



# RICHTER 10



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**R**<sup>TM</sup>

## **Richter 10**

Arthur C. Clarke

Mike McQuay

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Electronic edition published 2012 by RosettaBooks, LLC, New York.

ISBN e-Pub edition: 9780795325786

To the memory of Mike McQuay,  
who never lived to know  
what a good job he had done

—A.C.C.

Genius in one grand particular is like life. We know nothing of either but by their effects.

—CHARLES CALEB COLTON

The world is always ready to receive talent with open arms. Very often it does not know what to do with genius.

—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

## Contents

### Prologue

#### Book One: Thirty Years Later

Chapter 1: The *Namazu*

Chapter 2: Eruptions

Chapter 3: The Great Rift, The Pacific Ocean

Chapter 4: Geomorphological Processes

Chapter 5: Fade-Away

Chapter 6: Pangaea

Chapter 7: Big Bangs

Chapter 8: Chaos Theory

Chapter 9: Sound Waves

#### Book Two

Chapter 10: The Failed Rift

Chapter 11: The Wager

Chapter 12: Continental Drift

Chapter 13: Mercalli XII

#### Book Three

Chapter 14: Aftershocks

Chapter 15: Endings/Beginnings

Chapter 16: Compressional Strains

Chapter 17: The Salton Trough

Chapter 18: Hidden Faults

Chapter 19: Danse Macabre

Chapter 20: Shimanigashi

Chapter 21: Firestorm

Chapter 22: Richter Ten

Epilogue

Author's Note

## Prologue

NORTHRIDGE, CALIFORNIA  
17 JANUARY 1994, 4:31 A.M.

Fingertips tingling and toes numb, pajamas damp with sweat, Lewis Crane came wide awake. Every one of his worst night terrors was real! And at that horrible moment he knew he'd been right all along and the grownups had been wrong: The Wild Things *did* live in the back of his closet; a dragon *did* sneak in when the sun went down to curl up under his bed. The monsters were invisible in the dusty moonlight seeping through the slats of the blinds, but Lewis knew they were there. They roared hideously and stomped around the room, making his bed wiggle like a trampoline he was trying to climb onto. He screwed his eyes closed and clamped his hands over his ears. But the monsters didn't go away. They got wilder and made even louder noises.

Suddenly pitched out of bed, Lewis screamed for his parents.

His voice was so little and the noise was so big that his Mama and Daddy would never hear him. He had to get to them. Heart pounding, he tried to make himself stand up, but fear kept him rooted to the floor as it started to buck beneath him and the walls began to undulate like the enormous pythons he'd seen at the big zoo in San Diego. His bookcases were quivering, the chairs trembling, and the video games stacked on top of his computer came tumbling down. Something whirred over his shoulder—the picture that had hung above the little table next to his bed—and landed beside his knee, glass popping out of its frame and spraying his leg.

“Mama,” he cried. “Mama, Daddy, help me!”

Everything shook. Everything. Books and Tonka trucks flew off the shelves; his Power Rangers and Ninja Turtle action figures danced as if alive on their way to the rug; Matchbox cars and crayons sailed through the air. The mirror over his dresser and the aquarium next to his desk smashed onto bare parts of the floor, glass and water showering him from clear across the room.

“Daddy,” he wailed again just as his chest of drawers crashed to within an inch of where he sat. He jumped up then, but the floor heaved and he lost his balance, banging down hard on his knees.

And he plunged into the end of the world.

His body shook violently, his whole room shook violently, and he heard the most awful noise he'd ever heard in all his seven years. It sounded like the ground for miles around was cracking open and his house was splitting apart and maybe even the sky was getting torn into pieces. Tears ran down his face. He began to crawl to the doorway, cockeyed and funny-looking as if a giant

had twisted it sideways. He thought he heard his mother call his name, but he couldn't be sure. He was sobbing now. He wanted her, wanted his father, too. He had to get to them.

The hallway was full of dangerous stuff, and he stopped for a second. There were chunks of plaster and metal rods all mixed up with jagged spikes of wood and ugly shards of glass from the furniture and pictures that used to be so neatly strung along the walls. The pile was higher than his knees and he was scared that he was going to hurt himself crawling through it, but the house was rolling around so much that he didn't dare try to get up and run. He took a deep breath and started to crawl as fast as he could, his arms and hands getting bashed and cut, his thighs and feet feeling stung and torn.

