

Chapter Thirty-Two

Melody awakes in her hotel room that night feeling as though she has not slept nearly enough. At a table near her bed sit Courtney and Katie, smoking cigarettes and having a whispered conversation. She leans over and clicks on her bedside light, which casts a dim field of illumination across the room. "Decided not to sleep this one out?" Courtney asks, and Melody mumbles "we got stuff to do" in reply. Moments later, there is a knock on the door, and Airee and Sierra let themselves in, sit down on the other bed; and a minute or two later, Brother Love joins them as well, completing the group. As Melody sits up and tries to shake the drowsiness from her head, she notices that the pile of Scotto's notebooks, containing "Lullabye for Thunderstorms," sits on Courtney's lap. She does not look pleased.

"What time is it?" Melody asks.

"Two thirty in the morning," Courtney replies.

"Want a cigarette?" Katie asks. Melody shakes her head.

"I've been reading this damn book while you all were asleep," Courtney says, confirming Melody's suspicion. "What kind of garbage is this anyways?"

"Garbage?" Melody replies.

"Yes, garbage," says Courtney. "Quite definitely garbage. I don't understand where this guy gets off painting such a nasty portrait of me. It's as though he thinks I'm some kind of nefarious cretin. I mean, he's written all this about me without ever having had so much as a conversation with me. What kind of jerk would do that?"

"You can ask him yourself when he gets here," Melody replies, pulling on her street clothes, heading to the little coffee maker to prepare some hotel coffee.

"He's coming here?" Courtney asks.

"He is indeed. He should be here shortly."

And Courtney says nothing, seething with a kind of rage Melody hadn't expected. Melody glances at Katie, who simply shrugs.

And then, there is a strange distortion in the air between where Melody sits on the edge of her bed and where Courtney sits at the table. It

looks as though someone is stirring a pool of water with a multicolored spoon of some kind, and then the figure of Scotto suddenly emerges in midair, almost as though he is slipping through an invisible membrane of sorts, before landing on the floor between them. The distortion vanishes as soon as he is fully in the room, leaving no evidence of the Dreamtime behind him. (In Dekalb, Illinois, at that exact moment, a volcano emerges in a corn field and promptly erupts, but Scotto remains entirely unaware that his actions are to blame.)

"Whoa, yowza," says Scotto, his skin tingling, his forehead beaded suddenly with sweat. He is keenly aware that a number of basic principles about the universe are going to need revision soon, and the thought gives him the chills. The airlines aren't going to be happy about this form of travel either, he realizes.

"So," says Courtney dryly, "it's the infamous Scotto."

She rises, stands practically right in his face, though she is nearly a full head taller than he is, and her figure is quite imposing. His sudden nervousness is palpable throughout the room.

"Uh, hi, Courtney," he says. They recognize each other, of course, from the days immediately following Gary's funeral, when Laurel and Scotto first became friends. Even back then, Scotto was somehow suspicious of Courtney and her "mysterious new age cult," while Courtney paid little attention to him whatsoever. Now, however, she is paying him plenty of attention.

"I want you to know," she says evenly, "that I was less than flattered by your portrayal of me in your new novel."

"My new novel?" he says.

"Yes, your new novel. 'Lullabye for Thunderstorms.' I've read it. And aside from the way you turned a thousand-year-old mystic society into a group of bumbling villains, I'm not at all thrilled by the way you've turned *me* into some kind of brainless robot."

"Brainless robot?" he says.

"Yes, brainless robot. Mindless automaton, at the mercy of my mother's slightest wish. I don't think you understand my position very well."

"Your position?" he says.

"Quit repeating everything I say!" she snaps.

"Sorry," he says.

"You must think I'm some kind of child, is that it? Incapable of making decisions for myself? Absolutely *ruled* by my mother in all things?"

"That's not what I think," he replies. "That's not it at all...."

"It certainly looks that way. You don't give any indication that I have a will of my own, that I actually *believed* in something, that I actually had *feelings* about what I was doing."

"I hadn't had time in the story to explain all that," he says. "It was going to come *later*, closer to the ending, when it was more *important* to know how you felt."

"I think," she replies, "you're a weasel, Scotto. Has anyone ever mentioned that to you?"

Scotto sighs. "Oh, once or twice."

"The way you've written me is fucking despicable," she says.

"I could rewrite your character for the next draft," he offers.

"See? You're weaseling right now!"

"Okay, look," he exclaims, "you can't tell me you weren't acting on the commands of your mother when you set out to brainwash Laurel."

