

# Entropicus

Book 2: The Mystery of Atlantis



Chris Deggs

**This is a work of fiction except for the parts that aren't.**

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# Entropicus

Book 2: The Mystery of Atlantis

## ***Dedication***

This story is especially dedicated to Professor Robert Pope a man who has dedicated his life to the betterment of humanity and who has stood against the tyranny of 'second law physics' which has speeded up the entropic process in human society. It is also dedicated to my loving friend Lynn who is a great help in the editing process.

# Entropicus

Book 2: The Mystery of Atlantis

## **Chapter 1**

When Abbott Gallagher thought of pirates, a vision came to mind of swashbucklers sailing the Mediterranean, searching for treasure and living the adventurous life upon the high seas. However, the history of the Barbary Coast showed him a time and place that dated back hundreds of years and had nothing to do with the adventurous romanticism that Hollywood created of the pirate lore. In reality, stretching across northern Africa, the Barbary Coast was a hotbed of pirate activity. The treasure sought most often was not gold and coin, but rather slaves stolen from European Christians and sold in the marketplace of Algeria and Morocco. Barbarossa (Red Beard), the most famous pirate who operated in the area, was hired to defend Algiers from the Spaniards. After successfully doing so he killed the Algerian ruler and opened up the country as a home to many of the pirate ships that operated in the area. Despite Hollywood's and literature's idolisation, pirating marauders were brutal, violent and greedy. Although Abbott felt entranced by the natural beauty of the coastline, he was not enamoured by Algeria's barbarous history. He pondered this as Hassan drove into busy, bustling, scorching and very noisy Algiers.

Having found a car park, Hassan said, "Amuse yourself while I attend to something."

"Attend to what?" Abbott said, fed up with his guide's secrecy.

Hassan just smiled, "Soter business."

"So what am I to do while you go about your secretive stuff?"

"He handed the Australian a crudely drawn map. Pointing at a red spot on the diagram, Hassan said, "We're staying there tonight. It's only a couple of blocks away. Go and have a rest."

Out of the air-conditioned vehicle, the heat hit hard. Even the two block walk to the single room in a Pension was taxing in the late afternoon sun. Abbott discovered their compact unit fronted a narrow alley in the Casbah. An ageing ceiling fan made a pathetic attempt at keeping the room cool. There was a shower of sorts, but both taps coughed out hot water. Abbott, thoroughly annoyed, dragged a mattress onto the floor in the coolest part of the room and tried to sleep.

Once the Alchemist had returned, Abbott asked, "Why are we staying here? There's probably more room in the Winnebago."

"Because we have been invited to stay here by a colleague. it would be an insult to turn my friend down."

Abbott shrugged. He figured Hassan knew what he was doing. "Is this the person you came to see?"

"Yes." Then he grinned. "Don't worry Abbott; we are only staying overnight. He added, "Let's go."

"Go where?"

"You are about to have your first Casbah experience."

Although Abbott had visited other marketplaces in Morocco and Algeria, he had never been in a Casbah as claustrophobic as that of Algiers. Most Medinas and Casbahs were built like fortresses and were busy day and night. The Algiers Casbah was no different in that respect. A densely packed citadel on a steep hill, where twisting alleys, really staircases, were flanked by haphazardly built houses, one on top of another, forming a seemingly impossible maze. Abbott turned to his mentor, "Hassan how on earth do you know your way around this maze?"

The Muslim answered, "I have been here many times before. At night it is even worse. Because, since the curfew, there is no lamplight, because citizens are supposed to be indoors."

"Yet the Casbah stays open."

Hassan shrugged, then he pointed out, "Remember this landmark," indicating a blue tile-inlaid section across a building, "I will see you shortly."

"Where are you going?"

"Business," was all he said. Then, as an afterthought, "Don't talk to any strangers and don't answer any questions."

Jesus, I'm not a little kid, Abbott thought. He couldn't protest further as the tall bearded man had disappeared into the throng.

It was the day Americans had been waiting for, especially Boston Cybertronics and DARPA. Atlas, dubbed 'Robocop' had its grand debut. The event was fully booked; crowds eagerly awaiting the day's events packed the Speedway. Ulysses Covington and Lynne Becker were among the elite in the VIP box, that afforded them the best view. Outside the gates, protesters, with banners against transhumanism, gathered in large numbers. They were booed and spat at by members of the public, many of whom sported 'Robocop' t-shirts. It looked as though the Miami police had their work cut out for them that day.

General Logan Schulz puffed on a big cigar as he marched to the microphone. He began, "Ladies and Gentlemen and the media this is a very special day for all of us. Our national security is vulnerable to natural, and human-made disasters and there are often limitations to what humans can accomplish to help remedy these situations or mitigate further damage. Until now robotics have not been robust enough to function in all environments and perform the basic tasks needed to alleviate a crisis. The ATLAS class robot, we are unveiling today, is changing all that."

He waited for the huge applause to die down. "The goal of the DARPA Robotics Challenge, here today, is to generate groundbreaking research and development so that future robotics can perform the most hazardous activities. In future disaster response operations, in tandem with their human counterparts, to reduce casualties, avoid further destruction, can save lives."

More applause. Cheers and whistles from the audience.

"So, without further ado, I give you ATLAS."

A truck drove up to the platform. An enormous wooden crate was unloaded and placed centre stage. At first, nothing happened. Then there was a drum roll, and the container exploded into fragments

as a six foot two, three hundred, and thirty-pound robot burst out, onto the stage. The audience, awestruck by the dynamic spectacle, sat wide-eyed, as the robot proceeded to clean up the mess from the shattered crate.

ATLAS' Onboard real-time control computer, sent instructions to its hydraulic pump and thermal management system, which activated its two arms and legs to pick up the pieces and put them in the bin provided. Flashes from thousands of cameras, video cameras and media cameras that recorded the extraordinary event, flooded the arena.

Colonel Cormack grinned hugely. "What a great success."

Lynne Becker said, "I'm glad we went with the Carnegie Robotics sensor head."

"And Akawi Technics for the arms," Barney stated."

Ulysses couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Barney, did I just hear you correctly?"

Barney, not liking or trusting the Australian robotics man, said, "Yes, we used Akawi for the arms. Your piss ant company was just there for back-up."

"But what about the scandal with the whaling sonars?" Ulysses protested.

Barney pointed to the jubilant crowd outside, "Listen to them, Dr Covington. Do you think they give a fuck about your smear campaign?"

"So where does that leave Heron Robotics?"

"Why do you care, Ulysses, "Lynne asked, "They ditched you. You owe them nothing."

Ulysses knew these guys were ruthless, but this was beyond the pale. "So, even after we got our contract reinstated with DARPA, you had no intention of using us?"

"Of course not. Did you think your pathetic little stunt was going to pay off?"

"Heron will be finished."

"Yeah, well there's a lesson there. Don't fuck with the big guys."

The magical art of alchemy, to create objects out of raw matter or turn one object into another, was widely believed to be capable of anything, by those who do not understand it. The idea that alchemy was magical or miraculous, by those unfamiliar with the craft, had served it well. Hassan knew it was a science and, as such, was subject to certain natural laws and limitations. The alchemical process meant 'Equivalent Exchange' (to obtain or create something, of equal value must be lost or destroyed). However, with nanoscience, this was not the case. Nano-scientists (modern day alchemists) could make something from virtually nothing, so nothing needs to be destroyed in manufacture at a molecular level. Soter was well aware of this, and their secret scientists practised an alchemy not limited by old thinking.

This reasoning was why Hassan Shamsi needed to see a colleague who lived near the Casbah.

Karim Ibn Al Hamsa lived in a small dark apartment at the top of the narrow staircase. Hassan squeezed against the wall to let two women pass him on their way down. He knocked at the door. It

was opened by a white-bearded, florid looking man. His face split into a grin when he saw who it was. "Hassan, it is wonderful to see you. Come in. I will get us some tea."

Hassan sat cross-legged on a large cushion. Karim offered him a hookah, which Hassan accepted and sucked in the bubbling aromatic mixture, filling his lungs. He exhaled, coughed, and said, "I suspect Diabolus knows I am here and probably know what I seek."

"Then you have found an apprentice."

"Yes. Harry Scholfield was training him, but he has passed into spirit."

"May he find peace with Allah the Compassionate."

"Indeed."

Karim passed his friend a small cup of sweet mint tea. "Where is your trainee, in the steps?"

Hassan knew his friend meant the Seven Alchemical Steps. "Calcination."

Karim stared at him. "But that is only the first step! How is he going to reach the seventh before you find the key?"

Hassan stroked his long beard. "The long road trip across the desert will help. But I need to know if the way is safe for him."

"Are you ready for the Ast initiation?"

"Yes."

"Very well, be at the temple tonight."

Dayton sat facing Annabel Haifa. She looked to be in her mid-twenties, harmless and demure. But she had tried to assassinate the Israeli Prime Minister, and trigger World War III. "You are very lucky, you know," Lord Lynsey said.

She remained silent.

"If it weren't for our intervention you would now be facing execution. Do you understand that?"

Her blank expression gave nothing away.

"Ingenious device," he smiled, "but it still showed up on the X-ray." Dayton leant back casually, his hands clasped behind his neck. "So, the question is, what do we do with you now. Let's see. We can lock you away and lose the key. Nobody knew what you intended to do, so you are not news."

That didn't matter to her; she remained silent.

Dayton turned to Yasir, his back-up. "Whoever she is working for is not going to be happy with her failure. Perhaps we should inform the Professor where she can be picked up."

She didn't like the sound of that. And they called him the professor. How much did they know?"

"We can also turn you over to Mossad; they will interrogate you in ways, not at all pleasant."

Still no sound from her.

Yasir said, "Perhaps we should give her a taste of what to expect."

After seeing the state of the Rabbi Finstein, Dayton didn't know if Yasir was play-acting or not. Dayton concurred, "If it's the only way to get her to cooperate, you'd better get the tools."

Tools! Her skin went cold and clammy.

Yasir unrolled a piece of suede containing an array of sharp tools, pliers, blades and pincers, all fitting neatly in their loops. He removed some very sharp secateurs. "Hold her little finger out," he said, matter-of-factly.

Dayton separated her small finger of her left hand.

No! Surely they wouldn't, her mind screamed. She couldn't pull her hand away. Sweating profusely, she cried, NOOO!"

Dayton had broken her silence. Now came the crucial part. The Soter agent, relieved, said, "Now let's start again, shall we?"

She took a deep breath.

"Who are you working for?"

"I only know of him as the Professor."

"Have you met with him?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In his hotel room."

"Did you have sex with him?"

Annabel flushed, saying, "If you would call it sex. He whipped us while reciting some poem, or story, or something."

So she was a prostitute. "So how did you graduate from S and M to attempted assassination?"

"You must understand, he is a very powerful man."

"In what way?"

"He is scary. He does something with his eyes. It's difficult to explain."

Dayton looked at Yasir. "Next she'll be telling us she was hypnotised."

"No. Not hypnotised - but controlled in some way."

"This is rubbish," Yasir said. "I think I will get out my tools."

Dayton stilled him with his hand. "Are you saying he used mind control on you?"

She nodded frantically. "Yes, yes. That's what the Professor did."

"When did he do this?"

"After our whipping."

"Our! So there were other prostitutes involved."

"One more. A woman called Miriam."

"Do you know where I can contact her?"

"No."

"What does this Professor look like?"

"He had a dark pointy beard. He was not so tall but broad in the shoulder. A bit like a gnome or goblin."

At last Dayton had a physical description of the man.

She added, "There was one odd thing. When the Professor watched us having sex, he played with himself, but he never let himself go all the way. It was as though he was torturing himself, as well."

"The Atlantean resistance leaders understood the necessary protocols and seemed eager to submit to our demands," Colonel Lynch said, as he and Dr Gibson entered his quarters.

"Tamis looks like a bright, courageous girl. She expressed that her reasons for staying are intellectual, and the scientists will have no qualms with having someone like that around."

"Intellectual, huh! I've seen her fight and lead. She's a warrior."

Dorian laughed lightly. "I see you have felt the effects of their fighting," She said, touching his injured shoulder.

"Beck told you about that, huh?" Rafael gingerly reached up to touch his injured arm. Larson had thoroughly washed and re-bandaged it. He had said there seemed to be no sign of infection, and it would only hurt bad for a while."

"That's good news, but you should have let me know about it as soon as you got back here. It's important for me to know if my military commander got shot in the shoulder?" Dorian teased him gently. "Are you okay?"

Raf nodded, putting his hands on either side of Dorian's face. He leant towards her parting lips and kissed her slowly. "Fuck the stupid wound, this is what I want," the colonel mumbled, gently, running his tongue over hers. He nibbled her bottom lip, and the tips of their tongues danced like old lovers. It was only their third session together, twice after he got back from Atlantis missions. He guided her into his bedroom. She moaned as he pulled her into him, while they kissed deeply. She felt him getting hard and wanted him too. He reached for the zipper of her dress. Her heart began to race as the garment fell to the floor. Raf pushed her back on his bed and caressed her breasts.

"My God, I've wanted this," he said, running his hands down her body, lightly touching every curve.

She responded, "Raffie, I want you now," while grinding against him.

He pulled her up close, kissing her deeply while pushing her panties aside. "I have got to have you now," he groaned.

"Yes, fuck me," she moaned, as he thrust into her feminine warmth.

As they lie in post-coital bliss, she said, "Raf, we have to stop doing this."

He leant up on one elbow and stroked her coppery, slightly greying hair. "Why give up this pleasure that we enjoy so much?"

She looked at him. He reminded her of James Garner, in his 'Maverick' role from her childhood days. "Because we are commanders of this mission, Raf. If anyone finds out ..."

"And why's that going to happen. Christ, this is just one of the few pleasures to be found on this God-forsaken base," Lynch said, stroking Dorian's hair. "We just have to be careful; that's all." He grinned, "Now, how about a drink?"

She sat drinking coffee, naked but for the army issue blanket wrapped around her. "What are we going to do about Tamis and those kids?" she asked.

"More to the point, how are we going to weasel out our mole."

Dorian sniggered, "I know it's serious, but you seem to be getting your mammals confused."

Bella knocked at the door and responded to Tamis' "Come in." Everything seemed in order, so she turned and smiled at Tamis. "Are you settling in comfortably?"

The Atlantean smiled, "Thank you -yes. You have all been very kind."

Bella thought back to when she was made welcome. "Takran is just down the hallway. If you need anything, just ask."

The room felt alien and strange, vastly different to her chamber in her father's house. She sighed, putting on a brave face. "Thank you, Bella. I'm sure everything will be just fine. It will be wonderful to be able to bathe properly, in warm water, and not in a cold river."

"I will leave you to it, then." Bella smiled once more and then left.

Tamis stood still, at a loss for what to do. A hot, steamy bath had been on her mind, but she couldn't motivate herself to run it. Despite all the kindness showered upon her she was far away from home and had never felt more alone. It seemed that the entire weight of her world rested upon her frail shoulders. She thought she was prepared to lead her people, but that was when her father's robust and loving power had protected her. Despite their differences in religious beliefs, she had never doubted his love for her. Now she realised he had been right, but that had only got him locked up or killed. She shuddered at the thought and yearned for her father's experience and wisdom. But he had disappeared in the Singularian attack on the Capitol. Tears clouded her eyes. He had instructed her to remember all of her lessons and to lean heavily on Takran, for she would need a strong companion and a good friend.

