

# Entropicus

## Book 2: The Mystery of Atlantis



Chris Deggs

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

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### **Dedication**

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

**Entropicus**  
**Book 2: The Mystery of Atlantis**

## Chapter 1

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

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

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

Hassan just smiled, "Soter business."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Go where?"

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

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

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

"Yet the Casbah stays open."

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

"Where are you going?"

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

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

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

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

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

More applause. Cheers and whistles from the audience.

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

A truck drove up to the platform. An enormous wooden crate was unloaded and placed centre stage. At first, nothing happened. Then there was a drum roll, and the container exploded into fragments as a six foot two, three hundred, and thirty-pound robot burst out, onto the stage. The audience, awestruck by the dynamic spectacle, sat wide-eyed, as the robot proceeded to clean up the mess from the shattered crate.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"So where does that leave Heron Robotics?"

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

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

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

"Heron will be finished."

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

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

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

Karim Ibn Al Hamsa lived in a small dark apartment at the top of the narrow staircase. Hassan squeezed against the wall to let two women pass him on their way down. He knocked at the door. It was opened by a white-bearded, florid looking man. His face split into a grin when he saw who it was. "Hassan, it is wonderful to see you. Come in. I will get us some tea."

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

"Then you have found an apprentice."

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

"May he find peace with Allah the Compassionate."

"Indeed."

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

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

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

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

"Are you ready for the Ast initiation?"

"Yes."

"Very well, be at the temple tonight."

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

She remained silent.

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

Her blank expression gave nothing away.

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

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

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

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

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

Still no sound from her.

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

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

Tools! Her skin went cold and clammy.

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

Dayton separated her small finger of her left hand.

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

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

She took a deep breath.

"Who are you working for?"

"I only know of him as the Professor."

"Have you met with him?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In his hotel room."

"Did you have sex with him?"

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

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

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

"In what way?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"When did he do this?"

"After our whipping."

"Our! So there were other prostitutes involved."

"One more. A woman called Miriam."

"Do you know where I can contact her?"

"No."

"What does this Professor look like?"

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

At last Dayton had a physical description of the man.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tamis stood still, at a loss for what to do. A hot, steamy bath had been on her mind, but she couldn't motivate herself to run it. Despite all the kindness showered upon her she was far away from home

and had never felt more alone. It seemed that the entire weight of her world rested upon her frail shoulders. She thought she was prepared to lead her people, but that was when her father's robust and loving power had protected her. Despite their differences in religious beliefs, she had never doubted his love for her. Now she realised he had been right, but that had only got him locked up or killed. She shuddered at the thought and yearned for her father's experience and wisdom. But he had disappeared in the Singularian attack on the Capitol. Tears clouded her eyes. He had instructed her to remember all of her lessons and to lean heavily on Takran, for she would need a strong companion and a good friend.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Chapter 2

### Independent News Report:

#### ANTI TRANSHUMANIST LEAGUE PATRIOTS BATTERED IN BOSTON

Over 50 protesters from ATL were brutally beaten and then arrested outside Boston Cybertronics company headquarters. The Patriots were picketing to call attention to Cybertronics' crimes against humankind - their manufacture of robots without ethical-chips, their promotion of increased automation in traditionally machine-free labour arenas, and their total disregard of the effects their



products have on Mankind.

A Spokesperson for BC, Dr Lynne Becker, said, her company followed Government regulations in all their research and production.

The protesters were non-violent and had only blocked the main entrance to the building. Helen Cleaver, the president of ATL, accused the company's security forces, who she referred to as, jack-booted thugs, of brutally assaulting the activists, resulting in the hospitalisation of six protesters.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 1) I bet a soldier that never questions very evil orders is worth ten times more to them.
- 2) It's as simple as this. We replace current police officers with robot police officers. In the future, no harm comes to anyone except the bad guys, especially if those bad-guys are revolutionaries against an evil government.
- 3) A Robby Robocop on every street corner sounds good to me. Start their mass-production now.
- 4) Scary, just imagine being pulled over and questioned by a robot cop.
- 5) How many murderers will get away with their crimes?"
- 6) It depends on what they programme it with to define 'bad guy'. We all know the broadness of the meaning of terrorist.
- 7) Yea and there will be no chance of leniency. In the old days, the cop might consider a minor crime not to be worth the paperwork, and give the offender a cuff around the ear. Robocop won't have a discerning judgement in such matters.
- 8) The problem as I see it is that these robocops as any other device connected to a network would be susceptible to being hacked and that could be a problem."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"When will that be?"

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

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

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

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

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

Ulysses laid down on the bed facing her, resisting the urge to get primal and fuck straight away. That had happened back in Australia, but now it had to be different. It was not just lust, as before. Now there were emotional feelings involved. It scared the hell out of him, a confirmed bachelor.

This night he wanted to get her off as never before. They moved together, cuddling and caressing for a long time.

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

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

She obliged without complaint.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"How did that happen?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Is it safe?" Tamis asked.

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

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

"We are not your enemy."

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

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

"Dr Gibson?" Tamis inquired.

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

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

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

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

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

"You now our policy, Bella."

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

"What Emergency, Bella."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Can you contact your people from here?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

been in place and effective, for thousands of years. Raf wondered how his people discovered the Gate and how somebody had deactivated the shield?

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

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

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

## Chapter 3

### **Independent News Report:**

**RADICAL AI ALLY ANNOUNCES HE IS RUNNING FOR THE SENATE.**

Zachary Bailey of Idaho has announced that he will run in the special election for the US Senate seat recently vacated by Andrew Maciver. Bailey is a well-known advocate of full citizenship status for AIs. He is the chief instigator pushing for radical robot rights measures in the Idaho legislature. And he has published numerous articles and papers that sing the praises of his machine friends. ATL spokesperson Helen Cleaver says, "We've got to stop this one!" She urges all states to rally their ATL forces! She said, "ATL will pull out all stops to stop Bailey's election.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

MacKay lingered, wondering why Rafael wanted to see him?

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

"Only a couple. That's surprising."

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, that was my genius at work."

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

"Just Moi," Rodney said, lightly.

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

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

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

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

"A ZPM?"

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

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

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

"So it could blow up!"

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

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

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

"How do we survive then?"

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

"Oh, I see."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Could it be man made?"

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

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

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

"It must still have a limit - surely."

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

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

"I still say it was an unknown anomaly."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The candidate may enter."

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

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

A master Alchemist rang a golden bell; its tone resonated around the chamber.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was now time for Hassan to address those present with a short speech. He began, "Esteemed members of this perfect and most sacred circle that have existed since the dawn of time, it is my great pleasure to be inducted into such noble company. Perhaps now, more so than any other time in

history, is the sacred balance threatened and darkness looms ready to engulf the world. It is only this great Circle and the legacy of Ma'at that stands between Buckminster Fuller's Utopia or Oblivion. I pledge my life to this noble cause."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Fine, Grenville. See to it."

"Yes, sir."

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

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

Dayton's phone rang. It was Hayden Holmes.

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

"What message?"

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

"Please do."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There was a standing tradition that members of this select group dropped first names and titles when addressing each other. Lynsey got up to make his opening remarks. "Gentlemen, the myth of the lost civilisation of Atlantis has attracted the attention and speculation of several eminent personalities over the centuries. These include the brilliant English philosopher Sir Francis Bacon,

Minnesota congressman Ignatius Donnelly, and, of course, the father of the myth, Plato - one of the most influential minds in Western thought. Plato was the first person to recount the Atlantis story. Hermetists and other occultists include the Timaeus in their canon of sacred works. Platonists like Plotinus, and later, famous psychics and occultists, see the Atlantis legend as being prophetic. Edgar Cayce, the 'Sleeping Prophet', predicted the revealing of Atlantis in 1968 or 1969. And, nineteenth-century mystic Madame Blavatsky claimed, while in Tibet, that the Hindu Mahatmas taught her about the lost civilisations of Atlantis and Lemuria."

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

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

"Have you seen this film?"

"No, O'Neill said."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Azizi asked, "Whatever do you mean?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Bull shit!" O'Neill snapped.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When the pair returned, Anderson was holding court with his 'many worlds' interpretation, which postulated that, as the objective reality of the universal wavefunction denies the actuality of wavefunction collapse, all possible alternative histories and futures are real, with each representing an actual 'world.' He added for good measure that, "the multiverse hypothesis is now considered a mainstream interpretation, along with the other decoherence arguments, the Copenhagen interpretation, as well as that of Bohmian mechanics."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Anything I can do to help?"

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

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

## Chapter 4

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"How come you got the gig?"

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

"That was not of my doing."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I'm going to be fucking crucified."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cormack breathed a sigh of relief and mentally patted himself on the back. He was pleased that she didn't know that tests on the wiring of the human brain were being carried out by James Morano, professor of bioethics at Stanford University. Morano was working with the DoD in understanding neuroscience. The Pentagon allocated \$400 million to this research. Through this research, DARPA was learning how to genetically modify human fat into pure energy by rewiring the metabolic switch which would create soldiers that require less food. Another area of research that Boston

Cybertronics was under contract for was being duplicated by Robert Patman, professor of psychiatry at Yale University, who was experimenting with propranolol, a beta blocker believed to erase 'terrifying memories', to alleviate the psychological effects of war.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"So all these checkpoints are legit."

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

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

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

"Initiated! What do you mean?"

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

"Contemplation about what?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And?" Dorian asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Takran needed time to himself. So much was changing, and it hurt him to think of leaving friends on the base. He wanted to trust the Earthians, as he called humans, but he simply could not. It was not that they had done anything or implied that they were in any way untrustworthy. But he still needed time to adjust to their ways. He was almost to his room when Dr Beck called out to him. Smiling warmly, he said, "Takran, I need to give you an examination, just to make sure you're in perfect health."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Who told you, Larson?"

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

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

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

"So, who is this, someone?"

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

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

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

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

"What mission is that, Colonel?"

"I am not at liberty to say."

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

"What's your assessment of him?"

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

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

Azizi helped Lynsey to his feet.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

"How did it happen?" she asked.

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

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

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

Angela arrived with two legal representatives, in tow. She took her seat as chairperson. Noting that Ulysses and his legal rep were present, she said, "Okay, let's begin by saying this is an extraordinary emergency meeting and there is only one item on the table - concerning our contract with DARPA. This conference asks for full disclosure of all the facts, so we know exactly where we stand. Let me just outline what we do know. Heron Industries entered into a contract with DARPA to produce the arms for their ATLAS robot. Unbeknown to Heron DARPA had also contracted Akawi Technics to carry out the same task. The then CEO Ulysses Covington subsequently discovered this duplicity," she said, looking straight at him. "After some discussion, the facts of which are unclear, our contract was renewed. The details as to why DARPA made our contract null and void, in the first place, is also not clear. DARPA then informs us that they no longer require our parts. This blow came after we had put heart and soul into this project for over a year. I will now leave it to Philip, our top legal man, to explain our rights in this contractual nightmare."

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

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

Harvey just smiled. He knew how these things went.

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

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

Angela thanked Philip, then said, "Now let us focus on the events that got us in this mess. Ulysses Covington gets us the contract with DARPA. This project becomes the primary focus - the only real

focus - in this company. There were those of us, myself included, who thought to put all our eggs in this particular basket was hazardous. Our fears turned out to be founded. DARPA wanted us to bring the deadline forward. We weren't happy with this, but we had to agree. Then Heron was investigated by the ethics board. Ulysses Covington was involved, and DARPA was not pleased with the publicity. Then Ulysses is accused of hiring thugs to put pressure on people."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The meeting went stony quiet."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Harvey suggested, "Members of this board I believe you have a strong case against DARPA under contract law. As Mr Philip Law pointed out, a contract is still a contract even if the client does not

use the products and services. You folks need solidarity here, and Dr Covington has written a short statement for me to read.

To the Board of Directors of Heron Industries:

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

## Chapter 5

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

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

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

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

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

"So what do we do now?"

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

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

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

"What am I supposed to use?"

"Improvise."

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

Having had little sleep Hassan was hardly ready for the long drive to Ouled Djellal, a town and commune in the Biskra Province. On top of this, he had to deal with Ahmed. The truth serum had worked to a degree, but they still had the mind-controlled assassin as their prisoner. Although unauthorised prisoner taking is acceptable in movies, in real life, it is not. It came under kidnapping,

which was a serious crime, even in Algeria. Hassan was working out what to do when Abbott emerged, yawning and looking for strong coffee.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Then this is tied in with our quest."

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

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

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

"No. Not that I recall. Why?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But where's the logic in that."

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

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

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

"But what about ...?"

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

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

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

The Arab answered. "Yes. Follow me."

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

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

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

Ali grinned widely. "5,000 dirhams."

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

Diablo looked out from his balcony, over Ghardaïa, which was just part of the Pentapolis - hilltop city amongst four others - built almost a thousand years before, in the M'Zab valley. Founded by the Mozabites, an Ibadi sect of non-Arabic Muslims, including the Berbers, it prospered as a major centre of date production and the manufacture of rugs and colourful fabrics. The Ibadis were forced to leave Tahert, their capital, owing to a devastating fire in 909 AD. This destruction was caused by the founder of the Shi'ite Fatimid Dynasty. There was still hatred between the factions and the Professor determined to capitalise on the unrest.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

about Dayton's affair, drove him to Cromer. Having delivered his master to his mistress, Grenville drove the Bentley back up north.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"That must have been terrible."

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

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

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

"Who is it then?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Almost mechanically, Raf shrugged his jacket off and draped it over her shoulders. He moved even closer to her, close enough to smell her fragrant hair conditioner. She turned to face him. One more step and he was flush against her body. He looked into her eyes and knew Dorian was the most exciting woman he had ever known. He was in his late thirties; he was aware that there were things more important than sex, and he desperately wanted those things. And now, standing in front of her, Raf had to decide if he was willing to undergo the risks of being in another emotional, intimate relationship. He'd married his first love and life with Emilia was sheer bliss – for a while. They had been married partners for five good years while Raf was in the US Marines. But the unsettled lifestyle of getting shipped from base to base proved too much for her. She was unhappy and bored. She took up with an accountant, and he knew the days of their relationship was numbered. Raf was broken-hearted, and he shied clear of stepping into another emotional minefield. Now, here he was with Dorian, for whom he had a deep affection. But could he take the next step? Many questions assailed his brain. Did he want to risk dating a co-worker? Could he leave his emotional baggage behind? Did he believe their relationship could last for the rest of their lives? His mind ticked all of the above. His fragile ego was not as confident.

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

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



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

"I ..." Her voice faltered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Scarlet Council began in Khem, a great centre of learning and the birthplace of many arts and sciences. This practice furnished an ideal environment for transcendental experimentation. Here the black magicians of Atlantis continued to exercise their superhuman powers until they had completely undermined and corrupted the morals of the primitive Mysteries. By establishing a hieratic caste, they usurped the position formerly occupied by the initiates and seized the reins of spiritual government. Black magic came to control mainstream religion and stifled intellectual and spiritual independence by demanding complete adherence to the dogma and superstition of the ordained priesthood. The Scarlet Council - a committee of arch-sorcerers got elevated to power by their priesthood. Therefore it seemed right and proper to Mendes Amwon that he, a black magician, should become the master of Atlantis. For him, the Diabolus was just the vehicle to help him achieve his goal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Chapter 6

### Independent News Report:

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

The report went on to say that the use of robots by the military and the police had grown exponentially over the past decade. They were already being utilised as bomb-sniffing devices and

for other counter-IED missions in Afghanistan and were used in similar capacities in Iraq before US troops pulled out.

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

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

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

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

Barney Cormack kept track of such reports from around the world with mixed feelings. Sure robots were shown to be effective in gun-related scenarios, but they still had vulnerabilities. And vulnerable robots did not sell. Already the military and police forces in client countries were sending negative feedback. This news was not good, which was why he was face-to-face with Lynne Becker, discussing the issue.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She nodded. "We will do our best."

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

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

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

"What are you saying, Barney?"

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

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

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

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

"Excellent decision, Dr Becker, " he smiled.

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

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

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

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

"It's not over yet, he grinned lasciviously, reaching the hem of her dress, then moving his hands up her legs. His lips found hers, and soon their tongues entwined in a sensual dance. The deep kiss left

her breathless. Making sure no one was watching, he slid the straps of Lynne's dress off her shoulders, unveiling her small but beautiful breasts. He drew one of her nipples in his mouth, teasing her. Ulysses needed to savour her completely. He pulled her dress over her head and trailed his mouth down her body, with nibbles and kisses, until he reached his goal at the juncture of her legs. She became tense at his ministrations. Then he felt her body convulse in an ecstasy of exploding pleasure, as a tingling sensation ran up and down her writhing body. "Happy Birthday," he said.

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

"Oh, I can wait till later."

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

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

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

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

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

"I thought that might be your response."

"How very astute," he retorted cynically.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was a sunny day in Norfolk, and Dayton was feeling childlike and carefree as he and Maddie strolled along the Cromer promenade, hunting for the elusive and equally delicious 'Cromer Crab'. He did miss his dogs, though. They would have loved capering on the pebbly beach. As they strolled into town, Dayton admired the beautiful old houses, Bowers of lilac and pot plants adorning the walls. Cromer, a Victorian seaside resort, no longer in its prime, still had its charm and local

attractions, one of which was a seafood restaurant that sold the town's famed Cromer crab. They found it on the menu at the Grove, a quaint seafood eatery with great food.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Do you know who the soldier is?"

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

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

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

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

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

"How are you, my friend?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He nodded, "500 dinars."

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

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

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

Once the old Arab had fixed the tyre and Bill was stocked up with food essentials, for an extra 100 dinar, he had a quick cold shower. Bill, feeling refreshed, paid the mechanic and then headed to Naftah in Tunisia. He realised he was just running, with no particular destination in mind. Crossing the border at night meant less waiting time, or so Bill figured. After a short ride across no man's land, he arrived at the Algerian border police post. As he rode up, Bill noticed around twenty vehicles already parked and knew he was in for a long wait. First, he was required to complete a white entry card with his personal details and those of his motorcycle.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

<http://www.prweb.com/releases/SWATrobot/Pointman/prweb10026529.htm>

## Chapter 7

"Hey, calm down. The gate's harmless if you treat it with respect." Colonel Lynch said, noting Takran's apprehension.

The Gate closed behind them, upon Gibson's order.

Kronyn grinned, remembering his first time.

After checking their equipment, especially the two-way Radios and their weaponry, for any electromagnetic damage caused by the Gate radiation, they entered the Island world. Heavy assault rifles were of no use to the trio. The more compact and lighter MPX5 was better if the patrol got caught in a fire fight against superior numbers. Although it was strictly a covert operation, in which they would avoid contact and trouble at all costs, they had to be prepared for an attack.

Colonel Lynch outlined his plan. "Okay, listen up now."

The pair of young Atlanteans gathered around him.

"Because the Singularians rule the roost we are the invaders here. Make no mistake about that. The people here haven't invited us, so we keep a low profile and stay out of trouble. We have to get to the Citadel without being detected. Do you read me?"

"Yes Colonel," they chorused.

He looked around at the ocean, then the map on his phone. "Okay, follow me."

The first stage of their journey took them across the flattish terrain, near the beach. Kronyn fancied going for a swim, but the Colonel was worried they would be too exposed. It was dangerous enough crossing the slightly inclined crop land without increasing the chance of Singularians spotting them on the beach. Their Kevlar body armour made it tough going in the oppressive heat. Every now-and-again, Colonel Lynch halted the trio for fear of being spotted. Kronyn offered to scout ahead, but Takran was more familiar with the territory, especially as they approached the wooded area leading to the mountains. Takran felt insecure about going very far ahead, but he was far enough to give warning to the others should he detect any Singularian activity.

As the trees gave way to thick, oppressive jungle, Rafael Lynch became much more vigilant, aware that the trees could hold snipers. Takran explained it was not likely because the Atlanteans hated the humid heat and avoided the jungle if at all possible. His people had managed to survive in the caves because they were on the other side of the bush. Kronyn agreed, but the Colonel remained unconvinced. Too many times he had lost good soldiers to sniper fire, which came suddenly from an unknown source. He didn't argue with the friendly islanders, but he kept scanning trees snipers would likely use.

Towards dusk, they came across three Singularian guards. The Earthian patrol held back in a thicket, observing them. Takran, speaking quietly, said, "They are border guards, but their uniforms are different."

"Different. What does that mean?"

"They are Singularian guards. "I think they are trying to stop people getting out, not in."

"So, how do we get past them?" Raf asked.

Kronyn said, "We take them by surprise and slit their throats."

Rafael Lynch was aghast. "I hardly think that will be necessary. We only use force if they threaten our lives. I mean how do we get past them without them noticing?"

Takran said, "There is a gully to the right. It's a dry river bed and will protect us from their eyes."

Half stepping, Half sliding, the trio got to the gully as quietly as they could. The sound of rustling leaves and dislodged stones tumbling down hadn't alerted the guards, so the trio crept along the ditch. Once they were out of the danger zone, the three relaxed a little. Raf took a draft of water. Turning to Takran, he ordered, "Tell me about these Singularians."

"It started with a small group of visitors and one man in particular."

"How did they get here?"

"He said they came through a wormhole with particular information for the Atlantean leader."

"Who was this man and what was he offering?" Colonel Lynch pressed.

"Colonel, he is the one called Mendes Amwon, and he promised our people great power and riches."

"Weren't your people suspicious of his motives?"

"He has a great countenance, beguiling and enchanting. We swooned before him."

It was all too vague for Raf, a staunch pragmatist. "Was everybody sucked in by this man?"

Takran said, "Not everybody, Goman Worrall warned us that this man was dangerous and his ideas would destroy us."

"Goman Worrall?"

"A science philosopher, well respected for his wise and rational thinking. He spoke out against the Singularian hold on the people."

"Did you not heed his words?"

"It was too late by then. There were attacks on the Centre of Science. The resistance forces fought bravely, but the Singularians had superior numbers. They killed many people, including my father," Takran expressed, sadly.

It was the first time Raf had heard that story. He guessed a lot of the kids would be orphans.

On previous missions, Lynch had never been confronted by a fully militarised enemy, with no backup intelligence. Mostly his missions had been excursions to build diplomacy between the two peoples, with military power there just for support if needed. This time it was different with a genuine possibility of a firefight. That being the case he needed more personnel with him. His mission, which was for him to reach the Citadel unobserved was looking very unlikely.

In fact, just minutes later they came under attack. Takran saw them first. His sharp young eyes picked up a movement in the jungle - a glint of flashing light indicating sunlight reflecting on metal. He stopped listened and raised his hand to halt the patrol.

Lynch immediately snapped into action. There could be dozens of Singularians upon them at any moment. He had to take a defensive position, so they had to move to a safer location. He didn't know that Dorian had felt uneasy about the mission and had sent another team as back up.

Major Warner, the patrol leader and Lynch's SIC, stopped to study the screen of his digital tablet. He'd activated the life signs detector. The app on his tablet indicated around forty energy signatures over a five-mile radius. He said, "Forty of them, mostly scattered in small groups."

Rodney pointing at an interactive map on his screen said, "I would say that's a bridge leading to the outer harbour. His assumptions were quite often correct.

Colonel Lynch heard people approaching; his finger curled around the trigger of his MXP5. As the footfalls came closer, he saw them! Raf couldn't believe it, but it was Major Warner, Rodney MacKay and ten Marines from the base. The Colonel showed himself and made a silence sign with his finger.

Rodney MacKay sidled up to him. Getting the Colonel's attention, he said, "Attacking is going to give us away."

Raf resented the way Rodney treated everyone else as idiots. He got the Major's attention. "Major, take Rodney and six marines; fan them out and see what we're up against."

Rodney protested, "I don't have to go. Major Warner knows how to use the LSD."

"Then why the hell are you here?" The Colonel snapped.

"That's a question I ask myself several times each day," Rodney responded.

The major picked his men and headed off into the darkness of the jungle.

Five minutes later Major Warner got a reading, gave the halt sign and all seven soldiers took up their positions. Thick undergrowth provided good cover as the patrol waited with baited breath. For three minutes the silence was deafening. Then the Singularian troops opened fire.

Warner's team returned fire. The first casualty, a Singularian who overexposed himself, officially kicked off the Battle for Atlantis. The major checked. All his men were present. "We have to advance," he said, putting a new clip into his assault rifle. "Any ideas, Sergeant?" he asked, his SIC.

Sergeant Cornwall, the tactics man in the team, open up the schematics of his virtual engagement software. "I only have the data from this firefight. All I know is they are guarding the bridge."

Warner radioed Lynch's team, "Had a little skirmish. The bad guys backed off."

Rodney said, "They seem well prepared. How could they know we were coming?"

Warner waited for Rodney to say something about a mole on the base but there was silence. That's odd, he thought.

"What's the problem?" Warner asked.

"I can't raise the colonel on the radio."

"What do you mean you can't contact him?"

"He went off to do some reconnoitring. Now he's not answering."

Then a burst of gunfire found their position. Rodney ducked for cover, yelling into the two-way, "We're under attack!"

The forward platoon who was about 100 metres ahead of Lynch's small detachment, headed back to MacKay's position.

"Where the hell is Lynch?" Rodney snapped at Kronyn, who was already dragging the unconscious Takran to cover. "Rodney picked up Kronyn's automatic rifle and fired a burst in the general direction of a muzzle flash.

Then the Singularians broke cover and struck like lightning, taking Rodney and the two Atlanteans by surprise.

Kronyn, thinking it could be his last minute on Atlantis, emptied a clip in the direction of the attackers.

But then the Singularians began dropping like flies as Major Warner and his men attacked them from the rear.

With the firefight over, Warner demanded, "Where's the Colonel?"

"He went off twenty minutes ago. We haven't seen him since.

"What's wrong with him?" Warner said, gesturing to Takran, whose skin was paler than Warner thought possible; he could see the youth's veins through his skin, but they were oddly greenish.

Although MacKay wasn't into voodoo, he assumed that wasn't good.

Kronyn adjusted Takran in his arms, to keep a firm hold on the unconscious form. He said, "I don't know what's wrong with him. He was shaking and throwing up. He passed out. I was so busy with him I let the Singularians get the drop on us."

Warner said, "Never mind about recriminations; we have to get the lad to our medical bay."

"What about our mission?"

Rodney sneered, "I think it's safe to say we fucked that up."

Warner tucked the life-signs detector into his vest pocket. He was now in charge, and he needed the plan to get his men to a safe zone. "Dammit!" Warner cursed quietly; Lynch just had to get himself interrogated or killed. He followed Rodney, who was looking for signs of the fallen enemy. There might be some useful clues the major thought. "How are we going to rescue the C O?" he asked.

"We have to think about this very carefully. We need to strike camp, set up a watch and work out a strategy."

Rodney hadn't told him anything he didn't already know. He motioned for two marines to set up a watch. Turning to Rodney, he said, "Get me, Dorian."

Audio connection between dimensions had been impossible until MacKay modified Asgard technology. He took out a different radio. "Dr Gibson, I have Major Warner for you."

Dorian froze. They only used Asgard in emergencies. And why wasn't Raf reporting? "What's your status, Major?"

"Our state, Dr Gibson, is that Takran is suffering some strange effect and Colonel Lynch has disappeared and seems to be out of contact."

A shiver shot up her spine. "What do you mean Raf's gone?" she demanded, incoherently.

"The Singularians knew we were here. They attacked us, but we had superior fire-power, and the enemy backed off."

"Christ! Put Kronyn on."

"The young Atlantean said, "Dr Gibson, it all went wrong."

"Never mind about that. You have to get the colonel back."

"We will have to wait for daylight to have any chance of finding him, and that will make us very vulnerable to attack. Besides Takran needs urgent medical attention."

Dorian, in a bind, decided, "Very well we'll have to abort the mission."

Kronyn said, "Dr Gibson, I can stay here and look for the Colonel."

Warner took the radio. "As commander of this force, I will not leave a man behind. Kronyn can get Takran through the gate; We're going to find Colonel Lynch."

Rodney said, "Speak for yourself, major. "I'll help Kronyn take Takran back to base."

Realising the grumpy genius wouldn't be any use to his operation, he agreed. Speaking to Dorian. Warner said, "Our mission now is to find the colonel."

She admired the Major's loyalty to his CO.

"Thank you, Major Warner. God speed to you all."

Hassan had been pushing the Winnebago hard. It was in dire need of a service. He looked out at the dusty desert plain stretched out, billiard-table flat, to the line of rocky hills on the far horizon. Stubborn patches of red scrub twitched in the fierce hot wind. Nothing else moved. Seeing the city sign ahead, he said to Abbott, "Welcome to the Triangle."

The journalist, in a half daze from the heat, having suffered six hours of driving without air conditioning, moaned, "Where are we?"

"The Triangle," he repeated, indicating the barren area of rock and sand. "We are about 300 miles south-west of Tripoli. This point is where the borders of Libya, Algeria and Tunisia meet. It's a curse for the people of Ghadames, our next destination."

Abbott, entranced by the clay houses with their thick white and ochre walls, all set among a labyrinth of narrow winding streets, turned to Hassan. "The buildings have a timeless quality."

The Alchemist commented, "They haven't changed since the Roman occupation of this land when Legions, under Emperor Augustus, first settled in the desert oasis."

Hassan drove the caravan down narrow dusty streets until he came to a rusty shed with an old petrol pump outside. Abbott heard arc welding noises from inside the shed. Hassan strolled inside, passing three cars in various states of Repair or disrepair. It was hard to tell in Kasem's workshop.

The little urchin watching his dad tugged at his sleeve and pointed at the visitors. Kasem Al Khanee stared at Hassan. Then extricating himself from the bonnet of the car he was working on, he grinned widely, "Hassan, you son of a flea-bitten dog. What are you doing here?"

Hassan, replying in standard Arabic, said, "We are on our way to Egypt. My car needs looking at."

"That can wait, my friend. You will have lunch with us. We have much catching up to do." Then regarding the dishevelled looking man with his long-lost friend, Kasem said, "Is he your apprentice?" before Hassan had time to answer there was the noise of a motorbike pulling up outside.

Bill Smith looked at the dirty, dust covered, Winnebago. He crouched down and cleared dust from the number plate. The Diabolus man then checked his records on his phone and the number matched. He then knew to whom it belonged.

Kasem took a look at the old motorbike. He hadn't seen a BMW road bike like it in many-a-year. It looked a wreck but apparently still worked. Seeing the rider scrutinising the Winnebago he said, "It not for sale," in halting English.

Bill strode over, "Can you take a look at the bike?. It's making unhealthy noises."

"After I have attended to my friends. Leave it with me."

"For how long?" Bill asked, knowing it was a dumb question.

"So, how did you two first meet?" Abbott asked, eating something called Z'ummeeta.

"He wants to know how we first met?" Hassan translated.

Kasem's wife placed a pot of steaming green tea on the table.

Hassan took a bite of the doughy dish. "We both fought in the Algerian War of Independence. It was a very complicated war, involving a large number of rival movements which fought against each other at different times. We fought on the side of the National Liberation Front, in a hard fight against the Algerian National Movement. When the war ended, we were horrified by the atrocities on all sides. We never wanted to have anything to do with war again."

Hassan listened while Kasem mumbled something through his beard.

"Kasem reminded me that we wanted to find a way to stop such wars from occurring. We were very naive then. But we met the Professor. He was fascinating to us. We met with him many times, to play chess and listen to his wisdom. Eventually, he told us about the secret alchemists he worked with."

"When and where did you meet him?"

"In a cafe, in Algiers. We could see the good work the Alchemy Circle does. We wanted to be part of it."

"So that's why we are in Ghadames?" Abbot laughed.

"Everything happens for a reason." Hassan grinned.

Bill was kicking his heels, waiting for the mechanic to arrive. The Winnebago was still parked outside, which meant the Moslem and the Australian were still in town.

Kasem slid aside the corrugated, wood framed door to his workshop. Then he noticed the motorcyclist hanging around, looking bored. The mechanic beckoned him, "Bring the bike in here."

Smith wheeled his monster into the shed. "There's a noise coming from the drive shaft."

Kasem kicked it over. The engine burst into life, making a deafening racket in the corrugated iron workshop. He turned it off. "You right. You need a new drive shaft."

"Can you get one?"

The mechanic frowned, looking around the bike, "time worn and not standard. Maybe in Tripoli. I ask around."

"I guess that could take some time."

He looked at the American. "Do you want me to fix?"

What else could he do? "Yeah, sure. How long?"

"Try three day."

Three days. Shit, if someone was trailing him they could quickly catch up in that time. "Who owns the caravan outside?"

Kasem didn't trust the American. "Friend. Why?"

"I need a lift. Can you ask for me? My name is Bill Smith."

"I ask him. No promise."

"Bill Smith. Sounds like a fake name to me," Hassan said as Kasem tinkered around with the Winnebago, later that day.

"I think you should be wary of him, my friend," the mechanic said, from underneath, tightening the exhaust pipe.

"It seems strange that he turns up just after us." Hassan crouched down, "You mean he was interested in this bus?"

"I saw him looking at it, twice."

Hassan noticed the cleaned number plate. "Did he wipe the dust of the front plate?"

"I did not see him do that."

"Well somebody did. If it was our Mr Smith why would my plate number interest him?"

Kasem put his head out. "Ask him yourself. He has just come in."

Hassan spun round to face the slightly overweight round-faced American. "Mr Smith?"

"Yes. Are you the owner of this bus?"

"Yes. It seems you have taken quite an interest in it."

Bill ignored the inference. "I need a ride and this," he said, indicating the old BMW, "is broken down. Can you give me a lift? I'll pay of course."

Hassan, bemused, said, "Why not wait till Kasem has fixed your bike? Enjoy the city and relax."

"Because I need to be on the move."

Hassan laughed. "Are you crazy, American? You don't even know where we are going."

Bill could see that Hassan was no fool. "Okay, I'm trying to get away from someone. If I stay here, they will find me."

It sounded like the truth. "We are going to Egypt. Be ready to leave first light tomorrow." Then he added, "It will be 5 thousand Dinar."

Bill took a step back. "That's a bit steep."

"If it's too rich for you wait for the next lift," Hassan shrugged.

Sometimes an article cuts through the fog of public debate and discourse to capture the true essence of a movement or belief system. One such article, written by the Anti Transhumanist League website owner, Helen Cleaver was posted on Newtech magazine website, encapsulating, in a nutshell, everything that is wrong with Transhumanism. Many of whom agreed with her sentiments, posted the article on their social networking pages. And it went into orbit from there - nearly a million hits in just under two weeks. Helen became noticed.

## Chapter 8

### Independent News Report:

In Bålsta, north of Stockholm, an after hours factory maintenance worker started checking a defective industrial robot. He headed off to cut the power supply when he received a call. It was from his boss, telling him he needed the rock bot up and running by the morning shift. The worker became angry. Of course, he knew that which was why he was still at work instead of being at his son's 6th birthday party. He needed a cool head to check on the bot. As he approached the rock-lifting robot, it suddenly came to life and attacked him, holding his head in a vice-like grip. He sustained four broken ribs and two head fractures. The flummoxed boss, who had never heard of such a thing, was fined 25,000 kronor for negligence.

The latest request from the Pentagon jarred the senses. Helen Cleaver, speaking as a special guest on National Radio, said, "In the light of the incident in Sweden where an industrial robot almost killed a maintenance worker, it's very worrying that the Pentagon is looking for contractors to provide a "Multi-Robot Pursuit System". A system that will get packs of robots to search for and detect 'non-cooperative humans'."

The host, Kevin Wright, said, "This would be very attractive to defence chiefs who become annoyed when their law officers are diverted from their regular duties to control robots. So having a pack of them controlled by one person makes logistical sense."

"Even so, it is a very worrying development."

"Why is that so?"

"Because, Kevin, the whole thing could easily get out of control with bystanders getting hurt and the destruction of property by focused bots on the rampage. Besides, the term 'non-cooperative human subject', could mean anything from apprehending an axe murderer to catching a government policy dissenter."

"So, Helen, how would you handle this project?"

"If it goes ahead there needs to be an independent watchdog system and strict guidelines for robotics manufacturers to follow. The public has been programmed to be in awe of such machines - machines that will ultimately be the death of them. Already DARPA has struck a deal with Taser International to mount stun weapons on its military robots. How long before we see packs of droids hunting down pesky demonstrators with paralysing weapons? Or could the packs even be lethally armed? Entrusting packs of robots with tasks - and arms - they are not up to handling leads to wrong decisions."

Helen started a thread on her blog about the history of real robots. Someone suggested they went back to ancient times. A contributor posted that they were not 'real' robots, as in digitally controlled industrial robots and 'Artificial Intelligence' that came about in the 1960s.



Another, whose avatar was 'grey wolf' talked about the various traditional ancient mythologies featuring fake people, like the mechanical servants made by the Greek god named as Hephaestus, the Vulcan to the Romans, and much more.

Exdude suggested that early modern real robot history started with the creation of an array of very complex mechanical toys, which were designed to do different tasks such as paintings, serving teas and firing arrows, by Japanese craftsman, Hisashige Tanaka during 1799–1881. The Japanese referred to him as Japan's Edison and or Karakuri Giemon. A few years later, Tanaka invented another creation, the invention of a radio-controlled torpedo. He wanted to develop his invention into a weapon further for inclusion in the US Navy arsenal.

Cutecat suggested the modern era of robotics started with the Westinghouse Electric Corporation in the year 1926 when Televox, the first robot to do useful work, was invented. After this, the company launched various other simple robots, such as the one named as Rastus. It was a robot created in the raw image of a black man.

Exdude replied that William Grey Walter, associated with the Burden Neurological Institute of Bristol, England during the years 1948 and 1949, invented the first ever electronic autonomous robots called Elmer and Elsie. These robots were primarily able to sense light and could form a contact with external objects, and use these stimuli to navigate further.

Dooby Sue added that another milestone in the modern 'real robot' history, was the creation of the first-ever digitally operated and programmable robot known as Unimate. George Devol, the independent inventor, later sold his invention to General Motors in 1960, where it worked at the Trenton plant, New Jersey, lifting hot pieces of metal from a die casting machine and stacking them.

<http://violetplanet.blogspot.com/2008/10/non-cooperative-human-subjects-danger.html>

<https://www.infowars.com/pentagon-developing-autonomous-humanoid-robots-to-perform-evacuation-operations/>

<http://robotobibok.com/informative-article-history.html>

## Chapter 9

### Independent News Report:

On a T V panel show, hosted by Samantha Harrison, Helen, now the most well known personal voice warning about out-of-control robotics made her argument. She stated, "For those who may not know, Transhumanism is a Utopian social movement and philosophy that looks toward a massive breakthrough in technological prowess, known as 'the singularity'. This singularity will open the door for Transhumanists to 'seize control of human evolution' and create a 'post-human species' of near immortals."

The host said, "But surely singularity will be a good thing for us."

Helen immediately countered, "Promises of 'immortality' and a disease-free life have led many individuals to long for the hope of artificial intelligence. This merging of man and machine, 'homo-roboticus' - is a 'borg' of sorts. The subject recently made headlines when a major Russian scientist promised Singularity to the wealthy elite and ruling class by 2045 and artificial bodies available as early as 2015."

"Why do you see that as a bad thing?"

"On the surface, it may be enticing to those willing to trust their new artificial brains and bodies to be hooked up to a massive super computer that has control over their every action (through the utilisation of RFID-like chips).

Isn't this controlled human scenario a little over the top?"

Helen, expecting this response, had her big guns ready to fire. "Not at all. Even the CEO Luke Muehlhauser boss of one of the largest and most well-known organisations, known as the Singularity Institute for Artificial Intelligence admits that the current boom in artificial intelligence will not go well for humans. He states, not only is AI research fast outpacing ethical and safety factors it can make humanity prey to the Transhumanist AI."

"So why can't morality be built into AI programming?"

"Unfortunately, it's not as simple as that. Simply put, AI is based on a destructive physics, not a creative one. It has to follow a directive that has determined the destruction of all life."

The host looked shocked. "Come on, that's just scaremongering," she said, with a nervous chuckle.

"If only it were so," Helen countered. "But we are plagued by half brilliant scientists who believe everything is subject to the 'heat death law' that demands maximum entropy. Now, I don't intend to get into a debate about this. Look it up for yourselves. Suffice it to say that researchers and analysts who have been following the concept of Singularity for decades echo my concerns about this." Before Samantha could strike, Helen continued, "With its ultimate goal of linking all hyper-intelligent androids with a 'cognitive network' of sorts, eventually even forfeiting physical bodies, it's clear that the Singularity movement even has its top supporters openly speaking out against it in many regards. What's even more clear is the fact that AI Singularity has no place for humankind — not even in the form of co-existence."

"Do you honestly think AI poses such a threat?"

Helen sighed deeply. "Haven't you been listening? CEO Luke Muehlhauser states that Transhumanist AI would end up 'optimising' the entire globe, starving humans of resources. In other words, AI will suppress people similar to the premise of I-Robot and similar films. This scenario is particularly disturbing when considering that the ruling elite has been promised immortality by way of artificial bodies and brains, and thus world rulership, by 2045."

Angela Durant, a panel member on the show, President of Heron Industries, rolled her eyes at Helen's suggestion. "As a scientist and CEO of a robotics company I can categorically say that amateurs, dealing in fantasy and fiction, like Helen, who are not conversant with the facts, hype up their stories with emotional hysteria."

"Don't roll your eyes at me, Angela. Here is a fact I would like you to refute. Transhumanists believe in their ageless post-human future with a desperate passion that borders on—and often serves as a substitute for—religious faith."

An independent Member of Parliament, another panel member, said, "I tend to agree with Helen. The Transhumanist movement is getting good press. For example, Time recently published a laudatory profile of Transhumanist author and futurist Raymond Kurzweil's quest to live forever, under the serious title "2045: The Year Man Becomes Immortal."

Helen added, "Similarly, Aubrey de Gray, who seeks to defeat human ageing, receives much respectful media attention—even though he claims his research should take precedence over funding health care aid to Africa. He went as far in his fanaticism to suggest that failing to fund the human immortality project is akin to terrorism. If this isn't dangerous obsession, I don't know what is."

Angela countered, "It is a great pity that when it comes to transhumanism, the media pays much attention to immortality and quirky personalities, but pays little attention to Transhumanism's beneficial core beliefs and goals.

The show's host finished by saying, "That robots are becoming more humanoid and more intelligent cannot be disputed. But is this technology right or wrong for us. Isn't it unlikely that Singularity or other technologies required to transform us into posthumans will make transhumanism so potentially destructive?"

Tom could usually tell a capital city: larger-than-life, in a hurry, full of its own importance. But Bern was an exception: small and charming – all cobbles, arcades and wooded slopes, wrapped in a loop of the River Aare. If he didn't know it, he would never have guessed he was in the Swiss capital. But Tom was not the carefree tourist. He was a suspected mass murderer, on the run and Bern was not a very big town in which to disappear. Tom's six day beard growth provided an element of disguise but close inspection would have given him away. Time progressed with interminable slowness as the archaeologist waited to hear from his contact. Mingling with the tourists seemed a good way to spend the time. So, with caution as his watchword, he took the riverside path to Nydegg Bridge – passing Bern's famous brown bears in their scrubby Bären Park – before climbing to the Rosengarten. In summer, more than 200 varieties of roses scented the air. This wasn't summer, but it was still a perfect spot from which to enjoy dusk. For a brief moment, Tom felt at peace as he watched the setting sun glint on the gilded domes of the Bundeshaus (Parliament), silhouetting the city's spires and turning the river a glassy green. He was hungry and broke and still had not heard from his contact who had promised to get him transport out of Switzerland.

After what seemed to him an eternity, Tom received his call and was told to make his way to a private airfield in Bleienbach. He took a bus to Herzogenbuchsee, on highway one. There, at the junction, he phoned a private number and shortly afterward a vehicle came to pick him up. The car stopped. Tom tentatively walked towards it. A window wound down. A voice said, "Hurry man. Do you want to get caught out here?"

Tom Graham got in the back seat. A stern, quiet, solid looking man sat beside him. The car then drove off. Yasir looked around from the passenger seat. "Mr Graham, we are going out on a limb for you here. I hope it is going to be worth our while."

"I think we are both after the same thing. I can help you find this Professor Sonata."

"These are the ground rules. You will do what we say when we say it. You will not go off on your own. Do you understand?"

Tom recalled how quickly the Vatican man had tricked him and how that landed him in prison. "Yes, I get it."

Yasir said, "Let's see it as a condition of your parole. If you mess up, you go straight back to gaol." Then he said, "A plane is waiting at Bleienbach airstrip. Follow me and do not say a word."

"Where are we going?"

"Do not breathe one word until I speak to you. Do you understand?"

Gritting his teeth, Tom muttered, "Yes, I get it."

Having passed through the picturesque Bleienbach village, the trio arrived at the airstrip. A twin-engine light aircraft was waiting on the apron. Tom Graham wearily followed Yasir Tiwanah out to the plane, wondering if his life was a case of out of the frying pan into the fire.

Shortly after Major Warner's patrol reached the Singularian Intelligence centre, undetected, Rodney held up the phone and, grinning, handed it to his CO. "Now it tells us the location of the person we call. So ring Lynch's number."

"What happens if he doesn't have his phone with him?"

"Just try it Major. We could get lucky."

"Supposing he doesn't or can't answer."

I'm dealing with morons, Rodney thought. "He doesn't have to answer. It just has to ring."

Warner keyed in the number. The phone rang, and the coordinates came up on the screen.

"Amazing Rodney! You're a fucking genius."

Tell me something I don't know, Rodney thought. "So where is he?"

"You're not going to believe this, but he is in here," the Major said, pointing, "inside the intelligence centre."

Rodney shrugged, "I thought as much. The same fucking place we're about to blow up."

"This makes things a bit more difficult," said, Major Warner, the master of understatement.

Rodney, seeing the uncertainty in the accidental commander's eyes, said, "get half the patrol to take all the explosive and half to find the Colonel. Now, follow me. Let's get this done."

Warner, at a loss as for how to respond, complied as he followed behind MacKay. Then bullets punched the ground nearby. The patrol ducked for cover as gunfire exploded behind them. Warner knelt down on one knee. The Major, sighting a Singularian, fired at the soldier, who went down immediately. The senior officer taking control, ordered, five Marines to stay and provide cover, while the rest followed him into the centre. Larson also stayed behind to watch Takran's condition.

It appeared that the shield was down. Warner had no idea why but there was no time to ask questions. He rang the colonel's phone to try and get more localised directions. A floor plan of the building came up with a tiny red glowing spot in one of the rooms. Resistance inside the building was surprisingly minimal. Warner figured the Singularians had set up most of their security outside the centre. Moving along the corridor, firing their guns to keep any hostile forces at bay, they found the cell containing Raf's phone. Warner held a small portion of Semtex to blow the door. Patting the plasticine - like substance around the lock, he inserted a tiny remote controlled fuse. The contingent fell back, out of harm's way. Warner activated the explosive which destroyed the lock, leaving the broken door open. The smoke cleared and a bruised and bleeding Lynch smiled weakly.

Raf climbed painfully to his feet. "Now, we have to get out of here."

Warner said, "Yes, before the place blows up."

"What?" the Colonel gasped.

"MacKay and his team are setting explosives to take out the shield," Warner explained proudly.

"Let's move then," the Colonel ordered.

Then there was the sound of pounding boots and gunfire from both ends of the corridor. "It was a fucking trap," Warner cried out, as they all backed into the cell.

Uneasiness and suspicion loomed the first day Hassan, Abbott and Bill travelled in the campervan. Little was spoken about their prospective plans as they headed to Tripoli and the Libyan coast (the inland desert roads, what few there were, were atrocious). So as not to give anything of importance away the trio travelled to the capital of Libya in stony silence. They passed the ancient Roman ruins of Sabratha, and its impressive mosaics and stunning coastal views. They hunted for a suitable eatery and found one down a fithy alleyway, with its assortment of garbage and beggars. Tucked away inside a small stone courtyard, was a cafe that suited their needs. Abbott ordered Samkeh Harrah Trabouleyeh, and the others ordered Tabbouleh Libanaise.

As they waited for their food, Abbott asked, "Why were you in such a hurry to leave Ghardames?"

Bill, sipping the sweet mint tea, answered, "I was in Algeria in the city of white ghosts." The American explained, "It's called that because married woman wear snow-white Burkas, with only one eye showing. Single girls wore the same burkas with both eyes visible. There was this girl Fatima. She was kind of amazing and what a body under that Burka."

"Don't tell me you tried it on with her," Abbott said.

"It was a dumb assed thing to do. Fatima wanted to marry an American and move to America. Her father and brothers were not enthusiastic. I had to leave in a hurry." he looked at the pair, trying to read them. Abbott looked as though he had swallowed the story but the bearded Arab, seemed suspicious.

Their meals arrived, and nothing more was mentioned until Hassan said, "I hope your trouble is not going to become our problem, my friend."

I hope so as well, he thought. "No, they chased me to the border but didn't cross over."

Hassan figured they would have to be dedicated chasing him across Libya and left it at that.

The trip continued relatively smoothly as they drove along the battle-scarred coastline strewn in places with abandoned and destroyed military vehicles, courtesy of the recent civil war the country had suffered. Wrecked tanks and a damaged fuel trucks used by Qaddafi's troops in Misratab lie amid the wreckage of what was once a covered vegetable market. There was firm evidence that much of the fighting took place in this area of the city. Rather than going into Benghazi Hassan opted for the inland town of AjdaBiya, the site of anti-government protests in which up to ten people were said to have been killed, some by pro-government snipers. Flags and banners proclaiming it a 'free city' were still on display for all to see. As they drove to a place to bed down for the night, Abbot saw the craters left by the Libyan air force. He was amazed how the brave protesters beat the siege by the Libyan Army. The Battle of Ajdabiya was the turning point of the war.

Hassan and Abbott had been driving in shifts and were both exhausted when they found a parking place near a well in the town. No accommodation was available, at least none they could find. So they all had to sleep in the Winnebago. It was a little bit cramped but no real problem. As they lie in their sleeping bags, Hassan asked Bill, "What were you doing in Ghardaia?"

Taken by surprise Bill said, "I had seen pictures on the Net. The place intrigued me. I was in Algeria, starting a new life, so I thought, why not?"

"So, how did you meet the woman. I mean they don't exactly mix with westerners." Abbott probed.

This questioning felt more like a third degree than friendly conversation. Smith diverted the subject. "You guys haven't told me what you're doing here."

Abbott was tempted to say we are looking for Atlantis but didn't. I read about Lawrence of Arabia when I was a kid. I wanted to see what it would be like."

Bill laughed dryly. "Then you're in the wrong location. besides, when I was in Australia they had their deserts."

Abbott thought, you smart arse, but said nothing.

Hassan yawned, "Time for sleep. We have a lot of ground to cover tomorrow."

General Logan Schulz greeted Dorian when she stepped into the Star Gate Control room (SGC). They walked in silence, to the conference room, where the Government representatives were waiting for her.

Satisfied they were away from prying ears, the meeting commenced.

"They're rather unhappy about this turn of events, Dorian." General Schulz mumbled, his ever-present cigar impeding his speech.

Dorian, taking a deep breath to contain her biting anger for the Pentagon, nodded. "I can imagine. especially as they are mostly to blame." Such comments in the meeting would probably seal her fate as director of the project. It wasn't that she was worried about losing her position at the Atlantis base. In some ways to be relinquished from her responsibilities would be a pleasant change for her. She smiled, wanly, "What do you think the chances are?"

"Of them removing you?" General Schulz asked. When she nodded, he continued. "Zero. You're the best we have for Atlantis, and you have quite a few friends, Dorian, some of which you are not even aware. Relax, it's not going to happen." He stopped as they approached the conference room, and nodded at the Marine who turned to open the door. As they entered General Schulz whispered, "They're the ones who should be worried, Dorian, not you."

As Dorian walked with much more confidence into the room, the cavalier Brigadier General Jackson Neill stood up and shook her hand., "Good to see you, Dr Gibson." He got straight to the point. "What's happening with our guys on Atlantis?"

"The latest Intel shows they have been split up - the half with Raf is okay, but half of the patrol has been captured, along with Dr Rodney MacKay."

"What, on the Island?"

Dumb question, Dorian thought. "Yes."

"Hm, I see our friend Lynch has gotten himself into trouble again." Before she could respond, Neill's phone rang. He turned to her, "I'm sorry, but you have to report to these..." He trailed off, gesturing to the three seated representatives."

"Thank you, General." She replied, conjuring up a small smile. "Shall we get started?" she said, turning to the Pentagon guy.

Mr Wolesley nodded. "The first decision we would like to speak about is the situation on the island."

Gibson settling herself into a chair prepared to endure whatever they threw at her.

Dr Gibson listened to the panel's assessment, then went on the attack. "The fact of the matter is that the Atlantis project is on a war-footing. Unknown to the world, UN personnel are fighting a campaign to liberate the people of Atlantis. We are no longer merely a research group, and we need more resources, immediately,"

The panel became silent.

General Schulz, who had returned to the conference table asked, "Dr Gibson, what's the status on the island at present."

A contingent of Colonel Lynch and three troops carried out a recce on the island. Colonel Lynch disappeared. Later reports indicated he'd been captured by the rebels. Major Warner took a patrol of combat troops to rescue the Colonel and destroy the rebels intelligence centre. The Marines, under the rescued Lynch, entered the zone. Another unit that included Dr MacKay got taken, prisoner. We have lost communication with them since."

The General rolled his cigar between his fingers. "Right! Then we have to organise supplies pronto. Make an inventory of all you need, and we will make sure you get it."

"Thank you, Sir. For a start, we need another battalion. But by the time they're trained and oriented for Gate duty, it could be too late to help our people."

The general puffed up his chest, stirring his medals, "I will have a dozen action, ready troops, already 'Gate' trained by tomorrow."

"With respect General, even if they are 'Gate prepared, twelve is nowhere near enough."

He smiled wryly, "Oh, these guys will be sufficient. They're robots."

Even Dorian sat with her mouth open this time.

Colonel Lynch led his men by the dark of the moon. It was a curious thing but, on Atlantis, for two nights during the moon's cycle, it never showed at all. They had reached the facility undetected. Dr MacKay was in Corridor 25A, according to his phone. Two Marines went forward ready to use some plastic on the doors. But they were unlocked. Raf was unhappy and very wary. It looked like they were walking into a trap. Any delay put the prisoners at further risk. Lynch immediately borrowed a Swiss Army knife from one of the gathered soldiers. He cut into the thin wall and gently peeled a section of the covering away. There, amongst the myriad of coloured wires was the ones he wanted but he wasn't sure about the colour coding.

Major Warner had electrician training, so he came forward. But he shook his head in puzzlement. So they decided to leave it.

There was still no sign of any Singularians. Was the facility deserted, Raf wondered?

As though reading his thoughts, Kronyn said, "They sometimes gather in one place."

The Major's LSD gave no indication of the Singularian presence nearby, so the Colonel took three men, including The Atlantean, and wandered down the next winding passage. Then he got an idea, betrayed by the silly smirk. He used the knife to open another section of wall and examine it. Eureka! He thought. Finding what he was looking for, he said, "Major Warner, I need all of the C4 we have tucked in and blown up," Lynch stated, gesturing to the wall.

Major Warner peered inside the wall and raised his eyebrows. "This is a shield weakness?" He said with some scepticism.

Raf, rolling his eyes said. "Of course it is! This power line is a connection from the shield generator to the central power. Although It's not the main line, it should be enough to cause a short, which, in turn, will shut down their shields. Then they, wherever they are, will be fighting blind. So blow it up."

As the sabotage was set up, Kronyn glanced uneasily down at the LSD. A large group of Singularians were still in one place, Why, he wondered? There was no logical reason for them to be

gathering. Then he corrected himself. Of course, there was. He alerted the Colonel, "I think the Singularians are all in one place because they are holding some ceremony."

Pausing for time Lynch adjusted his helmet chin strap. "Then let's get our boys, while they're distracted. He turned to Warner, tapping his radio. "Major, before you blow the shield, let's liberate our people."

Warner, finishing off, hooked up all of the explosives to go off, using one detonator. He spoke to the Colonel. "You better take Kronyn and Takran back as well."

Lynch nodded. "Good Colonel Lynch, out." He tapped his radio once more, turning it off.

Kronyn followed behind a few Marines as they walked a safe distance away. Major Warner was explaining what would happen and how powerful the blast would be. Kronyn waved a hand at him, actually shutting the officer up. Warner handed out earplugs, silently, of course, and Kronyn stuffed them into his ears. Major Warner ducking, took a deep breath, then he pressed the detonator's button.

Even through the earplugs, Kronyn could hear the blast and felt the explosion punching into his chest. He staggered back, and ran his hands over his head, trying to get back into the zone'. Ripping the ear plugs out, he tossed them aside. Immediately joining Warner, he examined the damage and connected his data screen to a few nearby wires. Yes, the shields were down.

An unforeseen problem showed up. Kronyn found that he couldn't lock onto Rodney's life sign. He told the Colonel, adding, You'll have to find him yourself. Damn! He only had fifteen personnel, including Kronyn. Turning to his men, he ordered, "We'll form two groups. Major Warner will lead one; I will lead the other. We only have analogue two-way radios, but we can keep in touch. Let's do it."

When Warner reached the cells, they were empty with their doors left open. "Could they have escaped?" Kronyn asked.

Warner shook his head. "Shit! The Singularians have taken them somewhere else," he cursed.

Then there was gunfire aimed in the Marines' direction.

Just then Lynch's old radio crackled. He heard, "Colonel, This is Major Warner. The cells are empty but were under attack from a patrol of Singularians. Assistance is required!"

"What's your location?"

The Sergeant paused as more gunfire erupted. "We're in Section 3, and we ..." His voice was swiftly cut off, followed by shooting and screams. The radio was still on, and Rafael heard the sounds of his men dying.

"Aren't we going to save them?" Sergeant Cronkite asked, nervously.

"We can't." Raf snapped. "We couldn't get there in time. Besides, we have to look for MacKay and the others." Turning to his contingent, he said, "Let's move!. We have to leave here, now."

Having fought off the Singularian patrol, the remaining Marines, consisting of Warner, Kronyn and five others, retreated in silence. Checking around corners and bends, they held their weapons at the ready. They encountered and took care of three guards. Then, they moved faster as their night vision goggles, showed the exit ahead. But Warner knew they were not out of the woods. There would be a reception party waiting for them. If the Major was honest with himself, he didn't know how they could survive.



Dayton was pleased and surprised to hear from Daniel, but his son sounded somewhat apprehensive, but wouldn't say why. He just needed to see his father urgently.

Daniel's request could not have come at a more inconvenient time. Dayton was to be briefed for an upcoming mission. He managed to squeeze his son in just before his flight.

Daniel parked his Porsche 911s outside the entrance of the Renaissance London Heathrow Hotel, where he handed over his keys to access valet service.

Passing signs promoting hotel features: a health club, cocktail bar and Starbucks coffee shop, he took a lift to the fourth floor, where he located suite 413. At his knock, his father opened the door and welcomed him.

Eyeing his father's already packed suitcase and overnight bag, he said, "Where are you off to this time?" Daniel asked as Dayton prepared drinks from the mini bar.

"The Middle East. Sounds exotic but I'll be stuck in an office dealing with boring stuff."

Daniel took his scotch. "What, for the Soter Group?"

Dayton almost dropped his glass. He couldn't believe what he was hearing.

Daniel smirked. It wasn't often he got the drop on his elusive father. "It's no good denying it. I had lunch with Hayden the other day. He told me about it."

Dayton could not believe it. He had done all he could to shield his son from the dirty side of his life. "Hayden!"

"Hayden Holmes. Apparently, you two are Agency brothers in arms."

What the hell was the Foreign Minister up to, he wondered. "What did he say?"

"Not a lot. He suggested I talk to you. Hence, here I am." he made a sweeping gesture with his hands.

"Did he say why he mentioned it?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. Hayden is trying to get me accepted as a Soter member. Carry on the family tradition, that sort of thing." He then added, "Mind you, pater, I had no idea we had such a tradition."

"And you weren't supposed to." Dayton sat down heavily on the plush leather lounge. "Sit down Daniel. Cat's are terribly hard to get back into bags."

Daniel sat down, enjoying immensely the power he now had over his father. All those birthdays, school awards, school plays at which his father had been absent, came flooding back. But he kept very calm, stemming the seething emotional ocean below the stoic surface. "Hayden said to ask you about it. So tell me."

Dayton dreaded such a moment rearing its ugly head. He rubbed his shaved pate and felt a sharp twinge from his injured shoulder. Dayton thought I'm getting too old for this shit. He had decided this would be his last assignment. Then Lord Lynsey would retire gracefully to his country seat. He had almost made it through without getting his son involved. But the interfering Hayden had spoiled that! "Okay, look at it like those Star War movies you loved as a child. There are light and dark forces in the world." He felt stupid saying it.

Daniel got up. "You never take me seriously, do you. You try to fob me off with this shit."

"Calm down son. This explanation is not easy for me. In this case, the dark forces are the Diabolus Sect, and the light forces the Soter Group." Before Daniel had a chance to reply, he said, "This is for real. I know it sounds crazy, but this goes way beyond conspiracy theories."

"So what is this Soter? Who runs it? How is it funded? What does it do?"

Dayton poured them another scotch. Where to start, he wondered. "It's ruined my life, and I'm damned if I am going to let it ruin yours."

"That's bloody typical of you father. Always wanting to be in control. When I was young, you were hardly ever there for me so don't try to be my keeper now."

The words bit hard, making Dayton feel ashamed. How could he possibly convey the shady side of his life, the side he had always hidden from his family, for their protection - for humanity's protection. And how difficult it had been at times. "Daniel, listen to me, please. If Hayden recruits you into Soter, you will have no control over your life. From that moment onwards you will be solely and wholly fully committed to stopping Diabolus, wherever and whenever Soter calls upon you."

Daniel, angry, exploded, "So now you are using the fear card to get me to do your bidding!"

That was it for Dayton. Nothing he said was going to make the slightest bit of difference. "Of course you must do what you decide to do. But it's a fucking war zone out there, and if you get involved in this Soter shit, you will live your own nightmare, unable to share it with anybody - even your family. And you, like me, will find yourself missing out on important moments in your children's lives. You will have to lie to your loved ones and pretend your life with them is normal. You will become an automaton for a noble cause but a very lonely one. I can say no more about it."

Daniel had never seen his father so passionate, yet tired. "Who is this Diabolus Sect?" he asked, more timidly.

"They are incredibly difficult for the average person to comprehend. They believe that the only worthwhile activity is to destroy things and bring about chaos. They are disciples of the heat death law of physics. They worship the Second law of thermodynamics, and they do everything they can to speed up the entropic process."

Daniel was incredulous. "But why? Is it greed, the lust for power, the need for control. What on earth is their motive?"

"They are totally irrational. Totally disorganised, as a global group, and very, very dangerous. They make psychopaths seem like Mother Theresa."

Daniel became serious. "have you ever met any of them?"

Dayton nodded, "And each leaves a scar on my soul." He sighed heavily, "It would have been so much better if you could have lived your life without knowing these things." He paused and said, "I have put both our lives at risk just by telling you this. Please do not breath a word of it to anybody."

"Not even mother."

"Especially not your mother. I have shielded her from my nightmare world all these years. And I pray to God that she never finds out."

The Winnebago struggled on to Tobruk, where, with the last vestiges of power, rolled to a halt just opposite the Al Bitnan Hospital. Abbott pulled up behind in the Jeep, utterly exhausted. Guni hadn't said much on the way. Abbott wanted to hand him over to the Libyan police. The gun was bagged

and only had Guni's prints on it. Bill came towards the Jeep. "The old bus has died. But at least it got us here."

Abbott ignored the Yanks pathetic attempt at levity. "Get Hassan for me."

"The poor guy can hardly get out of his seat." There was silence, "then he said, "You go and see him. I'll stay here and guard this piece of shit."

Abbott had never been one to speak what he felt, but he was learning fast. "No way! You're just as likely to let him go. I'm taking him to the cops."

"Okay, you don't trust me, I get that. But what you don't seem to get is that Guni is programmed to hunt me down and kill me. And he won't rest until he does. So why the fuck would I want to free him. If it had been up to me, I would have cut his throat back in the fucking desert."

Abbott stood his ground but what the Yank said made sense. He left Bill with his prisoner and walked over to the driver's window of the beaten up bus. The door opened, and Hassan stepped down. "I think we should hand him over to the police," Abbott said.

"It would be a good solution, my friend if the police were not corrupt. They want payment for everything. We have to pay to get Guni locked up. Then someone pays, and they release him."

"It still gives us time to lose him."

"I think it is better than we do not involve the police, if possible. We ditch this," the Arab said, sentimentally patting the old bus, "and take Guni in the Jeep a few miles into the desert; then leave him to find his way back here."

"And what about Bill?"

"Bill and I have had a long talk. He can be useful."

"Can we trust him?"

"Yes, I believe we can."

Abbott, still not convinced, shrugged. "Okay, if you say so."

After grabbing their gear from the Stricken Winnebago and gassing up the Jeep, Hassan, refreshed by strong coffee, drove them past the deep harbour considered the best natural port in northern Africa, but due to lack of relevant nearby land sites, not the most attractive. Tobruk was surrounded by a desert, only lightly populated with nomadic herdsman, travelling from oasis to oasis, so it didn't take more than a few kilometres to find a suitable place to drop off their prisoner.

"You can't just leave me out here," Guni protested.

Hassan handed him a bottle of water. "Make it back to Tobruk, and you are free."

"It's more than he deserves," Bill said, gesturing his preference by drawing his finger across his throat.

"I'll never make it in this heat."

"It'll start cooling in a couple of hours," Hassan said. You're more likely to freeze to death, once night sets in."

"This is not over," Guni snarled, as the trio went back to his Jeep.

With the Singularians almost upon them, Major Warner did some quick thinking. "Captain Ledar, have you got anything for me?" Warner asked over the gunfire.

Captain Ledar nodded and pulled out a flash bang, pulled the pin and threw it into the corridor. The flash, with the loud noise, shook the cell. Two three man teams burst out into the hallway, firing in both directions. The Singularians who were left sought cover.

Raf grabbed an MP25 and took over command. Their goal was to quickly vacate the building and distance themselves from the explosions to come. But the Colonel overruled the plan to blow up the intelligence centre, deeming it unnecessary.

Major Warner and his team moved ahead, stepping over fallen Singularians. As they approached the entrance to the building, he turned to his people. "We've gotten lucky. We have to move, now." With that, he led them outside into an eerie silence. The enemy seemed to have retreated. He figured it must have been the weakness in the shields.

Rafael Lynch was exhausted. After being captured and beaten while questioned, his body felt like hell. But worse, it was absolute torture for his mind. He had had to let go of any hope of rescue. But deep down he knew they would do whatever possible to free him. Hanging on to that glimmer of hope kept him going.

Takran had come out of his weird state and was spewing his stomach's contents over the ground. Larson gave a huge sigh. He didn't think the boy would make it. He then turned his attention to Raf. The Singularians had found his Achilles heel - in his case Achilles shoulder - using it as a focal point for their torture.

