

Godzilla Reborn

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by Barry S. Goldberg

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“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

-- Hamlet: Act I, Scene V

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it”

-- George Santayana

Chapter One -- Remembrance of Things Past

Dr. Fong Yui Moon ("Kenny" to his friends) woke up screaming.

Again.

This was the third time in as many weeks. When he was a little boy, he used to wake up in the middle of the night, with his pulse pounding and his heart racing. Back then, he had never been able to remember what, exactly, he had been dreaming about that had shocked him awake. Now, however, he could remember his nightmares all too well, which wasn't surprising given that they were always the same. That huge face snarling at him, those teeth the size of school buses, those eyes.... His mother used to tell him that just had a very active imagination, that there were no demons, no monsters. His mother had been wrong, however -- there were indeed monsters.

Beside him, his wife, Julie, stirred under her covers. Kenny looked over at her, wondering for the thousandth time what he ever did to deserve a wife so wonderful. When they were first dating, a good friend had told him that if he ever met a woman who could sleep in the same bed with him and put up with his snoring, he should marry her in an instant. He wondered what his friend would say about this woman who had shared his bed for 30 years and who now put up with his screaming.

Kenny looked at the clock beside his bed. Only 2:43 A.M. He thought briefly of getting up anyway, but that *would* wake his wife up. He knew that he probably wouldn't fall back to sleep, but he could at least spend the time going over the speech he had to give later that day.

* * *

Kenny woke three hours later to find the early morning sun streaming through the bedroom window, his wife missing from his side, and the heavenly aroma of bacon and eggs wafting in from the kitchen. He inhaled deeply, sighed, and then swung his legs over the side of the bed. On his way to the bathroom he called out.

"Honey -- I hope you're not planning on eating all that yourself!"

"Don't be silly," came the drawl from the kitchen. "But if you don't hurry, I may give into temptation."

Kenny grinned to himself as he climbed into the shower. Julie's accent was one of the first things that attracted him to her in the first place. At just a little under five foot three inches tall, with a slender build and long black hair, Julie Hisako Nakamoto had looked like most other Asian girls he had known in his life. Her southern accent had completely thrown him for a loop, however. It was so incongruous and yet somehow so perfect at the same time. Although Julie's parents had both immigrated from Japan, she herself had been born in Austin, Texas and had learned to speak English with a deep drawl that years of living in New York hadn't been able to erase.

Kenny finished his quick shower, toweled himself off, donned his bathrobe and sauntered into the kitchen. Julie was standing at the stove with her back to him, and he took a moment to appreciate the view. After all these years, and after bearing him three wonderful daughters, she still had a great figure. The only real difference he could see between the woman who stood in front of him and the girl he married all those years ago was the color of her hair. When Julie started going grey a few years back, she decided to indulge in a whim and have reddish highlights added. Kenny had been a bit appalled at first, but soon came to realize that it really *did* suit her as much as her accent did.

Julie turned around and saw him standing there, staring at her. She stuck out her tongue playfully at him, and then placed his plate on the table. Without waiting for him, she sat down and began eating.

Kenny took his own seat and dove into the food with his fork. "Hey," he said around a mouthful of egg, "if I did something extra special to deserve this, tell me what it was so I can keep doing it!"

Julie smiled, but finished chewing what was in her mouth before replying. "Don't you wish! I just know you have that important meeting with the Secretary General this morning, and having you pass out from hunger in the middle of your big speech wouldn't reflect very well on me, now would it?"

Julie's mention of his upcoming meeting brought a somber look to Kenny's face, a look which Julie did not fail to notice. "You had another one of your nightmares last night didn't you?"

Kenny looked at her in surprise. "Women's intuition, eh?"

"Something like that," his wife replied. "Was it the same as before? Was it *Gojira*?"

Although Julie spoke English with a distinctly Texan accent, her Japanese pronunciation was straight out of Tokyo, and it sent a shiver up Kenny's spine to hear her pronounce that word. He thought briefly of lying to her, so as not to cause her any worry, but after 30 years of marriage she could read him like a book. Better than he could read himself, he reckoned.

"Yes, it was the same. Always the same. He just keeps coming toward me, closer and closer. Buildings get in his way, and he just knocks them over. Planes attack him, and he just blasts them out of the sky. No matter where I run, he follows. Finally, I turn around and I see him bending toward me. His head is enormous. He opens his mouth, and then...."

Julie looked deep into her husband's black eyes. "And then?"

"And then I wake up. Screaming."

Julie took Kenny's hands with her own and gave them a little squeeze. "It's been 15 years, Kenny. Surely if he were still alive he would have appeared by now."

Kenny gave a wry smile. "I know, I know. That's what I keep trying to tell myself, but my subconscious just won't believe me. Besides, if that were really true I'd be out of a job, and then how could I afford to buy you all the wonderful things you love so much?"

This time, Julie didn't smile. "I love you most of all, and I'd trade everything else if it would give you peace of mind."

Kenny squeezed his wife's hands and then stood up to go get dressed. "I know, and I love you, too. But to be honest, I think my nightmares would be worse if I *didn't* have this job. At least this way I know I'm helping to resolve the problem, instead of waiting for it to sneak up on me."

Chapter Two -- A Meeting with the Secretary General

Kenny paid the driver, got out of the cab and then headed toward the main entrance of the U.N. building. He had to squeeze past the usual bunch of protesters who, fortunately, seemed peaceful this week. Having been born in communist China, Kenny fully supported the rights of an individual to free speech and political demonstration. Hell -- he knew people who had been killed at Tianamen Square. There was still something to be said for common civility, however, and he objected to being accosted in the street and having somebody else's opinions rammed down his throat.

He paused to find out what the "cause of the week" happened to be. The first sign he saw mystified him -- "Not Another Dinosaur Killer" it read. Two other signs, however, cleared things up -- "Asteroid Mining Unsafe!" read one, and "Keep Asteroids Out Of Earth Orbit" said another.

Kenny sighed inwardly. He toyed briefly with the idea of going over and trying to set the protesters straight. He wasn't directly involved with the project himself, but he knew most of the people who were and also knew that all possible safeguards were being used. Besides, the Earth *needed* the materials being mined from the asteroids, and bringing them into near Earth orbit was the only way to mine them efficiently.

Kenny had a feeling, though, that logical argument probably wouldn't change the protesters' minds. These were probably the same type of people who would rather a major city go without

power than risk damaging the habitat of some endangered snail by building a hydroelectric plant. Kenny shook his head in silent disgust and entered the building.

Making sure his I.D. badge was prominently displayed -- "Dr. Fong Yui Moon, Director, United Nations Science Advisory Committee" -- he walked through the metal detector, past the security guards, and headed to his office. It was a nondescript interior office on the third floor, away from the hustle and bustle. Kenny often wished that he had a window office, but knew that part of his job was keeping a low profile. People were supposed to know who he was, of course, but they weren't supposed to spend much time thinking about what it was he did. In fact, Kenny had picked out his office himself, so there was nobody he could even complain to about it. Ah well. At least the office was fairly large, and he certainly couldn't complain about the salary....

Kenny settled into the leather chair behind his desk and sifted through the messages that had accumulated over the weekend, both phone and e-mail. Kenny didn't even bother wishing that he had a secretary to take care of such things -- a window he could have possibly rationalized, but a secretary would have meant one more person who would know what his job *really* entailed, and that would be one person too many. He then sent a quick inter-office e-mail to the other members of the Advisory Committee, reminding them of the 10:00 meeting with the new Secretary General. Not that he thought any of them would forget, of course.

At precisely five minutes to ten, he got up, checked his tie in the mirror, and walked out the door. He had to go explain a few things to the most powerful man on the planet.

* * *

United Nations Secretary General Juan Carlos Santos did not keep Kenny waiting. His secretary motioned Kenny to go right in, and the Secretary General stood to greet him. They had never actually met before, and Kenny was relieved to note that the Secretary General had an air of quiet self confidence about him, assured but not arrogant. His handshake was firm, but not aggressively so.

Kenny spoke first. "Good morning, Sir. I'm honored you were able to meet with me on such short notice, especially given that you must be swamped, this being your first week in office and all."

The Secretary General responded in almost completely unaccented English. "Well, I wish I could say that I've heard wonderful things about you and the other members on your committee, Dr. Fong, but to be honest I haven't heard much of anything about you, good or bad. My predecessor left an emphatic note for me, however, saying that it was vital that I meet with you as soon as possible. Needless to say, my curiosity was piqued."

Kenny nodded his head in agreement. "That's actually exactly how we planned it, Sir. We've gone to great lengths to keep as low a profile as possible while still allowing us to carry out our work."

The Secretary General raised an eyebrow. "And what, exactly, *is* that work?"

"Well, Sir, that's why I requested this meeting. If it's all right, though, I'd like to hold off any explanations until we can meet with the other members of my committee. They should all be

waiting for us now anyway.” Kenny looked at his watch. “In fact, they’re probably wondering what’s happened to us.”

The Secretary General gestured toward the door. “Lead on, then.”

* * *

With Kenny in the lead, they made their way down a back corridor. There were no offices, just a few small conference rooms. Kenny stopped in front of a small door marked “Cleaning Supplies” near the end of the corridor and inserted a small magnetic key in a slot set into the wall. After a few moments there was an audible *click*, and Kenny turned the knob and opened the door. Inside was a surprisingly spacious, well-lit storage closet, large enough for five or six people to fit comfortably. There were shelves against the back wall, but they were currently bare. Kenny stepped in and held the door open for the Secretary General. With a bemused smile, the Secretary General followed Kenny inside, and Kenny allowed the door to close behind him.

Kenny then opened a hidden panel on the right hand wall and inserted the same magnetic key into another slot behind the panel. With a slight lurch, the closet began to descend. Without waiting for the Secretary General to ask questions, Kenny began to explain. “As you have probably figured out, we are actually in an elevator. We are headed toward a sub-basement located seven stories below the ground floor. This is partially for security purposes, but mostly for the sake of protection.”

The Secretary General could restrain his curiosity no longer. “What, from nuclear attack?”

Kenny allowed himself a small smile. “Not exactly, Sir. If you’ll just bear with me for a little longer, I hope all will soon become clear to you. Ah, we’ve arrived.”

Kenny opened the door and they stepped into a brightly lit hallway. As they walked, Kenny continued his explanation. “As I’m sure you’re aware, there actually *is* a bomb shelter to protect the delegates in case of nuclear attack. It’s about fifty feet above us. This sub-basement was excavated years after the original bomb shelter was built. Ten years ago, to be exact. Your predecessor authorized its construction.”

They had reached the end of the corridor. In front of them was an unmarked door, which Kenny preceded to open. Inside was a functional, if not particularly elaborate, conference room. One wall was taken up by a large video screen. In the center stood an oval table, surrounded by eight leather chairs, and on four of those chairs sat the other members of the United Nations Science Advisory Committee. Everyone stood as Dr. Fong and the Secretary General entered the room.

“Everyone, let me please present our new Secretary General, Juan Carlos Santos. Sir, let me introduce everyone to you. This is Miyuki Oguri, our Japanese representative.” At just under six feet tall, Miyuki Oguri was far and away the tallest Japanese woman Kenny had ever met. She certainly towered over his own five foot six inches. She possessed an amazing amount of grace, however, for a woman her height. Miyuki took the Secretary General’s offered hand and shook it demurely. “Miyuki holds a Ph.D. in computer science and Master Degrees in both cybernetics and biotechnology.”

Kenny steered the Secretary General to the next person at the table. “This is Gregor Simonovitch, from the New Soviet People’s Republic. Gregor is our life sciences specialist, with advanced degrees in biology, zoology and paleontology.” Gregor was a bear of a man, almost broader than he was tall. Although only five foot eight inches, he had a presence about him that made him seem much taller. Gregor returned the Secretary general’s firm handshake with one of his own, grinning all the time.

The Secretary General raised an eyebrow. “Paleontology?”

Gregor grinned even wider. “Da,” he said in heavily accented Russian. “Paleontology is very important to us.”

Before the Secretary General could ask another question, Kenny gestured toward the third member of the group. “This is Jatinder Bouromphongsa, from India. Dr. Bouromphongsa has a doctorate in both analytical chemistry and chemical engineering.” Jatinder Bouromphongsa was slender to the point of seeming emaciated and stood just under five foot five inches tall, which made him the only one on the Committee shorter than Kenny himself. Kenny had invited Dr. Bouromphongsa to join the group because of his qualifications, not his height, but he had to admit he was glad not to be the shortest member. Dr. Bouromphongsa shook the Secretary General’s hand, his head bobbing up and down slightly while he did so.

“It is a great honor for me to be meeting you, Sir. A very great honor indeed.”

“Thank you very much Dr., um....”

“Please to be calling me Jatinder, Sir. I do not know whatever my parents could have been thinking when they picked my last name.”

The Secretary General smiled at the joke. “Jatinder it is, then. And the feeling is mutual.”

Kenny led the Secretary General to the last member of the group. “Finally, allow me to introduce Air Marshal Reginald Lethbridge-Smythe, Retired, formerly of His Majesty’s Royal Air Force.” Lethbridge-Smythe was the tallest member of the group, standing at six feet four inches. What little hair he still possessed was arranged in a grey fringe around his head. He often joked that he had simply grown too fast for his hair to keep up with him. He was starting to show the first signs of a pot belly, but still managed to hold himself up with military precision. “Reggie has degrees in nuclear physics and aeronautics, and serves as our resident expert on military technology.”

The Secretary General’s eyes widened. “Military technology? I’m afraid I don’t understand, Air Marshal.”

“Please, just call me Reggie -- I’ve been retired for 10 years now.”

“O.K., fine -- Reggie. But what’s this about military technology? I don’t like where this is heading.”

Lethbridge-Smythe glanced over at Dr. Fong for assistance. Kenny interposed himself between the two and guided the Secretary General toward a chair at the head of the table. “All in good time, Mr. Secretary. Now that the introductions are out of the way, why don’t we all take a seat and we can start explaining.”

The Secretary General didn't seem particularly mollified, but sat down anyway. "All right -- start explaining. That *is* what I'm here for after all, isn't it?"

"Just so," Kenny replied. "Just bear with us -- this could take a little while...."

Chapter Three -- The Real Purpose

“What do you know about the purpose of this group, Mr. Secretary?”

The Secretary general leaned back in his chair and thought for a second before responding. “Well, I know that the United Nations Science Advisory Committee was formed ten years ago, presumably to advise the United Nations, and the Secretary General in particular, on general scientific matters. I would hazard a guess that you have been involved, among other things, with the multinational asteroid mining effort, as well as any number of other projects which involve the various member nations of the U.N.”

Kenny coughed lightly into his hand. “That is exactly what you, and everyone else, were meant to believe, Mr. Secretary. However, with the exception of the fact that this committee was organized ten years ago, everything else you have said is completely false.”

“What!” The Secretary General placed both hands on the table in front of him, and made as if to stand up.

Kenny made a calming gesture with his hands. “Please, Sir, allow me to continue. This committee wasn’t created for any nefarious purpose. It was simply felt to be in the public’s interest not to reveal what the true purpose is.”

“And what *is* that true purpose?”

“In a word, Mr. Secretary, Godzilla.”

Juan Carlos Santos, Secretary General of the United Nations, well known for his eloquence in public speaking and for his fluency in eight different languages, found himself speechless for the first time in his political career. “But -- but --” It was no use. He was completely nonplused. He had known that *something* strange was going on, but *this*?

Kenny prompted the Secretary General. “Yes, Mr. Secretary?”

This time, the Secretary General did stand up. “Is this some kind of joke!” he roared. “Did you drag me all the way down here, through all that cloak and dagger nonsense with the secret elevator, just to play some sort of childish prank on me?”

“I beg you to please sit back down, Mr. Secretary. I assure you that this is no joke. Please, sit down.” Kenny waited patiently while the Secretary General composed himself. He could almost hear the internal debate as the Secretary General decided whether to sit back down or storm out. In his own mind, Kenny was terrified. *Oh crap! If he gets up and leaves we’re all screwed. Not just us, but maybe the whole planet as well!*

The Secretary General reached a decision. With a sigh, he sat back down and closed his eyes. Then, keeping his eyes closed, “But Godzilla is dead. Your own country killed him, Dr. Fong.” He opened his eyes and stared directly at Kenny. “In fact, if I remember correctly, you helped!”

Now it was Kenny’s turn to sigh. “Well, we thought we *had* killed him. At least, we did at first. Now, though, we’re just not sure. This committee was formed to deal with the possibility of

Godzilla's return or, heaven forbid, the possibility that there might be other creatures like Godzilla out there somewhere."

The Secretary General's face blanched at the thought. "Is there any evidence to suggest that there might be other godzillas loose in the world?"

"Well, no, but then again there's no scientific explanation for Godzilla's existence in the first place."

"What do you mean?"

Gregor Simonovitch took this as his cue to enter the conversation. "Simply put, Mr. Secretary, Godzilla is impossible. You asked why I study paleontology. Dinosaurs are the closest things we know of to Godzilla, but even then the comparison is slight. We have no record of any dinosaur even remotely as big as Godzilla, nor any other living creature for that matter. And the way his body apparently processes energy is wholly unprecedented! Simply put, everything we know about terrestrial biology says that a creature such as Godzilla simply cannot exist."

"*Terrestrial* biology?"

Gregor grinned sheepishly. "Well, I've never been one of those UFO fanatics or anything, but I have a theory that Godzilla might actually be of *extraterrestrial* origin. Please don't laugh."

The Secretary General was not laughing. "Are you suggesting that some alien species might have sent Godzilla here as some sort of biological super weapon?"

Gregor shook his head. "No, no -- nothing like that. As I said, I don't believe in little green men in flying saucers. It's simply that Godzilla is so unlike any other form of life on this planet that we must accept the possibility that he did not originate here."

The Secretary General looked around the room. "How do the rest of you feel?"

Dr. Bouromphongsa cleared his throat. "Well, if I may be speaking, Mr. Secretary Sir, Gregor failed to mention one important fact. That being Godzilla has DNA which is much like every other creature on this wonderful planet."

"Well, sure he has DNA," Gregor growled. "But I challenge you to show me a single other species on this 'wonderful planet' whose DNA is mutable like Godzilla's. Or whose DNA would allow it to grow to be four hundred foot-tall and spit radioactive plasma!"

"Ah, but the important thing is that he *has* DNA in the first place, is what I be saying to you! A so-called 'alien' would not be *having* such DNA in the first place."

Kenny cleared his throat with an audible "ahem." "Gentlemen -- now is really neither the time nor the place to get into this argument again. Suffice it to say, Mr. Secretary, that we don't know exactly where Godzilla came from, so it's impossible to say for sure that he is unique."

The Secretary General accepted this, although without much enthusiasm. "All right. So there *might* possibly be another Godzilla out there somewhere. It sounds like a pretty remote possibility, though."

"Maybe so, Mr. Secretary," Kenny continued, "but as I mentioned before, our primary concern is that the Godzilla we already know about might return."

“And I’m still waiting for you to explain that, Dr. Fong. Why aren’t you sure he is dead?”

“It’s a bit complicated, Sir. How much do you know about how Godzilla was ‘killed’ in the first place?”

“It was my understanding that the American scientists were able to develop some sort of super-virus which proved deadly to Godzilla. Isn’t that what happened?”

“Well, yes and no. As far as we know, Godzilla is immune to all known diseases. This is not because of some sort of super immune system, mind you, but simply because he is a very different creature, as Gregor has pointed out at length. In the same way that a cat is not likely to catch a cold from its human owners, Godzilla just isn’t susceptible to any disease of which we are aware. Not under normal circumstances, that is.”

The Secretary General leaned forward slightly, taking all this in. “And what would constitute abnormal circumstances?”

“Back in the final few years of the last century, the U.S. Government began work on a broad spectrum ‘super-vaccine.’ As part of this research, they developed something which came to be called ‘the Matrix.’ In a nutshell, the Matrix was a delivery system, capable of tailoring a vaccine to the exact genetic structure of the target. Unfortunately, it also allowed anything else to be tailored to the exact genetic structure of the target, such as deadly diseases. This project was kept top secret for fear that someone would attempt to use it to target particular individuals or even particular ethnic subgroups.

“When Godzilla appeared, the Matrix seemed to be the perfect weapon to use against him, especially since he seemed impervious to anything else the military tried against him. At great risk, and with some casualties, they were able to obtain a sample of Godzilla’s DNA and use the Matrix to tailor a particularly nasty and fast-acting strain of the ebola virus to use against him.

“You may remember hearing Gregor say something about Godzilla’s DNA being mutable. In fact, our tests have shown that Godzilla’s DNA is highly responsive to radiation. Whereas radiation destroys the DNA of every other creature we know of, in Godzilla it simply causes widespread change. This explains why Godzilla’s appearance has changed so dramatically over the years.

“Unfortunately, Godzilla was exposed to a sizeable dose of radiation between the time the DNA sample was obtained and the tailored virus was administered to him. The virus obviously had an effect on him, but our later studies have indicated that his DNA may have already been in a state of flux at the time. The virus would still have made him ill, but we strongly doubt that it would have killed him.”

The Secretary General was obviously perplexed. “But if that’s the case, if Godzilla is still around, where has he been? Why hasn’t he appeared in over fifteen years? Surely the danger is past now?”

Gregor took over the conversation again. “We have to look at the precedent, Mr. Secretary. The Japanese thought they had destroyed Godzilla when he first appeared almost seventy years ago. When he reappeared in the late 1990’s everyone was shocked! And then he wasn’t seen again for another five years or so. Although I am still not convinced that Godzilla is a terrestrial organism,

there are a number of species, including some reptiles, that are able to enter a state of deep hibernation. Unlike what bears do in the winter, this is a true suspension of all bodily functions and can last for years until environmental conditions improve. There's a very good chance, in my opinion, that Godzilla is just in a state of hibernation somewhere, perhaps recovering from the effects of the virus."

The Secretary general was still a little skeptical. "But you don't know for a fact that he's still alive, do you? Have you found where he is hibernating?"

Gregor shook his head no. "I have a pretty good idea where we could find him, but it makes no sense to look for him right now. Finding him would only tell us that we're doing the right thing, and not finding him would only tell us that we're probably looking in the wrong spot."

"O.K., I accept your argument. I assume that this sub-basement was built so that you would have a secure base of operations in the event that Godzilla returned and decided to attack New York this time?"

Kenny nodded in agreement. "Exactly."

"I'm still not sure I see the reason for all this secrecy, though."

Kenny was glad to get back to the text of his prepared speech. "Well, Mr. Secretary, there are two main reasons. First, as I already mentioned, we feel the public is better off not knowing that Godzilla could return. It would be akin to the fear and paranoia experienced during the Cold War, with everyone just waiting for the bombs to start dropping.

“Second, and perhaps more importantly, all of us here have sworn an oath of secrecy. This allows us to discuss amongst ourselves information which would otherwise be considered matters of national security. The Matrix project, for example. And the only way we can have complete freedom to discuss such information is if nobody else knows that we are discussing it.”

The Secretary General seemed satisfied with this argument, and Kenny breathed an inner sigh of relief. *So far, so good!*

The Secretary General leaned forward, put his elbows on the table in front of him and clasped his hands together. “I just have one question. What, exactly, have you come up with to defeat Godzilla if he *does* return?”

Chapter Four -- Theories and Prototypes

The mood in the room changed perceptibly. Whereas before the members of the committee had been bending over backwards to convince the Secretary General with how much they knew, now he detected a certain reticence on their part.

“You *have* come up with a way to defeat Godzilla, haven’t you?”

Kenny tried his best not to look sheepish. “Well, Mr. Secretary, we have a number of theories, and have even built some prototypes. We don’t have any definite solutions yet, however, mostly because we don’t actually have a test subject on which to try them out. We think we’re on the right track, though.”

“Would it be too much to ask for an example or two?”

“What? Oh, of course. Reggie, why don’t you talk about our weapon research.”

The retired Air Marshal sat up a little straighter in his chair, which was no mean feat considering just how comfortable deep the padded leather seats were. “Right. For a number of reasons, we are rather limited in the type of weapons we can use against Godzilla. Given his affinity for all things radioactive, nuclear weapons are pretty much right out. Perhaps a big enough blast would be more than he could handle, but it might also just make him that much bigger and stronger.

“Similarly, we’ve pretty much ruled out using biological agents again. We simply don’t understand Godzilla’s biological makeup well enough and, as has been pointed out, it tends to change when we least expect it. Rather unsporting, that.

“The problem with conventional weapons has always been that they don’t seem to actually *hurt* the big lug. Projectiles have the unfortunate tendency of, well, ‘bouncing off’ would be the best term, I suppose. Most of my research has been into the development of a special armor-piercing shell that would be able to get through Godzilla’s natural protection. ‘Get under his skin’ as it were.”

The Secretary General stared at Reggie intently. “And? Any luck?”

Reggie cleared his throat. “We think so, Mr. Secretary. Using a special Teflon-coated tip, together with a casing composed of spent uranium, we’ve come up with a shell capable of piercing a solid steel block 3 metres thick. These shells could be fired from a tank or even from an airplane.”

The Secretary General was clearly interested. “And what about the payload? Do you think conventional explosives would do any damage?”

Miyuki Oguri raised her hand for attention. The Secretary General had almost forgotten that she was in the room with them. “That would be where I come in, Mr. Secretary.”

“By all means, then, please elaborate.”

In a soft, yet clearly audible voice, Miyuki continued. “For a number of years now, scientists in my country have been working on microchip technology and its application in the field of biotechnology. Originally, the goal was to produce prosthetic limbs that could actually be integrated with an amputee’s nervous system. Part of the problem was figuring out how to read the correct

nerve impulses and have the new limb interpret them, and part of the problem was figuring out how to send feedback from the limb back to the brain.

“Solving this latter problem led to some unexpected results. It became possible to generate nerve impulses that could actually fool the brain into feeling what wasn’t really there. For example, a person’s brain could be fooled into thinking that he held an orange in his hand when his hand was really empty.

“It wasn’t long before it became obvious that it was not the artificial limb that was allowing this false feedback, but the microchip which controlled the limb. Thus, it became possible to implant the chip anywhere inside a person and have the ability to control what sensory input that person was receiving.

“At least one of our scientists thought it would be very profitable to sell this new technology to the video game industry. Can you imagine it -- complete virtual reality! Instead of just watching the game, you’d be *in* the game.”

“So, what stopped it from being sold?”

Miyuki lowered her head in shame. “Unfortunately, none of us had thought through all the ramifications of this new technology. The scientist in question decided to test it out on a number of live human subjects, unbeknownst to the rest of us. The technology did work, but it worked too well. The subjects were unable to distinguish ‘real’ reality from ‘virtual’ reality, and a number of deaths occurred, simply because their brains shut down after being convinced that they had received

mortal injuries. At that point, the government suppressed the technology to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands.”

“And you think this new microchip could be used against Godzilla?”

“Oh yes. Before the illicit human trials, we tried it out on a variety of different animals. Anything with a nervous system seemed to be equally affected. As long as Godzilla has a central nervous system, which he almost certainly does, the chip should be effective on him.”

The Secretary General clasped his hands together and tapped his index fingers against his lips a few times. After a moment, he looked at Dr. Fong. “So, you think that you can use one of these super armor-piercing shells of yours to implant this super microchip inside Godzilla, is that right?”

Kenny didn’t like the Secretary General’s tone of voice. “Yes, Sir”

“And that’s the best you’ve been able to come up with after 10 years?”

“Um, yes.”

The Secretary General stood up and stared down at the collective members of the United Nations Science Advisory Committee. “I will respect my predecessor’s wishes and allow this committee to remain as presently constituted, and I will further respect your wishes and keep this whole thing a secret. For now. In the mean time, I suggest we all just pray that Godzilla never reappears, because if he does we are all in a *hell* of a lot of trouble.” And with that, he turned around and walked out the door.

Kenny remained in his seat for a moment or two, too stunned to move. Then, he realized that the Secretary General would be unable to get into the elevator without him, and he ran out of the room after him.

Chapter Five -- Rock Hunting

Peter Murdock, Mining Engineer Second Class, could handle being cooped up in a cramped environmental suit for hours, sometimes even days, on end. He could handle the frequent periods of weightlessness. He could even handle living literally millions of miles away from civilization as he knew it.

It was the *smell* that was really getting to him. Nobody had ever told him that outer space smelled like a month-old gym sock.

Six months into his two-year tour of duty aboard the U.N. Mining Station, "Salvación," and Peter was really starting to wonder what the hell he was doing out here between Mars and Jupiter in the first place. Actually, he knew the reason -- he was an idiot.

With his qualifications he could have had his pick of assignments. His parents had urged him to sign up for a deep sea mining operation. Or, if he really had his heart set on going into space, why not the Moon? At least then he'd only be a day and a half away by shuttle and could visit once in a while.

But no, Peter had signed up to go to the asteroid belt. It had nothing to do with wanting to go into space, however. It was just the farthest away he could get from Earth. And Eileen. Peter had been numb for over a year after their divorce, and when the opportunity appeared to join up with the asteroid mining team he had jumped at the chance. Anything to put the memories behind him.

Oh, their marriage had started off all right. After their adventures together with Godzilla, they had become almost inseparable. They had dated each other exclusively for another three years before finally getting married at the tender age of eighteen. Their parents, of course, thought they were much too young to get married, but Peter had already been accepted to Texas A&M with a partial scholarship, and Eileen had agreed to go to work to support them.

Unfortunately, one thing became clear as the years had progressed -- if anybody should have been attending college, it was Eileen. As much as it pained Peter to admit it, even to himself, Eileen was just smarter than he was. A lot smarter. And, although Eileen always said that she didn't mind working, Peter knew that she felt unfulfilled. And then, when they discovered that they couldn't have children, an even greater void was created in Eileen's life.

When Peter finally graduated and got a job as a mining engineer with a Dallas company, Eileen decided it was her turn to go to school. Peter agreed that it would be a good idea, but he soon came to regret the decision. As Eileen took more and more classes, and started hanging out with a whole new group of well-educated friends, Peter began to feel like they had less and less in common with each other. He found himself getting more and more irritable at home, and even started drinking. When things finally came to a head, it was Eileen who ended up throwing him out of the house. Secretly, though, he was glad, because that way he could blame everything on her.

The sad part was that Peter still loved Eileen, and he suspected that the feeling was mutual. He was too proud to go back to her, though, and after a year she finally gave up and filed for a

divorce. Again, Peter was glad that she had taken that final step, and not him. Never mind that he had done everything in his power to push her to take that step.

Eighteen months and some 50 million miles later, Peter was finally starting to realize that he had made a really big mistake. *Maybe I can convince Lars to let me on the tugboat crew hauling the next asteroid back to Earth*, Peter thought. *I can take a little leave time and look up Eileen. If she isn't remarried by now, that is.*

At the moment, though, he was millions of miles away from home, in a dank, smelly space suit, sitting behind the controls of a dank, smelly space pod, about to land on an asteroid that was probably just as dank and smelly. *I hate my life!*

* * *

Twenty minutes later, Peter and the other half of his team, Ted McNealy, set down on a uniformly dull hunk of rock with the highly romantic name of "2011 BG". Peter figured that they had run out of interesting names like *Ceres* and *Hidalgo* years ago, so he always liked to give them his own private name. Usually, he named them according to some distinguishing feature. The last asteroid he had worked on, for example, he had called "Spot" because of the splotches of lighter material splattered around the surface. The one before that had been "Peanut," due to its uncanny resemblance to the legume of the same name.

This one, however, wasn't as easy. As far as Peter could make out, it didn't *have* any distinguishing features to speak of. Almost perfectly round, with no color variations, no large craters, no protuberances, nothing. It was almost as if someone had set out to create a perfectly ordinary, nondescript hunk of rock, and had done a very good job. In fact, it kind of reminded Peter of a fake "movie rock" a friend had shown him years ago. His friend, Ralph, had pretended to pick up the rock with great difficulty, and then had "accidentally" tripped and thrown it at Peter. Ralph had laughed uproariously when Peter had screamed, only to have the "rock" bounce off of him, light as a feather. Seems it was actually made of foam rubber.

All right, thought Peter, I hereby dub thee 'Ralph.' Let's just hope you're not made of foam rubber, though!

"Ralph" was only about two kilometers in diameter, so what little gravity it had was negligible; Peter and Ted didn't really "set down" on it so much as bump up against it. The trick was to not bump against it too hard so that you rebounded back the way you came. When Peter was first training it sometimes took him five or even six tries to get it right, but now he could do it in his sleep. Well, almost.

With Peter controlling the thrusters, they moved closer and closer to the asteroid. Two hundred meters. One hundred. Fifty. At the last moment, Peter had a horrible thought that maybe, somehow, this rock *was* made of foam rubber after all, and that Ted would start to laugh as they bounced off. In fact, now that he thought about it, Ted sort of resembled his old friend, Ralph.

Maybe this was all some sort of elaborate joke, although heaven only knows how anybody would have gotten a two kilometer chunk of foam rubber out here in the first place....

With a muffled *thunk* the pod came into contact with the asteroids surface. The pod rebounded slightly, but not nearly as much as Peter's overactive imagination had feared. At the sound of contact, Ted pressed the button which sent the two rocket grapples out from the bottom of the pod and into the rocky surface of the asteroid itself. The recoil caused the pod to "rise" a few meters from the surface, but Peter quickly compensated, and the pod gently settled back to the surface.

"Welcome to Ralph," Peter muttered under his breath.

"What was that," Ted asked?

"Nothing," Peter replied. "Let's get the magnetometer set up and find out whether we've earned our bonus."

"Works for me," said Ted.

Chapter Six -- A Rock Named "Ralph"

Peter and Ted's pod carried a lot of equipment for analyzing any particular asteroid, but most of it was only used if the magnetometer didn't indicate a rich find in the first place. They had a laser gas spectrometer to identify the elements making up the crust, but it was a very time consuming process and required samples from a number of points along the asteroid's surface and, if possible, from within it as well. Similarly, they had various seismographic instruments to determine the general composition of the asteroid, but this required setting off small charges on the opposite side of the asteroid and measuring the time required for the shock wave to pass through the center of the rock.

The magnetometer, though, could usually tell them right off the bat whether they had a winner or not. They were, after all, hunting for metals out here. Other substances, such as ice, could of course be used, but nothing was as profitable as good old solid metal. And profit was what it was all about out here. The U.N. might be funding this operation, but it certainly wasn't for the purpose of scientific research! Recycling could only do so much, and the Earth needed fresh supplies of raw metals to keep it's industries going. And a two kilometer chunk of metal would last quite a while....

The magnetometer was rather bulky, and having to wear pressurized environmental suits while carrying it didn't make things any easier. In this nominal gravity, the magnetometer wasn't heavy; it still had mass, though, and once set in motion was difficult to stop quickly. And, since it

cost more than either of their yearly salaries, Peter and Ted were very careful in handling it. Peter wished there was some way to store the stupid thing on the *outside* of the pod, so they wouldn't have to keep lugging it in and out, but he knew that would never work. One micro meteorite impact, and the magnetometer would be just so much useless slag. Of course, one micro meteorite impact wouldn't do *him* much good either, but Peter tried not to dwell too much on such thoughts.

The surface of "Ralph" was covered in a thin layer of fine dust, and Peter could almost imagine himself at the beach. Well, if the beach were cold, rocky and dark, that is. The surface was certainly solid enough, though, even if Peter was still unable to completely get the image of the foam rubber rock out of his mind.

Ted must have noticed that Peter was walking with a little more caution than usual. "What's the matter, Peter?" he asked over their suit radio. "Afraid something is gonna reach out and grab you? Hey -- watch out! Maybe Godzilla's hiding around here somewhere and he's gonna getcha!"

Peter had already endured six months of Godzilla jokes from Ted, and he would no doubt have to endure another eighteen months of it as well. He knew that the best thing was to simply ignore Ted, and not let him know how much it bugged him. Peter, though, didn't always do what he knew to be best. "No, Ted -- I thought I saw Godzilla behind that rock over there, but it was just your big, fat, ugly mother."

"My mother? Hey -- at least I know who *my* mother is!"

Peter had another repartee ready, but really just wasn't in the mood for this right now. To be honest, he *was* feeling a little spooked about this particular asteroid, but it had nothing to do with

Godzilla. "Just shut up, Ted, and let's set this hunk of junk down here, O.K.?" Ted accepted his victory gracefully; he grinned from ear to ear, but didn't say anything else. Together, they set the instrument down on a flat area that was relatively unmarked by impact craters.

Once the device was in place, Peter anchored it to the surface with high-impact plastic pegs. Metal pegs would have been preferable, of course, but those would have interfered with the operation of the magnetometer. When he was finished, he backed away and gave Ted a thumbs-up sign. Ted nodded and turned on the remote control unit he carried on his belt. Peter couldn't hear anything, of course, but he could swear he felt a slight vibration coming from the ground.

"Holy Spit!" shouted Ted. "I think we've hit the mother lode!"

Peter shuffle-walked over to Ted, being careful not to try running in the low gravity. He was tethered to the ship, but it was still embarrassing to have to be reeled in like a flounder. "What's up?" he asked as he shuffled. "What do we have?"

Ted was visibly excited. Peter was sure that if he were closer, he would be able to see little dollar signs dancing in Ted's eyes. "What do we have? I'll tell you what we have -- the richest metal deposit I've ever heard of, on the Earth or off! With the bonus I'm gonna get from this puppy I can retire!"

Peter had reached Ted by this time, and grabbed the remote from Ted's hand. He was sure Ted was either pulling his leg or simply incompetent, but there it was. All the meters were swung all the way over to the right, to the extreme end of the scale. "Mother lode" was right -- the magnetometer was picking up the magnetic signatures for a whole array of industrial-grade metals,

including iron, cobalt, nickel and copper. There were also indications of more exotic metals like iridium, vanadium and niobium. And just to make things extra interesting, there was the distinct signatures of gold and platinum!

