

The Enemy

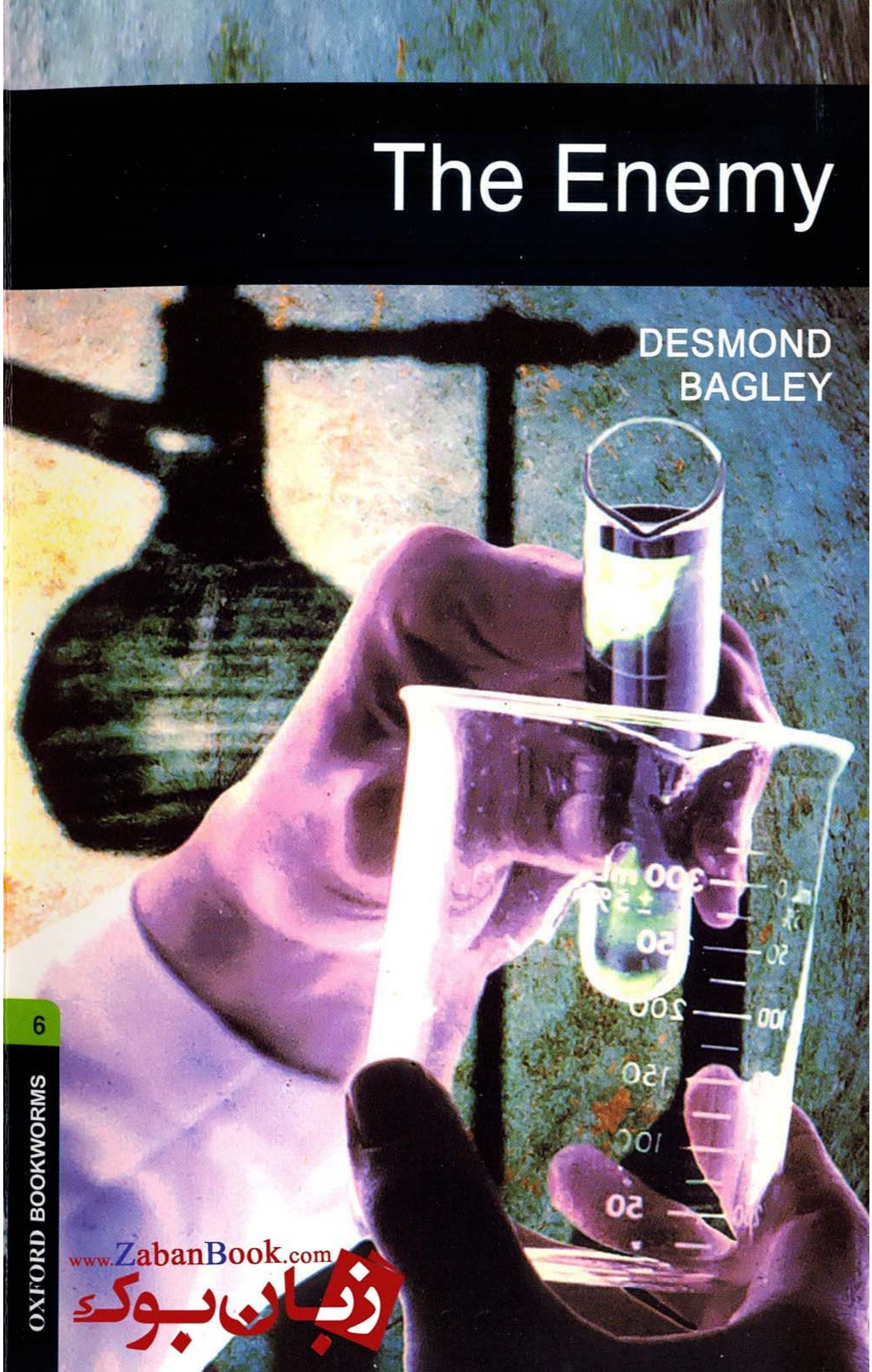
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The Enemy



On a beautiful summer evening in the quiet town of Marlow, a young woman is walking home from church. She passes a man who is looking at the engine of his car. He turns round, smiles at her . . . and throws acid into her face.