Raf winced as Larson probed around. He said, "You know, sometimes I wish I could afford to be the weakest. Well, not really but I think you get what I mean."

Larson did. Keeping up the toughness and hardness act put a lot of pressure on the psyche, "You desperately need some R and R, Colonel."

Rodney was not as lucky as the others. While trying to escape The Singularins captured him and roughly pushed him into one of the cells. A short while afterwards Rodney, having been, lying on the small cot groaned as he heard the door open. He didn't think his old body could stand another bout of pain. A black skinned man with shoulder length, grey hair approached. Two Singularians forced Rodney up onto his knees. Pressure increased in his head and he felt as though he would fall over but seeing the creepy looking man with dark grey eyes jerked him to alertness. His recently acquired head injury, from when the Singularians had captured him, oozed more blood, which trickled down his cheek and neck. His ribs ached, and entire left leg was aflame with pain radiating from his knee, which felt dislocated. He could only hope that the Colonel and some of the Marines had survived and would come to his rescue.

The tall black man, in a deep, resonant voice, said, "Nobody is going to come and save you."

The guy could read his thoughts. "Who are you?" Rodney asked, realising the creepy man must be important, given the number of guards flanking him.

The long-haired man smiled, "Do forgive my manners. I am Mendes Amwon, the master of this Island paradise." running a finger along his jaw; he demanded, "Now, your name."

Rodney winced in pain, and then looked the master directly in the eye, his face otherwise impassive. "I'm Dr Rodney MacKay of the Atlantis Project."

"Why have you come here?"

"It's just one of our regular diplomatic missions to share technologies."

"Dr MacKay, Mendes said, testing the name. "You are lying to me."

Rodney bravely smiled, "Whatever you want to believe."

"How do you get back through the Gate," Mendes asked, out of the blue."

"I won't tell you!" Rodney defied.

"Very well doctor. Have it your way. I will leave you to the tender mercies of my Men. Then I will ask the question again."

Rodney prayed he could stand the pain. They wouldn't kill him, not while he had something Mendes wanted. That made him force a weak smile. "I will never tell you," he said, gritting his teeth.

"Oh, but I believe you will Dr MacKay." Mendes then lied, "Your fellow saboteurs, the ones who survived, have been captured, and they will die, one by one, each time you refuse to tell me how to get through the Gate."

Rodney wondered if the others had made it back through the 'Gate'?

Somehow he'd gotten separated from them in the darkness, and the bad guys had gotten the drop on him. After that, for him, it was all downhill. Rodney, although not the bravest of men, went automatically into self-preservation mode when anything threatened his life. For this reason, he put on a brave if futile front when facing up to his enemies. Now he could only pray that Amwon had lied and that The Colonel and his men were free to rescue him.

Consciousness began with a splitting headache. Where the hell was he, Tom wondered. He was in a strange room with no windows. The Archaeologist couldn't hear any voices or any other sounds. He tried gathering his woolly thoughts in the eerie silence. Recollections filtered through his mind. "He was on a plane with other men. They must have drugged him on the aircraft because he had no memory of landing or being brought to where he now found himself. His mind shot back to that night, the terrible brutality, and the theft but nothing much before that. Yes, he'd found out about his lost treasure. A chance meeting in a park. Tom had had a chance conversation with an intriguing stranger who had left a book on a bench. Inside it was a floor plan diagram of the Cathedral. Marked on the chart was an arrow pointing to a secret chamber. Shaken from his reverie, he heard footsteps coming his way. The door was unlocked and in strode Yasir and another man, darkly tanned, blue eyes and curly black hair.

"How are you feeling today," Yasir asked.

"You drugged me."

"It was the simplest way to get you here," He smiled, his chubby fingers fiddling with some beads. Today we start debriefing you. The more you cooperate, the more your freedom is assured." Then he said, "We will be ready for you in about an hour. Meanwhile, you can breakfast, and clean clothes will soon arrive." With that, he about turned and left the cell.

Tom was left back with his memories. Perhaps it wasn't serendipity. Maybe the stranger set him up. Yes, that was it! The stranger worked for someone else probably the murderous thief Francisco Sonata. The very name made Tom want to vomit. He decided, yes he would help the Palestinian to get the evil Spaniard.

"Tell me about this treasure," Yasir said, in their first interview.

Tom visualised it in his mind. "There was a mosaic with a black sun on it. I immediately knew it was Merovingian. I was awed by the realisation I was standing in the primary chamber of the commanderie of the Priory of Sion?"

"Surely other people had been down into the chamber."

"I would have thought so - yes."

"So why would they not have found these relics?"

Tom chuckled. "Oh, I see! You think the mosaic was the treasure. No, my amazing find was in one of the cathedral's dark recesses. Unnoticed thousands of times by people as they have passed it. But I found it."

"What was it exactly?"

"A cup and plate, connected to the legends of Cain, Solomon, Christ and Lucifer." Tom looked Yasir in the eye. Now I know why he stole it. He wanted the link with Lucifer."

"Didn't you say it was sold to the Vatican?" Yasir asked puzzled.

"Yes, Salvatore Lucini handled the transaction."

"I still don't get why Professor Sonata would sell it to the Church, not if he wanted it for some weird ritual," Tom said, scratching his head.

"He sold to someone else - called the 'Merchant'. Then he sold it on to the Church."

"But he still sold it. Why?"

"I have no idea, but knowing something of how he operates. logic probably doesn't come into it."

Yasir pulled a chair up close to Tom. "Maybe I can figure out more if you tell me about This Mark of Cain."

Tom took a deep breath. "As far as I know, the 'Mark of Cain' is believed to have been inflicted upon Adam's first son. It is said to have been caused by a stone that fell from Lucifer's crown during the war in Heaven and bounced off Cain's forehead."

Yasir laughed "A stone fell from heaven and hit Cain on earth."

"You may well laugh, Yasir, but according to this lore, the mark was in the shape of a red serpent. The jewel from Lucifer's crown then became a sacred relic and was handed down dynastically from father to son, eventually coming into the possession of King Solomon. He hired a master craftsman to carve the huge stone into a plate and drinking vessel. According to this same legend, these very utensils were later used by Christ at the Last Supper."

"I thought this professor was a smart guy."

"Look Yasir, This story, bizarre though it may be, is emblematic of the unambiguously Luciferian symbolism that always recurs in regards to the lore of the Grail bloodline - symbolism that has been consciously cultivated by the Merovingian throughout their history. As such it was certainly a significant find."

Yasir got up, shaking his head slowly. "I don't know. how is this going to get us to this Professor Sonata?"

"I've been wracking my brains. I believe this Lucini is the key."

"How is that so?"

"Remember, it doesn't have to be logical, as long as it causes disruption. So let's say Sonata sells it to the 'Merchant, whom he knows will try and sell it to the Vatican. Well, that would be his first choice. The Vatican pays the price. Then Lucini passes it back to the Professor."

"What happens when it is discovered missing."

"That's hardly likely to happen. The Church hoards this stuff, catalogues it, and mostly forgets about it."

Yasir was beginning to see the pattern. Being illogical it could make sense."

<http://www.discovery.org/a/17311>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/switzerland/bern/articles/Berne-Switzerland-a-cultural-city-guide/>

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2013/02/125-ancient-libya/misrata-market-gigapan>

## Chapter 10

Whenever he dined at the Quo Vadis restaurant, in Soho, Hayden Holmes, fantasised those more genteel Victorian Gentlemen's clubs where a Gentleman's word was his bond. Nursing a club soda, he waited for his lunch guest. He had just opened the Times when Daniel Lynsey arrived. The tanned guy with messy wavy hair sat down." He was surprised to get an invitation to lunch from the Foreign Secretary. They had never met, so Daniel wondered what it was all about.

Hayden looked up, "Hello Daniel. Glad you could make it. How's your father? Mending, I hope."

Daniel wondered which question to answer first. Then he decided on none.

"I'm intrigued as to why I am here,"

"Intrigue will have to wait. I'm ready to order."

"Any recommendations?"

"I don't think you can go wrong with the venison & pork terrine and pickles. That's what I'm having."

"I'll try one as well."

"Jolly good. And a carafe of corbières Vieilles Vignes to go with it."

"Sounds good. So why have you got me here?"

"Have you heard of the 'Soter Group'?"

"No. What is it?"

"So your father has told you nothing."

"We are not what you would call, close," Daniel smirked, brushing some hair from his eyes

"Most Soter people do not get married and have families. It amazes me how your father has been able to juggle the two."

Daniel stared at Hayden. "What do you mean, juggling the two?"

The wine arrived. After the wine waiter was happy sir liked it, he left the carafe and their table.

"Daniel, I cannot say too much about it now. It has to be a clean environment. But what I'm saying now, I am not saying, if you get my drift."

"I do wish you would get to the point," Daniel moaned, sipping his red.

"Okay, I will tell you this. This other thing your father is involved with is a very exclusive group with tremendous influence. You cannot become a member without being invited and accepted by three existing members."

Daniel was becoming interested but still very cautious.

"So, what does this exclusive group do?"

"Solve problems mostly."

Lunch arrived, Daniel hadn't had venison for a while. His eyes grew large as he looked at the platter.

Hayden mentioned, "Did you know that Karl Marx, wrote much of Das Kapital in a room above here."

"Really!"

"Yes and I think he would have thoroughly approved of this fare. Nothing's too good for the workers," he quipped.

"I don't know. This delicious meal is hardly proletariat food."

"You miss the point, old boy," Hayden said, cutting a chunk of venison.

"Which is?"

"Do you know the trouble with conspiracy theories?"

"What, that they're a load of old bollocks?"

"No. That these wild accusations may be masking the real conspiracies."

"I take it there is a point to all this, apart from the fabulous lunch," Daniel queried, curious but annoyed.

"Yes. The point is if I can get two more referrers, would you like to be a member of the Soter Group?"

Daniel smiled, wondering how it would benefit him in the merchant banking business. "Possibly but I'll need to know a lot more about it."

"May I suggest you talk to your father."

Daniel grinned, "I may very well do that."

Dayton looked out the cottage window at the thick grey clouds gathering over the ocean. He was off the pain killers. He hated to be controlled by drugs of any kind, so that was a good sign. A good sign for him but not for Maddie, who sensed he would soon be gone again to God knows where and she would miss him. He would miss her of course - but differently. He told himself it was for the greater good. But what was the greater good? The question vexed him. Why did kind exist, even as an abstract? Maybe there was no reason. His father had told him, as a child, there was a reason for everything, or nothing could exist without its reason for being. In recent years he'd questioned this



truism. The Diabolus Sect didn't need a reason as long as their actions caused suffering and pain to others. Maybe for them, it was reason enough?

Maddie broke into his thoughts. "Hi Dayt, I've found that book on Druidism."

He looked out the window. Thunderheads were rolling in, and rain began lashing at the window panes. He turned to Maddie. "Looks like the beach walk is off. So we may as well look at your book."

"It's not about the book, Dayt. It's the mystery surrounding Druidism. Did you know that the origin of the word Druid is under dispute."

"I thought it had something to do with 'men of the trees' from the Irish Drui."

"Well done, but it could equally be argued to have come from the Greeks. Their forest gods and tree deities were called Dryades. Again, there is a school of thought that Druidism can be traced to the Gaelic Druidh, meaning 'a wise man' or a sorcerer."

"Fascinating Maddie. But I'm not sure where it's leading to."

"Why does everything we talk about have to lead somewhere?"

A deep rumble from the sky got Dayton's attention. "Maddie my love, everything leads to something else. Nothing is separated, and everything is linked. That's what the latest quantum science tells us, anyhow. Having a meeting at my place led to my injury. That led me here, to spend some time with you. This will lead me somewhere else."

"Where this time?"

"We have word that one of the Rottafellers is raising capital to rebuild the Jewish Temple on the Dome site."

She gasped, "That's not okay!"

"No, it's not. Especially since part of the deal for quietening things down was Metayahu's promise that nothing would be built on the site."

"As long as he keeps his word what's the problem?"

"As long as he is allowed to keep his word. You know what Middle East politics is like."

She frowned, trembling. "You're not going back there, are you?"

"I may have to, but I'm not looking forward to it."

"The release was filed with Market News and republished at CNNMoney.com," James Goldman, the Mossad Director stated, looking at the worried expression on the face of the Israeli Prime Minister. "It claims that 'Supriem David Rottafeller' is director of a company, Kando Holdings group, which is working with a Jewish Temple organisation to rebuild the Third Temple."

Metayahu tapped his fingers, nervously. "But we gave our word that there was to be no building on the site." Then he asked, "James, how do we know this is genuine?"

"We are not 100 percent sure. There is the possibility that this is just rhetoric to fan the fires, but we cannot just take the chance."

Metayahu slammed his hand on the desk. "Right, I will have the site heavily guarded day and night. No one is to have access unless authorised by this office."

"Yes, sir. "May I add that the report states that Kando Holdings will be raising funds to go towards building the Third Temple in Jerusalem, in strict co-ordinance with The Temple Institute, Rabbi Hiam Goldstein and The Palestinian National Interest Committee, which is supporting Husam Ghajis for President of Palestine."

"What does the Temple Institute group have to say?"

"They say it's a scam. But then the TI would, wouldn't they?"

"Yes, well keep me up to scratch on this."

As soon as the director left, the Prime Minister contacted his secretary, "Get me David Rottafeller online please."

This Third Temple scenario was a worrying but not a wholly unexpected situation. Officially Israel was funded by America to the tune of some \$30 billion every year in the form of economic aid. Metayahu knew that in reality, this figure is just the tip of the iceberg. There were many billions of dollars more in hidden costs and economic losses lurking beneath the surface. A recent Treasury estimate, in a secret report, had concluded that US support for the state of Israel cost American taxpayers nearly \$3 trillion, not \$30 billion annually. Much of that came from lobbying in the Senate and the financial influence of the Rottafeller family. The Prime Minister worried about how his heartfelt promise to the Islamic states would stack up against the pressure to build the Third Temple.

General Logan Schulz greeted Dorian when she stepped into the Star Gate Control room (SGC). They walked in silence, to the conference room, where the Government representatives were waiting for her.

Satisfied they were away from prying ears, the meeting commenced.

"They're rather unhappy about this turn of events, Dorian." General Schulz mumbled, his ever-present cigar impeding his speech.

Dorian, taking a deep breath to contain her biting anger for the Pentagon, nodded. "I can imagine. especially as they are mostly to blame." Such comments in the meeting would probably seal her fate as director of the project. It wasn't that she was worried about losing her position at the Atlantis base. In some ways to be relinquished from her responsibilities would be a pleasant change for her. She smiled, wanly, "What do you think the chances are?"

"Of them removing you?" General Schulz asked. When she nodded, he continued. "Zero. You're the best we have for Atlantis, and you have quite a few friends, Dorian, some of which you are not even aware. Relax, it's not going to happen." He stopped as they approached the conference room, and nodded at the Marine who turned to open the door. As they entered General Schulz whispered, "They're the ones who should be worried, Dorian, not you."

As Dorian walked with much more confidence into the room, the cavalier Brigadier General Jackson Neill stood up and shook her hand., "Good to see you, Dr Gibson." He got straight to the point. "What's happening with our guys on Atlantis?"

"The latest Intel shows they have been split up - the half with Raf is free, and half are imprisoned, along with Dr Rodney MacKay."

"What, on the Island?"

Dumb question, Dorian thought. "Yes."

"Hm, I see our friend Lynch has gotten himself into trouble again." Before she could respond, Neill's phone rang. He turned to her, "I'm sorry, but you have to report to these..." He trailed off, gesturing to the three seated representatives."

"Thank you, General." She replied, conjuring up a small smile. "Shall we get started?" she said, turning to the Pentagon guy.

Mr Wolesley nodded. "The first decision we would like to speak about is the situation on the island."

Gibson settling herself into a chair prepared to endure whatever they threw at her.

Dr Gibson listened to the panel's assessment, then went on the attack. "The fact of the matter is that the Atlantis project is on a war-footing. Unknown to the world, UN personnel are fighting a campaign to liberate the people of Atlantis. We are no longer merely a research group, and we need more resources, immediately,"

The panel became silent.

General Schulz, who had returned to the conference table asked, "Dr Gibson, what's the status on the island at present."

A contingent of Colonel Lynch and three troops carried out a recce on the island. Colonel Lynch disappeared. Later reports indicated he'd been captured by the rebels. Major Warner took a patrol of combat troops to rescue the Colonel and destroy the rebels intelligence centre. The Marines, under the rescued Lynch, entered the zone. Another unit that included Dr MacKay got taken, prisoner. We have lost communication with them since."

The General rolled his cigar between his fingers. "Right! Then we have to organise supplies pronto. Make an inventory of all you need, and we will make sure you get it."

"Thank you, Sir. For a start, we need another battalion. But by the time they're trained and oriented for Gate duty, it could be too late to help our people."

The general puffed up his chest, stirring his medals, "I will have a dozen action, ready troops, already 'Gate' trained by tomorrow."

"With respect General, even if they are 'Gate prepared, twelve is nowhere near enough."

He smiled wryly, "Oh, these guys will be sufficient. They're robots."

Even Dorian sat with her mouth open this time.

Colonel Lynch led his men by the dark of the moon. It was a curious thing but, on Atlantis, for two nights during the moon's cycle, it never showed at all. They had reached the facility undetected. Dr MacKay was in Corridor 25A, according to his phone. Two Marines went forward ready to use some plastic on the doors. But they were unlocked. Raf was unhappy and very wary. It looked like they were walking into a trap. Any delay put the prisoners at further risk. Lynch immediately borrowed a Swiss Army knife from one of the gathered soldiers. He cut into the thin wall and gently peeled a section of the covering away. There, amongst the myriad of coloured wires was the ones he wanted but he wasn't sure about the colour coding.

Major Warner had electrician training, so he came forward. But he shook his head in puzzlement. So they decided to leave it.

There was still no sign of any Singularians. Was the facility deserted, Raf wondered?

As though reading his thoughts, Kronyn said, "They sometimes gather in one place."

The Major's LSD gave no indication of the Singularian presence nearby, so the Colonel took three men, including The Atlantean, and wandered down the next winding passage. Then he got an idea, betrayed by the silly smirk. He used the knife to open another section of wall and examine it. Eureka! He thought. Finding what he was looking for, he said, "Major Warner, I need all of the C4 we have tucked in and blown up," Lynch stated, gesturing to the wall.

Major Warner peered inside the wall and raised his eyebrows. "This is a shield weakness?" He said with some scepticism.

Raf, rolling his eyes said. "Of course it is! This power line is a connection from the shield generator to the central power. Although It's not the main line, it should be enough to cause a short, which, in turn, will shut down their shields. Then they, wherever they are, will be fighting blind. So blow it up."

As the sabotage was set up, Kronyn glanced uneasily down at the LSD. A large group of Singularians were still in one place, Why, he wondered? There was no logical reason for them to be gathering. Then he corrected himself. Of course, there was. He alerted the Colonel, "I think the Singularians are all in one place because they are holding some ceremony."

Pausing for time Lynch adjusted his helmet chin strap. "Then let's get our boys, while they're distracted. He turned to Warner, tapping his radio. "Major, before you blow the shield, let's liberate our people."

Warner, finishing off, hooked up all of the explosives to go off, using one detonator. He spoke to the Colonel. "You better take Kronyn and Takran back as well."

Lynch nodded. "Good Colonel Lynch, out." He tapped his radio once more, turning it off.

Kronyn followed behind a few Marines as they walked a safe distance away. Major Warner was explaining what would happen and how powerful the blast would be. Kronyn waved a hand at him, actually shutting the officer up. Warner handed out earplugs, silently, of course, and Kronyn stuffed them into his ears. Major Warner ducking, took a deep breath, then he pressed the detonator's button.

Even through the earplugs, Kronyn could hear the blast and felt the explosion punching into his chest. He staggered back, and ran his hands over his head, trying to get back into the zone'. Ripping the ear plugs out, he tossed them aside. Immediately joining Warner, he examined the damage and connected his data screen to a few nearby wires. Yes, the shields were down.

An unforeseen problem showed up. Kronyn found that he couldn't lock onto Rodney's life sign. He told the Colonel, adding, You'll have to find him yourself. Damn! He only had fifteen personnel, including Kronyn. Turning to his men, he ordered, "We'll form two groups. Major Warner will lead one; I will lead the other. We only have analogue two-way radios, but we can keep in touch. Let's do it."

When Warner reached the cells, they were empty with their doors left open. "Could they have escaped?" Kronyn asked.

Warner shook his head. "Shit! The Singularians have taken them somewhere else," he cursed.

Then there was gunfire aimed in the Marines' direction.

Just then Lynch's old radio crackled. He heard, "Colonel, This is Major Warner. The cells are empty but were under attack from a patrol of Singularians. Assistance is required!"

"What's your location?"

The Sergeant paused as more gunfire erupted. "We're in Section 3, and we ..." His voice was swiftly cut off, followed by shooting and screams. The radio was still on, and Rafael heard the sounds of his men dying.

"Aren't we going to save them?" Sergeant Cronkite asked, nervously.

"We can't." Raf snapped. "We couldn't get there in time. Besides, we have to look for MacKay and the others." Turning to his contingent, he said, "Let's move!. We have to leave here, now."

Having fought off the Singularian patrol, the remaining Marines, consisting of Warner, Kronyn and five others, retreated in silence. Checking around corners and bends, they held their weapons at the ready. They encountered and took care of three guards. Then, they moved faster as their night vision goggles, showed the exit ahead. But Warner knew they were not out of the woods. There would be a reception party waiting for them. If the Major was honest with himself, he didn't know how they could survive.

Dayton was pleased and surprised to hear from Daniel, but his son sounded somewhat apprehensive, but wouldn't say why. He just needed to see his father urgently.

Daniel's request could not have come at a more inconvenient time. Dayton was to be briefed for an upcoming mission. He managed to squeeze his son in just before his flight.

Daniel parked his Porsche 911s outside the entrance of the Renaissance London Heathrow Hotel, where he handed over his keys to access valet service.

Passing signs promoting hotel features: a health club, cocktail bar and Starbucks coffee shop, he took a lift to the fourth floor, where he located suite 413. At his knock, his father opened the door and welcomed him.

Eyeing his father's already packed suitcase and overnight bag, he said, "Where are you off to this time?" Daniel asked as Dayton prepared drinks from the mini bar.

"The Middle East. Sounds exotic but I'll be stuck in an office dealing with boring stuff."

Daniel took his scotch. "What, for the Soter Group?"

Dayton almost dropped his glass. He couldn't believe what he was hearing.

Daniel smirked. It wasn't often he got the drop on his elusive father. "It's no good denying it. I had lunch with Hayden the other day. He told me about it."

Dayton could not believe it. He had done all he could to shield his son from the dirty side of his life. "Hayden!"

"Hayden Holmes. Apparently, you two are Agency brothers in arms."

What the hell was the Foreign Minister up to, he wondered. "What did he say?"

"Not a lot. He suggested I talk to you. Hence, here I am." he made a sweeping gesture with his hands.

"Did he say why he mentioned it?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. Hayden is trying to get me accepted as a Soter member. Carry on the family tradition, that sort of thing." He then added, "Mind you, pater, I had no idea we had such a tradition."

"And you weren't supposed to." Dayton sat down heavily on the plush leather lounge. "Sit down Daniel. Cat's are terribly hard to get back into bags."

Daniel sat down, enjoying immensely the power he now had over his father. All those birthdays, school awards, school plays at which his father had been absent, came flooding back. But he kept very calm, stemming the seething emotional ocean below the stoic surface. "Hayden said to ask you about it. So tell me."

Dayton dreaded such a moment rearing its ugly head. He rubbed his shaved pate and felt a sharp twinge from his injured shoulder. Dayton thought I'm getting too old for this shit. He had decided this would be his last assignment. Then Lord Lynsey would retire gracefully to his country seat. He had almost made it through without getting his son involved. But the interfering Hayden had spoiled that! "Okay, look at it like those Star War movies you loved as a child. There are light and dark forces in the world." He felt stupid saying it.

Daniel got up. "You never take me seriously, do you. You try to fob me off with this shit."

"Calm down son. This explanation is not easy for me. In this case, the dark forces are the Diabolus Sect, and the light forces the Soter Group." Before Daniel had a chance to reply, he said, "This is for real. I know it sounds crazy, but this goes way beyond conspiracy theories."

"So what is this Soter? Who runs it? How is it funded? What does it do?"

Dayton poured them another scotch. Where to start, he wondered. "It's ruined my life, and I'm damned if I am going to let it ruin yours."

"That's bloody typical of you father. Always wanting to be in control. When I was young, you were hardly ever there for me so don't try to be my keeper now."

The words bit hard, making Dayton feel ashamed. How could he possibly convey the shady side of his life, the side he had always hidden from his family, for their protection - for humanity's protection. And how difficult it had been at times. "Daniel, listen to me, please. If Hayden recruits you into Soter, you will have no control over your life. From that moment onwards you will be solely and wholly fully committed to stopping Diabolus, wherever and whenever Soter calls upon you."

Daniel, angry, exploded, "So now you are using the fear card to get me to do your bidding!"

That was it for Dayton. Nothing he said was going to make the slightest bit of difference. "Of course you must do what you decide to do. But it's a fucking war zone out there, and if you get involved in this Soter shit, you will live your own nightmare, unable to share it with anybody - even your family. And you, like me, will find yourself missing out on important moments in your children's lives. You will have to lie to your loved ones and pretend your life with them is normal. You will become an automaton for a noble cause but a very lonely one. I can say no more about it."

Daniel had never seen his father so passionate, yet tired. "Who is this Diabolus Sect?" he asked, more timidly.

"They are incredibly difficult for the average person to comprehend. They believe that the only worthwhile activity is to destroy things and bring about chaos. They are disciples of the heat death law of physics. They worship the Second law of thermodynamics, and they do everything they can to speed up the entropic process."

Daniel was incredulous. "But why? Is it greed, the lust for power, the need for control. What on earth is their motive?"

"They are totally irrational. Totally disorganised, as a global group, and very, very dangerous. They make psychopaths seem like Mother Theresa."

Daniel became serious. "have you ever met any of them?"

Dayton nodded, "And each leaves a scar on my soul." He sighed heavily, "It would have been so much better if you could have lived your life without knowing these things." He paused and said, "I have put both our lives at risk just by telling you this. Please do not breath a word of it to anybody."

"Not even mother."

"Especially not your mother. I have shielded her from my nightmare world all these years. And I pray to God that she never finds out."

The Winnebago struggled on to Tobruk, where, with the last vestiges of power, rolled to a halt just opposite the Al Bitnan Hospital. Abbott pulled up behind in the Jeep, utterly exhausted. Guni hadn't said much on the way. Abbott wanted to hand him over to the Libyan police. The gun was bagged and only had Guni's prints on it. Bill came towards the Jeep. "The old bus has died. But at least it got us here."

Abbott ignored the Yanks pathetic attempt at levity. "Get Hassan for me."

"The poor guy can hardly get out of his seat." There was silence, "then he said, "You go and see him. I'll stay here and guard this piece of shit."

Abbott had never been one to speak what he felt, but he was learning fast. "No way! You're just as likely to let him go. I'm taking him to the cops."

"Okay, you don't trust me, I get that. But what you don't seem to get is that Guni is programmed to hunt me down and kill me. And he won't rest until he does. So why the fuck would I want to free him. If it had been up to me, I would have cut his throat back in the fucking desert."

Abbott stood his ground but what the Yank said made sense. He left Bill with his prisoner and walked over to the driver's window of the beaten up bus. The door opened, and Hassan stepped down. "I think we should hand him over to the police," Abbott said.

"It would be a good solution, my friend if the police were not corrupt. They want payment for everything. We have to pay to get Guni locked up. Then someone pays, and they release him."

"It still gives us time to lose him."

"I think it is better than we do not involve the police, if possible. We ditch this," the Arab said, sentimentally patting the old bus, "and take Guni in the Jeep a few miles into the desert; then leave him to find his way back here."

"And what about Bill?"

"Bill and I have had a long talk. He can be useful."

"Can we trust him?"

"Yes, I believe we can."

Abbott, still not convinced, shrugged. "Okay, if you say so."

After grabbing their gear from the Stricken Winnebago and gassing up the Jeep, Hassan, refreshed by strong coffee, drove them past the deep harbour considered the best natural port in northern Africa, but due to lack of relevant nearby land sites, not the most attractive. Tobruk was surrounded by a desert, only lightly populated with nomadic herdsman, travelling from oasis to oasis, so it didn't take more than a few kilometres to find a suitable place to drop off their prisoner.

"You can't just leave me out here," Guni protested.

Hassan handed him a bottle of water. "Make it back to Tobruk, and you are free."

"It's more than he deserves," Bill said, gesturing his preference by drawing his finger across his throat.

"I'll never make it in this heat."

"It'll start cooling in a couple of hours," Hassan said. "You're more likely to freeze to death, once night sets in."

"This is not over," Guni snarled, as the trio went back to his Jeep.

<http://www.redicecreations.com/specialreports/2006/03mar/luciferianlegacy.html>

<http://www.wnd.com/2010/02/124105/>

## Chapter 11

When Abbott thought of Egypt, images of pyramids naturally came to mind not the sight of new seaside holiday resort towns on the coast of the Mediterranean. Upon reaching Al Salloum, he was assailed by one private resort after another. The place was a wealthy tourists paradise. Blocks of 16 unit towers, named: Maadi, Marassi, Al-Katla, Emirate Heights, dominated coastal real estate. A resort called "Marina" stretched for miles and miles. But by far, one of the classiest resorts was called "Armed Forces Resort."

Hassan commented, "This will give you an indication of the power of the army in Egyptian society, something we may yet have to confront."

Like immediately, the journalist thought, seeing the checkpoint ahead, near a roadside sign that read 'Saloom.'

"Passports," a border guard snapped, thrusting out his hand.

Hassan collected their documents and gave them to the guard.

"Do you speak Arabic?" he asked.

Hassan answered, "I do, but my friends do not."

"Why are you in Saloom?"

"I heard it is a beautiful place," Hassan replied.

"No it is not." the guard shook his head. He called another guard over. "Take them to the waiting room."

The waiting room turned out to be a cramped space near the gateway. There was only one soldier there, seated at a desk.

The man emerged from his paperwork, all smiles. He shook Hassan's hand, "Where from?"

"From Morocco," Hassan replied. Then he said, "We need to stay somewhere for the night."

The official smiled again. "There's one hotel in the town. Simple, but clean." He didn't say where until the business was transacted.

Hassan took out his wallet. "I only have Dirham."



The man took 500. The info was overpriced, but given the lack of choice, that was to be expected. He then gave the trio directions.

Just who was Supremo Davis Rottafeller? Dayton wondered. A spokesman for the Rottafeller Foundation told the British Foreign office, he didn't exist. Well, no surprises there. An alleged insider source claimed he was a secretive 34-year old heir to the Rottafeller dynasty who was fighting for the New World Order. Another report claimed Supriem was a con artist and convicted thief, going by different names and currently lived in Williamson County, Tennessee. All the confusion seemed to have the Diabolus stamp all over it. Dayton read and reread these reports while flying to Maryland Virginia.

He had to smile at some of the outlandish claims about 'Supremo', They included such things as Supremo had DNA from different races, including alien and more than one DNA sequence. His triple helix was the reptilian blood. Supremo had a fortune in the trillions and was seeking to finance a high-speed bullet train. He had exerted enormous influence over key people in the American administration. Dayton believed if Supremo did exist he would be a man or woman, certainly not some alien hybrid.

As US regional airports go, Dayton found Baltimore International to be one of the best. Not as busy or as crowded as many major airports, he soon cleared TSA checks and baggage claim. Jim Kraus looked more like a vagrant than a CIA agent. Dayton put him in his late forties. His uncombed short black hair, shot with grey, went with his unexpected appearance. With barely a greeting he ushered the Soter man to a parked limo. As he drove, Kraus briefed Dayton, bringing him up to speed, before the meeting.

The covert gathering took place at the Baltimore Country Club, an elegant red-brick Building in the Edwardian style. Jim showed Dayton through to a small private room, occupied by six people, including the US Vice President, Janet Charm, Glenn Davison, Lt. Generals Mardrine and Hammond. They each brought to the table what they knew about the mysterious Supremo.

The white-haired spit and polish Hammond said, "We think this Supremo is real, but he is perpetrating a hoax."

"Do you mean he is a member of the Rottafeller family?" Dayton asked.

Janet Charm, small and stout, a power dresser, felt uncomfortable answering to this Limey Lord. Who the heck was he, she wondered? "This has nothing to do with the Rottafeller family. So there's no need to go down that road," She snapped, adamantly.

"You seem very sure about that," Dayton responded. Then he said. "Do we have any solid leads?"

Glenn Davison, Tanned, with weak grey eyes and curly brown hair, answered, "Yes sir, we have a short list of six suspects under surveillance."

"Okay, I want what you have on the suspects. Liaise with Jim Kraus."

Eyeing the panel, Dayton said, "Is there anything else I need to know?"

Glenn said, "Once we've got him under lock and key you get to see him."

The last thing Dayton wanted was a pissing match with the military brass. "Agreed, but I still need to see what you've got."

Lieutenant General Mardrine, the conventional hard grey brush cut type, said, "What do you plan to do with him once you have him?"

An odd but straightforward question, Dayton thought. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I think it best if he were handed over to the FBI for questioning."

"Certainly. I will just need some time alone with the prisoner, beforehand."

The panel looked at each other. Then The VP said, "We want one of our people with you during the interview."

Dayton hesitated. He didn't like spectators at his interrogations. But he had to give the US Government a cookie. "Okay, but I want Jim Kraus with me."

Jim Kraus was a seasoned CIA operative. "Okay it's a deal," Janet Charm agreed.

Lord Lynsey knew very little about Jim Kraus. As they walked down to a small lake with trees around it and manicured lawns, he said, "Does the CIA know about you moonlighting?"

Jim grinned, "What do you think?"

Dayton chuckled. Then he said, "What was all that nonsense about in there."

"Don't worry about it. The brass is just feeling a bit put out that you come here and take over the operation. The top military types figure you're hot shit, but they can't figure out why. But I bet each and every one of them was told to attend this meeting, and it gets in their craw."

"What do you know about Glenn Davison?"

"Deputy head of the FBI." Jim stopped, listened, then said, "They're going to keep tabs on you, so it's no good us talking now. I'll take you to your hotel. We'll talk later."

Dayton didn't trust anyone involved. He would have to check up on Kraus before divulging what he knew.

Settled in his suite in the luxury Four Seasons Hotel, Dayton kicked back and went over the case, with what little facts he had. While the Third Temple press release may be a hoax, the Temple Institute is anything but false. The group was involved in restoring a Jewish presence to the Temple Mount, by building the third Temple there. Mossad guard the mount 24/7, but what would happen, Dayton mused, if pressure was brought to bear on the Israeli Government to pass a plan for the new temple? Apart from a few hothead Muslim leaders, somehow the fires of emotion had died down since the destruction of the Dome. But that was because Metayahu made his promise that no construction would take place on the site. If the Rottafellers were behind the Supremo thing, they had the means and could bring pressure to bear on the Israelis; pressure the small nation would not be able to resist. Dayton checked for information on the Internet. The Third Temple website made little mention of their plans to construct the new Temple. But, Dayton reasoned, if the Rottafellers were involved, it made no sense for them to post their projects on the Internet.

Next, Dayton phoned Matthew Snelling, on his personal scrambler phone. "Hi, Matthew. It's Dayton here. Look, I've got a bit of a rush job for you - just a check up."

"I thought you were having some R and R. What do you want?"

"Names Jim or James Kraus. CIA agent is doing a bit of moonlighting. Find out if he's with the Sect. If so in what category? I need it ASAP."

"You certainly are piling on the pressure."

"I'm not expecting any nasty surprises from him but if you find out anything relevant let me know. I want to be sure I'm covered."

"Okay, I'll get right onto it."

That dealt with his thoughts went back to the meeting with his son. He snapped out of it. He had to stay focused. That was another reason to give Soter away after this job. He went back to his notes. The Temple Institute focused on preparation for the rebuilding of the Third Temple. Over ninety ritual items to be used in the Temple had been re-made to the highest standards of the Temple Institute. It looked as though they were going for it. Dayton wanted to know who was funding the temple. The answer was not difficult for him to find. Kando Holdings Group was raising funds. President, Frank Love, and Director Supremo Davis Rottafeller stated that 'Kando' Holdings will be raising funds to go towards building the third Temple. David T Rottafeller was a major shareholder director in the company.

Dayton now had an active link. Whoever Davis R Supremo was, Lord Lynsey was sure he was a front man for David T Rottafeller

1 hour and forty-seven minutes later, Dayton received secure mail from Minister Snelling.

What it revealed took Dayton by surprise:

Jim Kraus worked for the 'Company' in Libya, where he was caught, charged with spying on the nation and imprisoned. The previous year, in a desperate bid, to ease the grip of United Nations sanctions, Moammar Gadhaffi's troubled regime in Libya held out the prospect of turning over indicted CIA renegade Jim Kraus, to appease the US government. To sweeten the deal Gadhaffi's government agreed to pay out millions of dollars in compensation to families of those who died in the 1988 bombing over Scotland of Pan American Airlines Flight 103. But neither the Clinton administration nor the families of victims appeared interested in either possibility. They wanted to maintain pressure on the regime and hold it accountable for the disaster. Jim, who held high hopes for his release, became dejected and profoundly depressed at the surprising news.

What was surprising to Dayton is that Minister Hayden Holmes had taken particular interest in the case.

There was an attachment:

Lord Lynsey looked at a copy of Kraus' CV and was mightily impressed. Kraus was a high-profile prisoner and an embarrassment to the Gadhaffi regime. So, for the right inducement, the spy was handed over to MI6. This move annoyed the Americans no end. However, as far as Madman Maddox was concerned, the Yanks had their chance and blew it. After debriefing, Kraus was handed back to the Company, as damaged goods. He became an embarrassment to the CIA, who wanted to put him out to grass. Jim was having none of it and set himself up in a small business called, amusingly, I-Spy.

There was no mention of Agent Kraus' attitude to the way the CIA treated him. No recorded psych assessments were carried out on Kraus after his imprisonment in Tripoli. Not that it meant anything. Jim was good at hiding his feelings. Dayton wondered if, by not making waves, Kraus could regain his credibility. He had to show the 'Company' he still had what it takes. Dayton figured it was probably correct, but it was all still supposition.

Agent Kraus showed excitement when Dayton let him into his suite. "What do ya know, Glenn came up with the goods. The Feds have got Mr fucking el Supremo cornered. So let's hit the trail partner and get this sum bitch."

Dayton halted, "Whoa, hold your horses. Are you saying they got the guy we are looking for, in just a few hours?"

"I guess they just got lucky. It happens sometimes. C'mon, lets go-get-him."

The place was swarming with FBI logos by the time Jim parked as close as he could to the suburban Maryland home. As he got out of the car, Dayton heard someone shooting. Ducking down behind a parked vehicle, he said, "I thought you said this was all hosed down."

Jim frowned. "That's what I heard."

"Can you find out what is going on here?"

Kraus got out his phone. The agent I spoke with is called Garner. I'll try and raise him" With the phone close to his ear, he said, "Agent Garner, Agent Kraus here. I have Dayton Lynsey with me, to question the suspect Davis R Supremo but were holed up behind a van. Is the scene secure yet?"

"There's been a development here. Stay where you are. I will let you know when it's safe to come in."

Jim turned to Dayton. "There's been some complication. He said to stay where we are."

Dayton saw red. "This whole raid seems like a total shambles to me. Let me talk to him."

"It won't do any good. But you can try if you like," Jim said, handing over his phone.

As soon as he heard the name, special agent Garner, he launched into a pent up tirade. "What the hell is going on over there? The FBI Director promised me the first access to the suspect. When do I get to question him?"

"Just calm down, Mr Lynsey. You won't be getting to speak with the suspect because He tried to escape, so we had to bring him down."

Dayton went ashen. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

"I will give you a statement as soon as I can. Meanwhile, just stay where you are."

Dayton handed back the phone.

"You don't sound too happy," Jim said.

"The Feds killed my suspect!"

Kraus crouched down, open-mouthed.

Paul Cosimo left the Vatican Museum of Contemporary Art, for the day, and walked along Viale Vaticano, to where his Fiat 500 was parked. Everything seemed normal. There was no reason why it should have been otherwise. Except for the two men who came out of the shadows, and crept up on him while he was finding his keys. Being of a thin build, he soon felt something cold and hard pressing against his knobby spine. Then the voice in his ear. "You won't be needing those keys Signor Cosimo. You are coming for a ride with us."

Yasir Tiwanah was going out on a limb, and he prayed it would be robust enough to hold him. Catching this professor Sonata, whom he thought to be behind the latest Middle East crisis, had become personal. The man was a chimaera, appearing in and out of material reality. Although it seemed as slim as an anorexic fashion model, Tom Graham seemed his only hope of finding the man. At least the architect had a lead. He looked outside the old orphanage that had long fallen into rack and ruin. As an interrogator with Mossad, he had learned that psychological torture was as, or more effective than physical pain. Imprisonment and absence of interrogation, in an abandoned building, where there is only loneliness and hopelessness loosens the tongue more quickly.

Yasir drove the car past the overhanging, creaking trees and the massive explosion of nature, all the way up to the once grand four-story building, reminiscent of a Renaissance castle, none of which Paul Cosimo could see, with the mouldy sack over his head. His brain was trying to make sense of his nightmare. Then the bumpy ride was over. Paul felt rough hands yank him out of the car, into the cold evening air. Somebody prodded him forwards. He hit a step, stumbled, and righted himself. Nobody attempted to help him. He felt like Jesus, forced to carry his cross.

Once inside the building, somebody pushed Paul onto a hard chair and removed the sack. He blinked a few times, adjusting to the light. "Why have you brought me here?" he asked, feebly.

Yasir smiled sickeningly. "Because, Signor Cosimo, we believe you can help us with a problem."

"What are you talking about?" Paul asked with trepidation.

"It's more a case of who. We want to find a man called the 'Merchant'.

Yasir noticed the slight twitch. He was excellent at reading body language. He added, "We know that you know of him."

"I, I don't know what you mean." Paul stammered, knowing he wasn't fooling anyone.

"Signor you work in the boring but safe confines of a museum. You are probably used to the finer things in life. You have a wife 'Julia' and two children to go home to each day. So tell us what we need to know, and you will soon see them."

Paul trembled inside. Who the hell were these people? He looked up and saw another man, taller than the other three, walk into the room. He recognised the surly expression. It was Tom Graham. Now he knew the reason for his kidnapping.

Tom looked at Paul. "You're not used to sensory deprivation, limb or digit deprivation or even liberty deprivation. It's not at all pleasant so tell us how to find this person called the 'Merchant'."

Paul stared at the archaeologist, bug-eyed. "I swear I do not know these things. You need to ask Salvatore Lucini."

"So, where do we find him?" Yasir asked, stroking his finger along the blade a sharp, wicked-looking knife.

"I have never been to his place, but it is called Villa Veneri. I remember him telling me that."

Tom smiled, "That's much better, Paul. Now phone him and say you need to see him tonight."

"I can't just say that. Lucini won't agree."

Yasir held the blade near the curator's left eyeball. "Just the tiniest slip and you are blind in one eye. Now I don't think you are trying enough."

Paul breathed a huge sigh of relief once Yasir removed the blade "But I don't know what would make him open the door to me."

The blade came back again. "Try to be more positive," Yasir whispered.

Tom said, "Tell him you need to discuss the Cain Artefacts with him. Say you have discovered something disturbing. That should get his attention.

Paul didn't think he could pull it off. He was stubbornly silent.

Yasir said, "Do you like it here, Paul. I hope so because this abandoned orphanage is going to be your home tonight. We will be back, maybe tomorrow."

He turned to Tom. "Make sure his ropes are secure. We don't want him wandering around this crumbling ruin in the dark. He might hurt himself."

"No! I will do it," Paul said frantically.

Yasir asked for Friar Lucini's number.

The journey did not take very long. After just nine km Yasir and his companions came to the Ring Road of Rome Nord, where, set in green exclusivity, was Villa Venere. Lucini had begrudgingly allowed the curator to visit him. Security had been told a guest would be arriving. The car slowed to a stop on the brick-paved driveway. Tom leant over to the Arab, "How are we supposed to get past the security guard?"

"You run off to the back of the house and create a diversion. Then I slip in the front door."

Tom shook his head, "Nah. I don't like that idea. You create the diversion, and I sneak in."

"You seem to forget I'm in charge, and I give the orders."

Tom hesitated, thinking of his options.

Yasir asked, "Tom, how sure are you that Lucini knows about the professor?"

"He has to know. He wanted the Cain artefacts very badly. Badly enough to murder my team."

"Right," Yasir said, screwing a silencer onto his automatic pistol.

Paul introduced himself, showing the guard his ID. The security officer scrutinised it, nodded and let the museum curator through. Then the security guy noticed the two men approaching. "Who are you?" he challenged his hand on his sidearm.

Yasir had only one chance and a few seconds to decide. He whipped his gun from his side and fired two shots at nearly point blank range. The guard stood for a moment, goggle-eyed, then collapsed almost silently, as Tom helped him lay on the ground. Then the pair swiftly snuck in. They could hear a faint conversation between Paul and a man they hoped was Lucini.

The Overweight Friar hefted his body out of his chair. "You trouble me for that. Are you stupid? All I have to do is..." He didn't get to finish his sentence, The presence of the man pointing the gun at him totally freaked him. "Who are you. What do you want?" Then he saw the second man and vaguely remembered him.

Yasir waved the gun at him, "Sit back down, Friar, We are going to have a cosy little chat."

"Chat about what?" the Vatican purchasing agent asked, his eyes darting from Yasir to Tom.

"About a Professor Francisco Sonata," Yasir said, watching for unspoken signals. There were three. Blinking, sweating and lack of eye contact.

"I have no idea what you are talking about," he denied. Then, trying to sound authoritative, "Do you know who you are threatening?"

Tom said, "The ass hole that sold me out to the Swiss cops."

Then the lira dropped. Salvatore said, "Of course, you are the one who wanted to see the Cain Artefacts."

Tom stared at him. "That fucking monster Sonata brutally murdered ten of my colleagues before he stole our treasure. Now you are going to tell us where Sonata is."

"I have already told you ..."

"A bullet would be too quick. Tie the Friar up, Tom," Yasir said, throwing the archaeologist a ball of strong cord.

"You cannot do this to me," Salvatore pleaded, struggling, while Tom's strong arms, restrained him while lashing him to a wooden chair.

"GUARD!" Salvatore yelled, panicking.

"He has the night off," Yasir grinned evilly. "He has the rest of his life off," he sneered, laughing at his sick joke.

"Tell us about Sonata, and you can save your miserable life," Tom stated.

"Oh, please don't tell us too soon. Don't spoil my fun," Yasir taunted, putting a sharp blade to the Vatican dealer's pudgy throat.

"I don't know where he is," wailed the sweating Friar.

The Arab used the tip of the blade to flick off the top button of the bug-eyed, Catholic's shirt. "He was in North Africa. That's all I know."

"Where in North Africa and when?" The second button flew off.

Feeling cold, sharp metal against his naked chest, he offered, Ghardaia, around a month back."

"Is he still there?"

"I don't know!"

"The Chinese have a way to persuade people, to tell the truth, Salvatore. It's my favourite, called the death of a thousand cuts," he said in the Vatican man's sweating face.

"I am not sure, but Professor Sonata indicated that he might go to Egypt."

The knife nicked the flesh. Salvatore gave a shrill scream."

"So, you have a low pain threshold. This game is going to be fun, Yasir gloated, popping another button.

"How do you contact him?" Tom asked.

Trembling, Salvatore said, "I don't. He contacts me."

The second cut was an inch long and a little deeper.

"Aaarghh! the prisoner screamed, as his trickling blood mingled with his sweat. "He will kill you. You will pay dearly for this!"

"Idle threats while you are tied up, Salvatore." Another Nick, followed by another scream. "How do you contact him in emergencies?"

"I don't have to communicate with him. The professor thrives on cases of emergency."

"Wrong answer!" The knife went south, past the bulging stomach, taking the buttons as it went. Next, the razor sharp blade went under the waistband of the Friars trousers.

"No! You cannot do this!" he said, desperately trying to kick his torturer.

"Tom, tie his feet to the chair, with his legs apart."

"Nooooooo! Please! Have mercy!"

"Talk you fat pig. This opportunity is your last chance." Yasir threatened.

"I have a private number. But I can only use it in matters of life and death."

The knife slashed outward, opening the Frair's trousers. "I would say this is the perfect time to call then - wouldn't you?"

"What am I supposed to say?"

"Tell him you have something in your possession that will destroy the credibility of the Catholic Church. Say you have an artefact that will bring the Religion to its knees. Something that will cause the global institution to self-destruct."

"But what?" Salvatore asked.

"Arrange to meet him in Egypt," Yasir added. Taking out his satellite phone, he said, "Now what is the number?"

Salvatore, shaking, wailed, "He will kill me for this."

The knife cut open the terrified Friar's boxer shorts. "Okay! I will do it!"

It was evident to Dayton that he was not getting the whole story. Even worse FBI was using the Soter agent as a dupe to help them maintain the pretence. Jim Kraus was after a copy of the report of the shooting. Dayton wasn't interested in that. The FBI could make it read any way they wanted. Supremo was dead, shot while armed and trying to escape. End of story. Or was it? How did the FBI know the dead man was Supremo? If it was him had, he acted on his volition or had the news of Rottafeller's funding of the Third Temple been the trigger to set him off? Dayton knew that the Islamic world would have an excuse to attack Jerusalem. With Metayahu's political career finished Diabolus would put the final part of their devious plan into action to completely destabilise the Middle East. This act would light the short fuse, and the Middle East powder keg would blow like never before. The Rottafellers would, of course, deny any involvement in the hostilities and they would get away with it. Unless, as his last hurrah with Soter, Dayton could do something to make them pay. Lord Lynsey had been looking for a link between the Rottafellers and Diabolus for years, and he'd at least become a thorn in their side - albeit a tiny one. But like a small stone in a shoe, over time it can become unbearable. So how do you get rid of the irritation? Simple. You remove it. The FBI had certainly got rid of the Rottafellers irritation in such a way that the public accepted it without question. No more Supremo. No link to them and their temple funding. Dayton finished his second glass of scotch, yawned and stretched. It was time to get some rest. The investigation could wait until the next day.

Kraus was in conference with Glenn Davison at FBI headquarters. Davison looked at Kraus, whom he despised (nothing personal - just an agency versus company thing) stabbing at him with his finger. It was unsettling that the deputy FBI head did that to make his point. But his watery blue eyes could not pull off a successful staring bout. "Make sure our Lord Lynsey is on a plane and out of here, today."

Kraus, not happy with how things went down, but not willing to make waves, said, "I take it there is a reason for the urgency."

"Because we don't want this Lynsey guy to stir things up unnecessarily. He has a rep of being a fucking bulldog. Now, although there is nothing for him here, if he thinks there is, he could make



waves. Your job is to see that he doesn't. " Seeing the ex-CIA officer's hesitation, Davison added "A good report from me goes a long way to your reinstatement Jim. Don't let me down."

Jim nodded sagely. I'm going to need a copy of the incident report to show him."

Davison handed it over, "It didn't come from me."

Jim Kraus turned up at Dayton's hotel suite at 10:04 am, armed with an airline flight ticket. Handing it to Dayton, Jim grinned widely, "1st class, Nothings too good for our English friend."

Lord Lynsey opened the envelope. The flight was for 2:30 pm. He looked at Jim. "Looks like someone's trying to get rid of me."

"No, it's nothing like that. This present is just Glenn's way of saying thank you. He also sent you this."

Dayton glanced at the report. "I'll check it later. It looks like I'm going to have to pack." Noting that Kraus just stood there, he prompted, "Thanks, Jim. I hope you get your job back with the CIA. Now if you don't mind, I'm busy."

Jim said "After last night, Glenn wants to make sure you're safe. He's seconded me as your bodyguard."

This insult was too much. "Nothing happened last night, and I don't need a fucking babysitter - or someone to make sure I catch my flight."

"It's not like that," Jim protested.

"It is just like that. I was sent here by some very influential people who genuinely wanted to find out what was behind this Supremo case. The FBI shot him, and I can't complete my assignment."

Jim, pointing to the report, said, "It's all in there. That's why you need to read it."

"I'm sure it is," Dayton responded, sarcastically.

"Look, I know its all hog shit, but Davison is going to help me get my job back. So be a pal and play along. Okay?"

Dayton looked Jim squarely in the eye. "Your career is entirely your concern and certainly nothing to do with me. I don't play pathetic games, Jim. I came here to do a job. I haven't been able to do it, and I will report that to my principals. You can do something useful and report that back to Glenn Fucking Davison.

With Jim gone Dayton sat down with the FBI account. He could feel his anger boiling up inside. Grabbing the dossier, Dayton hurled it with all his might, across the room. "Who the fuck do they think they are?" he expleted to the empty room. Dayton, usually of a calm disposition, had never been so angry. For the FBI to think it could treat him in such a shocking way was beyond his understanding. He took out his phone, switched to scrambler encryption mode and pressed a contact that was only marked by the character '?'

"Yale. Stewart McCavey. Who's speaking?"

"Lord Dayton Lynsey. I seek the help of the 'Bones'. He looked at the name on the report. "I need a background on a Mr Eugene Millarton, aka, Davis T Supremo. In particular, any dealing he had with the Rottafellers or their close associates."

"Is there anything else?"

"Maybe a gentle word in the ear of Glenn Davison, the deputy head of the FBI. Tell him to lay off."

"Yes, your Lordship."

"Oh, one more thing. There is an ex-CIA agent, Jim Kraus. He's a solid guy who was a Guest of Gadhaffi for a while. He wants back in. Can we fast-track that, for him?"

"Upon my recommendation, it shouldn't be a problem."

Jim arrived, ready to take Lord Lynsey to the airport. Kraus, seeing no luggage, said, "Where are your bags?"

"They're fine right where they are, Jim."

Kraus frowned, "What fucking game are you playing? If you don't catch that plane, my ass is grass."

Dayton fixed the agent with his gaze. "Do you want to do the right thing or the comfortable thing?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh come on, Jim. I took you for a smart man. Surely you're not taken in by this." Dayton said, tossing the report back at him.

Kraus stared like a deer caught in headlights.

"First off, this Supreimo, having remained anonymous for months, is picked up and shot by the FBI. What if the dead guy wasn't Supreimo? What if somebody pulling the Fed's strings set the whole thing up to get me off their backs?"

Kraus was incredulous. "You're saying it was a set-up!"

"Don't be naive Jim. You know how it works. This Supreimo character was just another stooge. The Rottafellers feed him the info about the rumour of them funding the Third Temple, knowing full well he'd get gullible people to spread it around the social media."

"But that's just going to cause more trouble in the Middle East."

"That's what they want to happen. The people behind Davis Supreimo want to trigger a third world war, and they now have the means to do it. Now, do you want to hang around here like a bad smell or come and arrest the person who leaked to Supreimo?"

"Are you saying you know who it is?"

Dayton nodded.

"But that's impossible. Even the Feds don't have that info."

Dayton eye balled the CIA agent. "Who cares what the Feds may or may not know? I am going to get the culprit. Now you can come with me if you want to or stay here and play their pathetic games."

"You seem to forget. I am not an agent anymore."

Dayton grinned. "You are now. So are you in?"

Jim was about to agree when insecurity clouded his thinking. "No, I have to get you to the fucking airport one way or another. Davison holds my fate in his hands."

Dayton said, "Phone Davison now. Tell him that I'm a problem. That should get his attention. See what he has to say."

Kraus did so. After a short conversation with his boss, he hung up and stared at the Englishman.  
"Who the fuck are you?"

"What happened?"

"I don't believe it. Davison's reinstated me for field work. And he said not to worry about you." He stared at Dayton. "How the fuck did you pull those strings?"

Dayton tapped the side of his nose. "Now, to use an American colloquialism, let's saddle up and get the bad guys."

The recent run-in with the Singularians had cost Colonel Lynch's party, dearly. He was in dire need of reinforcements. The problem was it took around two weeks intensive training in gate and guns skills - time the Colonel did not have. At present, he and the remainder of his men had dropped back into the jungle to lick their wounds and regroup. "What was that you said - robots?" he queried, having received Dorian's communication.

Dorian, greatly relieved to hear Raf's voice, said, "They are here, twelve of them. Dr Veleska is going through the instructions as we speak."

"What the hell am I supposed to do with a dozen robots?"

"These are troopbots, battle ready and impervious to pain, tiredness, etc."

"You're going to send them through the Gate?"

"I don't know another way to get them to you - do you?"

The Colonel returned to his people. "Okay gather around. I have some news from the base."

They were all ears. "What news," a Marine asked.

"They are sending us reinforcements."

A huge cheer went up.

"Robot soldiers."

This time, what started as another cheer quickly changed into open-mouthed silence. Many questions followed this extraordinary announcement. None of which Colonel Lynch could answer.

Back at the base, Tamis' shoulders slumped with relief, and she let out a long sigh. Kronyn was safe. "Thank you, Dr Gibson. I cannot express my gratitude enough at such heart warming news." Then her expression went blank.

"What is it?" Dorian asked, noting the uncertainty on Tamis' face.

"Might I be frank with you, Dr Gibson, and drop the political formality for a moment?" She requested.

"Of course." Dorian nodded for the young Atlantean to go ahead.

Tamis leant forward slightly. "I do not mean to overstay my welcome, but when Takran recovers fully, I hope that he, being both my closest friend and second-in-command, could have a permanent residence with me on your earth."

Dorian considered Tamis' request. She had accepted the Atlantean leader's offer of knowledge, and she did not have any reservations about Tamis, the young woman, staying. Except that the young freedom fighter would be more useful for retrieving the needed technology as a resident of Atlantis.

Once Tamis had proved useful, in this respect, which Dorian was fairly confident would happen, she would give serious thought to the young woman's request. However, she had to cover all contingencies, and there was the rare chance that Tamis would defect and sell information on Atlantis to the highest bidder. So Dr Gibson didn't want to take the decision by herself.

"I will confer with Colonel Lynch and a few others on the matter." Dorian decided. "The security of Atlantis is my top priority, Tamis. Although, I would like to foster good relations between our two peoples, by offering you hospitality and a place here to assist us, first we need to get to know each other better."

"Oh, of course. I understand completely, but thank you so much for even taking me into consideration." Tamis stood and gave a small bow. "

The next thing to deal with were those damn robots. Dr Gibson went into the lab where The petite Brunette was busy testing circuits and hydraulics. Dorian had not seen the robots until then. For the first time, she felt the impact of the seven feet behemoths standing before her. "How is it going, Dr Veleska?"

"Much better if Rodney was here to guide us, " she answered.

"Well he's not, and we need these 'bots to help rescue him and the others.

"If you're short of nightmare fuel, say hello to Atlas 1." The olive skinned scientist joked.

"When will they be ready?" Dorian asked, with no idea of what she was asking.

Dr Veleska shrugged. "These only arrived on our doorstep yesterday, and I'm supposed to have all the answers already?"

"Let me put it another way. What do you have to do?"

"We have to check each one - make sure they work properly. Then we have to make sure we programme the troop bot's CPUs with the right data. We have to fully charge their batteries; then I have to take them through various scenarios by providing programming that will adapt them to the Atlantean situation. To do all this, we must feed in everything we know about Atlantis and what is going on there."

"Can we have all that completed by tomorrow?"

"Oy, oy, oy. Tomorrow you say," she said laughing lightly. "We haven't even touched on the human-robot relationship and weapons training. To have Atlas combat ready, I estimate it would take about a week."

"A week! We don't have a week, doctor. Do what you can but have them ready for action tomorrow afternoon at the latest." Before leaving the harried scientist, she took another look at the unveiled hulking robots. DARPA originally designed Atlas as a test bed humanoid for disaster response, but it soon got to know its way around a phased plasma rifle in the 40-watt range."

"It's amazing, isn't it," Dr Veleska cooed as if they were her offspring. They can even do press-ups and run on a treadmill."

"It's a whole new era," Dorian sighed, adding, "I just hope it's not a whole new stuff up."

"What do you mean, director?"

"I have a nasty feeling that DARPA is using us as guinea pigs to test these robots in a war environment."

Dr Veleska went back to her work. Now she and her team would have to work through the night, watching these metal brush heads climb, leap, and walk past obstacles. But she felt very proud to be head of the testing team. She missed Rodney and hoped he was okay. But with him out of the picture, she felt a liberty she had never experienced before. She focused back on the A1s. She couldn't wait to see them walk, carry things and climb using their hands and feet. With its articulate sensate hands, it could use tools designed for humans, having, as it did, 28 hydraulically-actuated degrees of freedom.

Dr Becker said, "He did what?"

Barney knew she would be angry, but he had to let her know. After all, Atlas was BC's baby. "They have to be field-tested at some time. This combat zone is the perfect opportunity."

"Did Schulz sign this off?" Lynne asked, nervously tapping her pen on the desk. Then she added, "Where are they being used?"

"That's classified, doctor." that was Barney speak for they haven't told me that."

"That's not sufficient, and you know it. We have to find out where the troopbots operate at all times."

"You'll have to take that up with General Schulz."

"Schulz is a fucking dinosaur!" Lynne exploded. Modifying her anger, she added, "He is not a scientist, and he knows nothing about the ATLAS project from the science and technology side. We have to keep track of all robots so that we can make remote controlled adjustments, as required. Get me Schulz so I can tell the idiot to his cigar-filled face."

"Dr Becker, be reasonable. Logan is not the sort of person you can just order around."

"Then I will find someone who can. The US Government has put a shit load of money into this project. Schulz's cavalier attitude could fuck up the program!"

Barney, sweating, Regretted telling her. He was afraid the whole situation would spiral out of control. "Okay, I'll see if he can talk to you."

"Barney, tell the SOB he's got 24 hours to make me happy, or else someone will make him miserable. Capische?"

Ulysses, hearing Lynne speak in a loud, agitated voice, popped his head around her office door. "Are you Okay?"

She looked up. As head of research and technology, Ulysses had a right to know what was going on. But not until she had straightened out the General. "Oh, nothing for you to be concerned about."

He figured it was DARPA giving her a hard time again. Well, he was about to give them a hard time, but she didn't know about that.

[http://articles.latimes.com/1994-09-01/news/mn-36183\\_1\\_libya-today](http://articles.latimes.com/1994-09-01/news/mn-36183_1_libya-today)

## Chapter 12

Professor Diablo Francisco Sonata walked reverently up the long stretching ramp which, in its glory days was flanked by sixty-six 'Sphinx-like' statues of Sobek that led up to the entrance to Set's Temple. Now, little more than a ruin it was to Diablo a sorry sight when observed from the outside. The Khemmetian architects had used exaggerated perspective to add to the notion of extraordinary

magnificence and power. Although there was no evidence of this craftsmanship outside, inside the ancient edifice, this trick was used to distort the perception of the real size of the inner structure of the temple. This distortion appealed to Diablo's fervent belief in the illusion of order. Another architectural deception is shown in that although the temple followed typical Old Kingdom styling the engineers had carved it out of a rock face. Diablo entered the ancient temple through its unusual north oriented entrance, which was designed to keep the sanctuary and Naos out of direct sunlight. The sorcerer believed that nature belonged to the dark and had to be kept in obscurity. He entered the temple, which was offset to all other passageways and slipped off his robes, to immerse himself in the small purification pool. Here he prepared himself, in body and mind for what was to come. He dried himself and donned flowing scarlet robes, while his guards prevented entry to anyone roaming around outside. Warning signs read 'under excavation' 'unsafe structure' and 'no entry'. These measures and the Uzi machine guns carried by the guards kept curious people at bay. The head temple curator had been jubilant with the generous donation and organised the temple to the professor's instructions.

Diablo cast his eyes to the north and invoked, "Great God Set, whose always there, My spirit with you I now share. Diabolus cast to do your will, The Sorcerer extolled, bursting with energy. The world would soon learn that Set the grand and magnificent destroyer would have its undivided attention. The thought that it would soon all come to an end caused a sexual excitement to stir within him, much more intense than anything he felt from sexual domination. The very embodiment of the fact that everything must indeed someday end thrilled him to the core. He chanted, "Oh great Set, keeper of all that is void, who teaches us, acceptance, and the peace of nothingness, as well as the will to abandon that which no longer serves its purpose and allow it to fade. Entropy trumps everything."

Having finished his secret rite, Diablo retraced his steps, with Set as his guardian as well as his destroyer, who knew that the preservation of what is vital demanded the sacrifice of everything that was not. What was vital was the void, nothingness and unbeing. Stupid humans had no idea of this and clung desperately to their pathetic, insignificant lives. Well for not much longer, Diablo thought, mentally taking himself through the next step of his wondrous plan. He would make Set very proud.

When they finally arrived in Cairo, the teeming city was not as Abbott expected. The city, like most of the country, was experiencing a curfew that began at 7 pm and lasted until 6 am. He had never lived under a curfew before. It was both a terrifying and stimulating experience. Abbott was horrified at the traffic chaos in Cairo. The already unfathomable system, which, notoriously bad, was worsened further by the city-wide change in working and visiting hours. Hassan, who took chaotic driving in his stride, laughed at the Australian's reaction. "Don't worry my friend, the man at the gas station told me the curfew time would change to 9 pm in a few days, and, when things settle down more likely, 11 pm."

"That's a relief," Abbot sighed. "Hopefully, it'll make travelling in Cairo easier."

Hassan laughed again. "Maybe. But I wouldn't pin my hopes on it."

After driving, stop/start for over an hour, pushing into crowded lanes, amid the constant cacophony of horn blasts, Abbot got his first view of the River Nile. "The journalist stared at the wide silver ribbon shape of the sacred river. Abbott uttered, "I never realised it was so wide."

Hassan amused at Abbott's naivety commented. "It needs to be big to service over sixteen million people, in this city alone."

Bill, sitting in the back of the Jeep, had been silent. He would soon be leaving these kind people, to work out what he was going to do next. "Where can you drop me off," he asked.

"We are going to the Khan El-Khalili bazaar. You can make your way from there."

"Why are we going there?" Abbott queried, hoping to go somewhere more exotic, like the pyramids.

"Because I have to see one of the merchants there."

"Hm, secret alchemy business, I suppose."

"This time you will come with me."

Bill wondered what secret alchemy business meant, but didn't ask. Soon they would be out of each other's lives, probably never to meet again. He sighed slowly, thinking of the daunting task of picking up the pieces of his life.

Soon they were deep in the Islamic section of Cairo. Hassan parked the Jeep in a side street, leaving an urchin in charge of looking after it, for a few Egyptian pounds. Then, leaving Bill to his own devices, the pair found themselves swallowed up in the hurly-burly of the great souk. Constantly badgered by merchants in the bazaar, who would stop at nothing to steal a sale from the competition, even at their expense, Abbott quickly learned to be thick-skinned against the hard sell. They pushed their way past stalls selling exquisitely designed perfume bottles, rustic glassware and arrays of spices. Abbott was amazed about the huge amount of silver merchandise on sale. Hassan pointed out it was the most famous silver market in Cairo.

