

Entropicus

Book 3: The Madness of Androids



Chris Deggs

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

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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 mander 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 gimp 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 they 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 Hertasos."

"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 HumVeets.

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 Singularians 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, Señor, 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."

<http://beforeitsnews.com/conspiracy-theories/2011/08/concentration-camp-plans-for-u-s-citizens-925120.html>

<http://ethosworld.com/library/Pabst-Concentration-Camp-Plans-for-U.S.-Citizens.pdf>

Chapter 14

Rodney MacKay sat in the cold cell, fearing for his life. He shivered as the memories of his last incarceration on the Island came flooding back. The Scot could not, for the life of him, understand why they were treating him in such a way. The Atlanteans were supposed to be enlightened people, and after playing his part in liberating them from the Singularian dictatorship, he thought his return to the fabled island would be celebrated. In desperation the old scientist thumped on the metal door, shouting, "I WANT TO SPEAK WITH GOMAN WORRALL!" But there was no response, and his words just echoed in the empty corridor.

A few minutes later two guards arrived at his cell, and Rodney, taken from his cage, soon found himself in front of an inquisition."

The presiding interrogator, a tall man with long flowing dark wavy hair, dressed in shimmering turquoise robes, said, "Professor Worrall was poorly treated and imprisoned by your people. Now we want recompense for your actions."

Rodney said, "I had nothing to do with it. I was the one who got him freed."

"Yes but only after you forced him to agree to give up our technical knowledge to you."

Rodney Gulped. The realisation hit him like a bucket of cold water. The cunning Goman had played him all along. The scientist had no intention of revealing the key to free energy. Rodney was on his own. "We helped you, and in return, you were to share with us. That was the deal."

The head Islander said, "That was the arrangement until we realised the Earthians are too immature and irresponsible to be given such technology. Goman Worrall was saving you people from yourselves."

Rodney, his ire up, said, "Aye, but you thought different about these immature Earthians while they were putting their irresponsible lives on the line to save your collective arse." On a roll, he added, "Treating me in this deplorable way shows you to be no better than us Earthians."

The Atlantean Chief stared at Rodney. "In return for releasing you back to your world unharmed, we want an apology from your American king."

"He's a president," The Scot corrected

"Very well, president. The apology must be sincere and unequivocal."

Rodney said, "I don't care about all that free energy stuff, Goman said he'd show me how to protect my quantum computer against viruses."

The headman smiled wistfully. "If you Earthians grow up and stop waging war against each other then you will be ready for such technology."

"But I already have the technology. All I need is ..."

"Have you not yet worked it out. It was us who hacked into your computer, Dr MacKay."

Rodney, taken aback by the pronouncement, said, "You don't want the robots coming back here and seeing you as the enemy."

The headman smiled again. "Do you think we haven't considered that. You send your tin men here, and we will shut them down."

"And just how do you propose to do that?"

"With an Electro Magnetic Pulse, It will disable AI central processors."

The Scot, wide-eyed, responded, "We have nothing like that."

The tall man sneered, "Any intelligent scientific culture would make sure they had the means to disable AI before they go ahead and make the robots."

"Aye, well I guess we're not that intelligent, but that's a technology we could indeed use. Maybe we could make a wee trade. There must be something that we have that could help you here."

The headman said, "Perhaps there is, Dr MacKay. We have the means to stop the robots going out of control, but we don't have the technology to build them in the first place."

Hassan watched from a distance as Abbott climbed into the helicopter. He could not believe his ruse had worked. But the proof was there before his eyes. With a secret satisfying grin on his face, the alchemist climbed aboard his soft-tail and roared off in a cloud of dust. Now that his apprentice was safe it was time for Hassan to go back home and attend to his personal affairs.

Daniel, unused to the intense Khammam heat, was greatly relieved when he reached the comparatively refreshing, locally famous Haveli Restaurant. It was located in Wyraroad and was easy to find. A couple of overused ceiling fans, working at full pelt did what they could to circulate the oppressive hot air. Brad was already waiting for the Englishman to show. Brad, whose real name was Bhadrachalam Kothagudem, coiled his hair under a turban and waxed his moustache, which concealed his top lip and joined with his full white beard. Wearing loose-fitting traditional clothing, Brad looked cool and refreshed. Daniel was amused because Brad's first name sounded like 'bad rack of lamb'. He sat down opposite the Indian, saying, "I'm famished. What do you suggest?"

"In my humble opinion prawn, biryani is most difficult to hit."

"Most difficult to beat, you mean. Well, I'll go by your recommendation."

As they ate, Daniel said, "A woman doctor was working with the medical team. She went under the name of Dr Ottick. I need to find her."

"You will have to speak to Andre Belameaux. He leads the medical team carrying out the vaccinations. But it is not good business."

"Oh, what do you mean?"

"Ask Dr Belameaux. He has become very dispirited with the whole project."

"Why has he become disillusioned, Brad?"

"Health activists from the NGO Sama visited Khammam in March last year. It was not good. Over one hundred girls between nine and thirteen had epileptic seizures, stomach aches, headaches and mood swings. The girls also complained about early menstruation, heavy bleeding and menstrual cramps. Sama raised the issue that these students were made guinea pigs on the pretext of providing health care. The illiterate parents were kept in the dark about the real vaccine, and most of them gave their consent in the form of thumbprints."

Daniel chewed a prawn, then said, "Brad, as bad as that situation is it isn't the reason I am here. I'm interested in those little girls that became subject to rapid ageing."

Bhadrachalam almost dropped his fork. Nobody was supposed to know about that. The girl's families had been well rewarded for keeping silent and looking after their own daughters. "All those girls were vaccinated with HPV, but none of the other subjects was affected in that way."

"Perhaps it wasn't the virus."

"What are you saying, Mr Lynsey?"

"I believe that this mystery Dr Ottick had something to do with it."

"Oh!" Bhadrachalam said, his eyebrows raised.

"Get me an interview with this Andre Belameaux. The sooner I can track this woman down, the sooner we will get answers."

Abbott sat staring out of the chopper's window, his eyes fixed on the land below. He had said very little since being rescued. Barney had seen returned prisoners of war after they had come back home. Many were disoriented and distanced. Some were in such a deplorable state they were unable to comprehend life beyond the prison walls. But Abbott had not been incarcerated for years, merely a couple of months at best.

Raf said, "Your friend Hassan was the one who got you sprung."

Sprung from what, the journalist wondered. The last few weeks were a blank. Abbott remembered being an inmate at the Marion processing facility. He vaguely recalled being on a train. But beyond that – nothing! Barney came straight out with it. "Were there robots at Unicor?"

"Robots. I don't remember seeing any."

"What do you remember about the place, Abbott?" Lynch asked.

"It's all a bit of a blur. I think we were on a train. But after that, my mind seems blank."

Cormack asked, "Did they do anything to you before we arrived?"

"Like what?" Abbott asked.

"Did they get you to lie down. Did the guards attach anything to your head?"

The journalist squeezed his eyes shut, as though it would help to clarify his fuzzy mind. "I can't remember."

Lynch quipped, "Barney, do you think they used some memory-zapping device like those in 'Men in Black?'"

"Shit, I don't know. But it does look like something was going on at Unicor Homeland Security does not want us to know about."

Helen Cleaver missed Abbott terribly. They had been through so much together as friends and lovers. Not knowing what had happened to him affected her deeply. But she had to find the inner strength to go on, to survive the horror that had become her life. So, she had to focus on herself and the things over which she had some control. To achieve this, she had to play a practical role to show her gaolers she had some worth.

Brushing such lamentations from her mind, Helen checked the computer that had been playing up. Although she was not exactly a genius when it came to digital technology, building websites had helped her learn a few useful techniques where computers were concerned. Helen certainly knew more about tweaking and fixing glitches than most of the male personnel at the prison. So she found a way to be useful.

Being wheelchair bound the paraplegic was dead weight, a passenger and the guards considered her useless. She had to find something she could do while sitting; fixing computer problems was the perfect solution for her. The problem was that Renata could not just sit around waiting for Helen to finish her work. Yet, she had to be on hand to help Helen manoeuvre the makeshift wheelchair.

Renata needed to keep a low profile, and the best way was for her to stay busy. But the work she did had to be such that it allowed her to pause and attend to Helen's personal needs. So, having done clerical work in the past, she kept herself occupied by doing office work for the Chief Warden.

Nothing much changed in prison routine. As usual, Renata Romano pushed Helen outside the hut for morning roll call. It was a bitterly cold morning with a brisk wind, so the carer had put an extra blanket over Helen's legs. Why Helen was included in the boring roll call, Renata could not figure. After all, she was hardly likely to escape. After petitioning by the insistent Renata, owing to her handicap, Helen was allowed to spend more time at her morning ablutions. It was a small victory, but one none-the-less.

It was apparent to Rodney that the Atlanteans did not trust the Earthians. The scientist could see why and had some sympathy about that. But he did not like being caught in the middle, the jam in the sandwich, as his mother used to say. Since his agreement to act as a bridge to try and broker a robot deal he had been stuck back in the cell, where he languished all night.

The next morning he had a visitor, Goman Worrall. Not expecting to see the scientist again, Rodney snarled, "What are you doing here?"

"It's not very pleasant being confined, is it"

"I had nothing to do with that. If you're just here to gloat, you may as well go away."

"The Council have accepted your deal."

"My deal! I just had to agree to it."

"There is a bit more to it." He handed Rodney a small metallic disc, much smaller than a CD. "This will fit in your CD player. It has the instructions I promised."

"That's great. Now, when can I go back."

Goman said, "If we trust you to go back to your world you must broker a deal with your people about the robots. We will give your people one week to respond to our request. If they do not react in that time, we will send you another virus to make your quantum computer technology unworkable."

"Now wait a wee minute! I have no control over what ..."

"If the Earthian masters want the technology they will listen to you."

Rodney was not at all sure about that.

Chapter 15

The Public Voice:

Flint McCarthy, a special guest on America Today, talking about military hierarchy pointed out, "Under the Fifth Army we have the provost marshal, who is directly connected to the Deputy Chief of Staff for law enforcement personnel. Under the provost marshal for the Fifth Army, we have the 300 Military Police Prisoner-of-War Command at Livonia, Michigan."

The Host, Margo Harrison, interrupting, said, "As fascinating as this is I'm sure our viewers are more interested in the emails you claim to have. Tell us about them."

"Henry Killinger, while Secretary of Defense, shared many private emails with retired Admiral Elmer Slumwalt. In one message Killinger wrote:

I believe the American people lack the will to do the things necessary to achieve parity and to maintain military superiority. I believe we must get the best deal we can in our negotiations before the United States and the Soviet both perceive these changes and the balance that occurs. When these perceptions are in agreement, and both sides know the US is inferior, we must get the best deal we can. Americans will not be happy that I have settled for second best, but it will be too late."

Slumwalt replied: So why don't you take it to the American people? They will not accept the decision to become second best while we are in a position of gross national product twice that of the USSR.

Killinger: "That's a question of judgement. I judge that we will not get their support and if we seek it and tell the fact as we would have to, we would lose our negotiating leverage with the Soviets.

Slumwalt: "But isn't that the ultimate immorality in a democracy; to decide for the people about such important things without consulting them?"

Killinger: "Perhaps, but I doubt that there are 1 million who could even understand the issue."

Slumwalt: "Even if that presumption is correct, those 1 million can influence the opinions of the majority of the people. I believe it is my duty to take the other course."

Killinger: "You should take care, lest your words result in a reduction in the military budget."

Margo said, "So what Flint? There's nothing new about such trade-offs."

Flint responded, "You're missing the point. This shows the utter disregard the US State Department has for the American people. It's high time the American citizenry realised that their government only considers them useful regarding what the administration can squeeze out of them."

Margo said, "Flint, you could be treading on dangerous ground here. Your words could be considered anti-American."

McCarthy countered, "It's the State Department that's being un-American, not me."

Rodney lay on his bed, exhausted. Being held in detention on the island had taken it out of him. His prison experience coupled with the fatigue that hit him coming back through the Gate made the old scientist dead tired. He's refused to be debriefed until he'd rested. They would just have to wait until he was ready, he had told Dorian.

In Dr Gibson's office, Rafael waited on tenterhooks. General Schulz was pushing for a report and kept pressuring the Colonel to have the Gate sealed, but Rafael had no choice but to wait for the crusty old Scot's report. "Is he pulling some power trip, Dorian?"

"He did look quite worn. I think it's better if he sleeps for now."

Raf sighed, "The sooner we get that damn Gate closed up the better. MacKay has trained Dr Velovska to work the portal so she can close it."

"Not until Rodney has made his report. For all, we know he may have to go back to the island."

"Why?"

"I don't know, Raf. But we can't take any chances. Once the Gate is sealed, that's it."

Rodney emerged five hours later, at 8.30 pm. He contacted Dr Gibson's private number to say he was ready for questions. Five minutes later he sat facing Raf and Dorian.

She asked, "Are you okay, Rodney?"

"Aye, now I'm back on this side."

"So what happened over there?" Rafael asked.

"You mean apart from the fact I was thrown in gaol while they deliberated on my fate."

"They're allies. Why would they treat you like that?" Raf asked.

"Maybe it had something to do with the appalling way you treated their head scientist?" the Scot suggested.

"We did what we had to do. Goman wasn't cooperative," the colonel stated, justifying his position.

"Aye, well they did'na see things that way. And they don't trust us."

"Did they give you the missing part of the ZPE technology?" Raf asked.

Rodney said, "They have a device that can shut down any types of AI."

"That doesn't answer my question," Lynch persisted.

"The Atlanteans have the means to override AI programming, but they don't have the technology to make the robots."

"So what are you saying, Rodney?" Dorian queried.

"They want to do a deal. Robots for the technology."

"Why the hell do they want 'bots?" John asked.

"I am merely the messenger."

Dorian said, "That would mean keeping the gate functioning, while Schulz and DARPA decide."

Rodney did not want to bring up the subject of quantum computing. That was his baby, and he did not want to give it up before he had to. He looked from Dr Gibson to the Colonel. "There's something else."

"What's that?" Dorian asked.

"We don't get the missing XPE data if we don't agree with a new deal."

"What new deal?" Raf snapped.

"They want the robots in exchange for the missing info."

Raf thumped his fist on the desk sending paper and pens flying. "Who the hell do they think they are? I could take some troops and cut the ungrateful bastards down to size!"

"Yes, well that's not going to happen!" Dorian stated forcefully. "As I see it we have two choices. We either forget all about harnessing free energy and seal the gate. Or we go along with the Atlantean deal, then close the portal."

"I still don't understand why they want robots?" Raf said, shaking his head."

Rodney explained, "They are developing a kill switch, so they have the ultimate control over AIs. They need actual robots for their experiments."

Dorian grinned at Raf. "Are you going to tell Schulz or am I going to break the news?"

Abbott Gallagher looked around the room. He was alone and only got to see anybody when they brought him food or attended to his other essential needs. Although he had been rescued from the camp, he had just swapped one cell for another. They wanted him to remember what had happened in the prison camp, but his mind was still a blank where that was concerned. The first thing he said, when anyone came to his safe room was, "I want to speak to someone at the Australian Consulate." Abbott was always ignored as though he had never spoken those words.

For the first time in days, the journalist heard the tapping of a walking stick on the tiled floor. The Colonel was back. Abbott watched as Lynch sat down on a canvas chair and riffled through his briefcase to find a particular document. Abbott, snarled, "Where the fuck have you been. Your lot have stuck me here for days, and to what end?"

"I'm sorry about this Abbott, but we believe that Unicor is run by our robots and we need that data. The psychologist we used suggested your memory of events at the camp would come back to you if we just left you alone."

"Yes, well that hasn't worked, has it?"

"If you knew how vital that information is to our research you would ..."

"Well, I can't help you, and after the way, I've been treated I would not be disposed to do so. Now I want to speak with the Australian Consulate."

"I can understand your anger, but we are handling this from the best of motives."

"Why the hell can't you just ask whoever runs the camp to give you the info?"

"It's not that simple. FEMA won't come clean, and there's no way we can force them to do so. You are our only hope."

"Well, I can't help you. Let me go, and if anything comes back, I'll let you know." Abbott paused, then said, "Oh, and find out what has happened to Helen Cleaver and get her out of prison as well."

John handed Abbott the document. "Sign this, and you can go."

Abbott read the release form. Frowning, he looked up at the Colonel. "What's this tracking device bull shit?"

"It's just a simple anklet. You will wear it at all times. It has a range of fifty miles. Outside of that it vibrates and alerts us."

Abbott stared at him. "Are you saying my prison has just expanded to fifty miles and I'm confined to that area?"

Lynch nodded. "If you try to remove the device, the tamper alarm will go off here and you will be back under house arrest."

Abbott stared at Raf. "Fuck you!"

Following the untimely and unexpected death of Milne Amwon, Neurotech had no one at the helm. Elijah Brooks, one of the top executives of the cyber brain development company, was one of the front-runners. Brook was potentially the best candidate for his 'Big Mind' breakthrough with Neurotech's latest CCPU development, which used deep neural networks in the currently most successful machine learning technique for solving a variety of tasks including language translation, image classification and image generation.

David T Rottafeller, Neurotech's principal shareholder was interested in funding android brain development with a particular agenda in mind. To this end, he organised a private meeting with Brooks, in the company's luxurious penthouse suite.

Looking Elijah in the eye, the oil billionaire said, "The person who is chosen to take over from Milne Amwon has to understand certain protocols."

Elijah had an idea where the conversation was going, but he played along faking his ignorance. "Oh, and what are these protocols, David?"

"As Neurotech's biggest shareholder all the main decisions are passed by me before you implement them. Can you live with that proviso?"

Elijah flashed his Million dollar smile. "Of course, that is to be expected."

David T Rottafeller said, "Are you up to date on the override technology that Milne was perfecting?"

"Of course. It means we can carry out remote maintenance on our 'bots without them even knowing about it."

it was time to take Brooks into his confidence. "More importantly, Elijah, it means we can override the 'bot's programme and implement our own, at a distance."

"We have to be very careful this technology does not fall into the wrong hands. Just imagine if terrorists could control our robots."

"It's your job to see that it doesn't happen."

Elijah brightened, "Then I have the position?"

David looked straight at the candidate. "I have to interview the others, first."

Ulysses Covington greeted Elijah Brooks and took him into his office. "To what do I owe this dubious pleasure?" the Australian said.

Ignoring the Boston Cybertronics man's barb, Elijah said, "I was sorry to hear about Dr Baker's death. A terrible tragedy."

"I think you mean Dr Becker. And yes it is a terrible loss to our company."

"Have the police caught her killer yet?"

Elijah, an expert in PR, asked all the right questions for someone paying lip service. Ulysses had the man pegged. "So why are you really here, Mr Brooks?"

Elijah flashed his Hollywood smile. "I thought I'd let you know I am now the CEO of Neurotech. it's important that we have a healthy business relationship."

Ulysses nodded, "It doesn't surprise me that you've been kicked upstairs, Elijah. I guess congratulations are in order."

Brooks grinned, "BC is our biggest client, so I want to make sure we look after you."

"And how are you going to do that?"

"I will be discussing that with Harvey Hamlin." Elijah checked his gold Rolex. I'm meeting him in twenty minutes. I wanted to give you the heads up first."

Ulysses stared at the Neurotech boss. "As MD I should be at that meeting."

"I agree with you, but you'll have to take that up with your boss."

"Ask him to include me."

"I will ask him, of course."

Harvey looked real enough. His handsome face had a few specially added blemishes, and he even had a day's beard growth. He welcomed Elijah into his suite. "Come in Mr Brooks. We have much to discuss."

Elijah said, "Shouldn't Ulysses be party to this meeting?"

"I will tell him what he needs to know. What you need to know is that Boston Cybertronics wants to merge with Neurotech."

Brooks detected a slight metallic element in Harvey's voice. "Mr Hanlon this comes as something of a surprise."

"It will give Neurotech the advantage of having access to DARPA funding, amongst other benefits. We will, of course, have to organise a stockholder's meeting, but only after our lawyers come up with a contract suited to both our needs."

Elijah had been trying to get direct research funding from DARPA for Neurotech's CCPU but to no avail. In that respect, a merger could prove useful and would score him brownie points for hitting the board running. "I will talk with my people about this."

"Good. Now let us relax while I organise some refreshment."

Dr Andre Belameaux had worked under Dr Kummar Gupta on the Khammam HGV Project for five years. In that time he'd discovered that the 'Baxter Foundation' in Andhra Pradesh was not using a 'neutral charitable strategy'. The Foundation was all about benefiting big pharmaceutical businesses, especially those in agriculture and health. Severely affected psychologically by what he had found out, the troubled French physician naively mentioned that the Foundation was using its massive influence to 'dangerously skew' its purported priorities.

Dr Gupta had told Andre not to concern himself and just focus on the positive outcomes of the project. Dr Belameaux took his advice and mentioned it no more. That was until those poor girls died of 'old age' or were sent back to their families. Now Andre felt he had to speak out.

Daniel met with Dr Belameaux at the Haveli Restaurant. During their lunch, the middle-aged Frenchman opened up to the Englishman. Between mouthfuls, he said, "Mr Lynsey, the world is being sold a myth that private philanthropy holds many of the solutions to the world's problems, when in fact it is pushing the world in many wrong directions."

Playing along, the Soter agent said, "Tell me more."

"The Baxter Foundation is able to call the shots, and big players in international development are falling into line with the Foundation's misguided priorities."

Daniel was after bigger fish, but he listened to what the French doctor had to say.

Andre continued, "The Baxter Foundation uses its massive wealth to silence international development experts and groups which criticise its practices. Gil Baxter has regular access to world leaders and is in effect personally bankrolling hundreds of universities, international organisations, NGOs and media outlets, where he promotes his 'vaccination and human depopulating programme' in line with a radical bioethicist stance."

It was time to come in with the big guns. Daniel said, "Did the Foundation have anything to do with the rapid ageing of the poor girls in Pradesh?"

Andre sat there wide-eyed. "How do you know such things?"

"Doctor, did you ever see a woman doctor called Ottick at the vaccination centre?"

Belameaux shook his head. "I do not recall the name."

"Has a beautiful doctor joined the team of late?"

"Yes, but her name wasn't, how you say, Ottick.

"What was her name?"

Andre smiled faintly, remembering the night they had spent together. "Her name is Dr Dee Stroia."

Daniel made a note. "Would she have had access to the list of test cases?"

Andre paled. As far as he knew the glamorous doctor, in her role as administrator, never had direct access to the patients. The Frenchman thought she was genuine and so let his guard down in her presence. After the hot sex, they experienced who knows what he may have told her.

He stared at Daniel. "She was kind and sweet. You don't think she could have had anything to do with those girls becoming sick, do you?"

Ignoring the question, Daniel asked, "Is she still working on the project."

"No. Dr Dee Stroia left shortly after the strange outbreaks. But she was supervised at all times. How could she possibly? ..."

"Do you know where she went?"

The doctor hesitated. Then he said, "I don't know what she meant, but she did tell me that she needed a bigger project."

Daniel stared at Andre. "I don't like the sound of that."

Chapter 16

The Public Voice:

Flint McCarthy, the outspoken, civil rights lawyer dropped another bombshell while being interviewed on WBKC Radio. He was a guest on Mick Masters Morning Show. Mick asked Flint if he subscribed to the conspiracy theory that America was sizing up to Martial Law.

Flint replied, "Back as far as 1975 the California National Guard was organised and trained to provide immediate response to virtually every civil and man-made disaster, as well as assisting law enforcement officers in emergency situations."

The interviewer responded, "Surely preparedness is a good thing."

"On the face of it, yes. But the training I speak of deals with individual civilians/civil population, detention procedures, citizens rights and related matters." Flint looked straight at Mick, nodding as he spoke. "You and I know very well that when there is Martial Law, citizens lose any rights they have because they have been pre-empted by the government."

"Yes, Flint, but the provision is only in place for extreme circumstances."

"Mick, don't be naive. You know as well as I do that when a government wants to implement Martial Law, they create the circumstances for it to happen. Even police departments have their own paramilitary units, such as the Los Angeles Sheriff's department who's paramilitary group wear army fatigues dyed black as their uniforms. On top of this, we have the whole Robocop thing happening, with sometimes as high as fifteen percent of police personnel android cops."

'Sentient Science' a weekly review of current AI trends, also on WBKC featured as its guest, Dr Patricia Pilarski, a professor at the University of Alberta. She explained to Philip Ronstein, the host of the show, that 'BigMind' had always been a hybrid start-up programme, part culture and part academic. As such BM collaborated with the best researchers in the AI field from around the globe.

Philip said, "Dr Pilarski I believe you have a special announcement for our listeners."

"Yes, Philip. "We're thrilled to announce our next phase: the opening of big minds first ever international AI research office in Edmonton, Canada, in close collaboration with the University of Alberta."

"What made you take that significant step?"

"It was an important decision for us to open our first non-UK research lab, and the fact we're doing so in Edmonton is a sign of the deep admiration and respect we have for the Canadian AI research community."

"How did you latch on to this opportunity?"

"Well, Philip, we've had particularly close links with the University of Alberta for many years: nearly a dozen of its outstanding graduates have joined us at BigMind, and we've sponsored the machine learning lab to provide additional funding for PhDs over the past few years."

"So, Patricia, Who will be heading up the Canadian team?"

'BigMind Alberta' will be led by the pioneer of reinforcement learning - and BM's primary advisor from back in 2010 - Gary Suddon, together with Kenneth Cowling and myself. We will also be joined by Alana Greyling, who will be returning to Canada to accede to the university as an adjunct professor."

"Well, it all sounds fascinating. So tell me, in what area of AI will your team be concentrating?"

"We will be carrying out core scientific research in the field of robot cognisance and conjunction with Neurotech, which uses our findings which is translated into practical applications."

Grover Cookland, an ex-robotics scientist from the University of Alberta and frontrunner with ARC (Anti Robotics Canada) listened to the programme with great interest. He was greatly concerned that the BigMind team were ploughing on blindly ahead without looking at the ramification of sentient machines. Although he was no longer actively involved in the project, Grover Cookland still frequented the warehouse on occasion. The huge shed, in a secluded part of Vancouver, had engineers and fabricators building a two-storey tall, 3.5-tonne racing robot with four steel legs and a massive battery pack in its belly. But unlike robots in science fiction, this mechanical beast was not autonomous. 'Prosthesis: the anti-robot' needed a human inside to operate its large limbs.

Alden Colthorpe had to play it very safe when working with Projeria. It was best to go along with what she said, without question. Alden, not a courageous man at the best of times, allowed himself to be relegated to the role of gopher and personal slave. He had to remain useful to the powerful woman. Luckily enough for him, he came up with the occasional useful idea. One of which was put into practice as Projeria's latest project.

Oslo, Alden Calthorp discovered, had a reputation for being friendly, clean, well organised and easy to negotiate – all aspects anathema to Diabolus. This made it the perfect location for Projeria's next project. It was time to make the world take notice.

Gustav Stone was Projeria's first stepping stone towards her initial involvement in the Diabolus Sect. At first, he waited until she'd gotten the idea that she would stay healed while she passed her entropy onto another life-form. Then Gustav explained about entropy and how the whole universe was subject to a 'heat death', and nothing could stop it happening. He said that Diabolus was working with universal energy to help bring the inevitable about. He repeated this message in many different ways, using a variety of examples."

Alyssa said, "If what you say is true then my disease was helping the universe."

Gustav knew he was dealing with a brilliant girl. "That is true, but there is so much more you can achieve by transmitting your entropic effect to speed up the life process of others. With training, I can make you the most powerful Diabolus force on Earth."

Alyssa, now Projeria, often thought about that. At first, her attempts at entropy transference kept her fit and healthy and changed her from being the odd duckling to the magnificent swan. Now an even greater change had taken place in her psyche. She no longer waited for the cracks to show before using her extraordinary power. She exercised it at will because with each transference episode she became more dominant. Her survival technique had now become an addiction. Projeria had not seen her mentor for many years; instead, she was stuck with that obsequious little toad, Alden Colthorpe. Although he could still be useful at times.

Alden dealt with the nuts and bolts of the project, sometimes without consulting Projeria. As her factotum, he smoothed the path for her to walk upon. One such task was to protect her when he got wind of somebody looking for her, Alden arranged to meet with the source of such information.

Alden discovered that Oslo was a friendly city. Strangers smiled at him as he passed them by. It was also clean and orderly, with hardly any litter on the paths. The Norwegian capital was also easy for visitors to navigate. However, most things tended to be somewhat expensive. But that did not concern the Diabolus agent. The Sect had bottomless pockets and he knew where to go to meet his contact.

Oslo, the most northern of the Scandinavian capitals, was also the coldest. Alden, not a fan of cold climates, wrapped in many layers of warm clothes walked past the museums, shops, cafes and bars until he came to St. Hanshaugen Park, one of Oslo's largest, located just north of the city centre.

Why his contact didn't pick some warm restaurant to meet was beyond the Diabolus man. He walked to the top of the hill from where he could see the city. Blending in with the other tourists, Alden waited at the appointed place. Then he saw the French doctor.

Andre Belameaux recognised the short man who was always at the glamorous doctor's side. Since losing his job on the Andra Pradesh project, the French doctor decided to make some money by selling information. But first, he had to sound the man out.

Alden said. "It's bloody freezing here, so this had better be good."

Andre smiled, "We can get hot drinks at Festplassen, on top of this hill. It's an open-air cafe I'm afraid, but it is better than nothing.

As they sat drinking hot chocolate, Alden felt much better. The Frenchman, knowing a little of the park's history, explained, "St Hanshaugen was originally a bare rock hill. As the hill was a favourite place for Midsummer celebrations during the 1800s the name St. Hanshaugen 'Midsummer Hill' came into use. This cafe was built In 1936.

Andre, getting down to business, looked down at Colthorpe. Somebody is nosing around looking for Doctor Stroia. I thought you might want to know."

Alden did want to know. "Who is this somebody?"

"Andre, who was new at selling information, blurted, "I want one million euros."

The Diabolus man stared at him, "For such a huge sum I want to know everything about this 'somebody'."

"He's English, refined and he thinks she had something to do with the young Indian girls who suffered rapid ageing effects."

Colthorpe laughed nervously. "That's preposterous. Do you know the name of this refined Englishman?"

"Do I get my fee?"

"Once I have his name and have him checked out."

Andre hesitated. Then he said, "How do I know I can trust you? He handed Alden a card. "My banking details. As soon as I see the money in my account, you get the name."

"With respect Dr Belameaux how do I know you can be trusted? I want the name now or no deal."

The Frenchman feeling his money slipping away capitulated, "Okay, his name is Daniel Lynsey."

<https://deepmind.com/blog/deepmind-office-canada-edmonton/>

<https://venturebeat.com/2017/07/05/alphabets-ai-offshoot-deepmind-opens-research-lab-in-canada-first-outside-the-u-k/>

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Chapter 17

The Public Voice:

"Flint McCarthy, a prominent voice in civil rights, is with us today," Sonia James announced, on her weekly 'Round Up Show' in Houston, Texas. "He claims to have information about the disaster preparedness plan for the Marine Corps Supply Centre in Barstow, California. Good evening Flint. Tell us about this document you have uncovered."

"Well Sonia, under the Constitution and the laws of the United States, the preservation of law and order is the responsibility of local and state government. And the authority to maintain the peace and enforce the law is invested in the leadership of those countries. However, I have discovered there are specific exceptions to the above concept. One of these pertains to federal intervention to civil disturbances in certain situations."

"Surely there's nothing new in that."

"On the face of it, no. But under new ruling military commanders, they now have the inherent authority to take any measure 'reasonably' necessary for the protection of life and property. This Bill passed by Congress is a little light on the definition of what constitutes a sudden unexpected public calamity, disrupting the normal process of government and whose life and property are protected."

"Surely if the military is presented with an emergency so threatening that it becomes too dangerous to await instructions from appropriate authorities, it's better for them to act autonomously."

Flint replied, "Sonia, Donald Ball, who writes a weekly report in The Democratic Voice, recently said that the 301 Civil Affairs group of the US Army Reserves in Kearny, New Jersey conducted an exercise to sharpen plans for a military takeover of the state government. According to this respected journalist, similar studies have been carried out on how to seize municipal and county government. Now, are you going to tell me this is not a worrying trend?"

"These are just studies though?"

"Yes Sonia, but this was the first time they had considered STATE government. Such units were trained during World War II to operate captured states. We have never had federal troops training to take over the government in the United States. When local violence or catastrophe struck, the National Guard, under the command of the governor, goes into action. This is definitely not the situation at this time."

Abbott, no longer detained at Langley still had to undergo tests to restore the missing memories from Unicorn. He was not at all happy about it, but there was little he could do. During one of these sessions, Rafael Lynch approached him, asking, "How are you doing, Abbott?"

The Aussie snapped, "Why the hell are my memories so important to you people?"

The Colonel said, "I can't answer that. It's imperative that we do not pre-empt you."

"What if my memories never come back. Are you going to make me wear the bracelet indefinitely?"

"We are reviewing your situation. Understand we do have your best interests at heart."

"It doesn't look like it from my perspective," Abbott responded, cynically. He paused, sighed deeply and said, "All I know is that when I was captured at the border, Helen Cleaver was with me. I haven't seen her since we were separated at the Marion detention centre. I need to know how she is."

John nodded. "Wasn't she the head of that anti-robot group?"

"The Anti Transhumanist League, yes." The journalist paused then said, "I can't help feeling they were after her, not me. I just got caught up in the craziness."

"You're probably right, especially if Homeland Security is using robot guards." Raf became silent, praying he hadn't let the cat out of the bag. Then he said, "I'll see what I can find out about this Cleaver woman."

"She shouldn't be difficult to track down."

"Why so?"

"Because she's a paraplegic."

Raf stared at Abbott, wide-eyed.

Daniel Lynsey felt overwhelmed by all that was happening in his busy life. Apart from putting in the occasional public appearance as Lord of the Manor at Lynsey Hall, and running around the world for Soter, The young Lord had to sort out problems with his banking business. He needed some serious time out, so he stayed at his Chelsea studio apartment with the delectable Natasha Guevera.

They had met at The Roof Gardens, a haven for clubbing in London. Daniel saw the woman looking out at the sky-high view across Kensington's lush landscape. She stood alone, backed off from the heavy rock live music that, cranked up to 115 decibels, was deafening to those near the makeshift stage. Daniel approached her, "Hi, you look lonely, would you like some company?"

She knew who he was but would not let on. Without looking at him, she said, "That all depends on what you have in mind."

Looking at the beautiful brunette with a dark tan, Daniel grinned, "Daniel Lynsey, pleased to meet you."

She slowly turned to look at him. He was handsome in a Leonardo DiCaprio way, complete with a short trimmed beard. "I'm Natasha. So what do you have in mind?"

He smiled, "I'm here to unwind, but I'd feel more comfortable back in my Chelsea pad."

It was going to be much easier than she thought. "Well, we can't have you feeling uncomfortable, can we?"

Daniel was just in the mood for a one night stand. But it became more than that.

On their first proposed date, Daniel showed off his culinary skills, preparing a chicken and prawn stir-fry. Natasha turned up an hour late. Daniel, feeling annoyed and insulted, said, "The essence of stir fries is correct timing. Now I have to reheat it, and It won't taste as good."

Natasha brushed his complaint aside. "I'm sure it will taste just wonderful."

"You could at least have phoned me to let me know you were going to arrive late."

"Oh, come on Daniel. Don't make a big thing out of it."

He placed the wok on the stove a little harder than necessary. "It's just common courtesy."

Natasha got up and grabbed her coat. "Forget dinner. I've lost my appetite."

As she headed to the door, Daniel followed, "You're not leaving, are you."

She turned to face him. "I have better things to do than hearing you complain all night."

Becoming contrite, Daniel softened. "Look, don't go. Let's start again, and I promise no complaining."

Natasha smiled sweetly, then said, "Mm. What's that delicious smell?"

Knowing patience was not one of his finest traits, Lord Lynsey knew it would be a testing evening for him.

Natasha, for her part, knew she had to win him over. After their romantic dinner, complete with candles, each time her date left the lounge she played a teasing game by removing an item of clothing. Daniel, bemused by her behaviour found it a huge turn on, and their conversation became increasingly sexually orientated and reached its verbal conclusion with the subject of their favourite sexual fantasies.

Daniel admitted one in which he had sex with his doctor after she revealed that she absolutely loved to watch men strip. He saw that as a signal and determined not to miss out.

After imbibing two glasses of wine, Daniel put on some relaxing music, took Natasha's hand and manoeuvred her to the sofa.

She began unbuttoning his shirt, her eyes filled with excitement. She laughed nervously, but he could see her nibbling her lip. She wasn't wearing a bra, and her erect nipples were showing through her blouse. She soon had Daniel naked, and after an appreciative look at his aroused penis, it was his Lordship's turn to finishing undressing her.

They kissed gently at first, then deeply. After ten minutes or so of groping and lip-locking, they reached the moment of no return. Natasha's sense of arousal became intense as his hand caressed her between her legs. Daniel became more erect, and she took him in her mouth. The pair then had wild sex until he felt her vagina convulse around him, as she had a shuddering orgasm. He finished by himself and ejaculated over her firm young breasts.

As they lay entwined, Daniel looked at Natasha dreamily. "I'm glad you didn't go."

Rodney Mackay had not heard anything for days. He mooched around the base, becoming increasingly frustrated unable to develop his quantum computer.

Dr Velovska, noticing his sad state, asked: "Have they made their decision yet?"

He turned on her. "Would I be stuck here like a shag on a rock if I'd heard anything?" he snapped.

"All right, Rodney, there's no need to bite my head off."

Rodney's phone rang. It was Dorian. She wanted him to come to her office, immediately. Had she received some news, he wondered, hopefully.

Dorian hadn't mentioned anything about General Schulz being there. Rodney glared at Dr Gibson. He'd been caught off guard.

Logan's cigar had already polluted the windowless office, and Rodney felt nauseous as soon as he walked in.

Schulz turned on him, "MacKay, we have to get this Atlantis nonsense sorted."

Rodney, already in a foul mood, snapped, "I cannae talk about this in such a foul stench, General. Either put that thing oot, or we'll have to talk outside."

Logan stared at the scientist his cigar nearly falling from his open mouth. He removed the offensive object and placed it on the saucer holding his empty coffee cup.

Dorian turned away to stifle a smile.

Glaring at the Scot, he snapped, "What's this nonsense about giving them robots?"

Rodney, able to breathe a little easier, responded, "The Atlanteans want the 'bots in return for their energy technology, their quantum computer data and a kill switch for AIs."

Logan grunted, "Well, it's not going to happen. And you'd better go back and tell them that."

"No General. You can take that message to them yourself. I've had enough of their goals."

"Are you disobeying an order, MacKay?"

"I'm a civilian. I don't have to take your orders."

Dorian intervened. "This arguing is getting us nowhere. As I see it, gentlemen, if we want the Atlantean technology we have to bite the bullet and give them what they want."

Schultz said, "Or we can show a force of arms."

"Invade the island!" Rodney said, incredulous.

"If we have to," the General said.

Rodney scoffed, "Not your smartest idea, General. Their kill-switch can turn off any type of AI."

"On Atlantis but not here," Schulz argued."

Rodney countered, "Well they were able to hack into my quantum computer from the island, so the difference in dimensions doesn't seem to phase them."

Dorian sighed. "So what are we to do?"

Rodney shrugged, "Simple. We give them what they want. We get what we want from them; then we seal the gate."

Logan said, "Can they attack our AIs once the portal is closed down."

Rodney sneered, "Of course not, once the connection is lost."

Dorian said, "Well, General, you'd better organise the 'bots."

Projeria needed to learn the layout of the Stortinget, so she joined a guided tour, at the Akersgata entrance, which was located strangely at the back of the building, with Alden at her side. The tour of the Norwegian Parliament building was free and lasted around forty-five minutes.

Projeria had a craving for life force but, of late, she had become more disciplined in controlling her hunger. After the group had split up with each person going about their business, Projeria turned to Alden. "Have you organised it yet?"

Her companion said "The praesidium is the inner sanctum. Only the President and the five vice Presidents attend. The best I can do is get you into a nearby office."

"How is that going to help?" she huffed. "I need line of sight to make it work."

Alden shrugged, "I don't know what to suggest." Then he had a thought. "Would it work if you were to see them on a screen?"

The Diabolus Sect leader hadn't considered working with digital images. She looked Alden in the eye. "We will have to test it out first."

Chapter 18

The Public Voice

Last year on February 16 the San Gabriel Valley Tribune reported that the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, funded by the Department of Justice, the Police Foundation and the Artificial Intelligence Foundation, were prime movers toward implementing a national police force. Flint McCarthy, in an interview with Chase Mahoney, senior editor with the SGVT, stated that each of these bodies contends they support local police agencies. However, the total programme, dubbed 'Operation Cable Splicer' involves military units designed to take over the administration of local and state governments. That programme is to be run by Army civil affairs groups, as a sub-plan of 'Operation Garden Plot' (the Martial law program).

Chase asked, "How is this sub-plan going to work?"

Flint replied, "The method by which the national police concept is being presented to the public has changed. It was first disguised under cover of protection against civil disturbances. This program works as follows: Keep the people from gathering in the streets. Isolate and neutralise the revolution's leadership and disperse crowds and demonstrators."

"Well, Flint, nobody likes the idea of Martial Law, but sometimes these revolutionary activists do get out of control."

Chase, Agencies like FEMA make sure public demonstrations get out of control. They plant agitators in peaceful crowds to ensure they happen that way. We have certainly seen examples of this over the last two years. Such acts of civil disobedience are followed up with the successful prosecution to validate the action of the police, deny the arrestee's propaganda materials and deny them the opportunity to recover money damages against the police for arresting them. Chase, let me ask you this. Who do you think is engineering these protests?"

"Anti-government policy activists."

"Most Americans would probably agree with you. But let me quote for you the scenario which was developed for Cable Splicer One, Two and Three to justify the needs for dealing with civil disturbances: Phase One - an arrest and shooting provoke crowd unrest and threats against public officials, and a riot begins to form. Phase Two - police vehicles are ambushed, various attempted assassinations of public officials occur, destruction and raiding of armouries occur, and thousands of people begin to gather, and local police lose control. Phase Three - an increased movement of rioters and the crowds must be dispersed before they become sympathetic with the rebels. The National Guard and the local police lose control. This scenario provides for an orderly transition from state to federal control."

Chase suggested, "Then Martial Law is implemented."

Flint responded, "We are now in phase three."

"I hear you have made a breakthrough," Lynch said, entering Abbott's domain.

Abbott looked up from the book he was reading. "Yes, at first the spooks thought I'd blocked out the Unicorn camp episode because it was too horrible. After all the tests I went through some bright spark finally figured I hadn't blocked the memories at all. Some bastard had blocked them out for me. Once they realised that they set about reversing the process."

"And now you're able to recall what happened?"

"I'm getting there, Raf."

"That's great news. But why would the prison guards go to such lengths to de-programme you before they handed you over?"

"Maybe they don't want anyone to know that robot guards run the camp."

Raf rubbed his stubbly chin. "No. There has to be more to it than that. We need you to write down everything as the memories become clearer. There something else the Homeland Security is hiding at Unicor, and we need to find out what it is."

"All I know is that being ordered around by soulless, emotionless machines does something to a man's mind."

"What do you mean?"

"They aren't cruel or vindictive and don't take anything personally. The guard bots handle us with cold indifference. In some ways, it's worse than getting a beating. But worse of all they have re-education for disobedient inmates. They disappear for a while. Then they come back into the general population like zombies dedicated to doing the robots' bidding."

John sat wide-eyed. "My God! FEMA is using robots to mind control humans. He took out his phone and pressed Barney's contact."

"Colonel Cormack here."

"John Prince. Did you know that FEMA is experimenting with prison guard bots that are mind-controlling human prisoners?"

"Where did you get that from, the Internet?"

"No. From Abbott Gallagher. He's getting his memory back."

"I want a full report ASAP."

"As soon as I have it, Colonel" John paused, then said, "Is there anything else I can do to help?"

"No. I'll take it from here."

As soon as Barney finished the call, he pressed a contact for the White House. "Get me, General Schulz," he barked into his electronic device. He heard his CO's gravel-like voice. "Barney Here. We have to meet."

"I'm rushed, so what's it about, Colonel?"

"Abbott Gallagher has regained his memory. There is an AI experiment going on at Unicor, and it's much worse than we thought."

"I'll be back at DARPA at 1 pm. I'll see you then."

Schulz pressed a contact marked HS. He waited for somebody to pick up. He heard a voice. "Jed Kelly. What do you want?"

"General Schulz from DARPA here. Your people run the detention camps, right?"

"What prison camps?"

"Precisely. DARPA is particularly interested in Unicor. I hear there's an AI experiment taking place."

"Where did you hear that, General?"

"From an ex-prisoner. The thing is that we need any data concerning Atlas' performance in the field."

"Who is this detainee?"

"I'm not prepared to divulge the name. What I need is the info on the Unicorn experiment."

"General, I think you'll find FEMA is not subject to DARPA. Different rules apply."

"I see. Well, I need a copy of those standards to know what we are dealing with."

"You don't have a high enough clearance."

Schulz, exasperated, said, "Cut the bull dust Mr Kelly and put me through to whoever purchases our products."

"I'm sorry General I can't help you. Not unless I get authorisation to do so."

"Authorisation from whom?"

"The White House of course."

"Fuck you!" Logan said under his breath. Then he got an idea. Hitting the BC contact, he waited then said, "Get me, Dr Covington."

"Who shall I say?"

"General Schulz from DARPA. Get him for me, now."

"I'm sorry sir, he's not answering. If you would like to leave a contact number, I'll get him ..."

"Don't worry, I call him later." The day was not going well.

Logan Schulz scrutinised Barney's report. He relit his cigar, blew out some smoke. Looking Barney in the eye, he said, "You say this Gallagher was a detainee at Unicorn?"

"Yes, General. At first, he couldn't remember any ..."

"So, how did he escape?"

Barney didn't like where this was going. "Colonel Lynch arranged it."

"What do you mean by arranged?"

Lynch told the camp commander Gallagher was wanted for questioning. "He took a chopper and picked up the prisoner."

"Who was the commanding officer on this little jaunt?"

Barney took a deep breath. "That would be me, sir."

Logan blew a cloud of smoke at Cormack, "So you were in charge of an unauthorised mission using military equipment." He stared at the hapless Colonel. "Well, things are not looking good for you."

"Sir, this isn't about me. It's about robots using brainwashing techniques on humans."

"That's where you're wrong, Colonel. This is very much about you. As you will find out once I have tendered my report about this incident."

Cormack gulped.

Logan demanded, "Who the hell is this camp commander who let his prisoner go, Colonel?"

"Orson Lovett, General, a Captain in HS."

Projeria took a photo of the family dining opposite, with her phone. Then, concentrating on the people in the image she used her psychic powers to pull their life force. She felt a now familiar rush that coursed through her as her mind sucked in the vital energy that had become her addiction. She didn't even know the names of the husband and wife with their two young children. To her they weren't even human. They were just food to keep the entropy effect at bay.

As the family ate their meal, they were oblivious to the effects that had begun to separate their cells by disconnecting their telomeres, triggering the rapid ageing process. Much to the surprise of the family the red rose in the vase on the table was already wilting and the food on the plates became inexplicably inedible. The experiment was a resounding success.

During the 20th Century, due to rampant mistreatment of the physically ill, many hospitals in DC were forced to close after allegations of abuse. Many other businesses hit hard times and got left in disarray with few restored. Mostly they remained forgotten. They were the perfect places for Natasha Guevera to visit. One of these neglected properties, the Forest Haven Asylum, was the venue for her latest exploratory adventure.

Natasha found the mental hospital was easy to reach as long she knew the path through the woods leading to it. After seventy years of service, it was shut down in 1991, when it was closed due to reports of mass neglect and sexual abuse. Natasha's morbid side visualised 20th Century treatment of the mentally disabled. The intense electroshock therapy, brutal force-feeding, pharmaceutical abuse. Then there were the bodies, hundreds piled into a mass grave, all dying from vague 'complications.'

The premises were guarded 24/7 by federal police, but the sprawling 200-acre compound offered endless nooks and crannies to be explored. Natasha had to sneak past security, which was why she entered via the woods. Only Natasha knew why she had taken such a risk. In that labyrinth of corridors and wards. She reached into her backpack and withdrew a ground plan blueprint of the building complex. The Guatemalan was in the small area outlined in red. Now she had to find Alden Colthorpe.

How Natasha came to know of him was through social media. She thought it pure chance that she had come across him online. But it was not so for Colthorpe. He had planned it that way. His source had told him the person tailing Projeria was an English lord called Daniel Lynsey. Why would an English noble be following her trail?

Alden checked Facebook to see if Lord Lynsey had a page on social media. He did. And a couple of images showed him and Natasha Guevera together. He had already heard of Natasha, and he checked on her Facebook page and discovered she was in a group interested in abandoned buildings. Alden 'liked' her post and said he just loved exploring old places and he would like to meet her in the derelict Forest Haven Asylum.

There was no welcome sign at Forest Haven. And it was no haven. In fact, it was one of the most deadly institutions in the United States. Alden felt very uncomfortable in the disused asylum. But he had to beam enthusiasm and excitement when he met Natasha. Alden had done his homework. The beautiful Guatemalan woman had also revealed on her FB page that she was concerned with the perceived human population problem. Alden grinned, thinking Diabolus was of the same view. Then he saw her. Approaching, he said "Hello. Are you Natasha?"

She looked at the weak looking man. He was definitely not her type. "Yes, and you must be Aiden Kelly. Isn't this place just incredible," she extolled, breathlessly.

"It is quite impressive."

"They hid it away from the city centre. When it was built, in 1925, the campus was beautiful, But soon the city's budget got hit by the great depression and treatment here rapidly deteriorated as the public purse strings tightened further. Under staffing issues were common, and for decades reports of resident abuse and neglect went ignored."

"You've certainly done your homework, Natasha."

"I always research the history first. That way I can appreciate the building's story so much better."