Then her father, the scientist George Ashton, disappears. And her sister, Penny, discovers that her husband-to-be, Malcolm, is a government agent. Why has Ashton disappeared, and why is Malcolm told to hunt for him? Who is George Ashton, anyway?

And who is the enemy? [Word count 28,850]



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The Enemy

DESMOND
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Level 6

THE ENEMY

Scientists and politicians have a love-hate relationship. Scientists make discoveries and give new knowledge to the world, for the benefit of humankind. But knowledge can be bought and sold. Knowledge is power, and politicians use power for their own purposes . . . which are not always for the benefit of humankind.

Malcolm Jaggard is a spycatcher, and a servant of the politicians. He's hard, tough, and intelligent – and he wants to marry Penny Ashton, a scientist, and the daughter of the scientist George Ashton. Then the Ashtons' comfortable world is suddenly shattered, and Malcolm is ordered by his politician bosses to protect Ashton. But who is George Ashton? And how do you protect a man who has just disappeared?

Malcolm needs more knowledge, and he can't get it. So he fights for it. But knowledge is power, and servants must not have power. As his search for Ashton turns into a desperate and violent manhunt, Malcolm finds knowledge. But he also finds himself in the long-running war between scientists and politicians – a war that it is safer to keep out of, a war where

'We have met the enemy, and he is us.'

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CONTENTS

STORY INTRODUCTION

i

1 An interesting woman	1
2 Acid in the eyes	4
3 The mysterious George Ashton	10
4 Family problems	17
5 Ashton disappears	25
6 A bad son-in-law?	29
7 Ashton and the Russian scientist	37
8 The man who threw the acid	45
9 Lord Cregar again	51
10 Tragedy in Sweden	55
11 More mysteries and new dangers	65
12 The secret computer	72
13 Ashton's work and Benson's secret	78
14 Trouble in Scotland	85
15 Biological disaster	95
16 My new job	100
17 The future	102

GLOSSARY	105
----------	-----

ACTIVITIES: Before Reading	108
----------------------------	-----

ACTIVITIES: While Reading	109
---------------------------	-----

ACTIVITIES: After Reading	112
---------------------------	-----

ABOUT THE AUTHOR	116
------------------	-----

ABOUT THE BOOKWORMS LIBRARY	117
-----------------------------	-----

An interesting woman

I first met Penelope Ashton at a dinner-party. She was not a beautiful woman, but she was well-dressed, quite pretty and, as I quickly realized, very intelligent. She was a good listener, but did not say much herself. After dinner I managed to spend a lot of time talking to her. I learned that she was a biologist doing research with Professor Lumsden at University College in London. She was an attractive and interesting woman.

It was late when the party came to an end and I took her to catch the last train home.

'Which station does your train go from?' I asked.

'Victoria,' she replied.

In the taxi on the way to Victoria Station I asked her out to dinner. She was silent for a moment, then said,

'All right. Wednesday evening.'

After she had hurried off to catch her train, I realized I didn't know if she was married or not.

On the following Wednesday I met her at University College at a quarter past seven in the evening. 'Do you always work so late?' I asked.

She shook her head. 'Not always. It depends on how my work is going. Sometimes earlier, sometimes later.'

We went to the theatre and had dinner afterwards in a restaurant in Soho. For me it was a most enjoyable evening and I think it was for Penelope, too.

In the next six weeks we went out together several times

and I realized that Penelope Ashton was becoming a serious part of my life.

One evening we had dinner at my flat. I cooked a Chinese meal for her and, when she told me how much she had enjoyed the meal, she also invited me to her home for the weekend. To meet her family.

Marlow is a small town on the River Thames, about an hour's drive from London. The house where Penelope lived with her father and her sister was in the countryside, just a few minutes from the town. It was a large and beautiful house, the kind that you read about in the best magazines. It had a big, well-kept garden, tennis courts and a swimming-pool.