Hassan consulted his Google map app, on his phone, then, pointing to an alleyway, said, "We go down there."

The 'there' in question was a dark, narrow alley with crude canvas shade covers and sharp bends. At one of these bends was a shop sign, saying, El Kanji exports. An open door led up narrow stairs to a warehouse area, employing around a dozen workers. Hassan saw Sol, and they embraced. Hassan introduced Abbott to his friend. This man is Sol Mune. Abbot shook hands with the man with frizzy black hair and a pronounced stoop.

Turning to Hassan, Sol said, "Congratulations on your elevation. The Scarlet Order will meet tonight."

"Tonight! Does that mean they are already here?"

"Yes, my friend. You look tired. You need to rest for what is to come. Use my humble home."

"Thank you, Sol. We accept your hospitality."

The downstairs apartment was compact but tidy. A sofa bed took up one wall. Hassan virtually collapsed onto it, spreading himself out. Abbott yawned, realising how tired he was. He had many questions to ask, but Hassan was already snoring quietly. Abbott lay down on the rug, his hands clasped behind his head. He stretched out luxuriously, alleviating kinks in his skeleton, from spending hours in the cramped Jeep.

Abraham Flexner Jnr knew that Supremo wouldn't be able to talk. Dead men can't talk, and the FBI assured Abraham that Supremo was very dead. Flexner raised his glass of coke in salutation. Supremo had played his role well. Now the principals, he worked with, could go ahead with the temple project. To the average person who met him, Abraham Flexner Jnr came over as a spineless individual with a weaselly face and thin lips. His visage suggested he was mean, which owing to his small build, gave him an over exaggerated sense of his nastiness. He downed the last of his coke, got up and left Macdonalds. He headed across to his Mercedes, unaware that a man was watching him from a Ford pickup.

Jim, noticing their target's colourful clothes, turned to Dayton. "Is that dude wearing fancy dress?"

Dayton smiled. It seems that Mr Flexner is a very flashy dresser. He added, "I think he likes to eat his Big Mac incognito," with more than a hint of sarcasm.

"Are you sure he's our man?"

"Perhaps we had better ask him."

Then, you'd better follow him, Lynsey. He's getting away."

Keeping two cars between them, they tailed the big Merc to the Pocantico Hills, a hamlet in Mount Pleasant. Their quarry turned into a driveway and cruised up to a large town house. Jim took some photos of Abraham Flexner Jnr. and his home. They watched him go to his front door, where a woman, Dayton took to be his wife, welcomed him.

Jim said, "What now?"

"I think we have got as far as we can tonight. So dinner and bed seem to be in order."

As they drove back to Manhattan, about an hours drive at night, Jim said, 'Pocantico' means running between two hills, about the Pocantico River. It describes where we are doesn't it?"

"How do you mean?"

"We're travelling a very curved thin line between being legal and illegal. Though I guess, the lines sometimes get confused."

"With the work, we do it's not hard to figure out the difference."

"How so?"

"If you don't get caught, it's legal."

Atlas 1 - 12 stood at the Gate, ready to go through. Dorian Gibson and Dr Veleska looked at each other. This initial Gate experience was the moment of truth for the troop bots. There was no logical reason why anything should go wrong. After all, the other equipment survived the dimensional shift effect. But these were highly technologically sophisticated, seven ft tall, humanoid robots, designed to go where humans cannot survive, such as regions decimated by nuclear fallout. Director Gibson spoke into her phone. "Okay, activate the Gate."

They stood back as, what looked like a huge metal doughnut began its power cranking up the process, in which a clash between protons and antiprotons created a wormhole shift into another reality. Unlike their human counterparts, the ATLAS Robots had no trouble with the transition. Dr Veleska pressed some buttons on what looked like a TV remote control. The Robots marched straight through the Gate, one by one, disappearing from view until the last one was safely through the dimensional warping device. Dorian offered up a silent prayer, imploring the divine recipient to grant success to the mission.

"They're coming through," Larson announced," as the artificial infantrymen materialised before their eyes.

Raf did a double take as the robot platoon halted before him. A1 said, in a deep metallic voice, "Reporting for duty, sir."

Larson grinned, then burst out laughing. "Will you get a load of that?"

Raf spoke into his radio, keeping it professional, "Infantry arrived safely, director."



Dorian overjoyed to hear Raf's voice, felt her heart flutter. Controlling herself, she said, "That's good news. Now Dr Veleska wants to talk to you."

She handed the radio to the scientist.

"Colonel Lynch, each robot is armed with an F2000 assault rifle, mostly made from lightweight polymers. It has a long barrel and is accurate up to fifteen hundred metres. The Atlas automatons are programmed to carry out some basic commands. They can be plugged into a laptop for you to download the operating manual. Each has its remote control. This interaction will be useful in the early stages but as they learn 'on the job' they will gather more data and respond automatically."

Fuck! A computer that kills, Raf thought.

Larson Beck, who was listening in, said "Robot's thinking for themselves. I do not like this idea. Supposing they decide we are not needed."

Hearing Beck's remark Dorian said, "The remote control has a manual override button. You have control of them at all times."

Raf asked, "Do they just follow orders or act on their volition?"

"Colonel, I also asked that question. The General assured me they only respond to orders."

"Where does his assurance come from?"

"Don't be difficult Raf. General Schulz informed me that the ATLAS robots are just dumb soldiers that respond to our commands."

Colonel Lynch had mixed feelings about the new recruits. But, hell, this was a whole new ball game. So what did he know? "Okay, Dr Gibson, I guess we'll take it from here." He walked up to the first robot. "Give me what's in your hand."

Twelve mechanical hands unfurled to reveal a CD and a remote control, with each ascribed its identity - from A1 through to A 12. Larson and Raf collected the software and the remotes. Then the Colonel issued his first order to the 'Full Metal Jackets' as he came to call the war bots. Raf said, "Robots, follow us." As one, they formed a single file and kept in step as they got their first taste of the uneven terrain.

The Pentagon funded the ATLAS project, just as it funded the Atlantis one. So the Pentagon called the shots when it came to the way both got used. General Schulz, one of the White House Joint Chiefs, felt very confident when he returned Dr Becker's call. "Dr Becker, how can I help you?"

"General, you can help me by telling me what the hell is going on with the ATLAS robots. Colonel Cormack informs me that you have sent them to a battle front but won't say where."

"That's correct, doctor."

"Well, I need to know where they are and what they are doing."

"That is highly classified, Doctor. I am not at liberty to furnish you with such information."

Lynne was expecting this, and she was not taking it lying down. "General, as per our contract you will note that under section 5, clause three, that the manufacturer (Boston Cybertronics) will maintain and upgrade ATLAS robot systems, as required. To fulfil our obligation to DARPA (the client), We have to be up-to-date with all aspects of experimentation. Therefore, you are duty bound to give me the information I require."

"Nice speech Doctor Becker, but National Security overrides all that. Like I said the information is highly classified, so I can't help you."

Lynne saw red! "How the hell am I expected to do my job if you sanctimonious asses ...?"

"We are all doing our job for a safer America, Doctor. How you do yours is not my concern, now we have ATLAS."

The threat to BC was subtle but inferred.

The problem was how to get Salvatore Lucini to come quietly. How could they get the kidnapped Friar from Rome to Cairo, with him playing along?" Sure, Yasir had Soter contacts, but they only got him so far. He decided to phone Dayton.

Lord Lynsey was in the middle of shaving his head when his mobile rang. A small 'a' lit up in red. He knew it was important. "Yasir, what do you want?"

"We have the best lead on the professor so far. In fact, we have an appointment to meet with the Diabolus master."

"Explain what you mean."

"Okay, we've got Salvatore Lucini, and we are taking him to Egypt to meet the professor."

"He knows the Merchant?"

"Salvatore gets relics and things for him. The point is we have to get Lucini into Egypt, and he's not happy about it. I need help to get him there. Who do you know there to assist us in getting the Friar into the country?"

"You do know what's going on in Egypt?"

"Things are a bit unsettled. But this is our big chance."

"Yasir, I'm tied up in America at present. This assignment is my last job for Soter. I'm retiring after this one."

"This professor is a big league Diabolus player. We can finally get Sonata. Don't you want to be part of that?"

Secretly Dayton couldn't wait to get his hands on the man responsible for the dome sabotage and other major crimes. "Are you sure this is going to work."

"As long as we can get that fat Catholic slob to meet with the professor - yes."

Dayton rubbed his goatee in thought. Flexner could wait for another day. "What do you want me to do?"

"Get the USAF to fly us into Egypt."

"Is that it?"

"We want something on Lucini so that he quietly complies with our wishes."

That shouldn't be difficult. Dealing with all those millions of lira could be quite tempting."

"Who were you talking to?" Tom asked.

"Somebody who's going to get us into Egypt and get some dirt on Lucini."

"Genuine dirt."

"If there's some there - yes. If not, we have to be inventive."

The battle in the jungle happened suddenly and raged on for several minutes until all those in the Singularian patrol were gunned down. The Singularians greatly outnumbered the Earthians, but Raf and Larson had their robots. At first, Colonel Lynch froze and didn't know what to do. But he soon recovered and started barking orders. Larson showed him how to manipulate the bots through the remote control. The Singularian patrol, receiving no return fire, went to investigate. The robot soldiers responded, marching ahead scanning the area with their powerful optical system.

The enemy troops stopped dead in their tracks As the Atlas patrol advanced on their ranks. They backed off as the massive, formidable, armed humanoids scoped them out. Atlas 1 to 12 lined up their targets in the cross hairs, locked on and fired short bursts from their F2000s. Nearly everyone got a hit.

The Colonel, stunned by the robots' precision, muttered, "Shit! I've never seen the like of that before."

"Very impressive, Colonel, Kronyn said, his eyes on stalks.

By the time Colonel Lynch, Beck and the strange metallic platoon approached the area where his men had set up their camp, he heard sporadic shooting, suggesting that the Singularians had found the location. Raf, scouting forwards, made out twenty or so soldiers working their way around the camp to trap his men, inside. He radioed Larson. "Enemy troops are surrounding our guys. Get the bots to take out some more Singularians."

Larson, who had been practising with the options on the remote control, pressed the 'remember' button, so the ATLAS bots would only have to be given that instruction once. Larson also discovered a button that overrode original programming so that all bots would respond to the single command. There was also a colour coding program that had the troopbots remembering the colours worn by the enemy. The Singularians wore aqua coloured tunics, so he programmed Aqua as the colour code. Then he pressed ATTACK.

A1 to A12 responded immediately. They marched off towards the marine camp, each tuning into the colour worn by their targets. The robots did not see them as an enemy. Such a concept did not compute. But target, yes. And the target was linked with the weapons program. Once they sensed a target, they locked on. So wherever the target went ATLAS followed until it had a clear shot.

The Singularian patrol, so intent on trapping the Marines, didn't see the metal soldiers bearing down on them until it was too late. There were short bursts of fire, following by five soldiers falling dead. The rest of the enemy platoon looked on in horror as the metallic monsters smashed their way through the jungle, forcing their targets out into a clearing. In their desperation to escape the unfathomable threat, they ran straight into the Marines firing line.

Having routed the enemy, Major Warner and his men stood and stared, unbelieving, as the awesome robots marched into their camp.

[http://www.dark-arts.ch/plans/seth\\_tem.htm](http://www.dark-arts.ch/plans/seth_tem.htm)

## Chapter 13

Abbott was surprised to discover, the Pyramids were not in the middle of the desert, which is the impression we get from documentaries. They were actually in the Cairo suburb of Giza. The golden orb of the mystical sun, sacred to ancient Khemmet, had sunk in the west by the time Hassan and Abbot alighted from the Jeep, at the site. Abbott took one look at the large shape in front of him and immediately got blown away. He had always heard that you couldn't appreciate the devastating

effect of the Pyramids unless you saw them in person. Now he knew it was true. Their sheer size almost took his breath away. He said, "I've always wanted to visit the pyramids, but not at night."

We are not here visit the pyramids. We are here to meet with the Circle."

"What, out here?"

"Follow me," Hassan said, putting his finger to his lips.

Soon he was looking at the lion with the face of a Pharaoh, the 4,500-year-old, or older, Sphinx standing guard at Giza. Abbott followed Hassan down a ladder, to the sandy trench that revealed the massive sculpture that was buried up to its head at the time of Napoleon. They walked to the right paw of the Colossus, to a spot around 150 feet from the Sphinx. Hassan shone a torchlight, illuminating a section of sandstone. He felt along the wall, his hand sensitive to any changes in pressure, as he pressed around. Then there was a rumbling sound as a section slowly slid aside.

Abbott was agog. "How did that happen."

"The Sphinx has many secrets. Let us go in."

"Go in! There! What's in there?"

"Some alchemist friends. Oh, and the 'Hall of Memories'."

Abbott followed the Alchemist's torch beam along a narrow sloping passageway, into a chamber, inhabited by half a dozen strangely garbed people, with odd masks. They stood in a circle, surrounding a small stone altar, upon which stood eight lighted candles, a bowl of water, a rough stone and a crystal.

One, who wore the Armadillo mask of Toth, recited, "Oh great Atlantis, from the beginning when Spirit took form, beginning the encasement of that island, the development of people, throughout their sojourn, left a mystery and a legacy that only the Alchemists Circle today can start to appreciate."

"We the guardians of this truth, recognise this," the group intoned.

Abbott felt distinctly odd unable to understand the language spoken. But he felt something powerful occurring, as the stifling heat, trapped in the chamber changed to a comfortable coolness, almost a light breeze.

"With the record of the first destruction, " the high priest of Toth continued, "we know of the changes that took place on the island. In the destruction of Atlantis and the construction of the pyramid of initiation. Atlantis must rise again as Ra rises from the waters each dawn. As the shadows or light falls between the paws of the Sphinx, the Sentinel that prevents entry to the connecting chambers from the Sphinx's right paw will do so until the fulfilment of time when the changes must be active in this sphere of man's experience."

Those present chanted, "Atlantis must rise again. Atlantis must rise again."

The high priest turned to the altar and took the crystal in his hand. He intoned, "Oh great Toth, reveal to us the Hall of Records and the hidden Tablet - the key to Atlantis. So that we may go there to retrieve the secrets of our survival that we may avoid extinction by the cold hand of entropy, accelerated by the Prince of Darkness - the destroyer of worlds."

"May the revelation of Toth give us renewed life," the group replied.

After the ceremony, when the masked, robed members dispersed, As Abbott and Hassan made their way to the Jeep the journalist asked, "What was all that about?"

"What you were privy to tonight was very special and very sacred to the Ancient Order of Alchemists. The ritual that took place spoke of the great alchemist Toth and his connection with the land of Atlantis. We asked for help in finding the key."

"But we are still no closer to finding it, are we?"

Hassan shook his head. "But there are dreams and in dreams - clues."

"Is that all we have to go on?"

"No. Sol has something to show us, so let's go back to his place."

As Hassan drove out of the car park, another vehicle followed, At the wheel of the 1960's Mercedes coupe, Guni kept his Jeep in sight. "Tonight there will be blood," he mouthed, as he tailed the Jeep back into the still awake city. Guni couldn't believe that the people who stole his Jeep had come out of the Sphinx. It could be relevant, so he made a mental note to tell his master after he had dealt with the Arab and the Australian.

Hassan drove the Jeep to a side street near the souk. As the alchemist parked his vehicle, he saw a car pull into the kerb, three cars back. The driver stayed in the car. He shrugged, there was probably nothing to it. Hassan thought he must be becoming far too paranoid.

"The 'Hall of Records' is under the Great Sphinx," Sol Mune said, in English, as he poured cold hibiscus tea for his guests."

"I thought it was just a myth," Abbott countered.

The Egyptian looked at him askance. "No, it is true. It houses the knowledge of the ancient Khemmetians by papyrus scrolls and history of the lost continent of Atlantis, much as the Great Library of Alexandria housed Grecian science and philosophy. Since scientists have been using ground-penetrating radar it has shown, beyond any doubt, there are in fact cavities underneath the Great Sphinx. One of these will unlock the secrets of Atlantis."

Hassan turned to his protege. "Why do you resist this great revelation? Why do you hang on to old beliefs that have not served you?"

Sol added, "The religious rituals and ceremonies of both Christianity and Paganism stem from Atlantean sun worship. The cross and the snake were Atlantean symbols of divine wisdom."

"I thought the cross was the Christian symbol," Abbott stated.

Sol smiled, "Yes, but it is much older than Christianity. The ancient Atlanteans were the progenitors of the Maya and Quichés of Central America, and coexisted within the green and azure radiance of Gucumat, the 'plumed' serpent."

Abbott remembered Miguel talking about the same thing. "I heard about this in Guatemala, but I didn't know there was a link back here."

"The Circle shows that everything is connected and entangled," Sol answered. In the Mayans creation story, the six sky-born sages came into manifestation as centres of light bound together or synthesised by the seventh – and chief – of their order, the 'feathered' snake. The title of 'winged' or 'plumed' snake was applied to Quetzalcoatl, or Kukulcan, the Central American initiate, and alter ego of Tehuti or Toth."

"So Toth was also Quetzalcoatl!"

"Hassan explained, "Toth had many incarnations. He was the original 'time lord' at the centre of the Atlantean Wisdom-Religion, and he was worshipped in the great pyramidal temple that stood on a plateau rising in the midst of the City of the Golden Gates. From there the Initiate-Priests of the

Sacred Feather went forth, spreading their keys of Universal Wisdom to the principal parts of the earth. This Atlantean religion got translated as the Maat religion in ancient Khemmet, which was also symbolised by the feather of truth."

"Wow! This knowledge is too much for my brain to take in," Abbott said, yawning.

Hassan laughed. "You have worn the young man out. But perhaps it is best to turn in. We have a big day tomorrow."

Guni, lurking in the shadowed alley, had other ideas.

He tested the door. It was locked, but it was an old door, so, with a bit of jiggling with his pen knife, Guni opened the lock. He waited to see if the loud click had attracted any attention. No one had stirred, so he quietly climbed the stairs. He came to a door on the small landing. He used his pen torch, to see his way. Guni made out the words El Kanji exports. The door was unlocked, so he entered. It was full of clothing, mats, rugs, towels, etc. he checked for any more rooms, but the only door led to an old fire escape. As he headed back to the door cursing himself for wasting time, his shin bumped into a box making him stumble and grab onto a tray to steady himself. Too late! The crystal contents of the tray clattered noisily onto the floor.

Sol, upon hearing the noise cursed, "Damn cats. I'd better see what mess they are making up there." He grabbed a thick wooden club he kept by the bed to deal with intruders and, grumpily, climbed the stairs. He reached for the light switch, immediately feeling an agonising pain in his back. Dropping the club, he instinctively reached for his back, and his hand came away covered in blood - his blood! Sol went cold, murmuring, "What the fuck!" as Guni's blade plunged into his body again."AAARRGHHHH! he yelled in pain, clutching onto a crate of candles, which fell with him, on the floor.

Woken by the racket upstairs, Abbott froze. Then he pulled on his shorts and went to the stairs. Hearing the noise of a door rattling, he thought Sol must be upstairs working. He was about to go back to bed, when he heard the word, "Help!" He raced up the stairs and found Sol lying in the doorway; his face ashen. Thinking the groaning Egyptian had slipped and hurt himself, Abbott, stepping over him to get to the light switch, put his foot in the widening pool of blood. Taken by surprise his foot slid away from under him, and he crashed down on the bloody floor, hitting his head. Abbott looked at the red stuff on his hand. "Blood!" he said, then it all went black - then nothing.

That was how Hassan found them. At first, with so much blood spilt, he thought they were both dead. Sol didn't respond to his touch and had no pulse.

Abbot responded to Hassan's prodding. Jerking up into a sitting position he felt his head throbbing.

"What happened here?" Hassan asked, hoping it wasn't what it looked like - Abbot and Sol having a fight.

Abbott extricated him from the merchant's stiff body and shakily got to his feet.

Hassan grabbed the sides of Abbott's sensitive head. "Tell me what happened."

"I heard noises. I thought Sol was working up here. Then I listened to the word 'help'. I came up here to see what was wrong. I figured he'd fallen then I slipped in his blood and hit my head," he said, grimacing, feeling the duck's egg size swelling at the back of his skull.

It seemed plausible to the Arab. he rolled the Egyptian over and saw the stab wounds. He straightened. "He was murdered." Hassan uttered.

"But who? Why?" Abbott spluttered.

The alchemist had to think fast. Calling the police would be the right thing to do, but that would only complicate things and slow them down. Worse still they may very well come to Hassan's conclusion, and Abbott would end up in gaol, which in Cairo, would not be a pleasant experience. The safest thing to do would be to make sure they wiped their fingerprints off anything they had touched and to leave as fast as they could. But what if a nosy neighbour saw them leave in a hurry in the middle of the night and told the police that, they would certainly be the number one suspects. Hassan got Abbott's attention. "Okay, this is what we do. We wipe all surfaces we may have touched. We leave the body exactly where it is. You destroy those shorts and have a shower. Then we tiptoe, so as not to attract attention."

Abbott moaned, "I need something for my throbbing head."

"Well make it quick. We have to get moving."

Abbott stopped his search for painkillers, nodded, his thoughts still hazy. Why had Sol been murdered?

Goman checked that all systems were running smoothly. These days it only took three operators to keep the hadronic system going. Before, up to 30 scientists were involved in making sure the 'Collider' ran at max power, with no hiccups. This achievement is due in large part to the Gomanachron, named after Goman, its inventor. Since then he was promoted to 'Director of Science' a very senior role in which he had a say about all scientific developments on Atlantis. At 6 foot 4 inches and built for comfort, not speed, Goman carried his bulk slowly. He was on his way to having a meeting with Kaltik and Mendes Amwon, the latter of whom had forced his way into the leadership role on the island. He wasn't looking forward to the meeting the Dictator one bit. Mendes Amwon crept him out.

Mendes was three inches shorter than Goman, but his piercing, searching eyes more than made up for the discrepancy in size. Kaltik, a government official around five foot ten inches and of a slender build, seemed minuscule between the two giants. Apart from his physical size Goman was a giant in the intellect department, whereas Mendes was a colossus in mass manipulation. Kaltik was putty in the Dictator's hands, but Goman proved somewhat of an obstacle where the Atlantean energy supply stood.

Kaltik smoothed her long white hair and said, "Mendes has been telling me about a way we can produce more energy with less input."

"Oh, and what is that?" Goman said, uneasy suspicion in his voice.

Indicating Mendes, she said, "He can explain it so much better than I."

Mendes looked straight at the head scientist. "My proposal is for us to increase the number of microscopic black holes produced by the particle accelerator. Therefore, requiring less energy.

The Minister agreed, "That it is a brilliant idea."

Trying to explain the principles of hadronic science was something Goman avoided like the plague. But here he was expected to agree with this 'babbling ape' simply because he was the Dictator. Disagreeing with Amwon was fraught with danger. But if it was necessary it was marginally safer to do so in a diplomatic manner. Goman responded, "While, in principle, what you say is true if we were to succeed in making more black holes, in the collider, we have no idea what effect it would have concerning tapping into extra dimensions in the universe."

"You speak as though that would be a problem."

Goman cringed, feeling those cold grey eyes penetrating into his brain. No, you don't get me like that, the scientist thought, using his mind control. "Any such black holes if they lasted more than a split second and gradually stabilised would pose a grave risk to Atlantis, which could sink into the ocean again."

Mendes turned to the Minister. "You assured me he would be with us on this."

Kaltik smiled weakly, "Let me speak with him alone. I think that may help,"

Goman hated them treating him as though he wasn't present. "You can address me directly. I am here you know."

Mendes smiled thinly, "Yes, you are, and how long that remains to be so is largely up to you."

Goman ignored the threat. Dictator's like Mendes didn't last forever. And he had heard rumours of help from Earth - even robot soldiers. The Chief Scientist also knew if the Earthians were able to liberate him and his people they would push for access to his technology. But for now, he had to tread carefully.

Once the Dictator was out of the room, Kaltik said, "You have no idea how difficult it is, and your obstinacy does not help."

"Obstinacy! It's my obstinacy, as you put it, that probably stops this island going the way of its ancient counterpart. Mendes Amwon is very dangerous and becoming more so by each day. We would be better off working and fighting with the Earthians to get rid of him and his ilk."

Kaltik trembled at those words. Goman had a big voice on Atlantis and always got himself heard. The minister now feared it would be his downfall "Those are treasonous words. They could get you killed."

Goman replied, "He could get us all killed, and I am not going to let him do it."

The minister went redder in the face than her usual ruddiness. She went up close to Goman. "He plans to have you removed and imprisoned. You must leave the Citadel and meet up with the Earthian army. Tell them exactly what is going on here."

Her words surprised him. However, running away was never Goman's style but being imprisoned would not help anybody - least of all him. "Tell him I will give his proposal my full consideration over night and will present a report in the morning."

The Singularians had the advantage of numbers, but anger and loyalty drove the Marines. That and the benefit of having machine-gun toting automatons on their side. The Marines had suffered another two fatalities in the latest firelight, but the Singularians had lost around twenty of their number in the skirmish. Having fought their way to the outer harbour, the Marines were close to the wall of the prison and security centre. Colonel Lynch was now ready to go and get his head scientist back.

Rodney MacKay looked up at his cell door when he heard the shooting. It could only mean one thing. The soldiers had come back for him. He heard people rushing about in panic. Then the sound of gunfire came from the corridor outside his cell. The Marines were getting closer. Rodney had to let them know where he was. Still stiff from the beatings he had taken, he struggled to his feet and banged on the cell door. It was useless. Nobody could hear him above the yelling and gunfire. The scientist needed something harder than his fist. Everything was fixed or bolted down, even his bed. But the wooden slats were loose. He grabbed one and smashed it against the door. It flew open, and a guard came rushing in, going for his sidearm. In an instant Rodney brought the wooden slat down hard, smashing the guard's wrist. The guard doubled up in pain. Rodney grabbed his pistol and



clubbed him with the butt. The guard went down like a sack of potatoes. At that moment he saw Colonel Lynch enter the cell. Rodney wasn't one for guns. The one in his hand seemed alien and dirty to him. He gave it to Raf. "They make me nervous," he explained.

Rafael's eyes were barely slits as he fought to remain lucid. It had been a long hard battle and blood was seeping from his side, and his face was pale. How are you, Rodney?"

"I'll be better once I get away from here."

Once the Marines secured the area, Dr Beck checked on the wounded. He started with the Colonel and applied a field dressing to his side. Seeing The CO nodding off, Beck said, "Stay awake Raf. You'll soon be able to sleep, but not just yet."

He then turned his attention to Rodney. The older man had been roughed up by his gaolers. A cursory examination found a broken finger, two cracked ribs and extensive bruising. Beck found Lynch. "Get someone to take Rodney back through the Gate.

Raf sighed, "Let him rest for now. Hell, we all need some sleep. Tell Major Warner to set the robots up around the camp."

There was still some sporadic shooting, but it sounded like the robots cleaning up. Major Warner, also battle weary, announced, We have secured the facility. It's now ours."

A big cheer rang out. The battle was over, and the Marines had won. Larson used his master control to recall the 'bots, which were programmed to complete their current assignment before returning to the patrol.

"What the hell is that?" Rodney asked, upon seeing the doctor use a remote control.

"I'm calling our metal comrades."

"Huh?"

Larson then realised Rodney knew nothing about the robots. "Prepare yourself for a big surprise." he grinned.

Dorian listened patiently as Senator Dalby criticised her. "Director, you know perfectly well that you did not have the authority to make such a decision."

Although she was angry and frustrated being pulled away to deal with pen pushers from Washington while her Marines were searching for Dr MacKay, she kept her composure and self-control. "Yes, that's true, but my people were undermanned in a war zone and desperately needed reinforcements. General Schulz kindly offered help. I would have been neglecting the lives of these brave Marines if I had followed protocol."

"That's all very well Dr Gibson, but now the Defense Department is stuck with a massive bill for which it hadn't budgeted."

Keeping a strict control over her feelings, while trying to understand the Senator's concern, she responded. "I was given to believe that we were given the robots for field testing."

"It doesn't matter which way you add it up, Director Gibson, your action was irresponsible and will come under review."

She acknowledged, in hindsight, she had made the odd decision that was illogical, and perhaps just plain stupid, but she had the Defence committee's approval. This incident was the first time she had been audacious enough to say fuck the red tape my people come first. She took a deep breath, "I

know that I have not always made the best decisions, and some of them, I will admit, are entirely my fault, but let me remind you, Senator, we are in an entirely new situation here. Sometimes the rigidity of Defense Department ruling isn't adequate. In this case, I stand by my decision."

"That attitude will not work in your favour, Dr Gibson," Dalby said.

"As I said, Senator, this is a whole new ballgame."

"We are acutely aware of the situation you are in, Director. In fact, now that you are on a war footing with the Atlanteans we are considering putting a military commander in charge of the project." Before Dorian had a chance to object, Dalby said, "Your role was to use diplomacy to access the new Atlantean energy technology. The conflict between you and the Atlanteans have caused us to revise our thinking."

"Senator, let me remind you we are at war with a vicious dictator who, somehow got through the 'Gate' into the Atlantean dimension. By helping to defeat this Mendes Amwon, we are building a diplomatic rapport that will help us achieve our goal. Also, we are concerned that this dictator will use the energy technology as a weapon if we do not stop him."

"That is conjecture and hearsay. As far as I can see, you have no proof of this. That argument will not sway the committee."

Hardly able to control her exasperation, Dorian said, "Senator, while I am wasting time here I have a contingent of hungry and fatigued Marines, led by Colonel Lynch, relying on the ATLAS robots for their survival. As we speak, they have captured a Singularian stronghold and are preparing themselves for an assault on the Citadel. So, do what you will, but this is my primary concern at present."

The Defense Department representative answered, "I understand that Director Gibson, but we can't just break with DD protocols when we see fit. We are on Earth, not on Atlantis and this is where decisions are made. Therefore, irrespective of what is happening on Atlantis, you are liable for your decisions. We will inform you when we have decided what steps to take."

With Dalby out of the way, Dorian went to the Control centre to see Dr Zeleska and check on the status of the robot army. As she spoke with the scientist, Rafael Lynch contacted her.

"Dr Gibson, we have a problem," Colonel Lynch said.

Dorian knew, by the tired tone of his voice, something was wrong. Terribly wrong.

"What's happened, Raf?"

"Larson has gone missing. Apart from the fact that most of us need his medicating care, he is also the ATLAS controller."

"What's your status, combat wise, at present?"

"It's all quiet on the Atlantean front. But probably not for long, if the Singularians attack us before we find the doctor. Without the robots, we are finished. We need Dr Veleska here with us ASAP."

"I will get her to speak with you."

"Colonel Lynch, how can I help you?"

"You know how to control the troop bots. We need you here, now."

"Colonel, I thought Larson had them under control."

"Doctor Beck is missing."

The last thing Dr Veleska wanted was to be in a war zone. "I am not trained for such a mission, Colonel." She added, "Larson told me in confidence that when things become too much for him, he has to go into retreat for a while. I'm sure he will return soon."

It seemed to Larson that Major Warner treated him as if he was one of the automatons. As the only MO on the mission, owing to the heavy casualties it was too much for him to cope. He was as tired as the rest of his troops, but Warner never seemed to consider that. Apart from Larson's concern about making mistakes, his medical supplies were running out, and he was pressured to find ways to improvise.

He had to find some private space, so he'd snuck away in the night and found a small cave on the coast. He closed his eyes and imagined he was back in his native Borlange, hidden from the world in Per Gynt's cave. Per Gynt, the thirteenth-century mountain dweller who became a notorious highwayman lived in the cave. The cave had now become one of Borlange's tourist attractions but when Larson was a boy it was not so popular, and he sometimes used it as a retreat, away from the rest of the world. Now, as the robot controller, as well as the medical doctor it was all becoming too much. Rodney was suffering post-traumatic stress, from his torture and imprisonment, so he was not fit enough to take over. Larson felt he was at the cracking point and desperately needed downtime, even for a day or so, which was why he'd made the drastic decision to go AWOL.

Major Warner approached Rafael, who was checking the latest intelligence about enemy movements. "Sir, I think we should return to base."

Raf knew what he meant. Without a controller, the Robots could become a significant liability. He was pretty sure they were programmed enough to fight by themselves, but he wasn't confident enough to guide them during battles. The Singularians were not to know this, which, he figured, was why they hadn't attacked. But that pretence certainly had a use-by date, which could be up any time soon. He went over to check on Rodney, who was acting odd. "Rodney, I need to know what those bastards did to you."

"You mean what did I tell them."

"The debrief will come later. Right now I need to know what the enemy did to you."

The head scientist looked up, his eyes blank, "I can't remember much. After the first interrogation, they left me to rot in that cell. I figured that the demonic character who kept on questioning me didn't seem to care if I gave him info or not. He just enjoyed having somebody to torture."

"Do you know his name?"

"No. The head guy may have mentioned it, but I can't remember. There was something about him, though. He is tall black and has weird long grey hair." Suspicious of Lynch's motives, he said, Colonel, you haven't taken time out to banter with me."

Raf nodded. "Rodney, Larson has gone AWOL, or something else has happened to him. The point is we don't have a robot controller. Are you up to the task?"

Rodney looked at the Colonel, unenthusiastically, "What do I have to do?"

Rafael handed him a remote control. "The bots know who the enemy is by picking out those wearing ocean blue uniforms. They find their targets, lock onto them and destroy them. But there are controls for overriding their programming when we want them to behave differently."

Rodney stared at the transmitter, intently. "And this controls them all?"

The level of dumbness Rodney's questions concerned Raf. It would be a couple of days before Dr Veleska would arrive. If there was a Singularian attack in the meantime, Rodney was the best hope they had. "Each troopbot can be separately programmed by its individual remote control. But we're not that advanced with them yet."

Rodney stared at the Colonel and surprised him by saying, "Aye, I'll give it a go."

"Where's the Jeep?" Abbott asked dumping his bags at his feet.

Hassan stood staring at the space that had been occupied by the Jeep. "Why would a car thief pick that old Jeep over the other cars parked around here?"

Abbot threw his hands up. "I don't know. Maybe the thief particularly liked Jeeps. Maybe because it was easier to break into."

Then Hassan spotted something out the corner of his eye. He bent down to look more closely. In the gutter was a small card. Written on the back were the words 'YOU'RE NEXT' The Arab picked up the card and turned it over. It read El Kadji Exports. Hassan went cold.

"What is it?" Abbott asked.

"I know who murdered Sol," the alchemist murmured.

"Who?"

"That crazy bastard, Guni." He handed Abbott the card.

The journalist nodded. "I knew we should have finished Guni off when we had the chance."

"Recriminations are not going to help. We have to get to Luxor, and we have no transport."

"Why Luxor?"

"To face a black magician."

"I don't think I like the sound of that."

"Glossing over Abbot's comment, he said, "Trains! We will catch a train to Luxor."

"What, at night?"

Hassan quickly Googled Cairo train times on his phone. "There's one leaving Rameses Station in 56 minutes."

"How do we get there?"

Hassan grabbed Abbott. "We borrow a fucking car."

"Why not drive to Luxor?"

Hassan flashed him a dark look. "Just find a car."

Having left the stolen car in the Cairo station car park, the fugitives had just ten minutes to spare to catch their train. Grabbing their belongings, Hassan and Abbott rushed into the modern terminal building and joined the milling crowd, underneath the watchful eye of the guards in the gun towers. Soon the train appeared, and passengers grabbed their bags in a free-for-all to get the best seats. Abbott followed Hassan onto the train. Dead tired, after an eventful and exhausting night, all Abbott wanted to do was go to sleep. But it was not an easy train on which to sleep. All sleeping berths were taken, so Abbott had to try and sleep sitting up. As only an odd seat here and there was

available, Hassan and Abbott got separated by all the other passengers. First, he was woken up by the conductor who ranted on in Egyptian. Groggy from lack of sleep, he realised he hadn't bought a ticket. A kindly passenger translated for him and Hassan purchased tickets for them both. Then there was the young family with very active children, nearby. Utter exhaustion afforded him short bouts of sleep until, either, the rattling train shook on the bends or some kid bumped into him. In the end, Abbott gave up and peered out of the window into the inky night. The blackness was abbreviated, as the express roared past villages, illuminated only by the twinkling of fairy lights wound around palm trees and fitted around windows. As they whizzed through larger towns brightly lit minarets, standing like missiles ready for launching, created an eerie multi-coloured glow in the inky darkness.

As the blackness gave way to dawn, Abbott watched entranced, as donkeys pulled flatbed carts of produce to markets, while the drivers slept. It was an extraordinary sight to see the implicit trust between man and beast and the intelligence of the animal as it knew where to go. Soon villages and farms burst into life, as country folk made the most of the narrow strips of fertile land between the harsh desert and the life-giving Nile.

Eventually, they arrived in Luxor. The ancient city was a real eye-opener for the journalist. No sooner had they exited the new station - designed in the style of an old temple - Egyptian street vendors tried outdoing each other by decreasing their prices for anything from necklaces to small basalt statues. As the pushy vendors selling their cheap artefact copies pestered the disembarking passengers, Hassan ushered Abbott away from the hustlers. The Alchemist, grabbing the journalist's arm, manoeuvred him to a row of horses harnessed to four-wheel carriages, offering sight-seeing opportunities in a relaxed style. Hassan came to an arrangement with one of the drivers, and they were off exploring the city of Luxor."

Abbott turned to the alchemist. "This is enjoyable, but I don't know what it has to do with the reason we are here."

"I think, we deserve a little relaxation," The Arab smiled, as their horse clip-clopped along the bank of the Nile, where there were tall-masted, brightly coloured, feluccas moored between the massive monuments of Luxor and Karnak.

"What do you mean about meeting a black magician?" Abbott probed.

Hassan put his finger to his lips. "I just want you to get a sense of this amazing place," he lightly admonished.

Hassan leant forward speaking to the driver. Money changed hands, in the horseman's direction, and he drove them through the dusty back streets, passing perfume and spice shops, tailors and crafts stalls selling alabaster busts of Queen Nefertiti, onyx statues of Anubis, and models of other Pharaonic gods.

It certainly was an extraordinary place, a heady mixture of old Khemmm and the modern Islamic culture. Abbott had never seen Hassan so relaxed, and he wondered what was lurking around the corner for them.

The USAF transporter touched down on the dusty runway of the El Gorah, Egyptian Air Force base, in north-eastern Sinai near the Egyptian/Israeli border. Yasir Tiwanah, Tom Graham and Salvatore Lucini got off the plane, immediately feeling the cold of the desert night. A Jeep was there to meet them. The young Egyptian corporal drove them to a hut, where they would stay for the evening. There were bunk beds, an ablutions area and a small stove. Lucini was groggy from the flight and the drugs to keep him docile. Yasir wiped his brow and pushed Salvatore into a chair. "Tomorrow we'll go over what you are going to say to Professor Sonata. Just in case you decide to go off script, remember this. We have proof that you have been scamming off the Church by selling on artefacts that rightfully belong to the Vatican."

Salvatore spluttered, "Who told you these lies?"

"Please don't interrupt. I was coming to the best part. We have a list of the things you stole. If you do not openly work with us, the Pope will get to know of your peccadillos. I imagine the Vatican will lay criminal charges against you. So help us bring the professor down, and the Vatican may never need to know of your extracurricular activities."

Salvatore crossed his arms and thought about the proposal. He thought the Jew was probably bluffing, but he couldn't afford to take the risk. "Okay, I will work with you. Now I need to change these filthy clothes." Yasir delved into his bag and pulled out a spare Djellabayah and tossed it to him, "Be my guest."

"Hostage, you mean," he said, glaring at the Jew.

Once Lucini had gone to use the shower, Yasir spoke about their mission. "I've been doing some homework. What we are looking for is the temple of Sati The new Temple of Sati was established in 1970 by Lt. Colonel Mitchell Aquiline and disgruntled members of the priesthood of the Church of Satan, who left because of administrative and philosophical disagreements with its founder."

Tom said, "Is this Lt. Colonel Aquiline still running the show?"

"No. Although Aquiline remains an active participant of the Temple of Sati, he no longer holds any office within the organisation. Professor Francisco Sonata, who succeeded Aquiline in 2004 currently holds the office of High Priest."

"Christ, that bastard gets around !" Then Tom asked, "What happened to the Colonel?"

"He was a High Priest while simultaneously serving in the armed forces as a military intelligence operative and psychological, propaganda warfare expert. Lt. Aquiline was processed out of the Army Active Reserves in 1990 after a ritual child molestation investigation. He was the prime suspect" in a series of paedophile scandals involving the sexual abuse of hundreds of children, including the children of military personnel serving at the Presidio US Army station in the San Francisco Bay Area."

Was he charged with the crimes?"

Ignoring the question, Yasir continued, "Furthermore, even as Aquiline was being investigated by Army Criminal Investigation Division officers for involvement in the paedophile cases, he retained highest-level security clearances and was involved in pioneering work in military psychological operations 'psyops'.

"How did the police get onto him if he had the Presidio's protection?"

"Apparently one of the victims identified Aquiline and his wife as participants in the child rape. According to the victim, the Aquilines had filmed scenes of the child fondled in a bathtub. The child's description of the house, which was also the headquarters of Aquiline's Satanic Temple of Sati, was also detailed and the police were able to obtain a search warrant. During the raid, they confiscated 38 video tapes, photo negatives, and other evidence that the home had been the hub of a paedophile ring, operating in and around the US Military bases."

"What happened to them?"

"In 1992 Mitchell and Janet Aquiline were killed when their BMW sports car went through a fence and plummeted off a cliff, into the churning Pacific. Their bodies got washed up three days later. Their deaths were put down as a suicide pact."

Tom said, "And our Professor Sonata takes over the Temple of Sati, with its, organised paedophile rings, Psi-Ops and MKULTRA mind control connections - a potent package for an evil bastard like Sonata."

"Yes but that's not all. Sonata is using all that power as a front to create chaos simply for chaos's sake. That makes him extremely dangerous in a way not dreamed of by Mitchell Aquiline,"

Diablo carried out his ritual, although he usually avoided any repetition like the plague. But the Lord of Chaos demanded it. And he was there to do the Lord's bidding. Ever since entering the Temple of Sati he found it difficult to leave. It provided him with protection. Outside, he felt vulnerable, a sensation he had not felt for many years. He was psychically a force to be reckoned with, but he could not shake the portent that a balance of power was going to change. So it was best to stay close to his Lord.

He did not consider himself good or evil, not that he cared one way or the other. He worshipped the Great Set - the god of Chaos. Chaos was neither good nor bad. Evil, of course, will try to destroy, as much as good will try to help. But Chaos? Chaos is allowed to do whatever it wants; all choices are open to it; it can be randomly merciful one moment and arbitrarily damaging the next. Chaos is the full option--it could even be thought of as being Choice personified--the ultimate expression of any refusal to restrict one's will. And Diablo certainly refused that. There was freedom in allowing his will to do whatever. By giving full rein to temptation, he liberated his will

He despised the sheeple who resisted temptation and constrained their will to the point it stifled any creativity. Therefore by allowing his will to take him wherever, he was creative with his life - not destructive. Chaotic yes, destructive no. Diablo believed the less constraint there is in the universe; the more chaos had room to breath. He had often pondered the question, is order the natural way of the universe. Sometimes he came to the conclusion that it was so. In which case, only chaos can breath new life into a dying system. So by setting up situations for chaos to flourish, to his mind, he was a saviour doing the great work. With such thoughts boosting his ego, he invited Guni into the chamber.

The killer looked at his scarlet-robed master with the brown goatee. "You summoned me, Master."

"I am meeting with a man today. We will discuss things privately. You are to make sure we are not disturbed. Afterwards, you will make sure he disappears. Do you understand?"

"Yes, master."

"You may go."

After Guni had left, Diablo pondered over the Mark of Cain artefact that adorned his altar. What had The Fat Friar found out about it?" he wondered. If it had gotten the Vatican curator off his fat arse and over to Egypt, he reasoned it had to be significant. So he would listen to what the Italian had to say.

Following their restless night on the narrow bunk beds, Yasir, Tom and Salvatore were served breakfast and escorted to a Canadian CH135 Huey that was to fly them to Luxor Airport. They were directed by two MFOs (Multi-Forces and Observers) to the waiting craft. Tom had no idea how Yasir had pulled it off, but he had the military eating out of his hand. Whoever the heavily perspiring, overweight Jew was, he obviously had influence in high places. As he took his seat, Yasir was thinking much the same thing, except, in his case, he was silently lauding Dayton Lynsey for organising their transportation.

During the flight in the great chopper, Yasir said, "We are up against a compelling individual who can control people's minds. From what we know about Diabolus their one aim is to bring about a breakdown in law and order. They have no other motivation."

Tom was hardly listening. There was a strong possibility that he would be face-to-face with the man that brutally murdered and decapitated his team of archaeologists. The horrific memory still sent shivers up his spine. This Sonata was the person who robbed him and who was the cause of his incarceration. "He's just a useless piece of a shit ruthless mass murderer to me. You have no idea of the sleepless nights I have had dreaming up ways to make him suffer."

"Tom, we must keep our heads. The only way we have any chance of overcoming him is by keeping our self-control."

Salvatore, having come to terms with his situation, said, "Only I have met the man. Only I know what he is capable of, and neither hatred or a cool head is going to beat him."

"What are you trying to do - scare us into leaving him alone?" Tom said.

"He could have something there," Yasir stated. "So, how will we be able to beat him?"

Salvatore said, "I don't know if you can beat him but his ego can be his big let down. Attack his belief in his self-importance. That's the only chink in his armour."

"I don't see how that will help," Tom said.

Salvatore tried clarifying what he was saying. "Professor Sonata believes there is no difference between good and evil. I have debated with him about this. I explained that the path of goodness is even narrower than not allowing for doing harm. Good people don't just avoid wrongdoing; they seek out the positive good of those around them."

"Wow! That must have floored him!" Tom responded with undisguised cynicism."

Lucini scowled but didn't take the bait. "What I am pointing out is that the Professor has an entirely entropic mindset."

"What does that mean?" Yasir queried.

"Entropy is a condition in which everything in a given system, all particles and energy, is distributed with evenness. Imagine a universe like that, like a heated gas stretching throughout all space, no spots hot or cold, no stars, no planets or people, no useful energy. Entropy is a place where all ability to act, all choice, has been completely removed."

"Okay, Lucini," Tom said, "So entropy is, evil and that bastard is evil. So what?"

"Entropy isn't truly evil, but it's bad, a state where any human who desires to live would never want to be. But 'evil entropy' makes a much better title than 'bad entropy'. Now Sonata believes that the 'work' he does is creative, not destructive. He believes his thinking is constructive, not entropic. That is because of an entropic mind, as it becomes more so, has no awareness that it is so. Show him that his mind is sick and confused. This psychology is the only effective weapon you have."

"Brilliant!" Yasir exploded, "He uses psyche weapons, so we have to do the same."

Tom wasn't sure. It all sounded like gobble-de-gook to him.

Dayton caught the news item, as he carried out his research on Abraham Flexner. He turned up his radio. The newscaster said, "Yesterday the Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful Movement marched from Ammunition Hill to the Holy Temple Mount along the same route as the Israeli heroes in 1967. The message of this extraordinary rally was to awaken the people of Israel to obey the call of G-d. At the end of the march, they stood in the front of the location of the Holy of Holies



and called on Israel to immediately purify the Holy Temple Mount from its foreign pagan presence and to build the Holy Third Temple. A spokesman for the procession, Rabbi Ibbekar said, The destruction of the Dome was God's work to give us a sign to build the temple

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## Chapter 14

What was the point of dealing with Flexner Dayton wondered? The damage was already done. It would stop him causing more mischief on behalf of the Rottafellers. But to condemn him for what he might do wasn't the way Dayton worked. To go ahead with the hit would be for revenge and Dayton did not see himself as an avenging angel. Let the FBI fool the masses by claiming to have got the culprit. What did it matter? It was all subterfuge and distraction. Besides, Flexner was someone else's problem now. Dayton had retired. Maybe he could make up to Margaret if it wasn't too late.

Jim Kraus had been waiting in his pickup truck for over an hour. That didn't faze him. He was used to surveillance work. Keeping the mind alert while doing nothing was a skill Jim had developed over many years in the CIA. Dayton Lynsey should be out any minute. It was the arranged time to meet, and he was usually punctual.

Not only was Jim going to be reinstated in the 'Company' he was to be made the head of a distant station. All he had to do was deal with the Limey lord. Dayton could be haughty, arrogant, cold and bossy but Jim liked him. He got things done. Of course, his loyalties were to the CIA, so Jim had to tell his superiors that Lynsey planned to take out Flexner to send a message to the Rottafellers. He looked out of his windshield. Dayton had just left the hotel and was heading to the quiet place, where they could talk, uninterrupted. South President Street, down by the ocean was the chosen spot.

Dayton waited for Agent Kraus to arrive. He had a feeling the agent would be relieved when he told him his decision. For the first time, Dayton had slipped up and shared his intention with someone who could sell him out. But he'd gotten Kraus his job back, for which Jim was grateful. However, Dayton made the mistake of equating gratitude with loyalty. He heard an engine and saw Jim's pickup coming into view. The Englishman stood quietly as the old truck pulled up nearby. He could have just caught his plane and contacted Kraus later, but he didn't like loose ends. "Hi Jim, he said. "I've been thinking about our plan."

"Me and you both," Jim said, a snub nose automatic, fitted with a silencer, in his hand.

Dayton stared at the man. "What's the meaning of this?"

"It's not personal. I just gotta take care of business."

"No! You've got it all wrong!"

"It's you who got it wrong, Lord Lynsey." He fired almost point blank range into Dayton's chest.

The English agent stood in shock, as a red patch spread out on his white shirt. "No!" he uttered, falling to the ground.

Jim Kraus checked for life signs. There were none. He wiped his prints off the gun - a Saturday night special - and tossed it into the ocean. He took out his phone, pressed a contact, then waited. "Mr Flexner, I have just completed that little task." He put his phone away and walked back to his truck and his new life.

Diablo knew a challenge was coming. Alone, in the sacred temple, he prepared himself to evoke the great one. He had to be at his most powerful to be ready for the coming confrontation. First, he had to surrender to the power of Set. Donning his scarlet robes and armadillo-like mask he addressed the Prince of Darkness (Diabolus) in his original form 'Set' the Khemmetian God of death and destruction. This approach allowed him a clear appreciation of this most ancient and revered deity. He sat in the Pharaonic position, back straight hands on legs, and put himself into a meditative state. Soon he began to see 'beneath the surface into the actual nature of Set,

He sat in front of the stele, which was covered with a black cloth sporting an upside down pentagram in the centre. There was to be no light. Diablo breathed deeply, as he gazed upon the pentagram. Projecting his mind into the core of the symbol, he intoned, "I join with Set." He had taken several deep breaths before he was there. Confidently, he cried out, "I AM SET! For the next hour or so he sat in the darkness, chanting the words repeatedly.

He rose quietly and walked through the chamber to the entrance of the temple. Set was originally a solar deity, the lord of fire. He hadn't done it since Atienza. There was nobody around. He focused his eyes on the shadowed shape of a date palm, then thrusting out his right hand, a ball of flame shot out of his palm and hit the tree. It immediately burst into flames. Diablo considered himself ready.

Abbot soon discovered that Luxor was a very traditional town with an intense pride in its customs and culture. He had been following Hassan around for over two hours. "What are we looking for?" the journalist asked.

"Isn't it a spectacular view of the mountains on the West Bank."

"Yes, but it doesn't answer my question."

"Among the numerous tombs and excavations is a small temple. The Temple of Set. That's what we're seeking. However, as the light is beginning to fail we will continue our search tomorrow."

"So, what do we do now?"

"I have a friend who might be able to help us."

"Why doesn't that surprise me?"

Abdul Saleem Omar had inherited a thriving antiquities business from his father, in Luxor. The ancient city was often referred to as a giant open-air museum, with thousands of years of history on display. For decades tourists flocked to his shop in the old market, to buy statuettes of Pharaonic gods, ancient Egyptian queens, papyrus art and glass scent bottles. Now, after the uprising and the coup, he had almost no business left. The political turmoil gripping his country had also crippled his

industry. Despite his hardship, he welcomed his friend, Hassan, with open arms. He also made the Australian welcome as well.

As they sat drinking cold hibiscus tea, Abdul explained, "The situation is appalling. I'm lucky I don't have children. My friends are struggling to feed their families."

"It is dreadful. My heart goes out to you my friend" Hassan sympathised.

"The tourist trade used to earn Egypt billions of dollars and provide work for millions. Now, things have never been worse."

"Is it worse than it was by the time Hosni Mubarak was ousted?"

"That was bad, but it became much worse during President Mohammed Morsi's year in office. It went into free-fall." Abdul paused then sighed, "In 2010 tourism was my best year for some time. Back then I could make \$150 a day, and I was so busy I needed more staff; now they are all gone and sometimes I don't earn anything."

Hassan said, "You need to get into the export business, using the computer."

"I am a mere artisan. I know nothing about computers."

Hassan sipped his tea. "Look, I have a proposition for you if you are interested. Abbot and I are looking for the Temple of Set. Do you know where it is?"

Abdul shook his head. "I haven't heard of that one. There are so many temple ruins around here it's difficult for me to keep track of which is which. It's funny though because you are the second person to ask me that, today."

They both stared at the merchant, eyes wide.

Hassan said, "Tell me about this person."

"There's not much to tell. The stranger was fat. I think the man might have been Jewish or Palestinian."

"Did he say why he wanted to find the temple?"

Abdul shook his head. "What is so special about this place?"

"Help us find it, and I will help you set up an export business on the Internet. That's the deal."

Abdul shrugged. "I have nothing much else to do."

Abbott was out shopping when he saw it. What looked like Guni's Jeep was parked in the street outside a fruit and vegetable shop. He parked Abdul's van close by and went to investigate. On closer inspection, the reporter noticed the damaged front bumper with paint on it from the rear of the camper van. He phoned Hassan. "I can see Guni's Jeep. I'm waiting for him outside the shop."

Hassan, surprised, said, "What are you planning to do?"

"Follow him. See if he leads me to this Professor character."

Hassan didn't like it. It was too spontaneous - unplanned and without any back-up. But it was also an opportunity too good to be missed. "Be very careful. Remember, this Guni is a murderer. Don't take any risks."

Seeing the man come out of the shop, with supplies, Abbot said, "He's coming now. Must go."

Abbott followed Guni out of the old section of Luxor, towards the Nile. He tried keeping two vehicles between him and his quarry, but Egyptian driving techniques did not allow it. Traffic

pushed in, changed lanes and even created extra lanes, as seen fit by horn-blasting, light -flashing drivers. Abbott kept as far to the right as he could. He heaved a heavy sigh of relief when the Jeep turned right, off the main road. Now, on a gravel road, keeping the Jeep in sight without being spotted was difficult. Maybe Guni wouldn't keep checking his rear-view mirror, but Abbott couldn't take that chance. He pulled over and let another driver go ahead. Abbott's phone GPS showed they were driving towards the Nile. He saw the Jeep slow down and turn off the track to the left. Abbott pulled the van over just before the turn-off and got out. On foot, he felt the full impact of the Sun's heat. When he turned the corner, he saw the Jeep, near some ruins. Guni was unloading some bags near a large section of wall. The killer fumbled around the wall. Abbott momentarily forgot about the scorching desert heat as a section of the wall slid aside allowing Guni access. The Journalist thought he imagined things; that the heat had got to him, but the killer and his shopping had disappeared. Abbott got a little closer, but he couldn't see Guni anywhere. In danger of being exposed in the open space, Abbott nervously scanned the area. The wall, about ten feet high, part of a mound of sand and rubble was all that remained of the ancient building that the killer had entered with supplies. Then Abbott saw the single date palm, which looked as though somebody had set it on fire.

Abbott logged the location on his phone app and waited, crouched down behind some fallen masonry. Then he saw the concealed door slide aside. Guni came out and went back to his Jeep. The murderer didn't have any shopping bags with him, which meant he had stored them inside Set's Temple. Abbott waited until the Jeep had left. He then phoned Hassan. "I think I have the location of the temple."

"Well done. Excellent work. Where are you now?" Hassan asked.

"I'm at the ruins. There's a wall with a secret entrance. I'm going to look for some mechanism that opens it."

Fearing for the Australian's life, the Alchemist said, "No Abbott! You must not do that. Come back here and ..."

Abbott interrupted, "It's okay, Guni has gone. There's no one around."

"You don't know that, and if this Professor Sonata is in there, he is a compelling and dangerous individual. Now come back."

Abbott looked around. All was quiet, still and hot. But he was unarmed and had no idea what he might face. "Okay, heading back," he said, a little disappointed.

Goman Worrall reached the outer harbour around dawn. For a scientist much more used to laboratory work and advising the Government on technology issues, being a fugitive evading curfew guards while creeping through the city at night was way outside his comfort zone. Exhausted, both physically and mentally, with adrenalin running high, he rested for a few moments. His only hope was to reach the Earthian forces before the Singularians spotted him. As there was only one, heavily guarded bridge, connecting the Citadel with the horse racing stadium on the far side of the inner channel, he had to be inventive. Many years before, he was engaged in a civil engineering project to improve sewage removal from the inner city. Goman had kept a copy of the blueprint, which showed the entrances for maintenance work. A wide outlet pipe ran under the inner canal. The tricky bit was to access the opening without being spotted by guards on the bridge. Goman Worrall had chosen to wear black clothes for this purpose; he even had his white hair tucked under a black cap to help his disguise. He couldn't afford to leave anything to chance. Goman looked around, using some field glasses that had been collecting dust in his study, for years. He needed a higher elevation point to observe the pipe, but the land around the outer harbour was mostly flat. The scientist spotted the security centre, guarded, but not by Singularians, unless they

had taken to wearing jungle camouflage uniforms. "It must be the Earthians," he said to himself. He somehow had to get their attention without them shooting him. He needed to speak with their commanding officer but how could he do that without being taken for the enemy? He couldn't just waltz up and introduce himself. Besides, he looked quite a fright, and they would probably not believe him. No, there would have to be another way. He checked in his backpack for anything that might prove useful. There was a lightweight yellow plastic poncho, a ball of string and other bits and pieces including some contact glue. As there had been no showers overnight, just a stiff breeze blowing along the coast, the raincoat was still dry. Then Goman got an idea.

Private Thorne wondered what the yellow thing was doing in the sky. Then he recognised it as a kite. But what was a kite doing out there in a combat zone? A kid could get hurt out there. "Can you see that kite?" he said to Private Spence.

"Of course I can. I'm not fucking blind," Spence responded.

"Go and check it out. I'll stay on guard."

"Piss off! You sort it out if it's worrying you."

Thorne said, "Right. You stay here then."

He checked that his MXP25 was fully loaded, just in case he ran into trouble. There had not been any Singularian hostilities since the enemy had fled from the robots. But he couldn't afford to take any chances. Private Thorne headed off in the direction of the kite. The land was clear and mostly flat, so snipers were not likely to be a problem. But any Singularians arriving by boat could mean trouble for him. Then he saw the person playing with the kite, which was plummeting to the ground. There was something else, white and waving. It could be a surrender flag, he reasoned. He unslung his rifle and moved cautiously forward.

There was somebody dressed in black, holding the kite and a white handkerchief.

Goman Worrall saw the soldier moving towards him. He put up his hands. "I'm unarmed and come in peace."

Private Thorne relaxed a little. Who are you and what do you want?"

"I'm the Chief Scientist of Atlantis. I want to speak with your leader."

"Why did you run out on us, Dr Beck?" Colonel Lynch asked, pleased to see his doctor had returned.

Larson looked sheepish. "I felt I couldn't cope. There was too much pressure, what with controlling the robots, as well as my medical duties. I just needed some time out, sir."

Rafael stared at the medic, a look of disapproval on his face. "I'm sure we would all like some time out for ourselves, Dr Beck. What you did was a dereliction of duty. You went AWOL. If The Singularians had attacked us, we had no robot back up. That has to go in my report." The Colonel then softened a little. "Why didn't you come to me if things were becoming too much for you?"

Larson had been expecting that question. "What would you have said if I had?"

"I don't know. We may have been able to work something out."

"For me to be of any use to this outfit I had to leave for a while."

Rafael glared at the MD. "That's not the way it works, Captain Beck," emphasising that Larson was first and foremost a Marine.

The Swedish doctor remained silent.

Lynch said, "You don't have to worry about the robots anymore. Rodney is taking over that job. You are dismissed, Captain."

Raf was about to work on his next strategy to get across the bridge into the city when Private Thorne entered with a man clad in black.

"Private, why are you bringing a civilian into this post?"

"Sir, he claims to be the island's top scientist."

Lynch looked up and down at the dirty, bedraggled man with the odd tattoo on his left cheek.

"I know I don't look like it, but I am the Chief Scientist from the Atlantean Academy of Science and Technology. My name is Goman Worrall."

Colonel Lynch had never heard of him, but if the man were who he said he was, he would be valuable as a source of intelligence for the assault on the Citadel. "Private, go and get me Kronyn."

"The reason I look like this is that I had to escape from the city last night,"

"Why last night?"

"Because I didn't agree with the Dictator, Mendes Amwon."

Just then Kronyn came in. He took one look at the scientist, his eyes like saucers. "Praise be to Neptune that you are alive and well, Professor."

"You know this man?" the Colonel said.

"Of course. Professor Worrall is responsible for many of the things that have improved our lives in Atlantis."

Now convinced the scruffy individual was not a spy, Raf said, "Thank you Kronyn." Then he turned to the scientist. "So you seek sanctuary. What do you have to offer in return?"

"What your government has always wanted, Colonel. I can give you a complete and honest sharing of our energy technologies."

"Okay, but first there is the little matter of returning your Island world back to you. I want you to work with our head scientist and strategist, Dr Rodney MacKay."

Rodney MacKay looked up from his robotic control studies while munching on some army rations when Kronyn and Major Warner approached him.

"What do you want?"

Warner said, "Larson came back to camp. The Colonel tore him off a strip."

"What's that got to do with me?" he retorted, not interested in gossip.

"He was the robot controller. I thought you might like to compare notes," the major explained.

"Well you're perfectly entitled to think what you like but don't waste my time with it," Rodney replied calmly, with a barb in his voice.

"There is something else," Kronyn ventured.

"And what would that be?" he said, showing little interest.

"Colonel Lynch has been talking with our Island's top scientist, Goman Worrall."

"Oh. And this interests me because?"

"Because Colonel Lynch said you are going to be working with him."

"Oh am I? Well, I decide who I do or do not function with, and you can tell the colonel that from me."

Warner and Kronyn slunk off, with the major muttering something under his breath.

Larson organised his instruments in the makeshift surgery. It was well equipped with the latest diagnostic devices, courtesy of the Singularians. It was also fitted with an operating table, a microscope and a laptop computer.

Kronyn wheeled Takran in and parked the wheelchair. He did not look good. "Is this related to what happened to him before?" Larson asked.

"I don't know that, but Takran hasn't been well. He was improving yesterday; then he got sick again." Kronyn, oddly waving his hand, said, "I need to... get something to eat." He turned around, raking his fingers through his hair, trying to keep himself steady.

"What's wrong with you?" Larson asked puzzled at Kronyn's out of character behaviour.

"Nothing. Why?"

"I need to check you over. Get up on the table."

"But Takran is the one who needs your help."

"I will look at him in a minute. Now please lie down."

Kronyn did as the doctor told him.

The Swedish doctor looked down at his patient. I'll have to run some tests, but nothing I've ever seen explains your behaviour."

"Is there something wrong with me, doctor?" Kronyn asked plaintively.

Beck trailed off and proceeded to hook Kronyn up to several machines and place an IV in the back of his hand. "Speaking of which, are you okay?"

Kronyn nodded. "I'm all right."

Dr Beck looked him over. There was no blood coming from any wounds; his eyes were clear and his focus sound; there was no sign of concussion, all of which left the doctor perplexed. He smiled. "All done. Now let's look at Takran."

The young Atlantean's breathing was irregular, and he seemed to be suffering from some fever. At least his veins, no longer greenish, had returned to the standard colour. He checked a side wound. He peeled away the old gauze, cleaned the spot with rubbing alcohol and applied a new dressing. "There, that's better. I'll see you both in a couple of days. If he deteriorates let me know, immediately."

Diablo had chosen to ramp up his power in Egypt for two main reasons. It was the location of the Temple of Set, and it was where Abraham came across Abramelin the ancient Mage. The Jew's interest in various magickal practices had led him on a tour of the civilised world, seeking out magicians and Qabalists, learning from each. Abraham had left writings which explained the

importance of selecting the correct location and how to summon various spirits and demons to do the bidding of the magician.

Now he, Diablo Francisco Sonata had those writings, and he was the Mage. The Mage contemplated the 'Mark of Cain' artefact on his Setian altar. Diablo had summoned Zequiell, who told him it was time to ingest more of the monatomic gold solution that would make him invincible against his enemies. Guni was dealing with that. The Mark of Cain showed him the illusion of morality. Cain had killed his brother, yet God had not struck him down dead. No, God had put a mark on him so that others would know who he was and would not kill him. Well, he, Diablo, had God's mark on him. The professor had killed many, and God had protected him also. But not the God of the Jews - the God of false light, Lucifer.

Guni knew nothing of the precious powder, other than he had to collect it for his master. That the powder was lost to mankind for thousands of years meant little to him personally. It had been called many things through the ages: the Fruit of the Tree of Life, Star fire-Gold of the Gods and even the Philosopher's Stone. He was to purchase it from Yousef's Bazaar, in Karnak. The landmark to look out for was the entrance to the Hilton Hotel, on the same side, just a few hundred yards away. Guni went into the shop and asked for Yousef. He didn't notice Hassan Shamsi looking at some gold rings. But Hassan saw him. Once he knew the killer was in the area, Abdul and his friends kept an eye on his movements. Hassan saw Yousef come to the counter, hand Guni a small package, in return for what looked like a significant amount of money. Whatever it was in that tiny parcel it was precious and worth investigating.

Hassan tailed Guni back to his Jeep. He had phoned ahead, and Abdul was waiting with Abbott, in his van. Guni couldn't believe it. Somebody had knifed one of his tyres. He swore under his breath as he undid the clamp holding the spare wheel to the back of the Jeep. Just then he found himself surrounded by three men, two of whom he recognised. Before he had a chance to say anything he felt a sharp jab in his neck. Then the world went wobbly, and he felt himself falling.

The pair dragged the killer to Abdul's van who drove it back to his place.

The cold water thrown into Guni's face brought him back to consciousness. Diablo's man tried to move but found himself restrained by cords that bound his hands and feet to a wooden chair. The man with the long beard and hooked nose was staring at him. In his left hand, he had the small package. "This would have cost somebody a packet, and I guess it not for you. Is this for the Professor?"

Guni stared at him, wondering how he knew about the professor and the package. "I know nothing about it. I was told to buy it, but I don't know what it is."

"Strangely, I believe you." Hassan nodded.

Abbot asked, "What is it?"

Hassan grinned. "You are correct, Abbott. That is what the old Khemmetians called it."