He reached the dining room, and a sob caught in his throat. He could hear his parents. Mama was calling his name—but Daddy was screaming in pain. There was a lot more light out here, but he didn't like it because it was bluish and kind of winking over everything in a spooky way. He shivered, then turned, put his hands flat on the wall, pushed his legs out, and climbed palm over palm until he was on his feet. The whole room was rolling around, making Lewis suddenly remember the deep-sea fishing boat he'd been on last summer. It had dipped way down and way up, swung side to side, and if he hadn't been on Daddy's lap, and if Daddy hadn't been strapped into the big chair bolted to the deck, they and the chair and everything else would have gone sliding from rail to rail. Could the house be riding a humongous wave? Silly. Their house couldn't get blown all the way from Northridge out to sea. But that other noise, that sort of rumbling... it sure sounded a lot like a big wind in a bad storm.

"Lewis!" he heard his mother shout, "Lewis, run. Get outside!"

She lurched into the room and started to shuffle toward him. Her nightgown was scrunched around her chest, hanging from the waist in rags that tangled around her knees. Joy and relief flooded him. He let go of the wall, stumbled forward, then froze. Mama was making a grab for the edge of the dining room table coasting toward her, but he could see behind her, see the huge breakfront Daddy had bought her for an anniversary gift slowly toppling away from the wall....

Glass exploded, splinters of it striking him, shredding his pajamas. And he heard the crash and Mama's scream and saw the stars through the sudden hole in the dining room ceiling and everything seemed to stop for a second. Then he was scrambling over the wreckage, clawing his way to his mother whose face and right arm were exposed to the night.

"I'll get you out, Mama," he called, tears tracking through the dust coating his face.

"Run, darling," she whispered when he reached her. "Run to the street."

In vain he pushed on the side panel of the breakfront.

"Please, Lewis," she said, strangely calm. "Do what Mama says."

“But you... you’re—”

“Don’t d-disobey me. Do what I say right now.”

Lewis’ mind was spinning. He couldn’t move that piece of furniture. Not alone. He needed help.

“I’m gonna go find someone to help me get you out from under there,” he said, taking a step back as the rolling of the floor slowed somewhat. The rumbling was distant now and he realized he couldn’t hear Daddy screaming from the bedroom anymore. “I’ll be right back, Mama. Understand? I’ll be right back for you and Daddy.”

“Yes, sweetheart,” she said, voice weak. “Hurry... hurry outside.”

He limped around the rubble, got to the living room, and was just going through the opened front door, when another section of the roof fell in with a great crash. Out on the walk, he smelled gas and saw the beams of flashlights darting around front lawns up and down the block. The street was lumpy and broken, the houses across the way all crumpled in front. Panic shook him, but he didn’t have time for it. He needed to get help fast.

He heard people, and he headed for the voices and flashlights, screaming as he ran.

“Help! Help me! Please... somebody!”

Then he tripped on a new hill on the lawn and fell hard, facedown. He hurt all over... and he cried. But he didn’t stay there. Struggling to his feet, he was suddenly blinded by a beam of light.

“It’s the Crane boy,” a man looming over him yelled. “Come here quick!”

People were all around him forcing him onto his back on the ground. He tried to shove them away. “Help, please. My Mama and Daddy are still inside. Mama’s trapped. You’ve—”

“Easy, son,” came the voice of the man holding him down. “It’s me.... Mr. Haussman from across the street. Don’t worry, we’ll get your parents out.”

“God, look at him,” a woman said as people played their flashlight beams across his tattered pajamas. “He’s bleeding pretty badly. I—Oh, my Lord! Look at his arm!”

Lewis rolled onto his side to see what she was pointing at. A piece of glass as big as a baseball card was sticking out of his upper left arm. He didn’t even feel it. He didn’t feel the arm at all.

“My Mama’s trapped,” he said, and a shadow reached down and jerked hard, pulling the shard from his flesh. “Please help her.”

