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THE MOTE IN GOD'S EYE



THE MOTE IN GOD'S EYE

Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle

*And why beholdest thou the mote
that is in thy brother's eye,
but considerest not the beam
that is in thine own eye?*

MATTHEW 7 : 3

Chronology

- 1969 Neil Armstrong sets foot on Earth's moon.
- 1990 Series of treaties between United States and Soviet Union creates the CoDominium.
- 2008 First successful interstellar drive tested. Alderson Drive perfected.
- 2020 First interstellar colonies. Beginning of Great Exodus.
- 2040 CoDominium Bureau of Relocation begins mass out-system shipment of convicts. Colonization of Sparta and St. Ekaterina.
- 2079 Sergei Lermontov becomes Grand Admiral of CoDominium Space Navy.
- 2103 Great Patriotic Wars. End of the CoDominium. Exodus of the Fleet. Coronation of Lysander I of Sparta. Fleet swears loyalty to the Spartan throne. Marriage of dynasties produces union between Sparta and St. Ekaterina.
- 2110 Spartan throne. Marriage of dynasties produces union between Sparta and St. Ekaterina.
- 2111 Formation Wars begin.
- 2250 Leonidas I proclaims Empire of Man.
- 2250-2600 Empire of Man enforces interstellar peace.
- 2450 Jasper Murcheson explores region beyond the Coal Sack. Terraforming of New Scotland.
- 2603 Secession Wars begin. Growth of Sauron supermen. St. Ekaterina nearly destroyed.
- 2640 Secession Wars continue. Dark Ages in many systems. Effective termination of First Empire. Sauron supermen exterminated.
- 2800 Interstellar trade ceases. Piracy and brigandage. Dark Ages.
- 2862 Coherent light from the Mote reaches New Scotland.
- 2870 Effective end of Secession Wars.
- 2882 Howard Grote Littlemead founds Church of Him on New Scotland.
- 2903 Coherent light from Mote ends abruptly.
- 2903 Leonidas IV of Sparta proclaims the Second Empire of Man. The Oath of Reunion is sworn.

3016 Revolt of New Chicago.

3017 FIRST CONTACT

Prologue

“Throughout the past thousand years of history it has been traditional to regard the Alderson Drive as an unmixed blessing. Without the faster than light travel Alderson’s discoveries made possible, humanity would have been trapped in the tiny prison of the Solar System when the Great Patriotic Wars destroyed the CoDominium on Earth. Instead, we had already settled more than two hundred worlds.

“A blessing, yes. We might now be extinct were it not for the Alderson Drive. But unmixed? Consider. The same tramline effect that colonized the stars, the same interstellar contacts that allowed the formation of the First Empire, allowed interstellar war. The worlds wrecked in two hundred years of Secession Wars were both settled and destroyed by ships using the Alderson Drive.

“Because of the Alderson Drive we need never consider the space between the stars. Because we can shunt between stellar systems in zero time, our ships and ships’ drives need cover only interplanetary distances. We say that the Second Empire of Man rules two hundred worlds and all the space between, over fifteen million cubic parsecs...

“Consider the true picture. Think of myriads of tiny bubbles, very sparsely scattered, rising through a vast black sea. We rule some of the bubbles. Of the waters we know nothing...”

—from a speech delivered by Dr. Anthony Horvath at the Blaine Institute, A.D. 3029.

PART ONE

The Crazy Eddie Probe

1 *Command*

A.D. 3017

“Admiral’s compliments, and you’re to come to his office right away,” Midshipman Staley announced.

Commander Roderick Blaine looked frantically around the bridge, where his officers were directing repairs with low and urgent voices, surgeons assisting at a difficult operation. The gray steel compartment was a confusion of activities, each orderly by itself, but the overall impression was of chaos. Screens above one helmsman’s station showed the planet below and the other ships in orbit near *MacArthur*, but everywhere else the panel covers had been removed from consoles, test instruments were clipped into their insides, and technicians stood by with color-coded electronic assemblies to replace everything that seemed doubtful. Thumps and whines sounded through the ship as somewhere aft the engineering crew worked on the hull.

The scars of battle showed everywhere, ugly burns where the ship’s protective Langston Field had overloaded momentarily. An irregular hole larger than a man’s fist was burned completely through one console, and now two technicians seemed permanently installed in the system by a web of cables. Rod Blaine looked at the black stains that had spread across his battle dress. A whiff of metal vapor and burned meat was still in his nostrils, or in his brain, and again he saw fire and molten metal erupt from the hull and wash across his left side. His left arm was still bound across his chest by an elastic bandage, and he could follow most of the previous week’s activities by the stains it carried.

And I’ve only been aboard an hour! he thought. With the Captain ashore, and everything a mess, I can’t leave now! He turned to the midshipman. “Right away?”

“Yes, sir. The signal’s marked urgent.”

Nothing for it, then, and Rod would catch hell when the Captain came back aboard. First Lieutenant Cargill and Engineer Sinclair were competent men, but Rod was Exec and damage control was his responsibility, even if he’d been away from *MacArthur* when she took most of the hits.

Rod's Marine orderly coughed discreetly and pointed to the stained uniform. "Sir, we've time to get you more decent?"

"Good thinking." Rod glanced at the status board to be sure. Yes, he had half an hour before he could take a boat down to the planet's surface. Leaving sooner wouldn't get him to the Admiral's office any quicker. It would be a relief to get out of these coveralls. He hadn't undressed since he was wounded.