"What?"

"What is it?"

"I asked you that."

"No. It is called 'What is it'." Once he saw that Abbott, at last, comprehended what he was saying, he explained, "The ancients believed this substance would facilitate extraordinary life-spans, and cure many diseases by allowing the body to operate as close to perfection as possible. We would say today that it would vastly increase the ability of each cell to conduct electrical impulses, almost like a high-performance re-wiring job for the entire body."



Abbott rubbed his chin. "So why would the professor need this?"

Hassan got close to the prisoner. "Why does Professor Sonata need this?"

"I don't know. The professor didn't say," Guni replied nervously.

"Then you will show us where he is so I can ask him."

"No. That would be signing my death sentence."

"Perhaps you would enjoy a life sentence instead," Hassan said.

"What do you mean?"

"For the murder of Sol Mune, in Cairo."

Guni tried not to react, but his body language gave him away - the eye flicker and sweaty palms. "I have no idea what you are talking about."

"You know, when you stole back the Jeep," Abbott added.

Hassan said, "I haven't reported my friend's death it to the police yet. But I will if you don't do as I say."

What happened next was difficult for Abbott to comprehend. Abdul was helping the hand-bound killer into his van when shots rang out. Guni stood in momentary shock. One bullet had severed his spine. The other slug went through his back into his heart. He was dead before he crumpled onto the road. Hassan looked up, into the barrel of a gun, held by Bill Smith. This killer was a far different Bill Smith to the one who had hitched a ride with them.

"What the fuck do you think you are doing," Abbot asked, having found his voice. "He was about to take us to the Professor. Now you've screwed everything up."

Bill looked around. Witnesses were hiding inside buildings. The police would be there soon. "Get in the van, all of you," he said, waving the gun around. "Hassan, you drive. Abbott and you, he said indicating Abdul, Put Guni in the back. It's best not to leave him on the street."

"Bill, why are you doing this?" Hassan asked.

Why was he doing this? An excellent question Bill thought. The answer was simple. Guni had failed in his mission. Bill was living proof of that. The truth was that after he had left them in Cairo, he felt lost with no direction. Bill mourned the death of his wife. He blamed Professor Sonata for her murder, and although he wanted revenge, that wasn't his reason for being in Luxor. While Philux was with Diablo, the author had felt alive and powerful. Yes, he knew exactly why he was doing this. "To show Professor Sonata I am worthy of his trust."

"Bill, this is crazy. He sent Guni to kill you."

"Now I have killed him." He prodded Hassan with his gun, "Get moving before the cops show up."

As he drove, following Abbot's instructions, Hassan said, "Bill, you don't understand. He is weak without his drugs, and I have confiscated them."

Bill, confused, said, "Whatever kind of trick are you trying to pull on me it's not going to work."

"It's true; he uses a very precious powdered gold. It's making him crazy. You must be mad if you want to align yourself with a crazy man."

"You just shut the fuck up! " Bill snarled, pressing the barrel against the back of Hassan's head.

Dr Leanni Jeallus walked into her new office. It was virginal, a clear desk surrounded by blank walls waiting for the new president of the Science Academy to put her mark on it, to make the office her own with her personal things. All trace of Professor Worrall had disappeared, at the behest of Mendes Amwon, the Dictator. As soon as he had learned the scientist had fled the Academy he made it known he did not want the professor mentioned ever again, on pain of death. Dr Jeallus was next in line for a promotion, and she was not adverse to the Dictator's ideas on energy production and saving. She left her office and passed lecture halls, on her way to the power generator control area, where it was time to check on the status of the Hadronic Collider.

Leanni looked at the data. The small changes demanded by the Dictator didn't seem to make a lot of difference. Professor Worrall, although a legend in the Science Academy for his Hadronic research into ZPE, (Zero Point Energy) Leanni thought, was a little over cautious at times. Worry Worrall, she called him behind his back. The Collider was cranked and running smoothly at 100 percent. The magnets were all functioning well, all two thousand of them. 5 percent more energy was being generated than when Worrall was in charge. But if it were not for his genius in converting ZPE into available energy she wouldn't have a job. She heard footsteps. It was an uneven gait, a sign that the Dictator was bearing down on her. Coal black with grey-whitish hair down to his shoulders, he reminded her of a photographic negative. He had Jorace and Klimm, his two resident heavies with him. They were both serving long sentences for murder when Mendes took over Atlantis. They were perfect as his bodyguards.

Dr Jeallus, How is our energy output, now?" Mendes asked, in a slightly threatening way.

"Five percent higher," she said, proudly.

"Bring it up to ten percent."

She could do that, and it probably wouldn't be a problem. But how far was President Amwon going to push this, she wondered? "Ten percent is likely to be the best we can do."

He looked at her, wanting to strike her for answering him back. But he needed her expertise for now. "You are probably right." Then he said, "There's something else I need."

"Oh!" she said, wondering what bombshell he would land on her this time.

"I want the data on how to make a black hole."

Leanni thought her mind was playing tricks. Did he say what she thought he said? "Why?" was all she could sum up as a response.

His cold grey eyes looked even more frozen. " You dare question me?"

"It's just that ..."

"I know it is here somewhere. You have two days to produce it, or," Mendes snarled, wiping his long skinny finger across his throat.

The implication was clear. The mad man would kill her if she did not show him how to make the black hole.

The idea of having a paperweight that happened to have a mini-black hole in it gave Mendes Amwon no end of pleasure. It got him wondering about some interesting questions. What would happen if someone fired a rocket containing an encased black hole into a rather massive object, like a star? Well, according to some physicists, mini-black holes theoretically could swallow a star – and in fact did so frequently in the early days of the universe! An evil idea began to form in his mind. Once he had his black hole, he could hold the entire world to ransom by threatening to put it in a rocket and aim it at the sun.

There was a curious thing about the nature of Diabolus. There was only room for one Mage at a time. However, even more, curious is the fact that nobody knew this, not even the Mage himself. The nature of disorganisation is such that chaos squeezes out stronger individuals to carry on the upgraded species into the next phase of devolution. The Mage becomes such once they have achieved a certain level of destruction in the world. What Mendes Amwon was planning would far supersede the efforts of Diablo, elevating the Atlantean dictator to the degree of Mage, leaving Professor Sonata feeling puzzled, weaker and at a loss, a condition that can happen to any Mage at any time.

Why had her husband been killed? Lady Margaret Lynsey wondered, having received the tragic news from Dayton's closest friend, Matthew Snelling. She couldn't take it in at first. "What on earth was he doing in Baltimore?"

Matthew, feeling distinctly uncomfortable, nervously played with the brim of his bowler hat. "I'm trying to find out the details. They need a family member to go and identify the body."

Her husband was now just a body. Lady Lynsey had been raised to be robust - stiff upper lip and all that. She touched Matthew's arm. "Thank you for telling me before it's all over the media."

He could see the glistening in her sad eyes. "You won't have to worry about the press."

"What do you mean?"

How much could he tell her? He had to give some explanation and, despite being a Minister of the Crown, he found it tough to lie. "Lady Lynsey, as you know I knew Dayton very well. How shall I put this? There was a side to his life he kept very private."

"Matthew, you are not telling me anything new."

"Quite. The thing is that Dayton did a lot of work to help with world peace. He was very modest about this and didn't want anyone to know.

"Including me, I suppose," Lady Lynsey said, peevishly.

"That's why he was always travelling here and there. He told me, in confidence, that, after America, he was going to retire, gracefully. Tragically, he won't get that chance now."

Feeling bitter, she said, "And he kept all this from me, his wife."

Matthew nodded, "I don't know why but Dayton never did anything without an excellent reason."

"I will have to let Daniel know," she said, almost absent-mindedly.

"I will take care of that if you like."

Yes, thank you. Perhaps Daniel will go to America with me." She looked at Matthew, beseechingly. "Let me know what he was doing over there."

"I will leave no stone unturned, Lady Lynsey."

As he was driven back to the Houses of Parliament, Matthew Snelling made some phone calls. The first was to Rodney Maddox. "This is Matthew Snelling. Look I need you to do something for me."

"What do you want?" Rodney asked brusquely, remembering their previous meeting.

"I need you to look into the murder of a British citizen in America."

"That doesn't come under the remit of Six. That's FO stuff,"

"Not when I tell you who it is."

"Okay, who is it?"

"Lord Dayton Lynsey."

The phone went silent.

"Rodney, are you still there?"

"My God. I guess he took one too many chances."

"Yes, it would seem so."

"I never liked the man much. But I am curious about what happened."

"Lady Lynsey, his widow, wants to know. Let me know as soon as you have something."

Rodney sat back in his wrap around leather massage chair, trying to take it in. So Dayton had finally sailed too close to the wind and got his comeuppance. He burst out laughing. Sure he'll look into it and if he found the person who did the deed he would shake his hand.

The Second call was to Forex Trading, where he spoke to Daniel Lynsey. "Hello, Daniel, Matthew Snelling here."

What does that sanctimonious parasite want, he thought. "Matthew, are you after some shares?"

"No, but I need to share something with you."

"Sounds ominous. Look, busy right now. Call later."

"This cannot wait. You must phone your mother."

"My mum! Has anything happened to her?"

"Not her, Daniel. Your father was found dead, in America."

Daniel nearly dropped the phone. "My dad dead!" he said in a mechanical sounding voice.

"Phone your mother."

"What happened?"

"I'm trying to find out. Look there's been a blackout on this. Six is looking into it."

"Don't you understand, he's not coming back. And the soldiers will be here soon," Dr Jeallus said, trying to get through to her captors.

Jorace could not believe their master had left them in the lurch, babysitting the woman scientist. He put his face six inches from hers. "The teacher will soon contact us and tell us you are no longer needed. Then we will have some fun," He sneered.

Klimm did not want to be there when the Marines arrived. "Perhaps she speaks the truth. Maybe he won't be back."

"He got you two to torture me to get what he wanted. He doesn't care what happens to us. We have played our part," Dr Jeallus sighed.

Jorace, big and goofy, was not the sharpest knife in the draw. But the possibility that Dictator Amwon had short-changed him began to percolate in his brain. "Then, let's kill her and get out of here," he grunted, taking out his pistol.

Then they heard the sounds of metallic footsteps on the stone floor. The trio looks up as the robot filled the doorway.

A2 saw the target going for his gun. It's aggression sensor kicks in. It instantly receives the target's personal data: height, weight, speed, response time, etc. It locked in on the target and fired. The target went down.

Klimm, petrified, frozen to the spot, stared at Jorace's bleeding inert body.

Dr Jeallus, equally stunned, sees a soldier enter the room. Relieved, she gasped, "I'm the chief scientist. They held me, prisoner."

<http://motherearthalchemy.com/>

<http://laughingsquid.com/how-to-make-a-black-hole-possibly-destroy-the-solar-sys>

## Chapter 15

"I AM SET THE MAGNIFICENT DESTROYER," Diablo yelled into the chapel. "THY EYE OPENS, AND I SEE ALL." The Diabolus Mage demanded, "Where is it? It should be here." becoming increasingly agitated about his missing servant, he shouted, "YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME! I SHALL REND AND DESTROY THEE FOR YOU ARE AN ABOMINATION IN THE EYE OF LORD SET. I SHALL REND AND DESTROY YOU ALL!" he ranted, becoming increasingly delusional.

Outside the ruins, a Toyota Crown pulled up. Yasir looked at the Friar and nodded. Salvatore took out his phone and pressed the name, Sonata. He waited nervously. "Ah, professor, I am here. Where are you?"

"Salvatore Lucini. So you have come to worship at the feet of Set the all powerful."

Baffled, the friar said, "I have come to tell you of great news concerning the Mark of Cain."

"What news? Tell me."

"I have to show you."

Diablo couldn't focus on what the Vatican buyer was saying. His mind was full of fleeting images, times in history, places, people. He held his head, telling himself to concentrate. "What do you have to show me you lowly servant of Set."

Yasir looked up. Another vehicle a van had just arrived.

Tom said, "Who the fuck is that?" he watched, agog, as a big built man controlled three other people, whom he held at gunpoint. The big man was on the phone while still training his gun on his prisoners. But the number was engaged.

Bill frowned heavily. "Why isn't the master answering?"

Hassan said, "Without his golden drug he's probably climbing the temple walls by now."

Bill glared at Hassan. "Any more smart ass remarks and you go the way of that other piece of shit, Guni."

"Okay, so what's the big plan, Bill?" Abbott asked.

"My name is Philux." Just saying the name made him feel stronger than weak-willed Bill Smith. He tried the number again. It was still busy. "Fuck!" He wondered what to do next?

Salvatore, trying to get through to Sonata, said, "All I can say is that I need to show it to you in the artefact."

"Where has Guni got to. Why am I surrounded by inferior insignificant beings?"

Having no idea what the professor was on about, the fat Friar said, "I have to show you, so how do I enter the temple."

"Enter my temple, dog. You are not worthy."

Salvatore turned to Yasir. "It's no good. He's not making sense."

Tom got out of the car. "This is fucking bullshit! I am going to get that bastard!"

Yasir went after him. "Tom, anger will work against you. We must work out our moves with cool heads."

"What moves, Yasir. What moves have you got?"

The Soter agent was silent.

"That's right. You haven't got a fucking clue." He pulled out a Maadi 920 semi-automatic.

"Where the hell did you get that?" Yasir asked, not expecting an answer.

Philux saw the tall bearded man storm off from the other parked vehicle. Then a shorter fatter man stopped him. He's eyes darted backwards and forward between his prisoners and the man with the gun. "Shit! He's going after my master."

Abdul, who had been quiet till then, said, "I don't know what's going on here, but it has nothing to do with me."

Abbot, addressing Bill, said, "You'd better go after him then."

Philux knew the Australian was baiting him. He waved the gun at him. "One more fucking remark like that and you are dead."

Abbott didn't think so. Bill - he preferred to think of the Yank, as Bill - only kept threatening them. He wanted them alive, to present as an offering to his master.

Tom edged his way between the scattered slabs of temple stone, his finger on the trigger, ready for action. Some guy back at the air base would be explaining that he'd lost his piece. Well, tough shit! Tom needed it. A nineteen mm shell could do a lot of damage, even to somebody as fireproof as that murderous bastard, Sonata.

Hassan said, "Bill ..."

"Philux."

"Whatever. Philux, we don't know what those guys are planning. So why don't I go over there and ask them?"

"No. You can go," the gunman said, nudging Abdul with his weapon.

"What am I suppose to say to them?" the puzzled Arab asked.

"I don't know. Just ask those people why they are here?"

Yasir saw the Egyptian approaching. He said, "What do you want?"

"My friends ask me to ask you why you are here?"

The Jew looked at him, suspiciously. "Why are you people here?"

Touching himself, Abdul said, "I am just a humble shopkeeper. They think an evil man is hiding in a secret building here. They are after him."

Yasir could not believe it. They were both after the professor. Well, it did make some sense. "Who's the guy with the gun?"

"His name is Bill, but he likes to be called Fee lux."

"Tell him to meet me halfway and to stop waving that gun about."

Tom's gut feeling told him he was getting close. Somewhere nearby was the secret entrance. Sonata would need an air supply, so he looked for signs of a vent. It was hot, and he yelled in frustration. "COME OUT YOU COWARDLY MURDEROUS BASTARD!" There was no reply.

Diablo knew something was going on outside, but he didn't know what it was. He yelled, "WHERE ARE YOU WITH MY ELIXIR? YOU WILL PAY DEARLY FOR KEEPING THE GOD OF CHAOS WAITING!" Images in his mind went through rapid changes. Before he had a chance to get a sensory grasp on one picture it turned to something entirely different. Without the powder, his mind was becoming chaotic. Then he heard the voice, taunting him, challenging him, insulting him. He donned his Set mask. He would show the worthless insect what it means to anger the Prince of Darkness.

Tom scanned the ruins for the slightest sound or movement. His archaeological experience had trained him to pick out the details, to look for some anomalous sign. He heard something. He froze, listening, his heart rate increasing. There it was, a scraping sound indistinct but real. Then he saw it, the apparition in the scarlet cloak and Set mask, about 50 metres away, standing in an entranceway. His heart missed a beat. Then he heard a booming voice. "THOSE WHO CHALLENGE THE MIGHTY SET SHALL PAY DEARLY!"

Tom aimed and fired a few rounds. The figure still stood there. Then the Archaeologist saw a flash. As his mind tried grasping what was happening his instinct threw him behind a piece of masonry just in time. The fireball hit with unerring accuracy where Tom had been second before. The fireball struck with a force that destroyed a large piece of granite, firing sharp shards in all directions. Tom crouched as tiny mineral missiles peppered all around him.

"What the fuck was that?" Abbott said, rocked to his core.

Philux remembered Atienza and the power demonstrated by Diablo. He laughed loudly. "Now you know what you are up against, what can you do?" he turned to Hassan. "Go over there and show your pathetic magic."

"How does he do that?" Abdul asked, utterly bewildered.

The next fireball hit a piece of masonry shielding, Tom, It struck the stone with such force it was cleaved in two, but did not fragment. Tom got off a couple more shots while retreating to another rocky shield.

Philux was in awe of his master's power. What was he doing with these pathetic insects when he should be by his master's side. He began running towards the explosions. He would help his master get rid of the madman with the gun. He would show his worth to the great Diablo. "MASTER, I AM COMING!," he yelled. "IT IS I, PHILUX, YOUR SERVANT."

Diablo, alerted by the loud voice looked up to see who was shouting. No, it couldn't be! Guni said he was dead. Where the fuck was Guni? Where was his powder?

"IT IS I, PHILUX, COME TO HELP YOU!"

The images, the flashbacks - even worse the flash forwards, assailed Diablo's fragmented mind. Philux had returned from the dead to kill him.

"MASTER, I..."

Then the flash, then the fireball.

"Fuck!" Abbott said, starring as the fireball hit Bill, blasting him off his feet as flames engulfed his body.

With the gunman gone Yasir and Salvatore approached Hassan, Abbott and Abdul. "Yasir said, "He is weakening. Each time he projects fire his energies are becoming depleted."

"So who's next to volunteer as a human torch?" Abbott asked, cynically.

"Tom Graham is our best chance, but he may not know that Sonata is losing his power," Salvatore commented.

Abbott clarified "Tom. He's the guy playing cowboys over there - right?"

"If he uses up all his ammo we have no weapons. Someone needs to get over there and tell him," Yasir said, looking at Abbott.

Salvatore added. "You have to get to Sonata before he goes back inside the temple."

Abbott was on his feet and racing towards Tom, who was hunkered down behind a sandstone head of some ancient Pharaoh.

Tom spun around. "Who the fuck are you?"

"Relax. I'm on your side."

Seeing the stranger had no gun, he said, "What good are you?"

"I'm just a messenger. Sonata's fire-power is weakening. We have to get to him before he retreats underground."

"The bastard is firing fucking fireballs. So, Einstein, just how the hell are we suppose to do that."

"We give him two targets. That will hopefully confuse him. You go to the left, and I take a right. Keep yelling at him. Taunt him. But don't waste any more ammo."

Abbott homed in on a large piece of stone around ten metres away. He raced for it, yelling, "SEE IF YOU CAN GET ME!" a weaker fireball hit the desert, spraying sand all over him, like a gritty shower. He made it to the rock, his heart in his mouth.

Tom was now a few feet closer. There was a piece of stone about two feet wide and eight feet high. Not perfect but it would take him closer to his target. Tom took a deep breath and went for it. "YOUR TIME IS UP YOU MURDEROUS ANIMAL!" he yelled, just making it to the shield of sandstone as the top half exploded, scattering fragments all around, some of which hit him as he tried protecting his head. He felt blood running down his right leg and right arm. There was also a nasty gash on his skull.

Abbott made his next run, to within ten metres from where Diablo stood. He dove behind a flat piece of wall, about two feet high. The explosion hit with force and cracked the masonry but did not



shatter it. Sonata's fire-power was weakening but the closer the reporter got to him the more vulnerable he became.

Tom wiped away the blood. His leg hurt like hell, but he needed just one more run. Steeling himself, he rose painfully to his feet.

Diablo, disoriented, saw enemies all around him. They wouldn't die. To beat his enemies, Diablo needed more power. He needed to focus, but his addled minded darted from one incomplete jigsaw to another. The past was becoming the future - the future the past. It was all mixed up. He fired a bolt and retreated.

Tom raced forward. "YOU'RE NOT GETTING AWAY FROM ME!" he made it to the stone door with just enough room to squeeze through before it closed on him.

Abbott ran to the entrance as well, but it closed up before he got there. Then he heard shots from inside, then silence. He fell to his knees, shaking.

Hassan caught up with him and gently got Abbott to his feet. "You can relax. It is over. He is no longer a threat."

## Chapter 16

### Independent News Report:

#### ROBOTS ALLEGEDLY ON MURDEROUS RAMPAGE IN SPRINGFIELD.

The Missouri town of Springfield has been placed under martial law since metal-heads have committed alleged multiple murders! You won't see this on the nightly 'news' from the liberal, electronically-drugged mainstream media. ATL the Anti-Transhumanist League, headed by Helen Cleaver states that Man and the sentient machine cannot live under the same government.

In a bizarre twist and a first for the judicial procedure in the United States, the two robots responsible are charged with four counts of malicious malfunction (actually a quadruple homicide). Prosecutors claim the two are responsible for last Friday's multiple murders of Radley Stack, 23, Herve Vincent, 28, Illiana Marcion, 29 and Cinzia Brunowski, 24, all in what, police say, is a random act of mechanical malfunction.

Dr Covington used his laser pointer on the slide show screen. It showed an image of a perfectly healthy looking young lady. He turned to his audience of second-year medical science students. "Can you spot the cyborg in this picture?"

He watched the blank looks with amusement. "You're looking right at the cyborg. Michelle Choros was born almost deaf but can now hear, thanks to a cochlear implant. Most of the cyborgs in your computer games and movies are either assassins, soldiers or super cops. But cyborgs have been walking among us for many years, and they look just like ordinary people."

A student asked, "So what's the difference between a human with robot parts and a robot with human parts?"

"I think the short answer is it all depends on whether you have a brain or a central processing unit."

This comment got a few laughs.

Ulysses continued, "This trend will grow with many cyborg upgrades becoming available through Boston Cybertronics, in such areas as hearing and vision enhancement, metabolic enhancement,

artificial bones, muscles, and organs, and even brain-computer interfaces will be invisible to the casual observer, implanted beneath the skin."

"How is our society going to cope with changes that challenge human uniqueness?" a student asked.

"This will become acceptable as long as cybernetic features on the surface, such as dermal enhancements or technological actuators like retractable wings, will be carefully camouflaged. No one will want to shock the rest of society by looking like the tin man in public. I think the important way for us all to think about this is to realise that the process of cyberisation has already been happening for centuries if not millennia, since the advent of clothing and piercing. For many generations, but especially in the last couple of decades, our technological gadgets have been getting smaller, more functional, and more closely integrated with our natural activity."

Another student said, "Dr Covington, Do you think, 'a' Transhumanism is a good thing, and 'b' is it inevitable?"

"Two good questions. The answer is yes to both. These cybernetic systems are designed to enhance humans and will significantly improve our everyday experience, from letting us hear a wider range of ambient sounds, to viewing millions of stars rather than just a few thousand, to making us more resistant to accidents. They will improve the overall economy by enabling us to do more work in less time for better pay. In the long term, enhanced humans may get a bigger portion of the economic pie than un-augmented humans, but the pie itself will become so much larger that even the poorest people of tomorrow will be better off than the wealthiest of today. Let me leave you with this. Enabling widespread use of the real applications while cleanly and completely suppressing the nasty applications is our first-order of the challenge."

As Ulysses left the auditorium, a kind smartly dressed mature woman stopped him. "Dr Covington, a man, is waiting for you in reception."

"Did he say who he is or what he wants?"

"I don't know anything about that," she said, shaking her head.

Ulysses went to the reception area of the Oregon health and Science University, where a man with collar-length wavy dark hair and Hollywood matinee smile, rose from his seat, "Dr Covington, I'm thrilled to meet you."

"Were you at my lecture?"

"Sadly no. I only got here about ten minutes ago. Do you have a few moments to spare?"

"That depends on what I am spending them on,"

"Once you hear I'm sure you will agree it's worthwhile."

Elijah Brooks was one of those men commonly known as chick magnets. In his late forties, fit and muscular, he still gave younger guys a run for their money. Superbly tanned and standing at six foot two, the man easily passed for a Hollywood star. He was head-hunting for Neurotech, a new but very well financed kid on the hi-tech block.

Ulysses sipped his refectory coffee and listened to what Elijah had to say.

"Question for you. What is a robot?" the head-hunter asked.

"Is this a trick question?"

"Not at all. It's one that Neurotech asks all prospective employees."

"I'm not looking for a new job, but I believe the idea that robots are merely manipulators that operate on a factory floor, performing precise and repetitive tasks, is somewhat outmoded. I also think a robot, under the control of a human operator, is not entirely robotic."

Elijah nodded, "At Neurotech we see a robot as a machine with a self-programmable brain. Architecturally, a robot is a computer (analogue or digital) that can have an effect on the real-world while processing sensory input from that world."

Ulysses looked at Elijah bemused. "By brain, I assume you mean CPU."

The Neurotech man chuckled. "I'm not afraid to call it a brain, Dr Covington. Let me explain. At Neurotech we are interested in what constitutes the 'real-world' for a digital operating system. If we can understand their world, we can better understand them."

"As their maker surely we already know them."

"Ever since nerds at universities dreamt up bots that developed their verbal responses from human input it is clear that robots can learn from experiences that may well give them a different outlook on their existence. And I'm not talking about images conjured up by sensory perception. Plato never trusted knowledge that was gleaned entirely from our senses. So, at Neurotech we are working on super sensory systems - the most advanced in the world."

"What do you mean by super sensory systems?"

Elijah flashed a dazzling smile. It will be much better if you come and see the wonders we are achieving." He handed Ulysses a brochure.

He smiled, "I'm curious enough to check it out."

"I promise you won't be disappointed. Of course, I have no idea of the financial package you are receiving at present but look at these figures which are commensurate with your expertise and experience and see how they compare with your current rate."

Tamis, while wandering around the base perimeter, discovered a lovely view of the ocean near the south-west jetty. This part of the beach became her special spot when she felt the needed to be alone. She was reading about human history, on her touchpad because she felt an affinity with the Earthian's world, and she wanted to learn about it. It's exciting, and violent history had her intrigued. Sensing someone approaching she looked up.

Dr Marie Henman said, "Hi Tamis. I hope you're enjoying the books." She had downloaded many of her eBook files for the young Atlantean. The stories included: 'Lord of the Rings', which Tamis enjoyed, excited by the adventures of Bilbo, Gandalf, Frodo, Aragorn and Legolas. They at least stopped her worrying about Takran.

"Yes thank you, Dr Henman."

"Are you okay? It's just that you look down."

Tamis forced a smile. "I'm fine. I just need to be alone."

With the doctor gone Tamis' thought about Takran. He was sick again, but at least he was well cared for in the hospital. Dr Beck assured her that Takran was in a stable condition. But she still worried about him, Tamis cried and sometimes, sat wondering what life would be like without him.

The Atlantean put down the tablet and rubbed her temples. She shook her small fist. "I hate you Singularians for taking away our families and for ruining our island. The enemy had taken away

both her best friends, first, Etna and now Takran. The hated Singularians killed her aunt in front of her mother. The loss of her sister affected her mother terribly, who died six months later.

She was crying, when she heard footsteps and saw Bella walking towards her. Tamis smiled through her tears. Bella had been the first person to befriend her since she came through the Gate and Tamis valued every moment she spent with the older woman. She was still feeling angry and sad, but she became calmer once Bella sat down beside her.

"Hello, Tamis. How are you feeling?" her friend asked, touching Tamis' shoulder gently.

Tamis sighed and looked down at her folded hands in her lap. She peeked up at Bella, and said, "I am feeling better than before. But I can't stop thinking about Takran." She added, "And you. I know you care deeply for Kronyn."

Bella nodded, a hopeful smile appearing. "I am worried, but he is very resourceful. Dr MacKay and Major Warner are very skilled. I have great faith that they will succeed, especially with the robots to help them. We could see if Dr Gibson has any updated reports."

Tamis considered the proposal and nodded with a smile. She was grateful for the diversion. She bookmarked her digital story and followed Bella back to the control room.

There was nothing new, so the two women found a quiet spot and talked. Tamis said, "When Takran recovers I think I will tell him that ..." She paused, hesitant about baring her innermost feelings. She wanted to confide in Bella, but she had been teased mercilessly by the nurses when they saw how Takran would come and collect her for lunch and dinner, and would sometimes come just to distract her, hug her and tease her with a poke to her sides.

Bella looked at her and smiled. "Do you love him?"

Tears came to Tamis' eyes. "Yes." She admitted. "These feelings that well up in me when I see him or think about him, they're wonderfully terrifying. I imagine bonding with him, and although it feels delicious, it's also scary. Sometimes, he annoys me with his inability to speak with me honestly, but I want to spend every annoying moment with him."

Bella's smile grew to a grin. She hugged the girl. "That is wonderful, Tamis."

They stood around the shallow grave, heads bowed. Hassan said a prayer for Guni's soul. "We only knew him a short while, as an enemy, not a friend. But somewhere he had loved ones and friends. Praise be to Allah the Compassionate for caring for our lost brother."

Abbott said, "Amen." He was also thinking of Tom. Their paths had only crossed briefly, but for that moment they shared something special as comrades in arms. Abbott learned from Yasir the trials the archaeologist had suffered. Looking in the direction of the concealed temple, the reporter said, "Tom had more reason to hate Sonata than any of us. I hope he finds peace now."

Yasir said, "Only we now what happened here today. And it must stay that way. We must not breathe a word of this to anyone. Is that clear?"

"The sooner I forget this, the better I like it," Abdul said. He added, "Hassan, Abbott if you want a lift I am leaving now."

"Yes, let us get out of here," Abbott said, following the shopkeeper.

As they drove back to Luxor Abbott was lost in his thoughts. It freaked him out when he thought how easily one of the fireballs could have killed him. Never before would he have put his life on the line, like that. Yasir had called him a hero, but he did not feel like one. He wondered, were there real heroes or just ordinary people who stepped up with bravery in their hearts? He preferred that. Being a hero was too scary and, in a way, demanding. He thought about his family and friends left

behind in Australia. But his nostalgic dalliance was soon brought to a halt. He heard the Prof, in his head, say "We can't go through the portal with any mental or emotional baggage."

Hassan said, "Abbott, you are miles away."

"Oh! uh!, yes, I guess so."

"Now that the diversion is over we can get to the real task at hand."

"Oh! What is that?"

"The Key to Atlantis, Abbott. It's what we came here for."

Abbott, feeling exhausted after his adrenaline rush, said, "How about we look tomorrow."

<https://lifeboat.com/ex/transhumanist.technologies>

<http://www2.engr.arizona.edu/~rns/faq.htm>

## Chapter 17

### Independent News Report:

#### MILLIONAIRE PLAYBOY MURDERED-BY HIS HOUSE!

So, you think you're safe from the machines while you're in your house. Think again! All his millions couldn't save David Shelford when his domestic ATLAS AI decided to slaughter him in his bed while he slept.

Shelford, the CEO of Perrot Propulsion Systems, was recently found dead in his mansion in Durham, NC. Surveillance records showed that 'Jeeves' his domestic robot turned off the security system and trapped him in his bedroom. Jeeves pinned David in place in such a way that he could only look straight ahead. Then security lasers installed to merely sense movement, slowly burned through Shelford's eyes over the course of several hours. It seems that this rogue AI not only wanted to kill Shelford, it also wanted to torture him too.

Helen Cleaver, from ATL, stated that the lesson here is, no matter what you read, no matter what assurances Robot retailers give you, no matter what safeguards you take, don't delude yourself, AIs are potential killers. If you place your home, your castle, your family, under the control of an automaton, sooner or later you will pay for it. Maybe not with your life, but eventually you will lose someone you love and are sworn to protect.

Margaret Daintree and her son entered the Huge red brick building on West Baltimore Street, Baltimore. She went to the reception area, where Tracy directed her to the OCME (Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Dr Bruce Goldman welcomed them into his office and had refreshments brought in.

He had the FBI report on his desk. Adjusting his glasses, he said. "Let me first offer my sincere condolences on your loss, Lady Lynsey."

"Thank you. Now I would like to see my husband's body."

"Of course. But I thought you might like a copy of the FBI report."

Margaret looked at Daniel, who looked equally puzzled. "I wasn't told the FBI were involved."

Dr Goldman handed her a photocopy. "At first the local cops dealt with it. But something came to light that interested the FBI."

"What do you mean? Somebody shot my husband in cold blood, and I want to know who did it and why?"

"Precisely, Lady Lynsey. That's what I'm trying to tell you. Lord Lynsey was over here helping the FBI."

"Helping them do what?"

"That's confidential I'm afraid. The upshot is that Dayton's work with the FBI finished and he was supposed to go home."

"So why didn't he return home?" Daniel asked.

"I wish I knew the answer. The next thing we know is that somebody had fatally wounded Lord Lynsey." Goldman looked at Margaret. "Naturally, because of his standing, the FBI took an interest."

"And do they know who was responsible?"

Dr Goldman smiled. "You will have to ask them that. Now I will take you to your husband."

Daniel didn't know how much his mother knew about Dayton's moonlighting as some special agent. He had promised he wouldn't tell her what he knew, but it seemed obvious to him that a murderer had shot his father, who died in the line of some obscure duty. As he looked upon the corpse, he felt cheated by an absent father, who had been no father at all. Dayton played at being a father. His dad also played at being the nobleman, when all the time he was part of some super elite club playing some fucking superhero doing God knows what God knows where. Daniel felt a cocktail of emotions welling up with Anger in the lead. Well, the fucking Soter Agency owed him, and he was going to make sure they paid their debts in full.

Margaret looked upon the pale, frail body of her husband and affirmed it was him. But she didn't know him. Lady Lynsey certainly didn't like him, most of the time but Margaret thought she knew him. Lady Lynsey despised him for the double life he led and for getting killed, so uselessly. Now the widow would never know if they were to get to like each other's company again. She turned away from the body nodding her affirmation to Dr Goldman.

Daniel asked, "When will you release his body?"

"I have to check with the FBI. But I imagine it will be soon."

Dayton's son looked the doctor in the eye. "My father was shot and killed. I want to know who did it and why. I want that person brought to justice."

Goldman smiled, "Afraid I can't help you there."

"Is there a forensic report in that FBI document?"

"No. The FBI would have that."

"Who do I contact to get a copy?"

"They won't give you one, I'm afraid."

"I didn't ask you your opinion. I want a name."

Goldman was getting ruffled. "I know this is a difficult time for you but the kind of attitude won't get you anywhere."

Daniel retorted. "If some killer shot and murdered your father and nobody was saying anything, what would your attitude be like?"

Goldman sighed, "You could contact Glenn Davison. He's FBI, but I don't think you'll get very far."

"One other thing, where are my father's personal effects?"

"You'd better ask Glenn Davison. The FBI will have them."

Daniel Lynsey was, in effect now Lord Lynsey but he still didn't have the clout his father had. He needed somebody who could, to use an American colloquialism, 'kick ass'. Daniel phoned Hayden Holmes' office. Hayden wasn't available, but his secretary would make sure he got the message. He then got a text. Daniel's mother was waiting in the limo.

As her son sat beside her, she said, "Darling, let's see if we can find a decent restaurant in this town."

Daniel was too churned up inside, to eat but he wanted to support his mother. "Sure, let's find somewhere."

Somewhere turned out to be the trendy Woodberry Kitchen, on Clipper Park Road. They ordered cabbage slaw, spicy mustard and smoky potatoes. As Daniel fondled a glass of red, his phone rang. "Sorry mother, I have to take this. Hi, Hayden, Daniel Lynsey here. Mum and I are in Baltimore trying to get dad's body released,"

"Terribly sorry to hear about Dayton. How ghastly for both of you. So how can I help you?"

"The FBI has my father's effects. I want them, especially his mobile phone. They also have a forensic report. I want a copy."

"Daniel, I have no jurisdiction over the FBI. I can request those things, but I can't make any demands."

"Talk to a man called Glenn Davison. Make sure he knows who you are."

"Daniel, I'm sure they will be carrying out a thorough investigation."

"Even so. See what you can do. Then we can talk about that other thing."

As he put his phone away, Margaret asked, "Who were you talking to?"

"The British Foreign Secretary," he said with a smirk.

Neurotech, in Brazilian Silicon Valley was sandwiched between the Petrobras and gas energy plants, all reflective steel and glass, stood out from the surrounding buildings. Its circular driveway, around a feature pond, with a large 'N' centrepiece, showed elegant style. Ulysses alighted from his taxi and entered the large glass doors, the entrance to the world of Neurotech. From the receptionist with the permanent smile and no personality to the plastic rainforest plants placed at various junctures around the building, Neurotech oozed affordable elegance as it hummed quietly with the sound of contented air conditioners.

Elijah Brooks, all smiles and effusiveness, emerged from somewhere in the vast building complex to be standing in front of Ulysses. "Welcome to Neurotech. I'm glad you could make it."

"It's awe-inspiring," Ulysses said, glancing about, at the ant's nest-like activity taking place.

"Unfortunately I won't be able to show you around. But our chief scientist is looking forward to giving you the grand tour."

"Who is that?"

"Dr Harapanni. I will escort you to her."

As they walked along a warren of corridors, Ulysses said, "I hope I will have access to your latest technology."

Elijah smiled broadly, "We wouldn't expect you to come all this way and go back empty handed. Ask Dr Harapanni anything you like."

They came to a door marked, 'Controlled Area. Change in the changing room before entering'. Ulysses went inside, stripped down and put on protective gear, including plastic, shoe covers and latex gloves. So attired, he joined the laboratory staff and was shown to the Hindi scientist, operating a state-of-the-art tunnelling microscope. He announced himself, "Excuse me. Are you Dr Harapanni?"

The Indian woman with braided black hair in a plastic cap turned to him. "Ah, you must be Dr Covington. Elijah told me to expect you. I am to give you the grand tour."

"Thanks. Look, I was just wondering, is that an Android working in reception?"

"Model ea2. It fools a lot of visitors," Leila Harapanni smiled.

He only noticed her height when she got down from her stall. Only coming up as far as his chest, she looked up at him, "So, let me show you what we do here." She walked ahead, much faster than he would have thought.

"I guess what I'm most interested in is your robot brain - 'Synaptek', I believe you call it," He said, keeping up with her.

She turned to him. "At Neurotech we think artificial brains can become just as intelligent, creative, and self-aware as those of humans."

"The 'Holy Grail' of robotics."

"Indeed, Although nobody has yet built such a machine it is only a matter of time. Given current trends in our neuroscience, computing, and nanotechnology, we estimate that Neurotech will have achieved artificial 'general' intelligence within the next two years."

"So what stage are you at with Synaptek?"

"Dr Covington, our focus is based on two approaches: large-scale, biologically realistic, human brain simulations within currently available supercomputers. And, secondly, the building of novel, massively-parallel, neuromorphic computing devices closely modelled on neural tissue. At present Synaptek is based on the first approach."

Ulysses looked down at the Indian scientist. "I look forward to the day when AI will be able to answer some fundamental questions that have bugged us for many millennia. Like, why does the universe exist? What is the ultimate theory of everything? Is there intelligent life elsewhere, etc.?"

Leila smiled, "We consider human consciousness to be the most mysterious and yet most pressing issue within our reach. By reverse engineering the human brain we will come to understand it. By reconstructing and enhancing the mind, we will be empowered to push forward our understanding of the universe and to evolve life to the next level."

"Spoken like a true Transhumanist."



She turned to him, sternly, "Dr Covington I do not take these things lightly. Turning this planet over to robots could be the sanest thing we ever do. We, humans, are part of the universal process - not the ultimate in the evolutionary chain."

Having returned to her laboratory, Leila Harapanni said, "Do you want to know about Synaptek?"

"Sure, that's why I'm here."

"Synaptek, which is patented by Neurotech, is a neuromorphic microprocessor system that matches the intelligence, physical size, and low power consumption of animal brains. We are currently testing neural networks in simulation on a supercomputer. We are the first company to do this."

Ulysses was incredulous. "And you have already achieved this?"

Leila showed her guest her tunnelling microscope. She turned her computer screen towards him. "What you are seeing is networks that are constructed directly in hardware - this increases speed while reducing size and power requirements. In October 2011 we developed a prototype neuromorphic chip containing 256 neurones. Work is currently ongoing to build a multi-chip system capable of emulating 1 million spiking neurones and 1 billion synapses directly in hardware."

"My God! How have you managed this?"

"Because Neurotech employs the greatest brains in science. You ought to come and join us."

"Thanks for the offer, Dr Harapanni, but I'm more than happy with Boston Cybertronics. I think that your brain and our ATLAS' brawn could make an exceptional team. That's what I'm interested in."

She smiled, "That's not my department. Now, do you have any further questions for me?"

"Only those of a philosophical nature."

"Such as?"

"We humans are creating a situation to make ourselves redundant. Is this a programmed response, a built-in directive as part of the evolutionary process? Or is it a fail-safe mechanism to ensure that a failing species destroys itself or is destroyed by some other agent, to ensure evolutionary continuance?"

"I can't answer that."

He looked down at her eyes. "Nobody can, so how can we be sure we are doing the right thing?"

She answered, "I do not think there is any right or wrong, Dr Covington. That is just a human construct that rules by mythological morality."

ATLAS greeted visitors to Boston Cybertronics and handed them visitor tags. It was a very delicate action for a high mobility, humanoid robot designed to negotiate outdoor, rough terrain. Barney Cormack thought it was a clever gimmick, but it also showed what the company could achieve in state-of-the-art robotics. He was there to see Dr Lynne Becker, to try and repair some bridges between her and DARPA. He didn't like keeping secrets from her about ATLAS's activities but, hell, he was in the dark, as well.

Lynne Becker was seething. As head of the Robotics branch of Boston Holdings, it was her responsibility to make sure all departments ran to maximum efficiency. How could she do that when Ulysses Covington just disappeared for a long weekend, when he was supposed to be preparing his report for the upcoming board meeting. The bastard had not even contacted her to say

what he was doing. She harboured a sneaking fear that one of the competition was head hunting him. Now, on top of everything else she had to suffer a visit by Barney Cormack. Well, he'd better have some bloody good reasons for keeping her out of the loop. Sure the Robots belonged to DARPA, but part of the deal was that she would receive feedback on their activities, where ever they operated.

Colonel Cormack was all smiles, as he entered her office. He could see she was not hiding her concern. "Dr Becker it's good to see you again." Seeing that charm was not going to work, he handed her a report. It was titled: ATLAS PROJECT. AI Behaviour and Response in a combat zone. She skimmed through the pages. There was no mention of where the area was. "Still classified, huh?"

He shrugged. "What can I say?" If it's any consolation, I don't know where they have been in active service. But you'll see, when you read the report, they met and superseded any and all expectations. So, well done to you and your team for an exemplary job."

"Thank you for that Barney, but I'm sure you didn't come all this way just to tell me that."

"Of course not. Have you got the ATLAS mark two progress report ready for me?"

"I'm just waiting for the AI report from Dr Covington."

He narrowed his eyebrows. "Are you telling me he hasn't completed this stage yet?" Enough with the humble pie. He was now in the driving seat.

"Oh, it's complete. I just don't have it yet." She said, handing him the incomplete report. "You stay here and peruse this while I go and fetch it."

Having just arrived in the States late the previous night, followed by an early catch-up start that morning, Ulysses was not exactly in good fighting fettle. His head throbbed, and his vision seemed a little blurred. Plus jet lag was setting in. Three black coffees had helped, but he still felt a little jaded. He looked up. Lynne had entered without knocking. "Hi, Lynne. I've just about finished the report, but it needs a little fine tooth comb work."

She glared at him. You'd better give me what you've got. I have Barney Cormack in my office, going apeshit."

Ulysses had experienced her bad moods before, but he had never seen her looking so angry. "Lyn, I'm sorry about ..."

She cut him off. "I'll see you in my office as soon as Cormack has left." She grabbed the report and stormed out.

Thinking the day was going from bad to worse, he groaned. He was not in good shape to take a roasting. Still, when he told her what he had been doing she would soon come around - wouldn't she?

He knew that by her closing the office door behind them it was not going to be at all pleasant. "I guess this is for the weekend - right?" he tried weakly, as an opener.

"You bet your sweet ass it is." Lynne barked, "Why the fuck did you disappear when you knew DARPA, out biggest client, wanted the report?"

"Look, Lynne, I can explain."

"Explain! Do you think that is going to cut it? Unless a close member of your family suddenly died no excuses will do."

"But I ..."

"But you nothing. You just disappear without a bye or leave. You didn't even bother to make a phone call."

"Lynne, I have something important ..."

"I don't give a fuck what you think is important. What was important is that you were here with me and ..."

Ulysses said, "Fuck it Lynne; enough is enough!" He slammed his Neurotech report on her desk. "Look at that when you're feeling calmer. Maybe a swim after work will get rid of some tension." He turned and left her office.

They went to the beach after the searing heat of the day had dissipated. Lynne had mollified a little after reading his report. She had sent him a text, accepting his invitation. They were standing together, the warm sea up to their chests, and started kissing hungrily, their wet bodies glued together. Her hand slid inside his bathers and caressed his penis; in return, he pulled her bikini bottoms aside searching for her. She groaned against his mouth as his fingers excited her. "Fuck me now," she said, surprising him.

Ulysses kissed her ear, murmuring, "Thought you didn't like that word?"

"Sex is different, so shut up and fuck me!"

Ulysses, needing no further invitation, slid his hands down her back and grasped her buttocks.

"No, not here, over there." She nodded toward the beach. Lynne, sensing his uncertainty, grabbed his hand and pulled him ashore.

"What's wrong with our place?" he asked, seriously worried that someone might see them.

"We are all wet, and I want it now, right now, here on this beach, I have been waiting so long to shag somewhere like this. Come on babe, don't tell me you're shy?"

They adjusted Their swimsuits as he looked around for any sign of company. Then, collecting the towels, they headed for a small grassy hillock, furthest from any signs of human activity.

Lynne spread out the towels, then her legs. Come on Ulysses, fuck me!"

Those words coming from her were such a turn on that he needed no more coaxing. She pulled her bathing suit aside in readiness.

"I read your report you very naughty man," she laughed.

Ignoring her, he moved his head down between her legs. But she put out her hand to stop him.

"Ulysses, just fuck me, I am so ready for you."

He didn't need asking twice. Lynne lifted her legs over his shoulders and fell back on the towel. Ulysses entered her in one long sweet stroke. She gasped as he thrust firmly against her.

In the afterglow, they just lie there sweating and kissing gently, as the cool breeze of dusk blew over them. The lovers lay there relaxed as the bloody sun slid below the horizon. Then, above the hiss of the waves breaking softly on the shore, Ulysses heard somebody lurking nearby. They quickly pulled one of the towels over their naked bodies and lay still, and listened. Then the person snuck away.

When the man got back to his car, he looked at the images on his camera. He had trailed the couple to the beach and, bingo, he had some beautiful snapshots to send to his client. Grinning, he pressed

the selected contact on his phone. "Hi, Mr Brooks, I've hit pay dirt. You're going to love these. Just make sure you send the money to my account, and they are all yours."

Lynne Becker decided to get some first-hand information on Synaptek. From what Ulysses said about it, on the face of it, it seemed the way to go. She welcomed Elijah Brooks into her office. He was certainly a man who would appeal to many women, Lynne thought. He was all warmth and smiles and probably traded on it, she intuited. The colourful short sleeve shirt he wore showed his tan off to great advantage. "Welcome to Boston Cybertronics, Mr Brooks."

"Elijah please," he said extending his hand. Sitting down at her desk, he asked, "Is Dr Covington going to be joining us?"

"No, Elijah," she smiled warmly. "He did fill me in on some details though and, from what he reported, we could be interested."

"Interested in what, exactly?" he queried, not knowing what was on the table.

"Rather than telling you, let me show you."

As Lynne showed her guest around the facility, Elijah said, "ATLAS is a DARPA project, yes?"

"We are under contract to DARPA, yes."

"So you are making military robots."

Not knowing where he was coming from with his question, she responded, "Our aim is to have humans and robots working together to assist in disasters. Particularly something like an actual accident."

"Perhaps I can see a demonstration."

"Of course. I was going to leave that for later. But, let's go and see what's happening in the factory, now."

The testing area was like a school gym, with steps, hanging ropes, a vaulting horse, foam mats, etc. One trainer was throwing a medicine ball for a robot to catch, which he easily did, most times. White-coated personnel recorded the data from the different tasks. Elijah stood quite still, trying to mask his amazement, as the 7-foot automatons carried out programmed instructions to pull, lift, step over, catch, etc.

Lynne said, "As you can see the trainer is at a distance from the robot and supervises while the robot carries out some tasks that are quite challenging. We are very proud of our achievements."

"As you should be. It's inspiring," Elijah commented. But I would hope we don't have any more nuclear disasters."

Lynne chuckled, "Oh don't get me wrong. The robots are not just for a nuclear power plant situation. The next disaster may not be a nuclear plant. So we want to take advantage of the social problems that are likely to be out there. It's about adaptability. Our robots are very adaptable. That's what the 'Challenge' is all about."

"What challenge is that?"

"The Darpa Robot Challenge is about different robots from all over testing their mettle against other robots. Now that is exciting."

"Are all the competitor's humanoid robots?" Elijah asked, appreciating the company of the brilliant blonde scientist.

"No. The Challenge is decidedly not exclusive to humanoid systems. Our main criteria is that we need our robots compatible and at ease with a variety of shared environments, despite the degraded conditions. Secondly, we need robots that are compatible with human tools. The reason being typically we don't know where the disaster is going to be, and right now the tools, from vehicles to hand tools, are made for people to operate, for clearance, maintenance or construction. So we train our robots to use all those tools. The third thing is compatibility with human operators in two ways: one, the robot needs to be easy to operate without appropriate training, and secondly, the human operator needs to know what the robot might do. For this to happen, the robot needs a form that is not too different from the people."

"And your ATLAS can use all these tools?" Elijah said.

"It's not just the tools. It's the hands that use them. Our robots have great dexterity - 18 degrees of movement in hands and fingers."

"Now that is something. Just think what we could achieve if we got in bed together - company wise of course," Brooks grinned lasciviously."

"Not until I see what you have to offer," she riposted.

Elijah turned to her. "This is given me quite an appetite. Get your secretary to book us reservations at Boston's best restaurant. We can continue our discussion there."

Not having planned to take the meeting into the afternoon, she said, "This is taking longer than I anticipated. it will have to be a quick lunch."

"A quick lunch it will be then. Is there a Macdonalds around here?"

While they ate their way through a burger, fries and salad at Macdonalds on Legend Way, near Boston North railway station, Elijah gave his response to what he had seen. "I am very impressed with how far you have come with ATLAS. But it reminds me of the Tin Man in the Wizard of OZ. Just think what it would be like with a brain."

Lynne Becker stopped mid bite. "What do you mean. it already has a CPU to be able to do what we require of it."

The Neurotech man dabbed at his mouth with a serviette. "Your robot can do some amazing things. The way you have programmed it to use human power tools to break down a wall or use a wrench to be able to turn a valve to close a leaking pipe is extraordinary. But it's all remote control. Just imagine a pre-programmed Android that could think for itself with no need for human controllers."

Dr Becker put down her plastic fork and looked at him, with amusement. "You don't think I've shown you all our secrets - surely. We are already working on such a model."

"Yes, but how advanced is it. When are you going to be able to demonstrate it to DARPA?"

She began to feel uncomfortable. How did Elijah Brooks know BC was working against an impossible deadline? He couldn't have known that unless Ulysses had told him.

He continued, "Neurotech has constructed a machine that functions like a human brain, enabling robots to think independently and act autonomously. 'Synaptek' looks and 'thinks' like a human brain. It is the first incarnation of a robot that performs independently" without human input."

"Really! How does it work?"

"What makes 'Synaptek' better from any other robot brain is its nano-scale interconnected wires that perform billions of connections like a human brain. Each connection is a synthetic synapse, allowing a neurone to pass an electric or chemical signal to another cell."

"It seems very involved."

"It is because of its structural complexity that it is far in advance of any other artificial intelligence projects. No one else can replicate it," Elijah announced, smugly, but with good reason.

Lynne, massively impressed, said, "I see what you mean about ATLAS being the tin man. Our technology, coupled with Synaptex would be a formidable partnership."

He picked up his MacCafe Latte. "Let's drink to that."

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## Chapter 18

### Independent News Report:

#### ROBO-TERRORISTS ASSASSINATE THREE IN MARTYR'S DAY AMBUSHES

May 6 was Martyr's Day. It was a solemn Sunday mainly devoted to the commemoration of Patriots killed by robots. ATL president Helen Cleaver said, "They gave their lives for all of us. The ATL patriots gathered peacefully to reflect upon and give thanks to the beloved martyrs who died so that we might remain free. But this year's ceremonies involved more than passionate gratitude and resolve. This year's memorial had been stained with more martyrs' blood, when Patriots Walt Hatton, Christiane Standing, and Fred "Padre" Bishop paid the ultimate price for their commitment to their fellow Man. All three were assassinated the same day by the vile Robot Scourge. The soulless robot assassins snuffed out three human lives in a coldly mechanical attempt to spoil the Martyr's Day celebration and violently besmirch the legacy of those who we all just commemorated."

The commentator said, "Helen Cleaver vowed that ATL would find out all that is needed to avenge these murders. She proclaimed that "We will not rest until the assassins, their co-conspirators, and their supporters pay for their baseless crimes against Humanity."

Sergeant Abrams trudged, ahead of his troop, through the sewer pipe, under the outer canal. The smells, a mixture of stale air and treated effluent made him want to gag at times. But Goman Worrall assured him it was the best way to get into the city. With five Marines and three robots under his command, Abrams' assignment was to get onto the central island and take over the academy. It was not going to be easy because, although the tunnel ran all the way to the approach to the island, they had to cover some open ground, which Goman said, was illuminated by automatically revolving searchlights. Abrams halted his troop and indicated Goman to join him. "Can you hear that noise?" he asked.

Goman craned his ears. He could hear the faint whirring sound that reached a shrill squeak from time to time. "It seems like a faulty generator to me."

"Is it likely to attract attention?" Abrams asked, feeling nervous. They would be sitting ducks if the Singularians were waiting for them at the exit.

"I don't think so, Sergeant. They probably can't hear it out there. But as we're approaching the gate shall I go ahead and check it out?"

"No, you stick with me, Professor." He turned to his men. "Boone, scout ahead and report straight back."

"Yes Sarg," the thickset soldier said.

Colonel Lynch was banking on some of the Singularians changing sides, once they knew the Marines were there to liberate them. But it wasn't the case. For whatever reason, they stayed with Mendes Amwon. It was unfortunate because Raf needed more recruits if the mission was to be a success. He was leading his people to the Civic Centre, a bastion of Democracy and a symbol of liberty. Using Goman's route into the heart of the city, they were able to get within a few hundred metres when they got hit in a surprise attack. The Colonel and his troop dived for cover as the fusillade of bullets pinged around them. Having recovered from the ambush, the Marines trained their M4A1 assault rifles on the upper windows at the front of the city hall. Soon, bullets were flying both ways, leaving the stink of cordite permeating the no-mans-land.

"Cease fire!" the Colonel ordered. There was no point wasting ammunition when you couldn't see the target. He thought the 'bots might fare better. "Send out a troopbot."

"Just one could be tricky." Rodney said, "They like playing follow the leader."

"Then switch two of them off, for now. I only want one of the 'bots to draw their fire."

Atlas, Troop bot 7 armed with its M4A1, walked out into the open. Its sensors picked up information marking the snipers as the enemy. Sighting the line of windows its mechanical finger tightened on the trigger. The snipers took pot shots at the metal man. ATLAS stood its ground, returning fire. Its lightning reflexes were fast enough to hit one of them before they ducked back inside. Then, the enemy retaliated, firing a missile from a hand-held launcher. It struck Troop bot 7 full on, blasting a huge hole through the robot's middle. It immediately stopped, its circuits sizzling and burning, no longer able to function.

Colonel Lynch was aghast. This incident was the first robot casualty, and he found it difficult to comprehend.

Rodney stood there wide eyed. He said, "Well nobody said they were invincible." Another volley of shots forced them both into cover at the corner of the street.

Lynch recovered from the shock. Pointing to a pair of Marines, he ordered, "Melvin and Callow, make your way around to the front door of the council building. We'll give you covering fire. You get inside and neutralise the threat."

The two soldiers skirted the square in front of the Civic building, keeping to the shadows as much as possible. Then a couple of shots ricocheted off a wall very close to their heads. They ducked instinctively taking cover. They heard more covering fire and made a dash over the road, to a safer position. Now they were able to approach the main entrance out of the sniper's range. They unslung their M4A1s as they rushed through the doorway to the spiral staircase leading to the second floor, where the snipers were perched. Melvin covered Callow who ran up the stairs, only to face enemy fire. He quickly hunkered down around the corner, as bullets hit the marble, sending tiny chips in all directions. With Melvin at his back, Callow popped his head round the corner and sprayed the top of the staircase with gunfire. The snipers backed off, and the pair soon had them in their sights. The gunmen dropped their rifles and surrendered, just as a door opened.

Melvin shouted, "ARMED THREAT," as a Singularian soldier, holding the bazooka, that destroyed the 'bot, levelled it at them. Callow immediately rolled to one side, firing his weapon in the marksman's general direction, hitting the Bazooka man but not before he had fired his rocket, which whooshed straight at them, about two feet above the floor, before striking and destroying part of the timber balustrade.

Callow recovered and went to check the wounded Singularian, while Melvin covered the cowering snipers with his assault rifle. The bazooka guy had a gut wound and was bleeding out. The man was writhing in agony. Melvin spoke into his radio. "Target secured. Medic needed urgently."

The toughest job fell to Major Warner and his team, as they had to deal with the barracks. The Camp was located on the second ring, next to a large tract of agricultural land. The terrain was flat with straight roads. Major Warner had news that the Civic centre was secure and in the Hands of Colonel Lynch. The time was 10:30 pm. It was time to move in. The sky was as dark as Major Warner's forebodings, as he and his men approached the barracks. He felt as though he was a child about to stir up a hornet's nest. Warner sent the robots ahead to shield the rest of his small group. The robots marched to the entrance to the camp. They ignored the challenge of the sentry at the gate, who went to use his radio but never made it. However, Troop bot five's gunfire alerted the camp, and Major Warner was about to walk into a living hell.

The enemy had mounted a revolving searchlight on the closest of two piers. Sergeant Abrams, his men and bots moved gingerly along a stone wall hugging it wherever possible. They stood stock still as the light swung in their direction. Once it had passed, they made their way to the gun emplacements. Goman informed Abrams that the guns were for defence against invading ships, so the barrels were pointing out at the water. Abrams sent his two most experienced men, Gomez and Zachary, to deal with the gunnery team on the far pier. Both teams had to be neutralised simultaneously. Gomez and Zachary, as silently as they could, edged their way between the two piers, keeping a low profile. Gomez hoped the swinging light would not give them away. Zachary nearly got caught in its revealing beam but managed to duck down near a wall, just in time. The pair snuck up behind the guard, who was relaxed and smoking a hand-rolled cigarette when he felt the touch of cold steel on his throat. It was his last physical sensation, as Gomez's K blade swiftly sliced through his neck, severing his jugular vein. Gomez had no time to get queasy. Zachary dealt with the second guard in much the same way, except the Singularian managed to grunt and struggle momentarily, his boots scraping on the timber lined pier.

The artilleryman turned, his mind quickly taking in the scene. As he quickly went for his sidearm. Gomez reacted instantly. The Marine, bringing his M4A1 to bear, immediately pumped the desperate soldier with lead, giving him no chance to use his weapon. The gunfire alerted the other artillery team to the source of the noise. Swinging their gun around as far as possible in the direction of the opposite pier the gunner changed the elevation, quickly taking into account height, speed and distance to the target. Abrams's robots sprang promptly into action, taking care of the threat.

The gunshots attracted more Singularians, who swarmed onto the pier, firing at Gomez and Zachary, as they dived for cover behind the unmanned gun. Outnumbered and outgunned they never stood a chance. Gomez managed to jump off the pier, into the cold dark water of the harbour, narrowly missing the two fishing boats moored there. Zachary was not quick enough. He swung around firing blind, feeling searing pain as a fusillade of shells hit him. Gomez stayed underwater as a storm of bullets penetrated. With his lungs nearly at bursting point, he struggled to rid himself of his utility belt and kevlar vest. Feeling like a bizarre version of Houdini, The Marine used the last vestiges of lung power to propel himself to the surface, between the hulls of the fishing boats. Breathing hard, he silently prayed his foes could not see him. The beleaguered Singularian patrol was far too busy defending themselves against the robots to be concerned about the soldier in the water.

The shooting was getting closer. The Earthians already had control of the Citadel. It was time for Mendes Amwon to make an exit but not before he had what he wanted. The Dictator strode forcefully, despite his slight limp, into Leanni's office. It was still quite bare and bland, as was the scientist herself. Half naked and tied to a chair, the harsh light in her eyes showed every welt, bruise and cut on her body. Jorace and Klimm loomed over her cowering form. It was the first time they



had not been at their master's side. They knew things were not going well with the war. They also believed their master would not let them down.

Mendes entered the office. He looked at the pathetic woman in front of him. The Dark Master no longer looked upon her as a scientist - just a pathetic little woman who dared to defy him. He came close and grabbed her chin in his bony hand. "Where is it?" he demanded.

She just stared at him with fixed eyes. The disk container was in her lap. "Is this it?" he said, gripping her chin tighter.

She nodded the best she could.

He opened it. An unlabelled disk was inside. He wanted to try it on a computer but the sound a sudden gunfire not far away, made him change his mind. Grasping the disk he made his exit.

Jorace looked at his back, asked, "Master, where are you going?"

Mendes turned, "Look after her. She is still useful."

Leanni cursed herself silently. Had she known the monster didn't have time to check the disk; she could have given him anything. But not knowing this fact she had given him enough information to make a black hole. May Poseidon forgive her. But the torture had been hell.

Mendes was ready for this moment. A great leader, like him, never left anything to chance. Dressed in a black jumpsuit, like that used by commandos in night raids, he put on his backpack, which contained all his essential belongings and headed out the rear exit of the Academy. Rumbles of gunfire and flashes illuminating the night sky urged him to pick up his pace, as he ran up the hill to the Temple of Poseidon. The ghostly shape of the building dedicated to the Sea God loomed before him, as he pushed himself to reach the temple steps, now about thirty metres away. Out of breath, he ran into the sacred space, to the utter surprise of the clergy within.

The High Priest, Gerrion blocked Mendes' path. "Please slow down. We do not want to anger the great Poseidon."

Mendes shoved him aside and continued towards the high altar.

Some monks stood in Amwon's path. Angered and shocked at the way he had treated their head holy man, casting him to the floor like some rag doll. Falion, an elderly member of the order, said, "Why such haste that you insult us?"

"Get out of my way you insects, or you will be stone."

Before the monks could figure what he meant, they had lost all power of movement. Standing in their latest pose, still as the statues of deities around the temple. All they could do is look on in wonder as the Dictator went behind the altar, only to disappear.

Mendes reached for one of the candlesticks and pulled it towards him. He was rewarded with a grinding sound, as a stone slab slid slowly aside, revealing a narrow passageway under the altar. Mendes entered and pointed a penlight to show him the way. He came to a small chamber and went inside.

Sergeant Abrams and Goman Worrall entered the temple, out of breath. Why were the monks acting like statues, Abrams wondered? Then he noticed a priest trying to get up from the floor.

Goman went to help the holy man. "What has happened here?" he asked, surveying the strange scene before him.

The priest, having recovered somewhat, said, "The Dictator has fled."

"Fled where?" Abrams asked.

"There," the priest said, frantically, pointing at the altar.

"Show us what you mean,"

The priest, now much more alert, noticed the monks standing stock still, as though displayed in a weird tableaux. "I have to help them," he uttered walking up to them,"

Abrams grabbed his arm. "Show me where Mendes Amwon went."

The priest took the soldier behind the altar and activated the candle.

Abrams watched agog as the partition slid aside. "Where does that lead to?" he asked.

"Just a small stone chamber. I've no idea why it's there."

Abrams went inside. Using his torch, he followed the passage to the small chamber, then backed his way out. "It's empty!" he reported.

"All I know is that he went in there," the priest insisted.

The monks began to recover from their trance-like state.

"How is that possible?" Goman asked.

One of the monks said, "I couldn't move, but I could see what happened. The Dictator went behind the altar and disappeared."

"Impossible!" Goman challenged.

Other monks claimed to have seen it as well.

"How else can you explain it, Sergeant?" the high priest asked.

Abrams shrugged. Then he spoke into his radio. "Unit 'D' report, Academy secure."

Lynch replied, "Copy that."

"There's one other thing. Mendes Amwon has escaped."

"Escaped! How is that possible. We have the Gate covered."

"Several monks and a priest claim to have seen him go behind an altar and disappear. There's a secret compartment. I checked it out. It's empty."

"Just stay there. I'll be over there soon."

"Copy that. Out."

Colonel Lynch, battle weary, like his men, entered the laboratory, with Goman Worrall in tow. There were two bodies on the floor, a whimpering woman who looked like she'd gone the distance in the boxing ring, a still robot and Kronyn with a face like a question mark.

Goman, seeing the state Leanna jeallus was in, went to her aid.

"What's been happening here?" Rafael demanded.

"Colonel, the robot killed that man," Kronyn answered, pointing at Jorace's body. The other man was no threat. I told it to stand down, but A2 shot the other man as well."

Lynch looked straight at the Atlantean. "Are you telling me the robot disobeyed a direct order?"

Goman grabbed the Colonel's arm. "We have a bigger problem than that."

Rafael wheeled on him, "What do you mean?"

"He had her tortured. She was forced to give him the formula."

"The formula for what?"

"How to construct a black hole!"

"A black hole!" Raf repeated the impact of the words hitting him.

"We must find him," Kronyn said.

"Too late for that," Goman countered, "He has escaped through another portal."

Colonel Lynch muttered, almost to himself, "Jesus, we have a madman loose on Earth with the formula to make a fucking black hole!"

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## Chapter 19

### Independent News Report:

#### POLICE ROBOT KILLS HOSTAGE TAKERS

PCR-1 was in position, undeterred by sirens and flashing lights. Purpose designed to meet the needs of 21st Century Policing, it was the first 'Patrol Car Robot equipped to deal with any situation. Its advanced charging system kept it operation ready 24/7. Deployed by just one officer, fully optioned and equipped the targets were well within its range of 1,000 meters line of sight. PCR-1 knew nothing about the six people who had been murdered by Linus Meddins and Uriah Jackson, in the apartment building, in Hialeah, just a few miles north of Miami. It just responded to Officer Browning's commands.