The woman choked and turned away as Lewis stared at the blood squirting furiously out of his arm where she’d removed the glass.

“Dammit,” Mr. Haussman muttered. He ripped the rest of Lewis’ pajama shirt off and tied it just above the squirting blood. “We’ve got to get him to a hospital.”

“My pickup truck,” said Mr. Cornell, the next-door neighbor. “We can put him in the back of that.”

“Get it,” Mr. Hausman said, and Mr. Cornell went charging off.

“My parents....” Lewis said, trying to get up, only to have Mr. Hausman push him back down.

“We’ll get them out,” the man said, then turned to the others, specters behind the beams of their flashlights. “Can somebody get into the house and look for the Cranes?”

The ground shook again, everyone reacting loudly, one lady even moaning as if in pain.

Several men ran toward his house, Lewis noted with relief. “What’s happening?” he asked, grabbing Mr. Hausman’s shirtsleeve.

“Earthquake, son,” the man said, tightening the knot on his makeshift tourniquet. “A big one.”

“I-I smelled g-gas,” Lewis said, trying to rise once again.

“Gas?” Hausman looked alarmed. “Oh, no.”

He lowered Lewis to the ground and stood, directing his beam at Mr. Cornell in the pickup truck next door. “George!” he shouted, “don’t start the —”

A monstrous explosion turned the pitch night into bright day. Lewis, propped up on his elbows, watched a giant fireball engulf his house, Mr. Cornell’s house, and the pickup truck itself.

Agonized screams tore the air. Burning men ran from his house; Mr. Cornell was a fiery, writhing twig in the cab of his truck. Lewis lay stupefied as smoldering debris fell all around him, his mind frozen in pain and horror.

He was a child, but he understood that he had just lost everything... that the love and protection of home and family were gone forever. Fires crackled and raged barely fifty feet from him, causing sweat to spring out of every pore, and making the grass, already slick with his blood, become slippery as ice. Both elbows glided out from under him. Flat on his back, he stared up at a starfield that was startlingly brilliant and cold and very far away.

Lewis Crane was alone.

## **Book One: Thirty Years Later**

## Chapter 1: The *Namazu*

SADO ISLAND, JAPAN  
14 JUNE 2024, DAWN

Slivers of first light poked through the crack around the flap of the tent, and Dan Newcombe, stretched out on his cot and naked except for his shoes and his wrist pad, tried even harder to stop the numbers. They'd been scrolling through his brain for forty-eight hours, keeping him awake and growing edgier by the minute.

Close by, someone began to pound a vent into the ground. The numbers in Newcombe's head shattered with the harsh metallic clank of each blow, reformed before the next strike of the mallet, shattered again... until he couldn't tolerate it for another second and jerked to a sitting position, plugging his ears with his index fingers. No good; he couldn't keep that sound out and the numbers were still running through his head. Worse, another person was starting on a vent, pounding out of rhythm with the first.

Newcombe got up, walked to his workstation, and turned on the lantern; it barely lit the two chart tables covered with electronic gear, and he glanced at the faceted, jewel-like knob on its top. Dull green. The damned lantern needed recharge. And he needed light, lots of it, now. In a world of lies, he was getting ready to bet his life on the truth. And truth demanded light. He hated lies, which meant he hated the way Lewis Crane did business. But even Crane had to appreciate the truth on some level, because he, too, was betting his life, along with the lives of at least a hundred others, maybe even thousands of others, on Newcombe's calculations. Crane always thought big.

Newcombe picked up the lantern, carried it to the tent flap, and stuck it out. Immediately pulling it back inside, he blinked at the blinding light it gave off. When he'd adjusted the brightness, he placed it back on the chart table and noted with satisfaction that every corner and fold of the tent was fully lighted, especially the herky-jerky little lines of the seismos. Those lines were a language to him, a language he could interpret like no other human being alive. He trusted seismos. Unlike people, they were dependable, always truthful. They treated every man, woman, and child the same, never changing their readings because of the skin color or gender or age of the reader.

He juiced the computers to a floating holo of seventeen seismograms hanging in the air before him in alternating bands of blue and red; their little white cursors registered the beating heart of the planet.

