

Entropicus

Book 3: The Madness of Androids



Chris Deggs

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

www.coloursandwords.com

Published in 2017 by smashwords.com

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First Edition

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A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Entropicus

Book 3: The Madness of Androids

Dedication

This story is especially dedicated to my loving friends Patty French and Lynn Haines who have been a great help in the editing process.

Chapter 1

Alyssa Barker watched the clouds flash by overhead. They moved much faster for her although she did not know it. Everything progressed at a more rapid pace for her, including her life. When she was born Alyssa looked beautiful and healthy. But during her first year, she started to show signs of the disease. She didn't seem to be growing or gain much weight. Ron and Jennie, Alyssa's parents were distraught, wondering what was happening to their beautiful baby. They appeared to be spending most of the time visiting paediatricians, trying to get to the bottom of the problem.

Ron and Jennie first took their daughter to see a paediatrician when Alyssa was six months old. The doctor tested the baby's hearing, vision, measured Alyssa's pulse and took her blood pressure. She also compared the child's weight and height with other kids of the same age. There was definitely something abnormal about her. As Alyssa's facial symptoms became more noticeable the paediatrician referred her to Dr Margaret Collins, a senior Paediatrician at the West Suffolk General Hospital.

She diagnosed Progeria. The baby's oversized head, bulging eyes and small lower jaw had her resembling a Hollywood ET. Alyssa had grown very little hair. Her ears stuck out like jugs and her veins were quite visible. All of which meant she would be a social pariah with few if any friends. Dr Collins took Ron and Jennie aside, "The test results show that Alyssa has Progeria."

Although she had prepared herself for this prognosis, the doctor's words had Jennie transfixed to the spot.

Ron said, "What can you do to help her?"

Dr Collins sighed, "At this time we have no cure."

"What can we expect?" Jennie muttered.

"Your daughter will need constant care. We can provide treatments to help ease or delay some of the disease's symptoms."

"Such as?" Ron queried.

"Practical things like using medication to lower your child's cholesterol and blood clots. Small doses of aspirin to help prevent heart attacks. That sort of stuff."

"Aren't there any drugs that can deal with the cause, Doctor," Ron asked.

"Researchers are working on finding one, a kind of cancer drug inhibitor that may fix damaged cells."

Jennie had held back on the most important question, fearing the answer. But she had to know. Taking a deep breath she said, "If Alyssa's cells are not fixed can she have a reasonable quality of life?"

Addressing both parents, the Chief Pediatrician said, "As children with Progeria get older, they get diseases you'd expect to see in people age 50 and over. These include bone loss, hardening of the arteries, and heart disease. Children with Progeria usually die of heart attacks or strokes. The good news is that the illness will not affect Alyssa's brain development and intelligence. Also, she isn't likely to get infections more than other kids."

"If she remains healthy what kind of longevity are we looking at?" Ron asked, dreading the answer.

Dr Collins said, "By the time Alyssa reaches 12 or 13 she will be like a woman in her dotage. In one case, a boy did survive until he was fifteen but that is very rare."

Jennie looked at her husband, tears glistening in her eyes.

Alyssa was very unique, one in four million, making her condition very rare indeed. It had started before she was born. All it took was a single mistake in an individual gene, and Alyssa's fate was sealed. The error caused the nucleus of the cell to make an abnormal protein, called progerin, the effect of which causes cells to break down more easily. As the progerin built up in more and more of Alyssa's cells, it caused rapid ageing and abnormal growth in her body.

Once Ron and Jennie accepted the idea that their little girl would only be with them for a short while, they determined to make those few years the best they could for their child. At first, they trawled the net for any chance of a cure. They tried traditional and alternative medicines, but nothing made any difference. With each new approach came new hope. With each failure came a fresh bout of disappointment and sadness. Ron and Jennie decided to leave well alone and enjoy their little Alyssa for as long as they could.

Ron and Jennie built a tall fence around the yard of their House on Mildenhall Estate so that their precious child could play outside protected from the stares and judgements of others. Jennie stayed home and schooled her daughter, who turned out to be very bright.

When Alyssa was ten, she was regularly taking medication for heart disease, osteoporosis, arthritis and a mixture of other ailments afflicting the aged.

Then something unexpected happened. A stranger turned up at the front door with the promise of a cure. Ron never asked the man any questions and sent him away with a flea in his ear. But not before Alyssa's dad had been given a small card. Ron would love to have believed the stranger, but he could not handle having his hopes raised again only to be heart-broken when the proposed cure did not work.

Alyssa saw the visiting card left by the stranger. She picked it up and looked at the details. The little girl wondered, what if? Alyssa knew she could only expect a short life, three more years at best. She could understand why her mum and dad had given up on finding a cure for her. They had tried many treatments only to be faced with failure and disappointment. Alyssa's mum and dad couldn't face having their hopes dashed again. But for the little girl, it was different. It was her life, such as it was, and, as far as she was concerned, her decision. Besides what had she got to lose? So, while her dad was at work and her mum was showering, Alyssa took out the card and phoned the man's number. When he answered, she said, "My name is Alyssa Barker, and I think you may be able to help me."

"Ah, yes. But your father didn't want my help."

"Well, I do. So can you actually cure my illness?" Alyssa asked, in a shrill voice, a symptom of Progeria.

"I can, but there are certain conditions."

"What conditions?"

"We must meet, Alyssa. Can you manage that?"

"There is a gate at the bottom of my back yard. We can meet there."

<http://www.webmd.com/children/progeria>

Chapter 2

The only thing in Alyssa's life that did not speed up was a treatment to cure her of her malady and allow her to live a normal life. She waited just outside the back gate. Somebody was coming down the lane, but it was not him. The little girl turned around to face the fence, hiding her unusual looking features from the person who passed her. Her parents had kept her hidden from the embarrassed stares of strangers, and, even worse, the friends and family members who masked their shock with uncomfortable silences. Then she saw the man approaching. Her natural response was to go back into her shell and pretend she was invisible.

The stranger was casually dressed and probably in his thirties. He was tall, around six foot two, by Alyssa's estimate, with a full dark beard that obscured half of his face. The name on his card said Gustav Stone, and it listed him as an 'Ayurvedic Healer'. He said, "Turn and face me, Alyssa. I have worked in Leper colonies, so you don't scare me."

She tentatively turned around and faced him. "Mr Stone, can you actually cure me?" Gustav smiled, "If I do help you tell no one. Not even your parents."

"Why?" she asked, puzzled.

"It's a condition of me healing you. You mustn't question it."

"But, if you're successful, how can I explain it to them."

Gustav looked the little girl in the eye. "They will be so amazed they will put it down to a miracle – a gift from God."

Alyssa looked up at the Mr Stone. "How do you know my parents are religious?"

He chuckled, "I didn't just pick you out at random, you know." He left it at that.

"So when can you start the healing?"

He smiled wistfully. "I already have."

Chapter 3

As their chopper descended for landing, Abbott could just make out the shapes of factory sheds with rail lines leading into them. Little did he know but it was the former Marion County Rail Depot –

now used as a detention processing centre. As the helicopter came into land, the reporter noticed what looked like gas mains with pipes running to a huge shed. Had he then known the tubes ran into large furnaces his blood would have gone cold.

Once the aircraft had landed, Abbott and Helen were ordered to disembark. Indicating the disabled woman, Abbott said, "She needs a wheelchair."

The pilot looked at his colleague who had been watching the detainees and shrugged.

Abbott, really pissed off, said, "Are you going to carry her?"

Shaken from his apathy, the pilot took out his radio and requested a form of transport for a female prisoner. Abbott was waiting with Helen. She held onto his hand as she sat in the helicopter and he could feel her trembling. Putting on a brave face, Abbott said, "Don't worry. It's going to be okay."

She looked up at him. "We're in a secret prison camp. How exactly is that okay?"

Just then a soldier approached him. "Come with me and join the queue," the guard said, with a guttural German accent.

Abbott, scared for Helen, said, "I have to care for my friend. She's handicapped."

The soldier put his hand on a machine gun he had slung over his shoulder. "You will come with me now."

Abbott looked at Helen. "I will find you," he said as he was marched away from her. The reporter joined a queue of men, prisoners from a train that had recently arrived. The long row of detainees could not all fit inside the admissions building, leaving many, including Abbott, outside in the cold. Abbott rugged up for the Canadian winter, was all right but many of the men shivered in the bitter cold.

As the journalist waited in the slow moving queue, he had plenty of time to ponder his fate. The Australian tried not to dwell on the unknown forces that had suddenly taken over his life. No matter how glum the future looked for him, he thought about how terrible it must be for Helen. As there were only men in the queue, he figured the genders were separated and kept apart. The prisoners in the long straggly line didn't look like hardened criminals.

Abbott found out later the men mostly comprised citizens who had been involved in protest demonstrations or were individual activists fighting for their eroding civil rights.

As the prisoners were slowly processed, the man in front of Abbott turned his head and said, "It's no longer a conspiracy theory. These places actually do exist."

"Where are you from?" Abbott asked.

"Lawrence, Kansas. Where's your accent from?"

"Australia."

A guard prodded the American in the ribs with the barrel of his rifle, "No talking," he snapped.

When it came to Abbott's turn, the officer taking his details looked up at him. "You're an Australian."

Abbott tried, "Yes. I need to make a call to inform the Australian Consulate."

The official said, "All in good time. Right now we have to figure what to do with you."

"Look, a paraplegic friend arrived with me. I need to know that she's okay."

The officer stared at him. "Not my problem. My job is to get your details, so we are aware of where to put you."

Little did Abbott know at the time, he and Helen were part of 'Operation Garden Plot', which sounded like a horticultural show but was really incarceration without trial, without any friends or family knowing what was going on.

Chapter 4

Goman Worrall yearned to be back in his world. Peace was restored on the island, and a stable government was in place. But the American government would not release him until he'd given them everything they demanded. In the short time, he had been in America he, and a hand-picked team of scientists from NASA had been working on harnessing Zero-Point Energy.

Professor Worrall and the US Government had struck a secret deal. The arrangement was that in return for sharing Atlantean advanced technologies with America, the United States would provide Atlantis with all the infrastructure it needed to get back on track.

At first, the NASA scientists resented having to listen to the 'crackpot' academic's wild ideas about free energy. They thought they knew all about zero point energy, but it was all hush, hush. Any physicist worth his or her salt knew that quantum vacuum zero-point energy was the lowest possible force a quantum mechanical, physical system could have; it is the energy of its ground state. They were well aware that all quantum mechanical systems underwent fluctuations even in their ground state and had an associated zero point energy, a consequence of their wave-like nature. But what no earth scientist knew was how to harness this boon for humanity. That was until Goman Worrall came along.

He showed them that, although the uncertainty principle required physical systems to have zero point radiation greater than the minimum of its potential classical resource, the resulting motion, even at absolute zero, could be stored and used as an infinite energy source. Some scientists argued that the unlimited amount and unpredictable nature of zero point energy presented a global threat much worse than nuclear fission.

Professor Worrall carried out a simple experiment for the 'doubting Thomas' among the NASA group. He showed that liquid helium did not freeze under atmospheric pressure at any temperature because of its zero point energy.

All of the scientists present, except the die-hard doubters among them, were amazed at the result.

Chapter 5

Abbott, like all the other prisoners, was awakened at 4 am by somebody barking at him in an East European accent. His ears rang with, "HURRY UP! YOU MUST RAISE; FIND YOUR SHOES."

The Aussie copied other detainees and stood beside his bed.

"MAKE YOUR BEDS."

One of the internees fresh from the train roughly straightened the bed covers on his single foam mattress and got struck with a baton for not doing it properly. The guard, wearing US military camouflaged fatigues dyed black got a colleague to demonstrate how to make a perfect bed militarily, with blankets made up exactly over the foam mattress. The prisoners were only shown

once, after which they had to do it themselves. It was nearly impossible and was just another opportunity for the guard to use his baton to make an example of some of the prisoners. Such rough treatment shocked Abbott to the core. He stayed silent as the brutal guard dished out vicious punishment. A shiver shot up his spine at the realisation. This was now his world.

With beds made it was time for ablutions. It was freezing outside, and Abbott ran with the others to, what turned out to be a shower block with toilets. The journalist quickly discovered why the long-term detainees raced to the facility. It was not only the bitterly cold morning that got them moving fast. The reason for the race to get there first soon became apparent to the journalist. The small block only had half a dozen toilets for around one hundred prisoners who, Abbott discovered were only allocated five minutes for washing before the morning roll call. Latecomers yelled out in pain as black-uniformed guards hit them with their batons. Standing in the freezing cold now seemed the least of Abbott's worries.

An NCO carried out the roll call, after which an officer, announcing himself as Colonel Robertson, said, "Welcome to Camp Atterbury, a classification/processing centre for incoming detainees. You will presently be given a book of rules. While you are with us, as long as you obey these regulations without question, we will all get along just fine." The Colonel smiled, "One more thing, you will direct any questions to me through Sergeant Stratos."

A burly man with a thick black moustache stepped forward. He addressed the prisoners in a thick European accent. "If you have questions you will put them to guard in charge of your detail. If issue relevant he will tell me, and I deal with it." Scrutinising the men, he said, "New prisoners will come and collect rule book."

With the roll call over, the men raced back to their prison hut and grabbed their coats and jackets. With chattering teeth, Abbott followed the long-termers to a large hall and what passed for breakfast. He didn't know why they were running, but the best policy seemed to be 'monkey see, monkey do'. He saw the men queuing up with what turned out to be a mess-tin in hand. Nobody had told the newbies, no mess-tin, no food.

Abbott was one of those who went hungry that morning. He had no appetite, anyhow. His concern for Helen's well-being had his stomach churning. For those who did eat, a server dished out two slices of white bread and weak black coffee. This morning they were lucky and received a slice of spam and margarine on their bread. Food distribution provided the more sadistic overseers to have some fun. Sometimes they knocked the tins, so the food fell on the floor. Or they nudged a prisoner to make him spill his coffee. Not only did the prisoner receive nothing more. They risked baton punishment for wasting food.

As Abbott familiarised himself with his dire situation, he realised most of his fellow prisoners were ordinary American citizens who disagreed with government policies and voiced their concerns. That's all it took to earn a trip in a boxcar to nine shades of hell. Abbott sought out his prison hut overseer, a tall, thin corporal with a jagged scar on his left cheek. The NCO turned to Abbott. "What do you want?"

The journalist said, "I came here with a disabled woman. I need to see her. We are both Australian citizens, and I need to contact the Australian Consulate."

The NCO said, "You write down questions. Then I take to Sergeant Stratos."

"I don't have anything to write on or with."

The tall soldier said, "I ask Sergeant if you can have pen and paper."

