

12 May 1998

Dear Ken

I have been away lambing, as you might expect, and have just returned to find your typescript. I hope I am not too late

This novel is riddled with flaws, that much certain, but unfortunately my Alzheimers is kicking in so fast that I seem unable to detect them. Priest is a first class character and everything concerning him is up with Jim Thompson, and the earthquakes scenes are as good as descriptive action writing can get.

As for cliches I am not altogether clear what a cliché is anyway. "Disaster struck" and "X bit his lip" seem harmless and maybe indispensable expressions, just as tips of icebergs and level playing fields are indispensable metaphors. One likes to avoid the commonplace but sometimes only the commonplace will do. Sinking hearts also seem OK too as long as you do not, as in your cathedral period, use them so repeatedly that they leap out at the reader. If you confine yourself to one sinking heart and bit lip per novel that would be OK, I think. Any sort of determination is never as grim or remorseless or steely as simple unqualified determination. In general there are too many metaphoric hearts in your books and cumulatively too many faces displaying anger but I feel that my quibbles are vanishingly minuscule. If I go looking for cliches I can no longer see what leaps out, which is what a cliché does. Most errors seem to be typing errors. There might be quite a few of these since I read rather quickly so I enclose those I had spotted.

Other points:

You have done a great deal to convey that the SV is more than just a truck, it is an engine of apocalypse. Possibly you have not done quite enough. The very word "truck" is undermining, and the thought kept coming back to me: I don't really think this guy could start an earthquake with a truck. I am talking of doubt within the frame of suspended disbelief. I don't for a moment think any one could be invisible but I don't for a moment doubt it when I am reading HG Wells novel.

Since it is important to convey that this machine, if not of awesome aspect, has awesome powers, our first meeting with it is crucial. I am still not too clear what size this machine is or how near to it Priest is when it first rumbles. I take it that it is moving toward Priest across the desert. Perhaps you might recast the paragraph on page 9 along these lines:

[A sentence about the powerful/impressive machinery behind the drivers cabin]. As he watched, it slowly lowered a massive steel plate. There was a pause and a low pitched rumble. A cloud of dust rose around the

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truck as the plate began to pound the earth rhythmically. He felt the earth shake beneath his feet."

The emphatic position of the final sentence will register more strongly that Here is a truck which can at x distance make the ground tremble ~~beneath your feet.~~

At one point someone thinks the Commune will forgive an earthquaker but not a murderer. Similarly readers will respect a murderer more easily than someone who does something petty or mean. It bothered methat Priest should so cheerfully incriminate Mario, and even more that he should expect Star to enthuse about "the beauty of it". He might do it, but not without a qualm of self-justificatiorn. It is a bit out of character for him, evil though he can be, and quite out of character for Star. Perhaps Priest could insert a sentence. ... "they will throw him in gaol. By the time he clears himself my trail will be cold." .

- X p20 authorial naming of The Look, without any irony, makes it a bit giggly, like some amazing power in a Supercomic. Perhaps if you insert .. fixed him with what Star called The Look, a a hynotic stare..."
- X Simon Sparrow, I distractedly thought was the name of the Doctor in those Richard Gordon films. If so, you should change it. You already have one silly name in this novel
- X p85 I am obviously missing something here. I still dont see why poor uneducated people have to be forty-five years old. Its my Alzheimers again.

p192. For a moment Star believed that the earthquake had already begun." A sentence like this, if plausible, will emphasise the power of the machine.

page 438. The use of the word "decoy" suggests that Judy has understood that he is just that. Otherwise the author should not be telling us just yet. Judy blunders yet again in this scene and I wonder she need be as incompetent as all that. I hate to speak badly of someone you are obviously fond of, but its for her own good. If she already realised from lack of a Stewart Granger nose that he was not Priest her understanding of his character would set her scanning the crowd for the face of the true Priest. While she is doing this some secondary FBI could take the fall by doing the reasonable but disastrous thing when the decoy produces his magazine,

The epilogue is very fine and the otiose maudlin phrase "time to end it all" really does spoil it. The man is not choosing the valley as a setting for a self-pitying suicide; he is quite inevitably dying with his valley.

The apostrophe on Cuda is irritating and possibly the wrong way round.

The character of Oak** is a bit lifeless and I had to turn back the pages to remember who he was. I cannot without looking it up even remember his name. Perhaps its because he has almost no dialogue. No black actor would want to play this minor bad guy. Contrast with minor good guy, Raja, who lives with every breath.

This should make a terrific movie. For Priest I see Fred Ward or Corbin Bernsen or maybe Harry D Stanton. Definitely not Priest's own whoremongering father, who was a lousy actor.

All the above is captions cavilling and carping; but at least there is not a lot of it. Back to the sheep.

Love

George

(how far away
is this truck?)

9

As he watched, the powerful machinery behind the driver's cabin slowly lowered a massive steel plate, six feet square, to the ground. There was a pause, then he heard a low-pitched rumble and felt the ground shake beneath his feet. A cloud of dust rose around the truck as the plate began to pound the earth rhythmically. →h

This was a seismic vibrator, a machine for sending shock waves through the earth's crust. Priest had never had much education, except in stealing cars, but he was the smartest person he had ever met, and he understood how the vibrator worked. It was similar to radar and sonar. The shock waves were reflected off features in the earth—such as rock or liquid—and they bounced back to the surface, where they were picked up by listening devices called geophones, or jugs.

Priest worked on the jug team. They had planted more than a thousand geophones at precisely measured intervals in a grid a mile square. Every time the vibrator shook, the reflections were picked up by the jugs and recorded by a supervisor working in a trailer known as the doghouse. All this data would later be fed into a supercomputer in Houston to produce a three-dimensional map of what was under the earth's surface. And the map would be sold to an oil company.

The vibrations rose in pitch, making a noise like the mighty engines of an ocean liner gathering speed; then the sound stopped abruptly. Priest ran along the sendero to the truck, screwing up his eyes against the billowing dust. He opened the door and clambered up into the cabin. A stocky black-haired man of about thirty was at the wheel. "Hey, Mario," Priest said as he slid into the seat alongside the driver.

"Hey, Ricky."

Richard Granger was the name on Priest's Commercial Driving License (Class B). The

a lie." She turned her fury on Paul. "Liar!" she screamed. "Motherfucking liar!"

Her child began to cry.

"Hey, knock it off!" Paul said indignantly. "I'm just the goddamn mailman here!"

Everyone started shouting at the same time.

Priest was beside Melanie in a couple of strides. He put his arm around her and spoke quietly into her ear. "You're frightening Dusty," he said. "Sit down, now. You're right to be mad, we're all mad as hell."

"Tell me it isn't true," she said.

Priest gently pushed her into her chair. "It's true, Melanie," he said. "It's true."

When they had quietened down, Priest said: "Come on, everyone, let's wash the dishes and get back to work."

"Why?" said Dale. He was the winemaker. Not one of the founders, he had come here in the eighties, disillusioned with the commercial world. After Priest and Star, he was the most important person in the group. "We won't be here for the harvest," he went on. "We have to leave in five weeks. Why work?" *what Star referred to as The Look*

Priest fixed him with ~~the~~ *Star* The Look, the hypnotic stare that intimidated and mesmerised all but the most strong-willed people. He let the room fall silent, so that they would all hear. At last he said: "Because miracles happen." X



A local ordinance prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages in the town of Liberty, Texas, but just the other side of the town line there was a bar called The Doodlebug, with cheap draft beer and a country-western band and waitresses in tight bluejeans and cowboy boots.

