

THE 3RD PARTY

Lee B. Holum



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Snow beat against the tall windows of the terminal building. The howling of the wind around the corners of the building and across the broad expanse of the rocket field went unheard by the thousands who streamed across the crowded floor. Each was intent on his or her affairs, hurrying to board one of the tall spires out on the snow covered field, seeing someone off, or waiting for incoming friends.

Roger Lorin and his wife waited near the entrances to the boarding tunnels for the announcement that would send them out under the field to their rocket. The shouts of porters and the voices of excited passengers mingled with the noises of the terminal. Groups of people moved across the floor like the currents of the ocean.

Suddenly, the announcer's voice boomed out over the p. a. "All passengers for the Arctic City rocket report to tunnel seven."

"Come on Linda," Roger said. "That's our ship." He hurried his wife toward the tunnel entrance. A few minutes later they stepped off the conveyer walk at the bottom of an elevator shaft. The gray uniformed attendant checked their tickets, before the glass cage lifted them to the lock entrance high on the side of the rocket. The wind sang its mournful song around the corners of the cage and fired volleys of snow against the glass. At the air lock entrance, a stewardess checked their tickets a second time.

"Couches 34 and 35? Follow me, please." She led them up one deck and over to a pair of couches, one of which was next to a small eyeport.

"Take the one next to the port, honey," said Roger. "The view's worth seeing."

A moment later, a buzzer sounded, and a red light flashed on near the hatch to the deck above. The voice of the pilot came over the intercom system.

"We are blasting off in five minutes. All passengers who have not strapped in will please do so immediately." Three minutes went by, and the final warning buzzer sounded. After another two minutes, the rumble of the motors came from the tail of the ship. The rocket, a towering silver needle with orange flame spouting from its lower end, paused on the field as its motors warmed up. Then it rose majestically on a column of fire and disappeared in the swirling snow.

Linda was surprised to find that the sound of the blast off was not as loud as she had expected. Neither did she find the acceleration of two and a half gravities excessively uncomfortable. The brightly lighted compartment made the scene outside the eyeport seem dark; although it was only four-thirty in the afternoon. Tiny pellets of snow streamed by the port during the few seconds it took the rocket to scream through the lower atmosphere. Then the ship burst through the clouds. Linda gave an exclamation of surprise and pleasure at the sheer beauty of the sight. The clouds rose

like tumbled snowy mountain ranges under an ice blue winter sky. The setting sun painted their tops in brilliant hues of pink, orange, and violet. Their eastern sides lay in blue shadow honeycombed with caves and grottos.

"It's beautiful!" exclaimed Linda. "I never dreamed it would be like this."

"You have to see it to really appreciate it," Roger said. "Descriptions never do it justice."

As the rocket continued to rise, the clouds flattened until they resembled pack ice on an arctic sea. More of Earth became visible, and spots of green and brown appeared on the southwestern horizon. Finally the blue of the Pacific crept into view, brilliantly contrasted against the now black sky.

"You may be able to see a few stars if you don't look toward Earth or the sun," Roger said to Linda. Linda followed Roger's instructions; and, sure enough, a few stars appeared, unwinking points of light against black velvet. Now over three hundred miles above Earth, the rocket had crossed the frontier into outer space.

The rocket passed the top of its arc and the scenery was forgotten; the natural fear of falling to which all humans are heir asserted itself. Linda suddenly realized that there was no sensation of weight and that the rocket was falling steadily through space.

"Is ... is everything all right?" she asked in a weak voice.

"Don't worry dear," Roger replied soothingly. "We'll be landing in another half hour. You won't have to go through much more of it."

"Thank goodness!" Linda breathed a sigh of relief and laid her dark head on Roger's shoulder. Roger put his arm around her and held her until the rocket came in with a squeal of runners against hard packed snow. Lights flashed by the eyepoint as they slid along the runway. In the distance the lighted, slablike towers of Arctic City loomed against the dark sky. The night was clear and bitterly cold.

The rocket slid to a stop, and an electric tractor came to tow the ship to the top of an elevator shaft. A few minutes later the passengers streamed along a conveyer walk into the Arctic City terminal. The sounds of hurried activity echoed through the tunnel. The rumble of heavy freight conveyers, the shouts of stevedores, the whine of heavily loaded electric motors, and the hum of conversation mingled in a medley of sounds that spoke of commerce and industry, of people busy at an almost endless array of tasks.

"Are you Roger Lorin?" The question came from a short, stocky, gray-haired individual.

"Yes, I am," Roger replied.

"I'm Jacob Darcy. I'm supposed to show you to your apartment and help you get oriented."

"Good," Roger said. "You lead. We'll follow." Darcy turned and led them to a small electric monorail car which sped them through a maze of underground streets past the windows of many shops and stores.

After a ten minute ride in the monorail and a fast ascent in an elevator, the three of them entered a small apartment high in one of the slablike buildings. The apartment was comfortable and compact, though not luxuriously furnished. One transparent wall of the living room looked out over the city and the arctic landscape.

"I thought things would be more primitive," said Linda as she looked around her future home. "This doesn't seem like a frontier at all."

"No," Darcy replied with a smile. "Arctic City is pretty well built up. Conditions are a lot better here than they are in some of the mining centers farther north." He turned to Roger. "I'll be around tomorrow morning to show you the labs. Sometime around eight or eight thirty."

"I'll be ready," replied Roger. "It should be interesting to see the facilities here."

"I suppose the high temperature work will be most interesting to you," said Darcy. "I read your paper on molecular linkages. We'll sure be able to use you. We're having the devil's own time with the linings for the reaction chambers in the neutron pile."

"I hope I can help," said Roger. "The cooling problem should be quite a challenge without the extreme temperatures and high vacuum that we had at the moon labs."

"That's right. You did work on the first neutron pile, didn't you?" Darcy said as he prepared to leave. "That makes it much better. There are too few men with practical experience in neutron pile work."

