

RON OLSON

THE HACKER'S DUPLICATE

Bannack Publishing Company

THE HACKER'S DUPLICATE

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THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN FOR MARIAN.

And the shadowing hand of man encircled the nurturing
earth with fateful glow, doing annoyance unto the light

above and shrouding his path below.
Anon.

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Otis Pringle was a dirty little scientist who loved his formulas and worshipped his equations, but was flat and sour on people. His life's companion, insensitive to Otis' scientific ways and raw at heart from being treated like a lab assistant, had long since denounced Pringle and left him to his precious mathematical tables, his laboratory and the whuzz bumble of research. In fact, no person claimed Pringle as a friend, and even his colleagues at work disclaimed all but a strictly professional association with him.

Pringle's habits and practices of life were, for the most part, obscure. He had no apparent non-scientific interests, and never exchanged small talk with staff or fellow workers. He appeared each morning, entered his lab, checked ongoing projects, then went to his office and made notes and read scientific journals, tracts, treatises and reports and amused himself with...whatever amuses scientists.

When asked a question, he would answer, but in a clipped, precise, machine like way that interrogators were inclined to compare to a computerized voice synthesizer. Pringle had never been known to express an opinion on life or events outside the lab. However, in one legendary encounter with a secretary who, in a burst of christian charity, had invited him to church, he had rather rudely expressed the view that the idea of a human soul was a corrupt hypothesis because it had never produced an equation which could be balanced.

But Pringle survived in his work, and captured some degree of scientific recognition, even acclaim for some work that was so technical that only other technicians appreciated it. His little awards and his minor, or perhaps major, contributions to science were, however, generally unknown to his fellow citizens who neither cared about, nor, indeed, knew anything about the work of the peevish Dr. Pringle. Thus Pringle went his way and the rest of the world went its way with little regard for such things as chemistry, periodic charts, and oxides.

Still, those who knew about such things agreed that Pringle had produced some damned fine science. That apparently was enough for the Kreesap Institute, a no nonsense enterprise interested more in lab results and commerce than the personal habits of its employees. The Institute had Pringle on the payroll, it had Pringle in the lab, and it had the capitalistic benefits of Pringle in scientific print. Thus, Pringle, had become a fixture at the Institute, had endured and, in the modest way appropriate to men of science, had even flourished somewhat.

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In addition to his other projects, Pringle had recently prepared a little paper that had something or other to do with the events of combustion in vacuums. That modest think piece had attracted a degree of special interest in the front office of the Institute where it had generated some interest as a research possibility. In fact, Kreesap management types had even liked the idea and had asked Pringle to clean it up, expand it, and get it ready for the sales force to carry around. The idea seemed to be that the abstract could either be peddled to industry or packaged as a grant request to the Feds, who would dump money into almost anything that sounded new and trendy.

A summary of the piece, laying out an outline and a hypothesis, had been prepared and passed around to the area's industrial giants, as a sort of trial balloon. Calls had been made by salespersons and some of their calls had been returned. It seemed that the idea had potential and might be a project in which some businesses might want to invest actual dollars. Management was pleased and Pringle was told to get cracking on a fleshed out version of the paper before the Hotchkiss Foundation or Lipscomb Atmospheric swiped the idea and got out in front of Kreesap with a variation of the proposal.

Getting cracking on a Sunday was not a new experience for Pringle because the Institute had always made it clear that it expected to get its money's worth out of the research staff. And given Pringle's starchy way with people, including coworkers, one might have reasonably guessed that Pringle even enjoyed stints of working alone on Sunday.

The negative side of getting out on this particular Sunday was the god awful heat. Record temperatures, real, honest-to-god record temperatures, had been tormenting the Denver area, the Front Range and even the mountains for weeks on end. The hot fact was that everyone not ordered to get cracking was either at home or at Mile High Stadium watching the Broncos in the sixth home game of the season trying to avoid a complete meltdown of their ho hum season.

Driving down the Industrial Center access road, Pringle could see the Kreesap complex quavering in the heat rising from the ground. It almost looked as though the buildings and the mountains in the background were being shaken into liquid by an earthquake. At the guard station, he slid his pass card into the slot of the security box and watched the gate slide back, extending to Pringle a silent, mechanical invitation to enter.

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The surface of the empty parking lot was new black with bright yellow stripes and Pringle took some quiet satisfaction in parking in the area reserved for officers of the Institute. The repaving contract work had been provoking grumbles from nearly everyone for the past three weeks, including Pringle who was glad to see that it was finished. But, as he had expected, the surface was hot, and it even felt soft under his shoes.

He paused for a few seconds in the entryway of the lab building wondering if his shoes had picked up enough fresh asphalt to leave tracks on the gleaming tile. But, giving the thought an indifferent shrug, he pulled the glass door open and walked in. The welcome air of the dim and empty hallway seemed even cooler than he expected. He liked that and he was glad for the peace and quiet. No staff, no clumsy lab assistants and, best of all, no damned administrators sticking their expectant, pushy noses into everything he was trying to do.

After negotiating a series of turns and hallways which brought him to an isolated walkway, he turned a final corner, tucked his thin briefcase under his arm and began sorting through the keys on his key ring. Then, looking up, he forgot the key.

The glass panel from his office door lay shattered on the floor and the door itself stood open. "What the hell?" he muttered, staring at the broken glass and the door. Avoiding the slivers and fragments of glass as best he could, Pringle stepped inside where he immediately forget his inquiry about the lower regions and called on higher authority. "Jesus Christ!"

Books were on the floor, papers were everywhere, the middle drawer of his desk was broken, and its jagged, splintered remains hung awkwardly around the bottom panel. The screen of his computer had been smashed and the unit was a gaping frame, a punched out, fractured eye that would never again blink neat columns of numbers. The keyboard was nowhere in sight and the printer had been tipped off the table to the floor where it lay, presumably, in printer agony. Pringle issued an angry description of the scene, or started to, "Holy sh..."

The exclamation was closed off with a loud, frightened "...it!" as he sensed someone coming at him from the alcove storage area of the little office. He had only began to turn before something crushed down on his temple. He had the feeling he was falling into darkness, and that he wanted to stop but couldn't find anything that his flailing hands could seize. He vaguely wondered if this was the way dying was supposed to work and if he was doing it properly.

"Dr. Pringle...Dr. Pringle..."

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He struggled as the pain of something burned against the side of his head. A handhold; he needed something to stop the fall. He reached out, and the falling slowed.

"Dr. Pringle." The voice was that of a human, not God's voice. He was sure of that. Then, light, grey and hazy like morning fog, made him blink. With it came a form, and the voice found him again, "Dr. Pringle, relax. Stop fighting. The doctor will be here any minute. You're going to be alright."

"Alright?" he muttered, surprised that his mouth and tongue would even move. "Who the hell are you anyway?"

"Lind, Dr. Pringle. Carl Lind. You know, security. I found you here on the floor. I've already radioed for an ambulance and for the police. I think you're going to be okay, so maybe you could just let go of my arm, it kinda hurts."

"Your arm? Oh, sure. I'm sorry, I had the impression I was falling, and ..."

"Yes, You were moaning pretty loud and thrashing around a lot."

Lind's face began to come into focus as Pringle's head began to clear. "Lind, would you mind telling me what the hell is going on here?"

"You know as much as I do, Doctor. I was just making my rounds and heard you groaning. It looks to me like you and someone had a real rhubarb in here."

"Me and someone? What kind of lunacy..." Then, as the memory of his battered office swam back into his mind, Pringle relented a bit, "Oh, yeah. Well, I guess it might look that way."

Squinting and making an attempt to sit up, Pringle began making an assessment of the damage that had been done to his body. Reaching up, he pressed his hand against the pain. That made it worse, and he pulled his hand away. It came back bloody. The thought that he was bleeding coupled with the throbbing in his head drove him back down and he gasped.

"Just lie back, Doctor. I think I hear someone coming, It's probably the medics."

In another minute the little office was accommodating more people at one time than it had since being assigned to Otis Pringle. A young man who was white, and a young woman who was black, knelt by Pringle. The blue shirts with the caduceus on the pockets and red arm patches saying "Lifeline" told Pringle they were paramedics. Their clinical efficiency left little for even the likes of Pringle to complain about. Yet, he tried.

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"Dammit, that hurts," he yelled trying to draw away from the cleansing of his wound.

"I'm sure it does," soothed the young woman, still dabbing away with a cotton swab.

"The scalp laceration, is the only thing we have here," intoned the man into a handheld radio. "Judy's getting it cleaned up. I would suggest we transport since concussion's a good possibility."

A metallic voice came back through the speaker, "Okay, I copy that, but it sounds like it's the victim's option. Call me when you're clear."

Pringle scowled at being called a victim. He again fought the cotton swab. "Are you trying to rub it down to the bone?" he snapped.

"No need to, hon," quipped the girl, "someone already did that for you."

"Well, it hurts."

"I'm sure it does. Poor babe," she cooed, teasing him into submission. "Now, are you going to be a good soldier and let us take you to the emergency room where someone can stitch up that cut?"

"Emergency room?" echoed Pringle. "Is that required? Why can't you do it here?"

"Are you sure that's what you want, lover?" she beamed, almost seeming to enjoy the idea. She had obviously had been through this with lots of Pringles and the way she ask the question made him hesitate.

But the Pringle bile rose, and he snapped, "Of course, I'm sure."

Getting to his feet and into a chair was, in Pringle's view, as bad as being clobbered on the head. He gritted his teeth and hissed air in through his teeth as the pain seared along his head. After that, the paramedics moved with an efficiency that spoke of thousands of bashed in heads, gashed arms, legs and battered bodies. Periodically, Judy would ask, "How's it going, battler?" or "Are you making it okay, cousin?" and once, "Tell me, Stoke, what did you do to the other guy?"

As they worked, yet another guest crowded into the office and stood alongside the security officer. Lind was clearly relieved to see the new arrival, and the two stood talking as they watched the sewing of Pringle's head.

When the paramedics had closed their cases, the young man offered Pringle a clipboard. "This is a release and a statement that you requested medical treatment at the scene. It also says that you declined transport to the hospital."

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Pringle took the board and the ballpoint pen. He tried to read the form, but the throbbing in his head forced him to give it up. "Where do I sign?" he growled. Then scribbling his name, he asked "Will I get a bill for this?"

"You sure will," promised the woman, "and hear this, champ, you better come in and have that dressing changed tomorrow. The stitches can come out in a week."

"It hurts," complained Pringle. "Aren't you going to give me some aspirin or something?"

With a laugh she gave him a small bottle of capsules, "Take two and go to bed, lover." Then they were gone.

Pringle squinted up at Lind and the person with him. "Who are you?"

The woman smiled down at Pringle as she answered. "Sergeant Munro, Denver Police Department. And you're Dr. Pringle?"

"Yes, I'm Pringle," he snapped. "If you're from the police what are you doing about finding the punk who broke into my office?"

"That's what I'd like to do, Doctor. Did you see this...punk?"

"No. I didn't see anything. I came in, looked around, and then I guess I heard a noise or maybe saw something out of the corner of my eye. I started to turn around, and the next person I saw was Lind. That's it."

Munro, who had moved over to the desk, stood looking at the shattered drawer. "What do you keep in your office that a ...punk would be interested in, Doctor?"

"Nothing. Papers, reports, books, that sort of thing."

Munro gave that a professional, "Um hum," as she examined the desk. Lifting a section of the broken drawer, she held it toward the stronger light of the window and ran her finger along an edge.

Pringle, growing impatient, snapped, "It's a piece of wood, Sergeant, part of what was my desk drawer. Can we get on with whatever it is you're going to do?"

"Oh, I know what it is," Munro smiled. "I was just wondering, Doctor, what you might have been keeping in your drawers. Desk drawers," she added, obviously pleased with her attempted humor. "Were you keeping any...prescriptions or..."

"Drugs?" shot back Pringle, "No. Not even aspirin. And no money." His Pringle irritation growing, he added cynically, "No jewels, no atomic secrets, just pencils, paper clips."

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"I see," mused Munro. "And this," she peered into the broken eye of the computer.

"A broken computer screen," interrupted Pringle.

"I believe you're right," laughed Munro. Then growing serious, she looked back at Pringle. "Doctor, we get lots of smash and grabs every day. There are more broken windows, doors, dressers, cupboards, and desks than I care to think about. And all that breaking and smashing has one thing in common. Somebody is looking to steal something. It's usually money, drugs or things that can be sold for money. I guess my question is what do you have, or did you have, in here that a...punk would want to steal?"

"Stop saying 'punk' that way," snapped Pringle. "You sound like you don't believe what I've told you. And I didn't have anything here that a thief would care about. A few books, lots of computer printouts and lab reports."

"What kind of work do you do here, Dr. Pringle?"

"I do concept research in chemistry."

"I didn't even take chemistry in high school, Doctor. Neither did my Lieutenant. Can you give me a one-liner that a couple of marginally educated cops can understand?"

Pringle eyed the officer. Wearing soft brown slacks and a blue blazer, the woman didn't fit his notion of notion of police authority. Yet, the blazer didn't really conceal the snub nosed revolver on her belt, and she spoke in the kind of direct, insistent way that made him feel that he had to answer. And her inquisitive brown eyes made him feel like she was the scientist, examining, and analyzing him. For a reason he didn't understand, he suppressed the worst of his sarcasm.

"My job is to keep up with theoretical writings in my field and do related small scale lab work to determine whether various ideas have sufficient merit for further research."

"You mean you read the new stuff, the latest thinking, and then do enough in-house lab work to decide if some paper theory is worth serious testing?" asked Munro.

Blinking at her crude, but surprisingly accurate summary, Pringle conceded, "Why, yes. That's a fair statement."

"And when you find something that's looks good, what then?"

"I write up my test results. I also prepare an abstract of possible applications. It goes to the head office, and if the commercial people there think it can be sold, we polish it up and the sales people go around

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and try to find an industry sponsor to pay for a research program. Lots of times the feds are interested and they will put money into whatever it is."

Leaning against a file cabinet, Munro listened and seemed to be tracking Pringle's explanation. "I'd guess there must be other companies doing the same thing?"

"Sure. But if you're about to suggest that a competitor came busting in here to steal my research, forget it. It's my job to keep up with what's being published in my field, and I can tell you, there aren't very many people in the whole world who would give a thin damn about my lab reports."

"But there are a few?" Munro persisted.

"Two or three," Pringle conceded, "but I know who they are. And they aren't given to what you'd call...what was it you said? Smash and take?"

"Smash and grab," she smiled. "But tell me, Doctor, what kind of project have you been working on recently? Remember, this is for someone whose chemistry doesn't go much beyond a decent formula for adding scotch to water."

"Speaking of water," said Pringle, placing his fingers tentatively on his bandage, "I'd like to take a couple of that girl's pills."

He attempted to stand, but almost immediately sank back onto the chair as the room began to sway and Munro's face began to swim away and blur into her hair. He closed his eyes until the intense throbbing eased. Looking at the security officer he asked, "Lind, would you mind?"

"Oh, sure, doc."

The security officer turned out of the office and disappeared into the dim hallway. Pringle could feel Munro's eyes on him, watching.

"I wonder if you shouldn't have gone with those medics?" she asked.

Pulling in a heavy breath of air, Pringle wanted to disagree by shaking his head, but the thought of the pain that would produce, forced him to settle for a mere oral disagreement. "No. It'll pass." Glancing slowly around the room and at the littered floor, he absently said, "I had a small briefcase with me. I wonder if that son of a bitch got away with it?"

Lind returned with a paper cup filled with water. Pringle fumbled out a couple of the capsules the medic had given him and gulped them down.

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"You look like you need some rest," observed Lind. "Do you want me to get someone to drive you home?"

Almost as a reflex, Pringle protested. "There's nothing wrong with me that a few more minutes of sitting here won't cure. As soon as my head clears, I'll be okay."

The security officer and Munro exchanged glances. Munro gave Pringle an option. "Doctor, I'd like to secure this place and get one of our lab people in here. You never know, we may pick up something that would help us nail your visitor. So if it's all the same to you, I'd like to have you leave everything just as it is at least for the rest of the day."

"But I'd intended to get some work done," Pringle began. He trailed off as he saw Munro looking around the office. "But I guess I don't have much choice."

"No," said Munro. "I don't think you do. I'm sure Carl can find someone to drive you home."

There was a phone call. Then some small talk, mostly between Munro and Lind, and soon another security officer joined them. As Pringle, hanging on the strong arms of the guard, swayed to his feet and fought against the blurring of his world, Munro reminded him, "You didn't get around to telling me what project you've been working on, Doctor."

"No," he muttered. "I didn't." Between the two security officers, he shuffled to the door. Then pausing, briefly, Pringle added, "Perhaps tomorrow, Sergeant Munro. But I assure you, I had nothing worth stealing in here." Still Pringle hesitated, "I had that case with me when I came in..." he said, seeming to find it difficult to concentrate.

"I'll look around, and if I find it, I'll hold on to it for you," Munro assured him.

Watching him disappear down the hallway, Sergeant Leslie Munro's face became that of a thoughtful skeptic. "I wonder, Dr. Pringle," she murmured softly to herself. Then, systematically, she began working her way around the little office, lifting, peering, testing with her hands. Pringle's description of what he kept in his desk and in the office seemed to be accurate. She found only miscellaneous items of little value and no interest to an ordinary thief.

Then Munro's persistent search became more productive. Kneeling in the area where Pringle had gone down from the blow on his head, she picked up the plastic wastebasket, intending to set it upright. There, amid the clutter of twisted and crumpled paper she saw the edge of a thin leather case. Guessing that it was the folder Pringle had asked

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about and that it had slid there, just out of sight, when he had fallen, Munro picked it up and looked inside. There she found a small, blue plastic disk and a torn, dogeared airline guide from Stapleton International Airport.

Half aloud, she mused, "I think I really would like to know more about just what kind of science you've been practicing here, Doctor."

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The office of President Jason Porr was a statement. It spoke in grand terms of the generosity of the Kreesap Institute, at least as far as its executive officers were concerned. Large windows overlooking an expanse of lawn and trees with the mountains in the background, a wide, polished and conspicuously uncluttered walnut desk, a few leather bound books with gilded lettering on the spine, an expensive looking Colorado Dynasty type blond woman smiling from a gold frame, and melancholy French oils on the walls, all combined to persuade Detective "Hi-Shot" Ribbley that there was money to be made in research.

And Ribbley knew that "tall money" meant there would be more than one "tall" person, and more than one "tall" institute, corporation, or whatever, interested in seeking out the secrets of nature for the purpose of harvesting some of that money. Of course, competition and big dollars sometimes meant that the boys and girls of the corporate world might not get along. A push could lead to a shove, and then the squabble would get mean. Finally, someone would lose control and the playground would get bloody, then deadly. That was when he got to play.

"Mr. Porr, I know you must be busy, but I assure you this is most serious. Police business," smiled Ribbley.

Porr's brisk reply had a 'busy executive' sound. "I understand from what Sergeant..."

"Munro," she reminded him.

"Hem...Yes, Sergeant Munro. I believe she said this concerned Dr. Pringle."

"Yes. That's correct," said Ribbley. "Sergeant Munro responded to a routine call yesterday afternoon from your security people. There had been a breaking and entering. I believe it was Dr. Pringle's office."

"A break in?" frowned Porr. "My word, whatever in the world would prompt someone to break into Pringle's office?"

"That's one of our questions," replied Ribbley, easing himself back into the cushions of the exquisite DeHines sofa. "And it's a fine question, a mighty fine question. Let's begin right there, close to ground zero. Tell me, Mr. Porr, what would have inspired the violent burgling of an office in your Institute?"

"Violent did you say?" asked Porr.

"Most burglaries do involve some force," Munro assured him.

"Have you talked to Pringle about this?"

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"He was there when I arrived, and I managed to ask him a few questions," said Munro.

"And?" asked Porr arching his brow.

"He didn't say much before he went home to nurse his split skull."

Porr came forward in his chair. "Split...Are you telling me that Pringle was injured? How? Was it serious?"

Ribbley, from his position among the cushions, cut in. "Mr. Porr, you're asking more questions than we are. That's not the way it's supposed to be. No, sir. Not the way at all. Now let's get this investigation back on track. I had ask you to tell us why a thief would go to the trouble of breaching your security and breaking into one of your buildings, and more specifically, why would that thief be interested in one particular office? Now that's quite a question. Why don't you take a run at it for us?"

"Detective Ribbley, I don't know what to tell you. Kreesap simply does research. To the public, it's pretty dry, uninteresting stuff. Our scientists work with computers, and they have laboratories, but to my knowledge, the chemicals they use would not be of interest to a thief. No narcotics, I mean. The lab equipment is pretty standard. Nothing out of the ordinary."

"Fill me in, Mr. Porr," said Ribbley, "on the kind of things you do here at the Institute. I know you said you did research, but research on what?"

"Oh, pretty mundane things I'm afraid. Most of it's chemistry based research. We look at fossil fuels and at a few plastics since they are petrochemical products."

"Anything else?" asked Ribbley.

"We also do engineering design work. We have the expertise to design boilers, combustion equipment. We do some work on aircraft engine design, but the main focus of our work is the bench scale research work. That brings me back to the point I made earlier. There is actually little here that would attract a common thief."

"Well, after reading Officer Munro's report, I'm not at all sure that we're dealing with a 'common thief.' In fact, we may be looking for an uncommon thief. Yes, indeed, uncommon," repeated Ribbley, who seemed to like the characterization.

"But why do you say that?" asked Porr.

"Now you hold it right there," commanded Ribbley, raising his hand. "You're off again with questions." Then, dropping his hand and

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leaning further back into the DeHines, he seemed to relent a bit. "But I guess we can indulge you a bit, Mr. Porr. After all, it is your Institute. I say 'uncommon' because the computer was destroyed, not stolen. Thieves steal computers. They do not reduce them to trash. Our man... or person," Ribbley corrected himself with a quick look at Munro, "was not a simple, heavy-handed vagrant looking for a quick dollar. And wouldn't you agree, Mr. Porr, that no ordinary thief could get past that expensive security system of yours?"

"I would hope not," agreed Porr who seemed on the verge of asking another question. Instead, he settled for a nod and brief comment, "I see what you mean, Detective."

"You may see and then again, you may not see, Mr. Porr," said Ribbley. "But since you ask why I think we're looking for an 'uncommon thief,' let me put one more slice on the scale, so to speak. Your Dr. Pringle's office is not conveniently located. In fact, it's damn hard to find; you have to look for it. A run-of-the-mill, bust-in-and-grab thief would not have happened to find that particular office. It makes you wonder if he didn't have a map and if he didn't know exactly where he was going and what he was after." The room fell silent for a moment before Ribbley continued, "Why don't you pick that thought up, Mr. Porr, yes sir, just pick it up, and without asking me a question, tell me what you make of it."

Porr put on a serious face, one with the most confidential contour possible, as he composed a reply. "As to the location of Dr. Pringle's office, a word of explanation would perhaps be in order. I agree it is out of the way and difficult to find. I guess you could even say it is a bit isolated. But, you, see, officers, our Dr. Pringle is...well, he's something of a..."

"A crank?" suggested Ribbley.

"I wouldn't have used that exact word," said Porr, adjusting a very expensive Paisley necktie, pleased that his intended meaning had been received, "but he is eccentric. In fact, he prefers his out-of-the-way location."

"What exactly does he do in his out-of-the-way office?" asked Ribbley, giving emphasis to the word, "exactly."

"Research," shrugged Porr, with a meaningful look at his watch, seeming to tire of the conversation and seeming to have his thoughts on other matters. "But he would be the better source of information for questions on his work. You see, Dr. Pringle is only one of a couple of dozen scientists on the research side of our operation, and I must admit

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that I'm not intimately familiar with the details of his projects. In fact, not many people are. Given the rather acerbic," noting what he apparently thought was a frown on the face of Sergeant Munro, Porr injected an explanation, "bitter, and, I might add short-tempered, way Dr. Pringle approaches his work, we limit the number of people who have to deal with him."

"Why keep him on if he's such a pain in the ass?" asked Ribbley abruptly.

His eyes widening a bit at the tone in Ribbley's voice, Porr explained, "Well, I can understand why you might ask, but the truth of the matter is that Dr. Pringle happens to be a thoroughly competent scientist."

"Would it also be true that the Institute profits from his work?" asked Ribbley.

Rising from his chair, Porr gave only a brief reply. "Certainly, Detective Ribbley. But then that's our purpose, to make a profit for our investors." As he spoke, Porr began sending even stronger signals that he was growing weary with the interview. Shooting his french cuffs, and adjusting the lapels of a textured grey suit coat, Porr made a verbal escape attempt. "If you would like a tour of the Institute or if you need to ask further questions, I would be pleased to make one of my assistants available."

"What about Pringle?" asked Ribbley, unwilling to let Porr leave. As if emphasizing his leisurely approach, Ribbley leaned even further back in the soft enveloping cushions of the sofa. But there was a slight shift in the tone of his voice which suggested that he was as determined to stay as Porr was to end the interview.

"Pringle?" puzzled the heart and soul of the Kreesap empire.

"Since he's injured, as you say he is, he can certainly take whatever time off he requires, if that's what you're talking about. And you may certainly question him. The Institute has nothing to hide from the police."

"Why, thank you, Mr. Porr. Thanks, indeed, for permitting the police to do their job," replied Ribbley, in a voice laced with irony, "but unfortunately, I can't do that."

"Why not?" asked Porr, color rising in his face from the cynical tone in Ribbley's voice.

"Oh, weren't you told? Pringle was found dead this morning by his landlady and Sergeant Munro."

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"Dead! But you didn't say that before. You didn't say homicide. I just imagined..."

"Oh, no imagination required, Mr. Porr. Pringle's dead alright, completely dead."

Porr made an effort to adjust to the idea, by repeating Ribbley's words, "Completely dead, ...well, I mean...."

"Munro," said Ribbley with mock severity, "when you called this morning, why didn't you tell Mr. Porr that his scientist had become the late scientist sometime last night?" With a sigh, and with mock severity, he added, "I can see that you need seasoning, but then I suppose that's why the Lieutenant assigned you to work this case with me." Seeming to forget about Porr, Ribbley continued in an almost philosophical voice, "This kind of assignment really is unusual, Les. Most unusual. I hope you understand that a sergeant from burglary being assigned to work with a homicide detective is just not the usual way the Department does business."

Munro didn't seem particularly shattered by the rebuke, nor did she seem concerned about Ribbley's ramblings about Departmental procedures. In fact, one looking closely might have seen faint signs of a smile as she ignored Ribbley and fixed her attention on the thoroughly puzzled Jason Porr.

Suddenly coming out of the DeHines cushions, Ribbley's voice was low, but insistent. "Mr. Porr, tell me why someone might want to crush in the head of the late Dr. Pringle. And don't wear out your watch. Your meeting will keep for a while."

Porr's face, quickly older and strained, seemed to grow longer as he looked from one police officer to the other. Cautiously, he sank back into his chair, easing himself down as though expecting even that old friend to spring some new surprise on him.

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"I think your Mr. Porr talks like he's got a test tube up his butt, Les," said Ribbley as he watched Munro angle the car out of the parking lot.

"My Mr. Porr?" laughed Munro. "Tell me, Ribbley, just how it is that Porr becomes my Mr. Porr."

"He's my gift to you, Les. And a damned fine gift he is. Expensive tastes, high class office with a view, probably drives a Porsche. The beebop in the picture looked to me like a softy. You could take her out easy. What more do you want?"

"But he does a rotten job of answering questions," countered Munro.

"Yes. Rotten. Thoroughly rotten," agreed Ribbley. "What do you make of that smoke about Pringle's work?"

"Generally, it tracks with what Pringle himself told me yesterday. Kreesap ticks along on the very far out edge of research. It keeps guys like Pringle working to find ideas that the Institute can sell to big business or to the government. From what I've been able to find out there's a half dozen Institutes, Associations along the Front Range, call them what you will, doing the same thing. But I keep drawing a blank on the exact kind of work Pringle was doing. He told me there were only two or three people who really knew anything about his current project."

"And your Mr. Porr, says it wasn't secret," mused Ribbley. "If Porr isn't lying through his bleached white teeth, that seems to shoot the hell out of the industrial sabotage, or, in this case, industrial spying theory."

Giving Munro a narrow look as she scooted through a thoroughly yellow light, he observed, "I could give you a ticket for that, Les. In fact, I might write you up right here."

Ignoring him while she swerved around a delivery van and moved into the center lane of traffic, she replied, "We are going to talk to the landlady, right?"

"What else?" shrugged Ribbley. "Maybe she slugged him in his sleep. From what I've heard so far he was not a popular guy."

"Yeah," she agreed reflectively, "but even crabby, grouchy people have rights, Ribbley."

For a time they fell silent as the traffic lights slid by. The center of the sky was almost Colorado blue, but around the edges it was already tinged with the yellow pallor that had become as much a part of Denver

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as its western skyline. The unusual heat was building steadily and residents of the Mile High City would be talking about ways of escaping from the record heat wave. But with the snow caps long since melted off the peaks of the Rockies and with October feeling like July, even the mountains were no longer a refuge from the heat.

Rolling to a halt at a red light, Munro stole a quick glance at her companion. Ribbley was a heavy man, well past the body contouring stage of life, but still fit and athletic enough to manage the annual police fitness exam-somehow. And by no measure was Ribbley handsome. Instead, his face was unremarkable, probably plain. Long from neck to forehead and wide from ear to ear, Ribbley's face, to one interested in such things, had the look of one who should have been a farmer or rancher, not a city man. Thus, apparently misassigned to his proper role in life, Ribbley looked out upon the world with faraway blue eyes, and Munro had the fleeting thought that he perhaps saw everything in a far different way than most other people she knew.

Not being a vain man and being wise enough not to fret over things he could not change, Ribbley seemed to give little thought to his features or to his appearance. Except perhaps for the lower part of his face. In a moment of candor and reflection, Ribbley had once told a fellow detective that he hoped that people he met thought of that lower region of his face as a jaw, not a chin. But, apart from that puzzling observation, Ribbley seemed to be a man totally comfortable with himself.

Munro knew, by hearsay and more recently by personal experience, that Ribbley could be both engaging and disarming. But from the experience of the recent encounter in Porr's office, she knew that when Ribbley's face hardened against an antagonist, he could also be intimidating.

Munro had heard stories about "Hi-Shot" Ribbley and how he was seldom direct and was given to approaching tough cases with what appeared to be only a mildly serious attitude. It was also said that Ribbley was the philosopher of the Homicide Division, given to saying things that most people didn't understand. Some of his fellow officers shrugged Ribbley off as merely being "weird." But he produced results, sometimes in unusual and unexpected ways, and she was glad she had asked, and that he and the Lieutenant had agreed to let her work the case with him.

Feeling her glance, Ribbley, opened the conversation again, "If they'd ration gas in the Metro area the way the Mayor says they might,

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crime would go down and we could just cruise around on empty streets, Les."

"I'm not so sure. Everyone would just buy it up in Fort Collins or Colorado Springs or somewhere else out of the metro area and would keep on driving. We'd probably end up trying to enforce some damned coupon system. I, for one, don't think there is a solution to the pollution problem in this city."

"Hum," said Ribbley, "solution to pollution. That rhymes. You should put it in a sonnet and sell it to the Mayor, Les. But you may be right about the air. It stinks and it's getting worse, and if it doesn't cool off pretty soon, the whole damn county will be cooked and nothing will matter any more." As he spoke, Ribbley reached down and adjusted the air conditioning control.

"You know we're supposed to go easy on the cooler," observed Munro as she watched him fuss with the temperature knob. "Besides, it isn't really hot yet."

"Green," said Ribbley looking out the windshield and ignoring her comment about the air conditioner. "You know you shouldn't block traffic, Les. It sets a bad example."

Again, she ignored his comment, but accelerated through the intersection. Soon, they were on a residential street, moving slowly, as though looking for a street address.

Looking at the houses, Ribbley said, "This isn't what you'd really call the high poobah part of the city. Is this where Pringle lived?"

"We're close."

"Your guy must not have paid poor old Pringle much." In a mocking tone he paraphrased Porr's words, "Considering the fact that he was a first rate scientist."

Munro rolled the car to a stop in front of a two story, red brick house, vintage 1920's. The building's old bricks were dark from years of weather, and the persistent attention of climbing vines. Though it was clearly an older building, the place had the look of conversion about it. Once, perhaps two or three generations ago, it had been a single family home. Now it obviously was an up and down apartment with an outside stairway added. The small picture window on the lower level had been matched by the addition of one on the upper level. The effect, however, was less one of symmetry than it was of new sitting atop old.

"Pringle was up, the landlady down," reported Munro.

"Better talk to the lady first."

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Four long rings on the doorbell and a respectable wait after each convinced them they wouldn't get an answer. Turning to the stairway which was in view of the lower front door, Munro took the lead and they clomped up to the landing.

"She gave me a key after we finished up here this morning," explained Munro as she unlocked the door and gave it a push.

Inside, they stopped and looked around.

"Is this the way you found it?" asked Ribbley surveying the disarray in the living room.

"Hell no," answered a surprised Munro, "It wasn't the neatest place in the world, but someone has been in here since I left."

Suddenly cautious, Ribbley moved to the bedroom door and looked inside. As he stepped into the doorway, Munro behind him, an adjoining closet door in the living room crashed open slamming into Munro's back, throwing her into Ribbley. Together they stumbled and fell into the bedroom. Instantly, Ribbley was on his feet, service revolver in his hand. Brushing past Munro who was still pulling her own weapon from her belt, he spurted into the living room, his gun muzzle rapidly exploring in every direction. One look told him that his target was already outside and probably going down the stairs. On the landing, with Munro just coming out the door, Ribbley, yelled out, "Police, halt." Then he capped off a round which was high and away. He triggered off a second as the figure disappeared around the front of the building. Three steps at a time carried him to the ground and to the corner of the house where he paused. His instincts proved to be good as a slug whined by the corner and ripped into the grass a few feet away. His arm swept back and held Munro who came panting and cursing down the stairs.

"Call it," she hissed.

"I call wait," snapped Ribbley. As he spoke he jerked his head around for a snapshot look at the street, then pulled back and waited. "He's behind a blue Chevy across the street."

As Ribbley spoke, they could hear the engine crank and fire. Then, as they stepped from behind the building, the car gunned down the street, its tires squealing as it passed their position. Munro, in firing position, aimed, but before she could fire, Ribbley tackled her, and held her close as he rolled with her, back away from the building.