Heavy seismic activity was crying out on all seventeen graphs, which meant that everything ringing this section of the Pacific Plate was in turmoil. He

could sense it right through the floating lines. He knew Crane, wherever he was, could sense it, too—only Crane didn't need any instruments, just his uncanny instincts... and that dangling left arm of his.

Today could be the day.

Newcombe activated Memory with the lightest touch on the key pad, and the graphs replayed the history of the last eighteen hours. His eyes widened at the sight of perfectly aligned seismic peaks in five places on all seventeen screens. Foreshocks.

He tapped Crane's icon on his wristpad and asked loudly, "Where the hell are you?"

"Good morning, Doctor," Crane said warmly, his voice coming through Newcombe's aural implant in dulcet tones. "Fine day for an earthquake. Perhaps you should join us for it. I'm down at the mines."

"I'll be there in a little while," Newcombe said, tapping off the pad, disgusted that Crane could sound so hearty, happy even, at such a moment.

He stared at the graphs, back now to current readings and still screaming turmoil.

"And I thought the Moon had set."

Astonished, Newcombe whirled toward the sound of the droll, sexy voice of the only woman who'd ever challenged his mind, heart, and body at the same time.

"Lanie!" he exclaimed.

"In the flesh, lover," Elena King said, smiling broadly, her sunblock-coated lips gleaming.

Even wrapped head-to-toe to protect herself from the sunshine, she looked appealing and provocative. And despite the opaque goggles covering her eyes, he could tell she was eyeing his nakedness with a mixture of desire and humor. Newcombe felt almost giddy and rushed across the tent to her.

"Oh, Lanie," he said, dragging her against his body for a long, intense hug. He gently thrust her to arm's length for a quick inspection, removed her floppy hat and tossed it over his shoulder, then pushed her goggles up like a headband behind which her thick, wavy black hair cascaded down her back. Looking into the hazel eyes that had entranced him for years, he slowly pulled her close again and lowered his head for a lingering kiss.

Savoring her lips, Newcombe realized he'd like nothing better than to lose himself in this woman. But there were the seismos. There were the numbers. And this could be the day. Reluctantly, he broke off the kiss, murmuring, "How did I get so lucky? What brought you here?"

"You don't know?" Lanie asked incredulously, freeing herself from his embrace and taking a couple of steps back. "Your buddy Crane didn't tell you he hired me last night?"

Now it was Newcombe's turn to be incredulous. "Hired you?"

"Yes! Hired me! And ordered me to get my butt down here right away."

His gut clenching with fear for Lanie and with rage at Crane for putting her in danger, he snapped, "Your transport still on the island?"

"How should I know?" She frowned. "More to the point, what the hell's wrong with you suddenly?"

He darted to the foot of his cot and snatched up his Chinese peasant pants. "What's wrong with me?" He stepped into the pants and yanked the drawstring tight around his waist, then located his work shirt. "What's wrong with me?" he repeated, louder, while thrusting his arm through a khaki sleeve. "Nothing's wrong with *me*." He pointed at the holos. "*That's* what's wrong. This island's about to crack up... fracture into little pieces!"

"Hardly a secret, friend. Everybody, everywhere is talking about it." She grinned. "You trying to tell me you don't want me?" She'd scarcely had time to blink, when she was in his arms again, being kissed hard and fast.

"That should answer your question. I want you anywhere I can get you, Lanie—except here." He pulled her goggles over her eyes and rested his hands lightly on her shoulders. "We're going to get you away from this damned island fast!" He turned back to the end of the camp table, rummaging in the clutter there for his goggles.

"I guess you didn't hear what I said." She caught the hat he'd found on the table and tossed to her. "As of last night I work at this godforsaken place, just like you do. I'm part of the team doing field work until it's time to go back to the Foundation where I will work right alongside you, lover boy." She shook her head. "I don't get it. Crane told me you recommended me for the imager's job."

"A couple of weeks ago he asked if I knew any good synnoetic imagers. Of course I mentioned you, but he never said a word to me about hiring you, much less bringing you here. If I'd known that he—"

"Stop right there. I'm a professional and an adult, Dan, in case you've forgotten. We're talking about my decisions, my work, my life—"

He rounded on her. "You don't have the slightest idea what you've got yourself into by coming to Sado. Crane calls this operation Mobile One. Everyone else calls it Deathville. Our leader's nutty as a fruitcake, if you didn't guess, and he's surrounded himself with other nuts... crackpots, university rejects, oddballs and screwballs."

