. Acts of the Apostles."

7- Kelly laughed, and Alexander enjoyed the sight and sound of it. But she sobered quickly.

"If only there was some way I could reach Jay and make him stop being afraid of letting somebody love him.

Choosing his words carefully, Alexander said, "I presume you have offered him the delights of your flesh." Without a hint of hostility she replied, "He's too straight-arrow for that. He doesn't think people, who work up there ought to get themselves into romantic entanglements." Alexander grinned his widest grin. "Well that's easily fixed! After this Shamar business is over, I'll fire the bastard."

"You do, and I'll quit!"

"Suits me."

"Really?" She seemed surprised, almost shocked.

Alexander said, "Damned right. What I've got to do next is something you won't want to be mixed up with anyway. Red Eagle calls it vigilante justice."

"You're going to be a one-man crusade, is that it?"

300 Ben Bova

"It won't be just one man," Alexander countered.

6. There are plenty of people willing to fight against the drug trade. And terrorism. Plenty. And others who are willing to pay the bills, too.-

"But the Peacekeepers will be against you."

@14

I doubt it." The river was widening now. Other boats were chuffing along on ancient diesel engines. "They won't be for me, of course. Ol' Red Eagle will fuss and fume., but the IPF won't actively oppose what I do." It

Kelly looked altogether unconvinced.

Alexander nosed the little dark gray Zodiac through the growing river traffic, always remaining as much under the shade of the trees on the bank as possible. Abruptly the foliage ended and stark cinder-block and concrete buildings stood along the river's edge. Docks poked their fingers out into the water. Construction cranes swung high overhead. The city of Valledupiar was growing-

"This is what the fight is all about," Alexander said to his daughter over the noise of machinery and motors. "The country's getting rich on narcotics. The Castanada family wants to keep control of the trade."

'And you want to end it altogether."

"That," he said firmly, "is exactly what I'm going to do."

Alexander found the pier he was looking for, a busy commercial wharf where work gangs were unloading boats laden with tropical fruits from upriver. He tied his inflatable boat to a stanchion set into the new-looking concrete. An unmarked four-door sedan was waiting for them at the end of the Pier, its rooftop Photovoltaic cells glittering in the sun.

Kelly shivered slightly as they ducked into the air-conditioned interior and the driver wordlessly started the engine and headed out into the city. He was a thickset unsmiling man, swarthy and grim, with a black Pancho Villa mustache that drooped over his heavy lips. Through a tangle of crowded narrow streets they drove, the driver

3

PEACEKEEPERS 301

his horn at the people milling around the sidewalk. "I must be market day," Alexander muttered.

driver said nothing.

here are we going?" asked Kelly.

inal meeting with Castanada. He's supposed to fork the cash for the mercs.

ie, caught the note of skepticism in his voice. "You don't think he . . .

remember how the good burghers of Hamelin paid -off

Pied Piper? They offered him a thousand guilders

re he drove out the rats."@

-d once he'd done the job . . .

@'Alexander made a crooked grin. "'Besides, our losses

- - made us thrifty" " he quoted. "'A thousand guilders?

-me, take fifty!'"

J)Despite herself, Kelly giggled.

'we can't get the money for the mercs now, " her father said.

those guys don't work for promises; they want to see

h. Our own payment can come later. Castanada can

-p our money in his Swiss account for another week-
more interest on it."

The car left the narrow streets and headed into the
-der avenues that climbed up the hills that overlooked
city. Wide green lawns and large whitewashed houses
M graceful colonnaded facades and red tile roofs were
d generously along the quiet, treelined thoroughfare.
:"This is definitely -the high-rent district," Alexander
laid.

"The Castanadai must live here," Kelly guessed.

"Nope. The whole family I lives down in the presidential
,Wace. where the army surrounds 'em. I don't know what
hell we're doing up here."

He leaned forward and tapped the driver on the shoul-
der. "Where are we going?"

The driver grunted.

302 Ben Bova

"Dnde vamos?- Kelly asked.

Raising a heavy, blunt-fingered hand, the driver pointed, The street @ended in a cul-de-sac with a little park of carefully clipped bushes and a few tall trees. A second car Was sitting along the curve- a long gray, limousine with mirrored windows.

don't, like this," Kelly whispered.

Alexander looked at 'the driver, who turned off the ignition, @fdlded his arms across his;chest, and4 sat stoically unmoving. A rear door of the limousine opened and a slightly built man wearing a dapper double-breasted suit got out. His gray hair was brushed sleekly back and his mustache was neatly trimmed.

"It's Okay," said Alexander, withrelief in his voice. "I know him; he's one of Castanada's flunkies.-

Both of them got out of their car and walked over to the limousine.

"Setior. . ." Alexander groped for the name. 4'.Rodriguez?1'

"Ali, good morning, Seftor Alexander!" RodrigueZ smiled broadly, obviously pleased that his name had been remembered.

"Ifs good to see you again."

64

And you, my dear sir But please tell me, who is this charming young lady with you?"

"An assistant of mine,- Alexander said curtly. No one outside the immediate "family" of his organization knew of Kelly's relation to him.

"Ali," said RodrigueZ, his smile starting to look a bit

411 11

forced. see.

Alexander said, "I believe you have a package for me.

"St, st A rather heavy one, in fact. It is here in the car."

He Opened the limousine's door and ducked inside it.

Alexander had just enough time to wonder why the chauffeur wasn't doing his usual job of opening doors. RodrigueZ

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who allowed a servant to sit inside yelled.

sed submachine guns sprang out of of motorcycles made Alexander whirl', rhalf dozen on bikes wi@re coming up the street, g them off.

y-set driver of their car pushed his way out from leav

the wheel, yanking a pistol @ from his shoulder Kelly was already on one knee, an automatic in one 'le she slid a second one across the asphalt toward er.

slammed the driver back against the spouting blood. Kelly fired back, then car. Alexander froze where he stood limousine, Machine-gun fire raked the jounce on its springs as the slugs hit it.

into Alexande'es head and he pitched 4rst onto the asphalt paving. He heard more gunfire a scream. He tried to piih himself up, but everything ed black and silent.

