



Godzilla Attacks!

by Barry S. Goldberg

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Prologue

Hurricane Donald Slams into Panama

Associated Press

Panama City, Panama -- Hurricane Donald slammed into the Panama coast yesterday evening, causing an estimated \$1 Billion in damage.

Although Donald had officially been downgraded to a category one hurricane, with winds ranging from 74-95 mph, the destruction caused by the hurricane was closer to that typically caused by hurricanes of category three or four.

“This was definitely not your normal hurricane,” stated Dr. Roland Bronson of the US Meteorological Bureau. “There is a near linear swath of destruction more in keeping with a large tornado than a hurricane.”

Indeed, many of the buildings seem to have been crushed flat by the force of the wind rather than blown apart.

“What we may have here,” according to Dr. Bronson, “is a fairly rare phenomenon known as ‘micro-bursting’, where sudden down bursts of air traveling in excess of 200 mph may occur during an otherwise less violent storm.”

Although discounted by authorities, some local citizens claim that the hurricane was not the main cause of the damage. One eye witness, José Gutierrez, stated “it was a large

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Chapter 1

“Damn!”

Hank Mullin, owner of Captain Hank’s Whale Watch Tours, swiveled in his chair as the company’s chief pilot/tour guide slammed the door to the small office behind him.

“Hello to you, too, Bob.” Hank always had to suppress a chuckle whenever Robert Johanssen stormed into the office in one of his frequent fits of pique. Although Bob claimed to come from a long line of Norwegian whalers, at 5’ 5” he never quite managed to appear the pureblood Viking he apparently thought himself as. Hank often wondered whether Bob would be insulted or flattered to discover that most of the folks on the Wharf secretly called him “Thor” behind his back. Still, he *was* a hell of a good pilot, and seemed to have an almost preternatural knack for knowing just where the largest pods of whales could be found frolicking in the waters off Boston Harbor. Until recently, that is.

“Let me guess,” Hank sighed. “Another whale-less whale cruise? What is that -- three this week? What would your ancestors think?”

“It’s not funny! And you know it’s not just me -- Tina and Mark have been having the same luck.”

“Or lack thereof. Sorry -- I’m just giving you a hard time. I managed to finally get a hold of a couple of our competitors. They didn’t want to admit it at first, but it looks like we’re all in the same boat, so to speak.” Hank loved seeing Bob wince at his bad puns. “Unfortunately, we’re the only ones with a ‘see a whale or double your money back’ guarantee, and it’s killing us. Who’s the moron around here who came up with *that* bright idea -- and don’t you *dare* answer that!”

Bob suppressed a grin in spite of his otherwise dour mood. “Well, boss -- what are our options? The tourist season’s just getting into full swing, and if we don’t get a full booking for the 4th of July weekend we’re sunk. Um, so to speak.”

Hank refused to give Bob the pleasure of seeing him wince at the return pun. “Tell me something I don’t already know. The problem is, nobody seems to know what the problem *is*. In fact, I just got off the phone with someone over at the Aquarium.” The New England Aquarium was situated just few blocks down Atlantic Avenue from Rowes Wharf, and Hank had always tried to maintain a good relationship with the staff there.

“And?”

“And Dr. Schmitt told me that, and I quote, they are ‘tracking the phenomenon’.” Hank made little quotation gestures with the first two fingers of each hand. “When I asked for more details, she finally admitted that they’re baffled as well. Seems there have been no reports of beaching, no carcasses have been discovered, and there’s been no other indication of disease or pollutants or anything else that could be killing them off. Plus, there have been no reports of mass migrations away from the Harbor. The closest thing she could think of was that time a couple of years ago when that Great White got into the Harbor.”

“Yeah -- I remember that. It ended up killing half the harbor seals before they finally caught it.”

“Right. The problem is, what on earth could be big enough to eat a whale?”

* * *

“And finally tonight, something right out of the X-Files. It seems as though Boston may have something in common with Scotland. Or Loch Ness, to be precise. Yes, it looks like we may have our very own monster living in the waters off Boston Harbor. In the last couple of months, a number of local fishermen have reported seeing a large, strange creature swimming near their boats. Descriptions of the “monster” have varied, but most accounts agree that the creature is very long, perhaps snake-like, and has a series of ridges sticking up from its back. Of course, no one has managed to actually photograph the alleged monster. In fact, the Boston Herald has just announced a \$5,000 prize to the first person who submits an authenticated picture to the newspaper. So, all you fishermen out there, be sure to bring your camera with you the next time you go out fishing -- you just might end up taking a picture worth \$5,000!”

“That’s right, Mary. And while they’re at it, why not try and get a picture of a UFO and Big Foot?”

“Ha, ha! Well, that’s all for tonight. This is Mary Scott . . .”

“ . . . and Brian Morgan . . .”

“ . . . for Channel 5 News, wishing you all a pleasant evening. Good night.”

Chapter 2

“*Life is good,*” thought Major Mitchell Freeman as he drove up to the main gates of the Natick Army Research and Develop Laboratories. “The Labs,” as the installation was called by Army personnel and town-folk alike, was set off about a quarter mile from Rt. 27 and was nestled within a five square mile tract of federally protected national forest land. *I don’t know how many times I’ve looked out over Lake Cochituate, but it always makes me feel glad to be alive.*

As head of the Lab’s Special Projects Department, Major Freeman felt that he had finally arrived after years of struggling up the military’s equivalent of the corporate ladder. A secure position, decent salary and, most of all, respect. *Not bad for a 45 year-old career military man.* Natick itself was a little on the sedate side, but Boston was only ½ hour distant via the newly expanded Commuter Rail. Besides, with their second child due in a month, sedate was exactly what the doctor ordered.

There *was* one drawback to his job, Major Freeman knew, and that was all the secrecy. He hated not being able to tell Marcie about his day when he got home. Even though he knew the work was important, deep down it bothered Major Freeman when he talked to his neighbors, passed them on the street, saw them at the movies, all the while knowing that they didn’t have the faintest idea what was *really* going on deep in the bowels of the Labs.

Of course, the “official” purpose of the facility wasn’t a lie, *per se*. “Development of peacetime support technology” was what he told everyone when asked the inevitable question, “so, what is it you *do* in there, anyway?” And, to be sure, the Labs *had* produced a number of useful products over the years. Scientists there had done some of the pioneering work in the development of modern insulating fabrics such as Gore-Tex®, and where would McNuggets be without the Lab’s early research in food

processing techniques for improved battlefield rations? Still, Major Freeman knew, it was all an elaborate smokescreen, albeit a rather productive one at that. *If the Town Council ever got wind of what our main research project really involved, they'd make a racket loud enough to hear clear in Iraq!* Which was, of course, exactly the reason behind all the secrecy.

Major Freeman parked his car in his assigned spot and headed toward "The Block," a rather unobtrusive concrete cube of a building at the center of the complex. Although he had shown his I.D. to the sentry at the gate, he had to pass and be recognized by two more sentries -- one human, one electronic -- before gaining access to the main elevator leading down to the "real" labs located 100 feet below ground.

Although he appreciated the need for such tight security, Major Freeman often thought that in the event of an emergency it would be damn difficult to get out in a hurry. In his more cynical moments, Major Freeman thought that was probably precisely the point.

As he approached his office, he passed by Captain Stinson, his executive officer. Captain Mike Stinson was in his late 30's, skinny as a rail and just starting to go bald. At 6' 3" tall, he towered over Major Freeman who was "only" 5' 10" himself. Still, the height difference never bothered the Major. *Five foot ten is the height of the average American male, Major Freeman often thought. He's the one who is "abnormal," not me!*

“Anything exciting happen while I was gone?” Major Freeman asked. It was long standing joke between them, and Captain Stinson didn’t bother responding, other than to give him a mock salute and return to his paperwork. Nothing exciting *ever* happened around there. And it was Major Mitchell Freeman’s job to see that it stayed that way.

* * *

Coast Guard Rescues Charter Fishing Boat

By Frank Sherman
Globe Staff

BOSTON -- The Coast Guard was called into action yesterday afternoon when it responded to a panicked distress call from the *Mariposa*, a charter fishing boat operating out of Gloucester. No injuries were reported.

At approximately 2:15 P.M. yesterday, the *Mariposa*, with a 4-person crew and 20 passengers, was about 15 miles offshore when the incident occurred. “We were struck by a large, underwater object,” claimed the boat’s captain, Francis Reilly.

“It was the damndest thing,” explained Reilly. “We had been tracking what seemed to be a huge school of fish on sonar, and had just dropped anchor when all of a sudden there was a loud bang and the whole boat lurched. I was sure that the hull must have been breached, so I immediately contacted the Coast Guard.”

Although the hull turned out not to have been breached, Coast Guard divers did verify minor damage and scoring to the hull’s surface. As a precaution, passengers and crew were transported back to shore aboard a Coast Guard cutter.

One of the passengers, Richard Glavin of Somerville, claims to have overheard two of the divers mention something about “residual radiation,” and this has led Mr. Glavin to believe that the boat may, in fact, have collided with a nuclear submarine.

When asked about the possibility of a nuclear submarine’s involvement in the incident, Lieutenant J. Michael Stovers, the leader of the rescue team, had only one word to say in response -- “Ridiculous!”

Chapter 3

“Welcome back to ‘An American Fourth’, and our continuing live coverage of the Boston Pops’ annual 4th of July outdoor concert here at the beautiful Esplanade.

“Having just listened to the Pops’ trademark performance of Tchaikovsky’s ‘1812 Overture’, the crowd, estimated at over 200,000 this year, now anxiously awaits the start of what promises to be the largest display of fireworks ever shown on the Entire East coast.

“The producers of this year’s event decided to pull out all the stops and have promised a show that people will talk about for years to come. Or as one of the technicians put it, ‘twice the lights, four times the noise!’ With an estimated two-and-a-half tons of mid to high explosives being used for this year’s show, the display is expected to last a full half-hour. Looks like we’re in for quite a treat this year!”

* * *

“Oooooooh! Did you see that one? It looked like a giant heart with an arrow through it!”

“Wow,” agreed Peter, grinning from ear to ear. He had almost decided to forego the annual ‘let’s camp out on the Esplanade all day and watch the fireworks’ that he and his friends had been doing for the last three years, ever since Junior High. The novelty of getting there at 9:00 in the morning and sitting in a crowd of people for 11 hours had started wearing a bit thin. At the last moment, though, Eileen had casually asked whether or not he was coming. Although he and Eileen had been friends since grade school, his feelings toward her had recently begun changing. Unfortunately, he had no way of knowing whether her feelings had changed toward him, and was too embarrassed to ask. “Damn

hormones,” he had muttered under his breath, and then told her that sure, he wouldn’t miss it for the world.

Sure enough, the day had turned into an utter waste of time. For some reason, the crowd seemed especially large this year, almost as bad as when they introduced that new conductor a couple of year back. And to make it worse, Eileen kept disappearing with her friend, Mary, for hours on end. Feeling more frustrated than jealous, Peter had finally asked where they kept running off to, and Eileen just smiled and said “girl stuff.”

The concert, too, was mostly a waste, as far as Peter was concerned. They had all decided this year to sit on the other side of the trees surrounding the Esplanade, in order to get “front row” seats of the fireworks over the Charles River. Unfortunately, that meant that they couldn’t actually *see* the orchestra performing. *The only difference between this and listening to it on the radio, Peter thought, is that here I get to sit on the hard ground and get bitten by mosquitoes. Definitely worth the price of admission!*

Now, as if by magic, everything had changed. Just before the start of the fireworks, Eileen had slid over until she was sharing the little blanket Peter had brought to sit on. The first volley of pyrotechnics included a whole slew of large, bright explosions of pure white light that reverberated with a sound that could be felt as well as heard. At the first loud “BOOM,” Eileen had grabbed his arm and snuggled a little closer. After a few more such explosions, each one feeling like the coming of Armageddon, peter finally managed to screw up enough courage to put his arm around Eileen’s shoulder. Without knowing exactly how it happened, Peter soon found himself sitting there with Eileen’s head resting on his lap.

The lights seem brighter than ever before, Peter thought, and even the explosions seem louder.

I wonder if this is what it feels like to be in love.

Suddenly, Eileen jerked upright into a sitting position. *Crap*, thought Peter, *she couldn't have felt anything, could she? DAMN HORMONES!!!*

Instead of drawing away, though, Eileen began vigorously shaking his shoulder. "What?" he shouted, trying to be heard over the noise.

"I said, did you see that?" Eileen shouted in return, pointing out into the river where the barge with all the fireworks was floating. "Something's in the water behind the barge, and it looks huge!"

Peter squinted to see through all the smoke and haze given off by the rockets. At first he was sure that there was nothing to see except blackness. Suddenly, though, he noticed that the blackness was *moving*. A large shape -- too large, impossibly large -- was rising from the waters of the Charles River directly behind the barge. As Peter stared, details seemed to resolve, turning what at first had seemed to be an amorphous shape into something out of childhood nightmares. *Could those really be teeth? And those eyes!*

Without further warning, the creature struck the barge, which proceeded to explode. A vast fireball lit the night and enveloped the creature that had risen from the depths to wreak destruction on that which had disturbed its slumber. Before the echoes of the explosion had completely died out, a new sound rent the air, louder than any of the previous explosions. The strange and terrible creature tilted its head back and gave a second roar, announcing to the world at large that Godzilla was back.

* * *

Hundred's of miles away, a man sat in a comfortable leather recliner chair. The children had gone to sleep an hour earlier, and his wife was waiting for him to come to bed. On the television in front of him he watched the final few seconds of "A Capitol Fourth". He had hoped that his wife, Maureen, would stay up and watch the fireworks with him, but he knew she had an early flight to catch in the morning.

A tentative knock on the door startled him from his reverie. He arose and opened the door to his study. In the brightly lit hallway stood a man with short-cropped hair wearing an impeccably tailored dark. The intruder had what looked like a hearing aid in one ear, with a wire disappearing into his jacket. "Yes, George, what is it?"

"Sorry to disturb you, Mr. President, but we have a problem."

be *wading* through the streets. It's easy to forget that all of this was originally built on landfill. The monster's path is littered with huge craters -- it looks like the world's largest minefield! The devastation is horrendous! Fires are burning out of control throughout the area, and with the roads destroyed there is no way for fire crews to get to the affected areas. The power seems to be out in most of the affected area, and it's hard to make out specific buildings with all the smoke. Still, it appears that the 500 Boylston Street building is completely *gone*. There also seems to be a gaping hole where the French Embassy stood.

“The creature apparently left the Harbor and traveled *up* the Charles before coming ashore near the Esplanade. In the process, he has destroyed the Charles River Dam as well as the Science Museum. The Longfellow Bridge, however, appears to still be intact, and I can only assume that the creature swam under it.

“We are now approaching Copley Square, where the monster has temporarily stopped his rampage. I can see the creature clearly now. It seems to be staring at his reflection in the John Hancock Building as if transfixed. It seems to be oblivious to our presence, so we are carefully flying closer for a better look.

“The creature's size is enormous! It is fully half the height of the John Hancock building, which would make it almost 400 feet tall! Although hard to make out clearly in the dark, it appears to be black or very dark grey in color. Its skin seems *bumpy*, unlike anything I've ever seen before. How can I describe something that shouldn't even exist in the first place? Along its back are a series of what look like bony plates, sort of like those of a stegosaurus, but different. The head, although clearly reptilian in form, has an almost *feline* look about it.

“The creature is still peering intently at his reflection, while we hover behind and slightly above him.

Wait, I think it sees us in the reflection! *How the hell can something that big move that fast!*

“That was close! We managed to pull up just in time to avoid getting swatted by the monster’s enormous tail. We are now approximately 200 feet above the monster and will remain at this height from now on. It is definitely aware of our presence, though, and is now staring at *us* intently. It does not seem happy at having its reverie disturbed.

“Something new -- the spines on the creature’s back have started glowing. Now they’re flashing, lighting up like a 400 foot-tall Christmas tree! It’s opening its mouth, no doubt to roar a challenge at us.

No, wait -- now its *mouth* is glowing as well. *Oh my God, Pull up, damn it! Pull --*”

Chapter 5

“Mr. President!”

Franklin W. Adams, nominally the leader of the most powerful nation in the world, cast a weary glance at his Chief Scientific Advisor. “Were you able to get in touch with the Japanese government?”

“Yes, sir. I just got off the phone with Mr. Fukisama, my counterpart in the Prime Minister’s office.”

Franklin knew the next question he should ask. He also knew, however, that he really didn’t want to hear the answer. “Did he confirm it?”

Dr. Fong Yui-Moon, “Kenny” to his friends, let out a brief sigh before answering. “Yes, it’s confirmed. It’s definitely Godzilla.” Kenny had never seen his boss and longtime friend look so haggard before. Even back when they were roommates at Harvard, struggling through the two hour-long torture sessions casually referred to as “finals,” Franklin had always seemed chipper and composed. A large part of that, Kenny knew, was simply because Franklin had often seemed to know more about the subject than the instructor did. Now, perhaps for the first time in his life, Franklin was not in control of the situation.

“What, exactly, do we know about Godzilla? I mean, what is he? Or she. It. Whatever.”

“Well, nobody knows for sure where Godzilla came from, but there have been numerous theories. And, by the way, the Japanese generally refer to Godzilla as “he”. Anyway, Godzilla first appeared off the coast of Japan back in the mid-50's. Most experts now agree he was originally a member of a previously unknown species of amphibious dinosaur -- the Japanese coined the name ‘Gojirasaurus’ -- that was exposed to and mutated by atomic radiation, most probably as a result of nuclear testing in the

Pacific Ocean. An earlier theory was that Godzilla was simply *awakened* by the nuclear testing, but that wouldn't explain his radioactivity. Of course, nobody can explain how a dinosaur managed to survive into the 20th Century in the first place.

“Anyway, Godzilla was apparently much smaller when he first appeared. Eye-witness reports put him at approximately 150 feet tall, although there is apparently some debate over that. One witness, a reporter and the only American to survive the attack, stated that Godzilla was actually closer to 400 feet tall. At the time, this was discounted on the assumption that he was referring to the creature's total *length*, including the tail.

“Regardless, when Godzilla reappeared off the Coast of Japan a few years back, he was clearly much larger than 100 feet. There are three possibilities for this:

“First, the American reporter may have been correct all along. This assumes everyone else was wrong, though, and isn't likely.

“Second, since Godzilla was supposedly mutated by exposure to radiation in the first place, it's very possible that he has encountered even more radiation over the years and has continued to mutate. Given the number of accidents regarding nuclear submarines over the last two decades, this is a very real possibility.

“The third possibility is the most disturbing of all. Maybe this is *not* the same creature that originally wreaked havoc on Japan. If one dinosaur managed to survive into the 20th Century, why not others? After all, the Japanese claimed to have killed Godzilla when he first appeared, so either they were wrong, Godzilla somehow ‘got better’ or else they succeeded and this is a *different* Godzilla.”

President Adams' eyes held a gleam of panic. "Do you mean to say there might be even more of these monsters roaming around out there?"

"It *is* a possibility, as I said, but nobody really knows."

"But, if that were the case, why would *this* creature be so much larger than the original?"

Dr. Fong adjusted his glasses on his nose before continuing. "Well, one possible reason would be sexual dimorphism."

"Sexual di-whatism?"

"Dimorphism. In many species of animals the two genders are of different sizes. Presumably, if that's the case with whatever species Godzilla belongs to, this Godzilla could simply be a different gender than the original."

"So, you're saying that the original creature was female, and that this one might be the male?"

"Well, actually, it usually works the other way around. And in such cases the female is, more often than not, more dangerous than the male."

At this, President Adams stood up and began pacing around the office. "Terrific. Well, assuming this is at least the same creature that attacked Japan a few years ago, regardless of whether it's the same one that originally appeared back in the 50's, how the hell did he end up in Boston, of all places? It's the wrong damn ocean!"

For several years, ever since Godzilla's last appearance on the shores of Japan, the U.S. Navy had been keeping a surreptitious watch in the waters off the California coast. All the latest scientific gadgetry had been employed, from the newly developed "deep" sonar to infrared satellite scans. Not wanting to raise alarm, the Army had quietly relocated a number of heavy batteries to outlying coastal

communities. In addition, three “Snark” class nuclear submarines had been put on a state of constant alert, and airbases up and down the California coast had been running regular drills in preparation.

Dr. Fong was painfully aware that he didn’t have the answers to the President’s questions. “I really don’t know for sure. It’s possible that Godzilla has been living in the waters off Boston Harbor for some time. Nobody knows what his diet consists of, but presumably he feeds off some form of marine life and, given his teeth, it’s unlikely he is a plankton eater. In recent years the waters near Japan have been drastically over-fished. The waters off Boston, on the other hand, are home to a large and diverse marine population, including tuna, sharks, dolphins and whales. It’s possible that Godzilla went in search of better feeding. As to how he *got* to Boston, anything’s possible. Perhaps he swam around Africa or came through the Bering Strait. All of this is assuming, of course, that this *is* the same creature that attacked Japan.

The President slammed his palm on the desk with a sharp *whap*. “Our entire anti-Godzilla strategy hinged on intercepting him before he actually set foot on American soil. What the hell are we going to do now?”

“Well, sir, General Markoff *is* waiting outside. I really think he is the one to whom you should be addressing that question.”

President Adams closed his eyes for a few moments and then sighed. “Yeah, Kenny, I know. It’s just that you’re the only one around here who doesn’t have any hidden agendas. Markoff’s still upset at me for authorizing the military budget cuts last year, and the fact that Boston’s only air base was closed down as a result is just going to give him one more thing to rub my nose in. Look -- do we have any

idea as to why Godzilla attacking Boston? I mean, is this just the dinosaur equivalent of a random act of violence, or is there a purpose to all the destruction?”