It had long been known by physicists that tremendous amounts of energy could be released if matter could be collapsed to form neutrons. This step had been achieved in 2047 A. D., at the Lunar atomic laboratories. The Arctic City pile was the first attempt to apply it to industrial uses.

Up to this time (2054), man had been barred from the planets by the lack of a fuel cheap enough to make trips across interplanetary space economically feasible. Long, economical orbits could be used; but these brought on psychological problems resulting from living in cramped quarters for long periods of time, and problems of carrying enough supplies for such long trips. In shorter orbits, the profits would be burned up in excessive fuel consumption. The most efficient fuel was monatomic hydrogen, which is highly unstable unless dissolved in a catalyst to keep it from exploding at ordinary temperatures. The catalyst and the process for making the fuel were both expensive. Moon colonies were maintained only because the moon was the best known source of germanium; and its vacuum was a valuable location for astronomical observatories and atomic research laboratories.

The neutron pile applied to space travel would make an interplanetary civilization possible. The pile, releasing neutrons and ions at velocities approaching that of light, would make use of small amounts of inexpensive materials as fuels.

It also had frightening potentialities for mass destruction.

The ambassador of the South American Republic thought of the destructive possibilities as he rode the small monorail car toward the Government Center in Chicago, which was now the capital of the North American Union. The shore of Lake Michigan was studded with tall skyscrapers connected by streets with transparent coverings. At ground level, a system of conveyer walks ranging from the hundred mile per hour strips in the center to five mile per hour strips on the edges, whisked brightly clad people about their business. On the second level, monorail tracks carried the high speed freight and passenger traffic of the city. The ambassador's car pulled in at a second level siding near the loading platform for the Government Tower. As he stepped from his car, he was met by two secret service agents who escorted him to the office of the Secretary of State.

The Secretary sat behind a large desk in a comfortably furnished office on the eightieth floor. Through the large window wall behind the Secretary, the scattered towers of the city were somewhat obscured by flying snow and the gloom of a December morning.

The distinguished looking man behind the desk had served his country well during the past thirty years. He knew the problems faced by such nations as the South American Republic, the League of Islam, the Asian Commonwealth, the decadent subject nations of western Europe, and the tiny, constantly warring states that comprise what was left of the once mighty U.S.S.R. That morning he had sent a note refusing help to the Baltic Federation, which had accused the Arctic League of aggression. The North American Union had no desire to enter foreign wars that did not concern it.

The Secretary rose and extended his hand.

"Good morning," he greeted the ambassador as he shook hands with him. "Have a seat." The Secretary waved toward a comfortable chair near the desk. The ambassador seated himself with his overcoat across his knees.

"I cannot get used to your cold weather," he said good naturedly. "I have spent too much time in the tropics."

"We seem to be getting an unusually cold winter," the Secretary replied. "I'll have to admit that Chicago doesn't compare with Rio as far as weather is concerned."

"I wish that I were there now," the ambassador said in a more serious tone. "I would not have to discuss with you this trouble that has come up."

"What trouble?" the Secretary asked. "Your note wasn't clear about what you wished to discuss with me."

"As you probably know, there are groups in my country that fear the technical developments that have been going on during the past ten years," the ambassador replied. "They do not know your country as well as I do, and fear that you will use the neutron energy discovery as a weapon."

"Why should they fear our energy developments?" the Secretary asked. "The Lunar atomic laboratories are open for inspection at all times, and the pile being built

in the Arctic is no secret either. All the developments are private ventures. The idea of making neutron bombs hasn't even been raised in Congress."

"Unfortunately my people do not know this," replied the ambassador. "These groups have used much propaganda and have thoroughly misled the masses. That the laboratories are located on the moon does not help. You know how rigid the requirements are for those who would travel in space. Several men from my country have not been allowed to go for health reasons. This naturally feeds the suspicions of my people, who do not understand why such things must be done. To remedy this trouble my government has instructed me to arrange for a meeting between our presidents."

"I think such a meeting would be possible," the Secretary said. "I'm sure that the president will understand the situation. The memory of the twentieth century won't fade easily. I'll see if a trip to the Lunar laboratories can be arranged. It would be good if some members of the dissatisfied groups were allowed to make the trip."

"That would be very good," replied the ambassador. "It would help to counteract their propaganda. They are seeking power, and would gain it at the expense of good will between our nations. This will very effectively remove the source of their grievances."

"I'll bring it up at the cabinet meeting this afternoon," the Secretary said. "It would be wisest to get this business moving as fast as possible."

The ambassador rose from his seat. "You will let me know the outcome of the meeting as soon as you can?"

"Yes," replied the Secretary. "As soon as it's over."

The laboratories at Arctic City were fairly new but already had the cluttered appearance of all research labs. Electronic instruments, coils of wire, and various articles of chemical apparatus lay on the work benches. One room held the dial-studded face of a computer. Another contained several induction and carbon arc furnaces used in high temperature work. Men wearing white smocks or plastic aprons went quietly and efficiently about their tasks.

Roger and Darcy entered a lab in which a man sat staring at the face of an oscilloscope, where weird figures danced in yellowish-green tracery. The bench was covered with a bewildering array of equipment. A row of gas discharge tubes glowed with varicolored light. From them a spaghetti-like arrangement of many colored wires led to various instruments scattered along the bench.

"How's it coming, Phil?" Darcy asked.

The man looked up from his work. "Hi, Jake," he said. "I might get somewhere if this oscillator would stop wandering all over the place. This thing doesn't seem to be very accurate at high frequencies." He indicated a piece of equipment connected to the oscilloscope.

"I'll sure be glad when we get a good physical chemist to do this work. My business is ceramics, and I'm getting sick and tired of wrestling with his wiring."

"Well," said Darcy, "you won't have to worry about this any more. This is Roger Lorin, our new physical chemist. Roger, this is Philip Gordon, our ceramics expert."