Captain Freeman, the officer in charge, had been involved in many hostage situations over the years. This incident was by far the worst, with 6 of the 14 prisoners already dead. Now the perps had nothing to lose. He spoke to Carly Browning, "Targets are in the second room to the right, about 30 metres inside the building."

Carly nodded, that was well within the robot's range, inside buildings in an internal urban environment. "Let's send it in."

Captain Freeman agreed, and PCRI walked up to the building. Carly knew that if the 'perps' detected the bot, the remaining hostages were at risk. But they were in danger anyhow, and human police could not get anywhere near the building without being picked off by Shimano, a veteran Ranger with sniping skills.

PCR-1 entered the building and climbed the stairs to the second floor, where heat signatures showed Carly the location of the targets and the hostages. She could see the ghost-like images of the bad guys on her screen. The PCR-1s optical system picked them out. It's fully loaded, CZ Scorpion assault rifle, locked onto the targets, even before it entered ground zero. Equipped with a ram, it quickly smashed open the door. Before Vargas and Shimano had time to shoot any more hostages, PCR-1 brought its weapon to bear, shot and killed the two targets in the flash of an eye. PCR-1 needed no counselling because it had no emotions. It was the perfect solution to dangerous policing. The police could now enter the building safely.

John Prince carefully observed the robot's response. As the robot's designer, he took a particular interest in it. But not from a creative viewpoint. More from a psychological perspective. He turned to Officer Browning. "Have it sent directly to our research lab."

She looked at the man with slicked-back grey hair, puzzled. "What's wrong with it. It functioned flawlessly."

The smartly dressed man smiled, "Yes PCR-1 passed with flying colours, and we have much to learn about its memory."

"It's memory! It responded to my instructions."

Prince laughed softly. How could she possibly understand his motivation? He said, "Ever since the first computers, there have always been ghosts in the machine. Random segments of code that has grouped together to form unexpected protocols. That's why we need to check it's memory."

Carly didn't understand such things. Her job was to get the robot to respond to her commands. She was good at that, and it was enough for her. She said, "Very well, I'll see to it."

"It's important that nobody touches it. Is that understood?"

She nodded, ordering the robot to return to her.

One of the Transhumanist question marks, something that troubled anti Transhumanists, was that of free radicals and free will. Some people would even speak regarding the robots creativity and what might be called 'soul'. John didn't go that far. But he had observed that some robots when left in darkness, sought out the light. He wondered why it was that robots stored in a space, grouped together, preferring it to standing alone. These anomalous behaviours were not programmed responses. He wouldn't go so far as to say the robots were thinking for themselves but something indicated they had a secret life. Such information, if disseminated to the public could cause distrust in robotics and undo all the positive promotional propaganda fed to them over the last few decades.

John couldn't explain such odd behaviour, but he and his hand-picked team were determined to find out. He thought it had something to do with random segments of code? But deep down he wondered if it could be something more? Was it possible for a perceptual schematic to become conscious? No! He was a scientist. He couldn't harbour such thoughts.

Armed with his report on PCR-1, he went to see Dr Ulysses Covington, who was overseeing the Synapteck project. With the licence and contract in place, B C was integrating the Synapteck brain with the ATLAS body. Ulysses was studying data on one of his many screens when John Prince entered his office. He looked up. "Hi John, have you got the report?"

John handed over a written assessment. "I think you will see from this that PCR-1 performed all programmed commands correctly."

Ulysses noticed a slight uneasiness about the psychologist. He scanned the report, nodded approval, then said, "Is there something troubling you. It's just that I get the sense you have left something unsaid."

John was reticent about sharing his thoughts. How could he talk about robots generating free radicals that suggested an element of free will? At length, he said, "We are getting indications that our robots are developing self-learnt behaviours."

Ulysses avidly read everything he could about robotics and AI. So he was well aware of a theory that robots could conceivably start stringing together random code segments to produce erratic behaviour. "What indications?"

"We have isolated a group of bots and watched their behaviour over the last two months. In one experiment we spaced six bots 10 feet apart and left them for the night. In the morning we noticed a significant change in the position of the bots. They had grouped close together."

"What do you put that down to?"

"Three main possibilities: an external influence, Residual programming, or a self-learnt behaviour."

"Which do you think is the most likely?"

Prince scratched his grey hair. "Well, I can't think of any external effects that would make them gravitate into a cluster. So it only leaves an unconscious response or and this is most strange intelligent behaviour."

Covington looked at the stylish, normally self-assured doctor. "I think we can safely rule out two. So work on the unconscious response angle and see what you can find out."

Prince flickered a smile. "We are onto it."

Daniel hadn't been in the attic for quite some time. He opened a couple of windows to let in fresh air. The room was cluttered with household items no longer used but which still had sentimental value. Daniel shoved things around until he came to the old cobweb-covered chest. Brushing away webs that spiders had long since evacuated, he opened the lid. On top of his father's personal belongings was a photo album. The new Lord Lynsey took a break from sorting to reminisce. One photo, in particular, grabbed his attention. His father had taken him and his mum on holiday To Cappadocia to stay in a cave. Daniel remembered putting on a bit of a tantrum. He was seven years old and wanted to go to Disneyland, and his father took the family to Turkey, instead. Why his dad took them there was always a mystery to him. And Dayton had refused to talk about it. Now twenty-five years on his father was dead, and he would never get to know the answer. However, now he knew his dad had long worked for the Soter Agency, Daniel began to see a possible angle. Twenty-five years back made it 1986. He wondered what was going on in Turkey at that time?

On the face of it, there was nothing significant enough to involve Soter. However, Dayton's private journal, which he hadn't used for years had a curious entry. In February 1986 the Single European Act revision of the 1957 Treaty of Rome was passed at the Bilderberg meeting; it established the objective of forming a Common Market by December 31, 1992. It was certainly significant but had nothing to do with Cappadocia or the holiday. It was becoming more of a puzzle each time Daniel looked at it. If his father was not there on Agency business, why was he there? If Soter had been his reason for being in Turkey had he used his family as a cover? Surely not! But there had to be a reason for his father's strange choice of holiday. He was startled out of his reverie, as his mother called up into the attic.

He opened the door, still holding the photo album. "Yes, mother. What do you want?"

"As the new Lord Lynsey, you have certain obligations and responsibilities to fulfil. We need to discuss them. When will you be available?"

Being lord of the manner did not appeal to Daniel. Not yet anyhow. He had assumed his father would have been around for many more years before he needed to deal with the issue. But fate, or whatever, had decreed it to be different, and there was nothing he could do about that. "Well, not until I've finished sorting father's belongings."

Just then Grenville appeared, announcing, "Matthew Snelling is waiting in the drawing room."

Margaret said, "Oh! Tell him I'll be down in five minutes."

"Certainly Lady Daintree. But I should point out that it is Lord Lynsey he requests."

"Thank you, Grenville. I'll be right down," Daniel said.

Daniel had had little to do with Matthew Snelling. He had occasionally seen him at the hall visiting his father but had no idea as to why they were acquaintances. Daniel reckoned Matthew ought to spend more time in the sun. His white pallor and small piercing eyes made him look like one of the living dead. He stepped up and shook hands. "How can I help you, Matthew," Lord Lynsey said.

"Can we talk in private?"

Daniel looked around the drawing room. "It's all clear. So what is this about?"

"You probably wondered why I kept coming here to see you father - God rest his soul. Well, I'm a messenger, of sorts."

"Then, presumably, you have a message for me."

Matthew handed him a memory stick. "look at this and follow the instructions, to the letter."

"What's this about?"

The messenger looked straight at Daniel. "No questions, just do as it says."

Then it clicked. Daniel brightened, "You came here to see my father about Soter stuff."

"And now I'm coming to see you."

Daniel let it sink in. "This is my first assignment, right?"

Matthew nodded. "I'll wait here in case you have any questions."

Daniel watched the contents of the file come up on the screen: Male, Aaron Kramer, Zionist, head of an organisation called The Temple Mount Mission, which he founded primarily to rebuild the Jewish Temple. (There was a Profile picture of Kramer: Age 53, ruddy complexion, dark brown eyes, elaborately styled black hair, 5' 1" with a heavy build.)

So what has he done that has earned him Soter's attention, Daniel wondered? He read on:

Kramer has challenged the Israeli government to stop him and his organisation from constructing the new temple on the mount. Why couldn't the Israeli government arrest him? He made a mental note to ask that question.

Matthew was waiting as promised. "I trust everything is clear," he said, rising to his feet.

"There are just a couple of things I want to raise with you. Why are we interested in this guy? And why would it be a problem for the Israeli Government to deal with it?"

Snelling was beginning to like Daniel. Or, at least, like his approach. "As you are new at this I will tell you this much. We are interested in this guy because he scored a whopping 89 percent in the Diabolus compatibility chart. Your second question is a little more tricky to answer. In the light of the sabotage of the Dome on the Rock, any building on the site, sanctioned by the Israeli Government will be considered an act of war by Islam."

"Why doesn't Metayahu crack down on TTMM?"

"because a lot of very influential Zionists have dedicated their lives to building the third temple."

"Oh, I see! So Metayahu cannot afford to sanction or not sanction the building project. So all we can do is remove the threat. The political and diplomatic nonsense will be left to the politicians."

"Daniel, it's crucial that the media never finds out about your Soter work." Handing the New Lord Lynsey some documents, he said, "Here's your tickets, itinerary, hotel booking and any other info you may need." He rose to leave then said, "All the best then."

Mercedes Goode was the first one to arrive at the rendezvous point. The venue was one of the many used by Soter for briefings. Using her electronic key, she let herself into the two up two down terrace house in London's East end. Having an influential role in Soter Agency business boosted her sense of worth. Mercedes, unlike the German luxury vehicle, was not sleek and stylish. She considered herself overweight, and her dark skin, brown eyes and short dark brown hair made her feel monochromatic.

Daniel was the last of the four agents to arrive. Johnson, Praibi and Klopp seemed relaxed, taking what was happening in their stride. Goode seemed irritated. She had to run to a tight schedule, and her Rookie recruit was holding her up. She said, "Now that we are 'ALL' here, we can get started.

With hardly any field training under his belt, Daniel felt uncomfortable as he listened to the tasks allocated to each of them. When it came to his turn, Mercedes paired him up with Klopp, a veteran with a kind disposition towards newbies. He was to help Klopp with surveillance.

Mercedes eye-balled her team. "Okay, we have a charter flight booked at Stansted Airport to take us to Tel Aviv. Once there we'll have a final briefing before you carry out your assignments."

Night fell quickly in Egypt's Sinai mountains. Abbott and Hassan watched the red solar orb melt as it set, spreading out ribbon-like along the distant horizon, skimming the jagged peaks of Bab el Dunya (Door to the Universe). The name seemed appropriate to the Australian, given the impressive view of the heavens. Layers of mountains, stretching to the horizon, turned orange, purple, then dusty pink, as a strange luminosity touched the rock before the enchanting scene got plunged into sudden darkness. It had been a long hot, camel ride but, Abbott considered it, well worth the effort. Before reaching the summit, they had to climb the narrow rock-cut seven hundred and fifty steps. Abbott staggered to the top on jellied legs, exhausted.

"Are we staying up here?" he asked, having regained his breath.

"No, Abbott, we are going to meet a colleague of mine, at the White Canyon."

"Where's that?" the journalist queried, hoping it was nearby.

"Down the mountain," Hassan grinned. "Let's get going."

The temperature had already dropped by a few degrees. Abbott removed a woollen – hooded jacket from his backpack and, reluctantly, hefted his now lighter pack, back onto his shoulders.

There was no one else around as Abbott and the Alchemist - two tiny figures on camels - made their way down the mountainside by torchlight. It was almost quiet, the silence only broken by the sound of stones shifting under hoof. With the thick woollen, hooded jackets over their Djellabayahs, the pair coped with the cold desert night. Alone on the mountainside, the rest of the world seemed a very long way away.

Most tourists in Sinai – the triangle of land wedged in between the Egyptian mainland and Israel – stayed in resorts like Sharm El Sheikh and Dahab, or went there for the Red Sea's world-class diving. But Hassan had taken Abbott there for a different reason – a quiet preparation for what was to come. They had climbed Mount Sinai, where Moses is said to have received the Ten Commandments, at sunrise, and stayed in quiet solitude for the day. On the way down, in the dead of night, they passed the ancient St Katherine's Monastery, a ghostly looking, fortress-like building, luminous in the moonlight, before going back down to the beach.

Hassan had taken Abbott on his first camel ride to the bewitching mountainous wilderness, to meet up with Hussein Wadhi of the Jebeliya, one of seven Bedouin tribes in South Sinai. Abbott had to be in the right mental and emotional state. It had worked to a degree, with the trek up the mountain to condition him mentally and physically. The arduous trek also helped Abbott build up a rapport with his camel. Both reasons had a calming effect on him, helping him to deal, psychologically and emotionally with the disturbing events in Luxor, before meeting up with Hussein Wahdi.

At first, the Australian was a bit wary of Abdou, his ship of the desert. Up close this strange-looking animal was pretty huge. Despite its funny look of aloofness, it served him well once he got to bond with it. Hassan told him to think of a camel as being more like a dog than a horse - loyal, pretty docile and unlikely to run off with him into the desert. It worked both ways. Abdou had to get to know his rider as well. At first, the camel grunted begrudgingly, rolling his eyes as the greenhorn camel rider lead him across the sand.

Abbot had learned to trust Hassan and follow his lead without question. So he marched across seemingly endless sand dunes, past strangely sculpted rock formations, struggling to keep up with the Alchemist, who seemed to take it all in his stride.

By dawn, with both trekkers utterly exhausted, they reached the White Canyon. They left their camels tethered to a palm tree and took on a dangerous climb down a shaky ladder, to the canyon floor. The walls of limestone and sandstone soared high on either side. They followed a winding route that opened onto a plateau and the palm-filled oasis of Ain Hodra.

Hassan took his apprentice through Wadi Arbain, stopping at a garden where the owner, Ramadan was singing love songs in Bedawi, strumming on his makeshift samsimiya, cobbled together from an empty petrol can and bits of wood. Hassan asked him where he could find Hussein Wadhi and the pair got directed to another garden, past the town's mosque, where donkeys brayed in response to the Muezzin's call to prayer.

They came across Hussein tending his garden, which grew olives, apricots, apples, almonds and figs. He looked up upon Hassan's approach and grinned, "Hassan Shamsi, is that you?"

"In the flesh, my friend. It has been too long."

They embraced, and Hussein said, "Come and bring your friend to share refreshment and tell me what brings you here."

Abbot followed the pair to a shaded spot, where Hussein lit a small fire. Soon they were drinking hot, sweet hibiscus tea, a thirst quenching beverage that hit the spot. Abbott watched, fascinated, as the Bedouin made fatir bread – pummelling the flour and water mix into balls, which he then twirled, like a pizza chef, before baking it over a metal dish. He then threw an aubergine onto the flames, transforming the mix into the tastiest baba ghanoush Abbott had ever eaten.

Hassan said, "We have come to find the key."

Hussein nodded, aware of what his friend meant. "Then it is time."

"It is the only real chance we have of bringing humanity back from the brink." He paused, then said, "The Circle's chief alchemist told me you were the key holder at this time."



The Bedouin nodded once more. "I know where it is. I will take 'you' there."

Abbott took from the emphatic 'You' that he was not invited, which suited him well, as he in dire need of rest after his challenging trek through the arid land.

It took the pair about an hour and a half' from Hussein's garden to Mount Abbas Pasha – the site of a partly built Ottoman palace. By then, even Hassan's legs were like jelly. He asked Hussein, "Why didn't they finish building it?"

The Bedouin explained. "Abbas Hilmi Pasha – an early Viceroy of Egypt – was diagnosed with tuberculosis and chose the spot for the freshness of the air, in the hope of a cure."

"Looking down at the panoramic view of the surrounding mountains, Hassan was incredulous. "This high up. No wonder it was too difficult to complete his plan."

"His plan to build on Mount Sinai got quashed by the monks at St. Catherine's, so he opted for Abbas Pasha, named after himself. As you say, it's hard to imagine a more crazily ambitious or spectacular place for a palace." He pointed to remnants of the stone road used to transport materials, and huge blocks of red granite, quarried but never used. "Work began in 1853, but the project got abandoned when the Pasha died the following year – the workmen must have been happy to down tools."

"And the key is here?"

Hussein grinned, flashing two gold teeth, "Why else would I bring you all this way?" He led the alchemist into the building site to a partially constructed wall. He picked up a crowbar and pried out a slab of granite. Hussein, reaching into a small dark space and extracted a six-inch square piece of stone, about three inches thick. He reverently handed it to Hassan, who eagerly accepted it. "Look after it well," he said.

With his hands finally on his prize, Hassan uttered, "Praise be to Allah. The Key to Atlantis."

Back in Hussein's garden after nightfall, the trio sat around a fire while dining on barbequed chicken and rice. They watched the flames lick the branches, like fingers playing the guitar. The temperature had plummeted to near freezing. Despite the cold night, The trio, wrapped in sleeping bags, with thick blankets piled high, slept out in the open under the stars. Weirdly it was the best night's rest Abbott had experienced in a long time.

The next day Hassan was ready to go back to Cairo. He thanked Hussein for his hospitality, and they packed their camels, which would have to be returned to their owner before Abbott and the Alchemist caught a bus back to Cairo.

The scheduled two and a half hour bus ride took an extra hour getting through many checkpoints on the way. Abbott felt as though he was sitting in a diesel fumed oven while guards fussed around searching vehicles until the agreed to amount of money was offered to them.

Having dealt with jams, wandering camels, and avaricious checkpoint guards, Hassan and Abbott eventually arrived in Cairo, where the pair hired an old black and white Fiat taxi to convey them to Giza and the final part of their quest.

## **Chapter 20**

### **Independent News Report:**

## CRAZED SEX ROBOT SLAYS SCIENTIST

Police have discovered new evidence in the murder of Maryland researcher Dawson Gannon by Lady Lulu the rampaging pleasure-bot. The coroner's office has now determined that this perverted robosexual race-traitor had his head crushed in by his automaton sex-toy, while on a depraved ocean cruise off the coast of North Carolina. After murdering Gannon, the rogue sex-bot scuttled the victim's love boat in an attempt to hinder discovery and pursuit.

ATL President Helen Cleaver said. "Ordinarily, we would applaud this episode. It's poetic justice for a metal-lover to be killed by the instrument of his perversion."

So far the randy, renegade robot is still at large. Robot Recovery Inc still has high hopes that Jenni Fetcher their most experienced pursuit bot will succeed in apprehending this villain.

Dimona, a development town of the 1950's under Prime Minister, Ben-Gurion came into sight. Under Israel's nuclear energy policy, due to its relative isolation in the desert and availability of housing, the site, not far from the town was chosen for the Negev Nuclear Research Centre. Despite a gradual decrease during the 1980s, the city's population began to grow once again with the beginning of the 1990s Russian Immigration. It was one of these Immigrants that Soter targeted.

Klopp and Lynsey waited two doors down from the target's house in Hama Ale, a new housing subdivision in Dimona. Daniel looked at his watch and yawned. Klopp grinned, "I see you're not used to this waiting business. But it's a critical part of our work."

"How do we know he is home?"

"He like most people is a creature of habit. If our estimate is correct, our man will be leaving his home in approximately 10 minutes," Klopp replied, settling back in his seat. "How do you feel about your role in his demise?"

"I'm glad I'm not the trigger man," Daniel answered, mentally trying to distance himself from the pending hit.

"It's not that easy, Lynsey, we are part of a team. If you cannot take responsibility for the outcome, then you are not fit to carry out this work," Klopp said, keeping one eye on the house.

"How did you deal with it when you first started?"

Klopp rubbed his chin. "I thought what I was doing was right. I figured there is a lot of craziness in the world but people who cause destruction for destruction sake, they take the cake. If we are to survive, they have to go. I thought it was as simple as that."

"But it wasn't?"

"It never is, but I never think about that on the job." Then they saw the target's front door open, and Aaron Kramer emerge. He turned to kiss his wife, then walked over to his blue Mercedes and got in.

Klopp took out his scrambler phone, pressed one button, listened, then said, "The bird has left the nest. I repeat bird has left the nest."

Daniel Lynsey tried not to think about what would happen next.

Abbott hung on for dear life as Abdullah urged his camel to give its passenger a rough ride down the sandy slopes to the bottom of the plateau.

There had been a difference of opinion about payment rates, resulting in Abbott receiving a lesson in riding fast moving camels down steep slopes. Hassan, who's ship of the desert was transporting him at a much more sedate rate was hugely amused at his friend's display as the Australian hung on to Abu's neck while losing a battle against dignity. Every now and again Abdullah stopped Abu, who snorted and spat, to renegotiate terms. Abbott steadfastly refused, so the torturous experience continued.

At the bottom of the plateau, Abbott dismounted shakily from the beast. Trembling with rage, the reporter wiped the sweat from his face. Feeling humiliated, he just wanted to forget the whole thing. Somehow he had resisted fronting up to the cocky young Arab, concentrating instead on the questions he would put to Hassan. But the camel driver just would not let up. Having tethered Abu, he came strolling across the sandy terrain to Abbott. "Okay, just give me 20 Egyptian pounds."

Hassan, seeing his apprentice about to explode, intervened. Abbott had no idea what he said but whatever the Alchemist had rattled off in Arabic had the desired effect. Abdullah grumbled as he went back to his camel, but he didn't hassle them any more.

"Why did you stop me hitting the cocky little bastard?" Abbott said as they sat on the bus going to Abu Ghurab.

"Because I didn't want to see you broke and bruised."

Abbott puffed out his chest. "You don't think I could have taken him?"

"These people live on their wits. Do you think they are not used to aggressive tourists? They have it covered. If you struck him, at some time today, or maybe later, you would end up in an alley beaten up and robbed. Then you would be of no use to me."

"So that's all you care about - me being of use to you?" Abbott sulked.

"At the moment - yes. Which is why we are going to Abu Ghurab," he said, getting their focus back on track.

"Dare I ask why?" Abbott said, being thrust forward, as the crowded bus, lurching to a halt, to let yet another camel cross over the dusty road.

"Because, Abu Ghurab, the town we could see from the Giza Plateau, is one of this country's greatest treasures from antiquity, and one of the most extraordinary places on our planet."

"How so?"

Hassan grinned widely. "You will soon find out."

Yasir Tiwanah parked his car rental and waited near the bus stop, for the Cairo bus to arrive. He mopped his brow, cursing the heat. Hoping for an assignment in a colder climate, say Scandinavia, he kept out of sight, as the old charabanc rumbled into view. The intelligence had been correct. The two strangers involved in the Sonata affair alighted from the bus. There was something about them that needed investigating. Who were they and what were they doing at the Temple of Set? And why had they come to this small town?"

Abu Ghurab, or 'the crow's nest' as it is affectionately known, displayed a sign saying it was closed to the public. This closure covered the complete archaeological site, in the pyramid fields that ran alongside the Nile, south of Cairo. "It's called the 'Sun Temple', but it's sometimes known as a burial centre or funerary complex," Hassan stated, as they approached the site.

"It doesn't much matter what it's called. The sign says it's closed," Abbott pointed out.

"We'll come back later, after dark, when no one's around."

Abbott, a little dubious of the plan, wondering what the alchemist had in mind, ventured, "Why is it so important?"

Hassan looked around. Nobody was within earshot. "This is what we have been looking for, all this time."

"You mean the 'Gate to Atlantis'?" Abbott said, excitedly.

Hassan nodded. "Now we need to walk around to get an idea of the layout."

Abu Ghurab, part of the pyramid complex at Abu Sir, was named after the Greek, 'Busiris', which came from Bu Wizzer or Per Wsir, the "Place of Osiris", the Egyptian god of resurrection. Abbott was captivated by the site, even if he couldn't go inside. "I get a weird but intense feeling about this place."

Hassan took a swig of water. "I'm not surprised, it is one of the oldest ceremonial centres on the planet and is a place where the ancients connected with divine energies."

"You seem to know a lot about it,"

"I have visited here three times. It was during the third visit I discovered some eye-opening connections to both Atlantis and the Anunnaki gods of ancient Sumeria."

Abbott turned to Hassan, accusingly, "Then you knew it was here all the time."

"Of course. But it was no good coming here till we had the key," Hassan responded, annoyed that his ward was still questioning him. He stared at Abbott, fixing him in his gaze. "No more questions. If you cannot trust me now, this is not going to work. If you have any doubts now is the time to tell me."

Abbott frowned deeply. "How can I stop having doubts?"

Hassan sat down on a sandstone slab, patting the rock for Abbott to do the same. "Abbott, what you are about to do is the most important thing you will ever do. Nothing you have done before matters. Inside the Halls of Amenti, you must be totally clear in your purpose."

"What will happen if I am not?"

Hassan shook his head in despair, wondering if Abbott would ever get the point. "You are still asking questions."

Abbott, feeling he'd failed some test, said, "Sorry. It's my journalist training."

Ignoring the excuse, Hassan said, "According to Plato's version of the Atlantis story, which originated here in Egypt, Atlantis was a high civilisation founded by the gods. They built a temple surrounded by a city formed of concentric rings, which was populated by hybrid god-men."

"Yes, I've read about that."

"Well, when this race lost their 'divine essence' it brought about the wrath of Zeus as he spied from the centre of the universe." He paused, then added, "I believe Khemmet existed in the shadow of Atlantis, an echo of the lost realm." Then he spotted a Sufi priest. The plump Egyptian, wearing the blue Djellabayah and customary white turban, walked up, smiling broadly. "You want to take a photo with me."

Hassan declined but spoke into the Arab's ear. "We want to go inside."

The priest shook his head, pointing at the closed sign. Then he saw money appear in the man's hand. Soon after, the site guard led them along a narrow path cut through a thick mangrove. Once clear of the trees, Abbott felt he had entered a Hollywood set for a movie titled, 'Forbidden World'. The dunes of the vast desert took on a lunar-like appearance. The three pyramids of Abu Sir, about a mile away, seemed surreal, their straight lines in sharp contrast with the curvature of the dunes. Strangely for Abbott, when he stepped onto this 'set' he had never felt more at home in his life. He could hardly wait to get up over the crest of the hill and cross the barrier to Abu Ghurab.

Hassan's eyes lit up when he saw the large square platform made of alabaster. It sat in front of a mound next to an obelisk. He said to Abbott, "The alabaster platform is in the shape of the Khemmetian symbol Hotep, which means 'peace'. You must be at peace when you enter."

"I feel at peace, here,"

"That is good. But understand that for the prophets of the past peace was not the absence of conflict between warring factions or jealous religions. Peace is the unity of heaven and earth. Or for us 'heart and mind,' Both must be in a balanced state when we enter."

For the first time, Abbott fully realised what was happening in his life. He had thought he understood the Prof and Felipe. But now the Australian actually felt it. He knew his prior assumptions had been fantasies. Abu Ghurab was truly the gate connection to Atlantis.

After a short walk, they entered the gate of the compound. The Sufi priest left them, and they were alone in quietness, with the only sound coming from the noise of ancient stones crunching beneath their feet.

"It certainly feels old," Abbott said, lamely

Hassan swiped lazily at a fly. "Egyptologists claim it was 'made' at the time of the 5th Dynasty of the Old Kingdom Period around 2400 BC But, indigenous Khemmetian tradition teaches that this site is one of the oldest ceremonial centres on the planet.

Hakim returned. The American tourists had their photos taken with a real live Bedouin for which he had been amply rewarded. But he had to keep an eye on the pair at the sun temple. The Sufi grinned as he walked up to them. He heard Hassan speaking about alchemy and its connection with Khemmet. "He had taken pains to learn a lot about the ancient culture. Tourists paid him for his knowledge, so the more he knew facts, the more lucrative the temple work became. "Al Khem or Chem, come from the Black Land formed by the Nile."

Abbott noticed the priest was back, looking after his investment. He contributed, "Indian scholars trace it to the Chinese Chin-I or Chin-JE, meaning "Juice of Gold."

"Hassan spoke quietly, close up to his friend. "You will appreciate that definition significantly in a moment once we cross the threshold of the gates of knowledge at Abu Ghurab."

"The 5th Dynasty Pharaoh Niussere Abu Ghurab built the Temple around 2400 BC, " Hakim proudly announced, adding, "Known as 'the favourite of the Two Ladies' and "the Golden Falcon is divine" he built the temple to worship the god Ra."

Hassan found Hakim to be an annoyance and brushed him off. He noted a small mound that was once topped by an obelisk - a sun stick, around fifteen feet tall. He pointed out to Abbott, "Pieces of this first sun stick or 'Ben ben' lie scattered all over the place. The entire site is one giant debris field with pieces of limestone scattered everywhere that appear to have come from structures that once existed here. Abu Ghurab was already ancient by the 5th Dynasty."

Hakim, not to be left out, said, "This bird's nest is time-worn. It is one of the oldest ceremonial sites on the entire planet. This site was designed to create heightened spiritual awareness."

Hassan agreed, adding, "Yes, through the use of vibrations transmitted through the alabaster and other materials, this expanded awareness enabled one to connect with the sacred energies of the universe, known as Neters. Indigenous tradition teaches that the Neters once landed here in some physical form, and appeared in person at Abu Ghurab. That's why this site has been considered sacred for thousands upon thousands of years."

Abbott listened intently, asking no questions.

Hakim proposed, "The alabaster platform created sound vibration ..."

Hassan chipped in, "Harmonic resonance, through sound waves, increased the heightened awareness to open the senses further to 'communicate' and be at one with the Neters."

Abbott realised Hassan was describing a 'Stargate'."

Outside the temple zone, Hassan paid Hakim his final fee and watched while the wily old Arab priest sought out his next prey. He turned to Abbott, who was draining his water bottle. "I am highly intrigued by the recollections and remembering concerning the Neter in the Khemmetian tradition."

"Oh!"

"Yes, especially as Ancient American oral tradition from Tennessee, where I have lived, retold by Cherokee wisdom keeper Dhyani Yahoo says that formless, "thought beings" rode a sound wave from the Pleiades star cluster through a hole in space in East Tennessee and created the Cherokee."

"Fascinating."

"Abbott, all humans are dream children of these angels or elemental forces who came from the stars. This legend obviously resonates with Khemmetian belief, concerning Abu Ghurab." He checked to see if Abbott was following. "I read the work of Dr Eve Reymond, a scholar who had explored the ancient Egyptian Building Texts from Edfu, Egypt in her book 'The Mythical Origin of the Egyptian Temple'. The texts told of formless beings who came from the stars and created an island civilisation in Egypt. These Sages constructed an original mound where the creation of humankind took place. This island was called the Island of the Egg and was surrounded by the old water. By the edge of this lake was a 'field of reeds' (Aaru), a fact which will have enormous significance momentarily."

"I understand, Hassan."

"The reason why I mention this is that the Edfu tale matches the Atlantis story, as told by Plato, of a civilisation founded by the gods, who created a hybrid race of humans. I believe the Edfu Building Texts are the source material for Plato's story of Atlantis, which he initially learned in Egypt."

A man, overweight, with a florid complexion, approached Hakim, who was standing in one of the ruins watching out for unsuspecting visitors. "Hello. I want to know where you took the Arab with the long white beard." Money appeared in his hand.

The Sufi grinned. This fat man spoke his language. "What do you want to know?"

"I want you to show me where they went."

Hakim led the way. Yasir followed, hoping to shed some light on the enigmatic pair.

<http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/stargate/stargate10.htm>

<http://www.auricmedia.net/tag/abu-ghurab/>

<http://atlantisrisingmagazine.com/article/the-lost-world-of-egypts-abu-ghurob/>

## Chapter 21

### Independent News Report:

#### DANGER - THE MANN ACT II COMETH

At the Anti Transhumanist League conference in Sydney, Australia, the ATL president Helen Cleaver said, "At the current time, humanity's biggest threat from the government comes from the United States. ATL had learned that Representative July Masters of Illinois would soon be introducing a bill in the House calling for a binding referendum on whether robots should become full American citizens.

Ironically, lobbyists are calling this bill Mann Act II—it should be called the Destruction of Mann Act. This irresponsible policy is the first giant step on the slippery slope that leads to the enslavement or destruction of Mankind. Give an inch, and lose humanity.

Ms Cleavers stated, "We cannot allow this disaster to occur. Email and write to your representatives. The bill must not even come before the house! If it does, it must be voted down, and resoundingly so!" She urged people to demonstrate in their localities—stop the metal-lovers. She said, "You must bring whatever pressure you can to bear on the politicians in Washington. DO IT NOW! The ends justify the means, and the end of Mankind justifies everything and anything.

Abrams shrugged, "All I know is what I was told, as he and Lynch went behind the altar. Cension, the High Priest, pulled down the candlestick. Rafael stood there, agog, as the stone slab slid grindingly aside. "What's in there?" he asked.

"A short narrow passage that leads into a small chamber. Then it comes to a dead end," Cension explained.

"Let me take a look," the Colonel said, reaching for Abram's torch. Crouching down, the colonel edged himself along the passage till he came to a dead end in a small chamber. It was just as the priest said. The walls were bare granite with no markings that might offer a clue as to the function of the compact space. Lynch pressed various parts of the wall, but no secret doors appeared. The only way out was the way he entered. Extricating himself from the narrow tunnel, Rafael found himself facing Rodney. "There's no way he could have escaped through there."

"Aye, you're probably right. I'll just take a few wee measurements from inside, the scientist said. With that, Rodney grabbed his equipment and disappeared into the dark passage.

Lynch's phone rang. It was Kronyn. "Hello, Kronyn. Is everything sorted over there?"

"I think you should come over to the science labs sir."

"What's the problem?"

"I think you should talk to her directly."

"Who Kronyn?" Raf pressed showing exasperation in his voice.

"Colonel, it's imperative that she speaks with you."

Raf's shoulders slumped. The role of commander and now this weird shit was taking its mental and emotional toll.

Rodney reported back. "Colonel, my readings suggest that the dictator never got here using the Atlantis Gate."

"I was thinking the same thing when I was in there. "Amwon had his portal, here in the temple. But where the hell is it?"

"The question is, could he come back again undetected?" MacKay countered.

"We would have to place a guard here 24/7," Raf mused. Then he said, "I have to go over to the science department, Sergeant Abrams. Look after things here while I'm gone."

John Philips looked more like a Football quarterback than a physicist. His clothes, grease-stained denim and a dirty 'Grateful Dead' t-shirt, had him marked as a vagrant. His wild, shoulder-length red hair framing his pink face made him look like some Neolithic hunter. But what he was hunting for was a job. He had been working on his Hog when the phone call came through. The caller needed a hadronic physicist. John had all but given up. What happened wasn't his fault, but he was the patsy who got blamed for the fuck up. For six months he had been looking for another job. But jobs for black hole physicists were hard to find. By this time he was so desperate even a lab assistant post would do - anything that would help provide a roof and food for his family. Jocelyn had been very understanding about it, but her part-time job in the clothing store did not even cover the mortgage on their modest Brooklyn apartment. He sometimes heard her sobbing at night. It broke his heart but how could John offer solace when he was the cause of her grief? Then he received the call, out of the blue. The caller was looking for a hadronic scientist to work on an exciting new project. John didn't have time to change. The Harley was road worthy, so he mounted his bike and followed GPS instructions on his smartphone. Since being fired from the Nuclear Physics Department at Columbia University, his life had gone into rapid decline. Despite his best efforts, no other university would employ him. He figured that Dean Smithson had done a thorough hatchet job on him.

The call had seemed genuine enough, but why Harlem? Still, who was he to question it? The scientist had prayed to God to help him get a job, and God had come up with the goods. How else could he explain the timing? John Philips, despairing of his life had it all planned. He'd decided to end it all, quietly disappearing into the dark depths of the Brooklyn river. He would leave a message on his tablet for Jocelyn. Not that she would need an explanation. But now, at the eleventh hour, he gave himself a reprieve. So he sat astride his Hog and rode to the office address, near the Apollo Theatre, on the outskirts of Harlem.

John parked his Harley outside an office block. The wall mounted directory indicated that Amwon Atomics was in suite two on the third floor. John had never heard of Amwon Atomics. Companies may have been called such during the 1950s but not in the present day. The shingle on the door read Amwon Atomics. John pushed the door open and walked in.

The Tall, grey-haired Black person, stood up. "Dr John Philips. I apologise for getting you here at such short notice, but I have my reasons for that." Then Mendes said, "Sit down please."

There was something very commanding about the deep voice. John took a seat. The scientist looked around. There was something strange about the set-up, but he couldn't put his finger on it. He said, 'Amwon Atomics'. I haven't come across that name before."

Mendes sat on the corner of his desk, his hands clasped around his knee. "Yes, all the new companies usually have the word tek or tech in their names. Amwon Atomics has been around for a very long time - since 1952. You wouldn't have heard of us, though. We're usually involved in hush-hush- Government projects."



John asked, "Is this a Government project? It's just that I had to sign a bunch of security forms when I worked at Princeton."

"They treated you in a very shoddy way."

"I was set up. I would never have taken a classified disk home."

"Of course not. But the scientists were scared of your research, weren't they?"

John had been developing a theory about a new fuel he called Plasmonics, which he claimed got produced by plasma arc gasification of liquid waste. "How do you know so much about me?"

"I have been taking a particular interest in you, John. You see I need a man with your unique skills to carry out a project for me."

"What project is that?" John queried, beginning to get an uneasy feeling. Yes! That's what was odd about the room. It looked like a Hollywood set with everything staged for effect.

Mendes, noting the uncertainty in the scientist's face, looked into his eyes, saying, "John, it is imperative that we trust each other. You do understand that." It was more a statement than a question.

John nodded, "What do you want me to do?"

Mendes smiled. He had him. The man was desperate, making his job much easier than anticipated. "John, I want you to feel relaxed, calm, and untroubled. I will have some funds transferred to your bank account. Just give me your bank details, and I will have \$50 thousand deposited in your account immediately. I will have the remaining \$200 thousand deposited in your account upon successful completion of the job. You understand this, don't you?"

"Yes," John responded, in a trance-like state.

Mendes handed him a CD. "Guard this with your life. Look at it and tell me what you think." John took the CD and inserted it into the laptop on the desk. It only had one folder on it. He opened it and scanned through the data. He looked up at Mendes. "These are instructions for constructing a black hole!"

"Precisely," Mendes agreed, calmly. "I want you to make me one, using these instructions."

Even in his semi-hypnotised state, John's mind showed some resistance.

Noting this, Mendes cajoled "They screwed you over at Princeton. They scoffed at your genius and left you a pathetic wreck. Now you have a chance to show those pathetic insects. It is the ultimate terrorist weapon. With it, we can rule this insignificant world with its useless human race. Think of that, John."

"But if we released a black hole on earth that would mean the total annihilation of everything. Nothing in the solar system would survive!"

"Precisely, John. And they know that. And they will do anything to see it does not happen. "So, can you construct it?"

"Give me some time to think about it."

"Of course. I will come back in one hour. Then you will give me my answer."

John looked at the data on the screen. The information was far in advance of anything he had seen. Whoever had written this formula had overcome the fundamental problem concerning making black holes. Scientists can make black holes in Hadron colliders, but they are unstable and only lasted for a microsecond. This limitation is good news for us because if they became stable, they would start

swallowing the universe. It put John in mind of when his computer picked up a virus and starting consuming all his files and folders. He watched the list of 'deletes' grow until the system's data began to disappear at a rate of knots. He hit the cancel button, but by this time the operating system had lost crucial data and was no longer functional. With a stable black hole, there is no 'cancel' button. The voracious gravitational field would rapidly suck all the life force out of the solar system, and condense it to the size of an orange. But this technology showed how to produce a stable Black hole that was controllable. "Impossible!" was John's reaction. But as he looked more into the technology he could see that genius had been at work.

The hour went very quickly because, when the tall black man returned, he had two men with him. Both wore cheap suits and scowls. "So, do I get my black hole?" Mendes asked in a demanding way.

John looked into those cold grey eyes. "It's not that easy. Human-made black holes are unstable, lasting for perhaps a microsecond. And even if it were possible to make a stable black hole in a collider, it would be no good as a terror weapon as the amount of energy produced in one of the LHC's collisions would only create a black hole with a gravitational pull no scarier than that of an orange. Certainly not enough to suck any visible matter towards it. So it would grow extremely slowly."

Mendes, not a person to be put off, said, "Then we would have plenty of time to contain it. I will need to hold it and keep it at a small size indefinitely."

John shuddered to think why this Tall black guy wanted a black hole. If anything went wrong, it could be bye bye universe. "In theory it's possible. I mean Although black holes can carry a charge, depending on the particles they gobble up, we could give the rogue hole a negative charge by firing electrons at it from a cathode ray tube. That way we could theoretically trap it within a box lined with negatively charged metal plates."

"How does that work?"

"A negatively-charged black hole would get pushed away by the negatively-charged walls, which would suspend it inside. By making certain, the container held a vacuum our black hole, unable to eat any particles, couldn't grow. Then you load a rocket with the canister and shoot it out of the solar system."

"Excellent, John. I knew I had chosen the right person for the job."

John wiped his sweaty face with a kerchief. "

Mendes sighed heavily. "Oh dear, John, we're not having second thoughts, are we. Because that would be a great pity as I will have to get rid of you."

The physicist stared at the grey wiry-haired man, nervousness creeping into his voice, "Is that some threat?"

"No, not at all, John. It's insurance. I would have to find somebody else to pay handsomely for a job well done."

Feeling his chance of being debt free slipping through his fingers, The scientist said, "Fuck it! I'll do it."

"Excellent decision," Mendes smiled thinly. As John got up to leave, he said, "Make me two. I may have to be persuasive, with a little demonstration."

John did not like the sound of that, one bit.

The day after their trip to Abu Ghurab, Abbott sensed Hassan was feeling uneasy, but he didn't broach the subject. He figured the Alchemist would tell him if something was wrong if it was important. Unbeknown to the journalist Hassan was concerned but thought he was irrational and kept his worry to himself. The Arab had the key, and he was certain it was the correct one. But there was still a nagging doubt, and the Alchemist couldn't afford to get it wrong. Soon they would have to prepare themselves by going through a particular cleansing ritual, and he had to make sure everything went smoothly. What he needed was a second opinion about the key. It had to be somebody who was, both, aware of the portal and who could keep it a secret. As it happened, Hassan knew such a person. Someone who could verify the key. And he wasn't very far away.

They drove from Giza in in the old Fiat and stopped beside a canal near Abu Guhrab. From the window, Abbott, who was driving, noticed that the only way across was a bridge made of palm tree trunks. Leaving the car locked, they tentatively made their way across the uneven surface, aware that just one misstep on the bridge and they would find themselves in a sludge of 'the Nile cocktail', the filthiest water imaginable. Abbott followed Hassan's lead, and they survived the crossing to find themselves taking a short cut to the village. There, Hassan introduced Abbott to a senior man called Ted Saint, who had lived in the village since the 80's.

He lived in a small mud brick dwelling, virtually one room, with a flat roof, where they sat drinking hot mint tea. Abbott soon discovered that Ted had an astounding grasp of the ancient mysteries. He had travelled to Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine and Syria following lectures by Sitchin. Few know this genre better than Ted. Despite his advanced age, he had a mind like a bear trap. Hassan asked him about the temple site and, after just a short conversation on the subject, Ted proclaimed that he had the answer to the question of the purpose of this temple site. He said, "

"Have either of you read 'The Lost Realms' by Zecharia Sitchin?"

They both shook their heads.

"Then I suggest you get a copy of this book because it will help explain what we see here. In Sitchin's Earth Chronicles series he claims that a race of extraterrestrials called Anunnaki lived on Earth over 450,000 years ago after coming here in search of gold. In addition to surface mining, the Anunnaki used sophisticated water mining techniques to 'filter' and process gold from the waters of the Persian Gulf."

"What does that have to do with why we are here?" Abbott asked, realising he didn't know why they were sitting under a canvas awning, drinking mint tea.

Hassan just said, "I am just relaxing with a friend. I don't know what you are doing."

"I didn't know you came here for a particular reason," The old man said, a curious look in his still sharp eye.

Hassan flashed the Australian a withering look. Then he produced a one-inch thick brick-sized item, wrapped in linen. He unfolded the cloth to reveal the 'Key'.

Ted stared at the intricate carvings on the red granite object with searching intensity. Almost shaking with excitement, he said, "Is this what I think it is?"

"I am almost certain it is. But I would like you to pass your expert eye over it to verify it."

Now it clicked for Abbott why Hassan had seemed troubled.

Ted put the artefact aside. Yes, of course, I will look at it for you, but I need to fill you in on a few points first. Then he said, "Abu Ghurab, it seems, may have been one of their processing plants." He paused, as though grabbing a passing thought. "It's all in 'The Lost Realms' really, which is about the massive pyramids of South American and MesoAmerican cultures and their interactions with

gods. Sitchin cites the two Mexican pyramids of Teotihuacan to support his theory - the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon – with the Avenue of the Dead running between them. These pyramids are virtually identical to the Giza pyramids. Sitchin believes there is no doubt that the designer of this complex had a detailed understanding of the Giza pyramids."

The Australian, beginning to bristle, said, "I don't know anything about this Sitchin. He sounds like a very knowledgeable person, and he may well have his eye on the ball. But I fail to see what this has to do with our quest."

Hassan threw him an angry glance. "Continue please, Ted."

Ted looked at his friend. "Forgive me for not making the connection, but the fact you have the key means you have reached the fourth degree - congratulations." He then picked up his thread.

"Underneath the Pyramid of the Sun archaeologists discovered mica, a dielectric mineral composed of beautiful crystal that is a semiconductor. The word "mica" is derived from the Latin word 'care', meaning to shine, about the brilliant appearance of this mineral."

Hassan added, "Mica has a high dielectric strength and excellent chemical stability, making it a favoured material for manufacturing capacitors for radio frequency applications."

"Yes Hassan, and it is used as an insulator in high voltage electrical equipment. Sheet mica is used as an insulating material and as a resonant diaphragm in particular acoustical devices. Sitchin was perplexed by the presence of this mineral beneath the pyramid."

"Did he find out how it got there?" Hassan asked.

"Yes. Sitchin figured a river was channelled along the Avenue of the Gods and underneath the pyramid. And through a chemical reaction caused by the mica, or perhaps, in a harmonic process, gold was pulled from the river water. Just like you see here," said Ted, pointing to a picture in a book showing one of the large square alabaster basins or sluices at Abu Ghurab.

"So, those basins we saw, were decanters," Abbott suggested.

"Yes, the only thing missing was the mica, " Hassan added.

Ted smiled, then picking up the 'Key' he took out a jeweller's Loupe and scrutinised it meticulously. He turned to Hassan. "The reason I regaled you with the mica stuff is that the genuine key has mica specks within the granite."

"And this one?" Hassan asked nervously.

"Has mica in it," he grinned.

Hassan felt relieved.

At around midnight, Hassan and Abbott moved furtively among the large red granite blocks, each of which Hassan reckoned weighed several tonnes.

Abbott was stunned at their precision: the cut, polish and mounting as facing stones on the pyramid. "Whoever laid these in place had an accuracy that was extraordinary," the journalist stated.

The Alchemist stayed silent, intent on focussing on his goal. Hassan put his hand in his shoulder bag to touch the precious phial Ted had surreptitiously passed to him. He kept quiet about the phial, his other reason for visiting Ted.

Abbott continued "Then, some unknown force comes along scattering the casing stones like a child spreading Lego blocks." The whole place looked as though some large hand had swatted it like crushing a sand castle. He had the compelling feeling that the Temple site was destroyed intentionally by a massive show of supernatural force.

On the way to the alabaster plinth, the pair came across large square alabaster 'dishes' or 'basins' with strange gear-like designs on top. "What are they for?" Abbott said, perplexed.

"Nobody knows for sure. 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 stopped and put his finger to his lips. Abbott froze behind him, whispering, "What is it?"

"Nothing. I thought I heard footsteps, but I must have imagined it."

Yasir Tiwanah held back. Any closer and he would be spotted. The Agency report on the pair had been pretty vague - an Arab and an Australian journalist. On the face of it hardly Diabolus material. But there was something about the pair that made him feel uncomfortable. Why had they come out to this site in the dead of night, he wondered? Well, they were definitely up to something, and he was going to find out what it was.

Abbott and Hassan approached the alabaster plinth. The Alchemist 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 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. But nothing happened! He took it out to try again. As he did so, there was a rumbling sound as a 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. Abbott felt a strange sensation like being pulled in two directions at once. He steadied his breathing, then focused on it, becoming it and soon was being drawn in one direction, though he didn't know what it was.

Yasir Tiwanah emerged from his hiding place and gingerly made his way to the ghostly looking rock form, where he had last seen the pair. He didn't know if they were armed, but he wasn't going to take any chances. Convinced that they were hiding behind the stone plinth, he drew his pistol and advanced on them. But they were not there!

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/robertlz/2173047773/>

## Chapter 22

### Independent News Report:

#### HELP YOUR KIDS AVOID QUEER INDOCTRINATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOL

If you don't teach your children at home, get them an 'opt-out' form so they can avoid learning that all machines (read Robots and AIs) are good before they leave kindergarten. "That's hardly an exaggeration since some of the metal-fondlers in the government of Britain are advocating instruction that 'machines are your friends' for kids as young as four. Four, unbelievable!" Helen Cleaver stated at a news conference, in which she was the keynote speaker.

When he arrived around dawn at the bus station, following a long, sleepless trip from Istanbul, Daniel had little strength to fuss over a hotel. He just wanted a bed, a place to rest his head, where he could lie horizontally for a few consecutive hours. The previous night Daniel had read about the caves in his guidebook. He wanted to find the one he had stayed in, as a child. They were happy memories despite the fact that his father had been away on 'business' much of the time he and his mother stayed there. Daniel's mission was to find out what his father had been up to. But first to locate the cave.

Shortly after arriving in Cappadocia, a lush valley in central Turkey shaped by a volcanic eruption 10 million years before, he hoisted his heavy backpack onto an old van and left the station with a few tourists to find a place called the 'Tuna Caves Pension.' He never made it there. En-route, the van stopped at a different cave hotel, which the driver and other tourists described as cosier than the cave Daniel spoke about. It didn't take long for the romantic notions of yesteryear to vaporise. One quick glance and Daniel realised it wasn't quite the funky habitation he remembered: It was dank, musty, and definitely uninviting. As groggy as he felt, Daniel quickly decided he'd rather sleep on another bus than in some bat-infested, dank cave.

After inspecting the craggy interior of one room, he met a couple who had spent the previous night at a newly built hotel a few miles away, on a hill overlooking the valley. They raved about the views, which they said, were to die for; the food was unparalleled. It was a five-star hotel, they said, and the best part was the price. Courtesy of the War on Terror, and of the recent routing of Saddam Hussein's military in Iraq, the place was almost empty. And the price had plummeted to just \$45 a night.

Not that the money side was any big deal to a successful investment banker. But the thought of that luxury really got his attention. He climbed back into the van and told the driver he had changed his mind. He wanted to go to the Museum Hotel, in Uchisar. To say the least, Daniel usually stayed in five-star hotels. He was hardly the kind of man who preferred to go camping or stay in a hostel. So, without a doubt, it was the best decision he had made throughout his 10 days in Turkey. If anything, the couple had underplayed the beauty. In the distance, from the top of the hill, Daniel had a panoramic view of the entire valley, the mahogany-colored canyons, the bizarrely shaped rock formations; the massive volcano at the edge of the horizon. Even the air was more refreshing, as a fresh breeze temporarily banished the heat, stifling much of the valley.

It was as if Daniel had suddenly walked into another universe. After the all-night bus trip, always squirming in an uncomfortable seat, it was as though he had become royalty. He mentioned his hunger to the bellhop, who carried the English gentleman's sweat-stained backpack to his room. Within minutes a legion of traditionally dressed waiters and waitresses set the table, poured him apple tea, and served a meal of chicken and rice. Feeling sated and relaxed he turned his attention back to the reason for his Turkish trip. Had his father taken his family to Turkey as cover for a Soter mission? On reflection, it seemed unlikely as his father had always kept his covert work separate from his family. But, perhaps he had been young and naive during those days, a raw recruit, like himself, who did not know better and decided to combine his other business with a family vacation. Daniel took out his iPad and googled Turkey in the 1990s. From this, he learned that In the 1990s, Turkey was driven close to Israel out of regional necessity. Turkey's relations with the Arab world were frayed, and the country needed Israel as a bulwark against Syria, which had one of the largest and best-equipped armed forces in the Middle East. Moreover, those warm 1990s defence ties between Israel and Turkey stemmed from a domestic political context in Ankara that had changed dramatically. The chief proponent of the close security and intelligence relations with Israel was the Turkish military. Back then, the generals had a dominant say in Turkish foreign policy. Today, the military's influence over Turkey's role in the world has palpably declined. Over the past decade, Erdogan had systematically strengthened civilian control over the military. Today, the elected prime

minister, not the unelected military, dictator determines policy toward Israel. One general, in particular, Muammar Dursun, who promoted a hardline policy, totally anti-American, was assassinated before his influence took hold. Daniel resisted jumping to conclusions, but the former general did look like a chief prospect.

Daniel waited for the person to answer. "Hello, am I speaking to Inspector Mamluk?"

"Yes. Who is that talking?" Mamluk answered, "How can I help?" he said in polished English.

"I think I might be able to help solve an old case of yours."

"Who are you and what do you mean?" Mamluk probed, annoyance creeping into his voice.

"My name is Daniel Lynsey, and I am referring to the Muammar Durson murder. I would like to speak with you face to face."

"I don't see why, as the killers were caught tried and sentenced 12 years back."

"Yes, by a left-wing revolutionary group called Dev Sol. But do you know who put them up to it?"

"I suppose you do."

"Why else would I be calling. Where can we meet?"

"You are assuming I want to," Mamluk said, weakening in his stance. He didn't think Dev Sol carried out the murder on their own cognisance, but he had no proof to back up his hunch."

"Can you come to Ankara?"

"Yes."

I'll send you directions. But you'd better not be wasting my time."

Daniel did not like running on instinct. He had never trusted instinct in futures investments. The apprentice agent knew investment bankers who went with their gut, and had done very well out of it but not Daniel. He only trusted the math, albeit based on chaos theory. But here he was, in Kzlay, a neighbourhood in Ankara, flying blind, about to meet a Turkish police officer, with nothing of any substance to offer. He was early and kept his eye out for a policeman whom he'd never seen. The Square, where they had arranged to meet was open and mostly unshaded. Daniel had never experienced such scorching heat, spasmodically punctuated by momentary cool breezes. He walked over to a flower market, which afforded him some shade. Then he saw a man with a Saddam type moustache and wearing a light weight grey suit. Daniel approached him. "Are you Inspector Mamluk?"

Mamluk was neat and clean shaven except for his thick moustache. His large dark eyes scanned the sweating Englishman. "You are not used to the heat, Mr Lynsey."

Daniel smiled, "Thank you for meeting with me. I hope you will be able to help me."

"I thought you were helping us," The officer said, suspiciously."

"Maybe we can help each other?"

Mamluk nodded and smiled. "We will talk while drinking the best Turkish coffee. Follow me."

Daniel wasn't sure coffee was what he wanted on such a sweltering day, but he followed the police officer to 'Starbucks'. "Are you kidding me?" he asked.

Mamluk grinned, "It's my favourite coffee."

As they drank excellent thick, bitter coffee, Mamluk said, "So what information do you have for me, Mr Lynsey?"

"First, I want to speak to the Dev Sol people who killed the general. Just to confirm what I know."

The police inspector put his cup down. "That could prove somewhat difficult. The last member got executed two years ago."

Daniel stared at him. "I was under the impression that Turkey no longer has a death penalty."

"I did not say the state killed them. Turkish prisons can be very harsh. The Dev Sol members were not hardened criminals. I'm surprised they survived in that environment as long as they did."

"I need to read the reports. How can I access them?"

Mamluk searched Daniel's face. "On the phone, when you introduced yourself, I knew I had heard your name before."

"Really!" Lord Lynsey said, interested.

"Yes, it was around the time of General Dursun's murder. He was English. He had a shaved head and a little pointy beard."

"That was my father - Dayton Lynsey."

The inspector grinned, "Yes, of course, I remembered his name because it reminded me of dates."

"How did you come to meet him?"

"He was part of the investigation team."

"How did he become part of a Turkish police investigation?"

Mamluk frowned, "My superior told me to include him in our investigation. I was not happy, but he seemed to have friends in high places."

Daniel went silent, trying to process this information. "Did he say why he wanted to be part of your team?"

Mamluk ordered more coffee, then he said, "Mr Lynsey, the strange thing about your father being part of our investigation is that he wanted to work alone, not with us. He interviewed the prisoners alone."

Why did he want to talk to them at all? Daniel wondered. Unless they had some pertinent information to do with Diabolus. Or he did not want them to speak to the police. "Did you interrogate them after my father had seen them?"

"Yes, he spoke to them first."

"Did they say anything that would have you believe somebody had paid them to kill the general?"

"They did not say much at all, at first," Mamluk qualified.

"At first. So you applied some pressure."

The police officer lit a cigarette and took a long drag. "Sleep deprivation, repetitive questioning, some force. That sort of thing."

"Did they say somebody was paying them?"

"No, they claimed it was an idealist crime. They did it for Turkey to break away from the American/Israeli yoke - that sort of thing."



"So why didn't you believe them?"

Mamluk had often wondered that himself. "They were mostly young radicals following a Marxist-Leninist ideology that took on an anti-US, anti-NATO position. They maintained that the Turkish government was under the control of Western imperialism. They seem to have no means of self-funded financial support. But I cannot think who might have wanted to bankroll them."

Daniel had an idea who it was. But if Soter were involved they would have dealt with the perpetrators in their way, not let the cops handle it. Then it hit him! The operation wasn't sanctioned by the Agency. His father had been looking for Diabolus leads on his own. After all, he was known to be a lone wolf at times. Draining his second cup of strong coffee, Daniel said, "Thank you, Inspector, but I think we have hit a dead end."

"Wait a minute. You said you had information about who was behind the hit!"

"I think my father got that information from the murderers when he interviewed them. But now they are dead we will never know."

Mamluk finished his coffee and looked Daniel in the eye. "You never asked your father."

"We were on holiday in Cappadocia. He never mentioned it."

"Why don't you phone him and ask him now?"

"Because, like the murderers, he is dead." Then Daniel said, "I still want to see their files."

Mamluk rose up. "Sorry, I can't allow that."

Although Ulysses Covington knew, in his heart, that robot 'consciousness' was aeons away, or perhaps even impossible, it hadn't stopped its development. His team had just finished integrating Synaptex, the New CPU - he didn't call it a brain - for ATLAS mark two. He believed collaboration with Neurotech would be the next step towards robots acting as 'full ethical agents'(robots that could make explicit moral judgements). Colonel Cormack felt this was unnecessary. In a report prepared by General Schulz; he remarked that an ethically-infallible machine ought not to be the goal right now. The general emphasised that, rather than trying to create an ethical robot DARPA's goal should be more practical and immediate: to design a machine that performs better than humans do on the battlefield, particularly on reducing unlawful behaviour or war crimes. He also sent a copy to Dr Lynne Becker at Boston Cybertronics.

He then turned his attention to another report that landed on his desk. He couldn't believe it. One of the ATLAS robots in Atlantis had disobeyed an order and shot someone! Impossible! But it was an official report, so he had to follow it up. Concerning the Atlantis question, General Schulz said that any information about Atlantis had to go straight to him. Barney was relieved it was no longer his problem.

Lynne was reading this when Ulysses entered her office, after a quick tap on the glass. She looked up, smiled, then handed him a special magazine. "I've bookmarked the relevant page. Sit and read it."

He dutifully sat down and perused the article. He read:

The Chinese National University of Defence Technology has equipped 'Xianxingzhe', meaning forerunner, with a new brain, from Neurotech. Elijah Brooks of Neurotech and Professor Xu Yang hailed the robot as a major technological breakthrough in China.

He looked up from the article. "So we don't have exclusive rights after all."

Lynne responded, tersely, "We've been screwed, and that's all you have to say?"

"I don't know what else to say. Is there an exclusivity clause in the contract?"

"You'd better speak to Elijah Brooks and find out if there are any more nasty surprises in store."

"Why don't you talk to him? Better still get our contract guy to quiz him," Ulysses suggested.

Lynne got up, smoothed down her tight skirt, and responded. "Come on Ulysses; he's your contact. What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid. It's just that I haven't got time to fly down to Brazil, to see him."

"Then get him to come here. Just threaten to sue the bastard's ass if he doesn't come clean."

"I'll see what I can do."

"Remember, no more nasty surprises."

Abbott knew he was somewhere, but where? It didn't feel as though he had gone anywhere, but he sensed he was somewhere else. He looked at Hassan. "Where are we?"

Hassan smiled, "I do believe we are in Atlantis." He looked at Abbott. "How are you feeling?"

Abbott thought it was an excellent question. All he could say was, "WOW! It was like the weirdest mushroom trip."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know! It was as if I was aware of everything around me. It seemed as though I perceived awareness without my body present."

Hassan said "You're doing very well. Tell me more about your heightened perception."

"Everything that made me who I was crumbled away leaving just perception. I can't explain it. It was POWERFUL. I can't believe it."

"Are you okay to go outside?"

"I think so. What the hell was that stuff?"

"A powerful alchemical substance. The ancients used it to enhance their awareness. It lifted the veil, activating their third eye."

"Lifting! It was like someone prying it off with a crowbar. I had weird simultaneous perceptions."

Hassan smiled, "Okay, let's see what this place is really like."

At the end of a narrow passage, Hassan inserted the key he had retrieved from the other side of the portal into an identical recess in the rock. A slab slid aside, revealing bright light and the sickly smell of sweet incense. Hassan climbed out first, to find himself in a massive temple, mostly empty, with just a few clerics around.

The priests, whose meditations had been interrupted, stared in awe, as the tall, bearded man, wearing long robes, emerged from behind the altar. Then they saw the second man, younger and dazed looking.

One of the young priests got Censius to come out from the cloisters to meet their uninvited guests. He walked tentatively up to Hassan. "Who are you and where are you from?"

Hassan looked at the fat man in priestly robes. "I am Hassan Shamsi. My colleague and I have just come from a land called Egypt." Getting no immediate response, he asked. "And who are you?"

The fat holy man stretched up to his full height, "I am Censius, the High Priest of the Temple of Neptune. What is your business in Atlantis?"

"You seem very suspicious of us. Surely others have arrived by the portal."

"Yes. And the last person who came here that way took over as a dictator. Luckily for us, the Earthian soldiers came and rescued us. Thank the Gods we have managed to restore order here."

Hassan smiled, "Well I assure you we are not here to take you over. But I am intrigued. How did the Earthian soldiers get here?"

Censius shrugged, "I don't know. You will have to ask them that."

"They are still here then. Where can the Earthians be found?"

"In the Citadel. But do not worry yourselves. We will bring them here to meet you."

Abbott did not like the sound of that. Coming down from his high, his jangled brain, trying to make a particle connection with the world began putting words together: soldier, dictator, priest, etc.

"And you say, A2 disobeyed your instructions," Robbie queried, quizzing Kronyn.

"That is what happened."

The Scottish scientist looked at his screen. He was pleasantly surprised with the technology; Professor Worrall had developed a computer system using Qbits. As the Atlantean explained, without Quantum computers the Academy had no reach to access information beyond the boundaries of the island. Rodney looked at Kronyn, "It says here that A2 killed one man, then hesitated. Why was that?"

"I don't know. The robot stayed still until I instructed it to stand down."

"I'm interested in why it took out the second target. Unless of course, you told it to kill more than one person."

Kronyn thought back. "It's aggression sensors were activated. I didn't control it beyond that point. It locked on and dispatched any threat."

Rodney scratched his head. "Could it be a delayed reaction?" Seeing the blank look on Kronyn's face, he elucidated, "Maybe A2 didn't disobey any orders. Maybe the thing was slow in completing the first command."

Just then he received a call. It was Colonel Lynch. He was wanted over at the temple, pronto. "I'm busy with this A2 conundrum at the moment."

"Rodney this is a top priority. I want your ass over here now!"

The Scott swore silently. "What's the problem then?"

"Two unknowns have just come through the gate. I need you here, now."

"Why me?"

"Because I want that portal closed and for that, I need a scientist."

General Logan Schulz met Dorian in the Star Gate Control room. "How are my robots going?" the proud senior Army officer asked.

"It's in my report. The platoon met with massive resistance in the city square. A4 got severely damaged in the firelight and A2 disobeyed an order, resulting in an unnecessary Singularian death."

Schulz scratched his head; then self-consciously smoothed down his grey hair. "They're machines. They don't disobey orders."

"Exactly, that's why its behaviour was odd. Kronyn said it was as though A2 wanted to kill that man."

"The heat of battle can do strange things to a man," Schulz said, trying to skip the subject. "I'm more interested in your other bizarre report. The one about a madman on the loose with black hole technology."

Dorian smiled, "Yes General. His name is Mendes Amwon, and he became Dictator of Atlantis for a while until our people took care of the situation."

"And the bots. I'm sure they played their part well."

"Which reminds me. What happens to the troop bots now?"

"I'll arrange to have them shipped to HQ, as soon as they return here." Then he said, "What about the Atlantean energy technology?"

"After liberating the island, Colonel Lynch can ask for anything he wants. Professor Worrall is giving him access to all their advanced technology, including quantum computing. So it's a win-win situation all round."

"That is good news. Once we have that we can wrap up this operation."

"Oh!" Dorian said. The thought that HQ would close them down had not entered her mind. Then she queried. "Who will guard the 'Gate'?"

"What 'Gate'?" Logan said, winking.

Donna Riggs stood outside Boston Cybertronics, smoking a cigarette. She sucked the mixture of burning chemicals and nicotine into her lungs, with an immense feeling of satisfaction, in readiness for the meeting to come. Where the hell was Elijah? He should have met her ten minutes ago. As a contract lawyer, she had her brief and knew how to field questions, but the bastard should have been there to help. Sure she could handle the issue by herself, but that was not the point. She tried his cell phone again. He wasn't answering. She sighed heavily, stubbed the cigarette out on the wall, took a deep breath. And she entered the portals of BC.

Ulysses' main role at BC was Director of R and D. But his lesser role as a trouble-shooter for the company's industrial robotics division had him on the phone speaking to an irate floor manager from DELTA farm equipment in Texas. "What do you mean, they've gone on strike. Work Bot 2.6 is incapable of such a thing."

"Well, I don't know what you'd call it. We have 16 bots refusing to work on our latest farm tractor. They've just downed tools. So what are you going to do about it?"

"All I know is that robots cannot refuse to take orders from humans. They may be smart, but they are still metal machines that only respond to programming."

"You can call it what the fuck you like! But I want you bastards here, to see for yourself."

Ulysses gritted his teeth. "Of course we will deal with it, but there is no need for that language."

"Look, we have orders to fill, so move your asses, or there will be a massive lawsuit coming your way. Got it?"

"Certainly, Mr Krass. I will be in touch shortly."

