

## The HeavenField

Born in 1971, I G Hulme has been an artist, writer, musician and designer, before one day he entered The HeavenField. Since then he has no plans to return.



# The HeavenField

I.G. Hulme

edited by C. Ellis

*for Gemma...  
and of course Steven.*

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## A Ghost in the Chamber

“Okay, everybody quiet please. Do we have audio and video?”

“Tape’s rolling.”

“Coolant?”

“Green light.”

“Particle Chamber lock?”

“Green light.”

“Alright, commence initial sequence.... John, how’s the E.M. tolerance looking?”

“We’re barely touching minus thirty, we are green for go.”

“Preparing for countdown - three, two, one...”

“Dampers off, Chamber is showing two bars, rising good.”

“Approaching three bars, prepare the transmission signal, Standing-Point should be achieved in three, two, one...”

“Transmission signal is going green, we-”

“Oh shit! It can’t be! Stop the system! Shut it down! Shut it down!”

“What is it? What the hell’s going on?”

“Jesus Christ! There’s someone in the Chamber!...”

“What are you talking about? It’s impossible!”

“Look! On the monitor - there’s a girl in the Chamber! For Christssakes shut it down!”

“Initiating emergency abort, powering down.”

“Pressure should be dropping in - no wait-”

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s not responding - Pressure’s going through the roof - It won’t shut down!”

<signal ends>

Transcript from recordings of Standing-Point experiment,  
Hayden Hill.



# BOOK I



## A Light in the Dark

“Darling, fetch me a glass of water while you’re there would you?” mumbled Mrs. Lambert sleepily from somewhere beneath her duvet. Professor Keith Lambert grunted to himself as he felt his way across the darkness of the bedroom until he found the doorway. He fumbled for the light switch in the bathroom, and with his eyes still half-closed, winced and cursed as his feet touched the cold floor tiles.

Still muttering a tirade of expletives under his breath, he returned from the toilet and groped his way through the bedroom. He shuffled down into the living room and through to the kitchen, negotiating the darkness like some ghostly somnambulist. He passed the door to the hallway, where a faint light from underneath cast dark shadows. The quiet chatter of a radio, and then a muffled cough came from one of his security team outside.

Lambert’s feet found the stone tiles of the kitchen, and he fumbled around until he located a glass; he was determined to remain in darkness so as not to wake himself any more than necessary.

The Professor was a sprightly, energetic man, younger-looking than his sixty-eight years, still lean with only a hint of a paunch. Tonight though, his face was more drawn than usual; it had been a long day. He was impatient to get back to sleep, and mechanically filled the glass, spilling icy water over his hand. He made his shuffling progress back into the lounge, taking care to give the low coffee table a wide berth.

He stopped for a second. He thought he had noticed a movement away to his left, beyond the sofa. He opened his eyes fully, rubbing them tiredly, and swapped the glass of water into his other hand. Dark spots of shadows swam around him in the blackness, and he felt a sudden sense of unease. He fancied he heard a faint sound, like a distant wind, and was about to turn and pay a visit to security when the movement caught his eye again. On the other side of the living room he glimpsed a faint shower of sparks illuminating the darkness. He watched transfixed as the sparks began to trace an outline, and slowly that outline became the shape of a man. With a

brief flash and a crackle of electricity, the figure was in the room, moving slowly towards the Professor, who stood paralysed with fear, only his eyes darting to and fro, searching for any means of escape. Still holding the glass of water, he made a move towards the hallway, but as he turned he saw another figure blocking his way. He flung himself round again in a hysterical jerky motion, making for the bedroom, but yet another shadow loomed up in front of him. He span around like a cornered animal, losing his grip on the glass which tumbled on to the thick carpet with a dull thud. Hands reached out to grasp him as he stumbled to his knees, and a ring of pale, phosphorescent eyes surrounded him, their gaze cold and inhuman. One figure held up a weapon, and there was a muffled retort and a flash in the darkness.