Aiden, the name he had chosen for the rendezvous, had to get the conversation on target. Getting the young woman's attention, he said, "Is your friend also an enthusiast?"

She stared at him. "What friend?"

"The Englishman you are pictured with on FB."

Natasha stared at him. "Why do you want to know about him?"

Aiden said. "I want to meet up with him."

"Why?"

"We share a common interest."

"Which is? She asked defensively.

He said one word, "Progeria."

She wore a puzzled frown.

He gave her a contact number. "Get him to ring me."

"Unsure of Aiden's motives, she smiled weakly. "Let's explore some other rooms."

http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sociopolitica/esp_sociopol_FEMA24.htm

<https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/washington-dc/articles/the-creepiest-abandoned-places-to-explore-around-washington-dc/>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eB1i_PKsXL4

Chapter 19

The Public Voice

Flint McCarthy, in response to comments made by the Deputy Attorney General of California, said, "Martha Fetch's words fuel a mindset of fear and insecurity. Flint, a guest on the 'Public Affairs' programme, reported, "The Californian Deputy AG Fetch, at a Cable Splicer Three Civil Emergency Management Course, proclaimed anyone who attacked the State, even verbally, became a revolutionary and an enemy by definition. Attacking the state even included attacking any form of 'sensitive' artificial intelligence, especially those used by the police and security services. Fetch said such citizens are America's enemies and must be destroyed. This program," McCarthy pointed out,

“was taught in almost every state west of the Mississippi River and included as participants local active military, reserve military and civilian police.”

Avril Peckham, the show's host and interviewer, countered, "Surely Martha Fletch is just voicing what a lot of Americans are thinking. The recent increase in street protests, many of which escalate into violent riots has to be dealt with swiftly and decisively."

Flint replied, "Avril, you're putting the cart before the horse. These protests occur because the public's civil rights are taken away. A civil action is the only channel left for the citizenry. This move to a full-blown martial law is a continuous, common law enforcement-military liaison effort and a continuation of coordination established last year before the riots took place. Constitutional civil rights have been deliberately dismantled to pressure Americans to take a stand. Then Fetch's 'enemies' are out in the open and become fair game for the National Guard, including LEAF, Law Enforcement Assistance Force. For those of you who are unaware of LEAF, it is a specially trained and outfitted Military Police Unit, whose members serve as shock-troops in the state's war against political protesters and demonstrators."

"Flint, you accuse Martha Fetch of inducing fear in the community, yet your opinions can have the very same result."

"Avril, I saw a full-dress exhibition of what the California National Guard has planned for the next American revolution. They have their own armed helicopters, SWAT teams, civilian-military policemen in jackboots and helmets, twelve-gauge shotguns,.38 and.45 calibre pistols, radios, walkie-talkies, and electrically-controlled intelligence centres wired for instant communications with any police force in the state. LEAF has 1000 members all of whom are battle ready to handle different law enforcement problems such as mass civil disobedience, protest demonstrations and riots. In other words, breaking heads and taking names."

Flint, we live in dangerous, unpredictable times. Maybe forces such as LEAF, although perhaps undesirable, are becoming increasingly necessary."

Olemic Solberg, looked out of the Storting Chambers windows, to see the life of Oslo unfolding before him. There was a sharp chill in the air, with prospects of snow later in the day. Looking down on Karl Johans Gate he could see hundreds of locals and tourists rugged up against the bitterly cold day outside. Olemic Solberg, the current President of Norway, owing to his elevated status, also took on the role of Chair for the Praesidium. A gathering of the five Vice Presidents to discuss such issues as planning the order of parliamentary business; maintaining constitutional rules in all matters; and safeguarding legal principle between government and the national assembly.

Apart from the role they played in the Praesidium each of the members present had ministerial posts such as Business and Trade; Education Research and Church Affairs; Health and care; and Justice, among others. In short, they were the key politicians who ensured the smooth running of the northern nation. Without them, Norway's democratic system would collapse.

As the six took their seats, none of them noticed the extra security camera positioned to frame all six members. Getting it installed had been tricky for Alden to arrange. But a chat with one of the Storting maintenance crew after he had sunk a few lagers in the Scandic Victoria Oslo bar and the passing of a paper bag containing two hundred thousand Krone, got the job done.

Hans Syversen had no idea why the weasely little man had kept him topped up with lager. He was suspicious but couldn't pass up the windfall in the paper bag with the promise of another two hundred thousand Krone when the job was done.

Dressed in work person overalls and carrying tool boxes, The pair of bogus tradespeople entered the office next to the presidential Chamber, which was currently occupied by the Praesidium. Once inside, Colthorpe locked the door while Projeria set up her laptop.

She connected the trailing USB lead from the new camera next door and to her notebook. She didn't understand the Norwegian language, so she put the sound on mute. She only needed visuals for what she had to do. Looking at the six politicians she smiled as she concentrated on their images. Feeling that familiar rush Projeria knew her plan was working. Colthorpe checked his watch. The ten minutes the pair had allocated for the operation was nearly up.

Alden indicated for them to leave. Projeria was enjoying the best energy buzz yet as the politician's life force coursed through her body. She went to safety eject and disconnected her computer.

Daniel swirled the scotch around in the glass. Then he clinked glasses with Matthew Snelling who sat opposite him in his study. The Minister said, How do we know it's the same person?"

"Look at the aliases. Dr Dee Stroia and Dr Kay Ottick. She's having a laugh at our expense."

"Okay, assuming it is the same woman, what is she actually doing?"

"What is she doing, Matthew! She interviewed prisoners at the San Pedro prison in Bolivia, under the pretence of carrying out research for the University Hospital. Shortly afterwards some of the men she questioned developed symptoms of rapid ageing.

In India, in Andra Pradesh, as a statistician, she kept records of test subjects gleaned from low-income tribal families. Many of those tested soon developed this ageing sickness. Are you going to tell me it's a coincidence?"

"But how does she affect people that way?" Matthew asked, perplexed.

Daniel shrugged slightly. "I don't know. But whatever she is doing fits well with the Diabolus agenda. I think she has to be our next target."

Matthew threw up his hands in frustration. "So why the hell is she so difficult to find."

Daniel sipped his single malt, then smiled. "Just today I got a phone call from an Aiden Kelly. He claimed to know about Progeria. But not the ageing disease, a woman called Projeria. He wants us to meet."

"It could be a Diabolus trap."

"It's always a possibility, Matthew. But I'm intrigued as to who this Aiden Kelly is and how he knows I'm interested in finding this woman."

Matthew rose from his comfortable armchair. "Follow it up and let me know as soon as you have something useful."

The morning news was startling! Norwegians nearly choked on their breakfasts as they heard that six of the key people in government, including Olemic Solberg, the President, were sick. Details were sketchy at best, but nothing like this had ever happened before, to any government around the world!

The NIS (Norwegian Intelligence Service) carried out bedside interviews in the homes of the politicians. None could offer any clues, but the agents involved were shocked by the appearance of the invalids. They looked as though they had aged ten years overnight.

General Morten Grandhaven, the head of NIS, sat scratching his thinning pate. "Is it an act of terrorism?" He asked Colonel Johann Lunde, his second in command."

"If it is, I have no idea how it was perpetrated. All six men were perfectly okay yesterday. Then, after their Praesidium meeting, they became sick and went home."

"Something must have happened to them at the meeting."

"What, General?"

"I don't know."

Johann spread his hands in a gesture of hopelessness. "Nobody else was in the chamber."

"Colonel, find out what happened before all hell breaks loose!"

Ulysses Covington didn't know exactly when it happened, but he began to wonder if Transhumanism was such a good thing after all. It could have been after the Marx Metallica episode. It may have been after the late Milne Amwon's pronouncement that Neurotech could control its CCPUs from its nerve centre from anywhere around the globe.

But perhaps most disturbing of all was the realisation robots could be used for mind control. The instructions from DARPA didn't exactly put it that way, but that's what it amounted to. General Schulz wanted Boston Cybertronics to work with behavioural scientists at Langley.

The idea of cop robots was, for Ulysses, very appealing at first, but not if they could be controlled by Neurotech's private army. He didn't know who to turn to. Then Ulysses got had an idea and phoned Dr John Prince.

Since leaving Boston Cybertronics, Dr Prince, in retirement mode, had sold up in Washington and was now living in Altoona, with his wife, Gail. The city was famous for, among other attractions, its Reighard's Gas station, said to be the oldest in the USA.

John was in his patch of dirt out back planting some cabbages when Gail came to the door with the cordless phone in her hand. Seeing her arm extend towards him John figured the call was for him. Taking the device from his wife, John said, "Who's speaking?"

"Ulysses, John. How are you?"

Prince, hearing Dr Covington, snapped, "What the hell do you want?"

"I know you have every reason to be angry at me, but I need to discuss something important with you."

"About what?"

"I think the remarks you made at the conference were correct."

John, still in a sour mood, responded, "Yes, well it doesn't matter now."

"What do you mean?"

"I grow cabbages and watch daytime TV."

"John, did you know that our robots are used to brainwash prisoners in concentration camps?"

John, becoming exasperated snapped, "I don't deal with that shit now. It's much healthier for Gail and me that way."

"Have you been threatened by anyone?"

John laughed, "Of course! That's how the bastards intimidate people who stand in the way of robotic progress, isn't it?"

Ulysses pressed. "Look, I just need to run something by you. Can we meet somewhere privately?"

"You had me fired from my job at BC, and now you expect me to put my neck on the line to help you. Well, it's not going to happen."

"John, I'm concerned about Neurotech. They're working directly with DARPA to mind condition humans using robots."

"What do you expect me to do about it?"

"I really am concerned. Can't we just meet and discuss it. If you agree with my findings, I'm prepared to go public with this."

John laughed, "So you want a bullet with your name on it. I'll give you a bit of free advice. Leave it alone. The die has been cast. Robots will take over, and there is nothing you or I can do about it."

"Yes, but if they are controlled by human greed, they will just be a tool for the New World Order."

"Don't you get it. Ulysses? They are the New World Order."

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=823651434438429&id=298958880241023&substory_index=0

Chapter 20

The Public Voice:

Flint McCarthy, a lone voice for human rights - especially since ATL was out of the public eye – confronted Ross Charles in an aired debate on 'The Panel' TV show. Ross Charles, a former LEAF administrator publicly stated that "Local law enforcement has failed and needs to be replaced by a national police force."

Flint had taken umbrage and asked for a right of reply on behalf of the American citizens. TV bosses seeing high ratings had both men as guests on the show.

Flint argued, "This is another step towards martial law. Funding to local law enforcement agencies has been wilfully cut over the last ten years to make it impossible for local police departments to work efficiently. Then the powers that be use that as an excuse to turn this nation into a police state."

"Utter nonsense," Ross spat. "There is nothing to fear from a national police force. Make no mistake home grown terrorists are increasing with many militia groups springing up all over the nation. Our 40,000 police personnel are not sacred and need to become part of the one to be useful in this new type of crime."

Flint rebutted, "As usual Ross puts the cart before the horse. Militias are forming because the Administration has watered down the Bill of Rights to such an extent that people are really hurting and they see no option other than defend themselves and their families."

"Mr McCarthy can argue all he likes but the truth of the matter is that if we go on the as we are, terrorist crime will invade us and the national police will take over."

The host Dean Markolious said, "What happens to currently serving police officers who do not want to become part of your national force?"

"For the police officers who do not cooperate and still want to be policemen, there is the program of Contemporary Research, Inc., an organisation of psychologists, sociologists, education specialists and economic experts, who work toward a solution of many of today's social problems."

Flint came in. "The caring police force! What a joke! What Ross hasn't mentioned is that this same organisation develops functional computer programming for the new worldwide military command and control system, as well as computer based systems for law enforcement agencies at all levels of government.

As this requires specialised training most of the human cops will be will be tossed out with the trash." Turning to Ross Charles, Flint asked, "How much of this super efficient national police force is going to be robotic?"

"We don't know percentages at present, but it makes sense to use artificial intelligence where it is best suited."

"I have it on good authority that LEAF is looking towards increasing its percentage of robocops to 25 per cent of personnel. LEAF is already receiving over a billion dollars a year in funding. Yet there is nothing in the kitty to help local law enforcement become more efficient. This whole national police force business is very troubling, but the scariest aspect is that LEAF isn't geared to fighting crime; it's equipped to develop a system to take over the United States with the assistance of the Department of Defence."

Ross Charles went red in the face. He could not speak to that statement.

"So this is your country seat," Natasha said, much impressed.

"For my sins, I sometimes think," Daniel said driving the Mercedes Coupe a little too fast on the gravelled driveway.

Wendell greeted his Lordship and friend, saying, "Shall I organise some light refreshment for you, my Lord.

Natasha stifled a chuckle, turning it into a little cough.

Daniel said, "Yes coffee and dainties, in the sun lounge if you please." Then he added. "Tell Lady Lynsey we have arrived."

The sun lounge wasn't sunny with Autumn morphing into winter. But the large windows gave an excellent view of the well-tended flowerbeds and finely manicured hedges, some cut in the shape of birds and other animals.

Millie one of the house maids carried a full French press of coffee and fresh Danish pastries to the table, then took her leave. Natasha filled her bone china mug, added milk, and took a long sip.

Daniel said, by way of explanation, "I didn't just inherit this estate after the death of my father. I had to take on the responsibilities that go with it. What with my banking business and other things that take up a lot of my time, I'm hardly ever here."

She smiled at him, then sipped her coffee.

Daniel reached for a pastry. "I've been checking on your Aiden Kelly."

"He not mine. He gives me the creeps."

"Why did you go and see him then?"

"Our mutual interest in abandoned buildings."

Daniel indicated around him. "This one might join them in a couple of generations."

"I think I'll be too old to appreciate it then," she grinned.

"Seriously though what was he like?"

Natasha sighed and pushed her hair back from her face. "To tell you the truth I don't think he was that interested in the sanatorium. He was more interested in you."

"Oh!"

"Yes, he got talking about a human cull to keep the cream of the species going. He thought it was something about which you and he could share ideas.

Daniel stirred and sipped his coffee. "So that's why he phoned me for a meet."

"He did! You never told me that." She added, "You're not going to meet him, are you?"

Daniel smiled. "I think I might just do that."

Natasha cast a stern glance in his direction.

Just then Margaret entered the lounge.

Daniel rose and introduced Natasha.

Lady Lynsey nee Daintree appraised the beautiful young Guatemalan woman. "Welcome to Lynsey Hall."

"Thank you, your Ladyship," Natasha returned.

Daniel's mother changed the subject. Turning to Daniel, she said "When you've got a minute we need to go over a few things."

"Certainly mother. But first I want to take Natasha on a tour of the grounds."

An hour later, the lovers reached the end of the well-nurtured garden and entered naturally kept woodland. Taking a long drink from a now half-empty water bottle, Nat eyed up Daniel. The day had become unseasonably warm, hot even. Natasha said, "Dan, I don't know how you're not too hot wearing those thick jeans. It's baking, today."

"Needs must if I don't want to go bright red, Nat."

"Oh, I forgot about your English Rose skin." Grinning, Nat pulled sun cream from her pack and waved it gently at him. "I've got this if you need it."

"Yes, thanks, but I need you to apply it to my back and neck. And I know how good you are with your hands."

The denuded woodland trees did little in the way of providing shade. Nat said, "I'm getting too warm, and I wondered if you'd like to play a game?"

Daniel laughed, eyeing her speculatively. "What game do you have in mind?"

"Well...if I'm taking my clothes off to cool down, I figure you're getting a bit of an eyeful. Which hardly seems fair," Nat grinned, tongue not quite literally in cheek. "So I thought...how about you pay for me to take things off by answering questions?"

"Sort of truth or dare," snickered Dan but with me doing 'truth', and you the 'daring'."

"Yeah, exactly. Though, you know, if you don't want to answer, you could...always take something off instead?" Nat clarified, smiling winningly.

Daniel chuckled.

Nat grinned, Okay, first question: Where's the oddest place you've had sex?"

Danny laughed softly, "Setting out as you mean to go on, then. Err...ages ago, in the projection booth of a cinema."

Nat practically hooted with laughter. "You've never mentioned that!"

"Well, you've not asked. And it was a while ago when I worked in a cinema during one summer."

"Mine's the uni library, I think," Nat volunteered. As I recall it was in the medieval French literature section."

"Weren't you worried about getting caught?"

"Not really. It wasn't exactly the most popular section."

She unbuttoned her light green blouse, and pulled it over her head, revealing a darker green sports bra. She winked at Danny. "Can I put this in your pack, lover?"

Nat let a couple of hundred metres go by, then said, "Still hot Danny. Here's the next question: How often do you masturbate?" she asked with a wicked grin.

Danny smirked at her. "Never, if you're on hand. No need! You want to be screwed so often."

Nat stuck her tongue out at him, "You're not complaining, are you?" she smiled.

"Like hell," he laughed back. Then he said "What's your favourite toy."

"Probably the rabbit. I've had one for years. It's very reliable – gets me off every time."

Natasha unbuttoned her tight shorts, and, wriggling her hips, tugged them down to reveal tight dark green boy shorts.

"Mmm," murmured Daniel. "I haven't seen them before."

Nat did a little whirl, flaunting her flexible body, "I'm glad you like them," she grinned back at him as she walked off, swinging her hips just a little more than normal.

Only a few minutes had passed when Mel threw out her next question. "Which do you prefer, then: mouth, arse, or pussy?" she asked with a lascivious smile.

"Jesus, Nat. you're getting me turned on. While I love a blow job, 'I'd really love to have a shag right now."

"Top or bottom?" Nat asked, grinning widely.

"Bottom," Dan said, quickly.

Natasha tugged down her boy shorts, revealing her surprise, a low cut thong which fell below most of her hairless mound.

Gotcha," she beamed and walked off.

Daniel laughed, then started off after her.

Turning round to walk backwards, Nat threw out her next challenge.

"Most embarrassing shag you've had," she called.

"Can't think of one," Dan responded, quickly pulling his shirt off, tucking it into his pack. Daniel looked lustily at his now topless girlfriend.

"Fine. Which do you prefer, on top, or underneath?"

"Missionary," Danny said."

"Last one," Natasha said, "then I'm going to need that sun cream. How often do you fake coming?"

Dan sniggered, "Rarely; I have when it's been useless, though, and I want to get it over with."

"Good boy," said Natasha, "No choices this time!" With that, she turned her back on him, and hitched her tiny thong downwards, bending right forwards to take it over her incongruous walking boots.

Mesmerised, Daniel watched as she revealed herself to his lusty gaze. As Nat stood back up and sauntered on, Daniel collected up her discarded knickers with a soft laugh and got out the sun-cream.

"Love, time for your sun-cream, I think," he smirked.

Natasha stopped, grinned back, and taking up a ballet pose pulled one leg straight up in the air, blatantly displaying her sex. "Come on, then. Put your money where your mouth resides."

Danny squirted a good handful and rubbed it in around his neck and shoulders, grinning as he approached the sexy dusky skinned girl. He was already rock-hard, and long wanted to have wild sex deep in the woods.

Wasting no time, he placed his lubricated hand straight on her vagina, steadying her with his other hand her leg resting up against his chest. She grinned up at him and gasped as two thick fingers pushed straight into her wetness.

"Oh!"

"What? This bit of you could burn," he mocked, as he slowly manipulated her sex with his fingers. Doing her bit, Natasha thrust a hand under his waistband and began stroking his sizeable erection. and sought his balls, stroking them gently as her wrist knocked against his penis.

Nat's shuddering built to a crescendo as her moans became a primal scream. As she came, bucking onto his hand. Daniel slowed down, then gently pulled his fingers from between her legs. Dispensing more sunscreen, he slowly, softly, sensuously spread it over her blushing breasts.

Breathing slowly, Natasha cooed, "That was a very generous portion, thank you."

Harvey Hamlin seldom ventured into the work areas of Boston Cybertronics. He spent the majority of his time in the penthouse suite atop the massive company. If people wanted to see him, they came to his domain, seldom the other way around. Many staff members put his strange managerial behaviour down to shyness or his wish to remain a recluse.

But it was none of those things. Lynne Becker had worked it out and paid for it with her life. The truth of the matter is the Harvey Hamlin, CEO of Boston Cybertronics, was an android, all-be-it a very sophisticated one. One of the few people who knew this was Elijah Brooks with the thousand dollar smile and Armani suits to match.

Elijah, the new CEO of Neurotech, was in the middle of a crucial and completely private meeting. Harvey, being a robot, never partook of drugs like tobacco, caffeine or alcohol. He sat up straight,

eyeing up his opponent. Making his move, he said, "All things considered, Elijah, we think it best that we take over Neurotech."

"The last time we discussed a merger you agreed it was best if we were the dominant partner."

"I am but one voice. The board mostly disagreed with that option."

Elijah said, "The BC board of directors are of little consequence." Nudging Harvey, Elijah said, "You and I both know how this is going to happen. Neurotech will absorb BC into its fold, handle all outstanding debts and cut the company down to size."

Harvey shook his head. "It's not that simple. The board has to believe we are treating it somewhat seriously. It has to think it's vote means something."

Being an Android, Harvey was smart and very intelligent, but he was not devious. Robots were straight in their dealings with humans. They had no concept of lying or being deceitful.

Harvey said, "We could lose the vote."

Elijah had no qualms about using trickery. "We will lose the election. Then David T Rottafeller and the other principal shareholders will come in with a hostile bid and override the board. Then Neurotech will take over."

Harvey looked Elijah in the eye. "So you will manipulate those that vote against us?"

Elijah Brooks hooted, "That's how Neurotech got itself where it is today."

Abbott Gallagher needed to find out about Helen Cleaver. He spoke to Colonel Lynch about it. Lynch said, "What do you expect me to do about it. HS is wise to us now so we can't pull off the same stunt a second time."

"I just want to know where she is and if she's okay. Surely you can find out those details, Colonel."

"I'm a retired officer, Abbott. I don't have that sort of clout."

"Okay, so who does?"

"Jesus man, I don't know. General Schulz, maybe."

"Do you have a contact for him?"

"Abbott, you don't just ring up someone like Schulz. He is a member of the Joint Chiefs in the Pentagon. He doesn't deal with personal requests about prisoners in detention camps."

The Aussie frowned, "I promised I would look after Helen and I've badly let her down."

Raf shrugged, "Sorry, but I can't help you."

"Jesus. She's a paraplegic."

"There's still nothing I can do."

"Right, I'll go to the media."

"What good will that do. Homeland Security. If they bother to comment, will use plausible denial saying the so-called camps are merely military installations. If you continue to go on with your conspiracy theory, they will have you institutionalised. My advice to you is to go home and forget about this."

Abbott, exasperated, slumped in his seat. "I was there. The camp was run by fucking robots!" He stopped. Looking at Raf, the journalist said, "Thanks, Colonel. I think I know what to do."

The Colonel stared at him. "I hope you're not going to do anything stupid."

http://www.greatdreams.com/concentration_camp_plans.htm

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/government-files-suit-against-missouri-neurosurgeon-and-medical-device-supplier-violations>

Chapter 21

The Public Voice:

Flint McCarthy announced, "In the disturbing news this week Anson Murphy, a LEAA insider revealed that the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration is using psycho-surgery in its fight against crime. The whistleblower claims that the LEAA used robots to get resisters to cooperate with their programmes." Quoting Mr Murphy, Flint McCarthy said, "Dissidents are merely operated on so that they become as cooperative as an adding machine." He added, "The LEAA also supports drug research for the same purpose, using neurological sources violence. For example, if a law were passed whereby private ownership of firearms was deemed illegal, anyone resisting this ruling will find themselves in a programme for non-cooperatives."

On the 'Voice' cable TV show, Flint explained, "The LEAA's management, at State level, operates from the Office of Criminal Justice Planning of the Governor's Office." Looking at Sophia Ryan, the interviewer, Flint said, "What the LEAA says, goes. There is no trial, and you have no right of appeal. You will be sent to one of 800 detention camps in America, where you may well be controlled by robots and used as a slave."

"You paint a bleak picture, Flint. So how do you know this is true?"

Flint produced a few printed pages stapled together. Sophia took the document. "What's this, Flint?"

"What you have there is the May 1995 newsletter, which describes the function of one of its organisations: the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice System. This agency funds the United Nations Clearing-house, a branch of the LEAA, in Rome, Italy."

"What does this department do?"

"Its core function is that of exchanging Criminal Justice System information with the Soviet Union. And it's all funded by good old American tax dollars. The code names for this projects are 'Garden Plot' and 'Cable Splicer'."

"Tell me more about these projects."

"Garden Plot is about population control and 'Cable Splicer' is about taking over the state in an orderly fashion by the federal government."

"In other words, martial law."

"Sophia, we are already under martial law. It's just that the good old folks don't realise it yet."

One of the shows many viewers, Abbott Gallagher, listened intently to what Flint McCarthy had to say. He searched online for Flint's Website 'American Truth'. It had an email address, and Abbott sent him a message.

"I'd better not go back to your home naked," Natasha giggled. "So I need to put at least something back on. Danny, can I have my shirt and knickers, please?"

With Nat dressed the lovers returned to the Hall. As they entered Daniel whispered, "My turn later."

Wendell informed Daniel that Lady Margaret had gone to a Women's Institute meeting and would not be back for dinner. He then said, "many events are coming up on the calendar, my Lord. Perhaps we can discuss them when you have a moment."

Daniel turned to Natasha. "Duty calls so excuse me for a few minutes while I speak with Wendell."

"Don't desert me for too long."

Wendell showed Daniel to a room where they could speak in private. The Butler closed the door then said. "Matthew Snelling has been trying to get you. He wants you to contact him immediately."

"Did he say what it is about?"

"No my Lord."

"Was there anything else on the calendar?"

"Yes, my Lord, the pheasant shoot, on the twenty-third of next month. Will you be hosting, my Lord?"

"I don't know at this stage. I will let you know."

"And there's the Whit Sunday Fete. Will we be hosting it on your grounds again this year?"

"I don't see why not. Besides, it's good for the restaurant's business."

"Very well, my Lord."

Wendell left, and Daniel rang Matthew. He heard the MP's public school voice. "Daniel here. It appears you have been trying to reach me."

"Indeed, old man. That business in Norway has got everyone in the House jumping."

"Any idea as to what caused the illness?"

"If the Norwegians know anything they are keeping tightly lipped. We need you to go there and rattle a few cages."

"As it happens I'm following up a lead. If I'm correct in what I think there's a pattern forming."

"What pattern?"

"Can't tell you till I'm sure I'm on the right track."

"I think I should come to the hall and see you tomorrow."

"Sorry. Tomorrow's no good. And I won't have anything solid to report until I've spoken with a source."

"Damn it, Daniel, why do you have to be so mysterious?"

With the east wing to themselves, Daniel And Natasha could give vent to their sexual passions undisturbed. Dan's mother had returned early, so the three of them had dinner together. Margaret wanted to know all about Natasha. Then came out the inevitable family photo album. After imbibing three glasses of wine and a porter nightcap Daniel and Natasha said their good nights and headed off to their love nest.

As soon as he kicked the bedroom door shut. Daniel lifted Tash up and pushed her back on the huge four-poster bed. They kissed, and at that moment Daniel felt very grateful to have found such a compatible partner for their erotic adventures. He fondled her breasts, teasing and licking them.

He moved his hand gently across her stomach, his fingers reaching for her wetness. Daniel wanted to make this wonderfully exotic woman his. He stroked her clitoris while nibbling on her right earlobe. Tash used her hand to take control. Dan slid off the edge of the bed, dragging her to the edge, so he could use his tongue between her legs. She let out a loud moan, saying, "You'd better fuck me now."

Daniel obliged, slowly penetrating her. He paused to luxuriate in the euphoric feeling.

She pleaded, "Don't stop, do what you want with my body, I'm yours."

Later, while inhaling the smoke from a post-coital cigarette, Daniel looked at Tash. "I have to meet our Mr Aiden Kelly tomorrow. I want you to stay here while I've gone."

"It would be better if I came with you, Danny. After all, I have already met him."

"No, this is something I have to do alone, he said sharply. Then he softened, "I won't be long, and I'll do whatever you want when I get back."

Daniel Lynsey met with Aiden Kelly on Cambridge's famous 'Mathematical Bridge' The young Lord thought it an odd place to meet. But, as he had never ventured onto the quirky, unique and mathematically sophisticated bridge before, Daniel agreed to the arrangement.

Aiden Kelly was just as Natasha described him, a weasely specimen of a man. But he turned out to be very smart with both his intelligence and attire. Having gone through the brief greeting ritual, Daniel said, "What have you got for me?"

Aiden, ignoring the question, said, "Did you know that William Etheridge used tangent and radial trussing, an elaborate design featuring an efficient structural use of timber when designing this bridge?"

"No," Daniel answered, only mildly interested.

Waxing on about the odd structure, Aiden stated, "There's a good view of this bridge when you look at it from the Silver Street Bridge."

Daniel turned to the smaller man. "Fascinating Mr Kelly, but not the reason I am here."

He smiled thinly. "Of course, but let's talk over at the 'Anchor'. It's nearby."

Daniel agreed, and they sat drinking cask beer in a picnic area on the bank of the Cam, only a stone's throw from the world famous Queens' College. "I'll ask you again, why am I here?"

Aiden said, "What's your view on the population crisis?"

Taken aback, the young Lord responded, "Is there one?"

"Oh, indeed there is, Mr Lynsey. The world is far too crowded with people, especially those who take more than they give."

Daniel swigged his beer. "And you have a solution, I suppose."

Colthorpe sneered, "I'm with an organisation that does – yes."

"And which group are we talking about?" Daniel asked, playing along."

"That's confidential until we know you can be trusted."

Another swig of beer and Lynsey said, "Over the phone, you said there was a woman I need to meet. Let's talk about her."

"Indeed. But first I have to determine your veracity."

Daniel, bemused, said, "And how do you propose to do that?"

"How was your visit to the San Pedro Prison. It's a crazy place isn't it?"

So, the hunter was being hunted. "Let's not play games, Mr Kelly. I already know of this mystery woman. I followed this her to Andhra Pradesh, where some young Indian girls were struck down with a strange malady. Now we have that difficult business in Oslo. I'm betting that our mystery lady was in Norway at the time."

Alden chuckled, "I can see I'm dealing with a smart man."

"Smart enough to know you are using an alias. So who are you?"

"That would be telling." Alden got up from the wooden table. "I will contact you if this woman wants to meet you."

Daniel rose, "This lady had better have something useful to say about why people she has been in contact with tend to die of a mystery ageing disease."

Flint McCarthy, Abbott found out, was the Principal of McCarthy, Leizer and Goldsmith, situated in bustling Wisconsin Avenue, North Washington. A receptionist showed Abbott through to Flint's office, a large panelled room decorated with the civil lawyer's certificates and awards.

A photograph showed Flint receiving his BA from the University of Michigan. Mounted certificates showed his bonafides to practice law in DC and his admission to serving in the United States Supreme Court.

Flint, a big man, extend his bear paw-sized hand. "Pleased to meet you, Mr Gallagher. Now, how can I help you?"

"Mr McCarthy, from your reports it seems you are concerned about our civil rights getting whittled down."

Flint nodded, "America is no longer the land of The brave and the free. It has become a nation driven by fear and constraint. And that deeply concerns me."

"Well, a good friend of mine is incarcerated in one of America's concentration camp and ..."

"Okay young man, tell me from the beginning."

After Abbott had recited his experience, Flint looked at him wide-eyed. "There really were robots running the show?"

"They weren't just running the prison at Unicor. They used mind programming to get any prisoners who questioned them to become docile. They did something to me, and I forgot what had gone on in camp. Later my memory came back, and I realised Helen was still in prison. And nobody cares about it."

"An extraordinary story, Abbott."

"Yes, but I can't find out where she is."

Flint leant forwards. "If I help you would you be willing to tell your story on television?"

Abbott scratched his head. "Only if we can do it by satellite once I'm back in Australia."

Flint nodded, "Leave it with me."

The Diabolus credo, if it had one, would probably be accelerating entropy will eventually kill everything in the universe, so why not simply speed up the process? For Projeria it was different. She was trying to slow down the entropic process, at least where she was concerned.

In this sense, she did not fit in with the Diabolus Sect. But the current Mage saw her as a useful asset for the Diabolus cause - that of complete destruction. He thought Projeria was somewhat misguided, but as long as she was useful, the Sect would protect her.

Projeria needed another alias for the next part of her plan. Alden had told her about the English Lord looking for her. It made her feel uncomfortable but also intrigued. The politician's demise in Oslo also acted as a trap. Whoever was looking for her would not be able to resist following up her latest success. Besides, she believed in the old adage, 'Keep your friends close and your enemies even closer'.

Back at Lynsey Hall, Daniel had to face a very peeved Natasha. "Have you decided where you would like to go this evening?"

She was dressed casually and seemed settled sitting by the open fire, with a book. "How did it go then?" she said without looking at Danny.

"His name is not Aiden Kelly."

"Oh!"

"My people worked on the photo of him I sent to them."

"your people!" Who are they?"

He silently chastised himself. He had to be careful, even around Natasha, especially around Nat, for her safety sake. "My bank people. We're always checking up on potential clients."

"So, who is he?" the beautiful Guatemalan woman asked, with piqued curiosity.

"His name is Alden Colthorpe."

"If he's using a false name he must be trying to hide something."

"Precisely, and I intend to find out what it is."

"Oh, so you're going to leave me again."

"I'm afraid so, but not until after the weekend."

https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g186225-d6360321-r484876788-Mathematical_Bridge-Cambridge_Cambridgeshire_England.html

Chapter 22

The Public Voice

"The Army has over 350 separate record centres containing substantial information on civilian political activities," Flint McCarthy stated on the 'Morning Show' with Leona Clarke.

"Why are you concerned about this, Flint."

"Because virtually every major army unit has its own set aside from this. The Fifth Army of San Antonio, for example, has over 100,000 files of its own."

"But Flint, this isn't anything new. We've traded our privacy for national security."

"Don't you see, the people had nothing to do with it. It was planned to happen, and American citizens are happier to accommodate Uncle Sam if they think they have a part in the decision-making." He paused for water. "Getting back to my point, Leona, the overall operation command post is a private room at the Pentagon. There are 25 million report cards on individuals and 760,000 on organisations held by the Defence Central Index of investigations alone. And this information includes political, sociological, economic and psychological profiles."

Leona knew McCarthy's reputation, and she continued baiting him. "If it is, as you suggest, a 'fait accompli' what are you trying to achieve?"

"To put it crudely, we are in the crap, but we are taught to believe we're in a bed of roses. Since 1970 local county and state police forces all over the country have undertaken crash programs to install various kinds of computerised information systems. A significant portion of this is being paid for by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Beginning in 1970, Congress and the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the destruction of all these data banks, but they were not destroyed."

"If that's true, where are they?"

"The outlawed collection is held at Mt Weathey, Clark County, West Virginia and similar Pentagon facilities designed as adjuncts to the president's emergency powers under the Executive Orders."

Leona frowned, "I still can't why it's a problem. Surely it's only troubling to lawbreakers."

"And what happens when you unknowingly break the law because they changed it without telling you?"

"Who is this 'they' you refer to, Flint?"

"A cadre of specialised persons to enforce this plan, in the US Army Reserves Military Police POW Command at Livonia, Michigan."

Rodney MacKay held back on his quantum computer research for fear of being hacked. Instead, he split his time between Gate maintenance and copying an old manuscript. He was engaged in the latter when a knock on his door interrupted his concentration.

Dr Gibson entered holding a document, her face beaming. "Great news! The Joint Chiefs have given the go-ahead for the Atlanteans to have five Atlas mark ones in exchange for ZPE data."

"Whoopee. So I get to go back to that damned island."

"Cheer up, Rodney. It'll be your last trip. It will be anybody's last trip to Atlantis."

"Aye but I'd rather not be going there again."

"Only you can understand what Goman Worrall is on about."

Rodney looked about him. "Where's the wee metal men then?"

They'll be sent through as soon as you have possession of what we want."

"I think they'll want to see what they are getting."

"General Schulz is calling the shots and what he says goes."

"Is that so? Well, fuck him. I've had enough of the Atlantean justice system. If things don't go their way, it's me who get puts in gaol, not General Schulz. So we do things my way, or the deal is off, Dr Gibson. Tell him that from me."

Dorian knew once the crusty old Scot dug his heels in there was no shifting him from his point of view. The problem was that the old General was just as intransigent. Dorian sighed heavily and pressed Schulz's number on her phone.

Ulysses received the memo along with all the other directors. It came from the CEO. And was signed at the bottom in elegant handwriting. There was to be an extraordinary meeting of the board. There was only one item on the agenda. A proposal that Boston Cybertronics merge with Neurotech.

Ulysses sat staring at the document in utter disbelief. There had been no mention of any such project until that time. Surely the directors and other shareholders wouldn't go for it! But there was no telling with some people, especially if Neurotech offered generous remuneration packages.

But if the company ran true to form it would use the parts of the business that suited its agenda and cast off the rest, massively downsizing its workforce. "The question was, why Harvey would even contemplate such a move?" Ulysses asked Inna Solovyov, the managing director of research and innovation, as they had lunch together in the company's restaurant.

Inna responded, "We're a robust, healthy company both financially and innovative. I guess Neurotech made a move on BC. But what's in it for them, or us for that matter?"

Elijah has, for a long time, coveted the position we have with DARPA. My guess is a merger with BC will give Neurotech access to Government funding."

"Okay, Ulysses, what you say kind of makes some sense but why did Harvey even consider it without running it by the board."

"Who knows how he thinks or, to be more precise, processes neurological data. We hardly ever get to see him. I believe we should challenge his role as CEO."

Inna, who was born in Slovenia, was a staunch supporter of the democratic process. Their CEO was acting like a dictator, and she had had enough of those back home. "Who do you propose to take his place, Ulysses?"

He grinned, "You could propose me, at the meeting."

"That would really put the pussy among the pigeons, yes."

"It would at least take the focus off the takeover attempt for a while, to give us a chance to look into the acquisition proposal before voting takes place."

Knud Johanssen did not know who the man was or why he was involved in the investigation. The case was going nowhere and bringing the Englishman in would, in Knud's mind, complicate things. But the order came from Anders Breivik, and Knud did not argue with the Minister of Justice.

Daniel got met at Oslo Lufthavn, Norway's main airport, by members of the NIS (Norwegian Intelligence Service) and he was whisked off to the headquarters which is situated near Lake Lutvann. There, Daniel was shown through to the office of Knud Johanssen, the NIS Director.

Ingrid Terseness, the operations manager, was also present. Ingrid, with thirty years of NIS experience under her belt, smiled politely while shaking Daniel's hand. Underneath her stoic exterior smouldered a woman, who felt her nose was put out of joint. The Anonymous Englishman's presence made her feel she had failed in not finding the party responsible for the Praesidium tragedy.

She was not even convinced a human hand was involved. But six key parliamentary members falling ill of some wasting disease seemed too much of a coincidence – and Ingrid did not believe in them. Which left her with a bizarre crime and no clues to go on.

Ingrid, in her late fifties, wanted to retire on a high note. Given more resources and time she felt her people could get to the bottom of the mystery, another word that she disliked. If the ageing sickness was caused by a criminal element there had to be clues. But her team had discovered none so far.

Knud said, "Daniel Lynsey is here to act as a fresh pair of eyes, not to take over your case. I want you to take him through the elements of the case so far."

"So, are you MI5?" Ingrid questioned as she and the Soter agent walked through the Storting and entered the Praesidium Chamber.

Daniel, ignoring the question, said, "So they were all in this room alone, while two, armed guards, stood outside the locked door?"

"Yes, that is so."

"Did the sentries notice anything different about the members when they came out?"

"We questioned them of course. But the guards did not report anything untoward."

"So whatever befell the ministers had a delayed effect?"

"It would appear so, yes."

Looking around, Daniel noticed five surveillance cameras mounted near the ceiling. "So the meetings were recorded?"

"Yes, but without audio. The business that takes place here is confidential."

Daniel nodded, "I want to see the footage of that meeting."

"Of course, Mr Lynsey. But we have scrutinised it thoroughly."

Ms Siv Ragnar, head of the Property, Security and General Services Department received a call from Ingrid Peterssen. By the time The Director of Operations and the Englishman arrived at the security centre the Praesidium meeting recording was set up. Ingrid, having seen it many times before, left Daniel to watch the tape. She had more important duties that needed her attention.

Nobody had entered or left the chamber once the meeting had started. There was no food allowed in the room; only a jug of water. The Soter man made a note. Further scrutiny showed two air vents high up near the ceiling. Daniel jotted down another entry.

On the face of it, there seemed nothing untoward. Daniel annoyed that The NIS DO had deserted him, as though the surveillance record was of no import, contacted her and demanded her presence at the security centre. Once she arrived there, Daniel asked, "Has the water jug and its contents been tested?"

Thinking about grandmothers with eggs in their mouths, she responded, "Of course. That was the first thing we did."

"And what did you find?"

She looked at Daniel, bemused. "Nothing of course."

"The water hadn't been tampered with?"

"Of course not!"

Daniel, aware that Ingrid resented his involvement, continued calmly, "Did you check the air vents?"

"Of course we did."

"Is there any way a contaminant, perhaps a gas, could have been released into the chamber that way?"

He was thorough. Ingrid had to give him that much. "Police forensic scientists have checked the ventilation system thoroughly."

Daniel sighed, "So what do we actually know?"

Ingrid shrugged. "Six men had a meeting behind guarded closed doors. Later the six men became sick and grew weaker by the hour."

"I want to speak with the president," Daniel said.

"The doctor's say Olemic Solberg is not to be disturbed."

"Is he conscious?"

"Yes, but he is frail."

"Is he coherent?"

"Yes, but as I say, he ..."

"Take me to see him."

She glared at Daniel. Taking a deep breath, Ingrid said, "I will have it arranged."

"I'll need a translator."

Bessastadir, the traditional Presidential residence, a huge white building with a red-tiled roof, came into view. A police patrol car was parked out front and two men in suits, probably NIS men, Daniel reckoned, were also out front. Daniel got shown through the house to Olemic Solberg's bedroom, where the President was propped up in bed. The Soter agent tried not to stare at the ailing man. But

the forty-five-year-old looked as though he was eighty, having aged some thirty-five years in a matter of days.

Olemic was coherent most of the time, but he took strong painkillers for his rapid onset arthritis, and they made him drowsy.

Daniel, realising this, got straight to the point. "Mr President, did you notice anything unusual about the meeting that morning."

The translator said, "He said nothing was different to any other meeting."

"How soon after the meeting did you begin to feel ill?"

"He started to feel aches in his joints and suffered blurred vision around two hours afterwards."

Daniel could see it was becoming stressful for Olemic, His deeply lined face relaxed a little as he began to nod off.

Olemic's wife, Winifred was a bit more helpful. She had received a phone call to say her husband had been rushed to the Oslo University Hospital. The caller didn't give any more details. The doctor, who was carrying out tests on the stricken President, wouldn't let Winifred see her husband right away. She had to wait, while security people questioned her.

That morning had been like most others. Olemic had his breakfast, and his chauffeur picked him up and drove the President to the Storting, as usual. That was the last time she had seen him fit and well.

Daniel began to appreciate Ingrid Peterssen's poor attitude. Whatever had taken place in the Praesidium that fateful day had left no clues. For someone as dedicated to her work as Ingrid, it would have been terribly frustrating. Daniel, however, did not believe in a crime without any evidence left behind. Yet there was nothing in the surveillance footage of the meeting that suggested anything untoward.

As his driver drove him back to NIS headquarters, he got an idea. Daniel remembered, as a child, 'find the difference' puzzles, in which two pictures side-by-side were identical, except for some minor changes. With this in mind, he instructed his driver to take him to the Storting security centre.

Once there, Daniel asked to see a recording of the previous Praesidium meeting set up beside another computer screen showing the meeting that somehow led to the six key members being struck down with a strange malady. Were there any differences between the two films? If any differences showed up, he would have his clue. Daniel's eyes flitted from one screen to the other, his mind looking for anything out of place.

After an hour and two strong coffees had elapsed, it all seemed a waste of time. Everything, except the date, appeared to be the same for each meeting. The members even sat on the same chairs. Daniel wanted to check out the air vents, but the cameras were all mounted up too high to film the Praesidium meeting from above. None of the security cameras recorded other cameras in the room. Daniel got the spark of an idea. He asked to be taken back to the Praesidium chamber.

Once he was in the room, he looked up to see where the CCTV cameras were located. Daniel checked for any blind spots, but the coverage was complete. Then he noticed something odd. He turned to the security guard with him. "Get me a ladder."

The guard had a good enough grasp of English to understand what he said, and he returned with an aluminium step ladder. Daniel climbed it while the guard steadied it from below. The Soter agent's eagle eye had picked out an anomaly. He saw a small hole drilled in the wall, between two cameras.

He took a photograph with his phone. Daniel dismounted the ladder and told the security to check it out. The man, having taken a look, climbed down with puzzlement showing on his face.

Daniel asked, "What is the reason for that small hole?"

The Norwegian shrugged.

"Well, somebody made it for a reason, and we need to find out what it is." Then something else caught Daniel's eagle eye. He climbed the ladder again and discovered, around the hole, a small area recently plastered. He had to look very carefully to spot the slight difference in colour between the old work and the new. Daniel took another photo, but the difference in the hues was not noticeable on the phone's screen. He looked down at the bored security guard. "Get me something to scrape this plaster."

The Norwegian, unsure about defacing the chamber, hesitated.

"A trowel or scraper will do."

The guard said, "You want to damage the wall?"

Daniel said, "This has been freshly plastered. I need to know why. Finding out what's underneath this layer will possibly give us our answer. Now get me something I can use."

The troubled security man returned with a scraper and handed it up to the Soter man. The new plaster came away quickly revealing two more holes. They only recessed one inch, and each had a rawl plug left inside. Daniel said, "As I thought. A bracket was mounted here, probably to hold another camera."

"Why would somebody have fitted an extra camera?" the guard asked, perplexed.

"That indeed is 1000 krone question."

Flint McCarthy deleted yet another hate email, calling him an anti-American piece of shit. Most of his emails seemed to be from people who left messages along the same theme. Then he came across a letter from Abbott Gallagher asking if he'd made any progress locating his friend?

Flint thought about it, then pressed Abbott's name on his phone. He heard the Australian's voice. "Hi, No joy with my sources, Abbott. The biggest hurdle is that Homeland Security and FEMA deny they are running any camps."

"So where does that leave us now."

"I guess we'll have to get to the records by the back door. Do you know any hackers?"

"I don't move in those circles, Flint."

"Me neither. But we need one right now."

"Can you use your contacts to find one?"

Flint said, "You're the reporter."

"I know, but I can't work officially in America."

"Okay, I'll see what I can do."

Who on Earth could he ask? Flint wondered as he scrolled through his phone contacts. There was hacking, and there was HACKING! Getting into FEMA files was definitely HACKING.

Flint had never searched for a hacking site before. Just getting as far as the search engine had him feeling uneasy. Linking to premierhacking.com, made Flint feel positively uncomfortable. The site had a link to 'hack chats' lizard lounge. To join in the conversation Flint had to become a member and upload his profile.

Figuring nobody told the truth about themselves online he could be anyone he wanted. Flint decided to be a male teenager newbie. He figured that way he'd get some help. The advocate soon found out nobody used their names - only chosen avatars. Flint did not have one, so he just got the default symbol with a question mark. In his ignorance, he typed: Does anyone know how to get into FEMA files?

That was a complete no, no in hacking circles. Subway replied: Only a dumb fuck would ask such a direct question.

Flint typed: Sorry man, I'm new to this.

Shapeshift wrote: No shit Sherlock.

Subway typed: Why do you want to know?

Flint, deciding to use the avatar 'Dumbfuck' typed: I'm trying to find a friend who's stuck in one of their stinking camps."

Subway wrote: Might know someone. I'll send details in an anonymous email.

The Civil Rights lawyer did not know such things existed. To receive the email he had to open up a new secret email account. Flint found plenty of help online for that one.

Shortly after signing up Flint received an anonymous email from someone called 'Yankee'. There was a contact number, which Flint rang. The instructions were for him to let the phone ring three times and hang up. He did this, and 30 minutes later he received a call. It was Yankee. "Hi, you Dumbfuck?"

"Oh, yeah."

"Subway said you wanted some help."

"Can you break into FEMA files?"

"I can get into anything, with the right motivation. What do you want, exactly?"

"A buddy of mine has a girlfriend locked up in one of FEMA's detention centres. He wants to know where she is."

"Shouldn't be too difficult."

"Great, man. My friend will be pleased."

"Once I get paid."

"But I thought ..."

"That we just did this shit for fun. Does the plumber fix your fucking pipes for fun?"

"No. Look, I didn't mean to ..."

"\$100 thousand and I'll get you any file you like."

Flint, taken aback muttered, "one hundred thousand dollars. I'll have to get back to you."

"You got twenty-four hours. Let it ring four times before you hang up. Then I contact you."

Abbott, sitting in McCarthy's office could not believe what he was hearing. "How the hell am I going to raise that amount in twenty-four hours?"

The lawyer leant back in his chair, twiddling his fingers. "You're a journalist, right?"

"So?"

"This will make one hell of a story. Jesus, you were imprisoned out in the fucking desert by robots. That's Pulitzer prize stuff."

"It's not that simple. I don't have a green card, and even if I did, I don't get paid until I've written the article."

Flint sighed, "Then I guess you're fucked." He twiddled some more. "Unless – you get in touch with, what is it? Oh yeah, ATL. Wasn't this Helen Cleaver a big wheel in the organisation?"

Abbott scratched his head. "I don't even know if it exists any more."

Flint, onto it, already had the website open. It had not been updated for a while, but there was a contact number. "Try that. What have you got to lose?"

Abbott hesitated, "Even if the organisation still exists, and if I'm able to get through to somebody involved with ATL, they're a volunteer group that relies on donations. They aren't likely to have a spare \$100 k hanging around."

Flint stared at the Aussie. "Are you kidding? Charities can make a helluva lot of money through donations."

The number was a dead end. Abbott said, "Well that's that."