Peter couldn't help letting out a *whoop*. He was really glad he hadn't mentioned his initial unease about the asteroid to Ted. And any lingering thoughts about fake foam rubber rocks were quickly replaced by little dancing dollar signs of his own. *This has got to be an omen*, thought Peter. *If I have to go crawling back to Eileen to beg her forgiveness, at least I'll do it as a rich man! Maybe I wasn't such an idiot to come out here after all!*

* * *

After radioing in their find to the "Salvación," Peter and Ted got to work placing the shaped nuclear charges along one side of the asteroid. Because of the asteroid's unusually high percentage of heavy metals, they used more than normal amount. The object, of course, was not to blow the asteroid up, but just to get it *moving*.

The energy that would be required for a tugboat to haul an asteroid this size from a dead stop all the way to near Earth orbit would cost more than the metal was worth. Low yield nukes, on the other hand, were practically a dime a dozen these days. When the world's nuclear arsenals had been dismantled in the late nineties and early zeros, the question had arisen what to do with all the warheads lying around. A warhead without a delivery system (*e.g.*, a missile) was pretty useless as a

weapon, but some bright soul had the idea of using them in space industry. Not only would they provide a cheap energy source, but who cared about fallout and nuclear winter in outer space?

At first, the warheads were ferried up to the new multinational space station, *Freedom*, and stored there. Some were then shipped to the Moon to help excavate for the planned lunar base. Why spend weeks digging a hole, the thinking went, when you could simply use a leftover nuke to make one in a matter of seconds?

The majority of the warheads, however, were sent out to the asteroid belt for mining purposes. The procedure itself was fairly straightforward. A few medium yield nukes would be attached to the target asteroid to get it moving. Then, a tugboat would steer it into a parking orbit between the Earth and the Moon. Finally, a single, larger, nuke would be used to slow the asteroid down.

All the arrangements had been made to send "Ralph" on it's way. Peter had gotten the O.K. from Lars, the station head, to pilot the tugboat back to Earth, and Ted had signed up to go along. Peter had been a bit irked at Ted's decision at first. *Just what I need*, he had thought. *Three straight months of Godzilla jokes!* His excitement about getting back to Earth, collecting his bonus and possibly seeing Eileen again, however, far outweighed whatever slight irritation he might have been feeling.

Based on Ralph's high content of heavy metals, Peter and Ted decided to use three twenty kiloton nukes, arranged one hundred meters apart in an equilateral triangle. After rigging the charges for remote detonation, they headed back to the tugboat and pulled back a respective

distance. They wouldn't actually attach the tow line until after the asteroid got underway; attaching the line beforehand would be far too dangerous. Instead, they would rendezvous with it within a couple of hours of its "launch". Because their tugboat was so much lighter than the asteroid, Peter and Ted would have plenty of time to catch up to Ralph before it got too far -- basic physics dictated that the lighter the object, the lesser the thrust required to accelerate it to the same speed as that of a heavier object.

Peter checked in with the *Salvación* and double-checked that everything was ready to go. Then, he and Ted checked their instruments and confirmed that Ralph was "pointed" in the right direction. A couple of degrees off in any direction, and the asteroid could miss Earth orbit by millions of miles. They carried spare nukes on board the tugboat for just such an eventuality, but each explosion would disintegrate a small chunk of the asteroid itself, and each chunk was money in the bank that wouldn't be there when they eventually made it to Earth. In addition, each additional nuke increased the slight, though not inconsequential, risk of total fragmentation. If that happened, they'd end up playing sheepdog to a flock of meteors and could kiss their bonuses a fond farewell.

"All set," said Peter, as much to Ted as to the listening ears aboard the *Salvación*. "On my mark. Three. Two. One. Mark!"

Ted had already keyed in the detonation code on the keypad in front of him. At Peter's signal, he pressed a big yellow button, on which some anonymous wag had painted a happy face. There was no sound to mark the triple explosion, and they were out of the path of the shockwave. The front viewport of the tugboat lit up brilliantly for a split second, though, before the piezoelectric

crystals built in darkened automatically to block out the terrible light. Peter and Ted both knew better to stare directly at the asteroid at the moment of detonation, but the brief flash was still enough to cause spots to appear in their peripheral vision.

When the viewport became transparent a moment later, Peter and Ted looked out to make sure that the asteroid hadn't received too much structural damage. Ted was the first to break the stunned silence that followed.

"Where the hell did it go?"

Chapter Seven -- Runaway Ralph

“Salvación, this is Tugboat 14. I repeat, this is Tugboat 14. We, uh, seem to have a problem here. I think we just blew up our asteroid.” Peter tried to keep the panic out of his voice, but he had a feeling it wasn’t working too well. A quick glance over at Ted told him that at least he wasn’t the only one crapping bricks here.

There was a 20 second pause while the station crew checked their own instruments. “Tugboat 14, this is the Salvación. Negative on that. I repeat, negative. We are tracking your rock on course.” The radio operator’s professional tone disappeared. “Holy crap, guys! That baby’s moving like a bat out of hell -- it’s going at least three times faster than it’s supposed to be. How many bombs did you two set off, anyway?”

Peter fiddled with the maneuvering thruster controls and swung the tug around in a short arc. After a few seconds, “Ralph” appeared in the viewport, receding at a rapid rate. A large jet of gas was streaming from the rear of the asteroid, adding to the thrust originally imparted by the nuclear warheads. As they watched, however, the stream of gas petered out and stopped. Still, the damage was done. Peter knew that the longer they waited, the harder it would be to catch up to their runaway rock, and he engaged the tug’s main thrusters at full burn.

“Salvación, this is Tugboat 14. We only put three nukes on the asteroid, as approved. There seemed to be some sort of outgassing from the asteroid, though.”

“We saw the outgassing, Tugboat 14, but unless that gas was pure rocket fuel it still shouldn’t be moving *that* fast. Are you two sure you read your magnetometer correctly? There’s no way that thing’s as heavy as your reports indicated.

Visions of foam rubber rocks were starting to dance in Peter’s mind again. *Get a grip!* “Salvación, I’m pursuing the asteroid at maximum thrust. Hopefully we can catch up to it before we run out of reaction mass, otherwise we’ll need a rescue team of our own.”

“Gotcha, Tugboat 14. Proceed with rendezvous as planned, and we’ll gas up a rescue pod just in case. Wait a minute -- hold on, Tugboat 14.”

Peter and Ted exchanged looks. *Now what?*

“Tugboat 14, Salvación here again. We’ve just calculated the asteroid’s revised trajectory based on it’s current speed. You’d just better hope and pray that you can catch up with it and redirect it.”

Peter *really* didn’t want to know the answer, but he went ahead and asked anyway. “Uh, why is that, Salvación?”

“Because right now there’s a mountain of rock two kilometers wide bearing down directly on Earth, fast enough to completely destroy all life as we know it. And I don’t think I need to tell you two that if that happens, you can both kiss your bonuses goodbye!”

Peter wasn’t sure whether the radio operator was trying to be funny, but he didn’t feel like laughing. Screw their bonuses -- what would Eileen think of him if he blew up the Earth?

* * *

“Are you *sure* we’ve got enough fuel for this?”

Ted’s whining was starting to get on Peter’s nerves. “For the fifth time, Ted, we’ve got enough fuel. We’ll be fine -- trust me.”

But Ted refused to be mollified. “Yeah, but the way you’ve got the pedal to the metal, we won’t have enough left to steer the stupid rock if we ever catch up to it.”

“*When* we catch up to it, Ted. *When*. And we won’t have to worry about steering it -- it’s already on course. And we’ve got plenty of extra nukes aboard to slow it down. We’ll be just fine, I promise.”

Peter wished he felt as confident as he sounded; in fact, he was terrified. He should have listened to his instincts and stayed the hell away from that God-forsaken chunk of rock in the first place. Unfortunately, in spite of what he kept telling Ted, it looked like it was going to take all there fuel to catch up to it. If they were lucky, that is. He checked the fuel gauge for the tenth time in as many minutes and did some quick calculations in his head. They were *definitely* going to be running on vapors toward the end.

The other thing Peter hadn’t bothered telling Ted was that he wasn’t saving any fuel for deceleration. Their only chance was to match speeds with the asteroid exactly and then dock. Too slow, and they’d never catch up to it; too fast, and they’d overshoot with no way of turning back.

The asteroid now filled the tug's viewport. Peter gave a few quick bursts on the thrusters, and it loomed closer yet. Each burst caused the fuel reserve needle to inch more and more into the red zone. *Just a little more. A little more....*

"Stand by on the grapples, Ted. We're only gonna get one shot at this."

What few features the asteroid had were now clear to the naked eye. A large crack had opened in the crust, near where the nuclear charges had been planted. Now that gas had stopped jetting out, the fissure was sharp as a knife blade. Given the shape of the asteroid in the first place, it now looked like a giant egg in the process of hatching. Ted's earlier comment about Godzilla forced its way back into his mind, and he had to block out the sudden image of a giant clawed hand reaching out of the crack to grab the tug.

Now came the difficult part. In order for Ted to employ the grapples, Peter had to swing the tug around so that the bottom was facing the asteroid. Normally, he would have simply swung the tug around and then hit the thrusters to slow it down. Now, however, he didn't have the fuel to spare. He would have to use the last of the fuel to turn the tug, and then hope that they weren't going too fast when they hit.

"Here we go -- stand by the grapples!" Peter pulled on the control stick and fired the maneuvering thrusters for the last time. For a split second, nothing happened, then the last dregs of fuel spit out of the jets and the tug slowly started rotating. Peter stole a quick glance at the proximity radar. "Fifty meters to contact. Thirty meters. Ten. On my mark. Three. Two. One. *Mark!*"

Peter felt the vibration of the grapples being deployed less than a second before the tug crunched against the surface of the asteroid. He and Ted lurched forward with the impact, pushing against their restraining belts. As the tug began rebounding away, a red light started flashing on the control panel in front of Ted. "We've lost the landing struts!" shouted Ted.

Peter wasn't concerned about the landing struts. "How about hull integrity? Any leaks?"

Before Ted could answer, the tug reached the end of the grapple ropes with a jerk and started falling back toward the asteroid. "Reel in the damn grapples," Peter yelled, "or we'll bounce around like a yo-yo until we're smashed to pieces!"

The tug hit the surface one more time, and then stopped. "Grapples secured," called out Ted. "Checking hull integrity now. No significant damage -- probably a couple of dents, but no leaks."

Terrific, thought Peter grimly. *We made it one piece. Now what the hell do we do?*

Chapter Eight -- Into the Rock

Peter sent Ted outside to check the damage to the landing struts while he radioed the Salvación. He explained that they had used up all their fuel reaching the asteroid and had none left to do any steering. Lars, the station head, told him to just sit tight while they checked in with Earth for further instructions.

Ten minutes later, Ted returned from outside. "I've got good news and bad news, Peter my friend."

My friend? Sheesh — the bad news must be pretty bad! "Lay it on me, Ted."

Ted removed his helmet and hung it up on the equipment rack as he spoke. "Well, the good news is that we're solidly anchored and don't have to worry about floating away. The bad news is that the struts are totally wrecked. This little tug's not gonna be docking with anything anytime soon; they'll need a grapple to haul us back inside."

"That's all right, Ted -- we wouldn't have enough fuel to dock anyway. It looks like we're gonna have to ride this rock all the way back to Earth and jump ship when we get there."

"Oh yeah, I forgot about that. Crap. What did the Salvación have to say?"

Peter shook his head. "Nothing yet. Lars is gonna check in with the folks at the U.N. and get back to us. In the mean time, though, I want to take a little look around outside myself. Especially that big crack we blew in the surface. Mind the radio, O.K.?"

Ted leaned back in his chair with his arms over his head and cracked his back. "Yeah, O.K. Just be careful out there, huh? I don't want to have to go fishing for you if you trip and float away."

"Don't worry, Ted. I'll wear a jet pack. I wouldn't want you to have to get out of your comfy seat."

Ted didn't bother answering. Peter put on his helmet, grabbed his jet pack and some additional gear, and headed toward the tug's small airlock.

* * *

Peter reached the edge of the crack ten minutes later. The sun was on the opposite side of the asteroid, and he paused to gaze at the stars for a few minutes. With his flashlight turned off, and with no atmosphere to refract the light from the tug parked 100 meters away, Peter had an almost perfect view. The sight always fascinated him. At first, it looked like a perfectly black piece of velvet studded with a million diamonds. Then, invariably, a little *gestalt* switch in his mind would flick, and the velvet curtain would recede into infinity. The feeling always left him feeling dizzy.

Peter took a deep breath and got back to the task at hand. First, he hammered a plastic piton into the rock near the crack's edge. Then, he attached one end of a long, thin nylon line that he carried on his belt. It would play out as he went along, and then automatically retract when he returned. The line wasn't so he could pull himself out of the crack -- it was simply a way to make

sure he could find his way back. In the essentially zero gravity, it was far too easy to get disoriented and lose one's sense of up and down, and this worked a lot better than a trail of bread crumbs.

Once the line was securely in place, Peter crawled head first over the edge of the crack. Even though the entire asteroid was only two kilometers in diameter, he couldn't shake the feeling that he was staring into a bottomless pit. Slowly, he pulled himself hand over hand deeper into the gaping maw. As he went, he shone the powerful beam of his flashlight into the emptiness in front of him.

After about a half hour of crawling, he thought he could see a light far in the distance in front of him. He switched off the flashlight and was immediately immersed in utter and complete blackness. He waited a few minutes for his eyes to adjust, but there was no sign of the light he thought he had seen. He turned the flashlight back on and shone it in front of him. Again, he thought he saw a light ahead of him. *Must be a reflection*, Peter thought. *Probably just some rock crystals.*

As he crawled along the edge of the fissure, the reflected light in front of Peter grew bigger and brighter. Suddenly, the rock in front of him dropped away. He pulled himself to the edge and waved his flashlight around. He had reached what appeared to be a large hollow space within the asteroid, although there was no way to tell whether the entire asteroid was hollow or whether this was just a pocket in the rock. Peter could still see the reflected light in front of him, but was unsure whether he really wanted to launch himself into empty space with nothing to hold onto.

"Hey, Peter -- you still there?"

In the tomblike silence, Ted's voice over the radio seemed deafening. Peter jerked with surprise, smashing his flashlight against the rock. There was no sound, but the light cut out, plunging Peter once again into total darkness. He reached out to steady himself against the rock, but was unable to find purchase. Obviously, he had manage to launch himself away from the wall, but he couldn't tell in what direction without the light. Fortunately, he had spare bulbs in the kit on his belt, but it was awkward work replacing the broken bulb in the dark while wearing a full environmental suit.

Peter tried to keep the annoyance out of his voice as he drifted. "Yeah, Ted, I'm still here. What's up?"

"You find anything interesting in there?"

"Well, I think I've figured out what went wrong -- the damn rock's hollow!"

"Yeah, well, that *would* explain why it was so much lighter than we thought, but are you sure?"

Peter had managed to get a spare bulb out of his kit, and was now struggling to get the flashlight apart without strewing bits and pieces of it all over the place. *Why these stupid suits don't just come with built-in lights is beyond me*, thought Peter in a fit of pique. *Noooooo -- that would be to easy!*

"Peter? You still there, dude?"

“What? Oh -- sorry, Ted. Um, yeah, I’m sure this thing’s hollow. I was just at the inner edge when you called. My flashlight, uh, went out, and I’m trying to put a new bulb in so I can see what’s around me.”

“Well, in any case, I just heard back from the Salvación. Earth is not happy with our little asteroid. We’ve been ordered to blow the whole thing out of the sky.”

Peter was flabbergasted. “Are they insane? Aside from the fact that this is a valuable hunk of metal, we’re not a demolition crew.”

“Hey, don’t yell at me -- I’m on your side. I said the same thing. They said the risk was too great if we weren’t able to slow this puppy down enough for orbital insertion. As for demolition, they said we don’t need to be experts; all we need to do is use all the nukes we’ve got on board and blow them at the same time. We should have more than enough to pulverize this chunk of rock.”

“What about *us*, Ted? Have you forgotten that we don’t have any fuel left to get away?”

“Hey -- give me *some* credit, O.K.? All we have to do is release the grapples and float away. Once we’re a safe distance, we detonate. Then we wait to be picked up. No problem.”

During this whole conversation, Peter continued to fiddle with his flashlight. Finally, he was able to get the replacement bulb into place, and the flashlight leapt back into life. Unfortunately, it was pointed directly into Peter’s face, and he was momentarily blinded. He blinked a bit until the spots went away, and then shone the light around to get his bearings. In front of him, far in the distance, he could see the inner wall of the chamber, and he could just barely make out the crack from which he had entered. He twisted around and shone the light behind him. Again, he was

dazzled -- this time by his flashlight beam reflecting off the immense mirrored sphere suspended in the middle of the chamber directly in front of him.

“Holy crap!”

Chapter Nine -- The Sphere

Normally, it was almost impossible to judge distance and size in space, given the lack of reference points. Peter could clearly see his reflection in the sphere in front of him, though, which allowed him to make a fairly accurate estimate as to its size. It looked to be well over three hundred meters in diameter, big enough to hold three football stadiums end to end. As he played his flashlight beam around, Peter saw that the sphere was suspended in the middle of the chamber by a series of thin metallic struts extending from the surface of the sphere to the inside rock of the asteroid. From this distance the struts looked like thin wire, but Peter was sure that they had to be pretty darn thick to support a sphere that size.

As Peter drifted slowly closer to the sphere, he noticed that his reflection was not completely smooth. The surface of the sphere was covered with small indentations of some sort, almost as if something had been engraved onto the sphere itself. Whatever it was, however, Peter couldn't make it out against the sphere's mirror finish.

Ted's voice broke Peter's reverie. "What happened, Peter? Are you O.K.?"

"Yeah, I'm O.K. You wouldn't believe what I'm looking at, though! Hell, let me turn my video camera on and you can see for yourself. Better record it -- I have a feeling the U.N. guys are gonna want to see this!" Peter opened a flap on his suit's sleeve and activated the small video unit mounted on the side of his helmet. Ted would now be able to see everything that he was seeing.

As Peter swung his head around to display the cavern's entire interior, a low whistle escaped Ted's lips. "Man oh man -- what the hell *is* that thing? You think it could be some natural formation?"

"With those support struts holding it in place? Yeah, right. Besides, I could swear that it has writing of some sort on it. I just can't make it out."

Peter was staring to get a little too close to the sphere, and he fired his jet pack briefly to slow himself down. He was now about fifteen meters from the surface, still drifting closer, but much more slowly now.

"Hey, Peter -- I just had a strange idea, but do me a favor, O.K.?"

"Sure, whatever you want."

"Switch your video feed to infrared."

Peter couldn't see the reason. "Why? Everything in here is probably as close to absolute zero as you're ever gonna get, and I can't see how there would be any temperature variations."

"Just humor me, O.K.?"

"Yeah, whatever." Peter pushed a button on his arm panel and switched his video camera to record infrared images. Then, he stared at the surface of the sphere and moved his head back and forth slowly. It looked just the same to Peter, of course. Ted, however, was seeing something very different, however, and this time it was his turn to shout. "Holy crap on a crutch!"

Peter stifled a giggle at the mental image Ted's expression conjured up. "Now what?"

Ted was obviously excited. "You were right about that being writing of some sort -- in infrared it's lit up like a Christmas tree! The whole thing is covered with these really weird characters, kind of like, you know, what the Egyptians carved all over the place."

"Hieroglyphics?" Peter offered.

"Yeah, that. The whole sphere is covered with them, and they're all glowing in infrared. Whoever built this thing must have had completely different vision than us."

"By 'us' do you mean 'us humans'?"

"Well, duh! This thing sure as hell wasn't built by Metalworker's Union Local 401. I think you've found yourself a genuine alien artifact there, Peter."

"Yeah, that's what I figured, but I didn't want to be the one to say it. I don't know what it's doing in the middle of an asteroid, but I have a feeling the folks at the U.N. *might* just decide to change their mind about blowing this hunk of rock up after all."

"Hell, yeah! I'd better transmit this recording to the Salvación right away. I just hope they don't think we made the whole thing up just to save our bonuses!"

Peter had finally drifted close enough to touch the surface of the sphere. Gingerly, carefully, he reached out and placed his fingertips against the smooth, glassy surface. Through the thick material of his gloves, he couldn't make out the texture, but he could swear he felt a minute vibration emanating from deep within the sphere. All the unease he had previously felt about the asteroid returned magnified ten-fold.

“Ted? I’ve seen enough in here. I’m gonna work my way back.” And with that, Peter reached above his head for the nylon line that connected him to the surface. At first, he couldn’t seem to find it, but after a panicked few seconds he grasped it in his gloved hand. He shone his flashlight along the rope and, after making sure that he had his bearings, fired his jet back to start him moving. He knew that it would have been more fuel efficient to simply push off the surface of the sphere with his feet, but Peter had no desire to come in contact with the sphere again, even through his boot’s heavy soles.

Without a glance back, Peter headed back up to the surface.

Chapter Ten -- Decisions, Decisions

In the weeks that had passed since their meeting with the Secretary General, everything had returned to normal for Kenny and the other members of his committee. Well, as normal as it ever got, considering that they spent most of their time discussing four hundred foot-tall radioactive lizards. The Secretary General had promised to keep their committee alive and to keep it under wraps, and Kenny hadn't heard from him since. *Which, Kenny thought, is probably a good thing, all in all.*

So, when he heard a light knock on his office door and opened it to discover the Secretary General standing in front of him, Kenny was rather surprised. And not a little apprehensive. Kenny recovered quickly, however, and invited the Secretary General into his office.

"Good afternoon, Dr. Fong. You know, I had a devil of a time finding your office. Still, I found it, and that's all that matters I suppose."

"Please sit down, Mr. Secretary. I admit this is quite a surprise -- I hope there isn't anything wrong?" Kenny tried not to let any sign of worry creep into his voice.

"Wrong? Oh, you mean with you and your committee. No nothing to do with that. You're secret's still safe with me."

Kenny tried to detect any hint of irony in the Secretary General's voice, but didn't find any. Still, he got the distinct impression that he was being mocked. "I'm glad to hear that, Sir. Still, I assume that this is not simply a social call?"

The Secretary General gave what was obviously supposed to be a disarming smile. "Well, I *was* going to ask how the wife and children were, but no, this isn't a social call. Actually, I thought I'd come by and see if you wanted something useful to do."

There it was again, that feeling of being mocked. Still no trace of sarcasm in the Secretary General's voice, however. "Useful, Mr. Secretary? How so?"

"Well, I assume you've heard about the discovery out in the asteroid belt?"

"If you're referring to the giant silver sphere they've found inside one of the asteroids, of course. It's been all over the news for a few days now."

"Yes. Quite. What *hasn't* been in the news, however, is the fact that the asteroid in question is currently bearing down on Earth on a direct collision course. I won't get into the details of how or why, but suffice it to say that mistakes were made, and we've got a problem on our hands. As I said, though, this has been kept strictly out of the news so as to avoid any unwarranted panic. The last thing we need is to have those damn protesters outside get wind of this!"

Kenny thought about pointing out the obvious parallel between this situation and his committee's desire for secrecy, but wisely decided that this wasn't the time. "So what is being done about the problem?"

“Well, the Asteroid Mining Committee has all sorts of contingency plans for this type of thing, and it was originally decided that it was best to simply blow the asteroid up long before it could ever get close enough to pose a threat. Now, however....”

Kenny picked up the thread of thought. “Now, they’ve discovered what could be the first sign of intelligent extraterrestrial life and they don’t want to blow it up after all.”

The Secretary General nodded in agreement. “Exactly. Remember all the excitement back in the Nineties, when they discovered what might *possibly* have been a five million year-old fossilized bacterium from Mars in a meteorite? Well, this is a lot more than a bacterium!”

“And you want us to figure out a way to bring the asteroid safely to Earth?” Kenny sounded a little puzzled.

“No, no -- the Mining Committee has already come up with a plan for that. Basically, a series of small nuclear charges, placed opposite to the direction of motion and detonated over a period of weeks, can be used to slow it down, and then one big charge at the end to bring it to a relative stop. The problem in the first place was that they didn’t know that the asteroid was hollow, so they used too much explosives to get the thing moving in the first place. Now, however, they have much better estimate as to the asteroid’s true mass, so this idea should work.”

Now Kenny really was puzzled. “And what would have us do then, Mr. Secretary?”

“Well, the Mining Committee is made up of some really competent people, but their expertise is all in physics and engineering. Nobody has an idea what to make of this giant sphere they’ve found, and they’re not even sure whether it is an alien artifact or not. After listening to Dr.

Simonovitch, I thought you people might have a little better insight into the subject, and I don't have time to assemble a special committee just to deal with this subject."

"So what is it, exactly, you want us to do, Mr. Secretary?"

"Basically, I want a recommendation from you. What are the odds that this sphere thing actually *is* a 'sign of intelligent extraterrestrial life'? Is it worth the risk of letting it get closer to the Earth? Aside from the obvious danger of collision, are there any other risks we should worry about?"

The Secretary General placed the briefcase he had been carrying on the desk in front of Kenny. "All the information we currently have is in here, including copies of the video transmissions and transcripts."

"I see. And when do you want this recommendation?"

The Secretary General stood up and started walking toward the door. "Tomorrow morning should be soon enough." And, without bothering to say goodbye, he left, closing the door gently behind him.

* * *

Approximately eighteen hours later, a slightly disheveled Dr. Fong Yui Moon ("Kenny" to his friends) sat in the Secretary General's office. He had dark circles under his eyes, and his shirt looked like it had been slept in. Which was odd, since he hadn't actually slept at all last night.

The Secretary General, on the other hand, looked fully rested. “Dr. Fong! Madre de Diós, but you look like Hell! Can I get you a cup of coffee?”

Some little part deep inside Kenny was saying *I’ll get you for this!* Outwardly, though, he remained as calm and composed as ever. “No, thank you, Mr. Secretary. I think I’ve had enough caffeine to last me a year or two already. I’ve got the recommendation you wanted.”

“Splendid. Let me hear it.”

“Well, the short answer is that we think that the asteroid should be brought closer to Earth for study. Do you want to hear our reasons?”

“But, of course!”

Kenny consulted his notes before continuing. “In the first, and most important, place, we are convinced that the object in question is indeed the product of alien intelligence. Although a spherical shape is very common in nature, especially in space, this sphere seems to be too perfect to have formed through natural process. Theoretically, a sphere of solid neutronium, as one might find at the heart of a neutron star, might appear like this, but it would be fantastically massive. A million nuclear warheads wouldn’t have been able to move it.

“Also, there is the matter of the support struts, or cables, which seem to be holding the sphere in place directly in the center of the asteroid. No known natural phenomenon could account for that.

“Finally, there is the matter of the characters etched into the surface of the sphere itself. It’s pretty clear that it *is* writing of some sort, but it’s also clear that it bears no relation to any earthly alphabet and also that it was not intended to be read by human eyes.”

Kenny paused while the Secretary General absorbed this information. “O.K., so it’s definitely alien. What about the risks involved?”

“Well, we have to assume that the members of the Asteroid Mining Committee know what their talking about with regard to slowing the asteroid down before it reaches the Earth. If they say a collision can be averted, then we’ll have to take their word for it. As for other risks, we’ve identified two possibilities — biological and cultural.

“First, biological. There is a small, but not wholly inconsequential, risk of contamination. Assuming this sphere *is* the product of alien intelligence, presumably it carries the risk of infection from some alien disease. Gregor assures us, however, that the risk is really minimal, and can be avoided entirely with proper quarantine procedures.”

“How can he be so sure?”

Kenny consulted his notes again. “Um, well, first of all, the very fact that it *is* alien means that any germs it might carry probably evolved in a completely different environment, and therefore would not be adapted to Earth life. Remember that old movie, *War of the Worlds*?”

“The one where the Martians died out after being exposed to Earth germs?”

“Right. Complete nonsense, according to Gregor. Anyway, the second reason is simply that the sphere is in outer space, and it’s very unlikely that any germs on it could somehow travel down to Earth. That’s where the quarantine procedures come into the picture.”

“I see. What about the cultural risks you mentioned?”

“Well, Mr. Secretary, history has shown time and again that when a less advanced culture comes into contact with a more advanced one, the less advanced culture suffers, often dramatically. Just think of the American Indians and what happened after the Europeans arrived. And the very existence of this sphere indicates a culture more advanced than ours, although it’s hard to tell just how much farther it is. Or was.”

“Was?”

“Yes, Mr. Secretary, *was*. Which is the reason that we don’t feel that there that the cultural risk is that great. All the evidence we have indicates that the sphere was placed within that asteroid along time ago. Hundreds of thousands of years. Perhaps even millions. Even if the civilization that created that sphere were significantly more advanced than us, odds are they disappeared long before our ancestors came down out of the trees.”

“Speak for yourself, Dr. Fong. *My* ancestors were farmers.”

“Excuse me?”

“Nothing, just a small joke. Please continue.”

“That’s about it, actually. We feel that there is far more to be learned from studying this artifact than would be gained by blowing it up.”

“I’m glad you feel that way, Dr. Fong, because I happen to agree with you. In fact, I sent the word out yesterday evening to begin the braking procedure.”

“Yesterday evening? Then why did you want a recommendation from me this morning?”

“Oh, I just like to know that I’m right.”

Kenny said nothing, although that little part deep inside of him had another comment to make: *Grrrrrrr!*

Chapter Eleven --Heading to Earth

Two months had passed. Two *long* months. Two months of utter boredom, punctuated by brief periods of sheer terror, as Peter and Ted detonated one nuke after another in an effort to slow down their runaway asteroid. They didn't have the fuel to jet away and watch from a safe distance each time; instead, they had to strap down and ride it through.

The powers that be had deemed it too risky to wait until they entered near Earth orbit and then set off one large explosion. Not from any fear for the Earth's safety of course -- they just didn't want to risk damaging the asteroid and the artifact contained within. Instead, Peter and Ted had been instructed to set off a series of low yield nukes, one every two weeks.

Peter and Ted had soon realized that there's no such thing as a "small" nuclear explosion. They ranged from "incredibly huge" to "absolutely, unbelievably, immensely huge," and even one on the bottom of that scale were far too large for comfort. Especially when you were in a fragile space tug anchored less than two kilometers away!

The first three explosions had gone off without incident. The only apparent damage had been to Peter and Ted's increasingly frayed nerves. The entire tug had vibrated like a giant bell, and the asteroid itself seemed to shudder each time, but everything had returned to normal as soon as the shockwaves had died out.

This last explosion, though, had been different -- the shock waves had lasted much longer, and the vibrations had been more intense. Fearing for the safety of their prize, the U.N. Asteroid Mining Committee had ordered Peter to crawl back inside the crevice formed by the initial explosion and make sure the sphere was still intact. Peter had no desire to return to that stygian pit, but he wasn't about to admit that anywhere where Ted could overhear, and there wasn't much hope of privacy in their little tug.

Donning his gear, and this time carrying *two* flashlights, Peter had retraced his steps. His first glance had indicated no change in the sphere, but on closer inspection he noticed that the sphere had indeed changed position slightly. In fact, one of the support struts, which seemed to be made of the same material as the sphere itself, had completely given way. In the near absolute zero temperature inside the asteroid, the strut had shattered like glass, and pieces of varying sizes were floating around the inner chamber. Peter grabbed a six inch-long fragment as it drifted by and stuffed it inside his tool kit as a souvenir.

The rest of the struts appeared intact, though, and there seemed to be more than enough to hold the sphere in place. Still, Peter thought, it was a good thing that they were only going to be setting off one more explosion. Two more weeks, and they'd be home free!

* * *

Peter finished strapping himself in and glanced over at Ted. Even through the helmet, Ted was looking a little haggard. Peter thought of making a witty comment, but figured he looked just as bad. If not worse.

“Space Station Freedom, this is U.N. Mining Tug #14. Have you got us on your scopes?”

The reply from the orbital station was almost instantaneous — a welcome change from the minutes-long delays they had endured when they first left the asteroid belt. Even traveling at the speed of light, radio waves took time to travel millions of miles through space.

“We have you, Tug #14, five and five. You are on course for final orbital insertion. Prepare to detonate on our mark.”

“Roger, Freedom. Waiting for your mark.”

Peter couldn't believe they were almost done. Only the thought of looking up Eileen and possibly getting back together with her had kept him going. Well, that and the promise of a huge bonus. In addition to the standard metals bonus for the asteroid itself, they were sure to get even more for being the first people to find an alien artifact. And of course, there would be the television interviews, the magazine articles, the talk-show appearances....

The voice from the space station interrupted Peter's reverie. “Detonation in Five. Four. Three. Two. One. *Mark.*”

Ted pushed the large yellow button in front of him, and he and Peter braced themselves for the shockwave. The nuke had been placed on the opposite side of the asteroid from where they were anchored, so there was no visible flash. It was only a matter of seconds, however, before the

shockwave reached them. It started small, and then began to build, growing and stronger with every passing second. The shockwave was not uniform this time, though. Every couple of seconds there was an extra lurch. Almost as if something were rattling around inside the asteroid....

Suddenly, the entire tug lurched violently to the side. Peter turned his head and glanced out the viewport. His eyes opened in a combination of surprise and alarm as he saw the crevice in the rock's surface less than one hundred meters distant. At first, Peter thought the crevice was simply growing larger. With a shock he realized that the asteroid itself was splitting apart like a giant egg. Bits and pieces of metal were starting to float out of the widening crack as it split further and further apart. Peter had time for one quick thought — *oh crap, we lost the sphere* — before all rational thought was blotted out by a sight so incredible, so unbelievable, that he could only pray that he was having a stress-induced hallucination.

As Peter watched in horror, an immense clawed hand, twice the size of the space tug, slowly began rising from the lip of the crevice.

Chapter Twelve -- Emergence

Ever since news of the sphere's discovery had been made public, it had been on everyone's mind. And, unlike other major news events, the excitement and interest had continued to build over the weeks as the asteroid drew closer and closer to Earth. It had remained the number one news story all over the world, eclipsing wars, national elections, and even natural disasters and other calamities. CNN had even won a cable ACE award for the special theme song they used for continuing coverage.

Prominent scientists wrote article after article about the subject, and less prominent scientists gained overnight -- if fleeting -- fame by appearing on television talk shows and Internet chat rooms. World religious leaders debated back and forth as to the significance, if any, of the mysterious object, and a whole slew of new religions popped up overnight entirely devoted to the sphere and the alien intelligences that had built it. Equally vociferous, of course, were the groups denouncing the whole thing as a giant hoax, straight out of an old science fiction movie.

So it was that a significant portion of the Earth's population was glued to their T.V. sets as the asteroid finally reached near earth orbit. Live footage from the U.N. space station *Freedom* was broadcast on every channel, from ABC to the Zoo Channel. The SCI-FI Channel had, of course, already converted to 24-hour coverage of the event.

Kenny and Julie Fong were no exception, and they watched the proceedings on the beat-up wall-mounted digital HDTV set in their living room. Kenny had long wanted to splurge and get one of the newer hi-res 3D sets, but the money just wasn't there. Saving the world was good work if you could get it, he often thought, but it didn't really pay all that much. Oh well, at least they had been able to afford a flat wall-mounted unit which, at 60 inches across, was *almost* like being there.

Kenny put his arm around his wife and drew her closer. He was still a little apprehensive about the possibility of something going wrong with the insertion procedure, but so far everything had gone off with out a hitch. He had stayed in constant touch with the members of the Asteroid Mining Committee and had followed the braking procedures very closely.

The video feed from the space station was now showing the final detonation, carefully dampened down to avoid the embarrassment of blinding the viewing audience. Kenny had never seen a nuclear explosion in outer space, and hadn't known exactly what to expect. Certainly not a mushroom cloud. Still, he was a bit disappointed when the explosion consisted of a brief flash of light and nothing else. Any flame was almost immediately extinguished by the complete lack of oxygen, and there was no atmosphere to convert the explosion's shockwaves into the roiling clouds associated with terrestrial explosions.

Kenny turned to his wife and started telling her how disappointing the explosion had been, when he noticed a strange expression on her face -- a combination of shock, surprise, and sheer terror. For a moment, Kenny was afraid that she was having a heart attack or a stroke, but quickly realized that she was reacting to something she was seeing on the T.V. A quick apocalyptic vision

of the asteroid plunging to earth flashed through his mind as his swung his head back around to the T.V. Nothing had prepared him for the sight displayed there, though.

The asteroid itself seemed to be splitting in half from the rear, the two hemispheres slowly spreading toward the camera. That wasn't the horrifying part, though. As the camera zoomed in, something could be seen crawling out of the asteroid and scabbling over the split rock. Something immensely, impossibly huge. As Kenny and Julie watched in stunned silence, a huge, golden-scaled, appendage appeared. At first, Kenny thought it was an arm, but he soon saw that it was a massive claw attached to a membrane of some sort. No, not just a membrane -- a wing. A giant bat's wing! Another claw soon appeared, attached to the another giant membranous wing.

And then, horror of horror, the heads appeared. Not just one, not just two, but *three* nightmarish heads, unlike anything Kenny had ever seen. Vaguely reptilian, each head had a series of spines or spikes flaring out behind it like a fan, and each was covered with the same scales as the wings.

Time seemed to slow to a crawl, but it was only a matter of seconds before the hideous creature was fully revealed. First, a stout body, supported by two stubby legs. Then, two long tails, ending in spiked clubs. And, all over, a shimmering wash of scales glowing golden in the reflected sunlight. As Kenny, Julie, and billions of other helpless people watched, the huge wings slowly unfurled and turned toward the sun like giant radar dishes. The three heads began moving independently of each other, almost as if they were wholly separate creatures.

And then, without warning, the unthinkable happened. Huge, mile-long bolts of energy shot from the creature's multiple jaws, giant lightning bolts which extended hundreds of miles toward the earth. The T.V. screen soon became filled with the image of many small explosions in earth's upper atmosphere, as satellite after satellite was struck by the hideous streams of electricity and exploded. Even in the silence of space the apparent destruction was staggering and it overwhelmed the senses.

One of the monster's heads turned directly toward the camera, which zoomed in for an extreme close-up. Kenny had a quick glimpse of cold, red, soulless eyes set close together, and an expression of utter malevolence. Then, a brief flash of light, and the image on the T.V. dissolved into a sea of static.

Kenny turned, shaking, to his wife. Julie was pale as a ghost, and uttered a single word before passing out.

