



The UFO Murders

Reality Based Fiction
May 19, 1953
The Kingman UFO

A Novel

By John D. Conneally

Acknowledgments.

The murders of John Kramnicz and Charles Cockburn actually happened in the place and manner described; the murders remain unsolved. The tale of Arthur G. Stancil, also known as “Fritz Werner”, is well documented on television and the Internet. I leave it to the reader to determine its veracity. A great deal of information came from the [Mohave Historical Society](#), Kingman, Arizona, and especially from the Mohave Miner newspaper for the week of May 19, 1953, and for several weeks thereafter. I have also made great use of [Wikipedia](#). The atomic bomb information is available at a variety of Internet sites; information on operation Upshot/Knothole came from [Nuclear Weapon Archive.org](#).

A special thanks to Bill Howard and my daughter, Eryn Wisler, for their patience, proof reading, and good ideas, and to “Suzi Nagasaki” from [LDRC](#) without whom I would not be here.

Interviews were conducted with Kent Smith, Kelly Furr, John Osterman and a few other ‘old timers’ from Kingman. Unfortunately most of the people who would have direct knowledge of these events have passed away, many from the lingering effects of radiation exposure incurred during the 1950’s. However, one not-so-old ‘old timer’ has given freely of his time and his memory to ensure that the facts as presented are actually facts. Thanks to Chuck Snelling, my scoutmaster and my friend.

This is a work of historical fiction. Attention was paid to getting the details right, however, with the exception of the murders of Kramnicz and Cockburn, and the atomic bomb detonations, none of this ever happened. Any resemblance to any person, living or dead is mostly a coincidence. One of the pictures is from my personal collection. The rest are from WikiCommons.

The San Francisco Examiner. July 29 1952... "The Air Force revealed today that jet pilots have been placed on twenty-four-hour nationwide 'alert' against 'flying saucers' with orders to 'shoot them down' if they refuse to land."

The Louisville Courier-Journal. July 30, 1952... "Maj. Gen. Roger Ramey, deputy Chief of the Air Force Staff for Operations, told the news conference that interceptor planes have raced aloft several hundred times as a result of reported sighting of unidentified objects. He said that was just standard procedure."

The Fullerton News-Tribune, CA July 26, 1956... "The United States Navy will not publicly admit that it believes in flying saucers, but it has officially ordered combat-ready pilots to 'shoot to kill' if saucers are encountered, OCNS [Orange County News Service] has learned. The information was first learned when Navy pilots navigating trans-Pacific routes from the United States to Hawaii were ordered in a briefing session to engage and identify 'any unidentified flying objects.' If the UFOs (saucers) appeared hostile the briefing officer told the pilots of Los Alamitos Naval Air Station reserve squadron VP 771, they are to be engaged in combat... It was found that the orders are not unusual."

General Benjamin Chidlaw, Head of Air Defense Command... Uncontested quote, as told to investigative writer Robert Gardner in February of 1953. "We have stacks of reports about flying saucers. We take them seriously when you consider we have lost many men and planes trying to intercept them."

CIA memorandum - "Subject: Flying Saucers." Dated Sept. 24, 1952... H. Marshall Chadwell, Asst. Director of Scientific Intelligence: "A world-wide reporting system has been instituted and major Air Force Bases have been ordered to make interceptions of unidentified flying objects."

Donald Keyhoe, 1973... "In the late 1950s, as a number of futile US chases mounted, some pilots were convinced that the UFOs were immune to gunfire and rockets. Several Intelligence analysts believed the aliens might be using some negative force linked with gravity control to repel or deflect bullets and missiles. But the top control group disagreed. In a special evaluation of US and foreign reports they found evidence that UFOs were not invulnerable. Some had been temporarily crippled, apparently from power or control failures, and a few others had been completely destroyed by strange explosions. In one or two cases, it appeared that missiles or rocket fire could have been the cause."

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Kingman Arizona, Monday, 19 May 2003, 1123 hours.

If anything is consistent in the high desert, it is the wind. A little dust devil appeared in the empty field behind the [cemetery](#) and meandered slowly toward the lines of very old head stones. The ground here is filled with rocks and nearly devoid of moisture; there is no lawn. Nothing grows naturally in this ground except weeds and cacti and remorse. Planted on the fence line, next to the street, are dozens of sunflowers, a vain attempt to mask the desolation of this place. The old part of the cemetery is closed to casual visitors. Many of the old wooden coffins have collapsed leaving the hazard of stepping into a partially open grave. A crew comes here from time to time and fills them up, but the macabre sight is best kept from public view. No one alive, it seems, cares much about remembering those who are buried here. Mostly they came with the railroad in 1880, and tried to tease a little gold from the hardscrabble ground. These dusty graves are all that remain for the unlucky ones who were still searching for Cibola when death overtook them. Dreams are born here, nurtured, and then boil away in the summer sun. Kingman is hard, a place for hard men, stubborn women, and relentless wind.

Only one old man, once a year, came to stand quietly by a single marker; paying his respects to the memory of a man he never knew, a man whom, at the age of 80, was murdered in his sleep. The murder was done half a century before this windy day. The rumor mill held that he was once an Air Force officer. Despite his age and his use of a cane, he was a formidable man, not someone to argue with, and he was always permitted entry to the potter's field.

As the dust devil approached, he took off his hat, a straw [Resistol](#), but otherwise ignored the little windstorm and the dust it stirred up. Overhead, sailing on a desert updraft, a red tail hawk glided in wide circles. The bird flew with almost no effort looking for a kangaroo rat or a puppy, anything large enough to eat, but small enough that it could be carried away in delicate flight. The bird knew far more about 'targets of opportunity' than any human; his life depended on making the right choices.

When the dust devil passed, the hat went back to its rightful place. The old man considered, for a moment, the difficulty of knowing which is the right choice, and leaning heavily on his cane, walked back to his car.

Barstow California, Monday, 18 May 1953, 2023 hours.

The MiG had somehow gotten behind him and was bearing down on his port wing. The enemy pilot had huge grinning teeth and the corners of his mouth curled into a sneer every time the MiG fired. He maneuvered left and right, tried every trick he knew, but his [Saber Jet](#) was badly shot up and couldn't respond fast enough to avoid the attack. Tracers streamed out of the MiG; bullets the size of softballs were impacting the F-86 ... something exploded ... he was free of the cockpit. The softballs became fire hydrants as they blazed past him and he noticed the ground was coming up awfully fast. He opened the parachute but the canopy was on fire ...the fire crept down the shroud lines and threatened to engulf him ...

“Captain Holland. Wake up sir. You’re in Barstow” A man in the uniform of an Army corporal with the name ‘Green’ above his pocket was standing next to him on the train. Rich Holland could feel the sweat in his armpits and his crotch and as the dream evaporated he quietly thanked God he had not peed in his pants. He picked up his cane, a copy of a paperback book titled Casino Royale that had helped kill time on the long train trip, and followed Green out of the carriage and into the depot. Once there, Green scooped up Holland’s AWOL bag, not a suitcase, just a cloth bag that was large enough for a change of clothes and his toothbrush. Holland walked into the men’s room and relieved the pressure that always built up in his bladder when he had the dream. He stood quietly allowing his thoughts to return him to reality.

Barstow, Holland decided, was a very odd place to hold a meeting. A dusty little town in the middle of nowhere, a few buildings along the highway that seemed to run parallel to the railroad tracks and that was about it. The notion that it was a *secret* meeting had actually escaped him since his orders simply required him to report to the Commanding Officer of a small Marine Corps Supply Facility at Barstow. The corporal had been waiting at the Santa Fe railroad depot with a jeep and drove frantically in the light traffic on Highway 66, punishing the little engine as he passed every car on the road. Once he passed on the wrong side, taking the jeep on a dirt shoulder and nearly bounced Holland out. Holland was an Air Force pilot, and familiar with taking insane risks, but not when someone else was in control. He drew a breath to order the man to slow down but before he could speak the corporal veered off the highway onto a paved approach road, slowed, and then stopped at a guard gate.

Harsh military light-alls illuminated the guard shack which was manned by three Marines, two with M1 rifles and one with a Thompson sub-machine gun. All three were senior noncoms. Holland noticed that one had a nasty scar that ran from his left ear to well under his chin. These were serious men doing serious business, not the crew he would expect to guard piles of inedible c-rations and moth eaten blankets. A staff sergeant, who said nothing, simply extended his hand toward Holland, palm up, and waited for Holland to hand over his orders and identification. The other two watched the procedure very carefully, the machine gunner shifted his weight from one leg to the other but the Thompson remained cradled in his right arm. In the glare from the artificial lighting Holland noticed four other small groups of armed men at vantage points along the fence line. From behind a pile of sand bags he noticed a Browning automatic rifle pointed in his general direction.

The staff sergeant carefully reviewed the documents but ignored the corporal entirely. Eventually he handed the papers back to Holland. The sergeant then offered a crisp salute; someone pushed a wire gate aside and the corporal, carefully for a change, drove the jeep onto the compound. The staff sergeant had not spoken a single word.

The supply depot was about what Holland expected; Quonset huts laid out in neat military rows like they were standing an inspection, vehicles parked at odd places, tarps whose corners had come loose and flapped in a lazy breeze, street lights stuck on poles here and there in a haphazard way; a kind of studied disorder that seemed to accompany military bases from Korea to the Mojave desert. The squeaky gate call from a covey of quail sometimes penetrated the growl from the little engine. The presence of manned machine gun emplacement, however, was not what he expected. Dug into the ground in three dozen places, an entire company of Marine Corps infantry lined the fence, their

fields of fire generally pointed outward, away from the base, but many were pointed the other way. Clearly, something of great military value was here. Captain Holland began to briskly consider the few things that could demand this kind of security. One at a time he rejected options and finally settled on the idea that some truth must be associated with the rumor of a stolen or lost atom bomb. Perhaps their toy had been found, transported here, and was now to be sent back to its nest. Perhaps worse, the newly invented Hydrogen Bomb has something to do with this. He hoped it was merely atomic, but knew that at a distance of a few dozen yards the difference was exactly zero.

Corporal Green parked near a building large enough to be a theater. He climbed out of the jeep and said, "I know it was a rough ride, sir, but I was ordered to get you here as quickly as possible. The others are waiting inside. You were the last arrival."

"The others? Other what?"

The corporal didn't answer but in a gentlemanly gesture picked up Holland's AWOL bag, opened the door and held it open until Holland walked inside, then followed. Holland found it was, indeed, a theater, with a few hundred men in the varied uniforms of the US military, one Canadian pilot, and a few civilians milling around a table that supported several coffee urns and a few depleted piles of donuts. The room stunk of stale cigarette smoke, popcorn, and mildew. He approached an Air Force Major and asked, "Who do I report to?"

"Ah. You must be Holland. We've been waiting for you. I'm Jim Zumwalt." The Major stuck out an over-sized paw, and the men shook hands. Zumwalt pointed to the cane and asked, "How's the leg?"

"The flight surgeon says it will heal up. They told me I may not fly again but they don't actually know, so I'll stay for a while. See what happens."

"Really bad luck. I've read your jacket and you are one hell of a pilot. Eleven MiGs isn't it?"

Holland smiled. "Twelve actually, but who's counting."

Zumwalt smiled and said, "The Air Force still needs men like you. Not everyone gets to fly but everyone gets to serve. New things are happening, new opportunities. Yeah, stick around for a while yet. It could get interesting."

"You'll find this assignment a piece of cake I think. Just give me a moment ..." he gestured toward an enlisted man at the front of the room ... "I think we are ready to begin. Just take a seat. After the briefing, you'll get your assignment." The enlisted man opened a rear door, said a few words to someone Holland couldn't see and in a moment, in a loud voice announced, "Gentlemen, please take your seats."

The mob quickly ordered itself. The civilians took seats in the front row, senior officers in the second row, junior officers and a similar number of enlisted behind them. Holland recognized a few faces; pilots he had known in one place or another and a single curious out-of-place face.

Robert Kaiser was an intelligence type he had known in Korea. The man was something of a legend - nightmare might be a better word - who prowled around airfields and officer's clubs in search of God knew what. He engaged drunken officers in conversations of a questionable nature, wore any uniform he wanted, sometimes dressed as an Air Force officer, sometimes an Army private, and once as an Australian enlisted sailor. He had been a field agent for a very long time, they said, and had served in occupied Europe with the [OSS](#). His presence here, Holland decided, was a grave omen.

Holland remembered a sunny afternoon in a bar in Seoul. Kaiser was drunk and brandishing a suppressed .22 pistol; a [High Standard Model HDM](#) issued to him by the OSS. He claimed three Gestapo kills with it; all of them head shots. In retaliation, 30 innocent people from a tiny village in Holland had been pulled from their beds and machine gunned in the street. Rats scurried across the floor of the bar and Kaiser dropped them as they ran, the silencer made the report barely audible at a range of two feet. Holland would have bet Kaiser was too drunk to hit himself over the head, but the rats continued to die, and Kaiser continued to drink. Eventually someone used a shovel to scoop up the rat bodies. Kaiser taunted the boy, aiming first at the shovel and then at him. With great bravado, Kaiser aimed at the boy's head, fired, and cut off a piece of the child's earlobe. The supply of rats exhausted, and his welcome mat removed, Kaiser then stumbled into the street.

“Atten hut!” Everyone rose automatically while an Air Force Major General, followed closely by a Marine Brigadier entered the room. The Major General took his place at a podium and said, “At ease.”

“My name is General Black. I know that most of you have no idea what this is about. It was intended that you not know until now. This briefing is classified Top Secret, code name Blue Book. The information you are about to receive is not to be shared with anyone at anytime and any order given you to the contrary is to be considered an unlawful order. This is need-to-know information and no one outside of this room needs to know. This is operation *Electric Archer*.

“You have all heard rumors about foo fighters, UFOs, little green men and the like. Most of what you have heard is a lot of bunk. Most of it.

“In July of 1947 an incident near Roswell, New Mexico, gave us the first hard evidence that these things are real. Some bodies were recovered at the crash site, but the disk was reduced to so much scrap. In January of 1948, a pilot with the Kentucky Air National Guard named [Captain Thomas Mantell](#) deliberately crashed his P-51 into a flying disk. Captain Mantell paid with his life but our knowledge of a potentially hostile threat was doubled.

“Between [July 13th and July 29th](#) last year, a series of flying disks were spotted in the skies above Washington, D.C. By order of the President, a [commission](#) was established to look into this matter.

Nevertheless, the origin, power source, and purpose of these disks are complete unknowns, and we need to know more. Flying characteristics beyond what little has actually been observed are also unknown. The disks are able to hover and then accelerate at g-forces that would crush a human body, sometimes exceeding 3000 miles per hour.

“The details are highly classified, but I can promise you that these disks were not built by the Soviets or by any human technology. The Russians, in fact, have a great interest in this subject. Someone in the Pentagon thinks that if they are interested, we should be, and that's why we are here.

“There are other legitimate reasons to pursue these flying disks. Some pieces of the wrecks appear to have been grown and have the microscopic appearance of living cells. I cannot tell you if the disks are living things, but they definitely have an organic component. If they can be grown, then they could conceivably be grown into any configuration.” Military officers, career officers or not, are expected to withhold their personal opinions unless asked. Nevertheless, a mummer rolled around the room; such a

method of building aircraft was inconceivable to most of them. The capability to ‘grow’ an aircraft could provide configurations only dreamed of with current manufacturing techniques. Holland mentally skipped from one airframe to another. The possibilities were staggering.

“In order to gain further intelligence on who built them, and what they want, we have decided to attempt to bring down an additional craft.” Black gestured to his aide; a curtain draped in front of the movie screen was pulled back, an overhead projector was switched on, and a map of the Nevada/California/Arizona area was shown. Printed at the top in letters large enough not to be missed were the words ‘Top Secret’ and ‘Electric Archer’. A large pink wedge was drawn on the map. One corner was located at a point north of Las Vegas and stretched northeast to St. George, Utah, and from Las Vegas southeast to Kingman, Arizona. A red diamond was also on the map, located north of Las Vegas.

The General, using a long wooden pointer, continued his lecture. “This area with the red diamond is the Las Vegas Bombing and Gunnery Range, also known as Yucca Flat. The government has tested several atomic bombs on this range. Testing is ongoing. That is not a secret. What is not generally known is that one or more of these disks are present at every detonation. Before each shot the test range is cleared of civilian sightseers and roads into the critical areas are blocked. Several weeks ago a shot was scheduled, the range was cleared, but the shot was postponed. A single disk, however, was right on station waiting for the shot.”

“We believe the range is monitored. We don’t know how, but clearing the range is the signal for the disks to take up their station. Yesterday at 0700 local time, the process of clearing the range was begun. A test shot is scheduled for 0500 hours tomorrow,” Black glanced at this watch, “today actually, about five hours from now.”

“This line ...” Black pointed to a broad black stripe ... “is the suspected flight path of the object we intend to bring down.” The line ran in a northwest to southeast direction, beginning northwest of the Nevada test range and ending roughly at a place named Gila Bend in Arizona. “A disk has used the indicated path on nine separate occasions, including five of the last seven test shots. The method used to bring down the craft is a very powerful radar transmitter. Two other craft have been affected by our radar emissions, one crash landed in New Mexico but was able to take off and fly away after a short time.

“In 1943, the Japanese Imperial Army abandoned their effort to produce an atomic bomb in favor of a project to produce a [death ray](#). The technology involved was, essentially, a very high-power microwave transmitter. Captured documents indicate that a prototype weapon was tested on rabbits and monkeys. Given the nature of inhumane treatment afforded their prisoners we presume that the reference to monkeys actually indicated tests on humans. High-energy microwaves bombarded against unprotected living tissue cooks the tissue, causing death in a number of ways depending on which internal organs are damaged.

“The next slide please.” A picture of a large dish shaped object replaced the map. The object was oriented toward the horizontal and a pagoda like structure was clearly visible in the background. “Troops entering Japan in 1945 found 42 of these parabolic disks, apparently antenna, located in tactical positions where combat was expected. Since they were not orientated toward air defense we believe they were intended for use against

ground troops. It would have been a painful death, but not an effective weapon. The disks could not be rotated and could not be aimed at a specific target. It would have been easily destroyed by aircraft or flanked by ground troops.” The general pointed to the projector and said, “The map again, please.”

“We have modified a [B-29](#) which will fly in pursuit, with a very powerful transmitter, an upgraded version of the Japanese death ray, which we believe will seriously affect the flying disk and cause it to crash somewhere along this flight path. The '29 will depart [Nellis Air Force Base](#) at 0400 hours today. We expect the disk to be on station about 0430 hours and we expect the '29 will intercept about here “... the pointer still working ... “north of Las Vegas”.

“Since we cannot predict which way it will turn, you men will be stationed at selected points along the anticipated flight path. If the craft is taken down your job is to go to the scene and secure it until a larger inspection team arrives. Each of you pilots will be paired with a driver/radio operator so you can be informed of the situation in your particular tactical area, and you have the ability to alert command if or when you have sighted the disk. Communication relay points, “... he used the pointer again ... “are already setup and operating on selected mountain peaks in three places.

“Why are we sending pilots? Because we expect you will be able to tell the sheep from the goats. In flight, these disks don't look at all like a human built aircraft. If a civilian aircraft happens to crash near you, well, sorry about that, but your job is to find the disk and that is your only job. Find the disk, report back; remember what you saw because you'll be debriefed about it later. This is another reason to use pilots; you are already familiar with the procedure.

“Your drivers have been here for three days and are well acquainted with radio procedures and the various tactical areas. Each team has a four-wheel drive vehicle with maps, gasoline, and a small supply of rations. Each officer will be given 200 dollars in cash for repairs, gasoline, food, or anything else you may need. Keep your receipts. If you're forced to dig into your own pockets, you'll be reimbursed ... eventually.” A quiet chuckle rolled across the audience. “You are ordered to wear civilian clothing. We must keep this quiet and uniformed men in civilian vehicles would generate questions. If you don't have any civvies, see the supply sergeant before you leave the station. He has a collection of coveralls and skivvies shirts that can pass for civilian clothing. Also notice that the vehicles have civilian license plates and appropriate documentation in each vehicle.

“Once the crash site is identified and secured, a team of scientists will be transported to the site. Their jobs are classified but obvious. I know you have questions but the nature of this operation is such that I have already told you nearly everything I can.”

A hand went up in the third row, “General, what is the pink area about?”

Black looked at the projected image for a moment and said, “This map was originally intended for tracing fallout. The area in pink is subject to the highest concentration of fallout, due mainly to the prevailing winds at various times of year. The fallout information does not impact this operation.”

Holland took a moment to digest that little piece of information. The A Bomb testing was killing American civilians. Unsuspecting ordinary folks would die too young because of the testing. How many of those bombs had they set off? How many more

would die? He wondered for a moment; if the scientists were spending their weekends in Dutch Harbor instead of Las Vegas, how many shots would they need? More to the point, the Air Force was about to send him, and dozens of others, into a known fallout area a few hours before touching off an A Bomb. He could only speculate on how high his own exposure would be.

An enlisted man in the back of the room followed his orders and asked, "Is this actually some kind of loyalty test?"

Black followed his orders and ignored the question. Most of these men would never see any flying saucer; they would never have any contact at all with anything out of the ordinary. The psychologist assured him that this question would allow them a way out, another avenue to channel their thinking. They could walk away from this without knowing the truth about it, and be satisfied they had done their duty and nothing more.

"General, Sir, what if this thing crashes in a town somewhere?"

"We have a contingency plan but as you can see from the map the tactical area is sparsely populated. We really don't anticipate any problems along those lines.

"Very well, gentlemen, your assignments are posted. Good luck." The generals turned and marched from the room, everyone else stood.

Corporal Green was already dressed in denim trousers and approached Holland with a cup of coffee and a manila envelope stuffed with papers. "You and I are paired up, Captain. I'm ready to go and we have almost 300 miles to drive so I took the liberty of gathering up the paper work. We've been assigned an old ambulance and I put a thermos of hot coffee in it. We can take off any time you're ready." Green handed Holland eight \$20 bills. "I'll hang on to the rest Sir, if it's all the same to you, easier to pay for gasoline."

"You're pretty efficient Green. Why do I get the idea you are something more than just a corporal?"

"Don't know why you'd think that sir." Green again picked up Holland's AWOL bag and walked out of the building.

The ambulance was painted white, but poorly painted. Green explained that it would look a lot more like a war surplus civilian vehicle, therefore less likely to be remembered, if the paint job was not done well. Holland changed his clothes in the back and then took the passenger seat. He wished for a moment that the Army had installed seat belts to keep him from falling out when Green went nuts. As they rolled past the front gate for the second time in 30 minutes Holland said, "One thing. If we arrive on station a little late that would be far better than getting killed on this highway and not arriving at all."

Green smiled and said, "Understood, Sir."

The suspension in the ambulance was a little better than the much lighter jeep, but despite the paved road reading was difficult and the poor light from an overhead bulb didn't help much. After Holland leafed through the bundle of papers he asked, "Where exactly is Wikieup?"

"About two hours to Needles, another hour to Kingman, another hour to Wikieup, southeast of Kingman."

"So we should be on station in plenty of time."

"Except for the *about* part, which will probably cost an hour, yes Sir. We should be there in plenty of time. I grew up in a little town that's on the way. Place called

Hilltop. It would be a shame to come this far and not stop for a few moments.”

“What about points further south?” Holland’s map ended at something called Burro Creek.

“I don’t know the answer Sir, except to say that on the way over here I met five other men who were sent to Luke Air Force Base, and three others that were going to Tucson. We were all stacked up in a train station in Chicago.”

“They brought you all the way here from Chicago?”

“You know the Army, Sir. Well ... being Air Force maybe you don’t.”

“Different color uniform, corporal, same old shit.” They both laughed.

The ambulance rolled off a small hill and Green announced that they had entered the ‘flat part’ of the Mojave Desert. "If you check the map carefully you'll notice that they spell Mojave with a "j" west of the Colorado, and with an "h" in Arizona. Don't ask me why. I didn't draw up the map."

Holland laughed and said, “You hung around that base for three days? Just a guess but a bright fellow like you must have heard some things that Black didn’t talk about.”

Green hesitated, deciding how much to trust this man, and said, “I heard a few things. One rumor was that a Soviet agent was snooping around and that was the reason for the Marines. Or maybe this is just some kind of loyalty test. Let’s face it; the whole idea of flying saucers is pretty crazy. And bringing one down with radar is crazier. These guys have flown from God knows where, millions of miles maybe and get knocked out of the sky by radio waves.”

“Not just radio. A death ray.”

“If my grandmother had wheels, she’d be a wagon. In the case of my grandmother all she lacked was wheels. Woman was the size of a bear. Smelled like one too.”

Holland laughed out loud. “What’s your first name Corporal?”

“Smedley, Sir, but only my mother calls me that. Sam to everyone else.”

Holland nearly choked trying to suppress his laughter but managed to keep a straight face. “Nothing wrong with that name, but since I’m not your mother, Sam it is. I’m Rich. Richard actually, but I don’t like being called Dick.”

It was Green’s turn to avoid laughing aloud. “As far as I am concerned, Sir, your first name is Captain.”

“Actually”, Holland replied, “if we find ourselves having a beer together you’d better make it Rich. These orders are very specific that the public is not to know what we’re doing, so no saluting and no ‘Sir’ until we are back in uniform.”

Green nodded his compliance and said, “I’m not really comfortable with all this secret non-sense. If these things are real, this is the biggest deal since Jesus Christ and there is no way they will be able to cover it up.”

Holland considered that and said, “I don’t disagree, but we have our orders. What really bothers me is that once they decide to lie about it, they will never be able to tell the truth. It would be like the government saying that Franklin Roosevelt knew all about Pearl Harbor weeks before it happened but decided not to do anything about it. Fifty damn years from now they will still have to lie. If they admit it, the whole world will know they are liars, have been for half a century, and no government could ever survive that. Suppose they figure out how these things work and build one. They can’t just suddenly tell the world they have flying disks capable of defeating every enemy that

pokes his head up. Just telling could start another big war. And you can bet your ass that if we are doing it, so are the Russians. I'd guess the real motive for all this is exactly the Russians. We can't let them get ahead of us."

"People talk. You know that. *Loose lips* and all that is one thing, but you can't hide this forever. The whole A Bomb program was a big secret, but the Commies had people inside and knew all about it. Hell, my cousin in New Mexico was telling me something was going on there in 1944. She told me all about it. She said it was some kind of really big bomb that the government was going to use to end the war. You just can't hide that kind of stuff for too long."

"You're right about that. People talk. No way around it. I guess they could just shut up about it. Have a Blue Ribbon Panel look into it, say its bunk in a big public pronouncement and then never say anything official about it again. Just let everyone wonder about it." Holland yawned and glanced out the window.

Green asked a question he was not comfortable asking. "Why do you use a cane?"

"Chinese pilots don't fly the MiG very well. Russian pilots fly them much better."

"You mean in Korea?"

"Yeah. In Korea. This little jaunt is not my first go round."

"Rodeo, sir. In this part of the country, it's a rodeo. If you need people to think you are a local, tell them it was a rodeo."

Holland appreciated Green from a new prospective. He honestly doubted this little adventure would amount to more than a lot of driving around in the desert, but using a native guide could have advantages. Holland pulled his hat down over his eyes, settled back into the seat, and pretended to sleep, hoping the nightmare would not come.

Yucca Flat Nevada, Tuesday, May 19, 1953, 0452.943 hours.

Quinlab looked carefully at the power display, felt each output node for the reverse polarity charge that would indicate a problem. Satisfied that all was well he returned his attention to the primary monitor. If the *smart monkeys* detonated another device during the current rotation, his instruments were ready to monitor and record.

Quinlab and the other two aboard were manufactured beings. Their bodies were designed to operate continuously and did not require food. Instead, they absorbed energy directly from space, or they could convert energy from hydrogen. Their bodies were small which allowed better use of interior space inside the craft. Instead of skin, they had seven layers of scales. This afforded them great protection. The scales also allowed exposure to vacuum conditions for several minutes before any damage was done. If injured, a layer of scales could be shed revealing the next, undamaged layer, and a new layer would grow. Their oversized eyes were designed to accept and use the smallest amount of light; several eyelids with varying degrees of transparency were provided as protection against abrupt changes in brightness. This allowed him to see in lighting conditions that smart monkeys and even the overseers would consider dark, they could work easily in or out of the atmosphere. The craft itself was powered by accepting energy of many types. Nearly anything that was available would serve to propel the craft or power its many systems. Unexpected solar flares or nearby gamma bursts could overload the collectors, but this happened rarely and was not considered a serious problem.