Priest fixed him with what Star called The Look, a stare that mesmerised forced even the most strong-willed to hold eye-contact.

period, drinking cold water and eating raisins made from last year's grapes. "This is not just a wine farm, not just a valley, not just a commune—this is my whole life. We came here, all those years ago, because we believed that our parents had made a society that was twisted and corrupt and poisoned. And we were right, for Christ's sake!" Her face flushed as she let her passion show, and Priest thought how beautiful she was, still. "Just *look* at what's happened to the world outside," she said, raising her voice. "Violence and ugliness and pollution, presidents who tell lies and break the law, riots and crime and poverty. Meanwhile, we've lived here in peace and harmony, year after year, with no money, no sexual jealousy, no conformist rules. We said that all you need is love, and they called us naive, but we were *right* and they were *wrong*. We *know* we've found the way to live—we've *proved* it." Her voice had become very precise, betraying her old-money origins. Her father had come from a wealthy family, but had spent his life as a doctor in a slum neighbourhood. Star had inherited his idealism. "I'll do anything to save our home and our way of life," she went on. "I'll die for it, if our children can continue to live here." Her voice went quiet, but her words were clear, and she spoke with ~~remorseless~~ determination. "I'll kill for it, too," she said. "Do you understand me, Priest? *I will do anything.*"



"Are you listening to me?" Mario said. "You want a ride into town, or not?"

"Sure," Priest said. *Sure, you lily-livered bastard, you yellow dog coward, you goddamn scum of the earth, I want a ride.*

Mario turned around.

Priest's eye fell on the Stillson wrench he had dropped a few minutes earlier.

A new plan unfolded, fully formed, in his brain.

He knelt there, shaking. He was afraid that if he opened his eyes he might see Mario's soul going up.

To quiet his brain he recited his mantra: *Ley, tor, pur-doy-kor*. It had no meaning; that was why concentrating hard on it produced a soothing effect. It had the rhythm of a nursery rhyme he recalled from childhood:

One, two, three-four-five

Once I caught a fish alive

Six, seven, eight-nine-ten

Then I let him go again

When he was chanting to himself, he often slipped from the mantra into the rhyme. It worked just as well.

As the familiar syllables soothed him, he thought about the way his breath entered his nostrils, went through his nasal passages into the back of his mouth, passed along his throat, and descended into his chest, finally penetrating the farthest branches of his lungs, before retracing the entire journey in reverse: lungs, throat, mouth, nose, nostrils, and back out into the open air. When he concentrated fully on the journey of the breath, nothing else came into his head—no visions, no nightmares, no memories.

A few minutes later he stood up, his ^{heartbeat steady} ~~heart cold~~, his face set in a determined expression. He had purged himself of emotion: he felt no regret or pity. The murder was in the past, and Mario was just a piece of garbage that he had to dispose of.

He picked up his cowboy hat, brushed off the dirt, and put it on his head.

He found the pickup's tool kit behind the driving seat. He took a screwdriver and used

Aneth detached the child from her breast and patted his back. “Forget it,” she said. “I won’t have anything to do with that stuff. It’s deadly!”

Star began to sing again. *Train, train, no-good train.*

Oaktree persisted. “I could get a job in a nuclear power plant, figure out a way to beat their security system.”

Priest said: “They would ask you for your résumé. And what would you say you had been doing for the last twenty-five years? Nuclear research at Berkeley?”

“I’d say, I been living with a bunch of freaks and now they need to blow up Sacramento, so I came here to get me some radio friggin’ *activity*, man.”

The others laughed. Oaktree sat back in his chair and began to harmonise with Star: *No, no, ain’t gonna ride that no-good train.*

Priest frowned at the flippant air. He could not smile. His heart was full of rage. But he knew that inspired ideas sometimes came out of light-hearted discussions, so he let it run.

Aneth kissed the top of her child’s head and said: “We could kidnap someone.”

Priest said: “Who? The governor probably has six bodyguards.”

“What about his right-hand man, that guy Albert Honeymoon?” There was a murmur of support: they all hated Honeymoon. “Or the president of Coastal Electric?”

Priest nodded. This could work.

He knew about stuff like that. It was a long time since he had been on the streets, but he remembered the rules of a rumble: plan carefully, look cool, shock the mark so badly he can hardly think, act fast, and get the hell out. But something bothered him. “It’s too...like, low-profile,” he said. “Say some big-shot gets kidnapped. So what? If you’re going to scare people,

of energy to make the earth move.”

“That’s where you’re wrong. It might take only a small amount of energy, if the force was applied in just the right place.”

Oaktree said: “How do you know all this stuff?”

“I studied it. I have a master’s in seismology. I should be teaching in a university now. But I married my professor, and that was the end of my career. I was turned down for a doctorate.”

Her tone was bitter. Priest had talked to her about this, and he knew she bore a deep grudge. Her husband had been on the university committee that turned her down. He had been obliged to withdraw from the meeting while her case was discussed, which seemed natural to Priest, but Melanie felt her husband should somehow have made sure of her success. Priest guessed that she had not been good enough to study at doctoral level—but she would believe anything rather than that. So he told her that the men on the committee were so terrified of her combination of beauty and brains that they conspired to do her down. She loved him for letting her believe that.

Melanie went on: “My husband—soon to be my ex-husband, I hope—developed the stress-trigger theory of earthquakes. At certain points along the fault line, she^r pressure builds up, over the decades, to a very high level. Then it takes only a relatively weak vibration in the earth’s crust to dislodge the plates, release all that accumulated energy, and cause an earthquake.”

Priest was captivated. He caught Star’s eye. She nodded sombrely. She believed in the unorthodox. It was an article of faith with her that the bizarre theory would turn out to be the truth, the unconventional way of life would be the happiest, and the madcap plan would succeed

Perhaps this cd go
on page 9 for first impression

exploration firm he had been working for. The office was a large trailer in a vacant lot. Mario's seismic vibrator was parked in the lot alongside Lenny's cranberry-red Pontiac Grand Am.

Priest stopped and stared at the truck for a moment. It was a ten-wheeler, with big off-road tires like dinosaur armour. Underneath a layer of Texas dirt it was bright blue. He itched to jump in and drive it away. He looked at the mighty machinery on the back, the powerful engine and the massive steel plate, the tanks and hoses and valves and gauges. *I could have the thing started in a minute, no keys necessary.* But if he stole it now, every Highway Patrolman in Texas would be looking for him within a few minutes. He had to be patient. *I'm going to make the earth shake, and no one is going to stop me.*

He went into the trailer.

The office was busy. Two jug team supervisors stood over a computer as a colour map of the area slowly emerged from the printer. Today they would collect their equipment from the field and begin to move it to Clovis. A surveyor was arguing on the phone in Spanish, and Lenny's secretary, Diana, was checking a list.

Priest stepped through an open door into the inner office. Lenny was drinking coffee with a phone to his ear. His eyes were bloodshot and his face blotchy after last night's drinking. He acknowledged Priest with a barely perceptible nod.

Priest stood by the door, waiting for Lenny to finish. His heart was in his mouth. He knew roughly what he was going to say. But would Lenny take the bait? Everything depended on it.

After a minute, Lenny hung up the phone and said: "Hey, Ricky—you seen Mario this mornin'?" His tone was annoyed. "He should of left here a half hour past."

"Yeah, I seen him," Priest said. "I hate to bring you bad news this friggin' early, but he's

have been happy to die. But now he wanted to live.

Even road signs were difficult for him. If he stopped and concentrated for a while, he could tell the difference between “East” and “West” or “North” and “South”. Despite his remarkable ability to calculate in his head, he could not read numbers without staring hard and thinking long. With an effort, he could recognise signs for route 10: a stick with a circle. But there was a lot of other stuff on road signs that mean nothing to him and confused the picture.

He tried to stay calm. But it was difficult. He liked to be in control. He was maddened by the sense of helplessness and bewilderment that came over him when he lost way. He knew by the sun which way was north. When he felt he might be going wrong, he pulled into the next gas station or shopping mall and asked for directions. He hated doing it, for people noticed the seismic vibrator—it was a big rig, and the machinery on the back looked kind of intriguing—and there was a danger he would be remembered. But he had to take the risk.

And the directions were not always helpful. Gas station attendants would say things like: “Yeah, easy, just follow Corpus Christi highway until you see a sign for Brooks Air Force base.”

Priest just forced himself to remain calm, keep asking questions, and hide his frustration and anxiety. He played the part of a friendly but stupid truck driver, the kind of person who would be forgotten by the next day. And eventually he got out of San Antonio on the right road, sending up prayers of thanks to whatever gods might be listening.

A few minutes later, passing through a small town, he was relieved to see the blue Honda parked at a McDonald’s restaurant.