U

ben he came to, Rodriguez was bending over him,
babbling about the money being stolen. The
riddled-with bullet scars, but its armor and,
'Was

I glass had saved Rodriguez and his chauffeur.
the other driver. He lay dead in a pool of his own
Kelly was gone.

If we had known that Shamar was going to strike at Alexander before he could get his own attack started, we would have certainly warned the man. But we did not know. Even with the intelligence-gathering services of the International Peacekeeping Force, we did not know what Sharnar had planned. Cynics claim that we set Alexander up, sometven lay the blame for what ha@pened next at Red Eagle's doorstep. But I was there at Geneva. I was serving with IPF intelligence at the time. We did not know. How could we?

And we certainly had no part in what came afterward.

xONTESOLI)

Year 8

he lay prone in the high grass, studying the
red in the hollow just below
city that cluste sted bin

s crest through electronically boo
ard sensed that he was no longer alone.

OC-

The morning air was crisply coot this high above the,
Kmst. The Cesar River was nothing more than a glinting
the thick greenery that
ity ribbon snaking through
retched as far as the eye could see. Up here the trees were
naller, sparser, and tall fronds of grass waved in the
ntain wind.

Somewhere in the grass a man was crawling toward him-
hy could feel it in the back of his neck.

Damned fool he raged at himself. Dashing off like a one-man army without taking more than a handgun and canteen of water. What are you going to accomplish except getting yourself killed?

He went absolutely still. Except for his left hand, which snaked down to the holster at his hip and slowly pulled the heavy blue-black automatic pistol.

He lay the electro-optical binoculars on the ground before him and cocked the gun as quietly as he could, pulling the action back carefully and holding it as it slid forward again so that it did not make too much noise.

Slowly, ever so slowly, he turned over onto his back so that he could see who was approaching. The city and the men in it would have to wait. Kelly was there; Shamar had made the ancient ruin his headquarters. But whoever was sneaking up on him had a more immediate priority.

He lay there in the grass, gun cocked and ready, wishing he had a silencer for it. Or a knife. The morning sun was hot despite the altitude. His shirt was already soaked with sweat from the long climb up here.

"Jay, is that you?" A whisper carried by the wind.

He said-nothing.

"It's me, Pavel. I'm going to stand up so you can see me. Don't shoot."

Sure enough, the small slim Russian rose amidst the waving fronds of grass. Jay felt the breath he had been holding back puff out of his lungs.

Half annoyed, half relieved, he waved Pavel to him. The young Russian bent forward and crawled to his side, staggering under a backpack almost the size of his own torso. He flopped on the grass next to Jay with a grunt.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Jay growled.

"Same as you: trying to find Kelly."

"Who gave you permission to try a stunt like this?"

"Same as you: nobody."

Jay looked into the Russian's dark eyes, thinking, He's

.91

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nothing you can do about it. And you're going to need
e help you can get.

Ws AlexanderT'

ill under sedation. Steiner says he has a 'concussion,
bly from a ricocheting bullet."

id the mercsT'

el started to struggle the pack off his shoulders. -,It

W be two days before they arrive, even with our

pency call."

cement wait two &Ysm-:

agree. We must get Kelly out of there now.

my felt his jaw tighten. 1" Moscow order you to come and
me her?"

Moscow knows nothing of th*" Pavel snapped-

'Men why are You hereT'

I could ask you the same question."

'She saved my life," Jay said immediately- "When I

when I was exiled at Moonbase, Kelly

ght it was over,

faith in me. She brought me back to Earth, back to

b you love her." Pavel's voice trembled slightly-

ove hers No! I owe her."

_baking-his head the Russian said, "But she loves you."

%'That's crazy!"

.'She does."

His voice was so low, his face suddenly so miserable, that
iy finally recognized what he had not understood before.

knd you love her."

"Yes." The faintest of whispers.

Jay made a coughing noise that might have been a laugh.

lot even he could tell for sure. "Fine mess."

Pavel cocked his head

"You're certain she's there?"

ightly in the direction of the ancient city.

pe

"Haven't seen her, but that's Shamaes base Of (m-
ons, all right. Must be a couple hundred men there.

en, too."

rm

308 Ben Bova

"He sent a message to Alexander, after you left."

"Messenger"

"Last night. By radio, over the civilian band frequency."

"What the hell did he say,

that Kelly was alive and unhurt and that he would exchange her for Alexander himself."

Jay felt a surge of emotions blaze along his veins. "So that's his game. He wants Alexander."

"Shamar will kill Alexander if he gets his hands on 'him."

"He'll kill Kelly if Alexander doesn't agree."

"That is why we

must get her out of there," Pavel said.

"Right" Jay rolled back onto his stomach, then asked,

"What answer did you make to Shamar?"

"I asked

him to take the message- He told them that Alexander was under sedation and would be unable to reply for twenty-four hours."

"And what'd Shamar say"

"He said that in exactly twenty-four hours Kelly would be killed, unless Alexander agreed to surrender him

self."

"How long ... ago,

"Seven hours

ago- That is when I decided to come up here after you."

Jay's thoughts

were tumbling wildly through his mind.

"Kelly ... did they let Kelly speak?"

"No."

"Then how do we know she's still alive?"

"We only have Shamar's word for it,

but those

bastards could do anything to her," Jay said.

"We must act quickly."

"Yes, A

- But there's a couple hundred of them and only two of us."