Penelope's father, George Ashton, was in his mid-fifties. His wife was dead and he had not married again. He was tall, grey-haired, and very fit, as I discovered when he beat me at tennis. After the game I was tired, but Ashton dived in to the swimming-pool for a swim before going back to the house for a shower. He was twenty-five years older than I was, but I was exhausted from the game of tennis, which I had lost. I sat down beside Penelope.

'Is he always like that, always so full of energy?' I asked.

'Always!' she promised.

Her sister, Gillian, was not at all like Penelope. She was the kind of woman who likes to stay at home and run the house. It was a large house, with several servants, and she organized it very well. Gillian told the servants what to do, she planned the meals, and seemed to be very happy.

It was a friendly family and I soon felt very comfortable

with them, although I knew that I was there to be inspected. We had dinner, we talked, the girls went to bed, and George Ashton and I sat and talked for a long time. He told me about his two factories, which made special kinds of plastic materials. Then he asked me, very politely, how I earned my living.

'I'm an economist,' I answered. 'I work in a company which studies economic problems and then helps other companies to do their business better. We don't work for big companies, but lots of smaller ones, like yours, find our advice useful.'

Ashton seemed happy with my answers and the rest of the weekend passed quietly. On Sunday evening, as I was leaving, Ashton invited me to return the following weekend. I was happy to accept. I had enjoyed that first family weekend, and I had enjoyed their company. Ashton, the rich, fit and independent businessman; Gillian, his home-loving daughter, and Penelope, the scientist with her own career outside the family. The only strange member of the group was Benson, Ashton's personal servant. He spoke with a gentle, educated accent but his face looked as if he had had far too many fights when he was a young man.

Acid in the eyes

Penelope was very busy the next week. She worked all Friday night and when I met her at the laboratory on Saturday morning, she looked very tired.

'I'm going to have to sleep this afternoon, Malcolm. It won't be much of a weekend for you, I'm afraid. But I'm sure my father will keep you busy. I'm sorry, but I'm just very, very tired.'

I was sorry, too, because I was going to ask her to marry me that weekend. However, it wasn't the right moment to put the question, so I asked her what she had been doing all night.

'Oh, we were doing a very difficult experiment, trying to transfer some dangerous genetic material.'

'Is all this useful?' I asked. 'Does it do any good, or is that a state secret?'

'Oh, no secret, but it's useful, all right. What we're doing is an important part of medical research into cancer,' she replied.

Once again I spent an enjoyable weekend with the Ashtons. We swam, we played tennis, we talked. It sounds boring, but it was, for all of us, an important way to relax from the problems of the working week.

On Sunday evening Gillian went to church and Penelope, her father and I sat talking in the garden. It was a beautiful summer evening. Suddenly we heard a scream, then another.

Ashton said sharply, 'What the devil was that?' and we all

jumped to our feet just as Gillian came round the corner of the house, holding her hands to her face. She screamed again, and fell to the grass. Ashton was the first to reach her. He tried to pull her hands from her face, but she resisted him with all her strength.

Penelope bent over Gillian, who was now lying on the grass. The screams had stopped and a faint voice murmured, 'My eyes! Oh my eyes!'

Penny put her finger to Gillian's face and then put it to her nose. She turned to her father.

'Quick, take her into the kitchen – quickly!' She turned to me.

'Ring for an ambulance. Tell them it's an acid burn.'



A faint voice murmured, 'My eyes! Oh my eyes!'

I ran to the telephone as Ashton lifted Gillian up and carried her to the kitchen. I dialled 999 and immediately a voice said, 'Emergency services.'

'Ambulance.' I gave the address and telephone number. 'It's a bad acid burn on the face,' I said.

'We'll be there as quickly as we can,' said the voice.

I went to the kitchen where Penelope was trying to clean Gillian's face. Gillian was still murmuring low cries of deep pain. I looked at Ashton. I have never seen such an expression of helpless anger on anyone's face, but there was nothing I could do there, so I went outside.