He hugged Star gratefully. “What the hell happened?” she said worriedly. “I expected you a couple of hours ago!”

was a green-eyed Irishman, but she took more after her late mother, who had been Vietnamese. Judy was slender and dark-haired, with an upward slant to her eyes. The middle-aged Chinese gangsters she had been investigating had never suspected that this pretty little half-Asian girl was a hotshot FBI agent.

She was working with an Assistant US Attorney whom she knew unusually well. His name was Don Riley, and until a year ago they had been living together. He was her age, 36, and he was experienced, energetic and as smart as a whip.

She had thought they had a watertight case. But the accused men had hired the top criminal law firm in the city and put together a clever, vigorous defence. Their lawyers had undermined the credibility of witnesses who were, inevitably, from the criminal milieu themselves; and they had exploited the documentary evidence amassed by Judy to confuse and bewilder the jury.

Now neither Judy nor Don could guess which way it would go.

Judy had a special reason to be worried about this case. Her immediate boss, the supervisor of the Asian Organised Crime squad, was about to retire, and she had applied for the job. The overall head of the San Francisco office, the Special Agent in Charge or SAC, would support her application, she knew. But she had a rival: Marvin Hayes, another high-flying agent in her age group. And Marvin also had high-powered support: his best friend was the Assistant Special Agent in Charge responsible for all the organised crime and white-collar crime squads.

Promotions were granted by a career board, but the opinions of the SAC and ASACs carried a lot of weight. Right now the contest between Judy and Marvin Hayes was close.

She wanted that job. She wanted to rise far and fast in the FBI. She was a good agent, she

*so much a hotshot
for a young girl*

would be an outstanding supervisor, and one of these days she would be the best SAC the Bureau had ever had. She was proud of the FBI but she knew she could make it better: with faster introduction of new techniques like profiling; streamlined management systems; and—most of all—by getting rid of agents like Marvin Hayes.

Hayes was the old-fashioned type of law enforcement officer: lazy, brutal and unscrupulous. He had not put as many bad guys in jail as Judy, but he had made more high-profile arrests. He was good at insinuating himself into a glamorous investigation and quick to distance himself from a case that was going south. Sour?

The SAC had hinted to Judy that she would get the job, rather than Marvin, if she won her case today.

In court with Judy were most of the team on the Foong case: her supervisor, the other agents who had worked with her, a linguist, the squad secretary, the rotor who did the filing, and two San Francisco Police Department detectives. To her surprise, neither the ASAC nor the SAC was there. This was a big case, and the result was important to both of them. She felt a twinge of unease. She wondered if something was going on at the office that she did not know about. She decided to step outside and call. But before she got to the door, the clerk of the court entered and announced that the jury was about to return. She sat down again. ?

A moment later Don came back in, smelling of cigarettes: he had started smoking again since they split. He gave her shoulder an encouraging squeeze. She smiled at him. He looked nice, with his neat short haircut, dark blue suit, white button-down shirt and dark-red Armani tie. But there was no chemistry, no zing: she no longer wanted to muss his hair and undo his tie and slide her hand inside the white shirt.

knew she was the better agent, but Marvin ^{looked better on paper} ~~paper qualifications were superior.~~ (stuffed piece)

Judy fought back tears. She had worked her socks off for two years and scored a major victory against organised crime, and now she was being cheated of her reward by this creep.

Matt Peters came in. He was a stocky guy of about forty-five, bald, wearing a short-sleeved shirt and a tie. Like Marvin Hayes, he was close to Kincaid. Judy began to feel surrounded.

“Congratulations on winning your case,” Peters said to Judy. “I’ll be glad to have you on my squad.”

“Thank you.” Judy could not think what else to say.

Kincaid said: “Matt has a new assignment for you.”

Peters had a file under his arm, and now he handed it to Judy. “The governor has received a terrorist threat from a group calling itself the Hammer of Eden.”

Judy opened the file but she could hardly make out the words. She was shaking with anger and futility. To cover her emotions she tried to talk about the case. “What are they demanding?”

“A freeze on the building of new power plants in California.”

“Nuclear plants?”

“Any kind. They say they’re the radical offshoot of the Green California Campaign.”

Judy tried to concentrate. Green California was a legitimate environmental pressure group based in San Francisco. It was hard to believe they would do something like this. But all such organisations were capable of attracting nutcases. “And what’s the threat?”

“An earthquake.”

intelligent, successful, and working in law enforcement.

Judy said: "Don asked me to have a celebration dinner, but I think I'll cancel."

"I guess I ought to know better than to tell you who to marry," Bo said with a rueful grin.

He stood up. "I better get going. We have a raid going down tonight."

She did not like it when he worked at night. "Have you eaten?" she asked anxiously.

"Shall I make you some eggs before you go?"

"No, thanks, honey. I'll get a sandwich later." He pulled on a leather jacket and kissed her cheek. "I love you."

"Bye."

As the door slammed, the phone rang. It was Don. "I got us a table at Masa's," he said.

Judy sighed. Masa's was very swanky. "Don, I hate to let you down, but I'd rather not."

"Are you serious? I practically had to offer my sister's body to the maitre d' to get a table at this short notice."

"I don't feel like celebrating. Bad stuff happened at the office today." She told him about Lestrage getting cancer and Kincaid giving her a dumbass assignment. "So I'm quitting the Bureau."

Don was shocked. "I don't believe it! You *love* the FBI."

"I used to."

"This is terrible!"

"Not so terrible. It's time for me to make some money, anyway. I was a hotshot at law school, you know. I got better grades than a couple of people who are earning fortunes now."

"Sure, help a murderer beat the rap, write a book about it, make a million dollars....Is this

FBI

It was a standard-issue FBI weapon, a SIG-Sauer (✓) P228 pistol. It normally held thirteen rounds of 9mm ammunition, but Judy always racked back the slide and chambered the first bullet, then removed the clip and added an extra round, making fourteen. She also had a Remington model 870 five-chamber shotgun. Like all agents, she did firearms training once a month, usually at the sheriff's range in Santa Rita. Her marksmanship was tested four times a year. The qualification course never gave her any trouble: she had a good eye and a steady hand, and her reflexes were quick.

Like most agents, she had never fired her gun except in training.

FBI agents were investigators. They were highly educated and well paid. They did not dress for combat. It was perfectly normal to go through an entire twenty-five year career with the Bureau and never get involved in a shootout or even a fistfight. But they had to be ready for it. ✓

Judy put her weapon into a shoulder bag. She was wearing the *ao dai*, a traditional Vietnamese garment like a long blouse, with a little upright collar and side-slits, always worn over baggy pants. It was her favourite casual wear because it was so comfortable, but she knew it also looked good on her: the white material showed off her shoulder-length black hair and honey-coloured skin, and the close-fitting blouse flattered her petite figure. She would not normally wear it to the office, but it was late in the evening, and anyway she had resigned.

She went outside. Her Chevrolet Monte Carlo was parked at the kerb. It was an FBI car, and she would not be sorry to lose it. When she was a hotshot defence lawyer she could get something more exciting—a little European sports car, maybe, a Porsche or an MG.

Her father's house was in the Richmond neighbourhood. It was not very swanky, but an honest cop never got rich. Judy took the Geary Expressway downtown. Rush hour was over and

She had given ten years of her life to the FBI. Other women had got married and had children, or started their own business, or written a novel, or sailed around the world. She had dedicated herself to being a ~~terrific~~^{good} agent. Now she was throwing it all away. The thought brought tears to her eyes. *What kind of an idiot am I, sitting alone in my office crying to my damn computer?*

Then Simon Sparrow came in.

He was a heavily muscled man with neat short hair and a moustache. He was a year or two older than Judy. Like her, he was casually dressed, in tan chinos and a short-sleeved sports shirt. He had a doctorate in linguistics and had spent five years with the Behavioral Science Unit at the FBI Academy at Quantico, Virginia. His specialty was threat analysis.

He liked Judy and she liked him. With the men in the office he talked men's talk, football and guns and cars, but when he was alone with Judy he noticed and commented on her outfits and her jewellery the way a girlfriend would.