Before Munro could protest or move, an explosion thundered against the building and shook the ground. Dirt and brick fragments pelted them where they lay on the ground and dust seemed to gush up

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from everywhere. For a few seconds the silence around them was complete.

"Jesus H. Christ!" breathed Munro.

"Naw," drawled Ribbley releasing her and standing up, "he wouldn't have missed."

"What?"

"It wasn't Haysoos at all. It was that son of a bitch in the car. He tossed a grenade at us."

"A grenade?"

"Yes, Sergeant. An old fashioned, made for machine gun nests handgrenade. AKA a pineapple."

As he spoke, Ribbley walked to the apartment building and began surveying the damage. The brick facing had been torn away from a large section of the front of the building between the door and the staircase. Sections of wooden framing gawked from the wall where clots of brick and mortar hung in ugly threatening clusters.

"This is going to cost someone," he said. But as he spoke, he realized Munro was still on the ground behind him. Turning, he saw her sitting in the middle of the litter, laughing.

"What the hell is tickling you, Les? Don't tell me you're hysterical and that my suppressed reservations about women police officers are being confirmed."

"You, Ribbley." Still laughing, she finally stood up and began slapping the dust from her clothes. "Now I know why everyone calls you 'Hi-Shot' Ribbley. A brand new rookie could have put a slug in that bozo without even trying. But you missed, and missed high."

He grinned at her as she dusted herself off. "And I suppose you would have potted him? But if you had, you'd have nothing but a dead skuzball and a shooting team on your butt for the next three months. Maybe if you had scratched him, you could have begun to write a page in the legend of Les Munro, Lady of the Law from Grand Junction, but this is double entry bookkeeping, Sergeant. For cooking the only live lead in the case you'd get a zero on the investigation side of the ledger. And, think about it, Les. What had he done? Before he tossed a grenade at us, that is. Breaking and entering? You would have shot a guy who may have simply been doing a little free enterprise pilfering? No, sometimes a hi shot will stop a scooter that you can't really shoot."

His good sense dampened her laughter, but she couldn't drop the idea of his nickname. "Hi-Shot," where do we go from here, combat infantry training?"

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"Wouldn't be a bad idea. Not a bad idea at all. And drop the "Hi-Shot," that's supposed to be a behind-my-back nickname. It's more fun for the office gang that way."

The street was beginning to fill with curious residents. Craning their necks and talking to one another, they stared at the dust covered police officers. "You better call in and ask for a bomb squad," Ribbley told her, "but be sure you tell them it's already over. We only need confirmation that it was a standard army issue grenade. And Les, I didn't hear police gunfire, did you?"

"Not if I didn't hear anything about hysterical women police officers," she countered.

An hour and a long report later, they were in the car again. "How did you know he had tossed a grenade, Ribbley?"

"I heard the spoon fly. Once you hear that, you never forget."

"Viet Nam?"

"A lifetime ago," he said, obviously not wanting to dwell on that part of his life. "Let's head down to the Tap Tap office. Maybe your computer brains will have something to tell us about Pringle's disks."

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Bernie Finn stared at the display screen of his computer. It stared back at him. After a long moment, Bernie blinked. Then he swore. He quickly tapped in a command and authoritatively hit the Enter key.

The display answered, "File Not Found."

Bernie tried another command. He got the same answer. With a sigh, he pushed back from the keyboard and pulled a heavy, ring-bound manual from a nearby shelf. Flipping through the dog-eared pages, he went from one section to another and on to another.

After a time, Bernie was joined by a Colleague from the adjacent work station. "Problems?" asked the Colleague.

"Yes. I got an access problem. One of the broads from the burglary division brought in a disk. She said it belonged to a researcher who somehow got his head bashed in."

"And she thinks the disk will solve her case," laughed Colleague. "Who's the badge?"

"Name's Munro. Quiet a looker."

"Hey, I've heard of her," said the Colleague rolling his eyes in mock admiration. "She's the one the boys call 'O O Munro.'"

"A chemist," reflected Bernie, his mind still on his bout with the computer. "Munro said the researcher who got his head crushed was working for an Institute. She said he was a doctor of chemistry. I wonder if he was doing some kind of work that would have caused him to enter his data under a code?"

"Some of those types are pretty odd," said Colleague who got up and went to his own work station where he retrieved a thin folder. "Bernie, do you remember that guy from Restat who was here a few weeks ago?"

"The sales rep?"

"Yeah, that's the one. He gets into almost every tap tap center in the whole damn state, including those in Colorado Springs that belong to defense contractors. He said he went to a seminar in Washington, D.C. and even spent some time in the Pentagon planning centers. The guy really gets around. Anyhow, we got to laughing and joking about hacking our way into the IRS main frame and sending ourselves fat refund checks."

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"Good idea. Send me one too," put in Bernie. "I'd set myself up in a business where I'd could have my own computer company and a bunch of poor schnooks working for it."

"Well, the Restat guy gave me some notes on system bypass. I think he got them from some whiz in the computer engineering department of a defense contractor. The Restat bug said to keep his keys quiet and not spread them around, but he thought they might help us avoid a crash if we got locked up from overloads, the way we did last month. I've been looking at the notes he gave me and they look pretty good. Wanna try a bypass network on your 'O O Munro' disk?"

"Sure, why not. Give me something."

"Okay," replied Colleague, his interest in the puzzle growing by the second. "Let's have a go at the DOS system first. If I read these instructions right, we can create a new configuration for it and get to the data that way."

With Colleague reading commands, Bernie hunched over the keyboard and tapped them in. With speed that surprised them, they could see an alternative computer operating system begin to take shape on the hard drive. Step by step they built a 'ghost' system which had many of the features standard to DOS but also had a series of operational functions of its own.

"Holy bones!" breathed Bernie. "With this we could bust a whole bunch of codes."

"Try the data disk now," suggested Colleague.

Bernie tapped in the commands they had devised. Suddenly the screen flashed. "Combustion Data Directory."

"Bingo!" yelled Colleague, "We're in. Score hackers one, bashed in researcher zero."

Bernie selected the first document and keyed it up. A formula appeared followed by a double column of numbers. He paged down. More columns of numbers.

"Fascinating," drawled Colleague, obviously no longer interested. "Did you log your key strokes?"

"Um hm," Bernie nodded absently.

"Have fun," said Colleague returning to his own work station.

Curious, Bernie keyed his way to the end of the document. It was the same all the way through. The numbers seemed to rise in value, and at certain points they rose rapidly. Returning to the first page, Bernie studied the formula. He recognized it as being a chemical reaction. It

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included O for oxygen, C for carbon, N for nitrogen, NO for nitric oxide, and others he didn't recognize.

Tiring of the formula, Bernie returned to the directory and brought up another document. It was a replay of the first. The formula looked slightly different, but the columns of numbers ran on for pages.

Rapidly, he worked his way through more of the data. Pausing, to look at the notes he had made on the bogus operating system they had constructed, he began to wonder why there wasn't something more on the disk than just raw data. He selected what he hoped was a search command and keyed it in.

The screen rolled up a line he hadn't seen before. "Access To Federal Summary? Y/N"

Quickly he tapped the Y. The screen answered, "Access to Summaries By Numeric Code Only. Enter Code."

Scowling at the screen, he tapped in "1, 2, 3."

"Improper Code-Enter Numeric Code-Second Attempt."

Frustrated, Bernie tapped in a bypass command. Instantly the screen went totally blank except for the flashing cursor. Sitting upright, he began entering standard commands. The screen was adamant, "File not Found."

He tried the new commands he and Colleague had invented. They would not even produce a "File Not Found," inscription.

"Damn! I think I've erased the whole thing," he called to Colleague.

Now absorbed in another project, Colleague seemed unconcerned. "Munro's bashed in researcher probably embedded some kind of tamper bug in this program. If he was that nutty, he probably deserved a crack on the head. Don't sweat it. Let the Dicks handle it from here."

"Is he talking about us?" asked Ribbley.

Bernie swung around in his chair to face Ribbley and Munro. "I'm afraid so," he blinked. "Sergeant, I've been working most of the morning on the disk you brought in just trying to get access. We found something that worked a while ago, but now I'm afraid it's gone."

Munro, selecting her words carefully, asked, "Are you saying that you have lost access or lost the data itself?"

"To tell you the truth, Sergeant, I don't know. We got into the data by a skeleton bypass system we virtually created from nothing. But now I can't raise anything with that system or with the standard system. The disk seems to be blank, but I have the feeling it isn't. The

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programmer probably put in some kind of protective codes which will require special equipment or decoding programs which I don't have here."

"But you did have a chance to look at some of it?" asked Ribbley.

"Yeah, I saw the directory and some documents."

"Well, that's something," Ribbley said. "Describe these..."

"Documents," offered Munro.

Ribbley accepted the word, "Okay, documents."

"The initial entry on each one seemed to be a formula describing a chemical reaction. After that, there were just columns of numbers, pages of them."

Looking accusingly at Munro, Ribbley spoke as though he had been vindicated in some great debate, and as though he knew that computers were not to be relied on or trusted. "You see, Sergeant. We could have saved ourselves the trip. Pringle was a typical scientist who loved numbers. It's a nasty habit most of them have. But there isn't any way that a column of numbers will tell us who bopped your scientific crank on the head."

Ignoring him, Munro pressed Bernie, "Anything else?"

"Well, there was one thing. I managed to get a query inscription."

"A what," interrupted Ribbley.

"A query, Detective," explained Bernie. "The computer asked me if I wanted to see a summary. I would guess that meant a generalized description of the data. Perhaps the research theory would be there and perhaps even a statement of the testing regime. Of course, the summary would also describe the test results."

Munro sensed that Bernie hadn't gotten past that point. "But you didn't see the summary?"

"No. It called for a numeric code. I gave it 1, 2, 3 just to see what kind of response I would get, but that was rejected. I tried another command. That's where I lost the whole damn works."

"Enter the Dicks," said Ribbley, giving Colleague a hard look which drove Colleague's eyes away from Munro and back to his keyboard.

"Would it help to keep on trying?" asked Munro.

"I don't think so. There obviously is a protector code in the data, and like I said, I don't have any decoding programs or decoding equipment. I might just erase more or all of it, if I kept fooling around."

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Then, too, my supervisor is getting pretty itchy about the time I've already put on it. Sorry, Sergeant."

With that Bernie handed Munro the disk which he had taken from the B disk drive of his machine.

"And the keystroke pattern for your skeleton system?" she asked.

"Oh, I kinda forgot about it," he said with a weak smile. Taking a note pad from his desk, he tore off the first page and handed it to her. "Actually, this is kinda confidential, Sergeant. It's bypass system that may be...well used only by the government. So I'd appreciate it if you'd not pass it around to just anyone."

As Bernie spoke, he had gotten up from his seat to talk to her, leaving his station vacant. Then, while Munro was being introduced to Colleague who had stood up and leered his way into the conversation, Ribbley stepped over to Bernie's computer and stared at it as though it had committed a crime for which it might be arrested. As Munro and the computer operators chatted, Ribbley, leaning over the machine, must have delivered some quiet insult to computerism, because the CPU clicked softly back at him.

Giving the computer one last look, Ribbley stepped over to the threesome and broke up the conversation with vague comments about getting back on the road. "I'm sure all this computer talk is interesting," he said, "but the only system I know anything about is the one I work for. Officer do you have your...those little plastic....?"

"Disks," she said, holding them up for him to see.

"Whatever," Ribbley grumbled, seemingly embarrassed by his ignorance. Then, following Munro, he muttered something that might have been a thank you and walked out.

As Ribbley and Munro disappeared through the door, Colleague gave a low whistle. "O O Munro!" Then he asked, "Wasn't the big guy a homicide detective?"

"Yeah, I think so. I never thought about it, but I guess the researcher that got his head bashed in is now a stiff."

"Hm," toned Colleague, "That does make it interesting again."

With a conspiratorial laugh, Bernie returned to his chair and held up a disk. "Score one for the diskcopy command. Wanna do some more hacking on this backup after work?"

"Why not?"

Then, feeling the hard stare of their supervisor, Bernie and Colleague quickly turned to their keyboards. Colleague took up a stack of material which had accumulated in his "In" basket and began entering

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information into his machine. After some very puzzled fussing with his machine, Bernie did the same. Soon both were back to their routine, "Tap, tap, tap...."

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The hallway outside of the administrative offices of the Computer Science Department was flooded with students hurrying to afternoon classes. Struggling against the tide, Ribbley and Munro made their way past a row of bulletin boards, toward the glass door and the overhead sign, "Chairman, Department of Computer Science and Applications."

Ribbley glared at the students, "Jeez, I thought the sixties and seventies were over, but all I see here is hair and slop."

"Lots of brainpower under that hair," quipped Munro.

"But damn little sense," retorted Ribbley.

Crowding their way into the office and up to a counter, they were greeted by a young woman wearing large grasshopper glasses. Sensing they were visitors, she greeted them with the kind of politeness which is too often reserved for non-students. "Could I help you?"

"My name is Sergeant Munro. This is Detective Ribbley. I was told on the phone I could see Professor Liss at two."

With the suppressed curiosity which greets almost every police officer when he introduces himself, she said, "Oh, yes. He's expecting you. I told him myself that you were coming. Just go out the door and turn left. It's the third door."

After another scrum with the students, with Ribbley feeling like he was in the center of it, they soon found themselves in the quiet sanctuary and the presence of Professor Liss. Munro made the introductions and provided legitimacy for the visit by explaining that she had talked to and receive the blessing of the Chairman of the Department in enlisting the University's expertise in a police investigation.

While that was going on and while Munro explained the problem with the disk, Ribbley contented himself with surveying the office. He then turned his attention to Munro and the computer expert, Professor Liss. His long face was tapered to a point by a Lenin type beard. Above that, Liss viewed his visitors through small blue eyes, and glasses with lenses that glinted and winked in the lights and were somehow cleaner than ordinary glasses.

Ribbley noted that Liss seemed more interested in Munro than in the disk and decided that Liss was going to be a willing worker in the cause. As he listened, Ribbley also conceded, to himself, that Munro was, indeed, something of an incentive.

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"That's pretty much the story," Munro was saying. "With the researcher dead, this has become a homicide investigation. We think it is important to know what he was working on, and since this disk was in his briefcase, we're interested in finding out what it contains."

"I'll be delighted to do what I can," promised Liss. "As the Chairman may have told you, I've worked with the police before and have always found those assignments to be absolutely fascinating."

"Professor Liss," said Ribbley, "is there some way of protecting what may still be on that thing. Our guy said he may have lost all or part of what was on it. I'd like to think that if there is something left there, we won't lose it."

Liss, growing cautiously serious, turned his attention to Ribbley, "I understand your concern, Detective. But to be perfectly honest, there is always a risk involved. Some of these researchers are quite clever, and when they program in unexpected blocking or even erase commands, we can be caught off guard. Of course, I'll try to make a backup before I do anything else."

"Backup?" asked Ribbley. "That's encouraging. Are you saying that you can copy what's on a disk without being able to actually see the contents?"

"Usually that's routine, but again, some data is copy protected. However, I must say, we do have techniques for getting around that problem." With a sly smile, he added, "After all, Detective, computer technology is our business. Rest assured, I'll take every possible precaution against loss of the data."

Turning back to Munro, Liss asked, "Did I understand you to say that the young man in your computer division used some special technique to get access to the data?"

"He suggested that he had, and I think the system he used may be on this...." She handed him Bernie's keystroke log.

Ribbley interrupted, "The little tick tap did something he didn't want to talk about. While he and Colleague were gushing over Sergeant Munro, I took the liberty of checking to see what he had stored on his hard disk, but came up empty. But he did have more keystrokes listed in his notes than he gave to Munro. If you need anything from him, give us a call. I can promise you, he'll cooperate." Handing a sheet of note paper to Liss, he explained, "He gave Munro only the first page."

Munro sat mute as Ribbley spoke and as he produced the note paper. She started to say something, but decided either that it was not important or that it would be better said at a later and more appropriate

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time. Still, it was evident that she had suddenly seen a new side of Ribbley and, in the process, had perhaps learned that he had skills and knowledge beyond anything she had imagined.

His eyes widening, Liss accepted the offer, "Thank you. I have the feeling he would indeed be cooperative. But, I'll have a go at it with our lab equipment first. It may be something fairly simple."

Casually looking at the array of computer literature which filled every shelf and which was stacked around the small office, Ribbley asked, "Professor, do you ever do work for the feds?"

"Lots," smiled Liss. "I've consulted with nearly every Department in the area. They seem to have lots of start up problems. Of course, they also have special requirements."

"I would imagine some of the work is classified or restricted?"

"The government does love it's own material," agreed Liss.

"Then I'd guess they'd have their own special ways of protecting it?" persisted Ribbley.

"Detective, are you suggesting that the research data on this disk is somehow connected with the federal government?"

Ribbley replied with an ambiguous shrug. "I guess everything is, one way or another, isn't it? Besides, there's truth in every endeavor when one is diligent."

Liss quickly looked at Munro for a possible explanation of Ribbley's ambiguous remark, but her head was down; and her forehead was shielded by her hand. Investigatory fatigue no doubt.

"Our guy's note has some reference on it to federal restrictions," smiled Ribbley. "You'll see it when you look at that extra page. But we mustn't keep you, Professor," smiled Ribbley. "I believe you and Sergeant Munro agreed that we could check back with you tomorrow?"

"That would be fine. By then I should at least know what kind of problem we have here."

Ribbley stood and moved to the door. As Munro joined him, Liss placed the disk in an envelope, scribbled something on it and placed it in a desk drawer which he then locked. Smiling and satisfied with himself and his knowledge of police procedure, he asked, "Is that satisfactory for our chain of custody?"

"Looks good to me," said Ribbley holding the door open.

"We'll see you tomorrow then at eleven?" asked Munro.

"Eleven will be fine," Liss glinted at her through his super clean lenses.

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The squad room on the fourth floor of Police Headquarters was unusually full. Watching the activity through the glass partition of his office, Lieutenant Ned Banner harbored a suspicion that it was the heat outside and the air conditioning inside which had so many of his investigators lingering over reports, talking longer than usual on telephones, and leafing endlessly through the ever present city directories.

The supervisory responsibility in him nagged at his conscience. Banner considered walking out and asking, in a loud voice, if anybody wanted to work backgrounds on applicants for the academy. The work had to be done, and it was one of the most disliked assignments in the Division. It was a better way of clearing the room than going to each desk and starting to read half written reports or looking over shoulders or standing conspicuously around listening to phone conversations.

But Banner hesitated. He hated to roust them like that. Generally, they were a good group, and he knew the streets were unmercifully hot. The small radio on his credenza had said the temperature was another record. One hundred and four. Almost unheard of in Denver and startling for the month of October. Then, too, the damned yellow smog which hung over the city like a blanket was actually causing officers to call in sick with eye and throat irritations. There was no point in encouraging more of that kind of thing, because he was shorthanded as it was.

Sighing, Banner decided that the damned stinging, choking smog, and the mayor, who believed it could be cured by driving restrictions, both had one thing in common, lots of bad gas. As he peered at the detectives working at looking like they were working, he saw the door open to admit Ribbley and Munro. Lots of eyes saw Ribbley, but they watched Munro. He wondered if letting her work with Ribbley on the Pringle killing had really been such a good idea. It was unusual and would probably start all kinds of silly rumors.

As Banner watched and mused on the duo assignment, Ribbley and Munro went different directions, Ribbley to his desk and Munro to the ladies room. Even before sitting down, Ribbley began punching a number into his telephone. Then he began talking. In his inner ear, Banner could almost hear the easy cadence of Ribbley's voice and the occasional repetition of words or phrases which was a Ribbley trademark.

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Curiosity took hold of Banner, and he left his office and drifted out toward Ribbley's desk. As he approached, Ribbley hung up the phone and greeted him. "Afternoon, Ned. The place looks busy. Crime must be up."

"My guess is that the heat's up, and I don't mean heat from the coppers," quipped Banner. "How's the Pringle thing going?"

"Complications have set in. Munro gave our tap tap people a go at a computer disk that she found in Pringle's office, but our guy bombed. Probably bugged the damn thing up in the process."

"How's she doing?"

"Munro? She's okay. She just needs some seasoning."

"Want me to bounce her off the case and back to burglary?"

"No. I've already got too much invested in her. And she's does a pretty good job fronting for me. Let's give her some more time."

"Your call," said Banner. "Now, Ribbley, tell me that you haven't been out there trying to gun down citizens."

Ribbley's eyes opened wide and his mouth opened, "Shooting? Ned, I didn't report shots fired."

Ignoring Ribbley's pretended surprise, he went on, "That's why I'm asking you."

"Lieutenant, I know the rules. Yessir, I do know the rules. You pull the trigger and you pull a shooting team. It's bang, bang, and then write a report."

"Okay, Ribbley. Enough of that crap. I guess it isn't critical since you didn't put a hole in anyone, this time. It must be that nickname of yours, but remember, next time you light off a round, you write a report. Understand?"

"Sure." Then changing his tone and dropping his cynical, but, official, attitude, Ribbley opened another subject. "Ned, I may want to drop over and talk to some of our federal friends. I'm not exactly sure which compartment of the box yet, but it'll probably be the ones who pass out the bucks to guys like Pringle."

"You think the dead doctor was working on a government project?"

"Yeah, there may have been Washington dollars in it. But, right now, it's just an idea. If it grows up, I'll give a holler."

"Couldn't the place he worked, that institute, give you some answers?"

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"They could but, so far, they aren't inclined to talk much. The spit shine that runs the place keeps ducking the question. So, I'll probably go both ways, the feds and a return engagement with Porr."

"Sounds okay to me," agreed Banner as he began moving toward a cluster of men who were getting loud in a discussion of some fine point that had arisen in the endless negotiations between the NFL owners and players.

As soon as Banner was out of earshot, Ribbley was back at the phone, punching in numbers and swearing at a busy signal. As he tried another, Munro joined him. Dropping the handset into its cradle, Ribbley said to her, "I think everyone in the whole damn Denver area is on the phone." Then watching Banner sidle up to the dissolving cluster of detectives, Ribbley cautioned her, "By the way, Banner is on the prowl. If he asks you about shots being fired, give him a flutter of your big brown eyes and say the situation was fluid. You might remind him that the bad guy was trying to blow us to pieces in addition to trying to gun us down."

"I hear you, Detective. I don't want to fill out forms and talk to a shooting team any more than you do. And I sure as hell don't want to get a reputation as a crummy shot."

Ignoring the jibe, he sat down and leaned back in the chair. Claspng his hands behind his head, Ribbley spoke to the ceiling. "Les, old sock, we need to do some digging. Has it occurred to you that the eminent Dr. Pringle might have been working on a project for the federal government?"

"Should it have?"

"Observation, Sergeant, is the theme of our professional life. And we must never let professional association close the aesthetic distance between ourselves and our fellow workers."

"Hm," replied Munro, content to wait him out.

"By that, I mean, don't trust nobody," he said bluntly. Especially a screw loose like Mr. Bernie Tap Tap. There was a notation on that scribble sheet of his, something about 'Federal Summary.' I just talked to Bernie's supervisor and he tells me there isn't anything that looks or sounds federal in his shop. Does that tell you anything, Sergeant?"

"We don't know that it had anything to do with Pringle," she began. "Of course, Bernie said that he'd been working on Pringle's disk all morning."

"Think back, Les. My impression was that he was planning on holding out his notes, and I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't make his

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own copy of that disk. If the special system that he and Colleague cooked up is any good at all, they'll want to practice with it on their own time. Now that I think about it, I wish I had leaned on him a little."

"You may be right, Ribbley," said Munro. "Thinking back, he was acting a little fishy. We'll have to wait on Liss to see if he comes up with anything on the notes or the disk."

"Believe me, Les, Bernie was holding out on us."

As she listened, the possibility that Bernie had indeed been holding back information took hold of her. The idea made her angry. "Why that damn weasel," she sputtered. "But why?"

"I can't give you an answer that I'd bet on, but I can make a good guess. Their supervisor admitted that he's pretty sure that Bernie and his Colleague are hackers, after hours hackers. That crowd that thrives on prying into other people's data banks. To them the world's an electronic peep show. A disk that suggested it contained something federal and maybe even something secret would be red meat for those two."

"You want to go down there with me now and watch me pinch the creep's head off?"

"No," said Ribbley, "let's wait. If I'm right, he's made a copy of Pringle's disk and they'll rush home, wherever that is, and hack their way into it. I'm thinking we'd be better advised to plan on an early morning interview with Mr. Bernie and Colleague. If I'm right, we not only have the University expert working for us, we've also got the hacker industry going at the problem for us. Let's see who comes up with something first."

"Okay," she agreed, "Bernie can wait, but sooner or later, I'm going to remove his bunions. So what's for now?"

"I think we might profit from finding out which federal agency has been dropping money into Kreesap."

"We let our fingers do the walking?" she asked.

Looking around the squad room and seeing that the ambling Ned Banner was thinning the ranks, Ribbley hesitated. "Yeah, let's get started, but if Banner heads over this way, we'll have to pull out here fast. Unless you want to do backgrounds on applicants for the academy?"

"Never again in this lifetime," she said.

Well into his second cup of coffee and almost halfway down the telephone book list of federal agencies, Ribbley found himself in an interesting conversation with a grant officer from the National Science Foundation.

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"That's right. The name is Kreesap Institute. K r e e s a p...un huh. Yes. That sounds like it. I'd like to know the date, the amount of the grant, the name of the researcher, and I'll need a description of the work that was being proposed...I understand that it's technical and fairly long, but could you summarize it?"

Ribbley rapidly made notes. After his grant office had finished a long explanation, Ribbley asked, "Did I hear you say you've given them more than one grant?...Three. I see. Well, does the name Pringle appear on any of them?"

Disappointment registered in Ribbley's voice. "No Pringle? Alright, could you give me the names of researchers...okay investigators...that do appear on the proposals? Fine, fine."

He closed the conversation by giving his phone number, name and address and by getting a commitment that copies of the proposals and the grant documents would be sent to him.

Looking across the desk, he called, "Real exciting work, huh, Les?"

"Thrilling."

"Any luck?"

"Skunked, I'm afraid. But it's impossible to make sense of what I'm hearing. Some just say flat out, 'We don't have grant programs and we don't sponsor research by private institutes or by anyone.' Others say 'Yes on special topics, such as grizzly bear metabolism during hibernation.' Most say that detailed information has to come from Washington. They all give me the willies. I thought our city bureaucracy was bad, but these people are something else."

Ribbley was smiling. "Remember, our federal government invented modern bureaucracy. But, listen to this, Les. I did find one that sounds interesting. The National Science Foundation admits to giving three grants to Kreesap in the last year. But none of them named Pringle as an ...investigator, and none of the grants seem to have been in the area of chemistry. Still, it's a lead and any lead in the fog is better than nothing."

"Ribbley!" yelled Banner from his office door. "Bring your sidekick and get in here."

"Backgrounds?" whispered a horrified Munro as they came up out of their chairs.

"Not in that tone of voice. Come on."

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They found Banner standing and staring down at the computer display on his work table. "There, see that?" he said pointing to the screen. "We've got a ping on your Kreesap case."

Ribbley, who accepted but did not love computers, was at first puzzled, but Munro, who knew lots about them, instantly recognized what was happening. Without a word, Munro sat down at the terminal and, while Banner and Ribbley watched, she moved the cursor down to the line on the list which was blocked in red. "346- In Progress-Kreesap Institute- 7811 Tasmun Park." With the cursor in place, Munro tapped Enter. The "pinging" red band disappeared and the seemingly endless list of ongoing, citywide patrol activity was replaced by the incoming report on Kreesap. The first report to the department, usually a citizen call and appropriately termed the "John Q.", had been entered as it had been received. The second entry was the dispatcher's response. Following that was the "street" report of the patrol officers which had been typed in as it had been received from one of the officers on the scene who described into his handheld radio the scene as he found it.

"Call in: 14:25: Central Bureau - Unidentified John Q. reports fire and smoke in laboratory at Kreesap Institute-7811 Tasmun Park. Chemicals may be involved. Fire Station 74 unit out:14:27-Responding with Haz Mat suppression Team & Hose Truck. 14:35- B/W Unit 935 on the scene."

As they watched the screen, another entry from the officers in the Black and White appeared as it was typed in by the dispatching and reporting section.

"14:39- B/W reports two story building already evacuated by owner's alarm. No deaths or injuries-Ambul will stand by. 14:44-Owner on the scene identified as Jason Porr."

The cursor blinked and waited. Banner snapped, "Dammit, Ribbley, this has been on for almost twenty minutes. Are you wearing your beeper?"

Ribbley pulled a slender black case from his inside coat pocket and held it up. "Yep. And the green dot says it's working."

Before Banner could answer, Munro called out, "There's more coming in."

"14:49 Unit 74 rpts fire localized in lab. Haz Mat rpts explosive gas present. B/W officers moving employees out of area."

"I'd rather see it than read about it," said Ribbley. "You coming, Les?"

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"Wait one," she called.

"We can pick it up on the radio," snapped Ribbley heading for the door.

As they rushed out the door and through the squad room, Banner leaned out his door and called, "Ribbley, get that beeper replaced."

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Ribbley drove while Munro called in and got the tac number which the officers in the Black and White were using to communicate with dispatch. She set the radio but received only the frying sound of dead air.

Rocketing through traffic, Ribbley glared at the radio, "Check the tac, Les."

The metallic voice of dispatch confirmed the number and Munro said what Ribbley had already heard. "We're on the right tac. The Black and White just isn't talking right now."

"Time, Les?"

"14:54."

"Call us in and hold on. I'm gonna use the light and siren to bust some of these intersections. If old Pringle's lab is going to go up, I want to see it."

"I could write you up for improper use of light and siren, Ribbley," said Munro, utterly deadpan.

"Hey," said Ribbley, "don't mention lights or horn to dispatch. Banner would see it on his damn computer." Then realizing that he was being paid back, he waved a hand at the radio, "Call us in as enroute, Les. Just call us in, smart ass."

Munro picked up the microphone, "Central, this is unit H043 rolling on the Kreesap fire in progress."

Moments later, they wheeled hard around the corner and shot up the access road toward the Kreesap facility. Ribbley slowed only slightly for the security guard who waved them through the gate. Munro talked to the microphone again, "Unit HO43 at the Kreesap Institute." As Ribbley braked to a stop, and they both shoved their doors open, she told dispatch, "Out of the unit and on handset."

Ribbley made straight for the uniformed officers who were talking to Jason Porr. "Ribbley," he said tersely as he approached them and showed his badge. "Where's the Hazardous Materials guy?"

One of the uniformed officers pointed at a group of fireman standing in the parking lot a respectful distance from the laboratory building. "The one with the red coat's in charge, Detective."

Slowing, he said to Munro, "Isolate Porr with one of the uniforms. Then find out from the other one what Porr's been saying to them." Without waiting for an acknowledgment, he continued walking rapidly toward the firemen.

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Before he was close enough to speak, a large section of the roof of the lab building rose into the air. Under it, a plume of fire boiled angrily into the sky. Then, like a clap of thunder, the sound of the explosion rushed through the air. The first was followed by a second, and, almost as an echo, a third. In the space of the next minute there were three more.

With the sign of the first explosion, Ribbley knelt down and raised his arm to shield his eyes. The noise and the blast of air pressed against him. Dust and gravel blown by the wind pelted him for an instant. He started to rise after the first blast, but quickly went back down when the second one came.

Finally, looking up, Ribbley saw that the red and orange ball of fire had disappeared in a swirling cloud of smoke. The firemen, too, had ducked, and were now tentatively coming to their feet. Ribbley heard one call out, "Stay where you are. There'll be more."

His warning kept everyone down low, ready to duck at any sign of more explosions. The successive blasts came almost as echoes of the warning. Then, after a few minutes, the firemen began to relax and begin considering how they were going to handle the situation which faced them. The Haz Mat group leader gave orders to the men with him and then spoke into a handheld radio. When it looked like he had a free minute, Ribbley identified himself and asked, "What the hell started the war?"

"My guys did a run through when we first got here and found bottled gas in some of the labs. They figured there was some in the area which was burning and that it would go up. Our computer list of hazardous materials operations confirmed that and showed us that this place has recently stocked up on some bottles of gases."

"Gases?"

"My men saw bottles of hydrogen, and oxygen and the printout shows nitrogen, carbon dioxide and argon. It was probably the oxygen and hydrogen that went up."

Watching the firemen begin to move in on the building with hoses, Ribbley asked, "Those gases, any idea why they would have them? Those particular ones I mean?"

"Sorry, Detective. I haven't a clue. These lab types do all kinds of things in the name of science." He started to walk away to give directions to his men, but turned back for a moment. "Detective, have your uniforms keep the area clear. If some more of those bottles get hot, we could still have some more explosions."

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Ribbley stood for a time watching the smoke billow from the hole in the roof and from the broken lab windows. The firemen were close enough to reach the fire with hoses, and they had begun applying a cooling stream of water to the walls and the remainder of the roof. The Haz Mat team was cautiously preparing to move in, and in their special protective garb, the men looked like something out of the latest freak movie.

Looking back across the parking lot Ribbley saw Munro and one of the uniformed officers. Standing apart with the other officer was Jason Porr. "I have some questions, Mr. Porr," Ribbley said to the empty space around him as he turned and marched in the direction of Munro, the officers and the president of the Kreesap Institute.

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"Mr. Porr," began Ribbley, "is that Pringle's lab which just blew up?"

Porr, no longer polished and pressed, but rather sweat-stained in shirt sleeves and crinkled in dusty trousers, nodded, "Yes. His lab and his office are there together, or they were." Porr licked his dry lips and looked at the smoke plume which seemed to rise only reluctantly into the brooding yellow and brown haze.

"The explosions, Mr. Porr, were bottles of gas in the laboratory?"

Porr shrugged his sagging shoulders, "Why, yes, I suppose they had to be. Is that what the firemen said?"

Ribbley cut him off, "Never mind asking me what the firemen said. Recently your people stocked up on bottles of gas. Were you aware of that?"

"That we had purchased the gas?"

"Dammit, Porr, for the last time, I won't have you answer a question with a question," snarled Ribbley, "Yes or no. Did you know that the lab had recently stocked up on hydrogen, oxygen and some other gases?"

"Yes. I mean, yes, I knew about the plan to use certain gases in some combustion experiments. Some experimental work had already been done, but more was planned. But I didn't know exactly which experiments or how much gas was going to be used. But using gases in experiments is not at all unusual."

Ribbley pressed, "And Pringle was doing the work?"

"Probably. It was to be a series of experiments he had designed."