Mrs. Lambert stumbled into the living room, sleepily fastening her robe around her.

“Darling, are you alright? Did you knock something over? Keith, where are you?” She fumbled for the lamp, but couldn’t locate it in the shadows. Her foot struck a glass on the floor, and she swore as she stepped in a pool of water.

“Keith?” She was getting anxious now; there was a strange smell of burning in the air. “Keith, where are you?”

The door opened, letting in a harsh light that temporarily blinded her.

“Is everything alright Mrs. Lambert? I thought I heard - Oh shit!”

The security guard stood looking on in horror.

She followed his gaze downwards.

There, at her feet was the Professor, slumped next to the coffee table.

Cynthia Lambert screamed.

She was standing in an ever-expanding pool of her husband’s blood.

As the security team went to work, they quickly established that there were no signs of entry or egress. The only physical evidence was a scattering of fine red sand around the body. This was confined solely to the living room, and showed up the track marks of three sets of heavy boots. These footprints didn’t lead to or from any of the available entrances or exits. The security team all swore

they had seen and heard nothing unusual, before a muffled thud in the living room, and then Mrs. Lambert's voice calling for her husband.

It was as if the killers of Professor Keith Lambert had simply appeared and then vanished into thin air.

## Pattie

Pattie dressed early and took time to drink her cup of strong coffee. She sat on the end of the bed watching Alex as he slept. Her head pounded from her hangover, but she was so excited she hardly noticed. She gazed over his beautiful body, biting her lip to suppress a giggle, and lightly traced her hand over his stomach where the sheet was thrown back. He sighed quietly and Pattie grinned, knowing he was awake now, pretending to sleep on.

"Morning my love," she chirped. "I'm afraid some of us have work to go to."

"Surely it's not that time already?" smiled Alex sleepily, slowly opening his eyes. "And how are you feeling today my beautiful Miss Patricia?" He sat up and slid down the bed to her, taking her coffee and placing it on a chair nearby.

"Only my mother calls me Patricia," Pattie squealed as he kissed her.

"You could always take the day off couldn't you?" he whispered.

"Oh Alex, I - really, no I can't. Alex."

He was kissing her neck now, and playfully unbuttoning her blouse.

"What is it you do that can possibly be more important than this anyway?" The hint of an East European accent sent shivers down her spine.

"If you'd have been paying attention when you asked me that yesterday, you'd have remembered," she giggled, half-heartedly attempting to push him away.

“Ah, but of course, you work at the Maunsworth military base, you are very important; in fact the place will cease to operate without your presence,” he teased, laughing as he tickled her.

“I am not important in the least,” she laughed. “But if I'm not back for eight-thirty, I'll probably be shot by firing squad, or locked away forever, or-”

“Eight-thirty?” smiled Alex. “But Pattie my little soldier, my watch says six-fifteen. That means plenty of time before the firing squad.” She shrieked with excitement as he pulled her back into bed.

When Pattie finally signed in at the security desk, she was nearly twenty minutes late. It was the first time in seven years she had been late for work but she felt secretly exhilarated, like a naughty child. She walked down towards the labs, passing familiar faces, and giving her usual ‘good mornings’, but today she felt sure that everybody could tell what she had been doing only an hour ago. She stared at her feet, grinning again.

“Morning Pattie, I was beginning to think you'd run off to the circus - or a different one at any rate.” It was the familiar animated chatter of Grace Palmer, striding energetically across the concourse towards her.

“Morning Grace, sorry I'm a little late,” began Pattie in a fluster. “I er, had trouble with the buses, you know that connection from Eastfield up to-”

“Well, what happened?” Grace's eager tone was conspiratorial and light-hearted.

“What? The, er, buses?” Pattie looked up at Grace who was grinning from ear to ear, and promptly felt her cheeks burning.

“No point trying to deny anything you dark horse. Dean saw you in the Red Dragon, so just give me the gory details.” Grace laughed hoarsely. She was always forthright - and Pattie painfully shy, but Pattie was bursting to tell somebody all about Alex. She paused for a moment.

