

OMEGA

The train entered the Omega approach tunnel at near full speed. This time, the length of the tunnel itself and the speed of the train would take care of the scrubbing process. The air inside the cars was being exchanged as the train sped through the tunnel. The car attendant announced that they were beginning their deceleration in preparation of arrival at the terminal. This time she could feel it. The tires came down and there was a mild inertia pushing her very gently forward. Without warning Amanda's car emerged into the bright sunlight of a completely alien world.

She could not suppress an audible gasp and an involuntary shiver. The hair stood up on the back of her neck. It was overwhelming. She had seen it on the screen but the real thing was breathtaking. Quite literally, it took her breath away. Shafts of sunlight stretched downward from the transparent roof nearly forty stories above her head. It was too big to be real.

The open atrium floor alone covered seventy-seven acres. The hollow core of the building was a jungle of huge trees and foliage plants interspersed with cultivated fields. There was a river and a large lake with a sand beach. There were streets and parks and shops; a world trimmed to fit in a protected space. Terraces rose and receded at a gentle angle toward the base of the roof high above. Each section of each level was a neighborhood with a population as large as Hardhat.

Arching out over the core of the building there were six gigantic support structures so massive looking that they made her queasy. It challenged logic that something so big could arch overhead and support itself in flippant defiance of gravity.

There were gigantic trees in the central park area. She guessed that many of them must be well over thirty meters tall. Impossible! And something else was different, something palpable. There was no echo. The sounds around her were just absorbed into the enormous volume of air.

The rail line ran through the very center of the building. The terminal was situated in a wide central plaza with streets going out in six directions. It was the most amazing sight she had ever beheld. The impact was visceral. She walked around outside the terminal trying to take it all in. She struggled with the mind-numbing sensory assault of the place. It was just *too* big. There were too many people. All of it was terrifying!