



Lost and Found

An Adventure by

Tom Williams

Advance Praise for *Lost and Found*

“An adrenaline filled Rollercoaster ride with a pot of gold as the prize. Tom Williams takes the reader on the ultimate high-tech treasure hunt. Experience a treasure hunt firsthand. This is fiction, but someone in NASA could turn it into reality. A unique story written by a great storyteller. All the wit and emotion of Clive Cussler’s best novel. Great read, a page-turner that you won’t want to put down.”

**Ron Polli, Offshore Editor
Extreme Boats Magazine**

“While I normally only review books related to the health care business I decided to review this novel because it promised to be intriguing. When I read it I was delighted with the pace, adventure and timeliness of this story. The story centers on energy, starting with oil in Texas to gold in Turkey to a tease for the author’s next novel on breakthrough energy discoveries in Poland. Most of the action takes place on or near water, and it makes sense because the author is a master merchant marine officer licensed by the U.S. Coast Guard with special expertise in shipwrecks and salvage. This piece of information should give you another hint about the story line, and if you are willing to accept my opinion, this is a fun adventure with all of the thrills of an Indiana Jones story.”

**David C. Martin
Publisher & Editor of *Health Care Weekly Review*,
for 24 years the only independent weekly newspaper
in the state of Michigan directed to health care profes-
sionals**

“Tom Williams really keeps the action moving. Plot twists run deep into the content and the story takes you on some interesting journeys. Just when you think you’ve got it all figured out, there’s a surprise waiting in the next chapter. It’s an intriguing read with colorful characters we’ve encountered in our lives. The compelling story is hard to put down and the ending is well worth the read.”

**Larry Jewett, Editor
Mustang Enthusiast**

“The book *Lost and Found* has more twists and turns than a corkscrew. The story is action packed and full of suspense to keep you turning one page after another. The story leads you through the deceit and treachery of the Corporate Board room to the excitement and turmoil of the Treasure Hunt. This book would make a GOOD movie. I could see the movie in my mind’s eye as I read the book. ENJOY!”

**Owen Krahn, MBA
Krahn Publishing
Idaho Senior News**

“Tom Williams’ first novel, *Lost and Found*, has an interesting storyline that threads the reader from high-tech technology and touching on current topics, to mystery and intrigue. If you enjoy pirate stories, mysteries and adventures, you will enjoy Tom's modern-day treasure hunt for survival. Well-written for his first novel. I hope to see more of his work.”

**Loretta Lynn Leda
Feature writer for the Orlando Sentinel,
The Reporter, and the West Orange Times**

“This was a delightful and fun read. The book has lots of subtle humor, the characters well developed, and is a really good adventure story. Highly recommended!”

**Ralph L. Webb, Professor Emeritus
Department of Mechanical Engineering
Penn State University**

“Florida-based writer Tom Williams’ novel, cleverly titled, *Lost and Found*, will be released soon. It cannot be too soon. This extremely unpredictable adventure is guaranteed to keep even the most weary bedtime readers turning pages late at night, telling themselves ‘just one more chapter’ over and over again.”

**William Kerns
Entertainment Reviews
Lubbock Avalanche-Journal**

“A rip-snorting thriller, rich in vicious international intrigues, corporate treacheries and old-fashioned heroic pulp-fiction gumption— all in a lifelike setting that draws as much intense momentum from its technological realism as from the life-or-death urgency of the situation. A cracking good read.”

**Michael H. Price, Associate Editor
The Business Press Fort Worth**

“*Lost and Found* is a fast and easy read with all of the customary components of an entertaining book...murder, mayhem, madness, mystery and romance. Just the thing to liven up a long boring airline flight or for a lazy day by the pool.”

**Lynne Christen
Author of *Travel Wisdom***

“With treasure hunting, corporate back-stabbing and a sado-masochist on the heroes’ heels, *Lost and Found* has everything you could ask for in a great thriller. It’s a business meltdown that makes the story of Enron look tame.”

Brian Bandell
South Florida Business Journal

“*Lost and Found* is a mystery adventure by an author of startling ability. It’s common to talk of a novel’s “fast pace,” but the phrase is hardly enough to describe the fevered action in Tom Williams’ story. I’d never have expected such work from a local columnist, but finding it is a delightful surprise. You won’t set *Lost and Found* aside easily. That’s because Williams, when he talks of seeking undersea treasure, knows his subject. He’s skilled, himself, in underwater salvage operations off southern Florida. He knows the hazards. Combine such adventure in a story with corporate malfeasance in the petroleum industry. Then mix it in with local hoodlums off the coast of Turkey—the stew bubbles with threat. Now add a distorted villain of twisted character who honed his vicious skills in the pre-Mandela South Africa. You’ve assembled a feast that only the dullest reader could put aside. You’ll enjoy it thoroughly.”

Ed Nelson, Freelance Author, Chicago

“Tom Williams has woven together a masterpiece of adventure, murder and mystery all fueled by greed. This is a must read for anybody who’s ever dreamed about diving a wreck and finding a gold doubloon. Williams’ characters will pull readers into the adventure and along on a wild ride.”

Gabe VanWormer
Producer, Michigan Out-of-Doors TV

“Lost and Found: This contemporary thriller novel has it all: high-tech satellite gimmickry, brainy Brit scientists, corporate chicanery, sunken Spanish galleons, a genuine damsel in distress, arson, an earthquake and nutcase villains of multi international origins. In addition, it’s action-packed, fast moving, and totally engrossing. Read it in a hammock and you won’t even notice the mosquitoes.”

**Anne Stinson: Book Critic
The Weekend Star Democrat Easton Maryland**



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Lost and Found

By

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Dedication

To Vicki Lynn Williams, my wife and lifelong accomplice, all of my huge Macedonian family, and all of my friends and family at Marriott and Scripts.

Also to my parents Joyce and Seth, who were the best storytellers ever.

Acknowledgements

To Bono, who once on a sailboat near Marco Island, Florida advised me, “Be care where you set your goals, because you’ll probably get them.”

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Prologue

AUGUST 17, SATURDAY
GOODLAND FLORIDA

Billie slammed the door behind her and stepped out onto the little wooden balcony. She was high above the docks and could see everything clearly. A thunderstorm was building, and climbing up over the Everglades. From inside her second story office, the storm clouds had been hidden as the waterside view looked only over the mangroves and the winding channel leading out to the gulf. Billie, however, was not concerned with the weather, the tropical scenery, or with her appearance. Billie Johnson was looking for her husband.

“Goddamn it, Buddy!” Billie said loudly as she began her descent of the rickety stairs.

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Down on the dock, Dotson glanced over his shoulder at Billie's approach. Billie Johnson was a striking young woman dressed in a makeshift combination of sun-faded boating attire. She was a tall figure with a wild tangle of sun-lightened hair on a roving inspection of the South Florida docks.