He had a file in his hand. "Your earthquake threat is *fascinating*," he said, his eyes glowing with enthusiasm.

She blew her nose. He had surely seen that she was upset, but he was tactfully pretending not to notice.

He went on: "I was going to leave this on your desk, but I'm glad I've caught you."

He had obviously been working late to finish his report, and Judy did not want to deflate his keenness by telling him she was quitting. "Take a seat," she said, composing herself.

"Congratulations on winning your case today!"

"Thanks."

We are telling you to announce an immediate freeze on building power plant. ~~Now~~ new ⁸⁵ plant. Period. Or else!

Or else what, you say?

Or else we will cause an earthquake exactly four weeks from today.

Be warned! We really mean it!

—The Hammer of Eden.

It did not tell her much, but she knew that Simon would mine every word and comma for meaning.

“What do you make of it?” he asked.

She thought for a minute. “I see a nerdy young student with greasy hair, wearing a washed-out Guns ‘n Roses T-shirt, sitting at his computer fantasizing about making the world obey him, instead of ignoring him the way it always has.”

“Well, that’s about as wrong as could be,” Simon said with a smile. “He’s an uneducated low-income man in his forties.”

Judy shook her head in amazement. She was always astonished by the way Simon drew conclusions from evidence she could not even see. “How do you know?”

“The vocabulary and sentence structure. Look at the salutation. Affluent people don’t start a letter with ‘Hi’, they put ‘Dear Sir’. And college graduates generally avoid double negatives such as ‘you never do nothing’.”

Judy nodded. “So you’re looking for Joe Bluecollar, aged forty-five. That sounds pretty straightforward. What puzzled you?”

“I still think I should go in alone,” she said.

It was out of the question. Melanie was not steady enough. Priest could not rely on her when he was beside her, so there was no way he would trust her alone. “No,” he said.

“Maybe I—”

He allowed a flash of anger to show. “No!”

“Okay, okay,” she said hastily. She bit her lip.

Dusty said excitedly: “Hey, this is where Daddy lives!”

“That’s right, honey,” Melanie said. She pointed to a low-rise red-brick apartment building, and Priest parked outside it.

Melanie turned to Dusty, but Priest forestalled her. “He stays in the car.”

“I’m not sure how safe—

“He’s got the dog.”

“He might get scared.”

Priest twisted around to speak to Dusty. “Hey, Lieutenant, I need you and Ensign Spirit to stand guard over our spacecraft while First Officer Mom and I go inside the spaceport.”

“Am I going to see Daddy?”

“Of course. But I’d like a few minutes with him first. Think you can handle the guard duty assignment?”

“You bet!”

“In the space navy, you have to say ‘Aye, sir!’, not ‘You bet’.”

“Aye, sir!”

“Very good. Carry on.” Priest got out of the car.

He said: "We had some good times together." He stroked her thigh through the silk dress.

She said: "If you feel me up while I'm driving, I'll throw you out of the car."

He knew she could do it. "Whatever you say." He took his hand away.

A moment later she wished she had not been so harsh. It was not such a bad thing, to have a man's hand on your thigh. ~~Don~~ was not the world's greatest lover—he was enthusiastic, but unimaginative. However, he was better than nothing, and nothing was what she had had since she left him.

Why don't I have a man? I don't want to grow old alone. Is there something wrong with me?

Hell, no.

A minute later she pulled up outside his building. "Thanks, Don," she said. "For a great prosecution and a great dinner."

He leaned over to kiss her. She offered her cheek, but he kissed her lips, and she did not want to make a big thing of it, so she let him. His kiss lingered until she broke away. Then he said: "Come in for a while. I'll make you a cappuccino."

The longing look in his eyes almost broke her will. How hard could it be, she asked herself? She could put her gun in his safe, drink a large heartwarming brandy, and spend the night in the arms of a decent man who adored her. "No," she said firmly. "Good night."

He stared at her for a long moment, misery in his eyes. She looked back, embarrassed and sorry, but resolute.

"Good night," he said at last. He got out and closed the car door.

Judy pulled away. When she glanced in the rear-view mirror she saw him standing on the

explain the science to me in such a way that I can make my own judgement about whether a terrorist could cause an earthquake.”

“And you need to find these Hammer of Eden people and bust them for making threats. Any progress there?”

She shook her head. “I had Raja interview everyone at the Green California Campaign. No one there matches the profile, none have any kind of criminal or subversive record, in fact there’s nothing suspicious about them at all.”

2 Ba nodded. “It always was unlikely the perpetrators would have told the truth about who they were. Don’t be discouraged. You’ve only been on the case a day and a half.”

“True—but that leaves only two clear days to their deadline. And I have to go to Sacramento on Thursday to report to the governor’s office.”

“You’d better start early tomorrow.” He got up off the couch.

They both went upstairs. Judy paused at her bedroom door. “Remember that earthquake, when I was six?”

He nodded. “It wasn’t much, by California standards, but it scared you half to death.”

Judy smiled. “I thought it was the end of the world.”

“The shaking must have shifted the house a little, because your bedroom door jammed shut, and I nearly bust my shoulder breaking it down.”

“I thought it was you that made the shaking stop. I believed that for years.”

“Afterwards you were scared of that damn chest of drawers that your mother liked so much. You wouldn’t have it in the house.”

“I thought it wanted to eat me.”

She gave him a firm handshake. "Were you expecting someone else?"

He shrugged. "You don't look like Efram Zimbalist Junior."

Zimbalist was the actor who played Inspector Lewis Erskine in the long-running television show *The FBI*. Judy said mildly: "I've been an agent for ten years. Can you imagine how many people have already made that joke?"

To her surprise he grinned broadly. "Okay," he said. "You got me."

That's better.

She noticed a framed photo on his desk. It showed a pretty redhead with a child in her arms. People always liked to talk about their children. "Who's this?" she said.

"Nobody important. You want to get to the point?"

Forget friendly.

She took him at his word and asked her question right out. "I need to know if a terrorist group could trigger an earthquake."

"Have you had a threat?"

I'm supposed to be asking the questions. "You haven't heard? It's been talked about on the radio. Don't you listen to John Truth?"

He shook his head. "Is it serious?"

"That's what I need to establish."

"Okay. Well, the short answer is yes."

Judy felt a frisson of fear. Quercus seemed so sure. She had been ~~hoping for~~ ^{expecting} the opposite answer. She said: "How could they do it?"

"Take a nuclear bomb, put it at the bottom of a deep mineshaft, and detonate it. That'll

make the brick move. And where the San Andreas is under tremendous pressure, a little nudge may be enough to unjam the slabs. Then they slip—and all that pent-up energy shakes the earth.”

Quercus might be abrasive, but once he got on to his subject he was a pleasure to listen to. He was a clear thinker and he explained himself easily, without condescending. Despite the ominous picture he was painting, Judy realised she was enjoying talking to him, and not just because he was so good-looking. “Is that what happens in most earthquakes?”

“I believe so, though some other seismologists might disagree. There are natural vibrations that resound through the earth’s crust from time to time. Most earthquakes are probably triggered by the right vibration in the right place at the right time.”

How am I going to explain all this to Mr Honeymoon? He’s going to want simple yes-no answers. “So how does that help our terrorists?”

“They need a ruler, and they need to know where to tap.”

“What’s the real-life equivalent of the ruler? A nuclear bomb?”

“They don’t need anything so powerful. They have to send a shock wave through the earth’s crust, that’s all. If they know exactly where the fault is vulnerable, they might do it with a simple stick of a charge of dynamite, precisely placed.”

“Anyone can get hold of dynamite if they really want to.”

“The explosion would have to be underground. I guess drilling a shaft would be the challenge for a terrorist group.”

Judy wondered if the blue-collar man imagined by Simon Sparrow was a drilling rig operator. Such men would surely need a special licence. A quick check with the Department of Motor Vehicles might yield a list of all of them in California. There could not be many.

forces. Twice a day, there's a seismic window, when the fault line is under extra stress because of the tides; and that's when an earthquake is most likely—or most easy to trigger. Which is my specialty. I'm the only person who has done extensive calculations of seismic windows for California faults.

“Could someone have gotten this data from you?”