“Well, since he came ashore during a fireworks display, it’s possible that he was disturbed by the lights and noise.”

President Adams thought about this for a moment. Then, “O.K., but why is he *still* there? I mean, fine, the noise and lights woke him up, or gave him a headache -- whatever. Why doesn’t he just go back to sleep now that the fireworks have stopped?”

Dr. Fong looked uncertain. “If this were someplace other than Boston, I’d suspect he was looking for an energy source with which to replenish himself.”

This was a new wrinkle, and President Adams was intrigued. “Explain.”

“In the past, Godzilla has been known to seek out nuclear power plants. He seems to be able to somehow absorb radiation directly from the reactor core itself. This is not believed to be his primary sustenance, but more of a supplement. However, there *are* no nuclear power plants in the Boston area. The nearest one currently in operation is the Seabrook nuclear Facility in New Hampshire and that’s over fifty miles away....” Dr. Fong stopped when he noticed that the President had a far-away look in his eyes. “Something, Sir?”

President Adams snapped back to the present. “I was just thinking about something I heard when I was back at Harvard. Something about demonstrators protesting somewhere. Can’t remember where, though. Ahhhh -- it’s probably nothing. Um, before you tell Markoff to come in, did your ‘counterpart’ in Japan have any advice to offer?”

“Not really, no. All he knows is that Godzilla was lured away from Japan using some sort of sonic device, but the device disappeared along with its inventor. Apparently, the plane carrying the device never returned after successfully luring the monster back into the ocean. The inventor supposedly left detailed notes behind, but they were in a building that was subsequently destroyed by Godzilla, and no trace of them was ever found.”

“Terrific. O.K. -- you might as well get Markoff. He'll probably tell me to drop a nuke on downtown Cambridge and be done with it. Trust a Yale grad -- if there's a way to get an edge over Harvard, they'll do it, even if it means nuking the whole damn city back to the stone age!”

Chapter 6

“Eileen!”

It's no use. Either she's out of earshot, or else . . .

Peter had begun that same thought at least 50 times in the last couple of hours, but each time his mind refused to finish it. Instead, as before, a single phrase began repeating in his mind like some sort of weird mantra. *This can't be happening. This can't be happening.* Over and over again, until he wanted to pick up a piece of the rubble he was even now stumbling over and smash it against his skull.

Right now, Peter wasn't even sure where *he* was, let alone Eileen. After the explosion of the fireworks barge, the huge crowd had turned into a riot as everyone tried to flee the area at once. For a few terrifying moments, it had seemed as if the horrifying monster was going to wade ashore and step right on top of everybody. It hadn't come quite *that* close, thank heavens, but Peter had been able to feel the ground tremble beneath him at its passing.

Still, the crush of 200,000 people had caused almost as much damage as if Godzilla *had* trampled the outdoor concert area. Peter had seen too many bodies crushed beneath the feet of panicked people. Instead of fighting the crowd, Peter had allowed himself to be born along with it until it finally dispersed enough for him to break free. With all the smoke and shouting, though, Peter had completely lost his bearings.

I'm on the Common, he suddenly realized. But where's Godzilla? And Where's Eileen?

* * *

A few minutes later, Peter left the Boston Common and stepped onto Tremont Street. A loud crash, far too near for comfort, caused him to look to his right. *Well, at least I know where Godzilla is*, he thought grimly.

Approximately ten blocks away, in the center of Copley Square, stood the majestic John Hancock building. Built in the mid-70's, it was a 64-story rectangular tower of glass and steel standing almost 800 feet high. Specially treated windows created a near-perfect reflecting surface, at least when they didn't fall out during high winds.

Standing directly in front of the building was Godzilla, his head cocked slightly to one side. Although Peter could not see the reflection from where he stood, it was obvious that the giant creature was, in effect, looking at himself in the mirror.

Peter couldn't help wondering what, if anything, was going through Godzilla's mind. *Maybe he thinks it's another Godzilla. Maybe he's been lonely and thinks he's finally found a friend.*

Peter continued to stare as Godzilla raised one arm slightly, put it back down, and then raised the other. Just as he was reaching out to touch his reflection, Godzilla suddenly froze. Then, so fast it seemed almost a blur, Godzilla's massive tail *twitched* and rose into the air, only to fall back to the ground a moment later. On the way back down, the tail struck the edge of the old Trinity Church, shattering the large stained glass windows and sending a fresh avalanche of debris to the street.

For the first time, Peter noticed a helicopter that had, until recently, been hovering near Godzilla's shoulder, and that had apparently been the target of Godzilla's sudden movement. Fortunately, the pilot had been able to get out of the way in time, and was now hovering way out of Godzilla's reach.

Peter's relief was short lived, however, as a sudden jet of glowing plasma spewed forth out of the creature's mouth and enveloped the helicopter. For the briefest of moments, Peter imagined he could see the pilot and a passenger illuminated from within the craft, as if seen through one of those x-ray machines in Saturday morning cartoons. Then, the helicopter exploded in a silent fireball, sending twisted wreckage in all directions. A few seconds later the sound of the blast caught up with the light, in the form of a hollow *boom* that seemed to come from all directions at once.

Turning his attention back to the mirrored surface in front of him, Godzilla reached out with both hands toward his reflection, this time using both hands. As his hands met the cool, smooth surface, he emitted a roar that immediately shattered well over half of the windows. Then, he began to *push*.

Chapter 7

General Montgomery Omar Markoff, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had known this day was going to come. Not Godzilla attacking Boston, of course -- what kind of loony would have predicted *that* -- but a time when America was caught with its proverbial pants around its ankles. For years, he had advised against the wholesale slashing of defense spending that had caught the public's fancy of late. *Hell, if ever a president was elected on a one-promise campaign*, Markoff thought. But all the average American on the street thought was "the Cold War's been over for years now -- why are we still paying \$1 billion for a bomber we'll never need?"

Trust a democrat, Markoff often grouched to himself. *Great -- we'll increase benefits to the elderly, build better schools and create a national health care program, all without raising taxes. All we need to do is "dismantle the engines of mass destruction that have kept our children in fear for the last 50 years."* Markoff didn't know what disturbed him more - the fact that the President had come up with such an asinine plan in the first place, or the fact that people had actually *voted* for him!

As he waited outside the Oval Office, General Markoff tried to resist the urge to start pacing again. *Bad habit, I know -- makes me seem nervous.* The problem was, he *was* nervous. Although he had seen front-line action in two separate "conflicts," and had even received the Purple Heart for being wounded in one of them, Markoff knew that he was about to face his toughest battle yet. *Why did I ever accept this damn job*, Markoff wondered for the hundredth time in as many days. *I'm a soldier, not a politician!*

The door to the Oval Office opened, and Dr. Fong gestured that the President was ready to talk to him. Markoff tried to manage a glower at the Chinese-American doctor in protest for being left outside waiting, but he actually respected the good doctor. *At least Franklin has good taste in advisors, even if he only listens to their advice when it's politically expedient.*

* * *

“Have a seat, Monty.”

President Adams gestured to the chair in front of his desk and General Markoff eased his bulky frame onto the padded leather.

“Go ahead and say it, Monty. I know you're dying to, and now's as good a time as any.”

“Excuse me, Mr. President?”

“I told you so.’ That's it, isn't it? That's what you've been waiting forever since I took office two years ago, and now you finally have your chance.”

General Markoff gave a mental sigh. *This is going to be worse than I thought.* “With all due respect, sir, I don't think it matters at this point.”

“Yeah, well, thank heavens this isn't an election year.”

Inwardly, Markoff grimaced. *Are politicians born this stupid, or does it suddenly happen to them once they get elected?* Outwardly, he maintained the same calm visage he always did when speaking with the President. In two years the President had never succeeded in getting a rise out of

him, and he knew it drove the President up a wall. “The important thing is that we deal with present situation using the options available to us.”

“And what *are* our options?”

Here it comes. “Well, Sir, our military options are rather slim at the moment. We *do* happen to have an aircraft carrier, the U.S.S. George Bush, currently stationed nearby. Unfortunately, the information provided by the Japanese government indicates that very little, short of a nuclear device, can even harm Godzilla.”

“Damn it! I *knew* you wanted to drop the bomb on Boston. You military types are all alike. Any time there’s a problem, your first thought is always “let’s nuke ‘em ‘til they glow and then shoot ‘em in the dark!””

Markoff grinned at the mental image that conjured up, in spite of himself. “Actually, Sir, I agree that the use of nuclear weapons at this juncture would be ill-advised. I just brought it up to emphasize how useless our conventional weaponry would be against Godzilla. Normal projectile weapons wouldn’t even piece his skin, and any explosive powerful enough to actually hurt him would most certainly cause even more damage to the surrounding environs than Godzilla himself.”

“How about those ‘heavy bullets’ you folks were so proud of during the Gulf War. I thought they could go through anything.”

This time, Markoff’s sigh was audible. “Yes, Sir. We *were* using special slugs made up of spent uranium, and it’s quite possible that those could be effective against Godzilla. Unfortunately, they are very expensive to manufacture, and the specialized facilities that were producing them were shut down

as a result of last year's budget cuts." Markoff didn't need to add who was responsible for the budget cuts.

If the President was aware of the indirect accusation, he showed no sign. "Well, how long would it take to get the facilities back up and running?"

"At least six months, Mr. President."

"Damn! Well, if we can't attack Godzilla for fear of wiping out the city, what do you suggest? Just let him run around until he gets tired and leaves? How about we get all the Jewish grandmothers in the city together and have them put him on a guilt trip?"

This time, Markoff didn't grin. "Well, the good news is that, although property damage has been heavy, human casualties have been relatively light, owing to the fact that yesterday was a national holiday and the office buildings were, for the most part, unoccupied at the time. In the mean time, there is at least one other option we haven't discussed." Markoff opened his briefcase and withdrew a thick manilla folder marked *Top Secret*. "What do you know about the "Matrix Project?"

Chapter 8

As sudden as a thrown light switch, Eileen's world was turned back on. *There was an explosion. Was it the fireworks? Where am I?* Looking around, Eileen found herself standing in the middle of a large, deserted street, surrounded by rubble. *What's going on? Where's Peter? AND WHY CAN'T I REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED?*

As full awareness crept closer and closer, Eileen noticed a dull throbbing pain above her right temple. She reached up to touch it gingerly, and her fingers came away wet. And sticky. She screwed her eyes tightly shut and tried to concentrate. *We were watching the fireworks. Something happened -- I saw something. Rising from the water? Behind the barge?* It was no use; the harder she tried to remember, the more her head hurt.

Suddenly, she noticed that she was standing in what looked like the middle of a war zone. *What the heck?* All around her was strewn the remnants of a once proud building -- broken chunks of concrete, twisted rods of metal, shards of glass. Nearby, Eileen could make out the chipped head of a stone lion which, she suddenly realized, must have come from the doorway above the Public Library. With a start, she realized that the rubble over which she was stumbling *was* the Public Library, or what was left of it.

Heedless of the possible danger, and desperately trying to fight the panic that threatened to engulf her, she called out into the darkness. "Can anybody hear me? Will somebody please tell me what's going on? Where is everybody?"

A sudden bright light, almost immediately followed by a loud *whump* caused her to look up. Almost directly above her a glowing ball of flame was expanding in all directions. Her first thought was

the fireworks aren't over yet. Common sense kicked back in, though, and she realized that something had exploded. Right over her head. And was falling. On top of her. *Crap!*

Without consciously choosing a direction, Eileen began to run, tripping over chunks of detritus, but somehow managing to keeping her balance. A loud *crunch*, seemingly right behind her, told her that whatever had exploded had just hit the ground. Something whizzed past her ear, and a moment later she was surrounded by a shower of yellow and orange sparks. Having nowhere else to run, she fell to the ground and covered her head with her arms.

When nothing else happened, she stood up and began to look around again. The momentary respite, however, was shattered by an ear-piercing roar that split the night and caused the ground itself to shake. *I'VE HEARD THAT BEFORE!* Turning around, she saw the huge creature that had issued it's challenge into the night. *I remember! It came out of the Charles. Everyone was screaming and pushing and trying to get away. I lost Peter, and then I fell...* It finally dawned on Eileen that the creature was standing no more than 300 feet away from her. *I've got to get away from here!*

Unable to take her eyes off the terrible sight in front of her, she started to back up, slowly at first and then a little faster. When she tripped on something and landed on her rump, she paused before getting back up, forced to watch in spite of herself.

The creature's hands were pressed against the sides of the glass and steel building in front of it and was rocking the building back and forth. The air reverberated with the groaning and screeching of tortured metal. With each push, the building swung a little further from upright. Glass was raining down upon the creature, but it didn't seem to notice. Or if it noticed, it didn't care.

With a grinding roar, the building came loose from its foundation and began a long, slow, almost graceful fall to the earth. Time seemed to slow down, and for a moment Eileen was sure the building was going to fall as gently as a feather. Then, it struck the building behind it with a tremendous crash, sending up a cloud of dust and smoke that seemed to cover the entire sky.

Eileen couldn't see what happened next, but she could hear the buildings striking one another as if in a chain of giant dominoes, one after another. Eileen could picture in her mind what was happening and started to giggle at the thought. *This isn't funny -- stop laughing!* The more she tried to stop laughing, however, the harder she laughed. *Cripes -- I'm gonna wet my pants!*

After a few minutes she was able to get herself back under control, just in time to see the great beast step *over* the fallen building and into the darkness.

Can I go home now?

Chapter 9

“The Matrix Project? What the hell is *that*? Sounds like something out of a bad science fiction movie.”

Startled, General Markoff looked up from the pile of papers he had already started spreading out on the President’s desk. *Damn and double damn! I was hoping somebody had already briefed him on this. Oh well, when it rains, it pours.*

“I’m sorry, Sir. I was under the impression that you were aware of the project, at least in its basic form. Surely Dr. Fong has discussed it with you?”

“He may have, but I make it a point not to pay too much attention to all the various ‘projects’ going on around here, on the off chance one of them ends up backfiring and biting us on the ass. That way I can always claim that I was ‘out of the loop.’ Fortunately, both the public and the Press now firmly believe that the President usually doesn’t have a clue about what’s *really* going on in the government. Thank you Ronald Reagan!”

“Yes, well, this particular project may end up saving our ass instead of biting it. Do you remember how in the years immediately following the Gulf War many soldiers suffered from a wide range of illnesses?”

“‘Gulf War Syndrome,’ right?”

“Yes, that was the name used in the Press. For a long time, the government claimed that the ‘Syndrome’ did not exist and refused to pay benefits. Many people claimed that there was a coverup involved, that perhaps the Syndrome was a result of our own chemical and biological weapons, and that, in any case, the government was just too cheap to take care of its own.”

Markoff shifted his weight in the chair before continuing. “The reason the government was skeptical, though, was simply because of the phenomenally wide range of symptoms involved. Complaints ranged from irritability, to sleeplessness, to flue-like symptoms, to body sores, to bleeding gums. In short, no known chemical or biological agent could produce all those effects. To add to the confusion, many of the symptoms could be attributed to other causes.”

“So, there wasn’t any ‘Gulf War Syndrome’ after all?”

“Actually, the Syndrome was very real. The problem was that Doctors were looking for a single source for all the symptoms. But that’s just it -- there *was* no single source! In the mid-90’s, researchers finally realized that the madman, Hussein, had been stockpiling a whole panoply of biological and chemical weapons all over the countryside, many of them in buildings destroyed by our ‘smart’ bombs. There must have been over 20 different agents released into the air during the conflict.

“Once that was discovered, the government finally recognized the validity of the soldiers’ claims and agreed to pay medical expenses and make disability payments. In the mean time, work began on finding some sort of ‘multi spectrum’ defense against this type of thing happening again -- some sort of ‘super vaccine’ against any possible combination of biological and chemical agents. Just think -- if such a thing were possible, the benefits would be enormous! Hell, it could lead to an entirely new age of medicine!

“Anyway, that was the start of the Matrix Project.”

The President looked incredulous. “What, are you telling me that Godzilla is just a big germ and all we have to do is give him a giant flue shot?”

“No. As I said, that was the *start* of the Matrix Project. It soon developed along completely unforeseen pathways”

Chapter 10

For a long while, Peter just stood there watching, too stunned to move. A single perverse thought strayed briefly into his mind. *Well, so much for the famous Boston skyline!*

Although the smoke and dust obscured most of the view, Peter could see that Godzilla had left the Copley Square area and seemed to be heading downtown again. *At least he's not heading back this way*, Peter thought with a slight shudder. *Now what do I do?*

Peter could hear sirens in the distance. *Maybe I should try to flag down a policeman.*

Unfortunately, Peter couldn't tell whether the sirens were fleeing the devastation or rushing toward it. He looked around and noticed a number of people, in various states of shock and stunned disbelief, still wandering around the Common. A large group of them seemed to be congregating near the Frog Pond, if for no other reason than to seek out the vitality and reassurance of other living beings. Although Peter felt that he had had enough of crowds for the rest of his life, he decided to join the group.

As he approached, Peter noticed that one man was in the center of the group, and that everyone else was listening to him and asking him questions. As he got closer, Peter saw that the man was wearing a uniform of some kind. Never having been particularly interested in military stuff, Peter couldn't tell whether the guy was in the Army, the Navy, or what. *Heck*, thought Peter, *he could be with the Salvation Army, for all I know. Still, he seems to know what's going on...*

Peter tapped the shoulder of a short, elderly man at the fringe of the circle to ask what had been said. The man gave a violent start, and for a sickening moment Peter was sure that the old dude was going to have a heart attack right there on the spot. *Geez -- I guess everyone is freaked out.*

The man recovered quickly, however, and gave Peter a baleful glance forceful enough to shatter glass. When he saw how shaken Peter was by the encounter, however, his gaze softened.

“Um, I’m sorry if I startled you,” Peter began. “I was just wondering if you could tell me what’s going on?”

“It’s all right” replied the man. “I’m just on edge, I guess. Quite the 4th of July celebration, eh?”

“Uh, yeah. Look, do you know who that guy is? Does he know what we should do?”

“Well, I didn’t catch his name, but apparently he’s an officer on a ship that’s in port here over the holiday weekend. I guess he was on leave and attending the concert when the spit hit the old griddle, if you get my meaning.”

“Did he say what the military is doing about all this? I mean, why haven’t they attacked or something?”

“Use your noggin, son. What are they supposed to do, start shooting missiles and dropping bombs on downtown Boston?”

Peter hated getting lectured. *Old fart! Bet he used to be a teacher -- back in the Stone Age.* Still, he could see the guy’s point. “So what are they gonna do -- just wait for it to go back out to sea?”

“Maybe. Or perhaps just get away from the downtown area. That old critter’s pretty smart, though. He’s staying close to the buildings like fleas on an unwashed dog. You get what I’m saying, son?”

This guy is weird! Kind of reminds me of a cross between Foghorn Leghorn and that short guy from Texas with the big ears who runs for President every year. “Is that what the navy guy said?”

The old man laughed. “Him? Naw -- he’s just telling everyone to stay calm and not to panic. Stuff like that. He doesn’t know squat about what’s going on, any more than the rest of the damn fools wandering around here in the dark.”

Peter was confused. “Then why are you all standing around listening to him?”

“Hell, son -- you got someplace *better* to go?”

No, thought Peter grimly. *I guess I don’t.*

Chapter 11

“Maybe we should get Dr. Fong back in here. He understands this stuff a hell of a lot better than I do.”

The President waved the suggestion aside as if casually brushing away an annoying insect. “No, that’s all right. I love Kenny like a brother, but I always lose him when he starts going ‘technical’ on me. So far, I think I’ve actually understood everything you’ve said.”

Well, there’s a bona fide miracle for you, thought Markoff. “Well, as I said, the original goal of the research was to find a wide range vaccine for all the various chemical and biological toxins that could be released in the even of another ‘Gulf War’.

“Although the effects of the toxins seemed completely random at first, the researchers finally started noticing distinct patterns emerging. Apparently, the various toxins were reacting in different ways across a fairly well-defined set of genetic sub-groups. Nothing as fine as hair or eye color, you understand, but across broader groups such as gender and race. Thus, an Asian woman might have completely different symptoms than an African-American male, but two African-American males would most likely have very similar symptoms.

“Such race and gender specific effects were not wholly unprecedented, of course. There are a number of known genetic abnormalities and predispositions particular to specific ethnic sub-groups.”

At this, the President nodded. “Like sickle-cell anemia, which only affects black people.”

“Exactly. The key to the ‘super-vaccine’, then, seemed to be not so much *what* the particular toxin involved was, but *how* to tailor it to the effected gene type. Now we’re *really* getting beyond my level of expertise, but my understanding is that at about the same time, the Human Genome Project was

finally completed, giving us a fairly complete map of the human gene structure. This gave the researchers the ability to create the delivery system they needed for the vaccine.

“Essentially, what they came up with, and hence the revised name of the project, was a genetic ‘matrix’ capable of accepting any type of DNA. All the researchers needed to do was insert a sample of the target individual’s DNA into the matrix, and whatever was attached to the matrix would be effective for that individual and anyone else with a similar genetic make-up.

“The researchers were ecstatic. Continued experimentation showed that the matrix worked with any type of DNA. They tried it with lab rats, monkeys, sheep -- even fish and lizards, I believe.”