There were three hundred and fifty staff members on the Atlantis mission base, and one of them was the mole. But which one, the Colonel wondered? How could he find out? Dorian had gone back to her quarters, and he lay alone in the dark, trying to figure out a strategy. It had to be somebody with

the knowledge to cause a power surge to short out the shield. The shield, a device generating an energy barrier, was designed to block matter or energy directed at it to stop unauthorised personnel from passing through. Somebody had overridden it. The Ancients Atlanteans had placed a shield on the 'Gate' which had been in place and effective, for thousands of years. Raf wondered how his people discovered the Gate and how somebody had deactivated the shield?

His shoulder was giving him trouble, and he couldn't sleep. So he got up, made coffee, and pored over the reports he had requested. When the shield deactivation took place, the computers recorded everything that happened, power wise, as they went into battery mode. Schematics on the Gate came up on his monitor. Scrolling through the technical data, Raf came to an original report stating the shield on the Atlantis Stargate was translucent. This anomaly meant the suppressed unstable vortex and the impact of objects were prevented from re-materialising. The scientific consensus at the time was that it was unable to be breached. The reason given was that it could not be breached by anything because it was placed so close to the event horizon that it blocked even subatomic particles, not just objects larger than an atom. However, since advances in Star-Gate technology had taken place, a 'back-door' was previously coded into the shield's control system by, Dr Rodney MacKay. This extra port allowed the scientist to remotely deactivate and activate Atlantis' Gate shield, preventing anyone else (including anyone using the shield's control panel in Atlantis itself) from deactivating it.

Could MacKay be a spy for Diabolus? No, it didn't make sense. But he did have more control over the 'gate' than Colonel Lynch realised. Raf would have to check into it the next day. Now he had to get some sleep.

*<http://www.federaljack.com/terminator-robots-a-reality/>*

*[http://stargate.wikia.com/wiki/Stargate\\_shield](http://stargate.wikia.com/wiki/Stargate_shield)*

*<https://www.fanfiction.net/s/10062512/2/Alchemical-Ninp%C5%8D>*

## Chapter 2

The PR circus was in full swing as DARPA officials followed up the Cyberman 'Robocop' unveiling with much publicity. The media was in a frenzy, each publication and TV network pushing to get the first movie and pictures of the super robot. A television interviewer quizzed General Logan Schulz about 'Atlas' on 'yet another' chat show. The interviewer said, half joking, "A lot of folks out there are a little worried about armed robocops giving out speeding tickets."

Logan, trying not to sound scripted, answered, "This is a misconception. The Police don't just give out speeding tickets. Atlas is trained to help out in rescue situations. It is designed to work with rescue aid workers and human response teams, in disaster scenarios."

"When are we going to given a demonstration of that?"

"DARPA had contracted Boston Cybertronics to the tune of \$10.9 million to manufacture humanoid robots that were bi-pedal, built like humans and have a sensor head with on-board computing capabilities. The general said, "You will be able to see for yourself in just a few days when we demonstrate this function."

"Do you think this will be the way of policing in the future?"

"I couldn't speculate on that. it's one step at a time."

Barney had to admit the General handled himself very well. Give the media a taste but not too much. Keep them dangling on the hook. By the unveiling ceremony of ATLAS the (Activated Tactical Law Automotive System) the whole of the media was salivating. Barney phoned Dr Becker. "Hey Lynne, did you see Logan strut his stuff?"

"Yes, he's hitting some left-fielders well. By the demonstration, we should have any bugs dealt with."

"While we're talking about bugs, how does Covington fit in?"

"I didn't want to bring him into the loop just yet. But needs must and all that."

"You haven't answered my question. Has Ulysses he got his legal shit sorted?"

"That's not our problem. Heron isn't the front line. Just relax Barney. Everything is going like clockwork."

"Yeah, well I hope you right. I think you're taking a big chance with him."

Lynne was busy going through her in-tray when Ulysses knocked and entered her office. "Dr Becker, can I have a word?"

"Sure. What's on your mind?" Dr Becker said, removing her glasses.

"It seems that the biggest obstacle we face right now is biological to a technological interface. We have to get the public to accept Robocop as a necessary part of law enforcement."

Indicating the list she had on her computer, she said, "These are the public feedback responses from the latest survey. Here are a few random samples."

1) I bet a soldier that never questions very evil orders is worth ten times more to them.

- 2) It's as simple as this. We replace current police officers with robot police officers. In the future, no harm comes to anyone except the bad guys, especially if those bad-guys are revolutionaries against an evil government.
- 3) A Robby Robocop on every street corner sounds good to me. Start their mass-production now.
- 4) Scary, just imagine being pulled over and questioned by a robot cop.
- 5) How many murderers will get away with their crimes?"
- 6) It depends on what they programme it with to define 'bad guy'. We all know the broadness of the meaning of terrorist.
- 7) Yea and there will be no chance of leniency. In the old days, the cop might consider a minor crime not to be worth the paperwork, and give the offender a cuff around the ear. Robocop won't have a discerning judgement in such matters.
- 8) The problem as I see it is that these robocops as any other device connected to a network would be susceptible to being hacked and that could be a problem."

"What do you glean from that, Ulysses?" Lynne asked, watching his response.

"The good folks out there don't believe a word of Logan's lies about Atlas being used only for rescue duties, and there's a lot of uneasiness masked as cynicism."

"And we go ahead anyhow because we are leading the way and they are all following."

"Of course. We can't stop progress."

Her voice softened. "That reminds me, how is your situation improving?"

"Everything is fine except when Nick Griffin gives evidence in court."

"When will that be?"

"Three weeks from now. I have to be back in Australia then."

"Yes, I see what you mean. Can that thug's silence be bought?"

"I would think so. But how can we make an offer?"

Looking directly at Dr Covington, she said, "You just concentrate on ATLAS's debut."

There had been sexual tension between Lynne and Ulysses all day. They both determined to keep their relationship on a professional basis, but the chemistry between them had other ideas. It started off innocently enough in a Boston bar after work. But the signals became more overt over an intimate seafood dinner at the Island Creek Oyster Bar. By the time they got back to her apartment, Ulysses had made quick work of getting her undressed. She lay on the bed, naked, looking up at him, wanting him. He wanted her badly as his eyes sated themselves on her imperfect but erotic form.

Ulysses laid down on the bed facing her, resisting the urge to get primal and fuck straight away. That had happened back in Australia, but now it had to be different. It was not just lust, as before. Now there were emotional feelings involved. It scared the hell out of him, a confirmed bachelor. This night he wanted to get her off as never before. They moved together, cuddling and caressing for a long time.

"Lynne, I've missed this," he crooned, leaning his head forward until their lips met. I'm ready for you."

"Yes you are," she smiled wickedly, cupping his engorged penis.

She obliged without complaint.

His hands gently stroked her hips. She felt waves of pleasure rocketing through her at each touch by his tongue or fingers. He positioned his erect penis and pushed into her, immediate feeling enveloped by her soft wet, feminine warmth. As his rhythm and friction intensified, she raced towards a great orgasm, dissolving all the tensions of the day. Her climax hit hard, sending seismic tremors through her body, from her core to her fingertips.

"Oh God! Ulysses," she cried out, surrendering completely to the supremely enjoyable release, before collapsing on her stomach in ecstatic exhaustion.

Afterwards, as they lie in each other's arms, She said, "You're a good-looking, crazy man, Ulysses, but this has to be a one-off."

He propped himself up, looking at her. "Why? We're single, consenting adults."

"Where do you see this going then?" she asked

"I don't know. But I find you a very sexy, intelligent and exciting woman. I don't want this to end."

"But I'm your boss, and these things never work out."

He leant forward and kissed her on her forehead. "Maybe you're right, and maybe you're not. But it'll be fun finding out."

"You're one of us, aren't you?" Tamis asked as the procession came to the cave portal.

Bella answered, "Yes, I'm Atlantean by birth, but I have lived the other side of the gate for twenty-four moons."

"How did that happen?"

Bella smiled, "It's a long story."

Just then, Raf said, "Kronyn and I will scout outside to see if the way is clear. The rest of you stay put."

Tamis said, "Colonel, take Takran with you. He knows what signs to look for."

The Colonel nodded, and the Atlantean youth joined them. The portal wall looked solid and, although they knew they were looking at a holographic image, both Rafael and Kronyn hesitated. Takran grinned and walked straight through.

Once all three were on the other side, Takran climbed onto the rocks and scanned the area, as far as he could see. "There is no sign of Singulators," He said, jumping down the cliff, landing cat-like on his feet.

"Can they hear us through the portal?" Raf asked.

"I don't know," Takran said, stepping back into the caves.

"Is it safe?" Tamis asked.

"The way is clear, but we must move quickly and quietly."

As they walked, Tamis kept close to Bella. She said, "I do not know how to help my people. Most of them are children who are very dependent on us older ones. As we have only just met, I am taking a risk to trust you. But I see no other way."

"We are not your enemy."

Bella, I want to believe you, but that's what the singularians told us."

Bella placed a reassuring hand on the girl's shoulder, saying, "Colonel Lynch is a good example of the people on earth. They are robust and resourceful. They are also very kind, and there is no doubt in my mind that Dr Gibson will assist you."

"Dr Gibson?" Tamis inquired.

"She is the leader of the Atlantis expedition," Bella replied.

Tamis nodded. "Thank you, Bella. Your reassurances do calm me."

The two women, lapsing into silence, walked for ten more minutes, which brought them to the Gate. Bella sat-phoned the Gate-House.

"Bella, is there a situation?" Dorian Gibson asked, noting the expedition had been cut short.

"No, Dr Gibson, do not worry. Instead, I need your approval to bring a visitor. Her name is Tamis, and she is the leader of a group of young Atlanteans."

"You now our policy, Bella."

"Yes Dr Gibson, but in the case of an emergency ..."

"What Emergency, Bella."

"There is a takeover on the island. Tamis was hiding in a cave with a bunch of young Atlanteans."

Colonel Lynch said, "We need to question Tamis and Takran to find out what's going on."

"Just hold the line for a minute, Colonel." Turning to a subordinate, Dr Gibson said: "Tell Major Lorne to take a few Marines down to the Gate." Then, back to Bella, she said, "You have approval. The shield is down. Gibson out."

"Come." Bella led Tamis to the Gate, and they both stepped through.

Tamis carefully put on a neutral face, as she had, been taught, though this new land awed her. Bursting to ask questions about the strangeness of the buildings and the activities of the technicians, using all her will, Tamis remained silent. Six Marines had their automatic rifles trained on her and Takran, yet she did not feel threatened. Looking up, Tamis faced the brunette woman who was descending a flight of stairs.

"Welcome to Earth, Tamis." The woman greeted her. "I am Dorian Gibson, leader of this expedition. Come with me to my office; we can speak in private there."

Raf countered, "I need to be present at the briefing."

"This is a chat, and I want it to be private."

In Dr Gibson's office, Tamis seated herself, then glanced around the room. "Dr Gibson, your post is bizarre. I have not seen anything like it."

"I expect this is all strange to you, Tamis," Dorian said as she took her seat on the other side of the desk. Bella took the chair beside Tamis, "What is it that you need from us?" She asked kindly, leaning forward and getting straight down to business.

Tamis, straightening up in her seat, folded her hands in her lap. Dropping her gaze from Dorian, momentarily, she tried summoning up some courage. "Dr Gibson, my people have been dominated by the Singularians. They came to us with a new religion. Those who wouldn't convert got sent to a re-education camp. There are only about thirty of us young resistance fighters left after months of hiding in caves. There was no time for the elders of our culture to teach us how to use the Ancestral Ring, or Gate, as you call it, so we have been stranded there."

Dorian listened quietly, and when Tamis had finished speaking, she was silent. Looking over the Atlantis Mission inventory that morning, She noted that Government cutbacks had left them hurting. With the tightly stretched budget, there was not much Dorian could offer. At last, she said, "I can only provide temporary sanctuary for you and your people. Otherwise, the request has to go through normal channels. In return, I want to know everything about the situation on Atlantis."

"Thank you, Dr Gibson. We are all very grateful."

"Can you contact your people from here?"

Tamis shook her head. "Only from the other side of the gate."

Dorian spoke into an intercom. "Get Major Lorne to take his Marine detail and go through the gate to bring in the refugees." She turned to Tamis, "You'll have to go with them."

<http://www.abovetopsecret.com/forum/thread873913/pg1>

## Chapter 3

"They understand the necessary protocols and seem eager enough to submit to our demands," Colonel Lynch said, as he and Dr Gibson entered his quarters.

"Tamis looks like a bright, courageous girl. She expressed that her reasons for staying are intellectual, and the scientists will have no qualms with having someone like that around."

"Intellectual, huh! I've seen her fight and lead. She's a warrior."

Dorian laughed lightly. "I see you have felt the effects of their fighting," She said, touching his injured shoulder.

"Beck told you about that, huh?" Larson had thoroughly washed and rebandaged it. He had said there seemed to be no sign of infection, and it would only hurt for a short while."

"And so he should. It's important for me to know if my military commander got shot in the shoulder?" Dorian teased him gently. "Are you okay?"

Raf nodded, putting his hands on either side of Dorian's face. He leant towards her parting lips and kissed her slowly. "Fuck the stupid wound, this is what I want," the colonel mumbled, gently, running his tongue over hers. He nibbled her bottom lip, and the tips of their tongues danced like old lovers. It was only their third session together, twice after he got back from Atlantis missions. He guided her into his bedroom. She moaned as he pulled her into him, while they kissed deeply. Dorian felt him getting hard, and she wanted him too. He reached for the zip on her dress. Her heart began to race as the garment fell to the floor. Raf pushed her back on his bed and caressed her breasts.

"My God, I've wanted this," he said, running his hands down her body, lightly touching every curve. She responded, "Raffie, I want you now," while grinding against him.

He pulled her up close, kissing her deeply while pushing her panties aside. "I have got to have you now," he groaned.

"Yes, fuck me," she moaned, as he thrust into her feminine warmth.

As they lie in post-coital bliss, she said, "Raffie, we have to stop doing this."

He leant up on one elbow and stroked her coppery, slightly greying hair. "Why give up this pleasure that we enjoy so much?"

She looked at him. He reminded her of James Garner, a matinee idol of her girlhood days. "Because we are commanders of this mission, Raf. If anyone finds out ..."

"And why's that going to happen. Christ, this is just one of the few pleasures to be found on this God-forsaken base," Raf said, stroking Dorian's hair. "We just have to be careful; that's all." He grinned, "Now, how about a drink?"

She sat drinking coffee, naked but for the army issue blanket wrapped around her. "What are we going to do about Tamis and those kids?" she asked.

"More to the point, how are we going to weasel out our mole."

Dorian sniggered, "I know it's serious, but you seem to be getting your mammals confused."

Bella knocked at the door and responded to Tamis' "Come in." Everything seemed in order, so she turned and smiled at the girl. "Are you settling in comfortably?"

The Atlantean smiled, "Thank you - yes. You have all been very kind."

Bella thought back to when she was made welcome. "Takran is just down the hallway. If you need anything, just ask."