Benson was looking at the ground near the gate.

'I think someone parked his car here, sir, and waited for Miss Gillian. He must have thrown acid into her face when she walked into the garden. It looks as if he turned the car on the grass then, and drove away.'

I looked at the marks on the grass.

'I think you're right,' I said. I ran back to the house, dialled 999 again, but this time, when the voice said 'Emergency services,' I replied, 'Police, please. I want to report a criminal attack.'

The ambulance arrived very quickly and took Gillian and Penelope to hospital. Ashton followed them in his car, but before he went, I took him to one side.

'I've sent for the police. They'll come while you're at the hospital, but don't worry about that. I'll stay here until you come back.'

He seemed not to understand at first, and looked at me as if he did not even know me. I repeated what I had said, and this time he heard me.

'Thanks, Malcolm,' he replied. He looked as if he had grown ten years older in the last fifteen minutes.

Alone in the house, I poured myself a drink and sat down to think while I waited for the police. Nothing made sense. Gillian Ashton was an ordinary young woman who liked living at home, looking after her father. What possible reason could anyone have for throwing acid in her face? I thought about it for a long time and got nowhere.

After a while a police car arrived. I could not tell the two policemen much because I knew very little about Gillian and her father, and they did not seem very satisfied with what I told them. Twenty minutes later another car arrived. A policeman in plain clothes came in.

'I'm Detective Inspector Honnister,' he said. 'Are you Mr Jaggard?'

'That's right. Come in, Inspector. I've got something to show you which I'm not supposed to let you see. But in these circumstances I think I have to show it to you.'

Honnister looked puzzled as I gave him my special identity card. 'We don't see many of these, Mr Jaggard. They're rather special. Have you any ideas about what's happened? Are you here on business?'

I shook my head. 'No, I've got no ideas. I'm not here for professional reasons. I'm just a family guest for the weekend.'

'Well, this looks like the sort of problem we're going to have to solve the hard way – step by step. But I'll be glad to have your help, Mr Jaggard.'

Ashton and Penny came back some hours later. Penny

looked pale and tired, but Ashton had recovered some of his energy.

'Good of you to stay, Malcolm. Stay a little longer – I want to talk to you. Not now, but later.' He spoke as if it was an order, not a request.

He went off to his study and I turned to Penny.

'How's Gillian?'

'Not good,' she said sadly. 'It was strong acid. What sort of person could do such a terrible thing?'

'That's what the police want to know. Does your father have any enemies?' I asked.

'Daddy?' She frowned. 'If you become successful, you're bound to upset some people, so there must be some people who don't like him. But not the kind of enemy who'd throw acid into his daughter's face. That's something different.'

I had to agree, and we talked as we had our dinner – just the two of us. Shortly afterwards Benson came into the room.

'Mr Ashton would like to see you, sir,' he announced.

Ashton was sitting at his desk, a glass of whisky in his hand. The bottle in front of him was half empty.

'I'm so sorry about what has happened,' I said.

'I know, Malcolm,' he agreed. 'But, tell me, how are things with you and Penny?'

'We're very good friends. Is that what you mean?'

'Not exactly. What are your plans?' he replied.

'I intend to ask her to marry me, but I haven't done so yet.'

He rubbed the side of his face and thought for a moment.

'What about your job? Is the money good?'

'It's fairly well paid,' I replied. 'And I have a private income as well.'

'What about the future? Will you get promoted?'

'I think so. I'm trying hard.'

He was silent for a few minutes, then he went on.

'I could offer you a better job. You'd start in Australia, you and Penny, but you'd enjoy that. The only trouble is that you'd have to start almost immediately.'

He was going too fast for me.

'Just a minute,' I said, 'I don't even know if she'll marry me. I haven't asked her yet.'

'She will,' he said positively. 'I know my daughter.'

'Maybe so,' I replied. 'But I'd like to know a lot more about this job before I decide. And talk about it fully with Penny.'