Gordon grinned and extended his hand. "I'm glad to meet you," he said. "Sorry I blew off like that. I just get disgusted sometimes."

"It does get frustrating," Roger agreed as they shook hands. "Electronics is rather tricky."

"You're right there," replied Gordon. "Especially when you don't know too much about it. What I learned about electronics in college has long since departed. Take a look at this set up. It's about as poor a job of haywiring as you'll find anywhere."

"I see you're using high frequency excitation to get your high temperatures," Roger commented. "Just what compounds are you working with?"

"I've been working with some plastics, inert stuff, to see just what they'll react with, and how fast they'll react at high temperatures."

"It isn't too easy," Lorin said. "It never has been easy to find reaction rates. I'll get to work on these this afternoon. Maybe I can get some of these finished tomorrow or the next day."

"Thanks," Gordon said in a relieved voice. "It'll be good to get some results I can rely on."

Lorin and Darcy left the lab and walked through a winding succession of corridors until they came to a large room. One wall was lined with catwalks linked by metal ladders. Men in coveralls moved against the slate gray background like insects on the side of a building. Through a door to their right Lorin could see banks of instruments at which several men were working.

"This is the south face of the pile," Darcy said. "Most of the instruments are located here. The Klysten converters are mounted in that room over there." He indicated a door on their left.

"I'd like to see those," Roger said. "I hear that these are pretty large compared with what we had at the moon labs."

"They're big enough all right," Darcy said. "Each one is four stories high. We had a deuce of a time evacuating them."

As Darcy said this, they stepped into a long high room. To their right stood six immense transparent tubes. Each tube contained a grid of thick steel bars which was mounted so that it completely surrounded a coil of heavy copper bar in the center of the tube. The steel bars had been treated so that a magnetic field would build up rapidly when they were exposed to hard radiations. The radiation beams were passed into the grid in pulses, thus causing the magnetic field to build up and collapse rapidly producing current in the coils by induction. The tubes were generators with no moving parts except electrons and protons. The system used about seventy-five per cent of the

energy produced by the pile. The residual radiation was released as greenish yellow light.

"Why are they transparent?" Roger asked. "I should think that metals would be stronger and easier to manage."

"The transparency helps us to maintain a more accurate control," Darcy replied. "When the light shifts toward the blue, we know that more energy is being released as radiation, and can shut down the tube before it gets a chance to heat up too much."

"Good idea," said Roger. "Control was our worst trouble at the moon labs."

"We'll use this until we find something better," said Darcy as they left the pile area.

Unknown to Roger Lorin, events which would shape the course of the next few weeks, and would ultimately change his whole life were taking place far to the south. A third party had entered the political stage of the Western Hemisphere. The League of Islam had finally decided to do something about an incident which it had never forgiven. Over thirty years earlier, the Union had sent marines into the Suez Canal area to stop alleged assaults against American citizens. In a sense, the North American Union had indicated that it thought of the League of Islam as nothing more than a backward group, which could be pacified whenever trouble arose within its borders. The insult had never been forgotten by the fanatically nationalistic Moslems. Only the greater military might of the North American power had prevented a war at that time. Now, the League had decided that the time was ripe to gain immunity from such insults forever by some shrewd political maneuvering.

Working through a small dissatisfied political party in South America, they used the North's development of neutron energy to create fear in the minds of the people of the southern republic. By stimulating this fear, the Arabs hoped to weaken both powers through war, and thereby to gain power and prestige among the nations. The League hoped to gain through political devices what it could never get in open war.

Up to January 5, 2055, the leaders of the western hemispheric powers did not realize what was actually taking place. But then reports began coming into the offices of the investigators of both nations which changed the picture.

On January 2, an American oil well in the Gulf of Mexico had been blown up. The saboteur was not caught, since the bomb had been cleverly hidden sometime before the explosion. Two days later, in the state of Venezuela, an official of the South American government was shot and killed. Although the assassin escaped after a grueling two day chase and was never really identified, there were plenty of rumor mongers to remind the people that the dead official had held opinions that were not favorable to the North American Union. Accompanied by such incidents friction between the two nations grew.

The events that set the pot to boiling, and nearly caused it to boil over occurred at Arctic City. Up to this time, Roger Lorin had considered the reports of such

incidents as news that seemed rather unreal, because of its distance from his immediate affairs. Now, however, he found himself in the middle of the trouble between the two nations. Although he scarcely knew it, he had become a key man on the neutron pile project. His research into the physics of interatomic and intermolecular forces had aided materially the work on the pile.

It started, innocently enough, during the early afternoon of January 9, when a group of ten men ostensibly bound for a mining town farther north, took a guided tour of the pile area. About one sixth of the reaction cells into which the pile was divided for convenience, were in operation; and the six converter tubes were aglow with greenish yellow light. The entrance of the men into the central chamber was the signal. A previously planted bomb exploded with enough violence to shatter the tubes; filling the converter room with greenish yellow fire and hard radiations.

A smoke bomb provided extra screening and the group hurried down a side tunnel under cover of the gray mantle. Roger heard the sounds of confusion accompanied by the clangor of an alarm bell, announcing that hard radiations were loose somewhere in the plant. He stepped to the door of the lab, and a gas gun exploded in his face. He knew nothing more, until he awoke aboard a fast moving jet.

The convertiplane winged through the Arctic twilight for nearly two hours, and finally came down on a flat stretch of snow covered tundra, near the shore of the Arctic Ocean. A group of three dome huts stood at the base of a low cliff. Otherwise, the scene was one of silent, dark desolation.

One of the men handed Roger a pair of insulated, electrically heated coveralls. Roger put them on without argument. Next, the man motioned toward the hatch with a machine pistol. "Get movin'," he snapped. "Make it quick. And don't try to run for it. You wouldn't get far."

Roger dropped through the hatch and waited quietly. When his captors finally dropped through the hatch, they steered him none too gently toward the middle hut.

