

Dire Times

By Alex Pitcher

The symbols are what bother me.

Not the blackened 23rd-century sky, the disease, or the descending attack ships. Not the fact that I now sleep shoulder to shoulder with ten strangers in a cramped, dark, sweaty cell. Not the fact that I can no longer walk outside unless it's on the exercise schedule. Not the fact that I, like everyone else, am forced to eat the carbohydrate loaded stew that makes you want to throw up, but you have to keep it down because if you don't you'll get tazed by a Guard. Not the fact that at any moment my number may be read off a list on a martian database and Guards will come to my room and I'll be fed to the machine. The machine which will grind you up to a bloody, pulpy mesh, put you in saran wrap and send you to god knows where. It's the symbols.

The symbols that crushed the world's armies in a matter of weeks. The symbols that replaced each country's flag. The symbols that are now plastered on the giant skyscrapers. The symbols emblazoned on the Guards' badges. The symbols that betrayed their own people, putting us in camps, grinding us up into hamburger meat and exporting us across the galaxy. The symbols that pandered to the Aliens which, whenever they eat a burger and lick their lips, are tasting the flesh of humans.

The Symbol -- those golden arches, and that wretched slogan: *I'm loving it.*