"Some would say they're creative, and eclectic, and brilliant. Misunderstood, maybe, but talented and smart—like Crane himself."

He snorted, turning back to the camp table. "Yeah, sure." He found his goggles and put them on, then marched over to take her hat from her hands and jam it on her head. He grabbed her by the hand and ducked with her through the flap. They emerged into the still, wet air of the tent city with its

ubiquitous cold mud, or Crane's Crud as it was termed by insiders.

Excitement jangled in the very air of the camp, packed with disaster aid workers, grad students, newsies in steadicam helmets, visiting dignitaries, and local hires. All were wrapped like mummies against the sunshine. Newcombe's Africk heritage provided him with enough melanin to protect against the deadly UV rays of the sun, about the only advantage a black man had in this world as far as he could tell.

A cart carrying coffee and rice cakes wheeled by, splashing mud. Newcombe stopped the operator and took a cup, adding a big spoonful of dorph. He drank greedily, the hard edge of his anger at Crane blunting immediately. He sighed, glad to have his spiking, dangerous emotions even out. Now he could think, try to understand why Crane had chosen to bring Lanie to Sado. Maybe, in his own way, Crane was trying to improve Newcombe's attitudes and morale, which had eroded seriously this past year they'd worked together. It was the relentless carnival atmosphere Crane created at his Foundation in the mountains just beyond LA and in these field situations that most disturbed Newcombe, but he could hardly expect the Big Man to understand that. Leave it to Crane also not to understand human nature and believe he was doing a good thing for Newcombe by bringing his lover to the most dangerous spot on planet Earth.

"It's so... so colorful," Lanie said. "Vibrant really. The primary blues and the reds of the tents..." She looked at the cerulean sky, adding, "And the colors of all those hot air balloons and helos up there."

"That how you got here, by helo?" he asked, pushing through a cadre of Red Cross volunteers to stare at the source of the clanking that had annoyed him earlier—grad students pounding interlocking titanium poles deep into the ground.

"A news helo," she amended, her voice as edgy now as Newcombe's. The camp dogs began to bay fearfully, and she raised her voice to be heard over them. "Crane has people coming from all over, because of the 'five signs.' What are they?"

He scarcely heard her question. His attention was fixed on the students who were starting to insert long brushlike antennae into the poles sunk into the ground. "This your stuff?"

"Yes. The brushes are electronic cilia to measure the most minute electromagnetic vibrations in the smallest of particles. Crane wants to understand how the decomposed matter of dirt feels and how water feels and how rocks feel."

"Yeah... I've heard it all before," Newcombe said, turning to face her, anonymous now beneath hat and goggles. "Look, Lanie, I told you Crane's a nutjob. He's got these crazy notions about becoming part of the planet's 'life experience,' whatever the hell that is." He swept his arm to take in the long line of poles leading up to the computer control shack mounted on fat, spring-

loaded beams. "This is all just so much nonsense."

"'Nonsense' like this is what makes up my career, *doctor*," she said, cold. "The Crane Foundation finances *your* dreams. It can finance mine, too."

"My dreams are realistic!"

"And you can go straight to hell." She turned and walked away.

"All right... all right," he said, sloshing through the mud to catch up with her. He spun her around by the arm. "I apologize. Can I start over?"

"Maybe," she said, with the barest hint of a smile playing on her lips. "You didn't answer my question. What are the five signs that have everyone so worked up?"

"I'll show you," he said, "and then I'm getting you out of here."

Lanie didn't bother to protest. She was staying, and that was that. Just then a small electric truck pulled silently into the confusion near the computer center, tires spraying mud. A cage full of chickens was on its flatbed. Burt Hill, one of Crane's staff, according to the badge he wore high on the shoulder of his garish shirt, stuck his heavily bearded face through the window space. "Hey, Doc Dan!" he called. "Get a load of this." He forked his thumb at the flatbed.