On his right as he entered, three men sat playing cards around a small table. To his left, a man lay on a cot reading a magazine by the light of a mining lantern. Roger was shoved across the main room, through a passageway and into a room on the right. The metal door clanged shut behind him, and the bolt shot home with the finality of a prison gate.

"Well, I see I have company," a voice came out of the gloom. As Roger's eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, he saw an old man sitting on the edge of a narrow cot.

"Who are you?" Roger asked in a bewildered voice. "And just what's been going on? Why should I be kidnapped and brought to this God forsaken spot?"



"You must be the chemist they were talking about," the old man replied. "I heard them say something about one of the chief chemists at the neutron pile project. As for me, my name is Dr. Alexander Nolan. I came up here in my plane about a month ago to write up some historical research I've been doing during the past five years. Instead, your kidnappers came in and took over. But here I am rambling on about myself as usual. What's your name, young fellow?"

"I'm Roger Lorin," Roger replied. "I'm a chemist all right. I was working at Arctic City on the neutron project, but I still can't figure out why I should be kidnapped. They couldn't get any ransom, and I don't have any information that would be useful to them. I just don't see it."

"Roger Lorin, eh," the historian mused. "I think I see why you were kidnapped. You're more important than you think you are, which is unusual. Most men think that they are more important than they really are. I suppose you've heard about the oil well that was blown up in the Gulf of Mexico and the man who was shot and killed down in Venezuela. Now, if some North American Citizen were to be found dead, possibly tortured for information about the neutron pile, it might be just the spark that sets off the powder keg that's been building up during the past ten years."

"But why should South America do anything like that?" Roger asked nervously. "They have nothing to gain by such actions. We've shared the information on pile developments since the projects were started."

"Oh, but South America is not the power behind this business," Nolan said gently. "I'll admit that the evidence seems to point to South America, but I have reasons to believe that another power is behind this."

"But which one could it be?" asked Roger.

"Indications point to the League of Islam," replied Nolan. "They are clever, but a student of political history can get some insight into their plans if he looks carefully enough. If you're interested, I can give you some background."

"Go ahead," Roger said. "I'd like to find out what's behind this."

"Well," the historian began. "I guess that you could say that this story goes back 4000 years. The hatred between the Jews and the Arabs goes back that far, and it plays an important part in the present situation. Actually the seeds of the present trouble were planted more than a hundred years ago, when the United States helped the Jews set up a republic on land that the Arabs considered theirs. When the republic

of Israel was established, many Arabs were driven from their homes. Added to this, American economic aid to Israel didn't help our relations with the Arab world. As a result, the fifties and sixties of the last century were a time of unrest throughout the Middle East.

"A short war between Israel and the Arab States lasted from 1946 to 1949. The Arabs lost out, but border incidents occurred intermittently until 1969. After the United States and Russia were involved in the Two Week Chaos, the Arab League moved against Israel. The Arabs had grown in strength during the preceding twenty years and were able to push the Jews out of Palestine or put them under their control.

"Under agreements made in the United Nations, the United States sent an expeditionary force to the Holy Land. The whole affair was a debacle. America had been weakened by the atom bombing of many of her cities and military establishments. Russia was also out of the running. After the death of Malenkov in 1968, one of the party leaders had tried to bring union by starting a war. After American retaliation with hydrogen and atom bombs, the growing resentment of the Russian people against an undesirable system exploded into open revolt. The Soviet Union became a disorganized crazy-quilt pattern of small, constantly warring states.

"On top of the destruction of atomic war, came the great economic collapse of 1970. The financial structure of the United States and her allies fell apart, and with it the United Nations went down into oblivion. The states of the Arab League could now do much as they pleased without outside interference.

"The Two Week Chaos and the great collapse incapacitated the western powers for nearly thirty years. The Arab States prospered and formed the League of Islam in 1990. The League covered the eastern end of the Mediterranean and the coast of North Africa. During this period, South America had formed the South American Republic and became a world power.

"The North American Union, which was formed in 1997, wished to take up where the United States had left off in the development of Arabian oil. The Arabs, who had developed the fields themselves with help from South America, had no desire for North American intervention. The Americans, who had a long term lease signed in the late fifties, were not willing to give up so easily, and hard feeling developed. The Suez incident of thirty years ago and the American control of the moon and the satellite stations didn't help matters any.

"When the Americans finished the first satellite station in 1984 and landed the first rocket on the moon in 1991, the Arabs became apprehensive and made known their wish to build a spaceport in the Sahara Desert. The North American Union, which had a monopoly on rocket building facilities, refused to allow it, out of fear of the growing strength of the Arabs. I think that that was a serious mistake. The sight of the satellites passing overhead, plus the knowledge that they belong to an unfriendly power doesn't help to create good will. The fact that the moon has an independent government makes it worse. The leaders of Islam know that the Lunar government

wouldn't allow nationalism in space. I guess you know how the Lunar citizens feel about the North American monopoly on space travel."

"They don't like it," Roger said. "They feel that they could be more independent if they were receiving supplies from more than one source. Lunar government is nothing more than a form, set up by the North American Union to keep up appearances. The moon isn't self sufficient enough to make its independence more than a form. If the Lunar colonies could trade with more than one nation, they could maintain their independence by the moon's natural defensive position; and control of the satellite stations would help to ease international tensions. There's not much chance of a dictatorship being formed there, because the colonists are too individualistic and are interested in their government. It looks to me like both sides are at fault in this mess."

"That's usually the case," the historian commented. "The Arabs aren't free of blame either. Some of their tactics in the Holy Land weren't exactly calculated to win the good will of the United States, and they have been rather violent in some of their dealings with our citizens."

The conversation was interrupted when one of their captors opened the door a few inches and slid two cans of food concentrate through the crack.