Ashton was annoyed, but he tried to hide it. 'Well, we can wait a week or two, to decide about Australia. But you ought to ask her to marry you now. I can get you a special licence and you could be married by the end of the week.'

'Stop!' I said. 'You're going too fast for me. Tonight isn't the right time to ask Penny to marry me. Not after what happened to Gillian today!'

Ashton stood up and walked impatiently around the room. 'You're right, of course. It's between you and Penny, and it's wrong of me to interfere. But do ask her to marry you now, this evening.'

I stood up. 'Mr Ashton, I don't think that would be a good thing to do, especially today. I won't do it now. I'll do it when I think it's right.'

I left his study immediately. I did not understand why it

was suddenly so important for Penny and me to marry so quickly. There was something wrong and I had no idea what it was.

Penelope was telephoning when I entered the hall.

'I've been talking to the doctors at the hospital,' she said. 'They say Gillian's resting more comfortably now.'

'Good. I'm glad about that. Look, I'll come back tomorrow. Perhaps we can both go to visit her and see how she feels.'

3

The mysterious George Ashton

When I walked into the office on Monday morning, there was a message on my desk. My boss, Harrison, wanted to see me immediately.

'You told a policeman at the weekend who you were,' he accused me. 'Why? Your job is supposed to be secret.'

'I was at a house-party, and something horrible happened – acid was thrown in a girl's face. The police were beginning to look at me suspiciously, so I had to tell them who I was. They would have wasted a lot of time on me if I hadn't. We're supposed to co-operate with the police, aren't we?'

'Was it really necessary to tell the police about yourself?' he asked.

'In my opinion I had no choice. Damn it, I wanted to help the police.'

I walked out of his office and went back to my own, feeling very angry. Larry Godwin was there. We shared an office and were good friends. He also knew a great deal about factories and businesses in Britain.

'Do you know anything about a man called Ashton?' I asked him. 'He runs a factory in Slough. They make a special kind of plastic material.'

'I haven't heard of him,' said Larry. 'Why don't you ask Nellie? She knows everything,' he laughed.

The computer that our office used was called Nellie – I forget why. In its memory there was an enormous amount of information. I sat down in front of the screen, pushed a couple of buttons, and the words 'IDENTIFY YOURSELF' appeared on the screen.

I identified myself, and Nellie asked 'INFORMATION LEVEL?' I answered 'Green'.

All the information in the computer was kept on different 'levels'. Some people had permission to look only at information which was not very important and not very secret. That was 'Level Green'. There was other, very secret information, which could be seen only by Ogilvie, the head of the department. In between there were several different levels, each one known by a colour.

I typed in Ashton's name and address, and almost immediately the message came up on Nellie's screen.

THIS INFORMATION IS NOT AVAILABLE

AT THIS LEVEL

TRY LEVEL YELLOW

I was very surprised. I hadn't expected to find anything at

all about Ashton in the computer memory. What Nellie's message meant was that somewhere in the computer there was a lot of information about George Ashton, and that information was secret. Ashton wasn't just an ordinary businessman.

I typed my identification for Level Yellow. This was more complicated and took me four minutes. Back came Nellie's reply:

THIS INFORMATION IS NOT AVAILABLE
AT THIS LEVEL
TRY LEVEL RED

I sat back to think. I knew that information at Level Red was very secret, and I began to wonder about Ashton. Who was he? Why was everything about him so secret?

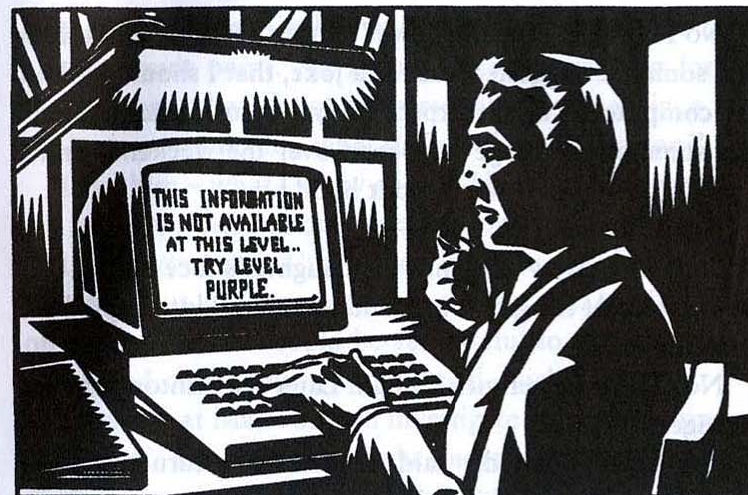
I had permission to see Level Red, but it took me ten minutes to go through the stages to identify myself. Finally I finished typing and waited for Nellie to tell me all about Penelope's mysterious father.