Pavel took the binoculars that he'd used before them and focused them on the stone structures in the hollow. It was an ancient city that must have been magnificent in its day. But now it was abandoned, crumbling

with age, half tumbled down. Massive stone statues had toppled over and

PEACEKEEPERS 309

on their sides. On some of the buildings entire walls were gone, leaving their interiors gaping. Grass and shrubs

invaded those broken buildings, making them look as if they were rotting, covering them with a green slimy

Pavel observed that the stones, were not blackened by earthquakes must have done the damage

The city had been built around a large central plaza with gray stones. Now it was weed-grown and

barren, but it served as a helicopter landing pad. A tower stood on one end of the

square, covered with a fine net. At the head of the square was an impressive temple raised on a tiered platform. A steep flight of

led to its colonnaded front entrance; most of the
ive pillars were still standing, but much of the roof
one. Several other old buildings were still intact, their
whole, although sprouting grass and flowers and even
small trees here and there. Ideal camouflage, Pavel
zed. Even satellite sensors would detect nothing much
dozens of men in the
a, most of them in military leetigues, assault
rifles slung
their shoulders. Some Kalishnikovs, he noted, but,
tly American Colts and Springfields.
dome of the ancient buildings had new additions of
ugated metal and even cinder blocL Always the roofs
covered with dirt and greenery. Men in jeans and
--irts lounged around the largest one. Pavel saw another
in a white laboratory smock come out of a door,
01-owed by three others-one of them a woman.
"Their processing factory is here," he muttered.
'Yeah," Jay replied. "But where're they keeping Kelly?"
All through the morning, as the sun climbed higher into
-Pale blue sky dotted with wisps of cirrus clouds, they took
s studying the city through the binoculars.
tried to deter-
Effftine where Shamar might be holding Kelly. Not in the
Slowly, by a process of elimination, they
pt natural vegetation.
icusing tighter, he could

factory, of course. Across the square was a smaller building where all the windows had been boarded up and a half-dozen armed guards lounged by the only door.

"Could that be it?" Pavel asked.

Jay brushed an insect away from his face. "My guess is that's the bomb-storage depot. And the building next to it, where the truck is parked, is probably their electronics facility."

Pointing to the temple at the head of the plaza, Pavel said, "She must be in there. None of the other buildings are guarded. Most of them are half destroyed."

Jay nodded agreement. "Plenty of guys with guns hanging around that entrance, too. How do we get in?"

"Through the back. It's only a few dozen meters from the trees to the rear of the platform. Can you climb the stones?"

"I guess, if I have to."

Pavel reached into the pack lying beside him and pulled out a coil of rope. "This will be helpful."

"Only if there's a door back there. Or a window."

They circled around the hollow, staying low, using the grass for cover, until they could train the binoculars on the rear of the temple.

Jay saw a dark oblong shape, focused the binocs on it. It wavered in the heat haze, then snapped into clear sight: a window, about ten feet above the floor of the stone platform. Unbarred. Unguarded.

Passing the glasses to Pavel, he murmured, "That's the way in."

The Russian nodded. "Let's go."

It was late afternoon by the time they reached the edge of the woods behind the temple. What had looked like a short distance to the stone base of the platform now seemed like a mile of terribly exposed open territory.

Both men were studded with tools and weapons from the pack Pavel had brought: ropes, grenades, knives, electron

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W7

their hips. Both men held machine long black ammo clips jutting from whispered. "Hurry it up."

from his kneeling position. He had

a of antipersonnel mines along the the trees, tiny gray plastic discs that feet off or shred his legs from ten retreat,- he whispered harshly. "It is

right- The Russian had a lot more of thing than he did, Jay knew. His consisted of a one-week course in guerrilla the mandatory training the Peacekeepers much. Would it be enough?

was ready. Jay tossed the rope up to the tier of the platform. The electrochemical the grapnel at the end of the rope took stone surface. Jay tested the rope with a scrambling up the face of the stones. one wary time, then followed him up

tiers to the platform, and then they were temple wall Once more Jay flung the rope

into the dark cavity of the window. They
up rope and disappeared inside the ancient
the site of countless human sacrifices in centuries
ast.

M at the base of the platform a hidden stone door
outward and four armed men dressed in ragged
tignes calmly walked out to the edge of the woods and
Vn picking up the small gray disc-shaped antipersonnel
ines that Pavel had so carefully scattered there to cover
eir retreat.

Gunfire broke out from inside the temple, booming,

312 Ben Bova

echoing weirdly. The four men looked up briefly. One of
Ahem pointed a finger to his head and' made a circular
motion.

-,Os

gringos hay MUY loco, no?"

His companions grinned. Then they returned to their
task.

That scene was a re-creation, of course. A
bit of dramatic license. We know some
details of the ancient city and it temple
fi-om questioning the grave robbers who had
been methodically looting Montesol until
the drug manufacturers chose it as their
headquarters. We assume that young
Hazard and the Russian Zhakarov made the
best use of the resources available to

them.

More than that we cannot say.

MONTESOL,

Year 8

ALEXANDER stood on shaky legs as four men in dirty fatigues searched him. They pulled his arms out from his sides and roughly pawed his chest and midsection, his legs and groin, both arms. They even yanked off the bandage wrapped around his head, revealing a nasty wound along his left temple, a gash crusted with dried blood and oozing slightly with medication.

Jabal Shamar sat on a canvas camp chair some ten feet away, smoking a cigarette, watching Alexander intently with eyes that looked only faintly amused. Shamar wore a one-piece jumpsuit of mottled jungle greens, the short unbuttoned halfway down his hairy chest to reveal an

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ignore box hanging by a silver chain about his neck. located pistol was tucked into his black leather belt, DOY-

C room was deep inside the Incan temple, solid-stone floor polished smooth even after centuries of neglect. iridows. Only one door. Yet natural light seemed to be through from some sort of hidden access up in the ceiling. Alexander tried to look up and see where the light was coming from, but his head throbbed so hard made him woozy with pain.

u Must excuse the primitive way in which my men arching you," Shamar said in his slightly guttural h. "We lack modern facilities such as X-ray machines metal detectors."

te four years since he had last seen Sharnar had not kind to the -man. His hair was almost entirely gray the scar along his jaw seemed more pronounced, fier almost as white as the cigarette that dangled from his lips. He was leaner, too, his face sculpted with and jutting cheekbones. Four years of ding have taken its toll, Alexander told

pounding, his stomach doing nervous nerve in his body was stretched taut. He to pull a gun on Alma Steiner before she iuld back away and allow him to leave the plane. "You're mad," the blond Austrian had whispered, star- at the pistol Alexander held in his wavering hand. 'Maybe so," he admitted. "But I'll kilt you if you don't the fuck out of my way." "He'll murder you!" she screamed. "He's probably al- y murdered Kelly."