“Well, I'm in the business of selling it.” He gave a rueful smile. “But, as you can see, my business isn't making me rich. I have one contract, with a big insurance company, and that pays the rent, but unfortunately that's all. My theories about seismic windows make me kind of a maverick, and corporate America hates mavericks.”

The note of wry self-deprecation was surprising, and Judy started to like him better. “Someone might have taken the information without your knowledge. Have you been burgled lately?”

“Never.”

“Could your data have been copied by a friend, or relative?”

“I don't think so. No one spends time in this room without my being here.”

She picked up the photo from his desk. “Your wife, or girlfriend?”

He looked annoyed, and took the picture out of her hand. “I'm separated from my wife, and I don't have a girlfriend.”

“Is that so?” said Judy. She had got everything she needed from him. She stood up. “I appreciate your time, Professor.”

“Please call me Michael. I've enjoyed talking to you.”

She was surprised.

So you have to know not just
exactly when, you have to
know exactly when

Not appropriate
enough.

Money makes you poor ✓

Marriage is the greatest infidelity ✓

When no one owns anything, we all own everything ✓

~~Do what you like is the only law~~ ✓

The Basic Rule is
that there is no
~~Basic Rule~~
basic rule

wash

~~The Supreme Law is~~
~~no supreme law~~

These were the Five Paradoxes of Baghrum. Priest said he had learned them from an Indian guru he studied under in Los Angeles, but in fact he had made them up. *Pretty good for a guy who can't read.*

He stood in the centre of the room for several minutes, eyes closed, arms hanging loosely at his sides, focusing his energy. There was nothing phoney about *this*. He had learned meditation techniques from Star, and they really worked. He felt his mind clarify like the wine in the casks. He prayed that Governor Mike Robson's heart would be softened and he would announce a freeze on the building of new power plant in California. He imagined the handsome governor in his dark suit and white shirt, sitting in a leather chair behind a polished desk; and in his vision the governor said: "I have decided to give these people what they want—not just to avoid an earthquake, but because it makes sense anyway."

After a few minutes, Priest's spiritual strength was renewed. He felt alert, confident, centred.

When he went outside again, he decided to check on the vines.

There had been no grapes originally. When Star arrived there was nothing in the valley but a ruined hunting lodge. For three years the commune had lurched from crisis to crisis, riven by quarrels, washed out in storms, sustained only by begging trips to towns. Then Priest came.

It took him less than a year to become Star's acknowledged equal as joint leader. First he

By the time they got there, everyone else had assembled, children included. They were sitting cross-legged on the floor, waiting.

Priest sat in the middle, as always. The discussions were democratic, in theory, and the commune had no leaders, but in practice he and Star dominated all meetings. Priest would steer the dialogue toward the outcome he wanted, usually by asking questions rather than stating a point of view. If he liked an idea he would encourage a discussion of its benefits; if he wanted to squash a proposal he would ask how they could be sure it would work. And if the mood of the meeting was against him, he would pretend to be persuaded, then subvert the decision later.

“Who wants to begin?” he said.

Aneth spoke up. She was a motherly type in her forties, and she believed in understanding rather than condemning. She said: “Maybe Flower and Pearl should begin, by telling us why they wanted to go to Silver City.”

“To meet people,” Flower said defiantly.

Aneth smiled. “Boys, you mean?”

Flower shrugged.

Aneth said: “Well, I guess that’s understandable...but why did you have to steal?”

“To look nice!”

Star gave an exasperated sigh. “What’s wrong with your regular clothes?”

“Mom, be serious,” Flower said scornfully.

Star leaned forward and slapped her face.

Flower gasped. A red mark appeared on her cheek.

“Don’t you dare speak to me that way,” Star said. “You’ve just been caught stealing and

to the PC note above? Would - pass unmarked?

“Yeah.” Priest hesitated, then blurted: “I guess I’m just scared it won’t work.”

“The seismic vibrator?”

He hesitated again. He would not have been this frank with anyone but Star, and he was already half-regretting his confession of doubt. But he had begun, so he might as well finish.

“The whole thing,” he said. “I’m scared there’ll be no earthquake, and then we’ll be lost.”

She was a little shocked, he could see. She was used to him being supremely confident about everything he did. But he had never done anything like this.

Walking back to the vineyard, she said: “Do something with Flower tonight.”

“What do you mean?”

“Spend time with her. Do something with her. You’re always playing with Dusty.”

Dusty was five. It was easy to have fun with him. He was fascinated by everything. Flower was thirteen, the age when everything grown-ups do seems stupid. Priest was about to say this when he realised there was another reason for what Star was saying.

She thinks I may die tomorrow.

The thought hit him like a punch. He knew that this earthquake plan was dangerous, of course, but he had mainly considered the peril to himself and the risk of leaving the commune leaderless. He had not imagined Flower alone in the world at the age of thirteen.

“What’ll I do with her?” he said.

“She wants to learn the guitar.”

That was news to Priest. He was not much of a guitarist himself, but he could play folk songs and simple blues, enough to get her started anyway. He shrugged. “Okay, we’ll start tonight.”

been a serious item for a while. All the men in the commune had slept with Star, in those days, but she had had a special soft spot for Bones. Priest felt a twinge of jealousy as he watched Bones press Star's body to his own.

When they let each other go, Priest could see that Bones did not look well. He had always been a thin man, but now he looked as if he was dying of starvation. He had wild hair and a straggly beard, but the beard was matted and the hair seemed to be falling out in clumps. His jeans and T-shirt were dirty, and the heel had come off one of his cowboy boots.

He's here because he's in trouble.

Bones introduced the woman as Debbie. She was younger than he, no more than twenty-five, and pretty in a pinched-looking way. Her child was a boy about eighteen months old. She and the kid were almost as thin and dirty as Bones.

It was time for their midday meal. They took Bones to the cookhouse. Lunch was a casserole made with pearl barley and flavoured with herbs grown by Garden. Debbie ate ravenously and fed the child too, but Bones just took a couple of spoonfuls then lit a cigarette.

There was a lot of talk about the old times. Bones said: "I'll tell you my favourite memory. One afternoon right on that hillside over there, Star explained to me about cunnilingus." There was a ripple of laughter around the table. It was faintly embarrassed laughter, but Bones failed to pick up on that, and he went on: "I was twenty years old and I never knew people did that. I was shocked! But she made me try it. And the taste! Yech!"

"There was a lot you didn't know," Star said. "I remember you telling me that you couldn't understand why you sometimes got headaches in the morning, and I had to explain to you that it happened whenever you got falling-down drunk the night before. You didn't know the

Priest took the guitar from Flower. "Go and get ready for bed, now," he said.

He and Star headed for the parking circle, dropping off the guitar at Song's cabin on the way. They found Melanie already there, sitting in the back seat of the 'Cuda, listening to the radio. She had put on a bright yellow T-shirt and bluejeans from the free shop. Both were too big for her, and she had tucked in the T-shirt and pulled the jeans tight with a belt, showing off her tiny waist. She still looked like sex on a stick.

John Truth had a flat nasal twang that could become hypnotic. His specialty was saying aloud the things his listeners believed in their hearts but were ashamed to admit to. It was mostly standard fascist-pig stuff: AIDS was a punishment for sin, intelligence was racially inherited, what the world needed was stricter discipline, all politicians were stupid and corrupt, and like that. Priest imagined that his audience was mostly the kind of fat white men who learned everything they knew in bars. "This guy," Star said. "He's everything I hate about America: prejudiced, sanctimonious, hypocritical, self-righteous and really fucking stupid."

"That's a fact," Priest said. "Listen up."

Truth was saying: "I'm going to read once more that statement made by the governor's cabinet secretary, Mr Honeymoon."

Priest's hackles rose, and Star said: "That son of a bitch!" Honeymoon was the man behind the scheme to flood Silver River Valley, and they hated him.

John Truth went on, speaking slowly and ponderously, as if every syllable was significant. "Listen to this. 'The FBI has investigated the threat which appeared on an Internet bulletin board on the first of May. That investigation has determined that there is no substance to the threat.'"

Priest's heart sank. This was what he had expected, but all the same he was dismayed. He

the vibration in the soles of his feet, a faint but definite trembling sensation.