Dotson, the local dock master, was helping with the lines of a visiting sailboat. A big sloop was nudging her fenders against the well-worn pilings and the current was running fast. A sunburned man at the wheel was hiding under the shade of a Bimini top, while two deck hands, both twenty years his junior and both wearing bikinis were standing on the foredeck. The girls were passing lines to Dotson as Captain Sunburn hollered orders.

"That's perfect, now the old man can handle the rest."

Billie walked over, but her eyes scanned for Buddy. There was a large area to search: eight sailboats tied in the slips, the ketch on the face dock, three crab boats, and the salvage-dive rig. The docks were wide, expansive, and hot. It was August in southwest Florida and the heat was oppressive.

Climbing over the mangroves, the thunderstorm clouds were coming closer and edging up the channel—a silver curtain of rain closing against the open water and the lush green foliage. Lighting spiked in the distance and thunder ominously rumbled.

Without warning, Captain Sunburn turned off the big sloop's diesel auxiliary. He wanted to be finished, off the boat, and away from the storm. The sailboat's motor had been holding the fifty-foot hull against the surge of a very strong flood tide, but now the mooring line began to slip, and the bow began to pull away.

Dotson was seventy and his reactions to the unexpected were slow. His end of the yacht-braided hawser was not yet

tied, but only wrapped around a piling. The dock line slipped, snaked away, and dropped into the water.

Both of the girls screamed together, suddenly alarmed that the big sloop was moving and turning sideways away from the dock. Beneath the shaded cockpit cover, Sunburn looked confused. He could only stare as his befuddled command drifted down current toward a large wooden classic with two towering masts.

Below the rigs of Billie's ketch and tied just over the booms were rigged awnings, the glow of varnish rich and soft under the shade. The sun was not yet swallowed by the storm, and poured a final serving of heat upon the classic antique about to be broadsided.

Billie stepped forward, her hand reaching for a life ring—a lifesaver buoy attached to a length of heaving line. She crouched low and threw the life ring like a Frisbee with the line trailing behind. The big sloop was now almost stern to the dock and rushing sideways in the current. In a moment, the metal rub-rail of the modern intruder would clash with the wooden matriarch of the marina. The collision would only affect cosmetics, but cosmetics were time, and time was money. Billie it seemed, always needed money so her reactions were fast.

With an abrupt clatter, the life-ring-Frisbee caught the drifting sailboat by the bow-pulpit railing. After wrapping twice around the sturdy stanchions, the big sloop was captured. Billie however, did not wait for a confirming glance at her target, but had already taken two turns around Dotson's previous dock pile. The line went taut as the big boat stopped and shuddered in the current. After a moment, the girls and Captain Sunburn obediently began to edge back toward the dock. Now with a much longer bowline, the sloop's stern was

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still moving toward Billie's classic wooden ketch.

Billie looked to Dotson and saw the age on his face, his features molded in concern. He was watching as the tourist boat once again began to shoulder against the dock.

The big sloop was under control, but drifting dangerously close to Billie's family heirloom. As Dotson watched, Billie saw the relief on his features. She also knew that only inches separated the two vessels, a sliver of space between an intruder and the anchor in her life.

Lightning flashed, thunder cracked, and huge raindrops began to pepper the dock.

"Shit!" Captain Sunburn exclaimed; he had had enough. The boat slipping away or the lightning next to the sailboat masts, whatever—he wanted off.

The two girls had already climbed over the lifeline railing and made a beeline across the docks for shelter. Beneath an Old Florida stilt-house, pilings rose over the decking to support the wooden balcony, the rickety stairs, and the living quarters of Johnson Charters, Fisheries, and Salvage. The sunburned man hurriedly followed the girls and watched from under the shelter as Billie and Dotson finished tying the runaway boat. The rain was stronger now and came down in sheets. A scent of wet-hot gravel and dock wood crowded the air.

Billie followed Dotson and joined the new arrivals standing under the house. Water began pouring out of the gutters in a torrent, sounding an accompaniment to the now constant rumbling thunder. The florescent signs above the "Ready Ice" machines began to glow against a suddenly dark and late afternoon.

Billie stepped forward. "Out from Miami?" she asked.

Sunburned man nodded and made a show of glancing at

his watch, a gold Rolex that he wanted to show off. “Left at six this morning, out through Hawk’s channel and up into Florida Bay, broad-reaching most of the way.”

It was Billie’s turn to nod, “How long you planning to stay?” Billie was not regarding the older, sunburned man wearing the flowery shirt, but the arm-crossed, pouting figures wearing the bikinis—their body language spoke volumes. The leader was a brunette, and her obvious underling a redhead.

Sunburn looked over to the two girls as they studied the tall blond woman intently. The girls from Miami Beach were making an evaluation.

Billie Johnson was indifferent to her soaking wet appearance. Her shoulder-length blonde hair was matted by the rain, and her long-sleeved white shirt open and rolled up to the elbows. A blue sports bra swelled beneath the now see-through material, and a pair of safari-type, khaki shorts were fastened below the knot of her cross-tied shirttails. Her skin tone was as dark as a lifeguard in September, her cheekbones high, and her nose aquiline. Billie’s eyes were the color of living emeralds and the intense green was now gripping. The young women from Miami could not hold her gaze.

The dark haired girl turned away first and was now clinging to the rain-spotted Hawaiian shirt of Captain Sunburn. “Melvin, you said we were going to Naples,” her voice was a whine, “to the yacht club,” she insisted.

The other girl, the redhead, appeared disappointed and miserable. She was looking around, first to the overhead plank floor supporting the large dock-house they were gathered beneath, then to a workbench littered with tools and boat parts. Finally, she gazed inland to a gravel parking lot and a distant trailer park rinsing in the rain.

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Abruptly, Captain Sunburn was reminded of his charges. The redhead pounded the dock with her foot and spoke with a disappointed whimper. “We can’t stay here, not on the boat, you promised.”

Billie ignored the girls and her focus returned to the man in the Hawaiian shirt. “How long?” she repeated.

“How far is Naples?” The sunburned face screwed tight with the question and looked upward into Billie’s features. Captain Melvin Sunburn had to look up. Billie Johnson was much taller.

“Twenty miles to Naples, We charge five dollars a foot, overnight.” Billie’s words were cut short as thunder crashed after a flash of lightning and a voice called out over the rumble.

“Aw, damn-it-to-hell, Billie, that ain’t no way to be friendly! Five dollars a foot? We ain’t never charged that much!” Buddy Johnson was moving beside the workbench and the boat parts, his smile cracking as he stepped out of the shadows. He was holding a can of Budweiser with one hand and gripping the remaining six-pack with the other.