Alexander tottered toward the helicopter @ Shamar had mt in response to his call. "Maybe so , he shouted over his shoulder. "But I've got to go. I've got no choice."

Alma understood, although she could not agree. Her
 ing
 tears were as much rage and frustration as Mourri for a
 man she could have loved.

The helicopter crew had searched him before letting him
 -tome aboard, but now Shamar's personal guards were
 searching him again. Very thoroughly. But will it be
 thoroughly enough? Alexander asked himself. Unbidden, a
 shadow of a smile touched his lips. Standing there, even on
 legs rubbery from his concussion, Alexander loomed over
 the diminutive Shamar on his camp chair.

Finally they removed his boots and tossed them across
 the bare little room, where they had thrown--the miniature
 radio transmitter and electrostatic stun wand he had
 carried inside his belt.

He stood on the cool stone floor, barefoot, beltless,
 wearing only a pair of light denim
 im. ns and a long-sleeved
 sport shirt.

The four men backed away, leaving Alexander to stare
 down at the seated Sharnar, radiating hatred.

"She is your daughter, isn't she?" Shamar asked.

Alexander nodded. "Where is she? I want to see her- If
 YOU , ve-harmed her. He suddenly stopped, realizing
 the words were totally empty. There was not a thing he
 could do to save Kelly from whatever harm Shamar wanted
 to inflict on her.

Taking the slim cigarette from his lips, Shamar asked
 calmly, "Have You learned to kill? The last time we met,
 YOU could have killed me, but failed to do so."

"That was four years ago.10

"Yes, but some men lack the ability to take a human life.
 I myself have never killed a man in combat; not face-to-
 face."

"You just order others to kill for you."

"As you do," Shamar countered. "We are very much
 alike."

Alexander swayed on his feet, a wave of nausea and

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wo washing over him. "Can I have a chair? They told
 ve, -got a concussion ...

lly"ars eyes narrowed suspiciously. "You can sit on
 or. At my feet."

Ander did so. Shamar seemed pleased to be able to
 own at the American.

-now what happens?" Alexander asked.

llw you die."

ot, before I see my daughter." ,

bu will see her, I guarantee that."

e, he said it sent a chill along Alexander'

way Is spine.

-ased, his hands clenched into fists.

ghting a fresh cigarette from the butt of the one he had
 smoking, Shamar said, "Please do not think that you
 cap up and disarm me. I -know how your mind works,
 Alexander. Remove all such romantic notions from
 thoughts.,,

lexander said nothing.

ngering the slim oblong black box hanging around his

Shamar said, "Do you know what this is? I will tell
It is a radio trigger for the nuclear bombs that MY
rucians have assembled. It is tuned to my heartbeat. If
range chance you should kill in , it will set off
st e

bombs. Everyone here will die. Everyone."

Including Hazard and Zhakarov," Alexander muttered.

"Hazard?" Shamar's slim brows rose in surprise.

AThe son of the IPF's director-general."

let a thin jet of blue-gray smoke stream from his
not realize he was Hazard's son."

Alexander felt startled.

both dead," said Sharnar. "Brave men, to try

woman. But foolish, also. They fought to the

killed more than a dozen of the drug mer-

unt's hired men. They nearly fought their way to.the very

t.11

)Om where your daughter is being kep .

%"Both dead." Alexander bowed his head. "Both of

hem."

"They would not surrender. Even after they had been wounded repeatedly they fought on. I would have treated them mercifully."

Sure you would."

"I am a soldier," snapped Shamar. not a cutthroat."

"Go tell it in Jerusalem."

"What I do I do for a cause! You may not believe in my cause, but I do. Millions do!"

'You're nothing but a bloodthirsty murdering son of a bitch." Alexander started to clamber to his feet. The four men behind him stirred, gripped their guns.

But Shamar merely smiled and tapped the tiny box on his chest.- "Be careful, Cole Alexander. If my heart should stop, this entire mountaintop explodes."

Alexander-sagged back to the floor, his head thundering. Shamar smiled at him pityingly.

Finally Alexander asked, "Aren't you being a little too dramatic about this? Triggering the bombs to y6 ur heart-beat? You've got a couple hundred people here protecting you and you know I'm no killer."

With a sardonic laugh Sham

ar tapped the electronic medallion and replied, "This is not because of you, Cole Alexander! I have no need of such elaborate precautions as far as you are concerned." ,His face grew more serious. "But I know that you have recruited a small army of mercenaries. Professional soldiers. They could cause much trouble. Therefore this little challenge for them. once they know that I am willing to blow up the entire top of this nkountain, I doubt that theywill even try to attack. They fight for money, and they will see no reason to march into guaranteed death. I am willing to die; they are- not,"

Alexander had to admit to himself that Shamar was entirely right. Once the mercenaries realized the nukes were rigged with a dead@man's switch, they'd pack up oeir gear and go home. Hell, he told himself, once they realize I

PEACEKEEPERS 319

be around to pay them they'll call the whole opera-see, cole Alexander," said Shainar, "I am a A true military man, WI ftd, professional soldier.

rifice my life to my cause. You are an amateur; sac

-e'driven by emotion, not logic. And you value your 0 highly to be truly effective." tander made no reply.

have bungled everything," Shamar went on. "All efforts have led to your defeat and humiliation." gone to a lot of trouble over my

eems to me you've a` efforts," Alexander retorted. ing

)h, you have been troubles me

0 . I grant you that. But' y I will remove your slight irritation and go forward Ifty plans.

what end?" Alexandet asked, his voice hoarse,

eked. "Just what in hell are you trying to obtain?"
Power, of course. That is the only goal worth pursuing-
ver. Without power a man is nothing. But with power,
C' Shamar's smile widened to show his perfect teeth.