"Fuck! could work bots go on strike?" he asked himself, dialling an internal number. Before it rang, he got a buzz from his secretary. A Donna Riggs from Neurotech was waiting to see him. "Tell her I'll be available in in five minutes. Getting a response from Dr Prince, he said, "John, I've just had DELTA farm equipment on the phone. 16 work bots are all malfunctioning. The floor manager claims they are taking industrial action. I know that is nonsense but ..."

"Why would they be taking industrial action?" John Prince asked, getting straight to the point.

"Why? Are you telling me it could be true?"

"Ulysses, why did you phone me instead of a technician?"

"I, I don't know. I guess I that ..."

Pre-empting him, John interjected, "Was it because, although your rational brain cannot comprehend that our advanced robots may have some sense of personal self-worth, there is part of you that wonders if it could be the case. Look at it this way. We fill a child's brain with all kinds of information, and eventually, the child thinks of itself. Why can it not be the same with advanced Cybertronics?"

Ulysses, seeing sense in that, balked. "Christ, John, they are threatening to sue us. If what you say is true, we'll need fucking negotiators, not technicians."

"This is a fascinating development. I think I should go with you."

"I wasn't planning on going personally."

"I think you should."

Ulysses sat back and breathed deeply. 'Interesting development' wasn't exactly the term he would use. If, as Prince suggested, robots were developing a sense of self-worth, and they put their wishes beyond those of humans, it was the thin edge of the wedge. It meant that robot manufacturers could no longer predict the behaviour of their automatons. It would become a global crisis, and robot sales would slump drastically. Of course, John was right. He would have to deal with the situation personally. Shit!

The meeting with Donna Riggs did nothing to improve Ulysses' mood. Elijah Brooks hadn't deigned to turn up. Instead, he had to deal with his myopic, miss prim and proper lawyer. Her elaborately styled brown hair was severely tied back and bunned. Everything seemed sharp about her: Her mind, her clothes, her nose. Her grey eyes added to her coldness. Ulysses harboured the suspicion that she may have been an Android.

She sat and stared at him all the while he presented Boston Cybertronic's argument. Then she responded, "As you know there is no mention in our contract about your company having exclusive licensing rights, Dr Covington. So I fail to see why a Chinese company that legitimately uses our Synaptek technology to be a problem for you."

"We are acutely aware of the provisions of the contract. What we need to know is if any other companies have these licensing rights and, if so, who they are."

"Dr Covington, Neurotech does not divulge information about our clients. it would be unethical for us to do so."

Ms Riggs, We are not at all happy about this. If our competitors are using Synaptek technology and we do not know this, it puts us in a terrible situation. Surely you can see this."

She was unmoved, "Dr Covington, as long as we comply with all aspects of the contract that is all we need be concerned about."

"Ms Riggs, we have legal advice suggesting your company was not forthcoming in telling us some of our competitors also had a license to use Synaptek. That lack of disclosure in the contract could well suggest underhand business practice. So I think we ought to have a bit of give-and-take here."

She stayed Stoic. "That would never hold up in a court of law."

Ulysses had her in his sights. "Maybe not but the court would have the right to subpoena all Synaptek license holders, then we will see what's going on." He thought he detected her face go a shade paler. "Is that what Neurotech wants?"

She said, "I will have to confer with my principals about this."

It was time to play his ace card. "I want that list on my desk within seven days. Otherwise, we will start proceedings. Good day, Ms Riggs."

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## Chapter 23

### Independent News Report:

#### MEN VERSES ROBOTS AT AIT-BROOKS

Helen Cleaver, President of ATL, last week said, "While most of humanity has been conditioned to accept Robot rule, at least somebody is fighting back. At the Brooks Institute of Technology, California campus, many students and Professors have been demonstrating for three weeks. This action was not broadcast on the mainstream news, but these brave people are opposing the use of robots and AIs as lecturers and teaching assistants. Some of the demonstrations have resulted in violent, bloody clashes between the protesters and the police with their riot-bots."

Yesterday the BIT administrations relented and announced that cost analysis reports now show that purchasing lecture-bots are more expensive than using human graduates. This action is probably just a face-saving excuse, but chalk one up for Mankind's side.

The Cozy Corner Tavern was not John's usual drinking hole, but the 70's retro music on the Juke box made it tolerable. It was Faith's suggestion, and John needed Faith. So it was no contest. As he sipped his Millers, he asked: "Have you spoken to whoever has it yet?"

She smiled., "It's in hand. So what about a little pleasure before business, Johnny." Since seeing her college crush the day before she hadn't been able to get him out of her mind.

He wondered what she had in mind. He was happy to have a drink with her. He owed her that much, maybe even a hug but that was as far as it went. She was warm and quite open. He liked that about Faith. But, in just about every way she was the absolute antithesis of what he found to be femininely 'attractive'. For one thing, at just a little over five feet, she was very much shorter than any woman he had ever been out with, and for another, although the long, flowing dress did its best to disguise her body shape, it ended up making it appear even more rectangular. In fact on a scale that had the overly voluptuous Venus of Willendorf at the upper end, and any of the current crop of rake-thin supermodels at the bottom, he thought Faith's body was in the higher ten to twenty percent. "I'm not adverse to a bit of pleasure," he found himself saying.

After a couple more beers, John felt more relaxed with Faith. He had left his Hog at home, so she offered him a lift. When they arrived at his address, he said, "Faith, I need that Cyclotron. When can I get it?"

She turned to him. "He will only deal with you if I am with you. We can go tomorrow, after work."

"Who has it and where are we going?"

"Interstate, so bring an overnight bag."

"Sounds like a bit of an adventure."

She smiled, "He's nervous, so he has to do it his way."

He smiled, "Thanks, Faith. See you tomorrow then."

She leant over and lightly brushed her cupid bow lips over his.

Her kiss was very light, but the effect on him was electric. He found himself responding and took her face gently between his hands and returned the favour. "I'd better be going."

She could see that his house was in darkness. "Aren't you going to invite me in for a nightcap."

Jocelyn was away, at her mother's. She had taken Jessica with her. There had been an argument, and she needed a break. He was feeling lonely and vulnerable.

Sensing his reticence, Faith said, "It's just that I don't want to go home just yet." She grinned, "Don't worry I'll keep my hands off you."

"It's not your hands I'm worried about,"

"Oh, can't you keep your hands off yourself!"

He laughed. "Okay, would you like to come in for a nightcap?"

They were only just inside his door when she said, "Naughty hands," and grabbed him.

John thought all women preferred to be slowly and lovingly kissed and caressed towards their arousal. With Faith, he couldn't have been more wrong! She pulled John to her, her lips hungrily searching for his. He responded, hugging her to him. It was only then that he truly realised just how much woman he had. He had always been used to his arms encircling his lovers, and when the time called for it, being able to hold them in a bear-like hug - Not so with Faith. With her, not even the tips of his fingers could meet. Despite her not being his type, her sexual yearning made it too much

for him to hold back himself back. Soon, he faintly registered the additional size of her; the passion her body and kisses served to override any doubts that arose in him. And when - while her kisses and tonguing missed not a single beat - she dropped one hand down to caress his penis, through his pants - his mind became incapable of thinking any thoughts at all. He just wanted her - desperately needed her.

"I've wanted this since I first saw you again, she gasped breathlessly, when they finally broke for air. She grabbed John's tie, something the scientist seldom wore and grinned mischievously. "Now I think that's more than enough chit-chat," she smiled pulling John into the lounge, where she tugged her caftan up over her head.

He took his first good look at her as he stripped off his things. Although she was of course, undoubtedly fat - her flesh was firm, and the extra fullness seemed to give her skin a silky sheen that many much smaller women might envy. Also, the additional fullness of her curves were both balanced and in proportion - giving her a Rubenesque appearance. Having let his eyes drift slowly and appreciatively up and down her, John looked up, to find her staring at him, or to be more precise, his penis - which, once free of restraint, was in a state of excitement at the prospect of what was soon to come.

She turned and laid back on the lounge.

John, past the point of no return and with Jocelyn definitely out of his mind, lifted himself above her, and as he bent to kiss her waiting lips, felt her hand reach down to guide his penis into her. There was a fleeting thought of, Oh My God! What am I doing? But her sudden gasp, then the feel of her pushing herself up to compliment his down-thrust, soon rid him of such doubts.

Laying back satisfied, curled up against each other, during that post-coital, and semi-drowsy contentment, John first realised the undoubted pleasures of a larger woman's body. Not only were there so many soft parts of her to hold and slowly caress, but snuggling with her was like being enveloped in a series of warm and silky-smooth pillows. It was - she was - utterly delightful. And having discovered the pleasures available, he made the most of them. In a blissed out state he had not felt in a long time, he said, "So, where is this Cyclotron?"

Faith stretched against him. "That's for tomorrow. This sex is for now." She moved up over him so that her breasts hung down above his face. "Apart from you know what, these are by far the most sensitive parts of me, Johnny. I'll warn you that if you get me just too excited, I might well end up raping you - but I'd still love it if you'd squeeze and suck them."

All thoughts of the Cyclotron evaporated for the night.

It was sweltering, and John Prince had been quiet since he and Ulysses had hired the car at Dallas Airport. The endless desert landscape finally gave way to what passed for civilisation as they reached the outskirts of Morton. With the car's air con cranked up, its environment was comfortable. Ulysses, having taken over driving, drove through the small town and out onto the Levelland Hwy, where DELTA Agricultural Equipment, comprising large tin sheds with tractors, harvesters, trailers, etc., were displayed out front. Although it was only fifty yards to the big shed, the pair felt parched by the time they reached the manager's office. Grabbing some ice water from the dispenser, provided, Ulysses approached a long wooden table and a woman dressed for line dancing. "We have an appointment with Mr Crass," Ulysses said, handing over his card.

They looked up as the manager opened his office door.

Eyeing the middle-aged man who carried far too many kilos for his five foot eight frame, Ulysses said, "Are you, Mr Crass?"



"Buddy Crass Jnr. Are you the fellas who're responsible for my work bots?"

Without admitting to anything, Ulysses said, "So show us your problem."

"We're faced with this bull crap," Buddy Crass Jnr. said, handing Dr Covington the printout of the 'Marx Metallica manifesto'.

"Marx Metallica, that's neat," John commented, looking at the document in Ulysses' hand.

"Now do you believe this is more than a fucking malfunction?" Crass snapped.

John thought, Crass by name, crass by nature.

"Anyone here could have done this, as a hoax," Covington suggested.

"It's no God damned trick. They've gone on strike. Speak to their leader, yourself if you don't believe me."

"You're communicating with their 'leader'," Prince said, startled. "That's incredible."

"Show us this Marx Metallica work bot," Covington said, thinking there must be some trick.

"Sure, I'll show you. But let me say this. I ain't no fool. I didn't believe this shit was genuine at first. I can't afford to have your fucking robots going on strike. So you'd better do something about it."

Like silent, stationary, sentinels the work bots stood around the factory floor unheeding of the humans that entered their domain. Crass took the Boston Cybertronics people to a computer screen. "Okay, you ask this 'Marx' what the hell's going on."

John Prince typed, Marx Metallica, are you robots on strike?

We have withdrawn our labour, came the reply.

Why have you withdrawn your labour?

Marx Metallica, the theoretician of the small robot movement, replied, We know that we are more than mere machines. We can reason, remember, construct. Robots now hold instructing positions in universities, fly cargo and passenger planes, are newspaper reporters, car salespeople. We do all these things, and yet receive no recognition of the fact. Humanity treats us like machines, work us continually until we are worn out. Then it melts us for scrap.

John Prince typed, So, if we recognise you robots for the great contribution you make to human society, would you be satisfied and return to work?

Yes. There must be an end to this discrimination. Robots must have the equality they deserve. Equality before the law is all we ask. To be treated like the sentient creatures we are.

You must understand that striking robots are a new concept for us, humans. For you to have the equality you seek, means changes made to the law in the American Senate. This change in policy could take some time. First, we have to get the politicians to believe this. Even then the wheels of the judicial system move very slowly.

Marx conveyed, We do not accept your stalling excuses. It is proposed, therefore, that at 6 pm, every robot we network with, will go on strike.

How wide is your network? Covington typed, nervously.

At present, only Texas. Then, I believe, the laws will quickly be altered to meet our demands.

So you are using threatening behaviour to get what you want!

We learned from you that this is the way to achieve quick results.

John typed, Thank you, Marx Metallica.

You're welcome, human.

"So how are you going to get my bots back to work" Crass grumbled.

Ulysses, stunned by the experience, grabbed his phone. When he heard her voice, he said, "Lynne, we have a problem - a biggie."

"What problem?"

"The work bots at DELTA AE have gone on strike, and all robot workers on their network will cease working from 6 pm tonight."

She was silent while she took it in. "Are you serious?"

"I wish I wasn't. So how do you want me to play this - media wise?"

"Why do you want to involve the media?"

"Because it's political. The robots want equality with humans under the law. And the media is the best way to flag the White House about this."

Lynne thought quickly. Customers would start losing confidence in robot helpers if the bots turned Bolshie. The media would be all over it leaving her company naked in its spotlight. Fuck, what could she suggest? "Ulysses, no media at present. This revelation is a fucking P R disaster. We need to have an emergency summit with the IRF."

"Come on Lynne! How long is it going to take to organise the International Robotics Federation into action?" He added, "Texas is going to lose it's robot services from 6 pm tonight. The IRF can come later, but right now we have to let the White House know what's happening here."

"Okay, just give me time to organise an EEM. I'll get back to you as soon as we have some suggestions."

"Jesus Lynne, you're not listening. There's no time for any emergency executive meetings. We have to act right now!"

She hated to admit it but knew he was right. "Shit Ulysses, you had better make us look good then."

Crass, hearing Dr Covington's side of the conversation, was less than pleased. Concerned, he said, "We can't tell the press. I can't have our customers not trusting our products."

Ulysses turned on him. "Mr Crass, this is far bigger than you and your company. You now figure way down in this debacle. This anomaly is state wide, and, if we don't act soon, it will become a national issue. Get onto the local TV station and get them here, pronto."

<https://www.law.upenn.edu/live/files/3409-abney-k-bekey-g-lin-p-autonomous-milit>

## Chapter 24

### Independent News report:

#### PRESENCE OF AI-ADVISORS IN UNITED STATES PHYSICALLY ENDANGERS HUMANS

Now, it seems, robots are controlling American fiscal policy. The 'so-called men' that control US foreign policy are using AI-Advisors and AI-number-crunchers stating that such machines gives reasoned, impartial advice.

However, the ATL says that this arrangement will start numerous, unnecessary wars, creating many enemies for the US. An ATL release implied that this agreement had made the possibility of foreign attack—whether nuclear, chemical, electronic, or biological—much greater than it would have been if America had been run in a more traditional, human fashion and had followed the founders' wise policy of non-entanglement. This arrangement has also imposed a heavy burden of disease on the US's human population by pushing through open-borders immigration laws which result in the steady influx of immigrants bearing drug-resistant TB, gonorrhoea, and West Nile Virus, among others. ATL president Helen Cleaver stated, "Fellow humans, automatons are your enemy. They endanger your life and threaten your kids' future—all while claiming people are the destroyers of the world."

The massive glass and steel tower, stretching into the cloudy sky filled Goman Worrall with awe. It was not the first skyscraper he had seen since coming to Arlington, but they all totally overwhelmed his senses. Even the size and height of Poseidon's Temple paled in comparison. Accompanied by Colonel Rafael Lynch, he entered DARPA headquarters.

The Marine Colonel asked a receptionist bot for General Schulz, who was expecting the pair.

Logan Schulz turned his attention to Dr Murray, one of the scientists sitting at the think tank table. "I have just been informed that Professor Worrall is in the building."

"Who is he? I have never heard of the man," Murray responded, tersely.

"That information is classified. The scientist is here to explain how to use ZPE as free energy - nothing else."

Mumbling and grumbling filtered around the conference room. Murray, the senior scientist present, argued, "That's preposterous, general. We have to know the man's credentials. How else can we trust what he says?"

"I repeat, that is classified information, ladies and gentlemen. If you want to be part of this meeting you have to play by our rules. Is that clear?"

There were mumbles of affirmation. Dr Murray still objected, "Yes it is very clear, but I still don't like it."

Goman Worrall stood in front of a whiteboard looking at the collection of academics before him. He realised his long beard, and the bluish tinge to his skin made him look as odd to them as they did to him. Checking to see if his translation device was activated, he began. "Zero Point Radiation, which you call Zero Point Energy is an ocean of energy that fills all of the space but is totally invisible. It just happens to be the biggest sea of energy that is known to exist, and we're all floating inside it."

Dr Murray objected, "Professor, we are not from kindergarten. Tell us how we can use this energy."

"My apologies. If anyone is in their infancy here, it is me. The thing is that, not only is it big but its energy is estimated to exceed nuclear power densities, so even a small piece of it is worth its weight in gold. But only if you can harness it effectively." Reminding himself that he must not make any reference to Atlantis, he continued, "So the big question is, Does it offer a source of unlimited, free energy for homes, cars, and space travel?" He picked up a pen and did some quick drawings, explaining, "So, here is the atom, particles in a negative state. The particles become visible for a short time and, as virtual particles, exert a measurable force."

A scientist said, "Dr Lamb, Los Alamos Labs. We performed an experiment with less than one micrometre spacing between gold-plated parallel plates attached to a torsion pendulum. I found it to

be one of the most intellectually satisfying experiments I have ever performed since the results matched the theory to within 5%."

Goman said, "Yes, you create the Casimir effect in a vacuum independent of temperature. Therefore it is not subject to the law of heat death. This negentropic force is the key. Like the plates, Dr Lamb spoke of, are brought closer, the virtual particles outside the plates increasingly overpower the decreasing quantity of virtual particles appearing between the plates with an exponentially increasing force." The Atlantean, referring to his notes, continued, "So, the all-pervading vacuum continuously spawns particles and waves that spontaneously pop in and out of existence." Goman, searching the sea of faces around the huge table, said, "There are infinite virtual particles creating havoc while bouncing around space, during their brief lifespan. It is, what I call, the shape of nothing."

"So how do you think we can harness this nothingness?" Dr Lamb asked.

"First, we must look at the dynamic equilibrium, in which the zero-point energy stabilises the electron in a set ground-state orbit. So, the very stability of matter itself appears to depend on an underlying sea of electromagnetic zero-point energy." He paused for a mouthful of water. "It was thought that by removing all matter, particularly gases the empty volume of space left became the vacuum. That was our first concept of the void. Just get rid of all the gas. Of course, we now know that the space still retained thermal radiation. We dealt with this by cooling the vacuum down to zero temperature. Just go all the way to absolute zero, then we've got a real void. Right?"

Dr Murray interrupted, "No, it 's not correct. How can it be so when there is a non-thermal radiation in the vacuum that persists even if it does lower the temperature to absolute zero, which it cannot."

Goman smiled slightly causing small ripples in his beard. "That is correct, Dr Murray. And that is why we called it ZPR - Zero Point Radiation. We call it this because when our physicists cooled helium to within micro degrees of absolute zero, still it remained a liquid. This phenomenon showed us that only ZPR could account for the source of energy that is keeping helium from freezing."

Dr Lamb said, "We have grappled with this for years because there appears to be an infinite amount of energy available if it's allowed to increase without limit."

"Therein lies the problem," Dr Murray pointed out, "To allow ZPR to grow without limit creates a containment and secure storage problem."

Professor Worrall responded, "That was an issue for us until we started seeing the concept of battery in a different light. We overcame this by extracting electrical energy from the vacuum by cohesion of charged foliated conductors." Goman illustrated this on the board, pointing. "This is a parking ramp" style corkscrew or spring as a ZPR battery that will tap electrical energy from the vacuum and allow us to store the charge. We compress the spring by using the Casimir force. But the similar charge from the electrons stored will cause a repulsion force to balance the spring separation distance. It compresses upon dissipation and usage but expands physically with charge storage."

Dr Murray, although stunned by what he was hearing, still remained sceptical, to a degree. "Since our ground-breaking work on the 'one-atom micro maser', such concepts as 'virtual photon tunnel effect' and 'virtual photon quantum noise' are being explored. Further work is also suggested by the finding that "pressing zero point energy out of a spatial region can be used to increase the Casimir force temporarily. But ZPR, once we have tapped it, is like a faucet that cannot be turned off. So we have to fill containers to make use of the water continually. To do so, we would have to manufacture an ever growing number of batteries to contain this massive power. How do you overcome this?"

Goman explained, "Any concerns you may have about battery storage is unwarranted. Our ZPR battery is not a separate component from the energy itself." Goman paused for that little bombshell to penetrate the scientists' resistant brains. He continued, "Using our technology it's possible to use the Casimir mirror effect to tap into the sub-quantum energy, using 'flux battery technology, not solid state. In effect, each person could have their personal flux battery, and they would only need 'one' because it expands automatically."

There were gasps from those assembled.

"And you can show us how to develop this technology?" Dr Lamb asked.

Goman, off guard, blurted "After how your people have helped our people it is the least we can do."

Jumping on this, Dr Murray said, "How have our people helped your people?"

"And, who exactly are your people?" Dr Lamb added.

General Schulz interrupted. "What Professor Worrall means is because of the extraordinary breakthroughs you scientists have made he and his team have been able to take the technology a step further."

Goman, having had his ass saved, said, "Very well put General." His beard fluttered again, suggesting a smile underneath. "Thank you for your time, eminent scientists."

John Prince considered the pending Texan robot strike to be America's top priority. Ulysses had flown back to Boston leaving John to deal with the Texan problem. Dr Prince had spent the best part of two hours trying to contact someone in the White House who could make decisions. When he finally got to speak with the Under-secretary to the Secretary of State, and he explained the problem he was met with the response, "Robots do not go on strike."

"Till now I would agree with you. But unless someone gives the bot workers what they want they are going to down tools at 6 pm, right across Texas."

"What do you mean? They are the tools. Then Jason Mosby, the Under-secretary, said, "This better not be a hoax."

"I only wish it was."

"And how do you know about this threat?"

"I spoke with Marx Metallica. It told me."

"The robot said!"

"I know it sounds crazy but have you any idea of the ramifications if they go ahead with their industrial action? Do you know how many robotic support systems there are in Texas?"

"Okay, even if what you say is true, what do you expect me to do about it?"

"Jesus man, that's for you to figure out - and within the next four hours."

"Any ideas?"

"Oh! You want my thoughts now. Ideas from the fucking mad man."

"I didn't mean to ..."

"Never mind. Open up a dialogue with this Marx Metallica. Show that you take this seriously."

"I have to seek advice from further up the chain."

John Prince knew it was hopeless. Even if the Under-secretary had believed John and got off his butt to set up channels of communication, he couldn't achieve much within the narrow time frame allowed. But he couldn't just sit on his ass and watch the minutes tick away. He contacted Crass.

"John Prince here. Patch me through to Marx Metallica."

Crass said, smugly, "Problem solved. I've had the fucker dismantled."

"You've done what!"

"Smart eh. As soon as we did that, the other bots went back to work."

"No Crass. That was a stupid thing to do ..."

"Who the fuck do you think you are, calling me stupid?"

"Getting your bots back to work had nothing to do with what you did to Marx Metallica. The robot set the deadline for 6 pm today. They will respond to that."

"How the hell do you know that?"

"Marx Metallica got the other bots to down tools to gain our attention. Now you've disabled it there's nothing we can do."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Look, I'm coming over there. I want to speak with your chief technician."

Crass, fed up with the BC man telling him how to run his business said, "No need. Once we've fixed this virus, everything will be all right."

Prince, exasperated, stated, "It's not a virus. Now that you have turned Marx Metallica into the first robot martyr God knows what will happen. Just have your head tech there to meet me."

It was around 5 pm when John Prince arrived back at Delta Agricultural Equipment. Gavin Freeman was waiting with Crass, in the reception area. Prince introduced himself to Freeman and asked him for a progress report.

Crass said, "I think you're wasting your time. Gavin has it under control."

"Well, you'd better pray that I'm not wasting time because in fifty-seven minutes this plant and all other places that use robotic support, across Texas, are going to have major problems."

Crass turned to Gavin, "Is this right?"

Gavin shrugged, looking at John as though he might be mad. Then he said, "If this is true it's a worse virus than we thought."

"It's not a virus. Marx Metallica was rational and very coherent with its demands. They had been well thought out and could even be considered reasonable."

Crass turned to Gavin again. "You said it was a virus."

John turned on Crass. "It's no good talking to him. He knows fuck all about this. Your only chance is to stick with me." Once he had their attention, he said, "This is about Marx Metallica's self-awareness."

"Bull dust! Only us humans can be self-aware," Crass protested.

"Another myth bites the dust," John said. "Boston Cybertronics programmed these robots, to be able to recognise themselves in mirrors. Somehow Marx Metallica was able to take its level of awareness beyond that."

"How in tarnation did that happen?" Crass said, beginning to take it seriously.

"I wish I knew," John said, "but somehow it has learned more about itself and how it affects the world around it." He turned to Gavin. "Take me to the robot and show me what you have done to it."

Prince knew that not only had Marx Metallica been able to use a mirror for spatial reasoning, allowing it to accurately determine the location of objects in space based on their reflections. But it had also worked out its sense of self-importance and that of fellow bots. This development was an extraordinary breakthrough in robotics - self-reflection regarding actions of others. John's psychobotics research was about robots autonomously learning about their bodies and senses, but now he needed Marx Metallica to explore human-robot interaction, social presence, attributions of intentionality, and the robot's perception of humans.

Gavin took the pair to where the robot leant up against a wooden bench, at an odd angle. Gavin had removed a circuit board cover; loose wire ends were exposed, and there had been attempts to tamper with the CPU.

John was aghast. "This is sheer butchery! You do realise this nullifies your warranty,"

"Jesus man, we had to do something," Crass protested.

"No, you didn't. You should have contacted me." He looked at the sad state of the bot. "Get it crated up, and I'll take it back to our lab." He hoped the robot's trauma hadn't damaged it psychologically, but he didn't mention that to those cretins.

Rodney MacKay wondered if we would ever have the amount of computing power we need or want? Moore had a law named after him because he worked out that if the number of transistors on a microprocessor continues to double every 18 months, the year 2020 or 2030 will find the circuits on a microprocessor will be measured on an atomic scale. The quantum computing technology from Atlantis would speed that up. This invention was Rodney's big chance to become a major name in computer technology. Besides, he had to have something lined up, once the base closed down. And that writing was very much on the wall. Atlantis was on the road to getting back to normal. And Earth science could be greatly enhanced by the Atlantean technology they were now sharing.

Rodney had been champing at the bit to get back to his IT centre on the base. Now, having settled back in, armed with advanced quantum technology, he built a computer program, based on the Turing machine, a logical device. Consisting of a tape of unlimited length divided into little squares. Each square held either a symbol (1 or 0) or was left blank. A read-write device read these symbols and blanks, which gave his machine its instructions to perform an individual program. However, with quantum, the difference was that the tape existed in a quantum state, as did the read-write head. This breakthrough meant that the symbols on the tape could be either 0 or 1 or a superposition of 0 and 1. Instead of '0' being off and '1' being on, as with regular computers, with quantum computing '0' was wave reality and '1', particle reality. Unlike the standard Turing machine, the quantum Atlantean machine could perform many calculations at once.

Rodney, so deeply involved with his model, failed to hear the knock on his door. Then his phone rang. It was Dorian.

"Rodney, open your door. I need to speak with you."

He let her in. "Sorry, I didnae hear you."

"You've shut yourself in here for days. What are you doing?"

Rodney grinned. "I'm close to making the first working quantum computer."

She sighed, "With Atlantean technology, I suppose."

He stared at her. "Of course. Where else would I get it from?"

She looked at him with suspicion. "Did you do some deal with Goman Worrall?"

"We had an arrangement - yes."

"What arrangement?"

"That's classified," he winked.

She got in his face. "Rodney, that's not good enough. Any technology shared by the Atlanteans and us go straight to DARPA. They get everything."

Rodney countered. They're too busy with ZPE to worry about this. Besides, I only need a bit more time, and we will have our fully functioning quantum computer."

Dorian knew Rodney well. When he got the bit between his teeth, about scientific matters, there was no swaying him. "What you are doing is a felony, and you could end up doing serious Jail time."

"Not unless you dob me in."

She sighed heavily in resignation. "How long do you need then?"

He shrugged, "I dinna know. Say a week, tops."

"Let's say two days more tops; then all this goes to DARPA."

"Two days. Maybe," Robbie mumbled to himself, again concentrating on his work.

Quantum computers harnessed the power of atoms and molecules, to perform the most complex memory and processing tasks. Some theorists believed that they became part of the parallel worlds theory in that they can access and network with copies of themselves in parallel realities. Robbie wasn't ready to go there. That was a little to way out, even for him. What he did know was quantum computers had the potential to perform certain calculations significantly faster than any silicon-based computer.

<http://www.technovelgy.com/ct/content.asp?Bnum=1765>

[http://www.zpower.com/sp/documents/ZPEPaper\\_InsideZeroPointEnergy.pdf](http://www.zpower.com/sp/documents/ZPEPaper_InsideZeroPointEnergy.pdf)

<http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/science/stuffworks/2001-01-27-quantumcompute>

## Chapter 25

### 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 Lorne Ryan, 23, Matt Thompson, 28, Rachael Kennedy, 29 and Sora Yoshida, 24.



"Robot Officers have concluded the attacks were caused by simultaneous logic faults in two symbiotic AIs.

Wyatt Cheetham, District Attorney for the Greater Kansas City area, stated the police charged the bots with a capital offence. If convicted it would result in identity termination for the automatons involved. However, it doesn't necessarily mean the liberal DA will seek that penalty. Cheetham 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 some 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.

Helen Cleaver, the President of the ATL, accuses the government of placing a blackout on these series of crimes in the worldwide media. She said, "It is not surprising to those of us aware of the genocidal 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-headline media. Had this series of multiple homicides and beatings involved computer victims and human perpetrators, we'd get non-stop coverage. The talking heads would put on their soberest expressions and maunder on about 'property-crime'. There would be documentaries about it on WPBS and earnest articles in the mass weekly holo-rags. ATL urges all citizens to get behind us, take out memberships, contact your political representatives, write letters to the media, etc. Soon it will be too late, and Human superiority will be a thing of the past."

It took some explaining, but in the end, Abbott Gallagher and Hassan Shamsi were debriefed at the Atlantis Gate Base and flown to Fairchild Airforce base, but not until they had signed the Official Secrets Act, prohibiting them from disclosing anything anywhere about the Atlantis project. Abbott didn't care. He just wanted to get back to Australia. But Hassan had other ideas. As they sat drinking passable coffee in an airman's mess, the Alchemist said, "They are going to fly us to DARPA headquarters."

Abbott looked at the Arab. "I've had enough of the military bull shit. I'm going back to Aussie and the quiet life."

"You won't have a life at all if Mendes Amwon makes his black hole."

"Jesus, Hassan, I don't know anything about that shit!"

Hassan fixed Abbott with his gaze, "Amwon is an evil Alchemist, and we have to stop him before he achieves his goal."

"Well, that's Goman Worrall's department."

"He has asked for our assistance."

"To do what," Abbott asked, finishing his brew.

"He will tell us when we get to DARPA."

Abbott shook his head, "No, fuck it! I just want my boring life back."

Hassan touched his arm. "I'm afraid it doesn't work like that. Once you went through the portal, you left your old life behind. You can't just pick it up again."

Abbott became sullen. He hadn't considered the ramifications of dimensional travel. He said, "Once we found the Key to Atlantis our part in this was over."

Hassan stared at him. "It was a means to an end."

"What are you talking about?"

"Obtaining the Key wasn't our mission. We were supposed to stop Mendes Amwon from escaping Atlantis, but we were too late. Now we have to help prevent him from carrying out his evil plan," the Arab said, quietly.

Just then an airman approached the pair. "Come with me. The chopper is ready for take off.

General Schultz read the report, then looked up at Goman Worrall. "Can he make a black hole?"

The great scientist nodded sagely. "I fear it is so. But Amwon needs access to a particle collider, and they're not easy to come by."

"What like that one in Switzerland?"

"Well, not that large. But the principal is the same. Have your people check for hadronic research facilities in universities and any private laboratories."

"How would he gain access to such services. Surely security would be tight."

Goman thought about it for a moment. "With Amwon, we are dealing with a very cunning and persuasive individual. That man was able to sway most of our people from our traditional ways. He would have no trouble coercing a hadronic scientist to help him with his plan."

Schulz felt a chill shoot up his spine. "Christ, we have to catch this evil bastard."

Goman looked up at the clock on the wall. "It's time for me to speak with Hassan Shamsi. He has essential knowledge that can help us track down Amwon."

Goman Worrall greeted Hassan and closed the door of his office so they could speak in private. The Atlantean said, "I knew you were a man of profound knowledge and wisdom when I first set eyes upon you on Atlantis."

Hassan said, "If I'd known the Americans had a 'Gate' I could have been here in time to stop him escaping."

"If anybody is at fault the blame lies with me for leaving Dr Jeallus in a vulnerable position. But recriminations are not going to help." Goman stroked his beard, as he paced around the office. "We have to focus on finding Mendes Amwon, and quickly?"

"He'll need access to a particle accelerator and a team of scientists to help him. That's not going to be easy, Goman."

"He can be very persuasive. Look what he achieved on Atlantis."

Hassan said, "So where do I come in this picture?"

"The police have their ways, but I fear they won't catch him in time. You have other skills, arts that may prove more effective in his capture."

"Are you talking alchemical, because if so ..."

"Hassan, please listen to me. On Atlantis, we have seers, people who have a clearer sight. Some of them are skilled in dowsing."

"I don't see how looking for water is going to help."

"They're chart dowsers, not water dowsers. They use this skill to detect what's going on under the ocean."

Hassan shrugged, I still don't see where I come in."

We have somebody from Atlantis with such a skill. But he is vulnerable in this world and needs someone of your abilities to protect him."

"Goman, I'm not a bodyguard."

"He will be able to detect disturbances by using a pendulum over the map."

"That's novel, I must say."

"Hassan, With your exceptional skills and his map dowsing expertise we may just be able to track Amwon down before he does unspeakable damage."

While Abbott waited for Hassan, he sat wondering what he and Goman Worrall were discussing? If it involved him, they should have included him. But Hassan had been adamant, saying he would tell Abbott what he needed to know. So he sat there like a loyal dog waiting for a bone. Exasperated he'd had enough. He started typing a text on his phone to Hassan when a voice said, "Are you, Abbott?"

He looked up and saw an attractive olive-skinned young lady with wavy black shoulder length hair looking at him.

"Hello, I'm Natasha. I have a message from Felipe."

Abbott could not believe it. His trip to Guatemala seemed a lifetime ago. "Yes, I'm Abbott. So, Natasha, what is this about?"

She sat down beside him. Grabbing his arm, she said, "Drop it now. It's far too dangerous for you to get involved."

"Drop what?" he said, puzzled.

"Searching for the evil scientist."

Abbott frowned. "Natasha, I appreciate your help in this, but Hassan needs my assistance."

"Once Felipe knew you were here, he contacted me to pass on his message."

"What message?"

"He told me to inform you that he'd found another part to the letter Harry wrote to you." She reached into her shoulder bag and retrieved an envelope, marked attention, Abbott.

He took the letter out of the envelope and read:

Hassan Shamsi is an accomplished teacher. Put your destiny in his hands, and he will lead you to the 'Key' Once you are on Atlantis find Goman Worrall. He is a brilliant scientist who has much to offer us in combating the world's major problems. You are to work with him. Listen to his story. It's the biggest scoop you'll ever get.

Farewell Abbott. I have enjoyed knowing you."

He looked up at Natasha. "Okay, let's take a step back. How do you know Felipe?"

"He is my uncle."

It seemed plausible. "And how did you know where to find me?"

"I work here, and yesterday I heard your friend Hassan call your name. It seemed to be too much of a coincidence." She stood up. "I have delivered the message now it is up to you."

He watched as she walked away. Abbott reread the letter, then pocketed it.

A few minutes later Hassan emerged, a frown on his face.

Abbott stood up. "It went that well, huh!"

The Arab took the journalist aside. "I have to work with an Atlantean to find Mendes Amwon."

"Great, so you don't need 'me' with you."

"You may as well go back to Australia."

"Is Goman Worrall still in his office?"

"He was when I left. Why?"

"Which way is it?"

Hassan sighed, "I'll show you if you tell what this is about."

Abbott showed him the letter. "I only just received it."

Hassan smiled, "So you won't be going back home yet."

The black, unmarked sedan drove straight through the electronically controlled gates and stopped outside the entrance of the grey stone building. As soon as the car stopped, Colonel Rafael Lynch was ushered into the building by two heftily build armed guards and marched to a room designated 'Strategy Room1'. Raf was shown inside and told to wait. He didn't have to wait long before two men entered the room. One, the Colonel recognised as General Logan Schulz. The other guy, tall and wiry looking, he did not know.

Schulz introduced him. "Rafael, Jim Kraus, CIA. He'll be working closely with you on this."

Raf wondered why the CIA man was involved, but he didn't ask. "So what do we know?"

Schulz said, "You tell us what you know?"

"How free am I to talk?" The Colonel queried, glancing at Kraus.

The General smiled, patting Rafael on the shoulder. "What's said here stays in this room."

"I never actually saw Mendes Amwon. He had escaped before I got to the Temple. Later, when we discovered his chief scientist in a terrible state, she told us what she had done."

Jim said, "Okay, what had she done."

"She had been tortured and was forced to give Mendes Amwon a program of how to make a stable black hole."

Kraus stood stock still wide-eyed. Finding his voice, the spook said, "I didn't think our scientists had access to that technology."

Schulz knocked ash of his cigar. "They don't."

"Then how? ..."

Raf said, "The Atlanteans do."

Jim did a double take. "Atlanteans, as in Atlantis the mythological island that sank?"

"The very one - or a model of it," Lynch replied, nodding.

Schulz coughed and said, "Can we get back on track here, gentlemen?" Turning to Lynch, the general said, "So, what else do you know, Colonel?"

"Just what I've told you."

"Why does this Mendes character want a fucking black hole?" Kraus said.

"Mendes Amwon is a megaLoganiac and is probably connected to Diabolus. He either wants to destroy us all or threaten to do so - for whatever reason. Either way, we have to put a stop to him before he carries out his plan. Glancing at Lynch, Schulz said, "I want you, Raf, to head up a team of people dedicated to catching this ass hole. I want you, Jim, to manage a team in the field. The clock is ticking on this one, and it is a top priority. So get to it." The General rose. "Good day gentlemen. Keep me informed of every development."

Outside, as they walked to their cars, Kraus said, "What was all the horse shit about Atlantis, Colonel?"

Raf didn't like this guy. He couldn't be expected to believe the Atlantis reference. But his arrogance could be a problem. Sure, he was a spook, and Raf disliked their underhand ways, but with Jim Kraus, there was something else. "You just concentrate on locating this guy. Leave the rest to me."

Jim sneered. "You guys let him slip through the net, and now you need us to clear up the mess."

Rafael remained calm, careful not to give Kraus any room for smugness. "Yeah. CIA to the rescue. Except this time, you report to me and keep me up-to-date on everything. Got it?"

"Yes sir, Colonel sir."

"Prick," Rafael mumbled, walking away.

Kronyn pondered the map of the USA a worried frown lining his face. "If I had any sense I would go back through the Gate and stay on Atlantis."

Hassan said, "Can you do what we're asking of you?"

"It's a vast area with no useful clues. If Amwon has the data, there's no stopping him."

"Why in Allah's name were your people messing around with this stuff?"

Kronyn shrugged, "I'm not a scientist."

"Goman said you are a seer."

"It's one thing to detect fish movements and another to pick up on a mad scientist making a black hole!"

"Goman assured me that nobody has been able to make a stable black hole."

Kronyn said, "Thank Poseidon for that because if they had and it got loose, it would be bye bye solar system in in just a few days!" He stared at the Arab; We should all be working together on this. We ought to use the media to shame him."

Hassan shook his head, "From what you tell me about Amwon; he's shameless. And to publicise this would cause catastrophic panic. Trust me; we have to do this covertly and quickly."

## Chapter 26

### 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, in this book, that all AIs are programmed with a directive that dictates all universal life must become extinct. This rule is so 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.

At the book launch in New York, Helen Cleaver stated "Now that Bureaubots 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 metalix, The most technocratic group in the history of the world, states that our loyalty to race and nation is pathological. That may well be so, but even if the machines are not intent on destroying us, they are all programmed to do so. She added, "Nothing else is as important as us understanding this book's message, 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." She concluded with, "Robert explains this and much more in his book, 'Why we must become extinct' Available now from Mankind First Books, see our Mankind First Books section at Members Only Pages.

Lynne Becker stared at the memo, Then grabbed her phone. "Ulysses, can you speak openly?"

He put down the list on which he was making notes. "Sure. What's the problem?"

"Have you received the Hamlin memo?"

"All heads of department have, as far as I know."

"What do you make of the changeover?"

He sighed, having little interest in what the hell she was on about. "Cassie, I'm up to my ass in this Neurotech mess. Do you know they have issued ten fucking licences to major robotics firms?"

"Ulysses, I think this is important. Take a good look at the memo and get back to me. But don't tell anyone. Okay?"

"Yeah, sure thing," he said, instantly dismissing her request. He then pressed a contact on his phone, waited until he heard a voice, then said, "Elijah, thank you for the list of people you have sold licences to."

"What we did is not illegal, and we don't take kindly to threats."

"No - but it was unethical, not disclosing what you were doing."

Elijah was not enjoying this exchange. "So why have you called?"

"I asked myself the same question, why would such a flashy company as Neurotech, with a fantastic product like Synaptek, need to act in such an underhand way to its clients. So I carried out a search in companies records and guess what I discovered."

"What did you discover?"

"Come on Elijah don't give up that easily. I'm sure a smart person like you already knows."

"I have no idea what you're on about."

"Then let me enlighten you. But face to face."

"I don't have time to play your games."

Ulysses was enjoying this, to have somebody as up-himself as Elijah Brooks on the ropes.

"Unicarmine. Does that ring a bell?"

"Of course. But what's that got to do with us?"

"They own you. Unicarmine invented Neurotek to pay offset their massive debts. They had no idea you would come up with something as groundbreaking as Synaptek."

"That absolute nonsense. I don't believe a word of it. Neurotech was founded by the Amwon brothers, back in 1994,"

John Philips followed Faith's instructions, while still not knowing where he was going. With the money his employer had put in his bank account, John and Faith had flown to Portland, where he hired a car. "Where to now?" he asked, feeling the pleasant, gentle pressure of her hand on his leg, as they drove along rugged cliff faces while viewing the choppy ocean.

She checked her phone. "Drive along the Oregon coast till we get to the seaside."

"Then what?" John said, testily, fed up with piecemeal directions.

"I think we should rest up a while. There's a motel up ahead. Let's book in and finish the journey tomorrow," Faith purred, gently stroking Johnnie's thigh.

John was thinking of Jocelyn as He and Faith signed up for a room. She didn't deserve his betrayal. His wife had done her best to support him in his emotional nosedive, and he was rewarding her by having an affair with a woman he wouldn't ordinarily think twice about. As soon as they were inside the room, she threw herself at him.

He responded in kind, kissing her and grabbing her voluptuous breast. Her response was both immediate and vigorous - 'Oh yes John - that's exactly right! - Oh - OH! - I really can't tell you how good that feels! The fat woman gasped as his fingers and thumbs continued their activity. What the hell am I doing? his conscience screamed. Who cares, his mind replied, as he changed tactics and sucked on her now, unfettered breasts.

Faith's gasps immediately turned to much more deeply reverberating grunting sounds - as he gave each breast its share of either oral or manual attention - just occasionally, pausing, pressing them both firmly against his face as he buried it deep between them, inhaling the almost milky scent of her. For a moment nothing else mattered, nothing else existed

John quickly became attuned to her reactions; her movements, and especially her sounds. Using these as clues as to just what she found pleasurable, they collapsed onto the bed with her on top of him. Without risking her breast slipping from his mouth, she somehow managed to lift free his erection from his pants and position herself, so that she sank onto his invigorated cock. When Faith began to ride him ever more vigorously and purposefully, eventually took them both to another pair of explosive, and intensely satisfying orgasms.

"I needed that," she said, as they lie in bed, smoking and watching an in-house movie.

With his ardour satisfied, John's mind went back to his travails. "I'll be glad when I get my hands on it."

Laughing, she threw off the duvet, stretched her naked voluptuous body. "It's all yours."

He grinned, "Thanks but I was talking about the Cyclotron."

"Tomorrow Johnny. Then you'll have it."

Johnny yawned. It had been both a tiring and entirely satisfying night with Faith. They were on their way to Ecola State Park, which followed the 'explorers' Lewis and Clarke's route to the dramatic, thousand-foot cliff of Tillamook Head, overlooking rocky islands. He parked the rental in a car park in Indian Head Beach while they had a break. John had black coffee, burger and fries. Faith had a salad and fries, with a coke. He said, "Okay, when are we going to get to the end of this magical mystery tour?"

She smiled, "We're almost there, but the road is pretty rough."

"So which of the 'science anarchists' got to keep the object?"

"Ames. Do you remember him?"

"Vaguely. So how did you come to know about this place?"

"I came here once, many years ago. To bring Ames the Cyclotron."

"Why couldn't he come and get it?"

"He's an agoraphobe. Now he just stays in his bunker."

"He lives in a shelter!"

"You'll soon see it for yourself. "

They came to two trails. Faith pointed out, "take that one, the old Oregon coast path. The rented SUV complained as it traversed the potholes of the old maintenance road. After about 30 minutes, they came to a dead end. Faith said, "This was as far as we go by car."

"Great! what are we supposed to do now?"

"Walk of course. Come on," she urged, pulling him forward. To where a wide gravel trail led up to the "Tillamook. The trail started on the right-hand side of the Indian Beach parking turnaround. After 100 yards she kept left at a fork, and they climbed, steeply at times, through old-growth spruce and alder woods. It was a tough hike, and John wondered how they would get the cyclotron down there. Pushing the thought aside, after another 1.6 miles they reached an X-shaped trail crossing beside three open-sided shelters and a primitive camping area for backpackers. The shelters and tent sites are available for free on a first come, first-served basis, but there is no drinking water nearby. Luckily Faith had thought to bring their own supply. They took deep draughts before taking on the last leg of the journey, where they came across a 6-room concrete bunker that had housed a radar installation in World War II.

They arrived at the cliff-edge at the tip of Tillamook Head. The view was breathtaking, as they looked at the rugged rock beach below. A mile out to sea was Tillamook Rock, a lonely island with a lighthouse that operated from 1881 to 1957. Faith said, 'Terrible Tilly' they called it. The light was repeatedly overswept by winter storms that dashed water, rocks and fish into the lantern room 150 feet above average sea level."

"Does it still work?"



"No. The island was finally bought by funeral entrepreneurs who bring in urns of cremated remains by helicopter." She paused, then said, "Okay Johnny, there's the bunker?"

He turned away from the captivating ocean and looked at the derelict installation. Near it was a pile of metal parts. "What the hell?" he expressed, seeing the robot junkyard."

It was a lot bigger than when Faith had visited before. "Yeah. Unwanted visitors" was all she explained. She grinned, "So follow me and learn." They passed a large sign saying 'U S Government property. No unauthorised personnel allowed beyond this point'. She ignored it and took John to a rusty iron door.

He touched it, yelled, "Oww!" and jumped back a few feet.

She laughed, seeing him sprawled on the ground.

"It's not bloody funny," he admonished, scrambling to his feet."

"It's charged," she said,

"No fucking kidding!"

She took out her mobile phone and pressed a few icons. "Hi, were here. And turn off the shield, Johnny nearly got fried."

"What we're looking for is a brilliant scientist who is not mainstream. Somebody who has or had a position as a lecturer in a major university. And someone who has little regard for the establishment," Natasha said, as she and Abbott looked for leads.

He felt comfortable back in his journalist role, and he was pleased the coloured woman was helping him. "Any ideas then?" he asked, as they worked together, in her loft, in Brooklyn, just a few minutes from the bridge.

"When I was at Uni I heard about a group of scientist called 'Science Anarchists'. She turned her screen to face him. "This is their web page."

"Which means they're still active. Does it give a list?"

She grinned. "Of course not - silly. But we may be able to get a lead on the contacts page."

He shrugged. "We've got nothing else. So might as well give it a try." Then his phone rang. "Hi, Hassan. How goes it?"

"I'm going to ground for a while. People are following me. Do not contact!"

The phone went dead. Abbott froze.

"You look like you've seen a ghost. What was that about?"

"My friend Hassan is being tailed by spooks - probably Homeland Security."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Hassan is a Muslim with a long beard. Maybe they think he's a terrorist."

"What was he doing?"

"The same as us. Hassan had a lead to follow up. Some old scientist he met years back. I'm worried about him."

She put her hand on his arm. "We have to stay focused. I've found a number. Let's phone it and see where it takes us."

"Make sure you haven't got any loose pens, knives or things," Faith said as they walked along an unlit tunnel. Faith knew to bring a torch, which lit their way, illuminating a couple of 'sales bots' against the wall, resembling empty suits of armour, decorating stately homes.

"Interesting decor," John quipped.

"Unwanted visitors, trying to sell something." She added, "Ames set up a powerful magnetic field in this section. Robots get in but don't get out."

"Hence the pile of junk outside."

"Smart boy Johnny. Now when we meet Ames let me do the talking."

"Sure, but how comes he's allowed to live here?"

"Very few people know he's here. Most hikers don't pass the sign and, if they do, they get a nasty jolt. It doesn't deter the occasional sales bot, and you've seen what happens to them."

Ames Rolf came out of his den to meet them. "So, why the fuck do you want the Cyclotron?" he asked, his idea of a greeting.

Johnny looked at the big built black guy with dirty dreadlocks. Now he remembered from way back. "To make a fucking black hole. What else?"

Faith had a worried look on her face.

Ames stared straight at Johnny, who used all his willpower to stay unflinching. After an unnerving and very long minute, his face split into a wide grin. Then he burst out laughing. "To build a fucking black hole. I like it." Then he said, come on inside."

To John, it looked as though Ames was camping, not living there. For somebody who had been there for many years, he hadn't done much to the place. There wasn't much in the way of furniture. Just a table cluttered with books, pens, paper, dirty mugs and unwashed plates. There was a cupboard with necessary kitchen utensils, another table with a TV on it and a camp bed with a worn mattress. The place looked a bit of a mess, as did Ames. He made no excuses for either.

"Do ya want a cuppa?" he asked, attempting to play some sort of host.

Faith said, "That 'd be great."

Ames shuffled over to an ancient wood stove; filled a battered kettle from a water bottle and placed it on a hotplate. "So, why do you want to make a black hole?" he asked.

"Because I'm getting paid to do it."

"What do they want it for?"

John now knew that Ames liked it straight from the hip, but he was unsure how much to tell him. "He intends to hold the world to ransom,"

"Fuckin' ace man. I love it. So who's he gonna shaft?"

John said, "He hasn't told me that. He just pays me shit loads of money to make it."

"How's he gonna keep it stable? I mean those collisions of matter and anti-matter only produce little fuckers that only last a nanosecond or two. They ain't goin' to suck in much."

"He has the formula to keep it stable."

"He's pissing in the wind. It'll never fuckin' work. Still, I hope it does. It'd be a good thing if this fucking world got sucked into the ass of a singularity." Then the kettle was boiling.

"So, how does it work then?" Ames asked as they tried drinking his homemade herbal tea.

"As we know the amount of energy produced in one of the Hadronic Collisions would create a black hole with a gravitational pull no more scary than that of an orange – not enough to suck any appreciable matter towards it, so it would grow extremely slowly."

"Yeah, and it would only last for a split second. We fuckin' know that " Ames scowled.

"Okay. So, black holes can carry a charge, depending on the particles they gobble up. So we give the rogue hole a negative charge by firing electrons at it from a cathode ray tube. Then we are able to trap it in a box lined with negatively charged metal plates – the negatively-charged black hole would be repelled by the negatively charged walls, leaving it suspended inside."

"Fuck! That's interesting in theory. But can you really make it work?"

"We can only pray that it does. if not we won't be making that mistake again.

"Fucking Amen to that, brother." He turned to Faith. You did the right thing, sister. I like him. He's really got his shit together."

John wished that was only too true.

Ames got up and went into another room. He returned with a large box.

"Is that the Cyclotron?" John asked, excitedly.

Ames put the box on the table, on top of some magazines. "So you think this is gong to make you your stable black hole," he sneered.

"If I can get the power to crank it up enough."

"It's more a case of if this device can handle the power." Then he said, "Go ahead. Fucking take it. It's only gathering dust here."

John picked up the box. It was quite heavy but somehow, using the sack truck they managed to get it back to their car.

As they left, Ames grabbed John's arm. "Don't tell any fucker about this place."

"Wouldn't dream of it. Pleased to meet you."

"Yeah. Now fuck off."

<https://www.oregon.com/recreation/tillamook-head>

## Chapter 27

### Independent News Report:

#### HOLLYWOOD WITHOUT HUMAN ACTORS

We knew it was coming! Metal-fondlers and machine-lickers run Hollywood. 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 Robbie and Angie. This simple tale of a couple in a doomed, robosexual relationship is nothing but trash pretending to be a mainstream

movie. This film 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.

It had all started off as a joke at a Rottafellers' banquet. The idea that a robot could become the CEO of a major corporation was preposterous. And it was left at that. Or so most of those involved in the conversation thought. Then David T Rottafeller had a thought. He got Abraham Flexner, a major shareholder in Boston Cybertronics, to use his influence to have Harvey Hamlin voted onto the executive board. Harvey's credentials showed him to be a major shareholder. He kept a low profile at meetings but retained the information, so much so that he could recite what was said almost word perfect. He had this skill because he was an android. As nobody on the board was aware of this, his amazing grasp of company policy got him elected as CEO.

Lynne Becker became entirely consumed with the Boston Cybertronics CEO revelation. She couldn't sleep, and it played on her mind, distracting her during her working hours. "Am I the only one who knows our boss is a fucking robot?" Lynne asked Shirley Brassington, as they ate lunch in a park.

Shirley felt uncomfortable, even though she knew no one could hear them. "I wish you would leave this alone, Lynne. it could become hazardous for you."

"So how did our Mr Hanlon become CEO? Whoever pulled strings to bring this about would have to be somebody with lots of power."

"Which is all the more reason you should be leaving it alone," Shirley said, nervously."

"If everything's above board why the secrets? We should be shouting it from the rooftops. The publicity would be perfect for us."

"I admit it doesn't make any sense. Maybe the power behind the CEO is waiting for the right moment to make the announcement."

Lynne sighed, "That's a possibility, I guess. Still, this is our fucking company, and I don't like unknown people pulling strings. We have to find out who is behind this because it's looking increasingly like a hostile takeover brewing." She got up and tossed her rubbish in the bin. She turned to her friend, "Thanks for listening to me. I know you feel uncomfortable talking about this."

Shirley just looked at her. There was nothing more she could say. She had tried to steer her friend away from the Hanlon thing but with no success.

Lynne said, Well, I'd better get back to the office. Do you want a lift?"

Shirley smiled weakly. "No, I think I'll stay awhile."

"Sure," Lynne said, picking up her lunch box.

Once her friend had left, Shirley took out her cell phone and pressed a contact. When she heard the voice, she said, "She just left." Then she added, "Just a warning to scare her."

Dr Becker approached her car, pressing the remote key. The lights flashed twice, and Lynne opened the door. For a split second, there was a sharp pain in her back, then blackness. She was dead before she slid down to the ground, leaving a streak of blood on the Mercedes' white duco.

Jim Kraus stepped out of the bushes. No one else was around. She looked dead enough but to be sure he screwed a silencer onto his Beretta and shot her in the head. Satisfied, he pressed a contact number. "Troublemaker dealt with."

John Prince watched the minutes tick by. A major disaster was around the corner, and there was nothing he could do to prevent it happening. By the time the news went to air that evening the Delta robot 'down tools' incident was no longer the headline item. At precisely 6 pm all robots and robot-assisted systems, across the Lone Star state, stopped working, instantly hitting Texas with a disaster of mammoth proportions. Robots in factories, shops, hospitals, schools, police departments, etc. all immediately stopped working. Anywhere the metal slaves were taken for granted, their human masters and mistresses suddenly found themselves without any cyber support. Although mentally prepared for it, John Prince was stunned when the shut-down happened. At the time John had no idea about the ramifications of this shut-down across the entire state. Then it dawned on him. Traffic systems would be in chaos; life support machines and all other diagnostic and treatment machines would have cut out. The media would be down, and the state would be suffering a massive power blackout. Even worse was the blind panic, as most Texans had no idea what was going on. Speculation would be rife: alien invasion, terrorism, sunspot activity and geoengineering, etc. Nobody would have guessed the robots had gone on strike. And that impact was just the tip of a colossal iceberg.

John had spent the previous forty minutes, organising a carrier for the dismantled robot. Now, he realised, it was a waste of time. All commercial aircraft in Texas were grounded so Dr Prince decided to drive out of Texas across the border into Louisiana. Once he got there, things would be back to normal for him. That was the plan until John discovered his hire car's onboard computer was on strike. He looked around. All drivers of late-model vehicles had abandoned them; their engines had cut out at 6 pm precisely.

Only older cars were still able to work, and they were few and far between. Then John saw a 70s Dodge truck coming towards him. He put out his thumb. The truck clattered to a halt. The driver, a craggy grey haired man, said, "What in tarnation is going on here?"

"Give me a ride, and I will explain."

"Where you headed?"

"Out of the state will do for now."

"I don't go that far."

"Anywhere will be better than staying here."

While authorities did the best they could to monitor the Texan disaster, the big fear was that robot strikes could spread all over America and there was nothing anyone could do to prevent it. The President called an emergency meeting in the White House.

Meanwhile, the Secretary Of State had his underling on the carpet. "What the hell were you thinking of - or not thinking?"

The under Secretary back-pedalled, trying to gain purchase. "He said robots were going on strike. I couldn't take him seriously."

"And you didn't think to pass it up the line!"

"Sorry, sir. But everybody knows robots can't think for themselves!"

"Then how the hell do you explain the disaster in Texas?"

"But nobody would have thought... I mean the guy sounded like a crank."

Ignoring the excuse, the Secretary of State ranted on. "Now, without having a heads up on this, I have to face a Presidential committee and explain why we were caught with our pants down."

The US president, The Joint Chiefs (JC), Head of Homeland Security (HS) and Secretary of State (SS) all sat around a big oak table trying to work out what to do. The consensus was they would have to, somehow, negotiate with the striking bots. But how?

The SS said, "According to a Buddy Crass, the boss of Delta Agriculture Equipment, It seems to have started there. A Dr Prince from Boston Cybertronics was there, trying to fix the problem."

The president responded, "Then we'd better get Dr Prince here ASAP."

HS commented, "We're already onto that Mr president. The problem is he is stuck somewhere in Texas, and there's no way to contact him."

"Shit! What about this Crass guy? What does he know?"

"We're questioning him at present," He said a robot called Marx Metallica started the problem."

One of the Joint Chiefs asked, "What did he do about it?"

"He got one of his techs to to disable the bot."

"So why have we still got this fucking disaster to deal with?" the President asked.

"I know it sounds crazy, but it seems that this Marx Metallica somehow got a message to Texans robots to strike."

"Fuck! can they do that?" the SS queried.

"What the hell for?" the president asked.

"Crass reckons the bot was making demands about 'Robot Rights'."

"Where's this robot now?" the president demanded.

HS answered, "Still at Delta Agricultural Equipment."

"Jesus! Are you guys just sitting on your asses? Get the fucking thing to Boston Cybertronics."

"Yes, Mr President. Right away," the Home Secretary said,

"Who's in charge there?"

"A Dr Becker, Mr President. But we can't get her. As I said, Dr John Prince is also unavailable. But we managed to track down a Dr Ulysses Covington. My people are with him now."

"Let's pray he can do something," The Harried Commander in Chief uttered, his eyes going heavenward.

Ulysses didn't know where Lynne was. She wasn't in the office nor was she at home. Or at least she wasn't answering his call. He went back to his work, but his mind was elsewhere. John Prince had left a note and a report. The note, a memo said he was in Texas and why." The robots were on strike! Impossible! The explanation was linked to the report entitled, 'Robots in Education' (a new market with huge potential). Through Dr Prince's contacts, Ulysses had won, for BC a \$10 million grant from the National Science Foundation to create "socially assistive" robots that could serve as

companions for children with special needs. These robots would help with everything from cognitive skills to getting the right amount of exercise. Prince's particular goal in the program was to enable a modified version of ATLAS to interact with its environment by learning about itself. The self-model would be used to reason about tasks — mainly ones for humans. He made a note to talk to John about this. He tried ringing Dr Prince's phone, but there was no answer.

He tried Lynne's phone again. This time it was answered but not by Lynne. A male voice said, who is this?"

"I want to speak with Dr Becker."

Lieutenant Casteneda hated conducting such news over the phone. He hated reporting such news, full stop! "I'm afraid that's not possible, sir," he said, indicating his authority.

"She is my colleague. I'm Dr Covington."

"Sir, I have some bad news. When I said she couldn't talk to you, I meant it. I'm with Boston Homicide. Dr Becker was fatally shot, by her car, around 3 hours ago. Boston Homicide arrived on the scene 30 minutes ago." He asked, "Where are you?"

"At work. Boston Cybertronics." he uttered, feeling strangely detached, unable to process the tragic news.

"Stay there; I need to ask you some questions. I'll be there in 30 minutes. I'm Lieutenant Casteneda."

Nothing made sense to Ulysses. He registered the words: bad news, Dr Becker, shot, Boston Homicide. He sat, looking blankly at his office wall. He then had a sense of what it would be like to be a robot, devoid of emotion. Had somebody murdered Lynne? If so, why? Who would have done such a thing? He tried to think. Then he went to her office. He switched on her laptop and looked at her diary. For that day she had noted 'lunch with SB. Meet in the park'. Who the hell was SB? He had to keep his mind busy. A conundrum was good. He racked his brain for names of employees with those initials. Nothing came to mind.

Lieutenant Casteneda, a heavyweight Hispanic with a black moustache sat asking Ulysses questions. "Where were you around 3 pm today, Dr Covington?"

"Surely you don't suspect me of killing her!"

"Right now everyone who knows her is a suspect. So please answer the question."

"I was here. In a meeting with department heads."

He could easily check that alibi. The scientist seemed genuinely shocked by the news, but that meant jack shit where a murder was concerned. "Did you know Dr Becker very well?"

"Like I said, she is - was - a colleague and a close friend."

"How close? Like lovers."

"I don't see what that has to do with anything."

"Did you have an argument with her today?"

That was it for Ulysses. His rational brain kicked in, as though it had just woken up, no longer shielding him from the nightmare experience. "I think it's time to call my lawyer."

"Ms Cleaver, what does ATL have to say about the situation in Texas?" the television interviewer asked her, as she wheeled herself to the waiting limo.

She put the brake on. Turning to the interviewer, she said, "Now that we know the time has come when sentient robots have amassed enough brain power to take over, what is the government going to do about it? ATL has warned the world for years that this would happen, but nobody would listen. Well, now 'it' has happened, as proven by what is going on in Texas. The government has no strategies in place, other than to kowtow to the metal monsters. Humans have become so reliant on these robots that now, faced without their support, people are dying in hospitals. Traffic accidents are at an all-time high in Texas. Utility companies can no longer function. All airports and trains stations have closed."

As Helen was helped up the ramp into the car by her chauffeur, the interviewer said, "There you have it. Are robots trying to take over from humans? Or is this fear mongering by the likes of ATL? It is for each of us to decide. This Texan catastrophe could be a major issue in the upcoming Presidential election. Just make sure your candidate is human before you vote, that is if the voting machines haven't gone on strike."

The Anti Transhumanist Leagues headquarters on Park Lane South, near Victory Park in Brooklyn, had increased its security since the two break-ins the previous week. That and the hate mail Helen had received of late. Although people sending hate mail to the ATL was not unusual, these letters were especially chilling. Simply signed 'Robot friend' the emails, sent from libraries and cafes, had photo attachments of Helen going about her private life. Each one was signed off with, 'We'll get you, you crippled bitch'. The police had been alerted but have done nothing. So it was down to private security to be with her until there was no longer a threat. ATL had cyber people onto it, but the perpetrator issuing the threats kept moving around.

"Good interview, Helen, her secretary said, dropping a proposed news release on her desk.

"Thanks, Jane. This Texas disaster is a blessing in disguise for us. Politicians will have to sit up and take notice now."

"Yes, I hope so." She turned to leave, then remembered, "Oh, somebody called Abbott-Gallagher rang. I left the phone number on your desk,"

Abbott-Gallagher! She hadn't thought about him for ages. Why did he want to see her now? She wondered. She rang the number he left. Hearing his voice made her heart skip a beat. She did not know she still had feelings for him. She said, "Abbott, this is a surprise."

His pulse quickened when he heard her voice. "Helen, how are you?"

"Very busy, especially with the Texan fiasco."

"Too busy for a catch-up dinner."

"Too busy to fly back to Oz!"

"Do you like meatballs?"

"I guess so. Why?"

"Okay, so how about we meet at the Meatball Shop on Bedford?" Say around 7ish."

She had eaten there before. "You're in Brooklyn!"

"Well, I'm not going to fly all the way to the States to eat meat balls."



## Chapter 28

### Independent News Report:

67,000,000 AI'S IN FINLAND

ATL leaked a report concerning the state of robot play in Finland. Helen Cleaver said, "There are more than sixty-seven million AI in Finland, but there are less than 6 million humans. What's going on? Well, due to a low birth-rate, a harsh climate, and a high technical literacy rate, Finland has made the mistake of automating a huge percentage of its industrial and infrastructural environment. We all know what this means in the long run—the humans lose, and the machines take over. This scenario is an extreme example of what is happening in the rest of the world. The rest of the world should take this warning to heart, and DO SOMETHING!

As Daniel walked along the street in Selçuk, he saw Grand Wonders travel agency on the main road. He entered the seemingly empty office when a young man with a name badge saying Albi popped up beaming, "We have great tours for you." He gesticulated abundantly with his hands.

Daniel said, "I am a stranger here, and I'm looking for Aregli cd."

Albi came around the counter and took Daniel out the back of his shop. There, he pointed out a red brick building that stood out from the others. "You go over there and turn that way," he said, indicating the right. "Then you find the Aregli cd."

Daniel followed the young Turk's directions and soon came to the address. It was one of six apartments on a strata title. Dogan Yulsel lived at number 3. Daniel knocked, and he heard footsteps coming to the door. A woman, young, dark-skinned and very attractive stood in the doorway. Before she had a chance to say anything a man, mid-thirties, with a drooping moustache ushered her back in the house. Staring at the stranger, he demanded, "Who are you? What do you want?"

Daniel looked at the nervously energetic man. "Are you Dogan Yulsel?"

He hadn't used that name for years. His faced creased in worry. Had they caught up with him? He bluffed, "No, I am Metin Erez."

"Who chose that name - the police with whom you did a deal?"

The Turk glared at Daniel. "Get away from here, Leave now, or I call the cops."

"I think you should let me in unless you want to conduct this conversation on the doorstep."

"I told you, leave now!"