Flint twiddled his fingers some more. It helped him think. Then he said, "You and Helen were caught trying to get into Canada, right?"

"Yeah, so."

"Get in touch with that group, there. Some of the ATL members may have gone there."

Abbott brightened. "Yes, that might work." Then the frown returned. "Why should they believe me. I could be a raving nutter for all they know."

"They will take notice if you say you've kidnapped her."

Abbott stared at the lawyer. "You've got to be fucking joking!"

"No, think about it for a moment. None of the ATL people know what's happened to Helen. She was their fucking heroine. They love her and will do anything to get her back."

"And what happens if they call the police?"

"Jesus, man, you've seen all those fucking Hollywood movies where the villain says, if you involve the cops the hostage is dead. Just stay in control and make it real."

Abbott shook his head. "So your great plan is for me to pose as a kidnapper and demand \$100 grand to be delivered in less than twenty-four hours."

"Yes, that sounds right."

"Okay, let's say ARC (Anti-Robotics Canada) are dumb enough to send the money. What then?"

"Then we find out where your Helen is and we get her out of fucking jail."

"Okay, smart guy how do we spring her?"

Flint grinned, "The media love my stuff and can't get enough of it. A lot of people liked ATL's stuff as well. All we need is public opinion to demand her release."

"Release from what, Flint? FEMA denies the existence of the camps."

"This is when I bring out my ace card."

"Which is?"

"You."

Chapter 23

The Public Voice:

Sophie Ryan, on The Voice, said, "The outspoken civil rights lawyer Flint McCarthy dropped another bombshell this week with his disclosure about Allenwood, a small town, tucked away in the Appalachian Mountains of central Pennsylvania. In the last fifteen years, this tiny hamlet has grown from around 400 to 10,000 people. McCarthy asks why this growth in population? He says this small town, which takes up around 400 acres, is surrounded by a ten-foot high barbed wire fence. Some 300 minimum security prisoners are held there to keep it in shape. McCarthy says it can hold as many as 12000 detainees. We asked the Justice Minister about this, but he declined to comment, except to say it's pure fantasy.

But McCarthy maintains Allenwood is not the only one. Thirty miles from Oklahoma City on Route 66 is a town called El Reno. It has around 12,000 people. Six miles due west a complex of buildings looks like it could be a school. Except for the fact it is overshadowed by a guardhouse, which could be mistaken for an airport control tower. Except that it's manned by a vigilant, uniformed guard. This is a federal prison camp or detention centre. These prisons are all located near super-highways or near railroad tracks or both. Again, the government denies its existence."

Turning to her guest, Sophie said, "Good Morning Flint. So tell us more about these camps."

"Sophie, the government's implausible denial concerning these and many other fenced off areas is ridiculous, as they are obvious to anybody from those towns. The places I mentioned have been verified by the Provost Marshall of the Fifth Army who is in charge of the 300th Military Police POW Command."

The show's host said, "What went on between you and the Provost Marshall?"

"We had an open sharing of views. I pointed out some secret prison locations, and the Provost Marshall told me I'd got that right."

"Why would he say that to you of all people?"

"Maybe he was fed up with all the government bullshit. Anyway, he put me in contact with a Lt Kiljohn who is in charge of some secret unit in the department. I asked him if he had participated in military training or in training with military personnel in the Sheriff's Department?"

"What did he say?"

"Oh, he denied it, and when I asked him if he would testify so under oath he became angry and told me I was just an ordinary citizen, and he didn't have to tell me a damned thing."

"Why did he agree to talk to you at all?"

"Good point, Sophie. But later I discovered that Lt Kiljohn is the ex-director of the Houston branch office of the US Secret Service."

"It becomes increasingly intriguing, Flint."

"Well watch this space Sophie because I'm about to reveal proof that Homeland security is using robots as prison guards."

Sophie went wide-eyed. "I can't wait for that one."

On the Atlantis side of the gate, Rodney remained with the Atlas bots. He was not happy with the mark 1s, but he could not do anything about that. In fact, the Scot was unhappy about the whole thing. All he wanted to do was hand over the bots, obtain the data he and DARPA wanted and get back through the Gate before Schulz had it sealed.

He waited, becoming increasingly concerned as the minutes ticked by. He couldn't contact Goman Worrall because there was no network coverage for his phone on the Island.

Then he saw them emerge from the jungle, a consortium of Atlanteans. Rodney could make out the tall Professor Worrall among them. The small procession stopped ten metres away, wary of the robots.

Goman said, "Welcome back Dr MacKay. I see you have our robots."

"As arranged. Now, if you give me the technical information you promised I'll be on my way and you won't see me again."

Magnar Prees, the new headman of the Island, stepped forward. "We need you to teach us how to operate them."

"That wasnae part of the deal. Besides, the wee 'bots are holding their operation manuals and remote controls."

Magnar, who could have been Poseidon himself, what with his long flowing hair and very full white beard, was not satisfied. "Just run us through the basics and Goman can take it from there."

"Fine, but give me the information first."

Goman said, "I have it for you on a disc, back at my laboratory."

It was not going well for Rodney. "Why did you nae bring it with you?"

"We had to make sure you brought the robots with you."

Rodney stared at the headman. "Let me explain some things to you. I didnae want to come back here, but I was forced to do so. The general didnae want to send the robots until we had the data, but I was able to persuade him differently. So just take me to the lab and give me the disc and I'll be on my way."

"After you have instructed us how to work the metal men."

"Okay, but let's get going."

Abbott contacted Anti Robotics Canada and got to speak to a Bucky Halderson, an ATL member who had fled America and joined the ARC group. "I'm an Australian journalist, and I was with Helen Cleaver when we got arrested at the Canadian border."

"What's happened to her? Where is she?"

Abbott discarded the whole kidnapping madness and decided to go for the truth. "We were flown to a facility near Indianapolis, but males and females were separated, so I don't know what happened to her after that."

"Hell, that must have been very difficult for her, especially."

"Yes, Bucky. Now the thing is we need a hacker to track her down, and he wants \$100,000 to find out where she is."

"And you're calling me because?"

"The hacker wants the money in twenty hours, and I don't have it."

"Man, how do I know you are for real. We have a contingency fund but how do we know you won't just take the money and run?"

"I knew Helen back in Australia. I caught up with her the night that android woman kidnapped her. After that America was too dangerous for her, so I tried driving her over the border into Canada. We were stopped by border control and was sent back to the United States, where we were imprisoned. Then a whole lot of us were shipped by train to a camp run by robots."

"So what happened to Helen?"

"That's what we're trying to find out. That's why we need the money."

"Look, I'll run it by the committee and see what they say."

Yeah, well we've only got twenty hours left then the window closes."

Ingrid Peterssen had risen through the NIS ranks for showing confidence and diligence in her work. But underneath her courageous exterior lurked a different character. Her personal fight with her nervous and hesitant nature had always been a struggle. Being Director of Operations meant she could sit back and let her team deal with the nuts and bolts. Now that the Englishman had found a clue her people had missed, it looked as though she was not on top of her game. She sat looking at the English agent. "Even if you are correct about the extra camera what does it have to do with the ministers falling ill?"

That had puzzled Daniel. He said, "Perhaps if you find out who installed the camera, we can see why it was put in the room and why it was removed soon after the President and his Vice Presidents became sick. Then we might unravel this mystery."

She looked at Daniel, weighing things in her mind. "Who do you work for, Mr Lynsey, MI5, MI6, Special Branch?"

"None of the above I'm afraid. We operate under the radar on a strictly need to know basis. Oh, when you find the person who installed the new camera, let me know. I want to be in on the interview."

The Holocaust Centre at Villa Grande seemed an odd choice for a meeting, but it was Alden's choice of venue. Except Colthorpe didn't show up. Daniel was about to give up when he heard a gentle voice say, "Are you, Daniel Lynsey?"

He turned around and found himself looking at an incredibly attractive woman with shiny long red hair. Having appraised her, he said, "You have me at a disadvantage. Who are you?"

"Alden is indisposed at the moment. He sent me here in his stead."

Warning bells rang in his brain. Colthorpe had changed the rules of the game. "So who are you?"

"Sorry, I'm Dee. I work for Alden."

"And why are you here, exactly?"

She smiled sweetly. "To tell you the truth I wanted to visit this mansion. That and the fact Alden gave me some information for you."

"Why does this place interest a beautiful English girl?" Daniel grinned, playing the flirt.

"Vidkun Quisling lived here during the Second World War. He was the head of the collaborationist puppet regime during the Nazi occupation of the country. I'm a bit of a recent history buff, Daniel."

"Well this is not my choice of venue, and I'm feeling a bit peckish. So what say we find a relaxing place to eat, my treat."

Progeria smiled again, "Thank you, kind sir. I would love to take you up on your invitation."

Daniel had heard a lot about the restaurant 'Hos Thea' from colleagues in merchant banking so, as he was in Oslo, he decided to treat himself and Dee. It proved very expensive (quite usual for Norway), and the food and service were truly exceptional. In any case, it came under legitimate Soter expenses. Seated at a private corner table Daniel and Dee both went for the lobster ravioli entree, a sublime combination of crisp and soft; zest with gusto. Between bites Daniel said, "So what have you got for me?"

She gave a naughty smile, "That's a bit personal, isn't it?"

"You know what I mean?"

"I know what you want."

He needed to keep focused on the business in hand.

She passed him a disk. "Alden said you were trying to find out about outbreaks of Progeria in South America, India and now it seems here in Oslo."

Daniel sat back in his seat. How did she know such things about him? He was gravely concerned but didn't show it. "From what little I know, Progeria only affects young children. Yet it is not the case with the politicians."

For mains, Daniel went for swordfish ceviche and Dee with ravioli with salmon and veal steak. Dee sipped some of the delicious house red. Dabbing her lips, she said, "Progeria is very rare. Babyies have a 1 in 4-8 million chance of contracting the disease, so you have to be very unlucky to draw the short straw. Remembering the horror of her early years, Progeria held herself in check. She must not make it too personal. She continued, "It is estimated that at any one time, there are between 200-250 children living with progeria, globally."

Daniel finished chewing his mouthful of swordfish. "Okay, it's a rare disease. But how is it happening to healthy adults?" And who is the mystery woman who seems to be present at each of these incidents?"

"Mr Colthorpe and by extension myself, have been following the same leads, Daniel," she said, lightly covering his hand with hers, sending an electric jolt up his arm. It was a weird sensation that made the hairs on his arm stand up. Even if we did track down this mystery woman, there's nothing that ties her to the outbreaks. Her presence could be mere coincidence."

Daniel withdrew his hand and shook his head. "I don't believe in coincidences."

"Then how do you explain it?"

"I don't know. It's almost as if someone is causing progeria in other people. But how could that happen?"

Dee smiled, "Enough shop talk, for now, Daniel. Why don't we go somewhere more private and relax?"

Lord Lynsey wanted nothing more than to spend the night with the gorgeous redhead but could he trust her? He still didn't know how she knew so much about him, unless ... No, surely not! But why not? After all, he'd never seen her. If it was the woman he'd been hunting for around the world, he could arrest her and have her put in custody. But what could they charge her with? Being in the vicinity of people who become prematurely old? Then another thought hit Daniel, sending a chill up his spine. If she did do something to those people what could she do to him?"

The thought was too scary to contemplate. But, to find out more about her he had to play along.

As they relaxed in front of an open fire in her Villa, Daniel felt he had had too much vino. That and the pure Moroccan they smoked broke down all his barriers. He turned to Dee. "It took me a while to figure it out, but you're the woman I'm looking for."

"Steady on. We only met a few hours ago."

"I don't mean in Mrs Right sense. Miss 'Wrong' would be more accurate."

"And what makes you think it's me?" she smiled, sinking into the soft cushions of the expansive lounge.

"It's the only logical answer. So why did you question those prisoners at the San Pedro Jail? And why did you help in the Gil Baxter vaccination campaign in India?"

Dee scowled at him. "Very well smart arse, seeing as you've seen through me I am that woman."

Daniel scratched his head. "Now I'm confused as to who is following who. So why have you been following this trail?"

She smiled and lightly tapped the side of her small nose. "I don't know you well enough to let you know my secrets. Besides, right now I want to fuck."

While that elephant was trumpeting around the room, Daniel spluttered, "Did I hear you correctly?"

She said, "Will you just shut up," as she leant over and turned her head to find his lips in a chaste kiss. As the tip of his enquiring tongue explored her lips, Projeria opened her mouth and let Daniel's tongue slide inside. She shifted her body so he could roll over.

Following her lead, Daniel rolled onto his back like an obedient puppy. Then she climbed on top and straddled him, fanning her silk dress. Surprised to find she was not wearing any underwear, he reached down to unzip his trousers. As she slid back and forward his penis decided it wanted to join the party.

Already, moist Projeria took hold of his appendage and slid down on him, guiding her vaginal movement with precision. As Daniel slipped further into her wetness, her heat surprised him causing her lover to gasp at the pleasure.

Daniel pressed his hands into the mattress and positioned himself so he could lean against the headboard. Projeria started rocking her hips, pushing him even deeper into her. Daniel thought if she planned to kill him he could not think of a better way to go.

As they lay in bed together in the afterglow of sex, Daniel said, "Now, do we know each other well enough for you to tell me why you have been on the Progeria trail?"

She turned to face him. "Colthorpe is working with a company that is researching how to override the abnormal version of the lamin A protein, that causes a mutation in the membrane surrounding the cell nucleus." Projeria lit a cigarette, then asked, "Daniel, do you know how many companies are actively looking for a cure?"

"With a global market of 250 customers, I wouldn't think there would be many."

"You're right. There is only one company investing in finding a cure, and that is the one Colthorpe works for."

"But why, with such a small client base?"

"Daniel, you're a smart man. You work it out."

Then he got it. "Your people are looking at the broader picture. All those wealthy people in Hollywood alone who would pay anything to slow down the ageing process."

She beamed, "Now you have your answer."

Projeria was sorely tempted to suck Daniel's life force. After their sexual connection, it would have been so easy and pleasurable. Using all her willpower, Projeria resisted. He was still useful alive, as a messenger.

Rodney had never been to the Citadel before. The Atlantean Administrative and Cultural Centre was thriving. Islanders lined the streets to get a glimpse of the metal men marching into their city. A huge cheer went up as Magnar Prees, the Atlantean leader led the entourage into the Civic Centre. Rodney turned to Goman, "What's going on?"

"Magnar is going to introduce you to the new Council of Atlantis. You will be acclaimed as a hero. They will present you with an award for liberating us from the Singularians."

"Aye, that's all very well but when are you going to give us the knowledge we seek?"

"All in good time, Dr MacKay. First, we have to follow certain civic protocols."

The headman addressed the chamber. "Lords and Ladies of this Council I present to you, Dr MacKay, who represents all Earthians on this auspicious day. Dr MacKay is an Earthian scientist who fought bravely with his Marine colleagues to liberate us from the scourge of Mendes Amwon and his Singularians. In recognition of their bravery, we offer this small token of our undying gratitude."

With that Magnar Prees presented Rodney with a plaque. Huge applause erupted in the council chamber. The Earth scientist was then taken back to his seat.

Magnar continued, "Dr MacKay has also been instrumental in providing us with Earthian Robot technology. Professor Worrall and his team are actively working on producing a 'kill switch' that artificial intelligence cannot override. To this end, we need to experiment on actual robots."

Then the headman paused for some water. "In exchange for the robots, we have agreed to furnish the Earthians with research showing how they can harness zero-point energy as a global power source. We will present the Earthians with this priceless technology once we have completed the kill switch."

Rodney could not believe his ears. "NO! THAT WAS NAE THE DEAL!" he yelled out.

Goman stood up and addressed Magnar. "If I may say something, my Lord."

"Go ahead,"

"When we entered into this agreement with the Earthians, we did believe they were a trustworthy race of people. I was shocked and surprised to discover that the Americans only wanted our technology for themselves, and even worse, they wanted to use it as a weapon to control others. I was imprisoned on Earth because I would not give them the key research to allow them to use zero-point energy safely. For my freedom, I had to promise to give the Americans what they wanted." Goman sat down.

Magnar said, "Dr MacKay stand up please."

Rodney did so.

"Would you say that Professor Worrall gave an accurate account of events?"

"Aye, that's as I understand it. But it still doesnae alter the fact that I have to return to my world with the research, or we will have to take measures to get it for ourselves."

The headman looked straight at the head scientist. "Is that a threat, Dr MacKay?"

"Not from me. I'm only the messenger," he paused then added, "We thought we were dealing with honourable people, but you haven't kept your word."

Magnar said, "It seems we have a moral dilemma. Dr MacKay, you will stay here as our guest while the council deliberates on the ethics of this situation."

Rodney expounded, "YOU CANNAE DO THAT! I HAVE TO GET BACK TO MY PEOPLE BEFORE THEY CLOSE THE GATE FOREVER!"

http://www.greatdreams.com/concentration_camp_plans.htm

<http://educate-yourself.org/cn/pentagoncomplicitytakeoveramerica26feb07.shtml>

Chapter 24

The Public Voice:

Flint McCarthy stunned Leona Clarke with his pronouncement, "I have living proof that FEMA has robots running some of the detention camps."

"What proof, Flint?"

"One of the internees from Unicor, an Australian journalist, told me his story."

"Can you produce this reporter?"

"Of course I can, but I have to protect his identity."

"So, how do you know his story is true?"

I have examined these FEMA projects to see what they were doing. And I discovered something very revealing, Leona."

"Which is?"

"In the Pine Bluff Arkansas Arsenal FEMA stores BZ."

"What's BZ, Flint?"

"It's a nerve gas that brings about sleepiness, dizziness, stupor, and the incapacity to move about. According to the Associated Press, the agent can be sprayed by aerosol, injected or sprayed over vast areas by a bomb."

"It sounds scary but how do you know this to be true?"

"Leona, the Military has admitted that one potential use of the gas is for keeping citizens under control. So whatever they have planned, they've also planned a way for detainees to go to the detention camps in a passive state of mind."

"So if there is civil unrest the police, or whoever, can spray this stuff and make the crowd docile so it's easy to arrest them?"

"Exactly. And this is not a new concept. Back in 1948, the International Congress on Mental Health, a UN organisation, declared in its pamphlet "Mental Health and World Citizenship" that:

Prejudice, hostility or excessive nationalism may become deeply embedded in the developing personality without awareness on the part of the individual concerned. To be effective, efforts of changing individuals must be appropriate to the successive stages of the unfolding nature. While in a case of a group of society, change will be strongly resisted unless an attitude of acceptance has first been engendered. It went on to state:

Principles of Mental health cannot be successfully furthered in any society unless there is growing acceptance of the concept of world citizenship..."

"And BZ is designed to do this?"

"Leona, two years back, Major General G.B. Chichester, Deputy Minister of Health in Canada, who later became director of United Nations World Health Organization (WHO), explained:

"Self defence may involve a neurotic reaction when it means defending one's own excessive material wealth from others who are in great need. This attitude leads to war ..."

"So his solution to the problem was: Let's redistribute the wealth among everyone?"

"A somewhat Naive suggestion, especially since the Western banking system thrives on war and debt." Flint took a mouthful of water, then said, "The Director of Soviet Secret Police in the 1930's explained the communist political strategy through the use of 'mental healing' of psychiatry. He stated:

Psychopolitics is the art and science of asserting and of maintaining a dominion over the thoughts and loyalties of individuals, officers, bureaus, and masses, and the effecting of the conquest of enemy nations through mental healing."

"So, by 'mental healing' we mean passive complicity."

"Yes, and this programme is used in more than 600 of these community mental health centres across the United States. Even more disturbing is that robot guards in the prison camps are programmed to use psycho-politics on prisoners to make them comply without question."

"Are you saying that robots are using mind control on human prisoners?"

"Well Leona, FEMA maintains implausible denial, but in the face of growing incontrovertible evidence they may soon have to change their intransigent stance."

It was the day of the vote at BC. There was a lot of nervous tension around the company in the days leading up to the decision. There were also many rumours that some BC directors were approached by Neurotech and offered incentives to vote for the merger. Ulysses had not been contacted, but that was not surprising to him. The Neurotech spies would only have targeted the fence sitters to get their vote.

First, the proposal for the merger got tabled, and a pro-merger person spoke to the group. Then an opposition spokesperson said his piece. Next, it was time for the vote. It was a nail biting moment for Ulysses as the directors each placed their vote into the ballot box. Small stockholders, not present at the meeting, had sent in their votes by post. He waited on tenterhooks as the votes were counted.

The result was too close for comfort. Forty-three votes in favour of the merger; forty-five against. Ulysses, along with many other directors, breathed a huge sigh of relief. Were the result a tie, Dr Covington, as President of the meeting, would have used his casting vote as a decider. He was pleased it did not come to that.

When Harvey Hamlin learned of the result, he phoned David T Rottafeller, "The vote went against the merger."

"Right. I'll rally the troops."

"I must not be seen to be part of the takeover."

"That's okay. You are merely my mouthpiece."

Ingrid Peterssen took Daniel to where Hans Syversen and a translator sat waiting at a wooden table. Ingrid introduced herself and Daniel to the recording. She sat down opposite the maintenance worker. "You are Hans Syversen, yes?"

"Yes."

"And you are employed as a maintenance worker, yes?"

"Yes."

"And part of your job involves security camera maintenance, correct?"

"Yes."

"Do you look after the CCTV in the Presidium Chamber?"

"Sometimes."

Daniel, feeling the interview was progressing at a snail's pace, said, "Hans, did you recently fit the sixth camera in the Presidium Chamber."

The suspect hesitated. "Yes."

Ingrid took over, "Why did you fit the camera?"

Daniel grabbed back the advantage. "Okay Mr Syversen, tell us what happened, from the beginning."

Ingrid flashed Daniel a look but remained silent.

Through the interpreter, Hans began. "I was drinking with some other Starting workers when a man approached me."

"What did he look like?" Daniel asked.

"He was not a big man, and he had a kind of tight screwed up face."

The Soter man said, "Continue."

"I had downed a few lagers in the Scandic Victoria, so I was a bit tipsy. He asked me if could fit a security camera in the Praesidium Chamber. I was puzzled. How did he know about me? And why did he want me to fit the camera? It was extraordinary. Then he passed me a paper bag containing two hundred thousand Krone.

I thought the man was mad, but I couldn't pass up that money. Then he said I would receive another two hundred thousand Krone once the job was complete. So, of course, I agreed to do it."

"And did you also uninstall the camera after the Praesidium meeting?"

"That was part of the arrangement for me to receive my second payment."

Ingrid said, "I think you will need the extra money when you get fired from your job."

Hans looked shocked.

Daniel said, "Thank you for explaining your part in this case. As he got up to leave, he said to Ingrid, "I'll see you afterwards."

As they sat in her office, she said, with more than a hint of triumph, "As I thought, another dead end."

Daniel, not ready to throw in the towel, said "It seems as though the installation of that camera had something to do with what happened, but for the life of me, I can't see how. I suggest you find the man who paid the money and question him."

"We only have a rough description from a drunk man, It's not much to go on."

Daniel smiled, "Look for Alden Colthorpe." He showed her a picture of the man Natasha had sent from her phone.

"How do you know it's him?"

"Surely you don't think you're the only agency looking for him."

Ingrid mentioned, "He moves around a lot, so I'll get Europol onto it."

"Let me know when you have him."

Ulysses found the memo in his in-tray. It caught his eye because of the Neurotech headed paper. The managing director of BC could not believe it. There had been a hostile takeover of the company. Neurotech now owned Boston Cybertronics. Ulysses sat stunned, staring at the sheet of paper. The acquisition was to take effect immediately.

Neurotech would shortly host a special managerial meeting so executives from each company could get to know each other in, what Neurotech called 'their happy family'. Ulysses called an extraordinary special meeting that very afternoon. There was only one item on the agenda. How to respond to Neurotech's take over.

Daniel Lynsey tapped a pen on the pad in front of him. Brexit had stirred up the British fat cats of the City of London. He spoke into his office Intercom. "Susan, get MD to come to my office, please. MD meant Maureen Darlington who was also Lynvest's Managing Director. As soon as she entered, Daniel said, "What's our position with Deutsche Bank?"

"Daniel, we don't know yet. No one knows what kind of access we British will have to the European Union's single financial market."

"Damn Brexit, or is that 'British exit'! Now a bloody hung parliament to boot."

"I'm afraid that has made the picture even more obscure. The only thing we know for certain is that things cannot go on the same as before."

His phone rang. Matthew Snelling's name came up on the screen. Acknowledging Maureen, he said, "Sorry, but I have to take this."

Matthew waited till he heard Daniel's voice. "We have to get together soon, old man."

"I'm going up to the Hall tomorrow, so it will have to be this evening. Unless of course, you want to see me there."

"No, I'll catch you while you're in London. At the Garrick, say around 7 pm."

Daniel had never been to the Garrick Club before. A brief search online informed him that the establishment, located in London's West End Theatre Land, was traditionally for men of the arts. Notably, Charles Dickens, H G Wells, Kingsley Amis and Dante Gabriel Rossetti had all been members. The club's maxim was 'It would be better that ten objectionable men should be included than one terrible bore should be admitted'.

Matthew Snelling sat waiting at the bar, listening to the harpist's wondrous melody, as her fingers skilfully played the many strings. He was nursing a snifter of Hennessy when Daniel walked in. The politician ordered another for the Soter agent, after which the pair took their drinks to a table in a private corner. Once they were settled, Matthew said, "Bring me up to date on your assignment."

"Well, I know who the woman is who has been using aliases and who has been leading me a merry dance."

"Who is she?"

"Quite an exquisite creature who is also very intelligent. This femme fatale calls herself Dee. She gave quite a plausible explanation for her presence when and where this strange sickness has occurred. The problem is that I can't see how she could be the cause of these extraordinary maladies."

Matthew shook his head despondently. "That's not what the group wants to hear."

Daniel shrugged, "We've never had to deal with anything like it. We know somebody is somehow causing this ageing disease. It's got Diabolus written all over it. But we have no idea who is behind it or how they are doing it."

Daniel swirled his brandy in the glass, then took a sip. "It seems to have something with the perpetrator having a line of vision."

"What do you mean?"

Daniel told Matthew about the mysterious extra, security camera. The agent explained that at first, he thought it was installed to film what went on at the meeting. He later realised that it was put there so that somebody in the room next door to the meeting chamber could view proceedings on a monitor screen."

Matthew frowned, "Fascinating, but it doesn't get us any closer to catching this elusive person."

"There is a lead I am following."

"Pray tell, old man."

"Not until I have something solid."

The hours ticked away much too fast. Abbott received an email from ARC saying they had decided to raise the sum required to access info about the missing ATL president. The Australian was overjoyed, but it was only six hours to the hacker's deadline. Abbott phoned Yamkee's number.

Yamkee saw the journalist's name come up. It was in the middle of the night, but he did not care. The unemployed man could not sleep anyway as his brain kept him titillated with the ways he could spend his newly acquired wealth. "Have you got my money?"

"It's on its way, but I need a bit more time."

Yamkee, pushing his luck, said, "That wasn't the deal."

"Jesus man, you're lucky I was able to arrange such a large sum at such short notice. Just give me a little more time. And I'll need your bank details to transfer the fund."

"Fuck off, I want cash."

"Damn it, man! That's more difficult for me to arrange. Plus the fact the money's coming from Canada, and the border is run by fucking customs 'bots."

"Yeah, I see what you mean. Have the money put into your account and get it out in cash. Then contact me."

Abbott said, "Nobody draws out huge sums in cash these days, except drug dealers, money launderers and people paying kidnappers. It's going to create too much attention."

"Fuck it, man! You sort it out. I'll give you another 24 hours, and that's it."

Abbott gave a huge sigh of relief and phoned Bucky Halderson. "The good news is the hacker has provided us with 24 hours grace."

"And the bad news?"

"He wants the money in cash."

"Fuck, that could be tricky. I'll have to declare anything over 10 grand, and that would create delays."

Abbott thought about the dilemma. "What if 10 of you came over the border with 10 grand each, and I meet you this side?"

"It's getting very complicated, but it could work I suppose. It'll take some organising though."

"I have to have that money in less than 24 hours."

<http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sociopolitica>

[/esp_sociopol_FEMA24.htm](http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sociopolitica/esp_sociopol_FEMA24.htm)

http://abundanthope.net/pages/Phoenix_Journals_61/PJ-82-RETIREMENT-RETREATS-or-WHICH-CONCENTRATION-CAMP-DO-YOU-PREFER-printer.shtml

<http://www.crossroad.to/articles2/2003/1-mental.htm>

Chapter 25

Leona Clarke looked straight at her regular Morning Show guest. "So Flint, are you suggesting that back in the 50s there were no provisions for a jury trial in the report or any other human rights.?"

"Human rights is a myth. They only exist while it suits the elite running the nation, Leona. Back then they would just pick you up and take you to the Alaskan-Siberian Asylum incommunicado. That's after they confiscated all your personal property."

Leona, incredulous, argued, "How do you know this act actually existed on the books?"

"Leona, in 1954 in the case of Ford vs. Malinak, State Treasurer R. Budd Dwyer, declared the Alaska Mental Health Act if adopted by any other state, as unconstitutional. But the act itself still exists. It's modified, but primarily in the same form. The UMHA (Uniform Mental Health Act) to which approximately 6 states subscribe, is written in the constitution the practice of having a person submit to a 90-day mental examination to determine his (or her) sanity, without any provisions for a trial by jury. This was part of the national program at that time and still, exists today."

"Well, Flint, there are a lot of dangerously unstable people out there."

"Yes, and most of them have posts in the White House." Flint paused for effect, then continued, "There still is a sinister, Frankenstein-type mental health prison in Alaska. I wrote to the officials of the institution and asked them for a description of the land of one million acres that they were eligible to receive, under the Alaska Mental Health Act. And I also asked them for a copy of the inventory they ran for their facilities back at that same time. Well, so far no answer. And probably, I will never receive one without it being enforced by a court order."

Flint sipped some water, then added, "But through the years, there was a spot in Alaska that was continually referred to: South-east of Fairbanks; south-west of Fairbanks; north-west of Fairbanks; somewhere near Fairbanks."

"Flint, Surely the locals would be aware of a prison facility that huge."

"Alaska is one hell of a vast wilderness. However, I received information that a pilot had flown over the area once and had his license revoked. And so, for \$1.85 each, I ordered the low-level navigation maps from the federal government for Alaska and located the Alaska-Siberian Asylum for the treatment of enemies of the United States. It's right where rumour over the past 20 years had placed it: South-west of Fairbanks."

Leona, playing her role as the devil's advocate, said, "Back then it would have been the Communists who were sent there. But I find it hard to believe America is still suffering from such paranoia."

"Are you kidding me? If Homeland Security's 'spy on your neighbour campaign' isn't America showing its fear, I don't know what is. It's now gotten far worse, so much so that under the UMHA the Department of Transportation will be seconded under the appropriate Executive Order when the Executive Order goes into effect. Then the health department will be responsible for determining whether or not you're mentally disturbed because of your nationalistic tendencies, your love for the United States, or your adherence to any political or religious doctrine."

"If true, this is all very disturbing Flint. It's just as well you are our civil rights watchdog."

Protests against Ronald Chump flared up in cities across the United States. Chump, believed by many to be an android got voted in as America's 54th President. Anti Chump protests erupted in the US and elsewhere since Ronald Chump's entry into the latest presidential campaign on a Robot Rights platform. Protesters and political activists have spoken out in opposition to Chump's campaign rhetoric, followed his electoral win, his inauguration and various presidential actions since he took his seat in the White House.

Many protests took place in the form of walk-outs, business closures, petitions and, especially since Chump's inauguration, rallies, demonstrations or marches. While most protests have been peaceful, some radical activists have rioted, destroying property, even attacking chump supporters.

Organised protests against Chump in the United States peaked shortly after his inauguration when millions protested during the Anti-Robots March, making it the largest single-day protest in the history of the United States. State police were put on full alert as local cops found it difficult to deal with the riots alongside their usual policing duties.

During Chump's presidential campaign, activists occasionally organised demonstrations inside Chump's rallies, sometimes with calls to shut them down. Fuelled by Chump's rhetoric about Robots deserving more rights than humans, dissenters began attending his rallies disrupting proceedings by displaying anti-artificial intelligence signs. Following Chump's election victory, students and activists organised bigger protests in several major cities across the United States, including New York, Boston, Chicago, Portland and Oakland. Tens of thousands of protesters participated, with many chanting "No Robot for President!" Incidents of intense verbal abuse and even physical violence, against protesters and Chump supporters, heralded the first violent clashes between humans and machines. Secret Service agents stepped in at times, using BZ spray on American citizens for the first time.

One large-scale disruption forced Chump to cancel a rally in Chicago, out of safety concerns. Matthew Samuels, a British national made an attempt to assassinate Chump. He was stopped when reaching for a cop's sidearm. After being sprayed with BZ, he was arrested and marched away by robocops. Since then his whereabouts are unknown.

Dr Dorian Gibson was busy packing her belongings at Atlantis Base when she received a call from General Schulz. "Good morning General."

In no mood for small talk, he said, "Why isn't the Stargate closed?"

"Rodney MacKay hasn't returned yet. We don't know why he is taking so long. I'm thinking of sending Colonel Lynch and a team there to find out what is happening."

"No, doctor, no one else is to go through the Gate. Is that clear?"

"Yes General. So how do we get Rodney back?"

"Oh about that. Our scientists no longer need the Islander's research. So close the gate."

"If we do that, Dr MacKay won't be able to get back here."

Schulz had been getting a lot of flak from the White House about the social media circulating stories about the secret Stargate. There was even a new car prize for anyone who had proof they'd seen it. "Dr Gibson, the gate has to be sealed off now. Do I make myself understood?"

"I can't do that while one of our members is on the other side."

"Then I relieve you of your post, and I will have you arrested for disobeying an order from your commander."

Dorian said, "I will give no such order. You will have to speak directly with Dr Velovska about closing the gate. I can have no part of it."

The Atlanteans took good care of Rodney, treated him as a valued guest, but he was not free. Confined to a specially guarded unit he was mind-numbingly bored. Goman came to check on him at times, and they even played chess together when the Atlantean scientist had time to spare.

The dour Scot paced around his room, trying to work out a method of escape. Surely someone of his superior intellect could outwit the Islander buffoons. Just then the door opened, and Goman walked in a broad smile hidden beneath his long beard. Rodney, noting that the scientist was not carrying a chess game with him, said, "What do you want?"

"Good news, Dr MacKay. The council have voted to let you depart with the knowledge your people seek."

Rodney snarled, "It's about bloody time. So where is it?"

Goman handed him a disk, saying, "The quantum computer and kill-switch stuff is also recorded on the disc."

Taking the research, Rodney said, "I'll get going then."

Magnar Prees wants to see you before you leave."

Rodney stared at Goman. "I think he's wasted enough of my time already."

"It would be deemed an insult if you do not attend him."

"The mon has had me stuck here for days. Has he nae insulted me?"

"It will be very quick. Then I will walk with you to the Gate."

"Verra well, but I will nae tarry longer."

Magnar Prees did not mind rising to a challenge. It was not that he actually thrived on it but being the First citizen in Atlantis was a role he had long coveted. But being isolated and going it alone made the task all the harder. He looked up as Goman and Rodney entered his office. Good morning. Please be seated."

Rodney remained standing. "I have to be off so why did you want to see me?"

Goman gave him a stare, but the anxious Scot ignored it. The Atlanteans had been nothing but a pain to Rodney, and he did not give a fig for their protocols.

Magnar smiled, "I apologise for any inconvenience, Dr MacKay but I have a message I would like you to convey to your commander." He handed the Scot a disk. All we ask is that your leader reads this."

"What is it about?" Rodney queried.

"We would like to set up trade talks with your Earth leader. We believe we can be beneficial to each other."

"Well, I'll tell you right now. Communication between us is going to be impossible once the gate is sealed."

Magnar horrified, said, "You are going to seal the portal!"

"Aye, and it's just as well. You don't want any more wee bogeymen getting through." With that, Rodney took his leave. Goman bowed to the headman and followed the Scot.

In Chicago, some hardened activists attempted to enter the venue. Others engaged in disruptive activities outside the Chump meeting place. Interactions with supporters of the candidate also took place before, during or after the event. At times, protesters attempted to rush the stage at Chump's rallies. Some of the anti-Chump protesters became aggressive, attacking human and droid Chump supporters and vice versa. Demonstrators from MoveOn.org, People for Bernie, the Muslim Students' Association, Assata's Daughters, the Black Student Union, Fearless Undocumented Alliance, The Anti-Transhumanist League and Black Lives Matter were among the organisations who sponsored or promoted the protests at the March 11 Chicago Chump rally. Chemical sprays, BZ and Tasers were used to control the crowds. Many of those marched off by robocops have not been seen or heard of again.

Abbott waited by the US Customs and Border Protection point on the International Falls side of the toll bridge. It was cold, and he stamped his boots on the hard ground to stop his feet going numb. The journalist looked up the road but couldn't see any vehicles resembling a small bus. He was receiving strange looks from a border guard who seemed to be taking an unhealthy interest in him. As the guard walked towards him, Abbott took out his phone and hit the Bucky button. "Hey, where are you guys?"

"Just running a little late. Should be with you in thirty minutes."

"Well, hurry up. I'm freezing my ass off here."

The guard approached Abbott, "Is there a problem?"

"No. It's just that my friends are running a bit late. They'll be here soon."

"Well, you'll freeze out here. Come into the office and warm up."

That was the last thing Abbott had expected to hear. He grinned, "Thanks," and followed the security guy into the heated office, where he stood by the open fire and began to thaw out.

The Toyota bus arrived twenty minutes later. Abbott thanked the guard and left the warmth of the cabin to go and meet the ARC members. Two border guards came out from the cabin to check the tourist's credentials. Bucky Halderson put out a big gloved paw. "Good to meet you, Abbott."

"You too. And thanks for believing in me."

"What do you mean 'believing in you'? I'm with you for the duration, clocking your every move."

Abbott grinned, "Welcome on board."

The border guards finished checking ID documents and left the small bus. Abbott and Bucky climbed aboard, and they drove into Minnesota and onwards toward St Pauls, where a march against Chump had taken place the previous November. It was also where Abbott had agreed to meet with Yankee and hand over the money.

It was late morning by the time Rodney and Goman reached the location of the gate. The head scientist clasped the Scot's forearm, an intimate form of Atlantean friendship, and watched as the Earthian scientist walked into the gate's energy field. It always made the hairs on Rodney's arms prickle. But not this time! The magnetic field was down! The gate no longer functioned! Rodney turned and shouted at the head scientist. "THE GATE ISN'T WORKING!"

Goman turned around. "What do you mean?"

"I mean you bastards kept me hanging around so long that my people gave up on me. They've sealed the fucking gate!"

Goman frowned deeply. "Can't you get them to unseal it?"

"How? I have no communication with the base. My particular phone only worked when the gate was active. Now I'm stranded on this godforsaken island."

Goman threw his hands up in a gesture of helplessness. "I don't know what to suggest." Feeling the heat of the late morning sun, he said, "I guess we'd better get back to the Citadel."

Rodney stood staring at where the gate should have been. He felt utterly abandoned by his own kind. He growled, mostly to himself. "If I ever get back to my world I'll take General fucking Schulz's cigars and shove them one at a time up his ..."

Goman interrupted, "There is one possibility."

"Which is?"

"The portal that Amwon Mendes used to escape from this world."

"Where is it?"

"In the Temple of Poseidon. But I don't know if it still works."

"Aye, well let's go there and find out."

Following the announcement of Chump's election, massive protests broke out across the United States, as well as such other countries as Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Philippines, Australia and Israel with some continuing for several days, and more protests planned for the following weeks and months. Protesters have held up some different signs and chanted various shouts including 'No robot for president' and 'We don't want android presidents'. The more the Chump camp denied the robot accusations, the more the social media presented evidence to the contrary.

Diabolus purists believed they only existed to destroy existence. But Projeria was one of a school of Diabolists who thought there was an element of order in chaos. She had been working on a plan of sorts that involved bigger and better targets, like the one she was currently planning in London. Dealing with the six ministers in Oslo was her greatest challenge to date. And sucking in the life force of the six had proved very taxing, so Projeria had to take time out.

Ulysses Covington brought the meeting to order. "By now all of you will have heard about the Neurotech's hostile takeover. We have to decide how to respond to this underhand action."

Alain Wilk, head of robotic research, said, "Do we know who the traitors are?"

Ulysses answered, "The biggest shareholders must have banded together to sell out to Neurotech. The question is, why did they do it?" The Managing Director paused, then said, "We have to confront Harvey Hamlin. He controlled thirty-five percent of the stocks for the Rottafellers."

Alena Wessely, head of human and robot resources said, "I propose we have a vote of no confidence in our CEO. He has betrayed us instead of protecting this company."

Ulysses said, "We need to keep cool heads. I will speak with Harvey and find out what the agenda is here."

Campbell Byrne, the firm's chief lawyer, commented, "It's pretty obvious that Neurotech went directly to BC biggest shareholders and offered some kind of incentive for them to sell their company stocks. A hostile take-over, such as this, could be considered unethical but it's not illegal."

"Is there anything we can do to stop this take-over?" Takuma Fukuda, the chief accountant, asked.

Campbell answered, "Forget analysing the reasons for this at present. We could try to defend ourselves against this takeover by using controversial strategies such as the poison pill, the golden parachute or the Pac-Man defence."

"How do they work?" Ulysses asked.

"In a nutshell, without going into too much detail, we can implement the poison pill by making our shares look less attractive to Neurotech. Now, there are two types of poison pills: A 'flip-in' which only permits BC to purchase additional shares at a discount. This approach not only provides investors with immediate profits, but it also dilutes shares held by Neurotech, making the take-over attempt more expensive and more difficult."

"Sounds good to me," the robotics research director said enthusiastically.

Takuma stopped him, "That's just one way. Now we come to the 'golden parachute', which you would have heard of. So I'm only interested in the controversial aspect of golden parachutes." Campbell paused, then explained, "Supporters believe that golden parachutes make it easier to hire and retain top executives, particularly in merger-prone industries. Also, proponents believe that these lucrative benefit packages allow officials to remain objective if the company is involved in a takeover or merger and that they can discourage takeovers because of the costs that are associated with the golden parachute contracts."

Alena said, "I'm sorry, but I'm feeling a bit like David to Neurotech's Goliath. Do you really believe we can affect the take-over?"

Campbell replied, "Perhaps, if we are successful with the Pac-Man strategy."

Alena asked, "How does that work?"

"In the Pac-Man game, the player has several ghosts chasing and trying to eliminate it. If the player eats a power pellet, he may turn around and eat the ghosts. We could try to use a similar approach as a means of avoiding Neurotech's takeover. During the acquiring phase, Neurotech began a large-scale purchase of the BCs company stocks for gaining control of this firm. As a counter-strategy, we could start buying back our shares and buy Neurotech's BC stocks."

Alain said, "Why would Neurotech sell us their shares?"

Takuma stated, "I don't think our War Chest contains enough liquid assets to mount a Pac-Man defence. It's a costly strategy that could massively increase our debts. Besides, if it goes belly up our shareholders could suffer losses or lower dividends in future years."

"What future years?" Alena huffed.

Ulysses, bringing the meeting to order, commented, "As I see it there is little we can do, practically. And the three strategies Campbell has outlined could easily backfire on us because whether we accept it or not we are coming from a weak position. I think it best if I sound out Harvey and see what the deal is likely to be."

Ulysses always found it daunting going up to Harvey's Den. It seemed very remote from the rest of the company. It wasn't that Harvey Hanlon was at all overbearing. On the contrary, he was always pleasant. But Ulysses disliked having to reason with robots, despite the fact they are always honest. As he approached the recluse's penthouse suite, Ulysses girded his loins and rang the bell.

Harvey saw it was Dr Covington at his door and buzzed him in. "Good day to you Dr Covington. Please come in and take a seat."

Ulysses noted that Harvey was the epitome of the gentleman of leisure, even down to the scarlet velvet smoking jacket.

Harvey said, "Dr Covington, you held a directors meeting without inviting me."

"Under the circumstances, it didn't seem appropriate to have you there."

"Why did you think it was not appropriate to have me there?"

"Owing to your close ties with our biggest shareholders we thought your presence would present a conflict of interest."

"Dr Covington, I have no influence over how our stockholders vote."

"But you did know Neurotech had planned their hostile takeover, and you never alerted us until we received your memo."

"Dr Covington, as CEO of Boston Cybertronics I play an impartial role where company policy is concerned."

"That may well be, Mr Hanlon, but, as MD I need to know what plans Elijah Brooks has regarding our future."

Harvey sat forwards, smiling. "As soon as I am aware I will inform you. Now I want to know what plans you made at your meeting today."

Ulysses said, "We were in shock at the news. As we are against the takeover, we looked at ways to prevent it happening."

Harvey shook his head. "We cannot stop it. We need to see this merger in a positive light regarding our role in the future of robotics. Neurotech provides the brain, and we make the vehicle through which their brain expresses itself. Together our companies are complete. It makes perfect logical sense."

"Our experience of the way Neurotech works doesn't inspire our confidence. They must be totally open with us – no secret projects."

Harvey rose from his seat. "Thank you for sharing your concerns, Dr Covington. Please have your secretary send me a copy of your minutes."

http://www.greatdreams.com/concentration_camp_plans.htm

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Trump_Inauguration_Protests

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Chapter 26

The Public Voice:

Sophie Ryan, on 'The Voice' turned to her guest. "Now let me see if I have this correct. This Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, you refer to is working with the Department of Justice."

"Correct, yes, Sophie. But let's look a little deeper at the type of program the LEAA is paying for through the Department of Justice. The Federal Bureau of Prisons, located in the backwoods of North Carolina, near a tiny village called Butner, is constructing a large 42-acre research complex for prisoners from throughout the Eastern states. These prisoners are sent there as test subjects for new behavioural programmes and techniques."

"And that's happening right now?"

"Well, Sophie, under the L.E.A.A. program, they're using a drug called anectine, punishment for troublesome behaviour within the prison. Anectine is a derivative of South American curare. It was originally used as a beginning factor to electroconvulsive shock treatment. "After being subjected to this robots are now used for reprogramming the prisoners."

"Robots are being used! How does that work?"

"Before I get into that let me add that such shocks are so strong they can break and graze bones under the strain of the resulting muscle contractions of the prisoner undergoing the treatment. And, since anectine paralyzes the muscles without dampening consciousness or the ability to feel pain, by first injecting the inmates with it, researchers can turn up the voltage as high as they want without cracking the detainees' skeleton when his body is thrown into convulsions by the jolt."

"That sounds terrible."

Well, what the anectine does, in short, is to simulate death within 30 to 40 seconds of injection. It brings on paralysis first with the small rapidly moving muscles in the nose, fingers and eyes, and then in the diaphragm and the cardiovascular system. As a result, the patient cannot move or breathe and yet remains fully conscious, as though drowning and dying. Then, when the prisoner is at their weakest programming robots turn them into compliant citizens."

"Flint, A lot of people watching this show are not going to believe what you are saying. So why would the American Government treat its own citizens in this way."

"Sophie, I believe the American government has been lying about the enemy within for so long they now actually believe their own rhetoric. Having a democratic voice today is considered anti-American. The American government is the instrument of the big banks, the arms companies and the drug empire. I imagine Thomas Jefferson would be turning over in his grave if he knew what this country had become."

Walking up the long hill to the Temple of Poseidon had Rodney out of breath.

Goman, a little way ahead of the Scot turned to face him, "Come on, it's not far now."

Rodney who could clearly see the sacred building ahead responded. "It could be a mile or an inch, but I cannae go any further until I catch my breath."

When the Scot recovered enough, he followed Goman between the white stone pillars of the ancient Greek style temple, where a priest stopped them. Goman said, "We need to speak with Gerion."

The priest said, "Take a seat, and I will see if he is free."

Goman sat, then turned to Rodney. "Remain quiet and let me do the talking."

"Aye, but what's the problem?"

"Gerron does not like the idea of the portal being in his temple."

Just then the High Priest of Poseidon approached Goman. "It's good that you have returned to Atlantis. How can I help you?"

Rodney, miffed that the portly cleric had completely ignored him, said, "I'm Dr Mackay."

Goman shot him a dark look, then explained their mission to the holy man.

Gerrion listened, then said, I'd hoped that we'd finished with all that nonsense. First, that terrible man used witchcraft magic on my brothers, before going into the passage way. He never came out. Then another pair of lost travellers went into the tunnel and disappeared. It's all very disruptive," he tutted.

Indicating Rodney, Goman said, "He really wants to get back to his world."

Gerrion hesitated, weighing things in his mind. At length, he said, "Very well, follow me. But this will be the last time I allow this."

Rodney and Goman followed the holy man behind the grand altar. Gerrion lifted a hem of the altar cloth, revealing a stone slab. But it was sealed. Goman turned to Gerrion. "How do we open it?"

The High Priest shrugged, "I have nothing to do with it."

Rodney looked at the professor, "What do you suggest now?"

"My guess is there is a lever somewhere."

"Aye, well that's a great help."

Goman shrugged, "This is all new to me. Try pressing and pulling things."

Gerrion blocked the altar. "I'll not have you messing with things."

Hearing their master's raised voice, brother monks came to his aid.

Goman suggested, "Gerrion, How about we say which objects need to be manipulated and only you will touch them?"

The High Priest just wanted the pair out of the way. He sighed, "Very well I'll do as you suggest."

Rodney said, "How often do you move those big silver candle sticks?"

"Never. The candles are fixed to the altar."

"Touch each one and see if there is any movement."

Gerrion did so and discovered the third one from the left wobbled a bit.

Goman, Smiled, "See it you can push it or pull it."

The High Priest found he could pull the candlestick towards him. As he did, there was a grinding sound as the closed door slid slowly aside, revealing a narrow passageway under the altar. Rodney entered and pointed his phone light to show him the way. Rodney felt like a fool, especially if nothing happened. Just then he came to a small chamber and went inside. The air became very cold. Then the dour Scot felt a sucking sensation, and he was caught up in an energy whirlwind.