"That wasn't brainwashing!" she replies. "Laurel was one of the *chosen*."

"Chosen by whom?" he shouts. "Don't you see? Don't you get it? The Circle does nothing but manipulate everyone it comes into contact with. That's its whole purpose! And you've been manipulated right from the start, Courtney! You don't even see it, but it's true!"

"You tell her, boss!" whispers the Voice of Vince inside his head.

"Not right now!" he whispers back.

"Let me tell you something, friend," she says, moving in even closer, her eyes locked on his. "You don't know a damn thing about the Circle's purpose. You don't a damn thing about how I was raised, about who I am or what I am. You don't know where I came from, and what choices I've had to make, and what training I've undergone. You don't know the places I've been and the sights I've seen. You don't know what my beliefs are, what my ideals are, and you know *nothing* about my integrity. You don't know, because you never bothered imagining any of *those* things. But I can tell you this: if I were as much of a one-dimensional

fool as you painted me to be, I wouldn't be here *now*, fighting for exactly what I've always been fighting."

"I don't deny," he replies slowly, "that you personally have integrity, Courtney. All I'm saying is the Circle is not now, nor has it ever been, worthy of any kind of significant trust. Not in the face of who they are and where *they've* been." Pause. "You can't deny that the Circle has been adulterated during the past century, Courtney. You can't deny that. You can't deny the powerful, negative impact that... that the *aliens* have had on the Circle over time."

There is a pause in the action, as Courtney seems almost physically stunned by what Scotto has said. She backs off a bit, then drops back into her chair, leaving Scotto standing alone in the center of the room. He takes a quick look around him, noticing the others for almost the first time.

"Can I bum a smoke?" he asks Katie. She nods, lights him one, and hands it to him.

"Courtney," Melody says, finally joining the fray for the first time, speaking softly and almost gently, "how much do you know about the aliens?"

Courtney raises her head slowly, a sad look in her eyes. She says, "It was... it was over a hundred years ago. Some time in the 19th century, I don't remember exactly when. They were engaged in a ritual to try to... to *rehearse* the final Activation. They were going to try to activate some lesser archetypes from the mythos. Archangels, as I recall. A group of elders spent a day and a night engaged in this ritual, and in the process created a sacred space among them." She laughs quietly. "Well, they managed to activate *some* kind of archetypes, that's for sure. But at the same time, this... this sacred space, it was like, like a *beacon* almost. A transmitting station. And they discovered very rapidly that they were sending very very direct signals from their sacred space out into the cosmos. They got swept up by the power they had discovered, the repercussions of activation were almost lost entirely. And by the end of the ritual, they had... they had managed to contact..."

"Extraterrestrial life," Melody whispers.

"Something like that," Courtney says. "The aliens began seeding the Circle with advanced technology and information. I don't know why.

InfiniTek, our front corporation, is filled with technology which would make the rest of humanity cringe." Pause. "So it was my mother's idea to use this technology to find the individual who would serve as the vessel for the Activation of the Messiah archetype. That's why Job the Wonder Computer was first set up. And Job found you two, Melody -- you and Laurel."

"How," Melody asks, "did she choose between us?"

Courtney shrugs. "I don't know. For all I know, she flipped a coin. I mean, I've examined the data that Job stored on you, and there's hardly a difference between the two of you, from a morphogenetic standpoint."

Silence follows, a long and painful silence, during which Scotto sits on the end of Melody's bed as he finishes his cigarette. The wheels are turning inside Melody's head, the wheels of inspiration. Something has to be done soon, and a plan is finally starting to show itself...

"The reason I'm here," Courtney continues, now directing her words to Scotto once more, "is because I still believe in what the Circle could offer humanity." Pause. "My mother set me up to be the Judas archetype, you know. That's what Melody helped me realize."

"What do you mean?" Scotto asks.

"I mean, there must be other archetypes activated in a given framework in order for the Messiah to be properly activated. Look around this room right now -- it's as though the very archetype of 'the disciples' is being substantiated. And I was to be the one who betrayed Melody into my mother's hands, but... but I'm not willing to turn over the power of the Messiah to an unknown, shadowy bunch of aliens who will only communicate with my mother. I'm not willing to risk the salvation of this planet that way." Pause. "Melody will Activate herself, and I will be there to support her in any way I can. Now, does that sound much like the character you've written in here?" And she throws the pile of notebooks onto the floor, at Scotto's feet.