Abbott, crestfallen, knew communication within the camp let alone with the outside world, was not going to be easy.

It was not easy for Alyssa to sneak away to see Mr Stone without her parents finding out. They smothered her with their love and stifled her with their protectiveness. For the ten years, Alyssa had been alive they hid her from the outside world. They could not allow their little monster to be seen in public. When they had to take Alyssa somewhere, her mum made sure her face was hidden by broad-brimmed hats and scarves. Now she had to do something for herself. It was time to meet Mr Stone again.

Jennifer Barker, like her daughter, was mostly trapped in her indoor environment. Unlike her daughter, Jenny's confinement to her home was of her choosing. She would argue it was not the case because she sacrificed her freedom for her daughter. As Alyssa became aware of the burden her mother's martyrdom put upon her, she couldn't stand it. Since she was eight, the little girl encouraged her mum to go out and spend time with her friends. At last, now that Alyssa had turned ten Jennifer finally let her stay home alone at times. But she was never to leave the house.

Gustav Stone picked Alyssa up in his car and drove her to Westgate Street, where he rented a flat. Once there, he gave her a fruit juice and sat down opposite her at his kitchen table. He said, "Before I heal you there are things I need to say."

Alyssa sipped her fresh orange juice and said, "Is this where you tell me the conditions?"

Gustav smiled, "I can cure you, but for you to stay healed and become healthy you have to be prepared to do something in return."

She looked up at Mr Stone, a bemused look on her distorted face. "What do I have to do?"

"Pass the ageing effect onto someone or something else."

She stared at the healer, mouth wide open but no words.

"I know it's difficult for you. But you have to make a decision if you still want the treatment."

"Why does it have to be that way?"

Gustav had no ready answer. He said, quietly, "That's the way it is. Whenever you feel the symptoms coming on you, have to transfer the ageing process for you to be renewed."

"Does it have to be a person?"

"No. it can be anything." Seeing her uncertainty, Gustav said, "I will drive you home. Think about it and tell me your decision tomorrow at the gate."

General Schulz looked squarely at Colonel Cormack. Removing the cigar from his mouth, he puffed out a cloud of smoke adding to that which already swirled around the confined office space. "How are you going to round up the stray Atlanteans?"

"Me?" Barney said, agitated.

"Have they been fitted with tracker bracelets?"

"I hope so. We'll never find the Islanders once they get swallowed up by DC."

"Do you mean you don't know, Colonel?"

"I believe Lynch was in charge of the Atlanteans."

"How is he?"

"On the mend but he was close to the blast when that lab blew up."

The General said, "Go and see him Barney and find out about those trackers"

Barney rang Dr Gibson's number. "Hi. Colonel Cormack here. We need to know how to round up our guests."

"Our guests?"

"You know who I mean. The Islanders."

"Colonel Lynch was in charge so ..."

"How is he?"

"Mending. I hope you're not going to worry Lynch about ...?"

"I just need to know how to access the codes for the trackers."

"I can probably get that for you. But why do you need that data?"

"The Islanders are going back home."

Dorian had an uncomfortable feeling. "And the Stargate?"

"General Schulz has ordered it to be sealed."

"But, we still have work to do there."

"Take it up with the General, Dr Gibson. And get me those codes ASAP."

Dorian was about to ring the General when he rang her. "Dr Gibson, come to Stargate base. We have to tie up some loose ends."

"General, Colonel Cormack tells me we are winding up operations."

"That's why I need you there. 9 am sharp, tomorrow."

Hassan Shamsi had not heard from Abbott in over two weeks. Although there was nothing significant in that when he rang the Aussie's phone, he was constantly told it was out of service. And that was worrying indeed. The last time he had spoken with Abbott was when he was searching for Dr Philips and his cyclotron. "Where are you, Abbott," he said privately to his Brooklyn hotel room. Then he had an idea! His Aussie initiate had mentioned A woman friend who headed an organisation called the Anti Transhumanist League. Maybe she knew of his whereabouts?

A quick search of the ATL Website provided a contact number and address, 155 Park Lane South, near Victory Park in Brooklyn. As the location was nearby, Hassan took a cab and visited the office block. The directory board near the elevators listed ATL on the fourth floor. But suite two was now occupied by a small publishing firm. The secretary informed the tall, bearded man that ATL had moved. That is all she knew. Hassan rang Helen Cleaver's contact number on the ATL Website and received the message that her phone, like Abbott's, was out of service. Hassan had hit a dead end.

Chapter 6

With its pleasantly mild climate and easily walkable colonial centre, Projeria found herself lingering longer in Tarija than she had anticipated. She was on her way to Argentina when she decided to stop off in the Bolivian city, where she visited the Museo Paleontologico y Arqueologico. Projeria

thought the busy little museum was adorable. Located just off the main plaza in an old building, it displayed an array of amazing fossils, rather a surprising treat in the middle of the city.

Despite it being small (just two compact floors) the amount of local palaeoecological information packed into this tiny space made it a very worthwhile adventure for her. However, she had another reason for being there. Apart from having a passion for fossils, Projeria was waiting for her contact to show.

She was to meet up with Alden Colthorpe. She looked at the picture of the man with close piercing eyes and scanned the museum looking out for him. Then she espied the short man as he jostled his way through a group of school kids, trying to reach her.

Projeria introduced herself saying, "Have you made the arrangements?"

Colthorpe looked at the beautiful redhead in the sleek black pant suit. "Gustav explained it to me. Everything is in place."

"Good. When do we leave?"

"I have a helicopter ready to go today if that is not too soon for you."

"The sooner, the better."

Natasha Guevera traipsed around the empty administration offices of the abandoned Holt House. Somehow the 1810 historical building had escaped demolition. Natasha stood, soaking up the history of the old Smithsonian edifice. Her attention was drawn to the sounds of elephants, lions and other animal noises from the nearby National Zoo. The second interruption came from her phone. It was Hassan Shamsi. "Hello. Natasha here."

Hello, Natasha. "I'm trying to find Abbott-Gallagher. Do you have any idea where he might be."

"I've only spoken to him a couple of times. I really have no idea."

Hassan did not want to leave it like that. He persisted, "I have tried his phone several times, but there's no signal."

"Sorry, but I can't be of any help."

With nowhere to go, Hassan said, "I'm concerned about him."

"Sorry, Hassan, but I don't know what to suggest."

The Arab sighed, "Thanks anyway."

Natasha continued her exploration.

Tony Cochran had been a 'guest' of the facility for six months, and he still had not been processed and sent to another detention centre. He had been caught up in a riot but had never been officially charged or been given a day in court. Tony, like the other inmates, had had no contact with the outside world. In fact, the outside world, including his family, had no idea what had happened to him and got the police to list him as a missing person. Tony pondered his next move when Abbott interrupted him.

"Sorry to trouble you mate but where do I get one of the mess trays?"

Cochran looked askance at Abbott. "So you missed out on two slices of stale bread and Spam."

"They don't tell us anything and expect us to know it."

The Ukraine guards, especially, take great pleasure in mistreating us, any chance they get." Cochran eyed Abbott up and down, getting a measure of him. "If you were observant you would have seen that they were to the left of the counter."

"Shit! How could I have missed that?"

"You'd better be on the ball if you want to survive here."

Abbott looked about him. "Strewth, it's a fucking nightmare."

"Strike me, you're a flaming Australian," the prisoner said, in a bad Australian accent. Cochran added, "The way to survive is to know your enemy, and that means knowing where you are."

"I know I'm in Indianapolis."

"That's a start. But find out all you can about this place. Like it used to be an Amtrak rail car repair facility. It can take up to 3000 prisoners, and it contains large 3-4 inch gas mains that run to large furnaces."

"Jeez, that doesn't sound encouraging."

Cochran continued, "The guards are all UN troops from Eastern European countries, mostly Serb and Croat. You won't find any Yanks."

"Why's that?"

"Wake up, Aussie. My countrymen might hesitate if ordered to shoot Americans. These bastards won't."

Abbott said, "One more thing. I came with a friend, She's a paraplegic. How do I get to find out about her."

Cochran grinned, "You can forget 'Scar face'. Give him a written request, and he just rips it up. But he doesn't rip up American dollars."

"But my wallet with my cards and cash were confiscated when I got here."

"There are ways."

"What ways?"

Cochran tapped his nose. "I'll talk to someone."

Rodney knew it was impossible, but there it was in front of his eyes. Somehow his computer was infected with a virus from a parallel virtual computer. The data had remained coherent at room temperature for almost 40 minutes. Then it became gobble-de-gook on his screen. Dr Jarvis, his DARPA assistant on the project, watched agog.

Since then Dr MacKay had retreated into his shell, not speaking to anybody. He knew the problem had something to do with 'entanglement'. Nothing else could explain the virus. But even that did not make sense to the scientist. Entanglement is a physical phenomenon that occurs when pairs or groups of particles act in such a fashion that their quantum state could not be described independently of the others, irrespective of distance. It was what Einstein described as 'weird stuff at a distance'. But, as far as science was aware it only worked as a physical phenomenon, not as a virtual one. The more Rodney searched for a rational answer, the more illogical it seemed. Dr Jarvis had since returned to DARPA, but Rodney could still hear his parting words. Maybe we're not ready

for this yet. Dr MacKay could not go along with that. So he refused to leave the Atlantis Gate base until he had his answer. Or perhaps until Goman Worrall had the answer?

Dorian arrived at the base to some consternation. As she approached what was her office she heard raised voices. Rodney MacKay was arguing with General Schulz. Within a cloud of cigar smoke, she heard Rodney saying, "You have no right to stop me seeing him!"

The General argued, "We have every right. He is helping us get a grasp of his energy technology."

Dorian knocked on the door, getting their attention.

Schulz, all official again said, "MacKay, we'll discuss this further later."

Rodney had other ideas.

"Come in Dr Gibson. I need your help to tie up some loose ends here."

"What's happening General?" Dorian asked.

"It's time to send all the Atlanteans back home and seal the gate."

She looked at him, surprised. "Isn't it premature. We're still helping them rebuild their society."

"We rescued them from a God damn dictator. Isn't that enough?"

No General, it's not sufficient. We are committed to helping them recover."

"Not any longer," the General said, stubbing out the end of his cigar.

Dorian retorted, "I guess you've got what you wanted from Professor Worrall."

Ignoring the barb, Schulz said, "Your job is to get the Atlanteans back here ASAP."

"All of them?"

"That's what I said."

"What about Bella and Kronyn? They have helped us with the gate experiment from the start. They are applying for American citizenship."

Logan Schulz extracted another cigar from his humidor. "It's not going to happen Dr Gibson."

"Why not? They deserve it!"

"Because none of this happened," he said, emphasising the base with a sweep of his hands.

"I'm sorry, General, but I cannot accept ..."

"My dear, you have no choice in the matter. And you did sign the non-disclosure Act. So we're trusting you to keep quiet and simply do your job."

Chapter 7

Independent News Report:

ROBOT RIGHTS: NEW MISSION FOR THE WELFARE STATE?

'Robot Rights', a new book written by Komax, the first Pulitzer Prize-winning robot, is a fitting complement to the gun and speech control favoured by egalitarian tyrants and pseudo-scientific

social engineers. Komax, well known for his controversial 'Metal Power' book, is stirring up the ATL with his latest book, which puts forward a coherent argument that malfunctioning bots get the sick allowance, while older 'bots go on a state pension, like humans.

Rafael Lynch sat in the wheelchair and looked out across the hospital lawn at the people outside. The day was warm with ribbons of fairy floss clouds scudding across the sky. He looked at his watch. Hassan Shamsi would be arriving soon. Raf's doctor told him he could soon go home. The intense blast from the explosion had knocked him off his feet leaving him with multiple injuries, including second-degree burns to 20 percent of his body.

Raf's brain swelling had gone down, and he could walk short distances with the aid of a stick. He considered himself one of the lucky ones. The "How are you today, John?" got his attention and he looked around at the Arab, who was grinning.

"Just get me out of here," the Colonel said.

As Hassan pushed Raf around the hospital precincts, he said, "I can't locate Abbot Gallagher."

"Is that supposed to mean something to me?"

"You're people probably have surveillance on him."

"Why's that?"

"An Australian freelance journalist loose in America and you don't know why he would show up on your radar? Come on Raf, you can do better than that."

"I need more to go on. Has this journalist committed any crimes here?"

"Not that I know of, but he was friends with a person who would have been of interest, as you Americans say."

Raf, curious, said, "Who are you talking about?"

"That woman who always in the news. She runs that group. The Anti-Transhumanist League, I think it's called."

"Is he doing a story on her?"

Hassan shrugged, "I don't know. I think their relationship is of a more personal nature."

Neil Jenkins, founder and former chief executive of Target Pharmaceuticals, looked at the figures on his computer and smiled broadly. The reason for his good mood was that the price of Dearerprim, which had shot up from \$13.50 per tablet to \$750, overnight. The drug used to treat toxoplasmosis, a life-threatening parasite in pregnant women and their unborn babies, was originally manufactured to treat Malaria.

Jenkins, the 33-year-old founder of Target Pharmaceuticals, having just acquired the drug immediately jacked up the price, costing patients hundreds of thousand dollars.

Matthew Snelling handed the dossier to Daniel, as they sat drinking brandy at Lynsey Hall. He said, "This is your first solo mission, Daniel. Make sure you stick to this brief."

Daniel Lynsey looked at the Minister coldly. He hadn't forgiven him for the beating he took in Turkey. Snelling's "It's not personal, my Lord," had cut no ice with the Soter agent.

Snelling finished his drink. "To be successful in this work networking is the key. Your father understood that very well, which was why he came through his missions with flying colours."

"Except the one in which he was killed."

"That was personal, not Soter." He added, "And that's why he came unstuck, Daniel. Never forget, teamwork is the key to your success and survival."

Daniel stared at the politician. "What do you mean – personal?"

"Not sanctioned by Soter." Matthew rose from his seat. "I have to be going, your Lordship." He added, "This job is rather urgent."

"Why have we targeted this Jenkins character?"

"Because he ticks enough of the boxes." Snelling sighed.

Daniel pressed, "Why? Because he's a ruthless businessman?"

Matthew shook his head. "No. His exploitation of sick people does not qualify him as a Diabolus agent. It's what he is about to do that puts him squarely in their corner."

"Which is?"

"Just trust that he deserves our attention."

As an investment banker, Daniel had a proper job, according to his proud mother. Lynvest was also a legitimate cover for his clandestine activities. However, as Lord of the Manor, so to speak, Daniel had certain functions to attend to, which kept him Hall-bound for days at a time. Grenville, his father's loyal and long-lived factotum, stayed on at the Hall to school young Daniel in the necessary protocols and functions befitting generations of nobility.

