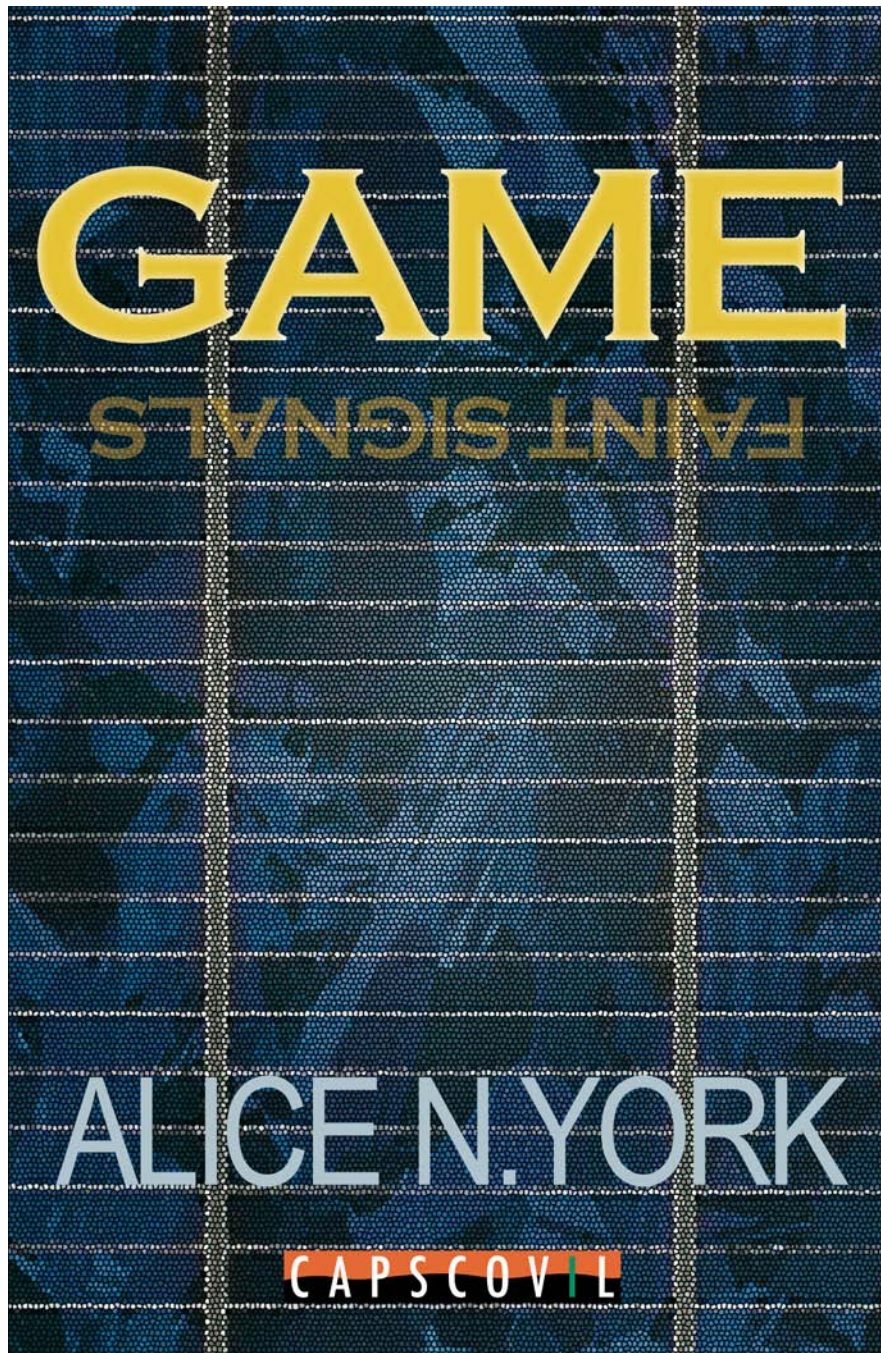


Excerpt from "GAME-Faint Signals"
by Alice N. York – Chapter 5, May.