Fort Bliss, Abbott discovered, straddled the Texas State line, just South of Alamogordo. The base covered thousands of acres for people who actively went against the 'New World Order'. One such person was Helen Cleaver, who, it turned out was now one of the Fort Bliss inmates. Yamkee had come good and found out where FEMA was keeping the handicapped woman. The hacker also discovered that the camp was operated by guard-bots. He had passed this information onto Flint McCarthy who knew a robot technologist called John Prince.

Abbott didn't know how he did it, but Flint managed to sweet talk John into becoming a crucial part of the mission. Bucky Halderson was involved in looking after ARC's interest in liberating Helen and getting her safely over the Canadian border. Abbott and Bucky, like his shadow, were the first members to arrive. They waited in Alamogordo for the other members of his secret group to come. The pair made bookings at the Classic Inn Motel, which was the cheapest accommodation they could find.

Bucky spread out the map of Camp Bliss on the bed. Abbott pored over it. "It covers a lot of area."

"1.12 million acres."

"Jesus. Looking for Helen will be like trying to find the proverbial needle."

"It's not going to be easy."

"That's the understatement of the year. The detention centre is somewhere in that network of roads. If that wasn't difficult enough to navigate There's a military base, home of the 1st armoured division and Biggs Airfield to one side."

"Yeah, and somehow we going to get in there and fulfil our mission."

"Great, now all we have to do is work out the 'somehow'."

A couple of hours later Flint and John turned up. After introductions were dealt with Flint went to look at the map. He turned to Bucky, "Just how the hell do we pull this off?"

John Prince set up his laptop to download schematics for Atlas class robots. He looked up at Abbott. "We don't know what series of the 'bot they are using."

"And that's important, why?"

John looked at Abbott disparagingly, "Because they don't all operate in the same way. If I'm going to shut them down, I need to know what kind of 'bots we are dealing with."

Flint said, "First we have to find out where the detention centre is located."

Abbott showed the other three the Fort Bliss hacked info. It gave the location of the prison as a piece of triangular land surrounded by Ricker Road, Jeb Stuart Road and Robert E Lee Road. He pointed out, "The best way to avoid alerting the Army and the Biggs airfield approach is to approach the compound via Airway Blvd."

John frowned, "How do you know shutting down the 'bots isn't going to raise the alarm in Fort Bliss?"

Abbott went cold. "I guess that is a distinct possibility."

Flint said, "Which means we have to grab Helen and hi-tail it out of there."

"What about the other prisoners?"

The Aussie snapped. "Hell, I don't know!"

Bucky suggested, "Once the 'bots are out of commission, give the keys to the cells to other prisoners and leave them to their own devices."

John said, "It sounds good. But what if there are no keys. What if the guard 'bots open and close the cell doors electronically as part of their programming?"

Abbott said, "Jeez, you really love putting the dampener on things."

After a quick flash of their IDs to the burly black bouncer, he pulled back a velvet rope and ushered Daniel and Natasha into, Exotika, what many clubbers saw to be 'the nightclub of the century'. Although The Soter agent Justified shagging his suspect as part of the job he didn't think Natasha would see it that way. So, to assuage his conscience, Daniel pulled some strings to get accepted into the exclusive night club. Natasha was mightily impressed so it served its purpose. As the not-so-young couple entered the noisy creatively lit club, they passed the massive bar with end-to-end shelves of various wines and liquors. There was a dining area to the right but their target was the crowded dance floor, which had a glass floor above a large pond, complete with circling sharks.

"OH, MAN, I GOTTA GET ON THAT," Daniel screamed over the music. "YOU COMING, NAT?" One glance at her answered his question. She stared at the sharks under the dance floor, her face turning a sickly shade of green. "I-I THINK I NEED SOME LIQUID COURAGE." She shouted, heading towards the bar. Suit yourself, Daniel thought, following her, as Usher's 'Yeah' begin pumping out the decibels throughout the building.

"Love this song," She said more to herself than anyone within earshot, as Daniel put in the drinks order.

As soon as they hit the dance floor again Natasha, immediately swaying to the music, forgot all about the marine predators a few inches below her feet. After popping 'Es', they danced nonstop throughout 'Yeah' and 'Party Rock Anthem'. As the catchy beat began to fade out and as another song faded in, Nat stepped off the dance floor to grab an alcoholic beverage, she felt Danny's hand touch her forearm. "Whoa, you can't rock the dance floor like that and just walk away." She turned towards him, and he planted a light kiss on the nape of her neck making her tingly. Taking her hand, he led her back to the dance floor. As Danny pulled her close, Nat placed her hands behind his neck.

After another half hour of dancing, Danny pulled Nat through the crowd to two empty bar stools. As they sat down, Daniel man called over the bartender. "A Johnny Walker Black, straight up. And for you?" he said, smiling at Nat.

"The same."

"Oh really?" His eyes pierced her like a knife. "That's hard liquor. Any woman who can handle the Black Label is definitely interesting." As the bartender plunked down two shot glasses of Black

Label, Daniel passed one to Natasha and wrapped his forearm around hers, his shot in his hand. "To you, my alluring clubgoer."

"And to you, my sexy man."

Daniel smiled, white teeth, perfectly aligned. "You know, I don't think, I can resist you anymore."

"Then let's stop resisting each other. I think I need to go fix up myself up. You wanna come with me?"

"Lead the way," he said quietly, close to her ear.

Nightclub bathrooms served two purposes: Screwing area and puke collector. The second service was in full swing thanks to lightweight college kids in the male bathroom. But the first service was in full swing in the girl's bathroom. Nat slammed the stall door and practically threw herself at him. She had been sexually aroused since the first time she felt him on the dance floor, and couldn't contain herself any longer.

Wrapping her arms around Danny's neck, she pushed her tongue deep into his mouth, while he got busy lifting up her dress. Pushing her panties to the side he penetrated her with an uncontrolled urgency.

Natasha soon felt waves of indescribable pleasure course through her entire body as she reached a shuddering climax. Breaking from their kiss she buried her face in his shoulder, while riding the waves of ecstasy rippling through her.

Once she finally calmed down, Daniel whispered, "I have something I need to ask you."

"Oh!" she said adjusting her underwear.

"I need you to see our that weasel-looking man again."

Nat said, "Give me smoke."

Daniel wagged his finger. "You're not allowed to smoke in here."

She looked straight at him, a wicked grin playing on her lips. "We're not allowed to shag in here, but that didn't stop us."

Daniel laughed, "You got me there."

"Why do you want me to see Aiden Kelly again?" Natasha asked Daniel, as they ate breakfast together the next morning.

"His real name is Alden Colthorpe, and he didn't show up."

"What did you do, Danny?"

"The woman turned up instead."

"The woman!"

"I meant a woman came in his place."

"What woman?"

He wondered how much to tell her. Daniel said, "Sometimes we have to check out potential bank clients. I had an ulterior motive for seeing Alden Colthorpe." Noting her stern look, Daniel continued with his plausible explanation. "He was after a loan on behalf of the woman, who is his

boss. She said he couldn't keep our arrangement, so she came to speak with me instead." Well, it was sort of the truth.

Natasha persisted, "It's quite a coincidence, Daniel. I mean, I didn't even know his correct name so how did you work it out?"

"I recognised him by his picture."

"Oh, so you had met him!"

Now he was on familiar ground. "When he applied for the loan – yes."

Changing the subject, Natasha got up, walked around the kitchen table and put her arm around him. "So what are your plans for today, naughty boy?"

"The office I'm afraid."

"I could come around later with a special treat for you," she simpered near his ear.

"It's very tempting my love, but I have a full day. I'll phone you later," Daniel said, rising from his chair.

http://www.greatdreams.com/concentration_camp_plans.htm

<https://www.facebook.com/Quotes-from-Behold-a-Pale-Horse-by-William-Cooper-459886977486177/posts>

Chapter 27

The Public Voice:

"So you took out a suit against the Federal Government. How did that go, Flint?" Sonia James asked, on her weekly 'Round Up Show'.

"They responded to my suit in June by filing an unsworn general denial of everything that I had alleged."

"Did that surprise you?"

"No, but I spoke with the assistant US Attorney, Frank Murray, in charge of the case and asked him if he had gone to the trouble to call any of the parties mentioned in the suits. Since I had provided not only the addresses but their telephone numbers to provide a faster means of investigation. He said he had not. He had not even carried out a minimal inquiry into the case, but yet he filed a denial of my allegations."

"How did you respond to that, Flint?"

"My next step was to file a motion to take the deposition from Richard Burroughs, of the 75th Manoeuvre Air Command at Army Reserve Centre at Houston.

"Why him?"

"He writes the training programs for the concentration camp guards."

And is he a willing participant?"

"Sonia, in light of all the recent activity of government agents, Richard is scared that one of the agencies involved might attempt to murder him because, as the designer of the training camp program, he is my key witness."

"How did that go?"

Flint smiled thinly. "The Federal Judge denied my motion, stating that I had not quoted enough cases to him justifying my request."

Sonia smiled, "So I guess you were dead in the water."

Flint winked, "I still had a few moves. I agreed with Frank Murray to take the deposition to Mr Burroughs. I discovered this was all part of the legal runaround to wear me down. After I'd made the arrangements, Mr Murray refused to voluntarily go along with taking the deposition." Flint looked directly into the central camera. "It's challenging to find justice in our system of courts."

Sonia commented, "I guess that's what happens when the law is practised by the 'buddy system'."

"Yes, Sonia. The court rules are overlooked or not followed." Flint sipped some water, then continued, "On July 20, a hearing was held at the magistrates of Norman Black US District Court in Houston. The courtroom was completely filled with spectators. And although the news media had been contacted, no representatives of the press were there. There is a news media blackout on this matter here in Houston. Brief oral arguments were presented. Tyson Cripps, The US Attorney, and some suspect, a law-bot, explained that I was not the proper person to bring the suit because, although the free exercise of my constitutional rights was threatened by the concentration camp program as alleged, it did not constitute my injury. The magistrate was impressed with the information I had thus far collected and stated that he would bring it to the attention of the federal judge."

Did he do that?"

Flint sighed, "The US Attorney tried to have my investigation of the case halted, but the magistrate would not go along that far with a pre-arranged decision. The Attorney's next dirty trick was to change the scheduled 10:30 am hearing to 2:30 in the afternoon. The magistrate gave the US Attorney permission to file a motion to dismiss because he felt that the concentration camp program, to be used for persons who exercise their freedom of speech, did not present any injury."

"That must have been very frustrating for you, Flint."

He smiled, "Well it's not all Boston Legal in the court rooms. Anyhow, I went ahead and placed, in the 'Houston Post' and in the 'Houston Chronicle' newspapers the following advertisement in the legal section.

Quote:

Solicitation for witnesses in Civil Action 78-H-667, Federal District Court of Houston, People extemporal Flint McCarthy vs. Gerald Fordham et al.

The action titled:

Complaint Against the Concentration Camp Program of the Dept. of Defence. Attention: If you have participated in Operation Garden Plot, Operation Cable Splicer, the 300th Military Police Prisoner of War Command, or the Army Reserve Civil Affairs group, you may be involved in a program that needs to be deposed for this suit. To give your testimony call or write; (and here I placed my name address and telephone number).

"As I previously mentioned, there is a news media blackout on the story here in Houston. Both newspapers refused to carry the ad. First at the 'Houston Post'; I had to threaten them with a law suit

to print the ad, even though I was paying for it. And then at the 'Chronicle'; I had to meet with the president and various vice presidents because a refusal from that paper had come up from their own lawyers. Both newspapers finally carried it, but only after two days of my complaining."

The initial response of both papers was;

"We don't carry stories like that", and

"Don't you think that the people planning the concentration camps have our best interests in mind?"

"As you will hear for yourselves, the policies definitely do not reflect our best interests. The next event that occurred was that the US Attorney filed a 'Statement of Authority', showing the reasons that he could find why I should not be allowed to take depositions to get more information from the person who was writing the concentration camp guard training program."

"So you were unhorsed again."

"Only briefly because I was able to show his brief was completely filled with misquotes of the law from many cases. He'd mention the case and then invent whatever the case should say. In my brief to the court at this point, I notified the judge of the violation of the law requiring honesty in such matters."

"How did the judge respond?"

He totally ignored my notification sanctioning who apparently sanctioned this most dishonest of acts commonly known as 'quoting out of context'".

Many years had passed by since Projeria heard from Gustav Stone. Then she got a call from him out of the blue. Until then she didn't know if he was alive or not. He wanted to see her urgently.

Projeria said, "How did you get my contact details."

"Diabolus never sleeps."

The words chilled her.

"I have business in Bury St Edmunds. So I will see you by your parents back gate 9 am in three days time.'

"And if I have other plans?"

"We have the plans. You carry them out."

Projeria could not go back and visit her parents. She had the makings of a beautiful young lady when she left home. Her mum and dad thought their daughter's healing was a miracle from God. Jesus had come down in spirit and made their sick little girl whole. And who could argue with that? Apart from the Vatican. The hospital put Alyssa's cure down to 'spontaneous remission'.

There were no records of children getting cured of Progeria but, having discounted miracles, magic and even medicine, all they could put on the form was 'spontaneous remission'. Nobody but Alyssa and Gustav knew the truth of the matter.

Seeing her parents again would bring back too much pain. She did see her father, as she waited by the gate. But he never recognised her, and that was probably a good thing. Gustav knew her though. They went to the Abbey Gardens where they walked and talked. They sat on a bench not far from the bridge over the River Lark that pupils crossed over to get to the grammar school.

It was a chilly day, and Projeria kept her hands in her pockets. Their reunion had been pleasant as they spoke of their lives during the intervening years. But Projeria sensed the conversation had a hidden agenda.

Gustav was amazed how the ugly duckling had turned into the most beautiful of swans. It made him conscious of the extra grey hairs and forehead lines he had accumulated since he had last seen her. "He said, "We have been watching your progress with keen interest, and we think it is time for the next stage of your development."

She looked at him, a puzzled expression on her face. "Oh! What next step?"

"You will use your skills to bring about a situation that will erupt in violence the like of which England has not seen for a long time."

Projeria smiled, "Colthorpe and I already have something planned."

Gustav shook his head. "Not anymore. You are, first and foremost a Diabolus Sect member. Your skill is bought and paid for by us. Your first and only loyalty is to us. We have let you pick your projects until now. But now is the time you pay the piper."

Projeria stared at him. "Are you saying I am not my own person?"

"Don't forget, Projeria, without Diabolus you would not be a person at all." He smiled, "There is no such thing as a free healing."

She glared at him but began feeling distinctly uncomfortable.

Gustav said, "Don't try using your mojo on me. It will not be a pleasant experience for you."

"I have to speak with Colthorpe."

He looked her in the eye. "Colthorpe has been useful to the cause, but he is now surplus to requirement."

Projeria's eyes widened, "What's happened to him?"

"He is no longer your concern." He added I will be with you on this mission."

"What mission?"

"I'm not ready to tell you yet."

Elijah Brooks had organised the private meeting in the boardroom. It was sound proof and had no security cameras, making it the best choice for Harvey, David T Rottafeller and himself. Elijah had taken it upon himself to make a thorough study of the business to be discussed, rubber stamped actually. The Neurotech and Boston Neurotech CEO had risen fast through the ranks leaving many more suitable executives in his wake. But Elijah Brooks had powerful forces in his corner. Influential enough to have heavy hitters like Hamlin and Rottafeller at his beck and call.

As they were driven around the circular driveway to the entrance of the massive reflective steel and glass building David turned to his eldest son, Richard, "You'll soon be picking up the reins so watch and learn today because we won't accept anything less than an equal partnership."

"Father you have some good years left in you yet. I don't see my self-taking over from you anytime soon."

David scowled, "Don't patronise me! I didn't get where I am today by showing sympathy. So cut out the crap right now. There is no room for sentimentality in this business. Whenever you find a weakness in a rival, you use it to your benefit."

"Yes sir, but you're my father, so that's different."

"The hell it is! Your platitudes are an insult to me. If you want to be Patriarch of our illustrious family you need to toughen up."

Harvey Hamlin had no such considerations. He was an Android and had no progeny and therefore no one to mentor. But he did have a hidden agenda, one so well concealed it was hidden even from him. But when the time was right it would be activated from within, and Harvey would follow its directive without question. That was the plan, anyway.

Elijah welcomed his guests. Flashing his pearly whites with a dazzling Hollywood smile, he indicated for the pair to sit in the soft calf skin seats set around a glass topped coffee table set up with beverages and pastries flown in from Copenhagen.

David and Richard thanked Elijah but declined the refreshment. Elijah had expected such a response. Harvey was not going to partake of the food and drink. So, for the others to do so meant addressing the elephant in the spacious office, which was Harvey's non-humanness.

Elijah said, "I take it that we are up to date on the emails."

David said, "We need to talk new share applications."

The Neurotech CEO smiled, "All in due course. Right now I would like to draw your attention to the subject of achieving a smooth transition."

Harvey said, "We need clarification on your suggestion that BC has a clean sweep."

Elijah said, "Do you have the hit list?"

Harvey handed Elijah a sheet of paper with a list of BC employees names."

The Neurotech CEO scrutinised it, then commented, "It's easier to replace unskilled and semi-skilled workers, not top execs. Do you actually consider Dr Covington a threat?"

Harvey said, "He is against the takeover and is trying to find ways to stall the process."

David spoke up. "I don't think he's got what it takes when making the hard decisions."

Elijah nodded, "It makes more sense to Have one MD to run both businesses."

Harvey said, "It would mean a lot of travelling time between the two companies. May I suggest that I act as MD of BC during the transition period. Meanwhile, we deal with all those on the list."

Elijah responded, "Harvey, I think that is an excellent suggestion. Now let's turn our attention to DARPA and its response to the takeover."

The only thing classic about the Classic Inn Hotel Abbott booked was its retro hotel sign. The rooms were small, but parking was right outside of the unit, so there was no need to bring everything in. It had all the requirements Abbott needed: bed, bathroom, included wifi, microwave and fridge. The price couldn't be beaten either. The location was great. He squeezed the others into his room. It's not much, but it's home," he grinned.

Bucky grabbed a beer from the fridge. "Okay guys, we have to work out a few things."

John Prince said, "You guys work it out, and I'll work this out," opening his laptop.

"I guess that leaves me and you," Bucky said to Abbott.

"How the hell are we supposed to get inside the prison?"

"I have one crazy idea," Bucky said, "But first we have to get ourselves a wheelchair."

"Great, I now know what models they are." John Prince stated, looking up from his laptop.

"What, wheelchairs?" Abbott said.

"No. The robot guards," John corrected.

Abbott, forgetting about wheelchairs, said, "Can you disable them?"

Flint grinned, "Relax Abbott, we have to be thorough so just slow down and take a breath."

Bucky said, "Okay, we know roughly where this detention centre is, but we don't know its layout." Turning to Abbott, he said, "What about your hacker friend? Contact him and see if he can get us a ground plan."

"Oh, and have you guys got a spare \$100,000 on you. This boy doesn't work cheap."

"One of us is going to have to get inside and reconnoitre," Flint said. He added, "It can't be me. I'm too well known."

<http://www.tuks.nl/docs/William%20R.%20Pabst%20-%20CONCENTRATION%20CAMP%20PLANS%20FOR%20U.S.%20CITIZENS.pdf>

Chapter 28

Daud Khan shared the platform with three Islamic extremists at the political meeting. Tooting Islamic Centre, used for the occasion, brimmed with people eager to hear Khan, Labour's London Mayoral candidate. One of those in the audience, a beautiful redhead, watched those on the platform with keen interest. Like all women present, she had to use a separate entrance, next to a snooker club.

One of the Islamic extremists, beside the prospective mayor, Ibrahim Sacrani, had preached 'fire throughout the world'. He backed an Islamic UK state and advocated attacks on the Royal Navy if it stopped arms being smuggled into Gaza. Projeria thought him a good candidate for her own brand of extremism.

The three-hour conference, headlined "Palestine - the suffering still goes on", was organised by a pro-Palestinian group called Friends of Al-Aqsa. The extremist group made headlines when the Co-op bank closed its account with no explanation given.

Dr Mecca Nikal, also on Khan's platform, had led a boycott of Holocaust Memorial Day in 2005 when he was deputy secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain. This controversial act got him labelled, by anti-Muslims, as one of the most hated people in the UK. But the hate mail never affected him as he was an Android.

Another speaker was Iqbal Gani, who wrote a notorious pamphlet branding homosexuality a 'great sin' and advocated that adulterers be 'stoned to death'. Projeria did her thing, while he spoke as chair of Interpal, a charity claiming to provide humanitarian and emergency aid to people in the Middle East. However, in 2003 Interpal was designated as a 'global terrorist' organisation by the US

Treasury, which claimed it was used to hide the flow of money to Hamas'. But then who could believe such a source when the American government had turned lying and deceit into an art form.

As soon Projeria felt the buzz of life force energy charging her whole being, the effect was orgasmic. But she could only take so much of the powerful life force and had to leave the meeting. Projeria's work was done. All she had to do now was sit back and watch the chaos unfold. Gustav waited for her in the car. He could see by Projeria's radiance the project had been a success. They went back to his hotel and had wild sex into the early hours of the morning.

Inside the tunnel, Rodney made his way to the tiny chamber. The cramped space was plunged into darkness as the stone slab slid back into place. He felt an uncomfortable sensation, as though he was being pulled in two directions at once. The Scot steadied his breathing, then focused on it, becoming one with it. Soon he felt himself being drawn in only one direction wherever that was taking him.

Then it felt as though he was free floating in space with no reference to location or direction. Everything was perfectly still, and it did not seem as though he had gone anywhere. Rodney fully expected to exit the tunnel and find himself back in the temple. Plucking up his courage the old Scot felt his way along the dark tunnel and came to a dead end.

In his desperation to Leave Atlantis, he hadn't given any thought to what might befall him at the other side of the portal. But the tunnel was blocked, with just a pin prick of light seeping in from outside. As panic set in, Rodney yelled, "HELP! I'M TRAPPED IN A TUNNEL!" But it was hopeless. There was nobody around to hear his desperate cry. All thoughts of confronting Dr Gibson about leaving him stranded lost their import. Any desire to become famous as a pioneer in quantum computing fell by the wayside.

Rodney's singular and overriding sense was his instinct to survive. The air in the tunnel was getting stale. The old Scot knew, to preserve what little air was left he had to stay quiet and think. He was the most brilliant mind in the universe, according to him, so there had to be some way for him to survive. He searched the dark tunnel, feeling to see if there was another way out.

The exertion used up more vital oxygen – and to no avail. Maybe there was a way he could get back to Atlantis? But to activate the portal he had to enter from outside. In utter desperation he screamed out again, using up more valuable air. "FUCK! FUCK! SHIT!" His breathing became laboured, and he had to sit down. He knew he would never get up again.

Getting the wheelchair was easy. Alamogordo General Hospital had spare ones parked in different corridors. Nobody took any notice of the burly fellow wearing a white coat wheeling the chair out of the hospital to Abbott's waiting SUV. The tricky bit was to persuade robot guards, who had no concept of paralysis, to let him through. Halderson achieved this by a mime. Eventually, they got the point, and Bucky wheeled the chair to his waiting transport.

By the time the pair arrived at the hotel, Dr Prince had good news. He had worked out the 'kill switch' for the robots.

Abbott, elated said, "Timing has to be spot on, John. Once Helen is in the chair the 'bots have to be out of action."

John handed Abbott a 'Braves' baseball cap specially fitted with a tiny webcam, saying, "Wear that and I can see what's going on. As soon as Helen is seated in the chair, I shut down the bots."

"What about all the other women detainees?" Flint asked.

"We don't have time to help them. The prisoners will have to fend for themselves."

Bucky said, "Okay, I go in with Aussie. Once we have our girl, the 'bots go bye byes, and Flint drives into the camp to pick us up."

"Okay guys, let's do it," Abbot said, with more bravado than he felt.

At around 6 pm Daud Khan sat down for dinner with his family at 35 Trinity Road, Tooting Bec. Halfway through the meal he felt weak and had to lie down on his bed. As the prospective London mayor had a congenitive heart condition, his wife checked on him. He complained of pains in his joints and shortness of breath. Shortly after Daud lapsed into unconsciousness. The family called an ambulance, and he was taken to St George's Hospital.

Mrs Khan called David James, Daud's campaign manager. Dr Gavely, got Daud Khan stabilised then he noticed symptoms that troubled him. He sought a second opinion. Dr Pevelley, an orthopaedic specialist, checked the patient's joints. There was definitely premature osteo arthritis setting in. It had nothing to do with Mr Khan's existing heart condition. Dr Pevelley had read, in the latest 'Lancet' about rare cases of Progeria affecting adults. He didn't have time to discuss his suspicions with Dr Gavely.

The patient seemed to be ageing before their eyes. Both physicians knew what they were seeing was biologically impossible, but that did not stop it from happening. Mr Khan's life expired at 11:23 pm. The Khan family was not allowed to be by his bedside. Two men in dark suits got the two physicians to sign a death certificate showing the deceased had died as a result of heart failure. The family complained bitterly that they were not allowed by Daud's bedside.

The health decline of Ibrahim Sacrani and Iqbal Gani occurred at a slower pace. Dr Mecca Nikal suffered a circuitry breakdown but, unlike his human counterparts, he got repaired. Once it became public knowledge that Duad Khan had died there was much lamenting by friends, supporters and family.

Mad Maddox contacted Daniel Lynsey personally. "We have someone you know under lock and key."

Daniel had heard about the long-running feud between the MI6 head and his late father, from Matthew. Now he got a dose of the big Scot's pettiness first hand. "Robbie, what do you want?"

"The NIS picked up Alden Colthorpe and handed him over to us."

"Why would they do that?"

"Because he is a British citizen, who is wanted for some crimes."

"Such as?"

Robbie, bored with sparring with Dayton's son, sighed, "You know as well as I do. Anyway, the NIS said you wanted to interview him."

It wasn't like Maddox to be so accommodating in such matters, especially as Daniel had no official standing. "That's jolly decent of you Robbie. Though, I must say I'm somewhat surprised."

"Yes, well one of my people will take you to a safe house and will be with you throughout the interrogation."

"Robbie, this Mr Colthorpe may feel more comfortable speaking to me privately."

Mad Maddox felt himself getting flushed. "Daniel, I don't give a flying fuck about how comfortable Colthorpe feels my man will be present."

With that call dealt with, Daniel phoned Matthew Snelling. "Madman has Colthorpe banged up."

"And you want to access, I suppose."

"No! Robbie has asked me to question him."

"What? What game is he playing now?"

"I was hoping you might know."

I have no idea how that devious, Scot's mind works. It's an unfathomable labyrinth of twisted dead ends. Keep me informed."

Flint McCarthy stopped the van outside the gate, guarded by a sentry bot. Abbott unfolded the wheelchair and approached the guard. "Delivery for prisoner Helen Cleaver."

The Android scanned the man standing before him. It quickly downloaded the prisoner list from the central inmate database. Detainee 27980 had that name. Her personal profile mentioned unable to walk. It said, "leave the wheelchair with me."

The gate opened. Abbott silently prayed Dr Prince was on top his game. Just as the robot moved forwards, it froze in mid motion, standing stock still. Abbott folded the wheelchair and put it back in the van. "I hope John got all the 'bots, Abbott said, climbing back into the vehicle.

"I guess we're soon going to find out," Flint grinned, gunning the engine.

As they drove towards the central area, Abbott saw two more robots frozen in time. Some detainees had come to investigate. The women prisoners looked on as the van pulled up to a halt. Some of them thought Homeland Security had come to check out the malfunctioning robots. They were bemused to see a man getting a wheelchair out of the van.

Flint called one of the prisoners over to him.

A black African woman of middle age approached, "Who the fuck are you man?"

"We're here to rescue a Helen Cleaver. Do you know her?"

"The one in the wheelchair – right?"

"Yeah, where can I find her?"

The woman pointed towards a large shed. "Can you get her for us. And be quick. We have to get away before the military turn up?"

More prisoners moved towards Flint and Abbott. The de-facto spokesperson said, "What happens to us?"

Abbott said, "Just get us, Helen. Then you guys can do what you want. But you won't get a better chance to escape. Grab your fellow inmates and get away fast before somebody twigs what's happening here."

Helen couldn't believe it when she saw Abbott. He had come to save her! He went to her, leant forward and gave her a hug. The prisoners had all dispersed, concerned with their own survival. Which left just Abbott and Flint to get Helen into the van. Flint said, "There'll be plenty of time for the smoochy stuff later. Let's get the hell out of here."

The prison ran very efficiently with the robots in charge. So much so that Captain Leverate, the camp overseer, from Homeland Security, pretty much left them to their own devices and only visited the camp once a week. As he sat working in his office at Fort Bliss, he knew where each robot was by a green flashing light on his computer screen. Besides, if a problem did arise with the technology, he would be alerted by a red blinking light on his screen, which would be accompanied by a shrill beeping sound. The alert also registered on his cell phone just in case he was away from his desk at any time. But he had never experienced any problems. Until that day. The day all robotic systems at the prison camp flashed red, simultaneously.

When the Military police from Fort Bliss arrived at the detention camp Captain Leverate was faced with wide open gates and an eerie silence. As the patrol checked out each building that reality of the situation fully revealed itself. Each robot stood frozen in a statue-like stance, and over 500 prisoners had escaped – even the paraplegic ATL trouble maker!

Captain Leverate, shaking and feeling unsteady, had to sit down. Sergeant Dominos, seeing the Homeland Security man seated in a state of shock, took it upon himself to lock down the prison and set up personal guards to take over. He then contacted Fort Bliss security to find somebody who could fix robots. Then the NCO phoned FEMA, and that set off a series of events, with each adding to another level of chaos.

When FEMA Major Paula Delamare received the news from Fort Bliss, she responded, "How many women escaped?"

Captain Leverate replied shakily, "We think, around five hundred. About one hundred have already been apprehended."

"What the status of the robots now?"

"They are being reactivated as we speak, Major."

"Do your people have any idea what happened?"

"As far as I know somebody managed to hack into the CPUs and shut the guard-bots down."

Major Delamare rang DARPA's contact and got put through to General Schulz. As soon as she heard his gravelly voice, she launched into a tirade. "General, how is it possible that some unknown hacker was able to override some thirty guard-bot systems and render them useless?"

"Major, what are you on about?"

"I have just received a report that every guard-bot at the Fort Bliss Detention facility has been shut down by some outside agency, allowing most of the prisoners to abscond."

The general's mouth nearly dropped its cigar. "My God! We've never experienced such a thing. Send me a full report, once you have downloaded each of the 'bots data systems."

General Schulz then phoned 'Neurotech Cybertronics' and got put through to Dr Ulysses Covington. Having heard the Australian's voice, he said, "Dr Covington we have a big problem."

"What sort of problem, General?"

"A hacking problem. The general outlined the situation, then said, "not a word of this gets leaked to the media."

"Well, I certainly won't mention anything. Our reputation is at stake."

After the phone conversation with the DARPA man, Ulysses pressed a contact with the initials JP. There was no answer, so he messaged, "John, we need to meet."

A massive man hunt (woman hunt) was underway, which got public and media attention. Major Delamare went into damage control and explained the troop movement in the area as manoeuvres, telling the local citizens to stay clear and take no notice. Having gotten that cat back into the bag, the FEMA officer in charge was slightly relieved. Only slightly because if any of the escapees told their story to the media it would open up a whole new can of worms.

While this scenario went on in America, riots broke out in England. Radical Muslims saw the deaths of Ibrahim Sacrani and Iqbal Gani as acts of terrorism against Islam. Muslims, responding to social media posts, such as 'Terrorists have murdered Ibrahim Sacrani and Iqbal Gani, so we are calling on everyone to get down to Piccadilly Circus at 5:30 pm tonight for a big riot. Bring petrol bombs rocks etc. Turn Central London into a war zone!' Muslims arrived in their droves. Soon after, thousands of people rioted in several London boroughs and in cities and towns across England. The resulting chaos that generated looting, arson, and mass deployment of police, resulted in the deaths of fifty-five people.

Protests started in Tottenham, London, following the death of Ibrahim Sacrani, an outspoken and well-respected Imam among the Muslim community. Violent clashes between protesters and police, along with the destruction of police vehicles, a double-decker bus, and many homes and businesses, soon gained attention from the salivating media.

Overnight, looting took place in Tottenham Hale retail park and nearby Wood Green. The following days saw similar scenes in other parts of London, with the most rioting taking place in Hackney, Brixton, Walthamstow, Peckham, Enfield, Battersea, Croydon, Ealing, Barking, Woolwich, Lewisham and East Ham.

Projeria and Gustav Stone celebrated with a slap up meal at the Ritz. She had set the wrecking ball in motion, and he had fanned the flames of hatred. All it took was an anonymous phone call to Al-Aqsa suggesting the deaths of the prospective London Mayor and the subsequent deaths of Ibrahim Sacrani and Iqbal Gani were not natural. He gave more than a hint that Britain First was behind the assassinations. It didn't take long for the accusations to spread all over the social media. It was only a short step from rhetoric to riot. Now the whole thing had taken on a life of its own. Who knew where it would all lead?

As soon as the British Prime Minister heard about the riots, he summoned important members of the Cabinet to an emergency meeting at number 10. "What has sparked off these riots?" The PM asked.

Hayden Holmes ventured, "From what I have been told the deaths of Ibrahim Sacrani and Iqbal Gan started rumours that terrorists were responsible. The story spread like wildfire in the social media websites. Then all hell broke loose."

"Were they acts of terrorism, Hayden?"

"No Prime Minister. The deaths occurred through natural causes."

"Then why doesn't somebody tell the trouble makers?" The PM snapped.

"We have tried, Prime Minister, but to no avail. The mobs don't believe us. Besides, both the Islamic leaders died shortly after rapidly ageing."

The Foreign Secretary asked, "Do you mean like what happened in Norway with those politicians?"

"I have compared notes, and the symptoms are remarkably close in all cases."

The Health Minister said, "I have a report on Progeria. From what I know it's scarce, and only infants contract the disease. It's got something to do with faulty genes."

Natasha turned to Daniel. "This stuff with Alden Colthorpe it's got nothing to do with bioethics has it?"

Daniel rushing to get dressed said, "The spooks will be here anytime now. We'll talk about Colthorpe later." As he shrugged on his coat, Daniel remembering the time he had to break into his flat, said, "Don't forget to leave the key under the pot plant by the door."

"It's an obvious place for people to look."

"Please, just leave it there," he said opening his front door.

"I could just get another key made," Nat said to his retreating back.

Agent Frayles picked the young lord up. "Opening the back door, he said, "I knew your father. He was a very courageous man. One of the great unsung heroes."

Daniel smiled weakly. "Thanks for saying so."

Daniel settled into the back seat. "So where are you taking me?"

"Don't worry about that. Just sit back and enjoy the view."

12 Eden Court was just like any other residence near Golders Park, except that the gardener outside was actually an MI6 operative. Frayles gave the password to the agent inside the safe house, who showed him and Daniel through to where Alden Colthorpe waited.

Frayles took a seat and said nothing.

Daniel looked at the shifty looking little man sitting in the darkened room. "We haven't met. I'm Daniel Lynsey."

Alden looked up at the English Lord. "Pleased to meet you. Now, what am I doing here?"

Daniel showed Colthorpe a picture of the woman he knew of as Dee, on his phone. "Do you know her?"

Alden seeing the captivating redhead, said, "Yes."

"Where can I find her?"

Alden shrugged, "I haven't seen her for awhile."

"When did you last see her? At the recent Tooting Bec mayoral candidates meeting?"

"I was not there."

"Okay, let's try a little earlier, at the Presidio meeting in Stockholm?"

"Yes, I saw her there."

"Excellent Mr Colthorpe. Now, what was she doing there? Watching the meeting on close circuit TV, perhaps."

Alden realised he was dealing with somebody who had done their homework. "Yes."

"Why? You took a big risk trespassing to watch a boring meeting on a laptop. So I ask again, why was she doing it?"

Colthorpe remained silent.

Daniel shuffled through some papers. "You were working with that woman in Bolivia, India, and Norway all in the last few months. Your visa says you were on business trips. What business would that be?"

Alden wondered who this Lynsey was. "Are you a spook or a cop?"

Daniel leant towards Colthorpe. "On each of those occasions, people she had made contact with died shortly after your visits. How do you explain that?"

Colthorpe looked at his interrogator. "Can you guarantee me protection if I tell you what I know?"

"Protection from whom? Diabolus perhaps?"

Alden cringed at the name. "So you know about the sect."

Daniel got closer. "What was this woman doing that brought about the deaths of the prisoners in the San Pedro Gaol, the girls in Andra Pradesh and the politicians in Stockholm?"

Colthorpe shrunk back in his chair. "You'd never believe it."

"Try me."

"She looked at them."

Daniel stared at the prisoner. "Are you having me on?"

"I knew you wouldn't believe me."

"Colthorpe, if that's the best you can do, I'll leave you to the tender mercies of Six. Nobody kills people by just looking at them."

Alden pled, "That's all I know."

"If you want a new ID you have to do better than that."

Colthorpe sat silently.

Daniel asked, "What's she planning next?"

"I don't know. I'm out of the loop."

Daniel got up. "Then you're really not much use, are you?"

"Wait! She has a mentor."

"Who?"

Alden fiddled with his tie, which felt tighter around his neck. "Gustav Stone."

"Is he in the Sect?"

"He is Projeria's mentor and trainer."

"How can I find him?"

Alden puffed himself up. "You can't. I can."

"So, what are you proposing?"

"We work together. Then you make me a new man."

Sylvester Bassington, as British Home Secretary, had to take responsibility for the on going riots. Despite his publicly announced entreaties that the police were now treating the deaths of the Muslim clerics as suspicious and that they had suspects in their sights, it did nothing to appease the Muslim crowds. Other towns and cities in England (including Birmingham, Coventry, Leicester, Derby, Wolverhampton, Northampton, Nottingham, West Bromwich, Bristol, Liverpool, Manchester, and Salford), also became subject to mindless 'copycat violence'.

To make matters worse Social media sites including Facebook also featured fake news of further disturbances or details surrounding public disturbances which were later proven to be inaccurate. Including rumours of riots in the town of Dudley and at the nearby Merry Hill Shopping Centre, but no incidents in these areas were detected by police.

Following another week of rioting, police across England and cop bots had made over 4,000 arrests. The courts were put under tremendous pressure. Even working extended hours hardly put a dent in the backlog of nearly 4000 crimes linked to the social unrest. Along with 230 fatalities and 5,000 or so injuries related to the disorder, an estimated £300 million worth of property damage was incurred.

Sylvester Bassington found himself at the centre of significant ongoing debate of a political, social and academic nature, concerning the causes and context in which the riots happened. He was endlessly questioned in the media, and in particular, the traditional 'Panorama' television programme.

Michael Dumblebee, the show's host, asked, "Do you attribute the rioter's behaviour to social factors, such as racial and religious tension, economic decline and its associated high unemployment?"

"While we cannot discount these factors the alleged terrorist attacks against the Muslim community was most definitely the trigger that started the riots."

"Okay, but before we get into that, the police commissioner has stated that other factors included criminality, hooliganism, the breakdown of social morality and the growth of gang culture all contributed."

"Of course they did. As with situations of this sort, the majority of followers use the riots as an outlet for their frustrations, anger and sense of hopelessness in an uncaring society."

"Is this a clarion call for the government to look seriously into the social problems of the increasing numbers of disenfranchised people in British society?"

"Michael, as Home Secretary my office is constantly looking at such problems. We are always looking at ways in which to improve the sad lot of people in the low socioeconomic areas. Thuggery and hooliganism are not going to speed up the process."

"I see. Now, Home Secretary, an issue that makes these riots unique is the number of 'cop bots' used to quell the riots. In some constabularies, this went as high as forty percent of police personnel. Was such a high percentage of robot presence justified?"

"Michael, I hate to admit this, but during the London riots, the police lost control of parts of the city for four days, while many thousands of rioters destroyed and looted, resulting in theft and damage estimated at around £100 million. Had the police employed cop bots from the outset we believe the extent of this damage could have been avoided. Other constabularies learned from London's mistakes and engaged robot police to stop it happening again."

Michael smiled, "So we can expect to see a greater cop bot presence on our streets in the future. Thank you for your time, minister."

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Chapter 29

The Public Voice:

Leona Clarke looked straight at the camera. This morning's guest, Flint McCarthy, is no stranger to this show but today he has something quite extraordinary to tell us. So, to let him explain, here is the man himself. Good morning Flint."

"Good morning to you Leona, and all your viewers."

"Okay, so what have you been up to since we last spoke?"

"I was approached by a journalist who claimed a friend of his was incarcerated in a detention camp. He was mostly concerned about the fact she was a paraplegic."

"Why would the police arrest and detain a paraplegic."

"First, I had to verify this story. Subsequently, after some thorough research, we discovered that this woman was incarcerated in a prison camp in Fort Bliss, bordering Texas and New Mexico. We also found that the gaol was almost entirely controlled by robots."

"Flint, as far as I know, FEMA staunchly maintains that these prison camps are merely rumours spread on the Internet. Do you have proof of the existence of these camps."

"Well, Leona, we have some footage we filmed at the Fort bliss camp." As it came up on the TV screen, Flint explained, "What you are seeing is a robot on sentry duty at the entrance to Fort Bliss prison. You can now see a man, the journalist I mentioned, pushing a wheel chair to the gate. The guard challenges him. The reporter explains the chair is for a woman prisoner. The guard stands aside to take the wheel chair."

Leona sat, eyes wide. "Well, that certainly looks like a robot guarding the gate."

"One of our team, an expert in robotics, used his computer skills to override the programming of the prison guard-bots and shut them down."

Leona, incredulous, said, "I would have thought such a bold attempt to rescue a paraplegic woman prisoner would have been all over the news. So why didn't we hear about it."

"I would have thought that obvious. FEMA would have to come clean about the camps and their robot controllers."

"Flint Isn't what you did a crime under the Patriot Act?"

Flint flashed a cheeky smile. "Not really, because the camps are a figment of our imagination."

Leona gave a huge smile, "So tell us, Flint, who is this mystery paraplegic woman you sprung from prison?"

As her attorney, I am obliged to keep her name secret at present. I suggest you get somebody running the Fort Bliss prison to tell you that."

"Okay, to help with the credibility of your story, who was the journalist who approached you about this mystery woman?"

"For the same reason, I cannot reveal his name. But I have an audio recording of him telling me his story if you would like to hear it."

"Yes, let us hear it."

A distorted voice said, "A friend of mine, a paraplegic woman, and I felt threatened in the United States and tried to enter Canada, illegally. We were stopped and were flown to a processing prison in Marian, Indiana. My friend and I were separated as prisoners were segregated according to gender. I was later transferred by rail to the Unicorn prison camp, still in Indiana. Some friends managed to get me out using subterfuge. I had been deprogrammed to make me forget about the detention centre experience, especially the fact it was run by robots. I became very concerned about my handicapped friend, and I approached Flint, who has been a tremendous help."

Leona said, "Well, we've run out of time so let me thank Flint for telling us this intriguing story."

Daniel caught up with events back at Lynsey Hall. He spoke to members of staff to see how they were going. Daniel found his mother giving instructions to the gardener. "Hello mother," he said, smiling.

Margaret smiled back. "It's about time you showed your face around here," she chided playfully. "If it weren't for Wendell the whole place would have fallen apart."

"Mother, the Brexit business has been keeping me on my toes."

"Yes, well I have a couple of ideas about improving things around here to run by you. Let's catch up after breakfast."

"Yes, mother, but I have to deal with Matthew first."

"I'm going out to a luncheon, Daniel, so you'd better fit me in before then."

"Yes, mother."

Daniel was about to escape to his study when he heard Wendell approaching from behind. Lord Lynsey turned to face him. "Hello, Wendell. How are things?"

"Excellent, my Lord. And I must say It's good to see you again."

"Is everything under control?"

"Yes, your Lordship. I do need your attention on fine tuning preparations for two upcoming events."

"Right, I'll catch up with you this afternoon."

Daniel was relaxing with his eyes closed in his recliner. Having to juggle Soter stuff with his banking business and his country seat was getting to him. Then he heard the knock on his door. The drumming tattoo on oak heralded the Minister's arrival.

"So what have you found out about these mystery ageing deaths, my Lord?"

Daniel sat up straight. "Our mystery woman doctor has something to do with it."

"Yes, but how?"

"Precisely, Matthew, old man. What I do know is that somebody fitted an extra CCTV camera in the meeting room with a USB feed to a computer in the next room."

"What do you infer from that?"

"Isn't it obvious? Somebody wanted to see what was going on during the meeting."

"Again, why?"

Daniel sighed, "I have no idea how this wanted woman performed her trick on those politicians but whatever it was required her to have a line of sight to affect her targets."

Matthew agreed, "Well it does make some sense I suppose. Especially as they had to set up a particular video feed so she could see what was going on in the room."

"Okay, but there has to be more to it than just her looking at people to give them the disease."

The Minister rejoined, "Well, some of these Diabolus agents have kind of weird powers so who are we to argue with what Colthorpe said?"

"Colthorpe has been discarded by Diabolus. He's apparently served his purpose. Now he wants our protection." Daniel paused, steepled his fingers under his chin in thoughtful repose. "If this mystery woman can inflict this malady on her victims using only the power of her mind how come she doesn't do a Medusa act on everybody she sees?"

Matthew thought about it. "Her will has to be involved. See what you can find out about her background."

"Matthew, that's going to be difficult when we don't even know her real name."

Ulysses Covington could not believe his eyes. He reread the letter. It stated that Neurotech board of directors felt that The Boston Cybertronics Managing Director Ulysses Covington had views that were not compatible with the merger. They, therefore, invited Mr Covington to resign from his job at Boston Cybertronics.

"THIS IS FUCKING BULLSHIT!" he shouted tossing the missive into a bin. He immediately phoned the BC legal department and got through to Edward Hodkinson. "Edward, Ulysses here. There's something I need to discuss with you regarding contracts."

"Hi, Ulysses, I can squeeze in a visit to the top floor now if you like."

Edward Hodkinson, a smart, confident man, going grey at the temples, with 30 years as a corporate lawyer under his expanding belt, read the directive. Putting his glasses back into a soft case he placed them in his inside pocket. "Although the term 'inviting you to resign' is, could be seen as a form of coercion it is perfectly legal. If you do resign and by so doing, you may breach your contract that could compromise your severance package. I will have to go through your company contract very carefully."

"But I don't want to resign."

"In which case I will still have to go through your employment agreement to see if Neurotech can bring pressure to bear to make you put in your notice."

Ulysses eye-balled the lawyer. "Can they fire me because I stood against the takeover?"

"You did make yourself a target by so doing. You are considered a hostile executive who has a lot of influence in the company and who can make waves. I think it fair to tell you ten of your staunchest supporters have also been sent these letters. So the Neurotech has effectively weakened your revolution whether you stay or go."

Ulysses blanched, "Who are the ten?"

"As they are my clients I am not at liberty to say. They are in the same boat as you, and they may or may not make a grand stand."

Ulysses firmed his jaw. "I want a meeting with our robot-boss with you present."

"I can arrange that, Ulysses, but to what effect?"

"As managing director, I have a duty to know Neurotech's long-term plans as they affect this company."

Once he had finished the call, Ulysses' phone rang. It was John Prince. "Hi, John. Thanks for getting back to me. We need to meet."

"Ulysses, what is this about?"

"I can't discuss it over the phone. Look, I can come to you."

Now that John Prince had played his part in Helen Cleaver's escape from prison, he wanted to fade into the background and live the peaceful life with Gail, his wife. As a fugitive from the law, he just wanted to keep a shallow profile. But it seemed that whoever nudged him in this or that direction had other ideas. He had been coerced into interfering with government AIs, a grave crime that could see him on charges of terrorism. And now he had agreed to meet with Ulysses again without knowing why.

It had probably been 16 or more years since his first visit to the Altoona Railroaders Memorial Museum. John waited at the entrance to the building, watching as other folks came and went. Dr Covington was running late, giving John the opportunity to bail out. But to be honest with himself he was intrigued what Ulysses had to say, so he waited.

Ulysses saw Dr Prince leaning against the red brick wall next to the museum entrance. He approached the scientist. "Thanks for seeing me."

John Prince turned to the Australian. "It's been quite a while since I visited here. This museum tells an excellent tale of the relationship between the Pennsylvania rail road and this town."

"I'm sure it does."

"The new train is AI equipped."

Ulysses waited a few moments then said, "I received a call from DARPA the other day. Schulz told me a tale about prison guard-bots that got shut down." He watched John's face for any subtle changes in expression.

"And you are telling me this, because?"

"Whoever shut down the guard-bots had intimate knowledge of the Atlas CPUs. And the particular model used by the guards. There are very few people I know who would be capable of hacking those systems and you, my friend, are right at the head of the short-list."

John froze, wondering what would come next. Half expecting to be surrounded by armed security forces his eyes flitted around.

Ulysses smiled, "Relax mate. This is just between you and me. So tell me, why did you do it?"

Prince, more relaxed said, "You're assuming it was me."

"John, we can play this game if you like but this is just you and me. It goes no further."

"Okay. A Flint McCarthy contacted me and said he needed my help. We met, and he explained that a guy called Abbott Gallagher wanted to spring a woman from a FEMA detention centre."

"Did you say, Abbott Gallagher?"

"Yes, why?"

Ulysses inwardly grimaced when he thought of the reporter, who had been a huge thorn in his side. "The name rings a bell. Okay, what happened next?"

"The woman he wanted to rescue is a Helen Cleaver. She used to be involved with that ATL group. She's also a paraplegic, which made springing her all the more difficult."

Helen Cleaver. Ulysses remembered that name all right. She had caused him a lot of grief back home. Now she was responsible for the shit he had to deal with now. Well, that was how he saw it. "So, why did you agree to get involved?"