“Anybody want a cold beer?” Buddy asked as he raised his cans toward the newcomers. His eyes were red-rimmed, glassy, and trying to focus on the two girls in bikinis. The dark-haired whiner instantly crossed her arms over her chest and the redhead moved closer to the short, portly figure wearing the Hawaiian shirt.

“Come on, girls, how ‘bout a beer?” Buddy insisted, waving the cans.

As harmless as the gesture might ordinarily be, there was something dangerous, something not right about Buddy Johnson. At first glance, he looked like a younger version of the Marlboro man, but rough and calloused around the edges.

He was dark with a permanent tan in the face and his sandy hair, like his mustache, was too long and sloppy. His blatant attraction toward the girls in bathing suits was obvious, and his lack of concern about offending the shorter, older man was alarming.

“No thank you,” said Melvin stiffly.

“What’s-a-matter, my beer not good enough?” Buddy’s voice dropped suddenly and matched the rumbling thunder in the distance.

Upon Buddy’s arrival, Billie had remained silent and watchful. Now she shook her head and disappeared around the corner of a storage locker.

The two Miami girls immediately became concerned with the tall, blond woman’s departure. The scant bikinis crowded closer to Melvin prodding him to speak, and the puffy sunburned face began to glance around—looking for help.

“No, that’s not—” he began.

“How ‘bout you Red? Buddy interrupted. “You want one? Maybe you want something besides a beer?” There was no doubt about the insinuation.

The dark-haired girl now looked sharply over to Melvin as the redhead actually moved behind the sunburned man with the flowery shirt.

“Now, let’s watch that language,” Melvin sputtered. His words had absolutely no conviction.

Buddy moved in, enjoying himself. “Who do you think you are?” he demanded. “Telling me to watch my language—watch my language in my own goddamned place! You city people make me sick, coming down here with your fancy boat and your fancy women. Look at you in that stupid shirt.” He gestured across the waterway. “Don’t you get it? You’re in the Everglades now! Hell, this is a mangrove jungle. Who do you

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think is gonna protect you now—some Miami lawyer? Maybe I'll just take that fancy watch, and go for a ride on that fancy boat. And maybe I'll just take these two fancy pants girls with me!”

Melvin stepped back aghast as the girls moved away silently, their darting eyes screaming panic.

“I bet I scare the shit outta you,” Buddy advanced, now very close, his sour beer-breath flowing directly into the sunburned face.

With a glance to the two girls, and then over to Dotson, he added. “I bet I scare the shit outta all-o-you! All-o-you!” Buddy motioned around the dock as if to include Dotson, the other boats and even the distant trailer park. His face frowned into a dangerous scowl, and he suddenly fired his beer and the remaining six-pack, down at Melvin's feet. The unopened cans exploded, beer spewed everywhere, and the girls screamed as Melvin's sunburned face turned white.

Suddenly Billie was back, trudging forward from the shadows. “Nobody...scares the shit out of me!” she said. After she spoke, she pulled the lever on a fire hose nozzle and a tremendous blast of water knocked Buddy off his feet. Water was ripping out of the two-inch hose and flying across the underside of the dock-house to pin Buddy Johnson in a corner of the workbench.

Melvin and the two girls were caught in the outer fringes of water but easily kept their footing and immediately started for their boat. The girls were screaming as their captain followed—their voices howling and unintelligible. Sheets of rainfall drenched the bikinis and the Hawaiian shirt, washing them into a blur before they reached the dockside sailboat.

Billie continued her focus and aim, sending the driving spout of water onto a struggling Buddy, keeping him pinned

under the workbench. After a moment, she shouted to Dotson. “Help them get away, and don’t let them hit the Ketch.”

Dotson nodded sadly and moved out into the rain. After the big sloop pulled away, Billie turned off the water. She threw the hose down and the nozzle crashed on the dock. She stood with her hands on her hips and regarded her husband with disgust.

“Goddamn it, Buddy! I just got the credit card bill! Five hundred dollars? Five-hundred dollars at a strip bar?” She shook her head and added. “We can’t pay the mortgage and you scare away the only business of the day. Visa says you spent five-hundred dollars at a goddamn, Fort Myers strip bar!”

Billie shook her head again and started back up the stairs.

Chapter 1

“How much longer do we have to listen to this rubbish?” Brian Pauliss whispered.

“Quiet,” hissed Peter Clopec
The chairman was droning on and on.

“...with political tensions building around the world, it has become apparent that new methods for oil exploration are now paramount.” The chairman, Alex Haggly-Ford, was also British, but his longevity in the oil business and his last twenty years in Texas had given his public school accent a strange twist.

“The justification for the expense of our new satellite is obvious. In the very near future, we will have no choice. The forecast demands for oil production in the twenty-first-century are staggering. Russia will no doubt hoard her vast oil reserves and share her petroleum business only with former

eastern bloc countries, and only on a favored nation basis. The rising Muslim population in Africa, coupled with the manipulations of fanatic leaders will create ever growing concerns whenever dealing with this volatile region. And the Middle East..."

Peter felt Brian's elbow nudge, and turned to observe his colleague rolling his eyes upward.

Brian was just like a schoolboy, thought Peter—despite the fact that Brian Pauliss was forty-six, divorced from his second wife, overweight, and smoked *a lot*. Yes, Peter considered, as the chairman continued. Brian is very child-like although not immature, and certainly one of the greatest academic minds that Peter Clopec knew.

"With this new technology," the chairman continued, "OPC will conquer the forefront of all future petroleum endeavors. All new oil fields and perhaps even natural gas reserves can now be mapped from just above the earth. Even as I speak, our precious *bird* is circling the globe, searching every flat steppe, every rising plain, and even the most rugged and remote mountain ranges."

The chairman paused. Haggly-Ford was amused to use the specialist's term for satellite in front of the board of directors. He glanced over to Brian and Peter with a fabricated smile and continued.

"Our *bird* is indeed precious, as the annual fiscal report will certainly indicate."

A low rumble of laughter rolled through the waiting assembly and fell short just before the first row and the stern-faced board of directors. Befitting his position as chairman, Alex Haggly-Ford was standing behind a lectern and delivering his annual address to the gathered stockholders of Odessa Petroleum Consultants, or OPC. He looked like a television

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news anchor. He was even wearing makeup. With a quick glance to the rear of the auditorium and the standing room crowd, it was obvious that over two thousand attendees were present at the meeting.

Peter Clopec swallowed hard against a rising bout of heartburn. He knew at any moment, both he and Brian would be called forward and introduced as the new managing directors of OPC's satellite mining division.

"Without further delay...ladies and gentlemen of the board, distinguished guests and honored stock holders, I would like to present Doctors Brian Pauliss and Peter Clopec."

"Christ!" Brian's sidelong whisper to Peter was not even covered as both men rose from their seats and approached the raised dais and the lone standing figure of the perfectly groomed, silver-haired, Haggly-Ford.