President Adams was nonplussed. “This is incredible! Why hasn’t this been made public knowledge?”

General Markoff leaned forward in his chair and stared directly into the President’s eyes. “Just think what *else* the matrix could be used for! If a vaccine could be attached to it, why not a disease? Why not a plague? Can you imagine what would happen if some of the more rabid folks in the PLO got a hold of this? Hell, how about the KKK here in the good old U S of A? We’re talking genocide here, perhaps on a global scale; we started out looking for a ‘super vaccine’, and instead ended up with the most deadly biological weapon the world has ever seen!”

President Adams stared at General Markoff for a full 10 seconds before saying anything. When he finally did his words were, well, if not the absolute *last* thing Markoff would have expected, pretty damn close.

“General -- Monty -- I know we haven’t exactly seen eye-to-eye in the two years I’ve been in office. Hell, I’d dare say you probably hate my guts for what I’ve done to the military budgets. Let me tell you two things, though, and you can decide for yourself whether or not to believe ‘em.

“First, in my heart I honestly felt that my actions were in the best interests of the nation as a whole, and not just for my political career. Just because someone is a career politician doesn’t mean he stops being an American.

“Second, I hold you in great respect. Haven’t you ever wondered why, in spite of all our disagreements, I’ve never tried to replace you with someone who agrees with me more?”

Actually, thought Markoff, I assumed you just liked humiliating me by asking my opinion and then ignoring it.

As if reading Markoff’s mind, the President continued. “Just because I don’t always follow your advice doesn’t mean I don’t value it. I always knew my policies carried a certain amount of inherent risk, perhaps less than you always claimed, but real nonetheless. If the day ever came when I was proved wrong, and you were proved right, I wanted you to be here to tell me what to do. Well, that day has come. What should I do?”

For a moment, Markoff could only sit there, flabbergasted. *Well, I’ll be damned. Wish he could’ve told me this a little earlier -- would’ve made life a whole hell of a lot easier!* Clearing his throat to cover his momentary confusion, Markoff responded. “Well, as I see it, there are two main obstacles we need to overcome in order for this to work. The first is a practical one, and that’s my department. The second one, however, is political, and that’s something *you* are going to have take care of.”

The president was all business again. “Continue, General.”

“In order for the Matrix to work as a delivery system effective against Godzilla, we need to first obtain a sample of his DNA. Offhand, I have no idea how that can be accomplished, but I’m confident that we can figure out a way. Fortunately, much of the research being done on the Matrix Project was conducted at a facility only about 15 miles away from Boston, so once we obtain a DNA sample we should be able to integrate it into the matrix in short order.”

“Wait a second. If the matrix is just the delivery system, what, exactly, are we going to deliver with it? How do we know what will be effective against Godzilla?”

Markoff smiled. “That’s the beauty behind the whole concept, Sir. It doesn’t matter *what* we send against Godzilla. If we send it via the matrix it will affect him. Hell -- we could infect him with the common cold!”

“Hmmm... the thought of a sneezing Godzilla doesn’t exactly fill me with hope. I’ve heard about his radioactive breath.”

“No, Sir. That was just an example. How about botulism? Or the Ebola virus? We can have the CDC in Atlanta send up any of a hundred different fatal germs. And the great part is that we don’t have to worry about the affecting anyone or anything else, unless there’s another Godzilla running around somewhere.”

“You mentioned a ‘political’ obstacle as well?”

“Yes, well, although the research underlying the Matrix Project was originally conceived with purely benign intentions, as it currently exists it qualifies as prohibited biological warfare research in violation of U.N. directives. We spent so much time and energy decrying Saddam Hussein’s use of biological and

chemical weapons during the Gulf War, it will seem very hypocritical if the world finds out about our own little experiments, regardless of how they got started. Plus, there's the bigger issue of keeping this technology out of the hands of those that would use toward more nefarious ends."

This time, it was President Adams who smiled. "Well, we'll just have to make sure that the world *doesn't* find out about this, now won't we?"

Chapter 12

“Tehhhhhhhhhn-hut!”

As Major Freeman strode into the small auditorium, he looked approvingly at the group of men and women standing before him. Scientists, technicians, pilots -- all of them soldiers above anything else, willing to lay down their lives in defense of their country. He returned Captain Stinson’s sharp salute. “Thank you, Captain. At ease everyone.”

Even though it was close to midnight on a holiday weekend, Major Freeman was pleased to note that everyone seemed awake and alert -- not a wrinkled uniform in sight. Turning back to his executive officer, he asked about missing personnel.

“We haven’t been able to contact Lieutenants Black and Clarke yet, Sir. I believe they are both out of state on vacation with their respective families. Captain Farrell is still incapacitated with pneumonia, and Lieutenant Reynolds is on his way. Other than that, all present and accounted for, Sir!”

“Thank you.”

Major Freeman quickly walked over to the podium at the front of the room and addressed the assembled officers. “As many of you are probably aware, we have a crisis before us. At approximately 22:00 hours this evening, a large creature identified as *Godzilla* began attacking the city of Boston. This is believed to be the same creature that attacked Japan in a similar fashion a few years ago.

“So far, no overt military action has been taken against the creature because of the danger to nearby structures. This may change, however, if the damage inflicted by the creature outweighs the potential damage from an attack by our forces.

“In any regard, the President is not convinced that conventional ordinance would prove effective at this time. Therefore, he has authorized the use of the Matrix Project in an attempt to kill the creature. Our primary objectives are to obtain a sample of the creature’s DNA, integrate it into the matrix and then use the matrix to deliver a lethal biological agent. Comments?”

Lieutenant Foster stood up. Lieutenant Barbara Foster, Ph.D. (or ‘Babs’ as most of the male personnel referred to her, but only when she couldn’t hear them) was one of the team’s two molecular biologists. An MIT graduate, the petite brunette simultaneously managed to attract and intimidate most of the male staff at the Labs.

Major Freeman nodded in her direction. “Yes, Lieutenant?”

“Sir! Do we know, exactly, what type of creature this Godzilla is?”

“No. Does it matter? My understanding was that the matrix worked with any form of DNA.”

“Yes, Sir. The only question is how we are going to get a sample of that DNA.”

“Explain.”

“Well, Sir, as you may know, the blood cells of reptiles do not contain any DNA. If Godzilla *is* some form of reptile, presumably his blood cells would not contain any DNA either. This would mean getting a tissue sample which, from what I’ve heard, could be nigh impossible. On the other hand, if Godzilla’s blood *does* contain DNA, we might be able to simply wound him and get a sample that way.”

“Thank you, Lieutenant, although I don’t think even wounding Godzilla would be ‘simple’. You’re right, though -- getting a blood sample *is* the most practical way of proceeding. For now, let’s work on

the assumption that Godzilla is *not* a reptile, or at least not one like any existing anywhere else, and pray that his blood does, in fact, contain DNA. Anything else? Yes -- Captain Collins?"

Captain Collins was one of the facility's best helicopter pilots and oversaw most of the transportation of people and materials to and from the Labs. Major Freeman often thought that Captain Collins, as one of the few African-Americans on the team, pushed himself too hard in an effort to overcome negative stereotypes. Regardless of the reason, though, there was no doubt that he was good at what he did. "Sir! Do we have a biological agent prepared?"

"An 'assortment pack' of various toxins is already on its way from the Center for Disease Control down in Atlanta. It should arrive long before we are ready to use it. Other comments? No? Good. Then here is how things are going to go.

"The purpose of this mission is *not* to kill Godzilla, but we *do* have to inflict enough damage to obtain a blood sample. This will be accomplished with the use of three separate teams of helicopters.

"The first team will be responsible for actually wounding the creature. This team will further be divided into two-sub teams -- one to draw the creature's fire, and one to actually attack. Captain Collins, you will lead this team, and will need 3 volunteers to accompany you.

"The second team will be responsible for obtaining the necessary sample. Under no circumstances should this team attempt to engage the creature. Your sole job will be to hang back until the creature has left the area, get the sample, and then leave. Captain Ramirez will be the pilot of this helicopter, and Lieutenant Foster will be responsible for collecting the sample. You will both be fitted with full biohazard and radiation suits.

“The third team will be on hand to coordinate the efforts of the first two teams and to act as a mobile observation post. Of key importance is observing when and where the creature has been wounded, and where the creature’s blood has fallen. This information will then be relayed directly to team two. Captain Stinson, you will designate a pilot to accompany you and head up this team. If there are no further questions, let’s get moving. Dismissed!”

* * *

Twenty minutes later, the teams were fully assembled on the helipad. Captain Collins had found his three volunteers within moments after the assembly was dismissed. Although possessed of differing skills and temperaments, they represented the best the army had to offer. Lieutenant James “Jimmy” Walker was a veteran of the Gulf War and had logged over 1000 hours of flight time in 4 different types of helicopters. At slightly under 5' 7" tall, he was the shortest pilot on the team. Perhaps because of his diminutive stature, he also had the quickest reflexes. Captain Collins assigned him to pilot the second ‘copter in charge of distracting Godzilla. *If anyone can dodge what that creature has to throw at us, it’ll be Jimmy*, thought Collins.

Lieutenant Walker’s copilot was Lieutenant Jenny “Mad Dog” Parker, one of the first women ever to fly the new Vulcan attack helicopters. With more muscle tissue per square inch than most of the men on the team, she was a compact dynamo of energy, a coiled spring ready to explode at a moment’s notice. *The definitive ‘lean, mean fighting machine’ if ever there was one!*

Joining him in the attack copter was Weapons Specialist First Class Russell Mycroft. Captain Collins would be flying the ‘copter, but the whole mission depended on Mycroft. With the advent of fiber optic controlled guided missiles back in the 90's, a new breed of specialists had been needed. Nicknamed “joystick jockeys,” America’s newest soldiers were selected with only one skill in mind -- hand/eye coordination. Barely in his twenties, Russ Mycroft seemed more of a boy than a man, especially given his slender frame. Captain Collins could picture Mycroft as a teenager spending hours on end in front of a video game shooting down computer simulated airplanes. *I wonder whether his parents ever thought he’d end up doing it for real someday?*

No pep talk was needed; everyone knew the seriousness of the mission. Each knew that he might not return. Captain Collins nodded and they turned as one and boarded the helicopters.

* * *

Thirty feet away, Captain Miguel Ramirez and Lieutenant Foster boarded their own helicopter. Lieutenant Foster didn’t know much about Captain Ramirez, but assumed the wiry Hispanic was a competent pilot. Captain Ramirez, on the other hand, had heard a *lot* about the lovely Lieutenant, most of it, well, *muy interesante*. He had hoped to finally meet her in person, but under less stressful conditions. *¿Quién sabe? This could be the start of a beautiful friendship. If we survive, that is.*

Their helicopter was a modified Huey that had been outfitted as a mobile laboratory unit. Although not as fast or maneuverable as the new Vulcans, there was more internal space for equipment. Besides, they weren’t even going to be entering the battle zone until after the fighting was all over. Lieutenant

Foster indicated that all the gear was safely on board and strapped down, and Captain Ramirez started up the engines in preparation for flight.

* * *

Although Captain Stinson knew that the helicopter was named after the Roman god of fire, he couldn't resist a quick "Mr. Spock" salute and a "live long and prosper" to the pilot as he boarded the craft. Lieutenant Reznikov, also an avid Star Trek fan, inverted the return salute with a grin and responded with "die young and suffer!" *Haven't heard that one before*, thought Captain Stinson. *I'll have to remember that and tell it to the kids when I get back.*

Captain Stinson strapped himself in and activated his helmet microphone. "All right, everyone. Let's blow this clambake!" Then, turning to the pilot, "Ahead warp factor one, Mr. Sulu."

Lieutenant Reznikov grinned broadly. "Aye-aye, Captain!"

Like a flock of strange, sleek metallic birds, the four craft rose into the air, hovered for a moment, and then took off into the night sky.

Chapter 13

The crowd gathered near the Frog Pond had started growing to a respectable size -- a couple hundred people, Peter reckoned. Although Godzilla was no longer in sight, Peter still felt uneasy as more and more people began pressing around him. Peter's mind refused to dredge up any specific memories of the rioting on the Esplanade that had followed Godzilla's appearance a few hours earlier. Still, enough of an impression seeped through to cause Peter to start worming his way toward the edge of the crowd.

The old man with whom Peter had earlier spoken noticed his movements and tried to grab his arm. Peter dodged the old coot's grip and took off at a half-jog. After about 20 steps he looked back and saw that the man had latched onto another poor soul and seemed to be yakking up a storm.

Where to now? On an impulse, and with more than a hint of morbid curiosity, Peter decided to head toward Copley Square to inspect the damage done by the awesome behemoth. Tremont Street was dark and deserted now. Many of the shops had shattered windows, no doubt caused by the vibrations of Godzilla's passing.

The dust kicked up by the destruction of the Hancock building had started to clear by now. Still, Peter could only make out a few details from this distance, more than half a mile away. The closer he got to the Square, the less he could see, owing to the numerous smaller buildings blocking his view. Most of these buildings seemed relatively intact, as they had not been in Godzilla's direct path.

When Peter was about five blocks away from the center of the Square, the damage finally started to become apparent. Large sections of the pavement were completely *gone*, as if gouged out of the earth with a giant spoon. The street itself was rent with gaping fissures of differing lengths, widths and,

presumably, depths. Peter really didn't feel confident enough to get close enough to peer over the edge of any of them.

As he turned the corner, Peter could see Copley square itself. What was left of it, that is. When Peter was much younger, he and his parents had visited relatives in Arizona. They had stopped to look at a giant crater said to have been caused by a meteor impact many thousands of years ago. Peter had often wondered what would happen if such a meteor were to hit the earth today, especially if it landed in the middle of a city. *A lot like this*, he now found himself thinking.

The ground in front of the Hancock building -- or, rather, where the Hancock building *used* to be -- had apparently been too weak to support Godzilla's enormous weight. For a radius of about 200 feet in all directions the earth seemed to *sag* inward, sloping downward at a ten or fifteen degree angle. Chunks of asphalt, concrete and other material lay strewn around the ground, or else were sticking up *from* the ground like bizarre post-modern sculptures.

Where the Hancock building itself had been, there was now just a gaping pit. Peter could see the edge of the building lying on its side, facing directly away from him. In its present state, however, it was barely recognizable. All the glass was gone, and all that remained was a skeleton of twisted metal and concrete. Peter wondered briefly whether anybody had been in the building when it had fallen, but couldn't bring himself to approach any closer.

I really wish I had a flashlight, Peter thought as he stumbled over a loose brick. Still, the night sky seemed eerily lit and he was surprised at just how well he could see. He was reminded of certain cold winter nights, right after a heavy storm, when the low clouds and the freshly fallen snow combined

to cast an almost ghostly glow around the city. Only, this was July, and there was neither clouds nor snow. *Maybe the rest of Boston is just on fire*, he thought grimly.

As Peter headed toward the place where the Public Library had once stood, he saw what had to be the remains of the helicopter he had seen destroyed from a distance. Peter didn't even bother looking for survivors -- there wasn't enough wreckage left for that. As he continued walking, he suddenly noticed what looked like a body lying in the middle of the street. He picked up his pace and, as he got closer the figure took on a familiar form.

“Eileen!”

Chapter 14

“Vulcan One, Vulcan Two. This is Vulcan Three. Any sign of it yet? Over.”

“This is Vulcan One. Nothing so far. Over.”

“Vulcan Two, here. Negative on visual. Over.”

“Roger that. Engage night vision and IR tracking systems. ETA to target 3 minutes. Over”

“Roger.”

“Roger. Night vision and infrared tracking engaged.”

Captain Stinson continued to scan the night sky in front of him. They had left Natick heading due east and had followed Rt. 9 all the way into Boston, passing through Wellesley, Newton and Brookline. Traffic below them was at a complete standstill as people tried to flee the city. Of course, the right hand lane leading *into* Boston was completely empty.

The four helicopters cruised approximately 100 feet above the surface of the road, with lights off so as not to make themselves obvious targets. The two attack craft of Team One flew side by side, about 50 feet apart. Captain Stinson’s copter followed about 200 feet directly behind them. And behind him, another 200 feet away, Team Three’s Huey brought up the rear.

As they topped a slight rise just outside Newton, the city proper came into view. Captain Stinson had never seen the city look so dark. *Something’s not right. Something’s missing...*

After a moment, it dawned on him what was wrong -- the skyline had been irrevocably *altered*. Even with the city lights off, he could see that the John Hancock building, the city’s single largest structure, was gone.

Nor was Captain Stinson the only one to notice its absence. Lieutenant Ramirez's voice wafted across the airwaves. "Madre de Dios! Where the hell did the Hancock tower go?"

"Belay that, Lieutenant. Let's all just stay focused on the job at hand. Anything on the IR yet?"

This time, it was Captain Collins who responded. "Vulcan One here. I'm registering a massive heat source about 2 miles directly ahead of us. It could be a fire, but -- no, wait, it's moving. I think we've found it, over."

Captain Stinson increased the magnification on his night vision goggles by one setting. "This is Vulcan Three. I see him. Next to the Prudential Center." *Damn, he's huge!*

Lieutenant Reznikow, also fitted with night vision goggles, could see Godzilla clearly now. "What the hell is he doing?" he asked aloud to nobody in particular. Godzilla was standing next to the Prudential Center, the second tallest building in Boston, and that's about *all* he was doing -- standing. Only his head seemed to be in motion, and it was making small jerking motions up and down.

To Captain Stinson, the gigantic beast seemed to be almost sniffing the air, as if searching for something. *Hope he can't smell us coming!* "All right, everybody. This is it. Deploy to assigned positions. Over"

With the command given, Vulcan One and Two sped ahead to flank the creature on either side. Captain Stinson motioned to Lieutenant Reznikow, and their craft rose an additional 50 feet or so in the air, stopping about half a mile away from Godzilla. From this position, Captain Stinson hoped to have an unimpeded view of the events about to unfold. Lieutenant Ramirez stayed well back and hovered low to the ground.

"Vulcan One in position. Over."

“Vulcan Two in position. Over.”

Captain Stinson took a deep breath, released it, and then “Roger that. Engage.”

* * *

Inside Vulcan Two, Lieutenants Walker and Parker briefly turned and gave the other a thumbs up and a smile. Then, it was all seriousness. Lieutenant Walker brought the attack copter around in a wide turn and headed in for a strafing run at Godzilla’s face. At about 500 feet away, he let loose with the gun ship’s main guns, pouring round after round of burning lead into the craggy visage in front of him, and then pulling up in a steep dive. At first, Godzilla didn’t even seem to notice their presence. Suddenly, though, he reached up and swatted the air in front of his face, as if shooing away a pesky insect.

Captain Stinson in the observation craft saw this clearly through his night vision goggles, now at maximum amplification. *Well, at least we’ve got his attention.* It wasn’t enough, though, and Godzilla started turning away. “Vulcan Two. You’re gonna have to make him angrier than that. Try the missiles. Vulcan One, get in position.”

Back in Vulcan Two, Lieutenant Parker prepared to launch two laser guided, Short-range Air-To-Air Missiles, or “SATAM”s for short. Because of the risk to nearby buildings in case of a missed shot, she aimed the laser sights for the broadest portion of the creature’s immense torso. This time, Lieutenant Walker kept the copter low to the ground so as to avoid being seen. “Missiles away!” she cried as first one, then the other rocket left the side launchers with an audible *whoosh!*

Meanwhile, Vulcan one had risen and was now facing Godzilla dead on. Captain Collins was hovering level with Godzilla's head, about 400 feet away. *A very dangerous position*, Captain Collins thought. *Like staring down the barrel of the world's biggest gun*. Beside him, Weapons Specialist Mycroft looked like some sort of weird cyborg, what with the VR helmet and all its wires trailing out behind. Collins knew that Mycroft was completely absorbed with the task at hand. *The kid has reflexes like a mousetrap, which is fine as long as you're not the mouse!* When the time came, Mycroft would fire a special missile tipped with high explosives. Trailing behind the missile and unspooling as it traveled would be an almost invisibly thin line of fiber optic cable. This cable not only allowed the operator of the VR system to control the missile's flight via the joystick in front of him, but also relayed the flight path of the missile back to the operator, as recorded by a small camera in the missile tip. Mycroft would have only seconds to make any necessary corrections to the missile's trajectory before impact, but that's what he had been trained for, and he was the best there was. They both watched as the two missiles left Vulcan Two and streaked toward Godzilla. *This is it!*

Captain Stinson tracked the missile's approach and impact. The two missiles exploded almost simultaneously against Godzilla's left flank. Twin fireballs erupted, and Godzilla actually staggered backwards a step. *Great! Maybe we won't need another shot after all*. When the fire died away, though, Captain Stinson could see no lasting effect. *Like tossing a lit match at a battle ship!*

Godzilla wasted no time reacting to this attack. Fortunately, he could not see from where the attack had come. His mighty tail lifted from the ground and carved a path through the air, narrowly missing the fleeing Vulcan Two. Suddenly, Godzilla's head twitched a fraction to one side, until he was staring directly at Vulcan One. The spines running up and down his spine began sparking, shining blue-white

and lighting up the night sky. The massive jaws opened, exposing row upon row of huge columnar fangs. Deep within the monster's gullet, something began to glow. . . .

“Fire, Vulcan One. Fire NOW!

Chapter 15

As Peter leaned over the supine figure in front of him, he could see the blood. His mind switched almost immediately into full denial mode. *This can't be Eileen; she just can't be dead!* Reality would not let him deny the facts for long, though. Deep down, he realized that this *was* Eileen, and that she was most certainly dead.