"Ghidorah"

Chapter Thirteen -- Myths and Legends

Kenny rushed into the kitchen and brought back a glass of water. He didn't actually know what you were supposed to do if somebody fainted, but he thought he had seen this in a movie somewhere. He dipped his fingers into the glass and then shook them in front of his wife's face, gently splashing her with water. When that had no effect, he poured some water into the palm of his hand and gently put his hand on her forehead.

After a few seconds, Julie groaned and opened her eyes to see her loving husband staring down at her with a worried expression on his face. "What happened, dear?"

Kenny breathed a sigh of relief. "You fainted, I think. You had me worried there for a minute."

Julie sat up and glanced over at the television, which was still just showing static. "Was that for real? Did I really just see that, or was I just imagining it?"

Kenny put his hand over his wife's and squeezed gently. "I don't know if it's for real or not, but you weren't imagining it. Maybe it's just a hoax or something."

Julie shook her head. "No -- that was too real, too horrible to be a hoax. I've never seen anything so *evil*." She gave a little involuntary shudder as she said this.

Kenny gave her a little hug to reassure her, although he wondered who was going to reassure *him*. When his wife seemed calm enough, he asked the question that had been preying on his mind

the last few minutes. "Honey, you said something just before you passed out. A name, I think. Do you remember?"

She looked at him with a hollow look in her eyes. "Ghidorah."

Kenny did not like the expression on her face, but decided to continue anyway. "Yes, that was it. What does it mean?"

Instead of answering the question, Julie responded with a question of her own. "What do you know about Japanese mythology?"

Kenny was puzzled. "You mean like gods and legends and stuff like that?"

Julie gave a sad smile. "Yeah. Stuff like that."

"Um, not much, really. Isn't the emperor supposed to be descended from the sun god or something?"

"Sun *goddess*, actually. Her name was Amaterasu. There's an ancient legend about her and her brother, Susanowo. He was the storm god, and was very devoted to his sister. Something happened to him, though, and he started going on a rampage. He destroyed rice-fields, uprooted trees, and tore down sacred buildings. He even ripped the roof of his sister's weaving hall, frightened her ladies to death, and drove Amaterasu herself into hiding in a cave. He then sealed her into the cave, which plunged the world into darkness. This allowed wild spirits free reign over the face of the earth, and an orgy of destruction ensued.

"Amaterasu had the power to leave the cave, but was too frightened to come out. The other gods got together to figure out a way to lure her out. They tried many different things, but to no

avail. Finally, they enlisted the help of a dancer and got her to perform outside the cave. The dancer, Uzume, was so entertaining that the gods present laughed until the heavens themselves shook with their laughter.

“Amaterasu was so surprised to hear the laughter that she stuck her head out of the cave. How, she asked, could they possibly be laughing when her brother was causing such great destruction and misery? Uzume replied that they were happy because there was a new goddess in heaven, even more beautiful than Amaterasu herself. Amaterasu was so intrigued that she came out of her prison a little bit more to see this new God. All she saw, though, was a mirror which the wily gods had placed in front of her. She was so captivated by the images she saw, that the other gods were able to pull her entirely free of the cave and seal it behind her.”

Kenny was completely captivated by this tale. “And what happened to her brother, the storm god?”

“Well, this version of the legend doesn’t say. My grandmother, though, told me a different version that she learned from *her* grandmother. In that version, it wasn’t her brother who went on a rampage, but an evil golden dragon. He loved Amaterasu, but his love was not returned, and he flew into a jealous rage whenever he saw her. His name meant ‘Destroyer of Worlds’, and Amaterasu hid in the cave not out of fear, but to protect the world from his wrath.

“The other gods pleaded with her to come out of the cave, because the world was now plunged into darkness. In this version of the legend, though, it was Amaterasu herself that thought of using a mirror to defeat the dragon. He was so captivated by his appearance that Amaterasu was

able to actually trap him inside the mirror, where he would only be able to see himself for the rest of all time. Amaterasu and the other gods then banished him to the uttermost regions of the heavens.”

Kenny felt a shiver run up and down his spine as he listened to his wife’s story. “And this dragon, this ‘Destroyer of Worlds’ --”

“His name was Ghidorah, yes.”

“But surely, this is just a coincidence. I mean, it’s just a myth, right?”

The hollow look had returned to Julie’s eyes. “Did I mention that he had three heads?”

Chapter Fourteen -- Ringside Seats

Amid all the horror and destruction, one thought kept returning unbidden to Peter's mind: *Not again! I mean, the odds of running into one giant monster in my lifetime were pretty astronomical to begin with, but two? Give me a break!*

Peter had watched with a morbid fascination as the monstrous creature had crawled out of the asteroid, like some hideous winged demon hatching from an egg. *Actually*, he thought, thinking back on it, *that's not a bad analogy -- as far as I know, it IS a demon from Hell!* He had cringed as the beast had stepped over the space tug where it lay anchored, and he and Ted got an extreme close-up look at one immense, scaly foot as it passed by. Peter heard Ted muttering something, and he glanced over to see Ted repeatedly crossing himself. Peter had never thought of Ted as being particularly religious, but he remembered the old saying about there being no atheists in foxholes. *Come to think of it*, Peter thought, *a little praying probably wouldn't hurt me any, either.*

Nothing they had witnessed so far, however, could have prepared Peter and Ted for what had happened next. They had an unobstructed view -- ringside seats, as it were -- as the creature, the *thing*, spread its wings and started firing off blast after blast of lightning toward the earth. In spite of his previous first hand experience with Godzilla all those years ago, Peter still couldn't believe that what he was seeing could possibly be real. *Nothing shoots lightning bolts out of its mouth -- that's just plain impossible! And out of three mouths? Come on!*

And yet, the evidence of his senses was undeniable. It was there, and it was hurling bolts of pure electrical energy crackling in all directions. And the *size* of those bolts! They must be traveling hundreds of miles!

Whether the beast was seeking out particular targets, or whether the electricity was simply drawn to anything metal, Peter couldn't be sure, but the end result was the same. As the half of the asteroid they were anchored to continued its stately tumble high above the Earth, Peter and Ted had a panoramic view of the destruction caused by the bolts of energy. The sky above the Earth was aglow with myriad small explosions as one satellite after another was annihilated. Larger explosions indicated the death of several orbital platforms in polar orbit.

The sheer scope of the destruction was appalling, and Peter knew that the orbital platforms had been manned. For a brief moment, he was able to forget his own predicament and grieve for the loss of life involved. A much larger explosion close by, however, shook him out of his reverie and brought things back down to a more personal scale. With a sense of dread, he turned his head to look at the UN Space Station Freedom, which had been guiding them into orbit. At least he *tried* to look -- all that was left was a rapidly dissipating cloud of metal and gas. Fortunately for Peter and Ted, before any shrapnel or debris could strike the tug, their half of the asteroid had rotated enough to protect them. This time, Peter's thoughts were not with the station crew that had just lost their lives. Instead, his only thought was *how the hell are we gonna get home now?*

And then, the truly unthinkable happened. Somehow able to navigate in the vacuum and weightlessness of space -- defying all natural laws in the process -- the giant, three-headed

monstrosity spread its golden bat-like wings even farther apart and began diving toward the Earth itself. A minute ago, Peter had been worried about getting home. Now, however, he was worried that they might not even have a home to return to!

* * *

Hundreds of miles below, the majority of Earth's inhabitants waited in stunned apprehension. The events portrayed over the vid net seemed too grotesque to believe, but who could possibly gain by pulling off such a hoax? And surely, if it *had* been a hoax of some sort, some official statement would have been made after the video feed had been lost. Instead, however, the entire vid net, all television channels, had been reduced to static. Had the space station been destroyed? Or had the video cut off for some other reason? And what about the creature itself?

The answer was not long in coming, at least not for the resident's of Toronto, Canada. Perhaps the space monster was drawn by the presence of the CN Tower which, standing 1,815 feet tall, was the second tallest freestanding structure in the world (only the new Sky One tower, built three years ago, was taller, but that was down in Argentina half a world away). Or perhaps Toronto was just unlucky. Whatever the reason, though, the great winged beast plummeted from orbit like a gold brick directly toward the bustling city. With no warning, few people noticed its approach. Even in broad daylight, people were more focused on where they were headed than what was up in the sky. Air traffic controllers had the first inkling of trouble, but even they had little time to prepare.

The images from space had shown the monster's hideous visage, but it had not prepared the hapless populace for the sound which emitted out of the monster's triple mouths as it descended on the city. An undulating, pulsating screech which grated on the mind like a rusty pin drawn across a blackboard. The audio equivalent of biting into a piece of tin-foil with a filling. All that, and pitched at a frequency which shattered skyscraper windows throughout the downtown area.

And then, as if the sound had been a signal, the lightning began. Bolt after bolt struck the CN Tower, which erupted in a shower of sparks. With a hideous sound of tortured metal, the Tower broke in half and crashed to the busy streets below, taking out a couple of smaller buildings in the process.

That was only the beginning, though. With each beat of its mighty wings sending cars tumbling and blowing pedestrians like leaves in a tornado, the monster hovered over the city casting bursts of energy in every direction. Within minutes, the entire financial district lay in smoking ruins. The Toronto Eaton Centre was converted to a heap of rubble. The crowd at the SkyDome watching the Toronto Blue Jays decimate the Boston Red Sox were the only ones in the entire city not to notice what was going on, until the dome itself crashed down on top of them. Thirty thousand people were killed within seconds.

The monster's attack lasted less than five minutes. The destruction was nearly absolute, though. Downtown Toronto no longer existed; in its place was a funeral pyre of metal and concrete covering more bodies than would ever be recovered. With a shriek that would have been ear-

splitting had anyone been left alive to hear it, the creature flew off toward the horizon, gaining speed until it was only a small speck. And then it was gone.

Most of the world was still blissfully ignorant, but the word would soon spread -- Ghidorah had arrived.

Chapter Fifteen -- Letting the Cat Out of the Bag

Kenny supposed he should take some satisfaction in seeing the Secretary General looking haggard and disheveled for once. For that matter, now that the continued existence of their committee was apparently justified, he supposed he should have an urge to say "I told you so." The terrible news the Secretary General had just imparted to the entire committee, however, drove such petty thoughts from his mind.

"The entire city, Mr. Secretary? Is such a thing possible?"

The Secretary General was obviously having a bad day. It was one thing to oversee sending peacekeeping troops into a war-torn republic or arrange a blockade of a small, oil-rich nation which refused to abide by U.N. resolutions. Dealing with alien monsters bent on total world destruction, on the other hand, was way out of his league. Hence his visit to Dr. Fong and his Godzilla committee. When he spoke, it was with a very uncharacteristic tremor in his voice. "Possible? Who the hell knows? It happened, though! The entire city of Toronto destroyed in a matter of minutes, wiped right off the map. I doubt a nuclear explosion could have done the job more thoroughly."

When the Secretary General had called Kenny at home, telling him to get his committee together for an emergency meeting, Kenny had assumed that it would be to discuss the events in outer space. Something in the Secretary General's voice, however, had set off a warning bell in Kenny's mind. Although there had been no mention that the creature had come to earth, Kenny had

instructed the committee members to bring their immediate families with them down to the underground command center. They were all settling into the dormitories, Julie included. Kenny had extended an offer to the Secretary General to bring his own family down, but he simply said that other arrangements had already been made. The Secretary General himself, however, had agreed to join them, at least for the time being.

Gregor Simonovitch asked the obvious question. "Do we know where the creature is now, which way he is heading?"

The Secretary General shook his head. "We've had intermittent reports from various ground-based radar stations, but nothing definite. With most of our satellites gone, long distance communication is almost impossible. There are still some land lines left over from the pre-conversion days, but they aren't reliable and can't reach everyone."

This time it was Dr. Bouromphongsa's turn. "And the military? It is doing something, surely?"

"We've sent out an alert as much as possible, and hopefully each nation is on full alert. With communications being what they are, however, it's difficult to be sure who has gotten the word. Obviously the U.S. and Canadian forces have been mobilized, but that won't help if the creature starts attacking China or the N.S.P.R."

Gregor paled a bit at the thought of his homeland bearing the brunt of an attack such as the one which destroyed Toronto. His national pride told him that his country would be able to fend off the monster, but his intelligence feared for the worst. "What are we to do, then?"

“Aside from praying? I was hoping you could tell me.” The Secretary General let that sink in for a moment before he continued. “I realize that I may have been a bit abrupt with all of you the last time we met, and for that I apologize. To be honest, I still have trouble believing that Godzilla could possibly come back to life. The fact remains, though, that you are probably the best-equipped people in the world to deal with this situation. Assuming anyone could be said to be equipped for a situation like this, that is.

“For this reason, I have decided to make the existence of this committee public knowledge as of this instant. Instead of causing panic, I hope this will engender hope. This means that you will have the resources of the entire U.N. at your disposal, as well as any member nation we are able to contact. The ball is in your court, gentlemen -- it’s up to you to save our planet.”

Nothing like a little pressure, thought Kenny wryly. “We’ll do our best Mr. Secretary.” And inwardly, *I just hope our best is good enough.*

* * *

“Alpha Leader to Base. We have target in sight, traveling southwest at approximately Mach 2. Preparing to engage.”

Captain Randolph “Buzz Cut” Brunascetti and the rest of his elite fighter squadron were currently flying less than one thousand feet above the Michigan countryside. At a little over Mach 2, they were traveling in excess of 1500 mph. Under normal circumstances they would never

fly this low at such a speed; even now, the sonic boom caused by their passage was shattering windows in the buildings below them.

Nothing was normal about these circumstances, however. Ground radar had picked up the intruder crossing into U.S. air space less than twenty minutes ago, and Captain Brunascetti and his team had been scrambled to intercept. They had all seen the video footage from the Freedom space station, but most had dismissed it as a hoax of some sort. That "hoax," however, was now directly in front of Captain Brunascetti. Looking at the creature, Captain Brunascetti couldn't understand how it could fly in the first place, let alone travel at supersonic velocities.

The monster was now passing over a sleepy little town called Stevensville. It was sparsely populated -- probably no more than one or two thousand people. There were no skyscrapers, no monuments -- no tall structures of any kind. As the monster passed over the town, though, it emitted a trio of white-hot bolts of pure energy which struck in the center of the town. The sheer force of the triple blast caused a huge fireball to erupt into the sky, leaving a crater over half a mile in diameter. Stevensville had been erased as surely as if it had never existed in the first place.

Captain Brunascetti watched in stunned disbelief at the callous atrocity, the senseless destruction, he had just witnessed. Then, with a bitter edge to his voice, he called out to the other members of his squad. "Alpha Squadron, this is Alpha Leader. Wide formation attack on my signal. Go!"

On either side of him Alpha Squadron fanned out and took up attack positions. The five of them were flying the latest model stealth attack fighters, equipped with state-of-the-art computer

technology. Unlike previous models, these new fighters didn't have to sacrifice speed and maneuverability to achieve near invisibility. Onboard gigahertz processors translated the slightest movements of the pilot's control web into the airplanes highly complex navigation system, making it seem almost like the airplane was able to read the pilot's mind. The plane thus became an extension of the pilot himself. The control web also served as a gravity net, cushioning the pilot from the extreme G-forces cause by high speed maneuvers, thereby allowing the pilot to withstand sharp turns at over Mach 5.

In front of them the giant creature loomed closer and closer. Captain Brunascetti attempted to lock his weapons on the target, but something was interfering with his targeting system. In fact, the closer he got, the less steady his command over the fighter jet became. Something was definitely wrong here! "Alpha Squadron, I'm picking up some sort of interference from the target. Switch to manual targeting and avoid close contact."

Captain Brunascetti activated his forward cannons and began firing over one thousand rounds per second. He could see from the tracers that he was making contact, but they seemed to have no effect. Either they were bouncing off the monster's golden scales, or else they simply weren't bothering it. *So much for doing things the easy way*, he thought, bringing his missile launch system on line. He was starting to get even more interference with his on-board systems, but the firing light was still showing green. Without a targeting system it was difficult to aim accurately, but not impossible, and Captain Brunascetti had trained for just such an eventuality.

A quick push of a button sent two Copperhead Air-to-Air missiles streaking toward the giant winged monstrosity, and Captain Brunascetti saw similar streaks emanating from the jets on either side of him. His first missile barely missed the target, but the second one hit dead on, together with four others sent by his wing men. Each one detonated on impact, but the flare from each explosion disappeared almost immediately, almost as if the flame had been sucked into a giant fan. The missiles did have an effect, however. They caught the monster's attention.

What happened next was impossible. No other word could suffice. The creature extended its great wings to the fullest and *came to a complete stop in mid-air!* Captain Brunascetti and his entire squadron passed the monster in less time than it takes to blink an eye and, in the process, passed within less than one hundred feet of the monster's body. As his plane passed by, Captain Brunascetti's entire electrical system shorted out in a blaze of sparks. The plane continued to glide forward under its own momentum, but all power was gone. Captain Brunascetti was unable to even radio for help, and with his rear radar and monitors down he had no way of telling where the monster had gone.

It was probably just as well that Captain Brunascetti didn't see what happened next, since there was nothing he could have done about it anyway, except scream. He never saw the golden dragon with the three heads and the giant bat wings start into motion again and accelerate toward the five fighter jets which were still traveling over Mach 2 and beginning to descend. He never saw the three hideous heads begin to weave back and forth with hideous purpose. And he never saw the bolt of lightning which obliterated his entire squadron less than two seconds later.

Chapter Sixteen -- The Big Plan

The Secretary General had left the room to allow the committee to work uninterrupted. Kenny looked at the faces of the people around the conference table and saw how haggard everyone looked. He was sure that if he looked in the mirror his face would be no different. There was a big difference between planning for a possible disaster and actually dealing with one, Kenny thought, especially when the real disaster is worse than anything you could have imagined.

Kenny took a deep breath and brought the meeting to order. "All right," he said. "Let's see what we've got. We'll start with you, Gregor -- do you think any sort of biological weapon would be effective against Ghidorah?"

Dr. Simonovitch started to answer, but then stopped with a confused expression on his face. "Ghidorah?"

With a sheepish grin, Kenny explained. "Well, I figured we might as well come up with a name for the creature. My wife told me about a monster out of Japanese mythology that seemed to fit the general description." Kenny looked to Dr. Oguri for support, but she just shrugged her shoulders. "I've never heard that one before," she said softly, "but it sounds like a good name anyway."

Dr. Simonovitch raised his left eyebrow slightly. “Ghidorah it is, then. Although I’m sure I could come up with a better monster from Russian mythology if I thought about it. We’ve got some really interesting legends, you know.”

Kenny smiled indulgently. “I’m sure you do, Gregor. Now what our biological weapon options?”

All sense of joviality left Dr. Simonovitch’s expression. “Not good, I’m afraid. This is clearly an alien species. All the arguments why most biological agents would be ineffective against Godzilla are one hundred times more powerful when you consider this Ghidorah. *War of the Worlds* may have been a great movie, but the truth is that an alien organism would simply not be affected by any terrestrial virus or bacteria.”

“How about the Matrix Project,” asked Kenny. “Couldn’t we use it to tailor something to Ghidorah’s unique DNA?”

Dr. Simonovitch shook his head. “We don’t even know if this beast *has* DNA, but even if it did it is highly unlikely that it would be recognizable as such. Remember -- the Matrix Project was designed to work on all forms of earth life. Besides, how would you propose getting a DNA sample? I don’t think it would roll up its sleeve and let you take a blood sample. If it even had blood, that is, which I highly doubt.”

Kenny wasn’t completely convinced that Ghidorah’s DNA would be completely incompatible, but he deferred to Gregor’s superior knowledge and expertise. He knew it was silly to

think that the legend Julie had told him was literally true and that Ghidorah had originated on Earth. Still, it *was* an odd coincidence.

“Reggie, what about you? Do we have any conventional weapons that would work against Ghidorah?”

Reggie straightened his tie and leaned forward in his seat before answering. “I tend to doubt it, Kenny. This Ghidorah is unlike anything we’ve ever encountered before.”

Kenny didn’t like the negative tone in the retired Air Marshal’s voice. “But surely it can be hurt? I mean, regardless of how alien it might be, it is still alive, and anything that lives can be killed, right?”

Reggie shook his head sadly. “Normally, I’d agree with you. But you’ve seen the reports from the attacks on Toronto and Michigan. No physical laws I know of would allow it to do the things it does. I *do* have a theory as to where it gets all its energy, though.”

Kenny was a bit surprised at the sudden shift in topics, but decided to allow Reggie to continue. “Really? Go on.”

“I believe this creature is some sort of living energy collector. Somehow it is able to absorb energy and convert it directly into those powerful lightning bursts we have seen.”

Kenny definitely didn’t like where this was heading. “What, like a giant solar cell?”

“Exactly. This would explain how it is able to survive in outer space. It wouldn’t need to eat or breathe -- all the energy it needed to survive could be obtained directly from sunlight. And it’s not just solar energy. The bullets fired by the jets either bounced off it’s hide or simply didn’t cause

it any damage, but the explosive force of the missiles seemed to be *absorbed* by the creature. I think we may be talking about complete energy conversion here.”

Kenny digested this for a moment. “So a nuclear attack --”

Reggie nodded grimly. “Would just make it stronger, yes.”

“Damn.”

Nobody said anything for a few seconds while the implications of what Reggie had said sunk in. Then, Kenny turned to Dr. Oguri. “What about your microchip, Miyuki — any chance it might be effective here?” Kenny already knew the answer, but figured it never hurt to ask.

“I don’t see why not, Dr. Fong.”

Dr. Oguri’s answer surprised him. “What? But what about everything Gregor said about it being an alien organism, totally different from anything on Earth?”

Dr. Oguri smiled and began to speak a little louder than was normal for her. “I think Dr. Simonovitch is probably right, but that’s a matter of biology. I’m talking basic mechanics here, though! Clearly, Ghidorah is capable of motion, which means it must have some sort of centralized nervous system to send commands to different parts of its body. We don’t even need to find its brain -- as long as we can place the microchip near any portion of its nervous system we should be able to control all of it.”

Kenny had never seen Dr. Oguri so animated before. “That’s terrific, Miyuki!” He then turned to Dr. Bouromphongsa. “How about chemical weapons, Jatinder -- anything there for us?”

Dr. Bouromphongsa cleared his throat. "I am thinking perhaps acid might be helping us. I do not think that normal chemical weapons are the answer here, for reasons similar to Gregor's, but a powerful enough acid might hurt the monster."

"Do you know of an acid strong enough to kill Ghidorah?"

"Kill? Ah, no -- not kill. This 'Ghidorah,' as you are calling it, is much too big, and I am suspecting that, much like Godzilla, it can heal itself quickly. Wounding, though, is other matter. Perhaps wings are vulnerable since they seem relatively thin."

Kenny mulled this over. "Hmmm... So maybe we can use some sort of acid bomb to first immobilize Ghidorah, or at least ground him, which would make it easier to implant the microchip. I like it!"

As Kenny said this, another thought occurred to him. The story Julie had told him kept returning to his mind and, even though he knew it was just a story, parts of it were making more and more sense to him. Especially that bit about how the dragon was trapped in a giant mirror. Kenny addressed the group as a whole. "Assuming this works, and we are able to stop Ghidorah, what do we do with him then?"

Reggie piped in with a puzzled expression on his face. "Then? Why then we kill it, of course!"

Kenny shook his head. "Ah, but how? Just because it is immobile and under our control doesn't mean it would be any easier to kill."

Gregor broke in. "Well, Kenny, from the way you are grinning like an idiot it's obvious you know the answer, so why don't you just tell us?"

"Well, I was thinking about what Reggie said about Ghidorah being a living energy collector. What if we could somehow block all energy from reaching it? Say, by trapping it inside some sort of reflecting material...."

Reggie pounded his fist on the table in front of him. "The sphere! Of course!"

"Exactly. The sphere. Presumably it was made of some sort of material which not only prevented Ghidorah from escaping, but also blocked any energy from reaching it.

Dr. Bouromphongsa clapped his hands together in delight. "Trapped like a genie in a bottle!"

"Good analogy, Jatinder. How about it, Reggie -- think you could come up with something on short notice?"

Reggie's face fell. "On short notice? I'm afraid not."

"Why not? If it's a matter of finding enough raw materials or manufacturing a suitable containment device, we have the resources of the entire U.N. at our disposal."

Reggie shook his head in despair. "It's not that. You're right -- building the thing would pose no major problems. The problem is what material do we use? I don't know of any metal or alloy that has the properties you want, and trying to develop one could take years!"

The silence that followed Reggie's pronouncement was deafening. In that silence Kenny could hear the world's death knell tolling. It was Dr. Oguri who finally broke it. "Can't we get a sample of the material used to build the original sphere? We know that the Freedom space station

was destroyed, but what about the mining team that brought the asteroid here. Has anybody tried contacting them to see if they're still alive?"

Kenny wasn't as hopeful as Dr. Oguri seemed to be, but there was no need to show it. "Excellent idea, Miyuki — I'll get on it right away. In the meantime, you make whatever arrangements need to be made with your microchip, and Jatinder, see what you can do about putting together those acid bombs of yours."

Dr. Oguri and Dr. Bouromphongsa went over to the communications console to make the necessary arrangements while Kenny left to go find the Secretary General. They hadn't solved the problem yet, but at least they now had a reason for hope, however slight.

* * *

Lieutenant Junior Grade Geoffrey Rhodes was not a particularly happy man. He looked out the window of his office above the Norfolk Naval Shipyard at what was supposed to be his ship, the U.S.S. Chesapeake. Not that anyone had said that he wouldn't be allowed to serve on it, of course -- the damn thing simply wasn't ready yet!

Lieutenant Rhodes had fought for this assignment tooth and nail, knowing what an honor it would be to serve on the very first fusion powered aircraft carrier. His parents couldn't understand why he was so intent on this assignment, but Lieutenant Rhodes didn't care. And, after months of

begging, pleading and calling in every favor he could think of, he had finally been given the assignment.

Just days before it's maiden voyage, however, somebody had discovered a "minor" technical glitch with the fusion reactor. "It should only take a day or so to get it fixed," Lieutenant Rhodes had been told. That "day or so" had unfortunately turned into three weeks. He had been on the point of being forcibly reassigned to another vessel when word had finally been given that the problem was fixed and everything was ready to go.

That was three days ago, and they *still* hadn't launched. Lieutenant Rhodes didn't know the details, but he knew there had been some sort of disaster out in space, and most of the Navy's communications satellites were out of commission. And then there were rumors about some big explosion or something up in Canada the other day, and everyone seemed to think that the two events were related. Lieutenant Rhodes didn't care. He just wanted to get on board his ship and get back out on the open seas. *It's probably all just some bureaucratic screw-up anyway*, he thought bitterly. *Damn pencil pushers!*

Lieutenant Rhodes was jolted out of his self-pitying reverie by a loud whine which started low and then proceeded rapidly up the scale. For a moment, he couldn't place what the sound was, since he had never heard it outside of training exercises back in the Naval Academy. Then, it clicked — *air raid!*

Air raid? What the hell — we're not at war with anyone! Somebody must have accidentally pushed the wrong button or something.

Lieutenant Rhodes remained at his window staring down at the air craft carrier and thus got a spectacular view of the huge lightning bolt which lanced down from the cloudless sky and struck the ship dead center. The “minor technical glitch” in the carrier’s fusion reactor may have been fixed to the satisfaction of it’s engineers, but it apparently was never designed to take that sort of abuse. Lieutenant Rhodes got a brief glimpse of a large golden object flying overhead before the fusion reactor detonated, taking out the entire Naval Shipyard, and most of Norfolk, with it.

Chapter Seventeen -- So Near, Yet So Far

Peter and Ted were not panicking. They weren't still panicking, that is. This wasn't because they had solved their problem, or had become resigned to their fate. The human body can only produce so much adrenaline, and Peter and Ted had simply used up their allotment days ago.

The panic had first struck when they witnessed the destruction of the space station, and had only escalated when they had seen the monster responsible for the damage flying down to Earth. The true enormity of their problem, however, hadn't sunk in until they tried to radio for help and only got static. That's when the panic really began. Ted had started shouting "what are we gonna do, man?" over and over, and Peter had inexplicably started shouting for someone to come and help them.

Onboard diagnostics indicated that their radio was still functioning, but for some reason nobody was responding. When things had finally calmed down in the cramped cabin, Peter recalled the explosions he had witnessed in the Earth's upper atmosphere and realized that their communications link with the Earth had been severed. Normally, they could have relayed a message through the space station, but that option was no longer available.

They didn't have to worry about running out of food and air anytime soon at least. Their small fusion generator was still working fine, and they still had plenty of supplies left. They had left the mining base planning on a three month voyage and had arrived in half the time.

Unfortunately, they had no way of getting back home. Even if they had enough fuel to get off

the rock fragment on which they were currently anchored -- and Peter was fairly certain they didn't -- their landing struts had been irreparably damaged when they had first collided with the asteroid. And without landing struts, they simply couldn't land anywhere where there was gravity. Crash, yes, but not land.

The worst part, though was simply the fact that nobody knew they were still up here. What with the destruction of the space station, and the fact that they hadn't been able to reestablish communications with Earth, everyone probably assumed that they were dead. And in a couple of weeks everyone would be right.

Peter was sleeping when the message finally came, but the huge squeal followed by the incredibly loud and distorted voice jerked him awake in an instant. Ted reached the radio first, and quickly turned down the volume. Once the ringing in their ears died down a bit, the words became intelligible.

"... please answer. I repeat, Tugboat 14, this is Dr. Fong with the United Nations. If you are receiving us, please answer."

Ted fumbled with the microphone and it drifted away from him in the virtual zero gravity. He managed to snatch it out of the air, however, and with another moment of fiddling was able to find the send button. "Uh, hello, Dr. Fong! This is Ted McNealy on Tugboat 14. Boy, are we glad to hear from you! We thought we were goners up here!"

There was a brief pause before Dr. Fong responded. "To be honest, we thought you were goners as well. But I'm glad to find out you're all right."

Ted tried not to let any annoyance creep into his voice as he asked his next question. "But where have you been all this time? I mean, we've been calling and calling, but nobody answered!"

Dr. Fong's response confirmed what Peter had already guessed. "Sorry about that, gentlemen, but we lost all our communications satellites a couple of days ago, and we didn't have anything powerful enough to relay messages back and forth."

"So, does this mean that you've gotten the satellites back up in orbit?" Ted sounded hopeful. If the U.N. had been able to re-launch satellites, maybe things weren't as bad down there as they had feared.

Again, the slight pause. "Uh, no. Actually, we commandeered a radio telescope and converted it to send as well as receive. It was a little tricky -- I hope the signal's not too strong."

There was no point mentioning that the original signal had almost blown out their speakers. "No, everything's fine. We're just glad you called. So, when can you get us down from here?"

This time, the pause was noticeably longer. "Uh, well, that's what I'm calling about, actually. We've been having some problems down here. Serious problems, actually, and there's no way we can launch anything to come and get you."

Ted and Peter exchanged astonished glances. Had Dr. Fong just called to tell them that they were doomed? Hell -- they already knew that!

Dr. Fong wasn't done talking yet, though. "There is one possibility, but it's a bit risky. We might be able to send a lunar shuttle to pick you up."

Ted was able to sense the hesitation in Dr. Fong's voice. "What's the catch?"

"The catch is that we really can't afford to take that risk right now, not just to rescue two people. I know it sounds harsh, but right now we have to conserve whatever resources we have. However, perhaps there is something you could do for us that would make it worth our while."

Ted's voice went up half an octave. "Do for you? What? Anything at all!"

"We need a sample from the sphere that was inside your asteroid."

Ted's face fell. He didn't like the way Dr. Fong had said "your" asteroid instead of "the" asteroid, as if the whole thing was somehow their fault. Regardless of ownership, however, they had a bigger problem. "Uh, I'm afraid we can't do that, Dr. Fong. You see, we're attached to a small chunk of the original asteroid, and we must have drifted a couple of hundred miles away from it since, well, you know. And we're out of fuel."

Ted was so wrapped up in pronouncing his own death sentence that he failed to notice Peter frantically waving his arms beside him. Peter tried to shout, but the words wouldn't come out. All he could manage was a soft "uh... uh... uh..." Finally, in frustration, he launched himself at the radio, knocking Ted out of the way in the process. Ted was so surprised that he dropped the microphone, which started floating away. Peter swiped at it, missed, and got it on his second try. He pushed the send button and spoke in an excited jumble of words.

"Dr.FongthisisPeterMurdockandIvegotthesampleyouwant."

There was dead silence on the other end. Had Peter somehow broken the radio? Had they been cut off? Finally, though, Dr. Fong's voice could be heard once again. "Er, I'm sorry, but could you repeat that in English?"

Peter sighed in relief and made himself speak more slowly. Reaching into his suit pocket and pulling out his "souvenir," he tried again. "Dr. Fong, this is Peter Murdock and I've got the sample you want."

* * *

Over the next few days, Ghidorah blazed a swath of destruction across the entire globe. There seemed to be no pattern to the attacks. For the most part, the destruction was unfortunately confined to areas with high populations and significant amounts of industry, such as Seoul, Madrid and Brussels. But a number of other, smaller, towns had been hit as well in between the larger targets.

There were only two consistent factors with each attack. First, they all took place in broad daylight. This seemed to fit in with the theory that Ghidorah converted solar energy directly into electrical energy. Perhaps Ghidorah was somehow "leaking" energy on his way between major targets. Or perhaps the attacks were truly random after all.

Second, every attempt to stop the monster had met with complete, and often disastrous, failure. Although difficult, the various nations' armed forces were able to track and intercept Ghidorah. They were even able to hit the winged demon on occasion. And they definitely had been able to get its attention; the countryside was littered with the wreckage caused by Ghidorah's particular brand of "attention." Unfortunately, they simply weren't able to actually hurt the triple-damned creature.

The death toll was well into the millions, and the damage estimates had gone beyond anybody's ability to calculate. The world needed a solution, and time was quickly running out.

Chapter Eighteen -- Preparations

The subterranean command center was a hive of activity. Each member of the Advisory Committee was overseeing a separate task, in some cases more than one. Family members tried to stay out of the way in the dormitories, but occasionally stuck their heads in and added to the general level of noise.

Air Marshal Reginald Lethbridge-Smythe, Retired, was in almost constant telephone communication with a manufacturing plant in upstate New York where construction of a containment vessel was now well underway. His biggest fear had been that the sphere sample would prove to be made of some exotic combination of bizarre alloys, alloys beyond they're ability to reproduce in sufficient quantities, if at all.

The Lunar shuttle had landed at the new Ronald Reagan Space Center on the Hudson Bay after successfully picking up the two tug pilots, and Reggie almost had to be physically restrained to prevent him from going and meeting the shuttle in person. Dr. Fong was adamant, however, about him staying in the underground facility where it was safe, and Reggie grudgingly agreed. It wasn't that he didn't trust anybody else with the job of analyzing the sample. Well, actually, he *didn't* trust anybody else, but he knew better than to admit it out loud. He knew, from many years of experience, that part of being a good leader was the ability to delegate responsibility and have faith

in the people you have selected to work under you. Still, if only he could hold the sample in his hands, just for a few moments

His fears, as it turned out, were largely groundless. The sample *was* made of a completely new alloy, but further analysis showed that it was comprised of fairly common metals. It was simply a combination of metals that nobody had ever thought to mix together before. In addition to its uncanny ability to reflect most, perhaps all, forms of radiation, it also had a very high tensile strength, was very malleable, and was surprisingly lightweight. In fact, assuming they all survived this little adventure, Reggie thought this new alloy might prove to be very versatile indeed. He wondered who would end up getting credit for its discovery.

Full-scale production of the containment vessel was underway, but they couldn't wait until it was finished before proceeding with their plan of attack. Too many lives had been lost already, and more were at risk every second they delayed. The containment vessel *was* crucially important to the plan, but right now the most important thing was to neutralize the immediate threat of Ghidorah. If they couldn't stop the monster at least temporarily, there was no way they would ever be able to trap it. It wasn't like they could just ask it very nicely to please step into this metal sphere over here. Gregor had jokingly suggested that, since the creature had to eat *something*, maybe they should just fill the vessel up with fish and hope the odor lured the monster in like a rat into a trap. This suggestion had, of course, been met with stony silence from all involved, and Gregor had bowed his head in mock shame. It *had* been a rather stupid idea, after all.

Still, a way had to be found to immobilize the monster long enough to trap it. To that end, Dr. Oguri had converted her control microchip from a simple prototype into a series of working production models. Implantation of the chip was going to be risky at best, and so she had made sure that there were plenty of spares. Even now, the chips were being installed in the tips of the special armor-piercing shells that Reggie's group had been furiously putting into production, and the shells themselves were being distributed among a number of different squadrons for immediate deployment.

Dr. Bouromphongsa, for his part, was busy coordinating the production of enough acid to be used as an effective weapon against Ghidorah. The hardest part had been deciding what type of acid would be the best. On one hand, recently developed molecular acids were probably the strongest and most effective. Unfortunately, they were not easy to synthesize, and trying to make them in large quantities was an extremely hazardous undertaking.

On the other hand, there were a number of conventional acids which might also be effective, and which would be much easier to produce in the required quantities. Of these, one called *aqua regia* was probably their best bet. A mixture of hydrochloric and nitric acids, *aqua regia* was one of the only acids capable of dissolving gold. It was used in ancient times by alchemists trying to turn lead into gold, and by kings who wanted to test the alchemists's claims. In fact, the very name itself meant "royal water". The fact that Ghidorah's scales were also golden in color was not lost on Dr. Bouromphongsa, although this did not enter into his decision. Still, he thought it added a slightly poetic touch to the decision once he had made it. *Aqua regia* it was.

In addition to its potency, *aqua regia* had one other important thing going for it. It was used commercially by jewelers for testing various metals, and was readily available. With almost no effort at all, Dr. Bouromphongsa was able to secure a few thousand gallons of it in a highly concentrated form, and with Reggie's help was able to convert a number of missiles to carry the acid as a payload instead of conventional explosives. As with Dr. Oguri's microchip, the acid was spread among a number of different squadrons, just in case.