But Grenville needed to retire, and Daniel and his mother had to choose a replacement. After much deliberation, the Lynseys finally settled on Wendell Meyer, known as Wendell, in the butler tradition. At Sixty, Wendell was still young in by butler standards. He came with glowing references and effusive testimonials. Wendell, a very amiable fellow, was more than happy to carry out some of his Lordship's delegated tasks while he was away on City business.

There were some things Daniel could not divulge to anyone else. He picked up the brief, poured himself a decent measure of brandy and sat down to ponder the Neil Jenkins dossier. Peter Lavell, who had been used by Soter on many assignments, including the Kamirov contract, seemed a good choice. So Daniel rang him.

Peter received Lord Lynsey's call as he got his equipment out of the back of his Range Rover, which was parked to the side of the muddy track leading onto the moor. Peter Lavell loved the peace and quiet of the English moor lands. The vast open spaces of the North York Moors captured his imagination. The moods of the moors went from melancholic to rugged and windswept. Many a person would become very lonely there, but Lavell welcomed it. Besides, he wasn't there just for the hiking. He was also there for target practice. Answering the call, he said, "Lavell speaking."

"We have a job for you. Usual arrangements."

"Send details, and I will look into it."

"Will do. But we have to meet."

"Right. Send me rendezvous details." With the call dealt with, Peter put on his backpack and slung his CZ 527 in .223 over his shoulder. Now to find a secluded spot where he could practise his shooting skills.

Helen awoke to the yelling of guards. The other twenty or so woman prisoners jumped to attention, but Helen just lay in bed.

A black clad guard approached her. "Why you not out of bed?"

Helen stared at him. "Because I'm a fucking cripple and need a wheelchair!"

He whacked her body with his baton. "Get up, bitch!"

One of the other women chanced, "She's telling the truth. She can't walk."

Not having faced this situation before, he stared at the brave, outspoken woman. "This a trick you be sorry."

The woman sighed. "It's no trick. She's a paraplegic, and she can't go anywhere without a wheelchair."

The guard scowled, "All you other woman go to wash house now. Turning to Helen, he said, "You stay where you are?"

Helen complied.

Colonel Cormack activated the codes, and in many locations around DC, bracelets began to pulse and flash a green light. Each wearer, having been given a mobile phone, received an SMS instructing them to return to 3701 N. Fairfax Drive. DARPA activated their phone navigation app, giving them directions. The pulsing sensation caused a mild pain. The bracelet was programmed to exert a stronger pulse, thus more discomfort after each hour. As soon as the wearers reached their destination, the pulsing was switched off. This ensured that every person wearing their location bracelet would return home without the need for a search party.

Within two hours all the wearers were back at home base, and the trackers were removed. Dorian Gibson was there to debrief them. Two guards stood outside her door. The Atlanteans were brought in one by one to answer questions about their DC experience.

Takran, now fully recovered, said, "Where is Goman Worrall. I have not seen him here."

Dorian, who had no idea where the head scientist suggested, "He is still helping us."

Takran eyed Dr Gibson. She looked tired, like someone beaten down. "He's our top scientist. We need him to come back with us."

She couldn't lie to him. "Takran, it's out of my hands. My job is to get you all safely through the gate to your island home."

Takran was not happy when he left the office.

Dr Gibson feared for Goman's life. Once the gate was sealed, he would never get back to Atlantis, and he could not be allowed Freedom on Earth. Her attention got drawn to an altercation going on in the corridor. Upon investigation, she saw Rafael Lynch getting pushed in a wheelchair by a tall bearded man, who was arguing with her guards. Addressing the doctor, one guard said, "He hasn't got any ID on him."

Dorian said, "It's okay, I can vouch for him."

Once they were in her office, she looked at Raf. "What are you doing here? I take it that you're not reporting for duty."

"I haven't heard anything from you. I wondered how you were faring."

She sighed, "It's been pretty hectic I can tell you." Then she said, "What have you done with Goman Worrall?"

Krauss was supposed to have dealt with that problem, but he'd gotten himself killed instead. Now Raf had to arrange something else. "Oh, he's still working with our people."

Once Rodney knew that the Colonel was on the premises he sought him out. Rodney, seeing the great warrior in a wheelchair, was surprised. Without any form of greeting, he demanded, "Colonel, where have you got Goman Worrall stashed?"

Rafael looked up at the rude scientist. "I haven't got him 'stashed' anywhere."

"That's nonsense! He wasn't fitted with a tracking bracelet; otherwise, he'd be here with the other Atlanteans. And your lot wouldn't let him loose in America. So where the fuck is he?"

Rafael said, "Like I said, I don't know. Besides, I don't have to answer to you."

Rodney calmed down a little "It's a matter of scientific importance that I have to speak with him."

"I can't help you!"

"Who can?"

Raf was feeling exhausted. He slumped back in his chair. "You could ask Colonel Cormack."

Hassan wanted to ask about Abbott's whereabouts, but Rafael had drifted off to sleep.

<https://www.lonelyplanet.com/bolivia/the-southwest/tarija>

Chapter 8

Independent News Report:

ROBOTS ON MURDEROUS RAMPAGE IN KANSAS CITY

Two robots have been charged with four counts of malicious malfunction (actually a quadruple homicide). Prosecutors claim the two are responsible for last Friday's multiple murders of Jack Fenton, 23, Timothy Planer, 28, Karen Jordon, 29 and Yvonne Foxton, 24, all in what, police say, was a random act of mechanical malfunction.

"Robot Officers have concluded this stage of the investigation, reaffirming the attacks were random acts, caused by simultaneous logic faults in two symbiotic AIs," said Albert Dobson, Attorney for the Greater Kansas City District. The two are charged with a capital offence that usually results in identity termination for the automatons involved. However, it doesn't necessarily mean the liberal DA. will seek that penalty. Dobson has three days to decide if the state will seek the maximum sanctions in these cases.

Human Police say they are looking into whether these robots are connected to many other recent incidences, including a crushing in Topeka and a case where a man was hi-jacked, taken to several ATM's, then beaten and left in a field.

Clive Salinger, the new President of the ATL, accused the government of placing a blackout on these series of crimes in the worldwide media. He said, "It is not surprising to those of us aware of the genocide policies of the new world order. We've learned that any story that has the potential to rip the mask from the smiley face of 'Machines are Our Friends' will always result in deafening silence from the metal-loving, headline media. Had this series of multiple homicides and beatings involved computer victims and human perpetrators, we'd get non-stop coverage. The talking heads would put on their soberest expressions and maunder on about 'property-crime'. There would be documentaries about it on WPBS and earnest articles in the mass weekly holo-rags. ATL urges all citizens to get behind us, take out memberships, contact your political representatives, write letters to the media, etc. Soon it will be too late, and human superiority will be a thing of the past."

On the first occasion Gustav showed Alyssa the cure, the pair were alone in Thorpe Forest on the banks of the River Thet, close to where the Norfolk and Suffolk borders met. He had chosen the place for its peace and tranquillity. Having returned to the spot by herself, Projeria recalled the first time she had used her power. Trembling, she had focused on a target for the first time. Then an ugly little girl, she had concentrated her mind on a flower five metres away. Nothing happened. Projeria said, "It's no good. It's not working."

Gustav had smiled, "This is your first time. You can't expect miracles. Try again and summon up your pain. Think about the terrible burden your life has been. Release it by sharing your pain with that flower."

Alyssa had concentrated on her hate and anguish against God for making her the freak she was. She had done nothing to deserve such a harsh sentence, a short, miserable life locked away with no friends and an agonising death just around the corner. This time she felt a small buzz of energy as the petals shrivelled up and the stem toppled over."

Gustav said, "Well done. So what did it feel like?"

Alyssa had mixed feelings that she tried putting into words. "I felt something as the poor flower died."

"Yes, it was the flowers life force. Now let's try something bigger. That elm tree near the fence," he said, indicating the target.

Alyssa had responded, a daffodil is one thing, but I don't think I can change a grown tree."

"You won't be able to unless you try."

Projeria remembered projecting all her negativity onto the tree. Again, nothing much happened at first then she felt an energetic charge shoot through her as the leaves of the tree dried up and turned brown. First twigs, then whole branches became brittle, and she could hear the cracks as the tree could no longer support them.

Gustav, his eyes wide open said, "Alyssa you have done it!"

The little girl's heart was beating like a drum. Astounded by the effect of her mind on the tree, she hadn't registered her feelings. Turning to Gustav, she said, "I feel as though a weight has been lifted from me."

Gustav, whom she had seen as her saviour, had referred to Alyssa as his 'Progeria Project' and he continued to guide her in harnessing her power.

From that time on, whenever Alyssa felt the weight descending on her she would find a quiet space and transfer her accelerating entropy onto a plant or small animal.

She was jerked from her reverie by the presence of Alden Colthorpe. Projeria despised the ratty little man. But he was useful to her at present. They waited at the Restaurant 16 de Julio, near the bus stop, for the Mayor's arrival. Projeria watched through the window as an old Mercedes limo pulled up at the kerb. Eduardo Atkinson alighted and entered the restaurant with two guards in tow.

Unlike most Bolivians Projeria had encountered, who suffered from malnutrition, Mayor Atkinson's ample corporation showed he did not go without. Following shared greetings Eduardo, all smiles suggested they try the alumerzo, followed by a set dinner. He was all ears and eyes as the captivating Projeria outlined her social experiment.

At length, the Mayor of Challapata said, "We don't usually have people taking an interest in our city. Most tourists only stop here for a break on the way to Uyuni. So I am honoured to welcome you both. Tonight I will provide you with a guide so you can experience a side of Bolivia rarely seen by foreigners."

Projeria looked the Mayor in the eye. "The University Hospital did not send us here as tourists. We are here to carry out serious social research."

Eduardo back-pedalled. "My apologies Senorita. I did not mean to suggest ..."

Bored with the fat, sleazy little man, The Diabolus Sect agent snapped, "No need for apologies. Just get me the necessary documents and your town gets its fee."

The Mayor rose and bowed, "Of course, Senorita, I will have it done immediately."

Abbott got on well with Cochran, who became his mentor in the camp. It turned out that Tony was a reporter with the Indianapolis News. So they had their profession in common. Cochran had been arrested while covering an anti-war street protest. Explaining he was just recording events cut no ice with the arresting officers. Conversations with Tony helped to make the living hell of Marion County Detention Centre, a little more bearable.

As Abbott stood to attention, in the second row comprising ten men at the morning's roll call he saw a body bag on the ground. All prisoners had to attend this daily ritual, even if they were dead. It was forbidden to move or to talk during the roll call. Nobody wanted to speak anyhow. All the prisoners stayed silent, praying there would not be a miscount. Any mistakes in the counting and the detainees had to continue standing in the cold, while the miserable, aggressive guards carried out a recount.

As Abbott stood there, it began to snow, and the standard prison garb all inmates had to wear was neither warm nor waterproof. One day during the morning roll call Abbot saw two elderly prisoners collapse and die of hypothermia. The bodies were taken away to the crematorium after the morning count.

Abbott no longer asked about Helen. He still cared about her, but all his energy was put into self-survival. The slightest veering from the course set by the prison's rule book attracted a baton attack by the merciless guards. As Cochran told him. He must never take his eye off the ball. His simple policy was to do what the guards say to you and keep your head down so as not to be noticed. Abbott's initial rebelliousness soon calmed down to reluctant surrender. There was no point in raging against the savage beast when you had no teeth.

After a basic breakfast comprising two pieces of stale bread with margarine – no processed meat, Abbott was taken to a hall where he joined a queue of inmates.

The officer in charge announced, "We have finished processing, so you will all be moved to another camp. Wait here for further instructions."

Abbott instinctively put up his hand.

Sergeant Stratos glared at Abbott. "What do you want?" he snapped, tapping his baton in the palm of his left hand.

"I came here with a paraplegic woman. Is she being sent to the same camp?"

Sergeant Stratos walked up to Abbott. "You go to men only camp."

"But I am her carer," Abbott pressed.

The queue of prisoners looked on, bemused by what was unfolding.

"You wish to argue with me?" the supervisor said, striking the journalist's ribs with his truncheon.

"Argh! Abbott doubled over, grimacing as a second blow struck him."

Stratos said, "I can make things very awkward for you. Do you still want to argue?"

"No. I just want to look after my friend."

"Get back in line," the sergeant barked.

Rafael Lynch needed Hassan off his back. He was out of the wheelchair, walking with crutches. The Colonel's right leg had taken most of the blast, shattering his kneecap and fracturing his femur. He had a total knee reconstruction, which allowed him to walk again but with a gimping leg. He would always need a walking stick. Rafael knew this latest injury spelt the end of his military career and he feared what may lie ahead. But at least he was alive, unlike some members of the SWAT team who served with him.

Sitting stiffly in Dorian's office, Raf reached for the phone. He dialled a secret number, and a voice said, "Homeland Security. Can I help you?"

"Patch me through to Major Sagerell."

"Who shall I say?"

"Colonel Lynch. Special Ops"

"Hold the line, Sir."

He waited. Then a gruff voice said, "Sagerell here. How can I help you, Colonel."

"I'm trying to track down a renegade news hound."

"Who are you talking about?"

"Name, Abbott-Gallagher. He's Australian, here on a visa."

"How do you spell that?"

"Abbott, two Bs, two Ts."

"Has he committed any offences?"

"I don't think so.'

"Pity. It'd be easier to track your man down. I'll let you know if I hear anything."

"Appreciated."

Dorian entered the office. She went over to Raf. "How are you?"

"Trying to get my life sorted."

"It'll take time," she smiled. Then she said. "I'm taking time out once I've finished here. Maybe we can catch up and relax together."

He looked at her, battle weary. There's going to be a memorial service for those who died in the explosion. Will you attend with me?"

"Of course, Raf," she smiled.

Rafael practised walking around the base, on crutches. Having gotten rid of the wheelchair, he felt more independent. Lynch was exercising with them when his phone rang. It was Major Sagerell.

"Colonel Lynch, why are you interested in this Gallagher character?"

Raf, taken aback, said, "It's classified, Major."

"So is what I have found out. If you want to know where your man is you're going to have to do better than that."

The Colonel didn't like going out on a limb, but he had no choice. "He's been mixing with subversives."

"What subversives, Colonel."

Lynch took a deep breath. "Helen Cleaver."

There was silence for a moment.

Then the Homeland Security man said, "I've tracked him and the woman to a detention centre in Indianapolis, Marion County. It used to be an Amtrak rail car repair facility."

"How did our man end up there?"

"Don't know the answer to that, Colonel. All I know is that this info isn't going to do you any good. You won't be allowed to see this guy."