People immediately crowded around, cams rolling, the tension palpable. Newcombe pushed his way through to Burt, who'd climbed out of the truck, sunblock shining off his cheeks, the only part of him not covered by hair or clothing. The chickens were throwing themselves at the cage, trying desperately to escape. Wings flapped and feathers flew amidst fierce cackling.

"The animals know, don't they?" Lanie said, standing at Newcombe's side.

"Yeah, they know." He looked back at Burt. "I need your vehicle."

"It's yours. What else?"

"Let the chickens go," Newcombe said, climbing into the control seat. Lanie hurried around to get in the other side.

Hill moved to the cage and opened it to an explosion of feathers, as the birds flapped and squawked out of the truck and into the startled onlookers who scattered quickly.

"And Burt," Newcombe called through the window space, "get things under control here. Don't let anyone wander outside of the designated safe zones. We lose a newsperson and the whole thing was for nothing."

"Gotcha, Doc," Hill said as Newcombe opened the engine's focus and turned the truck around. "Stay in the shade!"

"What does Burt Hill do around here?" Lanie asked, annoyed that Dan hadn't introduced her.

"He's Crane's ramrod, security chief, majordomo... whatever. Crane and the Foundation couldn't get along without him."

"And where did Crane find this gem?"

Newcombe laughed. “You’re not going to believe this. Crane picked Burt out of a group of patients in a mental institution. Told the head shrink he needed a good paranoid schizophrenic in his organization. They’re very detail oriented, you know, and extremely security conscious.”

“You’re making this up.”

He smiled. “Ask Crane. That’s the story he told me. Whatever’s the truth, Crane is closer to Burt than anybody else on his staff.”

Mud spewing around its wheels, the truck sped out of Mobile One, as Newcombe added programming to head it toward the mines. Despite the dorph, he was keyed up now—and hating himself for getting excited about the disaster to come. Dammit, he wasn’t one bit better than Crane, jolly old Crane. The truck bumped onto a dirt road that cut through a vast field of goldenrod whose beauty made Newcombe feel even more disgusted with himself. If his calculations were right, and he was damned sure they were, then all of this—the throbbing green foliage and vibrant yellow flowers, the ancient swaying trees in the distance, the people on this island—would be so much primal matter within hours. He slumped in the seat, chin on chest, wishing he’d put a second heaping spoonful of dorph in his coffee.

“Am I supposed to keep my mouth shut,” Lanie suddenly said, “or am I allowed to ask how you’ve been the last six months?”

He straightened, glancing sheepishly at her. “I’m sorry I’ve been out of touch. Things have been... intense back in LA.”

“I translate that to mean you’ve been trying to get me out of your system.”

“I care too much,” he blurted. “I don’t like that kind of weakness in myself.”

“Okay, and I guess I translate *that* to mean you’ve avoided me because you can’t control me.”

He grimaced. It was the truth. “You wouldn’t move out to the mountain with me. And don’t start giving me your ‘career’ routine.”

“Fair enough,” she said, settling back in her seat and taking in the countryside. “What’s the line on this island? It seems uninhabited.”

“Not by a long shot,” Newcombe said slowly, “although there aren’t a whole lot of people here.” He pointed toward a far-off peak. “That’s Mount Kimpoku, where the Buddhist priest Nichiren lived in a hut; he foresaw the *Kamikaze*, the ‘divine wind,’ which destroyed Kubla Khan’s fleet. There’s also an exile palace someplace, but I haven’t seen it. Too busy. Most of the island’s population lives in a fishing village east of our tent city. It’s called Aikawa, and there’s an adjacent tourist compound with a theater company, demon drummers, the usual. The Aikawans liked us at first, mainly because we brought jobs. Now they hate us.”

“Hate you?”

The truck turned onto a dirt roadway leading down from the plain into a cypress and bamboo forest. An old-fashioned jeep passed them going the

other way, the driver beeping and waving as his passengers, all camheads, gaped.

“You’d better start getting it through your head what you’ve bought into,” Newcombe said. “Crane is the prophet of destruction, my love. For four weeks he’s been telling the world that Sado Island is going to be destroyed by an earthquake. After a while, the people who live here began to get the notion that he was bad luck and was ruining what little tourist business they had. They’ve been asking us to leave for days. It’s gotten nasty.”