. A man of power
'ith power comes wealth, and respect
go where he wishes and do what he wants."

"And your cause?" Alexander asked dryly.

What is more vital to my cause than Power, real Power?
'he power to bend nations to my will. The power to
exterminate the Peacekeepers.

11W

Alexander made himself laugh. "With five little nukes?"

"Five nuclear weapons are quite enough for a start,"

replied Shamar. "Three of them will level Geneva." His

his voice became harsher. "I had hoped that

would believe they had located my weap-

ington and those other cities, but your prying

that plan.,, He took a deep pull on his

The acrid smell made Alexander realize that it.

ta more than tobacco.

320 Ben Bova,

"However," Shamar went on, -three small planes piloted by three zealots will obliterate Geneva soon enough. The two other major Peacekeeper facilities, in Colombo and Ottawa, will receive one nuclear kiss each

"That won't eliminate the IPF," Alexander said.

"Of course it will! They will be blown off the face of the Earth. Think of how many nations will welcome that moment. Think how many will flock to me, to form a new coalition of true power." Shamar clenched his fist, and held it up before his face. The scar along his jaw seemed to glow. "There will be no Peacekeepers to stop us."

"Then the world will go back to the way it was, with every nation building all the weapons it can."

"Yes. Including nuclear weapons. And I will lead the nations of the southern hemisphere-my own lands of the desert, together with most of Latin America and Africa. We will bring the industrialized nations of the north to their knees!" Shamar's eyes glittered with the vision of it.

"Or blow up the world trying."

"What of it? I am ready to die. Are you?"

"Not before I see my daughter," Alexander said.

"Ali yes, your daughter." The gleaming light in his eyes disappeared like a lamp being switched off.

"You promised that she'd be released if I came to you. I want to -see her before you let her go."

Shamar gestured to his men, and Alexander was hauled roughly to his feet.

"This way." Shamar ducked through the low stone doorway. The guards hustled Alexander through after him, into a narrow dark passageway. It was difficult to see, but Alexander felt a dampness, a slimy dank chill seeping from the stones. Like an old-fashioned dungeon, he thought. The passageway sloped upward, climbing.

"I actually had intended to seize you, not the young woman," Shamar said. "If I had sent my own men they would have done the job correctly. But these drug
==IRA:

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As Alexander could sense the man shrugging. "They nothing but common thugs. They botched it." Well, I'm here now," he said to the shadowy form king ahead of him.

Yes, that is true. For more than four years you have ibled me, Cole Alexander. You are a fanatic, just as I And therefore very persistent and annoying. Today I eliminate you. Tonight I will sleep more soundly than I e, in four years."

I'm flattered to think I've kept you awake."

Shamar did not reply. They strode along the narrow igeway. Alexander felt the grip of the guards on his Ir arms, half helping him along, half pushing him 'his coalition of southern hemisphere nations," he d to Shamar's back. "Won't they be at the mercy of the ustrialized nations once the Peacekeepers are gone? r all, it's the nations of the north that have nuclear :apons.

Again he could sense Shamar's reaction: a self-satisfied tie smile. "Cole Alexander, once the Peacekeepers are

ne, :how long do you think it will take Brazil or Argentina
even my own native Iraq to build nuclear weapons? We
Once the restraints of the Peacekeepers
we will build bombs within a few
 goes back to the edge of Armageddon,
to himself.

 He heard voices UP ahead, arguing loudly in Spanish.
'hey were speaking much too fast for Alexander to catch
more than a few words: it was an argument about money.
something to do with a shipment of "goods"-narcotics,
he guessed.

 But one of the voices sounded vaguely familiar. Alexan
er tried to identify it as they marched along the passage-
Way-

Ben Bova

Light spilled out from a room up ahead. The voices were coming from th

ere. Shamar Passed without even glance-

ing

inside; the arguments among the drug dealers were of no interest to him.

But Alexander looked as the guards half dragged him past the open doorway set into the massive stones. It was ; Sebastiano Miguel de Castanada, son of the presidents, Minister of defense, his face red with anger, his impeccably tailored white suit ruffled and stained with perspiration, bellowing at a sallow, skinny, ragged little man who sat behind a table snarling @ back at Castanada. -On the table between them were piles of money, neatly stacked and wrapped with dirty elastic bands. In that one glance into the room Alexander recognized that one pile was American burrency, another French francs. There were at least a dozen stacks on the table. The American seemed to be the highest.

Alexander's heart sank. The breath sagged out of him. So Castanada's in with them! It's been a trap all along. This entire operation has been nothing, more than an elaborate snare to catch me. The Castanada family has been working with Shamar and these drug merchants all along. There's been no war between them; they're on the same side. Shamar used Castanada to lure me up here. The only fight between them is over how big a cut of the money Castanada's entitled to!

And I walked into it. Like a fucking lamb going to the slaughter. I got Hazard and the Russian kid killed. And Kelly-what have they done to Kelly?

He wanted to cry. He wanted to scream. If his arms had been free he might have tried to kill himself.

It's MY fault. It's all my own stupid, blind, arrogant fault. As they hustled him along the dark endless passageway, Alexander knew that he had been beaten and nothing awaited him but death.

If I can get Kelly out of this, that's all I can hope for. To

PEACEKEEPERS 323

away from here. To see her safe. That's the most I do. That's all I can do.

The little procession finally stopped. Alexander peered I

the darkness and saw that they were at a tightly bolted en door.

"Your daughter is in here." Shamar's voice was strangely Jow. Alexandee's arms. One

The guards released their grip on = unbolted the door and swung it open. The room -, was small, but lit by a narrow slit of a window. Late slanted in,, blood red.

floor, unmoving.

