

Chapter Nineteen

The Best Laid Plans...

Don't just count your chickens before they are hatched, check the size of the eggs as well!

- Alligator Farmer's Joke Book.

Worrall happily watched the Revenge vanish into the blue, for him it was off with the old life and on with the new. He whistled tunelessly as he strode down from the coign of vantage above the ruins of the Fort. His mind was full: of plans for the railway; how he was going to persuade Rance to agree to the latest change he wanted to make; the play he was going to see that night with a delightful young prospect; the sheer beauty of the scene he was a part of; in short, he was enjoying himself. He looked up at the swirling mass of citizens with their flit-packs and chuckled. They'd soon become accustomed to them, next they'd want weatherproofing, soon it would be aircars, and then the slippery slope downhill to rack and ruin. Unless he could steer them along the straight and narrow, yes, this was definitely what fate had been saving him for, a good turn to be done at last.

He was unaware of the commotion developing down by the square, until suddenly three determined figures came round a corner below the rooftops, shot past him at low altitude and barrelled up the road. He barely had time to recognise Murdoch before they were out of sight over the ruined Fort. Worrall sprinted back the way he came, grateful for the thick air and the high oxygen level. He cursed not having a flit-pack himself the one time he really needed it. Past the Fort, skipping over the slagged parapets heedless of the drop down to the river below, he scrambled on up to the part of wall overlooking the little shrinking island in the centre of Lake Fax. To his horror he saw the body of an Avian fall out of the hatch, and another circle erratically around to the blind side of the little ship.

The hatch slammed shut, the surviving Avian swooped down to his colleague and struggled to lift him clear. Worrall urged him on,