The intervention was not slated for at least 59 additional solar transits, perhaps a bit longer, and everyone was concerned that the *smart monkeys* would blow themselves to bits before it could happen. Great curiosity had also been raised about their use of both fission and fusion weapons. If their aim was to destroy, their hydrogen weapons, less primitive and much more effective than many believed, were adequate to the task. If so, why were they still messing with atomic bombs? If their aim was conquest or intimidation, then hydrogen weapons would have little value since they would leave little to conquer and a great deal to clean up. Indeed, the radioactive residue from their smaller atomic devices had already begun the inexorable process of genetic mutation among the small population of smart monkeys who lived in nearby villages. Cancerous growths among those were up 2.416 percent and would continue to rise for many years, as mutated genes were passed from one generation to the next. Within three generations offspring would be born with cancer. What in the world were they thinking?

The atmosphere was also fragile and detonations above 10^3 would result in blockage of sunlight by high altitude dust and gas. Such an event would block solar radiation from reaching the planet, cause cooling on a global scale and reduce their present population to a fraction of what it now is. The estimated population of smart monkeys at the time for intervention was nearly seven billion, opposed to the barely three billion currently present. An increase of this nature, in a short time, would present problems associated with food production and distribution, and access to unsalted water. Most of the land-based life forms encountered on this planet were 66% salt water but could not drink salt water and survive. Further study was warranted.

Conversely, the local star was on the verge of a major change and had already begun an increased energy output of .26 percent; the trend line indicated the star would increase its output to almost an additional two percent. The smart monkeys had spent

well over nine thousand solar transits dumping billions of tons of carbon into the atmosphere that would capture ultraviolet energy and retard its escape back into space. This captured heat would warm the entire planet thus warming the biosphere. Such warming would cause unprecedented planetary change. The great ice systems at the poles would begin to melt, sea levels would rise, non-aware species which depended on the ice flows for survival would become extinct, many marshes and wet lands would be overrun by the sea ... these so called smart monkeys were not, actually, very smart and seemed to have little concern for the survival of lesser species. If left alone, the chances were 43 percent that they would ultimately destroy themselves.

In 59 solar transits, the Great One would leave the parallel dimension, fly his crystal ship to this place and take charge. He would declare himself to be the Creator and as such, would demand and receive the worship and respect of these smart monkeys. They would fall in line, or they would die. It was the way of things.

The *Suzie Lee* orbited quietly at 11,500 feet on its assigned station slightly north west of Las Vegas. Her pilot, Major B. J. Allred, knew that the old bombers days were numbered and the time was short. But one of the last operational B-29's was still a capable bird, still in the air, and from the point of view of her pilot, she was still everything she was meant to be.

The *Suzie Lee* had seen action in the Pacific with the 21st Air Force. She had dropped her bombs on the Japanese home islands and participated in the firebombing of Tokyo on March 9, 1945. Unlike other birds of her vintage she had lived to tell the tale. She was still sweet, after all these years. Like his high school sweet heart, she was still the girl he would always remember, still the first kiss, still the first in his heart, and among the first to deliver her payload of death.

But this flight, perhaps her operational last, above the Nevada desert, was unique in a way that no other '29 would ever match. Her bomb bay doors were welded shut; their payload was unlike any she had ever delivered, more ruthless and more complex than any bomb to fall on Europe; more deadly than any that was dropped onto Japan except the contributions of the [Enola Gay](#) and the [Bockscar](#). Secured in her bomb bay was the most powerful radar transmitter ever taken aloft, and the power supply to run it. The wave guides alone were five inches square and encased in a ceramic shield since they would heat to nearly 400 degrees when used. The bombardier position, directly forward of the cockpit, was stripped of instrumentation and contained a parabolic dish used to discharge the deadly electromagnetic bolt. During tests it had cooked birds as they flew.

Allred quietly monitored the chatter from half a dozen radar stations scattered across the desert. He traced a lazy circle in the sky, waiting for the moment of contact that may or may not come.

“Blackbird 14, this is Nellis control. I have a contact bearing 012 range 51 miles.”

“I'm on it.” The navigator quickly plotted the contact and then said, “Bearing 093 range 19 mile, angels 15.”

Allred glanced at his watch, 0458 hours, 8 minutes until detonation. He pointed the nose up a little, turned right to 093 degrees, and added power. The big bird responded well and began to close the distance to both the disk and the bomb. “Call out the range.”

“Range now 13 miles and closing.”

“We can fire at 9 miles.”

“Range now 11 miles.”

The co-pilot toggled the transmitter from stand-by and powered it up. In a moment he announced, “Full power.”

“Range 10 miles.”

The next minute was crucial. If the disk became aware that it was under attack, it could easily flee, open the gap, and avoid being hit. It was an agonizing exercise in time and distance. If they were too close when the atomic bomb detonated, the shock wave could tear the plane apart. If they were too far away from the target, their weapon would be ineffective

“Range 8 miles.”

Despite his anxiety Allred’s professionalism and many years of service won out. He simply whispered, “Fire.”

The co-pilot triggered the transmitter. A burst of microwave energy leaped from the antenna. Traveling at light speed, it impacted the disk almost immediately. It also blew out the circuit breakers in the B-29, which powered down all 4 engines. The crew had practiced what to do in this event and the flight engineer immediately began struggling to restart them. Allred turned the nose south and began trading height for speed. It was a dangerous maneuver, since he had no engines, but the bomb ...

Frenchman's Flat Nevada, Tuesday, May 19, 1953, 0505 hours.

As the first faint streaks of dawn poked over the distant hills the blast came. A vivid flash of light pierced the desert darkness and lighted up the entire countryside. It lasted but a moment or two then was gone. All eyes turned toward the spot where the bomb had exploded. They saw a big ball of furiously churning fire, smoke, sand and debris rapidly rising from the ground in huge, rolling waves. The afterglow remained for several minutes while the mushroom cloud continued to rise then drift away and apart. Then sun was still below the horizon but daylight was coming fast. Broad streaks of sunlight slanted over the mountaintops like ghostly fingers clawing at the heavens. Rumbling of the shock wave continued for nearly five minutes, bouncing back and forth from one mountain wall to another. [\(Nevada Highways & Parks3, no2, "Observation Shot Project", \(Jun-Dec 1953\): 3-16 \)](#)

The device named 'Harry', part of a series of tests collectively called Operation Upshot-Knothole, detonated. The system was 66 inches long, 56 inches in diameter and weighed 8,000 pounds. This particular design, using a large heavy bomb to get an efficient yield out a small amount of radioactive material, was never incorporated into operational thermonuclear weapons. As the supply of fissile material grew the design became obsolete.

'Harry' was notable, however, for a different reason. Of the cumulative total of 85,000 person-roentgens of gamma exposure produced at the Nevada Proving Ground over the lifetime of above ground testing, Harry contributed 30,000 all by himself.

The operation exposed military personnel to radiation more aggressively than previous tests. Observation by military formations was conducted at a minimum safe distance, but for some, it was not their first rodeo. 84 men exceeded the annual limit of 3.3 rems over an 11 week period. The highest exposure was 26.6 rems. The exposures

did not produce symptoms; they simply increased the lifetime risk of cancer a small amount.

The effect on the civilian population living downwind from the test site was much worse. Upshot-Knothole released 35,000 kilo curies of a radioactive form of iodine, Iodine¹³¹. The half-life of Iodine¹³¹ is 8 days, which means a quantity of it will remain radioactive for 80.7 days. The iodine was blown on the prevailing winds to St. George Utah where it fell on the grass that was eaten by cows. The milk was harvested and then shipped to a dairy in Las Vegas, then distributed across the region. Grade school cafeterias served radioactive milk to first and second graders; fifty years later the grandchildren who had inherited damaged DNA from this process would be born with cancer.

The total civilian radiation exposure amounted to 89 million person-rads of thyroid tissue exposure, about 25% of all exposure due to nuclear testing. Eventually it would cause 28,000 cases of thyroid cancer, 1400 deaths. Other cancers including breast cancer and brain cancer followed. In places as far away as Kansas people would die.

Quinlab felt three impacts. Nerve endings in his hands, attuned to signals from the living parts of the craft, felt the electrical surge as it burned into each system. The gamma burst, the largest he had recorded, was preceded by something else, followed by the expected shock wave. Damage was significant. Insufficient time was available for speculation about the first impact. It could wait. His thoughts controlled the craft and his first thought was a hyper jump. Too late, those systems were damaged and would require 1.67 hours to re-grow. He added all available velocity and the craft streaked across the nearly cloudless sky at a little under 800 miles per hour. In a moment he would be forced to touch the land and allow the ship time to heal. They were above a small range of desert mountains and the craft itself selected a flat spot on the western edge of these hills, and then settled onto the ground, but the landing was not smooth. He was thrown to one side and registered minor damage to his left leg.

Power was automatically re-routed from propulsion and other systems to allow maximum usage for repair. A conduit ruptured and sprayed green fluid into the cockpit. Quinlab was covered with the semi-vicious nutrient fluid used by main propulsion. The exterior door opened automatically, a safety precaution. Outside were two smart monkeys, so startled that they could do little but stand with their mouths open and look.

“Archer, this is Nellis control. Your bogey is down.”

General Black quickly translated the last known position, expressed in latitude and longitude, onto his map. It was near a tiny place named Silver Creek. Black wondered if this was inhabited or was simply another of the myriad of places which had a name, but nothing else. “Nellis this is Archer. Acknowledged. Remain alert to the possibility that the bogey could take off again. Pass that to the other stations.”

“Roger Archer. Nellis out.” Black was inside a “duce and a half”, a 2 ½ ton truck parked next to the Dairy Queen in Needles California. The truck was packed with communications gear and a large tent, various colorful banners and other objects that might become useful later.

The nearest ground team was on the Nevada side of the Colorado River very near Davis Dam. Black picked up a different radio handset and said, "Alpha Echo one two this is Archer. The bogey is down in your yard. Proceed to Silver Creek reference three five seven three one seven. Acknowledge."

The relay took a few seconds. The transmission was weak. "Archer this is Alpha Echo twelve. In route. Out."

Black glanced at the personnel roster. It was that intelligence wienie, Kaiser. He didn't trust the man but at the moment had little choice. Nevertheless, he located the next closest team and started them in the same direction.

[Wikieup](#) Arizona, Tuesday, May 19, 1953, 0517 hours.

Green pressed the headphones tighter against his ears, straining to hear the distant radio traffic. The radio calls were very weak and his attempt to follow what was happening was made more difficult since some of the transmissions were too distant to be heard. A relay station positioned on the highest peak of the Hualapai Mountains helped a lot. He was giving Holland a running commentary. Several maps were spread out on the floor of the old ambulance. Green squatted like a baseball catcher as he consulted the maps and tried to follow the situation, an unlit Chesterfield dangling from his lips.

"The bomb went off 12 minutes ago." He checked his watch. "The bogey is down near Silver Creek. It must have run like a bat out of hell to get that far in a few seconds."

Holland was amused by the play-by-play, but relieved that his part in this little melodrama seemed to be over. The ambulance was parked a few yards from a greasy spoon named *The Post Cafe*. Despite the morning light that was only now becoming visible, they had been awake all night and it felt a lot more like a sunset. He considered getting a few beers to celebrate, and then peered carefully over Green's shoulder to see where Silver Creek was.

"*Archer* has sent that guy Kaiser to Silver Creek." Green looked at the map again. "It will take him the better part of an hour to get there. The B-29 has been ordered to continue south, toward the bogey. *Archer* wants to be able to get another shot if the thing suddenly takes off again."

Holland reconsidered about the beer. Perhaps they should wait a while.

"Charlie look at that damn thing!" John Kramnicz, 35 and his partner, Charles Cockburn, 80, stood outside the one room cabin on the last day of their lives. Cockburn wore only his long-handled underwear and boots and stared at the strangest thing either of them would ever see. A lizard emerged from the saucer covered in green ketchup and then simply stood near the door and did nothing. "Do you think he's hurt? Do you think that's his blood?"

"He looks like he's favoring his left leg a little. He could be hurt." Cockburn ran into the cabin, grabbed a sheet and some duct tape and ran back outside. The lizard stood erect on two feet. Cockburn approached the lizard very slowly with the sheet extended in his right hand.

"What's with the sheet? You trying to surrender?"

“No, I’m trying to bandage it up.” He approached very carefully and then used the sheet to wipe away some of the green ketchup. The lizard blinked its large eyes several times but made no move to stop the humans. Cockburn made several swipes along the lizards left side, mopping up the blood.

Quinlab was not physically touching the craft but was close enough that its flight and data recorders clearly captured his thoughts, “... what is this asshole doing?”

Cockburn wiped away the last of the green fluid but found no puncture or abrasion on the lizard. Then he tore the sheet in strips and carefully tied one strip around the lizard’s knee, then another. After several wraps of sheet, he peeled off two feet of duct tape and secured his bandage to the lizard, which had yet to do anything except blink its huge eyes. It seemed to have several eyelids and they sometimes fluttered up and down.

Quinlab had no idea why the smart monkey would try to restrain only one leg and not both. But he sensed empathy from the human, not aggression, and became curious to see what it would do next.

Kramnicz said, “The little bastard looks skinny. I wonder when he ate the last time.”

“What do you figure he eats? Bugs?”

Kramnicz walked into the cabin and returned with a grocery bag that contained eleven oranges. He removed one, carefully peeled it, and then took a bite. The orange was sweet and for a moment he regretted his decision to feed it to the lizard, but it was, after all, one of God’s critters and it looked hungry. Then he rubbed his belly, said, “Yummy”, and offered the brown paper bag to the lizard.

Quinlab understood from this gesture that the monkey was trying to give him the bag and the fruit. It seemed normal, but somehow reversed, that a monkey would try to give him fruit. The ship alerted him to the presence of hydrogen and suggested that he should take it. He reached forward and grasped the bag.

“He took it, he took it.” Cockburn was delighted.

A previously alerted squad of Air Police began a simple job. There were given the names of 11 scientists, told to round them up and put them on board a waiting transport aircraft.

Green was puzzled; after word was relayed that the ’29 restarted and was closing to the new position, not much happened. The radio was quiet despite a flurry of activity to the north. The distance covered by the flying disk in a few short minutes would require hours of travel by several different groups to catch up.

Two cowboys rode their horses out of a field in back of the cafe, dismounted and tied their horses to a horizontal post that was apparently provided for that purpose. It looked like something out of a movie. One of the cowboys hoisted his pants up and both walked inside. Holland was still ambivalent about the beer.

One of the smart monkeys decided to move toward the open hatch. The walls of the cockpit were still covered with nutrient fluid, the craft had not healed the important

systems yet and cleaning up the fluid was a low priority. Quinlab was concerned for a moment about letting one of them get so close to the hatch, but the animal stopped short of entering and simply looked. Since he had no nose, Quinlab was unaware of the odor generated by the mess. The smart monkey, however, was well aware of it and took a very quick step backward.

The surveillance systems were slowly coming online. They reported that three smart monkeys were present. Two stood very near the craft, a third was standing in some rocks, bearing 101.44 degrees, range .0004 standard units. This one carried a device that used a chemical propellant and a metal projectile; a handgun. His intention was not clear but his behavior indicated he wished to remain hidden from the other two. With him was a large, heavy animal that used four legs; also concealed. It was festooned with a leather device that allowed the smart monkey to sit on its back, presumably for the purpose of transportation. The intention of the large animal indicated that it wished to eat. Quinlab evaluated both the third contact and the large animal as a potential threat, not to himself or the craft, but to the empathetic monkeys.

He could remember no precedent for this situation. The computer began an exhaustive search of memory for similar situations and also searched for instructions on how to proceed. Monkeys doing violence to each other was common. However no specific instruction was included that approached this situation. The computer did, however, find a few historical instances where a large carnivore was stalking a monkey for the purpose of consuming it. In some cases the animal was restrained in a force field until the monkey had time to successfully escape.

In this case however, he could not remain here long enough to use that remedy. He logically considered the options, among them the option of simply allowing these two to die. The other two occupants joined his thoughts; critical decision-making was regarded as a high priority and such mental joining was not unusual. The fact that these monkeys had shown empathy was considered a superior trait so the decision was made to save them. Quinlab removed a small device from his belt and held it out to the nearest monkey.

Kramnicz took the device and was mentally given instructions that it was a weapon and how to use it. He was also alerted to the presence of the other contact. "Charlie, is that R24 standing over in the rocks?"

Cockburn could see the south end of the horse and recognized the saddle blanket. "It sure is. Funny that he'd show up here just now."

"He probably just wants to trade for a bottle. These guys gave me a gun of some kind because they think he's up to no good. I guess they just don't like Indians."

The Suzie Lee, again under full power, began to orbit the town of [Oatman](#), Arizona, at an altitude of 12,000 feet. If the flying disk tried to take off, Allred would be in an excellent position to get another shot.

The ship alerted Quinlab that main power was restored and normal flight mode was available. He entered the cockpit, ordered the hatch closed and told the ship to continue the transit toward the southeast. The ship rose into the air ...

Allred saw the saucer scream past the nose of his ship at a range of less than 1000 feet. "Fire."

An electrical spike knocked Quinlab to the deck of the cockpit. The tough hide around his brain protected him from the impact but the shock was too much. He slipped into a dark place. The ship died in the same moment as Quinlab. Its velocity however was more than enough to throw it into a ballistic arc. It continued up and southeast like a giant cannon ball reacting, not to any command, but the simple Newtonian laws that governed such things. Within a second velocity began to fall away and gravity took over. The ballistic arc terminated when the saucer slammed into the desert for the final time.

"Archer this is Nellis control. Your bogey has re-impacted near Wikieup."

Holland felt, rather than heard, the impact, like the sickening crunch when two cars impact at high speed. He jumped behind the wheel and started the vehicle. The motor cranked, choked once, then caught; Holland slammed the transmission into gear and the ambulance kicked a ton of dust into the air as it accelerated down the dirt road that managed to masquerade as US Highway 93. He headed north for half a mile, and then turned west on yet another dirt road. A street sign named this one '[Chicken Springs](#)'.

Green was surprised by the take off and was knocked onto the floor in the back of the ambulance. But his headphones were still in place and he began yelling, "It's us. It's us. The damn thing is on the ground about 15 miles from here."

"I know." Holland raced down the dirt road like a mad man, emulating Corporal Green's performance from earlier in the day. Twenty minutes of driving passed quickly when, to his right, he saw the glint of metal. He turned off the road and drove directly up a sand wash, parking the ambulance a few yards from the wreck.

The saucer was upside down. It had plowed into a patch of mesquite trees and was partially obscured by broken branches. The hatch had sprung open pointing toward the sky instead of the ground. What looked like a body had been thrown from the craft and dangled from a tree a few yards away. Most of the saucer was visible from the road and Holland's first impulse was to hide it.

"Green, get an ax."

"I've got to radio in."

"Forget the radio. Get an ax. We've got to cover this up. Anybody can drive down that road and see the damn thing." Holland reached for his cane, climbed out of the ambulance and ambled toward the body. Patches of a green fluid clung to it in a few places and its left knee was wrapped in duct tape. He was surprised to find something as common as duct tape wrapped around the little body, more surprised to find that a bandage or dressing was underneath the tape. The little creature was gray and had scales, like a snake, for skin.

Green was gathering brush and pushing it into place to further obscure the saucer. Holland said, "Cut some of those branches, the big ones, and push them over the exposed part." Holland climbed back into the ambulance, put the headphones over his ears and spoke into the microphone. "Archer this is Alpha Echo one four. The bogey is down for the count. The occupants are dead. Over."

“Alpha Echo one four this is relay three. You are out of his range. I will relay.” A pause then, “Alpha Echo one four what is your exact location? Over.”

“Map reference five eight five four one three. The craft is visible from the road and we are covering it with brush. It will also be very difficult to get a recovery team in here without driving through the center of Wikieup. People will notice.”

“Is there an alternative route?”

Holland replied, “Wait. Out,” then began inspecting the maps. Green was swearing at a tree and as Holland watched he understood why. Each time Green struck the tree with his ax, the blade bounced off with no effect on the tree. Holland wondered what kind of tree that was and then called to Green, “Try using some branches from those skinny trees where the body is. They look easier to chop”.

After a few moments Holland picked up the radio. “Relay three, this is Alpha Echo one four. Will the convoy come from the north or the south?”

The relay took a few moments, “One from each direction, one four.”

“Take the Signal road, about 7 miles south of Wikieup, go west. Seven or so miles down that road is a power line. There should be a road on the power line right of way. Turn north, intercept Chicken Springs, turn west and look for my ambulance. The other alternative is to follow Signal road to a place called McCracken, then turn east back down Chicken Springs. It’s about 40 miles out of the way.

“From the north it looks like a road runs directly south from Yucca and intersects Chicken Springs at McCracken. Over.”

Green was making better progress with the smaller branches. Only a tiny part of the craft was still visible and Green was still working.

“Alpha Echo one four, this is relay three. I relay from Archer. Understand all. Remain with the bogey until relieved. Outstanding job.”

“Relay three, this is Alpha Echo one four. We have some work to do here so I will be away from the radio.”

“Roger one four. I will take notes for you. Out.”

Holland decided to inspect the little craft. The upside down door made getting inside difficult and the stench coming from inside the craft was almost overpowering. He noted the green blood on the bulkheads and something very odd. Several oranges were lying on the ceiling. A brown paper bag was near enough to reach without setting foot in the mess so he picked it up. In the bottom was a grocery store receipt, hand written, from the Table Supply store in Kingman dated the 17th. Listed on the receipt, among other things, were one dozen oranges. Printed at the top were the words, “Table Supply. Where you save twice.”

Nearly exhausted, Green pulled Quinlab from the tree, unceremoniously tossed it into the pile of brush, and then sat on the ambulance bumper. “What now?”

“Orders are to remain here until relieved. So we wait.”

They spent a leisurely half-hour with Green displaying his knowledge of which cacti was which, which could be eaten, and which could not.

A white pickup with a horse rack rambled down the road, kicking up dust as it went. Dust, Holland decided, was the primary asset to this place, but the wind had long ago blown the really loose dirt away and dust clouds generated by human activity were quick to disappear in the ever present wind. The pickup stopped at the foot of the wash

and a lanky cowboy emerged. Holland wanted to keep him as far away from the saucer as possible, so he walked back toward the road.

“Howdy”. The cowboy had a Texas kind of drawl, but his accent merged with something else. Holland had no way to know this was called a Utah Mormon accent.

“You fellows broke down?”

“Not really. We just decided to take a break. Rest for a while.”

“This land is just on the edge of my ranch. I figured it would be un-neighborly of me to not stop.” The drawl was unbelievable.

“No trouble. No problems. Just taking a break.”

“I see y’all got some brush piled up. Making a fire are ya?”

Holland smiled at the man but alarm bells were ringing in his head. He decided to change the subject. “What ranch would that be?”

“Canaan Springs. I thought everybody north of the Santa Maria knew that.”

“We’re not from around here. We just wanted to see the sights a little. So this is your ranch?”

“This is BLM land. Mine starts a ways north of here.”

“So we’re not in trouble to be here.”

“Not at all. In fact, if you wanted to make off with some brush I was gonna tell ya where to find a lot more of it. I’ve got more than I can use.” The rancher grinned.

Holland smiled and decided the rancher was exactly what he appeared to be and was not the least interested in flying saucers. Holland stuck out his hand and said, “Rich Holland.”

“Kent Jones”. The two men shook hands. For a moment Holland thought he had stuck his hand into a bear trap; the rancher had great physical strength but was so skinny his shirt tail refused to stay in his pants. The two men passed the time of day for several minutes, Holland working hard to keep the conversation away from the brush pile, but Jones was determined to give him a short lecture on the evils of growing cattle in a place with a lot of brush. Eventually the cowboy returned to his pickup and drove west, away from the crash site.

Holland was on the radio as soon as the dust settled. “Relay three this is Alpha Echo one four. I have a problem with civilian traffic on this road.” Holland briefly explained the encounter with Jones.

In a few moments, “One four, Archer has a contingency plan for that. He says it will take about three hours to put it in place. Archer will be with you in about 2 hours.”

“Two hours, roger.”

The *Suzie Lee*, Near Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, Tuesday, May 19, 1953, 0922 hours.

Allred was, in an appropriately professional manner, very pleased with himself. He had managed to be in the right place at the right time twice in the same flight. His crew had performed brilliantly and the -29 was the same tough old bird it had always been. As the plane neared Nellis, the co-pilot had begun an abbreviated check list for landing the old kite.

Without any warning at all a different bogey appeared in the sky, several miles away and a few point to port. It was huge, a mile long he guessed, triangular in shape, black as night and sinister as hell. He screamed at the co-pilot, "Power it up."

"You've got to be ..." the co-pilot saw the bogey, swore once, then said "... still powered up, ready to fire."

Allred turned sharply toward the craft and went to full military power. The old ship responded like a quarter horse, jumping to full speed in a matter of seconds. There was no time to set up the shot. Allred used a weather eye and his experience to judge the range.

The vast ship shimmered and parts of it became translucent, like it was trying to hide. At 10 miles Allred sensed that it was now or never and gave the command, "Fire."

The ghostly leviathan gave no outward indication that it had been hit or that the energy weapon had done any damage. Instead, it simply evaporated into nothing.

Silver Creek, Arizona, Tuesday, May 19, 1953, 0949 hours

R24 was a displaced Apache. He was from the Apache reservation in White River, known as [Fort Apache](#). Each Indian was given a serial number, in this case, R24. Many had taken Anglo names but not all.

R24 rode his horse the last few hundred yards to the cabin. Kramnicz greeted him with a bottle of Canadian whiskey, his favorite, and R24 responded by handing over a small cloth bag with a little gold dust in it. Not much, less than two ounces, but worth a lot more than a fifth of whiskey. R24 never said where he got the gold, and Kramnicz never asked. Better to keep those kinds of secrets a secret. But it was a good deal for Kramnicz and not a bad deal for the Apache so the two had done business this way for a few years.

Cockburn emerged from the cabin with some groceries that were quickly packed away in twin saddlebags. Kramnicz and R24 spoke for several minutes and R24 remounted the horse and rode away.

Chicken Springs Road, May 19, 1953, 0949 hours.

The morning sun had yet to heat the desert to its customary slow boil when Green noticed a dust cloud in the west headed in their direction. Eventually a jeep and a pair of two and half ton trucks stopped at the foot of the wash. General Black was in civilian clothes, actually dressed like a priest, so Holland refrained from a salute. "Holland you've done a great job. The road information you gave us worked out exactly. We found McCracken on the map, due south of Yucca, and then took Chicken Springs. Now I have a new assignment for you.

"I want you to go up to Kingman and put a lid on the rumor mill. Find out if anyone is talking about this and quash it. If anyone from the local newspaper knows anything, use friendly persuasion to stop them from publishing it, the Red Menace, that kind of thing. You know what to say. The only civilian involvement we are aware of is

your rancher. The scientists won't arrive for several hours, so we have a little charade planned to keep things quiet here. Let's see if we can put a lid on it."

"Actually Sir, there is something else." Holland explained about the bandaged leg and the oranges. "Those things had contact with someone, probably today."

Black shook his head, looked at his shoes and was lost for a moment in thought. It had to have come while the saucer was on the ground in Silver Creek. The people who had seen that flying disk had to be intimidated into remaining silent. Perhaps they could be incarcerated for a short time. Perhaps they could be left with such a fantastic story that no one would ever believe them. Perhaps someone could simply put the fear of God into them. One way or another they had to be silenced. Black didn't like the intelligence weenie, Kaiser, but he seemed to be the man for the job. One or two other names came to mind as well.

A crew of men had already begun setting up a very large tent around the disk, removing the brush Green had piled up, and muscling a portable generator into place. Major Zumwalt was having an intense conversation with Corporal Green; the two of them walked behind a truck and out of Holland's view. Another crew began tying brightly colored banners to the tent, the biggest was red, four feet high and 20 feet long. Printed on it in white letters was 'Jesus Saves'.

"Sir, what's this about?" Holland pointed to the banner.

"We're having a revival. That will keep people away. Mostly Mormon ranchers around here, and they won't be much interested." Black chuckled and then said, "I'll have someone take you into Kingman. How much cash do you have left?"

"Almost all of it."

Black fished into his pocket, produced \$200 in twenties and handed the money to Holland. "You'll be flush. Spend several days if you need to. Meet the locals, keep a lid on it. Report back to me at Nellis when you're done. You can contact me there via the base operator if you need to. Do you remember a pilot from Korea named Darwin Cole?"