"I see dinner has arrived," Nolan said as he stepped over to the door and picked up the containers. He handed one to Roger, and the two men removed the tops. In a few minutes a coil in the sides of each container heated the contents, and the prisoners ate a warm if uninspiring meal. Plastic spoons fastened to the sides of the cans served as utensils.

After they had finished the food, the two prisoners sat and discussed various topics until late in the evening, when they finally turned in.

Outside, the temperature dropped to sixty degrees below zero. The stars sparkled with a brilliance that was reminiscent of outer space. Once the frosty stillness was broken by the whine of the jets of a cargo plane, hauling a train of ore gliders from the mines on an island farther north. In the front room of the center hut a guard sat, watching a number of television screens which showed the area around the camp bathed in infra red light. In front of the hut lay the convertiplane, a shining, bluish silver dart with its needle nose and swept back wings and tail. Near the cliffs back of the huts, Nolan's small two seater lay with its channel wings folded into the fuselage.

At six, Roger was awakened roughly by one of the guards. He was given a can of concentrates which he ate quickly, his eyes straying now and then to the big machine pistol held by one of his captors. After Roger had eaten, he was ordered out to the plane and strapped into a seat, an armed guard beside him. With screaming jets blowing air over its channel wings, the convertiplane lifted from the snow and, a few minutes later, streaked into the dark sky under the power of its main jets.

Three hours later they descended to the yard of a large house on the outskirts of Denver. The scattered buildings of the city lay on a blinding white blanket of snow

that sparkled in the winter sun like minute jewels. Roger was hurried into the house and soon stood in the middle of a spacious living room, his hands held firmly by steel handcuffs. He faced a man with swarthy skin and dark hair, a typical Latin type.

"Señor Lorin," the South American said and motioned toward an easy chair. "Please be seated. Perhaps you are tired after your trip."

"The trip was all right," Roger replied coldly, "though I don't like traveling against my will. I trust that the Arabs are paying you well for this little job."

A momentary look of surprise crossed the man's handsome features, but he smiled quickly and said in an affable voice tinged with surprise. "Arabs? What do they have to do with this? I do not know any Arabs. You do me an injustice to think that I would work for any other country than my own."

Hoping that the results would justify his confidence, Roger replied. "Quit trying to bluff. South Americans have no reason to kidnap me. They'd have absolutely nothing to gain and plenty to lose by such actions. Even if they could fight a long drawn out war with us, they'd lose in the end. Why most of your scientists and engineers receive their graduate schooling up here. I met quite a few of your countrymen during my school days."

"You are an astute man," the South American smiled. "Yes, I am actually working for the League of Islam." He admitted it blandly without apparent conscience or remorse.

"I can't say that I admire a man who'd sell his country, and not only that but the whole western hemisphere down the river. Did they pay you thirty pieces of silver?" Roger asked scornfully.

"The stakes are much higher than that," the traitor replied, without apparently being affected by Roger's scorn. "An empire awaits those who are bold, greater power and riches than any ruler has even known before."

"I thought that we had left that behind with the twentieth century."

"The desire for power is always with us," the traitor, whose name was Manuel Juarez, said. "If I do not get it, someone else will. The struggle never ends."

"Maybe that's true in some parts of the world," Roger said, "but we don't do things that way here."

"Be that as it may," Juarez said with finality. "We won't speak of it again." Abruptly he turned his chair toward a blank wall and pressed a button on the arm of the chair. The whole wall lit up with stereo color, and the room resounded with the hum of a crowd of people.

"Skiing is an interesting sport," Juarez commented. "I enjoy watching the skill with which the skiers perform in these tournaments."

Roger and Juarez watched a symphony of graceful form and movement against a backdrop of snow, blue sky, and tall pines. Both men sat in chairs that moulded automatically to the shape of the body. Radiant heat bathed them in warmth that was a pleasant contrast to the wintry scene in the television wall.

The instrument which showed them the ski tournament so clearly represented a force that had killed an entire industry eighty years earlier. The economic collapse and the development of good color stereo television had resulted in the complete destruction of the movie industry. Although there was still much poor entertainment on the air, any person could usually find entertainment to suit his taste, whether it was for adventure stories or Shakespeare, for popular music or the works of the great composers.

Roger was held in the house for about a week and a half. Although he did not know why he was held for such a long time, he knew that he was being watched with unceasing vigilance. He had no chance to escape. Then suddenly the enforced inactivity was over.

Juarez and two guards entered his room. All three were dressed in outdoor clothing and were armed.

"You will come with us peacefully," Juarez warned. "If you try anything foolish, we will not hesitate to kill you. We have other plans for you, but your death here would serve our purpose."

Roger went. They left the house and prepared to enter a small channel winged plane. The craft had a tear shaped body flanked by two pontoon-like cylinders. Each cylinder contained two small jet engines, one blowing a stream of air forward and the other blowing a stream backward across wing-like plates. The supersonic blasts gave the wings enough lift so that the plane could hover, rise vertically, or move forward or backward with equal ease. Such planes could attain a speed of 450 miles per hour.

At this time, a small patrol plane of the same type was flying slowly through the area. Both of its occupants were thoroughly bored, and one of them began to look around through a pair of light amplifying binoculars. He spotted the abduction scene taking place below. Every detail, including Roger's handcuffs, was crystal clear. The patrolman, his curiosity aroused, switched to ultraviolet sensitivity, but saw none of the code numbers that appeared on the bodies of all police planes. Handcuffs and no police markings meant a check report to police headquarters.

"Patrol 67," the policeman reported into the radio. "There's a prisoner being held in Zone 18. The plane has no police markings. The prisoner is about five feet, eleven inches tall, has light hair, a rather large nose, and is wearing a green jacket over gray coveralls. One of the other men is dark, short, and stocky."

"That sounds like Roger Lorin," came the reply. "He disappeared from Arctic City about a week ago. There's a bulletin out on him. Keep a long distance watch on that plane."

About an hour after they had taken off, the fugitives, who were flying low, disappeared in the mountains and were lost to the police plane's radar.