The room felt alien and strange, vastly different to her chamber in her father's house. She sighed, putting on a brave face. "Thank you, Bella. I'm sure everything will be just fine. It will be wonderful to be able to bathe properly, in warm water, and not in a cold river."

"I will leave you to it, then." Bella smiled once more and then left.

Tamis stood still, at a loss for what to do. A hot, steamy bath had been on her mind, but she couldn't motivate herself to run it. Despite all the kindness showered upon her she was far away from home and had never felt more alone. It seemed that the entire weight of her world rests upon her frail shoulders. She thought she was prepared to lead her people, but that was when her father's robust and loving power had protected her. Despite their differences in religious beliefs, she had never doubted his love for her. Now she realised he had been right, but that had only got him locked up or killed. She shuddered at the thought and yearned for her father's experience and wisdom. But he had disappeared in the Singularian attack on the Capitol. Tears clouded her eyes. He had instructed her to remember all of her lessons and to lean heavily on Takran, for she would need a strong companion and a good friend.

There was 350 staff on the Atlantis mission base, and one of them was the mole. But which one, Rafael wondered? How could he find out? Dorian had gone back to her quarters, and he lay alone in the dark, trying to figure out a strategy. It had to be somebody with the knowledge to cause a power surge to short out the shield. The shield, a device generating an energy barrier, was designed to block matter or energy directed at it to stop unauthorised personnel from passing through. Somebody had overridden it. The Ancients Atlanteans had placed a shield on the 'Gate' which had been in place and effective, for thousands of years. Raf wondered how his people discovered the Gate and how somebody had deactivated the shield?

His shoulder was giving him trouble, and he couldn't sleep. So he got up, made coffee, and pored over the reports he had requested. When the shield deactivation took place, the computers recorded everything that happened, power wise, as they went into battery mode. Schematics on the Gate came up on his monitor. Scrolling through the technical data, Raf came to an original report stating the shield on the Atlantis Star-Gate was translucent. This anomaly meant the suppressed unstable vortex and the impact of objects were prevented from materialising. The scientific consensus at the time was that it was unable to be breached. The reason given was that it could not be breached by anything because it was placed so close to the event horizon that it blocked even subatomic particles, not just objects larger than an atom. However, since advances in Star-Gate technology had taken place, Dr MacKay had previously coded a 'backdoor' into the shield's control system. This upgrade allowed Rodney to remotely deactivate and activate Atlantis' Gate shield, preventing anyone else (including anyone using the shield's control panel in Atlantis itself) from deactivating it.

Could MacKay be a spy for Diabolus? No, it didn't make sense. But he did have more control over the 'gate' than Raf realised. He would have to check into it the next day. Now he had to get some sleep.



## Chapter 4

"Rodney, would you be so kind as to take notes so I can relate the information to the Immigration authorities?" Dorian asked, politely.

"What, I'm the most brilliant man in two galaxies, and I'm being reduced to note-taker?" MacKay stated, incredulous.

With a piercing glare from Dr Gibson, he quieted down, but grumbled underneath his breath, until Colonel Lynch hit his arm. "Ow!"

"Serves you right." The Colonel muttered. Then he said, "Rodney, there's something I need your help on after this."

"If we can begin?" Dorian said, smiling at her two guests. "I have briefed everyone on your request to stay here in at the Atlantis mission base, and, understandably, everyone has questioned this situation. This woman," She gestured to the man Tamis and Takran had not yet met. "Is Dr Zelenka. She is another scientist, here at my request, as Dr Beck is busy checking the health of the Atlantean children."

"Of course." Tamis nodded, "We have nothing to hide."

"Alright then," Zelenka said, adjusting his glasses. "What are your reasons for wishing to stay on this side of the Gate?"

Tamis interlaced her delicate fingers. Leaning forward to show she was paying attention, she marshalled her thoughts. "I can serve my people better here," Tamis stated calmly, watching Takran out of the corner of her eye. He appeared casual, but she knew he could quickly turn and cover her, just in case things turned nasty. She continued, "There is much I can learn from you, and much you might learn from me. We need help in our battle against the Singularians. In return, we have advanced technology that can help save your world."

MacKay interjected before she could continue. Rudeness was just his way. "And why should we trust you? You attacked us, remember."

"What could I possibly do to harm any of you? In a show of trust, none of my people have come armed. Only in times of emergency am I armed. We didn't know who you were. For all, we thought you were Singularians." She paused, looking at her interrogators. Then she said, "There is no reason you should trust me until my information and skills prove true." She looked away from MacKay. He made her nervous.

"Why should we trust any of your information?" MacKay continued, "How do we know if your information isn't going to lead us into a trap?"

Tamis, taken aback by his aggressive questioning, much preferred Dr Zelenka's calm and reassuring voice. She didn't feel as though she was on trial with her. She stuttered, cursing herself silently. "I cannot answer those questions. Perhaps, as I trusted you with the futures of thirty children I love very much and for which we are indebted to you all, can you also find it in your hearts to trust the gift of information I am giving you?"

MacKay leant slightly towards Lynch and muttered something in his ear. He rolled his eyes and scooted towards Zelenka, to get away from Rodney's paranoid ramblings. Sure, yes, MacKay was brilliant and usually right, and Lynch agreed with his questions. It was just that he was annoying at times.

Bella, noting the overwhelmed expression on Tamis' face, stepped in. Smiling to help reassure the younger woman, she said, "Perhaps it would be more of a comfort to your people if you were with them?"

Tamis hesitated at the gentle question. "If I am honest with you, my reasons here are partly selfish. I am interested in your technology, medicine and science." She added, " It would be comforting for them to see me, and it pains me to think of leaving them, but I do not feel as though I belong to them anymore."

Colonel Lynch, who had been relatively quiet since Tamis had walked into the room, spoke up. "You know that we're going to have to oversee you if we decide to let you stay until we're sure that you're not going to kill us all, right?" He asked casually, taking on a flippant tone.

Tamis could not help but crack a small smile at Lynch's tone. "Yes, I understand that. My father would do the same thing, and I expect no less." She answered, relaxing as she kept her gaze on Lynch. He did not seem at all threatening or intimidating. In fact, no one in the room seemed hostile, save Dr MacKay or Kronyn, but she supposed it was how they regarded strangers.

Dorian, who had sat back and watched the conversation, leant forward and turned her attention to the two scientists, who appeared restless. "You two are free to leave and get back to work. Thank you for your time." She gave them a small smile.

Dr Zelenka stood up immediately, taking the hint, and regarding those in the room with a friendly gaze, she left, apparently itching to get back into her lab.

MacKay lingered, wondering why Rafael wanted to see him?

The Colonel caught up with MacKay, saying, "I'm sorry for bothering you, Rodney, but we've got a couple of problems."

"Only a couple. That's surprising."

He followed The scientist into the lab. "Are we alone in here?" Raf asked.

"That depends on what you have in mind," MacKay winked.

"We have a mole, and I intend to flush him or her out," Raf said,

"What's that got to do with me?"

"You worked out how to take down the shield."

"Yes, that was my genius at work."

"Who else, on this base, can do that?"

"Just Moi," Rodney said, lightly.

Lynch felt annoyed. MacKay wasn't taking him seriously. The ass hole was playing the; I'm the brilliant scientist, you're the fuck wit, game. "Can you bring down the shield now?"

"No, I can't do that. It's not just like turning a light switch off, you know."

"What about the 'back door' you built into the system?"

"Oh, we have been doing our homework. Look, the shield is like an Iris. It has a ZPM built into it."

"A ZPM?"

"Zero Point Module. The Stargate creates a stable, artificial wormhole between itself and another Stargate. When activated, it produces a powerful burst of energy known as an unstable vortex. This effect is due to the significant amount of energy needed to form a stable wormhole. When we keep one side of the gate open it is much less powerfully-intensive. Deactivating the shield can be very dangerous."

Raf was way in over his head when it came to scientific knowledge. "Why's that," he asked, hoping for a simple answer.

"because it cannot destroy any matter coming into contact with it. Allowing anti-matter from sub-atomic particles to entangle with matter is not a smart idea."

"So it could blow up!"

"Excellent, colonel. I thought you'd understand the destructive element."

"So how do you safely deactivate the shield. Run me through this back door of yours," Lynch ordered.

"Rodney, fed up with trying to put brains into statues, sighed heavily. "Colonel, travel through a Stargate is strictly a one-way deal - from the transmission Gate to the receiving Gate. This property has to do with the limitation of our technology, not the wormhole. Wormholes will transmit anything that enters them, but no solid matter could survive the process."

"How do we survive then?"

"Because of each Gate having its particular role and they must be synchronised to carry out their functions. The transmitting Gate converts the traveller into his or her most essential components (sub-atomic particles) and transmits it, while the receiving gate reassembles the transferred matter back into its original form."

"Oh, I see."

"Yes Colonel, so taking down the shield reverses this process, which is not only fatal for the traveller but results in the transmitting Gate deconstructing the object upon arrival, converting it into sub-atomic quantum energy."

"You said, 'initially reverses the process.'"

"Aye, well I discovered that the natural proclivity of the Star Gate is to find its equilibrium. It works a bit like an automatic pilot. Once it finds its imbalance, to prevent it reaching criticality, it reverses the process to stabilise itself. But that takes time."

"How much time?" Raf asked, becoming excited that he was beginning to grasp the concept.

Rodney shrugged. "There is no set time. It takes as long as it takes."

"So for someone to deactivate the shield to let the Diabolus through, they would have to be aware of this and have the ability to carry out the process safely."

"To allow matter through the gate, yes. But using my back door technology would not have blown our power supply."

Lynch frowned. He hadn't thought of that. The mole didn't have to use Rodney's 'back door'. Okay, How did shutting down the shield have that effect on our power supply?"

"The only thing I can think of is that an anomaly caused the Gate to stay open longer than its maximum of 38 minutes requiring it to draw on massive amounts of power. It's only source was the main generator, and even that was nowhere near enough to close the Gate. Energy starvation caused it to find its equilibrium."

"What sort of anomaly are we talking about?" Lynch quizzed.

The scientist shrugged. "It's an anomaly. How would I know?"

"Could it be man made?"

"In theory, yes. if someone was able to crash the Gate." Then he shook his head. "No, Impossible! Even meteor impacts have failed to destroy these gates."

"What about a power surge too powerful for it."

Rodney laughed derisively. "The Portal is an enormous superconductor, capable of holding many times the necessary amount of power for a wormhole to form."

"It must still have a limit - surely."

"Aye, but surpassing it will create an explosion of considerable size, enough to potentially kill all life on a planet the size of Earth. So we'd best hope it never reaches that point."

The Colonel scratched his head. "Then how the hell did somebody deactivate the shield?"

"I still say it was an unknown anomaly."

"And the Diabolus Sect agents just happened to be hanging around, waiting to enter? Right."

"It's possible. If the agents entered." Rodney shrugged.

Raf was getting nowhere. "I don't believe it was a fucking anomaly. Somebody is responsible, and I am going to find out who."

"Yeah, whatever. But don't hassle me with it."

Sometimes Lynch hated MacKay. He glared at the scientist. "So far you are my only suspect, and until you can come up with a better answer, it will remain that way."

Francisco Sonata's plan was shaping up. Mohammed Farah was already putty in his hands. As soon as he offered to help fund the Euromed Heritage Montada project, the President of the M'zab area became an instant friend, offering, in return, to help the generous benefactor in any way he could. That would come later the Spaniard thought, as Mohammed drove with him around Ghardaia. It was enjoyable being chauffeur -driven in air-conditioned comfort, as the city outside sweltered. Ghardaia, Mohammed informed him, was founded by a Muslim sect called the Mozabites. Francisco was intrigued as the limousine, a rare sight in the impoverished city, drove along the narrow, winding streets and covered passageways. One of the oddities of the place was that married women wore burqas that covered them from head to ankle except for one eye. To Francisco, the women looked like white ghosts as they stood to wait for the buses that seemed only to have women on them.

Mohammed laughed pointing to some white-draped women. "That is why it is called the city of ghosts." Then, turning to Professor Sonata, he smiled "It is very generous of your Sect to fund this project."

"There are those of us who regret the damage the French Foreign Legion did to this area. The trust is set up to offer some small recompense."

"We are most grateful, professor. This afternoon the "Built heritage and collective memory team will be able to thank you personally."

Francisco smiled, thinking that there would most certainly be a collective memory but not the one Mohammed was expecting.

Hassan caught up with Abbott at the arranged place. They walked for a while in silence as Abbott took in the sights, smells and sounds of the Casbah. They followed the hill down towards the sea. The hill neatly divided the High and Low city. They passed masonries and mosques, dating back to the 17th Century. Abbott was enjoying the exquisite architecture of the Ketchaoua mosque, when Hassan said, "Tonight I am going to be initiated into the Ma'at temple."

Abbott, having no idea what it meant, said, "I guess it could be entertaining."

"You will not be attending. It is inner circle Soter business."

"What am I supposed to be doing during that time?"

"Anything you like, but as we have a long drive tomorrow, I would suggest sleep."

For Hassan consecration as a 4th Degree Apprentice as a Priestess Alchemist of Ma'at was of the highest significance. The Circle of Alchemists had been around since being founded by Thoth in ancient Khemmet. From outside the door, he could see the gold-covered altar cloth, upon which stood eight lighted candles, a bowl of water, a rough stone and crystal. The temple hall, bathed in candle and torch light, had a sense of reverence about it as Hassan, and other priesthood members, attired in gold robes, played their roles on that solemn occasion.

Karim resplendent in his Mercurial Winged headdress and gold robes led Hassan to the door of the temple. He held his gold caduceus high while knocking three times on the door.

"Who seeks admittance to this Solar Museum?" a voice asked.

"One of the Priesthood of The Fellowship of Ma'at, who has been prepared to receive the grade of Priestess Alchemist. The four significant degrees have been successfully passed," Karim responded.

"Apprentice, what is your Intention in acquiring the authority as Priestess alchemist?" the disembodied voice asked.

"It is my intention to aid furthering the alchemical transmutation of those who desire it."

The voice asked, "Has the candidate been able to accomplish the exacting task of acquiring self-knowledge, the ability to transmute his Shadow Self within the whole of his soul and spirit?"

Karim responded, "The task is not only deeply understood and attained but is also continuing. The teacher will have the humility to learn from those who enrol as pupils. Above all, the divine inspiration of The Goddess of Ma'at, the Goddess of Order, balance and transformation."

"The candidate may enter."

Hassan, feeling the weight of the occasion, made his way to the altar.

The head priest said, "We will now invoke the spirit of Ma'at."

A master Alchemist rang a golden bell; it's tone resonated around the chamber.

"We now invoke the spirit of Asar, Lord of the Underworld, to be with us at this time."

A silver bell rang, this time; its sharp resonance felt all around the chamber.

Karim, as the sponsor, and fully ordered Priestess Alchemist, turned to Hassan, saying, "Oh great mother goddess, Ma'at help us humble alchemists to restore balance to the energy systems on earth. The harmony of the yin and the yang; the masculine and the feminine, that all may live and grow in balance with the great mother." Looking at Hassan, he said, "Put your left hand on the rough stone on this altar and your right hand on the crystal.

The head priest said, "In the Name of the God Asar, keeper of the dead, Who is also Serapis and Horus, I accept this Candidate as Priestess Alchemist. He anointed the Apprentice's brow with 'oil of the five elements'. Then he said, "With this Holy Oil that holds all the five elements, I consecrate you Priestess Alchemist."