We know about Shamaes plan to attack Geneva and the other IPF centers from in BogotA the Valledupar that Shamar wore around hi neck was actually constructed by a Pakistani electronics technician who was picked up in London on a narcotics charge. We got the story on Alexander from Alma Steiner and Barker, the crippled pilot. It took months to sort out all the details, of course. More than a year, a matter of fact. We are still not certain of exactly every point, and there is considerable pressure from several sources not to investigate it further. I pursue whatever leads I can lay my hand on, for reasons of personal curiosity and professional pride. The complete story will never get into the official IPF history. But I can tell it here as completely and honestly as I can, if you will continue to grant me a modicum of artistic license.

324

Year 8

SHE lay on the stone floor in that awkward iotesque sprawl of death, beyond dignity, beyond shame, ryond help. Alexander sqpd to his knees, bile burning in his throat. longside Kelly's body lay jay Hazard and Pavel, riddled ith bullets, crusted with blood. Their eyes stared Sight- t chamber. Buzzing wly at the stone ceiling of the sunli es and other insects crawled over them. Most of her clothing Someone had closed Kellys eyes. off. Welts made by men's strong fingers purpled Ms torn er thighs, her arms, her face- She's so little! Alexander sobbed to himself So tiny and Irail. My baby ... my baby. @ftz

326 Ben, Bova,

6.1 Wanted you to see this," Shamar,
said. Alexander

heard him as if from a long distance away. His voice
echoed hollowly, like someone calling from far down a
narrow Stone tunnel. "This is your fault, Cole Alexander,
-not mine."

Alexander turned his head slightly. "My fault?"

If you had not pursued me, if you had not made
Yourself dangerous to me, this would-never have happened.
YOU killed these people.;' You caused your daughter's
death."

Alexander said nothing. He remained on his knees
beside Kelly's crumpled body, as if there was no strength
left in him.

"And now you must die, %9 said Shamar.

Running a hand through his white hair, Alexander
muttered, "Go ahead. You've killed everyone I care for.
Killing me will be a relief."

Shamar turned and spoke to the guards at the open
doorway. One of them nodded and left. The other re-
mained at the door, his face as cold and immobile as the
stones of the walls.

"The natives of these hills make a poison that they use in
hunting- It comes from the same plant that produces the
coagne."

"I know," said Alexander. "It kills YOU quickly, while
the, cocaine can take years to do it.,,

With a grim Smile, Shamar said, "It is painless

11

I I am

told.

"That's what I've been told, too."

Alexander brushed at his hair again. This time he
reached back for the slim glass blade taped to his spine just
below the collar of his shirt. Yanking it free, he lunged with
every ounce of strength left in him at his surprised enemy.
Shamar's eyes went wide and his arm automatically went
slashed

up to block Alexander's feeble blow. But Alexander

PEACEKEEPERS 327

the glass knife and opened a cut in the meaty part of
his forearm, through the sleeve of his fatigues,
his other hand Shamar slapped Alexander a sting-
N on the side of the face that sent him toppling to
the ground. The knife dropped and shattered against the
floor into dozens of fragments of green glittering glass.
With his head reeling, ears ringing, Alexander looked up to
see the guard leveling his rifle at him. Shamar held his left
hand up, peering at the bleeding scratch.

That was stupid, Cole Alexander. You are no fighter.

When you work up the passion to try to kill, you botch
job."

Alexander slowly, painfully sat up and clutched his
head with both arms. "Botched it, did I? How long does it
take for the natives' poison to -work?"

Shamar stared at him, mouth agape.

He told you I knew about it. It's painless. A nerve poison.

Shamar looked at the area of the wound and works its way through
his nervous system, from what the professors at the
university told me."

at him. "You've got about a minute to
less."

I" Shamar's voice was a terrified rat's
at the oblong black box hanging on the
neck. Clutched at it with his unwounded
M.

"You made a couple of serious mistakes," Alexander
dd, his smile twisting viciously. "You were so fucking
mvinced I'm a gutless coward that you didn't think I'd
y to kill you, even after you showed me what YOU did to
daughter."

--The bombs will explode if I die! You will be killing
e Shamar pawed at Alexander's shirtfront with

P urr

e han trying to lift him to his feet. But his own legs

Ben Bova

collapsed and he was suddenly on the floor, too, eye-to-eye with Alexander.

"And YOU also thought," Alexander went on, ignoring his ly

frenzied bleating, "that you and your kind are the ones willing to die for their cause. You depended on that little piece of ego-inflation too much, pal. There are plenty of men like me who'd gladly die to rid the world of the likes of YOU."

"You've killed us all!" Shamar whimpered. He was choking now, gasping for air. He ripped the electronic medallion from his chest and stared at it with fear-crazed eyes-

.1@

YOU're afraid to die, after all," Alexander said calmly. His smile was a terrible thing to see.

64 You... madman..."

"Think of this as I an environmental action. I'm cleaning 'up a source of pollution."

A few hundred meters away a radio receiver lost the signal that had been steadily beamed to it for more than forty-eight hours. The simple electronic switch attached to the receiver clicked, and the equally simple trigger controlling five nuclear weapons fired. Hemispherical shells of plutonium were slammed together. In less than a microsecond they achieved criticality and underwent five

simultaneous chain reactions. The incredible power of the strong nuclear force was liberated in an explosion that shook seismographs as far away as Boston and Buenos Aires.

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:,i

The explosion took off the entire top of the mountain. The ancient Incan city was

particularly dirty

simply I

vaporized. It was a mushroom cloud - millions of tons of radioactive rock and soil were lifted into the stratosphere the

and wafted across mountainous forests where the natives eked out their meager incomes, by cultivating the particular species of coca bush from which cocaine is derived.-

With the help of the Peacekeepers most of those poor families were evacuated and saved from the fallout. Their crops did not fare so well. The area is still a desert today, and will be for many years to come. The farmers were resettled in safer areas, under careful supervision. Satellite sensors watch for the signature of I coca, and IPF inspectors make frequent tours of areas where it might be grown - as well as parts of the world where the opium poppy grows.