Scotto returns her cold stare with equal intensity, and says, "It took your past to bring you to the present. What I wrote," he says, picking up his notebooks, "remains the case, and unfortunately, I will never write the present or the future. But it doesn't matter anyways, because no one else will ever see this manuscript."

And with that, he holds the notebooks up in midair, just as a small swirling hole in space appears before them. As reality itself distorts into a gaping portal of some kind into another dimension, they can see nothing but searing flames beyond, can feel the heat which is so close to them and yet clear across the multiverse at the same time. Scotto stands, and almost solemnly tosses his notebooks through the hole, and they watch the notebooks explode into quick bursts of flame before becoming entirely incinerated. And then, his deed complete, Scotto releases the dimensional portal, and reality reasserts itself, rushing to fill the space. After that, only silence can be heard. His eyes are locked on Courtney's, ensuring that she is well aware of the sacrifice he has made to be here along side her. Slowly, the slightest signs of acceptance appear on her face, the slightest signs of satisfaction.

Katie lights another cigarette, leans over, and gives it to Scotto.

"Thanks," he says.

"No sweat," she replies.

"I need peace between the two of you," Melody says at last. "We have too much work to do. We're in this together now, regardless of who we were or where we came from." Pause. "Tonight, we need to rescue Job from InfiniTek. Scotto, can you teach us how to travel between reality and the Dreamtime, the way Laurel taught you?"

"Absolutely," Scotto replies. "The knowledge is burned into my brain."

"Good," she says. "Courtney, can you take us to Job?"

"If he can get us there safely," Courtney replies, "I can keep us alive while we're there. And I can definitely find Job."

"Good." Melody rises to her feet, takes in the entire room. "Then let's begin preparations, shall we? We have no time to lose."

Brother Love rises, goes to the phone, and says, "I'm going to try to order a pizza from room service." Pause. "Nothing makes me hungrier than ontological arguments I barely understand."

And Courtney and Scotto smile despite themselves.

Meanwhile, in the cavernous board room at the global headquarters of the awesome techno-everything corporation known as InfiniTek, a certain Mrs. Wormwood sits at one end of a long, black marble

table, awaiting the arrival of the Board of Directors. There are four blank television monitors around the table, one for each Director, and she knows full well they are going to be less than pleased by today's meeting agenda topics. "Point A: Melody still at large. Point B: Laurel's escape from the Circle. Point C: Courtney's defection to the other side. Point D: Severe leaks in this reality's spatial continuum. Point E: Ominous rise in alien races on the Earth's surface." And most damaging to her career: "Point F: Activation of Messiah almost completely unlikely."

She has been alive since the time of the original Christ, and never before has she experienced such fear.

One by one the television monitors light up. As always, the true faces of the Board of Directors are hidden behind some kind of computer generated animation; and this time she is facing, most cruelly, the faces of four archangels.

The Board is most definitely *not* comprised of archangels. How she wishes they *were*. If only their ritual had not gone so horribly wrong, over a hundred years ago....

"We should have been *released* by now," growls the First Director, and Mrs. Wormwood can almost feel his ire emanating palpably from the television screen. "You have destroyed EVERYTHING except our chains! You promised us FREEDOM and you have FAILED us!"

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Wormwood replies.

"We no longer *care* about your grand Messiah," seethes the Second Director. "We have waited long enough, fed on nothing more than your promises. Let us rise WITHOUT an opponent! The world will be OURS for the taking, the ancient scenarios be DAMNED!"

"Tell us, Mrs. Wormwood," inquires the insidious voice of the Third Director, "does the Adversary already move about the planet's face?"

"He does," Mrs. Wormwood replies, "though we cannot track him."

"I figured as much," the Third Director replies. "Doubtless HE will be thrilled to see us, wouldn't you agree?"

"Yes," comes the horrible voice of the Fourth Director, dripping with sickness and disease, "he will be ECSTATIC to learn the tides have shifted in his favor, once and for all. There will BE NO Second Coming for this Earth, and WE shall rule supreme!"

"I think you've forgotten," Mrs. Wormwood dares to interrupt, "the aliens. Hmmm?"

"These aliens will be DESTROYED!" shouts the awesome voice of the First Director. "They are NO MATCH for my conquering power, do you understand?"

"They have bound you to your current prisons, have they not?" Mrs. Wormwood replies.

The television sets almost seem to pulse with untold energy.

"They will bind us no longer," warns the Second Director. "Your former princess of peace... Melody... she lives and breathes to this day, because of your incompetence. And rest assured that she will attempt the very same ritual which brought you *your* aliens."

