

THIRTEEN

"Paul, wake up, there is much to be done today. Paul, wake up."

"Are you here already? It must be five in the morning."

"No, I'm not there, and its a quarter of nine in your time zone."

"A quarter of nine? I can't believe I slept that late. Are you still in Borneo?"

"Yes I am, Paul. I wish I could have let you sleep later, but we have much to do. Perhaps tomorrow you could get some more rest. I'll see you at about 11:00 AM your time. Will that be late enough for you to have picked-up the machine?"

"Why don't we make it for 12:30, in case I run into any problems."

"OK, I'll see you then."

Paul returned from Al's store at 12:00. He readied a place for the machine next to his computer, and waited until Owhindamon arrived.

At a few minutes before the half-hour Owhindamon appeared in the den.

As the haze cleared, Paul noticed that Owhindamon was accompanied by a stack of gold.

"Paul, would you be so kind as to help me transport these gold blanks near the document duplicator? Paul, don't take too many of them at once, you're liable to injure yourself."

"Injure myself, how? Holy shit, these things are heavy."

"Of course they are, they're solid gold. By the way, they are still extremely pliant since they are 24 carat, so be careful."

"Did you have any problems with your friend?"

"To tell you the truth, I'm worried about him. I told him that it was a software duplicator, but I don't think he bought that story. I have a feeling he made duplicates of the prints and will try to make one himself. I hope the cost of the gold contacts for the circuit boards

will dissuade him from attempting to make a similar machine. I suppose he could substitute another metal for the connectors and make the machine less expensive."

"Even if he made the machine, he'd never figure out what its used for."

"He might not be able to, but he'd know it wasn't a software duplicator. I wouldn't know what to tell him if he confronted me. I wish there was some way to get him to stop interfering."

"Paul, don't worry about it. We can't control his curiosity, nor can we control his actions. In any case, I don't think he's a threat to us. Now, how about if we try the machine to see if it works properly."

"Sure, but what deed are we going to copy?"

"Well, just in case Nick tries to renege on his deal, I think we should make a copy of the deed for the Earth. After that's done, I think we should stir up a little trouble for Fleshrender."

"OK, let's get this thing cranked."

"OK, let's put the deed in the analyzer. Now, take it out and compare it to the original. Can you see any differences?"

"Are you crazy? Let me look at the damn things for awhile. Right now, both of them look like a bunch of squiggly lines."

"Take your time, I don't think you'll find any discrepancies. When you're satisfied that they are good enough reproductions, we'll begin making the balance of the forged deeds."

"OK, why don't you make yourself comfortable, because I'm going to go over these babies with a fine-tooth comb. I want to make damn sure I won't get caught passing bad deeds. I'm nervous enough about this deal as it is - I don't want to worry about the way these deeds look. Before long, I'll have plenty of other problems to contend with."

"Like I said, take your time. I'll step into the family room and watch TV for awhile."

"It's too early, there's nothing good on television."

"Paul, time of day has nothing to do with the quality of programming on your TV - there's never anything good on; I'll just watch a soap or

something. The plots on those things are so contrived: everything is so forced, I can't believe people watch them."

"They want to believe them; once you say something is 'nt impossible, gradually you come to believe it can become possible."

"I guess, but I still think they're stupid. Good for a few yuks, I suppose."

"Ya well go in there and yuk away - I've got serious work to do."

"Hey Owhindamon, I thought you were watching TV, not cutting Zzzzzs."

"Oh, must have believed sleep was possible and took an opportunity to prove it to myself. What happened on 'All my Progeny?'"

"That's 'All my Children', Owhindaman. I don't know, I was looking over the deeds. I'm finished. As far as I can tell they are exact reproductions. We should probably get started on the rest of the deeds."

"How are we going to get this deed to the Mantodeii?"

"We'll have some of our people talk to their people again to arrange for them to meet you. Then we'll give them your coordinates so that they can use the transport to get here."

"My coordinates? You mean there are some sort of coordinates you can use to beam in here?"

"Of course, but there pretty highly guarded - locked in the mainframe at Federation headquarters. Have to post bond to get the coordinates. The bond is intended to deter people from harming one another. Of course, the bond is 'nt always effective."

"How comforting. Well anyway, the Mantodeii get my coordinates and transport over. When do you think all this will happen?"

"In a matter of a few days I should think. Once they have the deed in hand, they'll probably send an expedition over to inspect the planet. Of course, the Panterran will blow their ship out of the air just as soon as it materialises in the atmosphere. Within a few weeks there will be all-out war."

"Hey you know, I just thought of something. Won't they ruin the entire

planet in this war?"

"I don't think so, Paul. The planet is too valuable; they won't risk it. Most of the fighting will be done in space - probably where the ships come out of hyperspace: maybe even in the area of space where they make the initial jump. It's hard to predict their strategy, except to say that nuclears probably won't be used in the confrontation."

"Well, I'll tell you what - since we have the deeds made, I think I'll be on my way. Why don't you get some rest; I think things will get rather hectic in the next few days. You can expect to be hearing from the Mantodeii within a short while. Don't be alarmed by their appearance; they will probably seem quite alien to you. Just stay calm and everything will be all right. If you need any help, just call for me. And remember, if I send to you while you're in the middle of a conversation, don't act alarmed. Good-bye for now, Paul"

"Good night, Owhindamon. Sleep within the bosom of the People."

"The same to you my friend," came the wordless reply.