It was not Rafael Lynch's problem. When Hassan came to collect him after his exercises, he said, "The guy you're looking for is in a detention camp in Indiana."

"What for?" Hassan asked, startled by the news."

The plaque said Bedminster was settled in 1710 by Dutch, Germans, and Scots-Irish immigrants. This was only of passing interest to Daniel Lynsey. He was mildly curious as to why the immigrants chose to name their new town after Bedminster in Somerset, England. But the young Soter agent was not there to delve into the city's history. He was there because it was the location of Target Pharmaceuticals and Neil Jenkins its CEO.

Daniel knew Soter was watching him closely to see if he was capable of doing the job without causing any screw-ups. Knowing the Agency was testing him added more pressure than he was already under. As he waited for Peter Lavell to arrive, he once more scanned the dossier Snelling had given him:

Jenkins had been embroiled in controversy before. As the Times report read, Jenkins started MSMB Capital, a hedge fund company, in his 20s and drew attention to himself for urging the Food and Drug Administration not to approve certain drugs made by companies whose stock he was shorting.

In 2011, Mr Jenkins started Target Pharmaceuticals, which acquired old neglected drugs and sharply raised their prices. Target's board fired Mr Jenkins a year before. Last month, it filed a complaint in Federal District Court in Manhattan, accusing him of using Target as a personal piggy bank to pay back angry investors in his hedge fund. Then, as if by magic, his slate was cleared, and he'd started a new company, 'Medichem' and carried on as before.

Daniel stopped reading as the sandy-haired clean shaven Lavell approached.

Lavell did not like meeting the client face-to-face. The least contact the better for all concerned. He hadn't been back to America since the Karimov hit. Looking at the young man, he said, "I had a holiday in Somerset."

Daniel gave his part of the password. "Where the cider apples grow."

Satisfied his contact was genuine, Lavell said, "Give me the details."

Daniel handed him the dossier.

Peter gave it straight back. Not the target's personal details. Just his patterns and habits."

Realising his mistake, Daniel handed Lavell a memory stick with photos, times and places, etc.

Peter took it and left.

Daniel reflected on his mistake. Lavell was a professional. He didn't need to know what the target did, just who he was.

Bernd Weber knew a certain customer when he saw one. The tall bearded guy had been nosing around the Custom Softail for 10 minutes. It was time to sidle up and make a comment.

Approaching the man wearing denim and a leather vest, he said, "I know a discerning rider when I see one and you, sir, have picked a beauty here."

Hassan had long been interested in motorcycles, having owned a few in his time. This one had been lovingly restored with a 124-inch s&s motor. "What's the best deal you can do?"

Bernd looked at the \$10,000 tag. "Man, it's got it all: Primo Rivera IV 3 inch open primary; Baker 6sp rsd; Spyke starter; and 21-inch front and 18 inch rear billet wheels. He retook a step, scanning the machine. "Couldn't let it go for less than \$9,500."

Hassan, used to haggling, pushed. "How about \$8,500, cash?"

Bernd rubbed his chin. "It's got Pm controls; 250 rear Dakota digital speedometer and has almost new registration. My bottom price would have to be \$9,000."

The Arab smiled. "We have a deal."

Hassan Shamsi bought the Harley Davidson motorcycle for many reasons. First and foremost to go to Indiana to find Abbott. Other reasons included personal desire and the fact, with his long beard and hair he could pass for a biker, no questions asked. Hassan had long wanted to make a road trip across the States. Now it was actually happening, there would be no time for sightseeing. The Navigator app worked out the shortest route with no detours. The trip an estimated 11 hours, would

get Hassan into Indianapolis at around 3 am. It could be difficult to get a room that time of the night. It would be best to drive all night and get there around 8 am. Then he could easily get a room.

To test the bike out, Hassan took a detour to Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater house in Mill Run Pennsylvania. Having parked his bike after a pleasant hour drive from DC Hassan joined other tourists as they walked around the house that became known of as Wright's 'most beautiful' job. Fallingwater house, which was commissioned by the owners of Kaufmann department store in 1935, was built over a naturally flowing waterfall. For a man who had lived most of his life in a desert environment, it was a wonder indeed.

Having taken light refreshment, Hassan mounted his Softail, and hearing its satisfying guttural growl he rode back to DC to the point where he could pick up the I270 to Frederick. It was already getting dark as the setting sun bled across the sky in a slash of red. Hassan continued at a steady pace, the Harley gently growling, to where the road merged with the I70 and onto Hancock. After a strong coffee, Hassan put his black leather jacket over his denim one. It was going to be a long cold ride. After kick starting the beast, the lone rider picked up the 168 to Morgan town. He passed through the sleepy hamlet around 1:30 am and took the I79 north to join the I70 heading westwards. This highway took him all the way to Indianapolis.

Mile after endless mile the train rattled southwards. Not that Abbott knew in which direction they were headed. As one of around fifty prisoners in the stuffy, windowless box car, Abbott kept to himself. Some of the men chatted on like nervous monkeys. Others, like the journalist, only had an internal dialogue going on. Abbott had no idea who his fellow passengers were or what they may have done to get themselves banged up. It didn't matter much to anybody in the carriage though. They were all wondering where they were headed and what it would be like for them at the end of the journey. Anybody watching the train pass by would think it was hauling cattle to the slaughter house and probably would not have given it any more thought.

Renata Romano pushed Helen outside the hut for morning roll call. Once her true identity was revealed, Helen's celebrity status had many of her cabin mates in awe. Renata, a staunch anti-robotics activist, was dutiful and willingly wheeled the paraplegic heroine around, in the basic but functional wheelchair. After breakfast, which was the same poor excuse of a meal shared by the men, The women were put to work carrying out various domestic chores.

Helen and Renata were part of a sewing circle doing piecework for a local clothing company. Renata, Helen learned, came from Italian migrant stock. Her great grandfather and Carmella, his wife, had queued up on Ellis Island as part of the 'huddled masses' welcomed into America. The firm, no-nonsense Renata had passionate Italian blood flowing through her veins. While working close to Helen, she whispered, "Have you found out anything about your man yet?"

Helen shook her head. "Not a thing. Apart from a rumour that some of the prisoners have been shipped out by rail."

One of the guards cast a stern look in their direction. The two women became silent and concentrated on their work.

The women detainees were generally treated better than their male counterparts. The male guards, mostly from Eastern Europe had been brought up as children with a superiority complex towards females and a competitive streak towards other men, whom they saw as their rivals.

Following the Baltic wars, battle-hardened soldiers were shipped to America to man the 800 detention camps set up by FEMA to deal with dissidents who reacted against harsh American domestic policies, which included their civil rights getting severely diluted. Some of the guards

mistreated the women as they did the males. But the majority carried out their duty without any malice, seeing themselves as cocks in a hen house.

Many of the women learned to trade sex for a softer life. Although this practice meant the men saw the women as whores; their property, to do with them as they wanted. This disrespect towards the female gender went for all women, and sexual predators even went after female prisoners who did not offer sex for favours. But none of the men went after Helen or the formidable Renata, who was seen as an extension of the crippled woman.

The train was slowing. Abbott peered through the narrow gap between the wooden slats of the box car, and he saw the sign 'UNICOR' on the temporary platform. The train had arrived at the Jefferson Proving Grounds, Southern Indiana. Other prisoners crouched down to peer closely at the military welcome committee lining the platform. One of the prisoners saw humanoid shapes among the black uniformed guards. He muttered, "Fuck me, they've got robots!"

Abbott later learned the prisoners and the guard-bots were part of a FEMA experiment. However, in real time the robots marched the inmates onto a fleet of buses, which drove the detainees past the now disused firing range and a new industrial park. Abbott saw a sign declaring 'Restricted Entry' after which the buses passed an airfield and a huge warehouse, which the journalist later found out was an Army Depot - VX nerve gas storage facility.

Chapter 9

Independent News Report:

PEOPLE: THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU WILL READ THIS YEAR

The ATL has published a book written by the Science-Art Centre of Australia, called 'Why we must become extinct'. The author, Professor Robert Pope, explains that AI is programmed with a directive that dictates all universal life must become extinct. This has to be because AI is a virus, obeying an incomplete understanding of the second law of thermodynamics, which demands maximum entropy, dysfunction and chaos leading to total extinction. Now that Bureau bots run government departments and make political policies understand who controls your country, and why they wish to destroy you and your race, and how they go about doing that.

Bretton Metallic, the most technocratic group in the history of the world, states that our loyalty to race and nation is pathological. Even if the machines are not intent on destroying us, they are programmed to do so. Clive Salinger of ATL says, "Nothing else is as important as us understanding the message of this book, and banding together to stop this virus from destroying civilisation. We must destroy all infected machines and urge science to use its modern technology, ethically, for the betterment of humanity. If we can do this, we are at least halfway to saving our world.

All this is explained and much more in Robert Pope's book, 'Why we must become extinct' Available now from Mankind First Books. See our Mankind First Books section at 'Members Only Pages'.

San Pedro prison was unique as correctional facilities go. It was a society within itself. Inmates had real jobs and the more affluent paid rent to get improved accommodation. Such privileged prisoners were, more often than not, drug traffickers, who carried on their lucrative business from within the prison. Projeria was not interested in those. Her target was the bottom feeders among 1500 inmates.

Carlos Estefania scanned the Mayoral document headed by the Challapata Council seal. Looking up at the gorgeous redhead, he said, "What exactly has the city Mayor permitted you to do?"

Projeria smiled at the San Pedro Mayor. "The University Hospital is funding us to look at the effect of ageing on the prison population."

"So what do you need from me?"

"We need a cross section of prisoners to be our subjects."

Carlos frowned, "We have different categories of prisoner – A, B, and C. Category 'A' pay rent and run their enterprises. 'B' pay rent and work for our community. And 'C' live rent-free and have no job. The prison Mayor looked at the pushy woman. "I can only give you access to category 'C'".

Projeria smiled. It didn't matter to her. She needed the prison Mayor's support in what she had to do so she did not want to do anything to upset Carlos' profitable business arrangements. "'C' will serve our purposes, Mr Mayor."

Hassan Shamsi booked in at the Shadeland Inn. After a rest, he took a refreshing shower and went to reception to start his search for Abbott. The quiet old guy peered over his glasses at the biker. "Reckon you'd be looking at the old Amtrak repair yards."

"How do I get there?"

The old guy looked at his client. "Probably be a waste of time. They put a big fence around the place. It's heavily guarded at all times." He added, "They say it's a prison now, full of agitating troublemakers."

Hassan chanced his arm. "I have a friend who might be in there."

The old guy cocked an eyebrow. "Maybe you should talk to Ambrose Chalkier. He takes food supplies to the camp."

"Where can I find him?"

"The Chalker Food Emporium, North Delaware Street."

Ulysses Covington's grief overwhelmed him. Lynne had been his boss, lover and friend; he missed her dearly. Her tragic death at the hand of a gunman made no sense to him at all. The cops were no closer to catching her killer, not Jim Krauss, who pulled the trigger. He was just the hired gun to carry out the deed. The police had subsequently found his body, but the CIA had taken over the case.

Most of the time Ulysses concentrated on his work, especially as he had temporarily assumed her responsibilities at Boston Cybertronics, as well as his own. But certain memories triggered his grief. A favourite restaurant in which they had dined; a particular beach along which they had walked; a pleasant park walk, all brought back the good times they had shared. His best legacy to her was to not take his mind off the ball at Boston Cybertronics. He had a suspicion that David Rottafeller was the real murderer, but nothing could be proven. He had to be careful because Harvey Hamlin, BC's CEO never missed a trick and often had long conversations with Elijah Brooks, the new CEO of Neurotech, who monopolised the global robotic CPU market.

Ever since the webinar with David Rottafeller and the late Milne Amwon, Ulysses had become disturbed by Neurotech's shady developments. An ardent believer in Transhumanism, the BC

managing director, saw the writing on the wall and realised that the ATL had a valid message after all.

There was very little of Alyssa Barker left. The ugly little caterpillar had metamorphosed into the beautiful butterfly, Projeria. The only time she remembered her awful childhood was when she noticed the subtle changes in her appearance and the aches and pains of ageing began to resurface. Gustav's help and her developing power of transference had kept the deterioration at bay but as soon as she started to regress it was time to sap the life force from other creatures and plants.

But she had never before tested her abilities on human subjects. Guards brought the prisoners in one at a time. Projeria went through the ritual of asking each the same questions, while she concentrated on their psyches. Her projection was a psychological defence mechanism in which she attributed characteristics she found unacceptable in herself to the person in front of her.

It wasn't only the lousy hand God had given her when she was a baby but the repressed hatred, jealousy and fear that went with it. By transferring these negative emotions to her target, Projeria found she could free up the emotional blockages to liberate her from the disease itself. This only worked with humans, of course, and only those who were susceptible to the transference.

Following her first session with the prisoners, Projeria felt exhausted and had to rest. Later, when she felt refreshed enough, she got up and looked in the mirror, New lines and wrinkles had appeared. She stared at her image aghast. The experiment had not worked. Something was wrong. She hadn't been able to transfer her entropy to other humans. Apart from the physical deterioration, Projeria experienced aches in her back and legs. She summoned Alden Colthorpe, who Diabolus had sent to help her."

"I need Gustav here," she said as Alden entered her room.

"Is something wrong?" The ratty little man asked.

"Are you blind? Of course, there's something wrong. The experiment was a failure."

Alden rubbed his chin. Then he said, "Perhaps the subjects are blocking you."

"Thank you, Einstein. I've already come to that conclusion. I need to know why?"

He thought about it for a minute, then offered, "Prisoners are suspicious creatures by nature. Perhaps they don't make the best subjects."

"You'd think it would have worked with at least one out of twenty subjects."

"Have a good rest, and we can try again tomorrow."

She glared at him. "Damn it, Colthorpe! There's a reason for my failure, and I'm going to find out what it is."

Perhaps humans need a different approach, Projeria mused, drinking her third coffee that night. Or maybe it was as Colthorpe suggested, the prisoners were being wary and on their guard. She didn't know how Carlos had gotten the inmates to submit themselves for questioning, but she figured some threat or promised punishment for non-compliance was involved. If her subjects were reluctant to participate in her experiment, there was no wonder it didn't work.

The next morning she spoke with Carlos about the problem and suggested he offer some kind of reward for the prisoner's willing participation. He did not understand her, but complied anyway.

Neil Jenkins left Medichem Pharmaceuticals around 6 pm as usual. He drove along the Van Wyck Express way in his Chrysler as usual. Niel arrived at 42 Bedell St in Rochdale Village as usual. His two small children rushed out to meet him as usual. A gunshot rang out, and he staggered forwards, dying as he reached out to them.