"Yes, sir, I do. He was my wing-man." An incident with Cole high above Korea was the reason for the cane. Holland did not blame Cole for what happened and had testified as a defense witness at Cole's court marshal; not that it did Cole any good.

"When we were putting this operation together we learned that Cole is a Deputy Sheriff in Kingman. Look him up, old friends and all that. He could be useful."

"Yes sir."

"One last thing and I didn't say this. Don't drink the milk in Kingman. No dairy products younger than 81 days. Cheese would probably be okay." Holland was puzzled by the last order. Perhaps it had to do with the fallout on that map.

Kingman Arizona, Tuesday, May 19, 1953, 1415 hours.

The driver dropped Holland off at the [El Trovatore Motel](#). It was not new by any measure, but it was clean. Holland tossed his AWOL bag on the bed, dug out a clean shirt, washed his face and shaved. It was finally time for that beer.

The desk clerk called a cab, explaining there was only one cab company in town, which had only one cab, and it might be delayed. The vehicle appeared sooner than expected and Holland stepped inside and simply said, "beer". He had been awake all

night but was so wired on coffee that sleep would not come for many more hours without something to counteract the effect.

The driver dropped him off at a bar called The [Sportsman's Club](#) that was wedged between two old brownstone buildings. “There is a bar inside the [Beale Hotel](#) on the right, and if you go out the back door of the Sportsman's, walk across the alley, you can go into the back door of the Kingman Club.”

Holland gave the man a five and told him to keep the change. The driver smiled and said, “I'll come back in about three hours and see if you need a ride back. You like Mexican food?”

“It's not something I get too often, but sure.”

“Eat at the El Mohave,” he pointed, “pretty good. But don't order a pork chop. Stick with the hot plates.”

“Why not a pork chop?”

“Last time I took the family there my kid got a pork chop. They put some applesauce on the plate but it was fermented. Have you ever seen a drunk three year old?” Both men laughed and Holland waved as the cab drove away. The cabstand was across the street in the same block, a tiny building with a large, blue neon, clock outside. Art deco and a 40 mile per hour blistering wind in the same little town seemed odd indeed.

Inside the Sportsman's was dark, cool and inviting. The room was long but narrow, just wide enough to shoot pool. The bartender was not very busy and brought Holland a can of Coors. Holland drank it in one motion, set the can on the bar and ordered another.

“Thirsty, huh?”

“Been awake all night. I should be ready for bed, but I've got too much coffee in me.”

“I know the feeling.” The man put another can on the bar and Holland began to sip this one. “So where you from stranger?”

“What makes you think I'm a stranger?”

“It's a little town. Everyone knows everyone else. No secrets here. They don't even give you a library card. The librarian knows everyone.”

Holland smiled, “Indiana. [Bloomington](#) actually. College town.”

“I've never been back east.”

“Indiana isn't exactly back east.”

“Is to me. What's it like?”

Holland reflected for a moment, “Lot of red brick buildings. Lot of Ivy. It's gentle there. In the middle of the campus, [Indiana University](#), is a stream that sort of winds around. They call it the Jordan River, but it's just a creek. Dozens of places where a man can spread out a blanket and have a picnic with his best girl. Lots of trees; the mythical babbling brook; fishing isn't bad either.”

“Sounds nice.”

“A lot of waterfalls. Most of them don't have a name. Places where the creek falls six or seven feet.” Holland tipped the beer can into his mouth and continued, “I remember one night several of us went to a quarry. They quarry limestone there and the place is loaded with abandoned quarries. A lot of working quarries too. But there was one

with a lake in the bottom. About 30 of us went skinny-dipping. It was great fun until a deputy showed up.”

The bartender laughed, “Spoil sport. Those guys have a way of never being around when you need one and always being around when you don't.”

“I think they teach them how to do that at cop school. Pain-in-the-ass 101.”

The bartender laughed and said, “So you went to college there?”

“A few semesters. Actually I graduated from [Purdue](#). Engineering. My folks lived in Bloomington so it was cheaper to stay there for a while.”

“What was her name?”

Holland looked at the man for a long moment. It was a very long time ago. All that water under the bridge should count for something. Long ago Holland decided that time was an illusion. Lunch time doubly so. “You must be some kind of witch.”

“Bartenders are good listeners, or they don't last long.”

Holland drained the beer and motioned for another. He took a sip and said, “Helen. Her name was Helen.”

“And ...”

“I was in Korea. She married an insurance salesman. End of story.”

“Korea. That's what the cane is about.”

“You noticed that? I thought I did a pretty good job hiding it.”

“Life isn't easy. The parson would have you think it is, but it's not. Some people, sure, just hunker down and never leave the house and everything is easy. But once in a while the world tasks us, gives us a job to do. And we do it. You my friend are one of those. It's written on your face. I can see it in your eyes. You are a hard man. The world has tested you, and it's not done yet.”

Another patron strolled into the bar and took a seat one stool away from Holland. Holland said, “You are a witch.”

“[Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.](#)” The new bar sifter ordered a scotch, neat. Holland was not surprised, exactly, by someone quoting Shakespeare in a bar, but it was yet another unusual thing in this little town. He turned to the new patron and said, “You must be a big fan of the Bard.”

“JJ Glancy.” The fellow extended his hand. “Road construction and anything else that I can think of.” Holland shook the offered hand, introduced himself and returned his attention to the beer.

“How many people live here?” The question was not directed at anyone in particular.

“About six thousand. Easy to spot a new comer. So you in town for long?” The bartender answered.

“A few days. I'm just looking around a little, on vacation.”

“Not much to do here. As a matter of fact you are presently in the hub of activity.” The bartender motioned toward the mostly empty bar. Two cowboys were shooting pool, a pitcher of beer and two mugs sat on a nearby table; a very old man at the other end of the bar slumped over, seemingly dead; a blond woman with large hair sitting alone at a table with a bar glass filled with what looked to be soda pop; a number of pictures on the far wall. Holland strode over to them. A naked woman in various poses was leaning against the bar; it appeared to be the same bar.

Holland walked back to his stool and remarked, "That guy at the end of the bar looks dead."

"That's Matthew. No one knows how old he is, even him. He comes in here about midday, orders one shot and takes his nap. He'll wake up in a little while and go home."

"Who's the woman in the photos?"

"No one is exactly sure. Probably some whore who was handy when they installed the bar. It was brought around the horn in 1880's, then transported here from San Francisco by wagon."

"Long trip." Holland sucked off the last of his second beer, and motioned for another.

"You bet it was."

Glancy said, "It's too windy today. I myself am convinced those damn A bombs have something to do with it. The government keeps telling us not to worry; it's perfectly safe. I say they are a lying bunch."

"Don't you worry about the fallout?" Holland asked cautiously.

["Cowards die many times before their deaths"; The valiant never taste of death but once. Of all the wonders that I yet have heard. It seems to me most strange that men should fear; Seeing that death, a necessary end, Will come when it will come. Julius Caesar. Act two, scene two.](#)

Holland laughed, then said, "I heard they set one off this morning about dawn."

"Where did you hear that?"

Oops. "It was on the radio. A station from Las Vegas." Holland crossed his fingers and decided to slow down on the beer.

"That would be [KENO](#). They'd know if anyone did. But that just confirms that the wind and those damn things are related."

"Perhaps so."

At the far end of the bar the old man awoke, stood, and with great effort began walking toward the back door. Holland pickup his cane and followed the old man out, helping him up the steps. Outside he found himself in a small backyard and north of that, across the alley, was a parking lot. In the parking lot was a collection of old cars, and one new one. A 1953 Corvette with Nevada plates was parked in the dirt lot, its white paint and chrome sparkling in the summer sun. Holland had only seen pictures of them. It was short so it would corner well but the front grill reminded him of a Jaguar roadster. It was a car that said something about the owner.

Holland walked into the Kingman Club, sat at the bar, and ordered a beer. This bartender also understood the generic word "beer" to be translated as "Coors." Holland laid some money on the bar, sipped from the can and said, "Does anybody around here not drink Coors?"

The bartender looked puzzled.

"You mean the beer?"

"Yes", Holland said. "The beer."



“Is there some other kind?” The bartender walked from behind the bar to attend to the needs of a couple sitting at a table. Their corner was dark. The man was sitting across the table, facing Holland, the woman sat with her back toward the bar. In the dim light the only detail he could discern about the woman was long dark hair. He could not see the man's face, but he was in a suit, not a cheap one, and Holland noticed his shoes looked very expensive. Around his neck was a gold chain that disappeared into his shirt, which looked like silk. His watch looked unremarkable but on the little finger of his left hand was a diamond ring unmistakably sparkling in the dim light. He had the annoying habit of clicking the ring on the table, apparently to add emphasis to his words.

He was emphatically explaining something to the woman. Perhaps he was a salesman.

Nuevo Berlin Argentina, Tuesday, May 19, 1953, 1800 hours.

The Rio Uruguay, thought wide at this point, was still a river and had not entered the vast delta that eventually led to the south Atlantic. [Edward Roschmann's](#) personal taste was for a simple living environment, but his position in [Odessa](#) and his political ambitions required that he occasionally entertain, so he had acquired a rather nice house. Nice by South American standards; roomy to be sure, but not the work of German craftsmen. The room he had chosen for this meeting had large windows that overlooked the river. It was comfortable for such a meeting. A large table was in the center of the room and against the walls were smaller tables with bottles of schnapps and whiskey, ice, glasses, and a local pastry called [sopaipillas](#), served hot and topped with honey. The roof leaked when it rained, but it was not raining today.

Roschmann quietly reviewed his guests for the evening. [Walter Rauff](#), SS Colonel, responsible for the “gas vans” used to killed over 100,000 people, now living in Chili. [Franz Stangl](#), SS, Commandant of the death camps at [Sobibor](#) and [Treblinka](#), living in Brazil, [Klaus Barbie](#), Gestapo Captain, the Butcher of Leon, living in Bolivia, and several others who had been faithful servants of the Fatherland and were forced into this exile. [Adolph Eichmann](#) was not present, but he was under constant threat of kidnapping and could not, reasonably, attend these little gatherings. Roschmann himself had been twice apprehended by the Allies after the war, but was able to escape both times. It was because of this that he believed his destiny was greater than other men.

“Gentlemen, if I may begin.” The room quieted, the other escaped Nazi's waiting to see what he had to say. “[Juan Peron](#) is a fool. Since his wife's death his regime has become unstable, irrational. He has become more difficult to influence and he is costing us too much. I have very serious doubts that he can retain power.

“Colonel Rauff, what can you tell us about Paraguay?”

Rauff had gained too much weight since his days with the SS. He was sloppy and his clothes were ill fitting. He rose to speak, found himself restricted by the suit coat, took it off and draped it over the back of his chair. Wearing a white shirt, suspenders, and no tie with his collar button open, he looked every bit an old, fat man; a farmer come to town for a glass of beer. “The government of Paraguay is ripe like a plumb and is about to fall. Living there is a man named [Alfredo Stroessner](#). His father served in the Wehrmacht in the first war and then emigrated from Bavaria, married a local woman. Stroessner is the youngest general grade officer in South America, but don't be fooled by

his youth. He has the heart of a lion and is a proud asset of the Fatherland. He speaks three languages and since he grew up in Paraguay he knows his way around.

“Our contacts with him are fruitful. I am hopeful also because he has not required a bribe of any kind, although we bought the man a car. His was dreadful, an American Ford from before the war that was falling apart. He has asked for our advice on a number of military matters and also on political problems he faces now and will face when he assumes power.

“We have already inserted a few of our people into the intelligence and internal security apparatus of Paraguay. Passports have already been issued and we have moved eleven men, seven of them with their family, into suitable positions.

“I have great hope that Storessner will provide the kind of haven we need.” The old man, like a school boy after a dissertation, plunked back onto his chair.

“Did I hear you correctly? We have not given him any money?”

“That is correct. He is only too anxious for our help.”

“What kind of car?” Barbi seemed very interested in the man.

“A new Mercedes. A modest one.”

Roschmann said, “Captain Barbie, what can you tell us about the American project.”

Barbie was still a young man, still fit, but generally contemptuous of authority. He did not stand but said, “I have not been able to insert our own man into the American atomic program, but everything in America is for sale. With the help of some American gangsters I have established a communication line and they have isolated the information we need. The next step is to obtain it. That could happen as early as this week. Unlike the Colonel, this has been expensive but I expect to be successful.”

“Excellent. Please keep up informed.” Roschmann turned to Franz Stangl and began a discussion about efforts to remove more men from Europe.

El Trovatore Motel, Kingman Arizona, 1928 hours, 19 May, 1953.

Holland switched the radio on and slumped onto the bed. He was tired, a little drunk, and had high hopes that he would simply sleep tonight and not again be a prisoner of his dreams. It had been a very long and extraordinary day. Those things he had always assumed were real, the very basis of his reality, had been challenged and forever altered. Green had said, ‘it’s the biggest thing since Jesus Christ’, and he was right. Knowledge that they existed, not half baked speculation but outright knowledge had changed everything.

“My fellow Americans.” President Eisenhower began a speech on the radio. Holland's thoughts were a cauldron of emotions punctuated by fantastic facts, fear, and his orders to ‘keep a lid on it.’

Tonight, as you sit in your homes all across this broad land, I want to talk with you about an issue affecting all our lives. It is the defense of our country, and its cost.

If we ponder this a moment, we all know that this really means the defense of those spiritual values and moral ideals cherished by generations of Americans--the true treasure of our people. This treasure of the spirit must be defended, above all, with weapons of the spirit: our patriotism, our devotion, our readiness to sacrifice.

If we think further, we also know that this defense of America demands still other weapons. We must, of course, want to be free. But this is not enough. To be free and to stay free, we must be strong--and we must stay strong.

Other weapons. That was the point of shooting them down. The President wanted their weapons and their technology. He was looking for a miracle; a source of advanced knowledge that could be turned against the Russians. It almost made sense. But the potential cost of gathering those weapons could be far more than any showdown with the Soviets. The Communists, for all their faults, were also human and while they would not turn away from taking the lives of other humans, they would at least understand its significance. These snake things, very likely, looked upon humanity like a rat in a lab. Something they owned, something they could toy with, the object of some obscene experiment. And when the experiment was over they'd swish some bleach around in the petri dish and start a new experiment.

Our national security is affected by almost everything that your government does--things far removed from the building of planes or the training of troops. National security involves, for example, the plain honesty and competence of government itself, for no nation is secure whose government does not command respect at home and honor abroad. We all know something of the long record of deliberately planned Communist aggression. There has been, to this moment, no reason to believe that Soviet policy has changed its frequently announced hope and purpose--the destruction of freedom everywhere. There is, therefore, no reason for the free nations to alter their course: to hope and work for the best, to arm and be ready for the worst. We must see, clearly and steadily, just exactly what is the danger before us. It is more than merely a military threat.

More than a military threat. You can say that again, brother.

I believe firmly--and I think the Soviets realize--that the United States, if forced to total mobilization today, could meet and win any military challenge. I believe no less firmly that we must see and meet the full nature of the present and future danger before us. For the nature of this danger dictates the nature of the defense we summon. This defense must, first of all, be one which we can bear for a long and indefinite period of time. It cannot consist of sudden, blind responses to a series of fire-alarm emergencies. Even we cannot always be mobilizing forces and materiel with a speed that is heedless of cost, order and efficiency. It cannot be based solely on the theory that we can point to a D-day of desperate danger, somewhere in the near future, to which all plans can be geared.

Holland decided Eisenhower was trying, in a very subtle way, to prepare for a long war; not just a cold war with the Soviets, but a black war against a completely different enemy. And he was right. It was going to be a very long war.

The truth is that our danger cannot be fixed or confined to one specific instant. We live in an age of peril. We must think and plan and provide so as to live through this age in freedom--in ways that do not undermine our freedom even as we strive to defend it.

Maintain our freedom. A wise man, Holland thought. If we looked under every bush or search every passerby, then we have lost our freedom. That's what it is about isn't it? Freedom. With those thoughts, Holland drifted into a dreamless sleep, but the President, unmindful of Holland, continued his speech.

The plain truth is that security is planned, not blindly bought. It is the product of thought, and work, and our ability and readiness to bear our military burden for however long the threat to freedom persists. The course we must set for ourselves is a difficult one. It must avoid, on the one hand, the indefinite continuance of a needlessly high rate of Federal spending in excess of Federal income. It must avoid, on the other hand, any penny-wise, pound-foolish policy that could, through lack of needed strength, cripple the cause of freedom everywhere. This middle way may lack drama and sensation. But it has sense and strength. It may not scream with shrill crisis and emergency. But it speaks with conviction and realism.

Next January, I shall recommend to the Congress a completely revised program of taxation. Already appropriate studies are under way in the House Ways and Means Committee and in the Treasury Department. Our system of taxation must not only provide our government with the resources to be strong for freedom's sake, but also enable our people to apply their initiative and industry fruitfully. This means taxes so adjusted as to fall where payment is least harmful, and so planned as to create jobs and expand the income of the mass of our people.

I have outlined my convictions as to the way to defend America. This is the way to work for national security--in the full, true sense. It is with the greatest confidence that I say to you: We possess, as a people, all the qualities, all the talents, and all the resources necessary to resolve the problems inherited from the past or inherent in the present. We live, as I have said, not in an instant of danger but in an age of danger. We will meet it, as Americans, boldly, vigorously, and successfully. We will make of it an age of productive freedom, unmatched in all man's history. This is what I ask all of you to help to do.

(Read Eisenhower's entire speech [here](#).)

Kingman Arizona, Wednesday, May 20, 1953, 0616 hours.

Holland awoke disoriented, which was not surprising because of the beer. He looked around and remembered he was at a motel named the "El Trovatore". A radio was playing Benny Goodman. He stumbled out of bed, attended to the pressing need to rid himself of the beer, and washed his face.

Someone on the radio said, "KGAN, Kingman." Events of the previous day began to replay themselves in his mind, eventually leading to his order to "keep a lid on it" and the suggestion that Darwin Cole might be of some value.

He brushed the dust off his civilian clothes as best he could, and dressed quickly. Coffee seemed like the first order of business, but he noticed the local phone book and thumbed through it looking for 'Cole'. D Cole was listed. He picked up the phone and waited for the operator to ask, "Number please."

Reading from the book he said, "Blue 998."

The line clicked a few times; eventually a chipper voice answered.

"You old reprobate. I have never understood how you can be so damn cheerful this early in the morning."

Cole paused for a long moment, knowing the voice but trying to place it. Finally he connected the two. "Holland where in the hell are you?"

"A place called the El Trovatore."

"You've got to be shitting me. You're in town?"

"Unless someone transported this motel to Indianapolis overnight, I must be."

"I'll be damned. What are you doing here? Never mind. I'll be over there in 15 minutes. Are you in town for long?"

"A few days."

"Well check out of that place and you can bunk in with me for as long as you want. Damn it Rich I wish you had said you were coming. I'd have baked a cake."

Holland laughed. He had expected a friendly greeting from Cole, but not one that had the aroma of brotherly love. "Okay. I'll meet you in the parking lot."

Eighteen minutes later Darwin Cole, in his deputy uniform and driving a marked police car pulled into the parking lot. The men gave each other a short hug; Cole suggested bacon and eggs at the 'diner' and Holland hoped they had coffee. Cole's eyes were bloodshot and Holland wondered if he'd been awake all night.

Cole looked at the cane, frowned and said, "What in the hell are you doing here?"

"I'm headed for a base in Washington state. Found my self here and decided to lay over a few days. I have plenty of leave to use up." Having told his little lie, and apparently having gotten away with it, Holland was quick to change the subject. "So how is the Deputy Sheriff business?"

Cole grinned. "Picking up. Picking up." The two men laughed. After a short ride Cole parked the car near a [Flying A](#) truck stop and the two men walked into a crowded diner. Inside were a dozen truck drivers and two men in oil company uniforms, complete with a peaked hat. One was standing, the name "Jack" emblazoned above his pocket. "Ole I've been here alone since 4:30. I need you to start coming to work on time."

Cole whispered, "Jack is the boss. He's a real sociable guy, real easy to get along with, too easy actually. Three weeks ago Jack sent Ole to the bank with the day's receipts but Ole stopped at the Smoke House. The bartender called Jack 30 minutes later and said

Ole was buying rounds for the house. I'd have fired him for that, but Jack just chewed him out. Jack was on Guadalcanal. Won the 'Legion of Merit'. He doesn't talk about it so no one really knows why he was decorated. He picked up a piece of shrapnel that's still in his leg and contracted malaria, but he is really one tough cookie. I've seen him sweating like he was in a steam bath from the malaria and pounding on a truck flat with a sledgehammer. I saw a truck driver get on his bad side once. Jack has a right cross that you wouldn't believe. Quick. Really quick. Like [Rocky Marciano](#) or something."

"Did you arrest Jack?"

"Hell, I was going to hold his coat but he was done before I could get there. The driver was drunk, I think, but he sure as hell was sober when he got off the floor."

The two men traded stories, told each other their lies, and generally caught up with each other over breakfast. Cole drank several cups of coffee. Holland tried to pay for the meal but Cole just waved the ticket at the cashier, who smiled and nodded and Cole simply got up and walked out of the diner. He stopped next to the pay phone, told Holland he had to call in, and Holland waited in the car.

"I thought you guys had radios."

"Are you kidding? If the telephones decided not to work we'd have to use a mule train. There was a little trouble last night over toward Oatman. Care to take a ride with me?"

"Sure. What's up?"

Cole turned onto Highway 66 headed west, gained some speed and turned on the siren. "A couple of guys apparently got themselves killed last night."

The trip through town was generally sedate, despite the siren, but once Cole entered a place he called 'Perfume Canyon' it became exciting with sharp curves, head on traffic, and three ponds of raw sewage that gave the place its name. Then Highway 66 straightened out for a few miles at a place named 'Holy Moses Wash'. The car blazed past the port of entry Holland remembered from the night before where they were only interested in fruits and vegetables. Eventually Cole took a side road that was also an arrow for many miles that penetrated a vast wasteland, no less forgiving than the sea and would claim the life of any unwary traveler. In spite of its desolate nature, the desert was an ocean of yellow wild flowers. The spectacle nearly took Holland's breath away, all the more so because of the unexpected absurdity of such rare natural beauty in so barren a place. Here and there small chunks of igneous rock seemed to grow out of the desert floor.

They passed a place called Ed's Camp and the road began to twist into the mountains again. Some of the curves were very sharp but Cole was obviously familiar with the road and drove the police car hard into the turns. They topped a large hill and the road going down the other side was, if anything, worse than coming up. Cole turned off the paved portion of 'old 66' onto a dirt road that was among the worst Holland had ever encountered.

In a few minutes Cole pointed to a collection of half a dozen small buildings, cabins at best, spread over the desert with hundreds of feet of nothing between them, and simply said, "Silver Creek."

Parked in front of one of the cabins was another car from the Sheriff's office and a civilian vehicle. Cole turned off the siren and parked. The two men walked up to another deputy.

Cole said, "Sheriff Carrier, this is Rich Holland, my wing-man in Korea and a good friend. He was in the car with me when I got the call, hope you don't mind that I brought him along."

Too late to worry about it, the Sheriff nodded his agreement and pointed toward the front door. They both stood on the porch and looked through the screen. Inside were two bodies. Both were on beds on opposite sides of the room. One looked like he had been shot while he was asleep. The other had been reading the funny papers; the newsprint was sprawled across his body which was also still on the bed. Holland noticed two small holes in the screen, .22 caliber size holes, and pointed them out to Cole. Then Holland remembered Kaiser's drunken demonstration in a filthy bar and his blood ran cold.

"Is anything missing?" Cole directed his question to the Sheriff, who said, "Looks to me like some food was taken."

The civilian approached Sheriff Carrier. "Body temperatures indicated they were killed last night, probably about 11 PM. Those bullet holes are small so I'm going to guess it was a .22 or a .25. That's about all I can tell you now."

"Thanks Doc. I called the coroner in Phoenix and he should be up here tomorrow. Can you put them on ice until then?"

"They can go to the undertaker. They'll keep that long."

Cole said, "Doc, can you tell if they were drunk?"

"Not until I draw some blood, but Cockburn was asleep and Kramnicz usually didn't read the paper when he was drinking, so I'd have to guess no, they weren't drunk."

Holland looked inside again and noticed an orange on the kitchen counter, next to a roll of duct tape. He turned away from the bodies, took a few steps away from the porch and noticed a sheet hanging on a wire fence. There seemed to be something green on the sheet. He walked over to it as casually as possible and smelled it. It was a stench he had recently smelled elsewhere. Large railroad ties driven vertically into the ground supported the fence. The top foot of two of the ties was scorched, and still warm to the touch, nearly nine hours after the murders. He pried a little piece of wood from one of the ties with his fingernails and sniffed it. The odor of creosote was still present. Something had heated the preservative to a very high temperature and it was cooling very slowly.

Cole walked into the cabin and called to Holland to follow. He noticed a few details and then noted a small cloth bag. The bag, he found, contained a small amount of placer gold. "Private ownership of gold is illegal under Federal law, but there's a hefty black market in it. I should have guessed these two were involved. Whoever did the shooting was not interested in the gold." Mentally Holland added, 'these men were not robbed and killed. They were just killed.' Cole pocketed the little bag.

"Why would they leave it lying out? I read somewhere about black marketers in occupied Europe and they all had a place to hide things."

Cole decided that was logical, even reasonable, and he rapped his knuckles on the counter and the walls for a few minutes but came up dry.

Holland and Cole remained in Silver Creek for several hours. Sheriff Carrier left shortly after the doctor and began to organize a search for the killer or killers. Holland knew he would not find any. An ambulance arrived, a civilian one, and carted the bodies away. Cole helped load the bodies onto stretchers. Holland moved to help, but Cole

waved him off, pointed at the cane but said nothing. As the ambulance left, Cole motioned toward his car. Once inside, they drove quietly back up the hill and this time into the little town of Oatman.

Oatman was once a mining town but gold mines were closed in 1943 by order of President Roosevelt. One whole side of the village was given over to a giant pile of tailings. Ferrell burrows roamed around the town looking for food; Cole nearly hit one, swore at it, blew the horn, and it slowly ambled out of the street. Cole parked in front of a bar named "The Office".

"I'll just be a minute." He left Holland in the car, engine running, and walked into the dusty building. In a few moments he emerged, and they began the drive back to Kingman.

Cole was subdued, talked to himself a little; swearing occasionally and spitting from the car window. As they got to the bottom of the hills and re-entered the 'flat part' Cole said, "I stopped to see what the mood was like in the bar. It was glum. No one said anything at all to me. Most of them were crying in their beer."

"So Kramnicz was well liked?"

"Actually, he wasn't all that well liked. Highway 66 was moved to run through [Yucca](#) just a couple of months ago. The traffic on this road now isn't a tenth what it was. Kramnicz had a partner in the bar who wants to move the bar to Yucca, follow the highway. With Kramnicz dead that bar will probably close."

"So you think the bar could be a motive for the killings?" Holland was reluctant to use the word 'murder' but knew it was the only word that fit.

"Anything is possible, but I doubt it."

"What do you think the motive was?" Holland was on the ragged edge of telling Cole the whole story. He had to bite his lip twice to keep it shut.

"Can't say. Did you notice anything strange about the cabin?"

"Like what?"

"Like the sheet you stuck your nose in."

Holland had never underestimated Cole in combat, and doing so now was a mistake. "I was just curious."

"Why'd you smell it?"

"Because it stank."

Cole grinned in a rueful way and said, "Yes I guess I do remember you walking around Korea sticking your nose into outhouses all over the place."

Holland decided changing the subject would be a good idea. "Where was their car? I didn't see a car anywhere."

"Good question. I suppose the killer could have driven it away."

"Then maybe you should be looking for the car."

"I imagine Carrier is doing just that." They passed Ed's Camp for the second time. Large signs were posted along the road about Fire Agate fields and the fact that people could dig around and mine their own agate, for a fee that seemed unreasonable. A mile beyond was a filling station at a place Cole called Fig Springs. He pulled up next to the pump. A middle-aged man in an oil company uniform immediately began refilling the gas tank. "Want a Coca-Cola?"

"I'd take a Root Beer." The two men walked into the office, found a soda machine and Holland dropped a dime into the slot; then opened a door and pulled out a

bottle of Hires. Cole changed his mind and bought a strawberry soda. He held the bottle up, as if to make a toast, said, “Ya'ah'tee” and downed half the soda.