In the midst of all this activity, Dr. Fong called for attention. At first, everything continued as if he weren't even there, but after another moment everybody stopped what they were doing and looked over at Dr. Fong. Once all eyes were on him, Dr. Fong cleared his throat and began. "Reggie, how are we doing on the containment vessel?"

Reggie's eyes lit up at the mention of his new play toy. "Fantastic, Kenny! I mean, this new metal is simply incredible! It makes carbon-tungsten steel look like aluminium, for God's sake! With this new stuff, we can --"

Dr. Fong cut off Reggie in mid ramble. "I don't care how wonderful it is, Reggie. Is it *ready?*"

Reggie was taken aback at the curtness in Dr. Fong's voice. "Er, no, not quite. Another couple of days. But you knew that already, right?"

Dr. Fong didn't answer the question. Instead, he turned to Dr. Bouromphongsa. "How about the acid, Jatinder? Are we ready to go?"

Dr. Fong's was speaking with a sense of urgency that was worrying Dr. Bouromphongsa. "Oh, yes. The acid is all set, ready to go."

Dr. Fong nodded and then turned to Dr. Oguri. "Well, Miyuki?"

Miyuki also didn't like the tone of voice Dr. Fong was using. Maybe it was just the constant stress that was getting to him, she thought. "The microchips have all been loaded and are ready to be used. Is something the matter?"

At first, Dr. Fong didn't answer. Miyuki thought that perhaps he hadn't heard her question, and was about to repeat it when Dr. Fong responded in hollow tones.

"Well, it looks like we're going to have a chance to prove ourselves a little sooner than I had thought. I realize we don't have the containment vessel ready yet, but we can't wait for it. I've just received word that Ghidorah is headed this way.

Chapter Nineteen -- The Best Laid Plans of Mice

Ghidorah came in from the west, staying low to the ground. Who could tell if this was done to avoid radar, or simply as an instinct? The result was the same -- tracking the monster was very difficult. Orbital satellites would have helped immensely, but there weren't any left. Again, had Ghidorah destroyed the satellites specifically for that purpose, or had it been a random act of destruction? Nobody knew. For that matter, nobody knew if the winged demon was even intelligent, or whether it acted entirely on instinct.

Radar tracking posts *had* been able to keep in sporadic contact with Ghidorah, though, at least enough to keep a rough bearing on it's general course and speed. And now, for whatever arcane reason, it was heading directly for downtown New York City. Fortunately, radar had been able to provide enough advance warning so that the first attack squadron could intercept Ghidorah before it actually entered the downtown area.

As he watched the proceedings from the Control Center, Kenny couldn't help remembering a time fifteen years in the past, when he had stood in a very similar room at the White House watching Godzilla wreak havoc on downtown Boston. Back then, he had been primarily an observer, an advisor to the people making the decisions. Now, however, he was the one calling the shots, and the decisions he made could very well mean the difference between life and death for millions of people.

Kenny was no politician, and this was definitely not a job he wanted. His wishes didn't enter into it, unfortunately.

The hardest decision was the same one that had faced the U.S. President fifteen years before, namely how do you fight a creature within a major metropolitan area without inflicting even greater damage on the city? Fifteen years ago, the decision had been made to not attack Godzilla within the city limits, and as a result Boston had been almost completely destroyed. Kenny hoped to avoid having to make such a decision in this case by intercepting Ghidorah before he reached the city limits. If they were unable to stop Ghidorah, however, Kenny knew what he would decide. The destruction already caused by this monster proved that, whether or not the U.N. military forces caused any damage themselves, the city would be doomed if they could not defeat Ghidorah. With Godzilla, there had always been the hope that he would simply turn around and return to the ocean whence he had arisen. Kenny knew, however, that Ghidorah would not stop until the city was a smoking, lifeless crater.

Kenny was shaken from his reverie by a signal in his headset that the lead attack squadron was in position. This squadron was made up of six hypersonic planes, three carrying acid bombs payloads, and three equipped with missiles carrying the Miyuki's microchips. The object here was not to engage Ghidorah in a direct confrontation, but instead to simply slow him down long enough to implant the microchip. If this failed, God forbid, three other attack squadrons were moving into position to engage Ghidorah with conventional weapons. By the time the other squadrons arrived, however, Ghidorah would be well inside the city proper.

Kenny gave the order to proceed with the plan, and then there was nothing left to do except watch. Kenny switched the radio to broadcast over the room's PA system, so that everyone could hear what was happening as well as see it play out on the main wall screen. The pilots had all been fully briefed on the mission ahead of time, so there was no need for Kenny to give orders. Considering the size of the lump in his throat, it was probably just as well.

As planned, the three planes carrying the acid bombs took the lead. They were spread out in a triangular formation, approximately three hundred meters apart, with the lead plane about one hundred meters higher than the other two. The other three planes in the squadron, the ones carrying the microchip-bearing missiles, flew in a similar formation, but were almost three kilometers further back and one kilometer higher up. The goal was to approach Ghidorah from the rear and attack its outspread wings with the acid missiles. Then, as it fell to the earth, the second squadron would dive in and strafe it with the microchip missiles.

Ghidorah was traveling at just above Mach 1, and the planes in the first team got within five hundred meters of the monster before initiating their attack. Since they were specifically targeting Ghidorah's wings, they need to make sure that the wings were fully extended before firing. It would have been nice had the monster obliged them, but the beast's wings were fairly close to the body at the moment as if it were simply being carried along by its own momentum.

The team was prepared for this eventuality, however. The lead plane engaged its afterburners and leapt ahead at Mach 2, accelerating all the while. As the pilot flew over Ghidorah, he fired two acid missiles directly at the base of the creature's three necks and started a steep climb,

still accelerating. He wanted to get the monster's attention, but that didn't mean he wanted to risk his life sticking around to see if he was successful. In the first of these two goals, at least, he was successful.

The missiles detonated against Ghidorah's skin in a cloud of white vapor. It was impossible to tell whether they had caused any damage, but they had certainly gotten the monster's attention. With a truly unearthly shriek, the creature unfurled its wings to maximum extension and began climbing after the fleeing jet. The jet had too much of a head start, however, and it was clear that Ghidorah would never catch up to it. Unfortunately, the airplane, as fast as it might have been, was not faster than the speed of light. Acting in eerie consort, Ghidorah's three necks extended forward until all three heads were lined up next to each other. Then, as one, they emitted three identical bursts of electrical energy which combined into one hideous bolt of destructive power and blew the jet out of the sky without a trace. There was not even any shrapnel; the airplane winked out of existence as if it had never been.

If the other two pilots in the first team had seen what had happened to their squad leader, to their infinite credit they didn't let it affect their actions. As soon as Ghidorah extended its wings to the fullest, they accelerated and locked on. They followed Ghidorah almost straight up, increasing their velocity from Mach 1 to Mach 2, and then to Mach 3. Within seconds, the creature loomed impossibly huge in their windshields yet again. As one, they launched their missiles, two each, directly at each wing, and then they peeled off in opposite directions, still accelerating. Their

payload had been delivered, and now it was time to get the hell out of there as fast as possible. This was not cowardice on their part -- it was a matter of simple survival.

Kenny and the rest of the Advisory Committee watched in silence. The Secretary General was there also, but kept himself well in the background. His job had been simply to get the ball rolling, but now he was content to let the experts do their job. He just prayed it was enough. On the wall screen, they saw the initial attack and watched as the monster pursued the lead craft. A concerted gasp of horror went up in the control room as the airplane was completely annihilated before their eyes. It was no use thinking that what they had just seen was impossible. Whatever this monster was, it seemed to have almost no regard for the laws of physics whatsoever. Maybe it really *was* an evil golden dragon straight out of Japanese mythology, Kenny thought numbly. *How can we possibly fight something like that? We're nothing more than rodents to it, mice which it will squash beneath its toes!*

Seconds later, perhaps less, the other two planes launched their missiles towards Ghidorah's wings. Nobody dared breathe while the jets delivered their payload and fled at ultrasonic speed. After what had happened to the first plane, nobody held out any great hopes for the survival of the other two.

Miraculously, however, the two jets escaped. Or perhaps not so miraculously after all; Ghidorah had something else occupying it's attention at the moment. All four missiles had reached their intended target and had detonated. Both of Ghidorah's wings were enveloped in an immense cloud of white vapor, and the monster began twisting its necks around in confusion, shrieking all the

while. At the same time, the monster's powerful climb stopped abruptly and it began to plummet back to earth. A loud *whoop!* went up in the control center as everyone rushed forward to congratulate Dr. Bouromphongsa on the success of his acid bombs.

This was the moment the second team was waiting for. All three broke formation and began a power dive directly at the falling monster. As soon as they were in range, they loosed their own special missiles directly at the central mass of Ghidorah's body. Without waiting to see if the missiles had hit the target, they, too, peeled off and fled in different directions.

All three missiles struck the monster dead on. Only one of the three planes managed to escape Ghidorah's wrath, however. The other two exploded into expanding clouds of superheated metal fragments as they were struck by the creature's energy bolts.

Dr. Oguri was overwhelmed by the nightmarish tableau of destruction that was being laid out before her, but she knew that she still had a job to perform. In front of her, built into the conference table, was a series of computer monitors which were tracking the telemetry data from the microchips. As soon as they were successfully implanted into the monster, she would send the signal which would activate them. The effects should be immediate, as the monster's entire nervous system was literally hijacked by the microchip.

They only needed one microchip for the plan to work, but they had decided to implant three just in case. Part of that was simple expediency, of course - there was no guarantee which of the three missiles would be successfully implanted. In addition, however, Miyuki had wanted be sure that the control system would be able to function under admittedly alien circumstances.

She watched the monitors and saw that all three chips had been successfully implanted. Reggie's shells had done the trick. Telemetry indicated that each microchip was implanted at least one meter beneath the surface of Ghidorah's skin, exactly as planned. She gave a thumbs up sign to the rest of the team, who were anxiously watching, and then typed the command to activate the microchips.

Miyuki took a deep breath and pressed the *Enter* key, sending the command. At first, nothing happened. Then, one by one, the screens in front of her went dead as Ghidorah's powerful internal electrical field shorted out each chip in succession. Miyuki moaned out loud and began pounding on the table with her right fist.

On the main wall screen, the rest of the Committee watched as Ghidorah halted its mad plummet and righted itself a couple of hundred meters above the earth. Dr. Bouromphongsa gasped as the monster unfurled its wings again to show little or no lasting effects from the acid. Either it had regenerated, or else the acid simply hadn't been strong enough. Dr. Bouromphongsa buried his face in his hands and began to sob quietly.

Kenny looked around the room in shock. He saw Dr. Oguri still pounding on the conference table, and knew he should go over and comfort her, or at least say something. Anything. But his legs wouldn't move, and his throat was frozen shut. The other members of the Committee were in a similar state; nobody seemed able to do or say anything.

As if his head were attached to a thin wire, Kenny turned back to the wall screen against his will. He didn't need to watch the screen to know what was happening now. Ghidorah, the Destroyer

of Worlds, was coming for him, coming for all of them, and there was nothing they could do to stop it. Nothing at all.

Chapter Twenty -- I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly

The three remaining attack squadrons had intercepted Ghidorah as the monster reached the downtown area of New York City. With a heavy heart, Kenny had given the order to do anything possible to stop Ghidorah, without regard to collateral damage or civilian casualties. It didn't matter, Kenny told himself repeatedly. If they were unable to stop Ghidorah the city would be forfeit anyway. At least the business district would be fairly deserted by now, so loss of life would be kept to a minimum. Unlike Toronto, this time they had a little warning and knew what they were up against. Besides, the Stock Market had been closed by executive order of the President for the last week, so there really wasn't much reason for people to be in the city anyway.

The attack squadrons were made up of state-of-the-art fighter jets from both the U.S. and Canadian Air Forces. This was officially a United Nations action, even though it was taking place on American soil. All together, eighteen planes screamed out of the brilliant blue sky and descended on Ghidorah like a swarm of angry wasps. Of course, these particular wasps had a bit more sting than your average insect. They were equipped with high velocity rail guns. They had laser-controlled, heat seeking missiles. They even had experimental micro-fusion powered particle emission weapons. The use of any of these weapons in the middle of a densely populated area was an insane proposition, of course, but desperate times called for equivalent measures.

In the end, however, none of it mattered. Kenny and the other members of the Advisory Committee, as well as the Secretary General, watched the orgy of destruction unfold on the wall screen in front of them with a shared sense of numb horror. They watched as Ghidorah demolished one tower of the World Trade Center with an almost casual disregard. Then, they watched as Ghidorah deftly avoided a salvo of missiles which proceeded to impact into the other World Trade Center Tower. The second tower slowly toppled and crashed to the ground, taking out a number of surrounding buildings as well. The destruction was brought immediately home to the observers in the Command Center as the floor beneath them shuddered and the lights flickered, but didn't go out.

The Empire State building was next. Ghidorah swung around in a wide arc, with six attack jets trailing it with guns blazing. For the moment, Ghidorah seemed to be ignoring the planes themselves, more intent on destroying the skyscrapers than on ridding itself of pesky insects. A double blast of superheated plasma energy from two of Ghidorah's heads struck the Empire State Building, one near the top, and one near the middle, and the building actually *shattered* in an explosion of glass, steel and concrete. Two of the pursuing airplanes were caught in the shockwave and exploded in mid-air.

Ghidorah had finally noticed it's attackers, or else it had finally decided to do something about them. Five more jets were vaporized in the following ten seconds as energy bolt after energy bolt unerringly found their target. Three other planes launched simultaneous missile attacks, which exploded harmlessly against Ghidorah's massive frame. Hitting Ghidorah wasn't a problem; it was

like hitting the proverbial broad side of a barn. So far, however, none of the missiles were actually doing any damage.

Two other planes targeted their high velocity rail cannons at Ghidorah's wings. The sheer kinetic energy of the bullets should have turned the monster's wings into Swiss cheese. And the bullets *did* have some effect. For a brief second, a number of dark spots appeared on the wings, looking like little freckles. The spots disappeared almost immediately, however, and the two jet planes followed suit almost immediately.

Kenny found himself thinking once again that the situation was hopeless. He still wasn't ready to admit that they were making the situation any worse, but they certainly weren't making it any better, either. *Nothing* seemed to work. For all his faith in science and technology, Kenny was realizing that there were some things outside the realm of science, things that couldn't be explained, things that couldn't be dealt with. Things like Ghidorah. Things like

Kenny's face turned ash grey as the implications of what he was thinking struck home. All around him, people were yelling as a falling skyscraper brushed the edge of the United Nations building itself, causing the room to shudder violently. The lights flickered again, and this time the lights *did* go out, only to be replaced by dimmer emergency lights a few seconds later. Kenny wasn't aware of any of this, however. Physically, he was still in the underground command center. Mentally, though, he was hundreds of miles away and almost fifty years in the past.

Oblivious to the tumult around him, Kenny found himself reliving a memory from grade school so many years before. He was sitting in a circle with the other members of his class, and the

teacher was leading them in a song. It was a silly song, the type of song that school children around the world sang. A song about an old woman who had swallowed a fly. Across the years, the words came back to him as if it were only yesterday:

I know an old lady who swallowed a fly

I don't know why she swallowed that fly

Perhaps she'll die.

I know an old lady who swallowed a spider

Which wriggled and jiggled and tickled inside her

She swallowed the spider to catch the fly

Kenny remembered thinking when he first heard the song how silly the old lady had been, especially as she proceeded to swallow bigger and bigger animals to catch the last animal she had swallowed:

She swallowed the cow to catch the goat,

She swallowed the goat to catch the dog,

She swallowed the dog to catch the cat,

She swallowed the cat to catch the bird,

She swallowed the bird to catch the spider

Eventually, the old lady swallowed a horse, and the song had ended with “she died, of course.” Obviously, the old lady had been crazy to eat something as big as a horse. And what Kenny was now thinking was just as crazy. But what other choice did they have? Nothing created by man could stop Ghidorah. As crazy as it sounded, they needed a spider to catch the fly, and they would just have to pray that they wouldn’t need a bird to catch the spider.

And the spider? There was only one possibility. A possibility that Kenny had devoted the last fifteen years of his life trying to prevent from ever returning. A possibility that might be the only chance the human race now had of surviving. The word escaped from his lips unbidden, soft enough that nobody else in the room heard him. A single word which summed up all his fears, and now all his hopes as well. A single word which filled him with terror and dread.

“Godzilla.”

And then, Dr. Fong Yui Moon (“Kenny” to his friends) collapsed to the ground unconscious.

Chapter Twenty-One -- Desperate Measures

Kenny opened his eyes to find his wife's face staring down at him. His first impression was a feeling of tremendous relief. It had all been a dream, just another one of his nightmares, and he was actually back home in bed. And what a doozy of a nightmare! He must have woken up screaming his head off; no wonder Julie looked so worried.

Except, why was his bed so hard? And why was there so much dust in the air? For that matter, why were there so many people in his bedroom?

With a jolt, Kenny started fully awake and became completely aware of his surroundings. He wasn't at home, and he sure as hell wasn't in bed. No -- he was lying on the hard carpeted floor of the Control Room, with his head cradled in his dear wife's lap. They must have brought her in from the dormitories when he had passed out. This was no nightmare, Kenny realized. It was all real, which was infinitely worse. With a groan, he struggled to stand up. His wife stood up with him, still looking very concerned. Kenny leaned on her for support, but was able to stand on his own after a few seconds. He gave his wife a brief kiss on the lips to assure her that he was all right, and then looked around the room to assess the damage.

Kenny didn't know how long he had lain on the floor unconscious, but it didn't appear as though too much time had passed. The room was still bathed in the subdued glow of the emergency lights which, when combined with the dust and smoke in the air, lent an unearthly, underwater

impression to the tableau. The Secretary General was on the phone, jabbering away in a language which could have been Swahili for all Kenny knew. Kenny couldn't tell if the Secretary General was shouting because he was upset or because of a bad connection, or both, but at least the phones seemed to be working.

Kenny didn't see any dead bodies on the floor, which was immense relief. Of course, maybe they had simply removed the bodies while he had lain unconscious. But no, everyone seemed to be accounted for. Reggie was holding what appeared to be a blood-soaked rag to his forehead, but it didn't seem to be bothering him terribly.

Turning his attention to the main view screen, Kenny was surprised to see that it was still functioning, although the image displayed was fraught with static. It took him a few moments to realize what he was looking at, and he couldn't help gasping in horror when that realization finally came. It was apparently a view of downtown New York, as seen from the top of the U.N. building itself. Or, rather, it was a view of what was *left* of downtown New York. In fact, if it weren't for the fact that the Chrysler Building had been inexplicably spared Ghidorah's wrath, Kenny wouldn't have recognized the scene at all. Gone were the Empire State Building, the Flatiron Building, the World Trade Towers. Gone was the entire pantheon of man-made gods of steel, concrete and glass, obliterating in minutes a skyline which had taken over a century to build. The Chrysler Building stood alone amid the rubble like a monument to some great historical event, or a solemn marker preserving the memory of a long-ago tragedy.

Of Ghidorah, there was no sign. Kenny thought of asking somebody which direction the demon had gone, but realized that he really didn't want to know the answer. And he was sure he would find out sooner or later, whether he wanted to know or not.

Kenny noticed that the room had gone suddenly silent, and he turned around to find everyone else staring at him. The Secretary General had finished his phone call, and was glaring at Kenny with a baleful, accusatory look. Everyone else in the room was looking at him with a variety of expressions, ranging from anguish to hope, from stunned disbelief to anxious anticipation. The important thing, however, was that everyone was staring at *him*, waiting for him to tell them what to do now.

At first, Kenny was at a loss for words. What do you say to people after a disaster of this magnitude, after so much destruction and loss of life? How do you reassure them, tell them that the world wasn't going to end after all, that everything was going to be all right. And how do you make them believe what you tell them, especially when you don't believe it yourself?

But then, Kenny remembered what he had been thinking about before he had passed out. Well, *fainted*, actually -- he might as well be honest with himself. Still, maybe it was just a sign that he was human; anybody who *wasn't* shocked at an idea like his probably had something seriously wrong with him.

Kenny knew he wasn't much of a public speaker, and his slight stature didn't do much to command respect and awe, but he drew himself up as straight as possible before speaking. Ignoring

the Secretary General's continued maleficent stare, he began as best as he could, struggling to keep the terror out of his voice.

“O.K., obviously things didn't work out as we had hoped. In fact, it looks like things didn't work out at all. We've been witnesses to a horrible event, a scene that nobody should ever be forced to see, and we were powerless to prevent it. We all wish there were something we could have done, and we certainly tried to do something about it. That doesn't mean, however, that we *should* have been able to prevent it from happening. I think if the events we have just witnessed prove anything, it's that *nothing* man can come up with will stop this monster.”

Kenny let that sink in a moment before continuing. He was starting to get into the rhythm of his speech, and he definitely had a captive audience.

“Mr. Secretary, you told me that you felt we were the best suited to deal with this problem, and I firmly believe that you were right. At least, there was nobody *more* suited to the job than us. Unfortunately, none of us were prepared for this. We've spent the last fifteen years preparing for one particular problem, and instead we're faced with something completely different. We all hoped that we could use all our plans, our stratagems, against this new threat, but we were wrong. Ghidorah is an *alien* creature, and none of our weapons or technology is going to stop it.”

The Secretary General could hold his peace no longer. “So, what your saying is that it's not your fault that you failed so miserably, and we should just accept the fact that we're all doomed? Is that it?”

Kenny shook his head placatingly. “No, Mr. Secretary. All I’m saying is that we’ve been approaching this problem the wrong way. This Committee was formed for the sole purpose of dealing with one problem, and one problem only, and that’s Godzilla.”

The Secretary General broke in impatiently. “Yes, yes, I know. And you’re just not qualified to fight this ‘Ghidorah’ as you call it. I got that part already.”

Kenny tried to remain as calm as possible and not allow the Secretary General’s comments to throw him off track. “What I’m saying, Mr. Secretary, is that we should be focusing on what we *are* qualified to do, instead of trying to solve the problem with the wrong tools.”

The Secretary General didn’t respond for a moment. “I’m not sure I understand. No, scratch that. I’m sure I *don’t* understand. What the hell are you talking about? You just said that none of our technology would be effective, and now your saying that we’re using the wrong tools. What tools *should* we be using? Prayer? Pixie dust?”

“No, Mr. Secretary. We should use the one tool that we are *prepared* to use -- Godzilla.”

The resulting silence was almost painful. Kenny imagined he could hear a cricket chirping somewhere in the distance.

This time, it was Reggie who broke the silence. “Er, I’m sorry, but did you say --”

The Secretary General finally found his voice again. “ARE YOU INSANE?”

Kenny flinched from the unexpected force of the outburst. “Please, Mr. Secretary, hear me out. The whole reason this committee was formed was to deal with a seemingly unstoppable force, a creature of great destructive power. We may not have found a way of killing Godzilla, but we have

found a way of *controlling* him. Sure, it didn't work on Ghidorah, but it wasn't *designed* to. It was designed to work on Godzilla, though, and if we can control Godzilla's destructive power, if we can harness it and redirect it, we can use it against Ghidorah. I know it sounds crazy, but these are desperate times. We all know that Godzilla is like nothing else on this planet, and what better weapon to use against something that *isn't* from this planet?"

That was all Kenny could think of to say. Perhaps somebody else could have said it more elegantly, or more persuasively, but it was the best he could do. Now it was up to the Secretary General.

The Secretary General looked pensive. For a few minutes he said nothing, but just stood there with his chin in his hand. When he finally spoke, his voice was choked with emotion. "Dr. Fong, a few minutes ago I tried to call the shelter where my wife and children are staying. *Were* staying. When I finally was bale to get through, nobody there could tell me whether they were still alive or not. I still don't know. 'Desperate times' you said? You may be right. And reviving Godzilla is about as desperate a measure in response as I can imagine. One thing I do know, however; things can't possibly get any worse than they are now."

The Secretary General looked around the room slowly, staring at each member of the Committee in turn. "Do what you need to do, and may God have mercy on your souls if you're wrong."

* * *

Gavin Smith was a true child of the new millennium. He was born in March of the year 2000, and by the time he was four years old he was already an accomplished Web surfer, well on his way to becoming a true Internet junkie. With the introduction of cheap and reliable broadband technology in the early years of the new millennium, Gavin had attended all his classes virtually, plugged into the Worldwide Education Net along with hundreds of millions of fellow students.

Gavin didn't want for companionship, even though he was an only child. Through the magic of virtual reality and real-time communication software, he had friends all over the planet, not just in his hometown of Bismarck, N.D. Who cared if he never actually met them in person? In *real* life, he never would have had the chance to meet so many interesting people.

When he wasn't plugged into the EdNet, Gavin spent most of his free time engaged in highly complex interactive gaming systems. Sometimes he played with, and against, his friends from "school", but other times he immersed himself in his own private universes, populated with strange creatures of his own design. It was better than any movie, as he traveled to distant stars to battle hideous aliens, or fought against deformed troll-like creatures in vast underground labyrinths. His parents often worried that he was becoming "detached from reality", but the on-line guidance counselor had assured them that in today's society, this *was* reality, and that depriving Gavin of this opportunity would surely harm him later in life. Besides, the counselor had added, all teen-age boys tend to live in their own private fantasy world, and they all manage to grow out of it at some point.

The last week had been sheer and utter hell for Gavin, though. All the various Nets, whether Education, Information, or Entertainment, had gone down at the same time, and Gavin was going through cyberspace withdrawal pains. Without his elaborate fantasy worlds, he felt naked and alone, adrift in a vast, empty and uncaring universe. He spent most of the time sulking in his bedroom, coming out only for meals. His parents had tried to tell him what was going on in the “real” world, but he didn’t care.

Gavin was upstairs sulking as usual when the noise began. At first, he thought was his parents banging on his door, trying once again to convince him to come down and join the “real” world. He soon realized, however, that the noise was coming from outside - a dull, echoing pounding. He dragged himself off his bed and peered out the window. A look of astonishment flashed briefly across his face, only to be replaced by one of utter contentment a moment later. *All Right!*

From his window, Gavin had an unimpeded view of the downtown Bismarck area. Something was flying over the city, swooping down and shooting giant lightning bolts out of its three mouths. Buildings were erupting in flames and the shockwaves of their demise was the cause of the pounding Gavin was hearing. Gavin recognized most of the structures as they were obliterated one by one. There went the Capitol building, followed almost immediately by the Heritage Center. The Gateway Mall was next, and it was followed by the United Tribes Technical College.

This is more like it, Gavin thought with glee! He didn’t stop to think how he was seeing these images -- it was obvious that somehow the Net was back up and he was immersed in one of his

virtual universes again. He didn't recognize that particular monster from his previous encounters, but it sure was cool!

And now, the winged beast was flying in his direction. *Awesome!* He looked around his room for a weapon. Surely he must have some sort of mega bazookoid lying around here somewhere. Boy -- wouldn't that monster be surprised when Gavin hit him with a blast of one of *those* babies! Gavin couldn't find a weapon, however, which was rather odd. He *always* had weapons in his virtual adventures. That's what made it so fun! What good was facing a monster if you couldn't fight back?

By now, the entire house was shaking, and Gavin was finally realizing that something was dreadfully wrong. His last thoughts, just before his house evaporated in a cloud of supercharged particles, were *Geez -- what a crappy game!*

Chapter Twenty-Two -- That Which Is Not Dead

The Woods Hole Oceanic Institute's fifteen minutes of fame had long come and gone. Back in the 80's, a team of scientists from the Institute had used a robotic undersea probe named *Alvin* to discover the final resting place of the famous luxury liner, the unsinkable *Titanic*. Although "final" proved to be the wrong word as larger and larger portions of the sunken ship had been dredged up and carted off to various museums and even sold on the international arts market.

The Institute was in the spotlight for a brief time, though, and all the publicity meant more money for research, which in turn meant bigger salaries for all involved. For a while, everyone involved was happy. Nothing lasts forever, though, especially publicity. Interest in the Institute slowly waned, and it soon became little more than a footnote in the public's ongoing fascination with all things *Titanic*-related.

The Institute didn't close down, of course; it just became less visible. And with the decreased visibility went the bigger salaries, and eventually most of the notable scientists working there left for greener pastures. The work went on, but on a smaller, and much more subdued, scale. In the subsequent decades, the Institute continued to pioneer the field of deep-sea research and exploration, and they retained a small degree of fame in certain, albeit exceedingly small, circles.

One of those circles, however, overlapped slightly with another, larger, circle of influence, and that circle in turn touched other circles. And so it was that Je’Nise St. Claire, the Institute’s number one submersible pilot, found herself in a truly bizarre situation indeed.

When the call had first come in, Je’Nise had assumed somebody was just pulling her leg. Although she had never experienced any overt prejudice since coming to the Institute, Je’Nise was extremely sensitive to the possibility. The fact that she was the top rated pilot didn’t change the fact that she was also the only woman pilot, and one of only a handful of black [she hated the term “African-American” -- her parents had come from Haiti, not Africa] people working at the Institute. And, on top of all that, she was only a shade over five feet tall. A number of people had suggested that her competitive drive stemmed from deep-seated feelings of insecurity, and they were probably right. It didn’t matter how successful she became in life -- she was always afraid that somebody, somewhere, was making fun of her for something.

So, when the voice on the other end of the phone told her that he was from the U.N. and that he wanted her help looking for Godzilla, Je’Nise was naturally just a *wee* bit skeptical. In fact, she actually swore at the caller (and his obviously fake Chinese accent) and hung up. A few seconds later she happened to look at the caller I.D. box attached to the phone almost had a heart attack on the spot. *I just hung up on somebody from the United Nations!*

Fortunately, the caller -- a Dr. Fong -- called back a couple minutes later and, after listening to her apologize profusely for a bit, had finally interrupted to assure her that he fully understood and that everything was all right. Even then, it had taken another couple of minute for Je’Nise to accept

the fact that she hadn't caused some sort of international incident, and that nobody was going to come and haul her butt off to jail for ... well, for insulting a person from the United Nations or something.

Dr. Fong had explained the situation and what was needed of her. Apparently, he had already spoken to the director of the Institute, who had recommended Je'Nise "in the highest possible terms." Je'Nise had a little trouble accepting that last bit, but decided to play along anyway. Of course, considering what she was being asked to find, maybe the Director had recommended her just on the off chance that she wouldn't make it back....

So, here she was inside Deep Submersible Vehicle Three (affectionately referred to as *Charlie*), miles off the Massachusetts coast, a thousand feet underwater, and looking for the mother of all things that ever went bump in the night. One of the Institute's two main research vessels, the *Ballard*, was somewhere overhead. They had gone to the approximate coordinates provided by Dr. Fong, and had begun an in-depth sonar scan of the area. Je'Nise had already checked out a couple of possibilities, but so far nothing had panned out.

Normally, they would have just used one of the remote probes for this type of exploration, but Dr. Fong had explained the necessity of having someone actually on-hand. Je'Nise tried to explain the advances that had been made with remote telemetry, but Dr. Fong had been quite insistent. Je'Nise hadn't really minded, though; she actually *enjoyed* piloting the little sub around. What other pilots found cramped and claustrophobic seemed just right to Je'Nise. *Chalk another one up for short people!* she thought merrily every time she climbed aboard.

So far, this particular trip down seemed to be another bust, at least insofar as locating Godzilla was concerned. Not that it was a total loss, however. In fact, Je'Nise was surprised at the variety of hitherto unknown sea life she was seeing down here. Strange, twisted forms which seemed only distantly related to normal sea creatures. Oddly colored fish with grotesque-shaped fins. She saw what looked like a crab of some sort, but much larger and with eight legs. What looked like a large grouper swum lazily in front of her, except that it had only one eye and its body was covered with suppurating sores of some sort which seemed to flow together even as she watched.

As she plunged on through the stygian darkness, her path lit only by the sub's main spotlight, she began to realize that something was seriously wrong down here. These weren't just different life forms -- these were unnatural, *mutated* forms. In the distance she could make out the outline of a large coral reef, and the closer she got to the reef the more twisted and bizarre the sea life around her appeared. It was almost as if the reef itself was the spawning ground for these undersea horrors. Maybe somebody had been using the reef as a toxic waste dump or something.

As she drew nearer to the reef she noticed that even it had been affected by whatever it was that had caused all the other mutations. It was like no coral she had ever seen before. The reef was composed of multiple rows of bluish-white lumps which seemed almost like giant maple leaves. No, not maple leaves. Something else, something she had seen before. But where? In a book? On T.V.? *Wait a minute -- that's no damn reef! That's --*

The sudden realization was almost enough to drive Je'Nise over the edge into a bottomless abyss of gibbering madness, but she recovered after a few minutes of borderline panic. *My momma didn't raise no wimps!* Then, her voice still shaky with terror, she radioed the *Ballard* and informed them that she had located Godzilla.

* * *

For almost two hundred years, the phrase remember the Alamo held a special meaning in the hearts of the American people, and especially those of the people of Texas. The battle had been lost, but that loss, and the heroic efforts of those who lost their lives, had provided a rallying call which had led to eventual victory.

Since the day when Texas had finally won it's independence from Mexico, the Alamo itself had served as a monument to that victory, and the sacrifices that had been made to achieve it. It stood as a constant reminder of the lengths the human spirit would go to in order to remain free from oppression.

Unfortunately for the people of Texas, it's hard to remember a monument after it has been blasted off the face of the earth, along with most of the surrounding countryside. It's doubtful whether Ghidorah had specifically picked the site as a target, but the result was the same. Two hundred years ago, remember the Alamo had been a rallying cry to victory. Now, together with

remember Toronto, remember New York, and a hundred similar phrases, it was simply a reminder of the how powerless man was in the face of Ghidorah's demonic might.

Chapter Twenty-Three -- That's Not a Moon!

Je'Nise hadn't really expected to find Godzilla, in spite of the assurances from Dr. Fong. And now, as she floated scant meters from the submerged and seemingly lifeless leviathan, she *still* couldn't quite believe it. The whole thing just seemed to surreal. At first, the sheer enormity of the situation had almost overwhelmed her, but that was more the shock of almost bumping into the enormous creature without even realizing what it was. Now, however, she found it hard to believe that such a monster could really exist, even when she was staring right at it.

She was briefly reminded of a movie she had seen once on laser disc as a child. It had apparently been a big hit decades before her time, but by the time she had seen it the special effects had seemed rather bland, in spite of the fact that they had supposedly been updated somewhere along the line. In the movie, there was a scene where the heros emerged from hyperspace expecting to find a planet, only to discover a previously unknown asteroid belt. In the distance was a large moon, which was also previously unknown. As they got closer, they finally realized that the "moon" was in fact a gigantic space station, the likes of which had never been seen before. When one of the characters first made the suggestion that it might be a space station, he was derided, since a space station that big was simply impossible. Or so everyone had thought.

And now, as Je'Nise stared at the vista in front of her, she could sympathize with the characters in that movie. This simply couldn't be a living creature. It was impossible. Nothing --

not the largest dinosaur known to have lived, not the greatest blue whale -- was this big. It simply defied all the laws of biology. It must be some strange coral formation, as she had at first thought. But in the back of her mind she could hear one phrase being repeated over and over again: *that's not a moon -- it's a space station!* And she knew, no matter how much her mind rebelled at the thought, that this *wasn't* just coral. This was, indeed, a creature. A creature straight out of Dante's worst nightmares, to be sure, but a living creature all the same.

At least, she *assumed* it was still living. Her next job was to attach probes to the beast's skin to see if there were, in fact, any life signs. She knew that the whole reason she was down here depended on Godzilla still being alive, but a part of her -- and not that small a part, to be brutally honest -- fervently wished that the great beast was truly dead. She knew about the invading monster from space, of course, but surely there was some other answer, some other idea that could be tried. Hers may not have been to question why, but this was sheer lunacy!

The little submersible was fitted with a series of external arms which could be controlled remotely from within the cabin. They were called "waldos" which seemed a damn silly name to Je'Nise, but somebody had once told her that the name came from some book that had been written a zillion years ago or something. Whatever. The point was that each of the arms was fitted with a different tool or device that she needed, and she never had to actually leave the sub to get the job done. Which was just fine with Je'Nise.

She was transmitting a continual video feed to the Institute ship above her, where the resident Godzilla specialist -- a giant bear of a man named "Gregor" -- was now giving her detailed

instructions. The specialist had apparently flown in from New York to join this little expedition, but his accent was definitely not local. Apparently, he was the one who figured out where Godzilla was located, and Je’Nise didn’t know whether to congratulate him or curse him for his success.

Following Gregor’s directions, Je’Nise piloted the little sub closer to Godzilla, toward what was apparently his chest. She was still about 10 meters distant, but already his bulk filled her entire view port. Je’Nise knew that Godzilla was possibly quite dead, and at the very least in a deep coma, but she was getting twitchy none the less. What if Godzilla woke up? What if he suddenly lashed out and swatted her like a bug? What if, what if, what if? Je’Nise shook her head to clear her mind of the negative thoughts. Now was definitely *not* the time to be getting nervous. Just get the job done and get the hell out of there.

Je’Nise reached the location described by the specialist. Very carefully, she deployed one of the waldos and used it to place a sophisticated listening device against the rough surface of Godzilla’s skin. Once the device was in place, she activated the sound feed from within the sub. The air inside the small cockpit was filled with a loud squeal until she reached out and turned down the gain on the receiver. A profound silence descended, marred only by the slight ringing in her ears caused by the momentary feedback.

For a moment, she thought there was nothing to hear. Godzilla *was* dead after all. They would have to come up with a new plan to fight the space monster, and Je’Nise wasn’t terribly upset about that. After a few seconds, however, her ears began to adjust to the sudden silence, and she

realized that there was a sound there, albeit a very faint one. It was a very soft, very low throbbing sound, as if someone were beating a bass drum a mile away: *thub-THUB, thub-THUB, thub THUB*. As she listened to the beating of Godzilla's mighty heart, Je'Nise's own heart sank. Wishful thinking be damned, Godzilla was definitely alive, and now came the *hard* part.