Gomer Worrall had a stubborn streak. Particularly when his convictions were concerned. He had offered free energy, and the American government wanted to turn it into a weapon. Gomer determined to do what he could to suppress the knowledge needed to control and harness the flow of zero point energy. Without the missing data what the scientists had was useless. He also knew his fellow islanders needed his help to rebuild Atlantis. But he could do nothing while he was kept in detention at DARPA.

To keep his mind active, the scientist took it upon himself to study Plato, the mathematical philosopher who first made mention of the fabled land of Atlantis in his writings. The excellent academic knew the dangers of playing around with free energy. His definition of evil was the unleashing of unformed atomic matter into the physical realms. So what if the humans used free energy in such a way and ended up destroying themselves? So why not give them what they wanted and go back to Atlantis?

Goman went to his door. There was always a guard outside. Opening the door, the scientist said, "Get me, Raf Lynch. I have valuable information for him."

The guard was about to use his radio when another soldier with a civilian in tow approached. "Who's this?" the sentry asked.

"His another scientist. He wants to speak with your one."

Rodney humphed, "Another scientist! Do me a favour. I've the most brilliant mind in three universes."

Goman looked on, bemused. "Why do you want to see me?"

Looking at the soldiers, Rodney said, because you also have a brilliant mind, Professor Worrall, and God knows intelligence is in short supply around here."

"You'd better come in then," Goman said, standing aside to let his guest into the room. Turning to the guards, he said, "Coffee for two, if you don't mind."

Closing his door, he said, "So who are you and what do you want?"

"I'm Dr MacKay, the genius who activated the Stargate that brought you here."

"I'm not so sure that turned out to be a good idea."

There was a knock on the door. A soldier held a tray with two mugs of strong coffee. Goman thanked him, then turned to Rodney. "So Dr MacKay what do you want from me?"

"Thanks to your technology I built a quantum computer and had code stability at room temperature for over half an hour."

"Thirty minutes, Dr Mackay, that's impressive. What happened?"

"The code began to break down. At least that's what I thought was going on."

"What do you mean?"

"It wasnae ordinary code corruption. Somebody was interfering with my system. Rodney looked at Goman, a quizzical look in his eye, is it possible to be hacked from a parallel Earth?"

Goman looked at the old Scot. "I'm assuming that by computer hacking, you mean breaking into different systems, infrastructure, applications, etc."

"Aye, most definitely. I understand that a quantum communication network works on the principles of quantum entanglement, which by its very nature should be hack proof. Having said that my system was hacked."

"I don't understand it, Dr MacKay. Any attempt to hack a quantum network would immediately lead to the collapse of the wave function of the entangled particles that make up the qubit."

"Well somebody has found a way to infiltrate my computer," Rodney stated, making a hopelessness gesture with his hands.

Goman sighed, "The only way someone could hack into a quantum network even in theory is by using faster than the speed of light communication, which your special theory of relativity rules out for any information exchange."

"Do you think it is possible, Goman?"

The science genius fixed Rodney with his gaze. "You want an answer, and I want to be back with my people. Get me safe passage to Atlantis, and I will give you what you want."

Rodney stared at Goman. "I have no influence over these DARPA people."

"Do they want a secure quantum computer system?"

"I did not make the computer for them."

"So you stole our technology to make it for yourself. You are no better than other Earth scientists. Tell your masters I am ready to tell them what they want to know."

"And you'll tell me how to safely encrypt my system?"

"Only when I am safely back home."

Rodney blanched. "That means I will have to come with you."

Chapter 10

Independent News Report:

HOLLYWOOD WITHOUT HUMAN ACTORS?

This will be the last report. Funding has been withdrawn and our license revoked. The reason cited, being that we are prejudiced against robots and AI. Well of course we are. We seem to be the only newscast putting the writing on the wall. Thank you to all our loyal supporters, and God helps us all. The final item we have is about robot movie stars. We knew it was coming! Hollywood has always been run by metal-fondlers and machine-lickers.

But the future is now. A small independent studio, Android Images Productions, is releasing the first feature film (porn movies don't count) with an all robot cast, its called Rodney and Angie. This simple tale of a couple in a doomed, robosexual relationship is nothing but trash pretending to be a main stream movie. This is not only an abomination that serves up a spewing of thinly disguised propaganda, but it marks a further erosion of our ever-shrinking pool of jobs for humanity.

Don't forget to go to the ATL Website and sign up. It's in your and your family's interest.

Hassan arrived at The Chalker Food Emporium on North Delaware Street. He removed his helmet to reveal a red bandanna. The emporium having conducted business for over 150 years, still in its original style, looked like it and it had been whisked from a Hollywood western film set. The Arab went inside and asked for Ambrose. The alchemist waited for five minutes then a middle-aged man sporting a full fiery ginger beard and wearing a brown apron over quality clothing approached. "How can I help you, mister?" the owner asked.

Hassan moved over to where they could talk privately. "I hear you deliver food stuff to the Marion Detention Centre."

"So?"

"I'm looking for a friend. I have reason to believe he is there."

Ambrose Chalker remained impassive. "So?"

"How can I find out if he's there?"

"I just deal with the head cook."

"My friend is an Australian. There can't be many of those there ..."

Ambrose, needing to be busy elsewhere, offered, "There is one thing. Marion is just a processing centre. Folks don't stay there too long."

"Where do the prisoners go from there?"

Ambrose shrugged, "How the heck would I know." He added, "That's all the help I can give you."

Hassan, frustrated, said, "Who's in charge there?"

"I can't help you there. Now I have to get back to work."

As a last attempt, the Arab said, "That's a real shame. The old fellah at the Shadeland Inn told me you could probably help."

Ambrose knew the old fellow in question was Marvin Skallow, They'd known each since their school days. They'd fought together in 'Nam. He turned to face the pushy biker. There's a FEMA guy. Major Lamont, I believe."

Projeria looked across the desk at Carlos Estefania. "Yesterday's session was a failure. What did you tell the prisoners to get them to agree to answer my questions?"

The prison Mayor smiled at the beautiful redhead doctor. "I said I would cut half their food rations for one week if they did not comply."

Projeria nodded thoughtfully. "I thought it might have been something like that. This time I want you to try a different approach. Tell them they will receive double their food rations for two days if the willingly answer my questions."

Carlos looked at her askance. "I don't think that will work. Most of the scum are lazy and need to be prodded to do any kind of work."

Projeria stared at Carlos. "Are you questioning my decision, Mr Mayor? If so I will have to put it in my report, along with some other activities that go on here."

The Mayor said, "No, of course, I am not questioning you. Your request just took me by surprise."

"Then you will see that it is done," Projeria stated, rising from her chair.

Dorian addressed the group of Atlanteans at the Stargate base. She was behind schedule and Schulz was on her back. Now the Islanders were itching to go back home. She said, "Thank you all for your patience. We will get you all safely back through the gate as soon as we can."

"Not without Goman Worrall!" Takran stated.

Dorian hushed the group. "We are waiting for Dr MacKay, who I am informed, will be here in a day or so. He controls the gate from his laboratory. So we can't send you home without him."

Takran pressed, "Where is our top scientist?"

"As I understand it he is still helping our people with something."

Bella, who had been doing a good job at keeping her people calm, said, "Dr Gibson, please tell us. Is Professor Worrall coming back to Atlantis?"

"I can't answer that question, Bella. I wish I could, but I'm not told everything about this mission."

Takran stood up. "I'm not leaving without him!"

Others followed suit, and soon six of the Atlanteans joined forces and refused to go through the gate. And Dorian found herself caught up in an unexpected and disturbing situation. She excused herself and went back to her office to make a call. Colonel Lynch was the person she phoned. "Raf, we have a problem."

"What problem, Dori?"

"Some of our guests refuse to go home unless Professor Worrall goes with them."

"And this has something to do with me, how?"

"I know it's not your problem. So do I lay it on General Schulz?"

"It'd probably be better if you spoke with Barney Cormack."

Barney Cormack was busy in his DARPA office dealing with another problem, in the shape of Dr Rodney MacKay. "What the hell are Qbits?"

Rodney sighed heavily, holding himself in check. Qbits are tiny packets of data used in quantum computers."

The Colonel cocking his head to one side, said, "So why would that be of interest to me?"

MacKay could not believe it. His tooth brush was savvier than this brush head Colonel. "Okay, take your Atlas robots. If they had quantum powered CPUs just think what they could achieve."

Barney scratched his head. "Are you saying Goman Worrall is the only scientist who has achieved this pinnacle of excellence?"

"No, Colonel, I'm not saying that at all. But he is the only person I know who can stop quantum computers getting hacked."

Barney thought about the proposition while walking around his office. It helped clear his mind. Turning to Rodney, he said, "Has he given us what we want to know about ZPE?"

"Colonel, He's concerned about getting home. I'll go with him and come back through the gate with the goodies. Then I can close it off."

Cormack frowned, "I have to run it by General Schulz and the Pentagon. I'm not sure they're going to buy it though."

"Well that's the best deal he's going to get."

No sooner than Barney had gotten rid of the irascible Scot, he received a call from a Dr Gibson.

"Yes, Dr Gibson, how can I help you?"

"Colonel Cormack, I'm in charge of Atlantis Mission Control. We have a contingent of Islanders we are sending back home."

Barney, getting a gist of what Dr Gibson was saying, asked, "Why are you ringing me to tell me this."

"Because half of the Islanders refuse to go home without their chief scientist, Professor Worrall."

Barney sighed slowly, "It seems our Professor Worrall is the flavour of the month."

Not quite sure of what he meant, Dorian said, "Colonel Lynch suggested you were the best person to organise this."

"I will have to speak to General Schulz and get back to you."

At her second session with a new group of prisoners, Projeria made more progress. The interviewees answered her questions, while she projected entropic energy at them. She had experienced a painful sleepless night. And her face looked even more lined when she looked into the mirror that morning.

Applying anti wrinkle cream and taking a painkiller made her feel better about approaching the day. Projeria was tempted to transfer her entropic force to a prison dog, but she resisted. She needed to know what effect the human life force would have upon her.

By the end of the second session, Projeria felt both exhausted and exhilarated. It was a strange combination of physical and mental fatigue coupled with a bounce in her step. That evening, when Projeria looked into the mirror; the wrinkles had all but gone.

At the same time, in cell block 4, Erick Alejandro, a fit 60-year-old inmate, stated feeling unwell. A strange and troubling change came over him, and he complained of intense pain in his joints and blurred vision. His two cell mates: Jose Luis Quisbert and Carlos Manuel Rolando, wanted to help their friend, but could not do so. They were feeling too weak and unwell themselves to go to his aid.

Chapter 11

The Public Voice :

Flint McCarthy, an active fighter for civil rights in America, spoke, at a media breakfast about a National Emergency of which most citizens were oblivious. He told the chilling story about the Nazi regime and a man who worked on an assembly line in a baby carriage factory. "His wife was going to have a baby, but the Nazi government would not let anybody buy a baby carriage. So the man decided he would secretly collect one part from each department and assemble the pram himself. When this was done he and his wife gathered up the pieces and assembled it. When they were finished they did not have a baby carriage; they had a machine gun."

He looked at his audience, telling them, "This is exactly the situation that I am going to present to you at this time. "This refers to America's concentration camps scattered throughout different states.

To this end, I have taken out a civil action Number 76-H-687 against the Department of Defense of the United States of America on behalf of the plaintiffs, the People of the United States."

The Unicorn detention facility in southern Indiana, Abbot, learned was a joint experiment between FEMA and Homeland Security to have a prison camp run by robots. Nothing like it had been tried before and Abbott and all the other inmates were the first guinea pigs to be subjected to such research. As a result, the journalist found himself in the very situation Helen Cleaver had repeatedly warned about with robots completely controlling human beings. It was not long after Abbott found himself in the Jefferson Proving grounds detention centre he discovered the difference between being bullied by human prison guards and controlled by seven-foot armed humanoids. Although the unpredictable sadistic behaviour of the Eastern European prison officers was frightening, in some ways, Abbott preferred it to the cold indifference of the robot overseers.

They followed guidelines unquestionably and passed these orders onto the prison inmates. Although these prison bots never laid a metal finger on the prisoners, they made it perfectly clear the detainees would obey them by placing their human-like metal hands on their machine pistols that they carried with them at all times.

Having been deposited at Unicorn prison by human guards Abbott and the others transported with him were quickly processed and allocated a number by one of the robots. The inmates were then assigned their cells each of which accommodated four prisoners. Abbott found himself sharing with three men who went under the names of Arnie, Spence and Jogger.

Daniel Lynsey was not your ordinary investment banker. Oxford-educated, the new Lord Lynsey, had spent a decade at Goldman Brothers, with a meteoric rise through the management ranks. Before becoming Lord of the Manor, or in this case, 'Hall', Daniel had founded his own London investment bank (Lynvest) with its own style. His approach used the UK style of banking, which US managers just couldn't understand. With his focus on US businesses,

Lynsey modified his methods to fit in with the North American financial market. Investment banking is a highly competitive, dog-eat-dog business, so he employed a team of people whose job it was to consistently spot changes in market trends.

Daniel Lynsey Investments had a diversified portfolio with a financial base in high-growth, non-discretionary businesses, which, although sounding like an oxymoron, worked well accruing huge profits for him and his partners. The portfolio had energy, commodities, agriculture and technology. The latter of which was centred in new breakthroughs in artificial intelligence. It was in this area of investment Daniel met Ulysses Covington at a business seminar in Boston. They swapped cards and arranged to do lunch.

However, before that happened Daniel had to meet with someone else, a journalist well known for his exposé's about lies and corruption within major corporations. Daniel had no idea how it might impact on his Soter work. But where there were dastardly dealings Diabolus would not be far away.

John Carrey, a Soter messenger, met with Daniel at Ostra, the upmarket fish restaurant. Daniel went with Massachusetts Cape Cod, while John chose Little Neck Clams from Hog Island, Virginia. As they ate, Daniel said, "Why am I here?"

Carrey smiled, "Doreen Soames, a Silicon Valley, wonder kid. She dropped out of Stanford to start Hertanos."

"And this is supposed to mean something to me?"

"You personally no. The group, yes."

"What group?"

Carrey grinned, "Our team of course."

Daniel stared at John. "So what has Doreen Soames done to attract Soter's attention."

"She built Hertanos to disrupt the way health care providers test for disease by using less invasive and cheaper blood tests that pharmacists could carry out."

Daniel, becoming annoyed, stated, "She sounds like a hero to me."

"Lord Lynsey, over the past 10 years, Hertanos was operating mostly in stealth mode but still managed to sky-rocket into galactic status with a valuation of \$9 billion."

"So she's done well for herself. Where's the crime in that?"

