

THE GREEN OVOID

Arlen, the head of ArCorp and chief supplier of andros and ores to the City, stood in his great chamber and stared, fascinated, at the sensi screen, taking in the awesome sight from the grassy surface above the City. An alien visitor had arrived; the sensi voiceover gathered itself in a frenzied stutter.

Arlen strode to his deep chair, turned, and studied the pale sky on the screen. He stood a head taller than most other men; he was muscular and solid, with curly dark hair, dark eyes, and skin that shone almost metal-golden over its umber tone. He sat down, extending long legs under the big conference table in the chamber's center, not taking his eyes from the sensicast.

Silent, glowing, the green egg-shaped vessel appeared in a clear noon sky: a long shining silver bar that seemed to fold softly into a triaxial star of pale gold, then into a green ovoid that hung steady until softly-turning gusts of light came under it.

Arlen clutched the arms of his chair, and impatiently silenced the panicked gabbling of the sensi announcers with a word to the room's other occupant, a trenzil droid with its links to the display circuitry.

The vessel descended on the shaft of swirling light, and sank through the City's covering hill to vanish underground, as if the soil and rock were thin as air.

No ship had come from space in thousands of years.

Arlen flicked a hand, and a viewscreen unrolled from the ceiling. His heart pounded almost loudly enough for him to hear it. "Get me the Regional Government Oversight Council," he ordered. "I want a full briefing on the visitor from space. Top priority, get Gullinder for me, if you have to." The other corps wouldn't be far behind him with this; best to act fast.