Cole Alexander's final act accomplished his goal: the Peacekeepers now actively

pursue international narcotics dealers and have the reluctant approval of the world's national governments to strike at the source Of the drug trade: 't ie fields where the plants are grown. Satellites search for them; genetically specific biological agents sprayed from IPF planes destroy them.

The Castanada, government, deprived of its prune source of cash income, collapsed within months. President Alfonso Joiije de Castanada suffered a fatal heart attack just after he was thrown out of office. His

330 Ben Bova
 friends say the loss of his son at montesol
 left him bereft and led to his demise; his
 enemies say it was the loss of political
 power and privilege; cynics say it was the
 loss of money from the drug trade that
 stopped his heart.@
 Aft that happened four years ago. Which
 brings us to the morning trek up from the
 steaming jungle base of the International
 Peacekeeping Force to the glassy crater of
 what was once Montesol.

40NTESOL CRATER;

P@ Year 12

crater
 ball of rock
 was nothing
 under the
 softly
 a shrub or
 was
 mountaintop
 radioactive four years
 limited to one
 the

have never been to the Moon, but the
 akes me think of what that airless, waterless
 ust look like.
 it was a scene of utter desolation. There
 efore us except bare stone glazed and glittering
 right cloudless sky. The wind rushed by, keening
 Imost like a mourner's dirge, without a tree or
 ven a blade of grass to be moved by it. There
 bsolutely nothing on what was left of this
 xcept the hard lifeless rock, still so
 fter the explosion that our time here was
 tour.
 Thirty-one of us, panting with exertion and altitude,

cers' uniforms and cadets' fatigues equally darkened with great pools of sweat, stood at the lip of the glass-smooth crater and stared at whatever private demons haunted us.

I thought of my lost hand, and felt bitterly glad that the Indians and Pakistanis had not attacked our little Peace-keeping task force with nuclear weapons. I had my life, my family, my new work as archivist. The prosthetic hand had become almost natural to me. And new models with improved sensitivity were being developed.

Then I looked across the lip of the crater at Director-General Hazard. The old man stood motionless, his back stiff and shoulders squared away. The bright sun was forcing him to squint as he stared into the crater, but the cool mountain wind could not ruffie his short-cropped iron-gray hair.

A man can sense when someone is staring at him, and I stared hard at Hazard. He did not look up. He did not move. His son had died here, and he stood alone amongst the thirty of us, squinting against the sunlight and the pain.

I heard a foreign sound carried by the softly wailing breeze. A mechanical sound. A motor purring from some distance away. Looking up, I saw a dark speck against the clean blue sky. It quickly grew to recognizable size— a small helicopter, painted in the sky-blue and gold of the IPF.

The cadets and other officers turned their eyes skyward. All except Hazard, who still stared blindly into the crater.

The helicopter circled us at a respectful altitude, then came down and settled onto the bare slope that had once borne thick tropical growth. Its whining rotor kicked up dust as it touched the ground lightly and then sank on its shock struts. The rotor slowed until once again the only sound we could hear was the keening mountain wind.

When the rotor stopped altogether, the oval hatch of the helicopter opened and a huge man stepped stiffly onto the dusty ground.

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Red Eagle. He walked slowly toward us, age had not diminished him, but it had taken its toll of his agility. He wore a fringed tan leather jacket and faded jeans. His feet shod in a modern variation of moccasins. I almost smiled, despite the somber tone of the occasion. Red Eagle was going native in his latter years. I wondered what he had done beneath his judge's robes in Washington. As he major at Hazard's elbow leaned slightly toward the

director-general and whispered briefly into his ear. Hazard nodded, almost seemed to shake himself, as if trying to get rid of an evil dream. He took a deep breath and abruptly turned his back on the crater to march forward. He extended his hand to Red Eagle.

They spoke together for a few moments, and then Hazard waved the cadets to get out of the way. The giant said, "I don't really have to tell you who our guest is," Hazard said in his rasping voice. "It is a great honor for me to introduce to you the Honorable Harold Red Eagle, Justice of the United States Supreme Court and spiritual founder of the International Peacekeeping Force."

If Red Eagle thought Hazard's introduction too fulsome, not fulsome enough, he gave no indication. He shook hands gravely with each of the cadets and officers, including me. He noticed my prosthesis, of course, and looked

9

reply into my eyes as he engulfed it in his huge hand. He did not say a word, except to murmur my name, yet those eyes told me of all the sorrow and understanding that a truly great man can offer to one of his fellow sufferers. Once he had met each individual among us, Red Eagle raised his voice to address us all. It was as if the wind had dropped; his deep, majestic voice was all that we could hear.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I did not mean to intrude on your exercise, but I could not resist the temptation of joining you here, at this special place.

"You are the first class to, be graduated from the Peace-keeping Academy. The future safety of the world and all its people will be in your young, strong hands—a heavy responsibility, I know. In my own lifetime I have carried a share of that responsibility. I gladly pass the burden on to you.*,

He glanced at their young faces, the variations in skin tone, in eye and hair color, in shape and bone structure. He saw the flags that each cadet wore on his or her shoulder.

"As Peacekeepers you have only one goal: to protect the peace. No matter what race or nationality you may be, no matter your religion or your politics, your task as a Peacekeeper is to do whatever must be done to preserve and protect world peace. Whatever must be done—."

Red Eagle seemed to look past them for a brief moment, toward the crater. Was he seeing Alexander's face smiling sardonically at him?

He returned his attention to the young cadets grouped before him.

"You have come from many different nations, from many different parts of this globe. I ask you now, each and all of you, to stop thinking of yourselves as Koreans, or Brazilians, or Poles, or Ugandans. I ask you to think of yourselves as human beings, as members of the great family of humankind, as Peacekeepers dedicated to protecting our world and our people—all of them. Each of them.