A pair of spotlights caught the climbing duo as they gained the center-stage-steps and a thunderous applause broke like a swelling wave and abruptly dribbled off into silence. The glare from the theatrical lighting was dazzling, but in the darkness beyond was the knowledge that a predator waited—a collective beast searching for the presence of fear, or perhaps, evaluating the possibilities of weakness. Two-thousand stockholders were now focused as one, two-thousand critical investors, waiting with the cold and calculating mind of a Wall Street financier.

Silence covered the dais and the lectern with a foreboding presence.

Haggly-Ford looked over to where Peter and Brian were standing. His smile was forced and weak. The chairman was waiting. He was waiting to measure the two men he had just employed. Beads of sweat were beginning to pop through his

makeup.

Peter Clopec was tall and lean, his hair too long and usually messy. He was gray at the temples before the ends of his troublesome wisps turned to black. He wore a moustache peppered with gray and a permanent stubble of salt and pepper whiskers suggesting more than a five-o'clock shadow.

Brian Pauliss was shorter than Peter, but much heavier. Brian was completely blond with no sign of gray. He combed his hair straight back as a grooming effort, but one could easily imagine long, rebellious strands constantly being replaced behind his ears. Brian, like Peter, also wore wire-rimmed eyeglasses, but he looked like a chubby little boy from an English boarding school.

Both Brian and Peter would always have a youthful appearance. In fact, all that was missing as the two men stood beneath the glaring spotlights were the brass buttons and embroidered crests of boarding school blazers. The Englishmen were of course, not dressed in uniforms, they were wearing suits—Peter in a dark worsted wool from Brooks Brothers and Brian in an British Banker's gray, straight off the rack at Harrods. Brian did not look good in a suit. His red striped tie was obviously constricting and the single middle button of his coat appeared ready to pop.

Haggly-Ford now gestured toward the lectern and mumbled, "Gentlemen." He pulled a handkerchief from an inside pocket and retreated out of the spotlights into the darkness.

"After you, mate," whispered Brian

"Right," Peter's answer was automatic, but he was surprised when Brian turned and followed Haggly-Ford onto the waiting sidelines, away from the focus and scrutiny of the predator.

Peter swallowed against a new rise of heartburn and

stepped forward to the podium. He gripped the lectern with both hands and looked at the microphone glinting in the light.

“Good afternoon,” Peter instantly felt the sweat break out on his forehead. The local time, he realized was about 10:00 AM. After an endless moment of silence, he began again. “In London, of course, the time is now afternoon.” A trickle of laughter drifted out of the darkness. This was not a friendly laughter, but the low growl of a predator sensing weakness.

“But here in Texas, the time is morning, and with each morning, there is an urgency to accomplish one’s daily goals—the goals and challenges so eloquently outlined by our chairman.” Peter paused and tried to peer into the darkness. He continued smoothly, fortified by the slow Texas drawl he had experienced when meeting most of OPC’s board of directors. “The excitement and challenges of prospecting for oil in a new millennium, and the ultimate goal of discreet geological surveys without the troublesome consequences of on-site, in-the-field analysis.

“As we are all-too-well-aware, the mere presence of a petroleum survey team instantly demands attention from even those most remotely involved. Real estate values and mining rights grow at an exponential rate, political issues become complicated, and greed, one of the most basic human instincts, grows to a level beyond all conceivable proportions.”

For a moment, Peter considered that he might have just described the motivation of OPC’s chairman and board of directors. Quickly he pressed on. “Satellite mining, hopefully, will eliminate on-site survey teams, restore confidentiality with petroleum futures, and secure the profit margins of Odessa Petroleum Consultants until the next scientific breakthroughs can be accomplished.

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“Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your kind attention,” Peter paused, and glanced over to the darkened sidelines.

“Doctor Pauliss?” Peter’s arm was now en-gesture, his palm open as if to bring Brian forward.

After an awkward moment, Brian reappeared in the spotlights, his face shinning with perspiration. He stepped forward quickly, took Peter’s place at the lectern and brightly offered, “Good morning!” This remark brought much more than a trickle of laughter. The Texans were now amused.

After a quick glance to confirm Peter’s blushing features, Brian continued. “What my esteemed colleague has noted, but thus far failed to expound upon, is the fact that we are both honored and grateful to be part of OPC’s new wing of experimental satellite research. Thank you and good day.” As he stepped away from the microphone, Brian raised a hand to the spotlights, waved into the darkness, and placed a playful arm around Peter’s shoulder.

As he led Peter away from the lectern and the now thunderous applause, Brian Pauliss whispered. “Thank Christ that’s over. Let’s get a drink!”

Chapter 2

FRIDAY, AUGUST 16

ONE YEAR LATER

“**D**octor Pauliss, the chairman will see you now,” the receptionist smiled sweetly after she spoke.
“Thank you, my dear.”

She was quite the looker thought Brian as he rose from his seat in the waiting room. The girl smiled again as she opened the door. She was tall and busty with perfect teeth and big hair. Texas women were wonderful. Charlene was her name and—

Brian’s thoughts of conquering the feminine Wild West were suddenly derailed upon entering the chairman’s office. Haggly-Ford was seated at his desk and Peter Clopec was standing before him. Here was a disobedient student presented before the headmaster, waiting for punishment.

Peter’s eyes shifted to an open file resting on the desk. The

file: a standard folder for an OPC geological report did not rest long. Haggly-Ford was out of his chair in an instant and the file-folder was flying across the room. Brian flinched as the file papers scattered.

Haggly-Ford roared, "Saltwater!" The chairman now seemed ready to crawl over his desk. He repeated, "Saltwater! I'm not bloody looking for saltwater, am I?" Haggly-Ford was beyond angry. He was livid. The chairman turned away, disgusted.

Peter shot Brian a "don't say anything look," as Haggly-Ford turned and began to pace before his floor-to-ceiling windows. The Midland oil fields lay beyond—endless pump-jacks nodding their horse-like-heads to withdraw the rough Texas crude.

Brian watched the chairman paced. Haggly-Ford was counting. Brian knew from experience that the chairman silently counted the oil wells. He counted the wellheads to calm his nerves.

"Bloody Hell!" Haggly-Ford's latest comment was announced quietly and apparently intended for the pump-jacks in the oil field. "Another bloody saltwater lake. Another underground, saltwater sea," the chairman continued softly. He was still looking out into the West Texas desert.

The sun was low over the Midland oil fields burnishing the horizon with shimmering heat waves. A fuzzy edge moved at the skyline revealing a dusty wave rolling forward with the silent desert heat. Shadows were beginning to tilt beside the mechanized oil horses and reach toward the OPC corporate headquarters.

Odessa Petroleum Consultants was a sprawling expanse of mirrored windows and snow-white geometric shapes. Twenty acres of executive offices, research facilities, and endless west

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Texas dust. OPC was a nightmare of ultra modern, too much money, new-age architecture.