"Who else knew what he was planning to do?"

Porr stared at Ribbley for a moment before answering. "Well, I did. The Department Head, Pringle's supervisor, knew. And in the last few weeks the research ideas were passed around to a couple of large firms that manufacture combustion chambers. And..." Porr's voice trailed off as he seemed to become lost in his thoughts.

"And who else?" prompted Ribbley.

"I don't want to sound accusatory, but there are two companies. Both are competitors of Kreesap. They would have learned of Pringle's work in the last week or two. They would have discovered it when we went public, that is, when we began looking for research sponsors."

"And those competitors are?" Ribbley remained close to Porr, and he held the man to his point with a hard, insistent stare.

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"The Hotchkiss Foundation and Lipscomb Atmospherics. They both have their own experts in the phases of combustion which were of interest to Pringle. I believe it's fair to say they both have a financial interest in combustion research."

"You said they were competitors?" Ribbley left the question open, hoping that Porr would elaborate.

With beads of sweat streaming from his hairline, and with the clammy heat in full possession of his clothes and body, Jason Porr seemed past the point of resistance. Giving his tie and collar a pull, he asked, "Detective Ribbley, is there a chance I could sit down? I'm afraid I'm getting a bit confused and I feel nauseous. The idea that men of business, whom I have known for years," Porr hesitated, apparently about to break down, "the idea that they could have sent violent men against me and against the Institute is...overwhelming."

With a gesture of disgust, Ribbley waved at Munro to join them. "Sergeant, Mr. Porr has asked for a chance to sit down. Why don't you put him in the car. And damn regulations, get that air conditioner running."

After talking with the uniformed officers for a few minutes, Ribbley moved over to the car and climbed in. Looking over the seat, he said, "I still have some questions. Do you feel up to them now?"

Porr, having recovered some of his composure, nodded, "I'm much better now, Detective Ribbley. Thank you."

"Good." To Munro he said, "Better call us in. I imagine Banner is back there reading the hot report. We'd better show him we're doing something besides watching."

"Dispatch this is Unit H043 at the Kreesap fire. Officers are questioning the owner, Jason Porr."

Ribbley, his arm resting on the top of the seat, contemplated the drawn face of Kreesap's President Jason Porr. Looking full in Porr's face, he asked, "Mr. Porr, who else would know about Pringle's research project, besides the ones you've already mentioned?"

"As far as I know, Detective, that's about it. Oh, some of the lab technicians would have known that Pringle was setting up for some bench scale project. I can't imagine that any of them would have any reason to break into the building and assault Dr. Pringle, or to set fire to the laboratory."

Ribbley came back fast, "Then you believe the fire was arson and not an accident."

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Porr was immediately off balance. "I guess I just assumed that the fire was set. I mean..."

"Why would you believe that?"

"Why? Well coming so soon after the..." Porr didn't want to say the word.

Ribbley helped him, "The murder of Pringle." He pressed, "Did you reach that conclusion, Mr. Porr, because you knew there was something about Dr. Pringle's work that could lead to assault, murder and now arson?"

Porr stammered, "I didn't make any connection like that."

"Perhaps you didn't, Mr. Porr, but it would appear that someone did. And that brings us back to the question I asked this morning. Just what was Dr. Pringle working on?"

"It's like I told you then, Detective Ribbley, I don't know the details..."

Ribbley shot back, "I didn't ask for details. I'm ask you a straight, simple question. What was Pringle working on?" The car was silent except for the noise of the engine and the whirring of the air conditioner. "The question is still on the table," Ribbley announced in a flat demanding tone.

"In general terms," began Porr, searching for words, "Dr. Pringle had done some lab work and had written some preliminary theories on the burning of fossil fuels." As Porr spoke, his own words seemed to give him strength and direction. As the tremor left his voice, he continued, "Pringle was planning on doing more of the same thing, with some special emphasis on the chemical reactions of burning gases in atmospheres with reduced pressure."

"You mean in vacuums?" asked Munro.

"Not in vacuums, but in reduced pressure situations," said Porr. "The work would have been done in special chambers where the atmospheric conditions could be carefully controlled and monitored."

As Ribbley listened and looked at Porr, he wondered who would care enough about such technical information to resort to violence to steal it. It seemed to be a point worth pursuing. "And who, Mr. Porr would care about the results of such research?"

"As I said earlier, Kreesap's competitors would be interested. But beyond that, the research would probably be of interest to companies who build devices related to burning fossil fuels. Ultimately, the users would be interested, that is those who burn coal for fuel. From there the

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world of interested persons or companies who would know, or care, about what we do ends."

Munro's mind was apparently racing along the same lines as Ribbley's. "You said fossil fuels. Who would that include?"

Porr hesitated, said, "I suppose it could include power plants. Coal fired power plants."

Ribbley added to her question, "Or gas burning power plants?"

Porr blinked, appearing to be surprised. "Why, yes. The effects of burning coal and natural gas would be of great interest to such people." Almost as an afterthought, he added, "and certainly manufacturers of the equipment they use would be most interested. In fact, there were some manufacturing concerns among those we had contacted looking for financial support for the research. That is, if Dr. Pringle's continued bench scale work had looked promising."

"Names, Mr. Porr," Ribbley said.

"The most prominent is Fossil Tech. They are a large manufacturing concern, but they do their own research. Yet, they are a competitor of Kreesap in some limited areas. Kreesap does not engage in manufacturing and we don't market to power plants or other such users. But in design work and in limited areas of research we do the same things. Thus they are competitors, of a sort. But I know the Chief Executive Officer there. That firm has been in business for seventy five years and is respected throughout the industry. That it could be implicated in such vicious business is out of the question."

Ribbley was unrelenting, "Others?"

"There is really only one. Turne Engineering and Manufacturing. Actually, it's connected somehow with Lipscomb Atmospherics, a subsidiary I think. But it really is a very minor player in the manufacturing end of the business. Turne Engineering is a competitor with us only because of their association with Lipscomb which is really the research side of the organization."

Ribbley, almost to himself, summarized, "Okay, I hear some names. But right now I'm interested in finding out who cared enough about Pringle's work to kill him for it. For me, it runs something like this. Pringle was getting out in front of other companies with his ideas on burning fossil fuels. He did some research, then wrote some theories and formulas. He planned more research. Enter someone who whacked him on the head. That makes it a 'who done it' question. From what you tell me, there are three leading candidates. One, a research company, that's Hotchkiss. That outfit does the same kind of work and would like to

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know what Dr. Pringle was up to. Two is a sort of combination operation. That's the Turne-Lipscomb crowd. They do research, but they are also into the manufacturing side of the fuel burning business. Three, the giant, Fossil Tech, which does everything, including engineering."

"That's a fair summary," agreed Porr, surprised at how quickly Ribbley seemed to cut through the explanations.

"We'll want names and addresses," said Ribbley. "Can you supply us that kind of information?"

"No trouble at all," Porr assured him.

"One more thing."

"Yes?"

"Were the feds paying any of the tab for Pringle's work?"

Porr's brow wrinkled and he spoke quickly, "No. At least not directly. You see, Dr. Pringle had already completed some of the theoretical work and had offered it to the government as a proposal for grant money. A portion of the work, just a review of the technical literature, was funded by the National Science Foundation as an addition to other work the Institute was doing."

Munro asked for clarification. "Do I understand then that Dr. Pringle had already written up some of the ideas for his research project and had tried to sell them to the feds?"

"Basically, that is correct," nodded Porr.

"But the idea was only partly accepted."

"Correct again," said Porr.

"Was any of the write up, the proposal, or whatever you call it, a secret?" asked Ribbley.

"It wasn't a government secret, if that's what you mean. But the government does have a policy of not giving our proprietary information to competitors. It's secret in that sense only."

Abruptly, Ribbley turned to Munro. "Les, call one of the uniforms." To Porr he said, "That's it for now, Mr. Porr. The officer will take you to your office and he'll wait while you prepare us a list of the companies you've already mentioned and the principal officers. If you think of any others before you finish, put them on the list. If more names come to you later, call me or Sergeant Munro. We'll be in touch. Oh, before I forget, we'll also want a list of the stuff in Pringle's lab. Someone will be by to pick that up tomorrow."

As he watched Jason Porr climb out of the car, Ribbley had the vague feeling the man had recovered his composure more completely and more quickly than might have been expected. And he wondered

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why. Ribbley frowned as he asked himself what question he had failed to ask. Or what question had Jason Porr answered, not with direction, but with misdirection.

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Lieutenant Ned Banner watched the on-the-scene reports from the scene of the fire march across his monitor. The system of having incoming reports instantly placed on the computer main frame was fairly new, but already was proving to be a time saver. Detectives and street officers could call in names, places, and events as they happened and have a complete report finished by the time they returned to their duty station. They could read the monitor, correct any mistakes they might have made, and print a hard copy if it was needed.

There were bugs to worked out, but since most cops, including investigators, liked to avoid report writing, they were cooperating and problems were being solved. Still, there would always be little things that would glitch up the system. Like Ribbley's pocket beeper. It should have beeped him the instant any report was entered from anywhere in the city which had a name which appeared in Ribbley's report. That kind of crosschecking had the potential to speed up research and to make sure that investigators were not duplicating each other's work. At least that was the way the system had been designed.

Banner had always known that if any of his detectives would have a screw up with the computer system, it would be "Hi-Shot" Ribbley. His suspicions were proving to be correct.

"Got a minute, Ned?"

Banner turned away from the screen, and faced his Division Chief, Captain Tom Urey. "Sure, Tom. What's up?"

Urey, a heavy bodied man, with thick bushy eyebrows, gave Banner a pained look. "I'm afraid it's one of those questions I've got to ask, but it's also the kind of question I already know the answer to."

"At least that makes it easy," retorted Banner, "but since you have to ask, go ahead."

"It's about your friend and mine, Ribbley," sighed Urey.

"I hear he fired his service revolver this morning."

"You heard that from?" Banner asked, tight lipped.

"Citizen complaint."

"The citizen have a name?"

"Probably, but he chose not to give it." Before Banner could speak, the Captain raised his large hands as if warding off a blow. "Don't say it, Ned. We don't respond to anonymous complaints about officer conduct. In a way it's a blessing. At least in this case, because we don't

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have to open an internal investigation. I only came down here to tell you about it because you should know that a complaint was called in."

"Tom, I'd already heard about the shots being fired, but we both know Ribbley. He probably did cap off a round or two, but my guess is that both those slugs are in orbit around the planet. That nickname of his is deserved. But believe me, if Ribbley had a good reason for shooting someone, he wouldn't miss."

"I know," smiled Urey, "I've lost shooting matches to him twice. You know, Ned, I once asked him once about the business of shooting high and wild like he does. He gave me some story about his grandfather who operated a ferry in Montana. Ribbley says his grandfather signaled the tow mules by firing some damn big piece in the air."

"Yeah," laughed Banner, "I've heard some of that, too. He told me that if a shot in the air would start and stop mules, it should work on bad guys who are on the lam."

"What's he working on now?"

"A scientist was killed last night. The guy apparently caught someone trashing his office, and the thief slugged him. The scientist died in the night, complications from the blow on his head, I imagine, but I haven't seen the coroner's report on it yet. The first call was handled by a Sergeant from a burglary detail. She had already done some good follow up work before the guy was found dead, so when she asked to work the killing with Ribbley, I gave it an okay."

"Hm. A bit unusual, Ned. Whose the Sergeant?" asked Urey.

"Name's Munro."

"Oh, I know her. Well, I hope Ribbley knows how damn lucky he is. She's a good officer." Urey started to leave, then with a quizzical look asked, "Who was the scientist?"

"A Dr. Otis Pringle. He worked at a place called the Kreesap Institute. According to Ribbley and Munro it's a think tank type of place where they do light lab research. As a matter of fact, the place just had a fire. I was watching the hot report on the computer when you walked in."

Urey's eyebrows lifted in interest as he ambled over to the computer and watched while Banner called his attention to the sequence of events. "It didn't take Ribbley long to get to the scene," he mused.

"No," Banner agreed, shaking his head, "He probably used a light and siren."

"He's probably already corrupted Munro, so she would never remember something like that," laughed Urey. "Well, cook him a little about that, Ned. Ribbley is one of the best we've got, but you need to let

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him know we're still running the shop. Let me know how the investigation on that scientist goes. It looks like an interesting case."

With that, Urey turned and left the office. Banner stood alone and watched the computer monitor for a time. Finally, he pressed F4 on the keyboard and watched while the Kreesap report disappeared as the screen scrolled up the general index listing of ongoing reports of activity on the streets. While he watched, the commercial radio station announced the weather forecast which called for continued high temperatures the next day.

Looking through his glass wall, Banner noted the squad room was again beginning to fill with lingering detectives. He picked up a file marked "Academy" and strolled out to see who he could see.

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Martin Nye laid the Rocky Mountain News carefully on the desk and leaned back as though he wanted to get a long view of the page 6A story. The editor had included a photograph in the layout which showed smoke spiraling up through the trees as firemen worked in the foreground.

"Explosions Shake Kreesap Institute," the little headline declared. The rest of the story was background. A fire chief had declined to comment on the cause of the fire promising only that a complete investigation would be made. Then, in the suggestive way used by some reporters, the story quoted the fireman as saying it was too early to rule out arson.

As Nye stared thoughtfully at the paper, he was interrupted by his secretary who called from the doorway, "Mr. Turne is here, sir."

"That was quick," he said.

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Nye, I believe he was already on the way over here when I called his office and left your message. Shall I have him come in?"

"Sure. Send him in."

Almost immediately, Nye was joined by another man who came in carrying a mug of coffee. Squat and burly, the Chief Executive Officer of Turne Engineering, Burl Turne, had eaten his way into a shape that challenged and very nearly defeated clothing manufacturers. His oversized shirts always seemed stretched to their limits, suit coats were never large enough, and the waistband of Nye's trousers was saved only by an extra wide leather, western style belt which was almost hidden from view by the overhang.

"Did you read the story about Kreesap?" asked Nye. The lack of formality and the fact that neither he nor Turne made a pretense of going through the rituals of greeting one another suggested that the two men met frequently.

Turne, with his cup of coffee, seemed quite at home, "The lab thing? Yeah."

Still gazing at the newspaper, Nye said softly, "Too bad." But his voice carried not a shred of sympathy. "It looks like Porchee Porr'll be out of business for a while."

"I'll cry later," promised Turne.

"We'll both cry if we don't get a chunk of that Blue Mesa contract," Nye promised. "But this," pointing at the news story, "gives us

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some help. At least it takes Kreesap out of the running." Looking carefully at Turne and smiling, he added, "It somehow comes at just the right time."

"Maybe," grumped Turne.

The tone caught Nye's attention. "Maybe? You sound like you don't agree."

"I'm not sure I do. Martin, our design people are telling me that we're having a hell of a time getting enough testing data to meet schedules."

Nye, the Director of Lipscomb Atmosphericics, came up straight in his chair. "Now wait just a damn minute, Burl. We've given your people more test data than ever before. If your engineers aren't up to handling it, don't come in here bitching at us."

"Oh, put a lid on it, Martin. Maybe I said it the wrong way. We're getting plenty of data, but it isn't the kind of stuff we need. If we're going to meet the deadlines to get bids in for Blue Mesa, we've got to solve some problems in a hurry. That's why I said I wasn't sure I thought the Kreesap fire was any great help."

"I don't see the connection," scowled Nye, still smarting from what he felt was a slap at his research group.

"Look, we know that Blue Mesa is the largest power plant to be built in the last ten years and we have to get a part of the action or Turne Engineering and Lipscomb both are in serious trouble. We're chasing our tails trying to put a bid together, but we keep bumping up against design problems."

"So?" Nye's tone indicated he was still suspicious of where Turne was going with his argument.

"So we know from the flyer that came out of Kreesap a couple of weeks ago that they may have solved some of our basic problems. Remember our talk about that? We agreed that if Kreesap has the data to back up their claims, they have made an honest to God breakthrough with a low pressure combustion system. That tells me that Kreesap is in line to do the engineering on those fire chambers instead of us."

"That still sounds like it's to our advantage to have Porr and his outfit out of the way," insisted Nye.

"They may be out of the running for the Blue Mesa engineering work," explained Turne, "but from the looks of that story, their data may have gone up in the fire. Think about it, Martin. Their loss is our loss. If you remember, we had been talking about a joint bid with Kreesap, and it was a good idea. With the data I think they had, we could have made that

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bidding deadline easy. But now any hope of working with them probably has gone up in smoke."

Nye toyed with the newspaper and finally folded it up. Then, pulling at his ear lobe, he asked, "Burl, what would we give to get our hands on Kreesap's data?"

"Are you talking about Pringle's low pressure combustion formulas?" asked Turne staring at his business associate.

"Yes. I'm talking about the preliminary work that Pringle did. The kind of stuff Kreesap hinted at in the little blurb they circulated a couple of weeks ago."

"Who's offering to sell it?"

Nye waved the question aside, "Don't worry about that now. Let's talk about whether we want the information. From what I understand, Pringle had done a fair amount of lab work to get to where Kreesap would go public. As I remember, they were planning on doing more work in the next couple of months. It may have even been some of Pringle's gas bottles that went up in the fire. But before the fire, Pringle must have written a series of equations, heat balances, and chemical reaction formulas. My guess is that they all support Kreesap's claims of more efficient burning of fossil fuels. That means less pollution and that's the key to everything these days."

Turne was getting excited, "Exactly, Martin, that's the very thing I was just talking about, a joint bid with Kreesap. In fact, some of my engineers were talking about that sales brochure just the other day, and they agreed that Pringle was on to something. And I'd bet a two foot piece of shiny new steam pipe that if we had Pringle's notes and data we could beat Fossil Tech's bid on the burners. But what about the fire?"

Ignoring Turne's question, Nye said, "We'd have to pay, and we might not be dealing with what you'd call an elegant gentleman."

Turne's beefy face became a study of concern. His face reddened and the color spread down to the folds of flesh which hung over his collar. "Martin, I don't want to get involved in something dirty. If we're talking about buying stolen research data, I'm not sure. In fact, I don't think I want any part of that kind of business."

"But you would like to have what Pringle had put together?" insisted Nye.

"No doubt about that," conceded Turne. "It could mean getting that Blue Mesa contract. And it's like I was saying, if we don't get some of the Blue Mesa work, we'll have to do some cutting back. Not getting in on Blue Mesa will probably mean skimping on everything and going

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back to doing odd jobs, the kind of stuff we started doing, replacing old boilers and installing new ones here and there. But that might be better than dealing with the kind of people I think you're talking about."

Nye was unrelenting. His thin face was intense, and he was leaning forward across the desk, staring at Turne. "Would you use the data if you had it without asking questions about where it came from?"

Turne hesitated as he struggled with his conscience. Finally, he looked into the bottom of his coffee cup, as though he expected to find an answer there. He hedged. "I suppose if it came to me, and I didn't really know the source, there wouldn't be anything wrong with using it. But, jeez, Martin, I don't know. The way you put the question, I have the feeling you know something I don't want to know."

Nye's response was cut off before the words could come out of his mouth. The sharp buzz of his telephone instantly brought his hand to the intercom button. "Yes?"

"There are two police officers here, Mr. Nye. They said they want to talk to both you and Mr. Turne."

Turne looked as though his thick body was about to catapult itself up and out of the room like a great human cannonball. "The police?" he whispered, his voice husky and thick. "You didn't..."

He was cut off by a sharp shake of Nye's head. To his intercom, Nye said, "Just a minute." Jabbing the off button, Nye's face suddenly became hard and his eyes blazed fiercely at Turne. "Christ, Burl! They might have been standing right there by the desk. What would that little hissy of yours sound like to them?"

"Okay, maybe I shouldn't have said anything, but why would the police be here wanting to talk to the both of us?"

"Damned if I know," said Nye, "but we don't have a choice. We've got to talk to them."

Turne's eyes blinked rapidly and he licked his lips, "I don't like this, Martin."

"Neither do I," shot back Nye, "but get a hold of yourself and stop acting like you'd just robbed Fort Knox. Okay?"

Taking a deep breath, Turne bobbed his head, "Okay."

Ribbley and Munro displayed their badges and gave their names as they looked from one man to the other. Speaking to Turne, Munro said, "I guess we're starting the day out right. We were on our way to your office, but when I called ahead on our car phone, your secretary told me you were here with Mr. Nye. He's also on our list of people to see, so we came directly here."

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Ribbley's quick gaze around the office of the Director of Lipscomb Atmospheric told him that its occupant was decidedly not given to worrying about decor. Either that or simple economic necessity had left Nye's office in spartan condition. Ribbley found himself comparing it with Porr's office at the Kreesap Institute. Here, everything looked as though it had come from one of the discount furniture warehouses along Interstate 25. Nye's walls supported only modest prints which were stark contrasts to the Flemish oils in Porr's office. Nye's desk and credenza were veneer, thousands of dollars removed from Porr's desk of solid walnut. Ribbley also noted that the sofa was an Acey special, not to be mentioned in the same breath with a DeHines. There was lots of blue on the walls, in the furniture covering, and even on the floor, and Ribbley wondered if the decorator had vaguely tried to convey the idea of the atmosphere in keeping with the firm name.

Munro began by asking if either had seen the story in the morning paper about the fire at the Institute. As she asked, she looked at the folded Rocky Mountain News on Nye's desk.

Speaking as if it were an incidental thing about which he had just been reminded, Nye spoke first, "Why, yes, Sergeant. I did notice that piece about Kreesap. Damned unlucky blow for Porr and his group."

Munro looked at Turne, eyebrows raised. She clearly was waiting for his response. With a rush he said, "Me, too. I mean, yes, I read the story. It looked pretty awful."

"I understand that Lipscomb Atmospheric has a research program along the same lines as Kreesap," Munro said, looking at Nye, "specifically in the area of fossil fuel combustion."

"As a matter of fact we do," said Nye smoothly, "of course, there are some differences in approach and in emphasis. But naturally, we at Lipscomb feel our program is the better one of the two."

"Naturally," agreed Munro, "but didn't Kreesap recently announce a proposed research program that was innovative and ahead of your own program and that of Fossil Tech?"

"Sergeant," replied Nye, speaking patiently as one would to a lay person, "in our field, as in all research fields, companies are making new claims almost daily. It's a way of doing business. Such claims are as much sales puff as they are science."

"But you do read the flyers and brochures that are passed around?" Munro asked.

"Do I keep up?" he laughed. "Believe me, it's keep up to date or perish in this business."

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Bluntly, and without any preliminary statement, Ribbley cut into the sparring, "Then you did read the proposal for research on low pressure combustion? The one based on work being done by Pringle?"

"I do remember that one," Nye admitted.

"And was it innovative and promising or has everyone else we've talked to been lying?" demanded Ribbley.

Nye began to show signs that he was uncomfortable under the Ribbley pressure. His face lost some of its self assured smugness. His eyes darted away for an instant, and he shifted in his chair. "Promising, Detective, is anybody's word. What is promising to one may not be so to another." Feeling Ribbley's probing eyes, he continued, "but, for want of a better term, I guess I'd accept that one."

"I believe that's what Sergeant Munro was asking you," said Ribbley in a tired voice which suggested that Nye had simply been wasting everyone's time. With that, Ribbley leaned back, seeming to turn the questioning back to Munro.

"Would the background information that Dr. Pringle had collected in putting his proposal together be useful to other firms in the business," she asked.

Not wanting to go another fall with Ribbley, Nye's answer was directly to the point, "Yes. If the claims Pringle made could be supported, that information would be useful to Fossil Tech, perhaps even to us."

Munro abruptly switched subjects. "Did either of you know Dr. Pringle?"

"Professionally, only," admitted Turne.

"Yes. I know, Otis," said Nye, "but it is as Burl said, on a limited and strictly professional basis. He is not an easy man to deal with. But I would imagine you already know that if you've talked to him."

Again, Ribbley abruptly stepped into the conversation. "Do either of you know why someone would want to murder Pringle?"

"Murder him?" blurted Turne, very nearly slopping coffee on his straining shirtfront. "Are you saying Dr. Pringle is dead?"

"That's the usual result of murder," Ribbley quipped, watching their faces. "I believe his death was noted in the newspapers, but it was pretty well hidden."

"How... Why would...?" Turne stammered, searching for words.

"How," said Munro, echoing Turne's question, "was by a severe blow to the head. Why, is the reason we're here. We're trying to find out

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if someone might have murdered Dr. Pringle while they were trying to steal his research data."

"Are you suggesting that one of us might have had something to do with his death?" asked Nye, his voice strained and angry.

Ribbley seemed to grow more and more relaxed as the two executives grew more tense. In an easy, almost friendly way, he replied, "Mr. Nye, nobody has accused anyone of a crime. We came here hoping you would be willing to help us with information. We're up to our necks in some pretty technical jargon. Believe me we need all the help we can get, and where better to go than to experts?"

Nye seemed to accept the assurance, but Turne, nearly in shock, was still reacting to the word, "murder." His round eyed stare at Ribbley and Munro gave him the appearance of being permanently frozen in place. Sensing that Turne's all too obvious freeze needed to be managed and that Nye's anger required some further cooling, Munro began to put the conversation back together with a brief explanation of how Pringle had been killed.

After a few routine questions and comments, she began to get some cooperation from Nye and began to see signs of life in Turne. Going on, she explored their combustion research program. She methodically probed about work they were doing. It was Turne who first mentioned their hopes for work on the Blue Mesa plant.

"Blue Mesa. What's that?" she asked.

Nye explained how the Blue Mesa plant would burn a special coal slurry and how it would require specially designed combustion chambers. With his confidence returning, Nye revealed their plans to submit a bid that, "would outclass Fossil Tech."

Again looking at both men, Munro asked, "How would Kreesap figure into the Blue Mesa plant?"

"Anything I could say would be a guess," said Nye. Then feeling Ribbley eyes bearing down on him, he added, "But Porr will probably be bidding on doing design work for the company."

"And would Pringle have figured into that bid?" she asked.

"As I said, Sergeant," replied Nye, "our relationship with Dr. Pringle was, to put it fairly, distant. Professionally distant. But from what I hear and from what I have seen of Kreesap's work, Pringle was the technical brain behind all of Kreesap's combustion work. So he would have definitely figured into Kreesap's plan to do some design work and technical consulting on the Blue Mesa project."

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As his business partner spoke of Pringle, Turne's vacant stare showed signs of returning. Munro decided she would have the most success with Nye. "Mr. Nye, your firm, Lipscomb Atmospheric is a research operation. You should have an opinion on this. Will the loss of Dr. Pringle eliminate Kreesap from competition for the Blue Mesa engineering work?"

"Probably," replied Nye, nervously.

"How about the fire?" asked Munro. "If it destroyed some of the research labs, would that impact Kreesap's bid on the Blue Mesa job?"

"It's simply not possible for me to say," replied Nye, giving Ribbley a nervous look, "I have only the newspaper story to go on, and that's pretty general. I could only guess that any major fire would be a serious blow to Kreesap, whatever it might be doing."

"Who is Blue Mesa?" Ribbley's question was fired directly at Nye.

"Who...?" he began, speaking almost involuntarily. Recovering, he said, "He is. I mean it is a group. A coal company, a slurry pipeline and General Western Power."

For the next few minutes, Nye outlined the plans for the new, super size fossil fuel plant. He explained that the designers and planners were in agreement that getting the plant licensed would depend on the efficiency of the gigantic combustion apparatus that would be required to heat the huge boilers. Nye explained that in this key area the competition was fierce and getting in on the Blue Mesa work was a matter of survival of the most clever, the most innovative, and the most aggressive.

Finally, seeming to have heard enough about power generating plants, Ribbley closed off the discussion. Coming to his feet, he towered over Turne. Peering down at the engineer, the detective gave him a powerfully official and suspicious look.

Turne suddenly couldn't find a place to put his hands, so he reached for his coffee mug. His eyes shifted from East to West and back again and, not finding a place to stop, they glazed over and almost closed. His mouth couldn't find anything to say, so he smiled and merely managed to look guilty.

Nye and Munro also rose. While Munro gave him a card and reminded him to call if he had questions, Ribbley continued to stare at Turne. Then, he offered his card to Turne, "The name is Ribbley, Mr. Turne. I'd like to thank you for your cooperation and for taking the time to talk to us. Homicide," he put heavy emphasis on the word,

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"investigations are never pleasant for those who are involved. We'll be in touch."

With a perfunctory "thank you," to Nye, Ribbley turned and took his homicide investigation out of the office. The responsible officers of Lipscome Atmospherics and Turne Engineering remained standing where he had left them, each holding the calling card of the Denver Metro Police Department.

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Over iced tea at every policeman's favorite cafe, "Molly's," Ribbley deliberately opened a blue packet of "Sweetly," and tapped it into his glass of iced tea. Munro had opted for Pepsi and watched the sweetening operation as she might have watched a laboratory experiment.

Ribbley folded the empty packet, deposited it in the ashtray and began stirring his tea, crushing the lemon slice against the side of the glass with his spoon. "You know, Les, this is much better for you than those sweet colas. Especially in this damned heat."

"Says who?" she countered.

"I read it somewhere. I don't remember where, but it was a very technical piece on how drinks sweetened with sugar did something to your blood. If I were you, I'd definitely taper off."

"Taper off, sounds like advice to a smoker, Ribbley."

"It's the same principle. Using sugar is a habit just like using tobacco. I believe it was Descartes who said 'Habit is the false mirror of spiritual impulse.' I'd think about that Les."

"That right?" Munro asked, sipping on her Pepsi and somehow passing on the opportunity of taking notes on either Ribbley or Descartes.

They sat for a time in silence. Sitting on a high shelf behind Molly's counter, a small radio passed from what was supposed to be a western song to commercial, and finally went on to the weather forecast that it had been promising for over ten minutes. Molly reached up and turned up the volume leaving Ribbley and Munro no choice but to listen.

"Hot is the only word for the weather throughout the State of Colorado," began the announcer, "Here at KDMA weather central, the temperature is ninety eight. That's right folks, a record setting ninety eight degrees and that's before ten A.M. Denver and the Front Range is not suffering alone though. Other cities throughout the nation are reporting record temperatures. San Diego's high yesterday was one hundred and two degrees, and it should make us here in Colorado feel cool to hear that Oklahoma City is already reporting one hundred eleven degrees, and that's the sixty fourth consecutive day over one hundred for that city. The list goes on and nearly every part of the nations is sweating out the longest and hottest fall weather on record. Meteorologists say the steering currents, or the jet stream, seems sluggish and shows no signs of changing. Usually, by this time of the year, Mid-October, we here in

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Colorado are seeing much cold nights and the beginning of Indian summer. But, with no fronts coming in from the Northwest, this spell of dry heat will go on for at least the next five days, and after that, who knows?"

Molly swore as she reached up and turned the volume down. "More tea?" she called to Ribbley.

"No, I'm fine."

"Did you hear that weather report?" she asked. "By God, if there was a cool place left in the country, I'd shut this place down and go."

"And I'd go with you," joked Ribbley. "Maybe we ought to try Montana. There's bound to be a cool place up there. My granddaddy lived up there, on the Missouri River."

"Is that so?" Molly asked in the way of one who has heard a story before, "What'd he do? Play detective, too, and hunt down horse thieves?"

"Had a ferry business. He hauled wagons and stuff across the river. This heat makes me think a swim in that river right now would feel pretty damn good."

"Unless the river water has gotten hot," laughed Molly walking off with her coffee pot in search of cups needing refills.

After a moment during which neither spoke, Ribbley said, "You know, Les, Turne and Nye could be holding back on us. I can't figure what or why, but I'd almost put money on it. That sausage, Turne looked like he was about to split his skin."

"I know," agreed Munro.

"But they really were surprised to hear about Pringle."

"And surprised to hear you were a homicide detective. You know, Ribbley, I always thought you were supposed to announce to people that you're from homicide when you first meet them."

"I do," he said looking surprised.

"I mean right away, not half way through an interview."

The sharp tone of Munro's beeper interrupted them. Quickly, she pulled it from her coat pocket and pushed the tiny switch turning it off. "Damn," she exclaimed, "Do you suppose we're getting another flash from Banner?"

"Pay the lady," called Ribbley over his shoulder as he headed for the door of the diner.

By the time Munro climbed into the car, Ribbley had the microphone in his hand, "This is Unit H043, Dispatch. You have a call for us?"

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"Wait one, H043."

The air in the police car was blistering. "Start the damn car," he ordered.

"H043, call H001 on tac 6."

"Copy," frowned Ribbley.

Quickly he set the radio and spoke into the microphone, "Unit H001 this is 43, over."

"Ribbley," the static couldn't disguise the voice, "this is Banner. Your Kreesap case has taken a very nasty turn. Code 3 over to 44321 Casmun Drive. We've got a couple of bodies here, and they have the uglies, the bloody uglies. And, Ribbley, get your beeper fixed. I had to call through Munro's number to get you. You should have picked up on this and been here a half an hour ago."

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As if posed for some grotesque wax works or for a photographic display, the bodies of Bernie Finn and Colleague were sitting as they had been found by a neighbor. Bernie sat slumped in a chair facing his computer, his head thrown back, his eyes staring lifelessly at the ceiling as though shocked by some ghastly electronic message the machine had imparted. The angry red bullet hole, on his left temple suggested the reason for the rude departure of his life. The absence of a large portion of the right side of his head left little doubt that the passage of life had been by gunshot.

Colleague was, as a colleague should be, nearby. And appropriately, he had on his head a matching hole on the left and a bullet exit crater on the right. He, too, was sitting in a chair, but unlike Bernie's fixation on the ceiling, Colleague's head was inclined forward as though he had been studying the pattern of the carpet.

As blood will when set loose from the body, it had splattered itself in grim patterns on the right sides of both men. Other grisly parts of skull and tissue decorated the wall, the chairs, the floor and a stack of green lined computer papers piled on a nearby table.

"Now we know why they hadn't come to work this morning when we drove by," said Ribbley. "Did you get anything from the neighbors?"

"Naw," said Banner, "they've taken the landlady to the hospital. She was asked to ID them, but after one look she got the screaming mee mees. When they took her away she didn't even know her own name. Another neighbor heard her yowling and came over. She isn't much better off. So the neighbors are zilch."

"I'll bet neither one of them heard or saw a thing," mused Ribbley, "this job was paid for, and it was high class talent."

Bending over to examine the adhesive tape on Colleague's wrists, Banner, grunted something that sounded like agreement. "Why do you suppose the other guy's wrists weren't taped?" he wondered, looking at Bernie's hands which hung by his sides.