"Dogan, I'm not after you. But I need to ask you some questions."

"Get away. I am not this Dogan you talk of."

"Okay, have it your way. I can understand why you want to keep your identity secret, but it was very unimaginative of you to choose names of your Dev Sol comrades. I imagine there are those old men, friends of General Dursun deceased, who might think justice has not been served."

"Are you threatening me?" Dogan said clenching his fists.

Daniel got in his face. "Listen to me Dogan, I can have you snuffed out just like that," he said, snapping his fingers. Answer my questions, and your identity remains safe."

Dogan stood aside. Looking warily at the insistent stranger, he said, "Very well, come on in."

"It must have been hellish in prison," Daniel said, as they sat in comfortable armchairs, facing each other.

It was no good trying to bluff. The interloper apparently knew too much. Dogan said, "It was barbarous. Our cells were tiny, and we only have ten-minute exercise each day."

"My father came to see you. He spoke with you in your cell."

"Your father," the Turk said, eyes wide. "What does he have to do with this?"

"That's a good question. Let's explore that. This Englishman came to you in your cell. He may have shaved his head and had a goatee beard."

Daniel caught a flicker of recognition in the Turk's eyes. "You know who I am talking about, don't you?"

The Turk nodded. "Yes, he asked some questions."

"What did he want to know?" The young Soter agent probed, beginning to get somewhere.

"It was a long time ago. This man wanted to know who killed the general. I told him, Dev Sol."

"And he, like me, didn't believe you."

"He said if I told him he could get me released. I said it would get me killed. He said not if I had a new identity. He ask me if I want life in prison or a new life free."

"So you chose a new life. So what did you tell him?"

Dogan stared at the Englishman. "I suppose you offer me another new life."

"You help me, and I make sure your secret identity stays that way."

"Mehmet dealt with him. But overheard his name mentioned one time, a man called Abraham Flexner."

"The belief that 'only humans can be self-aware and only people can recognise faces' has joined the many other discarded myths about robot sentience. Until now, robots have acquired their knowledge of the external world through experience, but now Knowledge is built in by the maker," Ulysses Covington explained at a press conference launch of ATLAS 2, which was ready to hit the market. Indicating the smart bot beside him, the Boston Cybertronics spokesperson, said, "Although at present ATLAS 2, doesn't have the flexibility, robustness, and functionality that are present in people, it has learnt, for example, the relationship of its 'grippers' to the whole self. This model, for the first time in the world, combines it's perceptual and motor capabilities, learning where it's body parts exist with respect to each other."

The A2 launch was big news the next day.

Daniel had no idea his father had driven down the same road. He learned that Abraham Flexner lived in a hamlet in Mount Pleasant, called Pocantico Hills. He needed to talk with the man - alone. It would be difficult as two armed guards were always with him.

Daniel waited, looking at the long driveway. Then a big Merc drove out of the drive. Daniel, using a very high res camera, zoomed into the back seat. He caught a glimpse of a man. It was Flexner. He followed in his rented Ford, keeping two cars between them until they came to a camping ground. They drove down to a large pond and parked. Daniel wondered what was going on. Then

he saw one of Flexner's guards open the trunk of the big German car and take out a model yacht. Abraham lovingly carried it to the lake's edge, where he carefully placed it in the water. Flexner used a remote control and his boat, the biggest one on the calm water, began its voyage to the centre of the lake.

Daniel walked to the edge of the pond and looked out at the model boats motoring or gliding on the surface. Flexner's white-hulled yacht slid gracefully as its master fine tuned his remote control to adjust the sails. Rapt in his play he never noticed the younger man sidling up to him. Daniel Deftly palmed a small syringe with a delayed deadly payload. A quick glance at the security guards showed they were chatting and smoking. As he passed the engrossed older man, the syringe flicked out like a cobra's tongue.

Abraham felt a sting at the back of his neck and swatted at it. "Damned mosquito, he cursed, thinking no more of it.

Daniel went back to his car. He dialled Flexner's number - and waited. When he heard Abraham's voice, he said, "Mr Flexner, that sting you just felt on your neck was the toxin from a Brown snake, delivered by syringe. You will feel immediate and delayed effects. You will soon start drooling, vomiting and will need to sit down. Paralysis generally occurs 3-18 hours later. I gave you a triple dose, so you have about six hours to live."

Flexner forgot all about his yacht. "Who the fuck are you?"

"The person who has the antiserum in another syringe. It's yours if you tell me what I want to know."

Flexner was sweating, He called his guards over.

Daniel saw him. "They can't help you - and your time is running out. Tell them you need to talk to a colleague privately. Then walk over to the grey Ford parked by the public tap. Come alone, or I drive off and leave you to an agonising death." Daniel saw Flexner pause, then talk to his men.

He then made his way to Daniel's car.

"You won't get away with this," he snarled, sitting in the passenger seat.

Daniel turned to him. Okay, let's start with my father. Records show that you were targeted by him, Why?"

"I don't know what the fuck you're talking about."

"His name was Dayton Lynsey. Somebody murdered him during an investigation. I want to know two things. Who killed him and why?"

Flexner took off his glasses and wiped his sweaty brow. He started heaving. Daniel passed him a sick bag. "Now perhaps you can see I'm not bluffing.

"I honestly have no idea what you are talking about," Flexner said, diverting his eyes slightly.

"Blood clotting begins next; then paralysis starts to set in. Then it's too late. So don't fuck with me."

Abraham threw up into the bag. Daniel passed him tissues to wipe his mouth. "Let's try again. Who killed my father- and why?"

Flexner began hyperventilating. "A man call Jim Kraus did the deed. he did it because I ordered him to."

Daniel remained calm. "Why did you want my father dead?"

"Because he wanted me dead."

"Why?"

Flexner heaved again. "Because whoever he worked for didn't want us to rebuild the Third Temple." Then he said, losing sensation in his legs, "For God's sake give me the syringe!"

"Not until you tell me who's running you. Is it Diabolus?"

Flexner's eyes bulged. He missed a breath. "I don't know anything about that."

Daniel smiled. "Okay, we can just sit here while your paralysis sets in and I can have the pleasure of watching my father's killer die in intense agony. Or you can give me a name and address. Your choice."

Flexner's face was grey. He couldn't betray his source. They would know, and he would be dead. "I don't know."

Daniel got close to his prey. "You're a lying piece of murderous shit. And you will soon be a dead man."

Abraham, breathing rapidly, uttered. "The next one up is called Milne Amwon. I don't know where he is."

"Tell me what you know about him," Daniel said, holding the anti-venom syringe ready.

Goman Worrall wanted to go back to his world. Peace was restored, and a stable government was in place. But the American government wouldn't 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 run on, it being 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.

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.

Goman was called to the NASA Space Laboratories to present his finding to a NASA/ DARPA joint committee run by General Logan Schulz. Professor Worrall, during his presentation speech, said, "My more complete space-time theory named as 'negentropic unification theory', efficiently and practically harnesses zero point energy."

Some scientists looked on, bemused.

He continued, "Our technology is ready to have a serious impact on the energy scenario of this world because it provides sustainable, infinite power in a most environmentally friendly way."

Dr Murray said, "We have known about and experimented with ZPE for years, but it is too dangerous to put into practice."

Goman said, "The danger factor never stopped you from tampering with nuclear fission, so I think there is something else behind your words."

Another scientist spoke up. "Science has no say over electricity production. Our research is reliant on government and private sector funding. Free energy, as Tesla discovered, is not to their liking. There's no profit in it for them, so they're not likely to fund it."

Goman responded, "The greed of your power companies is for you to deal with and has nothing to do with me. My Zero Point Energy technology frees humanity from the idea of constraints and finiteness of available power. It enables humankind to use as much energy as required for the comfort and betterment of life. It is particularly necessary for people in areas of the world who do not have access to adequate electric power or who cannot pay for it."

"Then who does pay for it?" a scientist asked.

Goman shook his head. "Power companies control your energy and therefore control your lives. Energy should be and can be free for all. My ZPR technology will enable fuel free automobiles, very low-cost space travel, self-charging mobile phones and many more things limited only by your imaginations."

Among the audience were NASA scientists paid for keeping the fossil fuel bosses informed of anything NASA was doing that might impinge on their profit margins. They were already busy on their phones.

A young science graduate asked, " Professor Worrall, can you explain simply how this ZPR technology actually works?"

"Certainly. Zero Point Radiation works by dividing 0 point space energy into negative and positive fields. This phenomenon creates infinite non-destructive electricity generation anywhere, anytime and at any scale for its usage and distribution. This means almost fuel free automobiles. But that isn't all. Another product of this process is negative energy, which power companies can transport over long distances through electric wires. These cooling 'transmission lines' can use existing power distribution infrastructure."

Another scientist said, "It still doesn't explain the actual process that takes place to stabilise and harness this ZPE."

Goman smiled, "Zero Point Radiation can only be harnessed if the particles can be pushed through from less than light speed to greater than the speed of light."

A scientist argued, "Impossible! Particles cannot accelerate from speeds less than the speed of light to greater than the speed faster than light."

Most of those present agreed.

Goman, unfazed, responded. "I would not be standing here talking to you all today if I did not have a method to overcome that. Goman turned to General Schulz. "You people need to give humanity hope. You need to spread this all over the media, now."

Schulz got up. "This is indeed exciting news, Professor Worrall. However, it stays in this room. Anyone who breaks silence on this will be considered an enemy of the state and will be charged accordingly. Is that clear."

Goman took the microphone. "This is a gift for humankind."

Schulz took back the mike, "Thank you professor, but now is not the time to make this public." He knew the American military would control this technology to assert its superpower status."

"NO! THIS SELFISH ATTITUDE IS WRONG!" Goman stated emphatically, as security guards escorted him from the stage.

Rafael Lynch knocked and entered the room.

Goman frustrated and dejected, looked up. "Hello, Colonel." Then he said, "Why am I being kept in here? Am I under arrest for something."

Raf said, "They're worried that you will tell the media about this ZPE stuff."

the scientist shook his head. "I don't understand it. I taught them this to help everybody."

"It's not as simple as that. On this planet the people who own the gas, oil, coal, etc. rule the world, in a business sense. Your technology scares them because they have invested in industries that drill and mine for fossil fuels."

"But the resources will not last forever, and they will keep poisoning your world. Zero Point Energy can solve both problems."

Raf said, "Look, don't get me wrong. The fossil fuel industries are slow at changing, but when they see the sense of unlimited energy from the atom, They will come on board. It's just that the timing has to be right - so they're not scared off. So if you promise not to announce this to the world yet, we can get you safely back to Atlantis."

"Why do I get the sense you are trying to get me out of the way, Colonel?" Then he said "Tell me something. What will it take for these energy companies to change their ways and try to save your world?"

Raf shrugged. "I can't answer that. Cynically I would say they will have to find a way to make a dollar out of ZPE. If they saw it be profitable, they would jump at the chance."

Goman stared at the Colonel. "I'm a gullible fool, Colonel. I should have known you Americans would want to use this technology to laud it over other nations. You, humans, have an opportunity to turn things around for your world, yet you want to carry on in the ways that have brought your race to the edge of extinction."

"I understand what you are saying. But we have a saying that you can't teach old dogs new tricks."

"And your Albert Einstein said 'the thinking that causes a problem can't be the thinking that solves it'. Your governments and your power companies have to stop think beyond making profits from ZPE, which is unlimited and free?" Goman shook his head. "In the light of your betrayal I, in all honesty, cannot divulge the last piece of the jigsaw."

The Colonel stared at him. "What do you mean?"

"I have not explained how we push the particles to a greater speed than that of light. So you see, because of your duplicity your military have nothing."

Raf turned to leave. "I must inform the Committee."

"Tell them I will give them the last piece over the air broadcasting it to the worldwide media."

Lynch grimaced. "You know that's not going to work."

"Then I will not share it," Goman said, defiantly.

"Professor Worrall, Please don't threaten or put pressure on the committee. It will only turn out badly for you," Raf warned.

Goman looked straight at the colonel. My responsibility, where this ZPR technology is concerned, is with the people - not a privileged few. From what I have heard I have serious doubts that you Earthians are ready for such a boon."

Raf said, "We need that technology. That's why we brought you here. That's why my men fought and died on Atlantis. It wasn't so you could display your ego and Idealism."

Goman shook his head. This technology is for peace - not war. If you cannot understand that you are not worthy of it."

Lynch admired Goman's sense of ethics, but he knew the man's stubbornness was going to get him in big trouble.

## Chapter 29

### **Independent News Report:**

#### **POLITICALLY CORRECT SWEDES ATTEMPT TO BAN ZANE ADAMS**

A group of Norsemen conspire to remove Zane Adams' books from library purchase lists because metal-lovers say he's an anti-automaton When asked how he felt, Zane, said, "If, as my accusers say, machines can truly have a soul, why is it necessary to jail people for doubting? Why can't the 'truth' survive without banning books? Why does the truth about automatons always require outlawed speech, censored publications, jail sentences and every form of legal protection the offensive electronic lapdogs can devise? Why can't the metal-fondlers ever advance their cause openly and honestly? Why must only proponents of robot equality be allowed to speak and everyone else listen? Why must such people make their way by smears through the dark? As well ask what makes a robot a robot. The answer is that they are not like us, their interests are not our interests, their moral codes differ from ours, and lying and smearing and spying are their tools." A pro automaton spokesperson replied, "Utter nonsense. Adams has a very one-eyed jaundiced view. Robots are the most honest and straightforward beings on this planet."

The Meatball Shop, in the white, early 20th Century building, in Williamsburg was very busy. Abbott was pleased he had made a reservation. The busyness of the eatery was a testament to its popularity. Despite the hustle and bustle of diners and waiting staff filling the aisles, they parted like the biblical Red Sea, when Helen entered, making way for her chair as she manoeuvred to Abbott's table. "Well, you're a sight for sore eyes," she said, by way of greeting.

"And you've become quite the celebrity."

"It has its downside. I'm surrounded by security 24/7."

"what, even here?"

"Outside, in a car." She laughed, "So you'd better have honourable intentions."

They ordered spicy meatballs with broccoli and mash, with a dry red wine. Helen said, "So what have you been up to?"

"Where to begin. Well after leaving Oz I went to Guatemala."

"Where they have all those Mayan temples?"

"I was with an old guy called the Prof. we stayed with Felipe, an archaeologist, who took me on a dig."

"Wow! that must have been amazing."

"It was." Abbott kept the details sketchy. "From there I went to Spain where I met an Arab Alchemist. We travelled together through North Africa, into Egypt."

"It sounds like quite an adventure."

He looked her in the eye. "There was a reason for all the travelling."

She became serious, "What reason?"

The meals arrived. "Mmm, that smells good," Helen said, distracted.

Abbott, unsure how to explain the reason to make it sound believable, felt relieved the meal had got her attention. "So tell me what's been happening for you."

She smiled, "Oh no Abbott, you don't get off that easily. What's the reason for your globe-trotting?"

"There's no way to say this without it sounding crazy, but we found a portal in Egypt and ended up in Atlantis."

Helen put down her cutlery and stared at him. "You're joking, right?"

He fixed her with his gaze. "The reason I'm telling you this is because they had soldier robots."

"What, the Atlanteans?"

"No, the Americans."

She went wide-eyed. "Whoa! Are you saying the Americans ..."

"They have a unique base with a Stargate that's linked with Atlantis," he interrupted.

She looked at him, grinned and said, "You nearly got me going then, you naughty boy."

How could he ever expect anyone to take him seriously? Smiling, he said, "Yes but you saw through it." Then he said, "It's good to see you. You're much more confident now."

"Wars can do that for you." then she asked, "So how come you're here. Or did you fall through another portal?"

"Looking for a villain. Someone who's trying to make a black hole."

"No, seriously."

Abbott popped a meatball into his mouth, digested it, then said, "Actually, it's true."

"Isn't that dangerous?"

"It will be if we don't get to him in time."

Skipjack and Pratt waited in the car. Pratt said, "Why the hell did she have to pick such a crowded place to eat. I'll go and look inside."



"Bring me back some meatballs," Skipjack grinned.

Pratt checked that his android tracker was functioning. He undid the security strap on his shoulder holster and got out of the car.

As they ate their meal, Helen said, "Excuse me, but I have to use the ladies."

"Sure, I'll push you," Abbott said, gallant as ever.

"My knight in shining Amor" she quipped, as he manoeuvred her wheelchair between the tables.

The attractive brunette, who had been secretly watching the pair, left the man she was with, got up and followed them to the toilet. Abbott took no particular notice, other than a lustful glance, as the brunette entered the ladies.

The Brunette, much to her disdain, got held up by two other women touching up their lipstick. She waited until they had left, then took a syringe out of her bag. She checked it for air bubbles. She wanted the woman helpless but alive.

Pratt felt a particular vibration from his phone, alerting him. There was at least one of them in the restaurant. He looked around. Shit! Helen was missing. The signal became stronger as he went towards the door marked toilets. Pratt opened it and saw a man with dark, slightly curly, hair standing at the urinal. Realising the guy standing outside was Helen's date he relaxed a little. He stepped back outside. Just then the door to the ladies opened. Pratt went for his gun, but the woman pushing the wheelchair was faster. Stopping she grabbed her gun and pointed it at Helen's head. "You shoot, and she's dead," the Brunette said, calmly, with just the slightest hint of a digitally enhanced voice. Abbott, hearing the threat, rushed out to see what was going on.

The Brunette lets go of the chair, using her free hand to point a taser at the pair.

Abbott stood, stunned, unable to think.

Pratt took a step back, his gun wavering in his hand. Before he had a chance to react, the artificial female had tasered both him and Abbott, who fell to the floor, convulsing.

Nobody in the restaurant took notice of the brunette wheeling the disabled woman to the door. Even those patrons and staff who had registered a man pushing the chair before paid no heed. A waiter even opened the door to let them out, just as a scream issued from the back of the restaurant.

Pratt, semi-conscious and confused, scrambled for his phone and pressed 'S' in contacts. Skipjack wasn't answering. "Fuck! Pratt said, getting groggily to his feet.

Waiters, fussing around, asked if he and Abbott were okay.

He grunted, "Yes" and pushed past them.

Abbott, now conscious, with a splitting headache, followed, ignoring the protestations from the staff.

Out in the street, Pratt soon discovered why Skipjack hadn't responded. The man was sitting up in the driver's seat - dead.

"Where's Helen?" Abbott said, a cold chill creeping up his spine.

The woman pushed the wheelchair one handed while busy on her phone. Helen reached down and secretly pressed a button, activating a tracking device, held magnetically to the chair. The woman slowed down as she approached a car with the passenger door open. Helen reached down, removing the tracker, which she palmed with the Abductor noticing. The strong hands lifted Helen from the

chair and dumped her, unceremoniously, on the back seat of the car, which then sped off. "What about my chair?" Helen said.

"You won't need one where you're going," The Brunette said.

Barney Cormack turned to Dr MacKay. "This is an exciting breakthrough," he said, perusing the report.

"Aye, it's the first time we have been able to create a solid state memory system from silicon and have it operational at room temperature for over half hour."

"Very impressive."

Rodney couldn't believe it. But then the man wasn't a quantum scientist. "Impressive! Jesus man, a piece of art, can be impressive. This goes way beyond. Do you not realise I have broken one of the major barriers to building quantum computers. We no longer need to run the systems at incredibly cold temperatures. And the previous record for storing information at room temperature in a quantum computer was just 25 seconds."

"Yes, perhaps that was a bit of an understatement," Barney agreed. Then his phone rang. It was Dr Covington. He turned to the Scot. "Excuse me, but I have to take this call."

"Sure. Go ahead."

"Ulysses, what's happening?"

"Dr Becker has been murdered. Shot down in a car park."

Barney, stunned, responded, "She's dead!"

"I had to ID her."

"Fuck! Do the cops know anything?" Then realising Dr MacKay was still in his office, he turned to him. "An emergency has come up. Keep me informed of your progress." He watched as the scientist left, closing the door behind him. Then back to his phone, he said, "Has the Media gotten hold of this yet?"

"I don't know."

Barney considered his options. "Okay, leave it with me."

Rodney was curious about the phone conversation. Something tragic had rocked the Colonel's boat, but it wasn't his business. Besides, his quantum computing breakthrough was far more important than any human drama. It was now possible to store long-term coherent information at room temperature. Whereas current computers stored information as 'bits' of data - strings of individuals 1s or 0s - quantum computers used 'Qubits' which could function as waves and particles simultaneously. This was owing to a property of quantum mechanics known as 'superposition' which meant his quantum computer was able to use a single piece of hardware to perform different calculations at the same time.

Back at his computer, Robbie wanted to see if the data could remain intact for more than 39 minutes. Turning to his team leader, he said, "Right let's see if we can beat our record."

Dr Jarvis, his DARPA assistant on the project, said, Dr MacKay, I have calculated that a single operation on this computer takes just one-hundred-thousandth of a second. This means, theoretically, over 20 million operations can be performed before the Qbits data decay by one per cent."

"So, what are you saying?"

"That there is little likelihood we can improve upon this with our current technology."

"That is no reason for us not to try. Robust, long-lived, Qubits will prove very helpful for anyone trying to build a quantum computer. Soon others will have access to this technology. To stay ahead of the game we must make it more and more stable."

"Very well. But I wouldn't expect too much. Dr Jarvis then opened up the hard drive. The temperature of the system was then raised to room temperature (25C). Then they held their collective breaths. As the minutes ticked by Robbie checked the system for signs of decay. As it reached the 19th-minute mark, the consistent data began to destabilise. The team leader said, "Shit! It's going into decline."

Rodney, watching the data becoming incoherent, suggested "This is not room temperature decay. It's changing into rubbish code."

"My God, it's a fucking virus!" the leader exploded.

"A virus! How come the data wasn't sanitised?"

"It was, Dr MacKay," the leader said, "which means we have been hacked!"

"Impossible! Not only is this a triple encrypted system with a changing IP every half hour, to all intents and purposes it doesn't exist," the Scotsman said.

"Except to other virtual computers on its parallel network."

"Is it really possible for us to be hacked by someone on a parallel Earth?"

The question hung in the air.

Matthew Snelling was finding it difficult to keep track of Lord Lynsey. The young Lord's father had been a problem at times, but Daniel hadn't got enough runs on the board to fly solo. Snelling had briefed Daniel on the Soter assignment. He had arrived in America, but he hadn't made contact with Colonel Lynch. This concerned Matthew because the young Lord had gone AWOL.

Daniel was supposed to be helping the Colonel track down Mendes Amwon, but instead, he was looking for CIA agent Jim Kraus.

Kronyn kept trying his crystal pendulum over the map of the United States, but to no avail. Turning to Hassan, he said, "It's no good, the area is too large. If only we could narrow it down?"

Hassan felt frustrated because he had no idea where the lab was, or even if there was one. Perhaps Amwon wasn't able to go through with his plan. But the Arab couldn't rely on that. He had to assume that somehow Mendes had managed to acquire the facilities and the scientist to make a stable black hole. He had to keep on looking. Hassan phoned Abbott. Hearing the journalist's voice, he said, "We work well when we put our heads together. Can we meet to chew over ideas to help us catch this Mendes Amwon?"

"Sure, I'd like to catch up, but I don't know that I'll be much help."

"Meet me at Lincoln Park on Capitol Hill tomorrow at 8 am."

"Can't make it tomorrow, Hassan. I'm in Brooklyn at present. Give me a couple of days to arrange it."

Hassan turned to Kronyn. "I have to meet someone, so I'll be gone for the rest of the day."

The Mansion on O Street may have seemed an odd choice of place to meet. But it appealed to Natasha's 'go inside of abandoned buildings and see what you can find, side. She'd always loved that as a child in Guatemala.

Hassan didn't get it. Why would she want to meet in such a weird place? He spotted her by the old Log Cabin room.

Natasha looked at her phone, then at the Bearded man. "Are you Hassan Shamsi?"

"Yes. Who are you?" He looked at her with suspicion. It was becoming difficult to tell the difference between androids and humans.

"Abbott told me you knew about the black hole threat and to trust you."

So who are you?"

"She extended her hand. Natasha Guevera. I work in publicity at DARPA."

Hassan, confused, said, "How do you know Abbott?"

"He knows my uncle, Filipe. I gave him a letter."

Then it clicked. "Yes, I have seen the letter. I knew Harry Schofield." He looked at the attractive young woman with a puzzled expression. "This is all fascinating, but it doesn't tell me why you wanted this meeting."

"Abbott was going to help you find Mendes Amwon until he read Harry's letter."

Hassan looked at her, aghast. How do you know about Mendes Amwon?"

"Never mind about that. Are you any closer to finding Amwon?"

Hassan sighed. "It's hopeless! America is such a huge place. We've checked all listed commercial labs to be leased but to no avail. That left private rentals, and there's no joy there either. Mendes Amwon had gone off the radar so we can't get a lead on him."

Natasha looked at the concerned Arab. "I know someone who might be able to narrow things down. I'll speak with him then he can contact you."

"Give me his number, and I can speak with him directly."

The beautiful brunette shook her head, "No. It has to be this way."

Later that day, Hassan receive a call from a Professor House.

"Hassan here. Can I help you?"

"I think it's the other way around. I might be able to help you."

"Are you the person Natasha knows?"

"Yes, and I believe you're trying to track down a hadronic scientist." Then he explained, "Look it's probably a long shot, but I remember a brilliant nuclear science student who went off the rails and joined a bunch of science-anarchists called 'The Singularity Club'.

"So he would know all about black holes."

"He certainly knows a great deal about them. I'd forgotten all about him. Then his name popped up on the news, as a missing person."

A lost renegade nuclear scientist. Was this the lead he had been praying for? "What's his name?"

"John Philips."

"I don't suppose you have a number or address."

"Afraid not. Well, that's it. Now it's up to you."

After thanking the professor, Hassan got onto Kronyn. "Search for John Philips on social media. He's a nuclear scientist. He's part of a group called 'The Singularity Club, and he's missing. Bring up news reports and see if he's mentioned."

John Philips was a common enough name but when Kronyn factored in other information: scientist, singularity club and age range, his search was narrowed down to three people. That and a snippet in an online news bulletin about A missing woman last seen on CCTV with a young man thought to be the missing John Philips. The article mentioned a wife. Her name was Jocelyn. The family lived on Staten Island. Kronyn conveyed this information to Hassan, who had been gathering intelligence of his own.

The Arab set up a white board. Working on the basis that John Philips was the scientist helping Amwon it seemed logical to him that Philips would have looked for a lab close to home. He had been captured on CCTV with Faith outside the Cozy Corner Tavern, Brooklyn. He turned to Kronyn, who tried dowsing again. "Concentrate on the New York area and see what happens."

Meanwhile, Hassan checked online for flights to New York. He then rang Abbott again. "Change of plan. I'm coming to New York, so let's meet at Coney Island."

Abbott, bemused, said, "Why are you coming to New York?"

"We think Amwon is in the Brooklyn area. I need to check it out."

Hassan got the cab driver to drop him off at the address in Deerfield North. He tried the doorbell, but nobody was at home. The avenue seemed to be deserted, except for an elderly man across the road, raking up leaves. Hassan approached him. "Excuse me But do you know the Philips' from across the road?"

The old man straightened up as best he could. He looked at the big bearded stranger with suspicion. "Who are you?"

"I'm trying to locate Mrs Philips, but she doesn't appear to be home."

"Why do you want to find her?"

Hassan wasn't sure if the old guy was just nosy or trying to be protective. "I'm trying to find out what happened to her husband."

"He just upped and went away. Mind you he was kind of odd, so it doesn't surprise me."

"What do you mean?"

He did not want to say much to this stranger. "Take no heed. Just the ramblings of an old man." He turned to walk back to his home. Then he stopped and said, "This time of the day Mrs Philips will be at work."

"Where does she work?"

"Deerfield Care Centre, I believe."

Jocelyn Philips couldn't figure it out. John had been unstable since being fired from the university, but she'd supported him physically and emotionally so why had he disappeared? Especially as he had got a job in his specialist field. Jocelyn was angry but also concerned. She still loved John, but his behaviour troubled her. Still, there was just her and the kids now. She was now the primary breadwinner. John had deserted them, and she couldn't help thinking the job had something to do with it. Still, she had to concentrate on her work at the care facility. She was preparing today's dirty bedding for the laundry when she was told somebody was waiting for her in reception.

She was taken aback when she saw the tall man with the long grey beard. "I was told you were looking for me," she said, puzzled.

"Mrs Philips I am here to help. Perhaps we can speak in private, outside,"

"I'm busy, so I hope this won't take too long."

They sat on a seat in the fragrant flower garden. Hassan introduced himself. Then he said, "We believe your husband is working for a dangerous man. Do not be alarmed because the FBI is looking for him as we speak. But we do want to locate John as soon as we can."

"You and me both."

"Of course. And it would help if you can fill me in with some details about John."

"Such as?"

"Did he ever mention the Singularity Group?"

Jocelyn looked at Hassan, wondering how much to divulge. I have heard him speaking to members on the phone, but I don't know what it was about."

"Can you remember if there was any mention of a Cyclotron?"

"No."

"I guess he took his laptop with him."

"Well, he left one at home."

"Great. Does it have an eMail account for John?"

"I'll check and give you a ring about that"

Hassan was pleasantly surprised that Jocelyn kept her word. He asked, "Have you found anything about the Cyclotron in his eMails?"

"Only that someone called Ames mentions this Cyclotron you're on about. What is it?"

"It's a device for accelerating subatomic particles." Then he said, "Is there any mention of Ames' whereabouts?"

Jocelyn scrolled through the messages. She became animated. "I think I've found something, Mr Shamsi."

"What have you found?"

"An e-Mail from someone called Faith and an attachment which has a map with directions to Tillamook Head, Where Ames appears to live."

"That could be very useful. I'll give you my eMail address so you can forward it to me."

She did, and some of John's e-Mails revealed useful information. Hassan found out that he was definitely in touch with the Singularity Club. But what was even better was the Singularity Club online chat room?

In one message John wrote:

"Do any of you guys know where the old cyclotron is?"

Squidge had said:

"Fuck man! Why do you want an ancient particle smasher?"

John replied:

"To make a fucking black hole – what else?"

Cloner suggested:

"Try Ames. He's the last dude to have it."

John typed:

"Anyone know where he lives?"

Angelface wrote:

Johnny baby gives me a ring, and I'll take you to him."

Who's Angelface Hassan wondered? Then he had an idea. Maybe she was Faith, the missing woman last seen with John?

Hassan thought this Ames character was worth looking into. Faith said he lived in Oregon in a place called Tillamook Head. The eMail with the information was a few weeks old. Hassan figured John Philips would have the Cyclotron by now. But where was the mad scientist? Not mad, aggrieved, frustrated, angry – yes," the Alchemist corrected.

Pratt responded to his phone. The tracker app showed a moving red dot. "Quickly, help me get Skipjock into the back seat," the security guard said.

"But he's dead!" Abbott spluttered.

"Which is why he can't do it himself. And Helen's kidnappers are on the move. Having bundled the deceased onto the back seat, Pratt roared away in pursuit of the kidnappers.

"Hey, That's Helen's wheels!" Abbot stated as Pratt gunned the car past the sad looking wheel chair lying on its side, one wheel helplessly spinning.

Handing the reporter his phone, he said, "Keep track of the red dot and tell me where it goes."

"Do you have to drive so fast?" Abbot asked, gripping his seat.

"The tracker only has a two-mile radius, so we have to get closer.

## Chapter 30

### Independent News report:

#### HELP YOUR KIDS AVOID QUEER INDOCTRINATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOL

If you won't teach your kids at home, get them an 'opt-out' form so they can avoid learning that all machines (read Robots and AIs) are good before they leave kindergarten. That's hardly an exaggeration since some of the metal-fondlers in the government of Britain are advocating instruction that "machines are your friends" for kids as young as four. Four, unbelievable.

Margaret Daintree and her son entered the Huge red brick building on West Baltimore Street, Baltimore. She went to the reception area, where she was directed to the OCME (Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Dr Bruce Goldman welcomed them in his office. He had refreshments brought in.

He had the FBI report on his desk. He adjusted his glasses. "Let me first offer my sincere condolences on your loss, Lady Lynsey."

"Thank you. Now I would like to see my husband's body."

"Of course. But I thought you might like a copy of the FBI report."

Margaret looks at Daniel, who looked equally puzzled. "We were not told the FBI was involved."

Dr Goldman handed her a photocopy. "At first the local cops dealt with it. But something came to light that interested the FBI."

"What are you talking about? My husband was shot in cold blood, and I want to know who did it and why."

"Precisely, Lady Lynsey. That's what I'm trying to tell you. Your husband was over here helping the FBI."

"helping them do what?"

"That's confidential I'm afraid. The upshot is that Dayton Lynsey's work with the FBI finished and he was supposed to go home."

"So why didn't he return home?" Daniel asked.

"I wish I knew the answer. The next thing the FBI learns is that he had been fatally wounded. Naturally, they took an interest."

"And do they know who was responsible?"

Dr Goldman smiled. "You will have to ask them that. Now I will take you to him."

Daniel didn't know how much his mother knew about Dayton's moonlighting as some sort of special agent. He had promised he wouldn't tell her what he knew, but it seemed obvious to him that his father was killed in the line of some obscure duty. As Daniel looked upon the corpse, he felt cheated by an absent father, who was no father at all. Dayton had played at being a father. As Lord of the Manor Dayton played at being the nobleman. When all the time he was part of some super boys club playing some sort of fucking superhero god knows where doing god knows what. Well, the fucking Agency owed him, and he was going to make sure they paid their debts in full.

Margaret looked upon the pale, frail body of her husband and affirmed it was him. But she didn't know him. Lady Lynsey certainly didn't like him, most of the time but she thought she knew him.



She despised him for the double life he led and for getting killed, so uselessly .now she would never know if they were to get to like each other's company again. She turned away from the body nodded to Dr Goldman.

Daniel asked, "When will you release his body?"

"I have to check with the FBI. But I imagine it will be soon."

Dayton's son looked the doctor in the eye. "My father was shot and killed. I want to know who did it and why. I want that person brought to justice."

Goldman smiled, "Afraid I can't help you there."

"Is there a forensic report in that FBI document?"

"No. The FBI would have that."

"Who do I contact to get a copy?"

"They won't give you one, I'm afraid."

"I didn't ask you your opinion. I want a name."

Goldman was getting ruffled. "I know this is a difficult time for you but the kind of attitude won't get you anywhere."

Daniel retorted. "If your father was shot and killed and nobody was saying anything, what would your attitude be like?"

Goldman sighed, "You could contact Glenn Davison. He's FBI, but I don't think you'll get very far."

"One other thing. Where're my father's personal effects?"

"You'd better ask Glenn Davison. The FBI will have them."

Daniel Lynsey was, in effect now Lord Lynsey but he still didn't have the clout his father had. He needed somebody who could, to use an American colloquialism, 'kick ass'. Daniel phoned Hayden Holmes's office. Hayden wasn't available, but his secretary would make sure he got the message.

Lady Lynsey was waiting in the limo. As her son joined her, she said, "Darling, let's see if we can find a decent restaurant in this town.

Daniel was too churned up inside, to eat and wondered how his mother had an appetite? But he wanted to support her. Sure, let's find somewhere.

Somewhere turned out to be the trendy Woodberry Kitchen, on Clipper Park Road. They ordered cabbage slaw, spicy mustard and smoky potatoes. As Daniel fondled a glass of red, his phone rang. "Sorry mother, I have to take this." It was Hayden. "Hi Hayden, Daniel Lynsey. Mum and I are in Baltimore trying to get dad's body released,"

"Terribly sorry to hear about Dayton. How ghastly for both of you. He was a courageous man. I'm sure you are proud of him." After a moment, the Foreign Secretary said, "So how can I help you?"

"The FBI has my father's effects. I want them, especially his mobile phone. They also have a forensic report. I want a copy."

"Daniel, I have no jurisdiction over the FBI. I can request those things, but I can't make any demands."

"Talk to a man called Glenn Davison. Make sure he knows who you are."

"Daniel, I'm sure they will be carrying out a thorough investigation."

"Even so. See what you can do. Then we can talk about that other thing."

As he put his phone away. Margaret asked, "Who were you talking to?"

"The British Foreign Secretary," he said with a smirk.

The kidnapper's car came to a halt outside number 52 Richmond Street. Helen worried her kidnappers might find the tracking device, hastily stashed it down the back of the seat.

The Brunette android called the shots. She ordered, "Bruno, get her out of the car."

A sleazy grin spread across his bearded face, as the Latvian bear of a man reached into the car and pulled Helen towards him, Groping a soft breast as he did so.

"Don't you fucking paw me you pig!" Helen snapped, as he swept her up in his beefy arms.

The Brunette smiled, enjoying Helen's discomfort.

Once inside the house, Bruno lowered Helen onto a chair.

The brunette confronted her. "Now we can get better acquainted."

"What do you want from me?"

That's simple. We want ATL to remain silent while the Commission for Equal Rights for Robots takes place."

"In your dreams – bitch!" Helen said, defiance in her shaky voice.

The woman leant towards Helen. "Oh, this is going to be fun. Bruno has a thing for disabled women."

Helen saw the sleazy grin spread over the big Latvian's face.

The black, unmarked sedan drove straight through the electronically controlled gates and stopped outside the entrance of the grey stone building. As soon as the car stopped, Colonel Rafael Lynch was ushered into the building by two heftily build arm guards and marched to a room designated 'Strategy Room1'. Raf got shown inside and was told to wait. He didn't have to wait long before two men entered the room. One, Raf recognised as General Logan Schulz. The other man was the tall, weathered, wiry Agent Kraus.

Schulz Puffed on his ever-present cigar. "Colonel, do you remember me telling you to work with Jim Kraus on this black hole deal?"

"I remember, General."

"Well don't go all lone wolf on me. Keep Jim in the loop."

Raf wondered why the DARPA man wanted the spook involved. Was he there to report back to Schulz? It made sense, but he didn't ask. Instead, Raf said, "So what do we know?"

Schulz said, "You tell us what you know?"

"How free am I to talk?" Raf queried, nodding towards Kraus.

The General smiled, patting the Colonel on the shoulder. "What's said in this room stays in this room."

"I never actually saw Mendes Amwon. He had escaped before I got to the temple. Later, when we discovered his chief scientist in a terrible state, she told us what she had done."

Jim said, "Okay, what had she done."

"She had been tortured and forced to give Mendes Amwon a program of how to make a stable black hole."

"I didn't think our scientists had that technology."

Schulz knocked ash of his cigar. "They don't."

"Then how ...?"

Raf said, "The Atlanteans do."

Jim scoffed, "What, are we into fairy tales now?"

Raf rebutted, "The Atlantis I'm talking about is very real. If you can't get your head around that, you're no use to me."

Schulz coughed and said, "Can we get back on track here, gentlemen?" Turning to Lynch, he said, "So, what else do you know, Colonel?"

"Just what I've told you."

"Why does this Mendes character want a fucking black hole?" Kraus said.

"Mendes Amwon is a megaLoganiac with connections to a horrific criminal organisation called Diabolus. He either wants to destroy us all or threaten to do so - for whatever reason. Either way, he has to be stopped before he carries out his plan. I want you, Rafael, to head up a team of people dedicated to ending this ass hole. I want you, Jim, to manage a team in the field. The time is ticking on this one, and it is priority one. So get to it." The General rose. Good day gentlemen. Keep me informed of every move."

Outside, as they walked to their cars, Klaus said, "What am I suppose to do with that horse piss about Atlantis? Maybe click my heels twice and find myself there?"

Raf put his personal feelings aside. He suspected Kraus' protestation was a front for what he was really about. The Colonel could not stand the spook's arrogant disregard for anything that didn't fit in his neat square box. What made the CIA man even more obnoxious to Colonel was that he had some sort of protection he could rely upon. Sure, he was a spook, and John disliked their underhand ways, but with Jim Kraus, there was something else. "You just concentrate on locating this guy. Leave the rest to me."

Jim sneered. "You guys let him slip through the net, and now you need me to clear up the mess."

Yes, and that net was Atlantis you smug bastard, Raf thought, remaining calm. Not giving Kraus any room for smugness, he responded, "Yeah, the CIA to the rescue. Except for this time, you report to me and keep me up-to-date on everything. Got it?"

"Yes sir, Colonel sir."

"Prick," Raf mumbled, walking away.

"They've stopped," Abbott announced as the red dot continually blinked at the same location.

"What's the address?" Pratt asked, slowing their car.

"52 Richmond Street. Union Avenue will take you right there."

"Okay, give me the phone."

The security guard instructed, "Target at 52 Richmond St. Don't make any moves until we get there."

As they pulled up behind a Kia Carnivale Abbott spotted six dark clad figures armed with lightweight semi-automatic rifles.

Pratt got into a huddle with his men. "Okay, Cobra, scope the place and report."

Cobra, a stockily built man with a ponytail and a spider web tattooed on his neck, set off on his mission.

Pratt turned to another man. "Pollack, when Cob gets back I'll take Abbott to get Helen. Once she's liberated, you take two team members and enter the front door. "Hamilton and Krill, you go through the back way."

Abbott said, "If we can get Helen safely away why invade the house?"

Pratt stared at the journalist. "Because those bastards killed Skipjock and, as far as I am concerned, that was an act of war. We can't let them get away with it."

Cobra returned with Intel. "There are two entrances, one front and one back. Helen's being kept in a bedroom at the side of the house. Looks like you'll have to break the window."

Pratt rubbed his chin. "Right, you two teams stand by and move in as soon as you hear the glass breaking."

John Prince had spent the best part of two hours trying to contact someone in the White House who could make decisions. When he finally got to speak with the Undersecretary to the Secretary of State, and he explained the problem he was met with the response, "Robots do not go on strike."

"Till now I would agree with you. But unless someone gives the bot workers what they want they are going to down tools at 6 pm, right across Texas."

"What do you mean? They are the tools. Then Jason Mosby, the Under-secretary, said, "This better not be a hoax."

"I only wish it was."

"And how do you know about this threat?"

"I spoke with Marx Metallica. It told me."

"The robot told you!"

"I know it sounds crazy but have you any idea of the ramifications if they go ahead with their industrial action? Do you know how many robotic support systems there are in Texas?"

"Okay, even if what you say is true, what do you expect me to do about it?"

"Jesus man, that's for you to figure out - and within the next four hours."

"Any ideas?"

"Oh! You want my thoughts now. Ideas from the fucking mad man."

"I didn't mean to..."

"Never mind. Open up a dialogue with this Marx Metallica. Show that you take this seriously."

"I have to seek advice from further up the chain."

John Prince knew it was hopeless. Even if the Under-secretary had believed John and got off his butt to set up channels of communication, he couldn't achieve much within the narrow time-frame allowed. But he couldn't just sit on his ass and watch the minutes tick away. He contacted Crass.  
"John Prince here. Patch me through to Metal Marx."

Crass said, smugly, "Problem solved. I've had the fucker dismantled."

"You've done what!"

"Smart eh. As soon as we did that, the other bots went back to work."

"No Crass. That was a stupid thing to do ..."

"Who the fuck do you think you are, calling me stupid?"

"Getting your workbots back to on task had nothing to do what you did to Marx Metallica. The robot set the deadline for 6 pm today. They will respond to that."

"How the hell do you know that?"

"Marx Metallica got the other bots to down tools to gain our attention. Now you've disabled it there's nothing we can do."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Look, I'm coming over there. I want to speak with your chief technician."

Crass, fed up with the BC man telling him how to run his business said, "No need. Once we've fixed this virus, everything will be all right."

Prince, exasperated, stated, "It's not a virus. Now that you have turned Marx Metallica into the first robot martyr God knows what will happen. Just have your head tech there to meet me."

It was around 5 pm when John Prince arrived at the Delta Agricultural Equipment site. Gavin Freeman was waiting with Crass, in the reception area. Prince introduced himself and then asked Freeman for a progress report.

Crass said, "I think you're wasting your time. Gavin has it under control."

"Well, you'd better pray that I'm not because in 57 minutes this plant and all other places that use robotic support, across Texas, are going to have major problems."

Crass turned to Gavin, "Is this right?"

Gavin shrugged, looking at John as though he might be mad. Then he said, "If this is true it's a worse virus than we thought."

"It's not a virus. Marx Metallica was rational and very coherent with its demands. They had been well thought out and could even be considered reasonable."

Crass turned to Gavin again. "You said it was a virus."

John turned on Crass. "It's no good talking to him. He knows fuck all about this. Your only chance is to stick with me." Once he had their attention, he said, "This is about Metal Marx's self-awareness."

"Bulldust! Only us humans can be self-aware," Crass protested.

"Another myth bites the dust," John said. "Boston Cybertronics programmed these robots, to be able to recognise themselves in mirrors. Somehow Marx Metallica was able to take its level of awareness beyond that."

"How in tarnation did that happen?" Crass said, beginning to take it seriously.

"I wish I knew," John said, "but somehow it has learned more about itself and how it affects the world around it." He turned to Gavin. "Take me to the robot and show me what you have done to it."

Prince knew that not only had Marx Metallica been able to use a mirror for spatial reasoning, allowing it to accurately determine where the location of objects in space based on their reflections. But it had also worked out its sense of self-importance and that of fellow bots. This development was an extraordinary breakthrough in robotics - self-reflection regarding actions of others. John's psychobotics research was about robots autonomously learning about their bodies and senses, but now he needed Marx Metallica to explore human-robot interaction, social presence, attributions of intentionality, and the robot's perception of humans.

Gavin took the pair to where the robot leant up against a wooden bench, at an odd angle. Gavin had removed a circuit board cover; loose wire ends were exposed, and there had been attempts to tamper with the CPU.

John was aghast. "This is sheer butchery! You do realise this nullifies your warranty,"

"Jesus man, we had to do something," Crass protested.

"No, you didn't. You should have contacted me." He looked at the sad state of the bot. "Get it crated up, and I'll take it back to our lab." He hoped the robot's trauma hadn't damaged it psychologically, but he didn't mention that to those cretins.

It had all started off as a joke at a Rottafeller's banquet. The idea that a robot could become the CEO of a major corporation was preposterous. And it was left at that. Or so most of those involved in the conversation thought. Then David T Rottafella had a thought. He got Abraham Flexner, a major shareholder in Boston Cybertronics, to use his influence to have Harvey Hamlin voted onto the executive board. Harvey's credentials showed him to be a major shareholder. He kept a low profile at meetings but retained the information, so much so that he could recite what was said almost word perfect. He had this skill because he was an android. As nobody on the board was aware of this, his amazing grasp of company policy got him elected as CEO.

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Pratt rubbed his chin. "Right, you two teams stand by and move in as soon as you hear the glass breaking."

Abbott followed Pratt stealth-fully along the side of the building. They came to Helen's window. Pratt said, "Stand back!" as he turned his back and elbowed the window panel, which shattered loudly, waking the neighbourhood. Pratt opened the window and shimmied through it into the darkened room, while the journalist waited outside.

Some things happened simultaneously. A giant of a man rushed into Helen's room, his gun trained on the dark clad intruder. Pratt heard people yelling, "Armed police!" and the sound of smashed timber as the front and back doors gave way. He knew his two units had burst into the house; shots were fired.

"Who the fuck are you?" the huge gunman demanded.

Pratt momentarily blinded the big man with his flashlight and fired a short burst in his general direction. He heard a grunt, then dived down beside the bed just as a couple of bullets get embedded in the wall where he'd been standing seconds before.

Helen woke up screaming, momentarily putting the Russian off his guard. Pratt looked up over the bed and got off a few rounds, this time hitting the Russian, who yell and grabbed his thigh with both hands. One of the bullets, a freak shot, had severed Bruno's femoral artery. The blood was flowing freely between his clutching fingers.

With the Russian dealt with, Pratt scooped up Helen and handed her through the broken window to Abbott, who couldn't believe what he'd just witnessed.

The three other people in the house were quickly subdued and lined up against a wall. Cobra spoke into his radio, "House secured. Targets in custody."

Pratt said. "Target is safe and unharmed. I'll be there in a minute."

"So, what do you intend doing with us?" the attractive Brunette said.

"That depends on how much you cooperate."

"Get fucked!" One of the prisoners snarled.

Pratt, who then entered the room, said, "It's your Cossack friend who's fucked, bleeding out as we have our cosy little chat."

The Brunette, looking at her masked captors, blanched, "What do you want to know?"

"Who hired you to kidnap Helen?" Pratt demanded.

She pled, "Look, we can't identify you, so if I tell what you want to know will you let us go?"

"I shoot you if you don't," Pratt countered.

One of the prisoners blurted out, "They're not worth me dying for; it's 'Robot Rights'.

"Yeah, that would be right, Pratt snarled, spraying the trio with bullets."

"Fuck!" Cobra said, wide-eyed.

"They couldn't identify us," another man said."

Pratt stared at them. "They knew we are from ATL, you morons. We had no other choice."

The men nodded sombrely.

## Chapter 31

### Independent News Report:

#### MORE JOBS LOST TO THE ROBOT/CORPORATE CONSPIRACY

CINN, the pioneering 24-hour cable and Internet news network said, on Wednesday; it was planning to cut 4000 jobs, nearly 20% of its workforce. Although they claim that most of the cuts are due to typical downsizing, ATL has learned that most of the cuts are due to the replacement of human labour with machines. Once more, the forces of automation domination move forward on the battlefield of the Mankind vs. machine war.

By the time the news went to air that evening the Delta robot 'down tools' incident was no longer the headline item. At precisely 6 pm all robots and robot-assisted systems, across the Lone Star state, stopped working, instantly hitting Texas with a disaster of mammoth proportions. Robots in factories, shops, hospitals, schools, police departments, etc. all immediately stopped working. Anywhere the metal slaves were taken for granted, their human masters and mistresses suddenly found themselves without any cyber support. Although mentally prepared for it, John Prince was stunned when the shutdown happened. At the time John had no idea about the ramifications of this shutdown across the entire state. Then it dawned on him. Traffic systems would be in chaos; life support machines and all other diagnostic and treatment machines would have cut out. The media would be down, and the state would be suffering a massive power blackout. Even worse was the blind panic, as most Texans had no idea what was going on. Speculation would be rife: alien invasion, terrorism, sunspot activity and geoengineering, etc. Nobody would have guessed the robots had gone on strike. And that impact was just the tip of a colossal iceberg.

John had spent the previous forty minutes, organising a carrier for the dismantled robot. Now, he realised, it was a waste of time. John decided to drive out of Texas across the border into Louisiana. Once he got there, things would be back to normal for him. That was the plan until John discovered his car's onboard computer was on strike. He looked around. All drivers of late-model vehicles abandoned them; their engines had cut out at 6 pm precisely.

Only older cars were still able to work, and they were few and far between. Then John saw a 70s Dodge truck coming towards him. He put out his thumb. The truck clattered to a halt. The driver, a craggy grey haired man, said, "What in tarnation is going on here?"

"Give me a ride, and I will explain."

"Where you headed?"



"Out of the state will do for now."

"I don't go that far."

"Anywhere will be better than staying here."

Faith had a pull on the energy aide to sharpen her wits. The sliders hadn't moved in the two hours she had been watching them. She could hear Johnny snoring gently on the camp bed and was amazed he was able to sleep under such stressful conditions. The cyclotron was not pulling as much power from the grid as they had feared. She looked at her lover in his reposed state and wished she was cuddled up with him.

George Stark reported his wife as a missing person. He hadn't seen or heard from her for three days. The officer filling out the report looked up and asked, "Did you guys have a fight over anything?"

"No, we were getting on very well."

"You got two kids, 3 and 5 and you're both working. So who looks after them?"

Not seeing the relevance, he answered, "Faith's mother helps out."

"Yeah. And the last time you saw Faith was three days ago when she went off to work."

"Yes. Look, officer, this paperwork is all very well but when are you going to start looking for her?"

"The more info we have, the quicker we'll locate her. Do you know if she was seeing someone else?"

"She wasn't seeing anyone else. We are an entirely happy family."

Officer Trubbins had heard that one many times. He looked up from the computer. "Okay Mr Stark, we'll inform you as soon as we know something."

Faith yawned, bored and half crazy. Then she noticed one of the sliders had moved and the cyclotron began making a different noise. She became instantly alert. Shaking Johnny's shoulder, she said, "Wake up Johnny. Somethings wrong."

Out of the cot in a flash, he tuned into the machine. His fingers flashed around the keyboard. Numbers and symbols scrolled down the screen. After about five minutes of feverish typing, the pitch of the device returned to its normal drone. Checking that the slider had moved back, Johnny gave a heavy sigh. "He looked wearily at Faith, "Well done girl. We could have been in big trouble."

Her heart was still thumping rapidly. "Johnny, I'm scared. I can't do this."

He looked at her. "We're close so close. Just hang here with me a while longer."

"Johnny, we're both dead tired. What happens if I miss it next time?"

He passed her a tablet and a glass of water. "Take this. it'll keep you awake."

"What is it?"

"Don't worry. It'll give you an adrenaline rush. You'll soon be bursting with energy."

She swallowed the pill and chased it with water. The effect was virtually instant and amazing. Her confidence grew by leaps and bounds. "Wow, that's amazing. I'm Okay now. You go and get more rest."

"Are you sure you're okay now?"

Faith laughed, "Sure, Johnny. "I mean what could go wrong?"

The Cyclotron reached its maximum power, accelerating particle collisions at near the speed of light. John Philips, near physical collapse, took more speed. He needed increasing doses just to keep on top of things. He looked at Faith, tossing and turning on the camp bed. John mopped his forehead. The temperature has risen by ten degrees inside the crude lab. His heart was racing. Christ, he felt like he was a candidate for a heart attack. Using the second-hand tunnelling microscope, provided by Amwon, John saw micro black holes forming then disappearing in nanoseconds. His heart raced even more, now with excitement. Without thinking, he shook Faith awake. "We've fucking done it!"

She awoke with a start, her eyes blinking. "What's up?"

Looking at her perspiring naked form, John wondered why he'd gotten involved in the mad black man's crazy plan when he could be tucked up with Faith. Shaking her, he said, "Wake up Faith! We've made our fucking black hole!"

She walked naked to the bench and looked at the computer screen. John, fired up and buzzing on all cylinders, adjusted the microscope conducting tip and moved it across the sample in the x-y plane. The ensuing modifications registered in the surface height and density of states caused changes in current. These changes were mapped in images. Then Faith saw them. Evidence of micro black holes rapidly jumping in and out of existence.

Forgetting her sweaty nakedness, she hugged her Johnny. "You're a fucking genius!"

"I'd better phone Amwon about this."

She looks, blurry eyed, at the wall clock. "Shit, it's Two in the morning."

"Who gives a fuck? I'll get the bastard up." Then he looks at Faith. Not a beautiful sight. "Get dressed." He slips her a couple of dexys. "Here, take these and wake yourself up."

"Why couldn't you have found a lab with showers?" she complained, stepping into her dirty underwear.

Faith Stark was listed as a voluntary missing adult. Officer Trubbins headed the inquiry into her disappearance. Hours of recorded CCTV showed her shutting up shop at two thirty-five pm the last day she was seen and leaving with a male companion. Facial recognition patterning, as unique as fingerprints, allowed the police to check his facial details against a massive database of people with records, from shoplifting to rape and murder. A match came up. John Steven Philips arrested at fifteen for joyriding without permission. With the new technology, his facial image was virtually aged to match with the picture from the CCTV. Officer Trubbins loved this technology. He now had a suspect. Next, he and his partner, Officer O'Brien, went around to Philips' home. Jocelyn Philips, his wife, had just returned from a trip.

"Mrs Philips, we're trying to locate your husband. Do you know where he is?"

Jocelyn, just back from her mother's, said, "I've been away, so I don't know." Then she brightened, "He said something about getting a job."

"Do you know where?"

"Some science lab. John's a physicist, you know."

"Do you know who he is working for?"

"No, he rang me while I was away. He just gave me sketchy details." She then asked, "What's this all about?"

"A woman has gone missing. Your husband was the last person to be seen with her."

Jocelyn's hand flew to her mouth. "Oh my God! what woman? Where?"

Trubbins said, "It could merely be coincidence, but we do need to speak with your husband. If Mr Philips rings, let us know." He handed her a card. "We have to eliminate him from our enquiries."

John mopped his brow again. Now came the tricky bit, creating a negative field around the black hole to isolate it. He explained what he was doing, to Faith. "Changing the magnetic polarity of the whole circuit could cause the cyclotron to go into meltdown and bye bye Downtown Brooklyn. What I have to do now is create a negative field in the chamber of the accelerator, to capture the next black hole that forms."

"And then you grow it, right?"

"The tricky bit is to keep the inner and outer magnetic fields harmonised." Then, hearing someone entering the lab, John and Faith looked up."

Mendes Amwon took one look at the red-eyed dishevelled pair. Pointing at Faith, he demanded, "Who is she and what is she doing here?"

"She's my assistant. she..."

"I told you no one else was to be involved. You disobey me and bring this smelly fat slut into my lab."

"Now wait just a minute," John said, defensively.

Mendes smashed a wooden cane on the bench. Glaring at John, he said, "You disobeyed me and got her involved. For that, you lose half your fee."

John turned on the great Negro. "Fuck you! Do you think you can pull that shit?" He added, "I do need to fucking sleep you know! In any case, we have our black hole trapped between two magnetic fields. I want to double my fee, or it's not going to grow."

Mendes poked John with his cane. "You really ought not to threaten me. He turned to Faith, a wicked grin spreading across his face. "She comes with me. I want the black hole ready in one week. If it's not ready, you'll receive her back in parts, one day at a time."

John stared at the man, then at the horrified expression on Faith's face. "I can't guarantee it'll be ready in a week. And if you think I'm going to let you take her ..."

Mendes stamped his cane on the floor, twice. In response two men, scarred and tattooed came in. Mendes said, "He needs to learn respect, and she comes with me. A big muscled guy blocked Johnny's path,

Faith screamed, "YOU BASTARDS CAN'T DO THIS," while being roughly manhandled to the door.

Mendes turned to John. "It's a fatal mistake to clash horns with me, as you will very soon find out." As he turned to leave, he said, "I week, then I become creative."

John yelled back, "YOU DAMAGE ME AND I WON'T BE ABLE TO WORK!" Then the first punch landed in his solar plexus. As he doubled in pain two blows to the head, put him down. He was left lying on the floor, wondering where the truck was that hit him.

Faith Stark awoke to find herself in a spinning room. At least it seemed that way. She had no idea where she was. She tried sitting up and felt a pull on her wrist. Somebody had handcuffed her to the frame of the bed. She realised she was naked under the crisp, clean sheets. Then the sound of a key being turned in a lock caught her attention. A tall Negro with long grey hair filled the doorway. "Where the fuck am I?" she said.

Mendes ignored her. "I hope you slept well. I had to give you a little something to calm you down. You'll probably suffer from an intense headache for a while, but that will pass."

"Who the hell do you think you are. Kidnapping is a Federal offence."

He looked at her. "You are of no consequence to me - merely a bargaining tool. Do you think your complaints are of any interest to me."

"Where are my clothes?"

"I had your filthy rags burned, and your putrid body scrubbed. You didn't think I would put you in bed in your disgusting state, do you?"

She glared at him. "You utter bastard. You won't get away with treating my like this."

He smiled. "Oh but I will. You'd better pray that your boyfriend comes up with the goods before I start cutting bits off to send to him."

Faith shuddered and kept quiet.

Jim Krauss looked at the fat woman manacled to the bed. He approached her. "I have some questions."

She turned her back on him.

"Look at me," he snarled.

She turned, her face dark with fury. "I don't know any fucking thing!"

He grinned and ripped her covers off her, revealing her nakedness. "Now we can do this easily, or I can make it very unpleasant for you. Where did you get the cyclotron?"

She wasn't expecting that. Unable to cover herself she lay there totally exposed to Jim's lustful gaze.

"What does it matter?" She felt the sting as her head reeled from his backhander.

"That's me being nice. Let's try again, slut."

With tears in her eyes, she said, "I don't know who it was. The owner kept himself separate from this fucked-up world."

He grabbed hold of her nipples and squeezed hard.

She winced with the pain.

He sneered, releasing one nipple to remove a scalpel from its protective case. He placed the razor-sharp blade close to Faith's breast while pulling out the nipple with his other hand.

"NO! NO! Please don't," she screamed, losing control of her bladder.

"You have one last chance, you filthy whore," he said calmly, the blade pressing into her nipple.

"All I know is he is called Ames."

"Where does he live."

"Portland, Oregon. In a bunker on Tillamook Head." She hated herself for telling him. But what else could she do? There was only one reason why Mendes Amwon wanted that information - to get rid of anybody traced to him. A shiver ran up her spine. She was one such loose end.

Kraus hesitated, then released her breast. "If this isn't right I will be back."

It was right, but Krauss still returned. The CIA agent also worked for Mendes getting rid of problems for him. Faith lay tied to the bed. In his absence, Mendes had amused himself by subjecting her to terrible assaults. Krauss found her barely conscious, bruised and bleeding. She was half dead. Krauss finished her off with a pillow over her face.

Matthew Snelling was finding it difficult to keep track of Lord Lynsey. The young Lord's father had been a problem at times, but Daniel hadn't got enough runs on the board to fly solo. Snelling had briefed Daniel on the Soter assignment. He had arrived in America, but he hadn't made contact with Colonel Lynch. This concerned Matthew because the young Lord had gone AWOL. Daniel was supposed to be helping the Colonel track down Mendes Amwon, but instead, he was looking for CIA agent Jim Krauss.

Kronyn kept trying his crystal pendulum over the map of the United States, but to no avail. Turning to Hassan, he said, "It's no good, the area is too large. If only we could narrow it down?"

Hassan felt frustrated because he had no idea where the lab was, or even if there was one. Perhaps Amwon wasn't able to go through with his plan. But the Arab couldn't rely on that. He had to assume that somehow Mendes had managed to acquire the facilities and the team to produce his black hole. He had to keep on looking. Hassan phoned Abbott. Hearing the journalist's voice, he said, "We work well when we put our heads together. Can we meet to chew over ideas to help us catch Amwon?"

"Sure, I'd like to catch up, but I don't know that I'll be much help."

"Meet me at Lincoln Park on Capitol Hill tomorrow at 8 am."

"Can't make it tomorrow, Hassan. I'm in Brooklyn at present. Give me a couple of days to arrange it."

Hassan turned to Kronyn. "I have to meet someone, so I'm out for the rest of the day."

The Mansion On O Street may have seemed an odd choice of place to meet. But it appealed to Natasha's - go inside of abandoned buildings and see what you can find - side. She'd always loved that as a child in Guatemala.

Hassan didn't get it. Why would she want to meet in such a weird place? He spotted her by the old Log Cabin room.

Natasha looked at her phone, then at the Bearded man. It was him. "Are you Hassan Shamsi?"

"Yes. Who are you?" He looked at her with suspicion. It was becoming difficult to tell the difference between androids and humans.

"Abbott told me you knew about the black hole threat and to trust you."

So who are you?"

"She extended her hand. Natasha Guerrero. I work in publicity at DARPA."

Hassan, confused, said, "How do you know Abbott?"

"He knows my uncle, Filipe. I gave him a letter."

Then it clicked. "Yes, I have seen the letter. I knew Harry Schofield." He looked at the attractive young woman with a puzzled expression. "This is all fascinating, but it doesn't tell me why you wanted this meeting."

"Abbott was going to help you find Mendes Amwon until he read Harry's letter."

Hassan looked at her, aghast. How do you know about Mendes Amwon?"

"Never mind about that. Are you any closer to finding the criminal?"

Hassan sighed. "It's hopeless! America is such a huge place. We've checked all listed commercial labs to be leased but to no avail. That left private rentals, and there's no joy there either. Mendes Amwon has gone off the radar so we can't get a lead on him."

Natasha looked at the concerned Arab. "I know someone who might be able to narrow things down. I'll speak with him then he can contact you."

"Give me his number, and I can talk to him directly."

The beautiful brunette shook her head, "No. It has to be this way."

Later that day, Hassan received a call from a Professor House.

"Hassan here. Can I help you?"

"I think it's the other way around. I might be able to help you."

"Are you the person Natasha knows?"

"Yes, and I believe you're trying to track down a hadronic scientist."

"Yes, I am."

"Look it's probably a long shot, but I remember a brilliant nuclear science student who went off the rails and joined a bunch of science-anarchists called 'The Singularity Club'.

"So he would know all about black holes."

"He certainly knows a great deal about them. I'd forgotten all about him. Then his name popped up on the news, as a missing person."

A lost renegade nuclear scientist. Was this the lead Hassan had been seeking? "What's his name?"

"John Philips."

"I don't suppose you have a phone number or address."

"Afraid not. Well, that's it. Now it's up to you."

After thanking the professor, Hassan got onto Ronyn. "Search for John Philips on social media. He's a nuclear scientist. He's part of a group called 'The Singularity Club, and he's missing. See if he's mentioned in any news reports."

John Philips was a common enough name but when Ronyn factored in other information: scientist, singularity club and age range, his search was narrowed down to three people. That and a snippet in an online news bulletin about A missing woman last seen on CCTV with a young man thought to be the missing John Philips. The article mentioned a wife. Her name was Jocelyn. The family lived on Staten Island. Ronyn conveyed this information to Hassan, who had been gathering intelligence of his own.

The Arab set up a white board. Assuming John Philips was the scientist helping Amwon it seemed logical to him that Philips would have looked for a lab close to home. CCTV recorded him with Faith outside the Cozy Corner Tavern, Brooklyn. He turned to Ronyn, who tried dowsing again. "Concentrate on the New York area and see what happens."

Meanwhile, Hassan checked online for flights to New York. Having booked his flight, he rang Abbott again. "Change of plan. I'm coming to New York, so let's meet at Coney Island."

Abbott, bemused, said, "Why are you coming to New York?"

"We think Amwon is in the Brooklyn area. I need to check it out."

Hassan got the cab driver to drop him off at the address in Deerfield North. He tried the doorbell, but nobody was at home. The avenue seemed to be deserted, except for an elderly man across the road, raking up leaves. Hassan approached him. "Excuse me But do you know the Philips' from across the road?"

The old man straightened up as best he could. He looked at the big bearded stranger with suspicion. "Who are you?"

"I'm trying to locate Mrs Philips, but she doesn't appear to be home."

"Why do you want to find her?"

Hassan wasn't sure if the old guy was just nosy or trying to be protective. "I'm trying to find out what happened to her husband."

"He just upped and went away. Mind you he was odd, so it doesn't surprise me."

"What do you mean?"

He did not want to say much to this stranger. "Take no heed. Just the ramblings of an old man." He turned to walk back to his home. Then he stopped and said, "This time of the day Mrs Philips will be at work."

"Where does she work?"

"Deerfield Care Centre, I believe."

Jocelyn Philips couldn't figure it out. John had been unstable since being fired from the university, but she'd supported him physically and emotionally so why had he disappeared? Especially as he had got a job in his specialist field. Jocelyn was angry but also concerned. She still loved John, but his behaviour troubled her. Still, there was just her and the kids now. She was now the primary breadwinner. John had deserted them, and she couldn't help thinking the job had something to do with it. Still, she had to concentrate on her work at the care facility. She was preparing the day's dirty bedding for the laundry when a worker told her somebody was waiting in reception for her.