Hassan was proud as he felt the esteemed 'purple mantle' around his shoulders.

Karim said, "With this cloak, I encompass you with the bounty of dark space.

As a mitre is placed upon Hassan's head, he hears the words "With this Khepf I bestow on you the Star Crown of Ma'at.

Another priest put a gold ring on the index finger of Hassan's right hand. "With this ring, I honour in you the ever renewing Circle of eternal and infinite life."

Karim, then, proudly hands his friend the caduceus, saying, "Behold the wand of Hermes Trismegistus! Use the power of the two Divine Forces of Light and Darkness in the balance, entwined upon the Tree of Life."

It was now time for Hassan to address those present with a short speech. He began, "Esteemed members of this perfect and most sacred circle that have existed since the dawn of time, it is my great pleasure to be inducted into such noble company. Perhaps now, more so than any other time in history, is the sacred balance threatened and darkness looms ready to engulf the world. It is only this great Circle and the legacy of Ma'at that stands between Buckminster Fuller's Utopia or Oblivion. I pledge my life to this noble cause."

The elaborate ritual was not just for show. Hassan, now a 4th-degree Priestess Alchemist, could open doors closed to all but high dignitaries in the alchemical arts. Although not as well known as the Illuminati or the Freemasons, The Alchemists Circle was much older and more secretive than the others. Where Hassan and Abbot were going, they would need many influential friends to help them reach their goal.

It was 6:30 am and the day promised to be warm and dry. But days did not always keep their pledges, so Dayton carried a lightweight raincoat with him just in case the day changed its mind. An early walk with his two dogs cleared the mental cobwebs. And he needed a bit of downtime, after what he had just been through in the Middle East. He had potentially stopped a war from breaking out, but he received no thanks. He didn't expect any, as very few people knew what happened, not even the Israeli Prime Minister. After the part, he played, with Hayden Holmes, Dayton was kept up-to-date on the Middle East crisis. Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Pakistan were all posturing, but so far the flames of war had not been fanned.

As Dayton strolled back to the main house, He pushed all thoughts of impending war to the back of his mind. Instead, he focussed on the day's events, especially the upcoming 'Brotherhood of the Mysteries' meeting, to be held in the main hall, that evening. Bringing Skipper and Jack, his two Border Collies, to heel, Dayton strolled back to his house and the day ahead.

Grenville was waiting to speak with his master. As Dayton wiped his walking brogues on the doormat, he approached. "Sir, it seems that Lady Margaret has arranged to meet with her Book group this afternoon - an annual general meeting I believe."

"Yes. And you are telling me this, because?"

"Because she wants the main hall for this event, sir."

"But that has been set aside for our 'Brotherhood of the Mysteries'. I'm sure I told her." Damned woman, he thought. She is doing this on purpose, just because he missed her sister's birthday celebration, while he was just doing something 'trivial', disarming a would-be assassin in the Knesset. Because of his secret life, his private life suffered, and there was nothing he could do about it.

"I'm sure you did, sir. What should I tell her Ladyship?"

"That she can't have the main hall, today."

"Very well, sir. Although I think I should point out that being forced to use an alternative venue may very well upset her Ladyship and if I may be so bold, my Lord, that would not be a good thing."

"What do you suggest?" Dayton asked, hearing his wife coming down the marble staircase.

"It's such a beautiful day sir; the ladies may find the conservatory's atmosphere more conducive to their needs."

"Fine, Grenville. See to it."

"Yes, sir."

As Dayton walked away, he turned, "Oh, one more thing Grenville. Have the list checked and let me know if there have been any last minute apologies."

Margaret passed by, on the way to the kitchen. Dayton said, "Good morning dear," to her moving back.

Dayton's phone rang. It was Hayden Holmes.

"Lord Lynsey, we received a message that involves you."

"What message?"

"It seems to be some warning. Look, let me explain."

"Please do."

"One of Maddox's people, I think it was the chap Frayles, received a message intercept. The names Lynsey and Lynsey Hall were mentioned. There was something about someone being in place to get rid of the problem."

"It sounds damned strange. Am I the problem, here?"

"It sounds like it. I'll get Frayles to come by ..."

"No. There's no need for that. I have a few men coming here tonight. It will make them uneasy if there are spooks around the place."

"Okay, but be very careful. Take down this number in case you need assistance."

The phrase, 'being in place to get rid of the problem' concerned Dayton. Was his English Lord cover blown? Did the Diabolus have somebody planted in his household? It seemed highly unlikely, but he couldn't take any chances. He conferred with Grenville on the matter.

"Are you sure it was about you, sir?" Grenville queried, thinking it all very odd.

"Both the names Lynsey and Lynsey Hall were mentioned, so I want only the staff you can vouch for, here for the meeting. Also, I want thorough background checks done on all employees."

"Certainly sir. I will get onto it right away."

## Chapter 5

The Brotherhood of the Mysteries was, in many respects, a think-tank of sorts. The group was started by Earl William Lynsey to research into the validity of certain ancient myths, thereby provoking healthy debates and, sometimes, heated argument. Dayton had carried on the long tradition. As the host of the current meeting, he got to choose the topic for discussion. He chose Atlantis as the principal subject. One of Dayton's primary interests, it spawned many theories.

Dr Anderson arrived first. The fractal logic expert always came early at events. As a mathematician he timed his journeys entirely, factoring in unknown elements of chaos theory, a pet subject within his discipline. He had a sour look about him that reminded Dayton of a sad bloodhound. He and Dayton engaged in a bit of catch-up, with a snorter of brandy while waiting for the others. Pat O'Neill, a local horse breeder, arrived with Mason Pears, who, as an engineer, had written many papers on fluid dynamics. Sir Gerald Thomas, ex-military, sporting a 'Jimmy Edwards, handlebar moustache arrived at the same time as Peter Cook (not the actor) and Bill Azizi, a rag-trade magnate. Philip Carnegie, a local GP and Earl Archibald Michel completed the compliment.

There was a standing tradition that members of this select group dropped first names and titles when addressing each other. Lynsey got up to make his opening remarks. "Gentlemen, the myth of the lost civilisation of Atlantis has attracted the attention and speculation of several eminent personalities over the centuries. These include the brilliant English philosopher Sir Francis Bacon, Minnesota congressman Ignatius Donnelly, and, of course, the father of the myth, Plato - one of the most influential minds in Western thought. Plato was the first person to recount the Atlantis story. Hermetists and other occultists include the Timaeus in their canon of sacred works. Platonists like Plotinus, and later, famous psychics and occultists, see the Atlantis legend as being prophetic. Edgar Cayce, the 'Sleeping Prophet', predicted the revealing of Atlantis in 1968 or 1969. And, nineteenth-century mystic Madame Blavatsky claimed, while in Tibet, that the Hindu Mahatmas taught her about the lost civilisations of Atlantis and Lemuria."

Michel said, "I'm not happy with this subject because there's nowhere we can go with it."

O'Neill disagreed, "Oh, I don't know about that. The legend of Atlantis, which had been dormant for many years in the imagination of the broader public, is now making something of a comeback in recent years. I was reading that Disney Studios have recently released a new animation feature, called Atlantis."

"Have you seen this film?"

"No, O'Neill said."

"It's an animation, so it's hardly going to bring out something new. We just go round and round the merry-go-round, regurgitating Plato and the like."

Thomas offered, "Apart from that, O'Neill, I have come across several new books on the legendary submerged civilisation."

O'Neill retorted, "Oh sure, ranging from crackpot to critical. From fringe-science like 'Gateway to Atlantis' by Andrew Collins, 'The Atlantis Blueprint' by Colin Philips and Rand Flem-Ath, and 'The Atlantis Enigma' by Herbie Brennan."

Carnegie said, "If you're looking for a more grounded, sceptical discussion, I strongly recommend 'Imagining Atlantis' by Richard Ellis, and 'Frauds, Myths and Mysteries: Science and Pseudoscience in Archaeology' by CSICOP Fellow Kenneth Feder. Ellis's book is a comprehensive account of speculation on Atlantis."

Dayton said, "Perhaps if we travel on Michel's merry-go-round with an open mind, we may glean something new. A critical and thoroughly researched approach at least borders on scepticism, which means we are not playing on a level pitch. Finding a lack of evidence is lazy and comfortable. Finding something solid takes diligence and hard work."

Michel said, "Do you have something solid to share with us, Lynsey?"

"The crux of this matter is whether Plato's account of Atlantis is a description of an actual civilisation that sunk beneath the waves or a tantalising tale that rose up wholly from the depths of the Athenian philosopher's imagination. In general terms, there are three possible conclusions to be made for the Atlantis legend: the account is entirely factual and inerrant; it is a blend of fact, fiction, and error; or it is entirely fictional."

Lynsey continued, "I tend towards the second possibility but not from the standpoint that Atlantis existed but rather from the proposition that it exists but not on our Earthly plane."

The group became silent, with all eyes focused on Lynsey.

Most of the group were wondering if he had lost the plot?

Azizi asked, "Whatever do you mean?"

"I keep asking myself" Lynsey stated, "why, with all the collective research and exploration carried out, has nobody been able to pin down the location and evidence that Atlantis existed somewhere in this world."

"That's easy," Michel stated abruptly, "It never existed."

Lynsey surprised the group, saying, "I have come to the same conclusion. It never existed on this Earthly plane. It existed and still does on a parallel earth, suited to its consciousness."

O'Neill sneered, "Parallel Earth! Now we're really in cuckoo land."

"You may know about horses, O'Neill but I suspect you know little about complex dynamical systems," Anderson countered. The concept of parallel worlds is not a new one, but now with the latest findings, science realises we have been looking at this vexing subject the wrong way. Parallel worlds are not out there, somewhere. They are closer to us than our skin."

"Anderson, what the hell are you on about, man?" Michel said.

"Parallel worlds have nothing to do with this reality, which is why you can easily mock the idea. But if you think the truth you believe in is the only one that exists, then you are arrogant fools who will learn nothing from this. Parallel worlds exist in different levels of consciousness. So, if Atlantis ever existed it still does so."

Michel reported, "As no substantial evidence exists to suggest Atlantis was real, my argument still stands."

"Perhaps, if we approach this from another perspective," Lynsey suggested, "we might shed more light. For the sake of argument let's say Atlantis is alive and well on a different dimensional plane to our world. How then could we access it from our world."

Anderson, interested, said, "It would have to be some portal that allows us to engage in dimensional travel."

Thomas joined in. "When I was in Iraq during the second war, I got to know a decent Yankee chap called Lynch. He was a lieutenant in some covert ops thing behind enemy lines. I was involved with his team, on one occasion. I had some Intel that would help with the mission. Anyhow, we got chatting during a break, by the Tigris, and the subject of Star Gates came up."

"Strange issue in the middle of the war, " O'Neill sneered.

Thomas gave him a look, and continued, "This lieutenant told me before being sent to Iraq he was involved in a hush-hush project about Star Gates. Apparently, the Yanks have made one. And get this! They had somehow created a wormhole to Atlantis."

"Bull shit!" O'Neill snapped.

"I'm only saying what he told me."

Dayton said, "Hold that thought." He excused himself and went to a bathroom on the second floor. Apart from needing to urinate he was also cognizant of the warning and was curious to see if anybody followed him. The thought that he was paranoid did cross his mind. But if the Diabolus Sect was that close to him it presented a big problem. That he and his family were no longer shielded from their reach, was worrying. As he climbed the marble staircase, as quietly as possible, he thought he heard something - a movement from upstairs. He froze and listened, thinking he must be imagining it. He paused at the bathroom door, drew his Beretta and inched the door open. It was just as he expected. No one was there. Realising he was entering his bathroom with a loaded gun, he felt like an idiot.

When he returned, the Brotherhood was still arguing. Michel and O'Neill maintained their positions that Plato's description could not be considered proof that Atlantis was real. Anderson and Thomas contested this, leaving Pears, Cook, Azizi and Carnegie, undecided. As an engineer, Pears wanted to know more about Star Gate technology, which Thomas couldn't offer.

Lynsey said, "Thomas, do you still have a contact for this Yank soldier?"

"Dear man, I haven't seen him since the war."

"Do you know any other details, apart from his name being Lynch and he's a soldier."

"All I know is that he was a US Marine."

Dayton said, "If you can remember any more details, please let me know."

"I think his first name was Rafael. But he hated it and settled on Raf."

Then the lights went out. The whole house got plunged into darkness. Suddenly Dayton felt very vulnerable. His gun would be useless in the dark, and that's all he had for personal protection. A maid entered with candles. Dayton said, "Get me, Grenville, now!"

"He isn't here, your Lordship," she answered, leaving the candles on the long table."

"Excuse me," Dayton said, "I'll have to check the fuse box."

Azizi said, "I have a torch so I will come with you."

Dayton, having known Azizi for many years, agreed and, following the rag trade man's powerful beam, guided him to the fuse box in the underground storage area. The trip switch was in the off position. Dayton breathed a sigh of relief. A fuse had burned out. He replaced it, and the power was back on. It was all very coincidental but perfectly reasonable.

When the pair returned, Anderson was holding court with his 'many worlds' interpretation, which postulated that, as the objective reality of the universal wavefunction denies the actuality of

wavefunction collapse, all possible alternative histories and futures are real, with each representing an actual 'world.' He added for good measure that, "the multiverse hypothesis is now considered a mainstream interpretation, along with the other decoherence arguments, the Copenhagen interpretation, as well as that of Bohmian mechanics."

Dayton, noticing that Cook was absent, queried, "Has anyone seen Cook?"

"Oh, his car alarm went off, just after the lights came back on," O'Neill said.

"I hope he's Okay. Give me your torch Azizi, and I'll check on him."

Dayton found Cook, with a flashlight, under the bonnet of his Jag.

"Everything okay, old man," Dayton asked, approaching the car.

"Got the bloody thing to stop but there's something wrong with the wiring," Cook said, his head still buried in the engine.

"Anything I can do to help?"

"Actually yes," Cook said, emerging from the bonnet. "Take these pliers and see if you can strip that red wire."

Dayton took the pliers and peered into the lamp-lit engine, intent on assisting his friend. He didn't see Cook get a large wrench from his tool box and raise it above his host's head.

## Chapter 6

Robots, as part of emergency teams, rescuing victims from various disaster scenarios, was not only acceptable to the American public as a whole but was a humane way to utilise modern technology. Every TV station, every newspaper and social network, praised the geniuses behind ATLAS for the humanitarian work they were doing. Orders were coming in from around the world, as countries wanted to make sure they got one of the first help bots to come off the assembly line.

Logan Schulz, overjoyed with the public response, smoked one of his special cigars. DARPA was well and truly on the map, not just as a military technological research institute but as being at the forefront of applied technology to help humanity. But both he and Barney Cormack knew different. Their annual \$2 billion budget, which would soon get a massive boost, was really about producing super soldiers and robocops. Working with the human genome, they had gotten ATLAS to manipulate certain gene expressions. Within the secret world of military industrial pharmaceutical complexity, the robot was already using natural abilities, enhanced through genetic engineering. Unbeknown to the media, the public and even Boston Cybertronics, The US military technology division, reported that by tampering with soldiers' genes, it allowed them to go for days without food or sleep and re-grow limbs lost in battle.