* * *

Je'Nise had no idea why, but for some reason they wanted her to get a freaking blood sample from Godzilla. A blood sample! Of all the stupid ideas.... The sad part, Je'Nise thought, was that the submersible was actually equipped for such a procedure. Well, not for taking *blood* samples, *per se*, but definitely for taking samples. Since the little sub was designed for deep sea exploration, it had the capacity to take core samples from the bottom of the ocean. This was accomplished by drilling a hole in the sea floor with a very narrow, very strong, tube. The tip of the tube was actually fitted with an industrial diamond-head drill bit in order to get through any rock that happened to be in the way of the sampling tube. Which was, of course, the whole reason why Je'Nise had been sent on this little expedition in the first place. Damn and double damn -- why couldn't she have been a truck driver instead?

Gregor, the Godzilla specialist from the U.N., had assured her that there was nothing to worry about. Godzilla was in a deep coma, and if he hadn't woken up already, nothing she did was going to change that. Besides, even if Godzilla *did* somehow wake up, he would perceive her

actions the same way a human being would perceive a mosquito bite. Je'Nise, who had swatted a goodly amount of mosquitos in her life, wasn't particularly reassured by this sentiment. She had sarcastically remarked that, if it were so damn safe, why didn't *he* come down here and do it himself. Either Gregor totally missed the sarcastic tone to her voice, or else was responding in kind, but he simply responded by saying that he was too big to fit in the little submersible. Which was true, of course, but that didn't make Je'Nise feel any better about it.

So here she was, the world's biggest mosquito. Not exactly what she wanted to put on a job resume, all things considered. As long as Godzilla stayed asleep, though, everything would be all right. At least, that's what she kept telling herself, over and over again, as she prepared to start drilling.

Gregor had at first suggested that she try drilling at some place where Godzilla's scales weren't as thick. Perhaps near the creature's eyes, or between it's toes. Je'Nise had told him to stuff it out his ear. She didn't care *how* out of it Godzilla might be -- there was no way in Hell she was gonna stick a needle into his eye or between his toes. Besides, the sampler had a maximum reach of 10 meters, which should be more than long enough to get through Godzilla's skin. And if Gregor didn't like it, he could come down and do it himself, and she didn't care how fat he was! Gregor had reluctantly agreed.

All of this assumed that the sampling probe could actually get through Godzilla's tough skin in the first place. It looked like solid rock, but that shouldn't be a problem. Of course, it might be ten times harder than solid rock, for all Je'Nise knew. There was only one way to find out, though,

and that was to give it a try. Taking a deep breath for purely symbolic reasons, she pushed the button that activated the probe.

Most people are probably unaware of this fact, but sound waves actually travel *better* through water and solid objects than they do through air. Je'Nise, on the other hand, knew it from past experience, and was getting a damn good illustration of the fact at the moment. As soon as the probe's drill bit struck the surface of Godzilla's skin and began burrowing into it, the sound was transmitted both through the water and along the length of the probe itself. As a result, the entire cockpit of the little submersible was soon awash with an eerie wail, the likes of which Je'Nise had never heard before. It permeated the air around her, reaching into every pore of her body. It made her teeth ache, and she could feel a headache building right behind her eyes.

Worse than the noise, however, was the vibration. Godzilla's skin *was* tougher than rock, apparently, and the probe seemed to be tearing itself apart as it dug deeper and deeper. The violence of the probe's struggle was causing the entire submersible to vibrate like a giant bell, and the deeper it got, the worse the vibrations, until Je'Nise began to fear that the sub itself might not last too much longer. But the probe *was* getting deeper, though, which was the important thing. Je'Nise had a feeling that the probe wouldn't be good for much else after this job was done, but if only it, and the sub, could hold themselves together for a few more minutes, she would be all right.

But just how thick *was* Godzilla's skin? Half a meter? A meter? Ten meters? More? Je'Nise didn't know how much longer she could keep this up. If they didn't get through the skin soon, something was going to give, and it wouldn't be a pretty sight when it did. Right now, the

probe was one full meter into Godzilla's skin, and still bucking like a bronco on PCP. Now, it was one and a half meters. Almost two....

And then, suddenly, the vibrations ceased. Je'Nise's first thought was that the probe had simply snapped off entirely. But, no -- the probe was still attached to the tube. In fact, it was now completely through the outer layer of Godzilla's skin and into the softer tissue below. Je'Nise quickly turned off the drill bit before it could go any deeper and *really* annoy Godzilla. A mosquito bite was one thing, but drilling all the way through his chest was quite another.

Then, Je'Nise activated the suction pump that would draw a small amount of material into the sample probe itself, down the connecting tube, and into the waiting receptacle on board the sub. For a few seconds nothing happened, but then the collection tube began filling up with a dark, viscous, evil-looking fluid. Je'Nise had no idea whether it was actually blood, or something else, but she didn't really care at this point. She just wanted to retract the probe and get the hell out of there.

Je'Nise disconnected the sampler tube from the collection tube and then hit the *reverse* button for the probe. There was a high-pitched whine as the drill motor increased its power, revving higher and higher, but the probe failed to retract. Somehow it was stuck. Je'Nise stared out her view port to where the probe was embedded firmly into Godzilla's flesh. As she watched, the sampler tube connected to the probe came loose from Godzilla, as if snipped off. And then, before her horrified eyes, the little hole left by the probe's entrance sealed itself off, trapping the probe inside.

The probe be damned, Je'Nise thought, I'm getting out of here. Hell -- they can bill me for it if they want! And with that, she reached for the controls of the sub to begin her ascent back to the surface.

Before she could do anything, however, she detected motion out of the corner of her eyes. She got a quick glimpse of Godzilla's skin suddenly getting closer -- Godzilla was waking up! -- and then the sub was hit with a tremendous impact that caused it to tumble away from Godzilla completely out of control.

Fortunately, Je'Nise really *was* the best sub pilot the Institute had, and she was able to bring it back under control before it hit anything else and suffered even greater damage. It took her a few extra seconds, however, to realize that Gregor was calling her on the radio, asking her if she were all right. They had tracked the events both on sonar and via the video feed. Apparently, Godzilla hadn't woken up after all; he had simply taken the equivalent of a sudden, deep breath, and the sub had been struck by his expanding chest.

How comforting, Je'Nise had replied. *Now* can I get the hell out of here?

* * *

Jerry Nichols was probably the only person left in Beaumont, Texas, who actually *remembered* what had happened there during Word War II. Well, "remembered" was probably too strong a word; at the ripe old age of 97, Jerry didn't really remember much of anything these days.

But he *had* been there, and every once in a while a little spark of memory ignited one of the few remaining neurons still functioning inside his withered brain.

He had been a young man back then, fresh out of his teens. He had actually been born in Port Arthur, just a few miles down the road, but his family had moved to Beaumont when he was only three years old. His father had been an oil man, and Beaumont was Oil Country. In fact, the world's first great oil gusher had come in at nearby Spindletop, and Beaumont had become one of the earliest centers of the burgeoning modern petroleum industry.

Over the years, Beaumont had also become one of the USA's largest petroleum refining and deposit areas, a fact which did not escape the attention of Nazi Germany. During most of the war, German U-Boats had targeted the entire area, prowling constantly off the coast and leaving the population in a state of sustained terror. Nobody knew when the attack would come, or how bad it would be.

Jerry had tried to enlist in the army, in spite of his parents' objections. He was an only child and they needed him to stay home and look after things. To his shame and dismay, but to his parents enormous relief, he had been rejected. "Fallen arches" might not sound like much of a curse, but Jerry's face had burned with the shame of being labeled "4F". All his friends had shipped out, and he had been left behind.

He had still tried to do his part for the war effort, though. He had volunteered long hours in the watch towers along the shoreline, keeping an eye out for the inevitable moment when a German sub would surface out of the deep, signaling an imminent attack. The attack had never come, but he

could still remember the feeling of dread and terror as he had looked out over the deceptively calm waters night after night. Nowadays, the memory of those long-ago nights mostly came to him in his dreams, but lately he seemed to be remembering those far-off events much better than more recent ones. He often sat in his rocking chair on the porch of his house, his mind drifting back over seventy years, and sometimes he could feel the terror and dread of that bygone time as if it were still 1944 and he were still up in the watchtower waiting for the attack to come.

And so, alone among the hundreds of thousands of residents of Beaumont, Jerry wasn't particularly surprised when the attack finally came. It wasn't the U-boat he had been expecting, but his mind didn't make much of a distinction. As the great winged shape flew over the Neches river, destroying both the Veterans and the Rainbow bridges in the process, Jerry knew what to do. Standing up, he shouted at the nonexistent people that stood at the bottom of his imaginary watchtower. "The Nazis are here! The Nazis are here!" he yelled, in as loud a voice as he could muster, a voice which seemed strangely weak to him.

A few moments later, a series of immense bio-electric plasma bolts rained down from the clear blue sky and struck the huge salt domes under which the US Strategic Petroleum Reserves lay. Most of the city of Beaumont was instantly obliterated by the resulting explosion. Jerry himself was killed almost instantly, and he died knowing that he had done his job and that his parents would be so proud of him.

Chapter Twenty-Four -- Say WHAT?

Back in the 1950's -- at the height of the cold war -- the Natick Army Research Laboratories facility was established in a sleepy little town fifteen miles due west of Boston, Massachusetts. At the time, it was felt that locating a top secret research facility in such an out-of-the-way place was the second best way to protect it from enemy attack. The *best* way to protect it, of course, was to keep it's true purpose a secret. Keeping a fully staffed military base a *complete* secret was out of the question, but it was surprisingly easy to convince people that "The Labs" was a simple R&D facility for such mundane items as better food storage technology and waterproof jungle gear.

Ironically, the cover story worked too well. By the early 1980's the Labs had gotten such a great reputation for producing improved rations and assorted battlefield survival gear that it was considered one of the top ten sites most likely to be nuked by the Russians in the event of a war. Of course, if the USSR had known about the biological warfare research that was *really* going on deep inside the Labs' sprawling underground complex, they wouldn't have waited for an official declaration of war to drop a couple of megatons on the site.

Finally, somebody in the Pentagon had the bright idea to discredit the Labs, at least in the public's eyes. A series of spectacular failures were staged, culminating in a much publicized test of a new flight suit for helicopter pilots that was supposed to protect them from the risk of fire in the event of a crash. Well, the suit emerged completely unscathed from the test. The crash test dummy

inside the suit, on the other hand, was cooked like a Thanksgiving turkey. The test had the desired effect, and by the mid 1990's nobody thought much about the Labs.

Colonel Michael Stinson had joined the staff of the Labs a couple of years after the “turkey suit” test. He was only a Captain back then and, under the command of then Colonel Mitchell Freeman, he had helped oversee the development of the ultra top secret “Matrix” project. The very same project which had been used to defeat Godzilla a few years later. Of course, nobody *knew* that the Labs had anything to do with Godzilla’s defeat, so the facility was able to keep it’s low profile. Well, *almost* nobody, but who was going to believe a couple of junior high school students?

In the fifteen years since Godzilla’s attack, Colonel Freeman had eventually retired, and Major Stinson had been promoted and had been put in charge of the facility. Because of the nature of the facility, it was more important to have somebody who already knew what was going on be in charge, as opposed to bringing in an outside officer who would have to be briefed on the situation.

As for the Matrix project itself, it, too, had worked too well. Originally conceived as a broad spectrum antibiotic, it had evolved into the ultimate biological weapon, capable of targeting any given genotype and delivering any desired disease to a person, or a particular group, with that genotype. The ultimate weapon for racial warfare. The ultimate weapon for any terrorist who got his hands on it. Rather than risk the weapon falling into the wrong hands, the Pentagon had decided to shelve the entire project after it had been used against Godzilla. The Labs soon began work on other projects and Colonel Stinson hadn’t discussed the matrix project with anyone since then. Neither had he heard it mentioned be anyone.

Until Dr. Fong from the United Nations called him, that is.

* * *

It was a overcast, blustery day, and the deck of the *Ballard* was not the most stable place in the world to be standing. In fact, Dr. Gregor Simonovitch kept a death grip on the railing as he inched toward the main cabin. Why they didn't have the bathroom [or "head," as the crew insisted on calling it for some arcane reason] in the same part of the ship as the control room was beyond him. Somewhere far back in Dr. Simonovitch's ancestry there were undoubtedly scads of fishermen who had spent their entire lives on the open sea, but those genes had apparently failed to make it all the way down to him. Right now, it was all he could do to keep from falling overboard.

In spite of his personal discomfort, Gregor was actually relieved that the day was as dark and stormy as it was. All the evidence so far indicated that the monster, Ghidorah, preferred to attack in full daylight, lending credence do to the theory that it was able do to absorb sunlight and convert it directly into energy. There was no guarantee, of course, that Ghidorah couldn't store up energy and attack in the middle of the night, but so far it hadn't done so, and as long as it remained cloudy that was one less thing that Gregor had do to worry about. Lord knew he had enough other things do to worry about right now.

He pulled himself into the main cabin. Outside, the storm that was brewing was still just a possibility. Inside the cabin, though, a storm of a very different type was raging full force. The

young black submersible pilot, Je'Nise, was striding up and down the length of the control room, waving her arms and shouting at the top of her lungs. The target of her diatribe was the army colonel who had apparently just come on board while Gregor was in the bathroom. Things had seemed peaceful enough when Gregor had left scant minutes ago, so he was at a little bit of a loss do to understand what the problem was. For that matter, the colonel himself seemed do to be unsure of what do to make of the situation either.

The colonel [Stenson? Stanton? Something like that] noticed Gregor's entrance and turned do to him with a look of mute supplication. Unfortunately, Je'Nise saw the look, and Gregor soon found himself on the receiving end of the young lady's barrage. It was almost comical do to hear such volume come out of somebody so small, but Gregor knew better than do to laugh; he was, after all, a family man, and he wanted do to retain his capacity do to have more children in the future.

"What the HELL do to you mean I have do to back down there? Are you people INSANE? Do to you have any idea whatsoever what it's like down there? What, you think just because I'm the token black woman onboard that I'm expendable or something? Well, if that's the case, you've got another thing coming to you, let me tell you!"

Gregor could understand why the colonel looked so flustered. Even if he had wanted to answer the young lady, she didn't even seem to take a breath between sentences. It was just one long string of continuous invective. The best bet, Gregor thought, was to simply wait until she had finally run out of things to say. Which, unfortunately for his beleaguered eardrums, didn't happen for another five minutes.

When Je'Nise finally did stop, it was very sudden. She stared Gregor directly in the eyes and simply said "well?"

Gregor hesitated for a second, and then decided to risk actually responding. "Er, I see you've met Colonel, um...."

"Stinson," the colonel volunteered guardedly. He'd already been yelled at, and wasn't anxious to become the focus of another verbal explosion.

"Colonel Stinson. Yes. Anyway, I see you two have met. I'm not sure what he told you, exactly, Miss, uh, St. Claire, but the colonel here is one of the keys to this entire mission. The other key, of course, is you."

Je'Nise started up again. "I don't want to be a 'key' for any damn mission --"

Gregor held up a hand in what he hoped was a calming gesture, and plunged blithely on. "The blood sample you obtained for us -- and let me tell you just how grateful we all are for the wonderful work you did, by the way -- was only the first half of our purpose here. Look, I'm sure you're aware of the problem we face right now. You may not understand just how serious it is, though.

"We've tried to keep publicity to a minimum, but the fact is that this creature from outer space, who we call Ghidorah --"

"I don't care WHAT the hell you call it --"

Gregor tried another placating gesture. "Please, if you'll just allow me to finish." Je'Nise glared at him, but didn't say anything. "Thank you. As I was saying, this Ghidorah seems intent on

nothing less than the complete destruction of this planet or, at the very least, the eradication of intelligent life on it. You may have heard what happened to Toronto. Well, the same thing has been repeated all over the globe -- London, Seoul, New York, Paris and even Moscow.” He tried to keep the tremor out of his voice as he mentioned that last one. Each city, gone without a trace, blasted off the face of the earth as if it had never even existed! And there is no indication that this creature, this *monster*, will stop until every population center, large or small, is completely destroyed.”

Je’Nise interrupted again, but this time her voice was tinged with horror instead of belligerence. “But, but -- why doesn’t the military do something about it. You know -- shot a missile at it or something.”

As the token representative of the military in the room, Colonel Stinson felt it was his responsibility to field this particular question. “We’ve tried, Ma’am. Nothing seems to work. Not only is this thing hideously destructive, it also seems to be completely invulnerable to anything we throw at it. We’re looking at the end of the world as we know it, I’m afraid.”

Gregor let that sink in before resuming his part of the discussion. “As the colonel points out, no man-made weapon seems to be effective. However, we do know of one other force which might possibly be capable of standing up to this monster.”

The answer was apparent, even to Je’Nise. “Godzilla.”

“Exactly. The problem now, however, is how to wake him up and get him to fight on our side, and that’s where you come in.”

“I don’t understand.”

“No reason you should, my dear, since nobody’s told you about it yet. I apologize for not going into greater detail with you before, but time was of the essence, and I figured you’d find out as you went along. Time is *still* of the essence, of course, so I’ll keep this short and to the point.

“The blood sample you obtained for us was sent to a special Army laboratory run by Colonel Stinson. His staff was able to analyze it and, uh, come up with a cure for what is ailing Godzilla.” Gregor could see that Je’Nise wasn’t buying this simple explanation, but she seemed willing to let it slide, at least for now. “He’s brought that cure with him, and your job will be to administer it the same way you obtained the blood sample in the first place.”

Je’Nise was getting angry again. “Yeah, I got that much from the colonel here when he first came onboard. What if he wakes up when I give him his shot?”

Gregor tried to speak in as calm a voice as possible, without actually sounding condescending. It wasn’t easy. “Yes, well, that’s where the other half of the solution comes in. At the same time you are giving Godzilla ‘his shot,’ as you put it, you will also be injecting a special microchip into his bloodstream.” As he said this, Gregor removed a small vial from his shirt pocket and held it up for Je’Nise to see.

“Say WHAT?” Je’Nise exploded. “You people really ARE insane, you know that? He’s what, a million tons or something, and your ‘big solution’ is to stick a piece of plastic the size of a postage stamp in him? This is supposed to make me feel better?”

Gregor sighed internally before attempting to continue. “I know it sounds hard to believe, but you have to trust me on this. This was designed specifically with Godzilla in mind, and there’s a

lot more to this little piece of silicon and metal than meets the eye. And besides, it's really our only hope. If this *doesn't* work, the human race is done for."

There was silence in the control room for a moment while Je'Nise thought about that. Finally, she nodded her head up and down slightly with a rueful smile. "Well, when you put it that way, I guess it doesn't really matter *what* I think about it anyway. I still don't think it's gonna work, but I'll do the job."

Chapter Twenty-Five -- The Sleeper Awakes

Far above Je'Nise, the skies had finally opened to unleash Mother Nature's fury. Torrential rains fell in almost opaque sheets, and wind-whipped waves reached heights of twenty feet and more. The *Ballard* was specifically built to handle rough weather like this, and was in no danger of sinking. That didn't mean that it was a particularly comfortable ride, however, and Dr. Simonovitch, Colonel Stinson and the rest of the crew were buffeted about like the little numbered balls in a lottery machine.

All was calm on the bottom of the ocean, however, where Je'Nise and her little submersible spurred along toward their fateful rendezvous. The damage to the sub's various appendages had been repaired, and there was nothing left but to go ahead with the mission. Any delay meant the potential death of more people, and Je'Nise did not need *that* particular guilt trip around her neck right now. So, in spite of her misgivings, she grimly headed back to Godzilla's resting place.

Not surprisingly, Godzilla was right where she had seen him last. This time, she knew what to expect, so the sight of the immense recumbent reptile didn't shock her as it did before. Terrified her, yes. But no surprise this time. And hopefully it would stay that way.

It was still difficult to comprehend the scale of the creature. Even knowing what she knew, Je'Nise's mind continued trying to convince her that it was just an optical illusion, or perhaps a

sunken oil tanker or something. She shook her head to clear her head of such thoughts. Right now, she had a job to do, and she darn well better get focused if she was going to do it right.

He really *was* huge, though. So huge that his form soon blotted out her front viewport entirely, even though she was still tens of meters distant. She drew closer and closer; thirty meters, then twenty. She hadn't really paid as much attention last time, back when she thought she was simply approaching a bizarre coral formation. Now, however, she could make out the texture of the creature's skin, almost like a porous tree bark with small [well, relatively speaking], spiny protuberances jutting out at odd angles. From this distance, she could clearly detect the regular patterns made by his overlapping scales.

Je'Nise's mind kept trying to compare it to something, to find some comparison, some way to intellectually get a *grip* on what she was seeing, but it was no use. She had heard that Godzilla was supposed to be a lizard of some sort, but that didn't help much either. She had owned an iguana as a young child, but this was nothing like her little green pet. Not even remotely. Maybe, as other people had claimed, he really *was* some sort of dinosaur, a member of a species whose terrible reign on this planet had ended millions of years ago. Or maybe he wasn't even from this planet in the first place. Je'Nise really didn't know, and she supposed that it didn't really matter, when you came right down to it. The important thing was simply that he *existed*, and that at the moment he was existing less than ten meters in front of her.

Five meters, four meters, three, two.... With a muted *thud* Je'Nise and her little submersible made contact once again with Godzilla. She tried to avoid thinking about it as much as possible.

Just get the job done and get out of here, she thought to herself, over and over again. Do the job, go home. Job, home.

The microchip was currently floating in a one-liter plastic bottle nestled on the dashboard in front of Je'Nise. At least, that's what she was told. The container itself, while transparent, was filled with a dark, viscous substance which she had been told was Godzilla's "medicine." The goal was to insert the microchip into Godzilla's bloodstream at the same time as the medicine. Unfortunately, though, the sampling probe was designed to extract material, not inject it. If Je'Nise put the liquid into the probe before activating the drilling mechanism, it would just be sucked right back into the sub. Instead, she had to wait until the probe had finished penetrating Godzilla's thick skin, turn the drill off, and *then* pour the fluid into the hose connecting the probe to the collection jar. The final step was to simply flood the hose with water from inside the sub, and hope that the pressure was enough to force the fluid up the tube, through the probe, and into Godzilla. The timing was crucial, however, since it would probably only be a matter of seconds before Godzilla's incredible metabolism kicked in, sealing the wound.

Je'Nise looked around her one more time, just to make sure that everything was in place and ready to go. Then, taking a deep breath and wondering yet again what she was doing down here, she activated the probe.

Once again, the air around Je'Nise was saturated with the eerie wail of the drill bit's vibration, as it attempted to plunge through Godzilla's nearly impermeable skin. She knew what to expect this time, but that didn't make the noise and the shaking any easier to take. All she could do

was grit her teeth and hope that everything held together long enough to get the job done. Almost there....

And then, that sudden calm again as the probe passed through Godzilla's outer skin and into the softer flesh below. Je'Nise had only seconds to act now, she knew, and she moved about the cabin with a practiced efficiency. She opened up the probe's sample container and emptied the contents of the plastic bottle into it. Then, as she had rehearsed, she grabbed the hose leading to the sub's fresh water supply and stuffed it into the container. The fit wasn't perfect, but it would have to do. Finally, she reached down and turned on the water, flushing the noxious mixture up through the probe's collection tube and into Godzilla himself. Dr. Simonovitch had assured her that the liquid wasn't toxic, but it was still nasty looking and smelly, and Je'Nise was very careful not to let any of it splash back on her.

And then, as simple as that, it was done. The collection tube was empty, and nothing seemed to be washing back into it. Je'Nise considered taking the time to detach the probe from Godzilla but, thinking back on what had happened last time, decided to forget it. *They can bill me, if they want,* she thought. Instead, she closed up the collection tube to prevent any water from getting in, jumped back into the control seat, and put the little sub into full reverse. With a jolt, the collection tube snapped off, and she was on her way.

* * *

Dr. Simonovitch and Colonel Stinson were observing the proceedings from the *Ballard's* control room, while the crew of the ship stayed busy trying to keep the vessel afloat. The wind had continued to pick up, and the waves were now thirty feet high at times. Dr. Simonovitch had made it as far as the door, but no farther, before finally succumbing to sea sickness, and the pungent aroma now wafted throughout the cabin. Colonel Stinson tactfully refrained from making any comment, but still covered his nose as unobtrusively as possible.

Dr. Simonovitch and Colonel Stinson were not the only observers, however. The data from the sub, as well as images from cameras on the deck of the *Ballard* were being relayed from a microwave dish on top of the ship. Satellite communication was still out, and would remain that way until somebody got around to launching new satellites, but line-of-sight communication was still possible. The signal which originated from the *Ballard* was bounced from one microwave tower to the next until it reached its destination far below the United Nation building in New York, where Dr. Fong, Dr. Oguri and the rest of the team stood by waiting.

The same microwave beams that relayed the images from the *Ballard* would also transmit the control signals to the microchip now embedded within Godzilla's flesh. Or, at least, that was the theory. As soon as she had received word that the chip had been implanted, Dr. Oguri activated her console and triggered the impulse that would take over Godzilla's nervous system.

Kenny spoke aloud, seemingly to the empty air. "Gregor, how long until we see a reaction to the anti-toxin?"

Dr. Simonovitch's voice, when it came over the loudspeakers, sounded very shaky. "Um, it should only be a matter of minutes, really. The strain of botulism that was used in the first place was very fast-acting, according to the colonel here, and the reaction to the anti-toxin should be just as quick. If my theories are correct, Godzilla's metabolism should be in a state of almost perfect equilibrium right now, as his immune system struggles to fight off the poison. Now that the anti-toxin has been introduced, however, that equilibrium should shift dramatically in Godzilla's favor. I hope Miyuki is ready with her microchip."

Kenny looked over at Dr. Oguri at her control panel, and was deeply disturbed at the look he saw on her face. "What's wrong, Miyuki? Please tell me the chip is working!"

Dr. Oguri looked up from her console. "Yes, Dr. Fong, the chip seems to be working. For now, at least."

Kenny didn't like the sound of that. "What do you mean 'for now'? Is it working or isn't it?"

Dr. Oguri looked very apologetic. "I'm sorry, Dr. Fong, but there's a problem. Godzilla's blood is apparently a lot more radioactive than we anticipated, and the radiation is causing the microchip to degrade."

"Degrade? How much time do we have?"

"It's really hard to tell, exactly, but I'd estimate at least twenty-four hours, but no more than forty-eight. After that, Godzilla will be completely out of our control."

Before that could sink in, Kenny's thoughts were interrupted by a shout from Dr. Bouromphongsa. "Look there, on the screen! The water is boiling!"

* * *

For fifteen years, a battle had been raging deep inside of Godzilla. A deadly neurotoxin, tailored to his unique genetic structure, had attacked every cell of his body with one goal, and one goal only -- complete and utter annihilation. His body's nature defense mechanism, combined with his preternatural regenerative abilities, should have been rendered completely useless against such an attack at the genetic level. The only reason Godzilla was still alive, in fact, was that his DNA had undergone a slight mutation just before he was infected. Not enough of a mutation to resist the toxin entirely, but enough to keep him alive. Barely.

The battle was at a stalemate, and had been for some time. All of Godzilla's bodily functions, with the exception of some deep-seated autonomic systems, had been completely shut down in order to conserve the resources necessary to wage the war within him. Without some outside intervention, however, it was a war that Godzilla was destined to eventually lose. Godzilla was used to hibernating for long periods of time at the bottom of the ocean -- years, decades, centuries, even longer. But now his body radiated the heat caused by the inner struggle at an alarming rate, and whatever energy stores he would otherwise have used to maintain his life over the long years were being rapidly depleted. Five years more, perhaps ten, and Godzilla would cease to exist.

But suddenly, there was a change in the battle for Godzilla's life. The stalemate was broken as a new substance entered Godzilla's bloodstream, an anti-toxin that multiplied rapidly as it sought out and destroyed the invading spores that continued to release the poison into Godzilla. The tide of the struggle changed rapidly and dramatically as Godzilla's own immune system was now able to take the offensive and drive the invaders from every cell of his body.

Heat poured from Godzilla's body in immense pulses as his metabolism kicked into high gear. A purging fever that coursed through his entire frame in a matter of seconds, heating the surrounding water to steam. His body began to convulse, twitching spasmodically as the poison was flushed from his system, further churning the water into a white froth.

And then, the twitching stopped. The struggle was over, the battle won. For the first time in fifteen years, Godzilla opened his eyes. Opening his mouth, he let out a roar that was heard by whales half a world away. He was still weak, and his thoughts, such as they were, were not entirely his own. But he was alive. And awake.

Chapter Twenty-Six -- A Slight Change of Plans

“Forty-eight hours? Damn it all!”

Air Marshal Reginald Lethbridge-Smythe could feel his customary British reserve slipping as he talked to Dr. Fong on the phone. Was *nothing* going to go right with this operation? He knew that yelling at Dr. Fong wasn't going to solve anything, especially since it wasn't Kenny's fault in the first place, but that didn't make things any better.

“Let me get this straight, Kenny. We've got forty-eight hours -- tops -- to get Godzilla to Ghidorah, and we also have to make sure that our containment sphere is in place when he gets there? We don't know even know where Ghidorah is right now, so how the bloody hell are we supposed to get everything together in the same place?”

Dr. Fong's voice was scratchy, but clearly audible through the phone's earpiece. “Reggie, you know we've been over this before. In fact, you were the one who came up with the idea of luring Ghidorah to the designated battle site, remember?”

Reggie uttered a loud *harrumph* in irritation. “Of *course* I remember the plan. But the plan was also to keep Godzilla on ice while we tested it out, to see if we really could lure Ghidorah in the first place. Hell, it will take us almost a full day just to get the sphere in place.”

Dr. Fong responded without a trace of irony in his voice. “Well, now’s your big chance to test it out, Reggie. I know it’s short notice, but we don’t have much choice. The clock is ticking, and if we wait too long we’ll have *two* monsters on the rampage instead of just one.”

Reggie knew when to accept the inevitable. “O.K., what about the engagement area? Is it clear?”

“The town and surrounding communities have been fully evacuated, and a fifty-mile cordon has been placed around the area. The nuclear power plant has been completely shut down, and all fissionable materials have been removed, so you don’t need to worry about that either. We’ll start moving Godzilla there momentarily, and he should be there by noontime tomorrow. And Reggie?”

“Yes, Kenny?”

“Good luck. I don’t envy you being there in the middle of everything, but I can’t think of anyone who could do the job better than you.”

“I appreciate the vote of confidence, Kenny, but I still wish it were someone else going.”

* * *

Reggie hung up and looked at the people waiting around him. Most of the people were the crew who had actually built the massive containment sphere here at the production facility. They were the lucky ones; their work was done, and once the sphere was on its way they could all go home.

A much smaller group of people was composed of the soldiers making up his team. Most were from the Army Corps of Engineers, and would be responsible for setting up and deploying the sphere. They were also trained in combat, of course, but nobody had any illusions that those particular skills would be of much use in this situation. Still, carrying a rifle certainly didn't hurt.

And finally, last but not least, was that mining fellow, Peter Murdock. His partner, Ted, had left for home as soon as they had returned from space. Peter, on the other hand, had asked to stick around, mostly because he claimed that he had no place better to go, but also because he thought he might be able to help in some small way. And he *had* been able to help. Peter's experience with various metals and his engineering background had made the process of building the sphere run that much smoother.

Reggie had been disturbed by Peter's next request, however, which was to accompany the team on the capture mission. It was highly dangerous, Reggie had explained, even suicidal, but Peter wouldn't back down. Apparently, he held himself personally responsible for Ghidorah's release, and simply bringing a sample of the sphere metal back down to Earth wasn't even remotely sufficient to redeem himself, at least in his own eyes. Reggie had attempted to convince the young man that nobody blamed him, that he couldn't possibly have known, but it was no use. Reggie could see that Peter would be haunted with blame for the rest of his life unless he could make amends, or die trying, and he finally agreed to let Peter join the team. Besides, if this plan didn't work they might all be dead anyway.

Reggie addressed the room, trying to keep his voice as cheerful as possible. "All right everybody, this is it -- the moment we've been waiting for. I wish we had more time to prepare, to run tests, but we don't. Fortunately, you've all done excellent work here, and I have full confidence that everything will work out the way we planned. Now, if nobody has any questions, let's get this show on the road!"

Nobody had any questions.

* * *

Back onboard the *Ballard*, things had finally settled down a bit. The storm had finally abated, and they were heading southwest toward Long Island Sound. Somewhere many meters below the ship, Godzilla was following under Dr. Oguri's control. Kenny tried to imagine what Godzilla looked like as he swam, but gave up. He had always assumed that the giant creature would simply *walk* along the ocean floor, but sonar images confirmed that he was indeed swimming.

Kenny had tried to sound confident while talking to Reggie on the phone, but the truth was that he was terrified. What if they couldn't lure Ghidorah in time? What if the containment sphere didn't work? And, Kenny's worst fear of all, what if Miyuki's control slipped prematurely and Godzilla regained his senses while *underneath the boat!* Kenny tried not to think of Godzilla rising from the depths and ramming the ship, or reaching out with a massive clawed hand to pull the ship underwater, or disintegrating it with his atomic breath, but he couldn't stop the constant parade of

morbid images running through his fevered mind. The audio and video links with the ship were still live, and every time he heard a board creak, or a particularly large wave rocked the ship, Kenny was sure that this was it, the end was near, the ship was done for, and with it their only hope.

* * *

Godzilla moved silently through the murky depths, like some unimaginably huge torpedo. His tail whipped back and forth through the water, providing him with the impetus needed to propel him forward, and his entire body wriggled like a snake as he moved. His arms and legs, on the other hand, were flat against his sides to provide the least amount of drag. Godzilla was surprisingly hydrodynamic, and moved with a fluid grace not immediately evident when he walked on land.

Godzilla didn't know where he was going, nor why he was going there for that matter. In fact, Godzilla wasn't "thinking" much of anything at the moment. Something beyond his control was urging him onward to an unknown destination. A human being would have been enraged to find himself being controlled in this manner, but Godzilla simply wasn't capable of understanding what was being done to him. A creature of instinct, he simply went where he was compelled to go, and did whatever nature told him to do. The fact that "nature" in this case was actually a Japanese woman, hundreds of miles away and sending radio impulses into a microchip lodged deep within his body, didn't matter to Godzilla. He just went with the flow.

Chapter Twenty-Seven -- Bait for the Trap

The military convoy had finally gotten underway, and was now heading toward the designated battle zone in Connecticut. All traffic had been cleared to make way for the procession, in order that it could reach its destination as quickly as possible. Even so, the timing would be tight; any non-essential vehicles that broke down would have to be abandoned, their crews reassigned to other vehicles. Comfort was not an issue here, speed was.

At the center of the convoy were two enormous, specially modified flat bed trucks. Atop each truck, sitting on a bed of giant rollers, was one half of the mirrored containment sphere, each half almost five hundred feet in diameter. At the moment, each hemisphere was upside-down, with the hollow end pointing toward the sky. When the rollers were activated, however, each half would be rotated into a vertical position, in order that they could then be joined together. Of course, the plan was that Ghidorah would be in between the two halves at the time....

The size of the sphere dictated the route the convoy followed. There would be no time to assemble the sphere from scratch on-site, which meant it had to be transported as nearly intact as possible. Unfortunately, there didn't exist a helicopter or airplane large enough to carry an object of that size, which meant the open road. Even keeping to the new superhighway system built over the last ten years, it was cramped, to say the least.

A little further back was a smaller flatbed truck, with a large, tarp-covered object tied down on it. The shape was indistinct under the protective covering, but it was clearly oblong and approximately twenty feet in length. At a casual glance it resembled some sort of odd-shaped missile or a refugee spaceship from an old Buck Rogers serial.

For several hundred feet behind and in front of the three flatbed trucks, the rest of the team rode in green covered military transport vehicles. And in the front of the convoy was a lone jeep, driven by Air Marshal Reginald Lethbridge-Smythe himself. He could have had a driver, but that would have been just one more person's life to needlessly risk, and Reggie had enough blood on his hands as is.

As he thought about needlessly risking people's lives, Reggie stole a quick glance at the somber young man riding beside him. Well, "young" compared to himself, that is; this whole mission was really causing Reggie to feel his age, and thirty seemed like a mere baby to him right now. He hadn't thought it appropriate for Peter to ride with the soldiers and other military personnel, and this way Reggie could also keep an eye on him. Reggie knew that it wouldn't take much to push the young man over the edge from mild depression to being outright suicidal, and he had begun to take a fatherly, or at least an avuncular, interest in Peter.

Returning his gaze to the road in front of him, Reggie tried to engage Peter in conversation. "There's still time, you know. I can drop you off right here and have somebody swing by and pick you up. I mean, your help has been absolutely invaluable -- don't get me wrong -- but there's really no need for you to put your life in danger. It really wasn't your fault, after all."

Reggie's only response was silence.

He thought he'd better try a different track. "Um, I suppose you're wondering what's on that other lorry back there, eh? While you engineers were putting together your containment sphere, the rest of us were building our own little science project."

Reggie stole another glance at his passenger. Peter still wasn't saying anything, but at least he was looking in his direction. *Curious people don't commit suicide*, Reggie thought before continuing. "Ah, well, you see, having a containment device is all well and good, but only if we can get it to Ghidorah. Or, in this case, if we can lure the beast to the containment device. What's a mousetrap without the cheese, eh?"

Reggie laughed at his own joke, but quickly stopped when he noticed that he was the only one laughing. "Ahem. Yes. Well, obviously we need a very special sort of bait for this particular mouse, as it were. Unfortunately, we haven't seen it eat anything. In fact, we're not even sure if it *needs* to eat anything. My colleague, Gregor, is convinced that it obtains all it's necessary sustenance directly from sunlight."

"What, like a plant?"

Reggie was surprised at the question, but tried not to let it show. Inwardly, however, he was delighted that Peter seemed to be finally coming out of his self-imposed shell of apathy. At least a little bit. "Well, no, not exactly. More like a photoelectric solar cell, I would think. Still, I suppose that you could say that the chlorophyll in a plant's cells acts like tiny solar cells, so maybe you're right after all. I'll have to ask Gregor about that next time I see him. The point, though, is that

Ghidorah seems to be able to absorb energy directly and convert it into whatever form it needs to survive.”

Peter piped in, with a little more enthusiasm this time. “That’s why nobody’s launched a nuke against it!”