The sun set, and night settled its cold hand over the mountains. The stars glittered like icy diamonds in the almost black firmament. The moon bathed the world in cold silvery light. The mountains rose like walls against the cold, dark sky.

The plane climbed out of a canyon and flew southwest along the side of a high peak. At treetop level, they flew through a high pass, and entered a valley where a small, ice-covered lake gleamed in the cold moonlight. The plane landed on the glittering ice. Among the pines on the west side of the lake, stood a stately hunting lodge. The outside was faced with logs to give it a rustic look, but the interior was luxuriously furnished.

Two men from the lodge pushed the plane into a hangar on the lake shore, while Roger and his captors climbed a short flight of stairs and entered the building.

"Now we wait," Juarez said disgustedly. "I hope that Gomez gets here soon, so that we can get this business over with and get out of here. I cannot be sure, but I thought I saw someone following us after we took off this morning."

But he didn't get his wish. For the next three days, the men passed the time in various ways. Some went fishing through the ice on the lake, others watched television, still others played cards or pool in the game room.

During this time the police were not idle. They staked out the house in Denver and waited. Their patience was rewarded when, on the second night, a small plane came down out of the dark sky and hovered over the landing area. A man dropped to the ground and headed toward the house, and the plane rose into the night with blue flame dancing from the ends of the wing cylinders, and headed back toward the mountains. A large police plane high above traced the flight of the small ship with infra red detectors and spotted the hideout of the fugitives.

On the third night Miguel Gomez arrived. He was a big, strapping man unusually light complected for a South American. His greetings were loud and boisterous.

"Well, Juarez," he said loudly, "I see that you have our prisoner in good condition. But we can do nothing for awhile. A new plan has been developed. In one week, a rocket carrying high officials from our Republic will take off from the Chicago spaceport. These officials go to inspect the Lunar atomic laboratories. That rocket will crash, and the North Americans will be blamed. There will be evidence of general negligence with hints of sabotage. So! the fun will begin. If that does not work, we will use our friend, Lorin, here to top it off."

That night they listened to a late newscast before going to bed. The situation was tense. The presidents' meeting had been postponed until after the inspection of the moon laboratories by the South American officials. There was talk of a general mobilization and a tightening of discipline at the military stations along the Mexican border and the gulf coast.

Five hundred miles above the Earth, the polar weather station wheeled silently through space. A sphere two hundred feet in diameter, it was girded by a ring deck that was home to forty men and women. The big observation room was the real reason for the space station's existence. Here, the weathermen kept watch over the movements of Earth's atmosphere. The fluffy white clouds that appeared on their

screens told a tale of mass air movements that meant stormy or clear weather for the Earth below. An almost blinding white mass of cloud over Canada told of a cold front moving southward to collide with warm air from the Gulf of Mexico and unleash a blizzard over the plains of the Midwest. Tumbling clouds hid a storm that whipped the North Atlantic into a raging fury of white water. Clear areas showed where snow sparked under the winter sun or where soft tropical breezes ruffled the fronds of palm trees.

The station was passing over the Pampas of Argentina on the day side of Earth when the incident occurred. Miriam Andrews, on duty at the time, sat watching the progress of a small rain squall. Suddenly a look of surprise crossed her rather plain features, and she turned the amplifier gain-knob of the light amplifying telescope to higher magnification. On the screen appeared a sprawling airport on which lay scores of large, box-like transport planes. Into the huge, channel winged craft flowed lines of robot controlled armored vehicles. Miriam, who had a keen mind and an interest in international affairs, recognized the dangerous possibilities of these preparations. She did not hesitate to call the station director. That individual was summoned from a deep sleep by the imperative buzzing of the intercom. He switched the instrument on, saw Miriam's excited face, and came fully awake with a feeling of alarm. Excitement on the part of station personnel was apt to mean deadly danger. He interrupted the excited girl. "Repeat that again and slow down." Miriam repeated her story.

"I'll send a message when we get close enough to Chicago to use a tight beam," he said. "There's no use spreading that news all over the western hemisphere." With that he broke the connection and called the radio room to give instructions about the message.

The station swept around the Earth untroubled by the gathering fury below. A rocket, a slender, blue steel, winged cone, blasted away from the station with a brief but brilliant display of its atomic jets. The watches changed, and the weathermen continued to receive data, analyze it, and send it to the coordinating centers on Earth.

Although most of the men on the station heard the news with the detachment of those whose main interest lies in space and on the moon, the North American government was not so calm. It was not long before big formations of box-like transports were headed southward with heavy loads of flying armored equipment, technicians, and troops. Flights of dart like interceptors patrolled the gulf area, ranging the blue skies at supersonic speeds. On the ground, rows of slim anti-aircraft missiles stood like candles in a birthday cake. At the first flicker on a radar screen, they would scream skyward to intercept hydrogen and atom armed missiles at the borderline of space. Both powers made good resolutions of nonaggression, but the rest of the world watched the preparations with a skeptical eye. The weapons that could unleash the horrors of nuclear warfare at the flick of a switch stood in frightening array on both sides of the gulf.

Meanwhile, the police prepared to close in on the mountain cabin. Equipped with gas bombs, machine pistols and recoilless rifles, they came struggling through a snow clogged pass and down the mountain sides from hovering planes. Unseen in the darkness, they crept through the woods toward the house. A rifle shot cracked as a guard sighted them with his sniperscope. One of the policemen fell, a bullet in his leg. The lights in the house went out, and gun flashes lanced through the windows. Bullets, hunting their prey like angry wasps, snarled through the darkness.

Roger was locked in an upstairs bedroom with a guard before the door. During the next two hours, the roar of



machine pistols and the crack of rifle fire split the mountain stillness and echoed from the hillsides. At the end of that time, the police withdrew to rearrange their strategy.