Haggly-Ford turned away from his bobbing steel subjects, his desert kingdom and his only reliable source of revenue. A disgusted expression molded his features as he pitched his voice as a mimic of Brian's piping contralto. "But Alex, me old son, we have recalibrated the ground-penetrating radar and the anomaly carrier-wave signal. No worries, mate! Bob's your uncle and Fanny's your aunt! We'll have it this time! This time we'll find an oil field!"

With a sudden motion that surprised both Peter and Brian, Haggly-Ford jumped forward and violently swept an arm across his desk. Every carefully placed item went tumbling: an oil well clock, a collection of classic miniature automobiles, and a red telephone.

"Because of you two, because of your incompetence, the board has called for an emergency meeting. Someone in Petroleum Discovery has leaked this latest report. Some moron in mid-level management knows someone on the board. Some *peon* is trying to leverage a promotion. The board will most probably call for a vote—a vote of confidence! I cannot retain my position as chairman against such a vote. Twenty years...twenty years wasted, unless I can make something happen fast."

The chairman glowered. "Well, let me tell you something, Doctor *bloody* Pauliss and Doctor *sodding* Clopec, it's your bones that will be burning on this corporate bonfire, not mine. You have exactly one week to find a substantial oil reserve. One week, or contracts be damned, you're out! Both of you fired! I will even call the state department and revoke your visas. I will *bloody well* have you deported!"

Alex Haggly-Ford looked as if he were ready to explode,

and when the misplaced telephone began sounding the off-the-hook busy signal, he turned back to his oil wells and the setting sun. After a moment, he spoke softly, as if to the windows or the dusty desert beyond. His voice was on the edge of panic.

“You have one week... Now get out!”

Peter looked over to Brian’s appalled features. Doctor Pauliss was apparently in shock and regarding the cleared desk, the scattered bric-a-brac, and the buzzing telephone resting among the littered sheets of paper.

After turning away from the chairman standing before the windows, Peter nodded to his best friend, and both men quietly exited the room.

Haggly-Ford’s receptionist did not look up as the two Englishmen passed; she was too embarrassed. The chairman had been screaming.

Peter only glanced at the blushing receptionist with her face glued to the computer screen. He punched the elevator call button and waited until the lift door opened with a pneumatic rush.

After stepping inside and waiting until the doors closed, Peter turned to Brian, “Happy Birthday Doctor *bloody* Pauliss, August sixteenth and aged forty-seven.”

“Too right, aged to forty-seven and sacked all in one day,” Brian shook his head. “Well, Doctor *sodding* Clopec, it is a Friday, the beginning of the weekend, and my birthday. Let’s get pissed!”

Chapter 3

Odesa in August was like any other city in the West Texas summer, hot to the point of being oven-like. Triple-digit temperatures cooked the landscape and the workforce, and evenly divided the population into two very separate categories. The outsiders were the oil field roughnecks: the men and women who worked for high wages in high temperatures. The insiders were the addicted-to-air-conditioning creatures of the corporate oil business. The outsiders resembled the landscape in which they worked, coarse, cracked, and resentful. The insiders could not have been more different. With very few exceptions, the insiders were fair, delicate, and soft.

Brian was most definitely an insider. When not working, he preferred the franchise bars and fashionable restaurants. In

West Texas, “Friday’s” was his favorite. Only a small number of the roughneck crowd ever came to “Friday’s.” Brian of course, was fair-haired, fair skinned, with manicured fingernails bordering on perfection. Brian hated the Texas heat and broke into a sweat whenever caught between air-conditioned cubicles. The only attributes Odessa and Midland could offer Brian were the seemingly endless chain of trendy restaurant-bars and the high-maintenance women that frequented these establishments.

Peter Clopec was also an insider, but Peter was different. Doctor Clopec could easily pass for an outsider. Peter was officially British. He had been schooled in England and attended university in Scotland, although Peter had been born in Africa. Clopec was a Hungarian name and Peter’s father came from Budapest. Mining in the Transvaal and East Africa regions had captured the Clopec clan for two generations, and as a result, Peter carried the seasoned, out-of-doors appearance of a geological prospector or an oil field professional. The Texas summer heat was nothing new to a native-born African, and Peter’s resulting complexion spoke of endless days by a swimming pool and his dark Hungarian heritage.

“May we please have another round of those delightful concoctions?” Brian’s voice was oily with alcohol. He was speaking to a waitress with incredible bust and cleavage.

Brian liked sweet drinks: whisky sours, rum and coke, anything with sugar. Tonight, Peter and Brian were encamped around a small table at the darkest corner of “Friday’s” bar. They had been drinking rumrunners, and they were not alone.

“Not here please, a Black Label if I may. No ice.” Peter’s voice was steady but his eyesight seemed to waver. Clearly, he was transfixed by the cocktail server’s low-cut costume.

“I just can’t believe you’re fired—fired on your birthday!”

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This was the voice of Pauline Taggart. Pauline was Brian's girlfriend of sorts, and she was attempting to divert Brian and Peter's gaze away from the departing waitress.

"That beats all—all I ever heard of! Haggly-Ford is a god-damned ass-hole! You two should sue. Yeah, you should sue the shit out of all of them!" This voice was from Becca Raimes, Pauline's friend. She was demanding complete attention from her side of the candlelit table.

Brian chanced a glance at Peter and was not surprised to observe an expression of vague annoyance. Peter was not a snob, but he obviously did not care for the vulgarity of the local Texas woman.

"You still have one week. Don't you think you could *still* find *something*?" Becca's latest remark was addressed to Peter, almost nagging.

Rebecca Raimes was a young woman who had been trying to build a romantic relationship, a West Texas woman with her matrimonial gun sights on a rich oil executive. She found Peter through Pauline, and Peter Clopec was definitely Becca's target of acquisition. Pauline's attraction to Brian had developed almost instantly after Brian and Peter's installation into OPC. Becca was Pauline's friend and had managed to strategically edge her way into a position of opportunity. Becca was physically well armed and mentally determined, as was Pauline.

Both women were young, in their mid-thirties, and attractive. Becca was a dark brunette with chestnut eyes and Pauline blond and hazel. Both were tall, slender, and carried an impressive arsenal of desirable endowments. Musky perfume was always well applied, hinting of the more seductive pheromones that could be uncovered at a moment's notice. Perfect hairstyles complemented the latest in stylish dress,

and augmented breast sizes seemed oddly round and out of proportion when displayed in the skimpiest of bikinis.

Brian had capitulated after one week of feminine attack and was currently ensconced into Pauline's intimate bosom. When her finger beckoned, Brian most often responded obediently. The ring finger on her left hand however, much to her frustration, remained unadorned.