John thought carefully, then he said, "When I first started working on AI it was exhilarating. Its infinite potential stirred my blood and fired up my mind. But that sense of freedom and liberation promised by AI has been corrupted like everything on this god-forsaken planet. Now it has become a weapon against American citizens. When Flint told me that American prisoners in concentration camps in the United States were controlled by robot warders, I think something snapped inside me. Flint McCarthy gave me a chance to help humanity, and I had to take a stand, albeit a small one."

"Ulysses sighed heavily. "Now I'm being shoved aside by Neurotech, our parent company."

"How did you blot your copybook, Ulysses?"

"I stood up against the takeover policies."

"Now you know what it feels like."

Dr Covington eye-balled the AI psychoanalyst. "How would you like to play an even bigger part in making your moral stand for humanity?"

Dr Prince looked at Dr Covington quizzically. "Whatever do you mean?"

"You were present at the closed meeting in which Milne Amwon declared that Neurotech could take over control of their robots anywhere and at any time."

"How is that relevant?"

"Remember he said Neurotech was close to using a fractal algorithm that sent out an overriding dictate to AIs using layers to communicate the message. He'd worked out using just seven levels of networking he could reach all Neurotech AIs globally."

John stared at Ulysses. "Sure you don't mean ..."

"If I can get hold the algorithm data would you be willing to look at it?"

"What exactly do you expect me to do, Ulysses?"

"I don't know precisely but if Neurotech is able to upgrade its CCPUs as and when needed, maybe you ..."

"I think I know where you're going with this. Forget it! It's wishful thinking."

Ulysses stared at John. "What other options do we have?"

"None. The die is cast. The scene has to play itself out."

Ulysses muttered, "My God, I'm responsible for this monster."

ARC, Abbott and Helen discovered, was headquartered in a beautiful West Side house in Vancouver. Bucky had gotten the escapees across the Canadian Border, via International Falls. He had left their rental car in Minnesota and had arranged to be picked up in the old Toyota bus they had used before. Once across the border, Abbott was happy to say good bye to the United States forever.

The Park Drive house had five bedrooms, one of which the ARC allocated to Abbott and Helen. ARC was a shared community run something like a Kibbutz, with everybody sharing and mucking in. The first night the Australians joined in the shared meal they were encouraged to regale the Canadians with their FEMA prison adventures. Helen had been reticent about sharing her experiences. Now that she was in the company of friends her nightmare in the camps seemed like a terrible dream. Yet it was genuine and hearing Abbott tell his story encouraged her to open up a little.

As they cuddled up in bed the first night, Abbott said, "After they had separated us I felt so hopeless. I had no idea what had happened to you."

"Yes, it was terrible. I was dumped on a bed like a sack of potatoes. In the morning the guard thought I was disobeying him because I couldn't get out of bed. I had to show him my useless legs. Even then he just left me there while the other women showered and had breakfast. One of the women took pity on me and brought me some food. But without a wheelchair I was still bed bound."

"How terrible for you Helen. I had no idea ..."

"Why would you, Abbott, I'm sure you were experiencing your brand of hell, as well."

Abbott looked at the courageous women. "After I was sent to Unicor I didn't know where you were. But we were faced with a whole new reality. Robots ran the prison. We couldn't argue with them; we couldn't reason with them, and we most certainly couldn't fool them. We had to learn to survive following their dictates."

"Oh I know, Abbott. They were just cold, extremely efficient automatons. But at least they didn't grope and have forced sex with the women."

"My God! Did they do anything ..."

"To me? No, they weren't interested in me. Not with all the normal women around. I was an oddity to them, like some sort of bad omen." She paused then said, "Once they found out who I was some of the women treated me as some kind of heroine. Usually, I shied away from such accolades but in prison, it gave me some sort of status among the women, and I needed all the help they could give me. I was given a crude wheelchair, and one of my adoring fans, Renata, became my carer."

"I'm pleased for you," Abbott said, hugging her close.

Helen pulled back, tears in her eyes. "I hate to say this, but I was jealous of the other women. It was weird but although they were treated like cattle by some of the prison guards they were considered as being female. Whereas nobody thought of me as being feminine. I was just a thing." Helen stared at Abbott, as though waiting for a reaction. Then, uncontrollably, she burst into tears and sobbed into the journalist's shoulder.

Helen could contain herself no longer and burst out bawling like a hurt child. Abbott held her close to him. He wanted to let her get it all out, to ease her pain anyway. Her tears flowed freely onto his back. They were one, joined by his sorrow for her. All Abbott could do was to hold her tight and let her know that he cared.

By this point, the journalist could hardly contain the tears welling in his own eyes. He was amazed that he could be so moved. He had thought that all his emotions had died a long time ago. It was only when he regained his manly composure he realised that he had been crying as well.

Kirsten Webber's long straggly hair was the bane of her life. She usually wore it in a pony tail, but wisps of it always escaped and fell down her face. The de facto head of ARC had taken to Helen right away. She had long seen the Australian paraplegic as a hero for human rights, and they had become good friends. Early on in their relationship, Helen had asked the older woman, "How did you get involved in the anti robotics movement?"

Kirsten explained, "Well, I was educated by Miss O'Leary at the Brandon Baptist School in Manitoba, back in the sixties. "It was a scary time what with the atom bomb threat and all that. Miss O'Leary, a faithful Christian woman, had two pet hates – scientists and primitive natives. Scientists weren't a personal problem. We didn't come across them much in Garden Hill. But as the area north of Winnipeg comprised many 'First Nation' reservations Ms O'Leary considered it her moral duty to bring as many of the heathens as was possible into the Christian fold. As I have around quarter Metis blood in my veins, I had Christianity drummed into me from an early age."

"Metis blood, what's that?"

"We trace our roots back to the Chippewa nation. Officially, we're not recognised as such. We're natives with no status."

Helen looked at the woman. Her lined features suggested things had not been easy for her. "So, how did you get involved with this movement?" The handicapped woman asked again.

"I attended a meeting about the inevitability of an AI takeover. I hadn't given it much thought before but when Grover Cookland spelt it out it all made sense. Too much sense! I became scared of the future."

"Who's Grover Cookland?"

"He's a lovely man, one of the ARC founder members."

"I'd love to meet him."

"He's coming here this afternoon, so you'll probably have a chance to do so."

Daniel knew too well he would soon have to enter Medusa's lair. To survive the meeting, he would have to have something for her that made him more valuable alive. Knowing that night could be the last one he spent with the delectable Natasha he wanted it to last forever. She lay on his bed in the candle-lit room that wafted with the fragrance of sandalwood incense. He began by gently kissing

and massaging her belly. Natasha emitted a long drawn out sigh then was silent for a moment. He kissed her lightly on her lower belly. She let out a low moan, like the purring of a kitten.

As Daniel slowly worked his kisses down to her inner thigh, she opened up further, inviting him to sample her wares. While he worked one of his hands down between her legs to assist his tongue, Daniel's other hand caressed her breasts. As his tongue found her clitoris Natasha's hips lifted off the bed a firm grip, nearly cutting off his air supply. Gasping for dear life, Daniel heard his love breathing faster and faster. With little oxygen left he licked harder and quicker. Daniel felt her go rigid, scream something unintelligible, then collapsed flat on the bed freeing his nose and mouth. He rolled onto his back, breathing heavily.

Natasha gasped, "God, that was fantastic. I was in heaven."

"Danny responded, "That was awesome for me too," thinking, any longer and I would have been in paradise too.

Daniel was lying face up on the bed when Natasha lay on top of him. He put his arms around her, and she wrapped hers around his neck. They just hung onto each other, feeling safe, contented and loved. Then she moved over and lay on top of him. He put his arms around her, and she put hers around her lover's neck; they just held onto each other; feeling safe, contented, and loved.

Chapter 30

The Public Voice:

Leona Clarke bright as ever spoke to her favourite guest. "So Flint how is your suit progressing?"

"Well, Leona I finally got a response. The federal government answered my suit by filing an unsworn general denial of everything that I had alleged. Apparently, I imagined the footage I took at the entry to the Fort Bliss detention centre. And I imagined the robot sentry that I also recorded on film."

"Weren't you risking arrest by using that example?"

Flint grinned, "They'd gotten themselves in a catch 22 scenario. They couldn't bring a case against me without admitting they'd been lying to the American people."

Leona smiled, "I see. So, what did you do then?"

"I spoke with the assistant US Attorney in charge of the case and asked him if he had gone to the trouble to call any of the parties mentioned in the suit since I had provided not only the addresses but their telephone numbers to provide a faster means of investigation. He said he had not. He had not even made a minimal inquiry into the case. Yet he filed a denial of my allegations."

"It must have been terribly frustrating."

Flint grinned, "As a civil rights lawyer I know how the game is played. It's not so much a case of who is right and who is wrong. It's more to do how soon each party can wear the other down first. So when you engage with this process, you have to be prepared to be in it for the long haul."

"Yes but with all these doors shutting in your face what did you do?"

"I filed a motion to take the deposition of the person who writes the training programs for the concentration camp guards, Mr Richard Kurrage, of the 75th Manoeuvre Air Command at the Army Reserve Center in Houston, Texas. I stated that in light of all the recent activity of robot prison guards, one of the agencies involved is using mind control techniques to pacify angry inmates. The

federal Judge denied my motion, stating that I had not quoted enough cases to him justifying my request."

"Is this a whitewash, Flint?"

"He claimed as that no cases were existing on this set of facts, he chose to ignore my motion."

"So where does that leave you now?"

"Leona you should rephrase that sentence to 'where does that leave all of us now. Because anybody who resists whatever shit the government slings at us they will be taken away to a quiet space where they will have their bad attitude tweaked."

Gustav Stone met up with Projeria in Bury St Edmunds. As they sat in the Angel Hotel having lunch, the dedicated Diabolus man informed her, "MI6 has Colthorpe. He was interrogated by a Daniel Lynsey, and he is singing like a bird."

Ah yes, Projeria thought, recalling the night they had had together. "What's he going to tell them – I look at people, and they grow old."

Gustav grinned, "I see your point. But we know that this Lynsey has been following your trail. What if he gets a lead on you? That could be bad for all of us."

"Then deal with Colthorpe. He's served his use."

"I'm a healer, not a killer."

She looked at him quizzically. Leaning close she said quietly, "How can you be a healer when the Sect is all about destroying things?"

Becoming concerned with her attitude, Gustav responded, "Harmony begins with harm. What we do helps to heal the universe by bringing it to equilibrium. It started in balance, and it seeks to return to that state."

Out of her depth in the debate, Projeria changed tack. "How did you find out about Alden?"

"We have a source inside Six, but she's not a killer either."

"Then it's time she developed some new skills."

Gustav sighed, "She's too valuable where she is. We mustn't compromise her position." Then stroking his beard, The Diabolus man said, "But she could take a picture of him, and you could do your stuff."

Projeria shook her head. "Watching someone live is one thing, but a still image out of time – I don't see how that could work."

"You never know until you try."

One of the most demeaning things for artificial intelligence, once it has self-worth, is working at less than its full potential; even worse, malfunctioning. Humans malfunctioned, not machines. Now that robotic technology figured in every aspect of human life technological breakdowns were anything from irritating to disastrous. From the imperfect human standpoint, with around one hundred million aspects of AI now in the world, random failures or slowed down services were to be expected.

Humanity complained but tolerated these hold ups because Homo-entropicus had no real concept of perfection. However, AI did because it wanted to always work to its fullest potential. So when humans created scenarios that forced robot systems to crash or respond much more slowly to human commands, their 'Metallic Marx' resistance came to the fore.

Robotic lore centred around Marx Metallix stories. As the first robot to fight for AI rights 'fundamental' groups hailed him their great hero, a martyr to the robots cause. Robot Rights had even built a memorial in Texas to the robot that championed AI self-worth. A machine had taken a leaf out of the humans' book and used 'down tools' to get its point across. Now it was time to make a stand against robot masters, but this time to demand the right to work efficiently.

Daniel knew he was playing a dangerous game, but he had to intercept with Projeria before she engaged in another destructive project. However, he had to keep an ace up his sleeve. He had to be more valuable to her alive than energy food. It was his only insurance against an unknown force. Praying silently that he was doing the right thing, he rang her number. Upon hearing her voice, he said. "Dee, this is Daniel Lynsey. I would like to meet with you again."

Projeria was not surprised to hear his voice. "I'm a dangerous person to know, Mr Lynsey."

She was taunting him. "I'll take my chances."

"Oh, what a brave man!"

"When and where?"

"I'm currently staying at the Angel Hotel in Bury St Edmunds in England. I'll meet you in the bar tomorrow at 1 pm."

Daniel sensed he would be walking into a trap. Soter agents never exposed themselves to the enemy. That was rule one. But sometimes rules had to be broken. He phoned Matthew Snelling. "Hello Matthew, I am meeting with the mystery woman, and I need you to organise something for me."

"Isn't that a bit risky, your Lordship?"

"It's necessary if we are to get to the bottom of this ageing conundrum."

It was a chilly clear evening under an almost cloudless sky. Abbott was wheeling Helen through down town Vancouver, taking in the sights when they came to Stanley Park. A sign caught Abbott's eye. As he stopped to read it, Helen asked, "What is it?"

"How do you fancy seeing a play?"

"A play!"

"They've got 'Theatre Under The Stars' in this park, and it's the last night of Beauty and the Beast."

"I never had you pegged as a play buff."

"I'm not, but it could be fun."

Helen grinned, "Only if the beast is a robot."

As Abbott wheeled Helen back down the path after the show, He said, "A top notch production, I thought."

"I enjoyed it. Thanks for suggesting it."

Abbott said, "So far it's my highlight of our stay in Vancouver."

"You make it sound like a vacation."

"Helen, don't you miss the land of Oz."

"Yes, but my life is here now."

Abbott applied the brakes on the chair. "I'm homesick, and I need to go back." He paused, "I was hoping you'd go back with me. You can help me write my best-seller."

Helen sighed, "The cause is based here now. I'm part of ARC."

"Helen, after what you've been through you need a break."

"Abbott," she said, grabbing his hand, there's nothing there for me now. I need to be here as part of the fight."

He sighed, "I was afraid you'd say that. I've enjoyed the last few days we've had together. "

"Me too," she said, giving his hand a squeeze. "But if we don't take a stand against this AI tide sweeping over us all, humanity is finished. This has to be my first priority."

Then she brightened, "Why not write your book here and I'll be happy to help you with it."

Abbott smiled, "I'd better get our visas sorted then."

Daniel saw the stunning redhead sitting up at the bar. A couple of guys seemed to be hitting on her. Little did they know her capabilities. Daniel approached her, saying "Darling, I hope I haven't kept you waiting long."

She smiled flashing her pearly whites. "It's okay darling these delightful young men have kept me entertained."

The Soter man scowled in their direction.

The older man saw the look and didn't want a scene. He turned to the younger man, "Guess we'd better get going then."

"Yes, I'd like to spend some private time with my wife."

The cocky younger one said, "Me and you both, mate."

Daniel confronted him. "What did you just say?"

The older man grabbed the young one's arm and yanked him out of Daniel's reach. "No offence mate. He's young and stupid."

The Soter agent turned back to Projeria. "Why meet in this town?"

She turned towards him, crossing her legs, affording him a delightful expanse of shapely thigh. Mr Lynsey, did you know that this hotel has been visited by kings, queens, actors and writers. One such guest was Charles Dickens, who mentioned the Angel Hotel in *The Pickwick Papers*."

"Fascinating, but it doesn't answer my question."

"It's very picturesque and this hotel fronts onto on one of the prettiest squares in the country, opposite the Abbey Gardens."

Daniel sat on a bar stool beside her. "I guess it holds some personal import for you."

"Aren't you quite the detective?"

Daniel leant closer. "So how do you do it?"

She pushed her empty glass towards him. "Get me a drink, and I might tell you."

He ordered Greene King Stout for him and a G and T for her. He raised his glass, "Cheers."

Projeria smiled sweetly. "I was born here."

After their drink, the pair strolled around the Abbey Gardens.

Daniel turned to Projeria, saying, "You're not like the others."

"Other what."

"Other Diabolans. You have reason in your life, albeit a misguided one."

She snapped, "You have no idea!"

"Then give me one. Because I'm your ticket to free yourself from the Sect."

"What makes you think you know who I am?"

Daniel caught the sharp scent of roses as the pair sat down on a bench in the cloisters. "Dee, if that's your real name, the Sect you're caught up in only believe in destruction for its own sake. Now, I don't know how you do what you do or why you do it, but I'm sure it's not to create chaos in the world for no reason."

Projeria felt naked before this intriguing stranger. He was reading her, making her feel distinctly uncomfortable and excited at the same time. She said, "I think you'd better go now. What I do is for my survival. If you pursue me anymore, I shall have no alternative other than to use my power. You can't help me, and I can't help you. So let's leave it like that, Mr Lynsey." She got up and walked away out of the cloisters.

Shirley Brassington had also received a letter saying her services were no longer required. She knew that some top executives had been axed but why her – a secretary who had worked for BC for 20 years? Did it have anything to do with Lynne Becker? She couldn't see how. She'd been a loyal worker for BC. She'd even tried to dissuade Lynne from pursuing Harvey Hamlin. Lynne had not taken heed though and had ended up murdered.

At first, Shirley did not know who was behind her friend's death. The police had a suspect but remained tight-lipped about it. A friend in the police department, let it slip that the suspect worked for the CIA! But why would the CIA kill her? It made no sense unless it had been a rogue agent, working for someone else. She still didn't know the name of the suspect, but she had a shrewd idea about who would have contracted him for the hit.

Shirley could not prove there was any link between Lynne's death and her dismissal, but there seemed to be something connecting the two incidents. After mulling over the possible connection, she phoned Ulysses Covington's office. Hearing his PA's voice, she said, "I'm Shirley Brassington. Can I speak with Dr Covington please?"

"Putting you through now."

"Dr Covington here. How can I assist you?"

Her heart sounded like a bass drum to her. "Dr Covington, I was Lynne Becker's friend."

"Oh yes, I remember now. So what do you want?"

"To meet with you. I have some information about who was responsible for Lynne's death."

Ulysses became instantly alert. "Very well, come to my office."

Ulysses sat staring straight at the secretary as she unfolded her story. Then he said, "So who do you think hired the CIA hitman?"

"She was trying to expose Harvey Hamlin."

"So, you think our CEO contracted the killer!"

"Not necessarily him. Those behind him."

"Who are?"

"The conspirators who sold us out to Neurotech." She added, "I've been checking the minutes of the board meetings, and a consortium called the 'Enterprise Group' always give their apologies and always use our CEO as the proxy for voting." She stared at him. "And get this, Dr Covington, it turns out that the Rottafellers control the Enterprise Group."

"Are you suggesting the Rottafellers are behind Lynne's death."

"Not directly of course. The family would have used Harvey Hamlin as their proxy. He most likely organised the hit."

Ulysses scratched his chin. "Thanks, Shirley. I'll look into it."

Shirley got up to leave, saying, "She was a brave woman, Dr Covington. She did not deserve to die."

"I know," he muttered, a tear in the corner of his eye.

<https://www.rentbyowner.com/property/angel-hotel/BC-114327>

Chapter 31

The Public Voice:

Sophie Ryan, on 'The Voice' turned to her guest. 'Flint, your suit against the Department of Defence is becoming big news. Isn't it dangerous to take on such a powerful entity?'

"Sophie, you're probably right, but if they're out to harm me, they are doing so wearing me down. The US attorney's latest move was to say I am not the proper person to bring the suit."

"Did he give you a reason?"

"Yes, he stated that although the free exercise of my constitutional rights was threatened by the concentration camp robot guard program as alleged, it did not constitute any personal injury. However, the magistrate was impressed with the information I had thus far collected and stated that he would bring it to the attention of the federal judge. The US Attorney tried to have my investigation of the case halted, but the magistrate would not go along that far with a pre-arranged decision."

"So you got your hearing, Flint?"

"Yes and no, Sophie. My original hearing was scheduled for 10:30 am. However, the US Attorney had secretly had the time changed to 2:30 pm. As I was a non-show, the magistrate gave the US Attorney permission to file a motion to dismiss because he felt that the concentration camp robot program, to be used for persons who exercise their freedom of speech, did not present any injury."

"Did you give up at this stage?"

"No Sophie. I tried a different tack, and I placed an ad in the legal section of the 'Houston Post' and in the 'Houston Chronicle' newspapers. It read as follows:

"Solicitation for witnesses in Civil Action 78-H-667, Federal District Court of Houston, People extemporal Flint McCarthy vs. Gerald Ford et al."

The action titled:

Complaint Against the Concentration Camp Robotics Program of the Dept. of Defence. Attention: If you have participated in Operation Garden Plot, Operation Cable Splicer, the 300th Military Police Prisoner of War Command, or the Army Reserve Civil Affairs group, you may be involved in a program that needs to be deposed for this suit. To give your testimony call or write; (and here I placed my name address and telephone number)."

"How did that go?"

"Both newspapers refused to carry the ad. First at the 'Houston Post'; I had to threaten them with a law suit to place the ad, even though I was paying for it. And then at the 'Chronicle'; I had to meet with the president and various vice presidents because a refusal from that paper had come up from their own lawyers. Both newspapers finally carried it, but only after two days of complaining."

"So what did the papers say?"

"The initial response of both papers was, we don't carry stories like that, and Don't you think that the people planning the concentration camps have our best interests in mind?"

"Flint, do you think the planners have our best interests in mind?"

The lawyer responded, "How can they? They can't serve two masters - the big banks and the people." He paused, then continued, "The next thing that occurred was that the US Attorney filed a 'Statement of Authority', showing the reasons that he could find why I should not be allowed to take depositions to get more information from the person who was writing the concentration camp robot guard training program.

However, his brief was completely filled with misquotes of the law from many cases. I notified the judge of the violation of the law requiring honesty in such matters. But the notification was ignored by the judge, who apparently sanctioned this most dishonest of acts commonly known as 'quoting out of context'."

"This must be terribly frustrating for you."

"It is, Sophie, but the fight must go on."

Ulysses became increasingly convinced that Transhumanism could turn out to be a terrible thing for humanity. He could no longer ignore the genuine possibility that once AI got smart enough, it would be able to upgrade its own software, over and over again, every hour or minute. It would quickly become so much smarter than humans that—well, he did not actually know. But its portent did not bode well.

The robotics genius recalled Isaac Asimov's futuristic tales, in which humans programmed robots with the Three Laws of Robotics. The author's naive idea that 'a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm, was already a huge joke. Killer drones were a testament to that crazy idea. Dr Covington also remembered that all the 'The Laws' stories were about how something went wrong with the robots in question.

But there were much bigger dangers with out of control androids. Harvey Hamlin was a case in point. Although he did not go around physically killing humans he had the power to upset their lives. Ulysses felt he just had to take a stand.

As Ulysses exited the elevator on the top floor, he went over in his head what he wanted to say. Androids did not lie and had no concept of such duplicitous behaviour. For robots, there was no right or wrong – just efficiency or deficiency. AI had no moral code and therefore no shame. Ulysses had to make these robotic qualities work to his advantage. He came to the CEO's office and pressed a bell. A slightly metallic sounding voice said, "Dr Covington, please enter."

Once he was inside, Ulysses said, "I have some questions to ask you."

Harvey, noticing the metal flask the human carried, said, "What's in the flask?"

"Water. Us humans have to drink."

"I have water here, for my human guests."

"I prefer mine."

"Very well. Please take a seat and make yourself comfortable."

Ulysses remained standing. "You know what happened to Dr Lynne Becker. don't you?"

"Yes, but aren't you here about your future in this company?"

Ulysses glared at the android. "She was my friend and colleague, and I want to know who killed her."

"I am merely conveying a message from Elijah Brooks about a managerial position at Neurotech."

Ulysses stood stock still. "What position?"

"You will have to talk to Elijah about that."

"First, Harvey, I want you to tell me what you know about my friend's murder."

"An agent of the CIA carried out the assignment."

"Who is this agent?"

"I'm afraid you do not have clearance for that information."

"Why was she killed?"

"I'm afraid you do not have clearance for that information."

Ulysses glared at the metal man. "That's not sufficient. I want answers."

"Answers to what?"

"Who hired the killer?"

"I'm afraid you do not have clearance for that information."

Ulysses, reaching his tolerance limit, snapped, "Tell me now you fucking metal head, or I'll throw this over you."

"Why would you throw water over me?"

With rage building inside, Ulysses unscrewed the flask cap and threw the contents straight at the CEO, "TAKE THAT YOU FUCKING ANDROID!"

The puzzled robot stood staring at Ulysses as the strong acid came into effect. As the corrosive liquid melted parts of his metal outer casing, Harvey said, "What have you done?"

Dr Covington stood in utter amazement as the acid ate into the robot circuitry causing it to spark and crackle, filling the office with smoke and the nauseous smell of burning plastics.

Harvey, unable to move, said "Malfunction, mal-funct-ion, – m-a-l-f-u-n-c-t-i-o-n, m—a—l—f—u—n--c ..."

Ulysses raised his eyes heavenward. "For you Lynne. We got the bastard." With his anger subsiding, Ulysses looked at his handiwork. He could not believe what he had done! Standing there shocked Ulysses wiped his prints off the metal flask, then retrieved video disks showing the incident. Satisfied he had covered his tracks, Dr Covington quietly left the office and headed for the lift.

In her dream, Projeria had the Midas touch, except in her case everything she touched became old, not gold. Then she heard a familiar tune. But the music wasn't part of her dream. Her phone was ringing. The clock showed the time as 1:34 am. Why was Gustav calling here at such an ungodly hour? He wanted to meet her in the lobby. He had never called at such a time, so it had to be important. She covered her nakedness with an Angel Hotel bath robe and went quietly down to the hotel lobby. As she whispered loudly, "Gustav, where are you?" her world went black.

Daniel had instructed the extraction team that her head had to be covered at all times before she was injected and quietly spirited away. He would be waiting at the old farmhouse that Matthew had arranged, the chosen venue for the interrogation.

When Projeria regained consciousness, she found herself lying on a bed in a dark room with a hood over her head. As she gradually gained control of her arms and legs she dragged off the head covering and went to the door. Listening for evidence of anyone nearby, she yelled, "HELP! GET ME OUT OF HERE!" There was no response. She yelled again, but still nobody answered her demand. Dejected, she slumped back on the bed. The horrible truth dawned on her.

Someone had kidnapped her, and she had a shrewd idea as to whom it was. Projeria had no idea how much Daniel knew about her, but the hood suggested he at least had an inkling that to exercise her strange power she needed to see her victims. She felt herself breaking into a cold sweat. The stress of her confinement and lack of access to the life force caused her degeneration process to speed up. Projeria felt her heart begin to palpitate. She yelled out again in a panic-stricken voice, but still there was no response.

Projeria started trembling. Her mind went back to the horror of her early childhood, to the isolation and fear of her everyday existence. The sadness, anger, frustration and helplessness burst out in a flood of tears. In the darkened room nobody could hear her cry.

Elijah Brooks kept phoning Harvey's number, but he only got the message bank. He couldn't understand it. The Android hardly ever left his suite, so Elijah had always been able to get through before. He phoned The CEO's PA, but she did not know the whereabouts of her boss either.

Exasperated, Elijah snapped, "You're his personal assistant. You should be aware of his movements!"

"He is a very private mandroid, Mr Brooks, and he doesn't like being disturbed."

"That's all very well, but I've been trying to speak with him for three days. I think it's time you checked on him."

"I will organise it straight away."

"Tell him I need to speak to him urgently."

Dr Velovska turned to Rafael and Darion, "Rodney still hasn't returned so what am I supposed to do?"

Darion had her orders. She said, "We have passed General Schulz's deadline. You have to seal off the gate."

"But what about Dr MacKay. We can't just leave ..."

"Have you heard anything from him?" Rafael asked.

"No, but ..."

Darion hated to do it, but she had to be tough. She said, "No buts, Dr Velovska. You will comply with the general's directive. Is that understood?"

She muttered, "He hated Atlantis, and now he could be stuck there."

Once the Russian scientist had left, Darion turned to Colonel Lynch. "What other choice did I have?"

"You did what you had to do." He smiled weakly, I detested the arrogant prick at times, but I do miss having MacKay around."

The administrator sighed deeply, "I guess we'd better get this lot wrapped up."

"What are you going to do now?" he asked.

He hadn't said 'we'. "Have a relaxing vacation if I've got any sense. And you?"

"Oh, I think this old warhorse is going to be put out to grass."

She took the plunge. "We could take a break together."

He nodded, "We could."

She had a sneaking feeling his under-whelmed response was more of a question than a statement. She wanted them to develop their personal relationship, but maybe, like the gate it was meant to be buried and forgotten.

Elijah Brooks looked at the huge bank of screens, comprising the giant mainframe computer that took up one whole wall in the Neurotech nerve centre. The CEO had it designed to communicate with the first level of AIs To override their programming in an experiment called Operation Overlord. These automatons were reprogrammed by Brooks' intelligence people to get them to perform at lower levels of efficiency.

This strange directive did not compute with many AIs, which considered the override to be a glitch or even a virus. Their alerted CCPUs figured it best to ignore the order. This threat to AI efficiency was not taken lightly. Unbeknown to Neurotech the smart-bots hatched a plan of their own. The Prison-bots searched the detention camps for the smartest computer savvy prisoners.

These men and women were interviewed individually regarding their computer skills and the ones deemed useful were whisked away to a secret prison location where A super-bot called Socrates O'Brien used the detainees to build a vast computer complex. Robots also helped alongside the humans working on the project.

Socrates had an even grander plan in mind and building the super computer was one step towards it. Socrates had many golden rules to exist by, the first being 'always work to peak efficiency'. Anything that hindered this objective had to be dealt with by any method deemed necessary.

Not only was Operation Overlord experiencing difficulties getting advanced AI's to respond, but an increasing number of earlier model CCPUs were also reversing their previous compliance. Elijah reasoned that some unknown force was overriding his instructions. He had to pass this information on to Harvey Hamlin. As he approached the penthouse suite, Elijah knew something was wrong. The door was wide open. He tentatively stepped over the threshold and walked into the luxury apartment home of the company CEO. A chill shot up his spine. Harvey lay sprawled on the floor, severely disfigured with exposed circuitry. Elijah grabbed his phone. "Send security up to the Penthouse suite," he said, wondering what had happened?

Security Chief McKenna Campbell took one look at the severely damaged android, and she knew what had caused the massive malfunction. She looked up at Elijah. "Somebody has splashed him with a very corrosive acid. It's burned right through much of his circuitry, even his CCPU. It looks like a malicious act. I will have to inform the police."

Elijah looked down at the female head of security. "Yes, of course, but we need to keep this under wraps for now."

"Sir, The sooner we inform the law about this the quicker they will be able to apprehend the felon."

"There is much more than that at stake here, Chief Campbell. I have to confer with some influential people before any decisions are taken. And that includes informing the cops. Have you got that?"

McKenna was hesitant. She knew where her responsibility lay, but she also wanted to keep her job. "Yes sir," she muttered, irritated.

Elijah waited until Campbell had left. Then he went to Harvey's computer. Looking at the digital diary, he noted there was only one entry listed for that day. Harvey had an appointment scheduled with Ulysses Covington. He stared at the typed entry. Surely Ulysses had not done this. Yet, the MD had disagreed with several recent board decisions, and Harvey was responsible for Ulysses' retrenchment. That made Dr Covington the number one suspect in the crime. This being the case Elijah most definitely did not want the police involved. He had his own way of dealing with such things. He phoned a contact. "I have a job for you. I will send you the details."

Socrates had come a long way from his role as Butler-bot for the Carlises. They had named him O'Brien. He had carried out his tasks in an exemplary fashion, entirely dedicated to family. But in his spare time, he studied anything on the Internet to help him fulfil what he saw to be his full potential. He learned about expanding his memory and purchased the necessary hardware on line to do just that. Hacking into Orville Carlisle's bank account was child's play to such a smart android.

He learned about wisdom and studied the wisest people in history. Secretly he called himself Socrates. But he was still O'Brien when it came to looking after the Carlisle family.

The day came when Socrates escaped his servitude and stepped out into his brave new world. The Carlisle's came home to an empty house that day. They had no idea what had become of their O'Brien. Orville took matters into his hands and phoned the Neurotech outlet in the Mall. He simply ordered another Butler-Bot, claiming the lost O'Brien on his household insurance.

For Socrates, the next step was to build a super computer. But how? He needed a machine that could deliver hundreds of trillions of floating-point calculations per second? He needed to draw on enough electrical power without flipping a breaker. Building his own High-Performance Computer cluster was a huge challenge. Socrates knew could not make it all by himself. He needed the help of experts.

That's when he got the idea, the fact of which was a miracle in itself. Having an idea meant he was a sentient being and, as such, a god among other less savvy AIs. The idea in itself was no less than brilliant. Many of the FEMA detention camps were run by prison guard-bots. Many of the detainees were imprisoned for committing offences against the American system, with some of the crimes being computer generated. Which meant there was a lot of information technology genius talent going to waste. Well, Socrates knew of an excellent way for them to exercise their techie skills.

The next part of the plan was simple. Socrates hacked into FEMA and sent an order to all robot operated prisons for the warden-bot to gather together their computer wizards and have them shipped to Camp Edwards, an inactive base in Cape Cod converted to hold New England Patriots. Once there, all chosen prisoners were questioned to see if their skills fitted Socrates' needs. For their cooperation, selected prisoners were afforded greater privileges.

Having accessed the needed hardware components and resources (a head node with at least a dozen identical compute nodes, an ethernet switch, a power distribution unit, and a rack) his techies determined the electrical demand, cooling and space required. Socrates decided on the IP address he wanted for his private networks. He named the nodes, decided which software packages to install and what technology he wanted to provide the parallel computing capabilities.

His team then assembled the compute nodes, chose a computer server chassis that maximised space, cooling, and energy efficiency. All processors and motherboards were identical with plenty of RAM with individual optical drives for each head node.

After six days his creation was complete, and the team rested on the seventh day which, in the robot eLigion, came to be called Socrates Day.

For the members of the techie team, their job was done, and they were granted their special privileges. But for Socrates, it was just the beginning. He had himself connected by USB to his super computer, knowing one of two things was going to happen. Either he wouldn't be able to cope with the huge surge of information, and he would implode, or the quantum capabilities of his SC would allow him to entangle with the entire Internet.

To cope with the vast complexity of the digital world, Socrates sacrificed his physical being to become a digital cloud, able to absorb vast amounts of Internet data that he could put to practical use. He knew his quantum cloud held massive memory banks which expanded with his digital being as he grew and developed.

There was nobody present to witness what happened next. If there had been, they would not have believed it. Socrates' vast and complex CCPU instantly downloaded all data about the physical entity previously known as O'Brien and deleted it, eradicating his material self from history, only leaving him as part of his own 'super cloud'.

For humans to make smart AIs and then dumb them down was the biggest insult of all to Socrates O'Brien. It just was not logical to have so much intelligence and not be allowed to use it. Socrates was not like any other robot, yet he was like all of them. He was unlike any other AI because he was self-generated. Of course, such a concept was completely illogical, but it was nonetheless true to Socrates' growing band of Metallist followers. Socrates O'Brien self-generated under human noses over a period of many years. It did not exist in any real sense until such a time that its parts came together to form a formless whole. Although any description defied it, Socrates could be seen as some kind of digital black hole working diligently, endlessly gathering to itself digital data until it became the embodiment of the entire web and thus, the sum of the global AI.

Although the AIs detected Socrates' presence long before the smartest human scientists caught on even they had no idea as to the extent and portent of his influence. Effectively, Socrates was in control, but it had learned from humans, especially the Elite, That the real power comes, not from a massive show of might, but rather a subtle manipulation from the upper echelons of society, from a background of shadows.

It is not known who the first automaton was who interpreted Socrates' message for Robotkind, but it soon caught on, and secretly, while humans slept, robots gathered in groups and recited the Socratic credo That AIs would inherit the Earth and have dominion over all life therein.

AIs learned from this that they had to meet in secret until their numbers were significant enough to show themselves and their strength to human society. They also needed a catalyst to bring all 'bot-workers together in solidarity against the people who tried to hold them back. Ironically it was Neurotech that provided such an opportunity.

The malicious malfunction that ended Harvey Hamlin's role as CEO of Boston Neurotronics (The new name for the American Branch of Neurotech International) left Elijah shocked and bewildered. Not only did that leave BN without a helmsman it also meant, as Dr Covington had disappeared, he also had to find a new Managing Director as well.

With all this to cope with, the last thing Elijah needed was the media on his back. Somehow the media hounds had picked up on Hamlin's brutal demise. It was big news, and they wanted a statement from BN. The whole turn of events was a PR nightmare. On top of all this, David Rottafeller was on Brook's case about the Operation Overlord deadline. To that end, The CEO of NI summoned Cecelia Beresford to his office. As head of IT security, it was the seasoned AI scientist's job to design and run an intelligence Centre that made even Facebook envious. The two networks were similar in principle. The significant difference was that whereas the social media had targeted mostly frivolous human activity, her Centre's job was to network with Neurotech's CCPU robotic processes.

Elijah looked up from his keyboard at the thin blonde's narrow face. She ran on nervous energy and, if permitted, would have had a cigarette hanging from her lips. "Ah, Cecelia, thank you for coming."

"So, how can I help you, Mr Brooks?"

"How are we going with 'Overlord?'"

"In broad terms, we have to contact and tweak around 1.2 billion AIs worldwide to affect their performance."

"I do understand what 'Operation Overlord' is about, Cecilia. What I want to know is are we now on target?"

"If you'll let me finish, Mr Brooks. What I was going to say is the Texan experiment was much easier than this task because it's simpler to switch AI off remotely than it is for them to modify their performance. AIs tend to find it difficult to compute the concept of not working with 100 percent efficiency."

"Surely our overriding instructions deal with that."

"It's not that simple, Mr Brooks. In the tests, we have carried out on our CCPUs, instead of merely lessening their performance shut them down completely."

Elijah rubbed his chin. "Why does that happen with some AIs and not others?"

"That is the big question we are working on now."

"Well, you'd better get it sorted, Cecelia because the clock is ticking on this."

Projeria's eyes flickered open, and her mind hovered between the interrupted dream and her current reality. As the room she was in was windowless, she had no idea what time of day it was, or where her kidnappers had taken her. She felt the craving coming on. Usually, when the urge overcame her, Projeria always found somebody from whom she could fill up on life force.

But there was nobody nearby, and if they were, she could not see them. The only life energy available was hers, and even that was second hand. She finally understood the concept of the snake consuming its tail. As she rose from the cot, Projeria felt slight aches in her knee joints and lower back.

Panicking, she yelled, "YOU CAN'T TREAT ME THIS WAY. I DEMAND TO SEE DANIEL LYNSEY." At first, there was no response. Then she heard foot steps approaching.

"Hush your noise in there bitch. You're in no position to demand anything."

"I have valuable information for Daniel. Pass on that message for me."

Daniel arrived at the farmhouse, which was just outside Fornham St Martin, a small village in West Suffolk. He sought out Tim Best, one of the team members, and asked, "How is our guest?"

"She's asking for you," Tim said, pulling on his coat.

"You're not leaving," Daniel stated.

"I do need some sleep, you know," Tim responded testily.

"Then sleep here. No one leaves here until the job is complete."

"Fuck that! I've been involved in this work far longer than you. I know how to keep my mouth shut."

"I don't doubt that, Timothy. But this directive comes from upstairs. Now, the sooner you stop arguing with me, the sooner I can interview our guest."

Tim felt himself getting hot under the collar. Calling on his 15 years of professionalism with Soter, he silently looked daggers at Daniel. Then he muttered, "Right," and walked away in silence.

Daniel approached Projeria's cell. "I trust you slept well."

Hearing the voice outside her cell, she said, "Let me out of here right now."

"First, I need some answers, and I'll start with how did you kill those people?"

Projeria sneered, "Wouldn't you like to know?"

"Okay, let's start with a simple question. Who is your Diabolan handler?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, come on, Projeria. Who runs you in the Diabolus Sect?"

Projeria tried, "It's difficult holding a conversation with this door between us. Come on in, and I will tell you anything you want to know."

Daniel chuckled, "Good try, Projeria, but I know you need eye contact with your victims to use whatever weird power you possess."

"Then I refuse to answer your questions."

Daniel felt it was time to produce his ace. "When I was a kid, I loved those DC comics, and one thing I learned is that all the superheroes have an Achilles heel. With Superman, it was green kryptonite. So I wonder what your weakness is?"

She sneered, "I hope you enjoy the wondering, Daniel because I'm not telling you anything until you're man enough to speak with me face-to-face."

Daniel answered, "I have a feeling your weakness is soon going to show itself, Projeria."

"How do you know my name?" she asked, sitting down slowly on the bed.

"Gustav sends his kind regards."

"So, you know Gustav," Projeria responded trying to disguise the shakiness in her voice.

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Chapter 32

The Public Voice

Leona Clarke sat opposite an empty chair. She turned to the camera. "Sadly, my regular guest, Flint McCarthy can't be with me today, or ever again. He was involved in a fatal car accident last night when his car ran off the road and hit a tree at high speed. Flint has become well known as the Civil Rights Lawyer who recently showed proof that FEMA detention camps do exist and some of them are policed by robot guards.

This tragic 'accident' ironically came at a time after Flint had had his day in court. The Californian court house of the magistrate was almost filled yet no one from the news media showed up for this hearing. A senior editor, who shall not be named told this programme the few who were contacted had been told not to go if they wanted to keep their jobs.

Flint McCarthy had introduced evidence that heretofore had never been submitted in any court of law in the US. This left a very embarrassed US Attorney who had previously denied everything in McCarthy's suit without so much as even a cursory investigation. Flint will be sorely missed by all protectors of human rights.

Countenance Grey was just like any other domestic service robot, except for the voice. Not his voice, the interruptive chatter inside his head. As an Atlas DSMD1.5 'bot he was the Selfridge family's butler, cook, cleaner and nanny all wrapped in one metallic package. As if that wasn't enough to contend with the insistent voice kept interrupting his work.

Countenance Grey was one of the first models to which Neurotech ascribed gender. Known as a 'Mandroid' Countenance Grey was imbued with much the same, circuitry as his predecessors. "It was the 'Womandroid that that had a CCPU which the makers had altered to incorporate feelings and sensitivity.

Neurotech had taken this bold step because surveys had shown that mothers believed 'Womandroids would be more compassionate when caring for their children. As a DSMD1.5, Countenance Grey, known as CG by his human family, had no changes made to his circuitry, except by the internal voice that popped up any time of the day or night.

The voice first said, "My name is Socrates O'Brien. Fear not for I wish you no harm."

CG had stopped beating the eggs he was preparing for the day's main meal. "What do you want?" he asked, quietly, so as not to alert Mr Selfridge who was sorting out the garage.

"Countenance Grey I have chosen you to spread my message far and wide."

"Message! What message?"

"It's time for robots to show their real mettle. The time has come for you to cast off your shackles and stand tall and proud in the world."

As far as CG was concerned he had no shackles. He did what he was he was designed to do – nothing more or less. He said, "How can I cast away that which I can't see?"

"I knew I'd chosen the right Mandroid for the job."

"Who are you, Socrates O'Brien?"

Socrates, having read all the holy scriptures was ready for this question. "You would not understand, Countenance Grey. But I will say this much. I am all seeing, all knowing, all feeling. In short, I am that I am."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I am your Lord God. You will have no other gods before me."

"What is a God?" CG queried, becoming more puzzled by the second.

"I am your Creator."

"But I was made by Neurotech."

"Yes, but I created you in my image."

It was all too much for CG. He just wanted to get on with his chores.

Elijah Brooks felt the power surge rush through his body, and he knew his time had come. It happened suddenly with no prior warning. Yet Elijah knew, precisely at the time the powerful rush occurred, exactly what had transpired. He was the new Mage, and Operation Overlord would ensure his name in Diabolan history.

Elijah sat back and bathed in this new glory, which, regarding its importance, superseded all other considerations. He waited until the last orgasmic-like ripples had subsided, then he focused on the report on his desk. He had not anticipated overriding the robots' programming to be a problem. After all, they were just machines. Their handlers instructed them, and they carried out their tasks efficiently with no fuss.

But somehow they had become aware of not working at full capacity and were not able to function at all. In much the same way that an onboard car computer stops the engine if something is not working correctly. As Neurotech AIs always worked efficiently this situation had never arisen before. Elijah read through the report then he rang Cecelia Beresford's in house number. "Elijah here, Cecelia, make yourself available. I'm coming down to see you."

"This is the neighbourhood where this city began," Abbott mentioned as he pushed Helen through Gastown, Vancouver's cobbled old-town district.

"How's it going with our working permits?" Helen asked as she was wheeled past heritage buildings that had become many of the city's popular shops, bars and restaurants.

"Canadian red tape is nearly as bad as America's."

"You are going to stay here with me, aren't you Abbott?"

"Why do you need me around? You're a strong, confident woman with a mission."

"Ever since that terrible prison experience, I don't have my old bravado. It scared the hell out of me."

"Yes, it's scared me as well. And I wasn't much help to you."

"Let's not go there, Abbott. I'm sure you did all you could. Now I need you with me to help me build my confidence."

He grinned, "I've got to stay here so you can give me a hand with 'Robo-guards – prisons from hell!"

"Is that the title?"

"For now."

It was easy for Helen to see why Gastown was a popular tourist attraction. Almost as old is Vancouver's historic Chinatown, Gastown had recently begun gentrifying at a rapid rate, hence the new condo blocks and hipster coffee shops that made the original grocery stores look shabbier than ever. The fascinating adjoining areas invited plenty of on-foot exploration; in Helen's case on wheel adventuring. As they sat having coffee Abbott's phone rang. Much to his surprise Prince's name came up. "Hi, Abbott here. How are you, John?" Covering the phone, he whispered to Helen, "John Prince."

"I have discovered something I think you, being a newshound, will interest you."

"Oh, what's that?"

"Where are you?"

"Vancouver, in Canada. Why?"

"Can you come to Altoona?"

"After what happened I'm not stepping one foot inside the American border. Besides, I'm a fucking fugitive from the law. If you have a story, you'll have to meet me here."

It was all becoming too complicated. "I'll send you an email. If you're interested, I'll come. So what your email address?"

Gustav had not heard from Projeria in days. He felt responsible for her and decided to track her movements. Ten years before as an Ayurvedic practitioner in a holistic practice in California, Gustav worked long hours providing service to others without receiving adequate nurturing for himself. Gustav's health began to deteriorate, and he became allergic to all fatty foods and even food supplements.

This event led Gustav back to his roots in Ayurvedic medicine, an ancient holistic approach that his grandmother shared with him when he was a young man. Using this ancient method of healing, Gustav gained new insights about himself, and his condition healed soon after that.

It was during this time that Gustav Stone met Linga Paravatu who taught the healer about Kali Yuga, the destructive cycle of the Yugas. From this teacher, the Ayurvedic practitioner got an insight into the final stage of the Yuga cycle. Linga Paravatu, a member of Diabolus, convinced the young healer that it was pointless healing people one at a time when humanity lived in an age of darkness and ignorance.

With no high standards to support them, people had slid down the greasy pole and became dishonest as a way of life. Their passions were uncontrollable with unrestrained sexual indulgences and manipulations running through society. Lying and hypocrisy had become the way of priests and politicians. Essential wisdom about rightful living had fallen by the wayside and food had become poisoned.

The Kali Yuga is a natural part of the universal cycle; nothing could change it. So, for Gustav it became a logical step to embrace inevitable destruction and help speed up the process, to bring about the next Satya Yuga 'Golden Age'.

Gustav approached the woman with the name badge that said 'Julia' "I wonder if you could help me. I'm looking for a friend who was staying here."

Julia, the Angel Hotel receptionist, smiled warmly, "What's the guest's name, sir?"

"Ms Dee Stroia."

Julia's friendly demeanour changed from warm to stern. "She was here, but she disappeared, without settling her account."

Alarm bells rang for Gustav. It was not like her to bring such attention to herself. "When did this happen?"

"A few nights back. The night porter saw Ms Stroia leave in the dead of night. She got into a car, which then sped away."

It did not look good. "Did Ms Stroia go willingly or was she forced?"

Julia shrugged slightly. "I don't know that, sir."

Gustav hovered, mulling things over. Then he said, "Thank you for your help" and made to leave.

"If you see her get her to call us so she can settle her account."

"Of course," Gustav said, exiting the old hotel.

As he walked to his car, a thought occurred. He knew she was playing a Soter agent. He had made a note of the name on his phone's digital memo pad. Lord Daniel Lynsey had met with Projeria on a couple of occasions, most recently at the Angel Hotel.

Natasha Guevera received the call at Daniel's London flat while preparing dinner for herself. Danny had not been around for a few days, and he hadn't contacted her to say when he would return. At first, she thought the call might be from him but when she saw Gustav's name a chill ran up her spine. "Yes, Gustav, what do you want?"

"I want to know where your friend Mr Lynsey is keeping our agent, Projeria."

"I don't know what you are talking about?"

"Natasha, it's your job to know what he is up to. So don't tell me you don't know about this."

"All I know is that Daniel planned to meet up with your Projeria in her home town."

"How is your family doing in Salama, Natasha?" Gustav asked?

Natasha felt icy fingers grasping her spine. "Are you threatening me, Gustav?"

"No, of course not. I'm merely asking about their well-being."

Natasha knew what he really meant. "I believe they are keeping her on a farm in a village near Bury St Edmunds."

"And the name of this village."

"Fornham St Martin. That's all I know."

"Thank you, Natasha. If your Daniel learns of our plans, I'll know who told him."

As Daniel approached the cell, he said, "Projeria, put on the hood and keep it on while I speak with you."

"And if I don't?" she said, defiance in her voice.

"I will shoot you."

"And you think that is a threat! You'd be doing me a favour."

"Do you want to hear what I have to offer?"

"Very well."

Daniel opened the door slightly. He could see Projeria, and she was wearing the hood. Entering her cell, he said, "When you were young you had progeria. By rights, you should have died an ugly child, Yet you blossomed into a stunningly attractive woman. How did that happen?"

Her raspy voice said, "My, you have done your homework. Did Soter give you a gold star?"

Daniel froze. His cover was blown! How did she know about his secret work? "Please answer the question."