Star said: "Oh, God." ^{For a moment she} ~~she~~ ^{believed} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~engine~~ ^{had} ~~begun~~ ^{already}

A cloud of dust billowed around the truck.

All four of them were taut as guitar strings, their bodies tensed for the first hint of movement in the earth.

Seconds passed.

Priest's eyes raked the landscape, looking for signs of a tremor, though he guessed he would feel it before he saw it.

Come on, come on!

The seismic exploration crews normally set the vibrator for a seven-second "sweep". Priest had set this one for thirty seconds. It seemed like an hour.

At last the noise stopped.

Melanie said: "God damn it."

Priest's heart sank. There was no earthquake. It had failed.

Maybe it was just a crazy hippie idea, like levitating the Pentagon.

"Try it again," said Melanie.

Priest looked at the remote control in his hand. *Why not?*

There was a sixteen-wheel truck approaching along US 395, but this time Priest did not wait. If Melanie was right, the truck would be unaffected by the tremor. If Melanie was wrong, they would all be dead.

He pressed the button.

The distant roar started up, there was a perceptible vibration in the ground, and a cloud

“Later.” She touched the button that terminated the call, then she turned up the volume on the radio.

She heard a low, sexy voice saying: “This is the Hammer of Eden with a message for Governor Mike Roberts.”

The picture that came into her mind was of a mature woman with large breasts and a wide smile, likeable but kind of off-the-wall.

That's my enemy?

The tone changed and the woman muttered: “Shit, I didn’t expect to be talking to a tape recorder.”

She's not the ^{organising} ~~organising~~ brain behind all this. She's too ditzy. She's taking instructions from someone else.

The woman resumed her formal voice and continued: “Like we promised, we caused an earthquake today, four weeks after our last message. It happened in Owens Valley a little after two o'clock, you can check it out.”

A faint background noise caused her to hesitate.

What was that?

Simon will find out.

A second later she carried on. “We do not recognise the jurisdiction of the United States government. Now that you know we can do what we say, you’d better think again about our demand. Announce a freeze on construction of new power plants in California. You have seven days to make up your mind.”

Seven days! Last time they gave us four weeks.

“Come in,” he called.

She stepped inside. Her heart sank when she saw that Kincaid was with Marvin Hayes. She and Marvin disliked one another intensely. He was sitting in front of the desk, wearing a tan summer suit with a white button-down shirt and a black-and-gold power tie. He was a good-looking man, with bristly dark hair cut short and a neat moustache. He looked the picture of competence, but in fact he was everything a law enforcement officer should not be: lazy, brutal, slapdash and unscrupulous. For his part, he thought Judy was prissy.

Unfortunately, Brian Kincaid liked him, and Brian was now the boss.

The two men looked startled and guilty when Judy walked in, and she realised they must have been talking about her. To make them feel worse, she said: “Am I interrupting something?”

“We were talking about the earthquake,” Brian said. “Did you hear the news?”

“Of course. I’ve been working on it. I just interviewed a seismologist who says the foreshocks are like nothing he’s ever seen before, but he’s sure they’re artificial. He gave me the map coordinates for the exact location of the tremor. I want to go to Owens Valley in the morning to look for witnesses.”

was he
sure?

A significant glance passed between the two men. Brian said: “Judy, no one can cause an earthquake.”

“We don’t know that.”

Marvin said: “I’ve talked to two seismologists myself, tonight, and they both told me it was impossible.”

“Scientists disagree—”

Brian said: “We think this group never went near Owens Valley. They found out about

Star hissed: “We’re not terrorists!”

The newsreader continued: “The tremor occurred on the day that the group had threatened to trigger one, but state seismologist Matthew Bird denied that this or any other earthquake could be caused by human agency.”

“Liar!” Melanie said under her breath.

“The claim was made in a phone call to this station’s premier talk show, *John Truth Live*.”

Just as Priest reached the exit, he was shocked to hear Star’s voice. He stopped dead. She was saying: “We do not recognise the jurisdiction of the United States government. Now that you know we can do what we say, you’d better think again about our demand. Announce a freeze on construction of new power plants in California. You have seven days to make up your mind.”

Star exploded: “Jesus Christ—that’s me!”

“Hush!” Priest said. He looked over his shoulder. The customer with the Jeep Wrangler was talking while the clerk swiped his credit card through a machine. Neither man seemed to have noticed Star’s outburst.

“Governor Mike Robson has not responded to this latest threat. In sports today...”

They stepped outside.

Star said: “My God! They broadcast my voice! What am I going to do?”

“Stay calm,” Priest told her. He did not feel calm himself, but he was maintaining. As they walked across the asphalt to the vehicles, he said in a low, reasonable voice: “Nobody outside our commune knows your voice. You haven’t said more than a few words to an outsider for twenty-five years. And people who might remember you from the Haight-Ashbury days don’t

they all got into the 'Cuda to drive the final mile.

Priest turned on the car radio for the midnight bulletin. This time, the earthquake was top of the news. "Our show *John Truth Live* today played a central role in the continuing drama of the Hammer of Eden, the terrorist environmental group that says it can cause earthquakes," said an excited voice. "After a moderate earthquake shook Owens Valley, in the eastern part of California, a woman claiming to represent the group called John Truth and said they had triggered the tremor."

The station then played Star's message in full.

"Shit," Star muttered as she listened to her own voice.

Priest could not help feeling dismayed. Although he felt sure this would not help the police, still he hated to hear Star exposed in this way. It made her seem terribly vulnerable, and he yearned to destroy her enemies and make her safe.

After playing the tape, the newsreader said: "Special Agent Raja Khan tonight took away the recording for analysis by the FBI's experts in psycholinguistics."

That hit Priest like a punch in the stomach. "What the fuck is psycholinguistics?" he said.

Melanie answered: "I never heard the word before, but I guess they study the language you use and draw conclusions about your psychology."

"I didn't know they were that smart," Priest said worriedly.

Oaktree said: "Don't sweat it, man. They can analyse Star's mind as much as they like, it ain't gonna give them her *address*."

"I guess not."

The newsreader was saying: "No comment yet from Governor Mike Robson, but the head

try. However, he disliked the position that put him in. He would be a supplicant, asking for the privilege of a conversation with the great man. His strategy was to impose his will on the governor, not beg for a favour.

Then it occurred to him that he could go to the press conference.

It would be dangerous: if he were found out, all would be lost.

But the idea appealed to him. Posing as a reporter was the kind of thing he used to do in the old days. He had specialised in bold strokes: stealing that white Lincoln and giving it to Pigface Riley; knifing Detective Jack Kassner in the toilet of the Blue Light bar; offering to buy the Fourth Street Liquor Store from the Jenkinsons. He had always managed to get away with stuff like that.

Maybe he would pose as a photographer. He could borrow a fancy camera from Paul Beale. Melanie could be the reporter. She was pretty enough to make any FBI agent take his eye off the ball.

What time was the press conference?

He rolled off the bed, stepped into his sandals, and went outside. In the moonlight he found his way to Melanie's cabin. She was sitting on the edge of her bed, naked, brushing her long red hair. As he walked in, she looked up and smiled. The candlelight outlined her body, throwing an aura behind her neat shoulders, her nipples, the bones of her hips, and the red hair in the fork of her thighs. ~~It took his breath away.~~

"Hello," she said.

It took him a moment to remember why he had come. "I need to use your cell phone," he said.

Kincaid seemed satisfied. "Well, we'd be delighted to have you join us, Florence," he said.

We did it!

"Thank you, sir," she said.

"If there are any questions I can answer now, before the press conference starts...."

Priest had been careful not to over-prepare Flower. If she appeared shy, or fumbled her questions, it would seem only natural, he figured; whereas if she were too poised and seemed well-rehearsed she might arouse suspicion. But now he felt a surge of anxiety on her behalf, and he had to suppress the paternal urge to step in and tell her what to do. He bit his lip.

She opened her notebook. "Are you in charge of this investigation?"

Priest relaxed a little. She would be fine.