“The Red Dragon? I was in there last night?” she asked, a little perplexed.

“Jesus Pattie, I didn't think you drank! You must have been enjoying yourself; Dean saw you in there on Friday,” laughed Grace.

“I don’t remember drinking much - but, oh Grace, I’m so happy. He’s such a wonderfully lovely man, he’s-” she stopped herself in embarrassment. “It’s just nothing like this has ever happened to me before.”

Grace put her arm around Pattie’s shoulder and gave her a hug.

“Well, it’s about time then; you deserve it.”

“It’s just with the Field going so well, and now this; I just think I’m going to burst.” She grinned sheepishly.

“Enjoy it while you’ve got it kid,” joked Grace whilst searching for a cigarette. “Now come on, let’s go and explore a bit more of paradise. Are you sure you can keep your mind on the job, or am I going to have to send you home sick, or rather lovesick?”

“Oh, I’ll be fine, believe me,” beamed Pattie. “Although I could do with another cup of coffee. I think I must have a bit of a hangover from last night. Funny I can’t remember...” She trailed off with a slight concerned look on her face.

“Is everything alright Pattie?” asked Grace.

“Yes, yes” said Pattie, snapping once again into her smile. “It’s just been a whirlwind of a weekend. I must have drunk a little more than I thought I had; it’s all a little hazy.” She laughed and walked with Grace to the coffee machine.

Grace lit her cigarette. She was happy for Pattie. Poor Plain Pattie, as she had heard someone speak of her once. But now, as they walked down to the locker rooms together, there was something nagging in the back of her mind.

## The HeavenField

“These suits were never designed with women in mind,” complained Pattie, struggling under the weight of her backpack, whilst attempting to fasten the seals on her gauntlets.

“You wanna swap?” grinned Stuart Nicks. He was wearing the sample claws on his suit; two bulky mechanical arms, sprouting from a framework on his back. The claws were used to carry heavy rock samples or equipment, and looked like the hydraulic arms on a mini-sub. An exoskeleton of leg braces took the load, and he was counterbalanced by computer-controlled gyros. The arms were able to carry huge weights, as Nicks himself had demonstrated one Christmas, when he’d attempted to lift Grace’s Mini as a bet. If Colin James, the Base Commander hadn’t happened to be driving past at the time, then Nicks swore he would have got it fully off the ground.

A technician helped Pattie on with her huge cumbersome helmet, clicking it into place. The locking bolts gave a thump, and the displays on her visor flickered into life as she ran the suit’s diagnostics. When the systems checks gave her the green light she followed the others out of the locker room. The five figures, struggling under the weight of their suits, made their way towards the Array Chamber and another journey into the HeavenField. Nobody could recall who had been the first to give it that name. Grace Palmer had claimed it was her, but she would do anyway, just for devilment. But whoever had thought it up, the name was certainly apt. Officially it was titled an Upper Order Standing-Point Particle Cascade, which Pattie always thought sounded a little clumsy. But it was probably the greatest scientific discovery of the century, and with everything still so new, they understood so little about it. This was only Pattie’s fourth journey, and at five hours, her longest. She had been in one of the earliest groups to have ever witnessed it, but Grace Palmer, along with Pattie’s companions on this trip, Saul Davisson and Stuart Nicks, had the honour of being the first.

Pattie was following the others into the Chamber now. This fraction of the huge structure was similar to a large diving bell, and she had to stoop to get through the low oval doorway. Beyond the opening was a featureless steel and concrete cylinder, just part of the massive Accelerator Array which branched off for miles and miles into the distance. Pattie strained to crane her neck upward in the clumsy suit. She knew that, disappearing into the blackness, the Chamber rose up for around one hundred and fifty feet, acting as the intersection for the many tunnels of the accelerators. On the lowest level, where they now congregated, only a small metal bench set into the curved wall and the untidy pile of scientific equipment they needed, broke the monotony of the Chamber.

