

When we left Peter Ward, he had just discomfited the KGB by foiling a plot to foment an Algerian immigrant rebellion in France and made off with the KGB's Paris agent, earning nobody any Brownie points in Moscow. As we look in on Peter again, he is assigned, somewhat against his will, to investigate the mysterious disappearance of seven globally prominent scientists from as many different countries and scientific disciplines. From their specialties, a somewhat oddball scientist in the CIA has deduced that they may have been kidnaped by you-know-who to man an exploratory landing on Venus at a time when lesser mortals were straining for the moon. It was to be an expendable, one-way trip to pave the way for real Soviet scientists later on, and just shows you how fiendish those Commies can be. Among those laughing like hell at this theory is our hero, Peter Ward. However he begins laughing out the other side of his mouth after he gets shot while investigating the disappearance of a Norwegian scientist in the Argentine Andes, and narrowly escapes getting laid in Paris and Berne by two ladies connected with two other missing scientists. The fact that he actually misses coitus with these two females shows you how sophisticated we are getting. (We make up for it later on a Micronesian island where a chieftain's granddaughter upholds the hospitality traditions of her clan).

Well, anyway, by this time Peter is convinced and goes on to man a surface expedition in a native canoe to reconnoiter a South Pacific site where there has been unusual Soviet naval and aerial activity, then mans a one-man submarine to locate an underwater colony in a submarine dome where the missing scientists are being conditioned for their flight to Venus. To make a long story short, he breaks up the whole deal and escapes with a young Nigerian scientist, one of the seven, after the security officer presses the destruct button and all others in the colony are lost.

This is a thoroughly improbable plot but well supported by apparently careful research for detailed backgrounding. It also has, to a degree not previously encountered in Hunt books, an element of steadily mounting suspense. There are fewer gourmet displays this time, and fewer bedroom episodes. More action and story development, with the denouement held for the last two pages. Better writing than the usual Hunt, and the temptation is to conclude that he had some fairly good professional help in the editing if not in the writing.