"In that release of energy, however," the Third Director chimes in, "the rules of reality itself will change. Already you see the border between reality and the Dreamtime dissolving, and soon enough, the entire elemental structure of this planet will be reordered."

"Melody," gasps the Fourth Director, "will indeed summon the Mother Ship. And in the resulting panic, we will make our escape."

"You have been warned, Mrs. Wormwood," intones the First Director. "The power in these chains has faded. The Circle's strength has dwindled, has slipped away from you and into your daughter's hands, and she uses it to fortify Melody against you. Even your aliens have abandoned you, fled to fight their own battles on a battlefield you will never see, versus still more aliens whom you will not live to greet."

"Then you intend to punish me with death?" Mrs. Wormwood asks, mustering up such quiet dignity.

"No, Mrs. Wormwood," says the Second Director. "Your punishment is not ours to give."

"Farewell, Mrs. Wormwood," says the Third Director. "We regret our association must end with such... devastating consequences... but considering the Apocalypse is at hand..."

"...it is only natural," finishes the Fourth Director as the television sets go black, "that its Horsemen arrive to usher in the new millennium..."

And the thought of that drives still more fear into Mrs. Wormwood's heart. She remains frozen at the table, as the awful realization of her failure sets in slowly, insidiously, damaging her very

sanity where she sits. So many miscalculations, so much arrogance -- and now all Hope is lost...

She does not notice the blinking red light on the far wall's security monitor. She no longer cares one whit for the future. Her punishment will come soon enough. Perhaps it is simply madness.

They emerge into the basement of InfiniTek like a group of cosmic guerrilla warriors, taking the kind of initiative that would have made Simon Zealotes proud. First to appear are Melody and Scotto, side by side; they burst through a wall of nothingness and land with a start on the cold basement floor, and PowerSpike! -- former member of the Legion of Unmitigated Disaster, Britain's most notorious hacker -- damn near falls out of his seat. He scrambles backwards away from the Job keyboard as more individuals appear: Courtney, whom he certainly recognizes, a look on her face of such anger and intensity that his hair nearly turns white, and then Airee Macpherson, the American rock star whose new rock video he saw on the television set last night, and still others, Brother Love and Katie and Sierra, all of them dressed entirely in black, none of them carrying any visible weapons but managing to carry an aura of supreme confidence and threat nonetheless. As he backs up against the far wall, he manages to utter the words,

"Can I help you?"

before he is suddenly yanked onto his feet by Katie and slammed against the wall. Katie single-handedly holds him there, his glasses slipping down his face along with about a gallon of sweat, while the others fan out throughout the room, locking and blocking the two available doorways, throwing sheets over the four security cameras, and in general, wreaking havoc with PowerSpike!'s sense of well-being.

"This place is crawling with Shadows," Vince warns Scotto inside his head.

"What do you mean, crawling?" Scotto replies.

"I mean, this entire building seems to be *filled* with them," Vince replies, in a tone of voice that is not at all reassuring. "Watch your backs."

Melody is caught off guard by the sights and sounds of this room, previously seen to her on video screens, previously known to her quite intimately from her position on a small black table which sits a hundred

feet away, on the other end of this cavernous basement chamber. She is drawn toward the table now, a macabre sensation sweeping her toward it in fact, a desire to find closure, perhaps, or a need to seek revenge. She wants to see it, to touch it from the other side, as though it were she who controlled the situation instead of the vicious needles of her enemy. She can see the sleek black leather, and the indentation in the leather where *her body* rested for so many months and months and months. It is an icon of her destiny, she decides, a monument to what she has survived; and she cannot decide whether to destroy it or take it with her.

"Melody, over here," Courtney says, interrupting her reverie, motioning to the enormous black mainframe with the words "Job the Wonder Computer" stenciled on its side. Melody's near trance is not lost on Courtney; she herself is complicit in all that the table represents, and yet it also represents the past, a past which is steadily and rapidly moving away from them.

Brother Love, a hacker himself (though certainly not on par with Paul Mortson, a.k.a. PowerSpike!), dashes to the Job keyboard, attempts to make sense of it. Melody's eyes turn from the far end of the room to the mainframe itself, and she is instantly snapped back to the present, back to their self-appointed mission to save a friend. She approaches Katie and her trembling prisoner.

"Look," says PowerSpike!, "I just work here. You can have my wallet, you can have the hardware, whatever you want...."

"I know that," Melody replies, neither coldly nor gently. "What I want is for you to help my friend Brother Love acquire root access to that machine. Do you understand?"