Then the doors were sealed behind them; eighteen-inches of steel and toughened glass, and the dim lights on their suits were the only thing holding back the darkness.

Pattie heard the chatter of frantic scientists in her earpiece, as she sat uncomfortably between Starling and Nicks.

“If anyone needs to pee, then it’s too late,” she heard Nicks over the open channel, and giggled nervously. The knots in her stomach threatened to do somersaults, and she felt Nick’s leg twitching rhythmically. The countdown commenced, and Pattie closed her eyes.

“Aw, Pattie, I never knew you cared,” whispered Nicks. Pattie realised she was clutching his arm. She released her grip a little.

“Sorry Stue, I just-” but she didn’t get to finish her sentence.

The strangest feeling of calm; of floating at an incredible speed without moving.

She felt as though she was suddenly extremely drunk, and the world was spinning. It wasn’t an unpleasant feeling, rather like slowly drifting out of her body. She concentrated hard now, and strained to keep her eyes open in the blackness, determined to see the transition into the Field. The lights and readouts in her visor swam, and she heard a faint gasp from Starling to her left. She realised she was staring blankly at nothing and turned her gaze towards him.

She was standing in the Field.

“Damn, missed it again,” she muttered to herself. No matter how hard she tried, each time she had missed the transition from out of

the Chamber and into the Field. It was as if the brain just blanked out for a split second, and then there you were, staring at paradise. “Oh my lord,” she heard O’Keefe gasp. “It really is Heaven.” It was his first trip through; everybody’s reaction contained the same disbelief and wonder, thought Pattie.

She was standing on a smooth blue-grey granite surface, flecked with orange veins, which seemed to glow in the strange sunlight. A beautiful silver formation of crystal shimmered nearby. Ahead, the ground dipped down to a long plain of tall lush grasses, rolling away towards purple mountains, hazy in the distance. The nearby tents and piles of equipment which made up base camp looked ugly and incongruous in this idyllic setting. She stared back across the plains, and just stood for a long while, taking it in. The beauty of it all was familiar, and at the same time, strangely alien. Everything she looked upon was like an extreme example of something she might find on Earth. The rock underfoot was exquisite in its form and colouration. The grass - every blade seemed perfect and unearthly, and the air; it was clearer somehow than seemed natural. Yes, the HeavenField was a good name, she thought.

When Grace and the others had made that very first journey, they later described how the environment had seemed to materialise around them from out of their imaginations. And as their joy and wonder had unfolded, so too the Field had solidified into the land they explored now. It was as if they had stepped into a dream. Pattie breathed deeply and let her thoughts return to the work at hand. She put all the questions and possibilities to the back of her mind. She tried to put Alex to the back of her mind. She had a lot of work to do. The others were already gathered around the boxes of equipment, and were taking them down to the base camp. Nicks was setting up the geological survey equipment, whilst Starling unpacked the atmospheric testing apparatus.

This was to be a momentous occasion, as they could finally, and unequivocally test the nature of the Field’s atmosphere. Up until now they had had all sorts of trouble with equipment failures, and had spent the last four weeks redesigning various tools to suit the environment. Although the Field looked benign and beautiful, the teams had found that any sensitive electronic equipment simply didn’t survive the journey. Circuits were fried, or just failed for no

apparent reason, and their suits had needed to be radically simplified and strengthened to avoid any danger. Therefore the expeditions had so far been confined to simple tests; collecting samples, exploring the terrain, and trying to work out just where in hell they were. There were many hypotheses, but no one really had a clue.

But now the environment testing equipment seemed to have survived the journey, so they might at least know if they could discard their horribly cumbersome suits. Pattie was dying to feel and smell the grass of the great plain, and the cool air, so pure and clean. She hated the weight of her environment suit, which in particular hampered her job.