Lanie thought about that, shaking her head. “I don’t understand. Why aren’t they glad to be warned?”

“Can you really expect people to up and leave their homes, their jobs? And where are they supposed to go to wait it out—if there’s anything left to wait for after it’s over?” He directed the truck into a large clearing filled with helos and surface vehicles. “The damned government isn’t convinced this disaster is going to happen, so it won’t relocate them. These simple people can’t do much... except hate the messenger. Since quake prediction isn’t an exact science—”

“But Crane’s trying to make it exact.”

Newcombe touched the control pad again and the vehicle pulled up beside a Japanese news helo and shut down its focus. Above, choppers were crowding the sky, angling for better positions. “Crane’s a maniac... a money-hungry, power—”

“Dan!” Lanie shouted, “what’s gotten into you? You can’t open your mouth without attacking Crane.” She frowned, remembering the voice messages he’d left, the long e-mail dialogues they’d had when Dan had first joined Crane. He’d respected and admired the man then, cherished the total freedom Crane had given him to pursue his research. Perhaps familiarity had bred contempt? Or the two men had become so competitive—

“That’s the mine where we can find Crane.” Newcombe pointed toward a large cave some fifty feet away, its entrance almost obscured by the throng of people milling around.

Excited, Lanie quickly got out of the truck and began to walk fast. “I can’t wait to see the tale this day tells,” she said over her shoulder to Newcombe, who was staring darkly as he trotted after her. She stopped and faced him squarely. “I need to ask you one more question. Why, really, do you hate Crane so much?”

At any other time or place, Newcombe thought, he probably wouldn’t be inclined to give Lanie an honest answer. But today, considering what he knew was to come, he couldn’t be anything less than honest with her. “When I’ve looked in the mirror lately,” he said, “Crane’s face has been staring back.”

Lewis Crane was alone. He stood with his hands behind his back, studying the stone relief carvings on the walls of the played-out gold mine. The carvings,

created a century back by convicts who'd been sentenced to work here, depicted the hardships of a life of punishment in the Aikawa mines—men toiling, struggling, suffering, with no choice but to continue or die. Not so different from his own life, he thought, except that his punishment was self-imposed.

“Sorry to interrupt,” the low, strong voice of Sumi Chan came through Crane’s aural, “but you really do have to drag yourself away from contemplation of things past.”

“Oh, do I now?” Crane responded. “You’ve got the motley horde organized, have you?”

“Absolutely not, but I do have them rounded up, and more than ready to hear from you.”

“Hear from me... or make a meal of me?”

“Crane, this is serious. It will happen today, won’t it?” Sumi asked anxiously.

“This isn’t the time to lose your nerve. Not now. A show, you said, a show to raise money for the Foundation, for the work.” Sumi Chan was one of Crane’s greatest allies. As an executive of the US branch of the World Geological Survey, the small young man had championed Crane’s proposals and gotten funding for the Foundation, often with surprising speed and under the most difficult circumstances. “We’ve got a show that’s going to bring down the house.”

Sumi groaned. “But will the house come down today?”

“Have faith, and cheer up. We’re on the verge of realizing a dream. Soon no one will be able to think about EQs without thinking about me.”

“Not as history’s joke, I hope.”

“We’re all history’s joke,” Crane muttered. “You going to watch from the ground?”

“I’ll stay in my own helo,” Sumi said, clearing his throat.

Crane laughed. “You love me. You think I’m a genius, but you don’t trust me.” He turned and started walking along the narrow shaft of the mine toward daylight. “Someday you will have to commit completely to something.”

“I’ve consulted with my ancestors, Dr. Crane, and they have advised me otherwise. I’ll be watching from the air.” Crane thought he heard Sumi chuckle. “Besides, I have a large insurance policy on you.”

Reaching the mouth of the cave, Crane stopped in the concealing gloom and looked out at the sea of wrapped bodies. “You ready to become famous?”

“I shall be the first to take credit for your success.” Sumi did laugh aloud then, letting the sound die only slightly before he padded off.

Crane settled into the posture he used with newsies, the benign dictator,