"I'd guess their visitor had him working the computer," reasoned Munro who was looking into at the central processing unit, at the disk drives and at the odds and ends piled around the work area.

"Tell me, Ned," said Ribbley, "if the neighbors didn't hear anything, who called it in and how did you make a connection between these killings and the Pringle case?"

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"Easy. The answer to both questions is the dead guy. He called it in and he told us his murder was connected to the Pringle killing."

Banner obviously enjoyed Ribbley's puzzled stare. Since the smiling Banner seemed content to let the suspense hang in the air for a while, Ribbley filled the silence with cynical agreement, "Sure, Ned, and did he tell you who shot him? I'll bet he collared the guy for us, too."

"Ribbley," said Banner, "you're going to have to join the rest of us in the electronic age." Surveying the puzzled detective as though he were a specimen from an earlier time, Banner pressed on with this gentle ridicule. "Yessir, you need to become an up to date cop like me. A keyboard cop. Isn't that what you called me? A keyboard cop? That's what I heard from the boys in the squad room."

"The boys in the squad room have big mouths," growled Ribbley. "Now climb off your perch and tell me what the hell you're talking about."

With a short laugh, Banner reached into his pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper which he handed to Ribbley. The distinctive line of holes immediately identified it as computer paper whose edges hadn't been stripped off. Unfolding it, Ribbley saw the brief, neatly typed message, "Code 7- 44321 Casmun Drive. Intruder demanding Pringle data..."

"You got this from your computer?" asked Ribbley.

"It came in to the computer center by way of their modem."

Munro, who had taken the message and looked at it, exclaimed, "I'll be damned! Bernie typed a Code 7- officer needs help- along with his address into his computer and then sent it by telephone to the tap tap center."

"Yeah," agreed Banner, "it was at least three, maybe four hours, before the computer room saw the incoming and called dispatch. Their incoming is never priority and is only picked up a few times a day. If we'd been a little faster or if Bernie had been able to send his message directly to dispatch, we might have gotten here in time."

"Hey Lieutenant," called one of the ambulance attendants, "this looks like something you should see."

The attendants had been in the process of putting Bernie and Colleague on stretchers for removal from the room. They had been lifting Bernie from the chair when they called to Banner. There on the cushion was a computer disk.

"He was sitting on it, Lieutenant," explained the attendant. "It was squarely under his butt. He must have been hiding it."

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Carefully, Banner lifted the disk and placed it in a clear evidence bag. Banner then held the bag up for inspection. Scrawled on the disk's identification label was the word "Munro." Banner put the bag on a table which had been cleared to hold items of interest to the investigation. "I'd say that our guy, Finn, did everything he could to help us out. It looks to me like he held out on the killer. It might even have cost him and Colleague their lives."

"But why these guys?" asked Munro. "Nobody knew they had worked on Pringle's disks except Ribbley, me, the supervisor in the computer room, and you, Lieutenant."

"And Professor Liss," added Ribbley.

"But we didn't give him any names," countered Munro. "I only told him it was some guy in our tap tap group. That gives him a an identification within a hundred or so people. Besides, I have a problem thinking that Professor Liss would be capable of a double murder."

"That's all very interesting," put in Banner, "but it doesn't get to the real question."

"Don't tell me," interrupted Ribbley, "I can guess. It's the same question we've been chasing around since this thing started. What was on Pringle's disk that would start this crime wave?"

"Any ideas yet?" asked Banner.

"One, but it's thin," replied Ribbley. As he spoke, he walked over to the stack of computer paper. Without touching it, he peered at the top, blood spattered sheet. Seeming to forget his suggestive comment to Banner, Ribbley shifted his attention to the printer and the wide sheet of paper protruding from its roller mechanism. "Damn things," he muttered, "Printers, computers, displays. You're right, Ned, it's a whole different world than what we grew up in." He added in a reflective way, "And I suppose the world is changing a helluva lot faster than I am."

Banner mopped the sweat from his forehead and looked around seeming to be looking for the heat that was already building up in the little room. He looked at the open door through which the coroner's people and the lab people were moving with their equipment and investigatory devices. "Yeah, it is. Things are a helluva lot different than when we were rookies. For a couple of flatfoots like us to be chasing some electronic question is something like putting a couple of old Ford pickups on a racetrack with formula one race cars."

"That's quite a comparison, Ned," chuckled Ribbley, "but it's pretty close to the mark. When I see all these electronic gadgets and hear all this computer talk, I think of old Chief Pony Walks."

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"Chief who?" asked Banner. He spoke before he thought and immediately knew he had done the wrong thing. From experience, he knew that Ribbley was a history buff and was especially full of information about Montana Territory.

"Chief who?" echoed Ribbley with a pained expression, "Ned, you surprise me. Chief Pony Walks was one of the greatest of the great Indian chiefs. He organized the counsel of the three walkman tribes and was the spokesman for them. In fact, he was the most influential Indian leader in the Montana and Dakota territories for thirty years."

Hoping to get his detective back on track, Banner stepped into a pause to ask, "What was it that reminded you of the Chief?"

The guidance seemed to have the desired effect. Ribbley rubbed his jaw and spoke reflectively. "All these electronic gadgets make me think of a comment by the Chief. One day while he was visiting Fort Benton, the army people explained the telegraph to him and how messages came from Washington, D.C. with orders and instructions for the Army."

"And?" prompted Banner, curious despite his wish to get back to business.

"Well, the old Chief listened politely until they asked him what he thought. He looked at the whole setup and said, 'I do not trust your Chief Long Wire. He has no eyes to see where he leads, and he has no heart to feel for his people.' That pretty says it all for me, Ned. Chemistry, computers, scientific data it's all too spiffy for me, and I don't like the idea of a computer telling me what to do."

This time, Banner was wise enough to withhold comment. He watched Ribbley pick up the incidental items of Bernie Finn's life and examine them before putting them down. The ambling detective peered at the large posters on the wall, one of which caught and held his attention for a long moment. It was a photograph of a powerful, gleaming motorcycle apparently at full throttle on an empty freeway. The view was from the rear and the rider's back was to the viewer. Except for the glistening chrome, the bike, the road, even the sky were in dark shades, but strapped to the seat behind the rider was a stark white computer. On the screen, in small green letters were the words, "Invalid Command. Retry? Abort?" Nodding approval, Ribbley said, "Pretty good for a wall poster. It makes me wish I'd known Bernie Finn better. He had guts."

Banner was content to wait. He knew from experience that Ribbley would not be rushed. He also reasoned that with the obvious Kreesap connection, this was Ribbley's case. Yet, he knew the murder of

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two department employee would bring lots of questions and pressure from higher levels.

"Ned, I agreed with you that the wonders of the new world are, to paraphrase the poet, 'too much with us, late and soon,' but I think there's hope for us. We need to remember that, wonders of the new world aside, the grim things we see usually come down to sheer damn meanness of some people coupled with a dose of greed."

Ribbley stopped and picked up a heavy bronze ashtray and smelled its dirty contents. Raising his eyebrows, he stared at the brown paper butts of two hand rolled cigarettes, then conspicuously carried the ashtray to the evidence table and put it with the growing assortment of items being laid there by the lab team.

Continuing with his rambling commentary, Ribbley looked at Banner, "You ask if we had a lead. I guess we do. I'm not comfortable with it, but we heard from a couple of Colorado's leading businessmen about a new power plant that's being planned. It's called Blue Mesa. Apparently its going to be a giant coal burner, a lalapalooza. From what I hear, it's one that will make an environmentalist's knees weak just thinking about the hell that can be raised about it. It seems that Pringle's research data would be valuable to the companies that are looking to get a piece of the action of designing and building the plant. That sounds a lot like motive to me."

"You want me to give you some more manpower?" asked Banner.

"Not yet. I know you'll be getting pressure because of Bernie and Colleague here, and the big gentlemen upstairs will be wanting some answers."

"It's nothing new," shrugged Banner. "I can handle it for now, but I'll have to have something to give them pretty soon. Just keep me up to speed, point by point. And give me something, anything, as soon as you can."

"I can't ask for more than that," said Ribbley.

"Lieutenant, we've got an appointment with Professor Liss at eleven," said Munro, "would it be alright if we took this CPU and the disk Bernie was holding?"

"It's your case, Munro. So far, I'm just an interested spectator."

While Ribbley continued to prowl through the apartment, Munro had a lab technician mark the CPU. The two of them unhooked it from a maze of wires, and the lab man carried the metal box outside to put it into the police car. When the coroner's crew asked permission to leave

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with the bodies, Ribbley interrupted his poking, lifting, and peering long enough to give his approval.

Stopping by the computer work area and pointing at the telephone, Ribbley called to one of the lab workers, "This been dusted and photographed, Red?"

"Yep," called a man who had so little hair that the name "Red" must have been applied to him at a much earlier time in his life. "We're almost finished with the first go around. In fact, we can lock up anytime. The detail guys can come out this afternoon and finish up."

The pace of the poke-around finally slowed. It seemed clear that Bernie and Colleague had shared the apartment and, judging from the massive amounts of paper stacked around the apartment, that the two had indeed been spending lots of time with the computer. Otherwise, the place was unremarkable and routine.

"Ned, we've got to go, if we're going to keep our appointment with Munro's Professor," Ribbley said, giving the room a last look.

"Sure go ahead. I'll stay here while they tag the exhibits and close the place," volunteered Banner. "It shouldn't take long. I think Bernie and Colleague took more with them than they left behind."

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The eleven o'clock rush to classes had cleared the hallway by the time Ribbley and Munro reached the door of Liss's office. Munro knocked and they were immediately greeted by Liss himself. Ribbley had the fleeting suspicion that the Professor had been lurking just inside, anticipating her return.

Stroking his pointed beard, Liss savored the appearance of Munro in her slacks and a form fitting sport coat. "Sergeant Munro, it's good to see you again. And, of course, Detective Ribbley, please come in and have a seat."

"I'm afraid we're running late," apologized Munro, "we were interrupted with a call."

"Don't give it a thought. I've had my own digressions this morning. I've had students in and out of here all morning, the Department Chairman called a committee meeting to discuss replacement of some of our interface equipment, and I've had a swarm of telephone calls."

"Seeing how busy you are, Professor," said Munro, "I hesitate to impose on you for some more assistance. But we do have a new problem, related to our computer case. I hope we can count on you to give us some more of your time?"

Ribbley knew before Liss spoke that he would be eager to help Munro. The glint, the smile, the incline of the head, the professorial stroking of the Lenin beard combined to convey the message that the powerfully minded professor would be delighted to assist the helpless young policewoman. In fact, Ribbley admitted to himself that if she had looked at him the same way, he would have agreed to do her a favor as quickly as Liss had.

Munro explained, without mentioning the killings, that she had brought a CPU that had been used to work on the Pringle disk. She told Liss that the machine contained a hard disk and on the chance it might assist him, she had brought it along for him to examine. Munro saved the blood stained disk that had been found under Bernie until she had Liss nodding agreement. Handing it to him, she said, "We're guessing this disk is simply a copy of the one you already have. Of course, if it's different in any way let us know."

If Liss wondered at the story, he said nothing. Instead, blinking interest through his super clean lenses, he assured them that the unit might be useful and agreed to examine it. "And the CPU is...?" he asked.

"In the car," said Munro.

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Ribbley pushed himself up out of his seat, "Save your strength, Sergeant, I'll get the damn thing."

Going out the double glass doors of the entryway to the building, Ribbley almost collided with two men coming into the building. They were talking and didn't seem to notice him, but he gave them a long look. They were conspicuously not students, and they seemed to be unfamiliar with the building. As he watched, they disappeared into the office of the Chairman of the Department.

The heat outside was bearing down, and Ribbley lifted the lapels of his coat fanning air against his body. The gesture made him think back on the two he had just met, and he had the vague thought the two might even have been armed, since they, too, had been wearing coats. Ribbley paused. "Jeez" he said to himself, "I'm getting paranoid."

He made his way to the car which was on the far side of the lot in visitors' parking and fished out his keys. Inserting them in the trunk lock, he jerked back from touching the metal. "Goddamn," he spat out flopping his hand from the burn, "Munro and her computer. I'll make her pay for hauling this junk over here."

After struggling his way back through the awkward door, Ribbley welcomed the cool of the corridor. He paused at Liss's door preparing to tap it with his foot. Then he froze. Through the frosted glass he could see two figures standing, and in the silence of the hallway, he could hear loud voices. Quickly, he stepped away and put the CPU down on the tile floor.

His service revolver appeared in his hand as he flattened himself against the wall and slid back to the door. "The broad's a cop," said a voice, "a diddly, piddly cop."

"Too bad," said another, "she's kinda cute. Too cute to be a sow pig. Maybe I ought to pat her down myself. Maybe I will when we finish with Franklin here."

Apparently Liss said something. One of the figures reacted loudly, "I won't say it again, Sport, give me Pringle's disk, now or I'll start shaving you with this blade. And you better remember, I ain't no barber."

There was a scuffling noise, and Ribbley could hear something falling. "Now don't be cute, Professor. You've got one chance of leaving this office alive and that's giving me that damn disk you were playing with on the computer last night. Be quick about it."

Ribbley guessed that at least one of the intruders was holding a gun. He reasoned they had found Munro's badge folder or her gun, but in

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any event, he couldn't plan on her being armed. Recalling the interior of the office, he could visualize Liss's desk which was off the left. The guest chairs facing it were placed so that one was near the bookshelf and the other closer to the door. He could see the shadow of one man's back near the glass, but he couldn't place the other one.

For the moment, the hall was empty, but there was no way of knowing how long that would last. Ribbley told himself that he didn't need the complication of a mob of students, and if the men inside were professionals, and he guessed they were, he didn't have much time. They wouldn't risk themselves in a public building for long.

Sliding a few steps back down the hall and away from the door, Ribbley stuck his revolver in his belt and picked up the CPU and hefted it, feeling its weight. It probably weighed thirty, maybe forty pounds. Its sturdy metal, designed to protect the delicate interior, gave the feel of being solid and strong. Holding it away from his body so it would not hit his gun, he moved back to the door. Seeing that the shadow had not moved from where it had been standing, Ribbley gave the CPU a strong heave, sending it crashing through the glass.

Even as the glass shattered, Ribbley pulled his service revolver and leaned in through the broken frame. The computer box had hit one man square in the back, and he had gone down on his face. The other dropped a knife and, as he turned to face Ribbley, he clawed at his pocket.

"Freeze!" Ribbley ordered. As he spoke, he watched the man's hand find a weapon. Ribbley called again, "Freeze, damnit!"

Then the man who had refused to freeze died from two shots in his chest. He was dead even as his automatic clattered on the desk for an instant and then rattled to the floor. The gunman's body slammed back into the red, blue, and brown books on Liss's shelves, hate flooding from his eyes. As he slid to the floor, a dying grunt, perhaps a final curse at the world, slid out of his mouth, but the sound ended in a sputter of blood.

Ribbley swung in the direction of the man on the floor. From where he lay, he had tried to roll, but was slow in moving. The CPU had apparently broken something in his back and he could only gasp for breath. Still, he managed to push himself to his side where he could raise a snub nose revolver. He screamed as Ribbley put a bullet in his shoulder.

Munro was instantly on her feet. She snatched away his gun, and, with a quick angry gesture, she pulled her own from his belt. Liss,

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uninjured, was wide-eyed and eagle spread against the wall of books. He stared down at the dead man and the widening pool of blood.

Shoving the broken door open, Ribbley stepped inside. Jerking his thumb over his shoulder he snapped, "Crowd control, Les. We'll have a herd of people out there. I'll call it in."

Ribbley straightened Liss's chair and pushed it in his direction. "Here, Professor, sit down before you fall down."

Picking up the phone he asked, "Nine to get an outside line?"

Sinking into the chair, Liss only partially understood the question. "Nine? Oh, yes, nine."

"Dispatch this is H043. Shots fired. Roll a black and white, code 3, to the DU campus, the Nunly Building on central circle. We'll need an ambulance. We have one back injury and a shoulder wound, one dead at the scene. File this under Kreesap as a hot report."

Ribbley grimly smiled to himself as he thought of Banner's face when he looked at his precious computer screen and saw another hot Kreesap report. But this time, Ribbley told himself, they'd be able to tell Banner they had a live lead.

Satisfying himself that Liss was beginning to recover from his shock, Ribbley stepped over to the wounded man. Kneeling, he checked the shoulder wound. It was messy and he guessed the bone was shattered. As he rigged a pressure pad over the wound, Ribbley noted the man's clothes were very expensive. Rolex watch and a one hundred plus dollars necktie.

Munro called from the doorway. "Ribbley, my badge. It's probably in his coat pocket."

He found the leather folder and tossed it to her. He also found a folded piece of paper with the words "Nunly Bldg. Den. Univ. Prof. Franklin Liss. Comp. Sci." scrawled on it. The paper was from a notepad which bore the emblem of the Westin Hotel. Ribbley also used the moment to withdraw the man's wallet from his inside coat pocket. He took a moment to briefly examine his find.

As the initial pain subsided and the shock passed, the wounded man moaned and struggled to pull air into his lungs. It was obviously painful, but as his awareness returned, he began to look around. "Should have taken up another line of work, Gates," said Ribbley. "If that's your name."

Moaning with almost every breath, the man stared up at him. "Go take a flying leap, cop."

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"Oh, my. So you're one of those," said Ribbley wearily, "a real bad ass. Well Mr. Bad Guy, you'd better be bad while you can, because I don't think your employers will think you're such a roaring, hell walking grizzly when they find out you cooperated with the police."

"Cooperated," he ground out, "what the hell are you talking about?" Ribbley's comment had surprised him, and he was instantly wary. Yet the confusion in his eyes was apparent.

Ribbley smiled. "Your pal is out in the hall with my partner, giving her writer's cramp he's talking so fast. The way he tells it, killing those two computer guys was your idea. He says you pulled the trigger on both of them."

"Bull," the man blurted, still confused and blocked from seeing anything in the office past the bulk of the large detective.

Ribbley interrupted him, "Hey don't talk. You may break something loose inside and bleed to death before the ambulance gets here. Besides, I haven't read you your rights." In a deliberate way, that might have been seen by some as slow, Ribbley fumbled open his badge folder and squinted at it. He then proceeded to read the Miranda warning.

With a cough that brought a gasp of pain, Ribbley's prisoner nearly fainted. His eyes fluttered, then opened again. Confused, he seethed, "That son-of-a-bitch. Is he really talking about them two computer freaks?"

"Don't talk," Ribbley cautioned again, "you sound bad, real bad. I'd guess it's blood in the lungs. You could drown from that. I've seen it happen before." With an elaborate look of concern, he asked, "You want a priest?"

Guessing that the CPU had broken some ribs, Ribbley knew the man was feeling as though death itself was reaching a sharp hand into his chest and squeezing his heart. Seeing the uncertainty that had been born from pain and confusion, Ribbley held his blood stained hand in front of the man's eyes. "Damn, it's all over and spreading," he reported.

"What's he saying out there?" Again the effort of speaking brought a hiss of pain.

"It's okay," soothed Ribbley, "we've pretty much got the whole story. Fossil Tech is going to scream. I can hardly wait?"

"You nuts, cop?" scowled the man. "Who's ...what Tech?"

"Look, Gates," said Ribbley in his most reasonable tone, "the Blue Mesa thing has all come out, so there's no need to protect anybody."

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"The Blue," he coughed, "what?" A glaze began to slide across Gate's eyes as he faded into unconsciousness. Ribbley emptied the man's pockets and placed the contents on the desk.

Next, Ribbley stepped over to the corpse and emptied the pockets of the finely tailored coat and trousers. He placed those items on the other end of the desk. From the corpse, he had taken a thin wallet, some change, and keys from a Hertz car. From Gates he had the wallet, and some pocket change. He placed Gate's revolver, with its long fingerlike silencer, near the Gates pile and the revolver and knife near the items taken from the corpse.

Snapping a look at Liss, he asked, "How are you doing, Professor?"

"Some better," he replied.

"Good," Ribbley assured him. "The worst of this little la la is over. If that's any comfort."

Hearing the sound of his own voice and having Ribbley talk to him seemed to help Liss recover. "My, God!" he exclaimed, "they would have killed us. I'm sure of it."

"Probably," Ribbley agreed as he inspected the wallets of the two men.

Munro walked in and joined him. "The black and white is here. They've got the hall pretty well cleared. You were right, Ribbley, we had a crowd out there." Glancing at the two bodies, she asked, "Have you been able to ID them?"

"Not really. They were carrying these wallets, and both have drivers licenses, but I'd bet you my best horse whip they're fake. The rental car keys tell me there're from out of town. The bleeder over there is our best lead, so we have to make damn sure he's on ice."

As they examined the items on the desk, the ambulance arrived. The medics immediately opened their cases and began working on Gates. When they felt he was stabilized, they moved him to the ambulance. A second unit removed the corpse, leaving Ribbley and Munro alone with Liss. Ribbley instructed the uniformed officers to find something to cover the window opening and then to lock the door.

Turning to Liss, he asked, "Is there somewhere we can go to talk? I imagine you'd rather not stick around here right now. Our lab people will be here to take pictures, make measurements and so forth, and we'd be in the way."

Later in a faculty lounge, Liss, fortified with coffee, leaned back and heaved a great sigh. "All this and I was just beginning to enjoy

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police work." His short laugh was forced, but it told Ribbley that the man was strong and that he had regained his composure.

"Professor," he began, "This business of Pringle's disk is getting out of hand. We'll take the disk with us unless you need it to work on the hard disk that we brought you." Smiling, he added, "I hope the hard disk was hard enough to hold up under a pretty good bump. But whatever you decide, I think it's a safe bet that no one will be bothering you again."

"I imagine I can pull something out of your CPU. If there's anything there," replied Liss.

His willingness to keep working on the project encouraged Ribbley. "Sounds good to me. And for whatever it's worth to you, I want to thank you for sticking with us on this. You just saw a close up of a side of police work most people never see except on television. It's never pretty and I wouldn't have blamed you if you had told us to take our disk and CPU and put it where the sun never shines."

Liss seemed to gather strength from Ribbley's words. "It was not the kind of thing I'd want to do again, but I can live with it."

Munro brought the conversation back to the work Liss had already done on Pringle's disk. "Were you able to find out if our technician had erased the data?"

"Yes. At least I believe I made some good progress, Sergeant. Last night I went to the laboratory where we have a variety of computers and some special electronic devices. The late Dr. Pringle had indeed entered his data by way of a coded entry. I won't bother you with the details right now. I can put it all in a report later. But the main substance on the disk was technical data, lab results probably. Then I noticed that there was space on the disk not used but also not available. I did some fancy back engineering and managed to figure out how to bring up the hidden portions."

"And?" prompted Ribbley.

"And I found out why you had asked me about involvement by the federal government," said Liss, his glasses glinting from Ribbley to Munro. Taking a sip of the black coffee, he continued, "There was an access query, 'Access To Federal Summary? Y/N' I entered Y and was confronted with another inscription which read, 'Access to Summaries By Numeric Code Only. Enter Code.' As you can imagine, that was an immediate red flag. I've seen those warnings many times before. If you enter the wrong code, entry is denied and the data simply disappears, or so it seems."

"I'd guess that's what happened to Bernie," Munro mused.

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"If Bernie's the one you had working on this in what you call your 'tap tap' center, that's exactly what happened. Let me explain. You're probably familiar with the recording head on a tape recorder. When the machine is in record mode, the tape passes over the head and the magnetic field there arranges the particles on the tape in a distinct pattern. In the play mode, the head simply reads the pattern and translates it into music or voice or whatever sound was recorded."

"The computer does the same thing?" guessed Ribbley, toying with his empty styrofoam cup.

"Roughly, very roughly, that's correct," nodded Liss. "Data being entered on a disk is read onto the various disk sectors by way of an extremely precise magnetic inscription device. When the data is called back, the device picks it up from the disk in somewhat the same way a tape recorder works. I mention all this because the key to this little security system is in the inscription mechanism."

Stroking his pointed beard, Liss looked from Munro to Ribbley and back to Munro again. He seemed to be waiting for a question, the way a teacher would expect a question from a student. Munro, who was obviously more interested in computer science than Ribbley, obliged him. "I understand the concept, Professor, but you aren't saying that Pringle used some different type of device are you?"

"Not at all," smiled Liss. "but in an electronic way, he tampered with it. Rather the federal government gave him a program which enabled him to tamper with it. You see the people interested in keeping secret the data on computers have devised various ways of protecting their information. Simple codes which permit access only by a word or set of numbers is the most simplistic way of doing that."

Glancing at Ribbley as though he needed special instruction, Liss give an illustration. "It's like having a book with a lock on it. You need the key before you can read the text."

"Or a jimmy bar," Ribbley suggested, seeming to tire of the explanation.

"But along come the feds and figure a way to change the way the inscription device works," guessed Munro.

"Bingo!" beamed Liss. "They have a code which, if entered correctly, changes, the way the basic system works. It tells the inscription device to work differently. For example, if you press the letter 't' on your computer keyboard, the inscription device is set to record a certain magnetic pattern on the disk. And so on with all the letters. Thus keys and combinations of keys are programed to inscribe the disk in certain

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ways. The federal program used by Dr. Pringle simply commanded the device to inscribe something besides the magnetic pattern for 't' on the disk when the key 't' is pressed."

"A scrambler," said Munro. "Scramble the data on its way to the disk and unscramble it on the way out."

"But only if you give the program the correct code," said Liss, who was clearly pleased with at least one of his pupils.

"I've just described, simplistically, what is known technically as 'random duplex refraction.' It makes coding quite effective."

"And you were able to find the code?" asked Ribbley as he walked over to the nearby table and refilled his cup.

"I won't bore you with the technical details, Detective, but rather than use the code, I simply applied a device we have to combat the false signal. Actually," he chuckled, "it was pretty simple. A lot quicker and easier than the 'ghost' system which your technician constructed. His notes were interesting but not necessary. But to make a long story short, the feds have some pretty old ideas about computers. In short their encoding system is known by lots of people in the engineering world, and is therefore of very little value, except to keep out amateurs and casual snoops."

Munro, sensing the growing impatience of her partner, turned Liss away from his focus on his science to the matter of the disk. "Professor, going on the disk itself. Were you able to bring up the material that our technician thought he had lost?"

Understanding that he was being subtly brought back to business, Liss adjusted his glasses, "Yes, of course. I determined that most of the available space on the disk was indeed still filled. Obviously, it had not been erased."

"And what can you tell us about the contents?" Munro asked.

As Ribbley rejoined them at the table, Liss leaned forward as though he was afraid the other occupants in the room would overhear his words. "Your Dr. Pringle was indeed doing some work on the combustion of fossil fuels. The narrative statement of his theoretical work confirms that. Specifically, he was interested in liquid fossil fuel."

Ribbley, who had been patient throughout the explanation of how Liss had heroically broken a computer code, was again interested. "Whoa, Professor. Did I hear you say a liquid fuel? I guess I'd been thinking about natural gas or coal. Now it sounds like we're dealing with oil."

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"Or a derivative of oil," suggested Liss, his small blue eyes narrowing in thought, "maybe a special formula."

"Didn't the description specify what the fuel was?" asked a puzzled Munro.

Liss, getting out of his area of computer science, became noticeably more deliberate and careful in his choice of words. "No. A term was used to describe it, a technical term that I'm not familiar with. But as to the rest of it, Dr. Pringle was suggesting, as a theory, that the residue of combustion would be a flow," Liss paused and frowned, "that was the expression, 'flow' of particles with at least one unique property."

Ribbley interrupted, "You're saying that the burning of this liquid would create a special kind of...smoke?"

Glinting at Ribbley in his most precise way, Liss corrected him, "Dr. Pringle said that, Detective. Not me. And he didn't say smoke, he said residue 'flow.' And I must put in what was the critical qualification. Low pressure combustion." Looking at Ribbley, he conceded to, "Low pressure burning."

Ribbley ignored the fact that Liss was treating him as a slow learner. "Unique property? Can you put that in language a cop can understand?"

"It simply means the residue would be different from what might be expected, different."

Ribbley and Munro exchanged glances. Both had the same question. Ribbley leaned back and waited while she asked, "Professor Liss, after reading the material and having had a chance to think about it, do you have any notion of why anyone would kill to get their hands on those discs?"

The reference to killing abruptly brought Liss out of his world of science. Remembering the event in his office clearly tended to unsettle him. Liss pulled off his glasses and, using lens tissue from his pocket, began cleaning them, carefully and thoroughly. Ribbley decided that, given the fact Liss's glasses were spotless and because they glinted so marvelously, Liss must be easily unsettled and must spend a good deal of time in that condition.

Speaking in a low voice, Liss said, "I hadn't thought of it until just now, Sergeant. But the answer is an emphatic 'no.' I saw only the work of another scientist, working in another discipline to be sure, but nonetheless, it was only science." Replacing his glasses, he continued, "But an expert in the field might very well see something different."

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Blinking rapidly, he added, "Obviously someone believes the data is critical to something."

"Professor," asked Ribbley abruptly, "have you heard of a place or thing called Blue Mesa?"

Straightening in his chair, Liss seemed perplexed that the question would be asked. "Certainly. It's a power plant in design stage. Our department has been doing some consulting on the computerization of the control systems. Actually, the department and some other members of the faculty are working under a cooperative agreement with the developer of the plant." Then, the connection suddenly came upon him. "It's a fossil fuel plant! Of course. Your Dr. Pringle must have been working on plans or designs for Blue Mesa." As he examined the thought, Liss slowed, "But I'm certain the current plan is that Blue Mesa will be a coal fired system. If they had planned on using a liquid fuel, we would have been told. Is it possible Pringle wasn't working on Blue Mesa but on something else?"

Ribbley left the question hanging. He opened his hands as if waiting to catch something and merely gave Liss a questioning look. Then, he closed the interview, "When we have the answer to that, we'll be closer to finding the employer of the two visitors you had this morning."

They talked for a few more minutes, and Liss agreed to examine the CPU and the blood stained disk. "I'll get on this right away," he promised. "Give me a day, two at the most."

Ribbley thanked him and observed that it was unlikely that Liss would have any more unwelcome visitors of the type he had just encountered. "But if you're concerned about it, I can arrange to have a police officer stay close to your office."

Liss, now fully composed, declined the offer. "I can't believe there are more thugs like those two anywhere in the city."

Ribbley and Munro quickly exchanged glances. They both believed Liss was not in further danger, so by an unspoken agreement they decided not to tell the academic how wrong he was about the number of bad guys in the world.

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Ed Gates, alias Earl Guterman, alias Errol Guy, alias any number of other E.G. persons, felt the heavy, constraining weight of a body cast. He also grimaced at a pain in his shoulder. As he took stock of the hospital room, E.G. felt a sense of gloom and anger.

What had started out as a routine muscle job to recover some computer disks had turned nasty. First, the two young computer hackers had turned out to be defiant and beyond intimidation. Then had come the run in with that damn cop. E.G. flinched at the that unpleasant memory. As he sorted out his recollections, things only got worse. He had a hazy notion of the cop being nice to him and telling him he was going to die. He seemed to remember shots being fired before he had taken one in the shoulder. If that was so, what had happened to Carver?

No matter how hard he tried, E.G. couldn't remember what he had said. Had he given his name? Worse, had he given any other names? Screw Denver! He wished he'd never heard of the place; smog, heat, freaky people and cops who thought they were cowboys. To top it off, nobody would talk to him. He could see a uniformed cop inside the door, and he was pretty sure there was one outside the door. They spoke not at all, nor did the nurse who flitted in and out, giving him only the faintest of professional smiles.

On one of her trips past the bed, he croaked at her, "Hey, nurse."

She stopped and gave him an antiseptic, "Yes?"

"Water?"

Obediently, she took a glass from the bedside table, filled it with water from a pitcher, inserted a flexstraw in the glass and held it alongside his head. As he sipped, he tried one of his 'I'm a hunk,' smiles on her. She was not impressed.

As she took the water away, he tried his best loud tactic, "Where's my doctor? I want out of this place." That had no more effect than his charm. Bluster then came in the form of, "Hey, sis, get your butt over here and tell me what's going on." But Bluster went away with a groan as the pain in his back from forcing the words out reminded him of the body cast.

When the nurse left the room, E.G. called out, "Hey copper, who's in charge here?"

The uniformed officer sitting near the door rose and walked to the foot of the bed. In a pleasant, quiet voice he said, "One more word from that big asshole you call a mouth and I'll fill it with a dirty sock."

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E.G. may have considered a reply, but the way the cop looked down at him and the promised consequence, with its distasteful effects, kept him quiet. Enforced silence is heavy silence, indeed, and E.G. felt it's weight. He was learning what all prisoners know, that time, alone and without any clocks, can be measured only in the mind, and when the world around is still and unresponsive, the mind's measure of time seems endless. Thus, E.G.'s mind struggled to count the minutes which dragged into hours.

In another room many floors below, Detective Ribbley also waited the patient wait of a determined police officer. His reward was ambivalent. Munro, blond and morning fresh in grey slacks and sky blue blazer, was worth waiting for, but the news she brought was depressing.

"No computer ID on either one," she announced. "And you were right about the drivers licenses. Dummies. So far, nothing on the fingerprints."

The nearby stainless steel door swung open and they were joined by a blue-coated, blue-capped member of the coroner's staff. "Later, I'll be able to tell you what he had for breakfast," he said, "but for right now, after a preliminary look, not much. Appendectomy scar, no other permanent marks or identifying features. Apparent cause of death two gunshots wounds in the chest. Dental impressions and finger prints are already on the way to your lab people, Ribbley. That's about all I can do for you until I open him up and write a report."

Ribbley and Munro left the doctor and took an elevator to a higher floor. There, they stopped for a moment in a small waiting area. From where they stood they could see a uniformed police officer tilted back in a chair making a serious, comparative analysis of the passing nurses, aides and candy-strippers. He was, of course, looking for bad guys, and to see the care with which he was doing his job one might have imagined the ward was fairly teeming with bad guys disguised as female hospital personnel.

Watching the guard, Ribbley said, "E.G. or whoever that dump inside might be, he is our best lead, but I have the feeling he's not going to give us anything if he can help it."

"How do you want to play it?"

"Well, he passed out in Liss's office right after the shooting. According to the doctor, he's really not been awake until this morning. The nurse said he woke up and started making noise, but it's just that, noise. Right now, Dooley's inside, so its a safe bet that Mr. E.G. is under a lid and being quiet. There isn't any way he knows his pal is dead, and

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I'd like to think I convinced him the guy is talking to us and laying the Bernie and Colleague killings on him."