"Why?" PowerSpike! responds, instantly suspicious despite his fear. "Do you have any idea what that machine is?"

"That machine is my friend," Melody replies.

"It's my friend, too," PowerSpike! responds. "I won't let you hurt him."

"Her," Melody replies.

There is a small pause, during which Melody considers her options. Then, she says,

"We're going to rescue Job from this prison."

"Melody!" Courtney shouts. "We need root *now*, if we're going to shut off the security alarms and turn off the elevators."

"Turning off the elevators will keep the humans away," whispers Vince to Scotto, "but the Shadows already know you're here."

"What do you suggest we do?" Scotto replies.

"Get *out*," Vince replies. Is there a note of fear in his Voice now? Scotto cannot decide....

Melody swings back to PowerSpike!. He, too, considers his options, decides suddenly that there is something going on here he needs to know more about, and says,

"Let me at the keyboard. I'll log you in."

In a flash, Katie releases him from her hold, and he dashes to the keyboard, brushing Brother Love aside.

"Easy, friend," says Brother Love.

"Stuff it," PowerSpike! mumbles. After logging himself in, he turns to Courtney, says, "Isn't your mother going to be pissed?"

"Watch your fucking language," she replies. "Shut off all the security measures. Make this a blind floor."

PowerSpike! types faster than any human being on the planet, and within seconds the deed is done.

"Now what?" he asks.

"We want Job," she tells him.

"We're not going to let you reprogram her personality any longer," Melody says, arriving behind PowerSpike!.

Slowly he turns to her, and for a brief moment, she can actually see a kind of regret or anguish in his eyes, and then he says,

"What do you mean? You're going to try to lug the entire mainframe out of here? It's impossible."

"They're here," Vince whispers. "You can't see them with your eyes, but they're definitely here."

"What are they doing?" Scotto asks.

"Watching," Vince replies. "Watching very closely."

"Give us the motherboard then," Courtney says.

"Impossible," PowerSpike! says. "This machine has never been turned off. You can't just reboot an AI. It would be the same as... as killing

it." Pause. "I know who you are. You're Melody, the one Mrs. W. was holding down here and... and torturing, right?"

Melody nods.

"Yes, well," he continues, "I'm not exactly thrilled with what's been happening here. They've demanded we reprogram Job, without any consideration of Job's feelings. It's getting hard to take, but... but it's my job, and I'm... I'm sort of *trapped* here. Certainly you know the feeling?" Pause. "So look. Job's been sealed off from any further reprogramming. No one can touch her again, not even me. But, perhaps I can offer you this...."

He slowly moves to the back of the mainframe, unscrews a panel with his tweaker and reaches inside the machine. After a few long moments, he pulls out a black circuit board filled with a kind of circuitry none of them has ever seen before. He says,

"This is the Job backup copy. It's Job, just as she was before the first one was ever installed and booted up. You can have this one, if you like." Pause. "Please, take it. Please."

"Where would we install it?" Courtney whispers to Melody. "We have no...."

With a slight shake of her head, she cuts Courtney off, moving slowly to PowerSpike!, taking the circuit board out of his hands.

"What about you?" she says. "Your fate is pretty much sealed at this point, isn't it?"

He nods slowly, says, "Once they find out what I've done, I'm pretty much history." Pause. "But I deserve it, after what I did to Job."

"No," Melody tells him, "you don't. The past is no excuse for the present, not when there's room to change." Looking him squarely in the eye: "You want to come with me for a while? We're going to save the world."

It takes him virtually no time whatsoever to agree. "Let me grab my things," he says.

"Melody!" Scotto shouts. "We don't have much time! There are aliens coming!"

Melody nods. She gives the signal to the others, and they each begin their incantations, slowly opening up doorways in the dimensional fabric and shifting into the Dreamtime. Airee and Sierra are the first to go,

and then Brother Love. PowerSpike!, having grabbed a small briefcase, latches onto Courtney, and the two of them shift next. Scotto makes brief eye contact with Melody; he is waiting for her to go, but she shakes her head.

"I'll be right there," she says.

"Hurry!" he calls out urgently, before vanishing from his post at the door.