“Exactly. We don’t know the upper limit of its powers of energy absorption, and nobody wants to risk making it even stronger than it is now. If such a thing is even possible, that is. Anyway, what this basically means is that Ghidorah uses energy for food. And once we know what it ‘eats,’ we can use that as bait for our little trap.”

Peter was obviously a little skeptical. “Uh, sure. But you said it absorbed solar radiation. What are you going to do – stick the sun in a box?”

Reggie smiled what he hoped was a fatherly smile. “No, not quite. You see, we’ve been able to learn a lot about the creature from his many attacks, and we’ve been able to analyze those energy bolts of his. They radiate a very specific frequency of light, one which can be detected with a properly calibrated spectrometer. Once we know what the frequency is, we can duplicate it. That gadget back there is a sort of Van de Graaff generator – do you know what that is?”

Peter nodded in affirmation. “Sure – I saw one of those at the Museum of Science as a kid. They actually had two of them, and they created these huge lightning bolts that would go back and forth between them. It made everybody’s hair stand on end! But, I thought those just produced static electricity?”

“Well, as I said, this is a *sort* of Van de Graaff generator. It runs on the same general principal, except that it has a number of capacitors to store the electricity, and then modulated converters change it into the desired frequency. Also, instead of random bolts of lightning, the generator will produce a super charged aura surrounding the discharge end.” *Or, at least, that’s the theory. Damn, but I wish we had time to test it out!*

* * *

The *Ballard* had nearly reached the Connecticut coastline, slightly ahead of schedule. Knowing that one was being followed by a four-hundred foot long creature of mass destruction did wonders for one’s sense of urgency, apparently. The seas were relatively calm, and Dr. Simonovitch and Colonel Stinson were conferring on the deck.

“I notice that you carried *two* biohazard container with you when you came on board,” Gregor started. “I assume that the other container holds what I think it holds?”

Colonel Stinson nodded glumly. “Yeah. Now that we have another sample of Godzilla’s DNA, Dr. Fong asked me to integrate it into the Matrix along with another toxin. If Ghidorah doesn’t kill Godzilla off, I guess we’re supposed to finish the job.”

“But, why do you look so sad?”

“Listen, Doctor. I was *there* when Godzilla attacked Boston. I saw the destruction firsthand, and I watched my friends die. Don’t think for an instant that I’ll be sorry to see Godzilla die for good. It’s just that...”

“Yes?”

“Well, I was also there when we injected the Matrix into Godzilla in the first place. It was horrible, Doctor, truly horrible. The agony he went through, the suffering -- it was just too much to watch. I know I’m a soldier, but that’s more than I would wish on my worst enemy. I mean, if I had a magic button that I could push and make Godzilla simply *vanish*, I’d push it in an instant! But *that*, it was just plain *wrong!*”

Gregor nodded somberly. “I think I see what you mean. Still, it’s better than the alternative, which would be to let Godzilla loose on the countryside, eh?”

“I suppose. One thing worries me, though.”

“And that is?”

“Well, Dr. Fong told me where they are setting up the so-called ‘battle-zone’ -- it’s right near a new nuclear power plant. He assured me that the place will be completely shut down, but if even a *little* radiation escapes, and Godzilla is exposed to it -- well, let’s just say I won’t have to worry about inflicting any more pain and suffering on him if that happens.”

Gregor smiled thinly. “So which is it, comrade? First you don’t *want* to use the Matrix, and then you’re afraid it won’t work if you *do* use it. You can’t have it both ways, I’m afraid.”

“Yeah, I know. Let’s just hope Godzilla and Ghidorah kill each other, and we don’t have to worry about it.”

“Ah – an optimist!” Gregor patted his new American friend roughly on the back, and then turned to go back into the cabin.

Chapter Twenty-Eight -- The Trap Is Set

The convoy arrived at the outskirts of New Haven, Connecticut, at a few minutes before ten o'clock in the morning. So far, everything seemed to be going according to plan. The *Ballard* and Godzilla were still en route, and were due to arrive sometime around noon. As for Ghidorah, the latest reports indicated that it was keeping to its pattern of remaining in direct sunlight, and was currently in the process of obliterating Memphis, Tennessee. If Elvis had been still hanging around after all these years, he was definitely dead now.

Nobody was entirely sure what the range of the generator was, nor how sensitive Ghidorah would be to its emanations. Hell-- nobody was even sure whether Ghidorah would even be attracted to it in the first place. But the engineering team's best guestimate was that it should work if Ghidorah was within a one thousand mile radius when the device was activated. Of course, nobody raised the obvious question: are we sure we *want* to attract Ghidorah? Everybody involved knew exactly what he was getting himself into, and questioning the sanity of the basic plan wasn't particularly productive.

Most of the team, including the retired Air Marshal and Peter, went with the containment sphere to the recently evacuated Settler Nuclear Power plant located approximately five miles away. Built according to the newest international standards, the Settler plant was designed to completely contain a worst-case nuclear disaster should one occur. Not even a total core meltdown would

breach it's outer walls. Basically, a nuclear bomb could be detonated inside the reactor core without any radiation escaping to the surrounding area. Or so the theory went. For obvious reason, nobody had attempted to test it in practice. Still, it seemed to provide the perfect cover for the team as they watched the ensuing battle.

Those members of the team responsible for setting up the generator drove to the designated battle zone itself, a deserted tract of land along the coast, bordered by Route 1 and Interstate I-95. First, they set up a number of cameras and other shielded sensors, designed to transmit data to the rest of the team at the nuclear power plant, the crew on-board the *Ballard*, and the rest of the people watching deep within the bowels of the U.N. building. Since much of what was going to happen would be done by remote control, it was crucially important that all parties involved could see and hear what was going on.

Next, they set up the generator itself. It actually *did* look like a giant Van de Graaff machine, with its large metallic ball atop a tall, slender column. The column was studded with various instruments, however, and the ball itself was enclosed within a wire mesh frame. Long, thick cables, each as thick as a man's arm, ran from the base of the machine to a large, black box festooned with all manner of lights, dials and antennae, and permanently affixed to the bed of the truck. Once the generator was set up and fully tested, everyone retreated to the power plant to rejoin the rest of the team. It was now exactly five minutes after noon.

* * *

As soon as the generator team was safely away from the designated battle zone, Reggie activated the device by remote control. He would have preferred to wait until the team was safely inside the power plant with the rest of them, but time was not on their side. Besides, even flying at Mach 5 it would take Ghidorah a good while to reach the site. Assuming he came at all, that is.

Reggie and the rest of his team watched the generator on the portable monitors they had set up in the power plant's main control room. They actually had five separate monitors running, one for each of the main cameras surrounding the site. On each one, an image of the generator was clearly displayed – no static, no interference. So far, so good.

At first, there was no discernable change in the generator, although a low hum could be heard over the audio feed. As the energy charge slowly built in intensity, however, small electrical discharges – tiny lightning bolts – could be seen racing across the wire mesh surrounding the metal ball atop the generator. Within minutes, the ball itself was hidden from view by the electrical activity, and a faint blue aura could clearly be seen emanating from the ball and extending fifty or so feet in all directions. Reggie had never seen anything so captivating, so beautiful, before in his life. It was eerily hypnotic, and he found himself drawn to the image in front of him like a moth to a flame. Hopefully, he thought remotely, Ghidorah would find it even more irresistible.

* * *

At fifteen minutes after twelve, the *Ballard* entered the relatively shallow waters of Long Island Sound, right off the Connecticut coast. This was close enough for them – here they would drop anchor and hopefully sit out the rest of the proceedings in safety. But first, there was still the matter of Godzilla....

Gregor would have preferred to be in direct control of Godzilla himself. Not because he thought that he could do a better job than Dr. Oguri, of course. After all, she was the one who had designed the control chip in the first place. It was simply the thought of being a passive observer as something as huge -- and as hugely destructive -- as Godzilla was brought out of the ocean only a few hundred meters away from him. If something were to go wrong, if the radio link between Miyuki and Godzilla were broken – well, Gregor tried not to dwell on such thoughts. He failed miserably, of course.

They received word from Reggie that the generator was in place and transmitting as planned. Dr. Fong had then contacted them from the U.N. to let them know that it seemed to be having the desired effect – Ghidorah had been observed changing course, and now seemed to be heading directly toward them. Fortunately, its flight path would not put it directly overhead – it should reach the generator first. Assuming it kept to its current flight path, that is. And assuming that it actually was responding to the generator, and was not just heading this way due to some cosmic irony. Although raised as an atheist, Gregor often felt sure that there was indeed a God, and that he was often amusing himself by playing capricious jokes on those poor mortals far below him.

Regardless, everything was coming together as planned, and it was now time to bring the last part of the plan to fruition. Dr. Fong radioed that Miyuki had given the signal, and all they could do now was watch and wait. And worry.

On cue, the water began to churn a few hundred feet away from the *Ballard*. Everyone held on to the rails as the ship began to be buffeted by the increasingly large waves. The disturbance in the water grew in intensity, the water turning white with agitation. And then, something broke the surface. A large dark shape, hard to make out against the froth and spume. As it rose, however, one giant eye, then another, quickly became discernable. Then, the terrible maw, agape and filled with deadly teeth. Now the spines were visible running down the monster's back, swaying gently back and forth as he lurched forth. Two arms, surprisingly small when compared to the rest of the creature's enormous bulk, were visible next, together with his massive chest.

Far behind Godzilla, so far away that it seemed a separate event, the tip of his long, serpentine tail broke the water for the first time, creating its own disturbance. As Godzilla rose higher and higher from the water on his way to the shore, his tail began to rise and fall, slapping the water and sending great jets of liquid in all directions. The crew on board the *Ballard* watched in dumb amazement, not even caring that they were getting drenched in the process. None of them, save Je'Nise and Colonel Stinson, had ever seen Godzilla close up, and even those two were struck silent by the spectacle.

Godzilla continued rising from the water until he reached the shore line. Almost fully exposed now, he stood nearly four hundred feet tall. Water dripped from his spines like miniature waterfalls. A few seagulls swooped in to investigate, and then wheeled away in abject terror.

Godzilla turned his head to stare at the sun, a sight he had not seen in fifteen years. And then, in spite of whatever control Dr. Oguri was exerting on him, he opened his mouth wide and let out a roar that caused the people on the *Ballard* to clap their hands to their ears in surprise and pain. A visceral sound, rich with subsonics that caused the very air to tremble. A sound of raw power, long bottled up and now finally able to escape.

Chapter Twenty-Nine – Battle Zone!

Air Marshal Reginald Lethbridge-Smythe heard the sound of Godzilla's roar more than three miles away, even deep inside the nuclear power plant. Not only was it carried over the live audio feed to the battle zone, but the very walls of the plant reverberated with the power of the sound. It was enough to enable him to tear his eyes away from the screen and from the image of the generator displayed on it.

Reggie shook his head to clear away the cobwebs. He couldn't quite remember exactly how long he had been staring at the screen, which worried him a bit. Looking around, he noticed that most of the team were still staring at the various monitor screens with looks of rapt attention on their faces, although a few were looking around with slightly dazed expressions.

Reggie clapped his hands together sharply and called out into the now silent control room. "All right, people! If everyone is done gawking, we've got a job to do." There were a few startled jerks from some of the team members, as well as a few sheepish grins, but everybody stopped staring and returned to their assigned positions. Of course, some of the team members were assigned to stare at the screen, but they took care to not become enraptured by the sight again.

Reggie looked down and noticed for the first time that the communications signal light was flashing red. He pushed the activation button and spoke into the microphone set into the console in front of him. "Lethbridge-Smythe here. Go ahead."

There was a brief pause, and then Gregor Simonovitch's voice could be heard wafting through the air. "Yes, Reggie -- This is Gregor on board the *Ballard*. In case you haven't noticed, we've, ah, arrived."

Reggie fiddled with the controls in front of him for a second. One of the monitor cameras began to track slowly until it was facing the shoreline. Reggie could clearly make out the shape of the *Ballard*, and beside it –

"Bloody hell, he's huge! Um, sorry about that. Yes, Gregor, I see you. It looks like your 'cargo' arrived as well. I assume he's firmly under control?"

"So far, Reggie. That roar was a bit unexpected, but other than that he's just standing here awaiting further instructions. How about the generator? I can just barely see it from here, but it seems to be operating."

"The generator is up and running just fine, although I'd advise against staring at it for any length of time. It also seems to be working. Dr. Fong has informed us that Ghidorah is headed this way, ETA about thirty minutes. He wants to wait until Ghidorah has actually entered the zone before bringing Godzilla in, although it's not as if it won't notice Godzilla standing there. Hopefully Godzilla won't scare Ghidorah off, or we'll have to do this all over again."

Gregor's voice was very somber. "Somehow, Reggie, I do not think we will have to worry about that."

* * *

Back underneath the United Nations Building, the tension was almost palpable, as if a thick, cloying fog had entered through the ventilation system and was permeating every nook and cranny. And right in the center of the cloud stood Dr. Oguri, staring at her console with a look of intense concentration on her face, her brow deeply furrowed and sweat dripping into her eyes. Kenny had never seen her like this before, not in all the years they had been working together. He knew that Miyuki felt personally responsible for the failure of her control chip on Ghidorah, and for the subsequent destruction of most of New York City, even though he and the rest of the Committee had tried to convince her otherwise. Even the Secretary General had told her not to blame herself.

It was no use, though. Miyuki had failed once, even if only in her own mind, and this was her one chance to redeem herself. And the knowledge that the control chip was rapidly degrading within Godzilla robbed her of any satisfaction she would have otherwise gotten from knowing that it was at least working for the moment. If anything went wrong, if more people died because of her failure, she didn't think she would be able to live with herself after that.

Kenny's attention was caught by a flashing light on the phone in front of him. He picked it up, listened for a few seconds and then hung up. Turning to the rest of the team, and Miyuki in particular, he said the two most momentous words he had ever uttered in his life.

"It's time."

* * *

Ghidorah crossed over the Connecticut border traveling at Mach 4 and decelerating rapidly. By the time it reached New Haven, it was practically hovering. For a few seconds it remained poised a few hundred feet above the generator, flapping it's gargantuan wings and creating a massive dust storm which temporarily blocked the view of those watching remotely via video feed.

All three of it's heads seemed totally focused on the blue aura emanating from the generator, and it didn't even glance toward the shoreline where Godzilla stood waiting like a modern-day Colossus. And then, still not looking in any other direction, it slowly settled down beside the generator and enveloped it within its massive wings, hugging it close against it's body.

Inside the nearby nuclear power plant, Reggie watched the indicator dials with growing dismay. Whatever Ghidorah was doing, it was draining the generator's power at a tremendous rate. In fact, at this rate it would only last for three or four more minutes at best. And then, Ghidorah would fly away. If they were lucky, that is. If they were unlucky, it would lash out and destroy everything in sight. In either case, they would be in big trouble. Reggie picked up the microphone and frantically radioed to Kenny to start moving Godzilla now, before it was too late.

* * *

Kenny received Reggie's panicked message, and gave Dr. Oguri the signal to bring Godzilla in. Miyuki did not reply, but the sudden motion of her fingers across her console indicated that she

heard. Kenny desperately wanted to ask her if everything was working correctly, but knew better than to disturb her concentration. Besides, he was sure Miyuki would tell him if anything was going wrong.

On the main view screen, Godzilla began to move. Slowly at first, ponderously, but then with greater determination. Kenny caught a quick glimpse of Godzilla's face as the giant creature turned his head from side to side, and he saw what looked like an expression of terror flash across the monster's visage. Kenny was sure that he was imagining it, just anthropomorphizing a bit, and he looked over at Miyuki to ask what, exactly, she was doing. Again, though, he decided not to interrupt her concentration. And when he looked back at the screen, Godzilla's face was no longer visible.

And then, for the first time, Kenny saw Godzilla and Ghidorah on the view screen together and his jaw dropped, first in amazement, and then in despair. Godzilla, Kenny knew from experience, was between three and four hundred feet tall – a true giant, an unstoppable force of nature. But next to Ghidorah, Godzilla looked small and ineffectual. With a sinking feeling deep in the pit of his stomach, Kenny realized that Ghidorah must be almost five hundred feet tall! A low moan escaped his lips as he realized that the entire idea of pitting Godzilla against this nightmare from outer space was utter folly. All it could possibly accomplish would be to irritate Ghidorah. Their only hope was to call off the attack, lead Godzilla back out to sea, and hope that Ghidorah hadn't noticed Godzilla's approach.

Kenny turned back to Miyuki to tell her to break turn Godzilla around, but it was too late. Godzilla had begun his attack.

* * *

Godzilla did not know what was happening to him. His mind, such as it was, was completely overcome by a sense of terror and fear. Neither of these were emotions he was accustomed to feeling. And the source of these feelings was the strange creature standing less than two hundred feet in front of him. Or so the control chip embedded deep within him led him to believe.

Godzilla shook his head back and forth, his mouth beginning to froth as these alien emotions threatened to overwhelm him. He wanted to flee back into the sea, but something prevented him from leaving. Instead, against his will, he felt his nuclear fire building deep inside his chest. *Something* told him that he should blast the offending creature, that this was the only way to rid himself of his fear.

The spines running up and down Godzilla's back began to glow a fluorescent bluish-white. Godzilla shook his head one more time, spittle flying in all directions, and then he opened his mighty jaws wide and focused his wrath on the strange winged beast standing in front of him.

* * *

The *Ballard* had a ringside seat for the battle, far closer than anyone on board would have wished. In fact, the only reason the ship hadn't fled back to the open ocean after "delivering" Godzilla was because their cameras were needed to transmit the events back to the U.N. in case the primary cameras arrayed around the battle zone failed.

Most of the crew was cowering below deck, firm in their belief that if they couldn't see Godzilla and Ghidorah, the two monsters wouldn't be able to see them, either. Colonel Stinson, Dr. Simonovitch and Je'Nise St. Claire, on the other hand, took a more prosaic view and decided to watch from the railings.

Nobody knew exactly what to expect, so they were all taken a bit by surprise by the vehemence of Godzilla's initial attack. First, they saw Godzilla's spines begin to glow. Then, a torrent of liquid hell spewed forth from Godzilla's mouth and struck Ghidorah dead center. The force of the attack actually knocked Ghidorah off balance, and its wings opened wide as it staggered backwards. This exposed the generator to the intense heat of Godzilla's nuclear breath, and it was instantly melted into glowing slag. There was no longer anything to keep Ghidorah within the battle zone.

Ghidorah didn't fly away, however. Instead, it quickly regained its balance and began to spread its wings to their fullest extent. As Godzilla continued to play his atomic fire along Ghidorah's torso, Ghidorah's wings began to be surrounded by a bluish aura, similar in color to Godzilla's breath weapon. For that matter, it was also similar in color to the aura produced by the

now defunct energy generator. Far from appearing hurt, Ghidorah actually seemed to be growing stronger, basking in the nuclear glow of Godzilla's breath.

* * *

Back under the U.N., Kenny was growing frantic. He no longer cared if he disturbed Miyuki's concentration. Instead, he was yelling at her: "Do something, damn it!"

Miyuki looked like she was at the point of exhaustion, ready to collapse, but she continued to work her console, jabbing buttons in rapid succession. On the monitor screen, Godzilla fired another blast of superheated plasma, then another. And another. And then one more, although this one seemed slightly weaker than the others. And yet another, but this time definitely weaker.

Godzilla was beginning to sway ever so slightly. He was clearly frothing at the mouth, and each use of his nuclear breath was obviously causing a strain on his system. And throughout all of it, Ghidorah just stood there absorbing everything that Godzilla could throw at him.

Another blast of plasma breath, this one barely a stream of glowing ions. And then, Godzilla opened his mouth one more time, but nothing came out. Only the whites of his eyes were now visible, and his entire body was trembling visibly.

Slowly, almost gracefully, Godzilla fell over unconscious. Kenny said the only thing he could think of at that moment.

"Oh, crap!"

* * *

Reggie watched in awe and horror from the control room of the nuclear power plant. Everyone else in the room was silent. Part of it was the thought that their great plan had failed so miserably. More important, and more immediate, was the thought “now what?” What would Ghidorah do now?

The answer was not long in coming. With a mighty flap of its bat-like wings, Ghidorah took to the air. It didn't travel far, however, and stopped directly over the seemingly inert form of Godzilla. As gently as a leaf, Ghidorah settle down upon Godzilla. Then, it grabbed hold of Godzilla's thick, scaly hide and lifted him into the air!

* * *

Je'Nise, Gregor and Colonel Stinson could only stare in dumb amazement as Ghidorah flew directly toward the ocean with Godzilla in its claws. It flew almost directly over the *Ballard* without a look back, and the shaken observers could count individual scales as it passed overhead.

It hadn't gotten too far, however, when something odd began to happen. Ghidorah's claws began to glow as strange lightning began to play around it's toes. Soon, Ghidorah's legs were also surrounded by the glowing lightning. At the same time, Godzilla's spines also began to glow as

power began to run up and down his back, and his entire body was encased with the crackle of electricity.

Ghidorah was now approximately three mile out, and was beginning to lose altitude rapidly. At the last moment, just before crashing into the sea, it loosed it's grip on Godzilla and dropped him into the water. Godzilla disappeared beneath the waves without a trace, and Ghidorah soared upwards toward the sun with his wings spread wide.

Back in the main Control Center underneath the U.N., Miyuki reported that she had lost contact with the chip embedded inside Godzilla, hours ahead of schedule. It hadn't degraded completely, she insisted in a weak voice – it had apparently shorted out somehow. Ghidorah had not been defeated, Godzilla was running around loose, and her control chip was useless. It was all too much for Miyuki, and she collapsed in a heap in front of her console.

Chapter Thirty – The Aftermath

Kenny's first instinct was to simply give up on the spot, curl up into as tight a ball as possible, and hope the world would just go away. The sound of Miyuki's collapse gave him a reason to hang on, though, if only for a little while longer. At the moment, his brain was only capable of handling very simple commands: first, see if Miyuki is all right; *then* curl up into a ball and hide....

Kenny could feel the weight of the entire world on his shoulders as he wearily trudged over to where Miyuki lay sprawled in front of her console. This was all his fault, he knew. It was his plan, his responsibility, and he had failed. Plain and simple. He wished his wife, Julie, were in the room so that she could give him a quick lesson in hara-kiri, or seppuku, or whatever the heck the Japanese called it when they stabbed themselves in the belly after disgracing themselves. Well, after he checked on Miyuki, maybe he'd go and find Julie and ask her about it. Or maybe Miyuki could tell him. If she were still alive, that is.

Kenny got on his knees in front of Miyuki's supine figure and picked up her wrist to feel for a pulse. He couldn't find one. Before he could panic, though, he noticed that she was actually breathing, which was usually a good sign -- at least based on his personal experience. Feeling a little foolish, Kenny realized that he had no idea how to check on someone's pulse in the first place. On T.V. they just held somebody's wrist and looked at their watches. Oh well, the important thing was

that Miyuki was still alive. Hopefully she hadn't banger her head on the floor or anything. Kenny laid Miyuki's wrist gently back down on the floor.

Before Kenny could stand up and loom for someone who might actually know how to help Miyuki, he heard her give a little cough. He looked down to see Miyuki's eyelids flutter briefly, and then she was looking directly at him with a confused expression on her face. Her expression quickly turned to one of shame, then depression, though, as she remembered what had made her faint in the first place. Kenny tried to think of something soothing to tell her, but what could he say? Everything would be all right? We'll get through this somehow? He was too depressed to even think about saying such things. Averting his gaze, Kenny did the only thing he could think of, and that was turn away in shame and walk back toward the main command console. He was surprised to see that someone was already standing there

United Nations Secretary General Juan Carlos Santos stood at the main console, surveying the state of the room around him. Most of the people in the room were either still staring at the monitor screens with slack-jawed expressions on their faces, or else were hanging their heads and staring at the ground. Not that he could blame them, of course. He had tried hard to stay out of everyone's way during the entire procedure – nothing makes people more nervous than having an authority figure peering over their shoulders – but he had seen and heard everything that had transpired from his station at the back of the room. And he was just as depressed as they were.

The difference was that Juan Carlos Santos was a consummate politician, and his entire life was based on the concept of putting the needs and feelings of others in front of his own. He had

years of practice in concealing his emotions, regardless of the provocation. And this was perhaps the ultimate test of his abilities.

The Secretary General cleared his throat loudly and then spoke into the air. "Air Marshal Reginald-Smythe? Can you hear me?"

His only response was silence. But then a feeble "yes" drifted from the speakers. *This is going to be harder than I thought*, the Secretary General mused grimly to himself. "And Dr. Simonovitch, how about you? Are you still there?"

The response, when it came, was also rather weak. "Da. I am here." The Secretary General could hear the bitterness in the man's voice, the sound of someone who had seen his dreams turn to ashes and was then forced to eat those same ashes.

The Secretary General then looked around the room one more time before beginning. Everyone there still had a haunted expression on his or her face, but at least they were all looking at him. Even poor Dr. Oguri, who was struggling to get into a sitting position on the floor. It was time.

"Thank you. First and foremost, and I am completely serious about this, I want to thank each and every one of you for a job well-done. The entire planet owes you all a debt of gratitude which can never be repaid."

The Secretary General paused a second to let that sink in. Which was a mistake, apparently, since everyone was now staring at him with looks of utter incredulity, as if he had suddenly sprouted feathers and started clucking like a chicken. It was too late to stop now, though.

“I realize that you may find that hard to believe, in light of what has just happened, but please believe me. I am utterly serious.”

People were still staring at him, but most of them looked like they were at least willing to listen to what he had to say. Fair enough. He continued.

“We have been faced with an impossible task, ladies and gentlemen – understanding and defeating an alien menace. But what we have failed to realize is that something which is wholly alien simply may not *be* understandable. If it were, it wouldn't be alien!

“As for defeating it, why must we assume that it is in our immediate power to do so? Now, I'm not saying that the monster cannot be defeated, or even that we will never be able to do so, but it strikes me as the height of hubris to assume that anyone, regardless of how brilliant, can come up with a solution practically over night. And yet, that is exactly what you have all tried to accomplish here today.”

Again, the Secretary General paused to let this sink in. And this time, it actually did. Or at least, it seemed to be sinking in.

“You have all achieved incredible feats. To be brutally honest, you have accomplished things which I thought were wholly impossible. And yet, you did them! Dr. Oguri – you developed a microchip to control Godzilla. What a ludicrous idea! But it worked!”

Miyuki started to say something, but the Secretary General continued on before she could get the words out of her mouth. “Yes, it didn't last as long as we had hoped, but it *did* work, and that's

the important thing. Now we know for sure that the technology is possible, and we can think about ways to make it work better.”

The Secretary General turned toward the monitors, even though the people on the other end couldn't actually see him. “And you, Air Marshall Reginald-Smythe! Your generator actually succeeded in luring the monster to where we wanted it. Incredible! ‘Pure science fiction,’ I would have said, and yet you did it!

“And Dr. Simonovitch, you were successful in your attempts to revive Godzilla. Who would have thought such a thing possible? But you did it nevertheless. Dr. Bouromphongsa? Your idea to use acid against the monster also worked, albeit to a limited degree. But it *did* work, and now we can think of ways to make it work better!

“And Dr. Fong. You, above everybody else, deserve my utmost thanks. Without your vision, your perseverance, none of this would have been possible. You may feel that you have failed, and thereby doomed the world by your failure, but you're wrong! It's not your fault that this monster has attacked us, and you have helped us develop the tools we need to fight it. Without you, we would have no hope whatsoever.”

The Secretary General looked over his audience one more time. They still weren't 100% convinced, but at least they no longer looked like they were about to slit their wrists, either.

“This is a war, ladies and gentlemen. What happened today was merely one battle. Yes, we lost this battle, but that does not mean the war is over! In fact, we are now in a *better* position to fight this monster than we were before. We *will* win this war, this I promise you. Maybe not today,

maybe not next week, but we *will* win. And it will be because of *you* that we will win, never forget that.”

The Secretary General could feel the energy level in the room surge upwards as he spoke the last words. Once again, he had done his job. He had given them back the most important tool of all, and that was hope.

If only he could believe his own words....

* * *

Hundreds of meters below the surface of the ocean, Godzilla was wide awake and fully in possession of his faculties for the first time since being revived from his coma. Much of what had happened to him was simply incomprehensible to him. The fact that he had been controlled, that his thoughts were not his own, meant nothing to him. Only the effects of that control lingered in his memory.

In his own, limited way, Godzilla remembered the strong, alien emotions of panic and primal terror that had suffused his very being, as well as the overwhelming urge to destroy the perceived source of that terror. Although the panic and terror themselves were now gone, the image of the creature that had carried him aloft and dropped him back into the water remained clear in his mind. The overriding compulsion to lash out and destroy the offending creature was also gone, but it had been replaced with an emotion with which Godzilla was much more familiar – anger. And, in its

own way, his anger created as great a compulsion to seek out and destroy as had the false emotion that had previously been implanted within him.

There was one important difference, though -- Godzilla was *used* to feeling angry, and he instinctively knew how to respond to that anger. Next time -- and there *would* be a next time -- he would be fighting the battle on his own terms, not as dictated by someone else.

Godzilla was now fully awake and in possession of his faculties, but there was also another difference, a more fundamental one. Godzilla was literally *seething* with energy. It coursed through every fiber of his being, every cell of his body, causing the very spines on his back to glow with excess power. It was similar to the way he felt whenever he had the chance to satisfy his mysterious craving for radiation, but this time his body was not subjected to the mutagenic effects of that radiation. This was energy in its purest form and, although he felt as though he might burst, he also instinctively knew that his body could contain far, far more of this wonderful energy that was currently permeating his system.

Godzilla wasn't entirely sure where this suffusion of energy had come from, but his reptilian mind was somehow able to associate it with the current object of his hatred and anger. And, if he stretched his senses to their utmost, he could just detect where that particular object had fled. It was like a far away beacon, a dim light which could be seen from the corner of one's eye, but not viewed directly. Nevertheless, it was there, and could be followed.

With almost lightning speed, Godzilla reached out with his right claw and snagged a passing grouper that was too stupid to realize what it was swimming next to. Popping the snack into his mouth, Godzilla let out a satisfied gurgle and began heading deeper out to sea.

Chapter Thirty-One – Picking up the Pieces

The situation in the underground control center had stabilized. People weren't rushing around slapping each other on the back or anything, but at least they no longer looked like they were about to commit suicide, either. The Secretary General still had grave personal doubts as to the continued survival of intelligent life on the planet, but part of his job now was to keep those doubts to himself. He knew it was a selfish thought, but the words "they just don't pay me enough for this" kept wafting through his mind.

Dr. Fong had helped Dr. Oguri to her feet. She still looked pale and stricken, but at least she was able to remain standing on her own. Of course, having the console to lean on probably had a little to do with that, but that wasn't important. What *was* important was that the Secretary General's little speech seemed to have had its desired effect. As for the Secretary General himself, he knew it was time for him to once again retreat from center stage and allow the team to get back to work. He didn't know what, if anything, they would be able to accomplish at this point, but it was best if they kept busy. And who knew? Maybe they would come up with something after all. *And maybe Saint George himself will magically appear and slay this dragon for us*, the Secretary General thought to himself ruefully. *Fat chance!*

Still keeping his inner doubts masked from his face, the Secretary General walked toward the back of the room, pausing only to clap his arm briefly on Dr. Fong's shoulder to reassure him that

everything would all work out in the end, and to let Dr. Fong know that he had the utmost confidence in him and his team. The Secretary General waited until he was safely out in the corridor before he let the mask of confidence and optimism slip. With a very audible sigh, he walked back toward the dormitories to find a little privacy.

Back in the control center, Kenny knew it was time to get the ball rolling again. The Secretary General was right – they weren't going to be able to solve this problem immediately -- but they had to start somewhere. And letting people wallow in despair and self-loathing wasn't going to get the job done. Kenny just wished that he had the Secretary General's confidence. He still felt that they were probably all doomed, but if the Secretary General believed in them, then maybe there was hope after all. But where to start?

That decision was taken out of Kenny's hands a moment later as Gregor Simonovitch's voice came over the loudspeakers:

"We just got a positive sonar fix on Godzilla."

Kenny was jolted out of his introspection by the news. Grabbing the microphone, he asked "And? Does he seem dead?"

"No. In fact, he's on the move."

Kenny really didn't want to ask the next question, but he knew he had to anyway. "Which way is he heading?"

"At the moment, pretty much due south, although he seems to be staying fairly parallel to the coastline. It's strange, though."

Kenny didn't want to hear about any more strangeness, but he asked anyway. "Strange? How so?"

Gregor paused a moment or two before answering. "Well, I'm not sure if it means anything or not. I mean, it might just be a coincidence, but he seems to be heading in the same direction that Ghidorah flew off."

Kenny didn't know what that meant, whether it was good news, bad news, or simply *news*. The way things had been going lately, though, he didn't think it could possibly be good. The gods were obviously punishing him for something, and he doubted they were finished tormenting him yet. With a sigh, he told Gregor to continue tracking Godzilla's movements and to keep him informed if anything changed.

* * *

Inside the temporarily out of service nuclear power plant, former Air Marshal Reginald Lethbridge-Smythe had passed along the Secretary General's comments to the people under him. Most had seemed to take the failure stoically, but Reggie could see that Peter was devastated by the events that had unfolded not 5 miles from where they stood huddled under countless tons of concrete and steel. It was almost as if he somehow felt that things would have worked out differently if he had been there in person. Which was, Reggie thought, wholly impossible. That fact didn't seem to be helping the young man's obvious guilt complex, however.

“All right, everybody -- here’s the plan. The generator is probably a total loss, but that’s O.K. We built it once, we can build it again. No problem. The important thing is that the darn thing actually *worked*. Not that I doubted you all for a moment, but it was still nice to see it actually perform according to theory.

“As for the sphere, well, obviously we still don’t know for sure whether it will work or not. I’m still betting on it, though. We picked this location specifically because we knew that we’d have enough room to transport it and set it up here, but now we don’t know exactly where we’ll get the chance to use it. For this reason, I want everyone to start thinking about a better way to transport the thing. We built it in a hurry, but, as the Secretary General said, wars aren’t won overnight. If we have to take it apart and rebuild it to make it easier to transport, then that’s exactly what we’ll do. If there are no questions, let’s move out.”

This time, however, there *was* a question. Peter, who up until now had been slumped dejectedly in his seat, now raised his hand to be noticed. Reggie was surprised to see the enthusiasm on Peter’s face, but was nonetheless glad to see it. “Yes, Peter – go ahead.”

Peter was clearly trying to work something out in his head as he spoke, and his words were hesitant at first. “Um, well, I was just wondering something. How does the monster,” he practically spat out the word. “How does this *Ghidorah* know where to attack?”

Regie wasn’t expecting this question, and it threw him a little off balance. “I’m not sure exactly what you mean, son.”

Peter was obviously struggling to find the right words. “How does it choose its targets? So far, it has only attacked populated areas, right? I mean, we haven’t heard anything about it blowing up trees or dive bombing mountains, have we? If it’s an alien monster, then how does *know* the difference between a city and a swamp?”

Something in the back of Reggie’s mind was tickling him, telling him that this was important somehow. He could *almost* see where Peter was going with this. Almost, but not quite. He motioned Peter to continue.

“Well, look, you built that generator to try and attract Ghidorah, and, as you said, it worked. Presumably, this means that Ghidorah can detect energy from a distance, otherwise it wouldn’t have come, right? You told me that the generator was designed to send out a frequency of energy specifically matching Ghidorah’s own, but we know that it can absorb other types of energy as well, right?”

The light was rapidly dawning in Reggie’s mind, but Peter hurried on before he could make the final connection.

“So, what I’m thinking is that maybe that’s how Ghidorah recognizes cities. Maybe it can detect all the electrical energy and is somehow, well, *programmed* to seek out and destroy anything that gives off electricity. If that’s the case, what would happen if we simply turned off all the electricity?”

Peter had finally run out of steam and was looking around sheepishly. He knew it was a dumb idea, that it must have already been thought of and discarded by the people in charge, and he

couldn't believe that he had actually stood there and blathered on about it. He was caught up short, however, when he saw the expression on the retired Air Marshal's face. At first, he thought that the Air Marshall also couldn't believe that Peter had uttered such a dumb idea. The Air Marshal's expression soon changed from one of utter astonishment to a broad grin, however as the full implications of what Peter had said finally sank in and took hold.

Reggie walked over to Peter and slapped him on the back. Probably a little harder than he meant to, since Peter staggered forward a step or two. Then, without a further word, Reggie ran back into the control room to call Dr. Fong.

* * *

Ghidorah had only one purpose, and that was to seek out signs of intelligent life and destroy it. That's what it had been designed to do, and it was *very* good at its job. The creatures that had created Ghidorah many thousands of years ago had sought to produce the ultimate weapon, and they had succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. Ghidorah was a pure engine of destruction, a perfect killing machine. It felt no fear, it felt no pity. In fact, it felt no emotions whatsoever. Although wholly organic in nature, it was just as much an artificial creature as if it had been constructed out of metal and wires. Ghidorah was neither a robot nor a cyborg; it was instead a biological machine, the pinnacle of thousands of years of experiments in genetic engineering.

Complicated machines eventually broke down, and the more complicated the machine, the more frequent the breakdowns. This was a simple law of mechanics, and no amount of redundant systems could change the fact. Therefore, Ghidorah's designers had chose to make it as simple as possible. It was able to absorb and subsist on virtually any form of energy, and it was further programmed to seek out any source of energy emissions and destroy that source. That's all it did – absorb and destroy. Very simple.

Ghidorah had not been imbued with any sort of “artificial intelligence.” There was no need. Nothing could withstand it's might, and there was no need for it to adapt to changing circumstances. It was supremely good at what it did, after all. Besides, giving such a destructive creature any form of intelligence or self-determination was probably not a good idea, just in case it someday decided that it didn't want to follow its programmed instructions anymore.