"I'd bet he won't buy it," countered Munro.

"Why?"

"I have the feeling these two have worked together before. It's like you said, Ribbley. They're expensive and very good. Each one is too good to team up with someone who would cooperate with the police. Anything he told you after the shooting is all you're going to get."

"I guess I was afraid you'd say that," grumbled Ribbley. "And we can't positively tie them to the Bernie and Colleague killings. I talked with the lab a while ago and they tell me the slugs from whatever gun was used were mushy soft. They clumped up on impact and there is no way ballistics can match them to anything."

"And they would know that."

"But we do have assault, attempted murder, interfering with a police officer, and some others we can think of later. Let's see what we can do with that. We may be overestimating this guy. He may not be a slick as we've made him out to be."

E.G. concealed his feelings behind a hard mask of hatred, but he was, in truth, almost glad to see Ribbley. With the detective present, he could speak, he could argue, he could communicate. Anything was better than just lying in the bed, staring at the hospital room, thinking perhaps of dirty socks.

Ribbley expressed concern, or his words did, but there was a cynical flavor to his greeting, "By golly, Ed. We thought we were going to lose you."

E.G. was not amused. "Are you the yellow bastard who hit me from behind?"

"You are a fright," mocked Ribbley, "just a fright with such strong language. You can use it down in Canyon City. I'm sure the boys there will be impressed."

"I want a lawyer," said E.G. "or have you fig newtons here in Denver never heard of rights?"

"Read E.G. his rights, Les," replied Ribbley. "We've got a square bust here. It's solid and there's no point in letting Mr. Easy Gun here complicate our lives by crying about rights."

As Munro read from her rights card, Ribbley studied the man on the bed. He was run of the mill, intelligent looking, mid forties and more like an office worker than a hired thug. He returned Ribbley's gaze, doing his own evaluating.

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"Now, you said you wanted a lawyer. Give me a name and I'll call him for you," offered Ribbley.

"I'll call him myself."

Ribbley picked up a white phone set from a nearby table and placed it on the bed near E.G.'s hand. "Nine to get out," he said. "But no long distance calls." With that, Ribbley turned to go.

"Hey wait," called E.G., "what the hell do you mean, no long distance calls?"

"Exactly what I said. The City is paying your tab here, bad guy. And the policy is no long distance calling unless you arrange to pay first. If that's a problem, call one of the local bananas, then have him call your agent or whoever it is that's got the bucks and is dumb enough to hire a bungler like you."

E.G.'s face reddened as he glared at Ribbley. "You're buying yourself trouble, cop. More trouble that you'll ever be able to handle."

Ribbley turned to Munro, "Add that to the list, Sergeant. Threatening and attempting to intimidate a police officer in the performance of his duties. On that one alone, I can guarantee him ninety days. I'll ask the DA to file that one right away so he won't be out walking around while he's waiting for his trial on the rest of the charges on our list." To E.G. he said simply, "You're going to need that lawyer, Ace."

"You haven't got a case," countered E.G.

"Haven't got a case," laughed Ribbley. "Let me give you the outline of our case, Buzzer. Felony menacing, three witnesses. I'd bet a paycheck you'll pull five to ten on that one. Holding a police officer and Professor Liss against their wills is probably kidnapping. Again, three witnesses. Ten years minimum. Felonious Assault will be a case so easy to prove, that I could do it without a law degree. Using a gun in the commission of a felony, to wit the assault, will get you ten years added to whatever else you get, that's automatic. And here in Colorado you'll probably serve all ten years of it." Leaning over the bed and looking down on E.G. Ribbley, ground out, "Now, Bloody Ed, Gates, or whatever your upchuck name is, tell me again that I don't have a case."

E.G. stared up from the bed. He looked away and cursed.

Ribbley pressed, "I forgot to mention, attempted robbery. Class one, if that disk you were trying to get your hands on is worth more than a hundred dollars. That, too, is a felony in this state."

"I don't know what you're talking about," bluffed E.G. "What disk?"

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"The one you tried to take from Professor Liss at gunpoint. The one your employer is so damned anxious to get his hands on. The same disk you and your pal failed to recover and the very one that is being copied and read by our computer people as we speak." After a long silence, Ribbley suddenly leaned over the man's face and hissed at him, "And the same disk you tried to get from the two police department employees you tied into chairs, tortured and murdered, you sick punk."

E.G. missed the fact that Ribbley said employees, not officers. He heard only police. His eyes snapped as he blurted out, "Police? Those two weren't cops."

The hospital room fell silent. Ribbley and Munro looked at each other and then down at the bedridden, killer. With a deliberation that was chilling, Ribbley turned to the uniformed officer, "Dooley, I'll want a complete report from you on what you saw and heard here this morning." He repeated the order for Munro, "Sergeant, I'll want your report and your statement. Be sure you note that the suspect's rights were read to him and that he spoke to us voluntarily after being told the nature of the crimes with which he will be charged. And I want you to put the suspect's exact words in that report."

Thoroughly rattled, E.G. called out, "Now just a Goddamned minute!" Trying to move his arms, he knocked the phone to the floor. The jarring clatter brought the officer in from the hallway.

"Everything okay, Detective?" asked the officer.

"The suspect just made an admission which sounded like a confession to me, officer," drawled Ribbley. "As far as I'm concerned, everything is just fine." Picking up the phone, Ribbley carefully placed it back on the bed. "Here. You really do need a lawyer, a very good lawyer. And since you're going down for the count, Dum Dum, I'll approve your call to anywhere on the planet. Call away."

In the hallway outside the room, Ribbley said to Munro, "Talk to the switchboard. I want to know who that numbskull calls."

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"We should live like this, Les," said Ribbley as he and Munro entered the wide reception room of Fossil Technologies Incorporated.

"Sure, tell me how," agreed Munro.

As they walked toward the receptionist and as Munro's eyes traveled around the room taking in the grand trappings of the large and obviously prosperous company, Ribbley, looking ahead, said in a low conspiratorial whisper, "Remember what Ekus said in his Chronicles, 'Behold a mighty wall which is but the whole of many parts.' And I'd say that lady behind the desk is only the first of those parts, but a big one."

"Wall?" puzzled Munro, still distracted by the furnishings of the grand office, "What did you say about the wall?"

"The tongue is but the sounding scribe of the mind, Les," said Ribbley, giving her a knowing look and a wink, "and the lazy ear ill serves where the current of sound is swift."

Almost coming to a halt, Munro, now giving Ribbley her full attention, demanded, "Ribbley, what in the living Hell are you talking about?"

"The word is but the coin of thought, Sergeant, and what better purchase could there be than your attention."

With that ambiguous answer and with Munro frowning along behind, Ribbley stepped up to the gleaming desk.

"We're here to see Mr. Leland Schute," said Ribbley.

The receptionist, who was predictably beautiful, was also predictably distant. "Do you have an appointment?"

"Yes, we called," Munro assured her.

"I'll confirm," the receptionist said in an arching, distant way which suggested she did not believe for a moment they really had an appointment.

While she appraised Ribbley as though deciding whether or not he measured up to some standard she applied to visitors, the woman prepared to speak to the thin wire of her headphone. "May I tell Mr. Schute's office your names?"

"This is Sergeant, Munro, and my name is Detective Ribbley. Denver Police Department."

Like a mean spirited keeper of other people's business who has detected a subterfuge, she asked, "Are you sure you shouldn't be talking to Legal?"

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Ribbley, who had known this would be a large part of the Fossil Tech wall, turned the question back on her, "Why in the world would we, or anybody, want to talk to lawyers?"

"Traffic matters are routinely handled by legal," she retorted automatically.

"Who told you this was a traffic matter?"

"Well, you are police, or so you say. What other reason could there be for you to be here?" asked the wall, standing firm.

Turning to Munro, Ribbley asked, "Sergeant, you did speak to Mr. Schute's office directly?"

"Directly," nodded Munro.

Seeming to have forgotten about the wall altogether, Ribbley asked, "Can you think of any reason, Sergeant, why we are facing an obstruction to a police investigation."

"Only the usual reasons, Detective," replied Munro, playing along, but letting Ribbley take the lead.

"This, of course, must mean that Mr. Schute is avoiding us." Staring off into the distance, he mused, "By deduction then, we should conclude that Mr. Schute has something to hide and is perhaps himself personally involved in this whole nasty business. And now it'll all have to come out in the papers because we'll have to put his name on the list the Chief is..."

"Mr. Schute's office is on the second floor. To your left as you exit the elevator, Executive Suite 201," said the suddenly cooperative receptionist, trying to remain calm.

As they made their way up a wide, white marble stairway and admired the soft, deep red woolen carpet, Munro, mimicking Ribbley, said, "By deduction, then we should conclude that Mr. Schute has something to hide." Laughing, she asked, "When do you say, 'Elementary My dear Mr. Watson,'?"

"It kept us out of Legal," he reasoned. "The way she said 'legal' it sounded like she wanted to send us around to the service entrance." Looking around and pointing to the oil paintings which lined the wide hallway, Ribbley added, "And this is definitely better than the service entrance. Definitely."

The high ceiling, dark wooden paneled walls and exquisite furniture brought agreement from Munro. "Yeah, this is not your basic rear door decor."

Leland Schute's secretary was charming and probably efficient, but the fact that she was stout, and well into middle age told Ribbley that

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Mrs. Schute had probably selected her. She was not much of a wall, and in a few minutes Ribbley and Munro were shaking hands with Leland Schute, the Chief Executive Officer of Fossil Technologies.

Instead of selecting the protection of his desk, Schute sat with them at a small conference table located in one wing of his large office. Schute himself was the picture of a successful executive, expensive dark suit, modest silk tie, grey hair and exactly trimmed moustache.

After they were provided with coffee, Schute, without preliminary skirmishing, simply asked, "Now, Detective Ribbley, how can I help you?"

Ribbley, for his part, was equally direct, "Tell me about your plans for the Blue Mesa power plant."

"Hm," began Schute, "That's a tall order, Detective. But in capsule form I'd say that, Fossil Tech is planning on submitting a bid to design and manufacture the hardware for the plant. As you perhaps already know, Blue Mesa is a large project. When it is completed, it will be the largest power plant in the United States."

"What kind of fuel will it burn?" asked Ribbley.

"Coal. Wyoming coal. It's a low BTU coal which will be provided by an open pit mine near Sheridan."

"Mr. Schute, does the name Otis Pringle, mean anything to you?"

"Sure. I've known Otis for years. As a matter of fact, I once tried to get him to come to work for us. It never worked out, but I suppose it's just as well. He's well situated over at the Kreesap Institute. But you must know that already."

Without responding to the question which was suggested by Schute's comment, Ribbley continued, "I understand Dr. Pringle has produced some interesting research dealing with the combustion of fossil fuels. Are you familiar with his research?"

"Oh, yes. Since that's our business, his work is known to us. I used to see him at technical meetings from time to time. Strange as it may sound, I always enjoyed those visits. Otis Pringle is not a friendly man or a man easy to talk with. As you may have learned, he's a pain in the lower behind, but for some reason, I was always able to draw him out and get along with him better than anyone else. But, I haven't seen him for some time now. I've had to give more of my time to administrative matters recently, and have lost touch with the research people."

"There was a recent abstract produced by the Kreesap Institute on fossil fuel combustion," said Munro, "specifically on combustion at low pressure. Are you familiar with that?"

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"Yes. It has been discussed at some of our technical meetings. Our view is that it's a bit theoretical."

"Would data on that theory be of use to you in preparing your bid for the Blue Mesa job," asked Munro.

"Not really." Schute hesitated as he looked from one visitor to the other. "We're getting into an area that is sensitive, Sergeant. I'm sure you understand that it's critical to us that we keep a close rein on what we plan to put in our bid." Quickly, he added, "I'm not suggesting that you would tell our competitors anything you learn from me. I'm just naturally cautious. Could I ask if your investigation is in some way related to Blue Mesa?"

"Only incidentally," replied Munro.

Schute smoothed the neatly trimmed moustache. "Incidentally?"

Munro, too, refused to begin answering the questions of the person she was interrogating. In the manner of a good cross examiner, she abruptly switched topics, "Mr. Schute, have you heard anything about a fire at Kreesap?"

"Fire at the Institute? Why no, but I was in Arizona until this morning. Was it serious?"

"Let's not get off track here," interrupted Ribbley. "We're not really interested in the fire. We're working out of the Homicide Division, Mr. Schute. Pringle was murdered. We believe he was killed by someone trying to steal his research data."

Schute seemed genuinely shocked by the news. For a minute, he seemed close to losing his composure. Standing and turning away, he heaved a great sigh and absently patted at his hair. More to himself than to Ribbley or Munro, he murmured, "Otis dead? Murdered?" Turning back to face them, his face long and drawn, he began, "You don't think that I had..."

Ribbley silenced him with wave of his hand, "Easy, Mr. Schute. Nobody's accusing you or your company of anything. As you said yourself, Pringle was researching in the same general areas as your company, Fossil Tech. We're here to ask if you have any thoughts about who would kill Dr. Pringle's just to steal some of his data."

"Good God!" breathed Schute. "Otis attacked and beaten. This is monstrous."

Rising and casually walking past Schute to the large window, Ribbley said dryly, "Yeah, monstrous." Abruptly changing the subject, Ribbley asked, "What's the main business of Fossil Tech, Mr. Schute? You certainly don't exist by just bidding on power plant work."

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As his manicured fingers checked the knot in his tie and straightened his expensive lapels, Schute readily accepted the change of topic. "Quite correct, Detective, Ribbley. Since new power plants, especially large ones, are not your every year event, we certainly couldn't look to that work to keep our enterprise going. We make boilers, furnaces, and a full line of combustion equipment, including jet engines."

"You mean furnaces for houses?" asked Ribbley.

"Yes, we manufacture them for different companies. A nationally known line whose headquarters is in Minneapolis is our principal customer."

"And you said jet engines?" Munro prompted.

"Right," nodded Schute, "but only the basic insides, the combustion apparatus."

Ribbley returned to his chair, "But with all that, you are interested in the Blue Mesa project?"

"Naturally," Schute assured him. "You see, Detective, there are certain alloys which are used in combustion chambers and in fuel nozzles and for the shrouding assemblies of burning devices. Those alloys are designed to withstand extremely high temperatures. Since we have large stocks of those materials, and have the special machinery to shape them, we would be interested in bidding on any project involving the burning of fossil fuels."

"Do you work on any nuclear power plants," asked Munro.

"No. Not any more," said Schute, shaking his head wearily, "We once were active in doing some steam boiler work for a couple of nuclear operations, but that industry is now stagnant, thanks to the louder members of our society."

The note of anger in Schute's voice was apparent, and it caught Ribbley attention. "Louder members, Mr. Schute? Are you talking about environmental types?"

"I am," he said, his voice hard and cutting. "They are a plague on us, on our business, and on everyone in the industry."

"Why you, more than anyone else?" Ribbley wondered.

"Because, we're in the business of making equipment for the burning of fossil fuels. They see the use of fossil fuel as the cause of the infamous greenhouse effect."

Ribbley seemed genuinely interested. "Is there anything to all that? The greenhouse effect, I mean."

"Blather," spat out Schute, "in my book it's not even science. It's the old game of scare the people, scare the legislature, scare the Congress

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and wait for the research money to come rolling in. The people making the noise have taken a possible, only possible mind you," emphasized Schute, thumping the table top with his fist, "one degree increase in the global atmosphere and have ballyhooed that around until people are starting to worry about the ice caps melting. What these..." he searched for an appropriate descriptive term, "these greenheads fail to tell you is that this global warming will, even by their calculations, take three or four hundred years to become significant."

"We're hearing more about it every day," said Munro. "The drought here and throughout the midwest certainly gives your greenheads lots of ammunition."

"But they ignore the facts, Sergeant," countered Schute. "For example, these greenheads, as I seem to have named them," he smiled briefly at his own term and at Munro's use of it, "talk of the carbon dioxide and nitric oxides which are emitted by a fossil fuel burning plants. But they don't tell you that ninety percent of the emissions never get near the upper atmosphere."

"All that smoke has to go somewhere though," said Ribbley, "what happens to it?"

"Detective Ribbley, you're expressing the conventional idea of a power plant having tall stacks belching out black smoke. It's really not like that. As a matter of fact, when Blue Mesa is completed and operating, you won't see anything coming from the stacks. There will be some steam, but that hardly counts as pollution. Most of the particulate is either incinerated by secondary combustion or captured in special filtration devices."

"Are you saying that nothing goes up the stacks?" asked a puzzled Munro. "If that's the case, why have stacks at all?"

Schute shifted in his chair as he qualified what had sounded like a sales pitch. "I didn't say there wouldn't be any emissions, Sergeant. There is some, but it's widely dispersed. The stacks put the emissions high enough to be caught by above surface currents that carry it away. Now, before you get the impression that smoke clouds are merely spread out, remember, we're talking about very fine particles and they are distributed so evenly over such a wide area, its almost impossible to even measure them."

"But some of those emissions do get into the upper atmosphere," said Munro. "I believe I saw a documentary which showed how they get into the jet stream and remain there for years. In fact, that's the basis for the greenhouse theory, isn't it?"

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"Yes," conceded Schute, giving her an uncomfortable look, "the idea is that those emission particle rise almost to the stratosphere and create a blanket which holds in the heat and causes the temperature of the air around the earth to rise. As I said, I think that's mostly claptrap."

"Well, something seems to be out of whack," said Ribbley. "The whole damn country is suffering from a record drought. Every city and town here and in Europe is rationing water and every day new records are set for temperature. And not just here. It's all over." Realizing that he sounded argumentative, he added, "At least that's what I hear."

Munro brought the interview back on course, "Mr. Schute, you said the Blue Mesa plant will burn coal. Is it possible there is an alternative plan to burn some type of liquid fuel?"

"No. It's going to be a coal burning facility." Defensively, he added, "But the combustion will be by state of the art technology. And, of course, we here at Fossil Tech are convinced that our technology is the best in the world."

"I understand that you do your own research here," said Munro.

Schute's face began to relax a bit, "As a matter of fact, we do, Sergeant. Our combustion lab is generally considered to be the finest in the United States."

"Have any of your people been working in the area of low pressure burning?" she asked.

Schute's smile faded into professional concern, "You're coming around to the Pringle thing again, and the paper he wrote. That's the one Kreesap sent around the country while they tried to get someone to fund Pringle's lab work. The theme of that paper was an argument that combustion efficiency could be increased by burning carbon based fuel in low pressure chambers. There is very little there beyond the speculation of one somewhat eccentric scientist."

"Otis Pringle?" asked Ribbley seeming to merely want confirmation.

The recollection of what he had been told about Pringle, brought a look of remorse to Schute's face. "I don't mean to speak disrespectfully of Otis. I only discount his most recent idea on combustion."

"Would that be an idea that could be used in making a bid on Blue Mesa?" asked Munro. Noting Schute's hesitation, she added, "a bid by anyone, Mr. Schute."

"Perhaps, but I'm not sure how. Low pressure combustion is just not in the cards for Blue Mesa. The technology is too new, too far out to be seriously thought of for a plant being built in this decade. It's an

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interesting idea, but like lots of Otis' thinking, it's theoretical." Schute seemed lost in thought for a moment. When he continued, it was in a speculative, distant way, "As I think about it though, the ideas being suggested by Otis have some rather disturbing implications."

"Such as?" prompted Munro.

"The chemical composition of the emission particles changes when the burning occurs under the reduced pressure," explained Schute. "They also display some unusual bonding patterns. That simply means that the particles have a tendency to combine with other particles, to aggregate. It gets pretty technical, but I use the word 'disturbing' in a very limited and technical sense. Still, the facts are there."

Ribbley, who was listening more carefully than his casual appearance would suggest, asked, "What would some of those implications be on a practical, day-by-day basis, Mr. Schute?"

Schute seemed to be reluctant to answer Ribbley's question. His face took on an almost pained expression as he wrestled with an idea he seemed to want to keep out of the discussion. He pulled at the cuffs of his suit and tried to downplay the interest he had created. "Oh, it's really nothing significant, I assure you, Detective Ribbley. I was speaking of a purely scientific consideration."

"Indulge me, Mr. Schute," urged Ribbley. "I'm always interested in a new idea and Sergeant Munro here is quite a science buff. Right, Sergeant."

"By all means," smiled Munro. "You've created a mini mystery here, Mr. Schute. Please explain why Dr. Pringle's theory on the chemical change of emissions is disturbing."

Still Schute hesitated. As his mouth clamped down in a look of grim determination, his moustache covered both lips. The bristle guard was in place, and it seemed that he was unlikely to speak.

However, the reluctant Leland Schute had never before dealt with Ribbley. "Mr. Schute," began Ribbley, "I'm sure I don't need to remind you that we are investigating a murder. Any information you can give us would help. While your information may not seem important to you, it could be critical to us. I would ask that you remember the teaching of Crimpon the Second who said, 'One echo speaks to many ears but teaches none the same.' I may hear something in your explanation that another person might not. I think you should share your notion of what is 'disturbing' about Dr. Pringle's theory."

If Schute found Ribbley's quotation from a sixteenth century chronicle to be unusual or perhaps puzzling, he gave no sign. Yet, after a

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brief moment, he seemed to relax. The bristle curtain raised, "Yes, of course. I understand that every thing about Otis Pringle's work would be a possible clue. I must warn you, however, that I'm just voicing a passing thought, a scientific curiosity."

Ribbley knew the ice had been broken. Leaning back and resting his arm on the back of a chair, he waited. Schute appeared to be a completely honest man and a thoughtful one who would usually come down on the right side of this kind of issue, but there was reserve about him that puzzled Ribbley.

Schute's gaze fell to the table and he seemed to be seeing something far away. "Some time back," he began, "almost twenty years ago, there was a lot of activity in my business about the possible environmental effects of burning fossil fuels. Studies were done, debates were held, research projects were being funded by the government in institutes, and in colleges, everywhere." As he spoke, Schute seemed to be seeing those earlier days, "I was beginning to make some headway as the leader of a research group at an institute here in Colorado. Our focus was on high altitude studies. One of the men in our group was especially interested in the possible effects of fossil fuel combustion on ozone. He had a theory that oxides of nitrogen and oxides of hydrogen produced by burning coal, oil and natural gas would destroy ozone. I always felt that he had the outline of a sound scientific theory. When I heard about Otis Pringle's research paper, I thought of that theory. You see his theory matches closely the earlier one. I said Dr. Pringle's idea is disturbing because there was a hint that the chemistry in such combustion could be more destructive of ozone than anyone had ever imagined."

"And would that theory be a concern to Fossil Tech?" asked Ribbley. "I ask because eliminating threats to the ozone seems to be much in vogue these days."

"Detective Ribbley," said Schute, "remember that none of this is proven and even if the oxides do threaten ozone, the combustion of power plants is here on the face of the earth and the ozone layer is between ten and twenty miles up. Scientifically, we are years away from having the kind of evidence which would be a serious concern to our business."

"But Dr. Pringle's work was a step in that direction?" asked Munro.

"Yes."

The three talked for a while. Schute promised to meet with them any time and politely offered them a tour of the Fossil Tech facility on

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some date in the future when none of them was so busy. Ribbley and Munro thanked him for this time and prepared to leave. As they walked toward the door, Schute, referring to the story he had told them about his days with the high altitude research group, mused, "It is ironic the ways things turn out as the years go by."

"Ironic?" asked Ribbley, who wondered if he had missed something.

"Why yes," replied Schute, "Kreesap and me being involved in the same thing."

Ribbley stopped at the door and asked, "Mr. Schute, I still fail to see the irony."

Schute seemed genuinely puzzled for an instant. Then he brightened, "Didn't I tell you the name of my associate on those high altitude studies, the one with the interest in the ozone problem?"

Munro guessed, "Dr. Pringle?"

"No," laughed Schute, "I understand why you seem at a loss. I neglected to mention his name. It was Jason Porr. You must have talked to him. He's the president of the Kreesap Institute."

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Larimer Street, the Denver home of many birds of a feather, flocking together, a street occupied by vacant heads from... wherever, usually experiences a lull in the middle of the morning. During those moments, the current of discontent, which carries every manner of human flotsam along that melancholy clutter of the new, the old, and the desperately destitute, weakens somewhat. In that interlude between the frantic hours of the night and the remorse of late morning, the life of the once proud old street is little more than a byway for the curious, a rendezvous, perhaps for some who might venture there with purposes of their own.

Overlooking the watching and the waiting is the old, four story Patman Hotel Building which occupies an obscure position between adjoining buildings, one taller and one less tall. By its cornerstone, which has been spattered, smeared, and begrimed with normal and abnormal usage, the building admits to having been built in the one thousand nine hundred and tenth year of the Lord God Almighty. The red bricks chosen for Patman's face are perhaps more red in the ninth decade of their existence than they were in that second decade of the century considering what they had been forced to witness night and day for eighty years.

Patman has been accompanied in its despair over the life and times of Larimer Street by a parade of sadness embodied in the broke, the busted, the down, and the out. The faces have changed many times, but each generation has moved around Patman with the same steady, melancholy tread.

Representative of those who inhabit the Street was Billy Natterham, at least that was the name he was using at one time in his life. It was Billy's fate that he took up a station on a slated bench across from the Patman where he could observe the pattern of pigeon droppings on the sidewalk at his feet. As he considered how he might advance his fortunes sufficiently to purchase liquid fortification against the afternoon sun, he looked across the way at old Patman and beheld what his experienced eyes told him was a stranger to the area. And the man he saw was not the run of the lot stranger drifting through looking to strike up a liaison with other strangers, nor was it a stranger looking for a drink.

This one seemed to have a different purpose. Billy's thirsty curiosity bestirred him, lifted him from the bench and carried him across the street. There, by sidling and shuffling, he was able to get close

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enough to see that the man had clean clothes, polished shoes, a white shirt, a tie unsullied by soup stains, and a gold wristwatch. Billy Natterham is naturally interested.

Accentuating his natural list and sway, Billy moved closer. Putting on what he believed was his most compelling "pity me" look, Billie came within hailing distance. "Got any change, Mister?" he asked. "I've got to call my little girl," he explained, believing he saw a spark of interest.

The man with the clean clothes looked away, obviously trying to ignore Billy and his request. His only other response was to nervously hitch his briefcase and to take a firmer grip on its leather handle.

Billy drew closer and whined, "Just some change would be a life saver, Mister. Little Janie is alone, the poor little tyke, and the last I heard she was sick. A couple of quarters would do fine."

Billy's plea went unheeded. The mark stared past Billy, around him and seemed to stare through him. His attention was reserved for the street and the sidewalk and for something other than the bedraggled offerings of Larimer Street. Giving the nearly empty street a glance to the left and to the right, his preoccupation reduced Billy to the role of backdrop, where as a minor factor in the dreary scene, he was of no greater importance or significance than Patman's red face.

Past experience with such subjects and with the tough Denver cops had taught Billy that open, loud confrontations with the respectable were to be avoided. Thus, the reluctant Billy Natterham moved on down the street, but only a little ways. Near the door of Patman, Billy found a battered plastic trash can. He welcomed its presence since it gave him an opportunity of staying close to the briefcase, the clean shirt and the gold wristwatch and because it also presented its own possibilities.

Before he had really gotten started with his exploration of the trash can's offerings, Billy saw another man coming down the street, and he, too, had a briefcase. But he was not of the level of silk tie and gold watch. Instead, he was of the open collar set, and was wearing wrinkled khaki trousers. However, it was evident that this man, also, was an outsider since he clearly had a daylight purpose about him. Billy had considered and dismissed the thought that he was about to witness a drug sale. It was too open and too obvious. Significant drugsters had long since matured past meetings on Curtis and Larimer Streets.

The two men spoke briefly, then stepped to over to Patman's door and went inside. Billy waited a moment, checked the street, ambled over, and ducked into Patman's familiar lobby. Once a proud entrance to

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a hotel and later the doorway to ambitious businesses whose faith had been placed in urban renewal, the Patman lobby, exhausted by time and usage, had become a dark, scrubby little metropolitan cave which gave access to some welfare offices, a couple of soaped over interior windows, and a religious bookstore.

The upper regions of Patman were accessible by a stairway which began as a wide sweep of stone running from the ground floor to the second level. Above that, the hallways and stairs were narrow, and the flowering carpet had mostly worn through to the bare wood below. Billy found silence in the lobby, but he heard voices at the top of the grimy steps.

"But how the hell do I know these are Pringle's disks?"

"Listen, you damn hickey, I brought the disks and I wanna see the color of your money. Now."

The reluctance of the first voice floated down the staircase, "Do you have anything to prove that they came from Pringle's office?"

"What do want, an autograph?"

"Did you take anything else, any papers, any notes or books?"

The second voice, rising in anger, replied, "I went in and I smashed things up like you said I should. Then I took these disks from the box by the computer and split. Now it's pay day." The first voice, still stalling, replied, "But I didn't say anything about killing him."

The second man's words were loud and angry, filled with surprise, "Kill him? Hell, I just sapped him on the side of the head. Who says he's dead?"

"The cops, that's who."

"Well, how the hell would I know the little bugger would come to work on Sunday? Anyhow, who cares?" Then in a taunting, threatening way, he added, "If these things are all that valuable and you're welshing on our deal, maybe I could sell them somewhere else, maybe to some other damn company."

That must have provoked an unexpected reaction. The same voice suddenly cried out, "Hey, wait!"

The sound of the two gunshots moved Billy Natterham faster than he had been moved for years. From his listening post at the foot of the stairs he threw himself into a corner which contained only rubbish and darkness. Billy listened. There were sounds, sharp clicks, perhaps a briefcase being opened and closed. Then, quickly, leather shoes slapped the stone faces of the steps. From his shelter, looking through the grillwork of the handrail, he could see the clean shirt, he could see the

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gold wristwatch, and he could see the briefcase. In a mad rush, they all disappeared through the door into the street.

Billy waited long enough to be reasonably certain the Khaki trousers were not coming down. Then he went up. After all, whatever there is to be found in a world of want must always be found quickly. That, in Billy's book, was the definition of survival.

The man in the open collar and khaki trousers, however, had not survived. He lay in a twisted, awkward pile along the hallway. Nearby was his briefcase open but empty. Billy stepped over to the body and reached down, searching. Some loose change in one front pocket. Little Janie could now certainly be given a call. Look in the back pocket. Mother Lode! A wallet with a handful of ones, a couple of tens and three twenties. And some plastic which could be examined later. A small notebook in a shirt pocket. Roll the body over. Hot damn! Car keys in the other front pocket. In a last greedy moment, Billy wondered what had been valuable enough to cause one man to kill another. Whatever it had been, Billy was delighted that its value had been so great that the dead man's pockets had been completely ignored. He wondered if any of that whatever might be left, but giving the empty briefcase a look and a shrug, he dismissed the thought.

The treasure quickly made the transfer from the man who would need it no longer to the greasy pockets of the prospector of the new West who stood in a pool of dirty blood surveying his claim. Satisfied that the diggings had played out, Billy decided to abandon the premises before some nosey claim jumper happened by. Pausing only long enough to make a shuffling effort to cleanse his shoes on the threads of the flowered carpet, Billy followed the lead of the clean shirt and gold watch down the stairway and out the front door of bloody faced Patman which had found a new occupation as a tomb.

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"Do you recognize him?" asked the uniformed officer holding the flashlight.

"Yeah. He answered to 'Billy.'" said the older cop. "He's been a fixture around here for years." Picking up a bottle which the wavering light showed to have been "Quinters Supreme," the officer guessed, "He must have scored big time. Billy was usually lucky to be able to borrow a swig or two of 'Shams.'"

The officer with the light moved the spot off Billy's face and down the length of his body. "Who do you suppose stiffed him? If it was one of the Jake Legs around here, they wouldn't have stayed around to kill the booze."

"Good question," said the partner stooping down to examine the remains of Billy Natterham. "My first guess is that Billy had something more than a bottle of 'Quinters.' Or he may have flashed some money around trying to impress some rummy who turned him down some time in the past. Or he may have simply gotten into a beef with some Jake pal of his. Who knows?"

Shifting the light around the alley and the rubbish where they had found Billy, the officers made a casual inspection of the area where the briefly wealthy Mr. Natterham had been hammered into the next life with a blunt instrument. The inspection yielded nothing, but when the light again found Billy, the partner called out, "Hold it a minute. What this?"

From the pavement he retrieved a small book. Laughing he wondered, "Billy's address book? If it is, I'll bet it's a classic."

Under the yellow light the two officers examined their find. After a minute the one who had found the little book tucked it into his shirt pocket. "I didn't see any Swiss bank account numbers."

The other chuckled, "Hell, I wouldn't recognize one if I saw it." In a serious note he said, "I wonder if there's a connection between Billy here and the 'shot dead' that was called in from the Patman this afternoon?"

"Naw," replied his partner, "that sounded like a drug pay off that went sour. This is probably nothing more than the old game of 'slug the guy with the bottle.' Billy here never had enough money to buy aspirin, let alone drugs. Let's call this in and then go code 11 for coffee at Molly's."

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"So who's this Billy Natterham?" asked Ribbley.

Munro looked at her notes, "From what the uniforms tell me, he was a harmless old rummy who lived in and around Larimer Street. The way I figure it, Billy was in the Patman either during or soon after the shooting. He probably went through the pockets of the 'shot dead' and found some money and this book."

Ribbley thumbed through the small notebook. "So this is the connection between the two dead guys and our case?"

"It looks that way," said Munro. "The black and white officers did a good job. When they called in their report, they read into it the name 'Kreesap' which was in the book. That pinged the computer and set off my beeper." As Ribbley began paging slowly through the book, she looked at him suspiciously, "By the way, Ribbley, why weren't you beeped at two A.M.? Have you picked up a new beeper yet?"

Without looking up, Ribbley muttered something vague and incomprehensible that sounded like, "Hum Tuh Hum. Damn thing's battery, huma...glad you picked up the report, Les."

"What did you say?" demanded Munro, who by now was pretty sure she had been the unofficial officer on duty, appointed by the wiles of her partner, "Hi- Shot" Ribbley.

"Kreesap, sure enough," read Ribbley, totally ignoring her question. "And, if my memory serves me correctly, that's the address and that's a description of the location of Pringle's office."

Munro, who had already seen the entries and who had already told Ribbley about them, looked away and shook her head. Putting away her notes, she turned her attention to a handful of reports which had accumulated in the IN box on her desk.

"Have you run these phone numbers yet?" asked Ribbley still peering at the small pages and the scrawled writing.

"I was getting ready to do that when you came in," she explained with exaggerated patience.

