

Chapter Twenty

Business as Usual

"When it comes to making a quick buck, all cats are the same in the dark."

- apocryphal.

The picnic in the 'sunshine', on the grass by the lake, was more of a council of war than anything else. All parties had their say; the link down to the town was busy. Plans were suggested, discarded, altered and shelved. Finally, several compromises were made, not everyone was happy by any means, but all were agreed it was the only possible way to survive, if the eight unknowns were who they most probably were.

Frantic work started immediately on several fronts. The base enlargement recommenced, using all the available mining tools. The repair priorities in the Revenge were rescheduled: the Mk65s were now top of the list, and life support moved down below mass storage and fuel conversion. The rubble and slag from the excavations were piped straight out to the mighty ship and processed by the flux net converters. The rare earth bins in the materials stores filled rapidly, the mass tanks less so, and a large spoil tip grew in the centre of the old crater.

The machine shops sweated double time refining, shaping and energising the superconductors needed for three extra particle beams, with which Harry intended to defend the base. Three more fusion plants grew into being, and were ferried to the tetrahedral points on the moon. Three more defence sites appeared there on the surface, and were dug down into the bedrock. Capable of being fully automated, it was hoped they could survive long enough to even up the odds should matters come to the worst. In addition to the quartet of twin particle beams, each site borrowed a needler and its local control system from the Revenge.

Boris was re-educated by the three senior computers to the mutual