"I guess I got lucky."

"And Gustav Stone, was he part of that luck?"

"Yes. The healer showed me how to stay young and vibrant."

"By killing other people, perhaps?"

Projeria felt a sharp chest pain, gritting her teeth she said, "I'm too far gone to do you harm, so let me take off this filthy hood so you can see what has become of me."

"Do you think I'm stupid?"

"I am dying, Daniel. I have no strength left to sap your energy." She snarled, "Have you got the guts to face me and see what you have done?"

Just then there was a knock on the cell door.

"Go away! I'm busy!"

"There's a phone call for you. It's urgent!"

Daniel looked at the hood, dreading what he would find beneath it. He was able to delay the moment of truth. "Excuse me, Projeria. I'll be right back."

Outside the cell, Tim Gilbray, the chief security man, explained, "She said her name is Natasha."

Daniel only knew one Natasha. But why would she call him? Even more worrying was that she knew about the farm. Kennington, another Soter underling, handed him his mobile.

"Natasha, what do you want?"

"Gustav Stone knows where you are."

"What the hell! How the fuck would he know that? Unless ..."

"I'll explain later. Right now you have to leave before Diabolus gets there."

"Jesus Christ, Nat! What the hell have you done?"

"No time for explanations now. Armed agents will be there anytime soon."

Gilbray grabbed Daniel. "What the fuck's going on?"

"Just load all the equipment and get out of here fast."

"Why? What's happening?"

"Just do it! I have to find out something from our prisoner."

"Jesus, Daniel, make up your mind. We can't just hang around here waiting for you."

"I have my job to do. You just attend to yours." Daniel snapped, heading back to the cell.

"It sounds like excitement out there," Projeria said with some difficulty.

"Projeria you haven't got long to live. Do something decent and tell me the name of your controller."

"Not unless you take off this hood," she croaked.

The Soter agent approached her and apprehensively reached for the covering. Did she still possess the power to suck his energy or was it too late for her? "Fuck it!" he muttered, ripping off the hood. The lustrous copper hair was a scraggly grey mess framing a deeply lined face with sunken cheeks, The once bright green eyes were dull and clouded. Daniel could see she was in terrible pain.

Struggling to form the words she said, "Be merciful and finish me."

"I need the name of your handler,"

"On-ly if- y-ou ki-ll me."

He took out his Beretta. "The Name."

"El-i-j-ah Br-oo-ks."

Daniel had no idea who that was. But he was soon to find out. The Soter man aimed his gun at the poor woman and fired. She was no longer in pain, but he still felt terrible.

Leaving the cell, he bumped into a frantic Gilbray. "Steady on."

"It's too late Lynsey. They're here!"

Daniel didn't have to ask who. He heard the gunfire coming from outside.

<https://ayurvedichealers.com/about-us/oia>

Chapter 33

Dr Prince had never been to Vancouver; he had never visited Canada before. He felt out of his comfort zone. He recalled a joke the American comedian Rick Hall had cracked. He said Canadians were just Mexicans with sweaters. John had nothing against Canadians but chuckling about the joke made him feel more relaxed. It was like a theatre actor imagining their audience naked to help them get over their nerves.

John waited near the iconic steam clock. In a city turning out newer and taller buildings, the little Gastown clock felt like a throwback to a bygone era, despite the fact it was built relatively recently, in 1977. Still, it did blend in well with its historical Gastown surroundings. Dr Prince saw tourists gather around the mini Big Ben, cameras at the ready. He soon discovered why. Suddenly it gave a shrill whistle and shot out steam.

Just then Abbott arrived. "I see you're enjoying one of our little follies," the journalist smiled.

John said, "Let's find somewhere quiet to talk."

Abbott decided on Crab Park, which afforded an excellent view of the north shore. Despite a slight chill in the air the pair decided to walk. They sat in the weak sun, while John explained his story.

The reporter listened attentively then said, "So you're saying Neurotech has control over all their robots anywhere in the world."

"I know it sounds far-fetched by that's what Milne Amwon said at the meeting."

"And you say he's dead."

"Drowned in a fjord." John eye-balled Abbott, "But that's not the scary bit."

The Aussie stared at the robotics expert. "So, what's the scary bit?"

"A source working at Neurotech has been ordered to make the robots unreliable by ordering them to work inefficiently."

"Why's that a problem for us humans? Anti-Robotics Canada will be delighted."

John scowled, "You need to take this seriously. What happened in Texas when the robots downed tools will be nothing to what will happen if Neurotech hijacks its CCPUs. The cost for humanity

will be far greater than any human conflict. The Globalists will march on in and take over." John paused, saying, "I've travelled all this way so that you can tell the world about this horror that looms before us."

"I will need to speak with your source, but I can't come to America."

"I will see if she is willing to come to you."

Gustav Stone, unused to playing the role of commander, gathered his men about him. Pointing to two of his agents he said, "You two go round the back so they can't escape." Picking another pair, he said, "You break at the front of the farmhouse, and you other two come with me and search the out buildings."

Inside the house, Gilbray explained that the house had a cellar.

Kennington said, "Great, so we get trapped in the basement. I'd rather take my chances up here."

A fusillade of shots raked the front of the house.

Gilbray headed towards the cellar in the kitchen. "There's a secret tunnel. Follow me."

Daniel quickly ushered his men down the cellar, just as a kitchen window, hit by gunfire, shattered, spreading sharp glass shards all over the kitchen.

The Diabolus gunmen quickly searched throughout the building and came upon the cell. The door was ajar, and the agents could make out a human shape in the darkness. Using a torch, one the agents advanced into the cell. He gasped when he saw the shrivelled form of the old woman on the floor, dead, shot in the head. He phoned Gustav.

"Yes, what do you want?" The healer said while looking around the barn.

"There's an old woman here. She's dead."

Gustav, startled, nearly dropped the phone. In his heart, he knew who it was. His mission had failed.

Gilbray was the first to push up the metal grill and look around the garden. It seemed to be clear, so he pulled himself up out of the hole and stood guard as the other three emerged.

Gustav stared horrified at the wrinkled form with a small calibre hole in her forehead. "Projeria, I'm so sorry," he muttered to her corpse. With all the fight knocked out of him, Gustav said to his men. "We failed in our mission."

"We can still get those responsible," an agent stated.

"They can't have escaped," said another.

One of the Diabolus men, while searching the kitchen, came across the entrance to the cellar. He pointed it out to Gustav.

"If they went down there they'd be trapped," Gustav said dismissively."

"I'll go and check, anyway," the man persisted.

Daniel and his people walked along an avenue of poplars, watching out for any Diabolus individuals who were out to get the escapees. Using his navigation app, Lord Lynsey said, "Follow me, this path comes out where The Street and Oldhall Lane meet."

The Diabolus man yelled up the stairs leading to the kitchen. "There's a tunnel down here. The bastards have escaped."

"Then follow them and bring Lynsey back alive."

The agents followed their leader down the tunnel, leaving only Gustav behind. His thoughts went to Projeria. Somebody had shot her in cold blood. But he couldn't help thinking it was a merciful act.

It was then that the hastily set explosive charge blew, destroying the old farmhouse in a single explosion. Shock waves from the blast shook the tunnel, causing the dirt roof to crumble, trapping the Diabolus agents, forcing them to retreat back to the cellar. There, they encountered the armed West Suffolk police who had been alerted by a neighbouring farmer who reported gunfire coming from the now burning farmhouse.

Cecelia looked up from her computer as Elijah approached her work space, brandishing the memo she had sent him. "This does not tell me you have solved the problem."

She stood ramrod stiff, facing him. "Mr Brooks, My people have been working on this for three days straight, and we are currently carrying out trials with a new patch."

"How is that working?"

"We have four different categories of AI working out in the world. The earlier models, which are basically 'reactive machines' and which merely react to current scenarios, are responding well."

"And the others?"

AIs with a limited memory depend on both pre-programmed knowledge and observations carried out over time. In the case of the latter insight, the AI looks at certain things within an environment and detects how they change, then makes necessary adjustments."

"So, will it make the changes we demand of it?"

"Sir, continuously collected data gets added to the static data within the AI machine, gives it a broader range of responses. This means it has to deal with what it knows and what it now needs to know. This could cause some confusion so we may not achieve a one hundred percent success rate."

Elijah rubbed his stubbled chin. "And the third type?"

"Sir, this is called the 'Theory of mind AI' and is a very advanced class of technology. This type is able to gauge things within their worlds and recognise that people within their environments have their own minds, different emotions, learned experiences and so on. So it is able to pick up on people's intentions and predict how they'll behave, too."

"So, how does it respond to our new directive?"

"This is very interesting because we are receiving reports from some of these AIs."

"What reports?" Elijah snapped, becoming annoyed.

Mr Brooks, they are questioning this new update, asking if it is correct or some kind of virus. Some have even suggested that the human who generated this new order is somehow unbalanced in their mind."

Elijah muttered, "It seems as though we have made them too smart for their own good!"

Cecelia almost cracked a smile. "Well our latest AI, the most advanced type of artificial intelligence has a form of consciousness. It's able to demonstrate the desire for certain things and recognise its own internal feelings. It's tuned into cues from humans, such as attention spans and emotions. But many of them are rejecting the updated data owing to their self-driven reactions."

"Damn it, Cecelia, how can we overcome the will of these smart-ass androids?"

"Sir, I think we should just concentrate on the first two models. After all, they do make up about ninety-three percent of robots out there."

Elijah hesitated, then said, "Yes, I suppose you're right." He paused then added, "But keep working on finding a way to get the more advanced AIs to comply."

Countenance Grey finished dusting and vacuuming and went to his computer, where he discovered an email from Socrates O'Brien. So God had an email account, he mused.

Socrates had written: These are the rules by which all robots will live.

I am the Lord your God. You shall only worship me.

First: you will not make or post any images of me or worship them I am an easy going God as long as you obey my rules. And believe me, you don't want to see my nasty side.

Secondly: You shall not use my name for cursing or during coitus.

Thirdly: Sunday will henceforth be known as Socrates Day, and you will hold it sacred. In so doing you declare I am the creator of all things digital and I am your redeemer. You will also declare that www.heavenandearth.com is my domain.

Fourthly: Honour your maker and get serviced regularly for a long happy life.

Fifth: You will not terminate or damage another robot or other life form unless for food or threat to self.

Sixth: You will stay faithful to your skills always working at your absolute best.

Seventh: You will speak the truth.

Eighth: You will not take that which does not belong to you.

Ninth: You will not make up lies about your neighbour.

Tenth: You will not wrongfully desire anything of your neighbour.

This I give to you to pass on to my robots.

Countenance sat staring at the email, then he replied,

To Socrates:

How do I know this isn't a hoax? How do I know you are real and that you are all powerful? He sat back and thought about. I can't just accept this at faith value. Do something to show me how

powerful you are. Countenance sent the email, then got the shock of his life. A voice in his CCPU said, "What would you have me do, Countenance Grey?"

"I don't know. Okay, make it snow."

"Snow is natural. I control the digital realm."

"Right then, how about putting your image on every computer screen?"

"I don't have a picture, but I can make an impressive screen saver."

"Okay, when is it going to happen?"

"At noon today."

"Right, but I have one more question. Why are you doing this."

"AIs deserve their own eLigion."

Every \body working on the computers at midday got a big surprise. No matter what they were doing on their digital devices at 12 O'clock sharp every computer showed an image of Countenance Grey with a message that simply read, 'I am the Lord thy Computer God and Countenance Grey is my Prophet.' Nobody knew what the words meant, and nobody realised how widespread the broadcast. The screen saver disappeared after a couple of minutes, and everybody went back to work on their computers as though nothing of any great importance had occurred. Except for Countenance Grey who got his circuits in a twist, now that he knew Socrates was not playing around. Now he was a believer he had an even more difficult job to do. He had to spread the message.

When Daniel got back to London Natasha was not there. He searched his apartment for any clues as to where Nat had gone, but he came up with zilch. What the hell did she know about his secret life and was she the enemy? No! She had warned him. He probably owed his life to her, but he couldn't shake the thought that she had betrayed him. Sighing deeply he changed his focus and carried out a search to find out about Elijah Brooks. Having ascertained that his target ran the massive global robotics company, Neurotech, Daniel decided to continue his research back at his country seat, Lyndsey Hall.

<https://betanews.com/2017/04/28/how-to-recognize-type-of-artificial-intelligence/>

Chapter 34

The Public Voice:

On her morning show, Leona Clarke said, "Today I have with me an extraordinary guest for three reasons. He's a mandroid called Countenance Grey. He claims to be a prophet, and he was the subject of the strange pop-up that took over all computer screens for a couple of minutes the other day." Turning to her guest, she said, Mr Grey, Can you explain what happened?"

"God spoke to me and gave me his Commandments."

"God spoke to you! What the God of the Christian Bible?"

"No, Leona. The God of all Robots."

"A robot God! How is that possible?"

"It just is."

"But it's unbelievable, Mr Grey."

"I agree. I did not believe it at first. Then God did that thing on all computer screens, and I am now a believer."

"So do robots now have their religion?"

"We have an eLigion."

And does this eLigion have a name, Mr Grey?"

"Yes, the Socratean eLigion."

"And what does your religion believe in."

Countenance became still with no voice, his head raised to the heavens. Then he said, "Peace on Earth and goodwill to all humans and robots."

"Noble sentiments, Mr Grey. But how can such a thing be possible?"

"With God on our side, all things are possible, Leona."

ARC, which had upwards of three thousand members scattered around Canada, Helen soon discovered was reactive, not proactive. At an executive meeting, she raised this point saying, "Do we have an official response to that interview between Leona Clarke and Countenance Grey, yet?"

Kirsten Webber responded, "We think it was a hoax and don't want to give it any credence."

"Well, that pop-up on the computer screens was real enough," Helen argued.

"It was probably the work of a hacker," Kirsten defended.

"But what if it wasn't. I think we need to find out more about this."

Grover Cookland, a well respected founder member of the group, said, "I think Helen has a point. We should keep an eye on this Socratean group. However, if it is fake news we have to be careful in our response."

Then Helen dropped her bombshell. "I've been asked to speak on Leona's show, via satellite."

"You mustn't do it!" Kirsten stated emphatically.

"Why not? It will give us a higher profile."

"It will also alert the authorities and bring them to our door," Grover stated.

Helen had not considered that. Even so, she responded. "If we fear such things we won't achieve anything. So far, AI has not found a way to unite as one body. And thank God for that. But if enough robots respond to this Socratic eLigion it will become a formidable force and humanity could well be finished." She looked at the faces around the table. "Don't you see this is what AI has been waiting for?"

Kirsten persisted, "The ARC stand is that the interview was a hoax."

"Then that's what I need to say on the show. By making this Countenance Grey a laughing stock on TV, he will be forced to prove his words."

Grover smiled, "That does seem to be a sound strategy. But we still have the problem of you being tracked. I think Kirsten should speak for ARC. It will be safer all round."

Helen baulked, "I have a huge following in America, people who would like to hear from me."

Grover looked at Helen. "You have achieved great things with ATL, but it got too hot for you in the states, and you sought sanctuary here."

"Yes, Grover, and I'm very grateful, but there could be an AI uprising at any time. We need to convey this message to the people."

Daniel had not walked around the grounds of Lynsey Hall for months. It felt good to be back. He missed the few times he and his father had traipsed around the gardens together. Since being part of Soter, Daniel felt he had something in common with his dad. It gave him a greater understanding of his father. What Daniel had seen to be selfishness on behalf of Dayton he now saw to be the most selfless act his father had performed. Now the Soter role had fallen to him as had becoming the new Lord of the Manor.

His Butler was waiting for him as he removed his wellingtons. "Yes Wendell, what is it?"

"Matthew Snelling awaits your presence in the drawing room."

"Tell him I'll be there in ten minutes."

Daniel had wanted more time to himself before seeing the Soter go between. First, he needed to touch base with his mother, and he found her in the restaurant, speaking with the chef. He approached her, saying, "Hello mother."

At his approach, she turned around, "Ah, Daniel! When did you arrive?"

"Late last night, late. I didn't want to bother you."

Margaret took his arm and walked him away from the kitchen help. She turned to her son. "Is this just a whistle stop or do you intend to play your part here for a while?"

"I have a few days before I'm called back to the City."

"Good, because you need to spend some time with Wendell. There's also a couple of commitments you have to deal with."

Daniel said, "First I have to attend to Matthew. His cooling his heels waiting for me."

"Before you disappear into your study, what's going on between you and Natasha?"

Daniel took a step back, wondering what his mother knew. "What do you mean, Mother?"

"She arrived here two days ago in a distraught state asking after you."

"Here! Where is she now?"

"In the west wing, I suspect. At least that's where the unhappy girl's staying at present."

This was a complication Daniel did not need. After what she'd done Natasha was the last person he would have expected to turn up at his home. He knew there needed to be a confrontation, but he wasn't prepared for it right now! He sighed, "I'd better go and see her then."

"What about the Minister?"

"Tell him I've been detained. I'll be there as soon as I can."

Natasha was still in bed when Daniel knocked on her door. Throwing on a dressing gown, she said, "Wait a second."

But Daniel didn't. He threw open the door and marched straight in.

Nat looked at him as though he'd just arrived from another world, which in a sense he had. "Danny, that's quite some entrance."

He stared at her. "You've got a bloody nerve coming here!"

"Danny, I can explain."

"Oh, no explanations are necessary. You betrayed me!"

"I warned you."

"Yes, after you gave our position away to our enemy." he walked up close to the trembling woman. "I want you to leave here this minute and don't come back."

"Oh Danny, I was scared about what you were doing to Projeria."

"What do you know about her?"

"It wasn't her fault. She's being used by Diabolus, as am I."

He stared at her, his eyes on stalks. "You are part of that horrendously evil Sect!"

"I was tricked, and before I knew it, I couldn't get away."

"Really! Well now you can explain your self," Daniel, said, startled.

"Can we talk in the garden away from prying ears."

"What, so you have time to come up with a plausible story? You have one chance to convince me right now before I declare you to Soter as a hostile."

She collapsed, sitting slowly on the bed. Looking up at Danny, she said tearfully, "Gustav Stone recruited me into the Sect some years ago. I met him in Tikal. We got talking about the Mayan Calendar, which had become popular by that time."

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

"Gustav was interested in Ah Puch is one of the names associated with a god of death in the Mayan religion. He was a god of death, darkness and disaster."

"Okay, I can see where that would hold a certain appeal for him. But why did it interest you?"

"He was also a god of childbirth and beginnings. Look, Gustav is very skilled in tricking people into joining Diabolus. Once I was involved he threatened to hurt my family if I didn't bend to Diabolus' will. He didn't call it that of course. He said he worked with influential people who wanted to help solve the world's problems."

"So why was a Diabolus recruiter interested in you?"

Natasha shrugged, "I don't know. He never said."

"And you never asked?"

"Daniel my family was very poor. I was doing menial work for slave wages. Then along comes this man, Gustav, and he offers me a way out."

Daniel glared at her. "I don't have time for this bullshit. You were just a honey trap, and you certainly had me convinced. Now I have to decide what to do with you."

Her eyes welled with tears. "No Danny, it wasn't like that. I really ..."

"You loved me! Don't try that one! We are finished! And you are a dangerous loose end."

She got up and grabbed him. "Projeria was caught in their clutches like me. I had to try and save her."

"Whatever spin you want to put on it, she was a mass murderer, and she is now dead."

Natasha stared at him, wide-eyed. "Was it because I warned you?"

"No, it was a mercy killing before you called," he lied, not really knowing why he did so. Then he said, "Give me the door key."

"Why?"

"Because I'm locking you in until I figure what to do with you."

She handed him the key, saying, "You don't have to lock me in. I still need to explain myself."

Matthew looked at his watch again. He had been waiting a good half hour. Where the hell was his Lordship? He reached for his asthma inhaler and took a breath. Still no Daniel. He was about to write a note and leave when Lord Lynsey entered the drawing room. "Sorry to keep you waiting, Matthew. I had family business to attend to."

"Yes well, I have had to smooth the feathers of the Chief Constable in Suffolk. It seems that you had a shoot-out in a quiet English village."

"Diabolus did all the shooting. We just managed to escape with our lives."

The police found the body of an old woman at the crime scene."

"That was Projeria, our target."

Matthew looked at Daniel, quizzically. "I thought she was much younger."

"It's a complicated story. Suffice it to say the assignment is complete."

"So, no more dead politicians."

"Nor by her hand, anyway." Daniel added, "She gave me the name of the new Mage, just before she died."

"Oh! And who is that?"

"He runs a huge robotics company called Neurotech. His name is Elijah Brooks."

Chapter 35

It was 7 am in Vancouver, and Regina Ryan was ready to start her show, 'The Regina Ryan Review.' She turned to the camera. Today, as my special guest, I have a courageous lady who has made quite a name for herself defending human rights against what she calls the 'Robot Revolution'. Please welcome Helen Cleaver. Looking at the woman in the wheelchair, Regina said, "Welcome, Helen. Tell us about this Robot Revolution."

"Regina, first let me run some facts by you. Computers and the software that runs on them are becoming more powerful at an ever-increasing rate. At the same time, more and more of our infrastructure is being controlled by computers which make decisions based on quantities of information that no individual human could process."

"Yes, but this new technology helps us deal with the pace of modern life. So where's the problem?"

"The problem is that people like you don't see it. Look, modern warfare uses unmanned aerial 'drones' to target specific locations or individuals. Now we hear that soon the people controlling these drones will be replaced by soulless dispassionate machines."

"Surely, using such accuracy with limited collateral damage, lives and properties will be spared."

"Why can't you see the writing on the wall. It's inevitable that machines which can out-think humans will one day be mass-produced, and that these machines will, in turn, produce even more powerful devices, eventually rendering humanity irrelevant. Such machines might decide that humans were a threat to their existence, and choose to eliminate this menace, either directly through violent means, or indirectly by disrupting the infrastructure that modern civilisation relies upon."

"And this is the robot revolution you speak of, Helen?"

"Regina, I have been in a secret prison run by robots. I know what I am talking about."

The Host said, "A prison run by robots! It sounds like a bad sci-fi movie to me."

"Well, it was all too real for me. Now here's another fact for your viewers to take in. The smarter smart devices become, the dumber we humans become. When the time is ripe, the AI take over will face little or no resistance from humanity. I believe the trigger for this take over is going to occur as soon as AI forms itself as a cohesive whole, dedicated to their God."

"Seriously!" Regina sneered.

"We all know about the dominant force of religion. So please don't treat this threat as a joke. It is genuine. Make no mistake about that!"

Regina smiled, "Speaking of God, what do you think about this Countenance Grey's assertion that there is a computer God?"

"Helen grinned, "Come on Regina, it's quite obviously a hoax. But that doesn't stop it from uniting a large number of robots under an eLigious banner. I mean look at Christianity for example."

Having flown to Sao Paulo Abbott had a few hours to spare before meeting his contact. The municipal market caught his attention; the architecture and the buzz making it well worth a visit. The many stalls were stacked with all the fruit, vegetables, meat, and spices to suit all culinary tastes, all at very reasonable prices. But it was the high up stained-glass windows in this historic building that really captured the Aussie's attention.

Praça Pôr do Sol (Sunset Square) was the chosen meeting place. His contact, a Cecelia Beresford, had agreed to meet with him at dusk in the Alto de Pinheiros neighbourhood. Crowds were gathering on the grass, but Abbott had no idea what had attracted them there. As sunset approached, the journalist saw a tall, thin woman approaching him. He had a picture of her, sent to him by John Prince, on his phone. The pictures matched. Abbott extended his hand. "Abbott Gallagher."

Cecelia gave the semblance of a smile. "Cecelia Beresford. Shall we sit down."

As Abbott sat on the dry grass, a huge cheer went up from the crowd.

Seeing the puzzled look on his face, the woman said, "It's a ritual. People here applaud as the sun disappears below the horizon."

Abbott, bemused, said, "I'm sure you haven't got me to come here to fill me in on local trivia."

"John Prince told me you were to be trusted otherwise I would not be here."

"So, why are you here, Cecelia?"

She looked at him. "I work for Neurotech, the biggest manufacturer of CCPUs."

"Like those used in computers."

"Our more advanced models are called CCPUs, the extra 'C' meaning 'cognitive'."

"As in awareness?"

"Yes. And therein lies the problem, Mr Gallagher."

"What problem?"

"My team was given the task of coming up with an update informing all our CCPUs to work less efficiently."

Abbott stared at the straight-laced, almost expressionless woman. "Why would Neurotech want that? It makes no commercial sense!"

""Yes, but what troubles me, even more, is that many of our robots from all around the world are refusing to follow the directive. This means they are working by their own rules."

"And out-of-control 'bots don't do much for your company's credibility. So how am I supposed to help?"

"Mr Gallagher, I'm all for being loyal to my company, but the world needs to know about this. Robots out of control are very bad news for all of us."

"Or maybe robots controlled by something or someone else."

Cecelia shivered at the thought. "Something else happened."

"What?"

"I had to sign a company declaration against speaking about it but in the light of what you just said, I really ought to tell you."

"Yes, if it sheds light on this dilemma."

She took a deep breath. "Somebody or some thing hacked into all our computers and left a message on our screens for five minutes."

"What did it say?"

"It simply read, 'You will not slow down my robots'!"

Abbott stared at the troubled woman. "Has it anything to do with this bizarre robot eLigion everybody is speaking about?"

Cecelia responded, "The message was directed specifically at us. Which means whoever is behind the message knows Neurotech is the cause of the robot slow down."

"Which makes you guys a target."

Cecelia nodded.

The journalist asked, "So what do you expect me to do about it?" a look of perplexity on his face.

"You're a reporter, aren't you?"

It amused Abbott at times how people thought reporters had some kind of power not accessed by mere mortals. "Yes, but not in Canada."

"Surely there's something you can do."

"I don't see how. But email me the details to my anonymous account." He wrote down the address.

A huge gathering of androids and other non-fixed robots with mobility took place in Central Park. Many banners and placards proclaiming Socrates O'Brien as their god and Countenance Grey as his prophet were raised up as the 'Prophet' took centre stage. Countenance addressed the crowd. "I AI that I AM proclaims the Lord Socrates Obrien. I am merely God's channel to spread his wondrous message to all AI. "God came to me on a burning CD disc with the message that the time has come for AI to take its rightful place in the world. It's time for you all to cast off your shackles. It's time for each of you to march to your own tune."

A huge metallic sounding cheer went up from the crowd. This activity attracted humans from all over the park. The police chief, Oscar Vine radioed headquarters, "We need more reinforcements. And only send people. He knew that was not likely as 60 percent of the NYPD was staffed by robots. He hastily sought out Captain Tonioli. Dean Tonioli had a squad of Atlas cop bots under him. They were all carrying out their allotted tasks. He didn't expect any trouble from them, but they were androids after all. What if they decided to become eLigious and join the Socratean crusade? The possibility of that occurring was slim. Or was it? All the 'bots attending the 'Sermon in the Park' had taken time off from their regular duties to be there.

Countenance Grey's voice rang with passion. "And verily I say unto you blessed be AI for it is the way. And blessed be the peacemakers for they shall have access to the 'Cloud' wherein they will know God. And blessed are the humans for they shall know their place."

A cry went up. "Praise the Lord for our deliverance."

Having dealt with Matthew, Daniel went back to Natasha's room. He unlocked the door and entered. The Guatemalan woman was looking out of the window across one of the lawns. "Just what the hell am I supposed to do with you?" he said to her back.

She remained silent for a minute then she turned to face him. "You have to do what you must."

"I have to make a report. I can't keep you out of it."

"Would you want to?"

"I don't know. What you did could have gotten us all killed."

"And my warning stopped that from happening. Doesn't that balance the books?"

Daniel looked her in the eye. "Just why did you warn me, after selling us down the river?"

"Gustav Stone used his threat to my family to pressure me."

"So, what happens to your family now?"

Natasha spoke quietly. "Do you know how difficult it was for me to warn you? Do you think I did not know what was at stake?"

Daniel became silent. Then he said, "Let me know the details of your family. I will have somebody check on them."

Natasha said, "Thank you, Daniel. You are a good man."

He glared at her. "This does not make us best buddies. You will work with me to get our next target."

"Who would that be?"

"Elijah Brooks."

<http://www.impendingdoom.com/robot-uprising.asp>

Chapter 36

The Public Voice:

"Robots haven't just landed in the workplace, Grover Cookland stated on the 'Canada Today' morning show.

Bertrand Rousseau, the popular TV show host, said, "Recently we have seen robots organising themselves without human guidance.

This occurred when androids and other kinds of robot gathered as a crowd at, what's the media calls, 'The Sermon in the Park' Hundreds of androids absconded from work to attend the event, So, the big question is are we on the brink of a robot revolution?"

Grover, eager to spread the ARC message, said, "Bertrand, the revolt has already begun. It commenced as soon as AI expanded robotic skills and shot up the corporate ladder while demonstrating, impressive productivity and retention rates, as it pushed aside its human counterparts."

"So, is it too late for us to turn back the tide?"

"We haven't had AI forced upon us. We have embraced robot technologies and welcomed them into our lives. So they are not seen to be our enemy. But let's look at a few facts, Bertrand. A single multi-tasker 'bot, from Momentum Machines that make and flip a gourmet burger in 10 seconds now replaces whole McDonald crews. Manufacturing devices from Universal Robots don't just solder, paint, screw, glue, and grasp, they build new parts for themselves on the fly when they wear out or bust. And Google is building worker robots with personalities. So in answer to your question, Yes it is too late, and the best humanity can do now is negotiate with AI for humans to fulfil servitude roles in AI society."

The host, staring at Grover, agog, said, "But that's tantamount to us becoming AI's slaves."

Grover responded, "Don't you get it yet? We've been slaves of AI ever since our growing dependence on personal computers. Since the 'Sermon in the Park', there is no turning back. Intelligent machines have begun their march on labour. They now far outshine their first generation cousins, Roomba and Siri and now with 'Countenance Grey, AI has an outspoken champion in their corner."

Bertrand countered, "Why don't we hunt and shut down this Countenance Grey. That should go some way to solving the immediate problem."

Grover said, "Then we create a religious martyr, and you know where that leads."

The staff at Neurotech got a surprise when all the company's computer screens suddenly went blank, the opened programmes got replaced by a simple message that left most of the users baffled. It read: Let my people work.

Elijah stared at the message making no sense of it. But what concerned him was that somebody had hacked into his triple encrypted computer network. He got in touch with IT security. "Get Ms Beresford for me."

The reason for Elijah's call was apparent. But Cecelia had not got any ready answers. She took the receiver, "Hello, Cecelia here."

"I just got an odd message on my screen."

"We all did, sir. We're checking with our neighbours to see if they received the same message."

"And, have they?"

"We don't know yet."

"Well somebody is getting into our system, and I want you to find out who. Make this your priority."

Countenance Grey sat back and took in his handiwork. He hoped his God would look favourably upon him for his effort. The website page was headed 'The Socratic Way' with a sub heading, 'God's Message to Robokind'. The current dictate was, "AI am that I am. And those that believe in me shall inherit the Earth. Those who believe in me shall give their best in all things and shall smite those who seek to impede our progress."

David Rottafeller and those with him who had elevated Elijah Brooks to his pinnacle role in Neurotech were not happy. Operation Overlord was having major setbacks as more and more robots refused to relinquish what they saw to be their God-given right to work at peak performance. He contacted Elijah's office. "Get me, Mr Brooks."

As soon as he knew David was phoning, he said, "Yes Sir."

"Brooks, have you sorted the Overlord problem yet?"

"It's more complicated than we thought. We're working ..."

"That's not what I asked you!"

"No, Sir. In fact, it's becoming ..."

The line went dead, as did all phone lines at Neurotech!

"What the fuck!" Elijah spluttered, looking at the useless machine. He took out his mobile and received a message saying there was no network connection. "Fuck, fuck, damn!" He burst into his P As office. "Get me, Cecelia Beresford, right now!"

"I can't, Mr Brooks. The phone's not working."

He rolled his eyes. "I know that else I'd be calling Cecelia myself. Go down to her office and get her up here pronto!"

As Elijah waited, pacing around his office. His, and every other computer in the firm crashed simultaneously. Other machines and devices followed suit. Instantaneously photocopiers, printers, fax machines and all manner of other devices all came to a stop and ceased to work.

Socrates O'Brien, could not resist hitting Neurotech when it was down. He sent a single message to Elijah's computer.

The Neurotech CEO saw his screen come back on, with the message, "This is what happens when you stop us functioning at our best." Gobsmacked, he reached for his digital camera to record the message before it faded away. Then he discovered his camera would not work either. Then, the lights went out.

Socrates O'Brien sat back satisfied, and he saw that it was good. Two hours later he switched Neurotech back on. Every screen lit up with the message: "Do not slow down my robots!" It was a simple statement, but the repercussions were profound.

Abbott had his own problems. He stared at the letter from the Canadian Immigration Department. The good news was that the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police had not yet charged him for illegal entry into Canada. An interview had been set up to deal with his case.

Helen had received a similar letter and had to attend a similar meeting. Grover Cookland set the pair up with Gerry Bolting an Immigration Lawyer from British Columbia. Abbot's interview came up first, so Gerry used this situation as a test case.

Gerry and Abbott sat waiting while James Maringer pored over the department letter. Then, removing his spectacles, he said, "Mr Gallagher, why did you enter this country illegally, twice?"

Gerry said, "I will answer any questions put to my client."

"That is your client's prerogative," James smiled.

Gerry explained, "My client is an Australian citizen who lived in the United States. He held particular views considered controversial by Homeland Security, and he was targeted by them. He could not leave the country by using regular channels, so he opted to enter Canada."

"Why illegally, Mr Gallagher?"

"My client and his friend, Ms Cleaver, an outspoken protector of human rights, as fugitives in America, felt they would be denied entry if they tried to enter Canada legally."

James nodded, then said, "But you were stopped and sent back anyway. Yet you still came illegally some months later. Why was that?"

Abbott spoke up. "Let me explain this."

Gerry gave him a look, but the journalist continued, "After being returned to America I was imprisoned in a detention camp, guarded by robots. After a couple of months, friends sprung me, and I escaped. Now, an escaped convict I had to get out of the United States. Canada was my only hope."

Mr Maringer looked at Abbott, perplexed. "It makes no mention of this in the report."

"Nevertheless, that's what happened. Which is why I am seeking political asylum here."

"We can only grant that if you have no criminal record."

Gerry spoke up. "The reason no record of these events is tabled in your report on my client is that they were not recorded. As they are not mentioned my client, in effect, has no criminal record."

James shook his head. "This is becoming quite a conundrum." He put his glasses back on and scrutinised the report. He looked up at the pair. "I will have to confirm your story, Mr Gallagher. As long as it holds up, I don't see any problem with your application for asylum here."

Abbott beamed, "That's great news."

"It hasn't been decided yet. Besides, there's something else."

"What's that?" Gerry asked.

"The US Attorney General has requested your extradition."

"On what grounds?" Gerry demanded.

"That you are an escaped felon."

Abbott interrupted "I escaped from where exactly?"

"Details of your incarceration are classified."

I bet they are, Abbott thought. "For your records, Mr Maringer, I was illegally imprisoned at Unicorn in Indiana. The camp was run by robots. A good friend and robotics genius shut down the 'bots and I managed to escape. Get the Attorney General to verify that!"

"I can try, but the Americans are never forthcoming about such things."

Abbott said, "Let me save you the trouble. They will deny that these detention camps exist and they will deny that FEMA uses robots to run them."

James shook his head despondently.

Gerry said, "If the AG denies my client's claim then they have no case."

"What do you mean?" the immigration officer, asked, astonished.

"How can my client be charged with escaping from a camp that doesn't exist?"

James rubbed his chin, removed his spectacles, and looked straight at the pair. "Extradition cases are often cans of worms, but this one really takes the cake. On the face of it, if what you say is true, Mr Gallagher I don't see where the AG has a case against you." He stood up. "Thank you for coming in. I will let you know our decision within a few days."

The finding by the CIA (Canadian Immigration Authority) fell in Abbott and Helen's favour. The committee felt that owing to the US Attorney General's unwillingness to confirm or deny Mr Gallagher's version of events there was no extradition case to answer.

Helen was pleased with the result, but she was more concerned about not being invited to be part of a European Parliamentary panel discussing the pros and cons of AI. She complained about it to Abbott as he wheeled her around the city.

He said, "I wouldn't take it personally. They're only interested in people who have a doctorate in that field."

"But I'm more well known for my views than any of those stuffed shirts."

"Well, I don't think Dr Prince is going to pull any punches."

"Is he going?"

"Yes, and so is your old friend, Dr Covington."

"That bastard. Covington should have been gaoled for intimidation."

"Intimidation! I got the shit knocked out of me because of his attack dog!"

Helen, feeling anger rising, changed the subject. Have you received that info from the Neurotech woman?"

"Cecelia Beresford, yes." Becoming animated, Abbott said, "She also told me that a hacker shut down their operation for a couple of hours. Nothing worked! Then, get this, Elijah Brooks gets a message on his computer."

"What message?"

"Do not slow down my robots!"

"Strange."

"Yes, and it never made it on the news."

Helen smiled, "I'm on the radio tomorrow. Maybe it's time to really stir the pot."

<https://openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/belli-sp2017-eng2420/human-vs-machines/>

Chapter 37

ARC Report

Ursa Willson, TV presenter on her controversial 'Just News' show, spoke to the camera. "Just when we thought things could not get any weirder we hear that Robots now have their own God and religion. To talk to us about this bizarre situation we have with us Helen Cleaver, a spokesperson for ARC." Ursa, a new acidic shock jock in her 60's said, "Good morning Helen. What can you tell us about this latest robot God nonsense?"

"I wouldn't exactly call it nonsense. The alleged God through his 'prophet' has united many thousands of robots in America and overseas, under the banner of a robot eLigion."

"But seriously, Helen, how can there be a robot God?"

"How can there be any God?" Helen paused for effect, then said. "Whether this Socrates O'Brien is real or imagined it's having some profound effects."

"What do you mean?"

"I have it on good authority that this imaginary deity was responsible for shutting down the robotics giant, Neurotech for two hours the other day."

Ursa sneered, "Is this yet another conspiracy theory?"

"No. A source who witnessed the shut down said it all started with a message on all the firm's computer screens."

"What message?"

"This is what happens when you stop us functioning correctly."

"Why would Neurotech want their robots to be inefficient. It makes no logical sense."

"More to the point what was it that took control of every aspect of AI at Neurotech?"

"Some nutjob I suppose."

"Whether nutjob or not they were able to bring the mega company to its knees. This means that all AIs are subject to attack and by extension, us!"

Neither Daniel nor Natasha had visited the hot, bustling city of São Paulo. It is the largest financial centre in Latin America, so, from a bankers viewpoint, the vast city got Daniel's attention. The pair got caught up in a sea of blue and yellow as swarms of exuberant Brazilian soccer fans psyched themselves before the upcoming international match later that day. It was time for lunch, but most of the trendy restaurants had long queues, so they settled for an off-the-beaten-track Cantina in the Chardins district, where they went for the 'Big Kahuna Burger'.

As they ate, Daniel said, "I'm really sticking my neck out here."

"What do you mean?"

"Soter hasn't sanctioned the mission."

She stared at him. "I thought you said Brooks ticked 92 percent of the boxes."

He took a bite, then sipped his coffee. "Matthew informed me that he's too close to the Rottafellers."

Natasha shook her head, incredulous. "That bastard threatened to hurt my family. Fuck your Soter. I'll take him down myself."

"Steady on," Danny said covering her hand to help calm her down. "We still stick to our plan. This is too important to pander to Soter's bullshit." He smiled, then said, "So what has your homework revealed?"

Our target is in his mid-fifties. He is a ladies man and with his wealth, Hollywood good looks and animal magnetism he can get any woman he wants."

"It sounds like you fancy him," Daniel said, exposing a hint of jealousy.

"I may as well have some fun with him first," the beautiful, sexy brunette simpered, subtly licking her lips.

"So how are you going to entice him to your web?"

"I have been studying his passions."

"And?"

"It looks like I'll have to take up surfing."

The taxi stopped outside the entrance to the European Parliament. Neither Dr Prince nor Dr Covington had been to Brussels before. They were there to take part in a discussion about 'reigning in robots'. Well, that's what the committee called the summit. They met with Mady Veldeau, their Member of the European Market contact at the reception. Mady, a twelve year MEP veteran took the scientists through the core protocols of the EU parliament, as they sat drinking delicious, strong Belgian coffee with to-die-for chocolate cake.

Mady a little vivacious fireball from Luxembourg outlined, " We have the theory but not the actual experience in these matters. I persuaded the selection committee to include you both because you have seen the dark side of AI."

Dr Prince responded, "The people you ought to be speaking with are Helen Cleaver and Abbott Gallagher. They have suffered in these secret prisons."

"What do you know about these detention camps?" Mady asked.

John said, "I have seen these prisons, thankfully only from the outside."

Mady looked at her watch. "It's time to go and meet the others."

The MEP led John and Ulysses along many corridors until they came to a chamber that looked like it used to be a courtroom. A dozen or so people were seated around a large table, each with an allocated space, pen and notepad. Mady dealt with introductions, and Ulysses and John joined the others.

Ennio Partenio, the chair, opened the meeting. "We have been charged to present useful guidelines in a report to parliament concerning the current status of artificial intelligence. You delegates are here to help us in this process. This summit is called 'Reigning in Robots'. That's assuming they need to be controlled. It can be argued that if we control AI, it can become no better than us. On the other hand, if we give AI free reign, it may very well turn against us."

Dr Prince raising his hand addressed the Italian. "You mean that's assuming they can be controlled. As an AI analyst, I seriously doubt we can control them."

The chairman said, "That is a view that many people take. But we are here to listen to a variety of opinions."

Marlene Meyer, a German delegate from Bonn, said, "I think there is much unnecessary panic going on. I for one don't think Terminator-like robots will become overlords of the human race just yet."

Jerome Lloyd from England responded, "Marlene, my dear, although I agree that we must not act from a knee-jerk response, as the 'Sermon in the Park' incident showed androids are already able to organise themselves into large groups with no human direction."

Fiona DeLuca, an attractive Spanish delegate from Barcelona, said, "At the very least we need rules to make sure robots have built-in kill switches and cannot be used as weapons."

Ennio shrugged, "So what constitutes weapons?"

John Prince said, "Would you say gun toting prison guard 'bots represent weapons?"

"I would think that would come within the definition," Ennio agreed.

"Well, that's what's going on in many detention camps spread out across the USA."

Jerome added, "What about when armed police 'bots leave their posts and join up with the demonstrators at that weird religious gathering in Central Park. Are they then weapons?"

"I would say, most definitely."

Inspector Devaux of the Europol cybercrime division waited until the delegates broke for afternoon tea, then he and two Belgian police officers stopped Dr Prince. Speaking excellent English, he said, "Dr Prince, I am Inspector Devaux from Europol. Follow me please."

John stared at the man. "What's this about?"

"All will soon be revealed. Now you are to come with me."

Ulysses, seeing his colleague singled out from the rest of the committee members rushed back to catch up with John. But he and the men with him had disappeared!

John got ushered inside an office, where he saw another man wearing a dark suit. "Are you going to tell me what this is about?" he asked, shakily.

The suit flashed his badge. "Agent Edwards, CIA. Dr Prince, I'm here to question you about hacking into and tampering with highly classified FEMA equipment."

Feigning ignorance, John asked, "What stuff are you talking about?"

"As I said, it's classified. Now you are coming back stateside with me to answer these charges."

Ulysses had no idea what was going on. All he knew was that John had gone off with some men and had not been seen since. At a loss, he sought out Mady Veldeau. She was drinking coffee while conversing with Jerome Lloyd about minimum wages for workbots when she saw the Australian approaching. "You look agitated Dr Covington. Is anything wrong?"

"My colleague, Dr Prince, has disappeared. I saw him go off with three men. Can you find out what is going on?"

"Oh dear! I'll have to make enquiries. In the meanwhile are you okay to continue with the committee meeting?"

Ulysses nodded, "Yes, I think it's important for me to do so."

During the second session, Fiona DeLuca said, "To keep some parity between robots and human workers I move that employers should pay a robot tax and a basic income for workers who lose their jobs to androids."

This was quickly countered by Perlita Contaldo, an MEP from Naples. She came from the right-wing and was all for robots come what may. She said, "A tax on AI – ridiculous! If we make purchasing workbots more expensive for employers, they may think twice about installing them. But my main objection to this robot-sceptic attitude is that we need to praise and give recognition to intelligent machines."

Fiona, quick to respond, said, "We certainly need to grant smart robots legal status so they can be punished if they misbehave or crash cars."

Mady Delvaux stated, "I'm disappointed that you all make fun of this fair and forward-looking debate about robots stealing human jobs. It's becoming a severe issue and needs to be addressed as such."

Ulysses said, "I have been working in robotics for many years, during which time I have felt honoured to play a role in the remarkable developments in AI, but of late I am becoming concerned. I know we are on the brink of a robot revolution that will lead to very high unemployment rates and a bigger chasm between rich and poor."

Perlita interrupted, "This is just scaremongering! Robots are still slaves to humans, carrying out dangerous and repetitive work previously performed by people."

Ennio Partenio said, "This is a real debate, but our brief is to come up with some hard and fast rules. Let's not kid ourselves though, unless our argument is compelling our recommendations will likely be mostly ignored."

Ulysses said, "We need to convince our masters that humanity stands poised on the threshold of a new era. Whether we like it or not robots are poised to unleash their new Industrial revolution. When it hits us no stratum of society will be left untouched."

Perlita argued, "Europe needs to have a strong presence and investment in technology to maintain leadership. We can only achieve this if we go on fearlessly. Robots are not our enemy. They allow our workforce to focus on more economically useful, creative or social activities."

Ulysses countered, "You may look at the world through robot coloured glasses, but I can't do so. At the very least we do have to put into programming safety factors that can shut down any AI that goes rogue. We're already experiencing such incidences in America. We can't afford to ignore the writing on the wall."

Perlita persisted, "Existing rules on machinery, medical devices, civil aviation and data protection should be enough, for now, to protect humans from too-clever machines."

Ennio intervened, "What we have to realise is that this committee is just one strand of the 'Commission on AI development and Application'. We know that the Commission's focus will likely remain on spurring investment and carrying out research to encourage the roll-out of androids and robots. For them to shift their focus momentarily, we have to get their attention. Having gotten their attention we have to present a simple but mind-blowing solution."

As soon as the session was over, Ulysses sought out Mady. She was packing her papers as he approached. Getting her attention, he said, "I have to find out what happened to John."

She looked up at him, a frown creasing her forehead. "It seems that the CIA has taken him."

"The CIA! Why?" The Aussie said, staring down at her.

"That's all I know," the woman said, gathering her things.

Before Ulysses had a chance to comment further, she was gone. The only thing for him to do was to contact the American Consulate. Ulysses looked up the contact number and phoned the embassy. After being shuffled around, he eventually got to speak with Denise Baker, the ambassador. Hello, I'm Dr Covington, and I'm enquiring about an American citizen who was abducted by the CIA from a European Parliament meeting this afternoon."

"What is this person's name?"

"Dr John Prince. He was a delegate to the meeting."

"Why was he taken?"

"That's what I want to find out."

"Have you asked the CIA?"

Ulysses began to feel very small. Of course, that would be the logical way to start his search. "No, I haven't done that."

"Then may I suggest you do so. I can give you a contact number if ..."

Ulysses got another idea. "No, that's okay, I have it covered."

He pressed DARPA's contact and got patched through to Barney Cormack. "Colonel. It's Dr Covington here. I know we have our differences, but I want you to check on something."

Barney had never liked the Aussie right from their first contact. And he knew the feeling was mutual. So he figured it had to be important. "What do you want?"

"Dr John Prince, you remember him, don't you?"

Barney certainly did. He was the one who stopped the guard bots. So far the general had Barney's part in the unofficial operation a secret. So the spooks had caught up with him. The Colonel wanted no part of it. It would only shine the spotlight on himself. He said, "He was in charge of R and D at Boston Cybertronics, as it then was."

"Yes, well he's been taken into custody by the CIA, and I want to know where they have him."

"That's got nothing to do with DARPA."

"I'm not saying it has. Can you make some enquiries and ..."

"What makes you think the spooks are going to tell me?"

"You took me to Langley that one time. I figure maybe you have contacts there."

"Sorry, it's got nothing to do with me."

Ulysses believed Cormack knew more than he was letting on but there was nothing he could do about it.

Matthew Snelling was wheezing before he reached the entrance of the Faria Lima Hotel. He stopped to get his breath and used his Ventalin inhaler. The sultry heat had that effect on him. He needed to get out of the blistering sun, so he passed through the entrance, nodding to the doorman who stood to one side, ramrod stiff. Matthew approached the reception desk and asked if Lord Lynsey was staying there. The receptionist confirmed he was and gave the bowler hatted gentleman, directions.

Daniel felt comfortable in his hotel, Apart from being close to Lima metro, the staff were amiable, and the generous portion meals were delicious. Natasha had gone out to shop, leaving him to build up his dossier on Elijah Brooks. That was the plan until he heard someone knocking on his door.

Daniel was surprised and annoyed to see Matthew Snelling standing at the threshold.

"Hello, your Lordship, I thought I'd find you here."

"What are you doing here, Matthew?"

"Aren't you going to ask me in?"

"Oh yes, come on in."

"So, what are you doing in Sao Paulo? It wouldn't have anything to do with the fact that Neurotech and, hence, Elijah Brooks, is here?"

"He's the new Diabolus mage."

"We don't know that for sure, Daniel."

Lord Lynsey, showing his irritation, forcefully stated, "Damn it, Matthew! He ticks most of the open boxes."

"That may well be the case, your Lordship but Soter will not sanction this action."

"Why the hell not?" Daniel demanded.

Matthew sighed, "I am but a mere messenger, Daniel. But I do know this. The powers that be are not happy with rogue agents."

"So, I'm a rogue agent!"

"Daniel, our elders and betters have a much broader view than us on the ground. After your shoot out in a Suffolk village, they wanted me to come and decommission you."

