

Trinity
by Jay Lake

He'd spent a lot of time thinking about the fire in the sun. Light was everywhere on the land, a none too gentle pressure forcing its brilliant, infinitely narrow fingers into every crack and crevice. Some of the bright bounty was captured by plants, solar batteries of infinite patience. Most of it simply seared, dried, dehydrated, desiccated.

New Mexico, they'd told him. And maybe Nevada. Gardens wrested from the desert by our hands, places to grow new sunflowers fit to overshadow the earth.

He'd driven the long, rutted, empty miles from here to there and back again more times than he could remember. Flown a few occasions, too, in roaring gooney birds that coughed blue smoke and grumbled curses at the cross-winds, but he'd always preferred the endless hot hours on the lonely roads. Once away from the checkpoints and the machine guns, there was little enough sign of man, save the road itself.

And the fire in the sun, of course.

His shoulders hurt. He hadn't quite counted on that. He shifted his weight, ignoring the key which glittered on the edge of the platform. That had been intended to tumble to the Nevada soil yards below, instead of hanging at the edge of his vision like a torment. No matter, it was out of his reach now.

A scorpion had somehow, improbably, found its way up the tower. Maybe it had clung to the canvas trousers of some member of the final inspection team. He'd worked out his escape well enough, running back for a forgotten item -- "I'll catch a ride with Ed and the others!" -- then avoiding them in turn. There were layers of guards, from here to Washington and beyond, but they all faced out.

Who would stay where he was? Chains and all.

The scorpion wandered aimlessly across the gridded platform which had served for final checks and arming. He'd sunk to a squatting position and wasn't sure he could gain his feet again now. There was some irony to be found here, he was certain, worried about a scorpion at this stage of events.

Distant sirens blared, the yowl of air raid, tornado, Armageddon. Men were arrayed in files within distant trenches, goggle-eyed, also serving who stand and wait. Cameras, seismographs, Geiger counters, spectrographs, binoculars, even the standard issue human eyeball, Mark I.

He wondered if they saw him now. He didn't think so. Viewed from the minimum survivable distance, he should be nothing more than the scorpion was to them. The films later might show something, but it wouldn't matter then.

There was a crisp scent of sand, soil and oiled metal. The sun continued to dance its bright tarantella on his sweating head, making the metal casing at his back ping. The song of steel and aluminum and the dark-bright heart of the atom. The scorpion, oblivious to both beauty and danger, found his boot.

A voice counted off numbers. Though it was no more than blare to him here, he knew that German-accented English well enough. Soon there would be a second sun birthed in the Nevada desert, light brighter than any balefire ever built by man.

In that moment, he would be repaid, remade, reforged. It was beyond his current means to hurl himself into the fire in the sun, so he had brought the sun to earth.

There was a sudden silence.

The scorpion raised its tail.

Wind shrieked a song of distant ghosts.

The bomb whispered in his ear.