As well as collecting and noting samples of various species of grass and rock in the vicinity, Pattie had the task of drawing records of their views, since for the time being, photographs taken on any medium were destroyed upon returning to the Chamber. The samples also, when collected in the Field: grasses, plants and flowers, seemed alien or perfect instances of their species. But on return to the labs they would turn out to be mundane versions of their earthly equivalents, much to the surprise of all who had returned.

So Pattie, who was more used to working on picture archives for archaeological digs, was now drawing a diary of their experiences in the HeavenField. She was getting used to the difficulty of manipulating the stylus with her heavy gauntlets, etching away at the carbon-coated zinc sheets she had to use instead of paper. She sat herself down on the flat rock and started sketching Saul Davisson and Gary Starling as they worked unpacking boxes of various equipment. She would do a few rough pictures of the team, she thought, before starting work on the more precise diagrams the geology department had requested.

## The Little Devil

Grace scanned through Pattie's computer records, not really knowing what she was looking for. The team had gone through to the Field now, and things wouldn't be as hectic for a good few hours if everything went as planned. She felt a little guilty, but something was troubling her, and when the little devil nagged, she couldn't resist it.

Pattie wouldn't have thought anything was out of place when Grace had scheduled the Medical just before the Field entry. They were random checks that all the team underwent at some point, just to make sure the journeys to and from the Field were not having any adverse physical effects.

But now, after the incident with Sally Aimes, Grace was suspicious of lots of things she would have once let pass. So she went through the tables and figures, X-rays and charts, desperately hoping to find nothing amiss.

Sally Aimes had been a biological scientist with whom Grace had worked for about two years. They weren't that close, but she was fond of her nevertheless. Sally was a fun, intelligent girl with a loud, infectious laugh, always the centre of male attentions. One night she was partying in town with a group from the Facility. Towards the end of the night her friends had noticed her talking to a man, with whom she eventually left, much to the chagrin of many of her male companions.

She'd turned up dead in a canal a week later after an extensive police search. The labs were devastated; in such a close-knit group, the loss hit everybody hard. The man she was with had never been traced.

But what now worried Grace was the way Sally had behaved shortly before leaving the club. Her friends spoke of how she had seemed vague and forgetful even though she hadn't drunk much. The way Pattie had looked so puzzled when she had tried to recall her weekend with Alex, could there be a connection? But no, thought Grace, stop being so damned paranoid. Poor Pattie, she had probably been as drunk as a skunk, and good for her.

But Grace scanned the records anyway.

Alex

Alex had walked with Pattie the short distance from the hotel to the bus stop.

“Oh bugger, I’ve missed the seven-twenty,” she cursed, biting her fingernails as she consulted the timetable. “Oh, I’m going to be late for work; I’ve never been late, ever. You’ve corrupted me already, you terrible man.” She giggled nervously and hugged his arm.

“I told you; phone in sick, and we can go back to my hotel room,” he smiled, kissing her again.

“You’re incorrigible,” she hissed, embarrassed at the looks the other people in the queue gave her. “No, here comes the bus now. I can get this one and change at Eastfield.”

“You will call me, won’t you Pattie?”

“Of course I will, silly.” She jumped back down from the bus, and hugged him, not caring that she held up the queue. “I’ll ring you tonight when I get back, promise.”

“Promise,” whispered Alex to himself as the bus disappeared into the traffic, Pattie still waving through the grimy window.

He walked off towards the centre of town with a spring in his stride.

He’d decided that he would buy himself an expensive suit; something different, he was sick of wearing jeans all the time.

A few hours later he was barely recognisable. He sat at a table outside a smart coffee bar; a double espresso and a newspaper in front of him. His shoulder-length hair was gone, replaced by a neat short-back-and-sides, and he wore a dark linen suit and black tie.

He shifted uncomfortably in his seat, his eyes darting surreptitiously at the passing faces. He took a sip of his coffee and savoured the strong, bitter drink.

A short, shrew-like man appeared from out of the crowd on the busy street, and approached Alex’s table. He looked like any

anonymous business type; possibly a banker, or a solicitor; grey, balding, wearing small oval spectacles. He carried a black leather briefcase, and a grey mac, folded over one arm.