Juarez sat on the floor near a broken window and cleaned his machine pistol. "I think that it is time to kill Lorin and get out of here," he said, as he placed a fresh clip in the magazine. "It will serve us to good advantage."

"Fool!" Gomez exclaimed. "If they found us with a dead man on our hands, we wouldn't stand a chance. I have used this place enough to know that they have us

pinned in. We can use Lorin as a bargaining point. We will arrange to take him with us and drop him by parachute. But—the parachute will not open. A convertiplane, which I have called, will meet us above the clouds and take us away before they can stop us."

"They will not trust our word," Juarez said. "We cannot get away with it."

"Oh, but we can," Gomez said. "The police know that Lorin's death would have regrettable results. Even the fact that he is a citizen of the North American Union would be enough to start trouble, let alone his position as a key research man on the neutron project. They will do anything to see that he remains alive. The scheme will further enrage the North Americans and might perhaps incite them to war."

"I see," replied Juarez. "An excellent plan. Let's contact the police, and see what happens."

Unseen by the guards around the house, four policemen crawled through the snow. Wearing white uniforms, they blended so well with their background that even the sniperscope men didn't see them. Their view was limited by the fact that most of the large lights that had flooded the area with infra red radiation had been shattered by gunfire. Individual beams were insufficient to sweep the whole area.

Carrying thirty-shot rocket launchers and rocket powered gas bombs, they took positions around the house and aimed the slender guns. At a radio signal, streams of red fire shot from the tubes, and the small rockets tore through every window in the house. In a few minutes, the place was saturated with sleep gas. Not a man moved throughout the building. Policemen in gas masks converged on the house.

Roger awoke on a stretcher aboard a police plane. A police officer sitting beside the stretcher answered his dazed inquiries. "You're on a police plane. We gassed the place where you were being held, and then moved in and took over." He grinned. "You looked so peaceful that I didn't have the heart to give you stimulants."

"How long has it been?" Roger asked worriedly. "I'd like to call my wife as soon as I can. She's probably worried sick by now."

"It's been close to three hours," the officer replied. "We had to buck a snowstorm when we came out of that valley. We knew it was coming, but we thought that we could move in ahead of it and get you out before it struck. Unfortunately, they spotted us with those big infra red lights of theirs and threw our timing all out of kilter. We should be in Denver in less than half an hour."

Twenty minutes later the plane set down on the landing stage at the top of police headquarters. Roger was helped to his feet and led from the plane across the wind and snow lashed platform to an elevator.

A few minutes later, he sat in the office of the Federal Police Commissioner for the Rocky Mountain district. Roger asked permission to use the desk viewphone and quickly put through a call to Arctic City. In a few minutes, Linda's face appeared on the screen. When she saw Roger her face lit up with joy. "Roger!" she exclaimed.

"I've been so worried about you. I haven't been able to sleep for days, wondering what they might do to you."

"I'm all right, honey," Roger reassured her. "I'll be home in less than a day if the police don't detain me here."

"Better have her come to Chicago," the commissioner interrupted. "You'll have to stay there until we get this mess straightened out."

"I guess it would be better for you to come to Chicago. The police say that it'll take a while to clear this business up. Maybe you'd better take a jet. It would be more comfortable for you."

"I'll take the evening rocket," Linda replied determinedly.

"OK," Roger said with a grin. "I'll see you this evening then."

"Your wife seems anxious to see you," the officer remarked drily. "Well, you may as well tell me about this business. I'll send you on the rocket this afternoon so that you can meet your wife. We're not sure just what was behind this kidnapping."

Roger narrated the events of the past two weeks explaining the part the Arabs were playing in the troubles between North and South America.

"The Arabs, eh," the officer mused. "I'm sending the prisoners to Chicago with you. I don't think that it will be too hard to get a cerebral analysis writ. At least I'm going to recommend such action."

"Cerebral analysis?" Roger asked. "That must be something new."

"It is," replied the officer. "This particular development of the encephalograph is so new that not many people know about it. The machine in Chicago is the only one in existence. We use truth drug writs to make it legal and still keep it secret. It isn't exactly according to Hoyle, but we have to be careful these days. It takes an expert to read the charts and, even then, only very clear thoughts can be picked up."

"It sounds like something out of science fiction," Roger commented.

"So did a lot of things we now take for granted," replied the officer.

Late that afternoon, Roger sat aboard a rocket that screamed through the upper atmosphere on the last leg of its flight to Chicago. He watched through an eyepoint as the ship lost altitude and circled the city, finally coming to rest with squealing tires on the concrete runway. As soon as the locks were opened, Roger, accompanied by a police officer, left the ship and went through the boarding tunnel into the bustling terminal building. Roger's eyes searched the crowd until they found Linda. He hurried toward her, and in a few minutes they were in each other's arms.

After two days of quiet relaxation, a plainclothes man took them to the tower of the Security Building which housed the Federal Police. The place was an electronic wonderland, with banks of instruments lining the walls. Gomez had been drugged and strapped into a large chair in the center of the room. His scalp was shaved, and several electrodes had been taped on. During the next hour and a half, the silence was broken only by the occasional click of a switch and the scratch of pens recording data. At the end of that time the electrodes were removed, and Gomez was carried from the room

to sleep off the anesthesia. One after another, the prisoners went through the same process. Gradually the data added up and revealed the plan that was meant to plunge two nations into the horrors of atomic war.

An officer gave quick orders. "I want all out going spaceships checked for sabotage. These men didn't know the technical details. The least obvious thing to do would be to tamper with the fuel in such a way that it would explode violently when it was heated in the motors. The nitric acid used in the booster stage would make the best reactant. The rocket would be too close to the ground to drop the booster. Better check the fuel before the rocket carrying those South American officials blasts off."

He turned to Roger. "Would you like to see how we stake out a place?"

"Sure," replied Roger. "Spaceports are always interesting."