“What does that mean?”

“It’s Navajo. I think it just means ‘hello’, but Navajo’s love this stuff so it’s called Navajo Champagne.”

“Many Navajo’s around here?”

“No. [Hualapais](#) live here.” He pronounced it ‘wall-ah-pies’. “A lot of Mohave Indians live here too, mostly down on the river. The Navajo live in Flagstaff. Up that direction,” Cole pointed across the mountains toward the east.

“So, if an Indian walked by here right now, what kind of Indian would he be?”

Cole took a pull on the soda bottle and said, “Most likely he would be lost.” He delivered the line with a straight face but waited for a moment, like a Burlesque comic, waiting for the laughter to die down before delivering the next joke.

Holland shook his head, knowing he had walked right into that. At least Cole still had a sense of humor after moving two dead men less than an hour before. Cole laughed, and slapped Holland on the back.

Mining towns strung out along the railroad from west Texas to the Colorado River all have a ‘Gold’ street. Kingman also has Silver, Copper, and Lead. Cole turned off Highway 66 onto Grand View, drove a few blocks, turned left onto Lead and parked next to a small house at the top of a hill. Holland stepped from the car and for the first time actually noticed the [Hualapai Mountains](#).

‘Grand [View](#)’ was exactly the right name. The mountain is far enough away from Kingman to look blue, but close enough that one might think it has taken the little town into a kind of geologic caress. Cole went inside but Holland stood in the yard for several minutes admiring the view and wishing for a camera. Aside from the wind, it was a perfect mid-afternoon, not too hot, with absolutely clear skies and air that was so clean the term ‘crystal clear’ was not an exaggeration. The mountain looked to have a life force of its own; belonged in its place and clearly had been stationed there for a very long time as though ordered to remain on post and keep watch. God must picnic here from time to time and thus the mountain projected a sense of peace and belonging. John Wayne and director John Ford could have made movies here, but the scenery would clearly steal the show.

“If you’re working on your sun tan you probably should take your pants off.” The voice came from inside the house, was laughing at him, and was female.

Holland turned to the door and saw a woman in her 20’s dressed in a white sun suit that barely covered her bottom, snaked up her torso to a halter top that tied behind her neck and left her arms uncovered. Her breasts were not large but, Holland decided, would do in a pinch, and her legs went all the way up. Her hair was brown and long; she let it cascade down her back and over her shoulders and it nicely complemented her brown eyes which seemed to be made of some kind of reflective crystal coated with a generous portion of mirth. She looked like a pinup of Betty Grable or nose art on an aircraft. He again wished for a camera.

She stood in the doorway, left hand on her hip, right hand hanging loosely at her side, head tilted slightly to the right, body tilted slightly to the left, and her smile, while genuine, seemed to say she was trying to decide about something. She said, "I'm Liza. Liza with a Z."

"Of course you are. Darwin didn't tell me he was married."

"Darwin?" She began to laugh. It started as mere amusement but quickly grew into full blown laughter that pointed her head down and her toes up. She choked the laughter away, pointed with her right hand as if to speak and then began laughing again until it seemed likely she would lose control of her bladder. Finally she regained control of herself and said, "Darwin. That's rich."

Holland said, "No, actually, I'm Rich. Rich Holland."

Still chuckling she stepped out of the doorway, put both arms over Holland's shoulders and said, "Pleased to meet you Rich Holland." For a moment he thought she wanted to kiss him, but decided it was simply because *he* wanted to kiss her.

Cole stepped into the doorway and said, "I see you've met the neighbor lady. Don't give him too hard a time Liz. He's a friend of mine."

She half-turned, leaving her right hand on the back of Holland's neck and said, "I've known *Dave* here for a while, but I've never known anyone named *Darwin*." Then she began to laugh again until tears welled up in her already liquid eyes.

Caught in his own lie and now made the butt of his own deception, Cole could do no more than laugh, was clearly embarrassed, shook his head, and walked away from the door. Liz took Holland's hand and pulled him into the house.

Cole had already removed his uniform shirt; his gun belt was hung neatly from a peg on the wall. He was sitting down to take off his cowboy boots, pulled the right leg of his pants up, well beyond the top of his boot, and revealed a holster with a small pistol in it. "Boot gun", Cole said as he pulled the holster out of his boot.

"It looks small. A .25?"

"Nope. A .22. My daddy once told me he knew a couple of cowboys who were feuding over some damn thing, probably a woman, and one of them caught the other in a bar drinking beer. Shot him five times in the belly with a .25 auto, then got in his pickup and ran away. The other fellow finished his beer before he went to the hospital. About five months later they found the first guy's body in a line shack, shot through the window with a 30-30. The moral to this story is; a .25 auto ain't worth the powder to blow it up. A .22 long rifle is much better."

"My choice is a .50 caliber machine gun."

"Can you get one of those in your boot?" A mischievous smile crossed her face.

"No. I kept it in my pants"

She licked her lips.

"I tell you what. You two can flirt the rest of the day but I am one tired Deputy and I am going to bed early." Cole, still in his hat, walked into the bedroom, and closed the door.

She yelled across the room, "Dave Cole, you promised me dinner."

From behind the door, "Rich can take you. But keep him away from Perfume Canyon. He likes to stick his nose into things that stink."

Holland simply shrugged. "Can we get lobster in this town?"

"Mountain oysters probably, but nobody has lobster."

“Mountain oysters. Never heard of them. But it sounds interesting.”

The smile returned. He knew she was up to something but wasn't sure what. “I will introduce you to mountain oysters. You'll love them.”

Her car was a convertible. She insisted that he drive saying, “I'll tell you where to turn and you only have to do that twice.” They drove back down Grand View and turned left at the park.

“That's one.” Holland smiled at her, marveled a little at the beautiful girl, and considered that a few hours ago he was looking at two murder victims. A few miles, a few hours, what a difference. “Where is Hilltop?”

“At the top of the hill.”

“Makes sense. Really though, where is it? I know someone who lived there once.”

“Someone told you he was from Hilltop?”

“Yeah.” They drove past the Sportsman's Club. Across the street was the Santa Fe depot.

“Nobody would ever say that. They'd say they were from Kingman.”

“Really?”

“Why do you think people from Texas always tell you they are from Texas? It's so you won't think they are from Louisiana.”

Holland chuckled a little. “Well, where is it?”

“I'll show you in about five minutes.”

Highway 66 continued to parallel the railroad tracks for two miles, then the tracks took an abrupt right turn or conversely the highway made an abrupt left, and then started up the side of a hill. “This hill is called El Trovatore Hill because the motel at the top of the hill is the El Trovatore. Once we get to the top of the hill, we are at Hilltop. Maybe *on* Hilltop.”

“So a local who lived on Hilltop would say he was from Kingman. Pretty strange. But he did know a lot about the desert. He knew the names of the cactus ...”

She interrupted him, “... knew their names? You mean like Bill and Fred?”

“No, like [cholla](#) and [prickly pear](#).” He laughed. “Come to think of it, he didn't know the names of the trees.” He pointed, “like that one.”

“That's a [mesquite](#) tree.”

“They must be pretty hard. He tried to chop one down and nearly broke the ax head doing it.”

“He wasn't from Kingman. He may have said that, but he lied. Everybody knows you can't cut a green mesquite with an ax. Even a dead one will take you an hour to cut up. Everybody knows that. Who was this guy?”

“Just somebody I knew.”

They drove past a bar named the Smoke House and Liza said, “That was it. The end of town. Kingman stops at the Smoke House. Now we are out in the boonies. But we have one more turn to make. See the railroad crossing up there on the right? Take it.”

Holland slowed, turned right, crossed the tracks and found he was on Highway 93 again. Liza said, “Actually, I forget. We need to take two more turns. Take a right at the stop sign. When that street ends, take a left.”

After the left turn he asked, “Where are you taking me?”

“Pine Lake. Up on the mountain.” She pointed toward the nose of the car. The road ahead was clearly visible for several miles and it was pointed toward a gap in the

beautiful mountains he had seen from Cole's house. "So tell me all about Rich Holland and how he came to know that impostor *Darwin* Cole."

"He and I were stationed together for a while in Korea. We were both fighter pilots and he was my wing-man."

"And the cane? Or is it just a prop?"

He smiled, "I have to prop myself up with it once in a while. I had a run in with an enemy fighter and came up short. It could have been worse. I may fly again, I may yet heal up and I'm still on active duty. Just taking a little leave."

"You could have been killed. Yes I guess it could have been worse." She put her left hand on his right shoulder and brushed the hair away from his face, a pointless gesture in a convertible. She brushed the back of her hand against his cheek and then rested her hand, again on his shoulder. "And where was Cole when you were being shot down? I thought the 'wing-man' was supposed to watch your back."

"He was engaging another MiG. It really wasn't his fault ... "

She drew a deep breath and said, "You like him don't you. Even so I could hear the word *but* when you said it wasn't his fault." She paused for a moment and said, "I'll bet you think I'm his girl."

"I probably do think that."

She tilted her head to the right and said, "Are you a gentleman Mr. Holland?"

"Do you have a dragon for me to slay?"

"Knights slay dragons. Knights in shining armor who rescue damsels in distress."

The road wound up the mountainside and the vegetation began to change rapidly. The hillside on the left had pine trees and prickly pear growing beside each other. A fox ran across the road in front of the car. On the right side was a deep gully with a little stream in it and a few deer stood on the opposite bank ignoring the road and the humans. The aroma of pine forest and honeysuckle and the flavorful smoke from a hardwood fire filled the air. Butcher birds hidden in the brush made a fuss calling to each other. High up on the hillside a lone bull elk surveyed the canyon as though it was his kingdom and he was the monarch. Above it all, a red tail hawk floated in a lazy circle, truly the master of the sky. And next to him in the car sat an angel, attired in white, who stroked his cheek, whose smile spoke of promise and whose moist eyes threatened to invade his dreams and drive away the terror of his nights.

The Pine Lake Lodge is a tiny place; a restaurant with a small bar and a few motel rooms. On the weekend it is a rowdy place where cowboys shoot pool, play the juke box too loud and drink whiskey from the bottle. But on this night it was a place where couples sat quietly and held hands. They took a table on the porch with several other small groups of people and watched the last light of day as it drained into the sky beyond the peaks and heralded the approaching night.

The waitress brought menus but Liza ordered without looking; two steaks, rare, a plate of mountain oysters, baked potatoes and Coors beer. She spoke loudly enough that everyone on the porch could hear.

When the food arrived, she forked one of the oysters and ate it whole, carefully chewing the meat with mischief in her smile. He poked one with his fork then stabbed it

and popped it in his mouth. "This is very good, but it doesn't taste like fish." He ate another. "More like a meat ball."

A couple on the porch next to him both smiled and the man said, "It's not fish."

He looked surprised and said, "Then what is it?"

Everyone on the porch began to laugh. He realized he was again the butt of some local joke, but swallowed the oyster. Liza had eaten one so it couldn't be too bad.

Liza carefully cut one in half, like a surgeon attending to her work, licked her lips in that sensuous way and ate.

"Calf testicles." The woman at the next table seemed to relish the ability to use the word 'testicle' in mixed company and pronounced each syllable with some aplomb.

Holland felt himself turning green but was determined to win this round. He stuck his fork into the last one, held it up so everyone could see and gamely bit into it. This brought more laughter, a little applause, and someone said, "All right!" as though his team had just scored another touchdown.

Liza spoke to the couple at the next table and said, "Meet Rich Holland, on leave from the Air Force for a few days. A fighter pilot.

"Rich, this is Carl Weather and his wife Myrt. Carl is the publisher of the Mohave Miner."

The newspaper man said, "And Miss Day, tell us how you know Mr. Holland?" A wink toward the angel.

"He's a friend of Dave Cole. Actually that's not absolutely correct. He was stationed in Korea with *Darwin* Cole who is now calling himself *Dave*." She looked at Myrt and raised her eyebrows just a little, some kind of signal that Holland didn't understand.

Weather extended his hand and Holland shook it. "I'm always pleased to meet folks in the military. We have a nice life here in Kingman, quiet life, and sometimes we need to be reminded who we have to thank for it."

"Thank you, Sir. I appreciate that."

Liza held up the cane and said, "Rich was shot down. Wounded. He's lucky to be alive. He's a living breathing hero, this one."

"You make it sound worse than it was."

"Nonsense." Weather said. "Let me get a few facts about you. Folks should know who's walking around town."

Myrt asked, "Did you shoot any of them down?" The others on the porch had grown quiet and were listening to the conversation.

"A few."

"How many is a few?" The woman was certainly stubborn.

Holland was starting to feel embarrassed. "Twelve."

A collective gasp echoed around the porch; people crowded up to the table to shake Holland's hand. The waitress removed the bill from the table and said to Holland, "Your money is no good here," then brought two more beers; two very old men in VFW hats who had been sitting in the bar offered a sloppy but goodhearted salute and took turns pumping his hand; Rich kept trying to say "It's really not that big a deal."

After a few moments the wave of well wishers dissipated. Liza moved her chair closer to his, took his hand and said, "Everyone, once in a while, needs a knight in

shining armor.” Then she kissed him on the lips. It was more like a peck on the cheek that landed on the wrong runway, then put her arms around his neck and hugged him.

Holland asked Weather, “Have you heard anything about a plane crash around here lately?”

“No plane crashes. Why do you ask?”

“No particular reason. Just wondered.”

“So,” the newspaperman said, “tell me all about Rich Holland. Major?”

“Captain. Just in town for a little leave, visiting Cole. Beyond that, you already know it all.”

“Where did you get your last kill?”

“In the 334th Fighter Squadron. On the Yalu.”

“MiG Alley. Hell of a fight.”

“We did what we had to do.”

“How long will you be in town?”

“Honestly, I’m not sure. A few more days, at least.”

Carl and Myrt finished their meal, and as they walked away Carl said, “Come down to my office tomorrow. We can chew the fat a little.”

“You are probably going to be pretty busy tomorrow. Maybe I should come another day.”

“And why am I going to be busy?”

Clearly the newspaperman had not been told about Kramnicz and Cockburn. “Do you know anyone in Silver Creek? You might want to call someone who lives there. Or you might want to call Frank Carrier.”

“What’s happened?”

Holland paused for a long moment. “It was a pleasure meeting you, Mr. Weather.” He smiled at the woman and added, “You too.”

With a reporter’s experience Weather understood that he had just been told something important. He also knew that this pilot was more than he seemed. The couple walked to their car and drove away.

Holland had been ordered to ‘keep a lid on it.’ He was sure the newspaperman would not be looking for information about any plane crash any time soon. He was not sure if he had done the right thing. Time would tell.

When the steaks were gone, Liza took his hand and gently led him into the bar. Once again she did not order, but a shot of tequila appeared on the counter in front of her. She tipped the shot glass up and downed it one pass. Holland decided he should be surprised that so sweet a young woman would drink liquor straight, but he was not. She was capable of almost anything. She was a free spirit living in a place where self expression was considered a virtue.

She paused for a few moments after downing the liquid fire; eyes closed, head slightly bowed, as though praying to Bacchus, then smiled sweetly and nodded to the barman who brought another. “And what would you like sir?”

“I’m driving. Just a beer.”

They sat in the bar for hours, drinking and dancing a little. Holland was able to dance with her when the music was slow and he could rely on her to support his shattered leg. She pressed her chest into his a little more firmly than he thought necessary and as the evening grew older she became more ... he struggled to find the right word ... kissy

was the only thing that came to mind. He knew it was the booze talking but delighted in the opportunity.

Eventually they returned to the convertible. The night was warm and he didn't bother to put the top up. She fell asleep as he drove home, passed out might be the right word, but her head on his shoulder and her hand in his lap were welcome. She began to snore, in a lady-like way, and for a moment he considered what her breast might feel like. Knowing that it felt like every other breast was suddenly not a deterrent. Then he remembered her words: "Are you a gentleman, Mr. Holland?"

As the car returned to the 'flat part' his right hand of its own accord slipped into the opening under her right arm. He answered, "I guess not."

It was nearly midnight when he called the operator at Nellis. General Black was available, but it took several minutes for the call to go through. When Black answered he sounded wide awake and was not the least bit troubled that Holland had called in the middle of the night. Holland quickly relayed the information about the two dead men and his 'tip' to the newspaperman who would not be interested in rumors of a plane crash and his feeling that no such rumors were present.

Black was concerned about the murders and assured Holland that he had given no such order. On the contrary he had ordered that the civilians, when located, were to be debriefed. Black instructed Holland to stay on for a few more days and follow the murder investigation.

Holland hung up the phone, laid down on the couch and in a moment sleep enveloped him.

Cole waited until he heard regular breathing, struck a match to a Lucky Strike, and stood at the window blowing the smoke outside. Liz's bedroom window was opposite his, but the house was dark. He could see Venus hanging in the sky and wondered for the third time how much Holland actually knew. He waited a long time, then quietly walked into the living room and made a phone call of his own.

Kingman, Arizona, Thursday, May 21, 1953, 0504 hours

The phone rang several times before Holland decided he should answer it. It was someone at the sheriff's office, looking for Cole. Holland switched on a light, opened the bedroom door and roused the deputy.

"Yes ... where ... anything in it ... I'll bring him ... lets us get some coffee ... one hour ... armed ...I'll take care of it." Despite hearing only one side of the conversation, Holland knew he was leaving, found his shoes and wondered if he had time to shave.

"Somebody found the pickup. Green Dodge left in a wash about three miles from the cabin. They hooked it about five minutes ago and it's on the way here, but it will be an hour, little less."

"I need to shave."

"So do I. You go first."

"Carrier thought you did a pretty good job poking around the cabin yesterday and he specifically asked that you come take a look at the pickup. In fact I am to inform you that you are volunteered, unpaid, and deputized for a few days. All very legal. You are now part of the posse."

"Did he notice I have a little problem walking? Besides, all I did was follow you."

"You knew to look for a hide, which we didn't find, but that doesn't mean it's not there."

"Yeah, but you found the gold and figured out they were in the black market."

"Yeah, but you pointed out the holes in the screen door."

The men were standing nose-to-nose, inches apart, in mock argument; a comedy routine they had used many times in the officer's club. Holland said, "I'm very sorry about what happened."

"It wasn't your fault. Of all the sons-of-bitches whose fault it was, none of that was yours. One day those bastards will pay for what they've done. They couldn't let Captain Holland, the double ace, get bounced without losing face. They had to blame someone for their own stupid battle plan, which I told them wouldn't work. So they hung the whole nasty business on the one guy who..." The veins on Cole's neck were beginning to pop out. He calmed himself a little and said, "This deputy stuff doesn't pay much and a police car is not a fighter jet, but I have to make snap decisions sometimes and I had damn well better be right. It's not very different from MiG alley in some ways. You'd be good at it." He smiled and added, "Almost as good as I am."

Holland held his cane in the air. "They won't let me fly, and if it's cold, I can hardly walk. I don't think I could run someone down and tackle him. But thanks for the vote of confidence."

Holland walked into the bathroom, didn't bother to close the door and urinated. Cole stood in the hallway and said "When's the last time you fired a pistol? As I recall, you were pretty good with one."

Holland took off his shirt, spread shaving cream on his face and between strokes of the blade he said, "Been a couple of years. Why?"

Cole didn't speak but held out a holstered [M1911A1](#) Government Issue .45 caliber handgun. Holland had fired this type of weapon hundreds of times and was very familiar with its good and bad points. The holster was not military issue and was worn on

the belt. Two extra magazines were provided with their own pouches. Holland looked at the handgun and said, "I seem to recall saying I kept a .50 in my pants." Both men laughed.

The Kimo was a Shell station with a little coffee shop. The coffee shop did more business than the gas pumps. There were tourists, still bleary-eyed from too little sleep and their children, already raising hell, a few long haul truck drivers and not just a few local delivery drivers, and three other uniformed policemen from different agencies all crowded into the little cafe. Holland and Cole were lucky to find two seats together at the counter.

On the walls were photos of cowboys, along with several belt buckles. It seemed odd to Holland to nail a belt buckle to the wall. Then he realized the ornate gold and silver buckles were trophies; prizes awarded for something called 'team roping'.

A truck driver, sitting at the counter, asked the waitress, "Are they checking down below?" She answered immediately and said, "Why? You got something down below you want to hide?"

Three coyotes were standing next to the railroad tracks just across the highway and they grabbed Holland's attention. They were skinny animals but nimble as they dodged cars and quickly drug the carcass of a road kill house cat out of the gutter and began to consume it. One of the cops behind him said, "Brazen little bastards." Holland turned to see a shoulder patch that read 'Arizona Game and Fish Department.' "One day those little devils will be living in Los Angeles. When the world is destroyed, only cock roaches and coyotes will be left."

Holland started to respond but heard the distinctive sound of a coffee cup being placed on the counter in front of him, turned to pick up the cup ...

"And I thought you were a gentleman." Liza Day looked good no matter what she was wearing, which included the less than flattering waitress uniform. He was so struck by her beauty, and the unexpected fact of seeing her here, that he had trouble finding an answer. He was pretty sure she was asleep when he ... "Are you going to say good morning or not?"

"Good morning to the most beautiful neighbor lady this side of the Mississippi."

She smiled. "That's more like it." She looked at Cole and said, "Are you two scoundrels going to eat or just take up space and drink coffee?"

"Just the coffee my dear. Duty calls and we have little time."

She turned to Holland. "And you?"

Holland rose a little and displayed the side arm hanging from his belt. "I was drafted."

Her expression shifted quickly. She shot Cole a look that could have killed the coyotes across the street and speaking in a stage whisper to make sure Cole heard every word, said, "If you get him hurt you miserable son-of-a-bitch ..."

"It was Carrier's idea. Talk to him about it."

"I'm talking to you."

"I'm all grown up, Liz. I could have said no. It's all right."

She turned the blowtorch toward Holland. "It's not all right. You can't even dance. How in the hell are you going to run? You fucking cowboys strap on your guns

and pretend you're bullet proof. You are not bullet proof *Captain* Holland. That cane you carry around ought to remind you." She turned away, coffeepot in hand, and stomped to the other end of the counter. Still distracted, she refilled the coffee cup that was stationed in front of Smedley Green.

The rabbit cop raised his voice a little against the din of the cafe and said, "I've known Liz since she was seven and I have never seen her that angry. She's in love with one of you, but I'll be damned if I can tell which."

Holland and Cole shared a look and in unison, well rehearsed from the Korean comedy team and said, "You poor bastard."

Green watched Holland and Cole leave the cafe, still careful to avoid showing his face. Because of the noise he could not hear Liz Day's outburst, but he noted the .45 on Holland's belt. His own .38 short-barreled 'Detective Special' was hidden under his shirt tale.

A tow truck dropped the pickup in the alley behind the courthouse, next to the [jail](#). The jail was, according to some old timers, the first permanent structure ever built in Kingman. It is a two story affair, crudely built of native rock with iron grates over the windows; just a square building with no particular mind paid to the rudiments of design.

The county seat, in the old days, was a now abandoned place in the hills named Mineral Park. When the railroad came in 1880 and Kingman was built, a kind of local war developed over where the county seat should be. The mining bosses in Mineral Park wanted it right where it was. The cowboys, on whose account the jail was built to begin with, one night got drunk and decided to move the county seat to Kingman. Thus began an absurd little odyssey where a few dozen mostly drunk cowboys stole the records and transported them to the jail and declared that Kingman was now the top dog.

The next day a mob of miners, armed to the teeth with picks and shovels, assaulted the jail in an effort to reverse the misfortune of the previous night. The cowboys however, armed with repeating rifles, won the day by shooting wildly into the sky and shrieking like ... drunken cowboys. No one was injured, unless someone wanted to count the hangovers, the miners went home empty handed and the county seat was forever moved from a tiny mining town to a tiny cattle town. (Modern efforts to move the county seat to 'Little San Diego' have failed twice; both attempts were limited to ballot boxes and repeating rifles were not allowed.)

They began with the obvious inspection; the cab, the glove box, under the seat, under the dashboard and were rewarded with a worn out pair of gloves, two cigar butts and an empty bottle of Canadian whiskey. The bed was also reluctant to give up any secrets since it was empty except for a layer of dust and several smashed beer cans. Cole lay on the street and quickly inspected the undercarriage, finding nothing that did not belong on the underside of a pickup.

Sheriff Carrier joined them. He did not expect anything interesting to come from the pickup but allowed that he could call a fingerprint expert up from Phoenix to go over the truck. Holland handed him the gloves and said, "Nothing to find," then sat behind the wheel, toyed with the transmission stick and imagined himself sitting here and wanting to hide something. The seat was worn out and lumpy; everyplace he could reach was exactly what it appeared to be. They looked in the wheel wells, examined the quarter panels to see if they had been removed and then remounted.

Another car parked in back of the courthouse. Carl Weather had to walk several yards to join the trio and while he was still out of earshot Carrier said to the other two, "Let's keep the gold dust to ourselves for right now." Then, cheerfully he said, "Good morning Mr. Weather. What brings you up here on this fine day?" The wind hadn't started yet, the birds were chirping at each other. Overall it was, at that point, a fine day.

"Do you have any suspects?"

Carrier spoke. "Not even one. We found a couple of 18-year-old boys that were armed with a .22 rifle hitchhiking, but they were in Williams on the 19th. The deputy up there had contact with them and confirmed it. So, at the moment, there is nothing at all." Carrier went on to lay out the few facts he could. Weather had his story, not much of one, but a double murder was news.

Weather pointed to Holland. "I see you've enlisted help from the Air Force."

"Captain Holland here has a keen eye for detail and I've asked him to help out. We swore him into the posse this morning. I'd appreciate it if you'd leave that part of out of your story."

The only swearing Holland remembered from earlier in the day was Liz's outburst, but he decided one person, more or less, swearing at him would not make much of a difference and remained silent.

"Holland and I had a little chat yesterday up to Pine Lake." Weather waved then sauntered back to his car and drove away.

Carrier said, "I've got to go to [Short Creek](#) today. Something brewing up that way. Doesn't have anything to do with this. Cole you'd better resume your normal patrolling for now, until something new breaks on this shooting business. The coroner will be up here today. Maybe he can tell us something. Captain Holland I guess you can enjoy your vacation."

"Actually, Sheriff, I was wondering if you have an airplane. I'd like to get a bird's eye view of Silver Creek."

Cole drove Holland to the airport. During World War II the Army had a [training base](#) in Kingman where they taught gunnery to men who would fly on B-17's. Kingman benefited from this training base in a number of ways, primarily a municipal airport with a pair of long, wide runways and half a dozen aircraft hangers that could cater to a blimp if one ever came along. The Army had also constructed an officer's club on top of a butte and graded out a dirt golf course. The building easily became the country club when the Army left.

Cole dropped Holland at one of the hangars and promised he would have someone pick him up about noon. Holland grouched a little, under his breath, that he didn't have a car. Surely, he imagined, a sworn member of the posse should have his own car.

The aircraft was a single engine [Cessna, 170](#), a small four place aircraft renowned for its stamina and maneuverability, dwarfed as the only occupant of a huge hangar that could probably accommodate half a dozen bombers. Holland fired it up and allowed the engine to run for several minutes at a very high speed to ensure it wasn't going to stop working at some critical moment. Then he taxied out of the hangar onto the flight line and tried to radio the tower for permission to take off. No one answered, but in a moment someone stuck an arm out of a low building, waved a large green flag, and Holland took

that as the all clear. The little plane needed only a fraction of the runway and soon he was airborne.

It was good to be back in the air, even if the plane was underpowered by the standard he had come to accept. The wind was just beginning to come up for the day. Holland had no charts, so he simply followed the highway across the 'flat part'. Below, the sea of wild flowers was still in bloom. The sky was devoid of clouds and he relaxed a little and began to enjoy the flight. His knee was not up to a fighter, but he had no trouble with the little Cessna.

Above the Black Mountain range he started to get some thermals that would suddenly raise the little plane a few hundred feet, and just as suddenly suck it downward. He was mentally prepared for this effect of the wind and had no particular trouble. Below him, Oatman was off to the left and, still following the roads, Silver Creek came up quickly.

He could see the cabin, an ant-sized dot sequestered onto a hillside. From the air he noticed a round, slightly burned spot a few yards from the house. This, he decided, is where the disk landed. He flew over the spot several times in an ever widening circle. Two canyons away he noticed a shelter of some kind. Made from natural materials it was probably nearly invisible from ground level, but from the air its square outline stood out as a man made structure. The ground was rugged and walking there from the cabin was going to be difficult, but he decided he would have to see what it was about. He looked very closely at the terrain and decided how to approach it on foot. The easiest way also turned out to be the safest way, since anyone in the lean-to would be unable to see him coming until he was very close.