Up until now, everything that had happened had taken on a certain dream-like quality. The appearance and subsequent attack by the giant creature were on such an unimaginably huge scale that it was hard to personalize the events, even though he had been caught in the middle of them. This, however, was different. Peter's entire universe of consciousness shrunk until it consisted solely of the body lying before him. Nothing else mattered; nothing else existed. This was *real*. Tears sprang, unbidden, to Peter's eyes as he knelt beside Eileen and reached out with one hand to stroke her hair.

With a decidedly unfeminine *snort*, Eileen rolled over onto her side and continued sleeping. Peter fell backwards onto his rump, and almost passed out from a combination of shock and relief. *She's alive!* The tears flowed freely now down Peter's cheeks as he began to laugh, softly at first, and then louder. Eileen rolled over again, this time toward him, and opened her eyes, albeit blearily. "What's so funny?" she asked, struggling to sit up.

Without thinking, Peter grabbed her and hugged her as hard as he could. Neither said anything for a few moments. Almost in a whisper, Peter said "I thought you were dead." Then, a little sheepishly, "I mean, you were just lying there, and there was blood on your face, and it looked like you weren't breathing and everything."

Eileen reached up and touched the sore spot above her temple gingerly. Not gingerly enough, though, and she winced a bit. “I must have hit a rock or something when I fell. I think someone in the crowd pushed me. I don’t really remember much.”

For the next 10 minutes they swapped stories, each relating their own version of the helicopter explosion and the subsequent destruction of the John Hancock building. Eileen explained that after Godzilla had left she hadn’t known where else to go, so she just sat down and stayed where she was. She must have dozed off in spite of, or perhaps because of, the shock of what had just happened to her. Peter, for his part, told her about the strange old coot he had met on the Common, and that the military apparently wasn’t going to do much against Godzilla anytime soon.

They spent the next few minutes debating the merits of this military strategy, whether it was better to attack Godzilla and risk doing further damage to the city, or just let the monster roam around unimpeded in hopes that he would eventually get tired and leave. Eileen took the view that Godzilla was like a hurricane or an earthquake -- you can’t do much to prevent them, and you just have to learn to deal with them and clean up after them. Peter, on the other hand, thought of Godzilla in terms of an invading army that needed to be driven away by force, even if it meant collateral damage to the city. “If we don’t drive him off now,” Peter argued, “what’s to keep him from coming back anytime he wants?” “Even if they *can* get him to leave,” Eileen countered, “he could *still* come back, though. I mean, unless they kill him. Do you think they could do that?” Peter remembered the sight of Godzilla pushing over the Hancock building. “I don’t know. I’ve never seen anything so *big* before.”

Their ruminations were cut short by the sound of gunfire off to the west. Peter and Eileen leaped to their feet and looked toward the Prudential Center, less than half a mile away. There, silhouetted

against the night sky, stood Godzilla, partially obscured by the Prudential Tower itself. He was swatting the air with his massive hands, flailing at some unseen nuisance and seeming almost off balance. Peter and Eileen stood riveted to the spot, knowing they should be running away, very fast. Both had thought Godzilla far away by now, but obviously they were mistaken. A mistake that could well cost them their lives, they realized. Still, they stood there watching, unable to tear their eyes away from the spectacle in front of them.

They couldn't see what was apparently attacking the giant creature. Neither, for that matter, could Godzilla, who continued flailing at the air in front of him. Suddenly, a spark of light, and then another, appeared seemingly from nowhere and streaked toward Godzilla's legs. *Somebody's firing missiles* Peter realized, just as the points of light impacted with an explosive fireball of light and smoke, followed almost immediately by an nerve-rattling *SHAKOOM-KOOM!* Peter still couldn't see what had fired the missiles, but Godzilla apparently had found a target. Peter and Eileen stood helpless as they watched the monster's spines begin to flare blue-white, the mighty jaws opening wide. Peter knew that in a moment a stream of devastating liquid fire would be spewed forth, and he pulled Eileen closer to shield her.

Then, something bizarre and wholly inexplicable happened. Instead of sending forth the expected ray of radioactive death, Godzilla's mouth seemed to actually *explode*. At first, Peter thought that the great beast had somehow *backfired*. It wasn't until Eileen whispered "oh my God -- they actually shot him in the mouth" that he realized just how stupid a thought that had been. Great gouts of flame shot out of Godzilla's mouth in all directions, as the creature shook his head back and forth like a dog with a rag

between its teeth. Dark liquid dripped out of the huge orifice as Godzilla bellowed a challenge into the air. Whatever had hit him had *hurt*, and he was *not* happy!

Chapter 16

From his vantage point inside the observation craft, Captain Stinson saw the missile leave Vulcan One, travel a *very* short distance, and impact inside Godzilla's open mouth. *Bingo*, he thought, as gouts of what was hopefully blood spilled out and sprayed to the earth far below. As he tracked the blood on its downward path, noting with dismay how much of it ended up on Godzilla himself, he continued to bark orders through his helmet microphone.

"*Direct hit, Vulcan One. I repeat, direct hit. Now, get the hell out of there!*" Captain Stinson knew that Captain Collins didn't need to be told twice to get away from the wounded creature. Hell, he didn't even need to be told *once*. Still, Captain Stinson needed to make sure that the crew of Vulcan One knew that they had hit their target, so that they didn't hang around hoping to get another shot. They had succeeded in provoking Godzilla's wrath, and the only thing that mattered now was surviving the next few minutes.

Back in Vulcan One, Captain Collins took the helicopter into a power dive, simultaneously breaking to the right, away from Godzilla. *Gotta get out of his line of sight!* Coming in low, in whisper mode, may have given them the edge of surprise at first, but there was no way Godzilla was going to ignore them now! Out of the corner of his eye, he could see the gigantic creature in motion, the great head shaking back and forth while the arms flailed ineffectually in front of it. Over the sound of the engine, now whining with the strain of the maneuvers the helicopter was currently performing, Captain Collins could hear a rumbling like a freight train smashing into a brick wall. The sound of tortured metal filled his ears. For a brief moment, he thought that something had hit the 'copter. Then, he realized that he was hearing Godzilla's roar up close and personal, *far* too up close for comfort.

Captain Collins pulled the ‘copter out of its dive moments before the ground rose up to swat it like a huge bug. He heard a low moan coming from his right, and hoped the kid was enjoying the ride. “Pretend we’re on a roller coaster,” he shouted at Lieutenant Mycroft, who was looking decidedly green. Leveling off a bit, he then took the ‘copter in a sharp curve around the Prudential Tower, hoping that the building would hide them from Godzilla’s view.

In Vulcan Three, Captain Stinson was powerless to do anything other than watch. He saw Vulcan One dive and circle around the Prudential Tower. He also saw, however, the way Godzilla tracked the path of the ‘copter with his eyes. As the ‘copter approached the rear of the building from the right, Godzilla swung his mighty tail around from the left. With a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach, Captain Stinson knew that the two objects would soon meet in mid-air. Godzilla’s huge tail was the proverbial “unstoppable force,” and Vulcan One didn’t even come close to qualifying as an “immovable object.” There was no time to shout a warning, and Captain Stinson involuntarily braced for impact, as if it were his helicopter that was about to be destroyed.

Whether due to some strange pilot’s “sixth sense,” good training or just plain luck, Captain Collins pulled Vulcan One into a sharp climb as soon as they had come around to the rear of the building. As he pulled up, both he and Lieutenant Mycroft could see Godzilla’s massive extremity approaching almost directly in front of them. Already climbing, Captain Collins sent the craft even steeper in an effort to avoid the inevitable. He heard a sudden retching noise close by, and the sharp, acrid odor of vomit filled the cockpit. Then, impact!

The tail hit the building mere feet, perhaps even inches, beneath the fleeing helicopter. Still, the shockwave buffeted the craft, and Captain Collins struggled to retain control of the bucking bronco into

which the helicopter had suddenly been transformed. He knew that if they swung the wrong way, they would hit the building itself and would die as surely as if Godzilla's tail had in fact hit them.

Captain Stinson couldn't see the actual impact from his position, but he saw the building shudder as the creature's tail smashed into it. A moment later, Vulcan One came into view around the far side of the building, wobbling in mid-air like an inebriated dragonfly. He watched in horror as the rotors swung first toward the building, then away from it, and then toward it again. At the last moment, the helicopter cleared the building, with inches to spare. Captain Collins now had the craft firmly back under his control, and Vulcan One streaked off to west, staying low to the ground. Godzilla started to follow, but Captain Stinson wasn't worried that the huge beast would catch up to the fleeing 'copter.

“Good job, Vulcan One. Wait until you're completely out of the creature's line of sight and then head back to the Labs. Vulcan Two, head back the way we came and rendezvous with Vulcan One at the Labs. Captain Ramirez, prepare to set down as soon as Godzilla has completely left the area. I believe you'll find what you're looking for near the corner of Dalton and Belvidere. Wait for my signal.”

A job well done. Now, for the easy part!

Chapter 17

In spite of himself, President Adams had managed to fall asleep. The orders had been given, the plan set into motion, and there was nothing left to do but wait. And worry. Kenny had urged him to catch some shut-eye before things started getting hectic again. Truth to tell, he *had* felt exhausted, utterly drained; it *was* after two in the morning, after all. He compromised by turning the lights down in the oval office and settling into an overstuffed chair that he dragged in from the hallway. *Just gonna rest my eyes*, he promised himself. *Got to stay alert and on top of things. That's what a leader is...*

The thought remained unfinished as he drifted almost immediately into a deep slumber. Strange images flitted through his mind as he dreamed fitfully. He found himself back at Harvard, in his old dorm room. The building was shaking. He opened the door and ran down the hallway, which now seemed to stretch off into eternity. The walls of the corridor were covered with scales and seemed to be pulsing with some strange, alien life. Suddenly, he reached the end of the hallway, as the floor suddenly dropped away beneath his feet. Now he was flying, the familiar Cambridge landscape beneath him. He could see the Charles River below him, and Memorial Drive snaking along its shore. There, up ahead, was the dome of MIT's science building, near where Memorial Drive intersected with Massachusetts Avenue. And there, set back a little from Mass Ave., was --

With a gasp, President Adams jerked awake. The memory of his dream faded fast, like morning mist under a strong sun, but he finally remembered what he'd been trying to recall ever since Dr. Fong had mentioned Godzilla's fondness for nuclear power plants. He rose from the chair, wiped the sleep from his eyes and went off to find Dr. Fong and General Markoff.

* * *

Within minutes, the President had corralled Dr. Fong and the General and had brought them back into the Oval Office. The General looked a little peeved at being dragged away from his post in the War Room. Dr. Fong, who hadn't had much to do once the plan had been set into motion, seemed anxious to listen.

President Adams indicated for them to sit down, and then began. "O.K. First of all, where do things stand at the moment?"

General Markoff resisted the urge to sigh. "With all due respect, Sir, it's too early for much information."

The President realized that General Markoff thought he was just being obnoxious, asking for information that wasn't available. Still, he continued. "I realize that. Do we at least know where Godzilla is right now? Trust me, I'm going somewhere with this."

General Markoff unstiffened a bit. "Last report puts Godzilla less than a mile away from his original point of landfall. The helicopter team out of Natick Labs has engaged the creature near what I believe is called the Prudential Building. No word yet as to whether their mission has been successful or not, and we probably won't know for at least another half-hour."

President Adams waved away the last bit of information as irrelevant. "The important thing is that he hasn't headed into downtown Boston yet. He's still near the Charles River?"

Now the General was interested. "As far as we know. Why?"

Instead of answering the General directly, President Adams turned to Dr. Fong. “Kenny, do you remember saying something about Godzilla seeking out nuclear power plants?”

Dr. Fong looked puzzled. “Yes, Sir, but as I said, the nearest one is over fifty miles away.”

President Adams smiled. “The nearest nuclear *power plant*, yes, but not the nearest nuclear *reactor!*” He saw a light go on behind Dr. Fong’s eyes, and he knew that they were on the same wavelength. He turned back to the General and continued. “Back when Dr. Fong and I were at Harvard, there was a minor uproar down the river over at MIT. For years, anti-nuclear activists had been driving down to Pilgrim or over to Seabrook to protest the nuclear power plants there. In fact, they finally got the one at Pilgrim completely shut down.

“Well, word finally got around that MIT had its very own nuclear reactor, primarily used for high-energy and medical experimentation. A bunch of protesters tried to chain themselves to the doors to the facility to keep anybody from getting in. There were a series of newspaper articles about it, exploring the whole issue of whether it was safe to have a reactor in the heart of a busy city, but the whole thing died down pretty quickly. I was a third year law student at the time, and it didn’t leave much of an impression at the time, but it’s been stored in the old brain cells along with a ton of other useless trivia.”

Dr. Fong broke in excitedly. “If I remember correctly, the reactor is in a domed building on Mass Ave., almost directly across the Charles from the Prudential Building!”

President Adams nodded. “Exactly. And the Charles is at its widest there -- almost half a mile across. General, if we could somehow lure Godzilla into the Charles at that point, he’d be totally exposed, away from any intervening structures. A nuclear bomb is still out of the question, but maybe if we hit him with everything *else* we’ve got. . . .”

General Markoff had a look of intense concentration about him, as if he were doing differential calculus in his head. Then: “It could work. We’ve got the U.S.S. George Bush stationed just off shore, and it’s carrying the latest F-23 Osprey VTOL jets.” *Thank heavens the budget cuts hadn’t slashed that deeply!*

“VTOL?”

“Vertical Take-Off and Landing. Basically, they can hover like a helicopter if necessary. They should be able to easily navigate around any buildings that might be between them and their target.”

“What are they armed with?”

“They’re essentially designed for air to air combat, so they’re equipped with AMRAMs, or Advanced Medium Range Air-to-air Missiles.”

“You military types sure do love your acronyms, don’t you?”

General Markoff grinned at the President. “Yessir, that we do!”

“Whatever. As long as they work. Are they powerful enough to get the job done?”

“Individually, probably not. But if we can hit him with a barrage of fire”

“Yes?”

“Well, to be honest I just don’t know. I guess there’s only one way to find out for sure, and that’s to give it a try.”

The President nodded. They were dealing with the unknown here, and there was no point in berating Markoff for his lack of knowledge. “What about the ship itself? Can we launch any missiles from the carrier, something with a little more punch?”

“Only as a last resort, Sir. The *George Bush* does have a full compliment of both Harpoon and Trident missiles, but the blast radius would probably be too great.”

“What about you, Kenny? Any idea as to how, or even if, we can use MIT’s reactor to get Godzilla’s attention?”

Dr. Fong was busily making notes on a small pad of paper. He looked up and responded. “Most nuclear reactors have a system for venting radioactive steam in the event of an overload or an impending meltdown. If we can simulate an overload, perhaps by temporarily removing the control rods, that should trigger the automatic venting system.”

President Adams stroked his chin, wishing for the millionth time that he still had his beard to tug on. Unfortunately, facial hair was not currently “in,” and he had let his aides talk him into shaving it off before the election campaign had gotten into full swing. “Hmmm. What about the danger to the immediate area? Are we talking about another Chernobyl here, or what?”

“No, nothing like that. Assuming we stay in control of the situation, we should be able restore the reactor to normal before the system becomes irrevocable unstable. I don’t think the reactor is that powerful anyway. There will be *some* contamination, but it should be localized.”

The President nodded. “Plus, everyone should be already evacuated from that area by now. Kenny, I’ll leave it to you to coordinate with the folks over at MIT. General, contact the *George Bush* and get those planes standing by. All right -- let’s do it, people!”

Chapter 18

Lieutenant Foster was getting antsy. The longer they waited, the harder it was going to be to get a viable sample. She activated her helmet mike again. “Vulcan Three, this is Lieutenant Foster. Sir, if we don’t do this now, the whole mission will be wasted. Over”

Captain Stinson’s voice crackled in her earpieces. “I understand, Lieutenant. But it’s not going to be any better if you get yourselves killed, either. The area is not, I repeat *not* clear. Is that understood, over?”

Lieutenant Foster took a deep breath. *Here goes nothing.* “Please repeat that, Vulcan One. Your last message was garbled, I repeat garbled. It must be the residual radiation, Over.”

“Damn it, Lieutenant! Don’t pull that crap. You heard what I said. This is a direct ord --”

Lieutenant Foster reached over and switched off the radio before Captain Stinson could finish his sentence. Then, she turned to Captain Ramirez and, with her best smile, said “I couldn’t quite catch what he was saying. Could you?”

Captain Ramirez didn’t respond. *¡Madre de Dios -- esta chica loca nos va a matar! She’s going to get us killed!*

Seeing his hesitation, Lieutenant Foster continued, still smiling. “Captain Stinson’s just covering his butt -- you and I know this mission’s too important to let an opportunity slip by. From what I’ve heard, I thought you were brave enough to take a few risks. Am I wrong?”

Captain Ramirez knew that he was being manipulated. Still, looking into those clear green eyes he felt like a deer caught in a car’s headlights. Silently cursing himself for thinking with the wrong portion of his anatomy, he nevertheless heard himself saying “No, you’re not wrong -- lets go.”

Lieutenant Foster squeezed him briefly on the knee and turned back to look forward. “Terrific! Maybe we can go out for a celebratory drink together when we get back.”

If we get back, thought Captain Ramirez grimly. *If*.

* * *

Back in Vulcan Three, Captain Stinson slammed his fist against the radio in frustration. *Residual radiation, my ass!* Godzilla was moving slowly away from the Prudential Center, toward the downtown area, but was still far too close for comfort. Or safety, for that matter. And to make things worse, Lieutenant Foster had turned off her radio, so there was no way he could warn her if Godzilla returned.

On his radar screen he saw the Huey approach from the rear and head toward the Prudential Center. As it passed him, Captain Stinson could make out the shape of the craft with his night vision goggles. With the grace of a hummingbird, the ‘copter set down less than a 100 feet from the site where Captain Stinson had seen Godzilla’s blood fall. He watched as Lieutenant Foster, looking like some sort of space alien in her radiation and biohazard suit, exited the craft carrying a sealed container that resembled an oversized thermos bottle.

Swivelling his head around, Captain Stinson checked on the movement of Godzilla. To his horror, he saw that the creature was no longer moving away from the Prudential Center. Instead, Godzilla was slowly heading *back* toward the Prudential Center, and toward Ramirez and Foster. Captain Stinson

realized that Godzilla must have heard and/or seen the helicopter landing, and was probably intelligent enough to associate the ‘copter with the attack which wounded it minutes before.

“Captain Ramirez, this is Vulcan Three. Godzilla is approaching your position. Get out of there! Do you read me, over?” It was no use. Surely they could hear Godzilla approaching!

* * *

Captain Ramirez was starting to seriously regret agreeing to this scheme. The ground was starting to tremble beneath the ‘copter and he had no doubt what *that* meant. Unfortunately, he was committed now -- there was no way he was going to take off and leave the lovely lieutenant stranded!

He watched as Lieutenant Foster carefully picked her way over the rubble and made her way toward the collection site. The bulky suit made walking awkward, but it was either that or risk exposure to potentially lethal amounts of radiation from Godzilla’s blood. Suddenly, Lieutenant Foster stopped and bent over. A few seconds later, she stood up holding the sample container over her head with one hand and waving with the other. Captain Ramirez started motioning for her to hurry up, but stopped when he noticed that the Lieutenant was no longer waving. Instead, she was pointing frantically behind and above the ‘copter, while simultaneously trying to scabble backwards over the broken concrete and glass strewn in her path.

It finally impinged upon his senses that the ever-present rumbling and trembling had stopped. Time itself slowed to a crawl as Captain Ramirez slowly tilted his head upward with the subjective speed of molasses in February. He saw the impossibly huge foot descending, every detail scorched into his brain

like acid. No last thoughts passed through his mind. His life failed to pass before his eyes. Captain Ramirez opened his mouth to scream, but there wasn't time.

* * *

Captain Stinson pounded impotently on the control panel in front of him. Lieutenant Reznikow let him continue for a moment before reaching out to stop him, afraid that the Captain might actually do some damage to the helicopter's delicate instruments. He placed his hand on Captain Stinson's shoulder, just firmly enough to get his attention. Captain Stinson snapped his head around, glared at the Lieutenant and opened his mouth as if to say something. Instead, however, he slumped down in his seat without saying anything at all, a look of utter despair creeping into his eyes.

Lieutenant Reznikow knew the pain his commanding officer was feeling. Just moments ago they had both watched in stunned horror as Godzilla had crushed the seemingly tiny helicopter under his massive foot. They had both seen Lieutenant Foster crumple to the ground after being struck by shrapnel from the helicopter's explosion. Lieutenant Reznikow knew that the Captain was taking this very personally, in spite of the fact that Ramirez and Foster had been acting against his express orders.

Ironically, Godzilla had stridden away from the scene immediately afterward, moving even faster than he had before. As he watched Godzilla leave, Lieutenant Reznikow cleared his throat and then, in a subdued voice, "um, do we abort, Sir, or what?"

As expected, the mention of aborting the mission awoke Captain Stinson from his stupor. The old fire flashed behind the Captain's eyes as he sat up straight in his seat. "Hell, no! We're not going to get another chance to get that sample. Bring us around as close as you can to the wreckage."

Lieutenant Reznikow grinned, happy to see the "old" Captain Stinson back again. "Aye-aye, Keptin" he said in his best Lieutenant Chekov imitation.

As they approached what was left of the Huey, Lieutenant Reznikow had another thought. "Um, how are we going to get the sample without wearing radiation suits? What if the area is still 'hot'?"