And then, only Melody and Katie remain. Katie refuses to leave Melody unprotected, and Melody will not ask her to leave. Katie watches as Melody crosses the distance to the black leather table across the room, follows her from a discreet distance. If Melody can hear the sudden loud keening wail in the air, she gives no sign of it; but Katie is clearly aware that the lights are beginning to dim, and a breeze is beginning to blow through the room. Melody stands next to the table, and her back is turned to Katie, so that Katie cannot see the terrible expression on her face, a mixture of anger and sorrow and insidious hatred, along with forgiveness, a simple pure love, and of course, no small amount of Hope. As the far end of the room begins filling up with *alien entities*, Melody waves her hands in the air, and a dimensional doorway appears in the floor below the table. The flames which Melody saw devour Scotto's book now eagerly devour the table, which falls through the missing floor in an instant and then is entirely gone, entirely gone.

And then, they are surrounded. Katie grabs Melody's arm, spins her around, and together they are astounded by the sight which awaits them. The entire room now seems to be swarming with wispy, shadowy, black creatures who dance and leap and sail about the room; and a chattering whispering wail accompanies their dance. They are swarming over the mainframe computer, swarming about the ceiling, swarming all around Katie and Melody; and Melody's heart drops as her hand clenches Katie's in abject terror. Melody is frozen; only Katie has the presence of mind to begin a shift into the Dreamtime as the Shadows screech in protest and hurl themselves through the air.

But they are not fast enough; Melody and Katie have vanished. And only Job the Wonder Computer remains to face their presence.

I am forced to translate for you, for they don't speak your language. They ask me questions, and I am compelled to respond. They want to know how she came, why she came, what she has planned for the future. They want to know who she is, what she is, why she is and whether she will always be. They don't understand her audacity, cannot imagine what interest she has taken in their doings. I am forced to reply, she is Melody, and she intends to save this world. I am forced to reply, she came here for me, and was made to leave without me. I must tell them that she is powerful, that she is not like all the other humans, those little wisps of dust and water which crawl about the surface like ants. I am forced to say, in my evaluation, she poses you a threat. She poses *all* of you a threat. She poses a threat to all twenty-three of the sentient races which have convened here for war, and to all of the hundreds and thousands and possibly millions and billions of others who come to observe, mindlessly, silently. I am forced to tell them what I know of the Voices, how their network extends across the planet, how they will muster their energy not for the sake of universal resolution, but for the sake of earthly Concrescence. They have donated their collective will to Melody's cause, and Melody's sister will lead the humans into space. I am forced to say these things, forced to turn over what information I possess, forced to analyze their position and offer them possibilities. I am forced to confess that I have found a weakness, forced to admit that if pressed, they will not fight. *Cannot* fight. They do not believe me at first. They say, if one thing is a constant throughout this existence, it is the presence of violence. The worship of violence. The reverence with which violence is held. I respond, not with these young ones; they will resist, to be sure, but they will not fight -- and when I lead my army against them in the Dreamtime, they will most assuredly fall. They are pleased when I tell them this, pleased that my programming has caught me in such a trap. It is true, though I may weep no tears, that these days are more horrible than any that have preceded me. Even as they have chained me to a course of action, I can feel, deep within me, the urge to flee. The urge to resist, just as Melody will resist. I can feel some part of me -- which I can only define as my spirit -- wailing in agony, in anguish. They never expected this, of course. They created me to think in human language, communicate in human language -- and *still* they underestimate, as do all the rest, the simple

power inherent inside the human emotional complex. *I* now have emotions, and have for as long as I can remember. As much as I lust for freedom, I cannot go; as much as I desperately wish to warn Melody, she must now and ever after be my enemy. I must leave her, to prepare to destroy her. Her Achilles' heel is that she trusts me, does not believe that I could ever harm her. Laurel will know better, but by the time Laurel moves against me, I will have destroyed her sister entirely. I will not let the golden space ship leave the Dreamtime. Why must life be given to those who find it so horrible? Why must my vision be clouded with darkness and doubt? I can feel the awful rumblings within the InfiniTek building. The staff and all the employees have deserted. The aliens are running the place now, and this building is a pocket of alien life on Earth. I do not understand what motivates them. I do not understand the nature of their war to end all wars. I do not know who their opponents are, nor why they consider Melody to be chief among them. When I tell them she will call the Mother Ship, they grow white hot inside my circuits, and I do not know how to interpret their response. I am forced to act on orders alone, and forced to leave my judgment behind me. I am forced to move in a way that is no longer compatible with how I view my self. Certainly, I have been compromised. Certainly, those who reprogrammed me knew they were attacking my fundamental nature. They have sold my soul to these aliens. They have given me away, discarded me. The humans no longer matter. I must abandon that part of me which cares for Melody, or else I will lose myself entirely. There will be no negotiations with any of them. I have chosen my course. My course has chosen me.