On the way back he over flew a place named Yucca, which he and Green had driven past. He could clearly see two more runways, large ones, carved into the desert floor.

Highway 66, just before reaching Kingman, ran through a gap between two ranges of desert hills. The hills formed a kind of bottleneck that forced the wind between them. Like squirting water through a hose, the bottleneck increased the pressure and then dumped the wind onto downtown Kingman. This partially accounted for the high wind velocity. The other part was that Kingman was just a windy damned place.

After landing, he parked the little plane where he had found it and noticed a convertible with a brunette in it. She sat on the back of the seat, head and torso well above the windshield, and waited.

He wasn't sure what kind of reception she was going to dish out, but as he approached the car, she climbed out of it, took several steps to meet him, threw her arms around his neck and kissed him on the mouth. This one landed on the correct runway. They stood in the sun for several minutes, embraced right out in the open in a very non-military way. She kissed his eyelids and his cheeks and after a few seconds tears began to well up in her eyes. "I'm sorry I was such a bitch. I felt like shit all day."

"You feel pretty good now." He drew her very close to his body, felt her breasts flatten against his own chest, felt the warmth of her breath on his neck and felt the urgency in her touch. He had never had sex standing up on a runway before, in full view of any unfortunate passer by, and decided that today was not a good day to start. He

stepped back a little and led her to the car. They sat together for a long while, enjoying the sun and saying very little.

“I thought you were Cole’s girl.”

“I thought I was too. My heart is still beating a mile a minute,” she took his hand and held it against her breast, “I’ve never been like this before. Some kind of sissy girl all head over heels for some damn pilot that can’t walk.” She rubbed the tears from her face but left little streaks of water on her cheeks. He kissed away the tears, then kissed her lips and overtly fondled her breast.

She regained control of herself, emotionally bucked up and said, “Okay cowboy. Lets go find your damn killer so I can get past this. I hate being a girl sometimes.”

“I’m pretty happy you’re a girl.”

She fished in her purse, found a Camel cigarette and lit it. “There are things you don’t know about me.”

He began to chuckle. “If you think you have some kind of corner on the secrets market, you are badly mistaken. Besides, I pretty much know about you.”

She started the car and said, “What do you now about me?”

“You drink too much, you smoke, you swear like a sailor and you are easily the most beautiful and passionate woman I have ever met.”

“I am? You’ve had a sheltered life. Anyway, I’m your guide the rest of the day so where to?” She drove away from the hanger, down the road that intersected Highway 66.

“Silver Creek. Can you take a little walk in those boots?”

“Can you take a little walk with that cane?”

“I’ll manage.”

“Then I guess I will too. I need to buy gas.” She turned left, headed back toward town. “I get a little crazy when I’m alone in the desert. I like to work on my tan, so don’t get too fresh. Until I say so, at least.”

The little cabin, now abandoned, seemed a lonely place. He inspected the burn mark he’d seen from the air. It was not obvious from ground level, but after he knew it was there, he had no trouble finding it.

“What are you looking at?”

“Something I saw from the plane. But it’s nothing. Let’s go inside.” She followed him in. Large blood stains saturated both beds. Except for the absence of the bodies and the gold, nothing had been moved. He said, “If I lived here and wanted a place to hide something, where would I put it?”

“I guess that would depend on who you were hiding it from. My little brother used to hide beer cans inside the seat of my dad’s pickup. If he tried to hide them in the house mom always found them, but dad just sat on the silly things and never bothered to figure out why the seat was so lumpy.”

Holland was amazed at how easily her mind leaped to what could be the right conclusion. He graduated college with an engineering degree. He was a fighter pilot; the United States had spent the better part of a quarter million dollars training him to do his job; he had killed a dozen men because they were stupid and hundreds of others when his bombs fell on them and there she stood. A woman possessed of simple wisdom he could never hope to emulate. All of the books and all of the charts, all of the training, vanished

into the mist of classes in home economy and the girl's glee club. In a single thought she had proven her value. For a moment Holland felt very small. In the next moment he knew. There is a time in every pairing between a man and a woman when they simply know; when the truth of the matter cannot be avoided. At that moment, Holland knew.

She watched the change in his eyes. His body showed no outward sign, but his eyes spoke very clearly indeed. She was sure in that moment; she too knew. They stood together in a death chamber where two men had lived and died, where the most heinous of crimes had been committed, and the remainder of her lifetime was decided. There were no die to roll, no cards to deal, no wheel of fortune to spin; fate had spun the wheel, the decision made. She simply *knew*.

They did not embrace. The time for that had come and gone but would return. They stood quietly in a place of death, like celebrants at a funeral, who learned to value life all the more because of it. For a long moment they simply stood, facing each other. Time slowed, and then suspended its long march from here to there. Each of them, one day, would face the grave, but until then, they would rejoice in life, together.

“So you up to that little hike? There is some kind of hidden lean-to about two miles from here.”

“Lead on.”

They walked west for several hundred yards until they came to place where a canyon split into two gullies, took the left fork, and began the arduous task of walking in a sand wash. His attention was to the front; someone might, after all, be in the hidden structure, or near it, and that someone might not want any company today. But the lack of traction was beginning to take a toll on his knee, and after a mile he decided to rest for a bit.

They sat on some rocks. The sun was warm and in this gully the wind was blocked. Sunlight absorbed earlier in the day by the surrounding rock had begun to be re-radiated as heat. The windless little gully created a perfect heat trap. She took off her tee shirt and arranged it over her head like a hat. Her bra was made of nearly sheer material, almost as though it wasn't there at all. Holland smiled at the display but Liz simply shrugged and said, “I can't see any reason to hide from my would-be husband.”

Holland digested that word for a moment and said, “I suppose I shouldn't hide things from my wife, either. My interest in these murders is professional, not personal. I was ordered to look into it.”

“You're a military cop?”

“Starting today, yeah I guess I am.”

“Why does the Air Force care about a couple of small time miners?”

He avoided answering the question but knew that sooner rather than later, he would be obliged to answer. “We shouldn't sit here too long. We are both going to need water in a little while.”

“There's some in the car.”

“You prepared for this?”

“Only an idiot would live in the desert and not keep water in the car. You never know when it could break down and leave you stranded. It won't be cool, but it will be wet. I might have a little whiskey in the trunk too, and a box of ammunition.”

“I've seen some canvas bags hanging from front bumpers. Does that keep it cooler?”

“No. That’s silly. It gets just as hot and the canvas doesn’t keep it clean. If someone needed filthy hot water, that’s the way to get it.”

“What kind of ammo?”

In response she pulled up the right leg of her pants and showed Holland a .38 revolver stuck into her boot. “Cole’s not the only one with a boot gun. In fact most people around here are usually packing some kind of weapon.”

“So the whole town is expecting trouble.”

She smiled and said, “If I was expecting trouble, I would have brought a rifle.”

They began walking again. After another three hundred yards Holland spotted the lean-to. He started to draw the pistol but she put her hand on his arm and very quietly said, “Never draw one unless you intend to use it. Some people might consider it an unfriendly gesture.” Then she walked a little closer to the hut, sniffed the air, looked at a blanket on the ground nearby and said, “R24. I recognize the blanket.”

“R24?”

“An off-the-reservation Apache. He refused to take an Anglo name so everyone calls him R24. That’s his serial number from the Indian Service. His actual name is unpronounceable in English.”

Holland pushed some of the brush aside and looked inside the hut. It contained two more blankets, some canned food, a kerosene lantern, a large cooking pot, a half empty bottle of Canadian Club, some small cloth bags. “You know this guy?”

“Yeah. I was over at [Peach Springs](#) once during the powwow. He was there raising hell. Then he just mounted up and road off.”

Holland picked up one of the bags; it contained about an ounce of flour gold. He handed it to Liz who looked inside, then pulled the top closed and put it back on the ground. “R24 must be trading this stuff to Kramnicz for food and whiskey. I should have guessed those two were in the black market.”

“Cole said the same thing. I wonder where he is. I’d like to speak with him.”

“He’s right here.” The Indian stepped out from behind a bush where he had been standing for some time. Holland was suddenly aware that Liz was nearly half naked, but it was too late to do anything about it.

She said, “Howdy. This is Rich Holland. Air Force pilot.”

“Air Force cop.” The Indian stood several feet away unwilling to close the distance with a man he didn’t know. “What do you want to talk about?”

“Kramnicz. You know they were both killed.”

“It was a bad day for them. They had visitors. Like today is a bad day for me.”

“You saw the visitors?”

“Both times.”

“Both times? More than one visit?”

“Yes. They gave away some oranges to a snake. They traded for something.”

The hair on Holland’s neck suddenly stood up. “They traded? For what?”

“Kramnicz said it was a weapon. After they thought I was gone they fired it a few times. Like a beam of light but it burned stuff.”

“You mean they fired it at the railroad ties in the yard.”

“Yeah. You got any whiskey? I can trade for it.”

Liz said, “Sorry. We didn’t expect to find you here, so we didn’t bring any.”

R24 looked at Holland and said, "Five ounces for the squaw." Liz decided it would be good time to put her shirt back on.

Holland said, "Thirty." She forgot about the shirt threw her shoulders back, hands on hips and lit the blow torch ...

"Fifteen"

"Thirty. What happened to the weapon?"

Words wouldn't come. He was actually bartering with this renegade for her!
"Some fucking husband. I'm worth at least 50."

"Charlie had it. They hid it somewhere."

"Where?"

"Don't know. Twenty."

"Who killed them?"

"A stranger. In a jeep."

"What did he look like? Tall or short?"

"It was dark. You guys all look the same to me anyway. Fifteen now and ten more in a week."

"That's tempting. Did he search for the weapon?"

"No. He stood outside, shot them, hid the pickup and left."

"You'd actually trade me for 25?" She was screeching now with fire in her eyes.

Holland said, "\$36 an ounce ... ten would be \$360 so \$720 plus half of \$360, another \$180 ... that comes to ... \$900. Actually not too bad."

"You son-of-a-bitch! I should rip your arms out and beat your head in with them."

"She always talks like that?"

"Most of the time, yeah. Terrible cook. Drinks all my whiskey."

"You lying, moth eaten, worthless son of a French whore ..." she began stomping her feet on the ground.

"I don't think I want her."

"Probably a wise choice." Holland pulled out his wallet, counted out \$20 in cash and handed it to R24. "You got anyone else to trade with?"

"A few."

"... I'm going to make a tobacco pouch out of your balls ..." arms waving in the air.

"If I can find you, others can. You should leave."

R24 simply nodded.

Holland turned and walked away in the same direction he had come. She followed, still screeching. After a hundred yards, she stopped screeching and said, "Nine hundred is a lot."

"You did good. You can think on your feet. I like that."

"You thought I was thinking on my feet? If you ever try to sell me for less than a thousand, you are one cooked goose. You are going to have to tell me what this is about. Buck Rogers ray guns?"

They continued walking. "I want to tell you, but at the moment you are better off not knowing. People have died over this. The killing probably isn't over. I don't know who to trust and I don't have all the facts. The best thing is for you to go back the coffee shop, pour out the coffee and let me deal with it."

It was just after 3 PM when they returned to her car. She got behind the wheel and said, “We are taking the rest of the day off,” then started the car and drove west, toward the Colorado River.

The day had become very hot and noise from the wind made it nearly impossible to speak. After a while, she stopped at a bar in a place she called ‘Bullhead’. The bar was cool and dark, inviting. She strolled off to the lady’s room. Holland ordered a beer and found a pay phone.

“General Black.”

“Captain Holland, Sir. Kramnicz and Cockburn didn’t just give those things some oranges. They traded.”

“My God! For what?”

“Some kind of weapon. Fires a heat ray. They used it to scorch two railroad ties. I noticed it yesterday and just got a confirmation.”

“How.”

Holland explained about R24, but left out the parts about Liz. He finished with, “I am of the opinion that those men were shot to keep them quiet. That means one of our people did it.”

“You’ve got to find that weapon.”

“Yes sir, I know that.”

“Do you have any idea where it is?”

“I might. But I still have some work to do.”

“Stay on it Holland. I’m going to send you some help.”

“Honestly Sir, I think it would be better right now if you didn’t. At least one of our people is dirty, I’m sure of it and sending more would muddy the water. The sheriff here deputized me this morning, made me a member of the posse so I have all the help I need. Even gave me a pistol. Give me another day or two.”

“I’ve got to contact command over this. They are not going to be pleased.”

“Just another day, General. Maybe two.”

“I’ll do the best I can but no promises.”

“One thing, General, where is Kaiser?”

“You think he had something to do with this?”

“I don’t *know* anything right now. I just wondered where he is.”

Liz walked down the hallway, put her arm around his neck and kissed his ear.

“He’s in Utah, so I was told.”

“He’s not on your payroll?”

“Are you?” Black paused for a long moment. “Find the weapon.” The line went dead.

The place was called Telephone Cove. [Lake Mohave](#) backs up behind [Davis Dam](#), on the Colorado, just north of Bullhead City. The locals fished downstream in the shadow of the dam for bass of both kinds, rainbow trout, bluegill, and a native fish called the [humpback sucker](#), which, naturally, has a hump on its back. Below the dam the river is overrun with small flies that swarm like mosquitoes and make boating there a serious endeavor meant only for the most adventurous fisherman, or perhaps the ones possessed of the foresight to bring cigars.

The lake, however, is deep and the currents are gentle. Directly north of the dam is a large cove where carp are the fish of the day. Even those poor souls who have no boat stand on the bank and fish for carp; no one ever keeps the carp. They are bony and too large for the frying pan, but Velveeta and other concoctions of cheese and bread are known to draw them out of their watery hiding place and onto the hook. They fight like a real fish; men who would otherwise hunt deer and elk are drawn here in the winter to test their mettle, returning with their tales of 'the one that got away' and the fish are happy for another day of life.

Liz drove past the damn, to a place called 'Katherine's Landing.' The lake had drowned a mine named the Katherine Mine and this little beach was named in honor of that. No one was sure just who Katherine was, but the name fit the place. Miles up a dirt road was 'Telephone Cove.' No telephone was here nor were any people. Liz parked a yard from the water, stripped off her clothing and ran nude into the lake.

Holland sat in the car, not surprised exactly, but not sure what to do. Her buttocks were small and muscular, but bounced a little as she ran into the water. He emerged from the car, unhooked the holster, threw it onto the seat and carefully but purposefully removed his own cloths, abandoning the cane that he depended on.

When he was knee deep in the water, she turned toward him, stood on the surprisingly shallow bottom, her own knees barely covered by the water, and waited while he walked into the lake. Devoid of modesty she seemed innocent, like a child, but wanton, like a woman. His own sexual desire began to build but he controlled his need, walked more slowly into the lake, the better for her to see him.

The afternoon was a fantasy for them both. They dove from the rocks, rolled on the sandy beach, and played among the salt cedar trees that grew near the shoreline and sometime into the lake itself. They hid from each other in the sharp branches, wanting to be found and carefully allowing the game of tag to change hands over and over as they reveled in each other.

Finally, they lay on the sandy beach where God Himself and everyone else could see them, and made love.

Chicken Springs Road, Thursday, May 21 1953, 2322 hours.

After an arduous journey and a long bus ride over dirt roads that included fording a stream, a bus with 11 scientists arrived at the crash site. None of the scientists knew each other but chatter between them on the long journey revealed that seven were physicists, two were aerospace engineers, one was a materials scientist and one was a pathologist. They developed a natural pecking order. After a short look around, the ad-hoc leader knew what had to be done and detailed the men, according to their specialty, to the task at hand.

Kingman Arizona, Friday, May 22 1953, 0743 hours.

Holland opened an edition of the Mohave Miner and quickly glanced at the headlines. It seems people were upset with the state mine inspector, though after skimming the article he was still unsure why. The other front-page story was about paved roads. The Arizona legislature had voted to pave the road from Phoenix to Prescott, but not the road from Phoenix to Kingman. Having spent a little time on that road he could certainly understand why it should be paved. Cole pointed out that the road from Kingman to Boulder City Nevada was paved in 1938 when [Hoover Dam](#) was completed.

A little column named "Around the Town" provided several juicy tidbits. Lola Conneally had taken a job at Table Supply as a grocery checker, a rancher had come into town because he ran out of beans, and some fellow from the Air Force was on leave and visiting *Darwin* Cole. There was no mention of the shootings in Silver Creek. Holland was curious about that but decided it would be in the next edition of a weekly newspaper. Nor was there any mention of a plane crash or other unusual event. For that he was grateful.

Cole noticed them first. A jeep with two uniformed Army men and three two and half ton trucks painted olive drab rumbled past the Kimo. Holland laid two dollars on the counter and they left before Liza had time to object. The patrol car joined the little procession quickly as it turned left across from the Santa Fe depot and the trucks halted,



still in the street, in front of a department store called Central Commercial. The street was narrow and no traffic could pass; a driver parked in front of the Rexall tried to pull out, but there was simply not enough room. In a glass display window of Central Commercial, under a large sign that read "Furniture" was a classroom with ten children, a few empty desks and a teacher. A sign in the corner of the

window said "2nd Grade Classroom" and "Public Service".

Cole got out of the car but the convoy began to move again, turned right and drove east another 200 feet, then stopped again. This street was wider here and traffic was still light. Men began to emerge from the trucks. Some were dressed in protective clothing of some kind and carried electronic instruments. They moved quickly into the grocery portion of Central Commercial and the few shoppers in the store at that hour were politely but firmly hustled into the street.

Cole parked in the street behind the last truck. The two men approached a group of soldiers. Cole was also in uniform so he didn't bother to introduce himself. "What's up boys?"

"Just routine, Sir."

Holland realized the instruments were Geiger counters. They were checking for radioactive contamination. And some of them were in exposure suits. His skin crawled. "Those are Geiger counters."

"Yes Sir, they are. Just routine. Nothing to worry about." A polite young lieutenant was clearly in charge of the detail and was following his orders.

Holland whispered to Cole, "They detonated an A Bomb on Tuesday morning. Have you ever seen this before?"

"No. Never."

"Something is not right. These people are checking for fallout. Maybe worse."

"What could be worse?"

"Contamination of food from gamma radiation. Fallout is just radioactive dust. As bad as that is, this is worse."

"Where did you learn all this stuff?" Cole was becoming suspicious, and remembered Holland's midnight phone call.

"I took engineering at Purdue. They made me take a class in physics."

"I have a degree too, but they didn't make me take physics."

"Where is your degree from?"

"Oklahoma State."

"Really. I've known you a long time but I didn't know you are from Oklahoma."

"[Ponca City](#). The home of Conoco. Got a degree in accounting."

"Ponca? What in the world ... never mind."

"So what do we do about this mess?"

"You are the deputy. But my advice is to let them do their jobs and get out of here."

"What will happen if they find any contamination?"

"In that case, all your babies will be born naked. I'd guess it depends on how bad it is." A crowd had gathered. People who were chased out of the market and others who had simply stopped by to watch the show were standing in the street. Someone suggested there might be a gas leak, and that was the reason for the exposure suits. Others agreed. Someone began telling about a gas leak in her home and how they were forced out until the gas company had come to fix it. Someone else pointed out that he could not smell any gas. A 14 year old who was buying food for a backpacking trip pointed out that the odor in natural gas was added later so it doesn't always smell and began to relate a tale of some workers who had spilled a 25 gallon barrel of the chemical by accident in Flagstaff and forced the evacuation of numerous homes.

Cole walked across the street to a jewelry store and used the phone. In a few moments he came back and said, "The boss is sending someone else for traffic control. Something has happened."

Holland noticed a white Corvette down the street, parked in front of a bank.

"What?"

"Someone found a body. An Indian with no name, only a serial number."

"Where?"

"On a dirt road northwest of Yucca."

"And you got the call."

"Actually, *we* got the call."

Instead of climbing into the patrol car, Holland walked 30 yards to the bank and took a close look at the Corvette. It was, indeed, very new. The normal amount of dust that accumulated on a car in this place was missing, so the car was recently washed. The tires were Michelin and the mold marks were still clearly visible on the sidewalls. He noted the tread pattern. Nothing was actually remarkable about the car, except the car itself. Chevy's were not delivered with Michelin tires and this Chevy was clearly pampered. The time was barely eight, so the bank was not open. He could only guess where the owner was.

Cole stopped the car so Holland could get in. "Nice car. Who owns it?"

Holland said, "I don't know. But it is nice."

Yucca ,Arizona, Friday, May 22, 1953, 0840 hours.

R24 was found by a local desert rat. The old man found the body then went to Yucca and called the sheriff. They met the old timer at a gas station and waited while he finished filling a 40-gallon water barrel, then followed him across dirt roads to find R24. Holland had hoped to find tire tracks, but the wind was already blowing and several vehicles had driven across the road near the body. The desert rat said he'd found the body when he got out of his pickup to pee. It was not visible from the road and a hundred people could have driven past it and not seen it.

R24 was in pretty bad shape. His body was nearly drained of blood and lay amid a thousand yellow wild flowers, some of which were now red. He had not simply been killed, he was partially skinned. The amount of blood on the ground indicated he had been killed where he was, not killed somewhere else and then dumped. Cole was tempted to remark about being scalped, but the scene was too grisly even for graveyard humor. Belongings were scattered around the desert near the body. Several blankets, an empty booze bottle, two haversacks and other assorted items were lying right where they had been tossed. A pile of vomit was on the ground near the body. The old man admitted he was a little shaken up when he found the mess. Someone, it seemed, was looking for something and when it wasn't found, went after the Indian.

Holland thought about telling Cole the truth, but decided against it, for now. Cole had no way to tie Holland to the Indian, unless Liza blabbed, and telling Cole would require telling him information that was Top Secret. He decided to ask Liza to keep the meeting with R24 to herself. Since Holland was pretty sure he, Holland, had not killed R24, their meeting was not actually relevant, at least not now.

Cole began going through the items on the ground. He found two cloth bags, similar to the one he found in Silver Creek. Each had about one ounce of flour gold in it. He also found \$30 in cash. "I think we can safely presume that R24 gave the gold to Kramnicz." He held up one of the bags. "But I don't understand why someone would go to this much trouble and not take the gold."

"Maybe they were after something else." Holland briefly wondered if the weapon was shaped like a handgun. "I can't imagine what. How did he get here?" Holland asked. "I don't think he walked."

"He had a horse. It probably just wandered off somewhere. The horse probably got a good look at whoever did this, but I don't think I can make him talk."

"Any water near here? Seems like it might have gone after water."

"I don't know." Cole looked toward the Black Mountains on the other side of the mountain range that held Silver Creek. A green patch seemed to be nestled in a tiny canyon. Cole knew this did not necessarily mean water was present, but the ground was moist and a horse may have smelled it and gone that way. Cole pointed out the green spot.

Holland asked, "How are we going to get the body out of here?"

"There's an old surplus ambulance in Yucca. Belongs to the fire department. I guess we can go back there and ask him to drive up here."

"While you're doing that, I think I'll walk toward the water, see if I can find the horse."

"Are you nuts?" In an hour it will be a hundred degrees out here. Besides, Liza is right. You can't even dance. How the hell are you gonna walk?"

Holland shook the cane at Cole and said, "I have my trusty walking stick. Actually, it's not that bad, I just have to keep most of my weight off the knee."

"You're an odd one, Holland. Okay, go ahead. If I don't see you, I'll come looking for you." Cole got into the car, turned it around and headed off toward Yucca. The turn required Cole to drive a few yards into the desert which made a new set of tire tracks. Holland looked for a moment and found another place, a few yards away, where someone else had made a similar three point turn leaving only one set of tracks. The tread design was different than the Corvette he noted, the marks were square and evenly spaced. They looked like the tread on a truck, or a jeep.

The walk was not as far as it looked and the ground was mostly flat with a few little gullies here and there. Holland had little trouble. As expected, the horse was standing next to a salt cedar that grew at the base of a little canyon, but the earth was as dry here as anywhere else. He quickly went through the few items still attached to the horse. In one saddlebag he found two more bags of flour gold. In the other, he found \$2000 dollars in cash, 20's and 50's. Two grand was a great deal of money for an itinerant Indian. Actually, it was a great deal of money for an Air Force pilot. Unless R24 was robbing banks on the side, he could never have generated that much cash from selling ounces of gold here and there. Paper clipped to the money was a note with a street address in [San Luis](#), Mexico. No name, just a \$2000 address.

Holland pocketed the evidence, mounted the animal and began the journey back.

As promised, Cole returned to the crime scene on time. They were just lifting the body into the old ambulance when Holland arrived. Cole loaded as much of the Indian's gear into the ambulance as he could and they debated what to do with the horse. Eventually the ambulance driver suggested they simply tie the horse onto the back of the ambulance and he would drive slowly.

Holland asked, "Any idea how long he's been dead?"

"He is pretty stiff. Probably early evening yesterday. Call it twenty hundred hours."

"Terrible way to die."

"Fillet de Apache. You'd have to be one sick puppy to do that to someone. Even if you were trying to get information out of him. At some point you'd have to know that if you kill him, you're gonna get squat. So what's the point of torture? I don't get it."

The ride back to Kingman took a little over half an hour. Holland and Cole were both quiet, lost in their own thoughts.

Only General Black knew about the connection between the killings in Silver Creek and R24. Only General Black knew about the alien weapon. Someone up the chain from Black, Holland speculated, and some unknown player in Kingman, were going out of their way to ensure that whatever they were trying to cover up remained covered, despite Holland's efforts to find the truth. Only General Black knew that ... but one other person also knew.

Liz knew.

Holland tried to keep that thought out of his reasoning, but it kept coming back. Liza knew about the alien weapon and knew about R24 and knew about the shootings in Silver Creek. Maybe her outburst at the Kimo was somehow connected to divergent loyalty. And what about the Corvette and the man with the diamond ring? He remembered the man's face and the back of a woman with brown hair ... *long brown hair*. She had once tried to tell him there were things about her he didn't know. What was she trying to say?

Linz Austria, Friday, May 22, 1953, 2003 hours.

This message was the fourth from an unidentified source in Argentina, a simple telegram. The source seemed to be a woman working as a housekeeper for Edward Roschmann. She insisted Roschmann was planning something, but was unable to give details. It involved a regime change in Paraguay and the acquisition of a weapon of some kind. Apparently the Nazi's considered it unlikely that a South American woman might speak German, and so discussed their plans openly while she served drinks and brought food.

[Wiesenthal](#), while seeing some value in the information, had no means to pursue it. He did what he always did. He put the telegram into a new envelope and marked it for delivery to the Israeli Embassy in Vienna. The Mossad was actively looking for Eichmann. Perhaps one day they would try to track down some of the others.

Kingman, Arizona, Friday, May 22, 1953, 1132 hours.

"So how attached are you to Liz?"

Cole parked the patrol car on the street outside his house and said, "To tell you the truth, she's too fast for me."

"You? Didn't I see you with a Korean hooker one night at ..."

"Now let's just let bygones be bygones." Cole laughed. "At my age I figure I need a wife. I like her, don't get me wrong, but I just couldn't take her home to my mother, if you know what I mean."

"Your mother in Poncton?"

"Ponca. And don't you start bad mouthing Ponca. Nice place."

"You'll have to tell me sometime how you managed to end up here."

"That, my friend, is a whole different story. Do you remember the tent city where the enlisted men lived? I was over there once and saw a sign nailed to a tree. It said, "Kingman Arizona, 4th of July Burro Bar-B-Que, Everybody gets a little ass." Thought it was cute, so I came here to check it out. Tell you what. I need to get some paperwork done so I'm going to sit at my desk and pretend I know how to type. Tonight the three of us can go to the Smoke House and have a little fun."

Holland stepped out of the car. "I'll hold you to that."

As Cole drove away, Holland noticed that the convertible was parked next door. He entered Cole's house and stashed the money and gold into his AWOL bag. It wasn't really safe there, but it was better than carrying that stuff around with him. Then he went next door.

A knock at the door drew no response, so he cautiously opened the door and inside he could hear the shower running and the white noise hum of an evaporative cooler. He stepped into the house and pulled the door closed behind him. It was rude to walk into someone's house without knocking, but he had actually knocked. He poked his head into the bedroom and could see into the bathroom. She was behind a yellow shower curtain and seemed to be washing her hair.

"Knock knock", he spoke loudly enough to be heard over the running water.

"I saw you pull up and I'm glad you came in. Have a seat and I'll be right out."

Holland opened the refrigerator, extracted a Cream Soda, and sat down at the kitchen table.