Captain Stinson had a grim expression on his face. "'We' are not going to do anything. *You* are going to set us down as close as possible, and then *I* am going to go out and retrieve the sample. Kapish?"

"Uh, kapish. Good luck, Sir."

"Thanks."

* * *

Less than a minute later they set down and Captain Stinson unbuckled and hopped out. Pieces of wreckage from the helicopter were still burning, but he made his way through the debris toward what was left of the craft's fuselage. A quick glance inside assured him that there was nothing living within, although the odor of burnt flesh had informed him of that fact from 20 feet away.

Next, he turned to where Lieutenant Foster had fallen, still clutching the sample container. A piece of what looked like one of the main rotors had embedded itself in the Lieutenant's chest, almost cutting

her in half. Captain Stinson reached out to take the container from her lifeless fingers but suddenly stopped, bent over, and threw up instead. After a moment, he felt well enough to try it again.

Fortunately, the container seemed intact, and the seal was still firmly in place. Unfortunately, it was splattered with blood, and Captain Stinson had no way of know whether all of it was from Lieutenant Foster or whether some of Godzilla's deadly blood was also there. If the container *was* radioactive, there wasn't a lot he could do about his own safety at this point. Still, there was no need to expose Lieutenant Reznikow to the danger as well....

Captain Stinson carefully stripped the shredded radiation/biohazard suit off Lieutenant Foster's twisted body, trying to preserve as much of her dignity as possible, even in death. Then, he turned the suit inside-out and wrapped the sample container up with it. With the bundle securely under his arm, Captain Stinson made his way back to Lieutenant Reznikow in the waiting helicopter.

Captain Stinson opened the door to the attack helicopter, and began to climb in, when the sharp sound of metal grating against rock brought him up short. For one panicked moment, he was sure that Godzilla had returned and that he was about to die. It was almost too much for his nerves, which were already stretched as taut as they could possibly be. He soon realized, though, that it was just the sound of the rubble outside settling, perhaps even a loose piece of metal being dragged along by the wind. He chuckled to himself for being a paranoid fool and resumed his climb into the helicopter. *Crap! I almost wet myself!*

Although Captain Stinson would never admit it afterward, when a young voice suddenly called out "can we go with you" a few seconds later, he *did* wet himself.

Chapter 19

“Sir, we’ve got the video feed operational.”

President Adams thanked his aide and followed him down to the War Room. Dr. Fong and General Markoff were already there, of course, but the President had decided to stay out of their hair until the show was ready to begin. He had learned early on in his political career the importance of trusting those below him to do their jobs, without his needing to “micro manage” everything in person. He found that most, although not all, people worked better without having somebody standing over their shoulders.

The War Room itself was a hive of activity. The President wasn’t exactly sure what everyone was doing, but he was quickly able to make out Dr. Fong on the phone in one corner of the room, and General Markoff talking to one of his staff in another corner. Not wanting to interrupt, he sauntered into the middle of the room and stared at the huge video monitor that took up most of one wall. At first, he thought the monitor was not turned on, but then he realized that it was simply displaying a dark scene.

As if on cue, the lights in the War Room dimmed, and the President could now make out the individual buildings making up the Boston skyline. Most were completely dark, but a few still showed glimmers of lights in the windows. Whether the lights were the product of emergency generators or simple candles, he didn’t know.

A voice, which the President recognized as that of General Markoff, suddenly called out “can we increase the sensitivity on that”? A few seconds passed, and then the view on the screen brightened noticeably and jumped into sharp focus. President Adams was surprised, although very impressed, with

the clarity of what was obviously a very low-light image. *Modern technology strikes again*, he thought with a swell of pride at good old American ingenuity.

Now by his side, General Markoff noticed the President's admiration. "Like it? It's the latest in low-light imaging systems from Sony. They've finally managed to get rid of the 'green screen' effect while maximizing the intensity of even the faintest amount of ambient light."

"Oh," was all the President could think to say in return.

Dr. Fong walked briskly over to where they stood. "I just got off the phone with the people at MIT. They've started bringing the reactor to a controlled overload, which should cause the emergency venting system to activate within the next five minutes."

President Adams nodded his approval. "Will we be able to see anything happen on the monitor?"

"Probably not. That is, not until Godzilla responds to the radiation."

The President turned to General Markoff. "How are things on your end?"

"Everything's set. The orders have been given, and the jets are standing by. As soon as Godzilla starts moving toward the reactor, they'll take off."

"Where is Godzilla now?"

The General's face took on a grim expression. "Unfortunately, after the attack by the team from Natick Labs, Godzilla headed deeper into the downtown area. Right now, he's in the middle of the Financial District."

The president winced. The Financial District consisted of a large number of very large buildings, very close together. "Damage?"

"Significant, I'm afraid."

“Damn. Well, let’s pray that this hair-brained scheme of mine actually works.”

The General opened his mouth to respond, but was cut off when one of the technicians suddenly called out, “there -- at the far left of the screen!” As if joined by invisible wires, President Adams, Dr. Fong and the General all turned their heads together to look at the giant monitor. At the edge of the screen a small, but expanding, cloud of steam was clearly visible. The President turned to look at Dr. Fong, who sheepishly shrugged his shoulders. “What happens now, Kenny?”

“Um, now we wait to see if Godzilla goes after the bait. It shouldn’t be long, now.”

President Adams thought about the gargantuan creature toppling buildings left and right in the middle of downtown Boston. “I hope you’re right, Kenny. I just hope you’re right.”

Chapter 20

As the helicopter sped high above the suburban landscape, Captain Stinson reported in. “Home Base, this is Vulcan Three. Repeat, this is Vulcan Three. Over.”

Major Freeman’s voice was clear over the radio’s speakers. “Go ahead, Vulcan Three. What’s your status? Over.”

“Mission objective achieved. Heading back to base. Over.”

“Any casualties? Over.”

“Unfortunately. The retrieval team did not make it, Sir. Over.”

“Say again? The *retrieval team*? You said the objectives were achieved. Over.”

“Yes, sir. I had to retrieve the sample myself. Um, request a medical team standing by. I may have been exposed to radiation in the process. Over.”

There was silence for the space of a few seconds. Then, “Roger that -- medical team will meet you upon arrival. Any other surprises for us? Over.”

“Just one. Two, actually. We’re carrying a couple of passengers. Over.”

“Did you say *passengers*?” This time, there was no “over.”

“Um, roger that. I’ll explain when we get there. Over”

“I can’t *wait* to hear it. See you in a few. Home Base over and out.”

Captain Stinson turned his head to face the young couple strapped in behind him. “Don’t worry about the Major. He’s a real pussycat under that gruff exterior. I’m sure everything will just be fine.”

Peter squeezed Eileen’s hand a little tighter. “I hope so, Sir. I mean, we don’t want you to get into trouble or anything for getting us out of there, but boy, were we glad to see you!”

Captain Stinson gave them what he hoped was a friendly smile and turned back to face the front of the helicopter. He hadn't seen his own kids in a number of years. After the divorce, his wife had moved all the way across the country to California, taking the children with her. Supposedly, he was entitled to visiting rights for a couple of months each summer, but so far she had blocked his attempts to see them. Every time he planned on going out to visit, she said "now's not a good time," and whenever he pressed the subject she threatened to call the police and tell them all about his "child abuse". He had never abused his children, of course, but he knew how hard it was to disprove that type of charge. If he was lucky, he got to speak to the kids on the phone every few months. One of these days he would hire a sharp lawyer and get this all settled once and for all, but so far he hadn't found a way to afford it.

These two in the back, though, were probably a couple of years older than his own -- three years at most. Still, when he had seen them standing there, covered in dirt and blood and looking positively wretched, his heart had ached. Well, after it had started beating again, that is. He knew that the area was still not safe, that Godzilla could return at any minute, and there was simply no way he was going to leave them standing there amid all the wreckage and ruin. Plus, he was afraid that they would stumble upon the remains of Lieutenant Foster, and that was just too much to bear thinking about.

So, against all orders, he had agreed to give them a ride back to the Labs. What was that old saying he used to hear back in boot camp. Oh yeah -- "It's always easier to get forgiveness than to get permission." Well, in a few more minutes he'd find out just how easy it was to get forgiveness from Major Freeman. Hopefully, he'd still be in the service this time tomorrow.

* * *

“Captain, do you have *any* idea what the words ‘covert operation’ mean? How about ‘top secret’ and ‘classified’? Ring any bells?”

Upon landing, the helicopter had been met by a swarm of people. First, specialists in suits identical to the one worn by Lieutenant Foster took the sample container, still wrapped inside Lieutenant Foster’s suit, and hurried off with it for analysis. Then, a pair of uniformed military police escorted the two teenagers away from the landing bay and into a secluded office where they would be kept until somebody figured out what to do with them. Finally, a medical team helped Captain Stinson onto a gurney and began wheeling him toward the Labs’ medical bay, in spite of Captain Stinson’s protests that he felt fine and could walk there himself. Major Freeman, not content to wait for a private discussion, followed along and was chewing the Captain out as he walked.

Major Freeman continued. “Of all the stupid, lame-brained -- just what was going through that pointy skull of yours, anyway?”

Captain Stinson was starting to get dizzy looking up at the Major while the gurney rolled along. He knew that most of Major Freeman’s anger was simply a way of covering up the worry he must feel for his poor friend lying there, perhaps dying from radiation poisoning. At least, he *hoped* that was the case. Just in case, he decided to try explaining his actions as best as possible.

“It wasn’t something I planned on, Sir -- they just showed up right as we were leaving. They saw the whole operation anyway, so I didn’t think security was much of an issue at that point. Plus, the girl was obviously wounded, and there was no telling when Godzilla would decide to return.”

Major Freeman’s face remained a stony blank. “Is that it?”

“Well, it turns out they were both from Framingham, which *is* the next town over from here --”

“I know where Framingham is.”

Hooboy! “Um, yes, well anyway, since we were already heading in this direction”

Major Freeman’s face finally softened a degree or two. “Let me guess -- they reminded you of your own kids, right?” The Major was fully aware of what had been going on with Captain Stinson and his ex, and they had often discussed how much he missed having his children around.

Captain Stinson smiled sheepishly. “Well, maybe just a *bit*”

They had reached the door to the infirmary. Major Freeman gave his friend’s shoulder a squeeze. “We’ll talk more about this later, and don’t think for a minute that you’re off the hook! For now, just have fun being poked and prodded. You’d *better* be all right, though, or I’ll *really* chew your butt off!”

Major Freeman stayed outside as the medical team wheeled the gurney inside. Just before the door closed, he added one last comment. “Congratulations on a job well done, by the way.” A muffled “thank you, Sir” could be heard from within the room, and Major Freeman turned and headed back to his office to deal with the rest of the problems that faced him.

Chapter 21

“Is there any way to pan the camera so we can actually see what’s going on?” President Adams was starting to get fidgety staring at the unchanging image on the wall monitor. “We *are* supposed to be watching Godzilla, aren’t we?”

General Markoff cupped the telephone into which he had been speaking and answered over his shoulder. “Sorry, Sir -- the camera is in a fixed position, although it does have a wide angle lens. I’m on the phone with one of our mobile observers right now, and he says that Godzilla is definitely heading back toward the reactor. He should be coming into view any second.”

As he finished speaking, a collective gasp was heard in the War Room as Godzilla appeared on the screen. Even with the distance and the wide-angle lens, his very presence dominated the picture. Everyone stood in a stunned silence for a brief moment as more and more of the fantastic beast came into view. Then, General Markoff pushed a button on the phone in front of him and spoke directly to the commander of the offshore air craft carrier.

“The target is approaching the designated area. Begin attack.” The General pushed another button, put the handset down and turned to the President. On the monitor in front of them, Godzilla had reached the banks of the river and was beginning to enter it. Every few seconds he would lift his head in the air as if smelling something, and then lumber forward a few more steps. General Markoff noted that he was making a direct beeline to the reactor building.

“The fighter squadron has launched, Sir, and should be making contact in a couple of minutes. They’ll be coming along the river itself, so we should see them approaching in the background.”

“How many planes are we talking here?”

“Five, Sir.”

“Is that going to be enough?”

“Well, if five aren’t enough, then I don’t think any number of planes would be able to do the job; either the missiles are effective against Godzilla or they’re not -- and if they’re not, then hitting him with twice as many isn’t going to do much good. Here they come now!”

On the monitor five little specks had appeared in the background, approximately 500 feet up in the air. It was impossible to judge their speed from this angle, but they were steadily growing more and more visible.

The silence in the room was a living, palpable entity unto itself until General Markoff broke it a moment later. “Their orders are to wait until they have a guaranteed strike range, so as to avoid any further damage to the surrounding area. Any second now”

* * *

If he were capable of rational thought, Godzilla would certainly say that he was *not* in a particularly good mood at the moment. His mouth still had a bitter taste from whatever had hit him there, even though the momentary pain had quickly vanished. He had been attacked many times during his life, and he had come to recognize the sounds and shapes of the strange creatures that occasionally roared toward him spitting fire.

This last attack had caught him completely by surprise, though, and that angered him more than anything else. In a moment of what would have been called *pique* in a human, he had even gone back and deliberately stepped on one of the creatures when he had seen it land. He was still angry, though.

In spite of his mood, however, he currently found himself drawn by a familiar hunger. This was different than the hunger which caused him to chase down and eat the delicious swimming things in the water. He had no words to explain it, but he somehow knew that there was something unnatural about this hunger. It was more a compulsion than a desire. “Drug dependency” and “withdrawal pains” were meaningless concepts to Godzilla, but the average addict on the street would be surprised to discover that he had something in common with a 400-foot radioactive lizard.

In fact, it was this hunger, this *craving*, that had kept Godzilla from returning to the ocean after his rude awakening hours before. He had sensed that somewhere nearby there was a source of his “fix” -- something to make the gnawing in his bones subside, at least for a while. The scent had been maddingly faint, however, and he had begun to grow more and more irate. Until, suddenly, his highly specialized senses were assaulted by an overwhelming presence, and Godzilla had, without any sort of conscious volition whatsoever, headed toward it.

Now, he sensed that he was almost there. He wanted it. He *needed* it, and nothing -- not the strange rock formations he pushed out of the way, not the water, not the annoying creatures with their spitting fire -- was going to stand in his way!

As he entered the water, he heard a familiar sound off to his right. More of those annoying creatures! This time, however, he heard them coming. And now he could see them as well -- five tiny

dots roaring toward him in close formation. He preferred to face his attackers head on, and *this* time there would be no surprises!

* * *

In the cockpit of his f-23 Osprey, Captain Joshua “Esquire” Arnold was prepared to take on the entire world, if necessary. His fellow pilots on the *George Bush* knew about his dream to go to law school someday, hence his rather awkward nickname. Right now, though, the only thing on his mind was several tons of airborne death and destruction that he controlled with incredibly subtle motions of his hands.

He could feel the power of the twin after burning Pratt & Whitney turbofan engines, each with 35,000 pounds of thrust. He was traveling well below supersonic speed and the plane rumbled like a Maseratti in low gear, anxious to leap forward and show what it could *really* do.

The planes primary guns, standard GAU/8A rotary cannons, were armed and ready, although Captain Arnold didn’t expect to use them. Not against *Godzilla*! No -- for a target this large, something *special* was required. If they got close enough, Captain Arnold planned on dropping a few GBU-27 laser guided bombs, of which he had six, right on top of the big galoot. First, however, a couple of Harpoon anti-ship missiles would do for a start. Heck -- they might even do the job all by themselves! He almost felt sorry for the big lizard.

His commanding officer gave the word to fire at will. Captain Arnold grinned and reached forward to launch the missiles, wanting to be the first to hit *Godzilla*. *Sayonara, Godzilla!*

* * *

It happened so quickly that they had to wait for eyewitness accounts from the mobile observation team to figure out exactly what had occurred. One moment, Godzilla was standing there with the squadron bearing down on him. Everyone in the War Room heard the order to fire over the comlink. Then, a sudden flash of blue light lit the room as the monitor, which had been set at near maximum sensitivity, was temporarily blanked out.

“What the hell happened,” the President demanded. “Get that thing working again. Now!”

One of the technicians was frantically punching buttons at a console in front of him. “Resetting now, Sir. Just give me a second. Ah -- there it is!”

On the monitor screen, a scene of death and destruction awaited them. Pieces of flaming wreckage were still falling into the water all around Godzilla, who was nonchalantly continuing toward the other bank of the river. Nobody in the War Room had seen the blast of superheated plasma that had picked off the attacking jets one after the other in quick succession. Nor had they heard the thunder-like rumble caused by the sudden displacement of air in the blast’s turbulent wake. Oh, but they could see the result of that terrible weapon of nuclear destruction!

The President was shocked, then livid with anger. “Damn it! General, you said the *George Bush* was equipped with harpoon missiles?”

The General nodded. “Yes, Sir, but the blast radius --”

President Adams cut him off in mid sentence. “I don’t give a rat’s ass about the blast radius. Tell them to fire one, and they damn well better not miss!”

General Markoff didn't bother to savor the irony of the President ordering a missile strike over *his* protestations. Instead, he picked up the phone and spoke a few brief words with the commander on the other end. "Order given, Sir."

Godzilla was now halfway across the river. The President turned to the technician controlling the monitor. "Are we going to be able to see what happens this time, or is the screen going to malfunction again?"

The technician briefly thought about explaining the difference between a malfunction and a safety feature, but immediately decided against it. Instead, "I'm turning down the sensitivity right now. We won't see much until the missile actually explodes, but that should provide enough light to see what happens next."

President Adams turned back to the monitor in time to see a streak of light fast approaching Godzilla's position. *Any second now*

* * *

Godzilla was still suffering from his strange cravings, but his terrible anger had been somewhat appeased. It felt *good* to lash out every now and then, especially at those pesky flying creatures! With that behind him, he could now find what he was looking for in peace.

His reverie was short lived, however, as a growing roar caught his attention. This was something he *didn't* recognize. A ball of fire was approaching from the East, directly toward him. He thought about

blasting it like he had the little flying creatures, but he was curious as to what it could be. Besides, the craving was getting stronger and he didn't want to waste precious energy unnecessarily.

The strange object continued approaching at an incredible rate. Godzilla had never seen anything move so fast! So, he wasn't quite prepared when it impacted against his side with an ear shattering blast. In fact, the force of the explosion knocked him momentarily off balance and he toppled over onto his side. Whatever it was that had hit him, his entire side felt like it was on fire. He could smell the distinctive odor of burnt flesh together with some entirely alien odor. The pain quickly subsided, though, and he was left more dazed and confused than actually hurt.

He didn't know what had hit him, but he certainly wouldn't forget it, either. He slowly got back onto his feet and then roared a mighty challenge into the night air, daring whatever had hurt him to try again, because *this* time he was ready for it!

Nothing answered his challenge, though. The night was suddenly quiet and nothing else appeared out of the darkness to attack him. Godzilla looked around a minute longer and then, satisfied, made his way to the opposite bank of the river to claim his prize.

Chapter 22

Pandemonium reigned in the war room for a few brief moments as the monitor screen went suddenly dark. All eyes had been glued to the screen as the missile zeroed unerringly toward its target. Then, contact! A sudden, intense flash of light that almost, but not quite, overloaded the camera a second time. A quick, almost subliminal, image of Godzilla staggering sideways. Then, nothing. The room was plunged into darkness until somebody thought to turn the main lights on again.

President Adams was almost apoplectic. Nobody in the room had ever seen him like this. “Get that picture back up,” he shouted less than 6 inches from the ears of the technician who was desperately trying to get something, *anything*, to work.

After a moment, however, the technician gave up. Looking the President directly in the eyes, knowing that his job was probably down the drain, he tried to explain. “It’s no use, Sir. We’ve completely lost the signal.”

The President was nonplussed. “Well, get the signal back!”

The technician swallowed hard, but continued. “I can’t, Sir. The camera itself is no longer broadcasting. There’s no signal to get.”

General Markoff put down the phone receiver and walked quickly over to the President, putting a hand on his shoulder and carefully drawing him away from the terrified technician. When he had the President’s attention, he said, “It’s not his fault, Sir. As I feared, the camera was within the blast radius of the explosion. Actually, the shock wave probably knocked the glass out of every window within a mile.”

President Adams understood what the General was saying, but he still looked a little lost. “Well, can’t they put up another camera? I need to see what’s going on!”

General Markoff sighed. “They *could* set up another camera, I suppose, but by the time they get it up it would be too late.”

“Too late? Too late for what?”

“I was on the line with the mobile observation post when the missile hit. It knocked Godzilla over, but didn’t seem to do any lasting damage. Godzilla immediately picked himself up and is continuing toward the reactor. He should reach it in another couple of minutes.”

President Adams’ eyes grew wider and wider as he listened to what the General had to say. “Has anybody alerted the reactor staff? Have they stopped venting?”

Oh, crap! “Not yet, Sir.”

The President was back in command of the situation. “Kenny! Get on the line to the people over at MIT. Tell them to shut down the reactor and get the hell out of there!”

Dr. Fong was already dialing. “Working on it, Sir!”

President Adams turned back to General Markoff. “What are our military options now?”

“None, I’m afraid. As we suspected, conventional weapons just aren’t effective against Godzilla. We still don’t know what effect nuclear weapons would have against him, but I’m assuming that’s still not an option.”

“You assume correctly. What’s the status of our ‘non-conventional’ weapon?”

Even here, in the middle of the War Room, they couldn’t be too sure who was listening. General Markoff chose his words carefully before proceeding. “Um, the ‘sample’ has been successfully

obtained and is currently being analyzed. No word yet, though, as to whether it contains what we're looking for."