Thus far, Peter had not fallen victim to Becca's advances, and her current tone and behavior suggested frustration at a lack of success. She was also quite agitated that her focused onslaught might have been misplaced and her efforts wasted. An oil executive without a job was not a target of opportunity.

The waitress returned, deposited the drinks accordingly, and departed after a brief eye-contact battle with Becca.

"Damn-it-to-hell, why won't the friggin' satellite work?" Becca leaned forward in the candlelight, her face hawkish.

"My dear, must we fall into that again? It's my birthday!" Brian's announcement was met with a quick visual between the two women before Pauline answered.

"Brian honey, maybe we could help," she offered. "Hell, the oil business is nothing new to Becca and me. My daddy was looking for oil in this desert before you two were born... Well, maybe not you, Peter."

Brian winced. He knew that Peter was going through somewhat of a mid-life-crisis; his age of fifty-one, obviously much more acute with Haggly-Ford's earlier ultimatum.

Becca shifted her eyes from one man to the other. "You boys have got to figure this out," she demanded. "If the damn thing won't work—fix it!"

Peter watched as Brian lit another cigarette. Brian was obviously drunk. His face was flushed red, his eyes rheumy, and

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he was chain-smoking. After another glance at the two waiting women, Peter sipped his scotch and spoke softly.

“The satellite does work,” he said. “There is not another or more sophisticated ground penetrating radar anywhere. The oil is the problem. It doesn’t have enough of a signature. Oil is too thin. Too thin and buried too deep. But the satellite does work.” Peter’s eyes were now focused and he held Becca’s gaze defiantly.

From the bar, a group of late night Texans began singing *The eyes of Texas Are Upon You*.

“This entire enterprise was destined for failure...even before it started.” Peter’s voice was stronger now, determined to carry over the drunks at the bar. “The satellite is a fantastic piece of aerospace hardware, but not for finding oil. OPC is up the spout,” he said, “Finished.”

Becca appeared skeptical as Peter continued. “Three-hundred and forty million wasted, all because Haggly-Ford wanted to be first. And, because he wanted to be first, he hurried. He bullied engineers, forced and threatened subordinates, and lied to the board of directors. No, he is finished, and so is OPC—only a matter of time.”

Pauline gasped. Both she and Becca also worked for Odesa Petroleum Consultants. They were administrative assistants—Pauline in Human Resources and Becca in Petroleum Discovery.

Brian was nodding sadly. Peter had spoken the truth and now the facts were out.

More drunks had joined the bar singers. “*The eyes of Texas are...*”

Peter drained his glass and tore his eyes away from Becca’s admonishing stare. He motioned for the waitress to bring another scotch.

“Brian? Up the spout? What does that mean?” Pauline asked. “Finished? The company is finished?”

He nodded.

“But OPC is the best place to work in Odessa. Brian, are you sure?” Pauline’s voice was pleading and hoping for a denial, but her mind was spinning. She had never been a saver and she knew that Brian was all but broke. He drove a nice new Jaguar, but she knew the car was leased.

Brian lowered his head. He had stubbed out his cigarette and was now rubbing his temples. He did not want to look up.

“Brian... Brian, honey?” Pauline looked around, her tears streaming.

“*Eyes of Texas...are...upon you...*” Everyone at the bar was singing. “*Louder! One more time...*”

Becca appeared ready to burst. Her hands were now gripping the table tightly. Her face was flushed, and little beads of sweat were shinning on her upper lip. The bad news about OPC was not what she wanted to hear.

The cocktail server returned with Peter’s scotch, but before she could deliver the drink, Becca was on her feet and grabbed the glass recklessly. Luckily, Peter’s wire-rim glasses protected his eyes, but the double shot of whisky covered his face and hair.

“If the oil is too thin...you fucking moron...find something that’s not! Pauline! We’re outta here!”

With a violent action that Brian found surprising, Becca pulled Pauline from her seat and began marching her adjutant toward her fellow Texans at the bar. With a dramatic disruption, the unofficial state anthem fell apart as the two women centered themselves among the bar singers.

“You see those two limey assholes.” Becca’s voice was a

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whip as she pointed. “They said all Texans are a bunch of inbred shitheads. But I think they’re wrong! I think that they’re a couple of snobby foreigners, and I think they need a lesson in whoop-ass.”

Becca was now entrenched among the singers and holding Pauline tightly, almost like a shield.

A few of the drunks began to grumble. Their song and patriotic focus had been broken. A few of the singers began to scrutinize the two men at the candle-lit corner table.

One of the drunks came up from behind Becca and whispered in her ear. She was focused for a moment before the Texan’s tongue came out and licked her on the cheek. After screaming, “Asshole!” she grabbed Pauline and stormed for the door. The entire bar erupted into laughter.

After a moment, Peter motioned for the waitress. She approached carefully and offered a damp bar towel.

“Sweetheart,” she said, “I’ve seen it all before, and believe me...” The busy server jerked a thumb toward the exit. “Those two think that every time they sit down, they’re sitting on boxes of gold. I hope it was worth it, but I somehow figure it wasn’t.”

After Peter thanked her for the towel and ordered another drink, the waitress nodded. “The next time,” she said, “I hope you find what you’re looking for.”

With the suggestion, Doctor Peter Clopec seemed to drift away, his features blank as his mind focused inward, his dark complexion and whisker stubble a silent mask over his lean and chiseled appearance. After a few silent moments, Peter came back. He then looked to Brian and smiled.

“Doctor Pauliss, I think it’s time to go to work.”

“I think its bloody-well time to get out of here.” Brian was covering his lips as he spoke, but offered a quick glance to

three roughneck patrons seated at the bar. Three of the former Texas singers were watching the corner table intently.

“Brian, Becca was right! And so was our waitress!” Peter began to laugh and Brian looked worried.

“Right, mate. What are you talking about? Are you pissed? Those blokes are just about to show us some southern hospitality.” After speaking, Brian’s face drained white as the three big Texans began to hobble off their bar stools, their intent and actions obvious.

“Now hold on boys!” The waitress was back, moving in front of the roughnecks and holding Peter’s scotch. She placed the drink in front of Peter, glanced over to the terror-struck Brian, and stood with her hands on her hips. She stood with her chest out and eyed the three Texans suspiciously.

“Well, what’ll-it-be,” she said. “The drinks are on Doctor Clopec,” after a quick glance and wink toward Peter, the waitress continued. “Well?”

“Well shit,” the biggest Texan replied. “I didn’t know that he was a doctor. I’ll have a Jack and Coke, what about you boys?”

The busty woman then turned on her charm and led the troublemakers back to the bar. After a few moments, Brian began to breathe. “That was almost a bollocking!”

“Brian, sort yourself out!” Peter’s tone was urgent. “Can’t you put it together?” he asked. “Remember your training! What did she say? Think man! You’re a scientist! ‘If the oil is too thin...then find something that’s not!’ And then our server, ‘Sitting on boxes of gold?’”