“Alexi, my good friend! It is fine to see you.” The man, in his mid-fifties, had a thick East-European accent. He held out his arms in welcome as he reached Alex’s table.

“Dragor; welcome,” said Alex, rising and embracing the man, kissing him on both cheeks. “Please, sit, sit. Waiter! Another espresso, - and for you?”

“Mineral water,” replied the man as he sat himself opposite Alex. The waiter returned promptly, and set the drinks between the two men, who regarded each other in silence.

“So, you are successful?” said Dragor eventually. He spoke in a clipped, economical tone; much like an indifferent bank clerk.

“We must of course wait and see, but I am very confident.” Alex spoke slowly; his accent was more pronounced than it had been earlier.

“So there will be no repeat of the Sally Aimes fiasco?” The thin lips of the man seemed to inflect coldness into the words.

“We had all this out before Dragor. She was just not susceptible to the conditioning - some people aren’t.” He paused as the waiter cruised past on his way to another table. “This one is perfect. I have been working all weekend. There will be no error in the plan; though I still do not agree with it. There must surely be some way, less extreme; less violent?”

“You are fond of the girl perhaps?” asked Dragor, his grey eyes peering over the lid of his briefcase, which he had opened upon the table in front of him. “We must all make sacrifices Alexi; I do not need remind you of that.” Alex flinched as if the man had stuck a pin in him. Dragor brought out a set of air tickets from the case and handed them to Alex. He closed his case and placed it on the ground beside him.

“The girl is of no consideration,” replied Alex, taking the tickets and placing them inside his jacket. “I am talking about the dangers that will arise if we are successful. If they should bring one back from the Field by mistake - have you considered the consequences?”

“You are rambling again my friend,” sighed the grey man, holding up his hand to silence Alex. “You seem to forget, we are at war; this very instant. The risks are great; but the prize is greater. *If* anything should be brought back by mistake, then - certain steps have been taken. You are just a part of a greater machine, as am I; we do not need to know how, but I have been told that it is all taken care of. Nothing will return from the Field, and we will buy time for the battle to come.” He collected his coat from the seat next to him, and picked up his briefcase. “Oh, by the way; just out of interest, what did you use as a trigger in the end?”

“An apple,” replied Alex, his eyes downcast.

“Very poetic,” smiled Dragor as he stood. “God be with you my friend.” They solemnly embraced once more.

Alex sat back down, and watched the little man trot away, easily melting into the bustle of people on the pavement.

Alex called for the bill, and left a twenty pound note in the saucer.

“Your change sir!” shouted the waiter, as Alex strode off through the tables. He turned, and stared long into the waiter’s eyes. He was a thin, pasty-faced youth, nervously holding the change towards Alex.

How long would he last, when the time came, Alex thought to himself.

“Keep it,” he heard himself saying.

“Why, thank you sir, thank you,” grinned the waiter, and hurried off back to the bar.

Alex, grim-faced, made his way to the taxi rank nearby, and got into the first car in the queue.

“The airport,” he said in a detached voice, still gazing at the people scurrying about, blissfully unaware of the fate that awaited them.

“Off on your holidays?” asked the taxi driver, as they cruised through the streets, Alex still staring morosely out of the window.

“Or is it business?”

Alex, broken from his reverie, looked at the reflection of the man’s eyes in the rear-view mirror.

“Business,” he said quietly. “Most definitely business.”

## Temptation

“Hope you’re getting my good side Pattie,” joked Nicks, as he expertly manipulated the sample claws, picking up a huge metal case full of geological equipment.

“I didn’t know you had one,” laughed Pattie, as she methodically scratched away with her stylus. She was getting quite used to the unwieldy medium now; she just wished she wasn’t so handicapped by her gloves.

After a couple of hours she decided to take a break, and plodded down to base camp to see how the others were getting on. The atmospheric analysis was up and running, and hopefully would divulge its results quite soon.