President Adams nodded thoughtfully. "Assuming it *does* have what we need, how long will it take to get the package ready for delivery?"

"Not long at all, Sir. That's the beauty of the Ma -- I mean, the 'package.' Once they have the right ingredients all they have to do is add them together and they're ready to go. The only delay will be in determining whether or not the sample is viable."

"And how long is that going to take?"

"Um, I really don't know. That's a little outside my area of expertise."

The President stroked his chin for a moment. "O.K. Look -- we now know for sure that nuclear radiation attracts Godzilla. Can't we use that some other way?"

The General wasn't sure where the President was going. "What, exactly, did you have in mind?"

"What about that aircraft carrier, the *George Bush* -- isn't it nuclear powered? Maybe we can use it to lure Godzilla back out into the ocean. Even if we can't kill him, at least maybe we can get him away from the city."

The General was not overly optimistic. "I'll get somebody to look into it, but I don't think it can be done without endangering the lives of the crew. To be honest, I don't even know if it's possible to create a 'controlled overload' with that type of reactor."

"Fine. Just look into it, O.K.? In the mean time, can we find out what's happening with Godzilla?"

* * *

Dr. Kimura worked slowly and methodically. He had just received word that *Gojira*, his homeland's old nemesis, was now heading directly for the building in which he was working. On the inside, he was a seething cauldron of adrenaline and terror. On the outside, though, he continued to display the Zen-like calm for which he was famous among his graduate students. He knew that he had to get the reactor shut down quickly. He also knew, however, that this was a job that just could not be rushed, no matter the reason. The control rods had to be inserted *just* so, the coolant had to be applied long enough, but not *too* long.

With all the finesse of a conductor of a symphony orchestra, Dr. Kimura pushed buttons on the console in front of him. He really wished that Charles were here, but he had refused his assistant's offer to join him in the potentially dangerous mission. Shutting down the reactor was certainly awkward with only one person, but it *was* possible. As long as you weren't in a hurry, that is.

Dr. Kimura didn't blame the government for failing to stop *Gojira*. In fact, he would have been greatly surprised had they succeeded! This was not out of any lack of respect toward his adopted country, but this was *Gojira* they were talking about. One might as well attempt to stop a tornado in its path by standing in front of it and waving ones arms! Better to be like the slender reed which survives the storm by bending, than the great oak which tries to stop the wind with its might and is destroyed.

Of course, knowing this hadn't stopped him from agreeing to man the reactor. As head of the research facility, he was honor bound to take responsibility and accept the danger. He could no more allow one of his subordinates to place himself at risk while he remained safe than he could, well, push his own mother in front of a speeding subway train!

Almost done, he thought with relief. *Just a few more --*

With a horrendous grating of twisted metal and concrete, the roof of the reactor facility disappeared. Dr. Kimura saw the terrible face staring down at him, and he had a moment to wonder whether the creature was even aware of his presence. He thought of screaming, but who would hear him? Instead, he silently thanked his ancestors for allowing him the privilege of living such a long, fulfilling life. A life that ended abruptly five seconds later, when a three-hundred pound chunk of concrete struck him down.

* * *

President Adams did *not* like the look he was seeing on General Markoff's face as the General listened on the phone. When the General put down the receiver a few moments later, his face had taken on an ashy hue. President Adams didn't need to ask what the news was, but he did anyway.

General Markoff quickly regained his composure before replying. The last few hours had just been one horror after another, and it was finally starting to get to him. "The was the mobile observation team. The people running the reactor apparently didn't get it shut all the way down in time. Godzilla destroyed it completely."

President Adams shut his eyes for a moment and allowed his shoulders to slump a bit. Then, "what about the radiation. How much contamination do we have?"

"Well, I don't know if this is really good news or not, but the mobile observation team's instruments aren't picking up any significant increase in residual radiation."

President Adams was elated. “But that means they *did* get the reactor off-line in time! That’s great!”

General Markoff hated to burst the President’s bubble, but he continued. “Actually, it probably just means that Godzilla absorbed the radiation.”

The President was crestfallen. “Oh.” Then, with a twinge of hope, “Well, maybe he’ll go back into the ocean now that he’s had his little snack?”

General Markoff was shaking his head during the President’s last comment. “If only that were the case, Sir. Right now, he seems to be heading into downtown Cambridge, toward Harvard Square. Most of the MIT campus is in ruins, I’m afraid.”

“So, what do we do now?”

“I guess we wait, Sir, and pray that the people at Natick Labs come up with something that works.”

Chapter 23

The science team was busy analyzing the sample. After assuring himself that there was no immediate need for him to wait in the lab for instant results, Major Freeman made his way down the hall to the makeshift “brig”. It was actually a small conference room, but there was only one door and no windows. They *were* 100 feet underground, after all!

He approached the door and returned the salute of the military policeman stationed outside. Then he entered and closed the door gently behind him. On the far side of the room, huddled together as if for warmth, were Captain Stinson’s two “passengers”. The girl had a fresh bandage covering one side of her head, and they both had been cleaned up. They still looked absolutely miserable, though.

He stood there looking at them in silence for another minute, until finally the girl asked, “are we in trouble?”

Major Freeman sat down across the table from them. “No, your not in trouble. We just don’t know what to do with you at the moment. Sorry about the guard at the door, but this is supposed to be a secure facility, and we can’t have people wandering around unsupervised. Besides, this isn’t the safest place if you don’t know where you’re going. I’m Major Freeman, by the way.”

They both started to answer at once, and then stopped. Finally, still a little warily, “I’m Peter Murdock, and this is Eileen Brennan.”

Major Freeman grinned. “Pleased to meet you. Do you know where you two are right now?”

This time it was the girl, Eileen, who answered. “It was too dark to see much from the helicopter, but Captain Stinson said we were at Natick Labs. That’s on Rte. 27, right?”

Thanks again, Mike! “That’s right. I forgot, you two are from around here, aren’t you?”

The boy, Peter, answered this time. “Yes, Sir. We’re from Framingham.”

Major Freeman continued to make small talk. “Really! You both go to Framingham North High School?” When they both nodded, he continued. “You guys gave us quite the run for our money last Thanksgiving. That’s a great football team you have over there.” Seeing that the pair had started to relax somewhat, Major Freeman carefully started asking the important questions. “Did Captain Stinson also tell you what we do here at the Labs?”

Eileen chimed in with a quick answer. “No, but you guys do research and stuff for the Army, don’t you?”

The Major nodded. “Exactly. Nothing dangerous or particularly secret,” he lied, “but we like to keep things pretty much under wraps until they’re completely developed and ready for use. Makes it easier that way.”

“Um, Sir?”

“Yes, Peter?”

“If you don’t mind me asking, why were you trying to get a sample of Godzilla’s blood? Do you think you can stop him?”

Damn! “Did Captain Stinson tell you that’s what he was doing?”

“No. We saw the whole thing, though, and it was kind of obvious what was going on.”

Smart kids. Oh well -- a little bit of truth won’t hurt. “Well, basically, we *are* a research facility, and we’re also the closest base with the right equipment. Besides, we happened to have a couple of helicopters stationed here temporarily, so the White House asked us if we could try and come up with

some way to defeat the creature.” The mention of the White House had the desired effect, and Major Freeman could see that his importance in their eyes had gone up a notch or two.

Peter pressed on. “So, what are you going to do -- develop some sort of anti-Godzilla drug or something?”

Major Freeman was dismayed, but also impressed, with how quick on the ball this kid was. “Um, yeah, something like that. Of course, that’s only part of the problem. Even if we somehow figure out something that will affect Godzilla, we still need to come up with a way to get it to him. As you may have noticed, not much seems to affect him, and I’d rather not lose any more people trying to shoot Godzilla in the mouth again. Besides, I have a feeling that wouldn’t work a second time, anyway.” Major Freeman wasn’t exactly sure why he was telling all this to them, but they *did* seem like such nice kids. He could begin to see why Captain Stinson had picked them up in the first place.

Eileen chuckled. “It’s too bad you can’t just roll it up in a piece of hamburger.”

Major Freeman was thunderstruck. “What did you say?”

“I said, it’s too bad you can’t just stick it in a piece of food. That’s how we get our dog, Rufus, to take his heartworm medicine. We just put it in a ball of hamburger and he gulps it down.”

“Oh my God! Kids -- I may end up having to give Captain Stinson a commendation after all for bringing you two here.” And with that, Major Freeman rushed out of the room.

Peter stood up and called after him, “Sir! Can we please call our parents and go home?” It was no use, though. The Major was gone, and the guard still wouldn’t let them out of the room.

* * *

Major Freeman stopped in the medical bay on the way back to his office. First, he looked in on Captain Stinson, who appeared to be sound asleep. Then, he walked over to Captain Blakely, the senior medical officer, who was reviewing some charts in his office.

“Any word on Captain Stinson’s condition?” the Major asked somewhat hesitantly. He wasn’t sure he really wanted to hear the answer.

“Captain Stinson? Oh -- he’s fine. His leukocyte count’s a little high, but that’s probably just due to stress.”

“What about the radiation?”

“A minor exposure, if any. Nothing to worry about.”

Major Freeman was perplexed. “Then why is he still here in the medical bay?”

Dr. Blakely turned back to his charts. “He was exhausted, so I told him he could sack out here for a while. Why? Is that a problem?” He looked up for a response, but the Major was already gone. A few seconds later he heard a muffled *thump* followed immediately by a surprised and indignant “hey!” He thought of going in and telling the Major to leave his patient alone, but thought better of it.

* * *

“Get up, you lazy bum!”

Captain Stinson, who had just been unceremoniously dumped out of bed, looked up at his commanding officer. It was obvious that Major Freeman was trying to keep a stern expression on his

face, but wasn't having much success. Captain Stinson grinned. "I guess the Doc told you the good news, huh?"

Still trying to keep a frown on his face, Major Freeman answered. "What news? That you're a hypochondriac who likes to lie in bed while the rest of us actually do all the work? That's not news -- I already knew that!" By this time, the Major had given up trying to appear angry and returned the Captain's smile. He put out his hand and hauled his friend to his feet. "Get dressed and meet me in my office ASAP. We've got work to do!"

Captain Stinson watched Major Freeman leave and then looked wistfully at the bed beside him. *Oh well -- it was good while it lasted!*

* * *

Major Freeman's phone was ringing when he entered his office. He hurried over to his desk and picked it up. "Major Freeman here. Talk to me."

"Yes, this is Captain Rosenberg." Captain Rosenberg was in charge of the scientific team analyzing the sample obtained from Godzilla. "We've finished our analysis and have the results back."

Major Freeman tried not to let the eagerness show in his voice. "Well, what do you have for me?"

"The results were, shall we say, interesting."

Major Freeman was in no mood for word games. "Get to the point. Can we use the sample or not?"

Captain Rosenberg still wasn't ready to give a simple yes or no answer, though. "Well, there's good news and there's potentially bad news. The good news is that the sample does, in fact, contain DNA."

Major Freeman cut him off. "It does? Well, that's *great* news, isn't it?"

Captain Rosenberg continued on, ignoring the interruption. "The bad news, or, rather, the *potentially* bad news, is that it's unlike any DNA sample we've ever seen before."

"But, I thought that was the whole *point* of our little project -- it doesn't matter *what* type of DNA is involved!"

"That's true, Sir, but this sample poses some rather unique problems."

Major Freeman was getting rather frustrated. Why couldn't the Captain just come out and *say* what the problem was? This was no time for him to lose his temper, though. As calmly as he could, he asked, "what sort of problems?"

If Captain Rosenberg knew that he was starting to annoy the Major, he didn't let on. "Well, basically, the DNA isn't altogether *stable*."

Captain Stinson appeared at the doorway just then, and Major Freeman curtly gestured for him to sit down before continuing. "Look, Captain Rosenberg, let's just pretend for a minute that I have no idea *whatsoever* what you're talking about. Just explain it to me in simple words, and I won't ask any questions until you're finished, O.K.?"

There was a brief silence on the other end of the line. Then, "um, O.K. Basically, there is something, which we haven't identified yet, which, uh, makes Godzilla's DNA extremely sensitive to radiation. Presumably, this is what caused him to mutate into Godzilla in the first place, assuming that he

used to be a normal dinosaur. I'd guess that every time he is exposed to large doses of radiation, he would continue to mutate. I've heard that he used to be a lot smaller than he is now, and that would be an example of the type of ongoing mutation to which he is susceptible.

“So, um, the DNA sample we have should be fine, unless Godzilla is exposed to more radiation and mutates further. If that happens, we'd have to get another sample to make sure that Matrix would still be effective.” A prolonged pause indicated that the Captain had said all we was planning on saying.

“So, how much radiation are we talking about here?”

“Um, a fairly significant amount, I would imagine, but it wouldn't take a full nuclear explosion to trigger a change. Also, the change wouldn't necessarily be immediate -- I imagine it would take a while for all the DNA to become affected.”

“How much time?”

“I couldn't really say at this point -- we only have a small sample to work with. Maybe months, maybe years. Or maybe only a matter of days. From what I've heard, the creature heals at a remarkable rate, and that could be a factor in how quickly the mutated DNA would spread throughout his system.”

“All right, Captain. I assume, then, that we can go ahead and insert the DNA sample into the Matrix as planned?”

“Oh, yes -- in fact, we've already done that. We decided to go with one of the more virulent strains of Ebola they sent us. Extremely nasty stuff.”

“Fast acting?”

“Quite. Probably no more than twenty or thirty minutes from time of contact to death.”

“Fine. I’ll get back to you when we’re ready to use it. And Captain, do me a favor?”

“Yes, Sir?”

“Don’t drop any of that stuff, O.K.?”

“No, Sir. Um, I mean, Yes, Sir. We won’t, Sir.”

Major Freeman said goodbye and hung up the phone. Then, he turned to Captain Stinson who was still waiting patiently. “Those kids you picked up actually gave me an idea we might be able to use to our advantage,” the Major began. “But first, we need more information about Godzilla and his eating habits. I don’t suppose *you* know what Godzilla eats?”

“Uh”

“No, I didn’t think so. Just a thought. Anyway, I’m gonna call the White House back and see if any of their advisers can help us. If this works, we may not have to lose any more good people.” This was not meant as a criticism of the mission lead by Captain Stinson, and Major Freeman hoped the Captain understood that.

Major Freeman picked up the phone and started dialing. “Here goes nothing”

Chapter 24

President Adams was sitting at his desk with his eyes closed when Dr. Fong entered. Dr. Fong hesitated for a moment, wondering whether he should wake the President. The question was made moot, however, when the President opened his eyes and asked, “any word from the Labs?”

Dr. Fong was slightly startled, but regained control of himself almost immediately. “Um, yes, Sir. That’s what I wanted to talk to you about.”

President Adams motioned for his friend to sit down. He had long ago given up trying to convince Kenny not to call him “Sir” in private. “A cultural thing,” was all Kenny would say by way of explanation. “I’m really beat,” President Adams remarked wearily, “so try to keep it simple, O.K.?”

Dr. Fong nodded sympathetically. Even though none of them had gotten much, if any, rest since this crisis had begun, he knew that the burden of responsibility fell heaviest on the President’s shoulders. Dr. Fong couldn’t imagine what it felt like to have the fate of thousands, perhaps even millions, in his hands. He didn’t *want* to know, either.

Dr. Fong cleared his throat before continuing. “O.K. The good news is that they have successfully isolated a sample of Godzilla’s DNA and have inserted it into the Matrix together with the selected pathogen.”

“Kenny”

“Uh, sorry -- the selected ‘germ’. Anyway, there’s some concern that Godzilla’s exposure to radiation to after the sample was obtained may invalidate its usefulness, but they feel the chance of that happening is fairly small.”

President Adams thought briefly of asking Dr. Fong to explain what he meant by this, but decided to let it pass. “O.K., so they have the sample and the Matrix is ready to go. Now what?”

“Now we have to figure out a way to get it to Godzilla. They considered trying to saturate the air around Godzilla with the Matrix, but they’re worried about dissipation.”

“How about just shooting it at him inside a missile?”

“Well, aside from the difficulty of placing the Matrix inside a warhead in such a way that it wouldn’t be instantly vaporized by the explosion, the only way to get it into Godzilla’s bloodstream would be another direct hit in the mouth. The odds of that ploy succeeding a second time are very low, I’m afraid -- Godzilla seems to be an exceedingly quick learner.”

“Which leaves us with what?”

“Well, they *did* have one other idea. It sounds a little complicated, but I think it’s basically sound.”

“Go on.”

“The idea is to get Godzilla to ingest the matrix voluntarily, instead of trying to shoot it into him. Basically, this would involve putting it into something he finds palatable, something he would eat without having to be forced.”

“Hmmm. Slipping him the old mickey, eh?”

The reference went right over Dr. Fong’s head. “Uh, excuse me?”

The President smiled. “Never mind. So, we stick the Matrix into his food. Any idea what he likes?”

This time, Dr. Fong smiled. “Actually, we have a pretty good idea what Godzilla eats. I’ve already talked to some people at the New England Aquarium, and they’ve given us a contact who should be able to help us find what we need.”

President Adams’s brain was kicking into high gear, in spite of his exhaustion. “O.K., next question -- how do we get Godzilla to actually eat our little poisoned apple? Put it on a giant silver platter? Ring the dinner bell?”

“Actually, I’ve got an idea about that.”

“Somehow, I thought you might.”

Dr. Fong took the compliment as intended and continued. “Instead of bringing the food to Godzilla, we should be able to lure Godzilla to the food. We’ve seen how attracted he is to radiation. It should be relatively easy to attach some sort of buoy to the food that will emit low levels of radiation. We can even use a series of these buoys to lay a trail to the food. This will have the added benefit of drawing Godzilla away from the city and back into the ocean.”

By now, the President was on his feet and pacing vigorously back and forth. “Great. That way we won’t have to deal with 100 tons of radioactive dinosaur lying dead in the middle of Boston. And even if the Matrix *doesn’t* work, we’ll at least have gotten him away from the city. Hell, I should have thought about that before we wasted all that time with the reactor!”

Dr. Fong winced at the President’s automatic assumption of blame. “To be fair, Sir, we wouldn’t have known for sure that Godzilla was even attracted to radiation if we hadn’t tried the reactor first. It’s not your fault that things didn’t go as planned. Besides, Godzilla would still be rampaging even if we *hadn’t* tried your plan.”

“Yeah, but before he was just rampaging through downtown Boston.” President Adams looked absolutely miserable. “Now he’s heading toward *Harvard!*”

* * *

Godzilla was restless. If he were human, he’d probably say he was starting to get a bit *bored*. Of course, he *wasn’t* human, and therefore such an emotion could not truly be ascribed to him. Still . . .

In his own limited way, Godzilla thought about returning to the ocean. The lights and noise that had originally drawn him forth from the waters had ceased long ago, and his strange craving had been more or less satiated. For now, at least.

Of course, there was still that mysterious attack on him that had seemingly come out of nowhere. His side still tingled faintly where it had burned. The memory of it made him want to strike out and get instant revenge, but there was no sign of his attacker. Instead, he periodically lashed out with his tail and knocked down another of the odd *things* that dotted his path on either side. Godzilla had no concept of *buildings* or *structures*, let alone *houses* or *apartment complexes*; still, he remembered similar objects from a land far away.

Actually, he *was* starting to get a bit hungry. Pretty soon he would go back into the soothing water and hunt down some of those delicious swimming creatures. Not yet, though. There was still a chance he would find whatever had attacked him. Godzilla gave a explosive roar at the thought. Besides, this land was subtly different than that of his homeland, many thousands of miles distant. Godzilla was certainly capable of curiosity, and it wouldn’t hurt to look around a little longer . . .

* * *

Cambridge was a ghost town. Most of the population had evacuated the night before, when Godzilla had first arose out of the Charles River. A few brave souls, or perhaps *stupid* would be a more applicable adjective, had refused to leave. When Godzilla had crossed the Charles and started toward the center of town, however, even these few had seen the value of self-preservation over curiosity or pride. Now, not even looters were stupid, or greedy, enough to remain. One could take one's chances and hope to live through a fire or an earthquake; 400 feet of fast-moving, fire-breathing dinosaur was another story!

This didn't mean that there was no one to witness Godzilla's continuing rampage, of course. In the neighboring towns of Brookline and Somerville people climbed up on their roofs, armed with telescopes and binoculars to watch the show. Some watched with a perverse sense of glee, happy to see those "damn liberals in the Socialist State of Cambridge" finally getting what was coming to them. The vast majority, however, watched with a mixed feeling of horror and awe; horror at the wreckage and damage taking place, and awe that such a creature could actually exist.

The Civil Defense Authority had already ordered an evacuation of all neighboring cities, but most people had decided to stick around and watch the spectacle. Well, at least until Godzilla started moving in *their* direction, of course.

For the moment, at least, there was no panic. Nobody could deny Godzilla's existence, nor his destructive abilities. Many of the people watching, though, had lived in New England all their lives and

had made it through countless blizzards, hurricanes and other natural disasters. Time had a way of inuring one to such things, and there was a strong tendency to think of Godzilla in the same terms. *We don't have to like it, we only have to endure it -- this, too, shall pass.*

* * *

“Hello, this is Hank Mullin speaking Yes, I am What? Uh, yes Thank you, Sir! Yes, yes I do Uh, let me write that down uh huh I'll get right on it, Sir!”

Hank Mullin, owner of Captain Hank's Whale Watch Tours, hung up the phone and stood there motionless for a few seconds. His wife noticed the strange look on his face. “Who was it, Honey?”