"Did you see this one?" he asked holding the book open to a page that was blank except for a penciled in number.

Leaning over, Munro studied the number. "Hey," she exclaimed, "that's..." she hastily consulted her own notebook. Scanning the entries she repeated, "That's...Here it is! Ribbley, that's Martin Nye's phone number at Lipscomb Atmospherics."

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"Could be," agreed a nonchalant Ribbley.

"What do you mean, could be?" she asked, "Here it is in my notes. It is Nye's number."

"Okay, Les. If you insist. I'll agree it's Nye's number."

"If I insist? That's a crazy answer. I wrote down Nye's telephone number. This is the number I called before we drove out there. The secretary who answered said, 'Lipscomb Atmospheric.' Why would you say I'm insisting on its being Nye's phone number?"

"Assume that it is Nye's phone number," said Ribbley as though the matter was entirely hypothetical, "what does that tell you?"

Her voice rising a notch and her eyes squinting hard at her partner, Munro said, "Assume? Assume? Dammit, Ribbley that is Martin Nye's telephone number. Now if you want to play games, tell me the rules."

"Easy, Sergeant," deadpanned Ribbley, "this is a police investigation and the first rule is that the investigating officer must remain objective and dispassionate. I believe you're slipping a bit on the passionate side of the rule."

Determined not to be baited, Munro leaned back in her chair and put her feet on the desk. Carefully examining her knuckles and then her fingernails, she ignored Ribbley. Humming to herself, she again picked up the reports and began reading them, slowly.

"Sergeant," drawled Ribbley, "you've gone and got your water up. So before something technical inside of you busts, let's go back to the question. Given the fact that Nye is up to his scrawny neck in this killing, what does that tell us?"

Too good a cop and too interested to ignore the fact that Ribbley was going somewhere with his question, Munro looked over her papers at him. "It tells me that we should talk to Nye and ask him how he knows the 'shot dead' that was found in the Patman." Growing more thoughtful, she went on, "And I suppose it tells me that we need to trace this thing, but wait! Ed Gates couldn't have...." She dropped her feet to the floor and leaned over the desk, "Damn. I see what you mean."

A smile creased Ribbley's face as he put the words to her thought, "You forgot to remember that we have bloody Ed Gates in custody and we've got everything but an outright blubbing confession from him that he killed Bernie and Colleague. He also tried to tamper with you and he was about ready to ventilate poor ole Liss, all for Pringle's disks, at least that was his motive as to the latter malefaction."

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Almost before Munro began to zero in on Ribbley's last comment, he went on. However, he avoided looking at her by giving his attention to the ceiling where he seemed to find wisdom. "We also know that Bloody Ed wasn't working solo because his podner is now cold. And we've got Ed in a nice box, wrapped and ready for delivery to the D.A. That tells us there is another shooter working the street and he seems to have some connection with Martin Nye. The simple fact is, Les, we're probably seeing that this case has two angles. There may be two parties after the Pringle data. The Patman shooter may be the one who did a do on Pringle and he may be the one who tossed the pineapple at us."

Crossing her arms and leaning her, ... chin, on the folded arms, Munro peered at Ribbley. "But we're still looking at one motive. Two interested parties, but one motive."

"Put a 'maybe' on that one too, Les," cautioned Ribbley. "Until we know what the hell was on that disk, we won't know who or why. One other thing, Les. There isn't just one disk in this damn case. You found one. Bernie was sitting on one and what you call a 'hard' disk is another."

They stood up and looked at one another. "Liss before Nye?" said Munro.

"Liss," nodded Ribbley. "And one more thing, Les, we need to start figuring out how Bloody Ed and friend found Bernie and Colleague and how the same two found Liss."

As they headed for the door, Munro gave Ribbley a narrow look, "What, Ribbley, was the former malefaction?"

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The glass in the door had been replaced. The carpet had either been patched or cleaned, and the office had been restored to the business of housing an eminent academic person, and it no longer seemed to be a crime scene.

The occupant, Liss, had been restored as well. His glasses glinted cleaner than ever, his Lenin beard was sharply tapered and trimmed to the finest degree of a whisker, and his bearing was that of a busy, involved teacher. The female student he had been counseling had received the full power of his scholarship, and was being properly respectful and attentive as Liss gave her a last few words of encouragement and ushered her out of the office, with, Ribbley suspected, a mental pat on the well rounded behind.

As the student, her brain disks now presumably recharged, came out the office door, Munro and Ribbley took her place in the office. The professor seemed genuinely pleased to see them, Munro especially.

"Sergeant Munro," he glinted, "and Detective Ribbley. This is a surprise and, I might add, something of a coincidence. I finished my written report this morning on the Pringle matter and had planned on putting it in the mail to you."

Munro gave him a wide smile, "Then we can save the postage and the time."

"Indeed," said Liss, as though the whole thing had been his idea, "let me just step down to the Chairman's office and rescue it from the secretarial staff before they put it in the hands of the postal service."

"You know, Les," said Ribbley at the door closed behind Liss, "the professor said he had consulted on the Blue Mesa project, but I don't recall him saying who he was working for."

Her brow wrinkling, Munro disagreed, "I'm pretty sure he did, Ribbley. He said some of the members of the faculty were working for the builder."

"Yes, but who's that? No, I don't think we've closed that loop yet."

"But he'd think we were odd if we ask him the same questions over again."

Stretching, Ribbley reminded her, "Nobody said this job was a popularity contest."

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"Then you're saying we should ask?"

"I'd like to know, especially if it was for Lipscomb Atmospheric."

Munro gave him a surprised look. "Do you think that's possible?"

"Possible?" reflected Ribbley, "Lots of things are possible. But probable? I'd say not probable. But go ahead and ask, Sergeant."

"Why me?"

"He's your professor, not mine."

"Mine? How can that be? Remember, Ribbley, you already gave me Jason Porr. I think Liss is yours and that you should keep him."

Affecting a surprised look, Ribbley pursed his lips in a soundless whistle and began contemplating the rows of books on his professor's shelves. His reflection was brief and it ended when Liss stepped back into the office carrying a manila envelope.

"I'm hardly a qualified mailperson," he quipped, "but here is a letter for Detective Ribbley."

Ribbley took the envelope and looked at the address as if confirming that he was indeed the addressee. Deliberately, he tore back the flap and removed a letter which was clipped to a sheaf of papers. Handing the contents, which included the stained 'Bernie' disk and the original Pringle disk, to Munro, he then proceeded to carefully tear away the upper right hand corner of the envelope which bore the stamps and offered the scrap to Liss. "No sense in wasting the postage. Stamps are becoming precious these days."

Smiling, Liss said, "But they were on your letter, Detective Ribbley."

Still holding the stamps out toward Liss, Ribbley said, "I remind you, Professor, of what Horace Lampley wrote almost two hundred years ago in his Essay On The Economy Of Persuasion, 'One who declines a token shall not thereafter prosper and one who disdains advice shall neither prosper nor rise.' Would you agree with the gist of that, Sergeant?"

Munro, quietly signing her acceptance of Ribbley's little philosophical message, looked up. "Oh, yes, Detective Ribbley. By all means."

"Why then, we should be about our business and not be keeping Professor Liss unnecessarily. I believe you had some questions for him?"

With a quick glance at Ribbley, who was again surveying the titles of books on the long shelves, Munro carefully chose her words,

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"Professor, purely as a matter of clarification, didn't you tell us you were doing consulting work on the Blue Mesa power plant?"

"Yes. I'm working on the computerization of the operational system. Essentially, that includes the hardware and the software which will control fuel mix, fuel feed, burn to fuel volume ratios in order to minimize emissions. That sort of thing." Obviously pleased with his answer, Liss looked at her seeming to be waiting for the follow up.

"I see. And didn't you tell us exactly who that work was being done for?"

Obviously becoming puzzled by the questions, Liss nodded, "I thought I had, Sergeant. But it certainly isn't any secret. A group of us here on the faculty is doing work for General Western Power Associates, the developers of Blue Mesa."

"Does that include Lipscomb Atmospheric?"

"I'm afraid I'm not familiar with that organization, Sergeant. Should I be?"

Breaking in, Ribbley said, "Exactly what I thought. That's pretty much all we have, professor." Giving Munro a quick look, he added, "Sergeant, I don't believe we need trouble Professor Liss on that point any further. Now, Professor, I wonder if you could give us a brief summary of your report, the 'bottom line,' I believe some of the young people are fond of saying."

"Certainly," Liss agreed. "But unfortunately for the resolution of your case, there isn't anything remarkable in the data on Dr. Pringle's disks. It's pretty straight forward work. He has a basic hypothesis which he then sets about to test. He does that by generating some chemical formulas. He then makes some bench scale tests to confirm them."

Leaning forward in his chair and leaving only the desk between himself and the glinting eyeglasses, Ribbley said, "That leaves us with the obvious question, Professor. What was Pringle's hypothesis?"

Giving the late Dr. Pringle's theory a disarming shrug, Liss explained. "It's out of my line so I took the liberty of asking a friend of mine in the chemistry department to review the narrative and the data. It's in the report, but your bottom line, Detective Ribbley, is that Dr. Pringle had a theory that the combustion of liquid fossil fuel under reduced pressure creates some rather nasty oxides of hydrogen and oxygen. Some of those compounds are aggressive scavengers and Dr. Pringle apparently believed that in the right circumstances they could be detrimental to the ozone layer surrounding the planet."

"Apparently?" persisted Ribbley.

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"Well," hedged Liss, uncomfortable because he had to abandon certainty, "I said apparently because there were references to effects in the upper atmosphere. I took that to mean the ozone layer. I can't imagine any other reason for doing research on the effects of oxides in the atmosphere. Then too, he did speak of the action of the scavengers."

"Scavengers?" echoed Ribbley.

"The term is used in the chemical sense of a molecule that readily combines with other molecules to form a different compound."

"Do you see any possible relationship to Pringle's theory and the Blue Mesa plant?" pressed Ribbley.

Shaking his head, Liss said, "For Dr. Pringle's theory to really work, those oxides would have to get into the upper atmosphere. Given the tight design standards of Blue Mesa and the filtration equipment that is being designed for it, the chance of significant amounts of such emissions escaping is very slight. In fact, it's not a credible threat unless the filters are fundamentally flawed."

"Credible, meaning such a slight chance of happening that it's not seriously considered?"

"Correct," said Liss.

"And we've already established that Blue Mesa is not being designed to burn liquid fossil fuel." Ribbley mused, aloud, but to himself as much to Munro and Liss. Searching for something that would add to his store of information, Ribbley asked, "Is there anything else about the report that struck you as being, shall we say, interesting?"

Liss stroked his beard as though feeling for any whisker which might be untrimmed by even a fractional amount. His eyes narrowed for a moment and it seemed that he would offer a negative answer. But then, he held up his palm as if stopping himself from making an error. "Wait. There was one thing. It may be of interest. One dimension of Dr. Pringle's theory was that the scavaging, or bonding if you prefer that term, was accentuated in low temperature environments."

"Like up north?" puzzled Ribbley, "maybe Montana or Minnesota? Someplace like that?"

Liss didn't seem to have an interest in the northern regions and showed his lack of concern with an abbreviated smile. "Take your pick, Detective. The entire region up there is a barren icebox to my way of thinking."

Ribbley didn't let the comment pass. "Take my word for it, Professor, those iceboxes do support life. Not a lot of life, only very hardy species, few of which are ever seen in hot metropolitan areas."

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Munro intervened. Trying to avoid a division of the house she diplomatically, suggested, "Each to his own. As I recall, Ribbley one of your relatives lived in Montana. A river boat captain, I think you said."

"No such a damn thing, Sergeant. He was the owner and operator of a ferry service across the Missouri River, and ..."

The tactful Munro interrupted again. "Oh, sure. Now I remember." Quickly, she went on before either man could speak, "But rather than get into that and waste any more time, I wonder if we shouldn't finish up here, Ribbley and be on our way. Perhaps we can get into hot spots and cold spots another day." To enforce her back-to-business suggestion, Munro asked, "Is there anything else that is bottom line type of information, Professor Liss?"

With an apprehensive glance at Ribbley, whose dimension seemed to have been increased by the comment Liss surely intended to be innocent and which Ribbley took to be a family insult, the academic selected his tone and words carefully. "Not really, Sergeant unless you attach some value to the water vapors."

"Water vapors," Ribbley almost snapped, "what about water vapors?"

"Nothing much," replied Liss, "except that in the combustion of liquid fuel in cold temperatures there is a considerable amount of water vapor produced. That's a well known fact. The theory of Dr. Pringle was that those vapors crystalize in cold temperatures and have an exceptionally strong reflective character."

"So?" demanded Ribbley.

"So nothing," said Liss easily. "It's merely a significant aspect of Dr. Pringle's theory."

The office enjoyed a moment of silence. Munro, uncomfortable and anxious to be out of the place, tried to think of a comment which would move Ribbley and not anger him. Liss, willing to have the police leave, waited for a sign they would go. Ribbley, however was not finished.

Ribbley found the answers given by Liss to be unsettling and discouraging. Each comment by Liss put up an obstacle to the investigation, and taken as a whole, they put an insurmountable barrier between murder and Blue Mesa.

Abruptly coming to his feet, Ribbley asked, "Sergeant Munro, I think we've intruded too long on Professor Liss. Do you have anything else to ask before we go?"

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"No," she said. "But we certainly may have more questions when we've had a chance to read the report."

"Anytime, Sergeant, anytime," glinted Liss. With considerable reserve, he made the same offer to Ribbley.

In the hallway, Ribbley turned back and with a word caught Liss in the act of closing his office door. "One thing occurs to me, Professor Liss," said Ribbley. "Do I correctly recall you saying that the first day you had the Pringle disk, you examined it in your laboratory?"

"Yes. I took it in that evening and did some analytical work on some of our equipment."

"I see," said Ribbley tugging at his ear. "One more thing, Professor. Does your report include anything on the second disk we brought or on the hard disk that I tossed through your door?"

"Ah yes," said Liss, "the second disk, the one with the.. hem... blood stain on it. I confess I didn't make a thorough analysis of it. It merely seemed to be a duplicate of the Pringle disk so I didn't look at it in any detail. Nor have I managed to examine the hard disk. However, I will do that today. Perhaps you or Sergeant Munro would like to call later and I can give you a progress report."

Ribbley had the distinct impression that Liss would prefer that Munro make the call. Aside from that, Ribbley had the nagging feeling that something was still missing. "Professor Liss, did you talk to anyone about the work you were doing for us?"

"Most assuredly I did not," Liss said quickly. "I take my work for the police seriously, Detective Ribbley. If you're suggesting..."

Ribbley cut him off, "I not suggesting anything, Professor, I'm trying to figure out how those grease balls knew you were working on Pringle's disk. Surely you must have wondered how they knew your name and where to find you."

Ribbley had guessed right. The eyes glinted behind the clean lenses and Liss's eyebrows walked up his forehead. "Yes. I wondered about that. But I dismissed the thought. I guess I just felt that there were lots of ways that information could have gotten out of the Police Department. Reports, phone calls, routine papers being filed, that sort of thing."

Obviously puzzled, Munro gave Liss a close look. "I can assure you, Professor, we were very close with our information. In fact, myself, Ribbley and our Lieutenant are the only ones who knew you were working on this."

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The three of them paused and looked at one another. Then Munro asked, "Professor, did you make any phone calls to anyone about the disk?"

"No," he said thoughtfully, "except during the examination of the disk."

"Who did you call?" she asked quickly.

"It wasn't a call in the conventional sense of the word," said Liss, "Let me explain. You see, there is a phone number in the coded section of the disk. I connected with it by way of a modem. It was only an automatic federal relay system. I keyed in my number but then, something else came up and I simply never went back to check it further. I can assure you it's not significant, because I never received a call back. In any event, it's in my report. You may want to call the number yourself."

"I may do that," promised Ribbley, "However they got your name, we'll find out sooner or later. When we do, Munro or I will give you a call." Then giving Liss a nod, he turned away and joined Munro. Together they headed down the long hallway toward the rectangle of light which streamed in the glass doors.

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Lemonade at Molly's was a welcome respite from the heat that was blistering the streets. Ribbley, in a thoughtful mood, jabbed with the end of a straw at the elusive slice of lemon which dodged around the ice cubes in his glass.

"Why don't you call the lab and see if they've got anything on that 'shot dead' they found in the Patman," he suggested.

Nodding agreement, Munro shoved her way out of the booth and went to a nearby phone on the counter which Molly had installed for her "guys," a term which she had originally applied to the male cops who made her place a regular stop. Molly still had reservations about female cops, and privately said "harness bulls" didn't mean "harness cows," but Munro had managed to escape that label and had become one of Molly's favorites.

As Munro connected with the lab and sat waiting for someone to find a file, Molly leaned over the counter and in a low voice asked, "What's with Joe Palooka over there? He's pretty quiet today."

"It's what's known as a brick wall, Molly. We've hit it headon in the case we're working."

"Hm," intoned Molly as though she was the wizard of all police work, "leads gone cold huh?"

Smiling, Munro said, "Yeah. We thought we were on the right track but, this morning we found out we were on a dead end to nowhere."

"Must be a helluva case to have Ribbley down like that. It ain't like him to be so quiet. He's usually sassin' me and smart mouthin' about something. What kind of crime you looking to solve, Les?"

"It a murder case. A research scientist at a laboratory got himself killed. That's got us wrapped up in power plants and computers..." She broke off her conversation with Molly and spoke into the telephone. "That's the one. The Patman Hotel...yes."

Molly moved away and took up a position closer to the booth where Ribbley sat, lost in thought. "Hey copper," she called, "more lemonade? You've about worn that poor lemon slice down to the peel."

Ribbley looked as though he had been interrupted in the midst of something. "Lemonade? Sure if there's no extra charge. You almost got it right today, Molly. But anything would taste good in this heat."

"Ain't that the truth," she agreed. Coming from behind the counter with her large Burtle pitcher, she lifted the curving handle and

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refilled his glass. "I heard on the radio that this whole heat wave business is the beginning of the end, Ribbley."

"How's that?" he asked.

"It's the greenhouse thing. You know, when the whole darn world gets hotter and hotter. The way I hear it, the rains will stop coming and everything will become a desert like Africa."

"Is that so?" smiled Ribbley.

"Your damn tootin' it's so," said Molly as though the idea was hers and that she had to defend it against skeptics and smart mouths alike. "It's been in the papers and on TV. Of course it probably won't happen all at once. It'll come on gradually, a few degrees each year. Finally, everybody will just cook or die of starvation."

"Today, I think I'd agree with that, Molly. It's sure as hell hot."

Detecting a note of toleration and mild skepticism in his voice, Molly turned to the counter and picked up a newspaper which she tossed down in front of him. "Here, Mr. Doubting Thomas. Read it for yourself."

With chuckle, Ribbley looked down at the paper where he saw the small headline below the fold. "GREENHOUSE EFFECTS EXAMINED AT SPECIAL MEETING OF UNIVERSITY SCIENTISTS" Idly, Ribbley sipped his lemonade and read the story which was a rehash of fears about planet warming that seemed to increase with every spell of warm weather. According to the story a combined group of meteorologists and chemistry specialists from a half dozen universities had met to share their ideas on possible causes of the extended heat that was simmering over much of the nation.

The story had found its headline in the statement by one of the scientists that the heat was the first definite symptom of the growing greenhouse effect. His theory was that a blanket of pollution was wrapping around the planet admitting heat from the sun and, at the same time, trapping the heat against the surface of the earth. Coming to a comment that the burning of fossil fuels was creating the heat blanket, Ribbley sighed heavily and put the paper back on the table. He'd had enough of fossil fuel burning plants and stories about them.

"That stuff is getting pretty serious, Ribbley" said Munro as she took her seat in the booth.

"What stuff?"

Jabbing at the paper with her finger she replied, "The greenhouse effect. Some people are getting pretty scared."

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"I know," he said, "Molly's one of them. Don't tell me you're getting nervous, Les? As long as we've got one of the few cars in the Division with air conditioning, we'll be okay."

"Be serious," scolded Munro. "The whole country has gone for weeks without rain. Every state and city has experienced record high temperatures, and reports from Europe are pretty much the same. I'm beginning to think that something really has gone haywire."

"Munro," said Ribbley with exaggerated patience, "there have been droughts before. Ever hear of the dirty thirties when the whole midwest became the great dust bowl? It was probably a lot drier and hotter then than it is now. You'd be alright if you'd switch to lemonade or iced tea." He smiled at her as she puckered her lips as though drawn tight by the sour taste of lemons.

Through her lemon face she mused out the words, "Then everyone would say there are two Ribbleys in the Department."

Laughing, he asked, "Speaking of the Department, anything from the lab on the shot dead?"

Glancing at her notepad, Munro fell back into a serious mood. "They identified him as a local yeg. His name was Frank Bemis. A tough guy with a string of short term 'ins and outs' in the county slam for petty jobs. He had a minor reputation and was known to some of the detectives in the North Metro area as a thief who apparently never had enough imagination to do anything big time. They found the slugs. A bit unusual, .32 caliber." Consulting her notes again, she added, "Oh, yes. For whatever it's worth, they traced the tracks around the body to the shoes of the drunk they found in the alley, name of Billy Natterham."

"I wonder if our friend Martin Nye owns a 32?" mused Ribbley.

"That might be a good bet," said Munro. "Speculate with me, Ribbley. If we can tag Nye with this shooting, doesn't that give us some answers?"

"Such as?" prompted Ribbley.

"First, it closes the book on the stiff in the Patman, the late Frank Bemis. If that's true it also suggests that we know who bashed Pringle."

"Bemis," agreed Ribbley, interested in seeing where Munro's logic would carry her.

"It makes pretty good sense when you think about it. Nye reads about Pringle's work in the blurb that Kreesap circulated. He figures he could use the data in preparing the bid for Blue Mesa, so he hires a local thug to go to Pringle's office and steal the data disks."

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Joining her in the process of putting the pieces together, Ribbley supplied a further detail, "That also explains why the office was trashed. Nye probably told his handyman to make it look like a routine smash and grab job in order to direct attention away from what his man was really after."

"And to keep anyone from suspecting Lipscomb Atmospheric," said Munro.

"So far, it's holds together," nodded Ribbley, "as a theory. But fit your theory into the Bernie and Colleague killings and into Bloody Ed Gates and his associate suddenly appearing and offering to shave Liss's chinny chin chin and tamper with you."

"That's a different story," admitted Munro. "We've got Gates for doing Bernie and Colleague, and, of course, we know about him coming to the office at the university." She paused, lost in thought. "We just don't have anything to connect the Pringle line to the Bernie line, do we?"

"Wrong," said Ribbley, a smile spreading slowly over his face. "We do have a connection. Frank Bemis, the head basher was not a total failure, Les. He did swipe some disks, but he didn't get them all."

Munro's face brightened. Quickly she fitted the pieces together. "Sure!" she exclaimed. "I found the disk that Pringle was carrying. It was under the desk where they fell when he was slugged. After he slugged Pringle, Bemis blew out of there without looking around because he already had some disks that he'd found in the office. There damn well may be more to Pringle's project than we suspected, Ribbley. Ed Gates was after the disk I found. Bemis was shot for the disks he swiped."

"And the Bemis disks are still out there," agreed Ribbley, "and if we've plotted this thing out correctly, Martin Nye has them." Suddenly putting down his lemonade glass, Ribbley said, "And I've got a strong hunch we'd better talk to Nye as soon as we can."

Sliding out of the booth, Ribbley called out, "Good lemonade, Molly." To the trailing Munro, he said over his shoulder, "Pay the woman, Les. I'll drive."

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"I'll see if Mr. Nye is available," intoned the secretary.

"Mr. Nye is available and will see me, sister," growled Ribbley who towered over the desk.

Undaunted she looked up at him and asked, "Your name?"

"Ribbley, Detective, City of Denver Police Department, Homicide Division," he said, opening his badge folder and holding it close to her face.

Either the tone of his voice or the badge or the emphatic way he identified himself or the combination of all those forces had the effect Ribbley wanted. "Oh, I see," she said, her eyes opening wide. She tapped at her phone keyboard and, without waiting for an acknowledgement, said "Mr. Nye, there is a Detective Ribbley here." Feeling Ribbley's eyes on her, she quickly added, "He's on his way in, sir."

As Ribbley headed for the office door, Munro, who was by unspoken agreement covering the back trail, waited. Then, showing her badge to the secretary, she asked, "Are there any other doors?"

Following the secretary's out flung arm and pointing finger, Munro stepped to an adjoining hallway where she immediately saw the side door. Quickly, she walked to it and pushed it open.

Inside the office, Nye had just risen and, seeing Ribbley advancing toward his desk, was opening his mouth to utter a protest. Munro's sudden, even dramatic, appearance through his side door seemed to render him speechless. Looking from one officer to the other and trying to comprehend the swiftness with which they had come upon him, he finally managed to sputter, "What the hell?"

In the manner of one who had done this before, Ribbley used a leading question which made it almost impossible for his subject to give an answer which wouldn't implicate him somehow. Abruptly, Ribbley demanded, "Nye, do you have a permit for that 32 of yours?"

"Permit?" stammered Nye his head swiveling from one officer to the other. "32? I...I...What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about that 32 you carried to the Patman hotel. Do you have a permit for it?"

"The Patman hotel?" asked a stricken Nye. "Where...I mean what do you mean a 32?"

Ribbley persisted with his disconcerting question. "The 32 you used to kill Frank Bemis. Come on, Nye, it's important. Do you have a permit for it?"

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Utterly swamped by the odd question and by Ribbley's insistent manner, Nye looked frantic. He rubbed his hands along the sides of his head, trying to clear his thinking. "Wait, Detective, please wait a minute."

"Wait hell," thundered Ribbley, "I've got to have an answer right now. Show me your permit?"

"But I don't have any permit," wailed Nye. "A permit to kill someone? Permit? What are you saying about a permit?"

Giving Nye a sour look, Ribbley relaxed from his demanding stance. Scratching his head, Ribbley then took a seat in one of the cushioned chairs. "Sit down, Nye, before you collapse."

The thoroughly shaken chief executive officer slid down into his chair. Somewhere he found a handkerchief and began mopping and dabbing at his face. His voice almost a whisper, Nye asked, "Would it be okay if I got something to drink?"

"Drown yourself for all I care," said Ribbley who seemed to have lost interest in the man.

Seeing that his shaking hands were putting his glass and decanter in peril of being shattered, Munro stepped forward, took the clattering glass from his grasp and poured him a generous shot of what looked and smelled like good brandy. Planting it in front of him she directed him to, "Put that in your sock, Mr. Nye."

Munro, speaking for effect, asked Ribbley, "Want me to read him his rights before we take him in?"

Giving the bewildered Nye an indifferent look, Ribbley drawled, "Naw. There isn't any point in it. This guy didn't shoot anybody."

Nye put down his glass. "Shoot somebody? There you said it again, Detective Ribbley," he said it almost as an accusation. "I didn't shoot anyone. Ever."

"I believe you," said Ribbley trying to put an end to Nye's denials. "But someone did and you're mixed up in it somehow, Mr. Martin N. and I want to know how."

"A killing?" gulped Nye. "No sir. No way. I'm not involved in any killing."

Ribbley examined Nye, he evaluated Nye's voice, he considered his behavior. Apparently satisfied with a method of proceeding, the burly detective became concerned about Nye. "It's like I said, Mr. Nye. I believe you, but there are some questions that have to be answered. If you'll be square with us, I think I can clear this up for you."

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Ribbley spoke as though some power, far away and high up, had pointed the finger of suspicion at Nye and that he, Ribbley, would make an effort to set things right. Gone entirely was the overpowering attitude of hostility and the accusatory tone, but apparently gone, too, was Nye's recollection of it. Instead, he was immediately cooperative, almost eager.

"Sure, Detective, I'll tell you anything you want to know. I don't have any secrets from the police."

Munro picked up the thread of the inquiry. "Mr. Nye, do you recall our last visit here and the conversation we had?"

"Certainly," said Nye, "you were here asking about our interest in the Blue Mesa power plant project and about whether we knew anything about Dr. Pringle's work over at the Kreesap Institute."

"Right," Munro assured him, "now let's talk about Dr. Pringle again. Some disks were stolen from his office and we believe they may contain information valuable enough to make someone commit murder for them. My question is, have you seen those disks?"

"I haven't seen any disks that belonged to Pringle."

Nye's answer came too quickly to suit Ribbley. Instantly, Ribbley asked, "But you have heard something about them?"

The President of Lipscomb Atmospheric's swallowed hard and paused, but only for an instant. "Yes, I have heard about them. The morning after Dr. Pringle was killed and before you came here and talked to Turne and me, I received a telephone call."

"From?" asked Munro.

"I don't know, Sergeant." Looking at Ribbley, he added emphasis, "Honest. It was a man and he wouldn't tell me his name."

"What did he say?" asked Munro.

"He asked if I would be interested in buying two computer disks that contained data from Pringle's research on the combustion of fossil fuels. I said I might, but I also told him I would have to see the disks first and that I would have to have a chance to put them on a computer to see if they were valid."

"And did he agree to that?" asked Ribbley.

"No. He said he wanted one hundred thousand dollars for the disks and wanted it right away. I told him that was not possible. He said that he thought he could sell them to someone else for that much money, but if he couldn't he'd call back. That's the first and last time I heard from him."

"And that's the entire conversation?" asked Munro. Seeing Nye bob his head, emphatically indicating that he had recited the entire

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conversation, Munro tried another direction. "Did you tell Mr. Turne about this offer?"

"Burl?" Nye, despite his fright, almost laughed, "Yeah, I mentioned it and he damn near puddled up right here in my office. Burl isn't what you'd call a strong businessman. I had just suggested that the disks might be available for a price when the two of you arrived. You must have noticed that he acted like he'd just committed the high crime of the century. Just the idea of stealing left him looking guilty."

Ribbley, who may have recalled Turne's behavior, found it more to his liking than Nye's apparent willingness to traffic in stolen research data. "There is still something to be said for honesty, Mr. Nye. Not enough to suit me, but I'm a throwback to a better time."

Nye simply stared down into the empty glass which he still held in both hands. Munro, perhaps feeling some compassion for him, asked, "Would it make you feel any better, Mr. Nye, to know that the data on Dr. Pringle's disks would not have been any use to you in preparing your Blue Mesa bid? We've had the disks looked at, and the report on them says that Dr. Pringle was concentrating on liquid fuel, not coal."

Nye's head came up. "Liquid fuel? But Blue Mesa will burn coal."

"That's what we've been told," said Munro. "That's what has us puzzled. Given the fact that Pringle was working on the combustion of liquid fuel, do you have any idea why somebody would be interested enough in his theories to kill for them?"

Nye's eyes stared vacantly at her for a moment. "Liquid fuel," he muttered, seeming to find it difficult to comprehend the idea. "A lot of work has been done on slurry which is really a coal mixture, not a liquid fossil fuel. Did your report say what kind of liquid, Sergeant?"

"It has a chemical name," said Munro, trying to recall the actual expression used in the report. "Would it help you to know exactly what it is?"

With a weak smile, Nye hedged a bit, "I can't tell you who your killer is, Sergeant, but if I knew exactly what kind of fuel you're talking about, I could suggest who might be interested in that kind of research."

Ribbley made the trip to the car and back, returning with the report in hand. Not expecting much from Nye, he tossed it on the desk and watched while Nye scanned the cover then immediately opened it and began reading. As quiet grew out of Nye's study, Ribbley sat and watched and mulled over his case.

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Unlike the conventional homicide investigation, this one had angles and blank spots that made him uneasy. He knew that his discomfort was caused, in part at least, by the fact he was dealing with factors beyond his own understanding. He had learned enough about computers to keep his job, and he grimly told himself that chemistry had never been his favorite sport.

Yet, he believed what he had said to Ned Banner, that all the science in the world hadn't changed the first axiom of police work. Simply stated, it was that you had find the motive and reel it until you could put your arm on the killer. In this case that first rule kept getting lost in computers and talk of combustion and formulas.

Looking at Munro, he wondered if he had gotten distracted. It would be easy enough. He'd heard the boys and their talk of O O Munro and had found himself feeling a little smug and superior since she was working with him. Usually a solo, he admitting that he liked the idea of working with her, and wondered how he could manage to get the assignment continued after this case was filed away, or as they said nowadays, saved on a disk. And distracting as she might be, she was a damned good cop and a good contrast to his approach to police work.

Motioning her over to a corner of Nye's blue office, Ribbley, speaking in a low tone, asked, "Think he's playing it straight, Les?"

"He afraid not to."

"You realize don't you that this is beginning to look like another dead end?" frowned Ribbley.

"There's always hope, Ribbley."

"There's always sunshine and flowers in the park, Les, but they don't catch bad guys and they don't keep Ned Banner from pointing at that damn computer screen and asking for 'closure.'"

"Yeah, I know what you mean, but I've got a hunch that we're due for a break in this case, Ribbley."

The two stood quietly looking from time to time at Nye. After more moments of waiting, Nye looked up from the pages of the report. A smile spread across his face. Looking first at Munro and then at Ribbley he said simply, "Kerosene!"

Both quickly moved back toward the desk. "Did I hear you say 'kerosene'?" asked Ribbley.

"You did," admitted Nye closing the report and pushing it across the desk at Munro. "Whoever prepared your report, identified it by its chemical name and used that reference almost all the way through. I thought it looked familiar, but it's been a long time since I had any reason

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to think about it. But there in a narrative paragraph near the end they referenced it by its other name, JP-2."

"And so Pringle's liquid fuel is kerosene?" said Ribbley. Voicing the question which leaped into his mind, he continued, "Who would be planning on using kerosene and where?"

Having lost most of his fright, Nye was able to smile, "Who uses kerosene?" he echoed, "The entire airline industry lives on kerosene. That's who."

"Airlines," repeated a surprised Ribbley, "are you sure?"

"JP-2 is jet fuel, Detective Ribbley. Common, ordinary jet fuel. Perhaps a higher grade and with some special additives, but basically it's old fashioned kerosene. The stuff your great grandparents and mine used as lantern fuel."

Ribbley's mind raced over the facts he and Munro had gathered. She, too, was sorting over what they had learned. She cried out, "It fits! Christ, Ribbley, it fits a lot of what we've been stumbling over."

Ticking on his fingers, he agreed. "It's burned in a low pressure environment, high in the atmosphere. And it's also a low temperature environment. Remember that stuff about a "flow of emissions?" That fits too."

"A lot of things do," agreed Munro. "Jeez, this even goes back to the day I went to Dr. Pringle's office and found his folder. It had the disk and an airline guide in it. That simply never rang a bell."