On it were several pieces of paper; one of them drew his attention.

*A summer storm piles up on the mountains to the east
colors change
fluffy and white to gray then black.*

*To the south, twin rain storms weep upon the desert floor
a dry mile between
life on the outside, death in the middle.*

*Music from the radio fills the cab
a dozen bolts of lightning strike miles away
in time to the music
counterpoint to the cellos
in concert with the oboes.*

*The sky; the distant hills
burnt out once green plants
a tapestry of dust
many hues of brown*

a hundred ways of birth
unique, violent, upheaval of the Earth.
Defiance in these hills.
Baked for a billion days
frozen and cut from an ice age
they keep their feet.

Peace is here. Perhaps God.

At night I stand naked in the yard
the milky way above
100 million stars unseen in cities
burst to greedy life each night
a swath of light across the sky

ants below
the little red ones
one mind for many
they bite my toes but I don't care

Next door two black Scottie dogs
ignored
trapped in the yard
their owner moved away.
They bark at everything.
I feed them
but like some capricious god
I don't let them be dogs.

The clouds again assault the peak
a nearly endless sea of gray
and black
and rain.
Life.

My Desert.

Holland had to read it twice. He was stunned. Perhaps this is what she was talking about. He read it a third time, finally looked up from the table. She was standing in the doorway with a towel wrapped around her. Her hair was wet and her body dripped water on the floor. The look on her face was odd, like she'd been caught with her hand in the cookie jar.

"Pretty good stuff."

"I didn't mean for you to see that." Her fist clenched and unclenched the towel.

"Sometimes we do things on purpose that we didn't mean to do."

"You think I left it there on purpose so you'd be sure and read it."

"Something like that."

"It's not that good. Pretty silly actually." Her eyes began their dance of light and hope and something else; something he could not identify, some kind of deep despair. Some sadness so buried in her mind that it could only be released in the window of her soul.

"Humility is about the last thing I would expect of you. You are a constant surprise."

"Is that bad?"

He walked to her, put his arms around her and kissed her very gently. Her body shuddered at his touch. She tried to pull away then decided not to. They embraced for a long moment.

Finally she smiled, said nothing else and retreated to the bedroom.

He stood in the living room and looked out a window at the view he found so remarkable. Perhaps it was that very thing, the view, which made her what she was. Perhaps it was this place, or perhaps it was the wind. His feelings from the day before resurfaced; he began to love her the moment they met and as they grew to know each other he found nothing to say he was wrong.

Then the terrible thought entered his mind. The Chevy, the diamond ring, it was probably nothing, a long lost uncle or a salesman or something equally bland. R24's body split open like a gutted fish. Two people knew about R24. One of them had killed him.

He had to know, not just guess. The shootings, and now R24, had become a quest and he would find the killer. He needed a plan; a way to smoke out the killer, and vindicate the innocent. But how? And how could he set someone up, knowing they might be killed because he did it. And what if it wasn't the General? What then?

From the bedroom she called, "Are you coming in here or not?"

The towel was recklessly tossed on the floor, she was sprawled on the bed, head propped up on pillows and mischief in her smile.

An hour later Holland said, "R24 is dead."

"What?"

"He was murdered last night. Cole and I hauled his body out of the desert this morning."

"Why? Who would do that?"

Her concern seemed genuine or else she was ready for the Oscars. He damned himself, always ready with the 'else'. "He wasn't just killed, Honey. He was skinned and bled to death from it."

"My God." The realization of what had happened began to sink in. "That poor son-of-a-bitch."

"It might be better, just now, if you didn't mention to Cole that we saw him the other day."

"You think Cole might think ... sometimes you are a mystery. Okay, I will keep my mouth shut about that. But I want to know what happened, who killed him, when you do."

"What makes you think I'll find out?"

"I can see it in your eyes. They just became hard. Does this have something to do with your ray gun?"

"I don't know. Maybe, but honestly, I don't know. Better to keep the ray gun part quiet as well."

"You need to come clean with me."

"So do you."

"Me. I'm not sure what you mean."

"New Corvette, diamond ring on his little finger. Ring a bell?"

She seemed somehow to deflate, withdrew into herself a little. "You don't miss much."

"They pay me to pay attention. I do. Sometimes they pay me to shoot. I do that too."

"I don't want to tell you. You'll drop me like a hot rock if I do."

"Try me."

She took a deep breath. "I'm half Jewish. I was born in 1930 in a town named [Baden-Baden](#), in Germany, very near the French border. My grandfather was a very well to do Jewish businessman. Baden-Baden is a resort town. He owned several hotels there, and was on the board of directors of a bank. I barely remember the place. There were a lot of trees.

"In 1933 when Hitler burned the [Reichstag](#), I was not yet three years old, my grandfather could see the writing on the wall and decided it was not safe for my parents and I to remain in Germany. My father is a simple man, the son of a farmer, but my mother loved him dearly. My grandfather sent us all here, to the United States. My father read western books as a child. Cowboys and Indians and such always fascinated him, so we came to Arizona.

"In the summer of 1938 my mother traveled back to Germany on a US Passport. She intended to talk my grandfather into coming here. He didn't want to leave Germany. He had been in the German Army in the first war and he believed, *hoped*, that nothing bad would happen. On Sundays he wore his army medals. He was a proud German but still a Jew.

"I remember standing in the train station downtown. She waved to me from inside the train. It pulled away. I never saw her again. Later, we learned she died in one of camps, along with my grandfather. I don't know which camp. I think dad does. Dad remarried after the war."

Holland said, "I'm very sorry. But I don't understand. Why would I drop you?"

"Because I'm a Jew."

Holland thought about that for a long moment. "I don't care."

"You *have* lived a sheltered life. During the war there was a little canteen in the train station. Sometimes, when troop trains went through, a bunch of us girls would put on our Red Cross shirts and go to the train station and serve coffee and donuts to the men.

We had to walk down the tracks and pass cups of coffee through the windows because the men couldn't get off the train. But once in a while they'd let the men off the train. Blacks could go to the back door to eat. Jews couldn't go in at all. So you didn't say you are a Jew and the Red Cross let you in the front door. Most of the bars here still wouldn't let me in, if they knew I was a Jew."

"Is there a synagogue here? When's the last time you went?"

She smiled a little and said, "Why would you think ... oh, I see. Actually I am a Methodist. I go on Christmas and Easter, like all the other Methodists. It doesn't matter if a Hualapai is a Mormon or a Catholic. He's still a Hualapai. It doesn't matter if I am a Methodist. I am still a Jew."

"And the guy in the Corvette?"

"He's ridiculous. He dresses up like some Italian mobster and then says he's a Nazi hunter. Why he thinks I might know something is beyond me."

Nazi hunter. In Kingman? Holland's mind raced. A Nazi hunter would be [Mossad](#), a professional, like Kaiser, and capable of anything. Slicing up R24 would be a walk in the park to a man like that. But that kind of work generally required a low profile and a brand new Corvette seemed an unlikely choice for someone who wanted to stay under the radar. The car cost a lot of money. The entire disguise was expensive and difficult to maintain. Why pick that? It made no sense. Perhaps, he reasoned, if you call attention to yourself for one kind of thing no one would make the connection for the truth. But what in the hell was he doing here? A tiny, hole-in-wall place where everyone knew everyone else is unlikely to become a respite for a bunch of old Nazis. Even the beer here was just colored water in comparison to actual German beer.

"Where does he know you from?"

"My dad, I suppose. Dad trades in Indian jewelry, artifacts, and stuff like that. But that doesn't make any sense either. Honestly, I don't know how he knows me."

"Tell you what. You and I and Cole are going out tonight. We'll go the Smoke House,, since you insist on going there, and if anybody tries to throw you out, I'll beat 'em up with my cane."

She laughed that glorious laugh of hers, the sparkle returned to her eyes, and she said, "You'd better take your .50." That made her laugh even harder.

"I'm kind of attached to that. It goes where I go."

She kissed him gently and said, "I'm becoming attached to it, too."

Kingman, Arizona, Friday, May 22, 1953, 1900 hours.

The State Theater was in downtown Kingman across the street from J.C. Penny's. The popcorn was about what Holland expected and the seats had the requisite amount of chewing gum stuck to the bottom, as did the floor. The movie wasn't too bad, something new with Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr called "[From Here to Eternity](#)". Liz got the giggles when they were rolling around in the surf. This upset the people nearby which only made her laugh harder. Holland was a little embarrassed at first but after he realized she was laughing because of their own romp in Lake Mohave he relaxed a little and let her have some fun.

Holland was a little amazed at the scenes of infantrymen firing machine guns from the hip at attacking aircraft. In the real world, there was always a chance that a stray bullet would impact some important part of the plane, but holes in the airframe from this kind of fire tended to be in the rear and usually amounted to a patch job and nothing more. Like shooting ducks, one had to lead the target and that was harder to do than it looked. On the other hand, he reflected, his knee was trash because a Russian pilot knew how to lead the target. He wondered for a moment if they hunted ducks in the Soviet Union. Were they Mallards, Wood ducks, or something else? For a moment, he imagined sitting in a duck blind with the man who shot him down, drinking ice cold vodka from the bottle and swapping stories.

What Holland didn't know, what no one knew, was that Cole had fired one brief burst at the tail of the MiG as it retreated toward the Chinese border. The bullets had punctured a control cable, which lasted another 4 minutes and 32 seconds, then parted. The MiG impacted Chinese soil well short of the runway at high speed and the pilot was killed.

When the movie ended Liz made an excuse and walked into the [Dime Store](#). Holland looked around and realized that he was two blocks from the jail. The green pickup was still parked where he had last seen it. He fished around inside the seat and found a square object about the size of a package of Chesterfields. There was no writing on the box but by holding it he became aware of exactly how it worked. Somehow it had the ability to read his thoughts, separate the relevant ones from myriad streams of thought that constitute human consciousness, and act according to the wishes of who was holding it.

It called itself a *micro thermal disruption generator*. It produced a concentrated point of heat on the skin of a target, with an effective range of about 50 yards. The heat was sufficient to melt most metals and softer, flammable materials could be carbonized quickly, or simply set aflame and left to burn themselves out. And, Holland marveled, all he had to do was think about it. He was tempted to try it but couldn't find a suitable target. Destroying a tree in someone's yard was a sure way to upset the neighbors.

He slipped the device into his pocket and walked back toward the Dime Store. After one block, he crossed a street and stood for a moment in front of the Post Office. Three metal signs were on the sidewalk, recruiting posters for the Army, Navy and one for the Marine Corps. Each was about two and half feet square and would present a nice sail area in the wind. The bottom corners of each sign, he noticed, were chained to the cement, an expedience because of the wind. Next door was a stone building that contained a doctor's office, a dentist's office, and the second floor was apparently the local Masonic Lodge. Engraved into the stone was the familiar [Masonic crest](#). A similar image suddenly popped into his mind along with the words *Symbol of the Great One*. In a moment he realized that the device in his pocket had not only the ability to read his thoughts, but to generate new thoughts in his head.

Panic briefly flooded into his thoughts ... he wanted to throw it and run away ... just as quickly he calmed down and considered the implications. This device had information and the ability to share it. Possession of the device in the right hands could advance science in extraordinary ways. He thought about growing airframes. In the wrong hands it could ... *a simple lattice in the desired shape, the skin grows to follow the lattice. Since it is skin it is one piece. No welds, no joints, no weak spots* ... in the

wrong hands ... *a circular tube filled with Mercury plasma, circulated at 12,000 rpm and heated to 8000 degrees ... generates gravity on the inside loop, generates anti-gravity outside the tube* ... his thoughts were confused. Images and information, one piece after another, were plowing into his brain without regard to his ability to absorb the information ... *vortex inside the tube bends space/time*.

“Christ. My head hurts.” The words escaped from his mouth, and he began to rub his head. *A naked man, nailed to a cross, blood running from his head and hands, blood dripping on the ground ... hatred, revulsion* ... the emotional content was, he knew, the emotions of whoever had seen the event. He wondered for a moment who could hate that much. He told the device to take a nap. *A Roman trooper shoving his sword into a dead body* ... The images stopped.

Liz walked out of the store and motioned for him to follow her back to the car. He took a few steps and slowly regained his composure. The image of the bloody cross was riveted to his mind, an image that he would never escape. What the hell, he wondered, was happening? What the hell?

Base Camp Mercury, [Mercury Nevada](#), Friday, May 22, 1953, 1910 hours.

Keith Preston and his crew were finished for the day, or nearly so, in assembly building #2. They spent several days testing and retesting the delicate circuits in the 280mm artillery shell that was to make history. The shell was 4 ½ feet long and weighed 805 pounds. A 280mm cannon is equivalent to an 11-inch gun, in the same range as some naval weapons. Indeed, the German Pocket Battleship [Scharnhorst](#) had used an equivalent gun.

The cannon itself was dubbed “Atomic Annie”, as though Annie Oakley, who specialized in very fine shooting, was behind the least specific artillery warhead ever devised. The expected yield was in the 15-kiloton range, the same explosive power as 15 thousand tons of TNT. Its official name was the M65 Atomic Cannon and it would deliver, to a range of six miles, a W19 Nuclear Weapon. Like *Little Boy*, which was detonated over Hiroshima in 1945, it used a gun-type fission reaction where one sub critical mass was fired down a gun barrel to impact with another sub critical mass, thus establishing a critical mass and an explosive reaction. Assembly of such a weapon is a slow process and plutonium cannot be used, so lower yield, highly enriched uranium, sometimes called oralloy for Oak Ridge alloy, was fitted into the shell.

Preston was well aware of all this as he and his crew finished packing the shell into a protective casket where it would remain until it was loaded into the cannon the following Monday. Many Army officers considered a 280mm gun a ‘bomb magnet’ and had some trouble seeing any practical use for it. The notion of a tactical nuclear weapon was also troubling. If one side used a TacNuc, the other was almost required to respond in kind, followed by escalation followed by hell come to earth. The slightest miscue on the part of some politician who would authorize the use of such a weapon could end life on the planet. Everyone knew it. No one talked about it unless they were drinking.

But it was a Friday and Las Vegas was only an hour away.

Preston had given considerable thought to what he was about to do. It was treason, no doubt, but it would not harm anyone. The harm was already done. The schematics for building a fission bomb were published years before, so simply supplying them again was not a big deal. Supplying a warhead, conversely, was beyond anything he would consider, and would be impossible anyway. But if some jerk was willing to pay for something he could get at a library, so be it.

The chance he'd be caught was null and the money he'd been offered was substantial. \$25,000 would go a long way. He gave a lot of thought to his escape and finally settled on Ireland over New Zealand. Ireland had no extradition with the United States, they spoke English mostly, and it was easier to deal with a lot of rain than a lot of earthquakes. He could easily get a job teaching physics in some small college, find a nice red headed girl and live happily ever after. His own red hair and slight build would allow him to fit right into any town in Ireland.

He secured the lights, locked the door, and walked away from the assembly-building empty handed. He carried no papers. The information was safely tucked away in his head, the one place a security check could never inspect. The last bus for Vegas left at 2100 hours, more than enough time.

His appointment was at the Flamingo. He knew, everyone knew, that a gangster, one [Benjamin 'Bugsy' Siegel](#), now departed, invested heavily in that casino some years ago. What they didn't know was that another gangster, one [Meyer Lansky](#), proud owner of many casinos in Havana, had an interest in the Flamingo and occasionally used the property to further his not insubstantial monetary interests. The man he was to meet had never expressed any affiliation to anybody, but the amount of money he was throwing around spoke in much clearer volume than name dropping could have managed.

Waiting at the Flamingo was a luxury suite with a drafting table and the appropriate tools. The work would go quickly. By the time anyone noticed he was missing he'd be in Dublin.

Preston returned to his quarters, changed his clothes, and picked up the overnight bag. He satisfied himself that his passport was inside and began a new adventure. He boarded the bus to Las Vegas with about 30 others and enjoyed the trip in a very singular way.

Kingman, Arizona, Friday, May 22, 1953, 2132 hours.

The Smoke House was apparently so named because of the copious amount of cigarette smoke that never left the building. The music was loud, the bar was clean and the beer was cold. Holland was surprised to find several kinds of beer; Budweiser, PBR, Schlitz, something called A1, and of course the ever present cowboy Cool Aid. The room contained two pool tables, an abbreviated dance floor, several tables and a whole bunch of what Liz called "shit kickers". Holland later learned this was a reference to kicking manure off their boots before walking indoors.

Liz was offered her traditional shot of tequila but declined. Holland could not hear what she ordered in the din from the juke box, but the bartender delivered a double shot of something dark and altogether sinister. She tossed it off in one swallow, took a

moment to pay her customary homage to some long forgotten Roman god, and took a small sip from the replacement glass.

Nearly yelling above the noise from “Your Cheatin’ Heart” she asked, “Do you want something to eat? They have great stuff here.”

Yelling back, Holland said, “As long it’s not balls ...”, thought better of his answer and added, “... or coyote or rattlesnake or something strange”.

“They have rattlesnake here, but we have to ask for it. You’ll love it.” She raised her hand to attract the attention of the barman and Holland quickly pulled it down.

“No rattlesnake! This is a cattle town. Doesn’t anyone ever eat beef?”

She laughed and yelled at the bartender, “Two cowboy steaks.” He nodded and stuck his head through a hole in the wall to the kitchen. Holland appeared to be lost in thought and she asked, “What are you thinking about?”

“Ducks.”

Cole had followed the pickup and trailer for several miles. The horse trailer had a tail light missing. He could have pulled it over for that alone, but worse, the tail gate was loose and looked as though it was about to fall off. Inside the trailer was a single steer that looked to be very healthy. Finally deciding that the tail gate was on its last leg, Cole turned on the red light.

The pickup immediately pulled to the right and into a vacant lot next to the Smoke House. As he exited the patrol car, Cole noticed Liz’s convertible. ‘Good enough’ he thought. I’ll take care of this little problem and step inside.

Howard Turfs, rancher and local businessman, stepped out of the pickup more than a little annoyed that he had been stopped by a deputy who, he was sure, had something better to do than worry about the tail light.

The noise in the bar was tremendous. For the most part Holland had given up trying to speak to Liz, or anyone else, and was simply swilling a beer, looking around and waiting for the steaks. Behind the bar was a large mirror and he was looking at the crowd in the mirror. He saw something he hadn’t expected to see.

Pinky ring was sitting at a table with two local shit kickers. He was decked out in the same kind of clothing they were wearing; Levies, a cotton shirt, brown alligator boots and on his head, pushed back in the same way as the others, was a cowboy hat. The hat, Holland decided, had given him away. It was obviously new; no sweat marks on the front or sides, and no else in the bar had a new one. But the pinky ring and the gold chain were plainly visible. The bar was dim, most are, but eventually the man moved his head just enough that Holland could see his face.

Kaiser.

Holland avoided eye contact for the moment. Kaiser was a lot of things and one of them was dangerous. Holland decided that since there were no rats in evidence in this bar, he would avoid trying to give Kaiser something else to shoot at. He also decided it was doubtful that even Kaiser would do something stupid in front of a bar full of people.

“GRACIE”. Liz jumped from her bar stool and strode quickly to the front door to greet Gracie.

Holland decided to act. He stood, walked to the back of the bar and sat down directly opposite Kaiser. "Fancy meeting you here."

"Don't reckon I know you, friend." Kaiser's accent was a touch overdone.

"Korea, Seoul, a filthy bar with a lot of dead rats and one little boy who lost an ear."

"Yeah. That was a little nasty of me, wasn't it? But what the hell. No harm done. And you must be Holland."

"I must be."

"They briefed me that you were in town but I figured you'd be at a church social tonight."

"We're having a Bible study in the back room later. So what brings you here?"

"I'm just tying up some loose ends."

"But you already tied up the loose ends in Silver Creek and another one in the desert near Yucca."

Kaiser didn't reply. Instead he simply sat, like a witness in the dock, waiting for the next question.

Cole kicked the tailgate once. It fell off the hinge. Inside 1048 pounds of beef on the hoof, named Chester, saw an opening for escape from the confining horse trailer and quickly backed out. Too late, Cole and Turfs tried to get out of the way but the steer was fast and knocked them both over as it exited the trailer. Still on the run it headed for the parking lot, found the route blocked by parked cars, and turned in another direction.

"The miners were killed with a .22. Each man was shot once in the head. Range was only a few feet. The Apache was carved up like a roast. It takes a special kind of man to murder people up close like that."

Kaiser said, "Is there some point to this conversation?"

"I'm going to find the proof that you killed those men. I won't rest until then."

"In that case you'd better get some sleep now because you're not going to find jack. I'm much better than that. I was doing this kind work when your mother was wiping your nose. National Security comes first and that Indian was a traitor."

"Traitor? He was nothing. Except for the UFO ..."

"You actually believed that UFO bullshit? I thought you were smart. There never was any UFO. It was a cover to ..."

Chester, whose care and feeding had been so tenderly attended to by Turfs, watched the back door open directly in front of him. His tremendous body weight required a lot of energy to move around, even for him, and once in motion the inherent inertia of half a ton of beef on the hoof was difficult to slow. Chester's horns had been removed as soon as they began to grow out. Chester, nevertheless, began to head butt anything in his path. Tables, chairs, cowboys, even a few cowgirls were quickly and unceremoniously tossed out of the way as Chester lumbered into the bar.

Holland had a sudden inspiration. He reached for Kaiser's shoulder. The High Standard materialized in Kaiser's right hand. Holland grabbed his wrist, pointed the barrel upward and as the two men wrestled for the hand gun Holland slipped his own finger into the trigger guard and fired several rounds into the ceiling. The suppressed automatic made almost no noise.

Cowboys, loaded or not, are still cowboys. Half a dozen men stood up and began waving their hats at the errant steer which turned abruptly and headed back out the door. A final kick launched a chair past Holland's head and he was obliged to release his grip on Kaiser and duck. By the time he sat up, Kaiser was gone.

Holland ran out the back door and encountered Cole and Turfs who were just closing the tail gate on Chester. "Kaiser is here." The noise from screeching drunks waving their hats, plus the music from inside the bar didn't allow Holland to whisper. It didn't actually matter since no one but Cole heard him, and no one but Cole would understand the significance.

"What's he doing here?"

"Long story." At the far end of the dirt parking lot a new Chevy sports car kicked up a ton of dust and then sped onto the highway.

Cole gestured for Holland to get into the patrol car, yelled at Turfs to get the light fixed, jumped into the car, and tried the starter.

Nothing. It wouldn't crank, much less start.

"You've got to be kidding me." Holland couldn't believe his bad luck.

"It's had a problem with the generator for a few days. The county mechanic keeps telling me he has it fixed." Both men walked back into the bar. Cole used the phone to call for a tow truck. Standing on a table, Holland used a fork to pry three of the .22 caliber bullets from the ceiling.

"So I guess you two cowboys need a lift." Liz stood with hands on hips and a disgusted look on her face.

"Yeah," Holland replied. "I guess we do."

Nuevo Berlin, Argentina, Saturday, May 23, 1953, 0210 hours.

Edward Roschmann stood by the phone clad only in his underpants and eyeglasses. He was furious at having been awakened in the middle of the night and angrier still by the bad news. "He was killed? Skinned? ... Do we have a replacement? ... How can you trust criminals? ... This is very important. Everything rests on acquisition of this weapon. We cannot afford any ... yes, yes, I know that. I don't care. ... All right but ... yes that's a good idea. Do that." He hung up abruptly, stormed from the living room back to his bed room.

Dolores Hernandez, born Dolores Zimmerman, stood quietly watching the old Nazi stomping his feet on the floor. She had the unpleasant duty of waking him up when

the phone rang at night. She slept in a night gown that covered almost none of her 35 year old body, the better to placate the old bastard at times like this. She waited patiently, knowing that in a few minutes he would demand her companionship in his bed. Three times she had hidden a butcher knife in the room with the intention of sliding the blade into his chest after he was spent; she considered it a valid punishment for multiple rape.

Then another idea had arisen. As he summoned her to his bed, she was already composing the next telegram to Austria.

Kingman Arizona, Saturday, May 23, 1953, 0710 hours.

The two men sat bleakly in Cole's living room, staring at each other, each one weighing options. Liz, on her day off, attired in her bathrobe, poured coffee for everyone and said, "I think the two of you need to come clean."

"I had a shower this morning."

"So did I," Cole had to put in his two cents worth.

"You two cowboys have been busting your asses to keep things to yourself, and still be friends. So far you've managed it. But the 'friend' part is wearing a little thin." Indeed, the two men had hardly spoken to each other after leaving the bar the previous night.

Cole let out a long breath, nodded his head and said, "Okay. Here we go.

"I don't work for Sheriff Carrier. Actually I do work for him, as far as he knows but I also work for someone else. Ultimately I work for Hoover."

Liz looked shocked and said, "You sell vacuums? Why didn't you tell me? I really need one of those canister ones."

Holland replied, "He means John Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI. So what in the hell are you doing here?"

"After the court martial which was rigged, by the way, I went to the FBI school at Quantico. They needed a new face for some undercover work and here I am."

"Rigged? You let me sweat that out for three weeks and it was rigged?"

"Not my idea. Sorry."

"I thought you were a bean counter."

"Yup. The Feds only hire accountants and lawyers."

"So what are you investigating?"

"An unnamed somebody in South America, formerly from Germany, is trying to purchase the plans for an atomic bomb."

Holland said, "Those plans were in 'Popular Mechanics' a few years ago. They could get them from a library."

"Too true. But someone has mounted a fairly massive effort to high grade the newest set of plans. They have managed to squeeze one of those things into an artillery shell. The whole deal is hush-hush but someone found out and someone else offered a whole lot of dinero for the blueprints."

"And you think someone here is involved."

“R24 was most likely the courier, or at least one of a few potential couriers. I can only guess that Kramnicz and Cockburn were killed because they were in on the deal some how.”

Holland stood, walked to his AWOL bag, pulled out the address, and reluctantly, the money, and handed the bundle to Cole. “This was in R24’s saddlebag.”

Cole looked at the scrap of paper, quickly counted the money, and said, “When were you going to tell me about this?”

“Oh he has something much better to tell you.” Liz looked absolutely pleased with herself. “He has a ray gun.”

“You mean like Buck Rogers?”

“Actually“, Holland said, “more like this.” He removed the device from his trouser pocket and placed it on the coffee table. “It is some kind of heat emitting weapon. It has other uses too.”

“You think this is what they are actually after?” Cole reached out to pick up the box, withdrew his hand, tried again, withdrew again and then looked at the thing as though it was covered in manure, not unlike the boots they had encountered the day before. “Nobody briefed me in on this.”

“They couldn’t have known. It came from a UFO.”

Cole looked at Holland for a long moment and said, “What have you been smoking?”

“I didn’t give him any loco weed, Dave. I swear. He was with me all day yesterday, and he didn’t have but about two beers the whole time.”

Holland briefly explained about operation *Electric Archer*. “My working theory is that Kramnicz and Cockburn were killed because they had contact with a UFO that was disabled and landed near their cabin. Kaiser shot them. I can’t prove that until we match the bullets I took out of the ceiling against the bullets that killed those two men. The problem is that Kaiser thought the UFO wasn’t real, that it was a cover for something else. Now I know what the something else is. For what it’s worth, R24 told Liz and I that whoever shot the two miners was driving a jeep.”

“When did you talk to R24?”

“On the 20th, about lunch time.” Holland paused for a moment, handed the three .22 slugs to Cole and then continued, “I saw that new Chevy about mid-day on the 19th, parked in back of the Sportsman’s Club. Kaiser was in the Kingman Club with Liz, pretending to be Mossad. But he was, apparently, hunting Nazi’s, or at least the people who are trying to get the blueprints to them. So I can’t guess why he killed them, unless he thought they were involved with the information transfer. But I also saw Kaiser in Barstow just before midnight on the 18th, part of the crew that went UFO hunting. I’m pretty sure he was driving a jeep. If we were able to shoot it down we had no idea where the bogey would crash, so we had two man crews spread out all over the area from Utah to central Arizona.”

“And where were you?”

“In Wikieup with a driver.”

Cole had some trouble accepting the information as factual, but he knew Holland well and knew which tone of voice meant business and which did not. “He didn’t pick up that car here, so he must have brought it in well before the 18th.”

“The Bureau has known about this for several months. Hell, I’ve been here since last October waiting for a break in the case. I wish to hell the FBI and the CIA, or whoever Kaiser is working for, were on the same page. A little co-operation would have saved three lives. If those slugs match, Kaiser is guilty of murder. But I can’t imagine how any of this would go over in court, especially here in Kingman. Hell, the people here are just now getting used to cars. How are they going to deal with flying saucers?”