“You won't believe this,” Hank said in a very subdued voice. “That was the President.”

“The President of what?”

“The President of the United States! He wanted to know if I knew where he could find a whale”

Chapter 25

“Um, just out of curiosity, is this going to be dangerous? Not that I’m afraid of anything, you understand, but, uh, we’re not gonna run into Godzilla out there, are we?”

Hank Mullin turned and put his arm around the shoulders of his chief pilot-*cum*-tour guide, Robert Johanssen, and responded in as paternalistic and condescending a voice as he could possibly manage. “Now don’t you worry, Bob; we won’t let that big old lizard get you. I’m here to protect you!” Bob just grumbled under his breath and went back to leaning over the railing.

Both of them were standing on the deck of the research vessel *Cousteau*, watching the rest of the equipment being loaded. The New England Aquarium had provided the vessel, since neither Captain Hank’s Whale Watch Tours nor the Navy had anything really suitable for transporting a tranquilized whale. Hank knew that he was pretty much just along for the ride; Bob was the one who was going to be doing all the important work, actually locating a whale. Hank didn’t know how Bob was going to find one -- whether he was going to pray to his ancient whaling ancestors, or simply rely on his sense of smell -- but Hank had confidence that if anybody could get the job done, it would be good old “Thor”.

The crew consisted of Hank, Bob, a few Aquarium staff members and a number of uniformed officers who had arrived shortly after Hank and Bob themselves had come on board. Hank couldn’t quite tell what branch of the service they were in, but judging by the way they lurched around the ship, even here in the harbor, it was rather obvious they weren’t in the Navy. One of them clutched a small package tightly in his arms as if it were a baby he was afraid to drop. Or perhaps a bomb.

Neither Hank nor Bob knew what, exactly, was the purpose behind their little whale hunt. The President had simply told Hank that his help was needed during the current crisis, and left it at that.

Hank tried to imagine what use a whale would be against Godzilla, but wasn't having any luck coming up with a reasonable scenario. *Maybe if we could find a whole school of killer whales and then somehow sic them on Godzilla.* No, that was ridiculous. In the first place, how the hell would you sic a school of whales on anybody, let alone Godzilla? More importantly, though, they had been asked to locate a single whale, not a school.

Hank thought of asking the military types for more details, but they were busy scuttling around the ship setting up equipment and doing whatever else military types do. Besides, from the way they all talked to each other in whispers, it was pretty clear that they weren't about to share any juicy details with a lowly civilian like himself.

The last of the crew and equipment were on board, and the ship was ready to leave the Harbor. Hank stayed out on deck enjoying the cool breeze that had come up, but Bob turned and went into the cabin. He wouldn't actually be piloting the *Cousteau*, but would be on hand to tell the captain where to go. The Ship was equipped with all sorts of fancy Sonar and thermal detection devices, but Hank knew that Bob didn't need any of that. Heck -- that's why he hired him in the first place! Machines break down, or are sometimes just plain wrong, but *instinct* -- that's what's important at the end of the day!

Actually, Hank was glad to be along for the ride. He spent far too much time lately behind a desk running the day to day operations of the whale watch company, and rarely got a chance to go out on the ocean himself these days. Heck -- he couldn't even remember the last time he had even seen a whale! Not that he was glad that Godzilla had attacked Boston, or anything, but this was the closest thing to a vacation he'd had in over 3 years. Besides -- Rowes Wharf had been spared Godzilla's wrath, so at

least he'd have a job to return to when this was all over. Unlike the majority of downtown Boston. Right now, it was time to just enjoy the cool sea air and not worry about anything else.

* * *

An hour later, Hank was starting to get just a little apprehensive. He knew that whale spotting wasn't what you'd call an *exact* science, but his reputation was on the line! Of course, the fact that the city of Boston was in the middle of a desperate crisis was important as well, Hank thought a few seconds later.

He had tried to find out how things were going from some of the military guys as they passed back and forth, but they either ignored him outright or brushed past with a "sorry, can't talk right now." Not knowing was starting to get on his nerves, though. Nobody seemed to know, or care, that he was the owner of Hank's Whale Watch Tours, and that Bob Johanssen, whale finder *extraordinaire*, was his employee. Finally, he couldn't take it anymore. Trying hard not to get into anybody's way, he sauntered into the pilot's shack to find out what was going on.

The little room was already very crowded. In addition to Bob and the captain, two of the uniformed officers were there, as well as one of the Aquarium staffers. At the moment, though, everyone seemed to be just staring out the front window of the cabin, so Hank felt it might be safe to interrupt. He cleared his throat, and everybody turned to stare at him.

"Uh, hi," Hank began. "I was just wondering, you know, how everything was going?"

Everybody turned back to look out the window except Bob, who got up and walked over to Hank. *It's nice that somebody around here knows who I am*, thought Hank a little peevisly. *I mean, it was me the President called, after all!*

"So, what's the scoop? Things have been awfully quiet around here?"

Bob nodded. "Yah, well, we knew that whales were scarce around here when we started. Besides, it's not just *any* whale we're looking for."

"Really? What type of whale *are* we looking for? Nobody will tell me what they even need a whale for!"

"They didn't want to tell me either, but I told them I needed to know what type of whale and why it was needed in order to find it for them."

Hank was incredulous. "And they actually bought that?"

Bob grinned. "Well, if they wanted a whale they pretty much had to, didn't they?"

"So, what did they tell you?"

Bob lowered his voice conspiratorially. "Well, you know how we've been having so much trouble finding whales lately? Turns out that Godzilla's been eating them!"

"You've got to be kidding!"

"No, seriously! They've figured out that Godzilla feeds off whales and other large sea life. I mean, heck - he's got to be three or four hundred feet tall, right?"

Hank still wasn't convinced. "Yeah, but a whale? A full-grown whale would be a mouthful, even for Godzilla."

Bob nodded his head. "That's what I meant when I said we had to find the right type of whale. Even Godzilla's not gonna go after a full-grown sperm whale. But what about a fin-back? They're only about 100 feet long. And what about an immature whale? In fact, it's possible that Godzilla's been feeding off the young whales, which is why they've gotten so scarce lately."

Hank was finally starting to see the light. More or less, that is. "So, we're looking for a whale that's big enough to feed Godzilla, but not too big, right?"

"You got it."

"O.K. Just one question -- why the hell do they want to feed Godzilla?"

Bob looked embarrassed. "Um, I forgot to ask. Maybe they want to appease him? You know, like sacrificing a virgin to a volcano or something."

"Thanks, Bob -- that *really* clears things up.

If Bob caught the sarcasm, he chose to ignore it. "Glad to help."

Hank let it pass. "So, any luck finding an appropriate whale?"

"Yeah -- actually, we've been tracking a whole pod of fin-backs. With any luck, there'll be at least one juvenile we can use."

"Really? How much longer until we see them?"

Bob started back toward the front of the cabin. "Any time now," he called over his shoulder. "In fact, I'm gonna tell people to get ready, 'cuz any second now we're gonna hear --"

Out on the deck a voice called out, "thar she blows -- whales off the starboard side!"

Bob grinned and then he and Hank flattened against the wall of the cabin to let the military folk squeeze by. Hank clapped Bob on the shoulder and congratulated him. "Glad to see you still have the knack, Bob. I guess they'll have to let you into Valhalla, after all!"

Bob beamed, and then they both left the cabin to join everyone else on deck.

Chapter 26

Robert Johannsen's uncanny knack for locating whales had worked again. Four sleek, naturally hydrodynamic shapes swam no more than 100 feet away from the *Cousteau*. Hank thought of asking Bob where this knack had been for the last couple of weeks, at the height of tourist season, but figured this probably wasn't the right time. For now, the only important thing was that they had found the whales they were looking for.

Near the prow of the boat the military types were busy at work. Everything had been unpacked and all the equipment was neatly arranged. Hank didn't recognize much of the stuff [what was that -- some kind of miniature electronic buoy?], but one item was unmistakable -- you didn't need to be in the military to know what a rifle looks like! Of course, upon closer inspection, Hank had to admit to himself that he had never seen a rifle quite like that before. It seemed much too thick. *Maybe they use elephant guns to shoot whales*, Hank thought.

His wondering was short-lived, however, as one of the uniformed officers popped open the back of the gun and inserted a long, feathered syringe that looked like something out of a child's nightmare. *And I thought getting a tetanus shot was a pain*, he thought with a shiver. Hank knew that this was all for an important cause, but he would *not* want to be the poor whale on the receiving end of *that* needle!

* * *

Captain Stinson finished inserting the tranquilizer dart into the air rifle, and re-closed the bore. As he walked to the prow of the boat, he was met by Major Freeman.

"Are you sure you're up to this?" Major Freeman asked with a mischievous grin. "I mean, if you're too tired to shoot strait, I'm sure we can ask one of the boat crew to do it for you."

"Ha-ha. Very funny. It is to laugh." Captain Stinson tried to maintain a deadpan expression, but his commanding officer's smile was infectious. Besides, he really enjoyed being out on the ocean. He had joined the Army because it had best suited what he wanted to do with his life, but every now and then he wondered deep down whether he was really a Navy man at heart. Not that he ever said that to anybody else at the labs! No -- the traditional Army/Navy rivalry ran far too deep for him to safely express sentiments like that. Of course, most of his friends knew that he owned his own boat, and the inevitable, if jocular, accusations were occasionally made. He usually responded that he *really* wanted his own tank, but they were just too gosh darn expensive!

Captain Stinson knew that he would never forget the sight of Godzilla's foot descending to crush the Huey like a little aluminum model, erasing Captain Ramirez from existence in the mere blink of an eye. Nor would ever be able to wholly erase the image of Lieutenant Foster's body lying twisted, broken and bleeding on the pavement. These things were indelibly imprinted in his mind, almost on a genetic level. Now, though, with the ocean beneath him and the wind in his face, it was hard to dwell on yesterday's horrors. Besides, if everything worked the way it was supposed to, he now had the opportunity to avenge their deaths.

Major Freeman tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to the smallest of the whales. "That one should do just fine. They tell me it doesn't really matter where you hit it, so fire at your discretion."

Captain Stinson raised the rifle to firing position and sighted down the barrel. The rifle itself was fairly standard, in spite of the fact that it used compressed air and fired darts instead of bullets. Instead

of the advanced laser sighting system he was used to, however, it just had a v-shaped notch above the trigger and a corresponding notch at the end of the barrel. He wasn't particularly worried, though -- something told him that he didn't need laser sights and a telescopic lens to hit a 40-foot whale from a distance of fifty feet!

He waited until the whale presented the broadest possible profile and then gently squeezed the trigger. There was a slight recoil, but nothing like the M-18 assault rifles to which he was accustomed. Also missing was the sharp *crack* of a normal rifle -- instead there was only a gently *phut*.

At first, Captain Stinson thought that he had somehow missed after all. The whale didn't seem to react, and he couldn't see the dart anywhere. As the target rolled slightly in the water, however, he could make out the red feather at the back of the dart embedded firmly in the creature's flank. *Bull's-eye!*

Behind him, Major Freeman was gesturing to the crew of the research vessel. It was very important that they secured the whale before it drowned. Once the signal was given, a large crane arm carrying a net swung out over the water. Two divers in wetsuits launched themselves backwards over the side of the boat at the same time. Once the net was positioned almost directly over the now motionless whale, a button was pushed and the lower portion of the net was released into the water.

The two divers quickly grabbed the ends of the net and dove under the whale, carrying the net with them. They reappeared moments later and brought the net out of the water on the other side of the whale. Once that was accomplished, the crane arm slowly swung over the whale and lowered until it was within reach of the divers. The divers then reached up and fastened the end of the net to the crane

arm. The divers backed away, and the crane slowly lifted. After a few seconds, the slack was all taken up and the net grew taut.

The whole operation had taken less than 5 minutes, but now the whale was firmly supported inside the net, where it would be slowly dragged back into the harbor. They had the "hamburger". Now it was time to insert the "pill".

Chapter 27

Godzilla had continued his path along the Charles River, and was now in the center of Harvard Square. In the center of what *used* to be Harvard Square, to be more precise. Much of the University itself had been spared so far, but the surrounding area was in ruins.

Back in the late 90's, there had been a lot of community discussion about whether or not to preserve various "historic" buildings in the Square. Many were well over 100 years old, and the entire area had a certain "old-world" flavor to it. The owners of the property in question, however, had wanted to raze the existing structures and build something a little more modern. An office building, perhaps, or maybe even an upscale shopping center. Much of the debate had centered around a single building which housed, among other things, the "Tasty," which held the title of the oldest continuously operating restaurant in the city. The Tasty was almost as integral part of Harvard Square as was Harvard itself, and local residents balked at the thought of tearing it down to put in "another damn mini-mall."

In the end, history had won out over economic concerns, and the buildings had remained as they were. The landlords raised the rent as soon as they were able, of course, but all the controversy had actually managed to make the Tasty even more popular than before and the owners could afford the increase.

Their victory had been rendered pyrrhic, as the entire block was now no more than a rather large pile of rubble. Most of the surrounding buildings were also destroyed, with the exception of the "Garage," a one-time parking garage that had been converted into a boutique of small restaurants and

stores selling sundry esoterica. That this one building remained intact while all around it were destroyed served as mute testament to the capriciousness of Godzilla's actions.

One could argue, of course, that the building had been spared due to some sort of divine intervention, but the simple truth was that Godzilla had not cared where he was walking, what buildings his tail struck. The fact that one of the stores within the Garage specialized in Japanese merchandise, and actually had a number of Godzilla toys and models in stock, was obviously a meaningless coincidence. At least, that's what people would tell the owner of that particular store in the following years whenever she would tell the story of how the mighty Godzilla had spared her store.

Godzilla stood motionless amid all the destruction, dust commingling with smoke and swirling around the lower half of his body. In his own ponderous way, Godzilla was trying to decide what to do next. The attack that had knocked him over and caused his side to burn had not been repeated, and he had been unable to locate its source. He *had* thrashed about and caused quite a bit of destruction, but the thrill and satisfaction of that was starting to pale. Now, not only was he starting to get *really* hungry, his skin had started to dry out as well. He could survive long periods out of the water, perhaps even indefinitely, but after a while he inevitably started feeling uncomfortable. Besides -- the water was where all the delicious swimming things were!

Godzilla gave one last roar and breathed a stream of super-heated plasma at a group of buildings a little distance away. Harvard Yard erupted into an instant conflagration as the stone and brick buildings making up the 350 year-old university campus exploded under the intense heat. Then, with a twitch of his tail, Godzilla turned around and headed back the way he had come.

Chapter 28

The *Cousteau* was still half an hour out from the harbor when Captain Stinson came rushing out of the cabin and ran on deck. Major Freeman was overseeing the delicate process of injecting the Matrix into the sedated whale. A large part of the problem lay in the fact that, while the team from the Labs was capable of handling the deadly toxin, they had no experience working around multi-ton mammals. Conversely, the Aquarium staff members knew *exactly* how to work with the whale, but had no idea how to handle hazardous materials. For Major Freeman, it was a long, tedious, but nonetheless crucial task making sure everything got done correctly. Unfortunately, he wasn't an expert in *either* marine biology or biohazard containment, and he just prayed that he didn't somehow micro manage the whole operation into the ground.

Hank Mullin and Bob Johanssen, their part of the whole operation finished, were lounging against the railing, watching. Not too close, of course; it didn't take a genius to figure out that some pretty nasty stuff was being handled there. Hank had thought of asking whether or not they were in any particular danger, but decided that it wouldn't change anything even if they were, so why bother asking? Potential dangers aside, however, they both edged a little closer to hear what the Captain was saying.

Captain Stinson gave a brief salute to get Major Freeman's attention. "Um, we've got good news and bad news. The good news is that Godzilla seems to be heading back toward the ocean, so we may not have to worry about rigging the buoys after all."

Major Freeman nodded. "Good. I really wasn't too sure about that whole idea in the first place. This will make things a lot easier."

Hank couldn't resist. "Excuse me, if you don't mind me asking, how are you going to convince Godzilla to eat this particular whale?"

Major Freeman was momentarily perturbed at the interruption. He would have preferred it if no civilians were involved at all, but he supposed it was unavoidable. Trying to be as polite as possible, he responded to the question. "Well, from what we've heard, there really aren't many other whales in the immediate vicinity. That's why we had to go so far out to find this one. Presumably, if we just drop this baby off anywhere near Godzilla, he'll home right in on it."

Hank was surprised to get that much of an answer from the Major, and decided to press his luck a little further. "What if he *doesn't* go after the whale, or it manages to get away? Are we going to have to find another one?"

"Hopefully it won't come to that. We've placed a radio transmitter on the whale, which should let us track it once we've released it. If it *were* to escape Godzilla, it will be a lot easier to find it the second time. Then, we'll just try again. Kind of like fishing, I suppose."

"Hell of a big piece of bait you've got there," Hank said with a grin.

Major Freeman smiled back. "That it is. Just wait to you see the fish, though!"

Captain Stinson cleared his throat pointedly. "Ahem."

Major Freeman turned away from Hank. "Oh right -- the bad news. What is it?"

"Yeah, well, the thing is Godzilla seems to be heading directly toward us. He seems to be making a beeline toward the Harbor and should make it to the water within the next few minutes. We were hoping we could lure Godzilla back into the water in a roundabout way, bypassing the downtown area. Instead, though, he's going right through the Financial District again."

Hank's face had turned a decidedly pasty shade of white. "Er, did they say exactly where Godzilla was going to re-enter the water?"

"Somewhere near the Aquarium. Rowes Wharf, I think. Why?"

Hank turned away and went back to find a place to sit down. "Oh, no reason," he murmured in a small voice. "No reason at all."

Chapter 29

They were close enough now to see the shore, and the combined crew from the Labs and the Aquarium were frantically trying to get the whale revived and unhooked from its harness. The original plan had been to tow the whale all the way into the Aquarium and release it after everything had been checked and double-checked. With Godzilla heading their way, however, there was no time for that. This might be their only chance, and they had to take it.

Godzilla hadn't entered the water yet, but he was already visible; even from this distance, his bulk was immense. Many of the buildings near the Waterfront were the same height as Godzilla, but it was impossible to fail to notice him. All eyes were invariably drawn to Godzilla's inexorable motion toward them, much the way one's tongue continually returned to the socket of a missing tooth. Something was *wrong* with the tableau, and that sense of wrongness constantly hammered at the brain, screaming that such a thing, such a sight, just should not, could not, must not exist!

Away from all the activity surrounding the whale, Hank Mullin was sitting on the deck, his back to the railing and his head buried in his arms. Every once in a while a small sob could be heard escaping. Bob Johanssen knelt beside Hank and placed one arm around his boss's shoulder, trying to comfort him as best as possible. "Maybe Godzilla will step *over* the Wharf," Bob offered. It was lame, but it was all he could think to say at the moment.

In the distance, they could hear Godzilla roar, and the air carried the sounds of explosions and buildings being destroyed. After one particularly loud explosion, Hank looked up, peered over the railing, and then sat back down again, sobbing even louder now.

Bob wasn't thrilled about the possibility of the Wharf, together with the Whale Watch Tour office, being destroyed either, but he had other, more immediate concerns on his mind right now. Like the fact that Godzilla was heading their way! What Bob had told Hank earlier was the truth — he *wasn't* afraid. Well, not in general, that is. You'd have to be insane, though, not to be a *little* nervous about an angry, 400 foot-tall, fire-breathing dragon -- straight out of Norse mythology! -- heading your way. Bob looked over at his boss, who didn't seem at all nervous, just upset, and wondered briefly about Hank's current state of mind.

Bob would have felt a little better if they were on a military ship instead of a research vessel. *Like a battleship, maybe?* he thought wistfully. Of course, that might just piss Godzilla off. He certainly didn't want to be caught in the middle of any firefight involving something that big. Regardless of who won, it would certainly get far too hot to handle! Hopefully, they'd be able to just drop the whale off and then get the hell out of the way before Godzilla noticed them. Then, for the umpteenth time, *what the hell am I doing here, anyway?*

* * *

“Everything's all set here, Major.”

Major Freeman nodded at the technician and waved at Captain Stinson to prepare the whale for release. The whale was obviously conscious now, although still sluggish. He couldn't help feeling sorry for the whale, but he knew it was necessary. At first he had worried whether injected bacteria could

possibly harm the whale, but then realized that it was irrelevant — the whale was going to get eaten anyway.

Godzilla had entered the water, and was still heading in their general direction. They had perhaps five minutes before he got too close. It was a delicate procedure — they had to drop the whale off close enough for Godzilla to notice it, but not so close that Godzilla decided to snack on *them* instead. Of course, there was also the matter of getting away after dropping the whale off. Even if Godzilla *didn't* perceive them as a threat, or as food, his very presence was a danger to them. Not only was he radioactive, but the slightest twitch of his immense tail could capsize their relatively tiny vessel.

Major Freeman remembered the command given during the Battle of Bunker Hill over two hundred years before: *don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes*. He had often wondered what it must have felt like, staring death in the face, but forcing oneself to hold off until the last possible moment. Well, this wasn't Bunker Hill [or even Breeds Hill, where the famous battle had really been fought], and that wasn't the British Army facing him. For that matter, he doubted Godzilla's eyes were even white. Still, he thought he now understood how it had felt.

As he watched Godzilla approach he felt a cold, hard lump form in the pit of his stomach. His throat began to constrict, and he found himself fighting the urge to gasp for breath. True courage, he knew, was not a lack of fear, but an ability to deal with fear and do what needed to be done anyway. Fortunately, Major Freeman had courage. Of course, he was also scared spitless.