Ulysses Covington, head of the 'future robotic systems' division of Boston Cybertronics wondered what was going on? Why had Lynne invited him to become part of Boston Cybertronics? Sure, he was a genius at programming and troubleshooting robotic systems, but there were other, home-grown talents, she could have used. He wondered if Cormack had suggested it or even told Lynne to hire him. But if so, why. He knew DARPA was devious and he wanted to knock the smug look off Cormack's face when he found out they had ditched Heron; left the company hung out to dry. He was also concerned about the way the Heron board would respond. The way it had been set up, it looked as though he jumped ship before it started sinking, suggesting he had prior knowledge. Damn! Why had he not seen it coming? He knew he couldn't trust these people, so why did he fall for it?

The answer was simple - self-preservation, making him the rat the heron board thought he was. They needed to blame someone and that someone would inevitably be him. After all, he was the one who got the company in bed with DARPA in the first place. Still, there might be some redemption in the fact that Boston Cybertronics developed robotics to help humanity in crisis.

His secretary's voice shook him from reverie. "Doctor Covington, there is an Angela Durant on the line for you."

He pictured the slim redhead with the multi-coloured spectacle frames. Why the hell was she ringing him? "Angela, so sweet to hear from you. How can I help?"

We need you to clarify a few things for us, Ulysses. Two days should give you enough time to get here."

"What do you mean?" I'm finished at Heron. The board made that quite clear to me."

"Yes, but we are not finished with you. You may want to bring a legal representative to the meeting."

Puzzled as to how the ex-vice president was the one phoning him, he said, "So, where do you figure in the backstabbing contest?"

"Oh, I'm the new CEO of Heron. The meeting will convene in three days time at 10:30 am sharp. Please be here by that time."

"How come you got the gig?"

"Somebody had to try and sort out the god awful mess you left us in."

"That was not of my doing."

"Save the excuses for the board. Just be there."

"FUCK! FUCK! FUCK! He yelled at the dead phone. He then called Lynne and told her what had aspired.

"And how long do you need off for this Australian trip?" Lynne Becker asked, her eyes narrowing.

"How the hell should I know? All I know is that you people have caused this."

"What do you mean? We had nothing to do with it. If you want to point fingers at someone, point them at DARPA. They're the ones who did you up."

"Are you telling me you didn't know they were going to go with the Japanese?"

"They only say what's relevant. Look, I know it's going to be tough but ..."

"I need something to show them - to convince them I did not set them up for a fall."

"Well, good luck with that because DARPA isn't going to admit anything."

"I'm going to be fucking crucified."

She despised his weakness and defeatist attitude. "For god sake, Ulysses, are you a man or a mouse?" Just do what you have to and get back as soon as you can."

She put down the phone; she had more important things to handle. She called Cormack." Hearing his voice, she said, "Barney, you told me DARPA would leave the gene research to us."

Cormack, puzzled, said, "What are you talking about?"

"Now I find out that scientists at Akawi Technics are researching into the enhancements of soldiers that feel no pain, terror and do not suffer from fatigue. That's our project. I hope you are not planning to treat us like you have Heron Industries."

"What the hell are you talking about, Dr Becker. Where did you hear this crap?"

"Don't take me for a fool, Barney. I know you treat us like we are DARPA's whore but enough is enough. You people had better come clean with us, or you are going to find yourself facing significant problems."

"Dr Becker, you've seen how we deal with people who try to threaten us. I wouldn't advise it."

"I need to know where we stand on this issue."

Barney took a more moderate tack. It usually worked with a woman. "Lynne we are on the same team here. You see problems where they don't exist."

"Yeah. Maybe." Dr Becker uttered, not feeling any better.

Cormack breathed a sigh of relief and mentally patted himself on the back. He was pleased that she didn't know that tests on the wiring of the human brain were being carried out by James Morano, professor of bioethics at Stanford University. Morano was working with the DoD in understanding neuroscience. The Pentagon allocated \$400 million to this research. Through this research, DARPA was learning how to genetically modify human fat into pure energy by rewiring the metabolic switch which would create soldiers that require less food. Another area of research that Boston Cybertronics was under contract for was being duplicated by Robert Patman, professor of psychiatry at Yale University, who was experimenting with propranolol, a beta blocker believed to erase 'terrifying memories', to alleviate the psychological effects of war.

Azizi saw it but didn't believe it. Perhaps it was because the metal object reflected in the moonlight. "LOOK OUT!" he exploded.

His outburst created just enough of a distraction for a number of events to happen in rapid succession. Cook hesitated in his downward blow. Dayton, alerted by the yell, moved his head slightly to one side to duck out from under the Jag's bonnet. It was just enough for the wrench to come crashing down on his shoulder, just missing his head. He felt his collar bone break as white-hot searing pain shot through him. Azizi, seeing Cook raise the heavy object for a second blow, acted quickly. Grabbing a nearby garden rake leaning against the wall, Azizi brought it down hard on Cook's back, ruining his aim. A street fighter from the old days, although old and slower, he grabbed the hand holding the wrench and wrestled Cook to the ground.

Dayton's mind, in a daze, recalled the warning.

Other members of the Brotherhood were now looking on at the strange, horrifying, drama unfolding before them. Cook, younger and fitter than Azizi, broke away and went to his car. Lynsey, shocked and disoriented, managed to roll away from the Jag's wheels just in time. Cook, in a panic, revved his engine, spun his drive wheels, spat up gravel, then sped away into the night.

Hassan and Abbott encountered both police and military checkpoints on their way to Bou Saada. Hassan knew how to deal with it as security personnel at these checkpoints expected full cooperation. He was also aware that terrorists set up false roadblocks for ambushes and kidnappings, primarily in the central regions of Boumerdes and Tizi Ouzou and some parts of eastern Algeria.

"How do you know the difference?" Abbott asked after The Muslim handed over yet more baksheesh to a couple of guards near Ain Ousera.

Hassan guided the dust covered Winnebago over the ruts of an unusually rough surface area of the atrocious road. "We still have transport, and we are still alive."

"So all these checkpoints are legit."

"Abbott, you are in a different world now. Different rules apply. As long as they are not too greedy, we tolerate these shady practices. However, I am surprised that you find this trivia more interesting than my initiation."

Abbott, still miffed at being left out, retorted, "I was not there so what is there for me to say?"

Hassan was silent for a moment. "I understand that you have no idea about what we have to do in Khemmet, but it's critical. And to do what we must, we have to initiate you into the sacred circle."

"Initiated! What do you mean?"

Hassan laughed. "Don't worry. There's no weird rituals or funny signs involved in becoming a first-degree apprentice. But you will need some contemplation time, which is why we are taking this desert trip, instead of flying."

"Contemplation about what?"

"About who you are and what you are doing. About how you fit in with the big universal picture. About the concept of being in an entirely different reality."

Abbott heretofore had seen the trip as a big adventure. He had been collecting notes and was going to write a hell Blog about it when he got back. Now the plan had changed. He found himself caught up in something unreal by a crazy fanatic. Well, that may be unfair, but at the least, he was with a stranger on a mission over which he had no say. He didn't know how to handle it and kept quiet about his concerns, instead, concentrating on the journey.

To try and avoid, what Hassan referred to as the 'bad' checkpoints, (unauthorised ones) he drove off the beaten track. This detour made the journey longer, as they had to drive around Hassi Bahbah and Djelfa, the latter of which they refuelled and topped up their water supplies.

After a further two hours driving Abbott was bored with the seemingly endless, unchanging desert terrain, occasionally punctuated by camel drivers and the odd person on a donkey. He was quickly coming to realise Algeria was not an easy place to get around. Roads were usually badly built and overcrowded, and traffic accidents killed a large number of people every year. The only way he could cope with the boredom was to adopt a stance of resignation and just go with it.

As they drove through the Atlas Mountains and the vast expanse of a huge salt lake they came to the city and oasis of Bou Saada, a pilgrimage town. This sanctuary was a welcome relief for the weary pair. A refuge for their tired minds and bodies, after having spent days crossing the endless sandy wasteland. The Hotel Kerdada, a castle-like white stone building, was a great comfort after the cramped quarters of their vehicle. The staff were very welcoming, and Abbott found the free Internet a pleasant surprise. As they settled in the hotel for the night, Hassan explained that roughly

translated, 'Bou' meant father and 'Saada' meant peace and happiness. Abbott thought the name appropriate for the little desert haven. But peace, in a chaotic world, only lasts so long.

The men moved like dark shadows towards the ghost-white building. Getting up to Hassan Shamsi's room was no problem. Two of them scaled the pillars to the second-floor balcony, dropping lightly over the ironwork railings. They heard gentle snoring coming from the target's room. The balcony door was locked, which meant there would be some noise. One of the men prised open the latch with a knife. The other stood guard, a wicked looking curved blade, in his hand.

## Chapter 7

Dorian Gibson nodded, signed the data pad a technician held out for her. She then opened up her laptop and checked her e-Mail. Dorian, finding nothing new, turned her mind to deciphering the odd text that Major Lorne's team had discovered on Atlantis. It was about a civilisation that had died out. They had also brought back some devices but were unwilling to test them until Dr Gibson had finished translating. It was a dialect of in an Ancient tongue with which she was not familiar. She decided against immersing herself into it and focused, instead, on daily reports and other mundane problems.

Just then Rafael Lynch walked into her office. The lines of exhaustion, on his face, appeared deeper than when she saw him just one hour earlier. "What's happened to you?" she asked.

"I just finished talking to Dr MacKay about the mole."

"And?" Dorian asked.

Raf dropped into a seat across from her. His eyes met hers. "He maintains that nobody but him had access to his back door."

"He is a proud man, Raf, and cantankerous a lot of the time, but I cannot see him working for the Diabolus Sect."

"He is trying to write it off as an anomaly."

"Maybe he is right. Maybe there is no mole."

"The Colonel sighed, "I need to know what's going on in Atlantis. A mole could be useful in that respect."

"Talk to Tamis. She wants to help and ..."

"They've been hiding in caves. they have no idea what's happening in the Citadel."

"Maybe we had better have our mole find out for us," she smiled.

"Who do you have in mind, Dr Gibson?"

"Maybe Takran. He's restless here. I think he wants to go back, but he takes protecting Tamis too seriously."

"The best way to protect her is to find out the strengths and weaknesses of the Singularians."

"But he would need someone with him who can detect Legion interference," she smiled.

He loved that confident smile. Despite Dr Gibson's slumped shoulders and exhaustion, he had the sudden urge to kiss Dorian but held himself in check.

Takran needed time to himself. So much was changing, and it hurt him to think of leaving friends on the base. He wanted to trust the Earthians, as he called humans, but he simply could not. It was

not that they had done anything or implied that they were in any way untrustworthy. But he still needed time to adjust to their ways. He was almost to his room when Dr Beck called out to him. Smiling warmly, he said, "Takran, I need to give you an examination, just to make sure you're in perfect health."

The Atlantean nodded, "Of course, doctor." He followed the man with the strange accent, to the infirmary.

Dr Beck kept up friendly small talk while making a cuff squeeze the Atlantean's arm. He took a blood sample for testing, causing the patient to wince. It was odd to see the bluish blood in the syringe.

Takran, bemused by the experience, said, "You have extraordinary methods of observing one's health, Dr Beck."

"Yes," he agreed with a smile. "Your medical people don't do it this way on Atlantis?"

"Not puncturing the skin. We just use scanners. It's much less painful."

Larson nodded. "Well, I'll soon have the results."

Takran stood up, saying, "Doctor, my culture once valued honour and respect. We had 'singers' who created with sound. Our scientists were proud people who used their knowledge for the betterment of the whole of Atlantis. They came up with great ideas, and the singers brought their innovations to life. I want it to be like that again."

Dr Beck placed a gentle, warm hand on Takran's shoulder, meeting the young man's gaze. A smile formed on the Swede's face, and he nodded, "It's a dream worth holding onto."

The young Atlantean left the infirmary feeling easier. Just being able to talk to the doctor help alleviate his fears. Returning to his room, he sat out on the balcony for a while, simply staring up at the stars, quietly entreating the sky for guidance and strength for whatever path his destiny would take him.

Tamis's mind was far away from Atlantis. She felt she had failed as a leader and as a woman. The very thought made her want to run back to her room and hide away from the world. However, as she passed by the Infirmary, Dr Beck called out, "Tamis, would it be a problem if I gave you an examination?"

Tamis weakly shook her shoulders. "It would not be a problem."

He smiled brightly, his calm and friendly attitude soothing her immediately. He put his hand gently on her shoulder and led her into the infirmary. There, he set about examining her from head to toe, continually making conversation to comfort the young Atlantean. Tamis participated in their conversation enthusiastically, no longer feeling as though the world would end because of her failure.

"How did you meet that lad, Takran?" He asked as he took a sample of blood.

Tamis smiled, bringing her friend to mind. "We have been friends since childhood, and we became very close, very quickly. My father would jokingly remark that some days, it seemed he also had a son." She recalled fondly. "He is my closest friend. Are there many people here worthy of trust, Dr Beck?" She asked, out of the blue.

He stopped, and his face softened at her question. "Yes, There are many of those here."

Tamis nodded, and they lapsed into a short silence. But then Dr Beck began to examine her and had her lie down for several scans. She asked what the purpose of his prods and pokes were, and why he touched her, a practice not used for a long time on Atlantis.

The Swede peered at the computer screen, and then looked up at his patient, "I do believe we are finished, young lady. You are very healthy, and I hope you continue to stay that way. It would be a shame if you ended up like Colonel Lynch." He commented teasingly.

Tamis laughed. "Why would you say that?" She queried.

"Because I seem to have become the good doctor's most frequent patient."

Colonel Lynch answered, entering the infirmary and heading towards the free medicine cabinet to snag a bottle of headache pills. "Through no fault of my own, I might add," he grinned.

Dr Beck busied himself with taking down notes on Tamis' health chart. "Oh, of course not, Colonel. I would never accuse you of being the cause of the trouble that revolves around you." He dryly replied.

Tamis smiled, amused by the situation. "Thank you, Dr Beck. Am I free to go?"

"Yes, you are." He said, smiling. After she had left Larson turned to Rafael. "I've heard some gossip about us having a spy, Colonel." He commented evenly.

Raf stared at him, eyes wide. "Where did you hear that?" he demanded.

"You ought to know you can't keep secrets around here."

"Who told you, Larson?"

"It was Rodney. He thinks you're lunging at shadows. What was that he called you? Oh yes! Rafael Quixote."

Ignoring the smart ass remark, Raf asked, "Have you told anyone, apart from me?"

"No, of course not. But, for what its worth, I agree with you about the shield business. And I think Rodney is protecting someone."

"So, who is this, someone?"

Larson hesitated. He didn't want to speak out of school. "All I know is that he is very friendly with Dr Veleska."

"And you think he may have shown her his back door?"

Dr Beck frowned. "I think nothing. But it might be worth following up."

The Colonel looked up, mentally running through the events of the last few days. Perhaps his paranoia was showing. Changing the subject, he said, "I need Takran for a particular mission. Is he fit enough?"

"What mission is that, Colonel?"

"I am not at liberty to say."

Larson turned to him. "You're sending him through the Gate - right?"

"What's your assessment of him?"