"The age of nationalism has passed. Nations still exist, I know, as they will continue to exist for many generations to come. But the idea of nationalism is fading. Inside many nations, local ethnic or religious or geographic minorities want autonomy. And modern technology is erasing the very meaning of national borders. The world's economy is an integrated, global interrelationship. The vast funds once spent on armaments are beginning to help the less-developed nations to feed and educate and house their

PEACEKEEPERS 335

Or., We are expanding into space—and bringing new and energy to Earth.

family. We will grow and thrive—if we peace with one another. Yours is the task of protecting the peace. You must make devastation that took place on this mountain—repeated—never—anywhere in the world. Eagle raised both arms and gestured toward the barren crater. The cadets slowly turned and gazed at it with new eyes.

Think of this lifeless, devastation as the site of your home, your village or town or city. That is your responsibility: to make certain that such inhuman destruction will not take the lives of those you hold dearest."

I could feel the emotional response from the cadets. Red Eagle was electrifying them, like a shaman of old preparing his clan for battle.

ask you once again, therefore, to stop thinking of yourselves as representatives of a single nation and begin to think of yourselves as members of the great and unified family of humankind. A long moment of utter silence. Not even the wind made a sound. Then one of the women cadets

reached up to the Rag of her shoulder patch and tugged at one corner of it. It yielded slowly, reluctantly; it had been firmly sewn into place. But with determination that gritted Cher teeth, she ripped it free.

One by one, and then all of them together, the cadets removed the emblems of their nations until the entire class of them wore nothing but their identifications as Peacekeepers.

REFLECTIONS,
 0@0 Year 12

THE last nuclear weapons on Earth were destroyed earlier this year. The Peacekeepers have established close ties with the world's scientific organizations and we keep particularly careful eyes on any work that might lead to weapons of mass destruction-nuclear, chemical, or biological. The system is far from foolproof, but it seems to be working.

The scourge of war is receding into history, like other diseases that have been conquered by advancing knowledge and social consciousness.

Would all this have happened without Red Eagle? Would it have happened without Hazard or Cole Alexandees dogged hunt for Jabal Shamar? Yes, I believe it would have,

PEACEKEEPERS M

oner or later. Perhaps it would have taken another ticular war. Perhaps hundreds of millions would have had Derish before the nations accepted the fact that war had altogether. There are no inevitabilities to no indispensable men.

the way I have told it. The world's has shifted away from the problems of war, no I w at the Peacekeepers have proved that war can be stopped. le irony is that the stronger the Peacekeepers become, the is likely they are to be needed.

The problems facing the world today are the ancient tinies of humanity: poverty, hunger and ignorance. And least one fairly new one- narcotics. Alexander was right the sense that the narcotics trade is a global problem that nnot be solved by individual nations. The Peacekeepers helping to orchestrate a global solution-while "yers point trembling fingers and warn that, the IPF is irning into a world dictatorship.

But that's another story. Perhaps someday I will write it.')o. For now, I must start the official history of the international Peacekeeping Force. It will be factual, enor-' lowly detailed, and quite dull. But once it is finished I can im to the real stories of the men and women who work to take a reality of the prophecy of Isaiah, the motto of the international Peacekeeping Force:

NANON SHALL Myr LiFr Up SwORD AGAiNsT NATIoN

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VOORLOPER

he surveyed what we could see.

s

elp asking, for she

"No memories?" I could not h
was frowning as one might who was attempting to re-
call something which remained as only a trace at the
very edge which thought could reach.

She shook her head instead of answering me, but
now she moved with some purpose. Shucking her back
pack she opened it -and searched among the contents to
-from

bring out a skin bag which I had already seen
which she had taken the salve which had brought me
relief from the poisonous sap. She opened that and,
ipping in two finger tips, brought out a gob which she
d

roceeded to rub over her face and then both of her
p

hands. When she had done she looked at me.

"This will sa ve us from another accident such as you
faced in Mungo's Town-"

Save-us? Then she expected me to accompany her
into Voor's Grove. Perhaps for a second or two I
thought of refusing, but I could not. My curiosity was
far too aroused. Would we find the same signs of a
massac re here?

I rubbed away until those portions of my skin which
would be exposed were well covered with a film of
grease carrying an odd but not unpleasant scent. It
pain from my blisters which were fast
had drawn the
healing so they showed now only as reddish marks.

I dropped my pack beside hers and checked my belt
equipment. There were tangler and stunner, both of
which were fresh charged, my long knife, the pouch in
which rode that enigma we had discovered in the
grass my torch-though it was still early afternoon@
and we should not be so long in there that I would use
that. Yes, all the defenses any looper could carry were

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ANDRE NORTON

close to my hand.

Relieving the gars of their burdens, we stacked that
packed gear at a point directly opposite the remains of
the bridge and then set out to see what might lie within
Voor's. Illo took the lead, moving out while I steadied
the water carriers against the other gear, before I could
call to her to wait.

She balanced lightly and skillfully from one stone to
the next, twice having to jump to cross gaps in the
masonry. The brown water swirling below had all
oily look to it, as if it were not really water but the
exudation of some unpleasant growth. I watched it
carefully before I began the crossing. There was no
movement to be sighted on the surface or under it.
However the tumble of stones could well give good
footing to any such monster as we had seen pull itself
up on the wagon. So I stood there on sentry duty, my
hand on the butt of my stunner, alert to any-move-

ment, until Illo was across. As a healer she wore no
weapons-had refused the other-stunner, and had only
P the long-bladed belt knife which was a working tool for
any traveler. That would be useless against the scaled
and armored thing.

Once she was across she turned a little and I was
quick not to let her believe that I held back where she
had led, setting foot on the first pile of stone to follow.
Some of those stones, as I made the same jumps over
the gaps, appeared unsteady and I wished I had had
the foresight to bring with me the rope which had
lashed the burdens on the gars. Linked so together, if
one o f us tumbled into the noisome appearing water
the other could lend a hand.

As is mainly true when one fills the immediate