

ENERGY WAR

Chapter 3

Down to the end of the corridor ran Cato. He checked his watch. It was 1.56 a.m. He had 64 minutes to get to the Archer Gate and back to the North Side. But as he raced down the clanking stairs, he heard footsteps rushing after him. Past Floor 1 he pelted and down to the bottom of the Energy Centre, where the green generators stood.

"SECURITY!" screamed a voice behind him. "STOP AT ONCE!" He turned back and saw two burly security guards haring after him. As panic churned inside him, he saw Entrance 13 up ahead and made a beeline for it. By now, another couple of guards were on his case too. He reached into his pocket for the Directional. But it wasn't there.

He checked his other pocket. Empty. It must have dropped out when he was running. Please, no! But, by a stroke of luck, at that exact second, Door 12 was just beginning to open; he threw himself forward and shouldered his way past the worker who was opening it to come in. Now Cato was outside in the loading bay. He'd walked from the right to reach Door 13 when he'd arrived so now he ran to the left, but when he came to a long, narrow road, he was stuck. He'd crossed so many streets on his way here; he had no way of knowing which way to go. But with the guards fast approaching, he had no choice but to move. Left or right?

He made a snap decision and went left. Next he took a right, then another right, then a left.
2.03 a.m.

He was troubled by what he had seen on the PIPELINE page but maybe he'd misunderstood the figures. Anyway, he couldn't worry about that now. He had to get out of here.

Even though it was early morning, he spotted a crowd up ahead. Get lost in this crowd. That'll shake off the security guards. He moved deeper and deeper into the crowd. After a few minutes, he couldn't see the guards. Now all he needed to do was find his way back to the Archer Gate.

2.09 a.m.

THE LAST DAYS OF THE ENERGY WAR

He had time.

Cato emerged into a huge market square. He gazed in stunned silence at the sights in front of him. He edged his way to the side of the crowd and stood for a few moments, surrounded by noise and lights.

He tried to focus solely on his journey back to the Archer Gate but it was hard with so much going on all around him. Stepping past several buildings, he finally managed to lose the crowd and, after a couple of turnings, found himself back on a familiar-looking road.

This was the way back to the gate.

2.16 a.m.

He was about to start running when a very firm hand gripped him by the shoulders. In a blur of movement, his hands were yanked behind his back. Standing directly in front of him was Cath Jenson from the South's Energy Centre. The two burly guards were holding him.

"I believe you gained unauthorised access to our mainframe," she said. Cato struggled with the guards but it wasn't worth the effort. They held him firm. So he stood still.

"This is a serious crime."

Cato said nothing.

"And I believe you dug into our PIPELINE file too?"

"I did," replied Cato, "and to be honest I found it impossible to believe."

"Everything you saw was true," said Jenson, "and that's only a fraction of it."

"Suppose I believe you and it is true, how long's it been going on for?"

"Years and years," said Jenson. "It's very brutal."

"And that town square I just saw. Is that for real? Or is it some sort of façade?"

Jenson laughed. "Of course it's real. There are many places like that here."

Cato shook his head in amazement. But he feared the worst. The South would never let him get away with a hack like this. Unless...

2.25 a.m.

He talked with Jenson for another ten minutes, upon which she told the guards to release him and handed him a phone.

"You can make one last call to the North," she said.

Cato gulped.

"Can I make two?"

Jenson raised an eyebrow, sighed and nodded.

As Cato made his calls, Jenson held a whispered conversation with the guards and they melted away into the night.

THE LAST DAYS OF THE ENERGY WAR

"Is this it?" asked Cato, seeing Jenson adjusting what looked like a weapon in the top inside pocket of her coat.

"This is it," she replied, "now walk."

2.40 a.m.

Down the streets they headed, until they slipped between two buildings and the Archer Gate appeared in front of them.

2.58 a.m.

Two minutes later, the clanking sound erupted and the gate started sliding open.

On the other side stood Arietta Stone.

"What's going on?" she demanded on seeing Cath Jenson. "Have you got the USB4 Stick, Cato?"

Cato pulled the stick out of his pocket, but instead of walking forward and giving it to Stone, he handed it over to Jenson.

"W... w... what do you think you're doing?" spluttered Stone.

"When I'd downloaded all of the info you required I took a look at a file called PIPELINE," replied Cato.

"I told you not to look at anything else!" hissed Stone.

"Well I did, and I discovered that the North have been stealing energy from the South for years. That's because the money the North should be spending on energy goes to the High-Ups to fund their luxurious lifestyle. The North are now running out of energy because the South have found a way to stop them stealing it. That's why you wanted me to come here, to kick off a new wave of energy grabs."

Stone's face was pale and shocked. "That's not true!" she insisted.

"Not only that, everything we're told about the South is a lie. There are no riots or civil wars in the South. There are brightly lit market squares. There is fresh food to eat. There are co-operative stores. I saw them all. And there are no Security Providers on every corner. They live in true freedom. In the North we're just prisoners of the government and the High-Ups."

"The South just put on a show for you," snarled Stone. "It's all lies. Now cross back here and give me that stick."

The clanking sounded again. The gate was starting to close.

THE LAST DAYS OF THE ENERGY WAR

"I'm not coming back, and nor are the two people I phoned."

At that second, Aunt June and Greta emerged from the shadows behind Stone. Greta took June's hand and they started running towards the gate.

It was closing fast.

"No!" screamed Stone. "I can't wait another three months for their secrets.

Hundreds of people are relying on me. You can't do this!"

"HURRY!" shouted Cato.

June and Greta flung themselves forward and squeezed through a tiny gap just before the gate crunched shut.

On the North side of the wall, Arietta Stone shrieked and banged her fists against the Archer Gate.

On the South Side, Cato ran over and embraced June and Greta.

"Well done, Cato," smiled Jenson. "Welcome to your new life in the South, you three."

The four of them stood there in silence for a few moments and then turned and started walking away from the gate.