They had to send for a surgeon's mate to undress him. The medic snipped at the armor cloth embedded in his left arm and muttered. "Hold still, sir. That arm's cooked good." His voice was disapproving. "You should have been in sick bay a week ago."

"Hardly possible," Rod answered. A week before, *MacArthur* had been in battle with a rebel warship, who'd scored more hits than she ought to have before surrendering. After the victory Rod was prize master in the enemy vessel, and there weren't facilities for proper treatment there. As the armor came away he smelled something worse than week-old sweat. Touch of gangrene, maybe.

"Yessir." A few more threads were cut away. The synthetic was as tough as steel. "Now it's gonna take surgery, Commander. Got to cut all that away before the regeneration stimulators can work. While we got you in sick bay we can fix that nose."

"I like my nose," Rod told him coldly. He fingered the slightly crooked appendage and recalled the battle when it was broken. Rod thought it made him look older, no bad thing at twenty-four standard years; and it was the badge of an earned, not inherited, success. Rod was proud of his family background, but there were times when the Blaine reputation was a bit hard to live up to.

Eventually the armor was cut loose and his arm smeared with Numbitol. The stewards helped him into a powder blue uniform, red sash, gold braid, epaulettes; all wrinkled and crushed, but better than monofiber coveralls. The stiff jacket hurt his arm despite the anesthetic until he found that he could rest his forearm on the pistol butt.

When he was dressed he boarded the landing gig from *MacArthur's* hangar deck, and the coxswain let the boat drop through the big flight elevator doors without having the spin taken off the ship. It was a dangerous maneuver, but it saved time. Retros fired, and the little winged flyer plunged into atmosphere.

NEW CHICAGO: Inhabited world, Trans-Coalsack Sector, approximately 20 parsecs from Sector Capital. The primary is an F9 yellow star commonly referred to as Beta Hortensis.

The atmosphere is very nearly Earth-normal and breathable without aids or filters. Gravity is 1.08 standard. The planetary radius is 1.05, and mass is 1.21 Earth-standard, indicating a planet of greater than normal density. New Chicago is inclined at 41 degrees with a semi-major axis of 1.06 AU, moderately eccentric. The resulting variations in seasonal temperatures have confined the inhabited areas to a relatively narrow band in the south temperate zone.

There is one moon at normal distance, commonly called Evanston. The origin of the name is obscure.

New Chicago is 70 percent seas. Land area is mostly mountainous with continuing volcanic activity. The extensive metal industries of the First Empire period were nearly all destroyed in the Succession Wars; reconstruction of an industrial base has proceeded satisfactorily since New Chicago was admitted to the Second Empire in AD. 2940. Most inhabitants reside in a single city which bears the same name as the planet. Other population centers are widely scattered, with none having a population over 45,000. Total planet population was reported as 6.7 million in the census of 2990. There are iron mining and smelting towns in the mountains, and extensive agricultural settlements. The planet is self-sufficient in foodstuffs.

New Chicago possesses a growing merchant fleet, and is located at a convenient point to serve as a center of TransCoalsack interstellar trade. It is governed by a governor general and a council appointed by the Viceroy of TransCoalsack Sector, there is an elected assembly, and two delegates have been admitted to the Imperial Parliament.

Rod Blaine scowled at the words flowing across the screen of his pocket computer. The physical data were current, but everything else was obsolete. The rebels had changed even the name of their world, from New Chicago to Dame Liberty. Her government would have to be built all over again. Certainly she'd lose her delegates; she might even lose the right to an elected assembly.

He put the instrument away and looked down. They were over mountainous country, and he saw no signs of war. There hadn't been any

area bombardments, thank God.

It happened sometimes: a city fortress would hold out with the aid of satellite-based planetary defenses. The Navy had no time for prolonged sieges. Imperial policy was to finish rebellions at the lowest possible cost in lives—but to finish them. A holdout rebel planet might be reduced to glittering lava fields, with nothing surviving but a few cities lidded by the black domes of Langston Fields; and what then? There weren't enough ships to transport food across interstellar distances. Plague and famine would follow.

Yet, he thought, it was the only possible way. He had sworn the Oath on taking the Imperial commission. Humanity must be reunited into one government, by persuasion or by force, so that the hundreds of years of Secession Wars could never happen again. Every Imperial officer had seen what horrors those wars brought; that was why the academies were located on Earth instead of at the Capital.

As they neared the city he saw the first signs of battle. A ring of blasted lands, mined outlying fortresses, broken concrete rails of the transportation system; then the almost untouched city which had been secure within the perfect circle of its Langston Field. The city had taken minor damage, but once the Field was off, effective resistance had ceased. Only fanatics fought on against the Imperial Marines.

They passed over the ruins of a tall building crumpled over by a falling landing boat. Someone must have fired on the Marines and the pilot hadn't wanted his death to be for nothing...

They circled the city, slowing to allow them to approach the landing docks without breaking out all the windows. The buildings were old, most built by hydrocarbon technology, Rod guessed, with strips torn out and replaced by more modern structures. Nothing remained of the First Empire city which had stood here.

When they dropped onto the port on top of Government House, Rod saw that slowing hadn't been required. Most city windows were smashed already. Mobs milled in the streets, and the only moving vehicles were military convoys. Some people stood idly, others ran in and out of shops. Gray-coated Imperial Marines stood guard behind electrified riot fences around Government House. The flyer landed.

Blaine was rushed down the elevator to the Governor General's floor. There wasn't a woman in the building, although Imperial government