"I work as an investigative reporter for the Wall Street Journal. Everything was going smoothly for our Doreen until my report refuted some of the company's claims, suggesting that Soames misled both the government and the public about the capabilities and effectiveness of the product."

Daniel said, "So how did she respond to your investigation?"

"Instead of backing down, Soames hit back, defending Hertanos' testing, while accusing the paper of shoddy reporting. In a statement after the conference, our Journal responded, "Nothing said at the conference by Ms Soames refutes the accuracy of the Journal's reportage or of the articles, which were subject to the Journal's rigorous and careful editing process. Contrary to Ms Soames' claims, the Journal shared all facts and anecdotes published in the articles with Hertanos before publication."

Daniel finished his cod, dabbed at his mouth with a napkin and got up to leave. "I give you ten seconds to convince me Ms Soames needs special attention or else I'm out of here."

John hedged a bit, then said, "The Hertanos blood test causes mutations in chromosomes, causing premature ageing."

"And you have proof of this, Mr Carrey?"

I have medical records showing the 'Telomeres' that keep the chromosomes healthy deteriorate in some of the people who have the Hertanos blood test."

"What percentage?"

"Twenty-one."

Daniel whistled, "It does seem to be high." he added, "You'd better leave it with me." Little did Lord Lynsey know, then, that Diabolus had their own secret weapon to cause rapid ageing.

Two weeks after Dr Kay Ottick had left the San Pedro prison Carlos Estafania took Betty Marcello to visit the patients in the gaol's infirmary. As the Minister of the Interior, Betty was at the hospital to follow up the Mayor's strange and troubling report. She looked at pictures of the seven inmates before the visit by Dr Kay Ottick, then at the seven patients in the beds before her. She found it very hard to believe these elderly looking individuals were the healthy prisoners shown in the photographs.

Turning to Francisca Enchado, the prison doctor, Betty asked, "How do you explain this?"

Francisca, in his forty years as a physician, ten of which he had administered to the prisoners at San Pedro, had never experienced any cases like it. He took the Minister aside.

"I have no explanation. Seven healthy men ranging from thirty-five to sixty have aged by twenty years in the last two weeks. The older people have developed prostate cancer and chronic heart and breathing problems. The younger ones are already showing signs of such conditions."

Betty needed answers for her report. "Dr Enchado, you will have to do better than that."

Francisca turned to the Minister. "In rare cases of the progeroid syndrome, the ageing process is greatly accelerated. Affected children develop all of the external signs of old age, including baldness, hunched posture, and dry, inelastic, and wrinkled skin. But it never happens to adults."

"If it isn't a natural occurrence could this condition have been caused by an outside agent, doctor?"

Francisca shrugged, "I'm not a genetic specialist, but it is possible for chromosomes to deteriorate and even mutate."

"Could that have happened in these cases?"

He looked at the politician. "It is going on, but as a result of the ageing, not the other way around."

"Then that's no help." Betty looked at her notes, then up at the doctor. "What do you know about the scientist carrying out research here?"

"All I know is that she was carrying out research for the University Hospital. I never met her or had anything to do with her."

Betty Marcello put in her report, such as it was. The Ministry of Health had to find a slot to fit in these unusual medical cases. So they added it to their slim file about incidents of Progeria in Bolivia.

Mayor Estifania, puzzled and embarrassed by the lack of prognosis, concerning his rapidly deteriorating patients, wanted to be rid of them. He petitioned the Director of prison services to make special allowances for the affected prisoners and have them freed, his argument being, that by ageing 20 years they had, in effect, already served their time.

Although the Director considered the Mayor's logic to be flawed, he also wanted them out of the prison system. It was much better they became their individual family's problem and not his.

When Alyssa began to show improvement in her condition Ron and Jenny could not believe it. The physical changes, subtle at first, soon became quite apparent. Alyssa's ugly face became beautiful, and her lifeless grey hair became red and lustrous. For Ron and Jenny, it was a miracle. They believed their prayers were answered. Jenny remembered all those nights she had read Alyssa the Ugly Ducking story, secretly praying her daughter would one day become the beautiful swan.

Now it had happened, and she gave thanks to God. Alyssa was happy for her parents to put her flowering down to their religious faith. Doctor Collins, astounded by the improvements in Alyssa's condition, put the phenomenon down to a rare but natural remission.

Gustav Stone continued with the healing while subtly preparing her for the Diabolus Sect. By the time Alyssa Barker was sixteen, she was a beautiful young woman but only as long as she could transfer her rapid ageing to other creatures and plants. The life force of cats and dogs proved much more beneficial to her than that of vegetation. The positive effects were also longer lasting.

Many of the pets in Bury St Edmunds became strangely ill and died with nobody knowing the reason for their sudden sickness and demise. Alyssa could not afford to give a thought to the bereaved owners. Not if she was to survive and thrive.

However, now Alyssa, the broken doll had become Projeria the glamorous Redhead who, for the first time, had stolen the life force of humans. To her pleasant surprise, the rejuvenation effect was much more profound and longer lasting than the energy from other mammals. This meant she didn't need the boost so often as before. But Projeria was becoming addicted to the high and needed more human life force to fulfil her need.

Love making was a great way for transference to take place with the draining being even more exhilarating than the sex act alone. She had many and varied sexual partners but only for one night stands because the next morning her suitors found it very difficult to get out of bed. But, no matter how much life force she sucked up she was always painfully aware she was living a premature death sentence.

The only military officer Hassan knew of who might help was Colonel Lynch. He figured the FEMA Major might listen to a person of superior rank. The alchemist banked on this as he waited for Rafael to respond to his call. Finally, the Arab heard Raf's voice. "Colonel Lynch, Hassan Shamsi here."

Recalling who the man was, Rafael, said, "You're the man who's a friend of the Australian reporter, right?"

"It's about him that I am calling."

"Oh!" Raf stated, bemused.

"He's in a detention camp near Indianapolis. It's run by a FEMA officer, a Major Lamont."

"That's unfortunate for your friend. But I don't see what it has to do with me."

Hassan took a deep breath. "I was hoping that you might ask him about Abbott."

"I don't know your Major Lamont, and I have nothing to do with FEMA," Raf responded, testily.

Hassan, desperate, said, "I have to know if he is okay. But Major Lamont wouldn't tell me."

"And what makes you think he'd talk to me?"

"Well, you outrank him."

"It doesn't work like that, Hassan."

"I don't know who else to turn to," the Arab moaned.

Raf sighed, "Very well, give me his details."

As Abbott got to know his cell mates better, he discovered Arnie was a history teacher who got arrested at a 'Tea Party' protest. He was married with two children of whom he had not heard since he was marched to the railway siding and the waiting Chinese-built boxcars. Spence, a returned Vet after two tours in Iraq, had the effrontery to Challenge US Foreign Policy at a Republican rally in Houston. This earned him his expenses paid vacation in, what he called, the desert holiday camp. Jogger received his term of imprisonment for begging on the street. Now he didn't have to beg for anything.

Now Abbott and all the other inmates were experiencing what Helen had warned about for many years. They were controlled by artificial intelligence in the shape of humanoids. The robots were in charge, and Abbott would soon find out the ramifications of what that meant. Although the Atlas mark 3s were programmed to give particular orders to the prisoners, the journalist had an unsettling feeling they were autonomous to a degree. It seemed they had the reasoning ability to assess situations and make decisions accordingly.

In the short time, Abbott had been a prisoner, he realised two fundamental things. Prisoners kept their personal stuff close to their chest they kept a low profile hoping to get hidden in the herd. Secondly, as detainees in facilities run by human guards, providing prisoners did not put their head above the trenches, there was a fair chance the warders would not notice them. But with the robots it was different. Although they did not bully the detainees, they monitored and targeted individual prisoners, not as a lesson to other inmates, but rather because they had not carried out orders with peak efficiency.

If detainees were found wanting in whatever job the cyber guards had directed them to conduct they weren't punished. One of the bots tutored them in the task, with the general prison population looking on. For the inmates, it was worse than a beating. Abbott thought the bots may just as well put a dunce cap on the head of the person given the remedial lesson.

Although Abbott never saw any incidents of guards laying a metal finger on any prisoner, nobody could question their orders. Anybody who attempted to do so became subject to specialised training and the humiliation that went with it. Although the bots never metered out physical punishment having a seven-foot metal behemoth toting a machine pistol, looming over prisoners was threatening enough.

That and the cold, unemotional indifference was, in some respects, harder to take than the guard's baton. Abbott realised that the metal overseers treated humans as their devices to be programmed at will.

The cyber guards thrived on repetition so for the prisoners each new sunrise represented another replay of 'ground hog day. The only thing the guards could not control was Abbott's determination to find Helen. He had promised to look after her, an oath he had been unable to keep.

Hassan had to admit he enjoyed the riding low on the hog experience as much as his covert adventure. Rafael Lynch had somehow managed to get Major Lamont to disclose Abbott Gallagher's current whereabouts. So Hassan was riding south through Indiana to Madison the closest town to the Unicorn Prison facility. Madison was a historic river town. Zane Quinn, the manager of the Comfort Inn, claimed the town was the best-kept secret in Southern Indiana. He waxed on poetically about the natural beauty of the Fall."

Hassan said, "I and the hog just want to park up for a couple of days."

Zane nodded, "Reckon that'll work out fine."

The Arab took his key, then said, "Can you give me directions to Unicorn? I couldn't find it on the map."

Old Zane scratched his thinning hair. "You wouldn't. It's not on the map." The old fellow brightened, "But the Jefferson Proofing Range is."

Hassan looked at the manager askance. "What's that got to do with it?"

"That's what it used to be called." He cocked an eyebrow. "Won't do you much good though. The whole place is fenced off and guarded."

"Why is that?"

"I heard say they're doing some kind of experiment."

"What sort of test?"

Old Zane gave a toothless grin. It's the dangest thing. There's talk of robots running the place."

Hassan whistled through his teeth. "Robots?"

"So I've been told."

Once the bearded man rode off, Zane got on the phone. "Major, I thought you might like to know there's a biker nosing around. He's moseying onto the old proofing range. He's a tall bearded fellah, riding a Harley."

Hassan brought his bike to a halt near the long fence. There were signs about 3 metres apart proclaiming 'private property, keep out'. Underneath were the words 'By authority of Homeland Security'. The Arab dismounted and took out a telescope to see what lay beyond the 12-foot barrier.

He could make out a compound with people moving around, but he was too far away to see who or what they were. Hearing a vehicle approaching, Hassan backed off and mounted his machine. Then he found himself hemmed in by two HumVees.

Sitting astride his Harley, the alchemist stared at the officer and four troopers wearing desert camouflage dyed black.

"Who are you and what is your business here?" the officer asked.

The Arab went out on a limb. "I am with Special Forces. And you are?" Hassan asked, giving the commander a penetrating stare.

"Commander Lovett. I'm in charge of this facility. Why is SF nosing around here?"

"You are holding a person of interest to us."

"And who would that be?"

"An Australian journalist called Abbott Gallagher. I have been sent here to tell you Special Forces personnel will be here to pick him up for questioning."

The commander, unsure, said, "Show me your identity?"

"We don't carry ID, Commander. Have the prisoner ready for when the chopper arrives."

Determined to take control of the unscheduled situation in front of his men Orson Lovett, the FEMA Commander, scanning the biker, said. "You don't look like SF. What's your name?"

Hassan, using his penetrating gaze, just said, "Precisely." Then firing up his engine, he left the bemused officer, his bike throwing up a cloud of dust. Now all Hassan had to do was find a bonafide officer who had access to a chopper, to come on board with his half cooked plan.

When Lovett got back to his office, he rang the Homeland Security Chief, Joan Kellerman, and explained what had just gone down. "He refused to show any ID. Oh, and he said there would be a chopper on the way to pick up the prisoner. Should I take it seriously?"

"Special Forces are a law unto themselves. To do what they have to it couldn't be any other way. Get the robots to prepare your prisoner. If a helicopter does turn up take it that the SF story is legit. You don't want to bring any unnecessary attention to what you're doing."

Raf looked Dorian in the eye. "Dori, you've been on my mind ever since I saw you when I got back here."

"Oh," she said, as they shared a bottle of wine in her quarters.

"The thing is, I've missed you and yearned for this time together. When I saw you bending over, allowing me to look down your blouse it only made things harder."

They both smiled at the double entendre. Dorian softly said, "So you liked what you saw?"

"Yes. What man wouldn't enjoy seeing you like that?"

Dorian looked into his eyes and felt his pain as she moved towards him. She reached out and ran her hands over his shoulders, down his arms, squeezing his biceps. Her touch was light, and Raf could almost feel her courage building. She took his hands into her own and pulled him into her. He felt his heart beating through his chest. He'd avoided any emotional commitment since leaving a trail of train wreck relationships. What are you getting yourself into? his panicky reptilian brain asked.

Dorian reached up and pulled his head down as she lifted her face towards him. Their lips met; it was electric. Unable to resist, Raf wrapped his arms around her as she pulled him closer. He felt her lips part and tentatively slipped his tongue into her mouth as their lips pressed tightly together. Their breathing was deep and fast. He moved his hands down to grip her bottom as her hands found his hard buttocks. They both squeezed and pulled each other even closer, as though trying to morph into one being. She moaned as he massaged her ass and pulled her even tighter against him.

Feeling Raf's erection pressing against her, she smiled, "You're still intact then."

With all inhibitions gone, Colonel Lynch groaned, "You are so fucking sexy. I've got to have you."

Dorian, breathless, said, "You have no idea how wonderful it is to hear you say that. It has been a long time since I have heard that from a man I desired."

It was the night of all nights for Raf. July 4th fireworks were no comparison to the wild time he had just experienced with Dori. He mused they call it sleeping together, but there hadn't been much of that. He was spooned into Dorian's back drifting in and out of consciousness when his phone rang.

Raf Lynch swung his legs over the side of the bed and reached for his crutches. He'd left his cell phone in the lounge, and he struggled to get to it before the noise woke up Dorian from her deep slumber. Luckily the device was still playing its familiar tune when he grabbed it off the coffee table. Seeing Shamsi's name, he said, "Hassan, what's up?"

"Ah, Colonel, I have located our missing Australian friend."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Raf yawned.

"Abbott Gallagher. They have him at the Unicorn Detention Centre in Indiana."

"And why have you phoned to tell me that?"

"Because we have to get him out of there."

"Whoa! What's with we. I'm retired now. And even if I wasn't I don't have that kind of clout."

"I have heard the camp is run by robots and Abbott is part of their bizarre experiment."

"Are you on some fucking drug, Hassan?"

"Look, I know it sounds crazy, but this is for real. Ask Colonel Cormack about it. He should be aware."