For years, Ghidorah had followed its programmed instinct and had blazed a path of destruction across countless worlds. Until the time that it was no longer needed, and it was put into “storage” inside the giant silvery sphere. The ancient race that had created Ghidorah had done its job a little *too* well, and they were unable to destroy the creature when it was no longer needed. They *were* able to trap it, however, and store it until such time as the need to use it ever arose. That time had never come, and the civilization that had created Ghidorah finally faded away and disappeared, leaving Ghidorah alone to mark the ensuing millennia in cold, dark silence.

When Ghidorah had been finally released from his deathless sleep, it had performed exactly as it had been designed. It had immediately sought out and found a myriad of energy sources on the

planet below it, and it had begun to destroy them one by one. Following the sun's rays, Ghidorah had meandered across the planet sowing death, destruction and despair. Nothing could stop it.

But something had happened to Ghidorah, something wholly unexpected. Something had actually weakened it, which should not have been possible. If Ghidorah had possessed even a rudimentary intelligence, it would have realized the danger in this situation. But Ghidorah's designers had withheld that precious spark of reason, and so it was unable to learn from past experience. Instead, it simply took the time to absorb the ambient sunlight and then, when it was strong again, it continued on it's chosen path of destruction.

Chapter Thirty-Two – Blackout!

Almost a century ago mankind first learned to deal with the concept of death from above. During the Second World War, the German government launched the *blitzkrieg*, or “lightning war,” against Great Britain. This consisted primarily of bombarding British cities at night with V-1 rockets and from airplanes. It was intended to demoralize the target population as well as cause damage.

The British couldn’t do much to counter the rocket attacks, except fervently pray that the rockets missed their intended targets. And, since rocketry was still in its infancy, their prayers were often answered. The attacks from the bomber squadrons were another matter, however, and the British *were* able to devise an effective defense.

The idea was almost laughingly simple. In order for a bomber pilot to hit his target, he had to first *see* that target. All the British had to do was to completely black out a city as soon as an approaching airplane was spotted, and the pilot would be unable to aim his bombs. It wasn’t always successful, of course, and it caused numerous hardships on the populace, but it *was* effective and ended up saving hundreds of thousands of lives.

Back then, the world had faced a “lightning war,” but only in the metaphorical sense. Now, however, the lightning was all too real, and it was inflicted by a hideous demon from another planet, a terror from beyond the stars that would have given H. P. Lovecraft himself nightmares. And,

based on Peter's recommendation, it was decided that it was time to try the blackout again. First, in the United States, and then it spread to the rest of the civilized world.

The entire fabric of society was turned upside down over the following few weeks as the world-wide blackout was put into effect. Since Ghidorah had only been observed to attack during the daylight hours, mankind slowly adjusted itself to a new rhythm. Cities became deserted during the day, and people went to work at the crack of dusk instead of the crack of dawn. In one sense, it was easier than a night-time blackout, since people could at least rely on natural sunlight during the blackout periods. The suffering and hardship was still immense, however. It wasn't just electric lights that were turned off – *all* electricity had to be cut off.

At first, emergency services such as hospitals, police departments and fire departments were exempted from the blackout. After a major hospital in Denver was destroyed by Ghidorah, however, the blackout was made absolute. Thousands of people died from inadequate care, but the alternative was simply too dire. Better that one person should die of a heart attack than an entire city should be demolished. Fortunately, it was soon discovered that, for some unknown reason, Ghidorah did not seem to be attracted to electricity generated by storage batteries. There was some crucial difference between AC and DC current which Ghidorah could detect and, although nobody knew how to use this fact against the giant monster, it at least allowed hospitals to carry on emergency services on a very limited basis.

During the Second World War, blackouts would be instigated the moment an enemy aircraft was sighted. People were trained to recognize and react to air raid sirens on a moment's notice.

Unfortunately, it was found to be impossible to provide adequate warning when Ghidorah approached a populated area; the creature's motions were seemingly erratic, and it had been observed moving in speeds in excess of Mach 5. Therefore, the blackout was put into effect across the nation uniformly throughout the daylight hours, regardless of where Ghidorah has last been seen.

It was a difficult decision, but the President of the United States finally declared martial law and ordered that anyone using electricity during daylight hours was to be summarily shot. With the survival of entire cities at stake, no exceptions could be made, no mercy could be shown. The President knew that his chances of ever being re-elected were officially up in flames, but it was the only course left open to him. And the other nations of the world soon followed suit.

And the blackout *did* work. Not entirely, not at first, but the number of attacks on populated cities dropped dramatically over the following weeks. Mesa, Arizona, was entirely obliterated after one man decided that firing up a portable generator to cook a burrito in his microwave oven couldn't possibly hurt anyone. Brussels, Belgium, was wiped out when city officials decided to restore power one afternoon an hour before the sun had set in the Western sky. After all, nobody had reported seeing Ghidorah in the vicinity.... But these were isolated incidents, and as the world adjusted to these new conditions, the death toll from Ghidorah's attacks almost completely disappeared. The threat was still there, literally hanging over everyone's heads, but at least it could now be dealt with.

Unfortunately for mankind, Ghidorah was not the only threat on the loose....

* * *

Following his own private agenda, Godzilla rose from the ocean depths at scattered points all over the globe. Sometimes he simply waded close to the shore, looked around, and then returned to the ocean – much to the relief of the people living nearby. Other times, however, he came all the way ashore and cut a wide swath of fiery destruction as he trampled across the countryside. He didn't seem to be going out of his way to attack anything in particular, but anything that got in his way was instantly demolished.

Many times in the past, Godzilla had been compared to a force of nature, and never had that description been more accurate than now. Like a living, nuclear powered hurricane, Godzilla roamed the earth sowing destruction wherever he went. The armies of the world launched attack after attack against him, but their efforts were useless. Godzilla would not be stopped, nor would he be turned away. It was almost as if he was on a mission, and nothing would dissuade him from his chosen course.

There *was* one weapon which could be used against Godzilla – the Matrix Project. Colonel Stinson still had the DNA sample from Godzilla and, as far as anyone knew, Godzilla had not been exposed to any more radiation since the sample had been gathered in the first place. This had actually surprised a number of people, since Godzilla's usual method of operation was to seek out nuclear power plants and feed on the radiation within their burning cores. For some reason, however, Godzilla didn't seem to need any radiation, at least not at the moment.

It was a temporary situation at best, however – sooner or later Godzilla *would* be exposed to radiation, and the Matrix would be rendered useless once again. Dr. Fong pleaded with the Secretary General to make the Matrix public knowledge, or at least share it with the governments of the world, but the Secretary General mysteriously and stubbornly refused. In fact, he forbade any of the members of the scientific community to discuss it with their own governments. Baffled, Dr. Fong agreed, but every time Godzilla destroyed another city his anger at the Secretary General increased.

Fortunately, Godzilla didn't move at supersonic speeds, so most cities in his path could be evacuated in time, thereby reducing the death toll significantly. Still, thought Kenny, why should there be *any* death and destruction whatsoever if there was a way to finally rid the world of Godzilla forever? He just could not understand the Secretary General's reasoning. Couldn't he see the danger Godzilla posed? Why was he being so stubborn?

Chapter Thirty-Three – Damned if You Do....

Charleston, South Carolina, looked like some sort of post-apocalyptic ghost town. In lieu of tumbleweed, however, there was just the occasional scrap of paper carelessly tossed about in the breeze. Oh, the buildings were still there, all right, but there were no apparent signs of life to be seen anywhere. No cars moved along the streets, no people were visible on the usually busy sidewalks. None of which would have seemed particularly odd at, say, three o'clock in the morning, but at just past one in the afternoon it was an eerie, disturbing sight. It was as if some hideous plague virus had roared through the city and wiped out all living creatures, leaving the buildings intact.

There *was* life in the city, if you knew where to look. People huddled in the basements of buildings. People cringed behind closed doors with the drapes firmly pulled shut, hoping against hope that if they didn't look out that nothing would look in, like little children hiding under their sheets from the monster in the closet. In short, everyone was scared, and the city only *seemed* deserted as its residents held their collective breaths and prayed to their various deities for the terror to pass over and leave them and their loved ones unharmed.

And people had good reason to be scared. Less than two hours ago a deadly shadow had fallen on the city – a grotesque, warped shadow of a creature straight out of a Hieronymus Bosch painting of the deepest layers of Hell itself. A great and terrible demon with golden wings, two spiked tails and three malevolent heads. In short, Ghidorah.

There had been no warning as the demonic beast had streaked through the morning sky from out over the Atlantic Ocean. Moving at almost five times the speed of sound, it arrived over the city long before anybody heard its horribly shrill cries. The electricity curfew had been in effect since just before dawn, but nobody knew for sure whether it would really work, or whether everyone was obeying it. The city had shut down the main power grid, but there was always the risk that someone would try and cheat by using a portable generator.

And so, a panicked city watched as the angel of death itself hovered overhead, making slow, lazy circles like a vulture eyeing a particularly juicy piece of carrion. People futilely scrambled for cover as Ghidorah swooped down between the buildings, its three necks bobbing snake-like in different directions, searching for the signs of civilization that had been genetically programmed into its memory.

And then Ghidorah had risen back into the air, its mighty wings creating massive gusts of wind in every direction. It hovered for a few minutes more, and then settled down on top of one of the larger buildings, sending a shower of concrete fragments to the street far below. Ghidorah had been programmed to look for certain indications of intelligent life, and so far it nothing had triggered its destructive power. But still, there was *something* which kept it there, searching, waiting. Some residual energy, perhaps, still feebly coursing through the city's power grid. Not enough to set Ghidorah off, no, but perhaps just enough to keep it there until something, some careless spark of electricity, signaled it to lash out and destroy everything in sight.

Ghidorah had remained on top of the building for ten minutes, fifteen at most, but to those watching it was an eternity. Imagine being locked into a guillotine *face up*, staring at the blood-speckled blade high above you and waiting for that terrible moment when the blade starts its final, fateful plunge directly toward your neck, knowing that there is absolutely nothing you can do to stop it. You might almost start wishing that the blade would just fall and end the torment, the suspense. How long can you hold your breath waiting for the end to come?

And then, with no warning whatsoever, Ghidorah had spread its wings and streaked off into the sky faster than any fighter jet. It happened so fast that nobody was sure where, exactly, it had gone. One minute it was there, the next minute it wasn't, and only the adrenaline and terror was left to indicate that it had even been there at all. There was no collective sigh of relief, though, as nobody knew whether the monster had truly left the area or was simply circling around for another pass. Maybe it was a trick of some sort, and the demon would attack as soon as people left the shelter of their basements. Nobody wanted to take that chance.

Two hours later, however, the first few brave souls dared to venture outside again into the eerie stillness. Everything seemed calm, and there was no sign of Ghidorah. A few ragged cheers, and then more and more, went up as people began to accept that their city had indeed been spared. People who, scant hours before, had been praying for deliverance either got on their knees to thank God for answering their prayers, or else forgot that they had been humbled in the first place and talked about the wonderful job the city government had done in shutting down the power so efficiently.

The one thing everyone seemed to be able to agree on, however, was that it apparently *was* possible to avoid the inevitable. Other cities had been destroyed by Ghidorah's wrath, but not theirs.

* * *

Down at the Charleston Battery, a park bordered by water on three sides and facing historic Fort Sumter out in the harbor, an impromptu celebration was starting to break out. The danger had passed and, as long as nobody was using any electricity, it was deemed safe to blow off a little of the nervous energy that had permeated the area for the last couple of hours.

Even without telephones or TV, word of the party slowly spread until well over ten thousand people had gathered. There was no music and the only refreshments were bottles of water and cans of warm soda that people brought with them, but the atmosphere was still very festive. It was a celebration of life, and more than one young couple sneaked off into the shadows to celebrate in their own private way.

It was a young twelve-year old boy named Tyler who first noticed the disturbance far out in the harbor, way past Fort Sumpter. His parents had been holding hands and getting all "mushy", so he ran to the water's edge to throw rocks at the passing seagulls. And it was while he was taking aim at a particularly slow-moving gull that he saw something that made him freeze in mid throw, the rock slipping from between his fingers.

Something was moving out there. Something *huge*. At first, Tyler thought it must be a submarine or something, but the shape was all wrong. It was hard to make out, exactly, since whatever it was, it was obscured by the froth caused by its very motion. It was dark, though, almost black. Round, like a globe of some sort, but bumpy, not smooth. In fact, the top of the object seemed to be *ribbed*, with rows of parallel protuberances running from front to back. And then, as the object came closer to shore, rising higher each passing second, two feral eyes became suddenly visible, followed quickly by a gaping maw filled with impossibly huge teeth.

Tyler stared mesmerized for a few moments longer, watching as the terrible prehistoric beast slowly made its way toward the shore. And then, finally, he shook off the paralysis that had held him rooted to the spot and ran back to where his parents still stood hand in hand, screaming at the top of his lungs:

“Godzilla’s coming! Godzilla’s coming!”

Chapter Thirty-Four -- Like Ants Beneath His Feet

What had begun as a celebration of life soon turned into something very different, as the panicked crowd at the Charleston Battery tried to flee from Godzilla's approach. Fish have an uncanny ability to sense minuscule changes in the motion of their fellow fish; whole schools of fish are able turn, seemingly as one body, and smoothly move away from danger. People, however, are not fish.

The people farthest away from the water's edge were, of course, the last to realize what was happening, and most of them only discovered that something was amiss as they were being trampled under the feet of those who had already figured it out. Certainly, their would have been more casualties had there been a hundred thousand people gathered in the park instead of simply ten thousand, but within five minutes of the time when young Tyler first cried out "Godzilla." at least twenty people lay dead, and more than two hundred had been seriously injured.

Of course, that was just the deaths and injuries caused by the panicked crowd. Five minutes later, Godzilla reached the shoreline, and then the death toll *really* started climbing. People who had been too injured to flee the park were completely pulverized as Godzilla's massive foot came down squarely in the middle of the park. Even those who had successfully escaped the confines of the park were only granted a brief reprise. In a matter of seconds, Godzilla had left the park proper and

headed north toward the oldest part of the city, squashing the fleeing crowds beneath his feet as casually and as uncaring as a man stepping on an anthill.

The fact that Godzilla wasn't purposely trying to kill anyone was no comfort whatsoever to the people who died, and only very slight comfort to the friends and family they left behind. Unfortunately for everyone, Godzilla wasn't going out of his way to avoid killing anyone, either. He simply didn't notice.

As Godzilla reached the edge of the older section of Charleston, he paused to look around. Not at the buildings on either side of him, though, nor at the people below him scurrying away like cockroaches in a kitchen when the lights are turned on. No, his gaze was directed toward the far horizon, as if he were trying to decide where to go next, what to do. His answer was not long in coming, although it wasn't the answer Godzilla was looking for.

* * *

The combined U.S. Navy/Air Force strike force had tracked Godzilla's motions toward the nation's eastern seaboard. Under an international agreement with the United Nations, the U.S. government had agreed not to attack Godzilla in international waters, even though nobody understood why the U.N. would make such a request. As soon as Godzilla reached American waters, however, all bets were off, and less than an hour before he came ashore in South Carolina, the Navy had launched an all out underwater attack.

Unfortunately, for all its vaunted might, the U.S. Navy hadn't been able to accomplish much. Multiple torpedoes, armed with high-yield conventional explosives had been fired at Godzilla from two attack submarines. At first, Godzilla didn't even seem to notice. After the third torpedo exploded against him, however, he lashed out and swept up one of the subs with his powerful front claws, crushing it like a beer can against his chest. All hands were lost.

The remaining three subs maintained their distance and continued to fire torpedoes at Godzilla. All they succeeded in doing was to make him mad. Whereas before Godzilla had been content to make his way toward the shore and ignore the strange metal objects swimming around him, now he turned and actively pursued them. Much more graceful in the water than he would ever be on land, Godzilla swam directly toward the three submarines which were beating a hasty retreat. They never had a chance, however. Godzilla grabbed one of the subs in his arms and crushed it just like he had crushed the one before it. At the same time, however, Godzilla lashed out with his tail and, using it like a whip, managed to actually chop one of the other two subs entirely in half.

The last submarine took off at a right angle from the direction the other two vessels had been heading, and for a brief moment it looked as though it might escape. Godzilla was not about to let it get away, though, and he fired off a brief burst of glowing blue radioactive plasma that caused the water to vaporize all around it. The fleeing submarine never had a chance, and a split second after being enveloped in the deadly blue flame, it exploded. Once again, there were no survivors.

On the surface, a fleet of ships consisting of a battleship, two destroyers and an aircraft carrier weighed its options. The officer in charge, Vice Admiral Virginia Kendall, knew that the

next logical thing to do would be to deploy rocket assisted torpedoes [the modern equivalent of the old-fashioned “depth charges”], especially since there were no longer any subs in danger of being hit by “friendly fire”. In a decision that would haunt her the rest of her life, however, she decided not to use them after all, and to allow Godzilla to continue on his way unimpeded. At her court martial months later, she argued that, in her opinion, depth charges would have had no effect other than alerting Godzilla to the fleet’s presence and provoking him into an attack. Furthermore, in spite of all the firepower that the ships carried, they were extremely vulnerable to underwater attacks, and they would essentially be sitting ducks should Godzilla decide to go after them. Since it could not be proven that Vice Admiral Kendall’s actions had directly led to the deaths of all the victims in Charleston, the board of inquiry eventually decided in her favor, but that didn’t stop her nightmares and self-recrimination, and she officially resigned her commission three weeks later.

And so, Godzilla continued toward the coast, with a fleet of the most powerful warships ever designed keeping well behind him, out of sight. To her credit, though, Vice Admiral Kendall ordered four squadrons of fighter jets to stand ready on the deck of the aircraft carrier, and the moment Godzilla’s head broke the surface of the water she ordered them into action.

* * *

Godzilla was gazing intently at the far horizon, so he didn’t notice the approaching jets until they were almost upon him. It didn’t make much of a difference, though. As with most battles

between Godzilla and the military, this one was over in a matter of minutes. Once again, Godzilla ignored the attack until it started annoying him, and then he went on the offensive.

Sixteen fighter jets screamed down at Godzilla from the sky, and one by one they were destroyed. They fired air-to-air missiles at Godzilla, but the missiles just bounced off Godzilla's scaly hide. They fired their forward cannons at him, but they might as well have been shooting spit balls for all the notice Godzilla paid them. One brave young pilot made a kamikaze run directly at Godzilla's mouth, guns and missiles all ablaze, hoping against hope that he could do some serious damage to a less armored portion of Godzilla's anatomy. And he was partially successful. One of his missiles managed to explode just inside Godzilla's gaping jaw and, while it didn't really do any serious damage, it *did* cause Godzilla to direct his full attention at the approaching plane. The pilot was rewarded for his efforts with an unusually long burst of atomic breath that not only vaporized him and his plane, but two office buildings that happened to be in the blast's path as Godzilla shook his head from side to side.

In the next couple of minutes, Godzilla took down six more fighter jets with his breath and four more with various parts of his body, including his hands and his tail. Every time a jet would approach for a strafing run, Godzilla would reach out to bat it out of the sky like a mosquito. And whenever a jet would try and attack from a distance, Godzilla would lash out with his fearsome breath and incinerate it in midair. Two of the remaining four jets were caught by the shrapnel of their exploding companions, and another two were accidentally caught in the cross-fire of other jets. The last jet actually managed to avoid getting hit altogether, but the pilot was forced to bail out

when the on-board computer glitched, causing all the planes control surfaces to inexplicably lock up.

Or, at least, that was the reason the pilot gave for bailing out when questioned about it later.

Ten minutes after the attack had begun, it was over. Godzilla stood just inside the city of Charleston proper, and all around him lay burning wreckage. He hadn't found what he had been looking for, though, and in a fit of pique Godzilla torched a couple more nearby buildings with his breath. Then, he turned around -- his tail whipping into the air and knocking over even more buildings -- and headed back out into the ocean.

Chapter Thirty-Five – The Plan Revealed

A full three weeks had passed since the disastrous battle between Ghidorah and Godzilla. Although, considering how one-sided the conflict had been, perhaps “battle” wasn’t exactly the best word to describe it. What should have been an epic battle of titans had instead turned out to be a grossly mismatched display of futility.

In the weeks following, the United Nations Science Advisory Committee continued it’s work as before. The only difference was that, while Dr. Kenny Fong was still technically in charge of the Committee, Secretary General Juan Carlos Santos stepped in to oversee the daily operations of the Committee. Dr. Fong tried not to be bitter about this fact. Taking a philosophical attitude, he realized that the Committee under his leadership hadn’t achieved its aims, and that it was probably for the best that someone was taking charge. This didn’t actually make him feel any better, but it least it gave him something to tell his wife, Julie.

The one thing that bothered Kenny the most, however, was the simple fact that the Secretary General refused to explain what his plan was. Assuming, that is, that the Secretary General even *had* a plan, and wasn’t just creating busy work to keep them all from getting depressed. Reggie and his team of engineers had been kept especially busy building a series of new generators and redesigning the capture sphere to make it more portable. It was obvious that the Secretary General wanted to try luring Ghidorah into another trap, but why did they need so many generators? Last

time, one had been sufficient to attract Ghidorah's attention. And how on earth were they going to get Ghidorah to stay still long enough to trap it?

Fortunately, the idea which that young man, Peter, had come up with had drastically reduced the death toll from Ghidorah's attacks. This gave them some time to recoup and plan their strategy. But in the mean time, Godzilla was running rampant, and Godzilla didn't seem to care whether people left the electricity on or not. As far as Kenny could tell, Godzilla was just meandering around the globe, randomly attacking anything that got in his way. Although even Kenny was surprised with how little damage Godzilla had caused, relatively speaking. For every city that Godzilla had attacked, there were at least two or three that he had approached and then ignored. Kenny tried to see the pattern, if any, but it escaped him. In fact, the only pattern he could see at all was that Godzilla did more damage when the local military attacked him first. Not that ignoring Godzilla automatically meant that he would go away, but getting him angry was practically a guaranteed way of provoking his attack.

And yet, in spite of all the damage Godzilla had caused, the Secretary General still refused to allow the Matrix virus to be used against him. And surely it was only a matter of time before Godzilla attacked a nuclear reactor and mutated further, thus rendering the Matrix useless again. In fact, Kenny couldn't believe that this had not already happened. The nuclear power plant outside of New Haven, Connecticut, had been shut down before Godzilla and Ghidorah had arrived, but surely Godzilla had passed other nuclear plants in his peregrinations across the planet's surface. And yet, for some unknown reason, none of them had been attacked. So far, that is.

After weeks of frustration, Kenny was about ready to burst. He had tried being patient. He had tried being philosophical. Heck, he had even tried doing Tai-Chi exercises with his wife. It just wasn't working, though, and he finally decided it was time to storm into the Secretary General's office and demand an explanation. Kenny was sitting in his makeshift office, building up a sufficient head of steam, when there came a knock on his door. Opening it, he was flabbergasted to discover the Secretary General waiting on the other side. Before Kenny could think of anything to say, the Secretary General apologized for keeping Kenny in the dark for so long, and asked him if he would please call a meeting of the entire committee to discuss what the big plan was.

Kenny shook his head numbly and then sat back down. *No fair*, he thought. *How dare he apologize to me like that – just who does he think he is, anyway!*

* * *

Twenty minutes later, the entire Committee was assembled in the underground control center's main conference room. Everyone, that is, except for Air Marshal Lethbridge-Smythe, who was on-site at the plant where the generators were being manufactured. He was present via tele-link, however, and his larger than life face took up most of one wall of the room. The dark circles under his eyes indicated that he still hadn't quite adjusted to the new work schedule. As much as his mind told his body that it was time to get up and go to work, his body kept telling his mind to shut up and go back to bed.

In fact, everyone in the conference room was showing signs of fatigue. Part of it was from working nights and trying to sleep, often unsuccessfully, during the day. Most of it, however, was the simple result of the stress they were all under. Granted, the entire world was under a lot of stress right now, but the rest of the world wasn't expected to come up with a solution to the crisis at hand.

The Secretary General assumed his place at the podium in the back of the room, and the conversation in the room died down as all eyes fastened on him. He acknowledged the virtual presence of the retired Air Marshall, and expressed his gratitude that everyone had been able to attend the meeting. He didn't bother mentioning the obvious fact that nobody really had anything more important to be doing at the moment. With the pleasantries out of the way, the Secretary General launched into his prepared speech.

"As I told you all a few weeks ago, I have every faith in your abilities to solve this problem that faces us. I know you've all felt a little depressed about recent events, and the perceived lack of success, but I'm glad to see that this hasn't stopped anyone from continuing the work that needs to be done.

"We learned a lot from our last effort, and I think it's almost time to put what we have learned into action. First, however, let's just recap what we do know, shall we? Air Marshal Lethbridge-Smythe, why don't we start with you and the generators."

On the large monitor screen, Reggie cleared his throat. "Right. The good news is that we know that it is possible to attract Ghidorah's attention using our generators. The bad news, as I'm sure you all remember, is simply that the generators burn out fairly rapidly once Ghidorah starts

absorbing the energy they give off. In other words, we can get him where we want him, but keeping him there is another matter entirely.

“Now, we’ve actually gone ahead and built a number of the generators. We have a total of twenty in working order, and we expect to have another three or four finished by the end of the week.”

Kenny couldn’t keep silent any longer, and interrupted. “Wait – so this is the plan? We’re just going to put a bunch of the generators together and hope they last long enough for us to trap Ghidorah in our sphere?”

The Secretary General tried to keep the condescending tone out of his voice as he answered. And he was successful. Well, more or less. “No, Dr. Fong. We are all aware how foolish an idea that would be. Just because we can keep Ghidorah occupied doesn’t mean we can convince it to just sit there while we trap it in the sphere. But, speaking of the sphere, perhaps the Air Marshall would be so kind as to fill us in on the new design he’s been working on?”

Kenny thought about interrupting again to ask what the generators *were* going to be used for, but Reggie jumped back in before he had the chance. “Well, originally we built the sphere in two large segments. We thought that this would be the easiest way to assemble it when necessary, rather than trying to weld multiple segments together at the last minute. Plus, using only two segments meant that the structure as a whole would be more solid.

“The two hemispheres, however, are really just far too enormous to transport easily. And, to be honest, we weren’t really sure that the system we designed to assemble the two halves in a hurry

would have even worked. It was a bit of a rush job, for obvious reasons, and we never actually tested it.

“Well, now that we’ve had a little more time to think about it, we’ve decided to take a radically different approach to the design. It’s a little hard to explain without actually showing it to you, but we managed to use a series of interlocking plates that slide together during storage. This makes it very easy to transport and set up. Then, when the time comes, the plates are released and they spring into shape to form the completed sphere. Think of an orange peel cut into segments and then stacked in a pile. It’s not an exact analogy, but you get the general idea.

“The only problem with this idea, unfortunately, is the fact that the entire structure is, well, rather flimsy. This was actually the first idea we came up with when originally designing the sphere, but we abandoned it in favor of the hemisphere concept. We just didn’t have any material both flexible and strong enough to hold the various plates together. At least, not until Jatinder came up with a suggestion.”

All eyes in the conference room turned to look at Dr. Bouromphongsa, who was busily straightening his turban. “Ah, yes,” he began in his usual lilting, almost sing-song, tone. “As Reggie pointed out, the important things were flexibility and strength. Very important, indeed! But mutually exclusive, are they not? The stronger a material is, the heavier it is, yes? And the heavier it is, the less flexible. Or, at least, this is the case with *most* materials!

“Back in the mid 1990’s, a group of chemists, Harold W. Kroto, Robert F. Curl Jr. and Richard E. Smalley, discovered an amazing molecule. They called it *Buckminsterfullerene*, or

“Buckyball”. The reason for this strange name is rather obscure, but the molecule was named after a famous inventor who designed a structure which closely resembled the molecule in question. Buckyballs are hollow, soccer ball shaped molecules composed of sixty carbon atoms, and are unbelievably strong. And, since they are so large, immense numbers of them can be strung together in large chains. In essence, this lets us produce what is known as a “monofilament” wire, a nearly unbreakable strand much narrower than a human hair!

“The actual production of Buckyballs in any significant quantities has eluded chemists for years, but we have now an experimental plant in India that has finally started producing them in great quantity. No official announcement has been made of our success, which is why Reggie did not know of it. But once he mentioned his problem to me I knew instantly that this was the solution! I talked to my government and was able to get enough of the monofilament wire shipped here for Reggie to build his sphere. A very lucky thing, yes?”

At this, the Secretary General interrupted. “Well, I’m no scientist, and I’m sure everyone else in the room has a better idea of what Dr. Bouromphongsa is talking about than me, but the point is simply that we have now found a way to make our containment sphere portable enough and strong enough to use effectively. The problem, as Dr. Fong so correctly pointed out, is how to get Ghidorah to stand still long enough to trap him within the sphere. And this is where Godzilla comes back into the picture.”

Kenny couldn’t believe his ears. Godzilla? After what happened last time? What was the Secretary general thinking? In confusion, he looked around at the other members of the Advisory

Committee. Both Gregor and Jatinder were nodding their heads complacently. Even Reggie on the monitor didn't seem surprised by this statement. In fact, only Miyuki was looking as stunned as he was, but Kenny took small comfort in that fact.

Kenny could contain his anger no longer. "Would somebody care to tell me just what the hell is going on around here? Last I checked I was still the head of this committee, and it would certainly be *nice* if people would actually tell me what they're doing on occasion!"

Kenny took some small satisfaction in seeing the smiles fall from Gregor and Jatinder's faces. How dare they do all this behind his back!

It was Gregor who finally responded. "My dear, dear friend," he began with a soulful rumble to his voice. "I am so sorry you feel this way, that we would purposely keep you in the dark. It was simply that we knew how upset you were at our previous failure. Your wonderful wife, Julie, asked us to please not burden you with any more responsibility and bad news. So we've been waiting until we actually had something positive to say before talking to you about it! We did not want to cause you any more grief with unfounded hopes. I can only hope that you can forgive us for this."

Kenny looked at his Russian friend, who was sitting there with his head bowed. Turning to the others in the room, he saw the truth of Gregor's statement reflected in all of their eyes. He would definitely have to have a little heart-to-heart talk with Julie when this was all over, but deep in his heart he knew she was right. And now all he felt was shame for doubting the people he had worked with so closely all these years, people that were far more than simple co-workers.

“I - I’m sorry. Everyone. I had no idea. You’re absolutely right, and I hope you can all forgive *me* for doubting you like this. The important thing is that we find a way to stop Ghidorah, and it doesn’t matter *who* is ‘in charge’ as long as we accomplish this task. Please. Forgive me.”

Nobody in the room said a word in response, but one by one they made eye contact with Kenny and smiled, and that was enough.

The Secretary General waited a respectful amount of time before starting up again.
“Well, why don’t we have Dr. Simonovitch tell us what he’s discovered about Godzilla....”

Chapter Thirty-Six -- The Discovery

Gregor cleared his throat, stood up, and then changed places with the Secretary General at the podium. Public speaking was definitely *not* his forte, and he shuffled his notes nervously for a few seconds before looking up and making eye contact with the other members of the committee.

“Um, yes. Well.” Gregor paused, took a deep breath, and then continued. “As you know, I have been studying Godzilla for many years now. One of the main mysteries has always been how such a creature could possibly exist in the first place. In spite of some of my suggestions that Godzilla may actually be of extraterrestrial origin, I have always looked to other earthly life forms for the answers. Logically, Godzilla *must* follow the same basic laws of biology and physics as every other living creature, and all I needed to do was find some other creature or species with similar characteristics. My assumption has always been that Godzilla is a mutation of some sort, but even a mutation must display some of the characteristics of the species from which it mutated. Unfortunately, Godzilla is apparently unique. I have never been able to discover evidence of any other living creature that even comes close to being like Godzilla. Until now, that is.”

Gregor paused and waited for that to sink in for a second or two. “I am speaking, of course, about this monstrosity we call Ghidorah. Now, wait -- before you ask any questions, please let me continue. Yes, I know that Ghidorah is most definitely not from this planet. Well,

at least not so far as we know. And it may even be possible that Ghidorah was *not* the product of normal evolution, but was somehow genetically engineered. But the fact remains that Ghidorah *does* exist, and even if it doesn't obey the laws of biology and physics that we currently understand, it must follow *some* set of laws. It's not simply a figment of our imagination, after all."

Gregor smiled briefly at his weak attempt at humor and then continued. "So, what do we know about Ghidorah? As bizarre and improbable as it may seem, we know that it is some sort of living energy collector, and that it can absorb and convert just about any form of energy for its own use. There's simply no denying this fact. It doesn't make any sort of scientific sense, and should be downright impossible, but there it is. Obviously, it *is* possible, and we'll just have to rewrite the laws of science to accommodate it. "Now that we know that such an energy absorption and conversion mechanism is biologically possible, it raises the question of whether Ghidorah is unique in having this ability. And the answer, I now believe, is no; at least one other creature on this planet has such an ability -- Godzilla."

The light was finally beginning to dawn for Kenny. He resisted the urge to jump up and start peppering Gregor with questions, however, choosing instead to allow the Russian scientist his moment of glory uninterrupted.

Gregor continued. "We all remember what happened when Godzilla last attacked Ghidorah. Ghidorah was able to absorb every bit of energy that Godzilla hurled at it until Godzilla, seemingly exhausted, collapsed. We then saw Ghidorah pick up Godzilla and fly away

with him. One thing bothered me about that, though. It didn't occur to me until later, but why did Ghidorah simply drop Godzilla in the ocean? Surely it had the power to destroy Godzilla completely, didn't it?

"If you will all turn your attention to the screen behind me, I want to show you something." All eyes turned toward the screen as it lit up. "This is footage that was shot from onboard the *Ballard* as Ghidorah flew overhead with Godzilla in its claws. Note that as Ghidorah flies away from the camera, it begins to drop lower and lower toward the ocean. At first I thought that Godzilla was simply too heavy for Ghidorah to carry, but look closer. There!" Gregor pushed a button on the podium and the image on the screen froze in sharp detail. Another push of a button, and the image enlarged until the two monsters filled the entire screen.

There was no doubt what Gregor was referring to. A blue nimbus of energy was clearly visible running up and down Godzilla's spines, enveloping Ghidorah's claws and leaping up its legs. Or so it appeared. Slowly, Gregor advanced the film one frame at a time, and it soon became apparent that the energy was actually traveling from Ghidorah to Godzilla, not the other way around.

There was no mistaking what the images on the screen meant, and everyone was silent for a few moments while the import of what they had seen sank in. Although not necessary, Gregor continued his explanation just for the sake of completion. "So, you see, Godzilla is apparently just as able to absorb Ghidorah's energy as Ghidorah is able to absorb his. In fact, he may even be *better* at it than Ghidorah. Through physical contact, Godzilla was able to absorb so

much of Ghidorah's energy that Ghidorah was forced to let him go."

Everyone in the room was nodding in comprehension. It seemed so obvious now that it had been pointed out. But this was only half of the answer. It was time for Dr. Simonovitch to let the other shoe drop. "In fact, it appears that the energy Godzilla absorbed from Ghidorah has actually made him stronger than before. We all thought it was just luck that Godzilla had not attacked any nuclear power plants since being revived from the bottom of the ocean. I don't think luck had anything to do with it, though. I think that Godzilla had simply found a source of energy that he *preferred* over nuclear power, and he's been looking for it ever since!"

Gregor pushed another button on the podium, and a map of the globe appeared on the screen behind him. The map was covered with a combination of yellow dots and green dots. "The yellow dots on this map indicate areas where Ghidorah has been sited over land, and the green dots indicate places where Godzilla has come ashore. At first glance, there seems to be no relation between the two. But look what happens when we connect the dots to show the *paths* of each creature."

At another touch of a button the map became crisscrossed with bright yellow and green lines. Suddenly, a clear pattern became obvious for all to see. Although Ghidorah and Godzilla were never in the same place at the same time, they were always traveling in the same *direction*. Every time Ghidorah changed direction, Godzilla also changed direction *to follow it*. So far, Godzilla had never been able to actually catch up to Ghidorah, but it was clear that Godzilla had spent the last three weeks *chasing* Ghidorah all over the map!

“So you see,” Gregor summed up, “all we have to do is get Ghidorah to stay in one place long enough for Godzilla to catch him.”

This time, Kenny *did* interrupt. “Gregor, this is wonderful, but what makes you think Godzilla will have any better luck this time around?”

“Good question,” Gregor responded. “And I think I have a good answer. With all due respect to Miyuki, I think our problem was trying to control Godzilla in the first place. We thought we knew the best way for Godzilla to defeat Ghidorah, and I think we were just plain wrong. Godzilla is a creature of instinct, just like any other living creature. And we prevented him from following those instincts. I have no idea how to best fight against Ghidorah, but I’m willing to bet that Godzilla does. And if we simply give him the chance to fight Ghidorah on his own terms, without any outside control or interference from us, we should see a very different outcome. Or so I believe.”

Everything was finally falling into place for Kenny. “So the reason for all the generators, then –” Reggie piped in with the answer. “-- is simply to keep Ghidorah occupied until Godzilla can make it on the scene, yes. One generator will burn out in a few minutes, but each time one burns out we will simply turn on another. And another, and another, and another, until Godzilla finally arrives.”

Kenny sat silent for a moment, tapping his index finger gently on his nose as he let it all sink in. And then: “you know, I think this might just work!”

Chapter Thirty-Seven -- The Final Battlefield

The ground was white as far as the eye could see. Miles and miles of blank, featureless and oppressive whiteness, stretching out in all directions. The type of whiteness that could drive a man slowly insane if he were forced to stare at it day after day. Mind-numbing whiteness. Not the gentle whiteness of a comfortably warm linen sheet, or the soothing white of mother's milk that gives sustenance to a newborn baby. Instead, the whiteness of despair, of abandonment. A whiteness that spoke of fear, and of terror, and of utter loneliness. A whiteness that conjured up images of the sightless eyes of degenerate cave fish and of all manners of disease. In short, a whiteness that could only be seen in the very bowels of Hell itself, or at the very least in some sort of Hell on Earth.

The Bonneville Salt Flats was all this, and more. A truly barren wasteland, devoid of any signs of life whatsoever. A cruel and totally inhospitable place where not even the simplest forms of life could manage to gain a toehold and exist, let alone thrive. During the prehistoric Pleistocene epoch, there stood a vast inland sea on this desolate spot of NW Utah. Now, however, there was simply the small remnant known as the Great Salt Lake, and the much larger -- although equally inhospitable -- Great Salt Lake Desert. And on the far Western edge of this desert was the featureless, wholly alien tract of lifelessness known as the Bonneville Salt Flats.