Instead of that, Nellie replied on the screen:

THIS INFORMATION IS NOT AVAILABLE
AT THIS LEVEL
TRY LEVEL PURPLE

Level Purple was too high, too secret for me. All I had learned about George Ashton was that something in his life or work was extremely important and secret.

A couple of hours later Larry and I were talking in our office when the phone rang. It was Harrison, our boss.



Level Purple was too high, too secret for me.

'What the hell have you been doing with the computer, you fool?' he demanded.

'Nothing much. Why? Has it broken down?' I said.

'What's all this about a man called Ashton?' he continued. 'Ogilvie wants to see both of us, immediately. Come on!'

Ogilvie was the head of our department. He was not alone. There was a short, fat man sitting in one of the chairs. Ogilvie didn't introduce him, but asked me immediately:

'Malcom, why are you so interested in George Ashton?'

'I'm going to marry his daughter,' I replied.

This statement produced a very surprising response. For a minute everybody stared at me in shocked silence. Then the fat man said:

'Why did you think information about Ashton might be in the computer?'

ACTIVITIES

Before Reading

- 1 Read the story introduction on the first page of the book, and the back cover. How much do you know now about the story?

Who

- 1 ... is a government agent?
 - 2 ... wants to marry Penny Ashton?
 - 3 ... has disappeared?
 - 4 ... are scientists?
 - 5 ... is attacked on her way home from church?
 - 6 ... are Malcolm Jaggard's bosses?
- 2 What do you think will happen in the story? For each sentence, circle Y (Yes) or N (No).
- 1 Penny Ashton will marry Malcolm Jaggard. Y/N
 - 2 Malcolm Jaggard will find George Ashton. Y/N
 - 3 George Ashton will die. Y/N
 - 4 Malcolm Jaggard will die. Y/N
 - 5 Penny Ashton will disappear. Y/N
 - 6 The man who threw the acid will be caught. Y/N
 - 7 We will discover that George Ashton was a spy. Y/N
- 3 Sentence 1 was said by a soldier. Sentence 2 is a play on his words. What do you think the two sentences mean?
- 1 'We have met the enemy, and he is ours.'
 - 2 'We have met the enemy, and he is us.'

ACTIVITIES

While Reading

Read Chapters 1 to 3. Match these halves of sentences and fill in the correct name each time.

- 1 ____ was a biologist doing research in London
- 2 ____ said that he was an economist
- 3 ____ spoke with an educated accent
- 4 ____ had acid thrown in her face
- 5 ____ was a businessman
- 6 ____ wanted Malcolm to guard the Ashtons
- 7 but there seemed to be no reason for the attack.
- 8 but looked like a fighter.
- 9 but there was a lot of secret information about him stored in the computer.
- 10 but refused to explain why.
- 11 but lived in Marlow with her father and sister.
- 12 but in fact was some kind of government agent.

Read Chapters 4 to 6. Here are some untrue sentences about them. Rewrite them with the correct information.

- 1 Gillian was not very badly injured.
- 2 Penny agreed to marry Malcolm immediately.
- 3 Lord Cregar was an important scientist.
- 4 Ashton disappeared because he didn't want Malcolm and Penny to get married.
- 5 Malcolm told Penny and her father the truth about his job.
- 6 The only surprising thing that they found in Ashton's house was a laboratory.