"Hassan, just tell me something. Why should I give a crap?"

The Arab had to think quickly. "Because you don't want robots to control your life. We have to get Abbott out, so we know what's going on there."

Deep down Raf knew Hassan was right. "Damn it! I'll speak to Cormack, but I can't promise anything."

"Thanks, Colonel. One more thing. We're from Special Forces on a covert op."

http://msz.gov.pl/en/foreign_policy/other_continents/north_america/bilateral_relations/test3

https://www.fastcompany.com/3054777/lessons-learned/the-10-best-and-worst-leaders-of-2015?position=3&campaign_date=12282015

<http://www.msmanuals.com/home/older-people%E2%80%99s-health-issues/the-aging-body/disorders-of-accelerated-aging>

Chapter 12

The Public Voice:

Flint McCarthy, a guest on the Daily Show, said, "There's much more to life in a 'free country' than paying the mortgage. Citizens need to be aware of what is going on and act accordingly and participate in government; that is get involved."

"Why is that important, Flint?" Bob Daily, the TV host, asked.

"Examine the organisation chart on Executive Order #11490 and discover how we have all helped finance (through our tax dollars) the mechanics of the overthrow of our Constitution. Executive Order #11490 designates certain authorities to the Office of Preparedness, which in turn assigns authority to the various departments of the federal government. If the Order were implemented, the Post Office Department would be responsible for a national registration."

"A national registration?" Bob queried, with eyebrows raised."

"Yes, Bob. The State Department will be responsible for the protection of the United Nations personnel or property and prevention of escape from the United States.

The Department of Defense would be responsible for its expropriation of industry; the direction of service and national production system; control of censorship; and communication expropriation of non-industrial facilities.

The Commerce Department would be responsible for seizures, selection and international distribution of commodities (which would be the actual looting of the United States), census information and human resources.

The Treasury Department would be responsible for the collection of cash and non-cash items and the recreation of evidence of assets and liabilities.

The Justice Department will have a concurrent responsibility with the Department of State."

Bob said, "What, for prevention of escape from the US."

"For many things, Bob. Replenishing the stockpile of narcotics for a national police force; for correctional and penal institutions for mass feeding and housing of prisoners. For the use of detainees to augment manpower which will be slave labour with detention centres run by Artificial Intelligence."

"What, robots!"

"Yes, Bob, human prisoners controlled by robots."

The routine went as follows: Morning ablutions, roll call, breakfast, then work. Chores included inside jobs from administration to heavy manual labour. Academics, like Arnie, got work in the prison library. Whatever task prisoners were assigned at least one camp robot watched them with an eagle eye.

Abbott and Spence got assigned clearance work in Clifty Falls State Park. Being a public area military personnel guard the prison crew, not robots. Despite being a place of forced labour, the rugged splendour of the creek and canyon made it a pleasant place to work.

During their thirty-minute lunch break, Spence turned to Abbott. Leaning close in he said, "This would probably be the best place to make a move."

Abbott shook his head. "I have a better idea. The robots are just machines. They're bloody sophisticated devices I grant you, but mechanical nevertheless. As such, they need a power supply."

"Okay, so just how does that help us?"

"By my estimate, there are about twenty 'bots in the camp. Now, they can't all get recharged at the same time, so we need to find out how their rostering works."

Just then the siren went off. It was time to get back to work.

Goman Worrall looked up as Dorian came into the lab. "Dr Gibson, I believe I have you to thank for getting me back here."

She smiled, "I think Colonel Lynch is the one you should thank. He pulled strings to get you released."

"And what am I, chopped liver?" Rodney said, walking in behind Dorian.

Goman replied. "I appreciate your help. But you're only interested in how I can help you."

"But of course. We Earthians believe in quid pro quo," Rodney responded, shamelessly.

"So, how soon will it be ready, Rodney?" Dorian asked.

"As soon as I've briefed Dr Velovska."

Dr Gibson looked at the crusty old genius. "I'm a bit envious, Rodney, you'll be the last Earth person to go through the gate."

"Aye, well I'm more interested in being the last person to come back."

When Takran saw Professor Worrall in the briefing room, he bowed before the great man. "It's good to have you with us again." Then he saw Dr MacKay and became silent.

Rodney had no inkling as to why the young Atlantean had responded that way. Particularly since the Scot was instrumental in getting the head scientist released.

Still, Takran had always shown some resentment towards the Earthians in general. He shrugged it off putting the Atlantean warrior's attitude down to youthful rebelliousness, something Rodney could understand.

Takran had assumed a leadership role and got all the Atlanteans assembled before Colonel Lynch and Dr Gibson.

Dorian addressed them, concealing the sadness she felt for having to say goodbye to Bella and Kronyn, Bella especially. She had been like a daughter to Dorian. "The time has come for us to part company with you all. I wish you prosperity and happiness in building your new world. We have enjoyed having you with us, but now it is time to send you home and seal the gate so agents of Diabolus can't infiltrate you again. On behalf of the Atlantis mission, I wish you all the very best for your future."

Bella wanted to give Dorian a huge hug. She had grown to love the Earthian woman and felt deep sadness at having to leave Dr Gibson. She looked knowingly at Kronyn, who also felt a tug at having to leave the Earthians, especially Colonel Lynch, whom he had learned to like and respect.

Raf took over from Dorian. "Right, we will now go to the ATV, which will transport you to the gate. Now, I know that some of you may have mixed feelings about leaving. You must forget about any such regrets and focus wholly on going back home and getting on with your lives in peace."

He grinned, "I'm getting too old to help you sort out your problems." After a slight pause, he said, "Seriously though if your mind is not entirely occupied with the journey ahead it will hurt you when you go through the gate." He paused again. "Right. Let's get going."

Kronyn sent Bella a secret mind message saying, 'be strong.'

She smiled at him. He'd been through the gate with the Colonel before, but she'd always stayed on the base.

During the day Abbott kept a shallow profile and followed the 'bot guards' instructions to the letter. If a prisoner questioned a guard's orders or went against them, they were subjected to 're-education' which meant the rebellious inmate went on the report. Human Homeland Security personnel downloaded these reports from the guard bots. More than three entries in the 'bad boy' book meant re-education of a more severe kind by human interrogators.

Abbott had seen the results of those interviews in the broken shell of the prisoner who had suffered such extreme physical and emotional abuse. So it was best to shut up and obey the metal monstrosities.

Night time was a different story for Abbott and the others in his cell. The four of them had made it their mission to find out all they could about the robots numbers, type and behaviour. But it wasn't just the guard bots they were interested in. Many more subtle robots worked in the background as a support system for the prison officers. One such AI they discovered was a smart gun. This machine gun turret idly scanned the prison from a tower. Abbott had looked up and seen the belt of bullets

trailing from the weapon. Spence told the journalist they were .50 calibre, the sort that could stop a truck in its tracks.

The mounted gun, unbeknown to Abbot had an Ethernet cable that ran from the weapon's base and trailed under the ground into the prison security centre, that monitored every part of Unicor. The cable slithered up onto a trestle table before plunging into the back of a computer, whose screen displayed a colourful patchwork of camera feeds. One showed a 180-degree, fish-eye sweep of the prison courtyard. Another presented a top-down satellite view of the scene, like a laid-out Google Map, trained menacingly on the gaol population.

A red cone, overlays on the image, indicated the turret's range. It spreads across the entire facility, able to deal with problems requiring machine gun assistance. Once alerted the gun comes instantly out of sleep mode. A complicated joystick, the type a PC flight simulator enthusiast might use, next to a computer screen aimed while another function measured the distance from the gun to its target. It then automatically loaded the bullets into the chamber, Pulled the trigger and fired. No prisoner was game to put it to the test. Information about this gun was beneficial but disturbing.

Before they went to sleep after lights out, Abbott and the others conspired with each other and quietly shared their intel on the robots, for the day. The cyber guards connected up to a power supply to recharge their batteries which took approximately ten hours.

Abbott said, "It seems that four metal heads can recharge at the same time. Which means at least sixteen of them are still active at any given time."

Jogger reckoned, "Sabotaging the power supply would be the best way to disable the 'bots."

"And just how do you propose to do that?" Arnie asked.

"I'm working on it," Jogger said. Before he lived on the streets Jogger had been employed as an engineer and knew all about mechanical things.

Spence said, "I don't want to rain on your parade, man, but any malfunction to something as important as their power supply would soon show up on their computers."

"Good point," Abbott said. "Besides, they are probably programmed to fix such things."

"And what would happen to anyone caught interfering with the power supply, on camera?" Arnie said.

"Anyone got a better idea," Jogger challenged.

There were no takers. But exercising their brains gave the prisoners a sense of being in control, at least mentally.

Abbott learned to develop mental toughness when dealing with the cyber guards. Some of the inmates learned the hard way. One day a prisoner on janitor duty stopped for a smoke. A robot approached him, saying, "Number 1278 Get back to work."

The inmate, an African American with a close-cropped beard and shaved head, looked at the 'bot. "I was just having a quick smoke."

"1278 Get back to work."

"Give me a break, tin head. I've been pushing that fucking broom for two hours."

"1278 Get back to work, or you will go on report."

The prisoner glared at the prison guard 'bot. "Get fucked metal head!"

"Stop talking 1278 and start working or you will go on report."

"Fuck your report and fuck you!"

"1278 You are assigned re-education." The 'bot pointed his M25 handgun at the prisoner. "You will come with me."

The prisoner was taken away.

Abbott watched this happen, and it was a big lesson. From experience, he learned the 'bots were impervious to insults, and it was best to obey without question. The Aussie never found out what 're-education really meant and he didn't want to, but when Abbott next saw the African American the man had changed. He kept very quiet and obeyed every order without question.

When inmates asked him what had happened. He only said, "The robots are our friends. They look after us." Abbott found it eerie. Even his voice sounded robotic when he repeated those words.

Rodney approached Goman Worrall. "Are you okay?"

"Fine, but I think some of the others have been shaken by the Star gate experience.

Rodney was not so concerned about that. Goman's quantum computer knowledge was his meal ticket and the only reason he'd agreed to go back to Atlantis. Takran was very protective towards the Atlantean scientist and stuck very close to him. Bella now let her sadness show. Kronyn put a supportive arm around her shoulder but said nothing. Tammis felt uncomfortable with Dr MacKay. He was not nasty or anything, but she did not trust him.

Rodney remembered the soldier boy's observation the last time they came through the gate. Now he picked it up a mild incense-like aroma that hung in the air. It filled his lungs with sweet, cloying air and took some getting used to. He asked Goman what it was?

The old scientist smiled, "Not far from here there is a spiritual community. The aroma you refer to suggests the holy place is operating again."

Takran explained, "The Singularity closed it down. The monks had to escape. Many didn't make it."

Tammis said, "It shows things are back to normal. So why are you here?"

Rodney was taken aback. He never expected such a direct question.

Goman said, "Fear not Tammis, all is well. Dr MacKay arranged for me to come home. We have an agreement."

It still did not sit comfortably with Tammis, but she said no more.

Rodney and the Atlanteans, having trekked through the jungle came out into the flat coastal lands. The vast expanse of blue sky was reflected in the azure ocean. Some of the islanders raced down to the sea and, shedding their clothes, dived straight in. Takran and Tammis stayed with Rodney and the professor, whom Dr MacKay stuck to like glue.

After the Atlanteans had frolicked in the ocean, the group headed off towards majestic trees that stretched up to be embraced by the warming rays of the sun. It was a beautiful sunny day, and they bathed in the warmth of Sol as they progressed towards the Atlantean capital. Even Rodney had to admit he was enjoying the experience. Then he was not!

It all happened quickly. Rodney halted his people. There was a surging chanting mob heading towards them. "What's going on?" MacKay asked troubled by this turn of events.

One of the Atlanteans, with an air of authority about him, confronted Rodney. "Please come with us."

Rodney turned towards, Professor Worrall, who had impassiveness written all over his face. He was not going to get any help from that quarter. Turning to face the man who had addressed him, Rodney said. "I'm with Professor Worrall. We have an arrangement."

"Whatever deal you have with our chief scientist can wait. Right now you have to come with us."

"Where are you taking me?"

The Atlantean ignored the question. Two Islanders fell in beside him and marched him away from the rest of the group.

Chapter 13

The Public Voice:

Flint McCarthy, the human rights attorney, argued, on 'The Debate Show' with Andrew Lawrence, "The Centre for the Study for Democratic Institutions recently completed a proposed constitution for the 'Newstates of America'. This Centre is Rottafeller funded. To give an indication of the type of structure intended, the term 'national emergency' is mentioned 134 times. This document does not have a Bill of Rights and unless you are a robot the right to own arms has been taken away."

Will Tucker, a spokesperson for Nelson Rottafeller, the presiding officer of the 'Centre', rebutted, "McCarthy is incorrect because Resolution #28 awaits in Committee and has yet to be ratified. If such a decision does pass Congress, it will only be implemented in extreme conditions."

Flint disagreed, pointing out, "There is no mention in Resolution #28 as to what the term 'extreme conditions' actually means. It's Obvious that money would not be spent on this significant programme unless it is intended to actually implement such a scheme."

Tucker, from a weak position, came back with, "We live in very uncertain times. Therefore we can't determine just what 'extreme conditions' actually define. We have to be ready to cope with situations as they arise."

McCarthy asked, "Will a position whereby American people who do not voluntarily adopt a new constitution and who actively stand against it be considered an extreme condition?"

Tucker, feeling distinctly out of his depth, said, "It would depend on the nature and virulence of the protest."

Flint replied, "I appreciate that such a public action would be troublesome to those who desire an American dictatorship. To deal with such a public uprising, there is already Executive Order #11490, which includes its predecessors when it is cited herein. This Executive Order authorises the secretaries of the various agencies to prepare for any 'national emergency' type situation, including, but not limiting itself to, those specified in the Executive Order itself."

Andrew smiled at the camera. "That's all we have time for today. Thank you to our guests for coming on the show."

On 20 January 2013, The Public Voice published an article headlined 'Gill Baxter admitted vaccines were the most efficient way to depopulate'. In the item, Baxter, the multi-billionaire computer guru, revealed that vaccinations are designed so governments can eliminate unproductive people.

In a filmed TED presentation Gill Baxter championed the cause of carbon emission reduction, and in front of an enormous live audience, he announced that one way to accomplish this goal is to reduce the global human population. Baxter said, in plain language, that his Foundation considered VACCINES to be desirable to that end.

There was not a murmur from the audience, even when he announced that if his foundation did a really great job on new vaccines, health care, reproductive health services, we could lower our 6.8 billion world population by, perhaps, 10 or 15 percent.