They left the building and rode to the rocket field. Night had fallen and the spaceport lay stark and cold in the beams of large floodlights. Three spaceships stood on the field, their bluish sides gleaming in the beams of the floodlights. To the south, a transcontinental rocket rose into the night like a spark from a chimney. The air was bitter with the temperature at eighteen below.

"Take a look," the police officer handed Roger a pair of binoculars. Roger placed the instrument to his eyes, and the side of the center rocket leaped toward him. He saw a man in the red overalls of a fuel technician climb the gantry alongside the center rocket and push something into a valve on the side of the booster stage, near its juncture with the main part of the ship.

"Do you see that mechanic on the center rocket?" Roger asked.

"Let's see," the officer replied and looked toward that rocket. "Yes, I see him now. A mechanic shouldn't be pushing anything into that valve. That particular valve is used to jettison fuel in an emergency. A blast of compressed air will usually clear anything out of it. If that doesn't work, the valve has to be taken apart to be cleaned. I'd like to know just what he shoved into that valve."

The officer spoke briefly into his pocket radio. Four policemen moved toward the entrances that led into the deep pit where the rocket stood. The technician closed the valve and climbed down the ladder. As soon as his feet touched the concrete floor of the pit, he was seized by the waiting policemen. A pistol shot cracked, and the prisoner sagged to the floor with a hole in his chest. Instant confusion reigned in the pit, and in that confusion the assassin somehow escaped.

When the officer and Roger arrived, they found the policemen talking with a fuel technician. The technician left the group and climbed the ladder to the valve. He opened it and inserted a spring operated probe.

"The valve's clean," he shouted down. "I'll take off some of the nitric acid." He did so, collecting the liquid in a small sample bottle which he carried on his belt. Climbing down the ladder, he handed the bottle to the officer in charge, who handed it to Roger. Roger unscrewed the cap and cautiously sniffed the contents. "I can't be sure, but if it's what I think it is, you'd better not have the tanks drained until morning."

Give it a chance to dissolve. Otherwise you'll have some left in the tanks. It doesn't react very rapidly at low temperatures."

"Just what do you think it is?" the officer asked.

"Well," Roger replied, "it's probably some organic compound that would react with the nitric acid to form an explosive nitrate. Of course, it could be an ammonium compound that would react to form ammonium nitrate. That would do the job just as well."

Three weeks later the agents were brought to trial for espionage and conspiracy to start a war. The whole story of the Arab plot came out. Following the lead of the North American Union, the South American Republic carried out an investigation of its own, and discovered the part the Arabs had played in various incidents on the southern continent.

Later that summer, the Gibraltar Conference met to settle grievances between the western powers and the League of Islam. King Ignatius II of the restored Spanish monarchy acted as a mediator. Reluctantly the North American Union agreed to let the Arabs build a spaceport in the Sahara, thus giving them a chance to trade directly with the Lunar colonies. On their part, the Arabs agreed to internationalize the Suez Canal area, on condition of free passage across the isthmus for Arab traffic between Egypt and Palestine. The Arabs refused flatly to allow a re-establishment of the Republic of Israel, but would allow Jews to settle in the Holy Land under yearly quotas. Despite reluctance and bitterness, a compromise was reached, and war was averted ... for the moment.

About a week after the trial Roger and Linda sat at a table in the large Spaceport Restaurant. Through the large window facing the rocket field, they could see clouds driven by an early March wind. Intermittent flurries of rain splashed against the glass. Roger happened to look up and see an elderly man approaching the table; his face lit up with recognition. "Well, Professor Nolan," he said, offering his hand, "I'm glad to see you."

"I'm glad to see that you got out of that trouble all right," Nolan replied as they shook hands.

"This is my wife, Linda," Roger said. "We're just about to order lunch. Won't you join us?"

"It would be a pleasure," replied Nolan as he sat down. "I'd like to hear about what happened to you."

Roger talked as he had punched their order into the robot server, and through most of the meal that arrived a few moments later.

When he had finished his story Nolan asked him, "Do you intend to go back to Arctic City, now that this is over?"

"No," Roger answered, "The pile at Arctic City is nearly completed. My part of the work is done anyway. I've been offered a job on the neutron rocket project at the Lunar laboratories, and Linda and I are leaving for the moon in about an hour. I

enjoyed working there before. The moon colonists seem to have something that most earthmen lack.... I guess you'd call it a pioneering spirit, a desire to explore. They are willing to accept new ideas.

"But that's enough about myself. I've been wondering how you got away."

"Simple enough," Nolan replied. "The men who were left behind pulled out and left me at the camp when they heard about your rescue. They probably didn't care to kill me if they didn't have to. They left while I was asleep and probably went over the pole into Russia. They took my ship, but I was able to call for help with the radio. What happens to them doesn't matter anyway. We'll probably never hear of them again.

"I suppose it won't be long before we have colonies on all the planets with that neutron rocket you mentioned."

"It'll be a while yet," Roger said. "There are a lot of problems involved in the development of a neutron rocket, and as long as we have to use a fuel processed by passing hydrogen through an electric arc and into an expensive organic compound at low temperatures, space travel will be too expensive for anything more than the exploration expeditions that have been sent to Mars and Venus."

The voice of the announcer interrupted them. "The spaceship *Goddard* is loading passengers from tunnel eleven. All passengers must be aboard in twenty minutes."

Roger and Linda rose from the table. "That's our ship," Roger said. "We'd better get aboard. Goodbye, Professor Nolan. I hope we meet again."

"Goodbye, young fellow, and good luck." Nolan gripped Roger's hand.

Thirty minutes later the professor stood at the window and watched the preparations for blast off. The tail gantry crane moved away from the rocket, and a siren blared forth its warning. The booster motors were started, splashing green flame into the pit and shaking the ground with their roar. The tall ship rose slowly at first, and then more rapidly as it climbed a column of green flame into the clearing sky. It grew small and disappeared. A few minutes later the ship's atomic drive came to life like a tiny new sun that was a beacon on the path to space.