"This is only one of many inquiries that I have to keep an eye on," Kincaid answered. He pointed to the man with the black moustache. "Special Agent Marvin Hayes has this assignment."

Flower turned to Hayes. "I think the school would like to know what kind of person you are, Mr Hayes. Could I ask you some questions about yourself?"

Priest was shocked to observe a hint of coquettishness in the way she tilted her head and smiled at Hayes. *She's too young to flirt with grown men, for God's sake!*

But Hayes bought it. He looked pleased and said: "Sure, go ahead."

"Are you married?"

"Yes. I have two children, a boy around your age and a girl a little younger."

"Do you have any hobbies?"

"I collect boxing memorabilia."

Simon smiled, ~~looking pleased~~. "But did you notice anything about the vocabulary?"

Bo shook his head. "Nothing I can put my finger on."

"What's a tape recorder?"

Bo laughed. "A machine the size of a small suitcase, with two reels on top. I had one in Vietnam—a Grundig."

Judy saw what Simon was getting at. The term "tape recorder" was out of date. The machine they were using today was a cassette deck. Voicemail was recorded on the hard disk of a computer. "She's living in a timewarp," Judy said. "It makes me think Patty Hearst again. What happened to her, anyway?"

Bo said: "She served her time, came out of jail, wrote a book and appeared on *Geraldo*. Welcome to America."

Judy stood up. "This has been fascinating, Simon, but I don't feel comfortable with it. I think you should take your report to Marvin now."

"One more thing I want to show you," he said. He touched the fast forward button.

"Really—"

"Just listen to this."

The woman's voice said: "It happened in Owens Valley a little after two o'clock, you can check it out." There was a faint background noise, and she hesitated.

Simon paused the tape. "I've enhanced that odd little murmur. Here it is reconstructed."

He released the pause switch. Judy heard a man's voice, distorted with a lot of background hiss, but clear enough to understand, say: "We do not recognise the jurisdiction of the United States government." The background noise returned to normal, and the woman's voice

power plants in the last three years. The search produced 117 articles. Judy scanned the headlines, ignoring stories about Pittsburgh and Cuba. "Okay, here's a scheme for a nuclear plant in the Mojave Desert...." She saved the story. "A hydro-electric dam in Sierra County...an oil-fired plant up near the Oregon border...."

Bo said: "Sierra County? That rings some kind of bell. Got an exact location?"

Judy clicked on the article. "Yeah...the proposal is to dam the Silver River."

He frowned. "Silver River Valley...."

Judy turned from the computer screen. "Wait, this is familiar...isn't there a vigilante group that has a big spread there?"

"That's right!" said Bo. "They're called Los Alamos. Run by a speed freak called Poco Latella who originally came from Daly City, that's how I know about them."

"Right. They're armed to the teeth and they refused to recognise the U.S. government...Jesus, they even used that sentence on the tape: 'We do not recognise the jurisdiction of the United States government.' Bo, I think we've got 'em."

"What are you going to do?"

Judy's heart sank as she remembered she was off the case. "If Kincaid finds out I've been working this case, he'll bust a gut."

"Los Alamos has to be checked out."

"I'll call Simon." She picked up the phone and dialled the office. The switchboard operator was a guy she knew. "Hey, Charlie, this is Judy. Is Simon Sparrow in the office?"

"He came and went," Charlie said. "Want me to try his car?"

"Yeah, thanks."

“Plus a pony-trekking center, a wildlife camp, several summer cabins, and a crazy bunch of armed vigilantes known as Los Alamos. Everyone gets compensation—except us, because we don’t own our land, we rent it on a one-year lease. We get nothing—for the best vineyard between Napa and Bordeaux.”

“And the only place I ever felt at peace.”

Priest gave a murmur of sympathy. This was the way he wanted the conversation to go. “Has Dusty always had these allergies?”

“From birth. He was actually allergic to milk—cow’s milk, formula, even breast milk. He survived on goat’s milk. That was when I realised. The human race *must* be doing something wrong, if the world is so polluted that my own breast milk is poisonous to my child.”

“But you took him to doctors.”

“Michael insisted. I knew they’d do no good. They gave us drugs that suppressed his immune system in order to inhibit the reaction to allergens. What kind of a way is that to treat his condition? He needed pure water and clean air and a healthy way of life. I guess I’ve been searching, ever since he was born, for a place like this.”

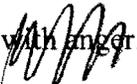
“It was hard for you.”

“You have no idea. A single woman with a sick kid can’t hold down a job, can’t get a decent apartment, can’t live. You think America’s a big place, but it’s all the damn same.”

“You were in a bad way when I met you.”

“I was about to kill myself, and Dusty too.” Tears came to her eyes.

“Then you found this place.”

Her face darkened  with anger. “And now they want to take it away from me.”

as if perhaps he had anticipated this moment. His head was covered by a cowboy hat. That suggested that the witnesses who had helped the sheriff create the computer picture had never seen the suspect without a hat. Consequently, there was no indication of what his hair was like. If he was bald, or grizzled, or curly, or long-haired, he would look different from this picture. And the bottom half of his face was equally well concealed by a bushy beard and moustache. There could be any kind of jaw under there. By now, she guessed, he was clean-shaven.

The man had deep-set eyes that stared hypnotically out of the picture. But to the general public, all criminals had staring eyes.

All the same, the picture told her some things. Ricky Granger did not habitually wear spectacles, he was evidently not Afro-American or Asian, and since his beard was dark and luxuriant he probably had dark hair. From the attached description she learned that he was about six foot tall, slim built, and fit-looking, with not noticeable accent. It was not much, but it was better than nothing.

And nothing was what Brian and Marvin had.

Honeymoon's assistant appeared and ushered Judy into the "horseshoe" where the governor and his staff had their offices.

Judy bit her lip. She was about to break the first rule of bureaucracy and make her boss look a fool. It would probably be the end of her career.

Screw it.

All she wanted now was to make her boss get serious about the Hammer of Eden before they killed people. So long as he did that, he could fire her.

They passed the entrance to the governor's personal suite, then the assistant opened the

and set up a command post at the officers' club. If I don't, I'll tell Honeymoon to call Washington. Your move." She went out and slammed the door.

She felt the exhilaration that comes from a reckless act. She would have to fight Brian every step, so she might as well fight hard. She would never be able to work with him again. The Bureau's top brass would side with the superior officer in a situation like this. She was almost certainly finished. But this case was more important than her career. Hundreds of lives might be at stake. If she could prevent a catastrophe and capture the terrorists, she would retire proudly, and to hell with them all.

The DT squad secretary was in Kincaid's outer office, filling the coffee machine. "Thanks, Rosa," Judy said as she passed through. She returned to the DT office. The phone on her desk was ringing. She picked up. "Judy Maddox."

"John Truth here."

"Hello!" It was weird to hear the familiar radio voice on the other end of a phone.

"You're at work early!"

"I'm at home, but my producer just called me. My voicemail at the radio station was maxed with overnight calls about the Hammer of Eden woman."

Judy was not supposed to talk to the media herself. All such contacts should go through the office media specialist, Madge Kelly, a young agent with a journalism degree. But Truth was not asking her for a quote, he was giving her information. And she was in too much of a hurry to tell Truth to call Madge. "Anything good?" she asked.

"You bet. I got two people who remembered the name of the record."

"No kidding!" Judy was thrilled.

“Okay.” She tried to keep the disappointment out of her voice.

“I’ll send that list right away.”

“Thanks.”

She hung up and started the engine. Ginny’s idea had not been so great after all. It took two to talk, and Michael was not willing.

When she reached the officers’ club, Michael’s fax was waiting for her. She showed it to Carl Theobald. “We need surveillance teams at each of these locations, watching out for a seismic vibrator,” she said. “I was hoping to use the police, but I don’t think we can. They might talk. And if local people find out that we think they’re a target, they’ll panic. So we have to use FBI personnel.”

“Okay.” Carl frowned at the sheet. “You know, these locations are awful big. One team can’t really watch an area a mile square. Should we put on multiple teams? Or could your seismologist narrow it down?”

“I’ll ask him.” Judy picked up the phone and dialled Michael again. “Thanks for the fax,” she said. She explained the problem.