Nye, who had been almost forgotten, interrupted. "You were asking who would be interested in Pringle's work. I'd have to say that is now a very broad question. The simple answer is everyone in the business of building and operating jet airplanes. You might even begin with Pringle's employer."

"Kreesap!" Munro exclaimed. "I'd almost forgotten, Ribbley. Remember that Porr told us Kreesap was involved in jet engine design? As I remember, he mentioned that as a sort of afterthought."

"Yes, I remember," said Ribbley, "and I also remember that we never got a straight answer from him. Especially when the questions got around to Pringle and the type of work he was doing. Porr always became pretty vague and claimed he wasn't really a detail man." His bile clearly on the rise, Ribbley added, "He may not have known the details, but he sure as Hell must have known that Pringle was researching jet fuel..."

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Ribbley halted and picked up Liss's report. Holding it up he looked at Nye and repeated his words as a question "was researching jet fuel...?"

"Emissions," filled in Nye.

"The more I think about it," put in Munro, "the more I have the feeling Porr headed us the wrong way. We picked up on his suggestions, very subtle suggestions I might add, that we should be looking at the people who were researching the combustion of coal."

"And down that road we went," agreed Ribbley, "full bore. When we came here and talked to Nye and Turne we heard about Blue Mesa. We've been following that trail ever since." Quickly, he added, "No need to duck, Mr. Nye, I'm not headed in your direction again. We asked and you simply answered. What we have to figure out now is why Porr steered us away from Pringle's work on jet fuel."

"And why some people are so interested in what Dr. Pringle had to say about it," added Munro.

"Any ideas?" Ribbley asked, looking at Martin Nye.

"Not off hand," shrugged Nye. "But from what I saw in that report, I think the key word is 'emissions.' Pringle seemed to be concentrating on the scavenging effects of some of the oxides which are produced by high altitude combustion and on the reflective character of larger particles."

"I've heard that before," said Ribbley quickly. "Scavenging, that means the oxides, as you call them, have the tendency to combine with other elements."

"That's a pretty good description," agreed Nye.

"And the subject element, the one that gets absorbed is ozone." Munro's flat declaration filled the office with silence. Somehow, everyone knew she was right.

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Ned Banner stared pensively at the computer screen on his desk. He tapped the page down key and watched the list of active files roll up only to be replaced by another full screen of different names. More active files. The list seemed endless. Shootings, stabbing, a couple of strangulations and even a decapitation. The damn city was becoming a war zone, Tet- Denver Metro style. It couldn't continue this way much longer, but then he'd thought that many hundreds of killings ago. Maybe the TV critics were right. Too many hours of violence burned for too many hours into too many impressionable brains. Then again, maybe it was the just the silly season, back for a long stay. The boys and girls in the squad room were convinced it was the heat. The damned constant, unrelenting, heat. Tempers were growing shorter by the day, water rationing rules were making people angry, and the pukey brown/yellow smog was getting worse every day.

Banner decided that when asked about the lengthening list, and he was sure he would be asked, he would offer up the heat as the culprit. After all, everyone knew about it, everyone felt it, and everyone talked about it. Banner knew the routine. The Captain would grumble about excuses, and make some meaningless comments about beefing up foot patrols, but in the end, do nothing. Because there was nothing he or anyone else could do to keep people from killing one another.

As he scanned the list, he saw Lewis. Well, Murphy was handling that and was close to making an arrest of a quarrelsome neighbor. Loginnet, funny name, sad case, unusual facts, intra family shooting, should be closed soon. Massman, a new file, maybe a drive by, but some odd comments by a neighbor made Banner wonder if he shouldn't talk to the detective. But he dismissed the idea. It would be read as interference. Mobley, a weird case, no leads, the detective assigned was on leave.

Natterham. Banner paused. He didn't recall the case. Staring at the entry, he noticed the case was tagged with a reference to Pringle. That rang the bell. Sure, Natterham was the wino found in the alley near the Patman Hotel. A notebook had been found with a reference to one of the people who had been questioned in the Pringle investigation.

Curious, Banner keyed in the number of the Pringle file. The list disappeared and in its place the detailed report on the Pringle case appeared on the display. It contained everything from the first call which was labeled a burglary-assault, later refiled as a homicide, up to the latest

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calls into to dispatch. As he read and keyed his way to the latest report, Banner saw that Ribbley and Munro had reported at 0920 that they were going to the office of Lipscomb Atmospherics to interview Martin Nye. The next entry, received at 11:15, said they were going Code 34. Banner frowned, Code 34? That was damned unusual. What in the hell was Ribbley up to now?

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"It must be budget crunch time," grumbled Ribbley as he watched Munro struggle with the door lock. "Damn cheap op house if you ask me."

"Hey, don't complain," said Munro. "We were lucky to get anything. If we'd told that guy in administration that we wanted it for a drug bust, we might have gotten something better. A mere homicide operation isn't the in thing these days."

Finally, the door of the "operations" house relented and swung open. Inside, as outside, everything was conventional and low cost. The furniture showed the kind of wear and usage inflicted by people who came and went but didn't live there. The shades were drawn down on the windows, and the dim interior had the close, musty smell of stale air.

"Welcome to the Denver Police Department's Operation JP-2," quipped Munro. Stepping inside, she held the door open for Ribbley who was carrying a CPU, a bulky computer screen and a keyboard.

"How come we didn't get one of those little computers, a laptop?" grunted Ribbley as he headed for the table in the dinette area.

"They make them with modems," agreed Munro, "but they're too new and too expensive for a police department's budget."

While Munro began plugging in cords and arranging the computer setup, Ribbley wandered around the house looking for the air conditioner control. "These places are supposed to be maintained and kept up, just like a regular house," he called to Munro. Then finding the control, he turned it to 'ON' and listened until he heard the motor pick up and begin running. Returning to the dining area he conceded, "If we get cool air, I may take back some of what I said to that guy in administration."

Sitting down and aligning the keyboard, Munro agreed, "You should, Ribbley. All that capooey you gave him about JP-2 being part of a federal operation and involving...what were your words? 'The most high of the high?' You made it sound like the mayor himself was a suspect."

"He should be. Just being a politician is a common law crime, Les. Did you know that in England in the fourteenth century the Shires, areas kinda like our counties, had a ceremony for removing local officials from office. Part of the ritual required each man being removed

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from office to confess to having committed the crimes of theft and making false statements to the people."

"Is that so?" asked Munro absently, as she gave her attention to the computer.

"Sure it's so," Ribbley assured her, "And the beauty of it was that refusing to confess was a crime. The punishment for refusing to confess was the same as the punishment for theft and lying to the people. The guilty parties were laid out in the courtyard of the town and great stone weights were placed on them. After a certain time, weights were added until they agreed to leave office and never run again. Most, being professional politicians, refused and were simply flattened."

Fussing with a cord that apparently was not seated properly, Munro asked, "Ribbley, is there a point to all that?"

"It is not required that History be instructive, it simply is. But it is the world's most perfect teacher and it speaks for itself."

"Well, what does that story teach?"

"What I described, Les, teaches us how the full court press began."

Focusing for a moment on what Ribbley had been describing and on his conclusion, Munro paused for a long moment as she stared at her keyboard. Then she chose not to react, but to continue setting up the computer. Obviously, Ribbley deserved only to be ignored.

Finally, she took two small computer disks from a leather briefcase she had been carrying. "Any reason to wait?"

"Wait for what? Hell, no. Let's get on with it so we can get out of this place."

Ribbley watched her snap on the unit and the display. The machine beeped, the screen flashed a line of copyright information at the top, beeped again, then settled down to displaying a capital A and a carat. Munro took the disk she had marked 'Pringle 1' and slid it into the drive. Then referring to a folded copy of the report Liss had given them, she typed "Pringle 1A." Munro pressed the return key. The screen went blank for a fraction of a second before the question appeared. "Combustion Data Directory." She tapped the Enter key.

The machine beeped, then came alive with a series of lines. Each appeared to be a formula. Ribbley recognized the symbols 'CO2' and 'O.' Suddenly interested, he pulled one of the nearby chairs closer and sat down. Munro, again looking at the report, rapidly hit the page down key until the end of the list appeared and a query appeared at the bottom of the screen. "Continue? Y/N."

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Munro answered by tapping the Y key. The computer answered with a beep. It replied by rolling up another formula. A tap of the space bar brought up lines and lines of data. As she tapped her way to the end, Ribbley sat watching the screen. At the end the word again appeared, "Continue? Y/N." She repeated the process, going through a formula and long lists of data that had no meaning for either of them. Referring to the report she commanded the machine to return to the beginning display. Typing in a command, the inscription appeared, "Access To Federal Summary? Y/N"

"If I understand all this," mused Ribbley, "We're seeing the original Pringle disk that started all this."

"And what Bernie saw when he tried to read it for us," she nodded. "It's pretty much the way he described it, formulas and then long columns of numbers. Had enough?"

"Yeah," said Ribbley, "Let's go on."

She pressed the Y key.

The screen went blank then displayed, "Access To Summaries By Numeric Code Only. Enter Code."

"That's the inscription Bernie mentioned, and it must be the place where everything disappeared," said Munro. "Hopefully, we now have the code he didn't have."

"It's the code he didn't have at the office," corrected Ribbley. "Our theory is that he figured it out later when he put on his hacker hat."

Carefully, Munro typed "15, 20, 9, 19." She checked the numbers against the report. "If Liss is right in his report, that's Pringle's entry code," she intoned.

"Yeah, right there," said Ribbley, pointing to a section of the report. "Liss says the numbers are simply the numeric order of the letters of his first name, O is 15, 20 is T, I is 9, and 19 is S. Not the most difficult thing in the world to figure out. A guess and a quick look at the phone book would have given Bernie Pringle's first name and address. Then all he had to do was count. It probably wasn't even much of a challenge."

"Poor man," said Munro.

"Pringle or Bernie Finn?" asked Ribbley.

"I was thinking of Dr. Pringle. The idea of him alone in his office, working on his formulas and on his data and then being so afraid someone would steal it that he tried to keep it hidden with a silly code made from his own name." Reading the report, she added, "But I guess he had to use a coded system to work with the federal system."

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"Yeah, I suppose," conceded Ribbley. Anxious to proceed, but not wanting to appear to be too abrupt, he asked, "What's next, Les?"

"We hit 'Enter,' and if I've got all the wires in place and if Liss is right, the modem will be engaged and we'll ring up that federal relay number."

"Let's do it."

With a deft stroke of her finger, Munro engaged the 'Enter' key.

Immediately, the numbers of the code disappeared and were replaced by two lines. The first read, "Enter C and assigned code to access Index of Authorized Contractors." The second read "Enter F and assigned code to access Federal Central Data File."

Across the bottom of the screen, the legend appeared, "Federal Use Restrictions Apply."

"Which file did Liss access?" asked Ribbley, looking for the answer in the report.

"I'm sure he said the C was merely a long list of Contractors doing research for the government."

"Okay," said Ribbley, drawing out the sound as he considered his options. "Let's start with that. You agree?"

"Sure," said Munro. "We're trying to exactly retrace the steps that Liss took and the ones we believe that Bernie Finn took."

"And they both got the same response. Different result, but same response. The difference between now and then is that we've got Bloody Ed Gates in the slam. Whoever sent him probably knows that so I guess we'll see just how much they want those disks."

Without a word, Munro pressed the letter C on the keyboard and then entered the numbers from the report. The cursor blinked and from the CPU's innards they heard what sounded like the whirring of a telephone ringing. A second ring and the screen flashed what was clearly a list of corporations and businesses. By using the page down key Munro was able to quickly work her way down what proved to be three page list.

Munro keyed back to the beginning and then down through the list again. "What we're seeing, Ribbley is the list of contractors that is on the central computer in Washington, D.C."

"Sure. That's the list the National Science Foundation office told me about. Kreesap received at least three grants so they should be listed there with the other grantees."

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Munro keyed down the list again. There was only one entry under the letter K, "Kansas Aerospace Industries." Slowly, she keyed through the entire list.

"No damned Kreesap," muttered Ribbley. Frustrated, he shoved back and stood up. "This, Sergeant Munro, is the reason I've never had any use for these damn..." he searched for an appropriate term and settled for "...gadgets. Every time I see people and computers together, the people are sitting tapping, staring, tapping, reading thick books, tapping and staring. Most computer time is time spent trying to find the exact word or exact symbol that will make them light up. Are you sure this is even the right kind of machine?"

Without looking up from the report, Munro said, "It's the right machine. You'd better sit down before you burn out a capacitor."

"A what?"

"Never mind. Just hold your horses."

Relenting, he grumbled something about seeing how well the operations house was really equipped and wandered into the kitchen area. After a minute of slamming, rattling and fussing, he called, "Want a beer, Les? These ops houses really are operational." Wandering back to the dining table and looking over her shoulder, he asked, "Did you check the phone line?"

"Um hum," she said absently. Then tossing down the report, she said, "Ribbley, this whole list of names shows companies with names like 'Air, Aerospace, Atmospheric, Aerodynamic.' They all seem to be related to the airline..." Abruptly, she keyed to the top of the list. Then she pressed the ESC key. Quickly, she entered another command from the report.

"Access To Federal Summaries? Y/N" asked the computer.

"Y" tapped Munro.

"Damn!" said Munro, "Look at that."

Ribbley was close behind, "This isn't the National Science Foundation computer. It's the central computer of the Federal Aviation Administration. Pringle was working under an FAA grant!"

There was a long silence while they stared at the screen and read what appeared to be technical abstracts of material which researchers had placed in the computer bank. The paragraphs were written as reports on work being done with federal money and most of them contained comments to the effect that much more work needed to be done on the question before a conclusion could be reached.

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"Funny how none of those grantees ever actually solve anything," chuckled Ribbley. Then in a reflective tone, he said, "You know, Les, I wonder if we haven't somehow gotten our hands on a disk that isn't related at all to research on fossil fuels combustion."

"Could be," she agreed, "but it's the one Bernie worked on, and it's the one he copied." Again they fell silent as she keyed through the summaries. Finally, the last paragraph appeared and Munro announced what was in both their minds, "Nothing on Kreesap here either."

After a long pause, Ribbley asked, "Les, is there any technical reason why Bernie's copy would be different. I mean, are we sure the two are exact duplicates?"

"They should be," she said, "but there's only one way of being sure."

Using the ESC key Munro returned to the cursor, withdrew the Pringle disk and inserted the copy. Again, using the codes from the report she went through the same steps she had taken earlier. The result was the same. With a sigh of resignation, Munro tapped the ESC key to return to the beginning.

As she reached her hand out to remove the disk from the disk drive, Ribbley stopped her, "Hold on, Les. What's that MEM mean? I don't remember seeing it on the Pringle disk."

"Let's find out," she said. She typed the letters MEM behind the cursor and tapped Enter.

The screen blinked, flashed, then told them, "You have requested access to saved material. Do you wish to access the saved file? Y/N"

"That sure as hell is different," Munro muttered. Deftly she tapped the Y key. Instantly the screen filled with information.

You have accessed the central data depositary of the United States Federal Aviation Administration. Information contained herein has been deemed exempt from 5 USC 552 pursuant to Executive Order 731763-A and Kover v. Pry, 777 F 2d 456 (D.C. Cir. 1987).

Use and reproduction of material contained herein are subject to the restrictions described in 53 CFR Part 753. Each separate violation is a misdemeanor, punishable by fine and imprisonment. Permission to reproduce data from this depositary may be sought by writing: Federal Aviation Administration, Deputy Administrator for Information

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Management, Independence Avenue, S.E. Washington, D.C. 20077, or by calling (202) 677-8876.

To access index of data files, enter the first three letters of the contractor and your access code.

"I'll be damned," breathed Ribbley. "Just like that huh?"

"Just like that," echoed Munro.

After they had read the introductory material, Ribbley reflected on what they were seeing. "If I understand this machine, we're seeing something that Bernie saved when he accessed the file that Pringle had access to and worked on?"

"Right," agreed Munro, "and its a file we didn't find by using the other disk. Want to see the rest of it?"

"Sure," said Ribbley, "this is getting interesting. But why would Pringle have sent his research material to the government in the first place?"

"As I understand it," explained Munro, "the terms of government grants usually require that summaries of federally funded research be sent in periodically. The feds think it's important, and if a company wants more money for research, they have to keep the agency happy. For some companies like Kreesap, that's critical. It's the difference between survival and bankruptcy. So it's no wonder they toe the mark on sending information into the central data bank."

"Okay," said Ribbley, "the feds required Pringle to send these..."

"Narrative summaries," filled in Munro.

"To this central computer. So what we see on our screen is the Pringle summary as he sent it to the big brain in Washington?"

"Right," confirmed Munro. "It was simply read by Bernie's machine onto his disk. He was saving the stuff off the FAA computer."

"And the FAA computer has the capability of recording incoming phone numbers?"

Again, Munro agreed, "My guess is that all incoming phone numbers are recorded automatically. And more to the point, the recording shows which item the incoming call accessed. Someone could get a printout of incoming calls and simply trace the numbers to the address and bingo, whoever has the printout knows who has been looking at the data."

"And that's how somebody knew that Bernie and Colleague and Liss had Pringle's disk."

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"That has to be the route," said Munro. "It's the only way it could have happened. You and I are the only ones who knew exactly what Bernie was working on. I didn't give Pringle's name or any details to the supervisor when I asked if someone could work on a case for me. So Bernie obviously copied the disk, took it home, and then he and Colleague hacked their way into the FAA computer system. The same thing happened with Liss. Again, you and I were the only ones who even knew his name. Yet, Ed Gates showed up in Liss's office within hours of the time Liss used Pringle's disk to access the government computer."

Ribbley pondered the outline of events that Munro had sketched. He knew her logic was sound, but he had the feeling that something was still missing. But he couldn't put his finger on the what it was. "Les, if we're right, someone with the government is behind all this. Doesn't that bother you?"

"Sure it does, but in my book that just makes it all the more important that we find out who and why."

"Okay. I guess we're wasting time sitting here. What's next?"

"We use the space bar and read what Bernie copied onto his disk." she said thoughtfully. "We'll probably see why he refused to give up the disk-even to save his life."

"Go," Ribbley said quietly.

Without a word, she pressed the space bar. The letters and the numbers sat behind the blinking cursor, seeming to wait. Munro and Ribbley watched silently. Suddenly the screen was filled with text.

KREESAP-Denver-Fed. Region VIII. Grant Number FAA-91-76075 Principal Investigator-J. Porr.

Reporting Investigator-O. Pringle. 2nd Rpt.-91.

SUMMARY A8: Hydrocarbon combustion in negative pressure chambers with temperatures controlled at -10 through -64 C. Prelim. analysis using random samples of JP-2 shows enhanced absorption of ozone-exceeding earlier projections by a factor of 2.7.

SUMMARY A9: Spectrographic analysis. Air samples captured at altitudes 9,500 meters to 11,000 meters shows: increase in concentration of H₂O crystals by factor of .5 above 89 baseline; NO_x concentration increase by factor of .67 over baseline; HO_x concentrations increase by factor of .58. The reflective effects of accumulating vapor crystals may be acting in combination with particulates of combustion to increase thermal packing at ground levels. Thermal levels rising rapidly and residing against the displacement effects of diminished steering currents.

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ATTENTION DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH-EMERGENCY NOTICE.

RESEARCH INVESTIGATOR PROPOSES IMMEDIATE PUBLIC NOTICE OF CAUSE OF THERMAL PACKING AT GROUND LEVELS AND RECOMMENDS IMMEDIATE REDUCTIONS OF MEDIUM ALTITUDE FLIGHTS. INVESTIGATOR RECOMMENDS TOTAL BAN OF JET TRAFFIC OVER 8,000 METERS. PRELIMINARY EVIDENCE INDICATES JET STREAM AIR IS THICKENING WITH PARTICULATES AND PATTERN OF FLOW MAY BE IMPAIRED.

Kreesap proposes immediate supplemental funding of A8 segment to establish absorption rates and to project effects-including biospheric effects-proposal to be submitted.

Kreesap proposes immediate supplemental funding for extended sampling program in atmosphere. Emphasis to be on reflective qualities of H₂O crystals and oxide concentrations. Proposal to be submitted.

The only sound in the little dining area of the operations house was the soft whirring of the electric motors in the computer's central processing unit. Both police officers read and reread the material on the screen.

Ribbley broke the silence. "I'll have to wait for the smart people to read and interpret that, Les, but I know one thing right now. That kind of suggestion would not be welcomed by airlines, by the FAA, by anyone in the industry or by anyone in love with flying. Pringle was declaring war on one hell of a lot of people."

"I'll wait, too, Ribbley," said Munro. "But what I think I see there scares the living dip right out of me."

"You mean the stuff there about the 'thermal packing' and the 'thickening' of the jet stream?"

Still looking at the screen, Munro said, "Yes, that's scary, Ribbley. Pringle was telling the FAA that jets are crapping up the atmosphere much faster than anyone ever imagined. I think he was telling them it's critical and that if it isn't stopped immediately, the 'thickening' could screw up the way the jet stream operates, maybe slow it down or something like that."

It was quiet again for a while in the dining area of the operations house. Ribbley and Munro stared at the screen, each trying to think through the meaning of what was before them. Finally, Ribbley said,

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"We've got a choice, Les. Either we can stay here on the stakeout we think we've created or we can pack all this up and take it in and put it on Banner's desk."

"If we get the same response to calling up Pringle's report and accessing the FAA computer that Bernie got, it shouldn't be long before we'll have a visitor. I vote to wait."

"I agree," smiled Ribbley. "The planet won't cook in the next few hours. Besides we've got an op house where the air conditioning works and the beer is cold. Why rush out into the heat?"

"You're right, Ribbley. And if Pringle was right, it's only going to get hotter."

After a long silence, Ribbley said, "There's only one problem with our theory, Les. Now I know what was biting at me a few minutes ago."

Turning to look at him, she said, "And that is?"

"We accessed the FAA computer with the Pringle disk. But, Les, the Pringle warning had been erased from the central computer. In fact, everything on Kreesap had been erased. What we have on that screen right now exists only because Bernie copied it onto his disk before the erasure. It's obvious that the FAA and whoever read the printout to get Bernie's number and Liss's number now think they're clear. If that's true, they won't give one diddly damn about our access. I'm guessing that they don't even know about Bernie's disk. They were after Pringle's disk because they knew about it, and they knew about it because Pringle had to have such a disk to put his warning on the main computer."

Munro looked at him. "That has to be the case, Ribbley. We could wait here forever alone, because no one is going to walk into our little trap."

"Well, if they won't come to us, I guess we'll have to go to them," smiled Ribbley.

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Lieutenant Ned Banner was pleased with his decision to send the package of requests for academy background checks back to Administration. As a matter of fact, Banner was almost gleeful. The absence of a D-PD Form 8-743, Request for Supplemental Assignment, was a perfectly good reason for bouncing the forms to another office, and it would take at least two weeks for some bureaucrat in residence to catch the file and get it turned back to his office.

Tossing the file package into the "Out" basket, he glanced at the nearby computer display screen. He realized he liked the computer display because it was his contact with the outside world, the world of the street cops. Out there was where the real work went on twenty four hours a day. Active investigations, arrests, pursuits, contacts with people in need, citizens in distress, citizens in fear of their lives.

Banner, a former street cop and former homicide detective, almost wished he could can his administrative job and go back to doing what he had done for over thirty years. Out there, on the streets, you could look the bad guys in the eyes and deal with them. He told himself that life in the office was not real. Dealing with higher level officers and politicians was like reaching for smoke. The line between yes and no was never clear, and worse, every decision was at the bottom of a stack of papers and always weeks away.

As he prepared to turn back to the work on his desk, Banner glanced through his glass partition and saw the squad room door open to admit Ribbley, Munro and a slender man with a long mournful face who looked vaguely familiar. Watching them walk into the squad room, Banner saw them talking easily and smiling. He couldn't help feeling envious of Ribbley.

The big detective, clearly overweight by the department's standards, walked with the strong, rolling, confidence of a cop who has just made a solid arrest, or was about to. It was something you couldn't see, and you could feel it only if had happened to you at some time in your life. And, damn, it was something! Banner guessed it was as close

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to a feeling of being completely in control as a man could ever get, and it probably included more of a feeling of being indestructible than was healthy.

The same attitude was apparent in Munro who had self assurance written all over her. But looking at her, Banner's reflex was an inward frown. He knew he wouldn't want to go on the street with a female cop no matter what all the regulations and federal laws in the world might say. Still, he paused. Watching her, he decided that if he had to work with a female cop, it would be Munro.

Banner's second reaction to the sight of Ribbley was official. He knew that Ribbley had been somehow skirting procedure again. That might be excusable if there was a good reason. Heading for the door of his office, Banner promised himself that he was damn soon going to find out if there had been some good results which would excuse the rules violation, and he was, by damn, going to find out just what page of the rule book Ribbley had been trashing this time.

"Okay, Ribbley," began Banner, "where the hell have you been? You went Code 34 yesterday morning. That permits you to work out of immediate radio contact for limited periods of time. Over 24 hours is not my idea of a limited time."

Ribbley offered Banner a tolerant smile, "Ned, I think you've just got your wig wagging because we weren't calling in to that blinking, winking sidekick of yours, Computer John."

"That's not an answer," snapped Banner whose guard automatically went up when he heard what sounded like an attempt to get him off the track.

Still giving Banner an easy, wide smile, Ribbley folded his arms across his chest and looked at his Lieutenant. "Ned, you're not even being polite. Let me introduce, Professor Sherman Ackerman. You may have already met Dr. Ackerman, Ned. He's one of the Department's technical consultants. Dr. Ackerman has been helping us untangle some of the strings in the Pringle case."

Banner cooled down to a respectable greeting and handshake. "Good morning, Doctor. I believe I have met you before, but it's been a while. It's good to see you again." Then, to ease the tension a bit, he added, "But I can't imagine why you'd consort with Ribbley. The first thing you learn from the likes of him is how to bend the rules."

Ackerman smiled as he shook hands. "Well, Ned, this time you might want to consider forgiving him. I think this may be the time to consider tossing out a few regulations."

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Before Banner could follow up, Ribbley said, "Ned, the Professor is right. So before you steam up on the book again, we'd better talk. I think we've got something you'll want to hear. Are you interested, or do you first have to give me the official line on the abuse of Code 34?"

Banner immediately sensed that Ribbley had something that was, indeed, important. At least it was important enough for a good detective to be openly defying his Lieutenant, and since that detective was Ribbley, Ned Banner knew it was time to toss the official attitude. "Come on in," he said as he turned and led the way to his office.

Inside, Ribbley turned to Munro and, looking at Banner's computer, asked, "Les, can you do your thing on that machine?"

"I hope so," she said, slipping into Banner's chair. Without seeking Banner's approval, she typed in the standard escape commands that cleared the screen. She then inserted one of the disks which she had carried into the office. With Ackerman and Banner looking over her shoulder, she spread out Liss's folded, refolded and creased report, and began entering the same commands she had used to bring up the material on Pringle's disk. The soft sound of an internal modem told them the computer had dialed a telephone. A short message appeared and every eye read, "Access To Federal Summaries? Y/N"

Banner expressed mild surprise. He looked at Ribbley, "The Feds?"

Instead of speaking Ribbley nodded at the screen. The reference to the Federal Summaries had been replaced by what appeared to be a long list of company names. Munro explained, "What you're seeing, Lieutenant, is an index of Grantees, companies that have within the last year received money from the FAA for research. The computer has used its modem to link up with the FAA computer in Washington, D.C., and what you see is what's on the computer this minute."

"So?" said Banner frowning and staring at the screen. "What am I supposed to see in that? And what the hell has the FAA got to do with the Pringle killing?"

"It's what you aren't seeing," said Munro. "There is no reference to Pringle, no reference to Jason Porr, and no reference to Kreesap. Yet we now know that Kreesap had at least one grant from the FAA. All references to the grant and to the research have been erased."

"As a matter of fact, Ned," said Ribbley, "that's what tipped us that something was screwball. At first, we thought we were hooked up to the National Science Foundation computer and we knew Kreesap had

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received money from them. Therefore, we thought it was odd that Kreesap's name didn't show up. Then we noticed that everything on the list had to do with airplanes and aerospace."

Munro picked up the thread, "So we got curious. We tried the disk we found in Bernie's apartment. It was not just a copy of Pringle's disk, it was that, but it was also a copy of what Bernie saw. It was a copy of what was on the FAA computer before the names were erased. Let me show you."

Defly, Munro removed the disk in the machine and inserted the blood stained disk. Again she typed in commands and again information appeared which seemed on first glance to be the same as the information they had just seen. "See there," called Ribbley pointing to the index." He read, "Kreesap Institute-Jason Porr, principal investigator." Pointing again he said, "There's another."

"So what's going on?" demanded Banner.

"Simple," said Munro. "Pringle used his disk to enter data and research summaries onto the FAA computer, but since he had access to it, he never copied his summaries onto his own disk. On the other hand, Bernie simply copied everything he found. That included the material about Kreesap which was later erased."

"Okay," said Banner, "I follow you. But what's so great about the Pringle data that got him killed?"

"It wasn't the data," Munro said, "it was the summary of the data that Bernie saved that is critical. I'll bring it up."

When the summary appeared, Ribbley explained, "What you're seeing, Ned, is the report that Pringle sent to the FAA. As Munro said, it was erased, but it too was copied by Bernie before the erasure occurred. And the way I figure it, that report has been the cause of five killings."

As Banner read, Munro rolled her chair out of the way leaving the Lieutenant with a clear view of the display. As they had, he stared at the summary and reread it. He turned and looked at the two police officers and at Ackerman. He looked back at the computer screen and read the report one more time. Then without a word, he stepped to his desk and lifted the phone and hit an automatic dial number.

"Tom, this is Ned," said Banner briskly, "I think you better come down here. Ribbley has brought in something that calls for a helluva lot bigger office than mine."

It was less than a minute before Captain Tom Urey was in Banner's office. He began by greeting the two officers, "Ribbley, Sergeant Munro, it's good to see both of you." Urey then gave a hearty

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greeting to Ackerman, "Sherm, it's good to see you again. How did they manage to drag you down here?"

Ackerman, seeming to be relieved to see someone he obviously knew, said, "Your detective Ribbley is a most persuasive person, Tom. Most persuasive."

Urey gave a short laugh, "I know, Sherm. Ribbley is indeed persuasive. Not always orthodox, but persuasive." Then to Banner he said, "Ned, that isn't the kind of phone call I'm used to getting. Let's hear it."

Banner turned to his detective, "Ribbley, lay it out."

"For over a week now," began Ribbley, "Munro and I have been sloshing around with the Pringle killing and we've been running into lots of walls. Now, I think that's changed."

"Pringle," interrupted Urey, "isn't he some scientific type that you mentioned to me the other day, Ned."

"That's right," said Banner, "He worked for a research outfit..." Banner paused.

Ribbley filled in the gap, "Kreesap." Then with the kind of informality that is not often found between long time "street" cops and senior policy officers, Ribbley continued, "Sorry, Tom, I forgot that you didn't have all the preliminaries. Let me back up a step or two. This thing began when Munro responded to an assault and burglary at the Kreesap Institute. A researcher, Otis Pringle, had been tapped on the head and his office had been trashed. It looked then like a routine break in. The next morning Pringle turned up dead. Ned assigned the case to me, and because Munro had already done some good background work, he told us to work the case together."

"Yes. I remember you mentioning the assignment, Ned," said Urey, "a bit out of the ordinary, but if it's producing something, it's fine with me."

"We interviewed the President of Kreesap," continued Ribbley, "and came away with essentially nothing. He acted like he hardly knew Pringle and had only a vague idea of what the guy was researching. We tried to pick up a lead at Pringle's apartment, but came up with nothing but a row with a bad guy who tossed a grenade at us."

"Shots fired?" asked Urey watching Ribbley closely.

Everyone in the office, except Ackerman the outsider, knew Ribbley had fired some shots high over the man's head, and all the police officers also knew what Ribbley would say. "You bet, Captain. The guy

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had a gun and things happened fast, very fast. I believe he fired twice. Or was it three times, Sergeant?"

"It was hard to count," said Munro dutifully, showing that Ribbley's schooling had paid off, "but I think three."

Urey and Banner knew that only the bad guy's shots had been reported. They also knew that was as far as that incident would ever go, "We saw the report," said Banner, drily, "go on."

"One of our leads was a computer disk that Munro had found in Pringle's office. She took it to our tap tap group and got one of the computer whiz kids to look at it. At least he agreed to try."

Banner filled in, "Bernie Finn and Colleague, Captain."

Captain Tom Urey's face tightened, "Sure. That double shooting was pretty close to home, but I thought you had buttoned that shooter up and tossed him to the D.A."

"Half way, Captain. The guy we brought in was a trigger, but that's all he was, just a trigger, no brain," explained Ribbley. "The link between the shooting of Bernie and Colleague and the Pringle killing was the computer disk. Bernie apparently made a copy of the disk Munro gave him and took it home. He and Colleague obviously entertained themselves by using the disk to hack their way into a main data bank. But what's critical here is the fact that they also copied onto the disk the message they found. A few hours later they were shot. When the ambulance people moved Bernie, they found the disk under his bloody bottom. I think the shooter, a beelzebub by the name of Gates, will admit that Bernie and Colleague told him to stuff his demand that they tell him where the disk was. That, of course, got them shot. I should add that we ought to give Bernie and Colleague some credit here. They had seen the message and obviously realized how important it was. That explains why they held out on Gates."

"Okay, what's this message that two computer hackers would die for and that someone would kill Pringle for," asked Urey.

"The message in a minute, Tom," promised Ribbley, "you need some more background first."

"Remember we were still looking for the someone who had killed Pringle but now we had to figure out how that tied in with the killing of Bernie and Colleague. We had Gates, but we didn't have the connection. So we next made the rounds of companies that might have had an interest in the kind of work we thought Pringle had been doing."

"Thought he had been doing?" asked Banner.

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"We thought Pringle was simply doing research on the burning of fossil fuels. Coal in particular. As a matter of fact, Kreesap's fine President, an expensive wrinkle, called Jason Porr, intentionally led us to that conclusion. We talked to the companies most likely to be involved in the slinky little business of stealing industrial secrets and were pretty well skunked there. At the same time, we arranged to have Professor Liss, a computer expert, take a run at Pringle's disk."

"Another of our consultants?" asked Urey.

"Yes," replied Munro, "he has done work for us before. His expertise is in computer data management. He used some special equipment and prepared a report on how to access the data that was coded on the disks."