He watched as Godzilla got closer and closer. It was a bit disorienting to watch. The closer Godzilla approached, the bigger he seemed. At the same time, though, the deeper the water became, thereby covering up more and more of Godzilla and Godzilla seemed to be actually shrinking vertically.

Right now, the water was almost up to Godzilla's waist, and Major Freeman was almost able to make out individual details. The skin seemed textured in some strange, wholly alien way. And the eyes, were they somehow glowing —

With a shake of his head, Major Freeman shook himself out of his reverie. It was time. He barked a command to Captain Stinson, who pushed the release button on the winch. The net opened up and the hapless whale fell back all the way into the water with a gentle *splash*. As soon as the whale was completely free, Major Freeman gave the command to heave to, and the *Cousteau* took off at a right angle to the approaching behemoth.

All we can do now is wait. And pray.

Chapter 30

Godzilla splashed through the Harbor, creating miniature tsunamis with each step. He knew he'd have to head out into the deep waters before he would find anything decent to eat, and so he plunged ahead. He wasn't a particularly fast wader, but just a little farther and he'd be able to dive under and start swimming. Any second now . . .

Godzilla noticed movement out of the corner of his eye and stopped. He'd seen things like it before, and sometimes they had even attacked him, spitting fire and hot metal. Not that they'd actually hurt him, of course, but it was still annoying.

Godzilla stared at the retreating vessel for a moment, deciding whether or not to go after it. Or, maybe, just a quick burst of flame -- that would do the trick. It was still close enough that he could hit it easily. Or, maybe, he should just hit it with his tail . . .

Godzilla's attention was diverted by another object, floating directly in front of him. *One of the yummy swimming things!* Something was wrong, however. He had never seen one of the tasty creatures so close to the shore before. Also, it didn't seem to be moving. Godzilla was *not* a scavenger or some bottom-feeding fish -- he caught his food live and ate it while it was still wriggling around.

Godzilla bent down to get a closer look and wrinkled his nose. It certainly didn't *smell* dead. Still, *something* was definitely not right with it. Maybe it was best to just leave it alone and head out deeper where there were sure to be other tasty creatures to eat . . .

On the other hand, he *was* hungry, and the creature certainly *looked* good to eat. Godzilla leaned a little closer and reached out to prod the motionless whale with one massive claw. Suddenly, the whale

spasmed, slapping its tail hard into the water. A jet of water splashed Godzilla in the face as the whale dove beneath the waves.

Godzilla was momentarily startled, but then gave a little *rowr* of contentment and dove under the water to give chase.

* * *

On board the *Cousteau*, there was an air of barely controlled panic. Bob Johanssen was in the pilot's cabin yelling at the captain to either go faster or "get the hell out of my way and let me drive!" Not that he was scared or anything, he quickly amended. The captain thought of telling Bob to shut up and let him do his job, but was too busy trying to coax every inch of speed out of the research vessel's engines.

On deck, things were no better. The sudden choppiness of the water was causing the boat to rock violently, and a couple of the technicians from the Labs were retching violently over the railings in response. Major Freeman was worried that somebody might actually be swept overboard, but there was nothing he could do to help them right now, as he was currently clinging to the railing and holding on for dear life himself.

A few moments before, they had all watched Godzilla approach. It was obvious that they had caught Godzilla's attention, and Major Freeman had been absolutely sure that Godzilla was about to attack them. Most of the people from the Labs had simply stared back at Godzilla, waiting for the

inevitable to occur. They had been trained to deal with life-or-death situations, and sometimes the only way to deal with such a situation was to accept it.

The Aquarium crew, on the other hand, had been a little less phlegmatic about the whole thing. In fact, most of them had started screaming and running about the deck, arms flailing. At any other time, Major Freeman would have found their antics amusing, especially when two of them collided and went down in a tangle of arms and legs. At the time, though, he had been too busy trying to decide whether there were any last-minute sins he needed to repent for, before meeting his God before that great tribunal. Major Freeman wasn't a particularly religious man, but if not now, when?

At the last moment, however, just when their doom was upon them, the huge creature had suddenly stopped dead in the water. It took Major Freeman a few precious moments to realize that Godzilla had finally noticed their little "present". Unfortunately, he wasn't eating it. Major Freeman knew nothing about how sensitive Godzilla's sense of smell was, but a sense of dread had overcome him when he saw Godzilla bend over and sniff the still-sleeping whale. *What if Godzilla can tell that the whale's been poisoned? What if we're wrong and Godzilla doesn't even eat whales?*

Major Freeman had watched as Godzilla reached out and prodded the whale with one enormous claw the size of a small bus. When the whale responded by flipping its tail in the water and spraying Godzilla in the face, Major Freeman couldn't suppress a short bark of laughter at the look of complete and utter surprise on Godzilla's face. Major Freeman knew that Godzilla was completely alien to him and his kind, but for that brief moment Godzilla looked almost, well, *human*.

Seconds later, the whale dove under water and Godzilla soon followed in hot pursuit. Major Freeman's elation had been swiftly quelled, however, when he noticed the splash caused by Godzilla's

dive. They were still too close, and waves that size could capsize their ship. Major Freeman had called out for everyone to hang on tight, and then he had wrapped his arms around the railing.

The aquatic shock wave had hit mere seconds later -- they really *were* too close. Fortunately, the *Cousteau* had been built for the high seas, and seemed able to withstand the sudden battering. Most of the people on board, unfortunately, weren't quite as sturdy, and that's when the breakfasts and lunches had started spewing forth.

It seemed to go on for hours, but it was only a few minutes before the water calmed down again. Major Freeman was drenched from head to foot, but at least he was still on the boat. A cursory look around assured him that everybody else was still on board as well. There were a lot of green faces, and the moaning seemed to be ubiquitous, but everyone seemed to be there. The only person who seemed completely unaffected by everything was Captain Stinson who was leaning against the railing with a silly grin on his face. When Major Freeman caught his attention, Captain Stinson shouted, "Was that a hell of a ride, or what?"

"Or what," Major Freeman shouted in response, and finished shaking himself off. *Thank heavens this is July*, Major Freeman thought, *or else we'd all be freezing to death by now!* And with that thought, he turned away from the railing and went back into the cabin. It was time to turn on the radio tracker and find out what was going on down there.

* * *

Captain Stinson joined him in the cabin a few seconds later. “Wipe that stupid grin of your face and get to work,” Major Freeman said, without any ire. He knew that Captain Stinson was a true adrenaline junkie, and he secretly envied his friend’s ability to get enjoyment out of events that would terrify any normal, *sane* human being. Captain Stinson wiped his hand across his face, taking the smile away with it, and then gave a crisp salute to indicate that he was ready to devote all his energy and concentration to the job at hand.

The Major went over to the little black box that was mounted on a shelf near the ship’s main control panel. It looked like a miniature television set, except that it had small joysticks and a small numeric keypad mounted in front of it. One of the Aquarium staffers had recovered sufficiently from the events of a few minutes before, and was standing next to the device, ready to activate it. At a nod from Major Stinson, he pushed a small button at the rear of the box and the little screen flared into life.

Major Freeman had seen tracking devices before, but never like this. Of course, there wasn’t much call for such sophisticated hardware in his line of work, so he didn’t feel too bad. Still, he could only assume that the military had a better, even more sophisticated, version of this device at its disposal, even if there hadn’t been time to find one for this mission. Running a state-of-the-art research and development lab had instilled a certain sense of technological superiority in Major Freeman, even though the obviously commercial tracking device in front of him *did* look rather spiffy.

The screen soon resolved itself into a highly detailed 3-D grid that could be rotated in any direction using the two joysticks. Near the center of the grid was a glowing dot that Major Freeman assumed represented the fleeing whale. Godzilla, of course, was not represented at all, but they had to assume that he was in pursuit. The Aquarium staffer fiddled with the joysticks, and the grid rotated so that both

the x and z axes were clearly displayed. It was apparent that the whale was simultaneously heading away from the shore and diving rapidly.

The effects of the sedative they had given the whale had obviously worn off, and the creature was moving *very* rapidly. *Hell, if Godzilla was after me, I'd be moving rapidly too!* Major Freeman thought. Then, he began to worry. *What's taking Godzilla so long? What if the whale is too fast? What if Godzilla gives up?* Major Freeman hated the nagging doubts, especially because there was absolutely nothing he could do about them, but he couldn't stop them from running through his head.

Suddenly, the little dot on the screen stopped dead, and then veered off at a sharp angle. Was the whale taking evasive actions, or . . .

* * *

Godzilla was enjoying himself. His food certainly wasn't dead -- in fact, it was getting livelier by the minute! Normally, he managed to sneak up on his food and gobble it down before it even knew he was coming, but this one was certainly leading him on a merry chase.

On land, Godzilla often appeared a bit awkward. There was a certain fluid grace to his movements, to be sure, but it was obvious that dry land had not been created with the likes of Godzilla in mind. Under water, however, it was a different story entirely. With his arms and legs pinned flat against his side he was amazingly hydrodynamic. His tail swished rhythmically back and forth, providing not only force but direction as well.

If the truth were to be told, Godzilla was actually playing with his food, enjoying the chase almost as much as he intended to enjoy the actual eating. After a little while, however, he decided that enough was enough, and that it was time to eat. He *was* hungry, after all!

With one final burst of speed, Godzilla shot *ahead* of the whale and placed himself in its path, jaws open wide. The frightened whale, stunned at this unhappy turn of events, almost swam directly down Godzilla's gullet before coming to its senses and executing a tight turn away from Godzilla.

The time for games was over, however, and Godzilla shot forward once again, closing the distance between them in less than 2 seconds. This time, he simply reached out and grabbed the whale by its tail flukes and jerked it to a halt. The whale continued to struggle, even after Godzilla had shoved it into his mouth. He enjoyed the sensation of the whale wriggling all the way down to his stomach, and didn't bother to chew his food before swallowing it.

Contented, Godzilla let himself drift with the current.

Chapter 31

The little dot of light abruptly dimmed, and then completely disappeared of the screen.

“What the hell happened?” Major Freeman demanded. “What happened to the target?”

The Aquarium staffer fiddled with the joysticks a bit, rotating the view, and then punched a few numbers on the little keyboard. After a few seconds, he turned to the Major with a perplexed expression on his face. “I don’t understand it -- the transmitter itself is supposed to be virtually indestructible. It’s enclosed in a hardened polymer and can withstand pressures up to 1,000 psi. Even if Godzilla *bit* the thing, it should still keep transmitting.”

Major Freeman was starting to get nervous. The *last* thing they needed right now was additional uncertainty. “Could the problem be on our end here?” He pointed to the tracking device. “Are you sure that thing is still working?”

“Everything seems to check out fine. The transmitter just isn’t sending any signal. Unless. . . .”

“Unless what?”

“Well, maybe the signal is being blocked by something.”

Major Freeman’s eyes lit up. “Could radiation do that?”

The staffer nodded. “I suppose so, if it were strong enough. Why? You don’t think --”

Major Freeman interrupted him. “That’s it, then! Godzilla must be a lot more radioactive on the inside than on the outside.” He turned to address the rest of the people now crowded into the small cabin. “Gentlemen, I think we can safely assume that Godzilla has taken the bait.”

The room was filled with a number of brief cheers, quite a few audible sighs, and at least one whoop of joy, the last emanating from Robert Johanssen. After a few moments, Captain Stinson interrupted the

general revelry with a subdued question. “Um, if the transmitter isn’t working anymore, how are we going to know what’s happening to Godzilla?”

* * *

“O.K., we think we’ve located him on the sonar.”

Major Freeman turned to the technician manning the sonar scope. “How can you tell? All I see are a bunch of amorphous blobs?” The Labs, being primarily an Army facility, didn’t have anybody capable of operating a sonar system, and they were forced to rely once again on the expertise of the Aquarium staff. Major Freeman hated trusting everything to civilians, but he had no choice. He just wished he had a clue what was going on half the time.

“Well, there *is* a hell of a lot of junk down there. To make it worse, he doesn’t seem to be moving too much at the moment, just kind of drifting with the current. Part of it, though, is simply know what to look for, and what to ignore. See that blob right there? That’s him!”

“Um, if you say so. He’s not moving?” Major Freeman turned to Captain Stinson, who was peering steadfastly over the Major’s shoulder. “What do you think, Mike -- did we do it? Is he dead?”

Captain Stinson wasn’t so sure. “I dunno, Sir. I mean, Captain Rosenberg said the virus would be quick acting, but I didn’t think he meant *that* quick. Besides, you’d think Godzilla would react to it somehow, not just lie there like a lump.”

As if in response to Captain Stinson’s comments, the sonar suddenly started pinging loudly.

The sonar operator bent down to stare at his screen. “We’ve got movement! Something’s definitely going on down there, and it’s heading this way!”

* * *

Something was happening to Godzilla, something inexplicable, something *painful*. In all his long life, the only sensation that even came close to this was that one time, many years past, when a single flash of blinding light has changed him forever.

Then, as now, his entire body had felt like it was being devoured from the inside out. At that time, he had also felt a distinct sense of growth, of expansion, coupled with a sudden increase in strength awareness. Now, however, he felt himself growing weaker by the second. His head was burning up, and every muscle in his body was aching. Even his internal organs felt like they were shriveling up.

As his body began to be wracked with violent convulsions, he tried to swim to the surface. His tail started thrashing on its own accord, however, and he was unable to control his motion. Blood clouded his eyes, and his vision grew dark. Then, his hearing began to fade, as if he were wrapped in a gigantic cocoon.

His head broke the surface of the water, but he was beyond the point of knowing or caring. The pain reached a blinding crescendo of agony, and then everything went black. The pain no longer bothered him. Nor, for that matter, did anything else.

* * *

On board the *Cousteau*, everyone was crowded against the railing at the stern of the boat. The water was being churned into a white froth less than five hundred feet away, as if some mighty continent, lost for ages, was preparing to arise once more from the depths of the ocean.

As the seconds passed, the disturbance in the water only intensified. Suddenly, a shape broke the surface. Everyone got a brief glimpse of Godzilla's head, his face locked into a silent rictus of pain, blood streaming from every orifice. It was an image that would remain indelibly etched into the consciousness of everyone who watched. Years later, many on board the *Cousteau* would still wake in the middle of the night, screaming at the memory of the terrible sight to which they were now witness.

Captain Stinson watched silently. He knew he should be elated that the giant creature was dying. The memory of what had happened to Captain Ramirez and Lieutenant Foster still burned brightly, and his whole reason for coming on this mission was to seek revenge for their deaths. As he watched Godzilla's death throes, however, the taste of victory in his mouth took on a bitter tang. Sure, he had wanted revenge, but not like *this*. Nothing deserved to suffer like this, not even Godzilla. Perhaps *especially* not Godzilla. Captain Stinson's anger and hatred were commingled with an unavoidable sense of awe and wonder that such a creature could have even existed.

He looked over at Major Freeman, and saw that the same thoughts must be running through his commander's mind. *Was this really necessary? Wasn't there some other way?*

After a moment, Godzilla's massive head sank again beneath the waves, and the churning ceased. This time, there was no cheering, no whoops of joy. Everyone on board stood in mute testament to the passing from this earth of a great and terrible example of God's handiwork.

Truly, giants *had* walked the earth, but no more. The last dragon had been slain, and the age of legends was over.

Chapter 32

The city of Boston, one of America's oldest metropolises, was in ruins. The loss of life, however, had been surprisingly low, and the old adage, "where there's life, there's hope" was as applicable now as any other time in human history. In the long run, buildings -- no matter how old, or how historical -- were simply objects and could be replaced. It would be a long process, to be sure, decades, perhaps, before every trace, every reminder, of the events of the last few days had been completely erased, at least physically. Mentally, of course, there was no way that these things could be forgotten.

The human psyche, however, was remarkably resilient, and the first "Godzilla" jokes were being told on late night T.V. talk shows within a week after the giant creature's demise. "Q: What do you call Boston's new plan of urban renewal? A: Godzilla!" Part of that was the age old attempt to deal with tragedy by laughing in its face. A larger part, though, was simply relief that the nightmare was over.

There were even some unforeseen benefits that had arisen out of the tragedy. Relations between the United States and Japan quickly reached a peak unmatched in the nearly 60 years since the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The expression "don't judge a man until you have walked a mile in his shoes" was used on more than one occasion to explain this phenomenon.

Similarly, the tragedy had evoked the sympathy of many other nations. Even many of the more hostile countries of the Near and Middle East seemed to realize that America had finally been punished for its many "sins," especially that of hubris, and incidents of terrorist attacks against the U.S. dropped sharply in the months following Godzilla's attack. Of course, this was a temporary respite at best, but it offered hope for future negotiations and even the possibility of lasting peace.

* * *

Back at Natick Labs, a full-blown party was underway. Shouts of “hail, the conquering heroes” had greeted Major Freeman, Captain Stinson and the rest when they had first set forth back on the base. Later, there would be time to mourn fallen comrades, but now was a time to celebrate life. Most of the personnel were surprised at how subdued the “heroes” themselves were, but ascribed it to sheer exhaustion.

Peter and Eileen were central figures at the bash. By an unfortunate oversight, nobody had bothered to send them home before the final mission had gotten underway. Both had secretly been afraid that they were going to be locked away forever in the name of “security”, but the simple truth was that they had gotten lost in the shuffle. They had both been allowed to call their parents, but had been invited to remain for the party. At first they had demurred, wanting only to get home, but then Major Freeman started telling everyone how it was really Eileen’s idea that had saved the day, and everyone began insisting that they stick around a while longer. They were still undecided, but then somebody -- Captain Stinson, perhaps? -- made a comment about them possibly receiving a Congressional Medal of Honor, and they had given in to the inevitable.

Peter sincerely hoped that they *did* get a medal out of this, or at least something. Otherwise, no one was *ever* going to believe their story when school started again in September. For the first time in his life, Peter was actually looking forward to the annual “How I Spent My Summer Vacation” essay!

* * *

The Natick Labs wasn't the only place celebrating, of course. In the War Room people were *still* grinning like idiots and slapping each other on the back. President Adams was more exhausted than he had ever been before in his life, but continued to make the rounds, congratulating everybody involved. He had already been on the phone to the Labs, and had given his personal stamp of approval on a job well done.

President Adams knew that the next few days, perhaps weeks, were going to be a nightmare of red tape and bureaucracy as all the details of starting the rebuilding process were worked out. It was obvious that Boston would qualify for a huge amount of Federal relief aid -- probably more than any other city since hurricane Andrew had lashed the Florida coast back in the 90's. Nothing was every done easily -- or quickly -- in Washington, however, and he didn't look forward to the mindless debates regarding how much and how soon. *I'm the President of the United States of America*, he thought ruefully. *You'd think that would entitle me to a little time off now and then!*

Out of the corner of his eye, President Adams saw General Markoff motioning for his attention. The President noticed, with not a little sense of relief, that the General was standing by the doorway. *Maybe this is my chance to slip quietly away and actually get some sleep.*

General Markoff was standing next to Claire Monson, the President's press secretary. The General started in as soon as the President was close enough to talk without shouting. "Mr. President, we've got a gaggle of reporters waiting outside for some kind of statement. Have you thought about what we can tell them?"

President Adams nodded. “Yup. Just tell them that we had our scientists put their minds to it and, in a blaze of originality and hard work, they were able to come up with a virus that could kill Godzilla.”

The Press Secretary was shocked. “Do you really expect anyone to believe that we just ‘came up’ with a solution at the last moment? Even *I* don’t think the public is *that* gullible, and I write your speeches!”

The President just grinned. “Of *course* they’ll believe it. Hell, it happens all the time! Don’t you ever watch movies or television? If the Starship *Enterprise* can save the entire universe in 1 hour, why can’t we save Boston in a few days? Hey -- it’s the American way! Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to bed” And with that, the President left.

General Markoff and the Press Secretary stared at each other for a moment. “Is he serious?” Claire asked. General Markoff considered it for a second. “Why not? I suppose it’s more plausible than half of his campaign promises, and he got elected, didn’t he?”

With a loud laugh, General Markoff turned around and headed back to rejoin the party. The Press Secretary stood there a moment longer, and then shrugged her shoulders and left to face the media.

Epilogue

The body continued to drift with the current, deeper and deeper out to sea. The blood trailing behind it had attracted a small school of sharks, but they had eventually given up after repeatedly breaking their teeth on the corpse's impenetrable skin.

The body was, to all outward signs, completely dead; there was no heartbeat, no brain activity, no respiration. Internally, however, there was a flurry of activity occurring at the microscopic level. Recently mutated DNA, nestled snugly within the nuclei of the creature's cells, were quickly replicating themselves, sending out little strands of messenger RNA. These strands, in turn, carried the revised genetic codes to the ribosomes in the cells' cytoplasm. Continuing a process begun days before, the affected cells divided at a furious rate, further spreading the message to other cells, other parts of the body.

The same process which enables the creature to heal almost instantaneously from injuries caused the new information to be carried from cell to cell like a wildfire. The recent virus that had attacked its body had operated much the same way, targeting specific genetic markers and overwriting them with its own insidious code. Now, however, those original markers were being overwritten by an entirely new code, one which the virus was not designed to recognize. Soon, the virus itself was being overwritten, and within mere moments had been completely expunged from the creature's system.

Deep within Godzilla's mighty chest cavity, a sound could be heard, if there had been anyone there to listen. Slowly at first, tentatively, then with greater force and power:

thub-thub, thub-Thub, thub-THUB!

The End.