“I’d have to visit the sites myself,” he said. “Signs of earlier earthquake activity, such as dried-up streambeds or fault scarp, would give me a more precise fix.”

“Would you do that today?” she said immediately. “I can take you to all the locations in an FBI helicopter.”

“Uh...sure, I guess,” he said. “I mean, of course I will.”

“You could be saving lives.”

“Exactly.”

to stop this happening again.”

“It’s not over yet,” Priest said. “In an hour or so, every cop in California will be looking for a carnival ride called The Dragon’s Mouth.” He turned to Oaktree. “How fast could we get these panels off?”

“In a few minutes, with a couple of good hammers.”

“The truck has a tool kit.”

Working fast, ^{Priest + Oaktree} the two of them took the carnival panels off the truck and tossed them over a wire fence into a field. With luck, in the confusion following the earthquake, it would be a day or two before anyone took a close look at them.

“What the hell you going to tell Bones?” Oaktree said as they worked.

“I’ll think of something.”

Melanie helped, but Star stood with her back to them, leaning against the trunk of the ‘Cuda. She was crying. She was going to make trouble, Priest knew, but there was no time to gentle her now.

When they had finished with the truck, they stood back, panting with the effort. Oaktree said worriedly: “Now the damn thing looks like a seismic vibrator again.”

“I know,” Priest said. “Nothing I can do about that. It’s getting dark, I don’t have far to go, and every cop within fifty miles is going to be conscripted into rescue work. I’m just hoping to be lucky. Now get out of here. Take Star.”

“First I need to change a wheel—I have a flat.”

“Don’t bother,” Priest said. “We gotta ditch the ‘Cuda anyway. The FBI saw it, they’ll

FLAB

Judy buried her face in her hands. It was too dreadful to watch. But then she remembered she was an FBI agent. She forced herself to look again. Cars on the freeway were now slowing early enough to stop before crashing, she saw. But Highway Patrol vehicles and the SWAT truck that was on its way would not be able to reach Felicitas from the freeway.

A sudden wind blew away the cloud of black smoke over the filling station, and Judy saw the man she thought was Ricky Granger.

You did this. You killed all these people. You piece of shit, I'm going to ~~put you in jail if~~ it's the last thing I do.

*nail you
- (1st mile)*

Granger struggled to his feet and ran to the brown coupé, shouting and gesticulating to the people inside.

The police cruiser was right behind the coupé, but the cops seemed slow to act.

Judy realised the terrorist were about to flee.

Charlie came to the same conclusion. "Go down, pilot!" he yelled through the headset.

"Are you out of your mind?" he shouted back.

"Those people did this!" Judy screamed, pointing over the pilot's shoulder. "They caused all this carnage and now they're getting away!"

"Shit," the pilot said, and the helicopter swooped toward the ground.



Priest yelled at Oaktree through the open window of the 'Cuda. "Let's get out of here!"

"Okay—which way?"

Priest pointed along the road that led to the town. "Take this road, but instead of going left into Main Street, turn right along the old country road—it leads back toward San Francisco,

Carl watched over her shoulder. It was a big directory and the search took a while.

Finally the screen flickered and said:

1 file(s) found

Judy felt a burst of elation.

Carl shouted: "Christ! The name is already in the computer!"

Oh, my God, I think I've found her.

Two more agents looked over Judy's shoulder as she opened the file.

It was a large document containing all the notes made by agents during the abortive raid on Los Alamos six days ago.

"What the hell?" Judy was mystified. "Was she at Los Alamos and we missed her?"

Start Cleever appeared at her side. "What's all the fuss about?"

"We've found the woman who called John Truth!" Judy said.

"Where?"

"Silver River Valley."

"How did she slip through your fingers?"

It was Marvin Hayes, not me, who organised that raid. "I don't know, I'm working on it, give me a minute!" She used the search function to locate the name in the notes.

Stella Higgins had not been at Los Alamos. That was why they had missed her.

Two agents had visited a winery a few miles up the valley. The site was rented from the Federal government, and the name of the tenant was Stella Higgins.

"Damn, we were so close!" Judy cried in exasperation. "We almost had her a week ago!"

"Print this so everyone can see it," Cleever said.

Brian was ready for her. “What the hell went wrong?” he said as soon as he saw her.

“We were too late, by a few seconds,” she said wearily.

“You told us you had all the sites under surveillance,” he snapped.

“We had the likeliest. But they knew that. So they picked a secondary site. It was a risk for them—more chance of failure—but their gamble paid off.

Kincaid turned to Cleever with a shrug, as if to say: *Believe that and you'll believe anything.*

Cleever said to Judy: “As soon as you’ve made a full report, I want you to go home and get some rest. Brian will take charge of your team.”

I knew it. Kincaid has poisoned Cleever against me.

Time to go for broke.

Judy said: “I’d like a break, but not just yet. I believe I will have the terrorists under arrest within twelve hours.”

Brian let out an exclamation of surprise.

Cleever said: “How?”

“I’ve just developed a new lead. I know who their seismologist is.”

“Who?”

“Her name is Melanie Quercus. She’s the estranged wife of Michael, who’s been helping us. She got the information about where the fault is under tension from her husband—stole it off his computer. And I suspect she also stole the list of sites we had under surveillance.”

Kincaid said: “Quercus should be a suspect too! He could be in cahoots with her!”

Judy had anticipated this. “I’m sure he’s not,” Judy said. “But he’s taking a lie-detector

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The man was within touching distance of Judy. He stepped around her and approached the governor. Without pausing in his stride, he put his hand inside his shirt.

In her earpiece, Charlie said: "He's reaching for something!"

Judy dropped to one knee and fumbled for the pistol in her camera bag.

The man began to pull something out of his shirt. Judy saw a dark-coloured cylinder, like the barrel of a gun. She yelled: "Freeze! FBI!"

Agents burst out of cars and vans and came running from the Capitol building.

The ~~decoy~~ ^{man} froze.

Judy pointed her gun at his head and said: "Pull it out real slow and pass it to me."

"Okay, okay, don't shoot me!" The man drew the object out of his shirt. It was a magazine, rolled up into a cylinder, with a rubber band around it.

Judy took it from him. Still pointing her gun at him, she examined the magazine. It was this week's *Time*. There was nothing inside the cylinder.

The man said in a frightened voice: "Some guy gave me a hundred dollars to hand it to the governor!"

Agents surrounded Mike Roberts and bundled him back into the Capitol building.

Judy looked around, scanning the grounds and the streets. *Granger was watching this, he had to be. Where the hell is he?* People had stopped to stare at the running agents. A tour group was coming down the steps of the grand entrance, led by a guide. As Judy watched, a man in a Hawaiian shirt peeled off from the group and walked away, and something about him caught Judy's eye.

She frowned. He was tall. Because the shirt was baggy, and hung loose around his hips,

address of a crooked doctor.

Granger made the driver drop him at a corner in a grungy neighbour. (The traumatised citizen drove home, called the local police precinct house, got a busy signal, and did not get around to reporting the incident until the next day.) The doctor, a disbarred surgeon who was a diamorphine addict, patched Granger up. Granger stayed at the doctor's apartment overnight then left.

Judy never found out where he went after that.



The water is rising fast. It has flooded all the little wooden houses. Behind the closed doors, the home-made beds and chairs are floating. The cookhouse and the temple are also awash.

He has waited weeks for the water to reach the vineyard. Now ~~it~~ it has, and the precious plants are drowning, ~~the vines are rotting all~~

He had been hoping he might find Spirit here, but his dog is long gone.

He has drunk a bottle of his favourite wine. It is difficult for him to drink or eat, because of the wound to his face, which has been sewn up badly by a doctor who was stoned. But he has succeeded in pouring enough down his throat to make himself drunk.

He throws the bottle away and takes from his pocket a big joint of marijuana laced with enough heroin to knock him out. He lights the spliff, takes a puff, and walks down the hill.

When the water is up to his thighs, he sits down.

He takes a last look around his valley. It is almost unrecognizable. There is no tumbling stream. Only the roofs of the buildings are visible, and they look like upturned shipwrecks floating on the surface of a lagoon. The vines he planted twenty-five years ago are now