"You should also know, Tom," said Ribbley, "it was in the professor's office that's we picked up Gates. I put his sidekick down and put a hole in Gates. The important point though is that Gates and his pal appeared the morning after Professor Liss had used Pringle's disk to access the data bank Pringle was using."

Urey's interest was growing. "So now you have two instances of someone accessing a central data bank by using Pringle's disk and two instances of someone showing up immediately after the access was attempted. And in both cases they were trying to recover the access disks."

"Right," said Ribbley, "and then we had the shooting of a skid row character which showed some kind of connection because it turned up the name of one of the company executives we had interviewed. That, too, turned up a blank. The exec, a guy named Nye, turned up clean, but he admitted he had received a call from someone trying to sell him a computer disk that belonged to Pringle. That boil turned out to be a small time job thief named Bemis, and he's the one that was stiffed at the Patman."

"All this is interesting," said Urey, "but I'm still waiting to hear why Ned called me down here. I'm guessing it's what you found on Pringle's disk."

"That's next," promised Ribbley. "Munro and I figured that if we could set up a computer in an operations house with a phone number under one of the department's phony names and, use Pringle's disk, we could use a modem to tap into his data bank the same way Bernie and Liss had done."

"Makes sense," nodded Urey. "You hoped to attract the same people who visited Bernie and then Professor Liss."

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"That was your code 34," guessed Banner.

"Sure," admitted Ribbley, "I probably should have cleared it first, Ned, but we never seemed to have time." Seeing Banner's shrug, Ribbley continued, "So we set up, and tapped in the codes that Professor Liss had uncovered for us. Using the Pringle disk, we discovered that all references to Pringle, Porr and Kreesap had been deleted from the central data bank. Then we tried Bernie's disk. The contents of the data bank was no longer important because Bernie's disk was identical to Pringle's, but it also contained the material Bernie had copied. That's the message Pringle had put on the main computer. That is what we saw." Ribbley's arm and finger sent every eye in the office to the display screen.

Urey walked over and began reading. The tiny hum of the computer's electric motor grew louder and with its persistence made inroads into the silence of the room.

Slowly, Urey turned from the screen. "Talk to me, Ribbley. Tell me why I shouldn't write this Pringle off as a crank. This is pretty far out stuff. Hell, it's more like science fiction. Pringle's report calls for a ban on jet flights above a certain altitude and a restriction on all other jet flights. He's talking about the jet stream pattern being clotted up somehow and what's the other expression? Thermal Packing? Who the hell was this guy?"

It was obvious that Ribbley and Munro had anticipated the response and the question. Munro, referring to her notebook, methodically ticked off the planned answer, "Dr. Otis Pringle, Ph.D. in chemistry MIT; specialty-the effects of carbon based elements on atmospheric compounds-nominated twice and twice awarded American Chemical Research Award for excellence-winner of the Oxford Glasser Prize for theoretical work on properties of inert gases." Munro paused, turned a page and went on, "Publications include a textbook considered a standard in college classes, titled 'Thermal properties of high end gases.' Pringle also had produced at least a dozen papers in different journals, lots of abstracts, and a half dozen scholarly papers in the last two years. I haven't had a chance to go farther back than that."

Raising his hand to call a halt to the dump he had just received, Urey called out, "Spare me, Sergeant. You've done your homework. I'll grant the point that Pringle was a brain of the first order. But what he has written here," pointing at the screen, "is the kind of thing that translates into a national crisis. More than that, a very big international crisis. Why haven't we heard anything about this before? Wouldn't other scientists have been in on this and have been talking about it already?"

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"Let me take the first shot at that, Tom," began Ribbley. "What Pringle said in his report to the FAA sure as hell was headline material and that's what got him killed. It's the oldest one, two, three in the world. One, Pringle was suggesting that the public be told about something that could impact an entire industry, from manufacturers to people who like to pay money to get on those kerosene burners and jet off somewhere so they can turn around and jet back. Two, somebody knew what Pringle was saying, or about to say, and, three, that somebody wanted to put a gag on him, permanently. I don't have anything close to a full answer to your question about other scientists, but I'd guess there are others out there working quietly on the same questions."

Ackerman, who had been patiently listening to the exchange between Urey and Ribbley, broke in, "I can confirm that, Tom. At least to a degree. It's pretty commonly known that there are a number of first rate scientists working on what's generally called the 'greenhouse effect.' And if there is such a thing as global warming, the cause is the burning of fossil fuel. The new angle here, and the one that other research people seem to have ignored, is the combustion of millions of gallons of kerosene every day at high altitudes. The late Dr. Pringle had the bad luck of saying it out loud and to someone who didn't want to hear the message."

"Slight correction, Doc.," said Ribbley, "Pringle's bad luck was being a first rate research scientist working for a greedy employer who thought he could kill the messenger and put the message back in the bottle."

Pointing at the computer screen as though he were accusing it of something, Banner said, "But that report makes it sound like we're on the verge of a catastrophe. I've read the papers like everyone else, and I always understood that global warming wouldn't be a problem for two or three hundred years."

With a shrug, Ackerman, replied, "That may still be the case, Ned. But Pringle's work had added a new factor, a very big factor. Meteorology is not really my area of expertise, but the idea of the jet stream being slowed by emissions, clotted up is a good expression, gives me a bad feeling. And who knows, the weather we've been having the last couple of years may be a symptom of what's happening. Dr. Pringle seemed to have thought there is a heat build up from the jet stream becoming stagnant. At least, I believe that's what he meant with the notion of 'thermal packing.'"

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"But all that just from jets? That is hard to believe," protested Urey, not wanting to accept what he was hearing.

"Munro and I thought the same thing, Tom," said Ribbley. "So the first thing we did when we picked up Professor Ackerman, this morning was to stop by the library. He's picked up some information and has been doing some quick calculations. From what I've heard so far, Pringle's theory makes a lot of sense."

Ackerman, a ruffled person, seemed at war with his clothes. His tie simply refused to permit itself to be completely covered with a shirt collar. His coat pockets sagged and nothing about his suit coat fit the body of its owner. Ackerman fought the battle of his wardrobe by patting at his coat, tugging here and there and frequently pulling at the offending tie which seemed intent on having its way with him.

Obviously a teaching professor, Ackerman smiled at his small class, giving special attention to the new pupils, Urey and Banner. "I must confess that when Detective Ribbley and Sergeant Munro called me and we first discussed all this, I was skeptical. Indeed, I reacted like you just did, Tom. But as I examined Dr. Pringle's theory more carefully, and as I began examining his backup data, it became more and more interesting, and I might add alarming. I guess I'm like everyone else. I just never considered the sheer volume of jet fuel, kerosene, that is burned in the upper atmosphere every day. A few hours in the library with my two assistants," he nodded at Ribbley and Munro, "produced some raw data that is simply staggering."

Warming to his subject, Ackerman, tugged at his tie and continued, "Let me give you an example. Remember, this is an oversimplification, and it's also grossly underestimated, just to be conservative. If you consider that a 727 burns approximately one thousand gallons of fuel an hour in flight and if you figure there are one thousand hours are flown in a day, and I'm absolutely certain there are many, many more than that, a million gallons of jet fuel are burned in the thirty to thirty six thousand foot altitude region of the atmosphere each day. Factor in flights in Europe and the rest of the world and you have tens of millions of gallons of kerosene being burned with the emissions being injected into the jet stream, every day."

"Wouldn't the smoke or residue, whatever, just fall back to earth?" asked Banner, still clearly skeptical.

"It would be better if it did," replied Ackerman. "However, the particulates from jet fuel combustion are very tiny, almost invisible. Given the relative light and fine character of the particles they would

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remain in the upper atmosphere for a long time. You see, there is a critical difference between jet emissions and air contamination from surface polluters. Cars, trucks, power plants, even low flying aircraft emit exhaust, but it's relatively close to the ground and those kinds of particulate do fall back to earth relatively quickly. But not so the high altitude pollution of jet aircraft."

"But Sherm," argued Urey, "the atmosphere of the planet is...well, it's a helluva big space to be filled with some jet exhaust."

"True enough," smiled Ackerman, "but I think, Dr. Pringle was again on the right track. I'm sure he would have admitted that some aircraft exhaust would have been meaningless, but the massive accumulation is something quite different. I can't be too strong on this point. It is simply frightening when you think about it. Again, using my underestimated example of a mere one million gallons of kerosene a day being burned over our heads, that would mean the residue of three hundred sixty five million gallons, is deposited in the atmosphere every year. Multiply that by the more realistic factor of ten and you're talking about billions of gallons a year. The two products of combustion are heat and residue, and we're only talking about the residue. If you want to visualize the problem think of a layer of kerosene in the sky, about five miles up, containing billions of gallons of kerosene. Then imagine that layer of kerosene being burned, a layer a year. I haven't calculated how thick such a layer would be, but it's just a way of describing what's going on in the atmosphere."

"But when you fly, you don't see smoke or soot, like you might from a truck or car," said Banner. "Is there an exhaust?"

"There is indeed," countered Ackerman. "Sometimes you see the exhaust tracks of jets in the sky. I believe they're called 'con trails.' Some of that is water vapor, but according to Dr. Pringle, that too may be a hazard. It thickens the jet stream and it holds in heat. Take it all together, the tons and tons of fine exhaust particles, the chemical compounds, then add the fine water vapor, couple all that with the heat and you can see we are literally wrapping the planet in a blanket. The heat from the sun and the heat from the burning of fossil fuels is held in and that's what Dr. Pringle called 'thermal packing.'"

Sensing the difficulty that his listeners were having with the concept, Ackerman, elaborated, "Consider this. Only thirty years ago, jet traffic in the upper atmosphere was almost nonexistent. But in that period of time, there has been a steady and very rapid growth in the fleets of jet airplanes that now fill the airways. There's no doubt that the deposit of

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this kind of pollution has been most intense in the last fifteen to twenty years. Pringle was saying that the accumulation of emissions in the upper atmosphere is just now, and very rapidly, reaching a critical point. He believed the jet streams which control the planet's climate are beginning to show signs of becoming sluggish, of not moving as fast as before. It's very much like a stream of clear water that has become thick and heavy with mud. It tends to slow down. If that's true, and if the jet stream is showing signs of clotting up from water vapor and kerosene pollution, the results could be mind boggling."

"It's still hard to think of jets affecting climate," said Banner absently, clearly rocked by the idea.

"I admit it's a blow," agreed Ackerman, "but consider this, Lieutenant. When Mount St. Helens blew a few years ago, it threw thousands of tons of dust into the air. That dust stayed there for months, even years. Most scientists agree that event may have affected weather for almost a year. Compare that to jet traffic which probably deposits the equivalent of a Mount St. Helens into the upper atmosphere every few months. The particles from kerosene burning are more evenly distributed and are finer and higher, but the results eventually will be the same and will be more nearly permanent."

"I remember reading about Mount St. Helens," said Munro, "there was talk of weather change, but all that pollution seemed to disappear naturally."

"Rock and dirt, Sergeant," Ackerman reminded her. "Those particles were much heavier and dense. They finally did fall to earth of their own weight, but as I said, even that took months. By way of comparison, remember the pollution flow from jets is virtually invisible and it's very high. Up in the jet stream the emissions are evenly mixed and distributed around the planet, it's accumulating rapidly, and according to Pringle it's wrapping the earth in a deadly, smothering blanket of heat."

The office was silent for a moment. Everyone seemed to be taking the time to adjust to the staggering news which Ackerman had unfolded and laid before them. Rather than look at one another, they looked at the computer screen display, the messenger which had first brought the news of impending calamity.

It was Urey who finally broke the silence. "Sherm, you've got as many degrees and honors as that guy Pringle had. Do you agree with this recommendation that jets need to be grounded right now?"

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Ackerman didn't hesitate. "Remember that Pringle only wanted to eliminate flights above a certain altitude. He wanted to put a limit on the remainder. But to answer your question, Tom, yes, I absolutely agree. It's critical. It may even be too late."

Urey, waving a big hand, persisted, "But are you considering the possible panic such a thing would cause. People are already close to rioting just over this damned heat spell. If someone in a position of authority told them it might be permanent and that it was being caused by airplanes, we might have problems beyond any nightmares we've ever had. When you consider that, Sherm, are you still willing to back the Pringle theory and call for a standdown of air traffic?"

Ackerman had listened carefully to Urey's grim description. His reply was immediate and strong, "Yes. That's the word, Tom. 'Standdown.' If not, what's the alternative? Keep the tourists and the businesspeople in the sky, burning millions and millions of gallons of kerosene over our heads every day. Maybe I have more faith in people than you do, but I think people will adjust and accept the truth. Of course, there will always be the ten percent who will claim privilege and make a lot of noise, but that's the case when any change is made. And, sure, there will be trouble, but I have faith in you and your people and your ability to control it. I say a shutdown is essential."

Ned Banner, already thinking about crowd control and riots, said, "You may have too much faith in people, Professor. This could cause massive panic. If people are given a reason to blame this damned heat on airplanes, there's no telling what will happen."

"Perhaps," admitted Ackerman, making a futile effort to adjust his tie, "but one thing we know for certain. This story will come out."

"But the decision on what to do is a half dozen levels above mine," said Urey. "Sherm, I'll need you to go along with me to explain all this to whoever, the mayor probably. Maybe even a mucky in the federal government. After all, grounding airplanes is probably the FAA's job. Hell, this will require action by Congress, maybe, the President."

"I disagree," said Ribbley, quietly but firmly.

"You what?" rapped out Urey sharply.

"I said that I disagree," replied Ribbley evenly. "If we go through regular channels with this story, it'll take months, even years for the truth to get out. What we've heard and seen will be studied, it will be compromised, it will be rationalized into pap. Special interests, powerful interests will simply kill it or bury it. If we need any proof of that, look at Pringle, Bernie and Colleague. What happened to them should tell us

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how far certain interests will go to put the lid on this information. No, we have to decide whether to go public, those of us right here. Jobs, rank, procedures, chain of command are without any meaning in this situation."

Urey and Banner stared at Ribbley in disbelief. Banner tried to make a counter argument. "But, Ribbley, you're preaching defiance of the system. That's anarchy, revolution. How can you say that special interests would try to suppress this kind of information?"

"Ned," said Ribbley, "Dr. Pringle's information was put on the FAA computer over a week ago. It's gone now. What have you heard about it? Or, more to the point, do you really expect that you would ever have heard about it had it not been for Bernie's disk? The government and special interests have covered up radiation spills, they have compromised and covered up the effects of radiation for years, big businesses and corporations have created massive toxic waste dumps and then managed to conceal the facts for decades. Why would this be any different?"

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In the rear view mirror, Ribbley could see the black and white following him. He smiled as he imagined the conversation that must be taking place between the two uniformed officers who had been simply ordered to follow him and Captain Tom Urey. They would be trying out dozens of different theories on what could bring a captain out of the office and put him on a high speed run on Interstate 70.

Ribbley also guessed that Tom Urey himself had some very mixed feelings about the ride. Urey had agreed to go with Ribbley and had agreed to the plan Ribbley had outlined. Ribbley knew the whole thing was a gamble and that Urey, like himself, had staked a career on what they were about to do. And he also knew that a lot would depend on Munro and Ackerman.

As he changed lanes and began passing a delivery van, Urey gave him a sidelong look. "I'm glad I don't have to ride with you every day of the week, Ribbley. I have the feeling you're a damned speedball. One of those lunies that really scares the dickens out of people like me."

"You've been behind that desk too long, Tom. Life on the road hasn't really changed. Every driver out here thinks every other driver is a maniac. Of course, they're all right, because it does take a healthy dose of nutty to be out here on this race track. But it's kinda like the writer, Waisley, said, 'The American freeway is the great democratic ideal. Everyone gets to be a leader and a follower at the same time, at a high rate of speed.'"

Urey, who remembered something of Ribbley's strange tendency to quote unknown philosophers, simply grunted, "Sure, Waisley, uh huh. But, you may be right. I've probably reached the point in life where I just don't follow anyone very well, certainly not maniac drivers and I guess I don't follow you very well either, Ribbley. Isn't this plan of your's pure bluff?"

"You already know the answer to that, Tom," replied Ribbley as he accelerated and changed lanes. "We have to play our hunches and sometimes that's all we've got. And, as cops, if we believe in what we're doing, we have to be prepared to pull for the lantern, and as the manual says, 'extend police authority to the limit of reasonableness.'"

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Urey looked away from the traffic and at Ribbley's face, "Pull for the lantern? What the hell are you talking about?"

"Tom, your memory isn't serving you very well. But then that's understandable, given all the paper work you have to do. Don't you remember the six months that we rode together before you got your promotion and started moving upstairs? I told you about my grandfather. He operated a ferry across the Missouri River in Montana. Whenever he had fares who had to get across the river in the dark, he would light lanterns and put them high up on stands on each side of the river. On the trips over and back he could steer by keeping his eye on the lantern. He called it 'pulling for the lantern.' I think that's what we're doing today. We may not know the way exactly, but we know where we're going."

"Okay," agreed Urey, "but this time we're going so far out on a limb that I don't even want to think about it. Ribbley, we're taking on some very powerful people." Urey lapsed into silence for a moment, finally muttering, again, "Damn powerful. It'll be a lot easier if these guys come clean. What makes you think, we can get anything out of them at all?"

Ribbley gave Urey a quick look as he headed the police car into the right hand lane. Smiling, he said, "One word, Tom. One of the oldest words in the book. 'Guilt.' They know they've been responsible for trying to cover up the most massive environmental crimes of all time. I'm betting that thought has been eating at their bellies like bad chili. If they're like most criminals, especially the civilized ones, their guilt is bubbling like acid just below that billion dollar surface they're skating on."

Before Urey could reply, the voice of the police dispatcher filled the car, "H034 go to tack 8. Acknowledge."

Urey, looked at Ribbley, "Is that us?" Seeing Ribbley nod, he reached down, picked up the microphone and handed it to the detective. Ribbley pressed the button on the side of the microphone, "H034 acknowledging and going to tack 8." Reaching down, he turned the tiny dial on the face of the radio, then pressed the microphone button, "This is H034."

"Ribbley, this is Munro. I'm on my handheld in the hallway. Ackerman is inside talking his head off. I hope Captain Urey is sure about this guy."

Ribbley smiled. Without thumbing the button, he said to Urey, "Are you sure about your guy, Tom?"

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"You tell your partner that I'm only as sure as a good guess. She'd better get her bunions back in there and be very persuasive."

To the microphone, Ribbley said, "Les, the Captain says this guy is not a sure thing, but he's the best bet we've got. So get back in there and put your...something or other into it. And get moving, we're about there. We're going to need you, soon."

As he spoke, Ribbley steered the car off the interstate and onto the access road. He took a right turn at the intersecting road and urged the car along the wide road, past a row of hotels. The wide double turn lanes approached, and, seeing a green light, Ribbley wheeled through a left turn onto the approach road. The large green and white signs directing traffic passed overhead. The rambling multi-level parking building, which Ribbley had always believed was some crazy architect's nightmare, filled the area immediately ahead.

Ribbley called into the microphone, "Ned, are you in the area yet?"

Banner's voice cracked immediately through the radio. "I'm in the parade. About a hundred feet behind you. With three units following me."

Ribbley's car was now the head of a procession which included his car, a black and white unit immediately behind, then Ned Banner and his three black and white units. Traffic around them slowed and crowded off to the left and to the right.

In another short minute Ribbley rolled to a stop along the curb by a glass door. As he and Urey slid out of the car a male, recorded voice greeted them. "Welcome to Stapleton Airport. You may park only long enough to load and unload. Unattended cars will be ticketed and towed away."

To the two cops who had joined them, Ribbley said. "Keep this area clear. In a few minutes, another unit will be pulling up here with a couple of passengers. Pull them out of the car and bring them inside up to the main floor. Right to the entrance to Concourse A. Got it?"

A tall, smiling black sergeant, replied, "You got it, Ribbley. You did say pull them out of the cruiser?"

"Yes, but leave them in one piece, Pomroy. Just get them up to Concourse A."

The half dozen uniformed officers from the remaining cars joined Ribbley who turned and led the procession into the terminal, up the escalator and to the wide entrance of United Airlines Concourse A.

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Already a dozen television and newspaper reporters and cameramen had gathered, and the crews with the television stations had set up cameras.

Urey, whom many of the reporters recognized, began getting shouted questions. "Hey, Captain, what's up?... Why the call to come out here?Captain Urey, someone big coming in?...How about a one liner, Captain?"

Ribbley took a quick survey of the area and indicated the wide carpeted area which led to the concourse entrance. "This should do fine." In a louder voice he called to the reporters, "You might want to set up here for a while. If you've got some mics to put up, I'd suggest you get with it."

While the press busily began setting up for an impromptu press conference, Ribbley, Urey and Banner stood and watched. In a few minutes, the tall Sergeant appeared at the top of the escalator. Leland Schute, rumpled and silent, was on one side. Jason Porr, trying unsuccessfully to hang back, was on the other. Blinking and uncertain as to what was taking place the two men were firmly planted near the battery of microphones and cameras. The presence of Pomroy was more than sufficient to keep them from pulling back or trying to run.

Urey and Ribbley stepped up to join the pair, Ribbley on one side, Urey on the other. Urey, smiling grimly, said, "It's your show, Detective Ribbley."

His bulk dominating the scene, Ribbley said, "Jason Porr, President of Kreesap Institute, I arrest you for the crime of conspiracy in the murder of Otis Pringle, complicity in the murder of Bernie Finn and Colleague, and complicity in the murder of Billy Natterham, and with the commission of the murder of Frank Bemis. I advise you that anything you say can be used in evidence against you; you have the right to remain silent; you have the right to have counsel present while being questioned; and you have the right to have an attorney appointed to represent you. Jason Porr, do you understand these rights as I have explained them to you?"

Porr's eyes were wide with astonishment and fright. His lips quavered as he tried to reply to Ribbley's demand. The ring of reporters had been enlarged by curious travelers and airport workers, and Porr felt every eye on him. His hands absently felt for his necktie, but then being deserted by his mind, the hands fell to his sides. "I...I.."

Ribbley was unrelenting, "Do you understand these rights as I have explained them to you?"

"I'm arrest...arrested?" stammered Porr.

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"Yes, you are under arrest for the crimes I named. Do you understand the rights I just explained to you, or do you want them read to you again."

"Oh... well, not again. I... Yes, I understand. But..."

"Alright, sign this form. It says you have heard me tell you what your rights are and that you understand them."

Ribbley held a clipboard and a ballpoint pen out toward Porr who tried to take them. His hands could only try to coordinate the two objects. Ribbley assisted by holding the board while Porr scrawled his name with the pen.

Abruptly Ribbley turned his back on Porr and confronted Leland Schute who stood, head down, looking at the carpet. "Leland Schute, President of Fossil Technologies, I charge you with complicity in the murder of Otis Pringle and complicity in the murder of Bernie Finn and Colleague. I advise you that anything you say can be used in evidence against you; you have the right to remain silent; you have the right to have counsel present during questioning; and you may have counsel appointed defend you. Do you understand these rights as I have explained them to you?"

A silence fell on the crowd. Schute stood silent his head bowed. Then slowly, he looked up, streams of tears on his drawn and mournful face. In words that barely had enough strength to be heard he said, "Lord God Almighty, what have I done?"

Quietly Ribbley said, "Leland Schute, do you understand the rights that I have read to you?"

With a great sigh, Schute nodded, "Yes, Detective Ribbley, I do."

Obediently, he signed the form. Quietly he asked, "Otis's data, do you have it?"

"We do," said Ribbley.

"And does it...well does it say that we've fouled the air as badly as Otis thought?"

"I understand it's pretty bad, Mr. Schute. Just how bad is something for others to decide."

Looking directly at Ribbley for the first time, Schute said, "Detective Ribbley, someone has to believe me. I never intended that Otis should be harmed. He was my friend. Is it in you to say that you believe me?"

"Others will have to judge you, Mr. Schute, but for whatever it's worth, I don't believe that you set out to harm your friend."

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Porr broke in, almost babbling, "We did it together, Schute. I only did what you told me to do...Pringle was hateful to me...He was a vindictive man...Bemis was trying to hold me up for more...I didn't intend...."

Shaking his head at what was becoming a breakdown, Ribbley called, "Pomroy, get them out of here. The names are on the clipboard. Book them for murder."

As suddenly as the two men had arrived, they were gone. The calls and questions began coming like a flood. Ribbley spent a few minutes carefully identifying Porr and Schute. He then gave the names of the victims and told the reporters who they had been. Then the questions began to focus on the setting, "Why were they brought out here, Detective? What's the connection with the airport?"

Munro's timing could not have been better. She, with Ackerman trailing behind, pushed her way through the crowd. Looking at Ribbley, she bobbed her head up and down.

With a wide smile, Ribbley quieted the reporters. "You'll know more in a few minutes," he promised. With long looping strides he headed across the terminal toward the down escalator. With Urey, Banner, and Munro immediately behind, Ribbley led the procession out of the terminal, across the pavement and to the security fence surrounding the tall white control tower. He showed his badge to a startled guard, then pushed past him through the door and punched the button to summon the elevator.

After a period of confusion, the reporters and cameramen, swarmed to the control room to join the police group that had assembled there. Startled air controllers looked up from their consoles. A supervisor came over and spoke to Ribbley, seeming to sense that Ribbley was the one leading the invasion force.

In a strong voice, Ribbley asked, "Who's in charge here?"

The supervisor replied, "I am. My name's John Abbot. Can I ask what the hell is going on? You may be endangering the safety of a lot of people by bringing all these people here." "Well, let's get those

people out of danger, John," said Ribbley. Then handing Abbot a folded piece of paper, Ribbley continued, "That, John, is a court order declaring this airport to be a public nuisance, a hazard to the health and safety of the people of Colorado. It orders the police to take action to immediately abate that nuisance. First, you can do whatever is necessary to bring down the planes which are in your area. Second, you will place a call to all airports in the country telling them that Denver's Stapleton is closed.

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Third, there will be no more takeoffs as of right now. So that there is no misunderstanding, tell those other airports that vehicles will be placed on all the runways to make sure no plane tries to land here. After the airplanes in this area are on the ground, this area is no longer an airport."

Abbot was speechless. He could only stand and stare at Ribbley and the police.

"Do you give the orders, John, or do I?" asked Ribbley.

"A nuisance?" asked Abbot.

"Yes, a damned nuisance," echoed Munro. "Now, let's get this place shutdown."

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The "Ribbley Faction," as Urey had named it, filed in and occupied one of big booths at the end of Molly's cafe. The only other customers in the place were two uniformed officers who sat on counter stools idly stirring and sipping coffee from Molly's standard, no-nonsense white mugs. The officers at the counter watched the procession go by and then turned back to their coffee.

The window above the large booth was dark and the street outside was almost empty. An occasional car would roll by and, for a few seconds, light the street before disappearing as two fading red spots in the darkness.

Leaning back against the vinyl cushions, Urey smiled and searched the cafe with his eyes. "Damn, I'll bet it's been ten years since I came in here. Nothing has changed. Nothing."

Banner laughed and agreed, "Yeah, it's been a long time for me, too."

Ackerman, patting at his coat pockets and straightening his lapels, said, "I guess you know that eggheads aren't expected to go to places like this, but believe it or not, I used to come in here with one of the guys from burglary. I was helping him set up a sting operation specializing in stolen laboratory equipment."

"I remember that," chimed in Banner, "they pulled in everything from microscopes to...what, Sherm?"

"To centrifuges and spectrometers."

"Exactly what I was going to say," laughed Banner.

The conversation died while a shuffling, balding man wearing a neat white apron distributed glasses of water. "Menus?" he asked. "Since it's after midnight, you can order breakfast if you want."

Urey looked around the group, "I vote to shoot the works, again." Everyone chuckled at the "again," and chimed in agreement. It took a few minutes to scan the list and order, but soon they were again engaged in animated conversation.

Watching the two uniformed officers toss money on the wooden counter and walk out of the cafe, Urey reflected, "Look at those two. Not a serious care in the world. I imagine street cops are the same the world

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around. Tough, smart, and utterly convinced they are the last stalwarts at the barricades."

"They are," said Banner emphatically. "I suppose it's kind of melodramatic to say it, but when you boil it all away, it's the flatfoot, the harness bull, the plain and simple cop who keeps any city liveable. They're the ones who are standing up to be counted, for the rest of the damned world."

"I guess that's what we did," mused Munro. "At least I'd like to think it was something like that. Standing up to be counted I mean."

Ribbley, who had been mostly listening to the others, picked up on Munro's idea. "We stood up alright. Whether we'll really get counted remains to be seen."

"We were counted," Urey said emphatically. "The car radio said that, based upon television reports from Denver, airports in Seattle and Salt Lake have already partially shut down. And one report said that people in Dallas and Houston have taken it upon themselves to close their airports. There are reports of trucks, cars and even campers driving through fences onto runways. One report said that safety concerns would probably have most of the United States in standdown by tomorrow morning."

Looking at Ackerman, Banner said, "Sherm, I don't know where you got all that information, but the reporters were eating it up."

Ackerman was pleased with the compliment, but he waved off the praise. "Credit must go where credit is due. Ribbley and Munro had the real headline grabber. Ribbley, I'd say your court order was the caper. A public nuisance! By damn, I just couldn't agree more."

Banner, musing about the case, said, "So Porr arranged the break in and ordered his bully boy to trash the office to make sure it looked like an outsider. I'll buy that. What about the fire? Did Porr burn his own building?"

"That's one of the ironies of this case," said Ribbley, "The fire was not started by someone. It was a bona fide lab accident. But it rattled Porr and caused him think that Schute had double crossed him. To get even he coughed up some information which pointed the finger at Schute. I suppose there's some irony in the fact that the bottles of gas which exploded were Pringle's."

"And Schute's plan to blot out the leaks might have worked," said Munro, "except that Porr was out of his league when it came to hiring bad guys. The one he hired, a clot by the name of Frank Bemis,

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got greedy and tried to sell the disk to Martin Nye. Failing that, he tried to hold out on Porr and got shot for his trouble."

"But none of that really points to Schute as the one who hired Gates," protested Urey.

Savoring a swallow of hot, black coffee, Ribbley met Urey's gaze. "Remember, Tom, Schute is the one with everything at stake. He had just signed a bagload of contracts to produce jet engines for some of the big manufacturers. He knew this kind of information could put his company in bankruptcy. And he saw all this coming. He and Porr saw the direction Pringle's research was going so they got an FAA insider to watch the summaries and tell them if Pringle wrote anything that could cause trouble. That's a lot of connection, Tom."

"Why now?" asked Urey. "I mean, why would Porr move against Pringle now rather than later or earlier?"

"Porr, at the urging of Schute," corrected Munro. "and remember, they really didn't have a choice. Pringle put that report on the computer. Then it started leaking. Their contact at the FAA probably told them that someone had accessed the report, namely Bernie. Their only hope was in stopping the leaks and recovering the disks. When you look at the attempted coverup, you realize that it might have worked except for the courage of two computer hackers."

"Well, I hope we don't get the public panic that we talked about," said Banner whose instinctive reaction was to begin evaluating the problem that street riots would cause his division.

"Yeah," mused Urey, "it would be a helluva mess, but I'm not sure that's the kind of reaction we'll get. Sure, people have reached the panic stage about this damn weather. But how do you riot against the weather? You don't. I think most people will pray."

Seeing a newspaper delivery truck stop outside the cafe, Ribbley said, "Let's see how this thing looks in print."

The group was silent while Ribbley rose and went outside to the newsbox. Walking back toward them, his wide face tried, without success, to suppress a smile. Without speaking, he handed newspapers to everyone at the table. The headline, in three inch type, fairly screamed.

JET EXHAUSTS BLANKET EARTH AND CAUSE
GREENHOUSE HEAT

Below the headline a sub-headline said,
TOP SCIENTISTS CLAIM THERMAL PACKING IS
SMOTHERING THE PLANET

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A sidebar story said that the Chairman of the FAA had been contacted and had withheld comment on the erasing of material from the FAA computer. He hinted that the FAA had been aware of the emissions problem for some time, but had wanted to study it thoroughly before making any public announcement. He added that, based on the "Pringle Report," he was giving immediate attention to ways of reducing the number of jet flights allowed from airports throughout the country. The Chairman also said an investigation would be promptly started to determine how unnamed officials had tampered with the FAA computer system and how they might be accomplices in a murder investigation in Colorado.

Everyone busily read the story which covered the entire front page and went on to fill the second. One by one they put the papers down on the table. Ribbley, still standing, looked at each of them. "I'll settle for that," he said, "Case closed."

After more comments from the others, Munro asked the question which was on everyone's mind. "But, Ribbley, will the standdown last?"

Smiling he answered, "I don't know, Les. Check the paper. What's the weather forecast for the next few days?"

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NEW BLUE TRUCK

On a clear, bright, blue winter day
When the land lay wide and white
And the air was thin and crisp and dry
And the trees' slim and fragile arms held tight against the cold,

We visited the open but were well enclosed
By glass and newness high above the road;
We felt the sun and watched the snow,
Bounced a bit by ourselves on a wooded road

We stopped a bit and then went on
Turned here and then turned there
And finally toward home we went
Content to know that we'll go again
And very glad to have a new blue truck to do it in.

METRIC-I

I have never heard an iamb
Ic foot with empha
Sis against a troch
Ee jambed without the meter thus
Ly turning anapestic.

TRINITY

Conceived by technical fertility
Born on a barren flat desperately,
It burst impossibility and knowledge exponentially.

MUD

Almost sixteen years a friend
Patient when people-business
Must have seemed a nuisance
To one eager for a chase or run.

So sensitive that admonition
Always became a regret since
Her only sin was in trying
Too hard to please or
In greeting us a bit too much;
At least it seemed so then.

But now she is gone.
Leaving stillness and
Hearts that hurt at the
Sight of an empty dish or
A checkerboard sack still standing half full.

Despite the grayness of this long day,
We must remember that
For ten years and six Mud
Never could understand anything
Less than a full and happy heart.
So we say “goodbye,” and
Smile a bit at pleasant memories
Given by a true blue friend.

LITTLE VICTORIES

A tentative paw is carefully extended from the safety of the captain's chair;

To touch, perhaps to tantalize, the unsuspecting dog that walks below.

Careful now kitty! Are your claws extended? Will you be felt?

Then—Ah, you withdraw. The tumult never comes; the moment's past.

But you're smug enough to know you've scored a touch, however slight, and

Wise enough to be satisfied with your own quiet little victories.