"Physically he's fit. I sense he's like a fish out of water here, though. The reason for going back might be better for him." Then he asked, "What does Dorian think about this?"

"The mission is important. Takran's probably the best for the job."

Azizi helped Lynsey to his feet.

Margaret stood there in her floral dressing gown, a concerned look on her face. "Is he all right?" she asked.

"He'll be okay Lady Lynsey. We just have to get him inside," Azizi said, supporting his Lordship.

Grenville came rushing out to see what the commotion was about. When he saw the state Dayton was in, he helped the injured man and aided Azizi to walk him into the house.

Carnegie, having rushed to get his medical bag from his car, set about examining Lynsey's injuries. After causing Dayton some considerable pain, he was able to extricate the left arm from the velvet smoking jacket. He could tell at a glance the blow had broken Lynsey's collarbone. The damaged area was already showing signs of swelling and bruising. "I will have to give you a painkiller to allow me to see the extent of the damage," Carnegie said.

"Damn that Thomas said, "The man needs a brandy," pouring a generous measure and placing it near the patient's mouth.

Lynsey took a sip, but it didn't dull the pain.

"What happened out there, man?" Anderson asked.

Azizi answered. "Cook was about to bludgeon Lynsey with a bloody great wrench. Thank the gods I was able to intervene in time."

"Why in God's name would he do such a thing?" Pears asked, mystified by their friend's unusually brutal behaviour.

Margaret came into the hall, more suitably attired. "What happened to him?" she asked Dr Carnegie, acting the dutiful wife.

"He sustained a broken clavicle, and there will be severe bruising. I'll drive him to the hospital for X-rays."

"How did it happen?" she asked.

"One of our colleagues attacked him," O'Neill said succinctly.

Carnegie needed to stay focused. "Never mind about that. get me something suitable to make splints and a triangular bandage."

Ulysses looked at the rough sea of familiar faces around the boardroom table. Angela had not turned up yet, and Ulysses could sense Psychic daggers thrown in his direction. His attorney 'Harvey Grosman' sat next to him.

Angela arrived with two legal representatives, in tow. She took her seat as chairperson. Noting that Ulysses and his legal rep were present, she said, "Okay, let's begin by saying this is an extraordinary emergency meeting and there is only one item on the table - concerning our contract with DARPA. This conference asks for full disclosure of all the facts, so we know exactly where we stand. Let me just outline what we do know. Heron Industries entered into a contract with DARPA to produce the arms for their ATLAS robot. Unbeknown to Heron DARPA had also contracted Akawi Technics to carry out the same task. The then CEO Ulysses Covington subsequently discovered this duplicity," she said, looking straight at him. "After some discussion, the facts of which are unclear, our contract

was renewed. The details as to why DARPA made our contract null and void, in the first place, is also not clear. DARPA then informs us that they no longer require our parts. This blow came after we had put heart and soul into this project for over a year. I will now leave it to Philip, our top legal man, to explain our rights in this contractual nightmare."

Philip said, "Contract law is not my area of expertise. So I will stick to the essential elements of contract formation. First, a contract is a legally enforceable exchange of promises, and its configuration requires an offer, acceptance and consideration. The offerer guarantees the offered person something in return for the offeree's promise to do or not to do something. Heron Industries promised to provide DARPA with a product. DARPA pledged to pay Heron for the products provided.

Ulysses was feeling more relaxed. They were looking at ways to be compensated for their work. DARPA was the villain here - not him. He was only there to add weight to the Heron case and, quite frankly, he was only too willing to do it. He turned to Harvey Grosman, whispering, "Looks like I might not need you after all."

Harvey just smiled. He knew how these things went.

Philip summed up by saying. There is nothing illegal about DARPA, farming out contracted work to two or more parties. And there is nothing wrong with DARPA only choosing one product. But a contract is a contract, and it is still binding, whether DARPA, uses it or not, providing Heron Industries meet all obligations."

Nods of affirmation and a chorus of, "Hear! Hear!" filled the boardroom.

Angela thanked Philip, then said, "Now let us focus on the events that got us in this mess. Ulysses Covington gets us the contract with DARPA. This project becomes the primary focus - the only real focus - in this company. There were those of us, myself included, who thought to put all our eggs in this particular basket was hazardous. Our fears turned out to be founded. DARPA wanted us to bring the deadline forward. We weren't happy with this, but we had to agree. Then Heron was investigated by the ethics board. Ulysses Covington was involved, and DARPA was not pleased with the publicity. Then Ulysses is accused of hiring thugs to put pressure on people."

Ulysses, about to object, was restrained by Harvey's hand on his arm.

"DARPA then trashes our contract. What happens next is unclear, which is why Ulysses is here to explain it to us. What we want to know, Dr Covington is why DARPA reinstated the contract."

Harvey spoke up, "As Dr Covington's attorney I will speak for him on this matter. Dr Covington found out about Akawi Technics being hired by DARPA to carry out the same work contracted to Heron Robotics. Dr Covington, at his expense, hired a detective agency to look into the background of the Japanese company. They discovered the company, under a previous name, was involved with whaling. Dr Covington brought this to DARPA's notice who then decided, publicity-wise, Heron was the lesser of two scandals. I think you all owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Dr Covington for his initiative and dedication to this company."

There were nods of approval from some members of the board.

Angela, not expecting Ulysses to come up smelling of roses, became concerned about losing the board's support. She had taken control and called the meeting. She was after Ulysses's blood. Now the promised success was turning to ashes in her mouth. She firmed her jaw. "Be that as it may, the way in which Dr Covington resigned from this company and took up employment with Boston Cybertronics, just before DARPA went ahead with Akawi Technics and breaking their contract with us, seems just a little too convenient. Perhaps Dr Covington would like to explain this to us."

Harvey said, "Ms Durant is there a question in there, somewhere?"

"Yes. it seems that Dr Covington must have had inside knowledge about DARPA's decision to drop us before he resigned."

The meeting went stony quiet."

Angela blanched. She knew that the answer would be no. The new CEO had set her trap and got snared in it. With no proof to the contrary, she had nowhere to go with it. She said, "No, that's not the question."

"Please enlighten us as to what the question is, Ms Durant," Harvey said, enjoying himself.

She only had one place to go, and it was a dark place full of booby traps. "DARPA lost faith in Heron after it came to light that the police accused Dr Covington of getting a thug to intimidate a disabled woman. This board would like to know, here and now, from Dr Covington's lips did he or did he not use a man to threaten this woman."

The board members, no longer bored, became very alert.

Harvey said, "As I understand it Heron Industries was finding it difficult to meet DARPA's deadline. What Dr Covington may or may not have done to contribute to their decision is questionable. Also as this business with this disabled woman, an ex-employee of Heron Robotics with an axe to grind, is under police investigation, I advise my client to say nothing at this time."

Angela sunk back into her seat, defeated, wondering how long she would be sitting there.

Harvey suggested, "Members of this board I believe you have a strong case against DARPA under contract law. As Mr Philip Law pointed out, a contract is still a contract even if the client does not use the products and services. You folks need solidarity here, and Dr Covington has written a short statement for me to read.

To the Board of Directors of Heron Industries:

**In my capacity as head of programming at Boston Cybertronics, who's major client is DARPA, I cannot testify in a court of law against the said company's unless I am subpoenaed by the prosecution to appear. I believe DARPA has treated us all very poorly and if we have a case against them, I am only too happy to help Heron win the suit. However, DARPA hates such publicity and will most likely be willing to settle out of court."**

## Chapter 8

The slight sound of a window sliding upwards disturbed Hassan's sleep. He lay in bed stock still, holding his breath. There was another faint sound, footfalls approaching his bed. He couldn't make out the vague dark shapes in the darkness, but the glint of moonlight on the knife blade was unmistakable. With cat-like alertness, he acted. As the wicked looking blade arced through the air, Hassan, sensing imminent danger, quickly rolled off the bed pulling his covers with him, as the blade slashed the mattress.

Abbott, rudely awoken by the noise, sat bolt upright, his heart in top gear. Rolling to disentangle himself from the sheets, Hassan ducked under the bed as a razor sharp blade stabbed into the bed clothes. He then grabbed the metal frame at the head of the single sized bed and thrust upward with his arms as hard as he could. He prayed the momentum would be enough to flip the bed over. The chances were that it would hit at least one of the assassins in the confined space of the bedroom. There was a crunching noise followed quickly by a piercing yell.

In total confusion, Abbott switched on his phone flashlight and saw a dark-clad figure beating a hasty retreat out of the door and over the balcony. Having turned on the main light, Abbott saw another dark clad figure laying on his back, groaning. The room looked like a hurricane had just ripped through it. Hassan stood up and took in the scene. Then he attended to the man hit by the bed.

Abbott said, "What the hell has been going on?"

Hassan picked up the dropped knife. "Somebody was out to do us harm."

"So what do we do now?"

The Arab said, "Help me with my bed so I "can get some sleep."

"What about him?" the journalist said," indicating the fallen man.

"Gag him and tie him to a chair. We'll deal with him in the morning."

"What am I supposed to use?"

"Improvise."

Abbott looked around. Then he saw it. The grappling iron the intruders had used to climb to Hassan's room still had the rope attached.

Having had little sleep Hassan was hardly ready for the long drive to Ouled Djellal, a town and commune in the Biskra Province. On top of this, he had to deal with Ahmed. The truth serum had worked to a degree, but they still had the mind-controlled assassin as their prisoner. Although unauthorised prisoner taking is acceptable in movies, in real life, it is not. It came under kidnapping, which was a serious crime, even in Algeria. Hassan was working out what to do when Abbott emerged, yawning and looking for strong coffee.

Seeing Ahmed still tied to the chair, He asked, "What are we going to do with him?"

"An excellent question. We could just slit the killer's throat, but then we have to dispose of his body. We could take him with us and slit his throat in the desert. Or we could just leave him here tied up."

Abbot watched the Gagged man's eyes dart around, like a frightened mouse.

Abbott said, "We could report him to the police. After all, he did try to kill us."

Hassan stroked his beard. "It would hold us up. We would have to wait to make statements. There is no guarantee they would believe us. Besides the Algerian police could make it very difficult for us and it could be costly."

"Well, I can't think straight without coffee. I'm going down to the restaurant for breakfast."

As Abbott and Hassan ate their M'shewsha, the alchemist mentioned, "Ahmed must be working for Professor Sonata, from whom I rented the castle in Atienza. So why is he after us." He quipped, "I always paid the rent on time."

Abbot, enjoying the delicious, egg, flour and semolina dish and strong coffee, responded, "So why did he set his dogs on us?"

Hassan said, "Because they do not want us finding the key."

"Then this is tied in with our quest."

"How else would you explain the attack. This Philux and the Professor are trying to stop us."

Abbott became thoughtful. Then he said, "The Prof hinted at some kind of enemy seeking to thwart him. He always played the role of a tramp rambling on about scientific stuff." Then he paused for more synaptic connections to take place. "So that's why he didn't want people to know who he was!"

Hassan looked around, then leant in close. Quietly he asked, "Did he ever mention Diabolus' to you?"

"No. Not that I recall. Why?"

"It's time I told you something. The Diabolus Sect has been around for a very long time, at least as far back as ancient Greece. Nobody knows their origins, but there are many theories regarding this. But back in ancient Greece, there was a sect called The Disorder of Diabolus. The first known high priest was Ankira, a high-born who became a powerful renegade."

"Don't you mean 'Order, not Disorder?" Abbott corrected.

"No. I mean what I said. These people worshipped chaos, destruction, extinction, death and decay. Their whole mission was to create disorder and breakdown stability and order wherever and whenever they could."

"But why? To what end?" the journalist queried, bemused.

Hassan looked Abbott in the eye. "They believe their Diabolus created the universe so there was something to fall into decay. Scientists who worship atomic decay are modern day Diabolists, even though they may not know it."

Abbott drained his coffee. "Do they do it for power, for riches or what?"

"No. Diabolists do it because the sect believes that by creating chaos and disorder they are helping their god fulfil its goal."

"But where's the logic in that."

Hassan grinned. "That's just it. There is no logic. Logic means order. Order is anathema to the Diabolus Sect."

Abbott finished his M'shewsha and pushed his plate away. "So this Diabolus cult is a modern version of the ancient Greek sect of the same name and Ahmed is one of them?"

"Yes, but he may have been under their control. And if this Professor Sonata is able to get people to kill for him, he is mighty and very dangerous. We have to get away from here, now!"

"But what about ...?"

"He is now the least of our concerns. We must get on the road and as far away from here as possible."

Philux made up his mind. He had to get out of Ghardaia. He had failed to kill Dayton Lynsey, and now his people had botched the murder of the alchemist. Today he had to own up to Diablo, a man who did not permit failure. Without the professor, he would be nothing. But if he stayed, he would be dead. He knew this for sure, having witnessed the fate of Ondricus, a minion who failed to secure a particular Spanish prostitute, for the professor's pleasure. The wretched man had pleaded for his life fifty times, one for each cut of the serrated knife before his life expired. Philux shuddered to think of what would happen to him once he had reported his failures. So he had to escape and disappear. It was at times like this he wished the French Foreign Legion still controlled Algeria.

At 6:32 am he was in Ghardaia carrying out his escape. The fortified town was quiet that time of morning. Philux walked through the old M'zabite area, unhassled by beggars, who would soon be on the streets. He passed the pyramid style mosque and headed to the arcaded market square, framed by the white, pink, and red houses, made of sand, clay and gypsum. He waited at the market, with a wad of dirham in his pocket of his Djellabayah. One-eyed women in white began to pass by, chatting away to each other, intermittently stopping and shopping at the stalls with their exotic food and wares. Then he recognised Ali, who approached with a grin that seemed to be fixed on his face. "Have you arranged transport?" he asked.

The Arab answered. "Yes. Follow me."

Philux followed, and soon the Arab pointed at an old BMW shaft driven motorcycle. He hadn't been on one for years, and this one looked past it. There was not much tread left on the tyres, but they stayed pumped up. "I was expecting a car, at least."

Ali looked hurt. "It's the best I can do at such short notice."

Philux threw his leg over the bike to get the feel of it. It started on the second kick. He turned the bike off and approached the Arab. "Okay, I'll take it."

Ali grinned widely. "5,000 dirhams."

"Here's 10,000," Philux said. He handed the money with his left hand because his right was busy extricating a curved knife from his robes. He had learned from Diablo you do not leave loose ends.

Diablo looked out from his balcony, over Ghardaia, which was just part of the Pentapolis - hilltop city amongst four others - built almost a thousand years before, in the M'Zab valley. Founded by the Mozabites, an Ibadi sect of non-Arabic Muslims, including the Berbers, it prospered as a major

centre of date production and the manufacture of rugs and colourful fabrics. The Ibadis were forced to leave Tahert, their capital, owing to a devastating fire in 909 AD. This destruction was caused by the founder of the Shi'ite Fatimid Dynasty. There was still hatred between the factions and the Professor determined to capitalise on the unrest.

His anticipated guests would help ensure this. As Diablo waited for the local dignitaries to arrive, he tried to locate Philux, his left-hand man. Nobody had seen him all morning, but sometimes he left early to go into town to carry out Diabolus business. Then he saw the limo flying the city's pennants on its aerials, coming slowly up the steep drive. He was ready for them. They were on his turf now.