Peter shook his head with amazement and began to smile again as he searched Brian’s expression. Slowly, through the alcohol and emotional excitement, Brian’s academia took over. His features became flushed, his mind accelerating. Suddenly

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the heavysset, middle-aged little boy became focused. Focused as only a man with two PhD's can become centered.

Dr. Brian Pauliss, hidden in the corner of a dark Texas bar was once again a scientist. After one year of dealing with greed-driven bureaucrats, and dulled by corporate procedures, Dr. Brian Pauliss was back. Gone was the frustration propagated by so many lies, distractions and deadlines. Brian's eyeglasses caught the candlelight as he nodded to Peter. This was the terse signal of a preoccupied mind.

Peter signaled the waitress.

She came over quickly. "Well, well, well," she said. "You boys look like the cat that swallowed the canary."

Peter asked, "How did you know my name?"

The waitress smiled. "I remember every gold or platinum card that comes in here. There aren't many. And by the way, Doctor, your three new friends at the bar are sucking down drinks as fast as they can."

The waitress smiled again, and Peter decided she was quite attractive, much older than Becca, but there was substance here, a distinct fortitude.

Peter handed her the card that she remembered. He touched her hand for a moment as the plastic passed between them, pausing as she regarded him carefully.

"Give our friends a few more drinks," he said, "but cut them off before they become dangerous. Add a hundred dollar tip for yourself, and keep those fellows on their stools until after we leave."

"Is that all, Doctor Clopec?"

"Yes, all for now. Doctor Pauliss and I have a satellite to reprogram. After that," Peter offered, "I think we just might find some new boxes of gold."

Chapter 4

A red trail of dust followed Brian's Jaguar as Peter drove just over the speed limit. OPC was twenty miles outside of town and well positioned in the middle of nowhere. All roads in the desert were perfectly straight, which allowed Peter a moment to examine the dusty red cloud glowing in the rear view mirror. The lone sedan was the only car on the road—a single pair of headlights racing toward the next horizon as the subtle purr of British engineering basted the drifting desert from the West Texas highway.

Brian was hunched over in the passenger seat and scribbling on a yellow legal pad. The glove box was open and spilling an essential light. A calculator was balanced on one knee and from time to time Brian punched figures into the little keypad.

Peter Clopec smiled. Here was the Brian Pauliss that he

knew. A man focused and determined, not the lazy and sloppy individual corrupted by unobtainable corporate goals. For the last year, Peter had watched Brian deteriorate. Haggly-Ford's offer of satellite mining, had at first, seemed irresistible. Here was a position with incredible possibilities and a virtual unlimited budget. This was before Peter and Brian both realized the OPC satellite was too good to be true. The orbital, ground penetrating radar was indeed a breakthrough, but certainly not capable of finding truly deep oil reserves. Brian's added carrier-wave tickler-signal was the only ray of hope for the over-priced, destined-for-failure project. Haggly-Ford had exaggerated the satellite's potential. He had falsified documents and deceived the board of directors.

Peter found and confirmed the discrepancies after only one month. He spoke to Brian and together they privately confronted Haggly-Ford. This was the first occasion that the chairman's anger had surfaced. At first, he had been only annoyed, but his irritation rapidly turned to antagonism as Peter insisted that the OPC satellite was impotent.

Brian had diffused the confrontation with a suggestion. A proper carrier wave, he insisted, could tickle certain underground formations and register anomalies that could point to future oil fields—a potential crutch for the stumbling project. Haggly-Ford had been pacified until recently. He would be satisfied with anything but an announcement of failure to the board.

Peter was distracted from his thoughts and turned away from the probing headlights and the dusty roadway. Brian was tapping his ballpoint against the figures on his legal pad.

"My God!" he said. "It's so simple. Gold is a super conductor and would have one of the most recognizable signatures of any element on the planet. How far down the

microwaves will reach, will once again be problematic, but results should be much better with a concentrated mass and shallow deposits. Meddlesome minerals and other potential blockers of the ground penetrating radar will also dissuade the purity and density, but even a small amount of pure gold should register an anomaly reading.

“But carbon, Peter, coal deposits, would certainly cover any veins of gold.” Brian was speaking, but his eyes were forward, regarding the rapidly approaching sodium lights of OPC’s corporate city. A glowing fence line surrounded the massive installation, suggesting the outline of a military base or an ultra modern prison. Brian swallowed hard against the thought of such confinement. He had always been extremely claustrophobic.

Peter slowed the Jaguar as they approached the entrance and security checkpoint. “Good evening,” he said to the guard as he presented his corporate identification.

“Good morning,” was the reply as the security officer examined the credentials.

“And your guest, sir?” the guard was looking inside the car.

Peter looked over to Brian. In normal business hours, only one identification was necessary. Peter also noticed the night watchman was armed. A holstered automatic rested high on the security man’s hip.

Brian was already responding to the request and reaching for his wallet when the beam of a flashlight invaded the sedan. Caught full in the face with the light, Brian instantly began blinking. After only a glance, Peter realized that Brian still looked drunk—flushed face and red-rimmed eyes.

Brian sputtered as he offered his OPC clearance. “My good man, is this really necessary?”

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“Yessir,” answered the guard before he took both sets of credentials and entered the glass and stainless steel checkpoint. As the Jaguar idled, Brian nervously lit a cigarette. Peter watched the guard as Brian smoked.

The guard at the gate was not fat and sloppy like the men of daytime security. This man resembled some kind of mercenary. He was tall, very fit, and carried a manner of arrogance and determination. Upon entering his well-lit security station, the sentry instantly picked up a telephone and was now speaking into the handset while making a photocopy of both sets of identification. After a few more moments on the telephone, he returned with the ID cards.

“Park up front, under the lights, next to the main entrance,” the guard’s voice was curt.

“Can’t we park and enter through Petroleum Discovery?” asked Peter.

“Nossir,” was the answer.

“*Bloody Nazi*,” Brian whispered under his breath, and both men were surprised when the guard leaned forward and said, “Yessir.”

Peter parked as directed and Brian muttered, “Bugger all,” as another armed guard strode forward from the main entrance. This man was an exact copy of the man at the gate.

“Petroleum Discovery, follow me,” the words were out, the guard turned, and Brian and Peter followed.

After a swipe of Peter’s all-access card and a rush of pneumatic pressure opened the sealed door to the satellite mining division, Brian and Peter stepped inside and were alone and away from the escorting security.

“Great buggering, bloody hell,” Brian announced to the closed door and the sealed-off guard on the other side. He walked with Peter past the cubical map stations, the glass-

encased private offices, and the rack-mounted stacks of computer hardware. Finally, they arrived at the split-level den of the satellite control system. At the base of the static-free room, Doctor Brian Pauliss sat at his throne. After a reverent pause, as if the very large plasma-screen monitor was an altar, his fingers began flying over a computer keyboard. After a few moments he stopped.