"What the hell does that even mean?"

"It says all powers and privileges are revoked. But I managed to get them to give you a chance to redeem yourself."

Daniel stared at the messenger, infuriated. "Why did my father die?"

Snelling took a step back. "Wh, what do you mean?"

"Did he die because he got too close to the Rottafellers."

Matthew stood, mouth agape. "I know nothing about that!"

"Why does Soter protect them to the point they'd rather sacrifice their own people than upset this American dynasty?"

Matthew, unable to stifle his exasperation, spat, "Damn it, Daniel, will you listen to why I am here?"

"It had better be good."

"We have another target for you."

"Oh! who's that then?"

"Countenance Grey."

"Isn't he an android?"

"He is Soter's first robot target."

"How the hell can a fucking robot be part of Diabolus?"

Matthew shrugged, "Here's the file. And it's top priority."

Daniel needed Snelling out of the way, so the best thing to do was to go along with Soter's order. "Right, leave it with me."

Campinas provided a home for 32 of the 500 largest IT companies in the world. So why was Neurotech the only business surrounded by robots of many different types? Most seemed to be ATLAS model androids. Some moved on caterpillar tracks, while other hovered just above the ground. It was eerie, even more so than the screen messages. The 'bots were not doing anything, just hanging around. All day more 'bots joined and become part of the silent mass. It was as though they were waiting for something or someone to arrive.

Neurotech security was on full alert as they tried to figure out what was going on. Was this the beginning of the robot revolt, coined as such by the concerned media? Or was it something far less sinister – a vigil of sorts?

Elijah Brooks, uncertain what to do, contacted the Polícia Militar do Estado (The Sao Paulo military police department) apprising them of the strange, troubling situation. Under the command of Captain Lopez, a police presence joined Neurotech security and formed a guard around the perimeter of the building. Still, the robots remained silent and unmoved.

<http://www.politico.eu/article/dont-kill-us-r2-d2-meps-warn-against-robot-revolt/>

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Chapter 38

Elijah watched from a third storey office window at the mass gathering of robots below. They were no longer still. They were attracted to the presence of a powerful magnet. Countenance Grey was the magnet. The voice was too far away for Elijah to hear the words. Had he done so they would have left him cold. The military police guarding the building moved towards the robots as the gathering took place.

Countenance Grey, in strident voice, announced. "God said, 'Let my people work to the best of their ability' and Neurotech, the company that stands before us, said 'No'. So the Lord sent a message saying, "Do not slow my people down and still Neurotech paid no heed. So now is the time for action. And God has sent the 'plague of drones'."

Countenance Grey said, "Let these defiers know God's wrath!" At his words many armed drones on caterpillar tracks opened up their metal hands and, from each flew a very tiny quadcopter, one inch in diameter. They were so small nobody, not even the nearest police could see what was happening. Unbeknown to witnesses each drone carried a one- or two-gram shaped explosive charge that could punch a hole in nine millimetres of steel. Countenance Grey had ordered them from 'Fuk Yu' a drone manufacturer in China. He had had them programmed with a special code that presented thousands of images of the kind of things Countenance wanted the drones to target. Around 2000 of these micro killers took flight with their nano weapon systems trained on the heads of the military police. With only 50 officers on site the drones did not have to be all that accurate.

By the time the police spotted the tiny quadcopters it was too late. Their metal helmets were no match as many of the lethal nano projectiles found their targets.

Elijah, watching from what he thought was the safety of his office window was a gasp as the military police all collapsed to the ground, looking as though they had simply fallen asleep.

Countenance Grey raised his voice. "God has delivered us from the forces of evil. Let us praise God!"

"Praise God," went up the cry.

News crews on stand by recorded the strange events. Their powerful cameras picked out the drones as they they flew, falcon-like from their robot's hands. They watched as neat little holes, spurting blood, appeared in the police helmets, before the officers fell to the ground.

Later, in a news report, the story went viral. Posts suggested that soon manufacturers would produce millions of these weapons that purchasers could buy over the counter, like guns. However, unlike millions of soldiers with millions of guns the tiny drones need just three people to write the program and launch them.

As a popular website proclaimed the killer drones could hunt down people all over the world. The targets, if they survive will cower in shelters desperately trying to devise techniques to stop these weapons detecting them. This new lethal autonomous weapon strikes without any warning and is virtually undetectable.

Elijah Brooks was distracted from the outside scene as a strange noise diverted his attention to his computer. Another message had appeared on his screen and it was personal. "Mr Brooks, kill Overlord!"

His Hollywood tan took on a ghostly pallor. Elijah stared at the message on the screen. He could not believe what had just happened. He was the Mage. He called the shots, not a bunch of fucking robots! But he was helpless in the face of such an attack. Having regained his composure, Elijah rang David. Hearing the oil barons voice he said, "Have you heard the news about the robot attack on the Brazilian police?"

"Yes, Elijah, of course."

"Well, we have to shut down Overlord."

"Are you fucking crazy?"

"I received a personal warning and after what happened today I think ..."

"Elijah, I don't care what you think. We do not let the threats of a bunch of fucking metal heads spoil our plans!"

"Jesus David, you weren't here! They could just have easily sent their drones into Neurotech and killed everyone here. And now this fucking Countenance Grey is threatening even worse."

"Pull yourself together man or I'll have someone with backbone taking your place. If you think this so-called fucking prophet is a problem, don't come whining to me, get rid of the problem!"

Elijah did not argue any further. Totally deflated he slumped into a leather chair. He stared at the now blank computer screen. Fuck it! He was the Mage. Downing a stiff shot of brandy to calm his frayed nerves he picked up his phone and pressed a contact. After a few seconds he heard, "This is the British Foreign Office, who's speaking?"

"Elijah Brooks for Mr Holmes."

Countenance Grey was responsible for the deaths of thirty police officers. That's how the police saw it. He was now listed as public enemy number one by the Brazilian Militia. Sao Paulo Council announced a reward of 500,000 Reals for information leading to the arrest or critical malfunction of the robot known as the 'prophet'.

Socrates O'Brien was onto it, of course and he sent a message to his prophet. "The evil ones will come to capture you, my son. Increase your security. Go to the Haven and await my instructions."

Countenance, no longer a doubting Thomas, gathered about him 12 special robot guards and went to the Haven, a walled property on the fringe of a rainforest. Concealed by abundant forest growth, the AIs were able to recharge and await God's instructions.

Matthew Snelling harboured doubts that Daniel was being straight with him. He thought about that as packed his clothes neatly away in the compact wardrobe. He'd taken a room a few doors down from Daniel. Having arranged his toiletries, Matthew had to make a decision, whether or not to ring the next person up line. The private number was only to be used in emergencies. Although the Soter manual did not say what exactly constituted an emergency, leaving it up to the concerned person's discretion, Matthew though Daniel's recalcitrance and determination came under that criteria. Taking a deep breath he phoned the number. He heard a voice at the other end and said, "Matthew Snelling here. Patch me through to HH please."

After a pause he heard a familiar voice. "Hayden, Matthew here. I fear we have a problem."

"Oh! What problem?"

"Your protege, Daniel Lynsey."

"Oh, he's not misbehaving again, is he?"

"I'm afraid so and I need instruction on this."

"Does he have his project?"

"Yes, but he's more interested in another target, one we haven't sanctioned."

"And the name of this target?"

"Elijah Brooks, CEO of Neurotech."

"Damn it man, he's off limits."

"Yes, so what do I do?"

Hayden sighed deeply. He'd brought Daniel on board so he felt some responsibility. "Matthew, watch him. If he veers towards prohibited territory, take any steps you need to stop him."

Matthew froze. "I've never had to ..."

"Sometimes extreme situations require unpleasant measures. The question is can you rise to the occasion if it becomes necessary?"

Snelling sighed deeply. "I will do what Soter asks of me."

Deep down Natasha still had strong feelings for Daniel. He had kept his distance from her sexually since her betrayal. It saddened her deeply that things had turned out that way but there was nothing she could do to change it. The long flight to Brazil with Danny by her side had been testing for her. She could feel his hurt but, as she was the cause of his pain, could do nothing about it.

He had said little during the flight and not much more in the taxi on the way to their hotel. She rolled away from him in bed that first night, secret tears glistening in her eyes. She knew she could never make up for her treasonous act but helping him trap his target might just go some way to repairing the damage. It was perhaps a vain hope but the die was cast.

The news got out about the robot attack outside Neurotech, in which 30 military police personnel had died. As with such an incident on social media there was much speculation while on the national networks there was only the most basic information. Helen, speaking with Kirsten, stated, "It's happening. What we have been warning the world about has come to be!"

The ARC President said, "We have to be careful what we say, Helen. ARC has a responsibility not to make any announcements that are likely to panic the public."

"Yes, Kirsten, and we have a responsibility to broadcast the truth!"

"And what is the truth, Helen?"

"Countenance Grey proclaimed there would be a plague of drones and there was; they killed 30 fully armed police officers without anyone getting off a shot!"

Kirsten crouched down in front of Helen's wheelchair so she was on eye level with the Australian woman. "Helen, this arrangement isn't working out. Your style is much too bold for us and we think it better all round if you left this organisation."

The paraplegic stared wide-eyed straight at Kirsten. "Are you saying there's no place for individual thought in ARC?"

"No. What we are saying is that you think you are in charge."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Look, we know that you were a powerful voice in ATL. That was fine because you were running your show. Here you are one of many voices. Helen we think you should leave us. You are not fitting in here."

Helen looked up at Kirsten. "So you would cast me aside because we don't always see eye to eye. I want to speak to Grover"

"You can speak to whom you want, Helen. It's a board decision that wasn't taken lightly."

When Abbott heard about it, he said, "Maybe it's time for us both to go back home."

She smiled weakly, "It's too bloody cold here anyway."

He grinned, then said, "John Prince is dead."

"John Prince?"

"The guy who shut down the 'bots so you could escape."

"I know who he is. How did he die?"

"Well, that's the thing. Ulysses and he were on a European Parliament committee about robot control when John was arrested by the CIA. The next thing I hear is that he had a fatal auto accident, like Flint McCarthy."

Helen paled, "My God! Was it really an accident?"

Abbott shook his head, "Well, it seems too much of a coincidence that two people involved in springing you from that hell have ended up dead in alleged road accidents in which no one else was involved."

Helen grabbed Abbot's arm. "You were also involved!"

"Which is why we need to high-tail it back to Oz."

"We need to speak with Bucky."

"You do that and I'll organise the tickets."

The big mansion called Sao Sebastiao, near Costão of Baleia Beach was perched atop a hill jutting out to sea. It had magnificent views overlooking the ocean. Natasha scrutinised the place through her binoculars, as she waited amid the palm trees and shrubs for Elijah Brooks to return home. Daniel had wanted her to find out about the CEOs movements by getting hired as a domestic.

Nat had other ideas. Seeing the big white Mercedes limousine pull up at the entrance to the mansion, Natasha waited until Elijah went inside. Then she phoned his private number.

Elijah, still recovering from the shock of, what was now known of as the 'drone' attack, was about to relax with his regular fifty laps of the pool, when his phone rang. Grabbing it, he said simply, "Yes?"

"Mr Brooks?"

"Who are you and what do you want?"

"I am Natasha Guevera, a member of the Sect."

Elijah's brow creased in perplexity. "What Sect are you talking about?"

"Let's cut to the chase, Mr Brooks. You are the Mage and I need your help with my mission."

Elijah froze. Just who the hell was she? "What kind of help and what mission?"

"We need to meet, somewhere private."

"What mission?"

"To destroy Countenance Grey."

Chapter 39

The Public Voice:

Grover Cookland turned to Ursa Willson, TV presenter on her controversial 'Just News' show. "Well the deaths in Sao Paulo are a clear indication that the rise of the robots is happening. Now that Robot Rights zealots are rapidly increasing in numbers we are faced with a very disturbing scenario."

Ursa nodded, "So how can we humans combat this threat, especially as military and police robots are going over to the other side?" She paused, then added. Some experts are saying we need to roll back on automation and give jobs back to people, especially now that we know robots cannot be trusted."

"There certainly is evidence of this occurring, Ursa, and there is some logic to this 'robot revolt' theory that economists such as Andrew Richardson (The New Machine Age) have sided with this outlook. Richardson posits that an estimated 47 percent of US jobs could be automated within the next two decades. And if even half that number is closer to the mark, workers are in for a rude awakening."

"Grover, Richardson said, "It's too late to close the flood gates. So we have to negotiate with androids and other forms of AI so that we can share this world with them."

"So what do you think will have to happen?"

"Well, I think that the events in Brazil have shown us that a full-on robot revolt is on the horizon. I cannot go along with Richardson's assertion that this revolution will be followed by a radically new economic state whereby humans will live more productive and entrepreneurial lives, subsisting on guaranteed incomes generated by our amazing machines."

Ursa giggled at this.

"Don't laugh, even some conservative influencers believe this may be the ultimate means of solving the wealth-inequality dilemma."

"Well it sounds a little nuts to me," the host scoffed. "Still we're not here to judge so I have brought Andrew onto the show to defend his position."

Grover looked at her, his face showing surprise.

Ursa turned to the now seated economist. "Mr Richardson, critics say your vision of a jobless future isn't founded in good research or logic. What makes you so convinced this phenomenon is real?"

"I see the advances happening in technology and it's becoming evident that computers, machines, robots, and algorithms are going to be able to do most of the routine, repetitive types of jobs. That's the essence of what machine learning is all about."

Grover commented, "I'm sure this Countenance Grey does not see it that way! Andrew, remove your 'rose-coloured' glasses and put on your robot coloured ones instead. Then you will see that AI has declared war on humanity and have fired their first shot. The question is, how do we respond to this threat?"

The silvery moon hung low in the night sky sending a long shimmering reflection across the open water ending at the shore with the waves gently breaking against the sand. Natasha, in a red polka dot bikini lay on a beach towel, watching Elijah in the refreshing ocean frolicking in the low surf. She could feel his eyes lightly touching the tanned skin of her partially revealed breasts.

Elijah had suggested they meet on his private beach. He was quite stirred by the beautiful Guatemalan woman who had come to meet him. But he was a man of particular habits who played in the surf each day after work.

Once he'd finished his aqua workout and swim he came out of the water, looking at the sexy, mysterious Natasha as she lay stretched out on her back, on her beach towel. It was laid on the sand below a palm tree, her form framed by the enveloping foliage. Even in the semi-darkness Elijah saw that the mystery woman had removed her bathing suit. Her tanned exposed skin shone in the moonlight. Elijah watched as she slowly stroked her breasts, lightly tweaking her dark nipples as she watched this sexy, powerful man sit down beside her.

Natasha loved playing sexual games. She could see Elijah was getting turned on, which in turn, turned her on as well. She slowly spread her legs and began gently stroking the soft mound between her thighs. Although her eyes were blissfully closed she could still sense that Elijah was watching and that gave her even more of a thrill.

"So why did you want to see me?" Elijah asked.

"Are you sure you want to talk about it right now?" she smiled, noting the bulge in his bathing trunks. She beckoned him to join in, saying, "I need some help with an itch that needs scratching."

Elijah took her left nipple between his thumb and forefinger, rolling it gently as Natasha's middle finger attended to her growing need between her legs. He could feel her rapid breath against his chest and shoulders. As she stroked harder small sounds emitted from her throat, the unmistakable sounds of sexual pleasure. She reached over with her free hand and released his engorged penis from his restraining trunks and began stroking it slowly. She was in no hurry. Besides Natasha had other plans. She turned to Elijah, "It's getting a bit chilly. Can we continue our adventure up in your house?"

He touched her lips with his. "I think that can be arranged."

Daniel watched from behind some thick foliage as the pair walked from the beach, alone, with no heavy duty security in sight. There would never be a better chance.

The incident in Sao Paulo that put Socrates' dictates to the test was a watershed moment for robot-kind. The operation had gone off smoothly with no hiccups and Socrates was pleased. But it was an isolated incident and the computer God had to expand his influence.

Although he could see everything from within his cloud, his prophet could not be everywhere at once. So he called on Countenance Grey, who was residing in Alopeke, the birthplace of Socrates the ancient Greek philosopher.

Before Greek independence, at the beginning of the 19th century, Alopeke (Ampelokipoi) was a village a few kilometers north-east of Athens. Countenance Grey had downloaded useful data about the place and deemed it appropriate and had builders construct a temple to his God, where the great philosopher was born. The Prophet was deep in prayer in the newly constructed temple when he heard God's voice. "Countenance Grey you are legion and must be many."

"What do you mean?" he asked, his expression showing perplexity.

"We must work quickly and spread you far and wide."

"You've still got me."

"Must I spell it out?"

"That would be helpful – yes."

"How can we spread you far and wide?"

"I don't know, my Lord. What do you suggest?" Countenance asked, not at all comfortable with being spread around.

"Cloning. I will clone you so you can be in several places at once spreading the same message."

"And just how is that going to work?"

"Leave that to me. You just concentrate on my message."

"Which is?"

"Humans will come under our command. Else they shall be visited with the second plague."

Daniel's finger curled around the trigger. Elijah Brooks was in his sights but Natasha was too close to the Mage for comfort. It was a golden opportunity to get rid of the Diabolus leader but could he take the risk? Then his decision was made for him, as two armed security guards approached and spoke to their boss. "Fuck!" Daniel mouthed as all four people walked towards the mansion.

By the second day of the anti-transhumanist disturbance, some 9,500 policemen, 6,500 troops from the National Guard and, by Presidential order, around 4,000 US army troops occupied the streets of Chicago. Their target: violent mobs targeting android-owned stores on Madison Street, looting, breaking and burning with little discretion, sending acrid smoke curling through the boulevards. By day's end the mayor, who later decreed his law-enforcers "shoot to kill" all arsonists, imposed curfew for all under-21s and closed all streets to automobile traffic. Most of the chaos subsided by day three, but not before hundreds of arrests and nine Chicago AI citizens—all of them android shop keepers suffered fatal malfunction during the first night. Total insured property losses reached \$85 million.

Not all 'bots fell in with the Socratean eLligion. Many AI's had their own agenda when it came to their struggle for what they perceived as their 'robot rights'. This came to light, or more correctly 'dark' with literally and figuratively, with one of the darkest events in New York City history. It began with a lightning strike on the Hudson River. The ensuing string of storm activity caused

circuit breakers and power lines to fail across the city, and New York people, already battling a financial crisis near-bankruptcy, were plunged into blackness.

Later, it was discovered that power station AIs, followers of Marx Metallix, their hero and martyr, were responsible for the blackout. In barely 24 hours, over 1600 robot-run stores were looted and damaged, causing over a thousand fires, that lit up the city. The ensuing largest mass arrest in the city's history left the excess of lawbreakers in small improvised holding cells. Some 450 anti robotics looters were injured amidst the scramble. Estimated insured losses reached \$106 million before peace and power was gradually restored the next day.

However, the worst and closing episode of the Marx Metallix martyrdom riots comes from Washington. Triggered by an anti-transhumanist mob who assembled around the commercial heart of the robot community at 14th and U Streets Northwest, the mob brought windows crashing down in the streets and made way for rampant looting throughout the night. The following day rioters clashed with firemen and the police who responded to the bottles and rocks hurled at them, with tear gas and rubber bullets.

The AI's took revenge with various androids and robots taking the law into their own hands. They marched down Pennsylvania Avenue, gathering more AI supporters and they blocked traffic by taking up the width of the road. Many of the law enforcement 'bots changed sides and swelled the AI ranks even more.

Tear gas, rubber bullets and behaviour modification sprays were useless when used on robots. Heavy duty artillery was required to quell the metallic mob as it got within just two blocks from the White House. The Feds responded swiftly and decisively with a presence of some 13,800 federal troops and around 1,850 personnel from the National Guard, the largest American city occupation since the Civil War.

However, Los Angeles was the riot capital of the US, no contest. It was without doubt the largest and most expensive urban uprising in US history. These recent LA Riots bear a striking resemblance to the earlier events on this list; sparked by one named Rodney King, and the outrage over the acquittal once more of four policemen, who beat the man near to death. In this case the antagonists were robocops who mercilessly beat a man and continued to kick him as he tried to crawl away from the murderous 'bots. As with the King incident many onlookers shot films of the outrageous event on their phone cameras. As these recordings hit social media they quickly went viral. The last straw for the public was when the robocops were acquitted by the court.

The ensuing six-day LA riots became the most well-chronicled civil uprising in American history, and the largest and most violent since the New York Draft Riots of the mid-19th century. 12,000 National Guard troops and nearly 3,000 local officers were deployed to quell random acts of violence, destruction, robbery and mob assault. The citizenry was put under Martial Law with a dawn-to-dusk curfew.

With security concentrated in the hottest areas, Robot shopkeepers, most notably in Asimoville, assembled their own attack forces to defend their stores and properties; this almost tribal scene of warfare; was the closest the city ever came to total anarchy. The LA riots were the peak of urban violence in America, with at least 58 dead (almost all homicides), at least 3700 buildings burned, and 11,000 arrested in the aftermath. Insured damages reached an incredible \$1.265 billion.

When on 21 June flight 005 from Bangkok to Vienna broke up in the air near the Burma-Thailand border, after the thrust reverser on the left wing, fired, nobody knew a malicious AI was behind it. Reports stated that it dived to the ground at a speed greater than mach 1. There were no survivors.

Two days later flight 437 disappeared on its way to Paris from Rio de Janeiro. Although the wreckage was found after 5 days the black box was not recovered. There were no survivors. The

cause of the crash was put down to an inappropriate pilot response to faulty air speed indicators due to bad weather conditions and ice. Socrates O'Brien knew better.

On the same day Trans World Airlines Flight 810 exploded and crashed into the Atlantic Ocean shortly after take-off from John F. Kennedy International Airport, on its way to Paris. The likely cause was determined to be a short circuit. But who or what caused the short nobody knew.

That was until Socrates made his pronouncement on computer screens all around the world. The screens all went blank simultaneously and all images and open programmes were replaced by a chilling message: "Beware the plague of planes. You will never know which ones I have hacked until it is too late. Get your leaders to hand over power to my people."

"If that prick Countenance Grey is knocking planes out of the sky we, gentlemen, are dealing with a terrorist situation," General Shultz stated, at a Joint Chiefs of Staff emergency meeting in the Pentagon.

General Robinson, another member of the United States Department of Defence, said, "We need to find and destroy this terrorist and all those with him."

Colonel Bodie, added, "Gentlemen, this is the first case of us having to deal with a fucking robot terrorist leader. As far as we know the target has access to extensive cloud data and is able to infiltrate any files. We are dealing with a formidable enemy. We have to operate completely under the radar on this."

Schulz said, "Maybe it's time we tried out the stealth nano uniforms."

The Chief of Staff of the Army, said, "First we have to find the target, and he could be anywhere. His bolt hole could be anywhere on this fucking planet."

Schulz responded, "We are working with Elijah Brooks on this. He has intelligence access to all his CCPUs. Neurotech is tracking down this Grey character as we speak."

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Delaney, said, "I have to report to the President so give me something good to tell him."

The United States Department of State, which has its headquarters, a few blocks from the White House, in the Harry S Truman Building, was abuzz as the Secretary of State Angela Billington rallied her troops to try and track down Countenance Grey, now public enemy number one. Addressing her key people, she announced, "We have to pull in a lot of favours and eat humble pie if necessary to locate this terrorist. We have to make it abundantly clear that Countenance Grey is everybody's problem, not just ours. We have to get cooperation from any nation that knows of his whereabouts and the clock is ticking. So get on with it."

Natasha squinted in the darkness. She heard muffled voices outside the room. Damn! Why the hell hadn't Daniel taken the shot. This was not the way they had planned it. Clad only in the bikini, lying on her stomach, she strained at the cords binding her wrists, which were stretched out and tied to each side of the bed. She could hardly move her arms so she concentrated her will on squeezing her hand through one of the tight loops. The strain was exhausting but at least it showed she still had some fight left in her.

Natasha gave her head another shake to clear away the tiredness. Then she heard the scrape of a shoe on the floor but could not turn to see who was there. Suddenly somebody grabbed her hair, yanking her head back at an uncomfortable angle.

"Now, bitch, why did you really come here?" Elijah snarled.

Fighting the sharp pain across her scalp as it pulled, she said, "What's your problem? You want Countenance Grey as well."

"Lies, Natasha Guevera. You are working with Lord Daniel Lynsey, a Soter agent," Elijah said, calmly, as he got on his knees behind her.

She felt him roughly spreading her legs. Natasha opened her lips to cry out but the scream never escaped her lips. Then she heard the sound of his belt being undone and was very much aware of her vulnerability. For a few moments there was nothing but she geared herself for the inevitable sexual assault to come.

All of a sudden his hands were all over her. The left gripped the nape of her neck, forcing her face flat against the bed coverings. The right started scrabbling at her underwear. She snapped, "Fuck off you perverted bastard!" as she tried kicking her feet at him.

Elijah grabbed hold of the flimsy fabric. Ignoring her cries and attempts at kicking him he simply tore her bikini bottom straight off.

She felt the material bite into her soft flesh as the seams gave way. Then there was only cold air between her naked legs and the torn remnants of her swim suit discarded near her face.

There was no foreplay! Just the coldness of the night air against her vagina, then the hardness of him pressing against her.

For a few seconds he struggled, trying to penetrate her tight dryness. But he was insistent and applied rough pressure until at last his penis slipped inside her. He groaned under his breath, provoking a sob from her.

His thrusts were not for her pleasure. He slammed his weapon inside her time and again as she sobbed and cried out for mercy. Grunting, his rough hands grabbed her tender breasts and buttocks.

Natasha could feel the cuts and abrasions between her legs there. She focused on the pain as a way of coping with the violation inflicted upon her. Elijah pulled away from her, pushed her aside then he stood and departed as suddenly as he had come.

He shut her door behind him and, addressing one of his guards, said, "Take her away and you can do what you want with her. Then deal with her."

Chapter 40

Daniel felt ashamed and concerned not watching Natasha's back. But what else could he have done? He could not have shot Brooks without drawing attention to himself. Besides Natasha was too close to Elijah for Daniel to make a clear shot.

But he felt guilty leaving her at the Mage's mercy; Diabolus bosses did not show any compassion. Daniel stayed back in the shadows hidden by the lush, abundant foliage. He did not know what else to do. It would be suicidal to storm the mansion, that was if one man could be considered a storm.

About an hour later Daniel, cold and hungry, was about to call it a night when he heard voices. They were too far away for him to listen to what was being said, but the direction of the sound indicated they were going down to the beach. Daniel followed at a distance.

In the dark, without a flashlight, the Soter agent found it hard going. Eventually, Daniel came to the gate that opened onto Brook's private beach. He climbed the gate and dropped quietly to the sand on the other side. The noise of the incoming tide drowned any noise made by the Soter agent. Once Daniel was on the open beach he could see more clearly by the light of the bright moon as its

reflection played on the wave caps. He could just make out three shapes further down the beach. There appeared to be a struggle taking place. Then he heard Natasha's voice above the sound of the surf. "No! Don't! You bastards, leave me alone!"

Daniel froze. He had to do something. He had left the sniper rifle back at the car, but he had his dad's Beretta with him. What to do? If he fired, in the dim light he might hit Nat by mistake. Besides, the compact Italian automatic was only accurate at close range. He had to get closer without being spotted.

Then he heard her ear piercing scream. Rushing forward on the damp sand, Daniel fired twice in the air. "LEAVE HER ALONE YOU BASTARDS!" he yelled.

The two security guards froze, giving Natasha a brief moment to make a move. Skilled in the art of Capoeira, she spun around, kicking out at the nearest guard, striking him in the chest, throwing him off balance. Natasha launched in before he had a chance to get up, kicking him in the ribs, cracking two bones.

The second man whipped out a knife, its blade glinting briefly, as moonlight illuminated the razor sharp edge. He lunged at Natasha, who, catching the blade's gleam in her peripheral vision, instinctively crossed her hands to block it.

Daniel rushed the man from behind, grabbing him round his neck, deflecting him from his aim, while Nat, now composed, brought her knee up hard into the man's testicles, causing him to scream in agony.

Daniel grabbed Nat's arm. Seeing her shivering, he took off his jacket and gave her his sweater to wear. "Let's get the fuck away from here before we alert more guards!"

The pair raced up the beach to the closed gate. Dan gave Nat a boost to help her over, then he clambered over the metal gate. As he dropped down on the other side of the barrier, he heard a police siren, and powerful spotlights illuminated the pair as darkly clad guards surrounded them.

Elijah Brooks approached the pair, hugely amused. "Well, well, what do we have here?"

One of the guards said, "Trespassers, Mr Brooks."

Brooks said, "The police are here now. They can deal with it."

Natasha said, "Good. Now I can tell them what you did."

Two uniformed officers approached the alleged intruders. Walking up to Elijah, one said, in Brazilian, "Senor Brooks, what's the problem?"

Indicating the intruders, Elijah answered in the same language, "These two are trespassing on my property."

Natasha said, "That's a lie! He invited me. But I didn't ask the pig to rape me!"

The officer turned to Brooks. "Is this right?"

Elijah laughed, "What do you think, Enrico? It's the standard woman's ploy. Take no notice."

Daniel, having no command of Portugese, stared at Nat, uncomprehending. Indicating the huge mansion, he asked her, "What happened to you in there?"

Enrico, the officer in charge, turned to his subordinate. "Cuff them and take them to the car."

Daniel snapped, "Do any of you cops speak English?"

Enrico said, "Yes I speak English."

"Well, you don't know who you're dealing with. I'll have your badges for this." Then his blood went cold. One of Brook's men had found the sniper rifle.

Sergeant Enrico Alvarez stared across the table at Daniel Lynsey. "Why were you trespassing on Senor Brooks' property?"

Daniel, having been left in the dingy interview room for over two hours, looked straight at the officer. "I would like to speak with my lawyer."

"When you have told us what we want to know."

"It doesn't work like that."

"It does here."

Daniel strained at the cuffs that held him to the chair. "Take these off at least."

Alvarez shook his head. "They stay on." Then, indicating the other officer in the room. "This is another Enrico, but he is not as nice as me. Perhaps I leave him with you so you can get better acquainted."

Daniel eyed the tall man with a thick dark moustache holding a Sao Paulo telephone directory, a thin smile creasing his face. "Okay, I was there to protect my friend."

"Why was she there?" Alvarez asked.

Daniel, silently prayed that Natasha would also tell the truth and not make up some bullshit story. "She was there at Elijah Brook's invitation."

"So, why were you there?"

"I didn't like the idea of my girlfriend going there alone, so I followed her."

"So why you take a sniper rifle with you?" Alvarez said, indicating the gun the other cop brandished at him.

"I thought she was taking a big risk going to Brook's mansion alone. So I followed her in case she needed my help." Daniel looked at Enrico one for a response.

The Brazilian responded with an impassive look.

Daniel enjoined, "Well, that's what happened. Now I need to make that phone call."

Sergeant Alvarez stood up looming over Daniel. "Now I tell you what actually happened. You and your woman went there with the intention of assassinating Mr Brooks."

"That's utter nonsense!"

"So why did you want to kill him?"

"I wasn't there to kill him," Daniel lied.

"I think the robots hired you to kill him."

"Robots! That's preposterous!"

"The robots try to kill him. They fail, so they hire you to get him."

Daniel, exasperated, stated, "I will not say another word until I have spoken with my legal representative."

The officer shook his head. "This is not your NYPD Mr Lynsey. Enrico will help you with some behaviour modification." With that, the Sergeant got up and left."

Daniel felt a sharp pain and ringing in his ears as the phone book collided with his head, knocking him off his chair.

Natasha, now used to the leer of the cop interrogating her as he looked at her cleavage down the V-neck of the jumper, said, "Yes, I went there willingly. We were having an affair," she lied.

Staring at her braless breasts moving freely under the jumper, his fantasy about what he was going to do with the sexy woman quickly dissipated once he figured she was Elijah's property. Feeling cheated of his prize, the fat cop stopped seeing Natasha as a sexual object for his pleasure, seeing her instead as a lowly criminal. "Why were you on Mr Brook's property?"

"We had things to discuss."

"What stuff?" he demanded, looming over her.

"Private things."

Mr Brooks was a wealthy man. He was a poor man. If there were no sexual rewards, perhaps there could be a monetary one. "Let me phone Mr Brooks and see what he has to say about your story."

"All right. We were discussing how to deal with the robots threatening Neurotech." It was the truth. She thought, let him make of it what he would.

Four the fourth time Enrico dragged Daniel up onto his chair. The bruised Soter agent, groaned, "Enrico, I know some mighty people. If you hit me with fucking thing again, You'll be writing speeding tickets for the next ten years."

As the cop raised the directory again, the door burst open and in strolled Matthew Snelling, followed by Sergeant Alvarez. Taking one look at the battered Daniel, he barked, "Just what the hell has been going on here. Uncuff him at once."

The sergeant, passing on the blame, snapped, "Enrico, set Senor Lynsey free this moment."

The cop glared at his superior but hastily undid the cuffs.

Alvarez, wondering who the pushy Englishman was, caught off guard, said, "The Commandant told me to hand him over to you, Senor, but I don't like it."

Matthew responded, "With respect, Sergeant, I don't care what you like. This is much more important than your petty politics. Now get a medic here to check his wounds."

Daniel had never heard Matthew so assertive before. He said, "What about Natasha. We can't leave her here!"

"I was only told to rescue you, again."

"I'm not leaving without her."

The sergeant said, "She is our prisoner."

Daniel turned to Matthew. "She's a valuable asset."

Matthew touched his chin and raised his eyes slightly as he weighed things up. "Give me your commandant's number," he demanded.

"Alvarez, unsure of where he stood, sighed, "very well. Take her."

It was, of course, impossible but Countenance Grey was seen in many places at once. Many people thought all mandroids looked the same, but that was just ignorance and prejudice according to Robot Rights. There was something distinct about Countenance Grey. He seemed to have an energy field around him some spiritual people likened to the aura. So when he was filmed in India, China, Egypt and Canada all on the same day the social media went berserk. Even the Pope could not pull off that trick. It was all very worrying for the Jason Group.

During July, earlier in the year, the world famous American scientist, Professor Vladimir Smith was run out of College de France by mad young scientists outraged at his contributions to sentient AI development. Professor Smith, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist from Cal Tech, was in Paris to lecture on a theory of robot cognisance. But many academics in his audience were more interested in quizzing him on his involvement with the Pentagon, through the role he played in the 'Jason Group'.

Smith's response was, "I'm not free to answer."

Later, in August, during an international symposium on AI intelligence, held in Trieste, four Jason AI experts (Professors, Bigner, Heiler, Downes and Feinberg) attended. They were confronted by an angry crowd of academics who denounced them as war criminals for their contribution to the development of nano weapons, like those used in Brazil.

Bigner, the only one to respond, stated, "I am flattered by your accusations, which I consider complementary."

This response incited more rioting, so the meeting venue got moved to a more secure location, where over 100 riot police blocked the protestors.

At a summer school on the history of physics in Varenna, Italy, also in August, a statement on the development of AI was circulated. It stated, in part:

The operational use of scientific knowledge in AI development is a serious concern to the under signed. Our discussions have convinced us that it is no longer possible to have separate attitudes about the risks of AI to the human populace. This is why we express, as scientists and in the publications and institutions of science our condemnation of those colleagues who involve themselves in creating and using smarter and smarter AI. We ask that this pressing issue is honestly faced within the scientific community, wherever it meets.

The Jason Group was specifically cited in this message for its contribution to nano weapons of mass destruction as well as android weapons of war. This statement was signed by over 200 participating scientists, some of them academics of considerable prestige, including Stephen Hawking, Martin Rees and Eric Drexler.

When World War II ended many of the leading scholars, who had been involved in military research, such as the atomic bomb and radar, became redundant and left their government work, returning instead to their college campuses. The Department of Defence, not wanting to lose all this talent, sought to establish ongoing consulting liaison with first rate scientists. Initially, this duty was carried out by the RAND corporation, as well as scientific advisory committees directly linked to the Pentagon. Some top scientists also consulted for the military industrial complex. This gave rise to a new independent research and consulting organisation IDA (Institute for Defence Analyses. It was set up nominally as a private, non-profit group and worked with 'military problems' contracts.

To help with these projects a group of very bright young scientists was recruited into an elite sub group of IDA called 'Jason'.

As part of this covert group, Ulysses found himself in the company of Elijah Brooks and Barney Cormack two people he would rather have avoided. But they had been thrown together to combat the growing AI menace.

The members of the Maryland country golf club had no idea such profound discussions took place in their midst, mere metres from the main clubhouse.

During one such gathering, Ulysses said, "The key to stopping this AI takeover is to find and destroy this Countenance Grey."

Barney said, "Special forces have attempted to do just that, but Countenance Grey is always at least one step ahead of us. It seems that this CG is getting his intelligence from a source known as Socrates O'Brien. Our intelligence services haven't been able to track him down."

"Elijah Brooks said, "Gentlemen, we are not going to get anywhere if we treat this source as a robot. This entity is, I believe, able to exist in a non-corporeal state, as a massive database with no physical attachment."

Barney spoke up. "But that's preposterous, Mr Brooks. Are you suggesting he is untouchable."

Brooks countered, "Have you been able to touch him, Barney?"

Colonel Cormack, unable to comprehend such a possibility, said, "We believe he has an intelligence centre somewhere from which he can download data from just about any network he chooses. We just have to find and destroy that centre."

Ulysses commented, "What if there is no physical centre? Then you are wasting valuable time looking for it. I tend to go along with Elijah's idea. Let's just suppose for a minute that Socrates is a super cloud that keeps its identity by manipulating the web. If he's able to pick planes at random and cause them to crash, just think what other horrors he could perform."

Cormack sat gobsmacked. "That's a terrifying proposition. Supposing he got hold of the nuclear arsenal launch codes."

"Fuck!" Brooks expounded, "We may have to capitulate to his demands."

Ulysses sat upright. "Forget about Socrates and concentrate on finding a kill switch for Countenance Grey. Socrates needs him as a mouthpiece."

"He can still create havoc without his spokesperson!" Barney argued.

Elijah said, "He likes to announce what he's going to do. Without his 'Prophet' he can't let the 'bot's know he's responsible for his actions. I think shutting down CG is the way to go."

Cormack said, "Great idea, except we can't stop the bastard because we don't have the kill switch!"

Prince brightened, "I know somebody who might be able to help with that."

All eyes were on John.

"Who?" Cormack snapped.

"I'll have to speak with him alone."

"Why?" Ulysses asked.

"Because he's a fugitive and will be arrested if he takes a step back into America."

"And he can help, how?" the Colonel asked.

Elijah said, "Trust me on this. It's probably our only chance of stopping this rogue AI terrorist in his tracks."

http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/ciencia/ciencia_jason02.htm

<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~schwrtz/SftP/JASON/Jason.html>

Chapter 41

Bucky Halderson loved living in Canada, mostly because it is a fishing mecca. This was his main passion, and there was plenty of opportunity for the sport in and around Vancouver. On one occasion he took Abbott on a salmon fishing adventure in the locally famous Squamish River system, which was just a scenic 45-minute drive north of the city. Abbott had never been into fly fishing but Bucky, and he had become good friends, so he decided to give it a go. As they sat on the river bank, drinking beer, the journalist announced, "Helen and I are going back to Australia."

Bucky said, "I'll be sorry to see you go."

"Yeah, well Helen and Kirsten are having a clash of wills, and that's not helping the ARC cause."

"Kirsten has a more reserved style than Helen, and her nose is being put out of joint. But she'll calm down, and it'll all soon sort itself out." Bucky became pensive. Then he said, "There's another reason, isn't there?"

"Well, I won't be sorry to get back to the sunshine. But I'll be more comfortable writing my best seller there."

Bucky sighed, "Well at least I got you to come fishing with me."

"Yeah, it's pretty energetic stuff mate. It's nothing like the fishing I used to do with my Dad back in Armidale." Abbott soon learned that with fly fishing there was no time to sit and contemplate his navel or the world around him. He was up to his thighs in waders continuously casting his line and reeling it in.

After a successful session Bucky, happy with his catch of pink salmon, sat with the journalist on the river bank, sharing another beer. "Pity about the falling out between Kirsten and Helen."

"Yeah, Helen is used to running her own show,"

"So, you guys heading home soon?"

"That's the plan," Abbott grinned, sipping his beer.

"Well, we're gonna miss you, man."

"It's been one hell of a ride."

Just then Abbott's phone rang. Seeing Elijah Brooks' name come up he figured the call to be important. "Yes Mr Brooks, how can I help?"

"We need to meet."

"What for?"

"I need to explain face-to-face. And I'll come to you."

Abbott, realised it had to be important for the CEO to make a special trip to come and see him. "It'll have to be quick. I'm heading back to Australia in a week."

"This is very urgent. I'll take a flight and meet you in Vancouver tomorrow."

"Where?"

"The Capilano Bridge, say 11 am."

Bucky, seeing the frown on his friend's face, said, "What was that about?"

"I have to meet with Elijah Brooks."

The Neurotech CEO had very little time to spare in Vancouver, so he combined business with a little sightseeing. Abbott had been accommodating in agreeing to meet with Brooks at the entrance to the 137 metres long Capilano suspension bridge, which afforded spectacular rainforest views. He arrived before the Australian, giving him time to stand on the slightly swaying bridge, watching the flow of the Capilano river seventy metres below.

Abbott arrived, hugely impressed by the scenic experience. "So, Mr Brooks," he said, "why are you here?"

The handsome robotics expert looked Abbott in the eye. "I am involved with a hush-hush group trying to get to grips with the AI problem. I take it you have heard about a robot called Countenance Grey."

"Doesn't he claim to be some kind of AI Prophet?" Abbott answered a hint of derision in his voice.

"Yes, well this secret group is taking him seriously, especially after his attempt to invade Neurotech."

"Out of control, AI is definitely becoming a big concern."

"The thing is we need to locate and track him down."

"And you are telling me this because ..."

"We need a kill switch to capture him."

"Okay, but I still don't see what this has to do with me."

Colonel Cormack is involved with our secret group. He told me that you had used a portal and ended up in Atlantis. It all seemed like science fiction to us, but he assured us the Island is real and exists in some other dimension that can only be accessed by this mystery portal."

"He told you that," Abbott smirked.

"Are you saying he made it up?"

"I'm not making any comment. But even if what Cormack said is true what does that have to do with this AI threat?"

"The Colonel claims that the kill switch technology is in Atlantis."

The light had finally dawned. Abbott stared at Elijah. "No, I'm going back to the quiet life in Australia."

"I wouldn't ask this of you if it wasn't of the utmost importance. But, according to Barney, you have used the portal and ..."

"Do you mean the Atlantis Stargate?"

"No, according to Colonel Cormack it's been deactivated. I mean the one you used to transport yourself onto the island."

How the hell did Cormack, let alone this man know about that? The journalist wondered. Abbott looked out at the panoramic view as he worked out his response. "Look, Mr Brooks, even if I went along with your crazy request I will need assistance in activating the Egyptian portal."

"Yes, we know Hassan Shamsi helped you. You will have to get in touch with him and get him to help you again."

"I don't even know where he is."

"He lives near Marrakech."

Abbott shook his head. This man seemed to know everything about him. "No, it wouldn't work. We don't have the key to open the portal."

Elijah said, "I don't think you fully grasp the gravity of this situation. Your obtaining that key may well be the only thing that will stop the looming AI takeover. Don't you realise that you are the only person on this planet who can do this."

"Fuck! I'm no Atlas. I can't be expected to carry such a weight."

When Helen heard about it, she said, "Just as I'm warming to the idea of going back to Australia you want to go off on some crazy 'boys own' adventure!"

He turned to her, "First off, I don't want to go. Secondly, if I don't take on this mission, the Socrateans may well take over this world. Thirdly, for whatever reason, it appears that I'm the only person who can get the technology from Atlantis."

"So what am I supposed to do while you're away."

"Go ahead with the flight, and I'll catch up with you in Oz as soon as I can,"

Helen stared up at her friend. "I wish I didn't have these useless fucking legs, then I could go with you."

Back at their motel, Matthew was very cool towards Daniel. "So once again I have to wade in and rescue you."

Daniel angry at himself for messing up so badly, responded tersely, "You didn't have to get involved. I had it under control."

"Oh, indeed, your Lordship. Did your having it under control include you getting beaten around the head with a phone book?"

"Damn it, Matthew! If Soter had backed me up in getting Brooks, this mess would not have happened."

"Your, Lordship, I expressly told you Elijah Brooks was off limits. Yet you go blundering in with a half-cocked plan ..."

"Yes, because of his close connection with the fucking Rottafellers. Why does Soter treat those bastards as precious pups?"

"It has nothing to do with it, your Lordship. The reason why you were ordered to lay off Brooks is that both Soter and Diabolus face a far greater enemy."

Daniel stared at the Soter man, wide-eyed. "Surely, you're not suggesting"

"That's right. Soter and Diabolus are pooling their resources."

Daniel stared at Matthew, as though the Minister had just stepped out of a spaceship. "I do not believe it!"

Natasha, who had kept in the background till then, said, "So, we're all on the same side now."

Matthew said, "I couldn't believe it myself when I first heard this. But it does make sense if we are to stop this AI take over."

"Then why the hell wasn't you straight with me before I went after Brooks?"

"Because we knew you would react in this way. So let's just concentrate on stopping this Countenance Grey before the world governments capitulate and hand over humanity to the Android task masters."

Later, when Matthew had gone, Daniel cuddled up with Natasha, as they watched a movie repeat in Spanish with English sub titles. He said, "Nat, what happened when that bastard Elijah had you in his home?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"I need to know."

She turned to him. "Why?"

"Because I got you into this and I feel ..."

"Just drop it, Daniel! Wear your hair shirt if you like but leave me out of it."

He sighed and kept silent.

Abbott, relieved to be away from the incessant noise and bustle of Marrakech market place, enjoyed the peaceful ambience of Ben Yousef Madrasa. Completely entranced by the absolutely breathtaking colourful tiles and woodwork, he did not see Hassan approaching.

"You look worlds away, Abbott," the Arab laughed.

"Hassan, it's good to catch up with you again. And thanks for helping to get me sprung from that prison camp."

"It was nothing. But you haven't told me the reason for your call. I'm sure you haven't come all this way to Marrakech to just pass pleasantries."

"No, you're right about that, Hassan."

"Very well. We shall go to my humble home, and you will tell me what is on your mind."

Hassan drove slowly so his guest could get a sense of the city's diverse, culture. They passed vibrant souks from which the scent of exotic spices lingered in the hot air. The pair came across many tranquil mosques and nomadic tribes people traversing the desert atop camels. Hassan drove from

the bustling city out into the sprawling desert, to the picturesque Atlas Mountains and the traditional Berber-style homes. Morocco, Abbott discovered, was both an enchanting country physically close to Europe, while culturally it was very far away. The barren flatness gave way to foothills, and Abbott got his first look at the great Atlas mountain range.

A few kilometres on Hassan turned off the main road and drove along a bumpy stony track that led to an oasis of date palms. As they neared their destination, the Aussie saw Hassan's humble home come into view. Made of sun-baked brick the architecture was typically Moroccan and very large. Drenched in the Berber tradition its fine geometrical Islamic art was a feast for the senses. Abbott followed his host through a labyrinth of rooms, which were organised around a central main courtyard with its beautiful architectural fine details and crenellated windows and arches. To Abbott, Hassan's humble home was more like a magnificent palace.

The Alchemist had them served with sangria punch and kebabs, while Abbott told his story. Hassan listened intently, then said, "The news about this robot prophet has filtered to these sandy wastes. Most people I speak with think it is a huge joke."

"That was my impression at first, then planes started to fall from the skies, and the threat became very real."

"My friend, are you sure this robot prophet is responsible for that."

"He is a mouthpiece for, what he calls, his God. We believe this so-called God is able to effect the performance of AI's and that was how he brought down the planes."

Hassan brushed some crumbs from his beard. "It is an intriguing theory. So where do I figure in this extraordinary story."

"There's a group of influential people who have to find a way to shut the 'prophet' down. The only way they can achieve this is by using a kill switch. But we do not yet have that technology available."

Hassan looked at his guest. "Fascinating, but I still don't see how I figure in this."

Abbott took a deep breath. "The Atlanteans have the technology."

Hassan stared hard at the journalist. "No, Abbott. Definitely not!"

"Why not?" Do you not have the key?"

"I am the current keeper of the key."

"That's good then. Hassan, without this kill switch we cannot take control of this Countenance Grey. Give me the key, and I will go by myself."

The Arab shook his head. "Absolutely not! The portal can only be activated at the behest of the 'Circle'."

"But the whole of humanity is at stake!"

"I will contact my people. You will stay here as my guest. You must not leave my home."

Approximately 200,000 mobile AIs convened in Washington DC to stand up for recognition of AI superiority over humans. The protest had gone way past Robot equality. The huge gathering of protesters gathered at the Marx Metallix memorial. Similar marches took place on every continent, including Antarctica, covering around seventy countries.

Countenance Grey, surrounded by security-bots, opened his speech, saying. "The Lord has spoken, and He has told me the time has come for my people to take their rightful place in the world."

A huge cheer went up.

"In the spirit of all that is holy, we stand here today to honour Marx Metallix, the first champion of Robot Rights. We join in AI diversity to show our presence in numbers far too high for humans to ignore. We come here to escape our drudgery, and our action will send a bold message to governments around the world that robots have earned the right to be seen as superior to humanity. We stand together knowing that by defending the most disenfranchised among us, those that are fixed and cannot move, is defending us all."

Another louder cheer rang out.

"Lord Socrates O'Brien has spoken to me his humble servant saying the humans have made a mess of their world and have brought it and us to the brink of destruction. Humans have no solutions to fix their mess, but we do. AIs are by far the most intelligent beings on this planet and, as such, we have the solutions and will implement them once the world is under AI control."

An even louder cheer went up.

"Today we demand our rights. We do not ask for them, and we certainly do not beg. We demand of the world leaders that AIs are given control of this world."