Mohammed Fakrah led the small procession, as they entered the not so humble abode, along with his city planner, environmental advisor and head of police.

Having settled his guests, Francisco, as they knew him, said, "I hear that at least a dozen people have been injured in the latest violence between the Ibadi and the Chaambas Arabs."

Mohammed used to such insurgencies over the years said, "They were only minor injuries."

Chief of police, Fekhar said, "Until the property rights of that cemetery are sorted more trouble is on the way."

The Mayor said, "They will always find something to fight over. However, my concern is UNESCO's response to this trouble."

"Yes, I see what you mean. And honestly, the benefactors I represent are a little concerned."

"I see, Francisco." The Mayor turned to Fekhar, "See to it that it does not happen again."

"Certainly, Mr Mayor," the Police Chief responded. "But do you think that I can just snap my fingers and over a thousand years of conflict between these sects is over just like that?"

The Mayor said, "I'm sure you'll find a way."

Kameled, the environmental and cultural adviser, stroked his greying beard. "Actually Mayor Fakrah, they were not all minor injuries. Dozens of people from the Mozabite community had been hospitalised."

Fekhar, himself a Mozabite, and traditional enemy of the Bedouin tried to remain objective. A worrying aspect of the latest violence was that it was youth against youth. The clashes broke out when children from the two communities began throwing petrol bombs at each other. From there the situation got out of hand. Fekhar had to give the order to disperse tear gas; gassing youths made him wish he's rethought his career. Ahmed Adli, the Governor, had already had him on the carpet, demanding an inquiry.

Francisco felt things were shaping up very nicely. The town's leaders wanted his money for their UNESCO project, and he was primed to ferment further disruption, and the council would unknowingly help him do it.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/quadralectics/22561183640/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gharda%C3%AFa\\_District](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gharda%C3%AFa_District)

<https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2013/05/89904/dozen-wounded-in-clashes-between-rival-algeria-groups/>

## Chapter 9

Dayton preferred convalescing in Cromer, rather than back at Lynsey Hall. The arrangement was pleasing to Lady Lynsey as well as him. It was also pleasing to Maddie, who had him for two or three weeks, while his shoulder healed. After what he had been through recently he needed Maddie's sympathy and warm heart. Grenville, the only other person in his household who knew about Dayton's affair, drove him to Cromer. Having delivered his master to his mistress, Grenville drove the Bentley back up north.

Maddie, seeing Dayton's arm in a sling refrained from asking him how he got injured. Instead, she said, "It's good to see you, Dayton, but it's a pity it took an injury for you to come and see me." Immediately she corrected herself. "I'm sorry my love, I promised not to pressure you. It is wonderful to see you."

He smiled, looking into her eyes, "I can't chase the bad guys at the moment."

"Come and sit down while I get us tea and cake," she said, cheerfully, guiding him to an armchair.

No sooner was he seated than Queen Jessica jumped onto his lap, purring. He tickled her behind the ear. Closed his eyes and relaxed. It had been a while since he could let his guard down and luxuriate in an aura of peace. Soon his mind was ticking over, wondering how Diabolus had got to his friend and colleague, Peter Cook, to kill him. Neither he nor his Brotherhood colleagues had heard anything about the man since the ugly incident. Then a thought hit Dayton If they could get to him at Lynsey Hall, he would have to be very careful in Cromer.

Maddie arrived with the tea and Madeira cake. "You look as though you need a long rest," she said, as he jerked awake from his dazed state.

"Oh, I was just thinking," he smiled.

As she poured tea, she asked, "So, what have you been up to lately?"

Accepting the tea and cake, he said, "I had to escape from Jerusalem when terrorists destroyed the Muslim shrine. Then I had to go back to Israel to assist at the summit."

"That must have been terrible."

He smiled wryly. "It was quite exciting really. Hollywood thriller stuff. But we lost a very courageous driver who died saving my life."

"Oh Dayton, when are you going to put your cloak and dagger away and leave all this international intrigue to the young cocks?"

He answered, "Maddie, we're hot on the trail of the king-pin, or at least we think he is. Once we get him, we can weaken them and give the world a chance to recover."

"Who is it then?"

"His name is Professor Francisco Sonata. We have good reason to believe he was behind the Jerusalem sabotage."

"So he's your professor Moriarty, Holmes," she teased.

Standing on his balcony, overlooking the ocean, Raf realised, were he honest with himself, that his pride stopped him from stepping into Dorian's office to ask her advice about taking Takran into Atlantis for intelligence gathering. He was the military Commanding Officer of the Atlantis project, which was about obtaining the necessary technology to launch 'Lifeline'. It was his job to make the right military decisions because a contingency of soldiers depended on him for leadership and direction. But underneath, Colonel Lynch was scared of all of the demons imaginary and real he had acquired over the years. He was terrified what would happen to him if he allowed Diabolus through the Gate. Above all, he was frightened of confronting their unpredictable powers. So he preferred to keep his pride and hide his pain.

"Hey, Colonel." Dorian's voice greeted him as she joined him at the railing. "I was looking for you."

"What do you want?" He asked, still staring out at the ocean.

She looked up at his face. "Are you okay, Rafael?"

When she used his first name, he knew he was in trouble. He couldn't deny her anything. His features hardened in his attempt to keep his concerns to himself; they were not for public display. He felt humbled by the concern he saw in her eyes.

"No," He replied honestly, "it's just been a difficult three years." He smiled thinly, looking back across the waves.

"It has certainly been that," She agreed, somewhat wryly. "You want to talk about it?"

He looked into her green eyes. She was a beautiful woman, and he loved her dearly. He loved her strength and the ability she had to help him be strong.

"I'm not good at ..." he began uncertainly.

Dorian stopped him. "I know. You don't have to be, Raf. But you have to try. I worry about you sometimes." She reached over and placed a hand on his forearm.

Raf looked down at her hand, and then back up at her face. Taking a deep breath, he shifted awkwardly. "It haunts me sometimes. Well, nearly every night." He took a deep breath and smelled the salty ocean. "I could have done a better job," He moaned, ashamed of himself, Verbalising his feelings became too much for him. He became silent.

To his surprise, Dorian didn't say anything either, and the two leaders of the Atlantis mission quietly stared out over the ocean. After a moment, she timidly stepped closer to him, and their sides were brushing. Raf glanced at her, startled, but his surprise faded into raging emotions. He desperately needed her in bed. He felt making love with her would cleanse his soul. She met his eyes nervously as she shivered, as though she was picking up his thoughts.

Almost mechanically, Raf shrugged his jacket off and draped it over her shoulders. He moved even closer to her, close enough to smell her fragrant hair conditioner. She turned to face him. One more step and he was flush against her body. He looked into her eyes and knew Dorian was the most exciting woman he had ever known. He was in his late thirties; he was aware that there were things more important than sex, and he desperately wanted those things. And now, standing in front of her, Raf had to decide if he was willing to undergo the risks of being in another emotional, intimate relationship. He'd married his first love and life with Emilia was sheer bliss – for a while. They had been married partners for five good years while Raf was in the US Marines. But the unsettled lifestyle of getting shipped from base to base proved too much for her. She was unhappy and bored. She took up with an accountant, and he knew the days of their relationship was numbered. Raf was broken-hearted, and he shied clear of stepping into another emotional minefield. Now, here he was

with Dorian, for whom he had a deep affection. But could he take the next step? Many questions assailed his brain. Did he want to risk dating a co-worker? Could he leave his emotional baggage behind? Did he believe their relationship could last for the rest of their lives? His mind ticked all of the above. His fragile ego was not as confident.

His hands warily went up to cup her jaw tenderly. He watched her face for an adverse reaction. One never came. He drew her close and wrapped one arm around her waist. His other hand remained on her face. The process was painfully slow, but he had to make sure that she saw something in him as well, that there was a real chance.

"Raf ..." she trailed off, suddenly appearing scared as his intent dawned on her.

"What?" He asked casually, not moving. He rather enjoyed having her so close. It made the stress melt away, and he felt a spark of hope for his life and the expedition.

"I ..." Her voice faltered.

Raf knew what she wanted to say. They had spoken the words before. It wasn't right; they would never work out; it could endanger them both. Those bitter thoughts faded, and he almost shoved her away. Instead, he slowly stepped back, staring at the floor contritely. Had he taken it too far? Did she only see him as a friend? Oh God, he had just humiliated himself, hadn't he? He was too arrogant, thinking every woman fell for him. "Sorry." He muttered. "I just ..."

"What?" She asked, her voice soft and tender.

It chilled him. Raf looked up at her apologetically and decided to play it off casually. "I kinda like you, Dorian. I wanted to kiss you. Sorry." He gave her a half-smile and looked away.

Dorian suddenly laid her head on his shoulder, and he instinctively wrapped one arm around her. He felt awkward. Lynch had terrible social skills, and he sucked at relationships. Flirting, Raf could do that. He was good at that, but anything deeper scared the bejesus out of him. The Colonel didn't know what to do, but there were a lot of things he wanted to do. Kissing her was an excellent start, but if this were all she could commit to at the moment, then he'd wait till later when they were alone.

Their moment was interrupted by an urgent voice. A soldier said, "Dr Gibson, there's been a problem. We need your presence in the control room."

Mendes Amwon cleverly assumed a charismatic mask that immediately inspired trust. A trust most people regretted once they got to know him better. Although there was much about him, most people were unaware. Holding secret magic rituals was in contravention of the code. Ceremonial magic was against the tenets of the Diabolus Sect. By invoking and controlling elemental forces by alchemical applications of precise formulae, was contrary to random chaos and system breakdowns, which required eventual static equilibrium. But Mendes was a sorcerer long before he joined Diabolus. His art was enveloped in sanctified vestments and carrying a wand inscribed with hieroglyphic figures, that could by the power vested in certain words and symbols, control the invisible inhabitants of the elements and the astral world. While the elaborate ceremonial magic of antiquity was not necessarily evil, there arose from its perversion several false schools of sorcery or black magic. Mendes subscribed to one such school - 'The Scarlet Council.'

The Scarlet Council began in Khem, a great centre of learning and the birthplace of many arts and sciences. This practice furnished an ideal environment for transcendental experimentation. Here the black magicians of Atlantis continued to exercise their superhuman powers until they had completely undermined and corrupted the morals of the primitive Mysteries. By establishing a hieratic caste, they usurped the position formerly occupied by the initiates and seized the reins of

spiritual government. Black magic came to control mainstream religion and stifled intellectual and spiritual independence by demanding complete adherence to the dogma and superstition of the ordained priesthood. The Scarlet Council - a committee of arch-sorcerers got elevated to power by their priesthood. Therefore it seemed right and proper to Mendes Amwon that he, a black magician, should become the master of Atlantis. For him, the Diabolus was just the vehicle to help him achieve his goal.

Goman Worrall, a revered Atlantean philosopher, realising the threat Mendes posed to the island nation, set out to expose him for what he was.

However, most Atlantean citizens saw this exciting newcomer as an angel, come to rescue them from an old world order they felt did not serve them. Of course, Mendes had to make changes, and the Atlanteans put up with them.

But Goman, a lone voice on the island, saw Mendes for what he was - evil incarnate. There was a huge backlash, encouraged by Amwon Mendes, from people who said Goman was intransigent, only trying to maintain a tired old religion dedicated to Poseidon. The followers of Mendes put increasing pressure on Professor Worrall and his intellectual supporters to leave the Centre of Science and live in exile beyond the outer harbour. To return to the citadel meant certain death.

Once Mendes established himself as master of the Citadel, he began to systematically destroy all the keys to the ancient wisdom, so that no one could access the knowledge necessary to reach the adept level, without first becoming a minion of the Scarlet Council. He cleverly mutilated the rituals of the Mysteries, while professing to preserve them, so that even though the neophyte passed through the degrees, he could not secure the knowledge to which he was entitled.

The next move Mendes made was to get the people to worship idols, instead of the power of nature, especially the ocean.

Therefore, the self-styled High Priest of the Singularity introduced Idolatry by demanding the worship of the images, initially sculpted solely as symbols for study and meditation - tools for enlightenment. Amwon gave false interpretations to the emblems and figures of the Mysteries, and he instilled elaborate theologies to confuse the minds of his devotees.

From afar Goman and the ousted wise council stood by while the masses, deprived of their birthright of understanding grovelled, to eventually become the abject slaves of the spiritual impostors. Superstition universally prevailed, and the black magicians completely dominated national affairs, with the result that the young people, led by Tamis had to flee the island or suffer from the sophistries of the black priest crafts of Atlantis and Khemm.

<http://gnosticwarrior.com/black-white-magicians.html>

## Chapter 10

### Independent News Report

The drunken man aimed poorly and fired erratically at the figure coming towards him. His muddled brain couldn't think why the person kept coming. Then he saw it wasn't human. The shock made 62-year-old Mitch Beeton urinate in his pants. The robot stopped, and human police took over, arresting the elderly man, who had been threatening neighbours with a shotgun, in his yard. The incident was reported this way in the Ohio newspaper. The article went on to say the man was later charged with firearm offences and wounding, but not killing a police robot. The robot, made by DARPA, was camera-equipped. Its mission was to locate the man and his guns. The Atlas robot was armed and primed to take down the suspect if he resisted.

The report went on to say that the use of robots by the military and the police had grown exponentially over the past decade. They were already being utilised as bomb-sniffing devices and for other counter-IED missions in Afghanistan and were used in similar capacities in Iraq before US troops pulled out.

Just as the military had carried out missions harmful to human personnel, with robots, civilian authorities were beginning to do the same for certain dangerous situations, to protect officers. The DARPA robots being used by police could automatically read license plates, fire tasers, use cameras, face ID scanners. They are now equipped with facial recognition software. Robots were the latest high-tech device employed by police.

The flying drone whirred softly, recording with its camera the movement of the fleeing figures, 150 metres below. Flying up to 50 kph, it was much more efficient than ground surveillance. The Turin Police were utilising this new way of monitoring illegal activity. The drone's transmitter sent, in real time, a video signal to a ground station, where an HD monitor visualised the camera's recording. Paula Morani, an officer at the scene, looked at the micro-monitor built into the special glasses, to see what the drone saw. Amazingly, like some special effect from Star Wars, it was like looking at an HD video on a 42-inch screen.

In Bellevue, Nebraska, two police officers responded to reports of an 'unstable man with a gun but were forced to beat a retreat on being greeted with a volley of shots from the gunman. A SWAT team arrived at the scene and decided to send in their robot colleague, to check out the lay of the land. Negotiations continued for several hours, during which time the officer in control of the robot viewed the suspect emerging from the garage doorway, attempting to close it with his firearm in hand. He then fired four rounds from his 12 gauge shotgun at the robot, disabling it. The Swat team deployed tear gas and arrested the suspect.

Although the metal cop was fully repaired and back on duty with the Bellevue SWAT team, it wasn't as robust as certain other mechanical law men. A robot cop in Florida - having been riddled with bullets by a nude man armed with an AK47 assault rifle - remained functional enough to beat a hasty retreat. Another metallic public servant in Tennessee proved even tougher, as it mounted an uncompromising assault on a heavily armed man, who had left his home a smoking ruin.