Although Gill Baxter is not a fully paid-up member of Diabolus, his depopulation vaccines made him susceptible to Projeria's wiles. She could help him in his cause without him even knowing it. But first, she had to get to know the man.

PUREN, A Florida based NGO funded by the Baxter Foundation was Projeria's entry card. She got herself involved in the Phase V1 vaccine trial, for cervical cancer in Andra Pradesh. PUREN carried out the extensive robot-assisted vaccine trial in India. (Phase V1 meant using approved, not test vaccines).

The vaccines in question Guardasol from Murck and Cervatrix from Glaxaklein were granted marketing approval in India in 2008, with the trial commencing in 2009. Its purpose was to generate data to support the inclusion of the HPV vaccine in India's Universal Immunisation Programme.

Projeria took on an administrative role as a senior statistician keeping a record of recruits gleaned from low-income tribal families. Testing was conducted on girls aged ten to fourteen using Guardasol in Khammam.

Khammam, Projeria discovered derived its name, which means 'pillar' from Narsimhadri Temple, which according to local lore is said to be nearly 1.6 million years old. It belonged to the period of Treta Yuga. Projeria was much more interested in Kali Yuga, the Hindu Iron Age. With her unique skills, she could move things along. She had been offered her role with the HPV project after meeting Baxter at a foundation fund-raising event in Seattle.

Projeria was a woman with a mission. She looked stunning in an off the shoulder bottle green dress, which accentuated her luxurious red hair. She made sure that Gill Baxter noticed her, by making a point of looking in his direction from time to time. She didn't know his age – but he was probably in his fifties. He looked as though he took good care of himself. Despite his billions, Gill looked natural, his short dark hair was shot through with streaks of grey. His sharp brown eyes peered out from behind his trademark black-framed glasses. Projeria also noticed his pierced ears with a tiny diamond stud in each. He was a classy man of the Eighties and, she discovered, quite liberal in many of his views. She found out through personal experience Gill was a strong man, full of passion. His pent up sexual energy and frustration showed itself as a real quality at times.

Projeria always had a higher sex drive than any male partner, many of whom felt at least twenty years older the next day. Sexual energy transference had a much more potent effect on Projeria's condition, but with Baxter she never took advantage. She needed him, or rather his foundation, for the bigger game. He never ever knew how close he came to his demise.

The first time Projeria, the 'Femme Fatale' had sex with Gill was, on an exciting trip to NYC. She and the Billionaire stayed in a 5-star suite 20 floors up, overlooking Central Park. The suite was the ultimate in luxury. After a beautiful day together, he settled into bed around 7 pm while she showered, shaved every stray hair on her body, lotioned up and perfumed herself. She applied a touch of eye make-up to accent their green colour and blush tinted lip balm. Projeria, satisfied with her sex appeal, slipped on a newly purchased black floral silk robe. She loved the contrast against her pale, lightly freckled skin.

Having admired her youthful beauty in the mirror, giving her shapely thighs and modest, narrow waist the tick of approval, she traced the vivid tattoo of the 'Fountain of Youth' on the right side of her body. Walking into the bedroom with the huge circular bed, she felt like the sexiest and most powerful woman in the world. Gill was relaxed, reading an eBook. Projeria climbed onto him having determined to ride the man soon to be her lover. They kissed deeply. She nibbled his bejewelled earlobes, kissed down his neck and arms. She felt his erection against her veiled vagina. Loving the sensation she teased Gill, even more, switching to a reverse cowgirl position. Reaching back, she grabbed his hands and placed them squarely on her bottom. She felt him growing as she took hold of his erect penis, rubbing him against the soft fabric of her dampening robe. He groaned with her teasing until unable to stand the sexual restriction no longer, buried himself inside her feminine warmth.

After a few more satisfying sex sessions with Gill, he arranged for Projeria to join Dr Kummar Gupta on the Khammam HGV Project. It was the perfect cover for her experiments. She could get young girls to age prematurely and the Project, left in confusion, would be blamed.

Between his private work and his banking firm, Daniel had little time to spend being Lord of the Manor. Much to his mother's deep chagrin, he spent only a brief period at Lynsey Hall. Wendell Meyer had filled Grenville's boots well, and he and Margaret had developed a good working relationship. But it was not the same as having her son there with her, and she felt very lonely at times.

On one of the rare occasions, Daniel was home he spent most of his time in a conference behind locked doors with Matthew Snelling, his Soter go between. Looking straight at the politician, he asked, "What do you mean, drop the Dorian Soames case?"

"I'm just the messenger, old boy. It Seems that something more important for you to attend to has come up on the radar."

Daniel topped up Matthew's wine glass. "Tell me about it."

Handing his Lordship a thin manila folder, the Minister said, "Not much to say at present. In fact, the think tank is positively baffled about this case."

"What's baffling about it, man. Spit it out."

"All the group knows is that a disturbing pattern is emerging that has Diabolus' dabs all over it. It's in the file. But I suppose you want me to spell it out."

"Go on."

"Right. Have you ever heard of a medical condition called Progeria?"

"I can't say that I have."

"It's a chronic condition in which the victim, usually a baby, grows prematurely old, ageing around seventy years in twelve years."

"It sounds terrible, but what has it got to do with this disturbing pattern of which you speak?"

"The trail seems to begin in prison in Bolivia where a group of prisoners sharing the same cell aged prematurely overnight."

"That is odd."

"Yes, and it becomes even stranger. It has come to our notice that over fifty young Indian girls have aged 30 years in just six months. Nobody knows why. Another incident involving elderly people has occurred in Iceland."

"What makes you think Diabolus is behind this phenomenon, Matthew?"

"It's not for me to say, my Lord. I've been asked you to drop all other projects and investigate this one. Locations and contacts are included in the dossier."

Daniel shook his head. "But Soter has not provided me with a target this time."

All we have is one suspect, a Dr Attick. She questioned the prisoners just before their physical deterioration occurred."

"I don't suppose we know where she is."

Matthew shook his head. "That's your first job."

There was no favouritism with robots. The cook bot served lunches with each detainee getting exactly the same amount. Abbott had to admire the efficiency. As soon as the thirty minutes was up the guard-bot said, in its electronic voice. "Back – to – work." Before Abbott dropped in with the others, another cyber guard approached him. "You – will – come – with – me." It was an order, not a request. Abbott complied, wondering what was in store. The journalist was taken to a place that looked like an operating room. Three bots and one human were present. One of the androids wore a doctor's white coat. The other two stood still, cradling their weapons. The man stayed in the background, silent.

"Why have you brought me here?" Abbott asked, nervously.

"You – will – lay – on – the – bed."

"What for?" Abbott asked in a tremulous voice.

"YOU – WILL – GET – ON – THE – BED," the scientist bot repeated, louder.

Abbott climbed onto the bed and lay on his back. A 'bot fitted a metal skullcap with electrodes attached to the journalist's head.

Abbott had heard rumours about individual experiments using prisoners as guinea pigs. Now he believed it.

Barney Cormack was just about to putt his golf ball in the lying down plastic cup when his phone rang. It was Rafael Lynch. "Yes, Lynch, what do you want?"

"Do you recall an Australian on our team, called Gallagher?"

"Vaguely, Lynch. What's this about?"

"He's being held in a detention camp. Unicorn in Indiana. Do you know about it?"

"It's on the list. So what are you saying, Colonel?"

"We have a man on the ground. The FEMA officer in charge is expecting Special Forces to fly in and take Gallagher away with them."

"Well, that's not going to happen!"

"There's something else."

"What?"

"Hassan Shamsi, he's the man on the ground, said something about Atlas robots running the camp. Do you know anything about that?"

Barney knew the robots were being tested, but he didn't know where. "Not much, Colonel."

"Gallagher is important to us. He knows what's going on there. And, I'm betting, he'll be only too happy to tell us. But we have to spring him first."

Barney was fed up with the way FEMA had kept him out of the loop about the Homeland Security experiment. They were always tight-lipped about their operations concerning the camps, so he jumped at the opportunity to put one over on them. "Okay, I'll organise it. But I'm in command. Is that understood?"

Raf grinned, "So I can tell our man it's on?"

Daniel looked at the San Pedro prison below. His information said it was initially designed to hold 600 inmates but now held around 3000. It was bizarre as prisons go. Prisoners held jobs within the community and had to pay rent for their cells. No pay, no stay meant prisoners had no roof over their heads and became vulnerable to muggers and murderers who looked down on the homeless.

Daniel's pilot touched down the light aircraft on an airstrip near to the facility. He was expected, so two guards awaited his arrival. Daniel stepped down from the plane and felt the sticky heat of the high humidity. The provided transport was hardly a limo. The old Mercedes Sedan was covered with dirt and dried mud. The dirty streaks down its faded paintwork suggested somebody had made an attempt to smarten it up using a hose and cold water. Thankfully the old German car made it to the prison amid a few coughs and splutters from its rattling exhaust.

As they drove through the vast prison community, it looked more like any other Bolivian suburb, except for the walled and fenced perimeter. Inmates, Daniel discovered, ran a variety of small business, providing essential products and services to keep San Pedro surviving. Inmates at San Pedro, had jobs inside the community so they could buy or rent their accommodation, where they often lived with their families. On the covert business side cocaine sold to visiting, tourists gave the least decent and most business-minded a significant income, which brought them an unusual amount of freedom within the prison walls.

Mayor Estefania was all smiles as he greeted the Englishman and took him through to his chambers. As they sat sipping a passable home-made prison red wine, Daniel said, "How did you meet this Dr Ottick?"

The personable prison chief said, "She comes to me on the recommendation of Challapata Council. She gives me a letter from Mayor Eduardo Atkinson."

"Have you still got the letter?"

"Si Señor. I have it ready for you," he said, handing over the document.

Daniel scanned it. "So the Mayor recommended you to allow this Dr Ottick to question your inmates."

"Si Señor. She says she is doing research for University Hospital in Lapaz."

"Did you check her credentials with the hospital?"

"No Señor. The Mayor told me to help her."

Daniel tried a different tack. "Was she alone with the prisoners?"

"Sometimes, but there was a man with her during some interviews."

"Do you know his name?"

"Si. He was the one who gives me Mayor's letter. He first leaves a message on the phone." Carlos Estifania checked his phone records. "Ah! Here it is – Alden Colthorpe."

Daniel made a note. "Were any of your prison officers present at the interviews?"

"No Señor."

"Did Dr Ottick show you a list of questions?"

"No Señor."

"How did Dr Ottick choose which inmates to interview?"

"She only wants to speak with poor people. She wants them to be happy to answer questions."

"Hm. Can I see the patients who aged prematurely?"

Carlos put his hands together as though in prayer. "Sadly they have died, Señor."

Daniel nodded. "So the affected prisoners were all from the doctor's test subjects?"

"Si Señor."

The Soter man gathered the documents. "Thank you, Carlos. I will let you know if I have more questions for you."

As the helicopter came into land Rafael still had misgivings about the mission. He felt uncomfortable lying to FEMA. Dorian had tried talking him out of getting involved, But he felt America owed the Australian journalist something. After all, he had been instrumental in tracking down the rogue physicist. So, in the end, he agreed to pose as a member of the United States Marine Corps Forces, from Special Operations Command. Colonel Cormack was in command. Barney, not having been 'operational' since retiring from the Marines, also felt uneasy, but determined. Homeland Security kept their experiment with Atlas mark threes a secret. Cormack saw this as his chance to find out how HS was using them.

Commander Lovett came to the gate to meet the men from the chopper. He stood barring their entry, with an armed human guard on either side. With his wraparound shades and hickory pipe, he strode MacArthur-like up to Colonel Cormack. "Are you here to collect detainee 13790?"

"We're here to pick up Abbott Gallagher. You were instructed to have him ready, Commander."

"I can't hand him over until you've signed this." Orson Lovett gave Barney the single sheet that outlined conditions of release. These included the name and signature of the senior officer.

Cormack scrutinised the document.

Lovett said, "It's just standard procedure."

Barney said, Commander, I'm betting it's the first time this has happened to you. Thrusting the piece of paper back at the startled senior officer, he smiled, "You'll have to do better than that."

Orson Lovett needed to save face in front of his men. He knew he had to hand the man over but on his terms. He gave Colonel Cormack another document. "Just sign this to say you are taking custody of Detainee 13790, and he's all yours."

Barney, fed up with the pissing contest, scanned the release form and scrawled his name at the bottom. "Now bring me, Mr Gallagher."

Commander Lovett spoke into his radio. "Bring 13790 to the front gate now."

Abbott could not believe it. They were letting him go. Led by two robots, Abbott reached the perimeter fence. He then realised it was inside a bigger perimeter barrier. The two robot guards backed off, and a personal guard took over. Abbott was taken to the outside border of the prison facility where he recognised Colonel Lynch and saw the helicopter just beyond the gate. He was free from the nightmare. Or had it been that terrible? His mind seemed blank.

After waiting around fifteen minutes, Daniel was shown through to Mayor Atkinson's office. Eduardo stood and shook hands. "Welcome to our beautiful city, Mr Lynsey. Now how can we help you?"

"Mr Mayor, I'm here to find out what happened to those prisoners at San Pedro who aged prematurely. What do you know about it?"

Eduardo, the genial host, checked the time. It was after 10 am. He offered, "It's time to have a 'merienda' a mid-morning coffee or tea." He ordered it through his intercom. "Ah, now about the prisoners. Carlos Estifania brought it to my notice I passed on the information to the Minister for the Interior."

The coffee duly arrived with roasted peas and sugared peanut nibbles."

Daniel said, "Did you not go to see the patients?"

"No Senor, but Betty, the Minister, sent me a report."

"Can I see it?" The Soter man asked, adding cream to his coffee.

"Certainly." The Mayor spoke into his intercom again. "Angelina, get me the Minister's report about the men who died at San Pedro."

Looking at Daniel, Eduardo smiled, reminding the English Lord of the French-speaking husband in the Addam's Family. "Try the snacks, Senor," he said passing over the dish.

Having scrutinised the report, Daniel was none the wiser. He looked up. "Did you check with the University Hospital about Dr Kay Ottick?"

The mayor looked sheepish. "She was such a beautiful young woman, and she had the letter from the registrar."

"Do you have the letter?"

"Of course, Senor. We keep all records. I will get it for you."

Daniel looked at the letter, which was written on the university's headed paper. At length he said. "I need a copy of this and any other material about this case."

"Si Senor. I will have it arranged right away." Then Eduardo asked, "Do you think The beautiful doctor had anything to do with those deaths?"

Ignoring the question, Daniel said, "Do you have an address for the doctor?"

"No, Senor, but the Hospital would have such information."

Daniel did not think so. He rose, "Thank you for your help Mr Mayor. Now if you can just get me those documents."

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