Both men were now regarding a series of diminishing figures scrolling down on the screen as they waited for the real-time and current position of the satellite to come into view. After a few moments, an image of the earth appeared, turning on its axis. Sunlight was crossing into shadow and daylight into darkness. Bisecting the globe and following the eternal sunset was a series of vertical lines showing the last four orbital paths of the OPC satellite.

Haggly-Ford's "bird" was on a high inclination-polar orbit. With the spacecraft orbiting from south to north, from Antarctic to Arctic regions, a complete worldwide survey could be completed on a routine basis. As the earth continuously turns beneath the satellite path, a new slice of the globe was offered for every 90-minute orbital flight.

Brian reached into his pocket, unfolded his recent notes on the legal pad, and lit a cigarette. Peter as he had done on many occasions when the two men were alone in the dust-free sterile environment turned away from the oversized monitor and approached another smaller computer terminal. He was, as usual, pulling up an encrypted software program to disable the smoke alarms in the environmentally sensitive room.

"There we are, my love," Brian was leaning forward in his seat, his voice almost a purr as he spoke to the satellite control system.

From 210 nautical miles above the earth, Haggly-Ford's

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bird was traveling 18,000 miles-per-hour and just crossing over Morocco and northward into the Straits of Gibraltar.

As Peter returned to the large monitor display, he stood and watched over Brian's shoulder. After another few moments, and another set of lengthy keyboard commands was entered into the system, the satellite responded and began a fresh download of information. Brian had completed the recalibration of the ground penetrating radar and now a plethora of new figures began marching into columns on the right side of the satellite display. Each individual column of numbers was dedicated to a specific return of wavelength. When the searching beam of microwaves crossed from the Moroccan coast and into the Mediterranean Sea, the wavelength signatures changed dramatically. Water was easy to penetrate, the stony African soil much more complex. Over land, the satellite was forced into dealing with a vast combination of sedimentary layers, the identification of complicated minerals, and a rise and fall of vertical terrain.

"Yes, my darling, take your time and study carefully." Brian's remark to the spacecraft was followed by another series of keyboard commands. "A sharper focus of the radar should yield better results with a solid element, and the tickler beam *should* excite the highly conductible molecules of gold. Shallow deposits that are truly dense would be easily recognized." Brian paused and looked up from the keyboard. "Of course, most gold mining is quite deep, or is it?" he asked.

Peter rubbed the stubble on his chin, a sure sign of collective thought. "As I recall, most gold mining in the Transvaal was very deep, six-thousand, even ten-thousand feet. At almost two miles down, the air in the ventilating shafts had to be refrigerated, simply abominable temperatures. On the other hand, you remember the forty-niners out in California in

the California gold rush, Sutter's Mill or something like that. Those old buggers found gold very near the surface, even in creek beds. You remember, panning for gold?"

"Of course, alluvial deposits created and carried by natural erosion. And don't forget, some of those strikes were incredibly rich." Brian paused, checked some numbers on his legal pad, and once again began typing.

Peter continued. "Alluvial deposits in this day and age would be incredibly rare or incredibly remote. Like the diamonds found on the shore in South Africa. Very rare now, but in the 1800's, sizable diamonds could be found walking along the beach."

Brian turned in his seat. "Just like tourists looking for sea-shells."

Peter nodded and pointed to a column of figures scrolling on the monitoring screen.

"If the microwaves are focused in a tighter beam," he said, "The conductive properties of gold should react with a stronger signature." Peter snapped his fingers. "Too right, Brian, narrow the beam. Smaller search areas with each orbit could quite possibly yield much better results than a wide-range, rummage around approach."

Brian's fingers were now flying over the keyboard.

The wavelength signatures dropped in quantity, but the numerical values rose as the traveling beam of microwaves became more concentrated.

Peter spoke again. "Can we introduce a trigger?"

"Absolutely!" Brian answered, but his fingers on the keypads were unstoppable.

"With the radar beams tighter, and the search pattern smaller, we must have a spiral." Peter was thinking aloud. "Can we do a reverse spiral?"

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Brian stopped and turned in his seat. “Of course, when the wavelength signatures, identify a potential deposit, only a small corner or narrow vein would trigger the anomaly display. We need a back-track, a verification.”

“Yes, but not the clockwise spiral as in oil anomaly returns, the satellite travels too fast.” Peter’s comment was acknowledged as Brian nodded and stubbed out his cigarette.

Here was one of the most prominent difficulties with satellite mining. Whenever the ground penetrating radar discovered an underground anomaly, the flight of the orbiting spacecraft was already too far along to register a proper or accurate reading. However, Brian had adapted his carrier wavelickler beam to probe out ahead of the orbital path and potentially refocus the searching radar beams into a spiral pattern around the triggered area of search. The spiral exploration process was better than the wide range, weak signal returns that were offered from broadband radar, but with a clockwise spiral, the speed of the spacecraft combined with the advancing radar was too much area to cover too fast. Conversely, a reverse spiral would travel backward, counter clockwise, and search in a slower, circular pattern for additional anomalies, a confirmation or denial of an actual deposit.

“There, now you have it, my dear.” Brian’s voice was a whisper. He had stopped typing and for the first time was leaning back in his chair. He turned and looked up to Peter. “My God, what have we done?”

Peter smiled when he answered. “Haggly-Ford wanted an oil field in one week. Well, we just might have something better. At any rate, we should know by Monday morning.”

Brian could not return the smile. He looked dejected. The alcohol in his system was gone, as was the excitement of his efforts. Doctor Brian Pauliss had the beginnings of a hangov-

er. He began to rub his temples and asked, “Could it really work?”

“On shallow deposits certainly” Peter nodded again as he spoke. He was trying to lift Brian’s spirits. “It’s about time we got out in the field, and away from this desert. Maybe do some panning for gold ourselves.”

Brian punched in the shutdown sequence to the satellite interface. He rose from his chair as the big plasma screen faded and returned to normal orbital tracking.

“It’s too easy! Why hasn’t anyone thought of this before?” Brian’s voice was filled with doubt.

“Because, old chum, this is the first satellite of its kind, and all these bloody Texans can think about is oil.” Peter frowned after he spoke, and continued in a rush. “What if someone else checks the information download before we do?”

Brian shook his head. “Anyone who checks will only find a copy and paste version of the last five days of input—more underground saltwater seas.” Brian now smiled, but his voice was thin. “Only with a password can any gold anomalies be downloaded, and only at a specific time.”

“And, what might that password be?” Peter’s arm was now around Brian’s shoulder as the men were moving toward the pneumatic door.

Brian pulled a rebellious strand of hair back behind his ear. He looked to Peter and whispered, “Forty-niners.”

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