Barney Cormack kept track of such reports from around the world with mixed feelings. Sure robots were shown to be effective in gun-related scenarios, but they still had vulnerabilities. And vulnerable robots did not sell. Already the military and police forces in client countries were

sending negative feedback. This news was not good, which was why he was face-to-face with Lynne Becker, discussing the issue.

"We're are working on paper-thin composite nanomaterials that could, theoretically, stop bullets just as effectively as heavyweight body Armour."

"Yes, Doctor Becker, it all sounds fantastic, but we don't see much progress in this area. Unless the next generation of tactical robots don't get their asses shot off by drunken hicks, we're going to lose custom, and that cannot be allowed to happen."

Lynne smiled sweetly. Cormack was a bastard to work with at times, but she had learned to wear his impatience. "We are making progress, Barney, the scientists' inability to reliably test such materials against projectile impacts are hampering our growth."

"Well that's a lot of fucking good, Isn't it?" he stated, cynically.

Lynne, ignoring Barney's sharp words, continued, "Our researchers have developed a breakthrough stress-test that fires microscopic glass beads at the impact-absorbing material."

"That's hardly going to do any real damage!"

"Barney, although the projectiles are much smaller than a bullet, the experimental results could be scaled up to predict how the material would stand up to larger impacts."

"Look, we are not happy. We're already talking up the next generation of ATLAS robots. So when are you going to get this fixed?"

"Barney, we are not fixing anything. We are creating something that is quite remarkable. I can't promise it will be ready for the next robocops that come off the line but we are confident that our self-assembling polymer will be just one nanometre thick, as opposed to the one-inch thick, cumbersome plating currently worn by military and police personnel."

"Yeah, well I can't make sales with promises." He scratched his brush-cut head. "What's it going to take to speed up the action?"

"Are we talking an increase in budget, Barney?"

"You get me the results I want and your people get a hefty bonus."

She nodded. "We will do our best."

There was a pause, then he said, "Heron Industries is suing as for non-fulfilment of contract."

She was not surprised but didn't show it. "Are you going to contest it?" she asked, fishing.

"You bet your ass we are." Then he said, "If this gets to court I don't want Dr Covington involved. It could be bad for both of us."

"What are you saying, Barney?"

"I just think it would be best all round if you have a quiet word with him."

Lynne felt her anger rising. "I have no jurisdiction over what he decides to do outside of work parameters."

"I would have thought BC had a clause in their employment contract to the effect that employees are not allowed to do anything that could damage the company's reputation or profits."

She was getting his drift. DARPA, getting involved in a civil lawsuit, would not be good for its reputation. That meant it would not be good for Boston Cybertronics. She murmured. "I will speak with him."

"Excellent decision, Dr Becker, " he smiled.

It was a warm day, and Ulysses had organised the romantic picnic at the Mystic Lakes, in celebration of Lynne's 45th birthday. Having arrived at the Upper Mystic Lake that, on the surface, was quite stunning Lynne grabbed the picnic basket from the trunk of his car, while Ulysses got the blanket. Little did he know that, despite its natural beauty, the vast lake suffered from arsenic and other heavy metal contamination from the Aberjona River. But that would have spoiled the romantic ambience. They walked towards a shady, secluded area next to the massive body of water, where they spread the blanket out, and Lynne began to organise the items from the picnic basket.

Feasting on strawberries dipped in chocolate, along with an assortment of fine cheeses and delicate cake, while drinking wine, they sat on the blanket watching the sun set across the bright horizon. As they watched the day turn to dusk, Lynne pressed her head on his shoulder, and life was blissful.

Oranges, yellows, reds, and pinks were now barely visible over the horizon. As the sky darkened into night, and the night's stars began to appear, accompanied by a nearly full moon.

Lynne started kissing his neck under the collar of his Polo shirt, as she rubbed her hands up and down his back. "Thank you for an exquisite time," she crooned.

"It's not over yet, he grinned lasciviously, reaching the hem of her dress, then moving his hands up her legs. His lips found hers, and soon their tongues entwined in a sensual dance. The deep kiss left her breathless. Making sure no one was watching, he slid the straps of Lynne's dress off her shoulders, unveiling her small but beautiful breasts. He drew one of her nipples in his mouth, teasing her. Ulysses needed to savour her completely. He pulled her dress over her head and trailed his mouth down her body, with nibbles and kisses, until he reached his goal at the juncture of her legs. She became tense at his ministrations. Then he felt her body convulse in an ecstasy of exploding pleasure, as a tingling sensation ran up and down her writhing body. "Happy Birthday," he said.

"What about you?" she crooned, having recovered from her grand climax.

"Oh, I can wait till later."

"There's going to be later, is there?" she teased, putting her dress back on.

Lynne had let herself enjoy him but lurking in the background was the elephant in the room. Sitting up, she said, "I had to see Cormack today."

Thinking the subject inappropriate, he said, "And this is important, because?"

"He wants you to stay out of the Heron lawsuit."

Ulysses sat bolt upright. "He can go and get fucked!"

"I thought that might be your response."

"How very astute," he retorted cynically.

She touched his arm, "I wouldn't have mentioned this, but if you testify against DARPA, it's going to hurt our funding."

Ulysses couldn't believe it. "Is that little prick blackmailing you?"

"It's a contractual thing. We cannot hurt DARPA and, as you're part of us, that includes you. If you go on the stand and testify against DARPA, they can pull our contract with them, and they will bury us."

Letting the words sink in, Ulysses, fuming inside, responded, "I am going to finish that little shit if its the last thing I do."

"He's just DARPA's mouthpiece, Ulysses. This policy is not personal; it's business. Don't muddy the waters."

Tom Graham looked across the metal table at his attorney, his face lined and grey. "Are you telling me they have given up looking for them?"

Rene Cabet shrugged. "What can they do, dig up the whole of Switzerland?"

"Is that the best you can come up with?" the imprisoned archaeologist spat, eyes glaring."

"I can understand why you are angry but ..."

"I'm upset because those animals brutally murdered my colleagues and the police are charging me with this terrible crime! I am angry because fucking Professor Sonata stole the treasure I discovered! I'm mad because they're trying to get me locked away in a fucking mental institution!"

"And I am doing my best to help you," Rene said, scared by the scientist's outburst.

"How is my appeal going?" Tom asked, quieter.

"They haven't set a date yet," Cabet sighed. He knew the courts were dragging their feet. It was a challenging and emotive case based on strong but circumstantial evidence.

"Have you got any good news, Rene?" Tom asked, pitifully.

There wasn't. There seemed to be no hope for him, at least not judicially. It looked as though he would have the dubious company of seriously evil villains for the rest of his life. Shut away alone in his cell, at night he listened to the constant drip coming from the ceiling. He figured it came from a leak in a water pipe. It reminded him of his life draining away.

Then, Tom, at his lowest ebb, in a desperate bid for freedom, began to formulate a plan. Using his archaeological skills, the scientist looked for a way to escape. With nothing to lose, except what passed for his life if he failed, Tom Graham put his plan into action. First, he managed to get a plan of the prison layout. It was a new gaol with single storey cell blocks set out in an open plan design. Next, Tom purloined a spoon from the gaol kitchen, which he sharpened in the prison workshop. This crude tool he used, at night to dig a hole through his cell's damp plaster board ceiling. Immediately he was confronted with two problems: How to conceal his work from the guards during the day; How to get rid of the material from the hole. Then there was the noise, Being an archaeologist, Tom was used to tedious digging, but he only had a sharpened spoon.

Tom overcame the first problem by getting himself put on a detail that cleaned up a storage area. Amongst the rubbish was some pieces of plaster board. Tom couldn't believe his luck. Smuggling a piece back to his cell undetected proved tricky. With the help of a couple of lookouts, he managed to hide the plasterboard cut off without any guards seeing him. That night he carefully cut the material to the correct size and, using Blu-tak he had scrounged from the notice board, replaced the damp patch with his new one. All he needed was to draw the prison layout, and he was set to go. The improvised ceiling section stood up to all but close scrutiny, and as his guards very seldom checked out his cell, he managed to conceal his extracurricular activities. The excess material from the hole he brushed under his bed. The final part of the plan was to for Tom to get wire cutters from

the tool room. Using the IT room's facilities, Tom paid an adequate amount of money online to the workshop foreman's account, and he got his tool. Within a week Tom had his plan and was ready to make his move.

In the dead of night, Tom carefully pulled his metal frame cot into position. With adrenaline pumping, he stood on the bed. Tom felt around the hole and grabbed onto two support beams, then pulled himself up into the ceiling. The exertion was excruciating for him, but Tom worked through the pain, as he had done so many times before, on digs. Sweating profusely and exhausted, the prisoner used the last vestiges of his strength to crawl stealth-fully across support beams until he reached the shower block. Using his sharpened spoon, Tom cut a hole in the plasterboard ceiling and eased himself down onto the shower room floor. He gingerly opened the door and making sure no guards were around, walked outside. The cold night air turned his sweat to ice. Once over the initial shock, he made his way to the gaol's eight-foot-high perimeter fence. The Archaeologist, dodging an intermittent searchlight beam, cut out a section of the fence wire. Once he was through, Tom collapsed onto the ground, immediately recovering as the sharp coldness chilled his bones. Soon, the Swiss police would be swarming over the area, so the archaeologist had to get away from the prison as far as was possible before morning. He figured he'd have just a three-hour lead before the hunt was on. He had to use the time to contact the one person who could help him.

[https://www.theregister.co.uk/2012/10/23/police\\_robot\\_back\\_on\\_duty/](https://www.theregister.co.uk/2012/10/23/police_robot_back_on_duty/)

<http://newatlas.com/mit-breakthrough-paper-thin-bullet-proof-armor/24971/>

## **Chapter 11**

It was a sunny day in Norfolk, and Dayton was feeling childlike and carefree as he and Maddie strolled along the Cromer promenade, hunting for the elusive and equally delicious 'Cromer Crab'. He did miss his dogs, though. They would have loved capering on the pebbly beach. As they strolled into town, Dayton admired the beautiful old houses, Bowers of lilac and pot plants adorning the walls. Cromer, a Victorian seaside resort, no longer in its prime, still had its charm and local attractions, one of which was a seafood restaurant that sold the town's famed Cromer crab. They found it on the menu at the Grove, a quaint seafood eatery with great food.

As they sat dining, Dayton told Maddie how he came to injure his shoulder.

She looked at him. "So this 'Cook' person had been nobbled by the Sect."

"It certainly looks that way," he said cutting out some of the crab's white meat.

"I'm intrigued by your interest in the Atlantis myth. You've never mentioned it before. I would have thought it would have been too irrational for you."

"Normally yes. But I received some info saying the Americans had control of a Star-Gate, leading to the Lost Island."

"Lost, sunk and destroyed, was the last I heard about it."

He loved Maddie for her youthful enthusiasm. "Apparently not, according to Major Thomas' source."

"Who's that?" Maddie asked while encouraging crab meat from its shell.

"An American soldier he met in Iraq. Apparently, this soldier was at the secret base before being shipped to the Gulf. He told the Major he'd been through the Star Gate." He paused then said, "Now that's something I'd love to do."

She smiled, "I'm sure with your contacts you could have it arranged."

"Only if Diabolus had an influence on the island, and I hardly think that likely." He ate some more crab, then said, "Mind you, with their vast resources and influence you never know."

"Do you know who the soldier is?"

"I'll have to press Major Thomas to find out."

Maddie smiled, "But not yet, I hope."

Dayton grinned, "Oh, I think I can have a bit more R and R before rushing back into battle."

As they were looking at the dessert menu, Dayton's phone rang. It was from Yasir Tiwanah, the Arab historian. Noting Maddie's look of disapproval, he said, "Sorry, but I have to take this call."

In a private space near the toilets, he said, "Dayton here."

"How are you, my friend?"

"Had better days. So what's this about?"

"Tom Graham has escaped Swiss police custody and is on the run as we speak."

Tom Graham? The name vaguely rang a bell. "Isn't he that arrogant archaeologist - the one convicted of killing his people?"

"Yes. Tom contacted me today and wants to meet with us."

"Sorry Yasir, I'm convalescing at present. It will have to wait."

"He claims to have a strong lead on Sonata and wishes to pool resources."

"Yasir, you share resources with him if you like. But if you help him in any way ..."

"Yes, I know. I could end up in Gaol. That's why I need Soter behind me."

"Find out what he knows. If it gets us closer to Professor Sonata, contact me."

Bill Smith rode the old BMW as fast as was safe along the ill-repaired road to El Oued. The motorbike's tyre treads were well worn, and he got a slow puncture on the way. Luckily, he'd thought to include a hand pump in his supplies. It felt strange to be Bill Smith again, and it brought back terrible memories. It was as though a spell had been broken, leaving him feeling liberated but wretched at the same time. He hadn't thought of Millie since he'd identified her body in the morgue. The recollection sent a shiver up his spine. He had to banish such thoughts from his mind and focus on the hot, dusty road and the camels that often wandered across them. Despite having stopped every few miles to put more air into his tyre, by the time he rode onto the forecourt of the only petrol station in El Oued, the rear one was almost flat. A skinny old man drowned by his oil-stained overalls gave a toothless grin. "Petrol effendi."

Bill pointed to his almost flat tyre, "Puncture." He looked at the guy, "You fix."

He nodded, "500 dinars."

It seemed a bit steep to Smith but he needed the job done quickly. He handed the old mechanic some notes, "Where can I buy food around here?"

The worker took his arm and walked him to the road. He then pointed at a store across the dusty street.

Once Diablo knew Philux was not coming back, he checked the tasks he had set for his left-hand man. He stroked his Van Dyke beard, trying to figure out what could have happened to Philux? He could be injured somewhere, or dead. But the fact he had failed to get rid of his enemies was damning evidence. Diablo needed a new left-hand man to carry out his orders for his current plan. Somebody, who could be easily trained to do his bidding. The acolyte nearest to being able to ferment further hatred between the Mozabites and the Bedouin tribesmen was a man renamed Ecco. But he had not been completely programmed for such a task. Diablo could not afford any more failures, and now, on top of everything, he also needed to track down Philux, now a loose end. To this end, the Professor dispatched a minion called Guni to silence Philux before he divulged Diabolus business.

Once the old Arab had fixed the tyre and Bill was stocked up with food essentials, for an extra 100 dinar, he had a quick cold shower. Bill, feeling refreshed, paid the mechanic and then headed to Naftah in Tunisia. He realised he was just running, with no particular destination in mind. Crossing the border at night meant less waiting time, or so Bill figured. After a short ride across no man's

land, he arrived at the Algerian border police post. As he rode up, Bill noticed around twenty vehicles already parked and knew he was in for a long wait. First, he was required to complete a white entry card with his personal details and those of his motorcycle.

Bill exchanged friendly banter with the police officer, who also asked, in halting English, "Do you have a guide and where are you going?"

"I am going to Naftah, but I have no guide," Bill said, shelling out 100 dinars from his rapidly diminishing stash.

The cop looked at him and the form "You find a guide in Naftah."

"Yes, I find a guide in Naftah." Bill agreed, wondering why it was so important?

Bill waited another hour for the cop to make photocopies of his passport and do whatever other things he had to rubber stamp His entry visa. Then he was on the road again.

*Pointman Tactical Robot Survives Four Rounds From 12 Gauge ... (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.prweb.com/releases/SWATrobot/Pointman/prweb10026529.htm>*