The Salt Flats were not totally lifeless, though -- at least, not today. From a distance, movement could be detected across the Flats, looking like small ants scurrying across a child's

sandbox. Upon closer inspection, however, the moving objects would resolve themselves into a small army of vehicles and equipment as technicians scrambled to set up tents, if not hundreds, of large generators in the very center of the wasteland. Also visible was a large, silvery crescent that looked for all the world like a section of some immense orange peel that had been discarded at a picnic held by gigantic aliens.

So yes, there *was* life evident on the Salt Flats today. Given the vast scale of the desolate plain, however, it was very minuscule life indeed. But, if all went according to plan, that would soon change dramatically. Not that the signs of life would disappear -- it was the *size* of life that was expected to change....

* * *

I hate deserts, retired Air Marshal Reginald Lethbridge-Smythe thought with an inward grimace. During his years of service with the Royal Air Force he had had the “privilege” of being stationed in both the Gobi and the Sahara deserts for long stretches at a time. Each desert had its own unique characteristics, and it could truly be said that no two deserts were exactly alike. But all deserts had one thing in common in Reggie’s opinion – he loathed them all. It didn’t matter that the other deserts had sand, while this one had salt. A desert was a desert was a desert and, if it were all the same to you thank you very much, he’d much rather be someplace else.

The irony, of course, was that he was the one who picked this desolate hellhole in the first place for this operation. In fact, he had picked it precisely *because* it was such a desolate

hell hole. Here there was no danger of civilian casualties, no risk of collateral damage to surrounding buildings. Not only was this area completely uninhabited, it also had the advantage of having a smooth flat surface where they could quickly set up their equipment. Indeed, this was the perfectly logical choice for the operation.

Which didn't change the fact that Reggie hated deserts, of course.

With a sigh, Reggie put on his sunglasses and stepped out of the command vehicle to look over the work. He was in constant radio contact with all the members of the team, of course, but sometimes it helped to actually *see* what was going on for oneself instead of merely relying on reports. And to his expertly trained eye everything actually seemed to be proceeding quite well indeed. The team had traveled to the Salt Flats under cover of night, and it had taken three full days to reach this spot. The convoy had actually arrived en masse two nights ago, but they had been running a bit behind schedule and it was decided that they could not finish the job before daybreak. And so the entire team had bivouacked under the blazing sun for an entire day, twiddling their collective thumbs and waiting for darkness to descend once again.

As soon as the sun had set yesterday, however, the entire team sprang into action like the well-oiled military machine that they were. Reggie was especially impressed with how Peter had handled himself. Peter might not have any military training, but he had shown a strong aptitude for teamwork and was able to follow orders when necessary. He was also very handy with radio equipment, and Reggie had let him man the radio here in the command vehicle. To be honest, Reggie just liked having Peter around, and the younger man's newfound enthusiasm helped keep

Reggie going in the face of nearly insurmountable odds.

All night long the team had labored, setting up generator after generator in the very center of the Salt Flats. And off to one side stood the disassembled containment sphere atop a specially constructed flatbed truck. When the correct signal was given, the stacked sphere segments would slide apart under the influence of powerful motors, and the sphere as a whole would spring together, locking together and held in place by immensely strong filaments of pure buckminsterfullerene. If all went as planned, that is.

And now, with dawn mere minutes away, technicians scrambled to put the finishing touches on their work before the sun could expose them to deadly danger. Their orders were clear – if everything was not in place by sunrise, the whole operation would be paused and would have to wait an entire day before resuming. Their biggest fear was that the space demon would notice their work and attack them before they were finished. Which was, thought Reggie, rather funny considering that the whole purpose of their work was to attract that very same space demon! But, as with most things in life, timing was everything, and here the timing was absolutely critical.

During the last week other members of the team had set up individual generators between the main assembly plant in New York and the Salt Flats here in Utah. And every day one of those generators had been turned on. The goal had not been to detain Ghidorah for any length of time, but simply to keep it in the general area. Not every generator had attracted the monster, but the huge beast had appeared four different times in the last seven days, each time dropping out of

the sky to hover mere inches above the generator, sucking it dry within minutes. Reggie thought of it as a trail of breadcrumbs, and he pictured the creature finishing each little morsel of energy and searching for the next one in the trail.

But it wasn't just Ghidorah that they were luring. Now that Ghidorah was staying in one general location, it was hoped that Godzilla would finally be able to catch up to it after many weeks of futile wandering the globe. And it seemed to be working! Last seen off the remote coast of Japan before the operation had begun, Godzilla had been tracked crossing the Pacific and was reported to have made landfall on the California coast yesterday afternoon. He had made minor course adjustments as Ghidorah had flitted from one generator site to the next, but now he seemed to be on a direct course to the Salt Flats. Nobody had ever discovered where Ghidorah disappeared to during the nighttime, but Godzilla's path indicated that Ghidorah must be close at hand. It was a sobering thought.

Reggie looked at his watch. They were cutting it very close – only twenty-five more minutes until sunrise. *And that's assuming that Ghidorah sticks to its pattern and waits until sunrise before attacking*, Reggie thought worriedly. The minutes passed agonizingly slow. At twenty minutes before sunrise, Reggie turned to reenter the command vehicles and call the operation off for the day. Before he made it inside, however, Peter called out that the last technician had reported in, and that everything was all set.

Reggie strode over to the radio console and picked up the mike. Pushing the general transmit button, he spoke solemnly but quickly. "All right, everybody. You know the drill. We

are go, I repeat go. Sunrise is in twenty minutes, and I want everyone clear *now!*” Most of the team had already fled to a hopefully safe distance of five miles from ground zero, and now the remaining technicians jumped in their vehicles and took off like bats out of hell. Or, more precisely, like a bat out of hell was chasing them, which wasn’t that far from the truth.

With five minutes left until sunrise, the Salt Flats were once again barren of life. Barren, that is, except for the lone command vehicle that stood alone and unprotected on the extreme edge of the plain, directly opposite the containment sphere. Remote cameras couldn’t be relied upon for this operation, and somebody had to be there in person to activate the generators and, hopefully, the containment sphere as well. Reggie wasn’t about to order someone else to remain in the middle of what might turn out to be the most deadly battlefield in history, and he wouldn’t even accept volunteers [of which, he was proud to note, there had been many]. It was a two-person job, however, and Reggie had finally relented to Peter’s request to stay. Reggie was fully aware that Peter blamed himself for Ghidorah’s arrival on earth and, right or wrong, he needed to do all he could to redeem himself in his own eyes. *Or maybe*, Reggie thought sadly, *he is just hoping to die out here and escape his guilt that way*. But no – ever since the plan had been put into motion, Peter’s eyes had shown with a sense of excitement, a sense of *purpose*, that had been lacking in all the time Reggie had known him. *Ah well*, Reggie thought as he looked at Peter hunched over the radio console, *I certainly hope he finds what he is looking for – for all our sakes!*

Toward the east, the sky was beginning to grow steadily brighter. Reggie glanced at his

watch. It might be a little while yet before the sun cleared the far away mountains and it actually *looked* like daybreak, but it was now officially sunrise. Without a word, he gestured at Peter who reached over and threw the first of many switches. Scant moments later, the deep bass hum of the first generator wafted across the still desert air and entered the command vehicle. It was accompanied by an almost imperceptible rumble that could be felt viscerally, deep in the gut. The operation had begun, and there was nothing left for Reggie and Peter to do except wait. They didn't have to wait very long.

Chapter Thirty-Eight -- When Gods Make War. The Earth Trembles

Now that the sun had fully risen, the use of electronic equipment of any kind was kept to a minimum. Although the presence of the powered up generators should theoretically occupy Ghidorah's full attention, nobody wanted to take any chances. Who knew just what level of intelligence that hideous demon from space possessed? Would it somehow be able to detect a trap? Would it recognize the significance of that single trailer on the far edge of the white and barren plain? Just to be sure, anything that might possibly draw Ghidorah away from the generators was turned off. There was no radar sweeping the sky, no scout airplanes flying overhead. All radio, telephone and video communication with the command trailer was severed, and Reggie and Peter were left alone and unprotected. Not that anything could protect them from the impending horror, of course.

Many miles away, the rest of the team was assembled in hastily constructed hardened concrete bunkers – the high tech equivalent of foxholes. Without audio or video feeds to keep them apprised of the situation, they were forced to rely on binoculars. They wouldn't hear anything from Lethbridge-Smythe until it was all over, one way or another. That is, assuming they heard from him at all. Assuming everything went as planned – and that was a very big assumption – the team would rush in to activate the containment sphere when – if – Ghidorah had been immobilized. At the same time, a squad of specially modified Pantera stealth attack

helicopters would launch from a nearby airfield. The Panteras were coated with an ablative heat shield that would hopefully protect them from Godzilla's fearsome plasma ray, if only for a few minutes. And each of the attack craft carried special Teflon-coated missiles that contained a deadly nerve

toxin that had been specially tailored to Godzilla's DNA by the Matrix. Dr. Fong and the Secretary General were leaving nothing to chance – the moment Ghidorah was defeated, Godzilla would soon follow.

Back on the Salt Flats, Ghidorah arrived without warning. Both Reggie and Peter were looking in the wrong direction when the winged terror plummeted like a stone from the clear blue sky and then settled like a butterfly above the first generator. No laws of physics could explain it -- at least, no *known* laws -- but Ghidorah managed to somehow hover mere feet above the generator by simply flapping its massive wings languorously in the still air. There didn't appear to be any other form of thrust impelling the huge creature upward, and yet there it stayed, just hovering. It was almost as if it were dangling from unseen wires like some grotesque marionette. This wasn't a puppet show, however – not even a Grand Guignol at its worst – and the only puppeteer in evidence was the same one who held the fate of the entire planet in his hands.

The deathly silence was suddenly broken as Ghidorah began uttering its familiar, albeit terrifying, cry. The air was pierced with a shrill warble that was unlike any other sound in or out of nature as Ghidorah's tripartite heads began their deadly weaving motion, like three cobras

waiting to strike. The sound was clearly audible across the Salt Flats, and Reggie and Peter were instantly aware of the beast's presence.

Even at this distance, Ghidorah was huge beyond belief. The first (and last) time Peter had seen Ghidorah close up, it had been in outer space where it was difficult to accurately judge distances and scale. Here on Earth, though, it was all too obvious how big and terrifying Ghidorah. Peter had thought him inured to the sight of such a large creature, especially after his experience with Godzilla many years ago, but this monstrosity now in front of him looked twice as big as Godzilla!

Beneath Ghidorah's feet the air became charged with electricity as small bolts of blue lightning bridged the gap between the generator and the beast's scaled claws. Reggie and Peter could only stare in awe and horror at the sight. Their reverie was broken less than ten minutes later as the nimbus surrounding the generator abruptly died. With a sub vocal curse, Peter dove from the window and slapped at the button marked simply "#2" in order to bring the next generator on line.

This was the most dangerous part of their job, and Reggie held his breath as the signal was sent from the command vehicle to the second generator. In order to avoid Ghidorah's notice, the command vehicle was not in continuous radio contact with the generators. Instead, a short duration signal would be pulsed to each generator in turn, and the radio would then shut down automatically. In theory, this pulse would be too short for Ghidorah to track back to its source. In theory. Reggie knew all about beautiful theories that got slain by ugly facts, and they didn't get

much uglier than the one less than a quarter mile distant from him at this very moment.

But Peter had apparently waited too long, and Reggie could only stare in mute horror as Ghidorah slowly extend its wings to their fullest and began a leisurely ascension back into the air. And, with growing terror, Reggie saw that Ghidorah was actually heading *directly toward the command vehicle!*

Behind and below Ghidorah, the second generator sprang to life with an audible hum. Already halfway between the generators and the command vehicle, Ghidorah slowed, its momentum carrying it another quarter of the way. Reggie found that he had stopped breathing entirely and tried to force air into his lungs, to no avail. Less than 100 yards away from the command vehicle, Ghidorah finally came to a stop, its three heads peering in every possible direction in short order. Reggie could sense Peter beside him now at the window, and neither of them made any sound as they waited for the killing blow to come.

The seconds passed like a butter knife through lead; each one ticking off a lifetime, an eternity. And then, Ghidorah turned around and floated back toward the generators once again. Reggie heard a loud gasp as Peter drew in a lung full of air, and it was only then that he found the power to take a breath himself. *I am getting way too old for this crap*, Reggie thought weakly as his knees turned to jelly and he forced himself to sit down for a moment. Then, after a few seconds to regain his composure, he turned to Peter and said, as nonchalantly as possible, “next time, why don’t you hit the button a little earlier, O.K.?”

* * *

After six mind-numbing hours, the plan seemed to be working just fine. After that initial scare, the activation of the next generator moments before the preceding one died had gone smoothly. And Ghidorah obligingly hopped from one generator to the next, seemingly oblivious to its surrounding. Peter tried to think of it as a giant hummingbird sipping nectar from a feeder, but try as he might the image just wouldn't work. Peter just could not get his mind around the concept of a five hundred foot tall hummingbird. And besides - hummingbirds were *cute*.

Only one thing was missing for the plan to be working perfectly. One very big thing, in fact. Right now, all they were doing was feeding Ghidorah and perhaps even making it stronger. They had enough additional generators to hold Ghidorah here for at least another 3 hours or so, but it would be useless if Godzilla didn't show up. Of course, there was no guarantee that Godzilla would be able to accomplish much anyway....

Six hours turned to seven, and still no sign of Godzilla. With complete radio silence in effect, Peter and Reggie had no way of knowing how close Godzilla was, or if he was even still on the way. Their biggest fear now was that he would show up after the generators had been completely exhausted – or after the sun had set – and Ghidorah had flown away.

Reggie had opened the door to the command vehicle again and was standing outside when he heard the distant rumble of thunder. He had a brief moment of apprehension as he thought what affect a cloud cover might have on the plan, but then he realized that there wasn't a cloud in the sky. And yet, that thunder.... With a start, Reggie realized that he could not only hear the rolling thunder, he could feel it in the pit of his stomach and in the soles of his feet. *That*

wasn't any thunder, he thought – those are impact tremors!

Before he could move a muscle, he heard a strangled gasp from within the command vehicle. He rushed in to find Peter on his feet and staring through the rear window of the van, his jaws moving up and down uselessly. “It, it, it – it’s”, Peter struggled to speak, without much success. Reggie stood next to him and voiced the name that Peter could not bring himself to say. “Godzilla”.

* * *

Reggie pulled Peter away from the window and forcibly sat him back down in front of the generator console. Peter was obviously shaken at the sight of the source of all his nightmares but, to his credit, he was able to soon shake it off and return to the job at hand. Reggie then stepped outside so that he could get a better and unimpeded view of the unfolding events.

In front of the vehicles, Ghidorah was about three quarters through the row of generators, still blissfully aware of anything else around it. Behind the vehicle, and approaching rapidly, was Godzilla. Even at this distance, Reggie thought he could make out a vague bluish glow surrounding Godzilla’s spines, but it might have just been a trick of the light. With each footstep Godzilla took, the ground trembled anew, and the closer he got the more violent the tremors became. In fact, the command vehicle itself was starting to rock up and down now in time with the gigantic footfalls. One after another, closer and closer. Thoom. Thoom. THOOM. THOOM.

Reggie suddenly panicked as he realized that Godzilla was actually heading directly toward the van. It didn’t matter if Godzilla’s true target was Ghidorah – they’d be just as dead if

Godzilla stepped on them on his way. Realizing that there only hope was to move the van at a right angle to Godzilla's path as quickly as possible, Reggie dove into the drivers seat and without even bothering to close the door reached for the ignition key. Which, since this was a keyless ignition system, wasn't there.

Cursing under his breath, Reggie grabbed for the ignition console and tried to punch in the five-digit code that would bring the engines to life. *Damn modern technology! Who cares how reliable these new systems are? I can't remember the stupid code!* Reggie closed his eyes and tried to imagine the feel of his fingers on the keypad. Then, with his eyes still closed, he keyed in the correct sequence and was rewarded with the sound of the engine roaring to life.

He opened his eyes and prepared to throw the vehicle into gear. Before he could move a muscle, though, his view was completely obscured by an immense dark shape that descended from above and planted itself mere yards from the van. Reggie had a split second to observe the rough texture of Godzilla's massively clawed foot before the impact caused the vehicle to leap up into the air like a matchbox car on a trampoline. Reggie was thrown out of the driver's seat and desperately tried to brace himself for the inevitable moment when the van came back down to earth. Which occurred mere seconds later.

Fortunately, the van had state-of-the-art suspension and shocks, and the impact had little effect on it. Its human occupants didn't fare quite as well, however. Once again, Reggie was tossed sideways and slammed against the interior of the van. Dazed, but not seriously injured, he pulled himself shakily to his feet and looked around to see if Peter was all right. Peter was lying

on the floor beside the generator console, and was vigorously rubbing the back of his head, but seemed none the worse for wear. Except, he was no longer sitting at his console. And that meant

—

Reggie pulled himself back toward the front of the vehicle and looked out the front windshield. Godzilla had crossed half the distance between the command vehicle and Ghidorah. But none of the generators were operating! Having drained the last generator, and with no new generator being turned on, Ghidorah was preparing to leave. Already he had unfurled his wings to their fullest extent and was slowly rising into the sky. Another minute and he would be gone!

* * *

Reggie would not forget what he saw next – not for the rest of his life. As Ghidorah rose higher and higher into the sky, the spines on Godzilla’s back increased their luminosity by a quantum order, soon outshining the very sun. Before Reggie could turn his head to shield his gaze from the terrible sight, Godzilla opened his mouth and issued forth a beam of pure blue-white energy that caused the air itself to sizzle. Lancing out into the sky, the beam traveled a short distance before impacting squarely in the middle of one of Ghidorah’s outstretched wings. The center of the wing glowed fiercely for a microsecond, and then erupted into flame as a large hole was punched right through it. The wing immediately folded close, and then, with all the grace of an elephant on roller skates, Ghidorah plummeted back to the earth with a horrendous crash.

But Ghidorah wasn’t dead. Truth be told, it probably wasn’t even seriously wounded, and

even now the punctured wing was beginning to repair itself. In the mean time, all three of the great beast's malevolent heads twisted around on their slender necks and focused their baleful glares on the author of the damage which had been inflicted on it. With an ear-shattering screech, two of the three heads fired off a bolt of electrical energy powerful enough to light a major city for a month. And both bolts struck Godzilla directly in the chest!

The force of the energy bolts staggered Godzilla, and he fell backwards. The impact caused a huge cloud of salt to arise from the Flats, and for a moment neither Reggie nor Peter could see what was happening. It wasn't long, however, before a shape became visible within the cloud as Godzilla struggled to his feet. He had barely regained his balance, though, when he was hit by lightning bolts from all three of Ghidorah's heads.

This time, however, Godzilla was prepared and only stumbled backwards a bit instead of falling over. Reggie could see how Godzilla was using his massive tail as a third leg to provide him with the necessary support, much like a kangaroo. Blast after blast struck Godzilla in quick succession, but he continued to creep inexorably closer to his foe. By this time, Godzilla's entire body was glowing with a blue nimbus of energy, and Reggie couldn't help wondering just how much more Godzilla could stand.

As if in answer to Reggie's unvoiced question, something very strange began to happen to Godzilla. As he drew closer and closer to Ghidorah – who, by now, had struggled to its feet and was preparing to take off again – and as he absorbed bolt after bolt of energy, he started emitting energy of his own from various parts of his body. Reggie watch in amazement as great

sheets of energy pulsed off Godzilla's body in all directions. They didn't seem to be directed in any intelligent way, but one vast pulse of energy leapt from Godzilla's chest and struck Ghidorah full on, knocking it back to the ground. It was enough to prevent Ghidorah from firing off any more bolts of energy, at least long enough for Godzilla to close the distance between them.

And then, Godzilla did a very surprising thing. Reggie expected Godzilla to tear into Ghidorah with tooth and claw. Instead, Godzilla grabbed Ghidorah around the waist in a giant bear hug, looking for all the world like a professional wrestler preparing to body slam his opponent. And Ghidorah looked just as surprised, its three heads bobbing and weaving frantically in all directions.

At first, Reggie thought that Godzilla really *was* trying to squeeze Ghidorah to death – which, given the relative body masses of the two creatures, wasn't likely to be terribly successful. It quickly became apparent, however, that Godzilla had something else entirely in mind. Within moments of making full body contact, a crackling nimbus of energy erupted around the two figures. At first, the energy surge seemed to be random, but Reggie was soon able to discern that the energy field had a distinctive pattern – it was flowing from Ghidorah to Godzilla!

Reggie felt a presence at his side and he turned to see Peter standing next to him. Reggie acknowledged him with a nod, and then the two of them turned back to watch the awesome spectacle in front of them. And they continued to stand there silently for the next three hours in stunned amazement as the massive and wholly unearthly struggle continued before their very

eyes.

Godzilla and Ghidorah stood like two immense sumo wrestlers locked in mortal combat. Neither one ceded an inch to the other, despite the obvious disparity in size and weight between the two combatants. Ghidorah howled in protest and battered Godzilla with its necks, but Godzilla was unmoved. On one occasions, Ghidorah sunk the teeth of one head deep into Godzilla's neck. Godzilla responded in kind, however, turning his head and actually ripping a chunk of pseudo-flesh from Ghidorah's neck.

Throughout it all, Godzilla continued to absorb energy directly from Ghidorah. Periodically, Godzilla would reach some sort of saturation point and vast sheets of energy would explode from his body in searingly bright actinic pulses. On several of these occasions the pulses passed directly over the heads of Reggie and Peter, causing them to flinch and cover their eyes. And at random intervals immensely powerful bursts of weirdly twisted electrical energy would burst from one or more of Ghidorah's gaping maws, gouging out great craters in the landscape. Occasionally these bursts of energy would strike Godzilla, but he simply shrugged them off and held on with apparently renewed determination.

In spite of all this, though, neither combatant seemed to have a clear advantage over the other. Godzilla was able to take whatever punishment Ghidorah inflicted on him and continued to drain Ghidorah's energy at a frightening pace. Ghidorah, however, seemed to possess an inexhaustible supply of energy and did not appear to be growing noticeably weaker as the hours passed. It seemed to be a complete stalemate between the classic unstoppable force and the

immovable object. And it remained that way until something very simple happened – the sun went down.

Sunset came so gradually that Reggie and Peter didn't even notice the approaching twilight. Part of that, of course, was due to the fact that the entire landscape was constantly lit up by the energy given off by the two creatures in front of them. It was Peter who first noticed, though, and he grabbed Reggie's arm and excitedly pointed to the western horizon. At first, Reggie wasn't sure what he was looking at, but then he saw the trailing edge of the sun's fiery red disk sinking behind the distant mountains and he understood.

On the battlefield, the tide of the struggle was beginning to change as well. Deprived of its power source, Ghidorah had no way of replenishing the energy that Godzilla continued to absorb. In one last frantic burst of energy Ghidorah managed to break loose from Godzilla's deadly grip and began to rise into the darkening sky once more. Godzilla wasn't giving up that easily, however. Before Ghidorah had traveled a hundred feet into the air Godzilla opened his mouth and let loose a powerful burst of plasma energy. Ghidorah tried to evade the oncoming blast, but it struck Ghidorah squarely on the base of the central of its three necks. With an immense explosion that lit the sky brighter than day, Ghidorah's neck severed completely from its body and fell to the earth with a crash, only to be followed moments later by Ghidorah itself.

Ghidorah was not dead, and its remaining two heads continued to move fitfully. But it was clear that the battle was over as Ghidorah's movements grew weaker and weaker. Soon, it stopped moving all together. And then, Godzilla uttered the first sound that Peter and Reggie had

heard from him since this entire battle had begun. He turned his head to the sky, opened his mouth, and let loose a roar of triumph that echoed and reechoed through the night. And then a second roar, louder than the first. And then a third. And then, without further acknowledgment of his vanquished foe, Godzilla turned around and began his long march back to the ocean many miles away.

Reggie and Peter stood in stunned silence as the sound washed over them again and again, their minds numbed by what they had witnessed. With a start, though, Reggie came back to his senses and rushed back into the command vehicle. He picked up the headset from the console beside the driver's seat and switched the radio on for the first time in many hours. First, he sent word to the rest of his team to return to the Salt Flats and prepare the containment sphere for deployment. They still hadn't figured out exactly what they were going to do with Ghidorah once they had it in the sphere – launching it into orbit didn't seem practical, but maybe they could tow it out to sea or something? The important thing, however, was simply to get it into the sphere, and get it there *fast* before it could recover.

As soon as he had given the mobilization order to his team, Reggie changed frequency and called Dr. Fong to let him know that the mission was accomplished and that Godzilla was now leaving the area. One menace had been destroyed, or at least disabled. Now it was up to Kenny to finish the job. Many miles away in the makeshift command bunker, Dr. Fong congratulated Reggie for a job well done, and then changed frequency to contact the nearby airfield where the specially modified attack helicopters were standing by to launch their deadly

assault on Godzilla. It was time, finally, to put an end to the madness once and for all.

Chapter Thirty-Nine – The Ultimate Decision

Inside the hardened concrete bunker that comprised the ad hoc command center, Kenny was struggling with his final decision. For over a decade he had planned for this very moment – the death of Godzilla. Everything he had done, every waking moment of his life, had been devoted to this single goal. Like the legendary Captain Ahab, Kenny had pursued his particular white whale with a single-minded determination that brooked no resistance. Kenny would have been the first to admit that his pursuit bordered on an obsession, except for the fact that Godzilla truly *was* a menace to the world at large. This wasn't just some personal vendetta. It wasn't just about revenge. This was something that had to be done, and Kenny was simply the person best suited to do it.

And yet, after all these years, Kenny hesitated. He didn't know why, but something prevented him from completing the transmission. Was it a sense of gratitude he felt toward this newfound savior of mankind? Kenny didn't think so – this “savior” was just as likely to turn around and destroy everything in his path as to protect it. No, Godzilla had defeated Ghidorah for his own reasons, and not out of any sense of benevolence toward the human race, of this Kenny was quite sure. Pity, perhaps? Did he actually feel sorry for Godzilla in some way, knowing the pain and torment the genetically tailored virus was sure to inflict on him? Again, Kenny didn't think so. He was certainly not a cruel man by nature, and he was even able to find within himself the desire that Godzilla would perish without suffering too much, but he didn't

feel *that* badly for Godzilla. No, it had to be something else deep inside him that was causing him to hesitate.

Kenny shook his head in anger. Anger at this whole situation. Anger at having spent so much of his life on this quest. And anger at his sudden indecision when it finally came time to do what he *knew* had to be done. *Enough*, Kenny thought. And then he picked up the transmitter once again and reached forward to flip the switch that would connect him to the airfield.

Before he could complete this motion, however, he felt a gentle hand on his shoulder. Surprised, Kenny turned to find Dr. Bouromphongsa by his side, the Indian's soulful brown eyes peering intently at Kenny from beneath his turban. "I perceive you are troubled, my friend," Jatinder said in his usual mellifluous tones. "You will permit me, perhaps, to be making an observation?"

Kenny's first instinct was to brush his friend aside, to tell him that there was no time for "observations". Angry with himself, Kenny felt the need to lash out at someone else, as if that would make his problems magically go away. But Jatinder kept a firm, yet also quite gentle, hand on Kenny's arm and continued to look deep into Kenny's eyes. With a sigh, Kenny said "yes, Jatinder, I think I could really use one of your observations right about now."

Without taking his hand nor his eyes off Kenny, Jatinder began speaking again in his lilting, singsong voice. "In my country, we have a terrible thing. You would call it a 'monsoon'. To us, however, it is simply another avatar of Shiva, the bringer of death and destruction. Almost every year the monsoons come and thousands of people die. The winds rage and the waters

flood. Entire villages are destroyed. Nobody knows how to prevent the monsoons from coming, and the best we can do is try and prepare for them as best as we can. Sometimes we are successful; sometimes we are not. Godzilla is very much like a monsoon, would you not say?"

Kenny had no idea where Jatinder was going with this, or if he even had a point, but he nodded his head in agreement. Satisfied, Jatinder continued. "Now, my good friend, please to be asking me if I would stop the monsoons if such a thing were possible."

Kenny was mystified by this rhetorical question. Of *course* Jatinder would stop the monsoons if he could. Didn't he just say that? Nevertheless, to make his friend happy, he asked the question anyway. "O.K., Jatinder. *Would* you stop the monsoons if it were possible?"

Kenny was completely nonplused by Jatinder's response. "No, my friend, I would not. Such a thing would be terrible indeed!"

Kenny opened his mouth to say something, then thought better of it. When Jatinder didn't continue, however, Kenny forced himself to ask the next question. "But I don't understand, Jatinder! You said how much death and destruction is caused by the monsoons. How could you *not* want to prevent them?"

Jatinder nodded sagely before continuing. "Remember I said that the monsoons come *almost* every year? Now, please to be asking me what happens when the monsoons do *not* come."

"All right, I'll bite. What happens when the monsoons don't come?"

Jatinder had a twinkle in his eye that belied the seriousness of his tone. "Ah, my friend –

when the monsoons do *not* come we have a great drought that kills millions of people instead of the mere thousands that are killed by the monsoon. Without the monsoon to bring the rain, the crops cannot grow, and we have famine and much sickness and death. In these times, the people pray for Shiva to return, since he is not only the god of death and destruction, but also the god of regeneration.”

Kenny was stunned. The implications of what Jatinder had told him slowly sunk in as his brain tried to understand the myriad and conflicting emotions that he felt. He had often compared Godzilla to a force of nature, but it never occurred to Kenny to take that analogy *literally*. Was it possible, though? Could Godzilla somehow be a natural phenomenon that was essential to the regular order of things? Like the monsoons that brought needed rains? Or the forest fires that cleared away the old and dying trees to make room for the new saplings? And if Godzilla were eliminated, would they face some other, even deadlier threat? A threat like....

Ghidorah.

Everything clicked into place in Kenny’s mind. He finally understood the source of his hesitation and uncertainty. In spite of all their efforts, Mankind had proved completely ineffectual against Ghidorah, and it was only with Godzilla’s help that they were able to defeat it. Everybody had been assuming, though, that Ghidorah was an aberration. For that matter, everybody had always assumed that Godzilla himself was an aberration. But what if they were wrong? What if there were more, even deadlier, monsters out there? How much did they really know about their own little corner of the universe, after all? And what would they do about the

next Ghidorah that showed up if they killed off the only force of nature capable of stopping it?

Kenny had the power to defeat Godzilla. But who was he to make that ultimate decision? Instead of spending all these years trying to destroy Godzilla, how much better would it have been to find ways to control him. Or, barring that, ways to deal with him, to lessen the loss of life from his attacks whenever possible? Early warning and evacuation plans, perhaps. Ways of discouraging Godzilla from coming ashore near populated areas. Kenny was surprised to discover tears welling up in his eyes as he realized the depths of his hubris, the lengths to which his obsession had driven him. And with that realization came a sense of deep shame, as well as immense gratitude for the wisdom of his friend.

Kenny reached out and flipped the switch that would connect him with the nearby airfield. Taking a deep breath, he then uttered the most difficult words he had ever spoken – words that would ultimately come back to haunt him later in his life, but would also prove to be the salvation of the human race on more than one occasion.

“This is Doctor Fong Yui Moon of the United Nations Science Advisory Committee. All attack craft are to stand down. I repeat, they are to stand down. Let Godzilla go, back to the sea where he belongs.”

The End.

Epilogue

*Mr. And Mrs. Patrick J. Brennan
are pleased to announce the remarriage
of their daughter,
Eileen Brennan,
to
Peter Walter Murdoch,
son of
Mr. And Mrs. Wallace S. Murdoch,
on
the fifteenth of September
in the Year of Our Lord
Two Thousand and Twenty-One
The ceremony will be held at
the Washington National Cathedral in
Washington, D.C., at 7:00 P.M.*

Author's Notes

What a long, strange journey this has been! Almost an entire year of blood, sweat and tears, and at times I seriously doubted I would ever finish it. But here it is!

When I finished my first on-line novel, *Godzilla Attacks!*, I had no intention of writing a sequel to it. Ever. I did leave it open for a sequel, but only because any good Godzilla story has to leave the door open for another tale to be told. You can't just kill Godzilla off and say "The End."

The inspiration for this novel came, believe it or not, while I was watching the movie *Alien: Resurrection* back in November of 1997. For those of you who have seen the movie [and I apologize to those who haven't], you'll remember the scene where it is revealed that the military ship, now filled with rampaging aliens, is on a direct course back to Earth. For some reason, I started thinking about what would happen if some *other* alien life form were onboard – an alien life form much more deadlier than those puny little aliens portrayed in the movie. An alien life form so incredibly deadly and destructive that only something as powerful as Godzilla could possibly defeat it. And thus was the story idea born [hey – you get your inspirations your way, I'll get mine my way....] Even the title of my novel, "Godzilla Reborn", was a nod to the movie "Alien Resurrection". I briefly thought of actually calling it "Godzilla Resurrection", but I thought that would be a bit too blatant.

I purposely wanted to make this novel very different from my first one. The first one was basically a one-idea story – Godzilla attacks [hence the title]. It was fun, and I tried to make it as

interesting and realistic as possible, but when it was over it was over. I really had nothing more to say about Godzilla going around and stomping on buildings. With this new novel, though, I wanted a much more complex story, and I hit upon the twin themes of obsession and redemption. I was struck with the notion of someone who had devoted his entire life to the destruction of something he considered to be the ultimate threat, only to have to actually turn around and revive that very threat in order to fight an even *greater* threat. I also liked the idea of a person who was directly responsible for bringing that horrible threat to Earth, even if unintentionally, and how he would react to that knowledge.

I also wanted to spend more time on character development with this story. The first novel was basically one long action sequence, played out over a 2 or 3 day period. Again, it was fun, but I just wanted to do it differently this time. So I spent more time developing the storyline and the characters, setting up the events and [hopefully] drawing people into the story. By about Chapter 20 or so I started getting a number of e-mails from people saying "I really enjoy the story so far, but WHEN THE HELL IS GODZILLA GOING TO SHOW UP ALREADY?" Hopefully, if I did it correctly, it was worth the wait.

I remember watching *Terminator 2* years ago and realizing that you were supposed to think at first that Arnold was once again playing the evil terminator, and that the new terminator was actually the good guy. The way director James Cameron set it up, it wasn't until the new terminator drew his gun and Arnold's character shot the other terminator instead of the young John Conner that you finally knew that Arnold was there to protect the boy instead of kill him.

Unfortunately, everybody knew ahead of time that Arnold was the good guy in this film because of the huge media blitz.

Well, I wanted to try and accomplish the same thing with my story. I purposely set things up so that the appearance of Ghidorah would be a surprise. In fact, I kind of hoped that people would think that Godzilla himself was going to emerge from that asteroid until the very last moment. In order for this to work, however, I needed to keep it all a tightly guarded secret. People asked me why I didn't have a picture on the front page of the story like I did with my first novel, and this is why. I mean, I would have loved to have had a picture of Godzilla and Ghidorah duking it out, but that would have ruined the surprise a bit, don't you think?

Similarly, I had previously decided to reward my loyal fans a bit by asking for suggestions on what cities I should destroy in this novel. In my first novel I had focused on Boston [my home town], but I thought it would be nice to give other people the chance to have their home towns stomped as well. Unfortunately, most people who wrote to me with requests assumed that it was going to be Godzilla who was going to be doing all the stomping. I got a lot of "well, it would be perfect, since there is a nuclear reactor right outside my hometown" and "I live on the coast, so it would make sense for Godzilla to come ashore here". Of course, I couldn't tell anyone that it would be Ghidorah destroying their hometown instead of Godzilla, since that would also ruin the surprise. I hope nobody was too disappointed.

In general, there were some real rocky spots where I honestly didn't think I was going to

be able to finish the story. And I'm not talking about plot problems, either. In the first place, as I mentioned above, I got my initial inspiration for the story from watching *Alien: Resurrection*, and I started writing this novel in December of 1997. At the time, I had never heard of the movies *Deep Impact* and *Armageddon*. Nor, for that matter, had Marc Cerasini's novel, *Godzilla 2000*, come out yet. After I had written the first 10 chapters or so, everything hit the fan. First, I heard about the aforementioned two movies – each involving a massive asteroid hurtling toward Earth, and the attempts to plant nuclear charges on the rock to deflect or destroy it. Sound familiar? Then, I finally got around to reading Marc Cerasini's book. Imagine my shock to read about a giant asteroid hurtling toward Earth that burst open at the last moment to reveal a hideous space monster called Ghidorah. I almost gave up right there and then. I had struggled so hard to come up with what I thought was an original plot idea, I was crushed to think that other people might think that I had stolen my plot from these other sources. In the end, though, I decided to continue on and tell the story I wanted to tell.

The second big setback came in May with the release of the American *Godzilla* movie. Basically, I had invested so much time and effort into following and promoting that movie's release that I got totally and completely burned out once it actually came out. Plus, the fact that it wasn't what I hoped it would be left me very dispirited and thinking that it was rather pointless to continue with my novel. The fact that I received over 200 e-mails *per day* over the week following the movie's release – most of them critical of the movie and some even blaming me for it for some reason – didn't help things any. I continued to churn out a chapter here and there,

but my heart wasn't really in it anymore.

The turning point came a few weeks ago when I purchased a copy of a video entitled "The Godzilla Fantasy Returns". It was a compilation tape of all the best action sequences from the modern Godzilla movies, set to the music of Akira Ifukube. Watching it really reminded me what Godzilla was all about in the first place, and also reminded me what I liked about Godzilla so much. I had always known how my novel was going to end, but this gave me the desire to actually start typing again.

And that's about it. I thank you for your patience and positive comments, and I hope it was worth the admittedly long wait. I won't say I'll never write another Godzilla novel, but let's just say there won't be anything else in the near future.

Regards,

Barry S. Goldberg

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Boston, Massachusetts