She sat herself down on a pile of boxes between the two tents that made up base camp. They were squat, silver-grey domes, crammed with boxes and canisters, and all manner of tools and equipment. Secretly, Pattie thought it ironic that they had already made such a mess out of one corner of paradise.

“Tea break!” shouted Davisson upon seeing Pattie, and sat down next to her.

“How are you getting on Pattie?” he asked, as the others took up makeshift seats nearby.

“Oh, I’ve just been doing a few holiday snaps really. I’ve got some geology stuff to do in a while - I thought I’d start with the strata on Palmer’s Point.”

She waved over to the outcrop of rock, rising out of the sea of grass, not far to the south. Grace had named it as a joke, and it had stuck.

“Let’s have a look then,” teased Davisson, and Pattie shyly handed over the engravings of the site she’d been working on.

“Hey, these are great Pattie,” said Saul, passing them around. Pattie had an exquisitely light touch, and an incredible eye for detail and realism, which suited the fine strokes of the engraving process.

“It’s really hard in these gloves,” she grumbled apologetically, as Davisson went through them.

“Well I think they’re amazing; better than photos any day.”

“Do I really stoop that badly?” asked Starling.

“Like an old woman,” laughed Nicks. Pattie blushed; she was glad she was hidden inside her helmet. She fumbled on the side of it for the right button.

“Oh, I hate these things. How does the straw work again?” she cursed to herself. Davisson leaned across and twisted the clip on the side of her helmet. A small tube popped up in front of her mouth, and she took a long sip.

“Mmm, warm dishwater; my favourite.”

The others laughed as they drank their own meagre ration.

“Well, that’s me revived. Off to do some interesting pictures of rocks.”

Pattie hauled herself to her feet with a steadying hand from Saul, and trudged off towards Palmer’s Point, about one hundred yards away.

“Don’t go out of sight Pattie,” called Davisson after her, “and remember, if you see animal life of any kind - even an ant; let me know okay?”

“Yes mum,” said Pattie cheerfully under her breath, as she clumped off towards the lush plain.

She held out her hand, letting it brush the tops of the high grass which reached up to her waist.

After a couple of minutes she arrived, out of breath, at the foot of the rocks - a tumble of huge boulders rising into the clear sky.

The rock was a deep rich red, heavily lined with black and dark purple striations. Pattie walked around its base, looking for the first place the geology department had asked her to draw.

“Oh a tree!” she exclaimed. “Guys, I’ve found a tree!”

Up until now, the short expeditions had found nothing larger than bushes, which was odd, thought Pattie, as they’d been all over this outcrop.

“A tree?” she heard in her earpiece. “Brilliant. Where are you? Oh, I see; funny they missed it... I’ll come over Pattie, I won’t be a minute.” It was Gary Starling’s voice. She turned and saw him leave one of the others and start his slow walk over.

“Oh, it’s an apple tree,” she smiled as she drew nearer.

The tree was only small, about five feet high, tucked against the side of the rock. Although still only a sapling, a juicy red apple hung from a branch right in front of her.

“It’s beautiful,” she gasped. She couldn’t understand why, but she was struck with an overwhelming sense of euphoria, and without hesitating she reached up and plucked the apple from the branch. She stared long at the huge, bright red fruit in her hand. It almost glowed.

She absent-mindedly reached up to the side of her helmet and flipped the safety off the locking bolts. Her mouth watered crazily. Dimly, as if in a dream, she thought she heard voices calling her, but they were distant, as if underwater. A funny hooter, like an alarm clock played in her ear.

“Pattie! What are you doing?”

It was Gary, shouting at her. He was charging through the grass as best he could in his huge suit, frantically waving his arms. Behind him, at the camp, the others were just stood looking at her.

“What the hell are you doing?” he yelled again.

She smiled and waved back at them.

“I’ve got an apple!” she beamed cheerfully, and lifted it to her mouth as she flipped open her visor.