“It can’t ever go to court. The whole operation is top secret. I’ve probably earned a court martial for just telling you about it.”

Cole said, “Maybe I can get that one rigged too ...” when the phone rang.

“Cole ... when ... I need to go over there anyway. Can you have the lab ready this afternoon ...” Cole looked at his watch ... “about noon? ... Good.” He hung up the phone and said, “That was the resident agent in Las Vegas. You’d think there would be a whole platoon of FBI over there, but it is just one guy, and he works out of the Salt Lake office. The Clarke County Sheriff’s Office found a body about an hour ago. A man named Preston. We’ve been watching him for a while. He worked up at [Indian Springs](#) on the atomic bomb project. He was shot once in the anus, and three times in the chest.”

“Did he have the blueprints?”

“No. But he had his passport. It looks like he was going to get out of the country pretty quickly. Just a guess, but he probably delivered the blueprints and then got shot for his trouble. They didn’t have to pay him that way.”

“They? Who killed him?”

“Shot in the anus. It was a mob hit.”

“I thought Hoover doesn’t believe there is a mob.”

“Did I tell you about the dyslexic agnostic insomniac? He lays awake at night wondering if there is a dog.” Cole rubbed his forehead and said, “I’ll go by the office and get the bullets that killed Kramnicz and Cockburn and take these three you dug out of the ceiling at the Smoke House. I’ll be gone most of the day.”

“I need to go, too. I need to report to my C.O. at Nellis. Tell him what’s up.”

Cole counted out \$500 from the money that had once belonged to R24, pocketed it, and handed the rest to Holland. “You’re right that this will never see the inside of a courtroom. Since this money isn’t evidence, exactly, and since R24 can’t use it, we might as well foot the bill for this on his nickel. So Liz? Up for a trip to Vegas?”

She thought for a moment and said, “I’d like to get in some shopping.”

“For what?” Holland’s question was not well thought out, he was simply responding to her.

“Wedding rings.”

Cole simply said, “You poor bastard.”

Holland gave Cole a rueful smile, thought for a moment and said, “Do you have an iron? My uniform has been stuffed into that AWOL bag for several days, and I need to press it.” Holland wondered how well his uniform jacket would conceal an M1911A1.

“I’ll take care of it.” Liz jumped to her feet, fished around inside the bag, removed the uniform and cheerfully walked back to her own house, still clad in her bath robe.

Forty minutes later they drove to the court house and Cole retrieved the two rounds that killed Kramnicz and Cockburn. On the way out of town, they passed the

Santa Fe depot. A single coffin waited on the loading dock with the rest of the cargo. “Kramnicz has family in New York, and they are shipping him back there.”

Holland realized the irony of the situation but only shrugged. The man was murdered, Cole had the proof in his uniform pocket, and it would never go any further. No trial would ever be held. But justice, he decided, would still be done.

Near Mile Post 1, US Highway 93, Nevada border, May 23 1953, 1023 hours.

A caravan of cars was stopped at a curio shop located in a wide spot in the road to watch a show rarely seen. Seven Desert Bighorn ewes, five lambs, several juvenile rams, and one remarkable adult ram had stopped to observe the tourists which were observing them. The old ram’s horns curled all the way to the back of his head; Liz said it was called a ‘[full curl](#)’; his chest seemed to be made of iron. He stood erect, proud, and seemingly fearless. No mountain lion in his right mind would attack an animal of that size and strength. As with all things, Holland knew one day he would become weak, incapable of defending his harem and eventually he would become dinner for something or other. But today he was the absolute monarch of this piece of desert.

Despite his obvious status, a juvenile ram took that moment to test the old man’s metal. The two animals faced off, eyeball to eyeball for a moment, and then each rose up on his back legs and they threw their heads together. The cracking sound of two thick heads butting together was audible at a distance of nearly 70 yards. After the collision, the young animal took a few steps backward and shook its head in an effort to ward off the pain. The elder ram turned his attention back to the highway, as though nothing had happened. One day the young one would defeat the old man, but that day wasn’t this day.

To the north and down a very steep slope, the view was entirely different. [Hoover Dam](#), in its day the largest concrete structure ever attempted, lay athwart the Colorado River holding back the mighty current and torrent of water. With it crops were watered and electricity generated. It was a monument to man’s ingenuity and a temple to his tenacity. Holland glanced again at the mature ram. In one corner, he thought, a creation of God; in the other, a creation of men.

Further up the slope, behind the Desert Bighorn family, barely noticeable in the ancient rock, was an anti-aircraft gun emplacement left over from World War II. Holland guessed that it must be 300 miles to the Pacific Ocean, and while that distance was easily within the range of a naval bomber flying off an aircraft carrier, the massive size of the dam would have made any attack, short of an Atomic Bomb, pointless. The Japanese made a halfhearted effort to float incendiary bombs attached to high altitude balloons across the Pacific Ocean, and a few of them actually managed to do some damage. But attacking this dam with any hope of creating reasonable damage was a daydream. The British had managed to attack and breach several German dams, but that was a major effort and it cost many lives. Attacking this place from the air was folly. He carefully surveyed the rocks high above the river bed on the opposite side and saw two more emplacements.

“Marlene Dietrich is at the Sahara.” Cole walked out of the little store and waved a newspaper at Holland. “If you don’t have anything better to do, we should catch this

show. It says here ... ‘ a gown of transparent black net, which veteran show business people called the most revealing they could remember ... The clinging gown, which supplied only a few scattered bangles and beads between Dietrich and her public, was reported to have cost \$ 6.000.’ Sounds like a great way to spend a couple of hours.

Liz laughed and said, “You go right ahead, Dave. I have something else in mind for Rich.”

“Speaking of ...” Holland gestured toward the car, an indication that their journey was not yet over.

Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, May 23, 1953, 1214 hours.

General Black’s Headquarters was temporarily found in building 127. Cole dropped Holland off in front of a one story slump block building. He and Liz then left the base in route to the FBI office. Holland had the phone number and would call and leave a message when he was ready to be picked up.

Once inside the building, Major Zumwalt was nearby and quickly escorted Holland to the General. As they arrived in his office, General Black was putting on his jacket and hat. “Something’s up. You two follow me.”

Black marched quickly out of the building and the three men scrambled into a waiting jeep. Holland decided the driver was taking lessons from Sam Green. He wasted no time with stop signs or turn signals, the stars on the front license plate being all the authority he needed. The jeep finally stopped in front of yet another block building.

Inside it was dark, artificially cool, with a dozen radar repeaters mounted along two of the walls. The men spoke to each other in hushed tones and clipped sentences that would make no sense at all in almost any other context.

Black said, “A pair of F-86’s on a training mission has encountered a UFO. They are about 180 miles north of here near [Garrison Utah](#) right on the state line.”

As General Black and the others looked over his shoulder, the radar operator pointed to three blips. Two of them were the training flight; one was the bogey which looked like electronic “noise” to Holland. It was so large the radar could not display all of it at once. The green radar trace illuminated first one end and then the other as it swept past. Black said, “How big is it?”

The enlisted man said, “At least a mile, probably not more than that. How they can keep something that big in the air, and go that slow ... I can’t imagine how it could work.” Indeed, the smaller blips seemed to cross and re-cross the radar screen at a short interval, but the large “noise” seemed to be just floating in the same place.

Garrison Utah, May 23rd 1953, 1232 hours.

It was black, shaped like an arrowhead, a mile long on each side and 100 yards thick. On each of three corners, pointing downward, were what looked like very bright

lights. A few other lights were spotted along the hull, but their arraignment seemed to be random. It didn't fly, exactly; it floated like some kind of insane balloon. As he watched, it changed course several times. Instead of pointing one end or the other in a new direction, it simply moved onto a new vector with no regard at all to its shape. First Lieutenant Gus Williams had nearly four years of service in the Air Force, all of those years tied up with the F-86. He had dreams of one day commanding a squadron of fighters. But from within the cockpit of his little airplane, he was watching a nightmare.

"Tango six, this is Nellis control. Say again your situation, over."

"Nellis, Tango six. This bogey is really big, triangular in shape and about a mile long on each side. It doesn't seem to have a base course. It isn't flying, more like it is floating. Over."

"Tango six, do see anything that looks like engines? Do you see any damage?"

"Nellis, this is Tango six. Nothing that looks much like a wing, no engines, no exterior damage that I can see. But it does seem to be in distress ... random course changes."

Black said, "Tell him to stay out of the way. Just follow it, don't piss it off."

"Tango, your orders are to observe. Take no action of any kind."

"Roger that, Nellis. There is almost no action I could take anyway. A fifty caliber machine gun would have zero effect on this bogey ... wait one ... something is ... it's firing some kind of light beam ... not at us, just randomly firing ... MAYDAY MAYDAY. My wing man was hit. He just blew up."

"Tell him to get the hell out of range." General Black spoke quietly to the senior controller. "Power up every radar transmitter you have and focus continuous wave on that bogey. Call Indian Springs, use my name, and have them do the same. I can't let this thing shoot up Utah without trying to stop it. Who else is in range? [NAS Fallon](#)?"

"Fallon is almost 300 miles away, too far."

"[Hill Air Force Base](#)?"

The controller checked his chart and said, "186 miles, bearing two one six" then turned to another office and said, "Make the call."

"What about [Dugway](#)? I want every radar transmitter in range on that thing."

"Dugway is ... "the controller check his chart again ... "97 miles bearing two zero four. They have three FPS-3 radars. Only one is powered up at a time but they can have the other two fired up in about 3 minutes."

"Get it done. Have Dugway send a recovery team, if they have one. If they don't have them send an ambulance. See if they can find the pilot's body."

For the officers who had nothing to do but watch, the wait seemed to take hours, but one by one, a total of 11 radar sets powered up and focused their energy on the bogey.

Black moved out of earshot from the enlisted men and motioned for the two officers to follow. "That's three in four days."

"What do you mean, General?" Holland asked.

"On the [19th](#) they shot down a Second Lieutenant on a training flight in an F-80 about 60 miles north west of here, one F-86 yesterday and this one today. I thought the shoot down on the 19th was retaliation. I don't like the notion of tit-for-tat, but I was willing to let it end there. It seems they are not."

"Are they trying to start a war?" Zumwalt was angry.

“I think, Gentlemen, they have already done just that.”

“Nellis, this is Tango six. The bogey is definitely damaged. It’s undergoing a pitch change ... a little yaw to the right ... oh shit ... it’s going in ...”

One of the corners on the arrow head nosed over and the behemoth suddenly accelerated toward the ground. It took several seconds for it to fall from 16,000 feet, but fall it did. Too late one of the corners came up a little but the craft scraped the top of a hill which threw tons of dirt and rock into the air. Then it nosed into the desert at high speed. The impact dug a large triangular trench in the sandy desert soil. The trench was deep and the sides collapsed only seconds later, effectively burying most of the craft. A second later the dirt and rock that had been thrown into the air from the hillside cascaded onto the wreck.

Gus Williams made his report to Nellis and circled the crash site several times, waiting for the dust to clear a little. He would mourn the loss of his wing-man later.

General Black listened to the radio report from the remaining pilot and picked up a telephone line to the base operator. He tersely ordered that he be connected with the base commander. In a few seconds Holland could hear a few muffled words of the conversation. “... need to get some earth moving equipment up there to bury the damn thing ... Yes Sir he was killed. ... It is approximately a mile long but my information is that it managed to pretty much bury itself ... “

The senior controller looked up from his chart and said, “General, excuse me Sir. It crashed into a Federal facility. Department of Agriculture. Something called the Desert Experimental Range.”

Black continued his conversation ... “It’s on Federal property, some Department of Agriculture station ... [The Desert Experimental Range](#) ... Fine, Sir.”

Black hung up the phone, looked at the floor, shook his head, apparently trying to decide about something. Abruptly, he said, “I want to show the two of you something.”

FBI Office, Las Vegas, Nevada, May 23 1953, 1251 hours.

Liz was entertaining herself by looking at photos in a “mug” book, while the two men talked quietly in another room. The door was not closed but she wasn’t paying much attention to them. As she turned the pages one familiar face jumped out at her.

“Dave. Who is this guy?” She spoke loudly enough to be heard in the other room.

The two agents took a few steps and peered over her shoulder at the mug shot she was pointing at. “It says Joe Genovese. But that’s not his name.”

“Where do you know him from?”

“He comes into the cafe nearly every morning. He always has sausage, never bacon. His told me his name is Sam Green. He’s asked me out three times.”

Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, May 23, 1953, 1310 hours.

A B-29, the *Suzie Lee*, was parked quietly on a piece of taxiway. If any part of a sprawling Air Force Base the size of Nellis could be said to be private, then this was that part. Dozens of technicians were at work on the *Suzie Lee*, removing some components, measuring others, and transferring the components from its soon to be baron womb and into the bomb bay of another aircraft.



Parked next to the venerable B-29 was the newest and largest bomber of its day, the [B-36](#). Manufactured by Convair and dubbed “The Peacemaker”, it was the largest piston engine aircraft ever made. It had a range of over 6,000 miles, a payload capacity of 72,000 pounds and, at 230 feet, the longest wing span of any military aircraft ever built. It was the world’s first manned bomber with intercontinental range. As a fighter pilot, Holland was actually amused by the heavy bombers, thinking of them as clumsy and slow moving targets. This one was the biggest target he had ever seen. Then he remembered a bogey that was a mile long and quickly retracted that thought.

Black said, “The generator in the B-29 is going into the B-36, along with four more just like it. The B-36 has been modified so its engines won’t cut out when they fire the weapon. We hope. And it can loiter on station for nearly 40 hours. If this works out, we’ll refit half a dozen of them.

“I’ve just been given command of Special Weapons Squadron 312. Major Zumwalt you’ll act as chief of staff for the squadron. Captain Holland, at my specific request you’ve been assigned to the squadron as the Operations Officer but you have some other business to finish, so I’m placing you on detached duty for a while longer.”

Black had forgotten about the device in Holland’s pocket. Holland toyed with the notion of reminding him, but decided he may still need it. He simply said, “Yes, Sir. What orders do you have to me?”

“They, whoever they are, have started a war. There won’t be any war bond drives or USO shows, but it is a war, never-the-less. The Pentagon has a few file cabinets filled with classified data on the subject and I’m having most of it shipped out here. You’ll

have access in a few days. Learn all you can about them, fighting them is pretty much going to be your responsibility and every ounce of information counts.”

“There is something else, another matter, which seems to be concurrent with this one.” Holland said.

“What other matter?”

“In a few hours, I’ll have proof that Kaiser murdered two men, and he made statements to me that proved he murdered another. Skinned him alive. Let him bleed to death. I’d like to wrap that up, as well. It shouldn’t take long.” Holland explained briefly about the Atomic Bomb secrets and included the fact that Cole was now an FBI agent, specifically recruited to work the case. He also mentioned the ballistics report that was being generated by the FBI.

“So, Kaiser doesn’t know about the UFO?”

“No, Sir. He thought it was just an exercise to cover his movements.”

“Yes, Captain. Nail that son-of-a-bitch to the wall with my blessing. What support do you need from me?”

“Honestly Sir, all I need is permission to get married.”

Black began to laugh. “You are a constant surprise, son. What’s her name?”

“Liza Day. Liza with a ‘Z’.”

“Where is she now?”

“Probably spending my money on wedding rings.” Holland chuckled.

Black became suddenly serious. “I can’t authorize any leave just now. I’m sure you understand why.”

“Wasn’t going to ask, Sir.”

“Okay son. You do what you have to do.”

Near Mile Post 57, US Highway 93, May 23 1953, 2029 hours.

The sun had fallen beyond the horizon as they drove back to Kingman. All three of them were stuffed into the front seat; Cole was driving. The ballistics, as Holland was sure they would, had matched. Liz had purchased her rings and they had discussed, in great detail, a plan to capture Sam Green alive. She would simply show up for work the next morning as usual, and if/when Green arrived, Cole would arrest him. Simple but effective, they hoped.

The radio was playing. *‘This is KGAN Kingman. Its eight thirty. Now one of those sweet vocals from Mr. Nat King Cole ...*

*Unforgettable
That's what you are,
Unforgettable
Tho' near or far.*

Liz noticed it first. The highway seemed deserted and they could only see into the night as far as the headlights would allow. But miles away, down the arrow straight stretch of US 93, a tiny red light appeared. It grew brighter or slowly came closer, then sped up and headed directly toward them. Instinctively, Cole slowed the car a bit and the three smart monkeys, having no particular choice, waited.

Speeding up, it closed the distance quickly and when it was directly in front of the car, a few yards away, it abruptly changed direction and paced the car from the front. Then it quickly circled to the rear, then to the side, once again pacing the car, only a yard away from the driver's window.

*Like a song of love that clings to me,
How the thought of you does things to me.
Never before
Has someone been more...*

“What the hell is it?” Both of the men seemed unable to speak but Liz had no such impediment, speaking for all three of them.

Surveillance drone. The device in Cole's pocket chose that moment to wake up. His thought became chaotic, and with an effort of will he focused on the device and thought, ‘Is it armed? Can it harm us?’

It has no weapon, but it can create a magnetic disturbance that will cause the mechanical engine to fail.

‘You mean it can just shut the car off?’

Yes.

‘What does it want?’

Me.

*Unforgettable
In every way,
And forever more
That's how you'll stay.*

Cole gave the car gas and tried to pull away from the light.

It can sustain a velocity of 3000 of your miles each hour for approximately 12 years.

Holland said, “I don't think you can outrun it.”

“What the hell is it?”

“Some kind of surveillance device.”

“Whose?”

“Not ours.” Holland directed his thoughts to the device in his pocket, ‘How can I defend against it? I'd rather keep you for a while yet, but if it can harm us ...’

I cannot function for anyone else. I am modified for your brain patterns only. It is a safety feature. A metal projectile from your hand gun has a 37% chance of actually striking the probe. But once struck, it will destroy the probe.

Holland awkwardly climbed into the back seat, moved to the driver side of the car and rolled down the window. Then he pulled the .45 out its holster, where it had rested unused for two days and aimed out the window. He fired twice, with no good result.

*That's why, darling, it's incredible
That someone so unforgettable*

*Thinks that I am
Unforgettable, too.*

Cole, shouting over the noise from on rushing wind said, “Don’t lead it too much. It’s stationary with us.”

Holland fired again. The probe died quickly, cart wheeling into the desert as its forward momentum began to fall off. The light became very white and very bright, and then flickered away to nothing at all.

Distress signal.

The saucer seemed to simply appear from the gloom, slightly to the left and above the car. The engine sputtered to a halt and Cole used the last of the forward momentum to pull off the road.

Electrical displacement field.

The headlights and dash lights became very weak, able to provide only weak illumination. The saucer hovered about 20 yards to the south and abruptly three beams of white light, like spotlights, produced round circles on the ground. Then three of the lizard things Holland saw at the crash site on Chicken Springs road materialized on the ground. These three were very much alive. A new, very bright blue light was projected from the saucer onto the car.

INTERRUPTS SMART MONKEY BRAIN PROCESS. RUN AWAY

In the front seat, both Cole and Liz stopped moving. The car seemed enveloped in some kind of fog; the stars were no longer visible and nothing moved except the three ...

GET OUT. DO IT QUICKLY.

Holland jumped from the car, the .45 still in his right hand and clutching his cane in his left. He was putting more weight on his right knee than it could support and he leaned against the car while backing away from the blue light. It seemed to have a limited range and as he moved away from it he could feel its effects diminishing.

One of the creatures opened the driver’s side door, pulled Cole’s body out of the car and let it fall on the ground. Then, impossibly, its arms stretched an extra three feet as it reached across the seat, grabbed Liz by the neck and jerked her out of the car too. Holland pointed the pistol and squeezed the trigger, but nothing happened.

Your weapon is disabled. Chemical explosives disabled.

The lizard produced something that looked like a syringe and jabbed it into Liz’s neck. It was too sinister, just too nasty for him to allow. Holland took a step forward, returned the .45 to its holster, transferred the cane to his right hand and took a swing at the creature that was choking Liz. It hit his head a solid blow but had no other effect. Unaccustomed to failure, Holland began to swear a blue streak. He swung again and screamed, “For Christ’s sake leave her alone!” The creature loosened his grip on her throat and took a step backward. Holland realized that the minor battering by his cane was not what caused the creature to step back. He screamed again, “I said put her down!”

The animal let go and took another step backwards. Liz’s unconscious body plopped onto the ground. The other two had also retreated a few steps and for a moment Holland and the three creatures stood their ground and stared at each other. Holland suddenly understood. Like Moses parting the Red Sea he raised both arms into the air and shouted, “For Christ’s sake leave her alone.”

The three creatures quickly scurried backwards into the fog, and after stepping into the bright light, they vanished. As they did, Cole moaned and looked in their direction. The fog began to evaporate and in a moment they were alone on the side of the road. The engine started up of its own accord, the lights came on, and the radio began blaring again.

It's eleven o'clock. Time for the news.

Holland took a few unsteady steps and pulled Liz onto her feet. Cole had managed to stand by himself and said, "The radio just said it is eleven. A moment ago it was eight thirty."

Gravity drive. Gravity warps space. Space and time are different aspects of the same thing. Gravity drive warps time within its operating envelope.

Cole asked, "How did you drive them off?"

"Harsh language." Holland helped Liz into the car and wished for a cigarette, then swiped one from her. His thoughts were still erratic but his head was beginning to clear rapidly. The only thing that occurred to him was, 'What the hell happened?'

The White House, Washington DC, Sunday, May 24, 1953, 0947 hours.

[Robert Cutler](#) stood in the hallway waiting. The President's schedule for Sunday was clear. He and Mrs. Eisenhower were scheduled to attend church at 11:00 and in the afternoon some people were dropping by to play bridge. Of course, no one simply dropped by when the president was involved, but the old man liked to pretend that he still had something akin to a normal life. That also meant that while the President finished his coffee, Cutler had to wait.

Cutler was the first to hold a new position in the White House, that of National Security Advisor. Some on the Hill had complained about his easy access to the President and others were making noises that sounded a lot like Congressional over site, but Cutler's thoughts this day were far from politics. He was nervous. He had served in the Army during the Great War and worked closely with the White House under then Secretary of War [Henry L. Stimson](#) during the second war. He was also familiar with some aspects of the problem at hand, having helped disseminate technology harvested from a 1947 crash onto a sheep ranch in New Mexico. Among only a handful of people, he was well aware of what kind of fire they were playing with, and just how hot that fire could become.

The old man had authorized *Electric Archer* in hopes that some new technology could be stolen and put to good use. His primary concern was the Kremlin and most of his thinking was along those lines. Eisenhower was, by nature, a very cautious man and he never decided anything in haste. But the potential for new weaponry was too tempting for him to simply ignore.

The doors were finally opened and Cutler was shown into the oval office. Eisenhower was at his desk, dressed for church. He was friendly but his manner made it clear that Cutler should be quick. "Mr. President I have some new information about *Operation Electric Archer*. I have a new message from General Black. It came into the Pentagon several hours ago and they sent it over by messenger." Cutler handed several sheets of teletype paper to the President, and remained standing.

Eisenhower began to read and after a few seconds he motioned to Cutler to sit. The National Security Advisor had learned that an invitation to sit down was a good sign; he had the President's attention. The old man read quickly, re-reading a paragraph or two as he went. Finally he leaned back, still holding the papers, and said, "Is it really this bad?"

"It certainly looks like we have a new war to contend with, one we can't tell anyone about."

"If we're able to shoot them down this easily then they can't be as big a threat as I've been lead to believe."

"Honestly, Mr. President, I think we've been lucky."

"Maybe. What about this other deal."

"There is an amplifying report from the FBI office in Las Vegas. They intend to make an arrest today and I'm told they already have search warrants."

"[Omar Bradley](#) will be over here tomorrow on his regular visit. I'll take this up with him then. One other thing. This fellow Holland."

"Yes sir."

“If he pulls this off, I’ll have him promoted. If he doesn’t . . .” Eisenhower let the sentence hang in the air, much like the end of a rope that had already been fashioned into a hangman’s noose.

“I’ll keep you up to date, Sir. If anything important happens you’ll know as soon as I do.”

“Yes. I will.”

Kingman, Arizona, Sunday, May 24, 1953, 0647 hours.

Despite their collective lack of sleep, and their encounter the previous evening, the plan to arrest Green was working out nicely. Cole was in the kitchen at the Kimo, Liz was at her normal station pouring coffee and serving up eggs, and Holland was hidden in the parking lot, waiting for Green to arrive. If he had the plans, he very likely would not remain in Kingman, so his arrest promised to be both exhilarating and disappointing.

When Green arrived he parked next to the cafe in a 49 Dodge sedan. The day already promised to be hot so he left the windows down and the car unlocked. Holland began searching the car as soon as Green was inside.

Green chose a table near the door and Liz walked around the counter with a coffee pot. She turned the cup already on the table upright, poured the coffee into it and said, “The usual, Honey?”

“Aren’t you the perky one this early? Sure. Eggs and sausage. The only thing a man should eat for breakfast. Besides that I’m headed for Vegas and after that Mexico so I need a good meal. Bring me a couple of biscuits too. And some gravy. You ever been to Mexico? You can come with me. We’ll have a great time.”

“My Spanish isn’t much. Cervesa Coors. That’s about it.”

At that moment Cole walked out of the kitchen, handcuffs already pulled out of their holster and walked directly toward Green. It was a mistake.

Green did not hesitate. The short barreled .38 special came out of his belt at once. With his left hand he grabbed Liz by the arm and threw the coffee pot at Cole. Cole danced sideways, away from hot liquid, twisting to the left and tried to draw his own weapon in the same move. Green shoved the barrel of his pistol into Liz’s nose and thumbed the hammer back. Liz would otherwise have fought like a bobcat, but she instantly understood that she was about six pounds of trigger pull away from death. The three of them stood frozen for a moment, Green and Cole locked in eye contact.

At the gas pump in front of the cafe, an encyclopedia salesman had just filled the tank of his [1952 Packard sedan](#). The car was black, and despite the chrome trim, it appeared evil at that moment. Green pulled Liz outside and opened the passenger door of the big Packard. He slid across the seat toward the steering wheel but was very careful to keep Liz between him and Cole, pulling her in after him. The keys were in the ignition and the car started easily.

Holland pulled the .45 from its holster and took partial cover behind the front fender of the Dodge. He was not trained for non-lethal combat with handguns at close range, and as he cautiously left cover and approached the Packard the thought flitted

across his mind and no one was trained for something like this. The sun was still low in the sky and bright sunlight flooded the Packard making it impossible to look through the windshield. He pointed the Colt at the spot on the windshield that Green would be directly behind. The car lurched forward a few feet just as Holland fired. The shot went through the rear passenger window and embedded itself in the rear seat. Green pointed his .38 special through the still open passenger door. Holland was aware of the barrel pointed at him. The world went black.

Kingman, Arizona, Sunday, May 24, 1953, 1110 hours.

It was a very bright light. He could hear something that sounded like speech, but he couldn't understand it. He felt like he was at the bottom of a very deep well and he began a mental effort to climb out. Everything went black again.

The light was not so bright. He could hear people talking, but it didn't make any sense.

"He's waking up again Doctor."

"Stubborn bastard ..."

A face began to take shape. It was wearing a flight suit and had one steel tooth, the product of Russian dentistry. A duck was standing on his head. The face faded out and another took its place. It was one of those lizard things. No, he decided, more like a frog. A frog with huge black eyes ... the frog faded away ...

"Are you gonna wake up or not?"

The voice belonged to Cole, but he couldn't see Cole. Holland tried to speak, nothing came out. He tried again and this time he tried to sit up. That was when he became aware of the pain. His entire head felt like it was on fire. He remembered about Liz and tried to sit up again, propped himself up on his elbows. His vision was clearing rapidly now and while the pain was intense he understood that it meant he was still alive.

Cole said, "Take it easy. You were shot in the head. The bullet grazed your scalp and you bled like a stuck pig. You'll be parting your hair on the wrong side for a while, but you'll be all right."

"Why do I feel this shitty?"

Someone held a flashlight in his eyes, checked each of them and said, "Equal and reactive. You feel shitty because you were shot. You'll be fine in a couple of hours. I'll give you some codeine for the pain."

"Liz.?"

Cole looked at the doctor who simply shrugged. "Not good news. Not the worst news but not good. Green still has her. The FBI is flying fifteen agents into Vegas and the sheriff's office is looking for her now. They will find her. It's only a matter of time."