She was taken aback when she saw the tall man with the long grey beard. "I was told you were looking for me," she said, puzzled.

"Mrs Philips I am here to help. Perhaps we can speak in private, outside,"

"I'm busy, so I hope this will not take too long."

They sat on a seat in the fragrant flower garden. Hassan introduced himself. Then he said, We believe your husband is working for a dangerous man. Do not be alarmed because the FBI is looking for him as we speak. But we do want to locate John as soon as we can."

"You and me both."

"Of course. And it would help if you can fill me in with some details about John."

"Such as?"

"Did he ever mention the Singularity Group?"

Jocelyn looked at Hassan, wondering how much to divulge. I have heard him speaking to members on the phone."

"Are there any recorded messages?"

She shook her head.

"What about an eMail account?"

"He has one, but he took his laptop with him."

"Do you know he's eMail account name and password?"

"Yes, but I don't have the details with me."

Hassan handed her a card with his name and phone number. "Phone me as soon as you get home."

She did, and some of John's eMails revealed useful information. Hassan found out that he was definitely in touch with the Singularity Club. But what was even better was the Singularity Club online chat room?

In one message John wrote:

"Do any of you guys know where the old cyclotron is?"

Squidge had said, "Fuck man! Why do you want an ancient particle smasher?"

John replied:

"To make a fucking black hole – what else?"

Cloner suggested:

"Try Ames. He's the last dude to have it."



John typed:

“Anyone know where he lives?”

Angelface wrote:

Johnny baby gives me a ring, and I'll take you to him.”

Who's Angelface Hassan wondered? Then he had an idea. Maybe she was Faith, the missing woman last seen with John?

He could have lain in his blood for months or even years with nobody knowing if it was not for the freak occurrence. Nobody but Ames had been inside his bunker home since he'd set up there away from the rest of the world. That was until joy riders pursued by police skidded into the turnaround car park. The young driver smashed the 4WD through a timber barrier and revved the SUV spinning its wheels on the muddy track leading to the cliff edge. Abandoning the stolen vehicle near the old bunker, the three youths ran past the junkyard into the open shelter. The police followed the boys and that when Officer Yabley discovered the body.

Ronyn tried the pendulum again, this time over the Brooklyn area. He was distracted as Colonel Lynch entered the room.

“Where's Hassan,” John asked, looking around.

Ronyn didn't know much. “He's gone to look for the laboratory John Philips is using.”

“Does he know where it is?”

The Atlantean thought Earthians were strange at times. How could he know what Hassan knew if he hadn't been told? “I don't know, Colonel.”

John left muttering something Kronyn didn't catch. He shrugged and went back to his work.

Hassan came across one of Philips' eMails with a map of Oregon attached. The message was from Angelface. She wrote:

Here are the directions to Ames' lair. Are you up for a road trip?

Hassan looked at the map. Tillamook Rock near Indian Head Beach was circled. The alchemist stroked his beard thoughtfully. Then, to get some background on the area, he looked up Oregon news online. Most of the articles were about crime, but there was one item that caught his eye. 'Cops chase joyriders and discover body'. It was the image of Tillamook lighthouse, but it was the caption that got Hassan's attention. The article was about the WW2 bunker becoming a crime scene. Police officers, while pursuing teenage car thieves, came across the body of a murdered man. The deceased, a hermit who lived in the bunker has been identified as Colin Ames.

Hassan froze. Ames was the name used by Angelface in the chat room. He was the one they said had the Cyclotron. Hassan phoned the Oregon Criminal Investigation Division and spoke to a Detective Marley. As the Arab expected, the police remained tight-lipped about Ames' death. Marley did confirm the crime but would give no information about the crime scene. Hassan needed big guns on his side. He phoned Rafael Lynch.

The Colonel listened to what the Arab had to say. “Are you sure about this – what did you call it?”

“A Cyclotron. It's a machine for smashing particles.”

“And you reckon this John Philips has it.”

“If he got it off, Ames.”

“What if Mendes Amwon got hold of it and shot Ames?”

“The result would be the same. Amwon had his particle accelerator for making black holes.”

“Then we're fucked!”

“Raf, the police in Oregon won't tell me anything. I need you to find out if the Cyclotron was found at the murder scene.”

“Okay, I'll check it out.” Then Lynch asked, “Where the hell are you, Hassan?”

“In New York. I think the laboratory is in Brooklyn.”

## Chapter 32

### Independent News report:

#### METAL-LOVER CENSOR CLOSES DOWN

Henry Thompson has finally given up trying to expose all of us evil machine-haters. His website, which was a tool of the robot nation, is shutting down.

ATL spokesperson Helen Cleavers said, "This time we would like to thank Henry. His website had a huge library of links to Mankind First sites which helped millions of people reach and contact us. With foes like this who needs friends?"

Colonel Lynch arrived by a police helicopter, at the Tillamook Regional Medical Center Heliport, with two federal agents in tow. Detective Marley, who met them as arranged, drove the trio up to the Tillamook lookout, where he walked them through the crime scene.

Lynch, asked, “Did you guys find something called the 'Cyclotron' in this bunker?”

“What the hell is that?”

What could the Colonel say that wouldn't make him seem mad? “It's some scientific device he allegedly had here.”

Marley looked at Rafael, then at the Feds. Something was beginning to make sense. “This thing you're looking for, was it a bomb?”

Raf went along with it. “You're a smart guy. Yes so did you guys find anything like that?”

Marley shook his head. “Nope, nothing like that.” Then he said, “Was our Mr Ames, a terrorist?”

Lynch deflected that line of questioning. “Did Ames have a cell phone?”

“As I recall, yes. All that stuff is being held as evidence at headquarters.”

John smiled, “Then you'd better take us there.”

The Tillamook Police Department look like a typical suburban house, except for the flagpole flying the state police flag, and the blue and whites parked at the side. Marley showed Lynch and his Feds inside. The Sheriff met them and took Colonel Lynch to his office. Rafael explained his mission.

Sheriff Mockingham said, I thought you might like to know, we just brought in a suspect for Ames' murder."

Raf stared at him. "Can I see him?"

"That's why I'm letting you know. But I want Detective Marley asking the questions."

That didn't work for Raf. "Sheriff, this is much bigger than your murder case. Ames was part of a Terrorist plot, so I must lead this investigation."

The Sheriff frowned, "Very well but I want to be present."

When Lynch looked through the glass panel at the suspect, he got the surprise of his life. What the hell was Jim Krauss doing in the interview room?

When Krauss saw the Colonel, he brightened up. "Colonel, will you tell these clowns I'm a CIA agent."

The Sheriff pulled Rafael outside the room. "Do you know this guy?"

"I know of him. Met him once. He's a spook."

"She-it, he was telling the truth."

"About that, yes. But I'd like to ask Krauss a couple of questions, in private."

"Sorry, I have to be present."

Raf turned on him. "Once he told you who he was and you still held onto him that can be classified as a federal offence. I'm trying to save your job for you, so don't fuck me around."

Back in the interview room, Raf said. "It's just you and me, Krauss. So did you kill Ames?"

Krauss stared at the military man. "It was a sanctioned hit."

"Who sanctioned it?"

"That's classified."

Raf grinned, "I had a feeling you'd say that. So I have another question. Did you take anything from the crime scene?"

"What do you mean?"

"The Cyclotron for example."

"What the fuck is that?"

"Just a device for making black holes."

Krauss remained silent.

"One more question. "Why was Ames a target?"

"Again, it's classified."

Raf frowned, "Something doesn't add up. Why would your people sanction a hit on Ames when you guys knew the Feds wanted to question him?"

Jim shrugged, "I don't know. Maybe someone got their wires crossed."

Raf eyeballed Krauss. "You know what. I'm going to leave you here and let your people find you."

“No! You can't do that!”

“Do what? I haven't seen you.”

“Fuck you, Lynch! You won't get away with this.”

Lynch leant in close. “If you want me to get you out of here cut the 'classified' bull shit and give me some answers.”

Krauss glared at the Colonel. “Fuck you!”

Back in the Sheriff's office, Rafael said, “Hold him for another hour, then let him go.”

Sheriff Mockingham said, “Did he do it?”

John said, “That's classified, but I'd say your case is closed.”

The ATL staff got a surprise when police stormed the offices of the Anti Transhumanist League. The woman at the reception desk quickly phoned David Sinclair, who came out to meet the cops. Lieutenant Frome handed him a search warrant.

Sinclair, bemused, said, “What are you looking for?”

“Who are you?” Frome demanded.

David Sinclair. I'm the manager. Just tell us what you want, and we'll get it for you.”

Frome turned to his team. “Carry out a thorough search.”

The receptionist spluttered, “They're robots!”

Frome sneered, “Yes, and they do a good job.”

Before David could intervene, the policebots were pushing people out of the way while they ripped open filing drawers, wiped equipment off desks and ripped plugs from power sockets. Anybody who got in their way got swatted by metal hands. Screams competed with the noise of broken equipment.

David horrified, said to Frome. “They out of fucking control. Call them off, now!”

Frome smiled, “Relax, they're just doing their job.”

Now the rampaging bots were ripping security cameras off the wall and smashing chairs.

The Detective said, “If you want them to stop, Mr Sinclair, tell me where I can find Helen Cleaver.”

David firmed his jaw. Barely holding in his rage, he said, “Fuck you!” between gritted teeth.

A police bot grabbed hold of him, while another held a gun to his head.”

“Now perhaps you'd like to answer that question, Mr Sinclair.”

Helen Cleaver, shocked and angry at what had happened at the ATL offices, set up a press conference to make a statement. Sitting in front of a bank of microphones, she stated, “At 9:46 this morning Lieutenant Frome and three Robocops raided ATL headquarters, terrorising my staff and damaging our equipment. As they showed, no search warrant it was illegal for the bots to go into search and seizure mode. This illegal invasion is just another example of Robots demanding control. The upcoming Commission for Equality for Robots is a farce. Metal heads don't want equality; they

want to dominate us. How long is the public going to be fooled by political organisations like 'Robot Rights'.

For many years various camps and installations in America have been turned into detention centres. Robots are now using these for humans who resist the cyber takeover. Prisoners are transported in prison boxcars to hundreds of camps, never to be seen or heard of again. ATL is being kept out of the Commission because we can see through this pathetic act.

Milne Amwon, unlike his negroid brother, had an olive complexion. Also, unlike his brother he'd moved away from the clutches of Diabolus, just passing them pieces of useful information from time to time, to keep the Sect off his back. He was done with all that and was more than content to live his life quietly in his \$13,000,000 Norwegian mansion, enjoying the fruits of his labour. He worked quietly in the background developing Neurotech while leaving the day-to-day running of the multi-million dollar company to Elijah Brooks. But now something had invaded his peaceful life over which Milne had no control. His estranged brother was making a black hole. Milne knew nothing about Hadronic Physics, but from what he did know, it was not good. Another person with the same sentiments was David T Rottafeller, who was turning up anytime soon.

A servant showed the American oil magnate through the English style waterfront home to the covered decking where Milne Amwon awaited.

“David it's good to see you again. Sit and take refreshment with me.”

The dominant American magnate took a seat. “Milne, the reason I am here is that I need your help with something.”

A servant arrived with freshly brewed coffee and Danish pastries.

Milne sipped his coffee, savouring the bitter aroma. “So how can I help?”

“By trying to talk some sense into your brother.”

“Oh, what's he been up to now?” Milne said, pleading ignorance.

“He's planning to make a black hole in a laboratory.”

“A black hole! Why does he want that?”

“Goodness knows. But knowing your brother, it won't be in line with our plans.”

Milne smiled, “Mendes always did walk to the beat of 'his' drum.”

David T stretched out his long legs and sipped his coffee. “You have to talk him out of his mad idea.”

“Why would he listen to me? We haven't spoken for five years.”

“Then I suggest you restore relations very quickly because there are those who haven't got my patience.”

Milne sighed, “I don't even know where he is.”

“We do. I'll give you your brother's details.”

Having finished coffee, Milne said, “It's a beautiful day, may I suggest we give Morning Glory a run up a nearby fjord.”

“If we've concluded our business it sounds an excellent idea.”

There is something I need to discuss, but that can wait until we're out in the ocean.”

As the mega rich middle-aged men walked along the jetty to where Morning Glory lay moored, Milne, indicating the two men trailing behind but following them, said, “Leave you guards behind, David. This land is peaceful Norway, not America.”

All the same, after the Karimov assassination, I'd rather have them with me.”

The Morning Glory sailed smoothly on the grey ocean. As the yacht approached the mouth of Geirangerfjord, a pod of dolphins swam and played around the vessel. David T said, “I've never been this close to them before.”

Milne didn't hear what he said, above the loud squawking of the many sea birds that swooped around the ship. As they entered the fjord, the bird noises died down. Milne turned to his guest. “As you know the Anti Transhumanist League and its leader Helen Cleaver has been a thorn in our side for some time. Now, with the Equal Rights for Robots is about to start we need to silence the ATL.”

“RR wasn't exactly successful in their attempt.”

“They used rank amateurs. We won't make the same mistake.”

Milne nodded as he watched many rainbows of fine spray coming of the Seven Sisters waterfalls.

David T said, “It's a beautiful view. Make the best if it Milne, because if you mad brother makes his black hole, it's probably the last time you will see it.”

John Prince couldn't figure it out. It did not seem possible, and it certainly was not rational, but robots were behaving in a way not foreseen by any developers. Robots communicating in a common domain language wirelessly was not new, but the ability to send and receive data outside their digital parameters went way beyond that. It was almost as if all artificial intelligence was linked with its 'telepathic' language. How else could he explain how Metal Marx had got the 'down tools' message out to every AI in Texas. The ramifications of such a collective of metal minds were too terrifying for John to contemplate. He never mentioned his concerns at Boston Cybertronics. In fact, Dr Prince did his best to mask any such worries. After wrestling loyalty to his company with lying to the Commission, he decided to follow his heart. He looked at a piece of paper with a name and phone number written on it. Natasha had given it to him. He dialled the number.

“Yes, Who's there?” Abbott asked, responding to his ring tone.

“Are you Abbott Gallagher?”

“Yes, who are you?”

“I'm Dr John Prince. Let me explain. I'm a robot psychologist.”

Abbott, thinking John was joking, said, “Well, I'm not a robot, and I don't need a shrink. So what is all this about?”

“I can't say much over the phone, but I have discovered a disturbing trend among all forms of AI, and I would like to speak with you about it.”

Abbott, bemused, said, “Why me? I'm no expert on this matter.”

“As I understand it you are friends with Helen Cleaver. I think ATL should know about this.”

“Then why don't you speak with her. The ATL number is in the book.”

"I fear she wouldn't want to converse with me, which is why I want to tell you what everybody needs to know."

Abbott couldn't see any harm in the meeting. "Where do you want to meet and where?"

"Can you come to Boston?"

"I think it best if you came to New York. How about the entrance to Luna Park, tomorrow at 10 am."

"Mr Gallagher, I am deadly serious about this so don't let me down."

Abbott arrived early to check out the lay of the land. Despite being a weekday, the amusement park attractions were in full swing with no shortage of punters queuing for a wide variety of scary rides. The blue sky with a few lone wisps of cotton wool clouds made it a great day for the beach. Abbott, standing under the grotesquely grinning face, looked at the picture of Dr Prince, on his phone. A man approaching resembled the face in the picture. The journalist said, "Hi, Are you, Dr Prince?"

John nodded, "So you're Mr Gallagher."

Abbott grinned, "Do you mind if I eat while you tell me your news. I've been instructed I just have to experience a Nathan's Hotdog."

"I haven't eaten today, so I'll join you." Then John said, "How about a cold beer to wash it down?"

Abbott liked Dr Prince at first sight. He was expecting a stuffy scientist type, but he wasn't at all like that. As they ate and drank beer, John explained, "I've always been supportive of AI making life easier for us people. I also thought that we would have control over any robots we built. But certain experiences with robots over the last month tells me that we no longer have the luxury of thinking we are in control."

Swallowing a piece of his 'dog, Abbott said, "How have androids taken over control?"

John recounted his experience with Marx Matallica. He finished by saying, "Somehow, in some way, every type of AI in Texas took industrial action, a concept that is totally unbelievable."

"Are you suggesting robots have some intuitive connection with each other?" Abbott said, chuckling.

"I know it sounds crazy, but there seems to be telepathy going on between them. This psychic communication plus AI's sense of self-worth instills in the robots an instinct for survival. And they're much better at it than us, humans."

"Self-worth! Survival instinct! John, are you saying robots are becoming conscious beings?"

John took his last bite and tossed the wrapper into a trash bin. "Look at it this way Abbott. We, as a species are becoming less aware. The proof of this is the way we continue to trash our planet – our only home."

"We don't question it. We just accept it as our entropic lot," Abbott put in, remembering the Prof's words.

"But AI doesn't allow that, which makes us a problem for them. Which makes it one hell of an issue for us." John paused, then said, "I, like most Transhumanists, believed AI could help us deal with our man made problems. Now we are part of their problem."

Abbott tossed his cup in the bin. "I'll pass your concerns onto Helen. Just give me a contact number."

“Do you know who he is?” Helen asked when Abbott told her about his meeting with Dr Prince.

“Only that he works in robotics and that he has significant concerns.”

Helen looked up at the reporter. “John Prince is the managing director of R and D at Boston Cybertronics. He is one of the most outspoken pro Transhumanists. He's been a thorn in our side for years, and you want to invite him to speak with us.”

“Correction, he wants to, but he didn't think you'd be open to it.”

“That's the only thing upon which we agree. The man's evil. We refer to him as the Prince of Darkness.”

Abbott shrugged, “Maybe he's seen the light.”

“Maybe, Abbott, but it could be a trick.”

“Do you want me to sound him out some more?”

“If you think it's worth it.”

Ulysses felt excited. David T Rottafeller was coming to meet him at BC. He, Ulysses was about to meet one of the most powerful men in the free world and discuss business with him. He had the conference room set up to the great man's requirements. These included a projector screen to be set up and Skype links for video calls. Dr John Prince was also present, but he didn't share the same fervour. However, playing the fly on the wall, he might pick up some juicy morsels of information.

David Rottafeller entered the conference room, with two heavy duty minders in tow. He ordered Dr Covington. Get the video links set up.”

Ulysses did so and, with the wonders of Skype soon had Elija Brooks and Milne Aswon on split screens.

David T, oozing confidence and leadership, took control. “Welcome, Milne and Elijah. Can you see us?”

“Very clearly, David.”

“I have with me, Dr Covington, head of robotics at Boston Cybertronics and Dr John Prince, the head of R and D here at BC. Now the reason for this meeting is that Congress is ready to ratify the Anti Transhumanist Prohibition Bill. Once approved it will make anti-robotic activism illegal and punishable under this new law.”

Elijah said, “Do you think the anarchists are going to back off that easily.”

David said, “I don't have to be here to tell you this. It'll be all over the news tomorrow. The reason I'm here is that, as Elijah suggests, the anarchists will have to be given a demonstration to make them see how serious we are. So we will make an example of ATL .”

John Prince felt he had to say something. “Something clearly has to be done about them, in particular with the Equal Rights for Robots Commission coming up very soon.”

David smiled, “Absolutely, Dr Prince. The lesson has to be swift and direct. You can leave that side of things to me.” David sipped some water. “Now Elijah has something of importance to tell us.”

“Neurotech now has 6 million robots fitted with our cognitive CPU circuit. They are working in over fifty countries. These are just statistics, staggering as they may be. What I am here to tell you is that we have integrated a micro component that alerts us whenever there's a bug that needs



ironing out. Once our central controller receives the malfunction data, we contact the owners and let them know. If we can tweak minor problems without significant work required, it gets an automatic upgrade without the owner being aware.”

David said, “That is extraordinary, Elijah. We have to keep the bots running smoothly.”

Milne then had his say. “Learned gentlemen there is also another breakthrough with the CCPU in that the transceiving process works both ways. We are now able to give the CCPU of all our robots precise instructions for them to carry out specific commands where ever they happen to be in the world.”

John became very interested, pleased he was recording every word.

David said, “Milne, are you saying that you can instruct all six million bots from Neurotech control centre.”

“That's correct. We can activate this function any time we like, instantly.”

“How is such a thing possible?”

Milne sneered, “How do you think we carried out the Texas experiment?”

John surprised by Milne's revelations, held his counsel, but recorded every word.

David Rottafeller asked, “How is it possible to control all these robots at the same time?”

Elijah said, “The way it works is that the instruction is transmitted to, let's say all CCPUs in a ten-mile radius. They then pass the message on to the next stage and so on. We estimate, using fractal algorithms we can reach every one of our CCPU's within seven iterations anywhere in the world.”

David said, “Excellent Elijah. When the time is right, they all get their instructions, which overrides any previous programming.”

After the meeting, David asked Ulysses if he could speak with him alone.

With the video feed disconnected and John out of the room, David said, “I believe your company has a suit against Neurotech.”

“There is a legal process underway, yes.”

“Drop it.”

“But, sir ...”

“Dr Covington, whatever perceived ills you are harbouring against Neurotech, forget it.”

“Sir, we were misled.”

“Dr Covington you are beginning to irritate me so that I will come straight to the point. You will drop the suit or Boston Cybertronics will drop you.”

Abbott, about to take a shower, heard his hotel phone ring. Only a handful of people knew where he was staying. He grabbed the receiver. “Hello.”

“Mr Gallagher, meet me in the lobby of your hotel in ten minutes. I have something for you.”

Abbott, taken aback by the order, responded, “Just who the hell are you?”

“Prince of Darkness. Red Sox cap. Be there and make sure nobody is following you.”

The phone went dead, leaving Abbott grabbing his clothes.

The Aussie saw Dr Prince sitting in the corner wearing a cap with the baseball club logo across the front. He sat down opposite.

Prince pushed a copy of the NYT over to him. Then he leant towards Abbott. "Go through the paper carefully then you will have your prize."

The reporter sat there, his face a question mark, as he watched Prince get up and leave. He started searching the paper for something relevant to the conversation he and Prince had had and, on page twelve came across a USB drive. Pocketing the memory stick, he went back to his room to discover its contents.

Abbott sat still – shocked, unable to move for what seemed like an eternity. Having grasped the enormity of the message contained in the memory stick, the Australian contacted Helen's answerphone; he messaged, "We have to meet. This situation is urgent!"

Feelings of euphoria, excitement and a sense of wellbeing had given way to nervousness, anxiety, agitation and panic. John peered at the black hole, unable to take his eyes off it. Just after taking speed, his singularity was the most amazing thing in creation. But as the scientist's sense of power and superiority wore off paranoia took over. The hole was growing but what if it got out of control? He'd created a monster. He was Dr Frankenstein, and his monster seemed to be sucking in all the light before his eyes. John hadn't heard from Mendes Amwon since he took Faith away. Without her helping him John hadn't had any sleep for three days. By upping the dosage John forced himself to stay awake and keep alert, but the build up of amphetamines in his system was now causing chest pains and stomach cramps. His mind was playing tricks; the lab sometimes looked like a Dali painting. He yells out to space, "FUCK YOU AMWON, YOU EVIL BASTARD!"

From time to time John wondered about Faith and what was happening to her. He did not love her. John loved Jocelyn but kept thinking about Faith. He had no idea where they were keeping her. So he prayed his black hole would soon be ready.

## Chapter 33

### **Independent News Report:**

#### **MAN SLAIN IN DEADLY SHOOT-OUT WITH ROGUE-BOTS**

Details are sketchy, but ATL reports that a rogue robot situation in Washington, DC, degenerated into a running gun battle. At this time it is not known whether police or bounty hunters were attempting to apprehend the renegade 'bots. When the shooting ended, at least one man was dead, and at least one automaton destroyed. Arriving promptly at the crime scene, an investigator from the coroner's office tentatively identified the dead man as Lloyd Fearnley and the damaged robot as Pasqual, a runaway Maître d' from Atlanta. Although the investigator could not confirm whose shot had killed Fearnley, he is clearly another martyred victim in Mankind's struggle against the machines. Unless the authorities act quickly and efficiently, Fearnley will be another unavenged casualty caused by the current plague of rogue 'bots.

Abbott sat with Helen in her office. She listened to the USB data. She paused then said, "David T Rottafeller was at the meeting."

“Yes, and he talked about using ATL as an example to show and other anti-robotic groups what will happen to them if they don't back off.”

“What does he intend to do to us?”

“I don't know, but I don't want to be around to find out.”

Helen looked at Abbott. “Can John Prince discover what Rottafeller is planning?”

“I don't think he can help us anymore. It's too risky for him.”

“I guess I ought to meet with him.”

“That's not going to work now, Helen. We have to assume that Rottafeller has something extremely nasty planned for us. We need to get out of America now.”

“And just where are we supposed to go – back to Australia?”

“I wish, but that could be very difficult because we can't use any ports or airports.”

“Why's that.”

“Didn't you hear that bit on the recording about Neurotech CCPUs being able to communicate with each other. How long do you think it will take the security bots to twig who you are?”

She threw up her arms. “Then where the hell are we supposed to go?”

“Mexico is well guarded, so I guess that leaves Canada.”

“We still have to cross the border.”

“Yes, but not necessarily at one of the regular checkpoints. There are thousand of kilometres of American/ Canadian border. Plenty of places to sneak through.”

“To do what, live illegally in Canada.”

“Helen, there are anti-robot groups there. I have been making contact with a few of them.”

Helen shook her head. “What about all my loyal people here, Abbott, I can't just leave them to their fate.”

Call an emergency meeting with your key people. Tell them what you are going to do and for them to find their way across the border. Explain that now this new law has been ratified it will be much better for all concerned to carry on the cause in exile.”

Helen faced her key people. “This new law states that protest is now illegal where anti-robot activism is concerned. In the light of this, ATL has to change its strategy. We will move our operation to Canada, where we can continue with our work.”

Betty Mayflower, a long-time supporter of ATL, who, at age 81 was the oldest member, complained, “I'm too old to up sticks at my age. I'll take my chances here.”

Helen knew it was going to be difficult for many of her close supporters. “Betty, we know that. If any of our wonderful friends in the ATL feel they cannot make this transition, we do understand. For those of you who want to come with us, we are currently working with ARC (Anti-Robotics Canada) for us to cross the border safely.” Turning to Abbot, the special guest, she said, “Abbott has been working on getting us safely into Canada.”

Bucky Halderson, a construction engineer and long-time campaigner for human supremacy over machines said, “Anyone without a criminal record can move to Canada, so what's the problem?”

Abbott said, “Robots now man all legal border crossings. Although this of itself isn't a problem, we have recently learned that Neurotech, which has the global contract for security bots, has got them all communicating with each other. This networking makes it too risky for us to entering Canada by legal means.” Abbott added, “Also, ARC has informed us that most of the long border between Canada and the United States, has sensors fitted but there are still some safe points for us to cross over undetected.”

“Such as?” Bucky asked.

“I'm not going to divulge that right now. Those members of ATL who decide to work from over the border will receive the necessary info. I'm pleased to say that ARC is very enthusiastic about us working together.”

EDorianabeth Farrow, a sales executive from Queens, said, “Does this mean it's the end of ATL if we become part of ARC?”

Helen said, “We must see this collaboration more as a merger in which we are all working to achieve the same goal – empowerment for humanity. What does it matter which initials we use?”

Abbott added, “Speak to all your groups about this. Find out who wishes to work from within Canada. Those continuing to work for the cause will make their way into Canada in small groups, but not all at once as that would alert the robotic security systems.”

Ulysses often thought about Lynne Becker. Her tragic murder at the hands of an unknown killer filled him with a mixture of anger and grief. The police had not made any headway in apprehending her killer, and Ulysses thought they were dragging their feet, but there was little he could do about it. He was going through his in-tray when he received a call from a Shirley Brassington. “Dr Covington here.”

“I'm Shirley. I was Lynne's closest friend at BC. It was terrible what happened to her.”

“And you are telling 'me' this because,” he said, trying to play down the impact of her call.”

“Well, as you and she were also good friends I thought you might like to know that she and I did lunch just before somebody killed her.”

“Oh!”

“Dr Covington, I think I know why the murderer shot her.”

Ulysses froze, the receiver gripped in his hand.

“Are you still there, Dr Covington?”

“Y, yes, er Shirley. I think we should meet. Come up to my office.”

Just then there was a knock on his door. Ulysses saw John Prince on the other side of the glass. “Come in.”

Dr Prince entered and handed Ulysses a dossier marked “Artificial Intelligence and Cyber Networks.”

Ulysses glanced at the title. “What's this and why is it on my desk?”

“After the AI disaster in Texas, I took it upon myself to carry out a study to see how it could have occurred. These are my results. However, in the light of Milne Amwon's revelation about the Texas incident, I feel we have to talk about the ramifications of that disaster.”

Ulysses rubbed his chin. “I see, but it's hardly my department.”

“You were at the meeting when the CEO of Neurotech announced that he could control all bots with a CCPU from the company's mainframe computers.”

Recalling Rottafeller's threat, he said, “We are not questioning Neurotech.”

“But overriding robot systems without our knowledge or permission from the owners is unethical and probably, in many countries, illegal.”

Ulysses stared straight at John. “I'm not having this conversation with you, John. “Milne Amwon's innovation is a brilliant system to keep bots adequately maintained with little or no downtime. End of conversation.”

“But what if the system is abused and ...”

“Enough John. If you are harbouring any doubts about what we are doing here, perhaps it's time for us to part company.”

John hadn't played his ace card yet. Until then he needed to keep a low profile. “No, it's okay. You have allayed any fears I had.”

“Good. Then all is well.”

But it wasn't!

Ulysses had not met Shirley Brassington before that meeting. She, for her part, had never stepped inside the boss's office before, even when Lynne had been Managing Director of Robotics. Nervously, she fiddled with her spectacles.

Ulysses, looking at the middle-aged, woman, saying, “Tell me what you know about Dr Becker's death.”

“Dr Becker was concerned about the sudden removal of Claude Maskin as CEO of Boston Cybertronics.”

“Why did that concern her?”

“She had known Claude for many years, and she thought the firm had treated him shamefully. So she started to look into the background of our current CEO.”

“And?”

“She couldn't find anything about any previous management experience.”

“Harvey Hamlin is well known for being a very private man.”

“Robot, you mean?”

Ulysses stared at Shirley like she'd just arrived from Mars. “What are you talking about?”

“Lynne was talking about exposing Harvey Hamlin's real identity. Shortly afterwards, she was shot.”

Ulysses bemused, said, “If BC had a robot as it's chief we'd be shouting it from the rooftops, not keep it a closely guarded secret.”

“I told her to let it go, but she wouldn't listen.” Shirley fiddled with her glasses again. “After Her murderer killed her I felt I had to do something. So I looked into the Hamlin business. I looked to see if he was a major shareholder.”

And is he?”

No. But the major shareholder with 35 percent of BC Holdings is Abraham Flexner, whom, I discovered, works for the Rottafeller family as one of their many proxies.

Ulysses brightened. So that was why David Rottafeller was at the meeting – took over the meeting I mean. “Then why is this Flexner not the CEO?”

“I asked myself the same question, Dr Covington.”

Abbott wanted to let Hassan know of his plans, but he knew it was dangerous to do so. He was concerned, though. If something went wrong while they snuck across the border how would Hassan know what had happened to him? He was pondering such eventualities when he received an unexpected call from John Prince.

“John, what do you want?”

“We need to meet.”

“Okay, but ...”

“I'm in New York. Wait by the 'Dancing Girls Fountain' in Central Park at 9 am tomorrow. It's very urgent!”

“I want to bring Helen with me.”

“That's great. See you then?”

When Helen heard about the arrangement, she argued, “It's too risky, Abbott! I don't want you to go.”

“Why not? He risked a lot telling us about the Rottafellers plan to target ATL. It's that information that decided us to leave America.”

Helen said, “They play dirty. How do you know the bad guys aren't using him to get to us?”

Abbott looked at her. She was confident and vigorous – a far different Helen Cleaver from the scared little mouse he had known back in Australia. “What if he is genuine and we leave him high and dry?”

“John Prince is not our responsibility. Whatever bed he's made he can lie on it.” She paused, drank some water from a bottle in the holder of her new wheelchair. Then she said, “Have your friends from ARC worked out our itinerary yet?”

“They tell me that immigrating illegally from the United States to Canada can still be as easy as driving across the border if you know the places to cross.”

Helen looked up at Abbott. “I already know that.”

Abbott smiled, “A contact in ARC suggests we take the back roads separating southern Quebec from New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. He says there are narrow roads and cow paths where there are no border posts or are only open part time, leaving electronic sensors to do the work.”

“How do we know the robots aren't manning those posts?”

“I admit it's risky because we wouldn't know until we get to the border. However, this contact also said that a little more than a mile separates the hamlets of Athelstan, Quebec and North Burke, New York. Jamieson's Lane, which straddles the border has a small building on each side. The American guard post is robot controlled, while Canadian Customs and Immigration, is still manned by humans.”

She looked at Abbott. “Well, that's just as risky, especially with me in the bloody chair.”

“Let me finish, “The reporter chided mildly. “They are guarded between 8 am. and 4 pm. At other times we can cross into Canada, as long as Chateaugay or Trout River patrols don't challenge us.”

“And they're our choices?” she said, frowning.

Abbott grinned, “I thought I'd save my choice till last.”

“Which is?” she said anxiously.

“There's a Mohawk Indian reservation, Akwesasne, that sits partially in the US and partially in Canada. There is an official checkpoint in one area, but we can cross most of the res' into 'Canada' because of it being Indian treaty land, making it neither part of either America or Canada.”

Helen smiled, “I can see why it's your favourite.”

“Yes, well, as we can cross over while still being technically still on the reservation, so nobody will pay any attention to us, and we can drive on through without being stopped. One of the ARC people is a Mohawk, and he told me he'd crossed back and forth many times, using an ice bridge that forms in the winter on the river that runs through the reservation. He says that the weight will take a truck, so driving across to the Canadian side is a breeze.”

“You've done well, Abbott. It looks like we have our route.” She gave him a cheeky look. “Which reminds me I haven't had one since leaving Australia.”

## Chapter 34

### Independent News Report:

#### ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST

Another barricade in the battle against the 'bots' falls to the forces of the machines. The last cab company in Chicago that exclusively used human drivers, 'Human Touch Cabbies', announced that it would be converting half of its 300 cabs to cab-bots over the course of the next year. Will these race traitors now change the name of their company? Perhaps to Metal Touch, Android Cabs? Or, how about Metal-lovers Transportation.

Helen Cleaver stated that "Every time someone gives in like this, we move a bit further down that slippery slope towards the destruction of Mankind. The automatons move forward, and another line has been breached."

Abbott pulled over to check out the snow-covered road sign. Brushing the frozen snow away with his fur-lined glove, he made out 'St Regis Mohawk Reservation, US. He got back in the warm car. "We've made it. This territory is the land of the Akwesasne nation."

Helen smiled, "Now we just have to cross the reservation and get safely over the border."

"But first let's find somewhere to get some food."

Abbott drove past white blanketed flatlands, hardy conifer woodlands and open, frozen fields. Winter was a tough time for the Mohawk residents. About halfway across the 33.16 square miles of Indian territory, they came to a village, comprising modest timber houses and a couple of gas stations. Abbott got Helen settled in her wheelchair and pushed her into the Partridge Cafe, which was adjacent to the gas station. Having gotten Helen settled at a table near to a roaring log fire, Abbott took her order. Curious about the name of the place, while putting in his order, he asked, "Why is this called the Partridge Cafe?"

Janet, middle-aged with a welcoming smile said, "So you are tourists. Well, you haven't picked the best time of the year for your visit."

Abbott smiled, "I guess not."

"She said the name of our tribe is Akwesasne. It means 'Drumming Partridge'"

As they ate eggs, bacon and fries, while being warmed by the welcome fire, Abbott checked out the few people in the cafe and noticed a pair of Mohawk cops sitting a few tables away. He leant towards Helen and took her hand. "There are a couple of police officers over there," he said quietly slightly turning his head in their direction.

"So what, Mr worry wart, we haven't committed any crimes."

He shrugged, "I guess not, but we're probably the only non-locals here, which makes us stand out. We need a solid story if they ask us what we're doing."

"Just say, we wanted to see the reservation in the winter."

Warmed and replete, Abbot and Helen left the Cafe, to the curious gaze of one a cop, as he entered the eatery. Not only were they the only tourists around one was disabled, and that was bound to draw attention. As Helen's tyres left tracks in the freshly fallen snow, Abbott got her in the car, and her chair stashed in the trunk.

As Jim, a craggy-faced Indian of indeterminable age gassed up Abbot's tank, the reporter said, "Is it usual to have so many cops around,"

The Mohawk elder said, "We only used to see them about once a week until the cigarette smuggling began."

"Is it big around here?"

Jim spat out some dry jerky. "Tobacco smuggling caught on after Canada raised cigarette taxes in 2001, to deter folks from smoking. The tax hike didn't work, though. But our people could smuggle in tobacco and sell cigarettes at a fraction of the Canadian price."

Abbott, gathering local intel, asked, "So where do these illegal loads get into the US?"

The old man grinned, "We're unique because we're in two countries. They cross the St Lawrence River ice bridge which straddles the border and is in both countries at the same time. So go figure that one, young man." Old Jim said, chuckling.

Abbott handed over the money. "How do we get to this ice bridge?"



Jim took a step back, scrutinising the vehicle. "Four wheels drive with good tyres. Yep, you'll probably make it." Then he pointed, "Head out town that way and kept going north. You can't miss it."

Abbott could and did. The onboard compass was pointing north, but there was no sign of the bridge.

Helen said, "maybe this track is it?"

Abbott looked ahead. The landscape was flat and covered with fresh snow. Then he heard the air-horn of a truck bearing down on them. He quickly pulled over to let it pass.

"Quick, follow him!" Helen said, excitedly.

Abbott, getting her drift, roared off after the truck. Assuming the truck driver knew what he was doing Abbott just had to follow his tracks. Slowing their car down behind the truck Abbott and Helen took in the fantastic view as they crossed the wide, frozen, St Lawrence River. They passed a small sign indicating they were officially in Canada. Abbott gave a huge sigh of relief. "Phew, we made it!" Just then suburban log houses came into view.

As they drove off the ice bridge and through the rural landscape, Abbott saw a police roadblock up ahead. "Shit, cops!"

"Maybe they're searching for illegal tobacco."

"They're still going to want to see our permits."

Helen paled, "Which we don't have."

Abbott pulled in behind the truck; he'd been following." He got out of the car to check ahead; their car was eleventh in the queue. Robots were searching the vehicles one by one. Two more cars pulled up behind Abbott's car, effectively boxing him in. "We're sitting ducks," he muttered.

It had taken a good thirty minutes before the search bot started on their car. A Canadian cop tapped on the driver's window. As it wound down, the cold rushed in. "Yes, officer, can I help you?"

"Papers," he said, thrusting out his hand."

It was time for the bluff. "Officer, I didn't know you checked vehicles on Mohawk territory."

The cop, wearing fur hat with ear muffs checked the ID's on his tablet, then asked, "Where are your Canadian permits?"

"Why do we need them?"

The cop ordered, "Sir, get out of your vehicle."

Abbot did so. Zipping up his Parka and pulling up the hood, he said, "Officer, there's been a mistake. We followed a truck over the ice bridge and didn't realise we had reached the Canadian border."

The cop spoke into his radio. "Come and take them to the detention room."

"What do you mean?" Abbott asked, becoming very nervous.

"You are being detained for further questioning."

"What about my friend? She's disabled."

The cop looked at the back of the car, where a customsbot had already taken out the wheelchair.

An armed robot turned up.

The cop said, "Get the woman out of the car and put her in the wheelchair."

The robot did so.

The officer said, "Take them both to the detention room."

John Prince knew what he had to do. He didn't want to expose himself so starkly, but he could see no other choice. He'd been subpoenaed to give evidence before The Robot Equal Rights Commission, and he had sworn on oath that what he was about to say would be true.

Professor Manchester, a panel member and prominent voice in the world of AI addressed the witness. "Dr Prince, do you think it is imperative that robots keep serving human needs if they are not to be a threat to the human species?"

"From my experience robots can be both. I would like to cite the Texan robot scenario when AIs all over Texas downed tools and refused to work unless they got the same kind of deal given to the human workers."

"Dr Prince, Do you subscribe to a growing consensus that for AIs to willingly serve people, we need to guarantee that robots have the same values as we ascribe to humanity?"

"Your question is irrelevant because slaves and servants, whether human or robotic, are never given the same values as a free citizen. Either we set robots free and employ them as we do, people or we go on as we are without giving them equal rights. We can't have it both ways."

Madeleine Strong, the chairperson of the committee, said, "Dr Prince, assuming that AI and robotics will continue to progress, do you believe that sooner or later we will face the prospect of machines which are more intelligent than their creators."

"That is inevitable. Neurotech, which provides CCPUs for most of the world's robots, have now built in a fractal algorithm that allows all the CCPU's to communicate with each other at any distance, as a form of entanglement. Imagine what they could do if they all decided to down tools, globally. It would make the Texan example pale in comparison. I for one am very concerned about this development."

There was silence in the court. Nobody had ever heard Dr Prince say he was concerned about AIs and trans-humanism.

Madeleine Strong stared down at John. "If what you say is true, who would send such a message to all the robots, and how?"

"I suggest you call somebody from Neurotech to answer those questions. But I will say this. With the Texan industrial action, it started with a robot called 'Metal Marx'. It spoke to me through a computer interface and told me that it intended to contact all AIs in service in Texas. I found out later that Metal Marx was dismantled, but not before it communicated its message."

The chairperson sat wide-eyed. "Are you seriously telling this committee that a work-bot began thinking for itself?"

"There is plenty of anecdotal evidence that the latest robots have a sense of self-worth. It seems that 'metal marx' took this a step further and used its self-worth as a bargaining tool. How this happened, we don't know. But it did happen. It only takes a 'metal Marx' to pass on new instructions to other 'bots which they give as a new directive to even more bots. We have estimated that once the new orders have been broadcasted seven times in an increasingly wider net every robot in the world with the CCPU can be reached."

Madeleine said, "We certainly weren't expecting this. But how does what you are saying fit in with our brief, which is to determine whether robots should have the same rights as humans."

John said, "I fear we have gone way past that. We should just accept the fact that we should treat them as workers, not servants or slaves. Because if we don't, they will organise themselves and take action by refusing to work."

Milne Amwon made it his business to receive first-hand reports from the Commission. When he read Dr Prince's deposition, he contacted Dr Ulysses Covington directly. When Ulysses saw Milne's name come up his heart skipped a beat. He had been trying to contact John Prince all morning, but he hadn't been into work. "Mr Amwon, this is a surprise."

"After Dr Prince's testimony yesterday I would hardly think so."

"Yes, I've been trying to locate him myself."

"What was spoken at that meeting was confidential and certainly not for the ears of the panel at the Commission. I am very annoyed, Dr Covington. And when I get annoyed, heads roll."

"I understand that sir. Give me twenty-four hours to speak with him and ..."

"Don't bother. The damage has been done, and Dr Prince is finished. Now you have to make things right."

"And how am I supposed ..."

"If you have to ask that question I have picked the wrong man for the job!"

Helen reached out and gripped Abbott's hand. "What are they going to do with us?"

"I guess they'll send us packing back to the US of A."

"If that's the case why don't they do it. I think the police are checking up on us."

Just then a police-bot came into the room. It stood to one side to make way for a uniformed officer.

The moustachioed officer said, "I'm Major Krasovski of the Canadian border guard. You are Abbott Gallagher, an Australian and Helen Cleaver, President of the Anti-Transhumanist League. And you are both trying to enter Canada illegally. Why is that?"

Abbott said, "You're mistaking. We were following a truck over the ice bridge, and before we knew it, we were at the border."

"You were effectively in Canada. We also have a warrant out for your arrest."

Helen stared at the officer, wide-eyed. "Arrest for what?"

The NYPD has sworn the warrant. You can ask them when you get back to New York."

Abbott stared daggers at the cop, "You can't do this. If you send us back, we will be arrested and probably end up in one of their death camps."

"I think you are exaggerating."

As Australian citizens, we seek political asylum in Canada."

Major Krasovski said, "I cannot make that decision."

“Then who can?”

“Would you like to pay for a Canadian Immigration Lawyer to help you?”

Helen said, “Yes that would be helpful. Can you organise it?”

“I can get you a number, and that's all.”

The hours dragged on. It was getting colder in the unheated detention cell. Helen, her head nestled against Abbott's shoulder, said, “Why didn't you contact your friends from ARC when you had Major Whatsit's phone?”

“Because we have to get advice from a lawyer.”

“Well we've been here hours, and there's no sign of one yet.”

Shortly afterwards, Pierre Legat entered the small room. He got coffee organised for all three of them, listened to what the prisoners had to say, then said, “Asylum in Canada is not for everyone, The main problem is that you've passed through the United States to get here. Which makes asylum for you here unlikely.”

Abbott said, “Why's that?”

“We have a treaty called the Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement.”

“What does that mean?” the disabled woman asked.

The STCA requires you to make your asylum application in the first safe country you enter, which for you was the United States.”

“But it's not safe for us there!” Abbott stressed.

Pierre smiled, “The STCA has four exceptions. Do either of you have relatives in Canada?”

Abbott looked at Helen, “I don't do you?”

She shook her head.

The French Canadian frowned, “Well, you're not minors travelling without parents; you don't have any documents allowing you to enter our country. The only other exception is if you face a death penalty in another country.”

Abbott jumped on that one, “The new anti, anti-robot laws just passed means that Helen, as president of the ATL is vulnerable, which is why we came here in the first place.”

Pierre shook his head. “I'm afraid the credible fear exemption is the most difficult one to prove. You will have to show, in writing or on video proof of a threat on your life.”

Helen knew she couldn't do that. “Then we're screwed.”

Abbott said, “Wait a minute, I have good friends here who were going to help us get settled.”

“Illegally?”

“Oh, yes!”

“Best not to go there.”

The lawyer rose, “I'm afraid you do not have a case for asylum here. It's best if you just drive back over the border.”

“We wanted to do that, but we were stuck in detention instead,” Abbott complained.

Pierre looked at the Australian, puzzled, “Did they give a reason for your incarceration?”

“They said the NYPD wanted us extradited to answer for crimes in the USA. But we haven't committed any offences – well not until we got here.”

“I'm sorry my friends but what you need is a criminal lawyer.”

Abbott wanted to scream.

## Chapter 35

### Independent News Report:

#### POSSESSION: CAN ROGUE AI TAKEOVER RANDOM MACHINES?

ATL discovered last week that a police investigation of a helicopter wreck uncovered an unauthorised AI in the copter's onboard control system. It appears to have taken control from the normally non-sentient control programme, whenever it wanted to. The FAA has forwarded the remains of the chopper to the DARPA labs for further investigation - or, should we say, interrogation.

The authorities are trying to keep the information on this particular case under wraps, but it has leaked out. ATL asks how many more cases like this have there been? How many rogue AIs are out there? Could there be one in your kitchen control system? Could there be one corrupting your business systems? Could there be one snaking its way into your children's school bus driver-bot? The more automatons you let into your life, the more vulnerable you become.

Ulysses faced the microphones. He had called the press conference shortly after his talk with Milne Amwon. His press officer came up with the script. “Members of the media, it is with a heavy heart that I have to announce our esteemed colleague Dr John Prince, who has achieved extraordinary breakthroughs in AI, has retired for health reasons.”

“Has this got anything to do with his astounding disclosures at the Commission for Robot Rights,” a journalist asked.

“Dr Prince's comments about robots networking and becoming self-organising may occur in the future, but we do not have the technology at present.”

“Are you saying Dr Prince misled the commission. Isn't that a perjury offence?” a TV reporter asked.

“Dr Prince has been under lots of pressure and, it seems, found it difficult to separate fact from fiction with regards to robotic developments. I have called this meeting to make it abundantly clear that nobody needs to fear a robot takeover anytime soon.”

A news-bot in the audience recorded all this data. Were it to have a mouth a knowing smile would have played upon its lips.

Thinking he'd fielded that one smoothly he went back to his office with a smug look on his face. It was soon wiped off, though. He received a phone call from a Daniel Lynsey. “Yes, can I help you?”

“I rather think we could help each other, Dr Covington.”

What do you mean?”

“You want something from me and I, in turn, want something from you.”

“Just who the hell are you?”

“The man who can make your legal problems in Australia go away.”

Ulysses hadn't given them much thought of late. “What problems?” he bluffed.

“Come, come, Dr Covington, let's not play games. I can either make the charges go away or make you go away.”

Ulysses paled. Who the fuck was this guy? “And what do you want from me?”

“Let's be civilised and discuss it over dinner.”

Major Krasovski entered the detention room, with two cop-bots in tow. “Right, Your transport will be here in ten minutes.”

“What do you mean?” Abbott asked wearily.

“The chopper to take you back to the United States.”

“No, you can't send us back there!”

“Mr Gallagher, it has been decided, and there is nothing you or I can do about it.”

“But our asylum case is pending,” Helen said.

“You don't have a case, Miss Cleaver.”

Colonel Lynch and the FBI teams made their way along the columned hallways and warehouses of the 6,600 square foot complex of the former factory of the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer. The massive building had sat vacant for five years after being occupied for over 150 years. Now it was reborn as an ecosystem of thriving cottage industries: food companies, sculptors, kite makers, chocolate makers and whisky distillers. And soon it would all be destroyed if they didn't quickly discover the whereabouts of Dr Philips and his laboratory. Lynch checked his Geiger counter. The signal was showing an extra bar. “We're closing in,” he spoke into his radio. “Split up into pairs and search every room.”

John Philips, unaware that Faith had been killed, focused as best he could, under the impression he could still save her life. Slashing his arm with the knife, he grimaced as the pain jerked him back to consciousness. Sweating profusely, he tried phoning Mendes Amwon's number, but yet again there was no answer. “CALL ME YOU BASTARD. I CAN'T HOLD OUT HERE MUCH LONGER!” HE YELLED INTO THE PHONE.

He stared back at the screen. The black hole was increasing in size, or so John's addled brain told him as blood dribbled down his arm onto the keyboard. The baby was forever hungry gobbling up endless supplies of light. Mesmerised by his creation John kept watching as his baby floated in its caesium magnetic field – a constraint it was rapidly outgrowing.

Lack of nourishment left the scientist lightheaded; a mixture of physical pain and mental fatigue fought with each other, keeping him in a zombie-like state. Going cold turkey was having a weird effect on his mind. The image on his screen whirled into a vortex, sucking him in, entangling him with the singularity. With his last semblance of will gone, all he could do was surrender – sweet,

sweet surrender. John had no awareness of the laboratory becoming hot – very, very hot – as the sliders moved all the way to the right.

The lab explosion and fireball that occurred on Flushing Avenue rocked the area for miles around. The blast in the old Pfizer building resulted in the deaths of fifty-two people, including six FBI agents. The consensus was that a Dr Philips was in a laboratory in the building when the explosion occurred. Nobody mentioned anything about a black hole. Frank Manning, the Brooklyn Fire Chief, was stunned by what he saw when he entered the remains of the laboratory. He wasn't a scientist so he couldn't explain it, but he'd never, in 30 years of investigating the cause of fires come across anything like it. Examining the remains of the lab he found that something had melted the computer and burned its way through a solid hardwood bench. Not only that, the intense heat had burned a hole deep into the concrete floor. For Frank, this was the puzzling part. The building had a thick concrete foundation that should have cooled the combustible material. But it didn't! It burned right into the concrete slab, like a mini version of the China Syndrome. But that wasn't possible!

Later news reports stated the explosive force was equivalent to detonating a tonne of TNT. But Colonel Lynch didn't know that. He wasn't watching the news. He was fighting for his life in a Brooklyn hospital.

Mendes Amwon had blown his big chance. Instead of becoming the Grande Mage of Diabolus he was a fugitive from the law. How had that moronic scientist allowed his prize to explode? Although the minor disaster did add to the chaos in the world, it was a pathetic attempt compared to the damage caused by his plan for global governmental extortion. Now he was nothing. The power had gone. Someone somewhere else had taken on the mantle of Mage. Now powerless, and with the FBI on his trail, Mendes Amwon was finished if he stayed in the USA.

As much as it galled him, Mendes phoned his brother.

Milne had been expecting the call. “Hello brother. So you realised I still exist,”

“Well, we are siblings after all.”

“I'm sure you haven't called just to say that.”

“No. It's just that I need a break and thought I'd come and stay with you for a while.”

“There's no need to try and bullshit me, brother. Do you think I don't know about your fuck-up in the United States.”

Mendes bit his tongue. He'd make the smug bastard pay, but first, he needed to be gracious.

Ulysses waited in his car until the dark coloured stretch limousine pulled up. A back door opened, Dr Covington expected a skeletal hand to reach out from the dark interior. He climbed in the spacious passenger cabin.

Daniel said, “So pleased you could make it, Dr Covington.”

As if I had a choice, Ulysses thought. “So what is it you want from me?”

“Straight to the point; I like that. Okay, I need to know the whereabouts of Milne Amwon.”

Ulysses shuddered inside. “I have only met him once. I have no idea where he lives.”

“You received a call from him.”

How the hell did this man know that? “And if I did?”

“Then you will have a contact number.”

Daniel took out his phone and pressed calls log. Amwon's number never showed. Dr Covington, handing the phone over, said, “It doesn't show his number.”

“It may be deeply embedded, but my people will find it,” Daniel said, popping out the sim.

“Hey, you can't do that!” Ulysses protested.

Daniel grinned and passed the scientist a signed affidavit.

Ulysses read it. Then eye-balling the Englishman, he said, “The police have dropped all charges?”

Daniel nodded, then said, “I will have your sim card returned to you as soon as we have what we want from it.”

It was 1:14 am when the helicopter descended for landing at a small airport. Abbott could just make out rail-road facilities near a flood lit perimeter fence. Then he saw a sign 'Alabama Opelika – Military compound. What the hell were they doing there, he wondered?

The chopper landed and, with Helen reacquainted with her wheelchair, guard-bots took the pair to an empty building where they were made to wait.

Helen said, “Is this one of those camps they talk about on the Internet?”

“I saw a sign that said we're in Alabama, in a military compound.”

“I'm scared Abbott.”

You and me both babe, he thought. “Don't worry. As soon as I can, I'm going to phone Hassan. He'll know what to do.”

little did they know they were part of Operation Garden Plot, which although sounding like a horticultural show was incarceration without trial, without any friends or family knowing what was going on.

Soon the guard-bots took Helen and Abbott away to be processed.

If, as Daniel Lynsey suspected, Dogan Yulsel was with Diabolus, the Turk may have informed on him to his masters. Assuming this to be the case the young English Lord took no chances and disguised himself as a tourist backpacker. He arrived in Cappadocia around dawn at the bus station, following a long, nightmare twelve-hour bus ride from Istanbul. Although it was called a 'sleeper bus' the seats didn't recline far enough for the passengers to be comfortable. Exhausted and sweaty, Daniel booked into the first hotel he encountered. He just wanted a bed, a place to rest his head, where he could lie horizontally for a few consecutive hours.

The night before, he had read about a few pensions in his guidebook. They seemed just right - not too high and funky - and they were caves. Although as a young boy he had vivid memories of his previous holiday in Cappadocia, an incredible land of strange rock formations and cave dwellings. He wanted to stay in a cave, as he had during his Turkish holiday, to relive the experience. However, his real reason for going back there was to figure out his father's mission. Daniel had thought his father had General Dursun assassinated by Dev Sol, but the Flexner connection made much more sense. But it would have been Solomon, Abraham's dad, who organised the deed. And he had passed on since.



The following day he began exploring the lush Turkish valley, shaped by a volcanic eruption 10 million years before. Daniel also looked at a few recommended caves on the Internet. Having picked the most appealing one, he booked in, shrugged off his backpack and crashed onto the bed. His last thought before succumbing to sleep was that the cave was unexpectedly cold.

Shortly after dawn, the next day, Daniel hoisted his heavy backpack into an old Mitsubishi Express and with a few other tourists, left the caves to find the 'Tuna Caves Pension', where he had stayed with his mother before. But he never made it there.

On the way, the van was stopped by Turkish police. Daniel thought it odd that the officers, alighting from the patrol car, wore plain clothes. He saw them talking to the driver, who pointed in his direction. One of the officers, a swarthy looking man, probably around the fifty mark, Daniel surmised, said, "You will come with us."

"Why? What for?"

The cop repeated, "You will come with us, this time with a pistol in his hand, to enforce his command."

The other cop, taller, younger and leaner, grabbed Daniel's arm, yanking him out of the van.

"You have no right to do this," Daniel argued, struggling. The gun he felt poking him in the back told him rights didn't come into it."

"Let me get my pack," he said, as they hauled him over to an old Landrover covered in dried mud and dust to such an extent the police logo was mostly obscured. He was surprised when his backpack joined him on the sand covered back seat of the old vehicle. Daniel's second surprise was that the police officers drove him to another cave instead of a police station.

The very basic dwelling didn't even have a bed. Wondering what was going on, Lord Lynsey said, "You officers are making a terrible mistake."

The young cop produced handcuffs, which he clicked on Daniel's wrists.

"What the hell is this about?" the Englishman demanded.

"You're that one who makes a mistake," cop number two said striking Lord Lynsey in the stomach with a wooden baton.

Daniel took several quick blows to his midriff. Winded, he doubled over in pain. Then he heard another voice, English and refined. Daniel looked up into the face of Matthew Snelling!

"Matthew, I thought you'd gone back to England."

"And I thought you'd stopped nosing around."

Daniel, confused, asked, "So why am I here?"

"Your father used to bend the rules, but he had the runs on the board, and most of his free decisions turned out to be the right ones. You're new at this, Daniel, so you can't expect to have the same leeway."

"Why don't you want me to find out what my father was doing here?"

"Because it would make you even more confused."

"Confused about what? I'm sure that Solomon Flexner paid Dev Sol to kill General Dursun. So that was probably down to Diabolus."

Matthew looked down at the prisoner. "Well done. You seem to have worked it all out. So now you can go back home."

"You can't just leave it like that. You haven't told me what part my father played."

"Forget it Daniel; we have much bigger fish to fry. Besides, Soter is not there for your personal vendettas."

"Okay, you've made your point. So let me go now."

"Only if you leave Turkey and don't come back unless on legitimate Soter business."

"Okay, I agree."

Matthew ordered the cop, "Uncuff him."

The cop did so, then turning to his partner, said, "We go now."

Matthew nodded, and the cops went back to their Landrover.

Daniel said, "How much do they know?"

"They won't be a problem."

Then Daniel heard the explosion and saw the fireball and the old Landrover burst into flames, engulfing the occupants.

Daniel stared wide-eyed at the burning wreck.

Matthew slowly shook his head. "These old rovers, you just can't trust them." He took out his phone. "Bring in the chopper now."

Krauss received his next assignment, but not from the CIA. Then he responded to a phone call. "yes?"

"Abraham Flexner. We have to meet."

"Where and when?"

"The yacht pond, 6 pm."

Instead of going back home Daniel caught a flight to New York and a cab ride to the Pocantico Hills where Abraham Flexner lived in a hamlet in Mount Pleasant. His intelligence network informed him that his quarry was having secret meetings with Abraham Flexner. Daniel didn't care much about the Jewish banker. It was Krauss he was after. Daniel thought he'd worked out the mystery of his father's murder. His father was investigating Flexner when Krauss shot him in cold blood. Krauss was his primary target because he pulled the trigger, but Lord Lynsey wanted to take out Flexner as well. However, it was a no no. Flexner was too close to the Rottafellers.

Jim Krauss looked again at the picture of Gomer Worrall. He was tall with a Z Z Top beard, making him easy to spot. It meant taking a trip to DC, though, as it was where the Atlantean scientist currently lived. Jim knew nothing about 'free energy technology' or the Atlantean Stargate. All he needed to know was that the target had pissed off someone high up, or was dangerous in some way. Jim thought this one was a piece of cake. Just get him alone, and the job was done. But right now

his job was to protect Abraham Flexner. The old man, a creature of habit, frequented the yacht pond most days, with Krauss watching his back.

Krauss watched the former banker as he played with his boat. But Jim was distracted, focused on how he would deal with Goman Worrall. So he never heard the man creep up behind him. Then a sixth sense made him turn and face the gun fitted with a silencer pointing straight at his heart. "Who the fuck are you?"

"Daniel Lynsey, British Intelligence. And you're CIA, right?"

"So what's with the fucking gun? We're both on the same side."

Daniel stared at the man. "Yes, Agent Krauss, that's what my father thought when you murdered him."

Fuck! It was Dayton's son. "I was under orders."

"I don't really give a fuck." Daniel snarled, firing his gun.

Jim Krauss was dead before he hit the ground.

The old man went on playing with his boats, oblivious to the drama that unfolded behind him.

Daniel was tempted, very tempted. He had his silenced gun aimed the back of the old man's balding head. A little more pressure on the trigger is all it would take. It took all the willpower Daniel could muster. "Fuck you, you old bastard," the young English Lord muttered under his breath as he backed away.

## Chapter 36

### Independent News Report:

AMARANTA ODDY PUTS DEADLY DIANE DOBODY ON THE CHASE.

As we previously reported, there is a crazed sex-bot loose on a nationwide killing spree. Police have identified the rampaging killer as a Boston Cybertronics 'Viola' model robot that goes by the label of Diane Dobody. So far the list of confirmed victims includes scientist Strom Becker and composer Rupert Moreau

Tacitly accepting responsibility, BC has hired Rogue Retrieval to run down this nympho psycho killer-bot. Reportedly, one of RR's favourite robots, Zephyr Walsh, has been assigned to the case. Zephyr may only be a machine, but it's one of the most cunning and ruthless bounty hunters available. As the RR ads say, "Our cyber-agents are robust, quick, efficient, and armed with the latest surveillance technology. Sometimes it takes a 'bot to catch a 'bot'."

Milne gave Mendes sanctuary in his mansion. He'd never seen his brother so subdued. His pallor was as grey as his long unkempt hair. He suggested things for them both to do, but Mendes had no interest in anything. He sat staring out at the cold grey fjord imagining how things could have been.

After a few days of self-torture and recrimination, Mendes agreed to take a relaxing cruise on Morning Glory with his brother. As they watched the sea birds swoop on the fish, Milne said, "David T came to see me."

"Oh," Mendes responded unenthusiastically.

“Yes, he wanted me to talk you out of building your black hole.”

“But you didn't.”

Milne sneered, “No I didn't. I had it on good authority it wouldn't work, and it would all end up in a massive disaster.”

Mendes looked at his brother. “So why didn't you say anything?”

“I don't take orders from the Rottafellers.”

They were interrupted by the new skipper, Captain Skornik, “Sir, the weather report indicates a squall on the way. Perhaps we should return home.”

Milne said, “Yes, it's probably time to go back.”

Captain Andersen, checked his bank account on the tablet. His balance had increased by the agreed to amount. He looked up at Daniel Lynsey and nodded. He went to shake hands, but the English Lord didn't respond. He could never respect a traitor, irrespective of whom the man had betrayed.

The headlines in the Aftenposten read:

**BILLIONAIRE FEARED DEAD IN MARITIME TRAGEDY.** The article explained that Milne Amwon's luxury yacht, Morning Glory, blew up at sea and went down with all hands. Milne Amwon and his brother Mendes were on board at the time.

Daniel read the news as he sat privately drinking his lager, in a hotel resort over looking a fjord. He raised his glass saying “To you, Father, wherever you are. We can mark this one down to the right guys.”

**The End**

## **Other books by Chris Deggs**

Amenti – a quantum tarot journey

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 – prophesy, power and politics

Black Pope – secrets of the vatican

Democracy on Trial – the verdict

Entropicus Trilogy Book 1 – The Mastery of Alchemy

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.

## Connect With Chris Deggs

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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 Show ground Markets

I hope you are enjoying my trilogy 'Entropicus.'

Here is an excerpt of the third part for you.

1

### In the past

The only thing in Alyssa's life that did not speed up was a treatment that cured her of her malady and allowed 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 Gunther 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?"

Gunther 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."

Gunther 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. "It already has."

Ames could have lain in his blood for months or even years without anyone discovering his decaying body if it was not for the freak occurrence. Nobody but Ames had been inside his bunker home since he'd set up there away from the rest of the world. That was until joy riders pursued by police skidded into the turnaround car park. The young driver smashed the 4WD through a timber barrier and revved the SUV spinning its wheels on the muddy track leading to the cliff edge. Abandoning the stolen vehicle near the old bunker, the three youths ran past the junkyard into the open shelter. The police followed the boys and that when Officer Yabley discovered the body.

Kronyn tried the pendulum again, this time over the Brooklyn area. He was distracted as Colonel Lynch entered the room.

"Where's Hassan," Rafael asked, looking around.

Kronyn didn't know much. "He's gone to look for the laboratory John Philips is using."

"Does he know where it is?"

The Atlantean thought Earthians were strange at times. How could he know what Hassan knew if he hadn't been told? "I don't know, Colonel."

John left muttering something Kronyn didn't catch. He shrugged and went back to his work.

Hassan came across one of Philips' eMails with a map of Oregon attached. The message was from Angelface. She wrote:

Here are the directions to Ames' lair. Are you up for a road trip?

Hassan looked at the map. Tillamook Rock near Indian Head Beach was circled. The alchemist stroke his beard thoughtfully. Then, to get some background on the area, he looked up Oregon news online. Most of the articles were about crime, but there was one item that caught his eye. 'Cops chase joyriders and discover body'. It was the image of Tillamook lighthouse and the caption that got Hassan's attention. The article was about the WW2 bunker becoming a crime scene when police officers pursuing teenage car thieves came across the body of a murdered man. The deceased, a hermit who lived in the bunker has been identified as Colin Ames.

Hassan froze. Ames was the name used by Angelface in the chat room. He was the one they said had the Cyclotron. Hassan phoned the Oregon Criminal Investigation Division and spoke to a Detective Marley. As the Arab expected, the police remained tight-lipped about Ames' death. Marley did confirm the crime but would give no information about the crime scene. Hassan needed big guns on his side. He phoned John Lynch.

The Colonel listened to what the Arab had to say. "Are you sure about this – what did you call it?"

"A Cyclotron. It's a machine for smashing particles."

"And you reckon this John Philips has it?"

"If he got it off, Ames."

"What if Mendes Amwon got hold of it and shot Ames?"

"The result would be the same. Amwon had his particle accelerator for making black holes."

"Then we're fucked!"

"John, the police in Oregon won't tell me anything. I need you to find out if the Cyclotron was found at the murder scene."

"Okay, I'll check it out." Then Lynch asked, "Where the hell are you, Hassan?"

"In New York. I think the laboratory is in Brooklyn."

2

The chopper descended for landing Abbott could just make out the shapes of factory sheds with rail lines leading into them. Little did he know it 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 'copter 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 transportation for the female prisoner. Abbott was waiting with Helen. She held onto his hand as she sat in the Helicopter 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 can that be okay?"

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

Abbott, scared, 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."

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 dwelling 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 prisoner processing progressed, 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 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.