CAPSCOVIL



First Edition English

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Published by Capscovil Verlag, Glonn, Germany, May 2011

ISBN iBooks 978-3-942358-11-8

First Imprint perfect paperback edition published by Capscovil Verlag, Glonn, Germany, May 2011

ISBN Print 978-3-942358-08-8

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".....The meeting with Hank and Chris took place near the airport the next morning. She was delighted to see Chris again after their pleasant first encounter in Tampa. She said hello in Italian and he replied with a smile; she had a good enough grasp for basic small talk, and soon a business-like familiarity set in. Chris was in his late twenties at most and thus belonged to a generation that adopted a more relaxed, friendly style with business partners – although never any less professional. Hank, who she was meeting for the first time in person, greeted her with a firm handshake, and due to his size was forced to bend down slightly. First, he gave her an update on where things currently stood with the project.

"We're already in talks with two small-scale inverter manufacturers," he began. "As we'll be dealing initially with an off-grid-system prototype, based on the amount of electricity we need to generate, we reckon we can take a standardised high-efficiency appliance and modify it. Deciding on the solar module design is a little trickier, though."

"That's right," Chris broke in. "We've decided to use the off-grid-system prototype as an energy source for greenhouses. Not traditional domestic greenhouses but self-contained ones, in which organically grown vegetables can be cultivated in water baths."

He produced a few slides with diagrams.

"From the outside, it looks just like a normal metal transport container," he explained. "But the inside conceals an ingenious high-tech world. Small receptacles containing the veg are tightly packed together on a number of shelves, themselves ordered into five different sections according to the individual stage of development. The first is where the seeding takes place. A nutrient paste is used instead of soil. Robot arms measure the exact dosage into the receptacle and sow the corn seed. The shelves are moved back and forth automatically so that the receptacles can even be placed into the furthest corner of the water bath. Small plants grow from the seed and paste mixture, receiving all other nutrients they require from fertilised water, added by the robots at regular intervals."

Alex looked at the diagrams in astonishment and noticed that Nobu was doing exactly the same.

"Air conditions are regulated by a computer program that adjusts the temperature, humidity and light quantity accordingly," Chris continued. "After a certain amount of time, the plants are moved from one section to the next by the robot arms until they are ready for harvesting. The crops and plants are then picked by robots and placed into a basket in the side room via a sluice. If you open the door to the side room to extract the harvest, the sluice locks from the inside. That way you prevent most pests from gaining access to the plants. There is thus absolutely no need to use pesticides."

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“This kind of market gardening was first developed a number of years back,” Hank added. “But it wasn’t until a few months ago that a major investor got involved. We at Natioba feel that a significant expansion is just around the corner. Until now, buyers have probably been deterred by the relatively slow payback period of their investment. Anything that takes longer than a year is seen as a non-starter nowadays. Nevertheless, the global demand for organically grown vegetables has grown exponentially. The system’s got a lot going for it. Not only can it run without pesticides or staff; it can also supply fresh vegetables at any time of year. The greenhouses can be built in the most remote areas, completely irrespective of the weather conditions. In an extreme case you could even have one in the desert or on an ice cap.”

“Only two things are indispensable if the system is to function properly,” Chris took up the thread. “Electricity and water. The latter can be integrated into the container via an isolated reservoir. Since the greenhouse is self-contained, water requirements are lower than normal. Generating electricity is the difficult part. With the existing solar technology, it would be necessary to have a relatively large surface area, which in turn would have a negative impact on the payback period. Your Vabilmo technology could help us develop a more cost-effective way of generating electricity.”

Alex and Nobu had been so fascinated that they hadn’t once interrupted. This could really be something, Alex thought to herself.

It was clear that Chris didn’t see this all as mere technical gimmickry, but as a serious prospect for the future. A thought crossed Alex’s mind. Perhaps now was the right time?

A closer look at the relationship between the development lab in Korea and headquarters in Italy would be necessary. She didn’t think about it for too long.....”