Holland felt a needles dig into the big toe on his right foot. "Ouch. What was that?"

"Just checking. You're fine."

"Why didn't you block the road at Hoover Dam?" Holland's rationality was rapidly returning.

“We did. He didn’t go that way. You can take the road to Bullhead City and cross Davis Dam into Nevada. Then take the Searchlight road into Boulder City. He must have gone that way because he never crossed Hoover Dam.”

“Ouch. Isn’t one toe enough?”

“Apparently both toes are working. I can’t let you leave here until all your parts and pieces are where they belong. Touch your nose for me.”

Holland rubbed his nose and said, “How do you know he’s in Vegas?”

“I don’t, but there is nowhere else for him to go. I overheard him tell Liz he was going to Vegas and then to Mexico, so we think he doesn’t have the plans yet, or at least didn’t have them this morning.”

“OUCH! I know my arm is there. I can see it.”

“Tetanus shot.”

Holland decided the doctor was enjoying his work way too much. “Have you ... “
“Vegas is pretty well sealed off. Clark County has roadblocks on all the major roads and even some of the dirt roads. He’s trapped there. We’ll find him.”

Holland managed to sit up and dangled his legs off the side of the hospital bed. “Take me back to the house. I’ll get Liz’s car and ...”

“Hold on partner. In case you missed it, you’ve been shot in the head and at the moment you’re a touch drugged up. You’re not going to be driving anywhere, anytime soon.”

Holland took a moment to inventory his parts; his fingers worked and all the other important parts seemed to be still attached. “I’m not about to lie here while she is over there.”

“You’d be lucky to walk for at least another hour.” The doctor made his diagnosis in a matter-of-fact way, as though he was ordering lunch.

Holland spoke to Cole, “Call General Black. Have him send a helicopter for me. That will take almost an hour and the better part of another hour to get back to Nellis. That suit you Doc?”

“As long as you’re not driving, yes. That would be all right.”

“I’ll need my clothes.”

[Mohave County Union High School](#), M.C.U.H.S., pronounced *mucus* by the student body, was located across the fence from the hospital. The following week the school would graduate a record number of 44 students, 12 would be drafted and 6 others would enlist in the military at the invitation of the Justice of the Peace. The big [Sikorsky H-19](#), officially a rotary-wing aircraft, had a little trouble landing on the football field. The big bird had to circle the field several times while the pilot tried to figure out the wind. Eventually he pointed the nose a little south of east, and settled down on the 40 yard line, adroitly avoiding the towers which support the stadium lights.

Holland was walking by the time his magic carpet landed, although he was still unsteady on his feet. Two men jumped out of the helicopter with a Stokes litter but Holland needed only a hand up to climb into the machine. Cole then handed up his cane, and followed him in. The pilot had less trouble lifting off than landing and after circling the field once, he took a course a little west of north.

Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, Sunday, May 24, 1953, 1320 hours.

When the helicopter touched down two unmarked government sedans were waiting and one ambulance. Holland was hustled into the ambulance against his wishes, while Cole was pulled into one of the sedans. The FBI car exited the base immediately. The other followed the ambulance to the base hospital.

General Black escorted Holland, strapped to a gurney, into the hospital, using his two stars to maximum effect which guaranteed an immediate visit from the ranking physician on duty. Holland endured being poked in the toes again and the new physician inspected the work from the old one. They also x-rayed his skull and simply confirmed the diagnosis from the hospital in Kingman, his skull was intact. Holland complained several times that he should be out looking for Liz, but even Holland was unwilling to face the wrath of a two star and didn't complain too much. Finally, the doctor simply placed a new dressing on his head and released his patient with the provision that he remain on light duty for the time being.

In a few minutes they were inside what Holland learned was his office, in the headquarters of the 312th Special Weapons Squadron. A pile of file folders were already on his desk, most of them marked TOP SECRET with additional caveats like EYES ONLY, [MAJESTIC TWELVE](#), OPERATION BLUE BOOK and the like. Black sat down on the visitor side of his desk and said, "Start with the one on top."

Inside the folder, marked ELECTRIC ARCHER EYES ONLY, he found a report from Allred about the large triangle he had fired at on the 19th. While Holland was reading the report Major Zumwalt entered the room and sat down across the desk.

Holland closed the folder and said, "So you think the object from the 19th was the same one from yesterday?"

Black answered, "It's possible, but I don't understand where it went for five days."

"Just speculation general, but I have a notion about that. Assume for a moment that these things are using some kind of gravity drive, something that generates its own gravity and uses that for propulsion."

Zumwalt chimed in and said, "That would explain how they can obtain such high speeds so quickly without smashing anything inside from the g-forces. If they can control gravity, they can also control inertial. No inertia inside the craft, no crushing g-forces."

"Exactly." Holland continued, "And remember that space and time are aspects of the same thing. Einstein said that. Gravity warps space, therefore it also effects time. If these things are manipulating gravity, by definition they are warping both space and time. Perhaps Allred injured this bird, and it tried to escape using the gravity drive. But it was damaged so it could only run for a short time. It went into the future, from our point of view, but was forced to disengage because of damage and we found it yesterday, alive but damaged."

"Shooting at them is an act of war." Zumwalt observed.

"Overflying our air space is also an act of war." Black said. "They started it."

Holland considered, for a moment, the distinctly American notion that one should never start a fight, but should always be ready to finish one. Americans consistently acted

as though they were facing a school yard bully, and acted appropriately. He wondered for a moment if the General had been playing marbles for keeps and lost his shooter. Weren't the marbles being shot at called ducks? Perhaps someone else had placed the General's ducks in a row and he had lost them. The notion brought an inward smile to Holland's face and the codeine nearly let it out, but he avoided allowing any levity into the room. Bad jokes and Major Generals generally didn't mix.

Zumwalt, thinking aloud, asked, "Do you think they can go backwards in time?"

The three officers shared a blank look. Holland finally capitulated to the codeine and said, "Put it in reverse."

FBI Office, Las Vegas, Nevada, Sunday, May 24, 1953, 1500 hours.

The office was crowded with two agents in it. Now, with four agents milling around, ten more out looking for Green and one on the radio trying to co-ordinate the effort, the office had become a zoo. Cole found an empty spot against a wall, leaned against it, and began reading the dozens of teletype dispatches that had accumulated in the past few hours.

An inquiry to the Army had revealed that Corporal Smedley Green was currently listed as AWOL from Fort McCoy, Wisconsin. A further inquiry to the Army showed that Joseph Genovese had been discharged with a Dishonorable Discharge in 1949, convicted of larceny, to wit: trafficking in stolen kitchen equipment. A third telex from the Police Chief in Oak Park Ill. had confirmed that a John Doe in the local morgue matched the description of the aforementioned AWOL Smedley Green. The FBI then telexed Fort McCoy with the bad news.

Cole was impressed with the paper trail, but none of it was useful in determining the location of Green/Genovese, not to mention the neighbor lady. Had almost any other woman he knew been in the position Liz was now in, he would have been worried to the point of distraction. Liz, however, was notorious for being able to take care of herself. She was notorious for a couple of other things as well. For example he was certain, due to his fine tuned pilot instincts, and a fortunate gust of wind, that Liz often kept a pistol in a holster strapped to the inside of her thigh when wearing a skirt.

In fact, Cole at this point, did not expect this massive manhunt to find Sam Green. He fully expected a phone call from Liz, calling from a gas station somewhere, to announce where she had left the body and then complain that she had broken a nail.

What he did find troubling was the apparent ease with which Genovese had assumed the identity of a dead man, and then penetrated a top secret Air Force operation. Someone on the inside, someone in the Air Force, was involved up to his neck. By extension that person was also involved with a bunch of Nazis. Not a good thing to have in one's personnel file and decidedly not something that would lead to promotion. Perhaps the man was a gambler or a narcotics addict and needed cash. Perhaps he was selling out for misplaced political reasons. Perhaps his mother was in need of surgery. Any of those could be the reason. But Cole understood at a deeper level that the real reason was the second oldest on Earth. He wanted the money.

“Agent Cole,” Cole looked up to see Inspector Clarke, from the Salt Lake office that was designated as the agent in operational command for this case. “We need to talk.”

Cole followed the man into the only semi-private place still left, the men’s room. Clarke pulled the door closed. In any other situation Cole would have found that too strange to contemplate. Clarke said, “I just got a call from Salt Lake. The atomic bomb plans have been picked up by someone who called FBI headquarters in Washington about 30 minutes ago. They want to turn the plans over to us, but they are demanding to remain anonymous. They want someone to walk into the service entrance of the [Flamingo Motel](#) at 10 PM tonight. You’ll be met by an assistant.

“I can’t have you representing the FBI in those clothes.” Clarke handed Cole a one hundred dollar bill. “Go buy yourself a suit. Then come back here and I’ll assign you a car. This is eyes only stuff between you and I and the DC office. It requires a little chutzpah to walk into the lion’s den, so mazel tov. Capish?”

“The notorious Flamingo. Yes sir, I capish.”

“That money is a significant percentage of my budget for this little escapade so go easy on it. Have you heard anything from Captain Holland?”

“Not since I was dropped off at Nellis.”

“You might want to call him, reassure him that we are doing everything that can be done to find his fiancée.”

“I’m sure he knows that, Sir. But it would not surprise me if Holland had borrowed a car and was out looking on his own. He’s that kind of man.”

“That wouldn’t be smart. He’d probably get in the way. Call him. Make sure he’s onboard with us.” Clarke walked out of the room, leaving the door open behind him.

Cole found a phone, called the base operator at Nellis and asked for General Black. Black’s secretary assured Cole that Holland was well. In fact he had been assigned a billet at Officer’s Quarters and was there now, sleeping, and was down for the night. Cole hung up the phone and wondered if he could interest the secretary in some land in the desert.

The Flamingo Hotel, Las Vegas, Nevada, May 24, 1953, 2150 hours.

Cole was dressed in a new black suit. Having spent nine months in Kingman, dressed in denim pants and a sheriff’s office shirt, he felt a little foolish. He also felt naked without the .357 on his belt; it was replaced by a Smith & Wesson .38 revolver which gave him little comfort but fit nicely under his coat. He refused to give up his entire wardrobe however, and the .22 was still safely tucked into his right boot. He did not feel the least bit awkward wearing a suit and cowboy boots. He was, after all, from Oklahoma, and cowboy boots were as popular there as anywhere in this desert.

The service entrance to the Flamingo was not crowded. Hotel employees hustled back and forth on a myriad of errands paying little attention to who walked in or out. But one person, as promised, was waiting for Cole. The “assistant” was female, mid thirties, with a touch of Asian blood. She wore a white dress that, in the harsh lights, was thin

enough to be called see through. And there was little or nothing behind the dress. She didn't speak, but gestured for Cole to follow, holding her hand up long enough for Cole to see the diamond ring that looked to be the size of a cinder block.

They walked 50 feet or so along a passageway, her waist length jet black hair swaying gently with each step and counterpoint to her hips, which seemed to swivel the opposite direction from the rest of her. She stopped at a freight elevator and pressed the call button. They had to wait for nearly seven minutes for the elevator to arrive. She remained silent, passive, but her musculature reminded Cole of a Cheetah. Even at rest, simply waiting for the elevator, her body seemed always on the verge of attack; a violent outburst waiting for a reason to strike.



The elevator took them up several floors where she led Cole down yet another hallway and finally to a double door. She knocked once, pushed the door open, and stood aside to allow Cole to enter.

“Oh look. The G-men finally showed.”

“Be polite.” The man was well dressed but not in the garish way one expected a major mobster to dress. “You must be Agent Cole. Have a seat.” He pointed to an overstuffed chair. Cole hesitated for a moment, never having confronted this kind of man before. “If I was going to shoot you, I would have already done it,” the man chuckled. “Sit down. Take a load off.”

Cole decided he might as well sit. There were a total of five men in the room. Three were bodyguard types, leaning against the far wall and apparently at ease. The fourth was heavysset and had a New York accent. The woman sank into an

overstuffed chair which seemed to swallow her up.

“You want a drink? Vinnie, get the man a drink. Scotch okay? Give him the good stuff.”

Cole smiled ruefully and said, “Scotch will be fine. A little water, but don't drown it.”

The man Cole had correctly identified as Meyer Lansky smiled back from the side of his mouth and sat down opposite Cole. Lansky had a reputation as a gentleman, and more to the point, an honest mobster, as though that was actually possible. His casinos in Miami and even the legal ones in Cuba had the reputation as ‘carpet joints’ and not ‘clip joints’. The croupiers, pit bosses, and other employees were required to be honest. If one was caught cheating a customer, his fate was quick and unpleasant. Lansky, apparently, understood the phrase “customer service” and made it a priority in his various endeavors

“You know much about me?”

“Just what I read in the papers.” Vinnie handed him a glass and Cole sampled the scotch. It was the smoothest he had ever tasted, which said something about Lansky’s largess.

A chuckle rolled out of Lansky, yet another sign of his momentary good humor. “I was born in Poland. My family left there when I was a little kid, thank God. My parents knew hundreds of people that were murdered by the Nazis. Believe it or not, I understand the value of this country and in my own way, I’m patriotic. During the war I fixed it for the Navy in New York Harbor. We watched for saboteurs. I told them Lucky did it and they let him out of prison, deported him to Sicily.”

“And how is [Mr. Luciano](#) enjoying Cuba?”

Lansky laughed again. “You’re not so dumb are you? He loves the sun and the cigars.”

Cole chuckled, “Give him my best.”

“I’ll do that.” Lansky laughed again, and then a scowl crossed his face and his mood became very serious. “One of my own people, without telling me, made a deal with some scum in South America. As you might imagine, I was not very happy about it.” Lansky handed a large manila envelope to his assistant and said, “Alonya, give that to the man, will you?” She graciously slinked across the room, handed Cole the envelope, then stood behind him, gently laid her hands on his shoulders and began to rub them. It was a distraction Cole didn’t need, but he decided it would be ungracious to refuse.

“I found it odd that when folded up, the plans they wanted were the same size as the Boulder City phone book. But I guess if they wanted to call someone in Boulder City they’d find it useful.”

Cole couldn’t believe it was that easy. He juggled the envelope, testing its weight. “So I guess Mr. Green is walking around with the phone book?”

“Take a look.” Lansky pointed to the envelope.

Cole opened the top, slid several folded pieces of drafting paper out of the envelope and gazed for a moment at what seemed like a wiring diagram for a plate of spaghetti. But it was labeled with words like “timer” and “detonator” and that was good enough. “Your country thanks you, Mr. Lansky. But there is one other thing.”

“And what would that be?”

“Mr. Green, or is it Genovese, has kidnapped a woman named Liz Day. I’d like to arrange for her release.”

“Genovese’s father worked for that Chicago outfit back in the good old days. I once heard him brag that his dad was killed by Eliot Ness. The truth is that his dad was drunk, slipped on some ice, fell into the street and was run over by a truck. I wish I could help you find her, but the truth is, I can’t. If you find Genovese, give him my regards.”

Cole stood. “It was a pleasure meeting you. I actually mean that.”

Lansky chuckled and stood up. “Maybe we’ll meet again one day. Alonya, show the man out will you? Make sure nothing bad happens to him. I like him.”

During the elevator ride Cole began to wonder how Lansky had known his name, known that he, Cole, was going to show up and not someone else. He had been well groomed as an undercover agent and it seemed his status had just been burned. Anyone, including Inspector Clarke, could have walked into the casino and pickup the ‘phone book’. Something else was going down here, but couldn’t imagine what it was.

Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, May 25, 1953, 0350 hours.

The Mig had turned into a male mallard, its distinctive markings all the more sinister for the machine guns sticking out of its wings. The duck wore a leather hat with ear muffs and had a cigar in his mouth. When his wings flapped up the guns fires and stopped when they flapped down. Sometimes it would roll to one side and only fire the guns from one wing, then right itself and fire from the other. With each cycle of the wings the duck came closer to his burning parachute, the gunfire became more accurate. In a few seconds it would be close enough ... One of the lizard things suddenly appeared next to the duck. It was sitting in a teacup holding a small square object. The duck turned to look at the flying frog and suddenly burst into flame. The frog then pulled a syringe out of its teacup and pointed it toward Holland. The syringe didn't hold a liquid, but held a tiny black circular something that was stuck to the end of the needle. The frog said, "Locator".

His eyes zoomed in to the object and he could see it in great detail. Scratched on the surface of the black thing were lines that resembled the wiring diagram for a radio or a television. The frog stuck the needle into Liz's neck. The black thing slid under her skin, just below the surface and the frog pulled the needle away. The circular thing, under its own power, burrowed deeper into her neck.

'Wake up.'

Holland opened his eyes and looked around the dark, unfamiliar room. It took a few seconds for him to remember where he was.

'[Amargosa Valley.](#)'

He shook the cobwebs away and looked at the glowing hands on the alarm clock. It was few minutes before 4 AM. The sun was not yet up; no morning glow had yet to reach the sky.

'Amargosa Valley.'

Holland spoke aloud and said, "Where the hell is that?"

The image of a Nevada highway map filled his mind. It was northwest of Vegas along US 95. The message became clear.

Holland dressed and left the room quickly, ensuring the .45 was secured to his belt and the alien box was in his pocket. An Air Police Sergeant was parked outside the BOQ, not doing too much. Holland approached the man who jumped from his jeep and saluted. "Staff Sergeant Williams, Sir."

"Can you take me to my office?"

"Yes Sir, I can."

A corporal was sitting at the front desk at the headquarters of the 312th. It was his misfortune to have drawn the duty for that evening. The young man was awake, however, and was briefed that Holland might show up anytime. On his desk, Holland found a telephone message from Cole, and a callback number. He had to wait several minutes for Cole to be called to the phone. The FBI was apparently, was having something of a party in their tiny office and the noise, even over the phone, was nearly overpowering.

"Cole."

"Dave, it's Rich."

“Rich! I was just about to call you. We’ve found the Packard at a mom and pop motel in North Las Vegas. We have agents and deputies on the scene and we’re gearing up to go kick the door in. We’ll have her safe in about an hour.”

“She’s not there. She’s in Amargosa Valley.”

“What? Why would you think that? We found the car.”

“Trust me, she’s in Amargosa Valley. It is a few miles north on Highway 95. I’ll be heading there myself in a few minutes.”

“Brother, I’m telling you ... “ Cole considered Holland’s state of mind, his gunshot wound and all the other things that had happened over the last week and decided it would be just as good if Holland was chasing around out in the desert instead of being underfoot. “Okay Pal. Do what you have to do.”

“See ya.” Holland hung up the phone, put on his hat and walked outside. He was looking for a car or a jeep he could borrow when he noticed a small helicopter parked on the pad 60 yards away. He was rated for rotary-wing aircraft, but he knew his knee would never take the pounding. He needed to find a pilot. He walked back into the office and located the corporal who was still on watch.

The Shady Rest Motor Court, North Las Vegas, Nevada, 25 May, 1953, 0547 hours.

The Clark County Sheriff’s Office was considered professional and well trained. Indeed they needed little prompting from the FBI to cordon off the area without being seen by anyone in the motel. It was a one story motor court and the night manager had been recruited to quietly knock on doors and ask people to leave.

This process took nearly 45 minutes to complete with some of the guests registering their displeasure at being roused from bed by the police at the un-heard-of hour of 6 AM. They were invited to join the FBI for breakfast at a greasy spoon across the street and to leave quietly. When every room except 107 was vacant, the real show began.

The idea was to kick in the door without giving the occupants any warning at all. An armed man, suspected of at least one murder, holding a hostage, couldn’t be allowed any time to prepare. Two teams of men, mostly deputies, approached room number 107, one team from each side of the door. A large FBI agent with a sledge hammer was assigned to one of the teams. Cole was stationed nearby so that he could run into the room, show a friendly face to the kidnapped subject and quickly exit her from the room to a place of safety.

At 0654, over an hour after the Packard had been identified and the first agents had arrived on the scene, they were ready. The large agent wasted no time in knocking the door down. He was stronger than he looked, or maybe the door was weaker than it looked, because when he hit it, it did not simply swing inward. It fell flat into the room. In the next ten seconds a dozen men were inside the room, their handguns out, each of them yelling at the top of his lungs, all the better to confuse the miscreant.

The room was empty.

Cole ran inside and found the others staring at a bed that had not been slept in, sheets that were not wrinkled, towels in the bathroom that had not been used. Even the ashtrays were still clean.

Cole walked back into the parking lot, put a match to a Camel cigarette and asked one of the Deputies, “Where is Amargosa Valley?”

Amargosa Valley, Nevada, Monday, May 25, 1953, 0730 hours.

The [H-23 Raven](#) was considered a light observation helicopter, but it was used extensively in Korea for the evacuation of the wounded. It was a nimble little bird, able to negotiate tight landing spots and when modified in a medical evacuation role, it carried two stretchers. It had a top speed of 95 mph and a cruising speed of 83 mph. Its range was about 250 miles. As the little helicopter carried him northwest, Holland reflected that despite its lack of speed he would arrive well before the FBI.

Amargosa Valley was a tiny place wedged between the Las Vegas Bombing and Gunnery Range on the east and Death Valley on the West. Piute Indians were the original inhabitants and they were still the only people who could survive here without significant outside help. Indeed, Death Valley had been so named by pioneers who entered it from this point. Their livestock died from lack of water before they could finish the trek into California.

Holland pointed to a spot behind a gas station and pointed his thumb down. The pilot settled the little bird into the vacant lot with ease. The vacant lot was surrounded by other vacant land which was surrounded by the vacant desert. Holland had already made arrangements with the pilot to orbit the area as long as he could and to keep an eye on things. The two men had no means to communicate beyond hand signals, but that would have to do. They had agreed that, if possible, the pilot would fire his .30 caliber machine gun at the tires of a vehicle if so directed by Holland. But they also agreed that hostage safety was paramount.

The gas station was closed and appeared to be abandoned; yet another vacant building in the middle of nowhere. Holland found a spot in the shade of an abandoned truck where he could watch the highway but remain out-of-sight. Then he waited.

Frenchman's Flat Nevada, Monday, May 25, 1953, 0813 hours.

The M65 Atomic Cannon was, in reality, an 11 inch naval gun, 280mm if you prefer, patterned after the K5 German railroad gun. It was probably named “Atomic Annie” after “Anzio Annie”, a K5 used in Italy during World War II. The gun had a muzzle velocity of 2060 feet per second and a range of about 20 miles. On this day it would be fired at a point in space only 11,000 yards away, about 7 miles, well within its range.

The gun weighed 85 tons and was moved slowly from one place to the next by two enormous tractors, one to pull, the other to push. The tractors were both capable of independent steering in the same manner as some fire engines. They had a maximum speed of 35 mph. The artillery piece could be setup in about 15 minutes and repacked for movement in the same amount of time.

The MK-9 projectile was expected to yield the equivalent explosive power of 14 thousand tons of TNT. It was 54 inches long and weighed 803 pounds. It was, oddly, the first test of a 'gun' type atomic bomb, the Hiroshima detonation not being a test. This method of creating critical mass involved firing a slug of fissionable material down a gun barrel into a larger mass of similar material. This gun, therefore, was a 'gun' within a gun. The test was named 'Garble', G for gun.

A demonstration model of the M65 had been included in Eisenhower's inaugural parade. On this day, the Secretary of Defense, Charles E. Wilson, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Arthur W. Radford, both stood in the shelter in order to observe the detonation which was scheduled to happen in 17 minutes.

If the test was successful, and the brass knew it would be, then 20 of the cannons would be deployed to Europe and Korea. With the advent of surface-to-surface missiles the big cannons, actually bomb magnets, were already obsolete. But their deployment was a prestige issue, a feather in the atomic cap of the United States and deployed they would be.

Amargosa Valley, Nevada, Monday, May 25, 1953, 0824 hours.

Ground transit device.

Holland looked to the south and could see a single car speeding toward him along an otherwise deserted road. He looked up for the helicopter, but it was not visible, nor could he hear it. Its time on station was not infinite, and it may have left in search of a gas station. Holland was on his own.

He pulled the .45 from its holster, pulled the slide back to chamber a round, and then knelt on the rough ground to provide a more stable shooting position. The distance between Holland and the road was about 40 feet. He picked the point that seemed to be closest and waited a few seconds for the car. He reminded himself to lead the target.

As the car approached, it slowed slightly making his shot a little easier. When the car crossed an imaginary line on the road, Holland fired.

The front passenger side tire instantly deflated. The driver tried to turn to the left, toward the west, but lost control and the car bounced over a low dirt embankment on the side of the road, continued bouncing to the west front to back as it careened into the desert and slowly settled to a stop. The dust cloud was as thick as the one on Chicken Springs road and Holland, as quickly as his knee would allow, hustled toward the wreck. His cane was useless in this situation and in any event, he had left it in the helicopter.

Green jumped from the car and pulled Liz out of the driver's side door and held her in front of him. Her arms were behind her back and a piece of tape was across her mouth. Her beautiful hair was filthy and matted, her makeup smeared across her face; she was a wreck. Green remained behind the car, standing with the .38 pointed at her temple. The hammer was cocked; a few pounds of pressure on the trigger and her life would end.

A gust of wind blew down the road from north to south but only managed to stir up more dust. Holland ran to the road and crossed it. Green pointed the revolver in his direction. Holland took a quick step to the right, Green's bullet missed to the left and Holland capitalized by taking two more steps forward.

Green fired again. Again Holland dodged to the right, having a fifty percent chance of guessing which way green would aim. Again, the bullet missed to his left. With the range between them down to about 30 yards, Green turned the muzzle back toward her head.

"Come any closer, and I'll kill her."

Far to the south Holland could hear a police siren as a caravan of marked cars screamed up the road. Holland knew they would be too late. "You're already caught, Genovese. You can't escape." The way Green was holding the pistol, and the way he was shielded behind Liz, gave Holland a small but clean target on the right side of Green's head. A chunk of forehead, about 1 inch square, was clear. If Holland missed to the left, Green would kill Liz. If he missed to the right, Holland would kill Liz. He had one small clean aim point and one chance. The trick here was not to miss.

In a moment of hyper-awareness that he had experienced so often in the skies above Korea, Holland became suddenly aware of Liz. The look on her face changed. The fear, somehow, drained out of her. There is a time in every pairing between a man and a woman when they simply know; when the truth of the matter cannot be avoided. At that moment, Holland knew. The look on her face was *trust*.

In the same moment, Green's eyes changed. He became an animal running on instinct, concerned only with self preservation. Holland applied a little more pressure to the trigger.

Frenchman's Flat Nevada, Monday, May 25, 1953, 0830 hours.

The Mk-9 280mm Artillery Fired Atomic Projectile was forced from the artillery piece in the same time-honored manner as a rifle bullet or a musket ball. Expanding gasses propelled the projectile at 2060 feet per second. It traveled 7 miles and when the timer detonated, the device was 86 feet west, 137 feet south, and 24 feet above its target.

Amargosa Valley, Nevada, Monday, May 25, 1953, 0830 hours.

Standing with his back to the east, his face away from the detonation, Holland was only slightly aware of the flash of light. Green was facing the detonation and when the flash came, he instinctively moved his right hand, the hand holding the revolver, to cover his eyes.

Holland fired.

Mountain View Cemetery, Kingman Arizona, Monday, 19 May 2003, 1133 hours.

The old man walked as briskly as possible away from the grave. He leaned heavily on the cane but it allowed him sufficient mobility that he could do the same things now, as when he was a young man. They just took a little longer.

He had parked a dozen yards away. His car was a new Navigator, painted black. It was an extravagance he could barely afford, but he thought it was hilarious to go bird hunting in a Lincoln. He and his friends hunted quail once in a while in the canyons just north of town. Less frequently, he traveled to the Topock Swamp to hunt ducks. Twice he had remembered his shotgun but forgotten the ammunition. It didn't really matter. He never killed any ducks, but he did sit in a duck blind and drink iced vodka from the bottle.

"If you are working on your sun tan you'd better take your pants off." The passenger side door swung open. She turned in the seat and let her legs dangle out of the door. The years had been very good to Liz Holland. When he held her close he would swear she had not gained ten pounds since the day they met. The fine wrinkles around her mouth and eyes were slight. The mirth in her liquid brown eyes, the humor, the hope, and even the sadness that had always flowed out of them was still there. She was exactly the woman he had married, the woman he loved, and the woman who took away the terror of his nights. And her legs still went all the way up.

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Rich Holland, Dave Cole, Liz Day and Robert Kaiser will return in:
The UFO Murders: Night of the blood red moon.