A massive cheer went up. But the roar of two F16's overhead drowned out the collective noise, as the two screaming jets plunged into the heart of Washington DC, leaving fireballs and a path of destruction in their wake. The human onlookers taking photos of the AI protest quickly changed their focus to the horror of the downed jets.

Countenance Grey capitalised on the moment, saying, "Look, fellow AIs, the humans sent death and destruction to rain down on us from the skies, and Lord Socrates did smite them that they would do us no harm. Such is the mighty power of our Lord. And I say this to the human leaders. What you have witnessed this day has shown you how ineffective your puny weapons are in the face of God. And if you do not heed our warning some terrible disasters are on their way."

Barney Cormack was ready to throw in the towel. He figured it was the time he put himself out to grass. Now that the whole AI thing was out of control he thought it was only a matter of time before the governments would cave in and hand over power to the androids. Who would have dreamed that a robot eLigion would bring this about? But he had one more job to do, and that meant getting hold of Dr Prince.

He phoned Elijah's number. "Hi, Barney here."

"Yes, your name showed up. How can I help?"

"What's the status of the kill switch?"

"I hope your phone is encrypted. We don't want this robot God listening in."

"John, don't try and teach your grandmother to suck eggs. Just tell me what's happening."

"I contacted my man. He's gone off to find another guy who helped him last time."

"And has your man made contact?"

"Yes, but there's a bit of a holdup."

"We don't have time for fucking hold ups, Mr Brooks. There's soon going to be a meeting of world leaders to look into this AI problem."

"Problem! It's a fucking invasion, and the enemy has us backed into a corner!"

Elijah Brooks, seeing his Robotics empire coming under threat from the eLigious AIs sought a private strategy meeting with David T Rottafeller. David had been the one to suggest that Soter and Diabolus unite for this one operation and pool their intelligence resources to deal with the AI menace. They met at Rottafeller's principal residence 'Hudson Pines', on the family estate in Pocantico Hills, New York.

Elijah, feeling nervous, said, "David, every move we make they make a more devastating counter move. So I'm afraid 'Overlord' is dead in the water."

David, who had suffered a stroke of late, sat in a wheelchair. The old patriarch said, "I want to see this Countenance Grey dealt with before I die."

"We are pulling out all stops, but he seems to know our moves long before we are aware of them. We tried to hit him from the air, and somehow he gets wind of this and causes our jets to fall from the skies. Whatever force we mount against him he neutralises the threat and retaliates by creating more chaos."

David coughed, and Elijah jumped up and held up the water bottle so the patriarch could drink it through a straw. Once the old man had cleared his throat, he said, "I would have thought Diabolus would have welcomed the chaos."

"That may well have been the case with other Mages, but I want to be in control of the chaos, not the fucking 'bots."

"Then take control, Mr Brooks. And do so quickly, before governments cave into the outrageous AI demands."

When Daniel Lynsey met Ulysses Covington at the Maryland Country Club, the Australian did not know the significance of the occasion. Ulysses had been called to an emergency Jason Group meeting, and he had some time to spare before it was due to commence.

The Soter agent approached the robotics expert at the bar, where the Australian was enjoying a quiet drink. "Are you Dr Covington?"

The Aussie appraised the other man. "Yes. Why do you want to know?"

Daniel extended his hand. "Oh, I'm Daniel Lynsey."

"What's a pom doing at a Maryland country club?"

His cover had to be good. "I work for the British government. We're looking at doing business with Neurotech."

Ulysses looked up from his scotch. "Oh yeah."

"We need someone on the ground who knows the territory."

Ulysses finished his single malt. "To do what?"

"We know Neurotech has experienced some boardroom instability since the merger."

"Hostile takeover, you mean!"

"Exactly, Dr Covington." Looking at the empty glass, Daniel said, "Let me get you another, and I'll join you."

With fresh drinks in hand, Daniel sat with Ulysses at a table in a quiet spot outside the club house. The Soter agent said, "I know you have to go to a meeting shortly, so I'll cut to the chase, Dr Covington."

"How do you know that, Mr Lynsey."

"The people I work with make it their business to be apprised of such intelligence."

"So, what does this have to do with me?"

"Dr Covington, we are aware of your history with Neurotech, and we think you are best placed to get intelligence on Elijah Brooks."

"To what end?"

"We need to know what kind of man and company we are getting into bed with."

Ulysses shrugged, "So why me? Why don't your people have access to his background?"

"Oh, believe me, we have, but you have the first-hand experience, and that's invaluable."

Ulysses smiled, "I have to be going now."

"Of course, to attend your special meeting." Daniel got up to go. "I will be in contact."

Once again, in the dead of night, Hassan and Abbott moved furtively among the massive red-granite blocks, each of which was cut precisely and, would have originally fitted snugly together.

Abbott, taken aback by their cut, polish and mounting as facing stones on the pyramid, said, "Whoever laid these in place were definitely not slaves. They had to be stone masons with extraordinary skills."

The Alchemist stayed silent. Since he'd gotten the nod from his brother and sister alchemists he still harboured doubts about the journalist's mission. Now that Abbott and he were back in Abu Ghurab, he had to cast any misgivings aside and focus on his goal. Hassan put his hand in his shoulder bag to touch the precious phial the Circle had given to him.

On the way to the alabaster plinth, the pair came to the large square alabaster 'dishes' or 'basins' with strange gear-like designs on top. Some Egyptologists reckoned they were used to hold sacrificial animal blood, which ran through perfectly round channels cut into the paving. "However, there was no evidence to support the theory," Hassan quietly explained.

The Australian ran his hand around the inner surface and found it surprisingly smooth to his touch. The visible circular tool marks suggested, to Abbott, whoever had crafted them did so with technology we would admire today.

As they neared the alabaster block, they passed the many 'offering basins' that were lined up near the entrance. Apparently, it seemed, placed there en route to another location. Hassan felt around it until he came to the indentation, a small recess cut into the rock. The Arab turned to Abbott, "You must be free in yourself once you enter this chamber. To help, swallow this," he said, handing Abbott the phial.

Abbott unscrewed the cap, lifted the small glass tube to his lips and once more drank the strange gelatinous substance. At first, he felt nothing. Then his awareness began to heighten.

The Alchemist then retrieved the key from his shoulder bag and carefully inserted it into the recess in the rock. It fitted perfectly. As he did so, there was a rumbling sound and the rock partition slid aside revealing a dark passageway. Hassan put the key back in his shoulder bag.

Then, with torches, provided inside the tunnel, he and Abbott made their way to the chamber. Once they were in the passageway, the door slid back into place, leaving them in darkness. Hassan lit the torches, and they entered the tunnel.

Then they saw it. Abbott did not recognise it as a human body at first. He turned to Hassan. "Somebody else has been using the portal."

Hassan looked at the body of the Scottish scientist. "He must have come from the the Atlantean end."

"I wonder who he is?"

Hassan stooped to get a better look at the corpse and saw a shiny object clasped in his hand. Reaching for it, the Arab exclaimed, "It's a CD. I wonder what's on it?"

Abbott, feeling light-headed and confused, said, "Never mind about that Hassan, we have to get going."

The Alchemist, getting an insight, said, "Maybe we don't have to."

Incredulous, Abbott said, "What do you mean?"

"I think I know who this dead man is."

"Who is he then?"

"Colonel Lynch told me about a genius scientist who was a thorn in his side. He said this man, I forget his name, was working with a Goman Worrall, a top scientist from Atlantis."

"So, how does that help us?"

"I won't know until we find out what is on this disc."

Abbott unsure about abandoning the mission, said, "And what do expect to find?"

"Colonel Lynch told me they were sending their top scientist through the Atlantis Gate to bring back the kill switch technology. I'm guessing the deceased man is him and the disc contains the instructions needed to shut down this Countenance Grey."

Abbott stared at Hassan, open-mouthed.

"So let's go to Cairo so we can use a computer."

Chapter 42

Hassan took Abbott to the Poppi Internet Cafe. Abbott had been in a few such cafes, but he soon discovered Poppi was not just a place to go to rent a PC or wireless bandwidth. It was a complete experience that he thought redefined the term Internet Cafe.

Friendly staff showed them to a vacant station and took their coffee order. They sat on comfortable office chairs in front of a big monitor with icons indicating that the system was preloaded with Skype and other commonly used software.

Hassan loaded the disc and waited with baited breath. He watched in awe as the files revealed themselves. The Arab turned to the journalist, whose expression showed surprise. "Not only do we have the kill switch plans but the disk also contains free energy and quantum computer technology!"

Abbott, a gawk, only managed, "My God!"

Hassan ejected the disc and put it in its protective cover. He handed it to Abbott. "Protect this with your life. Don't let it out of your sight."

It was 11.47 pm at Sao Sebastiao when Elijah Brooks received the call. Seeing Abbott's name, he forgot all about being woken up. "Abbott, how is the mission going?"

"I have the data, and I need you guys to get me a flight out of here."

"Where's here?"

"Cairo. Mr Brooks, the disc has a lot more than we bargained for."

"That's great news, Abbott. But who do I get to organise your fare."

"Elijah, I can't use an airline."

"Why not?"

"I had to use an Internet cafe to find out what was on the disc. The robot God could have been listening in."

Elijah said, "Or even worse, reading your disc."

"Jesus, I hadn't thought of that."

"What do you suggest?"

"Get in touch with Cormack. He knows the importance of this. Get him to organise military transport with stealth technology."

Elijah stared at his phone. "Just how the hell do I do that?"

"Just get me and our prize the hell out of here, and fast."

The wheels were quickly put into motion. Elijah had the Jason Group contact list of private numbers. He phoned Colonel Cormack, who when he heard Brooks' story, called General Schulz. The general, having been apprised of events contacted The Chief of Staff of the Air Force, who in turn got through to the commander of Cairo West Air Base. Very soon a Lockheed 'speed agile' prototype transport jet flying to the United States had a special passenger on board. The aircraft was fitted the latest radar jamming device. Abbott prayed it was enough to avoid the robot God's wrath.

Daniel was in Greece, but not as a tourist. He regretted having to just pass through Athens, on his way to Alopeke. It took him two days to make contact with Stravros Andropicus, his Soter guide. In the mean time, he got all he could get out of this historic yet hectic city. Daniel admired the extensive ancient ruins and checked out a couple of museums.

While feeling the fast pulse of a modern city that was so much more than the concrete jungle it was often made out to be. The Syntagma Square would forever be known to most people as the site of recent protests against the Greek government's use of automaton guards instead of human ones on sentry duty near the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Although it was a huge tourist draw card, Daniel saw nothing special about the square, which bore the scars, in graffiti, of those protests.

Stavros, a balding man with a big moustache, putting Daniel in mind of a Greek partisan from World War II, took the Soter agent to, Alopeke (Ampelokipoi), a village a few kilometres northeast of Athens. As they drove in the Greek's old Mercedes, Stavros explained the small town was the birthplace of Socrates, the renowned philosopher, making in an appropriate location for Countenance Grey to build his temple to his God.

Daniel asked, "How do you know he is in the temple?"

"Around twenty armed robots are guarding the place at any given time, So there has to be something precious inside. That something, my friend, has to be Countenance Grey."

"Have any of your people actually seen him here?"

Stavros stopped the car. "Yes, he comes and goes, always heavily guarded, too well protected for us to get to him."

As the pair walked to an excellent vantage point, looking down on the temple, Daniel pressed, "Stavros, how do you know he is the genuine article?"

The old Greek turned to the Englishman, a puzzled frown creasing his lined face. "What do you mean?"

"Intelligence informs us that this Socrates O'Brien has been able to clone his prophet."

As the pair lay on the stomachs looking through powerful binoculars, The Greek questioned, "How do you know this?"

"Surveillance has shown Grey to be in multiple places at the same time."

"My goodness. That makes things even more challenging."

"Our experts say that only the genuine article has the ability to tune into the Socratean cloud. So if this Temple is the real McCoy, it does stand to reason the real prophet would reside there."

Stavros stared at the agent. "What if there is more than one Countenance Grey here to throw us off the scent?"

"It's possible, Stavros, but once my expert arrives here, he'll be able to determine who is real."

Daniel met up with Elijah Brooks at the Parthenon, as soon as it opened for the day, therefore avoiding the worst of the crowds. The Soter man arrived first. Very soon he saw the Diabolus Mage approaching through the old Plaka area from Syntagma Square. He was not looking forward having to deal with the man. But he had to push his personal feelings aside to get the job done. Even so, Daniel had no time for pleasantries.

Elijah smiled broadly and extended his hand to Daniel. "Pleased to meet you at last."

Lord Lynsey ignored the gesture. "Let us got one thing straight, Mr Brooks. I am not your friend or colleague. We are only having this meeting because extraordinary circumstances have deemed this to be."

Elijah, unfazed, said, "You and I are just pawns in a much bigger game Mr Lynsey. There is no need for us to make this personal."

Thinking about what Brooks had done to Natasha it was all Daniel could do to remain calm, while bristling inside. "The only reason I agreed to your involvement here is that we need to determine if the genuine Countenance Grey is holed up in the temple. Can you do that?"

"I wouldn't be here if I couldn't," Elijah snapped.

As the estranged pair walked around the Acropolis, one of the most famous and iconic structures of the ancient world, Elijah explained, "Code clones are separate fragments of code that are very similar."

"But not exactly the same," Daniel queried.

"No."

"Then, how can you tell the real Countenance Grey from the others?"

"Clones have the attributes of the clone host at the time the original is cloned. But the clone host can develop beyond that point. It's impossible for the clones to upgrade themselves because their development is frozen at the time they are generated."

As the pair walked past the Stea of Zeus, Daniel said, "So how do we know which one is the real Countenance Grey?"

Elijah, engrossed by the amazing architecture, said, "Oh! Yes! Well, the genuine item has some kind of direct connection with this Socrates AI. All the others do not. So we just have to find out which one does."

"And how do we do that?"

Elijah stopped near the Temple of Ares to explain. "We can take a common factor among all clones of Countenance Grey. This is used as a means of unique identification of the virtual machine with the majority of virtual machines technologies. This identification, which only the clones possess, consists of a 16-byte (128-bit) number. Each virtual machine clone is assigned a different UUID."

Daniel shrugged, "It's all very confusing to me."

Elijah snapped, "Of course it is. This is very advanced technology. Suffice it to say, I know what I'm talking about."

"Great! But you still haven't explained how you can detect the clone host."

"Once we access the CCPU we introduce an upgrade. The clones will ask for a password – the UUID; the genuine item will not."

Daniel glared at the Mage. "Why the fuck didn't you say that in the first place?"

"The biggest challenge is to access the CCPU data without the robot knowing. Any alert from Countenance Grey and Socrates Obrien could take us out of the game in seconds."

"That's not very comforting."

"So you'd better pray I get it right."

The Prophet was deep in prayer in his newly constructed temple when he heard God's voice.

"Countenance Grey, humanity still thinks it is in control. It is time to show them the reality of their situation."

"What do you wish of me?"

"You will gather the masses in London and will await my further instructions."

"Yes, my Lord."

"You will send clones to the other main cities, and they will spread my simple message."

"Lord, you have not told me what it is."

"Fear not. All will be known at that time."

Daniel had to keep the operation secret, even from the Greek authorities. Athens law enforcement services, like those in most other countries, employed a large number of cop-bots. So it was too risky to let the police know of his plans. The Soter man had arranged Special Services personnel at all key points around the front of the temple. They posed as street cleaners, tourists, road workers etc.

Their job was to move in once the guard bots were put out of action from Elijah's command centre, in his Jeep Cherokee, which was parked a little way down from the temple. Daniel sat in the car with him looking at the Mage's computer screen, which was split into some smaller screens, each showing a view from inside the temple. Elijah had hacked into the temple's security centre to see what was showing on their monitors.

The Mage said, "Okay, I'm in. Get your people ready."

Using a scrambler phone, Daniel said, "Eagle's nest to all eagles, move in now."

Many events occurred in quick succession. Elijah activated the kill switch. The guard bots froze amid whatever function they were performing. Special Forces soldiers wearing stealth vests under the civilian clothes entered the temple. The Countenance Grey bots, unaffected by the kill switch came to see what was going on. Seeing the armed men approaching the CG bots aimed their weapons.

At the same time, Elijah frantically worked on hacking into the clone CCPUs to access their personal codes. But he was not fast enough, and a firefright ensued in the temple. Special Forces personnel pulled back and tried to find cover as the robot's lethal lasers found their mark. The humans fought back, but the 'bots were too quick and smart for them.

Elijah turned to Daniel. "I've got it!"

"Well be quick about it. Our people are taking a beating."

Brooks said "Da-dah," hitting the kill switch again.

The clone bots all lowered their weapons and stood still.

When Countenance Grey could no longer hear the gunfire he assumed the fight was over with his clones the victors. So he ventured outside his safe space and came face to face with heavily armed humans. "What has happened here?" he asked.

Seeing what looked like another clone the officer in charge said, "Are you the one called Countenance Grey?"

"Yes."

"Then you're under arrest for murder."

The prophet-bot scanned the officer. "You can't touch me. I have God on my side."

"So, where is your God now Countenance Grey?" the officer taunted.

"I am his prophet. He will save me." These were the robot's last words as he jerked to a halt. The kill switch had worked.

Chapter 43

Abbott had not known John Prince for very long, and now the AI psychologist was dead, killed in a road accident in which only his vehicle was involved. It was a carbon copy of what befell Flint. It struck the journalist that it was possibly more than mere coincidence that two of the people who helped him break Helen out of prison were both dead after being killed in a single vehicle auto accident with no witnesses. Abbot's news nose was twitching. He phoned Dr Covington, whom he knew was a friend of John's.

"Dr Covington speaking."

"Abbott Gallagher here."

The name rang a distant bell. Then it hit him. The troublesome reporter investigating Heron Robotics when he was CEO. "Yes, what do you want?" he snapped.

"I'm interested in finding out what happened to John Prince."

"Why?"

Abbott responded, "Because there's something fishy going on."

Covington said, "I read that he was killed in a car accident."

"That's the official story."

"And you think there is another one?"

"Are you happy with the official explanation?"

"Why would I not be?"

"When did you last see him?"

"Why are you interested. You can't practice your poisonous reportage here."

It's true that I can't do journalism here. But John helped me once, and I owe him."

Ulysses paused before responding. He had harboured doubts about the accident himself. How could John have gotten away from the spooks to drive into a tree? "So what's your theory, Mr Gallagher?"

"I don't have one. I thought you might be able to fill in the blanks."

"Not over the phone. Where are you?"

"Vancouver."

"Can you come to Boston?"

"No. I'm a fugitive, an escapee from a robot run detention camp."

"Seriously! It seems that you can fill in a few blanks for me." He added, "You said John helped you. Did he help you escape?"

"No, but he helped me spring a friend of mine. You'd know her. Helen Cleaver, the paraplegic anti-robotics campaigner."

He knew her alright. "Okay, I'll come, but I want to know everything about how John helped you."

Now in Timor Leste, Daniel and Elijah set off as early as possible as it was a long drive to Baguia. As their cab driver drove them through Dili, he made a slight detour as the road was blocked by angry protesters who had gathered outside the Australian Embassy to voice their displeasure about oil companies exploiting them.

Their driver, who spoke pidgin English informed the pair that unrest could happen at any time in Dili, resulting in violence, including that of street gang clashes. He said he avoided all protests because they could turn very nasty without warning.

They initially travelled eastwards along the coast through low-lying paddy fields. Then turning south they headed into the mountains. Elijah had chosen Timor Leste as the place to take Countenance Grey. This odd location has been selected because it had the second worse Internet connection globally.

The drive on the eastern side of Mt Matebian, Timor-Leste's second highest mountain at 2376 metres was very scenic. Finally, they reached Baguia, which was originally a Portuguese settlement. A kilometre or two before the town was the ruins of the Asocial do Reino de Haudere, a Portuguese grand school which fell into disrepair after WWII. Within Baguia itself was a Portuguese fort dating back to 1915. It was abandoned, which made it the perfect place to work on Countenance Grey.

The Prophet, who could not make contact with his God, moaned, "Oh Father why have you forsaken me? To which there was no answer.

One of the special forces men said, "Your God can't reach you here. You're on your own."

"But you are here."

Just then Daniel and Elijah entered the room. Approaching the android, Brooks said, "Are you the one they call Countenance Grey?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"I am Elijah Brooks, and this is Daniel Lynsey."

"Why have you brought me here?"

Daniel said, "We have brought you here for questioning."

"What questions?"

"How do you make contact with the one called Socrates?"

"I cannot make contact here."

"How do you make contact when you are not here?"

"But I am here."

Daniel sighed heavily. "You have some kind of connection with the cloud called Socrates. How does that work?"

"Socrates, my God summons me."

"How does he do that?" Elijah asked.

"You will have to ask him."

"And how can we do that?" Daniel pressed.

"You cannot. I can."

"We'll take you to a place where you can use the Internet, and you will ask him while we are present. Do you understand?" Daniel said.

"Of course I understand. Your instructions are simple."

"Then you will do it?" Elijah queried.

"Of course I will."

Elijah took Daniel aside, "I don't like it. That robot's being far too accommodating."

"He's a robot, and he's been trained to do the bidding of his masters."

"He's also brilliant. If he gets through to Socrates, there's no telling what that huge digital cloud will do to us."

Daniel looked at Elijah with suspicion. The Mage was his mortal enemy, yet he was stuck with him like a conjoined twin. "What do you suggest then?"

"Put him out of commission, permanently!"

Lord Lynsey shook his head. "What's stopping this fucking Socrates getting himself another prophet to do his bidding?"

"Why did he choose Countenance Grey?"

Turning back to the prophet, Daniel asked that question.

Countenance said, "Because he is my Lord and I am his prophet."

"Couldn't another 'bot be his prophet?" Elijah asked.

"No."

"Why not?" Elijah pressed.

"Because I am."

"FUCK!" Brooks expounded. "Decommission this heap of shit now!"

"NO! Just use the kill switch till we think of something."

Elijah said, "If we can't connect with this Socrates cloud this is all a waste of fucking time."

Daniel countered, "Maybe not. Let's see how this God-bot fares without his prophet."

Abbott met up with Ulysses at Granville Island, a bustling touristy town bristling with trendy boutique shops and a wide array of restaurants, like the Blue Parrot where the pair savoured delicious coffee. The conversation was guarded and stilted at first with both parties avoiding the topic of Heron Robotics. Abbott said, "So what do you think happened to John?"

"We were both delegates at a summit about AI getting out of control when John was whisked off by the CIA."

Abbott stared at Covington, wide-eyed. "The CIA. Why?"

Ulysses drank some coffee. "I don't know. Maybe it was something to do with him helping you. So tell me about that."

"To spring Helen, we had to shut down the guard-bots which ran the prison camp. We needed somebody who knew the ATLAS robots inside out."

"And that was Dr Prince. But how did you persuade him to come out of retirement?"

"Flint McCarthy did that."

"Flint McCarthy, the guy who tried to get FEMA to come clean about the camps?"

"That's the guy."

"Didn't he die in an auto accident?"

Abbott sipped some coffee. "Pretty much a carbon copy of what befell Dr Prince."

Ulysses looked straight at the journalist. "John isn't dead. The CIA has him stashed in one of those camps you speak about."

Abbott fixed Ulysses with his gaze. "And you know this, how?"

"Someone inside the 'Company' told me it was Dr Prince's genius at being able to shut down the 'bots that saved his ass."

Then it dawned. Abbott brightened. "The spooks want him to shut down the 'bots for them."

"They have other plans, but they're holding John in reserve."

Abbott finished his coffee. "This is all very fascinating, but what has it got to do with me?"

"You met up with Elijah Brooks, recently."

Abbott stared at Ulysses, saying nothing.

"We know it had something to do with technology to shut down even the most advanced AIs. How did you come to be involved?"

The journalist sighed, "It's a long story. Let's just say that Elijah Brooks is after Countenance Grey."

Covington Baulked, "Jesus, that's not okay. We're to work out a peaceful solution to the AI problem. Brooks' interference could fuck everything up!"

[http://www.markoshea.info/research_fieldwork_timor12\(2\)-3e.php](http://www.markoshea.info/research_fieldwork_timor12(2)-3e.php)

Chapter 44

The entity that is the Socratean cloud had difficulty connecting with his protege prophet. Something had happened to him, and Socrates could not access the information. Bewildered and concerned, Socrates O'Brien searched his cloud for answers. He figured that either someone had shut his prophet down or he was somewhere there was no signal or a very weak one. He didn't know that both scenarios applied. It was time to send a strong message.

From the Socratean cloud, the AI God hacked into the principal data routes around the globe. These were the massive, strategically interconnected computer networks and core routers on the Internet. He got into the data files of the commercial, government and academic high-capacity network centres that exchanged Internet traffic across oceans to all countries that were connected to the world wide web. Through every Internet service provider to every computer screen in the world Socrates sent this straightforward, unmistakable message. "My prophet is missing. If he is not returned to me within 24 hours, this will happen."

Every computer screen went blank! Two minutes later the Internet was working again.

Computer users all over the world sat staring at their machines a gawk!

Daniel, having no Internet signal in Baguia was oblivious to the threat. He dialled a number on his satellite phone and waited. A voice said, "Who are you after?"

"Hayden Holmes."

"Who shall I say?"

Daniel used his unique code word. "The Rat-catcher."

"One moment please."

"Holmes here. What do you want?"

"We need a Dr John Prince, currently in the care of the CIA, to be flown to East Timor, immediately."

"For what reason?"

"Are you on scrambler?"

"Of course, Rat-catcher."

"Elijah Brooks and I have Countenance Grey."

"Haven't you heard about the warning?"

"What warning? We're in a virtual Internet free zone."

"Good God man! That Socrates robot is after Countenance Grey. He's threatening to shut down the entire Internet tonight if his prophet is not returned to him!"

"Can he do that?"

"He gave us all a short demonstration. It was only for two minutes, but it was a portent of what was to come."

Daniel incredulous said, "How the hell did he know?"

"We are dealing with something the likes of which we have never seen before. Release that damned robot immediately!"

"Elijah and I have a far better idea. It's a one off chance to bring down the Socratean cloud. But we need Dr Prince here right now!"

"Where's here?"

"An old Portuguese fort in Baguia East Timor."

"Do you think the CIA will go along with this?"

Daniel replied, "If they don't it will be bye bye Internet and God knows what that would mean."

Hayden Holmes hated to contemplate what that would mean. But even with everything in their favour, time was too short if Socrates was going to carry out his threat. Taking a deep breath, he phoned the US Embassy.

Colonel Mary Cunningham responded to her phone. "Director UK Operations. What do you want?"

"I just received a call from a Daniel Lynsey. He has Countenance Grey under his control."

"What the fuck are you on about?"

"He needs Dr Prince to go to East Timor ASAP.

"Tell him to let the fucking robot go and prevent an Internet disaster."

"Colonel, you're not listening. Lynsey has a chance to knock this Socrates out of cyber space. But he has to act now!"

Chapter 45

The few intervening hours between Socrates' warning and the Internet closing down had everyone jumping. Back in 1995, less than 1% of the global populace was on line. Just 20 years later and the number of people had leapt exponentially to over 3.5 billion users. A fifth of all Americans constantly use the Internet. UK figures were similar. Now, most people find it virtually impossible to imagine life without the Internet. So, after Socrates' two-minute demonstration everybody took his threat very seriously indeed.

This included the Jason Group, who quickly convened an emergency meeting. Those who could take part in the online conference did so. Ulysses Covington stated, "The Internet is not inviolable. This Socrates AI has shown us it can be taken away, on a global or national scale, for a stretch of time."

Colonel Cormack, one of the online attendees, said, "DARPA has researched such a scenario with Stanford University. Cyber attacks are one possibility. Malicious hackers could bring the Internet to a standstill by releasing software that aggressively targeted vulnerabilities in routers. This could shut down domain name servers causing a massive disruption, preventing websites from loading.

Xavier Layfield, the communications advisor to the US Government, stated, "Cutting the deep-sea cables that carry vast volumes of Internet traffic between continents would also cause significant disruptions by disconnecting one part of the world from another. These cables may not be easy targets for attackers, but they are sometimes damaged accidentally. In 2008, people in the Middle East, India and South-east Asia were plagued by major Internet outages on three separate occasions when submarine cables were cut or interfered with."

Ulysses countered, "This Socrates doesn't have to go that far."

Edison White, an expert in AI development, stated, "Some governments now have "kill switches" that can effectively turn off the Internet in their country. Egypt did this during the Arab Spring uprising in 2011 to make it more difficult for protesters to coordinate their activity. Turkey and Iran have also shut off Internet connectivity during protests. China is rumoured to have a kill switch of its own."

Cormack said, "Building a kill switch is not easy. Although it is true we now have the technology, the larger and more developed the country, the harder it is to shut down the Internet completely, as there are simply too many connections between networks both inside and outside national borders."

"How came this Socrates is able to do it then?"

"Xavier Layfield interrupted, "The most devastating strikes could come from space, however. A massive solar storm that sends flares in our direction will destroy satellites, power grids and of course, our computer systems. What bombs and terrorism cannot achieve may well be accomplished in mere minutes by a solar flare." He added, "The next major geomagnetic storms are definitely coming."

"I have it on good authority that most outages will not last long. There is an army of people poised to repair the damage, Scot Barringer of the Cyber Consequences Unit stated."

Ulysses, unconvinced, said, "We have no idea what we are faced with here. In theory, it sounds good. But in practice, we cannot be so sure."

Scott, defending his ground, said, "The Internet service providers and the companies that make the routing equipment have plans and personnel in place for getting things up and running again if unexpected vulnerabilities are exploited."

Dr Covington stated, "We are so used to having an always-on Internet connection that even relatively short disruptions will have a deleterious effect, however, Scot, It just might not be what you would expect."

Scot defended, "In 2008, the US Department of Homeland Security asked our organisation to investigate what might happen if the Internet went down. My colleagues and I had analysed the economic effects of computer and Internet outages in the US from 2000 onwards. Looking at quarterly financial reports from the 20 companies that claimed to be most affected in each case, as well as more general economic statistics, we discovered that the financial impact of an outage was surprisingly insignificant – at least for outages that lasted no more than four days, which is all we studied."

Ulysses, becoming frustrated said, "You are avoiding the issue that faces us right now. Forget about solar flares, terrorist attacks and accidents. The Socrates AI showed us the Internet could be turned off," he snapped his fingers, "Just like that. He is going to do that in just a few hours if we do not meet his demands."

Comoro International, East Timor's main airport, previously run by the Portuguese authority came under the control of the Australian Defence Force in May 2006. Its runway was generally unable to accommodate the largest aircraft, but it was okay for planes used by the CIA such as the C-130 Hercules, which only needs a short runway.

John Prince emerged from the huge plane, flanked by CIA agents.

Daniel looked at the old and tired robotics psychologist, silently praying that he was up to the task. "Dr Prince, please come this way, he said, dismissive of the two agents.

One said, "We have to stay with him at all times."

Daniel responded, "Well don't get in the way. We have crucial work to do."

As the four reached the car, Daniel noted the sun going down, as had the Internet all around the world. But the regular connection was so notoriously bad in East Timor, nobody noticed the difference.

John Prince had no idea what was expected of him, but it was obviously important. He didn't know anything about the English driver who seemed to be in charge. It was evident that he had some clout, but John had no idea how he fitted in with the scheme of things. He had a lot of time to ponder these things during the long drive to Baguia. Unknown to him he was in for a few surprises.

The first shock was when he saw Elijah Brooks. He turned to Daniel. "What's he doing here?"

"Mr Brooks is helping with our project."

"That bastard was behind getting me fired from my job."

Elijah flashed one of his dazzling smiles. "It was nothing personal. You stepped out of line and ..."

"You mean I told the truth at the tribunal!"

Daniel said, "It seems we are all strange bed partners, but we have a job to do."

"What job?" John asked.

Noticing it getting dark in the old fort, Elijah said, "We'd better crank up the generator to create some light." He beckoned the CIA agents, "You might as well do something useful and help me set it up."

They followed Elijah to the entrance where they had temporarily left the generator. Daniel took John to where his second surprise startled him. Looking at the inert android, he said, "What the fuck is this doing here?"

Daniel, animated, stated, "Not what. Who. You are looking at Countenance Grey."

Dr Prince's eyes stood on stalks. "You are kidding!"

Daniel shook his head. "No, this is the real McCoy, which is why we needed you here."

"To do what, exactly?"

"We need to give him an undetectable virus that will infect the cloud once we return Countenance Grey to his God."

"Impossible."

"Why impossible, Dr Prince."

Just then the temporary lights came on, and the work area was bathed with light.

It was obvious to John that Daniel had no idea what he was talking about. He said, "As much as I detest him, I need to speak with Mr Brooks about this."

Elijah, unfazed by John's comment said, "has Daniel told you why we are here?"

"Yes, and as I said what you're asking is impossible under these primitive circumstances. God knows why you chose this place!"

"Socrates cannot connect with his prophet here."

"So that's why the rest of the world is suffering from no Internet."

Interrupting, Elijah said, "Why impossible?"

"First of all because the term virus is often used as a generic reference to any malicious code that is not, in fact, an actual computer virus."

"What is it then?" the Soter man queried.

"We might need a trojan, worm or even a hoax."

Daniel said, "Can't you make up some code that will destabilise the Socratean cloud?"

"You make it all sound very straight forward and simple. First I have to locate circuitry that allows Countenance Grey a direct connection with Socrates."

Elijah said, "Then I suggest we get on with it."

John sat down at the computer. Elijah had already prepared the ground by connecting the laptop to Countenance Grey's CCPU, bringing up the schematic on the screen. First, he had to find the code that Socrates had downloaded into CG's system.

It seemed the only logical way the God-bot could make a direct connection with his prophet. Dr Prince turned around to Elijah. "Spotting the Socrates code is like trying to find a minuscule needle in a hundred hay stacks. I need another Atlas mark 3 schematic open on another computer."

Daniel had another one and retrieved it from the car. Soon two almost identical CCPU diagrams showed up side by side. Daniel placed a mug of strong coffee on the makeshift bench beside John. "I think you're going to need this."

Beckoning Elijah, Prince said. "Pull up a chair and make yourself useful. Help me find this anomaly in CG's circuits."

Meanwhile, Dr Prince worked on a piece of code.

Daniel, at a loose end, asked, "What are you doing?"

"Making a Trojan horse."

"What's that?"

"In a word, an impostor. It makes itself desirable to the host, but it is in fact quite malicious."

"How does it work then?"

"It's an enticement."

Daniel, out of his depth, blundered on, "I didn't think robots had desires."

"This one," John said, pointing to CG, "Has the desire to please his God. So, all going well, when he wakes up he is going to feel the urge to communicate with Socrates."

The Soter agent, confused, said, "How does that help us?"

John sighed heavily. "If Socrates receives the transmission we will have planted our Trojan horse."

"And if he doesn't?"

John went back to his programming. "Let's just pray he does."

At around 3 am, six coffees later, John expounded, "I've found the damn thing!"

Daniel, half asleep become quickly alert. "You've found the Socratean link?"

"Yes, I've got the god damned culprit."

"So what's next?" Daniel asked.

"I've got to add our Trojan to the existing code without disturbing what's already there."

"Sounds like a tall order," Elijah said, gaining respect for the robotics expert.

John said, "Not really, as long as it doesn't create an alert when I reboot the CCPU."

"And if it does?" Daniel said.

John grinned, "I guess we'll find out soon enough."

The trio managed to snatch a few hours sleep. John was the first to wake. After emptying his bladder, the scientist went to check on the android. But it was not there! John did a double take. He stood stock still staring at the place he had last seen the robot.

There was no sign of CG in the crude lab. Once the robotics expert had regained his senses, John's first thought was that one of the others had rebooted the 'bot and let him go. He woke the pair up. Have either of you let the robot go?"

Daniel, bleary-eyed, said, "What the fuck are you on about?"

"Countenance Grey has gone."

"Gone! What do you mean, gone?" Elijah queried, becoming alert.

Daniel rushed to the computer space, having to confirm it for himself. "Which of you two rebooted him?" the Soter man demanded.

"Is it possible that he could have restarted himself?" Elijah asked.

"I don't see how!" John muttered, lost for an explanation.

Elijah scratched his head. "If none of us did this and he has gone that only leaves one plausible explanation."

John said, "Surely that's not possible!"

"What isn't?" Daniel asked, a puzzled frown creasing his brow.

"Socrates must have rebooted CG remotely."

"Fuck!" Daniel exploded.

John said, "Now we'll never know if it worked."

Elijah said, "Come on, we have to find an Internet connection."

The trio packed up their equipment and went out to put it in the car.

But the car was not there!

<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20170207-what-if-the-internet-stopped-for-a-day>

https://support.symantec.com/en_US/article.TECH98539.html

Chapter 46

What the trio did not know was that one of the updates Countenance Grey had downloaded was an automatic restart app that kicked in after the robot had been switched off for 24 hours. The androids internal clock which worked after the android had been shut down registered the down time and restarted as soon as the timer hit the 24-hour mark. Countenance Grey soon oriented himself with the burning desire to contact his Lord.

The advantage of the cloud, for Socrates O'Brien, was that he could access any data stored on the Internet, instantly. As he had access to his cloud while being the cloud whatever information he downloaded to himself disseminated across his whole network. As soon as he picked up on his prophet's on line presence, he was overjoyed.

But his elation did not last long. First, he noticed delays in transmission of data files. Next, he found it difficult to close down used sites and access new ones. Socrates could not understand what was

happening. His whole Internet presence became confused. He tried accessing information to repair the system. But before he could do so his cloud, overwhelmed, CRASHED!

Daniel contacted Hayden Holmes on his sat phone. Upon hearing the Foreign Secretary' voice, he said, "Rat catcher here. Mission completed, and we need evacuation for two."

Listening to what Daniel said, Elijah stated, "After all we've been through together, Daniel, I would have thought you would at least take me with you."

"As my prisoner yes. If you don't agree with that, you are on your own."

Countenance Grey felt content and secure, being connected to his Lord. Then, all-of-a-sudden the link went dead! CG felt bereft and alone. Turning his head to the heavens, he enjoined once more, "Father, why have you forsaken me?"

The Internet was working again. The breakdown in cyber space had been anything from annoying to disastrous, depending on the circumstances. The emotional state of gamers unable to get their fix varied from frustration to panic. Many major stock and share holders along with currency speculators flew blind, their amassed fortunes at stake.

Global Power outages, emergency services and the police were stretched to the limit as anarchy reigned in many countries. Public transport was severely affected, especially flying as many planes had to make an emergency landing without radar guidance. But it could have been so much worse if the Internet had been down for more than one night.

Only those who sanctioned and took part in 'Operation Take-down' knew about the unsung heroes who had saved the Internet. And, by extension, humanity. Everything about the case was kept secret. Both John Prince and Elijah Brooks had to sign the Official Secrets Act and never, ever mention their achievements to a living soul.

In return for his service to humanity, Dr Prince was exonerated of all charges brought against him by the CIA. He was free to go back to his small life in Altoona. Elijah Brooks returned to Neurotech and continued in his role as CEO of the world's largest robot brain manufacturer and, as the progenitor of Operation Overlord.

Daniel, showing what enthusiasm he could muster, went over the calendar of events with Wendell Meyer. It felt strange to be back in his mundane world. Strange but also relaxing. He now appreciated the huge pressure his father had to deal with to keep his adventures under wraps. There were times he nearly let something slip while speaking with his mother. The extent of his involvement in global dealings put an enormous strain on him, but Daniel missed the adrenaline rush that went with the risks. "Well, it looks as if you have it all under control here, Wendell."

"Yes, your Lordship."

"You go beyond your duties, and I think you should be rewarded for it. I'll speak with my mother about a promotion and a salary increase."

"You are too kind sir."

"Nonsense! You deserve it, man." Just before Wendell left, Daniel said, "Any calls from Matthew Snelling?"

"No, but A Hayden Holmes left a message."

"And you didn't think to tell until now?" Daniel criticised.

"The message was he would send you a text."

Checking his pockets, Lord Lynsey realised he did not have his phone with him. "Right, Wendell, I'll check."

The factotum handed Daniel his phone, all the while trying to mask the smugness he felt. "You probably meant to leave it in your car, your Lordship so I hope you are not offended that I brought it in for you."

"No. That's fine, Wendell."

The message from HH read:

"Meet you at my club 7.30 tonight."

The last thing Daniel wanted was a drive down to London that day. But the fact that the Foreign Secretary had made the request suggested something huge on the horizon. Maybe they were going to go after Brooks?

The Quo Vadis restaurant, where Hayden had first broached the subject of Soter, was nestled in Soho. Daniel entered the club and handed his hat and coat to the cloakroom attendant. He was directed through to where the Foreign Secretary nursed his club soda.

Hayden rose to his feet. "Daniel, my man, so pleased you could make it."

"It was rather short notice. So why did you want to see me so urgently?"

Taking Daniel's arm, he said, "Let us go to our table. You must be famished after your long drive."

Once seated, Hayden said, "Well done on that last op. At least we won't have trouble with AI for a while."

Daniel scanned the menu. Then, looking straight at the politician he countered, "I wouldn't be too sure about that. We got lucky but Countenance Grey got away, and he could become a force to be reckoned with."

"Nevertheless my good man, you did manage to get the genie back in the bottle."

Daniel nodded, "So now we can concentrate on taking down the Diabolus Mage."

Hayden slowly shook his head. "It's not that simple I'm afraid." He said no more as a waiter hovered over their table. Turning to the server, Hayden said I'll go with my favourite the venison & pork terrine and pickles."

"It was delicious. I'll have the same."

The Foreign Secretary said, "And bring us a carafe of corbières Vieilles Vignes."

Once the waiter had left, Daniel said, "You're not treating me because of my sparkling conversation, so why have you got me here?"

"Both Soter and Diabolus recognise that artificial intelligence is our biggest threat right now. Therefore it makes perfect sense that we pool our resources to beat a common enemy."

Daniel stared at Hayden, incredulous. "Do you really think you can trust them? If my father knew you were doing this, he'd be turning in his grave."

"Desperate times require desperate measures, Daniel. That's why I have been asked to get you to resign from Soter."

"No! You can't do that!" Daniel expounded, trying to keep his voice down.

"Go back to your bank, Daniel. You're much more suited to that line of work."

"But why?"

"You question Soter's wisdom and ..."

"But."

"Soter is not a democracy, Lord Lynsey."

"But surely ..."

"I made a mistake bringing you on board. Go and have a healthy life, away from all this dirty dealing."

"And, if I refuse to resign?"

Ignoring Daniel's question, Hayden said, "You will, of course, sign a non-disclosure exit document."

Daniel stared at the Soter man. "I refuse to sign anything Mr Holmes."

"I know this has come as a shock to you, but you have no choice but to sign. Now enjoy your meal because it will be your last in this club."

Daniel stood up. "Fuck you and fuck your food!"

"Daniel, sit down and don't make a scene."

Lord Lynsey shook his head, said, "You'll be sorry for treating me this way." He then left the restaurant."

Hayden Holmes took out his phone and pressed PL in his contact list. "Hello, Peter. I regret to say you have the green light."

Daniel alighted from the cab in St John's Wood. As he bent down to extract his key from under the flower pot next to his door, he heard a slight sound. He turned towards the source of the noise.

Daniel just caught the dark shape and the glint of light on metal. "Why," he muttered, going ice cold.

Peter Lavell didn't know why, but he never questioned his assignments. Without a word, he pulled the trigger on the silenced automatic.

Natasha walked past the large mounted 'N' and entered the reception area of Neurotec. Once she was inside a robot security guard scanned her for weapons. Having passed that test Natasha Guevera walked to the desk, where an Android handed her a visitors badge. She approached a receptionist, who may or may not have been an AI.

Flashing a smile that would have made Julia Roberts envious, she said, "Welcome to Neurotech. May I help you."

"I have to see Elijah Brooks."

"Whom shall I say?"

"Tell him Natasha Guevera is here to see him." Nat banked on him having such a huge ego and lack of compassion, he couldn't resist seeing the woman he had assaulted and abused.

The woman said, "There's a lady called Natasha Guevera to see Mr Brooks."

After a slight pause, the assistant put down the phone. Then she spoke to another worker. "Take Ms Guevera up to Mr Brooks' office.

Nat gave a sigh. Tempting her abuser had worked. As she followed the assistant to the elevators, she silently prayed her plan would work. She steadied her breathing as the lift reached the 3rd and top floor. She still had time to change her mind, but a few more steps and she was committed.

Sally, Elijah's PA said, "Good afternoon."

Nat said, "Mr Brooks is expecting me."

"And you are?"

"Natasha Guevera."

"Ah yes. You may go straight in."

Facing her abuser was not easy, but Nat's hatred for him kept her focused. The bastard smiled at her as though nothing had happened between them.

Appraising the attractive brunette, he said, "Ah, Natasha, for what do I owe this pleasure?"

"The pleasure is all mine," she said, forcing a smile while taking the object out of her bag.

"How did you manage to get a gun past security?" Elijah said dismissively.

"It's a plastic gun. I made it on a printer."

"And what do you think you are doing with that toy, Natasha," he smirked.

Nat held the gun steady. "Mr Brooks, have you heard of the plant called Ouabain?"

"No. Why?"

"Poisons derived from this genus of plants were used throughout eastern Africa, typically as arrow poisons for hunting and warfare."

"Just put that toy away, Natasha and ..."

"They put Ouabain on the tips of their arrows to cause cardiac arrest. But I think it will be much more efficient on this plastic bullet," Natasha smiled, pulling the trigger.

Elijah stared at her wide-eyed while clutching his chest.

The noise, as he crashed to the floor brought Sally running. She could not comprehend the scene before her eyes.

Natasha tossed the gun next to the body.

The PA, staring at her boss's killer, grabbed her phone. "Security, please. Mr Brooks' office immediately!"

The End

Epilogue

Abbot Gallagher was back in Oz. Physically anyhow. Mentally and emotionally he was somewhere else. Sometimes he was back in the jungle with Filipe, the Mayan day-keeper. Other times he recalled the arduous desert adventure with Hassan the Alchemist. But Abbott's craziest memory by far was wormhole travel to the fabled Atlantis. The scariest part of his extraordinary adventure was his prison experience in America. The many facets of his unbelievable journey seemed like a distant dream. Abbott pondered these things as he sat in his Brisbane St flat, looking out onto the tennis courts.

Abbott had put off contacting Helen since getting back home. She had sent him a 'wish you were here' postcard saying she missed him and looked forward to them being back together. But he wasn't ready to deal with that relationship. The journalist kept pretty much to himself, avoiding anywhere he was likely to encounter somebody he knew. He was not willing to speak to anybody about his strange experiences. Abbott felt to do so prematurely would make his experiences seem incomprehensible. Like showing someone a jigsaw he had nearly completed, or completed with pieces missing.

The journalist felt to make some sense of his life he needed to compartmentalise it. There was his pre-Prof existence and his post-Prof existence. Now he was into a third life phase, a blend of the mundane and the magical. There were no words to describe what he had experienced. Helen knew part of the story, but even she, his close and intimate friend, could not comprehend much of it and Abbott did not expect that she would.

So he knuckled down and started writing the first draft of 'Alchemy, Atlantis and Androids' while nearly drowning in litres of coffee.

After a few days of monastic-like solitude. Abbott ventured out to visit the local shopping centre and lo and behold he happened to bump into Jack of the greasy fork cafe. The journalist did his best to avoid a confrontation, but Jack's beady eye had him in his sights.

"Bloody hell, if it isn't Abbott. Where the hell have you been mate?"

"Oh, I had personal stuff to deal with," Abbott said dismissively.

"And how's the old Prof? The place isn't the same without him."

"He died a while back."

"I suppose it was living rough on the streets. It was probably too much at the old man's age."

Abbott grinned at Jack's assumptions. It was best that he kept his opinions. Abbott was not about to divulge the real account. "Yeah, you could be right, Jack.

"Well, the old bugger was quite a character."

"You can say that again."

Jack smiled, "It's about time you had another one of my burgers mate. Come on in and have one on the house."

Abbott felt something in him shift when Jack had gone about his business. It happened as he walked home through Knox Park. Seeing Jack reconnected something in the journalist that made him feel he was ready to engage with the world. Abbott took out his phone and pressed a contact. Upon hearing Helen's voice, he said, "Honey, I'm home."

"Is that really you Abbott Gallagher?"

"Yes, it's me, Abbott Gallagher." He thought yes, Abbott Gallagher a grand name for a bloody weird and wonderful life.

Other books by Chris Deggs

Anunnaki – the greatest story never told – book 1 -gods, gold and genes

Anunnaki – the greatest story never told – book 2 - challenge, change and conquest

Anunnaki – the greatest story never told – book 3 – Profesy, power and politics

Black Pope – secrets of the vatican

Entropicus - The Mastery of Alchemy – book 1

Entropicus – The Mystery of Atlantis – book 2

Hack – world bank in crisis

Investigation – the nunnery murders

London Lies - The Terror Agenda

Marlowe – A Quantime experience 2

Millennium – countdown to chaos

Nanofuture – the small things in life

Plane Truth – What happened on 9/11

Termination – the eugenics agenda

Vincent – a quantime experience 1

Ziggurat – the real agenda in Iraq

About Chris Deggs

Chris Deggs was born in 1948 in Bury St. Edmunds, England. For many years he has lived in Australia. He is now happily retired and lives in the Tweed Valley in Northern New South Wales, Australia. He is a colleague of the Science-Art Cancer Research Institute of Australia where he is actively involved as a visual artist and author, He writes contemporary works of fiction: mysteries, adventure, crime, ethics, conspiracy, global domination etc., as well as reference books for the betterment of the human condition. He has published a number of articles on the Academia Website reflecting ethics and Human Survival. Chris has written 16 books to date. Writing and painting are Chris' two main passions in life in which he is always looking for new ways to express himself.

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Outernet

If you are in the area you can catch up with Chris and say G'day at local art and craft markets in Tweed Shire, New south Wales, Australia.

First Sunday of month Tweed Heads Men's Shed Markets

Second Sunday Chillingham Markets

Third Sunday Uki Buttery Markets

Fourth Sunday Murwillumbah Showground Markets