Watching New York Melt

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Agobbet of molten glass spattered and sizzled across the sidewalk as I turned the corner; I stepped around it and glanced up. The saucer was still hanging there, right above the next block, and the building there—I didn’t know the name—was down to about the fifteenth floor, the red-glowing ends of exposed beams like blown-out birthday candles.

I didn’t have time to watch, though; I had to get lunch and get back to the office. I pushed past the guy selling souvenir pieces of the Empire State Building and into the coffee shop.

Harry was already at the counter; I took the stool beside him and picked up the menu he had just put down.

He sipped coffee and said, “So what do you think?

“About what?”

“Those saucers melting the city.”

I shrugged. “Not my problem,” I said.

“True enough, but it’s a shame, all the same. I didn’t mind when they got the World Trade Center, but I’m going to miss the Empire State.”

“Could be worse,” I said. “The Chrysler is still there. Maybe they’re art critics, and they’ll leave the good ones.”

“I thought of that,” Harry said, “Sort of, anyway. I thought when they first started that maybe it was all some cockeyed conceptual art project, like when they wrapped that island in plastic, y’know what I mean?”

I nodded. “It’s a thought,” I agreed.

“That can’t be it, though; they’d never get the city to go along this far. One building, maybe two, but not this.”

I put down the menu as the waitress came along.

Harry ordered the grilled reuben; I got a club sandwich.

“What I want to know,” Harry said, as the waitress stomped away, “Is who’s going to clean up the mess? The souvenir hunters will get bored eventually, and you can bet that the garbagemen aren’t going to do it. Against union rules, probably. The city’ll have to hire a demolition crew to break up the bigger pieces and haul everything away. And do you think the city can pay for something like that? Of course not! And you can bet that the damn feds won’t want to help—not in New York.”

I nodded. “You’re right; that stuff’ll probably be lying around for months, maybe years, all over the city.”

“Damn right,” he said.

We didn’t talk much after that, just ate, then ran. I had to get back to the office.

Outside the saucer had moved on, toward the west side, and I could see two more in the distance. A pair of fighter planes roared past without doing anything.

My manager met me on the stairs. “Get your stuff cleaned out of that pigsty you call a desk,” he said, “We’re moving.”

“What?”

“Some damn expert came by, says that the saucers will be taking down this building by Thursday or Friday—maybe over the weekend if we’re lucky. I’ve got us a temporary place up on East 55th; we’ll probably need to move out to the suburbs eventually.”

“Oh, jeez,” I said.

“Not my fault,” he said. “Get with it. The boxes are over by the coffee machine.”

I nodded, and he went on past me down the stairs.

I went to my desk and started pulling open drawers.

“Damn,” I said as I yanked the lap drawer open and spilled pencils on the carpet, “Stupid aliens. That’s New York for you; if it’s not one thing it’s another. All we need now is for the movers to go on strike!”